BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

14 December 2016

Present
David Latchman (Chair), Matthew Innes, Hilary Fraser, Diane Houston, Keith Harrison, Nick Keep, Johnathan Woodhead, Keith Willett, Katharine Bock, Megan Reeves, Stuart Motha, James Murphy, Jonah Duffin, Matthew Davies, Julian Swann, Roz Dixon, Jeremy Tanner, Stephen Frosh, Tim Markham, John Kempton

Apologies
Fraser Keir, Philip Powell

In attendance
Julia Day, Jasbir Gill, Kashim Barick

29 MINUTES
Confirmed
29.1 The minutes of the meeting of 19 October 2016.

29.2 The Minister for Universities and Science recently announced that mature student numbers had recovered to pre-2012 levels. This however was an overestimate as the figures reflected full time students only. This oversight has been communicated to the Minister who is now aware that most Birkbeck part time students are mature students.

30 ACTIONS
Noted
30.1 Progress on actions agreed at the last meeting (SP 2016 22)

Foundation Years
30.2 Members asked if the Foundation Years for Law programme has been launched on UCAS. It was reported that details will be communicated to the Committee at the next meeting.

TEF
30.3 Members heard that the work towards integrating the Learning & Teaching working group and the College’s professional services has progressed. Two working groups have now been established, a TEF drafting group and a TEF review group. The drafting group have had an initial meeting and the review group are scheduled to convene later in the week.

30.4 Both groups will continue to hold regular meetings leading up to the submission date of 26th January 2017.
Noted

30.5 The Committee noted that the College was recently visited by the DfE who have indicated that the bronze, silver and gold grading method may be subject to change. This as well as the distribution of flags were discussed at various briefing events within Schools.

30.6 The College is forecasting that it will be awarded a bronze grade which by default will be the grade awarded to any HEI that has two negative metrics. Birkbeck is the only HEI in the country with three positive flags within the bronze category therefore the College will make a strong case that a silver grade would be more appropriate.

Personal Tutors

30.7 It was reported that the Executive Deans have not yet nominated academics to participate in the project group. Richard Evemy is currently structuring the project and outlining essential activities. Members heard that the department of Psychology will be piloting Personal Tutors.

EU Referendum

30.8 Birkbeck’s webpages are being maintained as more information about the impact of the referendum becomes available. Although definitive conclusions about EU nationals living in the UK cannot yet be communicated, early indications suggest that they may be granted residency rights.

31 STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Received

31.1 An update on student recruitment (SP 2016 23)

Noted

31.2 Following a slow start to the 2016 recruitment cycle, cross College conversion initiatives and strong international recruitment resulted in the College finishing the year 7% above target. Large increases in postgraduate recruitment, a halt to decreases in undergraduate part time recruitment and improved conversion rates of undergraduate full time students contributed to the results. Also, for the first time in a number of years, the College saw an increase in mature undergraduate students.

31.3 International recruitment got off to a slow start but by the end of the cycle, student recruitment had exceeded targets by 7%. There was a significant recovery in the second half of the year which was partly due to the 10% discount offered on fees as a result of favourable exchange rates. Exceeding targets is something that has not been seen elsewhere in the sector and compared to other HEIs, Birkbeck has performed well in a number of other markets too.

31.4 Members acknowledged the importance of continuing to grow recruitment and expressed that the College should capitalise on Home and EU postgraduate students whilst latent demand remained high.

31.5 The College is introducing new undergraduate programmes with foundation years and it is expected this will attract new audiences.
International and home student recruitment is up significantly but EU recruitment is down by 20%. The Chevening Scholarship programme partly contributed to the large increases in international student applications.

It was confirmed that all Masters degrees are eligible for the standard Chevening Scholarships. The College selected Educational Neuroscience as it was the closest match but members expressed that they wished to change Educational Neuroscience for next year.

Full time undergraduate recruitment is tracking last year’s autumn term performance. Across the sector as a whole, full time undergraduate recruitment is low with some institutions seeing a 20% drop in applications.

**EXTERNAL IDENTITY**
Received and noted

A verbal update on the College’s new visual identity.

Members heard that the College historically did not have a unique visual identify and establishing one would be beneficial both for recruitment and reputational purposes.

The process of establishing a visual identity was led by a steering group comprising of academics and school managers who worked closely with world leading brand design agency, Pentagram.

Birkbeck’s new visual identity will go live on New Year’s Day when it will be seen on the Underground and buses in a new marketing campaign.

**FINANCIAL POSITION**
Received

An update on the College’s financial position *(SP 2016 24)*

Members noted that the accounting regulations had changed last year but the budget was set according to old accounting standards. Minor adjustments have been made to bring the budget in line with the new accounting regulations.

Members heard that the new FRS102 standards have introduced an element of volatility in terms of net pension adjustments, investment gains and losses and new endowments. In the past, when the College received an endowment, the income was recognised at the same rate as the subsequent expenditure however, under the new accounting regulations, expenditure can no longer be offset against income.

Forecast surpluses were discussed during the last Governors’ meeting. Surpluses were significantly above the £500k original budget which was predominately due to better than expected postgraduate recruitment resulting in the College not needing to use any of the £200k contingency fund set aside as a risk mitigation factor. The College also saved money on vacancy management. Governors agreed that the College should aim for a 5% of turnover as surplus as the College embarks on an estates expansion strategy.
34 CATERING SERVICES REVIEW
Considered
34.1 A report on the College’s catering services (SP 2016 25)

34.2 Members heard that the College has outsourced catering services for a long time and over the past few years the demand for these services have changed. As the current outsourced contract is due to end on 31 July 2017, rather than continue offering similar options it was agreed that the College would review its catering needs and services.

34.3 The College engaged the Russell Partnership, a leading UK food consultancy, to deliver a review of the College’s catering services. The Russell Partnership has developed sector specific financial and space models for catering provision and they used these models and their expertise in the catering market to draw up recommendations.

34.4 Between March and October this year, staff and student feedback was sought in a number of ways, including asking users at the point of delivery and seeking the views of key stakeholders in one to one interviews. The catering staff were generally perceived to be friendly and supportive, but the current service was seen to be poor in terms of hospitality catering services, variety and value for money.

34.5 All end users highlighted value as a major influence in choice and both staff and students indicated they would welcome branded operations on site, ideally with a blend of independent suppliers and national operators.

34.6 The College considered its options including an in house catering service however, upon further scrutiny this was deemed cost prohibitive therefore an outsourced catering service is the only option. Smaller suppliers will also be approached to bid for single venue outlets and depending on the findings of these soft market tests, a finalised specification will go out to tender.

34.7 Progress will be reported on at future SPC meetings.

35 GOVERNOR/SCHOOL SERVICE LIAISON SCHEME
Received and considered
35.1 Proposals to reintroduce the Governor/School Liaison Scheme and extending it to services (SP 2016 26)

Noted
35.2 The Committee noted that the College is considering the reintroduction of the governor/school liaison scheme. The scheme worked well in previous years but had recently been put on hold due to changes in the Governing body as some Governors’ terms had come to an end.

35.3 The College has 5 Schools, 12 professional services departments and 5 PVM portfolios. It is unlikely that a Governor can be linked up to each service area as there are only 11 independent Governors who the College can look to for external expertise, advice, guidance and advocacy.
Members heard that the Schools will remain as separate entities as they are coherent areas of activity. The professional services departments and PVM portfolios would be better serviced if grouped into themes with a Governor being linked up to groups of individuals from these service areas. Individual Schools will be assigned an individual Governor.

The Committee agreed that the Governors would be asked to select a service area of their choice with the Master and Vice Master providing mediation throughout the linking and selection process. Initial meetings between the governors, Schools and Executive Deans are being prepared.

Governors will serve for a set term which is yet to be agreed.

**2017 Strategy Away Days**

Noted

The proposed format of the 2017 SPC and Governors’ Awaydays (SP 2016 27)

Members were asked to note the theme for the forthcoming Strategic Planning Committee and Governors’ awaydays. The SPC awayday is scheduled for the 17th of January and Governors is on the 8th February 2017.

**IT Capital Projects**

Received

An update on IT Capital Projects (SP 2016 28)

Members noted the progress of IT capital projects which will be presented to F&GPC for approval.

**Business World at Birkbeck**

Received

A progress report on Business World at Birkbeck (SP 2016 29)

Members noted the progress of the project. Members noted that in some cases it might be helpful to use “Finance, Payroll and HR System” in communications to ensure clarity.

**Dates of Meetings 2016-17**

Noted

The dates of the meetings for 2016-17:

- 17 January 2017 Awayday
- 16 February 2017 at 2pm
- 28 March 2017 at 2pm
- 9 May 2017 at 2pm
- 7 June 2017 at 2pm
- 5 July 2017 at 2pm