Be Birkbeck is a brand new membership scheme, launching in April 2013. As far as we know, it is the first such scheme in the country. We have developed the scheme for two reasons: first, Birkbeck has a unique mission to provide part-time higher education which meets the changing educational, cultural, personal and career needs of adults, in particular those who live or work in the London region. Second, we want to share our research and our expertise through teaching, publication, partnerships with other organisations and through the promotion of civic and public debate.

While our current provision responds to a wide diversity of educational needs, more recently we have found that the needs of lifelong learners and people who want to engage in higher education without signing up to a degree, or want to continue to engage following completion of their degree, are not being met by universities. Be Birkbeck will enable those individuals to be part of Birkbeck’s academic community, to engage with like-minded people and to have the opportunity to discuss and debate ideas.

So what will membership of Be Birkbeck include? Everyone will be able to come to six lectures across a range of academic disciplines offered at Birkbeck. But these lectures will be designed with broader educational participation in mind: pre-lecture reading will be available to members as well as online discussion groups following each lecture. They will be linked thematically each year. Our first year, 2013, is the 190th anniversary of when George Birkbeck established the Mechanics’ Institute. To celebrate his controversial decision to offer education to working Londoners, the first lecture series will consider controversies in arts, science, law, social science and business.

Members will also be able to access a number of events, which Birkbeck will organise in collaboration with partner organisations. A regular newsletter will keep members informed and up to date about the developing programme of events.

We will have three tiers of membership, which starts at £5 per month. The first tier will include lectures, a newsletter and access to a number of collaborative events. The second tier will also include the use of the library (without borrowing rights). At the highest tier, members will also be able to borrow from the library. So members of Be Birkbeck will be able to decide on the level of engagement that suits them.

I look forward to welcoming many of you as Be Birkbeck members in the coming year.

Professor Miriam Zukas is Executive Dean, School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy, at Birkbeck.

For more information, and to register your interest, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/bebirkbeck