29 MINUTES AND REPORT
Received
29.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 19 October 2015.

Noted
29.2 The Report to Finance and General Purposes Committee (SP 2015 16)

30 ACTIONS
Noted
30.1 Progress on actions agreed at previous meetings (SP 2015 17)

Public engagement
30.2 The PVM Research was setting up a group to look at public engagement and related areas of research and academic engagement and impact.

HR, Finance and Payroll Systems
30.3 The scoring process was nearing completion and a mechanism had been put into place to enable Governors to approve the final decision in the New Year.

31 COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW
Received
31.1 An update from the Interim Policy Advisor on the consequences of the Spending Review for Birkbeck (SP 2015 18)

Noted
The Committee noted the most significant announcements in the Spending Review from Birkbeck’s perspective:

- The removal of restrictions on accessing tuition fee loans for a second degree in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects from 2017-18.
- The introduction of Part Time Maintenance Loans by 2018-19.
- The freezing of the student loan repayment threshold for Plan 2 graduates for 5 years from April 2016.
- The introduction of postgraduate loans for taught masters students from 2016-17, available to all those under 60.
- The introduction of a 0.5% levy on payroll for larger employers to support apprenticeships.
- The reduction of the teaching grant by £120 million in cash terms by 2019-20.

Many of these proposals were in the early stages of development and further details would be available on all of these announcements over the coming months.

It was confirmed that the postgraduate loans would not cover students taking postgraduate research courses, although there was scope to explore whether students on the first year of PGR programmes, who would be taking taught classes, might be eligible. Wider discussions about the introduction of postgraduate research loans in the future were in their infancy.

The College would need to consider how to support part time recruitment in the time before the proposed introduction of part time loans. It was possible that recruitment would suffer in 2016-17 and 2017-18 if students decided to postpone their applications until they were eligible for loans.

Actions

31.6 (Policy Advisor) Find out if the part time loans will only be available to new students, or whether students who had begun studying in previous years would become eligible once the loan scheme was introduced.

31.7 (Policy Advisor) Follow up with UUK for more details on the mechanics of the apprenticeship proposals.

31.8 SPC heard that BIS were still considering how the impact of the 50% reduction of the teaching grant would be distributed. Reductions in grants were not expected to be applied to all institutions equally; metrics would be used based on a widening participation agenda. The College would lobby against changes likely to have further negative effects on part time students being introduced before the proposed part time loans were available.
32 **BUDGET AND FINANCIAL FORECASTS**

Received

32.1 Updated income and expenditure forecasts *(SP 2015 19)*

Noted

32.2 Recruitment of new students for 2015-16 had fallen below target, with a resulting shortfall in tuition income of £5.6 million (as at 30 November 2015). In year budget adjustments could be introduced to counter this shortfall for 2015-16, but it was imperative to take early remedial action to ensure the College remained financially sustainable.

32.3 After discussions with the Executive Deans and the Directors of Professional Services, budget savings of £1,085,000, the majority of which related to unfilled staff vacancies, had been identified. Accounting for these savings, along with some identified additional costs that had not previously been included in the forecasts, such as the urgent need to rent additional space, left a shortfall of £1,537,000 in the 2015-16 budget.

32.4 It was important to reliably achieve the projected budget surplus each year in order to ensure the College was able to achieve the aims of its estates strategy. Other in-year adjustments were proposed for 2015-16, including freezing the College Innovation Fund which had been largely unused; an adjustment to the student financial support budget to reflect the reduction in student numbers; a potential saving in staff contingency following refinement of estimates of National Insurance and pension costs; and further budget savings of £700,000 to be identified by Schools and Professional Services. SPC noted that the College had regularly underspent against its non-staff budget in recent years. The Director of Finance, Schools and Professional Services departments would continue to discuss potential budget savings, and another iteration of the budget would be presented to SPC at the meeting on 11 February, going forward to the March meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

32.5 The Committee also noted the importance of carefully considering how to recover the College’s financial position and generate longer term savings, particularly in the context of an uncertain future for the HE sector and potential issues around student recruitment. This consideration would be a priority in the planning round for 2016-17 and beyond.

32.6 Given the current financial situation, the Director of Finance asked all budget holders to exercise restraint in spending.

33 **STUDENT RECRUITMENT 2016-17**

Received
33.1 A report on the current student recruitment position (SP 2015 20)

Noted

33.2 Applications for 2016-17 were down by 25% overall compared to this point in the cycle last year, and full time undergraduate applications were down by 26%.

33.3 SPC heard that the applications deadline for the initial phase in the UCAS cycle was 15th January, and that work was taking place to ensure that the College took full advantage of the remaining time. This included increased levels of advertising; targeted social media campaigns; CRM campaigns with enquirers, applicants and offerees; face to face recruitment; targeted changes to the website depending on the stage of the cycle; and direct mailing to key Head Teachers, Heads of Sixth Form and Careers Advisors. The College had made more offers than at this point last year, but the market appeared to be increasingly competitive, probably as a result of the removal of the SNC cap.

33.4 SPC noted the need for the College to make the unique nature of Birkbeck's flexible offer clear to all prospective students. It was noted that the phase “full time” did not make the distinctive Birkbeck proposition apparent. A Birkbeck Talent video was being developed which would outline how the College was able to help students take advantage of studying in the evening and get meaningful work experience. The student ambassadors programme, which involved graduates going out to secondary schools and FE Colleges and demonstrating the advantages of achieving a degree at the same time as gaining work experience, was a critical component of these efforts.

33.5 The marketing and recruitment team were identifying courses that were under-recruiting and working closely with Schools and departments to consider how to target potential students. In the longer term consideration should be given to the development of new subject areas. This would be discussed further at the upcoming SPC Awayday.

Action

33.6 (JD) Circulate more detailed recruitment monitoring reports to SPC members on a frequent and regular basis.

34 HIGHER EDUCATION GREEN PAPER

Received

34.1 A note on the Higher Education Green Paper (SP 2015 21)

34.2 A paper on relevant action being taken (SP 2015 22)

Noted
SPC considered the key themes of the Green Paper and the action being taken by the College in response:

**Teaching Excellence Framework**

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) would be rolled out from 2016-17. Under the Green Paper proposals, HEIs who met the required criteria would be allowed to increase their undergraduate tuition fees beyond £9000 in line with inflation.

From 2017-18 onwards metrics for the TEF would include the National Student Survey (NSS), Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) and student retention data from HESA. These metrics were already incorporated into the College and School Key Performance Indicators that were currently under development. SPC heard that future metrics might include direct information from HMRC on graduate earnings and participation in teaching qualification and accreditation such as the Higher Education Academy (HEA) framework. It would be necessary to support staff in engaging with the HEA where appropriate.

Work had already begun on preparation for the TEF. The PVM Learning and Teaching had convened a task force to take forward Birkbeck’s response to TEF, quality review and the key metrics. In addition, the Academic Registrar had set up an NSS task force to identify strategy to improve the College’s NSS ratings. The College’s response to the Green paper was likely to focus on the areas where Birkbeck’s unique nature could potentially disadvantage the College if the metrics were not contextualised appropriately. There would be a technical consultation on the metrics in 2016 to which Birkbeck would pay close attention.

Members discussed the metrics that might be used to measure widening participation, and noted issues around using postcode data as a proxy for this in London. Although the process was likely to involve an opportunity for institutions to present and explain their own data to a panel, the College should also explore opportunities to lobby on the use of postcode data to measure widening participation, potentially through the London Higher group.

**Office for Students**

The Green Paper proposed an Office for Students in place of HEFCE, QAA and OFFA, which would have a duty to promote the interests and consider issues from the perspective of students. Following Academic Board’s approval of the Student Engagement Strategy last term, a programme of student engagement projects had been drawn up to support the College’s focus on improving the student experience, following up the successful Catalyst programme to support students studying intensive flexible courses. This programme would be managed by the Strategic Projects Manager and overseen by the Student Engagement and Widening
Participation Committee. A progress report would be made to a future meeting of SPC.

Research

34.9 The Green Paper confirmed support for the dual research funding system, and proposed that the next main research funding exercise should be held by 2021. It supported greater use of metrics and a more “strategic, coherent and effective” funding landscape. The separate Nurse Review of Research Councils had also confirmed support for the dual system and for the establishment of a new executive structure, Research UK, while retaining the individual identities of the research councils. Even so, there was a risk that the dual system, with QR institutional funding separate from research council funding, would be weakened if it was administered by a single body. The College would register opposition to the idea, in the Green Paper, that institutions could not be excellent and teaching and at research.

34.10 It was expected that the Government would soon launch an independently led review of the REF to determine the form of the next exercise. The REF Working Party, led by the PVM Research, had begun preparations for the next research exercise, and was also currently considering the implications of the Green Paper.

34.11 The College was currently working on its response to the consultation on the Green Paper, and SPC members were invited to send any comments to the Policy Advisor.

35 SPC AWAYDAY AGENDA

Noted

35.1 The SPC Awayday would be held on 19 January 2016 at University Square Stratford. The Committee agreed the items for the agenda:

- Master’s strategy paper
- Updated five year financial and student number modelling
- New academic opportunities
- Key performance indicators, benchmarks and targets
- High level recruitment targets
- Green Paper, Spending Review and the political environment
- Fundraising strategy and 200th anniversary

35.2 Members noted that the discussion on new academic opportunities should separate longer term proposals from those which could be put into place quickly.

36 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT VISAS

Received

36.1 An update on the College’s response to Tier 4 student visa policy (SP 2015 23)

Noted
36.2 The HE sector has been informed, via the UKVI Licence Managers, that entry clearance officers will refuse visa applications where they believe academic progress is not suitably justified, although guidance states that if a student applies for a visa outside of the UK suitable academic progress is not required. There has not been clarification on this from UKVI, so in line with other University of London colleges Birkbeck will not sponsor Tier 4 students who have previously failed to complete a course in the UK and where academic progress cannot be justified.

36.3 Birkbeck was required to ensure that every student, whether on a Tier 4 visa or not, had the right to study in the UK. The College had carried out a survey of how other HEIs conduct registration checks, and found that Birkbeck was taking a lighter touch approach than other institutions, which all had a face to face registration process requesting original ID documentation before enrolment was completed. Members noted that this was a risk for the College, and that consideration should be given to introducing a face to face Registration event in the light of changing student demography and as an opportunity to enhance the student experience.

36.4 Comparison of the data from paper registers with eRegister data had identified a number of issues and work was ongoing to resolve them. Until a high level of assurance was achieved in the data, paper registers and eRegisters would run in parallel.

36.5 The International Student Administration team had checked the financial documentation for every student issued visa sponsorship who was a national of an identified “high risk” country. However, the College had seen an unexpected increase in refusals from countries which had not previously experienced problems. There had also been a significant increase in the number of visas refused on credibility grounds. Birkbeck had submitted a number of formal complaints about the reasoning behind these refusals, and were also feeding into an independent review on this area. It was expected that this, along with other new approaches including the newly introduced deposit scheme, should decrease refusal rates for 2016-17.

37 GUARDIAN SPACE UPDATE

37.1 Received

37.2 An update on progress in the Guardian Space initiative (SP 2015 24)

Noted

37.2 Since the update to SPC in December 2014, the building work on the Guardian’s new flagship membership space had been completed, and the Guardian had developed relationships with a number of partners and potential partners. The official launch of the building was expected to take place in September 2016, with a ‘beta’ programme of events running in July and August.
37.3 Birkbeck had signed an Interim Agreement for Provision of Events, and Heads of Terms in respect of Guardian Space. The Interim Agreement covered a small programme of test events in the existing Guardian offices, which ran from March 2015 until November 2015. The trial programme had provided useful information on how to develop a successful programme. SPC heard that it was felt that running a full programme was likely to be a financially neutral activity that would provide benefits through exposure for the College and opportunities for impact and public engagement activities.

37.4 The Guardian was currently undertaking a comprehensive review of its business activities, and there would therefore be a delay before a final agreement was drafted. This would be brought back to SPC for endorsement for approval by the Governors. SPC asked to see more detail about the role of the curator, including the job description, a description of how curators and academic staff would work together; and more detail on the links with the engagement and impact agendas.

37.5 Members suggested that if the final agreement was approved the ISSF group should consider making commitment to involvement with a Guardian Space event a pre-requisite of receiving ISSF funding.

38 ERASMUS+
Received
38.1 A paper on the Erasmus+ scheme (SP 2015 25)

Noted
38.2 Members noted that there had been positive feedback from students around the development of Erasmus+ exchange activity. A business plan would be developed exploring the potential for Erasmus+ becoming a significant activity for the College, and outlining the resource that would be needed to achieve this.

39 ATHENA SWAN
Endorsed
39.1 The College Athena SWAN group’s proposal that all members of promotion panels from 2016-17 onwards should have undergone either specific unconscious bias training or the updated Recruitment and Selection training offered by Learning and Organisational Development, which incorporated this.

40 DATES OF MEETINGS 2015-16
Noted
40.1 The dates of meetings for the rest of the session:
- 19 January 2016 (Awayday)
- 11 February 2016 at 2pm
- 22 March 2016 at 2pm
• 12 May 2016 at 2pm
• 7 July 2016 at 2pm