BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the meeting of the GOVERNORS

Tuesday 19 March 2013

Present
Mr Harvey McGrath (Chair), Mr Richard Abbott, Mr Robert Allison, Ms Julia Collins, Professor Philip Dewe, Mr Hugh Ferrand, Dr Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick, Ms Annabel Jones, Professor John Kelly, Professor David Latchman, Mrs Joy Manners, Mr Eamonn Moyles, Professor Julian Swann, Dr Ruth Thompson, Mr Peter Zinkin

In attendance
Mrs Katharine Bock (Head of Governance), Mr Keith Harrison (College Secretary and Clerk to the Governors), Ms Roisin Lynch (Corporate Support Officer), Mr David McGhie (Director of Planning), Mr Peter Westley (Director of Finance)

Apologies for absence
Mr John Biggs, Dr Alex Colas, Ms Liz Meek, Mr Stuart Popham, Mr Paul Shelton, Mr Pierre Smith Khanna

25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS
Noted
25.1 Governors were asked to disclose in advance any conflicts of interest in relation to the matters listed on the agenda. Robert Allison noted a consultancy arrangement with the external auditor KPMG.

26 CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES
Confirmed
26.1 The minutes of the meeting of 29 November 2012.

27 MATTERS ARISING
Noted (arising from Minute 10.6 of the meeting on 13 December 2011)

Review of Governor Effectiveness
27.1 A working group led by Ruth Thompson was conducting a review of Governor Effectiveness. The last review in 2007 resulted in an overhaul of the College’s Charters and Statutes and a restructuring of the membership of the governing body. The current review would look at how to make the Governors more effective, individually and as a team. Interviews to gather feedback would be conducted with all the Governors and senior staff and the working group would report to the July Governors’ meeting with recommendations.

27.2 Governors thanked Ruth Thompson for leading on the review.
28   MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
28.1 HEFCE had published a report on the impact of the 2012 fee and funding reforms which highlighted a national 40% decline in part time undergraduate entrants. Birkbeck’s view was that the downturn was largely due to the reluctance of part time students to take on large amounts of debt, especially if they were already earning mid level incomes. The College was addressing this by focusing its marketing strategy on emphasising the significant amount of added value a degree from Birkbeck could provide.

Secretary’s note: the HEFCE report is available to view here: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/about/intro/abouthighereducationinengland/impact/

28.2 Birkbeck would also continue to lobby for better funding for part time provision. The College had opened a dialogue with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, which was continuing with direct funding for part time students in Wales. Frank Dobson (MP for Holborn and St Pancras) and Baroness Brinton were both supporters of the College and would raise these issues in the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

28.3 There had been a significant increase in students on three year programmes recruiting via UCAS in 2012-13, after more courses were introduced. The College successfully appealed to HEFCE against the fine for exceeding its 2012-13 student number control (SNC) and secured agreement to increase its SNC for 2013-14 from 428 to 700. The new challenge was to ensure the new target was met. Work was being undertaken to define appropriate entry tariffs to increase uptake and maintain academic standards. The guidance for staff was that over-recruitment was preferable to under-recruitment.

28.4 Retention rates and achievement levels of students on three year and four year courses would be monitored. The data so far indicated that three year courses had higher retention rates. Some students had asked to transfer from four year to three year programmes. This was complicated because four year students transferring to the first year of a three year degree counted against the SNC. There were also differences in eligibility for maintenance support and State benefits between three and four year students. Students needed to understand that their eligibility for benefits would change if they were deemed to be studying full time, although they would then become eligible for student maintenance loans.

29   HEFCE FUNDING
Received
29.1 A letter from HEFCE on allocation of funding to the College for 2012-13 and 2013-14. (G 2012 16)

Noted
29.2 The initial Teaching funding allocation for 2013-14 reduced by £4M to £10.2M. The reduced allocation, reflecting phasing out of old system funding was £2M more than provided for in the current financial forecasts. Since the forecasts were agreed
HEFCE had changed its funding methodology and brought in higher levels of finding for subjects with a technology element such as IT, Archaeology and Psychology. Governors noted that the reduction in teaching grants meant that the College was becoming increasingly dependent on tuition fee income.

29.3 Part time premium funding had, as expected, decreased. The College would continue to lobby HEFCE on reinstating it as an essential stream of funding to support non traditional students.

29.4 Research funds at c£10M had not changed significantly. Members heard that the results of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which would be published in December 2014, were expected to have an impact on research funding from 2015-16 onwards.

29.5 The 2013-14 Teaching funding allocation was provisional. It was based on the initial student number return for 2012-13 made in December 2012. It would be adjusted in March 2014 based on the initial student number return for 2013-14 made in December 2013; and adjusted again if appropriate following the year-end return for 2013-14 made in the autumn of 2014.

29.6 It was also reported that the 2012-13 Teaching fund allocation had been reduced following the submission of the initial student number return for that year. As contingency against uncertainty over in-year HEFCE funding changes had been included in the budget estimates, the overall impact would be a reduction of £140K.

30 BIRKBECK STRATFORD

30.1 A report on academic and building developments at Stratford (G 2012 17)

30.2 The Vice-Chancellor of the University of East London (UEL) resigned in January 2013. The acting Vice-Chancellor had assured the Master of his and UEL’s continuing commitment to the University Square Stratford project.

30.3 Progress was being made on all fronts, with the building construction nearing completion and co-ordination of facilities and services development for the new building underway.

30.4 The main contractor, Volker Fitzpatrick (VFL), had reported a delay to the programme and the scheduled handover date of 30th April would not be met. The project team had negotiated with the contractor to take partial possession of the building to enable fit-out to begin in May. It would be necessary for the project managers to ensure that the correct protocols were followed to manage the presence of more than one set of contractors on site.

30.5 College management thanked Peter Zinkin for his visit to the site and noted that his feedback on the management of the site had been communicated to the contractor.
30.6 The construction contract was a fixed price design and build arrangement which would minimise the risk of the delay leading to extra costs for Birkbeck.

30.7 The joint UEL - Birkbeck groups continued to develop the services to be operated in the building. Birkbeck’s Audit Committee was receiving regular updates and had asked for a report confirming the cost-effectiveness of the proposal to use UEL’s cleaning, catering and security contractors at USS. Governors also asked whether the contractor staff would be paid the London Living Wage at USS. It was confirmed that UEL had a similar London Living Wage policy on place to Birkbeck’s.

30.8 The 2013-14 programme was advertised and recruitment was in train. In addition to traditional marketing methods, the Birkbeck widening participation team was holding events with community groups in East London on the benefits of university study. The Higher Education Introductory Studies access course would run in Stratford along with degrees, foundation degrees and short courses. The College also continued to engage with the cultural community in Stratford including the Stratford Picturehouse and the Stratford Circus performing arts venue.

30.9 Governors thanked the Vice Master and the Director of Estates and his colleagues for their hard work on the Stratford project.

31 COLLEGE PRESIDENT, VICE MASTER DESIGNATE AND PRO VICE MASTER DESIGNATE

Approved

31.1 Proposals for appointment of the College President, Vice Master designate and Pro Vice Master designate (Enterprise and Innovation): (G 2012 18)
- Baroness Bakewell of Stockport (Joan Bakewell) as College President for the remainder of 2012-13 and for 2013-14.
- Professor Matthew Innes, Pro Vice Master (Strategy), as Vice Master designate with immediate effect until 31 July 2014, and subsequently for a three year appointment as Vice Master ending on 31 July 2017.
- Professor Philip Powell as Pro Vice Master designate (Enterprise and Innovation) for a three year term from a date to be confirmed by agreement between the Master, Professor Dewe and Professor Powell.

Noted

31.2 The Vice-Master Professor Philip Dewe had confirmed his intention to serve as Vice Master until July 2014. The Vice Master designate and Pro Vice Master designate appointments were intended to ensure continuity of succession in key strategic areas.

Agreed

31.3 To invite the Vice Master designate to attend meetings of the Governors.

32 FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Received

32.1 The Report of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. (G 2012 09)
Noted

**Budget estimates 2012-13**

32.2 The forecast surplus had increased from £1.2M as reported in November to £1.5M. Changes included reduced estimates of School pay spend, a reduction in predicted tuition fee income, and increased forecast spending on National Scholarship Programme (NSP) fee waivers. Given the uncertainty in completion rates, student financial support uptake and call on the bad debt provision, F&GPC endorsed the retention of contingency provision totalling £2.1M, noting that it was likely that not all of this would be needed.

Strategic and financial planning

32.3 The College Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) held its annual awayday in January 2013 to discuss future strategy for the College. It considered the impact on income of current recruitment levels and different future scenarios, as well as an initial report on the market survey of 2012-13 entrants and non-enrollers focusing on undergraduates.

32.4 SPC agreed a number of actions to develop the College’s next phase of strategic response to the new system. This includes:

- Development and enhancement of the three year undergraduate portfolio
- More international student recruitment
- Launch of the new building at Stratford
- Review of tuition fee and bursary strategy, aiming to extend the reach to middle income students
- Technology Enhanced Learning, aiming to widen awareness of Birkbeck and to support and enhance face to face teaching, but not to replace it
- Segmented marketing strategies to recruit to the three year and the four year programmes
- Continuation of the review of postgraduate taught programmes, including an emphasis on flexibility of provision
- Continuation of the strategy to maximise the College’s position in the 2013 Research Excellence Framework.

32.5 Development of the three year portfolio would go alongside work on improving the four year undergraduate provision, rather than replacing it.

**Investment Committee**

32.6 The College continued to hold high levels of cash deposits against current uncertainties. The investment portfolio had returned the equivalent of an average 7.5% since its inception in 2009.

**Financial Performance Indicators**

32.7 F&GP received a report of financial performance indicators in the current agreed format and noted the impact of the College’s recent financial performance in improving the indicators. It was reported that HEFCE had issued new guidance on institutional sustainability indicators. A proposal on these would be made via F&GPC to Governors.


Estates Committee

32.8 As reported in November, Estates Committee commissioned a Masterplan to identify opportunities for further development of the Bloomsbury site. The College was moving forward with the initial stages for the possible development of one of the identified options, infill of the gap between the east side Torrington Square houses and the Warburg institute to create a ‘Toddlerlab’ linked with the existing Birkbeck Babylab.

32.9 Governors heard that this option had been selected from those outlined by the Masterplan as the most immediately achievable project due to the likelihood that it would be able to secure external donor funding, and the links with the existing Babylab.

32.10 Birkbeck had formally registered its interest in the site with the University of London and none of the other Colleges had expressed interest in making a bid for the site. A funding proposal had been submitted to the Wolfson Foundation.

32.11 Estates Committee would forward a detailed proposal via F&GPC for Governors’ consideration once University of London and funding matters were clarified.

Approved

32.12 F&GPC’s recommendation that the College sign up to a long term teaching space rental agreement with Friends House.

32.13 Governors heard that this agreement would secure good quality popular teaching space. The College would be able to participate in specifying the renovation plans for the building and display Birkbeck branding while the space was being used by the College.

HR matters

Approved

32.14 The following policies, which had been discussed with and agreed by the Trade Unions and recommended for approval by F&GPC:

- Fixed Term Contracts policy
- Redundancy policy
- Redeployment policy

33 AUDIT COMMITTEE

Received

33.1 The Report of the Audit Committee (G 2012 20)

Noted

33.2 Audit Committee considered and was satisfied with reports on student fees and debt collection, student financial support, IT security and Human Resources. On IT security, it was noted that there was a need to ensure that there was a robust policy on data held on mobile devices, and more frequent penetration testing on College firewalls.
33.3 The Committee had noted that the process of confirming and receiving student loan income was complicated by the National Scholarship Programme fee waiver scheme, for which means testing had to take place before the waiver, and thus the level of fee, could be confirmed. The College was responsible for means testing part time students itself, a process that was carried out by the Student Loans Company for full time students. This placed an inequitable burden on the College's administrative resources. Audit Committee had noted the measures the College was taking to streamline the process for 2013-14 and also to resolve the issue of students who had enrolled having promised to apply for student loans but who had apparently not applied. The Committee was keeping under review the level of bad debt provision.

33.4 Governors noted that Audit Committee had considered and was satisfied with a termly report on major projects being undertaken in the college.

33.5 The Committee forwarded a report on the top five risks and performance indicators on the College's management of them. The main risks were maintaining financial stability, national HE policy issues and student recruitment. The Committee was satisfied with measures to manage and control these very significant risks.

34 ACADEMIC BOARD

Received
34.1 The Report of the Academic Board (G 2012 11)

Noted
34.2 The process for the selection of staff for inclusion in the College's REF submission was almost complete and decisions were being communicated to staff.

34.3 Governors heard that it was likely that the next REF would require submissions to be published under new open access policies, in accordance with the recommendations of the Finch Report. The College felt that if the suggested “gold route”, in which researchers cover the costs of publication up front, was enforced this could have damaging consequences, particularly for arts and humanities research.

34.4 Academic Board had received an interim report on the three term learning pilot and noted that a student consultation indicated that students were in favour of the three term model. This model had both pedagogic and financial benefits for the College.

35 SAFETY COMMITTEE

Received
35.1 The Annual Report of the College Safety Committee (G 2012 22)

Noted
35.2 There was a wide network across the College of 34 safety coordinators and 100 first aiders, and that all staff were encouraged to report accidents and concerns.
35.3 Governors and F&GPC asked for the report format to be reviewed, in particular the statement on under-reporting of incidents and the detail of action taken as a result of reported incidents, to reduce the risk of recurrence. It was confirmed that this information was discussed in detail by Safety Committee.

36 EQUALITIES COMMITTEE
Received
36.1 The Report of the Equalities Committee (G 2012 23)

Noted
36.2 Governors asked for the next iteration of the report to include comparative benchmarking with other HE institutions. They also asked for clarification of the data on application to interview statistics; the percentage of female students; and staff recruitment broken down by religious groups.

Approved
36.3 The Annual Equality and Diversity Report, subject to clarification of the details above.

36.4 The Equality Strategy.

37 SEALING OF DOCUMENTS
Noted
37.1 The College Seal had not been used since the last meeting.

38 MEETING DATES
Noted
38.1 The date of the summer term meeting:
Wednesday 3 July 2013 at 5.15pm

39 SCHOOL OF ARTS
Received
39.1 A presentation from the Dean of the School of Arts, outlining the challenges facing the School in the changing HE sector and the ways in which the School was responding strategically and creatively to these challenges. These included developing new innovative programmes, harnessing the cultural links of the School’s staff and graduates and undertaking fundraising to allow for the development of the School’s facilities.