



A meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 21 January 2020 at 2.15 pm in the Trinity Board Room, Trinity Business School Building.

Present: Professor Kevin Mitchell, Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies (*Chair*)
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary
Professor Kevin O'Kelly, Dean of Students
Professor Aidan Seery, Senior Tutor
Professor Stephen Matterson, Director of TSM/Trinity Joint Honors
Professor Áine Kelly, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education
Professor Norah Campbell, Trinity Business School
Professor Nicholas Johnson, School of Creative Arts
Professor Brendan O'Connell, School of English
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 Elizabeth Nixon, School of Psychology
Professor Michael Wycherley, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Linda Hogan, School of Religion
Professor Eoin Scanlan, School of Chemistry
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 Derek Sullivan, School of Dental Science
Professor Joe Harbison, School of Medicine
Professor Valerie Smith, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Jake Byrne, Academic Director, Tangent
Ms Niamh McCay, Education Officer, Students' Union
Ms Zoe Cummins, Student Representative

Apologies: Professor Andrew Loxley, School of Education
Professor Rachel Hoare, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Professor Stan Houston, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Aisling Dunne, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Paul Eastham, School of Physics
Professor John Walsh, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences

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 Breda Walls, Director of Student Services; Director of the Academic Registry, Ms Leona Coady (for Item USC/19-20/033).

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, drew the attention of the meeting to the memorandum in Section C concerning a change in the membership of USC and welcomed Professor Jake Byrne, Director of Tangent, to the meeting.

USC/19-20/029 Minutes of the meeting of 10 December 2019

The minutes of the meeting of 10 December 2019 were approved.

USC/19-20/030 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

USC/19-20/031 Trinity Education Project

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i. Re-assessed, Deferring, Off-Books, Repeat Year, Course Transfer and Visiting Students and Facilitating Pathway and Module Selection

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 19 December 2019, was circulated. Speaking to item, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that the memorandum outlines solutions for students experiencing non-standard progression, for example, deferring students, with respect to making pathway module selections. He highlighted a key feature of the proposal, that 10% of places on Open Modules be held to accommodate students who, for various reasons, have to make their selections later than the June deadline. This would cover those who have failed or deferred their assessments to the re-assessment period, returning Erasmus or other exchange students, and visiting students.

He brought the meeting through each of the following student categories and the associated recommendations.

- Students assessed in the re-assessment period due to failure or permission to defer;
- Deferring students (Off Books) and students who are Off Books with Assessment;
- Repeat year students (who have failed to satisfy the requirements of their year at the re-assessment session);
- Students transferring courses;
- Visiting students

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that there would also be a two-week period in which students could change their mind with respect to pathway and Open Module choices (this does not apply to Trinity Elective choices). In relation to changing pathways, he advised that an approval process must be developed.

Responding to questions, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised that 10% is an estimate and the final number of reserved places will be driven by an analysis of the number of places actually needed. He confirmed that the 10% of reserved places should be read in terms of the overall capacity of a module and that there will be no formal appeals process specifically related to pathway/subject/module choices; exceptional cases could be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Decision USC/19-20/31(i): USC approved the proposed recommendations, as circulated.

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ii. Proposal for Mainstreaming of Trinity Electives: Academic and Operational

A memorandum from the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Science Education (ADUSE), dated 19 December 2019, was circulated.

Speaking to the item, the ADUSE noted that the current Trinity Electives Subgroup, which she chairs, is due to disband at the end of the current academic year. The memorandum includes a proposal to replace it with a sub-committee of USC, the Trinity Electives Sub-Committee, which would be supported by staff in Trinity Teaching and Learning, and which she would continue to chair for one further academic year. She outlined the terms of reference of the proposed sub-committee, its membership and calendar of events/deadlines for 2020/21. She further noted that some start-up funding remained for the development of new Trinity Electives. As approved by USC previously, there is no change of mind facility for students in relation to Trinity Electives

and this will remain the case for 2020/21. In exceptional circumstances, the Trinity Elective Sub-Committee may show discretion, where feasible. If a resolution is not possible at the level of the Sub-Committee, the matter may be referred to the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

Decision USC/19-20/31(ii): USC approved the proposals for mainstreaming Trinity Electives in terms of academic and operational matters, as circulated.

iii. Student Evaluations of Open Modules

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 19 December 2019, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies noted that a significant number of existing modules are being opened up to students from different disciplines as Open Modules and that student feedback must be sought to evaluate how well they are working as such. It would not be feasible to survey those students taking Open Modules separately, therefore, it is proposed that a new section, with three questions, would be added to the standard module evaluation form to capture their experiences.

In answer to a question, the Academic Secretary, confirmed that the data derived from these questions should be considered by the relevant module coordinator and at the school level. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that visiting student should not answer questions in the new section.

Decision USC/19-20/31(ii): USC approved the questions to be included on the standard module evaluation form for students taking modules as Open Modules subject to the inclusion of a sentence, ahead of the first question, to clarify that visiting students should not answer these questions.

iv. Bespoke Open Module for 2020/21

A memorandum from the ADUSE, dated 13 January 2020, was circulated. The ADUSE advised that the TEP Open Modules Sub-Group had considered and recommended the following module to USC for delivery in 2020/21:

- Introduction to Business Law

A member commented that many students would find it difficult to take up an Open Module carrying 10 ECTS in one semester, however, it was noted that there were other 10 ECTS Open Modules. In response to a query from another member, the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies commented that it is not intended that Bespoke Open Modules will proliferate.

Decision USC/19-20/31(iv): USC approved the Bespoke Open Module, Introduction to Business Law, from the School of Law, for delivery in 2020/21.

v. Guidance on Pathways to Students

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 17 January 2020, was circulated.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies advised members that significant work had been carried out on the development of a website dedicated to information on the Trinity Education pathways in the common architecture, which is due to launch imminently. The website will host case studies, videos, pathway diagrams and a section on frequently asked questions for students. In addition, an interim 'helpdesk' will be available with two members of staff to answer questions. However, it is likely that students will have specific curriculum/subject related questions and, as such, the website will contain contact details for Directors of Teaching and Learning in relevant schools, unless alternative contact details are provided. A number of members

commented that they had already provided more relevant contact details to the TEP Project Officer. In response to a query the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that a general school e-mail address could be provided on the contact details page.

USC/19-20/032 Proposed Changes to the Structure and Timing of the Scholarship Examination

A memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 16 January 2020, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies explained that the proposal was for discussion at USC rather than for approval; a more final proposal document will be brought to USC following further consultation.

He outlined the general proposal for discussion:

- (i) To use the module results from the first semester in second year as part of the criteria for the award of Scholarship.
- (ii) To have students sit an additional single general paper in a chosen subject as an additional part of the assessment towards the award of Scholarship.
- (iii) That this special examination would be held in the week immediately following the current first semester assessment week (possibly on the Monday).

He listed a number benefits associated with the proposal, which included:

- It maintains the special nature of the Scholarship examinations through the use of a general paper.
- Avoids the reassessment of material.
- More diverse modes of assessment are incorporated.
- It would make the Scholarship examinations more accessible for those student who have to work over the Christmas break and would prevent disruption of the academic year for certain candidates who must defer placements.
- It would simplify decisions about the subject(s) in which students sit Scholarship examinations.
- The period required for the Scholarship examinations would be condensed; if there is only one general paper per subject/programme to be taken by each candidate, all such papers could be scheduled at the same time.
- It would free up the first week of the second semester, which could be put to other uses.

He confirmed that the Central Scholarship Committee (CSC) had discussed the general proposal and were in support. Further, they recommended that:

- (iv) There should be a 50:50 weighting between the module component and the special scholarship examination paper.
- (v) The criteria for award should be the achievement of a first class honor in both elements.
- (vi) The module component should be the average of all modules for which a student received a grade in the first semester of their second year. This should include all breadth components, respecting the principle of equal academic rigour and esteem that underpins the TEP initiatives, but should not include modules such as some in health sciences where clinical competency has to be demonstrated and which are thus only graded as pass/fail.
- (vii) The module component would thus include all continual assessment components that contribute to overall module marks.
- (viii) The use of additional criteria (such as a minimum of 65% in all modules) was not seen as desirable or practical as there would be such a diversity of module numbers and sizes and types taken by each student.
- (ix) The examination should be held on the Monday following the first semester assessment week, rather than at any other stage during the first semester.
- (x) The examination should retain its 'unseen' character; the use of an assignment was discussed but did not receive wide support.

- (xi) The choice of which subject paper to sit is left to the student.
- (xii) Relevant additional reading material should be suggested.
- (xiii) The examination paper should ideally have a distinct qualitative nature, probing conceptual understanding, synthesis and integration.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies also highlighted potential changes to the academic year structure which could accompany the Scholarship proposal. He noted that if this or a similar proposal is implemented, some thought would also have to be given to increasing the average qualifying mark and/or to introducing quotas. He added that the Secretary to the Scholars was not in favour of the proposed changes as he thought it would diminish the advanced and searching nature of the assessment, however, the Students' Union Education Officer had shown strong support. Confirming her support, the Education Officer noted how this would open up access to a greater number of students.

In the discussion that followed, members were supportive of removing barriers to Scholarship and welcomed the review of these examinations in the context of the new TEP landscape, however, the following comments and suggestions were made:

- Quotas could lead to an increase in re-check/re-mark cases.
- Rolling Scholarship into normal Michaelmas term assessments will alter the nature of Senior Freshman assessment, which will become far more competitive and pressurised; this was expressly not intended for the Freshman years under TEP proposals.
- It could have a damaging effect on group work.
- Scholarship papers should examine the content of the first three semesters and not just the Michaelmas term of the second year.
- There are currently no Courts of Examiners in Michaelmas term.
- Many modules with large classes use Teaching Assistants/Assistant Examiners to assist with marking; this would place undue responsibility on them.
- Starting teaching earlier in the Hilary term may not be possible for a number of schools where they are already struggling with marking and the publication of provisional Michaelmas term results.
- Perhaps students be allowed to compile a portfolio of their work as an alternative proposal.
- There is a huge disparity in marking practices across faculties and also within faculties and even within schools.
- The use of Michaelmas term module marks, with a weighting of 50%, fundamentally changes the nature of Scholarship and this should be discussed in its own right.
- Some schools use external examiners to review papers or to moderate Scholarship marks, which is not standard practice for assessments in the second year.

The Senior Lecturer/ Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked members for their contributions and noted that wider consultation will take place across College before a more concrete proposal comes back to USC. He noted that a working group may have to be set up to examine all of the issues in detail but that, at a minimum, recommendations must be worked out for Senior Freshman students in 2020/21 who will be taking Scholarship examinations under the common architecture for the first time.

USC/19-20/033 Academic Registry Annual Report 2018-19

The Academic Registry Annual Report 2018-19, dated January 2020, was circulated. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies welcomed the Director of the Academic Registry, Ms Leona Coady, to the meeting.

The Director of the Academic Registry spoke to the item by way of a presentation, which had also been circulated just before the meeting. She brought USC through a diagram summarising the Academic Registry's services and another one related to its organisational structure, noting that Student Finance had become a fourth pillar. She advised that that staffing numbers have remained static with a core staffing complement of 54 full-time

equivalents, which roughly works out as one staff member for every 340 students in College. Additional temporary staff are recruited at certain times during the year.

She highlighted the additional initiatives in the Academic Registry in 2018/19, these were:

- the introduction of the new academic years structure;
- creation and development of the Student Finance team;
- introduction of new operational and management reporting (such as, weekly direct applications reports and new BBM reports);
- participation in TEP and Digital Trinity Projects, which has involved the secondment of certain staff members from the Academic Registry;
- continuous improvement of registration processes.

She noted the significant strain on the Academic Registry, given its current resource levels, and referred to a review carried out by PwC in September 2019. It highlighted that without addressing the resourcing need, the Academic Registry will face considerable challenges in supporting the projected growth in students of 5,000 to the year 2023, as well as future strategic objectives dependent on its participation. The Academic Registry Steering Group has approved the recommendations made by PwC and, as a result, a business case and workforce plan are being developed in an effort to enhance capacity and capabilities.

She outlined data on key performance indicators and in relation to applications, admissions and the overall student body, noting that the student population rose by 2% in 2018/19 on the previous year. She also highlighted data in relation to student finance, appeals, and student cases. Commenting on examinations, she noted that the Head of Operations had presented much of this information to USC previously but she drew the attention of the meeting to the overall reduction in examination sittings in 2018/19 compared to 2017/18, when term tests and Council approved examinations were also considered. She referred to the multiple examination durations leading to a large number of announcements, and further disruptions when students leave examinations, particularly in the RDS. She noted that the report did not contain retention information from first year into the second year of undergraduate courses, as the related data capture occurs on 31 January annually. She also noted that information had not been provided on the student-staff ratio, as data had not been returned by some schools; it is anticipated that these data will be included in the Senior Lecturer's Annual Report.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies acknowledged the enormous amount of work carried out in the Academic Registry, especially in light of their current short staffing levels. He commented on the issue of multiple examination durations and noted that USC would return to this issue in the future. The Senior Tutor also commended the Academic Registry, particularly in relations to the work on student case processes which, he noted, had improved significantly over the last three years.

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Director of the Academic Registry who then withdrew from the meeting.

USC/19-20/034 Any other business

The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies highlighted the Trinity Postgraduate Open Day on Thursday 13 February 2020 and requested that committee members encourage their final year students to attend.

USC/19-20/035 Items for noting

Revised Undergraduate Studies Committee Membership

USC noted the memorandum from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, dated 15 January 2020.