

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN  
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

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A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2012 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

- Present: Senior Lecturer, Dr Patrick Geoghegan (*Chair*)  
*Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)*  
Dr Philip Coleman, School of English  
Dr Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities  
Dr Rachel Hoare, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies  
Dr Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences  
Dr Benjamin Wold, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics  
Dr Paul O'Grady, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
Ms Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy  
Dr Michael Gormley, School of Psychology  
Dr Michael Shevlin, School of Education  
Dr Oran Doyle, School of Law  
Dr Dermot O'Dwyer, School of Engineering  
Dr Andrew Butterfield, School of Computer Science and Statistics  
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics  
Dr Stefan Hutzler, School of Physics  
Dr Clair Gardiner, School of Biochemistry and Immunology  
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology  
Dr Martina Hennessy, 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 Moray McGowan, Director of TSM  
Dr Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS  
Professor Graeme Watson, Director of Science (TR071)  
Mr Daniel Ferrick, Student Representative
- Apologies: Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan  
Dean of Students, Dr Amanda Piesse  
Dr Evangelia Rigaki, School of Drama, Film and Music  
Dr David Coghlan, School of Business  
Dr David Chew, School of Natural Sciences  
Dr Wolfgang Schmitt, School of Chemistry  
Ms Rachel Barry, Education Officer, Students' Union
- In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner; Mr Trevor Peare (Library Representative); Ms Orla Sheehan; Professor John Scattergood, Dr Niamh Harty, Dr David Wilkins and Ms Alexandra Anderson for (UGS/11-12); Professor David Taylor and Dr Martin Burke for (UGS/11-12/053).
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The Senior Lecturer noted that Ms Orla Sheehan has joined the Office of the Vice Provost to provide additional support to the Academic Secretary while she is heavily involved with the GeneSIS project and, as such, has been nominated to replace the Academic Secretary on the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) until December 2013. The Senior Lecturer invited Ms Sheehan to attend the meeting.

**UGS/11-12/050 Minutes**

The minutes of the 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012 were approved subject to the sentence 'In response, the Senior Lecturer commented that the matter would be returned to at a future date.' being changed to 'In response, the Senior Lecturer commented that the academic year structure would be reviewed in full.' (UGS/11-12/047).

**UGS/11-12/051 Matters arising**

- (i) UGS/11-12/047: The Senior Lecturer advised that Council approved the retention of the third revision week in the current academic year structure.

**UGS/11-12/052 Harmonized Assessment and Progression Models**

A memorandum from Professor John Scattergood, on behalf of the Harmonization Group, 'Draft Harmonized Assessment and Progression Regulations', dated 15<sup>th</sup> March 2012, was circulated along with the document 'Harmonisation of Assessment and Progression Regulations: Undergraduate Degrees', dated 14<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

The Senior Lecturer welcomed Professor Scattergood, Dr Niamh Harty, Dr David Wilkins and Ms Alexandra Anderson to the meeting and noted that Dr Rachel Hoare, one of the Committee members, was also a member of the Advisory Group. He invited Professor Scattergood to speak to the item.

Professor Scattergood advised that the Advisory Group had been formed to devise and get agreement on harmonised progression and assessment regulations, and has taken the decision of Council, at its meeting of December 2010, that there would be no customisation as its starting point (CL/10-11/070). He noted that the proposed models relate mainly to courses in the Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Engineering, Mathematics and Science. When agreement is reached on these the Group will turn its attention to the professional courses in the Health Sciences. There had been widespread consultation with representatives of courses with large student numbers. There is a single Freshman model proposed with two strands (one for single honors type courses and one for joint honors courses). The sophister years are more complicated and less consultation had been achieved, however, two models are presented for each of the sophister years. He noted the assumptions made by the group:

- Each year carries 60 credits.
- There is a pass mark of 40%.
- Students must complete all required assessments and examinations.
- Students must pass all non-compensatable modules.
- Only failed modules are to be re-assessed at supplemental examinations.
- Assessment regulations at the supplemental session would be the same as those at the annual session.
- If a student is required to repeat the year in full, it is expected that they would repeat all modules.

The discussion of the models covered the following topics:

**Capping**

A number of members commented that it would be unfair if a student received a higher mark at the supplemental session in a previously failed module and it was noted that this could lead to strategic failing and splitting of examinations. Further, it would be especially unfair if permitted in the Junior Sophister year, where results often feed into the degree classification. It was noted that the TSM Committee is considering the introduction of supplemental examinations in the Junior Sophister year but would be unlikely to do so if capping was not permitted.

Clarification on the meaning of capping was requested from the group as there are a number of interpretations in use in College and, in particular, it was queried if the intent is to allow the supplemental mark to feed into the end of year result.

Professor Scattergood explained the Advisory Group's rationale for proposing no capping, which is to avoid disincentivising students from doing their best in repeat examinations, and it was clarified that the transcript for the year would also record the earlier failing mark.

**Grade profiling algorithm**

It was commented that the proposed algorithm appeared more complex than the current grade profiling systems currently in use and other members noted that it expanded the range in which students could be considered for a higher grade which could contribute to grade inflation. Others thought that it diminished the decision making roles of external examiners and courts of examiners. Concerns were also raised about the possible situation where one student achieves 68% and gets a first whilst another achieves 69% but is held at a 2:1 and the resulting likelihood of an increased number of appeals.

In support of grade profiling algorithms, it was commented that they can be useful indicative tools when dealing with large cohorts of students and can strengthen the roles of academics and external examiners.

In response, Professor Scattergood advised that the algorithm was inserted into the document to support and enable those areas that wanted to use grade profiling. Similar algorithms are used in a number of universities in the United Kingdom, however, it is not the intention of the Advisory Group to make the algorithm obligatory for all courses. He noted that grade profiling could instead be covered by court of examiner protocols for those areas wishing to use it.

**Compensation/Aggregation**

It was noted that TSM is not in favour of allowing up to 20 credits in each of the sophister years which could be passed by compensation, or by compensation combined with aggregation, and is dissatisfied with the possibility of allowing up to 10 credits for compensation in one subject in each of the freshman years. However, another member commented that it is very likely that a high level of compensation, whilst not apparent, is currently taking place within TSM subjects.

In response, it was explained that permitting 20 credits to be passed by compensation, or by compensation combined with aggregation, was included to take account of there being no supplemental examinations in the sophister years. However, if passing 40 credits outright is too low there is the alternative model presented which would require students to pass 50 credits outright.

**Subject integrity**

In relation to the compensation rules, as they would apply to TSM, the Director of TSM expressed dissatisfaction at the possibility of having to wait until the overall TSM court of examiners to find out if a student could compensate, or not, at the subject level.

Professor Scattergood advised that the compensation rule had to cover all joint subject courses. The logistical concerns in relation to the TSM courts of examiners were acknowledged and discussed by the Advisory Group. However, the ability of the system to deliver information more quickly was highlighted meaning that certain pressures should be alleviated.

**Supplemental examinations**

It was queried if the Group had considered the maximum proportion that the Junior Sophister year could contribute to the degree result while still permitting supplemental examinations in the Junior Sophister year. Dr Wilkins suggested 20%. It was established that Law permits supplemental examinations in the Junior Sophister year even though this counts for 50% of the degree result. Students on the Moderatorship in Computer Science are also permitted supplemental examinations to allow progression to the next year but the mark from the annual sitting is fed into the degree result calculation.

**Student Cases/Disability**

It was noted that in Science courses not all students are required to repeat laboratory sessions when repeating the year in full, if permission is granted by the

Senior Lecturer. It was also queried if the impact of these regulation changes had been considered for students with disabilities as there is a risk that inflexible practices could build up around systems.

In response it was commented that such students in the situations highlighted would be able to receive derogations, where appropriate, as they do now. It was noted that it would be impossible to draft regulations for all such cases.

#### **Courses in the Health Sciences**

Professor Scattergood advised that the Group is finalising a proposal for the Graduate Studies Committee in relation to one-year master's courses, following which it will engage with areas in the Health Sciences. It was noted that Clinical Speech and Language Studies would be considered alongside Health Sciences courses for modelling purposes.

In summing up, the Senior Lecturer noted that the main issues identified by the Committee, which required further consideration by the Advisory Group, were capping, the grade profiling algorithm and the area of student cases/students with a disability. He advised the meeting that the proposed models should be discussed at a local level and comments should be submitted to [assessment@tcd.ie](mailto:assessment@tcd.ie) by the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

#### **UGS/11-12/053 Proposal for a new strand in Engineering**

A proposal from the School of Engineering for a new strand called Biomedical Engineering in the Integrated Engineering course, dated 15<sup>th</sup> March 2012, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer noted that whilst this is not a proposal for a new course it would constitute a major component within the Integrated Engineering programme and, therefore, it is appropriate for USC to consider it as it would a full course proposal.

The Senior Lecturer welcomed Professor David Taylor and Dr Martin Burke from the School of Engineering to talk to the document. Professor Taylor advised that this would add a sixth strand option for students on the general Engineering course. The area of Biomedical Engineering is a relatively young subject area which started to develop in the 1980s. The Biomedical Engineering industry in Ireland is large and all other universities in Ireland (north and south) offer relevant courses. He noted that the proposal, to a large extent, contains a number of existing modules from the Departments of Electronic and Electrical Engineering and Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering with the addition of a small number of new modules from within the School and from the School of Medicine.

Responding to queries, Professor Taylor explained the connection to the Trinity Centre for Bioengineering noting that a number of modules would be made available from the M.Sc. in Bioengineering, which is delivered by staff in the Centre, and that certain aspects of administration for this strand would also be located there. He confirmed that the biomedical modules would be provided by the Department of Physiology in the School of Medicine, building on the existing service provision to the M.Sc. in Bioengineering.

It was noted that not all module descriptions were consistent in terms of information provided and that there was no representative from the School of Medicine on the Programme Committee even though it is responsible for the delivery of a number of modules on the strand. In discussing the financial information it was noted that the overall entry quota for the course is not changing but there will be an additional cohort of students to accommodate as a result of the introduction of a fifth year. It was advised that the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering Mathematics and Science had signed-off on the proposal and finances.

USC recommended the proposal for external review, ahead of consideration by Council, subject to the standardisation of module information in Appendix A and the

inclusion of a representative from the School of Medicine on the Programme Committee.

**UGS/11-12/054 Response rates from External Examiners**

The Senior Lecturer noted that since this matter was last discussed at USC (UGS/11-12/045) staff in the Office of the Vice-Provost had followed-up with schools and disciplines where it appeared external examiner reports had not been returned. In many cases, reports had been returned directly to schools and disciplines, therefore response rates were better than they appeared.

He noted that from now on staff in the Office of the Vice-Provost would inform relevant areas of non-returned external examiner reports ahead of the start of each academic year.

**UGS/11-12/055 Learning Innovation Project 2012**

A document, 'TCD Learning Innovation Project 2012, Proposal from CAPSL to develop a Plagiarism Prevention Resource', dated 15<sup>th</sup> March 2012, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer, speaking to the proposal, noted that USC had discussed the issue of plagiarism in the last academic year (UGS/10-11/031 and UGS/10-11/050) and that a member had commented on the usefulness of web-based information on the topic. The proposal concerns the use of funding received from the National Digital Learning Repository (NDLR) to participate in the European-wide project, Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education across Europe (IPPHEAE), which would involve the surveying of Trinity students and the subsequent development of a web-based digital learning resource to educate students on how to avoid plagiarism. If supported by USC, the Senior Lecturer noted that staff from CAPSL would consult with Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate) on the content of the digital resource.

A concern was raised in relation to the possible lack of consistency in the use of the Summary Procedure (Calendar Part I, H19 and H20) and the low levels of reporting of the same to the Senior Lecturer.

The USC gave its support to the proposal as circulated.

**UGS/11-12/056 Assessment Forums**

A memorandum 'Update on Forums on Assessments', from the Senior Lecturer, dated 20<sup>th</sup> March 2012, was tabled. The Senior Lecturer confirmed the dates and venues for the forums, and stated that he would work with Dr Ciara O'Farrell to plan the appropriate format of these meetings. He noted that there should be a free exchange of information on assessment methods and a discussion of any barriers to innovation. Whilst the meetings are organised on a faculty basis, staff members are free to attend on any of the dates.

The meeting noted the forum dates as the 3<sup>rd</sup> (Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences), 8<sup>th</sup> (Engineering, Mathematics and Science) and 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012 (Health Sciences).

**UGS/11-12/057 Any other business**

There was no other business.

signature

date