UNIVERSITY OF YORK

SENATE

Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2012

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Dr J Grenville
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor C Mellors
Academic Coordinator (Sciences), Professor B Fulton
Professor S Bell
Professor J Bennett
Professor C Brown
Dr J Buchanan
Mr J Burch
Professor S Carroll
Dr A Charlwood
Dr J Clabour
Mr T Clarke
Ms K Diaconu
Mr T Ellis
Dr C Fewster
Dr A Frisch
Professor M Goddard
Professor H Graham
Professor M Hallett
Professor A Higson
Professor J Hill

Mr D Johnson
Professor A Jones
Ms E Leishman
Dr O Lisagor
Mrs K Mann
Professor M Maynard
Professor J Mc Dermid
Dr P Mitchell
Professor P O’Higgins
Dr A Rees
Professor J Richards
Professor P Sells
Professor L Stewart
Professor T Stoneham
Professor Q Summerfield
Professor R Taylor
Professor S Thompson
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
Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Officer, Ms H Brian
Special Cases Administrator, Ms K Lucas (for M11-12/24)

Apologies for absence were received from Professor B Chambers, Mrs C Camp, Dr S Chong, Professor E Corrigan, Ms E Heaps, Professor D Howard, Dr R Jacobs,

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Professor J Local, Professor M Ormrod, Mr T Rigby, Professor M Savage, Professor D Smith and Mr S Town.

11-12/18 Membership

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed newly elected student members. It was noted that Hannah Brian (Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Officer) was attending the meeting as an observer.

11-12/19 Minutes

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

11-12/20 National Student Survey/Postgraduate Experience Surveys

Further to M11-12/6 and M11-12/7, it was noted that the National Student Survey (NSS) 2012 ran from 23 January – 30 April 2012 and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) would run from 19 April – 14 June 2012. Departments were asked to encourage their students to respond to these surveys.

11-12/21 QAA Institutional Review

Further to M11-12/8, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor provided the following verbal update on the QAA institutional review:

- The University’s Self-Evaluation Document and the Student Written Submission had been submitted as required in November.

- The QAA review panel had carried out its first visit to the University on 3 and 4 January, meeting with YUSU and GSA sabbatical officers, the Vice-Chancellor and a group of senior staff.

- Following this visit the panel had provided a timetable for the main, week-long visit commencing 13 February. This would include meetings with groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students and with a range of staff on the themes of: managing quality and standards, learning and teaching support for staff, and support for students.

- The panel had requested some additional evidence, in particular to demonstrate the work undertaken at departmental-level (e.g. to
respond to issues raised by external examiners and to engage staff in learning and teaching developments and reflective processes such as the annual programme review).

- The panel would meet 16-20 students and 25-30 staff across six meetings. It was anticipated that a main theme would be the relationship between central bodies and departments, and the extent to which departmental responsibilities were being exercised effectively in a comparatively permissive managerial and policy framework.

- The University would receive a draft report by the end of March and the final report would be published on the QAA website in May. An action plan to address any recommendations would have to be drawn up by July.

11-12/22 Statement by the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported the following matters:

Events/Developments

The University had won its fifth Queen’s Anniversary prize in fifteen years, for the work of the Department of Archaeology.

The Heslington East campus had won three Gold awards from the Royal Institute of British Architects.

The White Rose University Consortium had secured £6 million from the BBSRC for a new Doctoral Training Centre in Mechanistic Biology.

Fifteen students had been presented with the Vice-Chancellor’s Diversity Awards, which aimed to encourage those groups who were under-represented at the University to study here.

The York Alumni Association had launched a Professional Network Programme to connect current students and recent graduates with alumni in established careers.

People
Professor Mohamed El-Gomati (Electronics) had been made an OBE in the New Year’s Honours List.

The University had awarded Morrell Fellowships to three major benefactors (Tony Cann, Graham Paterson and Tony Wild).

Professor Robin Millar (Education) had been appointed President of the Association of Science Education.

Professor Alan Burns had been elected a Fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers and Professor Sam Braunstein had been made a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (both Computer Science).

The Society of Chemical Industry had conferred its ‘Chemistry for Industry’ Award on Professor James Clark (Chemistry).

Dr Sarah Olive (Education) had been elected a trustee of the British Shakespeare Association and appointed editor of its new publication *Teaching Shakespeare*.

The York Press had awarded the Vice-Chancellor the ‘Lifetime Achievement’ award in its annual business awards 2011.

**Student Recruitment**

The Vice-Chancellor reported that, following the closure of the UCAS application deadline in January, the rate of home undergraduate application to the University was marginally lower than the previous year (0.2%, approx. 40 applications). Initial analysis indicated that there had been no significant shifts in the general pattern of applications as regards socio-economic background, spread across subject areas, schools mix etc. Detailed analysis was being undertaken at departmental level and the Vice-Chancellor emphasised the importance of converting applications into enrolments.

**11-12/23 Student Representation**

Senate considered a report from Teaching Committee recommending a new Policy for Student Representation in Learning and Teaching Activities and, as part of this, the establishment of Staff-Student Forums (SSFs) in all departments with Boards of Studies (S.11-12/14).
As Chair of the Committee, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor observed that, while the University generally had a good record of involving students in discussion and decision-making, the SU had identified varied practices across academic departments. As a result, Teaching Committee had established a Working Party to review the situation and bring forward recommendations, drawing on best practice at the University and elsewhere. Senate noted the main elements of the proposed new policy and in particular the role of SSFs as student-led groups which might raise issues for further consideration by Boards of Studies.

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) At an institutional level, formal student representation was achieved by a wide variety of different means (e.g. representation on committees, informal meetings with members of the SMG etc).

(b) Some Senate members expressed the view that the proposed role for SSFs was already being achieved in their departments by student representation on Boards of Studies and departmental teaching committees, and that establishment of another body would not bring any additional benefit. It was also noted that some departments had created SSFs, which had then been disbanded due to low student attendance.

(c) The head of a department that had recently established a SSF with the support of the SU reported that it was proving a useful forum for discussing the wider student experience and alerting the department swiftly to any emerging issues. It was noted that another department was also establishing such an informal group to discuss issues ahead of Board of Studies meetings.

(d) It was suggested by one HoD that the policy proposal contained a number of inconsistencies and structural/stylistic infelicities, and also that it underplayed the role of the Board of Studies and failed to be sufficiently clear about the minimum requirements for staff and student attendance.

(e) It was suggested that SSFs might address the fact that it was impossible for student representatives on Board of Studies to represent all student views and raise all the issues of concern to students in the department.
Following the above discussion, and acknowledging the difficulty of achieving an appropriate balance between prescription and flexibility, Senate decided to refer the policy proposal back to Teaching Committee for consideration of the points raised and further re-drafting as necessary.

**Special Cases Committee Annual Report**

Senate considered an annual report from the Special Cases Committee (S.11-12/15), noting that it had been produced in response to the previous year’s effectiveness review (M10-11/54 refers).

Presenting the report as Chair of the Committee, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Students highlighted the following aspects:

- The Committee sought to ensure equity and consistency in the handling of student cases and to prevent such cases escalating as complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

- The Committee’s work had increased when it assumed responsibility for postgraduate cases from the now defunct Board for Graduate Schools; the Committee had increased in size and introduced a number of process improvements to cope with the additional workload.

- 117 undergraduate academic appeals had been received in 2010/11, 4 of which had culminated in full hearings by the Committee.

- The report identified the likely reasons for increases in course extensions/transfers (especially in the context of the new Mitigating Circumstance Policy).

- Given the number of appeals that were referred back to Boards of Studies, it was important that departments maintained clear documentation of all cases in order to expedite their swift resolution.

During discussion of the report the following points were noted:

(a) Sector-wide benchmarking was difficult in this area due to different institutional processes, but efforts would be made to explore whether any comparable statistics might be available.
(b) The Committee’s annual report might usefully be provided to other committees for information (e.g. the Teaching and Research Committees and Standing Committee on Assessment).

(c) The target of confirming an outcome within six weeks related to the amount of time it could take to acquire further information from the student, and it was therefore not thought to be advisable to change this timescale.

(d) Given the high number of appeals in which *prima facie* grounds for appeal were not established, the total figures should not be over-interpreted. The fact that to date the OIA had not upheld a single complaint against the University confirmed that its procedures and practices were robust.

(e) In some cases the Committee was trialling more informal ‘case conferences’, with the student present, to ascertain the best way of proceeding with the case in question.

(f) With regard to the format of the report and its suitability in terms of providing Senate with an appropriate overview of issues and trends in this area, the following suggestions were made for future reports:

- more substantial overview by the Chair of the sorts of issues being raised in appeals and any emerging trends;
- breakdown of appeal statistics into categories for equality monitoring (e.g. by gender, ethnicity, full/part-time, home/international etc);
- annual statistics on the number of cases being submitted by students to the OIA.

Senate thanked the Committee for its first annual report.

11-12/25 **Regulation 7: Student Discipline**

Senate considered a re-draft of University Regulation 7 relating to student discipline (S.11-12/16). The Academic Registrar outlined the rationale for re-drafting the regulation in the context of legislative changes and drew attention to new additions in the text, especially the list of disciplinary offences in § 7.1.
Noting the importance to the whole University community of having a clearly defined framework for handling disciplinary offences, Senate members made the following comments:

(a) It might be helpful to provide further examples of the sort of conduct likely to bring the University into disrepute.

(b) Failure to disclose a criminal conviction to UCAS before registration at the University might also be identified as a disciplinary offence.

(c) There was no indication of the measures that would be taken in the event that a student failed to comply with a penalty such as imposition of a fine.

(d) Reference to “the Court” should be clarified to indicate that it did not refer to the University Court.

(e) In order to ensure consistency of practice across the University, it would be useful to provide accompanying guidance on the level of fines commensurate with different sorts of offences.

(f) The opening preamble, which referred to the “the University community […] within its learning environment”, might be amended to clarify that the regulation also applied to students off-campus on work placements.

(g) Notwithstanding the fact that some students were also staff members, a different set of legal provisions and regulations applied to disciplinary arrangements for staff.

(h) It was suggested that the opening sentence of §7.1 should be reworded as follows: “which cause or might cause...”.

(i) As the Vice-Chancellor held the ultimate authority within the institution for the suspension and exclusion of students (in accordance with Statute 6.5), the only course of appeal against any such suspension or exclusion would be to an outside body (e.g. the OIA or a court of law).
(j) It was suggested that the phrase in brackets in the first bullet-point in §7.1 should be re-worded as follows: “(including breach of this Regulation or failure to comply with...”).

(k) The reference to “duty of care” in the preamble might be elaborated to specify, in positive terms, what was meant by this expression.

(l) The regulation should attempt to specify under what circumstances and in what form a disciplinary penalty might be recorded on a student’s record and subsequently disclosed.

(m) The regulation should require disclosure of a criminal conviction acquired by a student during a period of suspended registration (leave of absence).

Following the above discussion, Senate asked the Academic Registrar and the Legal Administrator to amend the regulation in accordance with its comments and to re-submit a final version to a later meeting for approval.

11-12/26 Deputy Vice-Chancellor/Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning)

Noting that this would be the last meeting to be attended by Professor Trevor Sheldon as Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching & Learning, Senate thanked Professor Sheldon for his significant contribution to the University and, specifically, to academic standards and quality enhancement.

11-12/27 Business from Committees

Senate noted and approved business from the following committee meetings (S.11-12/17):

- HYMS Joint Senate Committee: 13 October 2011
- Research Committee: 19 October and 30 November 2011
- Teaching Committee: 7 November and 12 December 2011

11-12/28 Periodic Review Reports

Senate received for information periodic review reports in respect of Economics and Mathematics (S.11-12/18).

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11-12/29 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of Senate was scheduled for Tuesday 15 May 2012 at 3.15pm (in the Bowland Auditorium, Berrick Saul Building).