STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 4 May 2018 at 2.00pm in HG17, Heslington Hall.

Attendance and apologies for absence:

Present:  
Dr Steve King  Computer Science (Chair)  
Dr Louise Jones  Biology  
Dr Patrick Gallimore  York Law School  
Dr Francesco Bravo  Economics  
Professor Helen Smith  English  
Dr John Stringer  Music  
Julian Porch  YUSU  
Dr Danijela Trenkic  Education  
Anita Savage Grainge  Health Sciences

In attendance:  
Valerie Cotter  Dep Academic Registrar/Dir Student Service  
Cecilia Lowe  Head of Learning Enhancement (Minutes)  
Professor Mike Bentley  Chair of Special Cases Committee  
Robert Simpson  Special Cases Manager  
Claire Shanks  Disability Adviser  
Gillian Wright  Assessment Manager

Apologies:  
Dr Keith Allen  Philosophy  
Charlotte Chamberlain  GSA  
Dr Jen Wotherspoon  Assistant Registrar: Student Progress  
Stephen Gow (Secretary)  Academic Integrity Coordinator

Visitors:  
James Hare  Incoming YUSU Academic Officer  
Laila Fish  Head of Disability / Open Door

17-18/73  Welcome

The Chair welcomed James Hare and Laila Fish to the meeting.

17-18/74  Minutes of previous meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 2 March 2018 with one correction to the attendance list - Dr Anita Savage Grainge is a member of the Health Sciences department, not SPSW.

17-18/75  Matters arising from the minutes of 2 March 2018:

● 16-17/95: Review of Exceptional Circumstances Policy – due to disruption this year as a result of industrial action, this report will be postponed to SCA business for 2018 - 19. It was noted that YUSU, GSA and SCC will need to provide input to this report.

[ACTION: SK; JW; SG]
• 17-18/9: Proposal for extra time allowance in 72 hour examinations – this item was postponed to the 2017 – 18 July SCA meeting

[ACTION: CS]

• 17-18/10: Update on Assessments and Retention Project action points:
  a. proposal to SCA for making available student module results across all years and degree classifications at Board of Examiners meetings – ongoing

[ACTION: SK/ LJ/JW]

b. University-wide guidance on sending samples of assessments to External Examiners - ongoing

[ACTION: SK/ SG]

• 17-18/25: Discussion paper for SCA: response to QAA report on commissioning
Stephen Gow to draft a report for July SCA

[ACTION: SG]

• 17-18/50: PGT Academic Misconduct - In 2018 / 19, Stephen Gow to lead on investigating how academic misconduct cases are being considered by StAMPS and to outline a process for feeding back outcomes of academic misconduct cases to the reporting staff.

[ACTION: SG]

• 17-18/52c: Assessment issues raised by APRs: awarding marks as incentives for formative work – a poll of CoBoEs needs to be sent by the Chair to get a clear response from departments on this matter

[ACTION: SK]

• 17-18/52d: Assessment issues raised by APRs: University’s position on marking and moderation for external examiners – see 17-18/10 b

• 17-18/52g: Part-time students - completion of taught modules prior to beginning substantial work on ISM – this to be followed up by the Chair

[ACTION: SK]

• 17-18/53: Clarifying the role of GTAs with respect to assessment – coordination with ASO/AQ to draft guidance for inclusion in the Guide to Assessment

[ACTION: CL]

• 17-18/64: Review of the impact of New Compensation rules on Finalists 2016 / 17 – this item is not closed. Further work is being undertaken and an update will come to the committee in 2017-18 July meeting

[ACTION: JW]
17-18/66: Proposal for staggered penalties for the late submission of electronic assignments – following issues raised regarding including implications / costings of the proposal prior to submission to UTC, Chair to follow-up with UTC secretary 

[ACTION: SK]

17-18/76 Chair’s Oral Report

a. New Chair for SCA: The Chair updated the committee on actions related to recruiting a new Chair for the committee (current Chair taking up the role of Assistant Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students in the Faculty of the Sciences, from October). The post has been advertised and expressions of interest invited. SK is happy to have informal chats with anyone who is interested in knowing more about the role.

b. Industrial action and the University’s response: The industrial action has been suspended but could restart if negotiations are unsuccessful. The University now has procedures in place to address how such action affects assessments and awarding degrees but appeals may still be an issue. The Chair reported that a discussion paper is being sent to Senate concerning the options for waiving credit. At present, in the event of problems affecting final year assessments, the University provides provisional degrees until such time that the assessments can be completed. The new proposal to Senate lays out options for waiving a percentage of credit, thus allowing timely graduation. This is in line with practice in two other research-intensive universities. Concern was expressed by committee members that the proposal to Senate had not first gone through SCA and UTC (due to time pressure during the industrial action period) and therefore Senate would not be able to take into consideration the views of SCA or UTC members on the proposals.

c. Resignation of external examiners: The Chair reported that, as part of the industrial action, a number of external examiners had resigned. With departmental agreement, externals who had resigned have been asked if they would like to resume their appointment – 17 have been re-appointed / 3 have not.

17-18/77 Report from Students

YUSU: The YUSU representative noted that advice had been provided to address student concerns during the industrial action. YUSU is expecting a high number of appeals / complaints during the assessment/results period so YUSU is meeting course reps to discuss how to triage issues which may arise.

James Hare, the incoming YUSU academic officer, introduced himself to the committee.
GSA: In response to an issue previously raised by the GSA rep., the Chair reported that an assessment bottleneck (three major submissions and an exam in the same week) in an MSc Psychology programme had been raised and was being addressed.

17-18/78 Proposal on External Examiner fee rates

Jane Iddon (Head of Academic Quality team / ASO) joined the meeting and presented a process proposal designed to clarify how taught programme (UG and PGT) External Examiners are paid. The current system relies on complex calculations of exact student numbers in multiple, individual modules. In line with the sector, the proposed system – see SCA. 17-18/41 – would utilise a more consistent, coherent and efficient system of calculations. This would be introduced from June 1st for all new external examiners via an updated letter.

The Chair clarified that reviewing External Examiner pay used to be part of SCA annual business but was removed as this was seen as primarily a budget matter rather than an assessment matter. JI clarified that ASO was looking for SCA approval of the methodology used to calculate the payments rather than the budget arrangements. The committee agreed that it would be helpful, in future, for ASO to provide SCA with an annual Category II report / paper on external examiners pay.

[ACTION: SG to add to SCA annual agenda]

The committee queried the proposed cut-off points for differences in payment and how these had been arrived at:
- modelling has been undertaken by Operations Manager to check the impact of changes;
- there will be checks in place to monitor changes and check for any imbalances;
- past examiners will follow the contract agreed when they were first employed.

The committee considered the scope of factors which could be taken into account when making a payment calculation for externals (number of modules; range of assessment types; range of criteria used). The problem with taking such factors into account is that the process is very devolved and therefore it is not known how different departments, or different programmes within departments, operate therefore modelling for these factors is not possible. The move is to simplify and clarify in order to ensure fairness and consistency. It was noted that payment arrangements for external examination for such programmes as PGCE programmes where examiners make school visits should be considered carefully.

The committee accepted the proposal, and recommended that the Academic Quality team undertake further work with departments.

17-18/79 Annual Report – UG and PGT degree outcomes – sector analysis

The Committee received a report from the Business Intelligence Unit (BIU) comparing the university’s annual undergraduate degree classifications to other UK institutions. The relevance of specific factors (overseas domicile; male gender; low socio-economic
classification) to three categories of student outcome (a) withdrawn / failed / accepted lower exit award; b) completed degree with low outcome; c) completed degree with good outcome) had been assessed in the previously-considered deep/DEAP analysis, which showed significant gaps at York between norms and particular cohorts. The BIU proposes that academic departments should look more closely at degree completion / non-completion data (available via the Management Information (MI) Gateway) and consider the prevalence of key variables for student success. A possible way to do this would be to include reference to the MI Gateway data in APR reports, and this would be recommended to UTC. [SK & JI (ASO)]

The Chair noted that, in terms of national grade inflation, York is ‘bucking the trend’, as we are (close to) maintaining a stable standard. It was noted that the new national Office for Students is very interested in universities showing that they have stable standards. However, there is also concern in terms of the perceived effect of lower/stable degree outcomes on league tables, when the percentage of ‘good’ degrees is steadily rising at some competitor institutions.

The committee was interested in knowing whether there was a significant ‘gap’ in outcome for overseas students and recommended that data relating to overseas student performance be forwarded to the ‘Together York’ project group to inform development of appropriate support. [ACTION: CL]

17-18/80 Proposal for standard sticker scheme for certified disabilities

This paper was prompted by the Assessment and Retention project. The project raised the issue of the inconsistent use of stickers (related to marking spelling /grammar) for disabled students across the university and proposed the introduction of a more standardised procedure. The Disability Office proposed – via the paper – that no change to practice is required.

The committee discussed the range of practice related to ‘stickers’ across the university and the degree to which the students had had input to the proposal. The committee recommended that the student body should be consulted on this issue before a final decision is reached on whether any change is needed. [ACTION: LF]

The committee also requested better information in the Guide to Assessment concerning what ‘stickers’ are for and how they should be used appropriately. [ACTION: CL]

17-18/81 Annual Report – Undergraduate Academic Misconduct

The committee considered the data for Undergraduate Academic Misconduct cases for 2016 / 2017.

The most notable difference from previous reports was the number of cases relating to the International Pathway College (IPC). The Chair (as CBoS for the IPC) reassured the
committee that the IPC is addressing this matter by focussing more time and energy on making rules clear to students. In 2017-8, there has also been a clarification of the rules concerning probationary modules which has greatly improved the process for ‘repeat offenders’. The result is that the IPC is now reporting far fewer cases and fewer repeat offenders.

The committee also raised the issue of revisiting how the Academic Misconduct Policy and procedure is applied to disabled students. The Disability Office rep and Special Cases Committee rep agreed to work on this area

[**ACTION: VC / JW / CS / MB**]

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**17-18/82 Annual Report – PG External Examiners Report summary**

The Committee considered the points collated from the PG External Examiners reports:

a) The operation of Boards of Examiners: this should be addressed at departmental level

b) Availability of data for External examiners: a paper is due for the next SCA meeting.  

[**ACTION: SK**]

c) Lack of consistency in the application of standards: [**ACTION: ASO/LE requested to provide more support / guidance to departments**]

d) Inconsistent feedback: [**ACTION: ASO / LE requested to provide support to departments**]

e) Unclear procedures for marking and moderation: [**Action: Chair to send a letter to departments to encourage the clear communication or marking and moderation procedures**]

f) Improvement needed in Assessment criteria: [**ACTION: ASO/LE requested to provide more support / guidance to departments**]

g) Concerns re: marking decisions at grade boundaries: [**ACTION: Chair to obtain further information, either from the EE reports or from CBoEs**]

h) PGT Distinctions: have been previously reconsidered: no change

i) Feedback: both good practice and and a number of issues of concern were noted by EEs; this area would be discussed with CoEs in July. [**ACTION: SK/SG**]

j) Assessment tasks: departments will be engaged with more work in this area (range and appropriateness) as a result of Pedagogy Enhancement Plans i.e. aligning assessment tasks to the achievement of PLOs
k) English language concerns: the new ASO structure may help to alleviate language issues with more focussed service. Student Services is also looking at the provision of assistive technology for WP and disability students.

17-18/83 Proposals for changes to the Guide to Assessment
The Committee reviewed the number of items to be changed to date. The Chair is keen that any confirmed changes are communicated to departments early in the summer break, ideally in July.

CATEGORY II
None

17-18/84 Date of the next meeting
The next meeting will be on Friday 6 July 2018 at 2pm in room H/G17, Heslington Hall.