UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2014

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dr J Grenville
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor D Smith
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning), Professor J Robinson
Academic Coordinator (Social Sciences), Professor S Bell
Academic Coordinator (Sciences), Professor B Fulton
Academic Coordinator (Arts & Humanities), Professor M Ormrod

Dr R Aitken
Dr H Altink
Professor I D’Amico
Professor E Annandale
Professor K Atkin
Professor M Bentley
Professor C Brown
Professor B Chambers
Dr J Clarbour
Professor J Clark
Mr T Clark (student rep)
Professor E Corrigan
Professors G Currie
Professor C Dytham
Professor M Festenstein
Dr A Field
Professor R Godby
Dr J de Groot
Mr S Harper (student rep)
Dr T Helgason
Professor A Higson
Ms J Horvatic (GSA President)

Professor C Hunter
Professor A Jones
Mr S Maguire (SU President)
Dr J Moir
Professor K Mumford
Dr B Pownall
Professor E Prettejohn
Professor R Sainsbury
Dr J Schofield
Professor P Sells
Dr S Smith
Professor L Stewart
Professor T Stoneham
Professor Q Summerfield
Dr B Szczepk Reed
Professor R Taylor
Professor S Thompson
Mr S Town
Dr R Vann
Dr R Waites
Professor J Woodcock
Mr R Yates
Ms A Zaman (student rep)
In attendance: The Registrar and Secretary
The Academic Registrar
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
SU Academic Officer, Mr G Offer
SU Student Engagement Development Coordinator, Mr R Quayle
Executive Officer in the Vice-Chancellor’s Officer, Ms H Brian

Apologies for absence were received from Professor D Attwell, Professor C Fewster, Professor M Goddard, Dr R Jacobs, Professor C Mellors and Professor T Sheldon.

14-15/1 Terms of Reference/Membership

Senate noted its terms of reference as set out in the Charter/Statutes and the ‘Statement of Primary Responsibilities’ (S.14-15/1).

As it was the first meeting of the 2014/15 academic session, the Vice-Chancellor welcomed new members.

14-15/2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2014 were approved.

14-15/3 Appointments to Committees

Further to M13-14/48, Senate noted the appointments to committees which had been approved by the Vice-Chancellor since the last meeting and also the result of the ballot for membership of the Promotions, Research and Teaching Committees (S.14-15/2).

14-15/4 Statement by the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported the following matters:

➢ The Senior Management Group had recently been focused on further development of the new University Strategy (M14-15/5 below refers), and the Vice-Chancellor welcomed the high level of engagement by the University community during the consultation phase.

➢ In the recent student recruitment round it had been decided not to admit students with grades lower than BBC, despite a shortfall as the University
entered clearing. This reflected the ongoing challenge of balancing growth against maintaining academic quality. Further consideration would be given to the most appropriate approach to confirmation, clearing and adjustment for the following year.

- The annual planning round with departments had commenced, including some changes to the process as regards allocation of full costs and mechanisms for carrying forward financial over-performance. The intention of such changes was to improve integration of short-term budgets with longer term strategic planning.

- As the University’s performance in the 2014 National Student Survey had been disappointing, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (T&L) had been asked to establish a task group to address this significant institutional risk (M14-15/9 below refers).

- Changes to the USS pension scheme structure had been proposed in order to address a deficit in the scheme which was considered unsustainable. The University would continue to update members of the scheme as further information became available. In response to the proposals, UCU had balloted its members who had voted by a majority in favour of industrial action.

- The position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor had been externally advertised with a closing date of 24 October 2014 and interviews scheduled for 19 December 2014. Two members of Senate would serve on the selection panel, with the final recommendation for appointment to be submitted to Senate for approval.

14-15/5 University Strategy

Further to M13-14/46, Senate considered a further draft of the proposed University Strategy (S.14-15/3).

Presenting the document, the Vice-Chancellor highlighted the summary of the consultation responses, which had informed the new version. It was noted that some elements of the previous version had been amended and in other areas greater detail and clarification had been provided.

During discussion the following points were noted:
(a) Although some concerns had been expressed about the proposed institutional pedagogy over-riding departmental autonomy and being overly directive, the proposed framework would provide a general statement of effective teaching and learning that was applicable across all disciplines, based on sound evidence from educational research. It was acknowledged that work remained to be done to attain the correct level of specificity while retaining flexibility. It was noted in this context that the existence of programme/module specifications and identified learning outcomes already provided a pedagogical framework, with the overarching pedagogy designed to highlight the distinctiveness of the York curriculum.

(b) In response to a query about equality and sustainability as strategic priorities, it was noted that commitment to these matters was clearly stated in the introductory statement setting out the University’s values. It was intended that these values would be manifest in the ensuing operational plan.

(c) It was suggested that the strengthened references to colleges (key objective 3) and collaboration with public, cultural and charitable organisation (enabling objective 3) might be more seamlessly integrated into the text of the document, possibly with illustrative examples.

(d) As regards replacing poor-quality buildings on Heslington West (enabling objective 1), it was agreed that the University should seek to maintain a broad price range of different types of student accommodation on both campuses.

Subject to the points raised above, Senate approved the University Strategy for submission to the University Council.

14-15/6 Establishment of Faculties

As a related element of the new University Strategy, Senate considered a paper proposing the establishment of three faculties and the appointment of Deans of Faculty (S.14-15/4).

Introducing the paper, the Registrar commented that the proposal represented an evolution from the current arrangement of subject-based academic clusters and coordinators. As regards the terms of reference for the proposed faculty boards, it was noted that, although their authority levels had not yet been set out in a formal scheme of delegation, the main purpose
of the boards would be to discuss issues of common concern and promote greater collaboration.

The following points were noted in discussion:

(a) In response to a comment from the GSA President about consistency of support for postgraduate students, it was noted that this would fall within the remit of the proposed Graduate Research School (M14-15/8 below refers).

(b) Research staff such as post-doctoral researchers would fall within the definition of academic staff as regards Faculty Board membership.

(c) As regards the proposed delegation to Faculty Boards of the responsibility for junior promotions, confirmation following probation and early stage of special cases, it was suggested that no clear rationale was presented for this shift in responsibility, other than to address the increasing volume of such business currently processed by the central administration and University-level committees. It was suggested that devolving from the centre to three separate boards might reduce consistency of practice across the University and that changes to employment-related matters such as promotion and probation required consideration in the relevant negotiating forum. Following detailed discussion, it was agreed that the responsibility for junior promotions, confirmation following probation and early stage of special cases should be removed from the proposal. As a consequence of this decision, it was also agreed that the Boards should only meet once per term.

(d) In the context of the stated purpose of faculties to ensure better coordination of inter-disciplinary activities, it was suggested that care needed to be taken to ensure such activities were not impeded by the faculty structure (ie that inter-disciplinarity was understood to be across and not solely within faculties). As regards the proposed duty of Deans to manage budgets, it was noted that responsibility for inter-disciplinary activities would rest either at University or faculty level as appropriate.

(e) In response to the suggestion that the primary purpose of the Faculty Boards was to act as a discussion forum, it was suggested that their proposed constituency might be widened to be more representative and collegial. It was therefore agreed that the number of academic staff should be increased from 3 to 4-6, depending on the total size of the faculty in question. It was also agreed that undergraduate student
representation should increase from 1 to 2, with the SU Academic Officer also in attendance. It was also suggested that other officers (eg from HR, Planning, Management Accounts) might usefully be in attendance at Faculty Board meetings. It was however acknowledged that beyond a certain size such boards could easily become unwieldy and unmanageable. Notwithstanding this, the Boards would have the power to co-opt additional members as necessary for specific items of business.

Subject to the variations and amendments above, Senate approved the proposals regarding faculties for submission to the University Council. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the efficacy of the new structure would be reviewed and a report made to Senate in October 2015.

14-15/7 Research Strategy

As a related element of the new University Strategy, Senate considered the proposed new Research Strategy (S.14-15/5).

Presenting the strategy, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) reported on the seven-month consultation process and consideration of responses by Research Committee (further details provided in committee reports, M14-15/14 below refers). It was noted that the consultation had generated greater specificity, which had now been included in the proposed strategy objectives.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) The wording relating to ensuring equal careers opportunities for all might usefully be amended slightly to reflect the fact that such work was ongoing.

(b) It was suggested that quantum and digital technologies should be referenced in the theme descriptor for ‘Technologies for the Future’.

(c) While acknowledging that reference to the importance of QR income sought to accommodate the ‘lone scholar’ model, it was agreed that this did not imply that staff should not also be seeking other sources of research income.

(d) It was agreed that when an outward-facing version of the strategy was developed, it would be appropriate to broaden the range of references to research funders (eg Wellcome Trust) and other exemplar projects.
(e) As regards increasing PGR numbers while maintaining quality, it was noted that a strategic approach to this objective would be led by the Dean of the Graduate School (M14-15/8 below refers), including in respect of related funding bids.

(f) It was suggested that the importance of impact might be more strongly emphasised within the objectives.

(g) It was noted that the development of specific research themes was a response to the University’s relatively small scale and the increasing competitiveness of the external funding environment. Research Committee had expressed the view that such a thematic approach was appropriate and would not obstruct innovation or collaboration, especially as the themes were broadly drawn and had been closely aligned with the priorities of major funders. It was noted that the themes would be evaluated and perhaps refreshed after 2-3 years in order to maintain a dynamic research environment. The Vice-Chancellor observed that there was no value judgement inherent in developing different forms of support for different types of research: the University would continue to support excellent research irrespective of the identified themes. It was therefore suggested that the wording in objective 2 relating to prioritisation of calls on central resourcing and support might be re-worded to allay concerns in this area.

(h) In terms of incentives for successful researchers, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor observed that these might take various forms and would be developed in collaboration with departments in a way which matched their plans and priorities. There would be a high degree of transparency around such activity, which would be set out in the implementation plan.

(i) With regard to existing doctoral training centres, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor commented that their activities matched well with the proposed research themes.

Subject to the comments above, Senate approved the new Research Strategy, which was welcomed by the Vice-Chancellor as an exciting step forward that would greatly benefit the University.
14-15/8 Graduate Research School

As a related element of the new University Strategy, Senate considered the proposal to establish a Graduate Research School (S.14-15/6).

Presenting the proposal, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) commented that the intention was better to support, train and celebrate postgraduate research students, while also providing senior academic leadership in this area through the appointment of a Dean, supported by a Board.

In response to comments and queries from Senate members, the following points were noted:

(a) The Dean would be a 0.5FTE appointment, which was deemed sufficient in the first instance, and would report to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research). The post-holder would not be a member of the SMG.

(b) Associated resourcing, including in respect of related student systems, had been considered but not yet firmly delineated.

(c) It was suggested that the Board might usefully include representation from among departmental Graduate Chairs, Directors of DTCs, the Standing Committee on Assessment and YUSU. Further consideration would be given to this matter and also to the nature of the reporting lines to the Teaching and Research Committees.

(d) The Operation Sub-Group was intended to ensure effective operational support for the School. Its role would be kept under review.

(e) Resource allocation decisions in respect of postgraduate students would continue to be made by a sub-group of Research Committee.

(f) In terms of building space, the School would be a ‘virtual’ entity, at least in the first instance.

Subject to the comments above, Senate approved the establishment of a Graduate Research School.

14-15/9 National Student Survey 2014

Senate considered a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) on the 2014 National Student Survey (S.14-15/7).
Presenting the report, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor drew attention to the following points:

- seven departments scoring 95% or above for overall satisfaction and others achieving their best ever rating;
- best score to date for learning resources (9th in sector);
- disappointing overall result, with overall satisfaction falling by 3% to 85% (joint 56th in sector);
- declines in scores for all dimensions except learning resources;
- despite relatively static overall score in recent years (85% having also been achieved in 2011), decline in rankings due to improvements among competitors;
- the range of specific areas that would be considered by the newly formed Task Group;
- the detrimental effect of instances of poor teaching, with ongoing work to address this through performance management to ensure a shared culture of excellence;
- importance of communication with students and associated review of the effectiveness of staff-student forums;
- focus on Q22 of the survey relating to overall satisfaction, with the aim of halving the number of dissatisfied students within two years;
- analysis of the significance and effect of negative open comments.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Efforts were made to capture the good practice in the best performing departments for dissemination to others. This could be particularly useful in the areas of communication with students and related questions of expectation management.

(b) Timing was an issue in the context of new programmes and departments, especially given the inevitable time-lag in introducing remedial measures.

(c) It was possible for there to be a broad diversity of student views, with negative comments by some reflecting perceptions of teaching that might be viewed positively by others. This would suggest that harder evidence needed to be sought, eg from focus groups and module-level data, in order to identify the precise locus of student dissatisfaction.
(d) The Task Group would explore in greater detail the University-wide decline relative to the sector. Although there were not thought to be systemic issues, consideration would need to be given to the issue of balancing growth against quality, especially in the context of the imminent lifting of the student number cap.

(e) There were a number of different standards across departments regarding deadlines for feedback (with the University maximum being six weeks). The main factor here was to ensure clarity among students as to the departmental practice which applied, and then to deliver against this standard. It was agreed that failures in this respect demonstrated a lack of respect for students and colleagues.

Following the above discussion, the Vice-Chancellor emphasised that improvement in NSS outcomes was an institutional priority, especially in the increasingly competitive environment for the best students, and departments were accordingly asked to cooperate fully with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and the new Task Group.

14-15/10 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey

Senate considered a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) on the 2014 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey run by the Higher Education Academy (S.14-15/8).

It was noted that the survey was run every two years and had a relatively low response rate, with small numbers in some areas. Overall the results were encouraging, with the University in the top quartile, achieving higher results than the Russell and 1994 Groups. As with the NSS, the open comments section of the survey provided useful pointers for improvement.

14-15/11 Destination of Leavers from Higher Education

Senate considered a report on the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education in 2013 (S.14-15/9).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Director of Careers (Liz Smith) drew particular attention to the timing, process and scope of the survey, with 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 league tables). Compared to the previous year’s figures, the unemployment rate had increased from 6.2% to 8.3% and there had been a

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2% drop in further study (from 29% to 31%). Graduate-level employment had increased by 1% (from 43% to 44%), although the University remained at the bottom of the Russell Group on this measure. Senate also noted the further details provided on the employability work undertaken by the Careers Service in collaboration with departments.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) There were a number of likely factors in the relatively higher figure for further study and lower figure for graduate employment among York graduates, including those relating to curriculum, geography and aspiration.

(b) As a means of remaining in contact with graduates for a longer period of time, it was suggested that the ‘email address for life’ introduced by External Relations might be promoted more strongly (although for technical and security reasons it had to be different to the address used during the period of enrolment).

(c) The University was ranked 37th for graduate prospects in The Times league table, which was a lower position that might be expected given the University’s average entry tariff and data on degree outcomes. This ranking had implications for engagement work with national employers and also the future development of an institutional pedagogy (M14-15/5 above refers).

14-15/12 International Foundation Programme

Senate considered a paper outlining proposals for an international foundation programme (S.14-15/10).

Presenting the proposal, the Registrar drew particular attention to the following:

- correlation with the stated ambition in the University Strategy to grow international student numbers;
- differences to the proposal discussed and ultimately rejected the previous academic year, especially as regards control over teaching activities, scale of the enterprise and nature of the contractual relationship with an external partner;
- contribution to financial surpluses as a means of funding capital projects, investing in research initiatives and providing additional staffing.
Senate approved the recommendation that further consultation be undertaken with academic departments and a full business plan presented to Council.

14-15/13 Admissions Policy

Senate considered the updated University Admissions Policy (S.14-15/11).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Director of Admissions (Simon Willis) reported that the previous policy had been updated to unify undergraduate and postgraduate policies and to reflect the requirement of the QAA’s UK Quality Code. The following key features were noted:

- stronger focus on recruitment activities and responsibilities to enquirers/potential applicants;
- inclusion of reference to other student recruitment and admissions strategies, e.g. widening participation;
- greater focus on how we make information available;
- reference to the University’s stance on contextual data;
- greater focus on communicating with applicants/keeping applicants updated;
- more student-friendly structure based on the applicant cycle/student journey.

Senate approved the revised policy, in accordance with its responsibility to regulate the admission of students to the University (Statute 12.2.g refers).

14-15/14 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.14-15/12):

- Planning Committee: 16 July and 1 October 2014
- Research Committee: 19 September 2014
- Teaching Committee: 9 October 2014

14-15/15 Annual Report from Special Cases Committee

Senate received for information the annual report from the Special Cases Committee (S.14-15/13):
14-15/16  Staffing in Colleges

Senate received for information a report on the outcome of the pilot of new staffing structures in the colleges (S.14-15/13).

14-15/17  Periodic Review Reports

Senate received for information Teaching Committee periodic review reports in respect of the Centres for Medieval Studies and Women’s Studies (S.14-15/15).

14-15/18  Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of Senate was scheduled for Tuesday 27 January 2015 at 3.15pm.