

**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE**

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on **16th February 2010** 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 Claire Laudet, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Dr Irene Walsh, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Dr Zuleika Rodgers, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Ms Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Dr Jim Quinn, School of Business
Dr Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Dr Michael Shevlin, 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
Dr Vincent Kelly, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Dr Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
Dr Anne Marie Healy, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Johnnie Gratton, 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 Simon Trezise, School of Drama, Film and Music
Dr Paul Delaney, School of English
Professor Ciaran Brady, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Kevin O'Rourke, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Shaun McCann, School of Medicine
Dr Catherine McCabe, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Mr Trevor Peare, Library Representative

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Professor Brian Singleton (for UGS/09-10/023a), Dr Michael Wride (for UGS/09-10/023b) and the Deans of Students and Civic Engagement Officer (for UGS/09-10/026)

UGS/09-10/021 **Minutes** of the meeting of the 1st December 2009 were approved.

UGS/09-10/022 **Matters arising**

(i) *UGS/09-10/014* The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that the proposals for the *Certificate in Parliamentary and Legislative Studies* and the *Semester in Northern Ireland* were approved by Council at its December meeting.

(ii) *UGS/09-10/016* The Senior Lecturer noted that a working group to consider grade point average systems of marking has been established and has met.

UGS/09-10/023 **Undergraduate Course Proposals:**

(a) Bachelor in Acting

A proposal for an undergraduate degree, *Bachelor in Acting (Hons.)*, from the School of Drama, Film and Music, dated January 2010, was circulated. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed Professor Brian Singleton to speak to the proposal.

Introducing the proposed programme, Professor Singleton noted that the new undergraduate programme in Acting is intended to be the cornerstone offering of the recently established Irish Academy for the Dramatic Arts (IADA). It differs from the former Acting Studies course, in that, rather than merely serving the industry, graduates of the

new programme should be more self-sufficient and will be leaders through the creation of their own work. The proposed three-year honors programme consists of nine teaching terms. Each year consists of 36 weeks of teaching rather than 24 weeks as is standard in other courses. There are three major components of the programme, acting and text studies, voice and movement and theatre and film production.

In response to a query from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, he confirmed that the degree award of Bachelor in Acting is distinct from a Bachelor in Arts or the Bachelor in Acting Studies and would require a new degree title to be established.

Responding to further queries from the meeting he clarified that students would be taught during the third term of each year rather than undertaking examinations. International best practice indicates that the preferred model for actor training is an intensive course over three years. He confirmed that the proposal is based on the acting programme offered through the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA), as validated by King's College London. It was commented that the introduction of a three-year honors degree in Trinity could undermine arguments put forward for retaining Trinity's four-year honors degree. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer suggested that this should not be the case since students on this course would be required to undergo one additional term of teaching when compared to students on most other honors degrees. Concern was also expressed that this programme could also set a precedent for requiring three terms of teaching in the academic year. During the course of the discussion the purely 'practical' nature of the course, assessed only by continuous assessment was also queried. Professor Singleton reiterated that the nature of actor training requires the programme to be shorter and intensive and confirmed that the course proposal was based on the structure and curriculum of the acting programme offered by RADA. It was further commented by a committee member that this would not be a CAO (Central Applications Office) listed programme and therefore it should not be confused with purely academic programmes.

On a related point, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that a small working group had been established, chaired by the Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to review the issues related to Trinity's four-year Bachelor in Arts.

Professor Singleton stated the admissions criteria for new entrants and explained that where an applicant displays outstanding talent the minimum matriculation requirements may be waived if necessary. This mechanism existed for the Bachelor in Acting Studies and was only exceptionally invoked. Following the application stage, candidates would also be required to undergo interview and audition stages. He confirmed that he would specify the admissions requirements more clearly in the revised document for Council should the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) recommend the proposal.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer advised the meeting that the proposal would be reviewed by an external expert in this field prior to its submission to Council. He thanked Professor Singleton for attending to present the course proposal.

The meeting recommended the proposal for a *Bachelor in Acting (Hons.)* to Council.

(b) TR071 Moderatorship Option, Functional Biology: The Comparative Physiology of Organisms

The document, *Proposal for New Moderatorship Option in TR071*, from the School of Natural Sciences, dated February, 2010 was circulated. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed Dr Michael Wride to the meeting for this item.

Introducing the proposal, the Director of Teaching and Learning from the School of Natural Sciences stated that the School was seeking academic approval to run the moderatorship option and noted that there were a couple of outstanding issues which are being addressed, such as, the provision of administrative support for the programme option and the further refinement of module learning outcomes.

Speaking further to the proposal, Dr Michael Wride noted that there is currently no biology moderatorship option offered in Trinity College. This proposal represents collaboration between the disciplines of Zoology, Botany and Genetics, and describes the content of the moderatorship which offers training in the comparative study of organisms, both plant and animal.

The provision of administrative support for the option was queried and it was stressed that it is very important from a student's perspective to have a key administrative base. Dr Wride agreed with this comment and assured the meeting that this matter is being addressed.

The Academic Secretary questioned the assignment of 2.5 ECTS credits to Genetics modules in the proposal since the lowest permitted credit value in College for modules is 5 ECTS. The Director of Teaching and Learning in the School of Genetics and Microbiology explained that these were components which come together to make 5 credit modules. The Director of Science (TR071) explained that as combined module components these will be assigned a new module code which will carry a weighting of 5 credits.

Dr Wride clarified that there will be two completely new modules delivered through this Sophister option while the remaining modules are already in existence. However, he advised that the existing modules are not provided together in this configuration elsewhere and, therefore, it is sufficiently different to bear a new moderatorship title.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Dr Wride for attending the meeting for this item.

The USC recommended the proposal to Council subject to further work being carried out in relation to module learning outcomes.

UGS/09-10/024 External Examiners, Issues and Comments: A memorandum, *Issues arising from reports of External Examiners for Undergraduate Studies, 2008/09*, from the Senior Lecturer, dated 11th February 2010, was circulated. Opening the item, the Senior Lecturer explained that the memorandum covers recurring themes and comments from External Examiners who had undertaken this role in the 2008/09 academic year.

She drew attention to the fact that, on the whole, the reports received for 2008/09 are very positive. The amount of individual care and attention received by students and the close links existing between Senior Sophister dissertations and the research activities within disciplines were particularly commended.

She outlined briefly the main aspects of her memorandum which covered the following points:

- (i) The definition of the role of the external examiner.
- (ii) The possible introduction of policy in the area of double marking.
- (iii) Protocols for the adjudication of scripts where double marking is already practised.
- (iv) The need for the clear annotation of examination scripts.
- (v) Articulation of criteria for the award of an 'upper first'.
- (vi) The provision of information to external examiners.
- (vii) The use of anonymous marking and its possible application to Courts of Examiners.

Double Marking: During the discussion of this issue the following comments were made:

- Double marking is often recommended by external examiners coming from the United Kingdom. This can be compared to those from the United States who find the concept of external examining, in itself, as unusual.
- The use of double marking is related to the perceived risk in marking elements of assessments, when, in fact, one examination question has very little impact on the overall end of year result.
- Lecturers are professionals and should be trusted in their work. It should be recognised that, as professionals, they are mindful of ensuring the integrity of the examining process and the resulting degree awarded.
- It should be adopted for all degree level work, both formative and summative, whilst acknowledging that it would result in increasing workloads. It was noted that this is the practice in relation to a number of degrees in the arts and humanities, especially where grading is more subjective. In relation to the mathematical and science disciplines, where required answers are in the form of equations, its use is questionable since the answers are generally either right or wrong.
- It was noted that there would be logistical difficulties in establishing double marking in the contexts of small staff numbers, especially where specialist knowledge is required; increasing new entrant quotas; results from more than one or two years feeding into the final degree result; and coursework being routinely returned to students during the year for feedback purposes. As an alternative, one member

commented that in his discipline examinations scripts are not double marked, rather, there is a moderator who looks at the range of results achieved by students and highlights any anomalies.

- It was remarked that the practice of double marking is a very useful method of assisting new members of academic staff to develop their marking skills.
- The Student Representative commented that students would like to know that assessments counting towards degree results had been double marked.

Annotation of Scripts: Discussing the need for the annotation of scripts and other assessments, the Senior Lecturer noted that even a few clear and focussed key-words at the end of a page are incredibly useful to students and external examiners alike. She also referred to the College's responsibility under the *Freedom of Information Act* to provide reasons for decisions made in respect of individuals.

The Director of the Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning (CAPSL) noted that there are two standard methods for awarding marks to pieces of assessment, these are, grade descriptors and sample solutions; any annotations should be aligned to the categories provided in these and should use the same sort of language.

During the discussion of this issue the following comments were made:

- An increased use of clear annotations would reduce the need for double marking, as would making the re-checking/re-marking procedure for examinations scripts less prohibitive. Providing feedback to students by annotating scripts is an important method of informing students of how they might improve and makes it easier for other staff members to provide feedback if the examiner concerned is away.
- In opposition, it was noted that examiners often mark hundreds of scripts and this would increase their workload considerably. If grading descriptors are in place and marking is aligned to these, then annotations would be unnecessary.
- Certain disciplines use quite involved and transparent marking schemes, which often highlight areas requiring additional work from students.
- Whilst there needs to be overall policy to cover this issue the detailed practices should be decided at School level.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer commented that the level of annotation required is discipline specific and should be decided at school level.

Role of the External Examiner: The Senior Lecturer raised the issue of the role of the external examiner noting similar commentary from external examiners that they should not be asked to mark scripts. She referred to the fact that Trinity College guidelines state that they should only be asked to mark scripts in 'exceptional circumstances'. She also noted that the view of the external examiner normally prevails with the final decision being taken by the examination board.

Members of the committee discussed practices within their disciplines and programmes and remarked that:

- Some external examiners mark dissertations and *viva voces*, and seem happy to do so. It was suggested that this practice be permitted in relation to dissertations and projects, and associated assessments, but not for examination scripts.
- Some external examiners are satisfied with acting as second markers.
- It is appropriate to ask external examiners to adjudicate on differing marks awarded by different internal examiners provided there is not a significant disparity between the marks.

Student Anonymity at Court of Examiners: The Senior Lecturer queried if there would be support for providing only anonymous results at Courts of Examiners, as has been recommended by some external examiners.

It was commented that:

- Students in Dental Science would prefer if their results were published against their anonymous examination number, rather than their student identification number, since the latter is not always sufficiently anonymous. It was noted that this could lead to greater errors in transcription and that this measure would not actually be necessary if students could only access their own results.

- Allowing students to access only their own results and their class ranking would be greatly appreciated by students. The current system whereby students can view the results of the whole class, albeit by student number only, is not satisfactory.
- The presentation of results at examination boards using anonymous numbers is unlikely to benefit students. Often, extenuating circumstances are looked into prior to the Court of Examiners with permission sought from the Senior Lecturer for a particular course of action. There would be no way of accurately identifying such students if anonymous numbers were retained during the Court of Examiners.
- Anonymous marking is not used in relation to practical work nor for course work submitted during the year.

In relation to the foregoing discussions it was recommended that:

- (i) the use of student names at Courts of Examiners should be retained;
- (ii) the use of anonymous examination numbers for the publication of results should be further explored;
- (iii) where possible, a student should only be able to access their own results; and
- (iv) the guidelines for External Examiners should be revised and brought back to USC for consideration.

UGS/09-10/025 School Strategic Planning Guidelines: A memorandum, School Strategic Plan, 2009-2014, from the Academic Secretary on behalf of the Planning Group, dated 10th February 2010, was circulated. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer notified the meeting that the memorandum contained guidelines for Schools in the completion of their Strategic Plans and advised that a programme of discussions with each School is in progress.

UGS/09-10/026 Recognising Learning Outside the Classroom: A document, *Proposal for Provost's Roll of Honour Recognising Learning in Extra-curricular, Voluntary Activity*, from the Dean of Students, dated 9th February 2010, was circulated. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Dean of Students and the Civic Engagement Officer to speak to the item, noting that this proposal addressed two actions provided in the *College Strategic Plan 2009-2014*.

Speaking to the document, the Dean of Students commented that this was his second occasion to address the USC in connection with this proposal (UGS/09-10/004). He explained that there are two contexts in which students learn outside the traditional classroom or laboratory setting. The first relates to practical and clinical placements which are required elements of professional programmes and are thus formally assessed. The second covers experiences gained by students undertaking extra-curricular activities such as voluntary work or work connected to their membership of a club or society. The impetus for recognising learning in the second category is twofold. Student participation in extra-curricular activities enhances the 'Trinity Experience' and the recognition of such learning further augments this experience. Applicants, having been given a chance to reflect on their experiences and to consider the skills they have developed, will be in a better position to market themselves when seeking employment. The second impetus comes from the desirability of promoting civic engagement. It is proposed that recognition of extra-curricular learning would be by way of a Provost's Roll of Honour.

The proposed application form for inclusion on the Roll contains three parts:

- (i) A description of the work and activities undertaken. This element would have to be verified with the organisation at which the student worked.
- (ii) An examination of the experiences gained in relation to original expectations.
- (iii) The articulation, by the student, of what was learned and how it was learned.

To qualify for inclusion applicants must have dedicated at least 20 hours to the activity. However, in exceptional circumstances, this requirement may be waived at the discretion of the committee. The vetting and evaluation of applications would be carried out by a large committee, operating as smaller sub-groups in considering applications. The administrative burden is not yet known but similar schemes in other institutions seem to work well.

The Senior Lecturer expressed her reservations in relation to higher education institutions monitoring students' personal growth. The Dean of Students stressed that the *Roll of Honour* would only operate on a voluntary basis and its purpose is not to monitor students' personal development. Rather, it provides the opportunity for students to consider their participation in extra-curricular activities and to reflect on what they have learned. He re-

iterated that students, having applied to the scheme, should be in a stronger position when preparing for employment.

It was commented that this initiative seems to blur the distinction between academic and non-academic spheres of College life by requiring students to write an account of their learning and by then subsequently assessing it. The non-academic sphere of College life is currently vibrant as evidenced by clubs and societies membership and activities. The Dean of Students explained that this would be very distinct from the academic sphere and, following College-wide consultation, it was decided that students should not be awarded academic credits for their extra-curricular activities. He confirmed that it would be open to students who had undertaken activities overseas.

In discussing the Committee's role and ability to evaluate applications, which would contain self-reflective analysis, it was commented that there is a danger in this becoming an evaluation of literary talent rather than of learning. Concern was also expressed that the proposed Committee would not necessarily be equipped or qualified to assess certain aspects of the applications. The Civic Engagement Officer clarified that the Committee, in evaluating applications, would not grade or rank applicants nor would there be limits placed on the number of students the Roll could accommodate. The requirements on the form are to ensure that students have given thought to the skills and knowledge gained through their involvement in extra-curricular activities.

The Student Representative suggested that there should be a procedure for nominating peers or for members of staff to nominate students. The Students' Union Education Officer proposed, in such a situation, that the nominator could provide a paragraph concerning the student being nominated. The Dean of Students stated that he would further explore the possibility of a nominations procedure but advised that the student concerned would need to give consent and would still be required to fulfil the self-reflection requirements. The focus of this scheme is placed on student learning rather than on participation alone.

It was commented that the application form should require students to reflect on the impact that their activities have had on others since reflection on self-development requires the individual to think about how he or she has affected others. The Dean of Students confirmed that students could provide this information if they wished but noted that this proposal covers all civic engagement and is not limited to altruistic volunteering, therefore, it would not be relevant in all cases. He noted that the category, *Outstanding Contributor* is also being proposed, however, this is distinct from the *Student of the Year Award*.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean of Students and the Civic Engagement Officer for attending to speak to this item.

The USC recommended that the proposal be developed further, taking account of the comments made during the discussion, and be brought back to the USC at a later date. It should also provide details on the provision of feedback to applicants who 'fail' to make it on to the Roll of Honour.

UGS/09-10/027 Student Evaluations of Modules and Programmes: The document, *Report of the Quality Committee and its Working Group, Student Evaluation of Modules*, dated February 2010, was circulated, along with draft *Online Survey Templates*.

The Academic Secretary introduced the item and noted that it had been presented to the Quality Committee. The views of that Committee had been incorporated into the documents circulated to USC. She explained that she would speak to the recommendations covering the administration of the evaluations and the Director of CAPSL would speak to his memorandum, *Mandatory Student Evaluations*, dated 3rd February 2010, found in Appendix B of the report.

She outlined the recommendations contained in the report as follows:

1. Student evaluation of modules should be mandatory. The College's preferred method of evaluation is by means of online surveys. It is recognised that in some instances online surveys may not always be the most appropriate or preferred means of evaluation.

- Other methods of evaluation may be considered in certain circumstances, and their administration must conform to high quality standards ensuring student anonymity and lecturer confidentiality and conducted by the relevant administering Office.
2. The Working Group recommends the use of Survey Monkey for online student evaluation of programme modules.
 3. The Working Group feels that the administration of undergraduate student evaluations should be managed by CAPSL in conjunction with the Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) and in consultation with Course Offices.
Given the increased workload, it is recommended that the administration of postgraduate student evaluations should be managed by Faculty Offices in conjunction with Directors of Teaching and Learning (PG).
 4. The Undergraduate Studies Committee and the Graduate Studies Committee should review the questionnaire templates and provide feedback to CAPSL.
 5. The following principles of administration are recommended:
 - 5.1 **Schedule of Evaluations**
 - Schools in conjunction with the relevant course committees develop a three-year rolling schedule for survey of undergraduate modules (can be less than three-years but not more).
 - Postgraduate courses of one-year duration should be reviewed annually, and courses of two-year duration should be reviewed every two years.
 - Courses that are professionally accredited may require all modules to be evaluated at a certain time.
 - Evaluation schedules should be posted on the CAPSL website.
 - 5.2 **Exceptions**
 - All new modules are surveyed in the year that they are first delivered.
 - Modules that are taught by new lecturers on a contract of more than one year will be surveyed in their first year.
 - Where an evaluation highlights an issue for concern, that module should be reviewed again during the following term/year to ensure that concerns raised have been adequately addressed.
 - Modules that have been significantly revised should be reviewed during/after their first delivery.
 - In specific circumstances and in consultation with the Director of Teaching and Learning, class student representatives can request an evaluation of a module.
 - 5.3 **Questionnaires**
 - Only College agreed survey template and core questions should be used. The common core questions will allow for comparability across modules. These will be reviewed annually.
 - Schools can include up to four additional questions agreed between the Lecturer(s) and the Director of Teaching and Learning. This does not preclude Schools from requesting customised questionnaires when necessary.
 - 5.4 **Administering surveys - timing**
 - Modules should be surveyed at the most optimum time in the teaching year and a schedule of modules to be surveyed together with proposed timing should be published at the beginning of each teaching term.
 6. The Code of Practice recommends that Schools use several methods to obtain student feedback. While the use of questionnaires is College's preferred method, student representatives on School and College committees, as well as group discussions with staff and students are also ways of providing feedback.
 7. It is recommended that a review of the process is conducted every three years.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer invited the Director of CAPSL to speak to his memorandum on the mandatory nature of evaluating modules. In outlining the considerations concerning the mandatory nature of student evaluations the Director of CAPSL highlighted that College is legally required to facilitate the evaluation of teaching, research and other services provided by the university under the Universities Act 1997. Further in 2004, the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) commissioned the European Universities Association (EUA) to review quality assurance in Irish universities. The EUA strongly recommended in relation to Trinity that 'systematic evaluations of all courses be introduced...', however, he noted that the EUA had not been prescriptive in the methods to be employed to evaluate modules. Thus, it is proposed that the evaluation of modules should be mandatory and should occur at least once every three years. It is also proposed that whilst the use of survey questionnaires is the preferred mode of gathering assessment/evaluation data, other objective modes of generating this information may be

employed. If an alternative method is used then its administration must conform to high quality standards. The process of evaluation and data collection is as important as the data collected.

It was clarified that, for practical reasons, the administration of surveys was not devolving to Schools or to Course Offices. CAPSL will continue to manage student evaluations in conjunction with Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) and in consultation with Course Offices in relation to undergraduate modules.

The following comments were noted in relation to the draft survey templates:

- A significant number of modules are taught by various lecture staff and the questionnaires should allow students to distinguish between different staff members.
- Different lecturers could provide questions specific to their parts of the module.
- Some Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) are experiencing resistance to the surveying of individual modules.
- The quality of responses is very important, thus, the provision of open questions yields information not available from statistics alone.
- Since it is not mandatory for students to complete the online surveys, concerns were raised in relation to response rates.
- A question should relate to course support staff.
- The questions should deal with qualitative issues

The Academic Secretary, having noted the comments in relation to the draft templates, suggested that open questions could be provided to allow for students to comment on specific lecturers. She also advised that the online survey may help with response rates as it would capture those students who miss lectures. She advised that there will be four or five questions common to all courses and that feedback is required from members of the USC to finalise these.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Academic Secretary and the Director of CAPSL for outlining the recommendations and considerations concerning student evaluation of modules. He noted the broad support for online surveys and, in particular, their usefulness in gathering statistical information and increasing their availability to students. While evaluations should be mandatory, the online survey is not the only type of evaluation which can be used. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer invited the Committee members to discuss the suggested survey questions at School level, and to recommend core questions to the Academic Secretary for consideration at a future meeting of the USC.

UGS/09-10/028 Joint USC/GSC Taskforce on International Student Recruitment: The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer notified the meeting that a taskforce would be established to look at inhibiting factors effecting the recruitment of international students. He explained that he would Chair the taskforce and that members of the USC and the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) would be invited to join.

UGS/09-10/029 Learning Outcomes: This item was deferred due to lack of time.

UGS/09-10/030 Any other business: There was no other business.

UGS/09-10/031 Items for noting: The USC noted the following documents circulated for information:

- (i) Memorandum, *Reasonable accommodations for local assessment*, from the Senior Lecturer, dated 9th February 2010.
- (ii) Memorandum, *Undergraduate Student Recruitment*, from the Admissions Liaison Officer, dated 9th February 2010.
- (iii) Copy of e-mail, *Labour Market Activisation*, from the IUA, dated 4th February 2010.

signature

date