Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 11
November 2011 at 2.15 pm in HG17- Dawson Room, Heslington Hall

Present: Dr. Linda Perriton (Chair), Management
        Dr. Geoff Cubitt, History
        Prof. Victoria Gould, Mathematics
        Dr. Adrian Lee, Centre for Lifelong Learning
        Dr. Peter O’Brien, Chemistry
        Dr. David Halliday, Electronics
        Karisha George, GSA Research Student Representative
        Graeme Osborne, YUSU Representative

In Attendance: Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar
               Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (incoming chair)
               Cecilia Lowe, Project Leader: Learning Enhancement
               Rosemary Royds, Directory, Registry Services
               Dr. Jennifer Winter, Assistant Registrar: Student Progress

Apologies: Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator
           Karin Dianconu, GSA Taught Student Representative
           Dr. Jim Watt, English

CATEGORY I BUSINESS
11-12/20 The committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2011

11-12/21 Matters arising from the minutes
i. M11-12/4 The SCA Terms of Reference

The committee noted the changes from the University Teaching Committee to the
SCA Terms of Reference. The word University was missed from the title ‘University
Teaching Committee’ in item 1, and must be replaced.
At University Teaching Committee, the Deputy Vice Chancellor expressed a view that losing the input of the Project Leader for Learning Enhancement and the Special Cases Administrator would be a loss to the Standing Committee on Assessment, and a preference that they should be reinstated. The Committee therefore welcomes back Cecilia Lowe and Kathryn Lucas.

ii. M11-12/7 Academic Misconduct Annual Report

The committee noted an error in the reporting of the availability of the academic integrity tutorial in Mandarin. This facility is not available, and no further action is necessary by the Committee. Students were informed, in Mandarin, that the tutorial existed directly in the form of a letter from a student to students. Requests have been made for similar letters in Taiwanese and Cantonese. The Committee requested that a copy of the letter be sent to the departments by the Academic Support Office.

(Action: CL)

iii. M11-12/8b Review of Undergraduate External Examiners Reports for 2010-2011

The committee noted that the secretary has liaised with the Academic Support Office to raise the issue of the use of grades at the top and the bottom of the mark scale.

iv. External Examiners contact with students

The committee noted UTC Minute 11-12/25 wherein the University Teaching Committee noted the lack of contact external examiners now have with students and recommended that guidance be sent out to departments to clarify that whilst vivas with external examiners cannot be used to assess borderline cases, or to inform a student’s award, external examiners can meet with a selection of students to talk about the programme of study and the assessment in the Department, and departments may wish to encourage their external examiners to do so.

(Action: JW)

11-12/22 Oral Reports

i. Chair’s Oral Report

The committee noted that the chair had nothing to report.

ii. Report from Student Representatives

The committee noted that the student representatives had nothing to report.
11-12/23  Academic Misconduct Policy 7.4.1

The committee considered a proposal to revise the Academic Misconduct Policy section 7.4.1 to avoid disproportionate penalisation of students who attain lower exit awards.

The committee acknowledged that there appeared to be two legitimate interpretations of section 7.4.1: the first being that a student who was accused of academic misconduct in the late stages of a programme but subsequently failed that stage and received a lower exit award would not be penalised at all for the offence as the assessment in question did not form part of the award granted. The second is that the same student should be penalised for the credit weighting that the affected assessment had in the intended degree, weighted against the total credit weighting of the exit award, which results in a higher penalty for these students than for those who receive their intended award.

The committee agreed that in the short term, they would maintain the current practice of not applying any penalty for students who commit academic misconduct in the last stage of a degree, and who receive an early exit award based on failure in the final stages. [Secretary’s Note: This interpretation of the regulation was confirmed by Vicky Gould post-meeting with two former chairs of the SCA]

The committee expressed discomfort with this as a long-term solution, however, and recommends that the issue be considered by University Teaching Committee with the following considerations in mind:

i. Some members of the Standing Committee felt that there was a moral imperative to penalise all significant academic misconduct in order to show that the University does not approve of the behaviour

ii. Many training and development opportunities are provided before the last stages of a degree programme, and the student should be aware of the seriousness and consequences of academic misconduct prior to embarking, for example, on a dissertation.

iii. There may be broader issues about proportionality with regards to penalties for awards with small credit weightings (eg. CLL Certificates, and CPD courses)

iv. The misconduct does not form any part of the award received, and there is an argument, therefore, that applying any penalty to the exit award would be punishing the student out of context.

v. The University must consider the issue of proportionality, and any penalty should be in line with the magnitude of the offence.

The secretary of the Committee will prepare a paper for consideration by UTC.
outlining the issues.

(Action UTC)

11-12/24 Review of External Examining arrangements in universities and colleges in the UK: Final report and recommendations

The committee considered a recommendation from UTC on how the University of York meets the recommendations made in the UUK/GuildHE report and consider any necessary changes to current processes and recommend changes to UTC. The Committee notes that some of the issues in the report were addressed in 2010-2011, and further notes that the guidance from both the UUK, and the QAA is advisory, rather than prescriptive.

The committee notes the further release of a revision to the QAA Code of Practice and proposed to consider the implications and implementation of the revisions to the Code of Practice in early 2012, once the members have had the opportunity to consider it in more detail, and before the 2012-2013 appointments are made.

11-12/25 Confirmation of Enrolment as a Formal Progression Requirement in PhD Study

The committee considered a proposed revision to the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes (Section 8- Confirmation of PhD or EngD enrolment) for recommendation to UTC.

The committee approved the proposal in principle, with some minor changes to improve clarity and openness. These changes included:

- Clarify that not all members of the TAP are members of the Confirmation Panel, as the supervisor only makes recommendations to the panel, and this is not the ‘official’ recommendation of the panel
- Section e(ii).: The phrase “form part of the final thesis” should be changed to “contribute to the final thesis”
- In section (i.), reiterate that the recommendation is to the SCA, not to the student
- Section (f.): The phrase “defend your methodology” should be replaced by “explain your research approach”
- Section (f.): produce a piece of academic writing which indicates to the examiners that the candidate has the ability to progress to writing a successful PhD thesis
- Section (g.): Clarify that a second viva is optional, and the confirmation panel may waive it if they are convinced by the quality of the written work alone.
- Section (h.): role of external needs to be more clearly spelled out. The role of
the examiner is exclusively to determine whether the procedures were followed (including whether the standards were or were not met)
- Clarify that should a student fail to satisfy the examiners on the second attempt, their registration will be terminated

The committee asserted the importance of making progression criteria clear to all students at the commencement of study, and requested that the document be sent to departments for consultation before making its recommendation to UTC.

The committee further noted the importance of applying reasonable admissions criteria to research students, particularly where the student was likely to incur large debts in order to pursue study.

(Action: JW and UTC)

CATEGORY II BUSINESS

There is no category II business

11-12/26 Date of the next meeting

The committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 16 December 2011 at 2.15 pm in Room HG17- The Dawson Room, Heslington Hall.