14-15/29   Employability

Council received a presentation from the Director of Careers (Liz Smith) on student employability. It was decided that the new Student Employability Strategy currently under development should be circulated to Council members for comment.
14-15/30 Membership

The Chair welcomed new members Mr John Lister (lay member) and Professor Deborah Smith (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, appointed by Senate).

14-15/31 Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

Members were invited to declare any potential conflicts of interest relating to the business of the meeting.

Mrs McAleese declared an interest in the recommendation from the Nominations Committee that she be appointed as a Pro-Chancellor from 1 August 2015 (M14-15/49 below refers).

As Director of the Centre, Professor Stewart declared an interest in the item of business relating to staffing in the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (M14-15/35 below refers).

14-15/32 Minutes

The unreserved minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2014 were approved (C.14-15/30). Council also noted the action schedule based on the minutes (C.14-15/31).

14-15/33 Appointment of Chancellor

Further to M14-15/5, it was reported that at its meeting on 28 November 2014 the University Court had approved the appointment of Professor Sir Malcolm Grant as the next University Chancellor with effect from 1 August 2015, for three years in the first instance. It was noted that the installation ceremony for Sir Malcolm had been scheduled for 27 October 2015.

14-15/34 Piazza Building/International Foundation Programme

Further to M14-15/11, it was reported that at its meeting on 13 February 2015 the Finance and Policy Committee had considered the proposed financing arrangement for the Piazza Building and had decided to consider the matter further at its next meeting on 13 March 2015 (M14-15/49 below refers).

14-15/35 Staffing in Centre for Reviews and Dissemination

Further to M14-15/13, Council received for information an update on staffing in the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (C.14-15/32), noting that good progress was being made to identify
alternative employment opportunities for the staff who remained at risk of redundancy. It was also noted that the Centre had recently been successful in gaining new research contracts. Council expressed its support to the Director of the Centre in managing the current situation.

14-15/36  

Executive Report from the Vice-Chancellor

Council received an Executive Report from the Vice-Chancellor (C.14-15/33) covering the following areas:

- establishment of a joint venture between Capita and Newcastle University to run the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) in Sand Hutton;
- ongoing work with the local enterprise partnerships to secure investment in the BioHub initiative (as part of the wider Biovale project);
- agreement by the USS Joint Negotiating Committee and the USS Trustees of a proposal for reform of the USS (with consequential suspension of the industrial action by UCU);
- ongoing discussions with the City of York Council (CYC) in respect of vehicular access and parking restrictions on the Heslington East campus.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- Capita, the local enterprise partnership and Newcastle University had all confirmed that they wished to continue their active research collaboration with the University at FERA. With no risk or financial exposure relating to the new venture, the University would continue to benefit from the opportunities provided by the re-organised Agency.

- Successful briefings had been held with the local enterprise partnerships and the Minister of State for Universities, Skills and Cities (Greg Clark) in respect of the Biovale project. It was reported that the Minister had been impressed with the work of the Biorenewables Development Centre and had signed the local Growth Deal while at the University.

- The proposed USS reform package would now be subject to statutory consultation with members for 60 days before implementation with effect from April 2016. Although the recent agreement had successfully ended the industrial action and thereby minimised disruption to students, it was noted that
the future sustainability of the scheme would probably have to be re-visited after its next revaluation in two years’ time.

- It was reported that the chief executive of CYC understood how the current Heslington East access/parking restrictions impeded the University’s ability to develop the site, especially as regards business/external engagement. It was further reported in this context that the newly appointed managing director of ‘Make It York’ (Steve Brown), a public-private partnership tasked with business development in York, had already demonstrated a clear understanding of the University’s important role in attracting inward investment to the city.

14-15/37 Teaching Building
[FOI exempt/commercially confidential]

14-15/38 Biology Phase 2 Building
[FOI exempt/commercially confidential]

14-15/39 2015/16 Budget Process and Longer Term Plans
[FOI exempt/commercially confidential]

14-15/40 Borrowing Limits
[FOI exempt/commercially confidential]

14-15/41 Higher Education Code of Governance


Presenting the report, the Governance Officer commented that the new Code would be the central defining benchmark document against which the corporate governance of all HEIs would be assessed by their own internal and external auditors (whose opinions on this matter were provided to HEFCE annually as one element of the required ‘accountability returns’ on which HEFCE based its overarching risk assessment of the University). It was noted that the Code was presented as being a guardian of autonomy and a bulwark against external interference and over-regulation, with the central principle in its adoption being ‘comply or explain’. Particular attention was drawn to the table setting out a detailed analysis of the University’s current level of compliance with the so-called “‘must’ statements”, as well as additional notes.
on other elements of the Code and areas of governance oversight that might be enhanced.

In considering the report, the following points were noted:

(a) Current practices for monitoring the operation of the Students’ Union (§2.5 of the Code refers) were deemed to be acceptable, including consideration of its accounts by the Registrar & Secretary and Director of Finance. It was however agreed that YUSU’s annual impact report, currently only submitted to the University Court, should henceforth also be provided to Council.

(b) Council approved the recommendations that over the coming year the University’s Public Interest Disclosure Policy (i.e. ‘whistle-blowing’) be reviewed and a statement on corporate social responsibility developed.

(c) As regards gaining assurance on the accuracy and honesty of University publications, it was noted that a similar issue had been raised by the external auditors during their last audit in respect of responsibility for the maintenance and integrity of the University’s website. It was agreed that one possible route to provision of assurance in this area might be to ask the internal auditors to review the quality assurance systems within the publications process.

(d) With regard to the reporting of student complaints (as opposed to academic appeals), it was noted that these were currently handled by the Registrar & Secretary but not reported more widely (except in response to FOI requests). It was decided that a brief annual report on the volume, nature and outcome of such complaints might usefully be received by Council in order to identify whether there were any notable themes or trends.

(e) Council approved the proposal that the next governance effectiveness review (§7.11 of the Code refers) should take place during 2015/16. It was noted that the requirement for such reviews had been reduced from every five to every four years (§7.12 of the Code refers). In this context the Governance Officer reported that the internal auditors had reviewed the University’s current arrangements for corporate governance in September 2014, shortly before publication of the new Code, with an overall low risk (“green”) rating. It was likely that such audits would in future be based on assessment against the new Code.
It was decided that the considerably extended section of the Code on equality and diversity (§6.1-6.5 refers) should be referred to the Equality & Diversity Committee for further consideration.

Following the above discussion, Council decided formally to adopt the new Code, with areas of non-compliance explained as set out in the report. It noted that its formal adoption of the Code would be duly reported via the Corporate Governance Statement in the next (2015) Annual Report.

Noting that in the past Council had also adopted the ‘Statement of Primary Responsibilities’ for governing bodies (Appendix 1 of the Code refers), it was decided that a separate proposal be brought on this matter to the next meeting.

Executive Report: Pro-Vice-Chancellor/Teaching & Learning

Council received the annual Executive Report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching & Learning (C.14-15/39).

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

- distinction between academic standards and teaching quality (with some inconsistency as regards the latter);
- new Learning & Teaching Strategy and pilot of institutional pedagogy;
- portfolio developments (including new Natural Sciences programmes);
- ongoing work of the NSS Task Group;
- other student surveys (UKES, PTES, PRES);
- employability and academic skills;
- quality enhancement activities (with reference to timetabling, lecture recording, electronic submission of student work);
- new CPD framework for teaching staff;
- University Statement of Teaching Performance Expectations (M14-15/50 below refers);
- successful performance metrics in the Information Directorate (as regards NSS outcome for learning resources and national CSE award);
- enhancements to IT infrastructure.

In response to comments and queries from Council members, the following points were noted:
(a) Due to their different disciplinary cultures there had been diverse responses in those departments which had not performed well in the NSS, but none had responded defensively: the differences tended to emerge in their organisational capacity to effect change.

(b) Negative events affecting a single final-year cohort could generate a poor NSS response as a one-off that year, but it was generally more important to foster the notion of shared endeavour as the means to generate success in the long term.

(c) Of the seven departments working with the NSS Task Group, four of these had large cohorts of students, so it was hoped that the expected improvements in their outcome would have a wider institutional effect. The SU President confirmed that the SU Academic Officer was content with the progress being made and that, despite their increasingly consumerist attitude, students were beginning to understand that it was the quality not the volume of contact time that generated better learning outcomes. It was also noted that the manifestos of the candidates in the current SU elections gave an insight into the areas of interest for students (e.g. lecture recording, consistency of supervision, teaching/study space etc). In this context, one lay member observed that the NSS was only one quality indicator among many and was not without its own shortcomings.

(d) As regards the withdrawal of programmes from the portfolio, it was noted that such decisions tended to be made on the basis of general viability in the context of registered student numbers.

(e) The pilot exercise in respect of the new institutional pedagogy was currently half way through. It had been making use of a bespoke audit methodology and focus groups with students, and the outcome would be discussed with departments early in the Summer Term.

14-15/43 Executive Report: Pro-Vice-Chancellor/Students

Council received the annual Executive Report from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, as Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Students (C.13-14/51).

Dr Grenville drew particular attention to the following:
ongoing consideration of appropriate KPIs for the non-academic student experience (including levels of alumni engagement);
• the effectiveness of the collegiate structure in responding to extreme incidents such as the recent deaths of two students, (for which Council as the University governing body offered its condolences);
• changes to college staffing structures to improve consistency of service provision;
• the successful opening of Constantine College with 620 student residents (including 100 postgraduates);
• developments in student support, including a new ‘Fitness to Study’ process;
• large-scale investment in new sports facilities and different levels of participation (beginners/collegiate/University);
• collaboration with YUSU in challenging the so-called ‘lad culture’, which was often associated with sports teams;
• wide range of student-led activities and volunteering, with linkage to the employability agenda;
• University response to freedom of speech issues arising from global political events and their interpretation by different student political or religious societies (with support provided by the Equality & Diversity Office).

During discussion, the following comments were noted:

(a) The Chair noted that, following the useful pre-lunch presentation from the Director of Careers and reference to employability in other executive reports, this was clearly an area in which Council members were able to provide practical support and assistance.

(b) Given the outcome of recent market research into perceptions of York among potential applicants, it was suggested that the manner in which the colleges were promoted, and in particular their welfare function, might need to be re-visited from a strategic perspective. In response it was noted that such work was partly underway through the new college staffing arrangements which sought to re-focus the work of college tutors on building community and individual resilience rather than providing ‘welfare support’. The SU President confirmed that similar considerations were factored into the current work of the College Branding Working Group.

(c) As regards student identification with either a department or a college, it was noted that efforts were made to preserve a sense
of collegiate belonging by providing developmental opportunities in colleges (e.g. in respect of volunteering or employability). In this way reasons to return to the college were provided to off-campus and upper-year students, in a bid to counter the previously prevailing culture in which colleges were largely viewed as first-year halls of residence. The SU President reported that YUSU had also played a role in this reconfiguration activity by relinquishing to colleges a number of services and activities that it had formerly provided.

(d) The role of Wentworth as a postgraduate-only college had been reviewed two years previously, when it had been decided it should retain that function. However, it had also been decided that the proportion of postgraduates resident in other colleges should also be increased as this was beneficial in areas such as mentoring.

Key Performance Indicators


Attending the meeting to present the report, the Business Intelligence Development Manager (Alistair Knock) drew particular attention to the new division of the data into a core set of actual performance indicators (KPIs) and further contextual information. Council also noted the appendix setting out departmental KPIs, which were used in consideration of strategic investment proposals. It was also reported that discussions were ongoing with the Vice-Chancellor, the Director of Finance and the Director of Planning as regards the best metrics for monitoring implementation of the new University Strategy. As for benchmarking against other institutions at a departmental/subject level, it was noted that new HESA datasets now allowed this to be undertaken at a more granular level than previously.

The following comments were noted in discussion:

(a) With regard to the indicators for ‘market attractiveness’ (home undergraduates only, indicators M1 and M2 refer), which showed a declining trend since 2011/12, it was thought this related to a national decline in A-level outcomes and also York’s slight deterioration in league table positions. It was noted that the decline in the ratio of firmly accepted offers might also reflect broader sector trends in admissions (i.e. greater volatility in decision-making due to changing patterns
in adjustment and clearing). In this context it was noted that the strategic decision by some institutions to make unconditional offers subject to firm acceptance was not thought by UCAS to have considerable impact; firm acceptance was also not enforceable and not welcomed by schools (due to negative effect on A-level performance).

(b) The indicator in respect of the percentage of ABB+ entrants had been chosen as it correlated with the recent relaxation by HEFCE of student number controls for such students. However, as this control would be lifted entirely from 2015, it was suggested that a new and more sophisticated measure might be introduced in its place.

(c) It was suggested that, where available, it would be useful to include Russell Group comparisons into the KPI set.

(d) As it was a contributing element in some league tables, it was suggested that the percentage of ‘good’ degree outcomes (i.e. 1st and 2.1 classifications) might usefully be shown in the contextual data.

(e) In response to a comment on the considerable number of indicators, it was noted that this reflected the complex nature of contemporary higher education in which universities were expected to deliver on a wide range of measures and in response to the demands of many different stakeholders. In such an environment, which contrasted with the corporate world and its focus on the financial bottom-line, it had become essential for HE management to monitor performance in a wider and more nuanced manner (newspaper league tables, for example, used a minimum of 10-15 different measures). It was however acknowledged that the KPIs used by the University needed to be kept under constant review, with further refinement and a clear hierarchy of significance and priority. It was noted that this would in part be achieved by the ongoing work to develop performance measures for the three key objectives and the underlying enabling objectives of the new University Strategy.

(f) With regard to the contextual data in respect of gender balance (staff only, indicator S4 refers), it was suggested that it would be more useful not to monitor by overall percentages but rather by level.
(g) As regards the correlation between monitoring data and managing key risks, a subject which had been raised in a recent internal audit report, it was noted that a reconciliation exercise was routinely undertaken to ensure that there was appropriate mapping between the two activities.

14-15/45  **Annual Away Day**

Council *received* for information the summary notes of its Away Day held on 15 January 2015 (C.14-15/42).

14-15/46  **Annual Report on Health, Safety and Security**

Council *received* for information the annual report on health, safety and security (C.14-15/43).

14-15/47  **Financial Performance Data**

Council *received* for information financial performance data for the period ended 31 December 2014 (C.14-15/44). It *decided* that for monitoring purposes this standing report should henceforth be given greater prominence on the agenda.

14-15/48  **Development and Alumni Relations**

Council *received* for information the annual report on development and alumni relations (C.14-15/45). It *approved* the recommendation that henceforth the report be submitted to its June meeting in order that it might include the latest benchmarking data from the Ross-CASE Survey (an annual survey collecting detailed information about gift revenue and fundraising costs to measure the philanthropic performance of universities).

14-15/49  **Business from Committees**

Business from the following committee meetings was *noted* and/or *approved* (C.14-15/46):

(a) Equality & Diversity Committee: 30 October 2014  
(b) Ethics Committee: 7 November 2014  
(c) HYMS Joint Board: 9 December 2014  
(d) Nominations Committee: 6 February 2015 (including the appointment of Mrs Jenny McAleese as a Pro-Chancellor and honorary degree nominations from the outgoing and new University Chancellors)  
(e) Health, Safety and Welfare Committee: 10 February 2015
Council noted the following unreserved business from the meeting of the Senate held on 27 January 2015:

(a) Research Excellence Framework (C.14-15/47)
(b) University Statement on Teaching Performance (C.14-15/48)

With regard to the REF report, Council offered its congratulations on the successful outcome for the University, noting that it ranked 14\textsuperscript{th} overall based on GPA (10\textsuperscript{th} for impact), with twelve departments placed in the top ten for their subject.

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

Council approved the appointment of the Director of Finance (Jeremy Lindley) as a director of the Trustee Company of the University of York Pension Fund.

In response to a query about a potential conflict of interest for Mr Lindley arising from his role as the University Director of Finance, it was noted that the Trustee Company was independently chaired, with four employer members (including the Registrar & Secretary and the HR Director) and four fund members (current and former members of staff), and as such there was no perceived conflict in terms of representing the interest of both groups.

The date of the next meeting was noted as Friday 12 June 2015 (12:00 onwards).