

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 4 December 2020 at 2.00pm via Zoom online video conferencing due to Covid-19 lockdown.

Attendance and apologies for absence:

Present:	Prof Mike Bentley	Physics (Chair)
	Dr Nicoletta Ascianto	English
	Dr Daniel Baker	Psychology
	Dr Jim Buller	Politics
	Dr Kevin Caraher	SPSW
	Dr Patrick Gallimore	York Law School
	Dr Alet Roux	Mathematics
	Dr Katherine Selby	Natural Sciences/Environment and Geography
	Simon van der Borgh	TFTI
	Matt Johnstone	YUSU
	Jane Baston	GSA

In attendance:	Dr Martin Cockett	Chair of Special Cases Committee
	Dr Zoe Devlin	Acting Head of Online Partnerships
	Laila Fish	Disability Services
	Dr Stephen Gow (Secretary)	Academic Integrity Coordinator
	Cecilia Lowe	Head of Learning Enhancement
	Jessica Roehricht (Minutes)	Academic Support Administrator
	Dr Jen Wotherspoon	Deputy Director, Student Services

Apologies:	Dr Kate Arnold	Dean of YGRS
	Valerie Cotter	Dep Academic Registrar/Dir Student Services
	Dr David Clayton	History
	Sharmila Gohill	Asst Registrar, Student Progress
	Robert Simpson	Special Cases Manager

Visitors:	Elizabeth Allen	Quality Support Officer [M20-21/33]
	Craig Adams	Project Manager, Enterprise Systems [M20-21/31]
	Isobel Hall	GSA Representation and Democracy Coordinator

20-21/26 Welcome

The Chair **welcomed** the Committee.

20-21/27 Minutes of previous meeting

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meetings held on 30 October 2020.

20-21/28 Matters Arising from the previous minutes

- **20-21/8 YUSU Not-So-Big Assessment Survey 2020 - analysis for October meeting**

It was **reported** that analysis of the data had begun, however due to Covid pressures and complexity of the task, this would now be received at the January meeting. It was confirmed that this paper would definitely be reported to the January meeting of the Committee, as it had important implications for other ongoing work of the Committee.

[OPEN]

- **20-21/16 Chair's Report - suggesting to UTC the consideration of an institutional external examiner**

The SCA Chair **reported** that the Chair of UTC would be asking the Academic Support Office to put together a brief for the role, which would include suggestions for remuneration and expectations. **[CLOSED]**

- **20-21/18 BIU to report on how the median percentage of good degrees was calculated in table 1 of the paper**

The Secretary **reported** that this was still outstanding, however he would follow up with BIU and circulate the information to the Committee when it had been received. **[OPEN]**

- **20-21/20 Review of limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches - Hierarchy of penalties**

The Chair **noted** that a paper on the consideration of the hierarchy of penalties would be considered at the January meeting of the Committee. **[OPEN]**

- **20-21/21 Summary of assessment issues raised via NSS**

The Chair **noted** that group assessment fact finding had been added to priorities for the Committee for 2020/21, which Simon van der Borgh would lead and discuss with the Chair. Simon had discussed this with TFTI, who would be happy to help in principle, however did note that they had been extremely busy so it may not be appropriate. **[OPEN]**

- **20-21/22 Academic Misconduct Policy amendments resulting from Reg 7**

The Chair **reported** that this paper was being considered at UTCs meeting on the 10th December 2020. **[OPEN]**

20-21/29 Chair's Report

The Chair **highlighted** the Category II paper on the approvals of online exams that were shorter than 24 hours. In relation to this, the Chair noted that there had been some complaints from students in Chemistry and Mathematics, which had been resolved through student consultation. The Chair **thanked** the departments involved for this, and **noted** that clear communication and timings were important. It was **confirmed** that the module catalogue no longer specified that online exams were 24 hour exams. Additionally, the Chair **noted** that the January CAP scheduling had been problematic, with some exams unavoidably overlapping. The Chair **thanked** Walter Van Opstal and Jen Wotherspoon for their work on scheduling the January CAP. This had been finalised,

however the Chair **noted** that decisions had been made in relation to SSPs for online examinations, and these should be revisited after the January CAP.

The Chair **reported** that the [Degree Outcomes Statement](#) had been published on the University website.

The Chair **noted** the decisions approved by Senate regarding the restructuring of the academic year and common module sizes, and **confirmed** to the Committee that this would likely lead to work within the following 12 months or so, however may have a positive impact for assessment rules.

ACTION [SCA]

20-21/30 Report from Students

- **YUSU** representative **reported** that YUSU had been through another round of furlough, for example the Student Voice team. The YUSU representative also **noted** that he and the GSA representative had been involved in discussions with students around safety nets for 2020/21. They **noted** that they had explained the rationale for not implementing such a policy in 2020/21, as well as correcting some misgivings and explaining the complexity of this, which the students had responded to positively. The YUSU representative also **noted** that a YUSU Pulse survey which had received 509 responses at the time of the meeting indicated a large proportion of students were in favour of blanket ECA policies for any student that requested this. It was **noted** that this would not necessarily actually be beneficial for students, as there were many issues involved with this. The Chair requested that the YUSU representative send him this data in order to discuss it further at the Academic Contingency Group.
- **GSA** representative **noted** that the GSA had held bi-elections and therefore had a full Council, which had recently met, although no motions were of immediate relevance to SCA. The GSA representative **thanked** everyone involved in PGT students receiving their final grades, as there had been positive responses on social media. The GSA representative echoed the YUSU representatives report on discussions with students regarding a safety net policy, for which the Chair **recorded** his thanks to them both for engaging with these conversations in these fora for students.

20-21/31 Digital Assessment and Feedback Project Overview

Craig Adams, a Project Manager in Enterprise Systems attended for this item and provided an oversight of the project, which aimed for the University to have a new integrated system for submission, marking, and feedback for all forms of assessments. Craig **noted** his intention as project manager to provide updates on this project to Chairs of Boards of Studies, Chairs of Boards of Examiners, and SCA approximately every two months.

The software selected was Wiseflow from UNLwise, and initially a one year contract was being negotiated to allow for testing and use in pilot departments, one from each faculty, before being gradually rolled out to be University wide within eighteen months to two years.

The Chair **noted** his enthusiasm for the project, in particular the potential for more innovation in assessment. The GSA representative also **noted** excitement for the project. She **suggested** that during consultation with departments Graduate Teaching Assistants should be included as a key user group, as they were heavily involved in marking and feedback. Additionally, that disabled students should be a key consideration. Craig **confirmed** that those groups would be considered, although GTAs were unlikely to be included in the initial trials.

It was **confirmed** that the project would be overseen by the Digital Education Working Group/ Steering Group which had recently been approved by UTC [the name was to be confirmed at the time of the meeting]. This group would have a wider remit to include oversight of all digital education, and managing projects such as this to ensure consistency.

The Chair **thanked** Craig Adams for his presentation to the Committee, and **noted** that he would keep the Committee informed of any relevant updates.

20-21/32 Penalties for overlength work - policy wording paper

The Committee **considered** policy wording for penalties for overlength work that were approved in principle at the previous meeting, in addition to areas of further consideration which had been highlighted.

The Committee **discussed** whether departments could only use one option (i.e. a tariff penalty or a marking limit) or whether they could use both options for various assessments. It was first **agreed** that rather than referring to departments, Boards of Studies would be more appropriate in this context. There was **discussion** that only allowing one option per Board of Studies may provide more simplicity and clarity. However, the Committee **agreed** that each Board of Studies should be consistent in the penalty option used for each of the same assessment type, however the penalty option could be varied between different assessment types. This was because the Committee felt that different penalties would be more appropriate for different forms of assessment, and there would be multiple forms of assessment used within each Board of Studies. For example in a department such as Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media, it would be most appropriate to introduce a marking limit for a timed performance, however may more appropriate to use a tariff penalty for an assessment with a word limit. The Committee **noted** that information provided at the time of assessment for all assessments should be very clear about which penalty was being used to avoid confusion.

In the previous version of the policy presented to the Committee, a tolerance of 1% had been allowed in the tariff penalty, it was **agreed**, however that this should be removed. The Committee **discussed** that this would ensure that the penalty was not overly harsh for very slight overlength assessments, for example if this was by one or two words, and the GSA representative **noted** that having a very hard line with no tolerance caused increased student anxiety. It was also **noted** that 1% overlength would not result in an increase in marker workload. However, it was further **discussed** that a tolerance effectively increased the word limit, which could mean lack of equality between students within the set parameters, and itself cause confusion. It was **noted** that if

students were too anxious about going over the limit they should aim to be under it, as it was a maximum rather than a recommended length. Also, it was expected that students submit by a hard deadline, for example 11:59, and they achieve this, so a hard limit for length should also be manageable. The concerns raised regarding implementing a hard limit were **noted** by the Chair, however the Committee **approved** a hard cut off for assessments limits, as recommended by the Working Group. This would change the policy wording to “up to 15%” overlength, and not “0-15%”, which would imply that 0% overlength should result in a penalty, which was not the case.

At Chairs of Boards of Examiners’ Forum the question was raised as to whether 5 and 10 mark penalties would be sufficient deterrents. A member of the Committee queried why there was a tariff penalty rather than a single penalty. The Chair **noted** that this staggered approach had been suggested by the Working Group after consultation with departments, and should be understandable for students, and would allow penalty for slightly overlength work but also dissuade students from then taking advantage of a single penalty to produce excessively overlength assessments. Members of the Working Group **noted** the tariff penalty reflected the penalties for late hand in of assessments, which were 5 marks for up to one hour, and 10 marks above this. The Committee **agreed** that 5 and 10 marks were appropriate penalties for over length assessments, as these equated to half and a full degree classification, which were seen as significant deterrents by students.

Finally, the implementation of the penalties for overlength work policy was **discussed**, as there had not been time for this in the previous meeting. The Working Group had proposed a staggered implementation, therefore phasing in the policy as a change to existing policy from 2021-22, i.e.

YEAR 1 (2021-22): all Yr 1s & PGTs

YEAR 2 (2022-23): all Yr 1s & 2s, PGTS

YEAR 3 (2023-24): all Yr 1s, 2s, 3s, PGTs

It was **confirmed** that foundation students would be included in the 2021-22 implementation, and that year 4 integrated masters students in 2024-25 would not have this applied. However, it was **noted** that assessment rules were applied to a whole assessment rather than a cohort, and therefore there may be some situations where students would experience a change in policy, for example second year part-time PGT students in 2021-22, and students returning from a year in industry. The Committee **noted** that a single implementation rather than staggered would be clearer for students who may otherwise be unsure which policy applied for them, for example those returning from Leave of Absence.

The GSA representative **noted** her support for staggered implementation, although not the rationale that year 1 would be a learning experience that did not count towards degrees, as this did not apply for the PGT students, only the UG. She also raised concerns that implementation and communication around this change in policy should be handled sensitively, as students had experienced a lot of change due to Covid-19, and therefore more change could easily be viewed negatively.

It was **noted** however that students talked across years, and therefore a staggered implementation might actually cause greater confusion than a single implementation. It was highlighted that the policy on late penalties was introduced at a single point as a single University expectation and standard. Another example of a single implementation was in TFTI, when stepped marking had been introduced and there had been no issues with this. However, although the YUSU representative agreed that students talked across years, he **noted** that if communication about the policy was clear then he would not anticipate any issues from this.

The Committee **agreed** that whatever decision was reached regarding implementation of the policy, it would be vital that communication to students was very clear and as far in advance of the policy being implemented as possible.

It was **agreed** that the Chair would organise a consultation with students and Boards of Examiners regarding the implementation of the policy on penalties for overlength assessment. The Faculty Learning and Teaching Groups were discussed as a possible forum as there were student representatives on these groups. The student representatives would also be involved in the consultation and would collect student feedback. The results of the consultations would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee, at which time a decision would be made on the format of implementation of this policy.

The proposed policy wording for the Guide to Assessment on penalties for overlength work was **approved**, subject to the amendments reported above.

ACTION [MB/YUSU/GSA]

20-21/33 Annual Report – Undergraduate External Examiners 2019/20 (ASO)

Elizabeth Allen, Quality Support Officer in the Academic Quality Team of the Academic Support Office attended for this item and presented the paper. Elizabeth **noted** that one of the outstanding external examiner reports had been received since the paper had been circulated to the Committee, and that there were no outstanding standards concerns awaiting response from departments.

The Chair **thanked** Elizabeth for the report, and for including the number and departments associated with external examiner comments as had been previously requested by the Committee. The Chair further **noted** the positive comments on Covid-19 contingency arrangements, and that some of the comments relating to increased module marks and degree outcomes had already been addressed, as the external examiner reports had been written over the Summer so may not have been aware of this yet. Also that the discussion around the operation of exam boards was next on the agenda [M20-21/34 refers] so did not need to be discussed within the context of this paper. The Chair highlighted that marking schemes had emerged as an issue again, and that guidance on information provided at the point of assessment was being prepared for the end of the academic year. The Chair also highlighted comments on discrepancies between first and second markers and how these were resolved. There was clear guidance on this in the Guide to Assessment, and there had previously been communications to Chairs of Boards of Examiners. The

Chair **noted** he would write individually to the Chairs of Boards of Examiners of the departments specifically highlighted in this report. It was suggested that this may have arisen due to how these processes were communicated to external examiners, and they may in reality be transparent to students.

The Committee **noted** the number of positive comments raised by external examiners, and requested that this be fed back to the departments formally. The Chair **agreed** to report this to University Teaching Committee, for the Chair of UTC to take forward to the Vice-Chancellor.

ACTION [MB]

20-21/34 Impact of to change to online examinations for open discussion

The Chair **reported** that UTC had asked the Committee to consider the impact of the changes in assessment in the 2019/20 academic year, particularly the switch to online examinations taken to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. UTC was especially keen to understand how the results of such assessments were handled at examination boards and the mechanisms employed to handle mark distributions that were out of line compared with previous years.

The Chair **noted** that examination boards were given guidance, however were otherwise left to use academic judgement for decisions about mark distribution and scaling. However it was the desire that more detailed guidance could be provided for future assessments.

The Chair **suggested** that the Working Group led by Daniel Baker into contextual data provided at examination boards should investigate this further, for example by adding questions relating to the determination and handling of anomalous marks and mark distributions to their data gathering. The Committee **approved** this suggestion.

20-21/35 Academic Integrity Charter

The Secretary presented this paper, and the Chair **thanked** him for his work on this. The Committee **considered** the paper, which outlined the seven principles of the Academic Integrity Charter for UK Higher Education published by the Quality Assurance Agency, including a summary of where the University of York stood in relation to the principles.

The Chair thought that it would be a positive move for the University to sign up to this, especially as the starting position was strong. The Committee **noted** that the University put a lot of work into Academic Integrity, and the paper clearly showed how the University was already addressing the principles, and therefore it would be beneficial to recognise this through something such as the Academic Integrity Charter.

The Committee **agreed** that the Chair would report this **recommendation** that the University of York sign up to the Academic Integrity Charter to UTC.

ACTION [MB]

20-21/36 Individual Examination Arrangements

The Committee **noted** the number of individual examination arrangements.

20-21/37 Appointment of External Examiners

The Committee **noted** the external examiners appointed since the last meeting.

20-21/38 Date of the next meeting

The Committee **noted** the date of the next meeting as Friday 29th January 2021 at 2pm via Zoom online video conferencing.