

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

COUNCIL

Matters for note by Council at its meeting on 20 May 2020 arising from the meeting of Ethics Framework Governance Committee (EFGC) on 26 February 2020

1. *Membership and terms of reference*

The Committee noted:

- a. Details of its membership, terms of reference and frequency of meetings (approved by Council November 2019), alongside those of the Academic Ethics and Compliance Committee (AECC) (approved on behalf of Senate June 2019 following approval of its constitution by Council November 2018);
- b. A draft outline ethics governance structure showing the two new committees' reporting relationship with Council and Senate and the latter's sub-committees.

The Committee approved further recommendations relating to its membership as follows:

- i. The Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Research and Partnerships/Knowledge Transfer to be included as *ex officio* members;
- ii. The SU and GSA each to be asked to nominate one of their elected sabbatical officers to serve on the Committee;
- iii. The Chair of AECC to be a full member of the Committee, rather than in attendance. It was further recommended that the position should be held by one of the Faculty Deans rather than a departmental/subject level ethics chair, in order to provide a wider senior management perspective;
- iv. The Committee be allowed to co-opt additional members (external or internal) as necessary to advise on specific policy matters where subject-matter expertise would be beneficial.

The Committee further recommended to Nominations Committee the appointment of Amanda Nevill to EFGC as the third lay member of Council (subject to willingness to serve).

2. *Ethics and CSR Universe for York*

The Committee considered a paper setting out a draft 'Ethics and CSR Universe', structured around corporate, academic-related and research issues, including areas of legal compliance where ethical judgement might also be required. The paper mapped out where mature policies were already in place at York and where further work remained to be done, and had been endorsed by UEB.

The Committee observed the following:

- i. The University's approach to ethics and CSR should be rooted in clearly defined institutional values, as set out in University Vision. It would be helpful to elaborate clearly on the University's 'public good' purpose in order to guide institutional-level positions in a number of areas.
- ii. A values-based framework would support decision-making without being excessively restrictive.
- iii. Some areas of ethical consideration might usefully be linked to risk assessment/mitigation practices, especially as this related to defining risk appetite and issues of harm reduction.
- iv. Sustainability was identified as a key area of ethics and CSR. Despite the existence of other groups working in this area, the Committee should be responsible for assurance to Council on this matter.
- v. Other areas for development included:
 - A nuanced approach to international engagement, bearing in mind potential academic impact;
 - A review of Regulation 10, working with the students' unions to elaborate on the principles of upholding freedom of speech as well as the underpinning processes;
 - A review of the origin and nature of artefacts within the University's archival holdings.

3. Development of a University of York Ethics and CSR policy framework

The Committee considered a paper setting out the core elements of a possible Ethics/CSR framework, based on benchmarking of existing practice across the sector. The Committee observed that it would also be helpful to draw on relevant learning from other sectors or organisations which had undertaken in-depth review of their own corporate values and ethics. It further observed that the Framework would need to be a dynamic document capable of responding to new issues as they arose.

The Committee approved the proposed approach for the development of an Ethics and CSR Framework, including the establishment of an operational Working Group chaired by the Head of Governance & Assurance, to report to the next scheduled meeting of EFGC in July 2020. It further decided that:

- i. The Working Group's membership should include academic research expertise from a cognate subject area, student input through the relevant sabbatical officers, and representation from Human Resources;
- ii. The Group would need to establish appropriate links to the relevant University Strategy working groups (e.g. civic responsibility and international commitment);
- iii. The Group's work should be submitted to UEB, AECC and Senate for initial comment before coming back to the Committee for consideration.

The Head of Governance & Assurance reported that the following relevant policies were currently in development:

- Disclosure of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality Policy;
- Due Diligence Policy for Major Donations;
- Policy on the Revocation of Honorary Titles.

Under the EFGC's terms of reference, the first two of these would be brought to the Committee for approval by delegated authority from Council, and the third would be brought for the Committee's consideration, followed by recommendation to Council for approval.

**Dr Alice Wakely, Assistant Secretary to EFGC
on behalf of Professor Charlie Jeffery, Vice-Chancellor, Acting Chair of EFGC
30 April 2020**