STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 1 May 2020 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 Nicoletta Asciuto, English
- Dr Daniel Baker, Psychology
- Dr Patrick Gallimore, York Law School
- Dr Alet Roux, Mathematics
- Dr Danijela Trenkic, Education
- Dr Jess Wardman, Management
- Anita Savage Grainge, Health Sciences
- Simon van der Borgh, TFTI
- Giang Nguyen, YUSU
- Jane Baston, GSA

In attendance:
- Dr Martin Cockett, Chair of Special Cases Committee
- Dr Stephen Gow (Secretary), Academic Integrity Coordinator
- Dr Jen Wotherspoon, Deputy Director, Student Services
- Valerie Cotter, Dep Academic Registrar/Dir Student Services
- Laila Fish, Disability Services
- Sharmila Gohill, Asst Registrar, Student Progress
- Cecilia Lowe, Head of Learning Enhancement
- Jessica Roehricht (Minutes), Academic Support Administrator

Apologies:
- Dr David Clayton, History
- Prof Tom Stoneham, Dean of YGRS
- Robert Simpson, Special Cases Manager

Visitors:
- Paulo Schau Guerra, Business Intelligence Unit [M19-20/79-80]
- Chris Hoyle, Business Intelligence Unit [M19-20/79-80]
- Karen Payne, Business Intelligence Unit [M19-20/79-80]
- Elizabeth Allen, Academic Support Office [M19-20/82]

19-20/74 Welcome
The Chair welcomed the Committee.

19-20/75 Minutes of previous meeting
The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2020.

**19-20/76 Matters Arising from the previous minutes**

The Chair **noted** that a significant proportion of the Matters Arising had needed to be delayed due to the Covid-19 emergency situation.

- **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]

- **19-20/43 Chair’s Report: Information provided for examination boards**
  The Chair **noted** that the work on information provided at exam boards had been paused due to the Covid-19 situation, as it required the assessment team and the Chair. Work would continue on this when they were able to resume. [OPEN]

- **19-20/49 Review of degree outcome information provided to external examiners**
  The Chair **noted** work on this had also been paused, and would resume when the situation allowed. [OPEN]

- **19-20/52 Review of assessment issues raised via Annual Programme Reviews**
  The Chair **noted** that a meeting with The York Management School would take place at some point when the situation allowed. [OPEN]

- **19-20/62 Report on the change to exam calculator policy in the January cap 2020**
  A report on 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 was received at this meeting [M19-20/84 refers]. [CLOSED]

- **19-20/64 Academic Misconduct Case Data Report 2018/19**
  It was **reported** that the templates for academic misconduct cases had been checked and included information for students to seek advice from YUSU or GSA. These were available in an editable format, and the Secretary confirmed he would ensure this information was not being removed by departments. [CLOSED]

- **19-20/65 Repeat Study report and recommendations**
  The Committee highlighted that although recommendation had been made to UTC and the action marked as closed, this would need revisiting in light of the Covid-19 situation. [OPEN]

- **19-20/67 Review of page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches**
  The Chair **reported** work on this was ongoing, and would be discussed further later in the meeting in the context of SCA priorities in light on Covid-19 [M19-20/85 refers]. [OPEN]
• 19-20/68 Review of Guide to Assessment interim-report

It was noted that work had been scheduled on this before the Covid-19 situation, however in light of the situation, this work had been postponed. [OPEN]

19-20/77 Chair’s Report

The Chair reported to the Committee that a significant amount of work had been undertaken in response to the Covid-19 crisis, particularly with respect to assessment. The Chair noted that due to the rapid response necessary to address the issues as they arose, decisions had to be agreed by the Academic Contingency Group, and approved by Chair’s action by the Chair of SCA, Chair of UTC and Chair of Senate. The Chair therefore apologised to SCA that it had not been consulted on many important decisions and asked for understanding that this had been necessary due to the unique circumstances. SCA were asked to note that many of the Committees priorities had been postponed due to the situation, apart from those which were business critical, and these would be discussed later in the meeting [M19-20/85].

The Chair thanked all those who had supported the contingency efforts, in particular Jen Wotherspoon (Deputy Director of Students Services), Valerie Cotter (Director of Student Services), Giang Nguyen (YUSU Academic Officer) and Jane Baston (GSA Vice President Academic). There were also thanks to Patrick Gallimore (Deputy Chair of SCA), Daniel Baker (SCA), Jess Wardman (SCA), Steve King (former Chair of SCA, Associate Dean Faculty of Sciences) and Chris Fewster (former Chair of SCA) who provided valuable advice throughout this crisis.

The Chair noted that work on the Degree Outcomes Statement was now on hold, and he was waiting for QAA to release guidance on when they expected these to be published given the current situation. A lot of work had already been completed on this, so if the QAA did request these were still to be published in a short timeframe, this could be achieved.

The Chair also noted that service of two members of the Committee was coming to the end, one from Science and one Social Science. The Chair would consult departments for prospective candidates.

ACTION [MB]

19-20/78 Report from Students

- YUSU representative reported that the Not-So-Big Assessment Survey had closed, and received 267 responses. The YUSU representative queried whether there would be potential to generate a survey aimed towards understanding student experience with respect to teaching, learning and assessment moving online. This would be in line with some other institutions. The committee noted that Professor Richard Waites (Director for Students in the Department of Biology) had been using Mentimeter and asking all Biology students a few questions every week. The Chair agreed to raise this suggestion and example at the Academic Contingency Group. The YUSU representative noted concerns from students that online exams would be more challenging than closed exams. The Chair confirmed that departments had been asked to alter exams due to the move from closed to online exams, for example the removal of factual recall questions. These adjustments were to maintain academic standards, however it was confirmed that this should not make
exams more difficult overall. Any individual concerns should be reported by the students to
their department and Board of Examiners. The Chair noted that SCA would be providing
guidance to Boards of Examiners on what to do with unusual mark distributions.
- GSA representative had nothing to report, however noted thanks to the Committee for all
of the work carried out due to the Covid-19 situation. The Chair queried what the general
response had been to the additional measures introduced to protect and support the
academic achievement of PGT students during the Covid-19 emergency, relating to the
classification of merit or distinction. The GSA representative reported that the response to
this had predominantly been positive. There had been some concerns raised, as not all
students were clear about what it would mean for them personally. Students who had not
yet completed any assessments felt they were still being expected to complete all work to
a high standard during a pandemic. The Chair noted that this was understandable,
however unfortunate as it was difficult to put anything further in place for that group of
students.

ACTION [MB/SCA]

19-20/79 Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degree Outcomes Report 2018-9
Karen Payne from the Business Intelligence Unit attended for this item and presented this paper to
the Committee, during which she noted the overall percentage of good degrees awarded by York
in 2018/9 (the number of first class and upper second class degrees out of the total number of
degrees awarded) increased by 1.9 percentage points to 82.4% (from 80.5% in 2017/8).
Additionally, the Russell Group overall continued an upwards trend in good degrees, and that
there was variation across departments and faculties, particularly Arts and Humanities achieving
higher proportions of good degrees.

The Chair noted that the committee had seen the headlines for York earlier in the year [at the
November meeting, M19-20/21 refers], and that this report differed as it included sector
comparison. The Russell Group appeared to be plateauing compared to previous years, as did the
rest of the sector, appearing as if (so-called) grade inflation was stalling. This meant the gap
between York and the Russell Group for Undergraduate degree classifications had decreased. The
Committee noted that after 2013/14 York departed from the Russell Group with a smaller
proportion of good degrees, which was around the time the modular system was introduced. It
was noted that the increase in good degrees for the Russell Group, and most institutions, was
predominantly due to an increase in first class degrees. This was the same situation for York.

The Chair confirmed that the undergraduate degree outcomes for Health Sciences had been
noted, as these had significantly increased in 2018/19, however cautioned that the size of the
graduating cohort from this department was significantly smaller than in previous years, so there
could be a number of explanations for this.

Postgraduate taught degree outcomes were also discussed. The proportion of those ‘qualifying
with award at intended level’ increased in 2018/19, and the Committee noted that this has
interrupted a fall in outcomes, which was seen as positive as York was moving towards the mean
of the Russell Group. The Chair also noted this positive move, and that this could be linked to
preparation of students for courses, for example through the IPC, which could be reported to University Teaching Committee.

For PGT students, the proportion of qualifications achieved at intended level in 2018/9 increased the most in Social Policy and Social Work, and decreased by the most for Sociology. The Chair noted that it was positive to see TYMS remaining stable, and Economics and Related Studies increasing from 2017/18, as these departments had large PGT and large international PGT cohorts.

BIU were asked if future reports could include further comparison against the wider sector, rather than just the Russell Group. It was noted that this was possible, including the suggestion of using comparator institutions. The working group [see M19-20/80] would consider further a digest of variables for comparison which could be considered by UTC/SCA before reporting.

[ACTION: MB, BIU]

19-20/80 Degree Outcomes and Statistical Analysis Report
Karen Payne, Paulo Schau Guerra and Chris Hoyle from the Business Intelligence Unit attended for this item and presented this paper to the Committee. They noted that this paper only analysed undergraduate degree outcomes. This report follows from the progress note which was received at the February meeting of SCA [M19-20/63 refers].

The key points of discussion were around the influence of the BTEC as one of students' top three A level equivalent qualifications on increased likelihood of withdrawal, and also the influence of Chinese ethnicity on the reduced likelihood of withdrawal, contrasted with both of these factors having an influence of lower award marks. BIU confirmed that Chinese ethnicity included both UK and overseas students. The Committee queried whether these groups could be separated. It was noted that the influence of BTEC as one of students top three A level equivalent qualifications was a new measure, and required further investigation. There were several suggestions about what may have been the causes of the BTEC data, including whether students were used to different types of assessment, and whether this hid another correlation, such as proportions going through a foundation year.

It was noted that receipt of a bursary had shown reduced odds of withdrawal, which had not been seen in previous data. This was a positive finding, although it was noted that although this had been observed, the data did not indicate why this was found. It was noted that students coming through clearing did not appear to affect the likelihood of withdrawal. Black ethnicity showed lower final award marks, and the Committee noted that this was a concern which UTC was aware of. Mental Health had been separated from other Disabilities, and showed a negative effect on award mark. The Committee noted that York had students declaring mental health issues at a higher rate than other Russell Group universities, which was positive, but this data showed more work could be carried out to support these students.

It was noted that the departments with statistically significant increase in the likelihood of withdrawal, were also those with mathematical content and similar to the departments with high
numbers of students seeking repeat study in stage 1. It was also noted that the definition of withdrawal as not achieving the award you apply for - may be skewing the data as there is anecdotal evidence from departments that students switch from Integrated Masters to Bachelors in order to later undertake one-year postgraduate Masters programmes instead, for the chance of having a full year of a research project. It was also queried whether students went the other way, switching from BSc to integrated Masters and whether this would also be counted as withdrawal. [Post-meeting note: BIU explored this query and confirmed that Integrated Masters students, in the DOSA dataset, who changed, withdrawn, transferred, or who were otherwise awarded a degree were categorised as a Lower Exit or Withdrawal. This had been amended so that any student obtaining an Honours Degree level classification was deemed Complete. The models were regenerated with the new status and found for the most part there were no differences worth noting. There were slight changes to the Odds Ratio which didn't change the summary positions at all. One difference worth noting was that Physics, identified in section 5.5 of the main report as having a high likelihood of withdrawal, had changed. The odds had reduced by a large amount (OR 1.63 to 1.2) and there was now also no statistical significance.]

The Committee agreed to BIUs recommendation to support the establishment of a working group which could include members of SCA to participate in this work going forward. The remit of the working group would be to help develop and prioritise the questions asked of future analyses and the methods of evaluation, and define a reporting cycle. Several members of the Committee expressed interest in joining this working group. The Chair confirmed he would contact the Committee for volunteers.

**ACTION [ASG/DT/MB]**

19-20/81 Report contingency planning changes to Regulation 5 and Guide to Assessment
The Committee was asked to note the contingency changes to assessment policy and guidance in response to Covid-19 for report, as many decisions were made by Chair’s Action (SCA/UTC/Senate) due to the emergency context.

The Committee was asked to specifically note appendix 15 (Mapping of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Covid-19 Policy and Guidance to the Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback and to Regulation 5). The Committee was also asked to note that this was a mapping exercise to explain how decisions (documented and detailed fully in appendices 3 to 13) correspond to different aspects of the Guide to Assessment, and where sections of the Guide were superseded by those decisions. It did not contain the exact wording and policy decisions.

The Chair also asked the Committee to note the mechanism for the approval of changes, this was a Google Sheet which was fed requests from a Google Form detailing assessment changes from closed examination to either coursework, a special 24 hr examination or another special examination request. These decisions were then taken by Chair’s action.

The Committee asked for clarification of how the safety net would be applied to students who had already been granted sit as if for the first time in the August resit period, before the Covid-19
situation. It was noted that this, and other queries such as this which were arising, had been discussed and answered in various ways, such as in FAQs on the University website. The Committee recorded their thanks and acknowledgement to the Chair (and other Committee members) for all of the work to maintain teaching and assessment during such a difficult time.

**19-20/82 PGT External Examiner Summary report**

Elizabeth Allen, from the Academic Quality Team in the Academic Support Office, attended for this item and presented this paper to the Committee, which detailed eight broad themes in the external examiners’ reports: Standards, Moderation processes, Marking schemes/grading criteria, Assessment design and guidelines, Feedback, English language skills, Operation of Boards of Examiners and Workload. It was notable that overmarking of work, which had been reported in the past, was no longer a theme.

The Chair noted the overall positive report, which showed improvement, for example with marking schemes. He also noted that there had been work surrounding communications to students regarding assessments, however this was paused and awaiting the results of the Not-So-Big Assessment Survey which had been run by YUSU. The Committee noted that there had been a communication sent to departments regarding moderation procedure and what they were communicating to students, however this was unlikely to have fed through to the external examiners for the 2018/19 reports.

There was discussion that first and second markers should be independent, and therefore there was no expectation that second markers should be challenging first markers, in response to a comment in the report. It may be that markers agree on the mark, and there would be a difference depending on whether it was blind marking or not.

The Committee discussed the English Language theme arising from external examiner reports. The Committee noted that this was an area of concern for the following academic year [2020/21], as the University had relaxed entry criteria due to the Covid-19 situation. The Learning Enhancement team were working on a Skills Framework, which would include an English Language component. This framework would include online 1:1 sessions, as well as bringing groups of people together (in person or virtually, depending on the situation), to focus on language and academic language. This would allow for a combination approach, and would help provide students with situations which were not mono-lingual groups. The GSA representative noted their support of this. Departments were asked to contact Cecilia Lowe (Head of Learning Enhancement) if they had concerns regarding English Language skills for specific cohorts or situations, as it would allow the Learning Enhancement team to plan capacity for support. The Chair confirmed he would report these concerns and plans to UTC.

The Committee also noted that page/word length was a topic which was being worked on by members of SCA. Also, lack of variety of assessment had been raised as a recurring concern, however given the Covid-19 situation this would not be the case for 2019/20 so this did not need investigating further at this stage.

**ACTION [MB]**
19-20/83 Amendments to Guide to Assessment in relation to visiting students and study abroad
This item was deferred to a future meeting as further clarification was required before this report was received by the Committee.

**ACTION [SG]**

19-20/84 Report on 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 detailing the background of the change to the provision of calculators in closed assessments since September 2019, including the issues which arose in Autumn Term and the Spring CAP 2020, and feedback from departments and students. In the light of this information, the Committee was asked to consider two options:

1. Retain the new (modified) policy and transition, over the next few years, to a situation where students are required to bring their own calculator.
2. Revert back to the original policy, and replace the current stock of new calculators with the new model (at a cost of around £15,000).

It was noted that the student representatives, who met (before the Covid-19 lockdown) with the Chair and the Deputy Director, Student Progress since the last meeting, were in favour of option 2. The students felt they would only buy a calculator if they were required to have one for exams, as if not the majority would use phones and other devices. Therefore their overall view was that they would prefer the University were to revert to the original policy of providing calculators, and confirmed that this was a matter of principle rather than related to the way in which the new policy had been introduced.

In the course of discussion, it was noted that providing calculators would be a repeated cost (with updates to calculator models every three years and models becoming obsolete every ten years). It was also noted that in post-Covid-19 examinations, providing calculators to students may be much less desirable and more challenging due to hygiene requirements. Additionally, it was noted that the environmental impact of repeatedly purchasing calculators should also be taken into account.

The YUSU academic officer offered suggestions which could assist with the perceived financial cost to students of option 1, including a buy back scheme. The Committee noted that individual calculators were not expensive and a one off purchase, however would be in addition to other creeping costs for students. The Committee expected that both options were likely to lead to students having to buy a calculator, although students interpreted option 1 as them incurring the expense. This is because they thought most students would use devices they already owned rather than purchasing the model used in exams to become familiar with this, whereas if they were required to provide their own for exams, they were likely to have to buy a new calculator of the correct model.

There was further discussion about models of calculators, and whether students were and should be familiar with these. It was noted that there were already two different models of calculator used in closed exams, however if more were to be purchased, this would need to change to a
single model provided (as the new ones would be sufficiently different in functionality). For the majority of departments, the Committee felt the main concern would be the ability to cheat, rather than any issues around students familiarising themselves with the calculators. However, for some, with The York Management School as the example, the specific model was important as they used functions which were different between models, so it would be more straightforward to teach these on one model which all students would have in an exam.

The Committee voted eight for option 1 (retaining policy and transition to students bringing their own calculators) versus three for option 2 (reverting to the University providing calculators). Therefore, it was agreed that the new (modified) policy would be retained, and there would be a transition, over the next few years, to a situation where students are required to bring their own calculator to closed exams (from the academic year 2024/25 onwards). Suggested wording to this effect for the Guide to Assessment had been proposed in the report. If any members had any suggested amendments to this, they were to contact the Chair after the meeting.

19-20/85 Remaining SCA priorities considered in light on Covid-19

In light of the impact of Covid-19 SCA noted the following in relation to the SCA priorities plan for 2019-20:

Complete Actions:
1. PGR academic misconduct policy (update in light of new OiA guidance)
2. Review of Academic Misconduct penalty tables (including consideration of ethics breaches)
3. Review of Repeat Study Data and recommendation for continuation
4. Addressing Issues With Student Perception Of The Independence Of Markers

Actions on hold due to Covid-19:
5. Review of information provided to external examiners and exam boards.
6. Scoping and production of a university-wide statement on degree outcomes (UKSCQA)

Actions in progress:
7. Review of page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches
8. Clarification of information available to students when setting assignments

Items postponed until next academic year 2020/21:
9. Participation in Group Work
10. Guide to Assessment: expectations regarding students’ academic work outside of term Time
11. Guidance for staff on occasional extensions and alternative forms of assessment for students with individual arrangements
12. Review of the structure of the Guide to Assessment

During the discussion, it was noted that there had already been a lot of work put into the review of page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches, and a paper on this would be reported to the July meeting of SCA, although there would be no new policy in place in time for the 2020/21 academic year. It was also noted that work would continue on clarification of
information available to students when setting assignments once the results of the Not-So-Big-Assessment-Survey were reported by YUSU to the July meeting. The Committee agreed to postpone the action on guidance for staff on occasional extensions and alternative forms of assessment for students with individual arrangements to 2020/21, as it required work from people who were busy with Covid-19 related work. However, it was noted that as this was guidance rather than policy, it could be published during an academic year.

19-20/86 Individual Examination Arrangements
The Committee noted the number of individual examination arrangements.

19-20/87 Appointment of External Examiners
The Committee noted the external examiners appointed since the last meeting.