STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 23 May 2014 at 2.00 pm in HG17, Heslington Hall

Present:  
Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)  
Dr. Geoff Cubitt, History (Deputy Chair)  
Mr. John Bone, Economics  
Prof Stevi Jackson, CWS  
Dr. Philip Quinlan, Psychology  
Dr. Dominic Watt, Language and Linguistic Science  
Dr. Sandra Pauletto, Theatre Film and Television  
Dr. Oliver Craig, Archaeology  
Dan Whitmore, YUSU  
Xiaoyin Yang, GSA  

In Attendance:  
Jim Irving, Director: Registry Services  
Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator  
Peter Quinn, Director Student Support Services  
Cecilia Lowe, Leader: Learning Enhancement  
Dr. Jennifer Wotherspoon, AR: Student Progress  
Gillian Wright, Registry Services  

Apologies:  
Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar  

13-14/79 Minutes  
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2014.

13-14/80 Matters arising from the minutes

i. 13-14/67 Annual Programme Review: Assessment Issues  
The Chair reported that some departments had queried the committee’s response at UTC, indicating that the original APR included the detail that the Committee had been missing. The manager of the assessment team agreed to meet with the relevant Chair of Board of Examiners as soon as possible in order to make the necessary changes.

ii. 13-14/68 External Examiners and Boards of Examiners under NMS  
The Chair reported that UTC had considered the proposed plan for the scheduling and structure of Board meetings and the use of External Examiners under NMS. It was agreed that a memo should go out to all Chairs of Boards of Examiners in order to
explain the plan and seek input.

iii. **13-14/69 Annual Comparator Report on Undergraduate Outcomes 2012-2013**
The Committee noted that UTC had considered the report, and though they agreed that departments should consider the data included, they did not want to wait for the Annual Programme Review cycle. Instead, they requested that the information be included on the MI gateway for departments to consider. UTC also pointed out that this data would be more useful with additional data regarding entry tariffs.

**13-14/81 Report from Students**
The GSA reported that a joint case worker for YUSU and the GSA had been appointed, and had begun work. They also reported that there had been a spike in academic misconduct cases, which the Chair confirmed was to be expected for the time of year.

The Students’ Union reported that they had had complaints about UTC’s unwillingness to apply the newly approved rules regarding merits for taught postgraduates with failed modules to the current cohort. The chair confirmed that UTC had considered applying it to the current cohort, but determined that this might be deemed as unfair to those students who had planned work after a failed module based on the existing rules. In order to justify a change in the middle of an academic year, there would need to be a very strong sense of injustice, and this was not the case with this rule.

**13-14/82 Review of Academic Misconduct Cases by PGT Students 2012/13**
The Committee considered a summary of reported academic misconduct cases by taught postgraduate students during the 2012/13 academic year. The Committee noted that there had been little change in the number or breakdown of cases from previous years, but that there did appear to be a slight resurgence of cases by Chinese students. It was not clear, however, whether this was evidence of a trend, or simply a one-off anomaly. The GSA representative pointed out that Chinese students come from a different educational context, and that deference to textbooks may be responsible for some of the academic misconduct they commit. The manager of learning enhancement acknowledged this as a problem, and reiterated that these students required consistent reinforcement on how to engage with arguments rather than simply presenting information, and that they continued to work on this as a team.

The Committee also requested some benchmarking in order to determine whether the rate of 1-2% of students committing academic misconduct was broadly in line with competitors in the sector, which the Secretary agreed to follow up.
13-14/83  **Long Term Mitigating Circumstances**

The Committee considered a proposal for alternate weightings for degree classifications for cases where long term mitigation was raised late in a degree programme, and there was good reason why the circumstances could not have been raised in good time (for example, in the case of a late diagnosis of a specific learning disability).

The committee agreed with the proposal, in theory, but determined that the proposed reductions were not proportionate, and resulted in very little difference where, for example, the third year of an integrated masters is affected. The Committee agreed to delegate the creation of alternate weightings to the chair, secretary, and the secretary to special cases in order to expedite matters, with the following caveats:

- Any reduction in the weighting of a year cannot be applied as mitigation for circumstances arising in the final year of a degree programme, as such circumstances should be adjusted for using sits as if for the first time in accordance with the existing mitigating circumstances policy.
- The additional weighting should be available to all students with uncompensated mitigation, regardless of whether their initial award mark falls into one of the borderlines.
- The award mark that shows on a transcript following the application of this rule will remain the 2:3 or 2:2:3 ratio. Only the degree classification will change.

(Action: SK, JW, KL)

13-14/84  **Longitudinal Review of External Examiners Reports**

The Committee considered a summary of the issues identified as thematically significant in the reports to SCA and UTC on undergraduate external examiners reports for the last five years. The Committee noted that the majority of issues disappeared after only a year or two, suggesting that they had been adequately addressed, but that there continued to be an issue with the lack of clarity around the role of the external examiner. Though these questions had changed slightly since the introduction of modularisation, the committee hoped that the proposal for board structures currently with UTC might provide some clarity.

The Committee asked that Chairs of Boards of Examiners be told about these results at the upcoming Chair of Board of Examiners Forum

(Action: JW and SK)
13-14/85  Conversion Tables for Norway and the Czech Republic
The Committee approved proposed conversion tables for Norway and the Czech Republic, but requested that the reference to ECTSs be removed from the Norway table (to be replaced with the title ‘Norway’), and that the lowest available mark for the Czech Republic be clarified to 39, rather than ‘39 or under’.

13-14/86  Priorities for 2013-14 and 2014-15
The Committee reviewed the priorities set for the academic year, and agreed that the review of the NMS and the creation of proofreading guidance had been adequately completed and could be removed from the list. The e-assignment project and the review of the mitigating circumstances policy should be rolled over to 2014-15 as ongoing priorities. The committee also agreed that the University’s treatment of self-certification and assessment should be reviewed, and that group work and peer marking should be added to the list of priorities. Furthermore, the committee determined to consider student engagement and attendance policies and to support the roll-out of the new academic misconduct policy.

The Chair thanked the student members for their service.

13-14/87  Date of the next meeting
The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 26 September 2014 at 2.00 pm in Room HG17- Dawson Room, Heslington Hall.