

# UNIVERSITY OF YORK

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 12 June 2009 at 2.15 pm in HG17, Heslington Hall

Present: Dr David Efird (Chair), Philosophy  
Dr Anne Duhme-Klair, Chemistry  
Dr Pat Ansell, BfGS and Health Sciences  
Dr Amanda Rees, Sociology  
Dr Linda Perriton, Management  
Mr John Brown, Social Policy and Social Work  
Daniel Horsfall, GSA representative  
Rachel Hope, GSA representative  
Charlie Leyland, SU representative

In attendance: Ms Rosemary Royds, Student Administrative Services  
Mrs Rosemary Goerisch, Student Progress: SAS  
Mr Philip Simison, Student Progress: SAS  
Ms Wendy Shaw, SCC and Student Services  
Ms Cecilia Lowe, Project Leader Learning Enhancement

### **09/63 Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Prof Colin Runciman, Computer Science.

### **CATEGORY I BUSINESS**

**09/64** The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 1 May 2009 with the following amendments:

1. 09/48 c. Illegible Examination Scripts  
'no provision for screening students for learning disabilities', should be changed to 'no on-line provision for screening students for learning disabilities'.
2. 09/50i/7. Mitigating Circumstances  
'make an informed choice about submitting a claim for mitigating circumstances or not', be changed to 'make an informed choice about taking a first sit or not.

### **09/65 Matters arising from the minutes**

- i. Penalties for late submission of assessments (M08/64,65,85,

09/31,48)

The Committee and the majority of departments approved the proposal that the penalty should be a mark of zero. This proposal was not recommended to Teaching Committee because a number of departments had concerns about what constituted a valid mitigating circumstance for handing work in late. Those concerns can now be allayed by the work being undertaken on the mitigating circumstances regulations but it has become apparent that any penalty must not deter non-submission.

Students may not bother to submit work after the deadline if they are not going to receive a mark for it. A penalty must act as a deterrent to late submission but not be so severe that it deters submission. It must be clear to all what the penalty is and be simple to apply.

The Committee **decided** to **recommend** to Teaching Committee that all work submitted late, without valid mitigating circumstances, has ten marks (equivalent to one degree classification reduction) deducted for each day (or part of each day) that the work is late, up to a total of five days, including weekends and bank holidays e.g. if work is awarded a mark of 57, and the work is up to one day late, the final mark is 47. After five days, the work is marked at zero.

- ii. Rules on Assessment template for student handbooks  
The Chair **reported** that this work was on-going and would be an Annual Priority for the Committee for 2009/10.
- iii E-submission of theses (M09/35)  
The Committee considered amendments to regulation 2.8 in respect of the e-submission of theses and agreed that the detailed requirements for the presentation and binding of theses and dissertations should be removed from the Regulation to a separate document setting out the University's requirements.
- iv UTC Minutes and matters arising
  - a. Use of viva voce in taught programmes  
The Chair **reported** the Teaching Committee has approved the Committee's proposal regarding viva voce examinations for undergraduate students. UTC requested that guidance be given to departments who continue to use viva voce

examinations to determine borderline degree classifications.

**Action:** RG

The Chair **noted** that UTC asked the Committee to give further consideration, in consultation with departments, on the process that should be in place for other types of oral examinations such as presentations and language oral examinations. It was agreed that this would be an annual priority for the Committee for 2009/10.

b. Illegible examination scripts (M09/48, 09/15, 06/72)

The Chair reported that Teaching Committee referred the issue of illegible examination scripts back to SCA for further consideration.

The Committee **decided** to **recommend** the following to Teaching Committee in respect of illegible examination scripts:

- i. If two internal examiners cannot read an examination script they can request that it be transcribed;
- ii. Transcription must be carried out in such a way that students are not able to improve the quality of the answers they have given on the examination script; for this reason it is proposed that the transcription is undertaken by an academic member of staff – the SCA must be sure that this process is undertaken in controlled conditions, is accurate and that the student gains no material advantage.
- iii. As there are no resources available to provide this service, the student must cover the costs involved, which at the proposed level of support would be £30 per hour. This payment must be made before the transcribed script is released for marking.
- iv. Any disputes between the transcriber and the student must be recorded by the transcriber and include the student's signature.
- v. Disputes will be referred to the Chair of the Board of Examiners (or Board of Studies if there is a conflict of interest) for resolution.
- vi. Given that illegible handwriting is not a disability in and of itself, it would be

- inappropriate to provide such students with an amanuensis only for that reason.
- vii. All cases will be reported to the SCA for monitoring, and all students referred to Disability Services for disability testing because illegible handwriting may be a sign of an underlying disability. Should a relevant disability then be confirmed, the fee will be refunded and an amanuensis be provided for future examinations.
  - viii. The SCA recommends that students are given a handwritten formative assessment prior to students sitting a summative closed examination.

**c. Reassessment after compensation, Regulation D22**

Rules of Assessment section D22 states that:

*Reassessment in modules for which compensatable marks have already been achieved is simply an opportunity (not a requirement) for those who have not met the overall progression or award requirement.*

The Committee considered the implementation of the reassessment procedures in the light of the timing of examination processes, the range of possible reassessment choices available to students and the provision of academic guidance.

- a) Examination Boards take place in week 10 of the summer term;
- b) Students should be informed of the Boards' decisions within five working days;
- c) Students who cannot progress after application of the compensation rules may have the opportunity to retake modules with marks in the 30-39 band;

The Committee noted the practical challenges for academic staff in providing appropriate advice for an unpredictable number of students within two weeks, at a particularly pressured time of year, and **agreed** that staff could only outline the options available, but should never advise on what options should be taken. A written record of the discussion must be kept and where possible signed/confirmed by email by the academic and the student

At a further meeting of members of the Committee and the University's Registry staff to consider the assessment procedures under the new modular scheme, it was **decided** that the following be **recommended** to Teaching Committee:

- i. All students who have not met the overall progression or award requirements and who also have marks within the compensatable range, will proceed to resit for all modules with marks less than 40
- ii All students must have access to academic advice about the modules they are scheduled to resit
- iii Where possible, advice about modules that a student is not intending to resit should be provided to the Examinations Office in time to adjust the Resit Timetable.
- iv Where such advice is not received by the Examinations Office before construction of the resit timetable in mid July, SITS will record students as resitting all indicated failed modules;
- vi Students who choose not to attend a resit examination of a module should carry forward the original mark gained for that module.

**d. Reassessment process**

The Committee **decided** to **recommend** to Teaching Committee that the reassessment Examination Board must have informed students of their results by the end of the first week of September.

**e. Early exit awards**

The Committee approved the wording for results lists in regard to early exit awards.

**09/66 Chair's Oral Report**

The Chair reported that:

- a. Amanuensis  
Students who are allowed to have an amanuensis in closed examinations now have 25% extra time. This proposal was approved by the Chair of UTC by Chair's Action and was implemented immediately.
- b. Degree classifications awarded by the Department of Physics  
The Chair **reported** that the scatter plot, which is included in the comprehensive report prepared by Planning on the degree classifications awarded by the University, is considered by Physics to be unreliable. Members **requested** that the Chair discuss the relevance of the charts and diagrams provided for

the report and whether they are still fit for purpose.

*Secretary's note: In October 2003 Senate agreed that the SCA would consider the degree classification statistics forthwith and report to UTC, later changed to Senate. The statistics provided were for monitoring the awarding of different degree classifications in the most recent year, and trends in the award of good degrees over time.*

*SCA minute 12.3.2004:*

*The Committee's task should be to undertake monitoring and broad analysis of data, and analyses should be based on a simple dataset. If deeper analysis of particular issues were required it could be undertaken. The data and analyses is for undergraduates only. A-level entry tariffs should be examine. Degree results of York students against their equivalent cohort from comparator institutions should be analysed, and also between subject areas within York. All analyses are based on the same dataset provided centrally by the University.*

#### **09/67 Annual Priorities**

Member's **reviewed** the Committee's Annual Priorities for 2008/9 and **noted** that all would be completed by the end of this academic year or were in progress.

#### **09/68 Fee increases for 2009/10**

The Committee **received and approved** the proposals to increase External Examiner Fees for 2009/10 and resit examinations fees for 2009/10. Members **agreed** that in future annual increases in fees should be determined by the Student Administrative Services manager.

#### **7. Academic Misconduct Issues**

The Committee **received** proposals regarding academic misconduct

- i. Annual Priority 5: To give consideration to the issue of managing academic misconduct within the context of foundation degrees

Members **agreed** that Section 8.6.2 of the 'Academic Misconduct Policies, Guidelines and Procedures' addresses the application of penalty points for non-classified awards; and this procedure should be extended to foundation degrees.

**Action:** RG to update the Guidelines

- ii. Transferring penalties to another University of York Programme

Members **approved** the proposal that academic misconduct penalties remain attached to the programme of study in which the misconduct occurred and will not be transferred to any future programmes.

Action: RG to update the Guidelines

- iii. The soliciting of help during an open assessment period  
A department recently reported a case of soliciting assistance with an assessment in a discussion forum on the internet during an open assessment period and asked if this constituted an academic misconduct offence. Members noted that this form of discussion was no different from a face-to-face discussion on-campus and so the action was not in itself an offence. It was **decided** that not acknowledging the source of any material obtained on the internet is an offence of plagiarism.
- iv. Plagiarism in formal University examinations  
Recently, departments have queried if it is possible for students to commit plagiarism in closed University examinations. Members agreed that it was possible to commit plagiarism in a closed University examination and that it is clearly stated in Regulation 5.4 and in section 1.1 of the Academic Misconduct guidelines where 'all assessed work' is referred to.
- v. When should a piece of work be investigated for plagiarism?  
Members considered the appropriateness of determining a limit for investigating academic misconduct. It was decided that all academic misconduct should be investigated.  
Action: RG to update the Guidelines
- vi. A review of penalties applied by comparator institutions (M08/09) [Clare Wiggins](#), Project Officer, Learning Enhancement, review and findings of the penalties applied by comparator institutions.  
In a review of Undergraduate External Examiner Reports for 2007/8 in November 2008 members **noted** comments that academic penalties are too lenient and do not act as a deterrent. As there was some support for this in the Committee, it was **decided** that the Project Officer for Learning Enhancement, should be asked to review the penalties applied by comparator institutions and report the findings to the Committee. Members reviewed the findings.

It was evident from the findings that the current University procedure in this regard is at odds with many comparator institutions. For this reason it was **decided** to **recommend** to Teaching Committee that a working party be established to review the current procedures and consider any changes deemed appropriate.

- vii. Should references be counted as part of the word count in an assessment to establish the proportion of material affected by academic misconduct?

Members **noted** that not all departments/disciplines define 'references' in the same way, and so **decided** that what is normally included in the word count for assessment would be included in the word count to determine the amount of material affected by academic misconduct.

**Action:** RG to update the Guidelines

- viii. Personation  
Members decided that personation could not be dealt with by a formal warning and all cases must be fully investigated.

**Action:** RG to update the Guidelines

- vx. Formative work and repeated academic misconduct  
It is currently unclear in the Academic Misconduct Guidelines how repeat cases of academic misconduct in formative work should be dealt with.

Members **approved** proposed changes to Section 4 of the Guidelines for clarification.

**Action:** RG to update the Guidelines

#### **09/69 Modularisation Issues:**

1. Resitting failed assessments in term time  
Members **considered** the appropriateness of enabling students who failed pre-requisite modules to be reassessed during term time prior to commencing further study. It was **decided** to **recommend** to Teaching Committee that students must have studied for the pre-requisite module and undertaken the assessment but they do not have to have to pass the assessment to go on to further study within the stage. The module can be reassessed in the University's reassessment period.

Members further considered giving students with module marks of less than 30, an outright fail, the opportunity to be reassessed during term time should a suitable opportunity to do so arise. It was **decided to recommend** to Teaching Committee that this was inappropriate because:

i. Students with module marks of less than 30 tended to be weaker students who were struggling, and having a reassessment during term time when teaching and learning was still in progress could easily overburden such students causing them to fail and appeal because of an over-burdened workload.

ii. Students' teaching, learning and workloads have been carefully considered in the preparation of new programme structures, and generally there is no room for reassessing a module in term time.

iii. This goes against the principles of having common assessment periods.

## 2. Reassessment

The Committee considered the issue of reassessment and where it should be applied – at the module or component level.

Members **decided to recommend** to Teaching Committee that both options should be available so that departments can decide on the most appropriate way to reassess each module.

Departments must give clear guidance to students on the nature of the reassessment.

## 3. Reassessment and resubmission

Members **decided to recommend** to Teaching Committee that where it would not be possible to produce a new piece of work within 5 weeks, a reworked resubmission of the original assessment would be acceptable.

## 4. Non-submission of first attempt assessments

Members noted that departments are becoming increasingly concerned about students failing to submit first attempt assessments. It was also noted that there is the added complication of the funding body's regulation (HESA) that students must submit their final assessment for the University to receive funding for each student for the year; a resit assessment does not qualify as a final assessment unless

mitigation has been approved.

The Committee **decided** to **recommend** the following to Teaching Committee:

- a) That an addition be made to Regulation 5:2 Regulations on Assessment

*Students on taught programmes must submit all assessed work, relating to their programmes of study at the required location, date and time. Students who do not submit such assessed work at the required location, date and time will not be given a reassessment opportunity. (This sub-paragraph does not include attendance at closed examinations which is covered separately in Regulation 5.3.2)*

- b) Attendance at closed examinations is compulsory, (Regulation 5.3.2) and students are given a mark of zero for the paper. Despite this there are always a number of students who fail to attend an examination for no certified reason. It is **recommended** that the issue of non-attendance at an examination be referred to the Academic Registrar requesting her to consider introducing a disciplinary procedure robust enough to deter non-attendance at a closed examination.

5. Scaling of marks

The Committee noted that a number of departments within the University rescale assessment marks because the raw marks do not adequately reflect student performance. The marks are recalibrated to the University scale (GtoA 3.2.16). The issue here is that rescaling of marks must be actioned prior to the SITS assessment processing being undertaken. The Committee **decided** to **recommend** to Teaching Committee that an addition to 3.2.16 be added for modular programmes:

*The rescaling of marks must be undertaken before the SITS assessment processing takes place and before the end of year meeting of the Board of Examiners.*

6. The treatment of taught postgraduate marks following reassessment in the new modular scheme (M08/27)

At the June 2008 meeting the SCA approved the regulations for treating reassessment marks in all taught programmes in the new modular system. In a recent review of these regulations for taught postgraduate programmes members **noted** that the regulations apply more to undergraduate programmes than they do to taught postgraduate programmes, because no degree classification is awarded.

Members **decided to recommend** to Teaching Committee that students should not gain an advantage by reassessment over students who are not eligible for reassessment nor should students who have undergone reassessment be doubly penalised.

The rules for postgraduate taught programmes are written so that a student can only be awarded a merit or distinction on the first attempt of assessment. To ensure students are not doubly penalised the SCA **recommends** that marks following reassessment should not be capped. (The exception being the Independent Study Module, which if the original mark is in the 40-49 range, minor amendments/ corrections can be made and the resubmission is capped at 50.)

7. Mitigating circumstances – options available

The Committee **considered** a list of possible options available to enable students with valid mitigating circumstances to continue their studies. The Working Party were asked to consider the award of an aegrotat degree for taught postgraduate students. The proposal will be considered at the Committee's October meeting.

**Action:** WS

**09/70 An induction programme for external examiners**

The Committee **considered** Teaching Committee's request to provide an induction for external examiners. Members **decided** that a centrally provided induction would be appropriate and agreed that the format should be as follows:

One induction session will be provided annually. The morning session will be led by the SCA and Examinations Office and during the afternoon external examiners will meet staff from relevant departments and continue a departmental specific induction with them. The morning session will be recorded and made available on the web for those who could not attend.

**09/71 The degree classifications awarded to students on combined programmes of study**

At UTC request the Committee **decided** to review the process for determining the degree classification of students on combined degrees and this will be an annual priority for 2009/10. **Action:** RG

**09/72 Clarification of Section 2.3 (d) in the Guide to Assessment**

The Committee **considered** a proposal to clarify when a third marker sees the reports of the first two markers. It was **agreed** that as the third marker's role is to make a judgment they should have access to the reports before reviewing the work in question. This clarification will be included in the 2009/10 version of the *Guide*.

**Action:** RG to update the Guide

**07/73 Disability Issues**

The Committee **received** proposals regarding support for disabled students. Members **agreed** that section 8.4.3 of the Guide to Assessment should be changed to make it less dyslexia-centred; thus making these arrangements available for students with other relevant disabilities. **Action:** RG to update the Guide

Section 8.4.3 of the Guide to Assessment refers to stickers that students with relevant disabilities can chose to have attached to their examination scripts to remind markers that errors of spelling and/or grammar should not be penalised. This section also gives departments the choice to use the stickers or not. This option has led to inequity and disparity of practice. The Committee **decided** to **recommend** to Teaching Committee that the option not to participate in this practice be removed from this section, and it to be replaced with:

*All departments are expected to comply with this process and it must be applied to students on all taught programmes.*

The Committee also **considered** a request to allow extra time for open assessment of up to 48 hours for students with relevant disabilities. It was noted that such students take longer than their peers to complete each step of the essay writing process: reading and understanding the question, taking notes from books, planning and organising material, finding ways of expressing ideas coherently and sequencing a bibliography. The Disability Office informed that Committee that: in examinations of up to 48 hours duration, the tasks set are deemed appropriate for a non-disabled person to complete within the designated time frame; these tasks will take a dyslexic student

considerably longer and the only current alternative would be for them to work through the night. The Committee **considered** this to be an unreasonable expectation and one that would likely increase levels of stress and anxiety.

The Committee **decided** to **recommend** to Teaching Committee that students with relevant disabilities should not be expected to work more than 8 hours per day and that when they are taking papers designed to be completed in 48 hours should be offered 25% extra time, based on an 8 hour working day; and that stickers altering markers to ignore the student's problems with spelling and/or grammar be attached to these scripts at the student's request.

**09/74 Date of the next meeting**

Members **noted** the date of the next meeting as Friday **9 October** 2009 at 2.15 pm in Room HG17, Heslington Hall.