



**Trinity College Dublin**

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

**A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 21 January 2025 at 2.00 pm in the Boardroom, Trinity Business School.**

Present: Professor Vincent Wade, Senior Lecturer & Dean of Undergraduate Studies (*Chair*)  
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary  
Professor Stephen Smith, Senior Tutor  
Professor Richard Porter, Dean of Students  
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 Joanne Banks, School of Education  
Professor Julie Bates, School of English  
Professor Anna Chahoud, School of Histories and Humanities  
Professor Tylor Brand, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies  
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 Richard Deane, School of Medicine  
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  
Professor Ana Perez-Luno, Academic Director of Tangent  
Mr Eoghan Gilroy, Education Officer, Students' Union  
Mr Conchúr O Cathasaigh, Student Representative

Apologies: None

In attendance: Ms Ciara Conlon, Academic Affairs; Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative; Ms Rima Fitzpatrick, Assistant Academic Secretary: Academic Affairs; Dr Pauline Rooney, Head of Academic Practice; Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services; Ms Jennifer Pepper, Director of Academic Registry and Ms Karen Bebbington, Head Of Operations/Deputy Director of Academic Registry (for item USC/24-25/035/36); Dr Liz Donnellan, Academic Policy Developer, Academic Affairs (for item USC/24-25/037/38)

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**USC/24-25/030 Minutes of the meeting of 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

The minutes of the meeting of 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024 were approved.

### **USC/24-25/031 Matters arising**

None

### **USC/24-25/032 Senior Lecturer's Updates**

- i. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies updated USC on the pilot of Blackboard Ultra. He requested that DUTLs strongly encourage School staff to partake in training sessions as far as possible in advance of the implementation in the academic year 2025/26.
  
- ii. **Strategic Plan**  
The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that, along with the Dean of Graduate Studies, he will be contributing to the education pillar of the Strategic Plan. He indicated that the intention is to position Trinity as a university for life by providing multiple entry and exits routes for students. He also indicated that there is a commitment to digital transformation, which will be articulated in the context of educational strategy to provide more agility and flexibility for Schools and teaching staff.
  
- iii. **School Strategies**  
The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies notified USC that he has commenced a consultation process with all Schools to discuss School strategies for teaching and learning, with the aim of providing a conduit to resolve issues.

### **USC/24-25/033 USC Workplan Progress Report**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025, was circulated. He provided an update to USC on the work carried out in the undergraduate space in Semester 1 and provided an overview of what USC will be asked to consider in Hilary Term. He invited members to submit any additional items for USC consideration.

### **USC/24-25/034 Academic Year Structure**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 2025, was circulated. Speaking to a presentation, he provided an overview of the multiple iterations of consultations regarding the proposal that have taken place over recent months. He acknowledged that it is not possible to address all issues raised, such as the 2-week marking period for semester 1 exams before teaching commences at the beginning of Hilary Term. However, he stressed that all identified red line issues have been adhered to.

A member raised the difficulty that international students could face in returning home after the later semester 1 examination period. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that Trinity Global were consulted on this and it was concluded that this could be managed if advance warning is provided to students. He stated that the Academic Registry will make all efforts to publish exam timetables in a timely manner.

The Senior Tutor noted that the scheduling of the semester one examinations may impact on students applying to take Scholarship, and queried if Scholarship exams could be held later. Responding, the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that this will be monitored closely and appropriate action taken if necessary. A member drew attention to student withdrawals and the deadline for the refund of Semester 2 tuition fees, which falls on the 31<sup>st</sup> January annually. He expressed concern that students will be making the decision to withdraw without knowing the outcome of their semester one exams. Responding, the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies stated that it is his understanding that a student's decision to withdraw is multifaceted and would not be reliant on exam assessment result alone.

**Action/Decision:**

**USC/24-25/034** USC approved the proposed Academic Year Structure, to be implemented from 2025/26, and recommended it to Council.

**USC/24-25/035 Academic Registry Annual Report 2023/24**

The Academic Registry Annual Report for 2023/24 was circulated. Ms Jennifer Pepper, Director of Academic Registry and Ms Karen Bebbington, Head of Operations/Deputy Director of Academic Registry joined the meeting.

The Director of Academic Registry provided USC with an overview of the Academic Registry activities in 2023/24, including statistics on the composition of the undergraduate student body, applications and admissions and examination sittings. In response to a query regarding the decrease observed in applications to undergraduate programmes, Ms Pepper advised that this trend has not continued into the current academic year but could not confirm if this has been seen in other HE institutions.

**USC/24-25/036 Update on Semester 1 exams and Semester 2 proposal**

A presentation prepared by Ms Jennifer Pepper, Director of Academic Registry and Ms Karen Bebbington, Head of Operations/Deputy Director of Academic Registry was circulated and they remained in the meeting to speak to the item.

Ms Pepper informed USC that the Academic Registry are monitoring the impact of the move of exams venues to campus and presented some proposed improvements to ensure a smooth student and staff experience in the Semester 2 exam period. The proposals put forward were aimed at ensuring accurate and timely exam data is provided to the AR and reducing errors on exam papers. Examiners are requested to visit the main exam venues only, but to be available to invigilators in other venues via phone. This will minimise inconvenience to academic staff and interruptions in low distraction venues in which students with exam accommodations are undertaking exams. A memo clarifying this will be submitted to USC in February 2025.

A member queried if computer-based exams could be scheduled prior to 5pm to ensure IT support can be made available, and the Head of Operations advised them to contact her directly to discuss. Responding to a question on the invigilation of real time online exams, the Head of Operations advised that online proctoring is not provided, however students can take electronic exams for which AR will provide invigilators. It was confirmed that the new academic year structure will lengthen the formal exam period, removing the need for contingency days.

The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Ms Pepper and Ms Bebbington and expressed appreciation for the work the Academic Registry in light of the complexity of exam operations.

**Action/Decision:**

**USC/24-25/036** USC approved the proposed exam operations for the Semester 2 exam period.

**USC/24-25/037 Undergraduate Regulations**

**i. Clarification on Pass by Compensation Regulations**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025 was circulated. He welcomed Dr Liz Donnellan, Education Policy Developer, Academic Affairs, to the meeting. Referring to the discussion on the topic at USC on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024, Dr Donnellan advised that the proposed amendments are to provide clarity and ensure consistency on how students are treated across College in relation to the pass by compensation mechanism. She advised that Section 62 and Section 63 of the General

Regulations and Information of Calendar Part II will now clarify that students who have received permission to defer to the reassessment session and have also achieved a qualified pass grade must present for reassessment in all modules for which they obtained a qualified pass.

**Action/Decision:**

**USC/24-25/037i** USC approved the proposed amendments to Sections 62 and 63 of the General Regulations and Information of the Calendar Part II, to apply from the academic year 2025/26.

ii. **Repeating the Year**

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025 was circulated. Dr Liz Donnellan remained in the meeting to speak to the item. She explained that the proposed amendment to Section 65 of the General Regulations and Information of Calendar Part II is intended to provide scope for the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies to give special permission for students to repeat the year. In response to a query, the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that this is to be applied for ad misericordium cases only, and that the normal appeals process will apply if the request has been refused or a decision cannot be made. The Senior Tutor welcomed the amendment, stating that in cases with firm grounds, students will be given certainty in a more timely manner.

**Action/Decision:**

**USC/24-25/037ii** USC approved the proposed amendments to Section 65 of the General Regulations and Information of the Calendar Part II, to apply from the academic year 2025/26.

**USC/24-25/038 Academic Policies**

i. **Revisions to the Assessment and Academic Progression Policy**

A memorandum from Dr Liz Donnellan, Education Policy Developer, Academic Affairs, dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 2025 was circulated. Dr Liz Donnellan remained in the meeting to speak to the item. She advised that the policy was last reviewed in 2021/22 and she brought the meeting through the proposed revisions. USC members were invited to consider the proposed revisions and consult with their Schools for feedback before the policy returns to USC for approval.

ii. **Revisions to the Return of Coursework Policy**

A memorandum from Dr Liz Donnellan, Education Policy Developer, Academic Affairs, dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 2025 was circulated. She highlighted the proposed revisions, in particular the suggested new title 'Return of Feedback on Coursework (Assessed Components) Policy'.

In the discussion that followed, the insertion of the word 'normally' in Section 7.2 drew comments from the Education Officer, who expressed disappointment that this may result in feedback not being provided, making it difficult for students to engage in continuous learning. The difficulties with providing timely feedback due to large class sizes, unmanageable workloads of teaching staff or the scheduling of assessments at the end of modules was highlighted by various members. A member put forward a suggestion for the provision of feedback within a timeline in which students can action it. Student perceptions and expectations of what feedback consists of was discussed at length, and members offered examples of good practices. It was suggested that an explanation of what type of feedback students should expect, and where to find it, should be clearly articulated to students on the module level so as to encourage student engagement. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Dr

Donnellan thanked the meeting for a fruitful discussion and advised that this will be taken on board and a revised version will be brought back to USC. DUTLs are advised to consult within their Schools and provide any further feedback to the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Dr Donnellan.

**iii. Late Submission of Assessed Work (Extensions) Policy**

A memorandum from Dr Liz Donnellan, Education Policy Developer, Academic Affairs, dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 2025 was circulated. Dr Donnellan explained that this is a new policy that has been developed to ensure a consistent approach across College in relation to granting extensions and invited comments from the meeting.

In relation to the reference to LENS reports in 6.4.2 of the policy, the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies clarified that the intention was that valid documentation for extenuating circumstances would not be necessary if the student's LENS report outlines a need for flexible assessment deadlines. A member highlighted that not all LENS reports would detail this accommodation and suggested that general flexibility would be required so as not to place additional burdens on students. Another member expressed concern in accommodating extensions when not explicitly outlined as an accommodation in the LENS report. The Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that he would invite Mr Declan Treanor, Director of the disAbility Service to the next USC meeting to provide an overview of the LENS report process and clarification for all the appropriate steps to be taken in such instances.

In response to a query on the appeals process for students where extensions are denied, the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that students should have a mechanism for appeal but that this should sit within the School rather than on College level.

A number of further suggestions were put forward by members, including:

- Review the use of the term 'disabled student' in section 6.3.
- Replace the mode of communicating to students from programme/module handbooks to Blackboard to ensure visibility of students across all students.
- Consideration should be given to how the process for application will apply to students on programmes delivered across more than one School, such as TJH students. It was suggested that the process outlined in the Calendar Part II in relation to the re-check of marks could be utilised.
- Revision of sections 6.4.4 and 6.4.5 should be carried out to ensure clarity around extension timeframes.
- Further clarity needed on who the student should contact in the first instance when requesting an extension. It was suggested that requests are overseen by one person, such as the School assessment officer.

**USC/24-25/039 Any Other Business**

None

**USC/24-25/038 Minutes (Section B)**

USC noted and approved the following minutes:

- i. Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee**  
Minutes of the meeting of 19 November 2024.

**USC/24-25/039 Section C (For information)**

USC noted and approved the following items:

**i. Higher English Entry Requirements for the Bachelor in Social Sciences**

Memorandum from Dr Joe Whelan, Director of Bachelor in Social Studies, dated 16 December 2024.

**ii. Undergraduate Common Architecture Annual Report 2023/24**

**iii. New Minor Subjects 2025/26**

Memorandum from the Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee, dated 15 January 2025.