

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

COURT

Minutes of the annual meeting held on 23 November 2018

The meeting was attended by 50 members and 47 apologies for absence were received.

18-19/1 Membership

A list showing the current membership of the Court was **received** for information.

The Chancellor **noted** that since the last meeting the former Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Koen Lamberts, had taken a new post as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sheffield, and the Court joined the Chancellor in wishing Professor Lamberts success in his new role. It was further **noted** that while the recruitment of the next Vice-Chancellor and President was in train (M18-19/6 below refers), Professor Saul Tendler (Deputy Vice-Chancellor) had been appointed as the Acting Vice-Chancellor and President.

18-19/2 Appointments

It was **reported** that the Chancellor had taken Chair's Action on behalf of the Court to approve the following appointments (in accordance with University Statutes):

- Mr Richard Sommers as a lay member of the University Council;
- Mr Philip Carpenter as a Pro-Chancellor (in succession to Ms Julia Unwin)

18-19/3 York Talks

The Director of External Relations presented a promotional video for the annual York Talks research showcase event, which the Court **noted** was scheduled for 9 January 2019.

18-19/4 Acting Vice-Chancellor's Report

The Court **received** the Annual Report 2018 and an oral report from the Acting Vice-Chancellor covering the following matters:

- achievements in teaching and learning in 2017/18, including achievement of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Gold award and improved ranking in the *The Guardian* league table (rising from 17th to 12th position);
- successes in research funding and impact from a range of initiatives across different disciplines;

- ongoing development of knowledge exchange and partnership activities;
- international developments including in respect of student mobility and new institutional partnerships (e.g. with Maastricht University);
- estates development plans in the context of the recently confirmed listings decisions made by Heritage England in respect of Campus West;
- key priorities for strategy development, including institutional growth, focus on excellence, internationalisation and sustainability;
- the current external political climate for higher education, with particular reference to the government's ongoing funding review (the Augar Review) and the implications of Brexit.

During discussion of the Acting Vice-Chancellor's report the following points were **noted**:

- (a) The concept of two-year degree programmes had been discussed many times in the sector, but there was little evidence of high demand for such provision in the context of the wider student experience. The University was however continuing to develop its online learning portfolio together with consideration of graduate level apprenticeships.
- (b) With regard to international student recruitment in the context of Brexit and a possible reduction in tuition fees for UK/EU undergraduates, the University's overseas student population was lower than the Russell Group average. To drive further growth in this area an in-country presence was being established in territories such as China, India and Malaysia, with further expansion and diversification likely in the future.
- (c) On the subject of so-called "grade inflation" (i.e. rising proportion of higher degree results), it was important to distinguish between legitimate improvements arising from provision of better teaching and facilities and those which were inappropriate in the context of the maintenance of academic standards. It was reported there was no evidence from external assessment such as the TEF and external examiner reports that grade inflation was an issue at the University.
- (d) The TEF and its associated gold/silver/bronze awards was currently subject to a statutory independent review led by Dame Shirley Pearce (Chair of governors at LSE) in order to assess whether the process behind the ratings was "fit for use" and in the public interest. In the event of any statutory changes being presented to parliament on this matter, Court members would be appropriately briefed by the University.
- (e) In response to a query in respect of current staff morale and a general lack of commentary on staffing matters in the Annual Report, the Acting Vice-Chancellor observed that as a community of scholars the University's greatest asset was its staff and students, with morale remaining generally positive despite the period of industrial action during 2017/18. As regards

the Annual Report, it was confirmed that consideration was being given to how future reports might best accentuate the contribution made by University staff in all categories and roles, with a stronger emphasis on outcomes rather than inputs. It was generally agreed that, although the University was a large organisation which needed to be managed accordingly, and that there were certain statutory financial reporting requirements, the Annual Report should reflect the institution's core purpose of advancing learning and knowledge through teaching and research.

18-19/5 Treasurer's Report

The Court **received** the audited accounts of the University for 2017/18 and an oral report from the Treasurer (David Dickson).

The Treasurer drew the Court's specific attention to the following:

- headline financial results, including in respect of income, expenditure and surplus;
- balance sheet movements as regards net assets and reserves;
- net borrowing over the period since 2013/14;
- inflow and outflow of cash;
- increasing levels of operating cash;
- key facts in relation to capital expenditure, net worth and staff/student number growth;
- external factors affecting financial strategy and medium-term planning (including government funding review, Brexit and ongoing USS pension scheme issues).

In response to queries from members of the Court, the following points were **noted**:

- (a) As regards the University's asset base and associated issues of depreciation costs, the evolving estates strategy would seek to address such matters without significantly increasing gearing levels and in the context of phased investment funded out of operating cashflow.
- (b) With regard to mortality assumptions in respect of pension schemes (Note 25 to the accounts refers), the Treasurer confirmed that this was benchmarked data that had been updated for the 31 March 2018 accounting position.
- (c) The University would continue its collaborative approach to working with the City of York in areas of mutual benefit and interest, a vital relationship that had been acknowledged and supported by successive Vice-Chancellors.

18-19/6 Recruitment of Next Vice-Chancellor and President

The Court **received** an update from the Registrar & Secretary (Jo Horsburgh) on the recruitment process for the successor to Professor Lamberts as Vice-Chancellor and President, noting that:

- a joint committee of the University Senate and Council had been established in accordance with University Statutes to function as the search and nomination group which would ultimately submit a recommendation to the University Council for approval;
- the joint committee included lay members of Council, academic members of Senate, one member of the University Executive Board, the two student Presidents and a member of professional support staff, with an independent external adviser also likely to be appointed (most probably a serving or former Vice-Chancellor of a comparable institution);
- following a formal tender process a specialist executive search firm (*Perrett Laver*) had been appointed to support the recruitment process;
- consultation was currently underway with the University community to inform the person specification and job description for the role in the context of the current opportunities and challenges facing the University;
- after the consultation, search and selection phases of the process it was hoped to agree a recommendation for approval before Easter 2019.

The Chancellor shared his personal experiences of senior executive recruitment in the higher education sector and commented on the vital importance of top-level leadership to institutional performance and success, noting that the process provided an opportunity to focus on the University's ambitions and values in order to attract the interest of suitable candidates.

18-19/7 Presentations

The Court **received** the following presentations:

- Maria Ayaz (Head of Equality and Diversity) and Professor Saul Tendler (Acting Vice-Chancellor) on the University's strategy and vision for equality, diversity and inclusion;
- Dr Gavan Conlon (*London Economics*) on research findings in respect of the economic, social and cultural impact of the University;
- James Durcan (SU President) and Sehrish Shafi (GSA President) on the annual reports of the Students' Union and Graduate Students' Association;
- Zac Sheppard (York Sport President) on the annual Roses sporting competition against the University of Lancaster (3-5 May 2019 in York).
