

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN  
TRINITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Studies Committee

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A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

- Present: Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Patrick Geoghegan (*Chair*)  
Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan  
Senior Tutor, Professor Claire Laudet  
Professor Jarlath Kileen, School of English  
Professor Ken Mok, School of Biochemistry and Immunology  
Professor Paschalis Karageorgis, School of Mathematics  
Professor Ciaran Simms, School of Engineering  
Professor Graham Harper, School of Physics  
Professor Philip McEvansoneya, School of Histories and Humanities  
Professor Pádraig de Paor, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies  
Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences  
Professor Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy  
Professor Jane Farrar, School of Genetics and Microbiology  
Professor Michael Shevlin, School of Education  
Professor Andrew Butterfield, School of Computer Science and Statistics  
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences  
Professor Michael Gormley, School of Psychology  
Professor Graeme Watson, Director of Science (TR071)  
Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences  
Professor Oran Doyle, School of Law  
Professor Martina Hennessy, School of Medicine  
Professor Jacinta McLoughlin, School of Dental Science  
Professor Fáinche Ryan, Confederal School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics  
Professor Christine Poulter, School of Drama, Film and Music  
Professor Mary-Lee Rhodes, School of Business  
Professor Sharon O'Donnell, School of Nursing and Midwifery  
Mr Trevor Peare (Library Representative)  
Mr Jack Leahy, Education Officer, Students' Union  
Ms Clare Donlon, Student Representative
- Apologies: Professor Stephen Connon, School of Chemistry  
Professor Elaine Moriarty, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
Professor Moray McGowan, Director of TSM  
Dean of Students, Professor Amanda Piesse  
Ms Cliona Hannon, Director Trinity Access Programmes  
Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior Academic Developer

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The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies introduced the new members of the committee and welcomed back the continuing members.

**USC/13-14/001 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> May 2013 were approved.

**USC/13-14/002 Matters arising**

USC/12-13/079: Directors of Teaching and Learning in the Schools of Dental Science; Pharmacy; Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences; and Social Work and Social Policy, would like to meet with the Dean of Students to discuss aspects of the Procedural Guidelines for the Implementation of the Trinity Fitness to Practise Policy. It was agreed that the College Solicitor would be invited to the next meeting of USC to discuss the legal implications of a Fitness to Practise hearing.

**USC/13-14/003 Work Plan for 2013/14**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013, together with a work plan for 2013/14 was circulated. The work plan comprised of the following:

- developing the Trinity Education document and bringing it through as official policy in January 2014
  - successful delivery of the feasibility study in admissions
  - developing Trinity Explore and attracting more CAO first preferences
  - recruiting more students from Northern Ireland
  - designing, along with CAPSL, a model of professional development
  - redesigning the Broad Curriculum model
  - working to reduce course codes
  - clarifying regulations concerning supplemental examinations in Sophister years.
- At the request of a member the Senior Lecturer indicated that consideration would also be given to equity in the treatment of students who miss an examination or fail to hand up coursework. The timeframe involved in academic appeals would be reviewed this year as it currently placed too much pressure on staff and students.

The work plan will be reviewed at the final meeting of USC in this academic year.

**USC/13-14/004 The Trinity Education**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013 was circulated, together with the opening section of the Trinity Education document (previously discussed at the meeting of USC on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013). Consultation on the document is ongoing and the Senior Lecturer acknowledged the importance of the final document reflecting the academic values and beliefs of staff and students. The Senior Lecturer had worked with the Students' Union Education Officer over the summer and had prepared a piece for the Alumni magazine to encourage engagement in the discussion.

The Senior Lecturer had carried out 24 school visits with the Assistant Academic Secretary in the previous academic year and these had been very successful, and the contribution of students had been particularly valuable. Members were invited to comment on the best forum for consulting with staff and students. It was agreed that people can be more active at smaller meetings, that consulting with graduates was very important and that meetings should be used to share existing practices which are in line with the aspirations of the document. Members agreed that there was a place for a larger 'town-hall' meeting following the small-group consultations. A member reported on the student teaching and learning forum in her School which had proved to be an excellent opportunity to discuss practice. The Senior Lecturer advised that curriculum units in Schools should work on including further generic skills teaching into existing modules. Concerns were expressed that some aspects of the document will be increasingly difficult to implement in light of the financial cutbacks being imposed on College.

Following the consultation period the document will be brought back to USC and Council and it is hoped it will be adopted as official policy in January 2014.

**USC/13-14/005 Update on the Admissions Forum**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013 had been circulated. The Forum is chaired by the Senior Lecturer and membership is comprised of the Admissions Officer, the Admissions Liaison Officer, the Dean of Students, the SU Education Officer, Professor Graeme Watson, Professor Martina Hennessy, Professor Oran Doyle, Professor Pauline Sloane, Ms Cliona Hannon, and Elaine Egan in attendance.

Notes of the meeting of the Admissions Forum of 26<sup>th</sup> September 2013 were tabled. The Senior Lecturer outlined the function of the Admissions Forum as providing a link between admissions issues and USC; the forum provides an informal

environment for admissions matters to be discussed and any policy issues would be brought back to USC. The main items discussed at the meeting had been general student recruitment, recruitment of students in Northern Ireland, the feasibility study in Admissions and Trinity Explore.

The Senior Lecturer reported that the Admissions Liaison Officer had planned an event for the following day which would involve 121 guidance counsellors attending Trinity to discuss the feasibility study in admissions.

#### USC/13-14/006 Recruitment of students from Northern Ireland

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013 had been circulated. Trinity has traditionally seen itself as a university for the whole island of Ireland yet Northern Irish student numbers had significantly declined in recent years. Council had recently approved a policy change which allowed Trinity to treat equally all Leaving Certificate and A-Level students on the island of Ireland. Alongside this policy change, a number of strategies for Northern Ireland (NI) student recruitment were in place in College, including the Trinity Explore website; the appointment of a student ambassador for NI and individual ambassadors for each of the six counties; a full page of the new Prospectus aimed at Northern Irish students; representatives from College attending the Northern Ireland Careers Fair; and consulting with Trinity alumni from NI.

A small fund was available for school visits to Northern Ireland and a list of schools to target was being compiled. The Senior Lecturer indicated his intention to visit a number of schools in the coming months, many in Northern Ireland, and he indicated that the Provost had also expressed an interest in visiting some schools.

It would appear that a lack of information and a requirement to present with 4 A-levels for the higher points courses are the main barriers to students applying from NI. The existing misconception amongst Northern Irish guidance counsellors and students that the CAO process is complicated should be tackled and students should be encouraged to apply through the CAO in conjunction with applying to the UK universities. The Senior Lecturer was working with the TCD Association of Northern Ireland to plan an event for guidance counsellors in NI.

The Academic Secretary noted that the vast majority of applications from Northern Ireland are to a small number of courses and that College should promote a wider range of subjects to this audience.

#### USC/13-14/007 Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies' Update

##### (i) *Online education*

XX The Senior Lecturer and the Academic Secretary were members of a task force on online education which was looking into a number of online initiatives. College is currently exploring a relationship with a consortium of ten leading US universities. The Senior Lecturer, with the support of colleagues in the Department of History, had developed a 14 week module on Ireland in Rebellion 1798-1916. Lectures had been filmed, footage of historical sites was shot, and a number of interviews were recorded. It was hoped to offer the module in January 2014. Assessment for the course was project-based and would involve the students collaborating together. The course would run three times a year and students would receive credits for it from their home university. A memorandum on this initiative was expected to go to Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2013.

It is hoped to further develop the involvement with the consortium and if the module is a success, funds from it will be used to facilitate students from Trinity to take an online module from one of the other universities involved. A proposal for our students to take these courses will be brought to USC and Council at a future date. USC offered full support for this initiative and

members interested in offering an online module were invited to contact the Associate Dean of Online Education.

A discussion on online education in College ensued and it was agreed that the Associate Dean of Online Education would be invited to update members on online initiatives at a future meeting of USC.

(ii) *Issues with registration and student cases*

Students had encountered significant problems when registering this year and the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Graduate Studies had sent an email to students apologising for these issues and assuring students that this would not happen again. The difficulties related to issues in SITS and to teething problems in the Academic Registry. The Senior Lecturer had flagged the issues to the GeneSIS Board and project team. He confirmed to USC that this situation would not happen next year. On a positive note he reported that SITS had helped to streamline and speed up large parts of the registration process and that the problems were on an individual basis with the majority of students not being affected.

A discussion on student cases followed and members highlighted how decisions from the Senior Lecturer had on occasion been too late to be taken into account at the Courts of Examiners which resulted in students needlessly being returned as 'exclude'. This created huge difficulties for these students who were already in a vulnerable position, and prevented them from accessing the library, their timetable or Blackboard, and from receiving class emails. The Senior Tutor appealed to Directors of Teaching and Learning to advise staff in their areas to facilitate and assist these students where possible. Members further highlighted the unreasonable length of time it was taking to implement the outcome of the Senior Lecturer's decisions in SITS. Directors of Teaching and Learning were often not given adequate information through SITS on why students had been excluded and when the reasons were discovered they were not always valid. The Senior Lecturer noted the high volume of student cases and reported that a review of the student case process was underway and it was hoped that this would alleviate these issues and streamline procedures.

**USC/13-14/008 Update on Sympathetic Flexibility**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013 had been circulated. The memorandum sought to clarify that in all cases where agreement could not be reached between a course director, a tutor and the Senior Lecturer the case would proceed to a specialist group for a decision. The Senior Lecturer noted that the specialist group had recently met to discuss such a case and that this process had proved to work well. Approval was sought from USC to change the chair of the specialist group from the Vice-Provost to the Registrar, who would have relevant experience from chairing Academic Appeals. USC approved the change of chair.

**USC/13-14/009 Powers of Courts of Examiners**

A Memorandum from the Senior Lecturer dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013 had been circulated. The Senior Lecturer advised that a Court of Examiners, in consultation with the external examiner, has the power to make adjustments to marks which it considers academically appropriate for an individual candidate and following the Court of Examiners a student's result becomes fixed.

Members had misgivings with the final paragraph of the memorandum as it could imply that the Court of Examiners should act as a Court of First Appeal; it was agreed that this paragraph should be removed. The option was discussed of having a group meet to consider mitigating circumstances prior to the Court of Examiners rather than holding the Court of First Appeal after the Court of Examiners. Members agreed that a document clarifying the powers of a Court of First Appeal

would be useful. The Senior Lecturer asked that Directors of Teaching and Learning explain the powers of a Court of Examiners to staff in their Schools.

**USC/13-14/010 Any other business**

A number of members expressed reservations with the practicalities of implementing Council's decision for mandatory annual evaluation of undergraduate modules to be carried out by Schools (CL/12-13/148). Some School Administrators had indicated that they would be unable to carry out evaluations and it was felt that anonymity could be compromised if lecturers were to run the surveys. The Academic Secretary advised that Schools have discretion to choose which type of evaluation best suits their needs and to design their own questions, with the mandatory inclusion of a question on overall satisfaction level. Faculty Deans were currently in discussions with the Quality Committee regarding how results of the question regarding satisfaction level would be treated.

**USC/13-14/011 Items for noting**

**USC noted the following items:**

(i) Memorandum from the Senior Lecturer, 'Google Project - TAP, Bridge 21, School of Education, School of Computer Science', dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013. The Student Representative expressed reservations about the project and the Senior Lecturer advised that she could meet with the Director of TAP or attend a meeting of the Steering Group for clarification on these issues.

**Course Handbooks**

(ii) Memorandum from the Assistant Academic Secretary, 'Course Handbooks', dated 26<sup>th</sup> September 2013. A member of the Office of the Vice-Provost would contact School Administrators to request either a PDF copy of course handbooks, or a link to handbooks where they are already online.