UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2012

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
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor J Robinson
Academic Co-ordinator, Professor M Ormrod

Professor S Bell
Professor J Bennett
Professor M Bentley
Professor C Brown
Professor S Carroll
Professor B Chambers
Dr A Charlwood
Dr J Clarbour
Mr T Clarke
Professor E Corrigan
Dr C Fewster
Professor R Godby
Professor H Graham
Professor M Festenstei
Professor H Fulton
Professor A Higson
Professor D Howard
Dr M Leng
Dr O Lisagor

Professor M Maynard
Professor P O’Higgins
Mr A Oloyede (GSA)
Dr B Pownall
Professor E Prettejohn
Professor J Schofield
Dr J Schofield
Professor P Sells
Professor D Smith
Professor Q Summerfield
Professor R Taylor
Professor S Thompson
Mr H Toynton (SU)
Professor J Wainwright
Mr G Wall
Professor J Woodcock
Professor R Wooffitt
Mr R Yates

In attendance: The Registrar and Secretary
The Academic Registrar
University Governance Officer, Dr P Evans
SU Academic Affairs Officer, Mr G Osborn
Director of the Careers Service, Ms E Smith (for M12-13/7)
Head of the Academic Support Office, Mr N Dandy (for M12-13/8)
Deputy Director of Corporate Planning, Mr J Busby (for M12-13/8)

Apologies for absence were received from Professor J Buchanan, Dr S Chong, Professor B Fulton, Professor M Goddard, Professor V Gould, Professor J Hill, Dr R Jacobs, Professor

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A Jones, Professor M Luckhurst, Professor L Stewart, Professor T Stoneham, Mr K Taylor (SU) and Professor A Webster.

12-13/1 Terms of Reference/Membership

Senate noted its terms of reference as set out in the Charter/Statutes and the ‘Statement of Primary Responsibilities’ (S.12-13/1).

As it was the first meeting of the 2012/13 academic session, the Vice-Chancellor welcomed new members.

12-13/2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2012 were approved.

12-13/3 Appointments to Committees

Further to M11-12/56, Senate noted the appointments to committees which had been approved by the Vice-Chancellor since the last meeting and also the result of the ballot for membership of the Promotions Committee (S.12-13/2).

12-13/4 Postgraduate Fees

Further to M11-12/59, Senate received for information a minute regarding postgraduate fees from the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 10 October 2012 (S.12-13/3).

It was noted that, following consultation with academic departments and consideration of a range of options, the Committee had decided to set a single standard full-time home/EU fee for PGT programmes of £5,900 for 2013/14 (increase of £1,280 [28%]). During the course of the current year a four-level fee structure would be developed for 2014/15 on the basis of a typology of different programmes and taking into account market information, especially as regards pricing by key competitors.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) Given the global market for postgraduate education, the assessment of competitors would include consideration of fees at an international level.
(b) Although the market was complex and there were a considerable number of influencing factors, Planning Committee had decided to restrict the fee structure for 2013/14 to four levels (laboratory/non-laboratory and professionally-focused/non-professionally focused) in order to retain clarity and accordance with existing fee-setting criteria. It was noted in this context that premium fees would continue to be charged for specific programmes and from 2013/14 departments would in exceptional circumstances be able to request a lower than standard fee selected from the fee spine.

(c) Planning Committee would give further consideration during the current year to the possibility of discounted fees for alumni and nine-month Masters programmes, both of which had arisen as possible options during the consultation process.

(d) Following a period when PGT programmes had been allowed to develop organically without a defined strategic plan, Planning Committee had sought to evaluate the purposes of different PGT programmes, which was reflected in the multi-level fee structure to be introduced from 2013/14.

(e) The question of bursary provision for postgraduates would continue to be considered by Planning Committee, especially in the context of access arrangements. There were however no plans to hypothecate directly from fee income to expenditure as this might constrain further development.

Following the above discussion, it was decided that Senate should continue to receive reports from Planning Committee on its ongoing work in respect of postgraduate fees during the current year.

12-13/5  Statement by the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported the following matters:

Events/Developments

The University had formally joined the Russell Group on 1 August 2012.

Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal had planted an oak tree at the Diamond Wood on Heslington East to mark the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee.

The first student residents had arrived at the new £30 million Langwith College on Heslington East at the start of the term.
The £9 million York Sport Village, which offered facilities for staff, students and members of the wider York community, had welcomed its first customers.

The York Plasma Institute, a £6m collaboration with the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, had been opened by the Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Sir John Beddington.

Electronics had become the sixth University department to receive an Athena Swan award for support of women in science.

People

Professors Peter Biller (History) and Kathleen Kiernan (Social Policy and Social Work) had been elected Fellows of the British Academy.

Professor Pratibha Gai (Chemistry/Physics) had been named as the Laureate for Europe in the L’OREAL-UNESCO Women in Science Awards for 2013, for the excellence of her research.

Professor Mike Drummond (Centre for Health Economics) had received the first ever honorary doctorate awarded by the Institute of Health Policy and Management at Erasmus University, Rotterdam.

Professor Matt Matravers (Politics) had been conferred with the Award of Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences.

Professor Sir John Holman (Chemistry) had been elected Master of the Salters’ Company for 2012/13.

Dr Ana Cavalcanti (Computer Science) had received a Wolfson Research Merit Award from the Royal Society.

Student Recruitment

Despite under-recruitment nationally, the University had maintained a strong position with a shortfall of only ca. 50-100 home/EU undergraduate students. The Vice-Chancellor paid tribute to the hard work of departmental admissions tutors and the central admissions team for achieving such a successful outcome in a new and demanding environment. It was noted that the next recruitment round would also be challenging and complex, especially in the light of the government’s decision to lift the cap on recruitment of ABB and equivalent candidates.
International Student Visas

Following the revocation by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) of a London university’s licence to issue visas to international students, the sector was under pressure to demonstrate that it was compliant with UKBA requirements as regards monitoring of international students. The Vice-Chancellor was pleased to report in this context that an audit of the University’s arrangements conducted by UKBA in July 2012 had confirmed it as an “A-rated and highly trusted sponsor”.

Research Income

Work undertaken by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) and the Research & Enterprise directorate was beginning to redress the decline in research income experienced the previous year. The Vice-Chancellor commented on the relatively high level of research income per academic but noted that in terms of total volume, the University ranked about 20th in the sector. There was therefore a need to continue maximising research potential and winning large-scale grants.

12-13/6 National Student Survey 2012

Senate considered a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) on the 2012 National Student Survey (NSS) results (S.12-13/4).

Professor Robinson highlighted the following points:

- NSS as one of a range of metrics for academic quality which also influenced league table positions;
- the survey of 22 questions across 6 different dimensions;
- improved performance by the University across all dimensions, including overall satisfaction (=24th nationally);
- high score for ‘teaching on my course’ (=8th nationally);
- ‘assessment and feedback’ as the weakest area (an outcome also reflected in postgraduate surveys);
- large improvement in ‘learning resources’ (from 61st to 19th nationally) following completion of the library refurbishment;
- some slippage in certain large departments which had affected the overall institutional outcome.

During discussion the following points were noted:

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(a) YUSU had identified areas for improvement in response to the outcome from the additional question relating to satisfaction with service provision by the Students’ Union. It was noted that collegiate universities tended to perform poorly on this question.

(b) The question of managing student expectations, as referenced in the relevant minute from Teaching Committee, related to maintaining a productive and ongoing dialogue with the student body through groups such as departmental staff-student forums. In this shared enterprise, it was important to focus on providing the best learning experience possible and making it clear to students how departments were seeking to achieve this.

(c) Student expectations of the learning environment often related to their previous educational experience and making clear to students what was expected of them and what they could expect from the University was therefore important.

Following the above discussion, Senate approved the Pro-Vice-Chancellor’s recommendation that in future years a shorter report be provided with web-links to the main data.

12-13/7  Destination of Leavers from Higher Education

Senate considered a report on the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education 2011 (S.12-13/5).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Director of Careers (Liz Smith) drew particular attention to the following:

- data gathering six months after graduation (in April 2011 from graduates of postgraduate programmes and in January 2012 from graduates of undergraduate programmes);
- differences between the survey’s target population and the population used by HESA to calculate employment indicators for institutions (as used in newspaper league tables);
- increase in unemployment rate from 8.1% to 8.5% (approximately 7 individuals) and decrease in graduate-level destinations from 71.9% to 70.8% (approximately 20 individuals);
- higher than benchmark performance as measured by the HESA employment indicator (achieved by only 50% of the Russell Group).
The Director summarised the data as confirming that the University’s position was not deteriorating despite a difficult economic climate for new graduates.

During discussion the following comments were noted:

(a) Informal networking provided some information on the strategies of competitors whose performance as measured by the HESA employment indicator noticeably exceeded their expected benchmark.

(b) The cohort surveyed in the report had only experienced the University’s new Employability Strategy in their final year and it was therefore hoped that future graduating cohorts would reap greater benefits from the stronger focus on enhancing their employability from the start of their time at university (e.g. through the employability tutorial and enhanced alumni mentoring programme).

(c) A much stronger and more productive relationship had been developed between Careers and academic departments, and there was evidence this was beginning to have a positive effect on graduate employment prospects.

Senate thanked the Director for her report, acknowledging the impact of the wider national economic environment on graduate employment.

12-13/8 Key Information Set

Senate considered a report on the new Key Information Set (S.12-13/6).

Attending the meeting to present the report, the Deputy Director of Corporate Planning (John Busby) drew particular attention to the following:

- the collaborative process with academic departments for collating and checking data before submission to HEFCE;
- starting the process of analysing the new data-set to assess its value as business intelligence;
- currently unknown aspects such as the likely level of influence on applicants’ programme/university choices.

During discussion Senate noted the following:
(a) HEFCE was currently reviewing the implementation of the KIS, which afforded an opportunity for the University to provide feedback on specific areas of perceived inaccuracy (e.g. in descriptors of professional accreditation and practical placements).

(b) Further consideration would be given to the best means of capturing evidence of the influence of KIS on student choice (e.g. via focus groups, schools liaison, open days etc).

(c) Currently there was uncertainty as to the incorporation of KIS information into existing or new league tables. It was likely that certain new indicators of ‘value for money’ would be drawn from the contact hours data, requiring the University to respond accordingly with wider contextual information about quality and outcomes.

(d) The business intelligence provided by the Planning Office as part of the long- and medium-term planning process represented a more useful and accurate form of competitor analysis than the KIS data-set. The internal planning process also supported departments in developing their marketing strategies.

(e) In reporting lectures as lasting 50 minutes (with implications for aggregated contact time), the University had followed a specific written directive from HEFCE that required travel time between lectures to be discounted. As regards capturing the time allocated to, for example, supervision of final-year projects, efforts would be made to optimise the University’s return without compromising the integrity of its reporting. In this context, the Vice-Chancellor drew Senate’s attention to the number of high-quality institutions with relatively low scheduled contact time (Appendix A to the report refers).

(f) Although there was likely to be media interest in those elements of the data that might be viewed in some quarters as a proxy indicator of ‘value for money’ (e.g. average starting salaries of graduates), such reporting would lose credibility if highly reputable institutions appeared with a low ranking by such measures.

12-13/9 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.12-13/7):
Research Committee: 3 October 2012
HYMS Joint Senate Committee: 11 October 2012
Teaching Committee: 15 October 2012
Planning Committee: 10 October 2012

12-13/10 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of Senate was scheduled for Tuesday 29 January 2013 at 3.15pm.