STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 19 May 2017 at 2.00pm in HG17, Heslington Hall.

Attendance and apologies for absence:

Present:  
Dr Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)  
Dr Philip Quinlan, Psychology  
Dr Patrick Gallimore, York Law School  
Dr John Stringer, Music  
Dr Louise Jones, Biology  
Dr Francesco Bravo, Economics  
Dr Helen Smith, English  
Ms Rasha Ibrahim, GSA  
Ms Tamaki Laycock, YUSU

In Attendance:  
Dr Jen Wotherspoon, Assistant Registrar: Student Progress  
Mr Stephen Gow, Academic Integrity Coordinator (Secretary)  
Ms Cecilia Lowe, Head of Learning Enhancement  
Professor Mike Bentley, Chair: Special Cases Committee  
Ms Claire Shanks, Disability Support Adviser  
Mr Julian Porch, YUSU Academic Officer – elect  
Mr Dan Cashdan, Business Intelligence Unit [M.16-17/89]

Apologies:  
Professor Tom Stoneham, Dean of York Graduate Research School  
Dr Keith Allen, Philosophy  
Mr. Robert Simpson, Special Cases Manager  
Ms Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar  
Dr Zoe Devlin, Acting Director: Registry Services  
Ms Gillian Wright, Assessment Manager

16-17/84 Welcome

16-17/85 Minutes of previous meeting  
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 21 April 2017

16-17/86 Matters arising from the minutes of 21 April 2017:

i) 16-17/21 - UG Academic Misconduct – second offences and students with disabilities: A proposal is being drafted.  

[Action: JW]
ii) **16-17/39 – Ramadan during CAP**: GSA representative was asked to provide guidance for staff and students as soon as possible and Secretary of the Committee was asked to update information on *Guide to Assessment* webpage.

   [Action: GSA/SG]

iii) **16-17/56 - Report on Academic Misconduct by Postgraduate Students 2015-16**: PGR misconduct will be included in the Policy on Research Degrees, which is owned by YGRS.

iv) **16-17/58 - 16-17/58 - Update from the “assessment of group work” sub-group**: Group work will be a key Learning Enhancement theme as part of the Pedagogy project.

v) **16-17/72 - Careers Assessment of the Placement Year module**: It was noted that UTC supported the proposal however it could not be confirmed whether changes to the policy requested by the Committee regarding SCC Referral have been made and Careers have yet to contact Learning Enhancement to discuss assessment design.

   [Action: RS/CL]

vi) **16-17/75 - Annual Report – Postgraduate External Examiners 2015/16**: It was noted that the recommended clarification of roles of various exam boards will be included in the update of the *Guide to Assessment*.

   [Action: AQ Team]

vii) **16-17/76 - Assessment related issues in Annual Programme Reviews**: The York Management School have been informed that *Probationary* modules, in relation to Academic Misconduct, are already permitted on PGT programmes, with SCA approval. TYMS have been invited to submit a proposal.

viii) **16-17/77 - Use of ‘custom essay services’**: This report was discussed at UTC, the changes were approved with minor amendments to the proposals.

   [Action: SG]

16-17/87 **Oral Report from the Chair**: The Chair noted that the post of Chair of SCA is shortly to be advertised, as he is about to reach the end of his current term of office. The Chair also updated the Committee on the University’s Distance Learning project, which is working with *Academic Partners*. The initial aim is to have three online Masters programmes in Management ready for delivery by the end of January 2018.

*SCA Committee: 19 May 2017*
Report from Students
The Students’ Union reported on the Keep your Cool campaign. It was also reported that YUSU were working to address student concerns about exam timetabling, including recent discussions with Language and Linguistics to address timetable clashes between LFA exams and exams for other programmes. The Committee was also updated on the Liberation Survey, an anonymous survey which provides an opportunity for students who identify as LGBTQ, BAME, women, and disabled to discuss their experiences in academia.

The Graduate Students’ Association reported that the GSA elections were under way.

Shallow Analysis of Degree Outcomes
Dan Cashdan (Business Intelligence Unit) presented the shallow analysis of degree outcomes and demonstrated the Management Information (MI) Gateway. It was noted that the data included in the report is calculated based upon HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) data using the Joint Academic Coding Systems (JACS) which is also used to produce a number of high profile University guides and league tables.

The Chair noted that the Committee is also very keen to see the deep analysis which could establish relationships between degree outcomes and student attributes. It was suggested that there is a volume of research analysing the relationship between student attributes and degree outcomes which should be taken into account in the deep analysis.

The Committee considered additional analysis that might be useful in interpreting the data provided and using it as a basis for decision making. The Committee considered the institutional results and recent trends. Departments are encouraged to reflect on their own results, both in relation to other York departments and comparator institutions, and considered commenting on them as part of their Annual Performance Review.

What can the data be used for?

- Analysing the relationship of student attributes to degree outcomes
- Summary of degree outcomes by institution
- Sector comparisons of departments
- Comparison of four years of institutional data 2012-2016
- Variation by department
- Individual department degree outcomes
Comparison with Russell Group and former 94 Group

The Committee discussed the value of comparisons with the 94 Group and it was agreed that while the institution should be compared with the Russell Group, certain departments may value the comparison with the former 94 Group.

Highlighted data:

- Entry tariff has not been singularly influential on degree outcomes
- Overall York has been fairly consistent in terms of degree outcomes between 2012-2016
- While York has remained consistent, our degree outcomes have not increased in line with other Russell Group institutions

The Committee queried the use of the term ‘intended level’ in the analysis of PGT degree outcomes, recommending instead ‘intended award’. This is due to the fact that Masters degrees, diplomas and certificate are all considered Level 7 qualifications in the FHEQ. A student may not achieve a Masters degree but still receive a PG Diploma, which is at the intended level (Level 7) but not the intended award.

[Action: BIU to clarify in the report]

The Committee expressed some concern regarding the lack of awareness of the MI Information Gateway and its use amongst staff. It was agreed that a memo should be sent to all relevant Boards raising awareness of the MI Gateway and also recommended that training in using this gateway be offered to Chairs of Boards of Examiners and Heads of Departments.

[Action: SK/BIU]

16-17/90 Inclusive Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy

The Committee considered the draft of the Inclusive Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and made recommendations for redrafting the policy. Claire Shanks (Disability Services) presented the policy, noting that it had been also been considered by UTC the morning prior to this meeting. In presenting the paper, members’ attention was drawn to the fact that the policy precedes resources which will be developed in the future, and it was hoped that these resources would be sufficiently supported by the University.

The Chair noted that UTC members had highlighted the distinction between policy, strategy and guidance, commenting that some of the content in the draft was aspirational rather than policy. The Committee also noted that the policy had a strong focus on disability rather than the broader issue of
inclusivity. It was suggested that these issues and also unnecessary repetition should be addressed in the redrafting of the document.

The Chair recommended that the policy should include cross-references to other University strategies and policies, where appropriate. However this highlighted the fact that the Student Partnership Agreement and the York Pedagogy do not mention inclusivity.

The Committee raised concerns about the clarity of the assessment guidance in section 10.5.1 however it was noted that the certain problematic terms had been insisted upon by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Helen Smith offered to make suggestions to help rewording this section via email to Claire Shanks.

[Action: HS to email CS]

The Committee noted that the policy will be reviewed by Equality and Diversity Office and Faculty Learning and Teaching Groups before changes will be made in response to comments made by the various Committees and stakeholders consulted. A revised version would be brought back to UTC in the autumn term.

[Action: CS]

16-17/91  External Examiner Annual Report Form
The Committee considered proposed amendments to wording on the form and recommended approval to University Teaching Committee. The Committee also approved the inclusion of the annual review of the External Examiner Annual Report form in SCA’s cycle of business for future academic sessions.

16-17/92  Proposals for amendments to the Guide to Assessment
The Committee considered proposed changes to the Guide to Assessment, including specific policy amendments and changes to the online format of the guide. The following amendments were considered, with specific wording to be considered at the next meeting on June 30th.

- **Approved: Appendix C**: Considering clarity of rules regarding peers being involved in marking summative assessments
  
  [Action: SG]

- **Approved: Sections 12, 25.3 & Appendix C**: Further developing staff and student guidance regarding the assessment of group work
  
  [Action: CL]
• **Approved: p. 163:** Removal of references to the old modular scheme as there are no longer any Category 1 students.
  
  **[Action: SG]**

• **Approved: Section 13:** Further guidance on the use of online/VLE quizzes for summative assessment
  
  **[Action: SG]**

• **Further consideration: Section 16:** Boards of Examiners for Taught Programmes – further guidance on clarification of roles.
  
  **[Action: SG/JW]**

• **Further consideration: Reference to the Pedagogy** – there are currently no references to the York Pedagogy in the *Guide to Assessment*. A summary of the *Pedagogy* will be included.
  
  **[Action: SG, in consultation with Nigel Dandy]**

• **Carried over to 2017/18:** Defining distinction criteria and ensuring clarity on ‘weighted marks’.

• **Approved:** The Committee approved the proposal to improve the accessibility of the online guide by adding a hyperlinked content page and index.
  
  **[Action: SG]**

---

**16-17/93  Proofreading guidance and IPC**

The Committee approved a proposal that, for all IPC modules (including, but not limited to, Foundation Certificate, Pre-Masters and Pre-Sessionals), students should not be allowed any assistance at all in terms of proofreading or editing. This would apply from academic year 2017-8, including any Pre-Sessionals taught leading into that year. The Chair reported that this measure is in response to a significant number of cases of commissioning or inappropriate assistance on assessments submitted for IPC modules. It was noted that while the existing Guidance on Proofreading and Editing (Appendix P of the *Guide to Assessment*) allows for exceptions to the Guidance for certain assessments (those testing linguistic areas, p. 197), a single clear message was required for IPC students (and staff) to ensure consistency and avoid confusion; hence the proposal here to make this exception apply to non-language modules as well. It was noted that this measure is not to penalise students but to make sure that language issues are identified and supported on all IPC modules. It was also noted that, in the IPC, language teaching actually occurs throughout all modules.
Proposal: Repeat Study for UG students failing to progress from Stage 1

The Committee considered a proposal to allow a limited form of repeat study for a pilot period (2 years), with an evaluation allowing a decision to be made about whether to continue or to widen the scheme’s applicability or to revert to the current arrangements. The proposal was to allow undergraduate students who failed year 1 to repeat that year. During the course of a full discussion, the following concerns were raised:

- Concerns raised were about the principle of offering repeat study rather than the number of students who would take this option.
- Has the impact of repeat study at other institutions been researched, where is the evidence it is effective in improving retention?
- It could send out the wrong message to students and thus have a negative impact on behaviour and engagement.
- Significant concern was noted about the range 10-39; members of the Committee felt the lower threshold of 10 was arbitrary and suggested it should be 0-39.
- Staff may feel wary of advising students to take this option, because they might feel it was not in the student’s best interests.
- Students may repeat a year of a degree which is not suited to them.
- Students already have the opportunity to resit assessments and further opportunities may dilute standards.
- The impact of the proposed change would need to be considered by SCC, since the current appeals outcomes are based on the idea that students are not given the chance, via appeal to SCC, to repeat a year’s study unless there is clear evidence that their engagement with their studies has been impeded for good reason.
- Specific concerns were raised about the impact of repeat study on courses using PBL (Law), as the teaching model relied on students being faced with particular issues for the first time, and the presence of repeating students could significantly impact the learning experience for other students. There might also be an impact elsewhere, eg in Psychology, where 1st year performance has an impact on determining 3rd year projects.

On the other hand, the following advantages and support for the proposal were expressed:

- York’s level of retention is low in comparison to other Russell Group institutions and this may help to identify factors relating to this issue.
• The students’ representatives supported the proposal in the interests of inclusivity. However they also identified the need to raise awareness of the financial implications of repeat study, particularly for international students.

• The option for repeat study could actually be financially better for some student than the alternatives (e.g. starting a new degree elsewhere).

The Chair agreed to revise the proposal in the light of the comments made, and to include further data on the number of students at York that might be affected, and, if possible, to include information from other institutions using repeat study. He also agreed to ensure that SCC is fully consulted on the proposal and to take a revised proposal to UTC.

[Action: SK]

16-17/95 Any other business:

• **Review of Exceptional Circumstances Policy:** The Chair of SCC noted that SCC would require data from departments as soon as possible in order to carry out the review of the policy in Autumn. It was also noted that some of the responses to the YUSU Liberation Survey were relevant to this review. However, there is no central repository of data on EC cases, so thought needs to be given to the collection of data from departments.

[Action: MB/JW/SK]

[Action: TL to forward Liberation Survey information to SK]

16-17/96 **Date of the next meeting**

The date of the next meeting was noted as Friday 30 June 2017 at 2pm in Room H/G09, Heslington Hall.

CATEGORY II

16-17/97 **Chair’s Action Approvals:** There were no Chair’s Action Approvals reported to the Committee.