



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 12 December 2023 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 Stephen Smith, Senior Tutor
Professor Fraser Mitchell, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education (ADUSE)
Professor Martha O'Hagan Luff, Trinity Business School
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 Clare Kelly, School of Psychology
Professor Dino Hadzic, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Phillip Curry, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Michael Kirwan, School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies
Professor Derek Nolan, 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 Richard Deane, School of Medicine
Professor Aileen Lynch, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Jake Byrne, Academic Director of Tangent

Apologies: Professor Mark Sweetnam, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture (ADUCA)
Professor Martin Worthington, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Miranda Fay Thomas, School of Creative Arts
Catherine Arnold, Education Officer, Students' Union
Mr Eoghan Gilroy, Student Representative

In attendance: Ms Ciara Conlon, Academic Affairs; Ms Linda Darbey, Assistant Academic Secretary: Academic Affairs; Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative; Dr Pauline Rooney, Director of Academic Practice; Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services; Dr Carlos Bruen (for item USC/23-24/038); Dr Mark Hennessy and Ms Marie McPeak (for item USC/23-24/041); Mr Ronan Hodson, Admissions Officer (for item USC/23-24/042).

USC/23-24/035 Minutes of the meeting of 14 November 2023

The minutes of the meeting of 14 November 2023 were approved.

USC/23-24/036 Matters arising

- i. **USC/23-24/028:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the revisions to the USC Terms of Reference were approved by Council.

- ii. **USC/23-24/029 and USC/23-24/030:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that he intends to create a SharePoint folder to enable the sharing of examples of good practice in relation to policies and teaching and learning practices in areas that USC have been engaged in discussion, such as academic integrity, standardisation of feedback and marking. He noted that the materials posted will be for reflection and learning but not wider circulation.
- iii. **USC/23-24/031:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the proposed amendments to the Visiting Student Enrolment process were approved by Council.
- iv. **USC/23-24/033:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reminded members that the deadline for providing feedback in relation to Attendance/ Non-Satisfactory Attendance & the revision of the Programme Handbook Policy is the 15th December.

USC/23-24/037 Senior Lecturer's Updates

- i. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that the workshops on the Academic Integrity processes and procedures could not run as planned due to unforeseen circumstances, although he noted that only a small number had signed up, which prompted him to explore other approaches to disseminating the information. As such, a Frequently Asked Questions section is currently under development for the website, and he requested members to please send any suggested queries to academic.integrity@tcd.ie. A member noted that it was unfortunate that the sessions were cancelled and highlighted the importance of ensuring that information reaches all teaching staff, and not just DUTLs.

The Senior Tutor provided an update on activities being carried out to support tutors to help students navigate the process. He added that training for tutors is scheduled in the new year.

A member pointed out that SITS does not have the functionality to record cases of misconduct, to which the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that the Academic Integrity Working Group (AIWG) will be initiating discussions with Tribal on the issue. He stated that an interim solution is under development and will be made available to academics as soon as possible. A member questioned if the mark should be withheld until approval is obtained from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies. It was confirmed that a mark should be withheld until a decision has been confirmed by the appropriate authority as specified by the process. It is hoped that the central recording process will have a mechanism to record the status as either confirmed or suspected. Professor Kevin Kelly stated that the AIWG want to avoid escalation of cases where not appropriate, and reminded USC that the primary decision maker is located within the School. Cases are to be recorded centrally as previous infringements contribute to the indicative score to determine the outcome.

In response to a query regarding the location of the indicative score rubrics, the Assistant Academic Secretary confirmed that these are available to download on the [Academic Integrity](#) website.

- ii. Providing an update on the review of the the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)/ Learning Management System (LMS), the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that a detailed consultation with appointed School and unit representatives is scheduled for January, and that the details of the appropriate channels for providing feedback will be circulated.
- iii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies informed members that QQI are conducting a project to analyse Honours Bachelor's Degree classifications for the time period of 2012 to 2022. He advised that in addition to the four programmes that have been selected as case studies to participate in the project, an institutional level response on

perceptions of degree classifications is also being sought. He advised that Schools will be asked to participate via an MS Form, which will be circulated in the near future.

USC/23-24/038 Effective Teaching Practices: Responding to Generative Artificial Intelligence

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Dr Carlos Bruen, who is the course director of the MSc in Health Policy & Management in the School of Medicine, to the meeting, explaining that he was invited today to share good practice in relation to responding to generative Artificial Intelligence.

Speaking to a presentation, Dr Bruen took the meeting through the approach taken in the MSc, explaining that a policy has been developed, which permits students to use GenAI in a responsible, ethical and transparent manner. Students are required to complete a declaration of use, and to include the output in an appendix to the assignment. He underlined the importance of teaching staff familiarising themselves with the output generated by GenAI, to understand the limitations, which can inform assessment design. He stated that all assessment questions are tested in advance using GenAI tools so staff can better identify patterns in the output. Students are assessed through a variety of modes at different stages of the module, including a verbal mode of assessment. He reported that they have also utilized GenAI generated responses to policy questions, which students must critically analyse.

He pointed to useful resources developed by Miriam Scott and the Quick Start Guide by Sabzalieva and Valentini, which can educate students to use GenAI in an effective and ethically sound manner, and make them aware of issues such as privacy concerns or bias reinforcement. He noted that GenAI can exacerbate inequalities between students who can afford to purchase more sophisticated tools and those who can't. Concluding the presentation, he advised that the policy will continue to be reviewed and they are engaging with students to better understand how they are using AI.

Members commended the presentation and the well conceived approach. A discussion ensued on how GenAI use should be accounted for when marking student's work. Professor Bruen advised that this has been under consideration but at present coursework completed with GenAI is not differentiated. It was noted that marking rubrics do take into consideration the use of source material, but there was agreement that it is an area that requires further consideration.

The discussion moved on to the topic of detection of use of GenAI, as a member highlighted the ever-evolving sophistication of these tools, and the increasing difficulty in detecting their use. A number of members emphasised the importance of appropriate assessment design, and the inclusion of verbal modes of assessment, to appropriately measure student competence and knowledge, however it was acknowledged that this may be impractical in large classes.

A member raised the issue of the environmental impact of GenAI tools, and others agreed that it is an aspect that needs to be factored into the conversation. The School of Psychology DUTL offered to share the School's policy on academic integrity, which makes reference to the environmental and ethical issues. Another member highlighted the opportunity to leverage student interest in such topics to engage them in conversations on academic integrity.

Wrapping up the discussion, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Professor Bruen for the presentation and members for an interesting discussion.

USC/23-24/039 Trinity Electives Annual Report 2022/23

The Trinity Electives Annual Report for the academic year 2022/23 was circulated, and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reminded the committee that the Chair of the Trinity Elective Sub-Committee during that period was Professor Graeme Murdock. The current Chair, Professor Fraser Mitchell, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education (ADUSE) invited questions and comments from USC in relation to the report.

The Academic Secretary noted that some TE modules have a high student quota which are not filled and queried if this area is reviewed. Referring to the ongoing work in relation to Education for Sustainable Development, she questioned if the quota for modules that focus on sustainability could be increased. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies agreed that the committee should review module quotas. Responding, the ADUSE confirmed that the committee reviews module quotas annually, however he expressed concerns about module numbers being set centrally as this could potentially lead to some modules becoming unviable to run. He noted that the new 'first come first served' enrolment process that was implemented for the first time this academic year has been a success.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented on the student survey results in relation to the provision of feedback and questioned if the committee have looked at this issue. The ADUSE confirmed that the TESC has considered this at the previous meeting. The discussion moved on to the topic of evaluation, and the ADUSE drew attention to the recently developed website for rating TEs, advising that he has raised the issue with the SU Education Officer, particularly in relation to moderation of the website. In response to a query, the ADUSE confirmed that the Quality Office issue a central survey to students, however module co-ordinators are also free to carry out their own evaluation. A member raised the issue of survey fatigue among students, which can result in a low participation rate. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that it would be useful to consider how best to evaluate TEs going forward.

Concluding the discussion, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies stated that it is encouraging to see the continued proliferation of Trinity Elective modules, and noted the contribution they make in introducing breadth into Trinity undergraduate education.

USC/23-24/040 Columbia Dual Degree

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A memorandum from the Dual Degree Programme Director, dated 6 December 2023, was circulated and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Dr Mark Hennessy, Dual Degree Programme Director, and Ms Marie Mc Peak, the Undergraduate Common Architecture Office Manager, to the meeting. He noted that a review of the Dual Degree will commence in the near future, however the issue of the additional 30 ECTS credits needed to be addressed on a more timely basis.

Speaking to the item, the Dual Degree Programme Director stated that currently students on any of the twelve Dual Degree programmes with Columbia students must complete an additional 30 ECTS credits for Trinity during the sophomore years that they spend in Columbia. He explained that this has created a significant burden and resulted in stress for students and places an administrative burden on Trinity academic advisors, who, he advised, were unanimous in their view that this requirement should be removed. Following consultation with various stakeholders, including the Academic Secretary, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, and the Vice-President for Global Relations and with support from colleagues in Columbia, it is proposed to remove the additional 30 ECTS credit component requirement from the academic year 2024-25. As a result, a new degree calculation is being proposed which will be based on a conversion of the cumulative G.P.A students earn in Columbia. He advised that work will be undertaken to review the conversion tables, which will avoid any significant changes to degree results. It is also proposed that the degree parchment will be amended to reflect that work has been undertaken at Columbia University.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Professor Hennessy and Ms McPeak for putting forward the proposal and acknowledged the work of the UCAO in managing the Dual Degree programmes. He also thanked Professor Anna Chahoud who, in her role as Public Orator, contributed the proposed Latin wording to the parchment. He stated that currently the parchment students on the Dual Degree receive is indistinguishable from the one awarded to students who complete all four years of their degree in Trinity, and advised the proposed change adds transparency and acknowledges the role of Columbia.

The School of English DUTL advised that the School have concerns that the proposed changes will result in Trinity effectively awarding a degree on the basis of work completed in Columbia, and lead to grade inflation. She gave the example of the current graduating cohort on the English Dual Degree programme stating that with the extra 30 ECTS contributing to the degree calculation only five out of nine would receive a first. However if only marks received at Columbia are counted, all nine students would receive a first class degree. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies acknowledged the concerns expressed, advising that this has been carefully considered and emphasised that the revisions to the conversation table will prevent inflation. The Dual Degree Programme Director echoed the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies comments and noted that due to the demanding admission requirements for the Dual Degrees, the cohort who are admitted are high achievers who often receive excellent results. He noted that the Academic Advisor from the School of English was in favour of the proposed changes. Ms McPeak advised that the issue has been carefully considered, noting that grade inflation is being seen across the board and highlighted the parallels with students who spend a year abroad.

Commenting on the conversion of grades, a member pointed out the challenges in converting grades from North American institutions, as the grading system lacks granularity when it comes to higher bands of grades. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies acknowledged these limitations, and in response to a query, he noted that when entering into the Dual Degree agreement it was accepted that Trinity would award a degree based on credit earned in Columbia and underlined the importance of trust in ensuring successful inter-institutional partnerships. He also noted that this similarly underpins Trinity's awarding of degrees on the basis of credits earned by students while abroad for a semester or a full year. The Dual Degree Director advised that the conversion of grades will be suitably granular in nature and in addition, he emphasised the structures in place for regular review of the Dual Degree programme curricula as an extra layer of quality assurance.

The Academic Secretary provided some context to the addition of the extra credits on the Columbia Dual Degree programmes, stating that the additional Level 8 credit requirement was initially put in place to protect the integrity of the Trinity award, however it has become apparent that it has presented difficulties and needed to be removed. She stated that the reference to Columbia on the degree parchment will serve a similar purpose, although she was in agreement that the conversion of marks will require careful revision. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies stated that he was confident that the concerns raised by English will be assuaged.

Concluding the discussion, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked Dr Mark Hennessy and Ms Marie Mc Peak for their work on the proposal and stated that further work will be undertaken on the conversion table before the item is presented to Council.

Action/Decision

041.01: Subject to work undertaken on the grade conversion table, USC approved the proposal to remove the additional 30 ECTS requirement from all Columbia Dual Degree programmes from the academic year 2024-25, and the proposed degree calculation derogation, which will be calculated from the conversion of the cumulative G.P.A earned in Columbia. USC also recommended the proposed changes to the wording of the parchment to Council.

USC/23-24/041 Admissions: Proposed Revisions to the A-level Points Equivalences

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A memorandum from the Admissions Officer, Academic Registry, dated 5 December 2023, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that a Working Group on Leaving Cert and A-Level equivalences was established by Universities Ireland (UI) to consider a sectoral approach to addressing low student mobility from Northern Ireland to HEIs in the Republic of Ireland. Welcoming Mr Ronan Hodson to the meeting, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited him to speak to the item.

Speaking to the memo circulated, Mr Hodson explained that the UI have proposed a revised point scoring system to be adopted by HEIs in Ireland for admitting students from Northern Ireland. He brought the meeting through the proposed new equivalences, provided in the circulated memo, pointing out that points will be based on the results from 3 A Levels, in combination with either a 4th A-level, an Advanced Subsidiary (AS) or an Extended Project (EPQ). Applicants will be able to attain a maximum score of 601 points with 3 A levels combined with bonus points for taking Maths, and 625 using additional points scored from an AS or ESP and bonus points.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that this is a result of ongoing work to level the playing field for students from Northern Ireland, with significant input from NI Universities, and will be discussed at a UI meeting on 13 December, when it is expected to be approved for implementation either this academic year or the next.

In response to members' queries, the Admissions Officer advised that this would apply to all students awarded A-Levels from the various examination boards in operation, and not just those who completed them in Northern Ireland. It was also noted that A-Level candidates will now be able to apply to study Medicine, which was excluded from the NI Feasibility Study route. In response to a query, the Admissions Officer also confirmed that there are proportionally more A-level students obtaining A*s than Rol students earning all H1s.

A member remarked on similar issues faced by students applying from other EU countries, some of whom can only obtain a maximum of 600 points. The Admissions Officer acknowledged challenges in this area, but advised that there are some cases where students can obtain 625 points, and that this is revisited every year with ongoing examination of the points equivalences.

Action/Decision

042.01: USC approved the proposed revisions to A-level points equivalences.

USC/23-24/042 Any other business

- i. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies informed USC that Ms Linda Darbey, the Assistant Academic Secretary: Academic Affairs will be taking up a new position in the HEA from January. He extended gratitude for her contribution to the committee and to Trinity and wished her the best in her new role. He also noted that Professor Jacob Erickson, who was on sabbatical for Semester 1, will return to the role of DUTL for the School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies in January and thanked Professor Michael Kirwan for his work on USC over the Semester.

- ii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies drew attention to the Festive Gathering that will take place on Monday 18th December in the Secretary's Conference Room from 5pm and encouraged all members to attend.

USC/23-24/043 Minutes (Section B)

USC noted and approved the following set of minutes:

- i. **Trinity Electives Sub-Committee**
Meeting minutes of 22 November 2023.
- ii. **Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee**
Meeting minutes of 03 October 2023.

USC/23-24/044 Items for noting (Section C)

USC noted and approved the following item:

- i. **Proposed Collaboration between the School of Law and the University of California, Berkeley**

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