



BIRKBECK (University of London)

LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY 2009-12

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LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY 2009-12

I. Background

- I.1 Birkbeck occupies a unique position in UK Higher Education as the only multi-faculty university to specialise in providing face-to-face part-time degree programmes for adults. Its academic achievements are founded on a culture of research excellence. It is a self-governing College of the University of London.
- I.2 The principal aims of the College, as set out in our mission statement¹, are to:
- Provide part-time higher education courses² which meet the changing educational, cultural, personal and career needs of adults; in particular those who live or work in the London region.
 - Enable adult students from diverse social and educational backgrounds to participate in our courses.
 - Maintain and develop excellence in research and provide the highest quality research training in all our subject areas.
 - Make available the results of research, and the expertise acquired, through teaching, publication, partnerships with other organisations and the promotion of civic and public debate.
- I.3 In pursuing this mission, we have fostered an academic culture that values the synergies between scholarship, research, learning, teaching and professional practice. We believe that our unique mission, grounded in responsiveness to the needs of diverse and non-traditional students reaching out from a culture of research excellence, puts us in a position to make a strong and indispensable contribution to higher education and its role in society and the economy, now and for the future.
- I.4 Birkbeck students come from an increasingly wide and diverse range of home and educational backgrounds, from prior learning acquired through employment and experience to traditional “A” levels. There are some 18,718³ students in total, equating to a full-time equivalent figure of 7,918 students enrolled for HE award-bearing programmes: 4,383 are undergraduates; 2,761 taught postgraduates; and, 596 are postgraduate research students.
- I.5 The large majority of students – some 90% - are part-time. The majority of students live within the M25 area. The student population is composed largely of mature part-time students who remain in employment while undertaking their course of study. Their ages range from 18 to 83 and their average age is 35. One third of students fall within the 30-39 year age group.
- I.6 Birkbeck’s programmes range from short courses, foundation and undergraduate first degrees to taught and research postgraduate programmes within a strong multi-faculty context, covering subject areas across the life and social sciences, business and management, law and the arts and humanities.
- I.7 As well as a unique teaching mission, Birkbeck has an equally strong research presence. In the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, over 90% of eligible staff were submitted as research active. Over 75% of staff were returned in groupings which were assessed as having 50% or more of their research rated in the highest categories, 4* (world leading) and 3* (internationally excellent).
- I.8 In 2009-10 the College was restructured from seventeen to five Schools, each with Executive and budget-holding powers and led by an Executive Dean. Each School also has in place its own Learning and Teaching Strategy (building very much upon and supporting this College-wide strategy) together with an Assistant Dean with specific responsibility for this key area of activity.
- I.9 This Strategy and the areas of potential development have been drawn up by a working group of the College’s Teaching Committee (now Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee), chaired by the Pro-Vice-Master for Learning and Teaching, and approved by the Committee. This consisted of two groups – a smaller working group and a broader consultation group.
- **Working Group⁴:** Professor Stephen Frosh - Pro-Vice-Master for Learning and Teaching (Chair); Dr Rosie Cox – Deputy Head of the School of Continuing Education; Wendy Czogalik – Learning and

¹ Mission Statement

² See section 5.4.1 for reference to flexible, part-time provision

³ At the time of writing the Strategy

⁴ All posts as at time of writing the Strategy

Organisational Development Manager; Dr Jim Pitts - Chair of the Science and Social Sciences Degrees Committee; Dr Dick Rayne - College e-Learning Coordinator; Dr Martin Shipway - Chair of the Arts Degrees Committee; Dr Anita Walsh - Director of the CLPD; Alison Wood – Assistant Registrar (Academic Quality Assurance).

- **Consultation Group⁵:** Professor John Annette – Pro-Vice-Master for Lifelong Learning and Engagement; Professor Philip Dewe - Vice Master (Business Relations and Birkbeck Stratford); Professor Costas Douzinas – Pro-Vice-Master (International); Professor Michelle Everson - Head of the College Research School; Dr Jas Gill - Director of ITS; Professor Sue Jackson – Incoming Pro-Vice-Master (Learning and Teaching); Tricia King – Pro-Vice Master (Student Experience); Helen Lawrence - Head of Business Relations; Professor Les Moran - Chair of the Disability Committee; Dean Pateman - Academic Registrar; Philip Payne – Librarian; Mark Pimm - Disability Service Manager.

1.10 The broader consultation group was sent a final draft of the new Strategy for comment on relevant sections. The 2009-12 Strategy was developed using both the existing College Strategy for 2005-08 (including a report made on progress with meeting its objectives) as well as building on good practice identified through consideration of other HEI Strategies. The Strategy has been explicitly designed to fully engage staff and to help to promote within the teaching community ideas for future learning and teaching activities as well as priorities/targets for which the College can be held to account.

2. Implementation and Engagement with the Learning and Teaching Strategy

- 2.1 The Learning and Teaching Strategy should set the context for the remit of the College Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC) and School learning and teaching activities over the 2009-12 period. It should be viewed as providing the guiding principles which staff should engage with, as appropriate, rather than being a prescriptive document.
- 2.2 Each School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (STQEC) will be expected to examine the projects identified within the Strategy and to identify how these are to be addressed in light of their own context. All developments must satisfy the College's single equality strategy and be equality impact assessed. It is recognised that the rank order of priorities will almost certainly vary between Schools. The job of the Assistant Deans (Learning and Teaching) should be to ensure the priorities of the Strategy are adopted and owned by all staff, represented explicitly in their School's strategic plans, and that targets are designed to include actions that will address these priorities. Wherever possible, the Assistant Deans (Learning and Teaching) should liaise with one another to ensure the sharing of experience and good practice across the College, particularly exploring opportunities for economies of scale where common practices can be utilised.
- 2.3 Each School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee will be expected to provide an annual report on progress to the College Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC). In turn, overall progress made on the Learning and Teaching Strategy projects will be examined through a mid-cycle review with ongoing identification of further potential projects through regular processes and activities operated by Schools and the College as a whole. The TQEC will ensure this takes place through annually (at least) reviewing the priorities of the Strategy, reprioritising as appropriate to ensure their currency.
- 2.4 Of key importance to any strategy is being able to evaluate the effectiveness of its implementation. This includes being able to ascertain how examples of good practice have been identified and disseminated throughout the College, including members of staff receiving the Birkbeck Excellence in Teaching Award. Further evidence for measuring the extent of implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy could include *inter alia* the following: recruitment and retention data; results of the National Student Survey and other forms of student feedback; annual programme reports; internal review documents and reports, including presentations on enhancement in learning and teaching; accreditation by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; use of best practice by other HEIs; best practice disseminated from the HEA and its subject centres.

⁵ Ibid.
Its2010Mar31.doc

3. Learning and Teaching Aims

- 3.1 Birkbeck's overall learning and teaching aim is to develop resources and procedures which will ensure the best learning experience in higher education, for the widest possible range of students, in order to enable them to realise their full potential. In addition, the two overarching aims of this Learning and Teaching Strategy are detailed below. A number of projects have been articulated for 2009-12 in relation to accomplishment of each aim. The equality dimensions of all projects should be identified and robust equality and diversity auditing built into the aims. These have been outlined in summary below and in detail in sections 5 and 6. They have been developed in line with the College's Widening Participation and Student Support Strategy⁶, policy for employer engagement⁷, Quality Strategy 2009-12⁸ and eLearning Strategy⁹.
- 3.2 **Aim I – Identifying and meeting the needs of a changing student body.** Over the next three years the needs of the College's student body are likely to change significantly. In the light of these changes new developments in learning and teaching are likely to be necessary. The above aim should be accomplished through Schools defining the nature of their changing student body, identifying their support needs and ensuring that these are met. In turn, Schools will be asked to monitor and support retention, and, to identify new and existing programmes to better meet student demand.
- 3.3 **Aim II – Maintaining and enhancing the high quality of teaching within the context of a research-intensive environment.** Excellence in teaching should be accorded the same status as excellence in research. There should be clear links between teaching and research, thus enhancing the student learning experience. Achievement of this aim will include projects: defining high-quality research-related teaching; demonstrating the integration between research and teaching through teaching that is researched and reflected upon and through teaching feeding into research activities; and rewarding high quality teaching in its own right.

4. Learning and Teaching Strategy Projects

- 4.1 Each of the learning and teaching projects will be worked on systematically over the next three-year period. They should be read in the context of the more general strategic aim of developing a widespread culture of enhancing the student learning experience together with maintaining a strong commitment to learning and teaching.
- 4.2 Each project will be defined by the working groups¹⁰ identified in the first instance and then taken forward by Schools (see 2.2 above) as well as a key role being played by central College departments and services including *inter alia* the My Birkbeck Student Centre, Students' Union, Centre for Learning and Professional Development (CLPD), Library, Information Technology Services (ITS) and Disability Office and with specific reference to College equality and diversity policies. Each project is stated, defined in scope and followed by advice for its achievement. There is some overlap between the projects but each one has been presented separately in order to achieve clarity and detail.

⁶ Widening Participation and Student Support Strategy

⁷ Policy for Employer Engagement

⁸ Quality Strategy 2009-12

⁹ eLearning Strategy

¹⁰ The **Appendix** details the projects in summary, together with the timetable for their implementation and identified responsibility.

5. Aim I Projects – Identifying and meeting the needs of a changing student body

Project 1: Changing Student Body. Each School to define the nature of its changing student body.

- 5.1 Each School will need to examine and identify the changing nature of its student body including the varying levels of knowledge and expertise of its students at entry.

*This may include **inter alia** the following: fewer entering students already having degrees; an increasing number of international students; an increasing proportion of younger students owing to partial entry into UCAS; changes in entry profile due to possible changes in programme provision (e.g. new/expanded Foundation degrees, delivery of programmes at Stratford, alternative routes for entry and progression, summer schools etc).*

Project 2: Learning Support. Each School to identify the learning support needs of their student body and to ensure that these needs are being met.

- 5.2 This should take into account the context of individual Schools and enable Schools to show they have examined in a convincing way the learning support needs of their student body.
- 5.2.1 There will need to be increased support for students with the move towards greater flexibility, progression and accessibility (see project 4 below) and greater use of new technologies. Learning support should include pedagogical and curricular structures provided both pre-session and in the classroom (including the development of inclusive learning and teaching practices, and of e-Learning), through to pastoral support being provided outside of the classroom. The College's 'Procedures for Students with Disabilities' makes recommendations regarding inclusive learning and web resources for best practice.
- 5.2.2 Assessment should be considered in its own right and be flexible, fit for purpose, and able to utilise new and innovative developments. This should include a review of appropriate forms of assessment for both full-time and part-time students whilst addressing how best to deal with flexibility such as through modular structures, eLearning etc. This might include, for example, utilising new technologies to deliver teaching, learning and assessment more effectively.

In undertaking this project, Schools should ask their students to carry out a skills audit of where their needs are currently being met and where this is not the case. Wherever gaps are identified which the School in question is unable to address, there should be an identification of how these are to be addressed elsewhere. At all levels, but particularly at the more introductory end of provision, programmes need to be designed in order for students to accrue the study skills that will allow them to succeed in their studies.

The following is an indicative list of the skills required of students and the forms of learning support to be considered by Schools and should not be regarded as prescriptive. It has been based on a checklist of study skills put together by the My Birkbeck Student Centre, Students' Union, CLPD, Library, ITS and Disability Office. (see: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/support>). This includes: Bibliography and referencing skills, computing and IT skills, critical thinking, academic writing (including essays, reports and dissertations), revising for examinations, research skills (including utilising the library, research ethics, researching the internet), mathematical and statistical related skills, presentation skills, English language skills, understanding plagiarism, reading and note taking skills, dealing with stress and anxiety, working on a PhD and time management skills. Students can look up information on the My Birkbeck website, attend a workshop or arrange for a 1:1 tutorial with a study skills expert. An orientation event, including a Student Guide, at the beginning of the academic year introduces new students to the range of study skills training available.

Project 3: Retention. All Schools to identify the mechanisms for supporting student retention, examining and enhancing as necessary student learning experiences and current practice within Schools.

- 5.3 All Schools should continually strive to improve retention across the student learning experience.
- 5.3.1 Each School must have in place its own structures and mechanisms for monitoring and improving retention through building upon work already conducted, identifying key individuals, processes, practices and information required. A key role should be played by the Assistant Deans (Recruitment and Retention) in identifying the factors which might have an effect on retention as well as by students informing Schools of activities that have made a difference to them. The key components in maintaining student numbers should include *inter alia* those detailed in the box above.

The College is committed to constantly monitoring and improving retention rates wherever possible and is actively working on improving and monitoring management information in this area. The Common Awards Scheme has made progression much more explicit with level 4 needing to provide key skills as a foundation to further study and allowing for increased flexibility, interdisciplinarity, consistency and monitoring. The increase in ELQ students may lead to those already with degrees being directed towards postgraduate study thus pushing the knowledge threshold to a higher level. Increased levels of support may therefore be needed at the initial stages of degree studies.

Project 4: Programme Development. Each School to identify new and existing programmes that could be developed in order to better meet student demand.

- 5.4 This project should include enhancements to curricular design/programme development to make the most effective use of existing programmes to create new combinations and pathways, thus allowing for economies of scale, as well as developing new programmes where there is a clear strategic/market need.
- 5.4.1 A range of possible areas for programme development (both new and existing) have already been identified by the Academic Opportunities project strand of the Strategic Review. Each School should therefore provide an explicit framework for discussion of programme development to include **flexibility, accessibility, progression, business development and employer engagement** (see below). Much of this work will be undertaken through the portfolio reviews to be conducted by the new Executive Deans.

Flexibility should include the ability to build programmes of study out of elements that are available across the College's academic components, for example, interdisciplinary programmes and flexible modular programmes that draw on modules offered by different units within Schools, but also modules offered across or between Schools where academically appropriate.

Flexibility should also include consideration in mode of study, potentially moving between standard part time and accelerated programmes (including building upon entry into UCAS), evening, day, weekend and intensive summer school arrangements, and consequently spreading or concentrating the duration of study as required. The concept here is to increase the flexibility of programme delivery to enable students to complete their degrees at a pace that suits their needs. Two kinds of arrangement are immediately apparent: accelerated undergraduate programmes and variable duration programmes allowing students to vary the pace of their study between 1 and 4 modules per year (especially if a summer school option is available). **Flexibility** should also include consideration of method of delivery such as collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including distance, network, blended and eLearning).

Access to programmes at the appropriate level for a student should be straightforward, well publicised and well managed. College admissions practices should be efficient and user-friendly and should in particular enable the re-routing of applications from a programme judged as inappropriate for particular applicants to other programmes that might better meet their needs. Flexible AP(E)L procedures should also be incorporated into this.

Facilitating **progression** routes should be of benefit both to students and the institution including opening out progression pathways from Certificates of Higher Education and Foundation Degrees, direct entry onto three year Masters programmes (including a Graduate Certificate or Diploma), through to the highest level of study that a student desires and/or can cope with whilst retaining them within Birkbeck. This requires flexibility of provision (see above) whilst including the need for clear planning related to vocational and professional, as well as academic, progression. A key role should be played by the My Birkbeck Student Centre in providing appropriate training and advice for staff in guiding students to the most suitable degree pathways at the pre-application stage.

In developing new programmes prospects for potential **business development and employer engagement** should be taken into account (see project 7 below).

Project 5: International Students. All Schools to strive to increase international student numbers and to work with the International Office and the International Group to ensure their particular needs are met.

- 5.5 Schools should endeavour to improve recruitment of international students and should appoint an Assistant Dean (AD) for Recruitment and Retention with this as one of his/her direct responsibilities. The AD should also be responsible for ensuring that the implications of increased numbers of international students for all aspects of the student learning experience are properly considered.

This project should include examination of the specific needs of international students as a distinct grouping as well as a shared community and should take into account the International Strategy. This should include the provision of excellent pre-entry advice and information (including language support – English for Academic Purposes), induction, mentoring and pastoral support.

Project 6: Flexible accelerated undergraduate programmes. All Schools to examine the potential for recruiting undergraduate students onto accelerated programmes such as three year degree programmes and integrating them into a predominantly part-time, evening institution with consideration to different forms of pedagogic approaches.

- 5.6 This project should focus on the potential for, and impact of, introducing flexible accelerated degree programmes into the College as well as examining the resource implications of new teaching patterns. This should include consideration of the characteristics of students enrolling for accelerated programmes and the different forms of pedagogy which might be required.

Schools should monitor the success of the Schools piloting accelerated undergraduate programmes from 2010/11 (currently Law, Philosophy and Psychology) including the impact of partial entry into UCAS. This monitoring should take place immediately after recruitment and after the first year of retention, thus enabling all Schools to actively review and monitor this experience including assessing the early performance of undergraduate students enrolled on these programmes and their demands on pastoral care in comparison with part-time students. The assumption is that undergraduate students opting for accelerated programmes will include school leavers, but others may be those wishing to change career at a later stage.

Project 7: Employer Responsive Provision. Each School to review academic programmes and to ensure, where appropriate, that they are flexible and responsive to employers.

- 5.7 Schools should review their current provision with a view to examining whether or not this could be adapted to become more employer responsive both by revising existing areas and through new developments. This project should include a rational assessment of whether or not it is appropriate to take forward such developments.

This could be achieved through consideration of the following, if appropriate, with advice provided from the Institute of Professional Studies:

- professional accreditation;
- offering individual modules as short courses/Continuing Professional Development (CPD);
- integration of work-based learning elements into a range of academic awards, including Foundation Degrees;
- consideration of tailored short programmes/awards for specific occupational groups.

The increase in modularity in the College's programmes at all levels should allow more opportunities both for bespoke short courses and for the inclusion on undergraduate as well as postgraduate programmes of funded staff fulfilling Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements. There should be good prospects for employer engagement with some specialist Masters programmes. Active marketing of the College's provision to employers along these lines (emphasising the retention as well as 'upskilling' benefits of, for example, CPD) could be beneficial.

Both Schools and the College as a whole should actively monitor employer responsive provision to ensure that students who are workplace learners are effectively supported during their studies. They should examine the processes for developing, approving and reviewing employer responsive provision to ensure that students are provided with appropriate opportunities for both work-based and work-related learning, the responsibilities of the workplace partners are well documented, learning outcomes are clearly identified, students are provided with timely information, support and guidance, and are assessed appropriately.

6. Aim II Projects – Maintaining and enhancing the high quality of teaching within the context of a research-intensive environment

The following projects are linked to the way in which the curriculum is structured and the way in which the student experience is affected by a research-intensive environment. These should therefore focus on the student experience rather than on individual researchers and should look at the different ways in which research and teaching are linked.

Project 8: Defining high Quality Research-related Teaching. All Schools to define high quality research-related teaching in light of a changing student body within a research-intensive environment.

- 6.1 Schools should consider what high quality research-related teaching represents to them and reflect on this to provide the College with a clear idea of agreed excellence within different disciplinary areas.

This project should involve Schools examining the findings of the working group currently (2009) investigating understandings of “research-related teaching” and to develop these findings in accordance with their own needs. For example, this might include exposure to research methods, skills and practice, with Schools integrating research into teaching through involving students in an active research community. The College Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC) will then draw up College guidelines for demonstrating best practice to be built into promotion procedures.

Project 9: Research in teaching. All Schools to demonstrate the integration between research and teaching through teaching that is researched and constantly reflected upon and through teaching feeding into research activities.

- 6.2 There is a need to have a more integrated approach such as defining teaching-led research and to set a framework for linking research and teaching. Schools should maximise the amount of good quality teaching available to students through reflection on teaching (including engagement for example with the HEA Subject Centres and the discipline as a whole), thus ensuring the sharing of good practice and through teaching feeding into research activities.

The value of teaching feeding back into research ideas and activities might, where appropriate, be tied into interdisciplinarity in terms of research activities and curricular development, that is, how interdisciplinary programmes and teaching guide staff research projects and inform research objectives.

Project 10: Rewarding high quality teaching. All Schools to define how best to reward high quality teaching.

- 6.3 All Schools should consider how best to support and reward teaching and the way in which the drive towards research affects the distribution of research and teaching within Schools. Projects 8 and 9 above should be utilised to inform a more integrated approach regarding the criteria for promotion based on excellence in learning and teaching.

Where particular Schools/programmes and/or individuals have developed good practice in some aspect(s) of learning and teaching (particularly where relevant to strategic issues), this should be shared across the College. An annual cross-College learning and teaching event, organised by the College Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee, will help to promote dissemination.

APPENDIX – TIMETABLE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY PROJECTS FOR 2009-2012 WITH IDENTIFIED RESPONSIBILITY

Project	Action	Timetable	Responsibility for Project
Aim I – Identifying and meeting the needs of a changing student body			
Project 1: Changing student body	Each School to define the nature of its changing student body.	Autumn 2009 reporting autumn 2010	School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committees (reviewing the 2009-10 student data)
Project 2: Learning support	Each School to identify the learning support needs of their student body and to ensure that these needs are being met.	Spring 2010 reporting summer 2011	School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committees (drawing on the findings of the above project and the learner support project)
Project 3: Retention	All Schools to identify the mechanisms for supporting student retention, examining and enhancing as necessary student learning experiences and current practice within Schools.	2009-10 reporting summer 2010	Assistant Deans (Learning & Teaching) working with Assistant Deans (Recruitment & Retention)
Project 4: Programme development	Each School to identify new and existing programmes that could be developed in order to better meet student demand.	2009-10 reporting summer 2010	School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committees (drawing on the portfolio review process and in consultation with Executive Deans)
Project 5: International students	All Schools to strive to increase international student numbers and to work with the International Office and the International Group to ensure their particular needs are met.	2010-11 reporting summer 2011	Assistant Deans (Learning & Teaching) working with Assistant Deans with responsibility for Recruitment & Retention/International Recruitment
Project 6: Flexible accelerated undergraduate programmes	All Schools to examine the potential for recruiting students onto accelerated programmes such as three year degree programmes and integrating them into a predominantly part-time, evening institution with consideration to different forms of pedagogic approaches.	2010-11 reporting summer 2011	Assistant Deans (Learning & Teaching) working with Assistant Deans (Recruitment & Retention) (drawing on the first year of recruitment to the three-year LLB, BA Philosophy and BSc Psychology)
Project 7: Employer responsive provision	Each School to review academic programmes and to ensure, where appropriate, that they are flexible and responsive to employers.	2009-10 reporting summer 2010	School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committees in conjunction with the Institute of Professional Studies (drawing on the portfolio review process)

Aim II - Maintaining and enhancing the high quality of teaching within the context of a research-intensive environment			
Project 8: Defining high quality research-related teaching	All Schools to define high quality research-related teaching in light of a changing student body within a research-intensive environment.	2009-10 reporting summer 2010	School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committees (drawing on the findings of the Research-related Teaching Working Group and review of student profile)
Project 9: Research in teaching	All Schools to demonstrate the integration between research and teaching through teaching that is researched and constantly reflected upon and through teaching feeding into research activities.	2010-11 reporting summer 2011	School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committees working with School Research Committees
Project 10: Rewarding high quality teaching	All Schools to define how best to reward high quality teaching.	2009-10 reporting summer 2010	School Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committees in conjunction with the PVM for Learning & Teaching/Director of Human Resources