Dear Colleagues

There has been a great deal of activity in relation to the roll out of the Trinity Education Project over the past number of months, spread throughout College. In departmental level working groups, at School Executive meetings, Faculty Executive meetings, Undergraduate Studies Committee, and through the very successful series of Trinity Education Ideas Exchanges workshops facilitated by the TEP Fellows, there have been debates over topics ranging from assessment, to capstone projects and module size. The task for those of us leading the implementation phase has been to draw together all of this debate into a set of recommendations, and shepherd them through the process of becoming policy. In doing that, we’ve tried to keep a couple of key principles in view. We have consistently asked ourselves what a given decision will add to a student’s education, keeping in mind the graduate attributes agreed last year by Council. And we have tried, as much as is possible in a complex organisation, to keep it simple. Simplicity, transparency, and consistency in basic structures will provide the conditions for the flexibility, innovation and greater student choice for which we are aiming.

In order to keep the flow of information circulating, we are initiating a series of staff newsletters, to be updated monthly, to share what is happening around the university, and to provide solid information on recommendations that are being circulated for comment, and on the resulting policies arising from that process. This is the first of these newsletters. As with every aspect of the Project, if you have suggestions or views on the types of information that can usefully be provided, please let us know.

If there is any aspect of this on which you have queries, please don’t hesitate to contact the Trinity Education Project Manager, Fedelma McNamara trinityeducationproject@tcd.ie

Prof. Chris Morash, FTCD
Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer

Trinity Education Project: Ideas Exchanges (February 2017 – May 2017)

In some respects, the most visible part of the Trinity Education Project over the past six months has been the work dealing with structures and systems; the shape of the academic year, programme pathways, progression routes, etc. However, ticking along beneath the surface there has been an equally important piece of work underway, involving colleagues sharing their most innovative assessment practices with one another. Within the last month, there have been a dozen ideas exchanges held around the university. Facilitated by the TEP Fellows and CAPSL, these exchanges have attracted academic staff, students, administrators, and those involved in supporting student learning. The formats of these idea exchanges have varied, including workshops, seminars, discussion groups and fora, and collectively they have enabled the Trinity community to come together to discuss approaches to assessment in Trinity, and to explore how innovative approaches to assessment can make us better teachers. Themes to date have included assessment variety, programme assessment, the capstone, self and peer assessment, technology-enhanced assessment, and assessing graduate attributes, creativity, and reflection.

For further information on upcoming ideas exchanges please see: https://www.tcd.ie/CAPSL/staff/

As the culmination of this process, on 24 April the TEP Fellows will be hosting an ideas exchange ‘long table’, a public conversation about assessment and pedagogy, with a focus on the future of Trinity College Dublin’s undergraduate education. Mimicking some of the circumstances of a dinner party, with food, coffee/tea provided, there will be four sittings, each focused on a set of broad but defined topics. By gathering in this stylised forum, we hope to bring an open, innovative, and democratic energy to the conversation in College around new forms of assessment.
The Trinity Education Project

Newsletter Issue 1 – April 2017

The new academic year structure will be introduced in 2018/19 for all programmes, which means that all Michaelmas modules will be assessed before Christmas. This new structure contains a degree of flexibility, particularly in relation to the 12th week of the new term, which may either be used as an additional examination week, or may be used for revision. The decision here will rest with individual programmes. Guidance will be developed and issued to Schools in relation to how we can all best make use of this new structure.

External Review of entry routes to Two Subject Moderatorships (TSM), and Two-subject Combinations

Council agreed on 8 February that an external review panel should be convened to examine how best to admit students to two-subject combinations (TSM) and other two subject combinations), and to bring forward a series of recommendations before the end of Michaelmas Term, 2017. So far, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies has consulted with the relevant schools to formulate terms of reference for the external review, and these were approved by the University Council on 8 March. The external review will be asked to make recommendations on an optimal admissions mechanism to two-subject combinations that:

- best fits the common architecture and its range of exit pathways;
- enhances the range of two-subject combinations and maximises the potential for the provision of new combinations in the future;

ensures the distribution of students as effectively and equitably as possible across a broad range of subjects, taking due account of the needs of both large and small programmes, and is sufficiently flexible to respond to student demand;

Council is expected to receive a report on this by the end of Michaelmas Term 2017/18.

Academic Year Structure

The decision to take the extra time to explore the best way to admit students has a series of knock-on effects for the roll out of other parts of the new programme architecture. Entry routes are connected to programme pathways, and both are linked to a fixed timetable. To put a complex matter succinctly; we need to be sure that we create a fixed timetable that facilitates all available subject combinations, so until we know what those combinations are, we need to hold off on implementing a fixed timetable. To do so in advance of the external group’s report would be to pre-empt that report.

So: the implementation of TEP will now be phased.

Further information is included here

By phasing the implementation, further detailed work can continue at course/programme level in relation to curriculum review and embedding of graduate attributes, implementation of the assessment framework, the Capstone project/independent piece of work, the development of the Trinity Electives and approved modules. While we realise that postponing the introduction for some subjects for a year will be disappointing, making the proposed changes before 2019/20 would introduce a level of complexity that would not be useful for students and staff alike; and, given the complexity of what we are undertaking, an extra year may well be useful. It should be reiterated, however, that the new Academic Year structure will roll out for all parts of College in 2018/19.
Role of the Trinity Education Project Fellow

Nicholas Johnson, School of Creative Arts

In my work as a Trinity Education Project Fellow this year, the near-daily practice of talking and thinking about learning has felt like an important learning experience of its own. The project has connected me more strongly to colleagues across different disciplines, to the University’s strategy for the twenty-first century, and to my own values in relation to education. Specifically, it has brought me into close contact with the School of Law (for the first time in my decade at Trinity), and has helped me to reconsider assessment approaches and curriculum design in my own school as well. My own thinking about pedagogy has benefited from the leadership of CAPSL and the collegiality of the other TEP fellows. Every colleague I have met for the project has been generous in sharing their practice from their local contexts, and as a result I’ve also learned a lot about the daunting complexities of change management at large institutions. My real mission for the months ahead is to extend what we’ve learned during the year to the whole community, mostly by gathering with colleagues and students face-to-face in workshops and meetings. The TEP Fellows are hosting the democratic forum of "the Long Table" on 24 April to reflect together on issues around assessment, and we are hard at work on a written "toolkit" that gathers our individual two-page resources on TEP-related topics into one place. I am continually impressed by the scale of ambition and energy that I see around me on the project, as people from disparate areas of College work together, organising and debating passionately in order to provide a robust foundation for the future education of our students.

Strand work and policy documents

The Trinity Education Project is currently operating with a governance structure in which a number of individual strands take responsibility for various elements, which in turn report to a Steering Committee chaired by the Provost.

Strand 1: Education Working Group

Progression and Awards (Sub-group of Strand 1: Education Working Group) A number of draft recommendations discussed with colleagues will come forward to the University Council in May 2017. These will deal with progression and awards regulations to enable the embedding of the curriculum principles and the assessment framework in addition to governing the way in which learning outcomes are achieved at module and programme levels and, consequently, the graduate attributes. The common programme architecture cannot be implemented successfully without greater standardisation of Trinity’s assessment, progression and awards regulations. The rationale for this review is to ensure that progression regulations are transparent, clear, equitable, intelligible and meaningful for everyone, and also administratively manageable: the proliferation of management committees in the current system is unsustainable and to a great extent accounts for variations in practices, nomenclature, values, structures, pathways and regulations. It also takes up a lot of everyone’s time, to no great purpose. Simplifying regulations and structures will result in increased autonomy for students and a reduced burden on the staff required to explain how the system works. The regulatory structure informs colleagues’ implementation of the curriculum principles and provides a facilitative framework in which students progress and develop the graduate attributes. Simple, transparent, and consistent: those are the values that we’re working towards. We look forward to sharing the outcomes from this consultation process in advance of the University Council on 10 May 2017.
Strand 2: Internships and Student Mobility

The University Council on 5 April was presented with a number of preliminary recommendations for discussion and feedback which will inform the final Draft Policy document and implementation plan. This arises from the work of Strand 2: Internships and Student Mobility reviewed by the Trinity Education Project Steering Committee January 2017. Work is continuing on this aspect of TEP. Ideas are particularly welcome from those with successful internship programmes on what is required to make them work.

Strand 3: Communications, Differentiation and Positioning

This strand is leading a number of initiatives including:

- Development of the front pages of the 2018 prospectus to give an overview of our educational offering taking into account the broad objectives of the Trinity education project.
- The recent publication of an A5 Flyer to answer student queries that arose from a Student Council meeting earlier in the year; the VP/CAO spoke to the Student Council on 4 April.
- Drafting a communications plan which highlighted the need for a regular Trinity Education Project update (of which the newsletter you are now reading is a part).

Strand 4: Trinity Electives

The University Council approved on 5 April draft recommendations and next steps in relation to Trinity Electives. Trinity electives will be 5-ECTS modules open to all students, developed across a number of areas (including Research Themes, languages, and others). The recommendations looked at areas including management of these modules, learning objectives, and the use of blended learning in delivering them.

Strand 5: Co and Extra Curriculum

The purpose of Strand 5 is to define the structural and operational requirements necessary to allow students to achieve their best through co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. It is currently looking at the flexibility required in the structures, systems, policies, procedures and practices of the academic and administrative divisions to support the achievement of these graduate attributes. A draft interim report has been prepared with input from the Student Life Committee. Approval will be sought from the Trinity Education Project Steering Committee to commence the next phase of work to identify and evaluate systems for recognising/reflecting to ensure graduate attributes and curriculum principles are recognised and developed.