

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 5 March 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 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
	Laila Fish	Disability Services
	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 Nicoletta Ascuito	English
	Dr David Clayton	History
	Sharmila Gohill	Asst Registrar, Student Progress
Visitors:	Rowan Casey	YUSU Disabled Students' Officer [M20-21/57]
	Eddie Cowling	IPC [M20-21/59]

20-21/51 Welcome

The Chair **welcomed** the Committee.

20-21/52 Minutes of previous meeting

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2021.

20-21/53 Matters Arising from the previous minutes

- **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 May 2021. **[OPEN]**

- **20-21/33 Annual Report – Undergraduate External Examiners 2019/20 (ASO)**

This action was still open for the Chair to complete, the Committee agreed that the Chair would wait until after the Chair of Boards of Examiners Forum the following week (week commencing 8th March 2021) and then email chairs of Boards of Examiner the mark and moderation information before the end of the Spring term 2021. **[OPEN]**

- **20-21/42 Chair’s Report - Summary of Covid-19 Policy changes to SCC**

The Chair reported that this action remained open. **[OPEN]**

- **20-21/44 Report on the impact of the safety net - data on students who had not met the progression criteria**

The Secretary would follow this up with BIU but had not yet done this. **[OPEN]**

- **20-21/46 OiA Good Practice paper on Mitigating circumstances - working group**

The Chair reported that this working group was yet to meet. **[OPEN]**

20-21/54 Chair’s Report

The Chair **reported** he had been involved in discussions with professional services on behalf of the Committee regarding maternity and paternity leave for students, who were often left to apply for Exceptional Circumstances affecting Assessment, which was not always approved. Instead, in principle the Chair had approved an equivalent process to a Student Support Plan, allowing these students to defer exams and receive occasional extensions without going through an Exceptional Circumstances Committee. The Committee **endorsed** this action.

The Chair **reported** that the OfS and UKSCQA had announced the expectation for a Degree Outcomes Statement for 2020, however this could be updating the 2019 statement rather than an entirely new statement. The University was in a good position for this, and the original working group would take this forward for 2020.

The Chair **noted** that a paper on Exam Board policy had been drafted by Daniel Baker, however would be reported to the May meeting of the Committee after the working group had reviewed it. The Chair also **noted** that several members were approaching the end of their terms on the Committee, including Daniel Baker, Simon van der Borgh, David Clayton, Patrick Gallimore and the Chair. Although some of these may have additional terms, the Chair highlighted this as conversations about 2021/22 membership would need to begin soon after the meeting.

20-21/55 Report from Students

- **YUSU** representative **reported** specific situation in which a student in the Summer CAP 2020 had had a close bereavement and an ECA claim rejected as they could not provide evidence, despite the requirement for evidence having been waived. The YUSU representative would email the Deputy Director, Student Services with the details of the case to follow up, to find out if the policy had not been followed correctly. The YUSU representative also **reported** that he was currently running unopposed for re-election as YUSU Academic Officer for 2021/22.
- **GSA** representative **noted** that there were ongoing Spring elections for representatives.

20-21/56 Review of measures used in response to Covid-19 and recommendations for 2021/22

The Chair asked the Committee to reflect on the teaching, learning and assessment policy changes and contingency measures put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, **noting** that there was no new policy in this paper. The Committee raised concern that if 2021/22 was significantly affected by Covid-19 there was little room remaining for policy revisions, although also **noted** that the Committee had faith in the assessments now being run which were generating meaningful marks for students. Results were academically secure, with Boards of Examiners overseeing cohort marks to ensure this, and ECA available for students who were more personally significantly affected. However there was a feeling of increased student anxiety overall, which could impact assessments. It was **noted** that students could apply for a Leave of Absence, however the YUSU representative **noted** that this may have financial implications as these students could not access a maintenance loan.

Members **agreed** that the removal of requirements for evidence for ECA claims had been appropriate at the relevant times, however discussed that going forward this would need to be scrutinised as there were also potential negative impacts. It was **reported** that the Leave of Absence form had been amended to inform students that they may not return to exactly the same programme, as members highlighted this challenge when moving and amending modules to comply with Covid-19 restrictions.

The Committee commended the clear guidance and support provided to students during what had been extraordinarily difficult situations. The Committee **agreed** that the measures in response to Covid-19 had been appropriate. The YUSU representative **reported** that YUSU was requesting more measures be implemented to mitigate for Covid-19 for the Summer CAP 2021.

20-21/57 YUSU Extra time in examinations

The YUSU representative and Rowan Casey, YUSU Disabled Students' Officer, presented this paper. The Committee **noted** it had previously discussed and approved the policy that YUSU were recommending amending [M19-20/106 refers]. The key points from the paper were highlighted, and the Committee was asked to consider reverting the August change to the Online Examinations policy, so that extra time for students with SSPs was applied to the entire exam period (24 hours) rather than an 8 hour working day.

During the discussion, it was **noted** that although recommended time frames were provided for online exams, in practice the YUSU representative **reported** students spending much longer for a

variety of reasons. However, the Committee had **agreed** that an 8 hour working day was the absolute maximum any student should be spending on an online exam within the 24 hour window, and therefore to add extra time to the 24 hours could imply to students that there was an expectation that they were expected to be working for all of this time, which was not the case.

It was suggested that if students required more extra time than was being provided, it may be more productive for them to revisit their SSPs to revise them in relation to online exams. It was **reported** that Disability Services had not been contacted by many students in relation to extra time in online exams, and would be able to provide support, for example time management skills. The practical limitations to revising the policy to apply extra time to the full 24 hour window were **discussed**, as this would be mid-year and could disadvantage some students, who may feel the need to use the entirety of the extra time despite this potentially being 30 hours, which would be detrimental to health. Logistically, adding more extra time to online exams could cause further timetabling issues and exam window overlaps. For some students in different timezones it was **noted** that the extra time already provided may not be useful if it was for example overnight.

The Committee members present voted on whether to revisit the online examinations policy in relation to the period of time the percentage of extra time for students with SSPs was based on. The result was five in favour, five against.

[Post-meeting note: during the meeting, it was reported that this result was five in favour and six against, and therefore agreed that this policy would not be revised. However, this was not accurate as one of the votes counted was not from a full member of the Committee. Based on this there was not a clear decision from the vote, therefore the SCA Chair would report this discussion and vote to the Chair of UTC for a final decision.]

ACTION [MB]

20-21/58 Communication relating to Board-of-Examiners practices during Covid-19

The Chair led a discussion on the topic Exam board practices in relation to the processing of marks in advance of, and to feed into, the Chairs of Boards of Examiners Forum on 9th March, 2021. Due to the impact of Covid-19, with the introduction of the safety net, the shift to alternative modes of assessment exam boards had a complicated task of processing marks. As a result, in some cases boards of examiners had to consider whether rescaling of marks was necessary, where this was not the usual practice or in more cases than they would usually do so (SCA has carried out a survey of Exam Board chairs the results of which will be reported at a later date). Rescaling was necessary in a limited number of cases where the raw marks, in the academic judgement of the Board of Examiners, do not adequately reflect performance on the university mark scale. This usually comes about as a result of unforeseen issues with an assessment design resulting in marks that do not appear correctly calibrated. Rescaling is one way to achieve this recalibration, and other way of calibrating include various approaches to marking listed in appendix D of the Guide to Assessment.

In addition to the challenges of processing marks, students at this time have been highly sensitive to treatment of assessments - particularly due to the national issues with the disruption of examinations at secondary level and the discussions of algorithm use to predict A-level grades. This

has resulted in extra scrutiny of marks - including multiple FOI requests for “raw marks” that students are given for assessments. While the University has guidance on rescaling (Appendix K of the Guide to Assessment) and a rescaling tool, there have been isolated incidences where the situation has also been exacerbated by departments rescaling marks in a manner not recommended in the guidance and communicating the changes to students poorly.

The Committee discussed the following points in relation to this:

- **Definition of raw marks:** The discussion concluded that it is difficult to define what raw marks are - this is due to different departmental moderation processes. It was noted that in relation to science departments where examinations have strict numerical marking schemes, the raw mark may refer to the first total of marks awarded to a student for an exam - this however is acknowledged as merely the first step of the marking process. In the Arts and Humanities or Social Sciences, other moderation and mark-agreement processes take place and again it is difficult to define a raw mark. It was noted that a number of departments allow students access to raw exam marks - as part of the transparency of the boards processing procedures - which is clearly communicated with the students.
- **Communicating:** It was highlighted that any rescaling or other changes which may be implemented by an exam board should be considered prior to the meeting and communicated with students in advance with a clear rationale for why it is happening. In this way, the Committee was strongly in favour of transparency of exam board processing of marks.).

The Chair will discuss this matter with the Chairs of Boards of Examiners Forum and provide a progress update in the next meeting.

[ACTION: MB]

20-21/59 IPC Academic Misconduct Proposal

The Committee was asked to consider the proposal from the IPC to allow them to implement an internal StAMP system to deal with Academic Misconduct Cases. IPC have six StAMP-trained staff. Those trained staff are from a mix of disciplines including language, STEM, and management and business, bringing a balance of expertise to the panel composition. An SCA member would still have oversight of the cases and the data would be reported centrally:

The rationale for this proposal:

- IPC StAMP-trained staff have a good understanding of the linguistic challenges of users of English as a second language, which can result in a student resorting to commissioning or collusion. The panel members have a sound awareness of machine translation, online tools available to language learners, essay mills and commissioning services.
- IPC would be in a better position to give a timeframe to students for milestones during the process. This is something students understandably ask for.
- IPC probationary modules on preparatory courses allow reassessment for progression. A panel made up of IPC staff will accelerate the process, hopefully avoiding the problems

outlined above, ensuring cases and penalties are thoroughly considered whilst not disproportionately jeopardising students' educational future.

The Committee considered the following points:

- **Potential for bias:** It was highlighted that the purpose of having faculty based StAMPs was that students have academic judgement external to the department viewing their case, therefore having less chance for bias. This must be weighted against the particular expertise necessary to consider the cases - there is a balance to be struck. It was noted that IPC is a large body itself, which does not sit in one faculty but has several programmes pathways within it, and therefore the issue of bias would be addressed by having StAMP members from different pathway programmes could address the potential for bias and also enforce standards of academic integrity.
- **The StAMP process is the problem:** It was highlighted that the problem of delays in cases is a problem of the overall StAMP process - and that IPC may be seen as having favourable treatment to fast track students - however this was contested due to the particular progression issues which IPC students faced. York Online Programmes also noted that they have similar issues with the process. These overall problems with the Academic Misconduct process were noted and will be explored. The administrative side of academic misconduct was noted as perhaps providing solutions for delays in cases, in addition to looking at the guidelines for how cases are handled. It was also noted that the changes made to assessments due to Covid-19 have exacerbated the issues mentioned.
- **Expertise:** In terms of the cases which go to StAMP from IPC, it was noted that many relate to collusion or commissioning - which require special academic judgement on the language ability of students - which IPC staff are equipped to deal with and concerns have been raised from other non-IPC StAMP members about their ability to make judgements upon.
- **Impact of delayed cases:** Of course bias is a concern for students, however this must be balanced with the impact of delayed cases on students' progression to programmes in and external to York.

It was agreed that IPC could trial this process in Summer 2021 and report back to the committee in September. The Secretary of SCA will liaise with the department and Academic Misconduct administrators to arrange the trial and it should be clearly communicated to students. It was noted that certain members had voiced strong concerns about this however the consequences for IPC students of not being able to progress to programmes or alternatives providing a strong basis for trialing the system.

[ACTION: SG/IPC]

20-21/60 Individual Examination Arrangements

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

20-21/61 Date of the next meeting

The Committee **noted** the date of the next meeting as Friday 7 May 2021 at 2pm via Zoom online video conferencing.