Minutes of the Academic Board Executive Committee
10 February 2010

Present:
Professor David Latchman (Chair)
Professor John Annette, Mr Richard Clarke, Professor Philip Dewe, Professor Costas Douzinas,
Professor Hilary Fraser, Professor Stephen Frosh, Dr Nicholas Keep, Mrs Tricia King, Dr Kate
Mackenzie Davey, Professor Philip Powell, Mr Sean Rillo Raczka, Professor Miriam Zukas.

By invitation:
Ms Sue Betts (Lifelong Learning Network Director),
Dr Jasbir Gill (Director, IT Services), Mr Philip Payne (Librarian), Mr Trevor Pearce (Deputy
Academic Registrar, Registry Services).

In attendance:
Mr Dean Pateman (Academic Registrar), Mr Keith Harrison (Secretary and Clerk to the
Governors), Mr Peter Westley (Director of Finance), Mrs Katharine Bock (Deputy Clerk to the
Governors).

Apologies for absence:
Dr Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick, Professor Matthew Innes,
Professor Sue Jackson, Professor Mike Oaksford, Mr Rob Park,
Professor Julian Swann, Professor Patricia Tuitt.

13 MINUTES AND REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Noted:
13.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 5 November 2009 had been confirmed at the Academic
Board meeting on 18 November by the members of ABExCo who were present.

Academic Board approved:
• The College’s Learning and Teaching Strategy 2009-12;
• The proposal to undertake a Research Excellence Framework “Dry Run” on research
outputs during the Autumn term 2010-11;
• Proposed amendments to the constitution of the College Boards of Examiners; the
membership to be:
  • A Chair appointed by Academic Board;
  • Two members of Academic staff from each School offering programmes or
    modules within the College Board of Examiners’ remit;
  • An intercollegiate examiner appointed by Academic Board;
  • An external examiner appointed by Academic Board;
• Proposed revisions to the Academic Board’s Standing Orders;
• Proposed dates of term for 2015-16;
• Revised procedures for the appointment of research degree examiners updated to
  reflect the new School structure;
• Minor amendments to the Terms of Reference of the Student Experience and Widening
  Participation Committee.
14 MATTERS ARISING

Scheme of Membership
Received:
14.1 ABExCo's Scheme of Membership, which had been revised to include the College Dean ex officio. (X 2009 07)

15 ACTION SHEET
Noted:
15.1 Action taken since the last meeting. (X 2009 08)

16 MASTER'S REPORT
Noted:
16.1 HEFCE's circular letter on sector wide funding in 2010-11 outlined significant cuts (£449 million or 5.8% down compared with the expectations announced in 2008). This was having an impact across the HE sector including Birkbeck, with a focus on preparing for cuts and ensuring cost-effectiveness. Birkbeck was well placed to respond to this following restructuring, but had the additional challenge of recruiting and retaining additional fundable students to rebuild funding following ELQ.

16.2 Birkbeck was expecting its individual grant letter from HEFCE on 12 March. Teaching funding was likely be cut in line with the reduction in funding for postgraduate taught programmes in the arts and social sciences, although the proposed change in the formula for funding research would, potentially, benefit areas with research rated at 4* or higher in the RAE.

16.3 The HEFCE Strategic Development Fund (SDF) Panel had awarded an additional £4M for the Stratford campus development, making a total of £8M allocated to the Birkbeck/University of East London partnership.

17 QAA INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT
Noted:
17.1 An update on preparations for the summer 2010 QAA Institutional Audit.

17.2 TQEC had endorsed a draft Institutional Briefing Document which would be submitted to the QAA at the end of March. Copies of the document were circulated to ABExCo members with an invitation to give feedback, in particular on strategic aspects. The document would be revised taking into account feedback received from TQEC and ABExCo members before submission to the Academic Board.

Agreed:
17.3 To delegate authority to the Chair to recommend the draft Institutional Briefing Document to Academic Board for approval.

18 BOARDS AND SUB-BOARDS OF EXAMINERS: REVISED STRUCTURE
Noted:
18.1 Academic Board had previously approved the establishment of three College Boards of Examiners; an over-arching undergraduate Board, a postgraduate (Arts & Law) Board and a postgraduate (Science & Social Science) Board. A further division of the undergraduate Board into an Arts and Law Board and a Science and Social Sciences Board was now proposed. (X 2009 09)

Recommended to Academic Board:
18.2 Establishment of College Boards of Examiners for undergraduate (Arts & Law) and undergraduate (Science & Social Science), in place of the undergraduate College Board of Examiners.

18.3 Appointment of the internal members of the College Boards of Examiners.

Noted:

18.4 Some academic staff were serving on more than one Board. ABExCo invited Schools to re-nominate Board members should workloads prove excessive.

19 TEACHING & QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Received:

19.1 The Report of the Teaching & Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC) following its meeting on 19 January 2010. (X 2009 10)

Recommend for approval by Academic Board:


Noted:

19.3 TQEC had endorsed revisions to the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which would be further developed and presented for formal approval at the summer term meeting.

19.4 Preparations for the 2010 National Student Survey.

19.5 TQEC’s receipt of the annual programme monitoring template for reporting on the 2008/09 academic session.

19.6 TQEC’s discussion of peer observation of teaching within Schools.

19.7 TQEC’s receipt of a presentation on e-Learning.

19.8 TQEC’s receipt of a report on student complaints, appeals, code of student discipline and assessment offences.

20 PROGRAMME APPROVAL

Noted:

20.1 A list of programmes approved by Programmes Committee and the chair of TQEC through a fast-track approval process to commence in autumn 2010. (X 2009 11)

20.2 The fast track procedure was intended to facilitate programme development for 2010 launch, also ensuring that appropriate quality assurance checks and balances were applied. Further programmes for 2010 launch, including those identified though the Portfolio Review, would also be put through the fast track procedure and reported to ABExCo.

21 EXEMPTION TO THE REGULATIONS: POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT PROGRAMMES, SCHOOL OF ARTS

Recommended for approval by Academic Board:

21.1 An exemption to the regulations on the classification of awards for programmes offered within the School of Arts listed below, enabling a variation in the weighting of the dissertation and other modules.

21.2 A suspension to the regulations to allow the provision in minute 2.1 above to be applied to assessment of students in 2008-9. (X 2009 12)
22 APPEALS AGAINST DECISIONS OF BOARDS OF EXAMINERS

Considered:

22.1 Proposals for a revised procedure for appeals against decisions of Boards of Examiners, in accordance with the Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study. (X 2009 13)

Noted:

22.2 The procedures had been referred to ABExCo by Academic Board for further discussion on the issue of student representation.

22.3 The student representative outlined the Student Union’s view that students should be permitted to sit on panels considering appeals against decisions of Boards of Examiners.

22.4 It was the view of College officers, confirmed through discussion with Birkbeck academic staff and the University of London, that it was not appropriate for panels considering appeals against decisions of Boards of Examiners to have student members because the panels’ work involved the exercise of academic judgement.

22.5 ABExCo discussed these viewpoints, noting students’ legitimate interest in ensuring that due process had been fully and faithfully followed as well as the need to ensure that judgements related to confirming whether the standards of awards had been met should be reserved for academic staff. ABExCo noted views that it may be appropriate for the Students’ Union to nominate an observer or non-voting member of any Appeal Panel.

Agreed:

22.6 The procedure to be redrafted:

• To further clarify the role of the appeal panel in assessing whether Boards of Examiners
  o had followed due process and acted fairly
  o had exercised academic judgement appropriately
• To clarify the role of any nominee of the Students’ Union within the process.

Recommended for approval by Academic Board:

22.7 The procedure for appeals against decisions of Boards of Examiners subject to the revisions described in Minute 22.6 above.

23 RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Received:

23.1 The Report of the Research Committee following its meeting on 15 January 2009. (X 2009 14)

Recommended for approval by Academic Board:

23.2 Establishment of a Research Student Sub-Committee reporting to Research Committee.
23.3 Adoption of procedures for the consideration of research ethics, including the establishment of a College Research Ethics Committee, subject to further minor amendments.

23.4 Establishment of a Commodity Finance Centre in the School of Business (Department of Economics, Mathematics & Statistics).

23.5 Establishment of a Centre for Law and the Humanities, in the School of Law.

Noted:

23.6 Research Committee’s consideration of an interim report on the review of the College Research School. The Review would define the role of the CRS in supporting College strategy for postgraduate research students including recruitment, support, supervision, facilities, securing and using external grants and opportunities for collaboration.

23.7 Professor Li Wei would replace Professor Michelle Everson as Director of the College Research School from 1 March 2010. ABExCo thanked Professor Everson for her valuable work.

23.8 Research Committee’s receipt of a report on preparations for the Research Excellence Framework from the College’s REF Working Party and REF Support Group. The REF Working Party continued to meet frequently. It was reviewing research activity in six subject areas and would instigate an assessment of research impact within the College after HEFCE had concluded its work in this area and issued guidelines. It was reported that the sector wide REF exercise could be delayed by a year.

23.9 Research Committee’s receipt of the results of the annual Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.

24 STUDENT EXPERIENCE & WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

Received:

24.1 The Report of the Student Experience & Widening Participation Committee following its meeting on 14 January 2010. (X 2009 15)

Approved:

24.2 The terms of reference of proposed Strategic Review projects aiming to support and enhance student recruitment and retention, which would report to the Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee.

Noted:

24.3 The individual projects would include research on what works in terms of retention measures as well as assessing retention and completion data. They had been discussed at an awayday meeting with the Pro Vice Masters for Learning and Teaching and the Student Experience and the Assistant Deans for Learning and Teaching and Recruitment and Retention and would be defined and announced by the end of March.

24.4 HEFCE had postponed the submission date for Widening Participation Strategic Assessment reports for one year to December 2010. The assessments would be necessary to secure the widening participation part of core teaching funding.

25 CAMBRIDGE EDUCATION GROUP

Noted:
25.1 Cambridge Education Group was a commercial organisation offering pre-university programmes to prospective international students in tandem with progression agreements with specific HE institutions. An agreement had been confirmed for CEG to hire office and teaching space at Birkbeck.

25.2 Work had begun, co-ordinated by the Academic Registrar, on progression agreements at undergraduate and postgraduate level for CEG students to come to Birkbeck. The criteria for these agreements would be defined and controlled by Birkbeck. ABExCo endorsed this development and asked for a report on the agreements once these had been drafted.

**Agreed:**

25.3 To circulate CEG’s curriculum to ABExCo members.

25.4 To receive a further report on the content of the progression agreements

26 **REASSESSMENT AND THE 30% / 40% RULE**

**Considered:**

26.1 A paper drafted in response to a request from the Executive Deans to review the requirement in the Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study. (X 2009 17)

**Noted:**

26.2 Under the regulations for Taught Programmes of Study, reassessment was only available to students achieving 30% or above (undergraduate) or 40% or above (postgraduate). The Deans had proposed that this Regulation be waived to improve student retention.

26.3 ABExCo approved this proposal in principle and asked for a final version to be presented to Academic Board following further consultation between the Pro-Vice-Master (Learning and Teaching) and the Assistant Deans (Learning and Teaching).

27 **LINKING LONDON LIFELONG LEARNNG NETWORK**

**Received:**

27.1 A presentation from the Director of the Linking London Lifelong Learning Network on the work of the LLLLN bringing together partners from further and higher education to provide progression routes for vocational education. (X 2009 16)

28 **DATES OF NEXT MEETING**

**Noted:**

The date of the Summer term meeting:

- Thursday 3 June at 10.30am in the Council Room

Signed…………………………………………………

Date…………………………………………..........