Unconfirmed

BIRKBECK
University of London

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING & QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE
9th February 2016

Present:
Dr Tim Markham (Chair), Dr Christy Constantakopoulou, Dr Dionyssis Dimitrakopoulos, Dr Joanne Leal, Dr Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, Kevin Lau (Students’ Union), Dr Richard Rayne, Dr Martin Shipway, Dr Anita Walsh

Apologies for absence:
Professor Sue Jackson, Robert Atkinson, Katherine Bock, Fraser Keir, Dr Stewart Motha, Dr Jim Pitts, Jeremy Tanner

In attendance:
Lorna Bowden, Nigel Buckle, Dr Jennifer Fraser, Verity Hutton, Scott Miller, Neil O’Connor, Lucy Heming (Secretary), Rima Amin (Minutes Secretary), Mara Arts

25 APOLOGIES
25.1 Apologies had been received as noted above.

26 MINUTES (TQEC 34)
26.1 The minutes of the TQEC meeting of 13th October 2015 were confirmed.

27 MATTERS ARISING
(i) Noted: a verbal report on matters arising from the meeting of 13th October 2015 relating to items not featured elsewhere on the agenda.

27.1 The Chair noted that the action on minute 15.11 required follow up as it was not clear if it had been actioned. The action on minute 15.13 for the Students’ Union to select a Postgraduate student representative had not been completed.

(ii) Noted: The Report to Academic Board of the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Meeting of the 13th October 2015 (TQEC 35)

27.2 The paper would be amended to ensure the correct dates were listed.

28 CHAIR’S REPORT
28.1 A white paper on higher education is expected in early June which is later than expected. It was noted that there may also be an EU referendum held on the 23rd June which may delay development.

28.2 It was noted that the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey may be scrapped, due to the development of alternative metrics for the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). It was noted that a metric measuring graduate income may take place of the DLHE survey.

28.3 It was noted that the post-Catalyst programme of activity had been scoped; a series of separate project groups had been formed to lead on these activity areas and would be considered in more detail under agenda item 7.
28.4 It was noted there are discussions on enhancing feedback on assessments and double-marking which are ongoing through the Assessment and Feedback project led by the Head of Academic Services.

28.5 There would be a small group convening on the 23rd February to take forward the personal tutoring project. It was noted that there had been progress in uploading names of personal tutors to the My Birkbeck site.

28.6 Themes to be discussed within the personal tutoring project included the role of a personal tutor in relation to Learning Support Officers and the Disability office and communication to academics on personal tutoring.

28.7 It was noted that there is ongoing work on embedding study skills at Level 4; at Level 5 the focus would be on employability.

28.8 There had been an excellent response from the staff in regards to applying for fellowships to the Higher Education Academy. It was noted that seminars were running to support the writing of fellowship applications.

29 LEARNING AND TEACHING WORKING GROUP UPDATE

29.1 It was noted that there would be Learning and Teaching conference held on the 21st March 2016 held in Stratford. The conference will focus on TEF, social mobility and Birkbeck’s mission.

ACTION: TQEC members to encourage staff to sign-up to the conference.

29.2 It was noted that there is to be an away day for Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching on the 25th February. Themes that will be discussed include the changing demographic of Birkbeck cohorts, post graduate students, Birkbeck’s mission and tapping in to what having a Birkbeck degree means. The group will also look at employability and the job market.

ACTION: Chair to feedback outcomes of the away day at the next TQEC meeting.

30 TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (TEF) AND QAA HIGHER EDUCATION REVIEW (HER)

(i) Received: Planning update for the QAA HER and TEF (TQEC 36)

30.1 It was noted that Birkbeck would fall under the pilot scheme for the new auditing process however since the last meeting, there has been no further information on what that may look like. The college is currently waiting to hear from HEFCE and the QAA.

30.2 It was noted that in the meantime the college has been reviewing its mapping against the Quality Code and inputting feedback from the Schools against specific indicators.

30.3 A Quality Handbook will be produced to detail Birkbeck quality processes and their links to the Quality Code.

30.4 It was noted that the next TEF meeting is scheduled for the 15th March.

(ii) Received: The Birkbeck response to the Green Paper “Higher education: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice” (TQEC 37)
30.5 It was noted that Birkbeck had concerns over the lack of consideration within the Green Paper of mature students, post graduate students, and part time students.

30.6 It was noted that modular enrolments are still significant as there are approximately 5,000 students on modular enrolments at Birkbeck.

30.7 It was noted that the focus on teaching intensity, which seemed to prioritise face-to-face contact time, could detract from innovative learning mechanisms such as those delivered online.

30.8 It was noted that Birkbeck expressed preference for a five year TEF cycle which corresponds with sector opinion. This would include the potential for early re-submission for those who do not do well in the initial audit.

30.9 It was noted that Birkbeck suggested that the TEF should not be synchronised with the Research Excellence Framework (REF). This appears to be the opinion of the sector due to the intensity of workload and not wanting to assign staff to focus solely on either REF or TEF, creating an artificial split.

30.10 It was noted that Birkbeck expressed that it did not believe a 4 tier TEF banding system would be suitable.

(iii) Discussed: Updates on Teaching Excellence Framework Strands

30.11 There have been sector meetings on Learning Gain and the scope was starting to take shape. It is anticipated that it will focus on co-curricular activities to develop skills, wellbeing, citizenship and a well-rounded university graduate. A key question to be explored is how universities will measure Learning Gain. There was a concern surrounding a potential increased focus on facilities.

30.12 Further statistical work exploring Grade Point Average (GPA) is needed. Modelling is due to be taken forward in the next month. It will look at alternate models and how the GPA might impact differently on different types of students e.g. part time students versus full time students. Wider consideration of classification methods will take place, to address concerns over grade inflation and comparability to competitor institutions.

30.13 It was noted that in regards to Student Progression and Retention that there will be an emphasis to look at not only how many students are leaving but the demographics of those students. This will help Birkbeck understand where to focus their attention in regards to retention.

30.14 It was noted that embedded skills could have a focus on social capital and culture capital.

30.15 Other Higher Education Institutions have mandated that all teaching staff have a teaching qualification e.g. a PGCE. This could have a potential impact for Birkbeck.

30.16 There needs to be some exploration on how teaching outside of the classroom can be quantified in relation to teaching intensity.

31 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION
It was noted that there are student engagement projects happening within BEI and Law for which funding has been found however they are currently waiting for meetings to take place. In addition, meetings are scheduled to discuss Embedded Skills and Personal Tutoring.

### COMPLAINTS, APPEALS AND STUDENT DISCIPLINE (TQEC 38)

#### 32.1
It was noted that the numbers of students engaging in complaint and appeal processes or going through assessment offence or disciplinary procedures remain low and any variation from 2013/14 to 2014/15 was largely negligible. The percentage of students making representations in 2014/15 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Appeal</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Code of Student</th>
<th>Complain</th>
<th>Dignity at Work</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Termination</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>0.14%</td>
<td>0.09%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>0.04%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEI</td>
<td>0.73%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.19%</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.19%</td>
<td>1.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>0.95%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.23%</td>
<td>2.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
<td>0.24%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.29%</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSHP</td>
<td>0.24%</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td>0.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
<td>0.24%</td>
<td>0.04%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>1.17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 32.2
It was noted that Stage 2 examination offences appeared to have increased in correlation with the number of examinations administered centrally. Stage 2 offences rose from 17 in 2013/14 to 43 in 2014/15.

#### 32.3
It was suggested that the capping on the number of assessments may impact the number of assessment offences taking place due to increased pressure on students to pass first time.

#### 32.4
There is work taking place in order to improve consistency of assessment offence outcomes following feedback from Panel members and secretaries; improved guidance would be available for 2016/17.

#### 32.5
It was noted that the number of appeals increased this year from 43 to 63. Undergraduate students were more likely to appeal; it was suspected this was in correlation with fee increases. In addition, it may correspond with some schools being increasingly strict on mitigating circumstances.

#### 32.6
8 complaints were made to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE) which was a slight increase from 2013/14. Actions being taken forward to decrease this number include the encouragement of early resolution through the revised appeals and complaints policies. It was noted that the number of Completion of Procedures letters being sent to students, the stepping point to them going to the OIA, was 14 which is significantly lower than comparative institutions.

#### 32.7
It was noted that the transition of student complaints from Student Services to Academic Standards and Quality had taken place.

#### 32.8
The lack of investigators for complaints was discussed and it was noted that training for investigators is being arranged on two dates. It was noted that complaints need to be investigated by and reported on within two weeks from the investigators receiving it which is a difficult turn around.
32.9 The report included data on the comparative involvement of different student demographic constituents in these processes. While this data was welcomed, it was currently considered in separate strands and it was suggested that intersectional data would be beneficial in the future.

**ACTION:** Academic Standards and Quality to consider how best to report on equalities data in future.

33 **EXTERNAL EXAMINERS (TQEC 39)**

33.1 A thematic report on the issues raised in external examiner reports in 2014/15 was received and noted. This was the first time a report on these themes had been created.

33.2 It was noted that academic English was commonly flagged as an issue by external examiners, along with comments on assessment and feedback practices, marking and moderation and the administration of the external examiner and Board process.

33.3 A discussion took place on whether it would be useful to provide a report for external examiners to alert them to the fact the College was aware of these issues. It was noted that this could impact upon the external examiners comments, either by disproportionately encouraging them to report on the same issues or dissuading them from commenting on them altogether. It was decided that it may be more useful to provide a summary of this report to Boards of Examiners instead, to facilitate discussion with external examiners.

**ACTION:** Academic Standards and Quality to create a summary report to go to Boards of Examiners

33.4 There was a discussion on whether or not the number of responses required to external examiners was high. It was noted that the need for a response was common and to be expected as the College wanted external examiners to act as critical friends and provide commentary that promoted discussion.

33.5 It was agreed that in future the report could show the number of responses that were in reference to serious concerns, provided the cases were not identifiable.

**ACTION:** Academic Standards and Quality to take this forward for the next report.

34 **POLICY REVIEW & PROCESSES FOR APPROVAL**

(i) **Received:** An update on the progress with policy review (TQEC 40)

34.1 It was noted that the policy review schedule was ambitious however many of the policies required only minor amendments.

34.2 It was noted that as policies were reviewed, it created a domino effect for change as policies are often interconnected.

34.3 It was noted that adequate time was required in order to thoroughly consult the correct people for key policy changes.

(ii) **Considered and Approved subject to further amendments following additional consultation:** Policy and Procedure for Termination of a Student’s Registration and the Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy. (TQEC 41; TQEC 42)
34.4 The key changes to the Policy and Procedure for Termination of a Student’s Registration were: removal of the separate appeals process for academic termination decisions; removal of the distinction between mid-year termination and progression points; clarification of terminology of ‘termination of registration’ and clarification of reasons for non-academic grounds for termination (disciplinary, financial, assumed withdrawal).

34.5 Point 19 of the termination policy was discussed. It was noted that 10 working days may not be a sufficient timeframe for a student to appeal especially if a student is facing financial difficulties. It was noted that the timeframe may add pressure to an already pressurised situation. It was noted that this timeframe was reflecting current practice however can be looked at again.

34.6 There was a discussion on the Assumed Withdrawal part of the policy questioning what methods were in place to distinguish when a student can be withdrawn on this basis to avoid accidentally withdrawing a student. It was noted that there were a number of things in place including attendance monitoring and attempting to communicate with the student.

34.7 It was noted that attendance monitoring differs between schools; clarity and consistency was needed across the schools and detailed guidelines distributed.

34.8 It was asked whether the policy referred to research students as it is not unusual for long gaps in communications to occur. It was noted that this policy did apply to research students and further thought was needed as to how to identify when a research student has dropped out.

34.9 It was suggested that “will” as used in point 20, is changed to either “can” or “may” to recognising the different circumstances when it may be applied.

**ACTION:** Head of Academic Services to review and amend in line with the above comments and any further feedback from members.

34.10 The key changes to the Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy were: removal of the separate appeals process for APL decisions; clarification of terminology of accreditation of prior learning, as reflected in the change to the policy title from Assessment of Prior Learning; updating to reflect revisions to other policy, and introducing the possibility for mark transfer for approved Erasmus+ and Study Abroad activity.

34.11 It was suggested that the section on “internal credit transfer” needed to be removed from the policy as it did not need to be accredited.

34.12 It was noted that wording on point 23 about changes to classification where credit had been awarded without marks needed to be clearer.

**ACTION:** Academic Standards and Quality Manager to review and amend in line with the above comments and any further feedback from members.

35 **Surveys**

(i) **Received:** An update on the progress of the surveys (TQEC 43)

35.1 It was noted that videos on the National Student Survey (NSS) had been created. Although kept short in order to retain attention they are able to run through the full process of surveys for students and to provide examples of improvements being made due to student feedback.
35.2 It was noted that the college takes part in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) survey for research students every other year and the next PRES cycle would happen next year.

**ACTION:** The Minutes Secretary to circulate a full communications plan for the surveys via email after the meeting.

35.3 A weekly email would be circulated reflecting the response rates for the surveys.

35.4 Information had been collected on school improvements in response to student feedback and that External Relations had created letters to be sent from Executive Deans to students with this information.

**ACTION:** The Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching (School of Arts) to circulate the letters to relevant School staff

35.5 It was noted that the response rate for the NSS currently stands at 10% which is a 50% increase from the response rates this time last year.

(ii) **Received:** The Birkbeck response to the HEFCE Consultation on NSS changes, Unistats and Institutional information. (TQEC 44)

35.6 It was noted that Birkbeck were now subject to Consumer Market Authority (CMA) regulation and that academics had raised concerns over what this means for syllabuses, in particular the ability to make changes to curricula or learning, teaching and assessment methods once programme information had been published. Members were reassured that compliance with CMA would not mean the ability to make changes was removed.

35.7 It was noted that the proposal to facilitate more use of qualitative data was welcomed in regards to the NSS; in addition, an improved focus on postgraduate surveys was seen as a positive move.

35.8 It was noted that Birkbeck performs poorly on the NSS questions in relation to Learning Resources and it was hoped that the proposed amendments in paragraph 80-81 of the proposal would help clarify for students whether these questions were in reference to general facilities such as the library facilities or more specialist facilities.

(iii) **Received:** An update on NSS themes.

35.9 It was noted that other areas of improvement in relation to NSS themes included timing of feedback on assessments.

35.10 The Committee welcomed the results which showed students consider Birkbeck to be particularly successful in providing intellectually stimulating courses.

36 **COLLEGE PROGRAMMES COMMITTEE (TQEC 45)**

36.1 The committee endorsed the approval, amendment, suspension and withdrawal of programmes set out by the College Programme Committee:

Programme Approval:
• Cert HE Introduction to History (Full time)
• Cert HE Introduction to Social Sciences (Full time)
• PG Dip Philosophy
• MRes Philosophy
• MA Investigative Reporting

Programme Amendment:

• MSc Finance
• Grad Dip Finance

Programme Suspension:

• MA Social and Cultural Geography (2016/17 only)

Programme Withdrawals:

• DPsych Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy
• Graduate Diploma Arts Management

36.2. It was noted that two programmes would be taken forward through Chair’s Action outside of TQEC: MSc Data Science; BA Criminal Law Policy and Practice.

37 INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES
Considered and Approved: Annual Programme Reports (APRs), Programme Specifications and Regulations for the following programmes:

(i) PHILOSOPHY Annual Programme Report 2014/15 (TQEC 46)
(ii) PHILOSOPHY Programme Specification (TQEC 47)
(iii) PHILOSOPHY Programme Regulations 2016/17 (TQEC 48)
(iv) OPHRM Programme Specification (TQEC 49)
(v) OPHRM Programme Regulations 2016/17 (TQEC 50)

38 INTERNAL REVIEWS (TQEC 51)

38.1 Given the value of internal reviews and recommendations, the proposal to discuss broad themes arising from review at the Learning and Teaching Working Group was endorsed.

ACTION: Academic Standards and Quality to devise a mechanism for promoting discussion of themes from Internal Reviews at the Learning and Teaching Working Group

39 ASQ UPDATES (TQEC 52)
Noted: Summary of ASQ Updates including Erasmus+, Internal Review, Annual Monitoring, Programme Handbooks and QAA Updates.
DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS
Future meetings of the Committee are scheduled for:
• Thursday 19th May 2016

ANY OTHER BUSINESS
There was no additional business.