Minutes of the ACADEMIC BOARD

21 June 2011

Present:
Prof D Latchman (Chair); Prof P Dewe; Prof J Annette; Mrs T King; Prof M Innes; Prof S Jackson; Prof H Fraser; Prof P Powell; Prof A Poulavassilis; Dr A Liefooghe; Dr M Weait; Dr C Bristow; Professor M Oaksford; Dr R Rayne; Dr J Nicklin; Prof Li Wei; Ms A Jamieson; Prof H Downes; Prof J Henderson; Prof K Gemes, Prof M Hunter; Prof A Coombes; Prof M Lorch; Prof E Melhuish; Prof J Swann; Dr T Fenner; Dr J Gill; Mr P Payne; Dr C Fracchia; Dr S Arnold-de Simine; Dr J Mackintosh; Dr M Allen; Dr P Watt; Dr L Milbourne; Dr V Eatough; Ms K Purcell

In attendance:
Mr D Pateman – Academic Registrar; Mr K Harrison - Secretary and Clerk to the Governors; Mrs K Bock – Head of Governance and Corporate Support; Ms J Lerch – Corporate Support Intern.

By invitation:
Prof A Curry (QAA; Degree Awarding Powers assessment)

Apologies for absence:
Apologies were received from 17 members.

PROCEDURAL MATTERS

23 MINUTES
Confirmed
23.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 23 February 2011.

24 REPORT TO THE GOVERNORS
Noted

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

25 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
25.1 The Government White Paper on the new HE funding and fee system was due to be published at the end of June. College officers were involved with the development of policy for the new system and lobbying continued to secure best outcomes for Birkbeck and part time provision.

25.2 Important concessions had been secured, including agreement that students progressing from Certificates to Degrees would not have to start paying back student loans until 3.5 years after starting studies.
25.3 The campaign to secure a later start point for part time students to pay back their student loans – 4.5 years after starting studies, which for a student on a part time Birkbeck degree would be after graduation, continued. This would include questions in the House of Lords during the reading of the Education Bill; and at the Liberal Party conference.

26 ACADEMIC BOARD GOVERNOR’S REPORT

Noted

26.1 Professor Julian Swann reported on business conducted at the spring term meeting of the Governors:

• Endorsement of an approach of pragmatic engagement with the new fee and funding policy, together with lobbying for fair treatment of part time provision.
• Confirmation of the importance of maintaining high quality and sustainable research.
• Endorsement of a tiered undergraduate tuition fee structure for the new system, together with a strong offering of student financial support.

27 ABExCo MINUTES

Received

27.1 The Minutes of ABExCo’s meeting of 31 May 2011. (AB 2010 16)

Noted

27.2 The Minutes were confirmed by members of ABExCo present at Academic Board

28 LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CHANGING TIMES

Considered

28.1 A note from the Pro Vice Master for Learning and Teaching on the development of the College’s response to current changes in Higher Education. (AB 2010 17)

Noted

28.2 Work was focused 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 and combining the learning and teaching and quality assurance strategies into a new strategy for learning and teaching enhancement.

28.3 A holistic approach was being adopted, with the aim of responding to the need for change without losing sight of the College’s mission. The Board noted the link between this work and the work of the lifelong learning and engagement group. The note was on the Next Steps for Birkbeck website and staff groups were being consulted.

29 UNDERGRADUATE TUITION FEES AND STUDENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Considered

29.1 A note on the confirmation of undergraduate tuition fees and financial support for the first intake of students under the new funding system. (AB 2010 18)

Noted

29.2 The fee framework included higher levels (equivalent to £9,000 full time) for professionally oriented provision and lower levels for provision (equivalent to £6,000 or below full time) intended to encourage access to HE; as well as a standard level
(equivalent to £8,000 full time). Its aim was to respond to the requirements of the new system and take a step towards aligning Certificate provision with degree provision where appropriate.

29.3 The Board discussed the differences in fee levels between some Certificates of HE and degrees in cognate subjects. It heard that the price structure aimed to accommodate Certificate fees, which were in some cases currently much lower than degree fees, with additional lower tiers intended to help manage the transition to more comparable fees. The aim was to reach a point where students sharing a classroom would be paying the same fee, within a fee framework that also reflected differences in teaching models between degrees and Certificates where these existed.

29.4 Schools had assigned their undergraduate degrees and Certificates of HE to the fee tiers, employing criteria identified by the Fee Bursary and Scholarship Committee (FBSC) and Strategic Planning Committee (SPC). Validation of the assignment of programmes to tiers was taking place via a small group of College officers reporting to the Master and to FBSC and SPC. The proposals had also been discussed with the Students’ Union and the senior Governors. The Chair thanked the Schools for their considered and commendable engagement with this important exercise and their efficient approach to confirming the fees, in circumstances in which reservations about the new system had been expressed and shared.

29.5 A new student financial support scheme was being developed in parallel with the fee recommendations, enabling the College to continue to support students entering Higher Education with a generous financial support programme. Subject to confirmation of estimated income from the new fees, an estimated £1M would be allocated to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds and with low incomes. The programme would include fee waivers, cash bursaries and a hardship fund for students whose circumstances changed after enrolment.

29.6 The Student Union had advocated full fee waivers in the programme as well as an enhanced hardship fund. FBSC and SPC had considered the full fee waiver proposal but had reached a consensus supporting the approach of assisting a larger number of students with a lower value award.

29.7 The College would also seek to identify additional bursary income from donors as much as possible; and would continue and where appropriate enhance the already substantial outreach and retention programme.

29.8 The College had submitted its access agreement to OFFA setting out how a proportion of fee income above the baseline level would be used to fund the above activities. Although the formal part of this submission was restricted to UCAS students, because part time provision was not yet regulated by Government, the College’s submission would reflect the whole context of its undergraduate provision.

29.9 The College was preparing to make a statement on the new fees. The statement would also give details of the availability of part time student loans and the College’s plans for student financial support. The Board noted the need to reassure potential postgraduate taught students that their fees were not subject to these changes.

30 ACADEMIC POLICY AND REGULATION
Noted
30.1 The Reports of the Research Committee, the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee and the Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee were available on the Committees website via this link.

Approved
30.2 The new Dissertation Supervision Policy, subject to addition of references to responsibilities in relation to research ethics and clarification of provisions for when supervisors are on leave. (AB 2010 19)

30.3 The revised Policy on Assessment Offences. (AB 2010 20)

30.4 The revised Student Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure. (AB 2010 23)

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

30.6 The revised Good Practice in Research Policy, subject to addition of references to responsibilities in relation to research ethics. (AB 2010 21)

30.7 The proposed new Procedure for Appeals Against Decisions of Examiners of Research Degrees. (AB 2010 22)

30.8 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).

30.9 Continuation of the system through which the Birkbeck Graduate Research School allocates funding to Schools and departments to deliver generic skills courses for research students, subject to streamlining the application process and criteria.

31 COLLEGE BOARDS OF EXAMINERS 2009/10
Received
31.1 The Report of the four College Boards of Examiners on activity from the 2009-10 assessment and award rounds. (AB 2010 24)

32 VISITING PROFESSORS
Approved
32.1 Appointment of two Visiting Professors:

Professor John Annette, currently Pro Vice Master for Engagement, who was leaving the College to take up the post of President of Richmond American International University.

Professor Roger Williams CBE, Head of the Institute of Hepatology, with whom the College had recently signed a memorandum of understanding to facilitate joint research and PhD supervision.

MATTERS FOR REPORT

33 CHAIR’S ACTION
Suspension of Regulations
Noted:

33.1 Action taken by the Master as Chair of the Academic Board to approve the following suspensions of Regulations:

- MA History of Film & Visual Media: permit the award of compensated fail for a single module to one student;
- MA Television History & Practice: permit the award of compensated fail for a single module to one student;
- MSc Economics: permit the award of compensated fail for a single module to two students;
- MA Japanese Cultural Studies: permit the award of a compensated fail for a single module to one student;
- MA History of Art: permit the award of a compensated fail for a single module to one student;
- MSc Management: permit the award of a compensated fail for a single module to one student;
- MSc International Business: permit the award of MSc International Business with one, rather than two, optional International Business modules. The student would still be required to take all compulsory modules on the programme;
- MA Contemporary History and Politics: permit the award of a compensated fail for a single module to one student;
- MA History of Art: permit the award of a pass for a single module without having passed the core essay for that module, to one student;
- Certificate of HE: to permit the award of a Certificate of HE in Literature with the student having taken 15, rather than 30, credits from Group C: Literature 1770 to Contemporary.

University of London International Programme Regulations
Noted

33.2 Action taken by the Master as Chair of the Academic Board to approve the Regulations for the University of London International Programmes for the BA and Diploma in Philosophy and the BA Spanish & Latin American Studies.

34 DATES OF MEETINGS
Noted

34.1 Dates of meetings for 2011-12:

- Wednesday, 16 November 2011 at 2 pm
- Wednesday, 29 February 2012 at 2 pm
- Thursday, 19 June 2012 at 10.30 am