Minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2013

Present: The Acting Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor J Local
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor J Robinson

Professor E Annandale          Professor A Jones
Professor D Attwell            Dr J Moir
Professor M Bentley            Dr A Parsons
Professor C Brown              Dr B Pownall
Professor S Carroll            Professor J Schofield
Dr J Clarbour                 Dr J Schofield
Mr T Clarke                   Professor P Sells
Professor E Corrigan          Professor T Sheldon
Professor N Ellison            Professor D Smith
Professor C Fewster            Dr S Smith
Dr A Field                    Professor T Stoneham
Professor R Godby             Professor Q Summerfield
Professor H Graham            Mr K Taylor (SU)
Ms D Hale                     Professor S Thompson
Dr T Helgason                 Mr H Toynton
Professor A Higson            Mr Y Wang (GSA)
Professor C Hunter            Dr M White
Dr R Jacobs

In attendance: The Registrar and Secretary
The Academic Registrar
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
SU Academic Officer, Mr D Whitmore
Director of Careers, Ms E Smith (for M13-14/7)
Acting Chair of Special Cases Committee, Dr J Goldberg (for M13-14/8)
HR Manager, Ms N Pirozek (for M13-14/11)

Apologies for absence were received from Professor B Chambers, Dr A Charlwood
Professor C Dytham, Professor M Goddard, Professor V Gould, Professor D Howard,
Professor C Mellors, Professor M Ormrod, Professor E Prettejohn, Professor L Stewart,
Professor R Taylor, Mr C ap Tomos, Mr S Town and Mr G Wall.

Senate: 22 October 2013
13-14/1  **Terms of Reference/Membership**

Senate **noted** its terms of reference as set out in the Charter/Statutes and the ‘Statement of Primary Responsibilities’ (S.13-14/1).

As it was the first meeting of the 2013/14 academic session, the Acting Vice-Chancellor welcomed new members.

13-14/2  **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2013 were **approved**.

13-14/3  **Appointments to Committees**

Further to M12-13/40, Senate **noted** the appointments to committees which had been approved by the Acting Vice-Chancellor since the last meeting and also the result of the ballot for membership of the Promotions and Teaching Committees (S.13-14/2). Noting that there remained two vacancies on Special Cases Committee, Senate **decided** to delegate authority to the Acting Vice-Chancellor to make appointments on its behalf.

13-14/4  **Statement by the Vice-Chancellor**

The Vice-Chancellor **reported** the following matters:

- Student recruitment for the current year had proved successful despite the complexity of the process and volatility of the market. Admissions through clearing and adjustment had increased, and considerable attention would be paid to the best approach to be adopted in 2014. The Acting Vice-Chancellor offered thanks for the hard work of all staff involved in admissions and in the management of the new intake.

- Noting the current work on the Research Excellence Framework, all departments were encouraged to support the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) and the Research Office in finalising the University’s submission.

- A successful collaboration between the Universities of York, Leeds and Sheffield had received a £19m award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to create the White Rose College of the Arts & Humanities, one of eleven new Doctoral Training Partnerships.

*Senate: 22 October 2013*
There had been high turnouts at recent open days and also at careers fairs for current students.

The University had re-entered the Top 100 in the *Times Higher Education* 2013/14 World University Rankings and had risen two places to eleventh in *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* Good University Guide 2014. It was agreed that league table positions were important but needed to be understood as the outcome of operational excellence in all University activities, not as an end in themselves.

The Acting Vice-Chancellor was looking forward to meeting academic departments during the coming term to present on the current financial and political context of the university sector in general and the implications for York in particular.

The Vice-Chancellor Designate, Professor Koen Lamberts, would be meeting informally with various staff before taking up his appointment in January 2014.

**National Student Survey 2013**

Senate considered a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) on the 2013 National Student Survey (NSS) results (S.13-14/3).

Professor Robinson highlighted the following points:

- improved performance for *overall satisfaction, academic support, learning resources* and *personal development*;
- decline in the ratings for *assessment and feedback* and *organisation and management*;
- responsive actions, supported by the HR Directorate and based on the open comments, that sought to assist departmental management teams in improving the performance of all teaching staff;
- request to departments attaining an outcome at or below the level of sector average to develop an explicit statement of their improvement plans;
- longer term plans to introduce systemic improvements through programme design, module evaluation etc.

During discussion the following points were noted:
(a) Departments were not invited to challenge the interpretation of the NSS data as this would introduce unnecessary delays in the process of analysing the outcome and developing appropriate responses.

(b) The planned actions in respect of comments on poor teaching in some areas were not solely based on NSS data but also responded to other forms of student feedback and quality indicators (e.g. module evaluations).

(c) Students noted the importance of their input into the process and it was agreed that once departments had drafted improvement plans these would be shared with student representatives for their suggestions and agreement on the proposed way forward.

(d) Departments would be centrally supported in the drafting and implementation of their action plans in order achieve an open and transparent approach to improvement across the board.

(e) Consideration was currently being given to possible internal cohort surveys in the event that the NSS in its present form was replaced by an alternative. Teaching Committee was monitoring such national developments.

Following the above discussion, Senate endorsed the proposed approach to performance management/improvement arising from the NSS, with further clarification to be provided to departments on the best means of involving student representatives in agreeing action plans.

13-14/6 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

Senate considered a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) on the 2013 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey run by the Higher Education Academy (S.13-14/3).

Professor Robinson pointed out that historical comparison with past outcomes had not been possible due to changes in the survey design, but it had been possible to benchmark against the 1994 and Russell Groups (with the University slightly out-performing both groups). It was noted that, as the response rate was relatively low, most of the messages arising from the survey were in the form of indicative guidance for individual departments. There had, however, been a consistent level of negative feedback about the broader research culture and community, which related to networking.
opportunities among researchers locally, nationally and internationally. This matter would be taken up the incoming Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research).

It was agreed that, although an explicit question about teaching quality (in which the University had scored highly) had been removed from the survey, there should continue to be a strong focus on this at postgraduate level.

13-14/7 Destination of Leavers from Higher Education

Senate considered a report on the Destination of Leaver from Higher Education 2012 (S.13-14/4).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Director of Careers (Liz Smith) drew particular attention to the following:

- data gathering six months after graduation;
- inclusion for the first time of international students, as a pilot exercise;
- use of the data by UNISTATS in the Key Information Set (KIS);
- use of data on full-time, first degree, home domiciled graduates by HESA for its ‘employment indicator’ (EI) and also in newspaper league tables;
- strong relative performance in achieving employment (not distinguished by level/quality) and entering further study;
- slightly weaker relative performance (19th in Russell Group) in terms of achieving ‘professional’ (previously ‘graduate’) roles.

In response to a comment on the success of the winter graduate internships programme, it was confirmed that the University would continue to invest in this programme which had succeeded in both raising the self-confidence of participants and assisting the institution in the planning and management of future initiatives.

13-14/8 Annual Report from Special Cases Committee

Senate considered the annual report from the Special Cases Committee (S.13-14/5).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Acting Chair of the Committee (Dr Jeremy Goldberg) drew particular attention to the following:

- likely reasons for the significant increase in the number of academic appeals (including modular progression points, mitigating circumstances...
policy, cultural changes leading to appeal as the default reaction to
dissatisfaction with degree classifications etc);

- the workload and time commitment required to investigate all appeals,
  however speculative, in order to ensure equity of treatment;
- the University’s relatively successful track-record as regards the outcome
  of appeals/complaints that were escalated to the Office of the
  Independent Adjudicator;
- pressure on support staff in processing appeals to the required
timescales.

During discussion Senate noted the following:

(a) The SU President confirmed that the SU had also experienced workload
pressure in terms of the advocacy role it provided to the growing number
of student appellants. It was concerned about growth in the private
advocacy sector which introduced external individuals/organisations
unfamiliar with the University’s policies and processes.

(b) The Acting Vice-Chancellor encouraged departments when advising
students to consider with increased rigour whether grounds for appeal
existed, in order to free up time for consideration of genuine cases. It was
agreed that in some cases it was evident from the outset that the criteria
for submitting an appeal were not met, which raised false expectation for
the student if the appeal in question was nevertheless submitted.

(c) Departments were encouraged to ensure that they handled requests from
the Special Cases Committee for further information as swiftly as possible
in order the ease the time pressure on the Academic Registry and YUSU.

(d) A query was raised regarding the relevance and appropriateness of Table
7 in the report, which provided a breakdown of appeals by student
ethnicity. It was noted that this had been provided in response to Senate’s
previous request for a breakdown of the data by the standard equality
and diversity categories, which included ethnicity.

(e) As regards sector comparisons, the Academic Registrar reported that
there was a general trend across the sector towards an increasing number
of appeals, with the effect of modularisation as an additional local factor.

(f) As a general point, it was agreed that efforts should be made at the
earliest possible opportunity through the Mitigating Circumstances
Policy to resolve situations before they escalated into appeals.
(g) Where the Committee agreed that prima facie grounds for appeal existed, especially as a result of new information being submitted, the case was often referred back to the relevant Board of Studies for further consideration. It was suggested that as the majority of such referrals were then resolved in the student’s favour (rather than being escalated to a full hearing of the Committee), there might be potential to introduce greater efficiency into this stage of the process. It was noted that the decision as to whether prima facie grounds for appeal existed was a key decision-making point, and as such it was conducted with rigour and due diligence in the weekly case review meetings.

(h) The Academic Registrar agreed to explore the suggestion that the Working Group on stress and mental health conditions among students (referenced under the Committee’s annual priorities) might usefully include the SU Welfare Officer in its membership.

13-14/9

Regulation 7: Student Discipline

Senate considered a report from the Academic Registrar proposing changes to University Regulation 7 in respect of student discipline (S.13-14/6).

The Academic Registrar reminded Senate that it had approved a range of amendments to the regulation in question in 2012 (M11-12/38 refers), but no amendments had been made at that time to the role played by the Vice-Chancellor. It was now felt that, in order to respond to specific incidents in a timely manner, it had become necessary to extend the range of officers authorised to take actions such as suspending students or hearing appeals, hence the amendments being proposed.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) The amendment of ‘Provost’ to ‘Head of College’ reflected the current pilot of new management arrangements in Colleges and also sought to introduce a generic title(descriptor) that would remain appropriate regardless of future developments in college arrangements and nomenclature.

(b) It was suggested that clause 7.2.2(c)(iii) should clarify that the appeals panel of three SMG members should not include any officers previously involved with the case in question.
(c) A query was raised as to why earlier references to ‘the Deputy or a Pro-Vice-Chancellor’ were not repeated in clause 7.2.4(a), which only made reference to a Pro-Vice-Chancellor.

(d) It was suggested that the regulation should be consistent in its use of definite and indefinite articles when referring to the Pro-Vice-Chancellors.

Subject to the above comments and any further suggested textual amendments which members wished to convey to the Academic Registrar, Senate approved the amendments to Regulation 7 for implementation from the next (2014/15) academic year.

13-14/10  **Statute 18: Boards of Studies**

Senate considered a report from the Academic Registrar proposing changes to Statute 18 relating to Boards of Studies (S.13-14/7).

The Academic Registrar reminded Senate that as part of its effectiveness review in 2011 efforts had been made to clarify the respective role of Chairs of Board of Studies and Heads of Departments (M10-11/54 refers). However, this clarification had not been reflected in the University’s formal regulatory framework as expressed through its Charter/Statutes and Ordinances/Regulations, which hitherto had made only passing reference to departments and the role of their Heads. The following changes were therefore being proposed:

- re-drafting of Statute 18 to refer primarily to academic departments rather than Boards of Studies;
- nuanced re-wording of the function of Boards of Studies (from “control” to “oversee” as regards the teaching, curricula and examination of subjects);
- deletion from Statute 18 of the “powers and functions” of Boards of Studies, these instead to be provided through new terms of reference (to be drafted by Teaching Committee for Senate approval);
- deletion of the list of Boards of Studies from Ordinance 1.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) As the body responsible for academic governance, it was appropriate that these amendments had been submitted directly to Senate.
(b) A number of Heads of Department welcomed the clarification of their role through its inclusion in the statutes.

(c) It was suggested that the proposed role of Boards of Studies to “oversee” academic programmes might be somewhat passive given the breadth of their role. The verb “govern” was suggested as a possible alternative for consideration.

(d) Although the paper suggested that it was seeking to define further the parameters of the role of the Chair of the Board of Studies in relation to the Head of Department, it did not actually contain any proposals for this. The Academic Registrar confirmed that this would be brought forward for Senate approval as part of the new terms of reference for Board of Studies to be developed by Teaching Committee.

Subject to the above comments, Senate approved the proposed amendments to Statute 18 and associated amendments to Ordinance 1, noting that these would be submitted to the University Council and then, in the case of the Statute, to the Privy Council for approval.

13-14/11 Statute 20: Congregations

Senate considered a report from the Academic Registrar proposing changes to Statute 20 relating to Congregations and the senior officers who were authorised to preside over them for the purpose of conferring degrees (S.13-14/7). It approved the proposed inclusion of the Pro-Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellor and consequential amendment to Statute 20.2, noting that it would be submitted to the University Council and then the Privy Council for approval.

13-14/12 Academic Study Time Policy

Senate considered a new Academic Study Time (AST) Policy to replace the previous Leave of Absence Procedure for Academic Staff (S.13-14/6).

Presenting the new policy the Registrar & Secretary observed that the policy it sought to replace had not been updated since 1995. The new policy had been subject to some degree of consultation but was still in draft form: comments were therefore invited from Senate before the draft underwent a further iteration before being brought back for final approval later in the year.

Senate: 22 October 2013
During discussion the following comments were noted:

(a) The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) reported that the Research Committee had already submitted a number of drafting comments to the HR Directorate, but was supportive of the general thrust of the new policy. It was noted that the policy had arisen from work to enhance research performance while also taking account of equality and diversity considerations.

(b) The inclusion of AST for the enhancement of teaching quality was welcomed.

(c) The policy needed to clarify in its definition of academic staff that those staff members on research- or teaching-only contracts fell within its scope.

(d) It was suggested that in §2.5 the phrase “in most circumstances” be removed and that “will be entitled to” be substituted for “may also expect”.

(e) The suggested period of “around 12 weeks” for AST was queried, especially in the context of the University’s relatively short ten-week terms. It was felt that greater flexibility might be required in order to generate suitable outputs from AST. The comment was also made that such a stricture might render the University uncompetitive in terms of recruitment, especially against HEIs with fifteen-week semesters. As a general view, it was felt that the policy should adopt a permissive rather than prescriptive stance on time limits.

(f) A strong view was reported from HoDs in the arts and humanities that the proposed interval of three years between periods of AST was too long, especially in the context of research performance. It was likewise felt that the stricture against accrual of longer periods of AST might also be inappropriate in certain contexts (§5.1 refers).

(g) Support was offered for the statement in the policy that AST was not an automatic entitlement (§4.4 refers).

(h) Regardless of the provisions of the final policy, departments needed carefully to manage the impact of AST on students, especially as regards continuity of supervisory arrangements and staff with particular skills and/or training (e.g. as disability officers).
(i) Members welcomed the fact that the policy only sought to provide an enabling framework with core principles which departments could then adapt for their own schemes (§3 refers).

(j) The distinction between University-funded and externally-funded staff (§2.2 refers) was inappropriate as all staff should be deemed to be employed on an equal basis.

(k) There was no evidence in the report that the policy had been benchmarked against sector best practice.

Following the above discussion, Senate members were invited to send any further comments to Nina Pirozek in the HR Directorate (nina.pirozek@york.ac.uk). It was noted that the final version of the policy would be brought back to Senate for formal approval later in the year.

13-14/13 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.13-14/9):

➢ Teaching Committee: 30 September 2013
➢ Planning Committee: 2 October 2013

13-14/14 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of Senate was scheduled for Tuesday 28 January 2014 at 3.15pm.