University Teaching Committee

[Confirmed] Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 November 2023, 09.30-12.30, in HG/21, Heslington Hall and via video conference.

Meeting Attendance

Members present:

Steve King, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Students), Chair.
Claire Hughes, Associate Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students (Sciences)
Tom Cantrell, Associate Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students (Arts and Humanities)
Patrick Gallimore, Chair of Standing Committee on Assessment
Meely Doherty, YUSU Academic Officer
Cytherea Shen, GSA Vice-President, Academic
Jen Wotherspoon, Deputy Director, Student Services
Duncan Jackson, Head of Academic Quality and Development
Jan Ball-Smith, Head of Apprenticeships and Inclusive Education
Zoe Devlin, Head of Online Partnerships
Petros Kefalas, Vice-President Learning and Teaching, CITY College
Michelle Alexander (representing Arts and Humanities)
Richard McClary (representing Arts and Humanities)
Michael Bate (representing Sciences)
Paul Bishop (representing Sciences)
Claire Ball-Smith (representing Social Sciences)
Scott Slorach (representing Social Sciences)
Matthew Perry (co-opted member, Director of the International Pathway College)

In attendance:
David Gent, Academic Quality (Secretary)

Apologies: Tracy Lightfoot, Tom Banham, Wayne Campbell, Kirsty Lingstadt, Simon O'Keefe, Lisa O'Malley, Hannah Smith, Jill Webb.

Section 1: Standing Items

Welcome

23-24/33   The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies as recorded above.

Declarations of interest in items on the agenda [oral report]

23-24/34   Members were invited to declare any potential conflicts of interest relating to the business of the meeting; none were declared.

Unreserved minutes of the last meeting held on 28 September 2023 [UTC.23-24/21, Open]

23-24/35   The Committee **confirmed** the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 as an accurate record, subject to a minor correction under M23-24/27-28 to note that there was an 'Unsung Hero' category in the YUSU Excellence Awards specific to professional services staff.

[*Secretary's Note: this edit was made after the meeting*]

Action tracking and matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda [UTC.23-24/22, Open]

23-24/36   The Committee **received** a log of progress on actions arising from the minutes. The Secretary intended to work with colleagues to try to resolve outstanding actions ahead of the next meeting.

Report of Chair's action [UTC.23-24/23, Open]

23-24/37   The Committee **received** a report on decisions taken by Chair's action since the last meeting.

Chair's report [oral report]

23-24/38   The Chair **reported** the following:

1. The recent ballot from UCU for industrial action had not met the required turnout. Members **observed** that University staff were still dealing with workload arising from the Marking and Assessment Boycott.

2. Tom Banham had been appointed as interim Academic Registrar for a period of six months

3. Sally Quinn had been appointed as Director of Interdisciplinary Teaching and would lead on interdisciplinary initiatives. It was agreed that Dr Quinn should be invited to a future UTC meeting to discuss plans in this area.   **Action: Secretary**

4. The University had been nominated for the *Times Higher* University of the Year award, with a ceremony on 7 December 2023.

5. The University was holding its own Inclusive Impact Awards on 21 November 2023.

6. The PVC (Teaching, Learning and Students) was due to meet Professional Programmes Forum to discuss issues and concerns relating to professional programmes.

7. Adam Dawkins, University Secretary, and Bethan Ellis, Head of Strategic Insight and Analysis, were leaving the University to take up other positions elsewhere in the sector; both were thanked for their contributions to teaching and learning activities.

8. The Westfield Centre was now open.

9. Work on the next iteration of the Access and Participation Plan was ongoing and was due to be considered at a future meeting of the Committee; thanks were expressed to those involved for their work to date.

10. The QAA Optionality in Assessment Report had been published. This was the main output from a QAA enhancement project involving York, the University of Manchester, UCL and Imperial College London. Case studies and resources would also be made available.

11. The staff digest now contained a standing item for communications relating to teaching and learning; thanks were expressed to Jill Webb and Jan Ball-Smith for arranging this.

12. Discussions had been held with Heads of Department and Student Service Managers around the possibility of moving the timing of the summer 2024 graduation. The Deputy Director (SAAA) **reported** that Student Service Managers had been of the opinion that moving graduation was not likely to be feasible, but that conversations were ongoing on this issue.

    a. Related to graduation, members **noted** that there were some issues arising from the timing of the winter graduation and the expiry of student visas. The Deputy Director (SAAA) **reported** that the University was intending to address this issue via a closed congregation at the December UTC meeting, which would then allow the issuing of graduation certificates. Visas would not present a problem for summer graduation.

    b. It was further **reported** that marks for students in the Department of Mathematics affected by the Marking and Assessment Boycott were yet to be processed. The Deputy Director (SAAA) reported that a team was working to resolve this issue as soon as possible, and that those awards would be conferred at the closed

congregation referred to above. The team was also working on an issue with transcripts involving MAB-affected modules.

Student Representatives' reports [oral reports]

23-24/39   Cytherea Shen, the GSA Vice-President (Academic), **reported** that:

1. Students had expressed a need for additional guidance relating to the use of Artificial Intelligence in assessment. It was **noted** that this was addressed via an item elsewhere on the agenda [*paper UTC.23-24/27 refers*].

2. YUSU and GSA were concerned about significant delays in resolving appeals. The two unions planned a campaign to raise student awareness of the appeals and exceptional circumstances processes. Some students had reported that their supervisors had directed students to the appeals route when they raised problems, rather than to the exceptional circumstances procedure. Members **observed** that:

   a. The University had around 400 ongoing appeals. SAAA was working to reduce this number. Many of these cases might have been resolved at an earlier stage had students submitted timely exceptional circumstances claims. To be successful in appeal on this basis, students needed to have both legitimate exceptional circumstances and a legitimate reason why they could not have submitted at the time they encountered problems.

   b. The importance of submitting exceptional circumstances claims in a timely way was intended to be a key part of the YUSU and GSA campaign. There were cultural barriers for some students - particularly international students - to submitting claims.

   c. There was ongoing work to simplify the exceptional circumstances procedure, which should have the effect of making it easier to make a claim. The provision of assessment information was also a priority for Standing Committee on Assessment.

   d. There was a need for additional guidance in this area for both students and academic staff. This was a University rather than Student Union responsibility. This work should, however, be taken forward in collaboration with YUSU and the GSA, and include a clear message for supervisors on exceptional circumstances and appeals.
      Action: Tom Banham and Patrick Gallimore to take forward

   e. Key messages to staff in this area might be better communicated if they were issued by / through Heads of Department.

   f. Consideration would need to be given to the implications for professional programmes in any communication around exceptional circumstances.

   g. There was potential to develop training on exceptional circumstances as part of the broader training package planned for supervisors. There was also potential to raise this as part of PGCAP.

   h. Additional guidance on appeals and exceptional circumstances for YUSU and GSA staff would also be welcome.

23-24/40   Meely Doherty, the YUSU Academic Officer, further **reported** on ongoing work on the student submission for the Access and Participation Plan; and on intentions to learn from practice at other Students' Unions.

Section 2: Strategic Development, Performance Monitoring and Student Insight– items for consideration and/or decision

Arrangements for National Student Survey 2024 [UTC.23-24/24, Open]

23-24/41   The Committee **considered** a paper proposing arrangements for NSS 2024.

23-24/42   It was **observed** that:

1. YUSU had been consulted on whether to have an additional institutional incentive and had indicated that this was not necessary to support a good response rate.

2. Whilst the paper proposed an additional provider-specific question on overall satisfaction, it was noted that additional survey length might increase survey fatigue and that the response rate on this question in 2023 had not been high. The Committee felt there was no need to add this question.

3. The paper proposed to leave NSS promotion up to the discretion of departments / schools. The Committee noted the importance of NSS and felt that it should be fully promoted, both centrally and in departments, with monitoring of response rates. Faculties should be involved in encouraging and sharing departmental best practice in improving response rates. A meeting on NSS promotion planning (involving the PVC and Associate PVC for Teaching, Learning and Students; Strategic Insight and Analysis; Internal Communications and Academic Quality) should be set up, with Faculty involvement covered in the meeting.

    Action: Duncan Jackson

4. The paper proposed a number of additional question banks within the NSS survey. Members did not come to a consensus on which question banks to choose, but noted that:

    a. It would be beneficial to have a longer-term plan for these questions, whether to support longitudinal analysis or to have different questions each year to respond to specific needs.

    b. The question bank on welfare provision would allow insight into a key concern for students; that on sustainability would allow tracking of the success of University initiatives in that area such as ESAY, in ways not addressed elsewhere; whilst that on learning community would respond to a key issue within access and participation.

    c. The YUSU representative had consulted with the YUSU data team and did not have strong opinions on the inclusion of the additional bank on Students' Union activity, noting however that YUSU had yet to receive the equivalent results from NSS 2023.

    d. There was some duplication between the additional questions relating to assessment and the Assessment and Feedback section of the main survey. The additional banks relating to Careers and Employability and Skills were also duplicative of each other.

    e. Answers to additional questions relating to workload were likely to vary significantly across departments, such that differing departmental sample sizes and response rates might skew institutional results. Response rates for additional questions were currently too low for results to be meaningful at department level.

    f. The additional question banks should be further considered by Academic Quality and Development in light of the above comments and submitted for consideration and approval by the Associate PVC and PVC (Teaching, Learning and Students).

    Action: Duncan Jackson

23-24/43   **Resolved: to approve the following arrangements for NSS 2024:**

1. **To have a start date for NSS of 5 February 2024, to avoid the assessment period.**

2. **To not include a provider-specific question.**

3. **To not offer additional incentives for the survey and to not utilise the prize draw.**

4. **To fully promote NSS 2024 both centrally and in departments / schools.**

Update from Electives Working Group [UTC.23-24/25, Open]

23-24/44   The Committee **received** a report from Tom Cantrell, Associate Dean (Teaching, Learning and Students) for Arts and Humanities, on the progress of the UTC Electives Working Group. Beyond the details in the slide deck, it was specifically **reported** that:

1. The initial aim of the Working Group for 2023/24 was to improve the process and underpinning systems and information for electives, to support students to take electives in 2024/25. These improvements would also support wider use of the electives system in future.

2. Timetabling clashes had been identified as a key barrier for take up of electives. Without dedicated space in the timetable, there were limits as to how far electives could be utilised.

23-24/45   The Committee **observed** that:

1. Students taking modules in other departments / schools would benefit from greater information on assessment (such as e.g. marking criteria, referencing). This was also an issue for combined programmes and affected NSS results. Modules in ESAY had been carefully designed with these issues in mind. It was **noted** that the Director of Interdisciplinary Teaching had the experience of interdisciplinary and combined students in their remit and was on the Group. It could be worth drawing on the experience of units who successfully ran interdisciplinary programmes (such as Medieval Studies) in this respect

2. The Secretary has passed on feedback from students on electives from the original UTC Working Group on Interdepartmental Teaching. This indicated that students were likely to take up electives only if their department encouraged and facilitated them to do so; and were likely to be put off if they were a solitary student from their department on a given module due to the importance of a sense of community on learning experience. Timetabled interdepartmental options had been identified as a possible alternative to electives.

Update on Department of Architecture and the Built Environment [Verbal report; Open]

23-24/46   The Committee **received** a verbal update from Tom Cantrell, Associate Dean (Teaching, Learning and Students) for Arts and Humanities, on progress in developing the new Department of Architecture and the Built Environment. It was specifically **reported** that:

1. The Founding Professor and Head of Department, Professor Lorraine Farrelly, had now started at the University. The Department was intending to submit a BA Architecture programme to UTC for approval in March; Professor Farrelly had been invited to the meeting. The team was also considering possible Masters programmes in Architecture.

2. It was intended that the BA Architecture would focus around architecture and the public good, and thus link to the University's interests in areas such as sustainability, safety and housing policy. There would also be strong links in teaching to the heritage and fabric of the city of York. It was intended that the programme would have an interdisciplinary focus, including interdisciplinary modules. The team particularly intended to explore possible links with Archaeology, History of Art, the Centre for Housing Policy, Environment and Geography and ESAY.

3. The programme would need to meet RIBA accreditation requirements. Accordingly, 50% of the programme would be based around design. RIBA accreditation was given retrospectively, after the initial cohort had graduated. The project team had received written assurance that the programme did not require accreditation from the Architects Registration Board.

Section 3: Policy and Regulatory Matters

Degree Outcomes Statement [UTC.23-24/26, Open]

23-24/47   The Committee **considered** revisions to the University's public Degree Outcomes Statement, ahead of consideration at Senate and Council. The Statement had been updated to include

2021/22 degree classification data. It was **reported** that the Statement would be submitted to the institutional External Examiner after approval by Council.

23-24/48   The Committee **observed** that:

1. The data indicated that the University's proportion of graduates attaining 'good honours' degrees was lower than the Russell Group median. This gap was, however, closing and the University figure was above the sector average. Standing Committee on Assessment had considered the data and been content with the University's academic standards.

2. The University's proportion of good honours degrees was likely to further increase due to the decision to move away from use of 'first attempt' marks in degree classification of students who failed modules: former policy in this area had been out of line with the sector.

3. There was a tension between the UUK directive to return the proportion of good honours degrees to pre-COVID levels and the University's work to reduce award gaps and improve assessment practice. It was, however, noted that future Degree Outcomes Statements could present any analysis showing the impact of University initiatives.

4. The preparation of recent graduating cohorts and some current students for closed examinations had been affected by not taking closed exams at school-level during the pandemic.

23-24/49   The Committee **endorsed** the proposed Degree Outcomes Statement, subject to the following minor revisions:

1. The Statement should refer to sector data as well as the Russell Group.

2. Specific references to local policies on marking in section 4; how degree outcomes are annually analysed in section 5; the dissemination of degree outcomes workbooks in section 8 and to changes to the degree classification algorithm in section 9 should all be removed as they were potentially misleading or inaccurate.

3. Section 9 should be amended to refer to forthcoming work to review the Guide to Assessment and marking practice.

4. The reference to reduction in the use of online examinations should be revised so as to avoid an unintended implication that online examinations had lower academic standards.

Action: Stephen Gow

[*Secretary's Note: these revisions were all made in advance of the paper being submitted to Senate*]

Policy on Assessment Support [UTC.23-24/27, Open]

23-24/50   The Committee **considered** a Policy on Assessment Support, which was intended as both a replacement for the current Guidance on Proofreading and to address the proper use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in assessment.

23-24/51   The Committee **observed** that:

1. Employer representatives at the Employability Advisory Group had highlighted the need for students to develop understanding of when it was acceptable to use AI.

2. Guidance had been developed to accompany the policy and was thought by members to be helpful. It was noted that this was an adaptation of guidance developed by the IPC, which itself sat alongside a website. SCA was also exploring the potential to adapt the 'traffic light system for AI use' developed by CITY College.

3. The name of the policy was potentially misleading, as it could be seen to relate to University support for assessment more generally. It would benefit from a clearer title.

4. It was intended that a separate policy be developed for PGR students. References to PGR provision should be removed from the policy.

5. Statements on whether it was acceptable to correct (as well as identify) incorrect word usage were inconsistent between the policy and guidance; this should be resolved. It would also be beneficial to cross-refer to the guidance in the policy.

6. There was a need to further clarify the scope of the policy, and specifically whether it applied to CITY College, other forms of collaborative provision such as the partnership with Maastricht University, and HYMS. The policy and guidance would need to take into account differences in institutional advice and support available to these students.

7. There was a need to further consider the implications of the policy for professional programmes. Different public sector organisations and accrediting bodies were examining the use of AI and there were potential implications for students' assessment when in practice.

8. The paper asked the University to develop a high-level message on the use of AI. This was under active consideration by the Chair as Chair of the UTC AI Working Group, and would likely draw on the Russell Group principles on this issue.

23-24/52   **Resolved:**

1. To approve the policy for York-based provision (except for professional programmes) and York Online programmes, subject to the edits identified in M23-24/51/3-5 above.

2. To endorse the policy for other programmes, subject to resolution of the issues identified in M23-24/51/6-7 above. The policy should be revised and submitted for approval under Chair's action.   **Action: Stephen Gow**

Section 4: Quality Assurance Processes

Follow-up to Three Year Review of York Online: Computer Science [UTC.23-24/28, Open]

23-24/53   The Committee **considered** an updated action plan arising from the Three-Year review of online programmes in Computer Science held in July 2022. Zoe Devlin, Head of Online Partnerships, spoke to this item and **reported** that:

1. A Quality Review Group had been set up to monitor the quality of York Online programmes, as a sub-committee of the York-HEP Monitoring Board. Progress against the action plan would be considered at the Group.

2. Some of the actions within the plan were identical to those in the action plan arising from the Three Year review of online Management provision. Some were also duplicative of work elsewhere in the University, such as the review of Student Support Plans.

3. The original timescale identified for the actions had proved to be too ambitious. Progress against the actions had been delayed by a reduction in staff capacity in the central Online team arising from the University's cost containment exercise. The Department of Computer Science had also experienced delays in obtaining approval for teaching posts.

23-24/54   The Committee **observed:**

1. The review arose in the context of an OIA group complaint and had identified a number of urgent actions. Members were highly concerned that many of the actions were not yet completed, noting the risks for quality assurance and student experience.

2. It was acknowledged that delays in taking forward actions were affected by staff capacity and that UTC had no budgetary authority. How best to take forward this issue should be further considered by the PVC (Teaching, Learning and Students).

Action: Tracy Lightfoot, with Steve King

3. The action plan should be updated to set new timescales for resolution of actions.

Action: Zoe Devlin and Simon O'Keefe, to liaise with Steve King

4. The action plan should be submitted for further consideration at the May 2024 meeting of UTC. [*Secretary's Note: this has been added to the schedule of business*]

5. The original action plan noted a need to review PGCAP such that it became more useful for online teaching staff.

   a. The Head of Academic Quality and Development **reported** that the issue was that staff on York Online programmes did not meet AdvanceHE's requirements in terms of responsibility to successfully complete the PGCAP qualification. Whilst there was some relevant content, PGCAP was also currently not targeted to online teaching.

   b. It was **observed** that there was a broader need to institute training for online teaching staff. This need not necessarily be in PGCAP. To be able to gauge scale and scope for training, this would need to be informed by the University's strategy for online teaching, and would also need to take into account any contractual obligations and expectations for online teaching staff. This issue should be further considered.

Action: Duncan Jackson

Section 5: Sub-committee Summaries and Meeting-related information

Standing Committee on Assessment: Annual Priorities [UTC.23-24/29, Open]

23-24/55   The Committee **considered** a set of annual priorities from Standing Committee on Assessment. Patrick Gallimore, Chair of SCA, spoke to this item and **reported** that:

1. The review of the Guide to Assessment, revisions to the exceptional circumstances procedure and provision of assessment information were the key priorities for SCA.

2. The planned work on exceptional circumstances would include whether to move to a Faculty-based system, as reported at a previous UTC meeting.

3. Revisions to the Guide to Assessment would include reference to policy on online marking, an action from a prior UTC meeting, but this was likely to be a longer-term priority.

23-24/56   The Committee **observed** that:

1. There were too many priorities to successfully complete in 2023/24. It would be beneficial to split the priorities into work to be conducted in the current academic year and longer-term work. It was advised that SCA develop a longer-term picture rather than operate on an annual basis.

2. There were links between the provision of assessment information and the Assessment and Feedback project. SCA intended to partly focus on developing a central / shared record of key assessment information: this was likely to require attention to systems and thus might require central project management. Members noted the importance of any system working holistically with other systems such as the Module Catalogue in a coordinated way.

3. The revision to the process for approval of assessment adjustments under Student Support Plans would require close liaison with Disability Services, who were leading a broader review in this area.

4. As the review of the Guide to Assessment was a significant task, it would be beneficial for UTC to receive an update and any specific proposals in this area for comment at its March meeting. [*Secretary's Note: this has been added to the schedule of business*]

5. The priorities should be revised in light of UTC's comments and submitted for consideration by the PVC (Teaching, Learning and Students) and re-submitted to the December meeting unless approved under chair's action. This would not prevent SCA continuing work on key priorities in the interim. **Action: Patrick Gallimore**

Standing Committee on Assessment: September and October 2023 [UTC.23-24/30, Open]

23-24/57 The Committee **received** a summary report from the September and October 2023 meetings of Standing Committee on Assessment (SCA).

23-24/58 The Committee **observed** that:

1. SCA members had expressed concern around the risk of critical failure in the Progression and Awards team, having heard concerns about resourcing in the team from a number of different fora including Chairs of Boards of Examiners and Student Service Managers. The team was dealing with revisions to progression and award rules and the Marking and Assessment Boycott as well as more routine work. The Deputy Director (SAAA) reported that the team was under significant pressure and that their work was key to student progress. Members noted that UTC had no budgetary authority, but asked the PVC (Teaching, Learning and Students) to take this issue forward with the Academic Registrar as appropriate.
Action: Tracy Lightfoot

2. SCA had also expressed concern around resourcing in the Exams Team. It was noted that the move to semesterisation had changed the operational parameters for scheduling of assessments, with centrally scheduled examinations and departmentally-scheduled other assessments now both occupying the same time period. This was putting pressure on the Exams team. Consideration should be given to developing a more effective process.
Action: Tom Banham

3. SCA had noted concerns around the uptake of training for Turnitin Feedback Studio. This had recently been encouraged by Faculties; this may also have been delayed due to the need for departments to consider local practice on use of the tool. A further update on uptake of training should be developed for UTC.
Action: Craig Adams

Faculty Learning and Teaching Groups [UTC.23-24/31-33, Open]

23-24/59 The Committee **received** summaries or notes arising from the meeting of the Faculty Learning and Teaching Groups for all three Faculties held in September 2023. Claire Hughes and Tom Cantrell, Associate Deans (Teaching, Learning and Students) further **reported** more recent approvals of Data Science programmes; the recruitment of a Data Science lead in the Faculty of Sciences; the approval of an MSc in Psychology of Mental Health; and the approval of a MSc in Digital Design.

David Gent, Academic Quality Team
14 November 2023