BIRKBECK
University of London

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of 16 October 2016

Present
Fraser Keir, Katharine Bock, Adam Towner, Roz Dixon, Eddie Bruce-Jones, Mara Arts, Scott Miller, Hugh Kilmister, Caroline McDonald, Claudia Freemantle, Kate Mackenzie Davey, Luisa Staley, Tom Noble, Kerry Harman, Garmon ap Garth, Tara Olanes, Jeremy Tanner, Richard Evemy, Melissa Butcher, Chris Dewberry, Gabriel Koureas, (for Scott Rodgers, Arts), Justine Abbot, Katherine Thompson, Roisin Lynch, Alex Colas, Eleanor Mongey

Apologies
Keith Harrison, Elizabeth Charles, Scott Rodgers, Rose Devaney

30 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP
Confirmed
30.1 Updated Terms of Reference and Scheme of Membership for 2016-17 (SEWPC 2016 01), subject to the addition of the College Dean, and a change to the representative for the School of Arts.

31 MINUTES AND REPORT
Noted
31.1 The Report to Academic Board (SEWPC 2016 02)

Confirmed
31.2 The minutes of the meeting of 10 May 2016.

32 ACTION SHEET
Noted
32.1 Progress on actions agreed at the last meeting (SEWPC 2016 03)

Predictors of student success
32.2 Potential interventions that might come from this research were being taken into consideration when considering open evenings.

Action
32.3 (GaG) Report on progress in this area to the Spring term SEWPC meeting.
Care leavers

32.3 Improvements in the available data have indicated that there are more care leavers at Birkbeck than was previously known; work has started on a report on widening participation and care leavers at Birkbeck that will be brought back to a future meeting.

33  MATTERS ARISING

Induction Programme

33.1 This year’s induction programme for new students introduced the use of a guidebook app, which has had a high level of student engagement. Approximately 1000 students attended the main Saturday induction event, and in the lead up to this students engaged in large numbers with the Get Ahead programme of events at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Students who participated in induction events would be tracked to monitor retention figures. The Committee heard that there had been positive feedback from students on the orientation programme.

33.2 Members noted that the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy are moving towards a participatory model in their orientation programming, delivering a more student-like experience at an earlier stage rather than just having a series of talks and information. It was noted that the School of Law are also taking this approach, as are the Department of Organisational Psychology.

33.3 The Students’ Union also run their own orientation programming, which is successful, and reported good feedback on the College wide orientation offering. For next year, there will be further discussion on how the College and the SU can work together on orientation events.

Access Agreement

33.4 The Committee heard that a revised agreement has been submitted to OFFA stating the College’s intention to increase fees for new students in line with the new governmental guidelines.

33.5 There is currently a Government consultation underway on the potential for HE institutions to set up or sponsor secondary schools, and this is likely to feed through into the Access Agreement guidance for next year. The Policy Advisor is leading on Birkbeck’s response to this consultation, working with the Head of Widening Participation, who is also discussing the issue with WP colleagues in other institutions.

32  CHAIR’S REPORT

32.1 Since the last meeting, the UK has voted to leave the EU. A group has been set up, including Tim Markham, Anita Walsh and Joanne Leal, to consider how the College can lead on talking about Brexit from an academic point of view.
32.2 Members heard that, due to a lot of conversion and recruitment work by colleagues, the College’s recruitment figures are looking more positive. The Chair noted that Birkbeck needs to continue to recruit more students in order to be able to afford to expand the College’s estate and refurbish existing buildings to meet the need of the students. All academic members were asked to encourage their students to complete the enrolment process.

32.3 Roz Dixon has been leading on the development of a Foundation Year programme, and seven pathways have now been developed that will either lead students onto courses or provide an exit award. There will be two staff briefings on the programme next week.

Action

32.4 **(School representatives)** Encourage academic and administrative colleagues to attend the Foundation Year briefings.

32.5 The results of the student surveys (the National Student Survey, Birkbeck Student Survey and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey) were becoming available. In some areas such as academic support and assessment and feedback the College’s results were disappointing.

32.6 The NSS would be one of the metrics which informed the TEF. The results of the TEF will have a significant impact not only on the fee levels that institutions are able to charge, and positions in the league tables, but also on the reputation of the College as a whole. This highlights the importance of the student engagement projects that are aimed at addressing the issues that students are raising through these surveys.

32.7 Members noted that the demographics of the College’s student population are changing, and this will bring new challenges for frontline services in the College, particularly those dealing with student wellbeing. The impact of this and how it affects student success will need to be monitored.

Action

32.8 **(Eleanor Mongey)** Bring this issue back to a future meeting of SEWPC.

33 **RETENTION INITIATIVES**

Received

33.1 A written report on retention initiatives in BEI **(SEWPC 2016 04)**, and a verbal report on retention initiatives in SSHP.

Noted

33.2 The School of Business, Economics and Informatics (BEI) employ two full time Learning Development Tutors, who run a programme of support sessions ranging
from individual tutorial sessions to group sessions, and offer study skills training along with online resources. They also have a peer mentoring scheme, which has grown since its initial trial in 2013-14 to be available for all new undergraduate students. Both mentors and mentees give positive feedback on the scheme, and there is a measurably lower dropout rate for participants. From 2015-16 external trainers are being introduced for mentors. Every student in BEI is assigned a personal tutor, and the School continues to promote the use of personal tutors and share best practice across the College. The School produced a guide for personal tutors in 2015-16 and runs a successful in-house training session for tutors in BEI.

33.3 The School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy (SSHP) reported that they have also put a peer mentoring scheme into place, based on the BEI scheme. It is too early for the SSHP scheme to have any retention data to report, though it is felt that the scheme is helpful, although its implementation has had resource implications. SSHP have a 0.5FTE Learning Development Coordinator in place, whose role is to signpost the support available across the College to students.

Action

33.4 (School and Professional Services Departments representatives) Report to SEWPC at the next meeting on retention initiatives taking place in the Schools and Departments.

33.5 (School and Professional Services Departments representatives) Use the Tableau reports on student withdrawals to consider interventions that could be made before the points at which students were more likely to withdraw.

Noted

33.6 Dr Chris Dewberry gave an update on his work on the predictors of student success survey. It was hoped that identifying factors which made students more likely to complete their programmes would allow for the development of targeted interventions to increase retention. A new approach to the survey was being planned to increase the response rate and improve the data. An application for Catalyst funding was being made to support and develop the work on the survey. SEWPC would continue to receive regular updates on progress on this work.

34 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS

Received

34.1 An update from the Strategic Projects Manager on progress in those of the student engagement projects that currently have central project management resource allocated to them (SEWPC 2016 05)

Noted
34.2 A number of projects which had been started as part of the Catalyst programme are now being taken forward within the Schools and Professional Services departments rather than as central projects.

Query resolution
34.3 This project is the continuation of work initially started two years ago to develop a more advanced system of tracking and acting on queries the College receives. Having mapped the technical requirements for the project and held a workshop for academic and professional services staff, the Process Improvement team built a software solution and working pilot is now ready to go out to Schools and Professional Services departments for feedback. This testing process with colleagues is expected to take 3-4 months. The subsequent implementation phase of the project is expected to start in Spring/Summer 2017.

Personal tutors
34.4 In consultation with academics and Professional Services colleagues a policy has been drafted that defines what a personal tutor should do and what postgraduate and undergraduate students can expect from their personal tutors. The policy is being taken through College committees for formal approval in the Autumn term.

Competition and Markets Authority
34.5 Birkbeck is already compliant with CMA expectations in most areas, but there are areas where action is required to ensure full compliance. A project has been set up to take forward identified necessary actions in the following key areas:
- Provision of information at offer stage and provision of fair variation clauses.
- Providing contract information in durable medium.
- Ongoing review of provision of information to ensure compliance.

Action
34.6 (School, Professional Services Departments and Students’ Union representatives) Share this paper with colleagues.

35 WIDENING PARTICIPATION
Received
35.1 A report on the development of best practice guidelines on making non-curriculum provision more accessible to Widening Participation students (SEWPC 2016 06)

Noted
35.2 Following on from the development of a Widening Participation Framework that aims to identify widening participation students, it was found that widening participation students are less likely to be engaged with Birkbeck, to attend extracurricular activities, and to be successful in application to these activities. These
activities include schemes such as Get Talking, Mentoring Pathways, the Careers Service, and Birkbeck Chat.

35.3 Proposed best practice guidelines have therefore been developed to increase the accessibility of these schemes to widening participation students. The advice also includes encouraging a set of access monitoring questions in order to improve the accuracy of the data collected on students who engage with these activities.

35.4 Members heard that the Get Talking programme involved prospective students and alumni meeting to discuss the experience of studying at Birkbeck, and was aimed at improving retention by allowing prospective students to consider whether it was a good time for them to start a programme of study.

Action

35.5 (CMcD) Organise a programme of visits to Schools to ensure that colleagues are aware of the existence of these extra-curricular activities, so that they can encourage students to engage with them, and promote the best practice guidelines.

5 ALUMNI FUND
Approved

5.1 Applications to the Alumni Fund Grant scheme that had been considered by the Alumni Fund working group. (SEWPC 2016 07)

Noted

5.2 The Committee was pleased to note that due to successful fundraising there had been a £15K increase to the amount available for these grants, and that they had been awarded to a diverse selection of projects.

5.3 The Committee noted that, where possible, projects should involve the use of internal research or consultancy support rather than external consultancy.

5.4 SEWPC noted the College’s thanks to the alumni whose donations made the grant scheme possible. The successful applicants were asked to liaise with the Development and Alumni Manager on progress in their projects to ensure that alumni were informed of what their donations had achieved.

5.5 Going forward, the fund would be referred to as the Alumni Fund Innovation Grant internally. In keeping with practice in the wider sector, external communications would focus on ‘supporting Birkbeck’ rather than using a specific name for the fund. These changes were expected to improve clarity around the purpose of the grants.

6 SOCIAL MEDIA PRINCIPLES
Endorsed
6.1 Guidelines on social media principles for students and staff (SEWPC 2016 08)

Noted

6.2 The Committee noted that these are not intended to place restrictions on freedom of speech, but to provide guidance for those who are using official College or Student Union social media accounts. These guidelines will also be considered by HRSPC and SPC.

7 MEETING DATES

Noted

7.1 The dates of meetings for the rest of the session:

- 26 January 2017
- 10 May 2017