Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 24 January 2020 at 2.00pm in HG/17, Heslington Hall.

 Attendance and apologies for absence:

Present:
- Prof Mike Bentley, Physics (Chair)
- Dr Patrick Gallimore, York Law School
- Dr Alet Roux, Mathematics
- Dr Jess Wardman, Management
- Dr Daniel Baker, Psychology
- Dr David Clayton, History
- Giang Nguyen, YUSU
- Prof Tom Stoneham, Dean of YGRS [19/20 41-47]

In attendance:
- Cecilia Lowe, Head of Learning Enhancement
- Dr Stephen Gow (Secretary), Academic Integrity Coordinator
- Dr Angela Ranson (Minutes), Academic Support Coordinator

Apologies:
- Dr Danijela Trenkic, Education
- Anita Savage Grainge, Health Sciences
- Simon van der Borgh, TFTI
- Laila Fish, Disability Services
- Robert Simpson, Special Cases Manager
- Dr Martin Cockett, Chair of Special Cases Committee
- Jane Baston, GSA
- Valerie Cotter, Dep Academic Registrar/Director Student Service
- Dr Jen Wotherspoon, Deputy Director, Student Services
- Sharmila Gohill, Asst Registrar, Student Progress

19-20/40 Welcome
The Chair welcomed the Committee and noted that the high number of apologies was due to a clash with graduation and also teaching. The Secretary will ensure this clash does not happen in future.

[ACTION: SG]

19-20/41 Minutes of previous meeting
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2019.

19-20/42 Matters Arising from the previous minutes
- 18-19/87, 19-20/27 - Exceptional Circumstances Form
  This item is now closed. The new Exceptional Circumstances form was approved by SCA and is in use but Unity Health still has some reservations about the form. The Deputy Director of Students services is contacting Unity Health to receive feedback however, it
was agreed that current form should now be used until the end of the academic year and any changes in response to Unity Health’s feedback be implemented for 2020/21. [CLOSED]

- **18-19/97 - Consistency of Marking- responding to student complaints**
  Item is now closed as the YUSU/GSA Transparency of Assessment Information Survey is going out to students on 2nd Feb in Week 5 of term. [CLOSED]

- **18-19/97 - GSA response to increasing numbers of TYMS students seeking support for failing their programme**
  Item is now closed as the Chair has raised the item with the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Students and comments have also been raised and addressed in the APR. [CLOSED]

- **19-20/04 - Sticker Scheme for specific learning difficulties**
  Item is now closed as the Chair has discussed matter with the lead of the Inclusive Learning Teaching Strategy which addresses this issue and will be considered at a later date by SCA. [CLOSED]

- **19-20/12 - Requirement by UKSCQA to produce a Degree Outcomes Statement**
  The Chair reported that the University will be publishing a degree outcomes statement, and that a UTC working group has been formed Chaired by Professor Mike Bentley. The statement will be considered by SCA, but approval will be by UTC. [CLOSED]

- **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. The Chair will be meeting with the Associate Deans of the Faculty Learning and Teaching Groups to discuss this matter and the results of these discussion included with the production of the Degree Outcomes Statement. [CLOSED]

- **19-20/24 - UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance: Assessment Theme - 20 Day Feedback**
  The Chair and Deputy Chair will meet with the UTC Chair to discuss this matter. [OPEN]

**19-20/43 Chair’s Report**
The Chair also reported that the paper on the information provided at exam boards for examiners, such as average marks and degree classes has been paused until it can be clarified what information external examiners are requesting and why. The Chair is working with the Academic Quality team to collect data and they will meet with a sample of external examiners to discuss the
information requested at exam boards (for example degree classes, module marks). Daniel Baker, Jess Wardman and Patrick Gallimore volunteered to help analyse this information once it has been collected.

[ACTION: MB, DB, JW, PG]

19-20/44 Report from Students
- **GSA** representative sent apologies as the meeting clashed with graduation.
- **YUSU** representative **requested** that SCA members make any final comments on the YUSU/GSA Transparency of Assessment Information Survey which will be made available to students from Tuesday Week 5 (4th February 2020). It was also **noted** that YUSU had received a number of complaints from students related to issues and errors in exams, also regarding the use of calculators due to the recent change of university policy. It was **requested** that the SCA secretary pass the details on to the Examinations Office. There were several complaints relating to the poor conduct of invigilators in examination. It was noted that these complaints were not included in the paper on exam errors. The YUSU representative **questioned** how departments respond to these issues. The Chair **noted** that these matters are taken very seriously and will be raised with departments and the Examinations Office. It was also **noted** that SCA will receive a report on the change to the policy and practice of calculators in examinations in February.

[ACTION: SG/SCA/YUSU/GSA]

19-20/45 Proposal for changes to PGR Academic Misconduct Policy
The Committee **recommended for approval** the revised PGR Academic Misconduct Policy to the Policy and Programmes Sub-Committee (PPSC) of the York Graduate School (YGRS). The Dean of YGRS, Prof. Tom Stoneham was involved in the revision of the policy, was present at the meeting and introduced the paper to the Committee. The revisions of the policy have been strongly informed by the OIA Good Practice Framework (GPF) on academic discipline published in late 2018. The PGR policy as it stands does not have a penalty system in place if academic misconduct is identified in the assessment process (i.e. progression stage or examination stage). Currently, once academic misconduct has been identified, the report on the misconduct is given to the examiners, who are asked to make an appropriate academic decision in light of the report and the original work submitted by the student. Concerns were **noted** that the current policy may lead to inconsistent outcomes and it is possible, in theory, for a student who has engaged in significant academic misconduct to eventually (presumably after referral) graduate with a research degree.

The main changes **recommend for approval** to PPSC are as follows:

1. the introduction of penalty tables (3 levels specific to PGR students but process in line with Taught policy);
2. mitigation of penalties to take account of compelling personal circumstances (adapted from Taught policy);
3. definition of academic judgement in relation to this policy (adapted from Taught policy);
4. specification of how evidence is handled within the process (adapted from Taught policy);
5. clarification of appeals procedure (adapted from Taught policy);
6. other minor changes in wording to improve clarity.

The committee did raise concerns that the apparent two strikes and out approach (level 1 academic misconduct offences) may be too harsh. It was agreed that there are three outcomes available in response to accusations of academic misconduct (panels may also decide there is no case to answer or that poor practice has been observed) and this approach is in line with the that applied on taught programmes. It was noted that this effectively provides a two stage appeal process for students and introduces safeguards which are also in the interest of the student. Further concerns were raised regarding the use of commissioning services by PGR students, particularly those early on in their research degree when supervisors have little idea of the student’s writing and how to evidence their use in academic misconduct cases. It was agreed that students and their supervisors may be asked for documentary evidence to prove authorship of the PhD and avoid accusations of commissioning.

Other matters discussed were:

- The Committee also noted the addition of the new, detailed definition of academic judgement in line with the taught policy based on OIA guidance (3.6.).
- In section 2.1, there was a proposal to remove the reference to cheating as it may not apply to research students It was agreed that cheating should remain in the policy as it may be possible to cheat in a Viva voce examination through the use of technology illicit support provided to the student, as noted by the Chair of Special Cases Committee. It was also noted that academic misconduct committed by research students on taught modules is covered under the academic misconduct policy for taught programmes.
- It was noted that the Academic Misconduct panels for research student cases include the Graduate School Chair and one other Graduate Chair from the same faculty.
- It was noted that Senate has the power to revoke an award in Ordnance 7 where they have good cause to do so, which includes “the discovery, subsequent to the grant or conferment of the qualification, of academic misconduct in work submitted for the qualification, or other academic-related behaviour, which indicates that the person should be deprived of the qualification or that the qualification should be revoked.”

[ACTION: TS/PPSC]

19-20/46 Guidance for Appointment of Examiners of Research Degrees

The Committee recommended for approval, by PPSC, the revised guidance on the appointment of examiners for research degrees. Examiners are appointed following completion of an electronic form, and then the approval of examiners process is managed by RSA on behalf of SCA. As part of the process, a set of guidelines exists which is used by RSA, and by SCA members, when considering requests for appointment of examiners. This Guidance, which has previously been approved by SCA is referred to directly in the Policy on Research Degrees (PORD) however, other than to Graduate School Heads and PGR Administrators, the document is not accessible to staff or
students. The revisions included the removal of restrictive guidance on appointment of examiners who have previously taught students (this has been changed to previously supervised), the modification of the language for an outward-facing document and the addition of guidance on internal examiners, cross referenced with the relevant sections of the PORD. It was noted that in a number of departments the internal examiner may have been involved with a student’s TAP, however they should not be involved in the preparation of the final thesis. Finally, the committee agreed to include guidance that states that internal examiners should not be appointed if they have a close relationship with the student’s supervisor.

19-20/47 Addressing Issues With Student Perception Of The Independence Of Markers

It was noted that this issue was referred to SCA following discussions between Deans and Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning, as well as the Athena Swan working group as a result of (at least) one student complaint relating to a married couple acting as markers of a student’s work. There have also been concerns raised relating to couples acting as co-supervisors of PGR students and couples being on the same PGR TAP panel. The Committee noted the difficulty of legislating relationships and agreed that a level of trust of professional standards is needed in these situations. It was noted by the Dean of YGRS that there were certain complexities in the way this relates to the Personal Relationships Policy, however it noted this was beyond the remit of the Committee.

The Committee agreed that the current University policy on personal relationships is sufficient, but recommended that the York Graduate Research School make the process for handling such potential conflicts more available. The Chair of the YGRS was present at the meeting, and agreed to include this issue in the annual review of departmental handbooks in addition to the information already included in the York Graduate Research School Handbook For Postgraduate Research Students (p.12). It was also agreed that progression panels are considered examinations. In terms of relationships between independent markers on taught programmes, it was agreed that SCA does not wish to legislate against this possibility, trusting the professionalism of staff and the other safeguards in place that protect fairness in marking.

19-20/48 Proposal for changes to Academic Misconduct Policy - Penalty Tables, Ethics & Whistleblowing

The Committee considered the proposed changes to the Academic Misconduct policy to include separate penalty tables for plagiarism, collusion, commissioning and fabrication to make outcomes more consistent. The committee agreed to having separate penalty tables, and to having a wider range of clearly defined penalties for serious offences. The current approach makes it difficult for StAMP investigatory panels to differentiate between collusion and plagiarism, and also only provides the option of a zero for commissioning and fabrication. This new approach has defined penalty tables for all four offences which allow a range of penalties of zero, outright fail and compensatable fail, with clear justification. While a cap of 59 for poor practice may be given for plagiarism and collusion, it was agreed that poor practice was not a suitable outcome for commissioning and fabrication. The Committee agreed to recommend for approval these changes.
to UTC, with slight amendments to the wording.

It was noted that case of ethics breaches have been considered by the StAMP in the past year, particularly in TFTI who helped devise an approach to this matter. The Committee agreed the recommended changes to make clear on how to address breaches of ethics in assessment rules in the academic misconduct policy. While Unethical Research Behaviour is included under the Disciplinary Offences (AM1.2.2), it is also the case that a student may gain an unfair advantage in an assessment through breaching the ethical approval process, which can be included under breach of assessment rules or cheating, this will be made clear in the definition of the offence. It was also agreed that misrepresentation of page/word count could also be considered under this offence of breach/cheating.

In response to recent cases of whistleblowing by students and third parties, it was proposed that it was necessary to clearly articulate the university’s approach to addressing reports of academic misconduct by students and external third parties. The proposal was written in coordination with the existing policy on anonymous reporting of complaints and with reference of sector exemplars. The Committee agreed to the addition of the proposed guidance on academic misconduct reported by students and third parties (whistleblowing) to section AM2.17 of the Academic Misconduct Policy. This has been written in coordination with the existing policy on anonymous reporting of complaints and based upon examples from the sector. The proposed policy states that reports of academic misconduct by a third party will only be considered if the person reporting the incident is identifiable and there is sufficient evidence and will only consider anonymous reporting with very good reason and approval from the Chair of SCA, as it may be malicious.

UTC will receive the finalised version of the Academic Misconduct Policy 2020/21 for consideration and approval at its May meeting.

[ACTION: SG/PG/MB]

**19-20/49 Review of degree outcome information provided to external examiners**

The Committee considered the proposal to make available for external examiners the individual department’s degree outcomes information calculated by BIU. It was noted that externals examiners particularly need data which can assist them in making comparative judgements of the cohorts they are examining. The Committee agreed that the table displaying the *Distributions of degrees as a function of time for a specific department compared with mission groups for the same subject* should be part of data shared with examiners. It was noted that any data should include confidence intervals to help assess the validity of the data. It was also agreed that November would be an ideal time to share data in response to the receipt of the external examiner feedback reports, in addition to being sent to new external examiners. The Committee agreed to the Chair’s recommendation to join this item with the information provided at exam boards for examiners, such as average marks and degree classes [as noted in SCA19-20/43] and for the new Tableau workbook on degree outcomes including tariff, cohort and best three A-levels, to be shared with the external examiners as part of this information. There was discussion of how this data should be generated and reported, whether centrally or by departments, the logistics of which need to be
agreed as not to over burden central services. It was noted that these issues should be combined and reported to UTC later in the academic year. The Chair and Daniel Baker will follow up with BIU and report results at the next meeting.

[ACTION: MB/DB]

19-20/50 Review of page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches
Consideration of this item was postponed until the next meeting

19-20/51 Report – Spring CAP exam issues (Examinations Office)
The committee noted the rise in errors from 8 in 2018/9 to 15 in 2019/20, with one paper setter unavailable. It was agreed that the Chair will discuss the issue with the department(s) who had the most serious errors and data will be shared with the Chairs of Boards of Examiners.

[ACTION: MB/SG]

19-20/52 Review of assessment issues raised via Annual Programme Reviews (ASO)
The Committee considered the issues arising from APRs. It was noted that the new University Strategy may address some of the common problems identified by departments with the timings of examinations and marking turn around. In the case of Law’s noting of these issues, it was noted that they made no mention of the Head of Department’s discretion to provide exemptions to the 20 day feedback rule, which should have addressed some of the department’s concerns. The issue faced by Maths MSc programmes regarding the timing of examinations for spring term modules in light of the resit period not being until August was noted. The Chair noted that exams can take place during Week 1 of the summer term, however, departments have to run exams themselves during that week, which is not currently feasible for some departments. It was agreed that the Chair will discuss with the Assessments team and the relevant department(s). The Committee considered the concern raised by Management regarding the deadlines for assessment and noted that part of the problem is that the department has one of the largest cohorts of students but smallest cohorts of GTAs to help with marking. It was agreed the Chair, Deputy Director of Student Services, and Director of Students Services would discuss this matter with the department. The Committee rejected the request by the Mathematics department to formally include the Board of Studies in decisions regarding fail/repeat. It was noted that the opportunity to fail repeat should be based on assessment results and progression outcomes. It is hoped that the department’s concerns have been addressed in the recent changes to the Fitness to Study policy. In response to Sociology’s request to explore a university wide-system for online marking, it was noted that this question was becoming more prevalent and the PDLT were exploring options.

[ACTION: MB/JW/VC]

19-20/53 Guidance to support processing marking within the 20 week turnaround period
Consideration of this item was postponed until the next meeting due to time but it was also noted the first page of the report was missing from the printed papers.

[ACTION: SG/CL]
19-20/54 Chair’s Approvals
The Committee noted the Chair’s approvals.

19-20/55 Individual Examination Arrangements
The Committee noted the number of individual examination arrangements.

19-20/56 Appointment of External Examiners
The Committee noted the external examiners appointed since the last meeting.