BIRBKECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
20 February 2012

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

By invitation
Hilary Fraser, Jasbir Gill, Nicholas Keep, Philip Powell, Patricia Tuitt, Miriam Zukas

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Roisin Lynch

Apologies for absence
Matthew Innes, Li Wei

28 MINUTES
Approved
28.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 6 November 2012.

29 REPORT TO F&GPC
Noted
29.1 The Report made to the autumn term meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee (SP 2012 22).

30 ACTION SHEET
Received
30.1 An update on action taken following previous meetings (SP 2012 23)

Noted
30.2 Good progress had been made on the actions to ensure UKBA Tier 4 compliance agreed at the last meeting. The Committee recorded thanks to Schools and Registry Services staff for their hard work and collaboration in resolving these issues.

31 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
31.1 The College had successfully appealed against the £442K HEFCE grant reduction for exceeding the Student Number Control (SNC) in 2012-13. This was a very positive outcome. The College had also asked for an increase in the 2013-14 SNC target to 700 and was expecting confirmation of the outcome in late February. It would be crucial for the College’s strategy to recruit students to meet an increased SNC.
31.2 In early March, in the light of confirmation of the 2013-14 SNC and information from UCAS on initial application levels, work would begin with the Schools on maximising recruitment during the ongoing UCAS cycle and planning for Clearing. Progress on this would be reported at the next SPC meeting.

31.3 Informal feedback had been received from HEFCE on the College’s bid for Catalyst funding. More work needed to be done to focus the bid on our novel three year evening degrees as a model for development in the sector as a whole, including the opportunities offered for students to combine studying with work.

31.4 The College would continue to focus its political lobbying on the abolition of the distinction between full and part time studying. The success of the three year evening degrees indicated that this distinction was arbitrary. The current funding regulations were an unnecessary inconvenience to students who wanted the flexibility to change their learning patterns. An SNC based on overall FTE would make more sense than a move to a part time control in addition to the full time SNC.

32 MID YEAR INCOME DISTRIBUTION MODEL 2012-13


32.2 The revised IDM took into account the outcome of the mid year budget review. This year, due to the potential impact on student recruitment of increased tuition fees, the PVM (Strategy) had met regularly with the Executive Deans and colleagues from planning and finance throughout the summer and autumn to monitor the financial impact of recruitment and identify strategies in response to lower than forecast recruitment, to feed into the mid year review.

32.3 The predicted financial outcome was £1.5M, compared with £0.77M in the predictive IDM agreed in summer 2012. The main positive changes were an increased forecast of HEFCE income, mainly T fund income from old system students; increased forecast of other income; reduced pay and non pay spending in Schools and Professional Services; the release of most of the tuition fee contingency; and a decreased pay contingency following the reforecast of likely pay costs, supported by enhanced reports on spending against budget month by month.

32.4 The main negative changes were due to tuition fee income undershooting the target; increased forecasts of spending on student financial support due to higher uptake than predicted; increased provision of depreciation of assets; and the introduction of a contingency against uncertainties in HEFCE T funding.

32.5 The outlook had improved since the report had been written as contingency provision had been made for the potential SNC grant reduction which would not now be needed. The
contingency was retained against other uncertainties in HEFCE funding not yet resolved, including calculations of completion rates.

**Endorsed**

32.6 A proposal to enable Schools with an established structural surplus to transfer 5% of their surplus into School reserves, if the College’s financial position supported this. These reserves could then be spent on future centrally approved strategic projects. The percentage to be transferred would be reviewed regularly.

**Action (KB)**

32.7 Recirculate the IDM with the Key Performance Indicators rounded correctly.

33 2013 AWAYDAY

Received

33.1 A note on initiatives and actions agreed at the 2013 Awayday (SP 2012 25)

33.2 A note on the establishment of Technology Enhanced Learning projects (SP 2012 26)

**Noted**

33.3 The Strategic Planning Committee held an Awayday meeting in January 2013 to discuss future strategy for the College. It discussed future income scenarios based on current recruitment and an initial report on the market survey of 2012-13 entrants and people who applied but did not enrol. It agreed initiatives and actions to be taken forward including developing the three year degree portfolio and the international recruitment strategy; student number growth at Stratford; review of tuition fee and bursary strategy; development of online and technology enhanced provision; marketing strategies; and continuation of the Research Excellence Framework work and the review of postgraduate taught provision.

**Technology Enhanced Learning**

33.4 After further discussion it had been agreed that the work on Technology Enhanced Learning should take the form of two projects. The first would consider new forms of online provision and the second would look at enhancing the use of the existing Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

33.5 The first project would have a short timeframe, reporting back to SPC in the summer with a strategy for the development of online provision.

33.6 The second project aimed to have an enhanced content VLE for the start of 2014-15.

33.7 TEL was a strategic priority for the College, and the support of the Executive Deans and other colleagues across the College would be necessary to take it forward. The objective was to support and enhance the face to face delivery was a central feature of Birkbeck’s teaching, not to replace it.
Members discussed the advent of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), and noted that their value to Birkbeck was most likely to be an opportunity for a wider audience to try out samples of our provision before committing to enrolment.

**Internships and placements**

Students would increasingly want to understand the value of the degree that they were investing in. Building relationships between study, work and practice would be a key part of the College’s strategy.

This would be particularly important in competing with the growing private HE market and with institutions with significant access to industry contacts.

It was important to ensure that our work on employability was mission led and took in community as well as business engagement. Work had started on identifying the business and community engagement activities already being done within the College and the synergies between them.

**PORTFOLIO REVIEW**

Noted

A group chaired by the Pro Vice Master (Strategy) would consider the School Portfolio Review reports and make recommendations on approval to the Chair of SPC. A meeting with the Deans, to consider feedback and discuss cross cutting issues in preparation for the formal planning process, had been convened.

**FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE**

Approved

The report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee *(SP 2012 27)*

Financial Support

FBSC received an update on the issue identified last term of students being slow to apply for loans. These students were being contacted individually by Schools to confirm their status. The College would ultimately need to transfer tuition fee debt liability to those students who had not secured loans.

Having originally identified 800 students in this category, some 400 were still being chased. An estimate of the potential income at risk was made to feed into the mid year budget review. £2.4M of income was still to be accounted for of which £1.3M related to students not in contact with the College. The lessons learned from 2012-13 would be taken into account when planning processes for 2013-14.

National Scholarship Programme spending had significantly exceeded the College’s early predictions but was in line with the revised £1.5M budget incorporated in the Mid Year IDM. The Government allocation plus College matched contribution was expected to be £900K in 2013-14 and £1.5M in 2014-15.
The overall spend on cash bursaries was expected to be approximately £600K. More than 1,000 students had indicated during enrolment that they were eligible for a bursary but had not submitted proof of income. It was becoming less likely that students who had not submitted their documents would do so.

**Alumni fee reduction**

35.5 FBSC approved the Alumni Discount scheme to be kept in place for 2013-14, and marketed more widely, after which it would review the scheme’s effectiveness.

35.6 Only a small number of Birkbeck alumni re-enrolled onto a postgraduate degree. SPC noted the need for more information about which alumni did progress to a postgraduate degree and how long after finishing their first degree it was usual for them to do so.

35.7 SPC discussed other discounts that could be used as part of a strategy to increase postgraduate recruitment. The UnionLearn discount had been particularly successful. Birkbeck was the largest provider of this discount and had been approached by the Trade Unions with suggestions for working together more closely. There might also be scope to contact employers who frequently sponsored students for undergraduate degrees and emphasise the advantages of also sponsoring students for postgraduate degrees. It was agreed that the Vice Master and the Dean of the School of BEI would discuss this further and share potential useful contacts.

**Postgraduate Fees**

35.8 The postgraduate fee tiers, with a new Tier 5 level, were approved:

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**Modular pricing**

35.9 FBSC discussed the potential to introduce pricing based on the academic credit of each module taken, and agreed to investigate an approach in which postgraduate taught programmes were priced according to academic credit taken per year, enabling greater flexibility for programme structures. This was not the same as a credit-based award scheme where students built up modules to count towards an award. Programme structure would continue to be governed by the Common Award Scheme and individual programme regulations, with recognised routes and rules about progression, but the prices would be based on academic credit. SPC had endorsed this development at the Awayday in January.

**Student Status and Associated Fees**
35.10 FBSC agreed a more structured approach to fee reductions for students following non-standard programme structures, to reduce the risks of different groups of students being treated differently and misunderstandings over terminology, and to reduce the need for manual fee adjustments to student records. This would take a price per credit approach, in which repeating students paid for the elements they were repeating and students retaking exams only paid an administrative fee.

Fee setting process
35.11 Schools were confirming the assignment of programmes to tiers for 2013-14. FBSC would approve them by email circulation.

Non credit provision
35.12 FBSC recommended a tiered fee structure for provision not carrying academic credit, based on contact hours and with a similar structure to the current modular fee tiers. It would confirm recommended tier levels when costing was completed.

36 TRANSFERS BETWEEN MODES OF STUDY

Received
36.1 Guidance on students wishing to transfer between part and full time modes of study (SP 2012 28)

Noted
36.2 The College wanted to support students with changing circumstances or a need to study flexibly, but Government regulation presented a range of formal issues that would need to be addressed.

36.3 Students moving from part time to full time would count against the Student Number Control and lose eligibility for most means tested benefits. Students moving from full to part time would lose eligibility for student maintenance grants and loans. Part time students could not be charged more than £6,750 per year.

36.4 Transfers between part time and full time study should normally take place between academic years or in the first month of the academic year. Students were not allowed to enter the first year of full time undergraduate study except via UCAS.

Agreed
36.5 Each School should identify a ‘gatekeeper’ to handle cases and ensure Schools fulfilled their responsibility for ensuring transfers were academically and pastorally appropriate and that students understood the financial implications of the transfer. Staff in Schools should be made aware of the gatekeeper so that they could direct students appropriately.

Action
36.6 (Executive Deans) Nominate a gatekeeper to deal with transfers between modes and liaise with DP on communication.
37 POSTGRADUATE REVIEW

Received

37.1 A report from the postgraduate review working party (SP 2012 29)

Noted

37.2 Development of postgraduate provision was a strategic priority. A key recommendation of the review was increased flexibility of provision. Members remarked that a move towards modular pricing for postgraduate taught programmes, as noted in the report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee, would be helpful in facilitating this flexibility.

37.3 It was reported that the School of SSHP was launching a pilot scheme in the Department of History, Classics and Archaeology to allow Masters graduates to take further modules from Masters programmes, responding to a demand from alumni who wished to carry on learning but who did not want to complete another Masters degree or move onto PhD study.

38 RECRUITMENT OF STUDENTS AGED UNDER EIGHTEEN

Noted

38.1 Academic Board would be invited to approve a new policy on the recruitment of younger students. Staff wishing to offer places to students under the age of eighteen should contact the Academic Registrar to ensure that the necessary risk assessment was carried out.

39 STUDY ASSISTANCE SCHEME

Noted

39.1 The Study Assistance Scheme for 2013-14 was about to be launched. Uptake had increased after the scheme was revised for 2012-13. Under the scheme individuals contributed 5%, the College 50% and normally the School or Department contributed the remainder. Uptake had focused on Masters degrees.

40 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted

40.1 Dates of meetings for the rest of the 2012-13 session:
  - Thursday 21st March 2013 at 2.00pm
  - Wednesday 8th May 2013 at 2.00pm
  - Wednesday 5th June 2013 at 2.30pm