

# **Self Evaluation Document**

**The Department of Politics**

**March 2015**

## **Preface**

*This Self Evaluation Document was prepared for the Internal Review of the Department of Politics in March 2015. As part of this review, a panel of colleagues from other Departments in Birkbeck and a subject specialist from outside the College met with a group of current and former Politics students and all full-time staff from the Department to review developments in teaching and learning since 2010. As part of its commendations, the panel praised 'the support given by [Politics] staff to the students, and for conveying their enthusiasm for their subject to the students', 'the richness of provision in the programmes offered' and 'the Department's work on employability and the use of former students as speakers, and as mentors'. The panel also recommended that the Self Evaluation Document be made available to all students as a guide to the Department's strategy for assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. Please note that the information contained within this report is subject to change and that students should see their Module and Programme Handbooks as well as Birkbeck's Regulations for taught and research courses for the latest guidance on teaching and learning.*

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**SELF-EVALUATION DOCUMENT (SED) FOR  
FULL INTERNAL REVIEW OF TAUGHT AND RESEARCH PROGRAMMES**

## **1. Introduction to the Department**

(1) Politics has been part of our teaching provision at Birkbeck for nearly two centuries. Although George Birkbeck argued against ‘interference with political questions’<sup>1</sup> at the inaugural meeting of the London Mechanics Institute – founded in 1823 and renamed Birkbeck College in 1907 – the political reformer and archivist, Francis Place, ensured that the working men and women who came to this new institution had an opportunity to learn about politics. Political economy was covered in the College’s early curriculum by eminent lecturers such as William Ellis, Robert Wilmot Horton and Thomas Hodgskin alongside specialist provision for civil servants. Notable students in this foundational period include Karl Marx, who attended Hodgskin’s lectures on workers in the capitalist system, Sidney Webb, co-founder of the London School of Economics and Ramsey MacDonald, the first Labour Prime Minister. Building on this legacy, Birkbeck’s School of Sociology and Politics was founded in 1972 by Bernard Crick, a celebrated scholar of political liberalism, Paul Hirst, a social theorist who did ground-breaking work on globalisation among many other topics, and Sami Zubaida, a pioneer in the study of Middle East politics and an expert on, among other things, the political sociology of food and culture.

(2) The Department of Politics – as it was renamed in 2009 – has grown considerably over the last forty years. Birkbeck launched its flagship BA Politics, Philosophy & History (PPH) in 1988 and steadily increased the scope of its undergraduate and postgraduate provision in the 1990s. Today, the Department offers two certificate courses, three undergraduate degrees and 14 taught postgraduate programmes. At undergraduate level, the BA Politics, Philosophy & History remains a very successful programme and it now runs alongside a BA Politics and Government and BA in Global Politics and International Relations, the latter reflecting the Department’s growing strength in International Relations. At postgraduate level, the Department offers an innovative range of MSc programmes that match faculty expertise in British politics, global governance, European politics and Middle East politics, with the latest addition being a new MSc in Population, Migration and Ecology. MRes programmes and an MSc in Social Research include specialist training in qualitative, quantitative and interdisciplinary methods and the Department also runs a vibrant MPhil/PhD programme.

(3) Located in 10 Gower Street and situated within the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy, we are a community of over 400 students, 18 full-time faculty members, 18 visiting or sessional staff and five administrators. In keeping with our history, the Department’s approach to teaching combines the practical and the provocative. We still teach political economy, social and political theory and public policy alongside cutting edge

<sup>1</sup> T. Kelly (1970) ‘A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press): 122.

issues in comparative, European and international politics. Our students continue to excel in the study and practice of politics and can be found in Parliament, the Shadow Cabinet, the senior civil service, non-governmental and international organisations and leading European universities. While much has changed at Birkbeck over the last two hundred years, its mission to provide high-quality, research-led teaching to busy mature students in the evening has not. Our teaching in the field of politics has always been innovative and interactive and it remains so. This is due to the challenges of teaching students at the end of their working day and also because of the high levels of enthusiasm they bring to the classroom. On any given evening, lecturers in the Department of Politics teach some students who have little prior knowledge of the subject under discussion and others who have direct and sometimes very personal experience of such issues. Both groups share a deep determination to learn and it is with this in mind that the Department maintains – and keeps under regular review – a set of procedures to ensure and enhance the quality of its teaching.

## 2. Quality of Teaching Provision

### 2.1 Programmes of Study

(4) At the request of the Registry, the following certificate, undergraduate, taught postgraduate and MPhil/PhD programmes are included in this Self Evaluation document.

**Table 1: Programmes of Entry 2010-2014 for Review**

Codes	Programmes	Comments
INTEU-H	International and European Studies (Certificate of Higher Education)	Withdrawn
INEAS-H	International and European Studies - Eastern European Studies (Cert of HE) - Fast Track	Withdrawn
INTEE-H	International and European Studies: Europe (Cert of HE)	Withdrawn
INTEI-H	International and European Studies: International Organisations (Cert of HE)	Withdrawn
INTES-H	International and European Studies: Security (Cert of HE)	Withdrawn
INTEW-H	International and European Studies: World Economy (Cert of HE)	Withdrawn
UEHINTST	International Studies (Cert of HE)	New
UEHPOLGV	Politics and Government (Cert of HE)	New
UUBAGLPR	BA Global Politics and International Relations (UCAS Entry)	New
UBAPOLGV	BA Politics and Government	New
UUBAPLGV	BA Politics and Government (UCAS entry)	New
UBAPOSTY	BA Politics and Society	Withdrawn
UBAPOPHI	BA Politics, Philosophy and History	
UUBAPOPH	BA Politics Philosophy and History (UCAS Entry)	New
GCGINMIG	Graduate Certificate International Migration and Integration	Withdrawn
TPCSOCRS	PG Cert Social Research	New
TMAISLST	MA Islamic Studies	Withdrawn
TMAISLPS	MA Islam: Politics and Society	Replaced by MSc Middle East in Global Politics: Islam, Conflict and Development

**Table 1 (Continued)**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Comments</b>
TMSPOAMR	MSc American Politics	
TMSMNEUP	MSc European Policy And Management	Withdrawn
TMSEUPOP	MSc European Politics and Policy	New
TMSPEUP	MSc European Public Policy	Replaced by MSc European Politics & Policy
TMSGLGEP	MSc Global Governance and Emerging Powers	New
TMSGLGPP	MSc Global Governance and Public Policy	Replaced by MSc Global Governance and Emerging Powers
TMSPOGLB	MSc Global Politics	
TMSGOPPO	MSc Government, Policy and Politics	
TMSICGBG	MSc International Security and Global Governance	
TMSMEGPI	MSc Middle East in Global Politics: Islam, Conflict and Development	New
TMSNLECN	MSc Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict	
TMSPOEUU	MSc Politics of Europe and the European Union	Replaced by MSc European Politics and Policy
TMSPPMNG	MSc Public Policy And Management	
TMSPOPME	Politics of Population, Migration and Ecology	New
TMSSLPOT	MSc Social And Political Theory	
TMSSOCRS	MSc Social Research	New
TMRPOAMR	MRes American Politics	Withdrawn
TMREUPOP	MRes European Politics and Policy	Withdrawn
TMRGLGPP	MRes Global Governance and Public Policy	Withdrawn
TMRPOGLB	MRes Global Politics	
TMRGOPPO	MRes Government, Policy and Politics	Withdrawn
TMRICGBG	MRes International Security and Global Governance	Withdrawn
TMRNLECN	MRes Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict	Withdrawn
TMRPOLTC	MRes Politics	
TMRPOEUU	MRes Politics of Europe and the European Union	Withdrawn
TMRPPMNG	MRes Public Policy And Management	
TMRSLPOT	MRes Social and Political Theory	Withdrawn
RMPPOLTC	MPhil Politics	
RPHPOLTC	PhD Politics	

## 2.2 Educational Aims of the Provision

(5) The Department's principal aims are (a) to enable mature students in full-time employment to undertake undergraduate and postgraduate study in Politics in fulfilment of the mission of the College; (b) to enable students to develop and deepen their understanding of the conceptual and theoretical bases of the discipline, their methods of inquiry, and their domains of knowledge; (c) to offer students the opportunity to develop and deepen their skills of critical evaluation and analysis; (d) to enable students to develop and extend their key skills as a foundation for personal development, employment or further academic study; and (e) to contribute to the needs of local, national and international communities.

(6) These objectives are consistent with Birkbeck's mission to provide 'higher education courses which meet the changing educational, cultural, personal and career needs of adults; in particular those who live or work in the London region'.<sup>2</sup> The majority of our students are part-time, allowing those who work in politics and those who wish to do so to study at Birkbeck alongside those who simply want to learn more about the subject. The Department shares the College's commitment to recruiting students from 'diverse social and educational backgrounds'. We are selective about admissions but open-minded as to the suitability of applicants for undergraduate and postgraduate study. Many of our applicants are interviewed to ensure that we understand their passion for politics and to take account of relevant professional experience, as well as looking at their past academic performance.

(7) Module objectives are listed in the relevant handbook (see Box 1 above for an example) and the Department as a whole meets its principal aims by ensuring that all graduating students from the Department will: (a) be able to demonstrate the ability to apply critically the main theories, models and concepts used in the study of politics to the analysis of political ideas, institutions, processes, practices, developments and events; (b) have developed an understanding and substantive knowledge of political processes and/or social and political theory; (c) have extended and developed their analytical, evaluative and critical capacities; (d) have developed transferable skills, including the ability to take responsibility for their own learning, learning how to learn, making oral and written presentations, planning and producing written assignments, working independently, and using information technology; and (e) have developed, where they complete a dissertation, the ability to undertake independent research.

<sup>2</sup> For Birkbeck's mission statement, see: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/about-us/mission>



Box 1: Example of Module-Specific Objectives (Global Governance)

Global governance can be understood as the response of international institutions and fora to the manifold opportunities and challenges associated with globalisation. This module adopts a sceptical view of the twin concepts of globalisation and global governance. In the case of the former, it challenges the idea of globalisation as an ever-increasing integration of the world's economies through the opening of capital markets and the progressive liberalisation of international trade that renders states powerless and instead sees it as a process that increases the interdependence between states and encourages them to work together in institutions and fora. In the case of the latter, it challenges the idea of global governance as a residual term for all attempts at policy-making beyond the state and instead focuses on the de-centralised, non-hierarchical, and soft-law approaches that have dominated international decision-making since the 1970s but especially in the run up to and aftermath of the global financial crisis. A key concern in this exploration of global governance is where international institutions and fora can secure legitimacy in the absence of democratic accountability and whether the participation of non-governmental actors helps or hinders the pursuit of a pluralist international system. The discussion of international institutions and fora focuses on the origins and evolution of the Group of Eight, the Group of Twenty and governance reform in the World Bank and other Bretton Woods institutions. The exploration of non-governmental actors looks at the involvement in global governance of transnational networks, advocates and activists, expert groups and the private sector. A range of policy issues will be explored in this course, including international economic policy coordination, development aid, finance, climate change and human rights.

Students completing this course will: be familiar with the main concepts and theories applied to the study of globalisation and global governance; be conversant with debates concerning the nature and evolution of the idea of sovereignty; be able to engage in debates surrounding the emergence of new forms of global governance; have grasped the links between contemporary forms of global integration and its historical predecessors; and be able to assess the validity of analytical distinctions, to give oral presentations and to produce well-sourced argument-driven essays.

(8) These aims, objectives and commitments are consistent with the QAA's Subject Benchmark Statement for Politics and International Relations, which emphasises the importance of (a) knowledge of understanding of the subject; (b) generic intellectual skills; and (c) personal transferable skills.<sup>3</sup> On the first of these points, the Department's focus on the 'the analysis of political ideas, institutions, processes, practices, developments and events' is consistent with the QAA's emphasis on 'the analysis of political ideas, institutions and practices' the evaluation of 'different interpretations of political issues and events'.<sup>4</sup> On the second, the Department challenges students 'to apply critically the main theories, models and concepts used in the study of politics' and to extend and develop 'analytical,

<sup>3</sup> Quality Assurance Agency (2007) 'Politics and international relations' (Mansfiled QAA).

<sup>4</sup> Quality Assurance Agency (2007:6)

evaluative and critical capacities’, which meets the QAA’s focus on the development of generic skills to ‘construct reasoned argument, synthesise relevant information and exercise critical judgement’.<sup>5</sup> On the third point, the Department’s use of written and oral presentations chimes with the QAA’s emphasis on teaching students to ‘communicate effectively and fluently in speech and writing’.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 2: Departmental Aims and QAA Subject Benchmark**

All Students Graduating from the Department of Politics will:	Under the QAA Subject Benchmark, graduates in politics should be able to:					
	<i>(Knowledge and Understanding of the Subject)</i>					
<p>(a) be able to demonstrate the ability to apply critically the main theories, models and concepts used in the study of politics to the analysis of political ideas, institutions, processes, practices, developments and events; (b) have developed an understanding and substantive knowledge of political processes and/or social and political theory; (c) have extended and developed their analytical, evaluative and critical capacities;</p>	understand the nature and significance of politics as a human activity	apply concepts, theories and methods used in the study of politics to the analysis of political ideas, institutions and practices	demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different political systems, the nature and distribution of power in them; the social, economic, historical and cultural contexts within which they operate, and the relationships between them; evaluate different interpretations of political issues and events.			

<sup>5</sup> Quality Assurance Agency (2007:7)

<sup>6</sup> Quality Assurance Agency (2007:7)

**Table 2 (Continued)**

<p>All Students Graduating from the Department of Politics will:</p>	<p>Under the QAA Subject Benchmark, graduates in politics should be able to:</p>					
<p>(d) have developed transferable skills, including the ability to take responsibility for their own learning, learning how to learn, making oral and written presentations, planning and producing written assignments, working independently, and using information technology; and (e) have developed, where they complete a dissertation, the ability to undertake independent research.</p>	<p><i>(Generic intellectual skills)</i></p>					
	<p>gather, organise and deploy evidence, data and information from a variety of secondary and some primary sources</p>	<p>identify, investigate, analyse, formulate and advocate solutions to problems</p>	<p>construct reasoned argument, synthesise relevant information and exercise critical judgement</p>	<p>reflect on their own learning and seek and make use of constructive feedback</p>	<p>manage their own learning self-critically</p>	<p>recognise the importance of explicit referencing and the ethical requirements of study which requires critical and reflective use of information and communications technology in the learning process.</p>
	<p><i>(Transferrable skills)</i></p>					
<p>communicate effectively and fluently in speech and writing</p>	<p>use communication and information technology, including audiovisual technology, for the retrieval and presentation of information, including, where appropriate, statistical or numerical information</p>	<p>work independently, demonstrating initiative, self-organisation and time management, progressing through the degree programme to become a mature, independent learner</p>	<p>collaborate with others to achieve common goals through, for example, group work, group projects, group presentations, etc.</p>			
<p>Source: Quality Assurance Agency (2007: 6-7)</p>						

## 2.3 New Developments

### (i) New Programmes

#### *Certificates*

(9) Birkbeck's Faculty of Life Long Learning (FLL) was closed in 2009 with the result that a number of existing certificate programmes fell to the Department of Politics. Several poorly recruiting pathways for the FLL's Cert HE International and European Studies were withdrawn in 2011/12 (see Table 1 above). Two certificate programmes were retained in a reworked and simplified form: International Studies (Cert of HE) and Politics and Government (Cert of HE). The Graduate Certificate in International Migration and Integration was introduced in 2011 as part of a move towards Graduate Certificates in the School of Social Sciences and History. The programme did not recruit well and was subsequently withdrawn when the College decided to move towards modular enrolment, which serves the same purpose of allowing students to test the water before embarking on postgraduate study.

#### *Undergraduate*

(10) In 2011/12, the Department introduced a new BA Politics and Government in place of the longstanding BA Politics and Society. The latter programme experienced a decline in applications following the launch of our very successful BA Global Politics and International Relations in 2009/10 so the Department's view was that a change was warranted. The new BA Politics and Government also reflected the Department's strength in comparative politics and British politics. Other important changes here include the launch in 2012/13 of our three undergraduate programmes – the BA Politics and Government, the BA Global Politics and International Relations and the BA Politics, Philosophy and History – as three-year, full-time degrees.

#### *Postgraduate (Taught)*

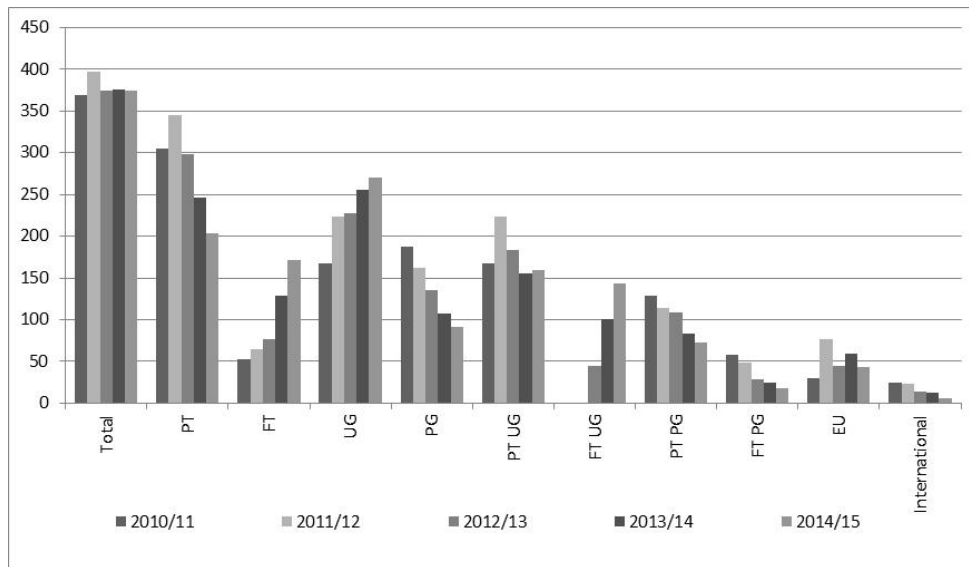
(11) Since the last Internal Review in 2010, the Department of Politics has launched a number of new MSc programmes. In 2010/11, the MSc European Politics and Policy replaced the MSc Politics of Europe and the European Union, and the MSc European Public Policy and the MSc European Policy and Management. The rationale for this change was to consolidate the teaching of European politics at Birkbeck. In 2013/14, the MSc Global Governance and Emerging Powers replaced the MSc Global Governance and Public Policy. This change incorporated the research interests of a new faculty member (Dr Ali Güven) with expertise in the World Bank and the politics of emerging powers such as Brazil, Russia, India and China. In 2014/15, the Department launched a new MSc Population, Migration and Ecology. This innovative programme draws on research projects run by Prof. Diana Coole on environmental politics and Prof. Eric Kaufmann on the politics of migration and demography. In 2011/12, the Department joined forces with other colleagues from the School of Social Sciences, Philosophy and History to launch a new MSc/ PgDip/ PgCert in Social Research. This programme showcases the School's wide range of expertise in ontology, epistemology, and quantitative and qualitative methods.

(12) During the same period, the Department withdrew a number of MRes programmes. Previously, all taught postgraduate programmes were offered in both MSc and MRes format. Student numbers on the latter were very low in a number of cases so the Department decided in 2011/12 to withdraw several MRes configurations (see Table 1 above). This leaves in place the MRes Global Politics, the MRes Public Policy and Management and the MRes Social and Political Theory alongside the more general MRes Politics, which was launched in 2008/09.

## **ii) New developments with respect to student recruitment.**

(13) In keeping with developments at the College level, student recruitment to the Department of Politics since 2010 has taken place amid difficult economic conditions and significant changes to the governance of UK higher education. The new fee system introduced by the government in 2012 was the most significant shock to face undergraduate recruitment. At the postgraduate level, a slight increase in fees for Politics programmes was a factor, as was a decline in employer contributions to the costs of study. Against this backdrop, recruitment to the Department held up well between 2010/11 and 2014/15 (see Figure 1 below). The principal success story is at undergraduate level, which has seen strong and rising applications to study for the new full-time BA degrees. Applications to part-time undergraduate programmes have fallen – as more and more of our students opt for full-time studies – and applications for both part-time and full-time postgraduate degrees is down. A lack of government funding (thus far) for taught postgraduate programmes would appear to be a key driver behind this development. Applications from other EU member states fluctuated between 2011/12 and 2014/15 but the number of applications from international students fell steadily, which could be because the government's restrictive visa policy is taking its toll.

**Figure 1: Applications to the Department of Politics (2010-2015)**



(14) The trends reviewed above underline the importance of having a well-thought out approach to recruitment. The Department relies on reputation, word of mouth, a departmental Recruitment/ Admissions/ Publicity Officer (currently Dr Edwin Bacon) and the efforts of Birkbeck’s External Relations office. We promote new programmes widely along with our continuing provision; the new MSc in Population, Migration and Ecology, for example, was advertised through banner ads on The Guardian website. Such efforts reinforce the College’s extensive publicity efforts, which include the ‘Change your life - Get a place at Birkbeck’ billboard campaign. Birkbeck Open Evenings are a mainstay of our recruitment strategy and the Department is usually represented at such events by two faculty members, colleagues from the departmental office and, more recently, former students. Other innovations here since 2010 include the Department’s participation in Birkbeck’s Pop-Up University. In July 2012, Dr Alex Colas ran a session on Careers, Jobs and Money in Camberwell and helped to organise a similar event in Willesden Green in May 2014. These events were well attended and helped to bring the Department’s teaching and research to new audiences. Dr Ali Güven has produced a new brochure aimed at international students. The Department also ran taster events in 2013 and 2014 at which faculty members talked about their research.

(15) We maintain close contacts with former students but faculty and students alike are keen to foster new networking opportunities. Dr Dionyssi Dimitrakopoulos is departmental lead for Birkbeck’s Catalyst Programme, an initiative funded by the Higher Education Funding Council to invest in, inter alia, student recruitment and progression and developing the link between work and study. As a first step in this programme, the Department has chosen three alumni to mentor current students in 2014/15 and appointed Fiona Harrow, Senior Civil Servant in the Home Office, as our first Expert in Residence. Other initiatives to foster links between current and former students include the Birkbeck Alumni Public Policy Network. This Linked-In Group, which was launched by Dr Dermot Hodson in 2014, provides a platform to discuss public policy issues and post events and job opportunities. It currently has 120 members from the UK and abroad.

(16) Over the last five years, the Department made significant improvements with regard to retention. Withdrawal rates for almost all years of study on both undergraduate and postgraduate politics programmes fell between 2010/11 and 2013/14 and are generally below the College average (see Table 3). This change was particularly striking for part-time politics undergraduates, which saw the withdrawal rate fall from 22% in 2010/11 to 5% in 2013/14 for first years and from 17% to 0% for second years. The withdrawal rate for year-one full-time students increased from 3% to 5% between 2012/13 and 2013/14 but this figure is still low compared to historical trends for part-time students. The picture at postgraduate level is fairly similar. Withdrawal rates for first year part-time students remained constant at 6% between 2010/11 and 2013/14. Withdrawal rates for second year part-time students fell from 3% to 0% over this period.

**Table 3: Withdrawal Rates (% of total enrolment withdrawn by cohort and year of programme)**

		Department of Politics				College			
		2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
<b>UG</b> (First Degree)	Y1 PT	22	10	3	5	22	15	13	9
	Y2 PT	17	1	0	0	16	4	3	1
	Y3 PT	2	1	0		5	1	2	1
	Y4 PT	0	0			1	1	0	5
	Y1 FT			3	5	8	8	9	5
	Y2 FT			3	0	9	3	1	3
	Y3 FT			0		1	1	0	0
<b>PG</b>	Y1 PT	6	4	6	6	8	7	7	6
	Y2 PT	5	1	0	0	6	2	1	11
	Y1 FT	3	2	0	0	5	3	2	3

(17) The Department's efforts are directed not only towards recruiting new students but also keeping existing ones. Since ensuring and enhancing the quality of teaching is essential for student retention, much of the material reviewed in this report is relevant here. One innovation that warrants mention is a new system of tutorial support for undergraduate students. At the postgraduate level, Programme Directors provide such support and the system works well because of regular opportunities to meet with students on core modules and through dissertation supervision. Programme structures are more fragmented at the undergraduate level so in the past, all BA students were assigned a personal tutor on an ad hoc basis. This system worked reasonably well but it was decided that a more structured approach was required to provide support to our new, younger cohort of undergraduates. Under this new system, which was launched in 2013, there is one personal tutor responsible for all students on the BA Politics, Philosophy and History and one for the BA Politics and Government. Since the BA Global Politics and International Relations is considerably larger in size, there is a separate personal tutor for each year of study.

#### **iv) New developments with respect to research initiatives**

(18) As noted above, changes in the Department's teaching provision mirror new research agendas from existing faculty members and the arrival of new ones. Another significant development was the launch in 2010 of the Centre for the Study of British Politics and Political Life. Led by Prof. Joni Lovenduski, Dr Rosie Campbell and Dr Jason Edwards, the Centre serves as a focal point for teaching and research at Birkbeck on a wide range of issues related to British politics. To date it has organised more than 40 events that have been well attended by our undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as members of the public. Highlights here include events on the Northern Ireland Peace Process (October 2011), the Big Society (November 2011), Press Regulation (October 2012) and Freedom of Information (May 2013). A distinctive feature of the Centre's work is the opportunity it provides for Birkbeck students to engage with politicians and policy-makers. Prof. Tony Wright (see para. 27 below) has played a key role here through regular Q&A sessions with Members of Parliament and Peers, including Sarah Wollaston MP, Lord Hennessy and Margaret Hodge MP. The Centre also provides a platform for Birkbeck graduates to share their experiences with current students. In March 2014, Dr Dionyssi Dimitrakopoulos organised a hustings event at which Richard Robinson, a graduate of the MSc in European Politics and Policy and a candidate in the European Parliament elections appeared alongside representatives of other parties. The Department also continues to play an active role in the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities (BiH) and the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research (BISR), which provide funding for research fellows and supports the organisation of workshops and conferences.

### **3. Curricula**

#### *Certificate of Higher Education*

(19) Students on the Certificate of Higher Education in International Studies take four modules worth 120 credit points over a duration of two to four years. During this time they take two core modules (Introduction to Global Politics and the Study of Politics) and choose two from a range of options (Comparative Government, International Organisations, Modern Political Analysis, Politics of Identity, Culture and Conflict, The Evolution of the International System and The Practice of Politics). Students on the Certificate of Higher Education in Politics and Government take four compulsory modules (Comparative Government, Modern Political Analysis, The Practice of Politics and The Study of Politics) worth 120 credit points over a duration of two to four years. Cert HE's are a comparatively new phenomenon for the Department of Politics so it is premature to make a definitive judgement on how they are working. That said, they appear to provide a useful route into undergraduate study for some students and a point of egress for those who might be unwilling or less able to pursue a full undergraduate degree.



**Table 4: BA Politics and Government**

	Part-Time (Four Years)			Full-Time (Three Years)		
	Module	Level	CAS credits	Module	Level	CAS credits
<b>Year 1</b>	The Study of Politics	4	30	The Study of Politics	4	30
	Comparative Government	4	30	Comparative Government	4	30
	Contemporary British Politics	5	30	Contemporary British Politics	5	30
				Level 5 option		30
<b>Year 2</b>	The Practice of Politics	4	30	The Practice of Politics	4	30
	Modern Political Analysis	4	30	Modern Political Analysis	4	30
	Democracy and Authoritarianism	5	30	Democracy and Authoritarianism	5	30
				Level 5 or Level 6 option	5/6	30
<b>Year 3</b>	Social and Political Theory	6	30	Social and Political Theory	6	30
	Level 5 or Level 6 option	5/6	30	Level 6 option	6	30
	Level 5 or Level 6 option	5/6	30	Level 6 option	6	30
				Level 6 option or Dissertation	6	30
<b>Year 4</b>	Level 6 option	6	30			
	Level 6 option	6	30			
	Level 6 option or Dissertation	6	30			
	Total CAS credits		360	Total CAS credits		360

**Table 5: BA Global Politics and International Relations**

	Part-Time (Four Years)			Full-Time (Three Years)		
	Module	Level	CAS credits	Module	Level	CAS credits
<b>Year 1</b>	The Study of Politics	4	30	The Study of Politics	4	30
	Introduction to Global Politics	4	30	Introduction to Global Politics	4	30
	Political Transformations	5	30	Political Transformations	5	30
				Level 5 option		30
<b>Year 2</b>	Introduction to Political Economy	5	30	Introduction to Political Economy	5	30
	Level 4 option	4	30	Level 4 option	4	30
	Level 4 option	5	30	Level 4 option	5	30
				Level 5 or Level 6 option	5/6	30
<b>Year 3</b>	War and Modern Society	6	30	War and Modern Society	6	30
	Level 5 or Level 6 option	5/6	30	Level 6 option	6	30
	Level 5 or Level 6 option	5/6	30	Level 6 option	6	30
				Level 6 option or Dissertation	6	30
<b>Year 4</b>	Level 6 option	6	30			
	Level 6 option	6	30			
	Level 6 option or Dissertation	6	30			
	Total CAS credits		360	Total CAS credits		360

## Undergraduate Degrees

(20) The Department's BA degrees are gained by four years-part-time or three year's full-time study (see tables 4-6 for an overview of the curricula). All students must complete twelve modules, comprised of seven compulsory modules and either five option modules or four option modules and a dissertation. All modules and the dissertation count for 30 credits under the Common Award Scheme and the total number of credits required for each degree is 360. Students take modules at level 4 and 5 in their first year at Birkbeck and all final year students take level 6 modules. The rationale for this approach is that students are gradually introduced to more intellectually challenging modules, while spreading the generic skills training emphasised by level 4 modules over years 1 and 2.

**Table 6: BA Politics, Philosophy and Politics**

	Part-Time (Four Years)			Full-Time (Three Years)		
	Module	Level	CAS credits	Module	Level	CAS credits
<b>Year 1</b>	EITHER Rise of the Modern State OR Conceptions of the Human	5	30	EITHER Rise of the Modern State OR Conceptions of the Human	5	30
	Introduction to the Study of Politics	4	30	Introduction to the Study of Politics	4	30
	Introduction to the History of Philosophy	5	30	Introduction to the History of Philosophy	5	30
				Level 5 option	5	30
<b>Year 2</b>	EITHER Rise of the Modern State OR Conceptions of the Human	5	30	EITHER Rise of the Modern State OR Conceptions of the Human	5	30
	Historiography	4	30	Historiography	4	30
	Level 5 or Level 6 option	5/6	30	EITHER Problems of Explanation and Interpretation* OR one level 6 option	5/6	30
				Level 5 <i>or</i> Level 6 option	5/6	30
<b>Year 3</b>	EITHER Problems of Explanation and Interpretation* OR one level 6 option	6	30	EITHER Problems of Explanation and Interpretation* OR one level 6 option	6	30
	Level 5 <i>or</i> Level 6 option	5/6	30	One level 5 option	5	30
	Level 5 <i>or</i> Level 6 option	5/6	30	One level 6 option	6	30
				Level 6 option or Dissertation	6	30
<b>Year 4</b>	EITHER Problems of Explanation* OR one level 6 option	6	30			
	Level 6 option	6	30			
	Level 6 option or Dissertation	6	30			
	Total CAS credits		360	Total CAS credits		360

(21) The Department’s focus on generic skills training at undergraduate level is consistent with the QAA benchmark statement for Politics, which expects students graduating with an undergraduate degree in politics or international relations to be able to ‘describe, evaluate and apply different approaches involved in collecting, analysing and presenting political information, including how to identify issues for political enquiry; assess their ethical implications; and gather, organise and deploy evidence, data and information from a variety of sources’.<sup>7</sup> Other elements of the curriculum chime with the QAA benchmark statement. In the case of the BA Politics and Government, for example, students taking Social and Political Theory learn about the ‘the contested nature of knowledge and understanding’ of political issues.<sup>8</sup> The BA Global Politics and International Relations students taking the modules Introduction to Global Politics and International Political Economy, likewise, gain ‘familiarity and engage critically with the nature and significance of politics or international relations’.<sup>9</sup> The BA Politics, Philosophy and History provides students with a broad understanding of modern politics, philosophy and history, and of the relationships between the forms of knowledge they represent. This is consistent, inter alia, with the QAA’s emphasis on exploring the ‘social, economic, historical and cultural contexts of political behaviour; and the factors accounting for political change’.<sup>10</sup>

### *MSc Degrees*

(22) MSc/MRes degrees are gained by two years-part-time study or one year’s full-time study. Students are required to take four 30 credit modules and one 60 credit dissertation. All MSc degrees have two core modules and two options although some have alternative cores, which allow students to choose two core modules out of three. The current structure for each MSc (summarised in the table below) works well. Core modules provide students with an in-depth understanding of subjects relating to their degree and a good grounding in a range of theories and methods that are relevant for their dissertations. They also foster a sense of programme identity, which has benefits for retention. Option modules allow students to pursue their intellectual interests in other areas.

**Table 7: Overview of MSc Programmes**

<b>MSc Programme Title</b>	<b>Core module 1 (Full-time students and first year-part time students)</b>	<b>Core module 2 (Full-time students and second year-part time students)</b>
European Politics and Policy	The European Union – Integration, Politics and Policy	Either: Comparative Government and Policy in Europe Or: Politics of Global Europe
Global Governance and Emerging Powers	Global Governance	Emerging Powers in World Politics
Global Politics	International Political Economy	Global Governance
Government, Politics and Policy	Modern British Politics	Public Policy – Ideas,

<sup>7</sup> Quality Assurance Agency (2007: 7)

<sup>8</sup> Quality Assurance Agency (2007: 6)

<sup>9</sup> Quality Assurance Agency (2007: 7)

<sup>10</sup> Quality Assurance Agency (2007: 6)

<b>MSc Programme Title</b>	<b>Core module 1 (Full-time students and first year-part time students)</b>	<b>Core module 2 (Full-time students and second year-part time students)</b>
		Institutions, Interests
International Security and Global Governance	Global Conflict, Security and Humanitarianism	War, Politics and Society
Middle East in Global Politics.	Middle East Politics	Either: Nationalism and Ethno-Religious Conflict or: Global Governance
Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict	Nationalism and Ethno-Religious Conflict	The Politics of Population Change: Immigration, Aging and Conflict
Politics of Population, Migration and Ecology	Population and Environmental Politics	The Politics of Population Change: Immigration, Aging and Conflict
Public Policy and Management	Public Policy: Interests, Ideas and Institutions	Public Management: Theories and Innovations
Social and Political Theory	Political Theory and Contemporary Politics	Political Sociology
Social Research	Quantitative Social Research and Qualitative Social Research	Theorising Social Research and Research Methods Masterclass

(23) Optional modules for MSc Politics students can normally be chosen from any of the postgraduate modules offered by the Department of Politics. The following is an indicative list of options:

- Comparative Government and Policy in Europe
- Emerging Powers in World Politics
- Global Conflict, Security and Humanitarianism
- Global Governance
- Intermediate Quantitative Social Research
- International Political Economy
- Islamist Movements
- Middle East Politics
- Modern British Politics
- Nationalism and Ethno-Religious Conflict
- Political Sociology
- Political Theory
- Population and Environmental Politics
- Public Management: Theories and Innovations
- Public Policy: Interests, Ideas and Institutions
- Qualitative Social Research
- Quantitative Social Research
- The European Union: Integration, Politics and Policy
- The Government and Politics of the United States
- The Politics Of Population Change: Immigration, Aging And Conflict
- War, Politics and Society

## MRes Degrees

(24) The structure of MRes programmes is similar to the MSc degrees (see Table 8). Students are required to take four 30 credit modules and one 60 credit dissertation. Students on the subject-specific MRes programmes take four compulsory modules while those on the MRes Politics can choose two options. The current structure for each MRes degree (summarised in the table below) helps to meet the relevant learning objectives. Students receive in-depth training in a range of qualitative and quantitative methods before choosing option modules according to their research interests and/or specialising in further methods training.

**Table 8: Overview of MRes Programmes**

MRes Programme Title	Full-time students and first year-part time students	Full-time students and second year-part time students
Global Politics	International Political Economy  Qualitative Social Research	Global Governance  Introductory or Intermediate Quantitative Social Research
Public Policy and Management	Public Policy: Ideas, Institutions, Interests  Qualitative Social Research	Public Management: Theories and Innovations  Introductory or Intermediate Quantitative Social Research
Social and Political Theory	Political Theory  Qualitative Social Research	Political Sociology  Introductory or Intermediate Quantitative Social Research
MRes Politics	Qualitative Social Research  Option from list below	Introductory or Intermediate Quantitative Social Research  Option from list below

(25) In 2009-10, the Department introduced two level 4 modules as part of the changeover to CAS on our undergraduate degrees - Introduction to Political and Social Analysis I: Argument and Introduction to Political and Social Analysis II: Evidence – designed to introduce students to different ways of thinking about politics. These modules worked well but they were delivered in short bursts during the academic year and were perhaps over ambitious as a result. In 2011/12, these modules were combined into a new level 4 module: The Study of Politics, which introduces students to key concepts and theories of politics and explores different approaches to the use of argument and evidence. The result is a much more coherent module that provides first and second year students on our BA programmes with a very solid grounding in how to approach politics as a subject of inquiry.

(26) In 2011/12, the Department introduced an innovative new Level 4 module: The Practice of Politics. Run by Dr Edwin Bacon, The Practice of Politics, seeks to understand how and

why actors participate in politics and policy-making and to encourage students to think about their own motivation for studying and, perhaps, doing politics. On this module, students learn about political writing and speech-making and meet a range of people who work in or have worked in political positions. This module has proved very popular with students, who have benefitted from its inventive teaching and assessment modes (see Section 9ii below).

(27) In 2013/14, the Department launched a new undergraduate module: Parliamentary Studies. This module is one of only 13 in the UK to be formally approved by the Houses of Parliament with the support of The Speaker of the House of Commons, the Lord Speaker and the management boards of both Houses. It is co-taught by Dr Ben Worthy, Prof Tony Wright and other colleagues from Birkbeck, with officials from the House of Commons and House of Lords as guest speakers, and a visit to Parliament included in the curriculum. Birkbeck's expertise in British politics is already well established thanks to the work of Prof Joni Lovenduski and Dr Rosie Campbell among others and this new module has been made possible by the appointment of Dr Ben Worthy and Prof. Tony Wright. Dr Worthy is an expert on Freedom of Information and he has incorporated this expertise into both Parliamentary Studies and a new module on Digital Politics. Prof. Wright is a leading scholar in the study of the British political system and was a Member of Parliament from 1997 to 2010.

(28) A range of other modules has been introduced at undergraduate and postgraduate level since 2010 (see list below). The general rationale for this innovation is to keep pace with faculty research interests (e.g. Dr Ben Worthy and Dr Antoine Bousquet in the case of Digital Politics or Dr Ali Güven in the case of Emerging Powers in World Politics) or to provide new options at undergraduate level in view of the increase in student numbers (e.g. Contemporary American Politics and The United States in International Politics). Other modules are associated with new programmes (e.g. The Politics of Population Change: Immigration, Ageing and Conflict and Population and Environmental Politics).

### *Undergraduate*

British and Comparative Foreign Policy  
Conceptions of the Human from the Enlightenment to Today  
Contemporary American Politics  
Digital Politics  
Empires: An Historical Sociology of International Relations  
International Migration and Transnationalism  
Introduction to Global Politics Undergraduate International Studies  
Introduction to International Political Economy  
Modern Political Analysis  
Politics, Power and Human Nature  
The United States in International Politics  
War and Modern Society

## *Postgraduate*

Comparative Government and Policy in Europe  
Emerging Powers in World Politics  
Global Conflict, Security and Humanitarianism  
Global Governance  
Masterclass in Social Research  
Political Theory and Contemporary Politics  
Population and Environmental Politics  
Religion and Politics  
The Politics of Population Change: Immigration, Ageing and Conflict  
Theorising Social Research

## **4. Quality of Learning Opportunities**

### **4.1 Learning and Teaching**

(29) The Department's teaching and learning strategy aims to provide high quality teaching tailored to our unique student body, which is diverse in terms of educational backgrounds and professional experience but united by its passion for politics. At the core of this strategy is an emphasis on face-to-face learning in the evening through lectures, seminars and other modes of teaching that introduce students to theoretical, normative and empirical debates in the field and which serve as a guide to further reading and reflection. Part-time students on our undergraduate modules typically attend class three evenings per week for 20 weeks with full-time students come in for four evenings. Part-time MSc/MRes students attend two evenings per week for 15 weeks compared to four evenings per week for full-timers.

(30) A typical evening for a Birkbeck politics student starts at 6pm with a 50 minute lecture followed by a 50 minute seminar. This pattern changes for larger modules, which run seminar groups at 8pm and in some cases 5pm, while other modules are taught more intensively (see para. 82). The Department emphasises preparation for and review after class, however modules are organised, and our guidance to students in interviews is that they should expect to spend between 6-8 hours studying for each hour in the classroom. This workload is considerable and all the more taxing for the significant share of students who work during the day. The inclusion of reading weeks, in which lectures and seminars do not run, in the sixth week of Autumn and Spring terms helps students to manage this workload, as does the timing of summer exams, which take place at least six weeks before modules conclude. Being a Politics student at Birkbeck is nonetheless demanding and so a key challenge for the Department is to ensure that our teaching is engaging and well-organised.

(31) The Department is committed to research-led teaching. While this term carries different connotations in different higher-educational contexts, we understand it as meaning that teaching should reflect colleagues' established research expertise and evolving research interests. This is essential to ensure that teaching is engaging for students and staff alike and it explains the Department's tradition of putting forward new modules

and revising existing ones regularly. Our teaching and research critically engage with national, European and international affairs, which reflects the Department's roots in the study of politics and sociology and students' experience working in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Evidence of this research-teaching nexus can be seen in the table below, which maps colleagues' research interests onto the modules that they teach.

**Table 9: Research-Led Teaching**

<b>Research interests</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Modules</b>
<b>American Politics</b>	Robert Singh	American Foreign Policy; Contemporary American Politics; Government and Politics of the United States; the United States in International Politics
<b>British Politics</b>	Rosie Campbell	Modern British Politics
	Dermot Hodson	Contemporary British Politics
	Joni Lovenduski	Modern British Politics
	Kevin Manton	Modern Political Analysis
	David Styan	British Foreign Policy in Comparative Context
	Ben Worthy	Contemporary British Politics
	Tony Wright	Modern British Politics
<b>Comparative politics</b>	Edwin Bacon	Comparative Government; Russian Politics and Society; Democracy and Authoritarianism
	Matthijs van den Bos	Islamist movements: organisational structures, ideologies and political conflict; Middle East Politics
	Dionyssis Dimitrakopoulos	Comparative Government and Politics in Europe; Democracy and Authoritarianism
	Ali Güven	Emerging Powers in World Politics
	Eric Kaufmann	Politics of Population, Immigration and Ageing; Nationalism Ethnicity Religious Conflict
	Dale Mineshima-Lowe	Comparative Government
	Barbara Zollner	Nationalism, Ethnicity and Religious Conflict
	Matthijs van den Bos	Middle East Politics
<b>European Politics</b>	Edwin Bacon	Democracy and Authoritarianism
	Dionyssis Dimitrakopoulos	European Union: Integration, Politics and Policy; Politics of European Integration; Contemporary European Politics.
	Dermot Hodson	Politics of European Integration; Politics of Global Europe
	David Styan	Foreign Policy Analysis; British and Comparative Foreign Policy



**Table 9 (Continued)**

<b>Research interests</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Modules</b>
<b>International Relations</b>	Matthijs van den Bos	International Migration and Transnationalism
	Antoine Bousquet	War Politics and Society
	Alex Colas	Empires: An Historical Sociology of International Relations; Global Conflict, Security and Humanitarianism; Space and Power
	Ali Burak Güven	Global Governance; International Political Economy; Introduction to Political Economy
	Dermot Hodson	Global Governance; Politics of Global Europe
	Robert Singh	American Foreign Policy; the United States in International Politics
	David Styan	International Political Economy
	Barbara Zollner	Islamist movements: organisational structures, ideologies and political conflict
	Patrick Coupar	Introduction to International Political Economy
	Noman Hanif	Introduction to Global Politics
	Arthur Kilgore	International Organisations
<b>Political theory</b>	Antoine Bousquet	Digital Politics
	Diana Coole	Political Sociology; Politics of Population, Immigration and Ageing; Population and Environmental Politics; Social and Political Theory; Challenges in Contemporary Politics.
	Jason Edwards	Political Transformations; Politics; Power and Human Nature; Social and Political Theory
	Sam Ashenden	Political Sociology. Political Theory; Challenges in Contemporary Politics Conceptions of the Human
<b>Public policy</b>	Dermot Hodson	Public Policy: Interests, Ideas and Institutions
	Deborah Mabbett	Public Policy: Equality and Redistribution; Public Management Theories and Innovations
	Ben Worthy	Digital Politics; Public Policy: Interests, Ideas and Institutions
	Patrick Coupar	Public Management: Theories and Innovations

(32) The provision of up-to-date and useful learning materials is essential for well-organised teaching. All politics modules have a module handbook, which provides key information on, inter alia, module aims and objectives, readings and assessment. These module books, which are updated annually and distributed in the first class of the year, also include detailed information on learning support, disability support and problems affecting study. Module handbooks are complemented by programme handbooks, which provide an introduction to the department, an overview of programme structure and information

about dissertations. Both the module books and dissertation guidance booklets provide advice on the College's rules regarding plagiarism. All of this material is available on either Moodle or the Department website.

(33) Module and programme handbooks are complemented by extensive use of the Department's virtual learning environment: Moodle. Each undergraduate and postgraduate module has its own Moodle platform, which provides links to module readings and relevant databases and information resources. The pedagogic benefits of providing extensive electronic readings to students is a matter of debate. Arguments for point towards the efficiency savings for busy students of accessing some or all of the readings for their module. Arguments against warn that students may become over reliant on lecturers to access the readings rather than learning to use the electronic and print library. The Department strikes a balance here by using Moodle to provide key readings while at the same time ensuring that students are comfortable using the library. Birkbeck's Subject Librarians for Politics give a presentation at the Politics Induction Evening each year (see para. 41) and provide information on the Library website. A number of colleagues also provide subject-specific information on library resources. Dr Dionyssi Dimitrakopoulos, for example, runs a session on researching the European Union (EU) during workshop week for students on the MSc European Politics and Policy. The includes a session on researching the life cycle of an EU directive alongside contributions from the Subject Librarians on accessing research material and online resources about the EU.

(34) While lectures and seminars form the backbone of teaching in the Department of Politics, colleagues are encouraged to experiment within and beyond this format. All colleagues update the reading lists for their modules on an annual basis to ensure that they reflect cutting-edge issues in their area of scholarship. Prof. Robert Singh, for example, has a session on the Obama Administration in the postgraduate module, *The Government and Politics of the United States*, which provides a real-time case study of the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States along with specific sessions on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (2010). Dr Matthijs van den Bos dedicates separate classes in the module Middle East Politics to the rise of Islamic State and the Shiite renaissance. Dr Barbara Zollner explores the evolving organisational structures, political strategies and ideological frames of various Islamist movements in the same module. In *Capitalism and the Politics of Markets*, Dr Samantha Ashenden brings together classic readings on political economy from Marx, Polanyi and others with contemporary case studies on life insurance, sub-prime lending, IVF and surrogacy. Dr Jason Edwards and Prof. Eric Kaufmann combine classic readings on political ideologies in their module Political Transformation with contemporary debates on issues such as liberal attitude changes in the post-industrial west and the rise of the far right in Europe. Dr Antoine Bousquet includes a lecture on drones and the new geography of war in his module War Politics and Society.

(35) There are numerous examples of innovation in teaching that go beyond the traditional lecture and seminar format. In 2013/14, for example, Dr Alex Colas, Dr Jane Levy and Prof. Sami Zubada included a small 'snack' in between lectures and seminars to illustrate the theme of that week's lecture; this initiative was predictably popular with students. Dr Antoine Bousquet and Dr Ben Worthy include a group discussion of the film, *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, in their module Digital Politics. In 2013/14, Dr Dermot

Hodson took his Contemporary British Politics students to the National Theatre to see *This House*, a play about Parliament in the 1970s. This was an interesting and challenging pedagogic exercise and it offered an alternative perspective on the issues explored in class. In 2014, the Department launched SPACE, a new ad hoc seminar series for Birkbeck students on politics, the arts, culture and entertainment. The inaugural SPACE event was a two-evening workshop on the history of political photography since 1840, which was well-attended and well-received.

(36) The Department's teaching and learning committee, which meets annually, provides an opportunity for staff members to reflect upon their approach to teaching (see para. 106). New and established colleagues are encouraged to talk about their approach to teaching at such events and they are also offered peer support and mentoring. All new colleagues have their teaching peer reviewed (see para. 105) and they are also expected to join the Higher Education Academy as fellows as part of the terms of their probation. Most new colleagues choose to do so by taking Birkbeck's Certificate of Higher Education for Further Education. Colleagues are encouraged to apply for the Birkbeck Excellence in Teaching Award. Dr Edwin Bacon won this prize in 2012 for his module *The Practice of Politics* (see Section 9(ii) below).

(37) The rationale behind the Department's learning and teaching strategy is robust. It builds on extensive experience of teaching politics to mature students alongside an on-going dialogue about how the learning needs of these students may be changing. Colleagues are encouraged to reflect on an annual basis on what works well in the classroom and to consider where there is scope for improvement. The results of this reflection can be seen in the regular revisions to module syllabi to keep up to date with political developments and research. It can also be seen in the experimentation within and beyond the traditional lecture and seminar-based format noted above.

(38) The overall effectiveness of this teaching and learning strategy is reflected in student satisfaction with departmental teaching. In the 2013/14 National Student Survey 89% of Birkbeck politics undergraduates were satisfied with the quality of teaching and 83% were satisfied overall. The College as a whole scored 90% and 89% respectively in these categories. The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey for 2013/14 shows high level of satisfaction among Birkbeck politics students, with 83% of respondents satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning. The corresponding figure for the College was 78%.

(39) There have been no significant changes to the Department's overall teaching and learning strategy since the last Internal Review in March 2011. The strategy is nonetheless kept under regular review in Departmental meetings and at annual teaching and learning discussions at the Departmental Away Day.

## **4.2 Student Admission and Progression**

(40) Admissions is one of the most important administrative responsibilities within the Department. The Recruitment/ Admissions/ Publicity Officer leads on this issue and is assisted by staff in the Politics Office, who arrange interviews with candidates and liaise with registry about application decisions. Decisions concerning admissions are taken by Programme Directors and, except for students with a very strong academic background, are

based on face-to-face or telephone interviews. The interview offers an opportunity for applicants to raise queries about the programme, the Department and the College, and for members of the academic staff to explain the demands of undergraduate study. It also helps to gauge the commitment and potential of students who may not have prior experience of higher education or who performed poorly in previous studies. This flexible approach to admissions is in line with the mission of the College to provide opportunities to adults from varied educational backgrounds.

(41) The Department holds an induction evening for all new students on the Friday before teaching begins. At this event, the Head of Department welcomes students and information is provided on student services and using the library. This is followed by a reception, where students have an opportunity to meet each other and ask questions to staff. As in all universities, the admission of a large cohort of students creates some administrative challenges in September and October of each year. Such challenges are usually resolved within the first three weeks of term by the Departmental Office with intervention, as need arises, from Programme Directors.

(42) Birkbeck provides extensive support for students with learning difficulties and other disabilities. Detail about this support is provided in module and programme handbooks and on the Departmental website. The Disability Office advises students about any financial support they may be entitled to and, where required, draws up a Disability Support Plan (previously called the Individual Student Support Agreement). This document, which sets out any special arrangements required, is forwarded to the Department office, which notifies relevant lecturers and seminar leaders who teach the student concerned. Once a Disability Support Plan is in place, the Department Office arranges special exam conditions where required. The cover sheet for coursework also allows students to signal to markers where they have dyslexia or other learning difficulties, while preserving the anonymity of essays and dissertations.

(43) Progression within undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes is comparatively straightforward under the Common Award System (CAS). Students are required to complete a certain number of credits for each year before being eligible to enter the next (see tables above for details about individual programmes). Undergraduate students must achieve a total of 360 CAS credits to complete their degree. Postgraduates must achieve 180 credits overall. These rules governing progression are fair and they give students every opportunity to fulfil their academic potential. The Politics Exam Board (technically a Sub Board that operates under the College Exam Board) considers students' results on a case by case basis and decisions concerning retakes, reassessment and alternative assessment are based on careful deliberation among Department members and, in the case of the latter, the advice of the Department's Mitigating Circumstances Committee. The Mitigating Circumstances Committee meets three times per year to consider evidence submitted by students to explain late submission of coursework. This system replaced the old approach of granting extensions on an ad hoc basis and it has worked reasonably well.

(44) At undergraduate level, students must take all assessment for compulsory modules. A passing grade for a module is recorded when a student achieves an overall module result of

40% or above. If a student achieves an overall module result of between 30-39%, their grade is recorded as a fail. Students may be reassessed for the failed elements of their assessment on the module, up to a total of three failed attempts.

(45) An undergraduate student failing a module by a narrow margin may be awarded a compensated fail. No more than two 30 credit modules designated as compensated fails may contribute towards the 360 credits required to obtain a degree. No more than 30 credits (i.e. one module) contributing in this way towards the final credit total can be at Level 6. A student achieving a module result of less than 29% will be deemed to have failed the module with an unsatisfactory performance. No credit will be awarded for the module and students cannot be reassessed. Students may only retake the entire module, which requires that they attend all scheduled contact sessions and complete all assessment on the module on the next occasion that it runs. The Politics Exam Board determines whether a student failing with an overall module result between 30-39% is to be reassessed for the failed elements of assessment, or is required to retake the entire module. Where the student submits mitigating circumstances, which are approved by the Department's mitigating circumstances committee, the Politics Exam Board can offer a student alternative assessment in the form of a set number of essays rather than a retake of the exam.

(46) When calculating final degree classification, only Level 5 and Level 6 modules contribute. The final classification is a weighted average of Level 5 and Level 6 modules; Level 5 weighted at 1, and Level 6 at 2. Where a student's average result is within 2% of the next (higher) degree classification the Politics Exam Board has discretion to consider the number of modules and credit for which the assessment falls within a particular class. If a candidate has preponderance of module results in a higher class than that determined by the aggregate result, the higher degree classification may be awarded. A student may obtain a Pass classification if they have accumulated 300 credits, with at least 120 credits at Level 6, and no more than 60 credits as a Compensated Fail (of which no more than 30 can be at Level 6). A student may not attempt further modules above a total of 360 credits in order to improve his/her average result. The Politics Exam Board may take into account such additional factors as may have affected candidates' performance and any special difficulties the candidate may have experienced, such as illness. Discretion will be used to the benefit of the candidate and not otherwise.

(47) Intermediate awards can be offered by the Politics Exam Board when a student fails to complete the full requirements for the degree.

**Table 10: Intermediate Award for Undergraduate Students**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Credits needed</b>
<i>Certificate of Higher Education</i>	120
<i>Diploma of Higher Education</i>	240 (including 120 at level 5 or above)

(48) For taught postgraduate degrees, core modules and the dissertation must be taken and passed with a mark of at least 50 to complete the degree. If a student fails a module, he or she will be offered a second and final attempt to pass the module. This second attempt will

take the form of a 're-take', 're-assessment' or 'alternative assessment' at the discretion of the Politics Exam Board. A re-take requires attendance at the module's lectures and seminars as well as another attempt at the assessment, whereas "re-assessment" is where a student attempts only the failed element(s) of a failed module. Alternative assessment allows a student to submit additional coursework in lieu of a second attempt at an exam and can be offered only in those cases where a student has applied for mitigating circumstances and this claim has been accepted by the Politics Exam Board. If a student fails one option module by a narrow margin the Politics Exam Board can under certain circumstances offer a compensated fail, which means that he or she will receive the credit for this module. No more than 30 credits of a degree can be subject to a compensated fail, which means that if a student takes a compensated fail for one optional module, they must pass the other option module.

(49) The final grade for MSc/MRes degrees is based on the average mark for all modules weighted according to credits i.e. the grade for the 60 credit dissertation counts for double the grade for 30 credit core and option modules. Where a student's average result is within 2% of the next (higher) degree classification, the Politics Exam Board will consider the number of modules and credit for which the assessment falls within a particular class. If a candidate has a preponderance of module results in a higher class than that determined by the average result, the higher class of degree may be awarded. Intermediate awards can be offered by the Politics Exam Board when a student fails to complete the full requirements for the degree.

**Table 11: Intermediate Award for Postgraduate Students**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Credits needed</b>
<i>Postgraduate certificate</i>	60
<i>Postgraduate diploma</i>	120

(50) These rules governing progression give students every opportunity to fulfil their academic potential. So, too, do the academic guidance, supervision and support provided by the Department. For undergraduates, Level 4 modules provide a good grounding in the generic skills that are so essential in learning to think and write about politics as a subject of academic study (see para. 25). For postgraduates, the emphasis is on developing such skills rather than learning from scratch. In Workshop Week, which is held in both the autumn and spring terms, lectures and seminars for specific modules are replaced by general study skills sessions and other events. These sessions cover topics such as essay writing, exam preparation and how to go about researching and writing the dissertation. Other events include outside speakers from the world of research and/or politics.

(51) Writing a dissertation is typically a rewarding exercise for students but it can be a daunting one given the demands of choosing a researchable question that can be explored theoretically and/or empirically within a set word limit. For this reason, academic guidance, supervision and support are particularly important when it comes to undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations. Programme Directors – or in the case of undergraduate studies, a dissertation coordinator – are responsible for approving dissertation proposals and

allocating dissertation supervisors. Any ethical issues surrounding dissertation research are dealt with at this stage, with all students required to submit an ethics approval form for research that involves intervention or interaction with human participants, or the collection and / or study of data derived from living human participants (e.g. conducting research interviews). Once dissertation topics have been approved, students hold three or four one-on-one meetings with their supervisors to discuss research in progress. Some postgraduate programmes bring dissertation students together for a PhD-style seminar at which ideas for and challenges associated with such research are discussed in a group.

(52) The introduction of full-time undergraduate degrees in 2011/12 has meant that the Department has recruited from UCAS for the first time. This has required a significant investment of administrative resources by the Department but the initial experience has been positive. The Department has been able to handle the volume of applications thanks to the efforts of BA Programme Directors, the Department Office and colleagues in the College. A question currently under discussion is whether the grade tariff is being set at the right level. This is a learning-by-doing process and the Department has sought advice on this issue from Birkbeck's External Relations office.

(53) There have been no significant changes to progression within programmes but the Department has taken steps to improve progressions between different levels of study. Students who successfully complete the Cert HE with a mark of 50 per cent can be admitted to the BA Politics and Government or BA Global Politics and International Relations, and will be able to transfer credit from the modules they have studied to these degrees. Credits from this award can also be used towards Birkbeck's BSc Social Science. This integration ensures greater intellectual coherence between teaching provision at these levels and helps to encourage students who may not be willing or able to begin an undergraduate degree. In 2014/15, 15% of new students on the BA Global Politics and International Relations had previously studied on our certificate programmes. Our Cert HE programmes therefore serve as an important pool of future BA students.

### **4.3 Learning Resources:**

(54) Administrative staff make a critical contribution to quality assurance and enhancement in the Department. The Department Office at 10 Gower Street, which is open for enquiries between 10:00 and 18:00 every weekday, is a key point of administrative support for students. Team Leader Irene Breckon, Undergraduate Administrator Simon Abbott and Postgraduate Administrators Nina Dartford and Imran Islam field scores of student questions each week and ensure the smooth running of modules, programmes, exams and exam boards. Their support and encouragement for students who encounter difficulties with their studies is of particular importance in this regard. Staff in the Department Office also help to organise the induction evening, the student Christmas party and the summer garden party for current and former students, the latter being a longstanding and popular tradition. The Assistant School Manager Jane Halstead plays an essential role too by arranging teaching contracts for sessional colleagues and providing a link between the administration of the Department of Politics and the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy. The Department Office is represented at Departmental Meetings and the Away

Day and its staff members make an active contribution to discussions on teaching and learning issues.

(55) Birkbeck Politics students benefit from a library that, by and large, meets their needs. A real strength is Birkbeck's electronic library, which stocks a wide range of e-books and electronic journals that are straightforward to find and access. The Department is supported by two Subject Librarians – Aubrey Greenwood and Jackie Madden – who are always willing to share their specialist knowledge of Politics with students and staff alike. The Subject Librarians typically run an information session at the Birkbeck Politics induction evening (see para. 41) and contribute to programme-specific workshops, where possible. They also usually attend the Student-Staff Liaison meetings to report to students on recent developments and to answer questions.

(56) In addition to the College Library, students have access to the nearby SOAS, University College, Senate House and British Library of Political and Economic Science libraries. Arrangements are in place for Birkbeck students to borrow from a wider range of university libraries in the London area. Inter-library loans can be obtained by students who require material that is not available in the College Library or a nearby library.

(57) Moodle is a key resource for improving student learning. As noted above, each module (including dissertations) has its own Moodle portal which includes a range of learning materials, including PowerPoint presentations, course-related materials and selected readings and it will also provide the principal means of electronic communication between lecturers and students. Essays and dissertations are submitted by Moodle and marks and feedback are provided by the same means. The switch from Blackboard to Moodle – something which was discussed in the last Internal Review in 2010/11 – went smoothly thanks to efforts of the Department Office, the Department's IT officer and Birkbeck's IT Services.

(58) Politics students are satisfied overall with the provision of learning resources. In the National Student Survey 2013/14, 81% of respondents were satisfied with learning resources in their degrees. In the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey for 2013/14, 82% of students were satisfied with resources and services provided at Birkbeck. Our learning resources could still be improved and two perennial sources of student concern warrant mention here. The first concerns the quality and location of teaching rooms and the second is related to the scheduling of exams.

(59) The quality of teaching rooms at Birkbeck is frequently raised at Staff-Student Exchange Committee meetings. The Politics Office has made tangible improvements here in recent years by arranging room bookings earlier and responding rapidly to problems in rooms once they arise. Staff are now notified of their room bookings for their modules in early September, which allows a few weeks to iron out any problems. Where difficulties do arise, such as having a room that is too small relative to class size, they are typically sorted out quickly by the Department Office in liaison with Birkbeck Room Bookings.

(60) One reason for students' continued concern here is that Birkbeck is a peripatetic institution. While a significant number of our classes are held in the Main Birkbeck Building



many take place in buildings belonging to University College London and other Bloomsbury Colleges. This can lead to a sense of dislocation among students and staff, particularly when lecture and seminar rooms are located in separate buildings. The use of teaching rooms that are perceived to be too far from Birkbeck, such as the Kingsway Building, the School of Pharmacy and the Anglo American Building also tend to be unpopular. Room layouts at Birkbeck have improved in recent years but there is a tendency in the College to overestimate the number of students that can be comfortably accommodated in some rooms. The Department Office is aware of such concerns and seeks to ensure the best available rooms for its modules. The College has taken a number of steps in recent years to improve room bookings but further steps are required in this area.

(61) The Department's exam period runs from April to June and students are not usually notified of the timetable until March. This leaves sufficient time for study but it can create problems with regard to time off from employers and booking holidays, the latter being of particular concern for students with children. Students have repeatedly asked to be given more notice but it has not been possible to bring forward the publication of the timetable. Devoting more resources to the Examination and Assessment Office in Registry Services would be desirable in order to rectify this situation.

(62) The library revised its online catalogue in 2014 to make it even easier to find electronic resources. Students can now go straight from Google Scholar to the reading in question, providing Birkbeck has an electronic subscription to the periodical in question. The Subject Librarians have also done an excellent job of digitising readings for a range of modules. Budget constraints are a concern and the Department has agreed to end its subscriptions to some periodicals that were not frequently used and to take out a few new subscriptions, as necessitated by new modules and programmes. While the electronic library remains a rich resource as a result, the budget for books has been squeezed in recent years. This phenomenon is not unique to Birkbeck but it has a tangible impact on the learning resources that are directly available to our students.

## **5. Assessment**

(63) The Department's assessment strategy is designed to meet departmental and module-specific learning objectives in ways that take account of students' varied educational backgrounds and outside commitments. Our undergraduates have traditionally joined Birkbeck several years after leaving school, which can produce a degree of trepidation about coursework and exams. Under the current strategy, first and second year part-time students consequently combine level 4 and level 5 modules, with only the latter relying on the Department's two conventional modes of assessment: an essay and unseen exam. Level 4 modules rely instead on alternative modes of assessment that equip students with specific and generic skills (see Table 12 below for an overview of coursework requirements in 2014/15).

**Table 12: Examples of Assessment at Level 4**

<b>Modern Political Analysis</b>			
<b><u>Requirement</u></b>	<b><u>Due Date</u></b>	<b><u>Weight</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>
<b>Book Review</b>	27 October	20%	~ 500 words; students choose a title from books listed in weekly recommended readings (further instructions tba)
<b>Essay</b>	24 November	30%	~ 1,000 words; essay questions included at the end of the reading list and posted on Moodle
<b>In-Class Test</b>	8 December	50%	One hour (Answer 2 out of 9 questions on each weekly topic)
<b>Politics of Identity, Culture and Conflict</b>			
<b><u>Requirement</u></b>	<b><u>Due Date</u></b>	<b><u>Weight</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>
<b>Book Review</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Feb. 2015	20%	~ 500 words; students choose a title from books listed in weekly recommended readings (further instructions tba)
<b>Essay</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Mar. 2015	30%	~ 1,000 words; essay questions included at the end of the reading list and posted on Moodle
<b>Take-Home Test</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> Mar. 2015	50%	One hour (Answer 2 out of 9 questions on each weekly topic)

<b>The Study of Politics</b>			
<b><u>Requirement</u></b>	<b><u>Due Date</u></b>	<b><u>Weight</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	17 October	20%	Students to submit correct bibliography from the list of bibliographic information provided (more details provided in seminar)
<b>Essay Plan</b>	14 November	30%	~ 1,000 words; essay questions included posted on Moodle; to include proper introduction + plan + proper bibliography
<b>Essay</b>	12 December	50%	~ 1,200 words (max.); using the essay plan, introduction and bibliography from previous assignment, complete the writing of essay (including proper in-text citations as necessary)
<b>Evolution of the International System</b>			
<b><u>Requirement</u></b>	<b><u>Due Date</u></b>	<b><u>Weight</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>
<b>Essay</b>	24 November	60%	2,000 word essay. Please post on Moodle <u>before</u> handing in a hard copy in class.
<b>Take-Home Test</b>	10 December	40%	24 hours. (Answer 2 out of 9 questions) 1,000 words. No references.

(64) Level 5 and 6 modules are generally assessed by means of one-essay and one unseen exam. The required word length for the essays is 1,500-2,000 words for level 5 and 2,000-2,500 words for level 6. Exams for level 5 usually require students to answer two questions in two hours. This increases to three questions in three hours for Level 6 modules. Birkbeck students tend to lack recent practice of doing exams so all are given a chance to sit a mock exam under exam conditions in March of each year. Colleagues are not bound by this approach and some modules at these levels rely on innovative modes of assessment. A case in point is Parliament Studies, which relies on two pieces of written assessment (see Box 2 below).

## Box 2: Examples of Innovative Modes of Assessment

Parliament Studies Assessment 2014/15.

*Assessment One:* 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015 40% (3-4k words) case study of an MP and/or Peer called 'What Makes a Good Parliamentarian?' As of Week 2 (study skills), each student will independently track a chosen MP OR Peer using Hansard, local and national media and Google alerts to follow what work they do. This will then be used to write a case study applying the work of the individual to the wider theoretical literature around what an MP or Peer does and the role of Parliament. There will also be a seminar for students in February where they can informally present and discuss their findings. Selected students will be asked to write a summary of their work for the CSBPPL and Birkbeck Politics blog.

*Assessment Two:* 16th March 2015 one 60% (5-6k words) research project on Parliament. Students will have a choice of three broad research topics where they will be asked to apply the theory behind the topic to the practice of a body/bodies or activity:

1. The role and reform of Select Committees
2. Comparison with the work and role of the UK Parliament against one other devolved body (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) or Parliament elsewhere
3. Public participation in the activities of Parliament

(65) Almost all students on our taught postgraduate programmes have a first degree but many graduated a number of years before joining Birkbeck. Assessment for MSc modules is generally based on an essay and unseen exam. Students take modules either as cores, which are required under their MSc/MRes programmes, or options, where permitted. For most modules, core course students submit a formative essay in December, which must be passed but which does not count towards the final mark. This approach allows students returning to higher education to develop their essay-writing skills without jeopardising their final result. For most modules, option course students submit a summative essay in February, which counts for 50% of the final grade. An unseen exam counts for the remaining 50% for option course students and 100% for core course students. Not all taught postgraduate modules follow this template, however. Qualitative research methods, for example, is assessed with two pieces of written work, an essay of 2,000-3,000 words (counting for 40% of the final mark) and a research design of 4,000-5,000 words (60%).

(66) The Department keeps the assessment methods that it employs under close review. In keeping with College regulations,<sup>11</sup> the Department of Politics uses three marking modes depending on whether the coursework in question (a) counts towards the final mark for the module or not and (b) whether it counts for 30% or more of the final mark for the module.

- **Single Marking** – One marker decides the mark, taking account of grade descriptors, and completes the mark sheet taking account of assessment criteria.
- **Seen Second Marking** – First marker proposes a mark, taking account of grade descriptors, and completes the mark sheet, taking account of assessment criteria. Second marker does the same, also taking into account the first marker's mark and mark sheet. The first and second markers agree on a reconciled mark.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/rules/markings-and-moderation.pdf>

- **Moderated Marking** – First marker proposes a mark, taking account of grade descriptors, and completes the mark sheet, taking account of assessment criteria. First marker provides moderator with a copy of all coursework along with marks and completed mark sheets, distinguishing between (i) all firsts and fails and (ii) the rest. The moderator should mark all coursework in (i) and 10% of the coursework in (ii), taking into account the first marker's mark and mark sheet. The first marker and moderator agree that the process of marking is fair and reliable and that the assessment criteria have been applied consistently.
- **Review of Marks** – First marker proposes a mark, taking account of grade descriptors, and completes the mark sheet, taking account of assessment criteria. First marker provides the moderator with a list of all marks by student number and a copy of the completed mark sheet. The moderator reviews the spread of marks and completes the relevant mark review sheet. Where the spread of marks is as expected there is no need for further action. Where the spread of marks reveals clustering around a particular grade or indicates lots of firsts or fails, the moderator should mark 10% of this coursework taking into account the first marker's mark and mark sheet. The first marker and moderator agree that the process of marking is fair and reliable.

**Table 13: Marking Modes by Level and Type of Assignment**

	Single Marking	Seen second marking	Moderated Marking	Review of Marks
UG Level 4 Assignments				X
UG Level 5 and 6 essays			X	
UG dissertations		X		
UG Level 5 and 6 exams		X		
UG alternative assessment		X		
PG core module essays	X			
PG option module essays		X		
PG dissertations		X		
PG exams		X		
PG alternative assessment		X		

(67) All examination scripts, all dissertations and a cross-section of assessed essays are sent to visiting (i.e. external or inter-collegiate) examiners to ensure consistency with standards. Bearing in mind the full range of marks on a course (including samples of median work), visiting examiners are asked to pay special attention to failed work, first-class BA and distinction-quality graduate work and all borderline marks (i.e. between classes). These examiners attend Exam Boards in the Summer term for undergraduate and postgraduate exams and one in the Autumn term for postgraduate dissertations. A separate exam board is held for the BA Politics, Philosophy and History. The undergraduate and postgraduate boards are chaired by dedicated Exams Officers (Dr Antoine Bousquet and Dr Dionyssi Dimitrakopoulos in 2014/15), who invest a considerable amount of time in ensuring that the marking process runs smoothly and in following up late coursework, alternative assessment...etc.

(68) The Department aims to provide timely and informative feedback to students on coursework. Provisional marks (i.e. marks that have been agreed by both markers but not approved by externals) for essays and other coursework are usually released along with feedback within three weeks. Exam marks and undergraduate dissertation marks and feedback are released after the Exam Board in July and postgraduate dissertation marks and feedback are released after the Exam Board in November.

(69) The rationale behind this assessment is appropriate. It is, as noted above, tailored to the varied educational backgrounds and busy work schedules of our students and it generally allows them to achieve their academic potential. Students are generally satisfied with the modes of assessment employed at undergraduate and postgraduate level and external examiners have been positive about the quality of our students' essays, exam scripts and dissertations. Commenting on the end of his three-year term as external in 2014, Prof. Jonathan Githens-Mazer (University of Exeter) noted: 'I am always impressed by the manner in which a diverse student population – with different sets of work pressures, personal situations, and educational background – is unified by outstanding MA module delivery to result in uniformly interesting and informed MA level work. No doubt, on the one hand, this speaks to the kinds of students that end up at Birkbeck – self-motivated, self-directed etc. I think it undoubtedly also speaks to the high quality of teaching and professionalism amongst those that deliver these modules as well'.

(70) The launch of full-time undergraduate degrees has increased recruitment among students in the 18-20 age bracket. This has led to discussions in the Department about whether these younger students might struggle with forms of assessment developed with more mature students in mind, especially when it comes to the standard forms of assessment that are typically associated with Level 5 modules. An initial analysis of this question suggests that in 2013/14 full-time students received a slightly lower median mark on essays (53 vs. 55) but a slightly higher one on exams (48 vs. 44). Nor was there any evidence that failure rates on essays and exams on Level 5 modules were consistently higher for full-time students compared to their part-time counterparts. The Department will continue to keep a close eye on this issue as the full-time undergraduate degrees are still new. For this purpose, an online tool for comparing the performance of full-time and part-time students on specific undergraduate modules has been developed by Dr Dionyssi Dimitrakopoulos and Robert Bell (Head of Management Information and Data Quality at Birkbeck).

(71) Undergraduate politics students can be less diligent than their postgraduate counterparts about submitting essays. One reason for this is that, traditionally, students were required to submit essays that did not count towards the final mark. In 2011/12, following a consultation with students, a new approach was introduced. Students are required to submit one essay for each compulsory and optional module at level 5 and level 6. Students are required to submit one essay for this module and must achieve a mark of at least 30%. These essays are compulsory in all cases, meaning that a failure to submit an essay that meets this criterion means failure of the module. This essay counts for 25% of the final module mark if the essay mark is higher than the exam mark. The system is more complicated to administer than assessment for postgraduate modules but it has encouraged undergraduate students to submit their coursework.

(72) The system for reviewing Level 4 coursework described above was introduced in 2012/13. It was designed to ensure that assessment at this level, which typically involves multiple pieces of coursework, was robust. A review of this system was held at the Departmental Away Day in June 2014, where some minor changes were introduced to

ensure that reviewers were given due notice of the deadlines for reviewing Level 4 coursework.

(73) Feedback on coursework is presented via a mark sheet that takes account of the relevant grade descriptors and assessment criteria for each piece of coursework. All three elements have been overhauled in recent years to ensure that mark sheets, grade descriptors and assessment criteria are appropriate for the type of coursework. There are now separate mark sheets and assessment criteria for level 4 and level 5/6/7 coursework, which reflects the different intellectual challenges associated with these levels. There is also a new grade descriptor for coursework graded above 80%, which has encouraged colleagues to use the full range of marks. Non-standard coursework, such as projects for qualitative and quantitative social research, are accompanied by bespoke mark sheets and assessment criteria. The Department's approach to providing feedback is summarised in a note to colleagues that is routinely circulated and frequently updated as new forms of assessment are introduced on specific modules. The result is a system that is much better understood by colleagues.

## **6. Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning**

(74) The BA Politics, Philosophy and History (PPH) is an example of collaborative teaching provision par excellence. Taught across three Departments in the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy, it is unified by three modules taught by members of all three contributing departments and taken by all the students on the degree: Rise of the Modern State, Conceptions of the Human from the Enlightenment to the Present, and Problems of Explanation and Interpretation. These modules bring the three disciplines together and focus on problems they share in common. Students then take a range of option modules for all three Departments.

(75) The Chair of the PPH degree is Dr Samantha Ashenden (Politics). The programme has an administrator who is based in the Politics Office. A PPH Admissions Tutor interviews new entrants to the degree and decisions about the degree are taken by the PPH Committee which is made up of all staff who teach on the degree. In addition to the PPH Chair, each department contributing to the degree has a designated PPH tutor. The role of the PPH tutors is to act as a point of contact with the departments, to be available to discuss student progress, the organisation of workloads, and problems affecting study. The BA also has its own (Sub) Board of Examiners, including external examiners, which meets in the Summer Term to review student marks. A separate Programme Handbook is prepared for the BA PPH to explain the specificities of this degree.

(76) Another instance of collaborative provision is the MSc Social Research, which was launched in 2010/11. This interdisciplinary programme is led by the Department of Politics but is taught by colleagues from across the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy. The MSc Social Research is made up of four modules and a dissertation. The modules each count for 30 credits under CAS and the dissertation for 60 credits towards the 120 credits required for the degree. The Postgraduate Certificate in Social Research is made



up of two of the modules from the full programme. The Postgraduate Diploma in Social Research is made up of all four modules but excludes the dissertation.

**Table 14: Structure of the MSc in Social Research**

<b>Core modules 1 and 2</b> (Full-time students and first year-part time students)	<b>Core modules 3 and 4</b> (Full-time students and second year-part time students)
Qualitative Social Research (Autumn and Spring term)	Theorising Social Research (Autumn term)
Quantitative Social Research (Autumn and Spring term)	Research Methods Master Classes (Spring term)
	The Dissertation

(77) The BA Politics, Philosophy and History is one of Birkbeck’s flagship undergraduate degrees. It draws on the combined strengths of three of the College’s strongest Departments, the Departments of Politics, Philosophy, and History, Classics & Archaeology. In collaborating on the degree, they offer a BA programme that is genuinely interdisciplinary: the course structure is designed not merely to require students to study a certain amount of each of the three subjects but to draw the three disciplines together and use them to interrogate one another. The modules offered under this interdisciplinary degrees fall under the Quality Assurance and Enhancement for their home Departments.

(78) Teaching on the MSc Social Research is subject to the same Quality Assurance and Assessment Procedures for Politics modules. A separate handbook is prepared for the programme that sets out module aims and introduces students to the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy. Qualitative Social Research and Quantitative Social Research are offered to students on the Department’s other MSc/MRes programmes so quality enhancement is consistent with the procedures described in this self-evaluation document. Theorising Social Research and the Research Methods Masterclass are both bespoke modules but they are assessed in much the same way.

(79) Theorising Social Research is assessed by two pieces of coursework. The first is a 2,000 word essay on the epistemology and methods underpinning a classic inquiry in social sciences and counts for 30% of the final mark. The second counts as a 4,000 word essay on different epistemological approaches to social research and counts for the remaining 70% of the final mark. These essays are assessed using the Department standard assessment criteria, mark sheet and grade descriptors.

(80) The Research Methods Masterclass is assessed by a 1,500 word research proposal applying a method taught in the course (15% of total marks), a ten minute oral presentation with slides, (15% of total marks) and a 6,000 word research project (70% of total marks). An unusual feature of this module (for Birkbeck) is that each week is taught by a different colleague from the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy. Students on both this module and Theorising Social Research receive a handbook that provides roughly the same information as handbooks for other MSc/MRes Politics modules.

(81) Theorising Social Research and the Research Methods Masterclass are examples of flexible as well as collaborative learning. Both are delivered over 10 weeks with classes running for three hours per evening rather than the usual two. This works well for these modules although the introduction of a similar format for Quantitative Social Research in 2010/11 and for both this module and Qualitative Social Research in 2011/12 in term 2 proved less popular with students. Both returned to two-term modules in 2013/14, although this does not preclude future experimentation with flexible modes of teaching at postgraduate level.

(82) Undergraduate teaching in the Department is more flexible in as much as level 4 modules run for three hours over a ten-week term. One level module – Introduction to Global Politics – runs in Autumn and Summer Term to cater for large class sizes. These modules are run well and have proved popular with students and speak to the viability of flexible learning for some types of teaching provision at Birkbeck.

(83) The Department also contributes to two collaborative programmes not covered in this Internal Review but which warrant brief mention here. The first is the new BA Language and Politics. This programme, which runs on a part-time and full-time basis, is coordinated by colleagues in the Department of Applied Linguistics and Communications. Students can study either French, German, Japanese, Portuguese or Spanish. They typically take six politics and six culture and language modules. The second collaborative programme, which is also coordinated by the Department of Applied Linguistics and Communications, is the new Foundation Programme for Postgraduate Study (Graduate Diploma). This programme provides a bridge between undergraduate and postgraduate study and is specifically targeted at students with limited experience of UK higher education. The emphasis is on developing postgraduate study skills, including academic English. Students on the politics pathway of this programme take the level 4 module Practice of Politics as an option and undertake a dissertation supervised by a member of the Department of Politics. These programmes remain in their infancy and have recruited few students on the political pathways thus far so it is difficult to gauge their impact yet.

## **7. Research Degrees**

(84) The Director of Postgraduate Research (currently Dr Rosie Campbell) leads on all issues related to MPhil and PhD teaching provision. The Department is keen to attract PhD students with a strong academic background and significant potential to conduct original research. Candidates are encouraged to make contact with potential supervisors and, on the basis of this meeting, to submit a formal application to study at Birkbeck. If there is sufficient support for this proposal within the Department, the applicant will be interviewed by up to three members of staff, usually the first and second supervisors and the Director of Postgraduate Research.

(85) The progress of MPhil/PhD students is carefully monitored and guidance offered at each stage of their study. A comprehensive set of guidelines is set out in a Research Students Handbook, which includes information about expectations and requirements of

students, supervisory arrangements, practices and procedures in the Department and College, and the facilities and services available in the Department and College, including the Birkbeck Graduate Research School (BGRS) which offers generic skills workshops and supports a Research Resources Room, and the Bloomsbury Skills Network, which makes modules from the University of London available to Birkbeck students. Research students receive information from the BGRS through its e-mail list.

(86) Supervisors are appointed by the Department of Politics and adhere to the Birkbeck Code of Practice for MPhil and PhD degrees. In accordance with these guidelines each research student will have two supervisors: either a first and second supervisor or two co-supervisors. Second supervisors act as a back up to first supervisors while co-supervision normally involves a process of joint supervision, for example, when a student's research area combines two subfields. Normally there should be three supervisory meetings per term for full time students and two meetings per term for part time students. These meetings may be facilitated by email and other forms of communication.

(87) A number of steps have been taken in recent years to foster a deeper sense of academic community among MPhil/PhD politics students. For the last two years, Dr Rosie Campbell has organised an information/social event for new and returning MPhil/PhD students at the beginning of the Autumn term. Students also have access to the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy Doctoral Centre in 27/28 Russell Square, which includes a computer room and a kitchen. All students are required to present their research each year at one of two MPhil/PhD evenings in the Summer term, which are attended by PhD supervisors and chaired by the Director of Postgraduate Research.

(88) The Department organises formal research training for research students, in line with Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) requirements. In the Department, participation in one of the research seminars is compulsory for all research students throughout their registration. Where students have not already done so, they may be required to complete the modules on Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods. Individual tutorials on methods are provided on request to research students who need further methods training at intermediate and advanced levels. On the recommendation of their supervisors, students can arrange a one-to-one tutorial with the research methods lecturers. All students are required to attend at least 60% of 18 Politics PhD seminars, consisting of taught workshops, external speakers and student presentations in their first year of study (first two years for PT students). These presentations are mandatory for all first year students. They are also encouraged to attend the College Research School workshops.

(89) The provisions and policies governing the progression of MPhil/PhD students is set out in the Research Students Handbook. All students are reviewed at the end of their first year of registration. All first year students must submit a report that sets out (1) the structure and argument of their planned research, (2) what they have accomplished in the preceding year, (3) what they intend to accomplish in the subsequent year. The work will be read and assessed by members of a staff panel established to assess year one progress. Supervisors will be asked for an indication that the quality and quantity of written work are sufficient, that the student is on track for timely completion and to estimate the likely completion

date. The panel will consider the assessment and if appropriate make a recommendation that the student's progress is satisfactory and they may therefore proceed to the next year of registration.

(90) Thereafter, in the Summer term of each academic year, supervisors write reports on each research students' progress and students are asked to write self-assessments of their progress. These form a major part of the research student monitoring and evaluation process. The progress of research students is reviewed once a year at a full meeting of the Graduate Teaching Committee. External funding bodies such as the ESRC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) require the Department to evaluate progress on each student who is in receipt of a grant. Grants may be terminated if the student's progress is deemed inadequate.

(91) Problems that appear between annual reviews are reported to the Director of Postgraduate Research by both student and supervisor when they occur. When a supervisor forms the view that a student's rate of progress is unsatisfactory, the supervisor will notify the student in a timely manner and discuss with the student in consultation with the second or co-supervisor, how best to achieve the objectives of the student's research plan. If progress continues to be unsatisfactory, the supervisor(s) will notify in writing the Director of Postgraduate Research, the Graduate Teaching Committee and the Head of Department.

(92) Students are initially registered for an MPhil and they are upgraded to PhD student status only after successfully completing a 'transfer of status' review. Such a transfer must be approved by the Graduate Teaching Committee, which meets annually in the summer term. The decision is based on the recommendation of a specially-convened Transfer of Status Panel, whose members include the student's supervisors and one or more members of the academic staff not involved in the student's supervision.

(93) Each year the Graduate Teaching Committee reviews the progress of each research student and decides if the student is permitted to register in the subsequent year. If a student's work is not up to standard and the Graduate Teaching Committee recommends that the course be terminated, the Head of Department will write to the Registrar with the evidence and recommendation and request that the student's programme of study be terminated. The Department will follow the procedures outlined in the College Calendar on Termination of a Student on Academic Grounds.

(94) A candidate must have the title or his/her title approved by his/her supervisor before being submitted to the university. At a point where the supervisors agree that the PhD has met (or will soon meet) the required standards, the candidate and supervisor must complete the entry for examination forms for the college. Students should notify the college of their intention to submit their thesis at least four but not more than six months in advance. Entry forms must be submitted to the Birkbeck registry. Where candidates insist they wish to submit against the advice of their supervisors, their work may be submitted to another expert in the relevant field, whether within the Department or without, who will act as a pre-submission referee. This referee will be asked to express his/her view as to (1) whether the work in question is ready, or almost ready, for submission, and (2) whether, if

the answer to the first question is no, the referee believes the work can reasonably be developed into a thesis of PhD standard within an acceptable time frame.

(95) Examination forms and associated documentation may be obtained by the candidate from the College Registry. Examination forms must be submitted at least four months prior to the anticipated submission. After the examination form is submitted, the supervisor will be asked to specify examiners for the thesis, one internal (to the University of London) and one external (not from the University of London). The supervisor will be expected to approach possible examiners, but the decision should be the result of agreement between the candidate and the supervisor. Examiners are appointed by the University of London. Once examiners have agreed and the thesis is completed, bound copies are sent to both examiners and the candidate. The viva normally takes place at Birkbeck and it is conducted in conformity with University of London Regulations.

(96) The Department of Politics runs a small but successful PhD programme. Since 2010, eight students have submitted PhDs, five of which were submitted on time. All part-time students who submitted during this period did so on time, which speaks to the diligence of these students and the robustness of MPhil/PhD supervision procedures. Testament too to the quality of our PhD programme are our students' achievements after graduation. Dr Peter Allen is currently Lecturer in Queen Mary, University of London. Dr Gareth Harris is Research Associate at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University, Associate Lecturer at Birkbeck in Research Methods, and Research Fellow for the ESRC-funded programme, Exit, Voice or Accommodation? White working-class responses to ethnic change in Britain. Dr Teresa Ashe is Associate Lecturer at The Open University's Faculty of Social Sciences. Dr Danny Rye won the Political Studies Association 2012 Sir Ernest Barker prize for best dissertation in the field of political theory and he now has a postdoctoral position at the University of Liverpool.

(97) In 2011, the Department was successful in its bid to create the Bloomsbury Doctoral Training Centre in partnership with the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the Institute of Education and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. This centre, which is one of 21 in the UK funded by the ESRC, brings together the constituent institutions to share PhDs studentships and provide methods training in the social sciences. The Department of Politics participates with SOAS in the politics cluster of the Bloomsbury Doctoral Training Centre, which offers training to students on languages and quantitative and qualitative methods. The Department also collaborates with SOAS on a two-year full-time MRes in Politics with a Language. Students on this programme take two research methods modules at either Birkbeck or SOAS, two language training modules at SOAS and two option modules at Birkbeck and complete a self-directed dissertation. This programme was launched in 2014/15 but it did not recruit any students in its first year.

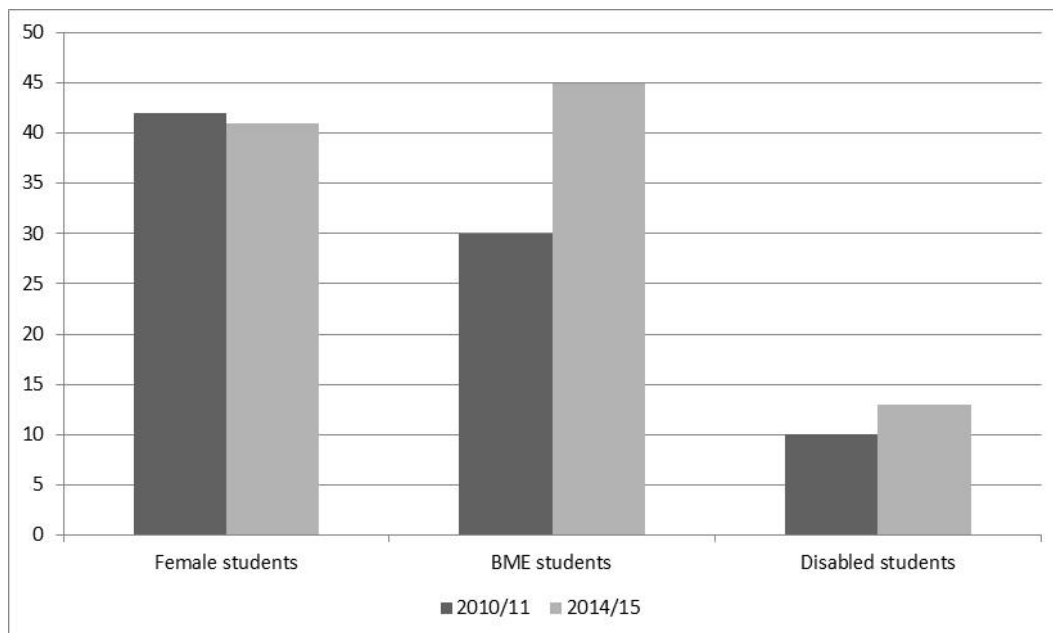
## **8. Student Profile**

(98) Aggregate enrolment data show an increase in full-time equivalent students (FTEs) from 369 in 2010/11 to 375 in 2014/15. The disaggregated data show a discernible shift in Birkbeck students from part-timers to full-timers and from postgraduate to undergraduates.

As regards the mode of study, a fall in the enrolments of part-time students from 305 to 204 full-time FTEs during this period has been offset by an increase in part-time FTEs from 52 to 171. The percentage of all Birkbeck politics students studying at undergraduate level increased from 46% in 2010/11 to 72% in 2014/15. The corresponding figure for postgraduate students fell from 51% to 24%.

(99) There is no typical Birkbeck politics student but a shift in student profile over the last five years is discernible (Figure 2). The share of female students fell by 1% between 2010/11 and 2014/15. The percentage of students with a declared disability has increased from 10% to 13%. The percentage of students identifying themselves as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) increased from 30% of the total to 45%. BME students' proportion in the total student body is increasing at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels; it is higher at undergraduate level (51% in 2014/15) than postgraduate level (33% in 2014/15) and higher still among full-time undergraduates (57% in 2014/15).

**Figure 2: Student Profile 2010-2015 (% of total students)**



(100) If the Department's student profile is thus becoming more diverse it has also become younger. Among all students, the percentage in the 18-20 age bracket increased from 3% in 2010/11 to 11% in 2014/15. This change is being driven primarily by the new full-time BA programmes, with 33% of UCAS entry students in 2014/15 aged between 18-20. Postgraduate students, in contrast, are getting older overall. The percentage of all postgraduate students aged 21-25 fell from 30% in 2010/11 to 24% in 2014/15, whereas the corresponding figure for students in the 26-30 age bracket increased from 31% to 34%.

(101) The completion rate – the number of students completing as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled – is satisfactory. The completion rate for all postgraduate students increased from 66% in 2012/13 to 79% in 2013/14. The completion rate for part-time postgraduate students was similar but it increased from 58% to 84% for full-timers. The completion rate for undergraduate students has been broadly stable during the same time

period. It remained at 69% for all BA students and at 68% for part-timers. The completion rate for full-timers in this two-year period fell from 73% to 71%.

## **9. Assurance and Enhancement of standards and quality**

(102) A Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) Director (since 2011, Dr Dermot Hodson) leads efforts within the Department to ensure the high quality of our teaching. Quality Assurance and Enhancement is a standing item in Departmental meetings and the QAE Director chairs an Annual Meeting of the Politics Teaching and Learning Committee. In advance of the latter, all Module Directors prepare an Annual Module Review, which takes account of the results of the online student survey and feedback from the Staff-Student Exchange Committee and identifies areas where there is room for improvement and instances of innovation and best practice. These Annual Module Reviews are tabled at the Annual Meeting of the Politics Teaching and Learning Committee, which takes the form of a forward-looking discussion of teaching in the Department. A summary of this discussion and issues arising from the Module Reviews is forwarded to the Staff-Student Exchange Committee.

(103) The Staff-Student Exchange Committee is a key mechanism for Quality Assurance. Chaired by the Department's Staff-Student Liaison Officer (in 2014/15, Dr Matthijs van den Bos), it is made up of representatives from each undergraduate and postgraduate module. Class representatives are appointed at the beginning of the Autumn term and students are encouraged to channel feedback on their module or the student experience in general to this office-holder, who attends meetings of the Staff-Student Exchange Committee in the Autumn and Spring terms. Students are also encouraged in module handbooks to see their lecturers and seminar leaders about any issues relating to the module or to approach the Department's Staff-Student liaison and/or Head of Department.

(104) Programmes are regularly reviewed in line with College practices to reflect on the success of the programme and to highlight areas for improvement. Coordinated by the Assistant Dean for Politics, they include analyses of student applications and intake, student progression, and student achievement, record changes introduced, and set out action points for the coming academic year.

(105) For research degrees, the Graduate Teaching Committee is the main forum for discussion of issues relating to MPhil and PhD students in the Department. Chaired by the Director for Postgraduate Research, the Committee brings together all members of the Department who supervise research students. It reviews procedures and policy and provides an opportunity for colleagues to discuss the progress of all MPhil/PhD students on a case-by-case basis.

(106) All members of the Department, full-time and part-time, participate in a regular peer review exercise. Colleagues form pairs and observe each other teaching. A written report is produced after each observation and the pair meets to exchange ideas about teaching styles. The Department sees peer review as an opportunity for mutual learning. It is

frequently as useful for the reviewer as the reviewee and helps to generate new thinking about teaching and learning.

(107) The annual Teaching and Learning Committee is another important mechanism for quality enhancement in the Department. Since 2012/13, this event has been incorporated into the Departmental Away Day to ensure that more time is devoted to teaching and learning discussions. At the first of these Away Day events in June 2013, Dr Samantha Ashenden, Dr Ed Bacon, Dr Alex Colas and Dr Ben Worthy talked about distinctive approaches to teaching. Issues discussed here included the use of humour in teaching and the perils and pitfalls of incorporating video clips into lectures and seminars. In June 2014, Dr Ali Güven talked about his evolving use of PowerPoint in class in recent years. Dr Antoine Bousquet gave a presentation on the incorporation of conceptual art into lectures. Dr Barbara Zollner gave a demonstration on using Moodle to provide instructional videos to students. These discussions do not presuppose that there is a single way to teach politics but they have increased the bank of ideas in the Department about different approaches to teaching.

(108) The Department also encourages colleagues to attend training sessions that are of relevance to teaching and learning. The Missenden Centre runs regular full-day sessions at Birkbeck on effective PhD supervision, which have been attended by a number of colleagues. Birkbeck's Centre for Transformative Practice in Teaching and Learning runs in-house training sessions that are of relevance here too. Colleagues from the Department attended a session on e-modules organised by the Centre in June 2014 and the Department was represented at a seminar on digital literacy in October 2014.

(109) The QAE Director represents the Department of Politics on the School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (STQEC), which approves programme and module proposals and amendments, as well as developing and implementing strategy and procedures for curriculum development, pedagogical enhancement, and quality assurance across the School. This committee feeds back to the department and in turn serves as a conduit for College-level policies helping to align departmental standards with those of the School and College as a whole.

(110) The Department has a strong track record for providing high-quality teaching in the field of Politics. It received a maximum score of 24/24 following a Subject Review by QAA in 2001 and has received positive assessments in Internal Reviews in 2005 and 2010. The most recent of these Internal Reviews commended the Department for, inter alia, the 'unique and innovative provision of programmes offered', 'its varied modes of assessment' and the 'inclusive nature of its admissions'. As outlined in this Self Evaluation Document, the Department has enhanced its performance in all three areas since 2010/11. In addition to consolidating our HE certificates and introducing several new innovative MSc programmes, we have introduced three new full-time undergraduate degrees, which have been very successful overall. Within these programmes, the Department's approach to assessment remains robust and also, increasingly innovative. The varied modes of assessment employed on the new Level 4 modules are illustrative of this development. Recruitment and admissions remain key priorities for the Department and they have helped to develop a more diverse student body over the last five years.



(111) These developments are testament, first and foremost, to the dedication of the Department's academic and administrative staff, but also the robustness of Department mechanisms for quality assurance and enhancement. At a procedural level, these mechanisms ensure that undergraduate and postgraduate teaching provision meet the high standard we set as a Department and provide a channel of communication between staff and students when issues regarding the substantive content or organisation of modules or programmes arise. At a pedagogic level, Departmental procedures create a space in which colleagues can talk about their commitment to and passion for teaching. There is no one-way to teach a subject as eclectic and contested as politics but there is always scope for innovation and improvement. This approach chimes with the QAA benchmark for Politics, which argues that all that 'can be asked of institutions [engaged in teaching Politics] is that they should continue to develop their teaching and research and to offer to their students a curriculum which is founded on the discipline as it has developed to date; which reflects their particular approach to the discipline and which draws on their specialist strengths' (QAA 2007: 4).

#### *Case Study of Quality Enhancement*

(112) The Department presents The Practice of Politics as an example of enhancement. Developed and taught by Dr Edwin Bacon, this undergraduate module forms part of a developing movement reconsidering the content of undergraduate politics degrees.<sup>12</sup> Essentially, the emphasis is on connecting students with the world of political practice. Students who study politics are very often motivated by their political beliefs and the notion of political engagement, whether in a professional or voluntary capacity. Traditionally, the curricula of politics degrees contain little about how to practice politics. At best, questions of political efficacy are posed indirectly, as theoretical analyses of what works well. The first order questions – 'how do I do this?', 'to what are my values and skills suited?', 'how can I develop in order to be successful in my chosen area?' – are broadly ignored. Too many academics have regarded such questions as not the business of universities, as somehow devaluing scholarship and promoting an employability agenda which allegedly undermines the notion of knowledge for its own sake. Happily, such a view has been rare at Birkbeck.

(113) A national survey of the reasons why students apply for degree programmes showed the top three reasons, by some margin, to be: to lead to a good job; as part of a career plan; and, to study a particular subject.<sup>13</sup> The same three reasons headed the list nationally for part-time students. The rationale for The Practice of Politics is that students' professional, personal, and vocational motivations merit attention within today's curriculum.

<sup>12</sup> Curtis, S. (2010). Learning in Public: Connecting Politics Students with Practitioners in 'the Edgeless University'. *Political Insight*, 1(3), 93-95. Wyman, M., & Longwell, S. (2010). Teaching the Practice of Politics. In S. Curtis & A. Blair (Eds.), *The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics*. Birmingham: Sociology, Anthropology, Politics (C-SAP), Higher Education Academy, 123-150.

<sup>13</sup> Purcell, K., Elias, P., Ellison, R., Atfield, G., Adam, D., & Livanos, I. (2008). Applying for Higher Education – the diversity of career choices, plans and expectations. Findings from the First Futuretrack Survey of the 'Class of 2006' applicants for Higher Education. Higher Education Career Services Unit (HECSU), Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), Warwick Institute for Employment Research.

(114) Students' professional, personal, and vocational motivations inform module design and assessment in this course. The Practice of Politics involves a value-oriented process of enhancing both personal awareness, relating to arenas of political practice, and relevant skills, to increase effectiveness in such practice. A secondary contextual matter addressed is the notion of disillusionment with politics widely identified in political science literature in recent years.<sup>14</sup> The Practice of Politics seeks to undermine such disillusionment with a focus on the potential of political practice.

### *Module Structure*

(115) The Practice of Politics is a 30 credit, level 4 compulsory module for students studying either for an HE Certificate or a BA degree in Government and Politics, and an option module, proving popular with students on the politics department's largest programme, the BA Global Politics and International Relations. The module, which is taught in three-hour sessions over 11 weeks, enhances students' awareness of the world of political practice from the perspective of their own values and skills, and explores ways, both professional and voluntary, in which they might engage with that world. The curriculum provides opportunities for students to:

- consider their values, motivations, and development needs as relating to the practice of politics;
- increase skills of constructive political discussion, decision-making, achieving consensus, public speaking, formal debating, lobbying, and producing different forms of written communication (for example, position papers, blogs, wikis);
- identify the qualities which they admire in positive and successful political actors;
- gain an increased awareness of a variety of political roles and careers through engaging in student-chaired weekly sessions with outside speakers from a range of political activities;
- enhance their employability and career awareness.

(116) Sessions are interactive, with little formal lecturing, and an element of negotiated curriculum. Assessment occurs throughout. It is innovative in form, including posting on a politics blog, writing a policy brief, critiquing a political speech, and producing a portfolio made up of a Curriculum Vitae, a skills and values audit, and weekly personal reflections on module content. Peer assessment, based on contributions to group work throughout the module, makes up 20 per cent of the final mark.

### *Learning Outcomes*

(117) Students on The Practice of Politics have been positive about the module, as evidenced by engagement both in class and between classes, on the online discussion board. It has taken them out of comfort zones to experience new practices (only about half had ever posted on a blog before doing so on the course), and to assess their own skills and values. Peer assessment of group work has influenced participation positively. An element of negotiated curriculum has facilitated coverage of issues of special interest to students. Of

<sup>14</sup> Hay, C. (2007). *Why we hate politics*. Cambridge: Polity. Stoker, G. (2006). *Why politics matters: making democracy work*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

particular value has been the agreement of external speakers from a range of political careers and activities – diplomat, local councillor, parliamentary lobbyist, BBC political journalist, NGO campaign director, and European Commission official – to be questioned by the students. This has enhanced students’ awareness of the range of politics-related opportunities, the routes into them, and the skills and values of relevance to them. Almost all external speakers have a Birkbeck link, which helps to emphasise that engagement with such political practice is not a remote activity beyond students’ current situation.

### *Improving Learning / Teaching / Assessment Practice*

(118) The module’s approach is well suited to Birkbeck’s mission to ‘meet the changing educational, cultural, personal and career needs of adults’. Many of our students engage with, or aspire to engage with, the professional / practice world as related to their subject of choice. The notion that at least some element of each undergraduate programme ought to purposefully enhance engagement with the practice of their discipline makes tremendous sense. In terms of students’ reasons for entering higher education, in terms of an increased focus on employability, and in terms of a holistic understanding of their subject, an opportunity to consider practice can deliver in most disciplines. Innovative approaches such as the negotiated curriculum, peer assessment, interaction with the blogosphere, reflection on personal values and purpose, and engagement with external practitioners are all valuable beyond The Practice of Politics. An eye to outcomes, based on skills and values, has the potential to increase students’ commitment to study, and to introduce explicit elements of personal fulfilment, career development, and civic engagement, all of which speaks to Birkbeck’s approach to teaching and learning.

## **10. Drafting and Consultation Process Followed in Producing this SED**

(119) This Self Evaluation Document was written by QAA Director Dr Dermot Hodson in the Autumn term of 2014 in consultation with staff and students. Prof. Diana Coole, Assistant Dean for Politics, provided extensive input throughout the drafting process, and a full draft of the document was circulated in December 2014 to all full-time faculty and sessional staff in the Department of Politics. The draft was also circulated at this time to the Department Office Team Leader, Irene Breckon, to the Politics Subject Librarians and to the College’s Learning Technology Support Officer. Several points were taken on board in the light of this consultation. The Subject Librarians, for example, drew attention to their involvement in the workshop discussed in paragraph 33. Prof. Deborah Mabbett, likewise, provided further context on the Graduate Certificate in International Migration and Integration, which was incorporated into paragraph 9.

(120) A second draft of the Self Evaluation Document was circulated to undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives in December 2014 and amended in the light of their feedback. One student representative, for example, called for more attention to be paid to College publicity and the scope for further networking with alumni. These changes were reflected in paragraphs 14 and 15 respectively. Both students and staff described the Self Evaluation Document as having wider application beyond the Internal Review. The Department has discussed making the document available to new colleagues by way of an introduction to how Politics is taught at Birkbeck. The College’s Learning Technology

Support Officer has asked to circulate a copy to colleagues as part of a project on electronic assessment and feedback across the Bloomsbury Colleges. One student suggested that a summary of the document be made available on the website as a resource for understanding how the Department of Politics is run.