BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the meeting of the GOVERNORS

29 September 2009

Present:
Lord Marshall of Knightsbridge (chair),
Mr Richard Agutter, Mr David Butler, Mr Richard Clarke, Professor Philip Dewe,
Ms Susie Hodge, Mr Tom Hoffman, Dr Diane Horn, Professor David Latchman, Mr Drummond
Leslie, Mrs Joy Manners, Professor Michael Oaksford, Ms Gita Panchal, Mr Garth Pollard, Mr
Sean Rillo Raczka, Ms Shrupti Shah.

By invitation:
Mr Robert Allison, Dr Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick, Mr Hugh Ferrand, Mr John Poggioli, Mr
Paul Shelton, Professor Julian Swann, Dr Ruth Thompson.

In attendance:
Mrs Katharine Bock (Deputy Clerk to the Governors), Mr Keith Harrison (Secretary and Clerk
to the Governors), Mr Peter Westley (Director of Finance), Mr David McGhie (Director of
Planning), Ms Megan Reeves (Deputy Secretary).

Apologies for absence:
Mr Robert Allison, Mr John Biggs, Professor Matthew Innes, Mr Rob Park, Mr Bruce Seton,
Ms Tami Peterson.

1 WELCOME
Noted:
1.1 The Chair welcomed independent Governors-elect Dr Ruth Thompson and Mr Paul
Shelton; Academic Board Governor-elect Professor Julian Swann; academic staff
Governor-elect Dr Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick; non-teaching Staff Governor-elect
Mr John Poggioli and student Governor-elect Mr Sean Rillo-Raczka. Their terms of office
would start on 1 October 2009.

1.2 The Chair also welcomed external Committee members Mr David Butler (F&GPC) and
Mr Hugh Ferrand (Investments Committee).

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS
Noted:
2.2 Governors were asked to disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest in relation
to the matters listed on the Agenda. No conflicts of interest were identified.

3 MINUTES
Confirmed:
3.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 2 July 2009.

4 CHAIR OF GOVERNORS
Noted:
4.1 As previously reported, the Chair of Governors had announced that he would be
retiring once a replacement was appointed. Nominations Committee would oversee the
search for a new candidate. A small group consisting of the Master, the Deputy Chair, the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk had met potential executive search companies and had appointed Perrett Laver to lead the search. Perret Laver staff were meeting with groups of Governors and College officers before submitting a list of potential candidates.

5 THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF BIRKBECK

Considered:

5.1 The Master’s annual strategy paper. (G 2009 01)

Noted:

5.2 The paper set out recent achievements and key issues faced by the College. The principal aim for the year was to build on the new academic structure to reach sustainability while retaining the core mission of widening participation in a research environment.

Student recruitment and retention

5.3 There were challenging student recruitment targets which included the 1,245 additional funded student numbers which if secured would replace the post-ELQ safety net. 2008-09 had been a record year for student applications and strong recruitment trends were continuing. Although it was not possible to be certain of the extent to which this was a temporary effect of the recession, Governors agreed that as many students should be recruited as possible in the short term.

5.4 34 new programmes had been launched for 2009-10 and 43 were planned for 2010-11, which would also support meeting the recruitment targets.

5.5 The College would develop strategy for accommodating increased student numbers given constraints on teaching space. There were aspirations for a large lecture theatre although these needed to be considered in the context of the College’s location and the need for additional external funding for building. More practically, ways of maximising the use and efficient planning and allocation of teaching space would be explored.

5.6 The Master reported that the political campaign for fairer part-time funding was ongoing and that he had met with both the main parties to pursue the case.

5.7 In expanding its provision, Birkbeck would focus on flexibility rather than on distinctions between part time and full time provision. The new three-year degree programmes would be badged as flexible accelerated provision rather than full time. Governors endorsed the view that Birkbeck should maintain its unique primary focus on evening teaching, but increase flexibility of delivery.

5.8 The need to improve student retention as well as recruitment was recognised and it was agreed that the College should establish strategy for increasing retention. The student governor noted the impact of changes to the student body, in particular more students and different combinations of old and younger students.

Strategic Developments and Strategic Review

5.9 In July it had been confirmed that the College had secured a £5M SDF grant and loan for Strategic Review development. Since then, criteria had been established for using the funding efficiently and ensuring financial sustainability for Birkbeck. It would be necessary to report back to HEFCE on the fulfilment of these criteria.
The core of the development strategy was for the College to expand income and student numbers while controlling costs by increasing fee levels, decreasing dependence on HEFCE income and reducing staff costs as a proportion of income.

Governors discussed the importance of maintaining access for students on low incomes while raising fees and noted that a new framework of scholarships and bursaries linked to fee levels would be developed.

There was an ongoing risk of significant cuts in public spending and a need to be responsive to potential funding changes. It would be necessary to monitor progress against targets and to model different financial scenarios to help the College react quickly.

Portfolio review had been launched in Schools, led by Executive Deans. The purpose was to identify courses which were not financially viable and agree action to take including programme amendment, closure and new developments. Governors noted the need for strong business cases underpinning any proposals for resource for new programme developments.

Birkbeck Stratford

Birkbeck Stratford had experienced three successful years, with a growing programme portfolio and student body.

Work continued on campus building development with the University of East London (UEL), Newham Borough Council and London Thames Gateway Development Corporation (LTGDC). The project was reaching a conclusive phase, with land acquisition close to completion and the partners identifying funding sources.

The project was costed at £33M, met by contributions from UEL, Birkbeck, LTGDC and HEFCE through its Strategic Development Fund (SDF). Birkbeck had already secured a £4M SDF grant and loan for the project and UEL was leading on a further bid, with confirmation of the outcome expected in December. In support of the bid, the partners would confirm their commitment to the overall funding package, which for Birkbeck would constitute £7M that could be sourced from fundraising, capital grant and cash balances/reserves. As reported in July 2009, the final decision to proceed with the project would be made by Governors in the light of the outcome of UEL’s SDF bid. Governors endorsed this approach.

Estates

There had been significant developments in Estates with the acquisition of 27-29 Russell Square and Egmont House enabling the instigation of a refurbishment and relocation programme to provide a base for each School and scope for relocation from Senate House North Block. Discussions with the Vice-Chancellor were continuing over appropriate compensation for moving out of the North Block.

Conclusion

Governors were, overall, very pleased with the progress and achievements that had been made, especially in the two years since the ELQ funding shock, but noted the considerable challenges ahead both in terms of institutional transformation and the external economic and funding climate.