BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

16 September 2015

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

In attendance
Richard Evemy (for item 7), Roisin Lynch, Tim Markham (for Sue Jackson)

Apologies for absence
Sue Jackson

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE
Received
1.1 The Committee's Terms of Reference and Scheme of Membership (SP 2015 01)

Noted
1.2 Members asked for the Terms of Reference to be amended to include reference to the Committee’s responsibility to strategically oversee the whole activity of the College, including teaching and research.

2 MINUTES
Approved
2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 1 July 2015.

3 ACTIONS
Noted
3.1 The following progress on actions agreed at previous meetings:

REF
3.2 The expectations for the Unit of Assessment leads had been developed, and these would be discussed and agreed at the year’s first meeting of the REF working party on 30 September, including whether there was scope for deputies to cover for the UoA leads if necessary.

Student Recruitment
3.3 The Registrar and Executive Dean of SSHP had met with various colleagues to discuss the potential to add HEIS routes to the College’s UCAS offering, and would highlight the existing route onto the BA Social Science in the coming year. For future years the aim would be that, where appropriate and agreed, there should be a full time four year degree route for students for whom a three year degree was not suitable, with an introductory first year to which students could be referred if they were not made offers for three year programmes. The curriculum should as far as possible be based on existing provision with additional specialist support, rather than a new reinvented curriculum. Members noted the need to continue to consider the operational detail of this proposal, such as the development of an agreed definition of success in order to allow progression to second year, and the increased risk that students could run out of their four permitted years of student funding from the SLC if they did not progress as expected.

3.4 Members also discussed the College’s current work with the Haringey Council Outreach Officer, in which the Council funded a year’s course to prepare potential students for HEIS. Consideration should be given to whether it was possible to scale this idea to include other subject areas or other boroughs.

**Student progression, retention and success at level 4 project**

3.5 Work was ongoing on clarifying the overall remit and scope of this project to ensure there was no duplication with activities taking place elsewhere in the College. A report would be brought back to a future meeting of SPC.

**HR, Finance and Payroll Systems**

3.6 The process of procuring the system was underway. It was expected that approximately four firms would submit a full tender, including presentations, and there would then be a scoring exercise. The project team had noted the active interest of the Schools in the process, and the need to have buy-in to the new systems from colleagues across the College, and would ensure that Schools were consulted and involved during the procurement process. The earliest that a supplier could be chosen would be the end of November.

**Catalyst**

3.7 A mid-point report was being prepared for submission to HEFCE.

**UK Visas and Immigration Regulations**

3.8 A written report on progress against the action plan for ensuring compliance with international student visa regulations would be brought to an autumn term meeting of SPC. A report would be taken to the Audit Committee on the 21 September on the UKVI’s regulations for staff and the actions that the College was required to take to comply with these. Members noted the need to be aware of the added
complications of Birkbeck-specific issues such as Teaching and Scholarship staff when considering these regulations.

4 MATTERS ARISING
Teaching Excellence Framework

4.1 The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) would launch in 2016-17, probably using HESA student retention metrics, National Student Survey (NSS) outcomes and graduate career destinations. The PVM Learning and Teaching was working on the College's approach to this; members heard that little was yet known about how the TEF exercise would be carried out. It was thought that NSS results would be one of the metrics used, and a paper on this would come to a future meeting of SPC. It was thought that the results of the TEF would be linked to the ability of institutions to raise fees in line with inflation in the future.

4.2 Members noted that Birkbeck had a large number of Teaching and Scholarship staff with less than 0.2 FTE workloads; depending on the rules of the TEF exercise regarding eligibility for staff to be returned this could impact the College's results, particularly in terms of staff to student ratio.

4.3 The new Minister for Universities and Science was in favour of the introduction of Grade Point Averages to replace the current degree classification system. Members noted that this would be extremely challenging to implement if it was introduced by the Government.

5 MASTER'S REPORT

5.1 The Master noted that the College had recently bid farewell to Professor Philip Dewe, who had been Pro Vice Master for Special Projects, and would soon be saying goodbye to Tricia King, PVM Strategic Engagement and Recruitment, and Professor Matthew Weait, PVM Academic and Community Partnerships. The Master thanked these colleagues for their work, and noted the need to consider how to cover these important roles.

5.2 The role of Director of External Relations would be filled by Jonah Duffin, and the fundraising function would become a separate directorate under Chris Murphy.

5.3 It was intended to create a new PVM role around access and community partnerships that would have responsibility for widening participation, relationships with Stratford and Tottenham, and links with FE colleges and schools as pioneered by Matthew Weait. Appointment to this role would be through the new procedure developed by the Vice Master and described in item 5.
5.4 The Master would take on an increasing political lobbying role assisted by a new executive officer.

5.5 There was a growing view that it was not necessary to have a specific PVM portfolio for every area requiring leadership. For example PGT matters could be included in the Learning and Teaching portfolio, and PGR within the Research portfolio. Members noted that PVMs might wish to consider appointing Deputy PVMs to assist them with their portfolios.

5.6 Members heard that a report the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills had commissioned from YouGov on part time education had recently been circulated to a small number of institutions, including Birkbeck, for discussion of the negative impact recent policy had had on the part time sector. There had been an increasing focus on part time recently, politically and in the media, and it was important that Birkbeck was well placed to respond with its perspective and take advantage of this momentum to advise on developing policy.

5.7 SPC noted that apprenticeships and the role of employers were also on the current HE policy agenda and this is one area in which the College could revitalise its part time provision.

6 PRO VICE MASTER ROLE AND SELECTION

6.1 The Vice Master had been working on defining the role description and selection process for new PVM appointments, and the portfolio that had been identified around access and community partnerships would be used to trial a new appointment process. The Vice Master would circulate further details of the trial process to the Committee. It would involve an all-staff call for expressions of interest, using a generic PVM role description and specific details of the portfolio. After shortlisting there would then be a presentation and interview with a panel, who would give advice to the Master who would make a final recommendation to the Governors. Members heard that this role could be filled through a job-share arrangement if appropriate.

6.2 It was hoped that this process would also help to identify talented and ambitious colleagues who could be kept in mind for other roles and responsibilities. Members noted the low number of women on Strategic Planning Committee and the desirability of a management group that reflected the community as a whole; it was hoped that this process would encourage members of groups from across the College that were under-represented at management level to put themselves forward.
6.3 Members heard that there was a need to appoint to this particular portfolio quickly as it was dependent on personal contacts and it was important that these were not allowed to go cold. This trial process did not preclude the potential for PVMs to be appointed externally in the future.

6.4 In parallel to this specific discussion a wider set of governance issues and senior appointment processes were under consideration and a paper on these would be brought to a future meeting of SPC. Members asked for consideration to be given to the resource requirements of meeting the responsibilities of PVM portfolios.

6.5 Members were encouraged to consider all of the senior level talent across the College, including its non-academic members, when filling PVM roles.

7 STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Received

7.1 A report on the current student recruitment position (SP 2015 03)

Noted

7.2 SPC heard that, while recruitment would continue through September so it was not yet possible to be sure of the final figures, the recruitment picture for 2015-16 looked like a positive one. Members noted that this was indicative of the success of all the work that had been done to sustain recruitment after the impact of the 2012 fees and funding changes on the College’s part time degrees.

7.3 UCAs applications had increased and the conversion rates so far had been maintained; it was therefore expected that enrolments would increase on the previous year. Despite anecdotal evidence of a sector wide decline in postgraduate part time recruitment, Birkbeck’s applications and offers to two year masters degrees were up. Applications to full time masters programmes were steady, and offers had increased by 2%. It was expected that international numbers would be maintained, which was a positive outcome considering global trends and the current UK political climate around international students.

7.4 Recruitment to four year undergraduate degrees continued to decline overall, although it varied by subject area with applications and enrolments up in BEI. Applications to part time Certificates of HE were down by 15% on this time last year.

7.5 Members noted particular concerns around potential volatility of conversion rates for international students to whom offers had been made but who had not yet provided evidence of their eligibility to enrol. The Registry were undertaking a programme of work to keep contacting all students who still needed to supply evidence, which included those who needed to provide identification checks but also
those who needed to provide confirmed degree results and other evidence, and encouraging them to do so. The contact that had been made with these students so far did not indicate that their delay in providing the information meant that they did not intend to enrol. It was noted that next year the Registry intended to streamline this process further by asking for identity documents at the application stage.

8  **PLANNING CYCLE**
Noted
8.1 The Director of Planning had met with the Vice Master, School Managers and Executive Deans, along with other colleagues involved in planning, to improve the information that was provided at the beginning of the planning cycle.

9  **CATALYST UPDATE**
Received
9.1 An update on the Catalyst programme projects **(SP 2015 04)**

Noted
9.2 The Strategic Projects Manager would circulate the interim report that was going to be made to HEFCE. Members requested that the report include a summary showing which of the benefits of the programme would be applicable to the rest of the HE sector as well as to Birkbeck. Members would need to give consideration to which of the projects should be continued after the end of the programme, and how they would be funded.

9.3 Members discussed the Student Achievement and Success project, and heard that while the current project had not considered success specifically in terms of equalities characteristics, a more specific consideration of this area could form part of a post-Catalyst continuation of the project. There was ongoing work in the College to develop the consideration of equalities data around students.

9.4 SPC thanked the Strategic Projects Manager for the large amount of work he had put in to the Catalyst programme.

10  **BIRKBECK’S DIGITAL PRESENCE**
Received
10.1 An update on steps taken to enhance the College’s digital presence **(SP 2015 05)**

Noted
10.2 Members heard that early priorities for rapidly improving Birkbeck’s digital presence had been agreed, and a project team set up to take forward these initial priorities while looking at overall ownership and responsibilities for the College’s digital presence as a subsequent phase. These priorities were:
• Rapidly developing a new, responsive home page paying attention to design, functionality, tone and content.
• Co-ordinating our digital student engagement from first point of contact to enrolment and then graduation.
• Developing Birkbeck's online research presence.
• Look at requested development work and seek to organise it according to the priorities identified.

10.3 The project team would report regularly to SPC.

10.4 Members noted the need for further training for staff around the obligations to students conferred on the College by the regulations of the Competitions and Markets Authority. A briefing by the College’s lawyers would be held for School Managers, Assistant Deans for Recruitment and Retention, and other relevant staff.

11 **ECONOMICS REVIEW**
Noted
11.1 SPC heard that the Executive Dean of SSHP and the Deputy Chair of Governors were conducting a review of the Department of Economics, Mathematics and Statistics, and the final report and recommendations would be brought to SPC.

12 **OUTGOING PVMS**
Noted
12.1 SPC noted its formal appreciation of the enormous amount of work carried out by Professor Philip Dewe in his roles as Vice Master and Pro Vice Master. They also thanked Tricia King and Matthew Weait, wishing them well in their new roles. All three had played an absolutely critical role in the development of the College and its continuing fulfilment of its mission.

13 **DATES OF MEETINGS 2015-16**
Noted
13.1 The dates of the meetings for the rest of the session:
• 19 October 2015 at 2pm
• 10 December 2015 at 2pm
• February 2016 at 2pm
• 22 March 2016 at 2pm
• May 2016 at 2pm
• July 2016 at 2pm