

# SCA Briefing Sheet

First edition March 2007

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

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. This Briefing Sheet is the first of a series of regular briefings that we hope will provide departments with useful clarification and guidelines for many of the issues they deal with each day.

## From Briefing Sheet to Guide?

The Examinations Office in Student Administrative Services will issue Briefing Sheets regularly to relevant academic and administrative staff in departments so that new information on significant decisions is delivered immediately. When the University *Guides* are updated, the information in the Briefing Sheets will be incorporated. Copies of the Briefing Sheets are available on the web at <http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/eto/exams/briefingsheets>.

## Items from the November 2006 meeting

### Dictionaries in examinations

In November the Committee discussed the dramatic rise in the number of students caught using their bilingual dictionaries to cheat in exams during 2005/06. The Committee surveyed other institutions and sought advice from the Director of CELT; on this basis, it decided that the advantages to overseas students of translation dictionaries were limited and outweighed by the need to prevent cheating. UTC has approved the SCA's recommendation to withdraw permission for students to use individual dictionaries in examinations from October 2007. Please ensure that your students are notified of this change by the end of the Summer Term.

In place of individual translation dictionaries, standard English language dictionaries will be

provided by the Exams Office at each exam location for any student to consult upon request.

## Reading Time in Examinations

Some examinations include a period of reading or preparation time during which students are not permitted to write in their scripts. This practice has proved difficult for invigilators to manage, created opportunities for cheating and was disruptive to students – both to those with the additional time and those without. It was agreed that the practice should be discontinued and that if additional time was needed to allow students to read complex papers, that time should be included in the length of the exam. This will take effect from October 2007.

## Invigilator Training

The Annual Report on Invigilation highlighted the need for invigilators to be trained. It is important that invigilators know and apply the University's policies and procedures for this role and without training many invigilators are finding this difficult.

The SCA and UTC have agreed that all new invigilators must attend a training session before being able to invigilate an exam. Experienced invigilators will be required to attend a briefing session every three years to update them.

The session will be brief and will include the recent changes made to the policies and procedures relating to the invigilating of exams. New policies are being introduced all the time for all sorts of reasons – efficiencies, changes to policy and regulations but mainly to reduce the opportunities to cheat. It is important that the University's invigilators give all York students the same fair and equitable experience in each exam session. This can only be achieved if invigilators are informed and enabled to apply the University's rules and regulations.

It is hoped that it will soon be possible to appoint at least one professional senior invigilator, which will reduce the workload for academic staff and provide consistency for students.

Queries relating to any of the issues in this Briefing Sheet should be addressed to Rosemary Goerisch (ext 4040) [rag501@york.ac.uk](mailto:rag501@york.ac.uk), Assistant Registrar Student Progress.

## Items from the January 2007 meeting

### Confirming the identity of veiled students in examinations

Section 8.9 of the *Guide to Assessment* requires the identity of each student taking an examination be established and confirmed. This presents obvious difficulties in the case of veiled students. The Exams Office, in consultation with other HEI's and Student Welfare Services, has prepared a procedure for dealing with this issue sensitively, in which the student's identity will be verified by a senior female member of the Exams Office staff in a private room. This will now be included in the *Students' Guide to University Closed Examinations*, which helps students know what to expect and how to behave in an exam.

To be able to apply this procedure sensitively the Exams Office need to be prepared. This can only happen if departmental administrators have informed us prior to the day of the exam that a veiled student's identity will need to be checked. We really appreciate your assistance with this issue.

### Identifying Dyslexic and Dyspraxic students' examination scripts

Section 8.4.3 of the *Guide to Assessment* is the current procedure for the management of exam scripts for dyslexic and dyspraxic students and unfortunately it has proved to be impractical to implement as well as too labour intensive and unworkable.

The Committee has approved a more efficient and effective procedure. The 2007/08 version of the Guide will be updated but in the interim the essence of the new procedure is as follows: students permitted to have special exam arrangements because they have been formally assessed as dyslexic will have the opportunity to have their scripts identified to alert markers to their needs. The Exams Office will produce a sticker template so that everyone uses the same version, and if the student has given their permission, the department will attach the sticker to the script. The new procedure will commence immediately. The Exams Office will contact departmental administrators with more details. Let us know how it works for your department.

## Postgraduate Examination Boards

A small number of Graduate School Boards have been holding Board of Examiners meetings at the mid-point of taught postgraduate programmes, rather than at the end. However, it is important that Boards should convene at the end of the programme, to take an overview of the performance of candidates, assure the quality of the process and deal with special circumstances.

The SCA has agreed the following to apply from 2007/8 at the latest:

- a) every programme should convene a final Board of Examiners meeting to take formal decisions on awards to be made;
- b) the final meeting must be attended by at least one External Examiner, as it is otherwise inquorate (see *Guide* 7.1.3). In particular, it is not appropriate for external examiners to attend a progression board but not a final meeting of the Board of Examiners;
- c) section 7.5.2 of the 2007/8 Guide to Assessment will be amended to indicate at which points in the administration of the programme the external examiner's involvement is required.

## Pilot Study for Recording Vivas

In response to the QAA's code of practice on monitoring viva voce examinations for research degree programmes, Senate has approved a pilot study for the recording of research students' vivas. Four departments have agreed to take part in the pilot and the SCA have now approved the policy and procedures for the study. The equipment has been ordered and the pilot should commence shortly. Health Sciences have been recording for several months and report that all is going well, and they are very happy with the system. We would like to thank them for their input into the drafting of the procedures.

## A New Exam Venue

The ever-increasing demand for additional exam space means that we can no longer accommodate all exams in the usual venues, especially during the first week of the Spring Term. From 2007/08 some exams will be held in Alcuin A/TB/056/057. Please check exam timetable drafts and schedules carefully, and remind your students that they may lose up to 15 minutes exam time getting from Central Hall to Alcuin if they misread the venue details.

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