27 MINUTES
Approved
27.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 27 November 2013

28 ACTIONS
Received
28.1 An update on progress on actions agreed at previous meetings (SP 2013 20)

Noted
Online provision
28.2 It had been agreed that the Vice Master would take over as chair and academic lead on this project. The group was continuing with the work from last term on three key priority areas: defining a solution for capturing or producing lectures on video; pursuing further enhancements to the VLE around assessment; scoping options for developing a new online distance learning programme. It was noted that this was part of the College's agreed strategy to use technology to facilitate and support learning and teaching rather than representing a move towards MOOCs or an Open University-style model of provision.
Employability
28.3 Progress was being made in implementing the Birkbeck Engagement, Employability and Employment Ecosystem, including developing a “portfolio education” concept; considering the best ways to improve the College’s careers provision; and buying new software to enable further development of networks between the College and its alumni, donors, supporters and potential mentors.

Flexible study
28.4 The postgraduate standalone modules were now online and twenty postgraduate programmes would be running in the pilot from the Autumn term 2014.

Recruitment Focused Institution
28.5 A number of improvements had been made to the online applications portal. A proposal to improve the offer making process had been presented to the Executive Deans and Assistant Deans (Recruitment) and the team was awaiting feedback.

National Student Survey
28.6 An in-house annual survey was being developed to accustom students to answering surveys of this kind before the next round of the NSS. This would also allow the College to collect more information that could be used to improve the student experience.

Postgraduate research student strategy
28.7 Work on taking this forward was being done through existing groups rather than through a new working group. The College’s Strategic Development Fund had been reinstated and its first call was the Birkbeck Anniversary Studentships for PhD students.

Strategic Futures group
28.8 The Master had met with this group and heard the presentation that would come forward to the Strategic Planning Committee and Governors’ awaydays. He noted that the group had come up with some exciting proposals that should generate interesting discussions.

Attendance monitoring
28.9 A scoped implementation plan for the project would be developed for consideration by the Committee.

Be Birkbeck Guardian proposal
28.10 The London based consultants 5x15, who designed the indicative programme, had put in a bid to plan the pilot programme for the scheme. However, the team was not planning to commit to any financial outlay or formally launch the initiative within Birkbeck until written confirmation had been received from the Guardian. The
possibility of working with colleagues at SOAS as part of the scheme in the future was also being explored.

29 **MASTER’S REPORT**
Noted
29.1 The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills had been asked to make large savings. The future of the student opportunity fund appeared to be under threat. Birkbeck had submitted a document to HEFCE showing its importance to the College’s impactful widening participation work.

29.2 Given the current national financial situation it was unlikely that lobbying for extra support for part time students would successfully get these issues onto the agenda. It was important for the College to continue lobbying for part time students, as an important issue, but also to continue to develop the three year offering as another key strand of Birkbeck’s mission. Strategy for this provision after the removal of the Student Number Control would be considered in more detail at the upcoming Strategic Planning Committee away day.

30 **REVIEW OF MODERN LANGUAGES PROVISION**
Received
30.1 A draft report on the review of modern languages provision (*SP 2013 21*)

Noted
30.2 Modern languages courses had been experiencing declining numbers across the national Higher Education sector. Birkbeck had been affected by this national trend, resulting in a financial deficit in the departments of European Cultures and Languages (ECL) and Iberian and Latin American Studies (ILAS). The review, which had been led by Academic governor Professor Julian Swann, had been commissioned by the Master to consider the future of modern languages at Birkbeck, addressing the problems facing the research and teaching of languages at Birkbeck and ensuring a flexible and financially sustainable future.

30.3 The report set out a plan to achieve this through the creation of a new fully merged department of Modern Languages and Cultures. It was felt there was scope to take fuller advantage of the College’s move into UCAS programmes, so an expanded teaching portfolio was proposed. The report also set out targets for growth in income and for closer monitoring of costs, and noted that there was an opportunity for the College to initiate a broader Birkbeck language strategy, including a Birkbeck Language Centre.
30.4 Members thanked Professor Swann for his leadership of the review. It was noted that the recommendations of the report explicitly laid out issues which had been under consideration in the School of Arts. It was felt that the new School structure would help to bring the two departments together as a single whole. There had been a positive and supportive atmosphere throughout the review.

30.5 Members suggested additions to the report, including reference to the opportunity for the department to put together a new research strategy and to recognise the academic integrity of the staff in the department. It was noted that the College supported academic staff in following their own research trajectories and academic interests but there was a normal, although not absolute, expectation that they would do the teaching that met the demands of the department. It was suggested that in addition Professor Swann hold an open meeting at which the report could be fully discussed.

**Endorsed**

30.6 The report of the Review of Modern Languages provision, subject to additional references to research and academic integrity.

30.7 The outcome of the review would be reported to Finance and General Purposes Committee through the next report of the Strategic Planning Committee, to the joint trade union committee, and the School of Arts Executive meeting. Any next steps involving staff, including redeployment, would be managed using established College procedures.

31 **RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK**

Received

31.1 A paper on lessons learned from the REF submission process *(SP 2013 22)*

Noted

31.2 The paper outlined some of the experiences of the REF submission process and some recommendations for the next REF round on general planning, working arrangements, personnel and quality based on these experiences.

31.3 A key recommendation was for the establishment of a defined research support function which would have management of the REF submission as one of its duties. This was a strategic and resource decision which would require a detailed proposal and consultation with stakeholders. SPC also noted the proposed change in reporting line for the Research Grants and Contracts Office, to be through the College Secretariat because its work had significant strategic as well as financial elements.
31.4 It would also be necessary to consider how to manage related issues such as impact evaluation.

**Agreed**

31.5 Further development of the research strategy, by the Research Strategy Group reporting via the academic committees.

31.4 The PVM Research to meet with appropriate colleagues including the Executive Deans and Human Resources to discuss the specific recommendations in the report and bring them back to the Academic Board or Strategic Planning Committee as appropriate.

**Action (SF)**

31.5 Circulate to Executive Deans:

- versions of Tables 1 and 2 in the report that mapped the data to departments in addition to Units of Assessment
- a table comparing this year’s submission to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise broken down by department.

32 **CATALYST BID**

**Received**

32.1 A note on the implementation of the Catalyst project proposal *(SP 2013 23)*

**Noted**

32.2 HEFCE had now confirmed that the College’s proposal for this jointly funded project would be supported. The bid was for a project to develop and enhance flexible evening-delivered provision.

32.3 There were five strands to the bid:

- Portfolio innovation and flexibility
- Linking work and study
- Student recruitment and progression
- Student achievement and Success
- Research, interpretation and dissemination

32.4 The College Secretary was putting in place a structure to manage the project and confirm the detailed scope, aims and outputs of each of the strands. As it was a HEFCE funded project, there would need to be a formal governance and reporting structure with documented outcomes. An initial meeting on this had been held, and a further report would be made to the Strategic Planning Committee once the structure was in place.
33 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE REPORT

Received

33.1 The Report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee (SP 2013 24)

Noted

National Scholarship Programme Forecasts 2014-15

33.2 The Government had cut its 2014-15 NSP contribution by two thirds from the original allocation. This announcement was made after the College committee cycle so after discussions with senior College management, Governors had agreed that Birkbeck should honour its original scheme and eligibility criteria, and make up the £436K cut to Government funding from College funds.

Financial support post NSP

33.3 It had also been announced that the National Scholarship Programme for undergraduates would end in 2015-16. This would obviously have a financial impact on the College, but was being taken as an opportunity for Birkbeck to review its student financial support strategy and create schemes that suited and supported the particular needs of Birkbeck students and reflected the current undergraduate recruitment patterns and the external policy environment.

33.4 The next scheduled meeting of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee would be dedicated to discussion of the College’s student financial support strategy, and those who were not already on the Committee were welcome to attend this discussion. The PVM Strategy and Special Projects would also be holding discussions on this outside the meeting.

33.5 SPC noted that it would be useful to have more information on what support was offered by other institutions to inform the discussion. It was reported that the Widening Participation team were preparing a paper looking at non traditional students including financial support.

Hardship Fund

33.6 FBSC reported the decision that the criteria of the Hardship Fund should be changed to allow for the provision of fee support to students in exceptional circumstances where all other sources of funding had been tried.

33.7 FBSC confirmed that, in the interests of fairness, the hardship fund should be operated at College level. While Schools should not be operating schemes for students who had not secured College hardship funding, operational solutions for individual cases, for example where students had not yet received expected external funding, could be discussed outside the meeting.
34  **SPC AWAYDAY Y AGENDA**

Noted

34.1 Members discussed the agenda for the upcoming Strategic Planning Committee awayday, and noted that data would be available on student demographics, income projections for the future, the results of student and applicant surveys and comparisons between Birkbeck and the rest of the Higher Education sector.

34.2 It was agreed that the awayday would include considerations of what kind of institution Birkbeck should aim to be in the future. There would be a presentation from the Strategic Futures group and a presentation from Mary Curnock Cook, the Chief Executive of UCAS, which would be an opportunity for SPC to reflect on Birkbeck’s particular experience with the three year programme, and strategy going forward. The need to promote University Square Stratford in these discussions was confirmed.

35  **MID YEAR BUDGET REVIEW**

Received

35.1 A note on the mid year budget review and Income Distribution Model 2013-14 *(SP 2013 26)*

Noted

35.2 The mid year budget review was underway, and the Vice Master Designate was meeting with the Schools and Professional Services. The mid year IDM would be produced once the review meetings were concluded, and considered at the February meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee. It was predicted that, based on income earned to date, tuition fee income would be £56M, compared with £54.6M estimated in the predictive IDM in June. Some departments had reached their income targets while others had not, and this was being discussed during the individual review meetings.

34.3 One focus of the meetings this year would be on increasing the accuracy of the mid-year forecast by assessing budget spending to date compared with the previous year, and confirming the position on staff posts that had been agreed in the predictive IDM but not yet been filled. The meetings would also be an opportunity to share issues emerging from Portfolio Review and the five year forecasts that were in development for the SPC Awayday.

34.4 The College had been notified by HEFCE that there would be an in-year grant adjustment (fine) following the College’s over-recruitment of three year undergraduates against the Student Number Control. The notification had been
automatically generated and the College had submitted an appeal. Until the outcome was confirmed the budget would retain a central contingency.

34.5 The College would ask for its Student Number Control to be increased to 1,000 students for 2014-15. The Chancellor of the Exchequer had announced that all student number controls would be removed from 2015 onwards. The College's strategy was therefore that Schools should continue to maximise their recruitment efforts in 2014-15.

34.6 COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

Received

34.7 A note following the review of committees and working groups (SP 2013 27)

Noted

34.8 SPC received a list of current centrally supported Committees and working groups, following a review aimed at rationalising these groups. Any additional central administrative or project resource would be determined by the College Secretariat after the aims and objectives of the work had been defined and agreed through SPC.

44.9 Members also noted the importance of involving a wide group of colleagues on Committees and working groups. If there was sufficient demand then a staff development session could be run for new committee members to brief them on what was expected of them at meetings.

45 THREE TERM LEARNING

Noted

45.1 Members noted the need to clarify the strategic importance of this initiative. Few new programmes had been put forward for three term learning following the pilot phase.

46 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted

46.1 The dates of meetings for the rest of the session:
- 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