Minutes of the Academic Board Executive Committee
31 May 2011

Present:
Professor David Latchman (Chair)
Mr Richard Clarke, Professor Philip Dewe, Ms Annabel Jones, Mr Sean Rillo Raczka, Professor Hilary Fraser, Professor Stephen Frosh, Professor Sue Jackson, Professor Nicholas Keep, Mrs Tricia King, Dr Kate Mackenzie Davey, Professor Julian Swann, Professor Mike Oaksford, Professor Philip Powell, Professor Patricia Tuitt, Professor Miriam Zukas,

By invitation:
Mr Philip Payne (Librarian), Professor Li Wei (Head of the College Research School), Emeritus Professor Eric Evans (QAA Observer).

In attendance:
Mr Keith Harrison, Mr Peter Westley, Mrs Naina Patel, Dr Jasbir Gill, Ms Megan Reeves, Mrs Katharine Bock, Mr Trevor Pearce, Ms Julia Lerch.

Apologies for absence:
Professor John Annette, Professor Costas Douzinas, Dr Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick, Professor Matthew Innes, Mr Dean Pateman, Mr David McGhie

18 WELCOME
Noted
18.1 The Committee welcomed Annabel Jones, new Student Governor and second student representative, to ABExCo.

19 MINUTES AND REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Noted
19.1 The Minutes of the last meeting of ABExCo, which were reported to Academic Board on 23 February 2011 having been confirmed by those members of the Committee present at the Board’s meeting.

19.2 Academic Board’s approval of ABExCo’s recommendations as follows:
- College Policy on Feedback on Assessed Work;
- College Admissions Policy, subject to increased emphasis on the role of admission tutors and programme directors in admissions and definition of candidates and applicants;
- Revised Terms of Reference for the College Boards of Examiners;
- Revised College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners; subject to inclusion of a reference to the role of Sub-Boards in admissions;
- College Policy and Procedure for the Termination of a Student’s Registration;
- Establishment of the Vasari Research Centre in the Department of the History of Art & Screen Media, School of Arts.

20 **MATTERS ARISING**

**Degree Awarding Powers**
Noted

20.1 As previously reported, the College had resumed its application for Degree Awarding Powers. It was not the College’s intention to use such powers while the University of London Degree remained in existence. QAA Assessors were observing College and School committee meetings and Exam Boards and would return to the College in July for meetings with staff and students. The outcome of the exercise was expected early 2012.

21 **MASTER’S REPORT**
Noted

21.1 Birkbeck was continuing its strategy of influencing and lobbying Government to ensure an optimal fee and loan system for part-time students. The College was still campaigning for a fairer payback point for part-time students of 4.5 years after the start of study, rather than 3.5 years as currently envisaged. It had been confirmed that Certificate students progressing onto a degree would now not be required to pay back their loan until 3.5 years after the start of their degree.

22 **LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CHANGING TIMES**
Considered

22.1 A note from the Pro Vice Master (Learning and Teaching) on developing an agenda for learning and teaching responding to current changes. (X 2010 10)

Noted

22.2 The development of learning and teaching was being taken forward in partnership with the Assistant Deans (Learning and Teaching) through the Learning and Teaching Working Group, which reported to TQEC. Assistant Deans chaired their School TQECs, where the work of the Learning and Teaching Working Group was discussed and disseminated.

22.3 The Learning and Teaching Working Group was working towards implementing more flexible learning and teaching, to better suit the needs of students, by offering an integrated range of flexible, research-led courses across all levels of provision. This included work on retention and progression; enhancing pedagogic practice and technology-enhanced learning; the development of decelerated degrees and cross-College and cross-School provision, reviewing teaching patterns; and revising the learning and teaching and quality assurance strategies into a new strategy for learning and teaching enhancement.

22.4 ABExCo members welcomed the move towards more flexibility, noting that although it was in response to an external agenda, it would complement the College’s unique mission. The agenda for learning and teaching in changing times would be further discussed at the next meeting of Academic Board.

*Minute 23.1 – 23.9 covers reserved business: commercially sensitive information restricted to members of the Committee and the Academic Board*

23 **UNDERGRADUATE TUITION FEES AND STUDENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

23.10 ABExCo endorsed the undergraduate fee tier levels set by FBSC and SPC and the ongoing process of assigning programmes to tiers. It also noted the further consideration of Certificate fees and endorsed the continued development of the College’s bursary and financial support offer for 2012-13.
24 LIBRARY AND LEARNING RESOURCES AT STRATFORD

Considered

24.1 A proposal for the provision of library and learning support and resources at the new Stratford building. (X 2010 12)

Noted

24.2 A small library/Learning Resource Centre was included in the plans for the new University Square building, which would open in 2013. Although most of the other aspects of the building were being developed on a shared basis with UEL, the Library/ Learning Resource Centre was originally intended as a dedicated Birkbeck facility. It was sponsored by the Garfield Weston Foundation.

24.3 Under current arrangements, Birkbeck students used UEL library facilities. UEL was planning to open a new library in 2012-13 and it had been proposed that the collaborative partnership with UEL be further developed, enabling Birkbeck students to use UEL’s new library and UEL students to use the University Square Learning Resource Centre. This was considered to be a good option both in terms of cost savings and the student experience.

24.4 Under this arrangement, the Learning Resource Centre facilities in University Square Stratford building would become a shared unstaffed learning space for individual and group study as well as for induction and workshop sessions. Books required by Birkbeck students would be housed in the UEL Library (provided the collection was no larger than had been planned for the University Square building). These proposals had been supported by the Library Advisory Group.

24.5 ABExCo endorsed this collaborative approach with the proviso that only UEL students taught in the University Square building should be allowed to use the Learning Resource Centre and that the arrangements should be reviewed after an initial period of use.

24.6 ABExCo also confirmed that academic teams should ensure the library was informed about new course developments at Stratford, so that the collection could be updated as appropriate.

25 TEACHING & QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Received

25.1 The Report of the Teaching & Quality Enhancement Committee following its meeting on 3 May 2011. (X 2010 13)

Recommended for approval by Academic Board

25.2 The new Dissertation Supervision Policy, subject to an amendment in paragraph 12: “The student should normally have three meetings with the supervisor.” (rather than “up to three meetings”)"

25.3 The revised Policy on Assessment Offences.

25.4 The revised Student Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure, which had also been endorsed by SEWP (see minute 27.2 below).

Noted

25.5 Staff and the Students’ Union had provided feedback on the draft and the revision of the Policy was largely complete. A revised definition of the role of the “companion” would be added
following further discussion. The staff trade unions had requested guidance for staff in complying with the Policy.

25.6 TQEC’s receipt of:
- Outcomes of the 2010 National Student Survey. ([http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/tqec/20110503/nss2010responsereport](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/tqec/20110503/nss2010responsereport))
- A report on progress in student retention work.
- University of London Quality Overview Report, detailing the issues raised by the College’s external examiners during 2009/10.
- An oral report on the review of teaching patterns that was currently in progress, to assess more effective use of campus space and consider increasing the use of College space across the whole academic year. Further consultation would be undertaken on this issue.

26 RESEARCH COMMITTEE

26.1 The Report of the Research Committee following its meeting on 10 May 2011. (X 2010 14)

Recommended for approval by Academic Board

26.2 The designation of the Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism as a research centre of the College.

26.3 The revised Good Practice in Research Policy.

26.4 The proposed new Procedure for Appeals Against Decisions of Examiners of Research Degrees, subject to an amendment in paragraph 25: “The observer may comment upon proceedings during the Panel discussion to consider its decision.” (Removed: “at the discretion of the Chair of the Panel”).

26.5 The proposal to provide for the normal word length for research degree theses in Geography to be up to 100,000 words (PhD) / 80,000 words (MPhil).

26.6 The proposal relating to generic skills training funding for research student events, subject to streamlining the application process for funding to Schools and Departments for generic skills courses.

Noted

26.7 With the withdrawal of targeted Research Council funding for generic skills training (Roberts Funding), the College had to identify alternative funding for such activities. Previously, the Roberts funding allocation had been administered via the Birkbeck Graduate Research School (BGRS). It was proposed to maintain funding for the BGRS by apportioning £200 per FTE enrolled research student (not including students on writing up or exam only status) to the BGRS, to fund both BGRS-delivered courses and to continue the allocation of funding to schools and department, on a competitive bid basis, to deliver generic skills courses. This was amount by which research council would be uplifting the standard fee level in calculating the value of training grants, to enable institutions to make their own arrangements for development for research students. The Birkbeck fee would be raised to the Research Council level to cover the costs for students not funded by research council training grants.

26.8 As the funding would in future come from tuition fee income which would otherwise have flowed to Schools, ABExCo agreed that the allocation system should facilitate access and
benefit to all Schools. It asked the BGRS to ensure that the bid system was as streamlined as possible and to relax its requirement for all bids to have new and innovative content.

**Recommended for approval by Academic Board:**

26.9 Continuation of the system through which BGRS allocates funding to Schools and departments to deliver generic skills courses for research students, subject to streamlining the application process and criteria.

**Noted**

26.10 Research Committee’s receipt of:
- Update on REF preparations.
- Report on research Strategy projects.
- Report from the Research Student Sub-Committee

---

**STUDENT EXPERIENCE & WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE**

**Received**

27.1 The Report of the Student Experience & Widening Participation Committee following its meeting on 4 May 2011. *(X 2010 15)*

**Recommended for approval by Academic Board**

27.2 The revised *Student Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure*

**Noted**

27.3 SEWP’s receipt of updates on retention strategy activities.

27.4 The College would reassess its widening participation strategy once the White Paper on HE had been published, the OFFA agreement been agreed and the Education Bill regulating part-time fees been passed by Government.

27.5 Communicating the new fees and loans system to student was a critical imperative and the College was assisting national policy bodies on communicating the student finance package to part-time students. It was also crucial to communicate to postgraduate and international students that the undergraduate fee rises did not affect them.

---

**COLLEGE BOARDS OF EXAMINERS 2009/10**

**Noted**

28.1 The Report of the four College Boards of Examiners to Academic Board on activity from the 2009-10 assessment and award rounds. *(X 2010 16)*