UNIVERSITY OF YORK

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2012

Present: The Chair of Council
The Vice-Chancellor
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
The Treasurer (Mr D Dickson)
Pro-Chancellor (Mr D Tecwyn)

Professor J Bennett
Mr M Burton
Ms K Diaconu (GSA)
Mr T Ellis (SU)
Professor B Fulton

Mr M Galloway
Mr B Greenwood
Mrs M Loffill
Mrs J McAleese
Mrs A Selvaratnam
Mrs J Unwin

In attendance: The Registrar and Secretary
The Director of Finance
Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, Professor J Local
(for M11-12/47)
Director of HR, Mrs P Lofthouse (for M11-12/48)
Director of Admissions and Student Recruitment,
Mr S Willis (for M11-12/49)

Apologies for absence were received from the Pro-Chancellor (Mrs L Wild), the
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor C Mellors), Mr R Gregory, Professor M Hallett and
Mr W McCarthy.

11-12/43 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.

11-12/44 Minutes

The unreserved minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2012 were approved (C.11-12/41) and Council noted the action schedule based on the minutes (C.11-12/42).
11-12/45 Membership

Further to M11-12/27, Council noted that:

- Dr Hazel Wilkinson had stepped down from Council due to her ongoing ill health (the Chair had conveyed best wishes on behalf of Council);
- Professor Colin Mellors had been elected by Senate to replace Dr Jane Grenville (who had acquired *ex officio* membership on becoming Deputy Vice-Chancellor);
- Kallum Taylor had been elected as SU President and Karin Diaconu re-elected as GSA President for 2012/13.

11-12/46 QAA Institutional Review

Further to M11-12/31, Council received for information a report on the final outcome of the QAA institutional review conducted in February 2012 (C.11-12/43).

With regard to the recommendation in respect of information provision to students and the reference to student charters, the Registrar expressed the view that this reflected the importance in the new funding environment of being absolutely clear as to what students could expect (and, conversely, what was expected of them).

Council reiterated its congratulations on the positive outcome to all staff and students who had taken part in the review process.

11-12/47 Executive Report: Research

Council received the annual executive report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, Professor John Local (C.11-12/44).

Attending the meeting to present his report, Professor Local provided Council with additional details in respect of:

- cuts to funding for research councils and consequential decline in research income, especially in sciences;
- impact of size (critical mass) of research groups on the University’s ability to generate research income;
- growing number of applications for larger grants in current year, although success rates uncertain;
increasing applications for EU research grants (despite lack of overhead payments from such sources);

actions taken to improve research success (including investment in research environment/facilities, new academic appointments and enhanced research support functions departmentally and centrally);

20% weighting of ‘impact case studies’ in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, as assessed for their wider societal impact;

implications of impact assessments for different academic disciplines, especially those that had traditionally been less ‘applied’;

rationale for strategic and more selective approach to staff submissions in individual departments.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Although the requirements of the REF and the priorities of research councils had the potential to have a negative impact on the sorts of subjects chosen for research, efforts were made to respond creatively and to ensure that exciting, engaging research remained the longer term priority. Although it was justifiable in some respects for governments to expect beneficial returns from taxpayer-funded research, the academy would rightly seek to protect high-quality research from distortions in its focus and subject matter while at the same time rising to the challenge of demonstrating its broader validity.

(b) Although writing research proposals was time-consuming, it was clear that the highest quality submissions (including in respect of impact potential) were those drafted by academics themselves. The process of drafting the application was part of the learning experience and the overall research project, and as such could not be undertaken by research support staff.

(c) Assessment of REF submissions would be undertaken by expert panels appointed by HEFCE that would also include ‘end users’. Panel members were nominated by learned societies and other institutions, and panels could refer research outputs to other panels if specialist expertise were required. To replicate this peer assessment process, all University departments had participated in a mock REF exercise in which a frank assessment of the quality of their research outputs had been undertaken, with input from ‘critical friends’ from other HEIs. A mixed picture of preparedness had emerged and actions were in train to address issues in specific departments.
(d) The Vice-Chancellor observed that the process of assessing research quality on a cyclical basis across the sector had contributed to ongoing state support for research which might not otherwise have been made available. While the bureaucratic quantitative assessment methodology was unfortunate, success for the University in the REF was vital in reputational and funding terms (with ca. 10% of income coming from ‘QR’ research funding allocated for the next six years on the basis of the REF outcome).

(e) With regard to declining income from research councils and actions taken to increase the ‘hit rate’ of applications, it was noted that application success in Biology and the Centre for Immunology and Infection was crucial to achieving research grant targets for 2012/13. With the concentration of large-scale funding in the health/bio-medicine areas, it was necessary to pay particular attention to the best means of accessing such funds in the context of competition from institutions with large, long-established medical schools.

Council thanked Professor Local for his report and, noting the REF deadline of 29 November 2013, conveyed best wishes to all concerned with preparing the University’s submission.

11-12/48  Executive Report: HR

Council received the annual executive report from the HR Director, Pat Lofthouse (C.11-12/45).

Attending the meeting to present her report, Mrs Lofthouse highlighted in particular the following aspects:

- implementation of revised employment-related statutes and ordinances;
- implementation of new online recruitment tool;
- improved staff induction process including introduction of a ‘Welcome Service’;
- introduction of a 360° feedback tool based on leadership principles.

In response to comments and queries from Council, the following points were noted:
(a) The Director’s main concern was to ensure that HR was sufficiently flexible to focus its support on the critical issues faced by the University.

(b) Sickness absence was generally under-reported by academic staff who tended to feel that they made up for absences in other ways and at other times. The periods of absence in question tended to be short. For longer term absences, return to work support was provided through an enhanced occupational health service.

(c) Assessment of the impact of staff development activities was important in order to be assured that training resources were being targeted at the right areas.

(d) Some of the HE metrics presented did not have an associated target as they were consequential upon other areas (e.g. number of staff on fixed-term contracts related in part to the number of research contracts won by the University). Such factors affected a number of the performance indicators, including recruitment of international academic staff and the ratio of academic to support staff.

(e) In terms of some of the broader financial challenges facing the University referred to by the Director in her opening remarks, it was noted that ‘Ask SMG’ events had been organised to allow all staff to raise questions about the University’s top-level strategies and future challenges, including in respect of financial issues.

(f) With regard to leadership and management development, the Director confirmed that, with a growing number of staff passing through in-house training programmes, it was evident that managers were demonstrating greater confidence in dealing with difficult performance management issues. Staff perceptions of their managers were also improving and overall there was a high level of staff engagement, as confirmed by the most recent staff survey.

(g) Casual job opportunities for students at the University were managed through the Careers Service (part of the Academic Registry). Such paid positions were included in overall staffing metrics and partly explained how turnover levels could differ across the support functions.

Council thanked the HR Director for her executive report.
Student Recruitment

Council considered a report on student recruitment, with particular reference to overseas recruitment and the use of agents (C.11-12/46).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions (Simon Willis), drew Council’s specific attention to the following:

- the scope of recruitment activities at different stages in the applicant lifecycle;
- work with departments to respond to the variations in recruitment markets for different disciplines/programmes;
- increasing importance of digital communications, with implications for staffing and systems in the admissions area;
- importance of providing accurate information to applicants in an environment of greater scrutiny and exposure.

During discussion the following comments were noted:

(a) In terms of the ratio of acceptances to offers (conversion rate), around 20% was considered to be a healthy figure for an individual department. Such figures could however be distorted as, under certain circumstances, the University might turn down candidates who had accepted conditional offers but then failed to meet the conditions set.

(b) Diversification of overseas markets was a major priority for cultural reasons as well as those relating to the mitigation of financial risk. Success for individual departments in specific overseas markets related to a wide range of factors (e.g. the York Management School was competing in the Indian market against many high-profile, long-established business schools). The University’s international market coverage had increased considerably in the last five years.

(c) Aside from the large markets of India and China, other smaller markets might emerge as part of a geographical cluster (e.g. in the Middle East) or for specific reasons relating to economic development and associated funding availability (e.g. overseas scholarships provided by oil companies in Kazakhstan). In general, entry into a new market was on the basis of detailed
market research and might be planned for development over a 5-10 year period.

(d) In some countries students paid agents for a range of specific services that might not be directly related to their programme of study at the University (e.g. visa applications, travel arrangements etc). The University only employed agents after a thorough verification process that included references from the British Council, which also provided training and scrutiny in respect of their activities.

(e) The University’s widening participation (WP) strategy had focused on target groups in low participation neighbourhoods and involved awareness and aspiration-raising in collaboration with selected schools and other HE partners. Two new programmes would be launched in 2012-13, aimed at years 7-11 and 12-13. The University broadly achieved its benchmark based on HESA data for such activities and also monitored its progress against the targets set out in its agreement with OFFA (relating to the proportion of entrants from social-economic classes 4-7).

(f) Schools liaison work in York related more to aspiration-raising than recruitment as the local schools did not generally meet the University’s WP target profile. There was evidence that such work was successful in encouraging young people to continue in education beyond the age of 16. In terms of the supposition that higher fees might lead to more students remaining in their local area to study, it was too early to discern such an effect.

(g) The idea of requiring a deposit payment from overseas students with confirmed offers in order to firm up the numbers of likely enrolments was reviewed on a regular basis. It was not currently thought to be necessary as the new visa requirements would provide similar information in the same timescale.

Council thanked the Director of Admissions for his report.

11-12/50 Financial Performance Data

Council received for information financial performance data for the period ended 30 April 2012 (C.11-12/48).

11-12/51 Business from Committees

Business from the following committee meetings was noted and/or approved (C.11-12/49):
(a) Equality & Diversity Committee: 1 March 2012
(b) Nominations Committee: 4 May 2012 (including nominations for honorary degrees in 2013 and Morrell Fellowships)
(c) Audit Committee: 25 May 2012
(d) Health, Safety and Welfare Committee: 29 May 2012
(e) Policy and Resources Committee: 8 June 2012

11-12/52 Unreserved Business from Senate

Council noted the following unreserved business from the meeting of the Senate held on 15 May 2012:

(a) Vice-Chancellor’s report on recent events (C.11-12/50);
(b) register of taught programmes of study involving collaboration, including validated programmes (C.11-11/51).

11-12/53 Use of Seal

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

11-12/54 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted as Friday 20 July 2012.

The Chair also reported that it had been decided to hold the annual Council Away Day on Friday 12 October 2012 (2.00pm, Lakehouse room, Ron Cooke Hub, Heslington East). Members with suggestions for the away day agenda were invited to contact the Chair or Registrar & Secretary.

11-12/55 Recruitment of the next Vice-Chancellor

[Note: The Vice-Chancellor left the meeting while this item of business was discussed.]

Noting that Professor Cantor had announced he would be stepping down as Vice-Chancellor at the end of December 2013, Council received a report from the Registrar & Secretary setting out the process and timescale for recruiting his successor (C.11-11/47)

It was noted that:
- A Joint Committee of Senate and Council would be established as a search and appointing committee, in accordance with Statute 6.1.
- The Joint Committee would be chaired by the Chair of Council and comprise four lay members of Council (including the Chair), five academics (to be appointed by Senate at its next meeting), one member of support staff and the Presidents of the two student organisations.
- The Joint Committee was expected to be balanced in terms of gender and to include BME representation.
- Following consultation with the wider University community in respect of job description and person specification, the post would be advertised in the autumn 2012, with interviews taking place in spring term 2013.

Council approved the above process, noting that the Joint Committee would agree a recommendation for approval by Council at a meeting specially called for that purpose. As regards the lay membership of the Joint Committee, Council approved the following nominations from the Chair:

- David Dickson (Treasurer)
- Lesley Wild (Pro-Chancellor)
- Julia Unwin (Court appointee to Council)

Council also approved the suggestion that the pre-lunch session before the next meeting should take the form of an informal discussion about the role of Vice-Chancellor in advance of the drafting of the person specification and job description, with the discussion to be facilitated by the recruitment consultants (Odgers) who had been engaged to support the process. It was agreed that the discussion should focus on the type of leadership the University would require in the context of its future challenges and opportunities. Members wishing to suggest possible candidates were invited to submit these in confidence to the Registrar & Secretary.
11-12/56* Reserved Minutes

The reserved minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2012 were approved (C.11-12/52*).

11-12/57* Reserved Business from Senate

Council noted the following reserved business from the meeting of the Senate held on 15 May 2012 (C.11-12/53*):

(a) promotions
(b) senior appointments
(c) honorary appointments
(d) student suspension