Minutes of the meeting of Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 28th October 2016 at 2.00pm in HG17, Heslington Hall.

Attendance and apologies for absence:

Present: Dr Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)
Dr Philip Quinlan, Psychology
Dr Keith Allen, Philosophy
Dr Patrick Gallimore, York Law School
Dr John Stringer, Music
Ms Tamaki Laycock, YUSU
Ms Rasha Ibrahim, GSA

In Attendance: Mr Jim Irving, Director: Registry Services
Dr Zoe Devlin, Acting Assistant Registrar: Student Progress
Mr Stephen Gow, Academic Integrity Coordinator (Secretary)
Ms Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Manager
Ms Gillian Wright, Assessment Manager
Ms Cecilia Lowe, Head of Learning Enhancement
Ms Claire Shanks, Disability Support Advisor
Professor Mike Bentley, Chair: Special Cases Committee
Mr Dan Cashdan, Business Analyst (for SCA. 16-17/10)

Apologies: Dr Jennifer Wotherspoon, Assistant Registrar: Student Progress
Ms. Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar
Professor Tom Stoneham, Dean of York Graduate Research School
Dr Louise Jones, Biology
Dr Helen Smith, English
Dr Francesco Bravo, Economics

16-17/15 Welcome
The Chair welcomed Dr John Stringer (Music Dept) and Ms Claire Shanks (Disability Support Advisor in Student Support Services) to their first meeting of SCA.

16-17/16 Minutes of previous meeting
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 23 September 2016, noting minor corrections to the attendance list and to Ms Wright’s job title.
16-17/17 Matters arising from the minutes of 23 September 2016

i. 15-16/78 Impact of fieldwork on progression policy for Research Students
The Chair reported that the progression section in the Policy on Research Degrees had been revised to allow students to carry out progression meetings by Video call software (Skype / Facetime / Google Hangouts).

ii. 15-16/83 Response to PGT External Examiner reports
An online repository for Committee papers will be in place by the next committee meeting.

 iii. Any other business: 15-16/67 Annual report on Degree Outcomes
The shallow analysis of degree outcomes report is an agenda item for the October meeting (16-17/23). The Chair had discussed the lack of deep analysis of degree outcomes with the PVC T, L & S, and, although important to both UTC and SCA, it remained on BIU’s agenda, but there were other items with higher priority.

iv. 16-17/6 Terms of reference
The Chair reported that UTC had approved the Terms of Reference, Membership and Areas of Activity at its meeting on 6th October 2016, with just one suggestion, that SCA should consider involving a member of the Disability Support team since a number of activities were related to this area. It was therefore proposed that Ms Claire Shanks should be invited to be ‘in attendance’, and the Chair would make this recommendation to UTC.

 [Action SK]

 SCA website had not yet been updated, to reflect the most recent Terms of Reference and Membership.

v. 16-17/7 Annual Cycle of Business – related to 15-16/86 Concerns regarding UTC’s deferral of the changes to the Policy on Mitigating Circumstances
The Chair confirmed that a review of the new Exceptional Circumstances policy will be undertaken early in 2017-18. This will involve a number of University committees (SCA, SCC, UTC & Senate) in consultation and/or reporting

16-17/18 Oral Report from the Chair
The Committee received an oral update from the Chair, in which he reported that a number of process review projects, led by the Operations Managers and reporting to University Executive Board, were related to the business of the committee. These projects concern:

- Professional / administrative support for assessment and exams
- Student retention
The Chair will remain in contact with the Operation Managers and update the Committee on these projects as necessary.

[Action: SK]

16-17/19 Report from Students
The Graduate Students’ Association reported the successful completion of the Course Representative elections with the appointment of 85 Course Reps.

The Students’ Union reported the completion of the Course Representative elections. A problem with a new website resulted in a number of students being unable to run for election. This resulted in some departments lacking representation. The website has been fixed and, despite the problems, the Students’ Union has more course representatives than previous years.

16-17/20 Report – CAP exam errors
The Committee considered three papers as part of this item: the first, a report written by the PVC T, L & S for UEB specifying the nature and scope of the specific CAP exam errors detailed in the student press; the second, a paper tabulating the Summer Term 2016 CAP Exam Errors; and the third, a paper tabulating the Resit period Exam Errors. During the course of a full discussion, the following points were noted:

- Future tabulations should be more accurately titled - ‘Issues reported during exams’ – as several reported incidents do not relate to exam paper errors. In addition, it would be helpful for the committee to have a summary of the issues (by department, by type, etc), rather than just the raw logs from invigilators.

  [ACTION: ZD]

- The Chair noted that though there are processes in place to avoid errors, an occasional error may slip through, particularly in number/formula-based questions. However, there were an unacceptable number of avoidable errors in this period (33 in the summer term CAP and 10 in the August CAP). In addition, there were too many occasions where paper setters or a suitable proxy could not be contacted (7 in summer term, and 2 in August).

- Examinations taking place outside core working hours may cause problems for staff with child care arrangements or other commitments. However, it was agreed that the examination timetable is made available far enough in advance for staff to make alternative arrangements for this.

- Staff are increasingly relying on their academic calendars, so it would be helpful if exams could be noted on the setters’ timetables.
In two cases, apparent errors were corrected, but later it was realised that the original had been correct. The Committee agreed those answering queries should be sufficiently aware to avoid this occurring.

The Committee agreed the Chair should send a memo to all Chairs of Boards of Examiners reiterating the need for:

a) robust procedures for checking the accuracy of exam papers;

b) paper setters (and any proxies) to be aware of the exam schedule as early as possible and to note when the exam they have set is scheduled to occur;

c) paper setters (and any proxies) to be available for consultation during the complete period of the exam, and to have any necessary documentation to hand.

The Committee also agreed the Chair should send specific memos to Heads of Department detailing the cases where paper setters could not be contacted during the 2016 Summer Term CAP period and Resit Period. The Chair agreed to discuss with the PVC T, L & S the strength of the message to be sent out to departments. He also undertook to discuss with Timetabling whether it was feasible to include exams in staff timetables.

[Action: SK]

16-17/21 Annual Report – Undergraduate Academic Misconduct

The Acting Assistant Registrar provided an overview of the report highlighting key issues for the committee’s attention. The Committee noted:

- the slight increase in misconduct cases in 15/16; however this was considered likely to be the impact of the implementation of the new misconduct policy which was expected to lead to increased reporting.
- the significant increase in administrative workload in Registry for dealing with misconduct cases, particularly coordinating various StAMP members.

Two specific issues were raised:

i. the seeming reluctance of StAMPs to punish second cases of misconduct in accordance with the Academic Misconduct Policy (Second offences involving the same offence that are discovered after procedures of the first offence have been completed would normally result in the recommendation to the VC to permanently exclude the student). The committee noted the difficulty and stress of implementing such a severe punishment.

ii. the inability to consider certain disabilities as mitigation for academic misconduct procedures. Currently only mental health issues are specifically mentioned in the Academic Misconduct Policy in relation to Exceptional Circumstances affecting Assessment.
The committee **recommended** that further consultation is necessary in relation to the guidance provided in the Academic Misconduct Policy relating to students with Second Offences of the same type and students with disabilities.

**[Action: SK, ZD, SG, CS]**

The Committee **agreed** to a proposal to publish the annual academic misconduct figures in the interests of transparency and to avoid time-consuming FOI requests each year. The Chair will raise this issue with UTC for approval.

**[Action: SK]**

**16-17/22 Annual Report – Undergraduate External Examiners**
The Committee **considered** the key issues which had been highlighted in the summary report.

- The Chair noted that the role of External Examiners in relation to Boards of Examiners needs to be better understood. The Committee **agreed** that the revised section on Examiners and Board Meetings in the Guide to Assessment should be sent to all external examiners in order to assist with this.

  **[Action: Bernie White (ASO)]**

- It was **noted** that External Examiners may not have access to appropriate data to fulfil their role. This may be an issue of awareness and availability of data at a time when the External Examiner can have an input into the assessment process.

- It was **noted** that despite central preparation and presentation of examination data, there was evidence that some departments are still preparing and presenting their own data. It was **suggested** that Chairs of Boards of Examiners should be reminded of central data reports and also about the capabilities of the Tableau software for data visualisation.

- The Committee **noted** External Examiners’ concerns about assessment design in some departments.

- It was agreed that the Chair will discuss External Examiners’ concerns about the exam timetable with the Director of Registry Services.

It was **agreed** the Chair will report these issues to UTC.

**[Action: SK]**

In reference to a specific comment by an External Examiner, it was **noted** that the reference to ‘viva criteria’ in a Law examiner’s report was actually referring to an oral examination (taken by all students on the Law Clinic module).

**16-17/23 Shallow Analysis – Degree results**
The Committee **received** a demonstration of the Tableau workbooks containing the shallow analysis of degree results from Dan Cashdan (Business Intelligence Unit). During the discussion, it was noted that:
sector data was not yet available to compare with the University’s degree outcomes;
the Tableau workbook tools and data are useful for intra-faculty and cross-departmental comparison of degree outcomes;
a separate Athena Swan Tableau workbook exists, through which degree results data may be analysed with regard to gender;
student representative committee members could not access the workbook due to the use of YUSU/GSA email usernames. The committee agreed the Secretary should liaise with the Planning Office to address this issue.

[Action: SG/DC]

The Committee approved the Tableau workbooks containing the shallow analysis of degree results and agreed that deep analysis is also needed. The workbooks would be made available to departments.

16-17/24 2016 NSS assessment and feedback results
The Committee considered the report and noted:

the changes to the NSS question set planned for 2017;
the steady improvement in department performance related to assessment and feedback between 2010 and 2016;
the University of York’s overall improvement in ranking in the sector related to NSS results for assessment and feedback, and specifically the University’s current ranking among Russell Group institutions – ranked joint first for Assessment and Feedback;
the impact in the Department of Philosophy of changing from a 6 week to a 4 week deadline for feedback on assessments. The department then experienced a 23% increase in student satisfaction for Assessment and Feedback, but, though some impact is clear, the underlying causality cannot be certain.

16-17/25 Proposal – Adjustments to Grade Conversion Table for Study Abroad students
The Committee considered a proposal from the Centre for Global Programmes to make an adjustment to existing Grade Conversion Tables, to allow marks of ‘Pass with Distinction’ to contribute to a grade calculation (unlike grades from pass-fail modules). The adjustment was approved, but it was agreed that the change should apply to students abroad in 17-18 onwards, rather than those already abroad in 16-17 (or earlier).

16-17/26 Discussion paper – informal resolution of queries prior to the appeal process
The Chair of SCC outlined the issue which arose as a result of an OIA recommendation that universities should attempt, as far as possible, to resolve students’ issues informally before an appeal is started. He asked the committee to consider whether a ‘results clinic’ might help students to understand results better, and thereby prevent some appeals which arose out of misunderstanding.
During the discussion, the Committee noted that
- practice regarding informally resolving student queries varies between departments;
- informal guidance on the appeals process was offered by YUSU and GSA;
- guidance needs to be accurately delivered by appropriate staff;
- equity across departments needs to be considered in relation to the provision of informal guidance.

The Committee agreed that the Chair will write a memo to all departments detailing the OIA’s recommendation and asking departments to consider what support they offer to students.

[Action: SK]

16-17/27 Any other business:

i. Regarding electronic publication of doctoral theses on the White Rose eTheses Online repository, concern was expressed related to the immediate publication online of PhD theses. The Committee agreed the Chair will speak to the Chair of YGRS regarding this issue.

[Action: SK]

16-17/28 Date of the next meeting
The date of the next meeting was noted as Friday 2nd December at 2pm in Room HG19, Heslington Hall.