



**A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 25 January 2022 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 Graeme Murdock, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture (ADUCA)  
Professor Jennifer O'Meara, School of Creative Arts  
Professor Andrew Loxley, School of Education  
Professor Mark Sweetnam, School of English  
Professor Robert Armstrong, School of Histories and Humanities  
Professor David Kenny, 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 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 David O'Regan, School of Physics  
Professor Áine Kelly, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education (ADUSE)

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Academic Affairs; Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative; Ms Linda Darbey, Assistant Academic Secretary; 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 (for items USC/21-22/029(iii) and USC/21-22/030); Ms Gráinne de Bhulbh, Assessment, Progression and Graduation (APG) Activity Lead (for item USC/21-22/030); Ms Dearbhla Cullinane and Dr Denis Barry (for item USC/21-22/032(i)); Dr Cuisle Forde and Ms Annie O'Brien (for item USC/21-22/032(ii)); Professor Martine Smith, Dean of Graduate Studies and Ms Leona Coady, Programme Director for Postgraduate Renewal Project (for item USC/21-22/033).

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**USC/21-22/027 Minutes of the meeting of 30 November 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of 30 November 2022 were approved.

### **USC/21-22/028 Matters arising**

- i. **USC/21-22/022:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that since the last meeting of USC, at which concerns were raised about the significant pressures faced by staff in mounting an additional examination session in February for Semester 1 deferrals, he had confirmed that examination papers do not have to be submitted, for the purposes of archiving and past paper provision, to the Academic Registry before the Autumn 2022, and that results from the February session can be published along with the end-of-year results, after Semester 2. He encouraged schools, however, to share these results with students, where available. Referring to the proposal to hold an additional Open Day in April, which was supported by USC, he noted that this would be reviewed in early February to see if it is necessary.
- ii. **USC/21-22/026:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the additional Further Education and Training admission routes were approved by Council.

### **USC/21-22/029 Senior Lecturer's Updates**

- i. Commenting on the additional public holiday announced for 18 March 2022, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that he and the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer were satisfied that schools and departments could put in place local arrangements to manage the disruption to teaching and learning activities.
- ii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, speaking on the topic of Academic Integrity, advised the meeting that Council has mandated the establishment of a working group for which an ad hoc group, including the Senior Lecturer, has been formed to draft terms of reference and membership; these will be presented to Council for approval. He stressed the importance of broad representation of stakeholders on the working group and indicated that interested parties should contact him.
- iii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Ms Jennifer Pepper, Director of the Academic Registry, to the meeting. He thanked members for responding to his request for information about staff in schools who are responsible for submitting and confirming module information. He commended the significant amount of work carried out over the last few years to implement online module enrolment, however, he acknowledged that further development work is required some of which will be significant and will require time and resources. He advised that he is co-chairing a small development group with the Director of Student Services, which will work alongside the larger Online Module Enrolment (OME) Working Group. This working group is co-chaired by the ADUCA and the Director of Academic Registry and is tasked with ensuring that the process runs smoothly this year, facilitating minor improvements, where possible, and recommending more substantial improvements to the OME Development Group.

The Director of the Academic Registry spoke to a short presentation. She outlined the data gathering timelines ahead of the 2022/23 academic year and advised that after these dates are supported by USC, they will be communicated to the wider community. Responding to a question, she confirmed that if a lecturer's name is not known by the March deadline to confirm modules, this information can be added at a later date; she undertook to find out if this information is a system requirement. She advised that she is reviewing the support requirement for OME within the Academic Registry in terms of clear points of contact.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Director of the Academic Registry for her presentation and registered his appreciation for the work being carried out in schools and in other areas of College in relation to OME.

#### **Action/Decision**

**029.01:** USC supported the timeline presented on the data gathering activities for OME ahead of the 2022/23 academic year.

## **USC/21-22/030 Assessment and Progression**

### **i. Assessment and Progression Data 2020/21**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 20 January 2022, was circulated with assessment and progression data from 2020/21. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Ms Gráinne de Bhulbh, APG Activity Lead, to the meeting to speak to the data.

The APG Activity Lead brought the meeting through a presentation, which covered:

- Measures to Mitigate the Impact of Covid-19 on Students in 2020/21
- Student Cases – deferral requests
- Resit requests
- Breakdown of Examination Sittings
- Grade Profiles under Covid measures
  - All undergraduate course and course years by Faculty
  - Average course results for all undergraduate courses all course years
  - Undergraduate overall final year grade distribution by Faculty

It was noted that there is an overall trend of increasing marks over the last five years seen in the data presented, particularly in the Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and it was queried if this trend had been correlated to particular factors, for example, to the increased number of assessments taken by students. The APG Activity Lead confirmed that data could be extracted for analysis if a school wished to help with this exercise.

A member commented that the increase in results in his School had been flagged to their external examiner who was asked to consider if there had been any lowering of standards. The external examiner confirmed that the marks awarded were in line with the quality of students' assessment work. He added that the increase in marks could indicate that certain changes brought about over last two years have had a beneficial impact on student learning. Related to this point, another member commented that examinations had not been used for a number of years in her School, therefore, COVID arrangements had not represented a change in assessment practices. However, it appears that students dedicated more time to research and study during the year and did better as a result; perhaps this is because there were fewer activities available to divert their attention during lockdown periods.

Another member commented that care should be taken when interpreting the general increase in year-on-year results; it is not students' fault if assessments are not fine-tuned enough to distinguish between student performances and, if an additional year of data had been included, it would show that 2016/17 represented a previous peak in student performance for the Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Science.

Another member commented that while there does seem to be an improvement in performance, there were also more cases of plagiarism. He noted that it is important to understand what is beneficial and to carry on using the methods that work in a post-pandemic environment.

The significant increase in the number of student cases was highlighted by some members. Tutors, the Student Cases Team and executive officer staff in schools were all commended and thanked for managing the considerable associated workload. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies wholeheartedly agreed and commented that he hoped that the number of student cases would start to decrease again.

Following questions on the number of students taking resits of passed assessments, the APG Activity Lead noted that the data indicates the number of students granted these resits, however, not all of these actually attended. Of those that did complete resits, extracting

data on improved results would not be straightforward; original marks were overwritten with improved results and this was recorded as the first sitting.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the APG Activity Lead for her presentation and for her offer to provide further statistics on assessment and progression if required.

**ii. Pausing the procedure on the non-submission of coursework/non-attendance at examinations.**

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that this procedure was approved by Council at the end of 2019/20, but its implementation was paused in 2020/21. The intention was to implement the procedure this year, however, there are concerns that this has not been communicated to students as consistently as it should, therefore, he proposed that this procedure should be implemented in 2022/23 instead.

There was support for this proposed pause. It was noted by a member that work was needed to finalise the module result codes that should be used with the various outcomes outlined in the procedure; this would need to be communicated to schools before the procedure could be implemented in 2022/23.

The discussion moved onto the topic of the module result codes that should be used this year in cases of absence or non-submission of coursework, without a valid excuse. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that he did not want to introduce further changes ahead of implementation next year, therefore, he advised that for missed examinations, a mark of 0% should be recorded with a result code of 'AR' to generate the reassessment. In cases of non-submitted coursework, a mark of 0% should be recorded and a result of 'AR' should be used if a reassessment is needed, or 'F' should be used if the reassessment is not needed, i.e., if a student has passed the module based on the average of other components. A member commented that this would require staff to carry out a pre-calculation of module results where this occurs.

The APG Activity Lead commented on the rationale behind this guidance. Schools would have the ability to make a decision on this locally, as to whether 'AR' or 'F' is used and this could depend on whether the missed component would have a significant impact on the grade or whether or not the student had achieved the learning outcomes for the module; the result of 'AR' will always generate a reassessment, whereas the result of 'F' only does so if the module is failed overall or cannot be compensated.

**Action/Decision**

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**030.01:** USC supported the pausing of the procedure for the current year, 2021/22, and noted that details on appropriate result codes would be needed before schools and course offices could implement this in 2022/23.

**030.02:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to circulate the above guidance to members for comment, after which final guidance will issue for the 2021/22 academic year.

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

**USC/21-22/031 External Examiners**

**i. Revenue's requirements for the external examiners.**

A memorandum from the Deputy Director HR, Data Protection Officer and Quality Officer, dated 10 November 2021, was circulated. The Quality Officer introduced the item and outlined the obligation for external examiners, appointed from outside Ireland, to apply for a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) if they are conducting their external examining duties in Ireland. She added that this does not have to be done before they attend for the

court of examiners, however, it would need to be processed before their fee and expenses are paid, otherwise, they are likely to be taxed at the highest rate. She stressed that external examiners, themselves, must apply for the PPSN; the application cannot be initiated by staff in Trinity. Lastly, she confirmed that information and template letters will be updated on Trinity webpages for external examiners <https://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/Education/Ext.Examiners/index.php>.

A member commented that external examiners for Trinity are already paid a low fee for their services, when compared to universities in the United Kingdom; the introduction of a further bureaucratic hurdle will not help in attracting new external examiners to act. Related to this, whilst outside the remit of USC, she requested the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to advocate for better external examining fees in Trinity. Another member requested that this information be sent to the School Administrative Managers.

#### **ii. Terms and Conditions of Data Processing by External Examiners**

USC noted the document Terms and Conditions of Data Processing by External Examiners, as circulated.

#### **iii. Virtual Courts of Examiners**

The discussion on external examiners turned to arrangements for courts of examiners during the current academic year. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that he would be happy to approve remote attendance of external examiners where necessary this year and done so as to satisfy the requirements of 7.6 of the External Examiner Policy. The retention of this option this year was welcomed, with a member noting benefits of holding courts of examiners online, which included improved attendance and less of an impact on the environment. Another member commented on the usefulness of online courts of examiners but reported access issues for external examiners to Blackboard.

#### **Action/Decision**

**031.01:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to raise the issue of fees for external examining with the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer.

**031.02:** The Quality Officer to ensure that the memorandum on the Revenue's requirements for external examining is sent to the School Administrative Managers in all schools.

### **USC/21-22/032 Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Presentations**

#### **i. Enhancing Blended Learning in Anatomy Education**

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Dr Dennis Barry and Ms Dearbhla Cullinane, who delivered a presentation on their project to enhance the Department of Anatomy's blended teaching and learning delivery through the digitisation of historic and radiographic teaching resources, which are used to complement existing teaching practices, including cadaveric practical laboratory sessions and didactic lectures.

They brought the meeting through the project deliverables, successes to date, examples of the digitised teaching resources and the next steps for the project.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Dr Barry and Ms Cullinane for their presentation.

#### **ii. DEPTH: Digitally Enhanced Practice Teaching in Health Science**

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Dr Cuisle Forde and Ms Annie O'Brien to USC to present information on their project.

Dr Forde and Ms O'Brien summarised the goals of the project which are to examine opportunities and barriers to digitally enhanced practical teaching; to analyse student, academic, clinical professional and patient perspectives on digitally enhanced practical

teaching; to examine the feasibility and efficacy of digitally enhanced practical teaching (in skills acquisition and assessment) in partnership with students; and to develop an open educational resource informed by results of this research. They brought the meeting through the themes that were emerging from their data.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Dr Forde and Ms O'Brien for their presentation. He noted that other recipients of Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement funding were scheduled to present their projects and findings during the course of the year.

*Dr Dennis Barry, Ms Dearbhla Cullinane, Dr Cuisle Forde and Ms Annie O'Brien withdrew from the meeting.*

#### **USC/21-22/033 Postgraduate Renewal Programme**

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Dr Martine Smith, Dean of Graduate Studies, and Ms Leona Coady, Programme Director of Postgraduate Renewal, to the meeting.

The Dean of Graduate Studies provided a brief update on the Postgraduate Renewal Programme via a short presentation. She outlined the governance structure and the programme work packages. In terms of timelines, she noted that the consultation phase is due to start imminently with surveys being released to the postgraduate taught students, postgraduate research students, academic staff and administrative staff on Monday 31 January 2022. Responses to these surveys will feed into a report to Council in May 2022 on identified priorities for postgraduate renewal and with recommendations for implementation.

A member requested that attention be given to the five-year integrated programmes which span undergraduate and postgraduate education.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Programme Director of Postgraduate Renewal for attending the meeting and encouraged members of USC to participate in the surveys.

*Dr Martine Smith, Dean of Graduate Studies, and Ms Leona Coady, Programme Director of Postgraduate Renewal, withdrew from the meeting.*

#### **USC/21-22/034 Any other business**

There was no other business.

#### **USC/21-22/035 Minutes (Section B)**

USC noted and approved the following sets of minutes.

- i. **Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee**  
Minutes of the meeting of 16 November 2021.

#### **USC/21-22/036 Items for noting (Section C)**

USC noted and approved, the following item:

- i. **New Minor Subjects 2022/23**  
Memorandum from the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture, dated 14 January 2022.