

# UNIVERSITY OF YORK

## COURT

Minutes of the annual meeting held on 25 November 2016

The meeting was attended by 52 members and 45 apologies for absence were received.

### 16-17/1      **Membership**

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

### 16-17/2      **Vice-Chancellor's Report**

The Vice-Chancellor (Professor Koen Lamberts) noted that the Registrar and Secretary (Dr David Duncan) was attending his last meeting of the Court before leaving the University in April 2017 to become Chief Operating Officer and Secretary at the University of Glasgow. Thanks were offered to Dr Duncan for his valuable contribution to the University and its development since 2008.

The Court **received** the Annual Report 2016 and an oral report from the Vice-Chancellor covering the following matters:

- headlines from the year (research income, investment in mental health provision for students, estates development on Campus West, opening of the International Pathway College and strong student recruitment for the current academic year);
- progress in implementation of the University Strategy (including development of online distance learning, roll-out of the institutional pedagogy and institutional fundraising campaign);
- key issues for the University arising from Brexit (especially as regards student numbers/mobility, status of current EU staff, research income/collaboration and general economic uncertainty);
- government policy as expressed in its new schools policy, the Research and Teaching Excellence Frameworks (REF and TEF), and the Higher Education and Research Bill (HERB) currently passing through parliament;

- the University's financial position, including modelling of the impact of Brexit and continued focus on income generation;
- areas of management focus during 2016/17 (including research/teaching excellence, campus development, financial strategy, institutional fundraising, improving entrant quality and communication of strategic priorities).

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

- (a) The University's formal response to the consultation on the HERB had included its concerns about the potential loss of institutional autonomy linked to the creation of the new Office for Students and the opening up of the sector to alternative providers through relaxation of the process for gaining university status/title. The latter development could lead to commercial organisations seeking to take market share from existing providers, especially in the low-cost/high-return disciplines on which traditional universities depended financially in order to support the full range of disciplines expected of a 'comprehensive' university. The risk of reducing universities to the status of mere service providers and the effect of potential 'market exit' on regional/local economies could be considerable.
- (b) The University had decided not to adopt a specific stance during the EU referendum debate as it had been a political matter to be decided by the democratic process. As regards the impact on research funding, other institutions were likely to be worse affected than the University where the expected impact was spread more evenly across departments. Likewise in terms of the proportion of EU staff, the University was less exposed than other institutions (e.g. specialist research institutes in London).
- (c) As regards the ambition to improve entrant quality, the University remained committed to widening participation, an area where it had a good track record and exceeded its benchmark targets. With appropriate admissions practices and effective identification of academic potential, there was no reason to expect that improving entrant quality would detrimentally affect the socio-economic mix of the student body.
- (d) The efficacy of the University's additional investment in student mental health services would be assessed by monitoring relevant

data, e.g. in respect of service usage and student suicides (which had risen across the sector, as confirmed by a specially commissioned report by Professor Hilary Graham, former Head of the Department of Health Sciences). Data would also be monitored in respect of waiting times for support services and the number of students contacting local GP services, as well as evidence from social media. The University would also emphasise the routes to accessing relevant support services and together with the two student organisations would support campaigns that promoted good mental health.

### **16-17/3 Treasurer's Report**

The Court **received** the audited accounts of the University for 2015/16 and an oral report from the Treasurer (David Dickson).

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

- highlights from the accounts;
- re-statement of the 2015 surplus under the new Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 102 requirement;
- 2015 surplus adjusted for one-off items;
- 2016 surplus (presented for comparability under the former UK generally accepted accounting principles [GAAP]);
- results for the year (income, expenditure and surplus);
- balance sheet movements;
- cash/loans ratio (excluding interest rate swaps);
- cash flow figures and levels of operating cash since 2011/12;
- projected cash flow;
- key facts (capital expenditure, net worth and staff/student numbers since 2013).

In conclusion, the Treasurer commented on some of the financial risks arising from Brexit and other developments with implications for the importance of sustaining strong cash balances (e.g. pension fund re-valuations, the new apprenticeship levy on large employers etc). The importance of sustaining strong student recruitment, as in the current year, was emphasised in the context of these financial risks presented by the external environment.

### **16-17/4 Presentations**

The Court **received** the following presentations:

- Gary Brannan (Borthwick Institute for Archives) and Heidi Fraser-Krauss (Director of Information Services) on digitisation of the Archbishop's Register and the Friends of the Library campaign;
- Professor Alastair Lewis (Chemistry) on the work of the Wolfson Atmospheric Chemistry Laboratory;
- annual reports of the Students' Union and Graduate Students' Association presented by Rasha Ibrahim (GSA President), Millie Beach (SU President) and Isaac Beevor (Sport Union President).

**16-17/5 Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was **noted** as Friday 19 May 2017.

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