UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2019

Present: The Acting Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor D Smith
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students), Professor J Robinson
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International), Professor M Smith
Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students), Professor T Lightfoot
Acting Dean (Arts and Humanities), Professor A Field
Dean (Social Sciences), Professor S Bell
Dean (Graduate Research School), Professor T Stoneham
The Director of Information Services, Mrs H Fraser-Krauss

Dr R Aitken
Professor T Andrews
Professor K Atkin
Professor N Audsley
Professor Y Birks
Professor L Black
Professor D Bruce
Professor M Burton
Professor N Carter
Ms C Chamberlain (GSA)
Mr J Durcan (SU President)
Professor M Freeman
Professor K Gibson
Dr J de Groot
Dr J Hardman
Mr J Hare (SU Academic Officer)
Professor M Hodson
Professor J Hudson
Professor C Hunter
Professor P Johnson

Dr S King
Dr O Lisagor
Professor N Mackay
Professor N Milner
Dr M Perry
Professor D Petrie
Professor J Potts,
Dr M Roodhouse
Professor A Sheil
Professor L Stewarh
Professor J Swaffield
Dr M Townend
Dr D Trenkic
Professor A Tyrrell
Professor S Velani
Professor P Wakeling
Professor G Wall
Dr J Wardman
Dr H Weatherly
Professor M White

In attendance: Registrar & Secretary, Ms J Horsburgh (Secretary)
Academic Registrar Dr W Campbell
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans (Assistant Secretary)
Planning & Governance Administrator, Ms B Carter Ellis

Apologies for absence were received from Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Partnerships & Knowledge Exchange) Professor J Timmis, Dean (Sciences) Professor B Fulton, Ms Z Disley (student faculty rep),

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The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2019 (S.18-19/18) were approved.

Policy for Handling Lost Credit

Further to M18-19/3 (Policy for Handling Lost Credit), Senate considered a further report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Students) [S.18-19/19].

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor reminded members that the matter in question had been previously discussed in considerable detail in May and July 2018, but without achieving consensus on the various options presented. As regards attempts to seek further guidance from the Office for Students (OfS), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and peer universities, this had been undertaken since the last meeting but had not provided any additional policy options or amendments. Following further discussion with the Faculty Deans, it had therefore been decided to recommend to Senate that all the information gathered thus far be retained for future reference, but that no changes be made to the current policy at the present time.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) The policy option adopted by the University of Liverpool (the Liverpool Model) replaced departmental exam boards with senior management decision-making through a ‘University Board of Examiners’, although externals remained involved. Adoption or modification of this approach was noted as an option that might also be considered at York.

(b) The legal advice received by the University had focused primarily on the nature of the contract with students, especially as regards the timeliness of programme delivery (in the context of graduation). The legal advice had also highlighted the discrepancy between mitigating for lost credits in order to deliver the contractual obligation, while simultaneously offering the opportunity to return and accumulate those credits at a later date (thereby undermining the validity of the initial mitigation). It was however reported in this context that the most generous credit waiver being offered (30% of a degree at Warwick University) had still entitled students to return to accumulate the missing credits. Despite these uncertainties, the University’s legal advisors had emphasised that students had a reasonable expectation for a policy and process of some kind to be in place.

(c) It was suggested that if an emergency meeting of Senate was required to make decisions in short order on such matters, it would be potentially contentious to schedule such a meeting during a period of industrial action.
(d) The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (TLS) reminded Senate that the University did currently have a policy dating from 2015 which provided a range of contingency actions, including allowing students to graduate provisionally (i.e. without necessarily knowing their final grade).

(e) Several members commented that the wording of Option 3 (the Liverpool Model) implied the complete replacement of academic judgement with managerial decision-making, when in fact the ‘managers’ empowered to make the decisions were senior academics (mainly at Pro-Vice-Chancellor level) and as such there remained strong academic involvement in the process. It was also suggested that to prevent excessive ‘top down’ decision-making, it might be preferable to convene faculty-level exam boards chaired by the Faculty Deans.

(f) While acknowledging that credits being lost through industrial action or as a result of a pandemic were quite different scenarios, the outcome for students remained the same and therefore required a coherent policy that accommodated different types of staff absence.

Following discussion Senate decided to ask the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (TLS) to develop for consideration at the next meeting a policy based on Option 3 (the Liverpool Model), suitably modified to recognise structural differences at York and to include a degree of academic involvement at faculty level.

18-19/22 University Strategy
[FOI exempt/commercially confidential]

18-19/23 Acting Vice-Chancellor’s Report
[FOI exempt/commercially confidential]

18-19/24 Special Cases Committee Annual Report 2017-18

Senate considered the annual report from the Special Cases Committee on its work during 2017/18 (S.18-19/22).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Chair of the Committee (Dr Martin Cockett, Chemistry) drew particular attention to the following aspects:

- positive impact of process improvements and increased staffing levels in the special cases team;
- 30% increase in the number of cases being considered (mainly from 120% increase in programme extension requests);
- significant improvement in the proportion of appeals completed within 90 days;
- analysis of submission rates by department and equality metrics (gender/disability/fee status);
- analysis of the effects of the new two-stage appeals process.

Senate noted the following points in discussion:

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(a) The large increase in extension requests had arisen from a policy decision to route all such requests through the Committee (requests for less than six months having been previously authorised by departments).

(b) On the basis of one year’s comparative data it was not possible to explain the rise in the proportion of disabled students submitting appeals (from 1.2% to 2.2%), but possible factors might include an increase in confidence or an effect of government changes to Disabled Students’ Allowances.

(c) It was confirmed that International Pathway College students were included in the data presented by the Committee, and that this would be subject to separate analysis during the current year.

18-19/25 Term Dates in 2026/27 and 2027/28

Senate considered a report in respect of term dates in 2026/27 and 2027/28 (S.18-19/23).

Presenting the paper, the Academic Registrar reported that the Operations Group had decided to invite comments from the academic community via Senate before it signed off the term dates for the two years in question. It was noted that term dates had to be set at least six years in advance in order to issue the required confirmation to students on five-year programmes (primarily in HYMS), especially those in receipt of Tier 4 visas. The other guiding factors in relation to the setting of term dates were also noted, especially as these pertained to the Easter public holidays, which fell at a different time every year, and completion of the ‘final academic element’ of a programme as defined by the Home Office (to prevent student visas and their associated periods of leave to remain being curtailed).

The following points were noted in discussion:

(a) For the reason outlined above in respect of the required lead time for longer programmes, it was not possible to amend previously approved term dates (i.e. up to 2025/26).

(b) In terms of accommodation provision, there were some years in which inevitably there was a tight turnaround for Campus Services to clean and prepare student rooms on campus.

(c) Regret was expressed that it had not been possible previously to accommodate the very late Easter weekend during the current academic year (19-22 April 2019) in such a way that it did not fall during Summer Term, noting that the dates had been approved a considerable number of years ago.
(d) It was suggested that henceforth consideration of family-friendly policies and work/life balance issues should be included in the guiding ‘rules’ identified in the paper for setting term dates.

(e) It was acknowledged that some programmes (e.g. online, IPC, CPD) operated with different term dates and entry points.

Following discussion Senate decided to recommend to the Operations Group that the term dates be approved, noting and welcoming the provision of a five-week Easter vacation in 2027/28 to accommodate the late public holiday in that year (as also in 2024/25).

18-19/26 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.18-19/24):

- Teaching Committee: 8 November and 6 December 2018
- Research Committee: 4 October and 13 November 2018
- Planning Committee: 20 September and 21 November 2018
- International Committee: 4 October 2018
- Student Life Committee: 1 November 2018
- HYMS Joint Senate Committee: 24 October 2018
- Arts and Humanities Faculty Board: 22 November 2018
- Sciences Faculty Board: 28 November 2018
- Social Sciences Faculty Board: 23 May 2018

18-19/27 Periodic Review Report

Senate received for information a periodic review report in respect of the Department of History of Art (S.18-19/25).

18-19/28 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 7 May 2019 at 2.15pm.