![Trinity College Dublin - Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath - The University of Dublin]

XX = Council relevance

A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 19 April 2016 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, Professor Gillian Martin (*Chair*)
                 Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan
                 Senior Tutor, Professor Claire Laudet
                 Dean of Students, Professor Kevin O'Kelly
                 Professor Jarlath Killeen, School of English
                 Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
                 Professor Elaine Moriarty, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
                 Professor Sarah Smyth, Director of TSM
                 Professor Ciaran Simms, School of Engineering
                 Professor Fáinche Ryan, School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology
                 Professor James Hanrahan, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
                 Professor Eric Weitz, School of Drama, Film and Music
                 Professor Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities
                 Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science
                 Professor Des Ryan, School of Law
                 Professor Imelda Coyne, School of Nursing and Midwifery
                 Professor Robbie Gilligan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
                 Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
                 Professor Mary-Lee Rhodes, School of Business
                 Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education
                 Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics
                 Ms Molly Kenny, Education Officer, Students' Union

Apologies: Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
                 Professor Kevin Devine, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education
                 Professor David Wilkins, School of Mathematics
                 Professor Michael Bridge, School of Chemistry
                 Professor Howard Smith, School of Psychology
                 Professor Mike Brady, School of Computer Science and Statistics
                 Professor Kevin Conlon, School of Medicine
                 Professor Jane Farrar, School of Genetics and Microbiology
                 Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences
                 Ms Sinéad Baker, Student Representative

In attendance: Ms Elaine Egan; Mr David Mockler, Library Representative; Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior
                 Academic Developer; Dean of Graduate Studies and Ms Sarah Coyle for item USC/15-
                 16/140; Professor Michael Shevlin and Professor Natasha Spassiani, School of Education, for
                 item USC/15-16/142

USC/15-16/138   Minutes
             The minutes of the meeting of 22 March 2016 were approved.

USC/15-16/139   Matters arising

        USC/15-16/133   The CAO admissions data would be discussed at a future meeting of USC.

USC/15-16/140   Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
XX   A draft policy together with a memorandum from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer and the Dean of Graduate Studies, dated 12 April 2016, was circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed the Dean of Graduate Studies and Ms Sarah Coyle, Trinity Teaching and Learning, to the meeting.

       The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer provided some context for the RPL policy and advised that as Ireland was within the European Qualifications Framework it was subject to the European Council Directive of 20 December 2012, which stated that all countries must have RPL procedures in place by 2018.

       In December 2015, a working group was established to define a policy position for Trinity with respect to the recognition of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning, taking into account current practice in relation to undergraduate and postgraduate admission and credit exemption. The working group was chaired by the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer and the Dean of Graduate Studies and included members of USC, GSC and Trinity Teaching and Learning.

       The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted that the policy was high-level, compared with the very granular policies in some other universities. She highlighted that an RPL policy would support the widening participation strategy that had been approved in Trinity.

       She outlined that Trinity had been facilitating RPL for years and that this had been borne out in the results of a recent survey to Directors for Teaching and Learning, Undergraduate and Postgraduate. Adhering to a policy would ensure that the RPL process was consistent, equitable and transparent, and it would allow for knowledge sharing and centralised data capture.

       Under the proposed policy, registered students applying for credit exemption post-admission, based on prior learning, could be exempted up to a limit of 20 ECTS at undergraduate level and 10 ECTS at postgraduate level in a given year.   Credit exemptions would not be permitted in the final two years of an undergraduate programme. It was noted that accrediting bodies may have stipulations that students cannot be exempted from particular modules.

       The current regulations for advanced entry, whereby applicants need to complete at least the final two academic years at Trinity in order to be eligible for consideration for an undergraduate degree, would continue to apply in cases of RPL at point of admission. Advanced entry to a programme would continue to be subject to quota and availability in the relevant programme year.

       A number of areas for consideration were highlighted to the Committee:
- implications for SITS;
- provision of adequate resources to provide support for applicants and training for relevant staff;
- whether a fee would be applicable.

       Comments were invited from the Committee and there was an overall positive response to the introduction of an RPL policy. On the subject of introducing a fee, one member felt that this could work against the widening participation strategy. In response to a

member's query, it was noted that the progression from an undergraduate course to the first year of a postgraduate course did not come under the RPL policy.

A concern was raised regarding students in the common-entry Science course being ineligible to specialise in their chosen field in the JS year if they had received an exemption for a module which turned out to be a pre-requisite in that subject area. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted that consideration of the appropriateness of RPL for individual students would need to be a priority when considering applications.

A discussion took place on the difficulties involved in identifying and quantifying prior learning of both a formal and an informal nature. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer acknowledged the increased workload RPL could bring and the requirement for support and training for staff involved in the process.

In response to a query asking who had responsibility for RPL on a multi-disciplinary course, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer emphasised that roles and responsibilities in the process would vary amongst different academic structures. She noted that it may be appropriate at the time of implementation for courses to nominate certain colleagues to liaise with Academic Registry.

At the request of members it was agreed that guidelines based on the content of the policy would be produced for colleagues and applicants.

The committee approved the policy on RPL. The policy would be considered by GSC ahead of consideration by Council.

USC/15-16/141   **Update on the Trinity Education Project**
         XX   A memorandum from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer to Council, dated 6 April 2016, had been circulated. The memorandum provided feedback on the proposed curriculum principles and architecture that had been received at and after the consultation fora held on 16 March 2016.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer summarized some of the positive feedback received. This included programme architecture that could be future-proofed; enabled student choice in terms of pathways and progression; decoupled entry from exit routes; and increased flexibility.

Other feedback included that flexibility should not be introduced in the freshman years due to the importance of covering a range of foundation modules; that the proposed 90 ECTS credits in the minor discipline of a double discipline programme was too high; that free electives must bring value to a student's degree programme; and that the 20 ECTS credit value proposed for the capstone project was considered too high.

Revised models for programme architecture were being worked on and once completed, Heads of Schools would be asked to indicate which model/s their programme(s) fit into. Further consultation would be required with Heads of Schools of professional programmes. A proposal on programme architecture would be brought to Council in May/June 2016.

A forum to discuss the proposed assessment framework and academic year structure had taken place on 18 April 2016. The Senior Academic Developer and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer brought the meeting through the presentation from that forum. The Senior Academic Developer advised that the working group on assessment had researched best practice in assessment and had developed a number of recommendations to support the introduction of an effective assessment framework in

Trinity. She elaborated on the proposed recommendations and highlighted how work was being done to consider how these would be implemented in practice.   The recommendations indicated that the entire spectrum of graduate attributes should be assessed in the curriculum; a whole-programme focus to assessment must be adopted; students should engage as partners in assessment; assessment practices should be authentic and connected to real-world challenges.

She noted that the term 'graduate skills' encompassed knowledge, skills and behaviours and emphasised that many of the attributes were learned from co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, but that the working group did not consider it appropriate to assess these. It was possible, however, that some of these activities would be acknowledged on a student's transcript.

A programme-focused approach to assessment would ensure that programmes would not be over-assessed and would eliminate duplicate assessments.   She emphasised the importance of having a range of effective assessments that would reflect the connections between modules. She indicated that encouraging more in-depth student engagement in assessment would mark a change of culture from students being mainly focused on their grade to valuing assessment as a learning tool. It would be assessment for learning, rather than just as a means to measure learning.

In response to a concern regarding the possible implications for lecturers' workloads, she clarified that these should not be negatively impacted as the approach advocated fewer, but more effective assessments. She also requested that members forward to her examples of effective modes of assessment that they were using.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer advised that the academic year structure should be considered in partnership with the assessment framework.   She noted the implications of the proposed assessment framework for the academic year structure: these included widening the range of formative and summative assessments, balancing their spread across the academic year, maintaining a more integrated focus, and moving away from an over-reliance on end-of-year formal examinations. The academic year structure must also provide space to offer students opportunities to reflect on their learning and to engage in varied types of collaborative and individual learning.

The Trinity Education Project team had reviewed a number of models of academic year structures nationally and internationally and was proposing two models. Both models encompassed the principles that programmes would be taught and assessed within the same teaching period, that they would normally consist of 30 ECTS credits per semester, and they would include a learning week or weeks in each semester. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer brought the meeting through a copy of the two proposed academic year structures, which were tabled at the meeting.

She emphasised that a revised academic year structure would provide the opportunity to think about how students were assessed and that it was not a matter of imposing what we currently do in Trinity on a revised structure. She acknowledged that there would be a number of implications when it came to the implementation stage, including: progression from one semester to the next, the fixed timetable, streamlining of modules and assessment weighting, online module registration, turnaround time for CAO offers, and professional development support for staff and students.

Members were invited to comment on what they considered to be the main benefits and challenges of the proposed assessment framework and on which academic year structure they preferred.

A number of members welcomed the proposals and the opportunity to review existing structures. Members welcomed the extra 'learning' weeks in the academic year structure and the space this would provide for students.

A number of concerns were also raised including that option 2 might put an unreasonably heavy workload on weaker students who were required to repeat examinations and might result in them focusing on their repeat examinations rather than the examinations for Semester 2. It was also felt that the terms 'learning' and 'teaching' weeks should be revised.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer reported that comments from the forum the previous day had suggested that having two 'learning' weeks in Semester 2 could result in fragmentation of teaching. The point was raised by a member that the asymmetry between Semesters 1 and 2 in terms of the number of 'learning' weeks could result in staff seeking to have their modules taught in Semester 1, rather than Semester 2. In response to a query, she clarified that the proposed structures would not facilitate assessment in the second semester of a module taken in the first semester. A member noted that due to discipline-specific issues, this would cause difficulties for his School.

In response to a query, the Senior Academic Developer confirmed that the learning week was not a reading week but rather an opportunity to engage in group or project work and whilst no lectures or formal examinations could be scheduled, consideration could be given to holding practical assessments.

Further comments included that despite the difficulties it might pose for international students and outgoing Trinity students, consideration should be given to holding examinations after Christmas; that the intensification of teaching over 11 weeks in both the current structure and the proposed structures placed undue pressure on students; that an earlier start to the academic year would not permit the allocation of tutors within SITS; that consideration could be given to merging the Scholarship week with a standard assessment week. A number of members proposed a different structure for the academic year and details of these and of the comments made would be passed to the Trinity Education Project team.

A proposal on the assessment framework and academic year structure would be circulated to Council in May 2016.

USC/15-16/142   **Level 5 Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice**
A proposal for a Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice from the School of Education had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed Professors Michael Shevlin and Natasha Spassiani from the School of Education to introduce the proposal.

The course was an initiative from the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) in the School of Education. It was a two-year full-time course, comprising 120 ECTS credits and it was proposed that 10-20 EU students would be admitted in September 2016. The course built on the Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL) which had been approved by Council in 2006. The CCL was not aligned to the NFQ and students successfully completing the course did not receive a formal qualification. The TCPID had substantially re-conceptualised the course to align with undergraduate curricula in terms of its approach. The proposed course involved more standardised entry requirements, standardised programme and module learning outcomes, and it was aligned with Level 5 of the NFQ.

The proposers noted that more young people with intellectual disabilities attended

mainstream schools than ever before, but that there was a lack of opportunities for progression at the end of second-level education. The programme aimed to provide an opportunity to complete an award at Level 5 and to offer a pathway to employment opportunities. It was closely aligned with the commitment in the Strategic Plan 2014-19 to promote equality and diversity in College.

The proposers brought the meeting through the content of the curriculum and the relevance that the different components had for individuals with intellectual disabilities. There would be an emphasis on work experience and a Pathways Coordinator would manage work placements for students. Links had also been established with outside business partners who had provided positive feedback on the proposed programme. It was noted that the programme staff would continue to reach out to Schools and encouraged members to get in touch if they felt that there were opportunities in their curriculum to involve the students on the programme.

In response to a query on the high number of assessments, the proposers confirmed that research had demonstrated that multiple assessments and modes of assessments were optimal for this cohort of students. Other comments from members included a query with regard to the accuracy of the term 'fine arts'; that library staff would be provided with an orientation to enable them to best support the students; and that consideration would be given to including a designated library shelf for programme materials.

The proposers thanked USC for its time and also thanked members of the College community for their assistance with the course development, including the Academic Secretary and staff of Trinity Teaching and Learning, the Vice-Provost and the Faculty Dean.

USC recommended the course for external review, in advance of consideration by Council.

USC/15-16/143
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Non-EU Collaborative and Transnational Education Partnerships draft policy
The Academic Secretary introduced the circulated policy.   She noted that in the last number of years, international recruitment in Trinity had grown rapidly and that many partnerships with international institutions had been established. The policy was designed to provide a framework for these partnerships and to ensure they were of a suitable standard. Trinity must comply with QQI policy in this area.

The policy should help academic staff, in conjunction with Trinity Teaching and Learning and the Global Relations Office, to develop partnerships that would be strategically useful and would attract funding. The Academic Secretary noted the significant funding benefits of the recent collaboration between Trinity and Thapar University.

She took the members through the draft policy, highlighting areas of particular importance. The policy outlined a protocol to protect the university brand by ensuring that partnerships would be entered into only with institutions that were in good financial and legal standing and whose principles on research were consistent with Trinity's.

When developing collaborative partnerships with overseas HEIs, institution-level agreements would normally be entered into with peer institutions only. In order to enter into a Faculty or School-level agreement with an institution whose international ranking was not uniformly high, the institution would need to be internationally recognised in the relevant discipline.   Partnerships in emerging markets would need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The academic standards of the proposed partner should be on par with Trinity's awards and consistent with the NFQ level descriptors. The quality of the student experience should also be on par with Trinity and the standard of facilities in the partner institution should be verified by Trinity.

Three main levels of partnership were identified in the policy:
1) Major institutional-level commitment
2) Academic programmes subject to an agreement/framework
3) Smaller collaborations.

The Academic Secretary noted that not all partnerships would fit neatly into just one level and that the level of partnership might change as relationships with a partner evolved.

The proposal had been discussed by the Planning Group, by Heads of School, and by the International Committee and would shortly be discussed by the Graduate Studies Committee.

A member suggested that partnerships should not be permitted with institutions where the international ranking was not uniformly high, even where the relevant discipline was internationally recognised. In response, the Academic Secretary noted that the level of engagement with the partner institution would have to be sufficiently robust and involve a high level of familiarity with the relevant jurisdiction to ensure the quality of the partnership.

In response to a query, the Academic Secretary emphasised that the language level in the policy represented the minimum requirement and that programmes could assess students in order to satisfy themselves of their language proficiency. She also noted that Trinity's articulation agreements were very specific regarding entry requirements and that programmes/schools had scope to define further requirements. She confirmed that the relationship with a partner institution would usually be managed by the relevant School.

She informed members that a partnership toolkit, developed by the Global Relations Office and Quality Office, Trinity Teaching and Learning, would shortly be available online. The toolkit would provide information on assessing an institution and a programme, curriculum mapping, the meaning of articulation in different jurisdictions, etc.

USC approved the policy as presented. The policy would be considered by GSC ahead of consideration by Council.

USC/15-16/144   **Procedures for the approval of new undergraduate modules**

XX   A discussion document, together with a memorandum from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, dated 18 February 2016, had been circulated, together with feedback from schools. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted that the feedback had supported the proposed approval process for new modules and modules with significant changes. She noted that the proposal supported good practice and would encourage a high level of communication between colleagues on programmes. She advised that stand-alone modules would continue to be considered by USC.

The procedures had been discussed at the previous meeting of USC, but the decision on whether to approve them or not had been deferred as a number of members had indicated that they would shortly be considered at the meetings of their School Executives.

USC approved the proposed procedures which would proceed to Council for consideration.

USC/15-16/145   Any other business
The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer requested feedback from members on two items that would be on the agenda of the next meeting of USC. These were:

1) Implementation of the general papers or general section/s in the Scholarship examination.
2) The return of work policy.

USC/15-16/146   Minutes
USC noted the following minutes:

1. **Associated Colleges Degrees Committee**, draft minutes of 18 November 2015
2. **Royal Irish Academy of Music, Associated College Degrees Committee**, minutes of 4 November 2015 and 3 February 2016

USC/15-16/147   Items for noting
There were no items for noting.