UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2018

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor D Smith
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students), Professor J Robinson
Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students), Professor T Lightfoot,
Dean (Arts & Humanities), Professor J Buchanan
Dean (Sciences), Professor B Fulton,
The Director of the International Pathways College, Dr M Perry
The Director of Information Services, Mrs H Fraser-Krauss

Professor K Atkin
Dr K Attwood
Professor N Audsley
Professor L Black
Mr J Bone
Professor D Brown
Professor D Bruce
Professor M Burton
Dr T Cantrell
Ms C Chamberlain (GSA President)
Ms Zoe Disley (student faculty rep)
Mr J Durcan (SU President elect)
Professor A Field,
Professor M Freeman
Dr J Hardman
Professor M Hodson
Professor C Hunter

Professor J Hudson
Ms R Khalil (student faculty rep)
Professor P Johnson
Dr S King
Dr O Lisagor
Professor N Mackay
Professor M Nazarov
Professor D Petrie
Mr J Porch (SU Academic Officer)
Dr M Roodhouse
Professor H Smith
Professor L Stewart
Professor V Sundaram
Professor G Richardson,
Mr A Urquhart (SU President)
Dr J Wardman
Ms H Weatherly
Professor M White

Registrar & Secretary, Ms J Horsburgh (Secretary)
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans (Assistant Secretary)
Planning & Governance Administrator, Ms B Carter Ellis
Director of Human Resources, Dr J Ivory
Head of Research Student Administration, Ms S Broom (for M17-18/46)

Apologies for absence were received from the Dean/Social Sciences (Professor S Bell) (Dean, the Pro-Vice Chancellor/Partnerships & Knowledge Exchange (Professor J Timmis), the Deputy Academic Registrar (Mrs V Cotter), Professor M Goddard, the Dean/Graduate Research School (Professor T Stoneham)), Professor J Schofield, Professor J Swaffield, Professor A Thomas, Professor P Wakeling and Ms Hanna Weiers (GSA).

Senate: 8 May 2018
17-18/39  Membership

On behalf of Senate the Vice-Chancellor welcomed the following newly elected student representatives:

- James Durcan (YUSU President elect)
- Zoe Disley (Science Faculty)
- Rifah Khalil (Social Science Faculty)

The Vice-Chancellor also thanked the outgoing SU officers for their contribution to Senate business during 2017-18.

17-18/40  Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2018 (S.17-18/37) were approved.

17-18/41  Student Admissions

Further to M17-18/25 (Student Admissions), it was noted that a further report would be submitted to the next meeting.

The Vice-Chancellor provided a verbal update on the current admissions round as follows:

- UGH: clearing requirement likely to be around 700 (640 in 2017)
- UGO: likely to be short of target, probably by about 50 after clearing (similar to 2017)
- PGTH: projected to reach target
- PGTO: capacity to go over target (forecast for +280 over target)
- PGRH and PGRO: both likely to be short of target

It was noted that as in past years Student Recruitment and Admissions would be working closely with departments during the clearing period to address shortfalls in recruitment targets.

17-18/42  Vice-Chancellor’s Report

Senate received a report from the Vice-Chancellor (S.17-18/38) covering the following topics:

- student loan interest rates
- government review of post-18 education
- HEFCE assurance review and student payments audit
- registration with the Office for Students (OfS)
- investment in cryo electron microscopy (Cryo-EM)
- performance and development review (PDR) process
- USS pension dispute

Senate: 8 May 2018

2
Following the commitment by senior management during the USS pension dispute to hold wider discussions with staff on associated matters, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that this would take place once formal agreement had been reached in the national-level process. It was noted that such discussions would be linked in an integrated manner to consultation with staff on the next phase of the University Strategy, the process for which was the subject of current planning and discussion.

**17-18/43 Policy on Repeat Study**

Senate considered a proposed policy on repeat study for students withdrawing during their first year (S.17-18/39).

Presenting the proposal, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students) commented that Senate’s previous decision to allow repeat study for students failing to progress to their second year did not adequately accommodate those students struggling at an earlier point during the first year. The Standing Committee on Assessment was therefore proposing a series of principles under which such students might choose to withdraw after a minimum of one term of study.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) The proposed withdrawal mechanism was not expected to affect many students (low double figures).

(b) Such students were in a different category to those considered by Special Cases Committee (i.e. those submitting claims of exceptional circumstances).

(c) It was suggested that some flexibility might be required in the case of mature students who had given up employment to study, although the number of such cases was likely to be low.

(d) As regards the risk of losing fee and accommodation income, this was already the case with students withdrawing from the University to study elsewhere and was not expected to have a significant impact on budgeting.

Following discussion Senate approved the proposed principles for repeat study for students withdrawing from the first year of study.

**17-18/44 Compensation Rule Changes**

Senate considered a report and statistical analysis on the impact of the changes to the compensation threshold for undergraduate as approved in 2016 (S.17-18/40).

Presenting the outcome of the review as Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment, Dr Steve King observed that only 81 of the ca. 4,000 students graduating in 2017 had been affected by the approved changes, having been
awarded degrees with marks below the level which would have been previously compensatable. It was also reported that further work was currently ongoing to address certain anomalies relating to the award of Ordinary degrees and the impact of academic misconduct penalties.

Following consideration of the report Senate approved the recommendation from the Standing Committee on Assessment and University Teaching Committee that the compensation policy revisions should be maintained in future years.

17-18/45  Policy for Handling Lost Credit

Senate considered possible options for a new policy on the handling of lost credit in award, progression and grading decisions (S.17-18/41).

Presenting his discussion paper, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students) highlighted the following key points:

- The current contingency framework for assessment had been revisited a number of times by Senate, including modification when the University adopted a modular scheme based on credit accumulation.
- If the recent industrial action had continued into the current Summer Term, under the current policy a number of students would not have been able to graduate as they would have been missing the required credits. It had therefore been decided to devise and evaluate alternative options in the event that similar circumstances arose again (noting that such circumstances might be caused by any major event affecting assessment, not just industrial action).
- The three primary elements of academic standards were education, award and grade, which could all be differently affected by lost credits. The maintenance of such standards was explicitly required by external regulatory bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Office for Students (OfS).
- Research into policies and practices at other Russell Group (RG) institutions had confirmed that, with one exception (Liverpool), there was a general lack of clarity in the approaches that would be adopted to missing credits other than interim measures such as provisional grades, credit waivers etc.
- The paper proposed a spectrum of four options (one being retention of the current policy), which were not mutually exclusive but could feasibly be combined in various different forms.
- A key factor to consider was the quantum (N) of missing credits that might be condoned whilst still maintaining academic standards, with different choices available for different values of N.
- Another important consideration was the precise timing of student choices as this would have significant practical and resource implications.
- While simplicity was generally preferable in policy matters, consideration might be given to a nuanced approach that better accommodated disciplinary differences in assessment practices.
In response to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor’s request for comments and views on this complex matter, the following points were noted:

(a) Even with fee waivers, options to return to York to complete lost credits after the degree programme would have other costs for students (accommodation, maintenance etc), which introduced a risk of possible inequity. Such an option was also particularly problematic for overseas students on Tier 4 visas.

(b) Whatever option might be adopted, all finalists would require formal documentation from the University confirming the approach to credit accumulation that had been adopted (e.g. for providing to prospective employers).

(c) The view was expressed that a simple policy might not necessarily be the best solution in the event of a wide range of missing credits across different departments.

(d) It was generally agreed that the acceptability of Option 1 (waive missing credits) depended largely on the precise proportion of such credits that might be waived, especially in the context of graduate employability.

(e) There would need to be special consideration of professionally accredited programmes and those with a fitness to practice element (e.g. nursing, social work etc), although here too a number of different options might be available.

(f) The level of general unpreparedness and variation in practice across RG institutions (including 25% credit waivers in some cases) suggested that such mission groups could not provide a means to collaboratively agree policy options.

(g) As one-year programmes, the N value of lost credits across the University’s PGT courses would have been high had the industrial action continued and would have also included a large number of Tier 4 students.

(h) On the question of simplicity versus complexity, it was acknowledged that any options for student choice needed to be clear and well documented, especially in the context of appeals and complaints. This also related to practical resourcing issues as it would be extremely difficult to consider student choices on a case-by-case basis without a clear guiding policy framework.

(i) It might be possible to devise a sliding scale of options connected to the N value of missing credits such that pre-devised solutions could be implemented for each different value.

(j) As the University was subject to the legal requirements of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in respect of information provision to students, it was suggested that clarity on this matter was essential and the need or otherwise to
include information in marketing materials, especially at the point when formal offers were being made to prospective students, should be investigated further.

Following discussion Senate decided to ask the Pro-Vice-Chancellor to consider its comments and bring a further paper back to the next meeting. The Vice-Chancellor also commented that, in the event of a resumption of industrial action during the current Summer Term, it would be possible to convene an extraordinary meeting of Senate to agree a policy on the handling of lost credit ahead of the summer graduation ceremonies.

On behalf of the central contingency planning group which he had chaired, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor thanked colleagues for their respectful and supportive conduct during the recent industrial action.

17-18/46 Postgraduate Research Outcomes

Senate considered a report on PGR awards, examination outcomes and withdrawals from the 2016/17 academic year (S.17-18/42).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Head of Research Student Administration (Susanna Broom) commented that at the request of the Graduate Research School Board the analysis had replaced the previous annual report on PhD submission rates. It was noted that overall the data confirmed a positive and stable picture, with only a slight rise (5%) in the number of referrals.

In response to a query on the reasons for withdrawing from an accepted place before the programme start (42% of all withdrawals), it was reported that a recent survey had confirmed financial reasons as the basis for most such withdrawals. As regards future compilation of the data, it was suggested that the DLitts might be removed as such higher doctorates were relatively rare (2 in 2016/17) and subject to a different form of assessment.

17-18/47 Professorial Promotions Process

Senate considered a series of recommendations relating to the professorial promotions process (S.17-18/43).

Presenting the proposals as Chair of the Academic Promotions Committee (APC), the Deputy Vice-Chancellor commented that the proposed transfer of responsibility from the Remuneration Sub-Group to the APC sought to acknowledge that such promotions involved assessment of academic quality and as such were not a remuneration matter.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Faculty advisory panels do not comment on such professorial promotion cases.
(b) As unsuccessful professorial promotion applications were automatically considered for a pay review without further application, the new sub-committee of the APC would submit recommendations on that matter to the Remuneration Sub-Group.

(c) A query was raised regarding the merit of requesting external references for applications to cross the bar within professorial Band 1. It was suggested that it seemed anomalous to take external academic advice on what was essentially an internal pay award. Although it would be possible to provide referees with advisory criteria, the view was expressed that such guidance tended to be too generic to support such external decision making.

(d) The proposals sought to provide Senate with greater oversight and involvement in professorial promotions through representation on the proposed APC sub-committee.

(e) It was uncertain whether statements from Heads of Departments were confidential from applicants as they would be releasable through subject access requests under data protection legislation if they contained personal data. It was decided to ask the HR Department to clarify this situation.

Following discussion Senate approved the recommendations that:

i. the review/oversight of professorial promotions be transferred from the Remuneration Sub-Group to the APC;

ii. the transfer should take effect for the 2018 professorial promotions process;

iii. references be taken up for all professorial promotions applications, except those to cross the bar within Band 1 (reflecting point [c] above);

iv. a new sub-committee of the APC be established to review professorial applications.

17-18/48 Student Protection Plan

Senate considered the new Student Protection Plan (S.17-18/44), noting that it had recently been submitted as required to the OfS as one element of the University’s registration application. It was noted that the plan described the actions which would be taken by the University in the event that a programme was suspended or closed.

Introducing the document the Registrar and Secretary commented that it had been submitted by the OfS deadline of 30 April 2018 together with the required access/participation plan, narrative description of the University’s governance and management arrangements and self-assessment against guidance on consumer law. 

Senate: 8 May 2018
protection. It was noted that the Plan was presented in the required OfS template, with a more user-friendly version to be published in due course on the student-facing part of the University’s website.

The following points were noted in discussion:

(a) The Plan was a live document which would be reviewed as required by University Teaching Committee to ensure it remained fit for purpose in protecting the student interest.

(b) It was suggested that further consideration might need to be given to how to consult all students on a programme at risk, including those that might be on leave of absence.

(c) As regards the advice to departments not to withdraw or suspend a programme once the application cycle for it had started, it was agreed that this guidance needed to be applied across programmes that might have different application cycles (e.g. the International Pathway College).

(d) In the event of possible programme closure, special consideration might need to be given to sandwich courses delivered in collaboration with the students’ employer.

Following discussion Senate approved the Student Protection Plan.

17-18/49 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.17-18/45):

➢ Teaching Committee: 8 February and 15 March 2018
➢ Research Committee: 30 January 2018
➢ International Committee: 1 February 2018
➢ Sciences Faculty Board: 15 March 2018
➢ Arts & Humanities Faculty Board: 19 February 2018

17-18/50 Forthcoming Committee Vacancies

Forthcoming vacancies for committee appointments to be made by Senate commencing 1 August 2018 were noted (S.17-18/46).

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 (Registrar’s and Planning Office, philip.evans@york.ac.uk) by Friday 22 June 2018 (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 10 July 2018. Where more than one nomination was received for a single vacancy, a ballot paper would be circulated to Senate members after the July meeting.

Senate **approved** the appointment with immediate effect of Professor Jon Timmis (Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Partnerships & Knowledge Exchange) and Professor Helen Smith (Head of Department of English) to serve on the University Council’s newly established Estates Committee for three years until 31 July 2021.

17-18/51 **Election of Members**

Senate **received** for information the result of the election of members to serve for three years from 1 August 2018 (S.17-18/47).

17-18/52 **Date of Next Meeting**

It was **noted** that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 10 July 2018 at 2.15pm.