

# UNIVERSITY OF YORK

## Senate

### TEACHING COMMITTEE

#### Minutes of the Annual Strategy Meeting of UTC, held 3 December 2015

**Present:** Professor J Robinson (Chair), , Dr G Cubitt, Mr N Dandy, Ms C Dantec, Mrs K Dodd, Professor C Fewster, Dr J Hardman, Dr S King, Dr T Lightfoot, Mr T Ron (YUSU representative), Dr K Selby, Dr Á Sheil, Professor J Thijssen, Dr R Vann, Professor R Waites and Dr L Waldorf.

**In attendance:** Professor S Bell (Dean, Social Sciences) and Dr D Gent (ASO, Minute Secretary).

**Apologies:** Mrs L Booth, Professor B Fulton (Dean, Sciences), Mrs J Fox, Professor J Hudson and Professor M Ormrod (Dean, Arts and Humanities).

#### CATEGORY I BUSINESS

##### M15-16/57 Higher Education Green Paper

The Committee **considered** the Higher Education Green Paper, *Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (UTC.15-16/42(a)). The Committee's discussion would inform the Chair's contribution to the University's response to the consultation on the Green Paper.

The Green Paper encouraged institutions to adopt a Grade Point Average (GPA) system. On this issue, the Committee **noted**:

- that there was a distinction between adopting GPA as a replacement for the traditional classification system and doing so as an addition to (and thus running alongside) such a system. The former would involve a change to marking practices, whilst the latter would not. The system already adopted by Oxford Brookes and favoured by many institutions was of the second kind, which would be easier to implement but might not yield the transparency and comparability sought by the Green Paper.
- that GPA systems typically involved a straight average which counted all years of study (including the first year) equally. In comparison, the traditional classification system typically did not count the first year and, by weighting final years more heavily, recognised 'exit velocity'. Whilst a GPA system would encourage more consistent effort across the programme, the traditional system supported the formative and transitional nature of the first year of undergraduate study, allowed students to take intellectual risks, and recognised that different learners progressed at different speeds. All of these factors were important in themselves and in supporting inclusivity and widening participation;
- that one of the motivations for encouraging a GPA system was to increase transparency and comparability between institutions. If this was to be realised, it would be vital that there was both a national framework for GPA and consistent implementation of that framework across the sector;
- that it would be important that any GPA framework took into account how students' performance would appear in the context of international use of GPAs, so as to not

- disadvantage students in the international employment market;
- that, whilst the Green Paper noted that GPA would increase granularity and avoid the sharpness of ‘cliff edges’ associated with traditional classification borders, there was a danger that the GPA system would merely introduce a new set of ‘cliff-edges’.

The Green Paper outlined the Government’s plans to introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). On this issue, the Committee **noted**:

- that plans for the first phase of TEF, based on prior QAA reviews, seemed sensible and cost-effective;
- that the TEF would have the benefit of incentivizing universities to make strategic and investment decisions that improve teaching and learning;
- that the vast majority of teaching both in the University and in the sector was good;
- that the Green Paper had a tendency to view higher education as a consumer product, for instance in references to value for money. The Committee felt that it was important that education be conceived as a partnership between staff and students. It also noted that it was not evident that ‘value for money’ could be meaningfully assessed at graduation;
- that it was intended that there be four levels within TEF, and that only those institutions granted the highest level would be able to increase tuition fees at the rate of inflation. At current rates of inflation the financial benefit from a high TEF level would thus be comparatively small. The Committee favoured an approach which either de-coupled TEF from fees or changed the linkage. For example, the system might be that Level 1 of the TEF allowed fee increases, whilst higher levels of TEF did not but did bring reputational advantages. It was noted, however, that if the sector argued against coupling inflationary fee increases to the TEF, this posed the risk that the Government would not accommodate inflation within fee arrangements;
- that there was a risk that the TEF would create an expensive and burdensome bureaucracy. It was not clear that the benefits of participating in the TEF were such as to justify this;
- that the Committee was concerned about the proposed use of metrics within the TEF, noting that metrics were imperfect proxies of the quality of education and that there was, as yet, no nationally agreed or tested metric for learning gain, a key element of the TEF. It was specifically noted that:
  - it was difficult to compare across all institutions in the sector. It would be important that, for instance, measures of learning gain took into account different qualifications of students on entry and differing standards of intellectual challenge;
  - the use of metrics created incentives to improve performance in those metrics, which might not correlate with, and may be contradictory to, real enhancements in teaching and learning;
  - increased use of metrics might discourage risk-taking and innovation within teaching, which sometimes came at a short-term cost;
  - that the proposed use of HMRC data on income after graduation as a metric for quality was particularly worrying. As well as the idea that quality could be measured through income being problematic as an idea in and of itself, such a metric would be sensitive to local variation (for instance in access to employment markets); would need to take into account differences between disciplines and thus institutions with different subject mixes; risked dis-incentivising subjects with lower scores in these areas, including the teaching of subjects or programmes targeted at social and community good (some of which produced graduates who tended not to be well-paid); and ran counter to the

imperative to increase social mobility (as social background influenced employment prospects).

On the other issues covered by the Green Paper, the Committee **noted**:

- that it would be important that the new Office for Students worked in partnership with the sector, and that the relationship was not an adversarial one;
- that the Green Paper encouraged new providers to enter the sector. Such providers commonly taught a single subject or small group of subjects, and these were often low-cost. Established universities, on the other hand, used low-cost subjects to cross-subsidise high-cost subjects, which were often high-impact subjects in terms of research. It would thus be important that, if the Government wished to encourage competition between universities and new providers and maintain capacity for education in STEM, it put in place robust mechanisms to protect the teaching of high-cost subjects;
- that the plans in the Green Paper to encourage social mobility ran counter to the recently announced plans to cut student grants.

### **M15-16/58 Learning and Teaching Strategy Action Plan**

The Committee considered a paper outlining initial priorities and an action plan for the implementation of the *Learning and Teaching Strategy 2015-2020* (UTC.15-16/42**(b)**). The Committee **noted** that:

- support was in place for the implementation of the York pedagogy, with further resources being developed. It was important that these resources be made available to departments as soon as possible to meet the timescales outlined in the paper;
- with reference to section C1 of the paper, it was not intended that the embedding of 'employability characteristics' within programme learning outcomes should be done instrumentally: rather, this section of the paper referred to such characteristics as being one of a number of prompts for reflection on learning outcomes;
- that the development of years in industry would be assisted by plans to build University-level links with placement providers and to facilitate years in industry being taken outside programmes under leave of absence. This was in addition to years in industry which were integral to programmes;
- that it would be important that student representatives were able to give input into the planned review of Boards of Studies;
- that, whilst the work of YUSU complemented the implementation plan in several areas, this was deliberately not referenced as the plan was for the University.

The Committee **approved** the action plan, noting that this would need to be amended in light of the Committee's decision to defer roll-out of the York pedagogy to taught postgraduate programmes in M15-16/59 below.

**Action: Nigel Dandy**

### **M15-16/59 Progress Report on the York Pedagogy**

The Committee **considered** a progress report on implementing the York Pedagogy (UTC.15-16/42**(c)**). The report also contained a number of proposals with respect to implementation.

The Committee **decided to recommend** that the roll-out of the York pedagogy to taught postgraduate programmes should be deferred for a year, with the effect of moving expectations for compliance with the pedagogy for such programmes to 2018/19. This view was taken in light of the work involved in rolling out the pedagogy at undergraduate level and the ongoing consideration of structures of taught postgraduate provision at Planning Committee.

The Committee **decided to approve:**

- the proposal that implementation of the York pedagogy at undergraduate level should be flexible as to whether 'compliance by 2017/18' meant roll-out for new cohorts or for some or all existing cohorts, following existing procedure for programme modifications. It was acknowledged that this might create complexity around student-facing information;
- the proposal that programme teams be asked to articulate stage outcomes as well as programme-level learning outcomes, and that this should be done within a single box for each stage (allowing a generic stage narrative) rather than requiring separate stage outcomes corresponding to each programme learning outcome;
- the proposed model for a 'programme map' articulated in the paper, with the caveat that programme teams should be permitted to (but would not be required to) map bundles of optional modules rather than separately map each optional module, provided such modules within these bundles all met the statements made for the contribution of that bundle to programme learning outcomes. The programme map would be used to inform the design of the Programme Catalogue.