Minutes of the ACADEMIC BOARD

23 February 2010

Present:
Professor D Latchman (Chair); Professor J Annette; Mr R Atkinson; Dr A Bale;
Dr C Bristow; Dr A Brooms; Ms E Charles; Professor P Dewe; Professor J-M Dewaele;
Professor H Downes; Dr V Eatough; Professor C Edwards; Dr J Edwards; Dr S Evans;
Dr T Fenner; Professor H Fraser; Professor S Frosh; Dr R Gumbrell-McCormick; Dr Z Hua;
Ms L Hughes; Professor M Hunter; Dr M Ingrouille; Professor S Jackson; Dr A Jacobs;
Dr R Johnson; Professor N Keep; Professor E Leslie; Professor M Levene; Dr A Liefooghe;
Professor M Lorch; Professor E Melhuish; Dr J Nicklin; Professor M Oaksford; Mr P Payne;
Dr J Pitts; Professor P Powell; Ms K Purcell; Dr R Rayne; Mr S Raczka; Dr K Retford;
Dr G Roberts; Dr M Shipway; Professor H Lawton-Smith; Professor R Smith;
Dr D Styan; Professor J Swann; Dr K Thompson; Dr A Walsh; Professor Li Wei;
Mr T Dallimore-Wright; Professor M Zukas.

In attendance:
Mr D Pateman – Academic Registrar; Mr K Harrison - Secretary and Clerk to the Governors;
Mr D McGhie – Director of Planning; Mrs K Bock - Deputy Clerk to the Governors;
Mr Trevor Pearce – Head of Academic Services.

Apologies for absence:
Apologies were received from 16 Colleagues

16  MINUTES
Confirmed:
16.1  The Minutes of the meeting of 18 November 2009, with an amendment to Minute 13.1 to read:
13.1  Since the last meeting, the Master had taken action on behalf of the Board to approve: the following suspensions of regulations:
   •  Graduate Certificate in History: award of a Graduate Certificate upon the successful completion of modules to the value of 60 credits at level 5 or above, with 30 credits from level 5, to 8 students;
   •  Graduate Diploma: award of a Graduate Diploma upon the successful completion of modules to the value of 120 credits at level 4 or above, including no more than 30 credits at level 4 and no more than 60 credits at levels 4 and 5, to 31 students.
   •  MSc Geographic Information Science (GIS, distance learning): admission with no first degree;
   •  MA Victorian Studies: admission with no first degree;
   •  MA Human Rights: admission with no first degree;
   •  MSc Management in the Public Sector; admission with no equivalent to a UK first degree;
   •  MSc Sport Management and the Business of Football: admission with no post-secondary qualifications;
   •  MSc Computer Science: admission with no first degree.
17 REPORT TO THE GOVERNORS
Noted:
17.1 Governors’ receipt of the Report of the Academic Board of 18 November 2009. (AB 2009 08)

18 MASTER’S REPORT
18.1 HEFCE’s circular letter on sector wide funding outlined significant cuts for 2010-11 (£449 million or 5.8% down compared with expectations announced by HEFCE in 2008). This was having an impact across the HE sector and institutions were preparing for cuts and ensuring cost-effectiveness.

18.2 Birkbeck was well placed to respond to cuts following restructuring, but had the additional challenge of recruiting and retaining additional students to rebuild funding following ELQ. Current projections were for £1M deficits for each of the next two years.

18.3 Staff were commended for their efforts resulting in increased student applications and enrolments. Fundable student numbers were expected to increase by 300FTE compared with last year but would nevertheless be likely to be 300FTE below target. The HEFCE safety net funding would offset the financial consequences of this, but the College would need to continue the recruitment and retention drive to recruit or retain 900 more fundable FTEs over 2010-11 and 2011-12.

18.4 The Pro Vice Masters for Learning and Teaching and Student Experience were working on student retention strategy, in consultation with the Assistant Deans for learning and teaching and for recruitment and retention.

18.5 The College would know more about the funding position on receipt of its individual grant letter, expected on 12 March. Teaching funding was likely to be cut in line with the announced reduction in funding for postgraduate taught programmes in the arts and social sciences, although the proposed change in the formula for funding research would, potentially, benefit areas with research rated at 4* in the RAE.

18.6 The Stratford campus project was set to proceed following the University of East London and Birkbeck’s success in securing an additional £4M HEFCE Strategic Development Fund award, making a total of £8M allocated to the partnership.

19 REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNORS’ REPORT
Noted:
19.1 Professor Julian Swann reported on business conducted at the autumn term meeting of the Governors, including the independent fees review, the College’s updated voluntary redundancy scheme and the re-launch of the Governor-School liaison scheme.

20 ABExCo MINUTES
Received and Confirmed by the members of ABExCo:
20.1 The Minutes of ABExCo’s meeting of 10 February 2010. (AB 2009 09)

21 QAA INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT
Considered and Approved:
21.1 The Institutional Audit Briefing document, on the recommendation of the Chairs of ABExCo and TQEC, which would be submitted to the QAA on 29 March 2010 and would
be a critical part of the audit process. The QAA briefing visit would be 4-6 May and the
audit visit 7-11 June.  (AB 2009 10)

Noted:
21.2 The Chair of TQEC thanked staff who had contributed to drafting the document.

21.3 There was a need for clarity in defining the role of the Academic Board and its
Committees in assuring academic quality and standards. The document, and associated
briefing for staff, would reflect this.

22  BOARDS AND SUB-BOARDS OF EXAMINERS: REVISED STRUCTURE
Considered:
22.1.1 ABExCo’s recommendations on undergraduate College Boards of Examiners.  (AB 2009 11)

Noted:
22.2 The Board had previously approved the establishment of three College Boards of
Examiners; an over-arching undergraduate Board, a postgraduate (Arts & Law) Board and a
postgraduate (Science & Social Science) Board.

Approved:
22.3 A further division of the undergraduate Board into two boards: Arts/Law and
Science/Social Sciences as proposed.

22.4 It was confirmed that the role of the College Boards of Examiners was not to approve
decisions of sub-Boards but to review their work for consistency and fairness of process and
to examine how they have applied procedures, making recommendations for future
enhancement of practice.

22.5 The Master, as Chair of the Academic Board, had approved the appointment of the following
Chairs of the College Boards of Examiners:
• Undergraduate Arts & Law: Dr Martin Shipway;
• Undergraduate Science & Social Science: Dr Anita Walsh;
• Postgraduate Arts: Dr Anthony Bale;
• Postgraduate Science: Dr Jim Pitts.

Agreed:
22.6 The membership of College Boards should be reviewed to ensure that School representatives
are also Chairs of sub-Boards of Examiners.

23  PROCEDURE FOR APPEALS AGAINST DECISIONS OF BOARDS OF
EXAMINERS
Considered:
23.1 Revised draft procedures for appeals against decisions of Boards of Examiners, in accordance
with the Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study.  (AB 2009 12)

Noted:
23.2 Academic Board had previously considered revisions to the procedure for appeals against the
decisions of Boards of Examiners. The matter had been referred back for further discussion
on the issue of student representation.

23.3 The Student Union’s view was that students should be permitted to sit on panels considering
appeals against decisions of Boards of Examiners. It was the view of College officers that it
was not appropriate for such panels to have student members because the panels’ work involved the exercise of academic judgment.

23.4 ABExCo had discussed these viewpoints, noting students’ legitimate interest in ensuring that due process had been followed as well as the need to ensure that judgment on whether the standards of awards had been met should be reserved for academic staff. Following ABExCo discussion, the procedure had been redrafted to further clarify the role of the appeal panel and to clarify the role of any nominee of the Students’ Union within the process.

23.5 The Board agreed to a further revision to make provision for Chairs of appeal panels to exercise discretion to permit student observers to speak during appeals.

Approved:

23.6 Procedures for appeals against decisions of Boards of Examiners, subject to the revision noted in 23.5 above.

24 REASSESSMENT AND THE 30% / 40% RULE: TAUGHT PROGRAMMES
Considered:

24.1 A proposal for the Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study to be amended to remove the rule that only students achieving 30% or above (undergraduate) or 40% or above (postgraduate) can opt for reassessment. Students achieving lower marks are required to repeat the entire year. (AB 2009 13)

24.2 This proposal had been put forward by the Executive Deans as a means to improve student retention and considered at ABExCo and through consultation between the Pro Vice Master (Learning and Teaching) and the Assistant Deans (Learning and Teaching).

24.3 In discussing the proposal, Board members noted a number of points:
- The 30/40% rule had been agreed by the Common Award Scheme working group following consultation;
- Evidence linking reassessment to improved retention would be helpful;
- An alternative to an overall regulation would be to give Sub-Boards of Examiners discretion to waive the rule as appropriate;
- There was a need for consistency of regulations across the College so that students were treated equitably;
- A number of views were expressed on the fairness of capping marks and it was agreed that there was a need for consistency between rules for examinations and rules for coursework in terms of capping marks;
- The rule could be amended to state a lower threshold than the 30/40% currently defined in the Regulations;
- The rule particularly affects students on courses that run every two years;
- Waiving the rule might be a disincentive to students to prepare for and perform in examinations if there was an automatic second chance.

24.4 Members of the Board voted on whether to amend the Regulation to give sub-Boards of Examiners discretion to waive the rule. There was a broad spread of votes for, votes against and abstentions.

Agreed:

24.5 To consider an amended proposal once further consideration and discussion and had taken place.
25 REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES

Noted:
25.1 The Reports of the Research Committee, the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee, the Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee. 
http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/abexcomm/20100210/index_html

Approved:
25.2 College Policy on the Accreditation of Prior Learning

Exemption to the Regulations: Postgraduate Taught Programmes, School of Arts

25.3 An exemption to the regulations on the classification of awards for programmes offered within the School of Arts listed below, enabling a variation in the weighting of the dissertation and other modules.
MA History of Film and Visual Media
MA Creative Writing
MA Cultural and Critical Studies
MA Creative Producing (Theatre/Live Performance)
MA Modern and Contemporary Literature
MA Medieval Cultures
MA Renaissance Studies
MA Victorian Studies
MFA Theatre Directing

25.4 A suspension of the regulations enabling the above provision to be applied to assessment of students in 2008-9.

25.5 Establishment of a Research Student Sub-Committee as proposed by Research Committee

Research Ethics

25.6 Adoption of procedures for the consideration of research ethics, subject to minor amendments, and including the establishment of a College Research Ethics Committee.

Research Centres

Establishment of:
• A Commodity Finance Centre in the School of Business Economics and Informatics (Department of Economics, Mathematics & Statistics).
• A Centre for Law and the Humanities in the School of Law.

Noted:
Recruitment and Retention Projects

25.8 ABExCo approved the terms of reference of proposed Strategic Review projects aiming to support and enhance student recruitment and retention, which would report to the Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee.

Programme Approval

25.9 Programmes Committee and the chair of TQEC approved the following programmes through a fast-track approval process to commence in autumn 2010:

School of Arts
MA Museum Cultures
MA Shakespeare and Contemporary Performance*

School of Business, Economics and Informatics
Graduate Certificate Mathematics
Graduate Diploma Mathematics

School of Law
Diploma in Law

School of Science
FD Psychology for Education Professionals

School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy
FDSc Environmental Management
BSc Public Sector and Local Government Management*
MSc Development Studies and Anthropology*
MA Philosophy
MA Classical Archaeology*
MA Ancient Near Eastern and Aegean Studies*

*Subject to additional work specified by Programmes Committee being completed by 18/02/2010

25.10 TQEC approved revisions to the Learning and Teaching Strategy

College Research School
25.11 Research Committee received an interim report on the review of the College Research School.

Research Excellence Framework
25.12 Research Committee received a report on preparations for the Research Excellence Framework from the College’s REF Working Party and REF Support Group.

26 EMERITUS TITLES
Considered:
26.1 Proposals for Emeritus titles for staff who had recently retired. In accordance with the agreed procedure, support for proposals had been confirmed by Master or the relevant Executive Dean.

Recommended to the Governors:
26.2 Conferment of the following titles:
Emeritus Professors:
• Professor Avtar Brah, Professor of Sociology until her retirement on 31 July 2009.
• Professor Graham Goldsworthy, Professor of Biological Sciences until his retirement on 30 September 2009.
• Professor Elizabeth Hounsell, Professor of Biological Sciences until her retirement on 31 December 2009.

27 NOTE OF CHAIR’S ACTIONS
Noted:
27.1 Action taken by the Master as Chair of the Academic Board to approve the following:
Suspension of Regulations:
• MA Creative Producing: award of a Compensated Fail for a single module;
• BSc Economic & Social Policy: permission to extend a break in study;
• MA/MSc Gender, Sexuality, Politics and Culture: permission to resume study;
• PhD/MPhil in Department of Biological Sciences: permission to upgrade from MPhil to PhD after successful completion of examination;

• [CAS] Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study: to permit the award of Extra-Mural Diplomas at Level 7 in place of Postgraduate Certificates for the following programmes for the 2008-09 academic year:
  o Web Design and Development - 14 Students;
  o Digital Media Management - 13 Students.

Termination of Appointment: External Examiner:
• Termination of the appointment of Mr Richard Earle as external examiner to MSc/Graduate Certificate Conflict Resolution & Mediation Studies.

28 DATES OF MEETINGS
Noted:
28.1 The date of the summer term meeting:
Wednesday 16 June 2010.

Signed……………………………………….
Date………………………………………..