BIRKBECK COLLEGE
University of London

MINUTES OF THE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

1 October 2015

Present
Tricia King (Chair), Sue Jackson, Fraser Keir, John Lindner, Kate Mackenzie-Davey, Chris Murphy, Caroline McDonald Rooseman, Elizabeth Charles, Richard Brink-Johnsen, Kerry Harman, Eleanor Mongey, Sarah Hart, Mara Arts, Garmon ap Garth, Suzannah Biernoff, Nigel Buckle, Louise Farber, Martin Shipway, Anna Gaze, Jane Nicklin, Keith Harrison

In Attendance
Katharine Bock, Rachael Boyle, Mark Pimm, Rob Park, Jonah Duffin

Apologies
John Arnold

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE
Noted
1.1 The current terms of reference for the Committee (SEC 2015 01)

2 MINUTES
Received and Confirmed
2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the 7 May 2015

3 REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Received and Noted
3.1 The Report of the Committee to the Academic Board following its meeting of the 7 May 2015 (SEC 2015 02)

4 CHAIR’S REPORT
Noted
4.1 This would be the last meeting of the Committee chaired by the Pro Vice Master for Strategic Engagement. Members thanked the PVM for her contribution to the work of the Committee and of the College.

4.2 The PVM noted that the timing of her leaving Birkbeck, a moment of personal transition, coincided with a moment of transition for Birkbeck. The College had seen much change over the last decade, and the institutional model that is being moved towards does not mirror the College as it was even two to three years ago.
4.3 It was felt that Birkbeck had risen to the challenges of recent years in large part due to the fact that it had not lost sight of the importance of its student body and the way students are engaged by the College.

4.4 Resilience and motivation had seen the College overcome the recruitment challenges posed by fee increases in 2012. The importance of the Committee had been highlighted in negotiating the new recruitment landscape.

4.5 The Committee would be central in managing the College’s engagement with new types of students that were currently arriving at Birkbeck. The Committee would maintain the College’s mission and vision whilst at the same time developing new and effective ways of engaging with students.

4.6 Proposed cuts to the sector and the potential impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review would be monitored by the Committee along with the effectiveness of the Student Engagement Strategy.

5 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY
Received and Considered

5.1 The updated iteration of the Student Engagement Strategy (SEC 2015 03) Noted

5.2 Members heard that since the last meeting there had been many consultations with various members of staff on the Student Engagement Strategy.

5.3 Many members commended the thoroughness of the consultation process, though others felt that there should have been more consultation with the Schools. It was confirmed that further input would be sought from both Schools, and specifically from students in the rolling out of the various strands of the strategy.

Considered

5.4 Members considered the second draft of the Student Engagement Strategy.

5.5 It was agreed that the introduction to the strategy should contain an explanation as to what is meant by student engagement.

5.6 Under, ‘Part 1: Principles’, it was noted that the phrase, ‘One named person will lead the cross-College co-ordination of each strand of work and will regularly report to the termly Student Engagement Committee’, should be reworded so as to be in keeping with the Committee’s terms of reference, which states that separate individuals will be responsible for each strand of the strategy.

5.7 Principle 1, ‘Understanding the Evolving Student Body’, was approved by members.

5.8 Members considered Principle 2, ‘Listening to Students’. It was noted that this point was explicitly regarding a two way communication process with students and that the Students’ Union would be invite to help roll out this strand of the strategy. It was agreed that the principle should be renamed to, ‘Listening and Responding to Students.’
5.9 Members considered Principle 3, ‘Offering Support Services that help all Students Succeed’. It was noted that whilst the need to enable staff to support students was mentioned in the introduction it should be more explicitly stated within this point.

5.10 Members considered Principle 4, ‘Widening Access and Social Mobility.’ It was agreed that due to the importance of this principle within the work of the Committee it should be presented as Principle 1 within the strategy.

5.11 Members approved Principles 5 and 6:
- Career capital
- Using digital opportunities to improve student engagement

5.12 Members considered Principle 7, ‘Connecting and communicating effectively with students’. It was agreed that the principle should follow on from the Principle of ‘Listening and Responding to Students’, these principle would now be Principle 3 and principle 4 respectively.

5.13 Members considered Principle 8, ‘Creating a social experience and a strong sense of belonging’. It was noted that the Students’ Union representatives were keen to be involved in the rolling out of this strand of the strategy.

5.14 Members approved Principles 9 and 10:
- Importance of research
- Engaging the whole Birkbeck community in the support of our students

Noted

5.15 The introduction of the Student Engagement Strategy has been partly driven by the need to address the changing student body at Birkbeck.

5.16 It was confirmed that the strategy was intended for use by staff, and that it was implicit in the document that students had been engaged in the creation of the document via consultation and would be involved in rolling out various strands of the strategy.

5.17 The Student Engagement Strategy aims to complement the College’s Research Strategy and the Strategy for Learning And Teaching Enhancement and to help define a cross-college Birkbeck student experience.

Recommended

5.18 That ABExCo endorse the Student Engagement Strategy, subject to the amendments outlined above.

6 FUTURE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

Received and Considered

6.1 The revised Terms of Reference and Membership of the Committee for 2015-16, with the new Student Engagement Strategy taken into account (SEC 2015 04).
6.2 Members considered the proposed future terms of reference of the committee. It was confirmed that the purpose of the committee moving forwards would be to deliver, monitor and adjust if necessary, the Student Engagement Strategy, and that the new terms of reference would be based on that.

6.3 Members discussed the name of the Committee and expressed concern at the loss of ‘Widening Participation’. It was noted that whilst the widening access work of the College was well entrenched in its mission and the terms of reference of the committee there would be symbolic significance in removing widening participation from the name of the committee, and potentially a lack of sign posting within the College as to where issues surrounding widening participation and widening access should be brought.

6.4 Some members suggested that whilst widening participation is an important issue for both the College and the sector, the challenge at present is not about recruiting students from certain backgrounds or societal groups but about supporting them through their student journey, and that the phrase Student Engagement reflected this focus on access, retention and student success.

6.5 It was agreed that the principle of Widening Access and Social Mobility would be prioritised within the terms of reference as with the Student Engagement Strategy.

**Membership**

6.6 The Strategic Project Manager had begun conversations with various members of staff who might conceivably be involved in implementing various strands of the strategy.

6.7 The proposed new membership was divided into members and those in attendance. Those in attendance would be involved in the work of the Committee and would make regular reports.

6.8 It was noted that the core membership of the Committee had not changed substantially.

6.9 The Students’ Union representatives expressed their desire for students to be heavily involved in the rolling out of the student engagement strategy. It was agreed that a student representative would be involved in each strand of the strategy.

6.10 It was noted that the inclusion of the College’s Careers and Employability Manager in the Careers Capital strand would be helpful. It was confirmed that conversations in this area with relevant staff members had commenced.

6.11 Once the membership of the Committee had been agreed in principle work would begin on finalising the various working groups in terms of both leadership and membership. The approach taken would not be necessarily to assign one working group to each strand of the strategy as this may duplicate work.

**Approved**

6.12 Members approved the proposed future Terms of Reference and Membership of the Committee (**SEC 2015 04**).
**Action**

6.13 The Strategic Project Manager would report back to the next meeting of the committee with a list of proposed working groups, including leadership and membership details.

7 **ALUMNI FUND**

**Received**

7.1 A report on initiatives to be sourced by the Alumni Fund *(SEC 2015 05)*

**Noted**

7.2 The College’s Alumni Fund encouraged applications from all areas of the College, both Schools and Professional Services, for; innovative projects or initiatives; events with a clear educational purpose and, projects which meet the College’s agenda for widening participation, retention and recruitment.

7.3 Projects would be funded for up to £5K with an overall budget of £30K. The Student Engagement Committee would make the final decision on the outcome of applications with recommendations from the Alumni Fund Disbursement Committee. The 2013-14 round was the third year of the programme.

7.4 The College Dean reported to the Committee on the 2013-14 round of applications to the Alumni Fund. 15 applications had been received with a total of £70,890 applied for. There had been two applications from students and two from academic staff with the remainder coming from members of Professional Services.

7.5 Feedback was sought from the Committee as to how more successful applications from academic staff or students could be encouraged.

7.6 It was noted that most applications from academic staff and students were rejected because criteria had not been met, not because they were not good ideas. The main reason for not meeting the criteria was that applications were written with a particular group of students in mind, i.e. from a particular department, and lacked the wider applicability required by the fund.

**Action**

7.7 The Pro Vice Masters and the College Dean would discuss the possibility of making the requirements of the scheme less stringent in regards to proposals needing to have cross college applicability, thereby increasing the chance of a departmental focussed proposal being successful.

**Noted**

7.8 It was agreed that offering assistance with the filling out of applications might decrease the number rejected due to non-adherence with the guidelines.

7.9 It was agreed that the phrasing ‘applications are particularly welcome from students and academic staff,’ would be added to advertisements for applications to the alumni fund.
7.10 It was determined that awareness of the scheme was reasonable across the College but that publicising it earlier in the academic year would be advantageous.

7.11 During the last alumni telephone fundraising campaign a 46% giving rate was achieved, this compares favourably with other universities. It was noted that alumni responded well to hearing about the different projects, and that having a list of potential projects to talk about would be helpful.

7.12 It was agreed that feedback should be sought from student representatives as to how the College should be communicating the scheme.

7.13 Members enquired as to whether there was an avenue through which proposals which had not been successful but were considered to have merit. As proposals would be requesting a maximum of 5K, they could be put directly to Schools as discretionary funding would be available at this level.

7.14 It was agreed that where possible feedback would be provided to unsuccessful applicants by way of offering to help write their application for next year and / or directing them to other potential funding opportunities.

8 STUDENT SURVEYS

8.1 The committee heard an oral update on the results of the National Student Survey, the Birkbeck Student Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey had been collated. Results from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey were not yet available.

8.2 Birkbeck had seen its highest response rate yet in the NSS, at 58.41%. Whilst overall satisfaction had dropped from 89% to 87%, high marks had been received in regards to Teaching Quality: 90% of students had agreed that staff were good at explaining things and 91% had stated that their course was intellectually stimulating.

8.3 Birkbeck had placed 9/19 (in London), for assessment and feedback, with 66% of responding affirming that feedback was prompt. For Teaching Space the College was ranked 133/120 (nationally).

8.4 In regards to Academic Support only 67% of respondents stated that they had received good advice for making study choices, placing Birkbeck 188/120 nationally.

8.5 The BSS comprised feedback from undergraduate students not yet in their final year, as such it might be seen as a possible indication of future NSS results. The BSS had seen a response rate of 14%. An overall satisfaction rate of 79% was indicated, with 55% of students being happy in regards to feedback from staff.

8.6 The PTES indicated feedback from those students on taught masters courses. There was a 21% response rate which approached the national average of 25%. Students indicated an overall satisfaction rate of 78%, close to the sector average of 82%.
8.7 It was noted that the purpose of this committee was to be aware of these figures and to understand how they fitted in with the student engagement strategy. The Strategic Planning Committee would be responsible for addressing any issues raised.

8.8 Moving forwards the Student Engagement Committee would recognise the student surveys as a communication channel for students to which the College should respond. Student Surveys would fall under Principle 3 of the Student Engagement Strategy; Listening and Responding to Students.

9 2016-17 ACCESS AGREEMENT
Noted
9.1 Members noted that the 2016-17 Access Agreement was approved by OFFA on 16 July. The document has been published on OFFA’s website, for prospective undergraduate students to consult. It sets out plans to promote access, support achievement, facilitate progression and provide financial support for undergraduate students from under-represented groups.

10 DATES OF THE NEXT MEETING
Noted
10.1 The dates of the next meetings of the Student Engagement Committee:
- Wednesday 27 January 2016, at 2pm
- Thursday 10 May 2016, at 2pm