



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 19 September 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 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 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 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
Professor Derek Nolan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
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
Catherine Arnold, Education Officer, Students' Union

Apologies: Ms Linda Darbey, Assistant Academic Secretary: Academic Affairs
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary
Professor Stephen Smith, Senior Tutor
Professor Ann Devitt, School of Education
Professor Valeria Nicolosi, School of Chemistry

In attendance: Ms Ciara Conlon, Academic Affairs; Ms Siobhán Dunne, Library Representative; Ms Pauline Rooney, Director of Academic Practice; Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services; Professor John Southern, School of Chemistry; Professor Jane Stout, Professor Sarah-Jane Cullinane, Professor Cicely Roche (for item USC/23-24/007); Mr Ronan Hodson (for item USC/23-24/008); Dr Liz Donnellan (for item USC/23-24/009i); Mr Declan Treanor (for item USC/23-24/009ii).

USC/23-24/001 Welcome

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed members and attendees, particularly new members, to the first USC meeting of the 2023/24 academic year and invited participants to introduce themselves.

USC/23-24/002 Minutes of the meeting of 23 May 2023

The minutes of the meeting of 23 May 2023 were approved.

USC/23-24/003 Matters arising

- i. **USC/22-23/084:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that the Director of Student Services circulated a document on OME developments after the May USC meeting.
- ii. **USC/22-23/085:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that Calendar changes for 2023/24 were approved by Council.
- iii. **USC/22-23/086:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the Academic Integrity process and Calendar Regulations were approved by Council.
- iv. **USC/22-23/087:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the progression and award regulation derogation for the School of Law was approved by Council.
- v. **USC/22-23/088:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that Council approved the conclusion of the Northern Ireland Feasibility Study (NIFS) and the Trinity Admissions Feasibility Study (TAFS).
- vi. **USC/22-23/089.01:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that Council approved the proposal to hold a Spring Open Day in March 2024.
- vii. **USC/22-23/089.02:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that the Director of Marketing confirmed that peer institutions schedule Open Days on Saturdays.
- viii. **USC/22-23/090:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the Faculty Deans' Review of Foundation and Non-Foundation Scholarship was approved by Board.
- ix. **USC/22-23/091:** The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that the External Examiner Policy (Taught) was approved by Council.

USC/23-24/004 Senior Lecturer's Updates

- i. Referring to updates to Blackboard during the summer session, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that due to concerns raised regarding students potentially missing important announcements, IT Services have been asked to investigate with Blackboard if the previous functionality can be automatically restored. In the meantime, teaching staff can amend notification settings and advise students to do likewise. In response to a request for teaching staff to be provided with a summary of changes before they happen, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised he will communicate this request to IT Services.

Noting that consultation prior to planned updates would be helpful, a member queried if a Director of Teaching and Learning (Undergraduate) (DUTL) group could be established to inform necessary changes to Blackboard. Another member noted that more cost-efficient alternatives to Blackboard are available, which could be tailored to Trinity's specific needs and managed within College. Responding to members comments, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies explained that a wider review of the Virtual Learning Environment will be conducted this year and input from DUTLs will be sought.

- ii. Speaking to the academic year structure (AYS), the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies stated that it was evident that consensus had been reached last year at USC regarding the challenges of the current structure and the significant pressure placed on both students and staff, particular in relation to reassessment and progression. He noted that this has been communicated and will be reiterated to the Vice Provost/Chief Academic Officer and advised that DUTLs should also articulate the importance of revisiting the AYS to their Heads of School, who can raise the issue at the Heads of School committee. In response to a suggestion that an ad hoc working group is formed to ensure consistency in rationale for change, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that the responsibility for this area lies with the Vice Provost/Chief Academic Officer and therefore he will consider if this is necessary.
- iii. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that the Quality Office are to circulate a summary report of all External Examiner reports, identifying common themes found and recommendations for Schools. Schools will be encouraged to reflect on the common themes identified in the report and provide feedback.
- iv. Referring to the examination sessions for 2023/24, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies reported that while the RDS is secured for this year's examination period, it is not expected that it will be available beyond that. He advised that the Continuity of Learning and Student Activities Working Group (COLSAG) has been reinstated to provide guidance to Council on returning examinations to Campus. He invited the Director of Student Services to provide an update on the pilot in place for the Semester 1 examination period 2023/24, who informed USC that following a consultation process with Schools, modules which can be conducted within a two-hour slot will be scheduled on campus. Work is underway on the scheduling, she explained, with a focus on avoiding students having to relocate between both venues. In response to a query, she confirmed that it is possible to facilitate local management of venues, and Schools who wish to do so will be contacted to arrange this once the central venues are confirmed. Thanking the Director of Student Services, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that USC will be kept informed of any updates on the matter.
- v. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies informed USC that the Academic Integrity steering group membership and Terms of Reference are currently being reviewed and encouraged members to contact him if they have any questions. He advised that the Academic integrity process approved at the May 2023 USC meeting has been further refined over the summer and further tweaks may be necessary as this is implemented. He advised that guidelines regarding the impact of new Artificial Intelligence developments on teaching are to be developed by NAIN. He stated that a survey to investigate behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs about academic integrity has been administered to faculty and students and the results will be made available during Academic Integrity week. He encouraged members to complete the survey, and to in turn encourage students to also do so. He drew attention to the event entitled *Going Digital, Staying Human: Opportunities and Challenges of AI for Education*, hosted by the Provost and Vice Provost/Chief Academic Officer, to be held on 28th September and encouraged all to attend if possible.
- vi. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that in response to concerns raised around the timing of Prize nominations, the Manager of Assessment & Progression is preparing an update for circulation. A member highlighted that queries sometimes come from students who graduate early who feel that they miss out on nominations, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies agreed that clear communication is needed to manage student expectations.

USC/23-24/005 Items of Business following the last USC meeting of 2022/23

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 7 September 2023, was circulated. He noted that further amendments to the Calendar Part II were approved by Council under vacation procedures since the last meeting of USC in May 2023.

Drawing attention to the new Foundation Scholarship Confirmation of Attendance process, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that a communication will be issued to students on the deadline for confirmation.

In response to a query regarding the amendment of Section 99 on Academic Integrity, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies acknowledged that there is a slight possibility that this could be misunderstood, however he explained that, after careful consideration, the additional wording had been added to provide flexibility.

A discussion ensued regarding Section 67(i) *Access to scripts and other assessed work and discussion of performance*, and a member highlighted the difficulty in balancing students' right to view the script with the high volume of requests from students with the intention of identifying areas they can request a re-mark in the hope of improving their results. Several members felt that guidance on an appropriate timeline within which a student can request a discussion on their performance should be developed, and in the discussion that followed it emerged that, in the absence of a defined timeline, Schools take varying approaches to managing student requests. The Education Officer stressed the importance of clear and timely communication to students on this. A member also highlighted a consistent approach would be useful, with the timeframe advertised clearly in programme handbooks. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked members for their contribution, stating that he would consider if central guidance was required, or if it should be managed locally by Schools.

In response to a query regarding providing access to and discussing an assessment which was completed online, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that if a student is not able to come to access the script and discuss it in person, teaching staff can meet with the student remotely and provide a verbal description of the feedback on the script to the student.

USC/23-24/006 USC Workplan 2023/24

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 12 September 2023, was circulated which outlined standard items that USC is expected to consider this academic year, along with a list of potential topics for USC. As outlined in the memo, DUTLs were asked to consult with their respective Heads of School regarding the workplan of USC for 2023/24 and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies invited members to suggest additional items or items that should be prioritised. In the discussion that followed the following comments were made:

- A member requested further clarity on the issue of anonymous marking.
- Consistency of conversion of grades for returning study abroad students should be provided.
- A member raised the issue of grades obtained by Junior Sophister students while on exchange counting towards their final degree result, which may disproportionately affect language students.
- A member remarked that the current guidelines on unsatisfactory attendance are not satisfactory, and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies agreed that this will be addressed.

- A member queried mark conversion models for students on the Columbia Dual Degree and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised the member to get in touch with Professor Mark Hennessy in the first instance.
- The DUTL of the School of Law reported an increase in the number of Junior Fresh students and they were interested to know if other Schools were experiencing similar increases. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies remarked that it would be interesting to know the composition of new students.
- The DUTL of the School of Physics informed the meeting that they are hoping to bring a solution to the accreditation issue the School is currently facing this academic year.

Thanking members for their contributions, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that members will be asked to prioritise issues via an MS form which will be circulated in due course.

Action/Decision

006.01: The Secretary of USC to circulate an MS Form to members to complete a prioritisation exercise for USC workplan 2023/24.

USC/23-24/007 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Fellows Working Group

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Professor Jane Stout, the Vice-President for Biodiversity & Climate Action to the meeting, along with Professor Sarah-Jane Cullinane and Professor Cicely Roche, who are members of the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Fellows Working Group.

Speaking to a presentation, Professor Stout provided an overview of the work carried out to date by the Education for Sustainable Development working group, highlighting the consultation process, benchmarking review, regulatory considerations, and a footprint analysis that informed the strategy. She drew attention to the three high level priorities, targets and areas of action, explaining that the implementation strategy is spread across four pillars, all of which have clearly identified objectives, actions and owners. She briefly brought the meeting through the 10 objectives associated with Education as an area of action all of which, it is hoped, will empower Trinity staff and students to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development.

Speaking on behalf of the ESD Fellows Working Group, Professor Sarah-Jane Cullinane explained that it is a cross disciplinary group funded by SATLE, which was created through a collaboration between Trinity Teaching and Learning and Trinity Sustainability. She outlined the objectives of the Group and the methodology and pedagogical approaches to be adapted to integrate sustainability into the undergraduate curriculum. She highlighted plans to develop a common module for delivery in the Freshman years and resources to support teaching staff. Concluding the presentation, Professor Cullinane advised that the implementation plan will be presented to USC in October, after which a consultation process with Schools will commence to identify opportunities for embedding ESD across the UG curriculum in their respective School, although DUTLs are welcome to get in touch before the formal process begins if they wish.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the VP for Biodiversity and Climate Action and the ESD Fellows, and noted the significant work undertaken. He acknowledged the contribution of USC on the matter to date, noting in particular the initial input of Professor Clare Kelly.

USC/23-24/008 Northern Ireland Deferral Scheme

A memorandum from the Admissions Officer, dated 11 September 2023, was circulated and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Mr Ronan Hodson to the meeting.

Providing some background on the issue, the Admissions Officer explained that this proposal, to expand the deferral quota from 10% to 15%, with the additional 5% reserved for NI students only, is aimed at increasing enrolments of students from Northern Ireland. The intention is to encourage students to consider coming to Trinity following a gap year, and it is hoped that this will go some way to address the barrier related to earlier offers of places by UCAS compared to CAO. If approved, it will apply from the 2024/25 intake onwards, and will be advertised publicly through various recruitment events attended by the Admissions Officer this academic year.

Thanking the Admissions Officer, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised the meeting that this is intended as a stop gap measure and to demonstrate Trinity's desire to address the issues Northern Irish students face in attending Trinity. He invited questions and comments from members.

A member raised a concern that, in the absence of other initiatives to attract NI students, the proposal could be counterproductive, and could be received as a trivial attempt at addressing issues faced by NI Students. Responding, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies acknowledged the limitations of the proposal, stating that the messaging will be carefully considered, and will be clear that this is aimed at creating additional capacity for students who opt to defer, and not envisioned as a comprehensive response to the issue.

In response to a query on the impact on CAO quotas, the Admissions Officer advised that students who defer are offered places in Round A and this will not increase student numbers. A member advised that they will be partaking in events in Northern Ireland and requested that any advertising materials be made available, and the Admissions Officer confirmed he would do so. A member requested an update on timelines for the release of CAO offers in upcoming years and the Admissions Officer advised that, while still considered to be too late, the 2023/24 offers were announced one week earlier and he was cautiously optimistic that we can expect similar timelines in the coming years.

Action/Decision

008.01: USC supported the Northern Ireland Deferral Scheme and recommended it to Council.

USC/23-24/009 Academic Policies

i. Revised Programme and Curriculum Design and Approval Policy

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 12 September 2023, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Dr Liz Donnellan, Academic Affairs to the meeting to speak to the item.

Presenting to USC, Dr Liz Donnellan acknowledged the work of the Assistant Academic Secretary: Academic Affairs in revising this policy and advised that it has been approved by Graduate Studies Committee. The policy was revised in light of structural changes to undergraduate education and developments as a result of the Postgraduate Renewal Programme. She advised that the policy has been developed with the necessary national and international requirements and guidelines in mind to ensure a high-quality education is provided in Trinity. She drew attention to Appendix 1, which outlines the required approval process for new programme proposals and curriculum revisions and clarifies what constitutes a Major and a Moderate change, and informed the meeting that an interactive summary will be made available on the Academic Affairs website to provide guidance on this.

In response to a request to provide further clarity on the necessary approval process, and a query on what constitutes a stand-alone module for credit (external), the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies suggested that the policy will be amended as appropriate in light of feedback and return to USC in due course. He thanked Dr Liz Donnellan for her work to date and asked members to get in touch with her if they have additional feedback.

ii. Implementation of the Reasonable Accommodation Policy

A memorandum from the Director of Trinity Disability Service, dated 11 September 2023, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed Mr Declan Treanor to the meeting to speak to the item.

Speaking to the item, the Director of Trinity Disability Service, explained that the Reasonable Accommodation Policy was brought to USC in March 2023, however inconsistent implementation has been highlighted repeatedly by students who already face significant disadvantages compared to their peers. He highlighted the core issues students face, due to a lack of understanding among staff regarding LENS report protocols, resulting in additional and unnecessary medical documentation requests, which in turn impact the College Health Service. To address these issues, several recommendations have been put forward:

1. Establishment of centralised oversight of designated staff responsible for disseminating LENS reports and clear communication channels to staff who do not have LENS access.
2. Staff undertaking training and awareness sessions offered by the Disability Service to ensure they are aware of necessary protocols around LENS.
3. Schools to take accountability in ensuring LENS protocols are understood and followed by all staff.

In the discussion that followed, a member highlighted that it is not always clear who has access to LENS reports, and some Schools are resorting to circulating student lists. Another member highlighted the difficulty in navigating LENS reports and noted that the dissemination of information can be burdensome, and some Schools may not have additional capacity to take this on.

In response, the Director of Trinity Disability Service stressed the importance of avoiding circulation of students' personal data via email and advised that access is given to Heads of Schools, DUTLs and module owners. Schools can request access to any staff as necessary. He pointed out limitations to SITS functionality in appropriately addressing the issue, advising that solutions should be found on the local level.

A number of suggestions were put forward by members, including the use of OneDrive to share information to all necessary staff, while another member pointed out that a solution could lie in the automatic transfer of data from SITS to Blackboard, which could disseminate LENS reports to anyone with instructor level access.

Concluding the item, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked members for their valuable contributions and advised that, along with the Director of Trinity Disability Service, he will consult with IT Services regarding member suggestions.

Action/Decision

009.01: The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, in conjunction with Academic Affairs, to revise the Programme and Curriculum Design and Approval Policy based on USC feedback to provide further clarity on the necessary approval process, and what constitutes a stand-alone module for credit (external) and will bring the policy back to USC for approval.

009.02: The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Director of Trinity Disability Service to consult with IT Services regarding suggestions on how to disseminate LENS reports to teaching staff via Blackboard.

USC/23-24/010 Any other business

USC/23-24/011 Minutes (Section B)

None

USC/23-24/012 Items for noting (Section C)

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

- i. **Derogations from Progression and Award Regulations for 2023/24**
Memorandum from Dr Liz Donnellan, Academic Affairs, dated 12 September 2023.
- ii. **Trinity Elective Sub-Committee Membership 2023/24**
Memorandum from the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education and Chair of the Trinity Electives Sub-Committee, dated 7 September 2023.
- iii. **Self-Evaluation Survey Results 2022/23**
Memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 13 September 2023.

DRAFT