26 MINUTES
Received and confirmed
26.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board 3 March 2015 (AB 2014 21)

27 REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Noted
27.1 The Report of the last Academic Board was received by the Governors (AB 2014 22)

28 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
28.1 Members heard that from Autumn 2015 there would be changes to the members of staff holding Pro-Vice-Master portfolios. Professor Stephen Frosh, the current PVM for Research would take over the International portfolio, while Professor Julian Swann, the current PVM for International, would take over the Research portfolio.

28.2 The Master and the Director of External Relations had met with the new Vice-Chancellor of the Open University to discuss political campaigning for the promotion of part-time study. There may be scope for a joint campaign between Birkbeck and the OU, however it remains to be seen what form this campaign might take. One
The area of focus for this campaign should be the potential benefits for employers, e.g. tax breaks for supporting part-time students.

28.3 The Student Funding Panel for Universities UK, of which the Master is a member, will shortly produce a report, to which the Master has contributed a section, on part-time study. Some suggestions made include maintenance loans for part-time students, and the extension of ELQ exemptions beyond science subjects. More research may need to be carried out, which could be jointly sponsored by Birkbeck and the OU. Government policy will be determined by the expected financial return on part-time student loans, the forecast figures of which show a range of outcomes.

28.4 Members heard that the College’s estates strategy for 2023 aimed to ensure that all teaching operations take place in Birkbeck facilities, and that the College retains exclusive evening use of those facilities for which it has a partnership agreement with another institution. It was confirmed that various refurbishment and sponsorship strategies were under consideration.

28.5 There also remained the possibility of a long-term project in collaboration with UCL. The College needs to acquire more property in the area of the main campus; however such property would be unlikely to have educational use (D1) planning permission. Offices and Research operations would need to be moved to the newly acquired properties with the core Birkbeck campus space being maximised as teaching space.

28.6 It was reported that the College had recently acquired a new property called Cambridge House, and would be looking into ways of developing it to be used for College activities.

29 ACADEMIC BOARD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Received and confirmed

29.1 The minutes of the Academic Board Executive Committee meeting of 27 May 2015. Members of ABExCo present confirmed the minutes. There were no matters arising. (AB 2014 23)

30 RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Received and noted

30.1 The Academic Board received and noted the Report of the Research Committee and considered its recommendations. (AB 2014 24).

30.2 The Open Access Working Group had been reconstituted and would be chaired by Dr Martin Eve; a new appointee to the College with expertise in the field of open access. Members were asked to endorse the proposal of the Research Committee to co-opt Dr Eve onto the membership of the committee so as to facilitate communication between the Open Access Working Group and the Research Committee.

Approved

30.3 To co-opt Dr Martin Eve onto the Research Committee from October 2015, to take the lead on Open Access issues for the College and to chair the Open Access Working Group.
The Research Committee and ABExCo had recommended the establishment of three Research Centres:
- Centre for Technology and Publishing.
- Birkbeck Institute for Data Analysis.
- Centre for Comparative Research in European Culture and Identities.

The Centre for Technology and Publishing would be headed by Dr Martin Eve. The proposed centre had already attracted interest from members of Birkbeck staff and funding applications were underway to both the Leverhulme Trust and the Mellon Foundation. It was noted that the timeframe for the outcome of these applications was not known.

The proposal to establish the Birkbeck Institute for Data Analytics (BIDA) was noted to be a response to the REF2014 results insofar as it would address the need to promote interdisciplinary research, support research that has the potential to have impact and invest more in the Birkbeck research environment. The Centre would bring together technological and domain specific areas of research, and in the longer term develop new areas of research. It was reported that the proposal had been met with support at various levels within the five Schools and by the Library.

It had been confirmed that the work of the Centre would not overlap significantly with the work of the Centre for Cognition, Computing and Modelling and that communication channels between them were open.

The proposed Centre for Comparative Research in European Cultures and Languages would facilitate the research activities of staff within the Department of Cultures and Languages that were not currently being catered for by the two existing research centres based within the department. The Centre would furthermore engage in interdisciplinary work with other research centres with a European focus.

Approved

Academic Board approved the establishment of three Research Centres:
- Centre for Technology and Publishing.
- Birkbeck Institute for Data Analysis.
- Centre for Comparative Research in European Culture and Identities.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

Received and Noted

The report of the Student Engagement & Widening Participation Committee meeting of 7 May 2015. (AB 2014 25)

Members noted that the Government was seeking to make an in-year saving of £450m within the Department of Education. There was a possibility that this would be deducted from the Student Opportunity Funding, with the result that Birkbeck and the Open University would be disproportionately affected.
Note: the Student Opportunity Funding was in the event not cut in the 2015-16 grant allocations.

31.3 The 2015-16 student recruitment round was likely to be very competitive in the first year of unregulated student numbers. Several Russell Group universities were planning advertising campaigns.

31.4 Members heard that the SEWPC has produced the first draft of the Student Engagement Strategy, which was intended to sit alongside and support the Research Strategy and the Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement. The strategy focussed on all the ways in which Birkbeck could engage with students from the first point of contact to alumni membership and every stage in between. This document was at a very early stage, and there would be many opportunities for input from various Committees and the Student Union.

32 TEACHING AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE
Received and Considered
32.1 The report of the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (AB 2014 26)

32.2 TQEC reported on proposals for a national Teaching Excellence Framework, along the lines of the Research Excellence Framework. The Higher Education Academy is convening a group to advise HEFCE on this. TQEC noted that the College’s Centre for Transformative Practice in Learning and Teaching will play a key role in demonstrating the ways in which the College engages in teaching excellence if a Teaching Excellence Framework is established.

32.3 TQEC also reported on external Higher Education Review (HER) in 2016-17. HEFCE has not yet identified what agency will be responsible for HER after the QAA’s contract ends in 2015-16, but has stated that those institutions due for review in 2016-17, including Birkbeck, will be asked to take part in a pilot. HEFCE has not stated whether this is compulsory. Within the College, a Higher Education Review Steering Group has been established to oversee preparations.

32.4 Members considered the recommendations of the report in relation to the amendments of the following policies:
- The College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners
- The Birkbeck Common Award Scheme Regulations
- The College Assessment Offences Policy
- New and Withdrawn Awards and Programmes

32.5 The College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners
Members considered proposed amendments to the College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners. Paragraph 43 had been added to the policy in order to detail the process for appeals by sub-boards. The proposed regulation read:

(43) The College through its Academic Board will consider appeals by Sub-Boards against the decision of the College Board where additional information and/or documentation is available that was not previously available or disclosed, or where there is concern by the Chair of the sub-Board that the decision of the College Board may not have been conducted
in accordance with the relevant regulations, policy and guidance. Appeals against decisions of the relevant College Board must be submitted in writing by the chair of the relevant Sub-Board to the chair of the relevant College Board within 14 days of the notification of the decision by the College Board. If in the opinion of the chair of the relevant College Board (or their Deputy), a valid case has been made the Sub-Board recommendation may be accepted by the Chair of the College Board. If in the opinion of the Chair of the College Board, the appeal requires further consideration or investigation, he/she may refer the appeal to the Academic Registrar for advice and who may convene an independent panel consisting of the PVM Learning and Teaching, Chair of Academic Board and Academic Registrar (or their nominees).

32.6 Members highlighted the risk and/or appearance of bias inherent within the regulation as written: If the Sub-Board is appealing against the decision of the College Board the decision as to whether or not to take the appeal forward should not be in the remit of the Chair of the College Board.

32.7 The paragraph was amended so as to clearly delineate the role of the Chair of Academic Board as the independent arbitrator of appeals of College Board decisions by Sub-Boards:

(43) The College through its Academic Board will consider appeals by Sub-Boards against the decision of the College Board where additional information and/or documentation is available that was not previously available or disclosed, or where there is concern by the Chair of the sub-Board that the decision of the College Board may not have been conducted in accordance with the relevant regulations, policy and guidance. Appeals against decisions of the relevant College Board must be submitted in writing by the chair of the relevant Sub-Board to the chair of the relevant College Board within 14 days of the notification of the decision by the College Board. If in the opinion of the chair of Academic Board (or their nominee), a valid case has been made, the Sub-Board recommendation may be accepted. If in the opinion of the Chair of the Academic Board (or their nominee), the appeal requires further consideration or investigation, he/she may consult the Academic Registrar for advice and who may then convene an independent panel consisting of the PVM Learning and Teaching, a member of Academic Board and Academic Registrar (or their nominees).

32.8 Members also considered regulation 42:

(42) Sub-Boards make recommendations to College Boards for consideration. Following consideration of Sub-Board recommendations College Boards may accept or reject recommendations made by Sub-Boards and may request additional information and documentation on recommendations from Sub-Boards.

32.9 It was confirmed that the consequence of a recommendation being rejected would be either acceptance by the Sub-Board or an appeal, the process of which was outlined in regulation 43.

32.10 It was noted that whilst regulations around Sub-Boards were detailed, regulations around College Board processes were less defined. Members also considered the relationship between the College Board and the Academic Board, which it reports to, and the circumstances under which the College Board might exercise its own
discretion and the circumstances under which decisions would be subject to further scrutiny.

32.11 The proposed amendments also covered the provisions for Sub-Boards to exercise discretion in making recommendations for higher classifications for candidates who had achieved a weighted average mark within 2.00% of the boundary between classes and for College Boards to provide guidance and ask for additional information if required. The proposed regulation read:

(9) The Common Award Scheme (CAS) regulations define the formula for determining the weighted average mark and the range and boundaries of marks for each award class. Under the CAS regulations, in certain circumstances Sub-boards of Examiners may recommend that discretion is applied to raise the classification. Where candidates have achieved a weighted average mark within 2.00% of the boundary between classes, Sub-boards should consider whether or not to recommend awarding the higher class on the basis of a preponderance of credit in the higher class. Unrepresentative performance in a single module or mitigating circumstances may also be taken into account. Where a Sub-Board recommends an award in the higher class, the recommendation and detailed reasons for making it should be clearly recorded in the Sub-board report. College Boards may accept or reject Sub-board recommendations or may request additional information before reaching a decision. Recommendations for awarding the higher class when the weighted average mark is more than 2.00% below the boundary should only be Appendix A considered in unforeseen and/or exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the Chair of the relevant College Board and the Academic Registrar or their nominee.

32.12 Members questioned the practicalities of the regulation in regards to the need to consult with the Chair of the relevant College Board and the Academic Registrar or their nominee before a College Board might accept or reject a Sub-Board recommendation.

32.13 It was confirmed that any discussions and decisions made by the Sub-Boards would be clearly documented and presented to the College Board. The Academic Board would be in a position to further scrutinise the decisions and actions of both the Sub-Boards and the College Board.

32.14 It was confirmed that the final phrase of the regulation, ‘and with the agreement of the Chair of the relevant College Board and the Academic Registrar or their nominee,’ would be removed.

32.15 It was determined that appropriate place to define the role of the College Board in relation to its scrutiny and ratification of the recommendations for classification made by sub-Boards was in the Terms of Reference of the College Boards and sub-Boards of Examiners. The documents would be updated for 2015-16.

Approved

32.16 Academic Board approved the College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners, subject to the above amendments.

The Birkbeck Common Award Scheme Regulations
Members considered the proposed changes to the Birkbeck Common Award Scheme Regulations:

- The clarification of regulation 22.6; making it clear that the capping of reassessments would apply to all students who fail an element of assessment for the first time in 15/16, rather than a module of assessment.
- The removal of regulation 43.5 so as to provide more clarity on the calculation of honours degree awards.
- The clarification of regulation 51.1 to make clear that calculations of preponderance are based on amount of credit and not number of modules and that considerations of raising of classifications should be considered for those within the 2.00% but not normally more than 2.00%.

**Approved**

32.18 Academic Board approved the amendments to the Birkbeck Common Award Scheme Regulations.

**Assessment Offences Policy**

32.18 Members considered proposed amendments to the College’s Assessment Offences Policy. The CAS Regulations and the College’s Assessment Offences policy had been updated to prohibit the use of wearable technology in examinations and to bring the policy in line with the code of student discipline.

**Approved**

32.18 Academic Board approved the amendments to the Assessment Offences Policy.

**New and withdrawn awards and programmes**

32.18 Academic Board agreed a new award: Certificate of Professional Education (Postgraduate), consisting of 30 credits at postgraduate level and intended for professionally oriented short courses. It also approved the following programme withdrawals:

- PGCE &MA Modern Languages: (French Studies) (German Studies) Portuguese and Brazilian Studies) (Spanish and Latin American Studies)
- BA Japanese and/with Film and Media
- BA Japanese and/with History
- BA Japanese and/with Management
- MA Japanese Cultural Studies
- BA Contemporary Dance as Creative Practice
- PG Dip Computer Science
- Grad Cert Geological Field Techniques
- Cert HE Interpersonal Communication Skills
- Grad Cert Professional Studies
- PG Dip Gender, Sexuality and Culture

**Approved**

32.19 Academic Board approved the new and withdrawn awards programmes.
STUDENT ATTENDANCE FRAMEWORK

Received and considered

33.1 The Academic Board considered the proposed Student Attendance Framework. (AB 2014 27)

33.2 This paper has been subject to consultation by the School Teaching, Quality and Enhancement Committees, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee, and the Academic Board Executive Committee. The framework was designed as a pilot for the year 2015-16 and would build on the E-Registers Project which had been running in the School of Law. The framework would give significant freedom for specific attendance requirements to be implemented at Modular, Programme, Department and School levels.

33.3 Members were invited to contribute their comments in response to the document. The Students’ Union representative stated that the SU was broadly in support of the document. The SU feel that the framework is a good mechanism for offering support and raising awareness of services available – some students may feel uncomfortable about asking for help but would be more likely to accept it if offered. The SU representative noted that support for the framework from the Students’ Union would be contingent on it not being used to penalise students for non-attendance which may be due to family, work, or other issues, but rather to support students who may be facing difficulties which prevent them from completing their studies.

33.4 It was observed that the document did not adequately address issues presented by Distance and Blended Learning, and might result in such students feeling they were getting a second-rate experience. It was noted that paragraph 1g related specifically to the needs of distance and blended learners, and that the document had not been designed to exclude or alienate any part of the student body. It was suggested that a covering clause be inserted which would state that students study at the College via a variety of mechanisms, and that the policy in question related primarily to face-to-face students. It was suggested that the document could be modified to specify the requirements of distance and blended learners.

33.5 It was queried as to whether or not the framework was needed at all, given that individual Schools were already responsible for deciding upon their own attendance policies. In answer to this, the Academic Registrar pointed out that according to the National Student Survey, Birkbeck has the 5th most intellectually stimulating classroom environment, and that the framework was a pilot to support the E-Registers trial in order to instil the idea in our students that it would be to their advantage to attend classes and engage with learning.

33.6 Should students start to disengage from learning, the framework would facilitate provision of support for them. In respect of Tier 4 students, the College had an obligation to monitor their attendance. It was noted that in order to ensure equal treatment of students and comparable student experiences the College should foster a general expectation of regular attendance across the student body.

33.7 Members considered whether issues of health and safety should influence the framework. For some courses students would be required to learn how to operate
specialist machinery, and attendance for introductory and training modules was essential. It was agreed that the attendance framework would fully devolve discretion to Schools over whether to specify mandatory attendance in such cases.

33.8 Members considered the role of personal tutors. Presently personal tutors can contact students personally if their attendance is flagged as being too low. There was no mention in the framework that personal tutors could be utilised as a resource for addressing attendance issues, and it was suggested that the document be amended to include this.

33.9 Concerns were expressed in relation to E-Register records being used as the sole means of monitoring attendance, as it is possible for a student to attend and for it not to be recorded, e.g. if their swipe-card has been lost, forgotten or stolen. However, members were also keen to consider how attendance data would be managed and in what way students would be informed as to how such data would be used in accordance with policies and frameworks.

33.10 It was suggested that the guidance in the framework document could be boiled down to a small number of key points, in order to effectively get the information across to students.

Recommended
33.11 It was recommended that the framework be amended to include policy points specifically relating to distance and blended learning students, and a summary of the document’s key principles.

Approved
33.12 Academic Board approved the Student Attendance Framework, subject to the recommended amendments, as a pilot in 2015-16. Two members of the Board registered their opposition.

34 STANDING ORDERS OF THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Received and considered
34.1 The Academic Board considered the Standing Orders of the Academic Board. (AB 2014 28)

Noted
34.2 Members were informed that a formal proposal would be made in the following term regarding the updating of the Standing Orders of the Academic Board. Specific examples of proposed amendments included:

- Reforming the official membership to reflect the Board’s current structure
- Reducing the Quorum
- Amending procedures relating to the calling of extraordinary meetings
- Updating the language to reflect the use of modern communications such as email, and modern practices such as online voting
- Granting Teaching and Scholarship Staff 2 seats on the academic Board

Members were encouraged to email the Secretariat with any additional amendment suggestions.
35 VISITING PROFESSOR APPOINTMENTS
Received and Approved
35.1 Members noted the recent visiting Professor appointments of Professor William MacNeil to the School of Law and Professor Claire Ewell to the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development. (AB 2014 29)

36 CHAIR’S ACTIONS
Received and approved
36.1 A report on the action taken by the Chair on behalf of the Board since the last meeting. (AB 2014 30)

37 COLLEGE COMPUTING REGULATIONS
Noted
37.1 The College Computing Regulations (AB 2014 31)

38 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS
Noted
38.1 The dates for meetings of the Academic Board in year 2015-16:
   • 5 November 2015, at 2pm
   • 3 March 2016, at 2pm
   • 16 June 2016, at 2pm