UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2014

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor D Smith
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor J Robinson
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor C Mellors
Director of Information, Mr S Town
Academic Co-ordinator (Sciences), Professor B Fulton
Academic Co-ordinator (Social Sciences), Professor S Bell

Professor E Annandale  Professor D Howard
Professor K Atkin  Professor A Jones
Professor D Attwell  Dr O Lisagor
Professor J Bennett  Dr J Moir
Professor C Brown  Professor R Nolan
Professor S Carroll  Mr A Oloyede
Professor B Chambers  Dr B Pownall
Dr J Clarbour  Professor E Prettejohn
Professor J Clark  Professor J Schofield
Professor E Corrigan  Dr J Schofield
Professor C Dytham  Professor P Sells
Professor C Fewster  Professor T Sheldon
Dr A Field  Professor L Stewart
Professor R Godby  Professor T Stoneham
Professor M Goddard  Professor Q Summerfield
Professor V Gould  Mr K Taylor (SU)
Dr J de Groot  Professor S Thompson
Mr S Harper  Mr G Wall
Professor A Higson  Ms A Zaman
Professor J Hill

In attendance: The Registrar and Secretary
The Academic Registrar
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
SU Academic Officer, Mr D Whitmore

Apologies for absence were received from Dr S Chong, Mr T Clarke, Professor I Graham,
Dr T Helgason, Professor C Hunter and Professor M Ormrod.

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13-14/32 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2014 were approved.

13-14/33 Foundation College

Further to M13-14/21 (Foundation College), it was noted that the Senior Management Group has decided not to proceed with the proposal to establish a foundation college as discussed at the last meeting due to concerns relating to student number projections and academic capacity in key departments.

13-14/34 Statement by the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported the following matters:

- UCU had called off its industrial action following acceptance of the final pay offer of 2%. This agreement settled the pay negotiations for 2014-15 and drew a line under the 2013-14 negotiating round and associated dispute.

- The University had received notification of a further reduction in HEFCE grant of £1.1m p.a. This negated gains in operating cash flow through improvements to contribution targets and emphasised the need to enhance and diversify income generation.

- The Vice-Chancellor had recently visited South Africa (WUN annual conference and visits to the universities of Western Cape and Johannesburg) and the USA (annual meeting of University of York in America, Going Global conference and alumni events).

- Following concerns raised by UCU, the current professorial performance assessment would be reviewed in consultation with the union before being rolled out to other staff groups.

- The Vice-Chancellor’s round of visits to all departments was ongoing, providing a useful opportunity to get to know staff and students and to discuss University strategy.

- With Greg Dyke stepping down as University Chancellor in July 2015, the University Council’s Nominations Committee was currently leading
the search process to recruit his successor. Members of Senate wishing to submit nominations were invited to contact the Registrar & Secretary.

- The Department of Biology had secured the top (Gold) award in the latest round of Athena Swan awards, further demonstrating the University’s commitment to women in science.

**13-14/35 University Strategy**

Senate **considered** a consultation paper on the development of a new University Strategy (S.13-14/24).

Introducing the document, the Vice-Chancellor **reported** that the consultation draft had arisen from discussions with SMG and Council and would now be subject to consultation with the broader University community, starting with Senate.

During discussion the following points were **noted**:

(a) In response to the concern that articulation of an institutional pedagogy applied to all programmes might work against the diversity and distinctiveness of the University’s programme portfolio, it was noted that the proposed approach focused on definition of objectives, specification of student work and design of contact with students, in order to generate stretching programmes that exhibited best practice in their design. It was further noted that a number of background papers on this matter had been discussed with Heads of Department and Chairs of Boards of Studies, and that this dialogue would continue in order to achieve a top-level definition of the distinctive character of the pedagogical approach at York without constraining innovation.

(b) In order to monitor the success of the strategy, appropriate and collegially owned metrics would need to be incorporated in the associated implementation plan.

(c) Balanced resourcing of both teaching and research would be required to ensure that the University’s stated commitment to their inter-relationship was realised and maintained. It was noted in this context that the strategy sought to identify a number of key principles and aspirations, with consideration of resource allocation to follow from this initial process.
(d) The question of student number growth needed to be considered on a department-by-department basis, as it was not a straightforward matter to assume that this was achievable across the whole institution in the new highly competitive and partly de-regulated student recruitment market. With reference to staff/student ratios, it was agreed that any growth in student numbers would have to be accompanied by appropriate and well planned staff increases in order to maintain a high quality student experience.

(e) As regards the proposed establishment of three faculties headed by Deans, with Faculty Boards reporting to Senate, it was noted that this did not correspond to the model in large civic universities in which budgetary control was devolved to faculty level. The proposal sought instead to develop the current University model and the role played by Academic Coordinators.

(f) Clear distinction was required between the concepts of “efficiency” and “effectiveness”, with each clearly defined in order not to generate misconceptions around such terms.

(g) It was suggested that there should be more explicit reference to the role played by the Students’ Union and Graduate Students’ Association as regards the student experience (key objective 3).

(h) The reference to having regard to the living wage (enabling objective 2) was queried. It was suggested that further consideration should be given to the possibility of a stronger commitment in this area, drawing on current research at the University if necessary. At the same time, the need to avoid an open-ended commitment which might make some commercial functions unviable and therefore lead to job losses was highlighted.

(i) The balance between growth and maintaining quality was complex and required a nuanced approach, with avoidance of any overly simplistic suggestions that increasing in size was intrinsically valuable. It was also suggested that, without careful planning and management, the two objectives of further growth and improving efficiency might work in opposition to each other.

(j) The question of efficiency was relevant to faculty governance in that duplication of effort might remain a risk (likewise as regards the roles played by departments and colleges in the area of academic support).
was suggested that the decision about whether to establish faculties was difficult to make without knowing in greater detail how they would be organised, what their powers would be etc. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that there was currently no strong view on this matter: it was hoped that the consultation process itself would help to define the way forward, with particular emphasis on improving communication between central management and departments.

(k) If decisions were made to drive growth in some areas, it might not be possible to maintain all the positive features of a small organisation.

(l) It was agreed that in areas of the strategy where there was background thinking in the form of position papers etc, these might usefully be shared as part of the wider consultation process as they could clarify the rationale for certain proposals. However, it was also noted that provision of such additional materials should not inhibit free expression of ideas and comments, to ensure that the final strategy was not overly prescriptive as regards pedagogy and research.

(m) The SU President commented that in part the document seemed quite bland and lacking in distinctive features. Support was offered for the points made about the importance of transparency/accountability, increasing international opportunities for students and responding (not just listening) to the student voice. As regards the planned consultation launch events, it was reported that these would be ticketed due to limited capacity, but would also be streamed online.

(n) Given that the strategy was a long-term vision, it was suggested that greater emphasis might be placed on the community and collegial aspects of University life. The document might also refer to the broad notion of scholarship as a key driver of University success.

(o) One of college provosts welcomed the reference to the colleges in the document, emphasising that they had played an important role in helping the University feel small and collegial to students despite the considerable growth of the last decade.

(p) Student members of Senate commented specifically on:

- ensuring that protection of research time (key objective 1) did not impair teaching quality;
- improving diversity of expanding postgraduate numbers;

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• commitment to provide appropriate facilities that enhanced the student experience and matched any growth in numbers;
• need for defined processes in the implementation plan to stimulate student engagement and participation (key objective 3);
• more explicit reference to provision of scholarships and bursaries in the section on student recruitment;
• development of programme content that challenged students while also accommodating different learning styles.

(q) It was acknowledged that the vision statement under enabling objective 1 relating to considerations of growth/size contained several valid points which needed to be balanced against the attendant risks. It was hoped that the consultation process would help to crystallise these risks and clarify the institutional ‘risk appetite’. This point was also linked to the stated intention to review and integrate the current medium- and long-term planning processes in such a way that their rigour was maintained without impeding creative innovation.

(r) There was deliberately no reference in the document to semesterisation in case this acted as an unhelpful distraction to the wider strategic picture. However, it was acknowledged that the topic might arise again in the implementation plan if assurance could be provided that it would serve the strategy rather than causing disruption and raising opportunity costs. Alternatively, a clearer view of institutional pedagogy might provide solutions to some of the issues which some departments had felt would be alleviated by semesterisation.

(s) Further consultation was ongoing to finalise the separate Research Strategy, which would support the thematic focus of the overarching strategy while also supporting excellent research that did not fit within the chosen themes. Further consideration would be given to the timing of the development process for both strategies to ensure that they fitted together coherently. It was noted that the concentration of research funding from research councils to the largest research units/institutions was a major issue, requiring development of appropriate match-funding and support for large-scale initiatives.

Following the above discussion, the Vice-Chancellor thanked Senate for its valuable input to the consultation exercise. Further consideration would now be given to whether the consultation document should be amended in the light of Senate’s comments and also whether additional background documents might usefully be made available.
13-14/36 Academic Probation Policy

Senate considered a revised and updated Academic Probation Policy (S.13-14/25).

Introducing the policy, the Registrar & Secretary confirmed that the HR Directorate had consulted widely in order to update the policy in accordance with current legislation and best practice.

With reference to the wording in paragraph 1.2 in respect of “academic (Lecturing) staff”, a query was raised regarding the exact staff group to which the new policy would apply, i.e. whether this referred to all staff on ART contracts, including research-only staff (despite references in the policy to the PGCAP programme). It was noted that the cover-note accompanying the policy referred to “academic (research and teaching) staff”.

Subject to precise clarification of the staff group which it covered, Senate approved the new policy.

13-14/37 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.13-14/26):

- Teaching Committee: 3 February and 3 March 2014
- Research Committee: 15 January and 19 March 2014
- Planning Committee: 5 February and 5 March 2014
- Special Cases Committee: appointment of Professor Deborah Smith as Deputy Chair (Postgraduates)

13-14/38 Forthcoming Committee Vacancies

Forthcoming vacancies for committee appointments to be made by Senate commencing 1 August 2014 were noted (S.13-14/27).

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/

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(b) submit nominations to Dr Philip Evans (Registrar’s and Planning Office, philip.evans@york.ac.uk) by **Friday 27 June 2014** (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 paper would be circulated to Senate members after the July meeting.

13-14/39 **Register of Collaborative Programmes**

Senate **received** for information the current register of validated programmes and collaborative provision (S.13-14/28).

13-14/40 **Date of Next Meeting**

It was **noted** that the next meeting of Senate was scheduled for Tuesday 15 July 2014 at 3.15pm.