BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

1 July 2015

Present
David Latchman (Chair), Katharine Bock, Hilary Fraser, Keith Harrison, Nick Head, Matthew Innes, Fraser Keir, John Kempton, Tricia King, Philip Powell, Megan Reeves, Julian Swann, Patricia Tuitt, Matthew Weait, Keith Willett, Miriam Zukas

In attendance
Roisin Lynch, Tim Markham (for item 91)

Apologies for absence
Philip Dewe, Stephen Frosh, Sue Jackson, Nick Keep

85 Minutes
Approved
85.1 The minutes of the meeting of 3 June 2015.

86 Actions
Noted
86.1 An update on the progress against actions agreed at the last meeting (SP 2014 58)

Research Excellence Framework Unit of Assessment Leads
86.2 The role description had been sent to the UoA Leads and the first meeting of the working party to prepare for the next REF had been set for September 2015. Members asked for a set of expectations around attendance and participation in the REF process for the leads to be developed and communicated.

International Student Visas
86.3 The International Group had approved the recommendation to introduce a deposit scheme for Tier 4 students and this would now be put into place. SPC heard that UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) would shortly be announcing a list of institutions that would be audited for compliance with UKVI regulations. There were indications that future regulations might be increasingly stringent. SPC would discuss this further at a future meeting.

87 Masters Report
Noted
The Minister for Universities and Science, Jo Johnson, had announced that a Teaching Excellence Framework would be introduced. There were few details currently available about how this would work, except that it was likely to be metrics-driven. It would be important for Birkbeck to try to be involved at an early stage in order to influence the metrics by which institutions would be judged to ensure that they were appropriate for Birkbeck.

**STUDENT RECRUITMENT**

**Noted**

Members received a note on the progress in recruitment for the 2015-16 session. Applications and offers remained high compared to this point in previous years, but SPC noted the need to continue to be cautious about recruitment in 2015, due to the unpredictability of the sector given the SNC removal and the possible introduction of postgraduate loans. Colleagues would continue to monitor the figures closely.

Recruitment and student data was being analysed to enable those students who were likely to need extra help and support to be identified so that appropriate support could be put into place. Members noted that the Higher Education Introductory Studies (HEIS) entry route had been developed to give extra support to students who needed it and discussed the potential to apply this model to students who had applied through the UCAS system. There was an existing model in the department of Management where students were, if appropriate, guided through a HEIS-based Introduction to Business Studies route.

**Action**

**88.3 (FK, MZ) Discuss the potential to add HEIS routes to the College’s UCAS offering.**

SPC discussed the School of BEI’s approach to recruitment, the guiding principle of which was that all applicants should be made an offer for a course, whether it was the course they had applied for or one that the admissions tutor felt was more appropriate. Members noted that this sent a powerful message to students, but did require careful consideration from admissions tutors and a portfolio of programmes which included something appropriate for everyone. SPC agreed that further thought should be given to whether it would be appropriate or possible to expand this approach across the College.

Members discussed postgraduate recruitment and the potential for competition from the satellite institutions that are being set up by some universities to provide postgraduate education in London, for example Loughborough’s east London campus. The data was not yet available to indicate how successful these campuses were likely to be in this recruitment cycle. Members also noted the potential for the development of an interest group for institutions based in or with campuses in east
London, and noted that the College would need to consider whether or not it wished to join such a group if one was formed.

88.6 As more data about this year’s recruitment cycle becomes available the College will be better placed to judge whether it has recruited well at postgraduate compared to other institutions, including other London-based universities.

88.7 Members heard that take up for the Postgraduate Support Scheme was low so far, and that this was also the case at most other institutions, including Russell Group universities. They noted that while the College would continue to promote the scheme, it should concentrate its recruitment efforts on activities that would bring in new students and income. It was increasingly unlikely that the government’s proposed postgraduate loan scheme would be in place for 2016-17, and it was unknown whether the bursary scheme would be continued as an interim scheme.

89 COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Received

89.1 A proposal from the PVM Academic and Community Partnerships on the establishment of a Community Partnership Programme and Centre at Birkbeck (SP 2014 59)

Noted

89.2 The aim of this proposal was to recognise and bring together the large number of disparate partnerships and relationships between other organisations and the College. The proposed Birkbeck in Community initiative would form part of the re-imagination of Birkbeck’s presence for the 200th anniversary, and would focus on the mutually beneficial development of, and support for, partnership working with public and third sector organisations in accordance with the College’s commitment to excellence in both research and learning and teaching.

89.3 It was suggested that the initiative should be run from a Centre for Community Partnership based at University Square Stratford (USS). SPC noted that, while there were concerns that this could distance it from other college initiatives, the College Governors had asked for a future strategy for the Stratford campus. Putting activities that were central to the strategy of the institution there would contribute to this.

89.4 Members discussed the details of the proposal and noted concerns around the placement elements, including the potential for disruption to existing partnerships and unnecessary duplication of current work. However, members supported the proposals around research, which would feed effectively into impact case studies for the next Research Excellence Framework.
The Committee endorsed the general principle of the initiative and the proposal to locate it at the USS campus. They asked the PVM Community and Academic Partnerships to bring a proposal back to a future meeting of SPC that had a greater focus on research development with an outline of resource needs.

200\textsuperscript{TH} ANNIVERSARY

Notes on the main points from the 200\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary Group discussion (SP 2014 60)

Noted

SPC discussed ways in which to commemorate Birkbeck’s 200\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, and heard that discussions were underway about the possibility of offering two PhD projects focused on material in the College archive. Part of this work would include growing the archive by interviewing people who are part of the Birkbeck story. It was agreed that a list of these people should be compiled so that interviews could begin as soon as possible. Members discussed the creation of an interdisciplinary history of Birkbeck, perhaps taking a thematic approach, involving the participation of several authors including postgraduate students. A series of essays about Birkbeck could be begun almost immediately and continue as the anniversary approached.

The Equalities Committee had discussed the 200\textsuperscript{th} anniversary and had also invited the Director of External Relations to their next meeting for further consideration of how to mark the approach of the milestone through a combination of looking back at Birkbeck’s equality triumphs and setting rigorous targets for the future.

There would be a soft launch in January 2016 to encourage all members of the Birkbeck community to contribute to and be engaged with the various strands of the preparations for the anniversary.

STUDENT PROGRESSION, RETENTION AND SUCCESS AT LEVEL 4

A revised project initiation document on developing this strand of work after the end of the Catalyst programme (SP 2014 61)

Noted

This paper had been discussed at the last meeting of SPC and changes had been made in response to feedback from that meeting to identify more specific deliverables. This proposal came out of the work that had been done through the Catalyst Student Achievement and Success project, and part of the project would be to bring together and build on work that was already ongoing in the College, in addition to rolling out new initiatives such as the personal tutor scheme.
91.3 Members noted concern that the proposed projects would overlap with the support available in the HEIS programme and affirmed the need to avoid duplication of effort. It was agreed that the project team should consider whether some of the deliverables around embedded skills modules could be achieved through expansion of existing HEIS provision. New provision should only be needed if it was not possible to provide it through HEIS. Members also cautioned that there may not be appetite in the Schools for the addition of accredited modules leading to the removal of other provision from curricula. Members noted the recent announcement of a metrics-driven TEF and suggested that the project team should take this into account.

**Action**

91.4 (SJ) After the first meeting of the project team, bring a refined list of specific proposed actions for discussion at SPC.

92 **CORPORATE PLAN**

Endorsed

92.1 The Corporate Plan 2015-2020 *(SP 2014 62)*

Noted

92.2 This was an updated version of the draft Corporate Plan that SPC had received at their last meeting, which now included material from the School business plans and the Professional Service plan summary and an updated People section. A section on enterprise and employability would be added. The Plan had been discussed and supported at the Governors meeting on 23 June 2015.

92.3 Members noted the need to ensure that all of the targets outlined in the plan were achievable and did not conflict with each other. Members were asked to send any editorial comments to KB by 30 July 2015.

92.4 The Plan was a living document that would continue to evolve; next year’s plan would include further sections on public engagement and on Stratford.

93 **FINANCIAL FORECASTS**

Received

93.1 The financial forecast summary to be submitted to HEFCE *(SP 2014 63)*

Noted

93.2 Forecasts were based on current HEFCE funding and did not make any assumptions about future government funding cuts. The Department of Business and Skills (BIS) had been told to make cuts of £450M, and it was thought that approximately one third of this would fall on HEFCE. Current modelling suggested that this would
impact universities during the 2014-15 and 2015-16 financial years, although the extent of the impact was not yet known.

93.3 The 2015-16 budget would be revisited once more information on funding cuts was available. The objective would be to deliver a surplus of 5% of income, which had been agreed as College strategy by the Governors. This might need to be reconsidered if cuts would have a negative impact on essential services, but would otherwise remain the aim of the budgeting process.

93.4 SPC noted that the forecasts were made on the assumption that non-pay efficiency savings would be made of approximately 5% in 2016-17 and 4% in 2017-18. These had not yet been identified and would be considered in more detail once student recruitment in October 2015 is known. As NI and pension costs increase further, consideration will need to be given to the budgets for 2016 and beyond, including potential ways to boost income.

94 PLANNING ROUND

Received

94.1 A note on the approach for the 2015-16 planning round (SP 2014 64)

Noted

94.2 Members welcomed the plan to restate the five year forecasts of fee income and staff costs once student numbers are available in the autumn term. SPC noted the need to ensure that data to support planning was available as soon as possible without compromising accuracy and reliability.

94.3 Members would discuss the planning process further over the summer and consider a proposed process and timeline for 2015-16 planning in the Autumn term.

95 IMPROVING BIRKBECK’S DIGITAL PRESENCE

Received

95.1 A paper on improving Birkbeck’s digital presence (SP 2014 65)

Noted

95.2 The Section Heads of Administration (SHA) had identified the need for a cross-professional services project to renew Birkbeck’s digital presence, ensuring it continues to support the College’s ambitions as technology changes and new ways of interacting with its communities open up. The College’s digital presence includes not only the main website but other areas such as the course listings, Schools and Department sites, My Birkbeck sites for staff and students, Moodle, Be Birkbeck, and Birkbeck’s presence on social media and other sites.
The project would aim to make the best use of resources to improve all aspects of the College’s digital work and consider the user’s experience across the whole of Birkbeck’s digital presence. SPC approved the initiation of the project, which would begin with a summer meeting to consult with SPC members, to understand frustrations and aspirations for the web and digital presence, out of which an action plan would develop.

**STUDENT ENROLMENT AUDIT**

Received

A note on the outcome of the initiative to improve student record keeping, confirm ongoing enrolment and promptly record withdrawals *(SP 2014 66)*

Noted

In 2014-15 termly student attendance audits had been carried out, using attendance registers and other engagement information such as VLE use, to identify students who had enrolled but may no longer be studying at the College. Staff were contacting these students to establish whether it would be more appropriate for them to be withdrawn or recorded as interrupted. SPC heard that this process is improving the accuracy of the College’s records and allowing for tighter management of fee liability and debt.

**RESPONSE TO COUNTERTERRORISM AND SECURITY ACT**

Received

A note on the College’s response to the duties of universities introduced by the new counterterrorism legislation *(SP 2014 67)*

Noted

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 makes it compulsory for specified authorities, including universities, to comply with the Prevent duty, taking measures to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. The Government has produced draft guidance for universities, following a public consultation exercise. Guidance on the relationship between the Prevent duty and universities’ responsibilities relating to freedom of speech on campus is also being drafted. The duty will not come into effect until after there has been a debate on the freedom of speech guidance in Parliament. This is expected to occur in September. It is likely that compliance with the guidance will be a prerequisite for the College’s continued licence to take students from outside the EU.

SPC noted the actions that the College will need to take, including liaison with the local Prevent co-ordinator and ensuring that staff are trained. College management noted that it would welcome comments from SPC on how to ensure the duty is understood and communicated widely, and implemented effectively and in line with Birkbeck’s ethos.
97.4 Members noted that, as part of the College’s duty to its students, staff need to be able to recognise a wide variety of issues affecting student wellbeing, and enable students to access support. Compliance with the counter-terrorism guidance should be considered as part of a wider agenda around enhancing the student experience and providing support.

97.5 A working group had held an initial meeting to consider the draft guidance. Members noted that the next steps should be considered by a group including Directors of Professional Services, School Managers and the Executive Deans.

98 **DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS**

Noted

98.1 The dates of the meetings next session:
- 16 September 2015 at 2pm
- 19 October 2015 at 2pm
- 10 December 2015 at 2pm
- 11 February 2016 at 2pm
- 22 March 2016 at 2pm
- 12 May 2016 at 2pm
- 6 June 2016 at 2pm