



## Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

### **A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 10 December 2024 at 2.00 pm in the Boardroom, Trinity Business School.**

Present: Professor Vincent Wade, Senior Lecturer & Dean of Undergraduate Studies (*Chair*)  
Professor Stephen Smith, Senior Tutor  
Professor Mark Sweetnam, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture (ADUCA)  
Professor Fraser Mitchell, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education (ADUSE)  
Professor Martha O'Hagan Luff, Trinity Business School  
Professor Miranda Fay Thomas, School of Creative Arts  
Professor Anna Chahoud, School of Histories and Humanities  
Professor Sarah Hamill, School of Law  
Professor Yvonne Lynch, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences  
Professor Paul Dockree, School of Psychology  
Professor Dino Hadzic, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
Professor Phillip Curry, School of Social Work and Social Policy  
Professor Alexandra Grieser, School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies  
Professor Jean Fletcher, School of Biochemistry and Immunology  
Professor Valeria Nicolosi, School of Chemistry  
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 Cormac McGuinness, School of Physics  
Professor Heather Reilly, School of Dental Science  
Professor Deirdre D'Arcy, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Science  
Mr Eoghan Gilroy, Education Officer, Students' Union

Apologies: Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary  
Professor Mark Faulkner, School of English  
Professor Martin Worthington, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies  
Professor Richard Deane, School of Medicine  
Dr Pauline Rooney, Head of Academic Practice  
Mr Conchúr O Cathasaigh, Student Representative  
Professor Richard Porter, Dean of Students  
Professor Ana Perez-Luno, Academic Director of Tangent  
Professor Joanne Banks, School of Education  
Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative

In attendance: Ms Ciara Conlon, Academic Affairs; Ms Rima Fitzpatrick, Assistant Academic Secretary; Academic Affairs; Dr Pauline Rooney, Head of Academic Practice; Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services; Prof Tylor Brand, Incoming DUTL for the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies; Ms Patricia Murphy, Student Counselling Services Director (for item USC/24-25/025)

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#### **USC/24-25/020 Minutes of the meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

The minutes of the meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> November 2024 were approved.

### **USC/24-25/021 Matters arising**

- i. **USC/24-25/004** The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies informed USC that the Statement on Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI was approved by Council.
- ii. **USC/24-25/006** The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the proposal for a Learning and Innovation Research Hub was approved by Council.
- iii. **USC/24-25/014** The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the change in degree nomenclature for Science programmes was approved by Council. Referring to queries raised at the last meeting, he noted that transcripts clarify that it is an Honours Bachelor Degree and that the announcement of candidates protocol at commencements will not change.
- iv. **USC/24-25/015(i)** The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the revisions to the Fitness to Practice policy was approved by Council.
- v. **USC/24-25/015(ii)** The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the revisions to the Recognition of Prior Learning policy was approved by Council.
- vi. **USC/24-25/019** The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the amendments to the entry requirements for Business, Economic and Social Studies (BESS) and Global Business was approved by Council.

### **USC/24-25/022 Senior Lecturer's Updates**

- i. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies updated USC on the pilot of Blackboard Ultra that will commence in Semester 2. He advised that emphasis is being put on optimizing training for academic staff to ensure a smooth transition ahead of the College wide adoption of Blackboard Ultra in 2025-26. In regards the migration of course material, he stated that there are two approaches being examined; one which will facilitate a bulk roll over while the other option allows for a more personalized migration approach.
- ii. In relation to the Senior Academic Promotions process review, the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that four pillars of performance criteria have been defined and further information will be widely communicated in semester two.
- iii. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies informed USC that Trinity entry requirements require a comprehensive review, which will commence in semester two. He stated that USC will have an opportunity to provide input.

### **USC/24-25/023 Academic Year Structure**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024, was circulated. He underlined that the discussion today is part of the extensive consultation process, to outline the proposed recommendation for a restructured academic year structure (AYS) and to invite feedback.

Speaking to a presentation, the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that a working group had been convened to identify the objectives, and the parameters for the restructuring of the AYS. He advised that the group have put forward three options, and Option A has emerged as the clear preferred option. He brought the meeting through Option A, highlighting the merits for staff and students, as well as any potential disadvantages. He confirmed that exam scripts will be made available before College closure for the Christmas period. He remarked that while there is still uncertainty regarding the reversal of the delayed start for Junior Fresh students, it is incumbent on Trinity to minimise the impact.

In the discussion that followed many members thanked the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies for developing the proposal and recognised the effort in doing so. The following comments and queries were raised:

- A member noted the discrepancy of the length of the revision period in semester one (5 days) compared to semester two (one full week). Responding, the Senior

Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies explained that the revision period in semester one is no shorter than the current revision period, and the longer period in semester two is due to the scheduling of Trinity week.

- A member pointed out that the teaching and learning periods in Ireland are among the shortest in Europe, which creates a significant workload for students. He acknowledged that it is not unique to Trinity and queried if there are plans to look at this issue. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies concurred that students do face pressures and pointed out that they also come with some advantages also. He emphasised the point that the quality of education is not contingent on the length of teaching periods, and that more objective indicators and metrics should be used to measure education quality.
- The DUTL for the School of Natural Sciences highlighted that Fieldwork trips for 2025/26 have already been booked based on the current structure and that there would be significant financial implications to reschedule. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies asked the member to contact him directly to discuss possible solutions.
- A member pointed out that UCD have been able to start first year students a week earlier and queried if Trinity could try to come up with a similar solution. In response, the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that UCD admit first year students after Round 2 of CAO offers, while Trinity do not do so until after Round 3 offers. He noted that if Schools support a change in practice, this could be looked at.
- A member pointed out that Option A will result in the Open Day falling during Reading Week, which may have implications for recruiting staff to attend. He also noted that the figures illustrating Option A should better reflect the dates of the results publication in semester two.
- The DUTL from the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies advised that the School have requested to meet to discuss the proposal in further detail and the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that he has reached out to organise a meeting.

Wrapping up the discussion, the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked USC for the constructive feedback, noting the enormous efforts that has gone into finding solutions to ease the pressure on staff. He stated that the proposal cannot address all issues, but that the AYS in its current form cannot be maintained. In relation to the next steps, he advised that he would ensure wide consultation is carried out before a firm proposal is brought back to the relevant committees for approval and encouraged members to get in touch with him to discuss any outstanding issues.

## **USC/24-25/024 Trinity Electives**

### **i. Trinity Electives Annual Report 2023/24**

The Trinity Elective Annual Report for 2023/24 was circulated and the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited Professor Fraser Mitchell, ADUSE and Chair of the Trinity Elective Sub-Committee, to speak to the item.

The ADUSE remarked on how exceptionally well Trinity Electives operate and recognised the role that the Academic Registry and Schools play in ensuring smooth delivery of TEs to students. He noted that the TE sub-committee are tasked with monitoring capacity, and while this has been adequate to date, the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) initiative may have an impact on capacity. In response to a query on results, he stated that these are made available in the Annual Report but they are not compared with other modules to ascertain if marks gained in TE modules are inflated.

Picking up on the comments on ESD, the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that a strategic approach to embedding sustainability into the

undergraduate curriculum is needed. He highlighted the success of the ESD module, developed by the ESD fellows, which was piloted to over 500 students in the Business School, and advised that this will be made available to all schools. He reported that supports for academic staff on developing sustainability modules is being prioritized, and that Sustainability Teaching Fellows will be appointed to support staff to develop Sustainability modules.

**Action/Decision**

**USC/24-25/024i** USC approved the Trinity Elective Annual Report 2023/24.

**ii. Trinity Elective Proposal “Histories and Futures of Climate Change”**

A proposal for a Trinity Elective entitled Histories and Futures of Climate Change from the School of Histories and Humanities was circulated. Professor Fraser Mitchell, Chair of the Trinity Elective Sub-Committee, spoke to the item, confirming that the TE sub-committee have reviewed the proposal in detail and have recommended it to USC for approval. He informed USC that more proposals for TE modules are in development.

**Action/Decision:**

**USC/24-25/024ii** USC approved the Trinity Elective Proposal “Histories and Futures of Climate Change” for delivery in 2025/26.

**USC/24-25/025 Update from Student Counselling**

A presentation from Ms Patricia Murphy, Director of Student Counselling Services, was circulated, and the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Ms Murphy to the meeting to speak to the item.

Speaking to a presentation, Ms Murphy brought the meeting through the current landscape on student mental health, remarking on the rise in cases over the years which may have been impacted by a reduction in stigma of reporting issues. She highlighted the reduction in waiting time for students, with a triage system has been implemented to identify crisis cases. She reported the results from a recent survey carried out among students on suicide help seeking and prevention, which are in line with other studies in the area. She highlighted good practice for staff when responding to student displaying mental health difficulties crisis, as well as other advice around interactions with students. She drew attention to the module ‘Identifying and Responding to Distressed and at Risk Students’ which is available on Blackboard for teaching staff.

Members thanked the Director of SCS for the informative presentation. In response to a query, she confirmed that the survey focused on identifying barriers to seeking help but did not examine the motivations for seeking help. A member queried why the Trinity student body was more likely to seek in relation to other institutions, to which Ms Murphy attributed to the integrated approach in delivering supports to Trinity students, and the investment made to develop services. The Director of Student Services remarked on the work undertaken to advocate for additional government support in the area. She noted that in person exams are a factor in students seeking supports, which could be addressed through alternative assessments.

**USC/24-25/026 Clarification on Pass by Compensation Regulations**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies stated that the regulations on pass by compensation require clarification in some areas as it has come to his attention that there is inconsistency in how students are treated. He

explained that he wanted to consult with USC on a consistent approach in relation to students who have gained a mark of 35%-39% in one module but who have had permission to defer another module(s) or go off books with assessment. He invited comments from the meeting.

DUTLs shared the common practice in their respective Schools, and a member commented that a mark of 35-39% can only be deemed to be a qualified pass when considered against all other marks the student has gained. The importance of a consistent approach was stressed, particularly for students who are in programmes delivered across multiple Schools. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked everyone for their contributions, confirming that there is general agreement that a qualified pass mark can not be carried into reassessment or while OBA and advised that proposed amendments to the Calendar will be brought back to USC.

#### **USC/24-25/027 Any Other Business**

- i. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that Professor Martin Worthington will be stepping down as DUTL of the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies and Professor Tylor Brand will be taking on this role. The meeting warmly acknowledged Professor Worthington's insightful contributions to USC over the years.

#### **USC/24-25/028 Minutes (Section B)**

USC noted and approved the following minutes:

- i. **Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee**  
Minutes of the meeting of 15 October 2024.
- ii. **MIE Associated College Degrees Committee**  
Draft Minutes of the meeting of 19 November 2024.
- iii. **RIAM Associated College Degrees Committee**  
Draft Minutes of the meeting of 12 November 2024.
- iv. **Trinity Electives Sub- Committee**  
Draft Minutes of the meeting of 25 November 2024.

#### **USC/24-25/029 Section C (For information)**

None