STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 24 May 2013 at 2.15 pm in HG19, Heslington Hall

Present: Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)  
Graeme Osborn, YUSU Academic Officer  
John Bone, Economics  
Dr. Dominic Watt, Language and Linguistic Science  
Prof. Peter O’Brien, Chemistry  
Tian Tian, GSA (for Daria Pawlowska)

In Attendance: Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar  
Jim Irving, Director: Registry Services  
Dr. Jennifer Wotherspoon, Ass. Registrar: Student Progress  
Dr. Adrian Lee, ASO (for Cecilia Lowe)  
Robert Simpson, SSS (for Kathryn Lucas)

Apologies: Dr. Oliver Craig, Archaeology  
Daria Pawlowska, Distance Learning Students’ Rep, GSA  
Robert Davis, Academic Affairs Officer, GSA  
Prof. Victoria Gould, Mathematics  
Dr. Geoff Cubitt, History  
Dr. Sandra Pauletto, Theatre Film and Television  
Cecilia Lowe, Project Leader: Learning Enhancement  
Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator

12-13/92 Minutes  
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2013.

12-13/93 Matters arising from the minutes

i. 12-13/80 Proposal for Additional Viva Results from Language and Linguistic Science  
Having awaited consultation by the GSA after last meeting, the Committee rejected the proposal for a third intermediary outcome for vivas on PhDs between minor corrections and
referral in light of discussions regarding extending the time limit for minor corrections.

ii. 12-13/81  Clarification on Time limits to minor corrections of PhD theses
Having awaited consultation by the GSA after last meeting, the Committee approved an extension of the period of ‘minor corrections’ to three months with a firmer explanation of the parameters of the deadline, and a change of the name of ‘minor corrections’ to ‘corrections’. The GSA did not receive any negative feedback on the proposal. The Committee also wished to clarify that nothing should be changed after corrections had been approved, and the student should be asked to confirm this at submission. In the event that a student has made minor typographical corrections after a ‘passed subject to binding’ result, they may declare those without having to have them checked by the examiner.

(Action: RSAT)

iii. 12-13/82  External Examiners, Boards of Examiners, and Boards of Studies
The Committee considered a proposal regarding the structure and function of Boards of Examiners and Studies in the awards process, but determined that in order to find a durable solution, the conversation should be postponed until a larger number of academic members were present. The Committee discussed the possibility of module owning boards, and some potential solutions, but there was no immediate consensus on a solution that would work for all departments. For this year, permission should be granted to all departments where an External Examiner wishes to attend the final BoE virtually, so long as the work has been adequately reviewed in order to allow Externals to attend earlier and have meaningful input into results.

12-13/94  Chair’s Oral Report
The Chair reported the following developments:
   i. Revisiting second year marks
The Chair and the PVC for Teaching and Learning have agreed to allow departments to revisit second year marks from the academic year 2011/12 for NMS students. This decision comes in consideration of departments who perhaps didn’t fully appreciate the impact of modularization on the calculation of degree classifications, and which believe that a wider spread of marks would create more accurate degree classifications based on credit-
weighted means. This was likely the result of staff attempting to mark under the old and new scheme simultaneously.

The Committee noted that this was a one-time exception only, and that departments should allocate their current second year marks in light of modularization, and this exception will not be repeated.

Marks can be reconsidered only with permission from the SCA, and only under the following conditions:

- Changes must be made at the module level, rather than at the level of individual students
- Changes need to be justified and have the approval of External Examiners
- Changes should be requested before Stage three marks are compiled
- Changes will be restricted to passing marks (failing marks will not be altered)
- Any changes can only increase marks to ensure that no student is disadvantaged

The Committee agreed that a single communication from the SCA regarding this matter was the most appropriate course of action, and that communications would be sent to departmental representatives as soon as possible, and students would be informed of the change by a central email to all finalists in week 10.

(Action: JW)

ii. E-Assignment
There has been no change in our approach to the E-Assignment project. There is still no single solution available, so the implementation group is working on shoring up existing solutions whilst keeping a watching brief on the JISC funded solution (Northumbria). This should become available in 2013/14.

12-13/95 Report from Students
The Students’ Union reported the following:

i. There continue to be complaints from students regarding the clustering of examinations in the CAP in the mornings, evenings, early in the CAP and late in the CAP. The SU understands the reasons for this, but felt it was important that the students’ complaints be voiced.

The Graduate Students’ Association had no issues to report.

12-13/96 Review of Degree Classifications and Submission Rates
The Committee considered a summary of degree classifications and PGR
submission rates for the 2011-12 academic year. The Committee noted that this is the first time that outcomes at all levels of study were being considered simultaneously.

i. Undergraduate Classifications
The Committee noted that the University is catching up with Russell Group institutions in terms of percentage of good degrees, and is pulling away from the 1994 Group. There are major differences between disciplines in this area, as well as variance year on year, but it is not possible to tell if these are trends or simply anomalies. Entry tariffs might also have an effect on the overall percentage of good degrees which has not yet been studied, but will be looked at in the Autumn. The Committee notes that this is particularly important in terms of the ‘value added’ scoring which is a major driver in many league tables.

ii. Taught Postgraduates
The Committee noted that results this year were very similar to previous year’s results in spite of the introduction of NMS. The committee requested that in future years, degree results such as ‘merit’ and ‘distinction’ be analysed along with the percentages of students obtaining intended awards.

iii. Research Postgraduate Submission Rates
The Committee noted that there was very little variation in the portion of PGR students submitting ‘on time’. There was a small decrease in percentages in the social sciences. The Committee requested that in future, this analysis be conducted including results of examination in addition to submission rates to give a better indication of success.

The Committee agreed that the Chair and Secretary should review the results and determine if any departments might need more support in the area of PGR submission rates.

(Action: SK and JW)

12-13/97 Proposed Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure
The Committee approved a proposal for changes to the Mitigating Circumstances Policy for inclusion in the Guide to Assessment 2013-14 in order to rationalise policy with changes to the regulations recommended to UTC at the last meeting of the SCA. The Committee agreed that the principles of penalising modules rather than award marks was fairer than the current system.

Some minor changes to the policy were requested before the policy be recommended to UTC. These included clarifying that cases should be reported to the Secretary of the SCA rather than the whole committee, and the replacement of ‘another student’ with ‘a third party’ in the definition of personation. Finally, the committee asked that it be clarified that though

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penalties (such as zeros for work) should be appealable, capping of marks for poorly referenced work and academic marks given after an academic misconduct investigation should not.

The Committee agreed to recommend the proposal for consideration at UTC.

12-13/98  Revisions to the Mitigating Circumstances Policy

The Committee approved a proposal for changes to the Mitigating Circumstances Policy for inclusion in the Guide to Assessment 2013-14 in order to rationalise policy with changes to the regulations recommended to UTC at the last meeting of the SCA. Wording was agreed which would make Mitigating Circumstances Committees sub-committees of the Special Cases Committee rather than the Board of Studies. A further proposal was approved which would expand the definition of ‘close relatives’ in the Mitigating Circumstances Policy to include Civil Partners.

The Committee recommends these changes to the University Teaching Committee.

12-13/99 Review of Annual Priorities for 2012-13

The Committee reviewed the priorities set at the beginning of 2012-13 and agreed to carry over the priorities which follow:

- Review of NMS for PGT Programmes, and include UG in light of first set of UG NMS awards
- Review of Mitigating Circumstances Policy in light of recent changes and the acknowledged difficulty of mitigating for longstanding illnesses such as depression
- E-Assignment Project
- Creation of Guidance on Proofreading

12-13/100 Proposal for dealing with longstanding mitigating circumstances

The Committee approved a proposal for dealing in some respects with longstanding medical and compassionate circumstances which could affect assessment, not easily covered by the current mitigating circumstances policy. The Committee agreed that in the event of a mitigating circumstance being identified after the fact (such as in the case of a late diagnosis of a learning impairment) the SCC will consider an additional stage weighting of 1:3 for the second and third stages of three year degree programmes, regardless of whether the student in question had a borderline result based on the traditional 2:3 weighting. This additional weighting might result in a higher
degree classification, but will not change the award mark. Ratios for four year programmes will still need to be considered. This change clarifies the parameters for SCC’s existing power to consider these as exceptional cases.

The Committee also agreed that letters from supervisors and College Welfare Team Members can be considered in addition to evidence from other professionals, and that Mitigating Circumstances claims should be considered in light of past claims by the same student.

These changes will be included in the Guide to Assessment 2013-14.

12-13/101 Criteria for Ordinary Degrees

The Committee noted that though Ordinary Degrees had been built into the New Modular Scheme as exit awards for students who obtained 300 credits, the programme documentation was silent on the capacity for reassessment or compensation. The Committee agreed to recommend that no reassessment be allowed in the final stage of this award, and that a maximum of 20 credits be allowed to be compensated of the 60 credits with the highest grades obtained in stage 3. It also agreed to recommend that the award mark be calculated at the same 2:3 ratio as is used for other Bachelor’s degrees, recognising that this puts a great deal of weight on the 60 credits obtained at stage 3. Because these awards are unclassified, however, the award mark will only be used in the event of an academic misconduct penalty, though it will appear on the transcript.

Expression of Gratitude to those who are finishing: Graeme, GSA Reps, Geoff, Vicky and Peter.

12-13/102 Date of the next meeting

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 27 September 2013 at 2.15 pm in Room HG17- The Dawson Room, Heslington Hall.