Minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2011

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Ms E Heaps
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor J Local
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor C Mellors

Professor S Bell
Professor C Brown
Mr J Calhoun (GSA)
Mrs C Camp
Dr J Clarbour
Dr C Dytham
Dr C Fewster
Professor B Fulton
Professor C Godfrey
Professor M Hallett
Professor A Higson
Dr R Jacobs
Dr S King
Ms E Leishman (SU)
Professor M Maynard

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

Apologies for absence were received from Dr J Buchanan, Professor R Burrows, Dr L Caves, Professor B Chambers, Professor M Festenstein, Dr A Frisch, Professor A Jones, Dr O Lisagor, Professor M Luckhurst, Dr S Mazzi, Professor J McDermid, Professor D Smith, Professor L Stewart and Mr H Whitwell.

10-11/33 Membership

Senate received for information the result of the election of members to serve for three years from 1 August 2011 to 31 July 2014, as follows (S.10-11/28):

Mr Geoffrey Wall (English)
Mr Tim Clarke (Electronics)
10-11/34 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2011 were approved.

10-11/35 Higher Education Funding

Further to M10-11/21, Senate received a report confirming the University’s HEFCE funding settlement for 2011/12 (S.10-11/29).

The Registrar commented that funding arrangements beyond 2011/12 remained uncertain until the government published its White Paper (expected in June 2011). It was noted that the University would budget conservatively for 2011/12 in the light of this ongoing uncertainty (M10-11/38 below also refers).

10-11/36 Review of Senate Effectiveness

Further to M10-11/24, Senate received an interim report on the ongoing review of its effectiveness (S.10-11/30), noting the areas in which proposals were being drafted for further consideration by the review group.

The Vice-Chancellor reported the view of the review group that, in broad terms, there were no major issues to be addressed, although a number of proposals for operational improvements were likely to be brought forward.

It was noted that Senate members had been invited via email to submit any comments on the questions agreed for the review and that a final report would be submitted to the next meeting.

10-11/37 Statement by the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported the following matters:

Events/developments

Dr Graham Spittle, Chief Technology Officer for IBM UK, had officially opened the new £21 million Department of Computer Science building on Heslington East.

The Harry Fairhurst Building, next to the J B Morrell Library, had been completely refurbished to provide new library and study facilities.
City of York Council had granted planning permission for the University’s £9 million sports facility, York Sports Village.

Construction work had started on the new Langwith College on Heslington East.

New businesses had moved into the Springboard pre-incubation space in the Ron Cooke Hub.

Nearly 250 students, aged 14 to 16, from schools across Yorkshire and the Humber had attended the University’s Science Trail, giving them a chance to work with academics and students.

A University delegation had visited the University of Cape Town (a Worldwide Universities Network partner) and other South African universities to discuss a range of academic collaborations and meet alumni.

People

Professor Dave Raffaelli (Environment) had been appointed director of the Natural Environment Research Council’s £13 million Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service Sustainability (BESS) programme.

Professor Jon Timmis (Electronics/Computer Science) had won a Royal Society Wolfson Research Merit Award for his swarm robotics research.

Professor Maria Goddard (Centre for Health Economics) had been elected to the Women’s Committee of the Royal Economic Society.

Dr Kevin Killeen (English) had been awarded the Council for College and University English Book Prize 2010.

The York team, comprising Andrew Clemo (Captain), Ben Keane, Chris Caudwell and Simon Donnelly, had reached the final of BBC Two’s University Challenge.

Music by two York graduates – Paul Mealor and Duncan Stubbs – had featured in the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in Westminster Abbey.

Adam Tuff, a postgraduate researcher in the Department of Physics, had won a top prize in the Wellcome Trust’s national science outreach competition, “I’m a Scientist, Get me out of Here!”
Senate received a report on the new higher education funding arrangements and also a digest of the University’s access agreement as submitted to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) (S.10-11/31).

The Registrar drew Senate’s attention to the agreed principles that would inform the fee-setting decision to be taken by the University Council at its next meeting. With regard to the financial aspects of the access agreement, it was noted that at least 30% of additional fee income (calculated as fee income above £6,000) would be spent on OFFA-related activities including outreach, access and retention measures and fee waivers and accommodation bursaries (£3k in the first year and £2k thereafter for students with household income below £25k).

The Vice-Chancellor reminded Senate of the broader context behind the new funding regime and in particular:

- parliamentary approval in December 2010 for a Bill raising the tuition fee cap to £9k from 2012/13;
- requirement for approval by OEFA of an access agreement if fees were set above £6k;
- increased fees to offset government cuts in teaching funding of 80%, with some cuts having been brought forward to 2011/12;
- the Treasury’s financial assumption of an average fee of £7.5k;
- many universities declaring fee levels before agreement by OFFA of their access agreements;
- the government decision to delay publication of its White Paper;
- a range of government measures being considered to ensure that HE’s contribution to deficit reduction delivered against the Treasury’s initial financial assumptions;
- ongoing uncertainty and politicised debate in the context of coalition politics;
- University budget-setting process for 2011/12 and conservative assumption that additional fee income would merely replace previous government funding;
- completion of expenditure on Heslington East Phase 2 and development of Heslington West (e.g. library refurbishment);
- intention to invest any additional income in support for access, teaching support, the student experience and financial sustainability;
- University commitment to invest in access at or beyond the minimum level required by OFFA (despite better track record than competitors).

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Following Council’s decision in respect of tuition fees at its next meeting written materials confirming the University’s fee and student support arrangements would be provided for use at Open Days in July. The
government and Higher York had also produced leaflets clarifying the new funding regime to try to dispel certain misconceptions among prospective students and their parents.

(b) The fee arrangements to be considered by Council would include proposals in respect of Foundation and 4-year integrated masters programmes. As this affected their medium-term planning and budgeting, further clarification would be provided to those departments offering such programmes.

(c) No changes were proposed at this time in respect of the fees for postgraduate programmes as the same student support mechanisms (loans) did not apply to such programmes.

(d) In the event that the government introduced further changes to the funding regime in order to ensure delivery of the Treasury’s initial assumption about HE’s contribution to reducing the national deficit, the University would review its agreed principles for fee-setting accordingly. This might depend on allocation of residual teaching funding from HEFCE and associated issues of cross-subsidy across subject areas and individual programmes.

(e) With regard to changing student expectations in respect of contact hours under the new higher fee regime, it was agreed that there was a range of factors involved in the delivery of a high-quality learning experience, of which contact time was only one. In this context the Deputy Vice-Chancellor reported that the Teaching Committee would be holding an open meeting for staff and students to consider what the University priorities should be for enhancing the learning experience.

(f) Following agreement that the University’s system should not be overly complex with multiple trigger points and awards, the income threshold for fee waivers and bursaries and the level of the support package had both been based on the government’s National Scholarship Programme. It was noted that £25k was roughly the average salary in the UK.

(g) The criteria and process for awarding national and University scholarships (171 in total) were yet to be finalised. This was likely to involve a combination of central University guidelines with some discretion across disciplines.

(h) The drop-off in the fee waiver and bursary package from £3k to £2k after one year was discussed. The proposed level of financial support partly related to the University’s current student profile, which in access terms was more diverse than its competitors (27% of current York students with
household income less than £25k) and which in turn raised a number of challenges in terms of sustaining and improving the current social mix.

(i) The Development and Alumni Relations Office (DARO) was developing a programme of alumni giving that would specifically support student financial support in the future.

10-11/39 Contingency Plans for Assessment

Senate re-affirmed its 2009 policy on contingency arrangements in the event of staff unavailability (S.10-11/32), noting that it had been updated to accommodate modularisation and changes to Ordinances/Regulations. It was noted that the policy sought to ensure business continuity and minimise the potential impact on students.

With regard to the technical process for over-riding automated systems for the generation of marks in the event that the policy had to be implemented, it was reported that Registry Services had considered this matter in order that it might be achieved without disruption.

10-11/40 Online Employability Tutorial

Senate received a demonstration of the new online employability tutorial from Heather Stout (Careers Education Manager) and Chris Wilkinson (Careers Advisor), noting that it represented one output from the Employability Strategy (M10-11/8 refers).

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Departments were engaging with the tutorial in different ways in order to increase student participation. The ongoing pilot and evaluation process would also help to identify means to promote uptake and this would be further reinforced by increased marketing of careers provision.

(b) The system was being developed to ensure that the input from students was still accessible once they left the University.

(c) Workshops would be used to promote the tutorial but it was free-standing through the VLE and so students could be guided to it via email. The workshops would be held in academic departments.

(d) Mentor networks would be developed in collaboration with DARO and the Colleges.
(e) The role of supervisors in promoting the tutorial was vital and the online system would also provide output to them (through e-Vision) to assist in the writing of references.

(f) The tutorial needed to be integrated into the curriculum in order to respond to growing student expectations in respect of employability support and guidance.

(g) Work was ongoing with the Researcher Development Team to develop a similar tutorial that met the needs of postgraduate research students.

10-11/41 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.10-11/33):

- Teaching Committee: 7 February and 14 March 2011
- Standing Committee on Assessment: 28 April 2011
- Planning Committee: 9 February 2011
- HYMS Joint Senate Committee: 5 May 2011

10-11/42 Forthcoming Committee Vacancies

Forthcoming vacancies for committee appointments to be made by Senate commencing 1 August 2011 were noted (S.10-11/34).

Members of Senate wishing to make nominations were asked to:

(a) check the current membership and terms of reference of the committee in question at:

http://www.york.ac.uk/about/organisation/governance/sub-committees/

(b) submit nominations to Philip Evans (Registrar’s and Planning Office, philip.evans@york.ac.uk) by Friday 1 July 2011 (last day of Summer Term) at the latest.

It was noted that the nominations received would be presented to Senate for approval at its meeting on 12 July 2011. Where more than one nomination was received for a single vacancy, a ballot paper would be circulated to Senate members after the July meeting.

10-11/43 Register of Validated Programmes

Senate received for information the register of currently validated programmes and collaborative provision (S.10-11/35).
10-11/44 Periodic Review Report

Senate received for information a Teaching Committee periodic review report in respect of Computer Science (S.10-11/36).

10-11/45 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of Senate was scheduled for Tuesday 12 July 2011 at 3:15pm.