



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 27 February 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 Fraser Mitchell, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education (ADUSE)
Professor Mark Sweetnam, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture (ADUCA)
Professor Evangelia Rigaki, School of Creative Arts
Professor Ann Devitt, School of Education
Professor Julie Bates, School of English
Professor Anna Chahoud, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Sarah Hamill, School of Law
Professor Margaret Walshe, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
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 Goetz Botterweck, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Kevin Kelly, School of Engineering
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 Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Mr Eoghan Gilroy, Student Representative

Apologies: Professor Stephen Smith, Senior Tutor
Professor Martha O'Hagan Luff, Trinity Business School
Professor Martin Worthington, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Clare Kelly, School of Psychology
Professor Valeria Nicolosi, School of Chemistry
Professor Cormac McGuinness, School of Physics
Professor Richard Deane, School of Medicine
Professor Jake Byrne, Academic Director of Tangent
Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services
Catherine Arnold, Education Officer, Students' Union

In attendance: Ms Ciara Conlon, Academic Affairs; Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative; Dr Pauline Rooney, Director of Academic Practice; Ms Jennifer Pepper, Director of the Academic Registry, (for item USC/23-24/058 and USC/23-24/059); Dr Liz Donnellan, Academic Affairs, (for item USC/23-24/060); Dr Ana Schalk, Academic Practice (for item USC/23-24/061).

USC/23-24/055 Minutes of the meeting of 30 January 2024

The minutes of the meeting of 30 January 2024 were approved.

USC/23-24/056 Matters arising

- i. **USC/23-24/048:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the proposal to cease matriculation examinations in Geology and Biblical Studies was approved by Council.
- ii. **USC/23-24/050:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the proposal for a new Trinity Joint Honour subject in Early Irish was approved by Council.

USC/23-24/057 Senior Lecturer's Updates

- i. Providing an update on the ongoing Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) review, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies informed USC that feedback on the academic requirements of a VLE system suitable for use in Trinity have now been solicited. The review group are currently considering whether to proceed within the Higher Education Authority (HEA) procurement framework, a process which has advantages, although he pointed out that it does not afford the same opportunity to test the chosen system before implementation as proceeding with procurement outside the framework. A member questioned whether the review group is considering the development of an internally hosted package and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that they are not currently but that he would bring this suggestion to the head of IT Services.
- ii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised members that he was encouraged by the responses received in relation to the survey recently conducted by Ms. Lizzie Witcher, Trinity Teaching and Learning, on the new Academic Integrity related processes and he invited members to continue to provide any further feedback or suggestions. He drew attention to the new interactive academic integrity form and email templates that have been developed by Ms. Witcher and advised that these are now available on the [Academic Affairs](#) website.
- iii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Schools who have completed case studies to be submitted to the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in relation to the project examining trends in Honour's Bachelor degree classifications, and noted that the report will be brought to USC for information when completed.
- iv. Speaking on the upcoming Semester 2 assessment session, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that planning for holding examinations on campus is progressing smoothly, and an update will be provided once timetable drafts are finalized. He confirmed that it is intended to hold the reassessment session on campus as well, if possible. A member drew attention to cases of students who are OBA who have submitted appeals due to their required accommodations not being met during the Semester 1 assessment session. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies asked the member to contact him directly and he will investigate the matter with Academic Registry and the Disability Office.

USC/23-24/058 Academic Registry Annual Report

The Academic Registry Annual Report 2022/23, dated December 2023, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Ms Jennifer Pepper, Director of the Academic Registry, to the meeting.

Speaking to the item via a presentation, the Director of Academic Registry highlighted the key activities performed by the Academic Registry in 2022/23 and provided data in relation to all areas related to the student lifecycle including applications, admissions, student cases, assessment and progression and graduation. She noted the 5% increase in registered students, now at the highest level in the history of Trinity at 21,380, highlighting the undergraduate programmes that saw an increase in applications including Computer Science, Linguistics and a Language (TR039), Middle Eastern and European Languages and

Cultures (TR040), Business Studies and Polish and Trinity Joint Honours combinations with Computer Science. She pointed out that statistics in relation to student cases and examination sittings are beginning to return to pre Covid levels.

In the discussion that followed, she confirmed that the data in relation to study abroad included only third year students and does not capture those who participate in study abroad in their fourth year or without financial support from Erasmus or other funding. She noted the uptake of mobility opportunities is particularly high in AHSS, which is partly due to a higher proportion of programmes delivered in STEM or HS being subject to external accreditation body requirements that limit study abroad opportunities. A member pointed out a potential inconsistency in the KPI data and the Director of Academic Registry advised that she will look into it.

The discussion turned to the increase in registered students, and in response to a query from the Academic Secretary, the Director of Academic Registry confirmed that this number is based on HEA return numbers and those taking Micro-Credentials or CPD courses are not captured by the Academic Registry. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies remarked that the increase speaks to the value of developing an admissions strategy. In response to a member's query, the Director of Academic Registry advised that communication data is regularly analysed, and a student survey is conducted annually to identify areas of continuous improvement and the AR have modified their communications strategies to better cope with the increasing demand from students.

A member commented on the disparities in the spread of students entering Trinity through alternative entry routes across faculties, to which the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that work is ongoing to implement the National Access Plan 2022-2028 in Trinity and that this is something for this group to examine. Wrapping up the discussion, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Director of the Academic Registry for her presentation.

USC/23-24/059 Reassessment Examinations Schedule 2023/24

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A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 21 February 2024, was circulated and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited the Director of the Academic Registry to remain in the meeting for this item.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that USC has, on numerous occasions, expressed serious misgivings about the lack of time between the reassessment session and the beginning of the teaching term in the current academic year structure (AYS) and outlined the various consequences related to this timeline. He proposed to move the 2023/24 reassessment session forward to the week starting on the 19th of August to allow more time for the progression activities to be completed. He invited the ADUSE to speak to the proposal, who reiterated the significant impact felt by professional and academic staff alike at this period.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited comments and questions from members. Members noted their appreciation for the initiative to address the longstanding issue and several expressed support for the proposal. In the discussion the following points were made:

- Several members raised their School's concerns regarding the reduction of time dedicated to research that will result if this proposal goes ahead and it was queried if time for research will be reinstated within the academic year structure.
- It was noted that staff typically take annual leave in this period, and there is a need to consider those with caring responsibilities during the summer period.

- The financial implications for students returning to Dublin earlier than usual were highlighted, as well as difficulties in finding accommodation, particularly for international students.
- A couple of members felt the proposal does not address other issues inherent in the current academic year structure, and the short timeframe for marking in the semester 2 examination session. A member pointed out that other universities have a longer academic year.
- A member felt that more time was needed for consultation on the proposal.
- For some Schools delivering externally accredited programmes teaching activities take place outside the academic year structure and thus their activities do not fit into the current academic year structure.

In response to a member articulating the need for a wider discussion on, and examination of, the AYS, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies acknowledged that the proposal does not address all concerns raised regarding the AYS, noting that the latter was designed to accommodate a range of university activities. He advised that he is open to a conversation on the matter and will continue to bring the concerns to the attention of the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer. He stated that he did consider other potential options, such as bringing the reassessment session forward to June, however the Director of the Academic Registry noted that this would raise a range of operational and logistical challenges for the Academic Registry. It was also pointed out by the DUTL for the Dental School that this would pose serious difficulties for their students. Furthermore, it was noted that this would reduce the time students have to prepare for reassessments. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies suggested that the proposed dates be piloted for the 2023/24 reassessment session and reviewed, and he agreed with a member's suggestion that discussions should proceed sooner rather than later regarding further changes in the future.

Action/Decision

059.01: USC approved the proposal to hold the 2023/24 reassessment session in the week starting the 19th of August 2024 on a pilot basis.

USC/23-24/060 Academic Policies and Regulations

i. Revisions to the Appeals Process and Policy

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 21 February 2024 was circulated and Dr Liz Donnellan, Education Policy Developer, Academic Affairs, joined the meeting for the item. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies stated that discussions about the Appeals process have taken place with the Registrar and advised that a review of the process is timely given the work already carried out in the area as part of the Postgraduate Renewal Project. Directing members to the questions that were included in the circulated memo, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited discussion. Members made the following comments and queries:

- The current process is stressful for students, particularly in cases of a more sensitive nature, and the format should be re-considered to ensure a positive student experience.
- It was suggested that a preliminary assessment or triaging of cases be implemented to ensure cases have sufficient grounds to warrant being heard and that they proceed as per the correct mechanism, which will in turn free up resources to handle students with genuine cases.
- The time period in which students can view examination scripts and the provision for re-checking of marks needs to be examined to ensure it is being used appropriately by students.

- It was pointed out that the timing of the academic appeals committee should be reviewed to ensure a timely outcome for students.
- Communication regarding the permissible grounds for appeals should be improved to ensure the correct process is followed.
- Clarification is needed on whether courts can proceed without a postgraduate student representation.
- The process creates a lot of duplication and attention was drawn to the improvements implemented in the Faculty of AHSS to address this, which can be shared with other Faculties.
- A member pointed out that Schools delivering professional programmes may still need to hold their own Courts of Appeals due to external body requirements.

Thanking members for their contributions, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that he will consider the suggestions put forward and he will bring the matter back to USC.

ii. Revisions to the Attendance/Non-satisfactory attendance regulations

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 21 February 2024 was circulated. Speaking to the item, he explained that the feedback sought from USC members previously illustrated the wide range of approaches and application of regulations related to student attendance. To facilitate the variety of practices, he explained that it is proposed to remove the college wide threshold of non-attendance and allow for locally developed requirements that are programme or module specific. A policy will be provided to guide Schools and ensure clarity is provided to staff and students. He invited questions and comments from the meeting.

A member highlighted the potential for students on multidisciplinary or Trinity Joint Honours programmes to be subjected to a range of attendance expectations, which could cause confusion. Responding, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that a coherent approach could be agreed on the programme level.

The Student Representative underlined the importance of being cognisant of students' economic need to work or to commute long distances due to the housing crisis when developing an attendance policy. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked him for raising this and agreed that it is an important point, stating that Schools will need to consider what student engagement/attendance is necessary to meet the learning outcomes of the module.

A member noted the need for investment in attendance monitoring infrastructure to ensure regulations are applied to students in a fair manner, with which the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies concurred.

Concluding the discussion, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked USC for their contributions.

USC/23-24/061 Using GenAI in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Dr Ana Schalk, Academic Developer, Academic Practice, to the meeting to present on the topic.

Speaking to a presentation, Dr Ana Schalk brought the meeting through the development of the use of GenAI in universities, and the various institutional approaches that have emerged, noting that it is an ever evolving space. She highlighted Academic Practice activities in the area, including the development of a National Forum Open Course on Generative AI in Teaching & Learning to be rolled out in June 2024 and an inter-institutional project to

establish open access publications on best practice in the field. She noted that Academic Practice would welcome the submission of case studies from Schools which they would disseminate (with permission) as evidence-based practice.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Dr Schalk for her presentation and praised the work that Academic Practice are doing in this area. In response to a query regarding the approach of other institutions regarding issuing guidance, the Head of Academic Practice advised that many are issuing institutional statements that account for ethical and responsible use of GenAI. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies concurred that an institutional level statement is needed, which would allow for a variety of discipline-specific practices.

The Library Representative emphasised the importance of aligning the messaging to students and staff regarding GenAI and underlined the need for collaboration across different units in College in responding to the issue. Echoing this comment, the Student Representative highlighted the work being done in the Students' Union and expressed a hope that students will be facilitated to engage in work being done in the area.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Dr Schalk for her presentation, and she withdrew from the meeting.

USC/23-24/062 Any other business

None

USC/23-24/063 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 7 February 2024.
- ii. **Trinity Electives Sub-Committee**
Draft Minutes of the meeting of 6 February 2024.
- iii. **Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee**
Meeting minutes of 16 January 2024.

USC/23-24/064 Items for noting (Section C)

USC noted and approved the following items:

- XX i. **Revisions to the Programme Handbook Policy**
Memorandum from Dr Liz Donnellan, Academic Affairs, dated 20 February 2024.
- XX ii. **Cessation of Trinity Joint Honours Combinations 2025/26**
Memorandum from the Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee, dated 23 February 2024.