Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on
Friday 6 February 2015 at 2.00 pm in HG17, Heslington Hall

Present:  
Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)  
Dr. Philip Quinlan, Psychology  
Dr. Geoff Cubitt, History  
Mr. John Bone, Economics  
Dr. Dominic Watt, Language and Linguistic Science  
Dr. Sandra Pauletto, Theatre Film and Television  
Prof. Stevi Jackson, Women’s Studies  
Jelena Horvatic, GSA  
George Offer, YUSU

In Attendance:  
Dr. Jennifer Wotherspoon, Ass. Registrar: Student Progress  
Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator  
Pete Quinn, Director: Student Support Services  
Gillian Wright, Assessment Manager  
Cecilia Lowe, Head of Learning Enhancement  
Dr Zoe Devlin, Executive Asst to the Academic Registrar

Apologies:  
Dr. Oliver Craig, Archaeology  
Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar  
Jim Irving, Director: Registry Services

14-15/48 Minutes  
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2014.

14-15/49 Matters arising from the minutes

i. 14-15/26 Proposal of alternate conversion table for Mathematics students studying abroad in the USA  
The Chair and Secretary had met with colleagues from the Centre for Global Programmes to discuss the principles of grade conversions, and agreed that differing conversion tables for different institutions within the USA were acceptable. It was noted that arrangements for students on joint programmes had not been included in the Maths Proposal. Any change is on hold until the
ii. 14-15/7 Annual Priorities – Oral Reports

The Committee representatives for each priority area reported the following developments:

- **E-Assignment (report from Steve King):**
  Work continues within the VLE department. A single feedback hub will be developed which will ease the burden on supervisors, but due to cost and timescale it may be some time before this is implemented.

- **Review of Mitigating Circumstances Policy (Pete Quinn):**
  A meeting has taken place at which data gathered from all but two departments was discussed. Letters from the Open Door team and Unity Health are still to be considered.

- **Collaborative Learning and Assessment (Cecilia Lowe & Sandra Paletto):**
  Guides produced by UK and overseas institutions had been reviewed and it was felt much of that work could be adapted in preference to starting afresh. The Head of Learning Enhancement displayed a draft pamphlet produced for students. The challenge has been to define and balance the student-facing resources and staff requirements. It was proposed that a package for staff, made up where possible of links to existing resources, in order to allow departments to select the most appropriate options for their circumstances. It was noted that if an intern were required to work on the project, this would need to be raised with Academic Registry.

- **Roll out of the new Academic Misconduct Policy (Jen Wotherspoon):**
  To date this year there have been 38 cases of which six are now closed. It had been anticipated that StAMP members would have to deal with one or two cases each year whereas already Education has fourteen and Economics eleven; no department outside Social Sciences has more than one ongoing case. Volume aside, the policy is working well with students happy to submit cases in writing and very few requesting an interview. Concerns had been raised regarding anonymity, with a suggestion that a new candidate number could be generated once a case is closed. It was also suggested that a flow chart on a cover sheet would enable cases to be tracked more easily.

It was proposed that Social Sciences departments should be asked to allocate an additional StAMP member

(ACTION: JW)

Concerns were raised over the standard of language and whether it was sufficiently high to allow overseas students to avoid plagiarism, and whether there may be too long a delay before the standard of written language is assessed. It was acknowledged that language
support has improved but that there is scope for further help. It was recommended that John Robinson should be approached to ask the Social Sciences departments running programmes with a history of plagiarism to consider carefully the use of probationary modules for 2015/6 onwards.

(ACTION: SK)

- Reviewing Departmental Written Statements of Assessment: (Philip Quinlan and Gillian Wright):
  It was proposed that in order to reduce the amount of duplication and improve clarity within documentation, the Written Statements of Assessment should be discontinued in their current form. Any department-specific information not contained within the Guide to Assessment should be incorporated into programme-level documentation such as programme specifications and/or student handbooks.

14-15/50 Chair’s Oral Report
The Chair reported the following developments:

i. USS Industrial Action
The threatened USS industrial action is no longer scheduled to take place.

ii. International Foundation
This has been renamed the International Pathway Programmes. Work will be needed to agree mark scales for foundation programmes. Progression requirements will form part of both the contractual arrangement with students and marketing information.

iii. Common Assessment Period
The January CAP reached an overall capacity of 96% with daytime volumes above that figure. The Committee were advised that John Robinson is in the process of sending a memo to departments informing that neither the proposal to move to semesters nor for an eleven-week term are to be taken forward. There are solutions available but they are not ideal, for example corralling students with exam clashes. Concerns were raised over the pressures that clashes and over-examining in general causes not just amongst students but also within the Open Door team and Student Support.

There were no issues with invigilation and the exam timetable was distributed earlier than usual, but it was noted that paper setters were not always available to answer queries which arose during exams, particularly those which took place outside normal working hours. The Secretary will highlight the timing of the exam session when the full report on exam errors is circulated.

(ACTION: JW)
iv. APR summary report
A summary of APR reports had been received by UTC on 5th February. A number of points of relevance to SCA had been raised.

a. The Committee has been asked to look at assessment rules in other institutions, particularly in the STEM disciplines, to consider options and to recommend a policy response. The particular concern is disciplines where evidence suggests that good students may nevertheless fail badly in certain areas, and the impact on failure and reassessment credit limits. The Chair is to contact the London Mathematical Society Educational Committee, for informal advice to complement the more formal information gathering.

(ACTION: JW, SK)

b. Suggestions had been made for improvements to the exam boards reports; these are already being developed by the Assessment Manager.

c. SCA and/or Exam boards were asked to follow up exam timetable issues with departments, noting the constraints imposed by a Spring term CAP.

d. The Spring term CAP would be considered as part of the TESTA+ pilot.

e. Certain issues with the Mitigating Circumstances Policy need to be followed up with departments.

f. Issues with the grade conversion tables for study abroad would need to be considered by SCA, the Centre for Global Programmes and the departments concerned.

14-15/51 Report from Students
The Students’ Union reported some lack of understanding amongst students regarding the fact that reassessment marks are not used in the final award mark. More emphasis will be placed during Welcome Week on differences between A-level marking and university-level marking. The Secretary will produce a webpage for the Exams area of the website to explain what will happen to reassessment marks.

(ACTION: JW)

The Students’ Union reiterated the concerns raised as a result of the congested examination timetable, in particular the stressful effects of multiple exams on the same day and the inability to speak to academics and supervisors in the period immediately preceding the CAP due to timing of the Christmas break and start of term. It was acknowledged that Mitigating Circumstances panels were unable to convene due to timescales which exacerbated some of the issues. The Chair agreed to raise the concerns with the Academic Registrar.

(ACTION: SK)
The Graduate Students’ Association reported that the Masters’ network, Café Masters, is seeing a shift in focus from welfare to academic issues. It was suggested that the network incorporate a feedback mechanism to departments in order to ensure that appropriate concerns were raised.

The GSA has been approached by PGWTs who feel unsupported when teaching students with disabilities. The Association felt more in-depth workshops and support would be beneficial. It was noted that some training and online resources are available, and that it is the responsibility of departments to train postgraduates working for them in how to deal with disabilities, but that at present, students were not feeling sufficiently supported by the current resources. The GSA planned to continue to lobby for additional training in this area.

14-15/52 Co-option of Professor Tom Stoneham
The Committee recommended that a proposal should be put to UTC for the co-option of Professor Tom Stoneham onto SCA for the remainder of 2014/5. This was in anticipation of the development of the role of the York Graduate Research School in the assessment of Research Students.

(ACTION: JW)

14-15/53 Summary of PGT Academic Misconduct Cases from 2013/14
The Committee noted no divergence from the previous trends. It was acknowledged that the current report is limited but improvements are expected next year. It was suggested that the ratio of male: female students in the total student population could be included on the report in future. The Secretary reported that female students currently comprise 55% of the total student population. It was also suggested that future reports might concentrate on proportions rather than absolute numbers.

(ACTION: JW)

14-15/54 Review the Terms of Reference in light of the formation of the York Graduate Research School
The Committee agreed to suggest that the items highlighted in paper SCA.14-15.25, along with the reference to “all students” in point 10, should be transferred to the YGRS Terms of Reference, pending Prof Stoneham’s agreement, when the SCA’s Terms of Reference are revised at the end of the year. It was noted that some changes may affect the University’s Ordinances and Regulations. Any transferred business previously carried out by the Committee on behalf of Senate will require a change as YGRS will need formal authority to act on behalf of Senate. It was agreed that a formal link between the Committee and the YGRS board would be beneficial, with a designated member of the Committee acting as liaison.
14-15/55 Conversion of Study Abroad Marks
The Committee considered a proposal that the top end of the marks conversion scales for Study Abroad should be revised in light of both the encouragement to mark across the whole scale and the anomaly whereby any mark between 85 and 100 is converted to a single mark, often 80%. It was suggested that where the host institution could provide appropriate evidence, a higher mark could be awarded. Reservations were expressed that this might lead to disparity between students of equal ability receiving different levels of evidence, or none at all. Concerns were also raised about the potential impact on the timing of processing such students through progression if the process for gathering evidence caused delay to the final mark. It was acknowledged that the number of students currently affected would be small but likely to grow given the University’s stated strategic aims. It was agreed that the option of awarding a higher mark on the provision of appropriate evidence would be acceptable, with the onus on the student to collect such evidence and with further input from the Centre for Global Programmes required to provide greater clarity.

(ACTION: SK)

14-15/56 Date of the next meeting
The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 17 April 2015 at 2.00 pm in Room HG17- The Dawson Room, Heslington Hall.

*14-15/61 Double blind marking
It was reported that only one component within an entire Psychology programme was blind double marked, and it was queried whether this was acceptable or if a higher proportion of the assessments within a programme should receive this apparent ‘gold standard’ of marking. It was agreed that, while blind double marking has its merits as a method of sharing understanding, it is neither particularly common nor necessary. The fundamental principle is that methods of marking are appropriate to the assessment, with robust evidence that they are appropriate.
[PMN: Though raised under Reserved Business, there is no reason why this issue should not have been considered under Open Business. So a copy of this minute is appended there.]