

University of York

Senate

Executive summary of the meeting held 29 Apr. 2025

Vice-Chancellor and President's report

1. Senate **considered** an overview report from the Vice-Chancellor, including significant achievements by members of the University and alumni since Senate's last meeting.
2. Senate **noted** the recent Supreme Court ruling on the Equality Act 2010, and the recent OfS judgment against the University of Sussex that touched on some of the same issues; that the University had established a task and finish group to consider the implications of these developments for the University; and recognising the concerns of members of the University (including those expressed at Senate) on the potential implications of the Supreme Court ruling, opportunities would be provided to allow such views to inform the work of the Task and Finish Group.
3. The report also updated Senate on the financial challenges that were facing all UK universities; and the University's continuing work to address the impact of these on York, including the significant progress already made towards achieving the identified cost savings for 2025-26 and the launch the previous day of targeted voluntary schemes for academic departments and professional services. The report also referred to the University's work to diversify and increase its income, and the Chair **reported** to Senate on the development of a significant such initiative for a new overseas campus developed by the University with a partner organisation; and that this development had reached the point where a public announcement of the project and intentions was likely in the coming days. Senate **noted** and welcomed that unlike many such initiatives being announced by other UK universities, this new campus would be research-led and intensive as well as providing an opportunity to expand access to the University's education provision.

Student Expert Panel

4. Senate **considered** a presentation from the Student Expert Panel's (SEP) representative to Senate on SEP's work over the last year, and its current priorities and activities. Senate **noted** the work of SEP, including in collaboration with the University of York Students' Union, to support partnership working between students and the University; that in support of this SEP worked across the University with a wide range of departments, professional services and projects; significant activities over the last year included SEP's contributions to the University's Access and Participation Plan, and the development of the Unheard Words Immersive Storytelling App; SEP's activity to present its work at workshops and conferences, including hosting representatives from the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus universities to explore first-generation student experience and EDI; and that a central future focus of the SEP would be to support the implementation of the new Access and Participation Plan.

Boards of Studies

5. Senate **considered** a report from the Task and Finish Group considering the proposed replacement of Boards of Studies with one Departmental Education Committee (DEC) per department. It **noted** the work to date of the Group, including the feedback from across the University about the operation of Boards of Studies, and looking at practice at other universities; the Group's recognition of the importance of taking account of differing structures and practices between departments in areas related to the work of Boards of Studies; and that the Group had therefore drawn up terms of reference and membership for DECs, and was recommending a pilot where volunteer departments would operate a DEC model in 2025-26 with this experience being evaluated during the academic year and a further report (taking account of the pilot and its evaluation) brought back to Senate with proposals for 2026-27 onwards.

6. Senate **approved** the proposed pilot of DEC's in 2025-26 on the basis set out by the Group, with an evaluation of the pilot to be undertaken and proposals for 2026-27 taking account of this evaluation to be submitted to Senate during 2025-26.

Special Cases and Complaints Annual Report

7. Senate **considered** the Annual Report on Special Cases and Complaints, and **noted**: the significant progress made in reducing the backlog of academic appeals over the last year (down from 459 to 130) as a result of process improvements and the appointment additional fixed-term staff posts; there had been reductions in appeals between 2022-23 and 2023-24, with the majority of appeals relating to students failing their programme; there had also been a reduction over the same period in student complaints, though within the relatively low number of complaints there had been an increase in more complex complaints relating to student disability; and the plans to undertake a more comprehensive analysis of appeals and complaints data in future years as part of a wider piece of work looking at the use data relating to learning and teaching.
8. Additionally, Senate **approved** the proposal to submit separate reports on appeals and complaints in future years, supported by the development in the analysis of data referred to in the report.

Sub-committee Minutes, Summaries and Other Reports

9. Senate **noted** reports from the following sub-committee meetings:
 - a. University Teaching Committee, 16 Jan. and 23 Feb. 2025, including the change of name to University Education Committee with effect from 2025-26.
 - b. University Research Committee, 21 Jan. and 12 Mar. 2025.
 - c. Student Life Committee, 6 Feb. 2025.
 - d. HYMS Joint Senate Committee, 23 Jan. 2025.