1 TERMS OF REFERENCE
Received
1.1 The Committee’s Terms of Reference and Scheme of Membership for 2013-14 (SP 2013 01)

2 MINUTES
Approved
2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 17 July 2013.

3 ACTIONS
Received
3.1 An update on progress on implementing the actions agreed at the last meeting (SP 2013 02)

4 THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF BIRKBECK
Received
4.1 The Master’s annual paper on the strategic direction of Birkbeck (SP 2013 03)

Noted
4.2 The paper had been endorsed by the Governors on 15 October 2013 and would be presented to staff at the annual Master’s Address.

4.3 The paper was cautiously optimistic. Recruitment to three year degrees for 2013-14 had been good; and recruitment to four year programmes had been better than predicted. This enabled the College to begin to consider the best ways of investing
for the future. Even though the position had improved it was still the case that all provision needed to be financially sustainable.

Research Excellence Framework

4.4 Since the strategy paper was written the percentage of staff being submitted had risen to just over 80%. The approach that was being taken, as endorsed by the Strategic Planning Committee, was to apply a quality threshold to research papers submitted so that only those with four papers meeting the quality threshold would be submitted. This would put the College in an optimised position in the future if research grants and studentship allocations were awarded based on the outcome of the REF.

4.5 The Master thanked the PVM for Research and colleagues for their work on the REF. The processes had run well and there had been just two appeals against non-inclusion, one based on a misunderstanding of the rules and one which was withdrawn.

5 STUDENT RECRUITMENT 2013-14

Received

5.1 A paper on the current student recruitment position (SP 2013 04)

5.2 The report and recommendations of the UCAS working group (SP 2013 05)

Noted

5.3 There had been a significant increase in recruitment to undergraduate full time programmes, and a smaller one to postgraduate full time programmes. There had been a small decrease (3%) in recruitment to undergraduate part time courses. Postgraduate part time had held steady.

5.4 Overall, recruitment was currently 97% of target and had exceeded target for UCAS recruited degrees and postgraduate research degrees. A small amount of additional late autumn term and spring term enrolments was anticipated.

5.5 Members noted that the growth in international undergraduate students was not only positive in its own right but also represented a potential source of recruitment for postgraduate courses. Work to attract increasing numbers of international students would continue.

5.6 In 2013-14, three year undergraduates would for the first time form the majority (in terms of full time equivalents) of undergraduate students at Birkbeck. This was evidence of the success of the three year programmes which had been launched as part of a mission driven effort to rescue Birkbeck from the crisis caused by the changes to the fees and funding regime.

5.7 The College had exceeded its Student Number Control (SNC) allowance so must prepare for the possibility of a fine from HEFCE, but the outcome lent strong support to the plan to ask for a further increase in the SNC. It was agreed that the College would consider asking for an increase to 1,000 students in 2014-15, rather than a two-year phased increase to this number as had previous been planned.
5.8 The over recruitment in 2013-14 was partly due to the fact that the College had
doubled the number of courses it entered into UCAS but still had relatively little
data on previous years UCAS recruitment. There had been an unprecedented late
recruitment peak in September, with a significantly higher conversion rate compared
with earlier in the year. More work would be done on the available data to increase
the accuracy of predictions for 2014-15.

5.9 There would be analysis of numbers of four year students on programmes with and
without a UCAS equivalent, in order to judge the demand and capacity for
introducing all existing programmes into UCAS in the future. Work was also ongoing
to consider new programmes that could be offered through UCAS. Members asked
for space and teaching room availability to be factored into future expansion
planning.

5.10 There was an initiative to recruit students with Higher National Diplomas (HNDs)
to top up to degrees. These students would count against the SNC, so the value of
this strand support for the national vocational learning agenda should be noted to
HEFCE when making the case for an expansion of the College's SNC target for
2014-15. Members also spoke in favour of a move to encourage the recruitment of
students with the BTEC equivalent of A level ABB, who would be exempt from the
SNC, onto degree courses.

5.11 Members heard that the results of the bid for Catalyst funding were expected to be
positive and to be linked to a final decision from HEFCE on the College's SNC
target.

5.12 The Committee noted that the 2013-14 recruitment figures were a tremendous
achievement and thanked colleagues across the College who had put in a significant
amount of work to make this happen.

6 **FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2012-13**

6.1 The anticipated financial outturn for 2012-13 *(SP 2013 06)*

6.2 The College anticipated a surplus of some £6.7M for the third consecutive year.
This was an improvement of £3.78M from the June forecast, due to the cautious
assumptions and large amounts of contingency provision that had been made.

6.3 It was noted that pay costs were especially difficult to predict at the mid year point.
More budgetary analysis in future years would support more accurate forecasting.

6.4 As the College had maintained a stable and significant surplus for the last three years,
it was appropriate to develop and agreed plan for investment of some of the surplus
in areas that would encourage growth and innovation, such as further development
of the estate.

6.5 It was suggested that some of the surplus be used to fund PhD studentships to mark
the College’s 190th birthday and invest in future research excellence by attracting
more excellent research students. SPC approved this in principle and asked the Vice
Master Designate and the Executive Deans to discuss further and develop a detailed offer.

6.6 Birkbeck had recently been ranked 54th in the world for Arts and Humanities in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. The Committee congratulated the School of Arts on this achievement.

7 SPC SUMMER DISCUSSIONS

Received

7.1 The outcome of SPC’s informal summer discussions on forward strategic priorities (SP 2013 07)

Noted

7.2 SPC convened a series of informal meetings of its members over the summer break, on the broad themes of the nature of Birkbeck students, undergraduate and postgraduate portfolio and learning and teaching innovation. The aim was to hone and prioritise the strategic aims already identified and to differentiate between short term imperatives and long term developments.

7.3 In discussing students, SPC noted that a unifying factor for Birkbeck students is that they had identities other than ‘student’ because they combine work or other responsibilities with studying. They were people of the world. Regardless of age or social background, the College should aspire to attract independently minded students who were serious about their studies and their careers and who wished to be part of a genuine community of learners.

7.4 The undergraduate portfolio meeting confirmed that the College should expand UCAS programmes, potentially offering all undergraduate degrees in three year versions. There was support for development of flexible modular provision and interdisciplinary degrees. There was also consideration of pricing, concluding that the College needed to retain a £9K pro rata fee for reputational reasons but should explore strategies targeting students on low incomes; ELQ students without access to loans; and the award of scholarships based on academic merit, to allow attractive propositions to be put together for students while maintaining a high standard fee.

7.5 On postgraduate provision, following the decision to embark on a large scale trial of a flexible modular enrolment model for postgraduate provision, as reported last term, discussion centred on how to promote the distinctiveness and value of Birkbeck Masters degrees.

7.6 It was noted that Birkbeck is a major (5th largest in the UK) provider of master’s degrees and more should be made of this in external marketing. There was also support for a clarifying typology for Masters degrees, making a distinction between programmes taken as preparation for research degrees, programmes taken for career development and programmes taken for personal development. Members noted that it was imperative to have an optimised Masters degree portfolio in preparation for 2015-16, the first year of recruiting postgraduates with large debts from the new higher undergraduate fees.
7.7 It was agreed that a paper on the future of Masters programmes at Birkbeck should be developed for consideration by SPC.

7.8 The meeting on learning and teaching built on the discussion of the nature of Birkbeck students. It concluded that learning and teaching strategies needed to be geared to meet the needs of a diverse group of independent, busy people attracted to an institution with an established reputation for academic standards and research. There was support for the development of technology enhanced components as alternatives or complements to face to face teaching. This would facilitate development of distance learning and blended programmes and provide a way for students who missed class, or needed more time to learn, to keep up.

7.9 It was important to think strategically about where development resources would be best placed. There was already significant useful work going on in the College, but more needed to be done to ensure this work operated in a joined up way.

7.10 It was also noted that it was important for Schools and departments to adopt the strategies that were most suited for them rather than implementing a one size fits all approach. Members noted that strategic developments should be relevant and understood at department level.

Agreed

7.11 Recognising the need to hear about ideas and experiences from staff beyond the senior management team, a group of staff nominated by Schools and Professional Services would be asked to meet independently from senior colleagues and discuss potential new directions for the College.

9 WORKING GROUPS
Received

9.1 Progress reports from existing College working groups (SP 2013 08)

Noted

9.2 A number of working groups had been commissioned to support development of strategic initiatives. As part of the reconsideration of the areas of strategic focus for the College, the Chairs of these groups were invited to consider whether the group had completed its task and should disband, or whether it should continue.

10 ONLINE PROVISION STRATEGY
Received

10.1 The report and recommendations of the online provision strategy and technology enhanced learning working groups (SP 2013 09).

Noted

10.2 This report was a collaborative piece of work drawing together the recommendations of the two project teams which had been looking at technology enhanced learning and the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and a strategy for online provision in the College. The report built on the Strategy for Learning and Teaching Enhancement and the ongoing strategic discussions of the mission and distinctive nature of Birkbeck.
10.3 The report proposed the development of a strategy for online provision at Birkbeck, focusing on six key recommendations:

- Develop the use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and other technology to enhance flexible learning and teaching at the College.
- Scope and initialise a flagship online programme for Birkbeck.
- Continue to maintain and upgrade classroom technology to enable staff and students to optimise their use of online learning and teaching environments.
- Develop a more student-centred approach to online facilities.
- Increase Birkbeck’s reach and reputation by creating a high quality open online showcase for the work already taking place at the College.
- Appoint an implementation team to develop a business case identifying the resources needed to take the online provision strategy forward.

10.4 SPC discussed the arguments for and against investing in the development of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). There was support for developing the Birkbeck brand both nationally and internationally, but it was noted that MOOC development represented a large financial outlay with little evidence that they would have a significant positive impact. For this reason the alternative idea of an open online showcase displaying some of Birkbeck academics’ best work was preferred.

10.5 While each School should take the most suitable approach to online and blended learning in its subject area, SPC noted that there needed to be an appropriate infrastructure in place to support developments.

10.6 SPC heard that online provision was an area in which other Higher Education institutions were investing significantly more resource, and it was important for Birkbeck to remain competitive.

10.7 The value of blended learning and online provision for students coming from other qualifications into the later years of degree courses was also noted.

10.8 The College Secretary had convened a group to deliver the initial implementation, including further VLE development, video lecture capture and scoping the development of a flagship online programme, in-house or with a partner.

10.9 Consideration would be given to the views expressed by members of SPC and the report would be revised and recirculated.

11 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

Received

11.1 A note on Birkbeck’s performance in the 2013 National Student Survey (SP 2013 10)

Noted

11.2 While the College’s score had stayed largely level, competitor institutions had improved their positions.
11.3 Members discussed potential ways to improve the score, including more communication with students on actions the College is taking in response to feedback from the survey; and internal surveys in preparation for the NSS, which undergraduate students take in their final year.

11.4 It was noted that responses to feedback were also taken forward by departmental teams with outcomes reported through the academic committee structure via Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee.

11.5 It was important to gain an understanding of the needs of three year students and whether they differed from those of ‘traditional’ Birkbeck four year students. The Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee had agreed to survey students every year to improve available information about their needs before they participated in the NSS.

11.6 A task force would be brought together to oversee work on improving the College’s results on the NSS in the short and longer term. It was felt that there was a need for a strategy to encourage people who felt generally positive about the College to respond in addition to those who had a particular issue.

11.7 Members noted that as the Higher Education environment becomes more competitive, the College’s position in various league tables would become increasingly important. It was suggested that it would be useful to compile and prioritise a list of public data in which Birkbeck appeared.

12.1 FEES BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE

Received

12.1 The report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee (SP 2013 11)

Noted

Student financial support

12.2 The Government National Scholarship Programme funding would end in its current form in 2014-15 and be replaced by a postgraduate scheme. FBSC had convened a group to consider what mission-led undergraduate student support Birkbeck should offer post-NSP.

12.3 SPC heard that early indications suggested that the percentage of undergraduate students in need of financial support in 2013-14 was likely to be in line with or slightly higher than 2012-13.

Undergraduate fee setting

12.4 SPC approved the approach to undergraduate fee setting for 2014-15 proposed by FBSC. It was expected that the process of entering fee tiers against programmes would commence in the week beginning 21 October. SPC also approved the proposal to take advantage of the efficiency of the new fee setting process and the clear pricing strategy by moving the undergraduate fee setting process for 2015-16 to earlier in 2013-4.
International fees
12.5 FBSC proposed that international student fees should be increased to £13K to bring them into line with the rest of the University of London. SPC asked for international pricing strategy to be considered further at the International Group.

Postgraduate fees
12.6 SPC discussed possibilities for adjusting fees for postgraduate Masters programmes on the lower tiers 1 and 2 to make full time fees pro rata with part time fees. Members expressed concern over possible recruitment consequences if fees were increased too rapidly.

Agreed
12.7 Full time fees on postgraduate taught fees should all be moved to pro rata with the full time fees over two years. There would be an interim fee tier structure for 2014-15:

- Tier 1 £2975 part time / £5950 full time
- Tier 1A £3475 part time / £6250 full time
- Tier 2 £3975 part time / £7250 full time
- Tier 3 £3975 part time / £7950 full time
- Tier 4 £4975 part time / £9950 full time
- Tier 5 £5975 part time / £11950 full time

13 TECHNICAL SERVICES REVIEW
Noted
13.1 A Review of the technical services in the Department of Biological Sciences was under way. The final meeting of the review panel was scheduled and there would be a report with recommendations.

Agreed
13.2 To delegate consideration of the Technical Services Review recommendations to a subgroup of SPC, including the Chair, the Vice-Master, the Director of Human Resources and the College Secretary.

14 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS
Noted
14.1 The dates of future meetings of the Strategic Planning Committee:
- Wednesday 27 November 2013 at 2.00 pm
- Tuesday 21 January 2014 at 2.00 pm
- Wednesday 19 February 2014 at 2.00 pm
- Wednesday 26 March 2014 at 2.00 pm
- Tuesday 13 May 2014 at 2.00 pm
- Wednesday 11 June 2014 at 2.00 pm