BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
27 April 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.

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

In attendance:
Katharine Bock

44 MINUTES AND REPORT
Confirmed:
44.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2010, amended to record apologies for absence from Sue Jackson.

Noted:
44.2 The SPC’s Report to the last meeting of F&GPC. (SP 2009 35)

45 ACTION SHEET
Noted:
45.1 Progress implementing the actions agreed at the last meeting. (SP 2009 36)

46 FUNDABLE STUDENT RECRUITMENT
Noted:
46.1 Following the report on fundable student recruitment made to the last meeting, the College had received further communications from HEFCE on full time recruitment. Birkbeck had been notified of a fine levied during a sector-wide exercise responding to over-recruitment of full time undergraduate students in 2009-10.

46.2 The fine related to recruitment of students on graduate diplomas. Having sought clarification with the funding council, the College had been advised to return these students and students on accelerated degree programmes in future as part time but with a full time equivalent ratio of one, provided they were being taught in the evening.

46.3 The College would appeal against the fine for 2009-10. It would also be necessary to confirm the immigration and student loan status of students on accelerated degree programmes.

ACTION (Academic Registrar)
46.4 Investigate the eligibility of students on accelerated degree programmes and UCAS programmes for immigration visas and student loans.

47 HEFCE FUNDING 2010-11
Noted:
47.1 Provisional recurrent HEFCE funding for 2010-11. (SP 2009 37)
Notification of funding for 2010-11 had already been reported to F&GPC. The grant cut was smaller than anticipated (0.7%). £723K of moderation funding, intended to mitigate changes caused by changes in HEFCE funding policy, had been allocated. This roughly equated to the loss from the reduction in funding for postgraduate taught programmes in the arts and social sciences (Price Band D).

As agreed at the last meeting, a working group was considering pricing strategy to make up losses from the Price Band D policy change. The group would report back to SPC following a second meeting in May 2010.

**NATIONAL REVIEW OF STUDENT FUNDING AND FINANCE**

Noted:

The Master reported that the national (Browne) review of student funding and finance had entered its second phase and was calling for further evidence. Birkbeck would be responding in partnership with the Open University, as had been the case following the first call for submissions. A *Birkbeck Briefing* document, setting out the College’s initial response to the review and its position on part time fees and funding, had been circulated to stakeholders and opinion formers.

**STUDENT RETENTION STRATEGY**

Considered and approved:

Proposed student retention strategy. (SP 2009 38)

The strategy had emerged from discussions with the Assistant Deans for learning and teaching and recruitment and retention. The focus of the strategy was first year undergraduate students and in particular their first few weeks, where rates of withdrawal were highest. Proposed activities included supporting transition into university, pedagogies, support and advice networks and learning support. The work would be co-ordinated by a steering group reporting to SPC.

**LEARNING SUPPORT**

Noted:

As noted at the last meeting of SPC (Minute 36.6), a review of learning support and the role of the Learning Support Officers had been conducted. There were seven Learning Support Officers in the College with varying FTEs and roles, recruited at different times and from different original funding sources. Not all Schools and Departments had a Learning Support Officer. It had been difficult to identify any measurable effect on student success, although the role was highly valued by Schools and Departments who had a Learning Support Officer.

The review had concluded that the College should continue to have Learning Support Officers and should take a more strategic and systematic approach, with central definition and co-ordination of the role, linked to delivery of the student retention objectives and ensuring more equal access for all Schools. Two options were proposed to deliver this:

- **Option 1:** A model similar to that used by the Library for Subject Librarians, with a centrally managed unit of Learning Support Officers each assigned to one or more Schools, reporting to the Director of the Centre for Learning and Professional Development with a second reporting line to the School(s)
- **Option 2:** Learning Support Officers assigned to and managed by each School, with a second reporting line to the Director of the Centre for Learning and Professional Development

SPC discussed the options and noted that, while the Learning Support Officer role was likely to be most efficiently deployed in large programmes, Schools should be free to determine the programmes and subject areas in which to deploy the resource.
50.4 The Committee also noted the relationship between general learning support and e-learning support. The approach being taken was to integrate e-learning support within the overall student retention strategy in the same way as the College’s e-learning strategy was being integrated with the overall learning and teaching strategy.

50.5 In redefining the Learning Support Officer role it would be necessary to take the Assistant School Manager (recruitment and retention) role into account to ensure the two roles were complementary and did not overlap. The School reporting line should be to the Executive Dean or School Manager.

**Agreed:**

50.6 To refocus the Learning Support Officer role as set out in Option 2 above.

**ACTION (PVM Learning and Teaching; Director of HR)**

50.7 Define the refocused Learning Support Officer role in consultation with the Executive Deans and taking into account the points noted above.

51 **BURSARY AND SCHOLARSHIP FRAMEWORK**

**Considered:**

51.1 A draft policy framework for bursaries and scholarships. *(SP 2009 39)*

**Noted:**

15.2 The paper set out a proposed framework for the undergraduate bursary scheme and discussion points for the development of the postgraduate framework.

**Undergraduate bursary scheme**

51.3 The undergraduate scheme would be available to students in receipt of the State Part Time Student Grant (PTG). The PTG was lower than the Birkbeck first year tuition fee and, given that the tuition fee would be rising, the gap between grant and fee was likely to grow year on year. Three options for “top up” funding had been costed:

- Option 1 supplement full and partial PTG grant holders to the full tuition fee;
- Option 2 supplement partial PTG grant holders to the full PTG grant level;
- Option 3 supplement full PTG grant holders to the full tuition fee and allocate partial supplements pro rata to partial grant holders.

51.4 Option 1 would allow for a strong and positive message about “topping up” for the student recruitment drive and the submission to the Browne review. The option had been costed at £1.2M for 2010-11 based on forecast headcounts, PTG1 and tuition fee levels. The costings would be updated annually to reflect student recruitment and updated student number forecasts.

51.5 The undergraduate scheme would continue to be operated at College level and would be included in the Income Distribution Model as a central indirect cost charged per undergraduate FTE.

**Agreed:**

51.6 The undergraduate student bursary framework as proposed in SP 2009 39.

51.7 Option 1 (supplement full and partial PTG holders to the full tuition fee) to be adopted for 2010-11, together with a commitment to continue to apply option 1 to these students during the period of their degree enrolment, provided they were eligible for PTG.

51.8 To review, annually, updated forecasts and costings prior to making a decision on the option to be applied to new students in following years.

**Noted:**

**Postgraduate scholarship framework**
51.9 The proposed postgraduate scholarship framework was a menu of fee remission scholarships for home/EU postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students for Schools to choose and fund. The allocation of scholarships would be included in the School plan - and thus the Income Distribution Model - as a separate non pay expenditure line.

51.10 The paper included a note of:
- The commitments under the former College schemes (College Research Studentship and Birkbeck International Research Studentship) that had been transferred to Schools;
- The Bloomsbury PhD studentships, which involved allocation of two fee remissions with stipend each year, chosen via a College wide competitive process, which would continue to be managed as a College level commitment.

Agreed:

51.11 SPC discussed whether there should be College guidance on the appropriate number and range of studentships to be allocated. It agreed that guidance would be helpful on:
- The appropriate proportion of scholarships to overall fee income/student numbers
- Use of scholarships in postgraduate taught programmes to support progression to research degrees
- Use of teaching assistantships in conjunction with research degree scholarships
- Focus of resource on non ELQ students

ACTION (Academic Registrar, PVM Strategy)
51.12 Develop College guidelines on allocation of postgraduate scholarships as noted in 50.11 above, and agree with the Chair for circulation to Schools

ACTION (PVM Research and Director HR)
51.13 Identify an indicative salary range for Teaching Assistants for Schools to use for planning (prior to the longer term review of the Teaching Assistant role)

ACTION (Schools)
51.14 Include proposed spending on postgraduate scholarships in the next iteration of the strategic plans.

Noted:

51.15 The International group had commenced discussion of policy for international bursaries and scholarships.

ACTION (Refer to International group)
51.16 Consider and report back on proposals for international bursaries and scholarships.

52 STUDENT NUMBER TARGETS AND FORECASTS

Considered:

52.1 College level forecast student numbers and student recruitment targets for the period 2010-14, drawn from the Schools’ strategic plans. (SP 2009 40)

Noted:

52.2 The forecast numbers were encouraging, indicating fulfilment of the numbers needed to convert post-ELQ safety net funding into recurrent teaching funding by the last-chance year of 2011-12. Schools had also forecast significant growth beyond that target.

52.3 SPC commended the Schools and asked them to continue their drive to deliver the forecast numbers and to carry on planning for growth. Success would increase income and demonstrate Birkbeck’s significance and capacity for growth.
52.4 There were risks involved in delivering targets, given that recruitment outcomes could vary from forecasts. Student recruitment would be closely monitored and managed by the Student Recruitment Monitoring Group reporting as appropriate to SPC. The group would use the forecast numbers in the School plans as targets for enrolment. The planning model had already taken into account predicted rates of fundable completion. Course by course student number forecasts were being compiled and would be issued as soon as complete.

52.5 Schools had made conservative initial ELQ forecasts in their plans, mainly based on standstill numbers. If the actual rate of student number growth brought about capacity issues, it would be necessary to revisit the ELQ targets.

53 STRATEGIC PLANS

School plans
Considered:

53.1 The School narrative strategic plans including strategies for learning and teaching, research and staffing. (Reserved business: circulated only to SPC members and Executive Deans) (SP 2009 41)

53.2 A note on issues arising from the plans and the next stage of the planning process (SP 2009 41A)

Noted:

53.3 The plans set out clear and sensibly argued strategies for each School, marking a very positive development in the transformation of the College.

53.4 The research structures within the five Schools had developed and improved considerably since the Schools were launched. The narratives indicated the extent of purposeful work going on in research. Schools were commended for this. The College research strategy was also under development and was expected to be circulated in autumn 2010.

53.5 The PVM (Learning and Teaching) would discuss feedback on specific learning and teaching matters with the Assistant Deans (Learning and Teaching) at their next scheduled meeting.

53.6 The staffing projections in the plans were indications of strategic direction rather than specific proposals for individual posts. During the current transitional period, requests for new and replacement posts should continue to be made through business cases linked to delivery of strategy and submitted to the Master as Chair of SPC for approval. Once the new structure and planning processes were fully established, the aim was to integrate staffing proposals in the annual update of the School strategic plans, with in-year variations approved by SPC or SPC Chair’s action.

53.7 An important next stage in the process would be for Schools to estimate their non-staff and bought-in teaching budgets for consideration by SPC at its next meeting. The process should be based on estimating the cost of planned activities and identifying areas for cost savings rather than rolling over the previous year’s spending.

53.8 A first draft of the IDM would be presented for discussion by SPC at its next meeting. As well as the Schools’ setting of bursary and scholarship, non-staff and bought-in teaching budgets noted above, work was in progress to estimate other costs including the Senate House Library subscription; external teaching room hire and premises maintenance. There would be individual meetings with Schools and planning/strategy/finance colleagues to discuss these estimates in the context of each School’s budget before circulation of the IDM.
As noted above there were risks involved in delivering the ambitious student recruitment targets. A moderating mechanism would be added to the IDM, in the form of a contingency budget line based on the difference between best case and worse case outcomes.

**Approved:**

The outline strategies and targets in the strategic plans, subject to resolution of these budget issues and routine processes of checking and verifying the numbers.

**Agreed:**

To consider final versions of the narrative plans at the next meeting, with a view to then making them available to staff on the intranet.

**Incentivisation**

Considered:

A proposed framework for Schools to set incentivisation mechanisms (set out within paper SP 2009 41A)

Noted:

The framework had been drafted at the request of the Executive Deans and took the form of expenditure lines in the non-pay budget, resourced from forecast income and distributed to individual personal or group accounts with proposed maximum levels of spending as follows:

- **Research Grants** - a maximum of 10% of overheads; distribution mechanisms at the discretion of the School;
- **External partnerships** - Schools to propose arrangements whereby net income after direct costs and overheads is shared, on a case by case basis for approval by SPC;
- **Tuition fee and HEFCE T fund income** - a maximum of 1% of income; distribution mechanism at the discretion of the School;
- **HEFCE QR income** - a maximum of 1% of income; distribution mechanism at the discretion of the School.

Incentive payments should demonstrably make additional resource available to groups and individuals in pursuing their academic strategies and in recognition of performance in key areas. They should not be used to subsidise core activity or buy additional sessional teaching. All core activity including sessional teaching should be accounted for in the core non-pay costs.

**Professional Services plans**

Noted:

A summary of key areas from the professional services strategic plans, linked to College objectives. (SP 2009 42) Draft individual section plans were available from: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/committees/strategic/20100427.

The professional services plans set out to support implementation of the College’s growth plan, identifying improvements in efficiency and cost effectiveness. The strategic aim was to continue to moderate professional services costs as the College’s student numbers and income grew. The process for new and replacement staff proposals was similar to that in place for Schools, with any proposals being submitted to the Master as Chair of SPC.

The plans indicated that substantial progress had been made and that there was substantial work still to be done. The plans would be reviewed in light of the student number targets. In terms of costs estimates, there were areas where the costs of professional services would rise if student numbers increased as forecast, such as the costs of teaching space.

**ACTION (Executive Deans):**
53.18 Produce estimates for non-staff budgets (including postgraduate scholarships) and bought in teaching budgets, identifying cost savings wherever possible.

53.19 Produce proposals for incentive spending within the School.

53.20 Produce updated versions of the narrative plans for wider circulation to staff.

**ACTION (PVM Strategy)**

53.21 Give more detailed feedback to Executive Deans.

**ACTION (Directors of Planning and Finance)**

53.22 Identify a contingency budget line to manage the risk of variation between forecast and actual student recruitment.

**ACTION (Secretariat)**

53.23 Estimate spending on central costs including professional service staff costs and space costs, linked to projected student number growth.

53.24 Schedule meetings with School and strategy/planning/finance colleagues to discuss budget estimates before the next meeting of SPC.

54 **QAA INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT**

Noted:

54.1 The College was preparing for QAA institutional audit. The briefing visit was 4-6 May and the audit visit 7-11 June. An Institutional Audit Steering Group chaired by the PVM Learning and Teaching and with representatives from Registry, Schools and Secretariat had been meeting fortnightly to oversee preparations, including submission of the self assessment document. Information on the audit for staff was available on the intranet at: [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/gev/news/qaainstitutionalaudit2010introduction](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/gev/news/qaainstitutionalaudit2010introduction) and further information would be circulated after the briefing visit. An audit rehearsal was scheduled for 12 May.

Secretary’s Note: It was confirmed after the meeting that the students had submitted their written submission to the QAA prior to the briefing visit.

**ACTION (Academic Registrar)**

54.2 Draft an email to staff for the Master to send with an update on audit preparation and linking to the intranet information.

55 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Noted:

55.1 The date of the Committee’s next meeting:

- Thursday 27 May 2010 at 2.00 p.m.

Executive Deans and the Students’ Union representative would be invited.