



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Trinity College Dublin

Quality Committee

Minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Quality Committee held on 2nd February 2015 in the Boardroom, House 1.

Present: Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, Dean of Engineering, Mathematics & Science, Chief Operating Officer, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Dean of Graduate Studies, Academic Secretary, Quality Officer, Ms. Laura Conway-McAuley, Professor Sheila Ryder, Professor Catherine Coxon, Professor John Walsh, Mrs Jessie Kurtz, Education Officer of the Students' Union.

In attendance: Professor Graeme Watson (former Science Course Director), Ms Victoria Butler (Assistant Secretary), Professor Sinead Ryan (Head of School of Mathematics), Mr Sean O'Driscoll (Interim Director of Human Resources), Professor Paul Brown (Head of School of Medicine), Dr Orla Bannon (Administrator, School of Medicine), Dr Liz Donnellan (Secretary to the Committee).

Apologies: Dean of Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences, Professor Simon McGinnes, Vice-President Graduate Students' Union.

QC/14-15/019 Draft minutes of the meeting of the 10th December 2014

The minutes of the meeting of the 10th December 2014 were approved.

QC/14-15/020 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

QC/14-15/021 Reviewers' report for TR071

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the former Science Course Director of the programme, Professor Watson, to the meeting and invited him to speak to the Reviewers' report for TR071. Professor Watson commended the report, which he felt was positive overall, and spoke to the Reviewers' six key recommendations, which were to:

- 1.1 **Re-structure the course management** of TR071 to increase coordination and communication by: (a) giving the Science Course Director Dean-level authority over TR071, associated Direct-Entry courses, and support units (along with significant budgetary control and representation on key Faculty and

College committees); and (b) creating a compact Science Course Executive to replace the current unwieldy management committee to oversee quality, content and timetabling.

- 1.2 **Streamline teaching** across the whole programme by: (a) reducing reliance on traditional lectures to release staff and student time; (b) increasing the use of virtual learning environments; (c) rationalising content among modules; (d) promoting a wider range of final-year research projects that do not necessarily demand lab facilities; (e) involving library and learning support staff in developing innovative curriculum content; (f) allowing/encouraging more self-learning, critical thinking and development of other transferable skills among students.
- 1.3 **Change the course structure of the TR071 Programme by introducing streaming** to allow greater alignment between student intake and Moderatorship choices, better coordination between TR071 and associated Direct-Entry courses (which for marketing purposes should nevertheless retain their distinct identities), broader but fewer Moderatorships, and degree specialisations determined primarily by the final-year research project.
- 1.4 **Improve programme resource management** by: (a) instituting a robust, rolling analysis of gross income versus real costs in relation to student numbers and profile (EU vs. non-EU) for which a light-touch, College-level system of auditing staff time and a common workload model are needed to evaluate if more students on TR071 really will translate into a larger net income; (b) developing a transparent resource allocation model across Schools and support units; (c) improving student information and other online systems necessary for TR071.
- 1.5 **Improve student facilities** by providing flexible learning spaces and more common space and informal meeting areas. It is also important to at least upgrade aspects of Goldsmith Hall.
- 1.6 **Manage changes positively and transparently** by giving staff a say in the process, incentivising staff to undertake necessary changes, and placing executive responsibility in the hands of the best possible leaders.

Professor Watson suggested that the proposed changes to the structure and management of the course would require a detailed implementation plan over five years and suggested that it would be useful to call on the expertise of the academic members of the review team to advise in the implementation phase. The Faculty Dean agreed with Professor Watson's comments and added that if the Reviewers' recommendations were to be adopted, there would be implications not only for TR071 but for other direct entry courses such as Medicine, in addition to the impact on administrative supports for teaching.

The Dean advised that implementation of the recommendations would have resource implications, and noted that while initial costs would come from the Faculty budget there would also be cost implications for other Faculties and Schools. In order to initiate and drive the implementation phase, and to flesh out the recommendations he suggested the appointment of a small internal team headed by a senior academic with one or two of the review team members acting as external consultants. He advised that the appointment of a senior academic to this post would be included in the annual budgetary process for 2015-16.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the former Science Course Director and the Faculty Dean for their contributions and invited comments from the Committee. She noted that many of the recommendations point towards features problematic across a range of courses in College as highlighted in School reviews, for example, timetabling, conventional teaching methods, under use of technology. The Academic Secretary commented that the implementation of a fixed timetable managed either centrally or at faculty level will require significant changes to the degree structure.

The Reviewers' suggestion to offer more 'dry' projects to final year students as a way of reducing costs and relieving pressure on laboratories was discussed. The Committee agreed that non-lab based projects could be incorporated more easily in some subject areas (e.g. Geography, Geology, Computational Chemistry) than others. The possible perception by students that 'dry' projects are easier to complete than 'wet' projects, that 'dry' projects do not have the same status as 'wet' projects and the risk of limiting a student choice by promoting non-lab based projects over 'wet' projects were noted. It was commented that Schools subsidise final year projects and this crucial financial support may be jeopardised under a new management structure that would see authority for the integrity of the programme cede to a small Management Committee and away from the Science Schools.

The Dean thanked Professor Watson for his excellent work and his contribution to the review. The Dean noted the position of Course Director has not been filled and expressed hope that a revised role that provided more authority to the Director might entice a response from senior academics. It was agreed that there is a need to clarify a remit for a new Science Course Director with power and responsibility, and that this senior post will need to be budgeted for at Faculty level.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Committee and closed the discussion.

**The Committee endorsed the Reviewers' report for TR071 and agreed to recommend to Council the establishment of a small taskforce under the leadership of a senior academic, who may also be the Course Director, to scope the changes for implementation of the recommendations by the review team. The taskforce should enlist at least two of the senior academic external reviewers as advisors to the taskforce, and make recommendations for implementation to the University Council in June 2015.

QC/14-15/022 Annual Faculty Quality Reports: FEMS

The Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics & Science spoke to the Faculty Quality Report for 2013/14 which had been circulated with the papers. Ninety seven percent of undergraduate modules and 94% of taught postgraduate modules were evaluated in the Faculty in 2013/14. A diverse range of evaluation methods are used across the Faculty and mechanisms are in place to relay feedback to students and External Examiners. A gap in the quality process identified by the Faculty is that there is no formal evaluation of postgraduate research programmes. This will be a key quality project for the Faculty in 2014/15. The Faculty will also engage with the Quality Office in relation to the revised External Examiners process, to identify any local gaps in the process.

The Dean identified that many of the same issues that had arisen in this report were also highlighted in the reports from the other two Faculties. In terms of issues for escalation to College level, they include registration delays, budget cuts and their impact on the Schools' abilities to maintain high quality course delivery. Maintenance of old building stock is also an issue for the Faculty. Retention rates have improved

compared to previous years. However, the Faculty noted that direct comparison of year-on-year data is not possible due to the transition from Admin 5 to SITS (the 13-14 data being for JF to SF progression only, and not all four years of UG study as previous). The Faculty would like to be in a position to compare retention data over a number of years, with the aim of establishing trends and pin-pointing practices that improve retention. In terms of feedback from the ISSE report, the Dean reported that the comment relating to 'interaction with academic staff being limited for first two years' is a result of the large cohort in freshman years. This can be resolved by putting procedures in place to manage expectations (such as responses to emails).

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean for his presentation and commented how impressive it is to see that 97% of Undergraduate modules were evaluated. She also praised the focus on feedback to students. In terms of student access to academics in the freshman years, she reported that it was hoped that this would be addressed by the TR071 review. The resource and space issues outlined were noted.

She invited comment from the Quality Committee and in the discussion that followed the Dean's reward for teaching was highlighted as an area of best practice. In relation to supports for postgraduate students, the Dean of Graduate Studies reported that the Graduate Students' Union is working with the Dean of Students to further embed and align the orientation programme for postgraduate students with the undergraduate orientation programme. Additional supports for postgraduate researchers will be dealt with under the new staff development programme.

In relation to the necessity for adequate shared student spaces, it was noted that this had also been highlighted in the TR071 review and would be considered in the development of the E3 project. The Academic Secretary commended the report and the work of the Dean in embedding quality into the School agenda. She praised the variety of feedback methods used and the Dean's involvement in meeting students. She noted that the English language issue needs to be addressed and noted the local arrangements in place to address issues on the implementation of SITS.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Committee and reported that common issues for escalation to Council would be drawn from the three Faculty reports. The Dean thanked the Faculty Administrator, the School Administrators and the Directors of Teaching & Learning for their work on the report.

QC/14-15/023 Student Complaints Procedure

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Assistant Secretary to the meeting to speak, on behalf of the Academic Services Division (ASD) Manager, to a new Student Complaints Procedure. The Assistant Secretary reported that the review of the Office of the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer in 2012 had recommended the development of a student complaints procedure. The need for a Student Complaints procedure has been further reinforced since College came under remit of the Office of the Ombudsman on 1 May 2013.

The Assistant Secretary reported that the proposed two-stage process does not aim to replace or duplicate existing complaints processes but to bridge any gaps that might exist. Stage 1 involves a written

complaint being submitted to the designated Complaints Officer for the area who forwards it to the relevant Head of School or Head of Unit for investigation. A written report of the investigation is sent to the student with the opportunity for him/her to respond. Should the student be dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, he/she has the right to appeal to Stage 2. It is proposed that Stage 2 of the complaint would be considered by the Registrar advised by other College Officers as appropriate (for example, the Senior Lecturer or Dean of Graduate Studies for academic matters or the Chief Operating Officer for student services). Again, the student will be provided with a report on the results of Stage 2 with the opportunity to respond. Should it still not be possible to come to an agreed resolution the student will be advised of his/her right to complain to the Office of the Ombudsman or Visitor, as appropriate.

The Assistant Secretary advised that it is envisaged that a new section in the website will detail the process in addition to highlighting alternative complaints mechanisms. She reported that there has been widespread consultation with both academic and non-academic stakeholders across College to ensure that the process is robust and fair.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Assistant Secretary for her presentation and invited comment from the Committee. In the ensuing discussion the following issues arose:

- In relation to section 8.3 which states that *'any staff member may be accompanied by a representative of his/her choice'* it should be clarified that the representative referred to should be a member of College;
- The procedure should clarify what is meant in this instance by a registered student i.e. what category of student can avail of this procedure e.g. Associated Colleges, Online students;
- The person who is assuming the role of the designated Complaints Officer for an area should be clearly identified;
- The nature of the complaints that come under the scope of this procedure should be more clearly outlined. Complaints may be 'individual' complaints where a specific action is possible to resolve or of a 'collective' or 'policy' nature or related to resources or allocation of resources which should be dealt with by other more appropriate mechanisms;
- The way in which this process dovetails with other College complaints processes should be clearly outlined i.e. Dignity and Respect Policy, Academic Appeals process or circumstances under which the student charter for example would be invoked.

The Assistant Secretary agreed to revise the document and bring to a future meeting of the Quality Committee. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Assistant Secretary and closed the discussion.

QC/14-15/024 Analysis of common themes in College-level recommendations arising from Quality Reviews conducted in the last three years

The Quality Officer spoke to a report on the common College-level themes that have arisen from quality reviews over the period 2011/12 – 2013/14. She reported that issues arose around a number of key themes such as HR/staffing, graduate education and system supports and that these had been raised with

the heads of the relevant areas. Progress in addressing these issues was included, where possible, in the report.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Quality Officer for her report and noted that in relation to the development of KPIs for system supports, the START process has formally concluded so an alternative process for KPI development would need to be explored. She noted that the same issues are being raised in quality reviews again and again and emphasized the importance of tracking how these issues are being addressed as a way of ensuring that the feedback loop is closed on College-level recommendations. In relation to mentoring, the Quality Officer reported that a report on mentoring from the Staff Development Office will be considered by the Quality Committee at its next meeting. In response to a query on whether a training needs' analysis will be carried out, the Chief Operating Officer confirmed that this will be addressed by the interim Head of Human Resources as part of the new strategy for HR.

QC/14-15/024

(i) Implementation Plan for the School of Mathematics

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Head of the School of Mathematics, Professor Ryan, to the meeting to present the School's Implementation plan. She reported that the School is in the process of recruiting for the Accenture Professorship of Mathematics and hopes to have a candidate in post in 2015. In relation to the Erasmus Smith's Chair of Mathematics, it is hoped that once the financial landscape has improved a high calibre international candidate can be secured for this position which is of strategic importance to the School. However, with research income to the School diminishing it is difficult to see how the financial situation can change significantly in the short term.

With regard to the Reviewers' recommendation to increase the number of graduate students, the Head of School reported that staff are enthusiastically seeking to increase their graduate numbers and there is no difficulty sourcing suitable candidates. However, a lack of adequate funds to support graduate students is a barrier to increasing the numbers. The Hamilton Scholarship programme, which is funded philanthropically, has been developed in response to this situation and the first Hamilton Scholar commenced in September 2014. The target is three funded scholarships per year for five years. The School has hired a part-time Global officer who it is hoped will help the school to increase its non-EU undergraduate, postgraduate taught and research student numbers.

In relation to the introduction of a second taught Masters, the Head of School reported that the School is developing a business case which will consider the undergraduate curriculum, the projected growth in student numbers arising from the E3 project and the provision of adequate facilities and space.

The School's submission to the US-based Simons Foundation for funding for the Hamilton Mathematics Institute was not successful and the School is now working with Trinity Foundation to explore other funding avenues.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Professor Ryan for her presentation and in the short discussion that followed the importance of attracting greater numbers of fee-paying students and the

possibility of tapping into overhead funding from research grants as a way of alleviating the School's financial situation was discussed. Professor Ryan noted that it takes time to switch from the funding model used (SFI) to other funding sources, and that for junior members without a national funding track record it can be more difficult to secure international funding.

(ii) Progress report for Human Resources

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Interim Director of Human Resources, Mr O'Driscoll, who reported that the HR strategy has been revised to ensure alignment with the College's new Strategic Plan 2014-2019. He reported that the revised strategy would be presented to the Human Resources Committee and Executive Officers shortly. The new management structure is now embedded in the HR function and all staff have been involved in the development of the new strategy, which has led to greater engagement and communication across the function. In relation to the Reviewers' recommendation concerning the role of the Faculty HR partners, the Mr O'Driscoll reported that the HR Partner role and positioning was reviewed as part of the START review of HR Structure. A revised operating model is currently being implemented and the HR Partners now report to and are represented at the HR Management Team by a Manager HR Partnering. A deeper engagement with the partners has commenced and the new model aims to ensure that local needs are being translated centrally. Some issues remain in relation to the HR work-stream and remedial working is being undertaken with IS Services to improve the functionality of the CORE system.

Human Resources is recruiting to a newly restructured position of the HR Services Manager, for whom a key task will be delivery of HR operational performance metrics via KPI's and SLA performance reports. Revised analytics and KPI's will be published as part of the revised HR Strategy early 2015. Work is continuing to professionalise the HR function by upskilling staff and workshops are underway to devise indicators of competency levels which will be used to guide professional development.

In relation to the Reviewers recommendation concerning management development, Mr O'Driscoll reported that Phase 1 of this initiative in relation to individual development for Executive Officers Group members has been completed and as a pilot, is under review. The College has been successful, as part of an IUA project proposal under the HEA Strategic Innovation and Development Call in securing funding for a project on Academic Leadership and Development. A workshop with Heads of School who are leaving post has also been developed and output from this has been included in a revised Head of Schools induction from 2014 onwards.

HR continues to engage the unions on matters of collective interest and in relation to staff development for non-academic staff, a full non-academic job evaluation and job assessment scheme is a component of the revised HR strategy and discussions will commence in 2015 on its shape.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Interim Director for his input and noted that many of the themes arising from recent quality reviews were of a HR/staffing nature. Mr. O'Driscoll reported that the majority of these would be dealt with in the new HR Strategy. In relation to probation and performance management, the Chief Operating Officer reported that work is being done on developing a

revised PMDS and the importance of communicating issues of common interest to non-academic managers was emphasized.

(iii) Progress report for the School of Medicine

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Head of the School of Medicine, Professor Brown and the School Administrator, Dr. Bannon, to the meeting to speak to the School of Medicine progress report. Professor Brown reported that a proposal on a workload allocation model would be considered by the School Executive in February 2015 and that a review of the School structure was on-going in the light of the College Strategic Plan 2014-2019 and the new School Strategic Plan. The development of the Trinity Translational Medical Institute (TTMI) is still under review and if approved will be a key strategic pillar in facilitating increased income for the School. The Institute for Population Health (IPH) is scheduled for completion in Q3 2015 and the School is working with the Interim Director of HR in relation to the promotions process for clinical staff. With regard to the development of on-line generic skills modules for PhD students, the School is working with the Graduate Studies Office to progress this.

Dr. Bannon reported that since 2013/14 all undergraduate modules are evaluated and that mechanisms for acquiring and providing feedback have been strengthened. In relation to the recommendation to grow the numbers of Physiotherapy research students, the School reported that the numbers of research students continues to rise. Concerning the provision of technical support for research laboratories, the Professor Brown reported that the issue has not been resolved and that the School is working with the Physiotherapy Discipline to identify possible funding sources. The School is working with the Staff Development Office in relation to the provision of mentoring and support for junior staff in Occupational Therapy and the development of inter-professional learning across the School and Faculty is on-going.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Professor Brown and Dr. Bannon for their update and commended the School on evaluating all of its undergraduate modules. Dr. Bannon reported that the process was a useful tool for eliciting feedback and stressed the importance of ensuring that the process dovetailed with any evaluations undertaken for the purposes of Medical Council accreditation so as not to overload students. In relation to the School structure, Professor Brown confirmed that the College Strategic plan will provide the framework for any restructuring which will include not only administrative changes, but financial changes and those needed to reflect the new Trinity Health Ireland (THI) and the relationship with St James's and Tallaght hospitals.

QC/14-15/025 Any other business

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer brought the Committee's attention to the Annual Institutional Quality Report to QQI and noted that the reporting period is moving from a calendar to an academic year from September 2015.

There was no other business and the meeting closed.