

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 9 July 2021 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 Daniel Baker	Psychology
	Dr Jim Buller	Politics
	Dr Kevin Caraher	SPSW
	Dr David Clayton	History
	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 (re-elected)
	Jane Baston	GSA (last meeting)
Dr Kate Arnold	Dean of YGRS	
In attendance:	Dr Martin Cockett	Chair of Special Cases Committee
	Laila Fish	Disability Services
	Robert Simpson	Special Cases Manager
	Zara Burford	Representing Online Programmes
	Ekanish Kapoor	GSA (taking over from Jane Baston)
	Dr Stephen Gow (Secretary)	Academic Integrity Coordinator
	Catherine Wild (Minutes)	Academic Support Administrator
Apologies:	Dr Jen Wotherspoon	Deputy Director, Student Services
	Valerie Cotter	Dep Academic Registrar/Dir Student Services
	Dr Zoe Devlin	Acting Head of Online Partnerships
	Dr Nicoletta Ascianto	English
	Cecilia Lowe	Head of Learning Enhancement
Visitors:	Karen Payne	BIU
	Prof Tracey Lightfoot	PVC for Learning, Teaching and Students

20-21/76 Welcome

Professor Tracy Lightfoot, PVC, opened the meeting and **thanked** the committee for its hard work over the past year. The PVC **acknowledged** that the current Chair's term was coming to an end, and asked for applications from committee members. The PVC **confirmed** that the role would only be open to applicants from the committee in the first instance, and would be an interim role of one year. The PVC **thanked** the Chair for the hard work and dedication shown over the duration of position.

The Chair **welcomed** the Committee.

The Chair **thanked** Jane Baston, David Clayton and Simon van der Borgh, in the last SCA meeting of their term. The Chair also **thanked** Daniel Baker and Patrick Gallimore, whose terms have also ended but hoped that an extension may be approved. The Chair **thanked** Matt Johnstone and confirmed that Matt's term had been extended for another year. The Chair **acknowledged** the attendance of Ekanish Kapoor, the new GSA representative. The Chair **acknowledged** the attendance of Zara Burford, representing the Online Partnerships today, in the absence of Zoe Devlin.

20-21/77 Minutes of previous meeting

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 7th May 2021.

20-21/78 Matters Arising from the previous minutes

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

The Committee considered the paper presented in the meeting and limits for assessed work added to priorities for 2021/22. **[CLOSED]**

- **20-21/42 Chair's Report - Summary of Covid-19 Policy changes to SCC**

The Secretary **reported** that this was ongoing. **[OPEN]**

- **20-21/65 Review of Exceptional Circs and Covid-19 pandemic adjustments**

The Committee approved the principles of the paper presented. **[CLOSED]**

- **20-21/65 Update on SCA membership**

The Chair reported on the progress of the new Chair and members of SCA. **[CLOSED]**

- **20-21/69 Information available to External Examiners and Exam Boards**

Development of a guide for new Chairs of Boards of Examiners, which would help to make them aware of best practice and the types of analysis which can be carried out. **[OPEN]**

- **20-21/71 Guide to Assessment change: Friday deadlines**

It was **noted** that even with the proposed changes, departments would still be able to choose not to set Friday deadlines if they wished. It was **agreed** that this caveat would be

added to the proposal - and update in the Guide to Assessment. **Need to agree on final wording. [OPEN]**

20-21/79 Chair's Report

The Chair **reported** again of the ongoing discussions outside of the Committee regarding SSPs for online exams, and reiterated the importance of encouraging students who were struggling to contact Disability Services and update their SSPs. In relation to the Summer CAP and online exams, Laila Fish (Disability Services), **reported** that a small number of students had complained, citing unfairness of the extra-time policy. Laila Fish explained students have been offered mentoring and study skill training sessions, but there has been no uptake to date. Laila Fish also **reported** that students have been asked to download the NHS app to store documentation and proof. The Chair **reported** that the topic was discussed at the Chair of the Board of Examiners Meeting, where some departments noted that complaints had been received regarding the communication of extra time, rather than the fairness of the policy - in some cases students had taken too much time and submitted late but the department had waived the penalty. The Chair **noted** that the current policy in place is the most appropriate and that SCA has **concluded** on this item.

The Chair **reported** that a proposal on the ECA Policy was being worked on and would be presented to SCA for approval in September. The Chair **noted** that this is one of the biggest assessment issues affecting the university at the moment and that mechanisms were needed in place to handle the increased volume of requests and reduce the stress on departments. The Chair **clarified** that a small working group was to be created to clarify the approach for ECAs for next academic year. The membership is in the process of being agreed and the group will meet soon. The Online Partnership representative **requested** consideration for the working group.

[ACTION: SG/MB]

20-21/80 Report from Students

The YUSU representative **reported** that the Excellence Awards had concluded, with 573 awards received and 10 awards given. The YUSU representative **reported** 27 new faculty and department representatives have been recruited. The YUSU representative **thanked** the Chair.

The GSA representative **confirmed** the attendance at today's meeting of the new GSA representative, Ekanish Kapoor. As this was the last SCA meeting in post, the GSA representative **thanked** the Chair and the Committee.

20-21/81 Degree Outcome Analysis

Karen Payne from the BIU **attended** for this item and **presented** the paper. It was **noted** that the report has already been presented to UTC and Senate as the paper was not ready in time for the May SCA meeting. Going forward it was **noted** that the cycle of business for this type of reporting would be redesigned, with SCA handling all degree outcomes on behalf of UTC, sending one summary report to UTC and Senate at the end of the year with observations.

A more detailed report of the feedback and issues would go to FLTG and departments for discussion and action.

It was **noted** that the PGT student figures were skewed due to the inclusion of the computer science online students' results. It was **proposed** that the data would be republished and re-presented to SCA in September. Karen Payne **reported** that new definition filters were being worked on for full-time and part-time students.

It was reported that:

- a) The overall percentage of good degrees awarded by York in 2019/0 (the number of first class and upper second class degrees out of the total number of degrees awarded) increased by 1.0 percentage points to 83.4% (from 82.4% in 2018/9).
- b) The Russell Group continues an upward trend in the proportion of good degrees awarded, with an increase of 4.0 percentage points from 86.1% in 2018/9 to 90.1% in 2019/0.
- c) The variation in the percentage of good degree awards made across the different department's remains marked with a variation of 31 percentage points. The distribution across the faculties shows a smaller spread of 13%. The percentage of Arts and Humanities students obtaining good degrees is higher than those obtained in the Science and Social Sciences faculties.
- d) In 2019/0 the proportion of postgraduates taught students 'Qualifying with award at intended level' decreased by -4.5 percentage points to 81.1% (2018/9 = 85.6%). The Russell Group sees a decrease in the proportion of those 'Qualifying with award at intended level', by -0.8 percentage points to 88.7% in 2019/0, from 89.5% in 2018/9.

The Committee was also asked to **note** the impact on widening participation: *2.1.4 Recent analyses show most demographics with a reduction in the gap between them and their more advantaged peers. The exceptions to this would be, POLAR4, Q2 and Q3, IMDQ2 and Black students (who saw the gap markedly increasing). This is in conjunction with increased awarding seen across the sector in 19-20.* It was noted that this gap should be explored in further detail when access to departmental access and participation data is available.

The Committee **acknowledged** the usefulness of the data. It was **noted** that visibility of the sample size is important to correctly interpret the trends. The Committee **discussed** the differences in performance between departments, faculties and institutions. Karen Payne **agreed** to investigate data suggesting a drop in good degrees for science subjects at York. It was **noted** that, unlike York, not all institutions modified their assessment and marking/moderation process when the Covid pandemic enforced a move to open book examinations.

The Chair **reported** that these reports always include masters students, which is different to other publications. The Chair **encouraged** all departments to work in the full marking range. The Chair **proposed** if open assessments are proven to be more accessible, then further work will be needed to standardise the process for full use. The Chair also **noted** that it may not necessarily be the best to

rely on comparison to the Russell Group or through the prism of sector competition, maintaining standards should be the priority of the committee.

ACTION [KP]

20-21/82 SCA review of Priority Areas 2020/21 and proposals for 2021/22

The Secretary **presented** a list of current actions and also **proposed** new items for consideration, by the Committee, to be carried through to SCA 2021/22. It was **noted** that it was a dynamic guide, which would be finalised at the September 2021 SCA meeting.

It was **agreed** that PGR assessment policy papers would be fed into the SCA as and when required, as opposed to being itemised as a priority area for 2021/22. The Secretary, GSA and YGRS are to **meet** to **discuss** this further.

ACTION [SG/JB/EK/KA]

20-21/83 ECA Policy - Review to take place in 2021/2 academic year

The Chair **clarified** that this discussion was to agree the scope of the work to be undertaken. The Committee **discussed** the proposals made in the paper. The paper **outlined** options to broaden the definition of “exceptional circumstances”, to incorporate both short and long term issues, and the Committee **discussed** other areas e.g. SSPs which could then be included the areas of the review are as follows:

- A. Summary of the points raised in the OIA and some observations regarding areas where our ECA policy might be out of line or where additional work needs to be done. Initial observations from the group about the OIA report and its consequences.
- B. Summary of the policy areas which will need amending and a few initial observations and suggestions of work to be done
- C. Summary of the issues to be addressed in the review relating to operation and implementation of ECA policy
- D. Diagram showing the interaction between various policies relating to additional considerations and highlighting where new policy is proposed to be developed.

Other topics **considered** by the Committee included centralising the procedure with Professional Services to relieve departments of some of the burden of the process - however it was **noted** that there would be a danger of departments losing sight of the well being of their students. It was also **noted** by the Chair of SCC that the majority of appeals come from students who should have claimed exceptional circumstances at the time - there needs to be a way to support students to seek help when they need it - GSA were keen to provide more information on this matter. The Chair **noted** that the university needs a system that is fair but not open to abuse. **Concerns were raised** in relation to students using ECs on an assessment by assessment basis to game the system and also there are increasing claims for impact on engagement of students rather than just on the assessments.

The Committee **approved** the scope outlined in the paper. It was **noted** that the current SCA Chair would lead the ECA Policy working group after stepping down from the role at the end of the academic year.

20-21/84 Academic Misconduct overview of cases 2021 and clarification of hierarchy of penalties.

The Committee **discussed** the high number of academic misconduct cases for this year up to July 2nd is 323. It was **noted** that this figure was not dissimilar to last year's figure of 309 at the same point. It was **noted** that a high percentage of incidents related to plagiarism. The GSA representative **reported** that GSA advisers had also commented on the high volume of cases, and **proposed** further training and support for students was needed.

The Secretary **arranged** to meet with the Online Partnership Representative to analyse the number of cases coming from online programmes.

The Secretary **presented** the Committee with a proposed policy clarification of the application of marks cap penalties for academic misconduct when combined with other penalties (such as late and overlength work). It was **acknowledged** that the existing wording of the policy causes confusion for departments and students. The Chair **clarified** that a mark cap is not an adjustment to the mark but an upper limit to the penalty. The Committee **approved** the new wording presented.

[ACTION: SG]

20-21/85 Progression, award and classification rules review to take place in 2021/2 academic year

The Chair **presented** the scoping document on key areas of the university's progression, award and classification rules for the Committee to review which he will be leading on in 2021/22. It was **noted** that the planned change to semesterisation, module size and received UKSCQA guidance raised the opportunity for a review.

The Committee **discussed** and **agreed** on the points for modelling as outlined in the paper. The main drivers of the proposed review are as follows:

- **The University of York Change Programme: Teaching Organisation** (semesterised structure and regular module size).
- **Recent national guidance from UKSCQA on [Degree Algorithms in Practice](#) and [Principles for Effective Algorithm Design](#)**
- **Request to reconsider PGT merit and distinction criteria** (the more generous criteria applied in the covid-19 pandemic)
- **Regular review of award and progression rules** - as York's rules as a whole or algorithm have not been formally reviewed since their inception in 2010.

The proposal is split into 3 topics areas:

- A. Proposed areas for review due to teaching reorganisation from 2023.
- B. Proposed areas for review following on from UKSCQA guidance and documentation on degree classification algorithms
- C. PGT merit and distinction criteria

The Chair **shared** supporting evidence regarding the complexity of some areas of the classification rules e.g. uncapped first-sit marks, resit limits, rounding. Additional proposals were **put forward** for consideration: for rounding to be highlighted as a sensitive issue for students; the ability of the SITS system to handle the assessment rules; the differing procedures for low credit modules. The Committee **approved** taking the paper forward. The Chair **agreed** to start the modelling process.

20-21/86 Date of the next meeting

The Committee **noted** the date of the next meeting as Friday 24 September 2021 at 2pm Room HG17, the Dawson Room, Heslington Hall/ via Zoom online video conferencing.