Part-time higher education continues to be buffeted by changes to the funding regime and the wider economy. It has seen sharp reductions in enrolments nationally, and has been the subject in recent months of several reports by organisations within our own sector, business and government.

There is widespread agreement that part-time higher education must be protected and supported. At Birkbeck, we will continue our active advocacy work to ensure that this rhetoric becomes a reality.

College finances
Given Birkbeck’s special offer and focus, we have weathered these conditions well. We have seen our three-year undergraduate courses go from strength to strength, with many younger learners keen to earn while they learn and gain the work experience that employers look for in today’s graduates.

As a result of healthy growth in student numbers, a responsive offer, and robust control over expenses, the College has returned a surplus for the year of £6.7m (compared with a surplus of £6.5m in 2011–2012). Total College income increased by £2.7m (2.8%) and total expenditure increased by £2.5m (2.9%). Income from academic fees and support grants continues to increase, reflecting the growth in our student numbers.

Development and alumni relations
Over the last year, we have invested in the Development and Alumni team, and philanthropic income in 2012–2013 totalled £3.31m.

Gifts ranged from £5 to £1.3m, and projects included support for undergraduate student bursaries, support for capital projects and funding for PhD students.

People do not always immediately recognise universities as charitable causes, yet education is one of the most important gifts that a person can give or be given. We are extremely lucky to have such a generous group of supporters, who recognise that no other institution provides what Birkbeck does, and who give back – to whatever extent they can afford.

Indeed, more alumni, friends and governors than ever before are supporting the College with gifts of £1,000 a year or more – there were 82 donors giving this amount in 2012–2013, up from 37 in 2010–2011.

These gifts are critical to allowing us to offer bursaries to students who otherwise may not be able to afford to study. We are grateful to all our donors for their generosity, and we will continue to demonstrate to you the impact of your support.

Alumni have supported the College in other ways too. As well as attending open evenings to talk about their experiences at Birkbeck, they now also support prospective and current students through one-to-one mentoring and employability schemes.

Our new international students are paired up with alumni who have had similar experiences, while a mentoring scheme for our business students aimed to help them find the right job on completion of their studies. A total of 121 students benefited from these schemes this year, and the initiatives have received positive feedback from both the students and alumni.

The green agenda
Birkbeck was awarded ‘Fairtrade University Status’ in April 2013. This is due to an ongoing commitment over a number of years from the College, the Students’ Union and the Catering team to increasing the volume and range of Fairtrade products, raising awareness of Fairtrade and setting up reporting structures to discuss Fairtrade issues.

The College moved 14 places up the People and Planet Green League table 2013, thanks to improvements in sustainable food policies and the Fairtrade accreditation. This is very positive news and shows that the College is on the right track with its environmental programme.

Outlook
During the coming year, we will continue to work with government and the rest of the higher education sector to ensure that the attention that part-time higher education has received this year is translated into actions and policies that will strengthen it in years to come.

Overall, Birkbeck’s strong leadership, effective management and good financial position, together with our ability to develop new and innovative courses and study structures, gives me every confidence that the College will continue to flourish despite the challenging environment.

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