

# ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY

Minutes of meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011 at 6.30pm in L/047

Reference: AA/02/2011

Chair: Tørris Rasmussen (TR), *Academic Assembly Chair*

**Committee Members present:**

Graeme Osborn (GO), *Academic Officer*

Eppie Leishman (EL), *Social Sciences Coordinator*

**Apologies from:**

Mark Taylor, *Arts & Humanities Coordinator*

Sophie Alexander, *Sciences Coordinator*

**Number of delegate members present:** 15

**Number of ordinary members present:** 10

**Minuted by:** Marc Kidson (MK), *Representation & Democracy Development Coordinator*

**NEW ACTIONS** – Summary of matters arising from this meeting

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>BY WHOM</b>	<b>BY WHEN</b>
Consider options for changing YUSU policy towards tuition fees and introducing policy opposing the use of fee waivers	GO & Union President	Update to next meeting
Plan for consultation on use of printer credits in departments	GO	Next meeting

**OUTSTANDING ACTIONS** – Summary of unresolved matters arising from previous meetings

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>BY WHOM</b>	<b>BY WHEN</b>
Compile a YUSU response to the HE White Paper	GO	This meeting
Bring back specific responses to HE White Paper covering LGBT and disabled students to the Academic Assembly if necessary	LGBT Officer, Disabled Students' Officer	This meeting
With the Careers Service, perform an audit of employers intending to come to York that are visiting our comparators	GO	This meeting

## 1) PRESENTATION ON WIDENING PARTICIPATION

MK gave a presentation on the Widening Participation agenda at the University of York, including details of the Access Agreement submitted to the Office of Fair Access and information about student-led WP activities available.

## 2) DEBATE: *Should students fight for lower fees or demand value for money at £9,000?*

The Chair informed the Assembly that the debate was being recorded and asked members to keep their contributions concise. The following points were raised by members in attendance:

- The battle against the fees increase has not succeeded at a national level, but we should continue to oppose higher fees
- At a local level, it does not make sense for the University of York to charge less than £9,000 fees as it would disadvantage the institution relative to comparator institutions while being of little benefit to students.
- Even at a fee level of £7,500 a student would have to start earning £40,000 immediately after University in order to pay off the loan in the 27 years – most students will never pay off their loan anyway, so a higher fee does not affect them.
- The fact that marginal changes to the fee level have little or no impact on the overall amount repaid by most students, means that the University should avoid using fee waivers as a means of support for widening participation.
- Nonetheless, it was felt that if the University is going to be charging £9,000 a year, students are entitled to question what we are getting for the additional income – international students already pay much higher fees.
- There is a perceived sense of unfairness between Arts and Science students, with the former not seeing how what they pay relates to what is provided for them compared to the sciences.
- Employability becomes a greater focus under the new fee regime, with students increasingly concerned about getting a well-paid job after University and looking at how well their course prepares them for that. Some people suggested we should be 'more realistic' about what students want out of university beyond what they learn.
- Bringing together employability and the research activity of the institution, we should continue to be research focused at all levels, as research-engaged teachers can inspire more interest in students and may have a greater industry focus.
- We should not lose sight of getting students from a wide range of backgrounds in to the University once fees increase – it is important to invest extra fee income wisely in doing so and that results are scrutinised.
- It was felt that the University should be explicit about which A Levels are desired for particular departments, so that students from non-traditional backgrounds are clear what they need to study.

- GO observed that this should be seen as distinct from ‘required’ A Levels, which are already made clear, and we should tackle this with other institutions in our mission group (1994 Group) and the Russell Group.
- Caution was urged about not unnecessarily narrowing the range of subjects students can study, e.g. some departments like creative but unrelated subjects such as Art.
- A number of people suggested that the University and the Union has a role to play in debunking myths and fears around higher education, especially concerns around debt.
- It was clearly felt that further work by YUSU on value for money when fees increase is required and should happen at the department as well as the University level.

**ACTION: GO and TE to consider options for changing YUSU’s current policy on tuition fees.**

**ACTION: GO and TE to consider introducing YUSU policy opposing the use of fee waivers.**

### **3) SENATE REP COOPTIONS**

The position of Senate Rep was explained by GO. It was explained that the role is being co-opted for the next Senate only, with the full positions being elected with officers in Spring Term.

Two candidates came forward:

- Eppie Leishman
- James Burch
- Richard Lynn

A vote was held: Eppie & James were elected.

### **4) A NEW APPROACH TO FREE PRINTER CREDITS**

In the absence of the Idea proposer, a discussion was had about the use of printer credits in departments. Points raised included:

- There should be a distinction drawn between what we want to print and what we need to print.
- There is significant variation in the amount that staff members print for their students.
- Allowances in many departments are small and are used up on printing for a single seminar or assignment.

- Online submission would significantly reduce the required printing by students, as two copies are required at present. GO assured the Assembly that he will continue to take this up with the University.
- It was felt that there was insufficient uniformity for a single, YUSU approach to printer credits, but that further consultation should happen at the department-level between YUSU, course reps and staff.

**ACTION: Mandate GO to take forward consultation with course reps on printer credits in departments.**

## 5) OFFICER REPORTS

### *Academic Officer*

GO referred members to his recent Blog post – NUS-related projects I've been working on: WP Champions, sharing good practice among Unions; National Student Skills Award, building on the local university awards to create national recognition for the activities students do at University, in collaboration with the CBI.

Representing York at Unions 1994 meeting of SUs in the same mission group. This is good for sharing good practice, and will increase the lobbying power of universities as a group towards government. GO was elected Secretary of the group.

Course Rep elections: paper to UTC about the success of course rep elections; thanks for standing and thanks for coming along.

We are also undergoing a QAA institutional review asking whether the University is doing what it says it's doing; we are involved in a project with NUS to look at student engagement in quality at the university and make sure we are doing things as well as possible.

## 6) OFFICER QUESTIONS

### **What do the University think about these NUS projects?**

- Trevor Sheldon (PVC, Learning & Teaching) was involved in the application for the Quality Engagement project.
- Careers interested in the Skills Award, have suspended review of York Award until after the pilot.

### **Chair asked whether there was a YUSU response to the government's HE White Paper?**

GO acknowledged that he had not made much progress. Some Universities returning to Access Agreements and renegotiating, so holding fire until results of that are known. Also, been too busy with various projects.

### **What has been the effect of fees increase on applications for 2012?**

- York was 10-12% down on like for like applications.
- TE added that it had improved since then but still a little behind last year.
- Everyone expects we will end up in a reasonable position, just with later applications and a small drop.

**Chair asked about expiring policies:**

***Earlier term dates***

- TE responded on earlier term dates as had attended a meeting about it. Post-qualification applications are being looked at, which would put York in a good position with its late starts. It was suggested that we could have a Freshers Week the week before Week 1, with teaching starting in Week 1 instead of Week 2. This could also involve a reading week in the term, or finishing term for Christmas earlier. GO said there will be further consultation and he will update the Assembly.

***Academic Sports Department***

- Nothing to report on an academic Sports Department at the University, old policy, no time to chase it up. It is very unlikely to happen.

***Six week turnaround on feedback***

- Currently looking at the possibility of a 4 Week Turnaround for Assessment Feedback, probably with a trial run before a full implementation of a new policy. Course Reps and students can challenge their departments to provide feedback more quickly.

**7) ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Notices were given for the upcoming Community Assembly.