Teaching Committee

Standing Committee on Assessment

Minutes of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 18 January 2008 at 2.15 pm in Room H/G17, Heslington Hall.

Present: Dr Chris Fewster (Chair), Mathematics, Professor Colin Runciman, Computer Science, Dr Anne Duhme-Klair, Chemistry, Dr David Efird, Philosophy and BfGS, Dr Simon Eveson, Mathematics, Ms Grace Fletcher-Hall, YUSU Member 2007/08

In attendance: Ms Rosemary Royds: SAS, Mrs Rosemary Goerisch, Student Progress: SAS, Ms Sue Hardman, Academic Registrar, Mr Philip Simison, Graduate Schools Office

08/01 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Ms Karen Fritz, Dr Amanda Rees, Ms Carylan Lobo and Ms Aseel Takshe.

CATEGORY I BUSINESS

08/02 Minutes

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2007 and requested that recognition of Dr Harold Mytum’s services on behalf of the Committee be acknowledged.

Secretary’s note: A letter has been sent to Dr Mytum thanking him for his work on behalf of the Committee and wishing him well in his new position.

08/03 Matters arising from the minutes:

a) 07/106 Pilot Study in the Recording of Research Students Oral Examinations (SCA M07/15, 07/90), (BfGS M05/66b, 05/82, 05/83iii), (Senate M05/71, 06/4)

The Committee received a copy of the report that has been sent to Senate recommending audio recording oral examinations of research students.

b) 07/107 Guidelines for the conduct of oral examinations for MA/MSc by Research programmes.
The Committee considered proposed guidelines on the conduct of oral examinations for MA/MSc by Research programmes and decided after consideration to recommend implementation to UTC.

c) 07/108 Annual Report on Invigilation

The Committee noted that the requested changes to the Examinations Incident sheet have been made. The results will be submitted to the relevant meetings of the Committee.

d) 07/113 Improving the effectiveness of external examiners reports

The Committee noted that the requested changes have been made to the External Examiners Report form. The form can be viewed at:
york.ac.uk/admin/eto/exams/ExternalExaminers/AnnualReportform06/07.doc

e) 07/115 Revision of University Regulations (Annual Priority, M07/85, 07/66)

The Chair reported that he had discussed the issue with the Chairs of UTC, BfGS and SCC. It had been decided that the proposed revision of regulations would be taken forward alongside the implementation of the review of modularization. A small working party has been formed to progress this revision and will keep the Committee informed of progress.

f) 07/116 Dictionaries at non-campus venues – an Additional item

The Committee noted that the Exams Office will ensure that staff in off-campus venues are trained in the procedure for vetting dictionaries and understand why the procedure is necessary.

g) UTC response to the minutes of 17 November 2007

The Committee noted that UTC had (i) approved the Committee’s recommendations that the length of examinations be standardised, and that external examiners should not act as markers under any circumstances; (ii) appointed Dr David Efird as the next chair of the Committee from 1 August 2008.

The policy changes will be communicated to colleagues via the next edition of the Committee’s Briefing Sheet and will be included in the 2008/9 version of the Guide to Assessment.

h) Access to examination papers (M 07/103, 06/106)
The Chair noted that a proposed revision of section 12.4.2 of the Guide to Assessment would be brought to the next meeting. (Action: CJF/RAG)

g) Anonymous marking and feedback to students (M07/112a)

The chair noted that further guidance on the process of anonymous marking and giving feedback to students had been received and proposals would be brought to a subsequent meeting. (Action: CJF/RAG)

08/04 Oral report from the Chair

To receive an oral report from the chair:

a) The funding of a professional team of invigilators (M06/104iv, 07/03, 07/52; UTC 07/125)

The Chair reported on the outcome of a meeting with the Director of Planning to discuss the University funding a team of professional invigilators. The proposal has consequently been passed to the Deputy Vice Chancellor for action.

b) Approval of Internal Examiners

The Chair reported that this process was almost complete for the 2007/8 session.

c) Briefing for Chairs and Secretaries of Boards of Examiners

The Chair reported that he and colleagues from SAS had conducted a very successful briefing session on 24 November for Chairs and Secretaries of Boards of Examiners.

d) The Chair reported a successful conclusion to the recent QAA Institutional Audit. The University was awarded the highest outcome, that of confidence. It was not expected that the Audit Report would recommend any actions relating to assessment.

08/05 Statistical analysis of classification of degrees I

The Committee considered a report produced by Celean Camp, Assistant Registrar (Planning and Management Information), on the degree classifications awarded to the cohort of undergraduate students graduating from York in 2006/7, in the context of UCAS tariff scores at entry and national statistics relating to comparator institutions and subject trends (shallow analysis). The Committee thanked Ms Camp for producing a comprehensive report.

The Chair noted that when the Committee first began analysing these statistics the University was
awarding fewer good degrees than its comparator institutions. That situation has changed and the University is now in the mid range (chart 9). The proportion awarded remains relatively stable year on year.

It was also noted that there was only a weak correlation between average entry tariffs and the proportion of good degrees awarded in different departments. While there is also no reason to expect a linear correlation, it was noted that the scatter plot (chart 7) provides a useful prompt for a discussion and a more in-depth look at the data at departmental level. The plot suggests that the departments of Mathematics, Management, English and History are currently outliers in this regard but it was recognised that there may be good reasons for these results.

The Committee requested that a copy of the full report should be sent to all undergraduate Chairs of Boards of Examiners and Studies, in order to raise awareness of the disparate degree awarding patterns in the University. Departments would not be asked to comment or explain their positions but instead will be encouraged to reflect on the data, in order to inform the discussion of the statistical analysis at the May meeting of Senate.

The Committee did express concern at the consistent number of third class degrees awarded in the science and engineering subjects, which in some cases exceed national rates in these subject groups and recommended that the relevant departments should reflect particularly on this issue.

The Committee debated the need for an all encompassing report of the current type and agreed that the format was useful and should be retained.

08/06 Resolving differences between first and second markers

The Committee received a paper from the Chair, written in response to external examiner comments over the last two years, proposing that each department should have written guidelines stating how differences between markers should be resolved, based on four stated principles.

The Committee decided to recommend the proposal to UTC, with the minor alteration to principle (d) that ‘third internal marker’ be changed to ‘further internal marker or moderator’.

08/07 The powers of external examiners to change marks (M07/114)

The Committee received the results of the consultation with Chairs of Boards of Examiners on the Committee’s recommendation that external examiners not be allowed to change marks. It was noted that the majority of responses were in favour of the proposal.

A number of responses opposed the proposal. Members noted that under the proposals, Boards of Examiners will still be able to take advice and guidance from their external examiners on problematic cases, but the authority and responsibility to make the final decision will rest with the Board rather than an individual external. The Committee agreed that this vitiated the main objections raised.

The Committee noted that a number of issues remain to be resolved before this proposal can be introduced fully, including: the production of guidance on how internal moderation can be operated effectively; the need to decide whether distinctions and firsts with distinction should still need the explicit approval of an external. Clear statements on the revised role of external examiners would also need to be prepared.
The Committee decided to request UTC’s approval to develop the process further.

**08/08 Marking closed examination scripts that deviate from the rubric**

The Committee received a paper from the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress requesting that guidance be included in the 2008/9 version of the Guide to Assessment regarding treatment of students who have answered more than the required number of questions in a closed examination.

It is difficult to have one policy that would meet every discipline’s particular needs and workloads. After some discussion the Committee approved the proposal that each department should have clear guidelines in their statements of assessment on how scripts that do not adhere to the examination rubric in this regard will be marked. The requirement would also be added to Appendix A of the Guide. (Action: update 2008/9 Guide, RG)

**08/09 Penalties for failing to meet assessment deadlines**

The Committee received a paper from the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress requesting additional guidance to section 8.5 of the 2007/8 version of the Guide to Assessment. Departments have been seeking advice and guidance to ensure equity in and between disciplines on applying penalties for the late submission of assessments.

The Committee requested further clarity as to what penalties could be applied and under what circumstances. (Action: RG)

(*Secretary’s Note: The paper will be updated and distributed by email for further consideration and comment.*

**08/10 Date of the next meeting**

The Committee noted that the date of the next meeting as Friday 7 March 2008 at 2.15 pm in Room H/G17, Heslington Hall.

*Rosemary Goerisch*

*Assistant Registrar: Student Progress*

RAG/[January 2008]