BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

3 November 2009

Present:
David Latchman (Chair), John Annette, Philip Dewe, Stephen Frosh, Keith Harrison, Matthew Innes, Sue Jackson, Tricia King, David McGhie, Naina Patel, Peter Westley.

In attendance:
Katharine Bock

Apologies for absence:
Costas Douzinas

9 MINUTES
Confirmed
9.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2009.

10 ACTION SHEET
Noted
10.1 Actions agreed at the last meeting and progress made. (SP 2009 10)

10.2 The updated action sheet is attached.

11 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
11.1 The Master had made his annual address to staff.

Flexible and accelerated part-time provision
11.2 Questions raised at the address had indicated confusion over whether the College was offering “full time” courses. The pattern of evening teaching would continue to be Birkbeck’s predominant mode of delivery; courses offered as equivalent to full time were actually accelerated part-time and were part of a developing portfolio of flexible part time provision, consistent with the College’s mission.

International student recruitment
11.3 The International office had carried out research indicating that the evening delivery pattern could be attractive to the international postgraduate market, but would be less attractive to undergraduates.

11.4 The international working group had a dual remit: to consider international institutional links and international student recruitment. The group had been convened before the new School structures and the membership reflected individuals’ knowledge of and involvement in international activities and markets rather than the subsequent Assistant Dean appointments. It was necessary to integrate the existing international group membership with School Executive representation.
11.5 The International group; and the employer engagement group that was also being established, would report as necessary to the Strategic Planning Committee.

**ACTION**

**11.6 (KB)** Draft a communication inviting Executive Deans to nominate Assistant Dean members of the international group as well as members with specialist area portfolios. The International Group should have at least one School Executive member from each School.

**12** **INCOME DISTRIBUTION MODEL 2009-10**

**Considered**

12.1 The final iteration of the 2009-10 IDM (SP 2009 11).

**Noted**

12.2 The IDM had been circulated to Schools. There had been requests for further information on the underlying data and methodology. These discussions would be taken forward by the reconvened academic consulting group (see Minute 5.7 15 October 2009).

12.3 The projected College level deficit of £1.8M and the pattern of Schools in surplus and deficit were similar to the last iteration of the model agreed by Governors in July. The principal changes feeding into the model were:

- Updated student number data
- Transfer of staff and non pay costs from the former Faculty of Lifelong Learning to central professional services
- Revised pay award forecasts (1%)
- Establishment of the Student Centre

12.4 The IDM would be re-iterated during the year for monitoring purposes. The next iteration would follow the HESES in-year student number return made on 1 December.

12.5 Sessional lecturer costs had been calculated from historical data. One aim of the portfolio review was to identify and address unprofitable modules, including those with disproportionate sessional costs. In carrying out this work Schools should also take into account the project being led by the Vice-Master to assimilate sessional grades onto the College’s grade framework, which had the potential to increase sessional costs.

12.6 Costs of provision had been broken down to programme rather than module level. Although this did not fully reflect distribution of interdisciplinary programme costs, it was reported that there was little inter-School impact. For College level monitoring, breakdowns and comparisons would be made School by School. Further disaggregation of the data to module and Department level would be provided to support School planning rather than for the record.

12.7 Clarification was given on the fundability of Masters programmes. HEFCE was consulting on a significant reduction in T funding for postgraduate taught programmes in price band D (many arts and social sciences subjects). It was confirmed that these programmes did and could contribute to achieving the College's fundable student numbers target, including Additional Student Numbers, as well as drawing in fee income. Schools should be planning a balance of provision reflecting their academic strengths and
taking the opportunity to raise fee levels where appropriate as well as considering HEFCE fundability.

**Endorsed**

12.8 The Income Distribution Model for 2009-10, to be confirmed by Finance and General Purposes Committee on 16 November.

**13 PORTFOLIO REVIEW**

**Noted**

13.1 The timetable confirmed at the last meeting included a requirement for Schools to submit their initial reports in early January. In addition, an interim report would be necessary for Governors on 26 November.

13.2 Schools should be addressing portfolio review now rather than later in the term, considering action in areas that were not cost effective and formulating business plans with evidence of growth potential for new developments where relevant, taking the market information provided into account.

13.3 It was straightforward to infer which areas were currently not cost-effective from the data provided.

13.4 The Master was meeting with Executive Deans on a monthly basis and would take up any specific concerns raised.

**Agreed**

13.5 Further detail of the timeframe for consideration of portfolio review reports in early 2010:
- 6 January – submission of reports by Schools;
- 6-13 January – group convened by MI to scrutinise the reports against defined criteria; including cost effectiveness and response to market information; and to formulate recommendations for SPC;
- 13 January – core membership of SPC to consider reports and the recommendations of the small group;

13.6 Decisions on new and discontinued programmes would need to be made by the end of January for confirmation via SPC on 4 February.

**ACTIONS**

13.7 (MI and SJ) Meet with Executive Deans before the Governors meeting to discuss progress in the portfolio review, the expectations of the SPC in relation to action on areas that were not cost-effective and in response to market information; and to discuss the formal of the initial reports from the Schools which were due to be submitted to SPC in January.

13.8 (MI) Make an interim report on portfolio review prior to the Governors meeting on 26 November.

13.9 (MI) Convene the group to consider the School reports and make recommendations to the SPC.

13.10 (KB) Amend the Committee calendar:
- The 13 January SPC meeting to be for the core members;
• The 4 February SPC meeting to be for the core members and the Executive Deans.

Noted

13.11 As well as planning for the year ahead it would be necessary to define a trajectory for financial recovery and sustainability for each School. This could be done through further refinement of the IDM.

14 REQUESTS FOR NEW AND REPLACEMENT STAFF
Noted

14.1 Interim procedures for considering requests for new and replacement staff during 2009-10. (SP 2009 12)

Agreed

14.2 In the interim period before budgeted School plans were in place, all staffing requests would be made via a proforma and submitted to HR. Senior academic and management posts and any post change involving a net increase in funding of more than £5K over 12 months would be referred for decision to the Strategic Planning Committee. Staffing bids from Schools would not be considered before the conclusion of the portfolio review.

15 STUDENT NUMBERS
Noted

15.1 A verbal report from DM on the preparation of the 2008-09 HESA student number outturn and the 2009-10 in-year HESES student number return.

Secretary’s note: Paper SP 2009 13 was withdrawn

15.2 The HESA return for 2008-09 was showing lower fundable numbers than had been forecast in the 2008-09 HESES return made in December 2008. It was necessary to be definitive about the number returned to HESA and the integrity of the processes used to reach it; and work was ongoing to analyse and assure the data. The College was expecting a HEFCE data audit during the session.

15.3 There were indications of a risk of undershooting the 2008-09 fundable student number target, which had included 200 Additional Student Numbers (ASNs), and of associated funding clawback

15.4 It was equally necessary to ensure accurate report of anticipated student numbers for 2009-10. As reported at the last meeting, the target was challenging and included the first tranche of 677 ASNs allocated as part of the SDF award. The most recent student numbers report for 2009-10 indicated a small increase in enrolments but reinforced the point that it would be necessary to recruit well to the January start programmes and to increase student retention and completion to achieve the target.

15.5 Following discussion at the last meeting an estimate of ELQ students had been produced. There were approximately 2,000 FTE ELQ students in the College in 2009-10 compared with 1,500 the previous year.
ACTION
15.6  (DM) Circulate confirmed fundable student numbers for 2008-09 and an updated report on fundable and non-fundable student numbers for 2009-10 with an explanatory note.

16  SDF AWARD: DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES
Noted:
16.1  An initial list of areas for development using Strategic Development funding.  (SP 2009 14)

16.2  Tight control of SDF related spending would need to be exercised and demonstrated, reflecting the business case made to HEFCE and the critical need to control costs and minimise financial deficit.  At least half the award was a loan to be repaid.

16.3  It would be necessary to make a report to F&GPC on strategic development spending already committed and intended spending for the coming year, including allocation of SDF award resource and College resource.  Committed allocations included recruitment of Executive Deans, management development, project management, website development and establishment of the student centre.

16.4  Allocation of resource to proposed new institutional strategic development projects would be considered in the first instance by the Strategic Review Steering Group.  Allocation of resource to new academic developments would depend on the outcome of the SPC’s consideration of portfolio review proposals and School strategic plans.  Redeployment of existing staff should always be the first option before considering making SDF-related proposals.

16.5  Any agreed allocations would appear in the IDM, clearly defined as SDF related and fixed-term.

17  RISK REGISTER
Considered
17.1  The Risk Register for 2009-10, revised following confirmation of the SDF award, as requested by the Audit Committee.  (SP 2009 15)

Agreed
17.2  Identification of a new risk to be added to the Register: increased costs through harmonisation of sessional lecturer terms and conditions as agreed through the National Pay Framework.

Endorsed
17.3  The revised Risk Register 2009-10, for consideration by the Audit Committee.

18  DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS
•  Wednesday 13 January 2010 10.30am
•  Tuesday 9 February 2010 10.00 pm - Executive Deans invited to attend
•  Tuesday 27 April 2010 10.30am – Executive Deans invited to attend
•  Thursday 27 May 2010 2pm

all in the Council Room