BIRKBECK COLLEGE
University of London

ACADEMIC BOARD
5 November 2015

Present
Professor David Latchman (Chair), Professor Matthew Innes, Professor Stephen Frosh, Professor Sue Jackson, Professor Philip Powell, Professor Patricia Tuit, Professor Nick Keep, Professor Miriam Zukas, Dr Kate Mackenzie-Davey, Dr Jasbir Gill, Mr Robert Atkinson, Mr Pete Williams, Dr Laura Jacobus, Dr Ann Lewis, Dr Richard Hayward, Dr Jennifer Baird, Mr Richard Brinck-Johnsen, Ms Hana Faber, Dr Martin Shipway, Professor Kevin Ibeh, Professor Gerald Roberts, Dr Richard Rayne, Dr Belinda Brooks-Gordon, Professor Hallvard Lillehammer, Professor Trevor Fenner, Professor Karen Hudson-Edwards, Professor Marjorie Lorch, Dr Tim Markham, Dr Eddy Davelaar, Dr Serafina Cuomo

In attendance
Mrs Katharine Bock, Mr Fraser Keir, Mr Keith Harrison, Ms Rachael Boyle

1 MINUTES
Received and confirmed
1.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board 17 June 2015 (attached)

2 REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Noted
2.1 The Report made to the Governors following the meeting of the Academic Board 17 June 2015 (AB 2015 01)

3 MEMBERSHIP 2015-2016
Received and confirmed
3.1 The Terms of Reference and Membership for the Academic Board 2015-16 (AB 2015 01)

   Noted
3.2 Some minor corrections were highlighted.

4 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
4.1 Members noted their thanks to Ms Tricia King (Pro Vice Master for Strategic Engagement and Recruitment & Director of External Relations), Professor Philip Dewe (Pro Vice Master for Special Projects) and Professor Matthew Weait (Pro Vice Master for Academic & Community Partnerships), all of whom had recently left the College.
4.2 It was noted that a new Pro Vice Master portfolio of Access and Community Engagement had been created which would cover aspects of all three previous PVM portfolios. The position will be advertised across the College and members of the Academic Board were invited to put themselves forward for consideration. Shortlisted applicants would be interviewed by a panel chaired by the Master who would make recommendations to the Governors following consultation with the panel.

4.3 The Committee welcomed Mr Jonah Duffin as the new director of External Relations. Members noted fundraising will no longer fall within the remit of External Relations instead be placed into a new and separate directorate to emphasise its importance. This will be headed up by the head of Development and Alumni, Mr Chris Murphy.

4.4 An interim policy advisor to the Master, Mr Jonathan Woodhead, had been appointed to support lobbying and work to promote the College’s interests with policymakers; an open ended post would be advertised in due course.

4.5 Members noted that there is to be a renewed focus on political issues concentrating on 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.

4.6 Members noted that supportive intervention from the government in regards to apprenticeships is only likely to apply to certain subjects, particularly those through which study is linked to work.

4.7 It was expected that businesses would pay a levy for apprenticeship schemes. Currently a broad range of stakeholders had been identified as having an interest in linking into the apprenticeship scheme.

4.8 It was noted that the College might consider broadening its offer to include bespoke part time degree programmes for specific employers.

4.9 Members noted that Mr John McDonnell (Shadow Chancellor) would be speaking at the College. It was further noted that the College has good links with both the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, the former of which had four Birkbeck Alumni on its front bench. The College would seek to improve its links with the Conservative Party.

5 ACADeMIC BOARD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Received and confirmed

5.1 Members of ABExCo present confirmed the minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board Executive Committee 22 October 2015. There were no matters arising. (AB 2015 03)

6 RESEARCH COMMITTEE
Received

6.1 The report of the Research Committee meeting of 8 October 2015 (AB 2015 04)
Noted

7.2 Members noted that the Research Committee had established a suite of working groups to assist in its broad remit of work.

7.3 Members heard that the date of the next REF exercise had not yet been confirmed. Once the date was known an internal timetable would be prepared and finalised.

7.4 It was noted that the Open Access Working Group are working towards establishing compliance with HEFCE’s Open Access Policy across the College by 1 April 2016.

7.5 Members noted that the Research Strategy Group was taking forward the implementation of the College Research Strategy from an academic perspective and the Research Support Group would provide administrative support for the implementation of the Strategy.

7.5 Members heard that the College was currently involved in discussions about the ongoing ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) bid that would combine the existing Bloomsbury and UCL consortia. In order to coordinate Birkbeck’s contribution to the application process, the PVM Research has set up a steering group.

8 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Received and considered

8.1 Members of the Academic Board received the Report of the Student Engagement Committee meeting of 1 October 2015 and considered its recommendations (AB 2015 05)

Noted

8.2 The Student Engagement Committee and ABExCo had endorsed the Student Engagement Strategy following extensive consultation with the Schools and various staff members. Representatives of the Students Union present expressed their support for the strategy and their desire to be involved in its implementation.

8.3 The purpose of the Committee would be to implement the Student Engagement Strategy. Various working groups, reporting to the Student Engagement Committee would be established to oversee the different strands of the strategy.

8.4 It was confirmed that issues of access and widening participation would remain prominent in the future work of the Committee.

8.5 The proposed future membership of the Committee would reflect the expertise and input needed to properly implement the different strands of the Student Engagement Strategy.

Approved

8.6 Academic Board approved the Student Engagement Strategy and the proposed future Membership and Terms of Reference for the Committee.

Secretary’s note: The Committee’s title will in future be Student Engagement and Widening Participation Committee.
9 TEACHING AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE
Received
9.1 The report of the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee meeting of 13 October 2015 (AB 2015 06)

Noted
9.2 TQEC reported on the proposal for a national Teaching Excellence Framework. Further information was due to be published in a government Green paper in October 2015, however, the anticipated publication date may now be pushed back possibly to November.

9.3 Members heard that the first iteration of the TEF was likely to be implemented quickly and was expected to draw on many of the metrics that HEIs already produce. A second, more developed iteration of the TEF might include further indicators, such as Learning Gain. This would be consistent with the Government’s current approach of prioritising value added.

9.4 TQEC also reported on a possible Higher Education Review (HER) in 2016-17. It is currently unclear what form HE quality assurance will take in the future but the College’s TEF and HER steering group are continuing to oversee preparations for the College’s response.

New, Suspended and Withdrawn Programmes
9.5 Academic Board agreed to the approval, suspension and withdrawal of the following programmes:

Programmes Approval
- Graduate Diploma in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies
- Graduate Diploma in Spanish and Latin American Studies

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)

9.6 Members considered the recommendations of the report in relation to the amendments of the following policies:
- Student Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Appeals Policy and Procedure (taught)
• Appeals Policy and Procedure (research)
• Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure

Considered

Student Complaints Policy and Procedure

9.7 Academic Board considered the new Student Complaints Policy and Procedure. The policy 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.

9.8 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.

Approved

9.9 The Academic Board approved the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure.

Considered

Appeals Policy and Procedure (taught) and (research)

9.10 Members considered the proposed new Appeals Policy and Procedure for both taught and research students. 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.

9.11 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.

9.12 Members considered the regulations outlined in the Appeals Policy and Procedure for taught students. Paragraph 9 outlined the procedure to be taken if a complaint was considered vexatious or frivolous. Members queried as to who would determine if a complaint met this criteria. It was further noted that the policy gave assurance that no penalty would be incurred for bringing a complaint; the question as to whether these two concepts could work together in the same policy was put to members. It was agreed that the Academic Registrar would provide further clarification on the matter.

9.13 Members considered the appropriateness of a third party bringing a complaint on behalf of a student with a disability. It was noted that robust support measures and reasonable adjustment policies were in place to support students with disabilities. It was further noted that the Students’ Union provided guidance and support for students wishing to make an academic appeal. It was confirmed that the exact extent of such support would be clarified.
9.14 Members discussed point 38 of the Appeals procedure, setting out the grounds on which appeals would be considered. It was suggested that the point might be extended to include reference to matters surrounding degree classification as well as irregularities around assessment. It was agreed that further discussion on this point would take place outside of the meeting.

Approved
9.15 Academic Board approved the Appeals Policy and Procedure (taught) and (research), subject to clarifications on the role the Students Union could play in supporting students.

Noted
9.16 The Appeals Policy Procedure (research) would be subject to further approval by the Research Student Sub-Committee.

Considered
Fitness to Study Policy
9.17 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.

9.18 Members queried as to whether sufficient consideration had been given to the impact of this policy on the College’s contractual obligations. It was agreed that the policy would go through another round of consultation with the Executive Deans.

APPROVED
9.19 Academic Board approved the revised Fitness to Study Policy subject to a further consultation round with the Executive Deans. Final approval would be taken via chair’s action.

Secretary’s note: The Fitness to Study Policy was approved by Chair’s Action following consultation with the Executive Deans.

Noted
9.20 Members noted the changes made to the following policies:
- Assessment Offences Policy
- Procedures for the Approval and Monitoring of Collaborative Provision

10 COLLEGE PROCEDURES FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF CONFERMENT OF TITLES OF EMERITUS PROFESSORS AND EMERITUS READERS
Received and approved
10.1 The revised procedure for the conferment of Emeritus Professor and Emeritus Reader of the University of London (AB 2015 07)

11 EMERITUS TITLES
Received and approved
11.1 Proposals for the conferment of Emeritus Titles (AB 2015 08)
11.2 Academic Board warmly endorsed a proposal to confer an Emeritus title on Professor Philip Dewe, noting his initial appointment at Birkbeck in 1996, his role as Head of the Department of Organizational Psychology from 2001, and as Vice Master of the College from 2003 until 2014. On stepping down from this role he was PVM for Special Projects until his retirement. He was made a Fellow of the College in November 2014. Members expressed their thanks to Professor Dewe for his service to the College.

12 TERM DATES
Received and approved
12.1 The College term dates for 2017/18 and 2018/19 (X 2015 09)

13 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE
Received
13.1 The annual report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee 2014-15 (AB 2015 10)

Noted
13.2 Members noted that in 2014-15 there had been no major policy or regulation changes around fees, enabling the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee to focus on horizon scanning and policy development. With Strategic Planning Committee it had developed the 2016-17 Access Agreement confirming commitment to Widening Access and financial support to students on low incomes. FBSC had also considered the response to proposed postgraduate student loans, noting that, following consultation, government proposals had not yet emerged.

13.3 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.

13.4 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 its income from fees over the £6K cap 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.

13.5 FBSC also noted the response of other universities to the ongoing refugee crisis. A number of Russell Group universities were offering scholarships to Syrian refugees on the grounds of academic excellence. Birkbeck would seek to offer provision in line with the mission of open access to education, working with the Widening Access team and contacts in local authorities.
13.6 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.

13.7 Members noted the importance of ensuring that the courses on offer were at the appropriate level, as many Styrian refugees were reported to be graduates.

13.8 Members noted that during the next FSBC meeting, discussions would be held concerning how Birkbeck might respond to the crisis. The importance of adhering to due diligence matters and compliance with UKBA regulations were noted.

13.9 Academic Board approved the strategic direction the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee was taking in regards to the refugee crisis.

14 POSTGRADUATE REVIEW

Received

14.1 The College’s Review of Postgraduate Research (AB 2015 11)

Noted

14.2 Members noted that the College’s Review of Postgraduate Research had been presented in various forums including the Strategic Planning Committee and was available on the website.

14.3 The recommendations of the review will be taken forward by the Research Strategy Group and the Research Support Group who would be considering postgraduate research student provision from academic and administrative perspectives respectively.

14.4 It was noted that the upcoming planning round would decide the availability of postgraduate research studentships for 2016/17.

15 VISITING PROFESSORS

Received and noted

15.1 The recent visiting professor appointments (AB 2015 12)

16 CHAIR’S ACTIONS

Received and approved

15.1 The report on the actions taken by the Chair on behalf of the Academic Board since its last meeting (AB 2015 13)

17 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Noted

- Thursday 3 March 2016, at 2pm
- Thursday 16 June 2016, at 2pm