Teaching Committee

Standing Committee on Assessment

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 9 January 2009 at 2.15 pm in Room H/G17, Heslington Hall.

Present: Dr David Efird (Chair), Philosophy; Dr Simon Eveson, Mathematics; Dr Amanda Rees, Sociology; Dr Anne Duhme-Klair, Chemistry; Dr Pat Ansell, BiGS and Health Sciences; Mr John Brown, Social Policy and Social Work; Rachel Hope, GSA representative; Samik Datta, GSA representative

In attendance: Ms Sue Hardman, Academic Registrar; Ms Rosemary Royds, Student Administrative Services; Mrs Rosemary Goerisch, Student Progress: SAS; Mr Philip Simison, Student Progress Administrator

09/01 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from: Richard Mitchell GSA and Colin Runciman, Computer Science.

CATEGORY I BUSINESS

09/02 Minutes

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2008.

09/03 Matters arising from the minutes

i. Student Guide to Assessment (M08/65 iii)

This matter is deferred to a later meeting

ii. Ramadan during the University’s Examination period (M08/67)

It was suggested that students with resit exams in August, observing Ramadan, be invited to submit a religious observance request and their needs will be taken into account when the examination timetable is constructed.

iii. Review of academic misconduct penalties (M08/89)
This review is being conducted at the request of Teaching Committee. Comparator institutions are being surveyed by Clare Wiggins, Project Officer Learning Enhancement, and a report will be submitted to a later meeting. The Chair will consult with departments on this issue and his findings will be reported at a later meeting.

**Action point** : Chair

iv. Audio-recording of research student vivas (M08/90)

A copy of the memo sent to departments regarding the need for external examiners to agree to being recorded was reiterated.

v. Fitness to practice (M08/92)

Only two departments responded to the memo requesting comments on the proposed changes and those responses were positive. The Committee requested that the department of Social Policy and Social Work be contacted again.

*Secretary’s note: This has been done. The Head of Department has contacted the relevant programme leader for comment.*

vi. UTC November Minutes

The Committee noted UTC’s approval of the recommendation to extend the on-line Plagiarism Awareness Tutorial to include collusion awareness.

**09/04 Oral Report for the Chair**

The Chair reported that some students had asked if their work showed no plagiarism after having been run through plagiarism detection software meant their work was plagiarism free.

The Committee agreed that no detection software was infallible and that the results could not guarantee that plagiarism had not been committed and as such that no claim academic misconduct could be made.

This decision will need to be included in the Academic Misconduct Policies, Guidelines and Procedures for taught programmes of study. The Committee also requested that the Student Union be informed of this decision so that it can be included in their academic awareness campaign.

**Action point** : update the booklet

*Secretary’s note: The SU has been informed.*

**09/05 Statistical analysis of classification of degrees I**
This report was deferred to the next meeting

09/06 Annual Priority number 2

The Committee received a proposal from the Chair suggesting what should happen if in exceptional circumstances it is not possible for a Board of Studies or Examiners to be quorate.

The Committee agreed that in exceptional circumstances where it is not possible to convene a quorate Board of Studies, the University Senate should be asked by the Registrar and Secretary to establish an executive sub-committee of three or more members of the Board of Studies or of the Combined Board (which must include at least one representative of each department involved in offering the combined programme) who will approve the recommendations of the Board of Examiners. These results will then be submitted to Senate for ratification.

The Committee noted that subject to approval of this proposal by Teaching Committee, the relevant ordinances will need to be redrafted.

There is a precedent for this procedure in the Contingency Plans for Assessment and Examinations approved by Senate on 16 May 2006:

B.2.6: Where it is not possible for Boards of Examiners to meet under the requirements of Ordinance [6], the Chair of Senate should be asked to approve alternative arrangements for the consideration of candidates for the award of degrees, diplomas and certificates and recommend to Council a temporary variation of the Ordinance if necessary.

This proposal will be recommended to Teaching Committee.

Secretary’s note: After the meeting this proposal was revised and the revised version was circulated to members for comment. The proposal was then approved by the Chair of Teaching Committee and forwarded to Senate for final approval. The revised version of the proposal is included as Appendix 1.

09/07 Annual Priority number 7

The Committee received a paper from the Chair proposing guidance for departments regarding the use of viva voce examinations for taught students including the consequences of non-attendance.

The current policy fails to address issues of student non-attendance, student appeals and failure of the examiners to agree the outcome of the viva

The Committee noted that this form of examination was not available to all students and this could be inequitable. It was agreed that the Chair would contact Chairs of Boards of Examiners with a proposal to remove this form of examination from October 2009.

Action point: Chair

09/08 Academic Misconduct Policies, Guidelines and Procedures 6.4.3

At the request of the Chair the Committee considered paragraph ii of this section to determine the maximum number of people who can accompany a student to a meeting of the investigating sub-committee. It was agreed that the maximum number was two people and that this section should be rewritten to make this clearer.
Action point: Update the Academic Misconduct Guide and inform SCC & BfGS to update their documentation

09/09 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

The Committee considered the results of the PRES in respect of the oral examinations and noted the level of dissatisfaction recorded by students. This was the lowest performing area for the University in this survey, both in terms of students nationally for 2007/8 and on last year’s satisfaction level for York.

The Committee agreed that preparation for the viva was the responsibility of the Thesis Advisory Panel and that ‘mock vivas’ should be encouraged. Members requested that the Graduate Training Unit be contacted to ascertain the possibility of targeting specific students prior to their viva to offer the ‘Preparing for your Viva’ training, with a copy of the invitation sent to the relevant graduate chair.

Action Point: RG to contact GTU

It was also noted that support for students who have minor corrections after their viva should be provided by the internal examiner and the students supervisor, but that the guidelines on the GSO website in this regard needed to be more explicit.

Action point: PS

09/10 Approving the results of modules taken for credit

The Committee received a proposal for approving the results of modules taken for credit.

There are a number of modules that can be taken for free-standing credit, offered by departments and centres within the University. Currently, there is no central ratification or record of these results and this must be rectified. The University’s Ordinances and Regulations make no reference to such results. Ordinance 6 of the University’s Ordinances and Regulations 2008/9 refers only to the examination process for degrees, diplomas and certificates. Ordinance 7 refers to ‘other academic distinction’ but in the context of a qualification.

The Committee agreed that these module results will be ratified by the appropriate Board of Examiners and the results list will be signed by the Chair of the Board and the appropriate External Examiner. The list(s) will then be forwarded to the University’s Examinations Officer who, using devolved authority from the Standing Committee on Assessment will: approve the results and enter them on SITS; will ensure that the relevant SITS record is closed; and an authorised academic transcript is issued that summarises and validates the study completed by each student. The transcripts will be distributed by the department concerned.

09/11 Using previous students essays as feedback

The Committee considered a proposal from the department of Sociology that previous students’ essays could be shown to students as a form of feedback.

The department of Sociology has been seeking ways to improve the feedback mechanisms for students and suggested that one way of improving such mechanisms could be to provide students with exemplar pieces of assessment work. They noted that there are both pedagogic and moral problems
with using such work, and that anonymity must be preserved. Morally, students do not expect their work to be made use of in such a way. Even though assessment work becomes the intellectual property of the University upon submission, they acknowledge that the SCA feels it is unreasonable to make such relatively public use of student work without their express permission. Pedagogically, simply presenting students with pieces of graded assessment work without an explanation of how and why the work achieved such grades is not useful.

Therefore, the department of Sociology proposes that where departments wish to make use of previously submitted assessment work as part of the process of assessment and feedback, the following procedures be adopted:

- Markers should be alert for examples of good to excellent practice in each round of assessment

- Having identified such examples, they should note the exam number of the script & pass it to the departmental administrator

- The DA should then communicate directly with the student to ask their permission for their work to be used in the future

- Assuming that permission is granted, scripts/parts of scripts can then be used in seminars and electronically as part of assessment/feedback workshops

The Committee approved the proposal that previous students work could be used as feedback. The proposed procedure was not approved; rather, it was recommended that all students be asked for permission to use any form of assessment that they have submitted during their programme of study. This would ensure that a range of work is used for feedback purposes, not just those of the highest quality. The department were asked to submit a reworded proposal for further consideration.

**Action point:** Amanda Rees

**09/12 Regulation 2.1 (i)**

The Committee considered a proposal from the Chair that this regulation be extended to those who have been full-time members of academic staff.

The Committee approved the proposal and decided that it applied to staff who had been employed at the University within five years of the date of submission of their soft bound thesis.

The Committee noted that regulation 2.1(i) is no longer fit for purpose in that it does not include all those employed by the University who may register for a higher degree. A rewriting of the regulation was proposed, and this and a rationale for the change will be submitted to the Committee’s next meeting.

**Action point:** PS/RG
09/13 Regulation 5.5

The Committee received a request for clarification from the department of Chemistry on the ownership of reports submitted for assessment by students on placement.

The department acknowledge that once material has been submitted for assessment it becomes the physical property of the University. The problem arises with students who spend 12 months on industrial placement. The students are employees of the company during this year and the results they obtain remain the intellectual property of the company.

To obtain the placements the department has to agree that each student’s report is released to the department for assessment purposes only and that once the assessment is complete the report is returned to the company. If no such agreement can be given the company will withdraw the placement. The ability to spend a year in industry is an attractive proposition for students.

The Committee agreed that, in exceptional circumstances, and with the approval of the Chair of SCA, students work submitted for assessment can be returned to external placement providers once the assessment process has been completed, but the work must be returned if there is a case of academic misconduct.

09/14 Missed Biology assessments

The department of Biology reported that students with valid mitigating circumstances, who missed a closed assessment, were usually given their yearly average as the mark rather than taking the assessment at a later date. The department acknowledges that this practice is no longer possible and that the students must undertake the assessment as a sit for the first time.

The department proposed a timetable of assessment for these students that would go throughout the academic year and requested the Committee’s approval of the proposal.

The Committee decided to reject the proposal because it did not give students time to recover from their mitigating circumstance or prepare for the assessment. It was recommended that the University’s closed assessment period in August each year be the time that these assessments take place.

09/15 Illegible examination scripts

The Committee received a request for guidance from the department of Economics on how to deal with illegible examination scripts. There is no current policy on this issue.

The Committee agreed that this issue needs to be addressed. This problem will be raised with the University’s Disability Officer and a report made to the next meeting of the Committee.

Action point: RG

CATEGORY II BUSINESS

NOTE: approval of Category II business will be assumed unless a member indicates that they wish to bring forward an item to Category I business.
09/15 Date of the next meeting

The Committee noted that the date of the next meeting as Friday 27 February 2009 at 2.15 pm in Room HG17, Heslington Hall.

Rosemary Goerisch
Assistant Registrar: Student Progress

RAG/[January 2009]