

**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE**

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on **1st December 2009** 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)
Professor Ciaran Brady, School of Histories and Humanities
Dr Claire Laudet, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Dr Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Dr Zuleika Rodgers, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Ms Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Dr Jim Quinn, School of Business
Dr Damian Murchan, School of Education
Professor Yvonne Scannell, School of Law
Dr Kevin O'Kelly, School of Engineering
Dr Ian Sanders, School of Natural Sciences
Dr Stefan Hutzler, School of Physics
Professor Graeme Watson, School of Chemistry
Dr Vincent Kelly, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Dr Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
Dr Catherine McCabe, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Director of TSM
Professor Pete Coxon, Director of Science (TR071)
Mr Ashley Cooke, Education Officer, Students' Union
Ms Jennifer Fox, Student Representative
Dr Brian Foley, Director of CAPSL

Apologies: Dr Simon Trezise, School of Drama, Film and Music
Dr Paul Delaney, School of English
Professor Kevin O'Rourke, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Dr Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Dr Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS
Dr Jeremy Jones, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Professor Shaun McCann, School of Medicine
Dr Anne Marie Healy, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Mr Trevor Peare, Dr Gail McElroy (for UGS/09-10/014), Professor Linda Hogan (for UGS/09-10/015), the Director of International Student Affairs, Mr John McPartland (for UGS/09-10/016) and Mr Michael Hughes (for UGS/09-10/018)

UGS/09-10/011 **Minutes** of the meeting of the 9th June 2009 were approved.

UGS/09-10/012 **Matters arising**

(i) *UGS/09-10/009* The Director of the Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning (CAPSL) noted that a number of 'grinds' schools are offering preparatory courses for students intending on taking the Irish Health Professions Admission Test (HPAT) for entry to Medicine programmes in Ireland and commented that Trinity College should perhaps offer its own such course. The Academic Secretary commented that the use of the HPAT was proving controversial and that the nature of the test is such that students should not be able to prepare for it.

UGS/09-10/013 **Library Budgets:** A document, prepared by the Deputy Librarian, showing an overview of the Trinity College Library budget over the years 2007/08, 2008/09 and estimates for 2009/10, dated 27th November 2009, was circulated.

Speaking to the document, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer informed the meeting that the Library books purchasing budget has not been substantially reduced, as is being claimed by the Students' Union. The area in which there has been a reduction is the Research Support Collections, which covers the cost of research specific manuscripts. However, funding for this area of activity comes from Library income generating activities such as visits to the Book of Kells and not from the non-pay grant from College. He commented that despite the economic difficulties, College is maintaining the Library books and periodicals purchasing budgets. Mr Trevor Peare confirmed that the Research Support Collections are funded by Library income generating activities.

UGS/09-10/014 Non-Standard/Minor Course Proposals:

(a) Certificate in Parliamentary and Legislative Studies

A proposal for a *Certificate in Parliamentary and Legislative Studies*, from the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy, dated 10th November 2009, was circulated. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed Dr Gail McElroy to the meeting to introduce the proposal.

Speaking to the item, Dr McElroy explained that the proposal was in keeping with the School's strategic plan to contribute to policy formation and debate in the Republic of Ireland and to share the expertise of School members with the wider community. The course proposal was submitted in response to a tender competition, run by the Houses of the Oireachtas, to develop a course for delivery to their senior-level managers to enable the development of required knowledge and competencies. The request for tenders was based on a study, carried out by the Discipline of Political Science in Trinity College, which identified the required staff competencies and provided a description of a course that would develop these.

The Discipline of Political Science was notified in August 2009 that it had won the tender but, due to financial cutbacks, did not receive authorisation from the Houses of the Oireachtas to deliver the course until recently. As a result, the delivery of the course is not in alignment with the normal academic year. It is an 18 month course leading to a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 7 special purpose award.

In response to a query about access to the Library Dr McElroy responded that students admitted to this course would not require access to the Trinity College Library as there are sufficient library facilities in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The categorisation of the award at Level-7 was queried since students enrolled on this course are likely to have already obtained a degree at a higher level. In response, Dr McElroy stated that this would not always be the case as the minimum entry requirement is the attainment of the Leaving Certificate. She also commented that in the future students might be able to use credits gained from this course towards a full degree.

It was commented that this course does not comply with the council adopted policy '*All modules, whether in undergraduate or postgraduate programmes should be designed to carry a credit weighting of 5 ECTS credits at their smallest, or multiples of 5 ECTS credits...*' (CL/05-06/215) It was explained that its modules do not have to fit into other programmes as it is a stand-alone course. Derogation from this principle will be sought from Council.

Caution was advised in developing too many specific purpose courses such as this one as they can become costly for Schools if demand dries up. Dr McElroy responded that the programme is utilising existing expertise in the School and it will be delivered off campus, therefore, costs to College and to the School will be kept to a minimum.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Dr McElroy for attending the meeting and speaking to the proposal.

The course proposal for the *Certificate in Parliamentary and Legislative Studies* was recommended to Council.

(b) Semester in Northern Ireland for Visiting Students

A proposal for *A Semester in Northern Ireland: A Semester Abroad Programme for Visiting Undergraduates*, dated 23rd November 2009, from the Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics, was circulated.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed Professor Linda Hogan to speak to the proposal.

She noted that the Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) currently delivers postgraduate courses only. It is trying to increase the number of students on its Belfast Campus, and it proposes to do so by offering a number of undergraduate modules to visiting students from North American universities. Initially, students will come from Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania and eventually it is hoped that the modules will be opened up to students from other North American colleges. Since the ISE does not offer undergraduate modules at present this proposal has been brought before the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) for consideration.

Three particular modules are proposed, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution*, *Social and Political Resolution*, and *Lessons from the Peace Process in Northern Ireland*, with the *Community Organisation Learning Module*, circulated with the proposal for information, which will be accredited by Swarthmore College.

In response to a query regarding the limited amount of historical content, Professor Hogan explained that historical analysis is not excluded but that the dynamics of conflict and its resolution provide the focus of the semester programme. The emphasis of these modules is similar to that already offered in the existing postgraduate courses with Northern Ireland being used as a case study.

In answer to a query in relation to the lack of financial information contained in the proposal she commented that the visiting students would use existing facilities at the Belfast Campus and that these students should generate an additional stream of income.

Professor Linda Hogan was thanked by the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer for attending the meeting to present the proposal.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that it was necessary to bring such proposals to USC since ISE does not offer any courses at the undergraduate level and since Trinity College is expected to provide credit for these modules. The meeting recommended the proposal to Council subject to the proposal being externally reviewed and subject to the ISE providing further satisfactory details of the historical content of the modules and/or the overall degree.

UGS/09-10/015 Foundation Programme for International Students (non-EU): A memorandum from the Director of International Student Affairs, *Proposal to Establish a Joint Foundation Studies Programme with University College Dublin*, dated 26th November 2009, was circulated.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Director of International Student Affairs to the meeting to speak to his document and to answer any questions.

Speaking to his memorandum, the Director told the meeting that one of Trinity College's strategic objectives is to increase its numbers of non-EU undergraduate students. One obstacle to achieving this aim is the lower standard of the final second-level examinations in many countries outside Europe, which are simply not equivalent to the Leaving Certificate or A-Levels. The programme offers a preparatory year for students to ensure they are academically ready for admission to Trinity College or to University College Dublin (UCD) and will also allow them to assimilate to life in Dublin. By allowing affinity to develop, it is hoped that at least half of the students reaching the required standard will choose to enrol in Trinity College.

Of the nine initial submissions made, five companies were shortlisted to make presentations to a committee comprising representatives of Trinity and UCD. On the basis of these presentations, three companies have been asked to submit applications in the second-round of the tendering process; these are Kaplan, Study Group and Navitas.

Responding to a number of questions from committee members the Director of International Student Affairs confirmed that:

- The academic integrity of the programme will be safeguarded by the involvement and high-level oversight of Trinity College and UCD. The chosen company will also be an expert at setting the curriculum at this level.
- It is still intended that there will be two streams, Humanities and the Sciences.
- This will not interfere with existing international and inter-institutional agreements, rather, it helps to enable the admission of students that Trinity cannot currently enrol.
- Schools can specify the required International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score for entry to specific courses; schools wishing to do so should contact the International Office. Students' English language competency should automatically improve as a consequence of spending a year in Dublin.
- Schools should start considering how many places they wish to offer on their courses and to think about the required grades for entry.
- This programme is not designed to be an easier access route to College. International students must meet the grades specified before they will be accepted to full undergraduate courses.
- This programme will not be available to Irish and other EU students.
- Students will not be registered to TCD or to UCD during this year-long course. The provision of student services will be discussed with the successful company.
- The grading system will have greater granularity than simply 'PASS' or 'FAIL'.
- There is likely to be a completion certificate awarded by the company providing the programme; it will not be an award of Trinity College or UCD.

The School of Education's Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) commented that the Schools of Education in both Trinity and in UCD were familiar with the Irish second-level curriculum and represent a resource that can be drawn on.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Director for International Student Affairs for attending the meeting to speak to this item. He noted that USC will be kept informed of developments in this matter.

UGS/09-10/016 **Grade Inflation in Irish Universities:** A report, *Grade Inflation in Irish Universities?*, prepared by the Academic Secretary, dated November 2009, was circulated along with the minute of the discussion of this item at Council on 25th November 2009 (CL/09-10/051) and a memorandum from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, dated 30th November.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that this report, written by the Academic Secretary, was considered by Council at its meeting of 25th November 2009 and he informed the meeting that Council has requested USC to consider the matters of grade inflation and grade point average systems of marking and to report back to Council with recommendations related to these.

In summarising the report the Academic Secretary noted that the report covers two periods, 1994-2004 (figures for 2003 were not included as these were not available) and 2005-2008. The first period was previously analysed in depth as part of a study by the Network for Irish Educational Standards (NIES) and the second period, prepared by Trinity College, builds on that study. Both studies use the Higher Education Authority's (HEA) published figures on graduate totals and grade results.

The focus of the NIES study was on the proportion of First and Second Class, Division One (2.1) awards. The data for the 2005-2008 period, prepared by Trinity College, focuses also on the proportion of First and 2.1 awards and on all other grades.

The proportion of Trinity College students getting a First rose from 6.8% in 1994 to 13.9% in 2004, representing a 104% increase. In comparison, the award of First class honours in the National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM) over the same period increased

sharply by 640%. The proportion of Trinity College students achieving a 2.1 honours grade rose from 23.2% in 1994 to 52.3% in 2004, representing a 125% increase. However, in the period 2005-2008 grade results in the First and 2.1 within each of the seven Irish universities seemed to be more stable than in the earlier period of study.

Considering the award of the second class, second division (2.2) honours grade there is on average no significant increase or decrease in the case of UCD, NUIG, TCD, UCC, and UL. The pattern in NUIM and DCU is slightly more erratic. There is, however, a significant decrease in the award of a pass degree grade in Trinity College, from 14% in 2005/06 to 5% (180%) in 2007/08.

It is important consider the trends in the changing profile of CAO points over the period 1995-2009. The proportion of candidates achieving 500 points and more has increased steadily from 3.8% in 1995 to 8.5% in 2009, representing an increase of 124%. The increase, however, from 2005 (8%) to 2009 (8.5%) is a more modest 6.25%. The proportion of candidates achieving points in the 400-499 range increased from 15.5% in 1995 to 21.5% in 2009, representing an increase of 38.7%. The increase, however, from 2005 (20.9%) to 2009 (21.5%) is 2.9%. It is worth noting that whilst there are marked increases in the higher bands (400+ and 500+) over the period 1995-2009 the number of candidates receiving points below 100 has decreased quite significantly.

The Committee discussed the issues surrounding grade inflation and the introduction of a Grade Point Average (GPA) system of marking. During the course of this discussion, the following comments were made:

- GPA does not in itself prevent grade inflation but provides greater transparency in terms of student achievement within grade bands.
- The introduction of GPA has proven difficult in UCD due to the uneven spread of marks across grade bands, for example, a First class result represents 70-100% whilst a 2.1 represents 60-69%.
- College should consider academic marking and the nature of assessments and if these discriminate sufficiently.
- Trinity College students are of a very high standard nationally but tend to be marked harder than students in other universities in Ireland. Anecdotal evidence was offered to suggest that external examiners from the University of Oxford often recommend increases in marks awarded to students.
- The proliferation of postgraduate courses requiring a 2.1 may be adding to the bunching of students within this band. Employers, too, often will not consider applicants with awards lower than a 2.1.
- Gold Medals and academic references allow for the differentiation of students within grade categories. Employers or other institutions will also ask for details concerning where a student ranks in his/her cohort.
- Increases in grades at second-level can partly be ascribed to more standardised marking practices and greater transparency, however, this does not account for all increases. Some studies have shown that there is perhaps grade inflation at second-level.

Following the above discussion, the USC recommended that a working group be established, chaired by the Senior Lecturer, to consider in greater depth the issues surrounding grade inflation and GPA marking systems. As part of its work, the group should apply the standard GPA calculation, found on page 11 of the circulated report, to a set of results achieved in Trinity.

UGS/09-10/017 Strategic Plan- Undergraduate Education Implementation: This item was deferred due to lack of time.

UGS/09-10/018 eStrategy – Student Administration System: A presentation prepared by the Academic Secretary, *Vision for Student Management*, dated 6th November 2009 was circulated. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed Mr Michael Hughes from the eStrategy project team and invited the Academic Secretary to speak to the presentation.

She explained that the subject of the presentation, the *Vision for Student Management*, had been developed by staff in the Office of the Vice-Provost as part of the tendering

process. This is the result of an examination of existing processes and structures and the consideration of how the new system should work.

A number of guiding principles have been developed to steer the procurement of a new fit-for-purpose student administration system:

- There should be a single central source of high-quality student information with one complete record per student.
- Processes and systems should be aligned and, where necessary, standardised.
- Services will be designed around student and staff needs.
- There will be improved access to information and ability to self-serve, with high quality person-to-person support if required.
- In the future there should be increased on-line services and reduced paper-based administration.
- Improved decision-making and management information at local levels.
- The system should facilitate a Student Lifecycle approach.

The stages to be considered in the student life cycle approach are Course Planning and Management, Recruitment and Admissions, Registration and Course Study, Assessment and Progression, and Graduation and Alumni Management. She outlined the main issues in each of these areas and noted the expected implications for academic and administrative practices. Chief among these will be the necessity to standardise certain practices and regulations across College where these cannot be facilitated by systems.

Mr Hughes provided an outline of the procurement process. He explained that there are three stages to the procurement of a fit-for-purpose student administration system; pre-procurement, design procurement and post-procurement/implementation. He noted that Trinity College will soon enter into competitive dialogue with three shortlisted applicant companies, which are top providers of student administration systems globally. Trinity is also entering into a phase of preparing data so that it can be migrated to the new system when it is put into operation. He confirmed that it will take approximately two years to implement the system once the vendor has been chosen.

Members of the meeting advised that experiences of other universities should be drawn on in addition to requesting feedback from administrators at school-level and student service providers. Mr Hughes confirmed that consultation with representatives from each of these categories has, or will, take place.

Concerns were raised in relation to the timeline for procurement and implementation if changes are required to existing academic policy and regulations. Adequate time will be needed for widespread consultation with the academic community before changes are adopted and implemented. Mr Hughes stated that changes will be necessary where vendors indicate that they cannot supply adequate solutions for Trinity specific regulations and practices. In relation to this the Senior Lecturer commented that there is also a question of whether increased costs can be justified to retain certain Trinity practices.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Academic Secretary for her presentation and noted that this has been delivered to a number of College fora. He also thanked Mr Hughes for attending the meeting to outline the procurement process.

UGS/09-10/019 Any other business

It was requested that printed committee papers be made available. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer confirmed that this is already the practice and that requests for papers in hardcopy should be made to the Secretary to the Committee.

UGS/09-10/020 Minutes: The meeting noted and approved the draft minutes of the Trinity Access Programmes Steering Committee meeting of 7th October 2009.

signature

date