BIRKBECK  
University of London  

Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee  

11 February 2016  

Present  
David Latchman (Chair), Anthony Bale (for Hilary Fraser), Katharine Bock, Roz Dixon, 
Jonah Duffin, Stephen Frosh, Fraser Keir, Keith Harrison, Matthew Innes, Nick Keep, John 
Kempton, Tim Markham (for Sue Jackson), Chris Murphy, Philip Powell, Megan Reeves, 
Julian Swann, Patricia Tuit, Keith Willett, Miriam Zukas  

In attendance  
Julia Day (for item 45), Chris Dewberry (for item 46), Roisin Lynch  

Apologies  
Hilary Fraser, Nick Head, Sue Jackson  

41 MINUTES  
Confirmed  

41.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 10 December 2015.  

42 ACTIONS  
Noted  

42.1 Progress on actions agreed at previous meetings (SP 2015 26)  

Part time loans  

42.2 The College continues to lobby for the part time maintenance loans for undergraduate students that were expected to be introduced in 2018-19 to be made available for all continuing students as well as new students.  

Postgraduate Review  

42.3 Several productive meetings have taken place to discuss the implementation of the recommendations of the Postgraduate Review. A report would come to the Autumn term meetings of the Research Committee and SPC.  

HR, Finance and Payroll Systems Replacement  

42.4 SPC heard that the tendering process had been concluded and a supplier selected. The Governors had delegated authority to approve the selected supplier to a sub group consisting of the Chair and Deputy Chair of Governors, the Chair of F&GPC, the Chair of Audit Committee, the Master and the College Secretary. The group considered a written report and proposal, and approved the procurement and
implementation of a comprehensive, cloud-hosted, HR/Payroll/Finance solution, from Unit 4, at a total capital cost of £2.25M.

Student Progression, Retention and Success at Level 4 Project

42.5 This work was ongoing. Members noted that the Governors had emphasised the importance of work to investigate and improve student retention during their Awayday.

43 AWAYDAYS FOLLOW UP AND ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

Noted

43.1 The reports and actions arising from the Strategic Planning Committee Awayday (SP 2015 27)

43.2 A summary of the key points arising from the Governors Awayday (SP 2015 28)

43.3 Discussion at both SPC and Governors’ Awaydays had focused on the need to expand and refresh the course portfolio and develop portfolio ideas to meet student recruitment targets, ultimately supporting the need to generate financial surpluses to invest in developing the estate.

43.4 Areas under consideration include:

- An expanded foundation year offer based on the existing CertHE provision
- Courses in the area of health
- Engineering linked to computer science
- Provision based on the intensive LLM model in the School of Law
- The development of degree apprenticeships
- Further development of cross-College and dual degrees
- Exploration of further involvement with the University of London International Programme
- Programmes involving the opportunity of a year abroad
- Further discussions on flexibility in the structure of the academic year

Actions

43.5 (JD) Bring comparative data on uptake of dual degrees in the sector to a future SPC meeting.

43.6 (SF) Convene a strategic discussion around the potential for further work with ULIP, to investigate whether there is scope for recruiting new students through these programmes, or whether there would be a better partner with which Birkbeck could work to provide distance learning.

43.7 Members noted that it is equally important to continue to support improvements in student retention and the student experience.
43.8 SPC discussed the need to establish a clear plan for these developments, as emphasised at the Governors’ Awayday. College management is setting up a project structure to co-ordinate development of College wide initiatives, including Foundation Year, Health and flexible academic structures. Schools have been asked to indicate student numbers for more localised initiatives and new courses as part of this year’s five year planning cycle.

**Action**

43.9 **(SPC)** Discuss plans for these developments in further detail at a future meeting.

44 **STUDENT RECRUITMENT**

**Received**

44.1 An update on student recruitment (**SP 2015 30**)

**Noted**

44.2 In the autumn term, the main activity is applications for three year undergraduate degrees, for which students apply through UCAS. For students going straight from school to mainstream university, this is the main cycle with a deadline of 15 January. With its student profile of diverse ages and backgrounds, Birkbeck receives nearly half of its UCAS applications later in the cycle when there is a much higher rate of conversion to enrolment, but also needs to compete in the first phase. Applications are down 22% compared with the same point last year, as the market has become increasingly competitive after the removal of the SNC cap. With measures in place to improve application handling, offers are down by 9%.

44.3 There is a considerable amount of ongoing activity supporting recruitment and promoting Birkbeck’s unique flexible academic offer and the opportunities and support available, including advertising, open evenings, follow up with enquirers and applicants, student ambassadors, an overhaul of the website, improved information for international students and making offers to applicants as quickly and efficiently as possible. SPC will monitor recruitment closely this year through reports from the Recruitment Strategy and Management Group.

44.4 Members discussed the approach for the youngest group of students and prospective students aged 18-21. While fewer applications from this age range convert to enrolment, there are young prospective students who would be well suited to the unique way of studying and working offered by Birkbeck, and it is important to target these students. There are focus groups underway with first year Birkbeck students in this age category to find out more about their motivation for choosing the College.

**Action**

44.5 **(JD)** Circulate the results of these focus groups when available.
45  DIGITAL STEERING GROUP
   Received
   45.1 An update on the progress of the digital steering group.

   Noted
   45.2 The first and urgent task of this group is to improve the College website. The group focused on remedial changes to streamline navigation and content on the homepage, improve searching facilities, and migrate key information for prospective students to a new responsive site that would work with smartphones and tablets as well as larger screens. A new website design and visual identity would follow, with a rewrite of content, improvement of the international student recruitment pages and work to improve our search engine rankings. Further phases would roll the work out across the Schools, the library, and later other Professional Services.

   45.3 Members noted the importance of bringing forward lessons learned from previous work on the website. Ensuring that content at all levels was accurate, up to date and relevant would be critical, as would a navigable and user oriented structure.

   45.4 Members noted the importance of ensuring clear lines of communication between the Schools and the central staff working on the website, so that Schools can control how they are presented and any inaccuracies can be quickly noted and amended. The Digital Steering Group would consider this issue. The group would report to SPC frequently. It was suggested that the website be included in the narratives created by Schools as part of the planning round next year.

   Action
   45.5 (SF) Invite Julia Day to attend the International Group.

46  PREDICTORS OF STUDENT SUCCESS AT BIRKBECK
   Received
   46.1 A report from a Catalyst programme project aiming to identify factors associated with the success and failure of students at Birkbeck. The research, carried out by Dr Chris Dewberry, linked the outcome of a survey of students in the Organizational Psychology department to data held by the College, including demographic variables and student attendance records, to develop a model of the factors influencing dropout intentions.

   46.2 The outcome suggested that it could be possible to develop a model to explain and predict student dropout, which could then assist in the development of targeted interventions.

   Endorsed
46.3 The proposal to repeat the research on a larger scale across the College. Birkbeck students would be asked to complete a survey annually, one third in the Spring term, one third in the Summer term, and one third in the Autumn term. Final year students would be omitted to avoid interference with the NSS.

**Actions**

46.4 *(Chris Dewberry, MZ)* Present the results of the project at the next Governors’ meeting.

46.5 *(Chris Dewberry, MZ)* Present the project at a future meeting of the Equalities Committee.

47 **ECONOMICS, MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS DEPARTMENT**

*Noted*

47.1 The report of the recent review of the Economics, Mathematics and Statistics Department was circulated to SPC last term.

47.2 SPC strongly endorsed the recommendations in the report and confirmed the need for clear improvements to be made within the agreed timeframes. SPC should receive regular updates on implementation and will monitor and report on progress. Members noted the difficulties involved in monitoring behavioural and cultural change, and suggested that it might be useful to ask a focus group of more junior colleagues to feed back on changes in the department.

**Action**

47.3 Develop targets to monitor against and make termly reports to SPC.

48 **FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE**

*Received*

48.1 The report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee.

*Noted*

48.2 FBSC considered the impact of the new loans for home/EU postgraduate taught students. Birkbeck is a major provider of Masters courses for Londoners and the introduction of the loans is likely to make the market more competitive as other institutions put more resource into targeting these students. FBSC will review postgraduate pricing, taking into account the need to retain postgraduate taught recruitment as a stable part of the College’s provision, the financial pressure being experienced by the College, and competitor benchmarking.

48.3 The College was giving feedback to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on part-time undergraduate maintenance loans, and would lobby strongly for the loans to be communicated effectively to the part-time market, and set up in a way that made it easy for students to change from full to part time. This would
allow Birkbeck to offer much greater flexibility and ensure Birkbeck students are studying at the right intensity for them.

48.4 FBSC discussed proposals for the College to offer support to refugees, asylum seekers and those with temporary status in the UK. Initial investigations had focused on seeking out external organisations involved in working with these groups to identify what support would be effective. A costed proposal will be brought back for consideration.

49 PORTFOLIO REVIEW
Noted
49.1 The portfolio review process will be concluded and feedback will be provided by Schools by email.

50 BUDGET REVIEW
Noted
50.1 The budget will be revised in light of January recruitment figures and circulated to members for approval by email.

51 SENIOR ROLES
Noted
51.1 SPC noted that Professor Sue Jackson and Professor Miriam Zukas would both be retiring at the end of the academic year. The initial recruitment process for a PVM with the Learning and Teaching portfolio would take place internally, following the same process as the recent recruitment for a PVM Access and Community Partnerships. The role of Executive Dean of the School of SSHP would be advertised externally, with applications from internal candidates encouraged.

52 DATES OF MEETINGS 2015-16
Noted
52.1 The dates of meetings for the rest of the session:
- 22 March 2016 at 2pm
- 12 May 2016 at 2pm
- 7 July 2016 at 2pm