



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 11 October 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 Aidan Seery
 - Dean of Students, Professor Kevin O’Kelly
 - Professor Elaine Moriarty, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
 - Professor Sarah Smyth, Director of TSM
 - Professor Alan O’Connor, School of Engineering
 - Professor Cathriona Russell, School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology
 - Professor Brian Brewer, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
 - Professor David Prendergast, School of Law
 - Professor John Walsh, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
 - Professor Louis Brennan, School of Business
 - Professor Kevin Mitchell, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education
 - Professor Paschalis Karageorgis, School of Mathematics
 - Professor Imelda Coyne, School of Nursing and Midwifery
 - Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education
 - Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science
 - Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
 - Professor Michael Bridge, School of Chemistry
 - Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
 - Professor Elizabeth Nixon, School of Psychology
 - Professor Frank Wellmer, School of Genetics and Microbiology
 - Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences
 - Professor Mike Brady, School of Computer Science and Statistics
 - Professor Jarlath Killeen, School of English
 - Mr Dale Whelehan, Education Officer, Students’ Union
- Apologies:**
- Professor Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities
 - Professor Eric Weitz, School of Drama, Film and Music
 - Professor Kevin Conlon, School of Medicine
 - Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics
 - Professor Robbie Gilligan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
 - Mr Colm O’Halloran, Student Representative
- In attendance:** Ms Elaine Egan; Dr Alison Oldam, Director of Student Services; Dr Sean O’Reilly, Student Recruitment Officer for item USC/16-17/012

USC/16-17/009 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13 September 2016 were approved.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer reported that a correction to the figures relating to the Northern Ireland Feasibility Study had been received subsequent to

the last USC meeting. The minutes referred to 102 students accepting a place whereas the revised figure was 78 students; 55 of these were via the standard route and 23 via the Feasibility Study.

USC/16-17/010 Matters arising

USC/16-17/005 Council had approved the acceptance of the HE for matriculation purposes for the legacy cohort.

USC/16-17/011 Admissions Data September 2016

A memorandum from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer to Council, dated 27 September 2016, together with admissions data for 2016, had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer had been asked to bring admissions data to Council that was more up-to-date than that contained in the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer's Annual Report 2014/15 (with admissions data for 2015/16). She advised that her office was looking to produce the SLAR in a different way that would allow for the admissions data to be captured at a much earlier stage in the academic year.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer highlighted a number of points in the data. She noted that there had been an increase in 2% over the 2015/16 figures of total number of applicants through the CAO for Level 8 courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions. A total of 18,540 students had mentioned Trinity as one or more of their CAO preferences, representing a 2% increase over 2015/16. The total number of applications to courses increased to 40,855 from 39,395 in 2015. The number of applicants who gave their first preference to Trinity also increased by 2%.

She advised that the data on course quotas related to 22 September 2016 and there had been some movement since then. The results of the rechecks of the Leaving Certificate would be known that week and would cause further changes to the figures. It was generally expected that if a recheck resulted in an upgrade, that HEIs would accept the student (with the exception of laboratory-based courses where it could be proven it was not possible to accommodate an extra place). She noted that the majority of course quotas had been filled in 2016. The overall quota for Trinity courses was 2922 which represented an increase from the previous year of 2888. The Senior Lecturer's Annual Report provided data on courses and subjects that did not meet quota due to insufficient eligible applications. Some of these courses and subjects appeared on a regular basis in the list. There was also some fluctuation year-on-year in terms of the acceptance of offers. The overall average acceptance rates in Round 1 was 77% (77% also in 2015).

The Provost had requested a financial analysis of the impact of under- and over- filling course quotas. The circulated document provided details of the loss of fee income relating to courses that were not filled for one year and also additional fee income received from over-filling courses for one year.

2016/17 was the first year of the revised model for converting A-level grades to CAO points. There had been an increase of 23% in applications from students in Northern Ireland and more offers had been made than in 2015. However, the number of acceptances was significantly lower than in 2015. The acceptance rate for standard offers was 28% whilst the acceptance rate for offers via the Feasibility Study was 50%; resulting in an overall acceptance rate of 32%. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted that there was a similar trend in at least one other Irish university and a discussion had taken place at Council as to the possible effect that Brexit may have had on the acceptance rate.

In response to a query, the Dean emphasised that the admissions process was not an exact science and that acceptance rates could fluctuate significantly from year-to-year. She noted that, given the indeterminate nature of the process, it would not be possible to avoid over- and under-filling of some courses. A member referred to the impact of seeking to fill course quotas in the first round. Members enquired as to the implications of under-filled courses and what the purpose had been of calculating the loss of income. The Dean highlighted that in the context of TEP, Trinity should look at its course offerings and the combinations of subjects available and at the patterns of quotas being filled. The Director of TSM warned of the danger of recruiting students to combinations that had not filled their quotas as these tended to be the less popular combinations and carried a risk that students might opt for them as a way to get into Trinity without having a particular interest in the course. A member commented that the main focus should be on the balance between over- and under- filling courses and that a level of cross-subsidisation should be permitted. The difficulties that could arise from over-filling courses were discussed and it was noted that it put a significant strain on resources for students, particularly for courses with a clinical aspect. A member noted that pressure had previously been put on their course to accept a significant number of students above the quota in order to keep the points level down. Some members expressed their discontent that while there was a focus on loss of fee income because of not being able to fill quotas, there was no financial gain to the those Schools whose courses were filled over quota.

USC/16-17/012 Student Recruitment Officer update

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed the Student Recruitment Officer (SRO) to the meeting for this item. The SRO gave a presentation on student recruitment and outreach activity.

He advised that in 2015/16 he had been supported by three part-time postgraduate student ambassadors, and a part-time postgraduate student coordinator for Northern Ireland. This represented a reduced level of support from the previous year.

He reported that there had been nearly 8,200 attendees at Open Day on 5 December 2015. It had been the first year that coordination with the Communications Office had taken place and a social media plan had been engaged. This resulted in Trinity trending on Twitter for the day and a more even spread of attendees over the course of the day.

He brought the meeting through the high number of events at which Trinity had been represented and highlighted the noticeable increase in campus visits by students both in, and outside of, Ireland. He estimated that the Student Recruitment team had engaged with over 15,500 students in 2015/16. He outlined the areas of the country where engagement with students was particularly high, including Dublin and the border regions, and others where engagement was lower, including the Midlands and the Mid-West. He noted the positive effect of the engagement activity in Northern Ireland over the last number of years.

In association with the Dean of Students' Office, all CAO applicants had been contacted in July and August via email to encourage them to consider accepting a place at Trinity. The SRO emphasised that further efforts must be made to communicate with applicants to ensure Trinity remained at the forefront of their minds coming up to offers being made. He noted the 2% increase in CAO first preference applications to Trinity and the nearly 20% increase in applications from Northern Ireland. He also noted the negative impact that Brexit had on acceptances from Northern Ireland and emphasised how Trinity must be clear to students on the implications arising from Brexit.

The SRO had met with a number of schools and departments to support course-specific recruitment activity and was keen to consult further to discuss what could be achieved in promoting Trinity to students.

The SRO also highlighted the success of Trinity's attendance at the Higher Options Fair on 14-16 September 2016. The Trinity space at Higher Options had been improved and a high number of academic staff had attended the event. A total of 15,000 Prospectuses had been given out at the event. In response to a query he reported that feedback on the changes to the Prospectus in 2016 had been very positive. Feedback had suggested that a summary document alongside the Prospectus would be valuable and this would be considered in the future. The SRO highlighted the importance of TEP in recruiting students and that changes arising from the TEP would impact on a range of recruitment activities and the Prospectus.

Members were invited to comment and acknowledged the extensive work carried out by the SRO and his small team. A member noted that the 2% increase in first preference applications to Trinity mirrored the 2% increase in applications across the board, and expressed a concern that the high level of engagement in Northern Ireland had resulted in only 78 acceptances. In response, the SRO emphasised the difficulty of competing with the UCAS system that made conditional offers at a much earlier stage in the academic year. He noted that despite consistent effort, there was a residual reluctance amongst some Guidance Counsellors to promote Trinity to their students and also a lack of awareness of the CAO admissions process.

He felt that Trinity needed further resources to engage in an effective and impactful recruitment campaign and noted that our competitors had much greater resources in this area.

A member who had attended the Higher Options event commended the SRO on the improvements to the Trinity stand, but noted that he had received many queries from students comparing the laboratory facilities of Trinity with the newer facilities of UCD. Other feedback included the possibility of scaling up the Transition Year programme and the importance of upgrading the online presence of Trinity for recruitment purposes.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer commended the SRO for his work and thanked him for speaking to this item.

USC/16-17/013 Trinity Education Project

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer noted that the TEP discussions at USC would be used both to update the Committee and to share best practice across areas. She advised that Undergraduate Programme Committees should begin to review 1) programme architecture in the context of agreed structures, 2) how curricula permit progression through the various levels and pathways leading to the exit awards, and 3) assessment practices.

The appointment process for five Trinity Education Teaching Fellows was underway and it was hoped that it would be complete in the following week. The Fellows would work with clusters of schools to provide support in moving towards the new architecture. They would assist schools with the embedding of graduate attributes into curricula, introducing breadth, introducing a programme-based approach to assessment, facilitating the introduction of approved modules, and facilitating development of the Trinity electives. A working group would also be established to look more broadly at the Trinity electives.

One of the working groups that reported into Strand 1 of TEP was looking at entry routes for admission into TSM and other joint programmes to protect the quality of

subject/student quotas and to simplify the admissions routes. The group would develop proposals in relation to entry, which take account of the IUA TGRUSE principles to which Trinity signed up in 2013 and sought to reduce the number of denominated entry routes.

The Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education reported that the three Science streams had been agreed upon and that the five direct entry courses would be folded into the streams, but would continue to exist as moderatorships. A document outlining the Science entry routes would be prepared by November 2016.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer outlined the work needed around progression and awards in order to simplify progression rules and develop principles that would facilitate transition through pathways. She highlighted the importance of adopting clear and transparent regulations across the university with regard to issues like compensation and aggregation, the availability of repeat examinations, repetition of year, award calculation, and pass marks. A draft document would be brought to USC for discussion early in 2017.

The Dean referred to the work that would be necessary to implement a fixed timetable. A draft paper including recommendations on implementation would be brought to USC for discussion by the beginning of 2017. It would address issues including the size of modules, modules provided across years, and the availability of modules across levels. Also included would be recommendations on centralising the allocation of teaching space and optimising the use of existing space and facilities.

In response to a question, the Dean advised that in addition to the five Teaching Fellows, colleagues in CAPSL and Trinity Teaching and Learning would be available to provide support in planning for implementation. Seminars would also be organised on assessment and other relevant themes. She acknowledged the work and challenges involved in implementing TEP. A member raised a concern regarding the lack of a clear resource model for implementation and noted that it could raise difficulties around approved modules electives. The Dean noted the issue and indicated that it had been raised at various fora. She confirmed the timeline of having programme entry routes for the 2018 intake defined by March 2017 to meet the CAO handbook deadline. A member reported that the Teaching Fellows would also provide advice on ensuring that curricula could support co- and extra- curricular activities in terms of time and flexibility.

The Senior Academic Developer gave a presentation on assessment. She brought the meeting through the assessment tenets and advised that assessment would support the acquisition of graduate attributes. She indicated that some of the graduate attributes were easy to assess whereas others posed greater challenges in terms of how they might be assessed. The working group on assessment was looking at how courses were assessed and how to encourage students to articulate their graduate attributes. Assessment should not just be seen as a way of measuring learning, but *as* learning and *for* learning. To avoid the risk of over-assessment that could come with modularisation, it was important to have a programme-focus; to map assessment throughout the entire programme. It was also important to look at the number of assessments with a view to including fewer, more meaningful assessments and assessments that could be integrated across modules. She highlighted the importance of preparing students to be able to self-assess and also the importance of peer-assessment. She acknowledged the cultural change involved in moving away from assessment only being linked to marks to assessment being used as a way of learning.

She noted that a range of good practice in assessment was taking place in schools and departments, but that it was often 'below the radar'. She provided a few examples of

current good practice in College. The Teaching Fellows could provide support in identifying and disseminating good practice across College.

In response to a query, she noted that studies had shown that while students appreciated a choice of assessments, they did not want to be given too much choice. A member noted that the Disability Services could be consulted with regard to different assessment methods and the impact of these on certain students. In response to a member's comment regarding the need to link in with accrediting bodies on any change of assessment practice, she noted that in professional schools there was usually a strong link between graduate attributes and assessment.

The Dean advised that she would contact individual Directors of Teaching and Learning to ask them to bring examples of good practice in their areas to USC for discussion.

USC/16-17/014 Role of External Examiner in the UK

A document dated 4 October 2016 was circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer asked the Academic Secretary to provide context for this item and advised that a full discussion on the item would take place at the next USC meeting.

The Academic Secretary noted that it had been suggested at Council that the role of external examiners be reviewed. Staff in Trinity Teaching and Learning had carried out some research into the role of the external examiner in the UK and in other Irish universities. Following a discussion of this issue at GSC, and a fuller discussion at USC, it was proposed to bring recommendations to Council regarding the role of the external examiner in Trinity. She noted that the external examiner process in Trinity was considered as an important part of controlling and assuring the quality of programmes. With the implications of the recent approval of the joint and dual awards policy and the different types of programmes that would be introduced, the importance of a robust quality control system was greater than ever.

The Dean requested feedback from members and their Schools on what they considered to be the role of external examiners in Trinity. A member emphasised the importance of communicating the changes that would arise with TEP to external examiners and felt this could be done by compiling a comprehensive information pack.

A member requested that the fee for external examiners be increased to recognise the level of work carried out. The Dean noted that there was a sliding scale of payment in the UK and that the fee issue could be considered at a later date.

USC/16-17/015 Articulation Agreement

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A memorandum from the Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning, Trinity Business School, dated 11 October 2016, together with a draft articulation agreement had been circulated.

The Director introduced the item and informed the meeting that a memorandum of understanding with the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh (UEH) had been signed in June 2016, which built on an existing relationship between UEH and the Trinity Business School in the area of International Finance. Under College's existing policy, an exercise in due diligence that involved curriculum mapping had been carried out and he noted that the School of Business was satisfied that there was an appropriate level of congruence in the curricula. He brought the meeting through the different agreement clauses, highlighting the admissions criteria, the selection of participants, and the progression requirements.

The meeting sought clarification on the process for agreeing an articulation agreement and what, if any, quality controls were in place with respect to admissions, English language competence, curriculum congruence, and students' academic readiness to enter Year 3 or 4 of an existing Trinity programme. The Academic Secretary referred to the 'Non-EU Collaborative and Transnational Education Partnerships Policy', approved in the academic year 2015-16, noting that there were three levels of partnerships: (i) major institutional-level commitment, e.g. Thapar partnership, (ii) academic programmes and frameworks, and (iii) smaller collaborations such as student and staff exchanges. She explained the different types of possible engagements with domestic and international partners, and assured the committee that robust procedures were in place to assess academic quality and student readiness. With respect to academic programmes, and proposals for articulation agreements and programmes leading to joint and dual awards, she commented that these were prepared by the relevant schools with support from Trinity Teaching and Learning and considered by the relevant academic officers. Such proposals were then brought forward in the normal way for consideration by the Undergraduate and/or Graduate Studies Committees and, subject to agreement, were recommended to the University Council. Proposals for new awards must also be approved by the Senate.

Responding to queries on English Language competence, she advised the meeting that discussions were in train with the Centre for English Language Learning and Teaching to assess the English language competence, but she did not have further information on this. The meeting felt that it was important to ensure robust assessment of potential partners and that students entering under articulation agreements were academically prepared and had a good prospect of completing their studies. The Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning, Business School, confirmed that UEH was a university of international standing and that students took courses that were taught in part through English.

It was noted that the Draft Articulation Agreement had not yet been considered by UEH. Trinity input into the selection process was suggested and it was recommended, and accepted by the Committee, that the Business School should be involved in an external evaluation of the Year 2 of the UEH Business Administration Programme. In response to a query about quotas, the Director confirmed that entry to Year 3 of the BBS was subject to places being available.

The Undergraduate Studies Committee approved the Draft Articulation Agreement subject to UEH's agreement and adequate controls in place to ensure English language competence.

USC/16-17/016 Student Evaluation

A memorandum from the Academic Secretary to the Quality Committee, dated 3 October 2016 had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer invited the Academic Secretary to introduce the item on student evaluation and advised that a fuller discussion would take place at a future meeting of USC.

The Academic Secretary acknowledged the high level of discussion that had taken place at USC regarding the value of module evaluation and the fact that it was mandatory in College. She noted that Council received the quality reports from each faculty: these showed that, in general, all taught undergraduate modules were evaluated in some form or other. She noted also that the Council regulation regarding mandatory evaluation of modules had allowed evaluation to be carried out in a manner that was chosen by the school or department.

The Academic Secretary and the Student Union Education Officer would engage with schools on the issue of module evaluation to determine which kind/s of evaluation might

be considered to best suit Trinity. Following consultation, recommendations would be made to USC and Council.

Some research of relevant literature and practice in other universities had been carried out by staff in Trinity Teaching Learning and had been circulated for the meeting. A member commented that studies had shown a lack of correlation between student learning and the rating of a course. The Senior Academic Developer noted that the entire programme experience was important, rather than just the experience of individual modules. A member observed that, having reviewed the research, they were not convinced of the validity of the student evaluation process and questioned why the exercise was being carried out on an annual basis when the validity was in question. A member commented that they did not agree with the finding that online evaluations resulted in lower response rates than in paper based evaluations.

The timing of evaluations was discussed and a number of members felt there was greater value in evaluations being carried out by students a number of years after they had completed the programme. The issue of survey fatigue was recognised by members who highlighted the large number of surveys involved in mandatory module evaluation. The value of speaking with students as a form of evaluation was recognised with some members noting that it yielded very valuable information. The Academic Secretary highlighted the richness of the information that was received from both students and staff during programme reviews and felt that the existing student module evaluation process did not yield the same quality of data.

Members were asked to discuss student evaluation in their areas and bring information back to the next meeting of USC when the item would be discussed in full.

USC/16-17/017 Self-Evaluation of USC 2015/16

A summary of the results of the self-evaluation survey of USC 2015/16 had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer brought the meeting through some of the comments received and outlined the reasons behind the issues and noted where improvements could be made.

A member noted the value of having discussions at USC, compared to just receiving information.

USC/16-17/018 Any Other Business

A member had raised the issue of students being given permission by the Disability Service to record lectures and noted that some of the audio material on his course was under copyright. He also raised a concern with students taking photographs of slides in lectures. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer brought the meeting's attention to a Calendar regulation that stated that 'Students with disabilities may be permitted to record lectures if it is deemed a reasonable accommodation by the Disability Service.' It was agreed that the Director of the Disability Service would be invited to a future meeting of USC to discuss this issue.

USC/16-17/019 Items for noting

USC noted the following item:

Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer's Annual Report 2014/15.