Teaching Committee

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held at 2.15pm on Friday 17 November 2006

Present: Dr Chris J Fewster (Chair) Mathematics, Ms Karen Fritz Health Sciences, Dr Harold Mytum Archaeology, Professor Colin Runciman Computer Science, Professor John Sparrow Biology, Ms Amy Foxton Y USU Member 2006/07, Mr Oleg Lisagor, GSA Member 2006/07

Apologies: Dr Ros Temple, Professor Geoff Hall, Dr Richard Walsh.

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

06/100 Minutes of the last meeting

The committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2006 (previously circulated). Two amendments were noted: (a) that the capitation fee of £2.58 for External Examiners had been omitted from 06/83; (b) that Minute 06/86(a) had omitted to indicate that some support had been voiced for the inclusion of first year marks in the calculation of the final degree classification. The phrase “although some support was voiced for a non-zero weighting” would be added to the end of point 2 in 06/86(a) to cover the latter point. With these changes, the committee approved the minutes.

06/101 Matters arising:

- Reading Time in Examinations (M06/60(c), M06/78(c))

The Committee considered responses from three departments to its request for pedagogic reasons for continuing with the practice of permitting students a period of reading time at the beginning of an examination. The Committee noted the burden on invigilators because of the opportunities reading time created for instances of academic misconduct; that practice was inconsistent for determining the amount of reading time and whether note-taking is or is not permitted; and the difficulty created for the students with reading time that occurs when students without reading time enter the examination room, are settled and are given their instructions. It was acknowledged that departments might have other practical or subject-specific considerations to take into account but that these could be addressed in ways other than the provision of reading time at the beginning of a formal examination, and that the cases put forward by the departments did not outweigh the practical difficulties associated with this practice.

The Committee recommended to UTC that the practice of permitting a separate period of “reading time” where students are not permitted to make notes at the beginning of formal examinations should be discontinued from the beginning of the 2007/08 academic year. Departments that wish to permit extra time for reading of complex examination papers should be encouraged to extend the
length of the examination session and to place an instruction to students on the rubric of the examination paper to the effect that they are recommended to spend a certain period reading the paper before commencing their answers. (Appendix 1)

06/102 Oral report from the Chair

The Committee received an oral report from the Chair, including:

a) Changes to Terms of Reference

The SCA’s revised terms of reference, incorporating its additional responsibilities for taught postgraduate and research students, were approved by UTC at their meeting in October 2006. The Committee noted that the Board for Graduate Schools had also considered revisions to its terms of reference and had recommended that a further item be added to the SCA’s terms of reference to “consult with the Board for Graduate Schools on assessment matters concerning the postgraduate student experience”. The Committee would receive the revised terms of reference for consideration at its January 2007 meeting.

b) Single system of degree classification

The Committee noted that the consultation paper on the above has been circulated for discussion with a response deadline of 15 December 2006, and agreed to convene an additional meeting on 8 December at 2.15pm in H/G15 for the purpose of detailed consideration of the consultation paper.

c) 2006/7 edition of the Guide to Assessment Policies and Procedures

Copies of the Guide were provided to members of the Committee and it was noted that it has been circulated to all members and relevant colleagues throughout the University.

d) Modularisation Review update

The Committee’s response to the above consultation paper had been considered by UTC and a small working group had been convened to consider the issues and take forward the necessary actions.

e) Disability Discrimination Act 2005

The University is considering actions arising from the requirements of the above Act. The Committee noted that as both UTC and SCC were considering institution-level recommendations it would delay its own consideration of issues affecting assessment until these working groups had reported. The Chair suggested that copies of the booklet of guidelines on the Act, ‘A Practical Guide for Academics’ should be obtained and circulated to all members.

f) Academic misconduct in formal examinations

The Committee considered whether the dismembering of an examination booklet to extract loose pages in a formal examination should be classed as academic misconduct, and noted that the current practice of binding the answer sheets into booklets protects both students and academic staff from the possibility of loss (or claim of loss) of loose pages from examination scripts. The Committee recommended that

i) extracting pages from script books should be considered academic misconduct;
ii) the penalty for doing so will normally be a mark of zero for the paper in the examinations session in which the misconduct was detected, although investigating committees must bear proportionality in mind and at a minimum could recommend that such action should result in a record of academic misconduct, thus constituting a first (or possibly second) offence;

iii) the invigilator guidelines and the instructions for beginning an examination should be amended to ensure that invigilators and students are made aware of the need to ensure that examination booklets are not tampered with;

iv) departments should be encouraged to provide examination preparation sessions for their students, and that the Examinations Office in SAS could provide support for such sessions;

The Committee noted that it would like to review the announcements made at the beginning of examination sessions at a future meeting.

g) Statistical analysis of classification of degrees I (M04/16, M04/96; M05/97)

This item, scheduled for consideration at the Committee’s November meeting, has been deferred to the January 2007 meeting.

h) Plagiarism awareness software

The Committee noted that the Department of Computer Science has been trialling the above, that it would be possible for members of the committee to review the package on the VLE. Access is not yet publicly available so the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress would obtain SCA login access from Dr S. King and circulate details to Committee members. It was noted that eventually all new students might be required to take and pass this module before submitting their first piece of assessment and that this would provide an audit trail that might be useful in future academic misconduct cases.

06/103Analysis of academic misconduct cases (M05/20 c), M05/04 f), M*05/87)

The Committee received an analysis of academic misconduct cases completed to date for 2005/06 under the procedures introduced in October 2004. The Committee considered actions arising from the data gathered and the following issues were noted:

a) that information about a significant number of cases had still not been received from investigating committees and that these should be pursued so that a revised and complete report for the year could be submitted to the Committee’s meeting in January or March 2007;

b) that the number of students found cheating in formal examinations (15) had risen sharply since the report from 2004/05 but that this might be attributed to the different arrangements for invigilation introduced as a result of the AUT industrial action;

c) that the number of cases of collusion had fallen and this might be attributed to improved guidance given to students following the 2004/05 cases;

d) that a number of departments had reported no instances of misconduct for two years; these departments might have particular examples of good practice that could be shared with others on campus, or else not be identifying cases of misconduct that might occur in the marking process;

e) that it appeared that many students were not accompanied at the investigating committees and
concern was expressed that students may not be aware that this was possible. The Committee **recommended** that the Summary Report and Tracking Forms should be amended to ensure that departments advised students that they could be accompanied to investigating sub-committee hearings and that a record of candidates not attending hearings could be compiled;

f) that the analysis of cases should be presented separately for undergraduates, for postgraduate taught students and for research students.

06/104 Annual Report on Invigilation (M05/81 a))

The Committee **received** an annual report on invigilation in formal examinations for the academic year 2005/06, thanked the Examinations Officer, Lynn Burnell, for the thoroughness of the report and **considered** actions arising from issues raised. The Committee **noted**:

i) new procedures for accompanying students to the toilets, and the introduction of randomised colours of paper for students with ‘reading time’;

ii) the need for the Examinations Office to monitor the make-up of invigilation teams and ensure that invigilators of both sexes were present in each examination session;

iii) its continued support for the appointment of a ‘professional’ senior invigilator as the inconsistent application of the University’s examination requirements by some senior invigilators in sessions causes confusion for students when, in other sessions, colleagues do apply the rules, and expressed the view that the appointment should be made as soon as budgetary constraints allow;

iv) that it **recommended** to University Teaching Committee that all new invigilators should be required to attend at least one training session before being permitted to invigilate, and that existing staff should undergo training on a three-year cycle as this would ensure that all invigilators were up-to-date with the University’s most recent requirements for the administration of formal examinations;

v) concern that the mobile phone detector, purchased in 2005/06, was still not in use in examinations although it was increasingly likely that some candidates may be using mobile phones in examination sessions. It was **noted** that the instructions for the use of the detector in a way that would not cause disturbance to other candidates were particularly complex but that the Committee **considered** that the detector would act as an effective deterrent and that it should be introduced for use in all examinations from January 2007;

vi) that a review of the current fees for invigilation and the process for setting them would be considered at the January meeting of the Committee, together with information about pay rates across the HE sector for this activity;

vii) that departments should be asked to maintain records of approved invigilators (see also (iv)) and that the Examinations Office should offer training sessions for departmental Examinations Officers and Administrators. *(Action: RG & LB)* *(Appendix 2)*

06/105 QAA Code of Practice, Section 6: assessment of students (M06/41)

The Committee **received** a copy of the finalised section of the Code and a draft of a report for UTC which took into account the Committee’s earlier consideration of the draft form of the code. Following a short discussion, in which a number of helpful comments were made, the Committee...
recommended that the Chair and Secretary should compile the final report, shown in Appendix 3, and that this should then be submitted to the December meeting of UTC. **(Action: CF, RG)** (Appendix 3)

**06/106 Access to exam papers**

The Committee considered the University’s recommendations on access to exam scripts after marking is complete. It noted that the Guide (section 12.4) requires that answer scripts of unseen papers should not be returned to students and that all work contributing to the final award must be available for external examination or comment throughout the period of study.

The Committee considered a request from the Department of Biology for students to have supervised access to their final year examination scripts in order to be able to give meaningful feedback in preparation for their final-year Project. The Committee noted that examination marking procedures are not currently designed for providing feedback to students; that the issue of providing appropriate feedback on closed examinations needed to be addressed but that providing copies of the scripts was not necessarily the way to do so; that the nature of examiners’ comments – at least in some disciplines – may confuse students.

The Committee agreed that it is important the University retains access to all candidates’ work until the end of the process of assessment but that in principle it had no objection to the return of copies of scripts, or to departments providing supervised access to them, although there may be resource issues attached to this practice and issues of equity within cohorts, particularly on combined programmes, if departments adopted differing policies. The Committee **recommended** to University Teaching Committee, when finalising the policy on Feedback to Students, that consideration be given to the issue of appropriate feedback to students in respect of modules assessed by closed examinations. (Appendix 4)

**06/107 Dictionaries in formal examinations (M06/60(a))**

The Committee received an analysis of e-mail consultation with members of the SCA and University Teaching Committee on proposed changes to the use of dictionaries in examinations, arising from the large number of cases of academic misconduct in formal examinations in 2005/6 associated with dictionaries, and a tabled paper of comments from the Director of the EFL Unit, contained in Appendix 5. The Committee **considered** recommendations for future practice in University examinations in 2006/07 with regard to the use of dictionaries in the examination venues.

The Committee noted from the survey of other institutions that few permitted students to have access to individual dictionaries; that the EFL Unit had indicated that dictionaries in examinations were unlikely to provide meaningful support or an advantage for students in such an environment; that students were using dictionaries as a means of committing academic misconduct and therefore it should be curtailed. Concerns were raised about students’ language abilities and the need for language support in examinations, but it was further **noted** that this issue should be addressed by consideration of entry-level language thresholds and admissions screening procedures. The Committee **recommended** to UTC

i) that the entitlement to use individual dictionaries in formal examinations be withdrawn;

ii) that the Examinations Office should purchase sufficient English dictionaries for each examination
venue, which would be available to any student on request in any examination;

iii) that University Teaching Committee should decide an appropriate point at which these recommendations should be introduced.

(Appendix 5)

06/108 Application of penalties arising from academic misconduct

(M06/79 c); M06/43)

The Committee received a draft proposal from the Chair in respect of the application of penalties arising from academic misconduct, revised following the meeting held with Special Cases Committee.

The Committee noted the changes in wording made to Sections a) and b) of the document it had originally approved, and also that Section c), relating to modules marked on a pass/fail basis, assumed a distinction between modules of this type which are purely progressional and those which are integral to the final award. The Committee considered whether misconduct in a pass/fail module should automatically attract a fail grade, but decided that, while Investigating Subcommittees should have the option of failure at their disposal, they should also bear in mind the proportionality of the penalty to the offence. Section d) addressed the issue of the 'best of' rules (e.g. taking the best available marks from three out of five assessments). In order to ensure that the mark for any work that had been reduced by academic misconduct could not be set aside, the proposal is that misconducted marks must be given priority over those not affected by misconduct and be carried forward into the final classification. Section e) proposed to rectify the anomaly that penalty points are not attributed to those guilty of misconduct in closed examinations under the existing arrangements, which stipulate only that the mark for the paper should be set to zero. The Committee agreed the proposals, thanked the Chair for the comprehensive and considered paper he had presented on the issues, and recommended to University Teaching Committee that the proposals be in place from the beginning of academic year 2007/08.

(Appendix 6)

06/109 Distance Education Programmes

The Committee received and approved a proposal from Martin Forster to extend the number of 'time zones' in which the Health Economics programme distance examinations would take place. The Committee received and approved a proposal from Adele Claxton for approval of a distant examination centre in Canada, subject to written confirmation from the distant centre that they had received the University’s current Guide to Assessment and agreed to apply the examination conditions required.

Secretary’s note: confirmation has since been received from the distant centre.

(Appendix 7)

06/110 External Examiners Induction Procedures

The Committee deferred the planned briefing on External Examiners Induction procedures at other institutions from committee members to its meeting in January 2007.
06/111 Checking students’ previous work during academic misconduct investigations (Agendum 21)

The Committee deferred this item to its meeting in January 2007.

06/112 Revision of Regulation 5.2 (Agendum 22)

The Committee deferred this item to its meeting in January 2007.

06/113 Resit Regulations and the Review of Modularisation (Agendum 23)

The Committee received for information the minutes and supporting papers of a meeting held during July 2006 between the Chair and Secretary, the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Learning, Teaching and Information, and representatives of the Modularisation Review Group, Special Cases Committee, and the Academic Support Office.

06/114 Date of the next meeting

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 19 January 2007 at 2.15 pm in Room H/G17, Heslington Hall.

Rosemary Goerisch
Assistant Registrar: Student Progress

RAG/[November, 2006]