Minutes of the Academic Board Executive Committee

9 February 2011

Present:
Professor David Latchman (Chair)
Professor John Annette, Mr Richard Clarke, Professor Philip Dewe, Mr James Emmott,
Professor Hilary Fraser, Professor Stephen Frosh, Professor Sue Jackson, Professor Nicholas
Keep, Mrs Tricia King, Dr Kate Mackenzie Davey, Professor Mike Oaksford, Professor Philip
Powell, Professor Patricia Tuit, Professor Miriam Zukas,

By invitation:
Mr Philip Payne (Librarian).

In attendance:
Mr Keith Harrison, Mr Dean Pateman, Dr Jasbir Gill, Mr David McGhie, Ms Megan Reeves,
Mrs Katharine Bock, Mr Trevor Pearce

Apologies for absence:
Professor Costas Douzinas, Dr Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick, Professor Matthew Innes,
Ms Naina Patel, Professor Julian Swann, Mr Peter Westley.

9 MINUTES AND REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Noted

9.1 The Minutes of the last meeting of ABExCo were reported to Academic Board on
10 November 2010, having been confirmed by those members of the Committee
present at the Board’s meeting.

9.2 Academic Board's approval ABExCo’s recommendations as follows:
- College Policy on the Accreditation of Prior Learning
- Dates of term for 2016-17
- University of London International Programme Regulations
• College Research Strategy
• Establishment of a new Centre for the Study of British Politics and Public Life
• Publications produced by academic staff leaving the College and publications produced by academic staff before they joined the College to be included in the Institutional Repository.

10 MASTER’S REPORT
10.1 Following circulation of the document Next Steps for Birkbeck, setting out proposed strategic developments responding to HE funding policy changes, the Master had commenced a round of meetings with each School to discuss the proposals.

10.2 HEFCE had announced its intentions for funding for 2011-12 at the sector-wide level. This included in-year cuts for 2010-11 which would apply from April 2011 when the fiscal year 2011-12 commenced. These cuts were to T and QR funding although funding for widening participation and internationally reputed research were likely to be better protected. The College would receive notification of its individual grant in March.

10.3 The in-year cuts had caused an increase in the forecast deficit for 2010-11 to £1M. A mid year budget review for Schools and Professional Services was under way, aiming to identify savings. As well as the immediate issue of the deficit for 2010-11, there was a need to make savings in preparation for the first years of the new fee and funding regime starting in 2012-13, which were likely to be financially challenging.

10.4 Lobbying and liaison with politicians and policymakers continued, with the aim of ensuring that the strong support expressed by Government for parity for part time students translated into policy and practice, without unintended consequences. The focus had moved on to arrangements for paying back student loans. Under current proposals, part time students would begin to pay back their student loans in the April following their third year of study. This was intended to mirror payback arrangements for three year full time degrees but did not take into account either Birkbeck’s standard four year degree pattern or fact that students on degrees with foundation components or intercalated Masters Degrees took four years full time to complete.

10.5 The College was also making the case for students progressing to Bachelors degrees from Certificates and Foundation Degrees not to begin paying back until they had completed the higher level programme. The position for these groups of students would also depend on College fee policy. It would be necessary to confirm the fee strategy for programmes with identified progression routes to higher level programmes, in particular the fees for students entering the lower level programme before the fee rise in 2012-13 but progressing after that year.
10.6 The interest rate for student loans (Retail Price Index plus 3%) was also a matter of concern especially for poorer students, who would be accumulating significant debt.

10.7 Early feedback from prospective students attending open evenings at Birkbeck was that intentions were split evenly between people aiming to enter in 2011-12 at current fee levels and people opting to wait until 2012-13 when loans would be available.

11 COMMON AWARDS SCHEME POLICIES
Recommended to Academic Board
11.1 Approval of the following policies, which had been endorsed by TQEC:
- College Policy on Feedback on Assessed Work (X 2010 06A)
- College Admissions Policy (X 2010 06B)
- Revised Terms of Reference for the College Boards of Examiners (X 2010 06C)
- Revised College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners, subject to clarification of the proscription on keeping assessment data on non-College computers. (X 2010 06D)
- College Policy and Procedure for the Termination of a Student’s Registration (X 2010 06E)

12 TEACHING & QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE
Received
12.1 The Report of the Teaching & Quality Enhancement Committee following its meeting on 19 January. (X 2010 07)

Noted
12.2 Withdrawn and suspended programmes

12.3 Proposed establishment of a Technology-Enhanced Learning Working Group of TQEC, which would establish how the College would meet minimum standards for Virtual Learning Environment provision as required by the QAA and develop technology enhanced learning. A two-year part time academic secondment had been agreed to support this and a job description would be produced.

12.4 Reports on the 2010 National Student Survey

12.5 Analysis of internal student surveys

12.6 Responses to Internal Review

12.7 A report on student complaints and the code of student discipline. A
12.8 A report on assessment offences and appeals

13 RESEARCH COMMITTEE
Received
13.1 The Report of the Research Committee following its meeting on 11 January 2011. (X 2010 08)

Recommended for approval by Academic Board:
13.2 Establishment of the Vasari Research Centre in the Department of the History of Art & Screen Media, School of Arts.

Noted
13.3 Preparations for the REF continued, overseen by the REF Working Group reporting to Research Committee. A report on the dry run of recording research outputs was being prepared for consideration by the working group. The group had also begun work on the research impact agenda, with guidance issued and Unit of Assessment leads asked to begin to collect examples. The outcome of HEFCE’s decision on the weighting of research impact was awaited.

13.4 ABExCo was pleased to note the success of the joint Bloomsbury Consortium bid with SOAS and the Institute of Education for an ESRC doctoral training centre. Birkbeck was leading on Psychology, Economics and Politics and its share of the awards was 26 per year. Feedback on the bid had noted the existing joint research activity in the Bloomsbury Consortium, including the joint PhD studentship programme.

13.5 Research Committee also reported its consideration of ESRC policy changes affecting applications for research grants.

13.6 On research student matters, Research Committee reported its ongoing work defining the role of the Birkbeck Graduate Research School in the context of the research cultures and research student communities developing in the five Schools.

14 STUDENT EXPERIENCE & WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE
Received
14.1 The Report of the Student Experience & Widening Participation Committee following its meeting on 12 January 2011. (X 2010 09)

Noted
14.2 SEWP’s consideration of a report on delivery of the Retention Strategy aiming to share best practice, formulate data and link with the Student Recruitment
Monitoring Group. Regular retention monitoring meetings with School and Professional Services representation were being established.

14.3 Development of draft guidelines for communications with students

15 STUDENT DISPUTE RESOLUTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Noted

15.1 SEWP and TQEC had both given consideration to a draft policy and procedures for resolution of disputes with students, intended to update and modernise the College’s provisions and to provide clearer wording on handling frivolous and vexatious cases.

15.2 SEWP had endorsed the document which had been forwarded to ABExCo for consideration. However at TQEC student representatives had noted concern over the constitution of Panels and the definition of the role of the student-nominated companion. TQEC had agreed that there should be further discussion between student representatives and Registry officers after which a reworded version would be submitted to the Chair of TQEC for endorsement and referral to ABExCo and Academic Board for approval.

Agreed

15.3 Confirmation of ABExCo’s endorsement of the draft policy as presented to it, subject to the Chair of TQEC’s approval of rewording as noted in 15.2 above.

16 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

Noted

16.1 The 2010-11 National Student Survey was under way. A 50% response rate was necessary for the results of the survey among Birkbeck students to be made public. In 2009-10, HEFCE had applied a new sampling method which included Certificate and module students who were less likely to respond; and the 50% response rate had not been achieved. For the 50% threshold to be achieved in 2010-11, the response rate would need to rise substantially.

ACTION

16.2 Schools to ask academic staff, including sessional staff, to encourage students to complete the National Student Survey.

17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted

17.1 The date of the Summer term meeting: Tuesday 31 May 2011 at 2.00 p.m. in the Council Room