

University of York

Senate

Executive Summary of the meeting held 30 Apr. 2024

Vice-Chancellor and President's report

1. Senate **considered** an overview report from the Vice-Chancellor. This set out and highlighted the significant challenges for all UK universities of the current financial context in which they were operating, and that the indications were that any changes to government policy (e.g. as it affected international recruitment) were likely to make this situation more rather than less difficult.
2. The Vice-Chancellor **noted** the continuing resonance of the Israel/Gaza conflict, and the PVC Enterprise, Partnerships and Engagement **reported** on the continuing work to support students affected by this situation. It was also **reported** that the University was seeking through OPPA to support alumni in situations affected by this conflict.
3. The Vice-Chancellor **reported** that the merger of YUSU and GSA to form a single Students' Union had been formally approved, and would come into effect from 1 Aug. 2024. Senate **noted** the successful completion of the first elections to sabbatical posts in the new, merged SU, and that work was underway to implement the new SU.

Protecting the Future

4. Senate **considered** a presentation from the Vice-Chancellor and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor on the steps that the University was taking to protect its core mission of delivering academic excellence to the benefit of society, in the context of the significant financial challenges facing the sector such as the freeze of home undergraduate fees; below inflation rises in what remained of the teaching grant from OfS; the impact of the significant inflation of recent years; and an extremely challenging international student recruitment market. This involved a combination of seeking to protect the University's income as far as was practicable, and reducing costs by 6% of current turnover through a combination of reducing Other Operating Costs and a reduction in staffing levels. In respect of the latter a voluntary severance scheme had been launched, and Changing the Work frameworks for academic work and professional services work had been developed.
5. Senate **noted** that there was little prospect of changes to government policy, either under the government or a new government following the general election, that would significantly address the challenging financial context universities faced, though the University continued to lobby on these issues. Senate expressed its frustration at the focus of national discussion on the economic dimension of international students in the UK, rather than the significant value and benefits that international students brought to UK higher education and wider society.

Changing the Academic Work

6. The PVC Teaching, Learning and Students and PVC Research **reported** on the Changing the Academic Work Framework that had been developed to take account of the future lower levels of staffing that would result from the measures discussed in the previous item. These sought to increase efficiency and effectiveness, in order to preserve the quality of academic activity and experience. The proposals would involve changes to policy and practice, and where policy was needed this would be considered in line with Senate's agreed Scheme of Delegated Approvals. Senate would also be asked to consider at its July meeting a proposal to replace Boards of Studies with a single teaching committee in each department, a proposal which would be developed by a Task and Finish Group.

7. Senate **noted** the proposals set out in the Framework. A range of views were expressed on the proposal relating to Boards of Studies. It was **agreed** that members of Senate who wished to join the Task and Finish Group working on this should communicate this to the Secretary

Research Excellence Framework

8. Senate **received** an update on the development of the next Research Excellence Framework, and **noted** the extension of the timelines for the next exercise and that further slippage had occurred even since the papers for Senate had been circulated. Senate also **noted** the University had submitted an expression of interest in participating in the People, Culture and Environment pilot that was taking place to explore approaches to the proposed increase in the weighting and scope of this area at the next REF.

The Sparks Programme - Equitable Technologies Lab

9. Senate **received** a presentation on the Equitable Technologies Lab, which had been the successful Sparks proposal from the Faculty of Sciences, **noting** a number of common themes across this and the other two Sparks projects.

Personal Relationships Policy

10. A report setting out recent developments in the sector on this issue was **considered**, and Senate **noted** and supported the direction of travel set out in this report towards a University policy of prohibiting staff-student relationships (while making appropriate provision for exceptions). The imminence of new regulatory requirements in this area from OfS was also **noted**.

Update: Review of Academic Promotion Criteria, Policy and Process

11. Senate **received** a report on progress in implementing the revised criteria, policy and process approved at its meeting on 30 Jan. 2024; and **approved** a plan for taking forward the new criteria and processes to include promotion within the professoriate.

Assurance Report on Alignment to Office for Students' B Conditions for Research Degree Programme

12. Senate **received** a report providing assurance that the University was meeting OfS' B Conditions relating to academic quality and standards in respect of research degree programmes (having previously received such a report for taught programmes). Senate **noted** that the report provided the necessary assurance; the sector leading work on research degree supervision, and access to doctoral education; and the actions being taken to enhance research degree provision.

Development of a new University Code of Practice on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech

13. Senate **received** a report summarising the new requirements in this area that it would be subject to from 1 Aug. 2024 under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act, and the steps being taken to address the Act's requirements. Senate **noted** that a joint University/SU Code of Practice was being developed to address these requirements, and that this would be subject to consultation before coming forward to Senate in July. Senate **agreed** that the draft Code should be shared with members for comment, prior to it being submitted to the July Senate.

Sub-committee Minutes, Summaries and Other Reports

14. Senate **noted** reports from the following sub-committee meetings: University Teaching Committee (15 Feb. and 14 Mar. 2024); Student Life Committee (28 Feb. 2024); University Research Committee (23 Jan. and 14 Mar. 2024); Partnership, Enterprise and Engagement Committee (8 Apr. 2024); HYMS Joint Senate (25 Jan. 2024); and Academic Promotions Committee.