Minutes of the Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee
12 January 2011

Present:

Mrs T King (Chair)
Mr N Buckle
Dr F Candlin
Mr S Deville
Mrs A Dierks
Professor S Jackson
Ms A Jamieson
Ms C McDonald
Dr J Nicklin
Mr R Park
Mr D Pateman
Mr P Payne
Mr M Pimm
Mr A Schmidt
Mr A Towner
Dr M Weait

In attendance:

Mr S Hirons
Ms A McCone
Mr T Pearce
Ms J Stephenson
Ms C Terrey

Apologies

Professor R Caldwell
Dr M Cook
Ms P Crampton
Mr K Harrison

13 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 October 2010

13.1 Confirmed:
The minutes of the meeting of 6 October 2010.
14 MATTHERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

14.1 Noted:
No matters arising that did not appear elsewhere on the agenda.

15 REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

15.1 Noted:
Receipt by the Academic Board Executive Committee on 25 October of the Report of this Committee following its meeting on 6 October.

16 CHAIR’S REPORT

16.1 Reported:
Student experience and widening participation are at the heart of the change agenda in higher education. As the white paper emerges this Spring, it is anticipated that the government will look to ensure HEIs deliver improved student experience and significant WP work in return for raising fees. Successfully competing in the new HE world will involve demonstrating real ‘value’ in return for increased fees. Details of Birkbeck’s approach to increased fees (when £6-9k is the norm in the full time sector) would emerge following the publication of the white paper at the end of March.

17 RETENTION STRATEGY

17.1 Noted:
A report from the Retention Strategy Steering Group on progress with the implementation of the strategy. Four projects had been agreed and a fifth project, supporting staff by sharing best practice, was in the early stages of development.

17.2 There was a report from the two retention projects that were initiated by the SEWP committee.

17.2.1 As part of the ‘Transition to HE’ project it was reported that the ‘get ahead stay ahead’ website was being further developed and linked to the Pathway to the Professions project.

17.2.2 The ‘Transition to HE’ project also ran a programme of talks and drop-ins for first year undergraduate students addressing concerns that were identified by staff as pertinent at this time in the student cycle, had been piloted at the end of November. Student interest had been high, but participation low because of snow and tube strikes. The timing and content of the programme was under consideration.

17.3 A report on the Mentoring and Buddying project described how the pilot scheme in Law had worked with second year undergraduate students in Law as they were
currently more easily identifiable than first year students. The survey of mentors and mentees would be carried out after completion of the first term’s assessments.

17.3.1 The mentoring scheme needed to be evaluated in relation to retention in schools and schools would be invited to identify staff wishing to be involved in this scheme. The pilot project also identified that retention was connected to the need for students to feel part of a community.

18 COMMUNICATIONS WITH STUDENTS

18.1 Discussed:
A consultation paper on draft guidelines for communications with students, produced in part as a result of the disruption caused to students by bad weather at the end of 2010.

18.1.1 The policy aimed to create guidelines for streamlining communication with students, ensuring that critical, essential and strategic information reached them via the most appropriate channel of communication.

18.1.2 Feedback on the communications grid should be given to the head of communications. The paper would then be discussed more widely within the College.

19 WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Noted:
19.1 The Committee had agreed a working group would be set up to help develop cross-college and a refreshed strategy for Widening Participation to support College objectives and the delivery of the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment. The establishment of the group had been delayed pending the publication of the government white paper which would outline new thinking and funding on WP.

19.2 The Disability Officer wished to be involved in work on the white paper, looking at disability aspects of the student finance package.

20 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS)

Noted:
20.1 A report on the preparations made by the College for the NSS, giving guidance on the methods for publicising the survey to students as well as actions taken by the College to analyse results. The results had not yet been analysed. When they had, they would need to be used to enhance the student experience.

20.2 A report on the survey would be made to the next meeting of the Committee.
20.3 Birkbeck had failed to achieve the required 50% response rate to the survey in 2010 and was working very hard with NSS to ensure this does not happen again.

21 COMPLAINTS

Received and noted:
21.1 a report on formal complaints and disciplinary cases within the College 2009/2010. Recorded complaints had increased significantly in 2009/2010. A straight comparison on previous years was not yet possible owing to the restructuring that had taken place.

Received and discussed:
21.2 a proposed revised Student Complaints Policy and Procedure, providing greater clarification of the role of the students’ companion at the hearing.

Agreed:
21.2.1 The Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee recommended approval of the revised procedure to Academic Board Executive Committee.

22 REPORTS FROM CENTRAL SERVICES

22.1 Noted:
A report from My Birkbeck Student Services.

22.1.1 The website was being further developed in the light of research on usage. The Student Services Forum was proving useful. Developments overall were proving effective.

22.2 Noted:
A report from the Student Centre Helpdesk.

22.2.1 The review of the service had been completed. A further report on the operation of the Centre would be made to the next meeting of the Committee.

22.3 Noted:
A report from the Outreach and Widening Participation Unit detailing the partnerships and events in which the Unit had been involved. Activities were being developed in the light of changing circumstances within higher education.

23 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted:
The date of the next meetings of the Committee: 4 May 2011.
REPORT OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE
12 January 2011

1 CHAIR’S REPORT

1.1 Student experience and widening participation are at the heart of the change agenda in higher education. As the white paper emerges this Spring, it is anticipated that the government will look to ensure HEIs deliver improved student experience and significant WP work in return for raising fees.Successfully competing in the new HE world will involve demonstrating real ‘value’ in return for increased fees. Details of Birkbeck’s approach to increased fees (when £6-9k is the norm in the full time sector) would emerge following the publication of the white paper at the end of March.

2 RETENTION STRATEGY

2.1 The four agreed projects of the Retention Strategy Steering Group are detailed on the Group’s website at:
http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/aguf/Retention/index.html
A fifth strand, supporting staff by sharing best practice, is under development. A retention report is attached.

3 COMMUNICATIONS WITH STUDENTS

3.1 A consultation paper on draft guidelines for communicating with students is attached. Feedback on the communications grid should be sent to the Head of Communications who is consulting widely across the College on this matter.

4 WIDENING PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

4.1 Plans for refreshing the widening participation strategy have been put on hold pending publication of the government white paper that will include new thinking and funding for WP.

5 STUDENT DISPUTE RESOLUTION

5.1 A proposed revised Student Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure is attached.

5.2 Academic Board Executive Committee is invited to approve the revised procedure.

Tricia King, Chair