BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the ACADEMIC BOARD

12 March 2014

Present

David Latchman (Chair), Philip Powell, Adam Gearey, Hallvard Lillehammer, Tricia King, Matthew Weait, Julian Swann, John Arnold, Sarah Hart, Patrizia Di Bello, Hilary Fraser, Darren Shaw, Martin Shipway, Stephen Frosh, Bob Westaway, Sue Jackson, Philip Dewe, Matthew Innes, Alex Poulavassilis, Li Wei, Elizabeth Charles, Chiara Barontini, Robert Atkinson, Hilary Downes, Gerald Roberts, Ron Smith, Tim Markham, Eddy Davelaar, Jasbir Gill, Keith Harrison, Katharine Bock, Miriam Zukas, Jane Nicklin, Nicholas Keep.

14 MINUTES
Confirmed:
14.1 The minutes of the Academic Board meeting of 28 November 2013. (AB 2013 09)

15 REPORT
Received:
15.1 Academic Board’s Report to the Governors following its meeting of 28 November 2013 (AB 2013 10)

16 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted:
16.1 The Master reported on progress in the development of College strategy, noting the promising picture for further expansion of three year evening degrees. The College had appealed to HEFCE to expand its Student Number Control (SNC) in order to respond to the clear demand for these courses. HEFCE had confirmed it would jointly fund the proposed Catalyst project, aiming to develop these courses as flexible intensive options. The College’s aim was to respond to the demand for three year degrees while continuing to offer four year degrees and to attract mature and non-traditional students onto them.

16.2 Over recent years there had been reduced demand (in terms of applications) for postgraduate taught courses. A priority in the development of new strategy would be to identify ways of responding to this and to the prospect in 2015-16 of the first graduates emerging from the new system, with increased student loan debts.

16.3 The College had an impressive history of responding successfully to funding crises. The current situation, combining funding cuts with less regulation, would give the College more freedom to choose its own direction, consistent with its mission, although the decisions it made would need to support financial sustainability.
16.4 Birkbeck would celebrate its bicentenary in 2023. The Master had asked a group, with members drawn from the Strategic Planning Committee and the Strategic Futures Group, to discuss what the vision for the future Birkbeck should be; consistent with the College’s 200 year old mission.

16.5 The Master welcomed the Interim Academic Registrar Bob Westaway to the Academic Board.

17 **GOVERNORS**

**Noted:**
17.1 The Governors had approved amendments to the College Statutes to reflect the harmonisation of terms and conditions for Teaching and Scholarship staff. This included a change to the College Statutes making Teaching and Scholarship Staff eligible to stand for election as Governors.

**Agreed:**
17.2 To add to two members of Teaching and Scholarship staff, to be selected by and from among the Teaching and Scholarship staff to the Scheme of Membership of the Academic Board.

**Noted:**
17.3 A report from the Academic Board Governor Julian Swann on recent Governors’ work. Governors had given consideration to the changing nature of the student body and potential responses to it and, at the Strategic Horizons meeting, had confirmed the College’s future strategy: to be an independent institution, excellent in both research and flexible teaching.

18 **ACADEMIC BOARD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Confirmed:**
18.1 The minutes of the Academic Board Executive Committee meeting of 20 February 2014 (AB 2013 11).

19 **RESEARCH COMMITTEE**

**Considered:**
19.1 The report of the Research Committee meeting of 30 January 2014 (AB 2013 12)

**Noted:**
19.2 Research Committee continued its rolling review of research centres. It was receiving increasingly helpful and interesting reports from the centres, illustrating their contribution to the College’s research. In the Spring term 2014 it reviewed the Centre for Contemporary Literature and the Centre for Iberian and Latin American Visual Studies in the School of Arts, the Centre for Applied Macroeconomics in the School of Business, Economics and Informatics and the Centre for Cognition, Computation and Modelling in the School of Science

19.3 Research Committee found all of these Centres to be active with programmes of events, active websites and collaborations with other universities and organisations, nationally and internationally. It confirmed particular support for the role of research centres in promoting interdisciplinary work.
Recent high profile activities included the conclusion of the £840K Arts and Humanities Research Council Grant for the Weaving Communities of Practice project, digitising and cataloguing Andean textiles in an innovative database, which was the subject of a Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2013 research impact study; international workshops on macroeconomic policy; and the Le Carre’s People event with Penguin Books and the Barbican, a potential candidate for an impact study in the 2020 REF assessment.

The Committee asked all these Centre how they were archiving their work, looking ahead to future REFs in which demonstrating evidence of research activities and their impact would become increasingly important. It heard that increasing use was being made of web-based and open access journals.

Research Committee also asked Centres to consider how to promote good quality research grant applications, needed not just to provide resource for research projects but also to promote the College’s status as a research intensive institution.

Research Committee had asked the School of Arts Research Committee to pay particular attention to maintaining the health of the research centres in the departments of Iberian and Latin American Studies and European Culture and Languages, which were merging. Academic Board confirmed that these centres should not be threatened by the merger, which was a response to declining student numbers rather than research issues. The REF working party had recently confirmed the value of the two centres.

Approved:

Establishment of a new research centre in Politico Legal Theology.

Noted:

The proposed research centre was expected to make a distinctive contribution to the College’s research, over and above that of existing research centres, by bringing together researchers working on the emergence of social and societal norms in the evolution of Christian and European secular law.

Research Committee also reported on the ongoing development of a new research strategy 2014-2019. There would be broad consultation with colleagues before the final draft was circulated.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE & WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

Considered:

The report of the Student Experience & Widening Participation Committee meeting of 12 (AB 2013 13).

Noted:

Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee (SEWPC) reported on its preparation to respond to HEFCE and OFFA’s National Strategy for Access and Student Success (SASS). The SASS for 2015-16 was expected to focus on promoting access and good outcomes for groups under-represented in HE. However it was withdrawn abruptly following a funding cut in the Department of Business,
Innovation and Skills. Like all HE institutions, the College would wait for news on whether SASS would reappear for 2016-17. In the interim it would submit an Access Agreement for 2015-16 explaining how income from undergraduate tuition fees over £6,000 was used to support outreach and student support; and a Widening Participation Strategic Statement explaining how it used the HEFCE Student Opportunity Fund allocation, currently worth £2.4M annually to the College, on outreach and student success.

20.3 SEWPC had positioned itself for its next phase of work focusing on widening access, student and alumnus engagement, student feedback and student services strategies in the context of changing national HE policy.

**Agreed:**

20.4 To change the name of the Committee to Student Engagement and Widening Participation Committee

20.5 Revised Terms of Reference for SEWPC reflecting this change in emphasis.

**TEACHING & QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Considered:**


**Noted:**

21.2 Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC) had considered a mid-term report on the implementation of the College’s Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement (SLATE). The SLATE focused on improving student retention, interdisciplinary programmes, the growth of the three year degree portfolio, learning across all three terms, minimum standards for the Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) and the launch of the Centre for Transformative Practice in Learning and Teaching. The current focus was on assessment and its role in learning and on developing a model for flexible blended learning by defining desirable graduate attributes and identifying how technology could help students acquire those attributes. This would underpin development of the flexible intensive curriculum in the Catalyst project.

21.3 Schools were engaging with feedback from the 2013 National Student Survey (NSS), for example with measures to improve the speed of feedback on assessment, better communications on personal tutors and extra-curricular events promoting employability. The 2014 NSS was in progress and Birkbeck needed to reach a 50% response rate threshold to be in the league table. Academic Board members were asked to remind their colleagues and students about the importance of the NSS.

21.4 The annual report on student complaints noted an increase in the annual rate of complaints received, likely to be linked to higher tuition fees and increased student expectations. It was considered important to make prompt responses to complaints, even when they were unfounded.

**Approved:**
21.5 New programmes:
- MSc Biobusiness
- Cert HE Funeral Management
- MA Film Curating

Withdrawn programmes:
- Cert HE Performance and Creative Practice
- Cert CE Performance Studies: Acting
- Cert CE Performance Studies: Concert Singing
- Cert CE Performance Studies: Dance
- Cert CE Performance Studies: Opera
- Modular Certificates in Music: Certificate, Cert HE, Certificate in Music and the Arts; Cert HE History of Music; Cert HE Opera Studies; Cert HE Musical Techniques and Composition; Cert HE Writing Music
- Graduate Certificate Islam: Politics and Society
- Graduate Certificate Islamic Studies
- PG Cert Professional Studies
- Graduate Diploma Biological Chemistry
- Graduate Diploma Molecular Biology
- MRes Management with Business Strategy and the Environment
- MRes Management with Business Innovation
- MRes Management with Corporate Governance and Business Ethics
- MRes Management with Creative Industries
- MRes Management with European Policy
- MRes Management with Human Resource Management
- MRes Management with International Business and Development
- MRes Management with International Business
- MRes Management with Marketing
- MRes Management with Sport Management
- MRes Social and Political Theory
- MA Creative Industries (Arts and Media)

Suspended programmes:
- MA Modern Languages (Combined Languages Studies)
- Modern Languages (French Studies)
- Modern Languages (German Studies)
- PG Dip Modern Languages (French Studies)
- Modern Languages (German Studies)
- PG Cert Modern Languages (French Studies)
- Modern Languages (German Studies)
- Modern Languages (Combined Languages Studies)
- MRes Modern Languages (French Studies)
- Modern Languages (Combined Languages Studies)
- MA Modern Languages (PGCE) (Portuguese and Brazilian Studies)
- MA Modern Languages (PGCE) (Spanish and Latin American Studies)
21.6 Programme regulations for the postgraduate taught programme in Organizational Psychology and Human Resource Management, a University of London International Academy programme.

22 **EMERITUS TITLES**

Considered:

22.1 Proposals for the conferment of Emeritus titles *(AB 2013 15)*.

**Recommended to Governors**

22.2 Conferment of Emeritus titles on the following recently retired staff:

- Professor William Rowe, Anniversary Professor of Poetics in the School of Arts
- Professor Christine Slingsby, Professor of Structural Biology in the School of Science

23 **CHAIR’S ACTIONS**

Noted:

23.1 An updated report of actions taken by the Chair would be made at the next meeting.

24 **DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS**

Noted:

24.1 The Summer term meeting of Academic Board would take place on 1 July 2014.