UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2015

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dr J Grenville
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor D Smith
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning), Professor J Robinson
Director of Information, Mr S Town
Dean (Social Sciences), Professor S Bell
Dean (Sciences), Professor B Fulton

Dr R Aitken
Professor K Atkin
Professor I D’Amico
Professor E Annandale
Professor D Attwell
Professor S Carroll
Professor E Corrigan
Professors G Currie
Professor C Dytham
Professor N Ellison
Professor M Festenstein
Professor C Fewster
Professor R Godby
Professor M Goddard
Dr J de Groot
Mr F Hamza (student rep)
Dr T Helgason
Professor A Higson
Ms J Horvatic (GSA President)
Professor D Howard
Professor C Hunter

Professor R Jacobs
Professor A Jones
Dr O Lisagor
Mr S Maguire (SU President)
Mr A Martinez (student rep)
Dr J Moir
Professor K Mumford
Dr A Parsons
Professor E Prettejohn
Mr S Pullen (student rep)
Professor J Schofield
Dr J Schofield
Dr A Sheil
Professor L Stewart
Professor Q Summerfield
Dr B Szczepek Reed
Professor S Thompson
Dr R Vann
Professor P White
Professor J Woodcock
Mr R Yates

In attendance: The Registrar and Secretary
The Academic Registrar
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
SU Academic Officer, Mr G Offer
SU Student Engagement Development Coordinator, Mr R Quayle
Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Officer, Ms H Brian

Senate: 5 May 2015
Apologies for absence were received from Professor B Chambers, Dr J Clarbour, Professor M Ormrod, Professor P Sells, Professor T Sheldon and Dr R Waites.

14-15/39 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2015 were approved.

14-15/40 Statement by the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported the following matters:

- The Senior Management Group (SMG) was working to finalise the implementation plan for the University Strategy, including identification of actions, timescales and lead members for each element.

- The Vice-Chancellor had assumed the Chair of the Employability Coordination Group to foster improvement of the employment rate of York graduates, which was currently below the Russell Group average.

- Following approval for the establishment of an International Pathway Centre (IPC), in which all courses would be designed and delivered by University staff, the University was currently seeking an external partner to provide marketing and recruitment support.

- Planning was underway for a new teaching building on the Heslington West campus, led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (T&L). The new building would be available from the 2016/17 academic year and would provide additional seminar rooms, a large lecture theatre and breakout spaces.

- Recruitment of the Research Champions for the separate themes of the new Research Strategy was almost complete, with an announcement regarding their appointment to be made soon.

- The inaugural meetings of the new Faculty Boards and Graduate Research School Board had been held.

- Work was ongoing to finalise a new performance review process for academic staff, which would be submitted to Senate for approval at its next meeting.
Professor Saul Tendler (currently a Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Nottingham) would assume the role of Deputy Vice-Chancellor from September 2015 in succession to Dr Jane Grenville.

Staff events led by the Vice-Chancellor and Director of Finance on the University’s financial position and the broader funding environment had been well attended, with open and productive discussions.

The Vice-Chancellor had been appointed to the Board of the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership to provide a voice for higher education generally but also to contribute to discussion of University-specific initiatives (e.g. BioVale and agri-tech/bio-economy projects).

A recent University visit to China (Peking, Nanjing and Zheijiang Universities) had been productive in agreeing various collaborative agreements and hosting alumni events.

Regardless of the outcome of the imminent general election, it was likely that the HE sector would continue to face financial uncertainty and further funding cuts in some form. Despite the likely continuation of the austerity agenda, work would nevertheless continue to implement the University Strategy and achieve institutional objectives.

In response to specific queries from Senate members, the Vice-Chancellor commented further as follows:

- The contractual arrangements with a partner for the IPC were still under consideration but would ensure that the University specified the volume and quality of entrants that the external partner would then be expected to deliver.

- The development of further links with Chinese institutions did not raise any issues of academic freedom, a matter to which the University would always give the highest priority.

- It was acknowledged that wide-ranging cuts to Further Education also had an impact on HE, especially as regards access arrangements. The University would however retain its commitment to widening participation and would continue to work with its FE partners.
Undergraduate Degree Attainment

Senate considered a report on undergraduate degree attainment and entry profiles in 2012/13 and 2013/14 (S.14-15/32).

Introducing the report, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (T&L) commented that it had been considered by Teaching Committee and would provide a solid statistical basis for future benchmarking and policy initiatives.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) The analysis had confirmed that gender was not an explanatory variable for degree outcome, i.e. there was no statistical difference in achievement between men and women.

(b) The spread of award marks in Arts and Humanities was narrower than in other subject areas, although the modular scheme had more recently encouraged wider use of the full mark-scale.

(c) Some features of degree attainment levels (e.g. comparison between three- and four-year undergraduate programmes) were captured in the ‘shallow’ analysis that would be submitted to Senate’s next meeting.

(d) It was agreed that the report might usefully be uploaded to the Management Information Gateway for further discussion by departments through the Faculty Boards.

(e) Depending on the availability of appropriate and sufficient data, the report might provide the basis for further work to identify risk factors for student withdrawal/non-completion, which in turn might inform admission decisions during confirmation.

(f) In terms of the value added in the teaching and learning process, it was important to identify and further explore those explanatory variables over which the University might exercise a degree of control (i.e. identifying the interventions that correlated with final award marks). It was noted that this related strongly to the concept of student engagement, which was a central feature of the emerging institutional pedagogy, and also to research confirming that pathways with clear thresholds and objectives tended to generate accelerated learning and higher achievement.
(g) Senate endorsed the decision made by Teaching Committee that no actions would be taken in the first year of the new statistical report, but that it should continue to be generated by the Business Intelligence Unit (Planning Office) in order to monitor trends and influence teaching and learning policies as appropriate.

14-15/42 Academic Promotions Criteria

Senate considered a draft of revised academic promotions criteria (S.14-15/33).

Presenting the document, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor commented that the revisions sought to introduce greater clarity and encompass the full range of contemporary academic contributions. Following a review of practices at other HEIs, it had been decided to develop an overarching framework of three core criteria (research, teaching/scholarship/professional practice and academic citizenship), each with three levels. Several key points were highlighted, including linkage with performance review, more broadly drawn criteria, reference to accepted disciplinary norms (e.g. in relation to research grants), definition of “academic service/citizenship” and a different approach to the Reader grade.

The following points were noted in discussion:

(a) There had been considerable discussion by Promotion Committee as to whether the Reader grade might have become redundant. However, in response to consultation comments, it had been decided to retain the grade as recognition of a defined point on the academic career trajectory between Senior Lecturer and Professor. It was however acknowledged that a considerable effort was required to apply for promotion to a grade that was only two discretionary points higher on the pay-scale. It was suggested that application for promotion to Reader/Professor rather than to Professor only might be clearer and simpler.

(b) As regards the academic citizenship criteria for promotion to Reader/Chair, it was suggested that, based on the examples given, these might be difficult to achieve for staff on research-only contracts (the majority of whom were female). It was also suggested that some of the exemplar positions (e.g. chairing departmental committees) might not be freely available or widely advertised within some departments.
[Secretary’s post-meeting note: In fact 49% of research-only contracts are held by women, 51% by men.]

(c) A query was raised regarding the nature of level 2 roles under academic citizenship, which it was suggested might cause management difficulties for Heads of Department (HoDs) as regards staff willingness and ability to assume certain roles but not others. It was also suggested that this might be particularly the case in research units, as many of the examples given seemed to be largely based around teaching-related activity.

(d) With regard to the distinction between Reader and Professor, it was suggested that the award of the former title to an applicant for the latter might have a dis-incentivising effect and lead to staff departures. Another potential unintended negative consequence might be staff choosing to publish their research in journals with the fastest turnaround times (to fulfil the requirement for articles to have been published and not merely accepted and in press).

(e) Senate proposed that the title Professor should be awarded without any additional indicator for staff on teaching-only contracts (such as Professor [Education]).

(f) As regards authorship of externally-published teaching materials (teaching, level 2), it was suggested that this might be difficult to achieve for staff on certain teaching contracts.

(g) It was suggested that some of the bullet-points forming the preamble to the academic citizenship section (2.3) might be more neatly consolidated into the main text of that section.

(h) It was noted that staff bought out to undertake large research projects might not be available to fulfil other promotions criteria and that this point should be addressed in the document.

(i) One HoD commented that there was a lack of discretionary opportunity for HoDs to reward excellence in a more ad hoc manner. It was also proposed in this context that certain major departmental roles might receive a salary increment to encourage more staff to take on such positions. Senate was however reminded that contractual variations and management of progression were subject to existing agreements between management and employee representatives, and as such were outside the terms of reference for Senate.
(j) It was suggested that the level 3 research criteria placed too great an emphasis on the success of other colleagues (e.g. research students or staff) as a measure for an individual’s own achievement. It was also proposed that for research leaders (research level 2), some evidence of actual delivery might be introduced to reinforce notions of steering and leadership.

(k) There might be some benefit in adding explanatory text to the preamble to assure colleagues of the full range of meanings implied by certain phrases and to indicate that higher level achievement would count against lower level criteria. It was also proposed that the document might provide some specific guidance on promotions for part-time staff.

Following the above discussion, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor noted that Senate seemed in broad agreement with the overarching structure and invited members with further points of detail to contact her directly. Senate noted that a final version of the new criteria would be submitted to the next meeting for approval, with implementation from the 2015/16 academic session.

14-15/43 Student Representation on Senate

Senate considered a proposal (S.14-15/33) presented by the SU President that:

- the SU Academic Officer, currently in attendance, become a full member of Senate;

- the three undergraduate students currently elected to Senate by all registered students be replaced by three departmental representatives, one from each faculty, chosen through mutual agreement between the departmental representatives in each faculty and the Academic Officer.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) If Regulation 9.2 (Election of undergraduate student members) were to be amended in order to introduce this change, Regulation 9.3 (Election of graduate students to the Senate) would also have to be amended accordingly.
(b) It was suggested that the process of “mutual agreement” with the SU Academic Officer for selection of three faculty representatives from among existing departmental representatives required further clarification in order to explain how this would function in practice.

In order to accommodate these comments, Senate decided that the proposal should be re-drafted and re-submitted to the next meeting.

14-15/44 Business from Committees and Faculty Boards

Senate noted and approved business from the following meetings (S.14-15/35):

- Teaching Committee: 5 February and 12 March 2015
- Research Committee: 14 January and 11 March 2015
- Planning Committee: 21 January and 4 February 2015
- Special Cases Committee: 16 January 2015
- HYMS Joint Senate Committee: 29 January 2015
- Arts & Humanities Faculty Board: 15 January 2015
- Sciences Faculty Board: 16 January 2015
- Social Sciences Faculty Board: 12 January 2015

14-15/45 Forthcoming Committee Vacancies

Forthcoming vacancies for committee appointments to be made by Senate commencing 1 August 2015 were noted (S.14-15/36).

Members of Senate wishing to make nominations were invited to:

(a) check the current membership and terms of reference of the committee in question at:

http://www.york.ac.uk/about/organisation/governance/sub-committees/

(b) submit nominations to Dr Philip Evans (Registrar’s and Planning Office, philip.evans@york.ac.uk) by Friday 19 June 2015 (last day of Summer Term) at the latest.

It was noted that the nominations received would be presented to Senate for approval at its meeting on 15 July 2014. Where more than one nomination was received for a single vacancy, a ballot would be held.
14-15/46 Register of Collaborative Programmes

Senate received for information the current register of validated programmes and collaborative provision (S.14-15/37).

14-15/47 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of Senate was scheduled for Tuesday 7 July 2015 at 3.15pm.