STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 26 October 2018 at 2.00pm in HG17, Heslington Hall.

Attendance and apologies for absence:

Present:  
Dr Mike Bentley  Physics (Chair)  
Dr Louise Jones  Biology  
Dr Patrick Gallimore  York Law School  
Dr Francesco Bravo  Economics  
Simon van der Borgh  TFTV  
Dr John Stringer  Music  
Dr Anita Savage Grainge  Health Sciences  
Dr Daniel Baker  Psychology  
Charlotte Chamberlain  GSA  
James Hare  YUSU

In attendance:  
Valerie Cotter  Dep. Academic Registrar/Dir Student Service  
Dr Jen Wotherspoon  Deputy Registrar: Student Progress  
Cecilia Lowe  Head of Learning Enhancement  
Dr Martin Cockett  Chair of Special Cases Committee  
Robert Simpson  Special Cases Manager  
Claire Shanks  Disability Adviser  
Stephen Gow (Secretary)  Academic Integrity Coordinator

Apologies:  
Dr Danijela Trenkic  Education  
Prof Helen Smith  English

Visitors:  
Karen Payne  Business Intelligence Unit  
Dr Angela Ranson  Academic Support Coordinator

18-19/13  Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially new members Simon van der Borgh and Daniel Baker.

18-19/14  Minutes of previous meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 21st September 2018.

18-19/15  Matters arising from the minutes of 21 September 2018:

- 17-18/10: Update on the Assessments and Retention Projects:
  University-wide guidance on sending samples of assessments to External Examiners. The Chair discussed this with the Chairs of the Board of Examiners’ Forum and the consensus was that current guidance was sufficient. The Committee requested that it should be checked that the relevant information from the Guide to Assessment is provided directly to external examiners. [CLOSED]
• 17-18/52c: Awarding marks as an incentive for formative work
The Chair noted that this was mis-typed: it should be ‘awarding marks for attendance or engagement’. The Chairs of the Board of Examiners were consulted on the matter and the consensus was that the GTA was clear on this that marks must not be given solely to reward attendance. Marks can be awarded for engagement as long as activities are being assessed against specific learning outcomes. [CLOSED]

• 17-18/80: Proposal for standard sticker scheme for certified disabilities
The Open Door Team is arranging consultation with the disabled student network on the proposal. The current guidance in the Guide to Assessment will be reviewed and suggestions for changes considered by SCA. [ONGOING]

• 17-18/95: Review of the extra-time allowance in open examinations
The wording of the late submission receipt was approved by Chair’s Action. [CLOSED]

• 17-18/96: Issues reported during exams for the summer CAP 2018
Informal guidance on how departments should address errors is to be removed from Matters Arising because it is one of the priority areas for SCA this year. [CLOSED]

• 17-18/100: Assessment Rules for Masters degrees with partner institutions
It was reported that the rules had been approved by SCA and should have been in the 2018-19 Guide to Assessment however were omitted. They will be posted as an appendix to the Guide online and will be included next year. [CLOSED]

• 18-19/6: Advisory Role of SCA Members
It was agreed that SCA members should not be departmental or faculty representatives; the role of members is to provide expertise for the consideration of committee business. Departments should use the formal channels of communication for advice on assessment related matters (sca@york.ac.uk/sca-chair@york.ac.uk). [CLOSED]

• 18-19/8a: Review of the implementation of the exceptional circumstances affecting Assessment policy
This review is part of the Committee’s annual priorities. [CLOSED]

• 18-19/8b: Alignment of various policies on examinations/Multiple module/composite ISMs – defining the rules
This is to be removed from Matters Arising because it is it is one of the priority areas for SCA this year. [CLOSED]

18-19/16 Chair’s Oral Report
The Chair noted the Chairs of the Board of Examiners Forum had been consulted (24th October) on the SCA’s priorities for the year:
1. **Review of the Academic Misconduct Policy:** There was positive reaction to the proposed department-level process for dealing with low credit assessments where convening a full STAMP panel may be considered excessive. The feedback loop of outcomes between STAMPs and departments was raised as an issue to be addressed in the review. Concerns were raised that since the introduction of the new policy, departments were not keeping oversight of outcomes and these were also not being reported back to markers who had reported misconduct.

2. **First class degrees with distinctions:** The Chair noted that the matter of first class degrees with distinctions had been presented and the Forum had been supportive of plans to develop clear guidance and rules on the award of first class degrees with distinctions.

3. **Availability of degree-classification data to module boards:** The Chair raised this matter with the Forum, noting that any feedback from external examiners on this availability of this data should be noted.

**20-day feedback rule:** The Forum raised concerns about the impact of the turnaround time on the quality of the feedback. It was suggested that SCA should be involved in reviewing and monitoring implementation of the policy, in addition to having an oversight of exemptions. The Chair will consult with ASO about guidance on efficient marking and monitoring of the feedback time for departments. Student services agreed to monitor, as far as possible, implementation of the 20 day rule - in relation to assessments mark returns. YUSU also suggested they could monitor student views on the implementation of the rule.

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

18-19/17 **Report from Students**

**YUSU:** The YUSU representative **reported** that Study Smart Week is taking place in week 6. While the name has been changed from Academic Integrity Week, it was hoped that it help to reduce academic misconduct through focusing students on their upcoming assignments and improving awareness of the variety of study and welfare support available to students.

**GSA:** The GSA representative **noted** that they have finished student elections and new reps will be in place soon. It was also noted are also working with YUSU for Study Smart week.

18-19/18 **Confirmation of Priority areas for action for the 2018-19 academic year**

The Chair presented priority areas for action 2018-19 to the committee for approval or amendment. It was **noted** that the data previously gathered in the review of the Mitigating Circumstances Policy (2015) has yet to be located, so the planned comparison between data from the previous policy and the Exceptional Circumstances Policy cannot take place. It was suggested that historic data could be gathered from departments if necessary; Student Services are in the process of collecting data from departmental administrators for the review. It was also **noted** that Paula Tunbridge (Student Life and Well-being) would like to be involved in the review of the Exceptional Circumstances Review. Francesco Bravo expressed interest in addressing Examination errors.

**[ACTION: JW/SG]**
The Committee considered the initial analysis of degree outcomes and the implications for assessment presented by Karen Payne (BIU). It was noted that although the university has risen only steadily 2017/8 by 0.8 percentage points (pp) to 81.4% there has been considerable departmental movement. The percentage of first class degrees increased slightly in 2017/8 by 0.1% to 25.8%. This is the highest level of first class degrees at York for all years covered by the report (from 2010/1 onwards). Overall, Arts and Humanities have a higher percentage of good degrees at 90.7% whilst Sciences have 80.0% and Social Sciences have 74.6%. Sciences is showing an increase of 3.0 percentage points from 2016/7 and has the highest percentage of Good Degrees since 2010/1 (earliest data point). The Social Sciences percentage of good degrees at 74.6% is the lowest they have seen since 2012/13 and represents a reverse from an upwards trend since 2014/5. Arts and Humanities is showing an increase of 3.2 percentage points from 2016/7 which interrupts a downward trend since 2014/5. Departments are encouraged to reflect on their own results and may consider commenting on them in the APR. In terms of assessment, it was noted that grade inflation is of particular interest especially as it is included in the Subject-level TEF. It was also agreed that Student Services should liaise with BIU particular to agree on specific characteristics which should be analysed in the data for upcoming university projects.

[ACTION: JW/VC/BIU]

18-19/20 Language and Linguistics LLS/LFA Oral examinations - Procedures for individual arrangements and emergency situations

The Committee considered the proposed guidance produced by Language and Linguistics Science/Languages for All to provide staff with general guidance for handling emergency situations (such as autistic meltdowns/anxiety/panic attacks) during oral exams. Following a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed that the Guide to Assessment should not be amended on this issue. For students with disabilities the SSP should cover oral exam arrangements, if that is deemed appropriate. It was agreed, however, that section 12.9 Viva voce examinations in taught programmes should be moved to a more appropriate place in the Guide to Assessment. The Chair noted that he will report back to the department on this matter.

It was agreed that from an assessment point of view, it is important to differentiate between timed exams and non timed exams.

- **Timed exams**: (i.e. where the completion of the exam within a certain time is required to assess learning outcomes), the same rules must apply as for closed written exams - a student will need to apply for exceptional circumstances if they believe their performance is likely to be, or has been, affected by illness or other issues. This could be after the fact, asking for a sit as if for the first time, or possibly modifying the timing of the exam to account for the circumstances, or other arrangements as allowed by the ECA policy.

- **Non-timed exams**: The kind of arrangements proposed by the LLS/LFA were deemed reasonable – for example having a brief pause in the examination - however there should not be a strict procedure for this but it is helpful to have guidance on this.
There was, however, concern that a delay in subsequent exams might disadvantage the following students, it was suggested the timetable could allow for short breaks.

The Committee agreed that in the case of oral examinations, departments are advised to:

- ensure that the SSPs are right from the start by liaising with the department’s disability advisor. It was noted that LLS/LFA should ensure that applications for their language courses which involve oral assessment ensure they have a tick box to indicate if a student has an SSP in order to make the department aware of the arrangements so they can be modified to address any oral assessments if necessary.
- ensure examiners take full advantage of the mental health and first aid training available, especially if using oral exams.
- If informal guidance is given to examiners the language used should be appropriate, for example referring to autistic meltdown rather than simply meltdown, which could be misunderstood.

[ACTION: MB/SG/CS]

18-19/21 Repeal Study – application to Foundation Year students

The Committee considered a proposal for how Repeat Study is applied for Foundation Year students. The proposal written by the Chair in consultation with the Physics and Electronics departments, both of which offer foundation year courses. The Chair introduced the proposal which aimed to address the ambiguity regarding whether or not the policy should be applied to the Foundation Year (FY) courses. This specific issue had not been addressed when the policy was formulated, and so FY students were allowed, for 2017/8 to repeat study if they failed to progress at the end of the academic year. Following a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed that the option to repeat study should only be available to Year One students.

Four options presented in the report:

a) the repeat option should apply (only) to the first year of study for all students - i.e. only Year 0 for FY students, and not Year 1,

b) it only applies to Year 1 for all students,

c) it can apply in either Year 0 or Year 1 but not both, or

d) it can apply to both Year 0 and Year 1.

While the proposal recommended option b), there were mixed views amongst Committee members in favour of options b) and c). After discussion, in which the high number of students taking the option on one FY course was noted, it was agreed b) was the most suitable option, especially as students also have an option to repeat for welfare reasons if they have exceptional circumstances.

The Chair also noted that SCA will be carrying out a progress review of the Repeat Study Policy as requested by Senate when the policy was approved. This review is under way recording the numbers of students and departmental views on the policy.

[ACTION: MB/JW]
Experience of Exceptional Circumstances (YUSU document)

The Committee considered the report produced by YUSU in advance of the SCA’s review of the Exceptional Circumstances policy and implementation. It will be used to inform the review conducted by SCA during the 2018-9 academic year. The report identified several areas of for consideration in a review of the policy including:

1. the difficulty of obtaining supporting evidence, particularly when under stress
2. the clarity and consistency of the procedures, including supporting evidence requirements and decisions
3. improving response times
4. flexibility in sensitive cases where evidence is hard to obtain
5. timely and clear communication students, including defining a reasonable timescale for response to students.

Summary of assessment issues raised via NSS (ASO/LE)

The Committee considered the University’s performance in the National Student Survey in relation to assessment, and discussed how to respond to issues which arise, such as unclear assessment tasks and criteria. The Chair suggested that consultation with the Faculty Learning and Teaching Associate Deans would be beneficial to deal with these matters. It was also noted that support is available to departments for improving feedback and assessment from the ASO.

[ACTION: MB]

Report – Resit CAP exam issues (Examinations Office)

The Committee noted that there were 20 errors from 421 exams, compared to 14 from 396 last year. It was notable that 6 paper setters were unavailable when called and the largest number of errors were in TYMS, although as usual the Sciences has a large number of errors. The Chair will contact Associate Deans (TLS) to discuss instances where no paper setter was available to address errors in exam papers. A working group of Chairs of Boards of Examiners from the Science faculty will be convened to discuss best practice on paper setting.

[ACTION SG/MB]

Date of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Friday 30 November 2018 at 2pm in Room H/G17, Heslington Hall.