BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
8 May 2013

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

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

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Jonah Duffin, Roisin Lynch

Apologies
David McGhie, Dean Pateman

54 MINUTES
Approved
54.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 21 March 2013

55 ACTION SHEET
Received
55.1 An update on progress on implementing the actions agreed at the last meeting (SP 2012 38)

Noted
Birkbeck Stratford

55.2 Negotiation was under way with the UEL School of Business for Birkbeck to run its BA in Accounting and Management and BSc in Accounting in Stratford. Negotiations would extend to potential postgraduate business provision based in Stratford.

55.3 There was a distinction between existing Bloomsbury based provision in which the Stratford building could be used as part of the College’s estate to reduce the dependency on external teaching space and provision that was specifically designed and marketed to run in Stratford. It was noted that the College would look at developing both of these areas of Stratford provision. Executive Deans should contact the Vice Master if they currently had courses which were being taught in external space but could transfer to Stratford. Schools should also consider potential courses that might recruit significantly if run and marketed specifically in Stratford.

Technology Enhanced Learning

55.4 Progress was being made in both TEL projects. The project to develop Moodle based provision had been launched, with a timeline leading to availability of enhanced
provision for students in 2014-15. The online strategy project was expected to have a shorter time frame once the external project management resource that had been identified for this project was in place.

55.5 Discussions with potential partners for online learning provision, such as HE Online and Academic Partnerships, were continuing.

REF
55.6 Work on this was progressing.

Academic Partnerships
55.7 The Executive Deans had each nominated an appropriate member of academic staff to act as a partnership advocate within the Schools.

55.8 (SJ) Contact the Executive Deans to request the nomination of an appropriate member of academic staff to take part in the work on transitions from undergraduate to postgraduate study.

Employability
55.9 A paper on this would be coming to the next meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee.

56  MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
56.1 College management was defining Birkbeck’s position in relation to lobbying on part time issues. There was a clear concern from the Government over the sector-wide decline in part time recruitment and it was important to encourage the Government to take action on this, whether through the introduction of loans for ELQ students in certain subjects, the retention of the part time premium, or a move to the Welsh model where funding had been retained for part time students enabling lower fees.

56.2 Birkbeck, along with other institutions including the Open University, Universities UK and the NUS, was involved with the development of a national campaign in support of adult higher education, ‘Part Time Matters’. The high profile campaign would be launched in Adult Learners Week in May 2013.

56.3 The campaign would promote an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons proposed by Frank Dobson, MP for Holborn and St Pancras, acknowledging the significance of part time higher education to the economy, and urging the Government to take action to address the decline in part time enrolments. The campaign website would provide a template for those concerned about part time education to write to their MPs encouraging them to sign the Early Day Motion.

56.4 The Committee noticed the importance of getting backing from high profile interest groups with a connection to part time education, such as Mumsnet and the Women’s Institute.
MARKET SURVEY 2012

Received

57.1 A report on the survey of new postgraduate enrollers and applicants who did not enrol in 2012 (SP 2012 39).

Noted

57.2 The report outlined key socio-demographic attributes of new postgraduate enrollers and those applicants who did not enrol, including preferred mode of study, age of students, employment status and income. It also looked at the key drivers which encouraged students to enrol, which included reputation, quality, value, course content, face to face evening study and value for money. Career development was the most important motivation to study among responders, while fees and affordability were a key factor in stopping people applying and enrolling. Prospective students found out about Birkbeck chiefly through online searches, followed by recommendations from family and friends and outdoor and print advertising.

57.3 The results from the survey indicated that, while enquirers did not feel that Birkbeck fees were too expensive compared to other institutions, they did consider the fee to be a significant amount of money to spend. There was a lack of confidence in the value of higher education. Birkbeck’s communication campaign would therefore emphasise the value of a Birkbeck degree.

57.4 The committee noted the importance of emphasising not just the quality of the provision provided by Birkbeck but also the ways in which the College differed from its competitors. Birkbeck was uniquely geared towards part time evening study and had considerable experience and expertise in delivering this provision. The Birkbeck experience was distinctive, enabling students to work during the day while studying and networking with other working Londoners.

57.5 The communications plan under development as a result of the survey would focus on these aspects. It would also include case studies highlighting the life changing aspects of studying at Birkbeck, in terms of personal development and advanced or changed careers.

57.6 The Committee discussed ideas for innovative provision that might attract more PGT students;
- degrees with ‘accelerating’ structures, with fewer modules in the first year to enable unemployed students to afford to study while jobseeking.
- bespoke versions of their courses designed for particular employers, trade unions, arts councils and accounting firms.
- collaboration with companies who wanted to develop their work based learning provision, such as the retailer John Lewis who was planning to offer senior managers the opportunity to complete a Level Six vocational qualification.

57.7 It was noted that the data from the survey could be broken down to department level in areas where the response rate was high enough and that External Relations would meet with departments as required to discuss department level marketing strategies.
57.8 Committee members noted the positive indication from the survey that students were attracted to Birkbeck because of its reputation. Potential ways to take advantage of this included posting example lectures from each postgraduate taught course online as tasters for prospective students or giving current undergraduate students in their last year the chance to sample masters modules.

57.9 Some work had already been done around possible new models and routes for study such as programmes with masters’ routes which integrated undergraduate and postgraduate study. There were some technical issues over the allocation of funding for courses, but if these problems could be overcome then these routes could be a powerful recruitment tool.

57.10 Further development of new postgraduate models would require a full understanding of external regulation on course structures and funding.

57.11 The School of Law were currently running the first cohort of their intensive masters’ provision which offered students a combination of distance learning and short, intense periods of face to face teaching. There was currently no competition for this kind of provision in the UK and the conversion rate from applications to enrolments was very high. It was felt that this model had significant potential.

**Action**

57.12 **(Executive Deans)** Consider possibilities for innovative masters’ provision and bring back to the Committee a proposal from each School.

57.13 There was potential for identifying schemes in which employers could benefit from tax breaks for sponsoring their employees on postgraduate programmes.

57.14 Members discussed the 10% discount for alumni progressing to postgraduate programmes and noted that the scheme would proceed as agreed for 2013/14 and then reviewed. Some members felt that calling the discount the ‘alumni scholarship scheme’ might make it more attractive to prospective students.

58 **PLANNING FOR 2013/14**

**Received**

58.1 A report on planning for 2013/14 and the proposed Income Distribution Model budget for 2013/14 *(SP 2012 40)*

**Noted**

58.2 The PVM for Strategy and Special Projects thanked colleagues in Schools and central services for their professionalism during the planning process. Significant progress had been made, but there was more work to be done to ensure that the College would break even with a reasonable contingency provision in 2013/14.

58.3 The report noted that the student recruitment picture for 2013/14 had become increasingly challenging during the planning round. Initial income scenarios had been based on assumption that undergraduate numbers would level out after the shock of the new system in 2012/13, but this had not been the case, with undergraduate part time applications falling by a further 27%, postgraduate taught part time by 20% and
postgraduate taught full time by 13%. There had also been some additional costs in 2013/14, resulting from: the impact of harmonisation of pay and conditions for teaching and scholarship staff (£500K), the need to pay back the HEFCE loan for Strategic Review restructuring (£625K per year for four years) and operating costs at University Square Stratford (£500K).

58.4 During the budget iteration meetings with Schools and Professional Services, which were led by the Vice Master Designate, all income and spending estimates were reviewed, unnecessary spending was deferred or cancelled, and appropriate contingencies were identified against the continuing uncertainty on student recruitment. Given the uncertain climate, it was necessary to make these contingencies although student numbers had been set as realistically as possible by comparing the previous year and the current trend in application rates, and Schools were also making every effort to maximise offers made to applicants.

58.5 There was provision in the tuition fee income line for expected levels of in-year withdrawal and bad debt, currently 10% of forecast income. This was based on losses for withdrawals and bad debt in 2011-12 and would be rebased against 2012/13 levels before the IDM was forwarded to F&GPC. A total of £0.865M of tuition fee contingency had been added School by School, based on the major areas of recruitment uncertainty and taking into account raw application trends and Schools’ forecasts. It was assumed that the full time student number control of 700 would be achieved.

58.6 During the budget iteration meetings, planned new staff posts were deferred wherever possible unless there were already established student numbers to justify them. Effective and commendable planning from the Schools had allowed most to absorb the extra costs of the teaching and scholarship staff harmonisation agreement. There would be an ongoing need to monitor staff costs and exercise caution and control over new and replacement posts and any staffing decision with an impact on costs.

58.7 Indirect costs charged to Schools in the IDM were made up of professional services costs, Birkbeck funded student financial support and the impact of the SDF loan repayment. The impact of the £0.5M operating budget for University Square Stratford had been distributed among the professional services budget.

58.8 The current estimate for external space hire reflected the current understanding of the room bookings team following the collection of initial data from Schools. Members noted that Schools should consider replacing their use of external space with available space in the Stratford building where appropriate. It would be important to inform students that their classes would be in Stratford. Members noted that a large percentage of Birkbeck students came from East London postcodes and that the Stratford building might be particularly popular with these students.

58.9 It was noted that it might be necessary to reconsider some of the drivers of the IDM in planning for future years.

Approved
58.10 The IDM as a first cut, subject to further validation of forecasts of School other income, research grant and contract income, bad debt/withdrawal contingency, and student financial support, to be taken to F&GPC and Governors after revision.

58.11 A mid year-review and monthly meetings of the budget/planning team and Executive Deans convened by the Vice Master Designate, to review the financial implications of recruitment trends and feed into recruitment monitoring and interventions.

58.12 The Master thanked colleagues in the Schools and central services for their work during the planning process.

59 UCAS STRATEGY
Received
59.1 A report on UCAS recruitment strategy for 2013/14 (SP 2012 41)

Noted
59.2 Birkbeck’s student number control had been increased to 700 in 2013/14, and it was hoped that it would be increased further in 2014/15. These ambitious targets, and the downturn in applications to four year programmes, made successful recruitment to UCAS programmes a key strategic aim for the College in 2013/14.

59.3 The UCAS Strategy and Planning Group had been meeting fortnightly to work closely with schools and professional services, monitoring applications and offers to establish the likelihood of the College reaching its SNC target. The group had commissioned work on the setting of entry requirements. It was working to ensure that the opportunity to recruit students during Clearing was maximised and was investigating what courses Birkbeck should be developing in the future.

59.4 Modelling of recruitment for UCAS degrees was difficult as only one or two years of complete data on application and offer conversions existed. However, based on current applications it was predicted that there would be 420 enrolments in 2013/14 from the main cycle. This would require the College to recruit approximately 350 students through Clearing, based on a total recruitment target of 770 taking into account the predicted number of students with ABB+ and the 3% tolerance included in the student number target. This was a very ambitious target for recruitment through Clearing, and it was therefore important to aim to improve our pre-Clearing recruitment rate by making significantly more offers on the applications received in the main cycle.

59.5 To maximise recruitment, it was important to clearly set out the different entry requirements for the different demographic groups attracted by studying at Birkbeck, such as traditional A level students, mature students, access students and those progressing from a Birkbeck Certificate of Higher Education. A course listings template which would display these clearly had therefore been developed. Research into national tariff levels and the entry requirements of competitor institutions had been carried out to enable each department to set UCAS tariff levels at an appropriate level.
59.6 The Clearing process would be run in the same way as it had been for 2012/13 recruitment, with a base room with a rota of administrative and academic staff to take phone calls from prospective students. It would be important not only to maximise the number of students recruited during the busiest period of Clearing (15 – 19 August) but to continue to make offers throughout August and September. There would be events aimed at prospective students throughout the summer and during the high point of Clearing, to allow them to find out more about Birkbeck.

59.7 Members discussed the possibility of piloting a ‘no tariff’ scheme for some courses for 2014/15, where there would be no published entry tariff, to encourage applications. Offer decisions would instead be made on the basis of interviews. Some members felt that it would send a stronger message if this was taken forward by the institution as a whole, but others noted that tariffs were particularly important to A level students who used tariffs to judge the quality of courses. Removing tariffs would run the risk of making Birkbeck courses invisible to 18-21 year olds, who were currently a major growth area for the College. It might therefore make sense to differentiate entry requirements for those students with A levels and those without. Those departments who wished to pilot a no tariff scheme in 2014/15 could do so.

59.8 One way of maximising recruitment while fulfilling Birkbeck’s unique mission to educate non traditional HE students would be to target specific Further Education institutions and offer their students a guaranteed interview. This could be taken forward immediately for the current recruitment cycle, with further work done in the future to embed specific provision for supporting and retaining these students.

Action

59.9 (MW) Take forward work on targeting Further Education institutions for three year degree recruitment with offers of guaranteed interviews.

59.10 The Vice Master thanked all the Schools for their participation in the UCAS strategy and planning process.

60 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE

Received

60.1 The report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee (SP 2012 42)

Approved

60.2 The fee structure for undergraduate and Certificate of Higher Education programmes for 2014-15 as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cert Tier</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree Tier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120 credit</td>
<td>£4,000</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
<td>£6,000</td>
<td>£7,000</td>
<td>£9,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 credit</td>
<td>£3,000</td>
<td>£3,750</td>
<td>£4,500</td>
<td>£5,250</td>
<td>£6,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 credit</td>
<td>£2,000</td>
<td>£2,500</td>
<td>£3,000</td>
<td>£3,500</td>
<td>£4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 credit</td>
<td>£1,000</td>
<td>£1,250</td>
<td>£1,500</td>
<td>£1,750</td>
<td>£2,250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
60.3 Schools could now begin to assign programmes to fee tiers.

60.4 From 2014-15 onwards there would no longer be old regime or concessionary fees for modular provision.

**Student Financial Support 2014-15**

60.5 FBSC recommended that, in conjunction with an enhanced bursary scheme aimed at students with a household income of £35,000 or less, 2014-15 student bursaries should be limited to students enrolled on courses with fees of £6,000FTE or more. However, SPC agreed that this issue needed further discussion and should be brought back to the next meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee. A holding statement should be placed in the prospectus in the meantime.

**Modular fees**

60.6 After discussion, FBSC had recommended that further consultation take place in the College on the introduction of a modular/credit based pricing system aimed at increasing student recruitment and improving the student experience through greater flexibility and clarity.

60.7 The results from the survey of non-enrollers indicated that prospective students sometimes felt a lack of confidence which prevented them from committing to the whole course and the large amount of money that represented. The ability to sign up and pay for single modules might encourage these students to enrol.

60.8 The College was experiencing declining student intakes and bold initiatives were needed to reverse this trend. If modular pricing was thought to have the potential to increase recruitment then it should be implemented as soon as possible, with an aim to introduce it by 2014/15.

60.9 SPC noted that it would be too administratively complex and resource intensive to introduce modular pricing for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes simultaneously.

60.10 It would be very important to have programme structures could be clearly communicated to prospective students. A move to modular pricing could allow the undergraduate offer to be simplified to UCAS courses and ‘flexible’ courses, which could take more or less time depending on the student’s needs.

60.11 It was noted that the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy were already considering a modular postgraduate offering, launching a scheme in which alumni of Birkbeck Masters programmes would be able to take other masters level modules in the School.

**ACTION**

60.12 (MW) Develop a consultation process leading to a proposal to introduce modular pricing for undergraduate programmes for 2014/15 and postgraduate programmes in 2015/16.
61 THREE TERM LEARNING: ENROLMENT DEADLINE

Received

61.1 A proposal for a student enrolment deadline to support three term learning in 2013/14 (SP 2012 43)

Noted

61.2 The Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee and the Academic Board Executive Committee recommended that SPC should set a deadline date each year for enrolment to facilitate the three term learning schedule. It was recommended that this deadline apply to all students on October starts, on three term and other programmes.

61.3 SPC noted that in the current recruitment situation, it would not make sense to enforce a deadline unless this was necessary for the effective implementation of the course as was the case for three term programmes.

Approved

61.4 A deadline date for 2013 enrolment of Friday 25 October 2013 for students on three term programmes. This would not extend to other programmes with October starts.

62 BIRKBECK INSTITUTES GOVERNANCE

Received

62.1 An updated document on the governing arrangements for the Birkbeck Institutes (SP 2012 44)

Noted

62.2 The governance arrangements for the Birkbeck Institute had been refined since their original approval in May 2010. The BI had acquired the status of a College Research Centre and would report to the Research Committee.

63 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted

63.1 That the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 5 June at 2.30pm.