Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2017

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
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
Interim Dean (Arts & Humanities), Professor J Buchanan

Mr S Alzahrani (GSA student rep) Ms R Ibrahim (GSA President)
Dr R Aitken Ms M Lewis (student rep)
Professor E Annandale Dr O Lisagor
Professor K Atkin Professor J McDermid
Professor D Attwell Professor N Mackay
Dr K Attwood Professor K Mumford
Ms M Beach (SU President) Professor M Nazarov
Professor L Black Dr S O’Keefe
Professor D Brown Dr F Polack
Dr E Brown Dr G Richardson
Professor D Bruce Mr T Shutt (student rep)
Professor I D’Amico Professor M Smith
Professor N Ellison Professor L Stewart
Professor A Field Professor Q Summerfield
Professor M Freeman Professor J Swafffield
Professor I Graham Professor A Thomas
Dr J Hardman Professor S Thompson
Professor A Higson Dr R Vann
Mr M Hodges (student rep) Professor S Velani
Professor M Hodson Mr G Wall
Professor C Hunter Dr R Waites
Dr G Hurst Professor M White

In attendance: Registrar & Secretary, Dr D Duncan
Academic Registrar, Mrs K Dodd
Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
Dean of Graduate Research School, Professor T Stoneham
SU Academic Officer, Ms T Laycock
VC Executive Officer, Ms H Brian

Apologies for absence were received from Professor S Bell, Mrs H Fraser-Krauss, Professor B Fulton, Professor M Goddard, Professor U Macleod, Professor J Schofield and Professor J Timmis.
16-17/16  Membership

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed Professor Tracy Lightfoot (Health Sciences) who was attending her first meeting as the newly appointed Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students).

16-17/17  Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2016 were approved.

16-17/18  Senate Effectiveness Review

Further to M16-17/8 (Senate Effectiveness Review), it was noted that initial meetings of the review group had been scheduled during Spring Term, with the intention of bringing a final report to Senate in Summer Term.

16-17/19  Statement by the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported the following matters:

- The House of Commons had begun its debate of the government’s Brexit Bill. Further updates on the implications for the University would be circulated to all staff in due course.

- The government’s approach to the issue of student visas seemed unlikely to change, with a formal Home Office consultation on immigration yet to be launched. Current indications were that differentiation of ‘trusted status’ between universities based on Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) outcomes was no longer being considered, although differentiation of some sort (possibly by visa refusal rate) remained likely. It was however believed that, in response to lobbying by sector groups, the government was not planning to cap international student numbers.

- The Higher Education and Research Bill (HERB) had received detailed scrutiny during its Committee Stage in the House of Lords, with a large number of amendments (600+) proposed. The Bill would now proceed to the Report Stage where it was hoped ongoing concerns about institutional autonomy and degree-awarding powers might be resolved.

- The National Union of Students (NUS) was campaigning for a boycott of the National Student Survey (NSS) due to its concern about TEF, which would employ certain NSS metrics, being the mechanism for increasing tuition fees. YUSU were holding a local referendum on the matter, the result of which would be known on 6 February 2017. The University remained supportive of the NSS as a means of better understanding and responding to the student academic
experience and as such would launch the annual survey irrespective of the YUSU referendum result.

The government had recently published a Green Paper on industrial strategy, which included proposals on research, innovation, business growth and skills. The consultation paper had a number of implications for higher education, especially in respect of the additional £4.7bn research and development funding that had been announced by 2020-21 (increasing UK investment to the OECD average). It was noted that this funding would be concentrated in STEM disciplines and that the University would be collaborating with the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to shape this emerging agenda. Other aspects of the Green Paper of significance to the University related to skills/technical education and the creation of institutions to bring together “sectors and places” (of particular relevance to the N8 Group and its work to develop the regional bio-economy). The University Executive Board (UEB) would submit a response to the consultation by the deadline of 17 April 2017.

Following the government’s announcement of £556m funding through the Northern Powerhouse for “local growth deals”, including allocation of £91m to the two LEPs with which the University was involved, the Vice-Chancellor would shortly be meeting the relevant minister (Andrew Percy MP) to discuss how the University might contribute to this agenda.

As regards developments and activities within the University’s key partnership groups, it was noted that:

- the Russell Group was continuing its lobbying work in respect of immigration policy, HERB and TEF;
- the N8 had received a positive mention in the government’s Autumn Statement and was now working to engage in the areas of innovation/enterprise and ‘Urban Transformation Centres’;
- the White Rose was preparing a bid to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for a doctoral training programme (DTP) to succeed the White Rose College for the Arts and Humanities and also developing its Brussels Office through hosting a number of research events and workshops (e.g. in respect of Brexit, Mediterranean migration, food security and agrifood resilience).

Following an invitation to departments to suggest possible candidates, the University would be seeking to recruit a number of world-leading academics, mainly at Chair level, to make a significant contribution to the University’s Research Strategy and Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 submission.

A new employability initiative called York Futures would be launched to provide a series of activities culminating in a one-day development event for all first-year students. The initiative would employ a leadership framework to help
students assess their own readiness for the labour market and would be piloted in 2017 before being made available to all first years in 2018.

- The University’s first two Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) had been launched (Exploring Everyday Chemistry and Becoming a Digital Citizen), with another two to follow shortly (Improving Children’s Lives and Crime and Punishment).

- The University had launched the first round of Laidlaw scholarships in partnership with the Laidlaw Trust. The twenty-five scholarships for undergraduates (total value: £750k) would involve a supervised research project and a leadership development programme.

- Anne Phillips (Health Sciences) had been awarded a National Teaching Fellowship by the Higher Education Academy and Professor Ottoline Leyser (formerly Biology) had been appointed DBE in the 2017 New Year’s honours list for services to plant science.

- Recruitment was proceeding for a Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Partnerships and Knowledge Exchange and for Dr David Duncan’s successor as Registrar & Secretary. As it was Dr Duncan’s last meeting of Senate, members joined the Vice-Chancellor in thanking him for his valuable contribution to the University since 2008.

16-17/20 Teaching Excellence Framework

Senate considered a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Students) on the TEF (S.16-17/13).

Presenting the report, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (TLS) drew particular attention to the following points:

- comments from Senate members had been incorporated in the University’s “provider submission”, which had been submitted to HEFCE and would be circulated for information in due course;
- the assessment methodology was set out in detail in the paper, including how the assessors would form an initial hypothesis from the core metrics based on a system of positive and negative flags;
- in the University’s bid for a “gold” rating emphasis had been placed on comprehensive excellence (supported by an extended set of benchmarked metrics) and on the design of programmes and student work through the institutional pedagogy;
- ratings would be published in May 2017 to apply to the student cohort entering in September 2018.

During discussion the following points were noted:
(a) As regards the link to fees, there would be no fee increase differentiation between the different ratings in TEF Year 2, but in Year 3 differentiation would be introduced (50% of inflation for Bronze, full rate for Silver/Gold).

(b) On the question of reputational risk associated with the ratings, it was expected that approximately 50% of institutions would receive a Silver rating and that some prestigious institutions might receive lower ratings.

(c) Work would be ongoing to ensure that the institutional pedagogy was aligned with TEF, including reference to employability skills and the totality of the university experience. The pedagogy’s emphasis on programme teams and programme learning outcomes also meant that the University would be well placed to respond in the event that TEF was extended to provide discipline-level ratings (as proposed for TEF Year 4). If escalated to discipline-level assessments, there would nevertheless remain one institutional tuition fee rate.

Following discussion of the report, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (TLS) offered his thanks to the drafting group which had prepared the provider submission, in particular the Head of the Academic Support Office (Nigel Dandy) and the Business Intelligence Development Manager (Alistair Knock).

**16-17/21 Student Partnership Agreement**

Senate considered the proposed student partnership agreement (S.16-17/14), noting that its development was an element of the Learning and Teaching Strategy approved in 2015.

Presenting the document, now entitled “Together York: The University of York Community Declaration”, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (TLS) thanked members who had commented during the consultation phase, which had led to substantial revision and a more concise agreement. Senate noted the intention to launch the statement at the start of the next academic year via a set of inter-linked webpages that would direct students to relevant support and policy pages.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) As regards enforcement of the expectation for students to attend all scheduled learning activities and complete assigned work on time, the statement would be linked to associated policies that clearly set out the range of possible responses and sanctions in accordance with accepted best practice.

(b) The following minor drafting points were suggested:

- “people of all backgrounds” to read “backgrounds and identities” (under “A Community of Purpose”);
- delete “clear” in third bullet of opening preamble;

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• “raise” to read “develop” in first bullet of expectations on the University (under “A Community of Scholarship”).

Subject to the above points, Senate approved the student partnership agreement.

16-17/22 Research Excellence Framework

Senate considered a report on the Research Excellence Framework 2021 (S.16-17/15).

Presenting the report, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) drew attention to the associated minutes from discussions held by Research Committee and the University Executive Board (UEB) as well as further consultation through the Research Forum, Faculty Research Groups and Departmental Research Committees. It was noted that areas of likely contention included returnable staff and the portability of research outputs. Senate noted that the outcome of the current sector-wide consultation would be published in July 2017 when the expert panels would be also be recruited. It was reported that UEB had approved the establishment of a REF Strategy Group and underpinning Operational Group, with additional administrative support to be considered as part of the medium-term planning process.

Senate noted the following points during discussion:

(a) General support was expressed for the decision to create REF Strategy and Operational Groups so that Research Committee could concentrate on other research-related matters.

(b) Following the completion of departmental research reviews, it was suggested that the current focus of departments should be on production of high quality outputs and impact studies. It was noted that institutional-level impact cases might also be required.

(c) While the newly formed REF groups would act in an advisory and supportive capacity when interacting with departments, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (R) reiterated that all final decisions relating to REF would be signed off at University-level.

(d) Further consideration would be given to the process and timing of a mock REF exercise, which would take place by January 2019 at the latest.

16-17/23 Online Learning

Senate considered a report on further development of online learning provision as an element of the University Strategy (S.16-17/16).
Presenting the report, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor noted that, following a competitive tender process, UEB had approved the appointment of Pearson UK as the agreed partner with which the University would seek to grow its online learning offering. The operational phase of the project would now focus on contract negotiation, resource identification, market analysis and programme development.

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

(a) The intention was for the new courses jointly developed with Pearson UK to integrate with current online learning programmes in order to present a unified University offering.

(b) A group of over 30 relevant individuals had been involved in scoring the tender bids during September 2016.

16-17/24 Special Cases Committee Annual Report

Senate considered the annual report on 2015/16 from the Special Cases Committee (S.16-17/16).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Deputy Chair of the Committee (Dr Jeremy Goldberg) commented that the new two-stage appeals process was bedding in well and that the number of appeals had stabilized after several years of consistent growth. Implementation of the new Extenuating Circumstances Policy and effective filtering of unviable cases by special cases officers had contributed to this welcome development. It was however noted that the complexity of cases had increased.

During discussion the following comments were noted:

(a) For some cases it had not been possible to achieve the 90 calendar days limit for resolution of both the formal and review stages, in part due to the high workload at peak times (i.e. over the summer vacation after the publication of year-end results) and in particular when student appellants employed the services of external legal advisors who raised extraneous matters.

(b) Following introduction in the current year of the ‘Policy on Communications in relation to Academic Appeals and Complaints’ in response to an increasing number of aggressive and persistent communications directed at staff handling appeals from third parties acting on behalf of students, it was suggested that the next annual report might usefully comment on the efficacy of this new policy.

(c) Advice from YUSU officers to students was welcomed as contributing to a smoother process and improved outcomes.
(d) It was noted from the appended statistics that appeals might still be rejected, even if they had passed the initial filtering process for meeting the submission criteria and having *prima facie* grounds to be considered.

Following discussion, Senate approved the Committee’s recommendation that it review the presentation of statistical data for future annual reports, especially as regards the use of percentages and reference to the entire student population. It was generally agreed that the monitoring data should be reduced in volume/scope and presented in a more graphical, user-friendly manner.

16-17/25   Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.16-17/18):

- Teaching Committee: 10 November and 8 December 2016
- Research Committee: 19 November 2016
- Planning Committee: 28 September, 31 October, 23 November and 7 December 2016
- International Committee: 13 October 2016
- Student Life Committee: 2 November 2016
- HYMS Joint Senate Committee: 26 October 2016
- Arts and Humanities Faculty Board: 24 November 2016
- Sciences Faculty Board: 30 November 2016
- Social Sciences Faculty Board: 1 December 2016

16-17/26   University Ordinances and Regulations

Senate approved proposed amendments to Regulations 2, 5 and 6 and to Ordinance 6.5 (S.16-17/19).

16-17/27   Periodic Review Report

Senate received for information a periodic review reports in respect of the Departments of Health Sciences (S.16-17/20).

16-17/28   Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 9 May 2017 at 3.15pm.