

XX = Council relevance

**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE**

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 30th September 2014 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Gillian Martin (*Chair*)
 Ms Katie Byrne, Education Officer, Students' Union
 Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
 Dean of Students, Professor Kevin O'Kelly
 Senior Tutor, Professor Claire Laudet
 Professor Elaine Moriarty, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
 Professor Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
 Professor Jarlath Killeen, School of English
 Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
 Professor Fáinche Ryan, Confederal School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
 Professor Des Ryan, School of Law
 Professor Mary-Lee Rhodes, School of Business
 Professor James Hanrahan, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
 Professor Martina Hennessy, School of Medicine
 Professor Rachel Moss, School of Histories and Humanities
 Professor Stephen Connon, School of Chemistry
 Professor Derek O'Sullivan, School of Dental Science
 Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences
 Professor David Wilkins, School of Mathematics
 Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
 Professor Jane Farrar, School of Genetics and Microbiology
 Professor Howard Smith, School of Psychology
 Professor Ciaran Simms, School of Engineering
 Professor Mike Brady, School of Computer Science and Statistics
 Professor Sharon O'Donnell, School of Nursing and Midwifery
 Professor Graeme Watson, Director of Science (TR071)
 Professor Sarah Smyth, Director of TSM
 Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior Academic Developer
 Mr Trevor Peare, Library Representative

Apologies: Professor Christine Poulter, School of Drama, Film and Music
 Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics
 Professor Ken Mok, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
 Professor Michael Shevlin, School of Education
 Ms Cliona Hannon, Director, Trinity Access Programmes
 Ms Ciara Coughlan, Student Representative

In attendance: Ms Elaine Egan; Mr Robert Otway-Norwood, Trinity Teaching and Learning, for item USC/14-15/006.

USC/14-15/001 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 27th May 2014 were approved.

USC/14-15/002 Matters arising

USC/13-14/077 (i) The Professional Special Purpose Certificate in Academic Practice had been approved by Council on 11th June 2014 and had been sent for external review.

(ii) The issue of supplemental examinations for Sophister students will be discussed at USC at a future date.

USC/13-14/079: The Proposal for a Diploma course in Music Teaching and Performance from RIAM for accreditation had been approved by Council at its meeting of 11th June.

USC/13-14/081: The Admissions Forum will continue in the 2014/15 academic year with the first meeting taking place on 7th October 2014.

USC/13-14/082: The Northern Ireland Feasibility Study was launched on 4th July 2014 and had received positive media attention. The Study will aim to address the challenges faced by A-Level students who wish to attend Trinity College. Only 1 in 8 students in Northern Ireland take 4 A-Levels. Under the Feasibility Study, students from Northern Ireland will be accepted on the basis of 3 A-Levels for all courses except Medicine. Applicants must fulfil matriculation and specific course requirements and the minimum entry level is ABB. Students taking 4 A-Levels will not be disadvantaged as their 3 best A-Levels will be counted. A set number of places in courses has been set aside for the Feasibility Study as follows: 1 place in courses with up to 10 places, 2 in courses with between 11-30 places and 3 where courses have over 30 places. Students will first be admitted via the Study in 2015/16. Students applying to Trinity from Northern Ireland in 2015/16 will also be eligible for all of the places that will be filled in the normal way through the CAO system.

USC/14-15/003 Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies' report

Admissions Feasibility Study

The Senior Lecturer updated the meeting on the Admissions Feasibility Study which had seen its first cohort of students admitted this academic year. The Study was set up to assess the feasibility of admitting students to undergraduate programmes using criteria other than the results of the Leaving Certificate examination. The criteria consisted of three equally-weighted modalities, namely: (i) Leaving Certificate results, (ii) Relative Performance Rank, and (iii) Personal statements and essays. Three undergraduate courses are participating in this two-year Study with a total of 25 places available. A total of 243 applicants completed the application process, making 270 unique applications: 61 in History; 187 in Law; and 22 in Ancient and Medieval History and Culture.

Applications came from 145 schools across the country: 23% of these came from fee-paying schools, 57% from non-fee paying state schools, and 12% came from DEIS/TAP-linked schools. School data was not available for students whose application was withdrawn or ineligible. In terms of offers, 38% of students who were offered a place were from fee-paying schools and 62% were from non-fee paying state schools. As of 16/9/14, nine offers in Law had been accepted, 10 in History, and three in Ancient and Medieval History and Culture.

The workload involved in analysing and marking essays had been significant and would have implications if the Study were to be adopted on a larger scale. The Dean of Students commented that this is a robust and challenging admissions system that must be presented as an equivalent system to the CAO and not as a compensatory system. The Senior Tutor cautioned that students admitted through the Study may potentially have difficulty in integrating with their peers, and that tutors would have a valuable role in helping them to integrate. The Senior Lecturer and Senior Tutor would discuss ways of approaching this issue.

The Senior Lecturer reported that none of the students admitted through the Study would have been admitted on CAO points alone. It was agreed that criteria for measuring the success of the Study must be decided upon. Students will be tracked throughout their College career and a full interim report on the Study will be prepared. It was agreed that a significant indicator of success would be if the Study reached students who would not otherwise have been admitted to Trinity.

Return of Coursework

It had been approved by Council in Trinity Term 2014 that individual feedback on assessed work should be provided to students within 20 working days, and that where this is not possible, students should be informed of the revised date for feedback: it is important that student expectations are managed. Directors of Teaching and Learning had previously circulated the approved policy to staff in their disciplines. A member raised a concern with regard to how to handle potential non-compliance with the policy. Following a lengthy discussion on this, it was felt generally that it was the role of the Head of School to manage non-compliance as it was a HR matter. In response to a query, the Academic Secretary confirmed that the Secretary's Office in consultation with the Academic Services Division was coordinating the development of a Students' Complaint policy, and this is expected to be published in the near future.

The Senior Lecturer undertook to email colleagues with a reminder of the policy and asked Directors to monitor its implementation this academic year. There was further discussion about how to monitor the implementation of this policy, and it was suggested that it could be a question on the module evaluation questionnaire. It was pointed out, however, that there could be logistical issues with this approach as students may not have actually received feedback by the time they fill out their module feedback forms. It was agreed that this matter would be an agenda item in Trinity Term.

In response to a query raised by the Students' Union Education Officer, the Senior Lecturer reminded colleagues that every School should have a staff-student liaison group to which students should be encouraged to bring any issues.

USC/14-15/004 Scholarship - general paper

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, dated 22nd September 2014, had been circulated. At their last meetings of the 13/14 academic year, Council and Board approved a policy on Scholarship, requiring that in 2014/15 all courses set a general paper that is not on the set curriculum.

XX It was subsequently considered that the implementation of this policy in 14/15 would pose academic and logistical challenges in certain programmes and to allow for consultation on the implementation of the policy in an effective way, the introduction of this requirement has been postponed to the 2015/16 academic year. Changes to the University Calendar will be necessary and must be finalised by early January 2015. The issue of the general paper will be an agenda item for each of the three Michaelmas term USC meetings and will be discussed with the Faculty Executives and the Central Scholarship Committee.

A discussion ensued on what defined a 'general' paper. The Senior Lecturer advised that a general paper should examine material that is related to the candidate's discipline/s, but is not on the set curriculum. Depending on the discipline/s, it should encourage candidates to display the depth and breadth of their learning and their ability to integrate and apply knowledge from different disciplines. Academic staff for each course should have the freedom to decide the most appropriate format of the examination for the subject or course involved. The Senior Lecturer noted the concerns of some members that a general paper would be particularly difficult in certain areas, including multidisciplinary courses, TSM and Science subjects. It was mentioned that some areas already have a general paper in examinations, but that it was not found to be a differentiating paper, so that its introduction to Scholarship may not achieve the desired outcome of limiting the number of Scholars and ensuring the consistency of the scholarship examination across all disciplines. Finally, some members voiced their unhappiness that the policy was going ahead despite the strong academic arguments in opposition to a general paper which had been raised at various fora.

USC/14-15/005 Library HITS programme

The Library has introduced the Library HITS programme: Helpful Information for Trinity Students/Staff. The programme was in its 2nd week of 3, and students and staff were invited to join one or more information sessions on the Library. Mr Trevor Peare tabled a brochure for the programme which listed the short courses on offer and advised that these could be tailored to particular requirements. In keeping with a global change in the information environment, Trinity's Library catalogue had evolved and now, in addition to library books, it includes most of College's electronic resources. The business of information delivery has changed radically in Trinity and we are ahead of most libraries in terms of integration of this system. Some members commented that it is now more difficult to source relevant material as the search provides a great more data than needed. Mr Peare noted that with all new systems, it is difficult at first to navigate, but with use, staff and students will be able to navigate the site to source material in a speedy fashion.

The Senior Lecturer thanked Mr Peare for introducing the programme to USC.

USC/14-15/006 Student Cases

A memorandum from the Student Cases Team, dated 23rd September 2014, had been circulated. The Senior Lecturer welcomed Mr Robert Otway-Norwood, Trinity Teaching and Learning, to the meeting for this item. The student case process had recently been reviewed by START and it had been concluded that one of the main problems faced by the team was the delay to the process caused by insufficient information received from tutors. This lack of clear and full information makes it difficult both to categorise the case and to make a decision on it. Four web forms had been designed - *Exams and Assessment*, *Off Books*, *Withdrawals*, and *Other* - and in addition to required fields, the forms were annotated with guidelines and a checklist to assist tutors in completing their case.

A proposal had been brought to the School Administrators' Forum to introduce generic student case email addresses in Schools for each course in order to facilitate communication between the student cases team, Schools, Departments and course offices. There would be difficulty implementing this as generic emails would still have to be managed.

A number of members indicated that with the large volume of student cases, a tracking system is vital to determine what decisions are pending. The Academic Secretary advised that START had recommended establishing such a system but it was not part of their brief to build such a system. Instead it is considered to be the brief of the ASD to implement.

The Senior Tutor highlighted that a thorough review of the University regulations is necessary in order to reduce the number of student cases which are now growing at an unsustainable level. The Senior Lecturer suggested that there were a number of regulations, including Off-books and the NS system which should be reviewed and that discussions should begin during the present academic year.

The committee requested that a student cases tracking system be implemented as a matter of priority.

The Senior Lecturer thanked Mr Otway-Norwood for speaking to this item.

USC/14-15/007 Research on Course Handbooks

An extract from a document by Aoife Ni Mháolain on '*Research on Availability and Information given in Course Handbooks*', dated 5th September 2014, had been circulated. The Senior Lecturer advised that it had been recommended during

College's institutional review that course handbooks should follow a standard template. This was not considered to be fully achievable so it had been agreed at a previous meeting of USC that a central online repository for course handbooks should be created and this had been set-up at <https://www.tcd.ie/undergraduate-studies/course-handbooks/>. Schools should ensure that course handbooks for their areas were available in the repository and tutors should inform students where to access these. It was agreed that the handbook should be updated and maintained at the School/Departmental level and linked to the central repository to prevent any version control issues.

The webpages <https://www.tcd.ie/undergraduate-studies/course-documentation/handbooks.php> provide details of the required content and accessibility of handbooks and include a definition of ECTS. The circulated document detailed the most common issues surrounding course handbooks and feedback for specific handbooks can be requested by emailing senior.lecturer@tcd.ie

USC/14-15/008 Any other business

- (i) The Senior Tutor advised that the academic appeals process had concluded the previous day and a very significant number of appeals had been considered. For a number of reasons, including the short turnaround time between the publication of results and the Court of First Appeal, many students had missed the chance to bring their appeal to the Court of First Appeal prior to academic appeal.
- (ii) Some members raised concerns with regard to how mark changes are processed in SITS and also the administrative procedures surrounding mark changes; the Senior Lecturer advised that this item would be discussed at a future meeting of USC.
- (iii) The Dean of Students thanked all those involved in the Orientation process, with special thanks to the student volunteers on the S2S programme.

USC/14-15/009 Items for noting

USC noted the following item:

- XX (i) Change to Undergraduate Studies Committee membership: memorandum from Head of School of Business and Head of School of Social Sciences and Philosophy, dated 9th September 2014, together with reply from the Senior Lecturer, dated 11th September 2014.