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**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE**

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 1st September 2015 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, Professor Gillian Martin (*Chair*)
 Ms Molly Kenny, Education Officer, Students' Union
 Dean of Students, Professor Kevin O'Kelly
 Senior Tutor, Professor Claire Laudet
 Professor Jarlath Killeen, School of English
 Professor David Wilkins, School of Mathematics
 Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
 Professor Christine Poulter, School of Drama, Film and Music
 Professor Elaine Moriarty, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
 Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences
 Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
 Professor Mike Brady, School of Computer Science and Statistics
 Professor Jane Farrar, School of Genetics and Microbiology
 Professor Mary-Lee Rhodes, School of Business
 Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education
 Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
 Professor James Hanrahan, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
 Professor Sarah Smyth, Director of TSM
 Professor Rachel Moss, School of Histories and Humanities
 Professor Ciaran Simms, School of Engineering
 Professor Kevin Conlon, School of Medicine
 Professor Imelda Coyne, School of Nursing and Midwifery
 Professor Michael Bridge, School of Chemistry
 Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior Academic Developer

Apologies: Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
 Ms Cliona Hannon, Director, Trinity Access Programmes
 Ms Sinéad Baker, Student Representative
 Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics
 Professor Robbie Gilligan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
 Professor Des Ryan, School of Law
 Professor Howard Smith, School of Psychology
 Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science
 Professor Fáinche Ryan, Confederal School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
 Library Representative

In attendance: Ms Elaine Egan

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed the new Committee members.

USC/15-16/079 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th May 2015 were approved.

USC/15-16/080 Matters arising

USC/14-15/070 A committee member had noted the differing practice across programmes of study in recording the overall end-of-year result, with some programmes recording when students pass by compensation or aggregation. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer advised that she would be gathering

information on this matter and that it would be discussed at the next meeting of USC.

USC/14-15/072 A committee member reported that a communication had been received from the Chair of the SITS User Group outlining that a number of the previously identified SITS issues had been resolved and that an updated list of issues had been sent to Tribal. In response to comments, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer advised that work is ongoing with regard to revising some business processes that impact on the usage of SITS and that she would update the committee at a future meeting.

USC/14-15/073 The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer reported that the Prospectus 2016 had been printed. It maintained the richness of content and information of previous years, but had been improved visually and also contained some new sections. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked the members of the Admissions Forum for their feedback, and in particular Professor Pauline Sloane for her extensive proofreading.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer requested that members ensure adequate representation from their Departments/Schools at the Higher Options Fair which would take place at the RDS on 16, 17, 18 September 2015.

USC/14-15/073 A call to invite applications for a Trinity Teaching Innovation Grant had been issued on 26 August 2015. The relevant form and information were available on the CAPSL website and the closing date was 25 September 2015. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted that the scheme had been funded by a benefaction. An interim progress report from successful applicants would be due in January 2016. A midpoint networking event would also take place in January 2016.

In response to a query, the Senior Academic Developer outlined that following the future addition of two new CAPSL staff members, the Teaching and Supporting Learning module aimed at Postgraduate Teaching Assistants would be delivered again.

USC/14-15/074 The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer had presented a discussion paper to Council on 10 June 2015 outlining the attributes deemed to be desirable in a Trinity graduate. It had been noted at Council that an institutional approach was required to support Schools and Departments in embedding the achievement of these attributes into the curricula. Since the last report at USC, the Education Project Steering Group had met on two occasions to review these attributes further. The next meeting will take place in October 2015. A number of subgroups are being established to examine different components of the Education Project and its implementation, e.g., Assessment, Internships & Exchange. Technology Enhanced learning. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies will chair a subgroup on defining the curricular principles and programme architecture required to achieve the graduate attributes.

USC/14-15/075 A report on the Northern Ireland Feasibility Study had been presented to Council in June 2015. Council had approved the continuation of the study for a further year. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer reported that applications from Northern Irish students had increased since 2014: a total of 755 students applied to Trinity in 2015, compared with 601 for the same period last year. Of the 223 applicants receiving offers in Round One, 68 were Feasibility Study applicants. One-third of the accepted offers in 2015 were from Feasibility Study applicants. It was hoped that the applications would be successfully converted to registration.

USC/14-15/046 The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer reported that the Plagiarism Implementation Group had met on several occasions over the summer. Feedback provided by USC and GSC had informed its work, including revisions made to the matrix on plagiarism. The Group had created an online repository, hosted by the Library, that would be up and running by late September in time for Freshers' week. It would contain a central bank of material for students, explaining what plagiarism is,

how to avoid it, and how to reference correctly. Information was currently being transferred into the repository from other College websites. The repository would also contain the Calendar entry, the matrix, and the online tutorial, 'Ready, Steady, Write', which must be completed by all students. It was noted that current cover sheets for assessed work should be retained, but that they should include a declaration for students to sign, stating that they have completed the online tutorial. The text of the declaration would be included in the repository.

An email will be sent out in the following weeks to all academic staff and to School administrators, informing them of the revised Calendar entry, the URL of the central repository, the mandatory online tutorial, the declaration for inclusion in cover sheets, and what needs to be included in handbooks. A slide will also be sent to Course Directors for inclusion in their orientation sessions to new entrants. Information will be included in the tutors' handbook and will be provided for module coordinators and for the Student Life website.

It was hoped that the steps taken to revise the Calendar entry and create the online repository would create a more coherent and educationally focused approach to dealing with plagiarism.

It should be possible to record instances of plagiarism through SITS at the module level, by extending the note type drop-down menu for the module minute to include the 4 levels of plagiarism. The report could be accessed by DUTLs and DTLPGs within their own school (or schools in the case of multidisciplinary programmes), tutors, the Senior Tutor, School administrators, and the Junior Dean.

In response to a query, the Senior Academic Developer undertook to investigate whether BlackBoard could be linked to Turnitin.

USC/14-15/077 A policy document on joint, multiple and dual awards, was circulated to Council for discussion on 10 June 2015. The document was to be revised and considered for approval at a future meeting of Council.

USC/15-16/081 Proposal for Revised Common Points Scale

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A memorandum to USC from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, dated 26 August 2015; a memorandum to Council from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, dated 26 August 2015, together with appendices, had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer would seek approval for the proposed revised common points scale at an extraordinary meeting of the University Council on 2 September 2015.

The background, the context and the process of development of the proposed scale had been set out in the circulated memorandum. The proposed points scale had already been approved by the other universities and the Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI) as they had delegated decision-making authority to their chief academic officers; Trinity had decided to put the decision to Council for approval.

The proposed points scale achieved the four principles that had been approved by Council in May 2015. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer emphasised that Trinity had a high level of input into the revision of the points scale through the expert technical advice of Professor Wilkins and through the Admissions Officer's representation on the Technical Working Group. She also noted that the proposed scale worked within the existing parameters of the CAO system. Testing of the revised scale had been undertaken by Professor Wilkins, by the Education Research Centre (St Patrick's College, Drumcondra), and by the CAO itself, using CAO data.

She noted that one of the main features of the proposed points scale was that it was moderately non-linear. Using a linear scale, similar to the current model, with the revised grading bands would lead to an unsatisfactory increase in random selection. The proposed scale was also moderately convex, i.e. the increments slightly

increased at the higher end of the scale. This would marginally favour students with an uneven grade profile over those with an even grade profile. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer raised the issue of 'leap-frogging' whereby an applicant with an uneven grade profile and a lower GPA on a linear scale could overtake an applicant with a more even grade profile and a higher GPA on the non-linear scale. As the scale was moderately convex, this would only occur within academically justifiable bounds. Professor Wilkins provided a number of examples of how the model worked with regards to applicants with similar marks and grade profiles.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer also noted that the points scale would not over-reward the H7 (30-39%) and bonus points for higher mathematics would not be awarded for this grade. The universities and IOTs could determine their own minimum subject criteria; however, guidelines would be provided to assist with translating current minimum subject requirements to the new grade bands. She advised that Trinity should be cautious to keep minimum subject requirements in line with other universities so as to avoid deterring potential applicants.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer emphasised the tight timeline for considering and seeking approval for the revised points scale: as it would come into effect for those sitting the Leaving Certificate in 2017, it would be necessary to inform pupils entering the senior cycle in 2015, i.e., this month. She noted that the Minister for the Department of Education and Skills would make an announcement regarding the revised points scale in the following days.

A discussion followed on whether the revised common points scale might take some of the heat out of the points race. It was felt that the wider grading bands, rather than the actual points award might contribute to this, although some members remained sceptical as to the impact.

USC/15-16/082 The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer's Annual Report 2013/14
A memorandum from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer to Council, dated 3 June 2015, together with the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer's Annual Report 2013/14, including admissions data for 2014/15, had been circulated. The report had not been finalised in time for consideration at the previous meeting of USC and the draft report had been presented to Council at its meeting of 10 June 2015.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer emphasised a number of items in the report, including:

- the significant increase in the number of student cases and the number of cases brought to the Courts of First Appeal;
- the number of gold medals awarded had dropped significantly from the previous year and the situation would need to be monitored;
- the first cohort of students, a total of 22 students over 3 courses, had entered under the Trinity Admissions Feasibility Study;
- there had been a 2% decrease in the overall number of applications to Trinity and a 6% decrease in the number of first preference applications;
- the rates of acceptances to offers in some courses fluctuated markedly across the years.

The Committee discussed the increase in the number of student cases and how the business processes surrounding mark changes in SITS significantly contributed to this increase. It was felt that these processes and some of our regulations should be reviewed as a matter of urgency. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer also remarked that issues that may have previously been considered at the local level, were more frequently being brought to the student cases team for

consideration. She emphasised that the sheer volume of work contributed to the delays in processing cases.

The Committee also discussed the varying practice and interpretation of regulations across Schools with regard to mark changes, excluding students, and permitting students to defer. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer concluded that the Education Project should help to simplify our regulations and to standardise practice across College.

She invited members with queries on individual figures to submit them to Trinity Teaching and Learning for follow-up.

USC/15-16/083 Undergraduate Studies Committee Self-evaluation survey 2014/15

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The Analysis of responses from the 2014/15 self-evaluation survey of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was circulated (the analysis is appended to these minutes). The response rate was approximately 50%.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer agreed with one member's comment that working groups were an effective mechanism for considering various issues that arose at USC, and also the suggestion that presenters at USC should return to provide an update to the Committee. She informed the Committee that she considered the discussions held at USC to be very important in informing policy in College.

USC/15-16/084 Any other business

- A member queried how changes to learning outcomes should be dealt with in the absence of the Bologna Desk. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer invited her to submit her query via email for follow-up by staff in Trinity Teaching and Learning.
- A member indicated that it would be useful to hold a discussion on how teaching and learning issues are discussed and handled in individual Schools. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer undertook to include this as an agenda item in a future meeting of USC.

Undergraduate Studies Committee 2014/15 Self-Evaluation Survey Results

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total responses received	Weighted average
Weighting	1	2	3	4	5		
The terms of reference of the Undergraduate Studies Committee clearly set out its scope, responsibilities and functions	3	11	2	0	0	16	1.94
	18.75%	68.75%	12.5%	0%	0%		
The Agenda and Papers are received early enough to allow adequate preparation for meetings and contain enough information to allow meaningful discussion and decisions	5	9	0	1	0	15	1.8
	33.33%	60%	0%	6.67%	0%		
Meetings are sufficiently frequent and of a duration to allow appropriate discussion	7	7	1	1	0	16	1.75
	43.75%	43.75%	6.25%	6.25%	0%		
Meetings are well organised and effective	9	6	1	0	0	16	1.5
	56.25%	37.5%	6.25%	0%	0%		
Action items identified by the Undergraduate Studies Committee are resolved	0	13	2	1	0	16	2.25
	0%	81.25%	12.5%	6.25%	0%		
Minutes to Council accurately reflect the views and recommendations of the Committee	7	7	2	0	0	16	1.69
	43.75%	43.75%	12%	0%	0%		
The Undergraduate Studies Committee plays an important role in devising and recommending policy in respect of undergraduate studies issues	5	9	1	1	0	16	1.88
	31.25%	56.25%	6.25%	6.25%	0%		
USC considers and advises on the Bologna process (ECTS, learning outcomes, modularisation, duration of courses, research-led teaching, transfer and progression) and makes appropriate recommendations to Council	1	5	8	2	0	16	2.69
	6.25%	31.25%	50%	12.5%	0%		
	Excellent	Good	Average	Below average	Poor		
Weighting	1	2	3	4	5		
What is your overall assessment of the performance of the Undergraduate Studies Committee in 2014/15?	5	9	2	0	0	16	1.81
	31.25%	56.25%	12.5%	0%	0%		
Are there any other issues you would like to raise in relation to the Undergraduate Studies Committee, its performance and/or scope to improve its performance?	Response Count: 4						

Undergraduate Studies Committee 2014/15 Self-Evaluation Survey Results

Open comments were received by four members and the following points were made:

- One member commented that outside presenters attending USC should address the priorities of the committee and that the presenters should subsequently address the feedback provided by USC.
- Two members expressed concern as to how much weight USC held and noted that USC should not be used to “rubber stamp” decisions already made elsewhere.
- One member was unsure of the efficacy of the meetings due to the large number of attendees, and saw a role for more working groups focusing on particular topics.
- Two members expressed dissatisfaction as they felt that changes to the scholarship examination had been made against the wishes of many USC members.
- One member noted the difficulty in ensuring that decisions made by USC and subsequently approved by Council were implemented as necessary.