

The University of Dublin
Trinity College
Minutes of Student Services Committee Meeting, 2nd February 2012

- Present** Professor Robbie Gilligan (Chair), Mr. Sean Gannon (Secretary/ Director of Careers Advisory Service), Professor Amanda Piesse (Dean of Students), Ms. Louisa Miller (SU Welfare Officer), Professor Claire Laudet (Senior Tutor), Mr. Martin Mc Andrew (Vice President GSU), Ms. Anne Fitzgerald (College Secretary), Mrs. Michelle Tanner (Head of Sport and Recreation), Professor Sarah Smyth (School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies), Ms. Janet Byrne (Treasurer's representative), Professor Hugh Gibbons, Mr. Ryan Bartlett (SU President).
- Apologies** Professor Howard Smith (Head of Psychology), Ms. Sonya Ahern (Acting Day Nursery Manager), Professor Veronica Campbell (Dean of Graduate Studies), Professor Patrick Geoghegan (Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies), Professor Mary McCarron (Dean of Health Sciences).
- In Attendance** Fr. Peter Sexton (Chaplain), Mr. Declan Treanor (Director of College Disability Service), Dr. David McGrath (Director of College Health Service), Ms. Deirdre Flynn (Director of Student Counselling Service), Ms Susan Byrne.

Section A

SS/11-12/25 Annual Reports from the Student Services

The Committee met with the directors of the College Student Services to discuss the annual reports. This meeting was designed to highlight the developments over the past year and draw attention to the major issues facing the Services.

College Health

Dr. David McGrath reported on the increase in the number of students and the growth in demand for the College Health Service. Waiting time for appointments had increased from 5 to 7.5 days and the main reasons cited for this were increasing numbers of students and also staffing shortages in the Health Centre. One major success over the past year has been the funding of a one year contract for a psychiatric nurse to meet the growing demand for psychiatric consultations. However the overwhelming issue for the Service is the lack of space in a building which is now dealing with 20,000 students and staff.

College Day Nursery

The Dean of Students, Professor Amanda Piesse spoke on behalf of the College Day Nursery. The main issue for this Service is also the issue of space. Locations at Dartry and St. James are being considered for staff based in off-campus locations. The opening hours also need to be reviewed to ensure they are tailored to the needs of users. The recruitment process for a manager for the Service is currently under way. The Dean paid tribute to Ms. Sonya Ahern for her work in maintaining the Service.

Chaplaincy

Fr. Sexton explained that the Chaplains report to their different churches and not the Student Services Committee. The major issues however facing the chaplaincy at the moment are student deaths,

Chaplains on-call, and services on Sundays. Individual reports for each of the main Churches are available for consultation.

Careers Advisory Service

Mr. Sean Gannon referred to three reports from the Service:

- **Destinations of the class of 2010.** Unemployment among primary degree graduates was 5% but 42% were undertaking further study. 60% were self-funding that study. Unemployment among postgraduates was increasing and currently stands at 13%
- **Activities at the Careers Service during 2010/11.** Engagement by students with the Service remained very high and new services were introduced including a drop in CV clinic and (with Student Learning Development) the delivery of a credit-bearing (ECTS) generic skills module for graduate research students. A survey of employer expectations and perceptions of the skills of Trinity graduates acknowledged a number of strengths but also identified some weaknesses which need to be addressed through the curriculum.
- **Civic Engagement during 2010/11.** The Dean of Students' Roll of Honour was inaugurated with almost 400 students participating. Research providing an institutional baseline of engagement with society was presented at Council. This research identified policy issues including time for staff to undertake voluntary activity and the recognition of that contribution through the promotions process.

Disability Service

Mr. Declan Treanor reported that the number of students with a disability enrolling in College was increasing. The main issue at present is funding with the need to finance four posts from core funding. ESF funding has been reduced by 20% and will continue to decline. The strategic plan for the Service focuses on three stages: 1) Pre-entry/ first year experience, 2) Retention and Progression, 3) Transition into employment. Mr. Treanor said that students with a disability face significant obstacles in the employment market and the Service is currently participating in a European project to identify a suitable model to aid transition from College.

Sport

Mrs. Michelle Tanner highlighted the fact that almost two-thirds of the student population indicated a desire to use the Sports Centre in the past year – a figure significantly ahead of other Irish universities. In total, as measured by footfall, there were 331,000 visits, 71% being students. College-wide budget cuts are an issue and the Sports Centre still needs central funding despite its ability to generate income. Challenges at present include the poor state of outdoor facilities at Santry and sourcing funding for an increased number of sports scholarships. There has been considerable investment in programmes including children's activities. The Centre was awarded 'White Flag' status (similar to the 'Blue Flag' for beaches) during 2011 and the intention is to re-apply for this in 2012.

Student Counselling

Ms. Deirdre Flynn reported on three aspects of the Student Counselling Service:

- **Student Counselling Service.** The move to new premises has given a positive message to students. 16% of the student population attended the Service and 83% of clients attending reported that they felt that they received the help that they needed. Forty-one percent felt helped with retention issues. With shortfalls in staffing it was not possible, during peak periods, to ensure that students received an appointment within two weeks of initial contact. Lunchtime opening hours for students without appointments have worked well. With the contractual nature of some staff appointments, there was a danger of expertise, built up over time, being lost.

- **Student Learning Development.** This service was maintained despite staffing being reduced to one person over the past two years. The service received a very positive external review during 2011.
- **S2S.** The feedback from students for this service was very positive. It is totally funded by the Senior Tutor's Office until May 2013.

In overall terms, however, the Service is overstretched with no leeway in the case of illness and there are concerns regarding the fixed-term nature of some contracts.

Senior Tutor's Office

Professor Claire Laudet explained that the unresolved issue surrounding the Tutors' allowance is a major concern and has resulted in difficulties recruiting new College Tutors. Finance for the Postgraduate Advisory Service is secure until September 2012, and funding for S2S, and Peer-Assisted Learning in Languages is available from a declining pool of reserves. Lack of sufficient funding continues to be a problem. A number of staffing issues were resolved during the year but improving the quality of the service and ongoing training for Tutors remain high on the list of priorities.

Discussion

Professor Gilligan expressed thanks to the Dean of Students and to all directors and their staff who delivered such excellent services to students and to staff. He invited comment on some of the cross-cutting issues raised in the reports.

The following points were made in the ensuing discussion:

- Concern was expressed with regard to staffing issues particularly within the College Health Service and the Student Counselling Service. The demand for such services is high and students cannot do without. Flexible opening hours are looked upon favourably and it is felt students respond well to this. Orientation was a vital part of the student experience and it is believed that all areas in College must contribute to this if it is to be successful.
- Greater awareness of the Postgraduate Advisory Service is needed. Branding of the service might aid this. The recent cutbacks in the maintenance grant for postgraduate students were extremely worrying and many students would be left in financial difficulty as a result.
- Budgets are being prepared at the moment and will be based on need rather than what was distributed in previous years. Some areas in College may receive less and some may receive more as a result.
- Overall, the Services were working well together and supporting each other. Outsourcing should be resisted as College-based services bring specialist, student-centred knowledge to student needs which might otherwise be lost. In terms of a mid-term review of the College Strategic Plan, there is a very clear focus on suitable premises for service delivery.
- It was important to ensure a strong link between Services and the academic community so that Heads of Schools saw not only the effects of cuts at School level but were also aware of the impact on Services.
- More could be done to communicate more widely in College the high quality of Service provision.

Finally, facilitating students from different cultural backgrounds and showing intercultural support was at the forefront of the discussion. It was acknowledged that efforts have been made thus far, however more could be done in terms of mapping out a strategy for development of Student Services, one which reflected a multi-cultural ethos and included diversity training for staff.

Section B

No items in this section were discussed

Section C

No items in this section were discussed

Signed:.....

Date:.....