TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP
Received and Confirmed

1.1 The terms of reference and scheme of membership for the Academic Board Executive Committee 2015-16 (X 2015 02)

MINUTES AND REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Received and Noted

2.1 The minutes of the Academic Board Executive Committee 27 May 2015

2.1.1 The unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board 17 June 2015 (X 2015 02)

2.2 There were no matters arising.

MASTER’S REPORT
Noted

3.1 Members noted their thanks to the Pro Vice Master for Strategic Engagement who had recently left the College. Discussions were ongoing in regards to how the portfolio of work previously overseen by the PVM for Strategic Engagement would now be carried out. It was noted that an Interim Policy Advisor had been appointed and that the post holder’s main duties would be around political campaigning and lobbying.

3.2 There would be a renewed focus on political campaigning particularly in regards to the decline of part time study, postgraduate loans for the over thirties and the possibility of extending the subject range of the new Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, which would enable them to be better integrated into the Birkbeck offering.
3.3 Apprenticeships were noted to be a popular concept within the sector currently. It was heard that they would be of value not only to young people seeking to combine education with tangible skills, but also to older people who had not been in a position to take advantage of educational opportunities earlier in life. Presently the most practical way of influencing government and policy, was via engagement with apprenticeships, however the College would also continue to promote part time study.

4 RESEARCH COMMITTEE
Received
4.1 The report of the Research Committee meeting of the 8th October 2015 (X 2015 03)

Noted
4.2 Members were updated on the current work of the Research Committee. There were no recommendations brought to ABExCo from the Research Committee

4.3 The REF Working Party had been reconvened and would be working to support the College in its submission to the next REF. The date of the next REF had not yet been confirmed as the publication of the consultation paper had been postponed until after the late November Comprehensive Spending Review.

4.4 The Open Access Working Group was working towards establishing compliance with HEFCE’s Open Access Policy across the College. It was noted that HEFCE had officially postponed the deadline for the deposit of publications on acceptance, from 1 April 2016 to 1 April 2017. It was agreed that all efforts should still be made to meet the 2016 deadline as compliance would yield benefits for the College.

4.5 A Research Support Group had been convened. The group would be chaired by the Deputy College Secretary (Governance) and will be comprised of those members of Professional Services that will be involved in supporting the implementation of the Research Strategy 2014-2019.

4.6 The Research Strategy Group has been convened. The Group will be chaired by the PVM for Research and will be comprised of the Assistant Deans for Research and Assistant Deans for Postgraduate Research Students. The meetings of the Group will provide a forum in which matters relating to both the implementation of the College research strategy and postgraduate research student matters can be addressed from an academic perspective.

4.7 The ESRC DTP Bid was ongoing. The PVM for Research had set up a steering group to coordinate Birkbeck’s contribution to the application process.

4.8 The Postgraduate Research review had been completed with the results presented at the last meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee. It was reported that the review was being considered within the working groups of the Research Committee, with a view to moving towards implementation of the review’s recommendations. Updates on this work would be presented to the Strategic Planning Committee on a termly basis.
5 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Received
5.1 The Report of the Student Engagement Committee meeting of the 1 October 2015 (X 2015 04)

Noted
5.2 The Student Engagement Committee had endorsed the Student Engagement Strategy following extensive consultation with the Schools and various staff members. There had been some debate amongst members of the Committee as to whether or not ‘Widening Participation’ should have been dropped from the Committee’s name. Concerns on this front had been somewhat appeased by the assurance that widening access would remain a key part of the Committee’s work and it importance would be reflected in the terms of reference of the committee.

5.3 Members of ABExCo discussed the implications of removing ‘Widening Participation’ from the title of the Student Engagement Committee. As in previous discussions on the point it was felt by some members that the loss of this wording would be of great significance in that it would mean that across the College there would be no named place to which issues of widening access could be brought and discussed.

5.4 The appropriateness of tying widening access with student engagement was questioned given that the first applied to processes at the pre-application stage and the second after students have enrolled.

5.5 It was determined that upon the appointment of a new PVM for Access and Community Engagement a conversation would take place between the post holder and other senior academic staff as to how it was envisioned that the portfolio would move forward.

Endorsed
5.6 The Student Engagement Strategy

5.7 The Student Engagement Committee had proposed a new Terms of Reference for itself: it would be primarily concerned with rolling out, delivering and monitoring the Student Engagement Strategy.

5.8 The Student Engagement Committee had agreed that in order to emphasise the importance of widening access to both members and the College it was agreed that ‘Widening access and social mobility’ should be the first element of the Committee’s terms of reference.

5.9 ABExCo queried as to whether the membership of the Student Engagement Committee had become too far removed from the academic body of the College. It was confirmed that the academic membership of the committee was comprised of the Assistant Deans for Retention (or equivalent) from each of the Schools. A list of School members will be sent to the Executive Deans for review.

Endorsed
5.10 The revised terms of reference of the Student Engagement Committee.
6 TEACHING AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Received

6.1 The Report of the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (X 2015 05)

Noted

6.2 Further information on the Teaching Excellence Framework is due to be published in a government Green paper in late October 2015. It was reported that the first iteration of the TEF is likely to be implemented quickly, followed by a second possibly more sophisticated iteration. The possibility of a metrics driven framework, with data being taken from such sources as the NSS and graduate employment information, was noted.

6.3 The second iteration of TEF might include further indicators, such as Learning Gain. This would be consistent with the government’s current approach of prioritising value added.

6.4 There was a possibility that the outcomes of the TEF might be tied to banding tiers; gold, silver or bronze. HEIs that were rated ‘excellent’ would be able to charge more than £9K in tuition fees in line with inflation.

6.5 ABExCo was presented with a suite of policy proposals. It was noted that the opportunity to consult with and elicit feedback from Schools had not been as extensive as would be preferred. The Committee agreed that proposals endorsed by it at this meeting would be subject to a consultation process and possible amendment before Academic Board. If further discussion was deemed necessary post Academic Board then the consultation process would continue with final approval being taken by Chair’s Action.

Considered

6.6 Members considered the recommendation of the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee for the suspension and withdrawal of the following programmes:

Programmes Suspended

- LLM Constitutional Politics, Law and theory
- MSc Children, Youth and International Development
- MA Social and Cultural Geography (2015/16 only)
- MA World Cinema (2015/16)

Programme Withdrawals

- MSc Health and Disease
- CertHE Psychoanalytic Psychology
- Fd Biological Sciences (formerly Foundation Degree in Science)
- CertHE Screenwriting
- FdSc Psychodynamic Counselling and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (from 2016/17)
- Grad Cert Iberian and Latin American Studies (from 2016/17)

Endorsed
6.7 ABExCo endorsed the proposed programme suspensions and programme withdrawals.

**Student Complaints Policy and Procedure**

6.8 A new Student Complaints Policy and Procedure had been written in response to external guidance, primarily the publication of the Good Practice Framework by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, Chapter B9 of the QAA Quality Code and ‘UK Higher Education providers – advice on consumer protection law.’ It was intended that the revised policy would come into place in January 2016.

6.9 It was noted that the College’s approach to student complaints would be to seek resolution via informal mediation, where appropriate, before initiating the formal stages.

6.10 Members requested details in terms of the number of complaints the College receives and how many are found for and against. It was agreed that these figures would be circulated to members after the meeting and would include retrospective figures. It was agreed that such figures would be circulated to members on an annual basis from now on.

Endorsed

6.11 ABExCo endorsed the Students Complaints Policy and Procedure, subject to further discussions as set out in minute 6.5.

**Appeals Policy and Procedure (taught) and (research)**

6.12 The New Appeals Policies and Procedures for taught and research students would replace the Procedure for Appeals against Decisions of Boards of Examiners and the Procedure for Appeals against Decisions of Examiners for Research Degrees respectively. The changes were in response to external guidance, primarily the publication of the Good Practice Framework by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, Chapter B9 of the QAA Quality Code and ‘UK Higher Education Providers – advice on consumer protection law’ published by the Competitions and Markets Authority.

6.13 The new policies would take effect from January 2016, and would therefore affect students already enrolled on their programmes. It was noted that before implementation of the policies there would be appropriate consultation with the Student’s Union and that all students would be written to informing them of the change in policy.

Endorsed

6.14 ABExCo endorsed the Appeals Policy and Procedure (taught) and (research), subject to further discussions as set out in minute 6.5.

**Fitness to Study Policy**

6.15 The Fitness to Study policy had been revised to; include a more formal stage before as is best practice in the sector; provide more clarity around the procedure; include a reference to the new Consultant Psychiatrist; to ensure that the College evidences each FTS case in a consistent way.
6.16 The revised policy had a new section to provide clear guidance and support around the reintegration of students after a break in studies.

6.17 It was noted that the revised policy would allow for the avoidance of disciplinary procedures in complex circumstances where fitness to study issues could be regarded as the primary factor.

6.18 Members asked about how the revised policy interacted with the Dignity at Work and Study principles recently approved by HRSPC, and the policies and procedures for making adjustments for students with disabilities and the code of student discipline.

6.19 It was noted that the FTS policy had been revised as a result of the review of Dignity and Work and Study principles and that the two were very much complimentary.

6.20 It was noted that the revised FTS policy applied to both applicants and enrolled students whereas the reasonable adjustments policy applied only to enrolled students. It was further noted that FTS panels would consider any reasonable adjustments and support that had been made available before taking a decision.

6.21 In determining whether a case would fall within the purview of the FTS policy or become a disciplinary matter it was confirmed that the opinion of health professionals would be made available as appropriate to the panels. It was agreed that interaction between the FTS policy and the Code of Student Discipline would be kept under review.

**Endorsed**

6.22 ABExCo endorsed the revised Fitness to Study Policy, subject to further discussion as set out in minute 6.5.

**Assessment Offences Policy**

6.23 The Assessment Offences Policy had been amended so as to bring the penalties for assessment offences in line with the 2015/16 Common Award Scheme regulations, and to increase the clarity of the policy.

**Endorsed**

6.24 ABExCo endorsed the Assessment Offences Policy, subject to further discussion as set out in minute 6.5.

**Proposed Procedure and Guidance for the Approval and Monitoring of Academic Collaborations**

6.25 The proposed procedure and guidance had been developed to assist Birkbeck staff in developing and seeking approval for collaborative proposals, as well as managing collaborative partnerships, in a coherent manner which safeguards the college’s reputation and has due regard for its responsibility towards the quality of its research and the academic standards of its awards.

**Endorsed**

6.26 ABExCo endorsed the proposed Procedure and Guidance for the Approval and Monitoring of Academic Collaborations.
6.27 Representatives from TQEC were currently working with Schools to establish a rolling schedule of policy updates. The rolling schedule would be published to members of ABExCo in advance to give adequate time for consideration. Furthermore, TQEC would prioritise policy amendments or proposals in line with College needs and would highlight this process to ABExCo members.

6.28 The student representative enquired as to what action was being taken on feedback from the National Students Survey. It was confirmed that a working group comprised of the Assistant Deans for Learning and Teaching and other key staff members had been convened at that they would be looking to further the College’s understanding of what could be being done to support and enhance the student experience. The student representative and the Academic Registrar would meet outside of the Committee to discuss further.

7 REPORT OF THE FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE

7.1 The Annual Report from the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee 2014-15 (X 2015 06)

Noted

7.2 It was noted that, with 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, providing sufficient net income for the College's needs.

7.3 FBSC, in conjunction with SPC, had confirmed the 2016-17 Access Agreement. The agreement represented a reduction in the percentage of additional fee income committed by the College to OFFA countable expenditure on student financial support, following several years of committing a high proportion since 2012-13. The decision was made in line with internal evidence of the lack of impact of financial support on access or retention, as well as national evidence that financial support does not lead to improved access outcomes.

7.4 The College maintains a commitment to Widening Access and providing support to low income students with various bursaries, fee waivers and applications to the Birkbeck Access to Learning Fund and the Hardship Fund. The College spends one quarter of fee income over 6K on student financial support, a figure which compares favourably with other higher education institutions. However, under OFFA classifications the College is not regarded as a Widening Access institution. The College continues to monitor its financial support provisions to ensure that support is finding its way to the right people in the right way and complements Birkbeck’s marketing.

7.5 In the autumn statement the government announced their intention to provide postgraduate loans from 2016-17. There has been little follow up on this matter and it may not come to fruition, probably due to cost issues. It was noted that those
most likely to benefit from the postgraduate loans were likely to be those most averse towards taking them out.

7.6 FBSC had noted the response of other universities to the ongoing European refugee crisis; a number of Russell Group universities were offering scholarships to Syrian refugees that would be awarded on the grounds of academic excellence. Birkbeck would look to offering provision that might be more practical given the small likelihood that refugees would have their academic transcripts and evidence to hand to make applications to such schemes.

7.7 It was reported that the College’s Head of Widening Access would be working with colleagues in the Schools and with the College’s existing local contacts with a view to opening up existing Certificate and Short Courses.

7.8 Members noted that many of the Syrian refugees were reported to be graduates and so the College must be sure to offer courses of an appropriate level. It was suggested that applicants might be invited to sit in on courses of a level they deemed appropriate and that this might go some way towards validating their existing qualifications at a relatively low cost to Birkbeck.

7.11 Members noted that whilst the Syrian refugee crisis was topical at the moment there were many refugees from other less publicised countries of origin. It was suggested that a blanket refugee policy might be more appropriate.

8 COLLEGE PROCEDURES FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF EMERITUS TITLES
Received and Considered

8.1 The revised procedure for the conferment of Emeritus Titles (X 2015 07)

Noted

8.2 It was noted that provision would need to be made in the event that an outgoing Master would have an emeritus title conferred upon them. It was agreed that the Chair of Governors would be invited to confer an emeritus title if such circumstances were to arise.

8.3 The Committee asked for point five to be amended as its current wording implied that Professors and Readers who resigned were doing so under less than optimum circumstances while this might not be the case. It was agreed that the last sentence of the point would read:

‘Professors and Readers who resign are not normally eligible for consideration for Emeritus titles.’

Endorsed

8.4 ABExCo endorsed the revised Procedure for the Conferment of Emeritus Titles, subject to the above amendments.

9 CONFERMENT OF EMERITUS TITLES
Received and Considered
9.1 The proposal to confer an Emeritus Professorship on Professor Philip Dewe (X 2015 08)

Noted

9.2 The proposal was received from the School of BEI. Professor’s Dewe’s initial position at Birkbeck was in 1996 and in 2001 he was appointed Professor and Head of the Department of Organizational Psychology. Professor Dewe was appointed Vice Master of the College in 2003 and remained in this role until 2014. On stepping down from this role he was PV-M Special Projects. He was made a Fellow of the College in November 2014.

9.3 Members expressed their thanks to Professor Dewe for his service to the College and whole heartedly endorsed the proposal of his emeritus Professorship.

Endorsed

9.4 ABExCo endorsed the proposal to confer an Emeritus Professorship on Professor Philip Dewe.

10 TERM DATES

Received
10.1 The College Term Dates for 2017/18 and 2018/19 (X 2015 09)

Noted

10.2 The student representative suggested that the start of the autumn term be advanced one week to allow for an induction week for students. It was agreed that induction arrangements did need to be addressed as currently there were logistical issues prohibiting students from attending such events before term such as; not being in receipt of grants before term starts and conflicts with religious interests.

10.3 It was noted that the induction process was very important in regards to retention, and that a two stage induction process might be implemented. In this way students who needed to access services a few weeks into the term could be actively signposted to the correct place.

11 DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS

Noted
11.1 The dates of the next meetings of the Academic Board Executive Committee

- Thursday 18 February 2016, at 2pm
- Thursday 2 June 2016, at 2pm