STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 19 August 2020 at 1.00pm via Zoom online video conferencing due to Covid-19 lockdown.

Attendance and apologies for absence:

Present:  
- Prof Mike Bentley  
- Dr Daniel Baker  
- Dr David Clayton  
- Dr Patrick Gallimore  
- Dr Alet Roux  
- Matt Johnstone  
- Jane Baston

In attendance:  
- Dr Martin Cockett  
- Dr Stephen Gow (Secretary)  
- Dr Jen Wotherspoon  
- Valerie Cotter  
- Laila Fish  
- Sharmila Gohill  
- Cecilia Lowe  
- Jessica Roehricht (Minutes)  
- Robert Simpson

Apologies:  
- Prof Tom Stoneham  
- Dr Nicoletta Asciuto  
- Dr Danijela Trenkic  
- Anita Savage Grainge  
- Simon van der Borgh

Visitors:  
- Dr Zoe Devlin  
- Dr Katherine Selby

19-20/102 Welcome
The Chair welcomed the Committee, and noted that this was the first meeting for the new YUSU Academic Officer, Matt Johnstone. The Chair also welcomed Zoe Devlin who was in attendance at the meeting for her expertise in online programmes, and Katherine Selby who was in attendance as an incoming member of the Committee.
19-20/103 Chair’s Report

The Chair reported that the Chair of UTC had approved three new members of the Committee for September 2020. These were Katherine Selby from Natural Sciences, Jim Buller from Politics, and Kevin Caraher from Social Policy and Social Work. The Chair recorded his thanks to Anita Savage Grainge and Danijela Trenkic who were ending their term on the Committee. Zoe Devlin (Acting Head of Online Partnerships) was in attendance at this meeting, and the Chair suggested that at the September meeting there would be a discussion as to whether a member of the online team should be added to the in attendance list for the Committee for 2020/21 onwards.

The Chair noted that this meeting was an extraordinary meeting to discuss proposals which were a direct result of the Covid-19 situation, and had been developed by the two working groups that had been created for this. Therefore some of the Committees standing items, such as approving the previous meetings minutes and discussing matters arising, would not be discussed until September.

The Chair noted that the late summer assessment period was underway, and that all of the Summer assessments had been completed. The Chair congratulated colleagues in departments for making sure all Summer assessments resulted in a set of marks which were approved by exam boards during such difficult circumstances, and thanked them for all the effort that went into this.

The Committee had previously discussed the requirement by UKSCQA to produce a Degree Outcomes Statement [M19-20/12, M19-20/42 and M19-20/99]. Work on this had been paused during the Covid-19 situation, however the Chair reported that the QAA had released guidance that the University should publish this statement before the end of the calendar year 2020. Therefore this work would be resuming, and the Committee would discuss this further at its September meeting. This work would include mapping the Universities processes to the recently published guidance on Degree Algorithm Design by the UKSCQA, and therefore also a light touch review of the York Algorithm.

The Chair thanked the Committee for all of their work during the Covid-19 situation, and specifically thanked Patrick Gallimore and Martin Cockett who had chaired the working groups which reported proposals to this meeting.

The Committee noted that during July 2020 there had been around half the number of appeals as were received during the same time period in the previous year. This reflected the absence of first year exams, however also reflected positively on the mitigations put in place to deal with the Covid-19 situation.

ACTION [SG]

19-20/104 Report from Students
- YUSU representative, Matt Johnstone introduced himself as it was his first time attending the Committee, and had nothing substantive to report.
- **GSA** representative had nothing substantive to report to the Committee, however again recorded her **thanks** to the Committee and colleagues across the University for their hard work during the Summer term Covid-19 situation, and for the work that was going into planning forward for the 2020/21 academic year.

### 19-20/105 Review of Summer-term assessments 2020 - Summary of outcomes

The Committee **considered** a summary of a review (commissioned by the Academic Contingency Group) of the Summer-term 2020 assessments. This was commissioned in order to understand the impact of the changes to assessments, and to feed into the planning process for the coming academic year. The data was gathered from data and outcomes tracked by the University assessment team, Chairs of Boards of Examiners Forum, Survey of Departments and Student Focus Groups. The paper had been **reported** to the Committee for information, and it was **noted** that the report had been available to the working groups, and had therefore contributed to the proposals which were discussed later in the meeting [M19-20/106 and M19-20/107].

It was **noted** that the report would be circulated to departments once the Online Examination proposal and Exceptional Circumstances Policy revisions due to Covid-19 had been approved by the Academic Contingency Group and UTC, as it would provide greater context for these.

The Chair **noted** from the report that Sciences students in particular had appreciated the focus of assessments being on what the students were able to achieve rather than just testing memory, and this would be worth remembering for the future.

The GSA representative **highlighted** the comment from the report “Students in all three focus groups said that they are concerned that when on campus they may not have good working spaces to do exams (e.g. noisy flats). Students asked whether spaces could be made available on campus for doing exams (message from all three focus groups).” Although this was not for the Committee to respond to, the GSA representative wanted to ensure that this was followed up in the appropriate group, as it was important to students. The Chair **noted** that this theme has been apparent in all three focus groups, and although it may be difficult to maintain equality here, it was apparent that there may be a need for quality space on campus for students to undertake assessments. The Chair **agreed to report** this finding to the Academic Contingency Group for further discussion and action.

The Committee **discussed** whether two 24 hour exams back to back may be challenging for students, as although the principle would be to work on an eight hour day [M19-20/106], the reality would be that students may not sleep between assessments. The Deputy Director, Student Services **noted** that due to the exam timetable it would not always be possible to space these out, and therefore departments should work to control expectations. The YUSU representative **noted** that Natural Sciences students would need to be taken into consideration when timetabling the January CAP.

**ACTION [MB]**
19-20/106 Online Examinations - proposal for formalising policy on online examinations in light of the Covid-19 contingency arrangements
The Committee considered the proposals for policy on online examinations proposed by the working group.

During discussion, the Committee approved the following proposals:

P1. Standard duration of an online examinations is 24hrs
P2. Standard Format of online examination is for a recommended timeframe (e.g. 3hrs) within a 24hr window - any alternatives to this must have approval from SCA in consultation with PDLT.
P3. Update the current Assessment Formats section of the Guide to Assessment to reflect changes in online examinations and the implications for other formats.
P4. The technological limitations of running limited timeframe online examinations indicate only one exam of this type can be run per day during the CAP.
P5. Guidance on applications for alternatives to the standard online examination (i.e. 24hrs with recommended timeframe) will be agreed between SCA, PDLT, Student Student Services and the Associate Deans for Teaching, Learning and Students and proposed to the ACG.
P6. Submissions up to 30mins after the deadline incur a 5% penalty. Submissions after that are considered non-submissions.
P7. Collusion/Plagiarism in online examinations is treated as cheating by StAMP investigatory panels.
P8. SAIFFT is the only result of a successful ECA claim for online examinations
P9. Upload limit for the VLE is 30mb, if departments anticipate submissions larger than that, they must liaise with PDLT to provide an alternative.
P10. The SCA guidance issued on dealing with illegible scanned solutions be made available to departments when needed.
P11. Extra time for students with SSPs is based upon 8hr working day, 25% = 2hrs with hand-in set during working hours (As in 4.3.3 of the Guide).
P12. Students must complete the work independently unless they have been recommended an exam support worker in a Student Support Plan.
P13. During the 1st hour of the 24hr period, the paper setter must be available and students may report errors in the paper to a designated place, and errors will be announced to the cohort in a manner communicated to students prior to the examination and in the examination instructions.
P14. Word limits and penalties at the discretion of departments but must be clearly communicated to the students.

The working group also proposed three terms for different types of online exams, which were as follows:

a. Recommended timeframe: Students provided with 24hr window to complete an examination within a recommended timeframe, for example 1-3hrs (in line with closed examinations).
b. Limited Timeframe: Students provided with 24hr window to complete the examination, however once they start the examination they must complete within a limited timeframe, for example 1-3hrs (in line with closed examinations).

c. Specific Timeframe: Students provided with a specific start and end time for an examination, for example start 9am, finish 12noon.

This working group had been Chaired by Patrick Gallimore, who presented the paper and proposals. The most fundamental constraints encountered when defining an online exam had been the administration of the system during the CAP and technology. For example, only one limited timeframe online examination could take place each day as otherwise there would be a risk of overloading the VLE and PDLT team. It was noted that creating an incentive for departments to get their own technological solutions to run specific/limited timeframe examinations must be avoided.

The 24 hour standard duration was discussed by the Committee. This timeframe had been proposed for many reasons. Reasons included to account for varied student circumstances, such as living in a timezone outside the UK and significant caring responsibilities, and technological limitations, as 24 hours allowed for a range of submission windows throughout the working day, reducing the risk of overloading the VLE. The YUSU representative confirmed that students would be more confident that 24 hour exams would capture a range of circumstances, including students living overseas who may otherwise be sitting exams during the night.

The Chair asked the working group to confirm that they had taken into consideration the Science Faculties strong desire for shorter exams if possible when writing this proposal. The Chair of the working group confirmed that this had been discussed at length, however it had been decided that there were too many practical constraints to allow shorter exams as the standard format.

It was noted that there was ongoing work within the University to try to remove technical constraints, and in the future this may mean that more exceptions to the format of online examination as a recommended timeframe within a 24 hour window may be approved. The Committee discussed cases where these exceptions would be allowed. The Committee noted that priority would probably have to be given to assessments with PSRB requirements, then to departments already running assessments of a similar nature, and after this pedagogic reasons would also be considered, but with available resources likely to limit approvals. The Chair noted a group would be needed to consider exceptions.

The Committee noted that guidance issued to departments should be very clear that the recommended timeframe exams were the expected format and the other types were only by exception. It was also noted that this should be circulated to departments as soon as possible, in part as departments may have been in the process of planning assessments, so having this information before assessment plans were confirmed may reduce the number of exception requests. The Chair confirmed that the next step would be to propose the draft policy to the Academic Contingency Group for approval and agreement of the implementation process.
The Committee discussed that existing online programmes did not use Blackboard or the CAP, and already run limited timeframe exams within a 48 hour period. The Committee suggested that the policy should include a blanket exemption for all York online programme assessments. The Committee also agreed that when the Guide to Assessment was reviewed consideration should be given to include specific guidance for online programmes.

The Chair confirmed that there was no intention to consider online proctoring technology at all by the University, except potentially in a very small number of cases to comply with PSRB requirements.

The Committee agreed that the reasoning behind late submission penalty (proposal 6) was sound, as it reflected the nature of closed exams while still allowing for technical issues that would not be a consideration in traditional closed exams. This would also keep the implementation straightforward as the policy was simple. This penalty could be waived if a student submitted a successful ECA claim. The Committee agreed that online programmes would introduce the same penalty policy as other online exams, and it was confirmed that Canvas did not display seconds on submission time, therefore submission must be at least one minute late to incur the penalty.

It was discussed that treating collusion/plagiarism in online examinations as cheating by StAMP investigatory panels would maintain a sense of the closed exam approach and was proportional. It was agreed that there would need to be clear guidance to students about collusion and working together in preparation for exams, especially as this should also reduce concern from students about accidental collusion. It was also noted that while no policy change was needed for plagiarism issues that had arisen in the Summer CAP, departments needed to make expectations of referencing, citation and quotation more clear to students.

The Committee discussed online exams in relation to students with SSPs. It was confirmed that representatives from Disability Services had participated in the working group meetings. It had been agreed that students with greater than 25% extra time in closed exams would be contacted individually by Disability services to offer bespoke adjustments appropriate to them. This was possible as this would be a small number of students. For limited and specific timeframe exams, any extra time would be added to the time allocated for the exam, rather than on the 8 hour working day.

The YUSU Academic Officer raised concerns around the one hour period for allowing mistakes in online exam papers to be corrected and whether this was too short of a period of time, as it relied on students opening exams and reading them all the way through at the beginning of timeframe. Other members also noted that the one hour limit could put a lot of pressure on the paper setter, as they would be likely to receive a lot of queries in this time, and not all of them would be regarding errors. However, the Committee decided that to allow any longer would have a high risk of disadvantaging students who completed the online exams quickly, especially in exams with a short recommended timeframe of an hour and a half for example, and the focus should be on having no mistakes in the papers to begin with and for students not to start examinations to expecting to find errors.
The Chair **thanked** members of the working group. The Committee **agreed** that when a policy based on these approved proposals and discussion was drafted, it could be **approved** by Chairs action on behalf of SCA.

**ACTION [SCA/MB]**

**19-20/107 Review for Exceptional Circumstances Policy due to Covid-19**

The Committee **considered** the proposals resulting from the review of the Exceptional Circumstances Policy in response to Covid-19.

The working group which presented these proposals had been Chaired by Martin Cockett, who presented the paper and proposals. During the discussion, the Committee **agreed** that the requirement for evidence be reintroduced, unless a reasonable account was provided to explain why evidence could not be obtained. It could reasonably be assumed that it would be possible for students to obtain medical evidence if the Covid-19 circumstances remained unchanged. The Committee **noted** that this requirement would be beneficial to students who would be able to receive more support as a result of the requirement for evidence, especially from the Open Door team. However, the proposal did still allow unevidenced claims in some situations, so if for example a student was living in an area which was undergoing a local lockdown they could still submit an ECA claim. The Committee felt that this would be sufficient to encompass most situations, including further examples discussed in the meeting.

The Chair **suggested** that along with clear communication of this policy, a list of exemplar situations may be released as to what would constitute acceptable situations in which evidence would not be required. It was **noted** that this list would not intend to be an exclusive list of situations, instead to be used as a tool for panels to make reasonable and consistent judgements.

The student representatives raised **concerns** around students understanding that although Covid-19 was now expected and mitigations are being put in place for this at an institutional level, unexpected situations for individuals could arise from the Covid-19 situation, and students should feel confident that they could submit an ECA claim if this was the case. The Committee **agreed** that a sentence should be added to the policy, which would highlight that although Covid was now an expected and ongoing situation, the ongoing impact of this on individual students may still be unforeseen. Martin Cockett would add this to the document.

The removal of additional work requirements due to Covid-19 as a valid reason for an exceptional circumstances claim was **discussed**. It was agreed that the particular circumstances relating to work caused by the initial stage of the pandemic had now ended. Members of the working group and Committee were **concerned** that Covid-19 may place strain on students’ financial situations and that the Covid-19 circumstances list might have retained some aspect of this, but after **discussion** it was agreed that compassionate circumstances in the regular policy already provided cover for such financial circumstances. In the context of online programmes, it was **reported** that many of these online students were still experiencing disruption in employment due to Covid-19 and therefore may need to submit claims. The Committee **confirmed** that under the normal policy
part-time students could submit exceptional circumstances claims based on work, so they would not be disadvantaged. In the context of online exams, it was also confirmed that this policy would be student facing. However, the final paragraph referenced the late Summer assessment period, which was not relevant to students on online programmes. Zoe Devlin (Acting Head of Online Partnerships) requested that the online team send separate communications which are specific to online students regarding this policy to avoid confusion.

The Committee approved the proposed Covid-19 Exceptional Circumstances Policy 2020/21 with the above considerations, and one minor correction to phrasing to change point B from ”...that could not reasonably have been anticipated and/or reasonably have been prevented..” to ”...that could not reasonably have been anticipated or prevented...”.

**ACTION [MC]**

**19-20/108 Date of the next meeting**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as Friday 25th September at 2pm via Zoom online video conferencing.