



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 19 November 2019 at 2.15 pm in the Trinity Board Room, Trinity Business School Building.

Present: Professor Kevin Mitchell, Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies (*Chair*)
Professor Kevin O'Kelly, Dean of Students
Professor Aidan Seery, Senior Tutor
Professor Stephen Matterson, Director of TSM/Trinity Joint Honors
Professor Norah Campbell, Trinity Business School
Professor Brendan O'Connell, School of English
Professor Rachel Hoare, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Elizabeth Nixon, School of Psychology
Professor Michael Wycherley, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Stan Houston, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Linda Hogan, School of Religion
Professor Aisling Dunne, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Jonathan Dukes, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Nicola Marchetti, School of Engineering
Professor Frank Wellmer, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Paschalis Karageorgis, School of Mathematics
Professor Paul Eastham, School of Physics
Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science
Professor Joe Harbison, School of Medicine
Professor Valerie Smith, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Ms Niamh McCay, Education Officer, Students' Union

Apologies: Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary
Professor Áine Kelly, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education
Professor Nicholas Johnson, School of Creative Arts
Professor Andrew Loxley, School of Education
Professor Peter Crooks, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Ailbhe O'Neill, School of Law
Professor Breffni O'Rourke, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Professor Eoin Scanlan, School of Chemistry
Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences
Professor John Walsh, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Ms Julia Piaskowy, Student Representative

In attendance: Ms Sorcha De Brunner, Academic Affairs, Trinity Teaching & Learning; Ms Linda Darbey, Assistant Academic Secretary, Trinity Teaching & Learning; Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Head of Academic Practice; Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative; Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services; Head of Operations, Academic Registry, Ms Jennifer Pepper (for Item USC/19-20/018 ii) & iii); Professor Henry Rice and Professor Brian Broderick, School of Engineering (for Item USC/19-20/019).

USC/19-20/015 Minutes of the meeting of 29 October 2019

The minutes of the meeting of 29 October 2019 were approved.

USC/19-20/016 Matters arising

USC/19-20/010 The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that Council approved the allocation mechanisms for new minor subjects and open modules. It also approved the new Trinity Electives, as circulated.

Referring to a query on differing marking practices across different schools potentially affecting students' ability to take up a new minor subject, the Senior Lecturer advised that data for 2018/19 had been considered. Marking appeared to be pretty consistent across all relevant courses apart from Mathematics, which stood out due to a higher number of first class results obtained, with a number of these coming in with overall marks above 80% and 90%. Some suggestions were proposed to counteract the effect that this might have on the allocation of places. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that Council had recently approved the allocation mechanism for new minor subjects based on the end of year results. He noted that the mechanism should operate for a year at least to see if mitigating actions were needed.

USC/19-20/011 The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that Council approved the expansion of the FET entry routes into Trinity.

USC/19-20/012 The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that Council approved the proposal for a minor subject in Statistics for the single honor Mathematics programme.

USC/19-20/013 The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that the Secretary's Office had confirmed that past meeting papers would be transferred from BoardPad to the Diligent Boards application ahead of the next meeting of USC.

USC/19-20/017 Trinity Education Project

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies provided an update on the Trinity Education Project. He noted that solutions are being considered for students whose progression is outside the norm, for example, those with permission to defer assessments or those who are off-books, taking assessments; these will be presented to the next meeting of USC.

He also highlighted that consideration of assessment practices, student workloads and the ways in which schools discuss these matters will come to a future meeting of USC for discussion. In relation to student workload, he drew the attention of the meeting to a prototype application which is being developed by Professor Kevin Kelly, School of Engineering, which should help schools to visualise the range of assessments used and associated workloads. Professor Kelly will attend the next meeting of USC to discuss his work.

USC/19-20/018 Assessment

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i) Survey of Assessment and Academic Progression Data 2018/19, under new AYS and TEP Regulations

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies with appended assessment and progression data, dated 14 November 2019, was circulated. He spoke to the item by way of a presentation, commenting that 2018/19 saw significant changes to undergraduate progression regulations and the academic year structure, namely the introduction of a formal assessment session in the first semester and the shortening of the assessment session following the second semester.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies brought the meeting through the data which covered the following areas:

- Overall average results for all undergraduate courses for all course years, by faculty, 2013/14 - 2018/19
- Overall average results for all undergraduate courses for all years 2013/14 - 2018/19
- Undergraduate final year overall grade distribution, by faculty, 2014/15 - 2018/19
- Undergraduate final year overall grade distribution, all courses, 2014/15 - 2018/19
- Undergraduate modules reassessments 2017/18 v 2018/19
- Undergraduate module fails by semester 2018/19

- Pass by compensation, by credit volume, 2014/15 - 2018/19

Adding to the data presented for 2018/19, he advised that 2,899 final year students were assessed in 2018/19, of these 8 students received permission to defer and 16 were required to repeat the year in full. Looking at reassessment, 107 students undertook reassessments in their final year. He noted that the data for 2018/19 did not indicate significant differences when compared to previous years.

Responding to a comment about the lower number of failed modules in Semester 1 compared with Semester 2, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that whilst teaching is evenly spread across the two semesters, 70% of the assessment takes place in the second semester due to a significant number of 10 ECTS year-long modules. In relation to requests to look at the reintroduction of mark capping for reassessed work in degree years, he noted that there was only one year of data to consider, therefore, its reintroduction would be premature at this point in time. He stressed that this would have to be monitored and suggested that an analysis could be done to look at the results achieved by students versus the results they would have achieved if the assessment component had been capped at the pass mark. He explained that the 8 students given permission to defer, mentioned earlier in the item, were deferring assessments to the next year and added that data on final year students deferring assessments from Semester 1 or 2 to the reassessment period would be requested for the next meeting of USC.

Action USC/19-20/018i: Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to request further data related to the number of deferrals to the reassessment session in 2018/19 and an analysis of final year results to look at the effect of capping the reassessed component(s).

ii) Operational Management Update for 2018/19 Assessments

A memorandum from the Head of Operations, Academic Registry, dated 21 October 2019, was circulated along with a presentation. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Ms Jennifer Pepper, Head of Operations, Academic Registry, to the meeting.

Speaking to the item via her presentation, Ms Pepper reminded USC of the specific examination scheduling rules and examination contingency days that had been approved by Council. She noted that examination sittings (number of students x examination papers) had increased by 8.4% from 66,635 in 2017/18 to 72,209 in 2018/19. All contingency days had been used for the Semester 1 and 2 examination but only one of the approved days for the reassessment session was needed.

She outlined a number of specific challenges experienced during the assessment periods in 2018/19 and detailed the remediating actions being taken by staff in the Academic Registry. She also proposed further measures to mitigate the effect of similar challenges, should these arise in the future. These were:

- A standard protocol in relation to delayed examination start times, whereby the 9.30 am and 2.00 pm examinations could commence no later than 30 minutes after their scheduled start time, with the 5.00 pm examination sitting delayed by no more than one hour.
- Continuation of the cloakroom arrangements and improve communication to students. In addition, the continuation of the arrangement with the Students' Union to provide a small area within the waiting area for students to leave notes and snacks where they have back-to-back examinations.
- The formalisation of a hybrid invigilation employment model in which invigilators are recruited from the postgraduate research community coupled with temporary staff from a recruitment agency, as needed.

- Implementation of quality controls in schools to ensure the accuracy of examination papers, thereby avoiding the need to make announcements about corrections during examinations.
- The rationalisation of examination durations across all sessions to minimise the noise and distraction created by related announcements. Standardising the duration for all assessments in the RDS would eliminate the problem.
- Institute a satellite Trinity Campus in the RDS to support all students across the three examination sittings daily, with representation from key offices and student support services.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, while acknowledging particular issues during 2018/19, commended the Academic Registry for its organisation and management of the examination sessions in Trinity, noting the enormous logistical challenges entailed.

During the discussion, several members made suggestions in relation to examinations as well as the RDS venue. It was suggested that the communication of the assessment contingency days could be better in College, particularly for visiting students who must book flights. In relation to the proposed time limits for delayed examinations, it was confirmed that staff on site need to have clear guidelines. It was noted, however, that some discretion would be shown, for example, in the case of the issue being resolved a little over the specified time limit. A member queried whether a fixed examination timetable could be introduced. Ms Pepper commented that this was not feasible at the moment and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies added that following on from the implementation a fixed lecture timetable this would be theoretically possible but the fixed lecture timetable itself would take a number of years to implement.

The discussion turned to the recommendation related to the rationalisation of examination durations to help reduce the multitude of announcements. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies queried the need for six different durations and it was noted that some universities allow only two. It was commented that examination durations should be driven by pedagogical rather than logistical needs and should be decided by the lecturer concerned. Another member pointed to the fact that so many students were now examined in the RDS, and this appears to be feeding into a growing negative student experience. It was noted that the Academic Registry has not been able to source other suitable examination spaces in the city.

USC/19-20/018ii: USC supported all of the recommendations as presented, apart from the further rationalisation of examination durations, proposals for which would require further investigation and development.

iii) Update on Semester 1 Examinations 2019

A memorandum from the Head of Operations, Academic Registry, dated 11 November 2019, was circulated. Ms Pepper outlined data related to Semester 1 examinations, due to take place in December 2019. She highlighted that there are due to be 34,156 examinations sittings, up 6.2 % on December 2018, with 11,583 students to be examined. Further, the number of students registered with the Trinity Disability Service for examination accommodations had increased from 914 to 1,441, marking an increase of 37%. She also highlighted data related to Semester 2 which is currently showing a significant increase in the number of modules due to be examined in Semester 2, from 792 in 2019 to 971 in 2020. She noted that this data had been gathered from SITS based on information provided by schools. The Academic Registry had validated Semester 1 data and would do so for Semester 2 examinations in January 2020, therefore, the expected increases might not be as pronounced. Notwithstanding the validation exercise, puzzlement was expressed in relation to the expected Semester 2 increases with some possible explanations discussed.

The significant increase in the number of students registered with the Trinity Disability Service for examination accommodations was also noted. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that increases in similar schemes have been seen across all levels of education. The Students' Union Education Officer suggested that this is likely to be due to a significant number of students wishing to avoid the RDS and that targeting the specific issues that have arisen, as discussed in the previous assessment item, may help to address this matter. It was noted that the multiplicity of locations creates a challenge for academic staff who visit examination venues and means that students accommodated in alternative venues receive information and clarifications later than their peers.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Head of Operations, Academic Registry, and she withdrew from the meeting.

USC/19-20/019 Proposal for an Articulation Route into Engineering

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A memorandum from Professor Henry Rice, Head of the School of Engineering, dated 12 November 2019, was circulated along with documentation related to an articulation route into the integrated Engineering programme. Professors Henry Rice and Brian Broderick were welcomed to the meeting.

Speaking to the proposed articulation route, Professor Broderick explained that under the agreement students complete their first two years in International Centre for Applied Sciences, Manipal University before being admitted via advanced entry to the third year of the Engineering programme in Trinity. If a student successfully completes the third and fourth year here and leaves, they are eligible for the awards of ordinary BA and BAI or, if they successfully complete three years here, they are eligible for the awards of ordinary BA and MAI. He advised that the International Centre for Applied Sciences is linked to a large number of international universities through similar arrangements, including many in the UK and USA. In preparations for expected international transfers, students are taught through English. Under the agreement, up to ten student per year can be admitted to Trinity, if they meet the entry criteria, with no more than five being accepted into any one stream of Engineering. Responding to a query he confirmed that places would be reserved for these students in College accommodation.

Professor Rice, responding to a question about the application process, confirmed that Manipal University initiates the process to ascertain students' interest in coming to Trinity and their eligibility to under the agreement before students make their formal application to the School of Engineering for advanced entry.

The Senior Tutor confirmed that these students will receive a College Tutor and requested that advice be provided to students about specific College regulations which may not be applicable; for example, permission to go off-books with assessments cannot always be granted due to visa stipulations. The Dean of Students, speaking about the low healthcare insurance threshold required for a study visa, requested that students be made aware of the types of healthcare services to which they are entitled; some international students are surprised to learn how little is covered. Professor Broderick confirmed that these points would be discussed with Manipal University to ensure that students are well informed.

Decision USC/19-20/019: USC supported the proposal, as circulated, for an articulation agreement into the integrated Engineering programme from specified programmes in the International Centre for Applied Sciences, Manipal University and recommended it to Council.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Professors Rice and Broderick, who then withdrew from the meeting.

USC/19-20/020 ISSE/StudentSurvey.ie Report for 2018/19

A presentation from the Dean of Students on the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) for 2018/19 was circulated. The Dean of Students noted ISSE had recently been rebranded as StudentSurvey.ie and that the 2018/19 report provides the fourth year of data available under this initiative. He acknowledged the work done annually by the Quality Office to present Trinity's data in readable formats and advised that school and programme level reports would be made available soon.

He explained that the survey covers a number of indices, higher order learning, reflective and integrative learning, quantitative reason, learning strategies, collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, effective teaching practices, quality of interactions and supportive environment. It is a useful tool to inform improvement strategies in the University. Each index comprises a number of questions and schools should dig beneath the surface and interrogate the responses to these questions. Whilst this survey has always been envisaged as an internal tool for higher education institutions, data from this is being used more and more by external parties in an attempt to rank institutions or in the case of a recent institutional review in Ireland.

He brought the meeting through some specific indices showing where Trinity's scores had improved or declined. Of particular concern is the response to an additional question put to students whereby they were asked whether or not they would stay in the same institution, if they had to start their third-level studies again. Over the last four years, the number of students responding in the negative has grown from 12.8% of respondents to 17.6%. Some broad reasons are given such as financial, personal, employment and a wish to transfer to another institution but these broad categories need to be interrogated further; he suggested that this is an example of a specific area where schools could gather richer information directly from their students.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that there were many positive trends for Trinity, however, certain areas require attention and that schools were expected to respond to these as part of their annual quality assurance processes. He noted that Trinity should do better in relation to the student-faculty interaction, quality of interactions and supportive environment indices. One development which might help with these is the work of the subgroup tasked with looking at students as partners in learning. Particular attention is being given to the convening of curriculum or staff-student committees within schools and whether or not these should be formalised in Trinity's governance structure.

The Dean of Students, responding to a comment, agreed that there are many surveys and reports from which to draw information about the quality of the education and environment in Trinity including the ISSE, International Student Barometer, employers' reports and external examiners' reports. He concluded by noting that Council has already considered the ISSE report and has tasked the Dean of Students, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Dean of Graduate Studies to develop a set of University-wide actions. In addition, he asked the Directors of Teaching (UG) to promote the investigation of school specific data within their schools.

USC/19-20/021 Any other business

The Assistant Academic Secretary provided an update on the outcome of Trinity's application to the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning funding initiative. She noted that all seven projects had been successful, the descriptions of which would be posted online shortly.