BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
5 June 2013

Present
David Latchman (Chair), Philip Dewe, Costas Douzinas, Stephen Frosh, Keith Harrison, Nick Head, Matthew Innes, Sue Jackson, Tricia King, David McGhie, Naina Patel, Matthew Weait, Li Wei, Peter Westley

By invitation
Nicholas Keep, Philip Powell, Patricia Tuit, Miriam Zukas

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Roisin Lynch

Apologies
Hilary Fraser, Dean Pateman

64 MINUTES
Approved
64.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 8 May 2013.

65 ACTION SHEET
Received
65.1 An update on progress on implementing the actions agreed at the last meeting (SP 2012 45)

Noted
Modular/credit based fees
65.2 The PVM Learning and Teaching had chaired a meeting to consult on the process for introducing credit based pricing. There was wide support for introduction at the postgraduate level initially, as it was felt that developing undergraduate credit based pricing would be more complex. It was confirmed that the systems development would also allow for the implementation of undergraduate credit based pricing in the future. There would need to be continuing discussions about the what the Birkbeck undergraduate and postgraduate models should look like in 2015/16.

65.3 The driving force behind the introduction of credit based pricing was the need to provide students with increased flexibility to choose how they studied and paid. It should also attract students who were wary of making a large initial financial commitment. However, student retention; and the impact of students not being kept together in their intake cohort groups; would need to be monitored.

Agreed
65.4 To implement credit based pricing initially for postgraduate taught programmes
65.5 To set up a working party to create a significant postgraduate credit based fee system for 2014/15. This would be a large scale trial of the operational effectiveness of the system rather than a pilot scheme to decide whether or not to proceed.

65.6 In order to attract students, the presentation of the whole of the Birkbeck PGT offer would need be considered. Modular pricing could not just be an addition to the existing offer as this would increase complexity and confusion.

65.7 To discuss progress at a further meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee in July.

Note: the working group will be chaired by the PVM Postgraduate Study

66 MASTER'S REPORT
Noted
66.1 Members were asked to forward Nominations for the Fellowship of the College by 6 June 2013, for discussion at the upcoming meeting of the Nominations Committee.

66.2 There were discussions underway with University College London on the potential for collaboration on a new building for Biological Sciences on one of the sites identified in the Master planning exercise. If this project was feasible it might lead to a future opportunity to improve the extension building, giving the College more space in the long term.

67 SCHOOL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES PLANS
Endorsed
67.1 The narrative planning statements of the Schools and Professional Services (SP 2012 46A-F)

Noted
67.2 The Executive Deans would meet with the Vice Master Designate to discuss the plans further if required.

68 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2013-14
Received
68.1 An updated draft of the Income Distribution Model budget forecasts for 2013-14 (SP 2012 47).

Noted
68.2 The 2013-14 planning round had been exceptionally challenging, and had taken place in the context of a recruitment picture that was worse than had been predicted in January. Undergraduate numbers had not levelled out after the shock of the new system as had been expected. The Committee commended colleagues in the Schools and central services who had worked together constructively to produce a viable budget under these circumstances.

68.3 There were budget iteration meetings with colleagues in Schools and Professional Services, during which all income and spending estimates were reviewed,
unnecessary spending was deferred or cancelled, and appropriate contingency against the continuing uncertainty of student recruitment was identified. The forecast surplus was £1.875M before moderation and £0.235M after moderation.

68.4 Members noted that the increases in School pay costs reflected the combination of harmonisation of pay and conditions for teaching and scholarship staff, incrementation and promotions. Wherever possible, Schools had absorbed costs within their budgets, but it was noted that this was more difficult for Schools with low staff turnover and high levels of promotion. It was also noted that incrementation had a differential impact on Schools, and that the REF preparations were also having an impact on appointments and staff retention.

**Agreed**

68.5 To forward the updated draft of the Income Distribution Model budget forecasts for 2013-14 (SP 2012 47) to F&GPC.

69 **BE BIRKBECK GUARDIAN PARTNERSHIP**

Received

69.1 A report on the potential partnership with the Guardian linked to the Be Birkbeck scheme (SP 2012 48)

Noted

69.2 The Guardian was seeking to expand its membership programme and develop a space in its Kings Cross building for learning and other events to take place, in partnership with other educational organisations. Discussions were taking place on a potential partnership involving the Be Birkbeck programme and a non-exclusive arrangement, with both parties free to form partnerships with other organisations.

69.3 This partnership would involve a programme of learning events that were jointly branded as Guardian and Be Birkbeck events. Preliminary meetings had been held and a consultant had been engaged to curate an indicative programme to explore the potential scope of the collaboration. It was noted that this programme was based on an initial brisk round of conversations and responses and was not an indication of what the final programme would look like.

69.4 SPC's view was that such a partnership could be of significant benefit to the College, as it would fit with our broader mission of providing higher education to working people and could give colleagues greater exposure to a wider audience, increase the worldwide recognition of the College and make a contribution to core costs.

69.5 Work was ongoing on the planning, financial and operational aspects of the proposal. The Guardian had proposed a revenue share model with a 70%/ 30% Birkbeck/Guardian split. The Guardian would be responsible for space, marketing and ticketing. Members noted that the scheme’s benefits should balance the resources being put into it and generate significant revenue for the College. A business plan was being drawn up. The Guardian was keen to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the College during summer 2013 to facilitate its negotiations on acquiring a property lease to house the initiative. This would require approval by the Governors.
Endorsed

69.6 Further development of the proposals and business plan, to allow a paper to be taken to the meeting of the Governors on 3 July 2013.

70 POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENT STRATEGY
Received

70.1 A report on development of strategy for postgraduate research students (SP 2012 49)

Noted

70.2 Competition for the ‘best’ research students was intensifying and there were increasing external pressures from research councils awarding research studentships. Although the College was spending significant amounts on financial and other support for research students, it was not clear either from internal planning documents or from prospective student information what was on offer.

70.3 It was noted that the recruitment and stewardship of research students was very different from the arrangements for taught students. Birkbeck should have a cross-college postgraduate research student strategy that reflected this. Research students did not necessarily contribute to College income but made a significant contribution to its culture, reputation and research standing.

Action

70.4 (MI, SF, LW) Set up a working group to review postgraduate research student strategy, including recruitment activities, recommendations on fee and scholarship strategies, and the review and refresh of recruitment, resource, activities and scholarship information for research students via a single “gateway” web page. The group should also consider the validity of distinctions between full and part time status for research students.

71 OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE PROGRAMME UPDATE
Received

71.1 A report on progress in the College’s Operational Excellence initiative (SP 2012 50)

Noted

71.2 The initiative was set up to respond to Birkbeck’s need to upgrade its administrative and support services, to meet the needs and expectations of students, raise the quality and consistency of services for students and other customers, drive greater efficiency into service delivery and deliver more and better services with the same or less resource.

71.3 The programme had five broad objectives:
- Identifying and describing processes
- Building capacity and skills for process improvement and improving specific processes
- Linking staff responsibilities, roles and rewards with process improvement
• IT systems development via Business Process Modelling software
• Putting in place organisational structure and resource

71.4 An Operational Excellence Programme Board had been set up to oversee the ongoing development of the programme. It was chaired by Governor Paul Shelton and the members include the Dean of BEI/PVM Enterprise and Innovation as well as Directors of relevant support services and members of the implementation team.

71.5 So far the programme had delivered the 2012 online student enrolment system; improved processes for setting and charging tuition fees; a system to track and record student status changes such as transfers and withdrawals; and improved processes for authorising new and amended staff posts and for defining and agreeing Estates projects. Current projects included improvements to the student enrolment system, including handling student financial support and confirmation of student loan applications; and a system to handle the resolution of queries from students and prospective students.

71.6 As well as systems development, work continued in a number of strands including more process improvement workshops and staff development.

71.7 The OE programme had started out with a focus on internal services such as Finance, HR and Estates. Since initiation it had also responded to the external pressures of the new system and had delivered large scale and high impact student facing improvements. Responding to Programme Board’s advice that the programme should be clear on its priorities and in a position to define and deliver against targets contributing to the College’s major strategic priorities, SPC noted that at present resource must be prioritised on primary student service related projects, which in the short term might mean that progress would be slower in some of the other projects.

Endorsed

71.8 The ongoing development of the Operational Excellence programme and its projects.

72 RISK MANAGEMENT

Noted
72.1 The Report from the Risk Management Group on the management of risk in 2012-13 (SP 2012 51) and the Risk Register for 2013-14 (SP 2012 52), which had been considered by the Audit Committee and would be forwarded for consideration by Governors.

73 RECRUITMENT FOCUSED INSTITUTION

Received
73.1 A note on strengthening and increasing the efficiency of student recruitment (SP 2012 53)

Noted
73.2 The College’s recruitment processes had improved substantially over the last five years, but there was now a need to improve further. The Recruitment Focussed
Institution initiative would focus attention and energy on recruitment, driving conversion from enquiry through to application, offer and enrolment. It was noted that there were strong indications that making offers quickly resulted in higher levels of enrolment.

73.3 Projects would include monitoring and reducing turnaround time between application and offer, reducing bottlenecks, producing advance timetables so that busy prospective students knew up front when their classes would be and coordinating email communications coming from different functional areas, to ensure consistency and clarity from the student perspective.

73.4 Members discussed the issue of following up applications, and noted that this had improved over the last few years, but that problems could occur when it was unclear who was responsible for the application at a particular stage. An agreed set of processes and deadlines would address this issue, and would also allow for the possibility of giving students the ability to track applications. Members also noted that it was good practice to refer rejected students onto programmes that would be a better fit for them.

**Endorsed**

73.5 The proposal to take forward the Recruitment Focussed Institution initiative (SP 2012 53)

**Action**

73.6 Report back on the progress and impact of the proposals around applications and the coordination of communications, and any other suggestions for the initiative, to the next meeting of SPC in July.

74 **EMPLOYABILITY ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION AT BIRKBECK**

**Received**

74.1 A note on the development of an employability strategy (SP 2012 54)

**Noted**

74.2 The paper drew together current and suggested future strands of activity linked to employability, enterprise and innovation in the College. Members noted that there was a significant amount of employability activity already taking place, and that there was therefore a need to draw it together and communicate it more widely.

74.3 Members highlighted the need to ensure that the College was maximising the opportunity to engage with students on issues of recruitment, retention, employability and widening participation at every contact point in the student journey. Implementation of the strategy would include the B4E initiative agreed in March as well as consideration of careers services and innovation and engagement projects.

**Endorsed**

74.4 The further development of employability, enterprise and innovation strategy, coordinated by the Vice Master and leading to implementation under the PVM Enterprise and Innovation’s portfolio.