Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

19 October 2016

Present

David Latchman (Chair), Matthew Innes, Hilary Fraser, Fraser Keir, Stephen Frosh, Tim Markham, Roz Dixon, Keith Willett, Jonathan Woodhead, Matthew Davies, Philip Powell, Nick Head, Chris Murphy, Julian Swann, Stewart Motha, Jeremy Tanner, Megan Reeves, John Kempton, Jonah Duffin, Nick Keep, Keith Harrison, Katharine Bock

In attendance

James Fisk, Roisin Lynch

12 MINUTES

Confirmed

12.1 The minutes of the meeting of 21 September 2016.

13 ACTIONS

Noted

13.1 Progress on actions agreed at the last meeting (SP 2016 08)

EU referendum

13.2 The Government had confirmed that EU students would be eligible for loans in 2017-18. No information was yet available about loans for students beginning their studies after this point.

13.3 The College’s webpage of information for EU staff is updated as more information about the impact of the referendum result becomes available. The Directors of HR and External Relations are also working on further internal communications.

Postgraduate loans

13.4 The Master and the Policy Advisor have had a successful meeting with the CEO of the Student Loans Company. The College’s key lobbying point in this area is to ask the SLC to ensure that part time and postgraduate students are given accurate information when they contact the enquiry line, as this is not always currently the case.

13.5 It was noted that more data on postgraduate loans across the sector from the SLC, even if anonymised, would be useful to help the College consider its postgraduate recruitment in the context of the wider HE sector.
13.6 The College have been invited to attend an informal meeting with the SLC and the Department for Education to discuss the potential for a postdoctoral loan. There would be more discussion to establish the College's position on whether this should include a bench fee.

14 CHAIR’S REPORT

Noted

14.1 The College continues to lobby politically as the Higher Education Bill progresses through Parliament.

14.2 The Minister for Universities and Science had made a recent announcement that mature student numbers had recovered to pre 2012 levels. This was probably an overestimate caused by including only full time numbers. The College would supply the Minister with more accurate statistics.

15 RECRUITMENT

Received

15.1 An update on student recruitment (SP 2016 09)

Noted

15.2 Projections suggest an impressive increase in recruitment to Masters programmes and maintenance of the position for undergraduate recruitment. EU recruitment broadly reflects this wider picture. Thanks to the hard work of staff in Schools and central Professional Services, international recruitment has been maintained in a challenging market.

15.3 Members noted the importance of undergraduate recruitment to College income. It was noted that improving the College’s student retention rate would also improve the projected income from recruitment.

15.4 Members discussed A level tariffs for younger full time younger students, and the concern that lower tariffs might dissuade some students from applying as they are seen as an indicator of quality. This is a problem across the sector. It is felt that there is still room for the College to achieve incremental growth in the recruitment of under 21s based on Birkbeck’s unique offer, and to that end colleagues have been working on building links with schools as well as FE colleges.

15.5 The College has seen a move towards recovery for part time undergraduate students. The Government has not yet formally announced a consultation on the part time maintenance loan, which it previously announced would start in 2018-19.
15.6 Members noted that the College has always had a strong postgraduate taught provision with a tradition of marketing towards home as well as international students, and has thus been in a better position than many competitors, which rely heavily on international recruitment at Master’s level, to take advantage of the availability of the new postgraduate loans. The College is keeping fee levels for postgraduate taught programmes in the sector under watch, but wants to take a tactical approach that prioritises student numbers.

16 BREXIT

16.1 An update on Brexit and its implications for the College (SP 2016 10)

Noted

16.2 Members noted that many uncertainties remain over the timeline and process for Brexit. Potential risks to Birkbeck’s operations can be listed as follows:

- Withdrawal of loans for both EU domiciled and UK-based EU nationals;
- Decline in demand from EU students;
- Inability to provide exchange opportunities through ERASMUS scheme;
- Threat of further reduction in international students;
- Status of current EEA staff;
- Possible cost of staff citizenship applications.

16.3 The College will submit evidence to the ongoing enquiries being carried out on the potential impact of Brexit on the HE sector, and will continue to monitor the policy and legislative landscape and participate discussions with policy and public affairs networks such as UUK, London First and the Greater London Authority.

17 FINANCIAL OUTTURN

17.1 The budget outturn for 2015-16 (SP 2016 11)

Noted

17.2 A draft surplus of £14.1M is reported, in contrast with the original budget surplus for the year of £5.5M. This increase is due to profit on the sale of Bedford Square, adjustments due to the restatement of the accounts under the new FRS 102 accounting standard, and a £3M positive budget variance.

17.3 This variance confirms the solid financial performance of the College, but reinforces the need to change the way that budgets are set and monitored. During the year, Schools and Professional Services departments were asked to identify budget savings to address the shortfall in undergraduate students. In hindsight these savings were unnecessary, and opportunities to fund other activities were therefore missed.
17.4 The College Audit Committee had asked for Schools and Professional Services departments to provide explanations on any variances of over 3% on non-pay budgets for 2016-17 compared to 2014-15 actuals. Directors and Executive Deans were asked to provide these explanations to the Director of Finance.

18 **APPRENTICESHIPS**

Received

18.1 An update on progress in the Apprenticeships Initiative (SP 2016 12)

Noted

18.2 The Apprenticeships initiative was introduced by the Government in 2014 to address a perceived skills shortage in the UK. Birkbeck is seeking to develop apprenticeship programmes for employers to enable their staff to enrol onto an apprenticeship.

18.3 Working groups have been established to manage the project and ensure that significant and relevant curricula are developed by April 2017, when the employer levy that will enable employers to access funding for apprenticeships will be introduced. Three areas of curriculum have been developed for the April launch, and the project management group will continue to liaise with other sections of the College to assess appetite and suitability for other programmes.

18.4 As well as offering degree apprenticeships, the College will have to pay an apprenticeship levy of 0.5% of the annual pay bill from April 2017.

19 **FOUNDATION YEARS**

Received

19.1 An update on progress in the Foundation Years project (SP 2016 13)

Noted

19.2 In response to a recommendation from SPC that a Foundation Year option be explored to provide integrated access level provision for students who are not considered to be ready to start the first year of a three year degree, ten pathways have been developed for four year full time degree with foundation year programmes to recruit for 2017-18, with an initial target for recruitment of 50 students. Passing the Foundation Year will lead to automatic progression to Year 1 of a three year degree.

19.3 Members heard that HESA data for similar courses suggests that students on foundation year programmes progress and complete at lower rates than students joining programmes in Year 1. Discussions are therefore underway in the College on how to make targeted interventions to address this retention risk.
**Action**

19.4 *(RD, CM)* Discuss any potential for donor/scholarship assistance with the cost of the Foundation Year, which may assist in increasing retention.

19.5 Work will be done in the future on the potential for targeting these programmes at international students.

**20** **TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK**

**Received**

20.1 A progress update on the College submission for the Teaching Excellence Framework *(SP 2016 14)*

20.2 Members noted that there are concerns across the sector that the proposed metrics will fail to capture teaching excellence. Their focus is on student experience and outcomes, which presents Birkbeck with both opportunities and challenges.

20.3 Birkbeck’s metrics are varied, with performance above HEFCE’s benchmark in part time continuation and employment and further study outcomes in general, and lower performance on full time continuation and on assessment and feedback.

20.4 The outcomes Meets Expectations, Excellent and Outstanding have now been replaced with Bronze, Silver and Gold. The final deadline for submissions will be late January 2017, with ratings to be published in May 2017.

20.5 The TEF working group is preparing a 15 page statement putting the metrics into context, with the aim of increasing our chances of getting a higher rating.

**Action**

20.6 *(TEF working group)* Work more closely with the Learning and Teaching working group on preparations for the College’s submission.

20.7 Members heard that student satisfaction is a key metric for the TEF and module and course evaluation scores are set to become an important measure of this. As this data is not currently collected centrally nor consistently across programmes, the College is not able to identify areas of good practice or highlight areas of concern. The current practice could be replaced with a centralised IT system for module and programme evaluation. SPC asked to receive a more detailed proposal at a future meeting.

20.8 In future TEF metrics are likely to include numbers of staff who are fellows of the HE Academy (HEA).

**Action**

20.9 *(JK)* Explore how to make more HEA fellowship application workshop sessions available, along with more written resources to enable the production of successful applications.
21 STUDENT SURVEYS

Received

21.1 College level analysis of two student surveys conducted in 2015-16:
- National Student Survey (NSS) (SP 2016 15)
- Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) (SP 2016 16)

21.2 Work on improving these results is being taken forward through the Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee.

21.3 Two sections of the NSS results gave significant cause for concern: assessment and feedback, and academic support. Members noted the need to ensure that resources are available to ensure that all students have personal tutors and make use of them. The PVM Access and Community Engagement and the Deputy PVM Learning and Teaching are taking forward a pilot scheme in this area exploring engaging Teaching and Scholarship staff to ensure that personal tutors are available when needed.

Action

21.4 (Executive Deans) Nominate a member of academic staff to participate in the project group for the personal tutors pilot.

22 SOCIAL MEDIA PRINCIPLES

Received

22.1 Proposed principles for the use of social media by Birkbeck staff and students (SP 2016 17)

Noted

22.2 The College recognises the right of all its staff and students to be able to exercise free speech online, and the numerous benefits and opportunities that a social media presence offers for all its members. The College’s approach is therefore to support staff and students to engage online with the wider community, while providing appropriate guidance on good practice to ensure such engagement is safe and responsible.

22.3 Members advised that the document would benefit from clarification on how people should make it clear that they are communicating in a personal capacity.

23 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE REPORT

Received

23.1 The Report of FBSC (SP 2016 18)

Noted
23.2 A programme of support has been developed for asylum seekers who have not yet been granted refugee status and therefore have no access to student finance and may not be able to work. The Transition Programme will offer a programme of advice, guidance and support events, at the end of which students will have the option to apply and receive support for a number of academic options, including taking individual modules up to 120 credits. Discussions are ongoing with a corporate partner regarding funding for the early non-credit-bearing aspects of the programme. The PVM for Access and Community Engagement would be providing academic oversight.

23.3 SPC commended the package that had been developed and thanked the Head of Widening Access and Retention, and Dr Leslie Topp, for their work on developing this.

23.4 SPC noted that following the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) review of compliance in 2016, the College had made amendments to its fees policy and complaints policy to ensure compliance. A project group has been set up to take forward further actions to ensure full CMA compliance, particularly around the provision of information, and FBSC will continue to receive regular updates.

24 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH IMPACT COMMITTEE REPORT
Noted
24.1 The Report of the PERI Committee (SP 2016 19)

24.2 Members thanked the Executive Dean of the School of Science for his work in securing further Institutional Strategic Support funding from the Wellcome Trust. This is match funded support for staff in Science and medical humanities, especially early career academics, to further the public and wider impact of their work.

25 FUTURE RESEARCHERS MATTER
Received
25.1 A report on the implementation of the Postgraduate Research Review (SP 2016 20)

Noted
25.2 Good progress has been made towards implementation of the review but much of the work is still on-going and additional reports will be made periodically to monitor continuing progress.

25.3 The Committee thanked the Head of Research Strategy Support for the progress she had made in implementing the recommendations of the review.
26 ECONOMICS, MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS REVIEW

Received

26.1 A report on progress in implementing the recommendations of the review of the department of Economics, Mathematics and Statistics (SP 2016 21)

Noted

26.2 The department reported that they had addressed all of the recommendations and carried out all the actions required by the report of the review, as well as instituting many other changes to support and build on those recommendations.

26.3 SPC commended the department’s response, noting that the report is a good model of how to monitor progress after a review.

27 LAW REVIEW

Noted

27.1 Stewart Motha is currently acting as interim Dean of the School of Law. He is meeting with the Vice Master to discuss the headline recommendations of the report of the review. As with other reviews that had been carried out within the College, ownership of carrying out the recommendations will then be handed over to the School executive. SPC thanked colleagues in the School of Law for their constructive engagement with the review.

28 DATES OF MEETINGS 2016-17

Noted

28.1 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