BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

9 May 2017

Present
David Latchman, Keith Willett, Stephen Frosh, Fraser Keir, Philip Powell, Matthew Davies, Hilary Fraser, Roz Dixon, Jonathan Woodhead, Diane Houston, Stewart Motha, Jeremy Tanner, Nick Head, Julian Swann, Richard Wilson (For Naomi Holloway), Jonah Duffin, Nick Keep, Katharine Bock, Matt Innes, Megan Reeves, Roisin Lynch

Apologies
Keith Harrison, Naomi Holloway, Chris Murphy

67 MINUTES
Confirmed
67.1 The minutes of the meeting of 28 March 2017.

68 ACTIONS
Noted
68.1 Progress on actions agreed at the last meeting (SP 2016 49)

69 CHAIR’S REPORT
Noted
69.1 It was noted that the upcoming General Election meant that there are currently fewer chances for the College to lobby politically.

70 STUDENT RECRUITMENT
Received
70.1 An update on student recruitment (SP 2016 50)

Noted
70.2 The rate of year on year increases has slowed slightly compared to the last report, which may be due to the Easter break, but the overall recruitment picture is similar to the last report. Overall applications and offers continue to increase, especially to full-time postgraduate taught courses.

70.3 Members noted headline figures:

- PG applications have increased by 16% compared to last year, this represents a five-year high; FT is up by 24%, PT is down by 2%.
• FT UG applications are up by 18% on last year. PT UG are continuing to grow for the first time since 2011, up 9%.
• International PGT FT applications are up by 29% compared on last year, again a five-year high. International UG FT are up by 14% compared to last year but below 2015/16 numbers.
• There is an overall increase in the numbers of offers by 14% which is in line with the increase in applications.

70.4 Members heard that the increase in part time undergraduate figures represents a contrast to the national trend. Maintenance loans for these students will not be available until next year. The College had undertaken significant marketing efforts to improve recruitment, including local targeted marketing and targeted digital advertising, and engagement with the new advertising campaign is much higher than previous campaigns.

71 BUSINESS WORLD @ BIRKBECK
Received
71.1 An update on progress in the HR/Payroll and Finance systems replacement project (SP 2016 51)

Noted
71.2 The new Businessworld system has gone live and all staff have been successfully paid using the system for the April payroll.

71.3 The next phase is the Expenses module which is expected to be made available to users from August.

71.4 SPC were pleased to note that colleagues have indicated enthusiasm for engaging with the project by giving feedback and testing. 63 members of staff from across the College have volunteered to act as Businessworld Champions.

71.5 Members heard that there was a project underway to make more straightforward HR reports available.

Action
71.6 (RW) Email the Executive Deans with the timetable for HR system implementation.

72 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS
Received
72.1 The Report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee (SP 2016 52)

Noted
72.2 FBSC reported on the Compass Project, which is an initiative that will offer twenty scholarships to asylum seekers and refugees enabling them to study a university-level programme at Birkbeck. SPC members noted that this is an excellent scheme that is
consistent with the College’s mission and unique in the sector, and commended colleagues for their work in developing this.

72.3 FBSC noted ongoing work to ensure compliance with the regulations of the Competition and Markets Authority. The Committee also noted the Access Agreement for 2018-19. In line with OFFA expectations, the agreement reviews the financial support offered to new students, with an overall reduction in direct financial support, the savings from which will be redirected towards retention and student success activities.

72.4 FBSC confirmed postgraduate taught fee tiers for 2018-19.

73 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH IMPACT

73.1 A report on the work of the Public Engagement and Research Impact Committee (SP 2016 53). It was noted that the reporting lines for this Committee had been reviewed and from next term it will report directly to the Research Committee.

74 COMPLETE UNIVERSITY GUIDE

74.1 Members received a paper summarising the metrics making up the Complete University Guide (CUG) 2018 and Birkbeck’s position in them. The Guardian league table would be published in the following week and the College’s position was expected to be similar.

74.2 Birkbeck’s overall ranking in the CUG is 115 out of 129. Members noted that there were a variety of reasons for this low ranking. There were some areas in which the College needed to improve, such as NSS score. However, there were some areas in which the College had not scored well due to its unique mission and offer, such as entry standards. The College’s policy of making offers to students with non-traditional qualifications has a negative impact on this ranking. Members noted the need to continue to make the case to the league table compilers that greater weight should be given to the value added to students rather than qualifications on entry.

74.3 Members noted that the College needs to consider its position in these tables and consider areas, including non-continuation, degree outcomes (classifications) and spending per student FTE, to identify where mission-consistent improvements can be made. In addition, a narrative should be developed which can be placed in a prominent position on the website which explains the way Birkbeck’s unique nature can have a negative impact on its league table rankings.

74.4 University league tables are aimed at undergraduate students but a bad performance could also affect the College’s reputation with postgraduate and international
students. There is a need to consider how we might segment the presentation of the College to the public in a way which reduces the impact of this. For example a statement should be placed on the website, aimed at postgraduate students, that highlights the reasons why postgraduates should study at Birkbeck including the College’s strong research reputation and large postgraduate student body.

75  **COLLEGE WEBSITE**

Noted

75.1 Colleagues in ITS and External Relations have been working hard to ensure that the new website is on track to launch on the 16 May 2017.

75.2 Members heard that this would be the first phase of the website project: improvements have been made to the navigation, content, and look of the site, but there will continue to be further phases to change and improve the site. Feedback has been and will continue to be sought from users to inform the changes.

76  **STRATFORD**

Noted

76.1 Members heard a verbal update on University Square Stratford from the PVM Access and Community Partnerships, who has been conducting a review of the College’s provision in the area.

76.1 Birkbeck has had a presence in Stratford for the last ten years, and currently has a 15% share of the USS building, with a primarily undergraduate portfolio. Feedback from stakeholders in the area is that they would like the College to increase its presence there but would like further provision that focuses on vocational skills that support employability.

76.2 It was suggested that in order to increase student numbers at Stratford there is a need to increase resource and develop a new management structure at USS. This could take several forms, including a new faculty with new provision that would not conflict with the existing Schools; the appointment of a campus dean or similar role and an executive for a cross-School campus with further development of currently offered provision; or the USS campus becoming a subsidiary of one or more of the Schools.

76.3 Members agreed that a structure needed to be put into place that would allow for growth at Stratford. Stratford is an important part of the College’s provision and is also a space that could be used to consider the College’s offer in a more experimental way. Members noted that discussions about structure and provision needed to also take market considerations into account.
76.4 The PVM Access and Community Partnerships will have further conversations with the Executive Deans to discuss their views on the most effective way to take provision at Stratford forward before bringing this discussion back to a future meeting of SPC.

77 **DATES OF MEETINGS 2016-17**

Noted

77.1 The dates of meetings for 2016-17:

- 7 June 2017 at 2pm
- 3 July 2017 at 2pm