



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 23 March 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 Jacob Erickson, School of Religion
Professor Clair Gardiner, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
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 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 Stan Houston, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Joe Harbison, School of Medicine
Professor Eoin Scanlan, School of Chemistry

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; Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies requested permission for the meeting to be recorded for minute taking purposes. He advised that the recording would be deleted once the minutes had been written. There were no objections.

USC/20-21/060 Minutes of the meeting of 23 February 2021

The minutes of the meeting of 23 February 2021 were approved.

- USC/20-21/061 Matters arising**
USC/20-21/050 The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave an update on the proposal for a climate awareness event to take place on 22 April 2021, advising that Council supported the proposal to deliver teaching and research activities related to this across Trinity on 22 April 2021.
- USC/20-21/051(ii)** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that the Library Representative had confirmed it is not possible to extract data on who has completed the 'Ready Steady Write' tutorial. He noted that it is only possible to see how many views there were of the LibGuide page, with 11227 views in 2020.
- USC/20-21/054** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reported that Council approved delaying the application of the procedures to the non-submission of coursework and absence from examinations under Covid-19 until 2021/22.
- USC/20-21/056** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that Council approved the four proposals on the revised undergraduate admissions criteria for foreign qualifications (China, Serbia, Turkey).

USC/20-21/062 Proposal for a Trinity Elective

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A proposal from Professor Áine Kelly, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education (ADUSE), dated 16 March 2021, was circulated, and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited her to speak to the proposal.

The ADUSE gave USC an overview of the document, explaining that the origins of Trinity Electives and the principles of the Trinity Electives were detailed within it. She advised that approval was being sought from USC for the addition of a new Trinity Elective 'The Psychology of the Climate Crisis', co-ordinated by Prof. Clare Kelly of the School of Psychology, to be rolled out in 2021/22. She added that, if approved, this would bring the total number of Trinity Electives to 40. She noted that the proposed Trinity Elective was a repurposed and repackaged Sophister module, aligned to the principles of the Trinity Electives, and that it had gained approval at the Trinity Electives Sub-Committee. She noted that the proposal had been positively received, as it is multidisciplinary in nature, very timely and addresses a global challenge which fits the idea of Trinity Electives.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the ADUSE, commenting that the proposed Trinity Elective is very well thought out. Responding to a query on whether the Trinity Elective is hybrid or blended as both terms had been used in the proposal, the ADUSE advised that a blend of teaching approaches would be used, including pre-recorded lectures, and live face-to-face teaching. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that blended may be the appropriate term to use.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/062: USC approved the proposed module 'The Psychology of the Climate Crisis' as a Trinity Elective and recommended it to Council.

USC/20-21/063 Proposal for a Bespoke Open Module from the School of Law

A proposal from the Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee (UCAGC), dated 10 March 2021, was circulated. The Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture (ADUCA) spoke briefly to the proposal, advising that the UCAGC were very pleased with the proposed 10 ECTS module 'Ireland's Changing Constitution', and noted that it is very clearly presented. He advised that approval was being sought from USC.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies praised the proposals and commented that it fits the idea of Open Modules very well. Responding to a query from a member on whether the intended cohort for the Open Module was restricted to the pillar structure, the ADUCA confirmed that it had been designed with a specific cohort in mind who are most likely to have an interest and had been placed within the Pillar block accordingly.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/063: USC approved the proposed Bespoke Open Module 'Ireland's Changing Constitution' from the School of Law.

USC/20-21/064 Continuity of Teaching

Two memorandums from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated March 2021, and a memorandum from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, dated 3 March 2021, were circulated.

Mitigation measures for semester two assessments

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies spoke to the first memorandum that had been circulated, 'Mitigation measures for semester two assessments.' He gave an overview of the memorandum, explaining the three measures that were being proposed for Semester Two assessments, and the rationale behind the measures. He advised that students will be allowed to apply for a re-sit of an assessment as in Semester One, that students will have the automatic right to defer assessments, and that students will have the right to defer Semester 1 assessments again if they wish. He reported that there will be no opportunity for a second attempt within this academic year if a student wishes to defer, but that the student may take the examination in the following academic year. He noted that the super-supplemental session which allowed for the second attempt of these examinations the previous year had been very disruptive for both staff and students. He advised that the proposal aims to recognise the difficulties that students face without disrupting staff and students at the start of the next academic year. He added that another measure he would like to propose was for an extension of the increased discretionary powers of the Court of Examiners when assessing students' overall marks and making progression decisions.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reported that a request had come from the Students' Union for the reinstatement of aggregation for assessments. He commented that it didn't seem to be a necessary measure for this academic year, as students are not under the same pressures as last year and added that this measure does not merge well with the other measures outlined.

During the discussion that followed, various comments and requests were made by members. Responding to requests from some members that grading on a curve be used for marking assessments, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that this would be a challenging mechanism to implement, and that it would be more useful to learn from the experience of grade inflation the previous year and recalibrate expectations accordingly. Commenting again on requests from some members for the implementation of aggregation for assessments, he advised that having this measure in place this year would have a different impact on results than the previous year. He explained that in 2019/20 this measure was only in place for Semester Two and affected 30 credits, while if it was put in place for 2020/21 it would impact 60 credits, meaning that students could potentially progress with a significant number of failed modules. He emphasised that it is important not to devalue the work that has been done by students and staff this year by using a measure like this. This was agreed with by other members who noted that the aggregation measures the previous year may have resulted in grade inflation and that it is not necessary this year as the situation has changed.

In response to a request from the Students' Union (SU) Education Officer that final year students be allowed to submit impact statements with their Final Year Projects, he said that this may not be such a useful measure with the other mitigation measures that will be in place. He emphasised that tutors should work closely with students to support them. Commenting on a request from the SU Education Officer and the Student Representative that students be granted automatic extensions of up to five days by schools, he said that this

should continue to be managed locally and that the majority of schools are co-operative in this regard.

A member requested that SITS codes need to be provided in advance to schools as there is a tight timeline to turn around assessments and marks. The Student Representative asked that the mitigation measures be made available on the Trinity website so they can be easily accessed by students. A member expressed concern on the negative optics for the College of not having a super-supplemental session due to administrative concerns. In contrast to this, the Senior Tutor noted that the super-supplemental session the previous year created a lot of issues for students waiting for results with some needing to go off-books in 2020/21.

Commenting on concerns about how the measures would apply to Capstones, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that deferral of Capstones should be allowed. He agreed with concerns from members that re-sits of Capstones is less straightforward, as students who receive feedback and are allowed to re-sit may have an advantage over other students, and suggested that students can defer Capstones but not re-sit.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies then summarised the response to the proposed measures. He noted that there was a positive response to the right to defer some modules, but not all, and that tutors should work closely with students to help them make these decisions. He noted that the proposal to not have a super-supplemental session this year was largely supported, while acknowledging that this was not unanimous. He noted that the right to re-sit was supported but not in the case of capstones. He noted that the suggestion to implement aggregation had been decided against and added that there was not strong support for grading on a curve.

Options for teaching activities, Academic Year 2021-22

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies spoke to the memorandum from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer 'Options for teaching activities, Academic Year 2021-22'. He gave a brief overview of the document, explaining that there are three scenarios envisaged for the following year, Scenario A being the best case scenario whereby most teaching and learning activity can return to normal, Scenario C being the worst case scenario, whereby teaching and learning continues as it has done this year, and Scenario B which would be a mix of teaching and learning on campus and online. He advised that the idea is that plans are made for each contingency over the summer, so that flexibility exists to change from one scenario to another as the public health situation emerges.

The following comments were made by members during the discussion:

- Scenario A and Scenario C are fine to plan for. Scenario B will be difficult.
- It will be difficult to transition from Scenario A to Scenario B as timetabling will be different in each scenario.
- It would be very difficult to switch scenarios for some schools where timetabling is built around practicals.
- There are students under 18 who will not be receiving the vaccine by September.
- A discussion needs to occur regarding the vaccination of healthcare students on placement.
- For some schools the capacity of all lectures are over 25 students, therefore no lectures could take place face-to-face.
- Lecture halls need to be fitted out for hybrid and hi-flex learning. Research shows this style of teaching requires full engagement by lecturers with the online 'audience'. A teaching assistant will be required to manage chat rooms in this scenario.
- A minimum percentage of face-to-face teaching is not desired. Schools should be able to make internal decisions about this to ensure consistency through year.

- Students need certainty as soon as possible as they will be out of work over the summer and accommodation is expensive. A broader conversation around this issue needs to be had.
- All students should have the opportunity to come on campus regardless of year and discipline.
- The most important thing is for the plans that are made to be executed well.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that there are discussions happening in the College on vaccination policy. He reported that there is not an inclination to be prescriptive with the amount of face-to-face teaching schools offer, but rather a desire for schools to decide locally how best to optimise this. He said that it may be best to work with the timetable as it is, whether teaching takes place in person or online, but acknowledged that this would be problematic also. He emphasised that the idea is to continue talking and planning for the various scenarios.

Assessments 2021/22 and beyond

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies spoke to the last memorandum circulated for this item 'Assessments 2021/22 and beyond'. He gave an overview of the memorandum, noting that there were positive changes made to assessments under the pandemic such as open-book take-home examinations which could be retained in the future. He advised that the retention of these types of assessments would mean there would be no need to book an external venue for examinations. He explained that there were two plans in the proposal to be considered. He advised that Plan A would take place under good public health conditions, as a hybrid plan with continued use of in-term assignments or other continual assessment. He noted that most final examinations would remain online as take-home, open-book assessments, while examinations that must take place in real-time would be held in person on campus, without the need to book an external venue. He explained that Plan B would be the same as Plan A except that in-person examinations would revert to taking place online.

The following comments were made by members during the discussion:

- Some schools wish to go back to having more face-to-face examinations.
- The retention of new types of assessment would be welcomed by students as they more closely mimic the application of knowledge in the real world.
- Moving away from using an external venue would be welcomed as the experience is not good for students.
- The long duration of open-book examinations can put pressure on the short window for scheduling assessments.
- Provision of quiet spaces in College for students to take open-book style examinations would be useful.
- Feedback from external examiners the previous year was broadly in favour of the new types of assessments.
- Holding examinations online can result in an increased risk of plagiarism.
- Plagiarism can occur during in-person examinations due to rote-learning, and there are not the same checks as per open-book assessments.
- The Student Representative offered to create a survey for Arts, Humanities, and Social Science students asking for their feedback on the new types of assessments that have been used over the past year, and to bring a report of the findings to the next USC.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that there was a diversity of views in relation to this proposal, and that it is necessary to get a sense of the number of schools in favour of having face-to-face examinations, to ascertain whether booking an external venue will be necessary. He advised that a survey will be sent to schools in order to request this information from them.

Responding to a member's query on whether it is possible to extend the publication date of results, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that the date had been fixed at the UCAGC for courses with interlinked common architecture pathways. He pointed out that results data also need to be in the system by a certain date in order to facilitate online module enrolment.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/064(i): The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to inform the Continuation of Learning and Student Activities Group of the outcomes of the discussion on mitigation measures for semester two assessments.

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Decision/Action USC/20-21/064 (ii): The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to convey to Council that there was support from USC to plan for the different scenarios provided within 'Options for teaching activities Academic Year 2021-22', but that members had strong concerns around Scenario B.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/064(iii): The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to request information from schools to ascertain the number of face-to-face examinations required in 2021/22.

USC/20-21/065 Proposal for Academic Integrity Working Group

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 18 March 2021, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave a brief overview of the proposal and advised that endorsement was being sought from USC. He noted the rationale behind the proposal, and the three main areas of concern that the group would address: plagiarism, essay mills, and the invigilation of real-time online examinations. He advised that the proposed membership will include, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Dean of Graduate Studies, Junior Dean, SU Education Officer, a Graduate SU representative, a Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning (DUTL), a Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning, a school manager, and representatives from Academic Registry, IT Services and Trinity Teaching & Learning. A member commented that it would be useful for more than one DUTL to be a member of the group to ensure the plagiarism policy will be functional across various areas of study in College.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/065: USC endorsed the proposal for the Academic Integrity Working Group.

USC/20-21/066 Admissions Feasibility Studies

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A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 18 March 2021, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave a brief background to the Trinity Admissions Feasibility Study (TAFS), and the Feasibility Study in A-Level Admissions (Northern Ireland) (NIFS), noting that they have both been running for seven years. He explained that they had been designed to examine and provide alternative ways of admitting students to Trinity. He reported that the studies showed that students who enter through this mechanism do as well in Trinity as students who enter through more traditional routes. He noted that from an administrative perspective they are difficult to scale, which is why they have previously been continued at the current scale. He then asked USC to consider the proposal that both of these studies be extended for a further two years, in light of a wider admissions strategy that the College may be developing, and the new College administration which is forthcoming. He advised that it also proposed that places on TAFS not be allocated to students with less than 330 CAO points, as this will align it with NIFS which also has a minimum threshold.

Responding to a member's query on whether Northern Ireland (NI) students will be affected by a change of fee status within the proposed extended timeframe of NIFS due to changes arising from Brexit, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that he would discuss this with the Admissions Officer.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/066(i): USC supported the proposals in relation to the two admissions feasibility studies, subject to ascertaining the fee status of students from Northern Ireland and their access to the CAO system during the two-year extension, and recommended these to Council.

USC/20-21/067 Lifting of entry requirements for Music for 2022/23 entry onwards

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A memorandum from Professor Jennifer O'Meara, School of Creative Arts, dated 16 March 2021, was circulated. She spoke to the item, explaining that the Department of Music wishes to open up undergraduate access to their programme by removing the restricted entry requirements permanently from the Calendar entry and prospectus, and gave the rationale for this. She asked for support from USC for the proposal.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/067: USC approved the proposal for the Lifting of entry requirements for Music for 2022/23 entry onwards, and recommended it to Council.

USC/20-21/068 Any other business

There was none.

USC/20-21/069 Minutes (Section B)

USC noted and approved the following set of minutes:

1. **Trinity Electives Sub-Committee**
Meeting minutes of 1 December 2020.
2. **Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee**
Meeting minutes of 9 February 2021.

USC/20-21/070 Items for noting (Section C)

USC noted and approved, where necessary, the following items/documents:

- i. **Cessation of Programmes in Information Systems (Diploma and B.Sc.)**
XX Completed forms from Professor Carol O'Sullivan, Head of School of Computer Science and Statistics and Professor Sylvia Draper, Faculty Dean of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, were circulated.
The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that Cessations are usually a Section A item at USC, but that these courses had suspended entry in 2015 and their final students had finished in 2018-19, with no further registered students.
- ii. **Approval of Additional Degree Destinations for the Trinity International Foundation Programme**
XX A memorandum from Ms. Clíodhna Martin, Admissions and Recruitment Manager, International Foundation Programme, dated 1 March 2021.
- iii. **Assess and Progress Schedule for Shared Elements of the Common Architecture**
A memorandum from the Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee, dated 2 March 2021.