Teaching Committee

Standing Committee on Assessment

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 5 October 2007 at 2.15 pm in Room H/G17, Heslington Hall.

Present: Dr Chris Fewster (Chair), Mathematics, Ms Karen Fritz, Health Sciences, Professor Colin Runciman, Computer Science, Dr Anne Duhme-Klair, Chemistry, Dr David Efird, Philosophy and BfGS, Ms Grace Fletcher-Hall, YUSU Member 2007/08, Mr Oleg Lisagor, GSA Member 2006/7

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

07/83 Welcome to new members and apologies for absence

The chair welcomed Dr David Efird from the department of Philosophy and the Board for Graduate Schools and Dr Simon Eveson from the department of Mathematics, who was unable to attend the meeting.

CATEGORY I BUSINESS

07/84 Minutes

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2007.

07/85 Matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2007

a) A report of the University Teaching Committee meeting of 25 June 2007
The Committee noted that UTC had discussed a number of matters referred from the June meeting of SCA, including:

A Defining Point for Registration to Modules (SCA M07/51)
UTC had approved the proposals as detailed in the SCA minute.

Invigilation of Formal University Examination
UTC had considered the SCA’s proposal to employ a team of professional invigilators (to be managed by the Examinations Office) and decided to recommend to Planning Committee that central funding be made available to support the initiative.
**Modifications to the Academic Misconduct Procedures (SCA M07/68)**
UTC had approved the SCA’s proposed modifications to the academic misconduct procedures, amended following the SCA meeting on 15 June.

**b) Matters arising from the minutes of the SCA meeting held on 15 June 2007**

**Academic Misconduct (M07/48, M07/64)**
The Department of Electronics and the School of Management had been asked to provide details of briefings given to overseas students in respect of academic misconduct.

The Committee received a full and informative response from the department of Electronics and noted that the department was taking significant measure to educate its students about good academic practice and to raise awareness of academic misconduct.

The Committee also received a response from the York School of Management giving details of the department’s strategy for informing students about academic misconduct, and asking for guidance from the Committee on how to reduce the number cases in the department. The Committee recommended that the department should introduce the University’s on-line plagiarism awareness module at the earliest opportunity. Secretary’s note: a memo, on behalf of the Committee, making this recommendation went to the department on 8 October 2007.

Departments that had not reported any cases of academic misconduct in the last two years had been asked to share their examples of good practice. The Committee received brief responses from the departments of History of Art and Archaeology that did not highlight any examples of good practice. The Committee received a very full response from the department of Physics explaining possible reasons for the lack of academic misconduct detected in their programmes. The Committee agreed with the department’s suggestion that it would be useful to disseminate the Committee’s annual report on academic misconduct to Chairs of Boards of Examiners would enable them to see the types of misconduct being reported in cognate disciplines. Secretary’s Note: this has been done

Committee members noted that a guide to good practice in educating students about academic misconduct would be a useful tool for academic colleagues and agreed that this suggestion should be forwarded to the Forum on the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. Secretary’s Note: this has been done

**Use of clear plastic bags in formal University examinations (M07/49, M07/64)**
The Assistant Registrar: Student Progress reported that the bags have been in use since the Committee gave its approval for the pilot, including the resit examination session. No issues or problems relating to the bags had been reported and both professional senior invigilators approved of the practice and felt that it made the handling of students’ possessions much easier to manage.

The Committee approved the continuation of this practice for 2007/8.

**Devolved responsibility (M07/31, M07/64)**
UTC had requested that the SAS should compile a list of the main interfaces between departments,
SAS and SCA and identify those that require academic involvement. It was reported that this has begun and that findings will be reported at a future meeting.

**Annual Priorities 2006/7 (M07/66)**
The Committee received a paper suggesting amendments to Regulation 2 in connection with the review of Regulation 5.2. The Committee noted that it might be appropriate to separate undergraduate programmes from postgraduate programmes in the revised regulations.

A small group of members will meet to discuss the assessment issues raised in the paper and make recommendations on other issues. (*Action point: PS*)

**Academic Misconduct Policy relating to research students (M07/67)**
The Committee received an amendment to the policy in regard to the format of students’ records of empirical research projects and approved the change.

**Trialling academic misconduct detection software (M 07/72)**
The Chair reported that the Safe Assignment plagiarism detection system was now a standard part of the University’s VLE, so a comparative trial of different systems was no longer necessary. However the Chair would liaise with the Learning Technologist, Richard Walker regarding ways of evaluating the effectiveness of Safe Assignment. It was also reported that the on-line plagiarism awareness module would be piloted with a small number of departments during 2007/8 and that customised versions of the module had been produced for these departments.

**07/86 Oral Report from the Chair**
The Committee received an oral report from the Chair. It was noted that:

(i) the schedule of signing sessions had been distributed to members and that the Chair would attend sessions where new members were present;

(ii) since the last meeting of the Committee, the Guide to Assessment and the Academic Misconduct Policies, Guidelines and Procedures had both been updated and would be distributed in the near future;

(iii) staff from Student Administration Services had recently visited a local school where identification technology was in use, in order to assess the feasibility of developing similar systems to detect and deter personation in University examinations. The committee approved further feasibility investigations.

**Terms of Reference and Membership**
The Chair reported that no changes to the Committee’s Terms of Reference were envisaged and confirmed this year’s membership as:

Dr Chris Fewster (Chair), Mathematics
Professor Colin Runciman, Computer Science
Ms Karen Fritz, Health Sciences
Dr Anne Duhme-Klair, Chemistry
Dr David Efird, Philosophy and BfGS
Dr Simon Eveson, Mathematics
Dr Harold Mytum, Archaeology
One Vacancy

The Chair confirmed that the Committee met its constituency requirements.

07/87 Annual Timeline

The Committee received and approved the annual timeline of routine Committee business scheduled for each meeting throughout the year. It was decided that as a number of changes had been made to invigilation procedures in the last year the annual review would be retained for this year.

07/88 Committee Priorities in 2007/8

The Committee received and approved its annual priorities for 2006/7.

07/89 Academic Misconduct Annual Report 2006/7

The Committee received an annual report on Undergraduate and taught Postgraduate cases of academic misconduct and their outcomes for 2006/7.

It was noted that the number of reported undergraduate cases was down by 11% on last year. In particular the department of Electronics had 35% fewer cases in 2006/7. The Committee noted that the statistics appeared to indicate success in educating students regarding good and bad academic practice. The hope was expressed that the number of academic misconduct cases in examinations should be significantly reduced in 2007/8, given that individual dictionaries will no longer be permitted in examinations.

The Committee also noted that the number of postgraduate cases had risen by 39% on last year. Members noted that this may be due to improved detection measures as there had not been this percentage rise in the student body. Concern was expressed at the number of students who did not avail themselves of GSA representation.

07/90 Pilot Study in the Recording of Research Students’ Oral Examinations

(SCA M07/15, BfGS M05/66b, 05/82, 05/83iii, Senate M05/71, 06/4)

The Committee received an update from the departments of Biology and Health Sciences on their recording of research students’ oral examinations. The pilot is being undertaken at the request of Senate.

The department of Biology reported that they had recorded nine vivas and only one external examiner had expressed unhappiness with the procedure as a matter of principle. Despite this he did not object to the examination being recorded. The department had raised the question as to whether responsibility for ensuring that vivas are recorded should lie with departments or the GSO. The Committee decided that this responsibility should lie with departments and noted that it would be important for departments to keep a diary of forthcoming vivas so as to ensure that the equipment was available.

Health Sciences had begun recording vivas before the official University pilot and had recorded 16
vivas. During this period two external examiners refused to be recorded. It was noted that in one of these cases there was an appeal which was eventually referred to the Independent Adjudicator. The department had asked for guidance on how to deal with an external examiner who refused to be recorded.

The Committee discussed the issue and decided that the nomination form should ask if the proposed examiner has agreed to the recording; if they have not then the name of an independent observer should be given. A student should not be disadvantaged because of an external examiner’s reluctance to comply with the University’s procedures, and the academic suitability of the proposed examiner should outweigh their views on this matter. It was noted that, based on the trial, independent observers would be needed only on rare occasions.

The committee also discussed elements of a viva that cannot be audio-recorded e.g. the use of equations, diagrams, white boards and computers. It was decided to bear this in mind when finalising policy on the recording of vivas, but it was generally thought that the audio recording provides the necessary minimum for any appeal against bias in the examination and that normally the routine collection of additional data was unnecessary.

**CATEGORY II BUSINESS**

**07/91 Copies of documentation**

Committeemembers received a copy of the latest edition of the Checklist for Committee members and SAS members undertaking Chair’s Actions. The University’s Ordinances and Regulations, Academic Misconduct Guidelines and the Guide to Assessment 2007/8 were to be distributed in the near future.

**07/92 Security of Examination Papers**

The Committee noted advice given to departments in respect of the secure handling of examination papers in 2007/8.

**07/93 Date of the next meeting**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 16 November 2007 at 2.15 pm in Room H/G17, Heslington Hall.

The Chair also thanked the retiring GSA representative Oleg Lisagor for his many contributions to the Committee over a number of years.

Rosemary Goerisch

Assistant Registrar: Student Progress

RAG/[October 2007]