BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

21 September 2016

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

In attendance
Roisin Lynch, Kevin Coutinho (for item 10)

Apologies
David Latchman, Stephen Frosh

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP
Confirmed
1.1 The Terms of Reference and Membership for 2016-17 (SP 2016 01)

Noted
1.2 This was the last meeting for Professor Sue Jackson, PVM Learning and Teaching, and Professor Miriam Zukas, Executive Dean for the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy. SPC thanked them for all of their contributions to the College and the work of the Committee.

1.3 SPC welcomed Professor Matthew Davies, who would be taking over from Professor Zukas as Executive Dean of the School of SSHP. Professor Diane Houston would be joining Birkbeck in December 2016 as PVM Learning and Teaching.

2 MINUTES
Confirmed
2.1 The minutes of the meeting of 7 July 2016, subject to the addition of Professor Matthew Innes to the list of attendees.

3 ACTIONS
Noted
3.1 Progress on actions agreed at the last meeting (SP 2016 02).

School Plans and Planning
3.2 A planning group had been set up with the Executive Deans which would deal with planning issues.

**Foundation Years**

3.3 Seven foundation year pathways were now in place, feeding into thirty undergraduate degrees. It was hoped that this entry into study would attract some more traditional Birkbeck students, who were not always ready to begin undergraduate study straight away. SPC thanked everybody who had worked on this project.

**EU Referendum**

3.4 Over the summer the College had focused on communicating with students to ensure they were aware that the Government had confirmed that EU students who enrolled in 2016-17 would still be eligible for funding and that the College continued to welcome and value the European members of its community. Colleagues in External Relations and HR would be meeting to develop a College-wide communications strategy with staff.

4 **CHAIR’S REPORT**

4.1 Members heard that the College has revised its Access Agreement in response to the Government’s announcement that institutions can raise their fees in line with inflation. Once the necessary legislation to enact this had been passed the College intended to increase its fees to £9250. It is important that the College communicates its intention regarding fees and future fee strategy in a way that is compliant with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance. These issues will be considered by FBSC and reported back to SPC.

5 **HE POLICY**

5.1 SPC heard a verbal update on HE policy from the Policy Adviser. One of the announcements that had been made in the recent education green paper was a proposal that universities should either establish secondary schools or support existing schools. The College would begin to communicate with the Government on how it was expected that this would work. Members noted that partnerships with FE or Sixth Form colleges might be more relevant to Birkbeck’s mission and areas of expertise than traditional secondary schools.

5.2 Colleagues had met with representatives from the Treasury to discuss the issue of whether EU students would be eligible for loans in 2017-18. The Treasury was aware that this was an important and time-sensitive issue, but was dealing with a large number of competing priorities in the current unsettled political climate.
**Action**

5.3 *(Policy Adviser)* Find out what actions other institutions are taking on EU loans for 2017 onwards in the absence of a clear steer from the Treasury.

5.4 SPC received an update on progress in other areas of HE policy. It was expected that the College would be required to make a formal response to a consultation on part time maintenance loans in due course. The HE Bill is currently in the Committee stage, and Birkbeck has lobbied on the interests of part time students as part of this process. It was thought that the proposed apprenticeship levy would be going ahead from next year. There had been a statement from the Chancellor confirming that Horizon 2020 and other EU research funding commitments would be met.

6 **STUDENT RECRUITMENT**

Received

6.1 A paper on student recruitment *(SP 2016 03)*

*Noted*

6.2 Current predictions are that, while the College will miss its undergraduate target, it will exceed its overall recruitment target, due to strong performance at PGT level. This was due to co-ordinated hard work across the Schools and professional services teams, and SPC noted their thanks to everybody involved. Colleagues needed to continue to make offers throughout the recruitment period.

6.3 There was a need to further analyse this increase in postgraduate recruitment to understand more about who these students are, and if the College is likely to be able to sustain the increase.

6.4 Members noted that the contribution of the strong performance in postgraduate recruitment to the overall recruitment targets demonstrated the importance of having a mixed portfolio to insure against the vagaries of the market and changing higher education policy.

6.5 Members noted that the dates for the Boards of Examiners were being reviewed to see if it would be possible to hold these earlier. This would be discussed further outside the meeting and then considered again at a future meeting.

7 **NEW FINANCIAL REPORTING STANDARD**

Received

7.1 A paper on the implications for the College of the new financial reporting standard, FRS 102 *(SP 2016 04)*

*Noted*
7.2 A new Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) based on the new financial reporting standard, FRS 102, has been developed for Further and Higher Education. To enable comparison of financial performance from one year to the next, the statements for 2014-15 needed to be restated under the new standard. A review of the implications of conversion was commissioned from our external auditor, KPMG.

7.3 Changes affecting the College were identified as:
   - Government grants;
   - Non-exchange transactions;
   - Componentisation of fixed assets;
   - Revaluation of land and buildings;
   - Employee benefits – annual leave accrual;
   - Pensions

7.4 Members heard that under FRS 102 the College is required to estimate its share of the assets and liabilities of the USS and SAUL pension schemes with the net liability reducing the College's accumulated reserves. At 31 July 2015 the estimated combined pension deficit for the College was £13.0 million. It was noted that this should be viewed as a “proper” liability rather than an accounting adjustment as there is a deficit in the pension schemes which will need to be repaid over the coming years.

7.5 The College will also be required to estimate the amount of annual leave that has been earned but not utilised by 31 July.

7.6 SPC noted that the surplus was larger than expected. This reinforced the importance of increasing control over the budget setting and monitoring process to ensure the actual end of year position did not vary so much from the expected position. The Audit Committee have asked to see more detail on the variance between predicted and actual budgets at School and Professional Service department level. A more detailed paper on the budget outturn would be brought to the next meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee.

8 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT VISAS

8.1 An update on the College’s compliance with international student visa requirements (SP 2016 05)

Noted

8.2 SPC noted actions taken to maintain the College’s ability to recruit international students through the Tier 4 Sponsor Licence. Members noted that the UKVI continue to adjust the requirements for Tier 4 students, which contributes to the ongoing complexity of recruiting students internationally.
BUSINESS WORLD @ BIRKBECK

Received

9.1 An update on the HR/Payroll and Finance Systems Replacement Project (SP 2016 06)

Noted

9.2 Good progress in being made in the project, which remains on budget and on target in terms of resource use, consultancy time, effort and progress. As the project continued more colleagues would be consulted to ensure buy-in from the wider College community and the delivery of useful functionality.

9.3 The Executive Dean of the School of Science commended colleagues involved in the project for their thorough engagement with the School’s technicians during the procurement process.

STRATEGIC EQUALITIES REVIEW GROUP REPORT

Received

10.1 The draft report of the Strategic Equalities Review Group (SERG) (SP 2016 07)

Noted

10.2 Members noted the need for a narrative that clearly identified the immediate equality and diversity needs of the College and the actions that would need to be taken to meet them. This should include a collective commitment to targets and review points, and a clear steer to Schools and Professional Services departments on what actions they were required to take.

10.3 It was suggested that the report should consider these needs and actions before proposing governance structures, rather than considering governance first. There was also a need to ensure that there was appropriate management in place to achieve the identified objectives in addition to governance structures.

10.4 SPC noted that the College needed to address gender balance and ethnic diversity at the highest levels. Unconscious bias training for colleagues conducting interviews would be helpful but members noted that the whole recruitment process, including advertising, applications and shortlisting, needed to be considered.

10.5 Members heard that there were academic representatives on the steering, working and focus groups; as a university it was important that Birkbeck provided academic leadership on equality and diversity issues. It was noted that as the work in the Students’ Union with the Turnaround Board progressed, there would be more opportunity to hear the student voice in regards to these issues.
10.6 The paper proposed that each School should appoint an Assistant Dean and an Assistant School Manager for Equality and Diversity; some members felt that this might not be the best approach, as it could lead to all equality and diversity issues only being considered by a small group of people.

10.7 SPC asked for the organisation chart to be revisited at the next SERG meeting, and for more horizontal lines to be added to connect groups such as the Women’s Staff Network, the LGBT Staff Network and the Athena SWAN SAT.

10.8 The report would be reframed for further discussion at the SERG project board. Members suggested a structure that identified the College’s vision and aspirations for equality and diversity, then outlined the issues that would need to be resolved.

11 DATES OF MEETINGS 2016-17

Noted

11.1 Dates of the meetings next session:
- 19 October 2016 at 2pm
- 15 November 2016 at 2pm
- 14 December 2016 at 2pm
- 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