BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

15 October 2009

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

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

In attendance:
Katharine Bock, Esther McKaig.

Apologies for absence:
Costas Douzinas, Tricia King.

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE, ROLES AND REMITS

Received:
1.1 Terms of Reference and Scheme of Membership. (SP 2009 01)

1.2 A note of the roles of the Pro-Vice-Masters, the Executive Deans and the School Executives in relation to the Committee’s business. (SP 2009 02)

Noted:
1.3 The Chair welcomed the members and the Executive Deans to the first meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee. The SPC had been established to enable the Master, Vice-Master, Pro-Vice-Masters and senior College officers to work together to determine the direction and strategy of the College. To facilitate this, Executive Deans would be invited regularly to meetings, together with other representatives as appropriate. The core members would also meet termly to scrutinise School and central service plans and performance against objectives, reporting to the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

2 THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF BIRKBECK

Received:
2.1 The Master’s annual paper on the strategic direction of Birkbeck. (SP 2009 03)

Noted:
2.2 The paper had been endorsed by Governors at their strategic meeting on 29 September.

2.3 Stratford was an important objective which needed to be considered as an integral part of the College rather than a separate project. From the point of view of HEFCE, Stratford was a defining part of Birkbeck’s identity. It would be necessary to work collectively to identify and embed an academic programme for Stratford within each School.
2.4 The Vice-Master was convening a College-wide group with responsibility for academic programme development at Stratford. There should be an academic lead for Stratford in each School (for instance, the Assistant Dean for recruitment and retention).

**ACTION:**

2.5 (PD) Establish a Stratford academic development group with members from all Schools.

**Noted:**

2.6 Policy relating to the Research Excellence Framework would be developed over the year and would take into account both the need for a tactical approach to maximise research funding and the inclusive policy for submission that was previously successfully adopted by the College for RAE 2008.

3 **PLANNING CYCLE**

**Noted:**

3.1 The annual planning cycle and key activities and dates for 2009-10. *(SP 2009 04)*

3.2 2009-10 would not be a standard year in terms of planning and budget management. Portfolio review was the overriding priority for the Autumn term and the timeframe to conduct it was limited. Management and information and budget monitoring tools would be under development over the year, but Schools should conduct portfolio review using the available information and to the timescales that had been identified.

3.3 The School plans would be five-year plans with annual iterations, giving opportunities for review in future years, but now was the critical point of opportunity to identify areas for change and growth, so that the implementation work could begin.

3.4 Objectives identified by the Pro-Vice Masters in their strategic areas could be defined either through discussion with the Master and Executive Deans or through the pre-existing individual College strategies linked to strategic portfolios (i.e. Learning and Teaching Strategy, Research Strategy). The Autumn term was the appropriate point for Pro-Vice-Masters to highlight areas for Schools to take account of during their annual planning.

**ACTION:**

3.5 (Executive Deans) Initiate portfolio review.

4 **PORTFOLIO REVIEW**

**Noted:**

4.1 The information pack supporting portfolio review. *(SP 2009 05)*

4.2 The pack contained the timeline for review and reporting back; a template guiding the review process; and guidance on HEFCE grant and fee income. The template defined the potential outcomes of portfolio review:

- Proposed new/withdrawn programmes and modules;
- Proposed recruitment targets for new and existing programmes (including %ELQ and %completions);
- Proposed fee tier for new and existing programmes;
- Projected income for new and existing programmes;
- Projected changes to costs and assessment of whether the level of projected income covers costs.
**ACTIONS:**

4.3 (MI) Publish the information pack on the Strategic Review website.

4.4 (Executive Deans) Inform staff about the availability of the information pack.

Noted:

4.5 Key dates for the next stages of portfolio review and the development of School strategic plans:
- October-December 2009: Schools roll out portfolio review across the full range of their programmes.
- January 6 2010: each School Executive to provide an initial report back on progress identifying proposed new programmes/areas for expansion, projected student numbers and fee income, projected cost savings and indications of modules or programmes where modification or withdrawal was recommended.
- January 13 2010: Strategic Planning Committee to consider these reports.
- January 27 2010: each School to complete templates with recommendations on each programme or programme cluster.
- February 4 2010: Strategic Planning Committee to consider the templates and recommendations.
- February 28 2010: deadline for new programme proposals to be submitted for outline approval and for inclusion of new programmes in the college prospectus for 2010-11.
- March-April 2010, recommendations of portfolio review to be fed into fully-budgeted School strategic plans for 2010-11.
- 27 April 2010: Strategic Planning Committee to consider School strategic plans.

Secretary's note: this timeline should also take account of Governors’ request for a progress report at their meeting on 26 November.

5 **INCOME DISTRIBUTION MODEL 2009-10**

Noted:

5.1 A verbal update on progress in finalising the Income Distribution Model 2009-10.

5.2 The final iteration was close to completion. The headline deficit had not changed significantly from the £1.8 forecast deficit reported to Governors in July 2009. There were some differences in School income and expenditure compared with the previous model and these would be set out in an accompanying note. The model took into account an anticipated pay increase of 1%.

5.3 This would be the final iteration of the IDM for 2009-10. The model would be re-issued during the year for monitoring purposes, including after the HESES fundable student numbers return in December.

5.4 The Committee discussed the action to be taken if Schools did not agree with the budget levels. Some variations were the outcome of mapping data from the old to the new budget system and would only be an issue during the transitional year 2009-10. The academic group overseeing the IDM would be reconvened to discuss resolution of these issues and areas requiring further development. Executive Deans would be invited to nominate members of the academic group.
5.5 The full IDM included indicative Department-level distributions of income and expenditure, but it was the responsibility of the Deans to manage interdepartmental variations in surplus and deficit generation.

**ACTIONS:**

5.6 (PW and DM) Complete the 2009-10 IDM.

5.7 (DM) Reconvene the academic group overseeing IDM development and invite Executive Deans to nominate members of the group.

5.8 (PW and DM) Submit final iteration of the IDM to F&GPC including a note of further developments and issues to resolve for the 2010-11 IDM.

6 **OBJECTIVES AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

**Considered:**

6.1 Proposed objectives and performance indicators monitoring progress towards achieving them. *(SP 2009 06)*

**Noted:**

6.2 This was the first iteration of a document aiming to bring together a coherent set of objectives including College priorities and criteria linked to the Strategic Development Fund award as well as relevant HE sector benchmarks.

6.3 The objectives encompassed the College’s broad strategic aims in the following areas:

- Teaching, recruitment and retention;
- Research;
- Tuition Fees and Bursaries;
- Cost Effectiveness, Value for Money and Service Improvement;
- Financial.

They were complementary to the detailed objectives set out in separate individual strategies for each area (i.e. Learning and Teaching, Research).

6.4 The performance indicators would be developed for regular monitoring by the SPC and reporting to F&GPC and Governors. They would also feed into a broader set of Key Performance Indicators that had already been developed for Governors in light of guidance issued by the Committee of University Chairmen (CUC).

6.5 The College’s staff costs expressed as a proportion of total income had been a focal point during discussions with HEFCE over the development of the SDF bid. Although factors such as halls of residence and proportion of science needed to be taken into consideration when comparing Birkbeck with other HE institutions, the College’s staff costs were considered to higher than others in the sector, including 1994 group institutions. The aim was to reduce the proportion of staff costs by increasing income and controlling costs, linked to reduced reliance on HEFCE grants and increased fee income. The principal indicator was thus income per £K of staff costs.

6.6 HEFCE’s criteria included annual targets and the College would make regular reports on these.

**Endorsed:**

6.7 Objectives and performance indicators, for further development and submission to Finance and General Purposes Committee and Governors.
7 FEES, SCHOLARSHIPS AND BURSARIES

Considered:

7.1 Strategy for fees, scholarships and bursaries. (SP 2009 07)

7.2 Proposals for fee tier levels for 2010-11. (SP 2009 08)

Noted:

7.3 Since 2006 the College had incrementally raised its undergraduate part time fee towards the pro rata equivalent of the full time fee charged by most HE institutions. The fee strategy set out to consolidate this approach into an integrated fee, scholarship and bursary strategy, with the aim of increasing fee revenue by charging higher fees to students who were able to pay, reflecting the quality of programmes; and to operate an enhanced, structured bursary programme to improve access for students less able to pay. This would extend to postgraduate as well as undergraduate provision.

7.4 As part of the implementation of the strategy a Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee would be formed, reporting to the Strategic Planning Committee and also making reports to ABExCo.

7.5 The proposed fee tiers put into practice the approach recommended in the fee, scholarship and bursary strategy for three tiers of fee for degree programmes and for CertHE modules. There were five tiers for the full time postgraduate taught programmes, reflecting the broader range of fees currently charged. The tier levels had been identified by consolidating the existing standard and premium fee rates and applying percentage increases to bring the undergraduate part time fee closer, pro-rata, to the current full time cap of £3225. Postgraduate and international fees would increase by 3%.

7.6 Schools would assign fees to tiers as part of the portfolio review, reporting back to the Strategic Planning Committee as noted in Minute 4 above.

Endorsed:

7.7 The fees bursaries and scholarships strategy and the proposed fee levels for 2010-11, for approval by F&GPC and Governors.

ACTIONS:

7.8 (TK) Establish strategy for communicating the new fee levels to students.

7.9 (TK) Continue to monitor trends in recruitment and potential effects of fee changes through the Recruitment Monitoring Group.

7.10 (KB) Ensure consistency between the full time undergraduate fee and the national £3225 cap.

Noted:

7.11 International students risked losses from currency conversions if required to pay fees in sterling. The possibility was raised of charging a dollar rate international fee, although this would transfer the currency conversion risk from the student to the College.

ACTION:

7.12 (KB) Refer consideration of dollar rate international fees to the International Group, with information on the approach taken by other London/1994 group institutions.
Noted:

7.13 The possibility was raised of a fee incentive for alumni re-enrolling for higher level programmes.

ACTIONS:

7.14 (DM) Produce and circulate data on how many undergraduate alumni currently progress to postgraduate programmes.

7.15 (TK) Produce and circulate data on alumni re-enrolling having been contacted through the fundraising campaign.

8 STUDENT NUMBERS

Received:

8.1 An estimate of 2009-10 student numbers against target and a note on the funding implications. (SP 2009 09)

8.2 Recruitment levels were significantly higher than the previous year but the target, including the first tranche of Additional Student Numbers secured through the SDF bid, was demanding. Achieving the target would enable conversion of ASNs to recurrent teaching funding. To achieve the target, it would be necessary to increase student retention and completion.

8.3 The College had identified improved student retention and completion as an important objective requiring significant work. However, wherever possible, Schools should identify practical immediate steps to improve retention and completion. The College-level non-completion rate was 27%, based on 2008-09 numbers, although there were variations between subject areas.

8.4 Successful recruitment to the CertHE programmes commencing in January would also be an important factor in meeting the target.

8.5 The significant rise in recruitment had led to full classes and some capacity issues had been reported. These could be addressed through closer alignment of expected class size with room allocation and through management of the balance of ELQ and non-ELQ students via fee levels and provision of alternative programmes.

ACTIONS:

8.6 (DM/TK) Include the percentage of ELQ students in the next student recruitment report.

8.7 (DM) Confirm retention and completion levels through the 2008-09 HESES return.