43 MINUTES AND REPORT
Approved
43.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 15 February 2011

Noted
43.2 The Committee’s spring term report to Finance and General Purposes Committee (SP 2011 37).

44 ACTIONS
Noted
44.1 The following progress on actions:

44.2 Strategy for pro rata for credit fee framework – a discussion paper would be drafted for the next meeting.

44.3 Development of an employability/business relations agenda – this was ongoing.

44.4 Develop and implement plans for the Birkbeck Association – this was ongoing.

45 EXTERNAL EXAMINER FEES
Approved
45.1 Proposed policy for External Examiner fees, revised following feedback at the last meeting (SP 2011 39).

46 DEBTOR POLICY
Approved
46.1 Proposed policy for student debtors, revised following feedback at the last meeting (SP 2011 40).

47 MASTER’S REPORT
Noted

47.1 The lobbying campaign on part time issues continued and was being positively received. The College was making the point that not enough had been done nationally to inform prospective students appropriately about part time student finance.

47.2 A meeting had been held with David Willets, Minister for Universities and Science, in which he had agreed to an information campaign on part time higher education. As this had not been included in BIS’s budgets, resource would need to be found.

47.3 HEFCE was consulting on changes to T funding including the possible removal of the part time premium. The College line was that as there was strong evidence for a decline in demand among part time students, probably linked to the lack of information on part time student finance, this was not the right time to remove part time premium funding from institutions.

47.4 These lobbying efforts were part of a longer campaign towards Birkbeck’s ultimate goal of a seamless and simple infrastructure in which part time was fully incorporated into the mainstream.

48 ENROLMENT 2012

Noted

48.1 The downward trend for undergraduate part time applications was persisting. Applications were 32-25% lower than the previous year.

48.2 However although applications were down the offer rate had increased and the impression of admissions tutors was that the quality of applicants was stronger this year. The recruitment process was benefiting from effective cross-College cooperation.

48.3 The key task was to convert offers into enrolments. It was possible that the new fees system would have a positive impact on conversion, as students would not have to find the money up front at the point of enrolment.

48.4 Fewer prospective students were attending open evenings, although uptake for other interactions, including the drop-in student finance sessions and the online webinar, was increasing.

48.5 At the 9 May deadline for UCAS entry applicants to “go firm” with their preferred university, 22% of offer holders had chosen Birkbeck. A further 12% chose Birkbeck as their insurance choice. There was significant variation between subject areas and the overall conversion rate was lower than last year’s. Conversion rates were lower in the most popular and competitive subjects.

48.6 Some 500 UCAS applicants had not been made an offer. Members asked if it was possible to identify these students and consider their suitability for four year degrees or Certificates of Higher Education. It was noted that the UCAS system did not allow for further communication with rejected applicants. This issue of the inflexibility of the system was one on which the College needed to lobby UCAS.
Action

48.7 (TK and DL) Take up this issue with UCAS at upcoming meetings

48.8 Postgraduate taught applications had increased compared with last year, but the conversion rates would need to be monitored. The overall increase was made up of a large increase in overseas applications, many with conditional offers, and a decrease in home applications.

48.9 The new online enrolment system was about to go live. Students expecting to apply for student finance would be enrolled on the understanding that they had accurately and truthfully answered pre-enrolment questions confirming eligibility. The system would process both old and new regime students in parallel. All routes of enrolment were online for the first time for 2012-13.

49 HEFCE FUNDING

Noted

49.1 Provisional HEFCE funding for 2012-13 (SP 2011 41).

50 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2012-13

Received

50.1 A first draft of the Income Distribution Model budget forecasts for 2012-13 (SP 2011 42).

50.2 A note of the main points arising from the budget iteration meetings with Schools and with Professional Services (SP 2011 43).

Noted

50.3 Colleagues in Schools and Professional Services were thanked for their participation in the process. All departments had been realistic in their approach, and conservative in their approach to staff costs. In addition, the contribution of all to building the new College structure meant that Birkbeck was in a good position to weather the coming storm.

50.4 Members discussed the IDM’s treatment of indirect costs. Although these costs, for the central professional and support services, were agreed in advance, their distribution among the Schools according to student numbers was altered at the mid-year point to reflect student numbers actually recruited rather than student numbers forecast. This could increase costs for a School that recruited better than planned, especially if other Schools recruited less well than planned.

50.5 The model for 2012-13 had adopted a more explicit approach to showing income and spending for student financial support. This would help with the monitoring and management of this budget.

50.6 To respond to the financial uncertainty of 2012-13, in which income would depend on new student numbers, there would be monthly meetings over the summer and autumn to review recruitment levels and predicted tuition fee income. This would allow for reiteration of spending plans if necessary before the mid-year budget review. It would also provide a strategic context for the Recruitment Monitoring...
Group to deliver its complementary job of taking all the steps possible to maximise recruitment.

50.7 A report was being developed taking current offers and extrapolating trends to predict likely income at the end of the recruitment cycle. By the end of October it would be possible to produce an updated IDM using recruited student numbers.

**ACTION**

50.8 *(MI)* Organise regular monthly income monitoring meetings between July and November 2012.

50.9 There would be variations to the pattern of cashflow, and cashflow could slow down if the Student Loans Company were not able to process part time applications by the deadline. The College had reviewed its banking arrangements to offset this risk.

51 SCHOOL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE PLANS 2012-13

Received

51.1 The draft planning narratives developed by the Schools and Professional Services to accompany their budget forecasts *(SP 2011 44A-F).*

**Action**

51.2 *(MI)* Organise a meeting with LW, SJ, KH and the Executive Deans to discuss the narrative plans.

52 THREE YEAR DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Received

52.1 A note on planning and support for three year intensive degree programmes *(SP 2011 45)*

**Noted**

52.2 The introduction of three year degree programmes with recruitment through UCAS was an experiment that had proved very successful. The programmes had recruited well and numbers of students and programmes were growing.

52.3 As more programmes were added the three year route would become a significant part of the College’s mainstream business. This would require strategic and operational decisions, and a shared understanding of where these degrees fitted into the Birkbeck offer.

52.4 They had been conceived as three year intensive part time versions of existing four year degrees, offering additional flexibility and allowing Schools to offer several routes to a degree including three, four and six year programmes. This was part of Birkbeck’s unique mission as a specialist evening university.

52.5 There were some practical implications to consider. Increase in UCAS intake could lead to situations where groups of students in the same classroom had different experiences and expectations, and it would be important to be aware of that.
52.6 The College needed to ensure that the student experience for three year and four year students was equal. It was noted that the student expectation of experience was getting higher in every group of students with the introduction of the new fees.

52.7 It was important to consider who the new UCAS programmes were targeting. Members noted that the programmes had been implemented to open up new markets, e.g. school leavers, so it would be disappointing if the result was merely a shift, with traditional Birkbeck students opting for three rather than four year degrees.

52.8 Members discussed the introduction of UCAS programmes. It was felt that a mixture of traditional Birkbeck students and school leavers could be a very positive thing in terms of furthering the College’s unique offer, as the experience of attending classes with older working Londoners would give younger students the opportunity to experience informal mentoring and gain more knowledge of the world of work. It was felt that Birkbeck would be attractive to certain sectors of the school leaver market, e.g. those who could not afford to leave home, or who could not afford the costs of full time student life. In order to take the existing brand to new markets, however, it would be necessary to have a campaign outlining the ways in which it could be attractive to young people, and this would need to be resourced.

52.9 It was agreed that there should be a review of UCAS programmes in order to approach the issue strategically right from the beginning.

52.10 It would be useful to look at the age of students within the conversion figures to find out to what extent the College was appealing to its traditional student demographic through UCAS. It seemed that the courses were popular with mature students, which might be contributing to the downturn in part time undergraduate figures if students who would otherwise have studied for four years chose to study for three instead.

52.11 It would also be useful to look at some of the courses which had done particularly well. It was noted that some courses had run UCAS specific events which seemed to have been successful.

**Action**

52.12 Set up a review of UCAS programmes.

53 **SELECTION OF STAFF FOR REF**

**Received**

53.1 A draft Code of Practice on selection of staff for REF 2012 (SP 2011 46).

**Noted**

53.2 It was a requirement of the Research Excellence Framework that institutions submitting research for consideration to the REF 2014 develop, document and apply a code of practice on selecting staff to include in their REF submissions.

53.3 All eligible staff would be considered for submission to the REF 2014. Individuals would be selected on the basis of adherence to the following criteria:
• Research which meets the REF published definition of research.

• **Volume:** Submissions must include the equivalent of four items of research output for each person submitted, unless a decision is made that the number of items to be submitted may be reduced as a result of the individual’s circumstances.

• **Quality:** Quality would be assessed on the basis of the staff member’s potential contribution to a submission relative to the REF criteria and working methods. This would be assessed by at least two people. The Master, acting on the recommendation of the REF Working Party, would establish a minimum quality threshold for all staff to achieve to ensure inclusion in REF submissions. Individual units of assessment might set higher quality thresholds than the minimum standards approved for the College by the Master.

• **Fit:** Staff deemed submissable based on the assessment of quality will then be assessed for fit with the units of assessment that the College has decided to submit to. In order to be submissable, research conducted by any staff member must demonstrably meet the criteria for the unit of assessment as outlined in the panel criteria published by HEFCE. In addition, unit of assessment panels will assess the research and judge whether the research forms part of a narrative that can be presented as demonstrating a coherent research environment. Where panels judge that this is not possible then the staff member will be considered not to ‘fit’ the submission and will not be included within the submission for that unit of assessment.

53.4 The Code of Practice took into account the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Birkbeck had a duty to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a relevant characteristic and persons who do not. This includes existing employment law on fixed-term and part-time working.

53.5 Members discussed the Code of Practice. It was noted that paragraph 48 should refer to capability performance as well as Progress and Development Review. Paragraph 47 should make clear that non-selection also did not necessarily indicate research quality, as decisions were also being made for strategic reasons. Not having been selected for the REF could not be used as a criteria at a promotion panel; the appropriate criteria was research quality.

53.6 It was noted that the Unit of Assessment Panel for Biological Sciences would not include Professor Nicholas Keep, and that Professor Gabriel Waksman was also from University College London.

53.7 When this document was circulated internally there should be an introductory paragraph to reinforce that this was an equal opportunities document and did not contain decisions about quality assessment.

53.8 The Executive Deans could give more feedback by email, and the document would be formalised by the end of the week. It would go to ABExCo and then to the Academic Board as a document approved by ABExCo.
53.9 The document was going to the Trade Unions through Human Resources.

53.10 The REF Working Party were planning an event to feed the document through to the Schools.

**Action**

53.11 *(LW and NP)* Do a case study of a theoretical person going through the system as outlined by the Code of Practice.

### 54 ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS

**Received**

54.1 A note on the development of strategy for academic partnerships *(SP 2011 47)*

**Noted**

54.2 The PVM for Academic Partnerships thanked the Outreach and Widening Participation officer for his support for this work.

54.3 Progression Agreements were currently organised at a programme level and it was felt that they were not the best mechanism for developing enduring and meaningful relationships at an institutional level. A possible solution to this would be to set up Institutional Progression Agreements: an in principle College-wide commitment to prioritise students applying for our programmes from partner FECs. This model would be an opt out system in order to allow programmes to impose exceptional admission requirements if necessary, for example language requirements.

**Approved**

54.4 The development of a model Institutional Progression Agreement by the PVM for Academic Partnerships, in consultation with the Executive Deans, Programme Directors and Admissions Tutors, and the School Managers.

54.5 Members noted that these initiatives would only work if they had support from the bottom up, both in Birkbeck and in the FE colleges. It would also be useful to start working more closely with FE colleges to ensure their Access to HE courses were those which Birkbeck would rate as appropriate for progression onto our programmes.

54.6 It was suggested that a working group should be set up to work on the development of IPAs which would report back to SPC. This was agreed in principle though more discussion was needed to decide on the membership.

**Noted**

54.7 MW asked all to involve him in any plans for new academic partnerships,

### 55 STUDY ASSISTANCE SCHEME

**Noted**

55.1 The Study Assistance Scheme was approved by the Governors at the March meeting as a replacement for the Remission of Fees scheme.
55.2 The previous scheme had been capped at £60K, and the new scheme would therefore be available to more people.

55.3 It was hoped that Schools and Professional Services departments would be positive in their response to the scheme and their voluntary contribution of £45%.