Birbeck
University of London

MINUTES OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE
4 February 2015

Present
Professor Matt Innes (Chair), Professor Roger Luckhurst, Professor Rick Cooper, Mr Paul Turnbull

In attendance
Mrs Katherine Bock (Head of Governance and Corporate Support), Ms Liz Francis (Head of Research Grants and Contracts), Miss Julie Radcliffe (School Manager Representative), Mr Fraser Keir (Academic Registrar), Mr Robert Atkinson (Director of Library and Media Services), Ms Fiona Macleod (Media and Publicity Officer), Mr Scott Miller (Head of Academic Services), Ms Rachael Boyle (Minutes Secretary to the Committee)

Apologies for absence
Professor John Kelly, Professor Stephen Frosh, Professor Sasha Roseneil, Professor Alex Poulavassilis

18. MINUTES
Received and Confirmed
18.1 The Minutes of the Meeting of the Research Committee 22 October 2014. No matters arising.

19 REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Noted
19.1 The receipt of the report of the Research Committee following its last meeting by the Academic Board. (RC 2014 21)

20 RESEARCH CENTRE REVIEWS
Noted
20.1 In the absence of the Pro-Vice-Master for Research it was agreed that the reviews of the Research Centres scheduled to take place would be postponed until the May meeting of the Research Committee.

20.2 Members agreed in principle to the establishment of the proposed new research centre; the centre for the Study of Critical European Law. It was decided that further discussion on its implementation would take place outside of the meeting.

21 REF OUTCOMES
Received
21.1 The initial report regarding the outcomes of REF 2014 (RC 2014 29) Noted

21.2 The results of REF 2014 had been widely reported and overall Birkbeck performed well, albeit with some uneven results across the College in terms of UoA outcomes. Once proportion of staff included is taken into account, the College as a whole moved in the tables from 46th nationally based on GPA to 30th when intensity was taken into account.

21.3 It was noted that the intensity weighted tables were beginning to be seen nationally as a much truer reflection of institutional performance given the perceived increase in the ‘gaming’ of the raw league tables.

21.4 It would be likely that HEFCE-R funding would be apportioned according to a formula based on proportion of 4* and 3* overall outcomes multiplied by number of staff submitted.

21.5 The possible 40% drop in teaching income is covered by the same percentage drop in undergraduates so overall the outcome is positive with Birkbeck being 30th in league tables.

21.6 The importance of recognising the REF as a ranking exercise with funding implications was noted by members. The results of the REF can effect up to 10% of overall College income and can have a significant impact on staff moral and institutional reputation.

21.7 The Planning Office had written some detailed predictions based on the assumption that assessment methodology for each Unit of Assessment (UOA) remained the same. The results of which indicated that overall funding would not change drastically but that there might be significant shifts between departments.

21.8 HEFCE have yet to announce the formula that would be implemented to allocate funding in future REF rounds. In previous rounds it had been the case that a contingency fund was available to mitigate any unintended consequences of changes to the formula. This would not be the case moving forward, which might in itself produce adverse results.

21.9 As of yet there has been no indication from HEFCE as to what the new formula will look like; the weighting for 3* and 4* outputs, impact and environment could all be different. This could produce unforeseen results for Birkbeck.

21.10 The 2015 General Election may have some impact on the funding formula in that it is unlikely that a new government would want to be seen in the media to be cutting certain types of funding, such as science.

21.11 It was agreed that the UoAs for the next REF should be agreed as soon as possible to ensure a guided transition into the next REF cycle.

21.12 The REF Working Group would work to improve staff and mentor structures and monitor staff turnover in relation to REF results.
21.13 HRSPC will consider a strategic approach to staffing, focusing on a 3-5 year plan that takes into account REF strategies, rather than responding to department requests on an ad hoc basis.

21.14 Members discussed the strategic importance of postdoctoral and early career posts. It was noted that Assistant Deans had not been enthusiastic about investing in new programmes to attract such candidates as the two year positions were increasingly being used as stepping stones to positions in other institutions. It was determined that the posts could not be modified to include a guaranteed job offer at the end of the two year period as the posts were designed to try and out and test promising candidates.

21.15 Members discussed the possibility of encouraging more internal competition for posts. This would be in keeping with the trends being set by external funders such as the Wellcome Trust who require participating organisations to complete a number of internal processes before funding is allocated.

22 EXTERNALLY FUNDED RESEARCH GRANTS AND CONTRACTS

Received

22.1 The reports of the Research Grants & Contracts Office:
- Research Grants Current and Confirmed (RC 2014 30)
- Grant Applications 2013-14 (RC 2014 32)
- Grant Applications 2014-15 (RC 2014 33)

22.2 The Committee regarded research income as one of the success stories of Birkbeck College, as it had grown faster than the College’s overall income in the last five to six years. This was reflected in the fact that research income for 2013-14 reached £11M (a 20% increase on the year before).

22.3 The total portfolio of currently active awards amounts to £44M; approximately the same as this time last year.

22.4 The total number of projects started in 2014-15 is just over £6M, this is significantly down on last year when the total was approximately £12M.

22.5 The total of 2014-15 applications so far is 114; this is significantly up from this time last year when the total was 80. It was noted that this figure included a higher proportion of BA Postdoctoral Fellow applications in comparison to previous years.

22.6 Members considered the internal processes in regards to the submission of research grant applications. It was noted that the Research Grants and Contracts Office had become exceptionally busy with the increase in applications and it would be appreciated if staff could adhere to the 9 day submission policy (i.e. that applicants submit their proposal to the Office at least nine days before the final external deadline). This would ensure that the Office has sufficient time to review and quality control applications, thereby increasing the College’s chance of success.
22.7 The Committee agreed that all applications would be internally peer reviewed, for purposes of quality control and in order to refine applications.

23 **RESEARCH STRATEGY**
**Noted**
23.1 Further to the Research Strategy 2014-19, which had been warmly received and approved by the College, the Pro-Vice-Master for Research had written an implementation plan. The plan defined actions for the central professional services and for the Schools. The plan would be rolled out across the College upon confirmation of administrative support.

23.2 It was noted that discussions were ongoing in regards to research administrative support and that there were a number of areas to consider in terms of existing resources and the distribution of resources, such as; the Research and Grants Contract Office, the Library, Registry, external relations, Graduate Research School Support, PhD Student Support and existing School resources. The discussion would continue concerning the effectiveness of a centralised office given the resources already available in these areas.

23.3 As an interim measure it was agreed that School Research Committees would work to ensure that mentoring schemes were supported, intermittent and annual reports were completed and schedules of work created and adhered to.

24 **RESEARCH STUDENT MATTERS**
**Noted**
24.1 The Pro-Vice-Master portfolio of Postgraduate Study is still vacant pending a review of postgraduate research funding, student administration and strategy in the college. The review will include recommendations on the remit of the RSSC and BGRS.

24.2 The Committee received the Report of the Research Students Sub-Committee (RSSC) and noted its discussion of distance learning and practice based PhDs, break in study and writing up policy for PhD students, research studentships, the work of the Birkbeck Graduate Research School (BGRS) and PhD enrolments and awards. A review of postgraduate research student matters is currently taking place and will make recommendations on strategy, administration, studentships and the remit of the RSSC and BGRS.

25 **THE FULLBRIGHT BIRKBECK SCHOLAR AWARD SCHEME**
**Received**
25.1 A report outlining the Fulbright-Birkbeck scholar award (RC 2014 35)
**Noted**
25.2 Birkbeck College had signed up to The Fullbright Birkbeck Scholar Award Scheme; the programme seeks to foster mutual cultural understanding between the UK and US via educational exchange between both nations. For Birkbeck this would entail receiving five scholars, for a period of 3-12 months depending on their proposal, over a period of five years; The college is due to receive its first scholar presently.
25.3 Over the course of the programme each of the five Birkbeck Schools would receive one delegate, thereby spreading the cost. However, it was noted that at present the number of applications to the scheme have been skewed, with Arts and SSHP receiving the majority of applications, creating pressure on faculty funding.

25.4 Members discussed what the values of the scheme are, as a goodwill scheme to prospective scholars, versus an opportunity to develop good research contacts, or an opportunity for advertising for the college. If it is the latter, then a more thorough selection process is required.

25.5 The Committee will look at creating more awareness of the scheme amongst staff, as well as assessing the costs and benefits of the scheme as a whole. The matter will also go to SPC for further discussion.

26 SCHOOL RESEARCH COMMITTEES

Received

26.1 The reports from the School research Committees from the summer term 2014 meetings;

- School of Arts (RC 2014 36)
- School of Law (RC 2014 37)
- School of Science (RC 2014 38)
- School of Social Science, History and Philosophy (RC 2014 39)

* BEI SRC has not met since the last Research Committee

Noted

26.2 The Committee would work towards a standardised format for School Research Committees that relate to the college research strategy.

SSHP Revised Terms of Reference

Received

26.3 The revised Terms of Reference for the SSHP School Research Committee (RC 2014 40)

Approved

26.4 Members approved the revised Terms of Reference for the SSHP School Research Committee

27 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETINGS

Noted

27.1 The next meeting of the Research Committee will take place;

- Wednesday 13 May 2015 at 2:00pm.