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 21 March 2017 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 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 Louis Brennan, School of Business
             Professor Paschalis Karageorgis, School of Mathematics
             Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science
             Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
             Professor Michael Bridge, School of Chemistry
             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
             Professor Peter Cherry, School of Histories and Humanities
             Professor Eric Weitz, School of Drama, Film and Music
             Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics
             Professor Elizabeth Nixon, School of Psychology
             Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education

Apologies: Professor Robbie Gilligan, School of Social Work and Social Policy
             Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
             Professor Alan O'Connor, School of Engineering
             Professor Kevin Mitchell, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education
             Professor Kevin Conlon, School of Medicine
             Professor Imelda Coyne, School of Nursing and Midwifery
             Professor John Walsh, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
             Mr Dale Whelehan, Education Officer, Students' Union
             Mr Colm O'Halloran, Student Representative

In attendance: Ms Elaine Egan; Ms Siobhan Dunne, Library Representative; Professor Sarah O'Brien,
             Director, Centre for English Language Learning and Teaching, for item USC/16-17/047;
             Associate Dean of Online Learning, for item USC/16-17/49a

Item 6 on the agenda was taken immediately after item 2 at the meeting.

USC/16-17/043   Minutes
             The minutes of the meeting of 21 February 2017 were approved subject to an amendment
             to the second half of the fourth paragraph for item USC/16-17/038 C. The text now spans

two paragraphs that read as follows:

The proposer noted that students would be eligible to apply for financial aid packages from Columbia and that the University of Dublin Fund US had offered to fund two scholarships of $14,000 each for both years of the pilot programme.

In response to a concern regarding the demands of the summer study and internship arrangements, specifically, that students would not have any summer break, the proposer emphasised that the structure of the programme had already been approved by Council and noted that this issue had been considered in the consultation period. A member raised a concern that due to the high cost of student fees and the living costs associated with the programme, it would only be available to students in the top socio-economic group.

USC/16-17/044 **Matters arising**
USC/16-17/036a A paper on Internships and Student Mobility would be submitted to Council in April 2017. A forum held earlier that day had been well attended.

USC/16-17/038a&b The proposal for the Bachelor in Stage Management and Technical Theatre and the proposal for the Certificate in Innovation and Entrepreneurship had been sent for external review.

USC/16-17/038c The proposal for the TCD-Colombia Dual Degree Programme Pilot was approved by Council at its meeting of 8 March 2017. The Provost had emphasised at that meeting the importance of an external review of the full proposal. Three students had been accepted to participate in the pilot.

USC/16-17/040 The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reminded members to inform Elaine Egan if they had an iPad that could be used for USC meeting papers.

USC/16-17/036b A member raised a concern that the time to process and publish results was too short in both the annual and supplemental examination sessions in the proposed academic year structure. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies observed that this had also been raised as an issue for the Academic Registry at the last USC meeting and that it was important to note these concerns.

USC/16-17/045 **Student Partnership**
In the unavoidable absence of the SU Education Officer, this item was deferred to the next meeting of USC.

USC/16-17/046 **Trinity Education Project**
a) **General Update**
The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reported that the Electives Working Group (Strand 4) would bring recommendations to the Steering Group on 29 March 2017. The recommendations build on the interim report that had previously been discussed at Steering Group in December and at USC. The Trinity Electives will be developed along the principles that were set out in the interim report. The Working Group was recommending that the Trinity Electives be developed around the research themes, but that there would also be an opportunity to develop Trinity Electives that broaden students' knowledge and understanding of key societal challenges, both contemporary and historical, and would ideally be amenable to multi-disciplinary exploration. It was also proposed that languages would be offered as Trinity Electives. All Trinity Electives should offer some form of blended delivery, on a spectrum of 20-80+%. This would encourage technology-enhanced learning, promote innovative approaches to teaching and learning and allow for an optimal fit between content and the modality of delivery. Electives would be stand-alone modules, delivered and assessed within one semester, and weighted at 5 ECTS credits.

The Working Group is recommending that there be a single module coordinator for each elective located in a named school who would be responsible for module delivery and assessment. Longer term, governance should be mainstreamed into the normal committee structures that will emerge through the TEP. In the start-up phase, an oversight committee, most likely chaired by the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, would be set up to ensure the coherence and quality of provision, the academic robustness, and that the electives conform to the established principles.

A member emphasised the importance of proper staffing to ensure efficient administration of the Trinity Electives. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that a system of online enrolment would be necessary. A member queried whether further thought had been given to transferable skills being taught through the electives, along the lines of the Certificate in Innovation and Entrepreneurship that had been discussed at the last meeting of USC. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that such a module could fall within the scope of Trinity Electives. A member noted that the workload model that takes account of staff involvement in electives would need to be discussed at a College-level to take account of the new electives. In response to a query, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that the working group was supportive of introducing incentives for offering electives and this had been brought to the attention of the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer.

b)   Progression and Awards Forum
There had been a good turnout at the forum on progression and awards in the previous week. The focus of the forum had been on three different areas:
- the number of credits required to pass a year of study;
- reassessment;
- repetition of year.

The questions to be asked at the forum had been sent to attendees in advance, together with the initial recommendations of the working group in relation to each of the three areas and the rationale for what the recommendation sought to achieve. These initial recommendations had also been discussed at USC in January. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies emphasised the interrelatedness of the recommendations and the need to consider them together. She brought the meeting through some of the slides that had been used at the forum, outlining both the recommendations and the rationale behind them. She also spoke to the high-level questions and sub-questions that had been asked.

Feedback received at the Forum indicated that some level of compensation should be permitted, although there was also an appetite for some tightening of the regulations around compensation. A member from the Science area noted that the Science Course Committee had agreed that some level of compensation was necessary in order to avoid unreasonable outcomes for certain students. A member agreed that there needed to be some flexibility in order to overcome some of the 'weaknesses' in our systems and noted that their School had decided to combine the results of the third and fourth year in order to remove the pressure from the fourth year.

There was a general agreement that supplemental examinations should be allowed in all years. There were differing views around capping, but with an agreed emphasis on the need to be consistent.

There was broad support for repetition of the final year but no agreement on whether this should be treated differently to repetition of other years. There was general support for

different modalities of repetition. The feedback had been brought to the subgroup and further discussion had also taken place at Strand 1 and would continue at the Strand 1 meeting in the following week. The feedback was consistent with feedback from other fora/committees.

A discussion took place around the available options for a student who failed the year and it was noted that off-books with assessment is not necessarily the best alternative for a student to take, especially if they were academically weak.

A member noted the large increase in workload that would be involved in introducing supplemental examinations at the Sophister level and wondered whether it was the best use of already constrained resources; he felt that setting extra marked work during the year would be a better use of resources. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies replied that the issue of resourcing had arisen previously and that time pressures related to the new examination periods, especially the supplemental period, would continue to be discussed. She noted that the proposed flexibility with regard to the type of reassessment and the implementation of the TEP assessment framework should reduce pressure on the assessment periods. She also highlighted the inconsistencies in the current system with regard to repetition and reassessment in different courses. A member highlighted the difficulties of finding external examiners for the Senior Sophister year and worried that offering supplemental examinations would make this more challenging. He also noted that he did not see any inequity in the current system that allowed supplemental examinations in some but not all courses; he highlighted the different regulations around capping at Junior Sophister level as an example of an inequity that might be looked at.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies stressed the importance of having greater standardisation of regulations across the University. There is a need for a set of regulations that are consistent, transparent, equitable, and fair, thereby reducing the current complexity and diversity of practice and enabling the enhanced flexibility which is linked to the TEP programme architecture. It would also make it much easier for students and staff to navigate.

c)   Review of entry routes into TSM and other two-subject combinations
Council had approved the terms of reference for the review of entry routes to TSM and other two-subject combinations. The admission of students to two-subject combinations would be considered in the context of the common architecture, implementation of a fixed timetable, CAO-administered admissions processes, and the agreed TGRUSE/DES/HEI policy to reduce the number of CAO entry routes. On this basis, reviewers would be asked to make recommendations for an admissions mechanism to two-subject combinations that best fits the common architecture and range of exit pathways, enhances the range of two-subject combinations and maximises potential for provision of new combinations, ensures the distribution of students effectively and equitably across a broad range of subjects and is sufficiently flexible to respond to student demand. Reviewers will also be asked to advise on principles that inform the choice and range of subject combinations, and how best to retain the distinctiveness that guarantees students their two-subject choice to degree level against the external pressures to reduce the number of CAO entry routes to Trinity's TSM degree offerings.

Schools involved in two-subject combinations have been asked to provide names of potential reviewers to the Academic Secretary. The names will then be considered by a panel that is chaired by the Provost, and a final list of reviewers will be identified and subsequently sent to Council for noting. The review report will be submitted to committees in Michaelmas Term.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that entry routes to two-subject combinations will remain as they are for 2018/19. Other implications of the review for elements of TEP implementation are currently being considered and will be discussed by the Steering Group, after which clarification will be issued. She also noted that it was recognised that implementation of the fixed timetable should not take place until the review had been completed. In response to a question, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that Trinity had committed to reducing entry routes and outlined the value of having an external review in this context.

USC/16-17/047   **English Language Support for Non-Native English Speaking Students**
A memorandum from Professor Sarah O'Brien, the Director of the Centre for English Language Learning and Teaching, dated 16 March 2017 had been circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed the Director to the meeting for this item. She noted that a discussion on English language competencies, particularly in clinical settings, had taken place during presentation of the annual quality report from the Faculty of Health Sciences at the previous week's Quality Committee. Separately, the Director of the Centre had contacted the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies about investigating ways in which English language competency amongst new English speakers in College could be improved.

The Director advised that the Centre provides courses for Trinity's non-native English speaking students throughout Michaelmas and Hilary Terms. Student feedback on the courses is positive but there are issues with attendance as the courses are taken as an additional load to a student's main programme of study. The Director noted difficulties with publicising the courses to students effectively and the Centre was working hard to increase the course profile. A number of different types of courses are offered, including skill-specific and discipline-specific.

The Centre also carries out research on English as an academic language and how to best meet the needs of non-native English speakers. It was hoped that this research could be shared with faculties and also that further feedback could be collected from staff and students on the English language needs of student non-native English speakers and on how to respond innovatively to these. The Director noted that a focus group would take place in June 2017 and she would welcome attendance by academic staff.

In response to a question, the Director outlined that the courses were available to any student who felt they would benefit from English language support. The course was flexible to suit students with varying English-language proficiencies. In response to a query, the Director noted that IELTS is a standardised international test for measuring English language proficiency but that there is also a level of subjectivity involved. The difference in IELTS requirements were noted: 7.5 in Health Sciences and 6.5 in other areas. The Centre is also working on creating its own standardised tests for students.

A member commented that teaching staff should be aware of approaches to best teach international students, including clear enunciation and pronunciation, and the use of clear standard English without overuse of colloquial language. A member noted that some students require extra help with written English rather than spoken English and the Director noted that classes for support with academic writing are also available. She commented on the frustration of students in relation to the disparity between how they are taught compared to how they are assessed, with grammar and spelling not being taught, but then being taken into account for assessment purposes.

In response to a query, the Director advised that courses are funded by College for students, but post-graduate teaching assistants may also attend. As it was not ideal for

teaching assistants to attend the same class as their students, it was thought that the programme could be expanded to include classes solely aimed at teaching assistants. A member raised a concern that students who use resources to improve English language skills can sometimes inadvertently slip into plagiarising content and the Director noted that some of the courses include elements of avoiding plagiarism. A suggestion from a member that the Centre should become involved with the induction programme for new staff was welcomed. The Director invited members to contact the Centre to arrange for a School visit during induction weeks. Members were invited to send further comments directly to the Director.

USC/16-17/048   **Scholarship Examination – 'Seen' Papers**
A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 15 March 2017, together with a discussion document, had been circulated. Seen papers are papers where all or some of the questions are made available to candidates up to six weeks ahead of the Scholarship examinations. Seen papers appear to be the exception, with only three courses using them as part of their Scholarship assessment.

The Central Scholarship Committee (CSC) had discussed the use of seen papers at meetings in September 2016 and March 2017. The Committee had expressed concerns about the suitability of these papers for Foundation Scholarship and about fairness across the student body. USC was asked to consider the use of seen papers at the Foundation Scholarship examination.

In response to a question, the Senior Lecturer advised that the CSC was not aware of differences in how the marking of seen papers is approached. Amongst the feedback received from the courses using seen papers, it was indicated that they allow students to better demonstrate critical thinking; students have the opportunity to be creative and analytical as they have to support opposing perspectives; they must develop a convincing argument supported by evidence and demonstrate an ability to assess this evidence critically and to integrate theory with practice; the papers also provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate higher level thinking. Members noted that these were the same values that were being tested overall in the Scholarship examination and were in no way unique to seen papers.

Members held different views on the use of seen papers for the Scholarship examination, including that there was not an issue with inequity once the expectations for seen papers were made explicit to students, that seen papers could be seen as a good example of assessment 'for' learning, and that a seen paper does not necessarily confer an advantage over an unseen paper; on the other hand, it is not possible to identify how a student has prepared for a seen paper and if the critical thinking is their own. Further, seen papers might encourage rote learning.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that there did not seem to be a correlation between seen papers and higher marks or a correlation between seen papers and the number of Scholarships awarded when the data is viewed over a number of years.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies will bring comments from USC to the Central Scholarship Committee and further evidence for the use of seen papers would be sought from the two Schools involved.

USC/16-17/049   **Policies**
a)   Trinity Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Policy
The policy, together with a memorandum from the Associate Dean of Online Education, dated 14 March 2017, had been circulated. The Associate Dean was welcomed to the meeting to speak to this item. The VLE Policy was developed by a working party chaired by

the Associate Dean and had undergone consultation with Academic Registry, the College Disability Service, the Academic Administrators Group and the Quality Committee. The policy would be submitted to the Graduate Studies Committee and subsequently to Council for approval.

The need for a VLE policy emerged through a number of initiatives including:
-        the terms of reference of the TEP (Strand 5);
-        the HEA Performance Compact;
-        IT Services' VLE Project.

In addition, the Associate Dean noted that the use of a VLE across all modules is considered standard practice in a university environment. The purpose of the policy is to support the development of technology-enhanced learning across online and face-to-face teaching environments that will assist in:
-        enhancing the student experience;
-        supporting innovative teaching strategies;
-        building digital capacity.

He advised that the policy relates to the VLE with regard to teaching and learning activities and does not apply to the technical service levels to support the VLE – the latter is the responsibility of IT Services.

The policy represents a commitment to a single VLE for teaching and learning activity – the VLE in Trinity is BlackBoard. The policy defines the minimum amount of content that should be uploaded to Blackboard and states that all users should comply with the College's Intellectual Property Policy and Data Protection Policy.

A member enquired as to what should happen in the case of non-compliance and provided the meeting with feedback received from lecturers as to why engagement with the VLE was not considered possible. The Associate Dean noted that this issue had been discussed in the Working Group and that no enforcement sanctions could be applied; it was hoped that a combination of pressure from the School and students would encourage all lecturers to comply with the policy. Student feedback indicated that the VLE was most beneficial when used by all lecturers on a course. He advised that lecturers can use their own websites but that digital content should also be made available on the VLE. The use of non-digital materials in class is not precluded under the policy. He advised that there was no evidence in the literature for a drop in attendance when content is made available on the VLE, but admitted that it was a concern.

The Associate Dean advised that Turnitin was currently being integrated with BlackBoard and should be rolled out in September 2017. This should streamline uploading of work by students. The use of additional environments is not precluded by the policy but these should be supplementary to BlackBoard and robust reasons for their use were required. Other technologies can be used in addition to BlackBoard in cases where the features are not available in BlackBoard.   The Associate Dean confirmed that ePortfolios are considered to be a separate technology and were excluded from the tender process.

In response to a query, the Associate Dean confirmed that issues with access to BlackBoard for students who had experienced delays in registering were out of the scope of the policy and were a matter for IT Services and the Academic Registry.

A member commented that he had found that attendance suffered when material was put on BlackBoard and asked that the element of discretion on the part of the lecturer to upload materials to the VLE be made more explicit in the policy. A minor change will be made to the punctuation in 7.2.1.iii to clarify this.

USC agreed to recommend the policy to Council for approval.

b)   Programme Cessation and Suspension Policy

The Academic Secretary noted that the policy represents current practice in this area in College and, therefore, approval of the committee was not being sought. She emphasised that approval for suspending or ceasing a programme was required from the Head of School and the Faculty Dean. She advised that the cessation of a programme should, where possible, be carried out prior to the closing of the application period.

With regard to point 7.4.2 of the policy, it was agreed to include the requirement of support from the course Committee, if it exists, for the cessation of a programme. The Academic Secretary confirmed that proposals for cessation of a course were presented to USC for noting only.

USC/16-17/050   Any other Business

Graduate Teaching Assistant Module

A memorandum from the Senior Academic Developer, Ciara O'Farrell, was tabled at the meeting. The Senior Academic Developer spoke to the item and advised that CAPSL currently offers a 5 ECTS module, 'Teaching and Supporting Learning', for Graduate Teaching Assistants. CAPSL and other institutions had now received funding from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education to develop and enhance this module online.   The project was currently being scoped, with feedback to identify gaps in current provision being sought from teaching assistants, the other institutions involved, and now from USC.

The module can be delivered fully online or in a blended format, and CAPSL will most likely opt for blended delivery. The module receives positive feedback, but attendance had dropped in the current year. In response to a query as to how the module would fit into a structured PhD, the Senior Academic Developer confirmed that it was one of the module choices offered as part of the PhD programme.

Members were invited to contact the Senior Academic Developer with further feedback.

USC/16-17/051   Items for noting

USC noted the following:

1. **Guidelines for students and staff on the modification of examination and assessment arrangements for students with disabilities**, dated March 2017