Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 10 February, 2012

Present: Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)  
Prof. Victoria Gould, Mathematics  
Prof. Peter O’Brien, Chemistry  
Dr. David Halliday, Electronics  
Dr. Jim Watt, English  
Dr. Geoff Cubitt, History  
Beatrice Akua-Sakyiwah, Academic Officer, GSA  
Karin Diaconu, President, GSA

In Attendance: Rosemary Royds, Directory, Registry Services  
Dr. Jennifer Winter, Assistant Registrar: Student Progress  
Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator  
Cecilia Lowe, Project Leader: Learning Enhancement  
Marc Kidson, Representation & Democracy Coordinator, YUSU

Apologies: Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar  
Dr. Linda Perriton, Management  
Dr. Adrian Lee, Centre for Lifelong Learning

CATEGORY I BUSINESS

M11-12/48 The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2011 subject to the following correction from Student Support Services that the final sentence of M11-12/40 should read “without a psychological assessment”.

M11-12/49 Matters Arising from the Minutes

i. M11-12/39 Guidance on Proofreading

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The committee received an oral report from the Project Leader: Learning Enhancement on the history of the proofreading protocols and consider alternatives to the current format.

The Project Leader for Learning Enhancement clarified that the motivation behind the proofreading guidance was initially a response to concerns in academic departments about the advice to give to students with regards to ISMs. However, further consultation on an initial set of guidance on professional proofreading made it clear that guidance would also be welcome on the appropriateness or otherwise of supervisors, family and friends proofreading work.

The Project Leader clarified that though basic guidance would be appropriate on such an issue, there are serious problems with creating any policy, in part because it implies that proofreading is a (potentially expensive) requirement for University work, particularly for overseas students, and also because it could hamper a supervisor’s ability to engage with such large pieces of work. The Committee also noted that the ASO is unaware of any other UK HEI with a proofreading policy.

The committee noted the underlying uncertainty about whether the document was meant as policy or guidance, and that, as guidance it could be quite helpful, but as a policy, it threatens to be overprescriptive. They noted that the intention was for the document to serve as guidance only, and that the departments had not seen it in its current state.

The Committee agreed that the document should be circulated to departments for comment with a clear indication that it was intended to be guidance only, and that departmental and disciplinary variations would be acceptable. The ASO should determine the best location for the guidance in future, accepting that its inclusion in the Guide to Assessment would indicate a level of formality and requirement which is not fit for the purpose of this document.

(Action: CL)

ii. M11-12/36 – Report from Students
The secretary reported that the Exams Office is to run mock exams for Overseas Students in December in preparation for first formal summative assessments of new students.

(Action: Exams Office)
iii. **M11-12/40 Proposed Changes to Dyslexia Protocols**

The committee noted that the paper on the proposed changes to the Dyslexia Protocols is being prepared for the UTC meeting of 12 March 2012.

*(Action: JW)*

**M11-12/50 Chair’s Oral Report**

The committee received an oral report from the new Chair, outlining the issues which are currently in discussion, or on the horizon, for the Standing Committee on Assessment:

i. There is no official register of conflicts of interest for the Committee. The chair has a niece in the Maths department, and so will not be signing or approving any proposals or pass lists relating to Maths. Other academic members of the Committee should inform the Chair about any existing conflicts beyond their own department.

ii. The review of Academic Misconduct procedures which was started in 2009/10 was delayed due to staffing changes. This project is now being restarted “The Checklist for Committee members and Registry Services Members Undertaking Chairs Action” is to be reviewed by the Chair and Secretary. Members were invited to alert them to any required changes, inconsistencies, or areas of confusion.

iii. The Mitigating Circumstances working party has completed its work, but the final report is still outstanding.

iv. The Deputy Vice Chancellor and the Chairs of Boards of Studies in the science departments are reviewing the possibility of reassessing or compensating ISMs in the Sciences, and how this might interact with accreditation.

v. Modifications to programmes for current cohorts require approval by University Teaching Committee. The chair reported that he is currently in discussions about the devolution of the authority to approve the modification of assessment only to the Standing Committee on Assessment.

vi. An issue was raised about part-time degrees in light of compensation and reassessment rules under modularisation. Because reassessment and compensation cannot be properly applied until the end of a stage, it can be almost two years before a module mark becomes reassessable (or ‘potentially compensatable’), meaning that the student is a long way from the teaching at the point of reassessment. A paper will come to the Committee once alternatives have been considered.

vii. The Registrar is working with a group of Universities being led by UCL to consider the use of Grade Point Averages as an indicator of student achievement as a replacement for degree classification. The committee noted that such an inclusion would have a large impact on Learning and Teaching practice throughout the institution.

viii. The university is considering potential changes to the Academic year, which could begin from the academic year 2014-2015.

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ix. The QAA are currently consulting on what will become Chapter B11 of the new Code: Research Degrees. The committee will be asked to send responses to the secretary for consolidation into a report for UTC.

M11-12/51 Report from the Students

The GSA reported that there is a Forum organized for the 21st of March at 4:30pm, and invited Committee members to attend or to raise issues in advance of the forum for consideration.

The GSA President further reported that their Representation, Advice and Welfare Coordinator currently had a very heavy workload consisting of 26 academic cases, 18 appeals against progression decisions, 3 academic misconduct cases, 2 mitigating circumstances, and two other cases.

The GSA Academic Officer reported that the GSA is undertaking a ‘Distance Learning Benchmarking Project’ to consider the extent to which distance learning programme students are being considered as part of the student experience, and what can be done to improve services to these students.

YUSU had no issues to report.

M11-12/52 Review of Common Assessment Period

The Committee considered possible remedies to the concentrated nature of the Common Assessment Period, and the separation of finalist and progression boards as requested by University Teaching Committee.

The Committee noted that the number of individual exam sittings in the Common Assessment Period was projected to increase from 13,000 in 2010/11 to 20,000 in 2011/12, and finally to 30,000 in 2012/13, with further expansion possible due to increased student numbers. It further noted that under the current space utilization framework, there are 988 seats available for each exam session.

The Committee recognise that changes to the CAP for this academic year would be very difficult to implement, given not only student expectations that examinations would be finished by the end of Week 7, but also that departments have worked very hard to get their teaching into the already limited available time.
It was agreed that the Exams Office would need to continue to seek alternate spaces for examinations, and that might include smaller rooms, which would increase the invigilation costs to departments. This already includes new spaces on Heslington East, but further expansion into smaller rooms, and potentially into tiered lecture theatres might be required.

The Committee agreed that where possible, for the 2012/13 academic year, departments should be asked to identify examinations where a quick turnaround of marking would be possible for inclusion in a fourth week of CAP in Week 8. These exams will then be timetabled in that week separately from the rest of the examinations.

(Action: Exams Office)

The Committee felt that the separation of finalist and progression boards might be possible under the new modularized scheme, given the increased use of algorithmic means of determining progression. It was agreed, however, that this would require new guidelines on the management and procedures for Examination Boards, which would clearly indicate quoracy, and how to include External Examiners in progression decisions without requiring a second trip to York to attend the meetings in person. A paper suggesting these new guidelines will be brought to the April meeting of the SCA.

(Action: JW)

M11-12/53 Anonymous Marking of First Year Scripts

The Committee considered concerns from the History Department about the new requirement in section 14.4.2.a of the Guide to Assessment which requires anonymous marking of all material that leads to progression or award classifications, and therefore requires anonymous marking of first year scripts.

The Committee acknowledged that the Department had provided sound pedagogic reasons for marking named scripts in the first year, and that such good practice was to be encouraged rather than restricted, particularly in the first year, which has been widely acknowledged through University policy to be formative in nature and a transitional period from earlier educational experiences.

Given this tension, the Committee agreed to change the wording of 14.4.2.a to “Anonymous Marking is mandatory for all assessment contributing to a final award, and normally encouraged for all assessment contributing to a progression decision, except where unfeasible” in the 2012-2013 version of the Guide.
Practice in History, and other departments in a similar situation will not be required to comply with the anonymous marking policy for first year scripts in the 2011-12 academic year, and may continue to mark named scripts under the new phrasing.

(Action: JW to change Guide for 2012-2013)

M11-12/54  Marking and Standards

The Committee received a report from the Learning Enhancement Team on the actions taken to address External Examiners concerns about marking to the full scale and a shared understanding of the academic standards.

M11-12/55  Marginal Fails for ISMs on Integrated Masters Programmes

The Committee considered a proposal for the definition of a marginal fail on integrated masters programmes to mirror the policy for PGT programmes.

The Committee noted that final ISMs on integrated masters programmes are often more than 40 credits, which makes them ineligible either for compensation or reassessment. It further noted that the modular assessment rules for taught postgraduate programmes have addressed this issue by allowing ISMs receiving a ‘marginal fail’ grade of 40-49 to be resubmitted after a period of no more than 2 months with changes made and including a cover sheet indicating what changes have been made.

The Committee agreed that the most equitable solution to the problem was to allow the same marginal fail rules to apply to ISMs in integrated masters programmes.

The committee recommends that Teaching Committee approve the application of Guide Section F.9 to ISMs in integrated Masters Programmes worth more than 40 credits.

(Action: JW to prepare paper for UTC)

M11-12/56  Response to Code of Practice Consultation
The Committee considered changes to the draft of Section 8 of the Code of Practice on Research Degrees resulting from consultation for recommendation to University Teaching Committee.

The Committee recognised the overwhelming steer from departments that the supervisor should be included in the decision making process, and that the requirement for an independent chair was a significant added administrative burden without corresponding advantage.

In order to address these concerns, the committee agreed that the supervisor should be included in the Confirmation Panel, and that the procedures involving the graduate chair and audio recording would only be put into practice at the second attempt at confirmation, where the first attempt had been unsuccessful.

The Committee expressed concerns about the removal of external examiners from the process, given that any other failure of a student would require External Examiner oversight. That said, they also acknowledged the consultation responses which expressed concern over the difficulty of getting appropriate examiners to agree to read only failing work, and the problems that this process might cause for the University’s reputation, given that the University of York appears to be the only institution considering such a process. The Committee requested that the University Teaching Committee be asked to consider this particular issue with care and determine whether the inclusion of an External Examiner in the final procedure is appropriate. Possible alternative to the involvement of an external in each Confirmation might be:

- Involvement only in the case of failure
- Involvement only in the case of appeal against failure

The Committee recommends this draft procedure for the consideration of Teaching Committee with special attention to be paid to the potential role of External Examiners.

(Action: JW to prepare paper for UTC)

**CATEGORY II BUSINESS**

There was no category II business

**M11-12/57 Date of the next meeting**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 27 April 2012 at 2.15 pm in Room HG17- The Dawson Room, Heslington Hall.

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