

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on **23rd March 2010** 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 Claire Laudet, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Dr Irene Walsh, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Ms Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Dr Jim Quinn, School of Business
Dr Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Professor Yvonne Scannell, 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 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
Professor Shaun McCann, School of Medicine
Dr Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
Dr Catherine McCabe, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Dr Anne Marie Healy, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Johnnie Gratton, 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 Ciaran Brady, School of Histories and Humanities
Dr Zuleika Rodgers, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Professor Kevin O'Rourke, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Dr Michael Shevlin, School of Education
Dr Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS
Dr Kevin O'Kelly, School of Engineering

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner and Mr Trevor Peare

UGS/09-10/032 Minutes of the meeting of the 16th February 2010 were approved.

UGS/09-10/033 Matters arising

(i) *UGS/09-10/024* The Senior Lecturer notified the meeting, arising from a recent decision of the Visitors to the College, that the guidelines for external examiners will be further amended to include an instruction to external examiners to initial or annotate all pieces of work that they review.

(ii) *UGS/09-10/026* The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer advised that the Dean of Students would bring a new proposal back to the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) in relation to Learning Outside the Classroom.

(iii) *UGS/09-10/027* The Academic Secretary noted that student evaluation templates had been discussed at the Graduate Studies Committee and that Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG and PG) had been e-mailed to seek comments regarding the core questions. She thanked those members who had submitted responses and reminded others that comments would be needed ahead of the next Council circulation.

UGS/09-10/034 Learning Outcomes: A document, *Learning Outcomes: progress report*, dated 12th February 2010 from the Director of the Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning (CAPSL), was circulated.

Speaking to the report, the Director of CAPSL provided an update on the Learning Outcomes project and drew the attention of the meeting to the appended list of courses which provides up-to-date information on the development of learning outcomes across College.

He noted that the project was approved by Council in April 2008 and was considered the logical extension to the development of programme level descriptors. He also noted that the project was further spurred on by the Higher Education Authority's (HEA) statement that future recurrent funding would be dependent on the development of learning outcomes at programme and module levels.

During the 2008/09 academic year the project fully commenced and the writing of learning outcomes has continued throughout 2009/10. To drive and assist the writing process, the Bologna Desk and CAPSL have organised and delivered a number of events and support resources, including workshops, resource documents and a triage group. He advised that workshops could be re-run if there is demand.

He noted that the initial target, of producing first draft learning outcomes by the end of 2008/09, was over-ambitious and he referred to the report's appendix which shows extensive engagement across College. It is expected that complete drafts will be in place by the end of 2009/10.

In relation to issues and future considerations he highlighted the following areas which may need College decisions:

- (i) The link between learning outcomes and assessment.
- (ii) Consistency between the stated outcomes at programme and module level. He advised that this is best achieved at a local level given the discipline specific information required for such a mapping processes. He also noted that this is a quality issue and views should be sought from external examiners and programme graduates.
- (iii) The process for the review and amendment of learning outcomes will require an orderly system to be developed. A solution will have to be worked out for an appropriate repository.
- (iv) Future training to keep academic staff informed of new thoughts and developments in this area.

The Director of Science (TR071) commented that the database for learning outcomes would have to store historic data, on a year-by-year basis, so that students can access outcomes relevant to their studies into the future.

The Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) for the School of Medicine noted that the Medical Council requires very comprehensive statements of outcomes, skills and competencies in relation to graduates of Medicine. In response, the Director of CAPSL stated that the approach being taken in College was broader and less stringent. He advised that no more than five or six outcomes are required at module level.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Director of CAPSL for his report. He noted that some schools have fallen behind in the submission of draft learning outcomes and urged co-operation with the project requirements.

UGS/09-10/035 **Open Day:** A memorandum, *College Open Day*, from the Admissions Office, dated 16th March 2010, was circulated.

The Senior Lecturer outlined the proposals in relation to Open Day in 2010 and for future open days as:

- (i) Open Day in 2010 should take place on Wednesday 8th December. To ensure the safety of attendees and students this should be declared a non-teaching day.
- (ii) In future years, Open Day should take place over two days, the Friday and Saturday of teaching week eleven in Michaelmas term.
- (iii) Banners should be displayed on each of the main Open Day venues.

Noting these proposals she commented that teaching cannot take place during the hours of Open Day due to the large numbers of visitors to the Campus; approximately 8,000 attendees are expected in 2010. She also commented that if the event is to take place

over a two-day period in future, incorporating a Saturday, this would have implications for staff members involved.

During a comprehensive discussion of the proposals the following comments were made:

- It would be less contentious to hold Open Day over two days in Reading/Study Week than to ask staff members and students to come into College on a Saturday.
- Re-arranging laboratory sessions is more difficult than re-scheduling missed lectures. The same practical session is delivered to a particular cohort, split into smaller groups, over a teaching week. It would be unfair to provide the practical session to some groups when others, scheduled to take it on the 8th December, would miss it.
- Study/Reading Week in itself is controversial in some areas of College. Anecdotally, students seem to treat this as a holiday week as they are not on Campus. Countering this comment, it was pointed out that students do not have to be present in College to study and that quite a number of students study at home.
- Students' input at Open Day is significant and should not be underestimated. Scheduling the date in Study/Reading Week would lessen student participation on stands due to course work deadlines and term tests. It was also highlighted that students also have many deadlines during the eleventh week of the Michaelmas teaching term.
- In relation to repeating talks for attendees, it was suggested that this is not always necessary as attendance tends to fall off sharply for the repeated talk.
- The agreed date must be clearly communicated to schools so that they can plan ahead.
- Holding the event on a Saturday could benefit students and parents travelling from outside Dublin.
- Mature Students are provided with an evening during the week. Given this, the Open Day could be extended from 3pm into the evening to accommodate repeat talks.
- Buildings which are not being used for Open Day could be used for teaching and practical sessions.
- If the two-day Open Day goes ahead in future years the Saturday session could conclude at midday since, normally, there is a sharp decline in attendees in the afternoon.

Addressing some of the comments made, the Senior Lecturer advised that Study/Reading Week has been designated as a week where teaching, meetings and other events do not take place to allow students and staff to read and research. She explained that allowing teaching to proceed in some venues and not others would cause ambiguity and confusion which is to be avoided. She also explained that even if USC supports future open days in week eleven there are other barriers such as the Commencements which are scheduled in this week.

The Academic Secretary noted that the Director of Buildings had written to her with a number of health and safety concerns, in relation to Open Day 2009, and therefore, teaching and practical sessions cannot go ahead. She also stressed that Open Day is a very important event for the recruitment of potential students. It is very much appreciated by applicants and needs to be given prominence as a significant event in the academic year.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer commented that a decision must be made soon for 2010. He suggested that a compromise be considered given the importance of the event and the expected large number of additional people on Campus.

The meeting recommended the following proposals:

- (i) The Open Day in 2010 should take place on Wednesday 8th December 2010, provided that laboratory sessions are allowed to start at 2pm.
- (ii) Future Open Days should take place over the Friday and Saturday of a week to be decided in Michaelmas term.

The meeting supported the request from the Admissions Office to the Site and Facilities Committee that:

- (iii) Banners should be displayed on each of the main Open Day venues.

UGS/09-10/036 Discontinuation of TR071 Moderatorship Option:**XX**

A memorandum, *Cessation of Academic Programme*, dated 18th March 2010, from the Senior Lecturer, was circulated with a proposal from the School of Physics, dated 9th March 2010, to discontinue the Physics and Computer Simulations Sophister option in Science TR071.

The Senior Lecturer introduced the proposal and advised the meeting that USC is not required to make a recommendation in relation to this proposal, rather, she asked members for their comments to accompany this proposal when it is considered by Council.

The Education Officer of the Students' Union notified the meeting that he had received phone calls from two Freshman Science students who had intended to take this option and who had enrolled on the prerequisite modules in order to do so. He suggested that the discontinuation be postponed to allow students, already registered, to avail of this option.

The Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) from the School of Physics informed the committee that he had spoken to students interested in taking this option and advised them that a number of modules from Physics and Computer Simulation will be subsumed into another Physics Sophister option. He noted that this seemed to satisfy the students concerned.

The Senior Lecturer thanked those concerned for their input and confirmed that Council would be made aware of these comments.

UGS/09-10/037 Calendar Changes: Amendments to programme entries in TSM, and the Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Engineering Mathematics and Science, and Health Sciences, for the University Calendar 2010/11, were circulated.

The Secretary to USC spoke to the item and advised, as in previous years, that staff in the Vice-Provost's Office would work with staff in the Enquiries Office to edit the Calendar and that Schools would be contacted further in this regard. She noted that amendments to the General Regulations section of the Calendar would be brought to the next USC meeting. She highlighted the following in relation to the submitted changes:

TSM

- The layout of the TSM entry presented to USC corresponds to a template developed by the TSM Office to ensure better consistency across the constituent subjects and to ensure that necessary information is included and that unnecessary information is removed. She noted that this format is not consistent with general format of the Calendar and in this regard she had met with the TSM Administrator and the Administrative Officer in the Enquiries Office and confirmed that she would assist the TSM Administrator in adapting it.
- The calculation of Pattern A degree results in Mathematics appears to be out of line with what is stated in the TSM regulations.

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

- The School of Drama, Film and Music have introduced clauses relating to penalty points for poor attendance. She noted that staff in the Vice-Provost's Office will request further information from the School concerning the procedures they propose to adopt.
- She queried the introduction of the wording, 'An elective module in a discipline other than Psychology (5 credits)' replacing wording related to the Broad Curriculum. She noted that the core and elective curriculum, whilst approved, has not been implemented due to insufficient information systems. The Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) from the School of Psychology confirmed that the wording should still reference the Broad Curriculum.

Engineering, Mathematics and Science

- The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted the inclusion of information on the integrated M.A.I. Engineering degree and queried if this had been formally approved. The USC Secretary confirmed that she would consult previous Council minutes and contact the School of Engineering in this regard.

- She noted that she would follow up with the School of Mathematics on the same issue as highlighted in the Psychology course amendments.

Health Sciences

- She stated that the revised faculty regulation for Health Sciences would be referred to the Dean of Students and the Disability Service to ensure compliance with relevant disability/equality legislation.
- Commenting on the entry for the Diploma in Dental Nursing she noted that the credit values for the listed modules were not consistent with the College policy on ECTS credit values.

The Director of TSM commented that the revised TSM entry was introduced to ensure greater flexibility for participating schools, clarity in what is required of students, greater consistency and comparability across the subjects and to reduce the workload related to the Calendar changes process each year. He noted that the template presented by TSM was ideally suited to web-based publication, a form likely to be adopted for the Calendar in the near future and was disappointed that it was deemed unsuitable for the print-based version. He contended that the TSM office had not been made aware of issues with the template during its development. In relation to the format of the entry it was confirmed that this issue would be discussed to try to work out a solution and in this regard there would be further contact with the TSM Office.

Responding to a query in relation to a lack of specific module titles, the Senior Lecturer stated that there should be a dividing line between the type of information provided in the Calendar and in handbooks. Such levels of specificity are better left to course handbooks.

A number of members expressed the opinion that penalty points should not be introduced for poor attendance. Concerns were expressed over the robustness of procedures for recording absences and it was commented, for various reasons, that sign-in sheets are not satisfactory. It was felt that separate schools should not implement procedures on penalty points in the absence of College-wide policy on this matter. Related to the latter point, schools should not operate outside the existing non-satisfactory returns procedure. The USC Secretary confirmed that she would convey these points to the School of Drama, Film and Music.

The Foundation Scholarship entry for the programme in Medicine was queried with regard to the sentence 'Additional reading will be required by the School of Medicine and this will be examined by special essay paper at the end of Hilary term'. The Senior Lecturer confirmed that this was out of line with the timescale for the Scholarship exams and noted that results have to be submitted to the Examinations Office well in advance of this.

The USC Secretary confirmed that she would contact schools in relation to the issues highlighted at the meeting.

UGS/09-10/038 Report on Mathematics: A memorandum from the Academic Secretary, *Mathematics Education*, dated 18th March 2010, was circulated along with the, *Draft Report on Developments and Trends in Mathematics and Leaving Certificate Subjects in Irish Education*, written by the Academic Secretary, dated March 2010.

Introducing the item, the Academic Secretary informed the Committee that it was intended that the Draft Report would generate discussion on the possibility of awarding bonus CAO points for Higher Level (HL) Leaving Certificate Mathematics for entry to undergraduate courses in Trinity College and on the possible review of the matriculation requirements for entry to undergraduate courses in Trinity College.

She outlined the recommendations of a number of reviews and reports conducted at a national level, since 1999, on the issue of awarding bonus points for Mathematics (HL). In addition, she highlighted information in relation to Project Maths; Irish Mathematical Performance – OECD PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) Test for 15 year-olds; the significant proportion of second-level Mathematics teachers with little, or no, attainment in the subject; trends in Leaving Certificate subject and level choices; comparisons with UK and Scottish data; and the results of a survey of first-year Trinity Science students which looked at the number of students dropping Mathematics (HL) at second-level and the stage at which they did so.

The follow comments and queries were raised during a discussion of the Draft Report:

- It was commented, that of the most recent new entrants to programmes in Business, Economics and Social Sciences, only few had ordinary level Mathematics. It is likely that the higher achievers are 'following the money' career-wise in areas like Finance.
- The Leaving Certificate is completely points driven leading to subjects being chosen because they are deemed easier.
- The ability to cover all the Mathematics (HL) syllabus will not be improved by offering bonus points.
- Improving the quality of teaching at second-level is required. It is likely that the introduction of bonus points is supported at second-level institutions since this is where the most significant problem lies.
- Since almost 50% of teachers of the subject are not qualified to teach it, rather than providing bonus points, Trinity could offer courses to teachers to improve their competency in Mathematics.
- Providing bonus points will simply increase the number of students getting grinds in the subject.
- It was queried if bonus points for international students were also envisaged.
- In support of bonus points, the previous provision of bonus points in Trinity was highlighted and it was noted that the Mathematics syllabus is far larger than in other subjects.
- Students typically do seven or eight subjects for the Leaving Certificate, therefore, it is not surprising that they drop Mathematics (HL).
- The introduction of bonus points would provide only a short-term solution and could lead to further grade inflation at second-level.
- The quality of teaching is likely to be a significant factor in students dropping Mathematics (HL).
- Providing bonus points for Mathematics could increase points in courses where a high level of proficiency in Mathematics is not required.
- There is a problem with the higher level syllabus in that it is very broad but has little depth.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Academic Secretary, for her Draft Report, and the Committee members for their comments. He stated that this issue would be brought back to another USC meeting for a fuller discussion.

UGS/09-10/039 Any other business:

- (i) The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer notified the meeting that a Digital Communications Steering Committee was being established and asked if any members were interested in sitting on this group. The Director of Teaching and Learning (UG) from the School of Chemistry confirmed his interest.
- (ii) The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer informed the meeting of the launch of the *Report of the Innovation Taskforce*, earlier in March, and stated that one of the recommendations relates to an initiative to cultivate innovation and entrepreneurship at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- (iii) Concerns relating to the new academic year structure were raised by a number of members. In particular, it was queried if the introduction of end of semester examinations would be revisited. Concerns were also expressed over the use of study weeks for term tests and the two-week period available for revision before the annual examinations was deemed too short.

signature

date