BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

27 November 2013

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

By invitation
Hilary Fraser, Nick Keep, Philip Powell, Patricia Tuit, Miriam Zukas

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Roisin Lynch

Apologies
Costas Douzinas, Dean Pateman, Matthew Weait

15 MINUTES
Approved
15.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 17 October 2013.

16 REPORT
Noted
16.1 The Committee’s Report to the last meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee (SP 2012 12A)

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

Noted
Research Excellence Framework
17.2 The College had now made its REF submission. The Committee recorded its thanks to the Pro Vice Master for Research and all colleagues who worked on the REF submission. Cross-college cooperation between Schools and Professional Services had been significant to the success of the process.
17.3 **Online provision** The group had met in November and defined three main initial priority areas: lecture capture, enhancements to the Virtual Learning Environment, and options around new online programmes and partnerships. The group would meet again in December.

17.4 **Flexible study** Work was at the information gathering and design stage. The modules to be offered as standalone courses were defined and a list of trial programmes for 2014-15 was being finalised.

17.5 **“Next generation” group** The group had met twice so far and would meet with the Master in January before reporting to the SPC awayday in February.

17.6 **Working groups** A meeting had been convened for 5 December 2013 to discuss which working groups could be disbanded and which needed to continue.

17.7 **National Student Survey** A communication had gone out to students to make sure that they were informed of the work that was being done in the College to improve the student experience. The task force was also working closely with the Assistant Deans for Learning and Teaching in the Schools to develop strategies to improve the results of the next National Student Survey.

17.8 **Be Birkbeck Guardian proposal** The proposal had been endorsed by the Governors on the 3 July, and the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding had been delegated to a sub group. The College was awaiting confirmation by email from the Guardian of the terms of the proposed relationship.

17.9 **Postgraduate research student strategy** A working group had been set up to review postgraduate student strategy and the first meeting had been held.

17.10 **Anniversary studentships** The PVM for Strategy and Special Projects and the Executive Deans were discussing proposals for College-funded studentships and would shortly agree the number of studentships that could be offered.

17.11 **Masters programmes**
17.11 The Pro Vice Masters for Strategy and Special Projects, Research, and Postgraduate Study would link the work on the future of Masters programmes with the ongoing work on research student strategy and flexible study.

18 **MASTER’S REPORT**

Noted

18.1 The annual meeting with HEFCE had taken place at Stratford. The College’s bid for Catalyst funding to develop intensive programmes had been approved, although the award letter would not be issued until the Funding Council had made a final decision on the action that would be taken as a result of Birkbeck exceeding its Student Number Control allowance, and what SNC target the College would be given for 2014-15.

18.2 When the College had received its new Student Number Control target it would need to consider how these numbers should be distributed and develop a strategy for the future when it was expected that Birkbeck’s SNC allowance would plateau at 1000 students.

*Secretary’s note: in December 2013 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the Student Number Control would be abolished for all institutions from 2015-16 onwards.*

18.3 It was noted that unlike the Strategic Development Fund award, the Catalyst funding would not need to be repaid.

18.4 Members noted that due to the delay in confirming the award, the original timeframe outlined in the bid would have to be adjusted.

18.5 The College would continue to lobby HEFCE on the interests of part time students.

19 **INCOME DISTRIBUTION MODEL OUTTURN 2012-13**

Received

19.1 The final IDM report for 2012-13 *(SP 2013 13)*

Noted

19.2 The College had a surplus of £6.76M for 2012-13, an improvement from the June forecast of £2.9M and the mid year unmoderated forecast of £2.8M. This reflected good student recruitment performance in the Schools, higher than forecast non-fee income, and lower than forecast pay and non pay costs.

19.3 The main causes of change since the mid year forecast were savings and lower spending/higher income than forecast in:
- School pay costs (0.5M)
- School non pay costs (£0.8M)
• Contribution of external research grants (£0.4K)
• Professional Services spend (0.8M)
• Other income, including commercial letting and provision of other services to external parties (0.9M)

19.4 Tuition fee income was £1.36M less than had been forecast at the mid year point, reflecting the student withdrawal following non attendance.

19.5 The HEFCE income overall was £140K less than at the mid year following a HEFCE T funding grand adjustment due to a correction of estimated old system numbers. The allocation of T funding between Schools had changed due to changes in fundable completion rates which were used to distribute the mainstream old system allocations as well as the allocation for Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects.

19.6 It was noted that the outturn was a very positive outcome for the College, and that all Schools had consolidated or improved their positions compared with the mid year review. Work would continue on improving forecasting, including during the mid year review, and establishing a realistic baseline for pay and non pay budgets which would reduce the need for late corrections.

19.7 Departmental breakdowns of the IDM outturn and income forecasts would be sent confidentially to the Master, Executive Deans and School Managers.

20 STUDENT RECRUITMENT 2013-14

20.1 An updated report on enrolments and tuition fee income (SP 2013 14)

Noted

20.2 Recruitment FTE was now at 100% of target and invoiced income was at 96% of target. The Committee congratulated colleagues in the Schools and in External and other professional services departments for their collaborative hard work in securing this successful outcome.

20.3 In order to ensure that the Student Number Control target of 700 would be met, UCAS applications had been held open until the end of Clearing. There had then been an unprecedented late surge of UCAS applications with a very high offer to enrolment ratio which had meant that UCAS numbers were now over 900.

20.4 In order to allow for more accurate predictions on applications and enrolments in the future work would be done to use the data available from the College’s experience in UCAS so far to map application and conversion rates for each phase of the recruitment cycle, drilling down to a departmental level.
20.5 SPC heard that work was currently being done to learn more about the College’s UCAS students, including their backgrounds and motivations for studying at Birkbeck, and that this would be presented to Strategic Planning Committee at their Awayday in February. Members asked for information on any differences between those UCAS students who applied earlier and later in the recruitment cycle.

20.6 There was a need to ensure that the College’s application process allowed for data on students’ qualifications and UCAS tariff points to be collected so that this could be used to gain a greater understanding of the backgrounds of these students.

20.7 Members asked for any available data on how other institutions who were new to the UCAS system had performed in terms of meeting their Student Number Control targets.

21 FINANCIAL FORECASTS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Received

21.1 Updated financial forecasts and proposals for the development of key performance indicators on institutional sustainability. (SP 2013 15)

Noted

21.2 Finance and General Purposes Committee had endorsed an update to the financial forecasts agreed in June 2013, to take into account the financial out turn for 2012-13 and the most recent forecast for 2013-14 as required by HEFCE as part of the annual accountability return. The forecast surplus provision had improved since the position reported in July due to successful student recruitment for 2013-14 and a better than forecast financial outcome in 2012-13.

21.3 F&GPC had also considered some provisional initial surplus target projections to 2017-18. The projections assumed that the College could increase to an intake of 1,000 UK/EU students and 100 international students by 2015-16.

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<td>July 2013 (£K)</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>260</td>
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<td>November 2013 (£K)</td>
<td>2,987</td>
<td>3,826</td>
<td>4,159</td>
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21.4 Members noted that there was a degree of uncertainty and risk in these projections, as the outcome of the REF and its potential impact on funding was not known, and the Government rather than the College had control over the level of tuition fees, which formed a significant part of the College’s income.

21.5 The College’s budgeting process in recent years had of necessity concentrated on the short term as there had been a need to respond to the crisis in the sector and demonstrate that action was being taken to make savings. However the planning
process should now increasingly include consideration of mid term planning and budgeting for the next 3-5 years. As part of this process, more detailed School level projections would be made to support the mid year budget review and annual planning round.

21.6 HEFCE was asking institutions to make an annual assessment of their institutional sustainability and define a target for annual income return. This would be required for the formal annual accountability return in 2014.

21.7 The assessment would include Key Performance Indicators in five areas:
- Teaching and the student experience
- Research outputs and sustainability
- Financial performance for sustainability
- Financial health
- Other leading areas at the institution’s discretion

21.8 The KPIs for financial performance and health were pre-defined by HEFCE, but the other indicators were to be chosen by institutions. It was proposed that Birkbeck use metrics that were already being monitored, covering student recruitment, student retention, National Student Survey outcome, REF outcome, research rants and contracts, research students, resource for new developments, online developments, diversity of income sources and activity at University Square Stratford.

21.9 Members were asked to consider the proposed KPIs and contact the Head of Governance and Corporate Support with any suggestions for further indicators.

22 TECHNICAL SERVICES REVIEW
Received
22.1 A report on the outcome of the Technical Services Review. (SP 2013 16)

Noted
22.2 The Finance and General Purposes Committee had received a copy of the report and been notified of the objections made to the report by the Trade Unions, who had been given the report to comment on prior to formal discussions as part of the redundancy process.

22.3 The recommendations involved potential redundancies, which would be dealt with according to the College policy, in which a detailed business case would be made for consideration by the Executive Dean, Human Resources and the Vice Master.
23 OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE
Received
23.1 An update on progress in the Operational Excellence programme *(SP 2013 17)*

Noted
23.2 The majority of process improvement resources were being concentrated in areas involving interactions with students, particularly those processes which resulted in income for the College. Major progress had been made on processes to automatically monitor and remind students to make and confirm their loan applications, and to facilitate interactions between the College and the SLC. These changes had had significant impact.

23.3 Although it had been necessary to concentrate resources on student facing projects, the steering group was considering ways to bring other departments’ processes into the Operational Excellence programme. One method of doing this was through the new Fast Fix initiative, which offered half day workshops aimed at applying the principles and methodology of operational excellence in areas where there was scope for process improvement without IT systems development.

24 MISSION STATEMENT
Received
24.1 A note on proposals for updating the College Mission Statement *(SP 2013 18)*

Agreed
24.2 That there was need for a more detailed discussion of the College Mission Statement, and that this should be given further consideration at the SPC Awayday.

25 ATTENDANCE MONITORING
Received
25.1 Recommendations for the development of systems to monitor student attendance *(SP 2013 19)*

Noted
25.2 A research exercise had been carried out, looking at current attendance monitoring practice at Birkbeck and in other institutions, and investigating possible solutions for Birkbeck.

25.3 The project team recommended fixed scanners at the entrances to Birkbeck rooms where students could swipe in with their existing student cards. A small portable device could be used in external rooms to register card swipes, and a paper roll call could be used as a back up when neither of these solutions were practicable.
25.4 It was noted that this solution was in use and had been implemented smoothly at London Southbank University.

25.5 Members discussed the proposed solutions and noted that the focus of monitoring attendance should be on encouraging people to attend, rather than identifying those who should not be present or had not paid their fees.

25.6 The database showing attendance would be viewable by staff and students. SPC asked for a supplementary paper indicating how the data collected by the system could be used to feed into the retention process.

25.7 The proposed solution would be scoped further in order to implement it as a project, and this would include further detail on how the data would be used.

Approved

25.8 Further development and scoping of the attendance monitoring solution.

26 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted

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