

# UNIVERSITY OF YORK

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 1 May 2009 at 2.15 pm in HG17, Heslington Hall

Present: Dr David Efird (Chair), Philosophy  
Dr Simon Eveson, Mathematics  
Dr Anne Duhme-Klair, Chemistry  
Dr Pat Ansell, BfGS and Health Sciences  
Prof Colin Runciman, Computer Science  
Dr Linda Perriton, Management  
Mr John Brown, Social Policy and Social Work  
Daniel Carr, GSA representative  
Richard Mitchell, GSA representative

In attendance: Ms Rosemary Royds, Student Administrative Services  
Mrs Rosemary Goerisch, Student Progress: SAS

### 09/46 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Dr Amanda Rees, Sociology, Philip Simison, SAS, Rachel Hope GSA, and Charlie Leyland SU

### CATEGORY I BUSINESS

09/47 The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2009 with the following amendment:

Minute 09/29, final paragraph, the Committee **decided** that, while students were informed in advance of an investigatory meeting that alleged academic misconduct was the reason for the meeting, in certain circumstances they should not be given full details of the allegations prior to the meeting as this would hinder an investigation of, for example, collusion. There are other circumstances when students are given full details in advance - for example, a marked up copy of a plagiarised piece of work, which they are then invited to explain to the investigatory committee.

### 09/48 Matters arising from the minutes

a. **Use of viva voce in taught programmes** (M09/26b,09/07,)

The Committee **considered** this issue in response to comments from

external examiners in their annual reports.

The Chair **reported** that departments had been consulted on the use of vivas in undergraduate programmes and the results showed a wide variety of uses and no provision for appeals for students on the grounds of bias. The Chair further noted that this practice was inconsistent with the 'general principles of assessment'.

The Committee **recommended** that:

1. Viva voce examinations can only be used in taught programmes where all students registered for the module have a viva. They will not be used to determine borderline degree classifications including those resulting from mitigating circumstances (GtoA 10.1.3), or for any other purposes.

Where the item of assessment contributes more than 5% of the total mark for the module the following applies:

2. Vivas must be conducted with at least two internal examiners present. External examiners may or may not be present. The final decision on what questions should be asked rests with the internal examiners.
3. The consequence of non-attendance for a viva voce examination in a taught programme is a mark of zero for that element of the assessment for the module.
4. Viva voce examinations must be audio recorded for two reasons:
  - a. The audio-recording will be used by further internal examiners not present at the viva in case the internal examiners present cannot agree a mark for the viva.
  - b. The audio-recording may be used by the student to appeal against inappropriate bias in the viva. The audio-recording will be treated in just the same way as an examination paper and will be destroyed by the department confidentially after one year.

These proposals will be **recommended** to Teaching Committee.

b. **Chair/moderator at research students' oral examinations**

(M09/26g)

The Chair **reported** that the proposal considered at the last meeting that a non-examining chair be present in a research student's oral examination when either examiner was inexperienced, was opposed by the Board for Graduate Schools, and the Committee decided not to pursue this proposal further.

c. **Illegible Examination Scripts** (M09.26h, 09/15, 06/72)

The Chair **reported** that departments had been consulted on the Committee's proposal that if three examiners are unable to read an examination script it would be awarded a mark of zero.

Of the 17 responses received, nine were in favour, four opposed and four were non-committal. The following points were raised by departments:

1. The rule should apply to all handwritten work and not just exam scripts (CLL).
2. If some of the work is legible that work should be marked (Mathematics) Scripts are seldom wholly illegible (Philosophy)
3. Illegibility may be a sign of disability such as dyspraxia (Health Sciences) but it is unclear how would we know if they had such a disability (English)

The Committee **recommended** that: this penalty is extended to all handwritten assessment not just examinations; that any legible elements of a script are marked and that departments refer students with illegible handwriting to Disability Services for testing. After testing, if a student is subsequently found to have a disability that has a negative impact on their handwriting, this will be regarded as a valid mitigating circumstance and a 'sit as if for the first time' will be awarded.

These proposals will be recommended to Teaching Committee.

Student representatives **noted** that there is currently:

- no provision for screening students for learning disabilities, including those that may lead to handwriting problems
- no time pressured compulsory handwritten assessments prior to sitting an examination, particularly given the increased use of computers for assessment
- no central provision to help those unfamiliar with the Roman alphabet on how to ensure their handwriting is legible

The Committee **decided** to refer these issues to Teaching Committee and **recommended** that they be incorporated into the new Study Skills unit.

The student representatives also **requested** that the Committee monitors the incidence of illegible handwriting to ensure no pattern within departments and or modules emerges. Members **decided** that monitoring should be done for three years and the results should be reported to the Committee annually.

d. **Penalties for late submission of assessments** (M09/31, 08/64, 08/85)

The Chair **reported** that departments had been consulted on the Committee's **proposal** that all assessment which contributes to progression and an award of the University will receive a mark of zero if it is submitted after the published deadline.

Of the 18 responses **received**, eight were in favour, three were in partial favour and seven were opposed. Of the seven who opposed the proposal, five did so in part because of the current difficulty of defining a valid mitigating circumstance. The Committee **noted** that there is currently a working party reviewing mitigating circumstances with a view to developing clear rules to govern the impact of mitigating circumstances on progression. Although the majority of departments supported this proposal, the Committee **decided** that this matter should be held in abeyance until the University procedure for dealing with mitigating circumstances has been agreed and departments concerns about what constitutes a mitigating circumstance can be allayed.

The Chair thanked the student representatives for their contribution to this issue.

e. **Amendment to Ordinance 2.3** (M09/06)

At the meeting held on 9 January 2009 members **approved** procedures for the conduct of University business in relation to assessment results and awards in situations where it may not be possible to convene fully-quorate Boards (for example, where a large number of staff become unavailable due to epidemic illness). Teaching Committee and Senate agreed that in exceptional circumstances, where it is not possible to convene a quorate Board of Studies to act in accordance with Ordinance 2.3, the University Senate should be asked by the Registrar and Secretary to approve the establishment of an executive sub-committee of three or more of

the members of the Board of Studies or of the Combined Board (which must include at least one representative of each department involved in offering the combined programme), who will be able to approve the recommendations of the Boards of Examiners and submit them for ratification by Senate.

This change in procedures requires an addition to Ordinance 2. Members approved the following which will become Ordinance 2.4:

*Notwithstanding Ordinance 2.3, in exceptional circumstances where it is not possible to convene a quorate Board of Studies, the University Senate shall be asked by the Registrar and Secretary to approve the establishment of a Board of Studies executive-committee of three or more of the members of the Board of Studies which will have the power to approve the recommendations of the Boards of Examiners and submit them for ratification by Senate. In addition, in exceptional circumstances the University Senate shall be asked by the Registrar and Secretary to allow the membership of a Combined Board Executive Committee, provided for in Ordinance 1.4, to be reduced to not less than 3 members, with at least one member from each Board of Studies.*

This addition to Ordinance 2 will be **recommended** to Senate

f. **Notes of guidance on minor corrections for research degrees**

(M09/34, 09/09)

Members were asked to **note** that the updated version is now on the Graduate Office website.

g. **The role of the external examiner – results lists**

The Committee **received** a proposal that, when signing results lists, external examiners are confirming the process not the results. The proposal was **approved** but excluded the confirming of starred firsts. The secretary of SCC requested that 'normally' be added to this proposal as external examiners' signatures are required for the results of students whose appeals or mitigating circumstances have been considered by SCC. The Committee **approved** the request.

**Action:** RG to update GtoA

h. **UTC Minutes**

Members **considered** the Teaching Committee minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2009. It was noted that the procedures for handling concerns relating to fitness to practise should be hosted alongside

Appeal and Complaints and actioned the SCA to do this. Members decided to **recommend** to Teaching Committee that, as SCA does not own the procedure for appeals and complaints, this procedure might be better placed within the Academic Registrar's remit.

#### 09/49 Oral report from the Chair

1. Briefing for Chairs of Boards of Examiners  
The Chair **reported** that he and members of Student Administrative Services had recently held a successful briefing for chairs and secretaries of Boards of Examiners. He would like to hold an induction for new Chairs in November and if possible have a Chairs forum on a termly basis.
2. The Chair also reported that SIPIG had **approved** the use of SITS for the administration of modularised programmes

#### 09/50 Modularisation Issues:

Members **noted** that the new modular scheme has led to a number of changes to the current rules of assessment; they **considered** and **recommended** the following **proposals**. This will enable the new rules of assessment for the modular scheme to be actioned.

i. **Mitigating Circumstances** (members **requested** that departmental level be changed to Boards of Studies)

##### **Principles**

1. The normal time-scale for completion of the programme should be adhered to as far as possible.
2. Mitigating circumstances should normally be considered before the end of the stage of the programme during which they occur.
3. Approval of recommendations from the Mitigating Circumstances Committee (MCC) should be at Board of Studies level with appeals to Special Cases/Board for Graduate Schools.
4. The usual means of compensating for mitigating circumstances affecting an assessment should be the opportunity to take the assessment again 'as if for the first time' if a significant part of it has been 'damaged'. Members **recommended** that the Working Party identify the range of other options that will be available to MCC's.
5. A 'damaged' assessment is one which is likely to have been affected

by relevant mitigating circumstances for which evidence has been provided.

6. The norm of the opportunity of taking the assessment again 'as if for the first time' should apply at all stages including final year.

7. Where a student re-takes an assessment 'as if for the first time' the new mark will stand. The original mark cannot be used except with the approval of Special Cases Committee/Board for Graduate Schools on a case-by-case basis. Members **recommended** to the Working Party that students should be informed of their original mark to enable them to make an informed choice about submitting a claim for mitigating circumstances or not.

8. Consideration of mitigating circumstances with a view to promotion to a higher class of degree should no longer take place as circumstances will have received consideration throughout the programme. Members **recommended** to the Working Party that in an exceptional situation a case could be made to SCC for consideration.

9. Mitigating circumstances should not be considered at departmental level without completion of the University standard form and provision of satisfactory evidence.

10. Consideration of mitigating circumstances must always take place prior to consideration of the assessment result by the BoE/BoS.

### **Procedures**

a. Mitigating Circumstances must be considered by a 'Mitigating Circumstances Committee' (MCC) which must be a sub-group of the Board of Studies or Joint Board of Studies (BoS).

b. A single subject MCC must consist of five members of academic staff selected by, but not including, the Chair of the Board of Studies in consultation with the Head of Department. The term of office for members should normally be three years. A Joint MCC must consist of four members. The lower number of members for a Joint MCC is in acknowledgement of the fact that the business of most Combined Boards of Studies is conducted through a Combined Board Executive Committee under University Ordinance 1.4 which prescribes a minimum membership of four.

- c. The quorum for meetings is three. The quorum for a Joint MCC must include at least one member from each department.
- d. The Chair of the Board of Studies in consultation with the Head of Department should appoint a fixed Chair MCC from its members.
- e. MCC must be serviced by an administrator and all decisions must be recorded. The administrator for a Joint MCC should be from the same department as the Chair.
- f. Consideration of mitigating circumstances cannot be anonymous since the need for consideration of evidence does not permit this. Consideration of mitigating circumstances should, however, remain confidential and should not normally be disclosed outside of the MCC and recording of decisions.
- g. Students are not permitted to attend the MCC.
- h. Departments must ensure that the MCC decisions are input into SITS at least 72 hours prior to the meeting of the Examination Board.
- i. MCC will report to BoS meeting (and BoS meetings must be held at least termly).
- j. In cases where a formal complaint has been lodged by a student with mitigating circumstances against a member of MCC or there is an evidenced conflict of interests that member should exclude themselves from consideration of the relevant case(s). In all other cases it is expected that the number of members present will act as a corrective for any individual bias towards or against acceptance of circumstances.
- k. The BoS will record their decisions concerning mitigating circumstances on SITS to enable the timetabling of first sit examinations.
- l. Students must complete a University mitigating circumstances form. Mitigating circumstances must not be considered at departmental level without completion of the form and provision of satisfactory evidence. Third-party applications for consideration of mitigating circumstances should not be accepted.
- m. Where a student is offered a re-take opportunity the options available if the re-take is failed must be explained to the student before

the re-take examination takes place. Where a student fails an assessment taken 'as if for the first time' during the third week of August, or where that assessment is itself damaged, leave of absence/suspension of studies may be needed to accommodate any further assessment.

n. Any requests for consideration of mitigating circumstances which fall outside this procedure will require the approval of Special Cases Committee/ Board for Graduate Schools.

### **ii Student Guide M08/65iii**

The Chair **reported** that the Chair of UTC had decided that it would be more appropriate for the SCA to provide a rules of assessment template that can be included in all departmental handbooks.

**Action:** RG

### **iii Reassessment after compensation**

Rule of Assessment D22, states that if a student cannot progress after compensation rules have been applied they can then choose to be reassessed in a/some modules but not necessarily all modules with marks of 30-39.

The Committee **considered** the issue in the light of timing, student choice and guidance. The difficulty of having academic staff provide appropriate advice at a particularly pressured time of year for an as yet unknown number of students was **noted**. It was **agreed** that:

1. Students should be given two weeks from the publication of results to make a decision on what assessments they will resit and then inform the department of their decision.
2. Students with retake opportunities, who fail to inform their departments of the choices they would like to make within the specified two weeks, should be assumed to proceed to resit for outright fails.

This item will be considered further by staff in Student Administrative Services at an additional meeting of members on 13 May 2009.

### **iv Total mark**

Members were asked to **consider** for undergraduate programmes if the total mark for a stage should be 4740, 39.5 x 120 credits, or 4800, 40 x

120 credits. The Committee **recommended** that the total mark for each stage of an undergraduate programme should be 4740 as this is the minimum mark out of 12000; this equates to 39.5% and progression decisions are based on rounded stage-averages.

#### **iv Resitting open assessments**

Members **noted** that in many cases failure will not become apparent until after the results have been processed collectively, compensation applied, and the Exam Board has met. Thus it will not usually be possible to retake any failed assessments until the end of year results are confirmed.

The Committee **recommended** that: students must be given a minimum of five weeks notice of the need or opportunity to resit any assessment and that feedback on the reason for failure and how to redeem that fail must be available.

Students will retake failed closed examinations during the third week of August, the University's designated week for resitting assessment.

The Committee **recommended** that:

those resitting open assessments will submit their work to their department at an agreed time and date also during the third week of August. Departments should determine the appropriate date within this week for the submission of their assessments.

#### **v Continuous/ongoing assessments**

The Committee **noted** that a number of programmes throughout the University rely on continuous and/or ongoing assessment and that it would not be possible or practical to wait until August to retake these assessments. It was agreed that a small group of members would meet to discuss the issues and will report back to the Committee.

**Action:** RG, PA, AD, CR

#### **vi Early exit awards**

Students who fail to progress to the next stage of their programme, after stage one, and who meet the requirements of an exit award after compensation and reassessment rules have been applied, will automatically be awarded a CertHE, DipHE or an ordinary degree, as appropriate. Students who withdraw before the end of their programme may be entitled to an early exit award. The reason for a student's withdrawal will determine the procedure and the Committee **recommended** that:

Board of Examiners results lists will confirm that all those who successfully complete a stage will be eligible for an early exit award should they withdraw before the completion of their programme during the next academic year.

1. Registered students requesting to withdraw  
They will complete the 'Leaver form' and confirm on the form that they wish to take the award they have achieved to date and will confirm the address to which they would like the certificate sending (this will require a slight modification to the current form). This form will be processed by SCC/BfGS representatives who will inform Registry Services to action the withdrawal on SITS and forward the form to Examinations. The relevant Chair of Boards of Studies will be asked to confirm the relevant awards by Chair's Action. The awards will be entered on SITS by Examinations and the certificates sent to the address confirmed by the students.

*It is not acceptable to send an award of the University to an unconfirmed address*

2. Registered students assumed to have withdrawn because of non-attendance  
Departments will inform SCC/BfGS representatives that a student is presumed withdrawn because of non-attendance. The representatives will contact the students giving them three weeks to respond and complete the 'Leavers form'. If students fail to respond within the time period they will be assumed withdrawn and a note recorded on their file that no award will be made until the student has confirmed their address and the Board of Studies has confirmed their award. If they do not voluntarily withdraw in the required time frame their award will be processed as in point 1.
3. Failure to return from leave of absence  
Student Administrative Services will contact the student. If the student fails to respond they will be assumed withdrawn and no award will be made until the student has confirmed their address and the Board of Studies has confirmed the award. If they voluntarily withdraw in the required time frame their award will be processed as in point 2.

4. Withdrawn because of academic misconduct – ‘sending down’  
When departments recommend termination of registration for whatever reason they should also recommend to SCC/BfGS the appropriate exit award. Recommendations made by SCC/BfGS will be actioned by Examinations.
5. Withdrawal because of a disciplinary issue  
Regardless of who conducts the investigation, the Academic Registrar should make a recommendation to the SCA on the appropriate award to be made. The SCA will consider the recommendation and make a decision. That decision will be actioned by Examinations.

#### **vii Externals Examiners role in progression boards**

The Committee **decided** that external examiners would not be required to attend stage 1 Boards of Examiners, though it would be considered good practice for them to do so for a new programme. External examiners should be consulted if a Certificate of Higher Education is to be awarded. It was also **recommended** that an external examiner must be present at a meeting of a Board of Examiners where marks contributing to an award are considered.

#### **viii Resit Boards of Examiners**

Members **recommended** that as progression and award decisions will be made by these Exam Boards an external examiner should be present and that students must be notified of the Board’s decisions within one week of the meeting.

#### **ix Rules for TPG marks after reassessment**

This item will be given further consideration at an `additional meeting of members on 13 May 2009.

#### **x Two versions of Guide to Assessment – Chair to report**

The Chair **reported** that there will be two versions of the Guide to Assessment from October 2009; one for the new modular scheme and the other to support the termination of the current scheme over the next four years.

#### **xi Transferring within a stage**

Members **recommended** that it would be appropriate to allow students the possibility to transfer within a stage. If the transfer does not require registering for new modules the transfer can take place at any time throughout the programme. If the transfer requires registering for new

modules the following will apply:

- Students must have successfully completed all assessments for all modules on which they are registered at the point of transferring to a different programme.
- The current department complete a transfer report commenting on achievement, attendance and effort.
- The receiving department must agree to the transfer and be able to accommodate an additional student. The department will not be obliged to agree to the transfer.
- Modules that have been completed must be relevant to the new programme and award
- There must be sufficient time available within the stage to complete the outstanding modules in the new programme.
- A request to transfer is a request which may be rejected.
- The current system for processing transfers will remain unchanged

#### **09/51 Taught postgraduate external examiners' reports 2007/8**

The Committee **received** the reports from the previous academic year and **considered** any matters arising. Members were pleased to **note** that all external examiners agreed that the University had met the required standards for all taught postgraduate programmes and that no policy changes were required as a result of these reports.

Examiners will be reminded to comment fully on issues in their reports and the issue of feedback will be referred to Cecilia Lowe.

**Action: RG**

#### **09/52 Regulation 2.5 (1)**

The Committee **received** a proposal that in exceptional circumstances only candidates may seek permission to waive the requirement to be physically present at York for the oral examination. Members recommended the following amendment to regulation 2.5(1)

*Every candidate for the degree of PhD shall be required to attend in person an oral examination on the subject of his/her thesis and on matters relevant*

*thereto. In exceptional circumstances, the Standing Committee on Assessment may approve a recommendation from the Board of Studies or Graduate School Board concerned, for the examination to be conducted by teleconferencing or to be dispensed with. Wherever such a recommendation is approved, the Examiners shall include in their reports to the Senate a special note on the circumstances in each individual case.*

This amendment will be recommended to Senate

**09/53 Procedure for dealing with students who fail to provide the requisite forms of identification for a University examination**

The Committee **received** a proposal for dealing with students who fail to provide the requisite forms of identification in a University examination. Members **agreed** that it was unacceptable for students not to provide photographic identification in an examination; they **recommended** that failure to provide photo ID in an examination did not constitute academic misconduct but that it was a breach of University regulations and as such the student should get a mark of zero for that examination paper.

The Committee considered and **agreed** the proposal that from October 2009 that the only acceptable form of photographic identification in an examination will be the student's University Card. This is because it is the only form of identification that links the student to their unique examination number as passports afford students the opportunity to commit academic misconduct in an examination.

**09/54 Date of the next meeting**

Members noted that the date of the next meeting full meeting of the Committee will be Friday 12 June 2009 at 2.15 pm in Room HG17, Heslington Hall and that an extraordinary meeting will be held on 13 May to review the new modular scheme rules of assessment.