Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

6 October 2011

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

By invitation
Hilary Fraser, Nicholas Keep, Philip Powell, Patricia Tuitt, Miriam Zukas

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Nick Head, Roisin Lynch

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE
Received
1.1 Terms of Reference and Scheme of Membership (SP 2011 01)

2 MINUTES
Confirmed
2.1 The Minutes of the last meeting

3 REPORT TO F&GPC
Noted
3.1 SPC's summer term report to the F&GPC (SP 2011 02)

4 THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF BIRKBECK
Considered
4.1 The Master's annual paper on the Strategic Direction of the College (SP 2011 03)

Noted
4.2 The paper had been endorsed by the Governors on 5 October 2011.
4.3 Since the paper had been written, the College had achieved the remarkable success of a listing among the top 150 universities in the world in the THE league table.
4.4 Progress had been made on the issue of repayment of loans for part time students. The Liberal Democrats had agreed at their conference to ask the Government to readdress the proposal for part time students to begin repaying their loans after 3.5 years even if they were still studying. An amendment to the Education Bill currently passing through Parliament was brought to the House of Lords and attracted strong cross-party support.

5 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS
Noted
5.1 The report of the FBS Committee (SP 2011 04)
Noted

Confirmation of Certificate of HE fees 2012-13

5.2 Most Certificate of HE fees had been set within the tier structure and FBSC was considering a small number of exceptions.

5.3 The Unions had expressed concern that higher fees would reduce the number of students, leading to course closure. It was reported that 40% of Certificate courses were in Tier 1 where the fee was below the cost of putting on the provision.

New system undergraduate financial support criteria and processes

5.4 FBSC had outlined the criteria and processes for undergraduate financial support in the new higher fee system. Emerging criteria for the National Scholarship Programme Awards, which would have a value of half the tuition fee and would be partly a cash award and partly a fee waiver, included study intensity above 25% and household income below £20K. The Birkbeck bursary scheme criteria would include household income below £25K, with cash awards of up to £1,000, pro rata to study intensity.

5.5 The principle that concessionary fees should be withdrawn had already been agreed and, with the new bursary scheme in place, this was the appropriate time to implement the decision. Most students studying for Certificates and currently receiving concessions would be eligible for bursaries in the new system. Concessionary fees would not be used in 2012-13.

5.6 Members noted that it was important for the College both to attract new students and to maintain its social mobility ethos - and that the financial support schemes should support these aims.

5.7 The National Scholarship Programme (NSP) awards would be used to support and incentivise progression and retention. This would involve ringfencing an agreed number of awards for students progressing from access programmes, both via partner FE Colleges and in the future, once Birkbeck Certificate of HE students started progressing through the new system, from Birkbeck.

5.8 There was discussion over the allocation of the remaining unringfenced NSP awards. Flexibility was an important factor and it was agreed that uptake during the initial year should be closely monitored and strategic decisions made about topping up allocations by transferring funds or stepping up fundraising.

5.9 SPC also considered study intensity and ELQ criteria. The national rule for NSP eligibility was 25% study intensity (30 credits per year), the same as for eligibility for student loans. It was agreed that the same principle should apply to the Birkbeck bursaries. The national guidelines for NSP did not rule out ELQ students, although ELQs would not be eligible for student loans and would have to fund their own fees. SPC agreed that the financial support schemes should not include ELQ criteria and that the uptake by ELQ and non ELQ students should be monitored in the first year.

5.10 The schemes reflected the principles set out in the national guidance from OFFA and HEFCE but, as the guidance was predicated on full time high fee provision, adaptations had been made to accommodate Birkbeck’s part-time lower fee provision. Confirmation was being sought from OFFA and HEFCE that these modifications were in order.
5.11 Although the budget allocations were finite and it was not possible to guarantee that all eligible students would receive awards, data modelling indicated that the College would not have to turn away students who met the criteria. Fundraising efforts would be stepped up if demand exceeded the allocations.

5.12 The Committee thanked Scott Miller and Katharine Bock for their work in developing these proposals.

**Endorsed**

5.13 The general principles for awarding financial support as outlined above.

**Agreed**

5.14 That the College would not offer bursaries to students studying less than 30 credits per year (25% intensity).

5.15 That the financial support schemes would not include ELQ criteria.

**Postgraduate Taught Programme fee tiers 2012/13**

**Noted**

5.16 There was considerable public confusion about PGT fees, including the belief that they would be going up at a similar level to undergraduate fees. It was essential to establish clarity of message, because postgraduate students made up a large proportion of student numbers and a significant contribution to fee income.

5.17 FBSC proposed 5% increases to the part time tiers, reflecting inflation. It discussed further raises to the tiers to compensate for lost HEFCE income but concluded that significant changes would send a negative message, diluting the headline that PGT fees would not be affected by the 2012 changes. Within the tier structure, some Masters programmes would move to higher levels, reflecting ongoing strategy to charge market driven fees.

5.18 The decision to raise full time fees to be pro rata with their part time versions was being implemented. Despite a significant increase in 2011/12, full time PGT applications had continued to rise. Nevertheless, to moderate risk in an uncertain future, FBSC proposed that the increases be made over two years, to reach full pro rata equivalence by 2013/14.

5.19 This was an appropriate time to review Masters provision. Undergraduates working their way through the new fee system and applying for postgraduate study in 2015 could be in considerable debt and this would present both opportunities and risks to Birkbeck. It would be important to have the right range of postgraduate programmes on offer; and to market them effectively making the most of their distinctive features.

**Action**

5.20 (CD & LW) Set up a working group with representation from the Schools to consider future development and presentation of Masters provision.

**Endorsed**

5.21 Postgraduate fee tiers and strategy as recommended by FBSC.

**International fees**

**Noted**
5.22 FBSC had started to consider international fees. The part time undergraduate degree fee was disproportionately low and was being reviewed. Other changes were likely to be in line with inflation, subject to a review of competitor fees.

Fee reduction for alumni
Noted
5.23 It was desirable to encourage alumni to return and progress to postgraduate study. FBSC had therefore proposed a one-off offer of a fee reduction for Birkbeck graduates progressing to postgraduate degrees.

5.24 Modelling of the impact of this suggested that the risk of lost income would be manageable.

5.25 The Committee discussed issues arising from the proposal. It was noted that, to be fair, the offer should extend to graduates of Masters degrees developed as a response to ELQ who wished to move on to further postgraduate study. It would also be necessary to decide whether a time limit should be applied.

Endorsed
5.26 The principle of a fee reduction for alumni progressing to Masters level programmes; the detailed proposal and implementation to be referred back to FBSC.

6 FINANCIAL AND STRATEGIC PLANNING AND BUDGETING FOR 2012-13
Considered
6.1 HEFCE T funding forecasts (SP 2011 05)
6.2 Proposed headline assumptions for forecasting student numbers and fee income for 2012-13 (SP 2011 06)

Noted
6.3 T funding was expected to reduce from £20.8M in 2011-12 to £13.8M in 2012-13, as most funding for first years in the new system disappeared. HEFCE had asked for a forecast of fundable student numbers in 2012-13 to be returned to it in December, with the 2011-12 HESES return. In addition, College and School level forecasts of all student numbers were needed, to enable planning. The proposed assumptions for making these forecasts were conservative predictions of the impact on student numbers of the new fee and funding regime and of College strategy. Part time undergraduate numbers were expected to fall, with ELQ numbers dropping dramatically, while international and UCAS entry numbers were expected to increase.

Agreed
6.4 The student number forecasting assumptions in SP 2011 06, subject to the advice of the International Office on forecast international student numbers.

Considered
6.5 A note on the planning cycle and planning governance (SP 2011 07)

Noted
6.6 The proposed timetable included provision for earlier circulation of an indicative IDM budget, to inform the planning meetings.

6.7 There was discussion around the timing of various points in the planning cycle, with views expressed that decision points should be earlier, because of the need to prepare for
significant changes, as well as later, to accommodate developments in national policy. The consensus drawing on both views was that planning would need to be done as early as possible but in the expectation of change and with provision for flexibility. 2012-13 would be an atypical year, and would therefore require an atypical planning cycle.

6.8 To accommodate the uncertainty, planning would involve several phases:
- Broad student number and financial forecasts based on the assumptions just agreed, to be considered by Governors’ committees in the autumn term
- Consideration of best and worst case scenarios and contingency plans as part of the SPC awayday in January.
- Mid year budget review, to assess performance on 2011-12 targets and set the scene for 2012-13 planning.
- Detailed planning by Schools and Professional Services, leading to the draft IDM budget.

7 INCOME DISTRIBUTION MODEL
Endorsed

7.1 The report of the IDM working group (SP 2011 08)

8 STUDENT RECRUITMENT
Considered

8.1 Final student numbers 2010/11 (SP 2011 09)

8.2 An initial report of student numbers for 2011/12 (SP 2011 10)

Noted

8.3 In 2010/11 the following final student numbers were achieved:
- New students reached 102% of target.
- Returning students reached 106% of target.
- Overall 103% of the target was achieved.
- Modular Certificates achieved 81% of target.
- International student recruitment exceeded target at 120%.

8.4 Current indications for 2011/12 were:
- New students expected to be 98% of target.
- Returning students expected to meet target.
- Autumn term modular enrolments 87% of target.

8.5 It was noted that the first weeks of term were a critical time for student numbers. High numbers of applications were still being received and offers were being made. It was therefore important to continue monitoring and facilitating enrolments. Provided the effort continued the indications were good; and the Committee congratulated everybody involved in student recruitment for their work. It was a great achievement and especially important as an opportunity to expand the student body before part time student number restrictions were imposed.

8.6 International student enrolment was currently at 66% of target with a large number of students with offers progressing through the visa system. It was likely that the international recruitment target would be exceeded. The College was almost at the limit of its current student visa allocation and would consider applying for a larger allocation if, as was likely, international student numbers continued to grow.
8.7 The appeal of being an international student at Birkbeck, living in London and studying alongside the College’s home student body of Londoners engaged with the business and cultural life of the city, was becoming more apparent. While the number of applications had risen, the percentage being made offers had stayed the same, indicating that higher student numbers had not come at the expense of academic standards.

8.8 The report of the Recruitment Monitoring Group on the 2011/12 recruitment cycle (SP 2011 11)

8.9 Birkbeck had enjoyed six consecutive years of record breaking recruitment. The student numbers lost to ELQ in 2007 had been successfully replaced. The partnership between Schools and Professional Services departments had been strengthened to deliver results year on year.

8.10 Increased investment in international recruitment at Birkbeck had so far resulted in a 48% increase in applications on the previous year for 2011/12.

8.11 It was felt throughout the College that the recruitment system was working more smoothly, and that this was making a real positive difference to the experience of academic and administrative staff.

8.12 2012 would be a challenging recruitment year. The reaction to the significant fee increases at certificate and undergraduate degree level, the uncertainty of part-time student take-up of the new loan provision and the non-availability of loans for ELQ students were likely to impact on recruitment. Hitting targets for 2012 would require new approaches and significant cross-College partnership.

8.13 There was scope to improve processes further, including the collection and use of data and reviewing taking up academic references for applicants who had been out of education for a long time.

8.14 There was also potential to link recruitment work with the development of partnerships and progression agreements with FE Colleges and other institutions. It would be important to develop monitoring arrangements to track the progress of students coming through these routes.

Action

8.15 (MW) Set up a working group to develop strategy for student recruitment and progression via partnerships with other academic institutions.

9 THE BIRKBECK ASSOCIATION

Proposals for the development of the Birkbeck Association (SP 2011 12)

The Birkbeck Associate Student scheme was aimed at addressing the educational, cultural and personal needs of students pursuing lifelong learning. The Association was envisaged as a membership scheme in which members would have access to educational events and opportunities including special events and lectures; learning events including events
developed with cultural partners and “auditing” opportunities, involving attending lectures linked to academic programmes.

9.3 A task force had been convened, focus groups with potential students conducted and a costing model developed. It was proposed that a pilot soft launch be run in 2012/13, to develop and test systems in time for a major launch in 2013/14.

9.4 The scheme would be marketed to a wide range of people, from longstanding Birkbeck students to alumni to regular attenders of London cultural events. The College should aim for Birkbeck Association events to become part of the cultural calendar of London. The objective was to create opportunities for lifelong learning for people who were not interested in certification or credit accumulation; and not to provide progression routes or run premium fee courses. The moderate pricing structure would reflect this.

9.5 The scheme would have an annual membership fee (£60 in the first year rising to £75) and a menu of events free to members and events with an extra fee. The task group had considered different charging options. Previous experience had been that free events tended to be over-subscribed but then under-attended. The focus groups had been broadly in favour of charging for at least some events.

9.6 The cost of the initial pilot year and launch of the full scheme was estimated to cost £160K. After this, projections were for the scheme to break even from year 2, provided there were more than 1,000 members. SPC supported the notion that, once membership had grown and start-up costs had been met, some of the income from the Association could go into the Student Hardship Fund.

9.7 The scheme would have its own identity within Birkbeck but at the same time be integrated with Schools and Professional Services activities. The next step was to open discussion with Schools and Professional Services. It was suggested that this should be done through introduction of the proposals at the Master’s address to staff, followed up by meetings at School level.

9.8 There was a discussion of terminology. Some members felt that describing the Birkbeck Association target members as ‘lifelong learners’ was not appropriate; however it was acknowledged that there was limited choice in terms of an alternative phrase.

9.9 The Committee commended Miriam Zukas and her colleagues for developing the proposals and costing models.

**Endorsed**

9.10 Further development of the Birkbeck Associate Student Scheme as proposed.

**10 REVIEW OF CERTIFICATES OF HE**

Considered

10.1 A report on the review of Certificates of Higher Education *(SP 2011 13)*

10.2 An audit of existing Certificate provision had been conducted in order to clarify purpose, progression and future strategic direction for Certificates within each School.

10.3 Issues identified during the audit, and which needed College level consideration, included:

- Variation in the extent to which Certificate credits are integrated into degrees.
- The need to further clarify and communicate progression routes
• The extent to which Birkbeck Certificate students progress to degrees at other institutions
• Potential decline in take-up in subject areas where not all students were interested in acquiring a qualification and would not be willing to pay higher fees.
• Potential decline in take-up from students who would have qualified for the Part Time Grant but may be unwilling to take out loans to fund their studies.

10.4 A significant number of current students wanted more than the provision to be offered by the Birkbeck Association but were not interested in progression. Much of the provision attracting these students was modular and currently set at fee tier 1 (£650 for 30 credits). As tier 1 fee income would not cover costs in the new system, this provision would make a loss. A strategy was needed to support the viability of this provision.

Agreed
10.5 Schools should be invited to give feedback on the issues raised in the report, after which proposals would be developed for SPC to consider.

11 REVIEW OF FOUNDATION DEGREES
Received
11.1 The final report on implementation of the recommendations of the Review of Foundation Degrees (SP 2011 14)

Noted
11.2 The need to confirm the lead role in the College for strategy on employability.

12 SPC AWAY DAY
Considered
12.1 Areas of discussion for an SPC awayday, to take place in early 2012.

12.2 The theme for the awayday would be preparation for 2012 and contingency planning. Financial and student number forecasts, the HESE student number return for 2011 and information on the student body would be available. The aim would be to consider best and worst case scenarios for student numbers, anticipate possible future developments and directions and establish planning principles before the start of the annual planning round.

12.3 The event would also be an opportunity for consideration of:
• The range of Birkbeck’s academic portfolio, from Certificates to postgraduate programmes.
• Preparation for the REF, in particular strategy for securing maximum research funding and for selecting staff for the REF return.
• Strategy for offsetting the need for redundancies should student numbers decline
• The sessional lecturer project.

13 FUTURE MEETINGS
Noted
13.1 Dates for SPC meetings in 2011-12
• Wednesday 2 November 2011 at 2.00pm
• Wednesday 25 January 2011 at 10.30am
• Wednesday 22 February 2012 at 2.00pm
• Wednesday 9 May 2012 at 2.00pm
• Thursday 31 May 2012 at 2.00pm