Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 31 October 2014 at 2.00 pm in HG17, Heslington Hall

Present: Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)
Dr. Philip Quinlan, Psychology
Prof. Stevi Jackson, Women’s Studies
George Offer, YUSU
Jelena Horvatic, GSA

In Attendance: Dr. Jennifer Wotherspoon, Ass. Registrar: Student Progress
Cecilia Lowe, Head of Learning Enhancement
Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator
Gillian Wright, Assessment Manager

Apologies: Dr. Dominic Watt, Language and Linguistic Science
Dr. Oliver Craig, Archaeology
Dr. Sandra Pauletto, Theatre Film and Television
Mr. John Bone, Economics
Dr. Geoff Cubitt, History
Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar
Jim Irving, Director: Registry Services
Pete Quinn, Director: Student Support Services

14-15/16 Minutes
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2014.

14-15/17 Matters arising from the minutes

i. 13-14/84 Academic Misconduct Statistics
The Committee considered York’s academic misconduct statistics against those of a number of other institutions in the UK in 2010/11, the most recent year for which comparator data is available. In light of the lack of any meaningful breakdown of the statistics from other institutions, few conclusions could be drawn beyond an acknowledgement that York was not significantly better or worse than the institutions listed.
ii. 14-15/7 Annual Priorities – Oral Reports
The Committee representatives for each priority area reported the following developments:

- E-Assignment (report from Steve King):
  A report based on feedback from the summer term pilot of an anonymous submission workflow is to be submitted to UTC in November. The pilot has been successful and the scheme is now being rolled out to any departments willing to participate, although it is not compulsory. The report will include recommendation for investment in further improvements such as batch printing, tablet-compatibility, enhanced student views and a dedicated feedback hub.

- Review of Mitigating Circumstances Policy: no representative in attendance

- Collaborative Learning and Assessment (Sandra Pauletto and Cecilia Lowe):
  A meeting has taken place and a list of questions regarding the scope of the project collated and sent to the Secretary for clarification. It was confirmed that the timescale for the project was this academic year, but that the option of rolling over into 2015-16 existed if it were agreed that the scope was too wide for one year. It was also confirmed that there was no dedicated budget but the team could draw on other SCA members for support if required. It was agreed that the next step is for the project team to identify what can realistically be delivered this year.

- Roll out of the new Academic Misconduct Policy (Jen Wotherspoon):
  A meeting has taken place and the majority of departments have nominated StAMP members. An induction session for departmental StAMP members is scheduled for 3 December in order to identify and agree types of academic misconduct.

- Reviewing Departmental Written Statements of Assessment: (Philip Quinlan and Gillian Wright):
  A brief meeting has taken place and the project team has identified that the next step is to identify how many of the items currently listed within Appendix A are now included in the Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback. It is expected that any exceptions will then form a revised Appendix A.

iii. 14-15/9 Preliminary Review of Awards and Progression
The Secretary has collated information as to which departments are withholding marks. The Students’ Union agreed to discuss the issue with students in these departments to determine how the withholding affected their student experience.

(Action: GO)
14-15/18  Chair’s Oral Report
The Chair reported the following developments:
   i. Action arising from National Student Survey (NSS)
John Robinson is leading a task force to identify how the University can improve in the areas in which low scores were achieved in the most recent NSS, which includes assessment and feedback. The Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment (TESTA) methodology is to be applied in order to audit and map departmental practice regarding assessment and feedback with the aim of producing a broader spread of data, using techniques such as questionnaires to students and inter-year focus groups. The Committee noted that the overall intention is to improve the student experience whilst it is hoped that NSS scores will also improve as a natural side effect.

   ii. UCU Industrial Action
UCU members voted in favour of action short of strike (ASOS) to start 6 November, to include a boycott of assessment setting and marking. A revised contingency plan for assessment is being submitted to UTC on 13 November and for ratification to Senate beyond that, with the intention being to minimise any disruptive effect on students. There are a number of options under consideration from awarding unclassified degrees where possible and confirming classifications at a later date, to postponing awards in the event of too many missing marks. It was noted that PhD vivas are affected but external examiners are not included in the action due to contractual differences.

14-15/19  Report from Students
The Students’ Union reported that the number of appeals had increased from the previous year but not by an unduly concerning amount. A new joint caseworker was recruited in the summer working with both YUSU and GSA members.

Course reps have now been elected and training events are scheduled to begin week commencing 3 November. The majority of department reps were now in place with training also taking place w/c 3 November. A full meeting is scheduled for 10 November.

The Graduate Students’ Association reported that the number of appeals amongst Masters students had decreased.

The GSA has scheduled weekly drop-in sessions where students can seek advice relating to mitigating circumstances. Timely submission of such claims is to be a key message. There will also be informal sessions for research students held in conjunction with the Open Door team. The GSA will be meeting with representatives from departments who historically have a high proportion of claims and appeals.
14-15/20  Shallow Analysis of Degree Results
The Committee considered the shallow analysis provided of degree classifications and results for the 2013-14 cohort. It was noted that this was the first stage of an ongoing process and that this shallow analysis merely presented the raw data. Further information, including comparator data from other former members of the 1994 Group, is to be made available in spring to be followed in turn by the first ever deep analysis of 2012-13 cohort data.

The report indicated that the percentage of “good” degrees has risen by 1.9% to 82.2%. This continues the overall trend of gradual increase year on year over the last five years, although variation between department and department year to year was evident. It was noted that the report does not include entry tariff information.

14-15/21  Undergraduate Academic Misconduct Statistics
The Committee noted that the number of undergraduate students found guilty of academic misconduct has almost doubled to 80 in 2013-14. The figures included a number of collusion cases which inflates the total, and it was noted that it is not possible to distinguish whether this is a genuine increase in academic misconduct occurrences or an increase in detection.

It was agreed that the following changes or additions to reporting would be beneficial:
- Percentage would be a more accurate indicator than absolute number
- Number of cases as well as or instead of number of students would add clarity, since collusion inflates the latter
- Breakdown by gender is of limited value
- Percentage breakdown by nationality preferred, to include percentage of nationality by student population
- Multiplier no longer required
- Students’ Union and GSA would appreciate data on who accompanied the students to the investigation hearing
- Under new AM scheme, measure of tariff applied will be required

The equivalent information for postgraduate students will be reported upon in January 2015.

(Action: JW)

14-15/22  Component and Module Marks
The Committee agreed to submit a proposal to UTC to include a presumption in the Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback that the weighting of assessment components will be fixed.

Following a request from the Philosophy department, approved earlier by Chair’s Action, to change the weightings of the components of their second
stage modules to a variable 30/30/30/10 split, with the students’ lowest awarded mark allocated to the 10-weighted component on a student-by-student basis once all marks were collated, it was noted that the policy is silent on the matter of fixed component weightings. Concerns were expressed that this change would result in grade inflation and that students’ study habits could be affected.

It was agreed that the department would be advised that the approval previously granted was in the short-term only and that the Committee would give guidance regarding a longer-term solution.

(Action: SK)

A proposal that such changes should only be approved in future by the Committee in session was rejected as the Committee preferred to retain the agility which approval by Chair’s Action offers.

14-15/23 Provisional Progression
The Committee agreed to submit a proposal to UTC that there should be an additional form of progression allowed for students on placements in 2014-15 and beyond: provisional progression would be used where due to the length of the placement the outcome is unknown at the point when progression normally occurs, providing that success or failure of the placement module once marks were awarded would make no difference to their future modules but only affect their registered programme of study.

(Action: JW)

14-15/24 Mitigation claims outside the student’s home department(s)
The Committee agreed that a clarification to address claims for modules taken outside of the student’s home department, including an instruction to the Mitigating Circumstances Committee to inform all relevant departments of the outcome of claims, should be added to the mitigating circumstances policy.

(Action: JW)

14-15/25 Movement of Results Release into Week 11
The Committee agreed, subject to rewording for clarity, to submit a proposal to UTC to remove the requirement on departments to submit results by the end of Week 10. The inevitable consequence of the time constraints within current process is that a substantial proportion of results are submitted to the Assessment team on Friday of Week 10, meaning students receive their results on the Saturday and Sunday when there are very few members of departmental personnel available to deal with queries. It was noted that further discussion and clarification is required before a final alternative can be agreed, although the expectation is that any proposed change would extend the process only into the early part of Week 11 so would not have an adverse
Standing Committee on Assessment: Minutes 31 October 2014

impact on Graduation or cause students undue delays.  

(Action: JW)

**14-15/26 Proposal of alternate conversion table for Mathematics students studying abroad in the USA**
The Committee did not approve the proposed alternate conversion table under discussion, on the grounds that while it was a useful starting point, it did not conform to the guidelines for alternate conversion tables as provided to departments by the Centre for Global Programmes, specifically by failing to address the issue of combined degree students and by failing to propose a single conversion table as opposed to many separate tables. It was agreed that the Chair would provide feedback to the Mathematics department.

(Action: SK)

**14-15/27 Date of the next meeting**
The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 5 December 2014 at 2.00 pm in Room HG17- The Dawson Room, Heslington Hall.