

XX = Council relevance

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 28th October 2014 at 2.30pm in the Board Room.

Present: Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, Professor Gillian Martin (*Chair*)
 Ms Katie Byrne, Education Officer, Students' Union
 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 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 Rachel Moss, School of Histories and Humanities
 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 Christine Poulter, School of Drama, Film and Music
 Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics
 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 Michael Shevlin, School of Education
 Professor Sarah Smyth, Director of TSM
 Mr Trevor Peare, Library Representative
 Ms Ciara Coughlan, Student Representative

Apologies: Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
 Professor Ken Mok, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
 Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
 Professor Stephen Connon, School of Chemistry
 Professor Martina Hennessy, School of Medicine
 Professor Jane Farrar, School of Genetics and Microbiology
 Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior Academic Developer
 Ms Cliona Hannon, Director, Trinity Access Programmes

In attendance: Ms Elaine Egan; Ms Clodagh Byrne, Mature Student Officer, for item USC/14-15/014;
 the Registrar, for item USC/14-15/015

USC/14-15/010 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 28th October 2014 were approved.

USC/14-15/011 Matters arising

USC/14-15/002 - The Professional Special Purpose Certificate in Academic Practice which was approved by Council on 11th June 2014 had received favourable feedback from the external reviewer.

USC/14-15/002 The Admissions Forum held its first meeting of the academic year on 7th October 2014. Preliminary admissions figures had been discussed and when final figures are available they will be brought for discussion to USC.

USC/14-15/003 At the Council meeting of 22nd October 2014 the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer had highlighted the concerns of the committee regarding possible non-compliance with the policy on the return of coursework. The Provost had voiced his support for Directors of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning in fully implementing the policy in their Schools and also sought the support of Council. It had been suggested by a Council member that implementation of the policy could be reinforced through Faculty Executives. The policy had also been discussed at the Quality Committee and was on the agenda of the next Graduate Studies Committee, following which the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer and Dean of Graduate Studies will send an email to academic staff further outlining the policy.

USC/14-15/012 Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer's report

The Strategic Plan 2014-19 had been launched on 21st October 2014 by Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD. The plan promotes nine goals:

- Strengthen community
- Promote student life
- Renew the Trinity education
- Activate talents
- Build valuable partnerships
- Research for impact
- Engage wider society
- Demonstrate institutional leadership
- Secure Trinity's future

Many of the topics in the Strategic Plan, particularly around the goal of renewing the Trinity education, will be brought to future meetings of USC for discussion.

USC/14-15/013 Scholarship

a) General paper

Following the last meeting of USC, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer had asked Directors of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning and Course Directors to submit a brief outline of how they envisage implementation of the requirement to set a general paper in the programmes offered by their School. Responses received from Schools by the time of the meeting had been collated and circulated. Some Schools were still discussing the matter and would send their response at a later date.

The following patterns could be seen in the responses:

- Single Honor and Single School programmes could mostly include a general paper without difficulty.
- Multidisciplinary courses had in some cases the potential for an overarching general paper.
- Joint honors and multi-school programmes, where there is little or no disciplinary integration (e.g., TSM) could assign a minimum of a quarter of the total scholarship assessment to general questions (e.g., a minimum of half of one paper in each subject would have a compulsory general section).

Schools should ensure that the general questions do not look for skills and knowledge that may disadvantage students following joint honors courses compared to students of single honor courses. In order to maintain consistency across areas, programmes should ideally not have more than one general paper or the equivalent. The general section of a paper must be compulsory and the paper's heading should clearly indicate its general nature.

Some members were having difficulty with finding a suitable solution in their School and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer agreed to meet to discuss how to progress the matter.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer again acknowledged the concerns of some committee members with regards to the implementation of a general paper as a means of achieving consistency in Scholarship and of lowering the number of Scholars.

In advance of the next meeting of USC, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer will circulate a template to be completed for each course that outlines the specific proposal on how the general paper will be implemented. The completed template will subsequently be circulated to Council and the Central Scholarship Committee before going to Board.

b) Recommendation from Central Scholarship Committee (CSC)

XX

A memorandum from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, dated 22nd October 2014, had been circulated. The Central Scholarship Committee at its meeting of 10th October 2014 had agreed that in order to be eligible for Scholarship candidates must, in addition to achieving an overall first, obtain a majority of first class marks with remaining papers achieving a mark of 65% or above. Candidates cannot get below 65% on any paper.

The Undergraduate Studies Committee noted the recommendations. It is envisaged that they will be implemented in 2015/16 in tandem with the General Paper.

USC/14-15/014 Mature Student application process

A memorandum from the Mature Student Officer, dated 22nd October 2014, had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed the Mature Student Officer to the meeting.

A Mature Student Dispensation Scheme (MSDS) is in place in Trinity College to facilitate the admission of mature students to undergraduate courses. Mature applicants apply to the CAO and also submit a supplementary application form directly to College. An applicant's previous education, work experience, and motivation are considered in the selection process.

The Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance's Widening Participation Strand mapped the varying application processes for mature students in the Dublin region and found a complex and diverse array of procedures. Consideration is now being given at a regional and local level to the streamlining and simplification of application processes for mature applicants.

Within College, there are varying practices with courses using interviews, aptitude tests, or both. The Mature Student Officer advised the meeting of an aptitude test called the Mature Student Admissions Pathway (MSAP) which is used for entry to certain courses in some Irish universities. An applicant pays €75 to sit the MSAP and it can be a quick and useful method of shortlisting applicants. She noted, however, a concern that there may be a level of inherent bias in the test. She felt that conducting interviews was the most thorough method of selecting the most suitable candidates for a course and invited comments from the committee.

Most members agreed that interviewing candidates was the best method of selection. While interviewing is a labour-intensive process, time is saved in the long run as students who would most likely have struggled on the course would not be admitted.

Members noted that the mature student application form on the Trinity website was difficult to navigate and they were invited to submit their suggestions for improvements to the form to the Mature Student Officer. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked the Mature Student Officer for attending the meeting.

USC/14-15/015 Trinity's Visual Identity

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed the Registrar to the meeting. Apologies were given on behalf of the Marketing Manager, Beibhinn Coman, who could not attend.

The new Strategic Plan states that College will complete work on our visual identity and achieve optimal consistency across the University. The Provost had set up a Working Group earlier in the year to continue with the identity initiative in College. The Working Group was chaired by the Registrar, and comprised the Marketing Manager, a technical web person from College, an alumnus, and a retired member of staff. The Working Group had a brief to tidy up some of the detail on the coat of arms (shield) to enable it to print more clearly and also had to:

- retain the form of name as it is, i.e. Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin
- retain the heraldry in the shield
- review the shade of blue in the visual identity.

The Registrar noted that it was a delicate balance between keeping the hand-drawn elements of our current shield and ensuring the logo reproduced more effectively.

A lot of work has been carried out to measure staff, student and public perception of the Trinity identity. Surveys had been conducted to determine which words in our name were considered to be the most important. While 'Trinity' and 'Dublin' were considered to be the first and second most important words respectively, 'University' was also considered very important. Students felt the term 'University' was important in helping to secure employment and it is clear that it needs to be prominent in our name.

There are currently a vast number of different logos used in areas of College. Some of these are required to develop a parallel identity where a unit is linked to Trinity but not a full part of the University, whereas some units have their own logo despite being fully within the University. The Registrar noted that there was not just one College shield but rather a number of them that were used for different purposes and that these had evolved and developed over time. A coat of arms is produced according to a textual description and there is complete discretion in producing it once it adheres to this description. The current College shield does not print well in a small size or on a dark background. Research shows that the vast majority of the top 100 universities use two, and sometimes three, colours in their logos; our current shield uses five. A very early prototype of a revised shield had been wrongly reported in the media as being the final logo and this had created disquiet in the College community.

Samples of various letterheads and versions of the proposed logo were tabled, e.g. English only, Irish only, small usage version, etc. The proposed shade of blue for the shield would reproduce more effectively. It will be proposed that the coloured shield would be retained for formal occasions. The University shield will be retained without any changes.

A discussion ensued and members provided feedback on the tabled samples.

Open sessions for all academic staff, all administrative staff and all students will be held shortly. Following the consultation period, feedback will be provided to Board and if the proposal is accepted, guidelines will be produced for the College community as to when to use each version of the logos.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked the Registrar for speaking to this item.

USC/14-15/016 SITS: Update from Schools on Functionality around Examinations and Progression

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer invited members to give feedback relating to the functionality of SITS. Members were also requested to submit comments in writing. A representative of SITS will be invited to a future meeting of USC to discuss the issues raised. It was clear from members' comments that many were still unhappy with some of the functionality of SITS and also with some of the business process around the use of SITS.

A member commented that examination and progression was still problematic and this was thought to be due to a combination of changes to staff in the Academic Registry, new Directors of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning, and also a perceived decrease in flexibility in the system this year.

The process of mark changes was found to be onerous and time-consuming as many different stakeholders were involved and it was felt that this process could be refined. A member commented that in certain areas, e.g. the creation of marking sheets and the creation of MAPs and MABs, academic units should be able to act independently of the Academic Registry.

Registration was another area where members reported problems - in some cases students had still not been able to register as of teaching week 6.

Other comments raised included:

- Schools should be able to enter marks in SITS by student name, rather than anonymously;
- there should be a link between BlackBoard and SITS;
- the slowness of SITS makes it difficult to retrieve information in a reasonable timeframe;
- at the most critical times for use of SITS, it is difficult to get assistance with the system.

A number of members noted that both academic and administrative staff in Schools felt that they could not rely on SITS and therefore maintained an entire parallel system of updating spreadsheets, keeping logs and setting reminders.

It was agreed that there should be a forum where staff could report their difficulties and receive feedback. The SITS User Group had stopped meeting due to non-implementation of requested changes. Work is, however, being done to establish a process whereby someone will be available to implement these changes in the future.

A number of members noted that they had previously submitted both extensive feedback and suggested resolutions on issues with SITS but that these issues had not been resolved. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer undertook to investigate the status of these submissions.

USC/14-15/017 Any other business

There was no other business.

USC/14-15/018 Trinity Access Programmes Steering Committee

The draft minutes from the meeting of 20th May 2014 were noted and approved.

USC/14-15/019 Items for noting

There were no items for noting.