Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 25 May 2012 at 2.15 pm in HG17, Heslington Hall

Present: Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)  
Prof. Peter O’Brien  
Dr. David Halliday, Electronics  
Dr. Geoff Cubitt, History  
Dr. Linda Perriton, Management  
Karin Diaconu, President, GSA  
Graeme Osborne, YUSU Representative

In Attendance: Dr. Jennifer Winter, Assistant Registrar: Student Progress  
Cecilia Lowe, Project Leader: Learning Enhancement

Apologies: Dr. Jim Watt, English  
Prof. Victoria Gould, Mathematics  
Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar  
Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator  
Dr. Adrian Lee, Centre for Lifelong Learning  
Beatrice Akua-Sakiwaya, Academic Officer, GSA  
Rosemary Royds, Directory, Registry Services

CATEGORY I BUSINESS

2. The committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2012 (attached)

3. Matters arising from the minutes

   i. M11-12/66 - Report from the Students
      The Committee noted that the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress has sent a statement of apology to Nouse with regards to the lateness of the Examinations Timetable for Summer Term 2012.

   ii. M11-12/68 - Implementation of Chapter B7 (External Examining) of the QAA Quality Code
      The Committee noted that UTC agreed to the SCA recommendations at its meeting on 21 May, 2012.

   iii. M11-12/XX

Standing Committee on Assessment: 25 May 2012
The Committee noted that the Project Leader: Learning in Enhancement has been considering the feedback from External Examiners regarding the setting of ISM topics, and will bring a report on Dissertation project support to a meeting in the next academic year.

4. Chair’s Oral Report
The Committee noted that the Chair had nothing to report.

5. Report from the Students
The Committee received oral report from the student representatives.

Graeme Osborne reported that there has been some complaints from students regarding departments who were planning on releasing feedback to finalists outside of the 6 week deadline laid out in the Guide to Assessment. This is particularly problematic given that finalists now have resits, and may not get feedback as early as their colleagues in other years.

Karin Diaconu reported concerns with the progression requirements for students on PGT courses under modularisation, which is currently happening for the first time. There is a disparity between undergraduate progression rules, which allow for some compensation in addition to the allotted reassessment, and the PGT rules, which do not.

The Committee considered paragraph F8 of the guide, which limits PG resits to 40 credits, where the student has no more than 40 credits of failing modules. They agreed that there should be some room for compensation to be applied in addition to the allotted 40 credits of reassessment.

In light of this, the Committee agreed to recommend to UTC that Section F8 be altered the following, effective 2012-2013:

“Where a student has failed modules and the award requirements cannot be met by application of the compensation criteria, s/he is entitled to reassessment in a maximum of 40 credits-worth of failed modules provided that they have failed no more than 60 credits, with no more than 40 credits of outright fail.”

6. ‘Shallow’ Analysis of Degree Classifications
The Committee considered the shallow analysis of degree classifications from the 2010-2011 academic year and agreed with Senate that the deeper analysis would be more useful when the University had a stable NMS cohort.

Standing Committee on Assessment: 25 May 2012
7. **Conversion Tables for Study Abroad**

The Committee approved a set of conversion tables for grades obtained on study abroad periods for outbound students taking a replacement year.

These tables are approved for each nation, and cannot be altered for individual institutions. All grades obtained abroad will be converted, using these tables to a single integer. This will require that the European tables, which are currently combined into a single table, which consequently continues to indicate bands of UK grades as equivalent of a single European grade.

The Committee also requests that the Study Abroad Office prepare some specific guidance for departments on how to calculate the grades, including defining the point of conversion (indicating whether it should be before or after the grades achieved abroad are averaged). The Committee agreed that it was essential that students understand how their results would be treated when they returned, so the indication on the tables that they are for guidance should be removed.

The Committee would also welcome a recommended set of parameters within which departments can determine average marks from abroad, for example, whether it is permissible to discount any modules, or double weight the best module grades, based on current practice.

Having considered whether it might be appropriate for departments to be able to propose variations to the tables, the Committee decided that in the spirit of consistency, all marks for returning students should be treated according to the same tables.

8. **SCA Signing Guidelines**

The Committee considered proposed changes to the procedures for SCA signing. It was agreed that the Committee should continue to be responsible for signing all progression lists, external examiner appointment and external examiner reports, maintaining oversight on all business, rather than only the exceptional cases.
Some changes and omissions were also noted: extensions and suspensions should be handed by Special Cases Committee as is current practice, and so should be removed from the signing guidelines; the academic integrity tutorial needs to be included as a criteria for progression for taught students; and research degrees need to be expanded to include the EngD. Furthermore, the title of each section should be changed from ‘Criteria’ to ‘Guidance to Signatories’.

9. **Request to complete progression boards with named candidates**

The committee **decided** to deny a request from Computer Science to allow candidates at NMS progression boards to be considered by name, rather than candidate number in specific scenarios.

Though the Committee understood that there was no longer any ability for the Boards to change progression or finalist results, they were uncomfortable with the move away from anonymity that this represented.

10. **Inclusion on First Attempt Marks on Transcript**

The Committee agreed to recommend a change transcripts to University Teaching Committee in order to include first attempt marks on transcripts.

The Chairs of Boards of Examiners were unanimously in favour of this proposal at their recent forum. It was felt that in showing both original and resist marks, the University would be showing a greater degree of clarity and transparency in our results, and removing potential disadvantages to students who did not need to resit.

In exploring this issue, it has also been shown that it is relatively easy to cover the Rs on our current transcripts in photocopies, so it is important that the column of marks be right justified in order to deter such fraud.

**External Examiners**

The Committee approved a proposal that logs of departmental responses to External Examiner reports be submitted to the ASO for review by the Assistant Registrars for Student Progress and Quality Assurance. The logs will be checked bi-annually to ensure that there have been appropriate departmental responses (both in terms of actions and communications) to the externals recommendations.
It was also noted that there is no appropriate written guidance for Chairs of Boards of Studies and Chairs of Boards of Examiners. The Committee requests that Kathryn Lucas, Cathy Moore and Tim Clarke be asked to consider the creation of such guidance.

(Action: JW)

CoP on Research Degrees: Section 8

The Committee considered a recommendation from UTC that external examiners be further involved in the examination of PhD processes, potentially examining cohorts of students in the same way as is done for taught programmes.

The Committee could see the value of such a proposal. The GSA Representative, in particular thought that it could bring Quality Assurance oversight to a process which is largely opaque. There were concerns, however, that it might be difficult to find examiners willing to perform such a function, given that it doesn’t exist in other institutions.

Furthermore, if such a proposal were implemented, it would be essential to make clear to examiners, departments and students the difference between this external examiner and that used to examine the thesis and the candidate. This proposal is that that process be subject to external examiner scrutiny, not that the candidate be doubly examined.

The Chair will contact Graduate School Boards to consult with them about such a change, and the implications of it’s implementation.

Given the urgency of the changes to section 8 of the code of practice, however, the Committee agreed that this proposal should not slow down the process of approving the substance of the proposal. It was therefore decided to decouple the consideration of external examiners from the proposal strengthening confirmation of registration. The streamlined proposal for confirmation of registration will not include mention of external examiners, but will be reconsidered following the consultation.

11. CATEGORY II BUSINESS
There is no category II business

12. Date of the next meeting
To note the date of the next meeting as Friday 5 October 2012 at 2.15 pm in Room HG17- The Dawson Room, Heslington Hall.

No marks for attendance.