Teaching Committee

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held at 1415 on 16 June 2006 in H/G17.

Present:

Dr Chris Fewster, Mathematics (Chair)
Ms Karen Fritz, Health Sciences
Professor Geoff Hall, Psychology
Dr Harold Mytum, Archaeology
Dr Ros Temple, Language & Linguistic Science
Dr Richard Walsh, English

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Jennifer Winter (GSA) and Mr Neil Barnes (YUSU).

In attendance:

Academic Registrar, Ms S Hardman
Manager: Student Admin. Services, Ms R Royds
Assistant Registrar (GSO), Mr P Simison
Ms N Allford (SAS)

06/58 Minutes

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2006 (previously circulated).

06/59 Matters arising:

- from M06/31 & M06/37, *Annual report on Undergraduate Appeals and Complaints*, the Committee **considered** issues arising from a copy of the report on recent cases dealt with in the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (previously circulated), and the Academic Registrar’s summary of relevant information from them. The Committee **noted** that the OIA encourages simple processes; that it is important for the University to follow its procedures correctly; and
that facts in references should be accurate. It was further noted that there is a need for proportionality of response over the application of deadlines, but that the way a particular department will treat them should be clearly stated at the beginning of study. The OIA report also suggests the need for clear information about the status of professionally accredited programmes; the Committee expressed the view that University Teaching Committee’s procedures in this regard are robust. The Academic Registrar acknowledged that the OIA preference is for cases to be resolved in 12 months or less, but noted that it can be difficult to meet this timescale and still respond appropriately. The process is best supported where departments have comprehensive paperwork and clear, published guidelines for staff and students. It was also noted that few of the cases investigated in 2004/05 were upheld, but where they were, financial penalties to institutions seemed high in proportion to the offence. To address the points discussed, the Committee recommended that:

- the academic misconduct flow chart should be amended to show as clearly as possible where and how departments should consult with the SCA before speaking to students;
- that the Academic Registrar’s report and the Committee’s recommendations should be drawn to the attention of the Board for Graduate Schools;
- that the attention of Chairs of Boards of Examiners and Chairs of Boards of Studies should be drawn to the report and issues arising from it and that the web reference for the OIA report, together with details of the latest statistics on appeals and complaints at York, should be included in the circulation.

b) from M06/39, Variation of assessment for a cohort of students, The Chair reported that he had learned following the last meeting that the secretary to University Teaching Committee had also circulated a paper on the same issue. The Secretaries to the two committees will prepare a single set of firmer guidelines about authority and responsibility for this action, which will be presented to a later meeting of the Committee.

c) from M06/42, Degree Classifications, the Chair reported that the report from the Chair and Planning Office regarding a strategy for obtaining more detailed statistics to assist consideration of the issues had had to be deferred, but would be completed in time to accompany the presentation to Senate of this year’s data, in November 2006.

- from M06/46, Calibration of Assessment Marks to the Mark Scale, the Committee received a revised version of the proposed Appendix C in the 2006/07 Guide from the Chair, outlining example calculations. The Committee decided a small clarification should be included as shown in Appendix 1.

(Appendix 1)

06/60 Chair’s oral report

- The Committee received an oral report from the Chair, including:

  - Misconduct in closed exams: it was noted that there had been a greater-than-usual number of cases of academic misconduct in closed examinations, mainly involving crib notes brought into
the examination venue and the discovery of written material in dictionaries. The Examinations Office had recently circulated a reminder of the penalties for such misconduct to Examinations Officers and to Chairs of Boards of Studies at the request of the Chair. The Committee noted that the Academic Misconduct booklet does not specifically cover misconduct in closed examinations, but section 9.5.4 of the Guide to Assessment is clear that at a minimum a mark of zero for the paper should be awarded (penalty points cannot be applied at present). If such cases are a second offence by a student, a formal hearing must be convened. The Committee recommended that the already-scheduled updating of the Academic Misconduct booklet should include a relevant clause dealing with misconduct in formal examinations.

- The Committee also noted that when writing is found in dictionaries, some invigilators remove the whole dictionary and some just the offending pages. The Committee recommended that:

  - i) anything written in a dictionary in a closed examination is considered illicit material and the whole dictionary should be confiscated;
  
  - ii) that this information should be included in the guidelines for invigilators;
  
  - iii) that invigilator training should include clear instructions on seizing materials;
  
  - iv) that the 2006/07 version of the Guide should be amended to make clear to students and staff that dictionaries brought to examinations should not have anything written in them, and that it is the student’s responsibility to ensure that this is the case.

b) A request for feedback from the Committee on the question of what resit opportunities should be available to students who commit academic misconduct and subsequently fail a progression hurdle. If the programme regulations would ordinarily provide a resit opportunity for the module or modules affected by academic misconduct (i.e., if the same mark(s) had been obtained without misconduct), should a resit be granted, and what mark should be used for degree classification and appear on the student transcript? Further to decisions recorded in M06/38 (c), the Committee agreed that students in this situation, on the recommendation of the Board of Studies, should be allowed to re-sit to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes in order to progress. The mark attached to a module affected by academic misconduct, however, used for the purpose of calculating the degree classification and to be recorded on the student's transcript, should be the academic mark for the module and not the resit mark. It was recognised that some students might progress with a failing average, but this was regarded as an appropriate element of the misconduct penalty.

It was noted that this decision would apply to cases that have arisen in the current examination session (as well as being included in the revised academic misconduct procedures) and it was requested that the minute of the Committee's discussion should be circulated as soon as possible after the meeting to aid members in advising departments.

The Committee also noted that it may be necessary to consider in future how academic misconduct penalties would be applied where the degree is awarded on the basis of, for example, the best six marks gained from a variety of modules.

c) a recent case that had arisen during reading time in an examination, where yellow paper had been issued so students could make rough notes. A student had been discovered with rough paper with notes on, which was a slightly different shade of yellow to that issued in the exam hall. Following
discovery of this, the Examinations Officer had immediately implemented a simple but effective process to randomise the colour of the paper issued during reading time, but the Committee noted that this was not the first incidence of difficulty with invigilating reading time in an examination it had considered. It recommended that the Assistant Registrar should gather data from those departments who still include separate reading time in their formal examinations, requesting a clear statement of the pedagogical reasons for the use of reading time and its conduct (i.e. just reading, or reading and writing notes) rather than including it in the overall time of the examination, and that this data should be presented to a future meeting of the Committee for further consideration.

06/61 Foundation Years and Foundation Degrees

The Committee received position papers from the Academic Support Office relating to the above. (Appendix 2)

06/62 Report from University Teaching Committee (UTC M06/81 & M06/82)

The Committee received minutes of the meeting of University Teaching Committee on 22 May 2006 in relation to Foundation Years and Foundation degrees, and copies of the University’s current documentation relating to external examiner appointment and reporting for information.

- The Committee considered actions arising from UTC M06/81 regarding further work to be undertaken by the SCA and Examinations Office on Foundation Degrees, and noted that consideration will need to be given in due course to how the University’s current academic misconduct procedures might be applied to these awards.

- Foundation Degree-specific external examiner’s report form: The Committee considered whether a separate form was necessary and decided that although current practice is for report forms to cover a number of programmes of study, these degrees will have defining characteristics that are very different from any of the University’s current programmes. It was decided that the Examinations Office should develop a new form in draft for consideration at the October 2006 meeting of the Committee;

- Foundation Degree-specific external examiner’s appointment form: The Committee decided that the Examinations Office should amend the existing form and present a draft for consideration at the October 2006 meeting of the Committee;

- Foundation Degree information in the Guide to Assessment: The Committee noted that in revising the Guide for 2006/07 consideration would be given to compatibility of guidance with the requirements of Foundation Degrees;

- Inclusion in the Guide of more detailed guidance on work-based learning: The Committee noted that they would be happy to assess any information already prepared on this issue, but could not include material in the 2006/07 Guide as there was not expertise within the Committee to be able to carry out this task. The Committee recommended that UTC convene a meeting of the developers of the University’s new Foundation Degree programmes to brief members of both Committees and to look at benchmarking statements for these awards in preparation for updating of the Guide for 2007/08.

- Consideration of graduation arrangements for Foundation Degree students: UTC M06/81 noted
that the PVC for Learning and Teaching was keen to ensure that all Foundation Degree students were given the opportunity to graduate in person, but acknowledges that this raises logistical issues. The Committee noted that this issue was not part of its remit but that the University’s students in similar-level programmes (ie Diplomas and Certificates) were not included in the graduation ceremonies, and that places available for candidates currently eligible to attend the ceremonies were already at a premium. The Committee recommended that this issue be referred to the Manager: Student Administrative Services for response.

- **Foundation year provision (UTC M06/82 refers):** The Committee noted that without the details of the proposed Foundation Year in Nursing that the Department of Health Sciences is working with York College to develop, it was difficult to make informed comments on this proposal. Concern was raised regarding opportunities for resitting failed modules when these are delivered by York College (where up to three resit opportunities are permitted) as the University’s current Year 0 courses offer students no resit opportunities, and other first year students have the opportunity to undertake only one resit where their programme permits resits. The Committee also noted that students on the DipHE in Nursing always have the option of re-sitting failed modules and that A-level students, whose programmes are at an equivalent level, have unlimited resit opportunities. The Committee recommended to UTC that the issue of re-sits should be clarified and guidelines established, and that they would be happy to re-consider the proposals when they were further developed.

  [Secretary’s note: revised proposals were presented to UTC on June 26 and approved. Some work remains to be done on the Statement of Assessment but the resit issue mentioned above has been resolved.]

The Committee recommended that an update on items a) (i)-(v) be passed to University Teaching Committee for consideration at its meeting in December 2006.

(Appendix 3)

**06/63 External examiners reports 2004/05 (SCA M* 06/53 ; UTC M 06/80)**

The Committee received feedback from the meeting of University Teaching Committee of 22 May 2006 following consideration of external examiners’ reports for taught postgraduate programmes in 2004/05.

The Committee considered actions arising from UTC M06/80. These included the request to give consideration to the proposals that:

- external examiners should be forbidden from acting as second markers.

- external examiners should only be permitted to act as third markers in exceptional circumstances and when permission had been granted by the Chair of the SCA.

The Committee noted that both the QAA guidelines on assessment and the University’s guidance already endorse these proposals, but that their application in some postgraduate programmes might have considerable implications for current practice. It was decided that Graduate School Boards should be invited to comment on the proposals, and their responses presented to the October meeting of the Committee for a final decision.
06/64 QAA Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of Students (M06/41 refers)

The Committee noted that a report for University Teaching Committee based on the Committee’s consideration of the Code of practice would be presented to the October meeting.

06/65 Payment of outside invigilators

The Committee approved the recommended increase in the hourly rate payable to outside invigilators for 2006/07 in line with the budgeted academic salary award of 3.0%. (Appendix 5)

06/66 Award of Masters degrees in Humanities & Social Science departments (M06/04 [d]; M 06/23)

The Committee noted approval from the University Teaching Committee (UTC M06/101) of its recommendations regarding taught postgraduate programmes in Humanities and Social Science departments since the implementation of the postgraduate mark scale in 2002/03. The revision would be included in the revised Guide for 2006/07. (Appendix 6)

06/67 Convening of Boards of Examiners

The Committee received a paper from the Assistant Registrar outlining assessment arrangements in two departments where formal exam boards are not convened for their taught postgraduate programmes and considered whether, and if so under what circumstances, recommendations for awards could be made in the absence of a formally-convened Board of Examiners. It was noted that neither the Ordinances and Regulations relating to assessment nor the Guide to Assessment specify a mandatory convening of a Board of Examiners but that it was difficult to see how mitigating circumstances and the award of distinctions could be properly considered without a meeting, nor how the Board and external examiner could conduct fruitful interactive discussions about programme structure and operation. The Committee recommended that extensions and referrals for postgraduate students could be dealt with by correspondence as they arise and with written support (eg a copy of e-mail correspondence) from the external examiner. Where awards are being decided a formal and minuted meeting with externals present should take place, and all recommendations for awards and distinctions must be signed by an appropriate external examiner. It also recommended that the Guide to Assessment be amended to specify the requirement for at least one meeting of the Board of Examiners to be formally convened each year, in order to ensure that adequate opportunities are provided for the external examiner to interact with staff and students of the department.

(Appendix 7)

06/68 2006/07 Guide to Assessment and Academic Misconduct Policies, Guidelines and Procedures

The Committee considered the process for updating the Guide to Assessment and the Academic Misconduct Policies, Guidelines and Procedures booklet for 2006/07. The Committee recommended that the updating of the Guide to Assessment should be carried out by the Chair and Secretary over
the summer vacation period without further consultation with the Committee members, as has been the practice in recent years. The Committee noted that issues arising from the undergraduate APRs will be one of the inputs in considering the updating of the Guide and that the booklet should be reprinted in time for circulation at the beginning of the August terms 2006/07.

The Committee recommended that a sub-committee should be convened during summer to deal with amendments to the Academic Misconduct Policies booklet. This would consider the incorporation of points raised in the February 2006 briefing meeting and feedback from those members involved in handling cases over the past year, as well as decisions made by the Committee in 2005/06. It was suggested that a reference to the guidelines on academic misconduct by research students might also be incorporated, or that the two might be published as a single volume. Any proposals for changes not already agreed by the Committee would be considered by e-mail circulation and the Committee and the Pro-Vice Chancellor: Teaching and Learning would be given the opportunity to comment on the final version.

06/69 Date of the next meeting

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting on Friday 6 October 2006 at 2.15 pm (room allocation to be advised to members during the summer vacation).

The Chair thanked the student representatives for their contribution and work over the past year. The Committee also noted that Karen Fritz and Geoff Hall had reached the end of their terms on the Committee, although it was not yet clear what the arrangements would be for next year. The Chair thanked Karen and Geoff for their hard work and valuable advice and expertise during their terms. It was agreed that Karen Fritz should remain as the Committee’s representative on the AP(E)L Working Party. The Chair also thanked Rosemary Royds for acting as secretary to the meetings, as she would be moving on to manage the Student Administration Services in the next academic year.

Rosemary Royds
Manager: Student Administration Services

RJR/[June/2006]