STUDENT EXPERIENCE & WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

Meeting 12 October 2011

Minutes

Present:
Tricia King (Chair), Professor Raymond Caldwell, Patricia Crampton, Garmon ap Garth [vice Caroline McDonald], Dr Adam Gearey, Jasbir Gill [vice Nigel Buckle], Professor Sue Jackson, Annabel Jones, Dr Tim Markham, Annette McCon [vice Caroline McDonald], Dr Jane Nicklin, Mark Pimm, Professor Matthew Weait

Apologies:
Nigel Buckle, Keith Harrison, Dean Pateman, Philip Payne

In attendance:
Darren David [Widening Access and Retention], Jo Fried [Students’ Union], Rob Park [Students’ Union], Trevor Pearce [Secretary], Evana Topolec [Development & Alumni Team]

1 MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE
Received:
1.1 The terms of reference for the Committee, together with the membership for 2011/12 (SEWPC 1 - 2011/12).

Noted:
1.2 The view that the terms of reference for the Committee should be strengthened in respect of the responsibility of the Committee for diversity. The College’s Equality and Diversity Officer would advise on a proposed re-drafting of this term.

ACTION: Patricia Crampton

2 MINUTES
Received:
2.1 The unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of 11 May 2011 (SEWPC 2 - 2011/12).

Agreed:
2.2 The minutes of the meeting of 11 May 2011 were confirmed, subject to the following amendments:
   (i) The numbering was amended to remove the duplicate 27.5
   (ii) Minute 28.3.1 was amended to read “reading week” rather than “reading work”.

3 MATTERS ARISING
Noted:
3.1 That a revised Student Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure had been adopted; further consultation was being undertaken with the Students Union to clarify the role of the companion within the Policy.

Received and noted:
3.2 The Committee’s report to Academic Board of its meeting of 11 May 2011.
4 CHAIR’S REPORT

Received:
4.1 A report, “Towards 2012: An Agenda for Student Experience Work” (SEWPC 3 - 2011/12).

Reported:
4.2 (i) By the Chair, that the Chair had discussed, with the Master and Pro-Vice Master (Teaching and Learning), during the Summer 2011, the impact of national developments on the student experience at Birkbeck and its implications for the Student Experience & Widening Participation Committee. The College had now submitted its OFFA Agreement, which had received strong informal feedback from OFFA, and had also submitted responses to the white paper both from the College and jointly with the Open University;

(ii) that the college continued to work with external agencies such as UCAS, BIS, Universities UK and the Student Loan Company to improve national support for Birkbeck students; this had benefits for recruitment and retention of students and would be central to student experience work during 2011/12.

(iii) that the paper provided to the Committee would be amended to take into account feedback from the forthcoming retention away-day before presenting to ABEExCo and Academic Board.

Noted:
4.3 (i) That research undertaken by the Students’ Union indicated that Birkbeck students considered there to be a gap in careers advice; careers advice was provided predominantly at Schools and Colleges and did not take into account the needs of mature students. Plans for government support for such support were not yet clear, but the College had engaged an adviser for one half day per week that Birkbeck students were able to see.

(ii) that Birkbeck students were entitled to use services provided by Careers Group London; these services were often geared towards traditional undergraduate students, but the Careers Group had indicated a wish to engage with the College to discuss services that it could provide that would be of use to Birkbeck students.

Received:
4.4 The response of the College to the Government’s “Students at the Heart of the System” white paper (SEWPC 4 - 2011/12), together the joint response of the College and the Open University (SEWPC 5 - 2011/12)

Noted:
4.5 That there had been a discussion following the latest Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee meeting of the white paper, at which it had been suggested that most College staff were unaware of the detailed implications of the white paper; it had been suggested that the College make more use of its intranet to publicise the white paper and the College position on its provisions.

5 RETENTION STRATEGY

Received:
5.1 The College’s Retention Strategy 2010-2013, together with a report from the Retention Strategy Steering Group (SEWPC 6 - 2011/12), the final report of the Transitions to HE project (SEWPC 7 - 2011/12) and the final report of the Mentors and Buddying project (SEWPC 8 - 2011/12)
Reported:

5.2 (i) By the Project Manager for the Retention Strategy Steering Group, that the first year of the Strategy had now been completed, with the two projects that reported to the Committee having now submitted their final reports. The Steering Group had identified a need for a more operational group that would meet more regularly to interrogate retention activities and data. Two useful datasets have been identified. There are new HESA data on part-time students, which have suggested that part-time students were more likely to successfully complete their studies at Birkbeck than at other comparable higher education institutions and new data has been compiled that charts retention rates from year 1 to year 2 at a programme, department and school level since 2004. This is available on the retention website

(ii) that the Transitions to HE project had now completed; the Committee was presented with its final report. The Get Ahead Stay Ahead website now had over 3000 users, and feedback had been overwhelmingly positive. Outcomes from the project report would be discussed at the forthcoming retention strategy away day. Over 90% of the students who attended the orientation and transition events in 2010 were still at Birkbeck at the end of Year 1

(iii) that an initial review of retention data showed that withdrawal rates for undergraduate programmes were generally between 14% and 19%; this represented an improvement on previous years' figures, and was well ahead of sector benchmarks.

5.3 By the Project Lead for the Mentors & Buddying project, that the project had now completed, and useful lessons on mentoring and buddying initiatives had been learned. It was difficult to identify year one students who would benefit from mentoring and buddying early enough to ensure success, and it was often the case that too much time had elapsed since their study for graduate mentors to be able to act successfully as mentors.

Noted:

5.4 that the College should ensure that its provision for dyslexic students was considered as part of the monitoring and implementation of the Retention Strategy, to ensure that the College put sufficient support in place to support dyslexic students and to ensure that opportunities were sufficiently well publicised.

Reported:

5.5 (i) By the Marketing Officer, that the College's Orientation week had taken place during September 2011, with further events to take place on a Saturday at the start of term and also at Stratford. Over 3000 people had attended orientation events; many students had enrolled after the event and so were not able to attend, but logistical issues prevented the College from holding such an event later in the year;

(ii) that a survey of attendees had been undertaken. The most popular reason for attending the event was to learn about the College and its support services, and a wish to visit and familiarise themselves with the College and its campus was also popular. The College would consider offering orientation surveys online in future years, but this might militate against the wish of many attendees to visit the College. Many respondents stated that they would have liked a formal tour of the College, and tours of the Library had been heavily over-subscribed;

(iii) that the most commonly expressed concern was that programme timetables had not been issued 10 days before the start of the programme concerned.

(iv) that 40% of UG attendee and 30% of PGT attendees had been out of the classroom for more than 10 years
6 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2011
Received:
6.1 A summary of the results of the National Student Survey 2011, together with a commentary on how the College would analyse these results (SEWPC 9 - 2011/12)

Reported:
6.2 By the Deputy Academic Registrar (Academic Services) that the College had achieved its 50% response rate target, ensuring the publication of its results by HEFCE, and that the results had been very positive. The College continued to review its mechanisms for analysing the results and its responses.

Noted:
6.3 (i) that NSS results would form one part of the Key Information Sets that the College would be required to publish from 2012. The College had fed back to the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills that the plans for Key Information Sets did not take into account the experiences of part-time students, and the Department had conducted interviews with a small number of Birkbeck students as a result. The College would continue to work with the Department on this issue;

(ii) that the College would work to publicise outcomes of its analysis of the NSS and internal student surveys.

7 ALUMNI FUND
Received:
7.1 A report on the use of alumni funds during 2010/11 (SEWPC 10 - 2011/12)

Reported:
7.2 (i) By the Development Manager (Alumni), that the College had raised approximately £125,000 during 2010/11 academic year from former students and other supporters of the College. There had been over 1400 donors and an average donation of just under £100 per donor, with donations of between £10 and £1000.

(ii) that all funds had been used in accordance with the College’s criteria for the use of such funds in supporting current students. Approximately £40,000 had been used to set up and support operations in the Student Centre, approximately £60,000 had been used for student financial support and approximately £25,000 had been set aside to support small projects to improve the student experience. It was intended to invite applications from schools and departments for this funding.

8 WIDENING PARTICIPATION
Received:
8.1 A report on the College’s response to the “Students at the Heart of the System” White Paper in relation to widening participation (SEWPC11 - 2011/12).

Noted:
8.2 That Professor Matthew Weait had now been appointed Pro-Vice Master (Academic Partnerships), one aspect of his new role is the development of pathways from Further Education and to develop collaborative partnerships with Further Education Colleges. This work would include the development of the College websites to ensure that the approach was transparent.
9 BIRKBECK / UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON STUDENT EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE

Received:
9.1 A report from the Birkbeck / UEL Student Experience Committee (SEWPC 12 - 2011/12).

Reported:
9.2 By the Chair, that the Birkbeck / UEL Student Experience Committee would now submit regular reports to the Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee. The College’s aim was to ensure that all College business was integrated; the primary focus of the Birkbeck / UEL Committee was to ensure a smooth transition to the new campus building, scheduled for completion in 2013.

10 WIDENING ACCESS AND RETENTION

Received:
10.1 A report on the activities of the Widening Access and Retention Team (SEWPC 13 - 2011/12)

Reported:
10.2 By the Acting Heads of the Widening Access and Retention Team, that Caroline McDonald, head of the Widening Access and Retention Team was now on maternity leave; Garmon ap Garth and Annette McCon were now acting as joint heads. The team remained highly active, and were now preparing “in-reach” activities such as a College open day, as well as providing support to potential students with limited supporting networks at schools and Colleges.

Noted:
10.3 That the College’s widening participation targets were now specified in its OFFA agreement.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted:
11.1 That the next meetings of the Committee were scheduled for 26 January 2012 and 10 May 2012.

12 OTHER BUSINESS

Noted:
12.1 That details of the evaluation of the OFFA agreement would follow once final decisions had been taken on the regulation of part-time fees and the agreements had been published.

Meeting concluded