BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee

6 June 2016

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

In attendance
Roisin Lynch

Apologies
John Kempton, Chris Murphy

87 MINUTES
Approved
87.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 12 May 2016.

88 ACTIONS
Noted
88.1 Progress on actions agreed at previous meetings (SP 2015 66)

University status
88.2 The University of London is seeking approval for an amendment to the University of London Act that would allow constituent colleges to become universities in their own right. The University has advised that institutions begin their internal processes for approving this change in status in the meantime. A proposal on this will be made to the Governors at their next meeting.

Staff vacancies review
88.3 The Vice Master and Director of HR will develop a process and timetable for the introduction of a monthly review of expected upcoming staff vacancies and plans for replacement.

HE Review/TEF
88.4 Governors will be briefed at their next meeting on the development of the Teaching Excellence Framework, and on the changes to Higher Education Review: instead of a six yearly HER there will be annual monitoring, which will include assurance from the
governing body on quality. It will be proposed that compliance with this is managed through the Audit Committee.

**New portfolio initiatives**

88.5 The new initiative around Foundation Degrees will be taken forward as a matter of priority, and a report will be produced that includes a timetable and feasibility assessments for the other initiatives.

**University of London International Programme**

88.6 The PVM International has had an interesting meeting with the ULIP Director, and there may be potential for the College and ULIP to work together in some areas. Consideration should also be given to exploring the possibility of using MOOCs as a recruitment tool.

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

88.7 SPC received a progress report on this project. It was noted that Assistant Deans can bring proposals for projects in this area to the Learning and Teaching Working Group.

**89 MATTERS ARISING**

Noted

**Law review**

89.1 SPC noted that the review of the School of Law has begun. A panel that includes Robert Allison as an independent Governor representative is meeting with staff in the Law School. The review will report through SPC to the Governors, and as in previous reviews the outcomes will be shared with the Executive Dean for comment. The Vice Master will share the timetable for the review with the Executive Dean.

**90 MASTER’S REPORT**

Noted

90.1 The Master noted the appointment of Professor Matthew Davies as the new Executive Dean of the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy. Professor Davies, who is currently a Pro-Dean at the School of Advanced Study, University of London, will take up the role at the beginning of the autumn term.

90.2 The position of Pro Vice Master Learning and Teaching is ready to be advertised and this will happen as soon as possible.

90.3 A date has been set for a meeting of the sub group of the Nominations Committee that would compile a shortlist from the expressions of interest that had been received for the position of independent Governor.
BUDGET 2016-17

Received

91.1 The draft budget for 2016-17 and draft forecasts to 2019-20 (SP 2015 67)

Agreed

91.2 A budget for 2016-17, giving a surplus of £0.5 million after contingency, to be presented to F&GPC and Governors for approval.

91.3 The forecasts for the period to 31 July 2020 to be presented to F&GPC, Governors and HEFCE.

Noted

91.4 The College will need to assure Governors that the College can be sustainable financially going forwards, by detailing the steps that are being taken to ensure that the forecast recruitment targets are met, to put into place new initiatives to ensure growth, and to manage costs. A paper will be submitted to F&GPC noting the ongoing student recruitment work and describing new initiatives.

91.5 Members noted that the recruitment targets for the Foundation Year initiative need to be realistic, and that it should also be seen as an initiative that would increase retention, by ensuring students are on an appropriate programme. It is important that the Foundation Year proposal forms part of a range of new initiatives that are in accordance with the College’s mission and are aimed at delivering growth.

SCHOOL PLANS

Received

92.1 A thematic summary of School business plan narratives (SP 2015 68)

Noted

92.2 These are helpful but detailed plans, and it would not be appropriate for all of the details to be publically available.

Action

92.3 (KB and Executive Deans) Discuss the level of detail from the School plans that should be included in the College’s public corporate plan.

STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Received

93.1 An update on student recruitment (SP 2015 69)

Noted

93.2 Members heard that, while increasing offers and improving turnaround times and conversion work has led to an increase in firm acceptances at undergraduate level,
there is still more than half of the College’s recruitment cycle to go, including the crucial May to October period in which around 60% of applications are usually received, and the vast majority of offers that progress to enrolments are made. It is therefore important to maintain the focus and intensity of recruitment activity over this period.

93.3 Birkbeck is operating in a time of increased uncertainty in the sector, with high levels of competition for undergraduate recruitment following the removal of student number control. The impact of the introduction of postgraduate loans is also unknown.

93.4 SPC heard that work is ongoing to ensure that final year students, alumni and other prospective students are aware that postgraduate loans are now available. Members noted the need to ensure that the Student Loans Company are giving the right information to enquirers.

Action
93.5 (JW) Invite the CEO of the SLC to discuss the issues around the new loans.

93.6 Students are not required to take the postgraduate loans; they will still be able to pay up front or have access to the College’s instalment arrangements. It will be important to ensure that all students are aware of these options. After the recruitment cycle is over, the College will analyse this year’s postgraduate cohort and the choices they made regarding payment.

93.7 Members noted upcoming Trade Union action that might impact a planned open evening. It was noted that open evenings are a key recruitment tool, with 16% of those who book onto an open evening going on to enrol. Members noted the College view that recruitment activity is a core element in staff contracts that should not be affected by action short of a strike. The open evening was not taking place on College property, so should not be picketed in the event of a strike.

Secretary’s note: the Trade Union UCU branch subsequently called a strike on 23 June, the day of the open evening. The open evening went ahead with UCU members distributing leaflets but not picketing outside the venue.

93.8 SPC discussed the upcoming EU referendum, and the need to be ready with a statement to reassure students in the case of a Leave vote. Members also noted that a Remain vote could present opportunities for a push for EU recruitment.

94 WHITE PAPER/HE BILL
Received
94.1 An update on the White Paper *Success as a Knowledge Economy* and the 2016 Higher Education and Research Bill *(SP 2015 70)*

Noted

94.2 The White Paper was published on 16 May 2016. It confirms the introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF); proposed changes to institutional title and degree awarding powers that will allow new providers to enter the HE market; the creation of an Office for Students (OfS) to replace HEFCE and OFFA; and the establishment of a body called UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to bring together the Research Councils, Innovate UK, and HEFCE’s research and knowledge exchange functions.

94.3 The introduction of the TEF does not require legislation so will go through a consultation process in the sector. The 2016 Higher Education and Research Bill proposes the creation of the OfS, UKRI and a change to degree awarding powers and university title, and the Second Reading is likely to be after the EU referendum.

94.4 SPC noted the need to ensure that Birkbeck focuses its lobbying efforts where it is most likely to be able to make a difference, e.g. in the context of part-time, flexible learning and mature learners. Birkbeck-friendly MPs and Peers will be briefed at appropriate stages.

95 **FOUNDATION YEAR**

Noted

95.1 SPC heard an update on progress in the Foundation Year project. At the last meeting it had been agreed that a foundation year programme should be developed, providing a supported route into undergraduate level study, to be launched for 2017-18. Three potential routes have been mapped, in SSHP, BEI and Arts, and discussions are ongoing with the Schools of Science and Law.

95.2 Members thanked the Executive Dean of SSHP and other colleagues on the task group for their work on this. SPC noted the importance of this project functioning as a coherent cross-School initiative, and the need to agree recruitment targets and make progress as a matter of urgency.

96 **TUITION FEE CAP**

Noted

96.1 It has been announced that all institutions with an existing successful QA assessment will be allowed to raise their fees by 2.8% in 2017-18. Birkbeck qualifies for this. If the College wishes to raise its fees it will need to inform OFFA that it wishes to do so and resubmit the Access Agreement to confirm how extra income will be spent.
96.2 SPC discussed raising fees, noting that it would be operationally complex to only do so for new and not continuing students, and that it would make sense for Birkbeck to remain in step with the rest of the sector by raising fees for all students.

Agreed

96.3 That Birkbeck should move forward with the OFFA process for increasing fees.

96.4 Birkbeck had not noted in its Access Agreement that it might raise fees, as this had not previously been a possibility. It was possible that OFFA might object to fees being raised for continuing students on this basis; the College would appeal against this decision if this was the case. Members noted the need to consider including caveats in future Access Agreements that fees might be raised if government policy is changed to allow this.

97 ACADEMIC QUALITY REVIEW

Noted

97.1 Members heard that there would be an opportunity for HE institutions to be involved in a pilot TEF exercise as part of the consultative development of the framework. This would allow the College to feed into the development and to build up links with those involved. However, members noted this would require significant resource. The College has many priorities at the moment, including working to ensure CMA compliance, preparing for potential future appearances in league tables, and preparing for the full launch of TEF, and it is important to strategically consider how the limited resources available should be allocated.

97.2 Members asked for further discussion to take place at the next meeting considering the advantages and disadvantages of participating; the resources required; and the College's likely performance in the pilot.