Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 15 May 2015 at 2.00 pm in JP/003- James College

Present: Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)  
Dr. Philip Quinlan, Psychology  
Mr. John Bone, Economics  
Dr. Sandra Pauletto, Theatre Film and Television  
Dr. Geoff Cubitt, History  
George Offer, YUSU  

In Attendance: Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar  
Dr. Jennifer Wotherspoon, Ass. Registrar: Student Progress  
Jim Irving, Director: Registry Services  
Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator  
Pete Quinn, Director: Student Support Services  
Cecilia Lowe, Head of Learning Enhancement  

Apologies: Prof. Stevi Jackson, Women’s Studies  
Dr. Oliver Craig, Archaeology  
Dr. Dominic Watt, Language and Linguistic Science  
Jelena Horvatic, GSA  
Gillian Wright, Assessment Manager  

14-15/76 Minutes  
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2015.  

14-15/77 Matters arising from the minutes  
i. 14-15/7 Annual Priorities (Academic Misconduct Policy)  
The action that Social Science departments should each be asked to allocate an additional StAMP member was closed, as it was determined that the additional members to StAMPs would be better deployed in the next academic year.  

ii. 14-15/50 Chair’s Oral Report
The action of reviewing the Common Assessment Period was to be brought forward into a full report on the year’s Common Assessment Periods to be considered at the Autumn meeting of the committee.

The Committee noted that a review of compensation and condonation rules at Russell Group institutions had been undertaken, and that the rules at the University of York were broadly in line with this sample. The full review will go to UTC for consideration. The related consideration of the views of the London Mathematical Society Educational Committee would also form part of a broader consideration of whether the University’s current regulations are appropriate for application to the STEM subjects.

iii. 14-15/51 Report from Students
The committee noted that the webpage explaining the use of reassessment marks was not yet complete, but that it would be useful to have such a resource available before undergraduate students were required to make decisions about reassessment in June.

iv. 14-15/65 i. Annual Programme Review
The committee noted that the deadline for the Chair to submit responses to the issues raised in the Annual Programme Reviews had been extended to the end of term, and that the response would be considered in the meeting of UTC in Week 10.

v. 14-15/65 ii. International Pathways Programme
The Committee noted that the foundation programme was now being called the International Pathways College, but that there are not yet any defined assessment regulations for the programmes being offered. The rules are to be considered and approved in 2015-16 for implementation when the College accepts its first students in 2016-17.

14-15/78 Chair’s Oral Report
The Committee noted that the Chair had nothing to report which was not already covered in the substantive business.

14-15/79 Report from Students
The Committee noted that elections had been held for the position of YUSU Academic Officer, and that Thomas Ron would be joining the committee in 2015-16 as the undergraduate student representative.

14-15/80 Review of the Implementation of the Academic Misconduct Policy
The Committee noted that the new misconduct policy had been in operation for approximately eight months, and though ongoing review was necessary (particularly in light of the completion of the PGT academic year, and the related cases of misconduct in Independent Study Modules), some issues had already become clear with the practical implementation of the policy.

In light of feedback from both Standing Academic Misconduct Panel Members, and departments, the committee has agreed to recommend the following changes to the policy to University Teaching Committee:

a) Removal of self-plagiarism as an offence (page 7)
This followed a prolonged discussion which highlighted that different disciplines approach the reuse of assessed material within a degree differently, and that departments should be encouraged to set assessment tasks that encourage and require new material, rather than punishing students for the re-use of material.

b) Removal of ‘Soliciting’ as a separate offence: this is not sufficiently distinct from personation to justify a separate offence (page 7)

c) Clarification on the interaction between the mitigating circumstances policy and the academic misconduct policy where sits as if for the first time are awarded against work affected by misconduct (page 10)

d) Increase of number of StAMP members per department to “two to three” (page 11)

e) Clarification of the evidence required from the examiner when a report is made (page 13)

f) Replacement of ‘subject-cluster’ with ‘faculty’ throughout.

g) Replacement of ‘serious case to answer’ with ‘evidence presented suggests that a full investigation would be appropriate’ (page 15ff)

h) Clarification that when a marks cap is applied without a full investigation, it does not qualify as a formal misconduct offence (page 16)

i) Clarification of the penalties available in non-probationary modules (Table 3.2, page 18ff)

j) Renaming of table 3.3 to indicate it is guidance to support table 3.2 (page 21)

k) Simplification of the reporting procedures when a case is concluded to represent practice (page 27)

The committee considered the possibility of having all first year modules treated as probationary as a default, but determined to revisit the discussion in the autumn when a full year under the new system had been completed.
14-15/81 Review of Written Statements on Assessment

The committee considered a report detailing the items departments were required to include in their Written Statements on Assessment which were not already pre-defined under the modular scheme. Though the committee noted that there were a number of non-standard procedures and policies which remained the responsibility of departments, they agreed that information of this nature for students should be located as centrally as possible. As such, the committee agreed to eliminate the Written Statement on Assessment as a separate document, and instead to require that departments include details of all department-specific assessment information in programme handbooks.

The Committee further noted that a repository of programme handbooks should be maintained at departmental level, and kept available to students for the duration of their study (regardless of any changes that may be made for subsequent cohorts), as the regulations in place at the beginning of a student’s study form part of their contract with the institution, and student’s may need to refer to it at any point in their study.

14-15/82 Review of E-Assignment Implementation

The committee considered a series of proposals to standardise the treatment of online submissions in order to support the expansion of e-submission. The committee agreed with the principle that all online submissions should be treated equitably across departments, and as such, agreed to recommend the following policies to UTC:

   a) Submission of correct file to the wrong module site, but within the deadline for submission will be treated as correctly submitted
   b) Departments should provide an alternative mode of submission (such as email to a central email account) for instances where technical difficulties prevent a student from submitting via the appropriate submission point. In order to use such a submission point, however, students must be able to provide evidence that it was not possible to submit in the normal way. Evidence will be verified by the ELDT and/or IT services. Issues such as browser compatibility or file size, which could reasonably have been checked in advance, will not be accepted as grounds for alternative submissions.
   c) Submission deadlines must be set during normal working hours in order to ensure that technical support for submission points will be available.
d) Departments must configure submission points to restrict submissions to acceptable file types for the assessment in question. Any such restrictions should be advertised to students at the time of the assignment of the assessment, rather than only at the point of submission.

e) VLE submission points should normally be configured to allow multiple submissions of the same assignment. If more than one version is submitted, then the latest version before the deadline should be the one marked, unless no versions are submitted on time, in which case the first submission after the deadline should be marked.

f) Standard lateness penalties should be applied, as for any other open assessment submission. The time returned on the receipt should be used to determine whether a submission is late, with no ‘margin of error’ at all.

If UTC approves these recommendations, the policy should be included in the Guide to Assessment for 2015-16.

14-15/83 Review of Mitigating Circumstances

The committee received an oral report from Pete Quinn regarding the review of the mitigating circumstances policy. The committee noted that the University receives approximately 3200 mitigation claims each year, and that currently 90% of claims are upheld. The committee recognises both the administrative burden of a system which encourages students to provide documentary evidence which is often not contemporaneous, and so proves little, as well as the potential disservice we are doing to students by indicating that any circumstance for which they can get a letter will be treated as mitigated in the world of work.

The committee confirmed the need for a full revision of the policy, but agreed that this should be formulated in the upcoming academic year in order to allow the appropriate attention to be given to the issue. In the short term, the committee agreed that more substantial guidance should be provided to support the current policy, both for students and for mitigating circumstances committees, and included in the Guide for 2015-16. This guidance should be approved both by the Chair of the SCA and that of the SCC, given that the policy is the remit of both committees.

(Action: PQ, JW, SK)

The review of the Mitigating Circumstances Policy will be brought forward to the priorities of the Committee for 2015-16.
14-15/84 Review of Guidance on Group Work

The committee noted that due to staff shortages and a lack of clarity on the remit, the review of guidance on group work was not yet complete. This will be moved forward to the 2015-16 priorities, with a meeting to be set up between the Head of Learning Enhancement and the Chair to clarify the parameters of the review.

Action: CL and SK)

14-15/85 Review of Terms of Reference

The Committee revisited an earlier discussion about the responsibility for policy regarding the assessment of research students, in light of the creation of the York Graduate Research School. The committee determined that the interim arrangements, which included the YGRS dean as a member of the committee, fulfilled the requirements, and that, with the support of the YGRS, it would maintain responsibility for issues of PGR assessment. The committee agreed to propose the inclusion of the YGRS Dean as a permanent member of the committee, ex officio, in addition to the 9 standard academic members of the committee.

14-15/86 Summary of Postgraduate External Examiners Reports 2013-2014

The committee received the summary of Postgraduate External Examiners reports on the academic year 2013-14. The committee noted that though there were some themes in the reports, most issues raised were not matters of policy, but rather of individual or departmental practice, as evidenced by the praise for practice of the same sort in other departments (such as the use of the full range of marks, and the link between feedback and marks).

The committee noted that preliminary analysis of last year’s PGT results indicated that the majority of students who achieved an average over 60 but did not receive ‘merits’ would have received merits under the more relaxed rules implemented for 2014-15, and agreed that further revisions to the rules would be premature before reviewing the outcomes for the current cohort.

14-15/89 Departing Members of the Committee

The chair noted that several members of the committee had completed their term of service, and thanked all departing members for their commitment and service.

14-15/88 Date of the next meeting
The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 25 September 2015 at 2.00 pm HG/17.
Reserved Business

*14-15/89   Reserved Minutes
The Committee approved the reserved minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2015. It was noted that item *14-15/62 was suitable for discussion by the entire Committee.

*14-15/90   Extraordinary Special examination arrangements
The Committee approved recommendations for special examination arrangements.

*14-15/91   Appointment of external examiners
The Committee received notification of appointment of external examiners approved on behalf of the Committee since its last meeting.

*14-15/92   Examiners reports and result lists
The Committee received notification of recommendations for the award of degrees approved on behalf of the Committee since its last meeting.