

# UNIVERSITY OF YORK

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on 30 April 2010 at 2.15 pm in HG17, Heslington Hall

Present: Dr David Efird (Chair), Philosophy  
Dr Pat Ansell, Health Sciences  
Mr John Brown, Social Policy and Social Work  
Dr Anne Duhme-Klair, Chemistry  
Dr David Halliday, Electronics  
Dr Linda Perriton, School of Management  
Dr Jim Watt, English & Centre for 18th Century Studies  
Ms Charlie Leyland, SU representative  
Mr Kieran Aulden, GSA representative

In attendance: Mrs Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar  
Mrs Nadia Fenn, Special Cases Committee  
Ms Rosemary Royds, Manager, Student Admin Services

Apologies for absence were received from Dr Amanda Rees, Sociology, Ms Cecilia Lowe: Project Leader Learning Enhancement, Mrs Rosemary Goerisch, Assistant Registrar, Student Progress: SAS and Mr Philip Simison, Student Progress: SAS

### 09-10/156 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2010 were **approved** subject to a minor amendment (the attendance at the meeting of Mr Kieran Aulden, GSA representative). Apologies were received from YUSU with regard to item 09-10/124 as the proposed paper had not been submitted to this meeting of the Committee as discussed because events arising from the recent Academic Integrity Week had led to a broadening of the area of discussion.

### 09-10/157 Matters arising from the minutes

#### (i) Degree Classification report for 2008/09

The Committee noted that its consideration of the report had been delayed in 2009/10 and apologised to members. It also **noted** that

- there had been a fall of .5% in the average percentage of good degrees awarded but that generally York is in line with its comparators;

- that it had been possible to provide comparator data at postgraduate level this year;
- that it has received more refined subject-level data to allow comparison with York and its comparator groups and this has highlighted subject effects noted in previous reports;
- that future reports might be presented to the Committee only once, providing annual high-level surface monitoring;
- that the next report would come to the November 2010 meeting of the Committee.

The Committee **recommended** that the Chair should work with the Planning Office to prepare an item for the May 2010 meeting of Senate based on the information given in the report. The item would recommend that in future the report should be received by the Committee only once annually, and that a small Working Party should be established to explore the data of the degree outcomes of students across disciplines more thoroughly in order to consider the possible causes of the variation among departments (paras 4.6, 6.3 and 6.5 of the SCA report refer). The Deputy Vice-Chancellor has agreed to oversee a more in-depth analysis of the data on these outcomes which will include: a statistical overview of the data (taking into account, for example, entry tariff, the length of the programme and any undergraduate Masters offerings,), a consideration of comments by external examiners, the method of classification used (given the variation in methods among departments prior to the advent of the new modular scheme), and other contextual factors. The Working Group would report its findings to Senate at the end of the calendar

(ii) 09-10/105(iii)/09-10/140 Classifying joint degrees.

The Committee **received** a proposed template for all combined programmes to use to explain the method used for calculating degree classifications. The Committee **noted** that the student representatives found the explanation of the ratio element confusing and **recommended** that this should be expanded and the wording improved before the circulation of the template to departments.

**(ACTION: Dr Perriton and Ms Leyland)**

#### 09-10/158 **Chair's Oral Report**

The Committee **received** an oral report from the Chair:

- (a) External Examiners' induction briefing session was held on 05 March 2010 with good attendance from both external examiners and departmental representatives. The session was well-received by participants and will be repeated in September 2010 and the Committee **noted** that future developments would include some online training sessions for those external examiners who are unable to attend on-campus briefings.

- (b) A Forum for Chairs of Boards of Examiners was held on 21 April 2010 and involved discussion of e-assessment as well as other items. Over the next few months work will be carried out to develop a profile of the issues that participants would find it helpful to consider. Members of the Committee were invited to contribute to this process, and it was **noted** that Tracy Lightfoot from the Department of Health Sciences would be asked to take part in the next event.

(ACTION: Secretary)

- (b) An external review of the external examining process at York is being undertaken by Ms Rachel Forsyth, a senior lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University, as part of studies towards an MBA. The report arising from the review will be ready in August/September 2010 and considered by the Committee at its meeting in October 2010.
- (d) A series of briefings on the new Modular Scheme assessment regulations have been prepared. The first briefing will take place on 19 May 2010 and will be followed by a session on 26 May 2010.

#### 09-10/159 Oral Report from student representatives

The Committee **received** an oral report from the student representatives:

- (a) The Students Union have been working with the Environment Department to pilot some feedback mechanisms and have also been looking at feedback on group-working assessment criteria. The Committee **decided** to establish a small working group (consisting of the Chair and Secretary, with Cecilia Lowe and Charlie Leyland) to take this issue forward, incorporating some of the work done in the Environment pilot. (ACTION: RG)
- (b) Arising from the travel delays associated with UK airport closure following the eruption of the Icelandic volcano the representatives noted the variation of solutions in departments when dealing with mitigating circumstances. The Committee **noted** that the introduction of an institution-wide policy will address some inconsistencies but that local arrangements would still occur as it is necessary for solutions to be appropriate to the nature of each missed assessment.
- (c) Feedback on examination practices had been received by student representatives recently, in particular a request for the opportunity to undertake mock examinations. The Secretary undertook to send

existing briefing documents written for students to the  
representatives. (ACTION: Secretary)

**09-10/160 HESA non-completion rules**

The Committee **received** a briefing paper from the Academic Registrar and **noted** in particular the requirement to gain approval in advance of extensions or alterations to final module assessment submissions using the mitigating circumstances procedures.

**09-10/161 Non-attendance at University examinations and submission and approval of mitigating circumstances**

The Committee **received** a proposal from the Manager: SAS arising from the requirements of the HESA non-completion guidance in the previous item and **noted** that the proposal was intended to apply to undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes; that it arose from the University's wish to ensure that students have the opportunity to redeem unintended failure while preventing strategic failure which may advantage some students; that the new mitigating circumstances policy and assessment policy would mutually reinforce each other; that departments should be encouraged to balance assessment methods within programmes to reduce the differential outcomes for students arising from the coursework and examination assessment methods. It requested that the paper be amended to make clear the cap at 50 in PGT programmes (see Appendix 1).

The Committee **approved** the proposals that:

- a) In order to encourage greater attendance at examinations students who fail to attend the first attempt of their closed University examinations without valid mitigating circumstances should be given the opportunity for reassessment, but the mark for the reassessment will be capped at 40 (undergraduate) or 50 (postgraduate), and such an option will be available only once during a student's programme of study;
- b) Students should be provided with mechanisms, as outlined in the Mitigating Circumstances Policy currently under consideration, to advise their Boards of Studies or departments that they are unable or unwilling to attend a closed University examination and that as far as possible they submit this advice in advance of the event;
- c) Consideration of mitigating circumstances that will prevent submitting an assessment or sitting an examination at the usual time, should be undertaken by Chair's action by a departmental Mitigating Circumstances Committee (MCC) in advance of the

examination session wherever possible, and approval or refusal given and communicated to the student in writing, either conditionally if all evidence is not immediately available, or unconditionally if it is.

**09-10/162 Requests from campus-based students to take examinations at remote locations**

The Committee **received** a proposal from the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress to deal with situations where students are unable to be present on campus during designated assessment periods because of valid mitigating circumstances. The Committee **noted** that it was not possible to maintain equity where large numbers of students requested to sit examinations in distant locations (except where these are arranged as part of a distance education programme) and **recommended** that requests to take a University open or closed examination at an off-campus location should be approved only if unforeseeable mitigating circumstances occur during a designated assessment period and only if it is practicable to do so. Where approved, all requirements of Section 8.13 of the *Guide to Assessment* must be adhered to. **ACTION:** GtoA to be updated

**09-10/163 Taught postgraduate external examiners' reports 2008/09**

The Committee **received** an analysis of the 2008/09 reports prepared by the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress and **noted** that where examiners provided reports that were considered too brief to be helpful to a programme, they would receive feedback from the Chair of UTC in their acknowledgement letter requesting fuller reports in future. The Committee **recommended** to UTC that where QA issues were signposted in reports that these should be addressed in Academic Programme Review meetings.

**09-10/164 Not penalising international students for language errors in assessment**

The Committee **received** a query from student representatives about the possible introduction of a University-wide policy that would not penalise international students for language errors, based on practice outlined in the Handbook of a department.

The Committee **agreed** that while departments might acknowledge that "some allowances may be made for errors of spelling and grammar in the marking process, the meaning should always be clear", such practice as outlined in the query should not occur unless it is to apply to all students rather than just international students, and not

compromise the learning outcomes of the programme itself. The Committee **recommended** that FELT should be asked to prepare some guidance for all departments on managing issues arising from poor spelling and grammar and how to encourage improvement through feedback provided to students. Awareness of the issues might be the subject of initiatives such as the current work on academic integrity and numeracy.

The Committee also **recommended** that the department in question should be requested to alter the entry in its Handbook for 2010/11 with the guidance provided in the York Management School Handbook provided as an exemplar. (ACTION: Chair/Secretary)

**09-10/165 Thesis Advisory Panel members serving as internal examiners**  
The Committee **received** a request from the Chair to consider whether Section 7(g) of the Code of Practice on Research Degree Programmes required amendment when considering the issue of whether a member of a research student's TAP should be permitted to serve as an internal examiner for the thesis. The Committee **considered** that the internal and external examiner should both approach the thesis from a similar point and did not believe that this would be possible in all cases if the internal examiner was also a member of the TAP and had been involved in the final preparation of the thesis. It also acknowledged that it can be difficult to find an appropriately-qualified internal examiner in areas where the subject of the thesis is particularly specialised. The Committee **recommended** that section 3 "Details of proposed internal examiner" of the appointment form for appointment of examiners for a research degree should be amended to ask if the proposed internal examiner is or has been a member of the Thesis Advisory Panel and, if so, whether they have been involved in the final preparation of the student's thesis. (ACTION: Secretary)

The Committee **requested** that the Chair develop a proposal to clarify what might be expected in identifying the meaning of "final preparation" in Section 7(g) and bring it to the next meeting of the Committee for further consideration. (ACTION: Chair)

**09-10/166 Date of the next meeting**

The Committee **noted** that the next meeting will be on Friday 11 June 2010 at 2.15 pm in Room HG17, Heslington Hall.

