

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 8 October 2010

Present: Dr David Efird (Chair), Philosophy
Dr David Halliday, Electronics
Dr Jim Watt, English
Dr Adrian Lee, Centre for Life Long Learning
Dr Geoff Cubitt, History
Ben Humphrys, YUSU
Kay Mitchell, GSA

In attendance: Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar
Rosemary Goerisch, Assistant Registrar
Cecilia Lowe, Project Leader, Learning Enhancement

Apologies: Dr Linda Perriton, Management
Dr Victoria Gould, Mathematics

10-11/1 The Chair welcomed new members and thanked continuing members for their service.

10-11/2 Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2010 were **approved**.

CATEGORY I BUSINESS

10-11/3 Matters arising from the previous minutes

i. 09-10/175 Classifying combined degrees (M09-10/105iii/175)
A template for representing how combined degrees are classified was recommended to and approved by Teaching Committee.

ii. 09-10/177 The Code of Practice and the external examiners' proposal form have been updated regarding internal examiners involvement in the final stages of the thesis preparation

iii UTC 28 June 2010 minutes

There were no actions for this Committee. An error regarding the reference to a working party on feedback was reported to ASO.

10-11/4

Chair's Oral Report

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

i. Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback 2010/11

The Chair reported that the 2010/11 version of the Guide had been distributed to key members of staff. He thanked Cecilia Lowe for her efforts in producing the new extended version. Feedback on the new version will be considered at the Committee's April 2011 meeting.

ii. External Examiners' Induction event

The Chair reported that another induction for new external examiners had taken place on 24 September and that the next briefing will be on 23 March 2011.

iii. New Chairs of Boards of Studies Briefing

The Chair reported that a briefing for new Chairs of Boards of Studies on assessment-related issues had taken place on 1 October 2010.

iv. Briefings on the new mitigating circumstances policy were given on 23 September 2010 and 4 October 2010.

v. The Chair asked members to **note** the following forthcoming events:

- Chairs of Boards of Examiners Induction on 27 October 2010
- Induction on policies and procedures regarding academic misconduct on 10 November 2010
- Forum on Changes to the new Guide to Assessment on 10 November 2010
- Chairs of Boards of Examiners Forum on 24 November
- Assessment Policy and Procedure Forum 1 December
 - This event is a new initiative where all who would like to give feedback on the University's policies and procedures on assessment may do so. The rationale is that at the hitherto successful briefings led by David Efird and Rosemary Goerisch, there is not a great deal of time for feedback from those attending on University policy and procedure on assessments. This event will provide that opportunity. It will be led by Ben Humphrys, David Efird, and Rosemary Goerisch. Staff and students, particularly, Chairs of Boards of Examiners and of Studies, associated

administrators, and course representatives, will be invited to attend. The feedback will be considered in future meetings of the Committee and action taken where appropriate. Following the Forum, a 'you said/we did' document will be produced and included in the subsequent set of briefing notes to Departments on SCA actions so that those who attended will be able to see the effect of their feedback.

10-11/5 **Student Representatives' Oral Reports**

The Committee received an oral report from the Committee's Student Representatives.

Ben Humphrys reported assessment-related issues that were raised in the recent NSS survey. Students were dissatisfied with some assessment processes, and they did not always see the relationship between the mark they were awarded for a piece of work and the feedback they were given. Furthermore, some exams did not appear to relate to the material taught on the programme.

Concern was also expressed about the differences in the distribution of degree classifications awarded by Departments and about whether the working party mentioned in Senate minute 09-10/39, concerning the analysis of degree classifications which the Chair presented to Senate on 18 May 2010, was going forward. The Chair will enquire as to the progress of the working party and report back to the next meeting.

Action: DE

10-11/6 **Committee's Terms of Reference**

The Committee **considered** proposed changes to the Committee's Terms of Reference in response to the dissolution of the Board for Graduate Schools and in response to the introduction of the University's Mitigating Circumstances Policy.

The Committee **recommends** to Teaching Committee that:

1. *Membership:* The membership of the Committee should be reduced from eight to seven academic members since seven

academic members is sufficient for the workload of the Committee. The membership of the Committee should not be required to include at least one member of the Special Cases Committee (SCC) or a recent member of SCC for the following reasons. Because SCC is the appeals body for the Committee's decisions on individual student cases, e.g. examination arrangements, having a member serving on both committees may create a conflict of interest.

Furthermore, it is not reasonable to ask a recent member of SCC to be a member of the Committee, since both committees have relatively high workloads for members.

2. *Purpose of the Committee:* The Committee should take responsibility, on behalf of Senate, for approving, reporting and monitoring the results of assessment for higher doctorates, and appoint Internal and External Examiners for the assessment of those doctorates.
3. *Term of Reference 1:* Because policy and procedure on feedback on assessment is closely related to policy and procedure on assessment itself, the Committee's remit to develop, consider, monitor, and review policies and procedures relating to assessment should include a remit to develop, consider, monitor, and review policies and procedures relating to feedback on assessment.
4. *Term of Reference 4:* The Committee should monitor trends of academic misconduct and recommend changes to policy and practice in light of that monitoring activity.
5. *Term of Reference 7:* Reviewing the remuneration for external examiners should be removed from this term of reference as this review is now done by delegated authority by the Manager of Registry Services.
6. *Term of Reference 8:* This term of reference should indicate that with the introduction of the new mitigating circumstances policy the Committee only needs to approve sits-as-if-for-the-first-time for category one students.
7. *Term of Reference 9:* Because Teaching Committee is the committee with primary responsibility for quality assurance, the Committee should report to Teaching Committee the distribution of results for examinations at all levels, including in relation to data on equal opportunities rather than reporting this distribution directly to Senate.
8. *Term of Reference 10:* This term of reference, concerning the approving of transfer of enrolment for postgraduate

students, should be deleted. Rather, the approval of such transfers should be the remit of SCC, which is consistent with its remit for approving the transfers for undergraduate students.

9. *Term of Reference 12*: Developing and monitoring policies and procedures in relation to the University's Mitigating Circumstances Policy should be the remit of the Committee.

10-11/7

Timeline

The Committee **considered** a timeline of routine Committee business scheduled for each meeting throughout the year and **considered** any necessary additions or alterations to the timeline.

Two additions were agreed: firstly, that the April meeting would review the feedback received on the new version of the Guide and, secondly, that the January meeting would review the completed templates received regarding the classification of joint degrees.

10-11/8

Committee Priorities in 2010/11

The Committee **considered** a proposal for its annual priorities for 2010/11. The proposal was agreed and is **recommended** to Teaching Committee.

In regard to the first annual priority concerning the production of guidance on group work, the Committee agreed that the first step in addressing this priority would be to map the policies, procedures, and practices currently employed by Departments on group work, and to determine what issues need consideration. Once this has been done it was agreed that a study on group work, similar to that conducted on the external examining system at York, should be commissioned. Once the report has been received and recommendations considered, the guidance can be developed.

Action: DE/RG

10-11/9

Academic Misconduct Annual Report 2009/10

The Committee **received** the annual report on cases of academic misconduct and **considered** whether there need to be any changes to the current policies and procedures.

The Committee **noted** that last year produced the lowest

number of recorded cases of academic misconduct by undergraduate students since recording began. Of these cases, plagiarism accounted for 72.5% of them, and there were more cases of plagiarism than the previous year.

The Committee also **noted** that the number of reported cases of plagiarism by postgraduate taught students had not declined, either. In light of this result and in light of the fact that given the shortness of postgraduate taught programmes it is essential that postgraduate taught students are aware of issues concerning academic integrity as soon as possible in their programme, the Committee reviewed the policy on when the Academic Integrity Tutorial should be completed by postgraduate taught students.

Various proposals were explored in order to encourage completion of the Tutorial as soon as possible. It was noted that the above guidance encouraged Departments to require students to undertake the tutorial in the Autumn Term prior to submission of their first assessment. However, it was also noted that if there is to be a requirement that students complete the Tutorial in their first term, then there had to be an associated penalty for failing to meet this requirement.

Given the shortness of postgraduate taught programmes and the consequent importance of completing the Tutorial successfully early in the programme, the Committee **recommends** to Teaching Committee that all taught postgraduate students be required to complete successfully the Academic Integrity Tutorial during their first term at the University, and, if they do not complete successfully the Tutorial by Week 9 of the Autumn Term, they will receive a warning stating that, if they have not completed it successfully by the end of Week 10, they will be fined. The Committee recommends that the fine be £25. It was thought that fining a student was a more proportionate penalty than ending the student's enrolment and provided sufficient encouragement for students to complete successfully the Tutorial by the end of the Autumn Term.

The Committee also **noted** the disproportionate number of reported cases of academic misconduct committed by Chinese

students. Consequently, the Committee **recommends** to Teaching Committee that guidance in Mandarin about academic misconduct, compiled by this Committee, be provided for Chinese students prior to their arrival at York.

10-11/10 Review of undergraduate External Examiners' Reports for 2009/10

The Committee **received** a review of undergraduate external examiners' reports for 2009/10 and **considered** the need to modify any assessment policies and/or procedures in light of these reports.

The Committee **noted** that several external examiners expressed concern about the full range of marks not being used in the first-class and failure categories. The Committee requested that the Project Leader, Learning Enhancement Team compile guidance to Departments on how to use the full range of marks in the first-class and failure categories and to submit this guidance to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration.

Action: CL

The Committee **noted** that several external examiners expressed concern about the opaqueness of the criteria used for calculating the degree classifications for students on combined degrees.

The Committee **requested** that all Chairs of Combined Executive Committees be asked to complete the Classifying Combined Degrees Template and return it for consideration at the Committee's January meeting.

Action: RG

Secretary's Note; this has been done and the deadline for submission is 1 December 2010.

The Committee **noted** that several external examiners expressed concern about the process for dealing with the results of students in the borderline category. The Committee **recommends** to Teaching Committee that academic members of Teaching Committee review the degree classification procedures for borderline students for the departments for which they are responsible to determine whether these procedures conform to the University's principles of assessment, namely, equity, openness, clarity, and consistency (Guide to Assessment §1.1).

The Committee **noted** that an external examiner recommended that the University should review its policy on not penalising

students with dyslexia for errors in spelling and grammar. While this policy has been the subject of review over the last two academic years in consultation with Departments and Disability Services, the Committee **recommends** that Disability Services be asked to confirm that the policy remains appropriate.

The Committee **noted** that one external examiner expressed concern about the remuneration for external examining. The Committee **recommends** that Registry Services review the remuneration given to external examiners.

The Committee **noted** that one external examiner expressed concern that they cannot increase the number of first-class degrees by insisting that marks be changed. The Committee **recommends** no action based on this concern.

The Committee **noted** that one external examiner expressed concern about the University's policy on late submission, remarking that a deduction of 10% of the available marks as a penalty for submitting a day or part-day, including an hour, after the deadline. Geoff Cubitt commented on the case that prompted the concern: a student submitted an assessment which was triple-weighted toward degree classification an hour late, and so, given the policy on late submission, this hour's lateness had what seemed to be a disproportionate effect on the degree classification. The Committee **noted** that the disproportionate effect was due, at least in part, to the triple weighting of the assessment. The Committee also **noted** that, otherwise, the policy has been well received and shown to work well across the University. In light of the fact that the concern arises in combination with a special feature of a particular assessment and the fact that the policy has worked well otherwise, the Committee **recommends** that the late submission policy not be changed, but where it has unintended effects in combination with a special feature of an assessment, as in triple weighting of an assessment, the Department associated with the assessment can apply to the Committee for an exception to the policy, as has been done by Departments in the past.

10-11/11 **Review of external examining**

Teaching Committee requested that the Committee review the University's system of external examining. To assist with this

process, a report was commissioned, and the Committee **received** and **considered** the report's recommendations.

REPORT RECOMMENDATION 1

That no action to be taken with respect to the role of external examiners in programme content, balance and structure until the UUK/GuildHE review is complete.

The Committee endorses this recommendation.

REPORT RECOMMENDATION 2

That the regular meetings of Chairs of Boards of Examiners considers the ways in which external examiners could work with internal examiners to get a fuller picture of the assessment process in the department and to make a more meaningful contribution to assessment policy and practice..

The Committee endorses this recommendation.

REPORT RECOMMENDATION 3

That an explanation of the role of internal and external examiners in the consideration of borderline classification decisions is included in departmental assessment policies.

The Committee endorses this recommendation.

REPORT RECOMMENDATION 4

That Departments review the procedures of their Boards of Examiners to ensure that they are fully prepared for modularisation and that external examiners are able to make contributions which fully reflect their expertise and role.

The Committee endorses this recommendation. In order to ensure that Departments are able to achieve this recommendation, the Committee **recommends** that the Chair and Secretary of the SCA will offer further opportunities for briefings on the assessment rules for the new modular scheme during which there will be a discussion on the role of external examiners in Boards of Examiners.

REPORT RECOMMENDATION 5

That any association of external examiners with members of the department is declared to the Board of Examiners' meeting.

The Committee **recommends** that external examiners be required to report to this Committee any association with members of the Department as they arise subsequent to their appointment. The Committee recommends this revision to the recommendation of the report on the basis that if external examiners wait until the Board of Examiners to reveal subsequent associations, it may be too late at that point to ensure properly independent scrutiny of the procedures of the Board of Examiners, which is one of the key functions of the external examiner, but if these associations are made known to the Committee as they arise, the Committee can judge whether the external examiner can still perform this key function given the new association.

REPORT RECOMMENDATION 6

That the SCA develops more specific criteria for the selection and appointment of external examiners and links this directly to any revised role descriptors.

The Committee reviewed the criteria for the selection and appointment of external examiners in the 2010/11 Guide to Assessment. The Committee agreed that the present criteria were sufficiently specific given the considerable guidance already present and given the range and number of external examiners required by the University. Consequently, the Committee **recommends** that the Committee not be asked to develop more specific criteria for the selection and appointment of external examiners.

REPORT RECOMMENDATION 7

That external examiners be asked to provide details of their assessment and examination experience at the relevant level on their nomination forms.

The Committee endorses this recommendation.

REPORT RECOMMENDATION 8

That the content of the induction session is provided in printed or online format to all external examiners.

The Committee endorses this recommendation.

REPORT RECOMMENDATION 9

That Chairs of Boards of Examiners are encouraged to attend the induction sessions on an occasional basis.

The Committee endorses this recommendation.

REPORT RECOMMENDATION 10

That no action to be taken with respect to the format of the external examiners' report until the UUK/GuildHE review is complete.

The Committee endorses this recommendation.

10-11/12 Clarifying the Reassessment Regulations D17-D25 and E1-E5

The Committee considered a request to clarify the wording of these assessment regulations. One of the pilot departments for the new modular undergraduate scheme highlighted an omission in the undergraduate reassessment rules, namely, the maximum number of credits which can be failed while still having the opportunity for reassessment for progression. The proposed additions to these regulations were agreed and will be **recommended** to Teaching Committee. Following a proposal from Adrian Lee, the Committee will also **recommend** to Teaching Committee that 'per stage' be deleted from D19 because University Certificates in Lifelong Learning do not have stages.

CATEGORY II BUSINESS

10-11/13 Security of Examination Papers

The Committee **noted** the response from the Computing Service's Systems Security Advisor to the request about whether revision is necessary to the Examinations Office instructions to departments about secure handling of examination papers in 2010/11.

- 10-11/14** **Copies of documentation**
Members **received** copies of the latest editions of:
University's Ordinances and Regulations
Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback
- 10-11/15** **Date of the next meeting**
Members **noted** that the next meeting will be on Friday **19**
November 2010 at 2.15 pm in Room HG17, Heslington Hall.

Reserved Business

***10-11/16** The Committee **approved** the reserved minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2009 (previously circulated).

***10-11/17 Matters arising:**

There were no matters arising

CATEGORY II

***10-11/18 Special examination arrangements**

The Committee **received** recommendations for special examination arrangements approved on behalf of the Committee since its last meeting.

***10-11/19 Appointment of external examiners**

The Committee **received** notification of appointment of external examiners approved on behalf of the Committee since its last meeting.

***10-11/20 Examiners reports and result lists**

The Committee **received** notification of recommendations for the award of degrees approved on behalf of the Committee since its last meeting.