Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment held on Friday 26 September 2014 at 2.00 pm in HG17, Heslington Hall

Present:
Dr. Steve King, Computer Science (Chair)
Mr. John Bone, Economics
Dr. Geoff Cubitt, History
Dr. Philip Quinlan, Psychology
Prof. Stevi Jackson, Women’s Studies
George Offer, YUSU
Jelena Horvatic, GSA

In Attendance:
Kate Dodd, Academic Registrar
Jim Irving, Director: Registry Services
Pete Quinn, Director: Student Support Services
Dr. Jennifer Wotherspoon, Ass. Registrar: Student Progress
Cecilia Lowe, Head of Learning Enhancement
Kathryn Lucas, Special Cases Administrator

Apologies:
Dr. Dominic Watt, Language and Linguistic Science
Dr. Oliver Craig, Archaeology
Dr. Sandra Pauletto, Theatre Film and Television
Ms. Gillian Wright, Assessment Team

14-15/1 Minutes
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2014.

14-15/2 Matters arising from the minutes

i. 13-14/83 Long Term Mitigating Circumstances
The Committee noted a set of alternate weighting was agreed by the SCC for use where long term mitigation was not able to be accounted for ‘in year’ because of a justifiable late diagnosis or disclosure. This weighting was available for use in the 2014 awards season, and would be included in the 2014-15 Guide to Assessment

ii. 13-14/84 Academic Misconduct Statistics
The Committee noted that an action had been put to the Secretary of the Committee to benchmark our academic misconduct statistics against those of other institutions in the UK to determine if we are out of line. This information will be presented with the UG statistics at the next meeting.
14-15/3 Chair’s Oral Report
The Chair reported the following developments:

i. Analysis of Degree Classifications
The Business Intelligence Unit produces an annual shallow analysis of degree classifications, comparing percentages of degrees at each classification to previous years at University and departmental level. It has also produced, somewhat less regularly, a further analysis which compares our percentages of degrees at each classification with the available statistics from our competitor institutions.

The BIU is currently compiling a deeper analysis of the 2012-13 data in order to consider other factors, and will present a timeline for completion of this work at the Committee’s next meeting. The Committee will be asked to consider what additional information they are likely to require from this analysis. The Committee has already identified the A-Level and GCSE results as relative predictors of success, and the value added by a York education as areas of interest, but noted that it is important that we keep in mind the policy implications of the questions we ask and our motivation for asking them in constructing our analysis.

The Committee noted that this analysis was to be built into the annual cycle of business for the Committee and for the BIU in order to ensure that we don’t lose track of the questions or the data gleaned.

14-15/4 Report from Students
The Students’ Union reported that course reps were to be elected in the next month, and that they were looking forward to work with the SCA and UTC, particularly in light of the importance of feedback and assessment.

The Graduate Students’ Association reported that some PhD appeals and extension requests had been rejected where students had not claimed mitigation in good time. In light of this, the GSA were planning a series of events around mitigating circumstances as they relate to PhD students.

The Committee noted that mitigation is a very serious issue for PhD students, particularly where events are highly traumatic. It also noted that support services are available, but only if the student does not hide their experiences in the hope that they will resolve themselves. It must be made clear to students that the services are available to them, as well as to taught students, and supervisors must be supported to give the right information when students are struggling.

14-15/5 Terms of Reference
The Committee agreed to recommend the Terms of Reference to University
Teaching Committee with the following changes:

- The title for the Project Leader: Learning Enhancement has been changed to ‘Head of Learning Enhancement’
- The number of academic members of the Committee should be increased to 9, including the Chair, to allow for three representatives from each of the academic clusters
- The number of members from the GSA will be reduced from two to one, with the GSA representative maintaining the right to bring a colleague in attendance for specific issues
- The Manager of the Assessment Team should be added as being in attendance
- ToR 4 should be changed to reflect the creation of StAMPs by the new academic misconduct policy

The Committee further considered whether the current Terms of Reference adequately reflected the strategic overview of assessment taken by the committee, but no specific change to the Terms of Reference was proposed.

14-15/6 Annual Timeline
The Committee agreed to the proposed timeline with minor alterations:

- the review of External Examiners fees should be moved to April for consideration and recommendation for the MTP bid for the following academic year.
- Remove the availability of members for signing from the timeline of committee business
- Include a review of the assessment issues arising from the Annual Programme Reviews in February

(Action: JW)

14-15/7 Annual Priorities
The Committee approved the proposed list of priorities with the addition of a review of the utility of Departmental Written Statements of Assessments in light of modularisation. The Committee further agreed that in order to move the priorities forward, an academic and operational lead should be assigned to each to ensure that forward momentum is maintained.

The priorities and leads are as follows:

- E-Assignment: Steve King and Richard Walker
- Review of Mitigating Circumstances Policy (including self-certification): Jane Grenville, John Bone and Peter Quinn
- Collaborative Learning and Assessment (including assessment of student engagement): Sandra Pauletto and Cecilia Lowe
- Roll out of the new Academic Misconduct Policy: Geoff Cubitt and Jen Wotherspoon
- Reviewing Departmental Written Statements of Assessment: Philip Quinlan and Gillian Wright
Each lead will be asked to submit a rough timeline for their report or action in time for the next meeting.

14-15/8   Watches in Examinations
The Committee agreed that students should be warned against audible alarms in examinations, and that any device making an audible alarm may be confiscated by invigilators. It further agreed that the possession of any device which can store and display data, including so called ‘smart watches’, in an exam would be treated as academic misconduct and students should be informed of that prior to each examination.

14-15/9   Preliminary Review of Awards and Progression under NMS
The Committee considered a preliminary report by the Assessment Team on the awards and progression season 2014 which identified, among other things, the very tight restrictions on the timing of award decisions and the consequences that this had for both the assessment teams and departments.

The Committee noted that, depending on the structure of programmes within a given department, requirements of boards and board reports might vary, and so it might be difficult to find a single solution that suited everyone. That said, the release of almost all results on either Saturday or Sunday following Week 10 has been identified as problematic for both the departments and the student experience. It was further noted that though the Committee could make some suggestions and decisions which might ease the congestion, there were some elements (such as the date of the graduation ceremonies, and the broader programme framework) which were out-with the power of the committee, and which could constrain attempts to improve the experience.

The Committee also noted that there were some particular activities and processes which seem to cause particular difficulties, including the withholding of marks from students until after the Boards. Given that marks released early through e:vision indicate that they are subject to ratification or change by the Board of Examiners, the Committee could not understand the advantage of maintaining the secrecy in these cases. It was agreed that the secretary would poll departments to determine who is withholding grades at the end of the year, and to what end; and the Students’ Union agreed to discuss the issue with students in these departments to determine how the withholding affected their student experience.

(Action: JW)

The Committee also noted that confusion around sits and resits caused a degree of delay, and that it should be made clearer to students and staff what the impact would and would not be of any further attempts at assessment.
Date of the next meeting
The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 31 October 2014 at 2.00 pm in Room HG17- The Dawson Room, Heslington Hall.