TERMS OF REFERENCE AND SCHEME OF MEMBERSHIP

1.1 Members noted the terms of reference and scheme of membership for the Academic Board Executive Committee (X 2016 01)

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

2.1 ABExCo welcomed the new Executive Dean of the School of SSHP, Professor Matthew Davies and also welcomed Dr Stewart Motha as Acting Dean of the School of Law.

MINUTES

3.1 The confirmed minutes of the ABExCo meeting 2 June 2016 (X 2016 02).

MASTER’S REPORT

4.1 Committee noted the appointment of a new Pro Vice Master for Learning and Teaching. Professor Diane Houston is currently the Dean of the Graduate School of the University of Kent and will be joining the College in early December. Members thanked Dr Tim Markham for acting as PVM in the interim.

4.2 Postgraduate loans have made a positive impact on the College’s student applications particularly with the concession to include students up to the age of 60 rather than
being restricted to age 30. The College will continue to lobby parliament for the commitment it has made for maintenance loans to part time students.

4.3 The HE bill is progressing through Parliament. The various amendments Labour proposed during the Committee stage, some of which related to part time and mature students, were rejected, but the discussion had raised awareness.

4.4 Members heard that the Minister of State for Universities had announced that the number of mature students has returned to the levels they were prior to the 2012 tuition fee increase. This has not been the case for Birkbeck, especially for part-time. It is likely that the Minister’s statement was about full time students only.

5 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

Noted

5.1 Members noted a report on the national student survey (X 2016 04)

5.2 ABExCo heard that the national student survey (NSS) has been discussed at the 17th October SPC meeting. There are two sections of the survey that are concerning; Academic Support and Assessment & Feedback in which the College ranked 122 out of 124 and 80 out of 124 respectively.

5.3 These results have also been discussed at TQEC. Taking necessary steps to make improvements in these two areas is a priority for Birkbeck.

6 POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

Noted

6.1 Members noted a report on the postgraduate taught experience survey (X 2016 05).

6.2 Members heard that the postgraduate taught experience survey (PTES) was also discussed at the October SPC and TQEC meetings. Academic support and student experience is below expectations from the enrolment stage through to submission of dissertations. TQEC has identified that more needs to be done to improve academic support and student experience for Masters students.

6.3 Although PTES is currently a voluntary exercise, the College is anticipating it may be absorbed into the Teaching Excellence Framework from the next iteration i.e. TEF 3 or 4.

6.4 Members heard that the sector as a whole is performing poorly in these areas and there is a general sense that postgraduate students are not satisfied particularly with the teaching intensity they receive.

6.5 Members queried if it was possible to run a comparison of the NSS and PTES responses to identify similarities between undergraduate and postgraduate student feedback in areas of underperformance.

ACTION

6.6 Academic Registrar to present results of the comparison at a future SPC or ABExCo meeting.
7 RESEARCH COMMITTEE REPORT

Received

7.1 The report of the 12th October Research Committee meeting (X 2016 06)

Noted and endorsed

7.2 Members were updated on the current work of the Research Committee. ABExCo endorsed the establishment of two new research centres; the centre for research on race and law, and the centre for political economy and institutional studies.

ABExCo recommends that Academic Board approve the establishment of
• The Centre for Research on Race and Law
• The Centre for Political Economy and Institutional Studies

7.3 Members heard that the research committee will be conducting a review of the College’s research centres this year with a view of streamlining and reducing the number of centres over the longer term.

Approved

7.4 ABExCo approved the suite of Research Data Management Policies governing use of the College data repository, noting that they had been endorsed by Research Committee.

Considered

7.5 Members heard that the Research Committee had endorsed the recommendation of the Open Access Working Group that the College should sign up to the UK Scholarly Communications Licence in Easter 2017.

7.6 Signing up to the licence will involve a modification to employment contracts. A formal consultation with Trade Unions would be required before the College can proceed. ABExCo chair recommended that this matter would need to be discussed at the Joint Staff Committee meeting.

ACTION

7.7 Chair of Research Committee to confirm the mechanism the College will be using to consult with the trade unions on the adoption of the Scholarly Communications Licence.

Noted

7.8 Research Committee reported discussion of a proposal from the Open Access working group for the College to sign up to the San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA). The declaration recognises that classical metrics can discourage researchers from open access outlets and encourages institutions to assess research outputs in wider terms.

7.9 ABExCo supported the move towards signing up to DORA but noted the need to confirm that the declaration had no impact on the College’s recruitment and promotion procedures or other HR policies and procedures.
Endorsed

7.10 Members endorsed the Research Committee’s recommendation that the College should adopt the ORCID online ID system. Increasingly Research Councils are requiring that individuals have an ORCID ID in order to be eligible for funding. ORCID is also HEFCE’s preferred method of entry for REF and this is likely to be part of the upcoming consultation exercise.

Noted

7.11 Members noted that the Stern report was published during the summer. There will be a 14 week consultation period and submissions will be due by 2020 following which, a REF report will be produced by 2021.

8 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE
Received

8.1 The report of the Student Engagement and Widening Participation Committee (X 2016 07)

8.2 ABExCo heard that at SEWP Schools reported that they have begun to see the impact of the work around student retention: mentoring, personal tutors and the predictors of student success survey.

8.3 The main student engagement projects that have central project management resources are:
- Query Resolution
  - The IT system to track questions is now ready.
  - Consultation will now take place with Schools, departments and professional services teams to encourage people to start using the system.
- Personal Tutors
- Competitions and Markets Authority compliance
  - This project looks at students’ information needs and getting the right information together for students.

8.4 Members heard about the development of a widening participation framework where the principal objective is to get WP students more engaged with support the College already offers. SEWP noted that students as well as staff need to be aware of the support programmes offered. The WP team will be convening with Schools to increase awareness.

Approved

8.5 Academic Board Executive Committee approved changes to the Student Engagement and Widening Participation Committee’s terms of reference.

9 TEACHING AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE
Received

9.1 The report of the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (X 2016 08)
TQEC reported on the Teaching Excellence Framework. Submissions will now be due in January 2017. The award badging has changed from “meets expectations”, “excellent” and “outstanding” to “bronze, silver and gold”.

Members heard that TQEC are planning on a new initiative for collecting student feedback on course modules, but this is still at an early stage and more consultation will be required with academics before decisions are made.

TQEC reported that the College will support academic colleagues to sign up for HEA accreditation, which is likely to feature in future iterations of TEF. HEA has a senior fellowship award for professorial staff.

Members heard about HEFCE’s new annual provider review, which replaces the former QAA HE Review regime. Governing bodies will provide an annual statement of assurance on student academic experience and outcomes and standard of awards, based on information about the College’s academic quality assurance framework and procedures. HEFCE will perform an assessment of the statement against the data it holds on each institution.

TQEC also reported that a one-off Institutional Verification exercise for 2017/18 is being prepared which HEFCE and QAA will use to confirm that institutions’ quality processes are fit for purpose.

**Agreed**

To recommend that the Academic Board approve the introduction, amendment, suspension and withdrawal of the following programmes:

Programme Approval:
- BA Psychology for Education Professionals (top up) programme
- Grad Cert in Psychodynamic Practice
- Grad Cert in Planetary Science

Programme Withdrawal:
- MRes Politics <Language> (a collaborative programme with SOAS)
- MSc Internal Business and the European Union
- MSc Career Management and Coaching
- BSc Business (Stratford language pathways)
- BSc Business and Portuguese
- BSc Business and pathway <Accounting; Management; French; German; Japanese; Spanish; Human Resource Management; Information Systems; Marketing>
- BSc Business Accounting (decelerated)
- MA Medical Humanities

New Programmes Approved by Chair’s Action:
- Grad Cert in Planetary Science
- Cert of Professional Education in Organizational and Business Psychology
Secretary’s Note: The following Degrees with integrated Foundation Years were also approved by Chair’ Action over the summer but were not reported directly to the Committee meeting. The following list confirms those approved to date:

- BA Arts and Humanities with Foundation Year
- BSc Social Sciences with Foundation Year
- BSc Accounting with Business Year
- BSc Business with Foundation Year
- BSc Economics and Business with Foundation Year
- BSc Mathematics with Foundation Year
- BSc Biomedicine with Foundation Year
- BSc Psychology with Foundation Year
- BSc Structural Molecular Biology with Foundation Year

ABExCo recommends that Academic Board approves the programme changes listed above.

Endorsed

Personal Tutors Policy

9.8 Some students in the National Student Survey had stated they wanted more Personal Tutor support. Currently there are no clear policies on what Birkbeck students can expect from a Personal Tutor and how a student should engage with this element of support at the college. The development of a college wide policy is an important first step to implementing how this support is developed across the college.

9.9 ABExCo considered a proposed policy outlining the College’s approach to personal tutoring and identifying the responsibilities of Schools and departments in the provision of personal tutoring and of personal tutors towards their students. The policy also outlines the responsibilities of students in working with their personal tutors. Members noted that the responsibilities of personal tutors should be explicitly clear as students are often confused as to whom to turn to if support is needed. The policy needed to make it clear whether the tutor or student was responsible for initiating contact.

9.10 Members discussed tutorial contact record keeping and agreed it should be balanced on the demands of personal tutors’ responsibilities and that the possibility of facilitation through one of the College’s IT systems should be explored.

9.11 ABExCo endorsed the TQEC recommendation of personal tutors policy subject to clarification as in 9.9 above.

ABExCo recommends that Academic Board approves the Personal Tutors policy

Approved

Appeals Policy and Procedure for research students

9.12 ABExCo approved amendments to the Appeals Policy and Procedure for research students covering examiners’ decisions on degree award and upgrade from MPhil to PhD, and termination of registration on academic grounds.
Academic Board is invited to approve the Appeals Policy and Procedure for research students

Term Dates

9.13 Members heard that TQEC had discussed proposed term dates for 2019/20 and 2020/21 but it was agreed that further consultation would be needed before a proposal was made to Academic Board.

10 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT

Received

10.1 The annual report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarship Committee (X 2016 09)

10.2 Members heard that FBSC confirmed fee tiers for 2016/17 and 2017/18 in September 2015, and approved an approach to the fee setting process whereby fee tiers would be reviewed and agreed annually in the autumn term, so that fees could be confirmed before the annual UCAS recruitment cycle.

10.3 FBSC reported on the advantages of this approach: with a few exceptions, tuition fees were not in need of further review. Most of the undergraduate degree fees were at the upper level allowed by the Government, and other areas of provision had fees broadly comparable with peer universities.

10.4 FBSC also noted that there were significant advantages in knowing fees in advance, including the ability to comply with the Competition and Markets Authority’s expectation that universities would provide information on fees and costs at the application stage; bringing Birkbeck into line with its competitors in the UCAS market by publishing fee information in the prospectus earlier; and enabling more accurate long term financial planning.

Noted

10.5 Members noted that in response to the Government’s change to tuition fee upper limits announced in summer 2016, the College has decided to increase undergraduate fees for first year students starting in 2017/18 to £9,250 for full time and £6,750 for part time. The fees for existing students will be maintained at £9,000/£6,000 and it is expected that the majority of the sector will do the same. In light of CMA expectations, fees below the regulatory cap which covers HE Certificates and some Foundation degrees, will not be changed for 2017/18 but will be reviewed going further ahead.

10.6 Members thanked Leslie Topp and Caroline McDonald for their innovative work to offer a programme of fee and academic support to asylum seekers. The Transition Programme will offer a programme of advice, guidance and support events, at the end of which students will have the option to apply and receive support for a number of academic options, including taking individual modules offering up to 120 credits.

11 DATES OF THE NEXT MEETING

Noted

11.1 Members noted the dates of the 2016/17 meetings of ABExCo:

- Thursday 23 February 2017, at 2pm
- Tuesday 6 June 2017, at 2pm