UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2011

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students), Dr J Grenville
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Estates), Ms E Heaps
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor J Local

Dr M Beaney
Professor C Brown
Dr J Buchanan
Professor S Donkin
Mr T Ellis (SU)
Professor J Everard
Dr C Fewster
Dr A Frisch
Professor B Fulton
Professor C Godfrey
Professor J Hill
Dr B Kewell

Professor M Maynard
Professor J McDermid
Dr R Ogden
Dr A Parsons
Professor J Richards
Professor J Robinson
Professor W Sheils
Professor D Smith
Professor L Stewart
Professor Q Summerfield
Professor S Toms
Professor J Wainwright

In attendance: The Registrar and Secretary
The Academic Registrar
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
SU Academic Affairs Officer, Mr G Osborn

Apologies for absence were received from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Business & Community), Professor D Attwell, Professor S Bell, Mr J Calhoun (GSA), Dr J Clarbour, Professor M Goddard, Professor A Higson, Dr R Jacobs, Professor M Luckhurst, Dr S Mazzi, Dr P Mitchell, Professor R Taylor and Mr S Town.

10-11/51 Membership

On behalf of Senate, the Vice-Chancellor thanked those members who were attending their last meeting.

10-11/52 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2011 were approved.
10-11/53 Higher Education Funding/Access Agreement

Further to M10-11/35 and 38, Senate received a report (S.10-11/42) confirming that:

(a) the University Council had approved the recommendation that the University set its home/EU undergraduate tuition fee level for 2012/13 at £9,000 per annum;

(b) OFFA had approved the University’s access agreement following clarification of the target for increasing the percentage of students from socio-economic groups 4-7 (now agreed as 20%, but with an aspiration to achieve a higher percentage).

In response to a query about the fee for students spending a year in industry or abroad, the Registrar asked members with comments on this matter to submit them to him so that the group responsible for deciding fee and bursary arrangements could consider the issue in greater detail and in the context of student recruitment to those departments offering such placements.

10-11/54 Review of Senate Effectiveness

Further to M10-11/36, Senate considered the final report from the effectiveness review group (S.10-11/30).

During discussion of the report and its recommendations, the following points were noted:

(a) For elected academic members of Senate, the electoral process was defined in University Regulation 9. In accordance with this regulation, the election of permanent academic staff [15 in total] was conducted on an opt-out basis (i.e. all eligible members of the electoral roll were candidates unless they withdrew themselves from the candidate list), while the election of fixed-term academic staff [3 in total] was conducted on a nominations basis (i.e. all eligible members of the electoral roll were invited to submit nominations for candidates and an election was only held if there were more nominations than vacancies). Both types of election were conducted via an online voting system designed by IT Services. It was noted that the rationale for the opt-out procedure was to ensure full involvement, guarantee that forthcoming vacancies were filled and guard against one individual department (or other group) from organising a concerted campaign of nomination and voting to pack the Senate with their preferred candidates, which might in turn affect the
subject-area balance of Senate membership in favour of the larger academic departments.

(b) The student representatives expressed some concern at the recommendation that the Student Services Committee cease to be a sub-committee of Senate (on the basis that its business was principally non-academic in nature). As Chair of the Committee, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) confirmed that, in the event of any business arising which had academic implications for students (e.g. in respect of disability provision), the matter in question would be referred either to Teaching Committee or Senate as necessary.

(c) With regard to the statement in the report on the respective roles of Heads of Department and Chairs of Boards of Studies (§29 refers), it was noted that the statement had not attempted to clarify whether the Board of Studies or Departmental Research Committee should be the body with ultimate responsibility for research students. It was suggested that departmental views might be sought on this matter.

(d) On the question of the election of Chairs of Boards of Studies (as set out in Ordinance 1, §29 refers), it was noted that departmental practices varied. It was agreed that the statement should be amended to reflect that the electoral process combined open democracy with ensuring the establishment of an effectively functioning Departmental Management Team.

Following the above discussion, and subject to consultation with departments in respect of responsibility for research students and further clarification of Chair of Board of Studies election arrangements, Senate approved the report’s recommendations.

10-11/55 Appointments to Committees

Further to M10-11/42, Senate approved the following appointments to committees (S.10-11/44):

**Council**
Dr Jane Grenville, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students)

**Promotions Committee**
Professor Paul Foulkes (Language & Linguistics)
Professor Andrew Higson (TFTV)

**HYMS Joint Senate Committee**
Dr Stephen Holland (Health Sciences/Philosophy) – re-appointment

**Student Services Committee**
Professor Carl Thompson (Health Sciences)

*Teaching Committee*
Dr Yvette Hancock (Physics)

[All appointments for a period of three years from 1 August 2011 until 31 July 2014 unless otherwise stated.]

Senate noted that as several nominations had been received for the one remaining vacancy on the Promotions Committee (for a Professor/Head of Department from Social Sciences), a ballot paper would be circulated to members with the minutes of the meeting. It also noted that vacancies remained on the following committees:

- **Court** (1 vacancy for a member of Senate, appointment co-terminous with membership of Senate)
- **Health, Safety and Welfare Committee** (3 academic members, one to be a HoD)
- **Nominations Committee** (1 academic member)
- **Special Cases Committee** (2 academic members)
- **Teaching Committee** (3 academic members, one Arts/Humanities and two Social Sciences)

Senate decided to delegate authority to the Vice-Chancellor to make appointments to the remaining vacancies and the Vice-Chancellor asked members to notify the University Governance Officer (philip.evans@york.ac.uk) of any nominations as soon as possible.

10-11/56 Statement by the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported the following matters:

*Events/developments*

The Law and Management building had been officially opened by Caroline Thomson, Chief Operating Officer of the BBC.

The Department of Theatre, Film and Television building had been opened by Denise O'Donoghue, Managing Director of ITV Studios.

The masterplan for the £750 million campus expansion at Heslington East had won a 2011 Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Award for architectural excellence. The Ron Cooke Hub had also won the York Design Award in the category for New Build/Non-residential/Public.

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The contribution of the University’s students to good causes in the city of York had been recognised at the Higher York Awards for Student Volunteering.

The first Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Outstanding Achievement had recognised and rewarded staff and students who had made a particularly significant contribution to the University.

The University had acquired the archive of playwright Sir Alan Ayckbourn, which would be housed in the Borthwick Institute and made available to the public as well as being used as a teaching and research resource by the Department of Theatre, Film and Television.

The University had played a key role in the inaugural York Festival of Ideas.

The University had secured a convincing victory at the 2011 Roses sports tournament, beating Lancaster University by over 70 points.

People

Dr Allen Warren (History), founder of York Students in Schools, had been awarded an MBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List for his services to higher education.

Professor John Goodby (Chemistry) had been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society and Professors Andy Marvin (Electronics) and Jim Woodcock (Computer Science) had been elected Fellows of the Royal Academy of Engineering.

Professor James Clark (Chemistry) had been awarded the Royal Society of Chemistry Environment Prize for his work in Green Chemistry.

Dr Zoe Norridge (English and Related Literature) had been named as one of 10 winners of the BBC Radio 3 and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) inaugural New Generation Thinkers Scheme.

Professor Kate Pickett (Health Sciences) had been elected a Fellow of the UK Faculty of Public Health.

Professor Eleanor Dodson (Chemistry) had received the triennial Ewald Prize from the International Union of Crystallography.

White Paper

The government’s Higher Education White Paper, Students at the Heart of the System, had been published on 28 June 2011 and a series of public and sector...
consultations led by BIS and HEFCE would now follow to inform a Higher Education Bill expected in 2012. The Senior Management Group had given the paper preliminary consideration and departments would be asked to revisit their student recruitment plans over the summer in the light of its proposals. It was decided that a summary paper prepared by the Planning Office for the Policy and Resources Committee and Council should be circulated to Senate members for information.

10-11/57 Analysis of Degree Classifications

Senate considered the annual report on degree classifications, noting that it also included data on PhD submission rates (S.10-11/45).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment (Dr David Efird) and the Deputy Director of Planning (John Busby) highlighted the main points, including:

- 1.1% rise (to 74.6%) in average percentage of good (i.e. first and upper second) degrees awarded;
- variability across departments and between years of award (cohorts);
- average entry tariffs by department;
- proposal in respect of deeper analysis of the data;
- departmental and subject-area variations in full-time PhD completions.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Given the different levels of achievement across A-level subjects, direct correlation between entry tariffs and degree outcomes needed to be viewed with some caution. The proposed deeper analysis would attempt to correct this by comparing specific A-level scores (rather than average entry tariffs) with university subjects.

(b) The data on PhD submissions was potentially confusing and could be presented in a more user-friendly manner.

(c) In addition to disability, age and ethnicity, the deeper analysis should also consider gender as part of its review of input measures and characteristics of the student body.

(d) The purpose of Senate considering this data was to gain oversight and assurance that the University was acting equitably towards students in its degree awards. While performance issues (of both staff and students) were a factor, the statistical analysis aimed to reveal any areas of undue bias.
(e) Discipline-related effects had been considered in the previous year’s report via subject-level data focused on comparator institutions. The proposed deeper analysis would include benchmarking at the institutional level.

Following the above discussion, Senate approved the proposal that a multilevel analysis should be undertaken in order to attempt to identify more precisely the sources of variation, using data from input measures, characteristics of the student body and degree classification outcomes. It was noted that analysis of 2010/11 degree classifications would include the outcomes partly of students from the programme structures and assessment rules of the New Undergraduate Modular Scheme (Music, Law, TFTV) and partly of students from existing structures and rules (other departments), which would need careful consideration to ensure valid comparison.

10-11/58 UK Degree Classification System

Senate considered a report from the Registrar on discussions at national level on the UK degree classification system, and specifically the potential benefits of moving to a Grade Point Average (GPA) system (S.10-11/46).

The Registrar commented that a group of seven HEIs, led by UCL, was considering the matter because the current system:

- failed to differentiate sufficiently between students (53% achieving a 2:1 in 2010);
- might influence behaviour among employers that was detrimental to graduates’ employment chances;
- was not well understood outside the UK.

It was noted that no commitment to change had been given by joining the group and that a wider debate had been provoked by reporting of the issue in the HE media.

During discussion the following comments were noted:

(a) It was uncertain to what degree employer behaviour would be altered by changing the classification system; degree outcomes were generally weighted with other factors and many graduate selection processes took place before they were known.

(b) It would be useful to consider evidence from other systems (e.g. the US) on the extent to which a more differentiated system could lead to an increase in the volume of student dissatisfaction and appeals, especially with regard to academic judgement. On the other hand, it was possible
that the increased significance of every assessed mark might incentivise sustained student performance throughout the whole degree programme.

(c) Moving from a 100- to a 10-point scale for modular marks would make it harder to indicate exceptionally high performance in some disciplines.

(d) One Head of Department (Social Sciences) reported that the departmental management team had identified a number of advantages with the GPA system and was generally supportive of it.

(e) If only a small number of institutions moved to a new system, they would be required in the first instance also to maintain the old system alongside the new classifications in order not to disadvantage their graduates, and this would involve a considerable administrative burden.

(f) Although GPA might more accurately represent student performance, moving to such a system would require changes to current marking practices.

(g) The level of incomparability, at least in public or employer perception, between the same classifications from different institutions would remain under the GPA system.

(h) Whatever system was used, it needed to be readily understandable and useful to all stakeholders. This might disadvantage a small group of ‘early adopters’, although it was possible that interest might grow swiftly across the sector with the majority of other institutions following.

Following the above discussion, it was decided that the University should continue to take part in the national discussions about the issue. The Vice-Chancellor suggested that Heads of Department might wish to take the views of colleagues in their departments.

10-11/59 QAA Institutional Audit

Senate received for information a report on the QAA Institutional Audit scheduled to take place during 2011/12 (S.10-11/47).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Assistant Registrar in the Academic Support Office (Cathy Moore) confirmed that a drafting group had been established to prepare the required Self Evaluation Document (SED) and that comments would be invited in due course via York Extra.

10-11/60 Business from Committees
Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.10-11/48):

- Teaching Committee: 23 May and 27 June 2011
- Planning Committee: 11 May and 15 June 2011

10-11/61  **Key Information Set**

Senate received for information an update on plans to implement a Key Information Set for undergraduate programmes (S.10-11/49).

10-11/62  **Periodic Review Reports**

Senate received for information a periodic review report in respect of the School of Politics, Economics and Philosophy (S.10-11/50) and interim reports in respect of the Department of Theatre, Film and Television (S.10-11/51) and the York Law School (S.10-11/52).

10-11/63  **Calendar of Meetings 2011/12**

Senate received for information the Calendar of Meetings for 2011/12 (S.10-11/53).

10-11/64  **Dates of Meetings in 2011/12**

The dates of meetings in 2010/11 were noted as follows:

- Tuesday 1 November 2011
- Tuesday 31 January 2012
- Tuesday 15 May 2012
- Tuesday 10 July 2012

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