BIRKENBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

1 June 2011

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

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

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Nick Head, Julia Lerch

57 MINUTES AND REPORT
Confirmed
57.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2011

58 ACTION SHEET
Noted
58.1 Progress implementing the actions agreed at the last meeting. (SP 2010 51)

59 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
59.1 Lobbying continued with the aim of securing optimal outcomes for part time and
Birkbeck students in the new fee and funding system, College officers were taking
part in consultation and working groups organised by the organisations charged with
developing and implementing the new system, including the Student Loans Company
(LC), UCAS and BIS.

59.2 Important policy developments included:
• Confirmation that the SLC would introduce loans for part time students for the
2012-13 session;
• Discussion on SLC’ provision of a means testing service for part time students,
giving them access to institutional financial support packages on the same footing
as full time students.
• Confirmation that Certificate students progressing onto a degree would not be
required to pay back their student loan until 3.5 years after commencing the
degree.
• Revisions to BIS’s information leaflets to give more relevant information on fees
and loans for part time students.

59.3 The campaign continued for a fairer payback point for part-time students of 4.5 years
after the start of study. The payback point of 3.5 years currently planned would be
half way through the final year for Birkbeck’s part time undergraduate degree students.

59.4 There was a critical need to communicate the new system effectively to potential students. The College was already successful in reaching students from diverse groups through advertising campaigns and the website and would need to ensure that the information available gave good guidance on fees, loans and financial support as well as the academic provision on offer.

60 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2011-12
Considered

60.1 An updated draft of the Income Distribution Model budget forecasts for 2011-12. (SP 2010 52)

Noted

60.2 Each School and Professional Services section had produced a plan of estimated student numbers, income and expenditure, from which budget information had been extracted to create the draft Income Distribution Model (IDM) for 2011-12. SPC had considered an initial draft IDM in May when it noted that the greatest contribution to maintaining the College’s overall solvency was, as previously, being made by the surpluses generated by the Schools of Law and BEI.

60.3 At the previous meeting SPC had acknowledged that the bottom line for all Schools was being affected by inherited commitments and the impact of previous changes, but confirmed the need to manage deficits as well as plans for expansion effectively in anticipation of leaner years after 2012.

60.4 The updated IDM draft included the outcome of a review of spending plans by the Schools not predicting surpluses. This had improved the forecasts for 2011-12 both for these Schools and the College as a whole. SPC commended the plans, which demonstrate the ongoing fulfilment of the strategic aims of all the Schools in expansion, rationalisation and academic development.

60.5 It was agreed that the budget should contain conservative levels of contingency for staff and general costs. This level of moderation was appropriate given both the ambitious student number growth forecasts and the uncertainty of business following the Government’s funding policy changes. In addition, while in 2010-11 the College’s ongoing change agenda has been supported by HEFCE Strategic Development Fund resource, in 2011-12, the resource for change would need to come from within the College.

60.6 The contingency provision would be especially important in funding the Voluntary Severance and Early Retirement Scheme, which had been re-opened for a limited period with the specific objective of reducing baseline staff costs in areas where the ratio of staff costs to income was disproportionate.

60.7 As was the case last year, there would be a mid-year budget review in January 2012, overseen by SPC, with the aim of conserving and releasing resources by reviewing budgets as appropriate once student numbers and fees were secured and confirmed.

60.8 SPC also considered various principles of income distribution including the space charging model referred to it at the last meeting and other Estates and Facilities
costs. It agreed that these issues would be best considered by a dedicated working group.

**Agreed**

60.9 To submit the Income Distribution budget forecasts for 2011-12 to Finance and General Purposes Committee and Governors for approval

60.10 To establish an academically led working group to oversee the principles of income distribution underpinning the IDM.

61 **SCHOOL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES PLANS 2011-12**

Received and **endorsed**

61.1 The narrative planning statements of the Schools and Professional Services. (SP 2010 53)

62 **TUITION FEES 2012-13**

Received

62.1 An update on setting undergraduate tuition fees for 2012-13

**Noted**

62.2 The Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee was continuing to develop strategy for home undergraduate fees for 2012-13, the first year of the new fee and funding policy. The strategy built on the principles agreed by the Governors for setting 2012-13 undergraduate fees on three tiers.

62.3 At the last meeting SPC had endorsed undergraduate degree fee tier levels for 2012-13 as follows.

- Lower tier: £4,500 part-time (£6000 for three year UCAS programmes)
- Middle tier: £6,000 part-time (£8000 for three year UCAS programmes)
- Upper tier: £6,750 part-time (£9000 for three year UCAS programmes)

62.4 As agreed, the senior Governors had considered and endorsed these fee tiers and Schools had set their undergraduate degree programme to the tier levels. School Executives had confirmed their assignment of provision to the fee tiers through consultation and negotiation with departments. Validation of these assignments was taking place via a small group of College officers acting for the Master as Chair of SPC, reporting to FBSC and SPC. The majority of degree fees were in the middle and upper tiers with an equal distribution among these two tiers.

62.5 A strategy was emerging for access oriented provision, including some Certificates of HE and Foundation Degrees, to be priced at lower levels.

62.6 Certificates of HE had historically had lower fees than degrees, partly reflecting the different model of delivery. In some areas they were particularly vulnerable to T funding cuts while others they had high levels of ELQ students who would not be eligible for student loans in the new system. The emerging work of the Review of Certificates commissioned by SPC included a typology of Certificates, underpinned by consideration of progression to degree programmes and identifying areas oriented to access to HE; areas focusing on the acquisition of professional skills or knowledge; areas focusing on the acquisition and development of subject specific skills; and areas oriented to lifelong learning. These distinctions were being used in fee setting, with access and professional programmes moving towards fees that were
comparable with degree provision and ongoing work taking place to identify appropriate fee levels for the lifelong learning oriented provision.

**62.7** The Certificate tiers included levels comparable with and levels lower than the degree tiers, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Per 30 credit module (25% intensity)</th>
<th>Pro rata to (100% intensity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tier 1</td>
<td>£650</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tier 2</td>
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<td>Tier 6</td>
<td>£2,250</td>
<td>£9,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**62.8** SPC commended Schools for their rational, balanced and swift response to the challenge of setting fees. **Agreed**

**62.9** Announcement of the 2012-13 undergraduate degree tuition fees, subject to confirmation of assignment of programmes to fee tiers. **63 STUDENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

**Noted**

**63.1** FBSC reported on its consideration of undergraduate student financial support. It agreed the distribution of donor funds for 2011-12, with an emphasis on fully funding requests for fee top-up payments for Part Time Grant (PTG1) holders. **Endorsed**

**63.2** The intention to fully support all Part Time Grant holders to the level of the Birkbeck fee. A budget of £1.6M was allocated to support this, to be spent along with donor and State funds. **Considered**

**63.3** The draft access agreement for 2012-13, setting out how the College intended to use new system undergraduate tuition fee income to resource outreach, retention and student financial support. (SP 2010 54) **Noted**

**63.4** For 2012-13, a new approach to student financial support was needed. Non ELQs studying at more than 25% intensity would be eligible for student loans, instead of the Part Time Grant. The loan would not be means tested. Part time students would not be eligible for State student maintenance grants and loans, but would remain eligible for standard means tested State benefits and support. **63.5** Like all other HE institutions, Birkbeck would be setting aside a percentage of its income from tuition fees above the pro rata to £6,000 baseline, to fund student financial support, outreach and retention work, as required by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). **63.6** OFFA required all institutions to submit an access agreement describing what additional income there would be and how it would be used. OFFA’s jurisdiction
currently extended to full time but not part time fees but there was legislation passing through Parliament to regulate part time fees and bring them under OFFA’s jurisdiction.

63.7 In anticipation of this, Birkbeck’s draft access agreement set out the full picture of full and part time fees and planned student financial support packages and resources for outreach and retention. OFFA had received other institutions’ agreements in April but had granted Birkbeck a later deadline recognising the need to develop an integrated plan for full and part time students.

63.8 The draft set out not just to enable Birkbeck to meet the requirements of OFFA and the Government in the new system, but also to put in place a strategy that responds to the needs and circumstances of the College’s student body. It was integrated with existing and planned future widening participation and student retention initiatives.

63.9 The initial plan was for 2012-13 undergraduate entrants and would include high value fee waivers and cash bursaries. The awards would be targeted to students on low incomes, students meeting widening participation criteria and students progressing from access courses run by the College and selected FE institutions. The spending was estimated to cost £1M and the College would also continue with and where appropriate enhance outreach and student retention work, so that overall spending on access would be at the high end of the range recommended by OFFA, in keeping with Birkbeck’s mission to teach non traditional students.

63.10 FBSC would continue to work on the detail of the awards and criteria and processes for making them, as well as the integration of decision making and monitoring data for student financial support, outreach and retention, to deliver an accurate picture of their impact.

Agreed

63.11 To submit the access agreement to OFFA. The OFFA decision and publication of all agreements was due in July 2011.

64 HIGHER EDUCATION INNOVATION FUND ACTIVITIES
Considered

64.1 Proposals for the future organisation of activities funded by HEFCE’s Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) (SP 2010 55)

Noted

64.2 At its previous meeting SPC had considered a report on the College’s Business Relations unit, whose activities were funded by HEFCE’s Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF). It had agreed that alternative structures and means of delivering support for engagement with businesses and “third stream” activities should be considered.

64.3 Proposals had been made for the development of new arrangements in which business engagement resource would be located within the Schools. These changes had human resource implications which were being addressed through the College’s standard procedures.
**Agreed**

64.4 Development of new arrangements for the College's HEIF funded and business engagement activities as proposed in SP 2010 55.

**65 STUDENT RETENTION**

Received

65.1 A report on implementation of the Student Retention Strategy (SP 2010 56)

Noted

65.2 Work was progressing in five areas, overseen by a Steering group and supported by an Operations Group:
- Transition to study
- Effective pedagogies
- Learning support
- Mentors, buddies and advisors
- Sharing good practice.

65.3 Work was also in progress on developing retention data to monitor the impact of this work.

**66 INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP**

Received

66.1 The report of the International Working Group (SP 2010 57)

Noted

66.2 The International Working Group (IWG) reported a good start to the recruitment cycle, with applications and offers higher than last year.

66.3 IWG received a report on the UK Border Agency’s tightening of international student immigration criteria. Although this had caused concern in the sector, it had not affected either Birkbeck’s English Language entry requirements or its student quotas. The issue of concern was perceptions among international students that the UK did not welcome them, which would be addressed by marketing and recruitment work.

66.4 IWG also received a report on an international student survey, with excellent feedback on academic experience but room for improvement on social experience. It planned to consider a follow up report and oversee action in response to recommendations in this area.

**67 RISK MANAGEMENT**

Considered

67.1 A report from the Risk Management Group on the management of risk in 2010-11 (SP 2010 58)

67.2 The Risk Register for 2011-12. (AC 2010 59)

**Agreed**

67.3 To submit the Risk Register to Audit Committee and Governors for formal approval
68 RESEARCH STUDENT TRAINING RESOURCE

Considered

68.1 A proposal for resourcing generic skills training and development for postgraduate research students (SP 2010 60)

Noted

68.2 The proposals set out to identify resource to replace the “Roberts” funding formerly provided by the Government for generic skills training for PhD students, based on guidance issued by the Research Councils.

68.3 Research Committee and ABExCo were considering the deployment of the resource and the nature of the training to be provided.

Agreed

68.4 An increase in PhD fees by £200 per head, the additional income to be allocated to the College Research School to provide generic skills training for research students, taking into account the decisions of Research Committee and ABExCo on the nature and delivery of the training.