Teaching Committee

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held at 1415 on 12 May 2006 in HG/17.

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
Ms Jennifer Winter (GSA)
Mr Neil Barnes (YUSU)

Apologies: Apologies for absence were received from Ms Karen Fritz and Ms S Hardman.

In attendance:
Manager: Student Admin. Services, Ms R Royds
Assistant Registrar (GSO), Mr P Simison
Ms N Allford (SAS)
Ms Becky Palmer (YUSU)

06/36 Minutes of the last meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2006 (previously circulated) and noted that M06/23 will be considered by University Teaching Committee at its May 2006 meeting, and that information from M06/22 has been sent to the International Office and to Boards of Studies.

06/37 Matters arising:

(a) from M06/25, Resitting at Postgraduate Level, the Committee noted that the proposed revision to section 10.2 of the Guide following the meeting was circulated to Committee members by e-mail and also sent to Dr Crawford for comment. Final approval of the wording was received from all members and Dr Crawford’s comments were positive and encouraging. Special Cases Committee and the Board for Graduate Schools had been advised of the
alteration.

(b) from M06/26 (UTC M06/09), Recommendations of the Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum Project, the Committee noted that a meeting had taken place with the Chair and Secretary of the Committee and the author of the UTC report where it had been reported that interviews with departments had indicated inconsistent processes across departments. Points of action arising from the meeting had been agreed as outlined in Appendix 1, and the Committee noted that the Examinations Office would undertake a process of regularly circulating information to departments about new guidance agreed in SCA meetings so that departments would receive such information in advance of the annual publication of the Guide to Assessment. (Appendix 1)

(c) from M06/31, Annual Report on Undergraduate Appeals and Complaints, the Committee received a copy of the report on recent cases dealt with in the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, and the Academic Registrar’s summary of relevant information from them. The Committee agreed that this item should be deferred until a meeting at which the Academic Registrar could be present.

06/38 Chair’s oral report

- The Committee received an oral report from the Chair, including:
  - a) A report had been received from a student and from a department that academic misconduct was being committed in examination sessions during visits to the toilets. New procedures were already under consideration in the Examinations Office to deal with the issue of ensuring security during toilet breaks. In consultation with the Chair these procedures were brought forward so that for the remainder of the 2005/06 examination session (and in future):
    - i) candidates requesting to visit the toilet during an examination will have their script stamped each time to note they have done so;
    - ii) invigilators will be requested to accompany them into the toilet block itself;
    - the invigilator will select the stall to be used and not permit candidates to choose;
    - invigilators should make use of the recently-purchased mobile phone detectors during toilet visits.
  - The Committee noted that while portering staff already check the Central Hall toilets, such practice is more difficult to implement in other venues that are not dedicated to examinations. The Committee recommended that guidelines for invigilators on these issues should be developed by the Examinations Office as soon as possible.
  - b) It was noted that a number of incidences of academic misconduct had been identified in recent examination sessions and were under investigation in departments.
  - c) The Chair outlined for the Committee a query from SCC as follows: “Could you confirm that the following would apply in the absence of any Departmental rule to the contrary? If a student fails to attend a re-sit they should be given the ‘sit’ mark rather than 0? If a student gets a worse mark at re-sit they should be given the ‘sit’ mark?” The Committee approved the Chair’s recommendation to SCC (that the answers to both
questions should be ‘yes’) but noted that there were difficult issues related to re-sitting that
could not be resolved piecemeal. It **recommended** that a meeting be convened of some of
the members of SCA, SCC, UTC, the Modularisation Review Working Party members,
the Academic Registrar and other stakeholders to identify and develop policy on the issue,
including whether a resit should be a full opportunity to redeem failure (which was the
view of the Committee), and how marks should be recorded on SITs and on the academic
transcript.

**06/39 Variation of assessment for a cohort of students (M06/21 (e))**

The Committee **received** a proposed revision to section 8 of the *Guide to Assessment* to clarify
the procedures that must be followed when it becomes necessary to vary published assessment
regimes. The Committee **considered** the content of the amendment and **noted** that
information published in module handbooks about the structure of programmes and modules
should be adhered to by both students and their departments. The Committee **agreed** the
revision as outlined in Appendix 2 and **recommended** to University Teaching Committee that
it should be introduced from the beginning of the 2006/07 academic year, but that information
should be circulated to departments in advance of that date in order for it to inform the entries
in departmental handbooks that are currently in preparation. ( Appendix 2 )

**06/40 Review of major items of business for 2005/06 (M04/68; M05/39)**

The Committee **received** a copy of annual priorities agreed at the October 2005 meeting and
the associated Annual Timeline for 2005/2006, and **considered** progress towards meeting
priorities as follows:

(i) the Committee is making a continuing contribution to the review of the academic framework;

- the review of policy and processes for the treatment of students who fail to progress or
  complete is underway under the aegis of Modularisation Review;

- the survey of practices where student transfer from combined to single-subject
  programmes had been completed (SCA M05/42 refers);

- the working party on APEL had been convened and Ms Karen Fritz was the Committee’s
  representative on it;

- the issue of electronic academic misconduct software packages has been taken up by
  University Teaching Committee and does not require action from SCA;

- a review of the academic misconduct guidelines has begun but is not yet complete;

- the review of the University’s invigilation procedures has been undertaken and UTC has
  accepted the Committee’s recommendations.

The issue of developing guidelines for staff on appropriate levels of feedback to students is being
dealt with through UTC and does not require action from SCA at present. The Committee noted that in addition to the above, new guidance had been provided on issues arising from an external examiner’s report in Humanities degrees; a number of revisions had been made to sections of the Guide to address problems raised by departments or other committees; a review of special arrangements in examinations had been conducted and improved advice on security of examination scripts and materials had been developed.

06/41 QAA Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students

The Committee received a copy of the January 2006 revision to section 6 of the QAA Code of practice for assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education and a summary of major issues identified by the Chair and Secretary.

The Committee considered the code in detail, taking each precept in turn. For the most part, existing procedures were judged to conform to the revised Code. The following are additional remarks and actions agreed by the Committee:

- The Committee welcomed the move to ‘precepts and explanation’ (rather than ‘precepts and guidance’) set out in the Forward, and noted that the explanations were not intended as a checklist (paragraph 20 of the Introduction).

- Precept 1 & Precept 2: no comments;

- Precept 3: recommendations on design of feedback should be drawn to the attention of UTC;

- Precept 4: the Guide should be amended to ensure that departmental Written Statements outline what, if any, student work is available at meetings of assessment panels and Boards. Guidance about circumstances in which it is appropriate for Boards to exercise academic discretion will be developed shortly by the Committee.

- Precept 5: it was noted that there is currently a mixture of institutional guidance (at a high level) and departmental practice (at the level of detail) in relation to mitigating circumstances, backed up by a centralised appeals process;

- Precept 6: recommendations on amount and timing of assessment should be drawn to the attention of UTC;

- Precept 7: the attention of UTC should be drawn to the comments on second or double-marking

- Precept 8: will be addressed in the recommendations of the Modularisation Review Working Party

- Precept 9: comments on feedback to students should be drawn to the attention of UTC;

- Precept 10: the planned briefing sessions for – initially – Chairs of Boards of Examiners and offered through POD were relevant to this precept, as were the current Examinations
Office investigations into enhanced delivery of material for distribution to externals;

- Precept 11: no comments;
- Precept 12: details of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies’ requirements are explicit in departmental documentation but UTC should be invited to consider whether the issue might be raised in relevant annual programme reviews.
- Precepts 13 & 14: no comments;
- Precept 15: recommendations should be drawn to the attention of Special Cases Committee and the Boards for Graduate Schools.
- Precept 16: the Committee considered that additional advice on backing-up of electronic mark information might usefully be included in the security recommendations it provides to departments at the beginning of each academic year.

The Committee noted that a detailed report incorporating their consideration and making reference to the appropriate sections of the Guide would be developed for submission to University Teaching Committee. (Appendix 3)

06/42 Report from University Teaching Committee

The Committee received a report from University Teaching Committee arising from consideration of the minutes of the SCA of 18 November 2005 and considered actions arising from UTC M06/38.

a) Invigilation

It was noted that the training on the mobile phone detectors had not yet taken place as there had been difficulty in operating the devices, but that it was hoped this training and introduction of use, would happen during this term. The Committee considered the question of contacting exam-setters and noted that although guidance on the availability of paper setters was clearly outlined (section 8.9.7) in the Guide, the contact information was not always available, particularly when examinations took place on Saturdays or Bank Holidays. The Committee requested that the Examinations Office review their procedures to ensure that paper-setters and their contact details were clearly identified in advance of examination sessions, and that guidance be produced for Senior Invigilators so that in situations where an exam setter cannot be contacted, students are instructed to outline in their script what they perceive to be the problem and how they are intending to address it, before going on to answer the question. In this way, all students would be instructed to approach the problem equitably, and the difficulty can be addressed in the marking process.

b) Examination end-times

The Committee considered the twin problems of varying end-times for examinations, and multiple examinations finishing simultaneously, which may cause difficulties for students
(disruption when other cohorts leave earlier) and for Senior Invigilators (in trying to collect and count 245 examination scripts distributed between several exams at the same time). The problem could not be addressed easily in the timetabling process without compromising many of the other considerations within exam timetable construction, such as ensuring that students do not undertake consecutive examination sessions. The Committee recommended to the Examinations Office that departments with over-riding concerns about the effects of varying end-times on their students should be invited to review their cohort end times when provisional exam schedules were produced. It might then be possible to address difficulties by, for example, agreeing to provide a level of invigilation that would allow a particular examination to take place in an alternative venue.

c) Degree classifications

The Committee noted that staff in the Planning Office and the SCA Chair had devised a strategy for obtaining more detailed statistics to assist consideration of the issues and a report would be available for consideration at the next meeting of the committee. (Appendix 4)

06/43 Application of penalties arising from academic misconduct

- The Committee considered an amendment to the academic misconduct guidelines to address situations where only a pass/fail decision is made at the end of the award and noted that these were intended to regularise current procedures.

- The Committee approved the proposal as outlined in Appendix 5 but noted that in some of the University’s programmes where modularisation is incomplete, it was possible that applying the University’s guidelines might allow some students to avoid penalisation for committing academic conduct. It agreed that in such cases proposal b) should be applied but recommended that the problem should be brought to the attention of University Teaching Committee. (Appendix 5)

06/44 Analysis of academic misconduct cases (M05/20 c); M05/04 f); M*05/87; M 05/96)

- The Committee received a final analysis of undergraduate and taught postgraduate academic misconduct cases completed in the academic year 2004/05.

- The Committee considered issues arising from the analysis and noted

  - that EU/OS students are over-represented in cases at both levels;

  - that five departments (Biology, Electronics, Environment, Linguistics and Mathematics) accounted for 48 of the 64 undergraduate cases, but that nine departments were not represented at all (Computer Science, Economics, History, History of Art, Philosophy, Physics, Politics, PEP, Psychology). The implications of this should be considered as data accumulates and the issue raised at the briefing session for Chairs of Boards of Examiners (see M06/45);

  - that undergraduate students committing academic misconduct in Year Two of their
studies were overrepresented. Concern was raised that misconduct in Year One might be going undetected or not treated as seriously. Departments may need to be reminded of the importance of briefing students about misconduct even when work concerned does not contribute to the final award;

- that cases of collusion were as frequent as those of plagiarism at undergraduate level;
- that it was pleasing to note that student support at interviews was provided by both supervisors and the student unions. The YUSU representative advised that many students are not aware of their right to representation at these interviews and it was decided that Committee members advising departments on cases would specifically raise the need to mention to students that they could be represented, while Student Administrative Services would ensure that contact details for appropriate representation would be circulated to departments to pass on to students. (Appendix 6)

06/45 Briefing session for new Chairs and Secretaries of Boards of Examiners
(M06/21(d))

- The Committee received a draft programme for the above event which is planned for delivery in September 2006 and noted the ambitious scope of the session within the timeframe, so that good supporting documentation would be essential. (Appendix 7)

06/46 Calibration of assessment marks to the mark scale (M*06/29 c))

The Committee considered a proposed revision to the Guide that included a greater explanation of the process to be followed in the calibration of assessment marks to the University’s mark scales, including examples of calculations to indicate how the process might be followed where a department has reason to believe that raw marks do not fall appropriately onto the scale.

The Committee agreed the amendments to section 3 of the Guide as outlined in Appendix 8. Minor amendments to provide further clarification of the example calculations in the proposed Appendix C were recommended. These included deletion of the last sentence in the first paragraph; inclusion of information about the use of the calculation ‘to repair individual modules’; the need for a minimum of 3 points of reference; the reformatting of the mark scale boxes to identify ‘intervals’ clearly and the possible inclusion of an example gradient for the overall function. The revisions to proposed Appendix C will be considered at the June meeting. (Appendix 8)

06/47 Appointment of internal examiners (M06/08; M06/24)

The Committee noted that departmental internal examiners in the Department of Music have been approved on behalf of the Committee since its last meeting and that all departments have now submitted their listings for 2005/06.

06/48 Date of the next meeting
The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: Friday 16 June 2006 at 2.15pm in H/G17.

Rosemary Royds
Manager, Student Administration Services

RJR/[May, 2006]