Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 28 February 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
- Dr Nicoletta Asciuto - English
- Giang Nguyen - YUSU
- Anita Savage Grainge - Health Sciences
- Laila Fish - Disability Services [Up to M19-20/67]
- Dr Martin Cockett - Chair of Special Cases Committee
- Jane Baston - GSA

In attendance:
- Cecilia Lowe - Head of Learning Enhancement
- Dr Stephen Gow (Secretary) - Academic Integrity Coordinator
- Jessica Roehricht (Minutes) - Academic Support Administrator
- Valerie Cotter - Dep Academic Registrar/Dir Student Services
- Dr Jen Wotherspoon - Deputy Director, Student Services

Apologies:
- Dr Danijela Trenkic - Education
- Simon van der Borgh - TFTI
- Prof Tom Stoneham - Dean of YGRS
- Robert Simpson - Special Cases Manager
- Sharmila Gohill - Asst Registrar, Student Progress

Visitors:
- Karen Payne - Business Intelligence Unit [M19-20/63]

19-20/57 Welcome
The Chair welcomed the Committee.

19-20/58 Minutes of previous meeting
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2020, noted the addition of Dr Nicoletta Asciuto who attended the meeting but had been omitted from the minutes.

19-20/59 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 UTC Chair to discuss this matter. [OPEN]

- **19-20/40 - SCA clash with teaching and graduation**
  Item now closed, the Chair noted that this issue had been dealt with for the following academic year. [CLOSED]

- **19-20/43 Chair’s Report: Information provided for examination boards**
  The Chair noted that the work on information provided at exam boards is ongoing. [OPEN]

- **19-20/44 Pass on student complaints regarding examination from YUSU to Examinations Office**
  It was noted that this item had been closed however YUSU had yet to receive clarification of what action should be taken in light of the invigilator issues highlighted by students. The YUSU academic officer was asked to inform the secretary of further specific complaints, including the example discussed in the meeting regarding a student experiencing a panic attack in a closed exam and the invigilators response, which would then be forwarded to the Examinations Office. It was noted that the incident reported seemed to match with the current invigilator protocol for when a student experiences a panic attack, and the Deputy Director of Student Services asked for YUSU to make recommendations if this protocol was not fit for purpose. The Secretary would follow up with the Examinations Office to confirm what action would be taken and inform the YUSU academic officer. [OPEN]

- **19-20/49 Review of degree outcome information provided to external examiners**
  The Chair reported ongoing work with the Business Intelligence Unit. [OPEN]

- **19-20/51 Report – Spring CAP exam issues**
  The Chair reported he would discuss the issue with the departments who had the most serious errors. [OPEN]

- **19-20/52 Review of assessment issues raised via Annual Programme Reviews**
  The Chair and YUSU representative reported they would meet The York Management School regarding this. [OPEN]

- **19-20/59 Report on the change to exam calculator policy in the January cap 2020**
  This item was carried over to the next meeting as detailed 19-20/62.

- **19-20/59 RSA - RSA delegated responsibility from SCA**
  Item to be considered offline by SCA members due to time constraints (update: SCA members approved the proposal.)

19-20/60 Chair’s Report
The Chair did not provide an oral report.
19-20/61 Report from Students

- YUSU representative reported that the Transparency of Assessment Information Survey was open and had received 256 responses, with a target of 500. From the responses before the meeting, there appeared to be a mix of students completing this. It was queried whether the industrial action taking place in Spring term 2020 would delay any students graduating. The Deputy Director of Student Services noted that although SCA would not be the Committee to discuss this, there were no plans for any delay in graduation. The YUSU academic officer asked if it could be guaranteed that no individuals would be affected in such a way that their graduation had to be delayed due to industrial action. The Chair confirmed that all possible actions are being taken and the progression and graduation of students is the top priority. However no such guarantees could be given, and confirmed that departments should be the first point of contact for any concerns. ..

- GSA representative noted that they had been contacted by students who were concerned about the industrial action which was taking place and how this would affect their grades, including moderation, and the effect on their dissertations. The Chair noted that Heads of Departments had been given clear guidance on protecting student interests, and that SCA though the Chair, is consulted on all issues related to affected assessments. The Chair stressed that the teaching and learning of all students is the Committee’s top priority.

19-20/62 The impact of the change of provision of calculators in Jan CAP 2020 and proposal for change to policy on provision and use of calculators in closed assessments

The Committee considered a report on the impact of the change of provision of calculators in January CAP 2020. It was noted that the cover sheet for this paper was incorrect in noting that the policy had been agreed for 3 years in September 2019. The Chair of SCA confirmed that SCA would make the policy decision for future years at the May SCA meeting.

Issues reported in the paper (largely to do with invigilation) were discussed in detail. It was agreed that the most pressing concern was for the problems reported with invigilation and provision of calculators, which should be resolved in advance of the SummerSpring CAP. The Deputy Director of Students Services apologised to students for the anxiety caused by this and the policy change. A new protocol for the management of calculators in examinations was presented and noted, with the intention to standardise this process. Amendments to this process were suggested, including students picking up calculators on their way into close examination rooms rather than raising their hands once in the room.

It was noted that the negative response from students to this change had not been anticipated, as the policy had been intended to be advantageous for students as they could bring their own calculator or be provided with one in the exam. The Chair noted that he had met with the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Sciences and the student representative for the faculty, with whom the issues had been discussed and they had been assured that measures have been taken to address the issues around communication and invigilation. Following this meeting, more student representatives had made contact who still, apparently, had concerns over the policy. The
Committee discussed the concerns raised so far by students and whether this was due to the transition and how this had been handled, or something more fundamental about the policy. The Committee discussed whether communication regarding the transition may have impacted how this policy was received by students. It was noted that all of the students received a communication regarding the change in policy from the University, although different departments sent either no or varied information to their students on this matter. It was noted that sending future communications from multiple sources, for example YUSU, might result in more effective retention of information.

The proposed policy wording for 2020/21 onwards was discussed. It was noted that the policy wording proposed seemed to be contradictory in that in the first paragraph it was stated that calculators would not be provided but then in paragraphs 3 it stated they would be provided, it was noted this should state clearly that students would be provided with calculators in the event they did not bring their own or if they had brought a model which was not on the approved list.

Following discussion, It was agreed that the decision on the policy on provision and use of calculators in closed assessments for the 2020/21 academic year was to be deferred to the May 2020 SCA meeting, which was before the summer CAP, meaning information from this upcoming CAP could not be used to influence the decision. It was noted that the Chair and The Deputy Director of Students Services had a further consultation arranged with students during the week following the SCA meeting, and therefore consideration of the proposed policy wording for the Guide to Assessment would be deferred to the next meeting.

**ACTION [MAB/SG/JW/JF]**

**19-20/63 Progress Note on Degree Outcomes and Statistical Analysis Report**

Karen Payne from the Business Intelligence Unit attended for this item and presented this paper to the Committee, providing an update on the Degree Outcomes and Statistical Analysis Report, which was to be presented in full at the April/May Meeting of UTC and SCA. It was reported that a change in method of analysis from 2019 using SPSS, to Python in 2020, resulted in more powerful modelling capability. It was noted that these results would use deciles rather than actual award marks, which would allow greater comparison between departments. Although this would not then allow for comparison between years, it was confirmed that there were other reports which looked at actual marks and discussed issues such as grade “inflation”.

The Committee queried whether ethnicity could be separated by UK and overseas students. It was confirmed that this would be included in the analysis, however if there were low numbers analysis may not reach the point of statistical significance. It was noted that there would be other forms of analysis to help with the widening participation data, with a stronger focus on belonging, analysing the majority compared to minority groups within specific cohorts.

There was discussion surrounding measures of student socio-economic status, with POLAR quartiles the primary method of comparison. Although a broad approach, using more detailed
financial information of individual students would pose data protection issues. There would also be data on students in receipt of bursaries, although again this would be a broad group.

It was noted that members were able to contact BIU directly for more individual data not covered by the statistical analysis in the report if they would find this useful, for example withdrawal numbers.

19-20/64 Academic Misconduct Case Data Report 2018/19
The Committee considered a report on academic misconduct data for all taught students. The Chair thanked the Secretary for all of the work that had gone into this, it should also be noted that the Assistant Registrar helped with compiling the report and the report was possible due to the Google Form created to collect the data by the Examinations Team, particularly the Assessment coordinator and Academic Misconduct Administrator. It was noted that this report was presented as a Data Studio report, and one joint paper for the undergraduate and postgraduate taught cases, which was different from previous years. The committee agreed that they were content with the format of this report to be used for future years.

It was noted that plagiarism was still the main issue. It was noted that the mean length of cases was fewer than 30 days, however this was skewed by a small number of cases which took longer to resolve, it was noted that these outliers could be removed from future reporting to get a better mean for the majority of cases. Any longer cases could be reported separately and the reason for the delay in resolving the case reported in order to avoid this in the future, where possible. A key issue highlighted in the undergraduate data was a number of individual modules with multiple cases of academic misconduct, which were not collusion based. This included a TFTI module, which the Secretary would follow up and gather more information about. It was highlighted that the three departments with the highest number of PGT cases also had a significant increase in international student numbers, while not statistically significant due to the small data set, would be an interesting trend to track to identify whether significant increase in cohort size results in an increase in academic misconduct.

The Chair noted that it was positive to see an improvement from the Department of Education. The Chair also noted that the significant overrepresentation of overseas students in the postgraduate taught data was concerning, and could raise questions on language ability. The Secretary added that IPC had been contacted and few of the students involved in cases in 2018/19 had been through International Pathway College programmes. Representation of overseas students in the academic misconduct data was lower at undergraduate level, and it was discussed that this was a consistent observation, and there were several possible factors in this. It was suggested that possible factors could include:

- The postgraduate courses where these cases were occurring may be more heavily essay based, rather than undergraduate programmes with closed exams, which would offer more opportunity for plagiarism.
- Undergraduate programmes tend to be longer, so students have more time to adjust to academic standards.
Overseas students make up a lower proportion of the undergraduate cohort than postgraduate taught overall.

The GSA representative highlighted that not all of the PGT students going through academic misconduct cases are using the GSA advice service. It was noted that all departments should be using a standard template to students which includes reference to YUSU and GSA advice services, however the Examinations Office would spot check that this was the case.

**ACTION [SG/SG]**

**19-20/65 Repeat Study report and recommendations**

The Committee considered the analysis of the first year of operation of the Year 1 repeat study report and data, which the Chair presented. The Chair noted the small number of students involved, so urged caution, although despite this there was statistically significant data. The current continuation figure of 50% was noted however concerns were raised that many students were only progressing after resits and a number of students were on LoA. The Chair also noted that there appeared to be a connection to maths skills, as high levels of students repeating were from the Science faculty or undertaking more numerical programmes. The Committee recommended that data on maths tariffs and grades for these students be included in future reports.

During the course of discussion, the following were noted. There was not yet any data on the Back on Track policy or graduation and final award marks for the repeating students. The high numbers of students on leave of absence, as well as the demographic data and apparent higher levels for repeating students amongst the registered disabled, overseas and BME students. Although it would be inappropriate to contact students who did not progress, their supervisor and/or department contact could be contacted to provide more information for future reports. It was suggested that it would be helpful for future reports to disaggregate the BME students into UK and overseas for a more detailed picture. Concerns were raised in relation to the seemingly high level of failure and resit rates among the group.

Suggestions were made as to how to best assist students, most of which were covered in the Back on Track policy. This included more discussion surrounding whether repeating the year was the best course of action for individual students, and the suggestion that some statistics regarding progression from this report were included in that discussion. It was suggested that the Learning Enhancement team could be a part of the process for the Back on Track policy. It was noted that there were other initiatives which may improve this retention, such as providing more support at the beginning of study for certain groups, who would then be less likely to need to repeat, for example putting adjustments in place early for students with disabilities. It was noted that using experienced supervisors for students with identified difficulties can help to support them better.

The Committee agreed that the recommendation to UTC would be that the policy be approved for continuation, with a policy review in 3 years time, by which time 2 cohorts of repeat students should have progressed through the system. It should be noted, however, that the original proposal was for a 5 year period before evaluation but the Committee agreed that this was too
long and the 3 year period would be preferable. In the meantime, SCA was to receive an annual update of the statistics included in the report, with a view to informing UTC of any significant changes in the operation of the policy.

19-20/66 Guidance to support processing marking
The Committee considered a paper suggesting guidance for efficient and productive approaches to marking practice, which was written and presented by Cecilia Lowe, Head of Learning Enhancement. It was noted that although this was initially in response to the 20 day feedback policy, the document would no longer reference this, and would instead provide more general guidance.

There was discussion surrounding this paper, including some suggested amendments, which included some amendments to tone (for example in section 2.1). In relation to section 1.5 “varying assessment formats to reduce the marking burden” it was agreed that this should include “where academically appropriate”. Several members of the Committee noted that pedagogic reasons should be the primary driver of assessment format not efficiency. Further points noted with regard to varying assessment formats included that this would sometimes result in a higher marking workload and would be more inefficient due to larger numbers of smaller assessments, current practice varied between departments, and students would also be interested in this approach.

The YUSU representative noted that this guidance would affect students. At section 2.5 of the report “ideas for managing writing feedback”, it was noted that emphasis on clear communication of the feedback students would receive, in addition to consistency of amount of feedback between students at different mark levels, would be appreciated by students (for example, high achieving students often perceive they do not receive as much feedback). It was also noted that the availability of past papers was inconsistent between departments, however was recommended in the report as good practice for marking, in addition to being beneficial for students.

It was agreed that the guidance to support the efficient processing of assessment marking and feedback would be revised based on the comments of the Committee, then circulated to Chairs of Boards of Studies and Chairs of Boards of Examiners before the end of Spring term 2020, along with further information of how to use and distribute this in departments. The guidance would be added to the Learning and Teaching web pages over summer 2020. It was also agreed that the guidance would be incorporated in the GTA introduction to Learning and Teaching training.

ACTION [CL]

19-20/67 Review of page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches
The Chair noted that this was a discussion paper on page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches, rather than policy, and that up until this point there had been a lot of variation in approach between departments. The Chair also noted that any future policy would only apply to assessments where a word limit had been specified. The Committee noted that most departments used word limits rather than page limits for a number of reasons.
The Committee **discussed** the different approaches to word limits between departments and disciplines, and the associated penalties. It was **noted** that in some departments the marker simply stops reading at the word limit, which would lead to its own academic penalties, although it was queried how this point was accurately and consistently determined.

It was **noted** that greater numbers of interdisciplinary programmes was part of the Universities strategic plan for the future, and standardisation of penalties for word limits could be beneficial to students on these programmes. Different approaches to some form of standardisation were **discussed**, including graded penalties based on percentage over the word limit (as in the discussion paper), and whether these should be discipline specific or University wide. It was **agreed** that any change in policy should be applied to all students, and not phased, as this had the potential to cause high levels of confusion due to communication between years (for example a 3rd yr student telling a 1st yr it was ok to be up to 10% over the word count when in fact the policy for the 1st yr was different due to phasing). The Committee **noted** that whenever a penalty was in place, staff should be consistent in applying this.

It was **agreed** that the working group would continue from this discussion, and produce a draft recommendation paper for the July SCA meeting. The policy would be developed during 2020/21 for implementation for the 2021-22 academic year, as it was **noted** that this was too late for implementation in the 2020-21. The membership of the working group was expanded to include the Chair, YUSU Academic Officer, Patrick Gallimore and Anita Savage Grainge.

**ACTION [MB/NA/DC/SB/PG/ASG]**

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

The Committee **agreed** to the proposal to review and revise the Guide to Assessment Standards, Marking and Feedback, and **agreed** to the proposed remit of the working group, including proposing a new structure and renaming the guide, considering content, and a process for version control. It was **noted** that this would include a student consultation, and the Secretary would consult the YUSU academic officer regarding the approach for this. The Chair **noted** that it would be positive to retain some aspects of the current format, for example being able to print a physical copy.

**ACTION [SG/GN]**

**19-20/69 RSA delegated responsibility from SCA - Exams**

This paper was **circulated** to the Committee post-meeting for comment, with feedback collated by the Secretary and then referred to the Chair for approval of the revised report by Chair’s action, which would be **reported** at the next meeting.

**ACTION [SG/MB]**

**19-20/70 Academic Misconduct Penalty Tables**

The Committee **agreed** to the revised Academic Misconduct Penalty Tables, with some minor corrections, to be **recommended** for UTC approval. It was **noted** that the main change since the
January SCA meeting was that collusion could not be considered poor practice.

19-20/71 Chair’s Approvals
The Committee noted the Chair’s approvals.

19-20/72 Individual Examination Arrangements
The Committee noted the number of individual examination arrangements.

19-20/73 Appointment of External Examiners
The Committee noted the external examiners appointed since the last meeting.