



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 8 December 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 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
Ms Megan O'Connor, Education Officer, Students' Union
Mr Sameer Shaikh, Student Representative

Apologies: Professor Jake Byrne, Academic Director of Tangent
Professor Stan Houston, School of Social Work and Social Policy

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; Prof. Veronica Campbell, Bursar (for item USC/20-21/031); Ms. Patricia Murphy, Acting Director of Student Counselling Service, Dr David McGrath, Director of College Health Service and Dr Niamh Farrelly, College Psychiatrist/Assistant Director of College Health Service (for item USC/20-21/032).

USC/20-21/029 Minutes of the meeting of 3 November 2020

The minutes of the meeting of 3 November 2020 were approved.

USC/20-21/030 Matters arising

USC/20-21/020

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave an update on the Foundation Scholarship Examinations, 2020-21 proposal. He reported that Board approved the quota mechanism for the Foundation Scholarship Examinations subject to the Visitor ruling that it is permissible under the Statutes. He noted that this has been referred to the Visitor as a *dubium* and a response is awaited.

USC/20-21/021

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave an update on the issuing of guidelines related to the recording of classes and assessments. He advised that there is a working group which is looking at this issue, and that interim guidelines on this topic, along with the timing of the provision of module materials on the virtual learning environment, will be issued shortly.

USC/20-21/031 Trinity Futures

A discussion paper from Prof. Veronica Campbell, Bursar, dated 3 December 2020, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed the Bursar to the meeting.

Giving some background to Trinity Futures, the Bursar explained that the Trinity Futures Group had been established in order to discuss long-term opportunities for Trinity beyond the current public health situation. She reported that it was recognised that Covid-19 had catalysed both positive and negative change. She advised the Trinity Futures Group had made an assumption that Trinity will be returning to a more usual state of activities in the coming months, with more face to face activities and interpersonal interactions. She reported that there may be an opportunity to do things a little differently and offer more flexibility in how the College operates.

The Bursar explained the output of the Trinity Futures Group was a discussion paper rather than a strategy document, but that future strategies may be informed by the discussion paper. She noted that the discussion paper was in the process of going through various fora for consultation, and that feedback and insights from USC would be valued. She advised that Recommendation 1 is for a working group to be established which would develop a strategy for Smart Working, examining all associated elements, such as policies, technologies, supports and workplace cultures. She reported that Recommendation 2 is that a working group is established to develop an updated strategy for the campus of the future. She noted that Board have already approved an estate strategy in 2018, and that this will be revisited. She advised that this working group will consider how spaces can be used. She pointed out that an appendix to the discussion paper included some initial ideas and suggestions for how spaces can be reconfigured to support different needs in the University. She advised that this group would also consider the idea of a remote Trinity 'Hub'. She explained that this concept would give Trinity a regional presence, as well as a location to support smart hybrid working. She noted that this may be the most controversial idea of the Trinity Futures Group, but that the consensus was that it was an idea worthy of more consideration.

The Bursar then outlined Recommendation 3, explaining that it suggests a role is to be created for a Director of Digital Learning with responsibility for developing a Digital Learning strategy, and noting that this has already been included in the new strategic plan. She reported that there has been an accelerated adoption of digital learning to date, and that there is considerable research expertise within the School of Computer Science and Statistics, in terms of immersive technology and how this applies to education. She noted that Recommendation 4 is to establish a working group to develop proposals for the next wave of Digital Trinity projects for investment.

She reiterated that while changes have occurred due to Covid, longer-term opportunities may arise from this in relation to ways of working, teaching and learning. She advised that measures would be taken to circumvent the negative challenges experienced during Covid. She emphasised that these changes should not come at the expense of Trinity values of collegiality, inclusion and connection. She reported that feedback to date indicated that the membership of the various working groups would be as broad and inclusive as possible, and she confirmed that both the membership and the terms of reference of these groups would be brought before Board for consideration. She reported that other feedback spoke of the need to be mindful of a balanced approach with the use of technology, and of the importance of the physical campus.

The following comments were made by members during the discussion:

- Holding face to face lectures in lecture halls carries significant benefits.
- Lecture halls are also used for other purposes, such as exams.
- Reconfiguring lecture halls for other purposes will have challenges.
- It is important for academic staff to retain office space for engagement with students and sharing of ideas.
- The timing of the Trinity Futures consultation is of concern, both in terms of the prevailing crisis and in the context of it being the final year of the current provostship.
- Academic Practice should be consulted for their in-house expertise on teaching, learning and pedagogy.
- Lessons from the current situation on the psychological reactions to changes and how people learn, should be built into any resulting strategies.
- Students need face to face teaching.
- There is a large gap between the flipped classroom mentioned in the document and the next suggestion of augmented and virtual reality; this requires further consideration.
- Student opinions should be sought in the widest possible ways.
- The innovation and entrepreneurship elements of the paper are less developed in comparison to other sections.
- The concept of the Trinity Hub is unclear.
- There is a danger that undergraduate education could become part time, which would change the nature of student societies and clubs and, consequently, affect the student experience. On the other hand, it could open up opportunities for more diversity in the student population.
- The timescale for any such changes should be clearly mapped out.

The Bursar responded to a number of the comments raised. She advised that certain ideas within the paper are already incorporated into the Trinity Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Responding particularly to concerns about changes to undergraduate education, she emphasised that Trinity Futures document acknowledges that undergraduate education should remain a largely face-to-face, interactive experience for students, and that technology would play an assistive role in this, rather than replacing it.

The Bursar thanked members for their input. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Bursar and she withdrew from the meeting.

USC/20-21/032 Student Mental Health during Covid

Ms. Patricia Murphy, Acting Director of the Student Counselling Service, Dr David McGrath, Director of the College Health Service and Dr Niamh Farrelly, College Psychiatrist/Assistant Director of the College Health Service, joined the meeting to speak to their presentation, dated November 2020, as circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed them to the meeting.

The Acting Director of Student Counselling Service spoke to the presentation, outlining the best international practices to support student mental health during this pandemic and noted that Trinity already provides these to a high standard.

The Director of College Health Service then brought the meeting through the slide entitled 'Complex Mental Health Consultations at College Health'. He explained that prior to the pandemic, mental health consultations comprised approximately 30% of College Health visits and that, for the most part, these were managed quickly. Since March 2020, however, there has been a significant change in the complexity of mental health issues being presented to the service, and that these were taking more time to resolve. He noted that these consultations related to depression, suicidality, psychosis, eating disorders, drugs and alcohol. During this period, he reported that there had been 543 complex mental health consultations carried out by GPs and 676 consultant psychiatry appointments, 224 of which had occurred in the first six weeks of this academic year. He spoke about the need to manage the increased risk of suicidal ideation that arises with some students and disclosed that four students had committed suicide between March and the start of the current academic year.

The College Psychiatrist/Assistant Director of College Health Service then spoke to the presentation. She reported that there had been an increase in the number of students trying to access services. She advised that this increase has been driven by three key things that students are experiencing: factors associated with online teaching and learning, a lack of social connectedness leading to isolation and the lack of routine and structure normally provided by face to face teaching. She noted that there are two groups of students who are accessing services. In the first are those students who would usually never need to seek help prior to the recent lockdowns, as they would have been supported by social contact and the routine of their day to day activities. She reported that the other group comprises students with pre-existing mental health difficulties, who are also experiencing the factors mentioned above.

The College Psychiatrist/Assistant Director of College Health Service advised that a survey was conducted by College Health in April 2020, to which approximately 1800 students responded (10% of student population). It showed that 92% of respondents found that the lack of structure and routine was having a significant impact on their mental health and wellbeing, and their capacity to engage with their studies. She noted that many students are eating poorly, they are not getting sunlight exposure during the day, are not exercising and they are experiencing disrupted sleep patterns. As a result, the Health Service has scheduled a number of in person consultations to get students out of their accommodation, and to give them some structure and motivation. She suggested that schools in Trinity can help with this lack of routine by providing live online lectures, and to schedule these, ideally, during the morning.

Returning to the Acting Director, Student Counselling Service, she highlighted the findings of a national survey of approximately 8000 students, which indicated, among other things, that seven students out of 100 have attempted suicide. She outlined the services and measures offered by College to support students generally and with their mental health. She also provided details of services which students can access during a crisis situation, noting that there will be cover over the Christmas period. Finally, she appealed to lecturers to contact clinical services in College if they can see a student is not engaging with online lectures as they will be able to intervene. The Director of the College Health Service noted that exam failure can provoke a mental health crisis in some students, therefore, it would be helpful if tutors were to receive information about failing students ahead of the release of results, so as to offer better support.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that this presentation provides a stark image of how students are struggling. He queried how staff could engage

better with students, beyond their academic needs. The following comments were made by members during the discussion:

- Lecturers could display a 'boilerplate' slide at the start of lectures, providing details of College supports for those experiencing mental health difficulties.
- It would be useful if a contact list were drawn up for staff so that they can direct students to the most appropriate service.
- The existing training for staff on how to recognize a student in distress was recommended.
- Regular office hours for students can be very beneficial both academically and to enable social contact for some students.
- Lecturers simply asking their students about how they are doing can have a profound effect.
- While it is important to have clear communication for students on everyday structure, it is also important to provide clear communication on the expected long-term structure of course delivery.
- Blackboard has a statistics function which lecturers can enable to show when students are generally accessing materials, and if this is being done at night.
- Feedback from a survey of Pharmacy students shows that students enjoy live online lectures. These can also be recorded for students to access later.
- Informal tutor meetings with a standing Zoom link are useful for student to connect with tutors.

Responding to questions about comparative data for previous years on students accessing services, the College Psychiatrist/Assistant Director of College Health Service reported that direct statistics cannot be provided as coding for these consultations has changed in response to the recent demands on the service. She pointed to the suspension of certain non-acute assessment services in order to meet the demand for mental health consultations, and she also highlighted that there is a waiting list to see her for a consultation; the next free appointment is not available until February 2021.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Acting Director of the Student Counselling Service, Director of the College Health Service and College Psychiatrist/Assistant Director of the College Health Service and they withdrew from the meeting.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/032: The Senior Tutor and Director of Student Services to discuss a mechanism for College Tutors to be notified in the event of a student failing a module.

USC/20-21/033 Continuity of Teaching

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that under Level 5 restrictions, while there was a need to protect activities that could not take place online, such as practicals and laboratory sessions, a consequence of the restrictions was that generally students in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences had no face to face activities at all. He advised that schools should follow the College policy for practicals and laboratory sessions, in particular sessions that form a part of Capstone projects, that states that these activities should take place face to face. He advised that there can be flexibility in how schools provide these activities. He acknowledged that some staff members feel uneasy about delivering in person teaching but there should be no unilateral decision made by staff to move such teaching online. If staff have concerns, occupational health assessments can be carried out. He noted that Government guidelines for third level education have become more nuanced, as a result, institutions are now enabled to take into account student engagement and wellbeing when considering what is essential.

Commenting on the mode of delivery of Semester 2 teaching, a member suggested that clarification on this be communicated to students as soon as possible, so that they can make decisions on whether to move to Dublin and begin to seek accommodation, where necessary. A common thread that emerged in the discussion was the issue of space and possible reallocations, with one member commenting that for some schools it will not be possible to carry out socially distanced face to face teaching due to limited space, and that it was unfair for students' hopes to be raised unrealistically. The Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning (DUTL) in the School of Natural Sciences expressed concern about students declining to participate in field trip activities. He advised that such activities have great pedagogical importance and queried whether field activities should be made compulsory. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies requested further information by e-mail on this matter.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/033: The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to raise the issue of space and the reallocation of space at the Continuity of Learning and Student Activities Working Group.

USC/20-21/034 Exam Measures for Academic year 2020/21

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A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 26 November 2020, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies outlined the main points of the memorandum, advising that it follows from the previous year's memorandum on exam measures, which contained measures designed to act as a safety net at the height of the pandemic. He noted that the previous memorandum had only been approved for the last semester of 2019/20 and advised that the same measures were not necessary for this academic year. He reported that the usual regulations and procedures for assessments are in place for 2020/21, and that these should be adequate to deal with any issues that may arise. He pointed out that the discretionary powers of the Court of Examiners will, however, continue to remain in place and that schools should show students a level of flexibility, for example, in relation to deadlines.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/034: USC approved the memorandum for Exam Measures for Academic year 2020/21 and recommended it to Council.

USC/20-21/035 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/20-21/036 Any other business

There was no other business.

USC/20-21/037 Items for noting (Section C)

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

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i. **HPAT memo from School of Medicine**

A memorandum from Ms. Áine Wade, Programme Manager, School of Medicine, dated 23 November 2020. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies made a clarification to the memorandum, stating that the change highlighted of setting the HPAT pass mark at 150-160 will only apply to non-standard cohorts such as mature students, and applicants from the Disability Access Route to Education, the Higher Education Access Route and the Trinity Access Programme Foundation programme.

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ii. **English Language requirements for 2021**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 11 November 2020.

iii. **Academic Integrity (Updated)**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 30 October 2020.