



Teaching Committee

Standing Committee on Assessment

Minutes of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 9 May 2008 at 2.15 pm in Room H/G17, Heslington Hall.

Present: Dr Chris Fewster (Chair), Mathematics, Professor Colin Runciman, Computer Science, Dr Anne Duhme-Klair, Chemistry, Dr David Efird, Philosophy and BfGS, Dr Simon Eveson, Mathematics, Ms Karen Fritz, Health Sciences

In attendance: Ms Rosemary Royds: SAS, Mrs Rosemary Goerisch, Student Progress: SAS, Ms Sue Hardman, Academic Registrar, Mr Philip Simison, Graduate Schools Office

08/19 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Dr Amanda Rees, Ms Carylán Lobo and Ms Aseel Takshe.

CATEGORY I BUSINESS

08/20 Minutes

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2008.

08/21 Matters arising from the minutes:

1. **07/106 Pilot Study in the Recording of Research Students Oral Examinations (SCA M07/15, 07/90), (BfGS M05/66b, 05/82, 05/83iii), (Senate M05/71, 06/4)**

The Committee **noted** Senate's response. During the Senate discussion it had been claimed that only 50% of oral examinations conducted in the department of Biology during the trial period had been recorded. The Chair reported that this was not reflected in the report that had been submitted to the Committee by the department.

2. **Access to examination papers (M 07/103, 06/106)**

The Committee **received** a proposal from the Chair for a revision of section 12.4 of the *Guide to Assessment*. This currently states that students cannot have access to their answer scripts for unseen papers, the marks of which contribute to the final award. In response to a successful pilot in Biology, the Committee had previously agreed in principle that departments should be

permitted (although not obliged) to offer supervised access to such examination scripts from October 2008. The Chair's proposal, setting out detailed principles to underpin access to scripts, was **approved**. Members also **decided** that students should notify the relevant Chair of Board of Examiners in writing of any errors they identify as a result of accessing their scripts, and that the Chair should respond in writing. **Action point** : Guide 2008/9 to be updated

3.
UTC response to the SCA minutes of the 18 January meeting

The Committee **noted** UTC's response to the guidelines for the conduct of oral examinations in research programmes, namely:

- (a) an amendment to the effect that departments should seek permission from SCA to hold the oral examination more than three months after submission of the thesis; and,
- (b) a request for clarification of the definition of the 'end of the examination' at which audio recording would cease. On the latter point, the Committee **decided** that the audio recording should end when the student leaves the examination room prior to the private discussion of the examiners, and that there would be no audio recording of any subsequent discussion between the student and the examiners. **Action point** : PS

4.
08/03e07/115 Revision of University Regulations (Annual Priority, M07/85, 07/66)

The Chair **reported** that the working party had met and that progress was being made on revising the sections on appeals and academic misconduct.

5.
08/03g Anonymous marking and feedback to students (M07/112a)

The chair **noted** that further guidance on the process of anonymous marking and giving feedback will be submitted to the next meeting.

6.
07/105c QAA Institutional Audit

The Chair **reported** that the University has recently received the report of the QAA Institutional Audit that took place in December 2007. The Committee will review any issues relating to assessment in due course.

7.
08/07 The powers of external examiners to change marks (M07/114)

The Chair **reported** that a full paper will go UTC in due course.

8.08/09 Penalties for failing to meet assessment deadlines

The Committee **approved** the changes made to the proposal to clarify what penalties could be applied and under what circumstances. It was also decided that public holidays as well as weekends should be included in the calculation of penalties. This proposal will now be forwarded to UTC for approval.

08/22 Oral report from the Chair

To **receive** an oral report from the chair:

1. Cancellation of the Committee's March meeting

The Chair **reported** that there had been insufficient business on the agenda in March to warrant calling a meeting of the Committee, and the scheduled meeting had therefore been cancelled.

2. Annual Priorities

The Chair **reported** that it would be necessary to refocus the Committee's priorities on preparatory work for the introduction of the new modular system in 2010. A number of the Committee's Annual Priorities for 2007/8 will therefore be deferred to 2008/9.

3. Confirming Students' Identity in Examinations

The Chair **reported** that he, the Academic Registrar and members of SAS had met with a group of Pro-Vice Chancellors to discuss the possible introduction of biometric identification systems in closed University examinations. The group felt that it was inappropriate to do so at this time. The Deputy Vice Chancellor has requested that a more robust system of checking students' identity in examinations be put in place for October 2008. **Action point** : RG

4. The proportion of third class degrees awarded by science departments UTC had requested that the Chair and the Science Academic Coordinator should meet with representatives from the science departments to discuss the proportion of third class honours degrees awarded in these departments, which appeared to be higher than national trends.

The Chair **reported** that this meeting had taken place and that the discussion had been useful. It had been agreed that more focused data would be sought, addressing comparator institutions and resolving below subject groupings and that once this has been received the group would reconvene. The departmental representatives had agreed to raise the issue with their external examiners this June. **Action point** : CF/RG

5. Report on the relocation of the University's closed examinations for the summer term 2008

The Assistant Registrar: Student Progress **reported** that summer term examinations had been relocated from Central Hall to the Roger Kirk Centre because of building work. The relocation process had been managed smoothly and had gone very well. Although acceptable, the Roger Kirk Centre venue is not an ideal examination venue because the lighting is limited in certain areas; it was also possible that the temperature might rise considerably in hot weather.

The Committee expressed their appreciation for the efforts Lynn Burnell has made to ensure that the relocation of examinations was executed efficiently and with the minimum of disruption to students.

08/23 Academic Appeals and Academic Complaints 2006/7

The Committee **received** the annual report on Academic Appeals and Academic Complaints 2006/7 and noted that no policy issues were raised.

In the course of discussion, the Committee also **noted** that:

- a) the number of undergraduate appeals had increased significantly over recent years, reaching 70 in 2006/7;
- b) however, the proportion of undergraduate students appealing remains low, at 0.88% of the student body, and the number of appeals upheld by Special Cases Committee has remained roughly constant (5 in 2006/7);
- c) a number of cases (23 in 2006/7) were referred back to the Board of Studies, usually resulting in permission to retake a failed assessment;
- d) of the 8 postgraduate appeals received in 2006/7, four were upheld by the Board for Graduate Schools;
- e) that the Code of Practice on Research Degree Programmes had resulted in a tightening of departmental procedures which may be responsible for the low number of appeals involving research students (1 in 2006/7);
- f) only a comparatively small proportion of appeals go on to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (7 in 2006/7), and no complaint to the OIAHE has yet been upheld against the University;
- g) overall, the report indicated that the University has an appropriate, robust and effective system for dealing with appeals.

The Committee was concerned to **note** that 47% of undergraduate appeals arose in the department of Health Sciences. Of these, many concerned students studying for the diploma in Nursing Studies who had failed in their final year. Students on this programme are required to pass every assessment. The Committee requested that these issues, and the approach to academic skill development in the programme, should be discussed with the department. **Action point** : CF/RG

It was also **noted** that many of these particular students do not submit evidence of mitigating circumstances at the appropriate time. The Committee requested further information as to the reason for this.

Secretary's note: The department ensures that all students are made aware of the system for submitting mitigating circumstances including submission deadlines. The majority of students on this programme are mature and tend to view circumstances that can have a negative impact on their ability to study, as something that they can deal with. It is not until they realise they have failed and there are no more opportunities to resit that they submit a claim for mitigating circumstances.

One postgraduate appeal concerned a programme validated by the University and had resulted in recommendations for changes in internal processes in the partner institution. Members of the Committee requested assurances that these changes had been implemented.

Secretary's note: A copy of the report detailing changes made to the programme has been received.

The Committee **recommended** that a summary of the statistical information should be made available on the complaints and appeals website in an effort to inform students and to demonstrate the robustness of the University's systems. **Action point** : SH

Finally, the Committee **decided** that a summary of the statistics; the observations made by the Committee and details of complaints submitted to the OIAHE would be forwarded to Senate. **Action point** : RG/SH

08/24 Psychological Assessment of students with dyslexia

The Committee **received** a recommendation from the Disability Service requesting a change to the criteria for the retesting of students with dyslexia.

Current practice, developed by the SCA in conjunction with Disability Services, requires students requesting special exam arrangements, because of dyslexia/dyspraxia, to submit a diagnostic report based on adult scales. The Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills recommendation for 2007/8 states that if an assessment was conducted by a accredited professional, before the age of 16 years and/or not more than four years old, then only a top up assessment will be necessary. The Committee **decided** to **approve** this and the associated Disability Service recommendations with immediate effect.

08/25 Taught Postgraduate External Examiners' Reports

The Committee **received** a review of the taught postgraduate external Examiners' reports for 2006/7. The report had already been received by UTC. The following issues were raised and will be addressed by UTC:

1. Insufficient feedback to students
2. No exit routes for students who fail their degree
3. The need for language support for international students

The Committee discussed a number of potential policy issues arising from the reports, including:

1. A process for resolving differences between internal marks – the Committee has recently addressed this issue
2. Not using the full mark scale – departments have been made aware of the need to use the full range of marks and this has become less of an issue in the recent years

3. Extending students' anonymity to the Exam Board – the Committee reiterated its commitment to the existing rules on anonymity as set out in the *Guide to Assessment*

The Committee requested further information concerning the comments of some external examiners in History that there had been insufficient external examiners at the Board of Examiners.

Secretary's note: The Department of History has confirmed that all external examiners were invited to the examination board and that all external examiners had provided detailed comments on the students under their purview.

Members were also concerned to **note** that the external examiner for MRes Bioinformatics stated that independent projects had only been marked by external supervisors. The department's assurance that these were second marked by internal examiners has been requested.

Secretary's Note: The programme leader has confirmed that he also marked the project referred to by the external examiner. He also stated that the arrangements for marking external placement reports in this current academic year have been modified, such that external supervisors are no longer required to mark the reports. Instead, marking will be performed by two independent internal markers.

08/26 Retired Staff as PhD examiners

The Committee **received** a proposal from the Chair regarding the use of retired members of academic staff as examiners for PhD candidates. An academic member of staff who has been retired for less than five years meets neither the requirements for an internal examiner nor an external examiner. The Chair's proposal noted, however, that the regulations do not require that the examiners should be classified as either internal or external.

Recognising the valuable contribution and experience of retired members of staff, the Committee **decided to recommend** to UTC the following proposals:

- retired members of academic staff, who have not been reemployed by another institution, should be eligible for appointment as examiners for research degrees;
- if more than 3 years have elapsed since retirement, evidence of continuing research activity or advanced scholarship must be provided as part of the nomination process;
- an examiner in this category should be paid a fee at the same rate as the external examiner;
- the letter of appointment for an examiner in this category would make clear that the nominee will be responsible for ensuring that the examination is conducted in accordance with current University guidelines and regulations.

08/27 Treatment of marks following reassessment

The Committee **received** proposals from the Chair relating to the treatment of marks following

reassessment and the application of academic misconduct penalties under the new modular system for taught programmes. The proposals were **agreed** subject to rewording the third bullet point on the second page, and with the choice of proposal (b') in place of (b).

08/28 Assessment rules governing modules taken outside the home department

The Committee **approved** a proposal from the Chair that the *Guide to Assessment* should include an explicit statement that students taking modules outside their home department should be assessed according to the rules and procedures of the department offering the module, in line with policy stated in the current academic framework.

It was also **noted** that it was the responsibility of the home department to ascertain that marks would be available in good time for their own Board of Examiners meetings, or to put suitable alternative arrangements in place, before approving an elective request.

08/29 Mitigating Circumstances

The Committee **received** notes of a meeting between the Chair and the Secretary of Special Cases Committee. Members were asked to consider suggested principles prior to further development.

In the course of the discussion, the following points were made:

- where possible, the precise nature of the mitigating circumstances should be restricted to a small group within the department;
- if a component of assessment is damaged but there is independent evidence that the corresponding learning outcomes have been achieved, the Board of Examiners should be able to waive the component of assessment, even if this exceeds 15% of the module;
- there was no support for the suggestion that an original "damaged" mark might be used where the re-take was also affected by mitigating circumstances;
- while it was agreed that mitigating circumstances should be handled by 'principal' Boards of Studies and Examiners, the need for communication between relevant Boards in the case of combined programmes was emphasized.

These principles will be developed further and will be presented at a further meeting of the Committee when completed. **Action point** : CF

CATEGORY II BUSINESS

08/30 Policy on transfers from master programmes to MPhil/PhD

Members received a policy on transfers from masters programmes to MPhil/PhD previously agreed by the Board for Graduate Schools.

08/31 Date of the next meeting

The Committee **noted** that the date of the next meeting as Friday 13 June 2008 at 2.15 pm in Room H/G17, Heslington Hall.

Rosemary Goerisch

Assistant Registrar: Student Progress

RAG/[May 2008]