UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2018

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor D Smith
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students), Professor J Robinson
Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students), Professor T Lightfoot
Dean (Social Sciences), Professor S Bell
Dean (Graduate Research School), Professor T Stoneham
The Director of the International Pathways College, Dr M Perry
The Director of Information Services, Mrs H Fraser-Krauss

Dr R Aitken Dr S King
Professor K Atkin Dr O Lisagor
Dr K Attwood Professor N Mackay
Professor N Audsley Professor M Nazarov
Professor Y Birks Mr J Porch (SU Academic Officer)
Professor L Black Dr M Roodhouse
Professor D Brown Professor J Schofield
Dr E Brown Professor H Smith
Professor D Bruce Professor M Smith
Professor M Burton Professor L Stewart
Dr T Cantrell Mr C Stickels (student faculty rep)
Ms C Chamberlain (GSA President) Professor J Swaffield
Professor M Freeman Professor A Thomas
Dr J Hardman Mr A Urquhart (SU President)
Professor M Hodson Professor P Wakeling
Professor C Hunter Ms H Weatherly
Professor P Johnson Professor M White
Dr S O'Keefe Mr M Worrall (student faculty rep)

Registrar & Secretary, Ms J Horsburgh (Secretary)
Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Officer, Ms H Brian
Planning & Governance Administrator, Ms B Carter Ellis

In attendance: University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans (Assistant Secretary)
Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions, Mr S Willis (for M17-18/25)
Head of Admissions, Ms R Pendlebury (for M17-18/25)
Chair of Special Cases Committee, Professor M Bentley (for M17-18/26)
Director of Global Engagement, Ms H Layton (for M17-18/27)
Athena SWAN coordinator, Ms A Reader (for M17-18/28)

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Apologies for absence were received from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Professor S Tendler), the Pro-Vice Chancellor/Partnerships & Knowledge Exchange (Professor J Timmis), the Dean/Arts & Humanities (Professor J Buchanan), the Dean/Sciences (Professor B Fulton), the Academic Registrar (Mrs K Dodd), Professor A Field, Professor J Hudson, Professor M Goddard, Professor D Petrie, Professor G Richardson and Dr J Wardman.

17-18/21 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2017 (S.17-18/20) were approved.

17-18/22 Vice-Chancellor’s Report

Senate received a report from the Vice-Chancellor (S.17-18/21) covering the following topics:

- new government education ministers
- composition of the Board of the Office for Students (OfS)
- Teaching Excellence Framework submission (M17-18/23 below refers)
- funding for student mental health support (M17-18/24 below refers)
- USS pension scheme (M17-18/29 below refers)
- Brexit and EU/international staff recruitment

During discussion the following additional matters were noted:

(a) The new Piazza Building had opened on time and budget and was already proving to be a popular and lively addition to the facilities on Campus East.

(b) It was clarified that the percentage figures in the report’s appendix relating to EU/international staff recruitment represented the proportions of staff within that particular staff group (e.g. the 22% of ART new starters from the EEA in 2017 represented 22% of the total number of such staff at the University). It was noted that the figures confirmed a net influx of staff from the EEA and the rest of the world.

17-18/23 Teaching Excellence Framework

Senate received the final version of the University’s Teaching Excellence Framework submission (S.17-18/22).

Presenting the submission, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students) thanked Senate members for their input to the drafting process, noting that the document presented a strong and compelling case backed by solid evidence. It was noted that, with 2.5 positive flags required to achieve an initial hypothesis of a ‘Gold’ rating, the University’s submission (2.0 positive flags, if the assessors treated a star rating for continuation as a positive flag) was very close to this hypothesis. The outcome of the exercise would be announced in June 2018.
Senate received the new Student Mental Health Strategy (S.17-18/24) and an associated report on the research strategy for mental health (S.17-18/25).

The Vice-Chancellor observed that, following a challenging period a few years previously in terms of student mental health matters, considerable effort had been invested in developing new initiatives and support arrangements, which were reflected in the comprehensive new strategy. It was noted that input from students themselves as well as from relevant external agencies (particularly the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys [TEWV] NHS Foundation Hospital) had been crucial to the strategy development process.

Presenting the associated research strategy report, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) commented that the Graham Review of Mental Ill Health at the University of York (2016) had confirmed the full extent of research being undertaken in this area across a range of disciplines at the University. It was noted that as a consequence a steering group had been established to consolidate this research and identify funding opportunities. Related activities had included a successful event co-produced with students on World Mental Health Day and further development of collaboration with TEWV, including staff secondments, joint grant applications and partnership working in respect of a proposed joint research facility at the new mental health hospital in York (due to open in January 2020).

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) As regards previously identified issues around data sharing between departments and the Open Door Team (ODT) in order to deliver more targeted support, the Registrar & Secretary confirmed recent efforts to bring together all mental health and wellbeing practitioners to overcome such obstacles through enhanced partnership working. Joint appointments between ODT and Unity Health would also play a role here.

(b) In response to a query on the implications for teaching and learning, in particular curriculum design and assessment, it was noted that guidance on such matters would be made available to academic departments and that operationalising the strategy would be incorporated in the Academic Registrar’s portfolio as part of the ongoing development of an inclusive curriculum.

(c) It was agreed that academic supervisors required support and guidance in order to make early interventions by signposting students to the appropriate support service. As part of this, a new staff training programme on mental health first aid was being well attended and positively received.

(d) As regards the future outlook for mental health support, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the new holistic and synergistic approach would continue and
that the University would continue to provide academic input to partnership working with relevant external organisations.

Following discussion the Vice-Chancellor thanked Professor Trevor Sheldon (Health Sciences) and the Student Mental Health Forum for their work to develop the comprehensive new strategy.

17-18/25 Student Admissions

[FOI exempt/commercially confidential]

17-18/26 Annual Report from Special Cases Committee

Senate considered the annual report from the Special Cases Committee (S.17-18/26).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Chair of the Committee (Professor Michael Bentley) highlighted the following points:

 re-formatting of the report to condense key data, with improved graphical presentation;
 approximately 4 special cases per 100 students for UGT (6 per 100 for PGT students);
 increasing complexity of appeals cases, arising partly from provision of better advice by departments and the student organisations;
 effective functioning of the new two-stage appeals process;
 increase in the appeals backlog due the increasing complexity of cases and staffing issues in the case handling team;
 positive increase in the number of PGR students seeking leave of absence (with consequential decrease in extension requests);
 rising trend since 2015 of appeals being upheld (again reflecting the improved advice to appellants);
 further analysis required of the clustering of 50% of appeals in five academic departments.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Most appeals arose in the area of exceptional circumstances, and there was perceived to be a strong link to incidences of student mental health concerns. This would be further explored in the evaluation of the departmental variances, in order to identify whether there was any linkage to assessment practices (e.g. the number of assessment points during the year).

(b) It was acknowledged that the increase in complexity of appeal cases arising from appellants being encouraged to provide more detailed evidence had generated a backlog which, in some cases, could not be resolved before the Summer re-sits or, in extreme cases, the following academic year. It was hoped that recent additional staffing (1.5 FTE) in the special cases team would help to

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resolve this matter, as well as further process review to identify the locus of any blockages in the system (e.g. in the provision of external medical certification).

(c) In response to a query on the reasons for the increase in appeals being upheld, it was noted that this did not relate to identification of procedural irregularities but rather to additional new evidence coming forward.

(d) It was acknowledged that the personal circumstances and general profile of part-time and distance-learning students tended to differ from the majority of full-time undergraduates, and that the current special cases principles and procedures sought to take this into account. It was suggested that any issues arising with a specific programme should be raised directly with the Chair of the Committee.

Following discussion Senate thanked the Committee for its annual report.

17-18/27 Magna Charta Universitatum

Senate considered a recommendation that the University become a signatory to the Magna Charta Universitatum, a general statement of the fundamental values of universities based on the European humanist tradition (S.17-18/27).

Attending the meeting to present the proposal, the Director of Global Engagement (Hilary Layton) observed that signing the statement had been recommended by the European University Association, which the University had joined in March 2017. It was reported that the proposal had been approved by the University Executive Board and the University Council, but also required approval from the primary academic body of the institution. Senate noted that to date the charter statement had been signed by over 800 universities from 86 countries (including 12 Russell Group institutions). As regards the specific clauses in the statement relating to the inseparability of teaching and research as a fundamental principle, it was reported that the Director General of the Magna Charta Observatory had confirmed this principle to be related to the institutional mission of the whole university, not to individual members of staff. In response to a query on the ability of new market entrants to sign up to the declaration, it was suggested that this might depend on each applicant’s core mission and level of research activity.

Senate approved the recommendation, noting that the more detailed application would be developed and submitted to the Spring meeting of the Magna Charta Observatory.

17-18/28 Athena SWAN

Senate received a report on University activity relating to the Athena SWAN Charter, which promoted gender equality in UK higher education (S.17-18/28).
Attending the meeting to present the report, the Athena SWAN Coordinator (Anna Reader) highlighted the following points:

- current institutional Bronze award, with plans to apply for an institutional Silver award in November 2018 (requiring the majority of academic departments to hold an award);
- ten current departmental awards (including two gold and three silver), with two further applications pending and another four due to be submitted in April 2018;
- expansion of the Charter to include all non-STEM subjects and professional support staff;
- establishment of the Athena SWAN Steering Group and a termly Athena SWAN forum;
- ongoing implementation of the action plan linked to the current Bronze award, including the organisation of high-profile events and speakers.

In response to a query on the linkage to the University’s wider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, it was noted that the Athena SWAN objectives were embedded in the strategy, with the charter awards functioning as success measures.

17-18/29 USS Pension Scheme

Senate received a report from the Finance Director on the triennial valuation of the USS pension scheme (S.17-18/29).

Noting the more recent developments in national negotiations since the circulation of the paper, the Vice-Chancellor reported as follows:

- The Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) had met on 23 January 2018 to discuss two proposals – one from the University and College Union (UCU) and one from the employers, represented by Universities UK (UUK). The JNC had decided six to five in favour of the UUK proposal, with the independent chair exercising his casting vote.

- The approved UUK proposal included:
  - no change to member and employer contributions;
  - future benefits to be delivered by the USS Investment Builder, effectively creating a defined contribution (DC) only scheme, with the option to consider a future return to defined benefits (DB) or a hybrid model, if the financial outlook improved;
  - death and incapacity benefits to continue to be provided on a defined basis (ie scheme members would be assured a specific level of benefit).

- The USS trustee had accepted the JNC’s recommendation, and would now formally consult scheme members on the proposed changes to the scheme and...
their impact on members (this statutory consultation to take at least 60 days from the middle of March 2018).

- The approved changes to the scheme would apply only to benefits that were yet to be accrued (benefits already accrued being protected by law).

- As the UCU did not support the UUK proposal approved by the JNC, it would continue with its previous decision to take industrial action through an escalating programme of strike action starting on 22 February 2018. As such action was likely to have significant implications for all staff and students, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Students) would oversee contingency planning to seek to minimise disruption for students.

During discussion of the Vice-Chancellor’s update report, the following comments were noted:

(a) Unusually, USS had itself also been invited to submit a proposal to reduce the scheme’s deficit, but its proposal had not been supported by either side in the JNC.

(b) With the involvement of The Pensions Regulator (TPR) adding further complexity to the current situation, and given the formal conclusion of negotiations, it remained uncertain as to whether there remained any space for further discussions or an alternative resolution.

(c) While the accepted UUK proposal would require further work (e.g. in respect of how risk sharing might be modified), the next formal stage was the 60-day consultation with all USS members.

(d) University management acknowledged the complexity of the situation, especially from the student perspective, but would continue to provide clear and balanced information to all staff and students.

(e) Although UEB had not as yet formed a collective opinion on the latest position, the Vice-Chancellor was encouraged to share his personal view with Senate, which he did as follows:

- As negotiations were conducted among representative bodies at a national level, the views of the University management could not individually influence developments (e.g. in respect of the maximum acceptable level of employer contribution).
- Increasing the level of employer contribution would have the effect of weakening the employer covenant (i.e. the capacity to support the scheme), leading to a deterioration in the assumptions underpinning the deficit with the result that deficit payments would need to increase; such an increased risk would not be acceptable to TPR.
• An element of greater structural reform was desirable and might include exploration and development of further options such as alternative models of risk sharing as per European models of collective Defined Contribution schemes; identification of the sort of economic conditions (especially in respect of gilt yields) under which a Defined Benefit element might be re-introduced; and consideration of methods for minimising deficit recovery contributions (e.g. by extension over a longer period).

• Ensuring the future financial sustainability of USS was essential to addressing key concerns about inter-generational fairness.

(f) Given the scale of the scheme and the associated legal protections, simply closing down the current scheme was not an option (although it was possible for individuals to transfer out). Merger with the Teachers’ Pension Scheme would require government support as this scheme was state-backed. It was suggested that growing differences in pension arrangements between pre- and post-92 institutions might distort competition (e.g. in staff recruitment) and as such could become a matter for the Office for Students or the Competition and Markets Authority.

(g) In terms of minimising disruption from the UCU industrial action on teaching and learning, this would be handled through agreed policies and protocols, especially as these pertained to assessment. The Faculty Deans were currently discussing the matter with Heads of Departments to identify the likely risks in this area and how they might be mitigated. It was noted in this context that the planned action coincided with the launch of the annual National Student Survey (NSS), outputs from which were included in the University’s TEF submission.

(h) The Vice-Chancellor endorsed comments on the need to maintain staff goodwill, especially by means of an open and honest tone in all communications and respect for individuals’ legal right to take industrial action.

17-18/30 Combined Boards of Studies

Arising from sub-committee reports (M17-18/31 below refers), Senate considered a request from the Arts and Humanities Faculty Learning and Teaching Group (FLTG) to discuss the recommendation from the University Teaching Committee (UTC) that Combined Boards of Studies be discontinued from the start of the 2018/19 academic year.

As Chair of UTC, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Students) reminded members that the proposal arose from Senate’s approval in July 2017 of a number of recommendations intended to strengthen programme leadership in the context of the institutional pedagogy, especially in response to student concerns about the academic management of combined programmes. It was noted that extensive consultation had been undertaken with faculties during March-April 2017, leading to the recommendations submitted to Senate in July 2017, which had

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all been approved with the exception of the discontinuation of Combined Boards (M16-17/59 refers). As a consequence, further consultation had subsequently been undertaken with student representatives, following which UTC had decided to re-submit its original recommendation that Combined Boards be discontinued.

The following points were noted in discussion:

(a) Combined Boards had been consulted through presentation of the proposals to all FLTGs, although it was acknowledged that this had confirmed a variation in viewpoint (unanimous support in Social Sciences, two dissenting departments in Sciences and a mixed view in Arts and Humanities). Some members of Senate perceived that members of the FLTGs might not have provided effective feedback on these discussions to their home departments.

(b) On behalf of the Arts and Humanities FLTG, the Head of the English Department confirmed that its concerns related to:

- the risk of issues relating to combined programmes being marginalised in meetings of single Boards of Studies;
- difficulties for student representatives in presenting the views of combined programme students to non-lead departments;
- lack of clarity on the cross-departmental authority of Programme Leaders;
- the risk of diminished engagement in non-lead departments;
- the risk of diluting the properly ‘combined’ nature of such programmes by consolidating the concept of a lead department.

The Head of the Department of Mathematics confirmed that his department shared these concerns about the proposal, which it was suggested might achieve the opposite of the desired outcome as regards more unified and coherent management of combined programmes.

(c) The student faculty representative for Sciences, who had initially raised the concern in July 2017, commented that he did not believe the re-submitted proposal would adequately address student concerns about communication channels between departments delivering combined programmes.

(d) A coherent policy on the primacy of Programme Leaders had emerged in the development of the institutional pedagogy, and training had been delivered in departments in accordance with this agreed viewpoint. It was generally agreed that it was beneficial to have a single individual with responsibility and accountability for ensuring the student experience for each programme.

Following discussion, Senate members were asked to vote by show of hands on the UTC proposal that Combined Boards be discontinued, with the following result:

For: 18
The UTC proposal was therefore approved.

17-18/31 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.17-18/30):

- Teaching Committee: 9 November and 7 December 2017
- Research Committee: 15 November 2017
- Planning Committee: 11 October and 22 November 2017
- International Committee: 5 October 2017
- Student Life Committee: 2 November 2017
- Arts and Humanities Faculty Board: 23 November 2017
- Sciences Faculty Board: 29 November 2017
- Social Sciences Faculty Board: 30 November 2017

17-18/32 Amendment to Regulation 2 (Research Degree Awards)

Senate approved a minor amendment to Regulation 2.3(f) in respect of paid employment/voluntary work by research students (S.17-18/31).

17-18/33 Re-validation Review

Senate approved the report and recommendations arising from a re-validation review of Masters programmes delivered by the Weald and Downland Living Museum (S.17-18/32).

17-18/34 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 8 May 2018 at 2.15pm.