

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 29 January 2021 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 Ascianto	English
	Dr Daniel Baker	Psychology
	Dr Jim Buller	Politics
	Dr Kevin Caraher	SPSW
	Dr Patrick Gallimore	York Law School
	Dr Alet Roux	Mathematics
	Dr Katherine Selby	Natural Sciences/Environment and Geography
	Simon van der Borgh	TFTI
	Matt Johnstone	YUSU
	Jane Baston	GSA
In attendance:	Dr Kate Arnold	Dean of YGRS
	Dr Martin Cockett	Chair of Special Cases Committee
	Valerie Cotter	Dep Academic Registrar/Dir Student Services
	Dr Zoe Devlin	Acting Head of Online Partnerships
	Dr Stephen Gow (Secretary)	Academic Integrity Coordinator
	Cecilia Lowe	Head of Learning Enhancement
	Jessica Roehricht (Minutes)	Academic Support Administrator
	Robert Simpson	Special Cases Manager
	Dr Jen Wotherspoon	Deputy Director, Student Services
Apologies:	Dr David Clayton	History
	Laila Fish	Disability Services
	Sharmila Gohill	Asst Registrar, Student Progress
Visitors:	Claire Shanks	Disability Services
	Catherine Wild	ASO

20-21/39 Welcome

The Chair **welcomed** the Committee.

20-21/40 Minutes of previous meeting

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 4th December 2020.

20-21/41 Matters Arising from the previous minutes

- **20-21/8 YUSU Not-So-Big Assessment Survey 2020 - analysis for October meeting.**
It was **reported** that this analysis would be discussed later in the meeting [M20-21/4].
[CLOSED]
- **20-21-18 BIU to report on how the median percentage of good degrees was calculated in table 1 of the paper.**
The Chair **noted** that BIU had provided this information. **[CLOSED]**
- **20-21/20 Review of limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches - Hierarchy of penalties.**
The Chair **reported** that this would be considered by the Committee at its meeting in March 2021. **[OPEN]**
- **20-21/21 Summary of assessment issues raised via NSS.**
The Chair had **reported** the Committee's discussion on this topic to UTC, and had had further discussions with the Secretary and Simon van der Borgh. **[CLOSED]**
- **20-21/32 Penalties for overlength work - policy wording paper.**
The Chair **noted** this would be discussed in more detail in the oral report [M20-21/42]. The Chair of UTC had asked if any work areas could be paused to reduce immediate workloads. The work on the policy for penalties for overlength work had been completed by the Committee, however the implementation would need to take place in departments. This would be an additional responsibility for Chairs of Boards of Examiners, and therefore the Chair of UTC had requested that the implementation of this policy be delayed. The Secretary would instead add this work to the Committee's priority areas for 2021/22.
[CLOSED]
- **20-21/33 Annual Report – Undergraduate External Examiners 2019/20 (ASO).**
The Chair **noted** that this action had not yet been completed. **[OPEN]**

20-21/42 Chair's Report

The Chair **noted** his thanks to all those who had been involved in the January assessments, including in departments, the Assessments team and the Programme Design and Learning Technology team. The Chair **reported** that at its next meeting [Friday 5th March 2021] the Committee would discuss the timetabling issues which arose during the January Common Assessment Period due to online exams and extra time from SSPs unavoidably leading to overlapping exams.

The Chair **reported** that at the next meeting the Committee would receive a list of decisions and approvals made on behalf of the Committee and the Academic Contingency Group over the previous 12 months to allow reflection for revision and implementation in 2021/22. The Chair **noted** that a new assessment support package had been introduced since the last meeting of the

Committee, and that some members of the Committee were consulted on this even though there had not been a chance to consult the whole Committee. Decisions on this had been taken through the Chairs action process for UTC and Senate.

The Committee requested a summary of all changes to the Guide to Assessment implemented due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the timings of these, as it would assist with issues such as appeals. The Secretary **agreed** to send the summary spreadsheet produced at the end of 2019/20 to Robert Simpson and to begin creating a similar summary for 2020/21.

ACTION [SG]

20-21/43 Report from Students

- **YUSU** representative **reported** that they would be bringing a report on extra time for online exams in relation to SSPs to the next meeting of the Committee, and requested that one of the Disabled Students' Officers attended for this item. The Chair **noted** that a lot of the challenges around SSPs for online exams had been due to timetabling and VLE functionality, rather than relating to the policy.
- **GSA** representative **noted** ongoing work with academic officers from other institutions into academic integrity, in particular commissioning and essay mills. Concerns about PGR student progression rules were also raised, to be followed up by the PGR Contingency Group and the Dean of YGRS.

20-21/44 Report on impact of 2019/20 Safety Net

The Chair presented and summarised the report. It was **noted** that the inflationary effect of the safety net, which has been small to date, would nevertheless have an impact on degree outcomes for the following two years. The Committee acknowledged that Covid-19 would have had a negative effect on the Degree Outcomes of individual students, however this individual impact could not be analysed. The Chair **noted** that this report contained data which would be important when producing the Universities Degree Outcomes Statement for 2020. Additionally, that UTC would use this data to identify areas where the Safety Net had not been the cause of changes to Degree Outcomes, for example the increase in good degrees in the University of York Management School and the department of Economics were not a result of the Safety Net.

In relation to PGT students, it was **reported** that the overall numbers of merits and distinctions awarded in 2020 had been approximately equal to in the previous year. It was therefore **noted** that the changes to criteria introduced as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic had achieved the intended effect, as if they had not been introduced the numbers would have fallen. Although it was **noted** that further analysis of these data would be reported at an upcoming meeting.

The Committee **noted** that the data presented did not include students who had not met the progression criteria, and **agreed** that more analysis was needed in this area. Additionally, it was **requested** that a future analysis by BIU, due to be received by the Committee later in the year, would include more details of Widening Participation groups. The Secretary **agreed** to highlight this to BIU.

20-21/45 Academic Misconduct Data report

The Secretary **reported** the doubling of academic misconduct cases between 2018/19 and 2019/20. The majority of the increase came from PGT programmes and a significant number of cases on York online programmes. It was also **noted** that the switch to online examinations may have been behind some aspects of the rise, though it was difficult to quantify the impact. There was discussion around the higher number of “no-case-to-answer” outcomes, with a number of contributing factors, including students sharing revision notes (as was allowed) and unclear referencing expectations. Additionally, that lots of assessments had been written differently to normal to avoid easy searching of answers, however this had led to some complaints regarding understanding the questions. It was **noted** that commissioning cases appeared to be bunched within specific modules, and queried whether the assessment tasks for these had been investigated.

The Committee **noted** that the largest rise in cases was for PGT students, and discussed potential reasons for this. A number of these cases were collusion, and a worrying number of overseas students. It was **agreed** that the Chair would offer support and share good practice with departments with higher numbers of cases. It was discussed that good practice may include providing clear examples and expectations at the point of assessment.

20-21/46 OiA Good Practice paper on Mitigating circumstances.

The Chair **noted** that the OiA “The Good Practice Framework: Requests for additional consideration” paper was guidance, however indicated if this guidance was not followed, it would be looked into by the OiA. The Committee was reassured that the University appeared to already be in line with a large proportion of the guidance, however there were areas where this was not the case. One example was self-certification for ECA claims for minor illnesses, such as stomach bugs, however if the University decided to follow all of the guidance, implementation of this type of change would require careful thought to avoid misuse and maintain fairness for students. The complexity of allowing ECA claims once an exam had already begun were also mentioned. Other areas the Committee highlighted to investigate further were embedding a policy of automatic referrals to Disability Services, and Supervisors excusing themselves from Exceptional Circumstances Committees.

It was **noted** that although there would be no immediate changes as a result of this framework, students were already referencing it in appeals. The Committee **agreed** that any policy revisions should be fit for general application rather than an emergency situation such as during the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore any revisions would not be implemented for 2021/22. It was **agreed** that a group of members would begin looking at the framework and identifying areas where the University was out of line. This Group would include: the Chair, the Student Representatives, Martin Cockett and Robert Simpson, in addition to the Universities Complaints

Officer who was the formal link to the OiA. Any other member who wishes to join was invited to contact the Chair outside of the meeting. It was **agreed** that the Group would provide an oral report at a future meeting with a proposal of how to proceed with this area of work over the following 12 months.

20-21/47 YUSU Not-so-big-assessment survey

It was **noted** that the aim of the survey had been to help the Committee develop good practice guidance on what should be available to students at the point of assessment, and the survey itself had been carried out before and at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. There was a Working Group to develop this guidance, such as a checklist for what should be available at the point of assessment. Suggestions to be added to a checklist included resources such as exemplars or marked past papers. It was **confirmed** that the focus of this would be guidance, not policy.

It was **noted** that this work may help with Academic Misconduct cases [as discussed in M20-21/47] as sometimes this was the result of a lack of understanding of expectations.

20-21/48 Mid-year oral reports from Committee members on priority areas

The Secretary provided an update on each of the Committees priority areas for the year, as follows.

1. Review of information provided to external examiners and exam boards.
A questionnaire had been circulated on the 20th January 2021, which included questions on scaling results as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting modifications to assessments. A report on this was due to be received at the Committees meeting in March 2021.
2. Production of a university-wide statement on degree outcomes (UKSCQA).
This had been published in December 2020, although it was unknown at the time of the meeting whether a new statement would be required by UKSCQA in May 2021. [UPDATE: QAA state "It is expected providers will update their statements before the end of the calendar year 2021" - "this may not mean publishing a whole new DOS, providers should then set out how and when future reviews will occur."]
3. Degree Algorithms Practice in 2020 - review implications for York.
This had been moved to March 2021, with the Secretary intending to attend a QAA meeting regarding this.
4. Review of the structure of the Guide to Assessment.
Transitioning to an online format was a priority area of work for the Secretary, and the Committee would receive an update in May 2021.
5. Review of page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches.
This had been discussed earlier in the meeting [M20-21/41] and had been postponed until further notice.

6. Clarification of information available to students when setting assignments.
The YUSU Not-so-big-assessment survey had been discussed earlier in the meeting [M20-21/47] and it was expected that in May 2021 the Committee would receive the full recommendations of the working group.
7. Guidance for staff on occasional extensions and alternative forms of assessment for students with individual arrangements.
It was **agreed** that the work on guidance for staff on occasional extensions and alternative forms of assessment for students with individual arrangements would be paused. This work would instead become a part of the work on the OiA good practice paper on mitigating circumstances [M20-21/46].
8. Academic Integrity & Misconduct: Contract cheating, translation software, third party support.
It was **reported** that the Secretary would meet the GSA representative and the department of Language and Linguistic Science to explore the specific cas data in more detail. The Committee would receive more information in May 2021.
9. Academic Integrity Charter
This area of work had been completed.
10. Attainment of minority groups in assessment / Inclusive assessment May/July 2021
Alet Roux **reported** that they had met the Chair and planned for the working group to approach this from two directions. First, exploring statistical evidence to determine if there was anything of statistical significance within what was often small numbers. Secondly, to look at the Guide to Assessment and assessment rule for any potential bias. It was **noted** that this should not take too much time from departments or the Progression and Awards team, who had high workloads due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation, and instead would focus on data gathered from BIU. The working group membership was discussed, with Cecilia Lowe being excused, and the YUSU Academic Officer requesting to join. The first meeting of this working group would take place in February 2021.
11. Group Work.
There would be a report of research into this area by July 2021.

20-21/49 Individual Examination Arrangements

The Committee **noted** the number of individual examination arrangements.

20-21/50 Date of the next meeting

The Committee **noted** the date of the next meeting as Friday 5 March 2021 at 2pm via Zoom online video conferencing.