



**A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 23 February 2021 at 2.00 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 Robert Armstrong, School of Histories and Humanities  
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 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: Professor Rachel Hoare, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies,  
Professor Juan Pablo Labrador, School of Genetics & Microbiology

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 Roisin Smith, Quality Officer; Mr. David Hamill, Academic Practice (for item USC/20-21/051i); Prof. Sarah Hamill and Dr. Eoin O'Dell, School of Law (for item USC/20-21/051ii); Ms. Jennifer Pepper, Acting Director of Academic Registry (for item USC/20-21/052); Ms. Susan Kirwin, Student Learning Development Coordinator (for item USC/20-21/053).

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The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies requested permission for the meeting to be recorded for minute taking purposes, as adverse weather conditions had caused some power outages earlier that day. He advised that the recording would be deleted once the minutes had been written. There were no objections.

**USC/20-21/049 Minutes of the meeting of 26 January 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of 26 January 2021 were approved.

- USC/20-21/050 Matters arising**  
**USC/20-21/041** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reported that Council approved Semester 2 assessments be held online, as well as the addition of a third week for Semester 2 final assignments (24-29 May 2021), and the scheduling of deferred Semester 1 assessments during the third week (24-29 May 2021) with two contingency days, 31 May and 1 June 2021.
- USC/20-21/044** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that Council approved the establishment of the subcommittee of USC and GSC for stand-alone modules for credit and micro-credentials proposed under HCI Pillar 3.
- USC/20-21/047** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that the proposal that education be cancelled for one day was brought to Council via the USC minutes. He advised that the proposal received both support from some members, and concerns from others that the disruption would bring distress to students, and that the lead in time was too short. He reported that instead Council approved a recommendation that the Provost, Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer and the Students' Union (SU) Education Officer develop a proposal for a climate awareness event to take place on 22 April 2021 (Earth Day).

**USC/20-21/051 National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**  
i. A poster from Dr. Ciara O'Farrell, Head of Academic Practice, 'Gateway to Digital Assessment' was circulated just before the meeting and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Mr. David Hamill, Academic Practice, to the meeting. The Head of Academic Practice provided members with an overview of the project, speaking of the aim and the approach utilised, which treated students as partners in learning. She noted that the project's focus is on online assessment, and that outputs include resources that have been developed by students for students. She advised that self-directed modules had been created for both staff and students, and that while there was good staff engagement, student feedback indicated that they preferred different types of resources, to be made available such as a website with short videos. She added that the Academic Practice website now hosts Gateway to Digital Assessment pages for staff and students. Mr. David Hamill then shared a short video which highlighted the work of the project.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that it would be useful to consider what positive elements could be retained from the pandemic with regard to digital assessment, and that conversations around this should continue to be grounded in evidence. Members expressed concerns that the move to digital assessments brings an increased risk of plagiarism and collusion amongst students, and that a conversation around academic integrity needs to take place, if the University continues with this into the future. Responding to these concerns, the Head of Academic Practice advised that students need to understand what plagiarism is, and that good assessment design can mitigate the chance of plagiarism.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that an Academic Integrity Working Group is in the process of being formed, and that it will specifically look at academic integrity in the online space. He added that assessments and academic integrity will be an item on the agenda at a future meeting of USC. He agreed with comments from members that digital assessment may not be suitable for all types of assessments. Responding to a comment from a member on the logistical issues of running digital assessments, he noted that a conversation around this will happen in consultation with

Academic Registry. In relation to a comment about the 'Ready Steady Write' plagiarism tutorial for students hosted on the Library's website, he requested the Library Representative to look into whether or not data can be collected on its use by students. The SU Education Officer advised that a bigger conversation needs to occur around plagiarism, as the shift to digital assessment has resulted in many students being unaware that they are plagiarising. She emphasised that critical thinking skills and research skills need to be embedded into teaching and learning.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Head of Academic Practice for the presentation and Mr. David Hamill withdrew from the meeting.

ii. A presentation from Prof. Sarah Hamill and Dr. Eoin O'Dell, School of Law, 'Embedding Group Work and Innovative Assessment in the Private Law Curriculum' was circulated, and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed them to the meeting. Dr. Eoin O'Dell provided members with an overview of the project, reporting on how group work was scheduled throughout the term. He explained briefly that students participate in a moot, which is a mock appeal court where students must argue a point of law. He noted that currently the majority of courts are taking place online, and that in the future there will be hybrid courts, therefore this virtual moot court prepares students for the future well. He advised that student feedback on the process has been positive.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Prof. Sarah Hamill and Dr. Eoin O'Dell and they withdrew from the meeting.

**Decision/Action USC/20-21/051(i):** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that assessments and academic integrity would be an item at a future USC meeting.

**Decision/Action USC/20-21/051(ii):** The Library Representative to look into whether or not student usage data can be collected on the 'Ready Steady Write' plagiarism tutorial.

#### **USC/20-21/052 Academic Registry Annual Report 2019/20**

The Academic Registry Annual Report for 2019/20, dated February 2021, from the Acting Director of Academic Registry, was circulated, and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed her to the meeting.

The Acting Director of the Academic Registry spoke to the item by way of a presentation, which was circulated just before the meeting. She brought USC through a diagram summarising the Academic Registry's services and another one related to its organisational structure, noting that five full time staff had been seconded to the Digital Trinity Project. She highlighted the initiatives undertaken by Academic Registry in 2019/20, which included a number of COVID-19 emergency measures. She commended the Academic Registry team who had made significant contributions in the rolling out of these measures.

She outlined data on key performance indicators noting that targets had been met by all activities, with the exception of response times to e-mail queries. She attributed this to the closure of the Service Desk which had resulted in in-person and telephone queries becoming email queries, thus increasing the number of email queries received overall. She also highlighted data in relation to the overall student body, applications and admissions, student finance and student cases. She noted that there was a significant increase from 2018/19 in student cases in June and July, advising that these arose as a result of the introduction of COVID-19 arrangements.

Commenting on examinations, she advised USC that the data needs to be examined with the understanding that significant changes had occurred in assessment halfway through 2019/20. She reported that there were challenges associated with gathering the alternative assessment types for the Semester 2 online examinations, and that the scheduling of these

examinations required the development of a bespoke systems solution. She noted that in the first session of online examinations some scheduling problems arose, and due to time constraints, there was no provision for schools to review examination timetables before publication. She explained that this was remedied prior to the re-assessment session and a short window of time was made available to schools for review purposes. She advised that a support system for schools was implemented whereby groups of schools had a dedicated contact within the Academic Registry, and that this was positively received.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies acknowledged the tremendous work carried out in Academic Registry. Responding to a comment from a member regarding the condensed scheduling of examinations in the first week of the period, the Acting Director of Academic Registry explained that this is a limitation of the system, and that changes to the schedule are made manually following the systems allocation of slots. She noted the suggestion that a sample of students' timetables are examined for this before publication. Responding to a query from the Quality Officer on whether progression and retention data could be integrated into the Annual Report, she explained that work is being done first on progression data for the Widening Participation Group.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Acting Director of the Academic Registry who then withdrew from the meeting.

**Decision/Action USC/20-21/052:** The Acting Director of Academic Registry to investigate how to achieve a better spread of examinations over the full two-week assessment session, following Semester 2.

#### **USC/20-21/053 Academic Writing Centre**

A presentation from Ms. Susan Kirwin, Student Learning Development (SLD) Coordinator, dated February 2021, was circulated and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed her to the meeting.

The SLD Coordinator spoke to the presentation, first providing an overview of the highlights of SLD in 2019. She noted that online workshops had already been provided for the last number of years in SLD, and this facilitated the move online due to COVID-19. She reported that there was increased connection with students over the year, with a 349% rise in attendance at SLD services between March and May from the same period in 2018/19. She outlined the services offered by the Academic Writing Centre and provided the timeline for the implementation of their recent pilot programme. She noted that two extra PhD students were taken on in January in order to meet the needs of students attending the service. She added that it had been a very successful year for SLD in providing services to students and she welcomed feedback from USC on how SLD could be improved.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commended the work being done by the service. He commented that all students could benefit from the services provided and not just those who are deemed to need it; the service needs to be normalised for all students. A number of suggestions were made by members in the discussion that followed:

- Services should be provided for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) students, such as scientific writing skills.
- The email to students looks the same each time it is sent; it could be updated regularly as this may increase student engagement.
- Schools have a large part to play in promoting these types of services to students.
- Peer to peer workshops could be beneficial.
- Students on Trinity Elective modules could be targeted for writing workshops as they are completing work in a new discipline for the first time.

The SLD Coordinator advised that SLD is a small team and commented that the feedback on emails and STEM students would be considered. She said that peer to peer learning could be valuable, and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that this is both a powerful and scalable learning tool. He requested that Directors of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning (DUTLS) bring the information shared in the presentation back to their schools. He thanked the SLD Coordinator and she withdrew from the meeting.

#### **USC/20-21/054 Continuity of Teaching**

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies asked DUTLS to examine the amount of synchronous versus asynchronous teaching that is taking place in their schools. He reported that there is concern for students' engagement with learning and noted that live lectures offered opportunities for students to engage. He requested DUTLS to look at cohorts of students across programmes to ensure that there are live interactive events for all students and noted that this was important both pedagogically and as a social support for students. The SU Education Officer agreed that live lectures can have a huge impact on students, and recognised that it is a big commitment, adding that students will understand if a live lecture cannot take place on a given day once this is communicated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies also requested that lectures do not run over time, and the SU Education Officer noted that a student representative can be nominated to remind staff of time.

On the issue of scheduled examinations and final assignments, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies requested that lecturers take care to consider deadlines when converting final examinations into final assignments, and to be mindful of pressures on students. If final examinations are converted into final assignments, their deadlines should fall into the additional week for assignments, 24-29 May 2021. Responding to a query on what constitutes a final assignment, he noted that while this is a grey area, generally if an assignment is worth 50-60% of the overall grade, this should usually be scheduled into the final assignment period but there may be valid reasons to have students complete such assignments before the start of the formal assessment sessions.

Commenting on a query on whether degree year students can request to re-sit both examinations and assignments, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that students may request to re-sit either. He added that this may need to be reviewed on a case by case basis in situations where it is difficult to replicate the assessment type. He suggested that the same principles, as when students fail, should be applied whereby students are provided with an alternative type of assessment, if the original component cannot be recreated. He emphasised the need to be reasonable and practicable. Responding to a comment on publication dates of results, he noted that there is flexibility offered by the Academic Registry on this, if schools need it.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies then spoke about the application of the procedures for the non-submission of coursework and absence from examinations under COVID-19. He explained that this procedure was approved for 2020/21 but that its implementation had not been discussed due to the emergency measures in place for COVID-19. He advised that this system was incompatible with the emergency measures in place, and that the procedures for this year would follow those enacted the previous year. He explained that students who missed examinations would have their relevant modules coded as 'AR' on the system, indicating that the student was absent from the examination and may be re-assessed; sanctions prescribed under the procedure such as capping of marks in the reassessment session would not be applied.

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**Decision/Action USC/20-21/054:** USC approved delaying the application of the procedures for the non-submission of coursework and absence from examinations, under COVID-19, until 2021/22.

**USC/20-21/055 Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on delivery of on-site clinical teaching in the School of Medicine**

A document from Dr. Joseph Harbison, Director of Undergraduate Medical Education (DUME), dated February 2021, was circulated. The DUME gave members an overview of the document, and asked that USC consider the request being made for a derogation to the usual requirement for students to spend 24 months at clinical sites be reduced to 18 months, in light of the current pandemic. He noted that this regulation is specified in the Calendar entry for the programme only and had not been set by the Irish Medical Council.

Members commended the School of Medicine and the Faculty of Health Sciences for the frontline work that has been carried out during the pandemic. Schools in the Health Sciences were also commended for their increased efforts to ensure final year students can graduate. Responding to a comment by the SU Education Officer that there was concern amongst final year students on their competency, the DUME advised that graduates from the previous year were excelling now, and that a request has been made of the government to allow this year's graduates to begin their internships three weeks early so that there is a crossover with the previous year's interns, enabling them to build up their experience and confidence. He added that outcomes of assessments from Semester 1 this year are concordant with previous years, and that meetings are taking place with class representatives each week to link in with students. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, referring to the circulated document, noted the virtual methods of conducting clinical training employed by the School of Medicine.

**Decision/Action USC/20-21/055:** USC approved the derogation from the Calendar regulation which requires students to spend 24 months at approved clinical sites before being allowed to sit their final medical examinations, in light of the current pandemic. This requirement is to be reduced to 18 months for affected students.

**USC/20-21/056 Proposal for revised admissions criteria for various foreign qualifications**

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A memorandum from Prof. Juliette Hussey, Vice-President for Global Relations, dated 26 November 2020, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave members a brief summary of the document and asked for the approval of USC.

**Decision/Action USC/20-21/056:** USC supported the proposal for revised admissions criteria for various foreign qualifications and recommended it to Council.

**USC/20-21/057 External Examiner Process**

A memorandum from Ms. Roisin Smith, Quality Officer, dated 16 February 2021, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave members a brief overview of the memorandum, noting that nominees should be of a certain level of seniority from peer universities. Responding to a comment from a member, he noted that he would like to see the use of online platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams continuing in the future, and that this would allow schools to expand the scope of potential pool beyond Ireland and the United Kingdom when looking for external examiners. A member queried whether a Personal Public Service (PPS) number was required for external examiners from outside of Ireland, and the Quality Officer clarified that this is not necessary once the Court of Examiners takes place virtually, meaning that the examiner does not have to travel to Ireland.

**USC/20-21/058 Any other business**

The Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education (ADUSE) reported that there had been a large increase in the number of students requesting feedback on assessments. She noted the significant increase in work involved in responding to all of these requests and the associated logistical issues. She suggested the deferral of some feedback until after Semester 2 examinations, with priority given to those students with low marks at this point. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies agreed that this was sensible, and the

ADUSE noted that this will be communicated at a local level to students. The SU Education Officer offered to communicate with students on this matter also.

Responding to a comment from a member on the rights of students to retain a copy of their scripts, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that he would need to examine the policy around this and consult with the relevant people.

**USC/20-21/059 Minutes (Section B)**

USC noted and approved the following set of minutes:

1. **Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee**  
Minutes of the meetings of 20 October 2020, 24 November 2020, and 19 January 2021.
2. **Associated College Degrees Committee (RIAM)**  
Minutes of the meeting of 7 October 2020.
3. **Associated College Degrees Committee (MIE)**  
Minutes of the meeting of 19 November 2020.