

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 2nd October 2012 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

- Present: Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Patrick Geoghegan (*Chair*)
Dean of Students, Professor Amanda Piesse
Senior Tutor, Professor Clair Laudet
Assistant Academic Secretary, Ms Orla Sheehan
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)
Professor Christine Poulter, School of Drama, Film and Music
Professor Jarlath Kileen, School of English
Professor Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Pádraig de Paor, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Professor Benjamin Wold, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Professor Eleanor Denny, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Mary Lee Rhodes, School of Business
Professor Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Professor Michael Shevlin, School of Education
Professor Ivana Bacik, School of Law
Professor Andrew Butterfield, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Professor David Chew, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Graham Harper, School of Physics
Professor Wolfgang Schmitt, School of Chemistry
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
Professor Sharon O'Donnell, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Moray McGowan, Director of TSM
Professor Graeme Watson, Director of Science (TR071)
Mr Daniel Ferrick, Education Officer, Students' Union
Ms Sinead Leydon, Student Representative
Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior Academic Developer
- Apologies: Professor Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Dermot O'Dwyer, School of Engineering
Professor Ken Mok, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Martina Hennessy, School of Medicine
Professor Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS
- In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner and Mr Trevor Peare (Library Representative)
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USC/12-13/011 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th September 2012 were approved subject the correction of a typographical error in the last sentence of the first paragraph of USC/12-13/006, to read: 'The Committee joined the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies in sending congratulations to Trinity Access 21 on this achievement.'

USC /12-13/012 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

USC /12-13/013 Proposed feasibility study on Admissions

XX A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, dated 26th September 2012 was circulated along with the document, 'Undergraduate Admission in the 21st Century: A Proposed Feasibility Study', also dated 26th September 2012.

The Senior Lecturer introduced the item noting that in drafting the admissions feasibility study document he had consulted widely with the Central Applications Office (CAO), the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), Professor Áine Hyland, the Schools of Law and Histories and Humanities (who supported the proposal), as well as with the deans of admissions in some leading international universities. The proposed study was an attempt to see whether, on a very small scale and with a small number of places on three courses, it might be possible to find a better and a fairer way of admitting students with the academic ability and potential to thrive at Trinity, moving away from a culture of 'wasting points' to one where the right student is matched to the right course. This was part of Trinity's attempt to inform national policy in the area, by addressing one of the most controversial questions in higher education.

The feasibility study will be shared with the Irish universities and institutes of technology, and will help inform the work of the Taskforce on Admissions chaired by the president of NUI Maynooth. One aspect, the Relative Performance Rank (RPR), which is the performance of an applicant relative to other applicants from their school, has attracted much interest externally, and could also help inform the development of national policy.

The Senior Lecturer outlined how the feasibility study would operate in practice, following international best practice in using three scales to assess students: Leaving Certificate results; the Relative Performance Rank of the student; and supplementary assessments. The process would be completely anonymous, and would be operated in partnership with the CAO. The feasibility study put academic excellence at the heart, recognising that 'the points race' is too crude a mechanism for admitting students, and that CAO points can provide a distorted impression of students' academic and intellectual capacity. Clear criteria for assessing the success or otherwise of the study were presented, and it was noted that this was a controlled study on a small scale, rather than a radical new admissions policy, and that it was appropriate that Ireland's leading university should attempt it.

The Dean of Students welcomed the details of the feasibility study as the proposed process is more student centred allowing applicants to provide contextual information. The Students' Union Education Officer commended the use of anonymity throughout the process, to safeguard against nepotism, and the use of three different scales. He added that applicants would have to show real interest in the courses since, with lower points, they would find it difficult to transfer within Trinity College. The Senior Lecturer confirmed that it was hoped the new admissions route might allow for greater flexibility within College.

Responding to queries, the Senior Lecturer explained that it would not be possible to prevent applicants from submitting forms completed by third parties, however, international best practice suggested that honesty was the best policy and that a student might actually be disadvantaged by having someone else write the application. He also noted the importance of bringing in an international admissions expert to assist with establishment of the required processes. He said that he expected this person to be in place during the academic year 2013/14, ahead of admitting students through this route in 2014.

In discussing the RPR aspect of the process, the Committee noted that consideration would need to be given to students repeating the Leaving Certificate Examination and that care should be taken to avoid disadvantaging students who are home-schooled. The Senior Lecturer commented that the RPR may have to be split for repeat Leaving Certificate students.

Commenting about her School's involvement, the Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) from the School of Law complimented the Senior Lecturer on the high level of consultation with her School, and noted that some of the issues had been addressed in the revised document and that, overall, the School was happy to participate in the study. She noted that some reservations had been expressed, including her own, about ensuring the Leaving Certificate was not diminished as a state examination, and assurances were given on that point. It was also noted that it may not improve admission rates of students from socio-economically under-represented groups (College has the Trinity Access Programmes anyway), earlier extra-curricular questions had been too Trinity specific, the logistics might be too cumbersome for the number of places available and it could lead to an increase in random selection for those students who do not opt-in to the study.

The Senior Lecturer gave special thanks to the Schools of Law and Histories and Humanities for agreeing to take part in the study. Thanking the committee for its support, he noted that the proposed feasibility study would be presented to Council.

USC /12-13/014 Review of Scholarship

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A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, dated 27th September 2012, was circulated along with a document outlining the recommendations from the Scholarship Review Working Group 2012, also dated 27th September 2012. Introducing the item the Senior Lecturer noted that 103 new Scholars had been announced on Trinity Monday in 2012. An additional student received the award after the event following the discovery of a miscalculation of examination results. In this case there had been no court of examiners held to consider and discuss the results. He advised that the recommendations supported by the Review Group were not formulated with an intention to reduce the number of new Scholars, rather, these were being put forward to ensure there is greater consistency in academic standards across College and that all recipients truly merit the honour. He added that the review group membership was diverse and included Scholars, members of the Central Scholarship Committee, Students' Union representatives and other members of the academic community. Eleven recommendations were brought forward for discussion, including a proposal to limit the examination to students in the Senior Freshman year in all but exceptional circumstances.

The following comments were made:

- It should perhaps be open to Junior Freshman students.
- Separate questions of a Junior Sophister standard could be set for Junior Sophister students if there is a concern that they have an advantage at present.
- Limiting the examination to the Senior Freshman year might disadvantage mature students.
- Double marking would be overly onerous for Disciplines and Schools and it was suggested that this should be limited to scripts in the first class range and those at the borderline.
- Logistically, the submission of papers to externals would mean a very tight turnaround.
- There would be additional work associated with these recommendations and it was asked if consideration had been given to how a School might ensure that candidates for Scholarship are serious.

Clarity was requested in relation to the level of authority a retired member of staff would have if a problem with the process was identified and it was also queried how retired members of staff could review the full process if they are not required to attend the court of examiners.

The Senior Lecturer particularly requested comments in relation to limiting the examination to the Senior Freshman year since this recommendation had the majority support of the Working Group and not its unanimous support. There were no objections raised and the Students' Union Education Officer noted that there was

the safeguard of allowing students to take it in the Junior Sophister year, should exceptional circumstances prevent their taking it in the Senior Freshman year. The Senior Lecturer confirmed that a student in this circumstance would be required to have made the initial application in the Senior Freshman year.

Summing up, the Senior Lecturer noted that limiting the examination to the Senior Freshman year, with the recommended safeguard, was not problematic for the Committee, however, clarification was needed in relation to the recommendation concerning the role of retired members of staff and further consideration might be required in relation to the matter of double marking examination scripts.

USC /12-13/015 USC Terms of Reference and Membership

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A memorandum, 'Terms of Reference and Membership' from the Senior Lecturer, dated 26th September 2012, was circulated.

The Senior Lecturer advised that the terms of reference had been revised to incorporate changes discussed at the previous meeting. He noted the revision to the membership which now includes representation from Trinity Access 21, and the Centre for Academic Practice and eLearning, for relevant items.

The Committee recommended the revised terms of reference and membership to Council and the Senior Lecturer welcomed Dr Ciara O'Farrell to the meeting for the next item.

USC /12-13/016 The Trinity Education

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'Work Programme 2012/13', dated 26th September was circulated. The Senior Lecturer invited the Assistant Academic Secretary to speak to the document. She advised the meeting that the work programme presented at the previous meeting of USC had been organised into themes and presented in the accompanying diagram. Rather than developing new policies there would be a focus on the implementation of existing policies and, in this regard, the Senior Lecturer and she would visit all Schools to discuss practical experiences and possible barriers. The thematic areas identified would provide the basis for these discussions. She further noted that a paper would be brought back to USC for discussion.

The Senior Lecturer referred to a recent OECD conference on teaching and learning which he had attended noting that there was an interesting discussion of 'T-shaped' skills, the vertical line of which represents in-depth learning and research whilst the horizontal line represents broader experiences. It was commented by a member that the concept of 'T-shaped' skills has long been used in industry. The Senior Lecturer noted his ambition to define the Trinity-shaped education in the coming year with the help of the committee, and how this could provide one possible model.

Following a query from the SU Education Officer about the review of the academic year structure and its place in the work plan, the Senior Lecturer confirmed that Council had previously noted that stability was required for the coming years to ensure the successful implementation of GeneSIS.

USC/12-13/017 Any other business

- (i) A memorandum from the Dean of Students 'Trinity Internship Programme', dated 2nd October 2012, was tabled along with a paper from the President of the Students' Union which outlined a proposal in relation to a TCDSU Summer Internship Scheme. The Dean of Student noted that it had been approved in principle by the Student Services Committee at its meeting of 19th September 2012 (SS/12-13/07) and that she was tabling it for information. She also noted that a working group is being established and expressed the hope that a USC member would join.

General interest was expressed by a number of members in relation to the scheme. A concern was raised in relation to additional workloads for Schools and another member commented that he hoped students registered with the Disability Service would be targeted to participate when it becomes operational.

The Senior Lecturer noting that this was a proposal from the Students' Union commented on the important contribution that Students' Union Officers make to the running of College. He expressed his thanks and appreciation and the USC noted the scheme and the proposed membership of the working group.

- (ii) The Senior Tutor noted that the GeneSIS team is working hard to resolve the problems with the allocation of Tutors. She asked members to refer students who were having problems to another Tutor in the School or to the Senior Tutor's Office.
- (iii) The Senior Lecturer reported that he had received communications from students who were upset that they could not access their timetables online. He asked members of the Committee to help student to access hardcopies of relevant timetables while the problems with displaying online timetables are being resolved.
- (iv) It was noted that Student Ambassadors were currently being recruited to promote Trinity throughout the island of Ireland.
- (v) It was noted that the National Student Survey is running again this year and its full rollout is intended for 2014.

signature

date