Present:
Mr Harvey McGrath (Chair),
Mr John Biggs, Dr Alex Colas, Professor Philip Dewe, Dr Rebecca Gumbrell McCormick, Ms Annabel Jones, Professor John Kelly, Professor David Latchman,
Mrs Joy Manners, Ms Liz Meek, Mr Garth Pollard, Mr Sean Rillo Raczk, Mr Paul Shelton,
Professor Julian Swann.

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

Apologies for absence:
Mr Robert Allison, Mr David Butler, Ms Julia Collins, Mr Hugh Ferrand, Mr Eamonn Moyles, Mr Bruce Seton, Dr Ruth Thompson

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 consideration. No conflicts of interest were disclosed.

2 THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF BIRKBECK
Considered
2.1 The Master’s annual strategy paper setting out recent achievements and the key issues facing the College. (G 2011 01)

Noted
2.2 The structures introduced in 2009/10 were effective in 2010/11 in implementing and developing the strategy for sustaining and enhancing Birkbeck. The College had grown cost-effectively and had reached a position in which it could respond to decreased Government funding and requirements to increase fee income. This would require gaining maximum benefits from the last year of the old system, and positioning the College to successfully meet the challenges of the new system.

2.3 The Master noted key successes:
- Award of the THE Outstanding Leadership and Management Team of the Year prize. The citation stated that Birkbeck had “reinvented itself as a very modern institution through strong leadership and management.”
- High scores in the National Student Survey (NSS): joint first in London for overall student satisfaction and first in London for quality of teaching. The College had not appeared in the NSS the previous year after the sampling
method was changed to include Certificate students to whom the survey was not obviously relevant, causing the response rate to fall below the required minimum. This year the College had worked closely with NSS to make the survey more relevant to Certificate students; and encouraged all students to respond

- Dr Carol Watts, Reader in Literature and Poetics, had been awarded a prestigious National Teaching Fellowship by the Higher Education Academy
- College staff had received numerous awards for research excellence. These included the election as Fellows of the British Academy (FBA) of Professor Mark Johnson, Director of the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, and Professor William Rowe, Professor of Poetics. Four members of Birkbeck were elected as Academicians of the Academy of Social Sciences: Professor Philip Dewe (Vice-Master), Professor Andrew Jones (Head of the Department of Geography, Environment and Development Studies), Professor Philip Powell (Executive Dean of the School of Business, Economics and Informatics) and Professor Li Wei (Director of the Birkbeck Graduate Research School).
- Birkbeck had been ranked at 149 in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings listing the top 200 universities in the world.

2.4 Governors congratulated the College and the award holders on these achievements.

**Research**

2.5 The College’s research strategy continued to be based on its core mission to provide students with an educational environment based on high quality research and a commitment to flexible patterns of teaching. Emphasising this unique feature would be very important in the new funding system, in which student choice would become increasingly important.

2.6 A Bloomsbury Colleges consortium involving Birkbeck, the Institute of Education, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and SOAS was successful in bidding to the ESRC for a Doctoral Training Centre. This would provide the partners with 26 PhD Studentships annually, the second highest award in London. Birkbeck would lead in Economics, Politics and Psychology. It was particularly important as in the future the ESRC would only award PhD studentships through the 21 Doctoral Training Centres already established. The success of the bid was down in part to the College’s ability to demonstrate its ongoing research collaboration with the Bloomsbury Colleges Group, particularly the twelve annual Bloomsbury Studentships.

2.7 Other Research Councils were likely to follow this model in the future, with the potential effect that studentships would be focused into fewer institutions. Further collaborations would be considered on a case by case basis to allow the College to achieve the best possible outcome as a high quality research institution.

2.8 The College Research School had been relaunched as the Birkbeck Graduate Research School (BGRS) under the leadership of Professor Li Wei, with a clearer focus and management structure. BGRS was leading in making arrangements for provision of generic skills courses for research students.

2.9 There were increasing financial constraints on research grant funding. Research Councils were imposing limits on the number of unsuccessful applications an individual researcher could make and severe cuts were being applied to small grant schemes for new researchers. Birkbeck would need to consider how to ensure that
applications were high quality while retaining support for newer researches. This would take place through the College Research Committee.

2.10 The REF Working Party, led by Professor Stephen Frosh (PVM for Research) was preparing for the Research Excellence Framework 2014. The Working Party had overseen a ‘dry run’ exercise in which each academic staff member submitted their four best current outputs and their future plans. This allowed for the identification of strengths and weaknesses and for feedback to be given to help individual staff members to strengthen their REF profiles. Particular attention would be paid to the submissions relating to the impact of research for each unit, as this would now count for 20% of the total REF score.

2.11 In the past the College’s approach to the REF had been to submit all members of staff holding four research publications. There had been indications that future funding would be focused on a narrower and higher quality range of research, potentially limiting the number of institutions eligible for research funding. This could cause Birkbeck to decide to submit only its strongest research. HEFCE had already stated that institutions would not be penalised for being exclusive in their selection.

2.12 Governors considered the potential impact of this on academic staff in the longer term. There were concerns that it would have a negative impact on the amount of research staff would undertake. Reassurances were given that there would be protections for early career academic staff, and that efforts would be made to ensure that all academics were encouraged to conduct research. There was no wish to create a two tier system within research at Birkbeck, and no internal distinction would be made between academics who had submitted and those who had not.

Planning and Resources

2.13 The processes of scrutiny and review put in place in 2009-10 for School and professional services annual plans and budgets had continued in 2011-12. In year savings had been achieved for Schools showing negative balances, including through the Voluntary Severance and Early Retirement Scheme funded by the HEFCE Strategic Development Fund award. The same approach was applied to the mid year budget review, which identified savings in Schools and professional services, leading to a surplus financial outturn for 2010-11. These exercises would continue and would be of particular importance in 2012-13 onwards as the College’s financial position under the new fee system would need close monitoring.

2.14 There was ongoing work on achieving value for money and improvement of services and processes, at college and school level. A cross college business process improvement project had been set up. There would also be extended contingency and scenario planning in the run up to the transition to the new fee system in 2012.

2.15 Although the College was in a good financial position for the coming year, it was necessary to be prepared for future uncertainties and difficult times, given the significant changes to the student finance system. It was not certain what impact the changes would have on Birkbeck’s student demographics. The strategy would therefore be to build up a contingency fund against this uncertainty, while also ensuring sufficient funds for Birkbeck’s share of the campus building in Stratford.
Estates

2.16 Progress had been made on the consolidation of the College Estates

• The Department of Computer Science and Information Systems had been moved from Senate House into the main building.
• The Wiener Library had moved to 29 Russell Square and was working with the Pears Institute for the Study of Anti-Semitism, concentrating research in this area and resulting in an agreement being signed with the Dreyfus Society for the relocation and ultimate donation of their library to the College.
• Birkbeck’s share in a building in Emerald Street had been sold to the Institute of Education.
• 7 Bedford Square would be leased to an overseas Business School and staff from the Institute for Study of Children and Families, where staff numbers were reducing following the winding down of the £16M National Evaluation of the Sure Start Programme, would be relocated to the main building.

2.17 New facilities, including an expanded lecture theatre and larger IT teaching facilities, had been provided, enabling the School of Business, Economics and Informatics and the Department of Psychological Sciences and others to teach larger class sizes. This was an example of investment in infrastructure in response to and to support increasing student numbers.

2.18 The policy for Estates in the short term would be to minimise the rental of expensive outside space by teaching in the College wherever possible and seeking cost effective high quality space to hire. In the long term, options would be defined for the development of the Bloomsbury site. There was a need for a 500 seat lecture theatre in particular, with some business classes already numbering over 500. A Masterplan for potential site development was being commissioned. While these plans would be ambitious and not immediately achievable in the current funding situation, it was important to be aware of options if new opportunities should arise.

2.19 The major ongoing Estates project was the development of the University Square Stratford building in partnership with the University of East London. The contractor had started work with a view to completing the project in time for the 2013/14 academic year. As well as the £1M Garfield Weston Trust donation already confirmed, funding from the Wolfson Foundation had been applied for.

2.20 As discussed at the last meeting in response to the Report of the Nominations Committee, in the light of the significant ongoing Estates work, it would be beneficial to appoint a Governor with Estates expertise. A proposal was being developed.

2.21 Feedback from students was that it was preferable to have all classes in one area, close to central College facilities. This was the basis of the Estates consolidation policy, which would not only give more of a sense of College unity but also save money on hiring external space.

2.22 Governors asked about the potential to use technology to reduce the pressures on physical space. There was work being done on blended learning on some courses, with students experiencing a mix of online and in person teaching. It was noted that online teaching also opened up a wider geographical market for potential student recruitment.
2.33 The new teaching space management system was improving the student experience, particularly the provision of online timetables with room directions. The system needed to be very responsive because students were still enrolling after term had started, following the spike in applications in September. This year had seen improvements in the interventions made when class sizes were different than planned, leading to the need for changes to room allocations.

**Student recruitment**

2.24 There had been significant achievements in student recruitment:

- The College had achieved all but 209 of the 1,245 additional funded student full time equivalent student numbers awarded by HEFCE during the Strategic Review, and was confident of achieving the full total in 2011/12. This number was likely to play a role in determining how many students Birkbeck would be allowed to recruit in the new system. Students recruited in 2011/12 and continuing their courses would also provide fee income in 2012/13 and beyond.
- The number of students studying in Stratford had passed 1,000 for the first time.
- International student numbers had doubled over the last four years and further increases were anticipated for 2011/12. Fee income from these students had also significantly increased. Work was being done by the Pro-Vice Master for International Links on negotiating agreements with high quality universities overseas to promote research and teaching collaboration.
- Under the oversight of the Recruitment Monitoring Group there had been a record number of applications for 2011/12, exceeding the corresponding levels in the also record-breaking 2010/11 recruitment cycle.
- The part time accelerated degrees offered through UCAS in 2010/11 had experienced a 33% increase in applications in 2011/12. The majority of applications had come from over 21s in the Greater London area, suggesting entry into UCAS had increased penetration of an existing target market. It had also increased recruitment from less wealthy areas of the city. The UCAS offering would be expanded in 2012-13 with 20 further part time accelerated courses. These programmes demonstrated the college’s commitment to flexibility as part of a range of accelerated and longer courses.

2.25 A potential market had been identified in international students working for multinational firms in law, banking and accountancy, who could combine working in the London office of their company while studying in the evening. Governors asked whether such students would be under excessive pressure and heard that the College has measures to prevent drop-out, including pre-entry support and induction and language support. Part of the attraction of Birkbeck to international students was the opportunity to study alongside working Londoners, and in turn students from London would have their experience enriched by studying with international students.

2.26 Governors asked whether staff to support teaching of increased student numbers would continue to be appointed on fixed term contracts. It was confirmed that fixed term contracts were used for new courses where recruitment was unpredictable and that such posts could be made permanent if long term viability through sustainable student numbers could be achieved.

2.27 Going forward into 2012-13, it would be necessary to monitor the recruitment cycle very carefully, as decisions would need to be made as the year progressed. An information campaign about the new fees system was planned because it was critical
that prospective undergraduate students understood how to access loans and financial support. It was also important that potential postgraduate students understood that their fees would not be subject to the same increases as for undergraduates.

**Lobbying and influencing**

2.28 The College had continued its political lobbying campaign to ensure that part time students would have a level playing field with full time students as promised in the Browne Review and the Higher Education White Paper, ‘Students at the Heart of the System’. The White Paper acknowledged the importance of part time education to under-represented groups who otherwise might not access higher education at all. It would be important for Birkbeck to continue to monitor the situation carefully to ensure that part time students were treated fairly under the new system and to draw attention to cases where this was not the case.

2.29 Recent successes had included:
- Persuading the Government to extend eligibility for loans to students studying at 25% or more of full time rather than 33%.
- Having the guidelines for eligibility for the National Scholarship Programme changed from having been in receipt of Free School Meals (a criterion clearly aimed at 18 year olds leaving school) to a household income based model.
- Lobbying successfully for a change in the regulations governing Certificate students who proceed to the second year of a related degree programme, who now do not have to repay their loans immediately after completing the certificate component.

2.30 Lobbying was still ongoing on the issue of repayment of loans by part time students after 3.5 years from the beginning of study, which compared unfairly to full time students who do not have to repay while they are still studying. Changing this to repayment after 4.5 years of study had become official Liberal Democrat Policy, and the Liberal Democrat peer Baroness Brinton had put down an amendment to the Education Bill in the House of Lords to this effect.

**Tuition Fees and student financial support**

2.31 As discussed last term, the undergraduate fees would have to be raised in response to the withdrawal of HEFCE T Funding. The College had adopted a tiered fee structure with lowest fees targeted at entry level programmes offering pathways onto degrees. The standard degree fee would be pro rata to £8,000 full time and the highest fee of pro rata to £9,000 full time would be charged for programmes with strong professional outcomes. Prices were linked to output and access rather than quality, and this would be reflected in the marketing message presented to prospective students.

2.32 It was necessary to take a pragmatic approach to the new fee system, ensuring that students in need of financial help to attend would be able to access it. In conjunction with the Government National Scholarship Programme, the College had developed a strong financial support package for low income students, providing partial fee waiver scholarships to students most in need, and real money bursaries to those with a household income of less than £25,000. Fundraising was ongoing to enhance this level of support and extend the fee waivers to more students as well as strengthening the student hardship fund. The aim would be to provide as generous a package as possible depending on fee income and donations.
2.33 Members raised the question of the potential impact of the 20 part time accelerated undergraduate courses that would be offered in 2012/13 on the demand for bursary awards. It was felt that the College had to take on the risk of projecting the likely level of demand and setting bursaries based on that number, rather than waiting until definite numbers were available and awarding money on that basis.

2.34 The Student Governors restated their preference for 100% bursary awards, on the basis that the new fees system was likely to discourage the poorest students from applying. It was noted in response that the decision to award partial bursaries had been made on the basis that the funds available for bursaries were finite, and the decision had been taken to spread the resource among more students.

2.35 The Student Governors asked for a review of the hardship fund to ensure it was reaching the necessary students under the new system. It was reported that a review was planned and that the Students’ Union would be consulted.

2.36 It would be important to maximise Masters recruitment in 2012/13 to make up for potential instability in undergraduate recruitment. The overall increase in Masters degrees was at the level of the cost of living, although fees would be raised in some subjects based on funding and competitor prices. A proposed fee reduction for students progressing from Bachelors to Masters degrees was under consideration.

Learning and Teaching Strategy

2.37 The Learning and Teaching Strategy would be developed to support maintenance of student recruitment in the new system. Radical ideas would be necessary to respond effectively to the new era of Higher Education. Initial ideas included:

- Offering blended learning routes combining online learning with in person learning to offer greater convenience and flexibility to students.
- Facilitating programmes that are taught across three terms, to bring assessment close to learning and make better use of the estate, so that students would be more likely to be taught in the College rather than in hired space.

2.38 To support development of learning and teaching strategy, Professor Sue Jackson, Pro-Vice Master for Learning and Teaching had been appointed to her role full time rather than as a 50% secondment from her School. She would also work closely with Tricia King, Pro-Vice Master for Student Experience, on retention. It was also proposed that Professor Matthew Weait would be appointed as Pro-Vice Master for Academic Partnerships, to lead on strengthening Birkbeck’s relationship with FE Colleges and encouraging progression for these students onto courses at Birkbeck.

2.39 A Review of Certificates of Higher Education was under way to identify a strategy for the future of this provision. It would be necessary to clarify the purpose of each Certificate and to standardise the framework of progression between Certificate and degree programmes, to ensure that Certificates acted as effective feeders to degree programmes or as standalone qualifications.

2.40 There were also significant numbers of potential Certificate students who were interested in learning but not assessment or acquisition of a qualification. Although assessed at the end of the course was a requirement for HEFCE funding under the current regime, it would not necessarily be so in the future without HEFCE funding. To meet the needs of these students and to develop the College’s lifelong learning
remit, Professor Miriam Zukas was developing a membership scheme which would allow members to pay an annual fee and receive benefits such as auditing a limited number of courses, attending special lectures or taking part in collaborative learning events with cultural organisation partners. Initial conversations with potential partners and focus groups with students had produced enthusiastic responses.

**The future**

2.41 There were a number of opportunities for Birkbeck under the new fees system. With the extension of loans to part time students and the agreement in the future for part time students to apply through UCAS, there was a genuine opportunity for part time higher education to be more mainstream and for the removal of barriers between part time and full time provision. Part time learning while working could become an increasingly attractive option for students faced with debt, especially students leaving undergraduate degrees owing £27,000 and wishing to study at postgraduate level. Part time options could also be appealing to employers who wished to recruit school leavers and offer them the opportunity to qualify as they work, for example in professions like accountancy.

2.42 It was noted that Birkbeck was likely to stay in a very strong position to compete for part time students. Most universities currently offering part time courses were offering part time day release courses to workers. Birkbeck was unique in its combination of research intensity and accessible programmes of study.

2.43 The financial strategy was to survive the potentially difficult period at the beginning of the new fees system and continue to deliver the mission of Birkbeck, by continuing the practice of regular budget review in response to student numbers and income; and building up assets and reserves in advance as insurance. The structural changes made to the Schools, the discipline of the planning process, and the innovative fees and bursaries offer would put the College in a good position to achieve this.

**Endorsed**

2.44 The strategic direction for Birkbeck as set out in the Masters paper.

3 **PRO-VICE MASTERS**

Noted

3.1 Pro-Vice-Masters were appointed by Governors for fixed terms of three years, on the recommendation of the Master, to be responsible for the strategic consideration and development of initiatives in specific areas.

Agreed

3.2 Appointment of Matthew Weait as Pro-Vice-Master for Academic Partnerships, for a three year appointment ending on 30 September 2014.

3.3 Appointment of Sue Jackson as Pro-Vice-Master for Learning and Teaching, for a six year term of appointment ending on 30 September 2017. Governors confirmed a six year term for this appointment in recognition of the importance of effective learning and teaching strategy in achieving the College’s mission and aims in the current environment.