



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 30 January 2024 at 2.00 pm in the Boardroom, Trinity Business School.

Present: Professor David Shepherd, Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies (*Chair*)
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary
Professor Richard Porter, Dean of Students
Professor Stephen Smith, Senior Tutor
Professor Fraser Mitchell, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education (ADUSE)
Professor Mark Sweetnam, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture (ADUCA)
Professor Martha O'Hagan Luff, Trinity Business School
Professor Evangelia Rigaki, School of Creative Arts
Professor Ann Devitt, School of Education
Professor Anna Chahoud, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Sarah Hamill, School of Law
Professor Martin Worthington, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Margaret Walshe, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Professor Clare Kelly, School of Psychology
Professor Dino Hadzic, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Phillip Curry, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Jacob Erickson, School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies
Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Valeria Nicolosi, School of Chemistry
Professor Goetz Botterweck, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Juan Pablo Labrador, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Jan Manschot, School of Mathematics
Professor Matthew Saunders, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Heather Reilly, School of Dental Science
Professor Aileen Lynch, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Richard Deane, School of Medicine
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Jake Byrne, Academic Director of Tangent
Catherine Arnold, Education Officer, Students' Union

Apologies: Professor Julie Bates, School of English
Professor Cormac McGuinness, School of Physics
Professor Kevin Kelly, School of Engineering
Dr Pauline Rooney, Director of Academic Practice
Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services
Mr Eoghan Gilroy, Student Representative

In attendance: Ms Ciara Conlon, Academic Affairs; Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative; Mr Ronan Hodson, Admissions Officer (for item USC/23-24/048); Ms Roisin Smith and Ms Leticia Peralta (for item USC/23-24/049); Professor Eoin Mac Cárthaigh (for item USC/23-24/050).

USC/23-24/045 Minutes of the meeting of 12 December 2023

The minutes of the meeting of 12 December 2023 were approved.

USC/23-24/046 Matters arising

- i. **USC/23-24/042:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the proposed revisions to the A-level/Leaving Certificate points equivalences were approved by Council and will be implemented from the academic year 2025/26. In response to a member's query, he confirmed this can be shared with prospective students from Northern Ireland.

USC/23-24/047 Senior Lecturer's Updates

- i. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the nominated representatives for their input into the review of the Virtual Learning Environment system, advising that there will be further opportunity for input in identifying the key academic requirements that should feature in a VLE system utilized in Trinity. In response to a member's query, he advised that all potential systems will be tested for functionality. A member emphasised the importance of integration of the VLE system with SITS, to which the Senior Lecturer clarified that this is being considered as part of the review.
- ii. Updating the meeting on the Academic Integrity Steering Group activities, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that template emails will be made available for teaching staff. He stated that the Group are currently reviewing the process, including possible re-calibration of the rubric. He highlighted the importance of recording incidents on SITS and advised that work was and is being undertaken to ensure module co-ordinators will be able to enter incidents and view previous records.
- iii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked members for providing feedback in relation to the QQI led project evaluating Honours Bachelor's Degree classifications, and informed USC that this will be reported on in an upcoming meeting. He thanked the Quality Office for leading on Trinity's response to QQI.
- iv. Referring to the review of attendance/non-satisfactory attendance regulations, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that members will be invited to provide more specific feedback in relation to proposed changes. He stated that it has become clear that a monitoring system is necessary to ensure equity in the application of any consequences for non-attendance, and this is being looked at as part of the VLE review.
- v. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reported that following the success in returning some additional in-person examinations to campus in semester 1, the number of exams held on campus will increase again for the semester 2 assessment session. Commenting on the examinations contingency days at the end of Semester 1, a member noted that they were too close to the end of Semester 1 teaching and asked that this be reviewed for next year. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies agreed, advising that given the shift back to campus for in-person exams there is a need to re-examine how exams are scheduled going forward.

USC/23-24/048 Cessation of the Matriculation Examinations

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The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Mr Ronan Hodson, the Admissions Officer, to the meeting.

Speaking to the item, the Admissions Officer stated that the two remaining matriculation exams in Geology and Biblical studies are no longer necessary due to their substantial overlap with the Geography and Religion Leaving Certificate curricula, explaining that admission based on these exams now offers some students an unfair advantage. He confirmed that academic colleagues involved in devising, administering and marking these exams support the proposal to cease these examinations. In response to a query, he advised that the number of students sitting the exams rose significantly during Covid, and that approx. 200 students sat the exam last year, the majority of which are from a small subset of secondary schools.

Members endorsed the proposal, and the DUTL from the School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies reiterated the school's support. In response to a query from the Academic Secretary on ceasing the exams with immediate effect, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that, if approved, the cessation will apply from the academic year 2026/27 so as not to disadvantage students currently in the Leaving Certificate cycle.

Action/Decision

048.01: USC approved the cessation of the Matriculation Examinations in Geology and Biblical Studies from the academic year 2026/27.

USC/23-24/049 External Examiner Nomination Process

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Ms Roisin Smith, Quality Officer, and Ms Leticia Peralta, Quality Projects Officer, to the meeting.

Speaking to a presentation, Ms Peralta brought the meeting through the new external examiner nomination and approval process, advising that it is an automated process intended to improve user experience and allow for accurate recording of nominations and appointments. She advised that the timeline for submission for undergraduate External Examiner nominees via the new online system is 19 February 2024. The Quality Officer pointed to the resources available on the Trinity Teaching and Learning website and recommended that nominations are submitted using MS Teams.

In response to feedback from committee members on the timeframe for submitting nominations, the Quality Officer advised that this is to facilitate the submission of the consolidated list of External Examiners to Council in April. She provided reassurance that nominations received after 19th February but before the April submission to Council would be processed in time for the next academic year. Nominations received after the deadline for Council would be submitted in the next academic year. In future, she confirmed that the call for nominees will be brought forward to October, to facilitate Schools who had difficulty recruiting External Examiners.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that the changes made to the external examiner policy last year should aid the search and asked that Schools make every effort to meet the set timelines. In response to a query from a member regarding extending a term of appointment, he advised that a term can be extended for one year only in exceptional circumstances, and that the same nomination process applies. The Academic Secretary noted that the proposed process has been successfully implemented in the postgraduate space and has been received positively by Schools.

A member enquired if DUTLs will have access to the database of external examiners for their School, and the Quality Officer advised that they can request the information from Trinity Teaching and Learning and that the intention is to make the database itself accessible in due course.

Action/Decision

049.01: USC approved the proposed automation of the external examiner nomination process.

USC/23-24/050 Proposal for a New Trinity Joint Honours Subject: Early Irish

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A proposal from the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies was circulated and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Professor Eoin Mac Cárthaigh, to the meeting.

Speaking to the proposal, Professor Eoin Mac Cárthaigh advised that the subject of Early Irish was previously available to students to study in combination with a variety of other subjects under the Two Subject Moderatorship system, but currently it is only offered as part of the Single Honours Early and Modern Irish programme. He explained that offering the subject in the Trinity Joint Honours structure will allow students to combine it once again with a wide range of subjects without requiring additional staffing resources. He highlighted the unique and valuable nature of the subject, indicating that the focus on Middle Irish makes the proposed offering distinct. In response to a member's question, he confirmed that the expected student intake is small due to the specialised nature of the subject, and it is proposed that the quota is set at 10 students, split evenly between EU and Non-EU. He paid tribute to College for the support provided which facilitates the study of Early Irish to continue, and added that this proposal will add value and opportunity for students without increasing current expenditure.

Members enthusiastically welcomed the proposal, and the Education Officer stated that there is support from the student body to strengthen the position of Irish in Trinity. In response to a query from the Academic Secretary in relation to timetabling, Professor Mac Cárthaigh stated that the current timetabling of the subject is compatible with the fixed timetable, stating that it will be slotted into Pillar 3.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies expressed his support for the subject to be offered as part of Trinity Joint Honours and thanked Professor Mac Cárthaigh for putting forward the proposal.

Action/Decision

050.01: USC approved the proposal for a new Trinity Joint Honours subject in Early Irish and recommended it to Council.

USC/23-24/051 Generative AI

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited Professor Clare Kelly, School of Psychology, to speak to the item.

Speaking to a presentation, Professor Kelly brought the meeting through the approach undertaken by the School of Psychology in addressing the issue of Generative AI, describing how the school have undertaken to examine assessment methodology and learning outcomes for vulnerability to inappropriate use of Gen AI. She illustrated the difficulties in detecting Gen AI use, concluding that simply prohibiting its use is not an effective approach to addressing the issue. She noted the need to reassess marking schemes, advising that a shift to emphasis on originality may be necessary. She highlighted the importance of engaging with students to understand and address the factors that drive the use of Gen AI.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Professor Kelly for her presentation and invited comments and questions from members.

In the discussion that followed, there was a consensus that a pedagogical approach needs to be adopted in response to the issue, with a focus on utilizing robust assessment methods which are not vulnerable to the misuse of Gen AI tools, due to the difficulty in detecting inappropriate use. A member expressed concern that this difficulty meant that innocent students may be wrongly accused, and mis-use would go undetected and suggested the need to re-think pedagogy and assessment.

Members remarked on how the issue raises fundamental question on the value and purpose of education, and it was noted that a stronger focus on students acquiring competencies may be appropriate. A member highlighted the need to impress on students the importance of engaging in their studies and the potential detrimental impact if foundational skills are

not acquired. It was pointed out that the response needs to be discipline specific, as there are some disciplines which require the use of AI and competence in its use. The discussion turned to the reasons for students turning to Gen AI tools, and it was pointed out that students face a lot of pressure to achieve academically. Noting the increase of continuous assessment components coupled with final examinations, the Education Officer stated that this is resulting in a heavier workload for students which may be a factor in the rise of Gen AI use. She also highlighted the need for assessment methods that are inclusive and student focused.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented on the complexity in developing effective policy on the topic, highlighting that this is the case across all HEIs, and he agreed with members that assessment design should play a crucial role in the response to the challenges posed by Gen AI.

USC/23-24/052 Any other business

- i. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies drew members attention to the event to be held on the 22nd of February entitled *Going Digital, Staying Human: Opportunities and Challenges of AI for Education*.
- ii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that Sharepoint folders have been set up for DUTLs to enable the sharing of teaching and learning policy and practice.
- iii. On behalf of colleagues in the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies, the DUTL raised an objection to scheduling Open Days on Saturdays. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies asked the member to follow up with him directly on the matter.

USC/23-24/053 Minutes (Section B)

USC noted and approved the following set of minutes:

- i. **Royal Irish Academy of Music Associated College Degrees Committee (RIAM ACDC)**
Draft Minutes of the meeting of 8 November 2023
- ii. **Marino Institute of Education Associated College Degrees Committee (MIE ACDC)**
Draft Minutes of the meeting of 6 December 2023
- iii. **Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee**
Meeting minutes of 28 November 2023.

USC/23-24/054 Items for noting (Section C)

USC noted and approved the following items:

- i. **New Minor Subjects 2024/25**
Memorandum from the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture, dated 22 January 2024.
- ii. **Undergraduate Common Architecture Annual Report 2022-23**