UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 May 2019

Present: The Acting Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor D Smith
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students), Professor J Robinson
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International), Professor M Smith
Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students), Professor T Lightfoot
Dean (Arts and Humanities), Professor J Buchanan
Dean (Social Sciences), Professor S Bell
Dean (Sciences) Professor B Fulton
Dean (Graduate Research School), Professor T Stoneham
The Director of Information Services, Mrs H Fraser-Krauss

Professor K Atkin
Professor N Audsley
Professor L Black
Professor M Burton
Dr T Cantrell
Professor N Carter
Ms C Chamberlain (GSA)
Dr M Cockett
Mr J Durcan (SU President)
Professor M Freeman
Professor K Gibson
Dr J de Groot
Dr J Hardman
Mr J Hare (SU Academic Officer)
Professor M Hodson
Professor J Hudson
Professor C Hunter
Professor P Johnson

Dr O Lisagor
Professor N Mackay
Professor N Milner
Dr S O’Keefe
Dr M Perry
Professor D Petrie
Professor J Potts,
Ms S Shafi (GSA President)
Professor L Stewart
Professor J Swaffield
Dr M Townend
Dr D Trenkic
Professor A Tyrrell
Professor S Velani
Professor P Wakeling
Dr J Wardman
Ms H Weatherly
Professor M White

In attendance: Vice-Chancellor Designate, Professor C Jeffery
Academic Registrar, Dr W Campbell
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans (Assistant Secretary)
Planning & Governance Administrator, Ms B Carter Ellis
Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Officer, Mr I Wiggins

Apologies for absence were received from the Registrar & Secretary, Professor Y Birks, Professor D Brown, Professor D Bruce, Ms Z Disley (student faculty rep), Professor M Freeman, Professor M

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18-19/34 Next Vice-Chancellor

Senate welcomed the Vice-Chancellor Designate, Professor Charlie Jeffery, to the meeting as an observer ahead of his taking up office on 1 September 2019.

18-19/35 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2019 (S.18-19/31) were approved, subject to the following minor amendment to M18-19/21(e) [Policy for Handling Lost Credit]:

- substitute “although it could be argued that the managers…” for “when in fact the ‘managers’…”

18-19/36 Policy for Handling Lost Credit

Further to M18-19/21 (Policy for Handling Lost Credit), Senate considered a further report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Students) on the contingency framework for assessment/examinations [S.18-19/32].

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor reminded members of Senate’s previous discussions of this matter at its meetings since May 2018, noting in particular the need to balance the key priorities of maintaining academic standards while also ensuring timely graduation for students. It was further noted that the updated framework sought to respond to Senate’s request at its last meeting for an outline policy based on the so-called ‘Liverpool Model’, suitably modified to recognise structural differences at York and include a degree of academic involvement at faculty level. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the proposed framework had also been subject to consultation with the Deans of Faculty, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment and the Assistant Registrar (Student Progress).

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) In response to a query from the Director of the International Pathway College, it was confirmed that assessment in programmes delivered by departments outside the faculty structure was appropriately accommodated under the proposed framework.

(b) It was confirmed that the Vice-Chancellor, as the Chief Academic Officer of the University (under the terms of the regulatory framework under the Office for Students), would be authorised to exercise judgement on whether the general contingency actions had become unworkable, with the authority to then declare a ‘Special Contingency Situation’ in which a University Board of Examiners would
be established. It was noted that the basis for such a judgement would be whether there were students with insufficient credits to graduate/progress.

(c) It was noted that Combined Boards of Examiners still existed in respect of certain University programmes (e.g. Natural Sciences).

(d) The authority of the University Board of Examiners to approve changes to assessment requirements (para 4.3 of the framework refers) had been deliberately worded to be as concise and flexible as possible.

(e) The importance of having such a clear and flexible contingency framework in place before it might need to be invoked was generally welcomed, especially by the student representatives.

Following discussion Senate approved the proposed Contingency Framework for Assessment and Examinations.

18-19/37 Acting Vice-Chancellor’s Report

Senate received a report from the Acting Vice-Chancellor (S.18-19/33) who drew particular attention to the followings aspects:

- The University Executive Board (UEB) had recently agreed to take forward new contextual admissions practices, which was linked to its decision also to discontinue the pilot exercise in respect of unconditional offers.

- A recent trip to Malaysia and Singapore had included a positive visit to the University’s new office in Kuala Lumpur which would be playing a key role in delivering enhanced international student recruitment.

- Disappointingly, the University had dropped nine places to 30th overall in the recently published Complete University Guide (CUG) 2020. In-depth analysis was currently being undertaken by the Business Intelligence Unit to understand the main drivers behind this fall in position and to identify appropriate mitigating actions.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) UEB’s decision to underwrite the University’s participation in the Erasmus+ programme had been welcomed by the student body.

(b) While some departments had gone up and others down in the CUG 2020, it would be important to understand clearly the parameters affecting the overall University position.

(c) The University had been in discussions with City of York Council (CYC) regarding the possible establishment of an incubator-like facility as part of the York Central
development which had received planning permission in April 2019. It remained to be seen how the outcome of the recent local elections would affect CYC’s view on the nature of this large-scale development project.

(d) The role profile was currently being considered for the appointment of the successor to Professor Jon Timmis as Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Partnerships and Knowledge Exchange, a role which would also be externally advertised.

18-19/38  First-Class Degrees with Distinction

Senate considered recommendations from the Standing Committee on Assessment (SCA) regarding updated criteria for the award of first-class degrees with distinction (so-called “starred firsts”) [S.18-19/34].

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Chair of the Committee (Professor Mike Bentley, Physics) drew particular attention to the following aspects:

- analysis in July 2018 confirming an unacceptably wide range of approaches, rules and principles being applied across different departments combined with a lack of clarity on this matter in the formal Guide to Assessment;
- approval for the updated criteria from the SCA and the University Teaching Committee (UTC);
- proposed use of the total award mark together with application of one or more additional subject-based criteria based on current departmental practices;
- objection to the new criteria by the Management School on the basis that use of a minimum award mark was not appropriate in that department, which wished to continue using a measure of distinctive performance based solely on the distribution of marks across modules.

Senate noted the following points in discussion:

(a) Although no formal survey had been conducted of practices at other institutions, it was believed that very few continued to award such “starred firsts”.

(b) In response to a query about relatively unorthodox teaching programmes, it was noted that the criteria were applied at the level of the degree award.

(c) As demonstrated by the additional data analysis requested by UTC (Appendix II to the report refers), it would be impossible to use only a single award-mark criterion without generating an unacceptably uneven distribution of such awards across the three faculties.

(d) It had not been deemed necessary to commission additional modelling of outcomes relating to the specified weighted proportion of marks (one of the previous criteria for such awards).

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Following discussion Senate approved the updated criteria for the award of first-class degrees with distinction for implementation from 2019/20 onwards.

18-19/39 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.18-19/35):

- Teaching Committee: 7 February and 14 March 2019
- Partnerships and Enterprise Committee: 17 January 2019
- HYMS Joint Senate Committee: 24 January 2019
- Planning Committee: 6 February and 14 March 2019
- Student Life Committee: 24 January 2019
- Research Committee: 13 March 2019
- International Committee: 4 February 2019
- Arts and Humanities Faculty Board: 7 March 2019
- Sciences Faculty Board: 14 March 2019
- Social Sciences Faculty Board: 11 March 2019

18-19/40 Amendment to University Ordinance 6.7

Senate approved an amendment to University Ordinance 6.7 [academic appeals] (S.18-19/36).

18-19/41 Forthcoming Committee Vacancies

Forthcoming vacancies for committee appointments to be made by Senate commencing 1 August 2019 were noted (S.18-19/37).

Members of Senate wishing to make nominations were invited to:

(a) check the current membership and terms of reference of the committee in question as listed online;
(b) submit nominations to Dr Philip Evans (Corporate and Information Services, philip.evans@york.ac.uk) by Friday 21 June 2019 (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 9 July 2019. Where more than one nomination was received for a single vacancy, a ballot paper would be circulated to Senate members after the July meeting.

18-19/42 Periodic Review Reports

Senate received for information periodic review reports in respect of the Department of Philosophy and the School of Philosophy, Politics and Economics (S.18-19/38).

Senate: 7 May 2019
18-19/43 Collaborative Provision

Senate received for information the current register of the University’s collaborative provision (S.18-19/39).

18-19/44 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 9 July 2019 at 2.15pm.