UNIVERSITY OF YORK

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2011

Present:  The Chair of Council
          The Vice-Chancellor
          The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
          The Treasurer (Mr D Dickson)
          Pro-Chancellor (Dr R Brech)
          Pro-Chancellor (Mrs L Wild)
          Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Ms A E M Heaps)

Mrs S Brabyn  Mrs M Loffill
Mr J Calhoun (GSA)  Mrs J McAleese
Mr T Ellis (SU)  Mrs A Selvaratnam
Professor B Fulton  Mr D Tecwyn
Mr M Galloway  Mrs J Unwin
Mr B Greenwood  Dr H Wilkinson

In attendance:

The Registrar and Secretary
The Director of Finance
Governance Officer, Dr P Evans

Apologies for absence were received from Professor J Bennett, Professor M Hallett and Mr B McCarthy.

10-11/63  Presentation

Council received a presentation from Professor Howard Wilson (Physics) on research in plasma physics and fusion.

10-11/64  Membership

The Chair thanked all outgoing members for their valuable contribution to the Council’s work, in particular Dr Brech who had served for 11 years.

10-11/65  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.
10-11/66 Minutes

The unreserved minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2011 were approved (C.10-11/62), subject to the following amendments:

- M10-11/47 (Minutes): substitute “re-balloting” for “balloting” in second bullet-point;
- M10-11/49 (Home/ EU Tuition Fees): delete “34% of additional fee income above £9k” in sub-paragraph (d).

Council noted progress against the action schedule based on the minutes (C.10-11/63) and, further to M10-11/49, it was reported that the tuition fee level for the Hull York Medical School (HYMS) had been set at £9k p.a.

10-11/67 Corporate Governance Review

Further to M10-11/48, Council considered a further report on progress to implement the action plan arising from the corporate governance review conducted in 2009/10 (C.10-11/64).

With regard to developing a mechanism by which the Senior Management Group (SMG) would report on its business to Council [action 6], Council discussed various options in order to avoid over- or duplicate-reporting of management activity while at the same time providing Council with an appropriate degree of governance oversight. It was decided that, as a starting point, the SMG should submit an annual digest to the Autumn Term meeting of Council (November) providing an overview of its business during the previous academic year. It was agreed that this retrospective report would enable Council to identify items of SMG business about which it would like to receive further briefing and/ or more regular reporting.

Council also considered the final report of the Senate effectiveness review group [action 13] and received the relevant minute (tabled) recording Senate’s discussion of the report at its meeting on 12 July 2011. As chair of the review group, the Vice-Chancellor drew Council’s particular attention to §30-34 of the report which made comments and recommendations in respect of the reporting relationship between Senate and Council. During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Council agreed that it was appropriate for the Student Services Committee no longer to report to Senate as well as to the Policy and Resources Committee, provided that its Chair (the Pro-Vice-
Chancellor for Students) referred any business with academic implications either to the Teaching Committee or Senate.

(b) With regard to the question of providing assurance in respect of academic quality, Council noted the various reports that were currently provided at various points during the year, e.g. Senate papers on the National Student Survey and other academic indicators (degree classification data, PhD completion rates etc), the annual executive report on teaching and learning from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and reports on external reviews and assessments (QAA audit, Research Excellence Framework etc). It was decided that such information on specific topics should be supplemented by provision of a summary overview paper from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor setting out the University’s overarching quality assurance/enhancement framework and processes (e.g. in respect of departmental periodic reviews and annual programme reviews). The annual executive reports from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) would also be enhanced to focus more specifically on academic quality assurance processes and issues.

(c) In response to a suggestion from the Chair, it was decided that the Planning Office should be asked to provide a brief digest of student-related metrics (e.g. total number and composition of the student body, completion/retention rates, proportion of different degree classifications awarded etc).

Council also considered the proposed Scheme of Delegation and Decision-making [action 9] and the following points were noted:

i. The approval powers of the Treasury Group would be added to the Scheme.

ii. The Policy and Resources Committee was not included as, following the governance review in 2009/10, it no longer had specific approval authority. Despite this change, it was generally agreed that the Committee continued to serve a useful advisory role by pre-considering major investment proposals before their referral to Council for formal approval.

iii. Major national changes in tuition fee structures would be considered by Council, but routine agreement of home and overseas fee rates, previously considered by the Planning Committee, would henceforth be decided by the SMG (§3.8 of the Scheme refers).
iv. It was noted that expenses claims of the Vice-Chancellor were approved by the Treasurer and those of the Chancellor and members of Council (including the Chair) by the Registrar & Secretary.

v. It was agreed that, in accordance with past practice, the Treasurer should also be included among the senior staff authorised to approve the use of the common seal of the University.

Subject to the above points and confirmation by the Finance Committee of the appropriateness of the proposed financial approval levels, Council approved the Scheme of Delegation and Decision-making.

10-11/68 Tuition Fees: Communications Strategy

Further to M10-11/49, Council received for information a strategy drawn up by the Directors of External Relations and Student Recruitment and Admissions in respect of communicating key messages about the new funding environment and associated student support arrangements \( C.10-11/65 \). With regard to the importance of outreach and schools liaison work, it was noted that this was extensively covered in the University’s access agreement (M10-11/69 below refers).

10-11/69 Access Agreement

Further to M10-11/49, it was reported that, following one minor clarifying amendment, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) had approved the University’s access agreement.

10-11/70 Staffing Reductions

Further to M10-11/50, Council approved the following membership for the sub-group established to consider and approve proposals in respect of staff restructuring/ redundancy affecting ten or more full-time-equivalent employees within a department:

1. Professor Trevor Sheldon (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Chair)
2. Professor Mark Hallett (academic staff member of Council)
3. Mrs Amanda Selvaratnam (support staff member of Council)
4. Mr Mike Galloway (lay member of Council)
5. Mrs Jenny McAleese (lay member of Council)

It was noted that all decisions made by the sub-group would be reported for information to the next Council meeting.
Budget 2011/12 and Financial Forecasts to 2014/15

Council considered the budget for 2011/12 and the medium-term financial plan to 2014/15 (C.09-10/67) as presented by the Director of Finance who drew particular attention to the following:

- key financial targets, constraints and assumptions;
- income and cost projections;
- cash flow and surplus;
- debt management;
- capital programme;
- sensitivity analysis.

In response to comments and queries, Council noted the following points:

(a) The planned contingency funds in response to the new funding environment (rising to £24.7m by 2014/15) reflected the SMG’s cautious assumptions in respect of the sustainability of student numbers, the ‘neutral’ replacement of government funding by the higher tuition fee and inclusion of costs arising from the access agreement approved by OFFA. In presentational terms, the accompanying financial strategy when submitted to HEFCE would reiterate that any additional income would be invested in a range of measures to improve the student experience, support access initiatives and sustain research capacity. Such expenditure had been identified in broad terms but not planned in detail as it seemed imprudent to raise expectations ahead of the funding actually materialising in the accounts.

(b) Forecasts in respect of future research income took into account pressure on the research councils and were based on the figures which had emerged from the medium-term planning process with academic departments. The projected increase in 2011/12 arose partly from research grants that had already been won and as such provided a relatively high degree of certainty.

(c) With regard to the future of national pay bargaining arrangements, it was noted that this was kept under review, particularly in the context of the likely fragmentation of the sector in the new funding environment. A number of factors would influence the ongoing consideration of this matter over the coming years (e.g. employee relations, potential set-up costs of local machinery etc) and it was acknowledged that all the advantages and disadvantages needed to carefully assessed.
(d) The seemingly large increase in residences and catering income in 2011/12 arose mainly from a revised accounting treatment of income previously appearing elsewhere in the accounts.

Following the above discussion, Council approved the budget for 2011/12 and the medium-term financial plan to 2014/15 for submission to HEFCE.

10-11/72 Executive Report: Pro-Vice-Chancellor/Business & Community

Council received the annual executive report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Business and Community, Professor Colin Mellors (C.10-11/69), who drew specific attention to the following matters:

- inter-relation of the business and community agenda with teaching and research;
- challenges and opportunities provided by the new political and economic environment;
- areas of varied performance, partly as result of deliberate focus on strategic priorities;
- different types of metrics for assessing performance;
- successful acquisition of funding from HEFCE’s Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF).

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) The University was well connected to the successor bodies to the Regional Development Agency (RDA), the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), through top-level membership of their Boards. Although the LEPs had clear objectives and considerable buy-in from the business community, they did not have the same level of staffing and, in the short term at least, would not be able to provide funding. The University also maintained its active engagement with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Pro-Vice-Chancellor’s chairing of its regional Programme Management Board.

(b) The Business Advisory Committee was proving helpful in developing performance in the area of spin-offs and licensing, which would be further boosted by investment from the University’s HEIF allocation. Student enterprise activities were an exciting part of this portfolio and work was underway to improve support for mentoring and proof of concept funding.

(c) New structures established to deliver outcomes required in response to ERDF funding were proving successful and
revealed the potential for further development of innovation and enterprise within academic departments.

Council thanked the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for his report.

10-11/73  White Paper

Council **considered** a paper outlining the key recommendations of the recently published government White Paper, ‘*Students at the Heart of the System*’ (C.10-11/68).

During discussion the following points were **noted**:

(a) The detail in the White Paper, currently out for consultation until the end of September, was complex in terms of the potential impact on recruitment to individual departments and programmes.

(b) The proposals in respect of unlimited recruitment of ‘high tariff entrants’ (i.e. students with AAB or equivalent at A-level) had led to the creation of a number of league tables showing where such students were currently clustered in the sector. Depending on the methodology employed, the University appeared 10–15th in such tables.

(c) The focus on entry tariff raised interesting questions relating to the correlation between that and final degree outcomes, and, by extension, the relative ‘market value’ of degrees from different institutions in the context of graduate employability.

It was **noted** that the SMG would be undertaking more detailed statistical analysis of the White Paper’s implications at its forthcoming away day and further reports would be submitted to Council at a later date.

10-11/74  Annual Feedback Questionnaire

Council **considered** a report summarising the feedback on Council effectiveness submitted by individual members via the annual questionnaire (C.10-11/70).

The Chair commented that overall the response was broadly similar to the previous year, with the matrix of ratings against different criteria confirming a generally positive opinion of Council performance. Some specific comments about challenging the executive and a perceived reduction in scrutiny by lay members as a consequence of the corporate governance review were **noted**.
With regard to a specific point made by one member about knowledge of the campus layout, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Estates) invited any member wishing to become better informed to contact her directly to arrange an informal tour. The Vice-Chancellor also commented that Heads of Department would be willing to show individual Council members around their departments on request.

10-11/75 Sickness Absence Data

Further to M10-11/54, Council received for information sickness absence data in respect of support staff (C.10-11/71).

10-11/76 Financial Performance Data

Council received for information financial performance data for the period ended 31 May 2011 (C.10-11/72).

10-11/77 Business from Committees

Business from the following committee meetings was noted and/ or approved (C.10-11/73):

(a) Health, Safety and Welfare Committee: 31 May 2011
(b) Equality & Diversity Committee: 23 June 2011
(c) Policy and Resources Committee: 8 July 2011
(d) Nominations Committee: 8 July 2011

10-11/78 Schedule of Business

Council received for information its Schedule of Business for 2011/12, including the schedule of Executive Reports (C.10-11/74).

10-11/79 Unreserved Business from Senate

Council noted the following unreserved business from the meeting of the Senate held on 12 July 2011:

(a) Vice-Chancellor’s report on recent events/ developments (C.10-11/75);
(b) analysis of undergraduate and postgraduate degree classifications (C.10-11/76)
(c) calendar of meetings (C.10-11/77).

10-11/80 Use of Seal

Council approved the use of the Common Seal of the University (details available in the Registrar’s office).
10-11/81 Dates of Meetings in 2011/12

The dates of meetings in 2011/12 were noted as follows:

Friday 7 October 2011 (Away Day, 2.30pm, in the Lakehouse room in the Ron Cooke Hub, followed by dinner in the atrium)

Friday 25 November 2011
Friday 2 March 2012
Friday 22 June 2012
Friday 20 July 2012
(all 12:00, room H/G15, Heslington Hall, unless otherwise advised)