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

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

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Nick Head, Roisin Lynch

Apologies for Absence
Tricia King

25 MINUTES
25.1 The Minutes of the meeting on 2 November 2011.

26 REPORT
26.1 SPC’s autumn term report to the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

27 ACTION SHEET
27.1 Actions taken following previous meetings:

Review of Certificates
27.2 The Deans were aware of the strategic issues involved and these had been picked up through the Portfolio Reviews in each School.

Birkbeck Association
27.3 Work on the development of the Association continued. The team had lost a key member of staff to an internal promotion and the role would be filled via an internal secondment.

27.4 It would be necessary to make a clear distinction between the Birkbeck Association, the alumni and the College’s fundraising schemes, although the potential target markets of each would overlap to some extent.
Future development of Masters degrees
27.5 A paper on this issue had been discussed by the Pro Vice Masters. Further discussion was postponed until after the away day.

Academic Partnerships
27.6 There would be an FE stand at the Birkbeck open days over the coming year to explicitly target FE students and explain the details of our progression agreements.

27.7 Several Heads of partner FE colleges had been invited to the College’s Foundation Dinner.

27.8 An Academic Partnerships away day had been arranged for March 2012, which would include representatives from the College’s FE partners as well as Birkbeck staff.

Employability
27.9 A meeting on the subject had been held and a document would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for further discussion.

Fixed term contract issues
27.10 HR would send to each Executive Dean a list of all the contracts in their School due to come to an end in 2011-12, to assist with a systematic approach to decisions about continuation. Decisions should also reflect the performance of the individuals concerned.

27.11 A distinction should be made between fixed term staff supporting new initiatives and fixed term staff covering for sabbatical or maternity leave. In the latter case converting the contract to permanent would effectively create a new post, with the consequent financial implications.

28 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
28.1 The implementation of the Government’s White Paper on Higher Education had been delayed. It was not yet known what the implications of that would be. The changes to fees and loans, including regulation of the part time fee; and eligibility and repayment arrangements for part time student loans; had already been enacted as part of the recent Education Bill.

29 FEE, BURSARY AND SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE
Received
29.1 The report of the FBS Committee (SP 2011 26)

Noted
Fees
29.2 Fees for Postgraduate taught programmes had been approved. FBSC thanked the Schools for their engagement with this process.

29.3 The full time home fees for postgraduate research students in 2012-13 had been set in accordance with the fee element of the Research Council studentships, including £200 per capita towards research skills training. The part time fees had been raised
by £200 per capita, as agreed by SPC. International fees had increased by 5%. The fees for 2012-13 therefore would be:

- Full time: home £3,840, international £11,475
- Part time: home £2,020, international £5,750

29.4 In the future there was a need for a review of postgraduate research fees, in the context of development of a more coherent strategy for research degrees.

29.5 Graduate Certificate and Diploma fees had been aligned, pro rata for credit, to the existing tiers for PGT programmes because graduate students would not be eligible for new system student loans.

29.6 A pricing structure and guidelines on costing and fee setting would be developed for non-credit provision, an area which was likely to be of interest to the College’s lifelong learning oriented students.

Financial support

29.7 The Birkbeck College Awards System would be replaced by the Hardship Fund. This would provide additional discretionary funding for students (including old regime students) experiencing unforeseen changes in their financial circumstances, provided they had exhausted alternative possibilities for funding.

29.8 The Hardship Fund would operate year-round and would not have an absolute deadline, though it would have a defined turnaround time for responses. It would be widely communicated, and the budget would be regularly monitored to allow the College to initiate fundraising efforts when the money started to run out.

29.9 The opinion of the SU representatives on these developments would be sought.

29.10 A proposal had been approved for full fee waivers for up to 30 students at two centres in the East End of London studying a 60-credit Higher Education Introductory Studies programme, at an estimated cost of £57K. The scheme would be renewed annually.

29.11 An allocation of 40 FE to HE progression scholarships had been agreed, with the same eligibility criteria and amount of award as the mainstream National Scholarship Programme and bursary schemes. FE partners would be invited to identify students meeting the eligibility criteria, who would then apply in the standard way. The allocation would be reviewed annually.

29.12 Following confirmation of a donation to support fee waivers specifically for students studying History, FBS Committee had established principles for School-based fundraising and scholarship marketing and administration. Local initiatives should complement the general scheme rather than operate independently; and Schools should pursue them in consultation with External Relations and Registry Services.

29.13 A 10% reduction fee would be offered to all Birkbeck degree graduates entering postgraduate taught programmes in 2012-13. Holders of postgraduate certificates and diplomas would not be eligible. This would be funded via a percentage of tuition
fee income based on the expected uptake for each School. Implementation of the offer would be developed and overseen by Registry Services and Planning.

29.14 A proposal for a one year pilot of a bursary scheme targeted at students in fee-sensitive countries would be developed.

**Old and new system fees and definitions**

Received

29.15 Proposed definitions of whether new, continuing, progressing and transferring students should be classified as old system or new system for fee and funding purposes; and proposed fee policy and fee tier levels for continuing modular enrolment students *(SPC 2011 26A)*

Noted

29.16 Modular enrolments students who had studied before and who enrolled on new modules in 2012-13 would be considered as old system students for fee and funding purposes, provided their study was sufficiently recent. Students who started before 2012-13 and then went straight from a Certificate of HE to a degree would also be considered as old system.

29.17 For financial planning reasons, it was necessary to define the period in which old system modular fees would be retained, to provide sufficient time for students intending to complete a Certificate of HE. FBSC had identified three options: to retain the fees for one, two or three years after 2011-12, the last year of the old system, giving students two, three or four years to complete.

29.18 Retaining these fees for a long period would lead to increased administrative complexity in dealing with increasingly small numbers of students. Current data indicated some 20% of modular students continued their studies in successive years.

29.19 It had already been agreed that concessionary fees would no longer be available to new system students from 2012-13 onwards. It was necessary to agree on a policy for concessionary fees for old system students. The concessionary fee system involved a significant amount of administrative complexity for a very low number of students. However, as it was part of the old system fee framework it should be retained for as long as old system modular fees were retained.

**Agreed**

29.20 The working definitions of old and new system students, for use in student administration; as set out in the document.

29.21 To retain old system modular fees until 2013-14, including ELQ and concessionary fees, for students meeting old system and concession criteria.

29.22 Old system modular fee tier levels for 2012-13 as proposed.

**30 NEW FEE AND FINANCE SYSTEM 2012-13**

Received

30.1 A projects briefing on the new fees and finance system 2012 *(SP 2011 27)*
30.2 2012-13 was uncharted territory for marketing part time degrees. For the first time, students would be expected to pay a high fee but would be eligible for student loans. Although the College planned to open enrolment in the early summer, and to encourage students to enrol early, the Student Loan Company was not planning to open applications for part time student loans until late summer. There was a risk that students would not get confirmation of their loan until close to – or after – the start of term and enrol late or not at all. To address this College marketing would state that, if an applicant was able to answer questions confirming loan eligibility, the College would undertake not to pursue them for payment while waiting for the Student Loans Company to process their entitlement.

30.3 Applications for financial support and assessment for loan eligibility would be integrated into the enrolment process. UCAS application students would be means tested by the SLC. The question of whether SLC would means test part time students was still unresolved. In this case the College would carry out its own means testing for PT students.

30.4 As previously reported, the College had not been allowed to allocate National Scholarship Programme money to part time students as a cash bursary rather than a fee waiver. Fee waivers were unpopular with students nationwide, and it was possible that there would be more political debate over this issue in the future.

30.5 A communication strategy should be developed to support staff answering prospective student queries. Staff should be aware of the new system of student finance, and the College's intention not to pursue students waiting to hear from the SLC. Staff should however be discouraged from giving specific detailed financial advice, but direct students towards those staff who had been trained in the complexities of the system.

30.6 Concerns had been raised over staff who might find themselves the subject of complaints from students unhappy with their funding situation. This was one of the reasons why it was important that staff did not give specific financial advice to students. It was noted that the process for applying for funding made it clear that the student was ultimately responsible for making decisions about funding, and fully informing themselves of the possible consequences.

30.7 It was noted that the Student Loans Company was in discussions about taking over the administration of the National Scholarship Programme, which might also impact the rules governing the allocation of the money in the future.

30.8 A paper on the approach to the Key Information Set (KIS) at Birkbeck (SP 2011 28)

30.9 The KIS was required for all undergraduate programmes of study greater than 120 credits, i.e. all Foundation Degrees and Bachelor Degrees at Birkbeck. It was mandatory to submit the required information and display the “KIS widget” (a link to
a standardised information set) on the College website. The KIS would contain data on:

- Student satisfaction
- Course information
- Employment and salary data
- Accommodation costs
- Financial information e.g. fees
- SU information

30.10 The presentation of the information would potentially be misleading for many Birkbeck students as it was based on a standard of a three year undergraduate course. The College would therefore supplement the KIS with relevant contextual information as part of the prospectus listings on the website. The following would be fully populated for all programmes of study:

- Programme description aimed at prospective students
- Module listings with links to module description
- Statement on employment opportunities on completing the programme

30.11 There had been a recent meeting with the Assistant Deans (Learning and Teaching) on creating more student friendly programme descriptions for the programme specifications. This would be discussed in the upcoming School TQECs.

30.12 There would be a large amount of work involved in putting together the programme and modular descriptions in a short space of time. It would be necessary to ensure that the administrative framework was in place to allow this to be accomplished.

30.13 It was also important to ensure that our contextual explanations made it clear that the College was not making excuses for any ‘poor’ performance in the KIS; there were genuine structural differences between Birkbeck and other universities that made the KIS not always directly relevant. At the same time the information should cater for students looking to take the three year degree courses, for which we were attempting to increase recruitment. The material should emphasis the College’s flexibility as an institution where students could study at a pace that suited them.

31 MID YEAR BUDGET REVIEW

Received

31.1 A report on the mid year budget reviews for Schools and Professional Services 2011-12 (SP 2011 29)

Noted

31.2 As the data was still being validated, this paper was an update rather than a final statement.

31.3 Schools had successfully recruited to – and in some cases above - their student number targets. However, the current indications were that the total tuition fee income was likely to fall short of the forecast in the predictive IDM.
31.4 The shortfall was partly due to the fact that a different mix of students was recruited than had been predicted, i.e. higher numbers in areas yielding a lower fee per FTE, resulting in a fall in fee income.

31.5 It was probable that all of the tuition fee contingency would be needed, and there might be a call on some of the general contingency.

31.6 Monitoring the inflow of tuition fee income was becoming increasingly important. There had therefore been a commitment to tighter monitoring of fee income, including earlier invoicing and running monthly reports.

31.7 There had been significant improvements in retention, with some Schools approaching 25% over target on the re-enrolment of returning students. This was an indication that our retention strategy was working, and this would be positive for the College going forward.

31.8 There was a falling conversion rate of applications to enrolments on postgraduate programmes, and this would need to be addressed. This issue would be discussed further during the upcoming away day.

31.9 However, it was noted that international recruitment for postgraduate programmes was doing well. There had also been an increase in FT uptake as FT was being introduced for programmes that had previously only been PT.

31.10 Professional Services had delivered recurrent savings through service redesign and restructuring. Some savings had been redirected for refurbishment projects for student areas and improving the reach of the College wireless network.

31.11 The IDM would be revised and circulated to Schools in advance to allow discussion before being brought for confirmation to the next meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee on 22nd February.

32 FUNDABLE STUDENT NUMBERS

32.1 A note on the College’s estimate submitted to HESES of HEFCE fundable student numbers in 2011-12. (SP 2011 31)

Noted

32.2 The College’s target of 5,165 fundable FTEs had been just exceeded, with a total of 5,339 FTEs. This positive result demonstrated the success of Birkbeck’s recruitment efforts during difficult times for the sector.

33 EXTERNAL EXAMINER FEES

33.1 A paper outlining proposed policy and procedure on External Examiner Fees (SP 2011 32)

Noted

33.2 There was significant variety in the workload and levels of fee paid to individual external examiners, sometimes without easily justifiable reasons. There was a need
for a mechanism by which the fee for external examiners would be calculated, to ensure clarity and fairness across the College.

**Agreed**

33.3 In future payments would be calculated according to a formula, based on one examiner appointment per 75 FTE of students enrolled on the programme. Additional examiners could be funded by the Department or School concerned. The rate would be £300, or £200 for examiners covering smaller programmes. A higher rate of £400 would be applied at the discretion of the Academic Registrar to those examiners with a demonstrably higher workload than normal.

33.4 The system should be phased in by continuing to pay existing examiners the amount paid in previous years until the renewal of their contract. This involved a small risk of challenge on issues of equal pay. However, the old system would be phased out in a short amount of time as all the contracts came to an end, and the system as it currently existed was probably more vulnerable to challenges of this nature.

**Noted**

33.5 The recommended rate of pay was generous compared with what other institutions were charging. This would need to be kept under review.

33.6 Members suggested that there should be a regulation governing the issue of examiners taking on several courses with very low numbers of students and consequently being paid several times.

**AWAYDAY AGENDA**

**Noted**

34.1 Information and documents being prepared for the SPC awayday on 2nd February (SP 2011 33)

34.2 The main focus of discussions at the away day would be on planning for 2012-13, rather than wider planning for the longer term future of Birkbeck.