

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

COURT

Minutes of the annual meeting held on 28 November 2014

The meeting was attended by 68 members and 43 apologies for absence were received.

14-15/1 **Membership**

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

14-15/2 **University Chancellor**

The Court **considered** a recommendation from the University Council (tabled) that Sir Malcolm Grant (*Chair of NHS England and former Provost of University College London*) be appointed as the next University Chancellor from 1 August 2015 for three years in the first instance.

Presenting the recommendation as co-chairs of the Nominations Committee, the Chair of Council and the Vice-Chancellor **reported** on the search and selection process that had been followed, including the timescale and nominations received. The Court also **noted** the details provided in respect of Sir Malcolm's career and achievements.

The Court **approved** the recommendation in accordance with University Statute 3.1, noting that Sir Malcolm would be installed as Chancellor in a ceremony to be held in 2015.

14-15/3 **Vice-Chancellor's Report**

The Court **received** the Annual Report 2014 and an oral report from the Vice-Chancellor (Professor Koen Lamberts) which covered the following areas:

- current context and external environment for higher education;
- changes in the University's senior management group;
- key features and developments as reported in the annual report and accounts;
- examples of research excellence across the three academic clusters;
- public engagement activities;

- key and enabling objectives of the new University strategy 2014-20.

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

- (a) The University aimed to ensure that a diverse mix of students was accommodated on campus in the different colleges. Work was also undertaken by the Students' Union (SU) in collaboration with the City of York to optimise relations with the local community.
- (b) Implementation of the new strategy required a clear intellectual case to be established for its objectives, in order to win support from the academic community. In the University's relatively devolved structure, efforts would be made to ensure sufficient management capacity to deliver the objectives, in part through identification of lead individuals to champion the different strands. The implementation plan would also include agreed performance indicators where appropriate.
- (c) The objective relating to the development of an institutional pedagogy was based on robust empirical evidence and a number of core principles of effective teaching and learning in higher education. One overarching aim would be to provide the appropriate framework in which students could develop as autonomous learners, supported by clear identification of expected learning outcomes.
- (d) As regards the sustainability of overseas student recruitment, it was noted that the international student market continued to grow, especially in the developing economies. As successful recruitment in this global market was critical to the entire higher education sector, efforts were made to work with the government on key influencing factors (e.g. immigration policy) in order to safeguard the UK's strong position.

14-15/4 Treasurer's Report

The Court **received** the audited accounts of the University for 2013/14 and an oral report from the Treasurer (Mr David Dickson).

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

- highlights from the accounts;
- results for the year (income, expenditure and surplus);
- balance sheet at 31 July 2014;
- operating surplus as percentage of income;
- gearing ratio and annualised servicing cost as percentage of income;
- growth over the period since 2010;
- projected cash flow to July 2018.

During discussion of the Treasurer's report, the following points were noted:

- (a) In the increasingly competitive student recruitment environment, price-cutting was not an option due to the complex funding model and the artificial nature of the market. The focus would remain instead on ensuring the quality of the student experience and seeking to cover costs (especially in the context of fee levels that did not increase with inflation, therefore representing a declining unit of resource).
- (b) International student fees, concentrated in postgraduate provision and varied across departments, made a vital contribution to the University's financial sustainability. Government changes to immigration policy therefore represented a key risk in this area.
- (c) In terms of staff/student ratios, it was noted that there was no sector-wide methodology for calculating these, which made benchmarking against other institutions problematic. The growth figures presented by the Treasurer confirmed the overall increase in staff numbers since 2010 (18%) as an essential investment to improve research output and safeguard the positive student experience.
- (d) The risks associated with the sector-wide USS pension scheme related to the need to reduce the considerable deficit, a proportion of which would appear on the University's balance sheet under revised accountancy regulations. The changes would not however affect current banking covenants or implementation of the new strategy.

Following discussion of the accounts, the Treasurer paid tribute to the Director of Finance (Mr Graham Gilbert) who was retiring after twenty-five years at the University. Particular attention was drawn to Mr Gilbert's prescience and sound financial acumen in delivering the resources required to fund the institution's considerable growth over the

period, especially as regards the nature and timing of borrowing arrangements. Members of the Court joined the Treasurer in thanking Mr Gilbert and wishing him well in his retirement.

14-15/5 Annual Reports from the Students' Union and Graduate Students' Association

The Court **received** the annual reports from the Students' Union (SU) and Graduate Students' Association (GSA) for 2013/14.

The GSA President commented on changes to the Association's representational structure, strategic planning and engagement with its membership, as well as a number of notable successes during the past year. The SU President also identified specific changes and achievements, with reference to the Union's financial situation and future plans, including greater collaboration with the GSA on matters of joint concern.

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

- (a) The tuition fee regime had a number of effects on students, including in respect of their approach to academic work, extra-curricular activities and paid part-time employment. The SU focused on improving student resilience in the face of competing pressures and ensuring value for money in their experience at the University.
- (b) The GSA was funded by a central grant from the University and some income from events. It was agreed that it would be useful to include some financial information relating the Association in its future annual reports.
- (c) Both the SU and GSA had been successful in working closely with local bus companies on aspects of publicity and co-branding to promote their respective activities and services.
- (d) The GSA had established a number of new networks and societies to foster cross-culture communication and integration, with particular focus on the sizable Chinese population. Work of this nature was also undertaken with smaller groups within individual academic departments. These developments had generated a positive increase in participation and advice-seeking from international students. The SU approached the same issue by a number of means, with particular

emphasis on communication strategy, diversity in campus accommodation and integration through sports.

14-15/6 YuStart Crowdfunding Project

The Court **received** a presentation from the Director and Deputy Director of the Development and Alumni Relations Office (Mary Haworth and Susie Braithwaite) on the *YuStart* crowdfunding project, an innovative and entrepreneurial example of online collaborative fundraising.

The Court **noted** that such initiatives raised awareness among alumni and benefactors of the way in which their giving could support the experience of current students and also enhance their employability. This “culture of involvement” would also support delivery of some aspects of the new University strategy and involved close collaboration with the SU (e.g. in respect of telephone fundraising and funds for student bursaries), the careers service and academic departments.

Following the presentation, three student-led projects pitched for £100 funding from *YuStart* and Court members were invited to indicate which group which they would most like to support (winner: SPiKL intra-university language exchange platform).

14-15/7 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was **noted** as Friday 1 May 2015.
