

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 12th October 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 Philip Coleman, School of English,
Dr Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities
Dr Rachel Hoare, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Dr Zuleika Rodgers, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Dr Eleanor Denny, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Ms Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Dr Jim Quinn, School of Business
Dr Michael Gormley, School of Psychology
Dr Conor McGuckin, School of Education
Professor Ivana Bacik, School of Law
Dr Andrew Butterfield, 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 Clair Gardiner, 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
Dr Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS
Professor Pete Coxon, Director of Science (TR071)
Dr Brian Foley, Director of CAPSL
Ms Jennifer Fox, Education Officer, Students' Union
Ms Rachel Barry, Student Representative

Apologies: Dr Simon Trezise, School of Drama, Film and Music
Dr Irene Walsh, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Dr Dermot O'Dwyer, School of Engineering
Professor Graeme Watson, School of Chemistry
Mr Trevor Peare, Library Representative

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed both the new and continuing members of the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) to the first meeting of the 2010/11 academic year. He advised that members are free to circulate USC minutes widely within their Schools.

UGS/10-11/001 Minutes of the meeting of the 1st June 2010 were approved.

UGS/10-11/002 Matters arising

- (i) *UGS/09-10/043* The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that three companies had submitted tenders to supply Trinity College with a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), one of which is a supplier of Moodle. These submissions are currently being assessed.
- (ii) *UGS/09-10/046* The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that Council, at its meeting of 16th June 2010 (Actum CL/09-10/201), approved that Higher Level Mathematics for the Leaving Certificate could carry an additional points weighting

of up to 50%, subject to there being agreement at a sectoral level. Since that meeting, the IUA Registrars' Group has approved a proposal from the IUA Admissions Officers, that each passing grade (D3-A1) should attract an additional 25 points, irrespective of an applicant's programme of choice. This scheme is due for implementation in 2012.

- (iii) *UGS/09-10/047* Responding to a comment, the Senior Lecturer advised that it is standard practice for the outcomes of Courts of First Appeal to be e-mailed to tutors, following consideration of these decisions by the Senior Lecturer. She also noted that the topic of appeals would appear as a future agenda item and she invited members to consider the discussion document, dated 28th May 2010, at a local level to allow for a full discussion at USC.
- (iv) *UGS/09-10/050* The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer advised that the review of the Academic Year Structure would take place during the 2010/11 academic year.
- (v) *UGS/09-10/051* The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that the proposal for the validation of the Certificate in Holocaust Education was approved by Council, at its meeting of 16th June 2010.

UGS/10-11/003 Draft Work Programme 2010/11: The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer presented the proposed USC Work Programme 2010/11 to the meeting and spoke to the items listed:

- Maintain and further promote the distinctiveness of Trinity College's undergraduate curriculum
- Foundation programme for undergraduate students (Strategic Plan Action 2.8)
- Student Information System project: GeneSIS
- Lifelong learning policy (Strategic Plan Action 2.15)
- Research-informed undergraduate curriculum
- Undergraduate student mobility (semester abroad/year abroad)
- Abridged/advanced entry
- Consideration of undergraduate admissions -CAO
- External examiner guidelines
- Review of the academic year structure
- Gold Medals -review of award criteria
- Examinations and appeals
- Feedback from survey of USC members 2009/10
- Foundation Scholarship: recommendations from the Central Scholarship Committee
- Project Maths: Expert Group
- Standard business (SL's Annual Report, Course Proposals, Calendar Changes etc.)

The following additional items were suggested by Committee members:

- end of semester examinations should be considered as part of the review of the academic year structure, as should the timeline between the Courts of First Appeal and Academic Appeals;
- regulations concerning students repeating an academic year;
- supports required for students from under-represented groups, such as those coming through the Trinity Access Programmes (TAP).

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer suggested that the discussion in relation to student supports for non-traditional students would be more appropriate for the TAP Steering Committee to consider. He confirmed that the draft programme, as presented, would be circulated to USC members and invited the members to start discussing these items locally.

UGS/10-11/004 Maintaining the Distinctiveness of Trinity College's Undergraduate Curriculum: The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, commenting on the worsening state of the Irish economy, noted the pressure this was exerting on the education sector. He queried if Trinity College truly has a distinctive curriculum and if it offers a unique experience to students. He further queried what, could it be said, feeds into this sense of a distinctive education and asked the Committee to consider if this could be safeguarded and even further promoted. He provided the following examples:

- good levels of face-to-face contact with Trinity lecturers- this is especially true in the Senior Sophister year where students are required to complete a substantial piece of independent work;

- institutional policy requiring senior academic staff to teach Freshmen students;
- research led/informed teaching.

The following distinctive aspects of undergraduate education in Trinity College were identified by the Committee:

- interesting interdisciplinary direct entry courses;
- a sense of belonging, which stems from the identification with particular disciplinary homes, especially in the Sophister years and/or through small group teaching;
- historic buildings;
- tutorial system and numerous societies which enhance the 'Trinity Experience';
- diversity in course offerings;
- Broad Curriculum- modules in the humanities have now been developed for the degree in Medicine;
- a very fine library;
- Foundation Scholarship;
- common entry programmes for Science and Engineering which allow specialisation for the final two years;
- high standards and quality of teaching - students remain challenged throughout their learning;
- well staffed course offices which provide a direct point of contact for students.

In discussing this item, members of the committee also highlighted concerns in relation to further increases in student numbers; the introduction of modularisation in an extreme form; senior staff members 'buying-out' their undergraduate teaching to concentrate on research and teaching postgraduate students; a seeming reduction in contact hours on some courses; and the effectiveness of some tutors. It was also commented that students expect a greater use of technology.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Committee members for their input and advised that the discussion would continue at a future meeting of USC.

UGS/10-11/005 **GeneSIS:** A presentation, *GeneSIS Project: Undergraduate Studies Committee Briefing*, from the Academic Secretary, dated 12th October 2010, was circulated. Speaking to the item, the Academic Secretary explained that she is the sponsor for the GeneSIS project, the aim of which is to 'implement improved student related processes supported by the procurement and implementation of a new modern student system.' The project is being overseen by the GeneSIS Project Board, which is chaired by Professor Terence Brown.

As part of the project, all current administrative processes from admissions to graduation have been documented, mapped and reviewed. This exercise has exposed a multiplicity of systems working around student administration (approximately 150), a high level of duplication of processes across areas of College and repetition of data entry. In addition, the review has also highlighted a fear of technology within certain areas of College.

It is intended that College will purchase one student system that will provide a software solution to cover nine key areas:

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| 1. Course management | 6. Graduation |
| 2. Recruitment and admissions | 7. Alumni Management |
| 3. Registration | 8. Student Financials |
| 4. Assessment | 9. System integration |
| 5. Progression | |

Procuring one system will enable better reporting and management information, provided that the required level and type of information is correctly input into the new system.

She reported that the project is progressing well within set deadlines. Competitive dialogue has been entered into with three potential vendors, with each indicating what they can and cannot deliver. Site visits, to view student systems in other third-level institutions, have taken place and a further number are scheduled to take place shortly.

College should be in a position to select the successful vendor by the end of December 2010, with contracts due to be finalised by the beginning of March 2011.

She advised that the system will be 'off-the-shelf', meaning that a certain level of customisation is likely to be required to ensure it is suitable for use in Trinity College. Whilst a high level of customisation is possible, she cautioned that this will add significantly to project costs. Thus, system changes, to suit particular regulations and practices, must have strong justification. Decisions must be made through academic committees and by senior administration as to when customisation is justified and, where it is not, the level of change required to existing practices and regulations.

Responding to a number of queries, the Academic Secretary confirmed that the new student system will interface with whichever VLE is chosen and, whilst the system will be bought as a package, it should be flexible enough to allow rule changes which would be facilitated through the vendor's maintenance contract and certain 'super-users' within College. She advised that the new system should help staff in a number of areas from the publication of the University Calendar to the issuing of transcripts, the latter of which could be provided on a self-service basis to students and graduates.

During the discussion of this item the follow comments were made by Committee members:

- it would be useful if the timetabling system could allow easier re-scheduling of postponed lectures;
- interested academic and administrative staff should work together to discuss what is needed in the new system;
- the system should not cause more work for academic staff members- for example, it would be important that examination results could be entered via class lists rather than to individual student records;
- it is important that access to examination results is facilitated for College Tutors;
- it would be helpful if the system could facilitate tracking of prizes and bursaries awarded to specific students.

The Academic Secretary advised that a further round of vendor presentations are scheduled for 28th October - 9th November 2010 and that USC members are invited to attend.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Academic Secretary for her comprehensive presentation.

UGS/10-11/006 Foundation Programme for International Students: A memorandum, *Foundation Studies Programme for International Students - Update*, from the Director of International Student Affairs, dated 7th October 2010, was circulated.

Speaking to the document, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer advised that Study Group International has been selected to supply the foundation studies programme and that the contract is now in negotiation. The programme will be of one academic year's duration and will contain two streams, one in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and the other in Science and Engineering. Academic staff members from TCD and UCD are now required to work with Study Group International to develop suitable curricula for both strands.

Responding to queries, he advised that Schools and course committees will determine the entry requirements and quotas for students coming through this route and should think about these in advance. Such students will apply directly to College and not through the Central Applications Office (CAO). He assured members that English language proficiency is a significant concern and, therefore, applicants must successfully pass a language proficiency module before being admitted to an undergraduate programme in Trinity. He also clarified that students admitted to this programme will be neither registered to TCD nor UCD; it is being delivered independently by Study Group International.

UGS/10-11/007 External Examiner Guidelines: A revised document, *Role of External Examiners for Undergraduate Courses*, dated October 2010 from the Senior Lecturer, was circulated.

The Senior Lecturer noted that the amendments to the guidelines had been discussed at a previous meeting of USC (UGS/09-10/024).

She explained that, following their consideration of an appeal, the Visitors of the College recommended that external examiners should initial assessment work they have reviewed to clearly indicate which pieces of work have been seen. She confirmed that Schools/Disciplines should provide external examiners with the revised guidelines.

The meeting approved the revised guidelines.

UGS/10-11/008 Any other business

- (i) Module evaluations: It was confirmed that it is Council policy that evaluation should occur at the module level (Acta CL/08-09/136 and CL/09-10/167). It was advised that Schools are permitted to provide their own evaluations where the online version does not suit particular requirements and can also work with staff in the Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning (CAPSL) to customise evaluations for specific modules.
- (ii) A draft document, *Regulations in respect of Degree Post Obitum Tempestivum*, from the Registrar to Council, dated 11th October 2010, was circulated. The proposal was positively received, though, it was commented that the wording should be revised to include reference to five-year undergraduate degree programmes.
- (iii) A memorandum, *Foundation Scholarship*, from the Senior Lecturer, dated 7th October, with an attached revised application form, was circulated as an item for noting. Various concerns were raised in relation to the requirement that students must have the form signed by a member of academic staff. The Senior Lecturer commented that the high level of absenteeism at Scholarship examinations must be addressed, not only because of the resource implications, but also due to the timetable constraints it imposes on all Scholarship candidates. She added that the application form would be reviewed but that measures would have to be taken to address this issue.

UGS/01-11/009 Items for noting: The USC noted the following documents circulated for information:

- XX**
- (i) Memoranda from the Head of Botany, the Head of School of Natural Sciences and the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science, dated 1st and 14th June 2010, concerning the title revision of the Moderatorship in Botany (TR071) to the Moderatorship in Plant Sciences, with effect from the academic year 2011/12.

signature

date