BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
20 October 2010

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

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

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Esther McKaig, Nick Head

Apologies for absence
Costas Douzinas, David McGhie

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE
Received
1.1 The Terms of Reference and Scheme of Membership of the Strategic Planning Committee (SP 2010 01)

2 MINUTES
Confirmed
2.1 The Minutes of the last meeting

3 REPORT TO F&GPC
Noted
SPC’s summer term report made to the Finance and General Purposes Committee (SP 2010 02)

4 ACTION SHEET
Noted
Action taken following the last meeting (SP 2010 03)

4.1 The Learning Support Officer role had been defined and the individual LSOs were about to be appointed: one in each School as agreed.

4.2 The Teaching Assistant role had been graded at grade 6.

4.3 The Recruitment Monitoring Group papers were being circulated as agreed.

Agreed
4.4 To give further consideration to incentivisation mechanisms later in the session.
5 THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF BIRKBECK
Considered

5.1 The Master’s annual paper on the strategic direction of Birkbeck (SP 2010 04)

Noted

5.2 The paper had been endorsed by Governors on 13 October and would be presented to staff on 26 October.

5.3 The external landscape had changed significantly since the report was drafted with the publication of the Browne Review of Student Finance and the Government’s Comprehensive Spending Review.

5.4 Some initial challenges for Birkbeck were
- planning for the future given that the HEFCE T funding system was likely to reduce or disappear;
- responding to the likely need for some ringfenced student numbers for students without traditional university entry qualifications, linked to widening participation objectives;
- pressure on the estate, in particular teaching space as student numbers grow further.

5.5 The issue of space had been raised at the Governors meeting and was linked to opportunities to step up and focus fundraising for better teaching space. The immediate estates strategy, for which there was a budget, was to finish the relocations and refurbishments identified during restructuring. Further work and expansion would depend on available funds.

5.6 Possible involvement in part time HE delivery outside London had also been discussed at Governors. There were political reasons for making Birkbeck’s expertise available outside London and to take the opportunity for expansion when the focus was on contraction and cuts. One model would be to act in an advisory role, working with a provider delivering locally with appropriate quality assurance measures in place. Analysis of feasibility, including existing provision and potential demand, was taking place. Members noted likely opportunities linked to professional training; and the existence of postgraduate Birkbeck student groups studying at centres outside London.

**ACTION (Academic Registrar)**

5.7 List existing activity in centres outside London.

6 STUDENT FINANCE AND COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEWS
Considered

6.1 An outline of the immediate impact of the Browne Review of student fees and finance and the Comprehensive Spending Review (SP 2010 05)

Noted

6.2 The Browne Review had reported on 12 October recommending removal of the HE tuition fee cap and revision of the student loan system. HEFCE, QAA, OFFA and OIAHE would merge into a single Higher Education Council. Students would finance the increased fees via state loans. An important positive aspect for Birkbeck was that part time students would have access to the fee loan system.
6.3 The government Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) would be announced on 20 October. It appeared likely that T funding for most subjects would cease, with the expectation that institutions would in future get the income from increased tuition fees if the Browne Review recommendations were taken up.

6.4 Much of the detail of the implementation of Browne was still to be resolved and Birkbeck would need to influence this wherever possible, for example with BIS and UCAS on areas including access to loans for ELQ students, older students and students already earning over the threshold for payback.

6.5 The Browne Review included a proposed mechanism for student numbers overall to be regulated using an entry qualification tariff along the lines of the UCAS tariff, but the extent and detail of regulation had not yet been determined. This was an area in which Birkbeck would seek to influence policy, stressing the importance of admitting students without traditional entry qualifications but with the aptitude to benefit from HE.

**ACTION (PVM Student Experience)**

6.6 Re-open dialogue with UCAS to discuss the development of a post-Browne tariff system and how this would work for part time students and non traditional entry qualifications.

6.7 The case would also be made for the recommended intensity of study threshold for access to loans to be reduced from 33% (40 credits) to 25% (30 credits).

6.8 SPC was pleased to note the overall very positive outcome of Browne for Birkbeck, in that although full time students would be worse off many part time students would be better off.

6.9 The impact on research was not yet clear cut. The CSR cuts involved areas responsible for both the HEFCE QR budget and the research council budgets, although no announcement had been made about how the budgets would be administered or whether the new Higher Education Council would administer QR funding.

6.10 Browne and CSR both posed immediate and long term challenges for many English universities who would need to ensure financial sustainability to offset the risk of closure or merger. The possibility was raised of competition arising from HE institutions entering part time provision to make up numbers. Initial views were that this was more likely from less prestigious institutions, representing less direct competition.

6.11 There were mixed indications on whether, how and how much the UK HE market would become marketised with differentiated fees. For Birkbeck, the fee strategy would be crucial and would need to take account of the complexity of student decision making between full and part time options, as well as the extent to which students would be prepared to pay higher fees.

6.12 The quality of the student experience would also become increasingly important in an environment of higher fees. Apart from the general increase in litigiousness being experienced across the sector, students had legitimate expectations of service levels and access to information and answers. SPC agreed that student feedback and
complaints should be analysed to gain a deeper understanding of student expectations.

**ACTION (Academic Registrar/PVM Learning and Teaching)**

6.13 Make a report on the nature of student complaints and feedback

Noted

6.14 Although the situation would continue to unfold over the coming weeks, with parliamentary debate on Browne in the autumn and announcements from BIS and HEFCE about 2011-12 grant from late 2010 - early 2011, it was critical to identify and prepare for the College’s response without delay.

Agreed

6.15 The College’s senior management (SPC and Deans) should discuss in more detail the strategic response to the new fees and funding environment, including the balance between undergraduate and postgraduate programme development, pricing strategy and how to protect and benefit from the College’s unique mission and market position. It would also be essential to engage with the Assistant Deans in identifying and implementing strategy.

**ACTIONS (Secretariat)**

6.16 Schedule an “away day” meeting for SPC and Deans later in the autumn term.

6.17 Prepare a report on the actions and decisions needed now and during the year, including portfolio review, pricing strategy and financial planning.

7 **TUITION FEES**

Considered

7.1 An initial report on the impact of tuition fee changes in 2010-11 and proposals for agreeing fees for 2011-12 and establishing strategy for 2012-13 and beyond *(SP 2010 06)*

7.2 The Browne review had altered the issues influencing the development of fee strategy. The pre-Browne priority, identified during the Strategic Review, was for undergraduate fees to be raised to the pro rata equivalent of the full time capped fee and for the College overall to charge market rate fees and reduce its reliance on grant income. There had been a 20% increase in first year undergraduate fees between 2009-10 and 2010-11.

7.3 The business plan identified during the SDF grant bid was for a second 20% increase between 2010-11 and 2011-12, which would bring the baseline undergraduate fee pro rata equivalent with the full time capped fee in what was likely to be the last year of the cap.

7.4 The new issue was to identify what strategy to adopt given that the full time undergraduate fees charged by HE institutions were likely to double after 2011-12, a change which would also have an impact on postgraduate fee strategy.

7.5 Although in the long term HEFCE policies and regulations around fundable student numbers would change and possibly disappear, it would be critical to maintain the recruitment drive for fundable numbers this year and next, to maintain eligibility for
income during the gap between the imminent funding cuts and the introduction of higher fees.

7.6 SPC agreed that it was too early to make an irreversible decision on fees, given the changing external environment. An appropriate time to finalise the 2011-12 fee tiers would be January 2011.

7.7 In the meantime consideration should start on communicating likely fee changes to potential students. It was not sensible to quote the previous year’s fee when the fee was likely to be increased substantially.

7.8 In considering fee strategy for 2012-13 and beyond (post-Browne) possible changes to the College’s modular portfolio to increase student eligibility for loans available at more than 33% of intensity of study should also be taken into account.

Agreed

7.9 Further consideration would be delegated to the new Fee Bursary and Scholarship Committee which would be asked to report back to the awayday and with recommendations to the next meeting of SPC on 19 January.

8 POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTSHIPS
Considered

8.1 Proposals for the governance, management and review of postgraduate research studentships (SP 2010 07)

8.2 Integrated consideration of postgraduate research studentships was needed. Although opinions had been expressed that the PGR studentship offer was not generous, evaluation of spending had shown that more than a third of PGR fee income was being spent on studentships. This was partly caused by commitments inherited by Schools from the discontinued central College Research Studentship scheme. It was not financially viable to continue this level of commitment.

8.3 The proposal was to verify existing commitments, model their decaying out over the next 3-4 years and make appropriate allowance in the IDM, while establishing new policy going forward for a percentage of income from new entrant fees to be set aside for studentships, also taking into account opportunities not currently being fully realised for partial studentships, targeted international studentships and postgraduate taught studentships.

8.4 It was also necessary to establish a baseline, to be identified on the basis of target new entrant tuition fee income for 2010-11, for new studentships for 2011-12 to enable Schools to advertise at the same time as other HE institutions and funding bodies to compete for good students.

ACTION (Pro Vice Master Strategy)

8.5 Establish new studentship spending for 2010-11 as noted above with Schools and report back to the next meeting of SPC.

Agreed

8.6 Development of a framework for future allocation of postgraduate studentships to be delegated to the Fee Bursary and Scholarship Committee.
9 FEE BURSARY AND SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE
Considered and agreed
9.1 Proposals for the establishment of a Fee, Bursary and Scholarship subcommittee reporting to the SPC (SP 2010 08)

9.2 As noted in minute 7 above, the Committee should immediately consider what tuition fees to charge for 2011-12, as well as the development of a post-Browne pricing strategy, and report to the awayday meeting and make recommendations to the next meeting of SPC.

9.3 Membership would include one representative of each School, either the Dean or School Manager, as well as of the International Office.

9.4 SPC endorsed a proposal that the international part time fee should be, pro rata, the same as the ELQ fee.

10 STUDENT RECRUITMENT
Considered
10.1 A report on the student recruitment cycle 2010-11 (SP 2010 09)
10.2 An update on actual and projected student numbers for 2010-11 (SP 2010 10)

Noted
10.3 There had been a very positive change in engagement with student recruitment over the year and this was reflected in the increased levels of intake on programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Recruitment to modules had been lower than target, with effects related to the recession and the increased fee for ELQ students apparent.

10.4 Numbers were changing daily due to late enrolments. A more accurate picture would be available at the end of October and would be reported to SPC on 8 November.

11 CROSS COLLEGE AND INTERDISCIPLINARY DEGREES
Considered and agreed
11.1 A proposal to establish a working party to develop cross-College and interdisciplinary degrees (SP 2010 11)

Noted
11.2 The proposal was intended to promote development of programmes to increase student recruitment. To maximise engagement form Schools and departments it would be necessary to demonstrate how fee and HEFCE income follows students in the IDM

ACTION (Planning and Business Systems)
11.3 Circulate a document demonstrating how the IDM allocates income by student in interdisciplinary programmes.

ACTION (Pro Vice Master Learning and Teaching)
11.4 Convene the working party on cross-College and interdisciplinary degrees.
12 INCOME DISTRIBUTION MODEL 2009-10
Considered
12.1 A report on income and expenditure in the Income Distribution Model compared with estimates and with the in-year report made in February 2010 ([SP 2010 12])

Noted
12.2 The College level outturn was £625K deficit compared with £1.08M deficit reported in February and the School positions were similar to those reported in February, demonstrating effective control of the budgets during the year.

13 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Considered
13.1 Updated Key Performance Indicators. ([SP 2010 13])

Noted
13.2 The KPIS included College objectives and objectives set with HEFCE during the SDF bid development.

**ACTION (Secretariat)**
13.3 Circulate the monitoring report made to HEFCE on the SDF objectives.

14 STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE BUSINESS 2010-11
Noted
14.1 Business expected to be considered by SPC at this session ([SP 2010 14])

15 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS
Noted
15.1 Executive Deans are invited to attend all meetings this session
- Awayday Tuesday 7 December 2010 at 10.00am
- Monday 8 November 2010 at 10.30am
- Wednesday 19 January 2011 at 2pm
- Tuesday 15 February 2011 at 2pm
- Thursday 5 May 2011 at 2pm
- Wednesday 1 June 2011 at 2pm