Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
17 July 2013

Present
David Latchman (Chair), Philip Dewe, Costas Douzinas, Stephen Frosh, Keith Harrison, Nick Head, Matthew Innes, Sue Jackson, Tricia King, David McGhie, Naina Patel, Dean Pateman, Li Wei, Peter Westley

By invitation
Hilary Fraser, Philip Powell, Patricia Tuit, Miriam Zukas

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Roisin Lynch

Apologies
Nicholas Keep, Matthew Weait

75 MINUTES
Approved
75.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 5 June 2013

76 REPORTS TO F&GPC
Noted
76.1 SPC's reports to Finance and General Purposes Committee's meeting of 19 June 2013
   - Budget Estimates 2013-14 (SP 2012 55)
   - SPC Report summer term 2012-13 (SP 2012 56)

77 ACTION SHEET
Received
77.1 An update on progress on implementing the actions agreed at the last meeting (SP 2012 57)
   Noted
   Be Birkbeck Guardian proposal
77.2 The proposal had been endorsed by Governors at their meeting on 3 July 2013. Consideration and agreement of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Guardian had been delegated to a sub-group. The Governors supported and noted the potential of the proposal, while also noting the need to manage the reputational risks involved.

78 MASTER'S REPORT
Noted
78.1 Remuneration Committee had discussed the option of a banded system for professorial salaries and asked HR to explore the implications. As senior academic staff had reservations about this option, a meeting would be set up with the Deans, the Master and the Remuneration Committee to discuss it further.
The Committee discussed the position on boycotts of other institutions. Birkbeck’s official position, in line with that of Universities UK, was not to support boycotts related to non-academic grounds. SPC confirmed that individual academics had the right to decide which staff and which other institutions they would collaborate with. If action was proposed at team, department or School level, College senior management should be informed before any external communication was made.

79 STUDENT RECRUITMENT 2013-14

79.1 A report on student applications, offers and enrolments (SP 2012 58)

Noted

79.2 The Committee noted student recruitment data as at 11 July 2013 on applications, enrolments and offers compared with targets and the position in previous years.

79.3 Enrolment numbers were slightly better than at this point last year, although new applicants were down by 5% overall, with undergraduate part time down 25% and Masters degrees down 11%. The pre-Clearing application target for three year degrees recruited through UCAS had been exceeded.

79.4 SPC thanked all involved for their hard work on converting applications to offers and offers to enrolments and asked colleagues to keep the momentum going.

80 RECRUITMENT FOCUSED INSTITUTION

80.1 An update on the Recruitment Focused Institution initiative (SP 2012 59)

Noted

80.2 The aim of the cross-College RFI initiative, as agreed by SPC at the last meeting, was ‘maximising enrolment by doing the very best job we can in Recruitment, Selection and Admissions.’

80.3 The immediate challenge was measures to improve short term 2013 recruitment. A telephone campaign was running in the International Office in which current Birkbeck students contacted prospective international students with the potential to enrol in 2013 and encouraged them to progress towards enrolment. The initiative would be rolled out in August to prospective home UG and PGT students. In addition to offering a chance to maximise conversion, this scheme would provide the College with evidence about what types of intervention with prospective students were most effective and what issues and problems were likely to prevent prospective students from enrolling. This would be useful both internally and to present to donors and other stakeholders.

80.4 A new report had been produced showing how long applicants had been waiting for a decision on their application. This report showed clear differences between departments and highlighted areas where action may be needed. An automated reminder email would go out to relevant staff when applicants had been waiting for a certain amount of time. It was noted that there was some skewing of the data where applicants had applied for multiple courses or had not responded to invitations to interview.
80.5 SPC asked Schools and departments to think carefully about whether it was necessary to make conditional offers. The School of Business, Economics and Informatics had stopped asking for references after finding that the references provided were unlikely to have an influence on the outcome of the application.

80.6 The second phase of RFI would respond to the medium term challenge of learning the lessons of 2012 and 2013 recruitment and implementing practical solutions for 2014.

81 COLLEGE STRATEGY

81.1 A paper on the development of the next phase of College strategy (SP 2012 60)

81.2 The purpose of the draft College strategy was to clearly outline the issues the College was facing, and set out a considered response for staff and key stakeholders. The strategy included developments already in progress as well as new ideas identified during the planning process.

81.3 The context of the strategy was turbulence in the HE sector, especially in part-time provision, due to the impact of the new undergraduate fees and funding regime. Because of the current external political situation, policy change was unlikely in the short term. It was therefore important for the College to take action to adapt to the external environment while continuing to fulfil its unique mission.

81.4 Members discussed the variety of different kinds of student in the College and the need to have a shared view on which students the College should aim to attract, linked to a shared vision of Birkbeck's mission and aims.

81.5 SPC also recognised the risk of over-segmenting the offer for different groups of students and losing strategic impetus by pursuing too many initiatives. There was a need to quickly establish a clear shared vision with a small number of priorities for the immediate future and for the longer term. The importance of a commitment to a multi-faculty university was noted.

81.6 The Committee outlined some points for further evaluation in developing the strategy. This included whether declining numbers indicated that the current offer was not what students wanted in the new regime; how to balance the needs and desires of students and the requirements of the government with Birkbeck's own purpose and mission; and the College's organisational structure and collaborative working in the senior management team.

81.7 It was important that all staff, in all Schools, recognised the seriousness of the current situation in the HE sector and the need to work together to address it. It would also be of benefit to increase the involvement of less senior members of staff in cross-College activities, in addition to the local mechanisms already existing to allow colleagues to bring forward new ideas. The Master would convene a group of two nominees from each School and the professional services, with a remit of considering new ideas for the future of the College.
Agreed

81.8 There would be a communication from the Master to all staff before the summer outlining the College’s current position and the plans that were being made to address it.

81.9 SPC received a list of current working groups (SP 2012 60 Appendix A). It was invited to consider whether these provided an appropriate framework to enable the College to effectively develop and implement strategy in the timeframe needed. There was also a need to ensure that School representatives on working groups understood how to represent views from their Schools effectively, and how to take information back to their Schools and make sure it is communicated effectively.

Action

81.10 **(Chairs of working groups)** Bring a brief report from each working group to the next meeting of SPC, outlining what the group had achieved; what it wanted to achieve in the future; and what its proposals for going forward were. SPC would then consider the appropriate structure of working groups to secure the College’s future in 2015 and beyond.

81.11 **(KH)** Organise a series of meetings of senior staff before the beginning of the autumn term, to develop a general strategy for the College and define areas of priority and focus for SPC.

82 ATTENDANCE MONITORING

Received

82.1 A paper on a proposed approach to formalised student attendance monitoring (SP 2012 61).

Noted

82.2 Systematic attendance monitoring would have significant benefits for the College by:

- aiding retention efforts, allowing early intervention and support to be targeted to students who were struggling or at risk of dropping out;
- enabling the College to more accurately monitor the status of students who had not applied for fee loans, allowing effective interventions to be made to maximise the College’s ability to collect tuition fee income;
- potentially providing a means of maintaining attendance records for international students, required by the UKBA;
- enabling comparison teaching space capacity to actual use to maximise use of the Birkbeck estate.

82.3 There were a number of possible solutions including electronic registers in Moodle; electronic sign in by students using their student cards; and paper based registers which would subsequently be recorded electronically. It was noted that considerable work was already underway on attendance monitoring in some areas of the College, notably BEI and Arts.

82.4 SPC also noted the need to respect privacy and civil liberties and be compliant with the law when collecting student attendance data centrally.
Agreed

82.5 The College would move forward with the implementation of attendance monitoring as a priority, bearing in mind the concerns raised over civil liberties and ensuring that appropriate safeguards were in place.

83 STUDENT LOANS AND DEBT POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Received

83.1 A paper on the College’s student debt policy and procedures (SP 2012 62)

Noted

83.2 As the College was becoming increasingly dependent on tuition fees as its main source of income, it had become more important to have clarity and certainty on the inflow of income and the effectiveness of procedures for chasing loan promises and debt.

83.4 By the end of the 2012-13 academic session, c.£1.9M of expected tuition fee income from students who had promised to apply for loans had not been received, either because students did not apply for or did not successfully secure loans. £1.65M of this related to 458 students still formally recorded as enrolled. The debts had been transferred to the individual students. It was possible that many of these cases were “ghost enrolments” with little evidence of any academic engagement from the student.

83.5 It was noted that this was the first year of the new system, and there had been externally generated confusion and misinformation which had since been remedied, so 2013-14 was starting from a more stable position. There was therefore a need to be cautious about predicting patterns for the future based on 2012-13 data.

83.6 A working group convened by the College Secretary with input from Finance, Planning and the Student Financial Support office had been working on this area, commissioning management information reports to bring clarity to the situation and defining action to be taken to resolve student loan uncertainties and to recover debt. The group would continue to work on improved procedures for 2013-14, including monitoring, promise chasing and debt chasing and aiming for more certainty earlier in the session.

Confirmed

83.7 The College’s student debtor policy, as approved by SPC in May 2012 (Appendix A)

84 INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Endorsed

84.1 The proposal that the College should extend the Institutional Partnership Agreement to include all FECs and Specialist Designated adult and community learning institutions in the London area offering Level 3 qualifications (SP 2012 63). The proposal would also be reported to the academic Committees.