



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 3 November 2020 at 2.15 pm via Zoom.

Present: Professor Kevin Mitchell, Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies (*Chair*)
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary
Professor Catherine McCabe, Dean of Students
Professor Aidan Seery, Senior Tutor
Professor Áine Kelly, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education
Professor Graeme Murdock, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture
Professor Norah Campbell, Trinity Business School
Professor Jennifer O'Meara, School of Creative Arts
Professor Andrew Loxley, School of Education
Professor Brendan O'Connell, School of English
Professor Peter Crooks, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Rachel Hoare, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Neville Cox, School of Law
Professor Breffni O'Rourke, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Professor Elizabeth Nixon, School of Psychology
Professor Michael Wycherley, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Stan Houston, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Jacob Erickson, School of Religion
Professor Clair Gardiner, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Eoin Scanlan, School of Chemistry
Professor Jonathan Dukes, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Nicola Marchetti, School of Engineering
Professor Juan Pablo Labrador, School of Genetics & Microbiology
Professor John Stalker, School of Mathematics
Professor Carlos Rocha, School of Natural Sciences
Professor David O'Regan, School of Physics
Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science
Professor Joe Harbison, School of Medicine
Professor Damien Brennan, School of Nursing & Midwifery
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Jake Byrne, Academic Director of Tangent
Ms Megan O'Connor, Education Officer, Students' Union
Mr Sameer Shaikh, Student Representative

Apologies: None

In attendance: Ms Lucy Shah, Academic Affairs, Trinity Teaching & Learning; Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Academic Affairs, Trinity Teaching & Learning; Ms Linda Darbey, Assistant Academic Secretary, Trinity Teaching & Learning; Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Head of Academic Practice; Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative; Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services; Ms Roisin Smith, Quality Officer; Ms Gráinne de Bhulbh, Manager of Assessment, Academic Registry (for item USC/20-21/022)

USC/20-21/019 Minutes of the meeting of 13 October 2020

The minutes of the meeting of 13 October 2020 were approved.

USC/20-21/020 Matters arising

USC/20-21/015

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave an update on the Foundation Scholarship Examinations, 2020-21 proposal. He

reported that the proposal had gone to both Board and Council, explaining that Board is the body that approves Foundation Scholarship changes. He noted that Board approved changes to the timing, conduct and the structure and format of the Scholarship examinations for programmes under the Common Architecture as outlined in the memorandum. He advised that Board required more information on the proposed use of quotas and explained that a memorandum was currently being prepared in order to outline this proposal and the method that is intended to be implemented. He noted that the rationale behind the proposal for a quota system arises as a result of the introduction of the untested and uncalibrated system under which the Foundation Scholarship examinations are to take place this academic year.

Responding to a query from a member about software for the proctoring of online examinations, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that this will be centrally decided and organized, however, schools may be asked to provide invigilators. He confirmed that he would follow up with the Assess and Progress team to discuss logistical issues related to the online examinations, such as who is to release the examination papers to candidates. Responding to a query concerning assigning weightings to papers under the common architecture, the ADUCA confirmed that such students are required to take four papers and advised that all papers should be weighted equally.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/020: The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to follow up with the Assess and Progress team in the Academic Registry regarding logistical issues associated with online real-time examinations.

USC/20-21/017 The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reported that Council approved the Revisions to the Direct Admissions Requirements.

USC/20-21/021 Resumption of Activities

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that Level 5 restrictions had not significantly changed the operation of College activities, as most lectures had already been taking place online, while laboratories and practicals were able to continue face-to-face. He explained that the rationale behind this is that, where possible, risks should be minimised as far as possible so that prioritised types of activities can be protected. He noted that there have been a few instances where schools have moved laboratory sessions online and advised that in the event that one or two Covid-19 cases arise in the class, the lecturer should not make such a decision unilaterally. He stated that there are a set of policies and procedures in place designed to handle outbreaks of COVID-19 occurring on campus to ensure public health, and that the College Health Service and the HSE are able to take action based on the events that are occurring. He added that staff can avail of occupational health assessments if they wish.

A member expressed a concern that staff were spending widely varying amounts of time on online teaching. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that this issue concerns student workload as well as staff workload. He advised that as per face-to-face teaching events, one-hour online events should be 50 minutes in duration. He noted that recording lectures takes a substantial amount of time, and commented that if students are expected to watch their recorded lectures asynchronously, and then to attend the lecture for discussion at the usual time, this effectively doubles the amount of time students need

to engage. He further commented that if all lecturers were to take this approach then students could find themselves rapidly overwhelmed with their workload. Finally, he spoke about the issues that may arise when continuous assessment replaces examinations, commenting that if this is done unilaterally, students may be overloaded with several deadlines in a given week. He added that he would encourage discussion within courses and co-ordination between lecturers in order to mitigate these possible scenarios.

The Students' Union Education Officer confirmed that she has been receiving feedback that students are feeling overwhelmed with some aspects of online learning. She advised that any extra content that has been created by lecturers to support learning should be clearly indicated as mandatory or non-mandatory to allow students to prioritise their workloads. She also suggested that guidelines be created indicating when staff intend to make teaching material available for students in advance of lectures. The Library Representative reported that there are difficulties involved in acquiring institutional licenses for e-books due to the high costs involved and requested that staff contact their subject librarians as far in advance as possible.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies drew attention to the challenge of keeping students engaged in the online modality where teaching and learning occurs. He suggested that lecturers keep office hours where students can contact them online.

The following comments were made by members during the discussion that followed:

- Online bullying and harassment is likely to increase with the increased use of online modalities where students engage.
- Social events for students have been organised by schools, but it is difficult to strike a balance, as students already have many obligations which involve screen time.
- Junior Freshmen are likely to be feeling isolated as they have not the opportunity to form social networks yet.
- Proactive engagement from societies has been very helpful for students.
- Freshmen students have given positive feedback about interactive engagement in tutorials.
- Group projects are working well to reduce isolation felt by students.
- In one school, in order to check in with students, all students from year groups across programmes were being invited to the Student Forum before Reading Week.
- While the Student 2 Student service for students usually only runs in Semester 1, this year it would be running again in Semester 2.

Commenting on the proactive engagement from societies, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies agreed that societies have an important part to play in social cohesion, and that breakout rooms are a useful function on online platforms which can be utilised. Regarding the activities of the Student 2 Student service, the Director of Student Services added that in the first two weeks of Semester 1 there was an increase in Student 2 Student activities, with 272 Google Hangouts conducted with Freshers and their mentors.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies highlighted that it is important for staff to provide rubrics to students for new forms of assignments, as there has been concern from students, who are unsure of what is expected of them. The Head of Academic Practice commented that Academic Practice are finalising pedagogic guidelines for open-book examinations for staff, students and external examiners, and will also be holding clinics for staff on how to write these. She advised that this information will be circulated shortly. A member noted that while the Semester 1 examination period had been pushed out by one month, the publication date for results had not been moved accordingly. She reported that a meeting between School Managers and Academic Registry was due to take place to discuss this. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that this would be reviewed.

Responding to a comment from the Student Representative concerning guidelines for proctored examinations, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies explained that students have agreed, when registering, that they may potentially be recorded during academic activities. He added that a communication regarding recording lectures and examinations was due to be issued the following week.

Looking ahead to Semester 2, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies emphasised the need to have contingency plans for all eventualities that may arise. He commented that as Semester 2 may also take place under Level 5 restrictions, courses which had pushed activities such as field trips into Semester 2 would need to consider substitutions for these so that students can progress. He added that consideration needs to be given to international students who may go home at Christmas and will need to quarantine for 2 weeks on their return, requesting that lecturers are flexible in these situations. Responding to a query from a member, he established that discussions are currently underway regarding Semester 2 and whether teaching will all be online. He noted the significant concern raised by a member in relation to students paying rent in Dublin, whilst attending College only by online means. He noted that many students would like as much face-to-face teaching as possible, and that the capacity for this differs according to discipline. Responding to a concern from a member about Erasmus students, he commented that flexible measures have been put in place in Semester 1 and that these measures would be extended into Semester 2.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/021(i): The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to follow-up on the issuing of guidelines related to the recording of classes and assessments.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/021(ii): The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to follow up with the Students' Union Education Officer to discuss ideas around creating guidelines for a timeframe in which teaching material should be available for students.

USC/20-21/022 Assessment and Progression Data, 2019/20

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, with appended assessment and progression data, dated 2 November 2020, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Gráinne de Bhulbh, Manager of Assessment, Academic Registry, to the meeting.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies spoke to the item, commenting that there was a seismic shift this year, with the annual session of examinations taking place at the height of the emerging public health situation.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, noting his thanks to staff in the Academic Registry for providing this report, brought the meeting through the data which covered the following areas:

- Average Overall Course Results for all Undergraduate Courses for all Course Years by Faculty, 2014/15 - 2019/20
- Average Overall Course Results for all Undergraduate Courses by Faculty 2015/16 - 2019/20
- UG students' overall performance at examination in 2019/20 comparative to the last five years, 2015/16 - 2019/20
- UG students' overall final year grade distribution 2019/20 by Faculty comparative to the last four years
- Number of deferral cases in 2019/20 academic year
- Breakdown of Student Re-sits per programme
- Pass by aggregation
- Breakdown of Examination Sittings for end of year/semester by Faculty and year
- Assessment and sittings, broken down by type, faculty and student year

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that 191 students chose to take re-sits to improve their results. He noted also that the number of students who passed by aggregation was small and did not overwhelm the system. He reported that there are some concerns for grade inflation, with the greatest level of inflation occurring in the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics, and Science. He acknowledged that there had been a rising upward trajectory over the last 4 years in this regard, but that the inflation this year was markedly increased. He emphasised that this is something to bear in mind while the method of grading online examinations is calibrated. He noted that the biggest increase can be seen in Freshmen years and acknowledged that is not unexpected, as these examinations are more commonly detail-oriented and based on memory rather than conceptual understanding. He noted that the breakdown of grade profiles for final year students did not indicate significant differences in grade distribution when compared to previous years.

Responding to a query from a member regarding requests from students for precise ranking of their performance, the Manager of Assessment commented that the Academic Registry could look into developing a report to extract this type of information. She noted that such reporting can be problematic in small cohorts.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Manager of Assessment, Academic Registry and she withdrew from the meeting. He invited members to email him in relation to any concerns regarding the data provided.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/022(i): The Manager of Assessment to investigate the development of a report giving the ranking of students' performance and to discuss this with the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

USC/20-21/023 External Examiners Reports 2019/20, analysis of Covid-19 impacts

A memorandum from the Quality Officer, dated 21 October 2020, was circulated. The Quality Officer brought the meeting through the highlights of the memorandum. She advised members that overall, the external examiners felt that both the examination session and the Court of Examiners went well. She reported that accessibility to Blackboard and having all material available digitally was important to External Examiners. She noted that feedback from External Examiners indicates that there is strong support for retaining some of the alternative assessment strategies going forward. Finally, she recommended that new External Examiners need to be prepared and supported through the process.

Responding to a query from a member, the Quality Officer confirmed that access to External Examiners reports was available for all Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG), and that members can request to be added to the Central Quality Folder by emailing the Quality Office.

USC/20-21/024 National Student Survey Report for 2019/20

A memorandum from the Dean of Students, dated 25 October 2020, and a presentation dated October 2020, were circulated. Via the presentation, the Dean of Students brought the meeting through some specific indices within the National Student Survey. She noted that the response to questions where students rated the effective teaching practices, supportive environment and quality of interactions showed that Trinity's scores were lower than the national average for all Irish universities. She reported that of particular concern is the quality of interactions, which was shown to decrease from first year to final year. She noted that a new set of questions relevant to the Graduate Attributes had been added for 2019/20, and that it will be useful to track this over the next few years as the data emerges, to see if students feel that they are achieving the attributes.

The Dean of Students commented that these survey results should be considered in light of the Strategic Plan, and that they can be used for quality enhancement. She noted that the survey is very relevant to the service provided to students and how students perceive their experience. She advised that school and programme level reports had been sent to schools via the Central Quality Folder, and that all Directors of Teaching and Learning (UG) had access to them. She requested that these individual reports are reviewed and discussed at relevant school committees, and time is taken to explore outcomes with students. She commented that agreed actions should be initiated in response to the survey outcomes, and that these actions can be reported in the School Action Plan that is sought as part of the Annual Faculty Quality Report, due in February 2021. She advised that the Student Survey group have agreed to include questions on the Covid-19 experience for the next iteration of the Student Survey.

Responding to a comment from a member regarding students concerned with College level issues that are beyond the scope of Schools to address, the Dean of Students advised that Schools now have a mechanism for communicating this to faculties and onwards. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that the statistics received here can be considered as a starting point for conversations with students, and for further investigations and actions. He thanked the Dean of Students and the Quality Office for their work in preparing the report.

USC/20-21/025 Academic Integrity

Due to lack of time this item will be considered at the next meeting of USC.

USC/20-21/026 National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Due to lack of time this item will be considered at the next meeting of USC.

USC/20-21/027 Any other business

There was no other business.

USC/20-21/028 Items for noting (Section C)

USC noted and approved, where necessary, the following item/document:

i. **Evaluation of Open Modules**

A memorandum from the Quality Officer, dated 23 October 2020.