

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN  
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

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A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2011 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Senior Lecturer, Dr Patrick Geoghegan (*Chair*)  
Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan  
*Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)*  
Dr Evangelia Rigaki, School of Drama, Film and Music  
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 Benjamin Wold, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics  
Dr Paul O'Grady, 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 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 Stefan Hutzler, School of Physics  
Dr Clair Gardiner, School of Biochemistry and Immunology  
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology  
Dr Martina Hennessy, School of Medicine  
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: Dean of Students, Dr Amanda Piesse  
Dr Oran Doyle, School of Law  
Dr Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS  
Dr David Chew, School of Natural Sciences  
Dr Wolfgang Schmitt, School of Chemistry  
Dr Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Mr Trevor Peare (Library Representative), Professor Terence Brown, Professor Niamh Harty and Dr Colm Stephens (for UGS/11-12/022), and Ms Michelle Garvey, TIC Development Officer (for UGS/11-12/025).

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**UGS/11-12/022 Minutes**

The minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2011 were approved.

**UGS/11-12/023 Matters arising**

- (i) UGS/11-12/015 (b): The proposal for a new course in Physiotherapy was approved by Council and Board. The proposal for the course in Occupational Therapy is likely to come before Council early in the New Year on the resolution of an outstanding matter.
- (ii) UGS/11-12/017: The Senior Lecturer reported that Council had approved the insertion of a tick-box question on student module evaluations, which is now

framed in more neutral language. Students, who are satisfied with the module, will still have the opportunity to provide additional comments.

#### UGS/11-12/024 GeneSIS

'A Proposal for the Harmonisation of Assessment Regulations in Trinity', dated 9<sup>th</sup> December 2011, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer welcomed Professor Terence Brown (Chair of GeneSIS Board), Professor Niamh Harty and Dr Colm Stephens to the meeting. He noted that Dr Rachel Hoare, the Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) from the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies was also part of the GeneSIS team which has been looking at assessment regulations across College. He invited Professor Brown to speak to the item.

Professor Brown explained that he had been asked to act as Chair of the GeneSIS Project Board by the former Provost. He noted the serious situation in College, arising from the continued use of an outdated student information system and associated work processes, and the variance in academic regulations, which pose serious risks to the day-to-day work and reputation of the institution. His role, as GeneSIS Project Board Chair, is to ensure that the project remains academically-led and that regulations are not changed simply due to the exigencies of the new system. He noted that Council had previously approved the streamlining and harmonising of regulations across College and that it is timely now to look at assessment regulations (CL/10-11/070). Whilst remaining academically-led this body of work is being supported by members of the GeneSIS team and the Office of the Vice Provost. He also noted that members of senior academic management in College, including the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, the Dean of Graduate Studies, and the Senior Lecturer, are supportive of the direction of the project.

In harmonising assessment regulations as presented in the circulated document, he advised that the following principles were observed in addition to principles derived from Council approved policies in the areas of modularity and terminology:

- Clarity and Transparency
- Equity
- Demonstrability
- Quality and Resources

He advised that the harmonised assessment regulations (schemes) presented in the document are not set-in-stone and that input is welcome from Schools following their discussion of this document at a local level. Requests for additional assessment schemes will be considered provided they are backed-up with serious and defensible academic reasons. However, he noted that he had confidence in what had been set out in the proposal and the range of recommended schemes. He added that College must move swiftly due to reputational risks posed by the wide variance in a number of academic regulations.

Thanking Professor Brown for his summary, the Senior Lecturer then invited the Academic Secretary to provide an overarching update on the GeneSIS project. The Academic Secretary advised that, while the project is experiencing some delays, the first two stages have been implemented, and the third stage which relates to admissions is still expected to go-live on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2012. A large amount of course data has been fed into the new system and the team is now working on inputting further information concerning ECTS and learning outcomes. The online student registration and choice of module options is expected to be completed by September 2012.

Noting the variance of current assessment regulations, provided in Appendix 1 of the proposal, and the number of students affected by each of the regulations, the Senior Lecturer commended the proposal document.

There was general support in relation to the proposed harmonised regulations voiced during the discussion of the item but concerns were raised, and comments made, in relation to:

- compensation in the F1 grade range should perhaps be limited to 35-39% range thus requiring a third failing grade;
- the number of credits for which compensation would be allowed;
- facilitation of non-compensatable modules;
- facilitation of the capping of sub-module assessment elements;
- the awards schemes not including the JS/SS split of 10%/90% which is currently available in some of the science moderatorships;
- the range of compensatable marks could possibly vary in proportion to the credit value of a particular module.

Responding to a query, it was clarified that there is no proposal to change the status of 'off-books' as it operates now.

The Academic Secretary confirmed that the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer would be writing to the Heads of Schools explaining the process for response to the proposal. She also clarified, in response to a query, that Schools will be given the opportunity to sign-off on the course data that will be used in the new information system. She also noted that there is a close working relationship between the School Administrators and the GeneSIS team and if required the members from the Team would be available to visit schools on any aspect of the GeneSIS implementation.

The Senior Lecturer noted the general support of the meeting for the proposal and invited members to discuss it in their respective Schools.

#### **UGS/11-12/025 Trinity Inclusive Curriculum**

A memorandum from the Trinity Inclusive Curriculum (TIC) Development Officer 'TIC end of project evaluation and recommendations', dated 28<sup>th</sup> September 2011, was circulated along with the end of project evaluation report, dated July 2011. The Senior Lecturer welcomed Ms Michelle Garvey, the TIC Development Officer to the meeting noting that this item had been deferred from the last meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) due to a lack of time. He also noted that, as a result of this project, Trinity had been named as one of eleven winners of the 2011 JISC TechDis OASES Award for Institutional Progress on Equality using Technology, which was presented to the TIC Development Officer at the meeting.

Speaking to the item the TIC Development Officer provided some background to the project which had been funded for three years under the second cycle of the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF). She advised that this funding ceased in October 2011, however, she had secured separate funding for an additional year to complete certain aspects of the project. During the life of the three-year project a dedicated website had been launched and a programme evaluation tool was created and she noted that she has provided training and other support activities to areas across College. She confirmed that aspects of inclusivity had been included in training offered by the Centre for Academic Practice and eLearning (CAPSL), in the school review process and in the criteria for the Provost's Teaching Awards. She reported that embedding inclusivity more formally into College policies and processes had not been as successful as other aspects of the project.

She outlined the recommendations in her memorandum and advised that a number of these are already planned for implementation through the GeneSIS project. She advised the meeting that she would be available to work with schools and other areas during the current academic year to raise awareness of inclusivity.

The Senior Lecturer thanked the TIC Development Officer for attending the meeting and commented that some of the recommendations concern areas where policy is already in place and that others were more aspirational in nature.

**UGS/11-12/026 Internationalisation of Academic Titles**

Noting that there is discretion in the use of the new academic titles, as approved by Board and Council, in the 2011/12 academic year, the Senior Lecturer asked committee members to indicate if they would prefer to start using these ahead of the report on the implementation working group.

A number of members highlighted problematic areas with regard to the use of the new titles, especially in relation to Assistant Professor, which suggests a lack of tenure to institutions in the United States.

The Senior Lecturer noted that there was no appetite at USC to use the new titles in the current academic year.

**UGS/11-12/027 Open Day**

A memorandum from the Admissions Liaison Officer to the USC, 'Open Day 2011', dated 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011, was circulated. Introducing the item, the Senior Lecturer noted that 2011 saw the first Open Day occasion to be spread over two days and he commended the Admissions Liaison Officer for his organisation of the event. Observing that the memorandum contained a request for feedback on experiences and opinions of the event the Senior Lecturer invited comments and suggestions from USC.

There were varying opinions expressed as to the success of the two day event. A number of members commented that the Saturday visitors generally seemed more engaged and interested than those who came on Friday. Some members highlighted the difficulty in organising staff members to manage stands on the Saturday of the event. Others commented that Open Day organisers were not as visible on the Saturday and there was less support available in relation to audio-visual equipment than on the Friday. The majority of the meeting expressed a preference for a one day event but there was no support for it returning to a Wednesday. However, it was acknowledged that since Saturdays have been introduced there will be pressure from schools and parents not to discontinue the practice. It was suggested that if the two-day event is retained there could be a later start time for each day.

In relation to information provided to attendees, members stressed the importance of involving current students in the manning of stands as potential entrants are likely to relate better to those in their own age group. It was also suggested that presentations could be more interactive rather than the standard set-piece lectures.

A number of members commented that it would be helpful to receive information about A-level requirements given the likelihood of increased applicants from the United Kingdom resulting from the changes to the fee structure there.

The Senior Lecturer thanked members for their comments and advised that these would be passed on to the Admissions Liaison Officer.

**UGS/11-12/028 Working Group on Admissions**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'Working Group on Admissions and Curriculum Renewal', dated 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011, was circulated.

Introducing the item the Senior Lecturer discussed the membership of the group and the three main areas it planned to examine:

1. **Where:** Is TCD attracting the 'best' students from all over Ireland (and how should TCD define the 'best')?
2. **How:** How does TCD admit its students and are there better alternative methods which would also be fair and transparent?
3. **What:** What happens to students when they enter TCD? Does the Trinity curriculum do enough to compensate for the negative effects on student learning at second-level which have been identified? Does the TCD curriculum

achieve its objectives of producing graduates who are articulate, literate and numerate and who have independent and critical thinking skills?

He commented that the 'where' questions may prove of lesser significance if the other two issues were addressed successfully. He provided examples of admissions criteria from some of the top universities in the United States noting that many of these take a holistic approach to admissions criteria looking at a range of achievements as well as student potential. He advised that a draft report should be ready for presentation to the USC meeting in March 2012 for discussion ahead of presentation to Council possibly in April. He informed the meeting that initial discussion had taken place about a national conference concerning admissions policies which he hoped would take place in May 2012.

During the course of the discussion, the following comments were made:

- Trinity aspires to be Ireland's university on the world-stage and therefore should have a representative student body;
- the universities in the United States referred to by the Senior Lecturer cater to their national arena, Trinity does not have the same level of resources and may not have the same catchment potential;
- changes to the fees structure in England is likely to have a significant impact on the profile of potential applicants;
- whilst many secondary school principals criticise the current points system, many concede that it is transparent and fair;
- many courses in College are already at full capacity;
- Trinity should take care not to set up unique entry requirements which might be off-putting to potential applicants;
- introducing additional application mechanisms, like interviews, would have very significant resource implications;
- trying to influence second-level teaching, learning and curriculum development may not be welcomed at that level;
- points could be assigned on a different basis;
- students who achieve 600 points are generally highly enthusiastic and are not automatons;
- there is a high level of homogeneity among school leavers coming into the undergraduate course in medicine which renders other entry metrics, like aptitude tests, less effective;
- there is less capacity in College to deal with students entering with poor information technology skills when compared with Harvard which, through Harvard Publishing, makes available online software to assist incoming entrants; and
- College should be careful when approaching this issue not to convey mixed messages in relation to access and inclusivity.

The Senior Lecturer noted that a particular challenge for the Working Group on Admissions is to develop proposals for entry which would facilitate the admission of the type of students best suited to the teaching and learning environment in Trinity but which are also realistic. He felt that this is a good time for Trinity to look at this area and try and define the type of entrants who are most likely to flourish in Trinity College.

Commenting on the importance of retaining students he stated that one of the most significant stated reasons for student withdrawals is the lack of information about the course to which they are registered. In this regard College must look again at how it promotes its courses and the level of information provided.

The Senior Lecturer thanked members for their views and stated that further comments are welcome from schools and departments following discussion within members' academic units.

**UGS/11-12/029 Academic Year Structure and Assessment**

A table, 'Assessment Loads 2010/11', dated December 2011, which presented information about the number of examinations taken in each year of each undergraduate degree course, along with further information on different assessment types, was circulated.

Speaking about the data, the Senior Lecturer noted the large number of 90 minute examinations, which relate to discrete modules, in the annual session. He commented that consideration should be given to combining some of these to create three-hour examinations, therefore, resulting in fewer overall annual examinations. Disquiet was expressed in relation to this suggestion in cases where modules are unrelated and it was observed that the same amount of revision work would be required in such situations. The Students' Union Education Officer commented that the Students' Union would be wary of such a proposal if the two sections of the paper were unrelated. It was also noted that, prior to the introduction of modularisation, many students were not satisfied with three hour examinations.

In support of this suggestion, it was remarked that there is pressure inherent in the actual preparation for examinations, whether these are 90 or 180 minutes, therefore, an overall reduction in their number would be welcome. It was also commented that a number of areas do produce examinations papers with separate sections for difference modules but these are related.

Responding to a query about the balance between examinations and other assessment types within a module, the Academic Secretary stated that she was not aware of any formal policy in this regard; it is likely though that 'custom and practice' has developed in certain areas in College.

The Senior Lecturer said he intends to hold three faculty fora later in the academic year, to be organised through CAPSL, at which staff from constituent schools could discuss assessment practices. He noted that the Provost is interested in innovation in the assessment of students and especially in the use of 'general papers' across College.

There followed a discussion about the use of general papers and the implementation of the Bologna process through which there was uncertainty expressed in relation to the permissibility of the use of general papers. However, a number of members confirmed that their schools continue to set these papers, which had been set up as separate modules.

The Senior Lecturer, noting the general support for the suggested fora, stated that these would be likely to occur in April or May 2012. Also noting the discussion on the use of general papers he confirmed that this would be a future agenda item.

**UGS/11-12/030 Any other business**

There was no other business.

**UGS/11-12/031 Trinity Access Programmes Steering Committee**

The draft minutes from the meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> November were noted and approved.

**UGS/11-12/032 Items for noting**

There were no items for noting.

signature

date