

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 17th April 2012 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Senior Lecturer, Dr Patrick Geoghegan (*Chair*)
Assistant Academic Secretary, Ms Orla Sheehan
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)
Dr Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities
Dr Rachel Hoare, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Dr Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Dr Benjamin Wold, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Dr Paul O'Grady, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Dr Michael Gormley, School of Psychology
Dr Michael Shevlin, School of Education
Dr Oran Doyle, School of Law
Dr Dermot O'Dwyer, School of Engineering
Dr Andrew Butterfield, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Dr David Chew, School of Natural Sciences
Dr Stefan Hutzler, School of Physics
Dr Wolfgang Schmitt, School of Chemistry
Dr Clair Gardiner, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Dr Martina Hennessy, 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 Moray McGowan, Director of TSM
Professor Graeme Watson, Director of Science (TR071)
Ms Rachel Barry, Education Officer, Students' Union

Apologies: Dean of Students, Dr Amanda Piesse
Dr Evangelia Rigaki, School of Drama, Film and Music
Dr Philip Coleman, School of English
Ms Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Dr David Coghlan, School of Business
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Dr Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS
Mr Daniel Ferrick, Student Representative

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner; Mr Trevor Peare (Library Representative); Professor John Scattergood and Ms Alexandra Anderson (for UGS/11-12/060); Dr Cornelius Casey (for UGS/11-12/061); and Ms Sue Power (for UGS/11-12/063).

UGS/11-12/058 Minutes

The minutes of the 20th March 2012 were approved.

UGS/11-12/059 Matters arising

UGS/11-12/056: The Senior Lecturer noted that an invitation had been e-mailed to academic staff in relation to the assessment forums taking place in May.

UGS/11-12/060 Harmonization of Assessment and Progression Regulations

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A covering letter from Professor John Scattergood, on behalf of the Harmonisation Group, dated 12th April 2012, was circulated along with the revised document 'Harmonisation of Assessment and Progression Regulations: Undergraduate Degrees',

also dated 12th April 2012. The Senior Lecturer welcomed Professor Scattergood and Ms Alexandra Anderson to the meeting and invited Professor Scattergood to speak to the documents.

Professor Scattergood, recapping on the discussion at the previous Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) meeting, commented that there were three particular issues highlighted for the harmonisation group to return to: the capping of marks for reassessments at the supplemental session; the grade profiling algorithm; and the matter of students with disabilities.

He outlined two proposed capping rules. Where the marks achieved at the supplemental session do not contribute to the degree result, the Harmonisation Group favoured returning the overall end of year grade as 'Pass at Supplemental', without capping the particular module mark. Where the end of year result contributes to the degree classification, the mark for the repeated module would be capped at 40%.

Turning to the matter of grade profiling he pointed out that the algorithm, which did not find favour at the last meeting of USC, had been deleted from the proposal and he invited the members to consider the replacement wording related to cases of borderline marks:

In borderline cases, if grade profiling is part of the degree classification, as it is in the case of some courses we recommend:

- that the appropriate protocols or rules should be established at local levels for the use of courts of examiners,
- that such protocols are consistent with the overall College procedures for the conduct of Courts of Examiners,
- that protocols should be submitted to the Senior Lecturer for approval,
- that they should be duly published so that students are fully aware of them.

He stressed that the submission of the protocols to the Senior Lecturer would be necessary to ensure the equitable treatment of students across College.

In relation to students with disabilities he indicated that general wording, related to reasonable accommodations, had been added to the document. The Harmonisation Group felt that nothing further could be added to cover all cases which might arise and that, by keeping the language general, the provision is more enabling. The Senior Lecturer noted that procedures and principles in relation to students requiring reasonable accommodations are being looked at separately from the development of the harmonisation document.

Professor Scattergood drew the attention of the meeting to an omission in item 4.5 of the Junior Sophister Model 2, on page 4-1 of the document. He advised that the progression mark of 40% should have been listed in addition to 45% and noted that this would be added.

He advised the meeting that there was dissatisfaction within TSM in relation to the compensation rules proposed for two-subject courses but that the Harmonisation Group supports its retention due to student equity concerns and the effect on other two-subject courses in College. He noted that matters of capping, compensation and passing by aggregation would have to be considered separately for professional courses governed by statutory and regulatory bodies.

The Senior Lecturer thanked Professor Scattergood for his summary and noted that the Harmonisation Group has rigorously examined the issues and had achieved a lot in the time available. He drew comments from the Committee in relation to the capping proposals. There was some concern that capping a module at 40% could still advantage a student where that mark feeds into a degree result. Some students could strategically fail certain examinations badly in the annual session and gain a better mark, albeit 40%, in the supplemental session. The Students' Union Education Officer commented that she was happy with the solutions being proposed in relation

to capping but advised that these must be publicised and that students should be made aware of the implications. In this regard she said that it would be useful for students to see a sample transcript. Noting the concerns expressed, the Senior Lecturer advised that the 40% capping rule could be reviewed after it had been in place for a year.

The TSM Director voiced his concern in relation to the inconsistent regulations governing the availability of supplemental examinations in the Junior Sophister year where these results contribute to the degree classification. Professor Scattergood advised that the Harmonisation Group had been asked to simplify the regulations, as far as possible, and that it had not been possible to address all inconsistencies in the time provided. The Senior Lecturer advised that the issue of Junior Sophister supplemental examinations would be discussed fully by USC during the next academic year.

During the discussion of grade profiling and borderline marks it was noted that the system will calculate a default mark based on the credit weighted average for the year. Any grade profiling to deal with borderline cases will have to be dealt with by manually overriding the grade suggested by the system. There were some concerns raised that this could be time consuming and could lead to the use of additional spreadsheets. However, it was reported that profiling exercises can take just 20-30 minutes ahead of Courts of Examiners. The Senior Lecturer commented that it was desirable to keep a human dimension to grade profiling.

The TSM Director reaffirmed his dissatisfaction with the compensation rules for two-subject courses, as these would apply to the Two Subject Moderatorship, and with certain inconsistencies in regulations which still remain. Notwithstanding, the USC recommended the proposed harmonised assessment and progression regulations to Council.

UGS/11-12/061 Course Proposal

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A proposal for a Moderatorship in Catholic Theological Studies, from the aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics, dated 12th April 2012, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer invited Dr Cornelius Casey, Director of the Loyola Institute, to the meeting to speak to the proposal. The Senior Lecturer noted that the proposal had been approved by the School Executive and the Faculty Dean.

Dr Casey advised the meeting that the Loyola Institute is principally concerned with research and learning in the Catholic tradition and noted that the Institute is a constituent part of the aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics. The structure of the School allows for the study of religions and theology from different perspectives and places Trinity at the forefront of institutions. In this regard, he noted that Harvard and Durham Universities have established professorial Chairs in Roman Catholic Theological Studies and Catholic Theology, respectively. Highlighting particular features of the course, he advised that it is organised in three parts: Traditioning (which covers historical and theological studies); Exploring (covering biblical, systematic and ethical areas); and Engaging (covering the engagement with different disciplines of study, in particular, Philosophy). There are strong complementarities between the Loyola Institute and the Department of Religions and Theology and, as result, it is intended that a significant proportion of modules, approximately 30%, will be shared across their undergraduate course offerings. Lastly, the course will locate the study of Catholic theology within the Irish experience. For example, the Book of Kells and high crosses, which are often studied from an artistic point of view, will be analysed from a theological perspective.

Responding to a number of questions, Dr Casey commented that since numbers would be small, he did not foresee problems in facilitating dissertations in the Senior Sophister year; studies conducted in the United Kingdom show that the number of students taking third-level studies in religion based courses has increased with the

availability of religious studies as an assessed subject at second-level; there will be collaboration within the School in relation to the teaching of certain languages such as Hebrew and Greek to maintain the linkages between biblical studies and those languages; and the Institute would be open to collaboration with other areas of College (including Philosophy and History of Art) and with the Church of Ireland Theological Institute.

The Library Representative pointed out that there is no mention of the Library in the proposal. He noted that a number of the key texts are from the United States and are not currently in the Library's holdings; additional resources would be required to stock an adequate level of copies.

In answer to queries concerning how the course would fit with the wider College Community and why it should be offered by Trinity, rather than by a religious institution, Dr Casey assured the meeting that all viewpoints would be listened to and that students could rely on academic freedom just as much as academic staff members. The academic space provided by the University allows for greater dialogue with other traditions and disciplines. He confirmed that the Institute, and students who complete the course, would be able to participate in national current debates.

Concerns were raised about the lack of financial information presented in the course proposal and the fact that, so far, only the Director's position had been filled. It was queried if the content of the course could be covered and whether this content would change on the arrival of new members of lecturing staff. It was confirmed that the intended start date of the course is September 2013 and that it is hoped that the Chair in Catholic Theology would be filled in the next academic year, followed by the post in Systematic Theology and the appointment in Biblical Studies. These appointments would follow standard Trinity College Human Resources policies. It is envisaged that the holder of the Chair in Catholic Theology would take over the Directorship of the Loyola Institute after Dr Casey finishes his three-year term. It is likely that individual lecturers would make changes to the course content, however, the overall structure would be maintained, as would the balance of modules shared between the Department of Religions and Theology and the Institute. Curriculum amendments would be handled through the annual Calendar changes process. Responding to concerns about the lack of financial information available to the Committee, the Senior Lecturer assured members that the finances would be incorporated into the proposal before it is circulated to Council.

Subject to the amendment of certain unclear sentences in the introduction of the proposal, and the receipt of a positive external assessment, the proposal was recommended to Council.

UGS/11-12/062 Review of the Scholarship Examination

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'Review of Scholarship Examination', dated 12th April 2012, was circulated.

Introducing the item the Senior Lecturer noted that 103 Scholars were announced on Trinity Monday, earlier in the month, and added that while this shows great levels of achievement, awarding this number of Scholarships into the future may not be sustainable. Speaking to his memorandum he noted that a review of the Scholarship Examination is timely since the revised Examination, approved by Council in November 2008, had been in place for three years (2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12). He drew the meeting's attention to the proposed membership of the review group which includes members of the previous review group, representatives of USC, members of the Central Scholarship Committee, and representatives from the Students' Union and the Scholars. It was noted that Professor McGowan was not available to sit on the review group.

A number of suggestions were put forward for consideration by the review group, which included, limiting the year in which students take the examination, the possible barring of students with previous degrees, analysing the proportion of recipients in each faculty and capping the number of Scholarships awarded in each year.

USC noted the membership of the review group.

UGS/11-12/063 Applicants from Northern Ireland

The Senior Lecturer welcomed the Admissions Officer, Ms Sue Power, to the meeting for the discussion about the number of registered students from Northern Ireland. Speaking to the item he noted that data gathered for the Senior Lecturer's Annual Report over the last number of years show that the number of registered students from Northern Ireland has decreased steadily. He added, however, that Trinity appears to attract more students from Northern Ireland than any other university in the Republic of Ireland. Increasing the number of Northern Irish students has been highlighted as a priority by the Provost. The Senior Lecturer advised that the Admissions Liaison Officer has increased activities in that geographical area, which include marketing Trinity directly to secondary schools, surveying those schools, and hosting a stand at the recent UCAS higher education convention held in Belfast in March. He suggested that chief among the factors affecting applications is the requirement to present results in four A-Level subjects, which must include a language additional to English.

Providing additional information, the Admissions Officer advised that it is not possible to alter entry requirements for students in Northern Ireland in isolation from those applicable to the rest of the United Kingdom. The current requirement of four A-Levels subjects derives from the findings of an expert group, published in February 2004, 'The Irish Leaving Certificate on the UCAS Tariff, Report prepared for the Outreach Department of the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS)'. It found that a leaving certificate subject, taken at higher level, is equivalent two-thirds of an A-Level subject. It was noted that the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge require three A-Levels for entry. However, if the number of A-Levels required for entry to TCD were reduced to three, this could unsettle benchmarking agreements and disadvantage Irish students within Ireland or in their application to universities in the United Kingdom.

It was noted that students from the south of England are more likely to take a fourth A-Level subject than those students in the north of England or in Northern Ireland. The Admissions Officer noted that the problem does not only lie with attracting applicants from the North, there is also an issue with the conversion of offers into acceptances indicating that a number of students apply to Trinity to keep their options open.

The Senior Lecturer thanked the Admissions Officer for attending USC to provide background information on the topic.

UGS/11-12/064 Any other business

There was no other business.

signature

date