BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

17 October 2012

Present
David Latchman (Chair), Philip Dewe, Stephen Frosh, Nick Head, Matthew Weait, Tricia King,
Peter Westley, David McGhie, Li Wei, Matthew Innes, Keith Harrison

By invitation
Hilary Fraser, Nicholas Keep, Patricia Tuit, Miriam Zukas

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Roisin Lynch

Apologies for Absence
Costas Douzinas, Sue Jackson, Naina Patel, Dean Pateman, Philip Powell

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE
Received
1.1 The Committee’s Terms of Reference and Scheme of Membership for 2012-13 (SP 2012 01)

2 MINUTES
Approved
2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 31 May 2012

3 REPORT
Noted
3.1 SPC’s summer term report made to the Finance and General Purposes Committee (SP 2012 02)

4 ACTIONS
Noted
4.1 Regular income monitoring meetings were taking place, and would be discussed later in the
meeting.

4.2 Rather than creating a case study of a hypothetical person going though the system as
outlined by the REF Code of Practice, several real cases had been considered.

4.3 A very positive meeting on employability had taken place.

5 THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF BIRKBECK
Received
5.1 The Master’s annual paper on the strategic direction of Birkbeck (SP 2012 04)

     Noted
5.2 The paper had been endorsed by the Governors on 24 September 2012.
The forthcoming Master’s Address would be based on this Strategy paper; the Master asked that colleagues raise with him any other issues that they felt should be included in the Address.

**INCOME DISTRIBUTION MODEL 2011-12**

Received

6.1 **The IDM outturn report for 2011-12 (SP 2012 06)**

Noted

6.2 The College had a surplus of £6.7M for 2011-12, an improvement from the June forecast of a surplus of £4M with £1M of contingency provision. This surplus reflected good student recruitment performances in the Schools as well as some genuine pay and non pay savings.

6.3 The main causes of change since the June forecast were savings and lower spending/higher income than forecast in:

- School non pay, studentships, partner fees and special funds spend (1.7M)
- Professional services (1.3M)
- Other income (an additional 0.6M)

As well as increased provision for bad debt and pay liabilities.

6.4 Income forecasting had improved from last year. It was noted that there was still a need to continue to improve forecasting. The methodology for forecasting pay spend particularly needed to be refined.

6.5 Members also noted that reporting needed to be improved so that Schools were better able to track spend on teaching and sessional staff; and that the process for sessional staff was currently manual and needed to be automated.

6.6 The variance in pay forecasting was due largely in non- sessional areas and due to issues such as staff posts being built into the budget at the beginning of the year and then not approved or actioned, or staff who had left and had not immediately been replaced at the same level.

6.7 As the current method was leading to over forecasting, any change of method would need to include measures to protect against under forecasting.

6.8 The outturn showed an excellent position for the College overall. All the Schools were congratulated for being in surplus. The surplus would give the College a cushion against income problems in the next few years but did not mean that commitments could be made to large recurrent costs.

6.9 The IDM had been built from department by department information. Schools had different requirements for presentation of Departmental IDMs and the Planning and Business Systems team would be working with Deans and School Managers to produce them.

**STUDENT NUMBERS**

Received

7.1 A report on student numbers for 2011-12 and current student enrolment for 2012-13 (SP 2012 06/07)
Noted

7.2 2011-12 had been a record recruitment year, in which the College had exceeded the Additional Student Number target agreed with HEFCE in 2009/10 as part of Birkbeck’s Strategic Development Fund agreement.

7.3 There would be a fuller picture of the autumn recruitment figures for 2012/13 by mid-November 2012. The current position (as at 12 October 2012) was that, overall, the College had invoiced 82% of target fee income. Undergraduate part time recruitment for new entrants was 38% down from this time in 2011-12, and ELQ undergraduate recruitment was, as expected, minimal.

7.4 There was a 12% increase in part time undergraduate students returning to later years of study, and this would partly offset the decrease in new students.

7.5 The UCAS headcount was now 505 students, exceeding the new HEFCE Student Number Control target of 428. Members discussed the extent to which this number would have been higher if the number control had not been an issue and the College had not stopped making offers. It was noted that the College closed UCAS recruitment on the 14th September, but UCAS did not close Clearing until the end of September, so the College could have continued to recruit during that time.

7.6 The Committee thanked colleagues who had worked to make sure that up to date data was available during the recruitment process, as it had been very helpful.

7.7 The Pro Vice Master for Student Experience gave a verbal report on student recruitment.

7.8 Enrolments across the Higher Education sector had been significantly lower than expected. From the information available it was not possible to identify any particular factors, e.g. branding or price, that were having an impact on enrolment.

7.9 At Birkbeck, despite large numbers of students attending the open days and drop in sessions, and visiting the website, this did not convert into a large number of applications.

7.10 The Student Loan Company had anticipated 60,000 part time applications, and had so far received and processed fewer than 30,000. Members recalled the poor communications with part time students from the Student Loans Company at the start of the recruitment season, which could have had an impact on loan take-up.

7.11 The issue of the drop in part time recruitment had been noted at the recent political party conferences.

7.12 The College was about to undertake market research with both students who had enrolled and those who had not, to increase understanding of the reasoning for the decisions being made by students in the new regime.

7.13 For the College’s future recruitment strategy, it was likely that price would be an issue that would need to be considered carefully. There were new markets that Birkbeck would be able to grow into, for example internationally, but retention efforts to keep the students the College already had would also be vital.
Political lobbying would be critical. The Master was due to meet with Alan Langlands, the Chief Executive of HEFCE, to raise some of the issues that were impacting part time students, and Birkbeck in particular, under the new fees regime. There was a need to argue that the College’s Student Number Control should be raised significantly, given the plan to introduce further new UCAS courses for 2013-14 and 2014-15. The College would also lobby that it should not have to pay the fine for exceeding the Student Number Control this year, considering the late stage in the recruitment process at which it was introduced for Birkbeck. Additionally, it would be argued that either the part time premium should be reinstated, or that institution specific funding should be made available.

During portfolio review Schools would need to consider the weaker areas of their portfolios and identify what was most vulnerable under the new fee regime.

Members noted that it might be possible to argue that part time tuition fees should be tax deductible for working people, both for students personally and for their employers if they sponsored study.

More information was needed on the type of student that was being attracted to Birkbeck’s three year evening courses: i.e. were they students who otherwise would have done four year courses, were they 18 year old school leavers, or were they students who otherwise would have quit their jobs to do three year courses elsewhere. There was also a need to decide whether Birkbeck wished to specifically target young people for these courses.

Members noted that when thinking about recruitment in the future it might be useful to consider the venue for open evenings, as other institutions frequently held their Open Days in the buildings in which teaching would take place.

There was a national level review on postgraduate study being conducted by the Higher Education Commission. No concrete proposals had emerged yet, but one suggestion that had been made was to give employers tax credit in return for sponsoring students. Birkbeck was undertaking its own review on postgraduate provision, and one suggestion that was being considered was a postgraduate equivalent to Higher Education Introductory Studies. The group was also looking at options for undergraduate degrees including postgraduate paths, e.g. four year undergraduate master degrees.

Universities UK were about to announce a review of part time provision.

It was noted that career break loans were now very rare, which should make part time provision that allowed people to study and work at the same time even more valuable. This factor should be raised with the government as part of the College’s political lobbying.

A note on the ongoing monitoring of the financial planning implication of 2012-13 student recruitment *(SP 2012 08)*
7.23 The Executive Deans, School Managers and the PVM (Strategy and Special Projects) had been having regular meetings with colleagues from Professional Services since July, to monitor student recruitment data. Thanks were given to everybody who had attended these meetings.

7.24 The group had noted that the estimated drop in income compared with forecasts would lead to most of the contingency provision being used up. Financial support budgets and additional fundraising would need to be reviewed to address this, and a mid year review would be essential.

7.25 The next year was likely to present a huge challenge to Birkbeck and there would need to be control and strategic direction from both the centre and the Schools.

7.26 The message should be taken to the Schools that it was good news that the College had a financial cushion due to the surplus, and it was now time to consider new modes of delivery and other innovations to take forward into the Portfolio Review process. Schools should produce four or five proposals as part of this process to discuss at the SPC Awayday in January.

7.27 Members noted that while the international market and UCAS courses were both areas in which the College could grow, they were also areas in which there was already a lot of competition. It was therefore important for Birkbeck to maintain the appeal of its distinctive offer, i.e. part time undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

**ACTION**

7.28 (EMcK) Find out what proportion of Masters provision is part time in the rest of the sector.

7.29 Members noted that in the future the College would increasingly need to be part of academic consortiums in order to compete for postgraduate research funding.

7.30 The monitoring meeting had also discussed the issue of the removal of visa granting status from London Metropolitan University when this had arisen. Birkbeck was going to have to take on increased attendance monitoring requirements to comply with UK Border Agency regulations. Members noted that there were also valid retention reasons to monitor students’ attendance. PhD students would also need to be monitored in the future to meet the new regulations that required proof that these students had met with their supervisors at least ten times a year.

8 **BIRKBECK ASSOCIATION**

Received

8.1 An update on progress with the Birkbeck Association Membership Scheme *(SP 2012 09)*

Noted
8.2 The Committee received a verbal update which revealed the new brand identity of the membership scheme, ‘B Birkbeck’.

8.3 The branding and new name would be revealed to the Governors on the 29th November, and an all-staff email would be sent before Christmas to introduce the scheme and the brand to staff. There would be a launch event in January for colleagues within Birkbeck, and it was planned that the members’ website and joining information would be launched externally in January/February 2013, allowing people to sign up to the scheme for the first time.

8.4 The update paper included costing summaries based on three sets of assumptions about numbers of members: conservative, best-guess and optimistic. It was noted at the meeting that these figures would need to be revised to include more staff time.

8.5 The business plan would be revised as more experience was gained and more information about take-up etc became available.

9 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE

Received

9.1 The report of the FBSC following its meeting on 25 September (SP 2012 10).

Noted

9.2 The NSP forecasts made in 2011-12 had underestimated the number of students with a household income of below £20,000 or an income source of means tested state benefits. The uptake had therefore been higher than expected, leading to an estimated overspend of £1-£1.5M. This was an indication that Birkbeck had been successful in appealing to lower income students, in line with its mission. Going forward it would be important to understand why uptake had been so high.

9.3 There had been a good uptake wherever the College had been able to offer incentives, even when these were very small. It was agreed that more discussion of how the College could use relatively small nudges to attract more students should take place at the Awayday.

9.4 Degree tiers 1-3 and Certificate tiers 4-5 were unchanged from 2012-13. Certificate tiers 1-3 had increased as the first stage of moving towards pricing to cover the costs of the programmes and to be comparable between degrees and Certificates.

9.5 There would be no further changes to the undergraduate fee tier structure for 2012-13. FBSC would undertake a full review of fees for 2013-15, taking in comparability between Certificates and degrees in cognate subjects and the need for the fees to cover the cost of the programmes.
9.6 SPC noted that there was a need to check whether there was price sensitivity between £6K, £8K and £9K degrees.

9.7 School members had agreed to confirm any changes to the current assignment of programmes and modular subject areas to fee tiers by 12 October.

Endorsed

9.8 The above approach by the Fees Committee to undergraduate fee setting.

9.9 There had been a decline in the numbers of applications for postgraduate taught programmes from Home/EU students over the last two years, both at Birkbeck specifically and in the HE sector in general. Birkbeck’s strategy had been to increase full time postgraduate fees in stages to bring them to a position where they were pro rata to part time fees. However, it was felt that in the short term postgraduate fees should be kept at the same level in order to offset any further fee related decline in full time masters programme uptake.

Endorsed

9.10 The Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee’s recommendation that postgraduate taught fee tiers should be kept at their current level for 2013-14, subject to FBSC’s consideration of a proposal for consolidation of the higher priced tiers.

9.11 FBSC reported that making decisions on international fee strategy was not straightforward, as the recession and international currency fluctuations have had variable impacts in different parts of the world. Overall, it was felt that international recruitment would be most sustainable with a small cost of living increase to international fees for 2013-14, along with the use of international scholarships as agreed last term.

Endorsed

9.12 The recommendation that international fees be raised by 5% for 2013-14.

10 PLANNING FOR 2013-14
Noted
10.1 The portfolio review, planning and budgeting cycle for 2013-14 (SP 2012 11).

11 INTERCOLLEGIATE STUDY POLICY
Approved
11.1 The financial aspects of the Intercollegiate Study Policy (SP 2012 12), the academic aspects having been approved by TQEC and Academic Board.

12 NON CREDIT PROVISION
Received
12.1 A proposed updated policy on the development and approval of provision not carrying academic credit (SP 2012 13)

Noted

12.2 The policy did not include details on where the fees would be set for non credit bearing provision. It was agreed that this a standard rate for non-credit bearing courses should be set by FBSC, who should then consider provision on an individual basis if there was an argument that the market could bear a higher rate.

**ACTION**

12.3 (FBSC Committee) make proposals for a fee strategy for non credit provision and fine tuning of terminology around courses, programmes, modules and events.

13 **INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

Received

13.1 The draft Institutional Partnership Agreement (SP 2012 14)

Noted

13.2 This agreement was aimed at increasing the number of students coming into Birkbeck from FE institutions while allowing admissions tutors to retain their rights to make academic decisions on prospective students.

13.3 Admissions tutors would be obliged to make an offer to applicants studying at level 3 on programmes to which the IPA applied; however if they felt it was necessary they could impose further conditions to determine an applicant’s skills, aptitude or ability.

13.4 The Committee suggested that the agreement should be amended to include a statement that the Pro Vice Master for Academic Partnerships would regularly review the extra conditions that admissions tutors were imposing.

13.5 It was noted that once this agreement was in operation these students would be a good group to target with strategic fee discounts.

**Approved**

13.5 The Institutional Partnership Agreement to go forward as a pilot scheme for one year; a formal agreement based on the lessons learned from this pilot would then be presented to Academic Board.

14 **PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE (WHISTLEBLOWING) POLICY**

Approved

14.1 The updated Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy (SP 2012 15)
15  SPC EXTENDED PLANNING MEETING
Noted
15.1 This meeting would take place on the 23rd January 2013. Suggestions and items for the agenda should be emailed to the College Secretary or the Head of Governance and Corporate Support.

16  THE QUEEN’S ANNIVERSARY PRIZES FOR HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION
Noted
16.1 The Queen’s Anniversary Prizes for Higher and Further Education were awarded to work by colleges and Universities that was recognized to be of outstanding excellence, innovative, and of benefit to the wider community.

ACTION
16.2 (Executive Deans) Inform the Master about any work in Schools fitting the QAP criteria.

17  DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS
Noted
17.1 The dates of future meetings:
- Tuesday 6th November 2012
- Thursday 24th January 2013
- Wednesday 20th February 2013
- Thursday 21st March 2013
- Wednesday 8th May 2013
- Wednesday 5th June 2013