Teaching Committee

Standing Committee on Assessment

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 15 June 2007.

Present: Dr Chris Fewster (Chair) Mathematics, Ms Karen Fritz Health Sciences, Professor Geoff Hall Psychology, Dr Harold Mytum Archaeology, Professor Colin Runciman Computer Science, Professor John Sparrow Biology, Dr Anne Duhme-Klair Chemistry, Dr Richard Walsh English, Ms Amy Foxton YUSU Member 2006/07

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

07/62 Apologies for absence

None were received.

CATEGORY I BUSINESS

07/63 Minutes

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2007 with the following amendment:

07/52, The Invigilation of Formal University Examinations Change ‘a majority’ to ‘a number’.

07/64 Matters arising from previous minutes:

i) SCA meeting held on 11 May 2007

1. Academic Misconduct 07/48

Departments who had not reported any cases of academic misconduct in the previous two years were asked to confirm that staff are alert to the issue of academic misconduct and to share examples of good practice for minimising cases. The following departments were contacted: Archaeology, History of Art, Mediaeval Studies, Music, Physics, Railway Studies and Women’s Studies.

Satisfactory responses have been received from Medieval Studies, Music, Women’s Studies and Railway Studies. Departments that had yet to respond would be sent a further request to share their procedures and best practice.

The departments of Electronics, Management and Mathematics had also been asked to supply details.
of briefings made to overseas students. A response had been received from Mathematics, indicating that briefings of this type would be developed. A reminder would be sent to the other two departments. **Action Point**: RG

2. Academic Misconduct Guidelines for Research Students 07/28(c)

a) The revisions requested by the Committee at its last meeting had been made, and the revised guidelines were included in the minutes.

b) In relation to paragraphs 3.1.5/3.2.3, the Student Union representative had suggested that research students might be accompanied by a representative of the SU in certain circumstances. The GSA representative has since confirmed that the GSA feels that the needs of research students would be best understood and met only by members of the GSA.

3. 07/49 Oral Report from the Chair

ii) At its last meeting the Committee had **approved** a pilot study in which each examination candidate would be provided with a clear plastic bag to hold items not needed for the exam e.g., purse/wallet, keys and mobile phones. The first study was conducted with a small group of students and all went well. The second was conducted in Central Hall with a full cohort of students. The Chair **reported** that the trial had been successful and that he had agreed that the bags be implemented with immediate effect. The Committee asked for a review of the procedure in October. (**Action Point**: RG)

**ii) Matters arising form Senate 15 May 2007**

07/08 Senate: Analyses of Degree Classification SCA M04/16, M04/96, M05/97, M06/102(g) 07/07

The Chair had presented the degree classification analysis at the May meeting of Senate. In response, Senate thanked the Chair for the report and agreed that it remained useful to monitor these output measures on an annual basis. It was also **decided** that in future it would be interesting to include completion rates in the report as well as separate data for PEP (given its different entry qualifications in relation to the three contributing departments).

**iii) Matters arising from UTC 21 May 2007 (TC07/98 refers)**

i) Academic Misconduct. UTC noted that the Committee had asked the University to reflect on the problem of communicating to overseas students, both individually and as a group, the University’s expectations in relation to academic misconduct. UTC acknowledged that it is important to improve students’ academic skills and it was suggested that training in how to avoid academic misconduct should ideally be provided for overseas students’ in their first language and in advance of their arrival at York.

The Chair of SCA **reported** that as a result of this discussion, the plagiarism awareness module would also be available in Mandarin. It is hoped that this will reduce the number of academic misconduct cases among Chinese students.

ii) Devolved Authority SCA 07/31

The Chair reported that UTC approved the arrangements proposed by SCA for delegation of some
routine business (including external examiner appointments) from the SCA to senior members of the Student Administration Services.

UTC had also asked the SCA to undertake some work to clarify whether the administration of assessment procedures within departments could be streamlined, in relation to contacts with the SCA and Student Administrative Services. In response, the Committee agreed that the Student Administrative Services should begin this process by compiling a list of the main interfaces between departments and the SCA and SAS and identifying those that require academic involvement. **Action Point:** RG

**07/65 Oral report from the Chair**

i) Trial of plastic bags in exams

This had been considered under matters arising (M07/64(i) (2)).

**07/66 Annual Priorities for 2006/7, 06/81, 07/33**

The Committee reviewed its Annual Priorities for 2006/7. Most items have been completed with the following in progress or still outstanding: item (iv) (contribution to UTC working party on AP(E)L) is still in progress; item (viii) (assessment procedures for foundation degrees) has not been completed and will remain a priority in 2007/8; amendments to Regulation 2 relating to item (ix) (review of Regulation 5.2) are still to be completed and will be presented at the October meeting of the Committee; item (a) (policy on feedback) is being developed by University Teaching Committee; item (b) (QAA Code) is addressed below M07/71; item (c) (policy on failure) will be addressed in the Review of Modularisation. **(Action Point : PS)**

**07/67 Academic Misconduct Policy relating to Research Students 07/48, 07/28c**

The Committee received a further, revised version of the policy and discussed an additional amendment that would require students to maintain records of empirical research projects. Members agreed that the data must be verifiable and credible but differed on the appropriate format. It was agreed that the policy should not stipulate that data be available only in hard copy but state that departments are required to determine an appropriate verifiable format for their particular discipline. **(Action point : PS)**

**07/68 Proposed Modifications to the Academic Misconduct Procedures**

The Committee received a paper from the Chair proposing changes to the University’s academic misconduct procedures. The current procedures have been in operation since October 2004. The SCA has continued to revise, develop and enhance the procedures and it is time to update the booklet with these and additional changes.

The Chair proposed the following additional changes:

1. **Improved flow of process**

i. Currently the Chair of the Board of Examiners is required to report cases of suspected academic misconduct to the Chair of the SCA in order that the latter may advise on the appropriate course of
action. This has the potential to create delay at the start of the investigation.

The Committee **recommended** to University Teaching Committee that the Chair of the Board of Examiners should determine if there is a case to answer, consulting with the Chair of SCA only if further advice is required, and the appropriate course of action to be taken, by conducting a preliminary investigation of the objective facts of the case. The student should not be interviewed as part of this process.

ii. The current procedures indicate (section 3.2) that membership of the investigating sub-committee should include ‘normally at least one external examiner’. The Committee also **recommended** to University Teaching Committee that while the external examiners should be informed in cases of serious academic misconduct, they should not be routinely included as members of the investigating sub-committee.

iii. Current procedures can be protracted and circulation and consideration of reports arising from academic misconduct cases can delay the conclusion of a case and take up time in other University committees. The Committee **recommended** to University Teaching Committee that only the following would be reported to SCC/BfGS: cases with a penalty of 5 or more, second offences or other offences, or instances where the Chair of the SCA deems a hearing to be necessary. In all other instances the department will conduct the process and submit a single report to the SCA, for report under category II reserved business.

### 2. Minor cases of academic misconduct

There are degrees of academic misconduct and any penalty should be proportionate to the offence. The Committee also recognised the administrative burden involved in implementing the full misconduct procedures as currently formulated, which are required to be applied to all assessed work. To reflect these concerns, the Committee **recommended** to University Teaching Committee the following:

- Academic misconduct in work that does not count towards an award, or a transcript mark, or a progression decision should not normally be addressed using the full misconduct procedures. In these instances the student should be warned by their department of the unacceptable nature of academic misconduct and the potentially serious consequences that would follow from misconduct in other circumstances, and the department should take the opportunity to educate the student regarding discipline-specific academic practice, using on-line plagiarism awareness materials, for example. There would be no need to inform the SCA about incidents of this type, although it would be advisable for departments to place a note on the student’s file, which could be considered in any subsequent case of misconduct.

Exceptions to the above would occur if a student has been recklessly dishonest in the course of their misconduct, or has acted so as to create a breach of faith with the University, or to raise questions about their fitness to practice.

Nonetheless departments should be vigilant for academic misconduct in all assessed work.

- There should be a system of formal warnings, administered within departments, to cover first offences of academic misconduct in work which does contribute to the award, or a mark on the transcript, or a progression decision, where the proportional contribution of
the affected work to the award is less than 0.5%. In these cases, students would be invited to a meeting with the Chair if the Board of Examiners, given the formal warning in writing and verbally, and required to undertake academic misconduct awareness training. The work involved would be given an academic mark, a record of the offence will be kept, and the incident should be reported to the SCA. This will not be considered as a ‘first offence’ but it may be taken into account should there be a subsequent offence of academic misconduct.

If the offence turns out to be more serious than initially suspected, or the student contests the case, then the full procedures would be invoked. Students would have the right to be accompanied to the meeting with the Chair of the Board of Examiners, and a standard template will be devised by the SCA for the warning letter.

The Committee noted that the formal warning procedure was sufficiently robust that it could apply to cases of collusion as well as plagiarism.

- The procedures currently recommend that the normal penalty for a second offence of academic misconduct should be termination of registration. The Committee agreed that Departments should bear in mind the proportionality of this sanction in relation to the nature and magnitude of the two offences concerned.

3. A minimum penalty

To avoid the possibility that misconduct pursued through the full procedures might carry a negligible penalty, the Committee recommended to the University

Teaching Committee that a minimum final penalty of 0.5 points should be established, to be used where a student has been found to have committed academic misconduct under the full procedures, even if the proportional contribution to the affected work to the final award would be less than 0.5. The minimum final penalty cannot be reduced by the use of the multiplier.

4. Forms of academic misconduct

The current procedures do not acknowledge all types of academic misconduct. The Committee recommended to University Teaching Committee that the procedures suggested by the Chair for determining academic marks for fabrication, cheating and personation should be adopted, in addition to those for plagiarism from the public domain, plagiarism from another student, or collusion.

5. Different levels of award

Penalty points have been associated with the award a student will eventually receive, rather than the one for which they are currently registered. Where more than one award is possible, investigating sub-committees have had to produce two or more possible penalty points. The Committee recommended to University Teaching Committee that if the final penalty exceeded 5 in any of the proposed penalties a hearing should be held.

The Chair also reported that the Academic Misconduct booklet would be updated and written in a more accessible way.
Secretary’s Note: UTC approved the proposed modifications: UTC Minute 07/125 25 June 2007 - Modifications to the Academic Misconduct Procedures The Committee approved the SCA’s proposed modifications to the academic misconduct procedures, amended following the SCA meeting on 15 June. The Committee noted that the procedures would be revised in the summer and circulated within the SCA for comment. The final draft would be sent to the Chair of UTC for approval.

07/69 Invigilation Procedures

The Committee received a paper from the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress proposing:

- Dispensing with the stamping of exam scripts after a visit to the toilet, SCA 06/38(i). This has proved to be time consuming for invigilators and has failed to produce any evidence of cheating in the year that it has been in operation. The Committee approved the proposal to cease using the stamp with immediate effect.

- A policy on actions to be taken if an examination venue is evacuated during an exam. Given the impossibility of ensuring that students do not communicate during the evacuation it was proposed that the examination should not be resumed. Once it is possible to re-enter the building the invigilators will do so and will collect in the exam scripts and papers. When this process is completed satisfactorily then the students will be allowed in to collect their personal possessions. The Exams Office will report the incident to the Chairs of the relevant Boards of Studies who will each decide the most appropriate way to proceed. Options could include:
  - the examination is valid and the results stand
  - declare the examination void and set another
  - set some additional and/or alternative assessment
  - assess the candidate on the basis of work completed prior to the incident

The Committee approved the proposal.

07/70 Establishing identity in examinations

The Committee received a paper from Assistant Registrar: Student Progress proposing changes to the current University procedures for establishing students’ identity in examinations and on actions to be taken if a personator is discovered. Recent events have necessitated the need to review the University’s current procedures.

While agreeing with the need for review, the Committee did not approve the proposals on establishing identity and requested that the matter be discussed again at the October meeting.

The Committee approved the proposal that if a person is found to be impersonating a student in an examination and their identity is unknown they will automatically be reported to the police. This will normally be done by the Academic Registrar, or the Registrar and Secretary or, if the incident occurs out of normal working hours, by the person who has delegated authority at that time.

07/71 Section 6: QAA Code of Practice on Assessment 06/41, 06/105

The Committee received an update and proposals from the Chair including proposed wording on new
entries in the Guide to Assessment. These were approved with minor amendments. Other issues will be treated as priorities for the Committee in 2007/8.

**07/72 Trialling academic misconduct detection software.**

This item was deferred and will be dealt with via email during the summer vacation.

**07/73 Examination Fees**

The Committee received a request from the Manager: Student Services to approve annual increases in examination fees. The following were agreed for 2007/8:

**External Examiner Fees**

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<th>Undergraduate (all programmes)</th>
<th>2006/7</th>
<th>2007/8</th>
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<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>£88.00</td>
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<td>Intermediate</td>
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<td>Basic Fee</td>
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<td>PGCE (Assistant)</td>
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<td>DSc, DLitt, DMus</td>
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<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPhil</td>
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**Staff Examination Fees**

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Examination Fee (PhD) 270.00 295.00 plus up to 300.00 expenses paid for by home department

Examination fee (by publications) 350.00 360.00

Examination fee (MPhil) 216.00 225.00

Re-examination Fees

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<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>PhD candidates</td>
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<td>140.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPhil candidates</td>
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<td>112.00</td>
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CATEGORY II BUSINESS

07/74 The Guide to Assessment 2007/8

The process for consultation in preparing the Guide to Assessment 2007/8

07/75 Senior Invigilators Report

The Committee received a report from the professional Senior Invigilator in preparation for the Annual Report on invigilation.

07/76 Date of the next meeting

To note the date of the next meeting as Friday 5 October 2007 at 2.15 pm in Room H/G17, Heslington Hall.

The Chair thanked Dr Geoff Hall, Dr Richard Walsh and Professor John Sparrow, retiring Committee members, for their work and commitment to the Committee. He also thanked the student representatives, Amy Foxton and Oleg Lisagor for so ably representing students’ interests and wished them well for the future.

Rosemary Goerisch

Assistant Registrar: Student Progress

RAG/[June 2007]