Master's Paper

The Strategic Direction of Birkbeck

1 This year for the first time, this paper is presented to the spring term Strategic Away Day Meetings of the SPC and then the Governors, rather than being presented to a special meeting of the Governors in the autumn term. Despite this change in the timing, the purpose of this paper is the same as in previous years, namely to review the current position of Birkbeck and to set out some ideas for our future strategy.

2 In the last few years, we have overcome two major challenges each of which threatened the survival of the College. Firstly, in 2008 the Government decision to withdraw HEFCE funding for students studying for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQ) to those they held already, resulted in the loss of 40% of our teaching funding. The re-organization of the College into five Schools with delegated financial responsibility, greatly facilitated the recruitment of significant numbers of additional students to replace those who were no longer funded.

3 Moreover, it provided the basis for our meeting the second challenge, namely the sector-wide withdrawal of HEFCE funding for all undergraduate students except those studying in very high cost or vulnerable subject areas, with the consequent need to considerably increase fees for undergraduate programmes. Although this coincided with the introduction of Government fee loans for part-time students, many such students proved highly reluctant to take out loans and were put off by the higher fees being charged. This resulted in a 40% downturn in part-time undergraduate numbers in 2012/13 compared to 2011/12 and this trend has continued, albeit less dramatically in subsequent years.

4 However, the introduction of three-year intensive evening degrees as part of our response to the ELQ crisis has allowed us to enhance undergraduate student numbers despite the downturn in part-time applications. Indeed, in 2014/15 almost two-thirds of our new undergraduates opted to study in this intensive three year mode.

5 Most importantly, we have survived these two major crises whilst maintaining our distinctive mission. As described below, the results of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) indicate that the College has maintained its position as a high quality research intensive institution. Moreover, in terms of teaching, we continue to offer flexible learning opportunities to those who do not wish or cannot study in the conventional three-year daytime undergraduate or one-year daytime postgraduate mode.
Similarly, in financial terms, we have not simply made it through the various crises. Rather, we have produced a steady surplus of income over expenditure in excess of £6 million p.a. for the last four years. In cash terms, this has generated considerable cash reserves amounting to around £40 million.

These successes pose a new and welcome strategic challenge for Birkbeck. Rather than simply trying to survive the current crisis, we now have the opportunity to consider how we wish to develop the College in the future and how the College should be positioned at the time of its 200th Anniversary in 2023 and beyond. The aim of this paper is to contribute to that debate both at the strategic meetings of the SPC and Governors, as well as in the general community of College staff, students and supporters.

**RESEARCH**

The results of the 2014 Research Excellent Framework (REF) convincingly demonstrated Birkbeck’s position as a high quality research intensive institution. Approximately three-quarters of the research submitted by the College was rated either ‘world leading’ (4*) or ‘internationally excellent’ (3*). This represents a considerable improvement on the results of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) when 56% of our research was rated 4* or 3*, paralleling the considerable improvement overall in the sector.

Part of this overall improvement in the sector, clearly represents strategic decisions of individual Universities to submit a lower proportion of their staff for assessment. Most importantly, Birkbeck submitted 83% of eligible staff for assessment, well above the national average. This results in our appearing higher up in league tables which take into account percentage of staff submitted rather than simply overall grade point average of research submitted. For example, the table in the THE on 1st January placed us 30th overall above Russell group members such as Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, Queen Mary, Sheffield and York. Similarly, the College performs strongly in league tables based simply on percentage of 4* research submitted indicating the very high quality of much of our research.

In subject terms, particularly strong performances were produced by the three submissions from the School of Science with Psychological Science occupying third to fifth position overall in the very large unit of assessment for Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience. Similarly, both our joint submissions with UCL in the science area performed strongly with our Earth Sciences Department rated 5th-6th in the Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences category, whilst Biological Sciences was rated from third (behind only Oxford and Cambridge) to 11th depending on the mechanism used to construct individual league tables.
A strong performance was also recorded by the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy with strong ratings for History, Philosophy, Politics and Sociology (a submission including staff in several departments).

Moreover, nearly all of Birkbeck’s submissions were in the top half of all submissions in the U.K., including not only those mentioned above but also Art and Design, English, Computer Science, Law and Modern Languages/Linguistics with particular improvement since the 2008 RAE being noted for Law and Modern Languages/Linguistics (following the recent review of this area conducted by our lay Governor, Mr Hugh Ferrand and Academic Board Governor Professor Julian Swann).

Although the final score for each submission is primarily determined by the quality of the research papers submitted, the overall score also contains assessments of research impact and research environment. The College also did well in these specific areas with eight of our submissions (Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience, Biological Sciences, Earth Systems and Environmental Science, Law, Modern Languages/Linguistics, English, History and Art and Design all achieving 100% of the highest ratings for research environment. This confirms the College’s status as one of the U.K’s leading institutions in which to conduct research. Similarly, three of these areas, Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience, History and Art and Design also scored 100% in the impact area indicating the manner in which our research is applied to specific issues in the outside world.

Although the figures on research environment and research are good they lag behind the scores for research publications. This indicates that it may be appropriate to provide further institutional support for research policy, strategy and infrastructure as well as continuing the College Anniversary Research Studentships (see below).

Overall however, this is an excellent performance made particularly impressive by the fact that the research being assessed would have been conducted whilst the College was passing through the two major crises described above, with College staff being strongly focused on the teaching area and student recruitment, potentially at the expense of their research activity. I am most grateful to Professor Stephen Frosh, the Pro-Vice Master for Research and his REF team for producing the College’s REF return and achieving such outstanding results.

Nonetheless, we cannot rest on our laurels and we need to consider how to continue our improvement at a rate greater than the rest of the sector prior to the next REF. For example, each Department/Unit of Assessment could be encouraged to consider its future research needs in the light of its REF result and
relate this to its teaching needs and future vacancies due to retirements etc. They could then put forward, via Schools, their staffing strategy rather than replacing vacancies piecemeal. Such a strategy would involve primarily junior posts but could also involve more senior posts where there was a need for strategic leadership. It would also be possible to use some of our financial surplus to fund early Career Fellowships across all areas. These would be tenure track positions for individuals who wish to focus on their research for two to five years prior to either applying for an externally funded Fellowship or being considered for a permanent research and teaching position at Birkbeck.

In the science area, such career development opportunities are a key part of the £600,000 award to the College from the Wellcome Trust under the Institutional Strategic Support Fund (ISSF). The College was invited to compete for this award as one of the 25 U.K. Higher Education Institutions with the greatest funding from the Wellcome Trust. We were successful in this competitive process, with an application which emphasized our strengths not only in Biological Sciences but also in the Medical Humanities, an area also funded by the Wellcome Trust. We have now received funding for our programme which includes an appointment in the area of public understanding of science, several Fellowship appointments for young researchers to prepare for their first independent position, as well as pump priming research funds for those who already hold an independent position. A novel aspect of the scheme is the funding available for PhD students who have submitted their thesis but need a further period of funding to complete their scientific publications ready for submission. Clearly, several of these funding schemes could be mimicked with College funds across areas outside the scope of the ISSF support.

As well as the successful institutional funding of ISSF, our success in open competitions for support for individual research projects continued to improve in 2013/14. Thus, despite an increasingly competitive environment for project-research funding, the College’s research income increased to £11 million in 2013/14, an increase of 21% over the previous year.

As in previous years, staff in the School of Science obtained a number of major research grants. Thus, for example, in Biological Sciences Professor Bonnie Wallace was awarded over half a million pounds by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) for a study of chronic pain and neurological diseases such as epilepsy, whilst Professor Gabriel Waksman (a joint appointment between Birkbeck and UCL) led a successful application to BBSRC for a £15 million Doctoral Training Centre across several institutions representing the largest centre awarded, comprising approximately 12% of all BBSRC-funded research students.
Similarly, in the Department of Psychological Sciences, the Wellcome Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation awarded £1 million to a joint project by Birkbeck and the Institute of Education using computer games to challenge children’s incorrect assumptions about maths and science. Also in the Department of Psychological Sciences, staff led by Professor Annette Karimiloff-Smith were part of the London Down’s Syndrome Consortium awarded £2 million by the Wellcome Trust for a project using non-invasive tests to investigate the development of babies and infants with Down’s syndrome.

Such grant successes were not confined to science, with, for example, Professor Daniel Pick from the Department of History, Classics and Archaeology being awarded £900,000 by the Wellcome Trust for a new study into the role of the clinical professions in “brain-washing” during the Cold War.

The research strength of the College in a number of diverse areas, indicates that it is appropriate to strengthen interdisciplinary research across different areas, as recommended by the “Strategic Futures Group” of younger staff established last year. Thus, in this year’s competition for internally funded College Anniversary PhD studentships, preference will be given to projects involving more than one Department or School. Similarly, the newly recreated College Innovation Fund is seeking to support the development of new areas of work with the potential to become self-sustaining.

As in previous years, our research grant successes were paralleled by awards to outstanding individuals at Birkbeck. For example, Professor Joanna Bourke (Department of History, Classics and Archaeology) became the tenth Birkbeck academic to be elected as Fellow of the British Academy, the prestigious national Academy representing the Humanities and Social Sciences. Professor Joni Lovenduski (Department of Politics) was awarded the Sir Isaiah Berlin Prize for lifetime contribution to political studies by the Political Studies Association. Professor Costas Douzinas (School of Law and Director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities) was awarded the James Boyd White Award in recognition of his contribution and commitment to the interdisciplinary study of law, culture and humanities.

Amongst more junior staff, Dr Gillian Woods (Department of English and Humanities) won this year’s Shakespeare Globe Book Award for her book “Shakespeare’s Unreformed Fictions”, whilst Dr Angelica Ronald (Department of Psychological Sciences) won the Janet Taylor-Spence Award for transformative early career contributions and Dr Mai Sato (School of Law) won the Young Criminologist’s Award of the Japanese Association of Sociological Criminology for her book “The Death Penalty in Japan: will the public tolerate abolition?”. 
In the non-academic area, Tricia King (Pro-Vice Master for Strategic Engagement and Recruitment) received the Annual Distinguished Service Award from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) which honours individuals whose professional activities have made a significant and lasting impact in Higher Education. Birkbeck also won a Silver CASE Excellence Award in the Annual Magazine Category for the Issue of BBK dedicated to the Memory of our President, Professor Eric Hobsbawm beating forty entries from institutions across the world.

At the institutional level, the College was shortlisted for The Times Higher Education University of the Year. Moreover, despite the evermore competitive nature of the THE World University rankings, the College maintained its position in the top 1% of Universities in the World, above a number of Russell Group and other former 1994 Group Universities being positioned in the 226th to 250th band in the THE World University rankings (2012/13: 201st to 250th band).

In the same rankings, our Arts and Humanities area was ranked 49th in the World, up from 44th in 2012/13. This very impressive performance indicates the international reputation of this area despite its relatively weaker showing in the 2014 REF compared to other areas of the College. The strength of this area is also indicated by the decision of world renowned academics in this area, such as Professor Jacqueline Rose and Professor (now Dame) Marina Warner to move to Birkbeck as well as the invitation to the College to join the Consortium of the Humanities and the Arts South East England (CHASE) which is a Consortium fostering collaboration in the Arts and Humanities between nine of the premier Universities in South East England.

ESTATES

It is obviously of vital importance that we provide the very best facilities for our research, as well as ensuring that high quality teaching facilities are provided for students. From our own resources, we carried out a number of improvement projects over the summer of 2014 including the completion of a new reception area and replacement of lecture theatre air and heating systems in the Clore building for the School of Business, Economics and Informatics as well as external refurbishments to the School of Arts premises in Gordon Square and those of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy in Russell Square.

Although Government/HEFCE funding for capital facilities has been greatly reduced in recent years, we have been successful in obtaining matched funding of £650,000 from HEFCE for new Earth Sciences Laboratories. These will greatly enhance the research and teaching facilities available to this very successful department and since they will also be used by UCL, will further the close links between our two
departments which has proved so successful both in the recent REF and in many other ways.

30 Our current major Estates project is however, the development of a Toddler Laboratory for the Department of Psychological Sciences, building on the great success of the Baby Laboratory in terms of identifying early markers of autism, potentially allowing much earlier interventions before the onset of the symptoms.

31 Following the receipt of major donations from the Wohl Foundation (£1.3 million) and the Wolfson Foundation (£800,000), Governors made the decision to proceed with this project. Unfortunately, progress has been delayed by the need to negotiate with the neighbouring Warburg Institute to gain their approval for the proposed scheme since the University would not grant us the site without such approval. The Warburg has now approved a revised scheme for the building and we have subsequently agreed the sum payable for the site with the University, allowing the project to proceed.

32 As indicated in last year’s Strategic Document, our master planning exercise identified a number of building opportunities on or adjacent to our buildings. This led Professor Gabriel Waksman, Head of the Joint Birkbeck/UCL Institute of Structural and Molecular Biology to propose the development of a new scientific institute to build on the excellent work being carried out both at Birkbeck and UCL in Structural Biology. This Institute would be named the Institute for the Study of the Mechanisms of Molecular Machines (IM³) allowing basic cellular processes and their alteration in disease to be analysed.

33 Subsequently, the project has grown considerably to include a large joint teaching facility with UCL. This would include a 500-seat lecture theatre, providing us for the first time with a large lecture theatre, as well as a large number of other teaching rooms. These would be used by UCL during the day and by Birkbeck in the evening providing both Colleges with much needed facilities. Indeed, UCL spends approximately £800,000 per year renting teaching accommodation from us during the day and conversely we spend approximately £300,000 per year renting space from UCL in the evening.

34 Although it was originally intended that the Institute would be sited on the North Heating Chamber site at the north end of Torrington Square, it now appears that Camden Council will allow only a small above ground building with basement floors on this site. Moreover, the University has identified this as one of the sites it wishes to investigate in detail as part of its master planning exercise which will greatly delay any potential allocation to us and UCL.
One alternative to the North Heating Chamber would be the reconstruction of the extension building to the Birkbeck main building. Although constructed later than our main building, this building will need to be rebuilt in the next twenty years or so due to its poor construction. Moreover, we believe that a building at least twice the size of this building could be constructed on this site due to its relatively low height compared to adjacent buildings and its unusual restricted footprint.

Evidently, the demolition of this building and its reconstruction would pose considerable decanting problems both in terms of laboratories and offices. Moreover, we would need to carefully negotiate with UCL their role in a building which would be constructed on our core site.

Nonetheless, this possibility offers a unique opportunity for a landmark project as we move towards our 200th Anniversary. It should attract considerable financial support from donors to both UCL and Birkbeck who are interested in support for research excellence and/or student opportunity. It would also indicate how a relatively small College can fulfil its specialist mission of widening participation in an environment of research excellence by close co-operation with but independence from a much larger mainstream College.

The model of evening use of teaching facilities by Birkbeck and daytime use by a partner is I believe one of considerable significance for the future of the College. Following recent property transfers within our joint building with UEL in Stratford, much of the space is now used by UEL in the daytime and by us in the evening. Similarly, the SOAS development in the North Block of Senate House is predicated on our use of the facilities in the evening with SOAS being the users during the day.

This joint use of facilities provides us with an effective say in the management of the teaching facilities we are using whilst providing us with a partner to share the cost in their construction and running. Moreover, electronic signage allows the space to be identified as Birkbeck space from 6.00 pm, so providing our students with the feeling that they are studying in Birkbeck facilities rather in a random space which is available for rental during the evening.

Indeed, I believe that it should be one of our ambitions that by our 200th Anniversary all Birkbeck students will be studying either in fully owned Birkbeck facilities or in shared facilities operating on this basis.

**TEACHING**

The provision of excellent teaching facilities, described above, is clearly of vital importance to the core mission of the College with our teaching activity being
absolutely critical to the College both in terms of its mission and its financial stability. Indeed, student fee income in 2013/14 constituted 57% of our total income as compared to 24% for Funding Council grants and 11% for Research grants.

42 It is therefore of particular importance that our scores in the National Student Survey (NSS) improved further this year. Our overall score for student satisfaction increased from 4.2 last year to 4.3 placing us joint first in London alongside Imperial, Queen Mary, Royal Holloway and Brunel and above many other institutions such as LSE, UCL and King’s College London. It is noteworthy that in the REF rankings mentioned above, we rank above all those who had a similar score for overall student satisfaction except Imperial.

43 As well as high scores for student satisfaction, we have also achieved success in the widening participation area. HEFCE recently funded 35 local networks under the National Network of Collaborative Outreach. The lead organisation in each network will act as a single point of contact to help teachers and advisors find out about HE outreach activity in their area and gain advice about progression into HE. We were successful in our two applications, one based on our existing Linking London Lifelong Learning Network with us as the host institution and the other a Pan London single point of contact submission led and hosted by Birkbeck which aims to co-ordinate the work of the three London Networks run respectively by Linking London, Access HE and Aim Higher London South.

44 These networks will greatly enhance opportunities for outreach work especially amongst younger people. In addition, we will also focus on widening participation at postgraduate level. PGT has been called “the new frontier of widening participation” and we do less well in this area than we should, given our mission and our focus on it at undergraduate level.

Undergraduate degrees

45 Our novel three-year evening degrees continue to attract increasing numbers of applications and enrolments. This year HEFCE raised our Student Number Control (SNC) (the number of full-time students that we can recruit) to 1,100 compared to an SNC of 700 last year. Actual enrolments were 1,190 compared to 926 last year. The 2014/15 figure is within our SNC quota since students with A level grades of ABB or better are not counted in the quota. Similarly, the total includes 70 international students on three-year full-time degree programmes (compared to 63 in 2013/14) who are also not counted in the quota.

46 The magnitude in growth of our full-time students can be seen by the fact that in 2010/11 we recruited 127 full-time undergraduate students compared to 1,190 in
2014/15. This raises obvious questions as to our strategy when the SNC cap on full-time student numbers is removed in 2015/16.

It is likely that some further growth in numbers on our three-year courses will occur naturally, for example, due to the introduction of attractive new courses such BA Creative Writing, BA Marketing and BSc Economics in 2015/16 and continued development of the existing portfolio. Similarly, we intend to continue to enhance our recruitment of full-time international students who can obtain visas to study on these three-year degree programmes. However, with these changes alone, it is likely that growth rates in student numbers will be much more modest than the spectacular rises seen in earlier years.

Based on the success of these programmes we now need to debate what numbers we wish to aim for on these programmes in future years. Although we are currently financially stable, our surplus could be wiped out by future increases in staff salaries, employers National Insurance and pension contributions. Moreover, the last large four year cohort (2011-12) will graduate this summer. Hence, there is a need for expansion in student numbers on our three year degrees.

Nonetheless, there needs to be a debate about to what extent to further enhance student numbers on these programmes in excess of continuing with natural modest growth as compared to enhancing postgraduate numbers (see below). Enhanced growth would involve new initiatives such as, for example, greater targeting of Schools and Colleges in order to increase the number of 18-year olds that we recruit. In 2014/15, 32% of new entrants on our full-time undergraduate courses were aged 18-20 compared to 6% on our four-year courses. However, only a relatively low proportion of these had taken A levels in the previous two years, as opposed to other qualifications.

Although younger, many of these full-time students have typical Birkbeck student attitudes to the combination of work and study. In contrast, we receive very large numbers of applications via UCAS from younger students but most of these are not converted into enrolments. It is likely therefore that, because of our lower A level requirements, these students are using us as an insurance offer so that they can enter a University of London College even if they do not well in their A levels. Further investigation as to why the majority of applications from younger students (both home and overseas) do not convert into enrolments would be required if we wish to enhance the number of younger students enrolling in Birkbeck.

It may be preferable however, to conduct further discussions with Schools and FE Colleges to identify more Birkbeck-type students amongst their pupils. To facilitate this, in February we will hold a major event at the Arcelor Mittal orbit in East London (generously provided free by Arcelor Mittal). This will be entitled
“Reimagining University education in London” and will target Head teachers and careers advisors in Schools (as well as business leaders) to make them more aware of our unique offering.

52 In contrast to the progressive rise in numbers on our three-year degree programmes, the numbers on the four-year programmes have continued to decline. In 2014, 762 students enrolled on these programmes compared to 908 in 2013/14, a decrease of 16%. Overall, numbers of part-time students have declined from 1796 in 2010/11 to 762 in 2014/15. Clearly, some students who would previously have taken the four-year programmes are now enrolling on the three-year programmes attracted by the ability to finish more quickly and to obtain loans for maintenance as well as for fees.

53 However, we are clearly no longer recruiting significant numbers of students who would previously have studied on our part-time programmes. It is unlikely that numbers of such students will recover in the absence of Government intervention. We continue to lobby for such interventions. Encouragingly, the UUK Student Funding Panel of which I am a member, although mostly concerned with full-time students, drew attention to the serious decline in part-time study and the need to encourage greater participation of part-time and mature students.

54 Potential Government interventions could include HEFCE support for part-time students (as occurs in Wales) allowing us to lower our fees and/or the availability of maintenance loans for part-time students. Moreover, following the Government decision to allow ELQ students in some specific subjects (Computer Science, Engineering and Technology) to obtain loans, we are arguing for an extension of this exemption to part-time students studying a wider range of subjects. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that any incoming Government would give this a high priority in the current financial situation.

55 One interesting development in this area however, is the stabilisation of numbers entering our one-year Certificate programmes in 2014/15 compared to 2013/14. This follows a period of progressive decline since 2012/13 when higher fees were introduced. The programmes which are recruiting well are those which lead to degree programmes, particularly where a good performance in the Certificate provides direct entry to the second year of a degree programme. Interestingly, one such successful Certificate is the Life Sciences Cert HE from which graduates move onto study Medicine elsewhere, indicating that the progression route need not necessarily be within the College (although see below). Further development of Certificate programmes with appropriate progression routes and their marketing as the “Gateway to Birkbeck” may therefore provide the means of boosting recruitment to both our full-time and part-time undergraduate programmes.
amongst those who are hesitant to commit to more than a one year of initial study for reasons of confidence and/or finance.
Postgraduate degrees

Encouragingly, following declines in 2012/13 and 2013/14, recruitment to our two-year Master degrees showed an encouraging increase in 2014/15 with student numbers up by 8% compared to last year, whilst numbers on our one-year courses are similar in 2014/15 to 2013/14. Moreover, international student numbers on our full-time one-year courses rose by 8% in 2014/15 compared to 2013/14.

Clearly, 2015/16 will be a year of major change in the Masters area with the first cohort of students under the new undergraduate fee regime, graduating from University and potentially entering Masters programmes. These students will evidently carry £27,000 of fee debt as well as considerable debt for their maintenance loans. In order to encourage them to enter Masters programmes, Government has funded a number of student bursaries at each HEI (with matched funding being required from the institution) for those graduating at that institution or elsewhere in 2014/15 and proceeding directly to postgraduate study. We will have 82 awards to allocate in 2015/16.

Moreover, Government has announced that from 2016/17, for the first time, student loans will be available for postgraduate students on similar terms to those available for undergraduate students. Encouragingly, such loans will be available to part-time as well as full-time students. However, it is proposed that they will be restricted to those under the age of 30. On the basis of current student numbers in the sector, this would eliminate 20% of full-time postgraduates and 70% of part-time postgraduates.

The sole argument in favour of such age restrictions appears to be affordability with older students having less of their working lives to repay their loans. We will lobby against this proposal in the consultation period arguing that it is both discriminatory on grounds of age and sex (a higher proportion of postgraduate students over 30 are women compared to younger students). Moreover, it greatly limits opportunity for development and retraining, running contrary to the culture of lifelong learning which those of all political parties supposedly support.

Whether a change to the age restriction is introduced or not, our overall strategy has to be to indicate the attractiveness of the Birkbeck model of working and learning so providing income to the student regardless of whether a loan is available to them or not. Moreover, we need to emphasize that Birkbeck currently and in the future allows postgraduate students to pay their fees by instalments, one of only two institutions which does so. Clearly, such an easy payment plan offers the opportunity to pay as you learn rather than accumulate a debt as in the loans system. Moreover, for those who wish to obtain a loan but cannot do so due to their being over the age of 30, it can be presented as an interest free loan which is repayable during the course of study.
Again, as with undergraduate degrees, we need to decide to what extent we wish to expand our Masters numbers by emphasizing the “earn while you learn and pay as you learn” possibilities of study at Birkbeck. If we wish to do this, then we would need to expand our recruitment by targeting undergraduate students from provincial Universities and from the EU, emphasising the attractiveness of moving to London and combining work with postgraduate study in an affordable manner at a high quality research institution.

**Future development of teaching**

The key to our teaching strategy must be to provide learning opportunities which are as flexible as possible to suit the different needs of our students. A number of potential means of doing this are possible and I will discuss some of these in turn. Several possibilities relate to the development of our intensive three-year undergraduate and one-year postgraduate programmes for which we were awarded £1.47 million from the HEFCE Catalyst Fund but others have broader implications.

**On-line learning opportunities**

As discussed in last year’s strategy paper, I believe that they are a number of our courses which could be offered in a fully on-line mode but I do not think this should be the predominant mode of our teaching. Thus, our students appreciate and benefit from the face to face opportunities which we provide and would not wish to study at a mini Open University-type institution in London.

It is of considerable importance however, that we use on-line learning in the most optimum way possible within a blended learning context to maximise our students’ use of their time. Thus, for example, we are now undertaking “lecture-capture” so that students who miss a lecture due to work commitments, etc. can catch up in their own time. Obviously, this opens the possibility of students choosing to watch the lecture rather than attend it. We may need therefore to consider whether the optimum use of face to face time involves tutorials/small group work rather than conventional lectures which may be better delivered on-line.

Similarly, it is possible to combine periods of study on-line with intensive periods of face to face study at Birkbeck as has been pioneered by the School of Law. This allows students to carry out most of their study in their home location, outside London or abroad whilst attending the College for short periods of intensive study.

**Time of study**

As well as short periods of study at Birkbeck, as described above, it is possible to envisage other study patterns to fit in with student’s requirements. For example, some Departments such as Computer Science or Biological Sciences offer daytime
study opportunities to those who are studying full-time. Thus, in courses with large numbers of students some may prefer to take some courses during the day whilst other prefer to study entirely in the evening.

67 Similarly, as suggested by the “Strategic Futures Group” of younger Birkbeck staff set up last year, we should offer study opportunities for as much of the year as possible. Thus, unlike conventional full-time students, many of our students do not wish to have a long summer break but would like to gain some credits during this period. Rather than offering a large number of specialist courses each attracting only a relatively small number of students, we should seek to offer generic/skills and professional development courses in this period to allow students on many different courses to attend.

**Place of study**

68 Following the success of our Stratford venture, we are developing a Birkbeck presence on a more restricted scale in other parts of London. In 2015 we will begin teaching the Certificate in Higher Education Introductory Studies (HEIS) in premises in High Road Tottenham which have been newly restored following the North London riots. The Mayor of London, the GLA and Haringey Council (which has no Universities in its area) have been working very closely with us on this with the Mayor’s office, finding us premises and the Council sponsoring bursaries for local residents and supporting an outreach worker. Students graduating from this course will, as normal be able to enter the second year of degree programmes at Birkbeck in Bloomsbury. We are already in discussions with the local authority about a similar venture in Croydon, south London and would subsequently look to develop one also in west London, so that the opportunity to study the HEIS Certificate is available in north, south, east and west as well as central London. This could potentially be supported by funding from the European Social Fund.

**Supporting study**

69 Through Catalyst we are developing ways to support students at two key points: during the first year of undergraduate study and in their transition into postgraduate study. These include more supportive pathways for those who need them during their first year as undergraduates and blended modules to equip students with the critical skills needed at postgraduate level. We are also increasing the ways in which students can access additional support to supplement their programmes, including the development of blended learning modules to support students with their generic study skills and their academic English. We will continue to develop this work through our ‘Centre for Transformative Practice in Learning and Teaching.’
Introducing new subjects

A considerable part of the current success of the College is due to the introduction of new subjects such as Law and Management when Baroness Blackstone was Master with these areas being highly successful in recruiting large numbers of students. As part of our mission to offer flexible learning opportunities to all who can benefit, we should continually monitor the possibility of conducting teaching (and potentially research) in new areas, particularly as we approach our 200th Anniversary.

Given the success of the Life Sciences, Cert HE as a feeder to full-time Medical Schools (see above), I have thought for some time that offering Medicine part-time would be an area where the College could offer a valuable service to a large number of students. We could readily teach pre-clinical Medicine taking advantage of the skills in our Biological Sciences Department complemented by Teaching and Scholarship staff. However, we would need to partner with an established Medical School with hospital links to teach the Clinical course. We have had discussions on this with UCL but they preferred to maximise their numbers of overseas students rather than partnering with us. It may be worth however, having discussions with the new Principals of King’s and Imperial who may see the value of this partnership as a widening participation initiative.

Another possibly less complex possibility would be to develop incrementally courses in Engineering/Technology. Thus, ELQ students in these areas, like those in Computer Science, are eligible for loans so opening the possibility of attracting both ELQ and non-ELQ students. Moreover, whilst our Computer Sciences Department links to other Departments in the School of Business in terms of its role in business, it would benefit from the presence of Engineering in terms of its more technical aspects. If we decide to consider this possibility, we would evidently need to agree teaching laboratory sharing arrangements, allowing us to use the facilities of another College in the evening, paralleling our sharing of lecture theatres/rooms discussed above.

Student Financial Support

In 2014/15, 51% of three-year undergraduate students and 40% of four-year students applied for financial support from the College. This indicates the enormous importance of fundraising to support our undergraduate students.

It is however, equally important to raise funds for postgraduate students, particularly as we move into an era where such potential students will have large undergraduate debt. Traditionally, this has been more difficult as donors often prefer to support those who have “not had a chance” rather that those who are seeking a further degree.
To overcome this problem, our Development Department has devised the concept of a learning ladder in which the donor sponsors one or more students at each of Certificate, Undergraduate Degree, Masters Degree and possibly a PhD student. This is proving popular with both individual donors and corporate donors such as Arcelor Mittal. In addition, we are offering donors the opportunity to sponsor a PhD student, to research a topic which is of interest to them. Thus, for example, the Community Security Trust has sponsored one of their employees to do PhD research on anti-Semitism in Britain at the Pears Institute whilst the Good Energy Company (whose CEO is an alumnus) has sponsored a student researching the area of alternative energy in the Department of Geography.

As we move towards our 200th Anniversary, our ambition should be to have sufficient funds to ensure that any student who can benefit from studying at any level in Birkbeck, is not prevented from doing so for financial reasons.

THE FUTURE

As we begin to plan for our 200th Anniversary in 2023, our core mission is intact and we are financially stable. We can therefore move from the crisis management which has predominated in the last few years to real strategic planning for the future.

It should be clear from this document that a very large number of opportunities exist and we need to debate which of these are most promising in terms of consistency with our mission, practical implementation, sustainability and fundraising potential.

To facilitate this and our long term planning, I have established a 200th Anniversary group. This consists of six members of SPC (Master, Vice Master, College Secretary, Director of External Relations, one PVM and one Dean, nominated respectively by PVMs and Deans) together with six members of the Strategic Futures Group (one from each School and the central administration).

This group has recently held its first meeting at which a number of novel ideas were discussed and it will continue to meet regularly reporting to SPC and via SPC to Governors. I believe together, this group, SPC and Governors will be able to develop a clear vision for Birkbeck and how we financially support this vision as well as planning the celebration of our 200th Anniversary itself.

Professor David S. Latchman, CBE
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