STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 1
November 2013 at 2.00 pm in HG17, Heslington Hall

Present:

Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)
Mr. John Bone, Economics
Dr. Dominic Watt, Language and Linguistic Science
Dr. Oliver Craig, Archaeology
Dr. Sandra Pauletto, Theatre Film and Television
Dr. Philip Quinlan, Psychology
Prof Stevi Jackson, CWS
Dan Whitmore, YUSU
Xiaoyin Yang, GSA

In Attendance:

Cecilia Lowe, Project Leader: Learning Enhancement
Zoe Devlin, Executive Assistant to the Academic Registrar
Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator
Dr. Jennifer Wotherspoon, AR: Student Progress
Bernie White, Registry Services

Apologies:

Dr Geoff Cubitt, History
Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar
Jim Irving, Director: Registry Services

The Chair reported that UTC had approved the membership for 2013-14 including the
appointments of Dr. Philip Quinlan and Prof. Stevi Jackson, as well as the continuing
membership of Dr Geoff Cubitt for a further term.

13-14/19 Minutes
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September
2013.

13-14/20 Matters arising from the minutes

i. 13-14/10 Review of the Common Assessment Period 12-13
The Committee considered a more detailed report on the paper queries
raised by students during the Summer Cap in 2012/13. The Committee
expressed concern about the number of queries resulting in a clarification
or correction (suggesting an error or omission in the paper itself). The
Committee further expressed concern about the predominance of queries
in particular departments and considered whether specific guidance on
Quality Assurance in Examination scripts beyond that which is already
published in the Guide to Assessment was necessary. The Committee
reiterated that External Examiners were not to be used to proofread exam
papers. The Committee agreed that in reaction to this report, the Chair would write to departments pointing to the specific examinations where corrections were required and referring them to the existing general guidance and also with specific guidance where appropriate. The Committee further agreed that in future Chairs of Boards of Examiners and HoDs should receive reports of all paper queries related to their examinations for the purposes of quality assurance and performance management.

(Account : SK, Exams Office)

ii. Guidance on Proofreading
The Committee reviewed the proposed guidance on proofreading, and agreed that it was broadly appropriate for any proofreading completed by anyone other than the academic supervisor or module leader. The Committee determined that there should be a slight variation between the guidance for taught and research students in light of the publication of research theses in the University library, but that otherwise, the guidance was appropriate for all levels of study. The Committee therefore agreed that the proposed guidance should be altered for research students to allow for the correction of syntax and grammar, but should leave errors of syntax and grammar to be ‘identified, but not corrected’ in work by taught students.

The Committee approved the guidance and agreed that it should be widely distributed by the ASO, GSA and YUSU.

13-14/21 Chair’s Oral Report
The Chair reported the following developments:

i. 12-13/97 Proposed Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure
The Committee noted that following UTC approval on second viewing, the proposed Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure would now go to Senate for final approval, with proposed implementation for 2014-15.

ii. Grade Point Average
The Higher Education Academy pilot of Grade Point Averages at UKHEIs was going ahead, but York had made the decision not to ask to be included in the pilot exercise. York will volunteer to be included in the wider focus group, and there are 6 Russell Group institutions included in the pilot. The pilot was expected to report at the end of 13/14.

13-14/22 Report from Students
The Graduate Students’ Association reported the following:

i. Some departments were perceived to be more strict than others on academic misconduct, raising more cases from similar Turnitin results. The Project Leader for Learning Enhancement reminded the Committee that a Turnitin score was not necessarily a good indication of the level or seriousness of plagiarism in a piece of work, and that
academic judgement had to play a role in identifying problematic work.

ii. The length of time taken to process appeals caused considerable difficulty especially for international students (because of visa expiry dates); the Committee noted that the University was aware of the problem, but that the sheer volume and complexity of appeals caused delays and appeals could not be prioritised other than in date order. The GSA also requested that more help be provided to support students in preparing appeals, but the Committee noted the inherent conflict in the University providing that kind of support and suggested that the GSA RAW coordinator was the most appropriate person to give additional support to postgraduate students preparing appeals.

iii. Problems with e:Vision meant that records were not always saved. The Committee noted the problems and the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress agreed to investigate the cause of the problem and possible solutions.

(Action: JW)

The Student Union had no issues to report.

13-14/23 Undergraduate Academic Misconduct Statistics
The Committee considered the report and noted that the data was broadly similar to previous years. There continue to be high levels of variation between the levels of reporting in different departments, which the committee agreed was more likely to be the result of the administrative burden of reporting rather than a meaningful difference in the levels of academic dishonesty. The Committee expressed its hope that the proposed policy currently with Senate might reduce the administrative burden and consequently ensure a fairer system.

13-14/24 Undergraduate External Examiners Reports
The Committee considered a summary of all external examiners reports on Undergraduate Programmes for 2012-13 as well as of the main themes which arose from the reports. The Committee noted with interest the themes of how departments resolve ‘substantial’ differences between markers, the utility of BoE meetings in light of modularisation, and the inadequancy of the current mitigating circumstances policy in dealing with ongoing mitigation which was unlikely to be resolved during the students’ studies, but which could not be accommodated by ‘reasonable adjustments’ (as they would be for disabilities). The Committee agreed to add these issues to their priorities for the year where they were not already included. Concern was expressed about missing or inadequate reports.

The Committee asked for a longitudinal view of External Examiner reports to see if there were any long term patterns.

(Action: JW)
13-14/25 Scheduled Review of External Examiner Fees
The Committee approved a 2% rise in External Examiner fees for taught programmes for implementation in 2014-15, subject to budgetary approval at MTP.

13-14/26 Proposed Updating of University Contingency Plans for Assessment and Examination
The Committee considered a proposal for revisions to the University contingency plan for assessment and examination in light of modularisation. Though the Committee expressed some concerns about the complexity and extent of the plan, it accepted that it was needed to ensure continuity of the University’s ability to mark students’ work and award degrees.

The Committee agreed in principle with the proposal, and more specifically with the principles that no award should be revoked after having been awarded under the contingency, and that no award should be made if more than 1/8th of the award is missing. The contingency plan will be updated and brought for approval to the University Contingency Plan Working Party.

(Action : SK)

13-14/27 Date of the next meeting
The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 6 December 2013 at 2.00 pm in Room HG17- The Dawson Room, Heslington Hall.