



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 17 October 2023 at 2.00 pm in the Boardroom, Trinity Business School.

Present: Professor David Shepherd, Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies (*Chair*)
Professor Richard Porter, Dean of Students
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 Martin Worthington, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
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 Jan Manschot, School of Mathematics
Professor Cormac McGuinness, School of Physics
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
Mr Eoghan Gilroy, Student Representative

Apologies: Professor Stephen Smith, Senior Tutor
Professor Mark Sweetnam, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Common Architecture (ADUCA)
Professor Margaret Walshe, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Professor Matthew Saunders, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Juan Pablo Labrador, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Catherine Arnold, Education Officer, Students' Union
Professor Heather Reilly, School of Dental Science
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary
Ms Pauline Rooney, Director of Academic Practice
Professor Miranda Fay Thomas, School of Creative Arts

In attendance: Ms Ciara Conlon, Academic Affairs; Ms Linda Darbey, Assistant Academic Secretary: Academic Affairs; Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative; Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services; Professor Jane Stout, Professor Sarah-Jane Cullinane, Professor Cicely Roche, Professor Felix Mezzanotte and Ms Nicola Byrne (for item USC/23-24/018); Ms Jennifer Pepper (for item USC/23-24/019 and USC/23-24/020), Ms Catherine Given (for item USC/23-24/019).

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that Mr Eoghan Gilroy has been appointed as Student Representative to USC and welcomed him to the meeting.

The minutes of the meeting of 19 September 2023 were approved subject to the following amendments:

- i. The attendance of Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services is recorded.
- ii. **USC/23-24/009:** A member wished to retract a question asked at the September meeting in relation to the approval processes for programme/module changes, which they later realized was not necessary.

USC/23-24/014 Matters arising

- i. **USC/23-24/004(i):** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reported that IT Services have communicated with Blackboard on restoring the previous alert functionality but advised that this may take some time to be addressed. IT Services strive to ensure staff are updated on changes through various means, such as emails and on the Blackboard or IT Services webpages, which are typically timed at the beginning of the term. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies stated that IT Services have been requested to, where possible, give staff advance warning of upcoming changes.
- ii. **USC/23-24/004(v):** The Director of Student Services wished to clarify the intention for conduct of examinations in the future.
- iii. **USC/23-24/009(ii):** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that a meeting was being set up with IT Services to discuss the possibility of disseminating LENS reports via Blackboard.

USC/23-24/015 Senior Lecturer's Updates

- i. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies drew attention to Academic Integrity Week, which commenced on Monday 16th October, with events taking place throughout the week. He particularly encouraged members to attend an event to discuss the results of the International Centre for Academic Integrity - McCabe survey, which examined student and faculty perceptions of academic integrity. He thanked all those involved in organizing the events, including Ms. Lizzie Whitcher, the Education Policy Developer (Academic Integrity), and colleagues in the Library, Student Learning and Development, and the Centre for Academic Practice.
- ii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that a communication will be forthcoming to request volunteers to participate in a working group which will conduct a review of the Virtual Learning Environment. Responding to a member's observation on the importance of prioritizing the needs of student and staff in the review, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies agreed and underlined the importance of ensuring the review is as comprehensive as possible.
- iii. Referring to the Trinity Open Day to be held on 4 November 2023, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies informed the meeting of a new approach to campus tours for visitors, the development of an app for wayfinding and the availability of free Wi-Fi access on the day. He stressed the importance of representation by all Schools and noted that while the deadline for confirming presenters has now passed, any Schools or disciplines which had not confirmed already should do so as soon as possible, and a follow up communication will be issued to all DUTLs and School Managers on this.

In response to queries from members, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reminded the meeting that USC approved the holding of a second Open Day, which brings Trinity in line with peer institutions, who typically hold two such events. He stated that changes implemented this year, including the decision not to attend Higher Options, will be reviewed to inform plans for future years. A member highlighted the need to prioritize the attendance of prospective students at talks rather than parents and suggested

recordings are offered to parents instead. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies agreed to communicate this feedback to relevant colleagues.

- iv. Speaking to student mobility, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate advised that he has become aware of some students who are affected by natural or geopolitical events while studying abroad, and requested members to contact him directly should they be aware of any such cases. He also stated that in response to a recent article in the University Times highlighting the challenges students who study abroad are facing, he will meet with the Vice President of Global Engagement to discuss the matter.
- v. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Exams confirmed that, based on the examinations pilot to be held in Michaelmas term, a proposal will be developed in relation to Semester 2 examinations, which may inform the strategy of addressing challenges posed by the Academic Year Structure.

USC/23-24/016 USC Work Priorities 2023/24

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 11 October 2023, was circulated. He thanked members for their contributions, which are reflected in the workplan for the upcoming year. He stated that he was mindful of ensuring the workload was manageable for the year but warned that there may be a need for flexibility due to both external and internal constraints that may impact on the work of the committee.

USC/23-24/017 Revision of the USC Terms of Reference

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 12 September 2023, was circulated. He explained that significant time has passed since the last review in 2012. He indicated that, with input from Academic Affairs, he has made some suggested changes to the ToR in the circulated document and invited input for members for further suggestions.

In the discussion that followed, the following comments were made:

- A concern regarding the reference to 'methods of teaching and learning' in point 3 was raised, due to the potential for this to be interpreted in a prescriptive manner which could infringe on academic freedom.
- Further suggested amendments to point 3 included using the word assessment rather than examinations and to move it before the term progression.
- A typing error in point 6 was pointed out.
- The reference to 'strategic or national initiatives' was commented on, as a member highlighted that there is a distinction between what is instigated internally and what comes from external bodies.

Thanking members for their input, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies suggested, and members agreed, that the term 'methods of' in front of teaching and learning be removed. In response to a comment about the decision-making power of the committee, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that USC is a sub-committee of Council and while items do need further approval by Council, USC's recommendations carry significant weight when considered by Council. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised amendments to the Terms of Reference will be made based on the above suggestions, and the item will come back to USC for approval.

USC/23-24/018 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Fellows Working Group: Implementation Plan

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The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Professor Jane Stout, the Vice-President for Biodiversity & Climate Action to the meeting, along with the ESD Fellows:

Professor Sarah-Jane Cullinane, Professor Cicely Roche, Professor Felix Mezzanotte, and Ms Nicola Byrne, the ESD Project Manager.

Speaking to a presentation, Professor Sarah-Jane Cullinane brought the meeting through the background of the Strategy and Action plan, explaining that the vision and strategic objectives are based on the principles developed in 2022/23 by the Sustainability in UG Education (SUGE) Working Group, and on wide stakeholder consultation and benchmarking of peer institutions. She advised that the plan is to use an interdisciplinary approach to realise the ESD vision of ensuring all students develop key competencies to work for sustainable development within planetary boundaries. She stated that the working group have taken into account a critique of a common approach which views social, economic, and ecological development as separate entities, and pointed out that the ESD objectives intend to bring these together. She underlined the critical role of partnership across College units and disciplines in ensuring the ESD objectives are realized.

She presented the three phases of curricular integration, underlining the cyclical nature of the plan. The academic year of 2023/24 is a co-creation phase, she explained, which will involve the finalisation of a ESD implementation plan, and the development of a level 5 ECTS Common Module to be taken by all undergraduate students in either of the Fresh years. Staff will be supported to deliver this through a specialised development programme. A pilot will commence in 2024/25, which a number of Schools have already signed up to deliver, with wider roll out across College envisioned for 2025/26.

She highlighted the areas Schools can contribute to in mainstreaming sustainability in the curriculum, which include identifying space in their curriculum for the module and identifying colleagues to participate in the development programme. She acknowledged the feedback already received from Schools and advised that this will also be invited through future discussions when finalizing the ESD implementation plan. Concluding the presentation, she encouraged members to participate in an upcoming Undergraduate Citizens Assembly for ESD in Trinity, the details of which are yet to be confirmed.

Members thoroughly commended the ESD fellows for the significant work undertaken in developing the implementation plan to date. In the discussion that followed members expressed a variety of opinions, including reluctance in approving a mandatory module, with some highlighting restrictions on their curriculums due to professional body requirements and programme architectures. A member pointed out the challenges in implementing curriculum changes in the allotted time period. Other members endorsed the plan, with one member stressing that it presents an enormous opportunity to Trinity to show leadership in enabling staff and students to influence wider society and address the climate crisis in a meaningful and ambitious manner. The DUTL for the Business School, which is one of the participants in the pilot, suggested that participating Schools should share best practice to optimize the implementation.

Addressing members' concerns regarding the mandatory nature of the module and the need for a more detailed plan, Professor Cullinane advised that the group are still exploring how the module will be embedded and acknowledged the variation of requirements across Schools. She stated that School ownership in the process is crucial in ensuring successful implementation and highlighted the student demand for institutions to act on the climate crisis. In response to a query regarding sharing the documentation circulated for today's meeting, she advised that the document is still a draft, but that ESD can present to Schools if requested.

The Vice-President for Biodiversity & Climate Action clarified that USC are asked to approve, in principle, the strategy and Education actions outlined in the circulated document, advising that the implementation plan is still in development. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies acknowledged the curricular implications of the plan and stated that

further conversations will be needed with UCAGC and the Trinity Elective sub-committee to explore the development of sustainability pathways. He asked USC to support this exploration and the development of a common module for piloting in Schools, to allow feedback to inform a decision regarding its wider implementation.

Action/Decision

018.01: USC supported further conversations between the ESD Fellows and UCAGC and the Trinity Elective sub-committee to explore the development of sustainability pathways and the development of a common module for piloting in Schools, to allow feedback to inform a decision regarding its wider implementation.

USC/23-24/019 Visiting Student Enrolment

A memorandum from the Erasmus and Study Abroad Manager and the Director of the Academic Registry, dated 10 October 2023, was circulated and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Ms Catherine Given and Ms Jennifer Pepper to the meeting.

Speaking to the item, the Erasmus and Study Abroad Manager explained that the current process for enrolling visiting students is a manual process, based on a first come, first served principle which is held one week before teaching starts. She explained that the current process often results in a poor student experience due to the timing, instability in module offerings as well as timetabling clashes. She presented several solutions to the challenges, which include:

1. An earlier visiting student module enrolment process to take place just after OME enrolment. This will require Schools to submit data on available modules earlier than they have done previously.
2. Reduce the number of disciplines for which visiting students can be approved from six to four, and limit enrolment of visiting students to Senior Fresh and Junior Sophister modules. Less modules will be made available to students as a result, which will require additional capacity to be made available in the modules that are offered.
3. Removal of the need to obtain module co-ordinator approval, where pre-requisites are met.

In the discussion that followed it was noted that the improvements to the OME process introduced last year will facilitate the first of the proposed enhancements. There was wide agreement with the implementation of an earlier enrolment period, and many members felt that this may go some way to addressing the other challenges. In response to a member pointing out that module capacity cannot be confirmed until the reassessment session concludes, the Erasmus and Study Abroad Manager stated that the changes could apply to Hilary term enrolments only. A member suggested that waiting lists might be introduced, and the Erasmus and Study Abroad Manager advised that this would be difficult due to staffing restraints, but an earlier enrolment period may free up time.

In relation to the source of timetabling clashes, the Erasmus and Study Abroad Manager clarified that this is due to visiting students enrolling across many disciplines. A member highlighted the lack of integration between timetabling systems and SITS, expressing regret that this may impinge on student choices. A member expressed their support for reducing the number of disciplines available to visiting students but pointed out that their School currently offers Senior Sophister modules and asked that Schools could have discretion to choose the two years from which modules are made available. Responding, the Erasmus and Study Abroad Manager stated Junior Sophister modules usually have the most capacity due to Trinity students studying abroad in that year, but that she will consider this request.

Thanking the meeting for their input, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that a follow up communication will go out to USC on the matter, and feedback will

be taken into account and feed into a concrete proposal which will come back to USC for approval.

USC/23-24/020 Semester 1 Examinations

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A memorandum from the Director of the Academic Registry, dated 10 September 2023, was circulated. Introducing the item, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies acknowledged the work of the Continuation of Learning and Student Activities Group (COLSAG) on the matter to date. He invited the Director of the Academic Registry Academic Affairs to speak to the item.

The Director of the Academic Registry brought the meeting through the plans for the 2023/24 Semester 1 on-campus examination pilot, explaining the criteria used to select the 94 modules in scope for scheduling on-campus. She advised that RDS examination days will reduce from five to four days, with three contingency days to be utilized on campus to schedule any clashing modules and exams from the 5th RDS day. Students will take a maximum of two exams per day, and the timetable will be structured to ensure students will not need to move between the two venues to ensure a smooth student experience. Schools/Programmes are not permitted to request specific timetable slots.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Director of Academic Registry, advising that lessons learned from the pilot will be used to inform a proposal for Semester 2 exams. The DUTL for the School of Computer Science and Statistics pointed out the need for computer-based exams to be scheduled in computer laboratories, and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that he would speak to him further on this.

Action/Decision

020.01: USC supported the 2023/24 Semester 1 on-campus examination pilot project.

USC/23-24/021 External Examiner Feedback Summary Report

Due to time constraints, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that this item will be moved to a subsequent USC meeting.

USC/23-24/022 Any other business

- i. The Director of Student Services invited members to attend the Services Expo to be held in the Exams Hall on 18 October 2023.

USC/23-24/023 Minutes (Section B)

USC noted and approved the following set of minutes:

- i. **Undergraduate Common Architecture Governance Committee**
Meeting minutes of 30 March 2023.

USC/23-24/024 Items for noting (Section C)

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

i. Appeals Policy (Revised)

Memorandum from the Registrar, dated 10 October 2023, with revised policy.

ii. Programme and Curriculum Design and Approval Policy (Revised)

Memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 10 October 2023, with revised policy.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited the Assistant Academic Secretary: Academic Affairs to speak to this item. She expressed her apologies for her absence at the September meeting. In response to a query from a member she advised that

the policy does not introduce changes to current practice, rather the intention is to make explicit where the oversight lies for programme and module changes – a recommendation in the Report on the Quality Review of Academic Affairs. She advised that the intention is to develop a template that will facilitate Schools in documenting planned changes, through which changes that require USC oversight can be notified to Academic Affairs to support the planning of USC agendas and the Academic Affairs workload for the academic year. She advised that Academic Affairs would consult with DUTLs and DTLPs on the development of the template.

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