UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on **13th October 2009** at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer (Chair)
Senior Lecturer, Dr Aileen Douglas
Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)
   Dr Simon Trezise, School of Drama, Film and Music
   Dr Paul Delaney, School of English
   Professor Ciaran Brady, School of Histories and Humanities
   Dr Claire Laudet, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
   Dr Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
   Dr Zuleika Rodgers, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
   Professor Kevin O'Rourke, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
   Ms Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
   Dr Jim Quinn, School of Business
   Dr Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
   Dr Damian Murchan, School of Education
   Professor Yvonne Scannell, School of Law
   Dr Kevin O'Kelly, School of Engineering
   Dr Jeremy Jones, School of Computer Science and Statistics
   Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
   Dr Ian Sanders, School of Natural Sciences
   Dr Stefan Hutzler, School of Physics
   Professor Graeme Watson, School of Chemistry
   Professor Shaun McCann, School of Medicine
   Dr Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
   Dr Catherine McCabe, School of Nursing and Midwifery
   Dr Anne Marie Healy, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Director of TSM
Dr Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS
Professor Pete Coxon, Director of Science (TR071)
Mr Ashley Cooke, Education Officer, Students' Union
Ms Jennifer Fox, Student Representative
Dr Brian Foley, Director of CAPSL

Apologies: Dr Vincent Kelly, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Mr Trevor Peare and Dean of Students (for UGS/09-10/004)

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed all members, both new and continuing, to the first meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) of 2009/10.

UGS/09-10/001   **Minutes** of the meeting of the 9th June 2009 were approved.

UGS/09-10/002   **Matters arising**
    (i)   *UGS/08-09/048* The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that the recommendations contained in the *Draft Report of the Planning Group Taskforce on Student Retention* were approved by Council at its meeting of 24th June 2009 and that the implementation of these is underway.
    (ii)   *UGS/08-09/050* The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer also noted that the recommendations emanating from USC in relation to undergraduate teaching workload were also approved by Council on 24th June 2009. He stated that these recommendations have fed through to the Undergraduate Education section of the new Trinity College Strategic Plan.

UGS/09-10/003 **Undergraduate Studies Committee – draft work programme 2009/10:** A memorandum from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, *Draft Undergraduate Studies Committee Work Programme 2009/10*, dated 8th October 2009, was circulated.

Speaking to the memorandum, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer listed the items of intended business for the year. The Students' Union Education Officer requested that the appeals process, Courts of First Appeal and Academic Appeals, be added to the list. Commenting in response to the request, the Senior Lecturer confirmed that a working party is being set up to review the appeals process.

The meeting noted the work programme for the 2009/10 academic year.

UGS/09-10/004 **Recognising Learning Outside the Classroom:** A discussion paper from the Dean of Students, *Recognising Learning Outside the Classroom*, dated 4th June 2009, was circulated. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Dean of Students to speak to the item. The Dean of Students introducing the item explained that the document has been circulated to this committee to generate discussion around the idea of recognising learning outside the classroom. Education is a holistic activity and cannot be classified as that which only takes place on campus or as a formal part of an academic programme. There are educational aspects of extra-curricular activities.

There are two main types of learning outside the classroom:

(i)   Those activities which are not linked to an academic programme. This may include participation in clubs and societies or community or national organisations. Such participation could be recognised through the inclusion of students' names on a Provost's Recognition List or Roll of Honour rather than through the provision of academic credit.

(ii) Community service learning which carries credit. Examples of this are the practice placement elements of professional degrees. Such placements could serve as a template for extending service learning recognition which can also take the form of a Broad Curriculum module or could be developed into Diplomas in Civic Engagement and Social Entrepreneurship.

The recognition or extra curricular activities, via a Provost's Roll of Honour, was mainly positively received by the Committee. In the course of the discussion the following comments were noted:

-   Students' ethical development through volunteering should be a reward in its own right. Some students might only participate in voluntary work to gain recognition under such a scheme.
-   Nominations from peer groups to such a list should be considered in proposals to help prevent individual students from misusing this scheme. The overall benefits of formal recognition would outweigh the negative impact of a few students undertaking volunteer work for self-serving reasons. It would also allow for the recognition of the efforts of quieter students.
-   In certain programmes, students already take up significant amounts of volunteer work and it would be good if College showed its support of this commitment. Since voluntary work requires a sustained commitment perhaps more detailed certification should be considered.
-   Any community engagement undertaken by Trinity students should be carried out on a mutual basis with members of the community.
-   Peer support work carried out in College should be included under the first category.
-   The initiative would lead to duplication as students already include this type of information on their *curricula vitae.* However, such a system would formalise this information and show College support for the efforts of students engaged in voluntary or extra-curricular activities.
-   Recognition and support should also extend to providing time and space in the curriculum for students to participate in extra-curricular activities and voluntary work.
-   The existing Broad Curriculum module offered by the Science Gallery could serve as a blueprint for any proposed Broad Curriculum modules which might include work experience or other placements.

- The initiative would require additional work and resources.

Responding to concerns in relation to existing course practice placements the Dean of Students clarified that there would be no proposal to change arrangements for professional courses.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean of Students for attending to present the discussion paper and noted that a final proposal will be brought back to USC at a later date prior to being presented to Council.

UGS/09-10/005 **Annual Examination Issues:** A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, *Streamlining the range of examination times,* dated 21st September 2009, was circulated along with the document, *Proposed range of examination durations*, dated 9th October 2009, and the minute of the USC discussion, *Annual Examinations 2009*, from 28th April 2009 (UGS/08-09/041).

The Senior Lecturer spoke to the item referring the meeting to the minute of the discussion of this issue at USC in April 2009. She informed the meeting that the memorandum and attached documents had been circulated well in advance to allow for full discussion at local level prior to the consideration of the proposal at this meeting.

She explained that due to an increase in the number of examinations during the Annual Examinations 2009 and a growing number of examination durations, there had been difficulties in accommodating the examinations within the normal four week period. The proposal to rationalise the number of examination durations to six standardised lengths should remove many of these difficulties and allow for the annual examinations to be scheduled comfortably within the traditional four-week period.

It was confirmed that this proposal does not seek to rationalise the examination durations for students sitting examinations in special venues, nor would it apply to the Scholarship Examination. In response to a query regarding examination length and ECT credit values, the Senior Lecturer stated that there should not be rigidity in this regard as there are different assessment modes which can be employed. Concerns were raised in relation to examination overload for students.

The meeting approved the introduction of the six standardised examination durations as circulated.

UGS/09-10/006 **Foundation Programme for International Students:** The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer introduced this item by noting that some non-EU entrants may not possess the same standard of education as those who have taken their secondary education within the European Union. In this regard University College Dublin (UCD) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD) have collaborated to offer a shared Foundation Programme for International Students.

This new programme will be outsourced to an external company for delivery and in this regard a tendering process has been entered. Three companies have been invited to tender. Once the appropriate company is chosen, the Foundation Programme curriculum will be presented to the USC for consideration and to Council for approval. Responding to a query the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer clarified that this is a completely separate course from the Semester Start-up Programme. He confirmed that it is expected that there will be no financial outlay or gain as the fees paid to the external company will cover students' tuition. Initially there will be two strands, one to prepare students for courses in the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science and the other to prepare students for courses in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Students who successfully complete the Foundation Programme will be offered a place on an undergraduate programme relevant to the strand they have completed.

Responding to questions the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer explained that participants are neither registered students of TCD or UCD, though they will require access to library facilities; this is not an alternative entry route for Irish or other EU students; whilst it is not the same as the Leaving Certificate syllabus it may be similar in

some regards. The English language requirement for students admitted to the programme will be of a high standard.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer concluded his verbal report by emphasising that this initiative is necessary to help build up the ratio of non-EU students in College.

UGS/09-10/007 **Student Evaluation of Programme Modules:** A memorandum from the Academic Secretary, *Student Evaluation of Programme Modules*, dated 8th October 2009, was circulated.

Speaking to the memorandum, the Academic Secretary noted that Council has approved the recommendation that the evaluation of programme modules by students should be mandatory and that these evaluations should be conducted at the School or Course Office level, thus requiring the devolution of this function from CAPSL (Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning).

She notified the meeting that a working group has been set up with representatives from each of the three faculties in College, and comprising academic and administrative staff and students. The working group, which reports to the Quality Committee, will consider software solutions for administering questionnaires; the development of guidelines for the administration of surveys, which includes the development of a bank of course specific questions; and will define the framework for devolution.

It is intended that the working group will prepare a report for wider discussion by the end of Michaelmas term 2009.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer stressed that Council has mandated the devolution of module evaluations to Schools. In order to limit costs an on-line system is being proposed.

In the course of the discussion the following comments were made:

- Up to now the questionnaires have not dealt with problem-based learning satisfactorily.
- A large amount of administrative activity will be needed at local level to deliver and interpret the results of the online evaluations. It was queried if the resources which had previously been routed to CAPSL for this function will be distributed to Schools instead.
- Concerns were raised in relation to the compulsory nature of the evaluations and it was recommended that discussions with the IFUT (Irish Federation of University Teachers) should commence.
- The working group should consider the process to be used in courses delivered across schools.
- Concerns for the confidentiality of results were raised.
- The practices in other third-level institutions, both nationally and internationally, should be considered by the working group.

In response to some of the queries and comments raised, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer explained that it makes more sense for these evaluations to be carried out at a local level given the high number of modules delivered annually. He pointed out that it is already practice in a number of Schools to supplement the findings of the centralised surveys with local evaluations and that a significant number of areas had previously run their own evaluations prior to the centralisation of this activity.

In relation to the concerns regarding confidentiality and union input he stated that these should not represent insurmountable barriers. Quality improvements are mandatory and the results of the surveys related to undergraduate programmes can be limited in distribution to the lecturer concerned, the Head of Discipline or Course Director, as relevant, and the Director of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate).

The Committee noted the terms of reference of the working group.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Academic Secretary for providing an update to the meeting on this issue.

UGS/09-10/008   **Research Quality Metrics:** A memorandum from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, *Research Quality Metrics*, dated 12th October 2009, was circulated along with a memorandum from the Dean of Research to Board, *Research Quality Metrics (RQM) for the Resource Planning Model (RPM)*, dated 30th June 2009, and the minute of the discussion at Board from 8th July 2009 (BD/08-09/316).

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer introduced the subject by noting that the Academic Resource Allocation Model (ARAM) is being replaced by the Resource Planning Module (RPM). The RPM will be forward looking and will provide Schools with their predicted funding levels for a five year period. Under the RPM 70% of funding will be allocated under the heading Teaching and Learning and the remaining 30% will be allocated for Research. Two measurements are currently used under ARAM to distribute research related funding to schools, namely, PhD graduations, and research spending (weighted).

Draft revised metrics for the allocation of the remaining 30% were presented by the Dean of Research to Board on 8th July 2009. The revised metrics are:

Principle 1   **To reward and to incentivise research participation by academic staff across college.** Each school will be required to agree with the Faculty Dean its definition of 'active participation in research' working from the current RSS (Research Support System) 'research active' definition as a minimum baseline.

Principle 2   **To encourage research quality and growth across College**. Each school will be required to agree with the Faculty Dean five high-level quantifiable research quality objectives for the School as a whole.

Principle 3   **To benchmark performance in peer international units.** Each school will be required to nominate up to three peer comparator units, indicating which of these units the school determines to be the 'best' international unit in their domain, and ranking suggestions as first, second and third.

The meeting discussed the proposed Principles and the following comments/observations were made:
-   The use of the word 'metrics' was queried.
-   Using the quantity of PhDs awarded is not appropriate for all Schools, especially in those where graduates traditionally go into practice after they receive their primary degree.
-   The use of research-spend as a metric will favour those disciplines in which research is inherently more expensive.
-   The application of these principles might have unwanted effects on the quality of research output; Schools might set deliberately low targets or might benchmark themselves against low performing counterparts internationally to ensure targets are always met.
-   The division between Teaching and Learning, and Research was queried in the allocation of funding when elsewhere in College these are being integrated.
-   The measurement of research activity cannot be considered in isolation of teaching loads across Schools especially now that there is College policy on senior members of staff providing undergraduate teaching. It is also a fact that some programmes require a longer academic teaching year than others.
-   Undergraduate research and research administration should be considered within the final proposal.
-   The chosen mechanism for measuring research outputs will need to be transparent but flexible enough to reflect differences across disciplines.
-   The paper discusses possible metrics but does not explain how the money will actually be allocated.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the members for their comments and undertook to provide these to the Dean of Research.

UGS/09-10/009   **Any other business**

     (i)   *Swine Flu:* It was confirmed that students should submit medical certificates retrospectively.

     (ii)   *Medical certificates:* It was confirmed that there is no time limit on the submission of medical certificates in relation to course work.

     (iii)   *Off-books permission for financial hardship:* It was requested that College policy be developed in relation to this issue. The Senior Lecturer confirmed that this issue will be analysed as part of the review of the appeals process.

     (iv)   *HPAT (Health Profession Admissions Test):* The Director for Teaching and Learning (UG) from the School of Medicine notified the meeting that there is a lot of misinformation in the media surrounding the HPAT. He clarified that this entrance test was introduced by the previous Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin and was resisted by all the medical schools in Ireland. It was introduced on the understanding that there would be a review of the system after a period of time to examine its effectiveness.

UGS/09-10/010   **Items for noting:** The USC noted the following document circulated for information:

     (i)   *Provost's Presentation to Council,* dated 30th September 2009.

     (ii)   Memorandum, *Revised Foundation Scholarship Examination Papers*, dated 7th October 2009.

     (iii)   Memorandum, *Processing of Calendar Changes for Undergraduate Courses*, dated 2nd October 2009.

     (iv)   Memorandum, *Trinity Inclusive Curriculum Project,* dated 6th October 2009.

     (v)   Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) brochure for entry Autumn 2010.

     (vi)   Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) brochure for entry Autumn 2010.

signature   *date*