BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee
14 January 2010

Present:
Mrs T King (Chair)
Professor J Annette
Mr J Bovill (part)
Mr N Buckle (for Dr J Gill)
Mr R Caldwell
Dr F Candlin
Mrs A Dierks
Professor S Jackson
Ms C McDonald
Dr J Nicklin
Mr D Pateman
Mr M Pimm
Mr A Schmidt (part)
Dr M Weait

In attendance:
Mr T Pearce
Mr J Smith
Ms C Terrey
Mr Iain Thomson (observer)

Apologies:
Dr M Cook
Ms P Crampton
Mr K Harrison
Ms A Jamieson
Mr P Payne

II  MINUTES OF THE WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 October 2009

11.1 Confirmed:
The minutes of the meeting of 14 October 2009.
12 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

12.1 Noted:
Under 4.1.1, the away day for the Assistant Deans with responsibilities for Learning and Teaching and Recruitment and Retention would be held on 2 February.

Under 9, Birkbeck had been successful in its application for an award under its Community Leadership Programme.

13 CHAIR’S REPORT

13.1 Strategic Review
The Chair focussed on Recruitment and Retention as major challenges of the strategic review, in order to preserve the future of Birkbeck’s unique mission. By 2011-12 Birkbeck needed to have increased its fundable student body by 900 FTEs. A first objective for student experience work had been to establish My Birkbeck and the next, to focus on increasing retention. The Chair thanked the student experience project group for their work which had achieved a great deal in a short space of time. Their work would now be taken forward by this committee, and the project would be going forward in a plan set out in a Project Initiation Document.

A retention awayday would be held on 2 February. Assistant Deans with responsibilities for Learning and Teaching and Recruitment and Retention had been invited. The awayday would consider what initiatives could influence retention. The outcome would be a set of projects, and these would need to be prioritised. Ms A Jamieson was drawing together best practice on retention across the College and across the sector, and this would be discussed at the awayday. Mr B Bell was producing an analysis of Birkbeck retention data to be discussed at the awayday.

13.2 Widening Participation
Increased recruitment of non-ELQ students was vital to Birkbeck’s success, and the work of the Outreach and Widening Participation Unit was crucial to this. HEFCE was developing its widening participation reporting mechanisms by introducing the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment. HEIs would need to submit convincing assessments to assure the widening participation part of core funding.

14 RETENTION

Received and considered:

14.1 the Project Initiation Document (PID), presented by Mr James Smith, Project Manager of the Student Support Project. The PID was produced for the projects identified in relation to the student experience, and specifically retention. The PID had been approved by the Strategic Review Implementation Team and was now available on the strategic review website. Reviewing learning support would be a related, but separate, project. The need for balance between improving
retention and preserving academic standards needed to be maintained. There
needed to be clear, transparent policies in place to assist this.

14.2 Recommended:
After discussion, approval of the terms of reference of the projects to Academic
Board Executive Committee.

15 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

15.1 Received for information:
A report from the National Student Survey for 2008-9, which was presented to
the Teaching Quality and Enhancement Committee (TQEC) in October 2009.
The report had been sent to Schools for comment and a further report would
be made to the next meeting of the TQEC.

15.2 The survey was sent to students at graduation, so excluded the 42% of students
who had already dropped out of their courses. In addition to the NSS, there
were suggestions to survey students in their first year, ask additional questions
to obtain data which was more specific to Birkbeck students and to survey
students who were also members of staff at Birkbeck.

16 COMPLAINTS

16.1 Received and discussed:
a report on formal complaints received by the College in 2008-9. The paper
reported on complaints, appeals, code of student discipline and assessment
offence cases as dealt with by the Academic Services Unit within Registry

16.2 The number of formal complaints remained low, and did not appear to be
increasing.

17 WIDENING PARTICIPATION

17.1 Received and discussed:
An update by the Head of Outreach and Widening Participation on the
Widening Participation Strategic Assessment document, the draft of which had
been submitted to HEFCE in December. The Chair, the Head of Outreach and
Widening Participation and the P-V-M for Lifelong Learning and Engagement had
attended a conference at which institution bids had been discussed. The HEFCE
evaluation template for assessments would not be available until September and
the first formal report would need to be submitted in December 2010.
Institutional targets and the financial investment of the College in widening
participation were still to be finalised. Comments and input on the draft should
be made to the Head of Outreach and Widening Participation. On completion
the document would need to be considered and approved by Governors prior
to its submission to HEFCE.
18 REPORT FROM HEAD OF THE STUDENT CENTRE

Received:
a report on My Birkbeck Student Services (14 October 2009-14 December 2009). A powerpoint presentation was also made by the Head of My Birkbeck Student Services. This focussed on: Where are we now? January 2010 helpdesk and helplines; My Birkbeck website; Web survey; My Birkbeck Web and Communication Group; Student Services Forum. Substantive matters raised at these groups would be brought to this committee.

19 REPORT ON THE OUTREACH AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION UNIT

Received:
An overview of the key activities of the Unit. The Unit was focussing less on small events and more on library roadshows. It would be useful to talk to teachers as well as students, but this should not duplicate the work of Aim Higher. Arranging for academics to visits schools would be labour intensive and the Unit had limited resources. A page for teachers may be included on school websites.

20 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted:
The date of the next meeting has been changed to 12 May 2010, at 2.00 pm.