

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 22nd January 2013 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Patrick Geoghegan (*Chair*)
Dean of Students, Professor Amanda Piesse
Senior Tutor, Professor Claire Laudet
Assistant Academic Secretary, Ms Orla Sheehan
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate)
Professor Christine Poulter, School of Drama, Film and Music
Professor Pádraig de Paor, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Professor Dirk Johanssen, Confederal School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Professor Eleanor Denny, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Mary Lee Rhodes, School of Business
Professor Ivana Bacik, School of Law
Professor Dermot O'Dwyer, School of Engineering
Professor Andrew Butterfield, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Jarlath Kileen, School of English
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Professor Graham Harper, School of Physics
Professor Michael Shevlin, School of Education
Professor Ken Mok, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Michael Gormley, School of Psychology
Professor Moray McGowan, Director of TSM
Professor Graeme Watson, Director of Science (TR071)
Mr Daniel Ferrick, Education Officer, Students' Union
Ms Sinead Leydon, Student Representative

Apologies: Professor Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor David Chew, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Martina Hennessy, School of Medicine
Professor Wolfgang Schmitt, School of Chemistry
Professor Sharon O'Donnell, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS
Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior Academic Developer

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner; Ms Elaine Egan; Mr Trevor Peare (Library Representative); Ms Cliona Hannon, Director Trinity Access Programmes; and Mr Declan Reilly, Disability Officer (for item USC/12-13/037).

The Senior Lecturer welcomed Professor Dirk Johanssen in the Confederal School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics to the Committee; and welcomed Professor Michael Gormley who had returned from sabbatical. He also welcomed Ms Elaine Egan who had replaced Ms Sorcha De Brunner as Secretary to the Committee. The Senior Lecturer thanked Sorcha for her dedicated work for the Committee.

USC/12-13/035 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th December 2012 were approved.

USC/12-13/036 Matters arising

(i) USC/12-13/028: The Senior Lecturer advised that Council had approved the proposals from the GeneSIS Project Assessment Team. Concerns were raised with regard to publishing examination results by order of the anonymous examination

number. A query was raised as to whether there should be a delay in publishing results to the noticeboard to allow for the possibility of subsequent mark changes. The Senior Lecturer advised that he would discuss the issues raised with the GeneSIS Project Assessment Team. It was noted that the majority of schools and disciplines would run a back-up system for examinations in the current academic year, in parallel with the new system.

(ii) USC/12-13/029: The Senior Lecturer noted that a document from the Director of TSM, outlining his concerns to the proposed structural changes to TSM, had been tabled at the Council meeting of 16th January 2013. The Senior Lecturer advised that Council had agreed to the reduction of entry codes for TSM courses. Council had also agreed to the setting up of a group, chaired by the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, to further explore flexibility in the structure of joint honours courses. Council approved, in principle, the proposal for a name change for TSM; the proposed name will be considered by the TSM Management Committee.

USC/12-13/037 Retention

A number of items were circulated: Retention on Undergraduate Programmes, Office of the Vice-Provost, dated January 2013; Report on TAP Progression and Completion from the Director of TAP, dated November 2012; and a Memorandum from the Senior Lecturer on a workshop on retention, dated 17th January 2013. The Senior Lecturer welcomed Mr Declan Reilly, a Disability Officer, to the meeting for this item.

- (i) The Assistant Academic Secretary spoke to the report on retention in undergraduate courses, highlighting the most pertinent points. New entrants in the years 2001/02 to 2007/08 had been tracked and data was presented for these seven cohorts. The report was discussed and the following points were noted:
- the retention rate had improved from 85% for the 2001/02 cohort to 86% for the 2007/08 cohort
 - the majority of withdrawals took place in the Junior Freshman year
 - withdrawals in the Senior Freshman year had increased
 - the HEA report 'A Study of Progression in Irish Higher Education' determined that the University sector had largely comparable retention rates
 - in the HEA report, Trinity was shown to have the lowest non-progression rate at 8% for the 2007/08 cohort
 - the HEA report noted that students entering higher education with lower points were less likely to progress. This was, however, not the case in Trinity.
- (ii) The Director of the Trinity Access Programmes (TAP) spoke to the report on the progression and completion of TAP students. The data was based on the academic year 2010/11 for students who entered College through the Higher Education Access Route; the TAP Foundation Courses for Higher Education (Young Adults and Mature Students); the TCD/CDVEC Partnership Courses in Liberal Arts; and the Mature Student Dispensation Scheme.

The following points were noted:

- the completion rate for TAP students in 2010/11 was 94%
- the progression rate for TAP students in 2010/11 was 96%
- the majority of students who completed a Foundation course progressed to a course in Trinity
- on-campus courses had a higher rate of progression to Trinity than off-campus courses.

A discussion ensued on how best to improve College's retention rate. It was suggested that determining the reasons why students withdraw was of vital importance. The most frequent reason provided on the Exit/Withdrawal Form was 'course not as expected', though it was suggested that there may be other

factors not highlighted by students. The Senior Tutor offered to work with College tutors on preparing a questionnaire for students who withdraw, in order to elicit the genuine reasons for the withdrawal.

The Senior Lecturer recognised that there are sometimes 'positive withdrawals' where it might be in a student's best interest to withdraw, or to transfer to a different course of study either in TCD or a different institution.

The Senior Tutor highlighted that the HEA report did not take into account the main socio/economic background and traditionally high points of Trinity new entrants. When these are allowed for, it is argued that Trinity's retention rate should be higher than it is. She noted it would be useful to determine the factors which encouraged students to stay at College when they had considered leaving. It was agreed that there should be more detailed exit interviews and that, where possible, College should aim to be flexible with students who wish to transfer. The Senior Lecturer noted that the student support systems in College were very effective and that this could account for our leading position in the HEA report.

The higher retention rate of TAP students was considered in detail. The Director of TAP advised of a number of important factors: the smaller cohort, having a contact in TAP, a cohesive/supportive group of students, and a collaborative effort across College staff to look out for and support TAP students. TAP staff were congratulated for their dedicated work in this area.

The importance of students understanding what their chosen undergraduate course would entail was considered vital to improving retention. It was noted that the TAP Foundation year allowed students to decide which subjects interested them and what they comprised. It was suggested that College's Open Day could be an ideal forum to demonstrate samples of teaching to prospective students. It was also suggested that the videos available for the Provost's Teaching Award Scheme could be used in a meaningful way for this purpose. The Student to Student (S2S) initiative could be built upon to familiarise students with course content, particularly for the later years of the course.

The Senior Tutor highlighted the need for students to be integrated into the College community, and to feel 'known'. Small-group teaching would help with this, especially in their first year. The Senior Tutor noted the very important role of tutors in College and asked that USC members encourage academics in their areas to become tutors.

Students at risk of withdrawing should be identified and targeted early, if possible. It was suggested that students should be provided with ID cards which could be swiped when attending a lecture/tutorial. Those students not fully attending could then be identified and contacted.

The Senior Lecturer spoke of the report by Alan Milburn published in 2012 'University Challenge: How Higher Education Can Advance Social Mobility'. A number of factors to encourage student retention were identified in the report:

- student services
- financial support
- holistic support / information and guidance on the course choice
- student charters
- equalising skills
- the ability for students to transfer between courses / credit transfer.

The Senior Lecturer advised that web-based education could be useful in familiarising students with courses, for example, an online sample module could be provided. It was noted that there would be a cost factor associated with the time and effort of improving College's retention rate. A comment was made that more current data on withdrawals, identifying the stage of the academic year, would better allow College to identify the barriers to student progression

and how best to address them. A member noted that the data in the report indicated that male students were more likely to withdraw than females.

- (iii) A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, dated 17th January 2013, regarding a workshop on retention was circulated. A member of the Disability Services spoke to the memorandum. He noted that the universities had many good solutions for retention in place and that a workshop would allow these solutions, and also problems, to be shared and discussed. It would allow for a framework and common language around the student experience to be created for the Irish University sector, while allowing individual institutions to develop their own policies. The proposal for the workshop had been discussed with a member of the HEA who had been very supportive of the idea.

He advised that retention rates relating to students with disabilities were higher than the overall College rates; the exception to this was for students who were deaf and students with mental health difficulties. Progression, however, for students with disabilities was slower than the overall progression through College. The Senior Lecturer noted that College was known for having good supports in place for students with disabilities and this helps to attract these students.

The workshop would comprise 5 or 6 members from each university, with a commonality of roles across the sector. A discussion ensued on the appropriate membership from College and the following was proposed: the Senior Lecturer, Mr Declan Reilly, the Assistant Academic Secretary, the Senior Tutor, the Dean of Students, and a Students' Union officer.

The Dean of Students advised USC of the orientation review which would provide a strategy to deliver a student-centred orientation process for new entrants to College. She advised that many of the retention issues discussed would also affect postgraduate students, but that these students would also have their own discrete set of issues that could cause them to withdraw. It was noted that postgraduate students account for one third of the student population in Trinity and that it is vital that College also reviews retention in that area. The Senior Lecturer indicated that he would liaise with the Dean of Graduate Studies in this regard.

The Senior Lecturer congratulated the Disability Officer for the workshop initiative and thanked him for his attendance at the meeting.

USC/12-13/038 Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies' Update

The Senior Lecturer informed the meeting that the admissions feasibility study had been launched and had mostly attracted positive feedback and gained a positive reaction in the media. The Senior Lecturer noted the potential of the scheme for furthering College's links with Harvard University.

The Senior Lecturer updated the Committee on the work of the IUA Task Group on Entry and Progression. The Senior Tutor suggested that the Task Group should meet with the National Parents' Council, Post-primary.

USC/12-13/039 Flexible arrangements for sporting excellence

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'Flexible academic provisions for sporting excellence', dated 17th January 2013 was circulated. Sporting excellence was defined as participating on the national or international stage. The Senior Lecturer invited comment from the Committee on the proposal to allow academic flexibility for students participating in high-level sporting events, where the student's course permitted this. It was noted that some courses, notably professional courses, could not permit flexibility in this manner.

The principle of academic flexibility was welcomed, however, members deemed that it should be extended to excellence in other areas in addition to sport. A concern was raised with regards to the proposal to allow students to sit annual examinations over two academic years as this could potentially be viewed as discriminatory and as against the spirit of harmonisation of assessment and progression regulations. It was noted that splitting the year is occasionally granted to students with serious disabilities/health issues. The Education Officer advised that some students currently intermit their studies, namely, some Students' Union sabbatical officers and the heads of some student societies, and that this should be considered instead.

The Senior Lecturer advised that other Irish universities have flexibility in their admissions procedures for students engaged in sporting excellence, but that this proposal related to flexibility during a student's time in College. Allowing flexibility in this manner would enable College to produce graduates with a wide breadth of experience and achievement.

It was agreed that the Senior Lecturer, the Dean of Students and the Senior Tutor would work together on the idea of 'sympathetic flexibility'. They would bring a paper to USC outlining a proposal for College to offer flexibility to students engaged in excellence in other prestigious areas as well as in sports. The requirement was noted for explicit guidelines to outline which achievements were deemed eligible for flexibility and how to ensure equity across the different areas.

USC/12-13/040 Any other business

- (i) The Senior Lecturer encouraged members to attend the symposium on online education which would take place on 19th February 2013. He advised that the Dean of Graduate Studies would attend the next meeting of USC to speak on the work of the Taskforce on Online Education.
- (ii) The Senior Lecturer advised that the USC meeting previously scheduled for 19th February 2013 had to be postponed and the new meeting date would shortly be advised.

USC/12-13/041 Trinity Access Programmes Steering Committee

- (i) The draft minutes of the meeting of 29th November 2012 were noted and approved. The Senior Lecturer brought the attention of USC to the 20th anniversary of TAP celebrations detailed in the minutes, and urged members to attend events where possible
- (ii) The revised terms of reference and membership of the Steering Committee were noted.

USC/12-13/042 Items for noting

USC noted the following items:

- (i) 'Guidelines for students and staff on the modification of examination and assessment arrangements for students with disabilities', dated December 2012. It was noted that a few practical matters in the document needed to be finalised with the Examinations Office, following which the document would be revised.
- (ii) Memorandum from the Senior Lecturer to Council, 'Admission to Medicine - HPAT', dated 8th January 2013.
- (iii) Memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'External Examiners 2012/13', dated 17th January 2013.