



**Trinity College Dublin**

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

**XX = Council relevance**

**A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 15 November 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 Aidan Seery  
 Dean of Students, Professor Kevin O'Kelly  
 Professor Elaine Moriarty, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
 Professor Sarah Smyth, Director of TSM  
 Professor Alan O'Connor, School of Engineering  
 Professor Cathriona Russell, School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology  
 Professor Brian Brewer, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies  
 Professor David Prendergast, School of Law  
 Professor John Walsh, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences  
 Professor Louis Brennan, School of Business  
 Professor Kevin Mitchell, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education  
 Professor Paschalis Karageorgis, School of Mathematics  
 Professor Imelda Coyne, School of Nursing and Midwifery  
 Professor Kevin Conlon, School of Medicine  
 Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science  
 Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences  
 Professor Michael Bridge, School of Chemistry  
 Professor Frank Wellmer, School of Genetics and Microbiology  
 Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences  
 Professor Mike Brady, School of Computer Science and Statistics  
 Professor Jarlath Killeen, School of English  
 Professor Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities  
 Professor Eric Weitz, School of Drama, Film and Music  
 Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics  
 Mr Dale Whelehan, Education Officer, Students' Union  
 Mr Colm O'Halloran, Student Representative
- Apologies: Professor Elizabeth Nixon, School of Psychology  
 Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education  
 Professor Robbie Gilligan, School of Social Work and Social Policy  
 Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
- In attendance: Ms Elaine Egan; Dr Alison Oldam, Director of Student Services; Mr Declan Treanor, Director of Disability Service for item USC/16-17/025

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**USC/16-17/020 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 11 October 2016 were approved.

**USC/16-17/021 Matters arising**

- XX USC/16-17/015** The Articulation Agreement with UEH had been signed at a ceremony in Vietnam the previous week.

**USC/16-17/022 Trinity Education Project****a) Update on the Trinity Education Project**

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer furnished the meeting with the names of the newly appointed Teaching Fellows and outlined the Schools/disciplines with which they would work. A training workshop had been provided to the Fellows and a further workshop would take place the following day. An appointment had also been made in the Faculty of Health Sciences to look at the provision of inter-professional modules.

The Vice-Provost was in the process of conducting lunchtime meetings with Schools to collect feedback from colleagues and to provide updates on TEP. The feedback would provide the basis for the creation of frequently asked questions (FAQs) which would be used to address commonly-shared queries.

Under TEP Strand 1, Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics, and Ms Mary McMahon, Trinity Education Project, were progressing work in relation to the fixed timetable. Subjects would likely be assigned to one of five pillars and work was underway to determine which subjects in joint honours programmes would be combinable.

A small subgroup had also been established to look at entry routes and subject combinations. The group was looking at existing combinations and also at the integration of existing joint-honours programmes outside of the TSM programme with a view to folding those in. The work also centred around the pillar model that was being used for fixed timetabling, with the subjects being fitted into one of these pillars: subjects across pillars would be combinable. Meetings with Faculty Deans to discuss the issues would commence in the following days and the meetings would provide the basis for further discussion and consultation.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer outlined the membership of the Progression and Awards Working Group, which was scheduled to meet later that week. A discussion document had been prepared and presented at a Strand 1 meeting. The document had identified a number of issues to be addressed in the context of progression and awards including transition through the various pathways, progression of students through a particular programme of study, the calculation of degree awards, issues around compensation, the role and power of Courts of Examiners, the appeals process, transfers, grading conventions, and the administrative structures that would best support the new architecture. It was planned to bring a discussion paper to USC in early 2017.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer highlighted the interdependencies between the components of Strand 1 and also between the main strands.

The Electives Working Group had met twice and had begun its work by looking at the principles that should underpin the development of the Trinity electives. A forum with students had also taken place where they had been invited to discuss how they envisaged Trinity electives. The Provost had recently held a forum with employers at which electives and career-readiness had been discussed. The Working Group would take the feedback from these meetings on board when developing principles for the design and delivery of the Trinity electives.

The Dean of Students advised that the membership of the Strand 5 group on extra-curricular activities was being finalised. The main output of the group would be to determine the co- and extra-curricular activities most strongly linked to the graduate

attributes and how to ensure that they would be accessible to as many students as possible. The group would liaise with the Teaching Fellows who would also work with Schools on co- and extra-curricular activities. The Dean noted that some of the activities could be quite impactful, including the possibility of a student taking a lower credit load in a semester if they had been engaged with a significant co- or extra-curricular activity, or taking a semester off.

The Registrar had presented to a Fellows meeting about the academic year structure and, subsequently, a list of FAQs had been put together to provide information on common queries. A meeting would take place on the following day with a subgroup of the Standing Committee of Fellows around specific details in relation to the proposals for statutory change. Pending approval, the proposed statute changes would proceed to Council in November 2016. Assent of the Fellows would be sought in January 2017.

#### **b) Proposals for undergraduate Science Programmes**

**XX** A Report of the Undergraduate Science Education Working Group, dated 11 November 2016, had been circulated. The Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education gave a presentation on the proposed Science Course structure to the meeting.

The rationale for change had come from the review of the Science Course (TR071) and TEP. Overall feedback from the course review had been favourable and had commended the programmatic nature of the course. Some concerns had been raised, however, with regard to the cohesion and coordination of teaching across the various Schools and disciplines.

The Associate Dean brought the meeting through the current structure of the TR071 programme and emphasised that while there was direct entry to the course, it was not a general science course. Students were immediately asked to make subject choices that then acted as prerequisites for moderatorship options. He noted that in effect, half of the moderatorship options were closed off to students from the first day. The current structure meant that students who entered with an interest in a particular subject area might find that there was insufficient capacity in the Sophister years. It was an indeterminate and unpredictable process and had led to student dissatisfaction.

Alongside TR071, there were currently five direct entry courses: Nanoscience, Human Genetics, Chemistry with Molecular Modelling, Medicinal Chemistry and Earth Sciences. Council had approved that TR071 and the five courses should be rolled into three streams, with the five denominated programmes becoming moderatorship choices at the end of the second year. However, the split into three streams was proving to be unworkable. The Associate Dean brought the meeting through the various course structures that had been considered, but not chosen and briefly outlined why they had not been selected.

The Working Group had set out to design a course that would achieve the best possible student experience within the principles of TEP. The proposed structure would allow for entry into undergraduate science to be streamed into four entry routes, each with a distinct CAO code, entry requirements and quota. The four routes were Physical Sciences (Physics, Astrophysics and Nanosciences), Chemical Sciences (Chemistry, Medicinal Chemistry and Nanosciences), Biological and Biomedical Sciences, and Geography and Geoscience. They represented transparent and coherent streams of worldwide recognised disciplines and, in each stream, the moderatorship options could be clearly marketed to students. The structure would make it possible to define core, approved and elective modules according to the TEP principles in a consistent manner across the four streams. It also allowed for each stream to customise content and minimise pre-requisites. It would provide greater clarity of progression routes and assure a better match between freshman intake and the capacity in the sophister years.

A disadvantage of the chosen structure was that the popularity of the direct entry courses with their unique branding may be lost by folding the courses into streams. The Associate Dean and the DUTL in the School of Physics outlined the concerns of the School with regard to the folding in of the Nanoscience course which would span both the Physics and Chemistry streams. The course was very successful with high entry points and consistently attracted excellent students and it was feared that it would lose its appeal to those students and that entry points would drop along with demand. The School had requested an opt-out and had only received an answer in the previous week. It was requested that the minutes record a request from the Head of School for written reassurance that the situation would be reviewed if it did transpire that the success of the course suffered due to its positioning within the streams. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted in response that the provision of any such reassurance would not be a matter for USC; she would, however, draw Council's attention to this discussion. It was also requested that freshman students retain the option of taking Geology or Biology alongside Physics.

The Associate Dean believed that as Nanoscience would be retained as a moderatorship, and would be noted in the title of the CAO offering, with the correct marketing it could continue its current success. He felt that the success of the course would help to market the Physics and the Chemistry streams.

The DUTL of the School of Chemistry was pleased with the positioning of Nanoscience in both the Chemical and Physical Sciences streams and noted that there was not a hard line between the two streams. The meeting heard that identical modules were taken in both the Junior Freshman year of Physics and Nanoscience and that there was no academic argument to keeping them separate.

Entry to moderatorships in the current Science Course was through competition in second year, with quotas based on availability. It was proposed that entry to a student's first choice of moderatorship be guaranteed to all students achieving at least a 2:1 grade in the senior freshman year. This guarantee would help with marketing the course to both national and international students. This did not represent a large change from the current process as records from previous years had shown that all students who had achieved a 2:1 or higher had got their first choice. Some members commended the guaranteeing of a place for students who achieved a 2:1, however, one member cautioned that the level for a 2:1 would begin to fall when the process was put in place.

In response to a query about transfers, the Associate Dean clarified that there should be sufficient capacity to allow students to move between streams in the first year of the programme. A member thanked the Associate Dean for all his hard work to date on the proposed structures.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer made a number of suggested amendments including an articulation of the requirements of the Teaching Council, an amendment to terminology used, and the need to link the science graduate attributes to College graduate attributes. It was agreed that the changes would be made prior to submission of the proposal to Council.

USC approved that the proposal should proceed to Council.

**c) Good practice in assessment**

This item was postponed until a future meeting of USC.

**USC/16-17/023 External Examiners**

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed Ms Ewa Sadowska, Trinity Teaching and Learning, to the meeting for this item. The role of external examiners had been briefly discussed at the previous meeting of USC and members had been asked to discuss the issues with their Schools and bring the feedback to the meeting. The Dean noted that this item had also been discussed by the Graduate Studies Committee.

Members spoke about the role of external examiners in their Schools and it was evident that the role varied greatly across College. The practice of having a second marker also differed widely and a discussion took place regarding the different practices in College. In some Schools, the external examiner would act as a second marker whereas in other Schools an internal second marker would mark all scripts and the examiner would be used to moderate scripts. In some Schools, the examiner would look at all Senior Sophister scripts, in others the examiner would review scripts only in borderline and failing cases, or would review a script where the first and second markers could not agree. Some Schools asked external examiners to review sample scripts for each grade to ensure that grades were being awarded consistently at each level. Some Schools did not approve of external examiners changing marks, whereas in other Schools this happened in consultation with School staff. External examiners in some Schools requested to meet students and this was facilitated where possible. Sometimes external examiners reviewed all final projects and one School noted that practicals were recorded, but that they hoped external examiners would attend the presentations in the future. One School noted the usefulness of external examiners moderating marks in a subject that had achieved overall particularly high or particularly low marks. External examiners also had a role in reviewing draft examination papers. The Senior Tutor noted that having external examiner input was useful if there were subsequently to be an appeal.

In Health Sciences, it was not practice for the examiners to moderate scripts. Their role was to monitor the quality of the assessment process. In the final years, the examiners would ensure that the examinations were mapped to the curriculum and that the standard was accurately reflected in the marks. External examiners would safeguard quality in the final examinations and would examine borderline and failing students. The external examiner had the final say in determining if a student was safe to practice in the health sciences area. The external examiners were appointed from Ireland and the UK to prevent difficulties with differing expectations and healthcare systems.

The importance of selecting appropriate external examiners was highlighted and members noted that it was a difficult and time-consuming process. A member wondered whether the external examiner term could be increased to four years, as was the case in the UK.

A member sought clarity on external examiners attending Court of Examiners at course-level and also at discipline level; it was not clear whether they were examining for the course or for the subject. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer confirmed the oversight role of external examiners and said it would most likely be considered by the Progressions and Award Group in the context of the TEP.

Members agreed that there was an absence of information and guidance from College on the role of the external examiner. Examiners relied on each School to provide information on what it required of them and members requested that more guidance be provided at an institutional level. The different terminology used to describe external examiners - moderators, externs, external examiners - was thought to add further confusion to the remit of an external examiner.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer agreed to look into creating a repository where current practice could be shared and from which good practice would be

identified and would feed into the guidelines. She noted the request for more institutional guidance to be provided to external examiners and also the need to provide clarity on the role of the external examiner and the terminology used.

A member sought reassurance that College saw the role of external examiner as being important for the quality control of programmes in Trinity. The Dean assured the meeting that the view of USC regarding the importance of the external examiner process would be included in a document that would be brought to Council. A member commented that the level of pay for external examiners was very low and the possibility was put forward of moving to a pay scale dependent on the level of work carried out by an examiner, similar to the process in the UK.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer requested that members direct any further feedback to Ms Sadowska, Trinity Teaching & Learning, and thanked her for her contribution to the meeting.

#### **USC/16-17/024 Student Evaluation**

At the previous meeting of USC, a brief conversation on student evaluation had taken place and members had been asked bring the discussion to their areas and feed back to USC. A number of issues had been identified at the previous meeting, including survey fatigue, the response rate to surveys, the quality of responses and the reliability of student evaluation to rate teaching. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer indicated that the discussion would focus on how best to maximise the value of student module evaluation.

The Academic Secretary and the Students' Union Education Officer were meeting with staff and student representatives in all Schools to discuss module evaluation. Following these meetings, a framework would be brought back to USC for discussion.

A member noted that module evaluation was only a portion of the student evaluation process that could also include meetings with student convenors and other fora. There appeared to be general agreement amongst members that, overall, the module evaluation survey feedback was less effective than feedback generated via other methods – e.g. student/staff fora and focus groups. The timing of module evaluation meant that issues could not be dealt with during the teaching of that module, whereas staff/student meetings that took place throughout the academic year provided instant feedback that could be immediately acted upon. The Students' Union Education Officer highlighted that the impact of the feedback received needed to be made more transparent to students to ensure they knew the importance of the evaluation process and that they were being listened to.

A discussion on response rates took place with a member commenting that they had switched back to paper-based surveys due to a decline in response rates when they moved to online surveys. The issue of a small number of responses or even a single response skewing results in very small cohorts was noted. One member commented that their students were allocated space in the timetable to respond to the survey and they achieved a high response rate.

A member reported on studies that showed that student evaluations were not a reliable indicator of teaching effectiveness and included an inherent gender bias and he agreed to forward these to the Academic Secretary.

The Academic Secretary reminded the meeting that the College policy on student evaluation did not prescribe the method to be used for evaluating modules and that each School/course had discretion to use an approach that best suited their discipline, provided

student engagement and feedback were addressed. She emphasised the need to understand the purpose of evaluations.

#### **USC/16-17/025 Recording of Lectures**

A memorandum from the Director of the Disability Service, dated 9 November 2016 was circulated. This item had arisen from a member's query at the last meeting of USC and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed the Director of the Disability Service to the meeting to speak to members about the policy around the recording of lectures.

The Director explained that the Disability Service had sought legal opinion in relation to the Disability Act 2005 to determine whether College was meeting all the requirements of the Act and had asked whether the recording of lectures was a reasonable accommodation in certain circumstances. The opinion received had confirmed that it was a reasonable accommodation within the context of the Act. The College Calendar allowed for the recording of lectures as a reasonable accommodation.

The Director explained that the Disability Service carried out a needs assessment and determined reasonable accommodations for each student it met. Students who were given permission to record lectures would typically have difficulty in taking notes. Where students were considered to be at a significant disadvantage it would be recommended that they use a Dictaphone or an app on their smartphone. Permission was noted on students' needs assessment (LENS) reports and students were asked to sign a memo confirming that recordings were made for personal use and would not be shared. The Service suggested to students that they might mention the permission to lecturers out of courtesy, but the Director noted that some students may find that difficult. Only students who had been given permission by the Disability Service may record College lectures. Further, the Service only granted permission for the recording of lectures, it did not recommend that students record tutorials or meetings as these were interactive and involved student participation. The Service recommended that recorded material be deleted once it was no longer needed.

The Director confirmed that a lecturer had a right not to allow a student to record a lecture, but that they would need to provide an alternative accommodation and should speak to the Disability Service about this.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked the Director for speaking to this item.

#### **USC/16-17/026 Any Other Business**

- The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer reminded members of the decision by Council (CL/13-14/167) that all undergraduate students should complete an independent project or dissertation in one of their final two years. The regulation would impact students who had entered Trinity in 2014/15 or who had been off-books in 2013/14 and returned to study in 2014/15. She noted that the regulation did not specify that the project or dissertation must be completed within a standalone module; nor did it assign a specific credit weighting to the work. She reminded members that the decision of Council in 2013-14 was separate from the planned capstone project within the context of the TEP programme architecture. The latter would apply to students entering in 2018-19.

The DUTL of Medicine noted that courses in Health Sciences were unable to fulfil the requirement as they were under the control of the regulator. He therefore sought a derogation until they had been able to work out the issue. The Dean of

Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer advised that she would follow up with the Director about the matter as had been flagged in the minute of the Council meeting.

In response to a query from a member, the Dean noted that the project or dissertation should be an individual, rather than a group piece of work.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer advised that she would send communication asking how the regulation would be achieved by each School.

- A member raised a concern regarding delays in students registering on their programme and getting access to BlackBoard. Other members noted that their students had experienced similar delays and one member noted that their course had previously lost international students due to severe delays at registration. Members were also very concerned about the possible implications of students being in clinical settings without being insured.

The Director of Student Services explained that an issue with Garda vetting was responsible for some, but not all of the delays. The Academic Registry would investigate whether Garda vetting could be carried out earlier in the admissions process, perhaps through the CAO mechanism. She noted that registering was reliant on Garda vetting and access to BlackBoard was reliant on registration and that perhaps that link should be reviewed.

Members noted that some of the delays were due to student cases and some members felt that the level of delays was worse than in the previous year. Members also noted issues with BlackBoard separate to the issues with registration.

The Director of Student Services undertook to investigate the registration delays and bring feedback to the next meeting of USC.