

# THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

## SCA Briefing Sheet

Fifth edition April 2009

Throughout each academic year the Standing Committee on Assessment (SCA) considers and provides guidance on a number of issues raised by staff, other University committees and external bodies. The Committee is responsible for the content of the University's *Guide to Assessment Policies and Practices* and for the *Academic Misconduct Policies, Guidelines and Procedures*. These documents are updated annually, but much of the Committee's work during the year is of immediate benefit to departments. The regular Briefing Sheets provide departments with useful clarification and guidelines for many of the issues they deal with each day.

### Academic Misconduct

#### Fitness to Practice and Academic Misconduct

The Committee approved a proposal regarding students who commit academic misconduct on a programme that has fitness to practice issues. These would currently be submitted to two separate hearings. From October 2009 both the academic misconduct and fitness to practice issues are to be considered at one hearing.

It was also decided that it was not appropriate to issue a formal warning to students on programmes with fitness to practice issues. In such cases a full investigation must be held.

*The Academic Misconduct Policies, Guidelines and Procedures for 2009 will be updated accordingly.*

#### Calculation and application of penalties for academic misconduct

The Committee approved the proposal that, where the best of a number of marks are to be used to determine a final mark, marks for modules that have attracted a penalty must be included in the calculation.

#### Detection Software

Some students had asked whether, if their work showed no plagiarism after having been run through plagiarism detection software that meant their work was plagiarism free.

The Committee agreed that no detection software is infallible and that the results could not guarantee that plagiarism had not been committed. A student could not therefore rely on a negative result to claim that no academic misconduct had been committed.

*The Academic Misconduct Policies, Guidelines and Procedures for 2009 will be updated accordingly*

#### Maximum number of people who can accompany a student to an investigatory hearing 6.4.3

Paragraph ii of section 6.4.3 is unclear about the maximum number of people who can accompany a student to a meeting of the investigating sub-committee. The SCA agreed that the maximum number was two people.

The 2009/10 version of the Guide to Assessment will make this clearer.

#### Misconduct Cases Involving Large Numbers of Internal Examiners

The SCA approved a proposal for capping the number of internal examiners on a sub-committee investigating academic misconduct to 3. Currently there is no upper limit on the size of the investigating sub-committee. A recent case could have led to a committee of seven people, five of whom were internal examiners, and this was considered excessive.

Where the number of internal examiners exceeds three, those not attending the investigatory meeting should submit written evidence and be available when necessary to clarify any points.

The SCA decided that students should not have details of allegations prior to the hearing as this would hinder an investigation of collusion.

*The Academic Misconduct Policies, Guidelines and Procedures for 2009 will be updated accordingly*

### Examinations for research degrees

#### Teleconferencing of Research Students Oral Examinations

If in exceptional circumstances an external examiner is unable to attend a viva at York it may be possible to arrange for the teleconferencing of a research student's oral examination. Requests for teleconferencing must be made to the SCA.

#### The definition of staff in regards to examining a research thesis

Regulation 2.1 (i) states that only academics and administrators should be considered as staff in regard to registering and being examined for higher degrees. The SCA decided that that this regulation was no longer fit for purpose and that it must be extended to all staff who had been employed at the University within five years prior to the date of submission of their soft bound thesis. Any requests for exemptions to this requirement should be made to the SCA.

#### Notes of guidance on minor corrections for research degrees

Guidance on minor corrections for research degrees can now be found on the GSO website, Examinations section.

## Electronic submission

The SCA agreed that research students who register for a research degree programme from October 2009 should submit a softbound copy of their thesis together with a copy on a portable data storage unit, for each examiner. When the examination has been successfully completed students will submit a softbound copy of the final version of the thesis for deposit in the library, and upload a copy (normally in pdf format) to the library repository.

## Items relating to closed examinations

### Students going to the toilet

To enable invigilators to fully fulfil their role the SCA decided that students would not normally be allowed to go to the toilet during the first 30 minutes of an examination and that this change will be implemented from January 2009. The impact of this change will be monitored.

*The Exams Office is pleased to report that overall requests to visit the toilet in an exam fell during week one of the spring term by two thirds – that is over 200 visits.*

## External Examining

### External Examiners at Board of Examiners

Chairs of Boards of Examiners must now seek permission from the SCA to hold a Board of Examiners meeting if no external examiners are able to attend.

### External Examiners – not changing marks

After consulting with departments the SCA requested that UTC approve the proposal that from October 2009 external examiners for taught programmes should not be permitted to alter marks produced by the internal examiners. UTC approved the proposal and agreed that externals could recommend alteration of marks to the Board of Examiners, which could then be accepted or not. Externals would be asked to monitor the process of adjusting marks or any remarking of scripts, and to draw attention to assessments where the run of marks appears out of line but would not take a direct part in any remarking.

This proposal requires Boards of Examiners to develop internal moderation procedures to replace work that may currently be undertaken by External Examiners.

### The Role of External Examiners – results lists

The SCA approved a proposal that, from October 2009, when signing results lists; external examiners are confirming the process not the results. This proposal excludes the confirming of starred firsts. A decision on the future of this

award is still awaited.

### The Role of External Examiners - Commenting on draft examination papers

The SCA agreed that internal examiners should review comments made by external examiners in respect of draft examination papers but are not obliged to act on those comments. Any comments deemed inappropriate will be discussed with the Chair of Board of Examiners before being filed for reference.

## Miscellaneous items

### Inquorate Boards of Studies

UTC and Senate approved the proposal that, in exceptional circumstances where it is not possible for a Board of Studies to be quorate, the University Senate should be asked by the Registrar and Secretary to establish an executive sub-committee of three or more 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 approve the recommendations of the Board of Examiners. These results will then be submitted to Senate for ratification.

### Approving the results of modules taken for credit

There are a number of modules that can be taken for free-standing credit, offered by departments and centres within the University. Currently, there is no central ratification or record of these results and this must be rectified. The University's Ordinances and Regulations make no reference to such results. Ordinance 6 of the University's Ordinances and Regulations 2008/9 refers only to the examination process for degrees, diplomas and certificates. Ordinance 7 refers to 'other academic distinction' but in the context of a qualification.

The SCA agreed that from October 2009 these module results will be ratified by the appropriate Board of Examiners and the results list will be signed by the Chair of the Board and the appropriate External Examiner. The list(s) will then be forwarded to the University's Examinations Officer who, using devolved authority from the Standing Committee on Assessment will: approve the results and enter them on SITS; will ensure that the relevant SITS record is closed; and an authorised academic transcript is issued that summarises and validates the study completed by each student. The transcripts will be distributed by the department concerned.