Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

16 February 2017

Present
David Latchman (Chair), Matthew Innes, Julian Swann, Anthony Bale (for Hilary Fraser), Chris Murphy, Matthew Davies, Keith Willett, Jeremy Tanner, Roz Dixon, Diane Houston, Fraser Keir, Jonathan Woodhead, Richard Wilson (For Naomi Holloway), Jonah Duffin, Stewart Motha, Nick Keep, Megan Reeves, Keith Harrison, Katharine Bock

Apologies
Naomi Holloway, Hilary Fraser, Philip Powell, Stephen Frosh

In attendance
Roisin Lynch

40 MINUTES
Confirmed
40.1 The minutes of the meeting of 14 December 2016.

41 ACTIONS
Noted
41.1 Progress on actions agreed at the last meeting (SP 2016 30)

EU Referendum
41.2 The College would continue to keep staff informed on the likely impact of the EU referendum when information became available. Members noted that it is important to reinforce that the College values all members of staff and will offer support to those staff affected by the referendum when there is more understanding of what support will be needed.

42 CHAIR’S REPORT
Noted
42.1 The College continues to use its connections with members of the Houses of Parliament to lobby the Government on issues affecting part time students.

43 STUDENT RECRUITMENT
Received
43.1 An update on student recruitment (SP 2016 31)
Overall, applications and offers are looking positive compared to last year, with increases across all levels and modes of study. This is due to hard work by all colleagues to increase applications through a new highly-targeted marketing campaign, and to make offers promptly.

However, members noted that it is still early in the recruitment cycle. The UCAS cycle is approaching the critical phase where students make choices about ‘firm’ and ‘insurance’ offers, and the late application phase is now beginning in earnest. The College will need to perform well in both phases to grow UG recruitment.

The College can expect increasing volatility in the market as BREXIT negotiations begin, universities react to the sector level downturn in UCAS applications and competitors wake up to the potential for growth in home PGT students from the introduction of the loans last year. There is also a demographic dip in 18-19 year olds and a decline in international students as immigration controls are tightened.

We should expect our competitors to be taking the steps that Birkbeck took last year to maximise late recruitment and conversions through Clearing campaigns. It is important that we do not become complacent at this stage.

Members therefore reinforced the need for colleagues to continue to work hard to increase applications and make offers, and to encourage conversion into firm acceptances and enrolments.

**Action**

(NH) Send information on applications on the system with no action against them to the Executive Deans.

**AWAYDAYS**

The outcome of discussions at the SPC and Governors Awaydays *(SP 2016 32)*

The Governors had commended the College for the fundraising proposals and the work on recruitment.

Governors had approved the direction of travel of the estates strategy. SPC noted the ramification of the Governors’ awayday discussions for the College’s planning; the College will need to maintain a student body of 10,000 FTE to stay financially sustainable and fund our strategic ambitions.

**UCAS TARIFFS**

Noted
SPC considered and approved a proposal on an annual process to review and agree any changes to advertised UCAS tariffs.

The review process involves looking at data on applications received and made at various tariff levels from other HE institutions across London, to ensure that Birkbeck is making sensible offers compared to its competitors. This work has so far been done for four courses that have proposed changes to their tariffs.

Members agreed that a rolling programme should be initiated to identify any courses that are out of step with competitor programmes.

Members noted that tariffs send a message about the quality of the institution and impact on position in league tables, in which Birkbeck will soon start to appear. However, they also noted Birkbeck’s important mission to provide Higher Education to non-traditional students, who by their nature may not have traditional qualifications. There is a need to consider how we can communicate clearly to students that Birkbeck has a diverse community which enables a rich experience to be offered: those students that do have qualifications will be expected to have good ones, but those who have come to Higher Education by other routes are also welcome.

**TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK**

Noted

Members received a verbal update on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The College has now made its submission, supplying as much contextual information as possible to support the case that Birkbeck should be more accurately awarded a silver ranking despite the metrics indicating a bronze award.

Members noted that it will be important in the longer term to consider how to improve performance in the areas which this process has identified as a concern. The recently announced review of the student experience, led by the new PVM Education, will consider this issue.

**RESEARCHER CAREER SURVEYS**

Approved

A proposal to introduce the Vitae CROS and PIRLS surveys at Birkbeck *(SP 2016 34)*

Noted

Participation in these surveys is standard in the sector, and will support the College in its ongoing preparation for application for the HR Excellence in Research Award.

Action
47.3 (JS) Ask the Head of Research Strategy Support to explain the importance of these surveys to the Schools in order to encourage staff to make these returns.

48 BUSINESS WORLD AT BIRKBECK
Received
48.1 A progress report on Business World @ Birkbeck (SP 2016 35)

Noted
48.2 Good progress is being made. The design phase has been completed, and the project team and consultants have been engaged with build work since September. The project has moved into payroll parallel running, with a go-live date of April 2017.

48.3 Members noted the importance of engaging with users and involving them in testing the systems. After the payroll system has been launched in April there will be further communications with colleagues on the next steps. A website has been set up to enable more frequent communication about the project: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/businessworld

48.4 Members asked the project team to consider the eventual name that would be used for the recruitment system.

49 BIRKBECK'S DIGITAL PRESENCE
Received
49.1 A progress report on improving Birkbeck’s digital presence (SP 2016 36)

Noted
49.2 A new design is now being applied across the recruitment-critical areas of the website. This work has been prioritised given the importance of attracting and retaining students. The new design and upgraded content will then be implemented across the rest of Birkbeck’s web presence.

49.3 In light of the significance of this project, which spans External Relations, Corporate Information Systems and the Schools, it has been agreed that the work will be scoped, managed and delivered as a programme of work split into manageable projects and overseen by the Strategic Projects Manager.

49.4 The Strategic Projects Manager will make a progress report at the next meeting.

50 ELECTRON MICROSCOPE
Noted
50.1 The School of Science has received a prestigious funding award from the Wellcome Trust for the purchase of a new electron microscope, which will be installed in the basement of the Malet St Extension Building. The grant from the Trust will be
topped up by £500,000 from UCL and £300,000 from Birkbeck. The College will also be responsible for the installation costs of approximately £1M. The approval process for this purchase will be taken through Finance and General Purposes Committee and Governors.

50.2 There is a need for an established process for non-estates capital purchases to be considered by a management committee before being taken to the Governors committees. As Estates Committee already has responsibility for considering capital purchases this may be the most appropriate route.

51 DATES OF MEETINGS 2016-17
Noted

51.1 The dates of the meetings for 2016-17:
- 28 March 2017 at 2pm
- 9 May 2017 at 2pm
- 7 June 2017 at 2pm
- 5 July 2017 at 2pm