AB 2014 03

Academic Board 13 November 2014

BIRKBECK COLLEGE

University of London

ACADEMIC BOARD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

5 November 2014

Present

Professor David Latchman (Chair), Professor Matthew Innes, Professor Sue Jackson, Professor Stephen Frosh, Professor Li Wei, Professor Philip Powell, Professor Hilary Fraser, Professor Nicholas Keep, Professor Patricia Tuit, Professor Miriam Zukas, Dr Joanne Leal, Dr Kate Mackenzie-Davey, Mr Charles-Michael Berry, Mr Robert Atkinson, Dr Jasbir Gill

In Attendance

Mrs Katharine Bock, Mr Keith Harrison, Mr Bob Westaway, Ms Nina Patel, Ms Megan Reeves,

Apologies for absence

Professor Julian Swann, Professor Costas Douzinas, Ms Tricia King

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

Received and Confirmed

1.1 The terms of reference and scheme of membership for the Academic Board Executive Committee 2014-15 (X 2014 01)

2 MINUTES AND REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD

Received and noted

2.1 The minutes of the Academic Board Executive Committee 17 June 2014

2.1.1 The unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board meeting of the 1 July 2014 (X 2014 02)

3 MATTERS ARISING

Considered

Smart Technology

3.1 The committee heard from the student union representative that at a hearing panel last month a first case of cheating via a smart watch had been brought. It is now possible for devices such as ear pieces and watches to have blue tooth and internet access.

Noted
3.2 Members were assured that the College’s senior management were aware of the implications of smart technology. The Academic Registrar would raise the matter in the University of London Academic Registrars group.

Considered

Disclosure of Criminal Convictions

3.3 The student representative also raised the requirement for disclosure of criminal convictions in the UCAS application forms, and proposed that this matter might sit alongside the College’s fit to sit procedures.

3.4 It was confirmed that this matter was being considered by TQEC which was planning to consider proposals at its spring term meeting.

4 MASTER’S REPORT

Noted

4.1 UCU had called action short of a strike in response to USS pension scheme issues. The issue was complex, involving the pension regulator, UUK, the USS Board and UCU at the national level; and College senior management and the local Union branch at the local level.

4.2 Discussions were ongoing with UCU on how the impact on Birkbeck students could be minimised. Birkbeck’s position would be to recognise that the dispute was on a national scale but maintain a local focus on minimising the impact on students.

4.3 It was noted that other Higher Education institutions were likely to exhibit a range of responses, for example, different percentages of pay deduction, performance based pay reductions or slower more stepped processes. The Master was attending a UUK Board meeting where the issue would be discussed.

4.4 Members asked what processes should be followed for the upcoming exam boards. A pragmatic approach was advised; if papers had been marked and a Board could be assembled within the regulations, the Board should meet. The Academic Registrar would prepare guidance.

4.5 Communications to staff and students on the matter would be prepared and discussions between College management and UCU officers would continue.

5 RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Received

5.1 The report of the Research Committee meeting of the 22 October 2014 (X 2014 03)

Noted

5.2 In its last meeting the Research Committee had supported a proposal for the establishment of a new research centre; The Centre for Architecture, Space and Society, with guidance that the Centre extend its interdisciplinary dimensions.

Agreed

5.3 To recommend that Academic Board approve the Centre for Architecture, Space and Society as a new research centre.
5.4 A final draft of the Research Strategy 2014-19 was returned to Research Committee following a period of consultation with the Schools and members of the Academic Board. Feedback from this consultation has been overwhelmingly positive and has confirmed the Strategy’s value in capturing the College’s distinctive and highly valued research culture. The strategy would be relevant both within the College and in external publicity.

5.5 It was confirmed that the Research Strategy included a requirement for every member of academic staff to have a research mentor.

**Endorsed**

5.5 To recommend that Academic Board approve the Research Strategy 2014-19.

6 **STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE**

**Received**

6.1 The Report of the Student Engagement and Widening Participation Committee meeting of 8 October 2014 (X 2014 04)

**Noted**

6.2 The Student Engagement and Widening Participation Committee is currently discussing the development of several key projects to develop and enhance student support, facilities and services and will draw these together into a student engagement strategy.

6.3 SEWPC heard about developments in mentoring schemes, the Careers service, projects resourced by the Alumni fund, the Birkbeck employment agency, student surveying and student representation.

6.5 Members asked about the E-registers project which will support better student engagement by recording attendance at teaching events. The project is currently in its pilot phase, running on programmes within Law and BEI. During the pilot it will still be necessary to keep paper registers to ensure that the College remains compliant with visa regulations.

7 **TEACHING AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Received**

7.1 The report of the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee meeting of the 30 October 2014 (X 2014 05)

**Considered**

7.2 A flexible learning discussion paper drafted by the Pro Vice Master for Learning and Teaching.

**Noted**

7.3 The paper was designed to bring together discussions on flexible learning from a Birkbeck perspective; it was not intended to be a policy paper. An open meeting
would be called in December for all staff to discuss what is meant by flexible learning and teaching at Birkbeck.

7.4 Discussion centred on the definition of ‘flexible’ used in the paper. Members expressed the view that there would be problems with framing the idea of flexibility as choice, and that choice was only one element of flexibility.

7.5 It was agreed that there would be further consultation with ABExCo members, which would feed into subsequent drafts of the paper.

7.6 A revised version of the Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement

7.7 The College’s Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement (SLATE) had reached its mid-way point. The revisions in this version included additional objectives and extension of the end point of the strategy for a year, to 2017, to fit better with the schedule of external institutional quality review.

7.8 The aims of the strategy remain the same, though they now appear first in the strategy, followed by context. Some objectives have been modified for example relating to the work of the Centre for Transformative Practice in Teaching and Learning and to the increasing number of students on three year intensive degrees. The revised SLATE strategy also has a more enhanced ‘research led’ teaching focus.

Agreed

7.9 To recommend that Academic Board approve the revised Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement.

Considered

7.10 Proposed new programmes and programme withdrawals.

7.11 Agreed

To recommend that Academic Board approve the following:

Programme approval
- MSc Geochemistry
- BA Global Cinemas and Screen Arts
- BA Media & Culture
- BSc Economics
- BA Languages and/with International Law (2014/15)
- BA Languages and/with English Studies (2014/15)
- BA Theatre Studies and English (2014/15)
- BA Theatre and Drama studies (2014/15)

Programme withdrawal
- Cert HE Linguistics and Japanese
- PG Cert Career Management and Coaching
- MSc Medical Leadership (2 year route)
- FdSc Environmental Management (Stratford)
- MRes Comparative Capitalism
• MRes Public Administration
• PG Dip Management in the Public Sector
• PG Dip International Business
• PG Dip International Business and Development
• PG Dip Corporate Governance and Ethics
• BA Accounting and Management [6-year, part-time]
• BSc Accounting and Management with Finance (Decelerated)
• BSc Accounting with Finance (Decelerated)
• BSc Business [6-year, part-time, central London]
• Business [6-year, part-time, Stratford]
• Grad Cert People Management and Communication
• MA/MRes Modern Languages (Combined Languages Studies)
• MA/MRes Modern Languages (French Studies)
• MA/MRes Modern Languages (German Studies)
• PG Dip/Cert Modern Languages (Combined Languages Studies)
• PG Dip/Cert Modern Languages (French Studies)
• PG Dip/Cert Modern Languages (German Studies)

Noted
7.11 ABExCo noted the annual reports of the International Programmes courses for
which Birkbeck acts as Lead College: Spanish, Philosophy and Organizational
Psychology/Human Resource Management.

Agreed
7.12 To recommend that Academic Board approve the regulations for
international programmes in Organisational Psychology and Human
Resource Management (available from this link).

Noted
7.13 The committee was informed that TQEC had considered and endorsed a proposal
from the School of BEI to vary the Accredited Prior Learning requirements of the
Common Award Scheme regulations (2.3g), in relation to a joint Masters degree in
Business Psychology being developed with the Higher School of Economics (HSE),
Moscow, to allow for a 50:50 split between modules taught at Birkbeck and modules
taught at HSE.

7.15 Members asked whether appropriate measures had been taken to maintain quality
assurance. ABExCo was informed that the programme had developed in liaison with
Registry Services, that the programme approval would be fully documented and that
there had been due consideration of the academic standing of HSE, which was a
highly rated university.

Agreed
7.16 To recommend the suspension of CAS regulation 2.3g for the MSc
Business Psychology to allow for a 50:50 split between modules taught at
Birkbeck and modules taught at the Higher School of Economics.

8 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE
8.1 Received The Annual Report from the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee 2013-14

8.2 Noted FBSC had reviewed undergraduate financial support and approved a scheme with increased flexibility and the opportunity to offer incentives to groups of students less able to attend university. This extensive undergraduate support has had a positive impact on student recruitment, with a more diverse range of students now attending Birkbeck.

8.3 Noted In contrast to the external focus of previous years, which was necessary to make sure the College was appropriately placed in the post 2012 fee and funding landscape, the College is now focussing more on internal issues and processes. There is a recognition that in some areas certain issues have fallen ‘through the cracks’ and not been properly addressed. Increased attention on communication with students and more definition in regards to the remits of different teams in the College would be the first step towards remedying this situation.

8.4 Noted Not only is the pricing of Birkbeck programmes competitive but the interest free monthly instalment payment plans are unique in the higher education sector. By offering this benefit Birkbeck is taking on a large amount of risk in terms of potential debt, but is offering a better deal compared with competitor institutions who typically require payment up front or will break the payment into a maximum of 2-3 instalments, and only then on specific request. It was agreed that Birkbeck’s monthly instalment payment plan should have a more prominent place in marketing to potential students.

8.5 Noted It was noted that other competitors offer what they market as ‘loans’. Members asked whether there were opportunities for students to claim tax relief on these loans. It was confirmed that there was currently no individual tax relief for tuition fees and that tax credits for corporations/institutions may apply in relation to staff development.

9 EMERITUS TITLES

9.1 Noted No proposals for the conferment of Emeritus titles have been received this year.

10 THANKS TO RETIRING MEMBERS

10.1 Noted The Chair and members thanked Professor Li Wei, Pro Vice Master (Postgraduate Students), Bob Westaway (Interim Academic Registrar) and Naina Patel (Director of Human Resources), all of whom were leaving the College, for their service on and contributions to ABExCo.

10 DATES OF THE NEXT MEETING

10.1 Noted Wednesday 25 February 2015, at 2pm
           Wednesday 27 May 2015, at 2pm