

**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE**

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on **4th November 2008** at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer (Chair),
Senior Lecturer, Dr Aileen Douglas
Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)
Dr Simon Trezise, School of Drama, Film and Music
Dr Paul Delaney, School of English
Professor Brian McGing for Professor Ciaran Brady, School of Histories and Humanities
Dr Claire Laudet, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Dr Irene Walsh, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Dr Anne Fitzpatrick, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Dr Jacco Thijssen, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Ms Ruth Torode, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Mr Patrick McCabe for Dr James Quinn, School of Business
Dr Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Dr Damian Murchan, School of Education
Professor Ivana Bacik, School of Law
Dr Kevin O'Kelly, School of Engineering
Dr Jeremy Jones, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Dr Ian Sanders, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Ignatius McGovern, School of Physics
Dr Michael Lyons, School of Chemistry
Dr Daniela Zisterer, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics & Microbiology
Dr Martina Hennessy for Professor Shaun McCann, School of Medicine
Dr Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
Dr Fiona Timmins, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Dr Anne Marie Healy, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
Mr Hugh Sullivan, Education Officer Students' Union
Mr Ashley Cooke, Students' Union representative
Dr Brian Foley, Director of CAPSL
Dr Jacqueline Potter, Academic Development Manager.

Apologies: *There were no apologies*

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner; Ms Alex Anderson (for item 7).

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate) to the first meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC), which he explained was an amalgamation of the remits of the Undergraduate Teaching and Learning Committee and the Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning (CAPSL) Advisory Committee. He informed the meeting that the USC is a sub-committee of the University Council and the terms of reference would be available for the next meeting of the Committee.

UGS/08-09/001 **Minutes** of the Meeting of the Undergraduate Teaching and Learning Committee of the 3rd June 2008 were approved.

UGS/08-09/002 **Matters arising**

(i) *Retention Data:* In response to a query from a committee member with regard to the sharing of Trinity's retention data across the sector, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer explained that there is no agreed sectoral methodology for the compilation of such data and as such the results cannot be reliably compared across institutions. Individual Directors can request the data from the Quality Office to analyse trends in their respective Schools.

(ii) *Modularisation – optional modules*: In response to a query, the Vice Provost/ Chief Academic Officer confirmed that Schools seeking derogation from the principle that ten ECTS must be made available for students to take optional modules from outside their course of study, would have to make a separate application to Council. It was clarified that the agreed model of modularisation cannot be implemented until College introduces the necessary management information systems, which may take a number of years.

UGS/08-09/003 Review of the role of Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate): The document, *Director of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate), Role and Responsibilities*, dated 11th May 2005, was circulated. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, noting that the document had been approved by Board in 2005, suggested that it might now be timely to review the role and responsibilities of Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG).

In the course of discussion on this subject, the following points were made:

- There is a need for greater clarity concerning the roles of the Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) and the Heads of Discipline. Directors are responsible for pedagogical issues but they do not have the necessary resources available to assist them in this role.
- Concerns were raised in relation to the apportioning of responsibilities to Directors without the requisite authority and resources. The Head of School can delegate authority to Directors, but is not clear how this authority relates to that of the Head of Discipline or holders of established Chairs.
- There are significant governance differences across Schools and it is necessary to reflect this diversity. The management of a single discipline School is different to that of a multi-discipline School: there are differences between 'professional' Schools and other Schools, between Schools with off-campus locations and Schools located solely on-campus. Many courses are offered cross-Schools and some cross-Faculty, this makes it more difficult for Directors to take responsibility for such matters as examinations, curriculum etc.
- Common entry programmes can be particularly problematic for Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) as these courses are administered from a central course office but taught by a number of disciplines.
- Responsibilities have in practice increased over the years and it should be noted that the workload of many Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) is becoming too onerous. In revising the roles and responsibilities of Directors, it is important not to add new roles and not to be too prescriptive. It is necessary to achieve greater clarity while at the same time to reflect the complexities discussed.

The Director of CAPSL advised the committee that when the document was drafted, the intention was that the line of authority would flow to the Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) rather than the Heads of Discipline to ensure that overall authority was vested in the School rather than constituent disciplines.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the members for their views and advised that the document would be redrafted during Michaelmas term and brought back to a future meeting for further discussion.

UGS/08-09/004 Research-led teaching: A memorandum from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, dated 3rd November 2008, was circulated together with a discussion paper on research-led teaching dated October 2008 prepared by the Academic Development Manager.

The Academic Development Manager introduced this item by way of a short presentation. She referred to Trinity's achievement in being placed 49th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2008, which confirms TCD as a research intensive university. However, research shows that while undergraduate students like the idea of studying in a research intensive institution, they do not generally associate themselves with the process of research. Certain assumptions can prevent undergraduate students from participating in research experiences, such as, it being considered a privilege or as being too expensive.

Through reforming its curriculum, College is presented with an opportunity to ensure that undergraduate students benefit from Trinity's research profile by explicitly including elements of research-led teaching into all undergraduate courses. She commented that while research-led teaching is concerned with the currency of content, it should not be limited to this aspect; it also concerns familiarising students with the process of research.

She concluded the presentation by advising the meeting that the Irish Universities Association (IUA) is currently offering 100 research project awards to students across all disciplines in Irish universities.

During a discussion on the use of research-led teaching in course curricula, the following comments were made:

- A number of Schools already explicitly use research-led/enquiry-based/problem-based learning from an early stage in their course offerings, and the high quality of their graduates was noted.
- Schools need to foster a spirit of engagement between research and teaching: it is necessary to inculcate the spirit of research from Junior Freshman years onwards. Many Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) thought it would be possible to introduce elements of research-led teaching in the Freshman years and noted that leaving it to the Senior Sophister year was too late.
- There is a need to differentiate between the process of research and the product of research. Students may not be equipped to process and interpret results until their Senior Sophister year but they can be introduced to research processes at a far earlier stage.
- One member commented that based on personal experience, participation in the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) programme was deeply beneficial and suggested that this programme could be tailored to the Freshman years.
- It was commented that research-led teaching did not have to be confined to laboratories or to being resource intensive. Other methods may be used to produce enquiry and critical thinking in students.
- There is a need to balance course content and enquiry-based learning.
- In many cases research-led teaching is better suited to small group teaching, which is more resource intensive. This may be problematic for several Schools which offer modules to large Freshman classes.
- It is likely that research-led teaching is already taking place throughout the College, but is not necessarily articulated as such. It may be necessary to make it more explicit. Research-led teaching is the norm in the arts and humanities subjects.
- It was felt by some that Freshman students needed to be weaned off rote learning and that introducing research-led teaching in the Junior Freshman may be overwhelming for some students.

There was some discussion about exactly what is meant by research-led teaching. There are many practices in College from students learning how to conduct research, students researching and presenting papers on specific topics in a seminar, student projects and skills development to teaching methodologies, such as problem-based learning, enquiry-based learning, teachers incorporating their research, or up to-date research on the subject, into the curriculum. It was noted that account should be taken of the fact that research in some disciplines is currently subsidising teaching, and care should be taken about framing the discussion in terms of students having a more positive experience if their teaching is research-led. In some disciplines students must learn and understand the principles of the subject before engaging in research-led activities. It was suggested that College should do an inventory of existing research-led practices across the Faculties.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that this issue is of national interest following the expressed concerns of the Minister for Education and Science that the emphasis on research is diminishing the focus on teaching in universities. This conclusion assumes that teaching and research are two mutually exclusive elements of third-level education. It is, therefore, important that academics actively involved in

research also teach on courses to ensure the currency of content and to demonstrate the positive effect of College's research agenda on the undergraduate cohort.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Academic Development Manager for presenting the item to the meeting and asked the committee members to bring the circulated discussion paper to their School Executive Committees to raise awareness at a local level.

UGS/08-09/005 **Proposed new Academic Year Structure:** A memorandum from the Academic Secretary, *Academic Year Structure*, dated 30th October 2008, was circulated.

Addressing this topic, the Vice/Provost-Chief Academic Officer informed the meeting that Board (Actum BD/07-08/275) and Council (Actum CL/07-08/155) approved the introduction of a new academic year structure with effect from the 13th July 2009. To give effect to the new academic year structure as approved by Board and Council, Chapter XVII of the 1966 Consolidated Statutes has to be amended. The Registrar is now preparing ballot papers for circulation to the Fellows of the College for their assent to the proposed changes, and it is expected that the result of the ballot will be known by the end of November 2008.

The Academic Secretary took the meeting through the various tasks and functions that will need to be rescheduled to ensure the successful implementation of the new academic year structure. She commented that the organisation of examinations, in the transition period will require an even greater effort at School level, especially in relation to supplemental examinations as there is less time to prepare for these over the summer. The conduct of appeals and special examinations will be especially difficult given the condensed timeframe available. Issues were raised as to the inadequacy of the timeframe currently available for the appeals process and it was commented that it would be helpful for tutors to receive a breakdown of their tutees' results. Difficulties in delivering pre-entry classes and for students applying to transfer courses were also noted. Some Directors felt that there should be unambiguous direction from the Office of the Vice-Provost on the implementation of the new academic year structure.

The Academic Secretary advised the committee that, if Fellows assent to this change, the issues raised would be noted and that input would also be sought from the School Administrators in working out the finer details of the implementation of the new academic year structure.

UGS/08-09/006 **Learning outcomes:** A memorandum from Ms Alexandra Anderson (Bologna Desk), *Introducing Learning Outcomes in Trinity College: overview of the process in the academic year 2008/09*, dated 30th October 2008, was circulated.

Ms Anderson introduced the item, stating that the purpose of the document was to detail the practicalities involved in developing learning outcomes, at both programme and module level, for all courses across College. She emphasised the following aspects of the process:

- This project is the next step required to implement the Bologna agenda in College and will be facilitated by the Bologna Desk with support from CAPSL.
- The scope of the exercise will identify the relationships between learning outcomes, levels and level descriptors, teaching, learning, assessment and credit.
- It is a self-validating exercise for Schools in that they will be required to develop the learning outcomes at programme and module levels for their courses.
- As module outcomes need to relate to the outcomes for programmes with which they are associated, it would be of benefit to commence the drafting of programme outcomes first.
- Programme outcomes should be written as a statement of what the 'typical' graduate can be expected to know/be able to demonstrate, whereas, module outcomes, which are subject to direct assessment, should be written as 'threshold' statements.

- Outcomes at both levels should not be so specific as to require annual amendment - their function is not to describe course content.
- Professional courses, accredited by external bodies, should ensure that learning outcomes at both programme and module level refer to the requirements, in terms of knowledge, skills and professional competences associated with the award in question.
- In the case of joint-honors courses, it is suggested that the most suitable way to develop programme outcomes is at the subject level, with supporting general statements on joint and single honors.

She notified the meeting that there would be a series of workshops starting in December to assist Schools in developing their programme and module learning outcomes. Working drafts at programme level are expected by the end of January 2009, with draft module outcomes expected to follow by mid-May 2009. Draft outcomes need only apply to courses running in 2009/10 and onwards. She explained that these deadlines are necessary to ensure that College is able to collect and publish outcomes, ahead of the 2010/11 academic year, though Schools are free to introduce them at an earlier stage if they are ready.

The Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) in the Schools of Engineering and Education welcomed the approach and informed the committee that it was consistent with the direction their Schools are currently following.

Some members commented that the process of introducing programme outcomes to certain courses, such as TSM, will require more detailed thought and suggested that course management committees need to consider the issues before programme outcomes are developed. Given the tight timeframe for the development of programme outcomes, further instruction, with concrete examples and templates, were requested from the Bologna Desk to allow the initiation of the exercise. Ms Anderson recommended that each School nominate a person or small group of people to drive the project at a local level and to liaise with the Bologna Desk.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer informed the meeting that he had invited the Faculty Deans to put this matter on the agenda of Faculty Executive meetings to secure the support of Heads of Schools. He thanked Ms Anderson for providing clarification on the process and commented that Schools would receive further details of the exercise in due course.

UGS/08-09/007 Any other business

(i) Course Directors

The committee agreed that the Course Directors of TSM, BESS and Science should be invited to join the USC.

(ii) Broad Curriculum

Professor Brian McGing, standing in for the Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) of the School of Histories and Humanities, asked for guidance in relation to Broad Curriculum courses where seed funding was running out. To ensure appropriate discussion of the issue, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer said that it would be noted as an item for the agenda of the next meeting.

(iii) Next meeting

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer asked the meeting to note that there would be a further meeting of USC in Michaelmas term followed by a Christmas drinks reception. He stated that his office would send further details in due course.

signature

date