



Trinity College Dublin

Quality Committee

Minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Quality Committee held on 10th December 2014 in the Boardroom, House 1.

Present: Academic Secretary (Acting Chair), Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences, Dean of Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Senior Lecturer, Dean of Graduate Studies, Quality Officer, Professor Simon McGinnes, Professor Sheila Ryder, Professor Catherine Coxon, Professor John Walsh, Mrs Jessie Kurtz, Education Officer of the Students' Union, Vice-President Graduate Students' Union.

In attendance: Professor Diarmuid O'Brien (Director of TR&I), Professor Vinny Cahill (Dean of Research), Dr Liz Donnellan (Secretary to the Committee)

Apologies: Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Dean of Engineering, Mathematics & Science, Ms. Laura Conway-McAuley.

QC/14-15/014 Draft minutes of the meeting of the 30th October 2014

The minutes of the meeting of the 30th October 2014 were approved with minor corrections.

QC/14-15/015 Matters arising

The Academic Secretary reported that with regard to the review of the Department of Sports & Recreation (QC/14-15/005), the Dean of Students has been appointed as the chair of the Taskforce to review the Sports Strategy.

With regard to the Review of the School of Mathematics (QC/14-15/009), the meeting was informed that Review Report was approved by Council at its meeting on the 19th November 2014.

The Academic Secretary reported that the IUA Registrar's Group established a small working group to engage with the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Justice and Equality with regard to the Code of Practice for Providers of Programmes of Education and Training to International Students (QC/14-15/010). One meeting has taken place to-date and feedback from this has been positive.

QC/14-15/016 Annual Faculty Quality Reports:

(i) Quality Report from Faculty of Health Sciences

The Academic Secretary invited the Dean of Health Sciences to speak to the Faculty Quality Report which had been circulated with papers for the meeting. The Faculty Dean provided an overview of the data presented in the report and identified the high rate of undergraduate module evaluations in the Faculty (93%) as one of the key findings of the report.

In terms of postgraduate module evaluation, three of the four Schools in the Faculty reported a 100% evaluation rate, with a gap identified in the School of Medicine due to the high volume of taught postgraduate modules available in the School (320 across 22 programmes).

The report highlighted concerns that the curriculum structure in some Schools does not lend itself to module evaluation (e.g. in Dental Science where the curriculum is delivered in a spiral and integrated fashion) and that the existing policy that every undergraduate module must be evaluated annually is not suitable for such programmes.

The variety of module evaluation and feedback methods used across the Faculty was highlighted as an area of best practice which will continue to be supported and encouraged. It was noted, however, that with the implementation of annual module evaluation the response rates have dropped in some schools (e.g. Medicine) and course directors attribute this to survey fatigue. The Vice-President of the Graduate Student's Union agreed that survey fatigue is an issue for some students, who are asked to evaluate not only the academic part of their student experience but also other elements of College life. There is also concern amongst some students that their feedback is not being acted on and this may influence their perception of the usefulness of the surveys.

A Committee member reported that their School is moving towards the use of single surveys covering multiple modules as a way of reducing survey fatigue, and that the initial response from the students to this form of survey was positive. The Dean undertook to feed this suggestion back to the School of Medicine. The Academic Secretary reminded the Committee that each School has the freedom to adopt an evaluation method that best suits its students and the course/modules.

College-level issues that the Faculty wishes to raise were discussed by the Committee and included:

- System issues that result in significant delays in the registration of undergraduate and postgraduate students and which are impacting on access to key resources such as Blackboard, on which Schools in the Faculty are increasingly reliant. During a brief discussion on Blackboard a Committee member reported that the delay in uploading some modules to Blackboard was also an issue that needed to be addressed. This delay was in part related to the fact that casual/ adjunct staff do not have Trinity email accounts and cannot therefore upload modules to Blackboard. The ability of individual Schools to register casual/adjunct staff on Blackboard would alleviate some of these delays, as they currently rely on CAPSL staff to do so. It is expected that the Academic Registry and SITS stabilization programme will address the registration issues.

- The devolution of module and course surveys to Schools in the Faculty has led to a perceived loss of impartiality in the process of student evaluation. The importance of maintaining the balance between local ownership and impartiality was discussed by the Committee, and it was noted that the TR071 Reviewers highlighted as critical the need to have local ownership of quality. It was suggested that reliance on a central system of evaluation would restrict the development of local methods of evaluation which are more appropriate to some courses/modules, and the Dean of AHSS noted his preference for a locally managed system. It might be useful to provide more explicit guidance on what is acceptable in terms of local evaluation methods.
 - The need for clarification regarding mechanisms for dealing with recurrent poor feedback in relation to individual staff. The Committee discussed how, in the absence of a formal PMDS, Heads of School can deal with this issue which impacts on quality. The appropriate mechanism for students to provide feedback on the quality of research supervision was also raised by a Committee member and the Dean undertook to raise this at School level.
 - The External Examiner process and, in particular, the pathway for receipt and distribution of External Examiner reports and payment of fees, was discussed. Members of the Committee reported significant delays in External Examiners submitting their reports and confusion at School level about where the reports are sent to and who should receive them. It was also noted that delays in distributing reports to the Schools may occur while payment clearance is sought, as the current system requires the completion of two separate forms for payment of fees and expenses. The Quality Officer reported that a review of the External Examiner process has been undertaken, which has mapped the distribution process and timelines for receipt and processing of External Examiner reports. The aspiration is to have a technical platform which will act as a central repository for reports but in the interim a more streamlined system for processing the reports will be recommended. In relation to the payment of External Examiner fees, the recommendation from the START External Examiner payment project will see the introduction of a single payment form and single point of payment which should alleviate some of the existing delays. It was noted that the role of the External Examiner extends beyond the production of an annual report, and that much of the quality feedback happens during the court of examiners meetings.
- ** The Committee agreed to recommend that key quality issues discussed at the court of examiner meetings be formally recorded in order to supplement the External Examiners' annual report.

In conclusion, the Dean noted that the Faculty Quality Review report was a very useful exercise.

(ii) Quality Report from Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

The Faculty Dean introduced the report by noting that the process had been very useful and that it would continue to inform Faculty discussions on quality issues. He noted that in the future Faculty Executive meetings will set aside time to report on quality issues and to share best practice across

Schools. In terms of module evaluations, he reported that 98% of the 1114 undergraduate modules and 94% of the 424 postgraduate modules in the Faculty were evaluated in 2013/14.

In terms of College-level issues that needed to be addressed, the following were highlighted and discussed:

- The quality and availability of appropriate teaching and learning spaces was a recurrent issue across the Faculty and adversely impacted the student experience.
- The lack of standardisation of the marking scheme in TCD was frequently raised by External Examiners. Differences in the application of the marking scheme across the Faculty and the College have implications for students engaged in inter-disciplinary programmes such as TSM and impacts on the internationalization agenda. In addressing this, a balance must be struck between grade-inflation and under-marking.
- The Dean agreed with the concerns raised in the Health Sciences Faculty Report about the External Examiner process and he reported difficulties in scheduling External Examiner visits, which he felt was partly due to the need to run examinations systems in SITS and Excel simultaneously. He recommended that problems associated with SITS be recognized and dealt with at College level.

A discussion took place concerning the timing and format of the Faculty Quality Report, and whether the level of detail supplied this year was necessary. It was agreed that while it is helpful to have a summary/overview of the findings, having detailed feedback on School-level activities is vital and will inform the next Institutional review. It was agreed that the template for the report would be reviewed before next year.

In response to a query, the Academic Secretary noted that the Quality Report from the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science was delayed due to other Faculty commitments and that it would be brought to the next meeting of the Quality Committee.

QC/14-15/017 Reviewers' report for Trinity Research & Innovation (TRI)

The Academic Secretary welcomed the Director of Trinity Research and Innovation (TR&I) and the Dean of Research to the meeting. The Director of TR&I spoke to the Reviewers' report which was circulated with papers for the meeting. He welcomed the Reviewers' endorsement of the recommendations outlined in the unit's self-assessment, and reported that the self-assessment and review process had been very helpful in terms of strategic planning for the unit.

The Director reported that the outcome of internal discussions concerning the role of TR&I has clarified the unit's wishes to operate in an outward-facing capacity to provide support to College staff and engage proactively with industry. This will be at the heart of the change agenda and support from College will be required to achieve this.

The Director highlighted the need for an appropriate space to deliver the enhanced functions and reported that KPIs for the unit are in development. The Dean of Research supported the Director's comments and re-iterated the need to provide a more seamless service across the space of activity.

A short discussion followed during which the following points were raised:

- The need to clarify ownership of industry relationships at TCD Executive level;
- The need to think holistically about industry engagements and internships;
- The role of the new academic director of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship hub as a champion for entrepreneurship;
- The need to articulate to the public the value of research in TCD.

The Academic Secretary thanked the Director of TR&I and the Dean of Research, and closed the discussion.

QC/14-15/018 Any other business

The Dean of Graduate Studies drew the Committee's attention to the Terms of Reference for a planned QQI Review and Enhancement of Quality Assurance Resources for Research Degree Programmes. She expressed concern that the scope of the review as outlined in the document includes an evaluation of research degree programmes. The Committee sought clarification on the intention of the review noting the importance of distinguishing between research activity and research programmes.

There was no other business and the meeting closed.