UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2015

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost, Professor S Tendler
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor D Smith
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students), Professor J Robinson
Dean (Sciences), Professor B Fulton
Dean (Arts & Humanities), Professor M Ormrod
Director of Information Services, Mrs H Fraser-Krauss

Dr R Aitken
Dr H Altink
Professor E Annandale
Professor K Atkin
Professor D Attwell
Dr K Attwood
Dr E Brown
Professor D Bruce
Professor B Doherty
Dr A Field
Dr J de Groot
Dr T Helgason
Professor A Higson
Dr G Hurst
Ms R Ibrahim (GSA President)
Mr B Leatham (SU President)
Dr J Moir
Professor K Mumford

Professor M Nazarov
Professor R Paige
Dr F Polack
Professor E Prettejohn
Mr S Pullen (student rep)
Dr G Richardson
Professor R Sainsbury
Dr J Schofield
Professor P Sells
Professor S Slorach
Professor M Smith
Professor Q Summerfield
Professor J Swaffield
Professor S Thompson
Professor J Timmis
Dr R Vann
Dr R Waites

In attendance: The Registrar and Secretary
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
SU Academic Officer, Mr T Ron
Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Officer, Ms H Brian
Dean of Graduate Research School, Professor T Stoneham

Apologies for absence were received from Professor S Bell, Professor B Chambers, Professor G Currie, Mr A Dennis (student rep), Professor C Dytham, Dr D Efird, Professor M Goddard, Mr F Hamza (student rep), Professor R Jacobs, Dr O Lisagor, Professor N Mackay, Professor M Matravers, Professor T Sheldon and Mr G Wall.

Senate: 20 October 2015
Terms of Reference/Membership

Senate noted its terms of reference as set out in the Charter/Statutes, the ‘Statement of Primary Responsibilities’ and its annual cycle of business (S.15-16/1).

As it was the first meeting of the 2015/16 academic session, the Vice-Chancellor welcomed new members, including the newly appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Saul Tendler. Professor Tendler confirmed that his principal areas of responsibility were the planning process, internationalisation and University partnerships.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2015 were approved.

Student Representation

Further to M14-15/57, Senate noted the agreed constituency of student representatives to serve on Senate (with effect from the YUSU elections in 2015/16) (S.15-16/2).

Statement by the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported the following matters:

- An event had been held in September with Heads of Department (HoDs) and other senior departmental managers at which the current external context for HE, the University’s last year, implementation of the University Strategy and key challenges had been discussed, as well as the main priorities for the current year. It was noted that the event would be repeated for the wider University community during the current term in order to highlight current developments and horizon-scanning in respect of future risks and opportunities.

- The University and the China Culture Investment Group (CCIG) were working together to develop new education and training provision in the creative industries aimed at Chinese and other international students. The initiative would be based on programmes offered by the Department of Theatre, Film & Television (TFTV), in particular its BSc in TV and Film Production. The intention was to recruit up to three hundred students a year from China and other countries to programmes delivered in bespoke
facilities on the Heslington East campus. All the new programmes would be taught by University staff and all academic issues, including entry standards and quality assurance, would be managed by the University. CCIG would provide investment to develop new facilities and be responsible for recruiting students in China. The agreement under discussion was predicated on an assumption that the first cohort of students would enter the degree programme in September 2018. The University and CCIG would be continuing their discussions during the current week at a meeting in London as part of the state visit by the Chinese President, although no legally binding agreements would be signed at this stage. Noting the press embargo imposed on the agreement by UKTI, the Vice-Chancellor asked Senate members to observe strict confidentiality on this matter until official public announcements had been made. In response to queries from Senate, the following additional points were noted:

- The new cohort of students would represent additional overseas student numbers and relevant immigration/visa matters would be discussed with the Home Office and UKTI.

- CCIG wished to deliver the programme in equivalent facilities to those currently available to students in TFTV and as such the programme would require additional buildings and equipment, allowing for crossover and integration with existing York students.

- Additional student accommodation would be required on Heslington East, and this could also be funded by CCIG.

- The initiative represented an exciting opportunity for the University, although considerable work remained to be done to negotiate and finalise the specific details.

15-16/5 National Student Survey 2015

Senate considered a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students) on the 2015 National Student Survey (S.15-16/3).

Presenting the report, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor drew attention to the following points:

- good progress made towards the departmental targets agreed by Senate the previous year, with these remaining unchanged for the current year;
improved scores for all dimensions, with a 2% increase in overall satisfaction (to 88%) and a notably high score for teaching on my course (91% satisfaction, ranking 8th in the sector);

confirmation of student satisfaction in the open comments section of the survey, which provided strong affirmation of the work of individual members of teaching staff;

relatively poorer scores for personal development and assessment and feedback, which would therefore be the focus of current year activities;

use of data presented in Tableau to identify the correlation between different sections of the survey (especially as these related to the overall satisfaction score);

the importance of clearly defined assessment criteria and associated equity issues;

roll-out of the institutional pedagogy (M15-16/10 below also refers) and a ‘partnership agreement’ with students, which would address some of the issues raised in respect of personal development;

the revised process for reporting and discussing the survey outcome with individual departments.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Although some of the data was for internal use only and as such should not appear in the public domain, it was permissible for individual departments to share their data with elected student representatives.

(b) The SU President commented that students would respond positively to clearer communication and clarification of expectations. The suggestion in the response from one department that their overall satisfaction rating had been negatively affected by satisfaction with the SU was deemed to be a tenuous correlation.

(c) Issues around student understanding of what actually constituted feedback would be highlighted and clarified as part of the York Pedagogy implementation.

(d) At management level there was linkage between the NSS outcome and the results of other surveys (e.g. in respect of the provision of learning resources).

Following the above discussion, Senate welcomed that the new reporting and analysis format as helpful and constructive for individual departments.
Destination of Leavers from Higher Education

Senate considered a report on the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education in 2014 (S.15-16/4).

Attending the meeting to present the report, Heather Stout and Andrew Ferguson (Careers) drew attention to the timing, process and scope of the survey, with particular reference to the data on full-time, first-degree, home-domiciled graduates (as this was used by HESA for its ‘employment indicator’ and also in newspaper league tables). Compared to the previous year’s figures, the unemployment rate had decreased from 8.3% to 6.4%, with a 5% increase in professional employment (44% to 49%). The decline in graduates continuing with further study mirrored the national picture and would be subject to further analysis. Noting the University’s overall rank for employability in the Sunday Times league table (40th), attention was drawn to the institutional target of achieving 80% of graduates in professional work or further study by the 2016/17 graduating cohort.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) The data only provided information on graduates’ activities six months after graduation, not on the motivation for these activities (e.g. earning money in order to travel). Graduates who were travelling at the time of the survey were excluded from the data as they were not considered available for work.

(b) As regards student engagement with employability, there had been an increase among first years (e.g. attendance at careers fairs) and regular monitoring was undertaken by both year group and department.

(c) Graduate entrepreneurs setting up their own businesses were categorised as having achieved a positive destination. Data was also available from the survey regarding the University’s contribution to supporting the development of graduate entrepreneurs.

Student Employability Strategy

Further to consideration of graduate destination data, Senate considered the new Student Employability Strategy (S.15-16/5).

Presenting the document as Chair of the Employability Strategy Group, the Vice-Chancellor highlighted the overarching target for graduate
employability (M15-16/6 above refers), the four top-level strategic aims and the objectives underpinning each of these aims. The following were noted as key features:

- senior management involvement
- departmental engagement and commitment
- messaging to stakeholders
- emphasis on work experience
- value of international experience
- proactive engagement with employers

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) The support provided through Careers Liaison Officers in academic departments was variable and further consideration would be given to developing and raising the profile of this role, possibly at a faculty level.

(b) Although resourcing in this area was an issue for academic departments, it was suggested that it was not appropriate for employability matters to be considered as part of the annual medium-term planning (MTP) cycle. In response the Deputy Vice-Chancellor commented that employability data was considered as an element of the longer-term strategic planning meetings with departments, and that efforts were being made to tie these meetings more closely to the MTP process so that departments were more empowered to take appropriate actions in this area.

(c) It was suggested that the wording of objective 3(a) regarding students being “unprepared for life after graduation” might be re-drafted for greater clarity.

(d) It was agreed that reference to the development of transferable skills as part of the York Pedagogy might usefully be included in strategic aim (3).

(e) Acknowledgement of students’ changing perspectives and career plans over the course of their time at university was built into the standard practice of careers services and was also recognised in the structure of the York Award.

(f) The Employability Strategy Group would re-visit the question of whether the University might usefully participate in the national Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) project.
(g) The SU President welcomed the references to peer-to-peer processes, mentoring/buddying systems and the role of supervisors in supporting the employability agenda. As regards graduate satisfaction levels with the professional employment they gained, it was noted that this was unquantifiable through the current survey but was acknowledged and referenced in the Teaching and Learning Strategy (M15-16/9 below refers).

(h) As regards the identification of actions for the SU in the strategy document, it was suggested that the language in these sections might be amended to reflect that the SU’s activities were mandated by the student body, not by the University.

(i) In the context of the totality of academic staff workload, it was agreed that adequate resourcing for employability activity would be considered as part of the planning process (point [b] above also refers).

Subject to the comments and amendments above, Senate approved the Student Employability Strategy.

15-16/8  Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

Senate considered a report on the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2015 (S.15-16/6).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Dean of the Graduate Research School (Professor Tom Stoneham) explained the process for feeding back to departments the outcome of the biennial HEA survey. Senate noted the response rate and the University’s improved results for most questions, with performance generally above the Russell Group average. Professor Stoneham identified the following as areas for attention that had emerged from the survey:

- overall satisfaction scores
- guidance/direction of research
- opportunities to discuss research with other students
- opportunities to develop contacts/networking
- personal training plans (an area of increasing focus by research councils)
- training for teaching

The following points were noted in discussion:
(a) Personal training plans were intended to cover two broad areas: project-specific skills and generic research skills (e.g. communication, impact, writing grant applications etc).

(b) The concept of the Early Career Researchers’ Forum allowed research students to gain advice and guidance from a wider group beyond their personal supervisor and to benefit from interaction with others at a more comparable stage of career development. It was also noted that having a forum in which PGRs could raise issues collectively had a positive impact on departmental training provision.

(c) Some students might require greater assurance regarding the anonymity of their response, and if provided this would increase the current response rate (49%, 986 students).

(d) As regards the possibility of analysis across and within research groups (rather than departments), this could be explored further, including with the HEA.

(e) The relatively high levels of dissatisfaction with specialist library resources in particular departments probably arose from some students’ conception of a “research library”, which provided messages for expectation management at induction.

15-16/9 Learning and Teaching Strategy 2015-2020

Senate considered the new Learning and Teaching Strategy 2015-2020 (S.15-16/7).

Introducing the strategy, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students) offered thanks to the University Teaching Committee Working Group which had produced the document and also to the colleagues who had responded during the extensive consultation period.

The following comments were noted:

(a) There was general support for the introduction of a ‘student compact’ (now called ‘partnership agreement’), a development which was becoming more prevalent across the sector. A suggestion that the compact should include the quality assurance of seminar delivery by
postgraduates who teach (PGWTs) would be taken up during consultation on the compact.

(b) It was suggested that the wording in the Preface relating to “outstanding individuals” might be amended so as not to imply that only a small number of colleagues were outstanding. The same generally inclusive tone and sense of collective/shared ownership was also suggested in the Principles section of the document, notwithstanding the emphasis on programme leadership in the York Pedagogy.

(c) Options for growing distance-learning provision (C.2.5 refers), a University Strategy commitment, were currently being assessed.

(d) It was suggested that the stated commitment to closing the gap of social advantage (B.4.3 refers) needed also to cover students with specific support needs (e.g. in relation to disability).

Following the above discussion, Senate approved the new Learning and Teaching Strategy.

15-16/10 Institutional Pedagogy

Further to approval of the new Learning and Teaching Strategy, Senate considered a report on implementation of the associated institutional pedagogy (S.15-16/8).

Presenting the report, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students) observed that, following a number of trials during the previous academic year and considerable developmental work over the summer, the next stage of implementation was now underway in order to achieve the University Strategy commitment for all University programmes to have adopted the pedagogy by 2017-18. Particular emphasis was being placed on programme design and the development of new learning outcomes for each programme, with programme leaders to be appointed during the next academic year.

During discussion of the report the following points were noted:

(a) With the pedagogy’s strong focus on student work, the provision of feedback would be central to the ProPEL (Programmes to Propel Effective Learning) project and the partnership agreement with students.
(b) In response to a concern that establishing a central role for programme leaders might create authoritarian and un-collegial hierarchies in relation to other staff tasked with delivering programme content, it was noted that various strategies would be employed to counter such a risk, including developing a course for programme leaders that emphasised how to engage colleagues in co-design and collaborative delivery.

(c) The Pro-Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the Chairs of Combined Boards would be able to act as the programme leaders for combined programmes. As a general point about the relationship between the new programme leaders and other senior departmental managers (e.g. chairs of boards of studies and departmental teaching committees), this matter would be the subject of further consultation with departments during the current academic year.

15-16/11 Research Performance Expectations

Senate considered the updated University Statement on Research Performance Expectations (S.15-16/9).

Presenting the Statement, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) commented that an earlier version had been in existence for several years but this had now been reviewed and updated to accord with the format of the Statement on Teaching Performance Expectations approved by Senate the previous year (M14-15/30 refers). Noting that the document had been subject to consultation with UCU, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor reported a number of comments submitted in writing by the Director of the Centre for Health Economics, which mainly related to financial implications and the PI role from the perspective of a research-only department. It was noted that these specific issues would be considered further by the University Research Committee (URC). Senate also noted that, as a consequence of disciplinary differences in research activity, departments would be required to produce their own Research Performance Expectations that would be appended to the generic institutional Statement.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) It was suggested that the reference to workload models in the section on research environment (§5 refers) should include reference to the sort of ‘citizenship’ (formerly: administrative) activities recognised in promotions criteria.
(b) It was suggested that the listed indicators of research activity and quality (§6 refers) should also include work undertaken in an industrial/commercial context that might not be ‘REF-able’.

(c) It was suggested that reference to ‘PhD Students’ (p9) should be replaced by ‘Research Students’ (to capture MSc by Research etc).

(d) Given the role to be played by the Deans in moderating performance review reports, it was suggested that they might also be asked to consider departmental Research Performance Expectations prior to their submission to URC for institutional sign-off. Similarly, it was suggested that the Deans could ensure equity across departments and faculties as regards interdisciplinary research collaborations. Likewise, it was suggested that the next review of the formal Capability Procedure should consider whether the Deans might play a moderating role in the process between HoDs and the HR Directorate.

(e) The wording of the document in some places suggested that the Chairs of departmental research committees acted as the line managers for academic researchers, which was not the case. This would be reviewed.

(f) In response to a query on gender-based analysis of the last REF outcome, it was reported that no gender differences had been identified in respect of the grading of research outputs, although URC had made certain observations on the promotion of aspiration among female researchers. Given the number of other protected characteristics in addition to gender that might be relevant in the research area, it was agreed that a generic reference to a positive approach to equity might usefully be inserted in the section on research environment (§4 refers).

(g) In response to a comment from the GSA President on the quality assurance of research supervision, it was noted that the Statement would facilitate identification of such issues. Specific concerns could also be raised directly via the Dean of the Graduate Research School.

(h) As a general point it was suggested that some of the language of the document might be finessed to be less intimidating and more enabling of best practice and collaborative working. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) agreed to re-consider the text of the document in the light of this comment.
(i) As regards the first response to triggers of poor performance and the escalation to involvement of the HoD at the first stage, it was suggested that this might depend on the size of the department in question (which could be indicated by addition of the wording “as appropriate”).

Following the above discussion, Senate approved the updated University Statement on Research Performance Expectations, subject to further re-drafting in accordance with the useful comments from Senate members. It was also decided that the final version of the document would be circulated to members for information.

15-16/12 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.15-16/10):

- Planning Committee: 30 September 2015
- Teaching Committee: 8 October 2015
- Research Committee: 29 September 2015
- Special Cases Committee

15-16/13 Periodic Review Reports

Senate received for information Teaching Committee periodic review reports in respect of the Departments of Sociology and Electronics (S.15-16/11).

15-16/14 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of Senate was scheduled for Tuesday 26 January 2016 at 3.15pm.