UNIVERSITY OF YORK

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2013

Present:  The Chair of Council
The Vice-Chancellor
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
The Treasurer (Mr D Dickson)
Pro-Chancellor (Mrs L Wild)
Pro-Chancellor (Mr D Tecwyn)
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor C Mellors)

Mr R Armitage  Mrs M Loffill
Mr M Burton  Mrs J McAleese
Professor B Fulton  Professor P Sells
Mr B Greenwood  Professor L Stewart
Ms D Jagger  Ms J Unwin

In attendance:  The Registrar and Secretary
The Director of Finance
Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
Pro-Vice-Chancellor/Research (for M12-13/52)
Director of HR (for M12-13/53)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Galloway and Mr W McCarthy.

12-13/45  Presentation: Centre for Novel Agricultural Products

Council received a presentation on the work of the Centre for Novel Agricultural Products (CNAP) in the Department of Biology from its Director, Professor Ian Graham.

12-13/46  Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

Members were invited to declare any potential conflicts of interest relating to the business of the meeting. None were declared.

12-13/47  Minutes

The unreserved minutes of the meetings held on 1 and 15 March 2013 were approved (C.12-13/43) and Council noted the action schedule based on the minutes (C.12-13/44).
Construction of New College

Council referred to M12-13/10 from the meeting held on 23 November 2012 at which it had approved the proposed development of the new College on the Heslington East campus. Council decided to delegate the authority to enter into all such documents and arrangements necessary to effect the transaction to the following two authorised University signatories:

- the Vice-Chancellor/Acting Vice-Chancellor
- one of the following:
  - the Deputy Vice-Chancellor
  - the Registrar & Secretary
  - the Director of Finance
  - the Treasurer

Appointment of Acting Vice-Chancellor

Further to M12-13/44 (Appointment of Next Vice-Chancellor) and with reference to the reserved business transacted by Senate in May 2013 (M12-13/63* below refers), Council formally endorsed the appointment of Dr Jane Grenville (Deputy Vice-Chancellor) as Acting Vice-Chancellor from 1 October to 31 December 2013.

Merger of Policy & Resources and Finance Committees

Further to M12-13/28 (Committee Review), Council considered the proposed merger of the Policy & Resources and Finance Committees (C.12-13/45), noting that the matter had been discussed at the meetings of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 15 February and 7 June 2013 (minute from the latter meeting tabled for reference).

Noting the comments from the Policy and Resources Committee relating to the proposed number of meetings, the format of the agenda regarding reserved business and the monitoring of subsidiary companies, Council approved the terms of reference and constituency for the new Finance and Policy Committee, to come into effect from the start of the 2013/14 academic year.

KPIs for Statutory Reporting to HEFCE

Council considered a report in respect of HEFCE’s new statutory requirement for an institutional sustainability assessment (C.12-13/46).
Introducing the report, the Registrar highlighted the mandatory key performance indicators (KPIs) required by HEFCE in respect of financial performance/sustainability and also the indicators proposed by the Director of Corporate Planning in the areas of teaching and learning, the student experience, research and the condition of the estate.

During discussion the following comments were noted:

- The data reported was likely to be publicly releasable under the Freedom of Information Act. It was agreed the guiding premise should be that all the KPIs would be in the public domain, in accordance with open and transparent governance.

- It was agreed that the proposed indicator for the conversion rate of offers to places would be better replaced by one for applicants to places as the former was influenced by a complex range of factors and might be open to misinterpretation. (Management would of course continue to monitor both indicators as part of its routine and highly detailed analysis of admissions data at both departmental and institutional level.)

- In order to prevent the proliferation of KPIs arising from different statutory reporting requirements, it would be important to harmonise the new set with those presented in the Annual Report and in Council’s own previously agreed set (M12-13/32 refers).

- With regard to the availability of comparative data for the various indicators, it was noted that, at least from HEFCE’s perspective, the exercise was part of the annual accountability return made every December and as such was more related to its monitoring of institutional sustainability than comparability between different HEIs.

- With regard to HEFCE’s template for the annual sustainability declaration by the head of the institution and chair of the governing body (Appendix 1 to the report refers), a query was raised regarding the potential use of the ‘Margin for Sustainability and Investment’ (MSI) in calculating the full economic costs of the University’s activities, including indirect cost calculations of funded research projects. It was agreed that the implications of such a declaration were unclear and that further clarification should be sought from HEFCE.
Following discussion, Council **approved** the proposed non-financial KPIs, subject to its comments above. It was **noted** that targets for each of these indicators would be brought to the next meeting.

As regards harmonisation of the new set of indicators with existing KPIs, it was **decided** that the Senior Management Group should consider this matter further before bringing a proposal for rationalisation back to Council at its first meeting in 2013/14.

### Executive Report: Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research

Council **received** the annual Executive Report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research (C.12-13/47).

Attending the meeting to present his report, Professor Local drew particular attention to the following:

- government cuts to funding from research councils and a more targeted, directive approach to project funding;
- the impact of subject mix (e.g. lack of clinical medicine and large-scale engineering research at the University);
- the need for a strategic approach to grant applications, including via the establishment of collaborative consortia (an area of activity in which the three Academic Coordinators had been playing a significant role);
- reasons for research income growth in the Russell Group, in particular success in attracting EU funding in the sciences;
- the ongoing requirement to support high quality research in some areas, even if it was not particularly well funded, in order to maintain a balanced portfolio;
- the key features of the Research Excellence Framework 2014, including assessment methodology/outcomes as they pertained to research outputs, impact and environment; uncertainty across the sector regarding the assessment of the newly required impact case studies; detailed work undertaken on scenario modelling in order to generate broad predictions (*Table 1* of the report refers); staff submission rates relative to the last such exercise in 2008;
- ongoing uncertainty as to the future QR funding that might flow from the REF outcome, with only 3* and 4* research to be funded, and additional uncertainty until the government’s next comprehensive spending review.

During discussion the following points were **noted**: 
(a) The decision as to the proportion of staff to be submitted had been a complex judgement call that sought to address issues around research intensivity, volume and quality, while at the same time maximising the quality of the new impact case studies.

(b) There had been a cultural shift since the 2008 exercise in terms of the attitude of academic staff as to whether their research was submitted, with a strong institutional emphasis on the tactical and bureaucratic nature of the exercise with specific rules to be followed (which could mean, for example, that an individual’s non-inclusion might be arbitrary as it depended on the required number of impact studies from that department and not on his/her individual research performance). Careful communication had been undertaken with all staff concerned in order to ensure clarity about the process and associated strategy and to comply with legal requirements relating to equality.

(c) It remained impossible accurately to predict the financial outcome as regards QR income.

(d) The University’s internal submission deadline was 30 September 2013, which allowed sufficient time for internal validation and verification before submission of research outputs to HEFCE (a significant proportion in hard-copy).

(e) The Vice-Chancellor commented that the REF process was mission-critical in that the outcome would have an ongoing impact for several years in terms of funding, reputation, league tables etc.

(f) Peer review of research was now being undertaken more systematically by departments, supported by the Academic Coordinators and with guidance from Research Committee. There was clear evidence that creative and innovative approaches to this activity were having a beneficial effect on research income growth in some areas (e.g. Biology), with further work being undertaken to embed this as routine practice across all disciplines. It was notable in this area that a cultural change was evident in the way that HEIs and individual academics generally accepted the need for more overt and frank discussion and evaluation of research quality.

(g) Although it was difficult to assess the full staff costs of managing the REF process, the University had invested in a research information system (PURE) that would assist in
collating data for future research assessment exercises. It was noted that, from the government’s perspective, the award of QR funding based on REF outcomes justified the associated bureaucratic costs as it was more cost-effective than the overhead calculations related to research council grants.

(h) The new addition of impact case studies was likely to form part of future research assessments, which had implications for maintaining a strong focus on impact in future research at the University.

Council thanked the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for his report, acknowledging the considerable pressure placed on staff by the requirements of the REF and also the inevitable opportunity costs arising from preparation of the University’s submission.

Executive Report: HR Director

Council received the annual Executive Report from the HR Director (C.12-13/48).

Attending the meeting to present her report, Mrs Lofthouse drew Council’s attention to the progress in the seven core projects that underpinned the HR Strategy as well as to the key achievements since the previous annual report.

During discussion Council noted the following points:

(a) The considerable growth in the number of staff attending training programmes related to an increase in the programme offering in response to identified needs and also to the influence of managers who had themselves attended leadership development courses (with consequential identification of skills deficits among their own staff).

(b) There were varied turnover rates among different staff categories, mainly as a result of contractual differences. Council also noted the proportion of voluntary turnover and the comparisons with the UK average and the public sector. It was noted that the transfer of ca. 120 staff to commercial subsidiaries had been a one-off action that was not anticipated to be repeated on this scale.

(c) The increase in advertised posts (from 589 in 2011 to 749 in 2012) was largely a result of the growth of the organisation.
Combined with turnover, the net addition was ca. 120 posts, the majority of which were academic.

(d) With regard to sickness absence reporting, the HR Director confirmed that there was full reporting across support areas while the picture was more varied across academic departments (the figure of 0.9% for the ART area was therefore representative). Academic members of Council clarified the cultural conventions regarding on-site attendance by academics and the manner in which teaching sessions missed due to ill health were re-scheduled. It was however generally agreed that accurate absence statistics were useful to management as indicators of potential problems and areas where the University might wish to provide additional support to staff. It was suggested that data collated for TRAC (Transparent Approach to Costing) in the research area might provide additional data relating to academic working patterns more generally, including sickness absence.

(e) On the question of performance management, the HR Director confirmed that here too the picture was varied across departments as regards objective setting and regular one-to-one meetings. Actions were in train to address the issue, which was acknowledged as important to the performance of the University as a whole. It was noted that science departments were generally more advanced in their current practices in this area, although there was evidence from the growing volume of performance management work supported by HR that there were gradual improvements across all disciplines. Council noted that the wider economic picture placed an ever greater emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness at an individual and institutional level. With regard to the general culture of performance management within academia, it was noted that there were generational differences, with more junior academic staff often more readily accepting of objective-setting compared to more senior academics who had been acculturated in a different environment. Staff members of Council confirmed that appropriate central support was available via HR and the Academic Coordinators to resolve the more difficult performance management issues.

(f) In response to a query relating to national pay negotiations for University staff, the HR Director confirmed that despite relatively low pay awards in recent years there had been no corresponding increase in voluntary turnover. It was noted in this context that the University provided relatively stable
employment compared to other large local employers and that a sizable proportion of staff also benefited from annual salary increments.

(g) With regard to the metric in the report showing the ratio of ART staff to support staff, the HR Director commented that it was not possible to develop a sense of the ideal ratio on a University-wide basis as it varied considerably across different disciplines. It was also noted that an increase in support staff might be a deliberate action to unburden academic staff from administrative duties and that the medium-term planning (MTP) process was in part designed to provide individual academic departments with the autonomy to make the sort of staffing decisions that best suited their needs.

Council thanked the HR Director for her report and confirmed that it was satisfied with the breadth and depth of the topics covered.

12-13/54 Financial Performance Data

Council received for information financial performance data for the period ended 30 April 2013 (C.12-13/49).

12-13/55 HEFCE Risk Assessment

Council received for information HEFCE’s annual assessment of institutional risk [dated 26 April 2013] (C.12-13/50).

12-13/56 Library Refurbishment Project

Council received for information a report on the library refurbishment project (C.12-13/51).

12-13/57 Beijing Graduation Ceremony January 2013

Council received for information a report on arrangements at the graduation ceremony held in Beijing in March 2013 (C.12-13/52). It retrospectively endorsed the decision that the Chair of Council would preside over the third ceremony in the absence of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor.

12-13/58 Business from Committees

Business from the following committee meetings was noted and/or approved (C.12-13/53):
(a) Ethics Committee (Policy and Guidance on the Acceptance of Philanthropic Donations)
(b) Equality & Diversity Committee: 27 February 2013
(c) Nominations Committee: 3 May 2013
(d) Audit Committee: 24 May 2013
(e) Health, Safety and Welfare Committee: 28 May 2013

12-13/59 Unreserved Business from Senate

Council noted the following unreserved business transacted by Senate in May 2013:

➢ register of programmes involving collaboration with other institutions (C.12-13/54).

12-13/60 Use of Seal

Council approved the use of the Common Seal of the University (details available in the Registrar’s office).

12-13/61 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted as Friday 19 July 2013.