XX = Council relevance

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on **30th April 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
Professor Jarlath Kileen, School of English
Professor Graham Harper, School of Physics
Professor Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Martina Hennessy, School of Medicine
Professor Pádraig de Paor, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
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 Dan Bradley, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Michael Shevlin, School of Education
Professor Andrew Butterfield, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Sharon O'Donnell, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science
Professor Michael Gormley, School of Psychology
Professor Graeme Watson, Director of Science (TR071)
Professor Francis O'Toole, Director of BESS
Professor Moray McGowan, Director of TSM
Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior Academic Developer
Mr Daniel Ferrick, Education Officer, Students' Union

Apologies:
Professor Christine Poulter, School of Drama, Film and Music
Professor Ken Mok, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Wolfgang Schmitt, School of Chemistry
Professor Dirk Johannsen, Confederal School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Professor Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Professor Dermot O'Dwyer, School of Engineering
Professor Ivana Bacik, School of Law
Professor David Chew, School of Natural Sciences
Assistant Academic Secretary, Ms Orla Sheehan
Ms Cliona Hannon, Director Trinity Access Programmes
Ms Sinead Leydon, Student Representative

In attendance:
Ms Elaine Egan; Mr Trevor Peare (Library Representative); Ms Claire Donlon (incoming Student Representative 2013/14), Mr Jack Leahy (incoming Education Officer, Students' Union 2013/14), Professor Etain Tanam and Professor Andrew Pierce, ISE (for item USC/12-13/070); Ms Amy Worrall, Secretary to the Scholars, and Mr Robert Noonan, Assistant Secretary to the Scholars, (for item USC/12-13/064).

The Senior Lecturer welcomed Ms Claire Donlon, Student Representative at USC for 2013/14, and Mr Jack Leahy, Education Officer, Students' Union in 2013/14, to the meeting.

USC/12-13/062 Minutes
The minutes of the meeting of 28th March 2013 were approved.

USC/12-13/063 Matters arising

USC/12-13/045: The course proposal for a Bachelor in Science in Radiation Therapy in conjunction with Singapore Institute of Technology had been approved at the Council meeting of 17th April 2013.

USC/12-13/056: The course proposals from RIAM for accreditation had been sent for external review and would be circulated for the Council meeting of 15th May 2013.

USC/12-13/064 Scholarship Examination

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, dated 24th April 2013, together with a breakdown of scholarship applicants and attendees by gender, and a 'Checklist of Scholarship Requirements for 2013/14' were circulated. The Senior Lecturer welcomed Ms Amy Worrall, Secretary to the Scholars, and Mr Robert Noonan, Assistant Secretary to the Scholars, to the meeting for this item. The Senior Lecturer spoke to the circulated memorandum. Although College has a higher proportion of female than male undergraduates, more male than female students present for Scholarship examinations. The success rate of students who sit the examinations is largely the same for male and female students. Ms Worrall advised that the Scholars had discussed this issue without coming to any conclusive reasons as to why female students are less likely to undertake Scholarship. The Scholars suggested that men may tend to be more ambitious than women, women may feel less likely to pursue academic careers, and departments which traditionally encourage students to sit the Scholarship examinations may have more male than female students. The Senior Lecturer advised that he would work with the incoming Students' Union Education Officer and Schools at the start of Michaelmas Term to actively encourage more female students to take the Scholarship examinations.

The circulated breakdown of applicants and attendees for Scholarship exams showed a large discrepancy between students applying for and students sitting the exams. The Senior Lecturer proposed the introduction of a €30 fee for students who register for the exams but do not sit them and do not withdraw formally by the final withdrawal date. Members were of the opinion that there must be a facility to waive the fee in extenuating circumstances. The Senior Tutor felt that many students who register for the exams in November may change their mind over the Christmas holidays, by which time they are too late to formally withdraw. She wondered whether it was possible to extend the final withdrawal date to 2nd January.

The Scholarship exams are only available to students in the Senior Freshman year of a degree course. This effectively prohibits students on diploma courses which then become degree courses (e.g. Dip/BSc Information Systems) from sitting the exams. The Senior Lecturer proposed a derogation for these students to allow them to take Scholarship exams in their Junior Sophister year.

USC approved the following:
- that the Senior Lecturer would work with the incoming Students' Union Education Officer to encourage more female students to sit the Scholarship exams.

USC agreed that the following proposals should be recommended to the Central Scholarship Committee:
- to have a derogation for students on diploma courses which become degree courses to take the Scholarship exams in their Junior Sophister year,
- to introduce a fee of €30 for registering for, but not taking, the Scholarship exams, and not withdrawing before the official withdrawal date; as long as it will be possible to apply for a waiver of the fee for genuine cases, and that it would be possible to change the final withdrawal date to 2nd January.

The Senior Lecturer thanked the Secretary to the Scholars and the Assistant Secretary to the Scholars.

USC/12-13/065   Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies' update
A memorandum from the Vice-Provost to Council, dated 8th April 2013, had been circulated for the meeting. The Senior Lecturer advised that the recommendations in the memorandum had been approved at the Council meeting of 17th April 2013.The overhaul of the student evaluation system had been discussed at the previous meeting of USC (USC/12-13/058).

A number of members expressed their concern with some of the recommendations in the memorandum. In particular, members were concerned with the recommendation that mandatory annual module evaluation is to be carried out at School level. Some members felt that it had not previously been made clear that module evaluation would be carried out by Schools and it was thought that this would be overly burdensome on School staff. The Senior Lecturer advised that the role of Directors of Teaching and Learning and Course Directors in the evaluation process was to ensure that lecturers had provided relevant feedback to students and it was not, therefore, an overly onerous task. He advised that an implementation plan for the overhaul of the evaluation system would be drawn up and that the Undergraduate Studies Committee would be consulted in the process. He highlighted that evaluations did not have to take the form of an online survey; Schools could employ different methods, for example, informal meetings or paper questionnaires. Some members of USC believed that, given the high workload and limited staff resources in many Schools, it may not be possible for Schools to undertake the task

XX   of annual module evaluation. Following discussion of this item, the Senior Lecturer advised that an implementation plan for the policy would be brought to the next USC and that it may be necessary to defer full implementation of the policy depending on resources.

Members also voiced concern about the possibility of overloading students with surveys which could lead to a very low take-up rate, or could lead to module evaluations being completed at the expense of programme evaluations.

USC/12-13/066   Return of coursework and Good practice in feedback
A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, dated 22 April 2013, and a document from the Senior Academic Developer had been circulated. The Senior Academic Developer spoke to the circulated document. She advised that research shows that students may have difficulty decoding the feedback they are given and are often unable to translate feedback into action. It is vital that the feedback given is readily-understood by students. Feedback should be seen in a more long-term approach; comments given should 'feed forward' and encourage students to learn from their mistakes and take their learning forward into other modules. The Senior Academic Developer is currently writing a guide on academic writing that could be used to help students to 'find their voice'; to make coherent arguments and to better discuss and interpret concepts. It is important that the criteria and standards expected from students should be discussed prior to their commencing a piece of work to ensure that they have a clear understanding of what is required.

As previously noted at USC, the results of the International Student Barometer had indicated an issue with the length of time taken to return essays and coursework. It is not considered appropriate to fix a turnaround time for coursework but it was noted that the need for a timely turnaround should be balanced with the need to provide effective feedback. It was agreed that turnaround time is particularly important for first year students, especially for the first assignment. Staff should inform students of when their work will be returned and should adhere to this timeframe.

The Senior Lecturer undertook to provide a summary of the guidelines in the circulated document to Directors of Teaching and Learning and Course Directors,

who could then inform staff in their Schools/Disciplines of good practice in this area. The guidelines will also be uploaded to the Undergraduate Studies website.

The Senior Lecturer thanked the Senior Academic Developer and invited her to circulate her guide on academic writing to colleagues when it was completed.

USC/12-13/067 The Trinity Education

A memorandum and draft document from the Senior Lecturer, dated 15th April 2013, had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The document had also been circulated for the Council meeting of 17th April 2013. The Senior Lecturer spoke to the document. He noted that together with the Assistant Academic Secretary, he had visited 23 of the 24 Schools, and the final visit would shortly take place. The visits provided invaluable feedback into the issues affecting Schools and insight into the great work that Schools do, and this information was used to inform the Trinity Education document. The Senior Lecturer advised that staff and student buy-in was essential for the recommendations in the document to be implemented successfully in College.

The document is in three parts: a summary of the Trinity Education; setting the document in a broader, historical context; and recommendations to enable a framework to be put in place to ensure the Trinity Education can be delivered across all programmes at the undergraduate level.

The ensuing discussion focused on the commitment of College to create opportunities for students to acquire both a wide range of general skills and also specialist skills in their relevant subject; the T-shaped education. Members agreed that curricula should largely be built around learning outcomes, as they currently are in the professional courses. Generic capabilities such as communication and presentation skills, critical thinking and group-work, were seen as vital to the employability of Trinity graduates and as such they should be built into course curricula. Innovation in course delivery and assessment is vital in creating the kind of learning environment which the Trinity Education should promote. The incoming student representative noted the difficulty which Trinity students currently had in gaining internships and how a lack of experience negatively affected the employability of Trinity students. Members agreed that College should be more pro-active in finding and creating internships for undergraduate students.

A number of amendments to the document were suggested as follows:
- to include a section on internships
- to note that a dissertation/research project may take place in any year after the Freshman years
- to amend the current paragraph relating to timetables to note that timetables should facilitate learning
- to explicitly reference the positive activity that takes place in College between staff and students
- to actively encourage students to contribute to College at a broader level.

In response to a question, the Senior Lecturer is convinced that the recommendations could be successful without demanding extra resources, but with an emphasis on working more effectively with the current resources in College.

The Senior Lecturer advised that he would amend the document in accordance with the discussion at USC and it would then be brought to the Council meeting of 15th May 2013. He proposed that the document would be discussed at various College fora between September and December and this input from staff and students would be used to further inform the document.

The Senior Lecturer thanked the IRIU subgroup, of which some members of USC were members, for its help with the Trinity Education document to date.

USC/12-13/068 Admission of students from Northern Ireland

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, dated 22nd April 2013, had been circulated. Following a discussion at Council on 17th April 2013, Trinity will implement a new policy for admitting students in September 2014 whereby all applicants on the island of Ireland will be treated equally when applying to Trinity. Legal advice had been obtained when the new policy was being developed. There will be a page for Northern Ireland in the new prospectus which will include the critical line that: 'Trinity College treats equally all Leaving Certificate and A-Level students on the island of Ireland in light of their status under Article 2 of the Constitution of Ireland'. It is hoped that this will help to address the problem of students in Northern Ireland feeling alienated from applying to Irish universities because of the rigid proportionality system which is currently in place. An IUA Group, which includes the Trinity Admissions Officer, is looking at the calculation of A-Levels to see if they could be re-calibrated to allow a new points conversion to allow for 3.5 A-Levels to be sufficient to gain entry to Irish universities. This is an issue to be agreed at a sectoral level.

Meanwhile, College's policy change will be accompanied by an increased recruitment drive in Northern Ireland involving alumni, staff and student ambassadors. It is hoped that a small fund will be available to cover costs associated with visiting schools in Northern Ireland. The Senior Lecturer invited colleagues with either an interest in visiting schools in Northern Ireland, or suggestions of staff who may be interested, to contact him. It was agreed at the meeting that a definition of students who would be covered under the new policy is needed and the Senior Lecturer advised that he would seek advice from the College solicitor on this matter.

USC/12-13/069 Publication of end of year results

A memorandum from the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Senior Lecturer, dated 16th April 2013, was circulated. The memorandum proposed a number of recommendations with regards to the publication of named and anonymous results sheets for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Publication of results had previously been discussed at the USC meetings of 11th December 2012 and 22nd January 2013 and members had expressed concern with regard to publishing anonymous results by order of the anonymous examination number as it would lead to increased checking at such a busy period. The circulated memorandum indicated that a hold had been put on this decision and that anonymous results sheets would be published by student ID number in the current academic year. A member raised a concern with using the student ID number as she felt this would compromise student anonymity. The Senior Lecturer advised that anonymous results sheets had traditionally been published in this format and that College was working towards a better way for future years.

A number of members raised concerns with regards to recommendations 3 and 5 in relation to their specific courses and it was noted that relevant staff in the Office of the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer would respond to the members concerned.

USC/12-13/070 Proposal for a semester abroad

A proposal from the Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) for a semester in Trinity for international students was circulated. The Senior Lecturer welcomed Professors Etain Tanam and Andrew Pierce to the meeting for this item. The semester abroad is modelled closely on ISE's 'Semester in Northern Ireland' which has been in operation since 2010. The School would target international students from a number of institutions with which it currently has links and these students would attend Trinity's main campus for a semester. Students would take three modules, each with an ECTS credit value of ten. In the first year the intake would be five students and this would increase to 18 in subsequent years. It is envisaged that the visiting students would benefit from the Trinity experience and this would be facilitated through an organised

orientation process. Staff from ISE will liaise with the Senior Tutor in relation to providing a tutor for the students.

USC approved the proposal which will now be circulated to Council.

USC/12-13/071 Any other business

1) A member wondered whether USC should be more involved with the implementation of SiTS as many of the SiTS issues that arose were concerning the delivery of quality undergraduate courses. In response to this, a small group was formed, comprising the Senior Tutor, Professor Andrew Butterfield and Professor Pauline Sloane, who could attend a special SiTS meeting and could act as a go-between for USC and SiTS.

2) The Senior Tutor advised that she is trying to recruit more tutors to reduce the size of tutor chambers and invited members to send to her the names of suitable candidates.

3) A new document on 'Fitness to Practice' has recently been drafted and will be circulated for the next meeting of USC.

4) The Senior Lecturer advised that Professor Ray Land, Durham University, will host a workshop entitled 'Using Threshold Concepts as a transformative approach to assessment and feedback' on 8th May 2013. Further details can be found at: http://www.tcd.ie/CAPSL/staff/learning-teaching/professional-development-events/

USC/12-13/072 Items for noting

1) Student evaluation system – this was discussed under item 4 on the agenda.

USC noted the following item:

XX   2) Change of strand title Psychiatric to Mental Health – memorandum from School Administrator, Nursing & Midwifery, dated 24th April 2013.