

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 13th September 2011 at 2.15pm in the Conference Room, O'Reilly Institute.

- Present: Senior Lecturer, Dr Patrick Geoghegan (*Chair*)
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 Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Dr Jim Quinn, School of Business
Dr Michael Gormley, School of Psychology
Dr Michael Shevlin, School of Education
Dr Dermot O'Dwyer, School of Engineering
Dr Andrew Butterfield, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Dr David Chew, School of Natural Sciences
Dr Stefan Hutzler, School of Physics
Dr Clair Gardiner, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Martina Hennessy, 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 Moray McGowan, Director of TSM
Professor Graeme Watson, Director of Science (TR071)
Ms Rachel Barry, Education Officer, Students' Union
Mr Daniel Ferrick, Student Representative
- Apologies: Dr Evangelia Rigaki, School of Drama, Film and Music
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 Oran Doyle, School of Law
Dr Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS
Dr Wolfgang Schmitt, School of Chemistry
- In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Mr Trevor Peare (Library Representative), Mr Colm Stephens (for UGS/11-12/007) and Mr Sean Gannon (for UGS/11-12/008)
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The Senior Lecturer welcomed all members of the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC), new and continuing, to the first meeting of the academic year. He reminded the meeting that USC is an academic committee of Council and, therefore, substitution of members is not permitted.

UGS/11-12/001 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 24th May 2011 were approved.

UGS/11-12/002 Matters arising

- (i) UGS/10-11/049: The Senior Lecturer noted that the proposals for five-year integrated courses in Engineering and Engineering with Management were approved by Council.
- (ii) UGS/10-11/050: The Senior Lecturer advised that the assignment coversheets are being finalised.

- (iii) UGS/10-11/052: The Senior Lecturer reported that he has discussed the matter of split examinations with the Director of the Disability Service, Students' Union Officers and the Dean of Students and a solution is being developed which hopefully would avoid the splitting of examinations for students with a disability.

UGS/11-12/003 Undergraduate Studies Committee Membership

A memorandum, 'Revised Undergraduate Studies Committee Membership', dated 9th September 2011, was circulated.

The Senior Lecturer explained that the duties of the Academic Director of the Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning (CAPSL) have been reassigned to the Senior Lecturer and the Dean of Graduate Studies, as appropriate, to ensure greater integration of teaching and learning developments. The removal of the Academic Director of CAPSL from the committee membership reflects this change in responsibilities.

Commenting on the proposed inclusion of the Dean of Students as an *ex officio* member of the Committee, he noted that the 'student experience' is not limited to lectures, tutorials and laboratory work and that learning occurs outside the classroom. Therefore, given the remit of the role, the inclusion of this Annual Officer would be useful to the future work of the Committee.

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The meeting noted the following revised composition of the USC and recommended it to Council:

Senior Lecturer, *Chair*
 Academic Secretary
 Schools' Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)
 Course Directors of TSM, BESS, and Science (TR071)
 Dean of Students
 Students' Union Education Officer
 A student representative
 Library Representative (*in attendance*)
 Administrative Officer, Vice-Provost's Office, *Secretary (in attendance)*

UGS/11-12/004 Draft Work Programme for 2011/12

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'Draft Undergraduate Studies Committee Work Programme 2011/2012', dated 13th September 2011, was tabled.

Speaking to the draft work programme, the Senior Lecturer outlined the items of intended business for the year ahead. Noting that the list may alter due to changing priorities he invited members to propose items for inclusion.

The Students' Union Education Officer speaking to the item on the academic year structure advised that this matter remains a significant issue for the student body. She notified the meeting that the Students' Union had produced a report which will be circulated to USC members in the coming weeks to allow for full consideration of the issues raised within it.

The Senior Lecturer commented that the report raises many important discussion points related to how students are taught, how they learn and how they are assessed. He commented that it would be useful to gather information on different assessment practices across College for discussion at USC and he remarked that it would be useful for Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) to be familiar with this information for the discussion.

No additional items were proposed and the USC noted the draft work programme.

UGS/11-12/005 Circulation of Documents: use of electronic tablets

The Senior Lecturer informed the meeting that the Provost is considering the practicality and financial feasibility of the use of electronic tablets at Board and Council meetings and, given the importance and usefulness of USC, may extend the scheme to cover this Committee, if members consider these useful. He commented that, if this proposal is implemented, the tablets would attach to the post of Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) and not to individuals. He also noted that the lack of standard access to the Trinity network for wireless devices would need to be addressed by College.

There were varying levels of support indicated by members. The Students' Union Education Officer cautioned that it would be useful to conduct an analysis of costs and benefits to back-up the purchase of electronic tablets especially in the current environment.

The Senior Lecturer advised that he would relay the varying comments to the Provost and Bursar.

UGS/11-12/006 Entry to Higher Education

The discussion paper, 'Entry to Higher Education in Ireland in the 21st Century', prepared by Áine Hyland, was circulated.

Introducing the item the Senior Lecturer noted this was a discussion document ahead of the 'Transition or Transaction' conference, scheduled for 21st September, organised by the Higher Education Authority and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. He advised that College has contributed to the document being prepared by the Irish Universities Association but added that it would be preferable if a position paper, specific to Trinity, could be drafted and made available before the conference.

The following comments were made by different members in relation to the discussion paper:

- Trinity should actively contribute to setting the agenda on the issues raised;
- the lottery system proposed, whether weighted or not, is non-meritocratic and sends the wrong message to entrants that only a bare minimum is required;
- there would be much at stake for Trinity if a lottery system were introduced;
- there are two pertinent concerns, 'taking the heat out' of the points race and the content of certain senior cycle subjects - a lottery system would not address the latter;
- subjects which are not relevant to the college course choices of candidates should be discounted;
- Mathematics and English could count for more or subjects relevant to course choices could have a higher weighting assigned;
- requiring leaving certificate students to take separate matriculation examinations would result in the over-examination of students;
- personal statements by potential entrants would be welcome provided that care were taken with respect to plagiarism;
- reducing the amount of denominated courses and instituting more common entry courses would have the likely effect of transferring the points race, or similar, to the end of the first year in college;
- some of the assertions in the paper are not necessarily true, such as, small quotas automatically leading to higher course points;
- the use of aptitude tests, such as the HPAT, function better in more heterogeneous societies, their worth breaks down when used to test the aptitude of homogenous groups;
- Trinity must decide on what type of institution it is, one that is fair or one that achieves high international rankings - those institutions which do best in the rankings tend to be Darwinian in their practices;

- this is a second-level education problem being shunted on to the third-level sector; however, this was countered by the comment that the points system, as configured, influences decisions made at second-level.
- examination paper setters for certain leaving certificate subjects in the sciences have previously ignored suggested improvements to examination papers, however, the opposite was reported in relation to the French paper;
- second-level education is generalist in nature, whereas, third-level education traditionally has tended to be specialist, however, there is growing pressure on third-level education to become more generalist.
- students should be allowed to begin specialisation prior to entry to college so that they are prepared for third level;
- consideration must be given to professional accreditation of courses.

The Senior Lecturer thanked the Committee members for their comments and advised that he would report back to USC after the conference.

UGS/11-12/007 GeneSIS

(a) Course-related terminology

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'Course-related terminology', dated 9th September 2011, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer, noting that greater consistency in the use of course terminology is required to ensure the proper functioning of the new student information system, welcomed Mr Colm Stephens to the meeting to talk to the document.

Mr Stephens explained that the new student information system will provide a single repository for course related details, such as, course and module descriptions, marketing information, reading lists and course regulations, some of which will be available to those outside College, for example, potential entrants and parents. Therefore, apart from being a systems requirement, it is an opportune time to introduce standardisation in terms so that information is clearly understood inside and to those outside College.

He brought the meeting through the definitions of the terms *course*, *award*, *programme*, *subject* and *module*, as presented in the memorandum. Elucidating further on the distinction between *course* and *programme* he advised that students apply and are admitted to a *course* and will remain coded to that particular course unless formally permitted to transfer. The term *programme* is used to convey the conceptual combination of the course, the associated award(s) and the regulations governing successful progression and completion. In many cases there will be one programme related to one course, such as, single honors courses or professional courses such as Medicine. He explained that the Two Subject Moderatorship (TSM) would have many courses, given the permitted subject combinations which students apply to take, there will be only one programme as there is an overarching set of regulations stating how the BA (Moderatorship) can be awarded to TSM students.

Responding to a number of queries, Mr Stephens confirmed the following:

- the five-year course in Engineering will have one course and one related programme and that it will be possible to specify a hierarchy of relevant degrees to allow for exit awards at different stages;
- the words topic or element could be used for sub-module components;
- specific assessments can span modules and it will remain an academic decision as to how assessments are configured within the disciplines;
- the new system will not place additional constraints on formal course transfers.

It was commented by a number of members that the definitions, as presented, were not sufficiently clear and would require further work. Accepting this observation, Mr Stephens advised that the definitions related to *course* and *programme* would be amended to ensure clarity. Noting the confusion around the term *programme* he suggested that a great level of consistency would be achieved if, this academic

year, Schools could concentrate on the correct usage of *course* and *module* in their calendar entries, handbooks and other course material.

In response to a separate query the Senior Lecturer stated that standardising terminology is not being used as a method to introduce full modularisation and that it would not change course content or the way in which students are taught. He noted that this GeneSIS item, and the one related to the direct admissions process, are also due to be considered at the next Graduate Studies Committee meeting. He stated that he has been invited to attend and would relay the comments from this meeting. He thanked Mr Stephens for attending for the discussion of this item.

(b) Application for direct admission

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'New Direct Admissions Process', dated 9th September 2011, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer invited the Academic Secretary to speak to the memorandum.

The Academic Secretary informed the committee that the company chosen for the implementation of the new student information system has proposed a solution to streamline admissions processes in College to two methods; the existing CAO process and an online method for all direct applications. She indicated that the online method would cover postgraduate taught and research courses, undergraduate diploma courses, different access groups and non-EU students.

During the course of the discussion it was commented that the standardisation of direct admissions processes and an online facility would be welcome as there are currently different versions of paper-based forms in circulation. Concerns were raised in relation to the amount of feedback which might be required for non-successful applicants and it was remarked that provision of feedback from disciplines should be limited to those applicants who actually request it.

Responding to other comments and queries, the Academic Secretary confirmed that abridged entry would be facilitated; mature students would still have to link in with the CAO system; visiting students would not be coded to full undergraduate courses; and it was standard for visiting student applications to be managed centrally.

The Senior Lecturer observed that the system would allow flexibility in relation to application fees set and that it can be waived in relation to those applying through access routes.

The Committee welcomed the use of an online system for direct admission to College.

UGS/11-12/008 Employer Expectations

A report from the Careers Advisory Service, 'Fit for the future?: Employer expectations and perceptions of the skills of Trinity Graduates', was circulated.

The Senior Lecturer commented that the findings of the report would be useful to inform the work of this Committee over the coming year. He noted the media coverage of the recently launched 'Generation21' initiative by Dublin City University to help produce well-rounded graduates. He noted that Trinity had articulated, some time ago, the nine attributes of Trinity students and queried if the different course curricula help to foster these. He welcomed the Director of the Careers Advisory Service (CAS) to the meeting to speak to the report.

The Directory of CAS explained that the research leading to the report was carried out at the request of the former Provost. He noted that the survey of employers revealed much good news about how Trinity graduates are rated in the workplace, however, it also highlighted some possible areas of weakness. It is worth discussing the issues raised to ensure that Trinity graduates remain employable in a competitive environment. He queried if College should introduce an employability policy and if placements should be included in more courses.

During the discussion of the report the following comments were made by members:

- given the emphasis on extra-curricular activities College must examine its timetabling practices especially as some lectures are being scheduled on Saturday;
- placements are useful to build experience and provide networking opportunities;
- careers events would be helpful;
- there are mixed messages from employers as to the type of graduates being sought, on the one hand those with broader skills and on the other hand graduates from business, computer science and engineering disciplines are the most highly sought after;
- it was disappointing that team working was considered to be a weakness as College has made efforts in this area;
- often students are not able to articulate well the transferable skills gained from their studies, however, they seem better able to do so from extra-curricular activities;
- the School of Medicine has altered their transcript format to include the types of skills gained by students;

The Senior Lecturer emphasised that the report highlighted that international experiences are deemed beneficial by employers and that perhaps the Vice-Provost for Global Relations could be invited to a future meeting of USC. In relation to examining timetabling practices, he noted that previously Wednesday afternoons were kept free of lectures and other forms of teaching to allow students time to participate in extra-curricular activities. He remarked that USC should return to this matter if deemed desirable and worthwhile. In response a number of members commented that the practicalities of such a policy would have to be considered carefully.

The Senior Lecturer thanked the Director of CAS for presenting the report to the meeting.

UGS/11-12/009 Any other business

- (i) The Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) from the School of Nursing and Midwifery queried if other schools facilitate graduate recruiters to speak to students. It was noted that such talks are facilitated in other schools.

UGS/11-12/010 Trinity Access Programmes Steering Committee

The draft minutes of the meeting of 16th May 2011 were noted.

UGS/11-12/011 Items for noting

There were no items circulated for noting.

signature

date