



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 26 January 2021 at 2.00 pm via Zoom.

Present: Professor Kevin Mitchell, Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies (*Chair*)
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary
Professor Aidan Seery, Senior Tutor
Professor Áine Kelly, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education
Professor Graeme Murdock, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture
Professor Norah Campbell, Trinity Business School
Professor Jennifer O'Meara, School of Creative Arts
Professor Brendan O'Connell, School of English
Professor Robert Armstrong, School of Histories and Humanities
Professor Rachel Hoare, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Neville Cox, School of Law
Professor Breffni O'Rourke, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
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 Jacob Erickson, School of Religion
Professor Clair Gardiner, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Eoin Scanlan, School of Chemistry
Professor Jonathan Dukes, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Nicola Marchetti, School of Engineering
Professor Juan Pablo Labrador, School of Genetics & Microbiology
Professor John Stalker, School of Mathematics
Professor Carlos Rocha, School of Natural Sciences
Professor David O'Regan, School of Physics
Professor Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science
Professor Joe Harbison, School of Medicine
Professor Damien Brennan, School of Nursing & Midwifery
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Jake Byrne, Academic Director of Tangent
Ms Megan O'Connor, Education Officer, Students' Union
Mr Sameer Shaikh, Student Representative

Apologies: Professor Catherine McCabe, Dean of Students
Professor Andrew Loxley, School of Education

In attendance: Ms Lucy Shah, Academic Affairs, Trinity Teaching & Learning; 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; Dr Mairead Brady, Dr Martin Fellenz, and Dr Michelle MacMahon, Trinity Business School (For item USC/20-21/040i).

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed new member Professor Robert Armstrong, Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning (DUTL) in the School of Histories and Humanities, to the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC).

USC/20-21/038 Minutes of the meeting of 8 December 2020

The minutes of the meeting of 8 December 2020 were approved.

USC/20-21/039 Matters arising
USC/20-21/030

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave an update on the Foundation Scholarship Examinations, 2020-21 proposal. He reported that the Visitor confirmed that the use of a quota mechanism is permissible under the Statutes. He noted that this was approved at Council last week, with some members dissenting, and that the Scholarship examinations are currently underway.

Following a query from a member on how the quota system will operate in faculties, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies explained that an arithmetic quota has been put in place where a student's overall grade would determine their ranking. He noted that setting quotas at the faculty level had been deemed to be the appropriate level of granularity for the system. He maintained that as long as grading is carried out in the usual way, the quota system would only be in place as a failsafe mechanism. He confirmed that the Central Scholarship Committee will consider the results and, if it transpires that the quota system produces unfair or unintended consequences, then it would be sensible to reconsider the parameters in that eventuality; any changes to the quota mechanism would have to be taken back to both Board and Council for approval.

The Students' Union Education Officer noted that it was regrettable that a number of questions were still to be answered, particularly as students had already started their Scholarship examination. She added that the discussion and experience had been negative for students, causing some to withdraw their application.

USC/20-21/034 The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that an update on 'Examination Measures for Academic year 2020/21' would be discussed under item 4 on the agenda.

USC/20-21/037 The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that Items for noting (Section C) (i) HPAT memo from School of Medicine and (ii) English Language requirements for 2021 (appended to the minutes), were noted and approved by Council.

USC/20-21/040 National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave an introduction to the item, noting that Trinity was successful in securing funding for seven projects under the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning Initiative: Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Funding in Higher Education 2019 – Developing Disciplinary Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment, in November 2019.

i. A presentation from Dr Mairead Brady, Dr Martin Fellenz, and Dr Michelle MacMahon, Trinity Business School, 'COMPARE - Deploying Comparison Processes to Support Student Learning', was circulated, and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed them to the meeting. Dr Martin Fellenz provided members with an overview of the project, noting the scope of the project, and current issues with feedback that exist in Higher Education. He explained that the project's focus is on leveraging students' inner feedback to support self-regulation and spoke of the implications for educators.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Dr Martin Fellenz for his presentation and commented on the project's potential for empowering students to take control of their learning. The DUTL from the School of Computer Science and Statistics, who

had participated in the project, reported that he had found it very easy to implement the methods as an educator, and that in employing peer review in his classes, it was the reviewers who gained great value from the process. In response to a query on the scalability and sustainability of the practices, Dr Martin Fellenz acknowledged that while this will be easier to implement for student-centred educators, it may prove more challenging for educators who have a didactic approach; academic staff in this latter group would need support and relevant professional development.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted the great potential of techniques developed through this project and advised that it should be communicated widely in College. He thanked Dr Mairead Brady, Dr Martin Fellenz, and Dr Michelle MacMahon for attending, and they withdrew from the meeting.

ii. A presentation from Professor Áine Kelly, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education (ADUSE), 'BioLabPrep: Maximising Student Learning in the Laboratory', was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited the ADUSE to present to the meeting. The ADUSE gave members an overview of the project, first by providing the context for its development, and by bringing the meeting through some examples of the materials created to help students to prepare for laboratory sessions. She noted that even though this project had been conceived of before the pandemic, the development of digital and online tools had been timely and assisted students with the changes that had to be implemented in laboratories as a result of the pandemic.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the ADUSE for her presentation and queried whether students engaged with optional exercises that were not for credit. The ADUSE reported that students had engaged with the pre-practical material and advised that Blackboard has a useful function for tracking this activity. She noted that, due to COVID, students are working individually this year, rather than within groups which was the norm for practicals in other years; this means that students must discover how to complete practical tasks for themselves. She acknowledged that in future years when there is a return to group work, there may be a need to incentivise these optional exercises for students. A member commented that in her school, similar materials have been developed, and that students have provided positive feedback. In response to a comment about the need to create professional looking content, particularly videos, and an inquiry about centralised resources to support multimedia creation, the Head of Academic Practice noted that there are tools, such as H5P, which are both inexpensive and intuitive to use.

The ADUSE was commended by members and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked her for her presentation.

USC/20-21/041 Options for timing of Semester 1 Deferral Session

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 20 January 2021, was circulated. He summarised the emergency measures that had been reinstated, which included permitting students to automatically defer their Semester One assessments. He advised members that the memorandum sets out two options for the scheduling of the deferred Semester One examinations, and asked members to consider these options and recommend one. He noted that option one would take a week from the summer research session, but may be more favourable for students, while option two may be more stressful for students but does not impact the summer research session.

The following comments were made by members during the discussion:

- The first option appears to be more student friendly.
- If Semester Two examinations also have these emergency measures, another supplemental session will need to be arranged.
- Option two would increase the likelihood of assignment deadlines clashing with examinations.

- Staff are under a lot of stress and research is suffering, therefore, the summer research period should not be reduced.,
- Option two may actually be a more positive experience for students as they are still in the examination 'momentum'.
- The number of students who have chosen to defer can be managed well under option two.
- Neither option is ideal but what is important is certainty for students, students should receive a clear idea of what examinations will entail in adequate time.

A straw poll was taken by USC on the scheduling of the deferred Semester One examinations, resulting in an even amount of support for both options.

Responding to concerns about external examiners' capacity to take on extra work, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that quality control in assessments is very important, particularly at Sophister level. He agreed that this matter required further consideration and would be discussed at a future USC meeting.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies then prompted a discussion about the conduct of the Semester Two assessment session. He reported that planning was underway for two scenarios; one scenario envisages holding some examinations on campus if necessary, while the other envisages holding all examinations online. A discussion ensued, with members commenting that certainty for students should drive this decision, and that certainty can only be found in planning for the examinations to be held online.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/041(i): The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies is to convey to the Continuity of Learning and Student Activities Group (COLSAG) that no preferred option emerged from the discussion.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/041(ii): The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to convey to COLSAG that there is a strong consensus for Semester Two assessments to be held online.

USC/20-21/042 Guidelines on Recording of Lectures for the Academic Year 2020-21

A memorandum from the Dean of Graduate Studies, dated 25 January 2021, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies summarised the memorandum and the guidelines that had been developed.

During the discussion, the guidelines were welcomed. Responding to a query from a member on when a student could withdraw permission to be recorded, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that he would raise this for clarification at the Working Group on Recording and Captioning of Lectures, so that it is addressed in the 'FAQ' section of the guidelines. Responding to comments on the difficulty of captioning certain types of lectures, he advised that captioning is not mandatory, but where possible it is preferred. The Students' Union Education Officer noted that students may be able to complete this task and that staff should contact the Students' Union to see if there is help available.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/042: The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that these guidelines would be communicated to staff members shortly.

USC/20-21/043 Continuity of Teaching

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that topics for discussion here had already been captured in earlier discussion at the meeting. He advised that he would follow up with schools in relation to Semester Two teaching plans for practicals, capstone projects, field trips and placements.

USC/20-21/044 Proposed subcommittee of USC and GSC for stand-alone modules for credit and micro-credentials proposed under HCI Pillar 3

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Due to concern for time this item was brought forward on the agenda to be considered by members. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave members an outline of the Human Capital Initiative (HCI) and the proposal that a subcommittee of USC and GSC is established to review, advise on, and recommend stand-alone modules for credit and micro-credentials planned under HCI Pillar 3 to either USC or GSC, as appropriate. He requested members to consider the proposal.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/044: USC supported the proposal for a subcommittee of USC and GSC to be established to consider proposals for standalone modules for credit and micro-credentials developed under the HCI.

USC/20-21/045 Principles of Study Abroad and the Undergraduate Common Architecture

A memorandum from the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture (ADUCA), dated 13 January 2021, was circulated. The ADUCA summarised the principles of Study Abroad and the Undergraduate Common Architecture. Responding to a query from a member, the ADUCA confirmed that the principles are following college policy on the minimum grade required by students to proceed on any exchange. He also confirmed that the principle that students should not begin or complete the study of a subject while on exchange abroad, is following the requirement for the Undergraduate Common Architecture pathways, but added that this could be reviewed in future years. Commenting on a query from a member on the conversion of grades from the host institution, the ADUCA stated that this is an adjacent piece of work that is underway in collaboration with the Global Relation Office.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/045: USC approved the Principles of Study Abroad and the Undergraduate Common Architecture.

USC/20-21/046 Module manager – Update of Module Descriptors

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies gave a verbal update on the updating of module descriptors through Module Manager so that these can be accessed by students ahead of online module enrolment. He explained that module descriptors held locally in school handbooks should link to live module descriptors held centrally in Module Manager, as there should be only one source of truth. He noted that module descriptors in Module Manager are not all up to date, and that a request for this information to be provided would be forthcoming. Responding to comments from members that the system is not fit for the purpose, he advised that College is aware of this issue, and that discussions are underway with IT Services for a solution on this. He advised that Academic Registry are to issue a report which will detail where module descriptors have last been updated, and this will be distributed to Schools as a starting point. In response to a call for Blackboard and SITS to be linked further, to enable the transfer of assessment marks from Blackboard to SITS, a member advised that a tool called 'Grades Journey' could be used to enable this, and that IT Services can assist with implementing this. It was noted that it applies to continuous assessment marks only and not examinations.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/046: The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Graduate Studies noted that a request to update module descriptors through Module Manager will issue to schools shortly.

USC/20-21/047 Any other business

Professor Norah Campbell made a proposal that education, as usual, is cancelled for one day during Green Week 2021 (22-26 February) and given over to a series of talks by staff in Trinity who research climate change and the biodiversity crisis. She requested support from USC for this proposal.

The majority of members displayed overwhelming support for the proposal and agreed that the point of cancelling classes for one day is to be disruptive. A member pointed out that this idea was aligned with Trinity's Strategic Plan and embodied the value of leadership. Comments were made by members on the logistics of executing the proposal.

Decision/Action USC/20-21/047: The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies agreed to meet with Professor Norah Campbell in order to discuss how to proceed with the proposal.

USC/20-21/048 Items for noting (Section C)

USC noted and approved, where necessary, the following items/documents:

- i. **2021-22 New Minor Subjects**
A memorandum from Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture, dated 20 January 2021.
- ii. **SEDA Wellbeing Online Workshops**
Information on workshops for staff and students.
- iii. **Trinity Postgraduate Open Day 2021**
A memorandum from Beibhinn Coman, Director of Marketing, dated 15 January 2021.