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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 17 November 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  
Dean of Students, Professor Kevin O'Kelly

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 Mike Brady, School of Computer Science and Statistics  
Professor Mary-Lee Rhodes, School of Business  
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences  
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  
Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology  
Professor Howard Smith, School of Psychology

Apologies: Senior Tutor, Professor Claire Laudet  
Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education  
Professor James Hanrahan, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies  
Professor Jane Farrar, School of Genetics and Microbiology  
Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences  
Professor Kevin Devine, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education  
Ms Sinéad Baker, Student Representative  
Ms Cliona Hannon, Director, Trinity Access Programmes  
Library Representative, Ms Kathryn Smith

In attendance: Ms Nicola Byrne, Professor Linda Hogan, Vice-Provost /Chief Academic Officer and Ms Fedelma McNamara, Trinity Education Project, for item USC/15-16/096; Ms Roisin Smith, Quality Officer and Ms Sarah Coyle, Trinity Teaching and Learning, for item USC/15-16/097, Dr Sean O Reilly, Student Recruitment Officer, for item USC/15-16/099

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**USC/15-16/094 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 13 October 2015 were approved.

**USC/15-16/095 Matters arising**

- i. (USC/14-15/070) The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer confirmed that the data received on the range of PIT codes used in departments and schools were being analysed by staff in Trinity Teaching and Learning. Details would be brought back to a future meeting of USC.
- ii. (USC/14-15/076) Now that the 2015/16 University Calendar is online, notification will be circulated to all students on the new regulations. Information screens around College will also be used to encourage students to complete the online tutorial on avoiding Plagiarism.
- iii. Feedback had been received from the external reviewers for the BSc. Physiotherapy (Joint with Singapore Institute of Technology). The reviewers raised a number of points which were addressed by the Discipline. The proposal was revised to incorporate the external reviewer's recommendations and had been circulated to Council for approval on 18 November 2015.
- iv. Feedback had been received from the external reviewers for the B.A. (Mod.) in Middle Eastern and European Languages and Cultures. The proposal received a very positive review and had been circulated to Council for approval on 18 November 2015.
- v. A report was received from the external reviewers for the International Foundation Programme. Once the report has been reviewed, the proposal will be brought back to USC before circulation to Council for approval.
- vi. Professor Patrick Geoghegan, Project Sponsor of the Trinity Admissions Feasibility Study (TAFS) had presented a document to Council on the proposed adjustments to the TAFS. Council approved the recommendation to use the personal statement as a qualifier only. The application guidelines have been updated to reflect this change.
- vii. Feedback had been received on the draft Student Complaints Procedure and straightforward amendments have been incorporated into the document. Some of the other feedback requires further consultation with the Faculty Administrators Forum. The document has been reviewed by the College Solicitor and a revised draft document will be circulated to USC and GSC for noting before proceeding to Council in January 2016 for approval.
- viii. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer reported that the Appeals Working Group had met on three occasions. It comprises the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer (Chair); the Registrar; the Senior Tutor; Professor Jarlath Killeen, School of English; two School Administrators; a representative from the Academic Registry; Student Cases team; and Ms Sarah Coyle, Trinity Teaching and Learning. The remit of the working group is to review the procedures underlying the processing of appeals at the supplemental session and to recommend to USC and Council interim measures to relieve the current blockages. A discussion document will be brought to USC in December 2015 before circulation to Council in January 2016.

**USC/15-16/096 Update on the Education Project**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer and Ms Fedelma McNamara, Project Manager Trinity Education Project, attended USC for this item. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer spoke to the item by way of a presentation. She provided an update to USC on the Education Project noting that the membership and terms of reference for the Steering Committee and for the project strands were in place; principal timelines have been agreed; and engagement and communication

with the University community has commenced. Initial consultation with employers had also taken place.

She outlined that the Education Project was undertaking a comprehensive review of undergraduate curricula and noted that the projected timelines for the delivery of the new undergraduate programmes would facilitate entry in the 2018/2019 academic year. The following project strands were highlighted:

- (i) Stakeholder Management, Communication and Resources
- (ii) Curriculum Principles and Architecture
- (iii) Assessment
- (iv) Internships and Study Abroad
- (v) Technology Enhanced Learning
- (vi) Learning Spaces
- (vii) Differentiation and Positioning (Branding)

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer explained that each project strand reports into the Steering Committee, with each member of the steering committee responsible for a sub-project or sub-projects. The Vice-Provost chairs strand 2 Curriculum Principles and Architecture. She noted that following on from discussions and consultation with the University community, this strand will look at the shape of the undergraduate education and develop proposals for an architecture for undergraduate programmes. The strand will also focus its attention on proposed graduate attributes, specifically, the attributes of Trinity graduates ten years hence and how the achievement of these attributes might impact on programme architecture, curriculum design and assessment. The four graduate attributes identified by the Steering Group, are:

- a) Academic Excellence
- b) Critical Thinking and Effective Communication
- c) Life-Long Learning
- d) Global Citizenship

A number of *ad hoc* working groups were established, they were tasked with bringing proposals/recommendations to strand 2 in relation to structures, taking cognisance of entry streams; enhancing or introducing flexibility; subject combinations; progression and academic year structure. The *ad hoc* working groups include:

- Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- Undergraduate Science
- All other programmes including professionally accredited programmes/courses.

In answer to a number of queries from the Committee on issues including the academic year structure, end-of-semester examinations, the final year research project, the alignment with SITS and the START administrative review, she noted the importance of identifying which structures are common across all courses and how the Trinity Education will look to further modularise the undergraduate education and to simplify progression requirements. A proposal will be drafted and brought forward to the Steering Committee before proceeding to Council for approval. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer advised that she would bring an update on the project to a future meeting of USC.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer and Ms Fedelma McNamara for attending USC.

#### **USC/15-16/097 Trinity policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

A memorandum from the Quality Officer, Ms Roisin Smith, dated 6 October 2015, had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed Ms

Roisin Smith, Quality Officer and Ms Sarah Coyle from Trinity Teaching and Learning to speak to this item.

The Quality Officer informed the Committee that Trinity College does not currently have a policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning and is in the process of drafting a policy document. The current practice in Trinity regarding RPL is localised at School level with coordination provided for undergraduate applications by the Academic Registry.

The key questions for discussion by the Committee to inform the policy are:

- What is the upper limit in terms of credit (ECTS) for which Trinity will grant exemption towards the award of a degree at undergraduate level?
- Characteristics of what can and cannot be considered for RPL, e.g., taught modules only, excluding research, dissertation, project work, professional and statutory accreditation requirements, prerequisites, core modules for moderatorships;
- Appropriate timeframe for Schools to respond to applicants.

Referring to best practice outlined in the report published by the Framework Implementation Network, the Quality Officer informed the Committee that admissions activity should be underpinned by a clear policy which provides guidelines as to what elements can and cannot be exempt under RPL, while giving due consideration to the requirements of accreditation bodies.

Some members expressed concern about how broad the definition of prior learning is, and whether it relates to competencies rather than knowledge. It was noted that Life-Long Learning and RPL practices have been discussed for some time in Trinity and that an articulation of the policy to underpin these practices would be welcome.

The Quality Officer advised that the circulated memorandum was also circulated to GSC members and it was agreed that an RPL Working Group be established over the coming weeks. Accordingly nominees from among the Directors of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning were sought to join the Directors of Teaching and Learning (PG) in the working group to consider best practice and agree parameters for RPL in Trinity. It would be particularly valuable to have members who had been involved in assessing applications involving prior experiential learning. Professor Poulter (School of Drama, Film and Music) and Professor Sloane (School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences) expressed interest in joining the working group.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked the Quality Officer and Ms Coyle for presenting to USC.

#### **USC/15-16/098 Implementing Teaching and Learning Policy at a Local Level**

A memorandum from the Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning, School of Drama, Film and Music, dated 8 October 2015 was circulated. She noted that when a new policy is adopted by College, it would be useful to be able to compare how best to introduce the policy at a local level. There are different philosophies and practices in place to support undergraduate teaching and learning across the disciplines and academic staff may not be aware of the structures operating at a local level in other disciplines.

Professor Poulter emphasised that the current challenge is one of cultural change, and changes in our practices, rather than logistic challenges. She highlighted a number of issues that necessitate discussion around teaching and learning in order for a policy to be effective, such as:

- How do we get 'buy in' from students?
- The kind of language to be used (Wanting - needing - expecting)

- How is teaching and learning being developed in the Schools? What kinds of teaching methods are being used?
- How much consistency exists around practices?
- Should there be student exit interviews?
- What support structures are in place?
- Who uses the College Virtual Learning Environment?

A discussion ensued and it became evident that there are many different fora linked to Teaching and Learning across Schools which comprise staff and students. However, it was noted that these fora do not necessarily generate change.

While it was recognised that one model does not fit all and depends to a large extent on the size of the School, members felt that further discussion on how to introduce a teaching and learning policy at a local level could benefit all disciplines. It was agreed that while the lead for initiating policy and discussion should come from the Directors of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning, CAPSL would supply the space and help with the organisation and dissemination of papers.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked Professor Poulter for talking to this item.

### **USC/15-16/099 Open Day**

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed the new Student Recruitment Officer to the meeting. The Student Recruitment Officer thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the USC. He gave the committee a brief outline of his own background, including his participation in developing and coordinating the Northern Ireland Engagement Programme. He advised on the number of activities that he has been involved in since he took up the post in September 2015, including:

#### **Schools engagement activity**

Since September 2015 the team has attended 49 schools in Ireland and Northern Ireland to deliver presentations and attend careers fairs. It is anticipated that by the new year the number of school visits will increase to approximately 110. Campus visits for class groups and individuals, particularly from the UK and Europe, are ongoing. These visits are recognised as a key area of student recruitment and require further development.

#### **Higher Options**

The Higher Options event took place in mid-September, engaging with over 12,000 prospective students. Trinity was very well represented and the Student Recruitment Officer thanked academic staff for their input.

#### **Open Day 2015**

Trinity College Open Day will take place on Saturday 5 December 2015. Organisation of the event is well underway and it is planned to develop new strands to showcase all sides of the Trinity experience. Approximately 160 presentations, tours, demonstrations and activities will take place on the day, including;

- 87 stands representing the diverse courses College has to offer
- Research demonstrations and clinical skills sessions
- Information sessions for mature students, students with disabilities, access students and parents/guardians.

Some of the new strands that are being developed include a 'mini-freshers' fair' to showcase activities such as:

- Exhibition games;
- Debates;
- Performance by Players;

- Performance in Front Square for some of our music/performing arts societies.

A member commented that they received a great deal of requests to visit schools around the country and asked if support could be offered by the Student Recruitment Officer or the student ambassadors. The Student Recruitment Officer confirmed that he would be very happy to assist, although the engagement with schools would be of a general nature, promoting Trinity as a whole

The Student Recruitment Officer welcomed the opportunity to engage with Schools on new initiatives. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited feedback from members. The Committee commended the Student Recruitment Officer on his efforts and wished him well in his endeavors.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked the Student Recruitment Officer for addressing USC on his activities.

#### **USC/15-16/100 Any other business**

- A member expressed concern regarding the critical delays in processing student cases and the deleterious effect on students, staff and College's reputation. Members requested that action be taken as a matter of priority to alleviate the backlog in the short term. Other members echoed these concerns.

It was made clear that there is no criticism of the staff currently involved in delivering the student cases function, rather the overwhelming workload and unreasonable level of responsibility that rests on a very small number of individuals. It is hoped that bringing the discussion to USC will be taken as a starting point for dealing constructively and positively with this very serious problem and for building on the work of the committed and dedicated staff.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer undertook to bring the matter to the attention of the Chief Operating Officer and colleagues from the Academic Registry as a matter of urgency, and to report back to USC on the 8 December 2015.

- The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted that, following the Paris atrocities of Friday 13 November 2015, the Senior Tutor and the Director of the Student Counselling Service travelled to Paris. They will hold group sessions and meet students on a one-to-one basis in an effort to support and advise students studying in France. Students who are concerned and wish to return home, will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

#### **USC/15-16/101 Trinity Access Programmes Steering Committee**

The draft minutes from the meeting of 28 May 2015 were noted and approved.

#### **USC/15-16/102 Items for noting**

USC noted the following document which had been circulated for information:

1. Undergraduate Studies Committee membership, dated 9 November 2015