<div align="center">**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT**</div>

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 30 October 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 Kate Arnold	Dean of YGRS
	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 Martin Cockett	Chair of Special Cases Committee
	Valerie Cotter	Dep Academic Registrar/Dir Student Services
	Dr Stephen Gow (Secretary)	Academic Integrity Coordinator
	Jessica Roehricht (Minutes)	Academic Support Administrator
	Robert Simpson	Special Cases Manager
	Dr Jen Wotherspoon	Deputy Director, Student Services

Apologies:	Dr Nicoletta Asciuto	English
	Dr David Clayton	History
	Dr Zoe Devlin	Acting Head of Online Partnerships
	Laila Fish	Disability Services
	Sharmila Gohill	Asst Registrar, Student Progress
	Cecilia Lowe	Head of Learning Enhancement

Visitors:	Chris Hoyle	Business Intelligence Unit [M20-21/18]
	Karen Payne	Business Intelligence Unit [M20-21/18]

20-21/13 Welcome
The Chair **welcomed** the Committee.

20-21/14 Minutes of previous meeting
The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meetings held on 25 September 2020, subject to the correction that Dr Katherine Selby was a member of both the Natural Sciences and Environment and Geography departments.

20-21/15 Matters Arising from the previous minutes

- **20-21/5 YUSU to share statistics from Advice and Welfare service with SCA.**
  It was **noted** that the YUSU Academic Officer would provide this update later in the meeting [M20-21/17 refers]. **[CLOSED]**

- **20-21/6 Chair to recommend Patrick Gallimore continue as Deputy Chair of SCA**
  The Chair of SCA **reported** that the Chair of UTC had **approved** this recommendation. **[CLOSED]**

- **20-21/8 Priority areas for action for the 2020/21 academic year - recommended to UTC for approval**
  UTC had **approved** the priorities, and these would be discussed in further details again later in the meeting [M20-21/19 refers]. **[CLOSED]**

- **20-21/8 YUSU Not-So-Big Assessment Survey 2020 - analysis for October meeting**
  It was **reported** that the analysis of this data would be reported to a meeting later in the year. **[OPEN]**

- **20-21/9 SCA members invited to comment on the draft Degree Outcomes Statement by Oct 1st before being considered by UTC**
  Members were consulted and comments taken into account. The Chair **noted** that the decision by UTC was that only the data from York and not the comparative data would be displayed. The Degree Outcomes Statement had since received approval from Senate and was going to Council the following month. The Chair **noted** that there may be the need to produce a statement for 2020/21, however this would be encompassed in the priority areas for the Committee [M20-21/19]. **[CLOSED].**

20-21/16 Chair's Report
The Chair **reported** that some requests for variation to the 24 hour exam format had been received and approved by the Chair, the Deputy Director, Student Services, and the Associate Deans for Teaching, Learning and Students. There were also some ongoing discussions about some of these requests relating to implementation. The Chair further **reported** that work was ongoing on the Digital Assessment and Feedback project, which was being led by the Enterprise Systems Group. As part of the project, external software and commercial solutions were being explored, and may result in trials off these, with a focus on innovative forms of assessment and effective methods of providing feedback. The Chair **noted** that he would provide the Committee regular updates on this project, and also **noted** that if other members wanted to be involved they should contact the Chair directly.

The Chair raised the suggestion of a University level External Examiner, and explained that this suggestion had been prompted by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment. A University level External Examiner would provide some oversight for the award and classification

system, providing advice, guidance and approvals. It was **noted** that other institutions had advertised for this role, so these published job descriptions could be used as a starting point if York progressed with this idea. The Chair **noted** that having someone in such a post would have been useful during recent discussions and decisions, for example regarding the Undergraduate safety net introduced in response to Covid-19, and during the work on the Degree Outcomes Statement. The Committee was supportive of this suggestion, and the Chair **agreed** to **report** this to UTC.

The Secretary to the Committee **reported** that an Academic Integrity Charter had been released by the QAA and they were asking universities to sign up. This consisted of seven areas, which were: Everyone is responsible as part of a 'whole community' approach; A 'whole community' approach; Working together as a sector; Engage with and empower students; Empower and engage with staff; Consistent and effective institutional policies and practices; and Institutional autonomy. The Vice Chancellor had requested the Committee look into this, to then report to UTC and onwards. The Secretary **noted** this would be reported in more detail to the Committee later in the year.

ACTION [MB]

20-21/17 Report from Students
- **YUSU** representative **reported** that for 2020/21, the YUSU advice and support centre had received around 60 new cases, with approximately 45 new cases in September 2020. This was similar to the volume the same months in the previous years but slightly down. Between Summer term 2020 to the start of September 2020 had been very busy, but had seen 15-20% fewer new cases than in previous years. The YUSU representative **noted** that a considerable number of the cases seen, particularly highlighting where the changes to policies and implementation of the safety net had not been sufficient to mitigate against the impact of Covid, had been especially complicated and required extensive advice and guidance. The YUSU representative **confirmed** that further analysis of the cases was needed to identify the key issues, whether they were more general or about online exams. The YUSU representative also **noted** that course representative nominations had closed earlier that day, with 265 nominations, which was higher than the previous year. The YUSU representative also **reported** that the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Students had offered verbal reassurance that the ECA policy would be revisited.
- **GSA** representative **noted** that she would **report** GSA advice service October numbers at the next meeting when these were available. The GSA course reps had been recruited and around 80% of positions were filled. The GSA representative queried when the exceptional circumstances policy would be updated and published to be as fair to students as possible. The Deputy Director, Student Services **confirmed** that this would be considered at the Academic Contingency Group the following week. The Special Cases Manager **noted** that they had seen a smaller proportion of students in appeal cases using the YUSU and GSA advice services, and had no unusual patterns to report.

20-21/18 York undergraduate degree classifications 2019-20 - initial analysis

Karen Payne and Chris Hoyle from the Business Intelligence Unit attended for this item and presented this paper to the Committee they presented the key points:

1. The overall percentage of good degrees awarded (the number of first class, upper second class degrees and unclassified Integrated Masters out of the total number of degrees awarded) has risen in 2019/0 by 1 percentage point (pp) to 83.4%. This is the highest level seen over the period of record (since 2010).

2. The percentage of first class degrees increased in 2019/0 by 2.1 percentage points to 29.8%. Likewise, this is the highest level of first class degrees awarded at York for all years covered by the report (from 2010/1 onwards). The previous highest percentage of first class degrees was in 2018/9 at 27.7%.

3. The percentage of Upper Second class degrees awarded decreased by 1.2 percentage points from 54.7% in 2018/9 to 53.5% in 2019/0.

4. Variation in the percentage of good degree awards made in the different faculties, and in the different departments therein, remains marked. Overall, Arts and Humanities have the highest percentage of good degrees at 91.5% whilst Social Sciences have 81.5% and Sciences have 79.7%.

5. Sciences shows a decrease of 2.4 percentage points from 2018/9 this follows a broadly upwards trend over the previous five year period. The Social Sciences percentage of good degrees at 81.5% shows an increase over the previous year of 4.7 percentage points. This marks the highest percentage of Good Degrees since 2010/11 (earliest data point). Since 2010/11, Social Sciences has made an overall increase of 13.1 percentage points. Art and Humanities has the highest proportion of good degrees in 2019/0 compared against the other faculties, showing an increase of 2.5 percentage points from 2018/9. However, the trend over the last 10 years is only gently upwards.

The Committee queried how the median percentage of good degrees was calculated in table 1 of the paper, and Karen **agreed** to investigate this.

The Chair **noted** that there was a priority for the Committee for 2020/21 on "Attainment of minority groups in assessment / Inclusive assessment" and therefore the information relating to this area of work regarding degree classifications would be investigated in more detail by this working group and reported to a future meeting. It was **noted** that the way this information was presented in the report was how the QAA had requested this to be presented. It was also **noted** that some of the data was concerning, especially surrounding black student attainment. The Dean YGRS **noted** that this was important from a PGR perspective, as it resulted in lower numbers of qualified ethnic minority students to progress to research.

The Chair **noted** that the safety net introduced to mitigate for Covid-19 may have had an inflationary impact, and therefore it was expected that overall good degrees had increased. However, the Committee **noted** that this was not as severe as some members had anticipated, and still anticipated for other institutions, and it was positive that the outcomes had remained relatively stable. It was **noted** that the safety net would additionally impact degree outcomes for

2020/21. The Committee **discussed** that it would be useful to have an analysis of how the safety net had impacted the degree outcomes, and what these would have been if it had not been introduced.

It was **noted** that there was a large amount of variation between faculties and departments, and that there were many potential causes of this. These included the effect of 24 hour exams on different disciplines, as well as the potential for variation between the way Exam Boards had handled the online assessments, which the Committee **agreed** would need further investigation to ensure consistency and fairness, especially as online assessments were continuing for 2020/21.

The Chair **thanked** Karen Payne and Chris Hoyle for this paper and their attendance at the meeting.

20-21/19 Plan for SCA Priority Areas 2020/21
The Committee further **considered** the priority areas agreed at the previous meeting and approved by UTC. During the discussion, the following points were **noted**.

The review of information provided to external examiners and exam boards would primarily be an information gathering exercise. The production of a university-wide statement on degree outcomes (UKSCQA) had already been completed for 2019/20 [M20-21/9 refers], however if this was needed for 2020/21 the Chair would lead on this work. The Chair further confirmed that if this requirement became an annual expectation, in future years it would be included in the Committees annual cycle of business, rather than priority areas. The priority area of Degree Algorithms Practice in 2020 - review implications for York, might eventually be superseded by the proposed programme for change to the teaching year set out in the Vice-Chancellor's strategy. It was, however, still necessary to continue with this area of work, especially in the context of the Universities UK Degree Algorithm Practice in 2020 Research Report. The review of page/word limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches was already in progress and to be considered later in the meeting [M20-21/20 refers].

It was **agreed** that the GSA representative would lead on the area regarding clarification of information available to students when setting assignments, although the other members involved in this area would provide support [Katherine Selby has since offered to lead on this project]. This work would include data from the YUSU/GSA Not-so-big assessment survey, which would hopefully be available in December 2020.

It was also **agreed** that the Secretary to the Committee would lead on the area of Academic Integrity & Misconduct: Contract cheating, translation software, third party support. This work would now also include the Academic Integrity Charter, as discussed in the Chair's Report earlier in the meeting [M20-21/16]. The Chair requested to be involved in the area on attainment of minority groups in assessment / inclusive assessment, although Dr Alet Roux would take the lead on this work with the Chair's support.

The Chair **noted** that although the Committee would try to achieve the agreed priorities, the year would be unpredictable due to Covid-19 and the associated workload for members.

20-21/20 Review of limits for assessed work and penalties for breaches

The Committee **considered** the recommendations for penalties for over-length assessments. The Committee **approved** in principle the proposal for penalties for over-length assessments and the implementation timeline, subject to final consultation with Chairs of Boards of Examiners and clarification of policy wording. The proposed rules were as follows:

1. References in these rules to 'limits' relate to any restriction on the maximum number of words or pages or to the maximum running time permitted to the student in completing an assessment task.
2. Each department may adopt one of these approaches to specified word, page or running time limits in assessments:
   a. A **tariff penalty:** the student loses marks where a limit is exceeded; or
   b. A **marking limit**: a rule that markers will not read or otherwise take into account work produced by a student that exceeds the specified limit.
3. Where a **tariff penalty** is adopted by a department, the department will use a standard University tariff for all forms of assessment with a set limit. We have simple and fair tariffs for over-length assignments:
   01 - 15% = 5 mark penalty [ie: including a one percentage tolerance range)
   16-50 % = 10 mark penalty
   Over 50% = mark of 0 awarded
4. Where a **marking limit** is adopted, only the specified number of words or pages will be read by the marker and used for grading of the piece of work. In any assessment type, any content appearing in the submitted assessment after the specified limit will be ignored. For a time-limited assessment, the marker will stop watching or listening to that assessment at the specified limit or, if conducted live, the assessment will be terminated at the time limit.
5. Students must declare word/time/page count on all open forms of assessment, with the following sanctions:
   a. A failure to adhere resulting in a penalty of 5 marks.
   b. If it is suspected that a limit has been inaccurately declared with intent to deceive, this will be investigated as cheating under Academic Misconduct regulations.
6. Lower limits become discretionary, with under-length assignments not penalised; such work is to be marked on its academic merit only.
7. Departments will need to make clear supplementary rules regarding the inclusion of extra material and whether it is included in the word limits (such as reference/bibliographies/tables/figures/equations/credits, etc in respect to the limit).

The purpose of this proposal was to generate clear, consistent, proportionate and enforceable penalties for exceeding limits of assessments. This included the need to dispel the myth that a tolerance range of plus or minus 10% of the word limit was applied. The Committee **confirmed** that this would not be applied to PGR students, and that the phased implementation would take integrated masters students into account.

The Committee **discussed** the proposed mark of zero for assessments over 50% over-length, and agreed that at this point the assessment brief had not been followed. The Committee **discussed** that the paper proposed under-length assignments were not penalised, as such work would be

marked on its academic merit only. It was **noted** that the marking limit option was specifically intended for use in assessments where a page limit had been set. The Chair **noted** that it appeared that the principle impact of the policy would be to standardise penalties rather than a significant change to policy. The Special Cases Manager **noted** that it was very important for rule 7 (related to what the word/page/time limit includes and excludes) to be clear and implemented, as there had been appeals relating to this.

It was also **discussed** and **confirmed** that the policy would only apply when a limit on the size (i.e. page/word length or time limit) of assessment had been imposed by the department in the assessment specification. It was **noted** that it was not an expectation that all assessments would have such limits, as this was not always appropriate. Text would be added to the policy to make this clear, for example "where such limits are defined in the assessment specification". It was also **clarified** that there was no expectation that staff within departments would check words on all assessments where a word limit had been imposed, as this should be displayed on the submission (as in rule five), however this would be checked when there was concern that the limit had been inaccurately declared.

This policy still allowed variation in approaches between departments, in particular the option of a tariff penalty or marking limit, which was **noted** as a concern by the GSA representative. However, it was **agreed** that it should still provide a higher level of clarity to students, without significantly impacting staff workloads. The YUSU representative **proposed** a correction to phrasing of rule six as in the proposal, which was **agreed** by the Committee to aid with clarity.

It was **confirmed** that a late and over-length submission would be penalised twice, as these deductions happened at different stages, and that a cap applied to the assessment would override the penalty. It was **noted** that further consideration of the hierarchy of penalties should be considered, for example should academic misconduct penalties be applied before or after late/overlength penalties. This would be presented to SCA later in the year.

The Chair **thanked** the working group.

20-21/21 Summary of assessment issues raised via NSS
The Committee **considered** the paper on assessment issues raised via NSS, and **noted** that Assessment and Feedback scores and the University's ranking in the sector for Assessment and Feedback both dropped in 2020. There were also more negative than positive comments, and the topics of these were concerning. The Chair **noted** that some of the concerns relating to quality of feedback had been raised directly with the PVC TLS, and potential causes of this were likely to be picked up in other work.

The Chair **noted** that group assessments had been highlighted in the paper as having received negative comments, and that group assessment had been a priority for the Committee in 2019/20, however had been removed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated workload of the Committee. It was **agreed** that this would not be added as a priority area for 2020/21, but may be for 2021/22. Simon van der Borgh **volunteered** to start gathering feedback from departments in

preparation for this work on group assessments, as TFTI was one of the departments using group assessment the most. Members were **asked** to send Simon any ideas which may be useful for this initial stage. This work would not initially be to develop a new policy, however would start identifying potential issues to ensure fairness in assessment. The Committee **noted** that the work would be specifically around group assessment rather than group work, as it was widely accepted that group work was positive for students and employability. The Committee **agreed** it would be useful to have access to the specific comments from the NSS relating to group assessment, although **noted** that these were often anecdotal based on the students most recent experience, rather than a more general perspective. It was **agreed** that the Chair and Simon van der Borgh would meet to discuss this further outside of the Committee.

ACTION [MB/SVDB]

20-21/22 Academic Misconduct Policy amendments resulting from Reg 7
The Committee **considered** and **approved** the update of consideration of second offences and the amendment of section 3.7 relating to the Penalty Mitigation Panel.

The Chair **noted** that late in the 2019/20 Academic Year, Senate approved significant changes to Regulation 7, relating to Student Discipline. The changes had implications for the consideration of serious academic misconduct offences and results in the need to change the policy to reflect Reg 7.5.6 which states "In cases of academic misconduct the referring policy (the Academic Misconduct Policy) specifies whether the potential sanction includes suspension or expulsion. When it does not include the possibility of suspension or expulsion, the misconduct becomes a Level 1 disciplinary matter; when it does include those possibilities, the misconduct becomes a Level 2 disciplinary matter." Non-concurrent second offences of the same nature and penalised as an outright fail (non-compensatable) constitute a Level 2 disciplinary matter and result in the recommendation for exclusion considered by the Chair of SCA, rather than Vice Chancellor, as stated previously. This necessitated removal of previous guidance on secondary offences and the adding of replacement text.

In addition, in a recent academic misconduct case, it was **noted** that the policy wording in AM3.6 incorrectly described the process of penalty mitigation. The policy referred to StAMP investigatory Panel making decisions on the penalty mitigation. When the policy was first introduced in 2018/19, this was the case however the policy should have been changed 2019/20 to reflect that it was the Penalty Mitigation Panel that made this judgement.

Another issue was also identified that "personal circumstances" appeared in the title of 3.7, but should also have appeared in the title of 3.7.1. Without it, it could be read that only 3.7.1 (i) corresponded to "personal circumstances". This had also been amended.

The Committee **confirmed** that the Chair was content with this change, as it appeared to add extra pressure to this role. The Chair **noted** that it was better that the SCA Chair had this responsibility than StAMP Chairs, and the final expulsion decision would be taken by a disciplinary committee,.

The Chair **noted** that the changes discussed should be approved and implemented mid-year, as they were not significant changes to policy, only framing these properly, and would not be disadvantageous to any student. The proposed changes would be sent to the Chair of UTC for formal approval.

20-21/23 Individual Examination Arrangements

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

20-21/24 Appointment of External Examiners

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

20-21/25 Date of the next meeting

The Committee **noted** the date of the next meeting as Friday 4th December at 2pm via Zoom online video conferencing.