MINUTES OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE
30 January 2014

Present
Dr Rick Cooper, Dr Rosie Cox, Professor John Kraniauskas, Professor Roger Luckhurst, Professor Sasha Roseneil, Professor Stephen Frosh [Chair], Professor Marjorie Lorch, Dr Stuart Motha, Dr Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, Dr Maya Topf, Professor Li Wei, 

In attendance
Robert Atkinson (Director of Library & Media Services), Julie Radcliffe (Science School Manager), Liz Francis (Head of Research Grants & Contracts), Bob Westaway (Interim Academic Registrar), Katharine Bock (Head of Governance and Corporate Support) Dr Luciana Martins (for item 7), Dr Yunus Aksoy (for item 7), Dr Ivan Petrella (for item)

Apologies for Absence
Professor Alex Poulavassilis, Professor John Kelly, Professor Sasha Roseneil

13 MINUTES
Confirmed
The Minutes of the meeting of 15 October 2013

14 REPORT TO ACADEMIC BOARD
Noted
The report made to Academic Board following the 15 October meeting (RC 2013 15)

15 MATTERS ARISING
Confirmed
Amendments to the Terms of Reference agreed at the last meeting (RC 2013 16)

Noted
Professor Mark Johnson would be invited to set out in more detail his views on research career progression

Schools were reviewing their research grant application management procedures. BEI and SSHP had completed their reviews and Arts was about to do so.

16 RESEARCH CENTRES
Noted
16.1 The rolling schedule of review of Research Centres (RC 2013 17)

Considered
16.2 The report of the Centre for Contemporary Literature (Arts) (RC 2013 18)

Noted

16.3 The Centre for Contemporary Literature in the School of Arts remained active, with a programme of conferences and events including student-organised events. The Centre brought together academics, students and critical and creative writers. The website had been improved (ccl.bbk.ac.uk/) with current and archive content and a new visual theme. Recent high profile events included Le Carre’s People with Penguin Books and the Barbican, a potential candidate for an impact study in the 2020 research assessment. The Committee asked how the Centre was archiving its work and heard that this was achieved through publication in the Alluvium open access journal.

Considered

16.4 The report of the Birkbeck Centre for Applied Macroeconomics (BEI) (RC 2013 19)

Noted

16.5 The Centre reported on its new management structure and revised aims: to promote collaborations with other institutions, prominent academics, policy makers and economists with a European and global reach.

16.6 There were two international workshops in 2012-13 and a programme planned for 2013-14. A website was under development. The Centre was aiming to promote more research grant applications, in particular for European focused work.

Considered

16.7 The report of the Centre for Cognition, Computation and Modelling (Science) (RC 2013 20)

Noted

16.8 The Centre was set up in February 2013 in the School of Science. Its initial activity was an interdisciplinary workshop, recruitment of 25 academic affiliate and associate members and development of a website (cccm.bbk.ac.uk). The Centre was based in Psychological Sciences and aimed to establish links with other disciplines, in particular computer science.

16.9 Research Committee confirmed support for the role of research centres in promoting interdisciplinary work and members also noted a potential link with this Centre and applied linguistics.

Considered

16.10 The report of the Centre for Iberian and Latin American Visual Studies (Arts) (RC 2013 21)

Noted

16.11 CILAVS, in the School of Arts, was established in 2007 to bring together disciplines including geography, art history, museum studies and digital humanities. Its programme included seminars, exhibitions, screenings and events. The Centre, with the Department of Computer Science and the Bolivian Institute de Lengua y Culture
Aymara secured a £840K AHRC Grant for the Weaving Communities of Practice project, digitising and cataloguing Andean textiles in an innovative database. This was the subject of a REF 2013 impact study and the largest research grant in the School of Arts.

16.12 Centre staff were concerned about its ability to secure future grants now that the Weaving Communities project was at an end. Members discussed the potential impact of the merger of the Department of Iberian and Latin American Studies with the Department of European Culture and Languages, a recommendation of the recent Review of Languages Provision at Birkbeck. Research Committee agreed that CILAVS should be a critical part of the research culture in the merged department and confirmed support for its continuation.

Agreed

16.13 To ask the School of Arts Research Committee to pay attention to maintaining the health of the research centres in the merging departments during implementation of the Review.

Noted

16.14 Research Committee was pleased to hear that CILAVS had secured two AHRC collaborative doctoral partnerships: with the V&A and the Royal Society.

Considered

16.15 A proposal from the School of Law to establish a Centre for Politico Legal Theology (RC 2013 22)

Noted

16.16 The proposed Centre aimed to bring together researchers working on the emergence of social and societal norms in the evolution of Christian and European secular law. Research Committee asked what the added value would be for Birkbeck in establishing this Centre, given the existing aims of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities: to promote interdisciplinary research promoting new ideas and forms of understanding in the humanities. It heard that the proposed Centre aimed to bring together an international network including high profile academics involving schools of thought that were distinct and different from those in BIH, while remaining under the umbrella of the School of Law.

16.17 The Centre planned to archive work through publication in the Italian philosophy and theology periodical Divus Thomas.

16.18 Members noted potential links with Psychosocial Studies and Philosophy at Birkbeck and with Heythrop College.

Agreed

16.19 To recommend that Academic Board agree to the establishment of the Centre for Research in Politico Legal Theology.

Note: The Centre has launched as the Centre for Research in Political Theology (CRIPT)

Noted
16.20 The closure of the Centre for European Protected Areas Research on the departure from Birkbeck of the staff involved.

17 REF POST SUBMISSION REVIEW
Noted
17.1 The REF material had been successfully submitted, including the additional submission of December publications.

17.2 The Chair of the Committee had drafted a paper on lessons learned from this round of REF, which was being considered by the Strategic Planning Committee. The paper included a case for there to be a dedicated research office or support function in the College. This was under discussion with stakeholders including the Deans. It had been agreed that the Research Grants and Contracts Office would report directly through the College Secretariat rather than the Finance department, reflecting its role which was as much strategic as financial.

17.3 Other lessons included the need for more clarity on the expectations, definition and delivery of roles, including Unit of Assessment leads and REF co-ordinators. For the 2020 REF, it was recommended that staff would be appointed to the agreed roles and that sabbaticals and study leave should be deferred until after the submission was made.

17.4 The paper also noted the need:
- to recognise the work that goes into creating impact cases, which could be included in promotion criteria in future.
- for better data on research students
- to begin to prepare for the 2020 REF now, applying learning from the 2013 experience.

17.5 The Committee also noted the need for a College level discussion on the role of impact officers and define the expectation for and the role of impact officers well in advance of the 2020 REF.

18 RESEARCH STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT
Noted
18.1 The Research Strategy Working Party continued to develop the research strategy for 2014 - 2019. Discussions were focusing on infrastructure, including the research office considerations noted above, research student strategy and infrastructure; and career and employment structures for researchers.

19 RESEARCH DATA MANAGEMENT AND SHARING
Considered
19.1 Policy on data management and sharing, proposed by the working party on research data management and sharing (RC 2013 23)

19.2 The College would need to have policy in place by May 2015 to meet EPSRC requirements. The other research councils were also introducing data requirements. The policy covered the storage of data and metadata, normally done
via libraries. At Birkbeck this could be implemented in parallel with the institutional repository BIROn.

Endorsed

19.3 Further development of the policy on data management and sharing

20 OPEN ACCESS

Noted

20.1 The ongoing requirement to deposit all journal publications and book chapters in the Birkbeck online repository (RC 2013 24)

20.2 An email had been sent to all staff confirming this requirement.

20.3 Ubiquity Press, an open access publisher spun off from UCL, was promoting an initiative to set up university presses. The School of Arts was considering a trial to run its open access journals with Ubiquity.

21 RESEARCH STUDENT MATTERS

Considered

21.1 The report of Research Student Sub-Committee (RC 2013 25)

Noted

21.2 RSSC reported the commencement of discussions on research student strategy, working with the Vice Master Designate. The strategy should cover information and support for research students and management of RCUK and other sponsored students.

21.3 Twenty Birkbeck Anniversary studentships, plus an additional three from the residual AHRC studentship grant; had been allocated to Schools. This represented a net gain in available studentships following Birkbeck’s participation in the unsuccessful bid for a doctoral training partnership in the next round of AHRC funding. There was funding for 15 studentships in the current AHRC round.

21.4 RSSC also reported on the agreement for the ESRC funded Bloomsbury Doctoral Training Centre to provide institutional matched funding for additional studentships. It was increasingly a Research Councils expectation that institutions contributed to DTCs. The tuition fee income element of the ESRC funded studentships would be recycled to provide additional fee plus stipend studentships. These would be allocated by the DTC on the basis of merit. Depending on the outcome of the merit based allocation Birkbeck could expect to get one additional studentship annually.

21.5 It was also reported that the Leverhulme Trust had issued a preliminary call for doctoral training centre bids, focusing on interdisciplinary themes. Schools had been asked to propose potential themes for a College bid.

22 RESEARCH GRANTS AND CONTRACTS

Received

22.1 Reports on:
- Research grants current and confirmed (RC 2013 26)
- New research grants 2013-14 (RC 2013 27)
• Grant Applications 2012-13 (RC 2013 28)
• Grant applications 2013-14 (RC 2013 29)

22.2 The value of new grants started in 2013-14 was £12M, the same as for 2012-13. This is a decrease in real terms and there was a need for departments and Schools to have effective strategies to ensure continuity in research grant income, especially when large value grants were about to end. The current success rate on grant applications was 1 in 3.

22.3 Academic staff should aim to strike an appropriate balance between time spent on writing grants and time spent doing research. Research grant success would be a significant factor in the 2020 REF, in which the College needed a good outcome to maintain both its income and its reputation.

Agreed

22.4 To give more attention to considering what could be done to support staff in making successful proposals.

Noted

22.5 RCUK’s intention to issue feedback on peer review of research grant proposals (RC 2013 30)

22.6 Success rates for RCUK grant applications in 2012-13 (RC 2013 31)

23 SCHOOL RESEARCH COMMITTEES

Noted

23.1 Minutes of School Research Committees held since the last meeting of the College Research Committee (RC 2013 32)

Endorsed

23.2 SSHP’s process for approval of research grant applications, in response to the Research Councils’ “demand management” requirement for universities to review their grant applications before submitting. (RC 2013 33)

23.3 Amended Terms of Reference for the SSHP Research Committee, subject to clarification of the role of the College and School Ethics Committees in relation to research ethics (RC 2013 34)

24 NEXT MEETING

Noted

24.1 The summer term meeting would take place on Tuesday 27 May 2014 at 2.30 p.m.