BIRKBECK COLLEGE
University of London

ACADEMIC BOARD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

27 May 2015

Present
Professor David Latchman (Chair), Professor Miriam Zukas, Professor Philip Dewe, Professor Stephen Frosh, Professor Sue Jackson, Professor Philip Powell, Professor Patricia Tuitt, Professor Hilary Fraser, Professor Nicolas Keep, Dr Kate Mackenzie-Davey, Ms Tricia King, Mr Charles-Michael Berry

In Attendance
Mr Fraser Keir, Ms Megan Reeves, Mrs Katharine Bock, Mr John Kempton, Mr Keith Harrison, Ms Rachael Boyle, Dr Jasbir Gill

Apologies
Professor Julian Swann, Mr Robert Atkinson, Professor Matthew Weait, Dr Joanne Leal, Professor Matthew Innes

19 MINUTES AND REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Received and Noted
19.1 The minutes of the Academic Board Executive Committee 25 February 2015 (X 2014 12)
19.2 The report of the Academic Board Meeting 3 March 2015 (X 2014 13)

20 MATTERS ARISING
Noted
20.1 Members heard that the College’s policy on Assessment Offences would be updated so as to include regulations on the use of wearable technology during examinations. The policy would state that wearable technology, such as smartwatches, would be prohibited from use in assessments. A secure area would be made available for the safe storing of such devices during the examination. The Student Union Representative confirmed the SU’s approval of this action.

21 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
21.1 Members were informed that the Master and the Pro-Vice Master for Strategic Engagement and Recruitment would shortly be meeting with the incoming Vice Chancellor of the Open University, Mr Peter Horrocks. It was hoped that the combined efforts of the two institutions in leading a campaign focusing on part time study would wield a degree of influence with the new government. It was noted that prominent representatives of both universities, Joan Bakewell and Martha Lane Fox, might prove useful in shaping debates regarding higher education and part time study in particular, within the House of Lords.
Given the election of a conservative government in May 2015 it was to be assumed that previously announced higher education policies announced by the party would come to fruition. Such policies included the introduction of postgraduate loans. The College would continue to focus on the age restriction aspect of this policy under which those over 30 years old would be ineligible. As approximately 70% of part-time postgraduate students were over 30, a large proportion of Birkbeck students would be ineligible for the provision.

It was reported that the College was currently involved in property acquisition negotiations. It was hoped that successful purchase of the property would be announced shortly. The new space would be used to accommodate activities currently on the main campus, freeing up more teaching space over the next several years.

The College would be celebrating its 200th anniversary in 2023. In the lead up to this landmark it was envisioned that the Birkbeck Estate be entirely fit for purpose. As a recent meeting of the Assistant Deans it had been suggested that as part of the 200th anniversary programme a scheme be introduced whereby individuals could sponsor the refurbishment of particular rooms or parts of rooms within buildings.

It was confirmed that the IT department had set aside a separate budget for new AV equipment for lecture theatres and other specified rooms.

RESEARCH COMMITTEE
Received

The Report of the Research Committee meeting of the 13 May 2015 (X 2014 14) Noted

Members heard that the Review of the Postgraduate Research Provision would be reporting initial findings in June 2015. It was anticipated that the results of the review would shape the strategic direction of research matters within the College.

Birkbeck continues to be involved within the Bloomsbury Doctoral Training Centre (DTC), which currently has 28 Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded studentships. The College benefits from this arrangement primarily in the subjects of Psychology, Economics and Politics. It was noted that despite the UCL / IOE merger, the ERSC was pushing for further institutional collaboration. The Bloomsbury DTC had been a noted success and the College’s high level management had agreed that the preferred way forward would be an enlarged Bloomsbury DTC, which now seems to be the most likely option. There would be an open meeting on 24 June 2015 after which further information would be circulated.

It was noted that an increasing amount of research grant applications had been made so far in 2014-15. However some individual applications had been made in competition with other Birkbeck applications: for instance the College had submitted 18 applications to the British Academy. The Committee noted a more centralised approach supporting collaboration on the submission of research grant applications would be helpful.
22.5 The Open Access Working Group had been reconstituted and would be chaired by Dr Martin Eve; a new appointee to the College with expertise in the field of open access. Members were asked to endorse the proposal of the Research Committee to co-opt Dr Martin Eve onto the membership of the committee so as to facilitate communication between the Open Access Working Group and the Research Committee.

Endorsed

22.6 ABExCo endorsed the proposal to co-opt Dr Martin Eve onto the membership of the Research Committee.

22.7 The REF Working Party had been reconstituted. Membership of the Working Party had been restructured; The Chair of the Working Party would be the PVM for Research and the membership would be made up from the Unit of Assessment (UOA) Leads and the Assistant Deans for Research.

22.8 In order to more clearly define the roles and responsibilities of UOA Leads it had been proposed that a role description be drawn up to confirm expectations for the work of the UOA Lead post holders. UOA Leads would be asked to commit to delivering the role throughout the preparation for the next REF and be given enhanced study leave opportunities following submission. Members noted the need for all UOA Leads including those already appointed to be aware of the role description.

22.9 Birkbeck would also receive Research Degree Programme (RDP) funding for PhD provision of just over £2M. This was money granted by HEFCE, partly weighted by the results of the REF2014. It was noted that more detailed planning on income and spending in relation to research students might be of benefit to the College.

22.10 It was confirmed that the College was moving forward with plans to co-ordinate and strengthen administrative provisions for Research support across the College, though not in the suggested form of a centralised Research Office. It was suggested that the College might consider a review of the College website, particularly in relation to its functionality in regards to research.

22.11 The Research Committee had recommended the establishment of three Research Centres:

- Centre for Technology and Publishing
- Birkbeck Institute for Data Analytics
- Centre for Comparative Research in European Cultures and Identities

22.12 The Centre for Technology and Publishing would be headed by Dr Martin Eve. The proposed centre had already attracted interest from members of Birkbeck staff and funding applications were underway to both the Leverhulme Trust and the Mellon Foundation. It was noted that the timeframe for the outcome of these applications was not known.

22.13 The proposal to establish the Birkbeck Institute for Data Analytics (BIDA) was noted to be a response to the REF2014 results in so far as it would address the need to
promote interdisciplinary research, support research that has the potential to have impact and invest more in the Birkbeck research environment. The Centre would bring together technological and domain specific areas of research, and in the longer term develop new areas of research. It was reported that the proposal had been met with support at various levels within the five Schools and by the Library.

22.14 It had been confirmed that the work of the Centre would not overlap significantly with the work of the Centre for Cognition, Computing and Modelling and that communication channels were open so as to allay any concerns.

22.15 The proposed Centre for Comparative Research in European Cultures and Languages would facilitate the research activities of staff within the Department of Cultures and Languages that were not currently being catered for by the two existing research centres based within the department. The Centre would furthermore engage in interdisciplinary work with other research centres with a European focus.

Endorsed

22.16 ABExCo endorsed the proposal to establish the following research centres:
- Centre for Technology and Publishing
- Birkbeck Institute for Data Analytics
- Centre for Comparative Research in European Cultures and Identities

22.17 It was confirmed that the Research Committee was actively involved in the management of the College’s research centres. Such centres were valued by staff, both in terms of networking and providing opportunities to collaborate on the submission of research grant applications. As well as establishing and encouraging the growth of such centres, the Research Committee has in the past closed research centres that were no longer active or adding value to the College.

22.18 Members of ABExCo thanked the outgoing Pro Vice Master for Research for his work, both in the chairing of the Research Committee and in steering the REF2014 submission.

23 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

Received

23.1 The Report of the Student Engagement and Widening Participation Committee meeting of the 7 May 2015 (X 2014 15)

Noted

23.2 The last meeting of the Student Engagement and Widening Participation Committee had taken place on the date of the general election and the UCAS deadline for applicants with offers to make their first and insurance choices in the 2015-16 recruitment cycle. It was reported to members that although part time applications for 2015-16 were down by 4% on the previous year, all other figures remained stable. It was noted that Birkbeck had not as of yet seen any detrimental effects from the removal of the student number controls.
23.3 Parliament had re-opened on 27 May and the Queen’s speech, setting out the policies of the newly elected Conservative government, had not included any specific Higher Education bills.

23.4 The first draft of the Student Engagement Strategy had been presented and debated at the last meeting of the SEWPC. This was to be the first of many iterations of the document. The Pro Vice Master for Strategic Engagement and Recruitment was seeking feedback from across the College including from the members of SEWPC and ABEExCo.

24 TEACHING AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Received
24.1 The Report of the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (X 2014 16)

Noted
24.2 The meetings of the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee had been rescheduled so as to allow the School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committees to feed into TQEC rather than TQEC feeding back to the Committees. It was reported that this had allowed for more constructive discussions and had received positive feedback from STQECs.

24.3 The Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee was continuing its work in preparing for the upcoming Higher Education Review. QA codes were being mapped against the RAG traffic light system in order to determine areas that require more focussed efforts from the College. A Higher Education Review Steering Group had been established and would meet monthly until further information regarding the format and structure of the upcoming review.

Considered
24.4 Members considered the recommendation of the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee for the approval and withdrawal of the following programmes:

Programme Approved
- Certificate of Professional Education (Postgraduate)

Programmes Withdrawn
- PGCE & MA Modern Languages: (French Studies) (German Studies) Portuguese and Brazilian Studies) (Spanish and Latin American Studies)
- BA Japanese and/with Film and Media (Decelerated)
- BA Japanese and/with Film and Media (UCAS entry)
- BA Japanese and/with Film and Media
- BA Japanese and/with History (Decelerated)
- BA Japanese and/with History (UCAS entry)
- BA Japanese and/with History
- BA Japanese and/with Management (Decelerated)
- BA Japanese and/with Management (UCAS entry)
- BA Japanese and/with Management
- MA Japanese Cultural Studies
- BA Contemporary Dance as Creative Practice
• PG Dip Computer Science
• Grad Cert Geological Field Techniques
• Cert HE Interpersonal Communication Skills
• Grad Cert Professional Studies
• PG Dip Gender, Sexuality and Culture

Noted
24.5 The proposed Certificate of Professional Education (Postgraduate) would be awarded directly from Birkbeck rather than from the University of London. The Certificate would be equivalent to 30 credits at postgraduate level and could be put towards a full postgraduate qualification. The Academic Registrar would report back to the committee on the implications of overseas students undertaking the qualification and their visa status.

Endorsed
24.6 ABExCo endorsed the proposed new programmes and programme withdrawals.

College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners
Noted
24.7 Several amendments, typographical and substantive, had been made so as to clarify College procedures. Paragraphs 9 (borderline degree classifications), and 42 and 43 (Sub Board and Boards of Examiners) were specifically noted by the Committee:

24.8 (9) The Common Award Scheme (CAS) regulations define the formula for determining the weighted average mark and the range and boundaries of marks for each award class. Under the CAS regulations, in certain circumstances Sub-boards of Examiners may recommend that discretion is applied to raise the classification. Where candidates have achieved a weighted average mark within 2.00% of the boundary between classes, Sub-boards should consider whether or not to recommend awarding the higher class on the basis of a preponderance of credit in the higher class. Unrepresentative performance in a single module or mitigating circumstances may also be taken into account. Where a Sub-Board recommends an award in the higher class, the recommendation and detailed reasons for making it should be clearly recorded in the Sub-board report. College Boards may accept or reject Sub-board recommendations or may request additional information before reaching a decision. Recommendations for awarding the higher class when the weighted average mark is more than 2.00% below the boundary should only be considered in unforeseen and/or exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the Chair of the relevant College Board and the Academic Registrar or their nominee.

24.9 (42) College Boards may accept or reject recommendations of Sub-Boards and/or may request additional information and documentation on recommendations from Sub-Boards.

24.10 (43) The College will consider appeals by Sub-Boards against the decision of the College Board where additional information is available that was not previously available or disclosed, or where there is concern the decision of the College Board may not have been conducted in accordance with the relevant regulations, policy and guidance. Appeals against decisions of the relevant College Board must be
members discussed the terms ‘unforeseen’ and ‘exceptional’ in point 9. While the view was expressed that these should be made clearer, it was also accepted that such circumstances could not be defined in advance and individual cases would require the consideration and expertise of those staff responsible. Please see minute 24.19-24.22 below for additional discussion on borderline classifications.

On points 42 and 43, it was agreed that the wording would be adjusted:

- to be clear that the sub-Board recommendations were formed at sub-Board meetings and that consideration of them by the College Boards, including decisions to ask for additional information and decisions on accepting and rejecting recommendations would take place as subsequent steps;

- to be clear that the College Boards of Examiners or their Chairs as appropriate could be asked to reconsider where, for example, additional information had emerged; and that independent Panels would only be convened in exceptional circumstances.

Endorsed

Members of ABExCo endorsed the College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners, subject to the amendments detailed above.

Action (FK) Circulate the policy with alternate wording as set out above.

Birkbeck Common Award Scheme Regulations

Members considered minor and major amendments to the CAS Regulations 2015-16. It was confirmed that all approved changes would come into effect in 2015-16 and would not be retrospective.

A new award was proposed: Certificate of Professional Education (Postgraduate), which would be awarded directly from Birkbeck rather than from the University of London. The Certificate would be equivalent to 30 credits at postgraduate level. The Academic Registrar would check and clarify the visa status implications of overseas students undertaking this qualification.

The CAS regulations would be amended to reflect College’s policy on the capping of reassessments; the proposal for this had previously been agreed by Academic Board in July 2014:

“Any piece of assessment that is submitted as a re-assessment and for which no application for consideration of mitigating circumstances has been accepted will be awarded a mark of no more than 40% (undergraduate modules) or no more than 50% (postgraduate modules)” (AB 2013 23, Pg. 1).
24.18 This was reflected in the proposed CAS regulation as follows:

(22.6) Any piece of assessment that is submitted as a reassessment and for which no application for consideration of mitigating circumstances has been accepted will be awarded a mark of no more than 40% (undergraduate modules) or no more than 50% (postgraduate modules). Where an application for consideration of mitigating circumstances is accepted, and a deferral awarded by the sub-board (see Reg 29.0) the work may be submitted without penalty and the reassessment will not be capped at the pass mark.

24.19 Members queried whether the introduction of this regulation would lead to a need to review the regulation for mitigating circumstances. It was noted that the Student Union Representative had also raised this point at the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee and that College’s policy on mitigating circumstances would shortly be reviewed.

24.20 It was recommended that CAS regulation 43.5, on the calculation of honours degree awards, be removed:

(43.5) The final degree classification agreed through the assessment process is based on academic judgement and the above calculation (regulation 43.3(iv) is only used as a guide).

24.21 Members noted the provision in regulation 43.3.5, which would be retained:

(v) The classification of honours degree to be awarded will be based on the average of all the weighted results for completed modules from Credit Levels 5 and 6 that have been assigned a mark of 0-100.

24.22 Regulation 51.1 had been reworded in order to provide clarification on the conditions under which borderline degree classifications could be raised.

24.23 (51.1) Where a student’s overall weighted average mark is within 2.00% of the next (higher) degree classification the Sub Board of Examiners should consider the amount of credit for which the assessment falls within a particular class. If a candidate has a preponderance of credit in a higher class i.e. 50.00% or greater of the overall credit in the award than that determined by the aggregate result, or if other influential factors apply, the higher class of degree may be recommended for award to the relevant College Board.1. Where the average weighted result is outside of 2.00% of the next (higher) degree classification, a recommendation for the award of the higher class degree will not normally be permitted.

24.24 This Regulation confirmed that justification for raising the class based on a preponderance of marks in the higher class should be based on credit value rather than number of modules. It also confirmed provisions for weighted average marks that did not fall within 2.00% of the classification boundary, whereas the previous regulations had been silent.

24.25 Following discussion it was agreed that, while this represented a change to the regulations rather than a clarification as presented, the provisions did provide
additional clarity and were in line with widespread practice in the HE sector. It was reported that some HE institutions were removing discretion boundaries, but that the College did not wish to take this step.

24.26 **Action (FK)**
Change the summary of changes to indicate that that the amendment to regulation 51.1 was a change rather than a clarification.

**Endorsed**

24.27 Members of ABExCo endorsed the amended Birkbeck Common Award Scheme Regulations, subject to the amendment noted in 24.23 above.

**Assessment Offences**

24.28 The CAS Regulations and the College’s Assessment Offences policy had been updated to prohibit the use of wearable technology in examinations and to bring the policy in line with the code of student discipline.

**Endorsed**

24.29 Members of ABExCo endorsed the Assessment Offences Policy.

25 **STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY**

**Received**

25.1 The Student Attendance Policy *(X 2014 19)*

**Noted**

25.2 The Student Attendance Policy was noted to be a new concept for the College, one that had been fed through much discussion with input from various College groups, leading on from previous work on student retention. The policy was recommended for adoption as a pilot during the 2015-16 academic year to support the College’s ongoing eRegisters project.

25.3 It was the intention of the policy to allow flexibility of attendance requirements across Schools, subject areas and modules, responding to feedback from those who had been consulted. There would not be a centralised minimum attendance requirement from the College. It was confirmed that any action taken in response to non-attendance or not meeting the attendance targets would be at the discretion of the individual Schools, Programme or Modular Directors.

25.4 The School Assistant Deans Learning and Teaching had specified the academic need for individual programmes to specify their attendance policies in line with the needs of the course. For example, language courses would undoubtedly require more face to face engagement from students due to the need to practice the language with others.

25.5 Concerns were raised over the implications of the policy for students of interdisciplinary studies. It was confirmed that attendance requirements would be defined at the modular level, defined in module specifications and changed through module amendments. Members asked whether this might be confusing for the
individual student and heard that, if the information was clear in the module specifications, this information should be available via handbooks.

25.6 It was noted that Student Loans Company did not require attendance monitoring, but did ask for confirmation of the presence of funded students 3 times per year.

25.7 It was confirmed that the policy would need to address issues of mitigating circumstances in regards to attendance, including access to classrooms and facilities for disabled students.

25.8 It was agreed that the document was more accurately a Student Attendance Framework rather than a policy.

25.9 Members asked about the related point of refunds for students deciding not to pursue their courses. It was noted that the College was developing a fees policy that would address the specifics of student refunds, including the ability to cancel registration within 14 days. This, and the attendance framework, would form part of the Terms and References agreed to by students at the point of enrolment.

Agreed

25.10 To recommend that Academic Board approve the Student Attendance Framework to support the e-registers pilot in 2015-16.

26 STANDING ORDERS OF THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Received
26.1 The Standing Orders of the Academic Board (X 2014 17)

Noted

26.2 Members were informed that a formal proposal would be made in the following term regarding the updating of the Standing Orders of the Academic Board. Specific examples of proposed amendments included:

- Reforming the official membership to reflect the Board’s current structure
- Reducing the Quorum
- Amending procedures relating to the calling of extraordinary meetings
- Updating the language to reflect the use of modern communications such as email, and modern practices such as online voting
- Granting Teaching and Scholarship Staff 2 seats on the academic Board

Members were encouraged to email the Secretariat with any additional amendment suggestions.

27 COLLEGE COMPUTING REGULATIONS
Received
27.1 The College Computing Regulations (X 2014 18)

Noted

27.2 Members noted the College Computing Regulations which had been adopted on behalf of the College by the IT Advisory Group in line with their remit. The regulations had been updated to reflect changes in technology and the growth in new
trends such as social media. The document had been presented HRSPC and SEWPC and was presented to ABExCo for members information.

28 DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS
Noted
28.1 The dates of the 2015-16 meetings of ABExCo:
   - Thursday 22 October, at 2pm
   - Thursday 18 February, at 2pm
   - Thursday 2 June, at 2pm