Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 3 July 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 [M19-20/94 onwards]
- Dr Daniel Baker Psychology
- Dr Patrick Gallimore York Law School
- Dr Alet Roux Mathematics
- Dr Danijela Trenkic Education
- 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:**
- Prof Tom Stoneham Dean of YGRS
- Dr David Clayton History
- Robert Simpson Special Cases Manager

**Visitors:**
- Dr Jim Buller Politics

19-20/88 Welcome
The Chair welcomed the Committee.

19-20/89 Minutes of previous meeting
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 1 May 2020.

19-20/90 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. This had been delayed due to the Covid-19 situation, however would be followed up when appropriate. [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, and would therefore be picked up in the SCA annual priorities as soon as there was space. [CLOSED]

- **19-20/49 Review of degree outcome information provided to external examiners**
  The Chair noted work on this had also been paused due to the Covid-19 situation, and would therefore be picked up in the SCA annual priorities as soon as there was space. [CLOSED]

- **19-20/51 Report – Spring CAP exam issues**
  The Chair noted that although this action had not been followed up it would no longer be appropriate given the current situation. The Committee approved closing this action. [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]

- **19-20/65 Repeat Study report and recommendations**
  The Chair reported that he had discussed this matter with the Chair of UTC, who had confirmed that although Covid-19 contingency arrangements had impacted the data that would be collected, UTC and SCA would continue with the previously approved timeframe and planned review of the repeat study policy in three years time. [CLOSED]

- **19-20/67 Review of page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches**
  The Chair noted work on this had also been paused due to the Covid-19 situation, and would therefore be picked up in the SCA annual priorities as soon as there was space. Simon van der Borgh noted that work had been carried out on this, however it was a complex topic, in part due to the likely need to introduce any new policy incrementally. This was in addition to large workloads of those working on this due to the Covid-19 situation, hence why no update had been ready for this meeting. [CLOSED]

- **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, and would continue when possible. [OPEN]

- **19-20/78 Report from students: Mentimeter usage in Biology**
The Chair noted that he had reported the weekly use of Mentimeter to gather student feedback to the Academic Contingency Group, who had agreed to disseminate this example of good practice to departments via the Associate Deans for Teaching, Learning and Students. [CLOSED]

19-20/91 Chair’s Report
The Chair reported with great sadness that a member of the Committee, Jess Wardman, Senior Lecturer in the University of York Management School, passed away suddenly on 28 May 2020. The Chair noted her superb contributions to the Committee and support for colleagues, and that she would be sadly missed. The Committee expressed their condolences to her partner, son, family and friends.

The Chair noted that the Chair of Board of Examiners Forum had taken place the previous day, Thursday 2 July 2020. The feedback during this had been largely positive regarding assessment in the Summer CAP, given the context. It had been noted that the 24 hour online exam format did not work well for all departments. The Chair recorded his thanks and congratulations to all Boards of Examiners, Departments and Examiners for their work for the CAP, noting that a set of marks had been generated for all modules for the Board of Examiners and External Examiners to work with.

The Chair proposed that there be an August meeting of the Committee. This was due to the nature of the Covid-19 situation, which had resulted in several tasks for SCA over the Summer. This meeting would take place in the second half of August and would be organised by the Secretary. The Chair noted that he was aware that some members of the Committee may have annual leave or other commitments at this time. He also confirmed that if any members could not attend for other reasons, such as workload, then they should contact the Chair directly.

The Chair noted that this may be the final meeting for Danijela Trenkic and Anita Savage Grainge who were both reaching the end of their term on the Committee. The Chair thanked them for the support they had provided to SCA.

ACTION [SG]

19-20/92 Report from Students
- YUSU representative noted that this would be their final SCA meeting in post, and therefore noted her thanks to the Committee for their support during her term, and support of the Not-So-Big-Assessment Survey [discussed in more detail later in the meeting, M19-20/98 refers]. The Chair noted his thanks to the YUSU representative for their contributions to the Committee and advocacy for students. The YUSU representative reported ongoing work in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement. The Chair noted that there were ongoing concerns surrounding bias in assessment due to some statistics which had previously been reported to the Committee, including that BAME students were more likely to have a repeat study year, and the grades of black students were statistically lower than their white peers. Cecilia Lowe reported that the Learning Enhancement Team
in the Academic Support Office had received funding from the Access and Participation Fund to investigate good practice in relation to BAME students and teaching and learning. The Chair asked the Committee for a volunteer to create a proposal regarding potential for unconscious bias and other assessment areas that the committee should be aware of regarding these issues. This work could be in conjunction with Cecilia. Martin Cockett volunteered to be involved, however did not have the time capacity to be the lead. The GSA representative also offered to be involved with this work. It was agreed that the Committee was content with this approach and would revisit the suggestion in September. In the meantime, members of the Committee were welcome to contact the Chair directly regarding volunteering.

- GSA representative reiterated the thanks to departments previously noted by the Chair [M19-20/91], in addition to thanks to the Chair and Deputy Director, Student Services, for all of their work for the January CAP during the Covid-19 situation. The GSA representative reported that the GSA Sabbatical Officers had all been re-elected for 2020/21. The GSA representative also noted that GSA had been working with YUSU and others on areas of work relating to the Black Lives Matter Movement, such as decolonising assessment practices, and had been conducting research into this.

19-20/93 Covid-19 Adjustments: the 2020/21 Academic Year
The Committee considered and noted emergency adjustments introduced in March/April 2020 in response to Covid-19. The Chair noted that the key emergency adjustments were the introduction of a safety net policy for UG students, changes to PG taught criteria for distinctions and merits, and modifications to the ECA policy. Moving into 2020/21 there would be greater opportunity to plan for teaching, learning and assessment, while accepting that the Covid-19 pandemic circumstances would be present in some form for the 2020/21 academic year. The proposals in the report had been approved by the Academic Contingency Group for consideration by SCA, and would then inform UTC and ultimately Senate decisions.

The Committee considered and approved the following proposals for the 2020/21 academic year:

A. Year 1 assessments and progression will proceed as normal.
B. The safety-net policy will cease at the start of the 2020/21 academic year and will not be applied to students starting Year 2, 3, 4 in September 2020. Students who were in Years 2, 3 or 4 during 2019/20, who have not completed by September 2020, will be able to make use of the current safety-net policy as long they have (a) been awarded a safety-net score, and (b) submitted assessments during the 2019/20 academic year after 13th March 2020.
C. The updated merit/distinction criteria for taught PGT awards will not apply for new entrants to the PGT programmes in 2020/21. For continuing PGT students (those with ISM extensions, part-time students, two-year programmes etc) the new criteria will be applied as long as (a) they are eligible for these new criteria and (b) have submitted assessments, or engaged with their ISM, during the 2019/20 academic year after 13th March 2020.
D. The usual Year 2 to Year 3 progression criterion for Integrated Masters programmes will be restored for students starting Year 2 in September 2020. Students who were in Year 2 during 2019/20, who have not completed by September 2020, will be able to make use of
the less stringent progression criterion as long as they have taken assessments during the 2019/20 academic year after 13th March 2020.

E. Exceptional Circumstances. The exceptional circumstances policy will be reviewed and updated in time for the start of the 2020/21 academic year to ensure that the range of pandemic-related circumstances can be accounted for, flexibly and fairly.

F. For online examinations, it will remain the case that students will be given longer to complete the exam than the “nominal” length of the exam. The time available will not necessarily be fixed at 24 hours, and will be decided following review of the online assessments from the summer CAP and considering the available technology for remote examinations.

It was noted that there may be the need for further emergency amendments to policy during the academic year. These would be considered by the Academic Contingency Group as required.

During the discussion the following points were noted. In relation to the safety net policy, proposal B, this was introduced partly in response to the University not being able to be confident that there would not be systemic issues with assessment due to the short notice modifications. Therefore it would be inappropriate to offer this to students who had taken a leave of absence after the 13th March without completing any assessments. Instead, there should be clear communication of the rationale for the safety net and the confidence in the system for 2020/21, despite these assessments likely not taking the form expected prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. For proposal C, the Committee noted that including engagement with ISM in addition to assessments submitted was important, as this had been a key concern from PGT students. For proposal G, the Committee noted that some flexibility in exam time would be beneficial as many students may still experience challenging home circumstances, however this will not necessarily be fixed at 24 hours as this may be too restrictive.

19-20/94 Proposal for working group to develop Online Examinations Policy for 2020/21

The Committee considered a report of the contingency changes to assessment guidance due to the implementation of online examinations to replace closed examinations.

The Chair noted that as part of the Universities response to the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent UK lockdown, all examinations (that did not move to coursework) were run as “online” examinations. The closed examination papers, or their marking schemes, were adapted, as far as possible, to account for the longer time available for completion of examinations and access to materials. This effectively represented a new form of assessment which retained some features of a closed examination but which otherwise ran as an open assessment. The Chair noted that operationally this had largely worked well. However, going forward these would likely run in similar formats in 2020/21, and therefore this would need to become a defined form of exam, with an official name and specific rules. This would involve complex decisions, including around academic misconduct.

The Chair reported that Patrick Gallimore had agreed to Chair a small working group of SCA which would be set up to look at the issues detailed in the report, and decide on formal policy for “online
examinations” (or whatever they would be called) for 2020/21 onwards, to be published in the Guide to Assessment. The Chair thanked Patrick for agreeing to this. The Committee approved the formation of a working group which would define online examination, consider the new policy introduced in 2019/20, and consider and propose to SCA, for the August meeting, any additional policy that needed to be introduced for 2020/21 onwards. It was noted that Rickard Walker, Head of the Programme Design and Learning Technology Team, would join the group to provide technological guidance. Alet Roux, Daniel Baker, Laila Fish and Sharmila Gohill volunteered to join this group. The Chair noted that members could contact him directly outside of the meeting if they also wished to volunteer for this group or suggest any additional members.

During the discussion concerns were raised by the Committee regarding academic misconduct and the principles that surrounded this for online exams. It was discussed that anecdotally there had seemed to be a greater number of instances of collusion than in previous CAPs, and these were more complex and highlighted areas that the current policy did not currently cover. For example, students who had shared revision notes before an online exam which had then been used by all in the exam, and whether this was collusion. Another example described was students cohabiting and taking the same online exam and the potential for in person collusion. The Secretary was exploring these issues in greater depth, including with other institutions, and would share this with the working group. The Committee agreed that greater clarity was required, including rules surrounding preparation for exams. Online proctoring was suggested, however the Committee agreed that there were many issues surrounding this and it was therefore not a viable option at this time.

There was discussion about the length of online exams, as there were academic consequences of long exams, especially for Science subjects, due to the nature of these assessments. Fixed time limits within a longer period were suggested.

The Chair agreed to share notes from the Chair of Board of Examiners Forum and some StAMP cases with the working group. The Secretary agreed to take a lead gathering Academic Misconduct data for the working group. The Secretary also took the opportunity to thank members of SCA for their involvement on this, as there had been an increase in cases and complexity, resulting in increased SCA involvement.

The Chair noted that he would be conducting faculty level focus groups with students about their perspective on the online exams.

Other tasks for the working group included defining online exams and their features, and it was noted that retaining the unseen nature of a closed exam would be important. The Committee also noted that open off-campus examinations were already defined in the Guide to Assessment, and needed to remain a separate format, as they served different purposes.

The Committee discussed sits as if for the first time, as these needed to be considered as part of the process, although any decisions could not be implemented immediately as it would be mid-cycle. It was noted that for a closed exam, when a student signs in for a sit as if for the first
time, any past score is immediately discounted, whereas during online exams this only happened after submission, so there was greater opportunity for students to compare likely marks. There would need to be a robust process for any new policy here, for example if downloading the exam paper was to indicate engagement with the assessment and therefore discounting of the previous mark.

**ACTION [PG/SCA]**

**19-20/95 Proposal for a Working Group for Exceptional Circumstances due to Covid-19**

The Committee considered a report of the contingency changes to the Exceptional Circumstances Policy due to Covid-19. This included the addition of a list of pandemic-related circumstances that would be acceptable ECA circumstances, the removal of the requirement for evidence for any ECA claim, and a set of defined processes for online exams. The Committee noted that it was essential to have an appropriate and functional ECA policy. It was also noted that this would be a complex issue, in part because decisions could affect others. For example, any form of automatic deferral of exams may be a straightforward option in terms of the ECA policy, however could put too much pressure on the resit period.

The Committee approved the proposal to establish a working group to review the issues detailed in the paper, and form recommendations for SCA for an updated ECA policy for 2020/21. Martin Cockett had agreed to Chair this working group.

Proposed members of the working group were as follows:

- Mike Bentley
- Stephen Gow
- Jen Wotherspoon
- Valerie Cotter
- Sharmila Gohil
- Martin Cockett
- Patrick Gallimore
- Other SCA members
- SCC Manager
- YUSU and GSA (Rich/Jane)
- Jill Ellis/Anne Haversham
- Some ECA administrators/leads in departments

It was noted that Anna Haversham had confirmed she would join the working group. Danijela Trenkic had suggestions of ECA administrators/leads in departments who could be contacted for this working group, and would email the Secretary these names. The Chair noted that members could contact him or Martin Crockett outside of the meeting to volunteer for this working group.

**ACTION [DT/SCA]**
19-20/96 Covid-19 Contingency policy: Appendix 16 - Record of Approved Modified Assessment Arrangements
The Committee noted the record of modified assessment arrangements due to Covid-19 contingency which had been approved by SCA Chair’s/Deputy Chair’s Action/UTC Chair’s Action.

19-20/97 Summary of changes to the Guide to Assessment
The Committee noted the changes to the Guide to Assessment for 2020/21 which had previously been approved. Further changes which would be reported for approval at the special August SCA meeting were also noted.

Changes for 2020/21 that had been approved included the introduction of a new calculator policy [previously discussed at the May meeting, M19-20/84 refers]. In addition there were some corrections to sections on ISM (to include some situations of departments with two ISM’s), wording adjustment to the section on Marks from Partner Institutions on Joint and Dual Awards, and a few other minor changes.

The Secretary welcomed members to contact him outside of the meeting if they had any further comments or questions.

The Committee noted that it would be useful to include the penalty tables in the note that would be circulated to departments.

19-20/98 YUSU Not-So-Big Assessment Survey 2020 - preliminary report
The Committee noted the preliminary report from YUSU and GSA’s Not-So-Big Assessment Survey 2020 which was carried out from March to May 2020. The YUSU representative thanked the Secretary for his work on this. The YUSU representative reported that the 267 responses received were lower than expected, however were well represented across departments.

The lower satisfaction scores for questions on access to assessment resources, feedback from staff and how work is marked reflected issues students had discussed with the YUSU representative. The Committee noted that where it is appropriate (as this will not be in all cases) then there should be an expectation of exemplars available to students.

It was noted that the feedback was more about the information provided around feedback on assessments, rather than the quality of this. It was also noted that international students may have more issues with the information provided about assessment. Cecilia Lowe reported that the Learning Enhancement Team were working with students in the area of understanding of expectations from assessments, with an interest to identify and share good practice, for example the past papers provided by the Psychology department.

The Committee agreed that, once the data had been analysed more fully, the new YUSU representative [due to take up the role on Monday 6th July] would produce a report for the Committee and include YUSU recommendations. The Chair and Secretary would meet the YUSU representative to discuss this further. Cecilia Lowe volunteered to assist with this work.
The Committee noted that it may be hard to draw meaningful conclusions from the data from this survey alone, for example Chemistry had only received eight responses out of hundreds of students. However, there were still a reasonable number of responses, and these appeared to fit with areas that the Committee agreed were important, and anecdotal evidence from the YUSU representative.

**ACTION [YUSU/SG/MB/CL]**

**19-20/99 SCA Priority Areas 2020/21**

The Committee noted Priority Areas for the consideration of SCA in 2020/21. These were as follows:

2019/20 priorities on hold due to Covid-19 - which would potentially be considered in 2020/21 (depending on contingency related workload)

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. Review of the structure of the Guide to Assessment - the initial structure would be retained for 2020/21, however work was ongoing with Rob Shaw (Programme Design and Learning Technology Team, Academic Support Office) regarding moving the guidance online.
4. Participation in Group Work - the Chair and Secretary would look into this further.
5. Guide to Assessment: expectations regarding students’ academic work outside of term time - it was noted that this had been discussed previously and was a complex issue.

Actions in progress to be carried over to 2020/21

6. Review of page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches [update previously in meeting, M19-20/90 refers].
7. Clarification of information available to students when setting assignments - the Secretary would discuss this with the YUSU and GSA representatives.
8. Guidance for staff on occasional extensions and alternative forms of assessment for students with individual arrangements - it was noted that this would be covered to some extent in Covid-19 contingency arrangements.

Proposed items for 2020/21

9. Academic Misconduct, online assessments and use of translation software

The Chair noted that he would discuss the suggested priorities with the Chair of UTC. The Chair also noted that there was likely to still be a significant amount of contingency work for 2020/21 due to significant shifts in assessment practices, and therefore high workloads may result in the further postponement of priority areas.

**ACTION [MB/SG/YUSU/GSA]**

**19-20/100 Individual Examination Arrangements**

The Committee noted the number of individual examination arrangements.
19-20/101 Appointment of External Examiners

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