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**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN  
TRINITY COLLEGE**

**Undergraduate Studies Committee**

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A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 13 October 2015 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

- Present:** Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, Professor Gillian Martin (*Chair*)  
 Ms Molly Kenny, Education Officer, Students' Union  
 Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan  
 Senior Tutor, Professor Claire Laudet  
 Professor Jarlath Killeen, School of English  
 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 Elaine Moriarty, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
 Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences  
 Professor Mike Brady, School of Computer Science and Statistics  
 Professor Jane Farrar, School of Genetics and Microbiology  
 Professor Mary-Lee Rhodes, School of Business  
 Professor Michael Shevlin, School of Education  
 Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences  
 Professor James Hanrahan, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies  
 Professor Sarah Smyth, Director of TSM  
 Professor Rachel Moss, School of Histories and Humanities  
 Professor Ciaran Simms, School of Engineering  
 Professor Kevin Conlon, School of Medicine  
 Professor Imelda Coyne, School of Nursing and Midwifery  
 Professor Michael Bridge, School of Chemistry  
 Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics  
 Professor Robbie Gilligan, School of Social Work and Social Policy  
 Professor Des Ryan, School of Law  
 Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science  
 Professor Fáinche Ryan, Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology  
 Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior Academic Developer  
 Ms Sinéad Baker, Student Representative  
 Library Representative, Ms Kathryn Smith
- Apologies:** Ms Cliona Hannon, Director, Trinity Access Programmes  
 Professor Howard Smith, School of Psychology  
 Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology  
 Professor Jane Farrar, School of Genetics and Microbiology  
 Professor Kevin Devine  
 Dean of Students, Professor Kevin O'Kelly
- In attendance:** Ms Elaine Egan, Professor Daniel Faas, Department of Sociology, and Dr Sean Delaney, Registrar, Marino Institute of Education, for item USC/15-16/087iii; Professor Patrick Geoghegan, School of Histories and Humanities, for item USC/15-16/088; Ms Vickey Butler, Assistant Secretary, for item USC/15-16/089

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**USC/15-16/085 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 1 September 2015 were approved.

**USC/15-16/086 Matters arising**

**USC/14-15/073** A member thanked CAPSL for organising the Teaching and Supporting Learning module for Postgraduate Teaching Assistants.

**USC/14-15/070** The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer advised that information had been received on the range of PIT codes used in departments and schools for end of year results. Staff in Trinity Teaching and Learning would go through the data and bring details back to a future meeting of USC.

**USC/14-15/076** Various stakeholders had been consulted on the plagiarism policy and a reminder email would be sent to all students in the following week. Information screens around College should be used again to encourage students to complete the online tutorial. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer and the Dean of Graduate Studies were investigating whether it would be possible to produce a record confirming completion of the tutorial. Possibilities which had been discussed were embedding the tutorial within BlackBoard or producing a certificate upon completion of the tutorial. As the 2015/16 University Calendar had not yet been published, the entry on plagiarism had been made available on Libguides. Students would be informed when the new Calendar goes live. The Deans were also discussing the recording of the different levels of plagiarism in SITS.

**USC/14-15/081** Council, at its meeting of 2 September 2015, had approved the proposed revised common points scale. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer and the Admissions Officer had written to staff requesting that they align their minimum subject requirements to the new grade bands. Members were reminded to submit any outstanding responses.

#### **USC/15-16/087 Course Proposals**

**For approval:**

- XX i) BSc. Physiotherapy (Joint with Singapore Institute of Technology)**  
The Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning in the School of Medicine spoke to the circulated proposal. The proposal was for a full-time, 4-year programme, carrying a credit volume of 240 ECTS credits. The course would be delivered in Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) where SIT staff would teach 180 ECTS credits and Trinity staff the remaining 60. Trinity would take the lead in teaching research methods and would supervise 50% of the undergraduate dissertations. The course would commence in 2016/17 and would admit 100 students in the first year, increasing by 20 each year for five years. The programme would lead to a jointly awarded degree.

The Director advised that the programme was designed to prepare graduates to enter into the physiotherapy profession in Singapore and that it would meet the requirements of the relevant regulatory authorities there. He outlined the ways in which the course aligned with both the College Strategic Plan 2014-19 and the School of Medicine's Strategic Plan.

The library representative raised a possible concern regarding online access to resources by students on a different campus and the Director agreed to discuss the issue with her directly.

The Senior Academic Developer commended the range of assessment methods outlined in the proposal. She commented that there was a high number of modules carrying 5 ECTS credits and as most of these would be assessed there was a risk of over-assessment. She advised that there was scope to pare back the assessment while still ensuring that learning outcomes would be met. The Director thanked her for the feedback and confirmed that the high assessment volume was because the course had to both equip graduates with the necessary skills to enter into the profession and also meet the requirements of the regulatory authorities.

In response to a query, the Director confirmed that this course would replace the existing one-year collaborative programme that upgraded the SIT Diploma in Physiotherapy to a degree. In response to a query regarding the parameters for dual

and joint awards in Trinity, the Academic Secretary advised that a paper on the subject would be brought to a future meeting of the University Council.

The Director confirmed that while the business plan referred to an initial 5-year period, it was hoped that the partnership would continue beyond that. He also noted that the partnership opened up pathways for other research collaborations.

USC approved the proposal to proceed to external review and subsequently to Council for approval.

- XX      **ii)      B.A. (Mod.) in Middle Eastern and European Languages and Cultures,**  
The Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning in the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies spoke to the proposal which had been circulated in advance. He thanked Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Trinity Teaching and Learning, for her assistance with the proposal. The course would be fulltime, of 4-years' duration and would carry 240 ECTS credits. It was proposed that the course would commence in 2017/18 and would admit 12 EU and 4 non-EU students in the first instance.

The Director outlined how the proposal had arisen from the establishment of a new department of Near and Middle Eastern Studies within his School. The Director highlighted the growing interest in Middle Eastern culture and in the relationship between Europe and the Middle East. The unique features of the degree were that it bridged Middle Eastern and European cultures through modules in the Freshman and Senior Sophister years, and also that it allowed students to study a Middle Eastern language to an advanced level. The course would include a year abroad to provide students with the opportunity to improve their language skills and cultural awareness.

The Director acknowledged the external pressure to reduce course codes, but noted that the exceptions to this included where a course was strongly aligned to an institution's strategic plan. He brought the meeting through the sections of the proposal that demonstrated how the proposal was closely aligned with the College's Strategic Plan 2014-2019. In response to a query, the Director noted that the School was interested in making some of the modules available through the Broad Curriculum.

In response to a query the Director confirmed that the course would not create any timetabling issues. A discussion took place regarding the requirement for Library usage for students on the course and the Director clarified that the library requirements had been agreed in consultation with Library staff.

A discussion also arose with regard to the destination for the year abroad and the possible safety concerns surrounding certain possible locations. It was noted that the first year abroad would arise in 2019 and an informed decision would be made at the time, taking the relevant security issues into account.

A concern was raised with regard to taking up a language in the second year and whether students would be sufficiently proficient in the language by the Junior Sophister year to undertake a year abroad. The Director confirmed that this could be considered on a case-by-case basis for each student.

USC approved the proposal to proceed to external review and to Council for approval.

**For consideration:**

- XX      **iii)      International Foundation Programme**  
The proposal together with a memorandum from the Vice President for Global Relations / Director of Internationalisation, dated 8 October 2015, had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer introduced the item and set out the context for the request that USC approve the programme in principle. Global Relations was hoping to have the first intake of students in September 2016

and needed to be in a position to publicise the programme for recruitment purposes. In order to maintain the momentum and to accommodate the impossibly tight window between the next meeting of USC on 17 November and the Council meeting on the 18 November and the fact that neither USC nor Council meet again until January, USC members were being asked to consider that the proposal be sent out for external review after today's meeting. Following incorporation of feedback from USC members, and the external review, it would be brought back to USC for final approval, before proceeding to Council. The normal procedure was that USC would approve proposals before they would be sent out for external review. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer also welcomed Professor Daniel Faas, Sociology, and Dr Sean Delaney, Registrar, Marino Institute of Education (MIE), to the meeting.

Speaking to the proposal, Professor Faas noted that the one-year programme was designed to equip students with the appropriate English language and discipline-specific skills to prepare them to undertake full-time undergraduate studies at Trinity. The programme would facilitate entry to the University for students from regions of the world where the secondary-school leaving qualifications did not permit students to qualify for direct admission to undergraduate programmes. The programme would replace the foundation programme delivered by Study Group International (SGI). The SGI foundation programme had not met agreed targets and there had been some progression issues with students who entered Trinity undergraduate programmes through this route.

The proposed programme had been based on the Trinity Access Programme foundation modules and then tailored with input from the academic staff from the destination Trinity programmes. It was therefore felt that the programme would be more successful in preparing students for Trinity courses than the SGI programme had been. The course would contain two streams: Business and STEM. Each semester would be of 15 weeks' duration, with a reading week built in to each. Students would take 70 credits, including core modules in Mathematics and English for Academic Purposes, and electives in laboratory sciences or social sciences depending on their pathway.

The programme would lead to a Certificate qualification and work was underway to establish the appropriate level on the National Framework of Qualifications; this would support student mobility for students who did not progress to Trinity. The course would be delivered in MIE and would recruit approximately 30 non-EU students in the first year. It would commence in 2016 and would continue to be overseen by Trinity staff, alongside staff in MIE.

In response to a query regarding the level of supports that would be in place for these students it was noted that MIE was relatively small with a strong community atmosphere and that the students would live on the MIE campus and have a personal tutor. They could also call on the MIE chaplaincy service or attend counselling through the service agreement with Trinity.

The Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning in the School of Mathematics queried whether students on the STEM stream could have the option of taking electives in social sciences. He also advised that students coming into the Moderatorship in Mathematics should be required to achieve a minimum mark of 80% in the mathematics module in order to ensure they have a reasonable chance at progressing through the course.

The Senior Academic Developer noted that the learning outcomes were derived from the syllabus and were content-focused rather than focused on skills, and that for some of the programme outcomes there was no alignment with the assessment methods within individual modules. She also noted that in many modules continuous assessment was not specified.

Responding to a query on staffing, it was noted that a fulltime Programme Manager would be appointed and would be responsible for staffing matters. Some additional staff would be recruited and would teach the course in conjunction with existing MIE staff.

A member inquired as to the quality control of the assessments taken by the students and it was noted that external examiners would be appointed. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer advised that under the SGI admission process, interviews with Trinity staff were held for entry to Pharmacy. Members requested that should the new foundation programme be approved, all Schools have the opportunity to interview students and make the final decision on entry to a course.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked Professor Faas and the Registrar of MIE for speaking to the proposal. Discussion continued amongst members and the importance of the students being competent in English and also receiving continuous English language support in Trinity was emphasised. A member also noted that the external examiner arrangements were quite vague.

Due to the high number of concerns and queries, members were invited to send further comment for the proposers via email. USC agreed that the proposal could be sent for external review following incorporation of feedback arising at USC and understood that the revised proposal would revert to USC prior to the approval process at Council.

#### **USC/15-16/088 Trinity Admissions Feasibility Study**

A memorandum from the Project Sponsor of the Trinity Admissions Feasibility Study, Professor Patrick Geoghegan, dated 24 September 2015, had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed Professor Geoghegan to the meeting to speak to this item. She noted that this year 10 students had been admitted to Law, 7 to History, and 4 to Ancient and Medieval History and Culture.

On 13 May 2015 Council had approved the extension of the Trinity Admissions Feasibility Study for a third year (CL/14-15/169). The third year would allow for the collection of further data, to explore ways of extending the study to other colleges and, to allow some testing of the modalities. It had been agreed at the Council meeting that a paper outlining any changes to the process would be circulated to Council at the start of the new academic year for approval. The sponsor noted that as this was a study, it would be worthwhile experimenting with the modalities to ensure different processes were well tested. The following three options for the study in 2015/16 would be presented to Council:

- 1) Make no change to the process.
- 2) Weight the modalities differently.
- 3) Use the personal statement as a qualifier only.

The project sponsor advised that the third option was his preferred one. Many students indicated in January that they would apply through this route but did not submit a personal statement by March. To request a personal statement would therefore be an effective measure to identify students with more determination and drive. Continuing to assess the personal statement using trained readers and review panels would be labour-intensive and expensive, and near impossible to scale up for larger numbers of applicants. To use the personal statement as a qualifier only would involve insisting that all applicants complete the personal statement and scoring it as Pass or Fail to determine whether applicants qualify for the next stage of the process.

Members were invited to provide feedback on the three options and comments received included:

- continuing to weight the personal statement could lead to a situation similar to that in the US whereby companies offer to create a personal statement for a fee

- it is difficult to verify authorship of the personal statement and some applicants may be advantaged by virtue of social background
- using the personal statement as a qualifier only may suggest a 'watering-down' of the aims of the study, we could consider also using interviews to recruit students but it was felt that this would be politically unacceptable and logistically difficult to implement
- removing the statement altogether could result in losing some students who really want to take the course and this would run counter to the study's aim to identify a student's motivation and suitability for the course
- raising the weight of the RPR would mean that the study would become more like an access programme
- the study is displacing 'eligible candidates' and it is important that this is addressed if the study is to continue, and if the quotas were outside of the standard course quotas, experimentation might be perceived as more equitable
- in relation to outcomes, it is unclear what is being measured in this study and it will be several years before we can determine its success. A further factor to be considered in this context is the small number of participants and the impact of any changes to existing modalities
- whatever system is used it must have the full public trust.

XX USC gave support to option three being tested in 2015/16.

#### USC/15-16/089 Student Complaints Procedure

A copy of the draft procedure had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed the Assistant Secretary, Ms Victoria Butler, to the meeting to speak to this item.

The Assistant Secretary advised that the need for a student complaints procedure had been raised during a quality review of the Office of the Vice-Provost in 2011 and later by the Office of the Ombudsman. The procedure had been drafted by the Assistant Secretary and the Manager of the Academic Services Division and had undergone revisions following consultation with various College committees. It was hoped that the procedure would be rolled-out in College at the end of 2015. The procedure and forms would be hosted on the Secretary's Office website and in the first year would be monitored and revised as necessary.

The Assistant Secretary emphasised that the procedure was not designed to replace the current processes in place for dealing with student complaints but rather should be invoked when complaints had not been successfully dealt with at the local level or via other existing mechanisms. The circulated document outlined the two different stages of the complaint procedure; the Assistant Secretary would assess and manage complaints in the first stage, and the Manager of the Academic Services Division would assess and manage those in the second stage. The document outlined a number of issues which would be outside of the scope of this procedure, including academic issues and issues that would be covered under the Dignity and Respect Policy.

Members commented that the document did not provide clarity on what type and level of complaint would be covered by the procedure. A suggestion was made that there should be a clear benchmark against which students could gauge whether a complaint under this procedure was legitimate, e.g. the Student Charter could be made more explicit for this purpose.

Members raised concerns that the procedure could leave staff accountable if they inadvertently provided advice that a student felt worked against them. It was not clear to members how a student could complain locally about the University and some had concerns that the procedure would essentially be the University investigating itself. In response to these concerns, the Assistant Secretary noted that the procedure would involve staff members who were not involved in the complaint and that that was standard in many of our existing procedures. She emphasised that

the procedure was not intended to hold people accountable but rather to address legitimate concerns that students may hold.

A number of members were of the opinion that the personal tutorial system which was in place in Trinity represented a satisfactory centralised complaint system for students. Another member was concerned that resources should not be diverted to the complaints procedure when current vital systems in College were in crisis. A further concern raised was that the procedure was putting students somewhat in the position of customers which went against the spirit of collegiality and belied the fact that they were members of an academic community.

In response to a query, the Assistant Secretary advised that the student evaluation system could not address the complaints in the same manner as the proposed procedure. A member outlined that many of the complaints students might make, e.g. in relation to poor-quality teaching facilities, were likely to have been previously reported by staff and that resources were not usually available to address them. The Assistant Secretary advised that a report would be submitted annually to the Quality Committee and this would track which items had been the subject of complaint on a frequent basis. A member agreed that a formal complaint procedure may provide the weight needed to address longstanding issues.

The Students' Union Education Officer welcomed the procedure and felt that while the tutorial system was invaluable to students, the focus of the procedure was broader and would catch issues that currently did not have a forum where they could be raised and addressed.

It was agreed that consultation on the procedure would take place with the School Administrator's Forum and the Trade Unions that represented University staff. Furthermore a comment regarding the possible exposure of College staff would be sought from the College Solicitor. Following this further period of consultation, the document would be redrafted to incorporate the feedback and also to make more explicit the type and level of complaints that the procedure would cover. The revised procedure would be recirculated to USC for noting prior to submission to Council for approval.

**USC/15-16/090 Trinity Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

Due to time constraints this item was deferred.

**USC/15-16/091 Implementing Teaching and Learning Policy at a Local Level**

Due to time constraints this item was deferred.

**USC/15-16/092 Any other business**

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer informed the meeting of an issue relating to appeals. The number of appeals heard at the Supplemental Courts of First Appeal in 2015/16 had slightly reduced from the previous year (from 230 to 201), but the number of appeals heard by the Academic Appeals Committee had risen from 39 to 47. Twenty-nine appeals considered at the Academic Appeals Committee had not been considered by the Courts of First Appeal. It had become evident that the time between the publication of results, the submission of documentation to the Courts of First Appeal, the sitting and decision-making of the Courts of First Appeal, the reading of all the appeals decisions by the student cases team and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, and the submission of documentation to Academic Appeals was simply too short. The Dean proposed that a working group be established that would include the Senior Tutor, the Registrar, the Academic Secretary, and a number of Directors of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning to consider ways in which this issue may be addressed and to bring recommendations to USC and Council. The Education Project may help to resolve this issue in the long run, but measures should be put in place to improve the situation in the interim.

Members approved the establishment of the working group. They also suggested that more explicit guidelines should be put in place to outline what could be resolved by

the Courts of Examiners and this would reduce the cases that proceed to the Court of First Appeal and the Academic Appeals Committee. A member noted that it was vital that marks were changed earlier in the process and guidelines should also be made available on this. It was agreed that the issues around the nature of special examinations should also be considered.

**USC/15-16/093 Items for noting**

USC noted the following document that had been circulated for information:  
The Trinity Research Education Environment (TREE).