

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 21st February 2012 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Senior Lecturer, Dr Patrick Geoghegan (*Chair*)
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
Ms Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Dr Michael Gormley, School of Psychology
Dr Oran Doyle, School of Law
Dr Dermot O'Dwyer, School of Engineering
Dr Andrew Butterfield, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Dr 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

Apologies: Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
Dean of Students, Dr Amanda Piesse
Dr Paul O'Grady, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Dr David Coghlan, School of Business
Dr Michael Shevlin, School of Education
Dr Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Dr David Chew, School of Natural Sciences
Dr Stefan Hutzler, School of Physics
Dr Wolfgang Schmitt, School of Chemistry
Dr Clair Gardiner, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Mr Daniel Ferrick, Student Representative

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Mr Trevor Peare (Library Representative), and Professor Sheila Greene (for item UGS/11-12/044)

UGS/11-12/042 Minutes

The minutes of the 31st January 2012 were approved.

UGS/11-12/043 Matters arising

- (i) UGS/11-12/035: It was confirmed that students permitted to take special examinations would be covered by the College insurance policy, if they are advised to attend lectures or take laboratory sessions while they are waiting to sit these examinations or to receive their results.
- (ii) UGS/11-12/036: It was noted that the Senior Lecturer's Annual Report 2010/11 was well received by Council. The Senior Lecturer commented that next year the draft report would be available earlier so that members of the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) would have sufficient time to read it.

- (iii) UGS/11-12/037: The Senior Lecturer noted that Council was enthusiastic about the discussion paper from the Working Group on Admissions and Curriculum. The version presented to Council had been altered slightly, following the last meeting of the USC, to take account of comments raised during the discussion. He noted that Council supported the hosting of a national conference in May for the Group to consult more widely on admissions and curriculum matters.
- (iv) UGS/11-12/038: The Senior Lecturer noted that Council had approved the proposal to hold Open Day over one day in 2012 and confirmed that it would take place on Saturday 1st December. He commented that the issue would be revisited if the outcomes of this change are unsatisfactory.

UGS/11-12/044 Review of the Report of the Working Party on Teaching and Learning, 2003

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'Report on Teaching and Learning (2003)', dated 15th February 2012, was circulated along with the 'Final Report of the Working Party in Teaching and Learning' dated 18th February 2003.

The Senior Lecturer, welcomed Professor Sheila Greene, a former Senior Lecturer and the Chair of the Working Party on Teaching and Learning, to the meeting. He informed the Committee that he had read the circulated report while researching topics surrounding admissions and curriculum and noted that it contained a number of policy recommendations which are still relevant today. He noted that not all of the recommendations had been implemented and added that it was timely to review this report. He invited Professor Greene to speak to the item.

Professor Greene advised USC that the report was produced in a context of change and renewal. The Working Party was established in 2001, the year in which the then new Provost, Dr Hegarty, took up office. She noted that the process adopted by the Working Party was very much to work from first principles, using a 'bottom-up' approach, since there were few statements held centrally on Trinity's philosophy of teaching. However, she advised that there were two useful statements in existence at that time: (i) The Educational Objectives of the Moderatorship (found in the Calendar Part 1); and (ii) the Policy on the Broad Curriculum.

She spoke about the challenges faced by College, and within College, at that time. Firstly, she noted that core funding and resources were reducing even then. However, Trinity did have access to Targeted Initiative Funding from the Higher Education Authority (HEA), which was integral to the establishment of CAPSL. Secondly, some of the recommendations were not supported due to a lack of resources and others were not supported due to the lack of 'buy-in' across College. Thirdly, there was a shift in College priorities which moved to focus on restructuring and the implementation of a resource allocation model. She welcomed the review of the 2003 policy and concluded her summary by noting that teaching and learning needs a champion to maintain its position on Trinity's agenda.

The Senior Lecturer noted that the document provides a solid foundation for discussions on teaching and learning today and he particularly commented on the aim in the Report to maintain teaching excellence, especially the objective to link teaching excellence to promotion rounds and the specified action to establish a new scheme of teaching fellowships. He noted that it would be useful for Trinity's lecturers to experience practices in other institutions and to display the high quality of teaching offered in Trinity.

In discussing the section covering the establishment of CAPSL, it was questioned if it is fit for purpose. Responding, Professor Greene noted that CAPSL has never been formally reviewed, therefore, negative comments about it are anecdotal. She also noted that not all teaching staff members are intuitively good teachers and many welcome the support and advice provided, especially at the start of their careers. A number of committee members stated that they were satisfied with assistance they

had received from CAPSL and it was observed that it would be unusual for an institution of this standing not to have such a unit.

The Senior Lecturer noted that it currently operates with few resources. He advised that the Senior Academic Developer, Dr Ciara O'Farrell, would like to work with disciplines to tailor plans for the delivery of academic practice within their areas and to disseminate research on teaching and learning; she does not favour an intrusive approach. He commented that centres for teaching and learning are criticised by academics as they are deemed to be interfering, and that CAPSL supported a different model which is more inclusive. He remarked that, with few resources, College must set priorities for CAPSL.

There was discussion about the use of a dissertation in the final year and Professor Greene noted that its prevalence had previously been cited in the defence of the four year undergraduate degree. She added that many students found the preparation and completion of their dissertation to be the most satisfying aspect of their undergraduate studies. The Students' Union Education Officer pointed out that the dissertation was useful to help counteract the over-reliance on written examinations for assessment. However, it was noted that some disciplines have discontinued with its use as they are struggling with increased student numbers.

In discussing the Broad Curriculum it was commented that there is no mechanism to drive it since the philanthropic funding ran out. The Senior Lecturer commented that the aims of the Policy on Broad Curriculum were wider than requiring students to take a module or two from outside their course. The policy document set out the nine attributes of a Trinity student and graduate and he commented that these should be considered in curriculum design. He referred to a speech by President Michael D. Higgins, delivered in Trinity earlier in February, in which the President referred to the need for educational institutions to help students to develop into well-rounded citizens. The Senior Lecturer added that third-level institutions in Ireland are required to define their missions as part of the HEA's process of higher education reform. There is much exemplary material contained in the 2003 Report and the Policy on the Broad Curriculum, however, work remains in relation to the full implementation of relevant recommendations.

The Senior Lecturer thanked Professor Greene for joining the meeting to talk to this item.

UGS/11-12/045 External Examiners

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A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'Reports of External Examiners', dated 15th February 2012, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer noted that during the discussion of the 'Senior Lecturer's Annual Report 2010/11' at Council, the Provost specifically asked about the reason for the differing percentages of external examiner reports returned across the three faculties (CL/11-12/098). He advised USC that there is an exercise being carried out in the Office of the Vice-Provost to collate comments from external examiners' reports and to identify those areas where reports were missing for 2010/11 and 2009/10.

The reasons for the lower return rates in Health Science were not apparent to the Committee. However, methods to improve response rates were discussed and it was suggested that a series of prompts, for the Schools concerned and then for the external examiners themselves, could be put in place for when reports are not received by a certain date.

The importance of these reports, in prompting changes in courses and Schools and in the defence of the four year Trinity degree, was discussed, as was the need to inform external examiners of changes made on foot of their comments. The presentation of consolidated comments to USC and the format of report forms were flagged items for discussion.

The Senior Lecturer commented that details would be brought back to a future meeting of USC.

UGS/11-12/046 Forums on Assessment Practices

A memorandum concerning forums on assessment practices from the Senior Lecturer, dated 15th February 2012, was circulated. Speaking to the item, the Senior Lecturer noted that he had raised the possibility of holding a number of forums, arranged on a Faculty basis, at which attendees could discuss innovative assessment practices and related matters. He advised that these events would be organised in conjunction with CAPSL and asked the committee members for suggestions in relation to these events.

The meeting discussed appropriate attendees which included Heads of Departments and Disciplines, Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) and Course Directors, with an open invitation available to other members of interested academic staff. The Students' Union Education Officer commented that it would be more beneficial if School Convenors, rather than Class Representatives, were invited to attend. She further commented that student representation would not be possible if these events are scheduled to take place during the annual examinations. It was suggested that a member of the Bologna Desk should attend to clarify the impact of Bologna on assessment practices. Clarity was also sought on College's policy in relation to holding examinations for all modules.

A number of forum formats were discussed and it was stressed that such meetings would require strong facilitators to maintain focussed discussion. The Senior Lecturer commented that he would like to become more aware of the varied and interesting assessment practices used across College and further said that such sessions would provide an opportunity for sharing information and possibly inspiring innovative practices in other disciplines. He suggested that more innovative and flexible assessments arrangements could be put in place in the Freshman years.

There was further discussion about how assessment practices can be limited by a lack of resources. There are no central funds available for assessments outside formal examinations and it was further commented that such examinations are not suitable to test the attainment of certain skills. It was commented that innovative assessments can be particularly costly.

There were concerns raised in relation to any suggestion of the complete removal of written examination and it was noted that College must be able to stand over grades particularly those which feed into degree results. It would be difficult to include more flexible assessment types under the College's system of external examination. In discussing 'General Papers' it was confirmed that these are consistent with Bologna provided that they are set up as separate modules with defined ECTS credit loads and appropriate learning outcomes.

The Senior Lecturer thanked members for their input and commented that he would bring back fuller details to the next USC meeting.

UGS/11-12/047 Academic Year Structure

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'Academic Year Structure: Third Revision Week', dated 16th February 2012, was circulated.

The Senior Lecturer invited the Committee Secretary to speak to the item. She advised that when retention of the third revision week was discussed at USC in May 2011 (UGS/10-11/051), the Committee was reluctant at that time to approve its use beyond 2011/12 since College had not completed a full year with its inclusion. She explained that the Almanack is currently being drafted for 2012/13 and that definitive information is needed in relation to the timing of examinations for international and other students. She asked the meeting if there were any

objections to the continued use of the third revision week in the current academic year structure.

There was general consensus that the additional revision week should be retained in the current academic year structure to assist students. However, there was disappointment expressed that decisions in relation to the academic year structure were being made in a piecemeal fashion. In response, the Senior Lecturer commented that the matter would be returned to at a future date.

XX USC recommended the retention of the third revision week before the annual examinations, within the current academic year structure, to Council.

UGS/11-12/048 Any other business

- (i) The Senior Lecturer drew the meeting's attention to the memorandum 'Provost's Teaching Awards 2011/12: Panel Members'. In relation to the pool of nominees for the 2011/12 awards round, he noted that 32 went forward for initial consideration and, of these, 17 were shortlisted. He commented that since there are limited awards available it is possibly demoralising for candidates who do not make it to the final four places. He asked the meeting to consider if this demoralisation effect could be counteracted perhaps through the presentation of certificates or through the provision of more extensive and encouraging feedback.

It was suggested that being shortlisted could be linked to the teaching criteria when academic staff are considered for promotion. It was cautioned though that such a development should not lead to the practice of negative marking for those not shortlisted. On a separate point it was suggested that the title for the early career award should be removed as it possibly implies that the award recipient is not really as deserving as the other prize winners.

The Senior Lecturer commented that the scheme would be reviewed this academic year.

UGS/11-12/049 Items for noting

USC noted the following document circulated for information:

1. Memorandum, 'Provost's Teaching Awards 2011/12: Panel Members', dated 16th February 2012.

signature

date