BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

2 May 2016

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

In attendance
Roisin Lynch

Apologies
Roz Dixon

70 MINUTES
Confirmed
70.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 22 March 2016.

71 ACTIONS
Noted
71.1 Progress on actions agreed at previous meetings (SP 2015 49)

Comparative data on uptake of dual degrees
71.2 External Relations are working with a market researcher who will be looking at this area; the data will be brought back to SPC when it is available.

Economics, Mathematics and Statistics Department Review
71.3 Implementation of the recommendations will begin when a new Head of Department is in place. A report will be made to a future SPC meeting.

Senior Roles
71.4 Interviews have taken place for the position of Executive Dean of SSHP, and the advertisement for the role of PVM Learning and Teaching will go out shortly. There has been a call for expressions of interest in the position of independent Governor and 41 responses have been received; a sub-group of the Nominations Committee will be convened to compile a short list.
71.5 Members discussed the Governor adoption scheme, in which independent Governors took an interest in the work of particular Schools, and suggested that the College explore reinvigorating the scheme. SPC also noted the new emphasis in the Green Paper around the engagement of Governors in learning and teaching, and discussed the potential for Governors to also be attached to PVM portfolios.

72 MASTER’S REPORT

72.1 SPC heard that the UCU Trade Union have announced strike action in May. The College will continue to explore ways that the impact on Birkbeck students can be limited.

72.2 The Master reported that there has been a move within the University of London to establish a process by which the constituent Colleges can become universities in their own rights. This will require an Act of Parliament to be amended, but Colleges have been advised to begin considering this internally in the meantime.

Action
27.3 (College management) Begin to consider the process of Birkbeck becoming a University.

73 BUDGET

Received

73.1 The budget forecasts and income distribution model for 2016-17 (SP 2015 50)

Noted

73.2 A final budget for 2016-17 had not yet been reached. A deficit budget for 2016-17 with an uncertain plan for future recovery is unlikely to be acceptable to Governors.

Agreed

73.3 The need to set a budget for 2016-17 with a target surplus of at least £1M after contingency.

73.4 That a general contingency of at least £2M should be set aside to mitigate risks, in addition to specific contingencies totalling £1M.

Noted

73.5 In order to achieve this an adjustment of £2.5M would need to be made to the current budget proposals.

73.6 Members discussed the way that staff costs are represented in the budget. There has historically been a difference between projected and actual costs due to delays in filling posts. Schools are able to spend money saved in this way on non-staff
expenditure. School representatives asked for further consideration of whether this was the best way to manage this expenditure.

73.7 A blanket freeze on recruitment has not been planned, although discussions around posts will be influenced by the financial situation of the College.

73.8 Members noted that a monthly review of upcoming vacancies and plans for replacements would allow for tighter control of staff cost budgets. Additionally, having more regular large recruitment advertisements in which several posts were advertised at once could save money and duplication of effort.

**Actions**

73.9 **(EDs, DoPS)** Introduce a monthly review of expected upcoming staff vacancies and plans for replacement.

73.10 **(KW, MI)** Work with Schools and Professional Services to produce another iteration of the budget, identifying known resignations and using historic data to estimate staff costs.

**Noted**

73.11 In order to be able to achieve surpluses in 2017-18 and beyond it is important to quickly develop our plans for new initiatives.

**Action**

73.12 **(RE, MI)** Produce a report considering the timetable for new portfolio initiatives, including markers for progress, risk and projected income.

**Noted**

73.13 Members discussed external developments that might influence the College’s income in the future. The upcoming White Paper should give an indication of whether HE institutions will be allowed to increase fees in line with inflation and the College consider whether it would wish to do so in that case. A vote in favour of Britain leaving the EU in the upcoming referendum could have a serious impact on recruitment and therefore income, as EU students would no longer be able to access student loans or to work while studying.

**74 SCHOOL PLANS**

**Received**

74.1 The first draft of the School business plan narratives *(SP 2015 51)*

**Noted**

74.2 The drafts were shared at this stage for information. The PVM International praised the international section of the School of BEI plan in particular. Members noted that
all the Schools should be discussing their plans with the PVMs with reference to their portfolio areas as part of the planning process.

74.3 The plans would be confirmed at the next meeting of SPC on 6 June 2016.

Action

74.4 (KB) Produce summaries and action points from the School Plans for the next meeting.

75 **STUDENT RECRUITMENT**

Received

75.1 An update from the Recruitment Strategy and Planning Group *(SP 2015 52)*

Noted

75.2 The College is moving into the summer period where it usually receives 50% of its total annual applications. Additional resources have been committed to promoting the College, and colleagues will continue to work hard to make offers quickly and maximise conversions from offers to enrolments.

75.3 Members noted that it would be useful to ask students why they converted as part of the enrolment process.

76 **QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK**

Received

76.1 A briefing on Quality Assessment and the Teaching Excellence Framework *(SP 2015 54)*

Noted

76.2 Following the announcement of the HEFCE review of quality assessment, the College had been advised that HEFCE would be piloting a new approach to quality assessment in 2016-17. Birkbeck had been due to be reviewed under the old system in 2016-17, so was expecting a review. It was not yet clear what this would look like, although it is expected that the annual Governors’ accountability return will be expanded to include quality-related assurances.

Action

76.3 (Secretariat) Brief Governors on the expected increase in Governor involvement in quality review.

76.4 The Queen’s Speech on 18 May 2016 is expected to announce an HE Bill, and it is anticipated that the HE White Paper, possibly including a technical consultation on
TEF2, will be published at the same time. The College’s Quality Assessment/TEF group will meet following its publication to discuss Birkbeck’s response.

77 LEAGUE TABLES

Received

77.1 A paper on Birkbeck’s likely future performance in league tables (SP 2015 55)

Noted

77.2 The College currently has agreements with the three main UK league tables that it will not appear in the institutional rankings for 2016. There is no current agreement for 2017, so if one is not made Birkbeck is likely to appear in all three next year. SPC noted analysis of Birkbeck’s likely performance in these tables.

77.3 Members noted that if Birkbeck appears in a relatively low position in the tables, this could potentially impact recruitment among younger students in particular, who are anecdotally considered to be more influenced by league tables. However, appearing in the tables would increase visibility; it was expected that the College would perform well in comparison to its main competitor institutions; and the majority of mature students come to Birkbeck because its offer suits their needs and do not apply elsewhere. There are other indicators of academic standing beyond league tables that could be given more emphasis in the College’s advertising.

77.4 Regardless of whether the College appears in league tables or not, the analysis should inform where more work can be done to improve the experience of Birkbeck students. Some of this work has already begun: analysis is being carried out on the differences between subject areas in the National Student Survey results; and there are new projects on assessment and feedback, and on personal tutors.

Considered

77.5 An analysis of Birkbeck’s performance in some of the likely TEF metrics (SP 2015 56)

Noted

77.6 “TEF 1”, the review that will take place in 2016, will be based on successful QAA review and assurance from Governors. This will be followed, after consultation, by “TEF2”, which is likely to be focused on undergraduate only, and be metrics-based with an additional contextual narrative added by institutions. This contextualisation will be particularly important for Birkbeck given the College’s unique profile, as it will provide an opportunity to make the case that the way in which our full time students study makes it unfair to compare them directly with full time students at other institutions without taking context into account. Additionally, NSS scores for London institutions are lower than institutions outside London, so the College will argue during the consultation process that location adjusted benchmarking should be used.
The College should attempt to have representation on the TEF2 project board, which will be announced after the HE White Paper, to ensure that Birkbeck’s needs are taken into account.

**FOUNDATION YEAR**

Received

78.1 A proposal on the development of supported routes into undergraduate programmes *(SP 2015 57)*

Noted

78.2 The paper proposed the development of a new full time supported route into undergraduate study to launch in 2017-18. This had been discussed by the Assistant Deans (Learning and Teaching) at their working group, and supported as an opportunity to make more offers.

78.3 SPC agreed that this should be developed by the group led by the Strategic Projects Manager. The focus of the project should initially be on home students, but with an awareness that there is a potential market of international students. Expansion of this work into the international market in the future will involve careful consideration of English language provision to go alongside it.

78.4 SPC thanked the Executive Dean of SSHP for putting the paper together, and the Directors of External Relations and Planning for the work they had done in support of this development.

**Action**

78.5 *(JD)* Circulate research on Foundation Years at HE and FE level.

78.6 *(RE)* Report back to SPC with a timetable for implementation of this work.

**RISK MANAGEMENT**

Noted

78.1 A report on the management of risk in 2015-16 *(SP 2015 59)*

78.2 The draft risk register for 2016-17 *(SP 2015 60)*

**STUDENTS’ UNION**

Received

79.1 A note on the Birkbeck Students’ Union *(SP 2015 61)*

Noted
79.2 It has become apparent to the College that the Students’ Union requires further assistance from the College to help it prioritise and plan effectively, and the College is currently supporting the SU with a range of complex HR, finance, governance and complaint handling services. Following a report from the NUS Strategic Support Unit, it is proposed that a Turnaround Board be appointed to help resolve the situation.

Endorsed

79.3 The formation of a Turnaround Board and the appointment of a Change Manager on a short-term contract.

80 ACCESS AGREEMENT
Noted
80.1 The Access Agreement 2016-17 (SP 2015 62)

80.2 A new report from the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) has been released, focusing on the underachievement of young men in HE. The Director of Alumni and Development and the Head of Widening Access are currently working on a proposal to raise funds to address this issue.

81 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT VISAS
Noted
81.1 An update on the College’s compliance with international student visa requirements (SP 2015 63)

82 HR/PAYROLL AND FINANCE SYSTEMS
Received
82.1 An update on progress in the project to replace the HR/Payroll and Finance systems (SP 2015 64)

Noted
82.2 The Athena SWAN working group had emphasised the need for a HR system that accurately collects data that can support equalities work in the College.

83 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH IMPACT
Noted
83.1 The Report of the Public Engagement and Research Impact group (SP 2015 65)

84 LAW REVIEW
Noted
84.1 The Vice-Master will undertake a review of the Law School, which will be announced to the School shortly.
ISSF
Noted

85.1 SPC heard that Birkbeck has been invited to apply for the Wellcome Trust’s Institutional Strategic Support Fund award. The awards support institutions to invest strategically in work to address fundamental health challenges, and being invited to apply is in itself a distinction.

DATES OF MEETINGS
Noted

86.1 The dates of meetings for the rest of the session:

- 6 June 2016
- 7 July 2016