1 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS  
Noted  
1.1 Governors were asked to disclose in advance any actual or potential conflicts of interest in relation to the matters under discussion. None were disclosed.

2 MINUTES  
Approved  
2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of the Governors on 3 July 2013.

3 MASTER’S STRATEGY PAPER  
Considered  
3.1 The Master’s annual strategy paper, setting out recent achievements and the key issues facing the College. *(G 2013 01)*

3.2 Despite the challenging environment of the new student funding system, prompting a substantial decline in recruitment to four year undergraduate programmes, the College continued to flourish both intellectually and financially during 2012-13, resulting in a significant financial surplus.

3.3 This success was due to careful financial management; expansion in teaching areas such as three year evening undergraduate degrees; and the hard work of colleagues...
to increase income from other areas such as room bookings. The Master noted that this good financial position would allow the College to explore potential opportunities for investment to put it in a good position to respond to the significant challenges that still lay ahead.

Research

3.4 The College was preparing for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) and would make its submission in November 2013. The outcome of the exercise would be released in late 2014 and the results would impact funding from 2015-16 onwards. The Master thanked the Pro Vice Master for Research and his colleagues on the REF working party.

3.5 Governors heard that HEFCE had not yet announced how post-REF funding would be calculated. It was clear that the outcome of the REF would be a critical influence on research funding and research profile of the College in future. This was the reason why the College was submitting staff with four papers (or equivalent), meeting an established quality threshold.

3.6 It was expected that approximately 85% of eligible staff would be submitted. This evidence of the research calibre of Birkbeck’s academics was further demonstrated by the many distinctions and grant successes achieved in 2012-13. Governors noted that the College should continue to emphasise these achievements, for instance in advertising to postgraduate students.

3.7 Some staff who had produced excellent research meeting the quality threshold would not be submitted for strategic reasons, for instance if there were not a sufficient number of staff in a subject area to make a viable submission.

3.8 Birkbeck would not have a policy of teaching-only contracts for staff not submitted to the REF, unlike some other HE institutions. Research quality, rather than inclusion in the REF, was the prerequisite for promotion.

3.9 Members asked how far Birkbeck’s research strategy was influenced by information on where other institutions decided to commit their resources; and heard that rather than looking at other universities, the College's goal was to focus on its own strengths across a wide range of disciplines.

3.10 Governors congratulated the College on their management of the REF process. The staff Governors noted that consideration of staff with special circumstances such as maternity leave or illness had been handled well.

3.11 Governors noted the importance of supporting the research culture of Birkbeck, especially in a time when large amounts of student debt could deter good students,
the potential academics of the future, from taking higher degrees. It was reported that the College was planning to launch a new scheme of PhD studentships.

**Estates**

3.12 Although the available Government/HEFCE funding for capital projects was now greatly reduced, it was important that the College continued to invest in our estate and provide the best research facilities for staff. The fundraising team had been working on raising money for a proposed ‘Toddler Lab’ development in Torrington Square to build on the considerable success of the existing Baby Lab. Funding had so far been secured from the Wolfson Foundation and the Wohl Foundation. The work that had been done in the Baby Lab and was proposed for the Toddler Lab was an example of top quality research that raised the profile of the College as a research institution and had the potential to attract new sources of funding.

3.13 A number of other potential building opportunities had been identified following the 2012-13 Master Planning exercise. The College was discussing with University College London (UCL) the potential to build a science building on the north end of Torrington Square which would provide the College with significant teaching and laboratory space. UCL staff had expressed enthusiasm for the project. The plan would also contribute to the long term strategy for the estate by providing de-cant space that would enable much-needed large-scale improvements to be made to the extension building. If departments – and the Students’ Union – needed to move out while the extension was refurbished alternative accommodation would be provided.

3.14 There were considerable advantages to working in partnership with other Colleges of the University, including an increased probability that the University would approve the building proposal. Birkbeck and UCL were planning a feasibility study, funded equally between the two institutions. When plans had been developed in more detail a funding split for the whole project could be proposed. Birkbeck had gained considerable experience of large scale joint projects from its work with the University of East London on the University Square Stratford project.

3.15 The building proposal was the continuation of a long tradition of working with UCL in the area of Biological Sciences. Professor Gabriel Waksman held a joint appointment as Head of the UCL Department of Structural and Molecular Biology and Head of the Birkbeck Department of Biological Sciences and the two departments would be making a joint return to the REF.

3.16 The Master Planning exercise had been very helpful for identifying possibilities and framing discussions about the future of the College’s estate. The strategy for future estates projects would be to look for sources of external funding as well as considering investing some of the College’s surplus funds and exploring opportunities for partnerships with other institutions.
3.17 It would be important to make optimum use of the new facilities at University Square Stratford now that the building was open. The Executive Deans of the Schools had been asked to consider what additional courses could be offered there. Governors noted that the proximity of the building to Canary Wharf and the Crossrail construction project could inform thinking about new provision and innovations in the curriculum.

3.18 Governors were also updated on the Senate House North Block development. SOAS was refurbishing the North Block for teaching use from 2015-16 and it had been agreed that Birkbeck would use the space in the evenings. This was part of the College’s strategy to improve the student experience through partnerships to increase good quality teaching space.

Resources 2012-13

3.19 The College accounts were expected to show a surplus in excess of £6.5million for 2012-13. However, smaller surpluses were expected in the ensuing financial years as the large cohorts of undergraduates on the old financial system were replaced by potentially smaller cohorts of new system students. It was therefore important to retain tight control over the budget, although consideration would be given to investing as appropriate in areas such as the estate and in the College’s research culture by funding PhD studentships.

3.20 Detailed budget monitoring meetings with the Schools and the Vice Master Designate would continue. Schools would continue to review their portfolios and look closely at areas where there was room for improvement. A review of Languages provision, in which there had been a downturn in recruitment across the HE sector; and a review of technical staff in the Department of Biological Sciences were underway.

Teaching

3.21 Recruitment to four year undergraduate programmes had declined significantly in 2012-13, although recruitment amongst lower income students was maintained with over 40% of the 2012-13 intake being eligible for financial support. Although applications made for four year courses fell in 2013-14, the number of offers made so far was similar to 2012-13 and enrolments were higher, reflecting the hard work done by colleagues to improve the student journey from application to enrolment. Birkbeck would continue to lobby the Government, HEFCE, UUK and other relevant organisations on the behalf of part time students. Governors heard that one issue of particular relevance to Birkbeck students was the difficulty students faced if they wished to transfer from four year to three year courses and vice versa. National regulations had created completely separate student finance systems for full and part
time students. The College would lobby for the ability of students to study in a truly flexible manner.

3.22 Recruitment to three year programmes had considerably increased following successful lobbying to have the College’s Student Number Control (SNC) raised to 700 for 2013-14. Recruitment to three year courses would exceed this challenging target, largely due to a surge of late applications with a high offer to enrolment conversion rate than previously experienced. The College would appeal against a fine for exceeding the SNC on the grounds that Birkbeck did not have historical data to help predict the behaviour of these applicants. The intention was to ask for a steady state SNC intake of 1000 going forwards. This might be reconsidered in the future if it was found that it was not sufficient to meet the demand from good students, although there would be a need to weigh the demand with the capacity and sustainability of the College.

3.23 The intake for three year programmes was expected to be approximately 850 students counting against the Student Number Control and approximately 100 students who did not, including international students and students with ABB or higher A level grades. This would mean that three year students would make up the majority of undergraduate students for the first time. Governors noted that the increasing number of international students at undergraduate level could also choose to stay on for a postgraduate degree, further boosting international student numbers.

3.24 Governors heard that significant work had been done to increase the recruitment of three year students and to take advantage of recruitment methods that were not available for four year students, such as contacting students who were in UCAS but had not yet secured a place. There had also been a significant increase in engagement with applicants which had resulted in a higher rate of conversion from application to enrolment. This work would continue in future years to attempt to ensure good recruitment going forward.

3.25 Governors asked about the characteristics of the three year cohorts. The students recruited onto three year courses were a mix of ‘traditional’ Birkbeck more mature students; some 18 and 19 year olds, mainly coming from Further Education (FE) Colleges in response to the outreach work of the Pro Vice Master for Academic Partnerships; and a significant number of students aged 21-25, suggesting that Birkbeck was appealing to people who had come to see the advantage of a degree for advancement in their careers. Governors commended the work with FE colleges and heard that it was to extend this to all FE colleges in London.

3.26 College management was aware of the need to consider the impact of three year students on the mission and ethos of Birkbeck. The College would continue to
target students who wished to combine study with other commitments. The bid that had been made to HEFCE for Catalyst funding focused on developing intensive part-time courses. Governors asked how the focus on student retention and academic quality was being maintained at a time of such significant change for the College. It was reported that retention rates had increased and that retention on three year courses was higher than on four year courses. To provide a benchmark, the College was reviewing its degree class data in comparison with similar institutions.

3.27 There had not been a significant increase in demand for student accommodation, because the majority of home students lived in London already. The student representatives noted that the Student Union had a housing officer who would help students find accommodation as necessary. Current practice was to accommodate international students in University of London accommodation. The College would explore further options for helping students with accommodation if demand increased.

3.28 The College would maintain an open dialogue with the Students' Union to get an idea of what additional social facilities might be required for three year students. Governors asked to receive more information about three year students and the ways in which they differed from four year students as it became available. More work would be done on analysing the socioeconomic characteristics and motivations of the three year students. Governors also asked for more information on the career destinations of Birkbeck graduates.

3.29 Governors heard that Certificate of Higher Education provision in the College would fall into two categories going forward. There were Certificates which were operating as routes into degrees and recruiting well, and these would be retained. Some of the Certificates which had previously attracted primarily people studying for personal interest were not managing to recruit sufficiently to meet their costs now that fees had been increased. The academic staff Governors noted their concern over the impact of the decline in student numbers on these Certificates, given that the courses had been a core component of the College's provision. The College would explore other ways of providing opportunities for this group of students though forms of non credit bearing provision including the Be Birkbeck membership scheme.

**Masters courses**

3.30 The number of students taking Masters degrees across the UK was declining and it was expected that this trend would accelerate when new system students with increased loan repayments graduated from their undergraduate courses. Birkbeck was therefore exploring ways of increasing its Masters recruitment by differentiating its offering from other institutions, particularly other Colleges of the University of London, by emphasising that Birkbeck’s evening teaching allows students to work as
well as study. The College had made a bid for HEFCE Catalyst funding for a project to further develop intensive evening study at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, focusing on provision that not only allowed students to work and study, but maximised the benefits students received from the interaction between their studies and their workplace activities.

**Online learning**

3.31 Birkbeck would need to think carefully about positioning itself in the area of online learning. There had been considerable publicity recently for MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) but these seemed to represent a considerable investment for an uncertain return. Birkbeck would instead improve the flexibility it offered to students by developing provision that blended online and face to face learning. A senior appointment to lead this important strategic area was under consideration.

**International activity**

3.32 Increasing the College’s international recruitment at both undergraduate and postgraduate level would be a key focus for the College. The International Office was expanding and targeted scholarships were being offered for students from countries where there were significant opportunities for expansion. There were arrangements in place with Chinese universities for students to have a year abroad at Birkbeck. Governors heard that the College was always ready to consider proposals for developing closer connections with institutions overseas and would seek to ensure that partnerships were with compatible institutions by carrying out rigorous due diligence. It was also noted that the majority of Birkbeck students had work or other commitments and would therefore be unlikely to take part in an exchange programme, although potential for foreign exchanges would be considered by programme teams.

**The future**

3.33 The Strategic Planning Committee was considering progress reports from its various working groups and confirming priorities going forward. Recognising the importance of hearing ideas from colleagues other than the senior management team, the Master had set up a group consisting of nominees from the Schools and Professional Services, who had been asked to develop new ideas for the medium to long-term future strategy of the College. The group would present their ideas in Spring 2014. Governors applauded the establishment of this new group, and in addition noted the importance of having input from students.

3.34 Governors agreed that the College had so far successfully met the challenges of the new fees and funding regime, maintaining a stable financial position and a focus on the core mission. The recent financial and student recruitment outcomes showed constructive trends that opened up possibilities rather than leaving the College in the
position of having to focus on fire fighting. The current challenge was to identify and take appropriate opportunities for future success and development.