



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 18 April 2017 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 Sarah Smyth, Director of TSM
 Professor Cathriona Russell, School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology
 Professor David Prendergast, School of Law
 Professor Louis Brennan, School of Business
 Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
 Professor Jarlath Killeen, School of English
 Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
 Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education
 Professor Brian Brewer, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
 Professor Imelda Coyne, School of Nursing and Midwifery
 Professor Robbie Gilligan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
 Professor Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities
 Professor Eric Weitz, School of Drama, Film and Music
 Professor Aileen Patterson, School of Medicine (on behalf of Professor Kevin Conlon)
 Mr Dale Whelehan, Education Officer, Students' Union

Apologies: Professor Michael Bridge, School of Chemistry
 Professor Frank Wellmer, School of Genetics and Microbiology
 Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences
 Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics
 Professor Elizabeth Nixon, School of Psychology
 Professor Mike Brady, School of Computer Science and Statistics
 Professor Paschalis Karageorgis, School of Mathematics
 Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science
 Professor Elaine Moriarty, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
 Professor Alan O'Connor, School of Engineering
 Professor Kevin Mitchell, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education
 Professor Kevin Conlon, School of Medicine
 Professor John Walsh, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
 Mr Colm O'Halloran, Student Representative

In attendance: Ms Elaine Egan; Ms Siobhan Dunne, Library Representative; Dr Alison Oldam, Director of Student Services; Ms Maura Horan, Head of Digital, Public Affairs and Communications for item USC/16-17/054; Ms Fedelma McNamara, Trinity Education Project, for item USC/16-17/055

Item 7 on the agenda was taken immediately after item 3 at the meeting. Item 4 on the agenda was taken after item 6.

USC/16-17/052 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21 March 2017 were approved.

USC/16-17/053 Matters arising

USC/16-17/038a The proposal for the Bachelor in Stage Management and Technical Theatre had been approved by Council.

USC/16-17/046c A panel, chaired by the Provost, had met to consider nominees for the review of two-subject combination entry routes.

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USC/16-17/048 The Central Scholarship Committee would meet in the following week and make a decision on whether a recommendation should be brought to Council that 'seen' papers should not be allowed in the Foundation Scholarship examination.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies also noted that a total of 55 Scholars had been elected on Trinity Monday 2017: 29 female and 26 male. The Faculty Deans had been invited to undertake a review of elements of the Scholarship examination as per the procedure decided after the 2012 Scholarship review. This takes place every three years and reports are due by 10 June 2017.

USC/16-17/054 Website Performance - School Websites and Undergraduate Studies

Ms Maura Horan, Head of Digital, Public Affairs and Communications, was welcomed to the meeting. Ms Horan updated the committee on the website design upgrade work that is taking place in Schools. The new website templates use a 'responsive design' where the display is mobile optimized for the device that is being used. At the time of the meeting, 13 School websites had been upgraded with a number of other Schools in progress or due to start.

Ms Horan also outlined the importance of the website in the context of communications and marketing and how web analytics could be used to help improve the user experience and to ensure better visibility of School websites. For example, analysis of page views for most clicked content or looking at which countries the website traffic is coming from, can help website owners hone in on those areas of their site where they should concentrate their efforts. She also highlighted the need to maintain up to date websites with effective content, working links and accurate spelling. She advised that videos and student testimonials were very popular with web users.

Following a brief discussion, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited members to send further comments directly to Ms Horan and thanked her for her presentation.

USC/16-17/055 Trinity Education Project

Ms Fedelma McNamara, Trinity Education Project, was welcomed to the meeting.

a) Progression and Awards Forum

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies dated 13 April 2017 had been circulated, together with draft recommendations for discussion.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that the initial recommendations had been brought to USC for discussion on 17 January 2017. Feedback received from USC and from other committees, Schools and individuals and from the forum held on 16 March had been considered by the 'Progression and Awards' subgroup of Strand 1 and it informed a set of recommendations which were brought to Strand 1 for review. The recommendations which were now being brought to USC for discussion, represent the outcome of that review.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies brought the meeting through a number of the recommendations and highlighted the need to consider the

recommendations as a whole rather than in isolation. She noted that the recommendations were designed to achieve greater consistency of practice within and between programmes and that this would enhance academic integrity. Greater alignment of regulations would mean greater transparency for students and staff. The recommendations were also designed to support learning. She noted that the recommendations relate to standard progression and were designed with the majority of students in mind: it was recognised that non-standard progression would be dealt with on a different basis. Enhanced coherence and transparency would enable greater flexibility within and across programme pathways, which, in turn, could enable the development of more cross-faculty programmes in the future. Importantly, the common programme architecture could not be implemented successfully without greater consistency of progression and awards practices. She noted the important function of the student transcript, specifically, in documenting in a transparent way a student's academic journey in College: it would include information on whether a student has supplemented and/or repeated a year and the number of attempts.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies drew the meeting's attention to recommendations which had been brought to the January USC meeting and, on the basis of feedback, been withdrawn or amended: the recommendation to grade Junior and Senior Freshman years on a pass/fail basis had been dropped, whilst the recommendation that all 60 ECTS credits be passed had been amended to allow for some compensation. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies then brought the meeting through the recommendations and the rationale behind them.

Recommendation 1 proposes the need for progression regulations to be standardised across all undergraduate programmes.

Recommendation 2 proposes that progression should be on an annual basis, that students should be allowed to carry failed modules from semester to semester and that provisional module results should be provided after Semester 1 for all modules completed and assessed in Michaelmas term. Widespread support had been received for progression on an annual basis.

Recommendation 3 proposes that the pass mark should be standardised across programmes as far as possible and that the progression threshold in standard four-year degree programmes should not be higher than the pass mark. The initial recommendation to have a 'shared' pass mark across the university had been modified on the basis of feedback received from the Health Sciences area where some programmes have a pass mark of 50 rather than 40, in line with comparable programmes across the sector.

Recommendation 4 proposes that students should have a balanced credit load across the two semesters, that 60 credits would be required to pass a year, that all modules and their components are compensatable and that students should be able to compensate up to 10 ECTS credits if they achieve a mark between 35-39 (where the pass mark is 40) as long as the overall weighted average mark is above 40. Students who do not achieve an overall pass grade and cannot progress must present for reassessment at the supplemental session as set out in the document on compensation which had been circulated. It was noted that modules and/or components of modules in the professional courses in Health Sciences that are currently non-compensatable, should remain so.

Recommendation 5 proposes that the calculation of the degree award be based on the final two years on a JS 30 / SS 70 basis. This supports the principles of consistency and fairness by seeking to ensure that a module taken by students in the JS or SS year in different programmes of study contributes the same proportion to the degree calculation. It also aims to achieve appropriate recognition of the contribution of both depth and

breadth components of each of the degree pathways [SH, SH with minor etc.]. It was noted that the 30/70 weighting should not act as an impediment to students going abroad.

Recommendation 6 proposes that the maximum number of years to complete an undergraduate degree should be 6 years for a standard four-year programme and 7 years for a five-year programme, unless otherwise specified by accrediting bodies. This is the current regulation.

Recommendation 7 proposes that students should be allowed to repeat all years. They should not be permitted to repeat (i) any academic year more than once within a degree programme and (ii) more than two academic years within a degree programme. Further, students who are required to repeat should do so on a module-by-module basis. It was emphasized that the default method of repeating should be on a module-by-module basis and that students would pay on a pro-rata basis. The option for a student to repeat modules on an OBA basis (off-books with assessment) would cease to exist.

Recommendation 8 proposes that supplementals should be available in all years; that the right to supplementals where a student has failed at the annual session should be automatic; that the same progression regulations, including compensation, should be applied at annual and supplemental sessions; that re-scheduled exams within the session should be discontinued; that students should only be required to re-sit exams or re-submit coursework for failed modules or components thereof; that different reassessment modalities should be allowed where appropriate; and that where supplemental assessments are taken, marks are awarded as usual – capping will not be applied. It was noted that not applying capping was a move towards supporting learning and that capping could be demotivating for students. Not capping supports the principles of assessment for and as learning and places the achievement of the learning outcomes at the centre of how we approach assessment. It also provides motivation for students to achieve their best. It was noted that the transcript will state clearly whether the student has passed at the first or second attempt.

Recommendation 9 proposes that special examinations should be discontinued. Widespread support had been received for this proposal.

A member suggested that in order to prevent students 'gaming the system' when capping is no longer applied, College could impose an administrative fee for reassessment at the Supplemental session. In response to a query regarding allowing students to carry a failed module when this might be predicated on passing another module, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that this was not a change from current progression practice. It was clarified that a year off-books would not count towards the number of years that a student had to complete their programme. In this regard, it was also noted that Recommendation 6 contained a statement on the possible requirements of accrediting bodies in relation to the number of years within which a student must have completed the degree. With regard to a student failing a non-compensatable clinical component, it was clarified that in professionally accredited programmes, in particular in Health Sciences, modules that are currently non-compensatable will remain so.

The Director of Teaching and Learning in the School of Law also advised that one professional body in law did not permit passing by compensation in a particular module. The Director of Social Work and Social Policy outlined a similar issue in his School. It was agreed that the Directors would liaise with TEP Strand 1 to outline particular requirements of the professional bodies.

A member advised that their School was supportive of most of the recommendations, but could not support the 30/70 calculation of the degree mark. He highlighted the increased

weighting that this would put on the Capstone project, which was seen as being a challenging module for students. He also noted that the School had concerns in relation to the recommendation to not apply capping at reassessment.

A number of members commended the recommendations noting that the 30/70 calculation of the degree award would alleviate some of the pressure on students in the final year; that they would simplify and streamline processes; that they were equitable; that they would be easy to administer; that they would make progression more transparent for students and tutors; and that they would work better from a systems point of view.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that the recommendations would be brought to the next meeting of the TEP Steering Committee on 26 April 2017.

b) Co- and Extra-Curriculum

An interim report from Strand 5: Co- and Extra-Curricular Activities had been circulated. The Dean of Students reported that it had been recognised from the outset of the TEP that graduate attributes and curriculum principles could not be achieved solely through Trinity's academic framework. Strand 5 recognised that co- and extra-curricular activities are fundamental to students' development and set out to identify possible impediments to these that may exist within Trinity's structures and systems. Consideration to providing credits for co- and extra- curricular activities had been given at the early stages of Strand 5 and both the student community and Strand 5 were against the idea. Students should record this kind of activity in a portfolio or similar way. In speaking to the interim report, the Dean focused on the areas that had been identified as impacting upon Strand 1.

The Dean reported that more physical space was necessary to support the activities of clubs, societies and the students' unions. Space was also needed to provide an informal place for students to congregate for social and intellectual purposes. Following a Students' Union referendum, a levy had been introduced with the aim of improving student spaces and creating a new student centre. The Dean asked members to reflect on space in their areas and how it could be utilised by students.

The Dean advised that co- and extra-curricular activities did not always align with academic schedules and this could present problems for students engaged in high-level extra-curricular activities. Adding flexibility to the curricula would ensure these students were more easily accommodated.

Strand 5 had suggested that reducing the ECTS credit load to less than 30 ECTS credits in a semester should be explored for students engaged in an activity at an intensive level, where it was feasible within the academic programme. It was recognised that a lower credit load in one year would result in an extended time in College. The option of going off-books with assessment for a single semester should also be investigated. In terms of the Trinity Electives, there were opportunities for the non-academic areas of College to contribute and the Careers Advisory Service had already shown strong interest in generating a module on professional development.

The Dean noted that Strand 1 was looking into establishing a fixed timetable and highlighted the importance of programmes containing their academic programme within the timeframe of 9am-6pm and allowing time where students could meaningfully engage in co- and extra-curricular activity. The Dean would shortly speak with the Teaching Fellows and Directors of Teaching and Learning and requested that when reviewing academic programmes, staff remain mindful of the need to allow students space for co- and extra- curricular activities.

In response to a query, the Dean confirmed that the option to take a reduced credit load should also be available for students who may need it for reasons outside of high-level engagement. The Dean explained that it was yet to be determined if a student who was taking a reduced credit-load would still be considered a full-time student and that this would be decided with reference to the academic side of the TEP, rather than by Strand 5. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies highlighted the need to ensure that the integrity of programmes would be retained.

The Dean explained that part-time programmes would not usually be possible: while modules may be offered on a semesterised basis, they are only offered once per year and students progress by year, rather than by module. However, having the option to pay on a module by module basis could help to introduce more flexibility into the system.

The interim report would be brought to the TEP Steering Committee on 26 April 2017.

c) Module Sizes

A paper with draft recommendations on module sizes had been circulated for consideration and recommendation to Council. The proposals had previously been discussed by the Steering Committee. Currently in Trinity module sizes range from 2.5 ECTS credits to 30 ECTS credits. Greater standardisation of module sizes is necessary in order to enable the implementation of the common programme architecture and facilitate flexibility and inclusion of core, optional and elective modules. The proposal aims to standardise module sizes and proposes that module sizes for taught modules are limited to 5 ECTS credits and 10 ECTS credits, with 20 ECTS credits reserved for the capstone project. It proposes that 5 ECTS credit modules are taught and assessed within one semester, while 10 ECTS credit modules may be taught and assessed over one or two semesters. Additionally, it is proposed that students should have a balanced credit load across the two semesters: 30 credits in semester 1 and 30 credits in semester 2. Further work would be carried out under the rollout of the assessment framework to ensure that assessment is commensurate to the credit weighting of the module.

In response to a concern from a member, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that while guidelines would be drawn up to ensure that the assessment is commensurate with the ECTS credit size, decisions on the method of assessment will remain with individual disciplines. The member noted that the guidelines should be carefully worded to ensure that this is explicitly noted.

A member highlighted that a module with a 10 ECTS credit weighting that was taught and assessed over two semesters would pose a barrier to student mobility and urged members to be mindful of the years in which they included these modules in their curricula – with an emphasis on not including them in the third year. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that a commitment had already been made to permit modules that span the two semesters.

It was noted that due to accreditation issues in certain Schools, there would need to be exceptions to the balanced credit load due to placements. In response to a query, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that the Strand 1 was aware that having a number of 5 ECTS credit modules can sometimes fragment a curriculum and lead to over-assessment. It was thought that by ensuring that assessment is commensurate with module size, this would alleviate the risk of over-assessment or duplication of assessment.

USC recommended the proposals to Council for approval.

d) Trinity Electives

The proposal that had been approved by Council on 5 April 2017 had been circulated for information.

e) Internships and Student Mobility

Preliminary recommendations had been circulated for discussion and would be considered at a future meeting of Council.

USC/16-17/056 Student Partnership

A memorandum from the Education Officer, TCDSU, dated 4 April 2017 was circulated together with the Student Partnership Policy and Implementation Documents Sections A, B and C. The policy and documents had previously been discussed by USC on 21 February 2017 and a number of changes had since been incorporated. The policy and documents had been approved by the Student Life Committee.

The Education Officer, TCDSU, spoke to the circulated documents. Section A outlines the current student engagement representation within College. Section B proposes the Partnership Theme – Revolutionising Student Engagement through embedding a Culture of Collaboration and Partnership - and associated projects for 2017/18. The Students' Union and Graduate Students' Union would launch a campaign to ensure the key performance indicators would be achieved in the academic year. Section C proposes the scope of the policy and highlights areas where staff and students could act in partnership for quality enhancement. The Education Officer emphasised that Section C would not impose any legal obligation on members of College.

The Education Officer indicated that the partnership agreement would replace the Student Charter that had previously been in place. He explained that the Charter was deemed not to be implementable, whereas the circulated documents make reference to actions that the Students' Unions can achieve, including protecting the students' right to vote on student levies, involvement in electing representatives to committees, etc.

In response to some suggestions from members, it was agreed that the documents would be amended to read as follows:

p13., 1st bullet point:

Provide excellence in academic education through both depth and breadth

p13., 7th bullet point:

Will endeavour to achieve excellence in their programme of study

8th bullet point:

Respect the rules and regulations of the University

It was suggested that there was room for greater precision and clarity in Chapter 4. In addition, it was agreed that references to School Convenors should be expanded to School, Faculty, and Course Convenors.

USC approved the Student Partnership Policy and Sections A, B, and C.

USC/16-17/057 Student Evaluation Review Report**XX**

A report on the review of student evaluation was circulated, together with a memorandum from the Education Officer, TCDSU, and the Academic Secretary, dated 13 April 2017. A review of research on student evaluation and practices in peer universities had been carried out by staff in Trinity Teaching and Learning. The research was discussed at the Quality Committee and Undergraduate Studies Committee in Michaelmas Term 2016 and, subsequently, a discussion took place at Council that raised concern about compliance with the policy on module evaluation. Council recommended that the

Academic Secretary and the Students' Union Education Officer visit Schools to assess whether and how undergraduate modules were being evaluated. The visits took place during Michaelmas and Hilary terms 2016/17 and involved a total of 157 staff and student class reps across 20 Schools.

The visits showed that the majority of modules were being evaluated in some form and reflected the varying levels of engagement across Schools and programmes. Schools that reported having effective module evaluation processes had demonstrated a high level of effort and engagement in the process. There was no suggestion from staff or students that module evaluation should be discontinued. Students had pointed out that while they were represented on committees, this did not represent true engagement as the number represented was low and the balance of power was not seen to be equal. Regarding the timing of the module evaluations, students had shown their interest in mid-module evaluations as they would benefit from the resulting improvements. The Academic Secretary noted that the School of Chemistry had an effective student-staff liaison committee with strong student involvement and engagement. Other Schools had shown interest in replicating this model in their School.

It was clear that paper-based surveys were preferred overall as they usually achieved a higher response rate than online surveys which often achieve poor response rates. The School of Mathematics had developed its own online evaluation tool that had reduced the administrative burden and achieved high response rates. Clickers were used in some Schools and would be available to all Schools on a trial basis in 2017/18.

The Academic Secretary concluded by explaining that Schools should give serious consideration to mid-term module reviews, whilst being cognisant of not overly increasing the administrative load.

The circulated report would proceed to the Quality Committee and Council and would form the basis for a work-plan for the next academic year.

USC/16-17/058 Undergraduate CAO Admission Data 2017-18

This item was deferred to a future meeting of USC.

USC/16-17/059 Chair's Report

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A number of interim measures had been approved by Council in January 2016 to address the severe pressure in relation to appeals, particularly during the supplemental period. The group which had recommended the interim measures that were subsequently implemented, had met on two occasions this year to review the situation.

The group reviewed the guidelines that had been drafted in relation to exceptional circumstances in support of an *ad mis* appeal. Based on the feedback received from Courts of First Appeal, it was considered that these had worked well and no changes were required.

The guidelines on the evidence in support of an *ad mis* appeal were also considered to have worked well. In response to a suggestion, some examples of financial evidence had been included in the documentation, which had since been updated and would be uploaded to the Undergraduate Studies website.

In terms of permission to defer, it was felt that the process had worked well. There had been some misunderstandings in relation to the procedure for recording medical absence from the annual examinations and the timeframe during which Courts of Examiners could return students as PD: This would be clarified in communication which would issue shortly to School and course progression managers.

Feedback received from School Administrators and Chairs of Courts of First Appeals had indicated that nothing had worked well.

There was some concern around the issue of evidence on the appeals form. The group felt that it would be appropriate to insert a heading in the form that requires the type of evidence to be listed (e.g., medical cert), including oral evidence and evidence tabled at the appeal. Providing a record of all the evidence would assist the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies in making a decision, rather than having to seek further information. Feedback from Academic Appeals requested that the form be amended to allow for inclusion of fresh evidence that is being brought to Academic Appeals post Courts of First Appeal.

The documentation on the role of Courts of First Appeal and Academic Appeals had been amended to provide a stronger statement that neither Court may recommend a change of mark/grade. Students seeking a mark change would be directed to the recheck procedure.

There had been some concern that tutors and some Chairs of Courts of First Appeals remained unaware of the regulations introduced in the previous year and this would be addressed through communication. The Senior Tutor had organised some workshops on appeals and advocacy in February and March.

The group had also investigated the types of cases that were heard by Courts of First Appeal and the Academic Appeals Committee. It was noted that the Calendar entry did not make any distinction between the courts in terms of the types of case they hear, nor in terms of whether further or 'fresh' evidence must be brought to Academic Appeals. The Academic Appeals Committee was a way of escalating cases that had been unsuccessful at the Courts of First Appeal.

Initial consideration had been given to the role of Courts of Examiners but further work was required. The group was also cognisant of the ongoing work in relation to TEP, particularly, progression and awards. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reminded the committee of a document outlining the role of Courts of Examiners that had been brought to USC in September 2013. She read from the document and drew members' attention to a paragraph that had been removed following discussion at USC. She noted that Courts of Examiners focus on academic matters and should not consider *ad mis* issues. The memorandum and the relevant minute will be circulated to the committee.

In response to a query, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that a student's narrative of their situation could be used to provide contextual information, but would not meet the requirements for primary or secondary evidence

USC/16-17/060 Any other Business

There was no other business.

USC/16-17/061 Minutes

USC noted the following minutes:

1. **TAP Steering Committee**, 28 May 2015, 18 November 2015, 25 May 2016
2. **Careers Management System Steering Group**, 24 February 2017
3. **Admissions Forum**, 30 November 2016

USC/16-17/062 Items for noting

USC noted the following:

1. **Dates of USC meetings 2017/18**
2. **Delta Award**, Memorandum from the Senior Academic Developer, dated 13 April 2017