Welcome to the latest Trinity Education Project newsletter. This monthly newsletter provides staff and students with the latest news and events from the Trinity Education Project.

Progression and Awards: Principles approved by the University Council, 10 May 2017

The new curriculum that we are working towards with the Trinity Education Project will combine our traditional strong disciplinary formation with opportunities for breadth. If all we offered were a series of autonomous degrees, each in its own silo, it would matter less if each had its own local rules and regulations. Once we start to allow students to move between programmes, find new pathways, or take approved or trinity elective modules, it becomes necessary to tidy up the plethora of local practices.

With this in mind, after a lengthy period of consultation and discussion a working group brought an initial series of proposals to the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) on 17 January 2017, held conversations with various course committees, School committees, individual colleagues, hosted an open forum held on 15 March 2017, and produced a document that went forward to USC on 18 April 2017, which (after more conversation) was ultimately approved by Council on 10 May 2017.

The result is a set of nine principles that will form the basis of a standardised set of university-wide regulations for progression and awards. While some professional programmes will continue to have externally mandated rules, on the whole these principles will apply throughout the University.

All are designed to be aligned with and support the achievement of the curriculum principles, assessment framework, programme architecture and academic year structure. Equally important, however – not least for students, and for course committees – these principles are designed to be consistent and will reduce substantially the complexity of current regulations. Underlying all of them are four basic foundational values:

- Simplicity
- Transparency
- Consistency
- Fairness

Next step: Workshops will be organised with Schools (including Course offices) over the coming months to support the introduction of these principles at a local level. In the meantime, you may want to read through the nine principles, as approved by Council. They will shape much of the work to be done over the coming year.
Module sizes: Standardisation approved by the University Council, 10 May 2017

Closely related to the work on progression and awards is the issue of module size. Once again, if it were simply the case that all students were enrolled in self-contained programmes, it would not matter if modules were of all manner of irregular sizes and shapes (indeed, there would be no need for modules at all). Modularisation is designed to allow the kind of movement, flexibility and choice within the context of a disciplinary formation that we are trying to achieve with the Trinity Education Project. However, in order for modularisation to work, the pieces have to fit together; otherwise, it’s like trying to build a castle from a bucket of bricks where someone has mixed the Lego with Duplo (a metaphor that may only work for those of you who associate with small children).

At the moment, there are module sizes around the camps that range from 2.5 ECTS credits to 30 ECTS, and the alignment of module size to assessment shows even greater variation. In order to address this, and to enable the implementation of the programme architecture (thereby facilitating flexibility and inclusion of core, optional and elective modules), the assessment framework, the academic year structure and support student mobility, University Council on 10 May 2017 agreed the following principles:

1. Module sizes will be limited to 5 ECTS credits and 10 ECTS credits, with 20 ECTS credits reserved for the capstone only.
2. Modules of 5 ECTS credits are taught and assessed within one semester.
3. Modules of 10 ECTS credits can be taught and assessed over one/two semesters.
4. Students should have a balanced credit load across the two semesters, i.e. 30 credits in Semester 1 and 30 credits in Semester 2.
5. The 20 ECTS credit capstone may be taught and assessed over one or two semesters.
6. Assessment should be commensurate with ECTS credit size and guidelines will be developed as part of the roll out of the assessment framework.

Next step: Meetings will be organised with those Schools that are impacted in relation to the approved recommendations. Again, it might be useful to read through the document approved by Council, as the standardisation of module sizes will constitute part of the work to be done over the coming year.

Trinity Education Project – Toolkit (Resources on TEP-related topics)

Over the past year, the Trinity Education Fellows have been working with Schools and programmes around the campus on aspects of the Trinity Education Project such as capstone projects, graduate attributes and wider issues relating to pedagogy. Their work has involved not only sharing their own experiences, but also listening, and gleaning some of the innovative teaching that is already taking place around the campus. In order to share that learning more widely, they have begun to develop a series of short teaching resource documents. If you are interested in developing your own teaching practice, this might be of interest, and so we are attaching the first one here. In addition, Strand 1 has developed guidelines in relation to approved modules. As we develop more of them, we will bring them together on the TEP website.
Co and Extra Curricular Activities: Interim Report approved by the University Council, 10 May 2017

The Dean of Students presented the University Council with an interim report and sought approval on the objectives outlined therein. The report had previously been discussed by the Student Life Committee, March 2017, Undergraduate Studies Committee 18 April 2017 and approved by the TEP Steering Committee, 26 April 2017. The report reviews, on a high level, the flexibility required in the structures, systems, policies, procedures and practices of the academic and administrative divisions to support the development of the graduate attributes; to think independently, to communicate effectively, to develop continuously and to act responsibly. While not as specific as the principles for progression and awards or module size approved at the same meeting, this document is an important reminder that there is work to be done in acknowledging the remarkable range of activities in which students engage, from journalism to sport, from volunteering to the arts. These, too, are part of Trinity education.

Next steps:
- Identify and evaluate systems for recognising/reflecting to ensure graduate attributes and curriculum principles are recognised and developed by the students.
- Develop a set of concise guidelines for school/course committees as part of the implementation phase for this aspect of the Trinity Education Project.

Events

The Long Table: A New Forum for Assessment and Pedagogy

Nicholas Johnson, School of Creative Arts

Extending from the one-hour ideas exchanges that were held by the Trinity Education Fellows over the course of the Hilary Term, the fellows wished to engage the college community in a substantial public event focused particularly on the issue of assessment. This event took place on 24 April in the Innovation Academy, and was called “The Long Table: An Ideas Exchange on Assessment.”

Supported by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and theorised in the radical feminist practices of Lois Weaver, the idea behind a Long Table is to mimic some of the circumstances of a dinner party — in this case with light snacks and coffee/tea provided — to generate productive and honest conversation around complex issues.
The spatial layout of the long table, together with food and a clear protocol around “etiquette” at the table, allowed the fellows to intervene in institutional space by performing a more domestic environment. We invited participants either to speak at the table, to write on the table mats, or to listen/observe from beyond the table. By gathering in this stylised forum, we hoped to bring an open, innovative, and democratic energy to the conversation in College around new forms of assessment.

The sessions, at 90 minutes each, focused on three main questions: 1) the Trinity Graduate Attributes and assessing for the 21st century (Beyond the University?); 2) creative, reflective, and authentic assessments (Beyond Essays and Examinations?); and 3) capstone projects and integrated assessments (Beyond Dissertations?).

The table was full at every session, and we were thrilled to see the level of engagement from colleagues across faculties in College, across generations, and inclusive of student services as well as senior management. The experience verified that TEP has created genuine opportunities to share best practice among colleagues, and the format is potentially a way for Trinity College to lead not only in the space of undergraduate education, but also in methodologies of collaboration in pedagogy. The experience has generated valuable data that the fellows will reflect on and respond to in later publications.

Colleagues interested in hosting a future long table in their area or in learning the methods of facilitation for this format should email johnson@tcd.ie. A similar forum designed specifically for students will be held in the 2017-18 academic year.

Guidance Counsellors event

On 25 April, guidance counsellors from around the island of Ireland (including Northern Ireland), converged on Trinity to hear about our new curriculum for the first time. With the first intake into the new Science degree already taking shape for 2018-19, there was lively interest in the ways that we have been reimagining our curriculum. As is so often the case with these events, the most engaged conversations took place over coffee between the presentations, and, based on my own unscientific sample, a couple of clear things emerged. The clarity and logic of the new Science programme is very much appreciated. From 2018-19 we will have entry routes that line up in ways that students can understand with the secondary school curriculum. The four new portals – Chemical, Physical, Bio and Geo, to put them simply – map on to Science subjects that Leaving Cert and A-Level students recognise. The overwhelming consensus is that this can only be a good thing.

The other thing to emerge with clarity was the interest in approved modules, and, even more so, Trinity Electives. Trinity’s reputation as a centre of research excellence is a factor for guidance counsellors; the idea that we are finding new ways to link research and teaching through the Trinity Electives is something that are certain will excite the students.

More information available from:
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www.tcd.ie/academic-services/tep