



XX = Council relevance

A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 22 March 2016 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present:

Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, Professor Gillian Martin (*Chair*)
Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
Senior Tutor, Professor Claire Laudet
Professor Philip Coleman, School of English
Professor David Wilkins, School of Mathematics
Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Professor Elaine Moriarty, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Mike Brady, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Sarah Smyth, Director of TSM
Professor Ciaran Simms, School of Engineering
Professor Michael Bridge, School of Chemistry
Professor Fáinche Ryan, School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology
Professor James Hanrahan, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Eric Weitz, School of Drama, Film and Music
Professor Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Imelda Coyne, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education
Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics

Apologies:

Dean of Students, Professor Kevin O'Kelly
Professor Kevin Devine, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education
Professor Mary-Lee Rhodes, School of Business
Professor Howard Smith, School of Psychology
Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science
Professor Kevin Conlon, School of Medicine
Professor Des Ryan, School of Law
Professor Jane Farrar, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Robbie Gilligan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Ms Molly Kenny, Education Officer, Students' Union
Ms Sinéad Baker, Student Representative

In attendance:

Ms Elaine Egan; Mr David Mockler, Library Representative; Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior Academic Developer; Dr Erika Doyle, Global Officer Co-Ordinator for item USC/15-16/131

USC/15-16/129 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 23 February 2016 were approved.

USC/15-16/130 Matters arising

USC/15-16/107 A communication regarding appeals had been sent to all stakeholders and documents on the appeals process had been uploaded to the Undergraduate Studies web pages (<http://www.tcd.ie/undergraduate-studies/academic-progress/appeals.php>). The appeals form would be changed to an

editable format and would include different sections for completion by the tutor and the Court of First Appeal.

USC/15-16/115 A member thanked the Quality Office for preparing the school-based report on the results of the ISSE 2014/15 and noted that it contained very useful and detailed data.

USC/15-16/124i Following approval from Council on 9 March 2016, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer had invited colleagues to join the taskforce to develop a widening participation strategy with the aim of increasing admissions for under-represented groups in College to 25% by 2019. The taskforce will include representation from USC, TAP, Disability Services and Trinity Teaching and Learning.

USC/15-16/124ii The Code of Practice governing institutional DARE and HEAR Admissions Policies had been approved by Council on 9 March 2016.

USC/15-16/126 The proposal on the publication of results in cases of compensation or aggregation had been approved by Council at its meeting of 9 March 2016. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer had been in contact with the Academic Registry in this regard. She noted that it would be unlikely that the new process would be implemented in 2015/16.

USC/15-16/131 International Student Barometer Results (Autumn 2015)

The results of the International Student Barometer (ISB), Autumn 2015, had been circulated together with a memorandum from the Vice-President for Global Relations, dated March 2016. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed the Global Officer Co-ordinator to the meeting for this item.

The response rate to the survey had fallen to 15% from 31% in the previous year and the Global Officer Co-ordinator outlined the external reasons thought to be behind this. The respondents were mostly from the USA (22%), UK (8%), and Germany (8%). Undergraduate students accounted for 51% of respondents, postgraduate taught students for 27% and postgraduate research students for 20%. The majority of respondents, 58%, were from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 24% from the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science, and 16% from the Faculty of Health Sciences. The Faculty home of 2% of respondents was unknown.

The Global Officer Co-ordinator brought the Committee through the results of the survey, concentrating particularly on factors relating to learning.

The survey showed that the College's website continued to be the most influential source of information for students. The perception of the course and reputation of the institution were the most important factors in the decision to study at Trinity. Some aspects of students' arrival had improved since the last survey (registration, internet access, bank account), whilst others had continued to score poorly. The propensity to recommend Trinity (76%) was below the UK average of 85%. The overall satisfaction rate for 2015 was 85%, down 3% on last year.

Trinity continued to receive good scores for expertise of lecturers, language support and multicultural learning. Course organisation (which included timetable, clarity of handbook, reading lists, etc.) and technology were the most poorly scored areas of the student learning experience. Under the heading of 'learning satisfaction', satisfaction with the physical library had increased by 7%, topic selection had increased by 1% and all other criteria had decreased from the previous survey.

A discussion on the results took place and members felt that a number of improvements could be made with immediate effect without requiring much input in respect of staff time or financial resources. These included upgrading the College WiFi and streamlining how information was made available to students - particularly by offering a single source of information on the College website. Websites of

schools that have Global Officers contained a tab with information specifically for international students and it was suggested that other schools follow this format.

It was acknowledged that other improvements would require significant changes to College structures and processes and it was hoped that many of these changes would take place under the Trinity Education Project. In particular, difficulties caused by the current timetable would be addressed by the introduction of a fixed timetable. In response to a query with regard to the difficulties around module selection for visiting students and the resulting lack of access to the timetable or BlackBoard, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer undertook to look into this matter. It was queried whether the constrained financial situation in College had played a part in the lowering of the scores and whether the scores might impact the University rankings.

It was noted that certain factors were not fully comparable across institutions and that this could be reflected in some of the poorer scores – an example given was the Trinity marking criteria compared to the US marking criteria. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer emphasised the importance of clear marking criteria being available for students in handbooks or local websites. The Co-ordinator outlined how members of the Global Relations Office met annually with the parents of incoming students from the US to outline some of the educational differences between the US and Trinity. She suggested that this would also be a useful exercise for schools in order to frame the differences at a more local level. The discussion highlighted the need for oversight and quality control in the four key learning areas that performed poorly, to include both the academic and administrative input into course organisation and the communication of clear and concise information to all students.

The Coordinator advised that the ISB would be discussed at the International Committee and Planning Group and detailed school-level data and comments would shortly be sent to the Faculty Deans. Members were encouraged to request their school's data from their Dean.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked the Global Officer Co-ordinator for presenting the survey results to the meeting.

USC/15-16/132 Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer's Report

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer updated the meeting on the Trinity Education Project (TEP). Four College-wide fora with an emphasis on curriculum principles and programme architecture had taken place on 16th March 2016. The fora involved a presentation followed by a discussion session. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer and Ms Fedelma McNamara, Trinity Education Project, had also met with all schools running professionally-accredited programmes and would shortly meet with the remaining schools in College to discuss programme architecture.

The proposals for programme architecture, which had been presented for consultation on 16th March, had emerged from working groups in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science. Programme architecture would support the delivery of the curriculum principles and the principles would support the development of the graduate attributes. A number of proposed models had been put forward: single honors, double honors joint major, double honors major/minor, and multi-disciplinary. A minimum credit threshold had been set for each model.

Each programme would consist of core, approved and free elective modules. Approved modules were modules in a related or complementary field that would enrich the learning in the core programme. Free elective modules were credit-bearing modules not included in the list of core or approved modules and would be available to all students. The proposed programme structure would enable students to engage in learning opportunities outside of their core programme and would also provide time and space for students to engage in co-curricular learning. Students

would be able to choose whether to take the minimum number of credits solely in the core programme or to take approved modules and free elective modules outside the core programme up to a defined credit threshold.

The Project team was looking at ways to decouple entry and exit routes to enable a student to move from one pathway to another. An example was given of a student in the Junior Freshman year of a single honors course in AHSS taking 20 credits in another discipline: this would open up the opportunity to move to a double honors programme in the following year. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted that the proposed programme structures were designed to safeguard depth whilst allowing experience of other disciplines.

Discussions at the fora had raised the question of whether flexibility would be more beneficial in the later years of a programme. The discussions had highlighted the need for definitional clarity around the terminology used. Feedback had also raised questions on where co-curricular activities would be managed and where responsibility would lie for ensuring a student had the requisite number of credits for their award. It had also been suggested that there should be some flexibility with regard to the suggested 20 ECTS weighting that had been proposed for the capstone project.

A number of members highlighted their concerns about the single honor model, which would require students to take 20 ECTS in another discipline in the Junior Freshman year, when it was essential that they cover foundation modules. Members also commented that it was inevitable that depth would decrease as a result of increasing breadth. A member expressed a concern that the structures were too prescriptive and noted that he was not in favour of the proposed programme architecture. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer advised that the proposed architecture was designed to provide structured but flexible pathways to support the achievement of programme-level outcomes and the development of the graduate attributes. She referred to an OECD report from 2012 that had highlighted the need for graduates to be intellectually and academically agile and exposed to interdisciplinary experiences. The Director of TSM noted the importance of future-proofing the programme architecture so that it would allow new development in the coming years. Another member suggested that it would be useful to see a 'mock up' of the models.

In response to a comment from a member who noted that, in his experience, students did not necessarily draw on their learning from other disciplines, the Senior Academic Developer noted that assessment could drive learning and that integrated assessment would encourage integrated learning.

In response to a query as to the rationale for the TEP, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer referred to how the work done in preparation for the Strategic Plan 2014-19 had informed the project. She also noted the importance of simplifying our current systems.

The Senior Lecturer confirmed that the models remained under discussion and may be revised. She noted that work was also being undertaken to review the academic year structure.

The presentation from the fora on 16th March 2016 would be forwarded to members following the meeting and members were encouraged to provide comment to the TEP team by 29th March 2016. A Strand 2 meeting would take place later in the week to discuss the feedback received and a proposal on curriculum principles and programme architecture would be circulated to Council for its meeting on 13 April 2016.

USC/15-16/133 CAO Application Statistics 2016/17

This item was deferred to the next meeting of USC.

USC/15-16/134 Procedures for the approval of new undergraduate modules

A discussion document, together with a memorandum from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, dated 18 February 2016, had been circulated, together with feedback from schools. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted that the feedback received had supported the proposed approval process for new modules and modules with significant changes.

She confirmed that this would be a devolved process, allowing schools and disciplines to have control over the approval of new modules at a local level. It would allow for all stakeholders to ensure there was an overall programme-focus.

A number of concerns were raised, including concerns around the implications of new staff joining a school at a late stage in the year, that the proposed procedure might discourage the introduction of new modules, that it might compromise academic freedom and that it added unnecessary administration to the process. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted in response that the proposal was based on a 'light touch' approach, managed at local level, so as not to stifle innovation. Further, she considered it to be good practice that new modules be presented to and discussed by the relevant local committee/s in order to ensure the overall coherence of the programme.

A number of members explained that the proposal was due to be discussed at a future meeting of their School Executive Committees. In light of this, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer postponed the decision on approving the proposal to the next meeting of USC.

USC/15-16/135 Calendar Changes 2016/17

A memorandum from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer dated 15 March 2016 was circulated. The memorandum proposed modifications to the existing process by which changes to course entries in the University Calendar Part II were considered. It was acknowledged that the practical application of the process had altered somewhat since its approval in 2006.

The procedure outlined that changes should first be considered at the appropriate committee in each school. Changes involving interdisciplinary courses should then be considered by the relevant course committee. Staff in both Trinity Teaching and Learning and the Secretary's Office would review the changes and consult with schools prior to final proofs being circulated to the final USC meeting of the academic year. This would replace the procedure whereby proposed changes had traditionally been presented in a less final form to USC at its March meeting.

The procedure was approved by USC. It was noted that due to the timing of the proposal, step 2 of the procedure may not have been followed in all cases in the current academic year. The rest of the procedure would be implemented with immediate effect. Final or near final proofs of the faculty/course sections of the Calendar would be circulated to the USC meeting of 24 May 2016.

USC/15-16/136 Any other business

Ms Alison Oldham, Director of Student Services, would be in attendance at future meetings of USC.

USC/15-16/137 Items for noting

There were no items for noting.