STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 21 April 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 Keith Allen, Philosophy  
Dr Patrick Gallimore, York Law School  
Dr John Stringer, Music  
Dr Louise Jones, Biology  
Dr Francesco Bravo, Economics  
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  
Mr. Robert Simpson, Special Cases Manager  
Ms Lucy Worthington, Placement Co-ordinator, Careers (16-17/72)  
Ms Helen Poyer, Research Student Co-ordinator (16-17/73)

Apologies:  Ms Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar  
Dr Zoe Devlin, Acting Director: Registry Services  
Ms Gillian Wright, Assessment Manager  
Dr Helen Smith, English Professor  
Mike Bentley, Chair: Special Cases Committee  
Ms Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Manager  
Professor Tom Stoneham, Dean of York Graduate Research School

16-17/67 Welcome

16-17/68 Minutes of previous meeting
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 10 February 2017, with the exception of an amendment to the date for the subsequent meeting.

16-17/69 Matters arising from the minutes of 10 February 2017:

i. 16-17/39 Planning the impact of Ramadan on the Common Assessment Period (CAP) in 2016/17 and 2017/18: GSA representative noted guidance for staff on

SCA Committee: 21 April 2017
Ramadan during the CAP is currently being produced. It was requested that the GSA representative be present at the Chairs of Boards of Examiners’ Forum on May 5th, 2017, to provide an oral update on this matter.

[Action: SG/GSA]

ii. 16-17/42 CGP Grade Conversion Tables: It was noted that the Chair has discussed this matter with CGP and the Grade Conversion tables which were queried by the Committee will not be used this year as no students are attending those institutions. Therefore, the Committee reconsider the grade conversion tables in future.

iii. 16-17/54 Oral report on perceived effect of DSA funding withdrawal on students with disabilities: It was noted that the first draft of the Inclusive Learning and Teaching policy has been completed and will be considered at a subsequent meeting.

iv. 16-17/56 Report on Academic Misconduct by Postgraduate Students 2015-16: The Chair is in the process of arranging a meeting with Chair of York Graduate Research School to discuss PGR misconduct policy.

[Action: SK]

v. 16-17/57 Review of the rules for closed exams re i) smart watches; ii) frequency of bathroom breaks: Updates to specify the removal of watches approved to be added to the Guide to Assessment.

[Action: SG]

vi. 16-17/58 Update from the “assessment of group work” sub-group: An update will provided in the May SCA meeting.


viii. 16-17/60 Review of assessment issues raised via Annual Programme Reviews: Matter closed.

16-17/70 Oral Report from the Chair: The Chair noted that the role of Chair of SCA will be advertised in the coming weeks

16-17/71 Report from Students
The Students’ Union reported the Keep your cool campaign is running well, in coordination with the University.
The Graduate Students’ Association reported that they have successfully been running exam de-stress activities around the university. They also reported concerns over the length of appeals for PGT students, SCC noted they are aware of the issue and are doing their best to deal with the appeals as quickly as possible.

16-17/72 Careers Assessment of the Placement Year module (Lucy Worthington)
The Committee considered a paper about the proposed assessment of the ‘With a Placement Year’ module. The Committee recommended for approval in principle the use of the proposed assessment of the Year Placement however raised the following issues regarding the proposal:

- Queried where placements will take place and how students secure their own placements? Through department, Careers or independently?
- Queried the impact of the proposed module on accredited programmes?
- Concerns the Placement Year modules may generate a significant amount of marking, does Careers have the capacity to mark the work?
- Concerns were raised about the Academic relevance of the Placement Year module, especially where students choose to do a placement in an industry unrelated to their degree.
- Concerns about what implications failure would have on participating students’ degrees?
- Concerns that the guidance SCC Referral on page 5 is incorrect.
- Concerns were raised that the description of the proposed assessment was not detailed enough and students may require further support with writing the assignments.
- Concerns regarding ethical considerations related to writing reports about work placements, particularly the naming of co-workers or managers in reports.
- Concerns that there is no guidance on how to proceed if a student considers they have been unreasonably dismissed from their position.
- Suggested that the word ‘consider’ be removed from the learning outcomes and they be made more clear.

In response to the queries and concerns the representative from Careers noted that the department has capacity to mark the assessments based upon estimates of a similar programme at the University of Leeds. It was noted that the students would ultimately be responsible for arranging their placement year, with support from careers and their department. It was noted that students will receive further instruction on report writing, will receive a pre-departure workshop and an on-site visit.

The Chair noted that the module will be an additional year, rather than a replacement year and would not be a replacement for programmes that have a Year in Industry option. As the module is an additional year, it should have no impact on accreditation but relevant departments are being consulted. In
response to the Committee’s concern regarding the academic relevance of the placement year, it should be emphasised that the Placement Year modules are referred to as Career’s modules rather than academic modules. This will make it clear that while students have enhanced their employability and reflected on the process, they have not been assessed on their academic performance in the module.

[Action: SK]

In response to the concerns regarding the learning outcomes, assessment and ethical considerations, it was recommended that Careers consult Learning Enhancement to discuss the learning outcomes and assessment design. It was also recommended that further consideration be given to the guidance on the ethical dimensions of writing the assignments.

[Action: CL/Careers]

In response to the concern that the guidance on SCC Referral (p. 5) was incorrect, it was recommended that Careers contact Special Cases to amend the proposal to provide the correct guidance.

[Action: Robert Simpson to follow up with Careers]

16-17/73 Proposed move to ‘paperless’ signoff of PGR examination paperwork (Helen Poyer)
The Committee considered the proposed mechanism for ‘paperless’ signoff of PGR examination paperwork in order to reduce significant time and resources dedicated to printing and scanning involved in the current process, and raise issues that are not yet covered in the attached proposal.

The Committee approved the proposal however raised concerns regarding the use of Google drive and recommended careful consideration of how reports are stored online. It was noted that RSAT will test the use of shared Google drives to see if they are fit for purpose. It was noted that although paperless sign-off should be used, members of the Committee still appreciated the physical act of signing off in the RSAT office. The procedure can be complex and they often need to ask questions about the process, particularly when they are new to the process. Finally, it was recommended that all SCA members would have access to one Google folder which contains all documents which require sign-off, rather than restricting access to individual documents.

16-17/74 Exams & Assessments Support and Retention Projects update
The Committee considered the comments from departments shown in Appendix 1 and 2 and noted the summary of feedback and revised Project Plans in Appendices 3-6.
Repeat Study: It was noted this is a current issue which the Committee is looking to address, the Chair will take comments into account when developing a specific proposal.

[Action: SK]

TESTA: Electronic Engineering queried whether TESTA could be used at the University, it was noted that TESTA is already being used at 16 departments related to the York Pedagogy, but the project is exploring systems rather than assessments.

Disability Allowance in extended examinations: History of Art requested consideration whether the disability allowance on assessments up to 48 hours be extended to 72 hours assessments. It was noted this will be included in Committee considerations in the near future.

Guide to Assessment: History requested improved briefing of annual changes to the Guide to Assessment, it was noted that there will be an annual list of changes sent out to departments and also more regular Chairs of Boards of Examiners’ (CBoE) Forums will help to disseminate important information. It was noted that resources were not available to provide printed copies of the Guide to Assessment.

Chair to invite the Jamie Holliday, Lead on the Exams & Assessments Support and Retention Projects, to update CBoE Forum on the projects.

[Action: SK]

Annual Report – Postgraduate External Examiners 2015/16
The Committee considered issues arising in the reports and discussed appropriate actions to be reported to UTC on 19 May 2017. The following matters raised in the PG External Examiners’ reports were considered by the Committee:

Lack of clarity to External Examiners regarding the role of Chairs of Boards of Examiners: It was recommended further information be disseminated to External Examiners and better guidance on the Guide to Assessment provided to departmental staff dealing with External Examiners.

[Action: JW/SG]

Availability of data on student progress: It was noted that awareness of the data available needs to be raised.

[Action: JW]
Academic Skills provisions: It was recommended the Learning Enhancement Team respond to the individual queries.

[Action: CL]

Difficulty of obtaining merit/distinction: It was noted that these had been considered recently by SCA, resulting in relaxation of the merit rule. It was queried whether the External Examiners had up-to-date information on this recent change.

Generous Marking: It was noted the Committee is aware of the issues and suggested this be considered as an item for 2017/18.

Over-length assignments: While the Committee acknowledges that submission of work which exceeds the stated word count may be problematic, it was noted that no university wide standard is necessary other than for departments to be transparent make sure students are aware of the assessment specifications and penalties for over-length work.

Responding to External Examiners’ comments: It was noted that a minority of departments have yet to respond to their External Examiners’ comments, it is recommended that all departments do so in a timely fashion.

Further assessment related issues in Annual Programme Reviews
The Committee considered the report on further assessment issues raised via Annual Programme Reviews to determine if any further action is required and report to UTC by 30th May.

Probationary Modules in PGT Programmes: The York Management School had made a request to use probationary modules (in terms of academic misconduct) in their taught postgraduate programmes. The Committee noted that probationary modules are already allowed be used in PGT programmes. Chair to remind TYMS that this option is already available.

[Action: SK]

Extension to January CAP: The extension of the January CAP is currently under consideration by UTC.

Delays in arranging GP appointments: In response to the concern for Physics, it was noted that the Committee has considered this matter and will be carrying out a full review of the new Exceptional Circumstances Policy in Autumn 2017, and considering related issues.
Compensation rules: The compensation rules will be reviewed after a full year of operation, as the policy has recently been changed.

16-17/77 Use of ‘custom essay services’
The Committee considered the summary of the August 2016 QAA report on custom essay services and considered proposed changes to University policy and procedure concerning their use. The Committee recommends to approve the amendments to the Academic Misconduct Policy to provide more robust and clear guidelines for staff of dealing with cases of commissioning and incorporation. The Committee, however, noted the following clarifications to be made to the amendments:

Use of terminology relating to markers and examiners: It was noted that these terms are used interchangeably, and recommended a consistent use of these terms would provide more clarity.

Reference to transactions: It was recommended that it would be legally sound to refer to acts of commissioning and incorporation, rather than to transactions. This will clarify that there does not need to be a financial exchange involved in illicit third party support for academic offence to have been committed.

Probationary modules, not probationary offences: It was noted that probationary offences do not exist and it was recommended to amend the proposals to clearly state that acts of commissioning and incorporation are considered academic misconduct in all modules, even probationary modules.

[Action: SG]

16-17/78 Any other business:

16-17/79 Date of the next meeting
The date of the next meeting was noted as Friday 19 May 2017 at 2pm in Room HG19, Heslington Hall.
**Chair's Action Approvals:** The Committee received notification that the Chair, acting on behalf of the Committee had approved the following:

- Special examination arrangement for student on Natural Sciences Neuroscience BSc

- Agreement for the University of Melbourne, Australia and The Galway & Roscommon Education & Training Board, Ireland to host University of York examinations, for Health Economics distance learning programmes.

- Biology student to resit examinations in home country due to exceptional visa issues.

- Environment dissertation module assessment: The Chair approved the students in this year’s cohort to have the choice of method of assessment between solely producing a dissertation, and producing a dissertation plus presentation. This is due to the students being informed of the addition of the presentation to the assessment of the module without this revision being approved by the faculty.