BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

29 April 2015

Present
David Latchman (Chair), Katharine Bock, Philip Dewe, Hilary Fraser, Stephen Frosh, Keith Harrison, Nick Head, Matthew Innes, Sue Jackson, Nick Keep, Fraser Keir, Tricia King, Philip Powell, Megan Reeves, Julian Swann, Patricia Tuit, Matthew Weait, Keith Willett, Richard Wilson (for HR), Miriam Zukas

In attendance
Richard Evemy, Roisin Lynch

61 MINUTES
Approved
61.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 25 March 2015.

62 ACTIONS
Received
62.1 An update on the progress against actions agreed at previous meetings (SP 2014 29).

Noted
62.2 The possibility of validating FE Foundation Degrees had been explored and would not be taken forward as it was not thought to be of benefit to the College. Other potential routes into later entry were being explored.

63 MASTER’S REPORT

63.1 The Master updated SPC on his visits to the Schools and the Professional Services to encourage engagement with plans for the College’s 200th Anniversary. He was continuing to explore opportunities for cooperation and joint lobbying with other institutions with an interest in part time Higher Education.

63.2 The Committee thanked the Executive Dean of the School of Science, the Head of HR Strategy and Policy, and Dr Belinda Brooks-Gordon for their work on the College’s submission to the Athena SWAN Charter scheme that aims to recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in STEM. Planned expansion to the breadth of the scheme would mean that future submissions would involve an even
greater administrative workload, and consideration would need to be given to resourcing this.

Secretary’s note: the Athena Swan renewal application was circulated to the Committee in advance of the meeting.

64 STUDENT RECRUITMENT UPDATE
Received
64.1 A report on the current student recruitment position (SP 2014 42).

Noted
64.1 While the College’s recruitment performance was good it was extremely important not to become complacent. Next year Birkbeck would lose its last large pre-2012 cohort, and there was in addition uncertainty as to the outcome of the election and what impact the decisions of a new government could have on the College. Birkbeck would continue to explore ways to support part-time study.

64.2 The Academic Registrar and the PVM Learning and Teaching would take forward an issue identified with progression onto Level 5. There was some variance in the marks required to progress from some areas of Level 4 provision. SPC noted that this raised issues around inequity and could cause student complaints, and reaffirmed the principle that all provision at a particular level should be equivalent.

64 BRIDGES TO BIRKBECK
Noted
64.1 Details of a new partnership project with the London Borough of Haringey (SP 2014 43). SPC heard that if successful Birkbeck would hope to consider how to scale the model across other London Boroughs.

64.2 Members noted that the College should also be considering how to encourage the Local Authority in Newham to invest in a similar partnership that could use the University Square Stratford building. The Pro Vice Masters for Special Projects and Academic Partnerships were continuing to work to build relationships in the area and a proposal for a partnership project would be brought to the next meeting of SPC.

65 PLANNING
Noted
65.1 Close, careful planning was particularly important as Birkbeck approached the last of the large cohorts of students, and faced an increased financial cost from pensions due to changes in regulations. The current round was progressing well and was enabling confidence in planning by ensuring that there was a common direction of travel. While it would take time for all colleagues to become used to the new
process, it was hoped that with increasing amounts of high-level data available and monthly reports it would eventually become embedded as a year-round approach rather than a large annual task.

65.2 After this year’s round had been completed a list of themes for the next five years that had emerged would be produced. The stakeholders would also discuss ways to optimise the process and allocate ownership of it for next year. It was agreed that the PVMs should be more involved in more detailed strategic discussions as part of the planning round outside of the framework of SPC and a meeting with them should be built into the planning round timetable.

65.3 The budget for next year and draft School and Professional Services plans would be brought to the next SPC meeting.

66 RISK MANAGEMENT
Endorsed for approval by the Governors
66.1 A report on the management of risk in 2014-15 (SP 2014 44A)
66.2 A revised risk management policy (SP 2014 44B)
66.3 The draft risk register for 2015-16 (SP 2014 44C)

67 EREGISTERS
Approved
67.1 The proposed roll out of the eRegisters project across the College for 2015-16 (SP 2014 45).

Noted
67.2 The project sits within the Student Recruitment and Retention Strand of the Catalyst Programme. The pilot with the School of Law in Friends House had gone well. It was confirmed that the 2015-16 stage of the project only involved installing the hardware and collecting data, and the work to analyse and use the data was a separate project. This phase of the project would focus on centrally-managed teaching locations and non-centrally booked rooms within the main campus would be done in a later phase.

67.3 The use of attendance data would be framed by the Student Attendance Policy. The Policy, which had been written to be descriptive rather than proscriptive, was currently with the Learning and Teaching Working Group and would then be taken for consultation through School TQECs and up through the College committee structure. SPC noted members’ concerns about the potential for an increased atmosphere of surveillance both at Birkbeck and more widely, and confirmed that the driver for the Student Attendance Policy and the eRegisters project was supporting engagement with learning and teaching, and through doing this improving
retention, and the policy would make this clear. A Fees Policy was also being drafted which would start to frame the rights and responsibilities of students around fees, and how the College should interact with students who had not paid their fees. The Academic Registrar would send the Student Attendance policy to the Vice Master to share with UCU.

68 ACCESS AGREEMENT
Noted
68.1 The Access Agreement for 2016-17, which had been submitted to the Office For Fair Access (SP 2014 46).

69 INTERNATIONAL VISA REQUIREMENTS
Received
69.1 An update on the College’s compliance with international student visa requirements (SP 2014 47).

Noted
69.2 SPC heard that since the last update a manual process had been put into place to ensure that the necessary checks were being carried out on modular students. A significant amount of staff time was being taken up by identifying all the locally allocated rooms where international students were being taught in order to provide the UKVI with a full list as required. The College would be taking further advice from the specialist firm Penningtons on areas where the UKVI guidance was not completely clear on what should be included as teaching, such as study visits to historical attractions. The Academic Registrar was in regular dialogue with Registrars at other institutions over how they were approaching these issues. The International Group was considering the implementation of a Deposit Scheme for Tier 4 applicants.

70 200TH ANNIVERSARY
Noted
70.1 Members received an update on the 200th anniversary discussions. The working group had met with Jennifer Cormack, who had played a lead role in King’s College London’s successful fundraising campaign World Questions, King’s Answers and discussed King’s experience and potential points for the Birkbeck 2023 campaign. It was important that the Birkbeck campaign was true to the College’s mission and ethos, and that regardless of what specific areas were chosen as a focus the core concern should be the student experience across the College.

70.2 Although the fundraising campaign would facilitate the 2023 commemoration it was not the only part of it. The group had discussed other ways to celebrate the College’s 200th anniversary, including commissioning a history of Birkbeck. A series of lectures by Birkbeck academics was also suggested, which would continue to
situate the College within the intellectual tradition focusing on education and access within which it was founded. There was potentially for collaboration with the Guardian, which had been established within the same tradition, and the College would also continue to explore other ways to develop partnerships with the community.

70.3 The Executive Deans would encourage their Schools to discuss their aspirations for the fundraising campaign, and the Pro Vice Masters would hold similar meetings to encourage discussion in their portfolio areas.

71 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Noted

71.1 The date of the next meeting:

- Wednesday 3 June 2015 at 2pm