STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 6th July 2018 at 2.00pm in HG17, Heslington Hall.

Attendance and apologies for absence:

Present:  
Dr Steve King  Computer Science (Chair)  
Dr Louise Jones  Biology  
Dr Patrick Gallimore  York Law School  
Dr Francesco Bravo  Economics  
Dr John Stringer  Music  
Dr Danijela Trenkic  Education  
Anita Savage Grainge  Health Sciences  
Charlotte Chamberlain  GSA  
James Hare  YUSU

In attendance:  
Cecilia Lowe  Head of Learning Enhancement  
Professor Mike Bentley  Chair of Special Cases Committee  
Claire Shanks  Disability Adviser  
Dr Jen Wotherspoon  Assistant Registrar: Student Progress  
Stephen Gow (Secretary)  Academic Integrity Coordinator

Apologies:  
Professor Helen Smith  English  
Dr Keith Allen  Philosophy  
Robert Simpson  Special Cases Manager  
Valerie Cotter  Dep Academic Registrar / Dir Student

Services

Visitors:  
Sally O’Connor  Exams Team Leader

17-18/88  Welcome  
As this was the Chair’s final meeting in post, he welcomed the Committee and thanked members past and present for their work over the years. He also officially welcomed James Hare as YUSU’s Academic Officer for 2018-19. It was noted that Charlotte Chamberlain will be continuing on the Committee in 2018-19 as GSA’s Academic Officer rather than as President.

17-18/89  Minutes of previous meeting  
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 4 May 2018.

17-18/90  Matters arising from the minutes of 4 May 2018:
• **17-18/10: Update on Assessments and Retention Project action points:**
  a. proposal to SCA for making available student module results across all years and degree classifications at Board of Examiners meetings – this item was considered later in the meeting **[CLOSED]**

  b. University-wide guidance on sending samples of assessments to External Examiners - taken forward to 2018/19 **[ONGOING]**

  **[ACTION: MB / SG]**

• **17-18/25: Discussion paper for SCA: response to QAA report on commissioning**
  Stephen Gow to draft a report for September SCA. **[ONGOING]**

  **[ACTION: SG]**

• **17-18/50: PGT Academic Misconduct** - The incoming Chair has expressed interest in carrying out a 5 year review of the Academic Misconduct Policy. **[ONGOING]**
  **[ACTION: MB/JW/SG]**

• **17-18/52c: Assessment issues raised by APRs: awarding marks as incentives for formative work** – a poll of CoBoEs has been carried out but further consideration of the matter is required. **[ONGOING]**
  **[ACTION: MB]**

• **17-18/52d: Assessment issues raised by APRs: University’s position on marking and moderation for external examiners** – Economics to provide update on their review of the processes for marking and moderation in response to external examiner’s comments. **[ONGOING]**
  **[ACTION: FB]**

• **17-18/52g: Part-time students - completion of taught modules prior to beginning substantial work on ISM** – matter carried over to 2018/19. **[ONGOING]**

• **17-18/53: Clarifying the role of GTAs with respect to assessment** – coordination with ASO/AQ to draft guidance for inclusion in the Guide to Assessment **[ONGOING]**.
  **[ACTION: CL]**

• **17-18/64: Review of the impact of New Compensation rules on Finalists 2016 / 17** – The findings of the review were considered by Senate and it was decided the new rules would be kept in place. **[CLOSED]**.
• **17-18/66: Proposal for staggered penalties for the late submission of electronic assignments** – Following discussion at SCA, this proposal had not been taken forward for UTC consideration, because of concern about resource implications. The Chair reported that he had recently discussed the matter with CBoEs and Departmental assessment administrators: both groups had confirmed that they supported the proposal and that resource implications were manageable. He would therefore take the proposal forward for approval by Chair’s Action, by the Chair of UTC, allowing implementation for 2018-19.

[**ACTION: SK**]

• **17-18/79: Annual Report – UG and PGT degree outcomes – sector analysis** - It had been suggested that departments should be required to respond to the degree outcomes report as part of APR. After discussion at UTC, the report was shared with CBoSs, and briefly discussed at CBoS Forum in May. UTC did not feel it was appropriate to seek response via APR. [**CLOSED**]

• **17-18/80: Proposal for standard sticker scheme for certified disabilities** - The committee recommended that the student body should be consulted on this issue before it is finalised. Carried over to 2018/19. [**ONGOING**]

[**ACTION: SG/LF**]

• **17-18/80: Proposal for standard sticker scheme for certified disabilities** - Better information in the Guide to Assessment concerning what ‘stickers’ are for and how they should be used appropriately. [**ONGOING**]

[**ACTION: CL/SG/CS**]

• **17-18/82: Annual Report – PG External Examiners Report summary** -
  - Availability of data for external examiners - Delayed by industrial action effects, but on agenda July 2018
  - Chair to send a letter to departments to encourage the clear communication of marking and moderation procedures - Chair to send before handing over September 1st

[**ACTION: SK**]

  - Concern about marking decisions at grade boundaries - Chair had investigated the 3 depts mentioned and was satisfied that there were no generic issues to be addressed concerning marking at grade boundaries.

• **17-18/82: Annual Report – PG External Examiners Report summary** - ASO/Learning Enhancement have provided workshops on feedback, standards and assessment criteria for Health Sciences but need to clarify resources issues if these are to be offered to other departments. [**ONGOING**]
17-18/91 Chair’s Oral Report

a. **Students without enough credit to graduate:** The industrial action earlier this year raised the prospect of students completing the year without achieving enough credits for their degree. Under current rules, this scenario would have meant that students affected would have had to wait until the following year to complete their degrees. Since this outcome was thought undesirable, Senate was currently considering a paper which detailed how the university could have responded had the industrial action continued.

b. **SCA membership:** as three academic members were coming to the end of their term of office, three new members for SCA were required for 2018/19. Suggestions for possible replacements should be sent to the Chair. The retiring members (Drs Allen, Gallimore and Jones) were thanked for their service, along with the outgoing Academic Officer of YUSU, Julian Porch.

c. **SCA Chair:** the Chair reported that Professor Mike Bentley (currently Chair of Special Cases Committee) would be taking over as Chair of SCA when the current Chair became Associate Dean (Sciences), probably from 1st September. The Assistant Registrar: Student Progress thanked the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, for all his hard work over the previous seven years.

17-18/92 Report from Students

**YUSU:** The new Academic Officer introduced himself to the Committee. He noted that YUSU are currently running elections. Due to the success of Academic Integrity Week in 2017/18, YUSU will again run an Academic Campaign Week in Autumn term.

**GSA:** GSA elections are now over, and course representative training is underway. The Advice team have been dealing with queries relating to Academic Misconduct, and one problem is that certain departments only provide a Turnitin report as evidence whereas other departments provide a clearly annotated Turnitin report and description of the problems with the work. Guidance for departments on best practice for using Turnitin and reporting plagiarism is requested.

17-18/93 Proposed invigilator policy

The Exams Team Leader was present to introduce the proposed guidance for invigilators at a granular level of detail in order to ensure consistency and fairness in exam settings and consequently reduce stress and impact of issues on students. The Exams Office feels that
this policy will explicate the situations in which students have legitimate grounds to appeal, and provide clear instructions for invigilators regarding their responsibilities in these areas.

One of the concerns raised was that there are already 3 different forms of guidance: invigilators guidance, Student Guide to Examinations and the Guide to Assessment. It was stressed that these should all be aligned. Furthermore, the Chair of SCC added that even though this document may be guidance rather than policy, it may still be used as grounds to appeal.

The committee approved the policy in principle, however it considered two points in detail:

- **4.2 Where possible, any suspicious behaviour should be witnessed by two invigilators. However this may not always be possible.**

  The Chair of SCC suggested it may be better to remove the reference to the number of invigilators necessary to witness suspicious behaviour, 1 person should be considered credible.

- **9.3 Medication** - The students representatives queried why medication was not mentioned in this section. The Exams Office noted that any medical requirements would be covered in the special arrangements information given to invigilators.

17-18/94 Proposal for a standard examinations rubric

The Examinations Office had introduced a standard examination rubric (ie front page for exam paper) last academic year however there had been a slow uptake in using it. The Exams Office has now made adjustments to the template which is available to departments to use. It was noted that departments can add information and adjust the template where needed. The committee approved the use of the template, however it requested that it was called a cover sheet and not a rubric. It was also requested that the position of the term ‘secure’ be reconsidered as it was not part of the paper title. The Chair requested that the cover sheet be made available as soon as possible to departments.

**[ACTION: Exams Office]**

17-18/95 Review of the extra-time allowance in open examinations

The paper considered a change to the procedure for the release and hand-in times of open examinations up to 72 hours for disabled students and considers how the extra time should be applied.

SCA was asked to consider two proposals:

- **Consider a change to the start and hand-in time to 10am for all open examinations up to 72 hours.**
Consider changes to how the process is managed for disabled students where extra time would exceed 18:00 on the hand-in day.

While the committee was broadly in favour of the need to clarify extra-time allowance and make sure start and hand-in times are fair, there was debate as to whether 10am and 6pm were appropriate times. The Chair suggested that opinion should be canvassed from Chairs of Boards of Examiners, Assessment Administrators and YUSU/GSA. There were concerns regarding extensions that would result in out of hours or out of term time hand-ins.

[ACTION: SG/CS]

SCA also considered the following points:

- Consider the clarification in the Guide to Assessment on the extra-time allowance provision for disabled students.

**8 hour working day** - it was noted that an earlier agreement by SCA in 2009 had not made its way into the Guide to Assessment:

- **09/73 Disability Issues**  The Committee decided to recommend to Teaching Committee that students with relevant disabilities should not be expected to work more than 8 hours per day and that when they are taking papers designed to be completed in 48 hours should be offered 25% extra time, based on an 8 hour working day;

The committee agreed that the overall recommendation for 8 hours as a working day was good practice for all students. However there were concerns that, in the case of open examinations, it would be unrealistic to expect students to work only 8 hours. It was therefore recommended that the Guide to Assessment include an explicit reference to 25% extra-time being based upon an 8 hour working day where disabilities were being considered.

[ACTION: SG]

- Consider asking the E-Learning Team to see how the VLE can be modified for those students who have been recommended extra time in open examinations. Currently if a student submits after the submission deadline they receive an automatic notification that the work is late. It was recommended that this message be amended to clarify that the work is late unless students have a special arrangement or extension.
[Post-meeting note: consultation with CBoEs resulted in a change of recommended hand-in time to 11am, with any additional time past 5pm being carried forward to the following day. This will be documented in the 2018-19 Guide to Assessment.]

17-18/96    Issues reported during Exams for the Summer CAP 2018
There were 43 errors out of 547 exams this year compared with 27 out of 536 exams last year. The Chair noted that the increase in errors may be due to the impact of industrial action, with more exam papers being submitted late, or needing late changes. It was also noted that at UCL the policy is that errors in exams are not announced, to avoid disturbance; students are expected to answer the questions as set, noting in their answers if they believe there is an error in the question. It may be worth monitoring how this policy impacts the errors at the institution, or whether it should be considered at York.

The students’ representatives noted that there had been complaints due to time lag in reporting exam errors to all relevant exam venues. Student Services noted that they were working on addressing this issue. In relation to this point, it was noted that exam errors were being referenced in appeals handled by SCC. It was queried whether departments consistently reported back on how issues during exams are handled, and it was noted that, in particularly bad cases, they do inform SCA (or ask for advice), but not in every case. The Chair noted that a message would be sent to relevant departments where a number of exam errors occurred.

The committee agreed that informal guidance on how errors are handled (including discussion with external examiners and students) should be considered in 2018/19.

17-18/97    Review of cheating outcomes in Academic Misconduct Policy
In the past two years, many cases of apparent cheating reported in examinations have been agreed to have no case to answer by the StAMPS:

- 2016/17 - 22 out of 31 (70%) - no case to answer
- 2017/18 - 24 out of 25 (96%) - no case to answer (2 after appeal)

It seemed likely that, in many cases, this is because StAMP investigatory panels believe that the cheating penalty is too harsh in the circumstances. The committee considered a proposal to have a four tier approach for misconduct cases where a breach of assessment regulations and/or cheating has occurred, in order to ensure more fair, consistent and efficient application of outcomes.
1. **The current definition and outcomes for cheating cases** - One of the issues identified with the current policy is that there is no differentiation between cheating and breach of assessment regulations, therefore a new definition was proposed - **Breach and/or Cheating**: *failure to comply with the rules of closed assessments e.g. unauthorised access to materials in a closed assessment* (p.6, 1.2.1 Assessment Offences).

2. **Proposed four tier approach for cheating cases** - Currently StAMPs have only an outcome of zero for cheating cases to consider. The proposal recommended a four tier approach:
   i. **Minor offence**: Breach of assessment regulations - (Outcome: Formal warning letter)
   ii. **2nd and subsequent offence**: Breach of assessment regulations - (Outcome: Cap of 59)
   iii. **Middle outcome**: Breach of assessment regulations where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the student could have gained an unfair or inappropriate advantage or where other students would have been disadvantaged by the breach - (Outcome: Cap at compensatable fail).
   iv. **Major outcome**: Dishonest breach of assessment regulations where there is sufficient evidence reasonably to infer an intention to gain unfair or inappropriate advantage thereby - (Outcome: zero).

3. **Appropriate outcome for students using their own calculator**: The committee agreed to the proposal that if a student uses their own calculator where they are not permitted, they have an unfair advantage, whether intended or not. Therefore their mark should be capped at a compensatable fail. If pre-programmed information potentially relevant to the exam is found on the confiscated calculator, then a mark of zero should be applied.

4. **Academic Misconduct Administrators make recommendations, thereby avoiding full investigations for minor cheating offences**: The proposal also recommend that minor cases of breach of assessment regulations could be dealt with by the Academic Misconduct Administrators.

The committee was broadly in favour of the proposal, however there were some queries regarding procedural issues which need to be ironed out before implementation. The committee agreed that the proposals may mitigate the current issues and should be included in the 2018/19 Academic Misconduct policy, with the changes should be communicated to students and StAMPs in good time.
17-18/98  Proposed update of the Academic Misconduct Policy
The committee considered several minor additions to the Academic Misconduct Policy including the clarification of second offences, the clarification of self-plagiarism/re-use of work by students for assessment and the broadening of the focus of commissioned work to include a wide range of assessments, not simply essays. The committee agreed to the changes and noted the need to replace references to PGWTs with GTAs. It was also requested that students be directed to Student Support services and students’ unions when they face cases of academic misconduct.

[ACTION: SG]

17-18/99  Review of departmental criteria for UG 1st Class with Distinction degrees
The committee considered the review and the Chair thanked Keith Allen, in his absence, for compiling the report. The Chair noted in introducing the report that UTC had considered abolishing ‘starred firsts’ when the modular scheme was introduced, however decided not to. The aim of the report was to ensure that the criteria that departments use for awarding starred firsts are unambiguous and the terms that they involve are clearly defined.

The following were recommended:

- **Maths and Philosophy:** Consider whether joint programmes criteria for distinctions are consistent.
- **Management:** Should ensure their criteria are in line with the framework set out in the Guide to Assessment.
- **Education:** Should be encouraged to remove ‘normally’ from their criteria which gives the impression that exceptions may be made – and perhaps consider restricting the condition about academic misconduct to Stages 2 and 3 (i.e. non-probationary modules), if students achieve the distinction grade, should they be punished a second time for misconduct?
- **Rounding criteria:** It was apparent from comparing the criteria that ‘rounding’ was being used in different ways by departments, it was suggested that this term be clarified.
- **List of criteria available to Boards of Examiners:** It was agreed that, once the recommended changes had occurred, the full list of departmental criteria should be made available to all Boards of Examiners, to allow comparisons.

The committee agreed to the proposals. It was noted that some external examiners may raise queries about these criteria.

[ACTION: SG]

17-18/100  Assessment Rules for Masters degrees with partner institutions
The University Teaching Committee has recently approved a dual award with the Erasmus Mundus Masters Degree in Women’s and Gender Studies, pending the approval of appropriate assessment rules. The committee considered and approved the proposed assessment rules, noting the following:

- it was clarified that the students on this programme would gain 240 credits for two masters, one from York and one from one of the partner institutions.
- it was requested that references to ‘exchange’ be removed.
- It was noted that the failing grades for Masters are 0-49 not 0-39.
- it was noted that with this new policy, exit awards could be awarded only where at least half of the passed credit was achieved at York

[ACTION: JW]

17-18/101 Stage averages and ‘predicted’ classification report
The committee considered a paper exploring the advantages and disadvantages of making reports showing stage averages for individual students and ‘predicted’ degree classifications available to Boards of Examiners and External Examiners. Such reports are not currently available until all module marks are finalised and cannot be changed. During the course of a full discussion, the following points were noted:

- Introducing these reports would have serious resource implications.
- Considering the reports could significantly extend Board of Examiners discussions.
- One of the main disadvantages of having access to these reports would be the temptation to adjust individual students’ results, which can result in grade inflation.
- It was noted that certain departments already generate their own reports.
- The reports could have advantages for boards to access data to assess student module marks and provide external examiners with the opportunity to comment before ratification.

Considering arguments for and against, SCA was not in favour of introducing these reports and agreed that a memo should be sent out explaining the reasoning behind this.

[ACTION: SK]

17-18/102 Use of “ideal technology” for electronic assignment submission
Due to the ever-increasing number of devices and browsers available for use, students need to ensure that they are using a robust device/browser set up that will allow them to reliably submit assignments to the Yorkshare VLE. The committee considered a proposal from the E-Learning Development Team to clarify this in the Guide to Assessment. The committee approved the proposal based on the proviso that it is referred to as recommended technology, rather than ideal technology.
Grade Conversion Tables
The committee approved grade conversion tables for Keio University (Japan), University of Granada (Spain) and Anglo-American University (Czech Republic). It was suggested that YUSU discuss these criteria with CGP due to concerns raised about the equivalence of grades offered.

Proposed changes to the Guide to Assessment
The committee considered the list of proposed changes to the Guide to Assessment. It was clarified that in regards to the 20 twenty day feedback rule that feedback may include marks. It was noted that the ASO is aiming to make these changes by the start of August and a summary of proposed changes will be circulated to departments after the meeting so they can take into account any proposed changes in handbooks or other publications.

Review of Annual Priorities
The committee reflected on the year’s annual priorities:

Completed:

- Review of the 2017 change to compensation rules
- Clarifying the role of GTAs with respect to assessment
- Review of sticker scheme highlighting certified disabilities
- Penalties for the late submission of electronic assignments
- Review the impact of Ramadan and Eid on the Common Assessment Period in (CAP) in 2017 and plan for impact in 2018 (Ramadan 2019 = May 6th - June 3/4th )
- Considering clarity of rules regarding peers being involved in marking summative assessments
- Considering the implications for assessment procedures and rules of the new Online Learning project

Carried over to 2018/19:

- Review of the Exceptional Circumstances affecting Assessment policy
- Multiple module / composite ISMs – defining the rules
- Defining distinction criteria and ensuring clarity on ‘weighted marks’ and other
 terminology used
● Further development of staff and student guidance regarding the assessment of group work

New priorities:

● 5 year review of the Academic Misconduct Policy

Suggestions for priorities to considered by SCA can be emailed to sca@york.ac.uk

17-18/106  Date of the next meeting
The next meeting will be on Friday 21st September 2018 at 2pm in room H/G17, Heslington Hall.