BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
6 November 2012

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

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

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Roisin Lynch

Apologies for absence
Philip Dewe, Philip Powell

18 MINUTES
Approved
18.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 17 October 2012

19 ACTION SHEET
Received
19.1 An update on action taken following previous meetings (SP 2012 16)

Noted
19.2 A suggestion for development of a Queen’s Anniversary Prize submission based on work in the Department of History, Classics and Archaeology would be followed up.

20 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
20.1 College management had had a positive meeting with Alan Langlands, the Chief Executive of HEFCE, and Derek Hicks, the London Regional Consultant for HEFCE, over increased full time student number controls and Birkbeck’s strategy in response to the drop in part time undergraduate recruitment in the new fee and funding system. The College had been asked to produce estimated figures on the cost to the Treasury of full time students compared to part time students in terms of loans, maintenance and other State support in support of our request for more full time numbers. Securing a higher student number control would enable Schools to continue recruiting to and expanding their three year degree offer.

20.2 The College would develop a bid to HEFCE’s Catalyst Fund based on further development of three year degrees and intensive evening provision at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, including links between the world of study
and the world of work capitalising on Birkbeck’s existing position as the university for working Londoners.

20.3 The University of Bath and the University of Surrey had left the 1994 Group. They had not joined any other group of Universities but would be remaining independent. There was a need for Birkbeck to consider its own place within the 1994 Group. The College’s main motivation for being in the group was as a mark of research excellence, but it would be necessary to monitor the situation in case further attrition caused the 1994 Group brand to lose value.

20.6 Members noted that the 1994 research and postgraduate groups held useful discussions and had lobbying influence, although there were some indications that the group was losing its lobbying power. Membership of the Group had been helpful in the past during the ELQ crisis, and currently in lobbying on postgraduate taught issues.

20.7 Because of Birkbeck’s high proportion of part time provision, much of the lobbying done by the 1994 Group reflected issues not relevant to Birkbeck. There were also issues that specifically impacted London institutions on which the 1994 Group had not lobbied.

20.8 There might be developing opportunities for the College to form new links with other institutions, for example other London institutions with whom our interests might be more aligned, perhaps including the remaining members of the Bloomsbury Colleges group and other University of London colleges.

21 STUDENT RECRUITMENT REPORT

21.1 An updated report on enrolments and tuition fee income 2012-13 (SP 2012 17)

21.2 The overall income prediction had reduced since the last meeting. New and returning students had enrolled earlier in the cycle than in previous years, so late enrolments were lower than predicted.

21.3 There was a strong performance for returning student enrolment compared to previous years and to the IDM predictions. This was, anecdotally, also the case in other institutions, suggesting that the upsurge in returners was due to students wishing to stay on the old system. This could present a risk for 2013-14 when the number of remaining old system returning students would decrease.

21.4 Members noted that there were some data differences between the IDM and the student recruitment management information (Tableau). The Planning Team was working on consistency between systems and it was agreed that the Executive Deans would discuss any specific differences with NH.

21.5 The management information on recruitment of research students would also be reviewed.
21.6 The income to the College per student FTE varied according to fee tier, level of study and whether students were home, international, new or old system. It would be important to plan and monitor on the basis of income and student numbers rather than just student numbers.

21.7 HEFCE's student number control exemption for entrants with A levels graded AAB or equivalent also applied to high achievement in Access to HE, BTEC and other level 3 diplomas. Students moving directly from foundation degrees to BA or BSc top-up programmes would also be outside the control.

22 STUDENT LOANS
Noted
22.1 The College had issued £10.7M of fee invoices to students who had indicated that they would apply to the SLC for a loan. The SLC's annual payment profile to institutions was 25% in the first term, 25% in the second term and 50% in the third term, so the College was expecting approximately £2.5M in the autumn term instalment.

22.2 In fact, by the beginning of October only £660K had been received from the SLC. According to data from the SLC system, more income was due to flow through as loans were processed and attendance confirmed. However, approximately 400 students who had enrolled on the basis that they would apply for a loan had not done so, and approximately another 400 had applied but had not yet provided the full information needed by the SLC, leading to their applications being classified as “pended”.

22.3 It was agreed that these 800 students would be contacted to ask them to confirm their application and remind them that they needed to apply for a loan and make sure they had supplied all the necessary information; and to remind them that the College could provide advice if there were any issues preventing them from completing the process.

22.4 The data on those students who had not applied would be broken down by School and department to enable specific local intervention if appropriate. The data should be circulated as soon as possible.

22.5 Members noted that receiving the money from the SLC was very important for the College’s cashflow. They asked whether there was a higher proportion of “pended” applications for Birkbeck compared with other institutions and heard that the proportion was slightly lower than the Open University and was comparable with part time applications across the sector. There was no significant delay in confirming full time loans because the process was fully established and more systematic and straightforward, with online application forms and attendance confirmation.

22.6 96 SLC applications had failed due to students not meeting the criteria, probably because they had answered the “Our Promise” questions inaccurately on enrolment.

23 UK BORDER AGENCY COMPLIANCE
Received
23.1 Proposals and an action plan to ensure and demonstrate the College’s compliance with UKBA requirements as a sponsor of students from outside the EU obtaining a Tier 4 immigration visa (SP 2012 18)

Noted

23.2 The College had undertaken a ‘robustness’ review of its procedures and systems for the administration of Tier 4 visa sponsorship and the accompanying systems for the checking and monitoring of attendance. The internal auditors had also carried out a review and had reported to Audit Committee. Their report was circulated to SPC for information.

23.3 Overall the College’s procedures were robust but some procedures needed to be tightened, including more consistent attendance monitoring and reporting. Experience in other institutions suggested that UKBA disliked evidence of a variety of schemes operating within a single institution.

23.4 Members asked how the data collected on attendance would be used. It was envisaged that it would be kept locally within Schools, with a reporting framework in place for regular returns to the Registry. This would enable an institution-level overview including advice to Schools as appropriate.

23.5 Members discussed issues over reporting and monitoring the attendance of research students. ‘Writing up’, ‘dissertation only’ and similar statuses were not acceptable for visa purposes because there was no attendance requirement. Procedures for recording interactions with research students needed to be reviewed. Additionally, any activity that took the student away from the institution during term time including breaks in study or research/field trips needed to be approved and reported to the Registry to be added to student files.

23.6 Members discussed the use of research supervision logs. Although in the past some members of academic staff had not supported their use, others believed there were genuine academic and pedagogical benefits to keeping logs, as well as an opportunity to address retention issues.

23.7 The requirement for PhD students to first register for MPhil degrees and then upgrade to PhD registration was inconsistent with UKBA requirements with a risk that students would be asked to go home after their upgrade and apply for a new visa for their “new” qualification. It could be possible to replace the upgrade process with registration directly onto the PhD with a formal progression stage. This would require further consideration and discussion in the academic Committees.

Action

23.8 (LW) Take the following issues to the Research Students Sub-Committee for consideration:
• Research student supervision logs
• The potential to replace the MPhil upgrade process with direct registration to the PhD and a formal progression stage.

Endorsed

23.9 Implementation of the actions defined as urgent on the action plan:
• For taught programmes, roll out a common class check list across the College, to be in use from January 2013
• Agree and circulate an annual engagement schedule for each research student
• Improve understanding of need for formal approval and reporting of break in study, implement system changes to support this
• Discuss and agree a final application/process date for Tier 4 applicants for 2013/14.
• Identify a School lead administrative contact to work with the Registry Services International Student Administration (ISA) team on UKBA compliance.
• Establish a user forum of School representatives to meet termly with the ISA team.
• Implement the recommendations of the internal audit report on the development of high level policy statement setting out how the College meets UKBA requirements, where responsibilities are located, minimum requirements for verifying attendance and deadlines for applications, offers and enrolments.
• Write and publish a staff user guide covering Tier 4, Highly Trusted Sponsor status and the financial, academic and reputational implications of loss of licence.
• A development meeting for the ISA team who deal with Tier 4 and the International Office to ensure a joined up approach.

SPC endorsed these actions because the College was required to comply with the regulations of the UK Border Agency. Members confirmed that this did not constitute an endorsement of government policy on immigration.

23.10 The need to ensure compliance with UKBA’s requirements should be communicated widely at School and departmental level. It was important that all staff understood why it was important to comply, and that the ability to admit international students was vital to the continuing survival of the College. The Master would give an overview at his forthcoming Address. After implementation the changes would be reviewed to ensure that they were working effectively and meeting the individual needs of departments while conforming to a minimum standard.

24 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Approved

24.1 The report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee (SP 2012 19)

Noted

24.2 FBSC confirmed that there would be no changes to old system fees for modular provision for 2013-14. This would be the last year in which old system modular fees would be set.

24.3 FBSC also confirmed that there were no changes to the assignment of undergraduate provision to tiers.

24.4 FBSC discussed what data would be useful for discussions on 2014-15 undergraduate fee setting. It would be useful to assess whether price had an impact on recruitment and retention. The Committee discussed analysing data on students recruited through Clearing and what the College’s recruitment strategy in relation to Clearing
should be. It agreed to revisit this matter following the Vice Master’s review of UCAS programmes. It would also consider fee reductions and incentives, once there was more data available on their impact.

24.5 FBSC also planned to develop a strategic approach to Masters fees after the review of postgraduate provision, led by the Pro Vice Master for Postgraduate Study, had reported. In the meantime, as already agreed, Masters fee tier levels for 2013-14 would be kept at 2012-13 levels.

25 INFORMATION GATHERING EXERCISE
Received

25.1 A paper on the commencement of a market survey and data analysis to better understand the characteristics and motivations of applicants, enrollers and non-enrollers in 2012-13 (SP 2012 20)

Noted

25.2 The increase in undergraduate tuition fees and introduction of loans for part time students had had a major impact and the College had experienced a 38% decrease in part time undergraduate enrolments in 2012-13. Before deciding on the strategic response it was important to understand what had happened. There would be an analysis of internal data on enquiry, application and enrolment to identify changes to the 2012-13 undergraduate intake, as well as a survey of students who had enrolled and students who had enquired or applied but not enrolled, to explore their motivation and decision making processes.

26 PLANNING AND REVIEW TIMELINE
Received

26.1 An updated version of the Planning and Review timeline for 2012-13 (SP 2012 21).

Noted

26.2 The next stage in the timeline was Portfolio Review. Supporting data would be available to Schools in mid-November.

27 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS
Noted

27.1 The dates of future meetings:
- Thursday 24th January 2013
- Wednesday 20th February 2013
- Thursday 21st March 2013
- Wednesday 8th May 2013
- Wednesday 5th June 2013