

SCA Briefing Sheet

Second edition September 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 second 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.

Copies of the Briefing Sheets are available at <http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/eto/exams/briefingsheets>.

Items from the May 2007 meeting

Electronic devices in examinations

Although students are advised not to bring electronic devices to exams, including mobile phones, they continue to do so. Some items are programmable and can be used to commit academic misconduct. The SCA has decided that, in future, failure to comply with the instructions regarding mobile phones or other electronic devices capable of storing data will, in itself, be regarded as academic misconduct.

Dealing with other items brought into an exam

Some students will need to bring certain non-exam items with them to an examination, e.g., keys, purse/wallet, glasses case. These items are not permitted on exam desks but need to be stored securely during the exam. The Exams Office is currently trialling the use of plastic bags to store these items under the student's chair for the exam duration. Tampering with the bag during the exam is considered an academic offence.

The trial is going well. There have not been any problems and students feel their personal effects are safe and secure. Results of the trial will go to the SCA in October.

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

Academic misconduct by research students

The Chair of the SCA now advises on academic misconduct cases relating to research students. Previously this was done by the deputy chair of the Board for Graduate Schools. Cases should be reported in the first instance to the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress, rag501@york.ac.uk.

The SCA acknowledges that it is not always possible for the Head of Department to Chair the investigating committee. The SCA will approve a suitable deputy should the need arise.

A defined point of module registration

HESA have changed their reporting requirements for the University from 2007. Student numbers must now be returned at the level of modules and not programmes of study; this has potential funding implications for the institution.

To be sure of receiving funding for a student, that student must have attempted **all** assessment components of **each** module for which they are registered. Missing module results may result in the University not receiving funding for that student for the entire reporting year. While there is some leeway, which can accommodate student transfers and academic failure, it is important that an accurate record of student module registrations is kept. For this reason it has been agreed by SCA to introduce defined points in term at which module registrations are finalised.

Having a defined point of module registration will have a number of other advantages in the future, including the production of accurate transcripts, student access to transcript data at any point in their studies through e:Vision, and the management of assessment and progression processes within the student records system.

SCA and UTC have agreed the following, to apply from October 2007:

1. Undergraduate and postgraduate students' module choices for the Autumn and Spring terms must be established and entered on their SITS record by the end of Week 4 of the relevant term. For modules taken in the Summer term, the choices must be established and entered on the SITS record by the end of Week 3

- of that term to accommodate HESA reporting deadlines.
2. After these points, any modules that have been placed on the record but which a student no longer intends to follow must be deleted from the profile so that incomplete modules do not skew completion rates.
 3. Where deliberate over-registration is permitted (i.e. more than 180/360/480 credits over the course of the programme) the retention on the student's record of modules that do not count towards the credit requirements of the award will require consultation with the Standing Committee on Assessment/University Teaching Committee.
 4. Where departments are unable to comply with these requirements in 2007, for example where conflicting information has already been distributed to students, they should liaise with the Student Systems Manager Del Gee (ext 4655, email dj3@york.ac.uk) to ensure accurate reporting.

External Examiners – sharing good practice

During its annual review of External Examiners Annual Reports the SCA noted that the postgraduate external examiner for Bioinformatics reported receiving 'an excellent induction'. We are grateful to the course leader for supplying the following description of the induction process:

The course leader meets with the new external examiner for a day prior to attending their first meeting of the Board of Examiners. The following are reviewed thoroughly together: course structure and aims; assessment processes; placement procedures; review of Board of Examiners meetings; meetings with relevant staff. A Course guide, assessment handbook and marking sheets are provided.

Items from the June 2007 meeting

Academic Misconduct Procedures

A number of significant changes to the Academic Misconduct procedures have been proposed and approved by UTC. The new procedures will be circulated at the beginning of the next academic year, and a separate edition of the SCA Briefing Sheet will set out the main changes.

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

Examination Issues:

1. Stamping of students examination scripts after a toilet break

In May 2006 the Committee was alerted to rumours that students were using toilet breaks as an opportunity to cheat during exams. A number of measures were introduced in response. However, it has now been decided that one of these – stamping the student's script after each toilet visit – has not served a useful purpose, and will be discontinued. Other procedures related to visiting the toilet will remain: students will still sign out of the exam room and will be accompanied to the toilet area by an invigilator who will assign a particular cubicle as appropriate.

2. A Fire Alarm Policy

The University has not previously had a policy for what should occur if an examination hall has to be evacuated during an examination. Given the impossibility of ensuring that students do not communicate during the evacuation it has been decided that the examination should not be resumed under these circumstances.

If the alarm is sounded during an examination the University's evacuation procedures will be applied. Once it is possible to re-enter the building the invigilators will do so, and will collect in the exam scripts and papers. When this process is completed satisfactorily, the students will be allowed in to collect their personal possessions. The Exams Office will report the incident to the Chairs of the relevant Boards of Study who will each decide the most appropriate way to proceed. Options could include:

- a) accepting the examination as valid, and allowing the results to stand
- b) declaring the examination void and setting another
- c) setting some additional and/or alternative assessment
- d) assessing the candidates on the basis of the work completed prior to the incident

3. Establishing identity in an exam

The SCA has decided that if a person is found to be impersonating a student in an examination and their identity is unknown they will automatically be reported to the police. This will normally be done by the Academic Registrar, or the Registrar and Secretary, or, if the incident occurs out of normal working hours, by an appropriate deputy.