BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

2 November 2011

Present
David Latchman (Chair), Philip Dewe, Costas Douzinas, Keith Harrison, Matthew Innes, Sue Jackson, Tricia King, David McGhie, Naina Patel, Dean Pateman, Matthew Weait, Li Wei, Peter Westley

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

In attendance
Katharine Bock, Nick Head, Roisin Lynch

14 MINUTES
Approved
14.1 The Minutes of the meetings of 1 June and 6 October 2011.

15 ACTION SHEET
Noted
15.1 Actions taken following previous meetings:

Working group on Masters programmes
15.2 It was agreed that work on this should take place after the awayday. A paper on the issues surrounding postgraduate degree development would be drafted.

Employability
15.3 Discussions on employability issues were ongoing.

16 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted
16.1 The government had agreed to an amendment to the new fees systems to allow part time students to repay their fees after 4.5 years rather than 3.5. This would support the powerful message that students would not have to start repaying their fees until after graduation. The benefit of this change was directly relevant for students on four year degrees such as Birkbeck’s.

16.2 The Committee endorsed the Master’s thanks to Belinda Brooks-Gordon of the department of Psychological Sciences, who as a Liberal Democrat Councillor had been instrumental in the campaign to change the policy.
16.3 Going forward, the main focus would be on the marketing and recruitment campaign for 2012 and on encouraging students to apply with the assurance that they would be able to afford to study.

16.4 Political efforts would shift towards a vision for more flexible higher education provision and removal of the current barriers between the full and part time systems.

17 STUDENT RECRUITMENT 2011-12

Received

17.1 An updated report on enrolments for 2011-12 (SP 2011 16)

17.2 A report on the fundable student number reconciliation for 2010-11 (HESA) (SP 2011 17)

Noted

17.3 Enrolment had been launched earlier for 2011-12, with new students invited to enrol from early May. Recruitment patterns were similar to previous years, with enrolments peaking in late September and early October.

17.4 New and returning enrolment levels were running above forecasts and the 2010-11 enrolment total had already been exceeded. Based on the numbers for home and EU recruitment the College was confident that it would meet its HEFCE recruitment targets.

17.5 There was a need to plan for the possibility of relative over and under recruitment against target student numbers in different Schools. The HEFCE T funding allocation would not go up and would be distributed among the Schools according to non ELQ recruitment.

17.6 Modular enrolment was at 95% of the autumn target, a positive signal for the annual outcome, although the 2011-12 target was lower than the 2010-11 target.

17.7 International students were currently at 91% of target with 100% expected once enrolment and visa formalities were concluded. It was noted that while other institutions were struggling with international recruitment, Birkbeck was not.

18 INCOME DISTRIBUTION MODEL BUDGET OUTTURN

Received

18.1 A report on the Income Distribution Model budget outturn for 2010-11 (SP 2011 18)

Noted

18.2 The College had a surplus of £M6.7 for 2010-11, a £M4.3 improvement on the un-moderated mid year estimate. The original budget had been drawn up on the basis of prudence, with significant contingencies built in against not achieving the ambitious plans for increased tuition fee income.
18.3 The planned income had been secured and Schools and Professional Services had identified significant savings. The Committee congratulated the Schools and Professional Services on their continuing work to meet objectives.

18.4 Some of the surplus was due to factors which could not be relied on in future years, such as investment returns and the final year of grant funding for the Linking London Lifelong Learning Network and the current round of business relations activity. Discounting one-off factors, the underlying surplus was £M3. This level of surplus, just over 3% of turnover, was exceptional for the College but an expected norm for the HE sector.

18.5 This was an excellent outcome especially considering the recent ELQ crisis. It had been achieved through restructuring and the efforts of staff and put the College in a good position to address the challenges of 2012-13. However, while the outcome was good news for the short term, it would be vital to take an analytical approach to the situation going forward and to avoid increasing recurrent spending commitments. There was no guarantee of student recruitment patterns for 2012-13.

18.6 To assist in planning for the future, it would be good to have estimates of what the loss of various possible percentages of student numbers would mean in real financial terms.

**ACTION**

18.7 (KB NH) Prepare estimates of the impact of reduced student recruitment for the Awayday meeting.

19 FEES, BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS

**Received**

19.1 The report of the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Committee (SP 2011 19)

**Noted**

**Progression from Certificates of HE**

19.2 The Government’s Student Support Regulations for 2012-13 confirmed that students starting a Certificate of HE before 2012-13 and then progressing straight to a degree without changing mode (part time to full time and vice versa) would be, for fee and funding purposes, in the old system. These students would pay fees at current (plus inflation) levels, and would not be eligible for new system loans or financial support. This policy would have an impact at both School and College level.

19.3 Earlier financial modelling had assumed that CertHE students would pay higher fees and be eligible for new system financial support. The financial implications would need to be remodelled to gauge the increase in commitment as progressing CertHE students came through the new system. There would b a rigorous process of monitoring of uptake and available funds and fundraising would be stepped up if uptake exceeded available funds.

19.4 FBSC supported the introduction of formalised break in study and end of registration procedures for CertHE students, to assist in determining whether students were old or new system.
19.5 CertHE fees had been set. The progression rules would add complications to this, as there would be two sets of fees: one for new students, and one for continuing students, likely to be the current level plus inflation.

Student Access and Financial Support

Endorsed

19.6 FBSC’s proposed criteria for financial support:

National Scholarship Programme

- Resourced by £240K of Government funds, plus £240K of College funds.
- Available to students enrolling on or after 1 September 2012 on a programme or module(s), with an annual fee of £6,000 or higher pro rata to full time and a study intensity of 25% or more (30 credits per year), whose household income was under £20K
- Award worth £3,000 pro rata to full time
- The scheme would fund 160 FTE awards (estimated to be 200 actual awards).

Birkbeck bursary scheme

- Resourced by £760K of College funds.
- Available to students enrolling on or after 1 September 2012 on a programme or module(s) with study intensity above 25%, whose household income was under £25K.
- Award worth £1,000 pro rata to full time
- The scheme would fund 760 FTE awards (estimated to be 1,000 actual awards).

Noted

19.7 Under the new system there would be a group of people who earned just over £20K who would have previously qualified for PTG1 but now would only get the cash bursary rather than the fee waiver. Fundraising would be necessary to potentially address this gap.

2012-13 Postgraduate Taught Degrees

19.8 Some PGT courses would be moving to higher fee tiers in response to HEFCE funding changes or competitor fees. However, the general message to prospective students would be reassurance that postgraduate fees would not be affected by the changes happening at undergraduate level.

19.9 Other HE institutions had not yet published their postgraduate fees. In 2012-13, institutions were likely to be looking to maximise their postgraduate recruitment to make up for potential shortfall in undergraduate numbers.

19.10 The PGT fee tiers would be entered into the Planning Tool, and Schools would review and change tier assignments during November prior to publication of the fees in December.

Approved

19.11 Postgraduate taught fee tiers for 2012-13 (FBSC 2011 19 Appendix A).
Noted
Postgraduate Alumnus Fee Reduction

19.12 FBSC had discussed the possibility of an alumnus fee reduction scheme, as suggested at the last meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee. It recommended that there should be a fee reduction on PGT programmes, in the first instance for 2012-13 only, to be offered to any Birkbeck graduate (undergraduate or postgraduate degree programmes), regardless of year of graduation. The data on uptake would then be analysed in order to contribute to development of a longer term scheme.

Approved
19.13 A 10% postgraduate alumnus fee reduction scheme for 2012-13, subject to review after one year.

ACTION
19.14 (FBSC) Develop detailed regulations for the postgraduate alumnus fee reduction

Noted
Postgraduate Research Degree Fees

19.15 Fee levels for 2012-13 would be agreed subject to confirmation of research council studentship levels. As agreed by SPC in June, the fees would include a £200 per student uplift to provide resource for centrally provided research skills training.

19.16 In the future, it would be necessary to consider a fee strategy for postgraduate research degrees, but no major changes were proposed for this year.

International Fees

19.17 There had been a market assessment of international fees which confirmed that Birkbeck’s fees were at appropriate levels. FBSC agreed to increases of approximately 5% across the board. The exception was the part time undergraduate degree fees, which were anomalous in being less than pro rata to the full time fee. These fees would increase to be pro rata with the full time fee.

Endorsed
19.18 International fees for 2012-13 (SP 2011 19 Appendix B).

20 COMMUNICATION ON FEES, LOANS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Received
20.1 Next Steps in Communicating Fees and Funding (SP 2011 20)

Noted

20.2 The communications strategy for 2012-13 would begin with headline messages and move through stages of detail, finishing if necessary with individual students getting one to one advice.

20.3 The aim was for staff to give students the headline messages and support them in finding the relevant information to answer their particular questions.
20.4 The student recruitment website would be developed to act as a single source of information, containing detailed information of fees, loans, bursaries and fee waivers. It would include FAQs, case studies, and links to good external advice.

20.5 It was suggested that there should be targeted campaigns aimed at particular groups, for example mature students who may not need to pay loans back. Case studies would focus on reasons to study at Birkbeck in particular.

20.6 There was a simple message to be given that virtually every part time student would be better off under the new system as they would now be eligible for loans. It was important, however, not discourage recruitment onto intensive three year undergraduate courses offered through UCAS.

20.7 The Committee noted that there should be an acknowledgement in communications that the College did not support the cessation of funding which had led to a need to increase tuition fees.

21 AUTHORISATION OF STAFFING EXPENDITURE

Received

21.1 A paper on proposed changes to the procedure for authorisation of changes to staffing expenditure (SP 2011 21)

Noted

21.2 The current procedure for authorisation of new, changed and replacement posts was through the Master in the case of academic appointments and the College Secretary and Deputy Secretary in the case of administrative posts.

21.3 Since the procedure was agreed, the Planning Tool had introduced a means for entering information and estimating costings for new and replacement posts and other staffing changes. The College had also built up two years of experience of successfully operating the devolved budget structure.

21.4 Taking this into account, a new procedure for the authorisation of staffing expenditure was proposed. In the new procedure, cases for new and changed posts likely to arise during the coming year would be entered into the Planning Tool, together with business cases, for central on-line approval. This would provide a closer link between the planning and approval processes and eliminate duplication of effort. Staffing changes and proposals not captured at the time of the planning round would also be approved via an online process.

21.5 SPC would retain its role in considering School and Professional Service plans and budgets and providing high level approval for strategies and budgets.

21.6 SPC agreed that this was an appropriate point to delegate more authority in relation to routine matters where there was limited risk, such as approval of replacement Lecturer A posts in Schools operating in surplus.

21.7 There was discussion over the limiting of delegation of authority to Schools operating in surplus. Concerns were raised that treating Schools differently might
undermine the planning and budgeting system by providing an incentive for unrealistic surplus forecasts. However, the over-riding incentive for all Schools should be to be genuinely in surplus, and there should be benefits for Schools in this position. Schools in deficit would not necessarily be denied replacement posts, but their spending plans would be subject to central high level approval.

21.8 A number of new appointments had been made on three year contracts, so that expansion in student numbers could be supported and secured before permanent commitments were made. This was potentially an area for further delegation, if a mechanism could be set up to check student number expansion in relation to the post. However it was noted that the use of fixed term contracts was in response to the College’s expansion plan agreed with HEFCE during the Strategic Review and that there was a particular risk in making permanent commitments in 2012-13 because new system student numbers were difficult to predict.

Agreed

21.9 A schedule of authority and delegation for the approval of staffing expenditure.

| Replacement academic posts, where the replacement post is at the lecturer A level and the School is operating in surplus | Executive Dean |
| Grade 1-7 replacement professional and support posts, provided projected staff costs for the school or section will be within budget | Head of Professional Services / School Manager |
| Increased hours, provided projected staff costs for the school or section will be within budget | Executive Dean / Head of Professional Services |
| Maternity and sabbatical cover where the cover post is at or below the grade of the original post and the costs can be met within existing staff budgets | Executive Dean / Head of Professional Services |
| Research grant and contract fully funded posts | Head of Research Grants and Contracts |
| Sessional staff provided costs are within budget | School Managers |

ACTION

21.10 HR staff to discuss fixed term contract issues case by case with Schools as required.

22 EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Received

22.1 A note on the restructuring of the External Relations department and its future plans.

Noted

22.2.1 The restructure was in response to the departure of senior staff and the need to address the challenges of the future. A new service focusing on web content and

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1 The definition of “operating in surplus” is a surplus forecast in the most recent IDM budget approved by F&GP.
social media and a joint marketing and recruitment service for home and overseas recruitment would be put in place. Interviews for a new Head of Fundraising were scheduled.

23 SPC AWAYDAY AGENDA

Received

23.1 Proposed agenda items for the SPC away day in early 2012.

Noted

23.2 The following suggestions for additional agenda items:
   • Masters degrees
   • Employability
   • Modelling on the implications of the REF return in different potential scenarios.
   • An attempt to look at the future beyond 2012/13. It was agreed that this agenda item would need a more specific focus to facilitate useful discussion.

ACTION

23.3 (KB) Bring a draft awayday programme to the next meeting

24 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted

24.1 The dates of future meetings of the Strategic Planning Committee:
   • Wednesday 25 January 2011 at 10.30am
   • Wednesday 22 February 2012 at 2pm
   • Wednesday 9 May 2012 at 2pm
   • Thursday 31 May 2012 at 2pm