

**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE**

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on **3rd February 2009** at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer (Chair)

Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)
Dr Paul Delaney, School of English
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 Zuleika Rodgers, 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
Dr Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Dr Damian Murchan, School of Education
Professor Ivana Bacik, School of Law
Dr Jeremy Jones, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Dr Ian Sanders, School of Natural Sciences
Dr Michael Lyons, School of Chemistry
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Dr Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
Dr Fiona Timmins, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Dr Anne Marie Healy, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Peter Coxon, Director of Science (TR071)
Professor Johnnie Gratton, Director of TSM
Professor Alan Matthews, Director of BESS
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: Senior Lecturer, Dr Aileen Douglas
Dr Simon Trezise, School of Drama, Film and Music
Dr James Quinn, School of Business
Dr Kevin O'Kelly, School of Engineering
Professor Ignatius McGovern, School of Physics
Dr Daniela Zisterer, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Shaun McCann, School of Medicine

In attendance: Professor Gerry Whyte (for item 5), Ms Sorcha De Brunner

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed Dr Zuleika Rodgers, Professor Johnnie Gratton and Professor Alan Matthews, to their first meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC). He confirmed that since the USC is a sub-committee of the University Council, member substitution at meetings was no longer permitted.

UGS/08-09/017 Minutes of the meeting of the 10th December 2008 were approved.

UGS/08-09/018 Matters arising

(i) *UGS/08-09/011:* The Director of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate) - School of Histories and Humanities, noted his School's concern in relation to the new examination arrangements for the *Foundation Scholarship 2009-10*. The School feels that the maximum of nine hours for the examination of candidates will cause problems for inter-disciplinary programmes. Since exemptions have been abolished, including for those gaining Scholarship, the situation could arise that a Scholar fails his or her annual

examinations. In response, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that the matter has been debated at College level for several years and that Council has approved the recommendations of the Working Group on the Scholarship Examination. Other Schools, also with interdisciplinary programmes, are adopting the new requirements.

(ii) *UGS/08-09/014*: The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer informed the meeting that Council approved USC's recommendations in relation to the Broad Curriculum.

(iii) *UGS/08-09/015*: The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer informed the committee that Council approved the recommendation that mature applicants graduating from the TAP Foundation Course and mature disadvantaged students graduating from the CDVEC Liberal Arts Courses would be assessed for entry to an undergraduate degree programme at Trinity based on academic merit only.

UGS/08-09/019 Academic Year Structure The memorandum *Academic Year Structure*, dated 28th January 2009, was circulated.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer confirmed that the new academic year structure would commence on the 31st August 2009. He advised the meeting that discussions with staff representative groups were on-going regarding a number of issues, and added that none of the issues identified would prevent the implementation of the new academic year structure in 2009/10.

The Academic Secretary spoke to the circulated memorandum, highlighting a number of key issues that needed to be addressed in preparation for 2009/10. She informed the meeting that School Administrators are being kept informed of requirements through the School Administrators' Forum. She emphasised the importance of finalising course structures so to enable timetabling. In finalising course structures, Schools should be mindful of the spread of modules over each semester and avoid overloading students in any one semester. With regard to inter-disciplinary programmes, the Schools involved should coordinate the delivery of modules across the two teaching semesters. It is important to publish details of deadlines for essays and coursework in course handbooks and to achieve a balanced student workload across the two semesters. Where course structures have changed, Schools and Course Offices should review their Gold Medal criteria to ensure that they are still applicable.

The meeting heard that some disciplines participating in TSM wished to frontload modules in the first semester. If permitted to do so, the workload of students taking certain combinations would be too high in one semester. It is necessary that a policy on workload is agreed, and it was suggested that no more than 35 credits in any one semester should be permitted. The Director of Science (TR071) explained that the course structure agreed for the degree in Science could result in a split of 40:20 credits across the two semesters. He advised that this issue may not be resolved in time for 2009/10, but that it would be addressed for future years. There was general support for a policy on an even spread of ECTS across the two semesters, and the meeting agreed that the module load should be split evenly with 30 ECTS in each semester. It was also confirmed that a module can span two semesters.

The Academic Secretary drew the Committee's attention to the proposed timing of the Foundation Scholarship examinations and Trinity Week in 2010. It was proposed that the Scholarship examinations would commence on the 11th January and that Trinity Week would be scheduled for the week beginning 12th April 2010. She explained that dates for future years would have to be mapped at a later stage, but that a decision for 2010 was now necessary.

The ability to hold all Scholarship examinations within one week was questioned. The Academic Secretary confirmed that this would be subject to the number of papers and examinations. Some concern was expressed about the possibility of students having to sit more than one examination in any one day. There was general discussion about the possibility of starting the examinations in the middle of the week starting the 4th January 2010, and some members expressed concern that Scholarship candidates would not receive a break before the start of the second teaching term.

In discussing the timing of reading weeks, the meeting was strongly of the view that these should be coordinated across the College to take place in the same week. Subjects in TSM span two faculties, and it was therefore important to hold reading weeks at the same time in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science. The issue of professional bodies requiring a minimum number of contact hours was raised, and the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer confirmed that, unless programmes are restricted by professional accreditation requirements, all courses are required to incorporate reading weeks into their curricula.

The USC made the following recommendations to Council:

- (i) *Reading Weeks*: The Faculty Deans should seek consensus to hold reading weeks at the same time in both teaching semesters.
- (ii) *Trinity Week 2010* should be held on the week beginning 12th April, the first week of Trinity Term 2010.
- (iii) *Foundation Scholarship*: subject to the number of separate examinations, the Foundation Scholarship examinations should take place on the week beginning 11th January 2010.
- (iv) *Course workload*: the 60 ECTS requirement for each year of the undergraduate degree course be distributed evenly across the two teaching semesters, i.e. 30 ECTS in each semester. There may be a need for some flexibility in the 2009-10 academic year to allow some courses to adjust.

UGS/08-09/020 Strategic Planning The document, *Transforming Trinity: The process for development of a strategic plan for College for the five year period 2009-2014* was circulated along with an excerpt from the call documents for PRTL1 5 (Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions), *Submission Requirements-Phase 1-Institutional Focus* and *Trinity College Dublin-Strategic Policy on Teaching and Learning 2007-2011*.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer introduced this item. The process, as presented in the document, allows participation from all levels of College in the development of the strategic plan, which will cover the period 2009 to 2014. The plan will focus on a number of strategically important themes, and each theme will have a planning team involving members of the College Community. The USC will be involved in developing the undergraduate education strategy. During the process, a framework document will be compiled and sent to Schools and administrative areas for comment on how the Schools/areas can contribute to the proposed objectives under each theme.

The meeting considered the proposed process, and made the following comments:

- When considering eStrategy, it should not be expected that technology will be a panacea to problems in College. It will be necessary to introduce changes to work practices and procedures.
- The strategic plan should not be too restrictive; Schools should not be restricted in responding to changes in a flexible manner.
- The plan should highlight the strategic importance of undergraduate education.
- There is a need to respond to external factors. However, College must proactively plan for its own future rather than reacting solely to external demands.
- Access and outreach should be highlighted and possibly have its own chapter.
- Many themes overlap to a large extent; teams should think outside of their own themes to ensure that each theme fits and works together.
- It was suggested that, in addition to core and enabling themes, there could be a global theme, such as Trinity's contribution to society.
- Schools are expected to complete their own plans during the very busy annual examinations marking period.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer confirmed that the Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate) would have a central role to play in developing strategy on undergraduate education. The Faculty Deans will raise the matter of strategic planning at Faculty Executive meetings and Heads of Schools will address the matter at the School Executive and School Committee.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer referred the meeting to the PRTL 5 submission requirements and to the *Strategic Policy on Teaching and Learning 2007-2011*, noting that the existing policy on teaching and learning would have to be amended and provided in College's submission to PRTL. He confirmed that all staff members and students would receive an e-mail in due course with information concerning the strategic planning process and details of the dedicated website.

UGS/08-09/021 Fitness to practise The *Discussion Document on College Fitness to Practise Policy*, dated, 15th January 2009, as prepared by the Dean of Students was circulated.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Dean of Students to the meeting to speak to the document. The Dean of Students commented that in drafting the policy, the Working Group considered admissions issues, issues that might arise subsequent to admission and legal obligations arising from the Equal Status Acts, 2000 and 2004 and the Disability Act, 2005. Where undergraduate programmes involve professional placements, Schools and Disciplines must formulate their own Fitness to Practise policies which must include information regarding: (i) the competencies relevant to the discipline, which have been approved by its regulatory body; (ii) how the required competencies are justified in relation to the discipline; (iii) the methods used to assess competencies; and (iv) reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. In formulating their policies, Schools will need to engage with their relevant professional bodies.

In response to a query in relation to reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, the Dean of Students clarified that the types of accommodations can differ from student to student. Such accommodations are not open ended and do not have to be provided if they represent more than a nominal cost. However, he cautioned that it is likely that nominal cost would be interpreted in the context of the institutional budget not the School's budget. Institutions may only derogate from the principle of non-discrimination, where to do otherwise, would cause harm. He advised that the Equality Tribunal would have jurisdiction over decisions made in relation to students with disabilities and, in the future, possibly also the Ombudsman, if the Ombudsman Bill 2008 is enacted.

Regarding the assessment of competencies which requires subjective judgements to be made, the Dean suggested that in such cases it would be safer if at least two assessors came to the same decision. It was felt that the statutory definition of disability should be contained in the policy. It was also suggested that the policy should specify that tutors and postgraduate advisors are allowed to attend the meetings of the Fitness to Practise Committees. It was confirmed that provision exists for an external member to sit on the Fitness to Practise Committees. A number of committee members stated that they wished to discuss the document with their external partners before it was finalised. The Dean of Students confirmed that he was open to receiving further comments before a final document is produced.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean of Students for attending to speak to this item.

UGS/08-09/022 Research-led teaching A memorandum from the Education Officer of TCD Students' Union, *Research-led Teaching*, dated 30th January 2009, was circulated.

The Education Officer of the Students' Union, speaking to his memorandum, explained that there are a number of different perspectives in relation to the definition of research-led teaching. Having consulted with his counterparts in other Students' Unions across Ireland, it seemed that Trinity is the only Higher Education Institution actively pursuing this policy.

He acknowledged that the commitment to research-led teaching is specified in the *Strategic Plan Update 2006* but this does not mean it is actually being practised. Having consulted further with students and lecturers in Trinity, there seems to be a perception that Trinity actually practises research-inhibited teaching. This is based on a number of perceived factors:

- Some lecturers feel that teaching is being devalued.
- Students sometimes find it difficult to get in contact with lecturers.

- There seems to be an increase in the amount of teaching being carried out by teaching assistants.

He concluded by stating that College needs to define what it means by research-led teaching. Having defined what is meant, there should be some measurement mechanism introduced into the School quality review process to assess the interconnectivity between teaching and research and College should seek out new ways of developing research-led teaching to benefit students and researchers.

It was commented that there are benefits in employing traditional teaching methods to provide students with basic knowledge in their areas of study. This view was countered by the opinion that attitude to knowledge attainment can be improved by employing research-led teaching methods. Clarity as to the definition of research-led teaching is needed in this regard. It is not limited to the cutting edge of research, it is also about how students learn.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Students' Union Education Officer for his memorandum.

UGS/08-09/023 Non-satisfactory returns procedure: Due to time constraints, the item was deferred.

UGS/08-09/024 Any other business *Calendar changes:* A memorandum from the Academic Secretary on *Calendar Editorial Issues*, dated 29th January 2009, was circulated for information. There was a lengthy discussion about the proposed use of discipline instead of department in Calendar entries. It was noted that the majority of Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate) wished to retain the use of Department in the Calendar to reflect activity at a local level.

UGS/08-09/025 Items for noting The USC noted the documents circulated for information:

- (i) Review of Scholarship, Students' Union Executive meeting, 10th November 2008.
- (ii) Memorandum – Calendar Editorial Issues, from the Academic Secretary, dated 29th January 2009 noted subject to UGS/08-09/ 024 above.
- (iii) Memorandum – Gold Medal Recommendations, from the Senior Lecturer, dated 29th January 2009.
- (iv) Memorandum - Courts of First Appeal and Academic Appeals – schedule for 2009, from the Academic Secretary, dated 27th January 2009.

signature

date