

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on **1st June 2010** at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer (Chair)
Senior Lecturer, Dr Aileen Douglas
Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)
Dr Claire Laudet, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Dr Irene Walsh, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Dr Zuleika Rodgers, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Ms Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Dr Jim Quinn, School of Business
Dr Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Dr Michael Shevlin, School of Education
Professor Yvonne Scannell, School of Law
Dr Kevin O'Kelly, School of Engineering
Dr Jeremy Jones, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Dr Ian Sanders, School of Natural Sciences
Dr Stefan Hutzler, School of Physics
Professor Graeme Watson, School of Chemistry
Dr Vincent Kelly, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Shaun McCann, School of Medicine
Dr Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
Dr Catherine McCabe, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Dr Anne Marie Healy, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Johnnie Gratton, Director of TSM
Professor Pete Coxon, Director of Science (TR071)
Mr Ashley Cooke, Education Officer, Students' Union
Ms Jennifer Fox, Student Representative
Dr Brian Foley, Director of CAPSL

Apologies: Dr Simon Trezise, School of Drama, Film and Music
Dr Paul Delaney, School of English
Professor Ciaran Brady, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Kevin O'Rourke, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Dr Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Mr Trevor Peare, the Dean of Students and Civic Engagement Officer for UGS/09-10/042, Ms Theresa Logan-Phelan and Mr Stephen Elster for UGS/09-10/043 and Dr Helen Kelly for UGS/09-10/048.

UGS/09-10/040 Minutes of the meeting of the 23rd March 2010 were approved.

UGS/09-10/041 **Matters arising**

(i) *UGS/09-10/035* The Senior Lecturer notified the meeting that the recommendations in relation to Open Day had been approved by Council, however, the date of the event in 2010 had been revised to 1st December due to the traditional closure of secondary schools on the 8th December.

(ii) *UGS/09-10/036* The Senior Lecturer also noted that Council had approved the discontinuation of the Science TR071 Sophister option, *Physics and Computer Simulations*.

UGS/09-10/042 **Recognising Learning in Extra-curricular, Voluntary Activity:** A document, *Proposals for Awards Recognising Learning in Extra-curricular, Voluntary Activity*, dated 25th May 2010 from the Dean of Students, was circulated. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Dean of Students and the Civic Engagement Officer to the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC).

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The Dean of Students, speaking to the item, noted that this was his third occasion to address the Committee in relation to this proposal (Acta UGS/09-10/026 and UGS/09-

10/004) and advised that the proposal had been revised in accordance with concerns raised during his last visit. He identified these concerns as:

- The blurring of the distinction between the academic and non-academic spheres of College life. He stressed that recognition through this process does not confer any academic credit and the proposal is now explicit in this regard.
- The perception that the process would be competitive. He commented that it was never intended that the process would be competitive and explained that the assessment of applications would focus on the fulfilment of the minimum 20 hours requirement and the presence of the reflective element. Further, he stated that the category of 'outstanding contributor' had been removed from the revised proposal to ensure that the process is non-competitive.
- The lack of a procedure for peer nomination. He noted that this has been facilitated in the new proposal but advised that the student would have to consent to his/her inclusion in the scheme and provide required information as to the fulfilment of the minimum 20 hours and the reflective element.
- The absence of consideration of the affect on others, in the reflective element. He noted that this is now provided for within the application form.

The Dean of Students confirmed that, in addition to peer nomination, members of staff would also be allowed to nominate students and he would revise the proposal accordingly. He advised that the scheme covers voluntary activities both on and off campus and that 'voluntary activity' should be considered in the broadest sense of the word.

In response to a question regarding the expected number of applications, the Dean of Students commented that it would be hard to quantify at this stage but it is possible there would be over 100 per year. In response to a query about the Provost's Roll being reserved for special achievements, he noted that he had considered re-naming the initiative. However, the presence of the word 'Dean' in the title would have academic and competitive connotations for students from the United States; two aspects that the revised proposal specifically rules out.

A number of members confirmed that their concerns had been addressed in the revised proposal and the meeting recommended the proposal to Council, subject to the inclusion of a mechanism to allow academic staff to nominate students and the Provost's final approval as to the name of the initiative.

UGS/09-10/043 Learning Technologies, Moodle: A report, *Moodle*, from the Acting Manager of the Centre for Learning Technology (CLT), dated 11th May 2010, was circulated. Ms Theresa Logan-Phelan, the Acting Manager of the Centre for Learning Technology, and Mr Stephen Elster, from Information Systems Services (ISS) were welcomed to the meeting by the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer.

The Acting Manager of CLT introduced the report by providing information about a pilot programme carried out, from October 2009 to date, to test how the tools within Moodle support teaching and learning. A total of 12 modules, taught by 10 lecturers, were made available to 850 students through Moodle. Of these students 141 participated in the survey. Results from the surveys of the lecturers and the students were positive.

She outlined the benefits of using Moodle for College's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), chief among which is the fact that it is an open source product. Thus, College is free to adapt the software meaning that it is cheaper than other options. She confirmed that it can operate on the College network and interact with College applications, including the Student Information System.

An extension of the pilot is planned to commence in October 2010 and will encompass other applications used in College. A newer version of Moodle will be available at that stage which will be able to interact with campus; an application which can be downloaded to mobile phones to allow access to certain information available through the College network. She advised that a tender process would have to be followed in order to upgrade College's VLE.

Mr Elster provided an update in relation to the Digital Communications Strategy Steering Group noting that the group has been established and its terms of reference have been approved. In relation to campusM, he noted that a policy has been approved with the College Secretary. He also reported that there are talks underway with Vodafone in

relation to subsidised rates for students and advised that there had been a briefing day given recently by Apple on campus in relation to podcasting and 'iTunes U'.

During the discussion of these developments the following comments were made:

- the presentations given by representatives of Apple were extremely informative;
- switching to Moodle would be a positive step;
- support and training will be vitally important if Moodle is based on a server off-campus;
- the current VLE, WebCT is not very user friendly and it would be preferable if the new VLE required little, or no, training;
- not all lecturers would be comfortable with their lectures being played on mobile devices in public; and
- whilst students can access more teaching on-line it does not help increase face-to-face time with students.

Responding to a number of queries, the Acting Manager of CLT confirmed that lecturers would be able to give timely feedback and marks to students through Moodle for assignments and that full confidentiality is facilitated; a final decision has not been made regarding the location and support of Moodle; and Moodle does facilitate the creation of student portfolios.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted the meeting's general support for the developments in the VLE and campusM.

UGS/09-10/045 XX Working Group on Grade Point Average: A memorandum, *Recommendations from the Working Group on Grade Point Average*, from the Senior Lecturer, dated 24th May 2010, was circulated.

The Senior Lecturer noted that the University Council had asked the USC to consider the introduction of Grade Point Averages (GPA) as a method to counteract grade inflation (CL/09-10/051). In this regard, a working group was established to consider this issue and met on two occasions in Hilary term 2010. She outlined the recommendations from the Working Group:

- (i) The Working Group does not recommend the introduction of a GPA system in College.
- (ii) USC should discuss the nature of achievement deserving a Gold Medal and Schools should articulate what constitutes a gold medal performance for each degree award.
- (iii) Schools should review their current award criteria for gold medals bearing in mind that the marking scale approved in College is up to 100%.
- (iv) Percentage marks should be generated and ranking calculated with the information stored officially.
- (v) USC should consider how recommendation (iv) should be implemented.
- (vi) Percentage results should be included on student transcripts.
- (vii) That the generation and storage of information regarding student rank position be addressed in the development of the new Student Information System.

Responding to a query the Senior Lecturer confirmed that it was not intended that ranking information be provided as standard on transcripts, rather, it would be held and provided only if needed. To differentiate results in each grade, especially in the 2:1 and First Class degree results, she clarified that the overall percentage should be provided on the transcript.

It was commented that the new Student Information System should run off transcripts easily and automatically. The Senior Lecturer advised that in order for this to happen, College would have to be clear in terms of the information it requires on the transcript and, therefore, what information will need to be fed into the system. For example, a decision will have to be made as to whether percentage marks for modules appear or if the overall degree percentage only is provided next to the grade. The Academic Secretary confirmed that these issues would have to be considered further by USC as part of the development of specifications for the new system.

The meeting approved the findings of the Working Group on GPA and recommended these to Council. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that issues surrounding the awarding of Gold Medals should be discussed further at USC during Michealmas term 2010.

UGS/09-10/046 XX **Weighting of Leaving Certificate Mathematics:** A document, *Briefing Note for Undergraduate Studies Committee Regarding the Weighting of Leaving Certificate Mathematics for Admission to Undergraduate Courses in Trinity*, from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, dated 31st May 2010, was circulated.

Speaking to the document, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that the USC had a preliminary discussion on this issue (Actum UGS/09-10/038). Since this discussion, a letter, dated 23rd April 2010, had been received from the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills on this matter and, following this, a group was convened to provide a briefing note to assist the USC to make recommendations to Council.

He advised that it is within the power of the University Council to set the admissions requirements for programmes in Trinity College and this includes setting points for specific subjects such as Mathematics. He noted that the number of students taking Higher Leaving Certificate (HLC) Mathematics is in decline. Anecdotally, there is evidence to suggest that there is a heavier workload associated with HLC Mathematics, including, a greater number of timetabled teaching hours and a greater volume of homework. In order to optimise their points, students are likely to pick their subjects and subject levels strategically.

He noted that there is no common position among the universities in Ireland on this issue. If a heavier weighting is approved by Council it could not apply until 2012, at the earliest, given that the Leaving Certificate cycle is of two year's duration.

In the discussion of this matter the following comments were made:

- If a heavier weighting is introduced for HLC Mathematics, points in excess of 600 could be achieved. Responding, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer commented that ceilings could be introduced in certain circumstances.
- Any decisions on a higher weighting for the subject would have to be taken in conjunction with developments occurring through 'Project Maths', a likely outcome of which will be the significant reduction of the HLC Mathematics syllabus. If the workload is reduced then a higher weighting should not be applied.
- Any new syllabus will affect the way incoming cohorts are treated with regard to Mathematics and related topics.
- The argument is less about the extra work involved than about the 'points race' and the perceived difficulty of Mathematics. The same problem exists with Physics and Chemistry.
- If the goal is to make Mathematics more popular then Trinity cannot make policy on its own; it will need to agree an approach with the university sector.
- A student's decision to drop HLC Mathematics is likely to be associated with the fear of failing, therefore, attention should be given to the C, D and E grades.
- University offers should drive subject choice. For example in the UK, subject choices must be relevant to the intended course of study otherwise the student will not get an offer. Irish universities should be more courageous and specify required subject combinations to gain access to particular programmes.
- If the other universities provide a higher weighting the question, as to whether Trinity introduces higher weightings, is no longer relevant. Considerations would then have to focus on the level of that weighting.
- It was commented that it should not apply to programmes in the Arts and Humanities area. This was countered with the point that if a student is doing HLC Mathematics the workload is the same and course choice does not alter this fact.

The Senior Lecturer commented that the approval of a higher weighting for HLC Mathematics will have to be dependent on the suitability of the revised Mathematics curriculum for matriculation purposes, especially if the reduction in the syllabus affects the ability of students to participate in specific courses offered in Trinity.

The meeting agreed that the general matter of matriculation/admission requirements would be discussed at the next meeting of the USC in the new academic year.

The USC agreed to recommend to the University Council that:

- (a) HLC mathematics should carry a weighting of 40% to recognise the extra work effort required by students taking this subject;
- (b) it is preferable that a university sector-wide position is agreed, however, Trinity College should not exceed a 50% weighting for HLC mathematics;

- (c) a review of student workload and the relevance of the curriculum for university matriculation requirements should be carried out after three years following the full roll-out of 'Project Maths' in second-level schools.

UGS/09-10/047 Academic Appeals Discussion Document: A document, *Discussion Document on Academic Appeals and Student Progression*, from the Senior Lecturer, dated 28th May 2010, was circulated.

The Senior Lecturer introduced the item noting that USC had previously asked that matters relating to academic appeals be reviewed and discussed at a later meeting (Acta UGS/09-10/003 and UGS/09-10/009). She noted that the appeals process was very complex with a large number of staff and students involved in the process each year. She highlighted considerations around the areas of:

- (i) the definition of *ad misericordiam* grounds
- (ii) Mitigating Circumstances Committees
- (iii) documentation required for the court of first appeals
- (iv) outcomes of the appeal process, including:
 - a. the 'off-books, exam only' status
 - b. special examinations
- (v) Re-check/re-mark of examination scripts.

She requested that members of the Committee discuss the issues highlighted in the document, at a local level, to allow for a more comprehensive discussion at a later meeting of USC.

UGS/09-10/048 USC/GSC Task Force on International Student Recruitment: A draft report, *USC/GSC Task Force on International Student Recruitment*, dated May 2010, was circulated. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed Dr Helen Kelly to the meeting to speak to the item.

Dr Kelly advised that the Task Force had been set-up to consider what the barriers to international student recruitment are in College and, further, to consider ways in which these can be removed. Improving international student numbers would increase non-exchequer funding and increase diversity on campus.

She outlined the main findings and recommendations of the draft report. Of particular relevance to the Committee was the recommendation that language provision sessions, piloted by the Centre for Language and Communication Studies, should continue. It was clarified that these sessions are offered in a pre-semester block and on a weekly basis during the academic year. It was commented that there are language barrier problems in Dental Science and the provision of language support in the first year of the programme would be very beneficial.

Responding to a query on why recruiting international students is so difficult, Dr Kelly advised that there are issues which are internal to Trinity College and there are also national issues, such as, the cost of living in Ireland, the visa application process and the lack of international familial connections that exist, for example, between the UK and India.

It was commented by one member that career guidance counsellors from the United States (US) have advised that the provision of care, such as, accommodation, meals and pastoral care, offered by universities in the US is not replicated in Ireland and this is an issue of great importance to the many parents. The lack of marketable structured PhD programmes on offer in Ireland was also highlighted as an issue, as was the lack of Scholarships.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted the possibility of '2+2' degree programmes, where students would spend the first two years studying in a partner institution in their home country and spend their final two years studying in Trinity College. He suggested that Schools consider if this would be possible. It was suggested that Trinity College should look at the recruitment practices in the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland (RCSI) as they are very successful in attracting international students.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Dr Kelly for attending to present the draft report and advised the meeting that the issues raised would be considered before the final report is presented to Council.

UGS/09-10/049 XX University Calendar: A memorandum, *Calendar Changes: General Regulations*, dated 27th May 2010, from the Senior Lecturer, was circulated with the amended General Regulations section of the Calendar.

The Senior Lecturer drew the attention of the Committee to the changes made in the General Regulations section of Calendar. In particular, she highlighted:

- (i) A footnote to § 48, the 'Re-check/re-mark of examinations scripts' regulations, which directs readers to the detailed procedure to be followed in requests of this nature.
- (ii) The insertion of a regulation, §61, concerning the professional re-orientation of students, on certain professional courses which have clinical or practice components, where such students have been permitted to go off the College books for a number of years.

It was commented that the 'Re-check/re-mark' procedure is of no help to those students who, for particular reasons, do not perform to their full ability in examinations. It was also commented that the procedure does not cover situations where students are required to do group work. The Senior Lecturer commented that the procedure only fleshes out the existing regulation and if members think that different grounds or situations should be included in the regulations then they should submit a proposal.

In relation to the administrative procedural change proposed for students who are off-books and taking examinations, the point was made by a member that there was confusion surrounding how students are notified of the work they are required to do while they are off the books.

The meeting approved the proposed changes to the General Regulations.

UGS/09-10/050 Academic Year Structure: A memorandum, *Academic Year Structure*, dated 27th May 2010, from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, was circulated along with a draft Council minute from the 19th May 2010, with an appended year structure for 2010/11.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer speaking to this item noted that Council, at its meeting of 21st April 2010, requested that the USC consider ways of releasing the mounting workload pressure in the second teaching semester (Actum CL/09-10/148). Following this, members of USC were consulted by e-mail on a number of possible configurations of the second teaching semester. The responses received were varied and, due to timetabling and other commitments already entered into, none of these could be implemented for 2010/11. An alternative option, specific to the academic year 2010/11, emerged from the consultation process, namely, the insertion of a third revision week before the Annual Examinations. He advised that Council has requested the USC to review the academic year structure and make recommendations for the implementation in the academic year 2011/12.

The following comments were made:

- If a gap week is introduced in the second teaching semester, the academic year may as well revert to a three teaching term structure. However, the gap week was favoured by others.
- There should be a discussion about end of semester examinations.
- Problems in the Science programmes were highlighted. These are interconnected courses and they work on a system of dividing the year into quarters. The Science Management Committee has requested that study week should fall on week six of each semester rather than week seven.
- Clarification is required as to what can, and cannot, be held during study week.
- The number of students presenting medical certificates in the Pharmacy programme, ahead of the Annual Examinations, increased acutely this year and there is anecdotal evidence that this was not confined to Pharmacy.
- The bunching of assessment deadlines together presents a problem for students. This needs to be considered at course level and, where possible, deadlines should be staggered.
- If substantial differences are to be made to the academic year structure, college needs to start considering the issues as early as possible.
- Consideration should be given to the results achieved by students this year. Next year will be less daunting for the majority of students having gone through the cycle once already.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer asked the Committee to discuss these issues locally to enable a full discussion at a later meeting.

UGS/09-10/051 XX **Course Proposal:** A memorandum, *Certificate in Holocaust Education*, dated 31st May 2010, from the Senior Lecturer, was circulated with the document, *Proposal for the Validation by Trinity College Dublin of a Certificate in Holocaust Education*, from the Aspirant School of Religion, Theology and Ecumenics, in association with the Holocaust Education Trust Ireland.

The Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) from the Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics spoke to the proposal explaining that it relates to the validation of a course which is already offered by the Holocaust Education Trust Ireland (HETI). It is the only course of its kind in Ireland and was initially developed to assist educators who found that introducing the Holocaust into a learning environment posed particular challenges. As such, it is expected that while the majority of applicants will be secondary school teachers, there are likely to be applications from primary school teachers and those working in areas requiring racism sensitivity.

The course comprises four modules of five credits each, three of which will be delivered in the different locations of Dublin, Krakow and Jerusalem. The fourth module consists of an elective project. She commented that this course fits in with the strategic priorities of the School and, through the Herzog Centre, it is able to offer unique resources to support the programme. HETI will take responsibility for all the administrative arrangements apart from specific Trinity record keeping requirements and the organisation of awards ceremonies, which will be undertaken by the Office of the Vice-Provost.

Responding to a comment concerning the seemingly narrow focus of the course she clarified that topics such as genocide and anti-Semitism within the broader context of racism will be covered and she also noted that the course will not just focus on the Jewish experience of the Holocaust. She confirmed that the learning outcomes for the fourth module would be developed before circulation to Council, if USC lends its support to the proposal. If approved by Council, College would seek placement of this Certificate at Level 7 of the National Framework of Qualifications

The USC supported the proposal and recommended it to Council.

UGS/09-10/052 **Any other business:** There was no other business.

UGS/09-10/053 **Minutes:** The meeting noted and approved the Trinity Access Programmes Steering Committee minutes of 24th March 2010.

UGS/09-10/054 **Items for noting:** The USC noted the following documents circulated for information:

- (i) Memorandum, *TCD School Websites - Information Architecture*, dated 19th May 2010, from Ms M. Horan.
- (ii) Memorandum, *Retention-five cohort analysis (new entrants) from 2001/02-2005/06*, with attached data, dated 8th April 2010, from Ms H. Condon to the Quality Committee.
- (iii) Memorandum, *Proposal to Establish a Joint Foundation Studies Programme with University College Dublin – Update*, dated 25 May 2010, from the Director of International Affairs.
- (iv) Memorandum, *Academic Liaison Officers*, dated 25th May 2010 from the Senior Lecturer.
- (v) Memorandum, *TSM and Gold Medal Criteria, Category 5*, dated 10th May 2010, from TSM Administrator.
- (vi) Memorandum, *Study abroad: table for the conversion of marks returned by US universities*, dated 26th May 2010, from the Senior Lecturer.
- (vii) Memorandum, *Learning Outcomes, Course Handbooks and Transcripts*, dated 27th May 2010 from Ms A. Anderson.
- (viii) *Format and Composition of Courts of First Appeal 2009/10*, updated May 2010.

signature

date