STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 11 January 2013 at 2.15 pm in HG17, Heslington Hall

Present: Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)
Graeme Osborn, YUSU Academic Officer
Prof. Victoria Gould, Mathematics
Daria Pawlowska, Distance Learning Students’ Rep, GSA
John Bone, Economics
Dr. Dominic Watt, Language and Linguistic Science
Dr. Sandra Pauletto, Theatre Film and Television
Prof. Peter O’Brien, Chemistry
Dr. Oliver Craig, Archaeology

In Attendance: Dr. Jennifer Wotherspoon, Ass. Registrar: Student Progress
Cecilia Lowe, Project Leader: Learning Enhancement
Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar

Apologies: Dr. Geoff Cubitt, History
Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator

12-13/48 Membership
The Chair welcomed Daria Pawlowska to her first meeting; she will be representing the interests of Taught Postgraduate students. He also noted that Taha Rajab has stood down as Academic Officer for the GSA, due to academic pressures, and thanked him for his work on the committee. A replacement will be elected in due course.

12-13/49 Minutes
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2012, subject to the following corrections:
- Dr. Geoff Cubitt and Prof Peter O’Brien should both be listed as having been present
- Jennifer Winter should be listed as Jennifer Wotherspoon
- Oliver Craig’s department should be listed as being Archaeology
- Graeme Osborn should be listed as the ‘YUSU Academic Officer’

12-13/50 Matters arising from the minutes
i. M12-13/4 Report from Students
The Committee noted that the Chair had reassurances from the Director of IT Services that the issue of printer downtime and PGT dissertation deadlines was being seriously considered, and that a change manager was now in post in order to minimise disruption in future.

ii. M12-13/22 Mitigating Circumstances Working Party
The Committee noted that a Working Party of the Special Cases Committee was being tasked with considering the appropriateness of the University’s Mitigating Circumstances Policy for dealing with ongoing cases of mental ill health, chaired by Jane Grenville. A report on their findings will be brought to the SCA when their work is completed.

iii. M12-13/24 Interim Report from the Academic Misconduct Working Party
The Committee noted that an interim report of the Academic Misconduct Working Party was to be considered at University Teaching Committee on 4 February 2013. The UTC response and resultant actions will be reported to the Committee when they are available.

iv. M12-13/25 Royal Academy of Engineering Summer Soiree
The Committee noted that the secretary of the Committee had included the Summer Soiree in the recent SCA Briefing note in order to increase awareness of the impact that the event might have on end of year Boards.

12-13/51 Chair’s Oral Report
The Chair reported the following developments:

i. The E-assignment project remains ongoing, though there is likely to be some slippage from the original timeline, which would have had us at an institution wide distribution for October 2013. The project group is currently seriously considering a system developed as part of a JISC project begun at Southampton, and currently being further developed by Northumbria. The system is not ready for full testing yet, but they are hoping it will be available by September 2013. The Committee noted that the project group is currently focusing on a VLE extension currently being used by the Politics Department as an interim measure and looking at an in-house system developed by Computer Science in order to determine if there are lessons to be learned.

The Chair acknowledged concerns raised by the Academic Registrar that there were many kinds of assessments which could not be uploaded electronically, but stated that it was the remit of the project group to create a system which would be able to deal with the marks and feedback for assignments (whether electronically submitted or otherwise), and allowing for their distribution to students as well as their upload to SITS and therefore to e:vision.

ii. The Committee noted the recent concerns raised in the student press
regarding the potential impact of modularization on the distribution of degree classifications. The Chair reported that he is currently in conversations with the PVC for Teaching, Learning and Information regarding the analysis of the available data. Having looked at the data using the Tableau software used by the planning office, they are considering the issues raised, as well as the potential for using the reports produced by Tableau to allow Boards of Examiners and Boards of Studies to have a more holistic view of their marks in future considerations of results.

12-13/52 Report from Students
The Students’ Union reported the following:

i. The Union had been approached by several students regarding the concerns (raised by the student press) about the issue of modularization and degree classifications, particularly in the Philosophy Department. The Academic Officer had assured these students that the University was aware of the issue, and was considering it at an appropriately senior level.

ii. The Union had also been approached by several students, particularly in the Computer Science Department, who felt that their individual examination timetables for the Spring Common Assessment Period were disproportionately skewed towards evening slots and those late in the week. The Assistant Registrar: Student Progress expressed her sympathy for the students effected by this and other issues (such as ‘too many’ exams early in the week, or early in the morning), but explained that the Exams Office had successfully scheduled 16,350 exams in six days, with only 18 examination slots available and a limited number of desks. These constraints, combined with the University constraints that students not be asked to write more than two exams per day and the fact that students could not be scheduled for more than one exam at a time meant that there was no viable alternative to the timetable produced. The Computer Science Department, in particular, had a number of 1.5 hour exams, which could not practically be scheduled during the day, as this would remove capacity from 3 hour examination slots without freeing time for longer exams in the evening (as the evening slot is limited to 1.5 hours in order to allow students to complete exams by 7:30pm).

The Graduate Students’ Association reported the following:

iii. The GSA had recruited Ruth Gibson to the position of Advice and Welfare Coordinator to replace Kay Mitchell who has joined the Research Student Administration Team

iv. Training events have been held for all GSA Council and Course Reps. No specific issues regarding assessment were raised either there or
at the most recent Postgraduate Forum.

12-13/53  Postgraduate Taught Academic Misconduct Report 2011-12

The Committee considered a report on the outcomes of academic misconduct cases concerning taught postgraduates in the 2011-12 academic year. The Committee noted an apparent increase in the overall number of cases reported in the 2011-12 academic year over previous years, but this was explained by the later reporting period for PGT cases this year, which allowed cases involving ISMs to be reported, which had not been the case in the past. The Committee further noted that there appeared to be a decrease in the percentage of cases of academic misconduct brought against students of Chinese origin, which was a reassuring indication that attempts to raise awareness in this subsection of the student population were having an effect.

The Committee considered whether the lack of students being accompanied to hearings was cause for concern, and determined that this was unclear in the light of a lack of evidence that students who were not accompanied felt or were at tangible disadvantage over those who were accompanied. In order to get a better sense of the experience of students in the Academic Misconduct investigative process, the Committee agreed that a survey of those affected in the 2011-12 academic year was appropriate, and should be conducted by the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress. The Committee further agreed that the form letters used throughout the process should be reviewed, and that a full set should be sent to the departmental contact responsible when an SCA Rep is assigned for each case.

(Action: JW)

12-13/54  Combined Analysis of Academic Misconduct Reports 2007-2012

The Committee considered a report on all academic misconduct cases found to have been with cause between 2007 and 2012, divided by department and with reference to current student numbers. The report showed that there was a substantial difference between the percentages of students in different departments who were found to have committed academic misconduct. The Project Leader: Learning Enhancement reported that there was evidence that students in the essay-based subjects were statistically less likely to plagiarise as they have more practice with academic writing and avoiding plagiarism, and the Committee noted that the science subjects were more prone to cases of collusion which could inflate the number of cases as they concern multiple students and therefore multiple cases for the same act. Having noted this, the committee nonetheless agreed that some of the departments appeared to have a very low number of reported cases compared even to similar disciplines, and that it would be useful to have a conversation with the Chairs of Boards.
of Examiners in these departments in order to ensure that they understand their responsibilities under the procedures, and that their students are not receiving unfair advantage over students in other departments, and students in joint programmes are not receiving mixed messages.

(Action: SK)

With regards to the issue of collusion, the Committee agreed that more should be done in supporting departments in helping students avoid collusion, both in defining appropriate and inappropriate co-operation for each task and by including more information on collusion in the academic integrity tutorial.

(Action: ASO)

The report further indicated a large difference between the percentage of postgrads and that of undergraduates having been found to have committed academic misconduct. The Committee agreed that this was probably due largely to the intersection of three factors: the higher percentage of students in the PGT population who are studying in the UK context for the first time, the intensity of the workload and steepness of the learning curve on a one year master’s programme, and the higher academic standard to which Master’s students are held. In light of this, the Committee determined that though support should continue to be offered to PGTs on Academic Integrity and integration into the UK HEI system, the differential was not a reason for alarm, and no additional action was required.

12-13/55 External Examiners, Boards of Examiners and Boards of Studies: Expectations

The Committee considered a paper on issues regarding the powers and timing of Boards of Examiners and Studies post-modularisation, and how best to make use of External Examiners under the new system. The Committee noted the constraints placed on Boards by the University’s Regulations, the principles of the University’s modularisation scheme, the QAA Quality Code, and the information systems available and agreed that the intersection of these constraints made continuing to employ pre-modular processes for examining scrutinising processes at programme level untenable for at least some departments. The Committee further noted that there had been several informal requests for guidance on how to reconcile these concerns from departments.

In discussing these issues, the Committee acknowledged that there was no single pre-modular procedure for the scheduling of Boards or the inclusion of External Examiners in the process, and that consequently the implementation of modularisation was having a wide variety of unexpected impacts on
The Committee **agreed** that a complete review of the processes was necessary, including a review of the role of External Examiners, the most appropriate points for External Examiner engagement, the roles of the Boards of Examiners and Boards of Studies, and the appropriate quoracies for each. Consequently, such a proposal was likely to need approval of UTC and Senate, and as such, any change was unlikely in the current academic year. The Chair agreed to formulate a working paper from which alternatives could be considered.

*(Action: SK)*

**12-13/56 Summary of External Examiners Reports for Undergraduate Programmes 2011-2012**

The Committee **reviewed** a summary of Reports on Undergraduate Programmes by External Examiners for the Academic Year 2011-2012. The Committee noted that though there continue to be some reports of departments not using the whole scale, and some concerns with the bedding in of the new Modular Scheme at the point of degree classification, generally these concerns are both less numerous and less vociferous than they have been in the past.

The Committee agreed that reports of ‘over-generous’ marking were concerning, and that the Chair would talk to the Chairs of Boards of Examiners in these departments to determine the extent of the problem and possible solutions.

*(Action: SK)*

The Committee also discussed the possibility of having Examiners ‘self-code’ their reports in order to indicate whether they expected either; a formal receipt of the report with thanks, specific actions and a reply from the department, or specific actions and a reply from the university (depending on the level of their concern, if any). The Chair will discuss with John Robinson whether this might be appropriate.

*(Action: SK)*

**12-13/57 Request for Clarification of the Guide to Assessment re: ISMs in Integrated Masters**

The Committee **noted** discrepancies in the Guide to Assessment regarding ISMs worth up to 40 credits in Integrated Masters Programmes. These have come about from a flawed assumption that all ISMs on Integrated Masters Programmes were worth greater than 40 credits, and so were covered under...
the marginal fail rules approved by the UTC in UTCM11-12/138.

In order to correct the discrepancy, the Guide to Assessment will be changed to state the following:

i. 10.6 “Reassessment through resubmission on Independent Study Modules is allowed under certain circumstances. For students on taught postgraduate courses or those on Integrated Masters Programmes (where the ISM is worth more than 40 credits), reassessment is only possible where the ISM receives a marginally failing grade (defined in Appendix N). In these cases, the credit value of the reassessment exceeds the normal reassessment limits.

Students on Integrated Masters Programmes with ISMs worth up to or exactly 40 credits may be reassessed on ISMs, if the volume of reassessment is available to them within the normal reassessment and compensation rules.

In each case, consideration should be given to what is realistically possible in terms of revising a sub-standard dissertation/ project within a limited time frame.”

ii. U2.26- All references to Independent Study Modules on Integrated Masters Programmes in this section will be changed to indicate “Independent Study Modules worth more than 40 credits”.

iii. U2.15- “In stage 4, if a student fails a non-ISM module, or an ISM module worth up to 40 credits, s/he may still receive the credit and progress to classification provided that:”

iv. U2.25 “In stages 3 and 4, where a student has met the required stage average for progression or award, reassessment opportunities will be limited to 40 credits, except in the case of marginal failure of an ISM worth more than 40 credits in stage 4 (see: U2.26)”

The Committee further agreed that given that only the ISM in the MMath was affected, the opinion of the Maths department would be sought as to whether the smaller ISM should be included in the marginal fail rules.

(Action: JW)

12-13/58 Date of the next meeting
The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 8 February 2013 at 2.15 pm in Room HG17- The Dawson Room, Heslington Hall.