STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 6 December 2019 at 2.00pm in HG/17, Heslington Hall.

Attendance and apologies for absence:

Present:  
Prof Mike Bentley  
Dr Danijela Trenkic  
Anita Savage Grainge  
Simon van der Borgh  
Dr Patrick Gallimore  
Dr Alet Roux  
Dr Jess Wardman  
Dr Daniel Baker  
Dr David Clayton  
Giang Nguyen  
Jane Baston  
Valerie Cotter

In attendance:  
Dr Jen Wotherspoon  
Sharmila Gohill  
Cecilia Lowe  
Dr Stephen Gow (Secretary)  
Dr Angela Ranson

Apologies:  
Laila Fish  
Dr Nicoletta Asciuto  
Robert Simpson  
Kathryn Lucas  
Prof Tom Stoneham  
Dr Martin Cockett

Visitors:  
Jane Iddon  
Elizabeth Allen

19-20/31 Welcome
The Chair welcomed new attendee Sharmila Gohil (Assistant Registrar, Student Progress).

19-20/32 Minutes of previous meeting
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2019.

19-20/33 Matters Arising from the previous minutes
- 18-19/87, 19-20/27 - Exceptional Circumstances Form
The form is live, but there will be further discussion with Unity Health to address their concerns. After this meeting, the form will return to SCA for approval. [OPEN]
• **18-19/97 - Consistency of Marking - responding to student complaints**  
   Note: this issue refers directly to inconsistency in combined degree programmes, not departments in general.

   YUSU and GSA are still developing a survey, which will be circulated to SCA members for their consideration before it is released to students in the spring term. [OPEN]

   [Action: CL, GN, JB]

• **18-19/97 - GSA response to increasing numbers of TYMS students seeking support for failing their programme**  
   The GSA is trying to determine whether there are actually more failures than usual, or whether the increase is due to more awareness about the GSA advice service. The Chair has not yet informed the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Students about this issue but will do so. [OPEN]

   [Action: MB]

• **18-19/98, 19-20/25 - Exam errors - report back to departments**  
   The Chair has reported the previous two years’ data on errors on exam papers to the Chairs of Boards of Examiners. [CLOSED]

• **19-20/04 - Chair’s oral report - sticker scheme**  
   The Chair will meet with Steve King, who is leading on the Inclusive Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy. [OPEN]

• **19-20/12 - Requirement by UKSCQA to produce a Degree Outcomes Statement**  
   The Chair reported on a briefing that he attended, along with the head of the Academic Quality team, regarding the Degree Outcomes Statement, which may become part of the SCA’s remit this year. [OPEN]

• **19-20/21 - York undergraduate degree classifications 2018-19 - initial analysis**  
   The Chair reported that a Tableau workbook has been created which correlates entry tariffs with achievement at graduation for each academic year, by department and by faculty. [OPEN]

• **19-20/22 - Plan for SCA Priorities Areas**  
   The Chair recommended that this item be closed all Priorities areas have been assigned to groups and included in the agendas for the coming year. [CLOSED]

• **19-20/24 - UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance: Assessment Theme - 20 Day Feedback**  
   The Chair will meet with the UTC Chair about this issue after the industrial action has passed. [OPEN]

19-20/34 Chair’s Oral Report
The Chair noted the new structure of the Level 2 SSPs which go to SCA members for signing. Explanations for the various adjustments are provided through links in the SSP (to a generic document for particular types of disability) rather than detailed within the SSP itself. The Chair expressed concern that some students may not feel fully informed about the terms of the SSP and the nature of the adjustment. The Chair advised SCA members to be aware of these links when signing off the SSPs.

The Deputy Director Student Services noted that the change in SSPs is part of an ongoing plan to include all adjustments on SITS, so that detailed information is available on e:vision.

19-20/35 Report from Students

YUSU: YUSU are still working on creating an assessment transparency survey for students, which will focus on what information about the assessment is provided to students and how clearly this is done. It will be sent to the Committee members to consider and comment. They plan to launch the survey in the spring term between Week 6 and 8.

GSA: Nothing to report, other than that GSA is helping design and launch the survey.

19-20/36 Annual Report - Undergraduate External Examiners 2018/9

Note: Subsequent to the circulation of papers two more outstanding External Examiner reports for the Centre for Lifelong Learning and Health Sciences have been received. There are now just four outstanding.

Jane Iddon and Elizabeth Allen from the Academic Quality team reported that all externals confirmed that the standards set by the University are appropriate for the level of the qualification; that academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions; and that processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards were sound and fairly conducted in line with the University’s regulations and procedures.

The committee discussed a number of highlighted areas, including information made available to examiners and exam boards, assessment criteria, information made available to students at the point of assessment, and marking and moderation practices. These are all issues that are being considered by SCA this year in various ways, and the YUSU-led project on assessment will hopefully enabled SCA to gain some further insight. SCA also welcomed the focus in the report on degree outcomes, and the analysis that departments are undertaking to understand their trends in graduate outcomes. This is especially helpful in the context of the national debate on degree standards. The Committee discussed the checks and balances in place to ensure that comments from external examiners are followed up. It was noted that it may be necessary to differentiate between external examiners and programmes in the reporting as otherwise it may lead to a department being associated with an issue which only occurs on one programme.

There were seven broad themes that came from the report.
1. **Board of examiners meetings:** As in previous years, the report highlighted the need (expressed by some externals) for more contextual data to be provided prior to the examination boards, to help identify trends.

2. **Moderation practices:** As in previous years, there were a number of reports of moderation practices not being transparent. Departments had all responded that they were addressing the issues raised, for example, by reviewing processes/moderation forms; ensuring clearer audit trails; providing further training or revising their marking criteria and guidance.

3. **Assessment criteria:** A number of departments were commended for the quality, clarity and robustness of the assessment criteria. However, a small number of externals suggested clearer marking criteria and more detailed granularity.

4. **Standards:** The increase proportion of first class degrees was highlighted by a small number of externals, although the majority reported that this was comparable to peer institutions, and reflected high achievement, high quality teaching and admissions tariffs. There were some pockets of overmarking and undermarking reported. Departments had responded that they were improving guidance and / or training for markers and moderators.

5. **Feedback:** Numerous externals identified areas of good practice across departments. However, reports of inconsistencies were raised in relation to the quality, the volume of feedback provided and being more explicitly aligned to descriptors.

6. **Assessment:** A number of departments were commended for the quality of assessment design and variety of assessment methods, with some perceptions raised in relation to over-assessment, and suggestions that a greater diversity of assessments should be considered.

7. **Workload and marking deadlines.** Pressures on staff workload (marking turnaround, BoE administrative demands) were highlighted by a number of externals.

The Chair **noted** that the report structure was excellent. He also **reported** that since these annual reports were submitted, he has sent guidance directly to the Chairs of Boards of Examiners regarding clarity of moderation practices.

The Chair **reported** that there are new assessment criteria in Appendix D of the QAA Quality Code, where the descriptors that came out last year are now published. They are not currently compulsory, but the Committee will consider their use.

**19-20/37 Chair’s Approvals**

Chair’s approvals to follow in January meeting.

**19-20/38 Individual Examination Arrangements**

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

**19-20/39 Appointment of External Examiners**

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