BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

13 January 2010

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

In attendance:
Katharine Bock

19 MINUTES
Confirmed
19.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2009.

20 REPORT TO FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
Noted
20.1 SPC’s report to the autumn term meeting of F&GPC following its meetings on 15 October and 3 November 2009

21 ACTION SHEET
Noted
21.1 Progress on implementing the actions agreed at previous meetings (SP 2009 17)
21.2 The Stratford academic group, chaired by the Vice-Master had been convened.
21.3 A report of numbers of alumni returning for further study was being produced by the Directors of Planning and External Relations to aid consideration of a pricing strategy for alumni.
21.4 Executive Deans had nominated colleagues to join the International Group which was being reconvened.

22 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
22.1 The Secretary of State’s letter setting out the annual grant to the Funding Council, although financially stringent, contained messages that were positive for Birkbeck including a statement of the importance of flexible HE provision. It appeared that resources for teaching would be concentrated on STEM (science, engineering, technology and mathematics) subjects.
22.2 The Master was convening a group to explore development of subjects linked to engineering including sustainability and the green agenda.
22.3 The terms of reference for the national fees review had been announced and the leader of the review, Lord Browne, would be visiting the College. Birkbeck was preparing a joint
submission with the Open University, recognising the need to ensure the review took account of the issues of part time and flexible programme funding and finance. The two institutions had a common agenda to promote the interests of part time and non traditional students but had expressed different views on student finance. Birkbeck’s research suggested that replacement of grants with loans would not be as well taken up by part time students as it had been by full time students.

23  **FUNDABLE STUDENT NUMBERS**  
Noted  
23.1 An update on the 2008-09 and 2009-10 fundable student numbers.

2008-09  
23.2 It was confirmed that the College had made its end of year HESA return of 3699 FTE, 164 short of the 3863 target. As the in-year HESES return for that year, made in December 2008, had predicted a higher number (4263), work was ongoing to analyse and assure the data and understand the cause of the variance. Finance and General Purposes Committee and Governors had agreed provision of £500K in the 2008-09 budgets in case of funding clawback.

2009-10  
23.4 The target for 2009-10 was 4596, based on the 2008-09 targets plus the first tranche of 677 ASNs allocated as part of the SDF award. The College had submitted the HESES return in December 2009, predicting 4263 fundable FTEs at the year end; 333 fundable FTE short of the target.

23.5 This indicated that the College would take three rather than two years to recruit the full complement of ASNs and convert the post-ELQ safety net into recurrent funding. In the short term there would be minimal impact on HEFCE funding because of the safety net, but 2011-12 would be the College’s last chance to recover funding through ASN recruitment. Continuing the current drive to increase both recruitment and retention would be crucial.

23.6 These had been more positive reports earlier in the session of increases in the number of new fundable entrants but these did not appear to have translated into the predicted year-end numbers. SPC asked for a breakdown of the causes, noting the critical need for a broad understanding throughout the College and in the Schools of what was needed to achieve student number targets. This included conversion of application to enrolment and the impact of ELQ status; conversion from part-time headcounts to FTE counts; estimated and actual enrolments for shorter courses during the academic year; and how successful completion of the intended programme of study at the year-end was assessed and recorded.

23.7 It was equally critical to understand the financial impact of recruitment short of target and what could be done to offset this.

23.8 **ACTION (Director of Planning):** make a report on these matters to be considered at its next meeting.

**Agreed**

23.9 To discuss the report on fundable student numbers, the national fees review and HE funding cuts and their implications at the next meeting, with the Executive Deans.

24  **INCOME DISTRIBUTION MODEL**
24.1 A note on the principles of income distribution and in-year monitoring of the IDM. *(SP 2009 18).*

Noted

24.2 The note had been drafted in response to a request from Executive Deans for guidance to provide the context for planning and development. These principles would ultimately be included in the Financial Regulations.

24.3 The 2009-10 IDM was being reiterated to take into account the HESES 09 student number return. The updated IDM would be presented to the next meeting of SPC.

24.4 The IDM would undergo several iterations during the annual cycle:
- Setting of budget estimates against strategic plans in the summer term;
- Reiteration in the spring term following the HESES return and also taking into account actual spend so far, providing the opportunity to revise budget allocations if necessary;
- Reconciliation at the end of the financial year in preparation for the issue of financial statements.

24.5 While the College was in deficit, Schools in surplus would need to contribute to offsetting the overall College deficit while Schools in deficit would need to provide plans to get out of deficit. As the College’s overall position improved, there would be scope for Schools to reinvestment surpluses.

24.6 Further guidance was needed on the transfer and use of special fund balances, especially former Departmental and individual accounts with large balances. Some spending that had been charged to special funds under the previous system was being charged to mainstream balances, but some was being charged to special fund accounts.

Agreed

24.7 The principle that special funds should be held at School level with an annual operating spending budget for Departments and individuals. Under a certain threshold, control of special fund balances could be delegated.

24.8 **ACTION (Secretariat)**
- Send the note to Executive Deans for comment;
- Further develop the statement of financial principles for SPC’s consideration at its next meeting, including:
  - proposed policy for special fund accounts;
  - how improvements in surplus generation would be rewarded.

25 **BENCHMARKING**

Considered

25.1 A summary of a recent exercise to benchmark the income from and costs of College activities against comparable institutions. *(SP 2009 19)*

Noted

25.2 The main issue identified during the exercise, conducted by Tribal Education, was the relatively high cost of teaching and the relatively low contribution of teaching activity to Birkbeck’s income. SPE asked for more information on the relative cost and contribution of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.
25.3 The Strategic Review had also identified the need to improve the cost effectiveness of teaching and staff student ratios and this was a criterion of portfolio review.

25.4 Tribal had also provided comparisons of the cost of support services which, although confirming that support services overall were not high compared with peer institutions, had identified areas for improved cost-effectiveness that were being addressed.

25.5 The Audit Committee had asked to receive regular updates on the response to benchmarking and improvements in cost-effectiveness.

25.6 **ACTION (College Secretary): ask Tribal for a breakdown of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching costs for SPC to consider.**

26 **ELQ STRATEGY**

26.1 Considered

26.2 A note on development of College-wide strategy for ELQ students and fees. *(SP 2009 20)*

26.2 The note addressed the ramifications of the ELQ policy after a year. The College had encouraged Schools to develop alternative non ELQ routes for students with degrees and had introduced a modest ELQ premium for 2009-10 (c.15% above the standard fee for programmes except in Science, which had levied a higher undergraduate ELQ premium (40-42%) in 2009-10, seeking to recoup higher proportions of lost HEFCE income because science degrees were in HEFCE price bands B and C attracting more funding for non-ELQ students).

26.3 This followed the campaign against ELQ which had emphasised the value of second degrees for students seeking career change and improvement and in the context of lifelong learning.

26.3 An across the board 15% ELQ premium for 2010-11 had been proposed and endorsed by SPC in October.

26.3 While ELQ numbers overall had reduced in the College, issues had been raised of whether ELQ students were contributing to capacity problems, especially in large undergraduate programmes; and whether Schools would have sufficient opportunity to recoup lost HEFCE income with an across the board 15% premium.

26.4 At postgraduate level the issue was not of capacity, but recouping lost HEFCE income. The case had been made to introduce an ELQ fee for postgraduate taught programmes in price bands B and C. However, HEFCE’s intention to further reduce funding for price band D (most arts and social sciences) had led to the view that price band D programmes should not have an ELQ premium because the lost income from ELQ enrolments was minimal.

**Agreed**

26.5 SPC agreed that it was not appropriate to introduce an admission policy for ELQ students but that the ELQ fee premiums should be reviewed and raised.

26.6 The Recruitment Monitoring Group should continue to monitor the impact of fee increases on recruitment and report to SPC accordingly.
26.7 Schools should consider their pricing strategies for postgraduate taught programmes in price band D, especially where it would be possible to charge higher prices for high quality programmes or programmes with distinctive features.

26.8 **ACTION (Secretariat): present to the next meeting**
- proposals for raised ELQ premium fees for undergraduate programme
- proposals for a modest ELQ fee for postgraduate taught programmes in HEFCE price bands B and C

27 **PORTFOLIO REVIEW**

**Considered**

27.1 The report of the working group convened by the Pro-Vice-Masters for Strategy and Special Projects and Learning and Teaching on the Schools' initial reports on portfolio review.

**Noted**

27.2 The group had considered the reports from the perspectives of learning and teaching strategy, market opportunities, student numbers planning and financial viability. It had identified a number of College wide issues to be pursued as well as specific feedback for each School.

27.3 The working group commended the reports, noting that they had built a good foundation for the significant amount of work still to be done.

27.4 Larger and more concrete projections for student number growth would be necessary in the next stage of planning, to enable the College to secure financial sustainability. SPC commended the development of “generic” multi pathway degrees as proposed by Arts, SSHP and BEI. Additional growth areas were likely to be interdisciplinary and, in particular, a strategy for the development of STEM subjects was needed.

27.5 SPC discussed progression and entry points, noting the need both to ensure there were no unnecessary barriers to entry and to ensure that students were appropriately academically prepared for their programmes.

**Agreed**

27.6 Prospective students who were not eligible for the programme to which they had applied should be offered suitable alternatives without being required to re-apply. The Certificate of Higher Education modules and the Higher Education Introductory Studies programme would be important in enabling this. This principle should be integrated into the development admissions policy for the College:

27.7 One area requiring a College-level strategy was further development of Foundation Degrees, including routes of progression from Certificates of HE and to other degrees.

27.8 Other imperatives identified by the working group included:
- To promote programme development for 2010 launch wherever possible and to continue the student recruitment drive;
- To monitor the success of the existing UCAS entry three-year degrees before confirming further developments in this area;
- To link potential developments at Stratford to the specification of space and facilities in the new building;
• To ensure integration of learning and teaching strategies and different modes of teaching into programme development proposals, paying particular attention to retention and completion;
• To consider redeployment of resources when considering new developments

27.9 A number of potential programme closures had been identified in the portfolio review reports. SPC noted these but confirmed that the formal procedure for programme closure would need to be followed.

27.10 SPC thanked Schools and the working group for their work which had led to significant progress in a short time.

27.11 ACTION (Pro Vice Master Strategy and Special Projects)
• Meet with the Executive Deans (and the Master as appropriate) to give detailed feedback on portfolio review;
• Draft a note on:
  o College wide areas for review and development arising from portfolio review;
  o Next steps following the initial phase of portfolio review for consideration and discussion with the Executive Deans at the next meeting of SPC.

27.12 ACTION (Pro Vice Masters Learning and Teaching and Engagement and Lifelong Learning): convene a working group to make recommendations on the development of foundation degrees

28 SCHOOL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE PLANS
Considered
28.1 A note outlining the process through which School and professional services strategic plans would be created, discussed, budgeted and agreed (SP 2009 21)

Agreed
28.2 To send the note to Executive Deans for comment prior to SPC’s formal approval of the planning template and procedure at its next meeting.

29 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS
• Tuesday 27 April 2010 10.30am
• Thursday 27 May 2010 2.00pm

Signed……………………..
Date……………………….