

The University of Dublin
Trinity College
Draft Minutes of the Student Life Committee
18th September, 2013

Present: Dr Amanda Piesse (Dean of Students (Chair)), Ms Leona Coady (Head of Academic Registry), Mr Graham Daniels (Director of Accommodation and Catering), Ms Erika Doyle (Global Officer Co-ordinator), Ms Deirdre Flynn (Director, Student Counselling Service), Ms Cathy Gallagher (Development Manager, Sports & Recreation), Mr Seán Gannon (Director, Careers Advisory Service), Mr Stephen Garry (SU Welfare Officer), Mr Ryan Kenny (GSU President), Ms Jessie Kurtz (Acting Librarian), Mr Tom Lenihan (SU President), Ms Ciara Lynch (Treasurer's Office), Mr Donal McKeating (Chair, CSC), Mr PJ Moloney (Chair, Publications Committee), Ms Sarah Smith (GSU Vice President), Mr Brendan Tangney (Warden, Trinity Hall), Mr Declan Treanor (Director, Disability Service)

Apologies: Ms Aoife Cox (Manager, Day Nursery & Crèche), Mr William Hurley (Vice Chair, DUCAC), Dr Claire Laudet (Senior Tutor), Dr David McGrath (Director, College Health Service), Mr John Murphy (Director, Information Systems Services), Fr Peter Sexton (Convenor, Chaplaincy), Dr Emma Stokes (Registrar of Chambers)

Present: Ms Simone Cameron-Coen (Minutes)

Section A

SLC/13-14/01 Welcome and Terms of Reference of the Committee

The Dean of Students welcomed the committee to its inaugural meeting. She explained that Council and Board had approved the committee's formation, membership and terms of reference as an appropriate and timely replacement for the Student Services Committee. Referring to the terms of reference, she outlined the purpose of the committee, underlining the importance of representation from and discussion among all those groups involved in improving the quality of student life in College. She expressed the hope that the new committee would facilitate good communication, high quality policy development including plans for implementation, and provide a regular source of advocacy to Council and from there to Board.

She thanked everyone for attending given that it was Freshers' week and observed that the meeting would be only one hour long on this occasion due to the pressure of time.

SLC/13-14/02 Year's Work

The Dean introduced the item and explained that the committee's year's work may expand if there are particular items referred to it by USC, GSC, Council, Board, or the Provost.

a. Student Life Strategic Plan

The Dean invited discussion of the headline items in the document that was tabled. These derived in part from the mid-term review of the College Strategic Plan and in part from the HEA mission-based performance compact document.

Mr Gannon recommended including employability in headlines given the current levels of graduate unemployment. The President of the Students' Union concurred and asked that readiness for employment be included in any assessment of service provision to student life in Trinity.

Mr Gannon considered that module learning outcomes might include and highlight the transferrable skills achieved.

The committee accepted the headlines suggested.

Ms Gallagher asked if the work would inform the strategic plan 2014-2019. The Dean of Students confirmed that is the rationale.

b. Orientation Review

The Dean introduced the item noting

- the extension of the orientation process to 3 weeks duration to take account of start dates for postgraduate, TAP and mature students and to keep information sources in place and visible during the first week of teaching term
- the coordination of ID card collection and course orientation meetings
- the redesigned website, and the efforts made to make it more easily accessible and more visible for longer on the College homepage
- the launch of a dedicated orientation Twitter account, @tcdheretohelp
- the extension of the S2S mentor-led tours to include the library and the sports hall,
- the extension of the library HITS programme, so that it remained available after the initial pressures of Freshers' week and well into the first half of the semester
- the extensive GSU orientation programmes and assistance with resolving individual problems for new graduate students
- the SU's contribution especially in managing the Freshers' Facebook page, the accommodation advisory service and assisting the large numbers of students who were having difficulty with the online system
- the Here to Help initiative with highly visible student helpers at key points on campus across the three week orientation period.

The Dean invited comment as she was preparing to carry out a full of review of this year's process

The following comments were made:

- the global room is now open and 12 ambassadors are being recruited. It is open to all students and staff who are interested in internationalisation and can be booked free of charge for global- related events by both staff and students. A drop-in session in the global room was being advertised on Facebook to help international students towards the end of the week
- the student ID number problem that arose early in the process permeated all levels of registration and orientation for the students. College was slow in communicating to the students and did not use the most appropriate media for that cohort.

- the response of the SU and GSU to those problems was to be applauded; they had managed the situation extremely well, using appropriate media.
- information to students had not been clear and the academic registry had insufficient means to deal with the resulting level of incoming queries.
- students were directed to the library to print paperwork for registration. Some students were directed off-campus to print, which did not give a good impression, especially to international students unfamiliar with the language and the city.
- information should be sent out much, much sooner especially to international students.
- general orientation meetings should be shorter, more upbeat and less problem-based, and slides less text-heavy and more image-based.
- mentor meetings should be back to back with course meetings to maximise attendance
- the library closing at 4.45 limited time available for library tours.
- an identified orientation person in every school would facilitate coordination and information flow especially given that much of the work is done over the summer.
- genuine review, redesign and implementation of same would need a full time orientation officer working year round.
- communication and co-ordination was poor and needs great improvement especially during moments of systems transition. It needs to be concise, agile, and timely.
- a student member of the committee commented that getting information from the portal was confusing, and he is not a new student.
- many of the students with a disability feel disconnected from the Freshers' Week process.
- the results of the review would help inform a draft proposal for the recruitment of a First Year Experience Officer.
- the GSU and the SU needed clarity from the academic registry about when the different stages of the registration process happen. This would reassure many students, especially if they knew when to expect to be invited to register.
- students may be experiencing information overload and information should be staggered over a longer period.
- given the challenges faced by those involved in orientation, they pulled together and managed the situation very well.
- the success of the Provost's welcome to the students was noted. Ms Coady suggested that the event be run later in the term to enable late starters to have that experience too.

The Dean felt that many of the issues highlighted by the group have been on-going for some time and that the SLC is ideally placed to report on and address them in a student-centred, coordinated, coherent and timely fashion. She observed that the Library's proposal to introduce the extended HITS sessions, and the extension of the orientation period over three weeks was designed in some small way to begin to ease overload. She asked that any more suggestions or comments that came to light before the end of the month be forwarded to deanstu@tcd.ie for inclusion in the review and recommendation process that would form the main business of the October meeting.

c. Irish National Student Survey /Irish Survey of Student Engagement

The Dean reported to the group on the INSS pilot. The report on the pilot process of the survey has been received by College, but as it is a pilot, certain protocols exist around the information. A formal

account of the pilot will be published in November. She would expect the Student Life Committee to play an important role in facilitating participation in Trinity when the survey is rolled out fully next semester and would hope to start planning that process at the next meeting in October. The survey will change name to ISSE.

Mr Gannon asked if the survey was incentivised. The Dean confirmed that acting on the long experience of the NSSE and more recently of the AUSSE and SASSE, on which the INSS had been based, it had been decided not to offer incentives. This would form part of the report.

d. Residential Accommodation

The Dean informed the committee that the Working Group on Residential Accommodation had met in the previous academic year and was about to begin the mid-to-long-term review which would be both quantitative and qualitative. She sought constructive comments on how to improve the qualitative process.

Mr Garry had met with Mr Tony Dempsey to discuss the pressure on students to find accommodation and on the accommodation advisory service, which had increased significantly in recent years. Mr Daniels noted that the rental market was hardening, making it increasingly difficult for students to find accommodation. Mr Garry said that one-semester students find it particularly difficult to secure accommodation.

The Dean invited comment from the Warden of Trinity Hall. Mr Tangney informed the committee that Trinity Hall was at full capacity with many students being turned away. The orientation weekend had gone well. He suggested that a communications piece needs to be done around the application process, and that more could be done for those students who were not successful in getting a place.

It was observed, and noted, that some members of the committee, while more than happy to contribute positively to discussions on policy, had reporting lines on the corporate rather than the academic side of the house. It was also observed that the impact of systems failures were not always clear since the interdependencies of systems were not always clear, and the opportunity to address this through this new committee was welcomed.

The Dean informed the committee that the WGRA would be meeting soon and a brief set of questions would be circulated to all stakeholders after that, within a week or ten days of the present meeting.

SLC/13-14/03 START

The Dean reported on START. She informed the committee that the student services would be moving from the Chief Operating Officer's area to the Academic Services Division. The Dean will keep the committee informed.

Section B

SLC/13-14/04 Dates for future meetings

The next meeting of the committee will be 16th October and will be a full two hour meeting.

SLC/13-14/05 Any Other Urgent Business

Ms Gallagher informed the committee of the town hall meeting about the proposed development for the Luce Hall area of College. She felt that it is important for the Student Life Committee to advocate for the importance of sport's role in student health, recreation and well-being during the planning process for the development, since the development will involve displacement of some sporting activity.

Section C

There were no items for Section C.