UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2013

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dr J Grenville
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor C Mellors
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor J Robinson
Academic Co-ordinator, Professor M Ormrod

Professor J Buchanan
Professor S Carroll
Dr A Charlwood
Professor E Corrigan
Dr C Fewster
Professor R Godby
Professor M Goddard
Professor M Festenstein
Professor V Gould
Professor A Higson
Professor D Howard
Dr R Jacobs
Mr H Kesvani (SU)
Dr O Lisagor
Professor J Maltby
Professor M Maynard
Dr S Minta

Mr A Oloyede (GSA)
Professor E Prettejohn
Dr J Schofield
Professor P Sells
Professor T Stoneham
Professor Q Summerfield
Mr K Taylor (SU)
Professor R Taylor
Professor C Thompson
Professor S Thompson
Mr H Toynton (SU)
Professor J Wainwright
Mr G Wall
Professor J Woodcock
Mr R Yates
Mr K Zu (GSA)

In attendance: The Registrar and Secretary, Dr D Duncan
The Academic Registrar, Ms K Dodd
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
SU Academic Affairs Officer, Mr G Osborn

Apologies for absence were received from Ms E Heaps, Professor B Fulton, Professor A Webster, Professor J Local, Professor D Smith, Professor A Jones, Professor H Fulton, Professor J Schofield, Professor H Graham, Professor C Brown, Mr T Clarke, Professor M Luckhurst, Dr B Pownall, Dr S Chong and Dr J Clarbour.

Senate: 29 January 2013
The minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2012 were approved.

The Vice-Chancellor reported the following matters:

Events/Developments

The University had announced that celebrations to mark its 50th anniversary would start with a major event at York Minster in February, incorporating the conferral of five honorary degrees to people who had made outstanding contributions to York and Yorkshire.

The Digital Preservation Coalition had awarded its Decennial Award for an outstanding contribution to digital preservation, to the Archaeology Data Service in the Department of Archaeology.

The University had won the Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers.

A new £9.4 million second phase of the Dorothy Hodgkin building – the latest stage in the re-development of Chemistry– had been opened officially by Professor Michael Grätzel.

A delegation from the University and the Hull York Medical School had visited India and Sri Lanka to promote new health-focused and academic links between the two countries.

The University's travel plan designed to discourage driving and promote other forms of transport had been recognised with a top award at The Press Business Awards 2012.

People

The Vice-Chancellor and Professor Sue Mendus (Politics) had been made CBEs in the Queen’s New Year Honours List, while Professor Sarah Thompson (Physics) had been made an MBE.

Dr Amanda Lillie (History of Art) had won one of seven new Fellowships announced by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
HRH The Princess Royal had presented Professor Callum Roberts (Environment) with the Mountbatten Maritime Award for best literary contribution for his book *Ocean of Life – How our seas are changing*, at the annual Maritime Media Awards.

Theatre, Film and Television students Dan Atherton, Tom Day, Oliver Hadlow-Martin, Danny Carter and Oscar Udbye had won the top prize in three categories at the Royal Television Society (Yorkshire Region) Student Awards.

The family of a former York student, Dinesh Vaswani, who died in December 2011, had generously funded a scholarship in his name to take effect from the academic year 2013-14.

**Student Recruitment**

The Vice-Chancellor commented on recent media reporting of the mixed fortunes of UK HEIs as regards student recruitment for 2012/13. It was noted that a number of factors had influenced the decline in numbers across the sector, including changes in demographic profile, deferral rates and A-level scores. The Vice-Chancellor congratulated all staff involved in admissions at the University for a successful recruitment round, noting that the next year would continue to present considerable challenges.

**12-13/19 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey**

Senate considered a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) on the 2012 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) results (S.12-13/14).

Professor Robinson highlighted the following points:

- the survey had been conducted by the Higher Education Academy in April-June 2012, with a 34% response rate at the University;
- although differently structured, there was some correlation in the questions with the topics of the undergraduate National Student Survey (NSS);
- a key indicator was the outcome as regards “overall experience of my course” (Figure 2 refers), and specific issues had been referred to individual departments;
- Teaching Committee had reviewed departmental responses to a series of questions on assessment and feedback, a process which had highlighted
good practice and also areas for improvement, including in relation to policy formulation (the latter being referred to the Standing Committee on Assessment for further consideration).

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Teaching Committee was collaborating with the GSA to increase the response rate, and a number of potentially motivating suggestions were noted, including encouragement via supervisors.

(b) As regards the turnaround time for providing feedback on formative assessments, it was noted that there were no perceived issues with departments complying with the University requirement for such feedback to be issued within six weeks. Issues had been raised in this and other surveys in respect of the usefulness of feedback, the specification of assignments and the risk of over-assessment, but it was felt that departments were addressing these issues in the new modular structure.

(c) The data regarding satisfaction levels of students with a declared disability did not numerically show a high variance from the norm, but as the reported lower level of satisfaction was across all the main areas, this would be investigated further to identify whether there was a systemic issue.

12-13/20 Special Cases Committee Annual Report

Senate considered the annual report from the Special Cases Committee (S.12-13/15).

Presenting the report as Chair of the committee, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor drew particular attention to the following:

- the provision of additional data, as requested by Senate the previous year;
- the importance to issues of fairness and equity of maintaining clear paper trails;
- the range of issues considered by the committee, including appeals, transfers and leave of absence;
- examples of insufficient evidence provided by students to support claims of mitigating circumstances;

Senate: 29 January 2013
the number of complaints submitted to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator following the outcome of appeals (19 in 2011/12, none thus far upheld);

- the vital role of departments in providing a timely and sufficiently detailed response to requests for further information;
- the re-categorisation of some appeals as formal complaints, which triggered a different process;
- the peak periods of the year for submission of appeals;
- the increasing number of assumed withdrawals and the overall withdrawal rate of 4% (which included failure to progress academically, withdrawal for medical/personal reasons and leave of absence);
- gender differences in the statistics relating to transfers, extensions and appeals, and possible explanations for such disparities;
- the cautious approach taken to allowing students to progress ‘at risk’ (i.e. taking failed assessments as additional workload simultaneously with the next stage of the programme);
- further consideration of the statistics relating to declared disability in the context of appeals (M12-13/19 above also refers).

During discussion the following comments were noted:

(a) With improvements in data capture, the following year’s report would provide a breakdown of the statistics by department, which would help identify any specific local issues.

(b) The timely certification of ill health provided by the Health Centre had improved following the introduction of a new booking system and encouragement to students not to miss appointments.

(c) The zero rate of dismissal of postgraduate appeals related to the initial process for establishing whether *prima facie* grounds for appeal existed, in which some appeals might be re-categorised as complaints (e.g. in respect of the degree result awarded) or there might be failure to provide supporting evidence.

(d) The relevant administrative departments were considering the best means to handle the high volume of appeals that extended without resolution into the following academic year, in accordance with the progression points built into the modular scheme. The availability of input from academic departments over the summer vacation period was essential to resolving such issues.
Approval of Awards and Examiners

Senate considered recommendations from Teaching Committee in respect of clarifying the responsibility for approval of awards and examiners (S.12-13/16).

Presenting the recommendations as Chair of the Committee, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) reported that the proposed amendments sought to address certain inconsistencies between documentation and actual practice, as identified by the QAA during the recent institutional audit. In addition to the amendments in the paper, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor also tabled the following additional proposals for greater clarity:

- all abbreviations to be spelt out in full in the relevant ordinances and regulations;
- “Standing Committee on Assessment on behalf of Senate” to read “Standing Committee on Assessment acting on behalf of Senate” throughout;
- deletion of the potentially misleading bullet-points relating to powers of Boards of Studies that appeared at the end of Regulation 6.5.

It was also reported that Teaching Committee was conducting a further review of the ordinances and regulations to ensure they remained consistent with development of the modular scheme (e.g. the introduction of departmental mitigating circumstances committees). Any proposed amendments would be brought to Senate for consideration in due course.

During discussion the following additional textual amendments were agreed:

- SCA term of reference no.10 (first sentence): delete “the results of...” and replace “degree results” with “University awards”

Subject to the further amendments as set out above, Senate approved the proposed changes to Senate’s Statement of Primary Responsibilities, the terms of reference of the Standing Committee on Assessment and the associated ordinances and regulations.

Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.12-13/17):
- Teaching Committee: 5 November and 10 December 2012
- Research Committee: 28 November 2012
- Planning Committee: 7 November and 5 December 2012
- Special Cases Committee: 26 November 2012
- Student Experience Committee: 24 May 2012

12-13/23 Periodic Review Reports

Senate received for information periodic review reports in respect of the York Management School and the Departments of Biology and Theatre, Film and Television (S.12-13/18).

12-13/24 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of Senate was scheduled for Tuesday 14 May 2013 at 3.15pm in lecture theatre LMB002, Law/Management building, Heslington East.