

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 25 September 2020 at 2.00pm via Zoom online video conferencing due to Covid-19 lockdown.

### Attendance and apologies for absence:

<b>Present:</b>	Prof Mike Bentley	Physics (Chair)
	Dr Kate Arnold	Dean of YGRS [to M20-21/8]
	Dr Nicoletta Ascianto	English
	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
	Jane Baston	GSA

<b>In attendance:</b>	Dr Martin Cockett	Chair of Special Cases Committee
	Valerie Cotter	Dep Academic Registrar/Dir Student Services
	Sharmila Gohill	Asst Registrar, Student Progress
	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

<b>Apologies:</b>	Dr Zoe Devlin	Acting Head of Online Partnerships
	Laila Fish	Disability Services
	Robert Simpson	Special Cases Manager

<b>Visitors:</b>	Rachel McCormack	Academic Support Coordinator
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### 20-21/1 Welcome

The Chair **welcomed** the Committee, in particular Dr Kathryn Arnold, Dr Jim Buller, Dr Kevin Caraher and Dr Katherine Selby, for whom this was their first meeting as members of the Committee.

### 20-21/2 Minutes of previous meeting

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meetings held on 3 July and 19 August 2020.

## 20-21/3 Matters Arising from the previous minutes

- **19-20/24 - UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance: Assessment Theme - 20 Day Feedback**

The Chair and Deputy Chair would meet with the incoming UTC Chair to discuss this matter. This had been delayed due to the Covid-19 situation, however was still felt to be important and would be followed up when appropriate. **[CLOSED]**

- **19-20/52 Review of assessment issues raised via Annual Programme Reviews**

The Chair **reported** that a Digital Assessment and Feedback Project was in progress, and would be addressing the main concerns raised here, which were around assessment feedback for large online cohorts. **[CLOSED]**

- **19-20/68 Review of Guide to Assessment interim-report**

It was **noted** that this would be discussed later in the meeting [M20-21/8] as part of the discussion on priority areas for action for the Committee in the 2020/21 academic year. **[CLOSED]**

- **19-20/98 YUSU Not-So-Big Assessment Survey 2020 - preliminary report**

It was **noted** that this would be discussed later in the meeting [M20-21/08] as part of the discussion on priority areas for action for the Committee in the 2020/21 academic year. **[CLOSED]**

- **19-20/106 Online Examinations - establish grounds for exemptions to run shorter online examinations**

The Academic Contingency Group had agreed to generate criteria and process for exemptions, as this Group also had oversight of other issues, for example resourcing, which would be factors in these decisions. An email had been sent to departments on the morning of the meeting [25 September 2020] by the Deputy Director, Student Services regarding this process. **[CLOSED]**

## 20-21/4 Chair's Report

The Chair **noted** that this was the first meeting of the 2020/21 academic year, and would predominantly be to discuss the business and priorities of the Committee for the year. The Chair also **noted** that there had been a lot of work going on, and the contingency work was likely to continue. The Committee still had important business which should be worked on, however the Chair **noted** that due to ongoing contingency efforts, this would have to be planned in such a way that the Examinations and Assessments team would not be required to be heavily involved, as they would not have capacity. The Chair would be **requesting** that Committee members take the lead on the projects for the year, while remaining realistic about what the Committee would be able to achieve. The Committee **confirmed** that this was the correct approach.

The Chair **recorded** his thanks to Dr Patrick Gallimore as Deputy Chair, and to the rest of the Committee, for all of the work so far.

## 20-21/5 Report from Students

- **YUSU** representative **reported** that preparation for welcome week was ongoing. Additionally, the YUSU representative **commended** the work on the Degree Outcome Statement by the Working Group. The YUSU representative also **noted** that he would share statistics in relation to the YUSU advice service with the Committee when he was able to access these. The Chair **noted** that the student representatives were full members of the Committee, and therefore could report papers for consideration of the Committee.
- **GSA** representative **reported** that it was the Postgraduate Welcome week which was being held exclusively online, in addition to two Network weeks to encourage community. Nominations were open for course representatives and council. The GSA representative **reported** that the GSA advice service had dealt with 49 cases throughout July and August, including 20 appeals and 12 regarding misconduct. This was a reduction from 2019. The Deputy Director, Student Services added that across the University appeal numbers were similar to previous years, although there were none from first year students.

**ACTION [YUSU]**

## 20-21/6 Terms of Reference and Membership

The Committee **confirmed** its Terms of Reference and Membership for recommendation to UTC.

It was **noted** that there were no substantive changes to the Terms of Reference. The Chair **noted** that the main change to membership suggested was the addition of a Representative from York Online Programmes in attendance, which would be Dr Zoe Devlin. The Committee **confirmed** this addition for recommendation to UTC. There were also three new academic members **reported** who had been **approved** by UTC Chair's action, who were Dr Jim Buller, Dr Kevin Caraher and Dr Katherine Selby. In addition, there was the new Dean of York Graduate Research School Dr Kate Arnold, who was an ex officio member of the Committee.

Dr Patrick Gallimore had been reported as remaining in the Deputy Chair position. He confirmed that he would be happy to undertake this role, however it had been decided that this position would be subject to annual reappointment. The other members were content that Patrick remained as Deputy Chair, so this would be **recommended** for approval by the UTC Chair.

**ACTION [MB]**

## 20-21/7 Annual cycle of business

The Committee **confirmed** the Standing Committee on Assessment 2020-21 Annual Programme of Business.

The Chair **noted** that mostly the annual cycle would be prescribed and was as it would be in normal years. It was **noted** that papers on CAP exam issues were unlikely to be received as all assessments were being held online, however the Committee did still expect some feedback on CAPs. This was more likely to be obtained from the Chairs of Boards of Examiners Forum, rather

than the Examinations Office.

The GSA representative queried whether the Committee received any reports regarding numbers of extensions. The Deputy Director, Student Services **noted** that no such report was received by SCA, however the GSA representative may be able to find some of the information she was interested in in the Special Cases report to Senate in January.

### **20-21/8 Priority areas for action for the 2020/21 academic year**

The Committee **discussed** and **agreed** a schedule for assessment matters which required the Committee's attention in 2020/21 and **agreed** courses of action as follows:

1. Review of information provided to external examiners and exam boards.
2. Scoping and production of a university-wide statement on degree outcomes (UKSCQA)
3. Degree Algorithms Practice in 2020 - review implications for York.
4. Review of the accessibility and format of the Guide to Assessment.
5. Review of page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches.
6. Clarification of information available to students when setting assignments.
7. Guidance for staff on occasional extensions and alternative forms of assessment for students with individual arrangements
8. Academic Misconduct: online assessments contract cheating and use of translation software review
9. Attainment of minority groups in assessment/Inclusive assessment

During the discussion, the Chair **noted** that the majority of 2019/20 priorities had been completed before the Covid-19 lockdown in March, although some had been carried over to 2020/21.

In relation to priority number one, it was **noted** that the **review of information provided to external examiners and exam boards** had been part of long running discussions about two areas which had been combined. These topics were information related to cohort level outcomes provided at modules boards and the extent to which this is and should be provided, and looking at the potential reporting of trends in degree outcomes to external examiners. The Committee **noted** that Dr Daniel Baker had led a working group looking into some of these discussions in 2019/20. The Chair **suggested** that this work was continued with some fact finding, for example discussion with external examiners who had raised queries relating to this, and discussion with Chairs of Boards of Examiners to identify any variation between departments. This would provide helpful background information and show areas of work to pursue, with a plan to eventually present a set of proposals to UTC. Dr Daniel Baker **agreed** to lead on this piece of work. The Committee **noted** that this area of work fits in well with the Degree Outcomes Statement work. There was **discussion** relating to recording Exam Boards, as no individual attended all of these to compare how they were run and the information provided to gather insight from this, and this would not be possible due to the overlapping times there were run. It was **noted** that there would be data protection issues with recording these.

In relation to priority number two, the Chair **noted** that the statement on degree outcomes would

be discussed in more detail later in the meeting [M20-21/9], however would remain on the priorities list as would likely need to be generated and published again by the end of 2020.

The **review of the accessibility and format of the Guide to Assessment** would include work to add this to the University website. However, this would not be a full review of the Guide to Assessment, as had initially been discussed, for several reasons. These included the workload this would generate, which would predominantly fall to people who had large Covid-19 contingency related workloads for 2020/21. In addition, upcoming teaching organisation changes, including the proposal of semesterisation, may result in the need for revision to the Guide, making any earlier reviews less productive. The Committee also **noted** that assessment guidance was changing substantially in 2020/21 due to the online nature of assessments, and therefore it made more sense not to attempt to fully revise the Guide to Assessment before this. However, the Committee **agreed** that accessibility work to provide a framework for future reviews would be beneficial, and would be led by the Secretary to the Committee, Dr Stephen Gow, with support from the Academic Support Office. The YUSU representative **noted** that in the current format, the Guide to Assessment was a cumbersome document which students sometimes struggled to fully understand.

One of the priorities which had not been completed in 2019/20 was **Guide to Assessment: expectations regarding students' academic work outside of term time**. The Chair **noted** that this query had arisen at the end of the 2018/19 academic year from the Academic Support Office. However, given the ongoing review of the structure of the academic year, it was felt that this question should be encompassed in this work, which was outside of the remit of the Committee. It was hoped that the Committee would be involved in this work at some point, and could therefore raise the question in this context, however it would not be included on the priorities list for 2020/21.

The Committee **noted** that a working group had already been formed to **review page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches**. They had not generated a proposal, however they **noted** that a lot of work had already taken place on this piece of work and a proposal would be **reported** for consideration of the Committee during the 2020/21 academic year.

The Chair **noted** that the priority regarding **clarification of information available to students when setting assignments** was initially discussed in 2018/19 and was raised by the YUSU Academic Officer at this time. This work was picked up by the YUSU Academic Officer in 2019/20 in the form of the YUSU Not-So-Big Assessment Survey 2020, which explored the information provided to students about assessments. It was **agreed** that GSA and YUSU would complete more analysis of this data, and would report an expected timeframe for this paper to the next meeting of the Committee in October.

Priority area seven, guidance for staff on **occasional extensions and alternative forms of assessment for students with individual arrangements**, would require liaison between SCA and Disability Services. It had arisen as disability officers within departments did not feel they could deny extension requests for these students, however this would not always fall into the category

of reasonable adjustment. The Chair **noted** that greater clarity and guidance was required as to the circumstances, rules and roles for approving alternative forms of assessment. The Committee **agreed** that a short paper on this topic would be received during the academic year, identifying the principles around this area of work. Dr Patrick Gallimore would lead on this, working alongside Dr Jim Buller, Dr Martin Cockett and the Chair, who volunteered to be involved with this priority area. The Committee **discussed** that although the current processes often went smoothly and were approached with objectivity considering the unique situation, it was still required that this process was more regulated to control standards and ensure consistency.

The Secretary volunteered to lead the work on priority area eight, **Academic Misconduct: online assessments contract cheating and use of translation software review**. It was **noted** that this had arisen in relation to the department of Language and Linguistic Science, and examples would be obtained from here to aid the work, however was not restricted to this department. Dr Patrick Gallimore offered to be involved in this work, as did the GSA representative, as it was felt the input of a student representative would be important during this review.

The final priority on the list, attainment of **minority groups in assessment/inclusive assessment**, was added during the meeting. The student representatives had raised this in the July meeting [M19-20/92] in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement. The Chair **noted** that this piece of work would be part of efforts to provide reassurance that policies were robust and designed to avoid unconscious bias. The group that would look into this would be investigating policies and processes to identify areas which could be improved. Concerning statistics **discussed** included the attainment gap between black and white students, and the large (around 50%) proportion of academic misconduct cases which involved overseas students. The group would help identify whether these cases were purely academic and would confirm that bias was not built into the processes. Members of the Committee who volunteered to be involved in this group included Dr Alet Roux, who would take the lead, Dr Martin Cockett, Cecilia Lowe and both student representatives. Cecilia Lowe **noted** that a member of the Learning Enhancement team would be researching progression and attainment gaps and coordinating the Inclusive Learning and Teaching and Assessment groups, and it would therefore be appropriate for them to be involved in this work. The Committee **noted** that those working on this priority area would have to be careful when drawing meaningful conclusions based on small numbers of students, and that it may be helpful to separate overseas students for analysis. It was also **noted** that there was some statistically significant data already around these topics, however the work should focus on ensuring pro-actively that policies are robust, rather than focussing too heavily on statistics. The Committee **noted** that the YUSU Not-So-Big Assessment Survey may also help inform this work, as clarity of information provided about assessments would impact inclusivity. The Chair **noted** that the first part of this work would be to decide the scope for further work of the group.

The Chair also added the priority area **Degree Algorithms Practice in 2020 - review implications for York** during the meeting. This had arisen as the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment had published a document on principles for effective degree algorithm design. The Chair **noted** that although York was broadly in line with most of these principles published, and had not seen grade inflation, there were a few areas that had been identified where York was not in line with

the guidance. These areas included rounding numbers and borderline criteria, although it was **noted** that there may be other areas in addition to these. Work for this priority area was suggested to begin with a paper proposing where York may be out of line with the guidance and require further investigation. Sharmila Gohill **agreed** to be involved in this work area. The Committee was **asked** to contact the Chair before the October meeting if they would like to be involved in this area of work. The member leading on this area would be decided before the October meeting, and they would present a short outline of the expected scope of this area of work at this meeting.

**ACTION [SCA/YUSU/GSA]**

### **20-21/9 Requirement by UKSCQA to produce a Degree Outcomes Statement**

The Committee **considered** the preparation of the draft University's 'Degree Outcomes Statement' articulating the results of an internal institutional review. The Chair **noted** that work had started on this prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, however this had been paused and the deadline was extended from the end of the 2019/20 academic year to the end of the 2020 calendar year. The Chair also **noted** that the paper circulated to the Committee from the working group was still in draft form, and therefore this was not for approval by the Committee but rather for comment. The Chair **noted** that he would circulate the next draft of the statement on the 28th September 2020, and further comments and thoughts could be sent by email to the Chair, with a deadline of the 1st October 2020 for these to be received. It was **noted** that suggestions regarding shortening the statement would be appreciated, however additions should be avoided if possible. After this, the statement would be received by University Teaching Committee and finally Senate for approval.

The Chair summarised the analysis, including that overall the proportion of upper-classification degrees awarded by York had remained relatively stable. The sub-headings in the statement were the areas that the UKSCQA had requested institutions cover. The decision had been taken by the working group to remove subject and faculty level data, as well as tariff information, which was in response to the information published by other institutions, which did not show this much detail.

The Chair showed the Committee a graph which had been generated to accompany the statement, showing the proportion of upper-classification degrees awarded by York. During discussion, the Committee **agreed** to **recommend** that both comparative lines should be shown in relation to York's results, which showed upper-classification awards for all UK institutions and for Russell Group institutions, or neither should be shown, however showing only one of the comparative lines should be avoided. Concerns were raised regarding including comparison to Russell Group institutions, as these were a self-selecting group, and against all UK Universities as this could set a precedent. However, these did demonstrate that York had maintained high and consistent academic standards. The Committee **noted** that the information for both of these comparative lines was already available in the public domain.

**ACTION [MB]**

### **20-21/10 Individual Examination Arrangements**

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

**20-21/11 Appointment of External Examiners**

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

**20-21/12 Date of the next meeting**

The Committee **noted** the date of the next meeting as Friday 30th October at 2pm via Zoom online video conferencing.