



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 30 November 2021 at 2.00 pm via Zoom.

Present: Professor David Shepherd, 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 (ADUSE)
Professor Graeme Murdock, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture (ADUCA)
Professor Paula Quigley, School of Creative Arts
Professor Andrew Loxley, School of Education
Professor Robert Armstrong, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Sarah Hamill, School of Law
Professor Ciara O'Hagan, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Margaret Walshe, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Professor Clare Kelly, School of Psychology
Professor Michelle D'Arcy, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Julie Byrne, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Jacob Erickson, School of Religion
Professor Vincent Kelly, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Iouri Gounko, School of Chemistry
Professor Jonathan Dukes, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Kevin Kelly, School of Engineering
Professor Juan Pablo Labrador, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor John Stalker, School of Mathematics
Professor Carlos Rocha, School of Natural Sciences
Professor David O'Regan, School of Physics
Professor Heather Reilly, School of Dental Science
Professor Joe Harbison, School of Medicine
Professor Damien Brennan, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Jake Byrne, Academic Director of Tangent
Ms Bev Genockey, Education Officer, Students' Union
Mr Yannick Gloster, Student Representative

Apologies: Professor Norah Campbell, Trinity Business School
Professor Mark Sweetnam, School of English

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Academic Affairs; Ms Linda Darbey, Assistant Academic Secretary; Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative; Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Director of Academic Practice; Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services; Ms Roisin Smith, Quality Officer; Ms Ciara Conlon, Academic Affairs, Ms Jennifer Pepper, Director of the Academic Registry and Ms Gráinne de Bhulbh, Assessment, Progression and Graduation (APG) Activity Lead (for item USC/21-22/022).

USC/21-22/020 Minutes of the meeting of 2 November 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the 2 November 2021 were approved, subject to correcting minute USC/21-22/013 to reflect the fact that more than one member expressed concerns about additional Saturday work, and the effect this would have on work-life balance.

USC/21-22/021 Matters arising

- i. **USC/21-22/013:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that he had received correspondence from USC members about the proposed Spring Open Day and that he had forwarded this feedback to the Director of Marketing. He advised that a more detailed plan would be submitted to the Committee, for consideration, in due course.
- ii. **USC/21-22/014:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies indicated that he was due to attend a meeting later that week in relation to the next-steps following the conclusion of Digital Trinity 2 and advised that further information would be forthcoming in the New Year.
- iii. **USC/21-22/015:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies notified the meeting that issues raised at the last meeting of USC were addressed in the revised Assessment and Academic Progression Policy. This policy was subsequently considered by GSC and approved at the last meeting of Council.

USC/21-22/022 Semester 1 assessment contingencies

This item was moved up the agenda by one place to facilitate the attendance of representatives from the Academic Registry. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Ms Jennifer Pepper, Director of the Academic Registry, and Ms Gráinne de Bhulbh APG Activity Lead, to the meeting to help answer operational questions.

Speaking to the recent e-mails to staff and students, on contingency plans for Semester 1 assessments, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that recent feedback submitted by Directors of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning (DUTLs) had been considered at the Continuity of Learning and Student Activities Group (COLSAG). He noted that serious consideration was given to the option of allowing deferrals to the reassessment session only, however, as this is so far away, it was thought that this might lead to students attending for assessments when they should self-isolate instead. He also noted that deferring to the January session was also seriously considered before the final recommendations were put forward, that is for late afternoon, evening and weekend examination sittings during 7-19 February 2022, with contingency dates of 21-26 February 2022. He added that the February deferral session would also have to apply to students taking online examinations, in light of the inevitability that some students will not have the facility to sit online examinations at home and will need to take these on campus.

During the discussion, it was commented that while this should work for the majority of students, further contingency plans would be needed for Semester 1 visiting students, who will have returned to their home countries by February, and for Trinity students who are due to undertake Semester 2 abroad.

Several members emphasised the high stress levels being experienced by staff and advised that this cannot be sustained, as staff are worn out. A proportion of staff, as with students, are suffering the effects of the pandemic, whether related to having had Covid itself or through experiencing mental health difficulties. A member particularly commented that it must be recognised that such an undertaking will reduce the time available for other priority areas in Trinity, including research, and teaching and learning innovations. He suggested several ways in which College could counterbalance the additional work required to put on the February deferral session. For example, the Annual Faculty Quality Review or the Open Day in Spring could be put on hold; an exemption could be granted from the requirement to send degree examination papers to external examiners for review, and also in relation to sending online examination papers to the APG Team; the results from this deferral session should be published with the Semester 2 assessment results; SITS should be developed to process deferral requests more efficiently; overtime payments should be considered for administrative and professional staff who are involved in the additional deferral examination session; a fund should be set-up for schools to use on priority areas such as for research and teaching and learning innovation. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies

acknowledged the additional work caused by this decision, however, he noted that much thought had gone into this and it was considered to be the best option in the circumstances. He advised that staff in the Academic Registry will work hard to schedule these examinations in the most efficient way possible. He also acknowledged the pressure being experienced across College and confirmed that he would relay the suggested counterbalancing measures to the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer.

Responding to some of the suggestions, the APG Activity Lead noted that it is recognised in the Academic Registry and by IT Services that SITS needs to be developed to better deal with student cases and deferral processes. She clarified that the Academic Registry is required to maintain a record of examination papers, however, in relation to online examination papers, these can be provided after the examination session concerned (it was confirmed later in the meeting that this relates to the main papers and not to those for reassessments and deferrals). She confirmed that publishing the results from the February session at the same times as Semester 2 results would not cause progression issues, however, she advised that this would need to be discussed with the Students' Union and the Graduate Students' Union. The student representatives advised against delaying the publication of the February deferrals, as this would cause significant stress for students.

Some members queried the criteria and the protocol for making a February deferral request. It was also queried if such deferrals would relate to coursework too. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies asked these members to e-mail him with their particular queries so that clarification may be offered. The APG Activity Lead advised that schools should return module results of 'PD' for Semester 1, where a deferral has been granted.

Several members spoke about the need to start making contingency plans for the next few years as it appears that Covid-19 will be present for quite some time. It was suggested that College should develop a framework of standard contingency measures corresponding to key national Covid indicators; this would help to prevent emergency decision making and would improve communication with staff and students alike. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that he would discuss this amongst senior management but cautioned that, given the many variables, this is unlikely to bring the planning certainty that everyone would want.

Responding to a query about invigilation for examinations which pivot from in-person to online formats, the Director of the Academic Registry advised that sufficient invigilators have been recruited to accommodate in-person examinations and would be available for re-assignment in such a situation. She commented that schools should contact the Academic Registry so that they can broker arrangements between the schools and invigilators.

The Students' Union Education Officer expressed the view that all examinations should move online, however, she noted that some module co-ordinators have been told that they cannot do so. A member responded that the decision to move an examination online resides with the module co-ordinator, in consultation with the school. Some co-ordinators are feeling pressurised to use online methods, even though this is sub-optimal from a pedagogical point of view. Another member commented that his school did not allow an examination to move online as there was no pedagogical reason to do so and that last year, a significant number of plagiarism cases were detected in this module under online conditions. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that in the absence of a direction from government on this matter, the decision as to the format of an examination is best left to the module co-ordinator in consultation with the school, that is, with the DUTL and in some cases the Head of School; it is not the co-ordinator's decision alone.

Responding to a query about available spaces on campus for students who need to avail of facilities to take online examinations, the APG Activity Lead outlined the expected space requirements. She also confirmed that students who have both an in-person and online examination on the same day are being contacted by the Academic Registry to enquire if they require space on campus.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies concluded the discussion by saying that members should contact him if they did not manage to comment during the discussion.

Action/Decision

022.01: The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to discuss suggestions put forward during the discussion with the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer to alleviate pressure on staff in schools and across College.

Ms Jennifer Pepper, Director of the Academic Registry, and Ms Gráinne de Bhulbh, APG Activity Lead, withdrew from the meeting.

USC/21-22/023 National Student Survey Report 2020/21

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 25 November 2021, was circulated along with a report produced by the Quality Office, dated 2 November 2021, and a presentation from the Dean of Students.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies introduced the item by noting that this year he hoped that USC could be used to help DUTLs, and to facilitate mutual support among members, to enable the development of objectives for their School Action Plans, to feed into the Annual Faculty Quality Report process. He invited the Dean of Students to present information from the National Student Survey 2020/21.

The Dean of Students brought the committee through information on the following areas:

- Demographic Profile of Participants 2020/21
- Additional Covid-19 related questions
- Student Experience During Covid-19
- Survey Outcomes Impacts of Covid-19
- Overall Indicators: Trinity vs. other Irish Universities (UG (Yr 1 and Final Yr) and PG Taught)
- Overall Indicators: Cohort Results (UG (Yr 1 and Final Yr) 2020/21
- Overall Indicators: Faculty Results (UG (Yr 1 and Final Yr) and PG Taught) 2020/21
- Overall Experience Trends (UG (Yr 1 and Final Yr) and PG Taught) 2016-2021
- Student comments

In outlining the data gathered from the survey, she commented that the results should be used to highlight particular areas for further investigation.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Dean of Students for her presentation and invited members to comment about the survey results and their schools.

A member suggested that given the focus on plagiarism in recent years, the poor score related to student collaboration could be driven partly by students misinterpreting the term collaboration as collusion. The Dean of Students agreed that the questions are open to interpretation, however, there are a few areas in which the indicator scores for Trinity are inconsistent with scores in the other universities, and the reasons for this should be explored.

One member, commenting on data for his school over the last two years, noted that the number of respondents represented approximately 10% of the student cohort, which makes it difficult to say if the opinions are representative. They have started to roll-out more

collaborative tasks within modules, however, module co-ordinators cannot be told how to teach and, therefore, this requires work to promote cultural change and acceptance.

Another member noted that the flipped classroom model seems to have increased workload for students, and for staff too, therefore, they are looking at the number of tasks associated with this format. They are also seeking advice as to how collaborative learning could be used to a greater extent, however, it should be noted that the late confirmation of module class lists impedes the use of collaborative methods.

Speaking about the effect of lockdown measures, a member noted that these would have had an adverse effect, particularly on collaborative learning and in relation to staff-student interaction. She pointed to an example in her school, where they previously hosted a Sophister module group-work conference, which was followed by a reception to allow informal discussion; it has been very difficult to find a suitable space for this.

Another member commented on the incentivisation structure in College, which significantly rewards research over teaching efforts. This can work against implementing more resource intensive assessment methods, even if they are desirable pedagogically.

A member voiced concerns about the current Junior Sophister cohort of students in her school as they seem to be experiencing difficulties in interacting with each other and are not fully engaging in their courses. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that these students faced severe disruption during their first year in College.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that staff and students have done remarkably well over the last few years. He thanked members for their contribution to the discussion and invited others to contact him after the meeting if they wished to comment further.

USC/21-22/024 Any other business

- i. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies highlighted the upcoming Postgraduate Teaching Awards and indicated that a representative from either the Faculty of Health Sciences or the Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics is required for the judging panel. He asked for interested members to contact him by e-mail.
- ii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies drew attention to the additional Further Education and Training (FET) route into the Dental Technology programme, circulated under Section C.
- iii. Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the DUTLs for all their work and advised that he is continuing to meet with them on an individual basis. He hoped to meet with the remaining members soon.

USC/21-22/025 Minutes (Section B)

USC noted and approved the following sets of minutes.

- i. **Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee**
Minutes of the meeting of 19 October 2021.
- ii. **Trinity Electives Sub-Committee**
Minutes of the meeting of 25 February 2021.

USC/21-22/026 Items for noting (Section C)

USC noted and approved, the following item:

- XX** i. **New Further Education and Training (FET) Routes and Update**
Memorandum from the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDET) Co-ordinator, dated 16 November 2021.