



Trinity College Dublin  
The University of Dublin

Minutes of the Quality Committee

12 May 2016, 15.00 – 17.00, Boardroom House 1

**Present:**

Professor Linda Hogan, Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer *Chair*  
Ms. Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary  
Professor Darryl Jones, Dean of Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Professor Gillian Martin, Senior Lecturer  
Professor Aideen Long, Dean of Graduate Studies  
Ms. Roisin Smith, Quality Officer  
Professor Peter Crooks, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Professor John Walsh, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Professor Sheila Ryder, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Professor Catherine Darker, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Professor David Lewis, Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science  
Ms Sandra Kavanagh, Secretary's Office  
Ms. Laura Conway-McAuley, IS Services  
Mrs. Jessie Kurtz, Deputy Librarian  
Education Officer Students' Union  
Vice President Graduate Students' Union

**Apologies:**

Ms. Geraldine Ruane, Chief Operating Officer  
Professor Mary McCarron, Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences  
Professor Vinny Cahill, Dean of Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics & Science  
Professor Aonghus McNabola, Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science

**In attendance:**

Professor Chris Morash, Head of School, English  
Ms Amy Murray, Quality Office  
Professor Shane Allwright, Registrar  
Dr Alison Oldam, Director of Student Services  
Professor Juliette Hussey, Vice-President Global Relations

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The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, as acting Chair, opened the meeting.

**QC/15-16/045 Draft minutes of the meeting of the 7 April 2016**

There were no corrections to the minutes of the 7 April 2016 and they were approved.

**QC/15-16/046 Matters arising**

In relation to QC/15-16/038, the Chair reported that the revised Terms of Reference for Trinity Research Institutes (TRIs), considered by the Quality Committee on the 7 April, were subsequently approved by Council on the 13 April 2016, in addition to the programme reviews of BESS, the Masters in Theology (M.Th.) and the joint M.Sc. in Human Nutrition and Dietetics (QC/15-16/041, QC/15-16/042 and QC/15-16/043 respectively. With regard to the Designated Awarding Bodies'

(DABs) appeal mechanisms for Linked Providers (QC/15-16/040), the Quality Officer reported that the draft process is still under discussion with the Irish Universities Association. In response to a query, the Quality Officer reported that a review of the student evaluation process (QC/15-16/041) will be initiated by the Academic Secretary in the coming months.

### **QC/15-16/047 Quality Review of the School of English**

The Senior Lecturer welcomed Professor Chris Morash, Head of the School of English, to the meeting to speak to the Reviewers' report for the School of English.

Professor Morash prefaced his response by praising the calibre of the Review Team and welcomed their report. He spoke to the recommendation that the School take advantage of the Trinity Education Project (TEP) to implement syllabus reform in the undergraduate curriculum by reporting that a curriculum review, which was temporarily put on hold when the TEP was initiated, will move forward once the basic TEP architecture has been agreed. This is expected to address the Reviewers' comments on the number of modules and the overly complicated freshman cycle. Professor Morash also welcomed the review recommendations on staffing, particularly those relating to the School's taught postgraduate programmes, which include a re-organisation of administrative staff to support the taught M.Phils and the appointment of a deputy Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning with responsibility for postgraduate taught provision. The School will work with the Faculty Dean to address the staffing issues, and in particular the filling of the two vacant Chairs, which the Reviewers felt that if left unfilled, there is the potential to cause reputational damage. In relation to the Reviewers' comments regarding the paper-based nature of the School's interactions with students, Professor Morash commented on the need for the School to consider adopting policies for on-line submission and implementing the use of anti-plagiarism software, as well as more innovative use of new teaching technologies. The lack of adequate and appropriate space and facilities, particularly a dedicated seminar room for the School, remains an issue and will impede plans to expand numbers of International Students.

The Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences warmly endorsed Professor Morash's comments. He praised the School report and noted the exceptional level of collegiality in the School, which was observed by the Reviewers. He commented that the current staff-student ratio is related to the School's space issues, and is a serious obstacle to any attempts to attract greater numbers of International students and recruit high-calibre staff. He concluded by suggesting that Schools such as English with such a high international reputation should not have two established chairs vacant.

The Chair thanked the Head of School and invited comment from the Committee. The Reviewers' praise of the level of collegiality in the School was noted by a Committee member, noting this is not necessarily widespread across College. Professor Morash reported that this was a deeply held ethos in the School, facilitated through extensive consultation and discussion to ensure that there is shared responsibility for all decisions made. In relation to the Reviewers' comments on space, it was noted that the lack of suitable teaching and seminar facilities in the Arts building is a recurrent issue in quality reviews. The Dean of Graduate Studies reported a disparity between the experience of Arts postgraduate students and those from other Faculties in this regard, and suggested that there are two different models for postgraduate research students in existence.

The Reviewers' suggestion to appoint a dedicated Faculty IT resource was discussed, and it was noted that once again concerns around central College systems have been raised in quality reviews. The Dean supported the idea of a Faculty IT advisor in principle, but stressed that any appointment would be made within the context of the reduced Faculty budget and could impact decisions around the filling of existing vacant posts. The view was expressed that the creation of such IT posts is as a result of the additional work generated at local level by the new systems.

It was felt that there is disparity between the rhetoric around the ability of new systems and processes to improve efficiency and reduce workloads, and the lived reality of how these systems function locally. Members reported that the amount of time devoted to addressing and resolving systems issues is a huge drain on resources, and the implementation of workarounds detracts from time spent on other things. A Committee member reported that the role of Faculty IT liaison had been created as part of a recent restructuring of IT Services, but that the role/s had yet to be filled.

The Reviewers' recommendation to appointment a deputy Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning was welcomed by the Dean of Graduate Studies, who suggested that it would be useful to share marketing for M.Phil. courses.

Other issues raised in the course of the discussion included;

- The requirement to have agile and responsive information systems to cope with the envisaged flexible TEP architecture;
- The aspiration to have basic blackboard sites for all modules, with the level of detail dependent on the nature of the material;
- The need for flexible and equitable workload models that are suited to an academic rather than an industry environment;
- The gap between system operators and system users in relation to FIS – Heads of School need easy access to financial information in a user-friendly format.

The Academic Secretary thanked Professor Morash and Ms Ruth Archibold, the new School Administrator, for their collaborative approach to the review process and the School's willingness to explore different approaches.

The Chair reported that the review report would now be forwarded to Council for approval, and thanked Professor Morash for attending the meeting.

### **QC/15-16/048 Postgraduate Research Survey**

The Senior Lecturer welcomed Ms Amy Murray, Administrative Officer in the Quality Office to the meeting to speak to the report on the postgraduate research survey. She reported that the survey was developed in response to a finding in the 2013/14 Annual Faculty Quality Reports that highlighted that Trinity does not evaluate the quality of the postgraduate research experience.

There were 445 responses to the survey which accounts for 26% of research students enrolled in Trinity in 2015/16. PhD students accounted for 87% of respondents (389), M.Sc. by Research accounted for 10% of respondents (45) and a small numbers of respondents were recorded in other Masters courses (11, 2.4%) and Doctoral programmes (6, 1.5%).

The key findings were presented to the Committee and a rationale was presented for survey questions identified as requiring revision for 2016/17.

The Chair thanked Ms Murray and invited comment from the Committee. In response to a query as to whether there are plans to disseminate the results of the survey across College, and particularly to research supervisors, the Dean of Graduate Studies reported that the survey had already been disseminated to Directors of Teaching and Learning Postgraduate. The Academic Secretary undertook to consider how the survey's findings could be communicated further to internal and external stakeholders, and to identify issues for follow up and action. The issue of postgraduate vs undergraduate satisfaction was raised and it was suggested that a Faculty-level comparison with the results of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement might be useful.

The Dean of Graduate Studies expressed concern that while 80% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience as research students at Trinity, 20% of respondents were not satisfied, and this requires further investigation. She suggested that clearer information needs to be provided to research students regarding the structured PhD, funding opportunities, and the relevant regulations, and that fundamental issues regarding skills acquisition and supervision need to be addressed. She reported that she has already developed a step-by-step guide for research students which will be published on the Trinity website and should provide relevant information in an easily accessible format.

A Committee member expressed concern that 13% of research students reported teaching over 11 hours in a typical week which, coupled with a reported low level of attendance at CAPSL training for TAs, is a worrying situation. It was suggested that students are more likely to undertake training modules if they can accumulate ECTS and the Dean of Graduate Studies encouraged Schools to develop their own training modules for credit. The lack of information regarding the structured PhD was raised and it was suggested that a College-level PhD handbook would be a useful addition to the School-level information currently available. In response to a query, it was clarified that information on similar surveys in other institutions is not readily available, as until recently there has been no requirement to publish survey results. The new QA guidelines from QQI, however, require institutions to publish their survey results, which will facilitate comparisons with other universities. The Academic Secretary commented that since this is the first survey of postgraduate research students that it was important to use the information to improve the survey instrument, to encourage a higher response, and to focus on remedying issues that demand attention. She noted that it was more important to address perceived and/or real deficiencies and to engage with schools than to focus on publishing results at this stage.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer joined the meeting at this point and thanked the Senior Lecturer for chairing.

#### **QC/15-16/049 Revised Terms of Reference for Linked Providers' Governance Committees (attached as Appendix 1)**

The Chair welcomed the Registrar, Professor Shane Allwright, to the meeting. Professor Allwright reported that the recent publication by QQI of its Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines necessitates Trinity implementing a framework for its interactions with its Linked Providers that complies with the 2012 Act and the new core QA Guidelines. The first steps include a review of the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Linked Provider Management Committees to ensure that the functions of the respective governance reflect the new QQI requirements.

A proposed generic Terms of Reference for the Linked Provider Governance Committees have been produced and circulated to Committee members. The Registrar reported that Linked Providers' governance committee representatives were being consulted and the revised TOR may need further specification in order to bring them into effect for the 2016-17 academic year.

A change to the relationship with Linked Providers is required as, in addition to academic oversight, the relationship now needs to include non-academic oversight at the institutional level. It is proposed that in addition to the normal meetings of the Governance Committees, an extraordinary meeting be held annually to discuss the institutional quality assurance issues, and that minutes of that meeting come to Quality Committee for consideration and approval. This will require a change to the Terms of Reference for the Quality Committee.

The Committee approved the proposed Terms of Reference for Linked Providers' Governance Committees, and agreed that the appropriate changes to the Quality Committee Terms of Reference should be made.

#### **QC/15-16/050 Procedure for approval of Quality Assurance procedures for Linked Providers**

The Chair invited the Quality Officer Roisin Smith to speak to the draft procedure for approval of Quality Assurance procedures for linked providers. Ms Smith reported that Trinity, as a Designated Awarding Body under the QQI Act 2012 and the associated quality assurance guidelines, has the authority to request from its Linked Providers their proposed quality assurance procedures for approval prior to publication. The approval of Linked Provider's proposed quality assurance procedures is a pre-requisite to the conduct of a review of the effectiveness of those procedures at least once every seven years, as required by the Act, and is also a requirement for attainment for the International Education Mark (IEM).

A draft approval process was prepared and Linked Providers were consulted on this in May 2016, and was circulated to Quality Committee members for consideration.

A short discussion followed in which the following points were made:

- Colleges who approach Trinity to act as their designated awarding body must undergo a due diligence quality review before Linked Provider status is conferred;
- In relation to the list of documents to which a Linked Providers' quality assurance procedures must have regard, it was clarified that the core statutory QA guidelines is the fundamental document and that others must be referred to as appropriate depending on the nature of the relationship with Trinity, the mode of delivery and the type of qualification awarded;
- With regard to the use of the term 'all embracing' in section 6.1.2, it was suggested to remove that term or that an alternative wording might be more appropriate;
- In relation to section 7.4.3, it was suggested to add that any revised procedures should be submitted to a subsequent meeting of the Quality Committee for approval before submission to Council;
- The related document section should include URLs for relevant procedures and policies;

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Quality Officer and reported that a revised version of the document would be circulated to the Committee for information and noting.

#### **QC/15-16/051 Progress report for Day Nursery**

The Chair welcomed the Director of Student Services Dr Alison Oldam to the meeting to speak to the Progress Report for the Day Nursery.

Dr Oldam reported that much work has been undertaken in the Day Nursery to address the issues and recommendations arising from the quality review of the Nursery in October 2014, including compliance and staff training issues, and the revision of 13 policies. A Health Services Executive (HSE) inspection took place in December 2015, and as a result, the Day Nursery has engaged with the Better Start programme (a Department of Children and Youth Affairs initiative aimed at engaging staff in training and mentorship around the care of children). Dr Oldam reported that monthly meetings with the Service Director are taking place, at which documentation and leadership skills are discussed. In relation to the Service's finances, a detailed cost analysis is planned, in liaison with the CSD Finance Partner, and this will include a review of Nursery charges and the use of agency staff. Any resulting financial plan will be consulted and discussed with Day Nursery staff, and any changes to the student charge will be considered by the Student Life Committee.

The Chair thanked Dr Oldam and invited comment from the Committee. In response to a query, Dr Oldam reported that the other recommendations arising from the HSE inspection were primarily of a practical nature and, for the most part, were straightforward to implement e.g. lower shelving so that children could help themselves to toys and books. A Committee member queried how easy it is to measure whether staff morale is improving, and Dr Oldam responded that absenteeism is a strong indicator of staff morale. Further, she reported that the rates of absenteeism directly impact finances, as there is a cost associated with hiring agency staff to cover staff on sick leave. It is envisaged that lessons learned from the work that Human Resources has undertaken with the Academic Registry can be applied to the Day Nursery, and experience has shown that engaging staff in set programmes (e.g. Better Start) offers a greater chance of success and reduces staff anxiety around change. A Committee member queried whether the Nursery is running at full occupancy and Dr Oldam reported that of the 52 places available, 42-50 are currently occupied. She suggested that although the rates are competitive, the location of the Service means that there is a considerable level of external competition, and that this may explain why numbers are lower than capacity. She concluded by saying that the general feedback from users is that they are satisfied with the Day Nursery. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Dr Oldam and noted that much work has been done since the quality review to address the compliance issues. The report will now progress to Board for consideration.

#### **QC/15-16/052 Non-EU Collaborative and Transnational Education Partnerships Policy**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed Professor Juliette Hussey (Vice-President Global Relations) to talk to the Non-EU Collaborative and Transnational Education Partnerships Policy which was circulated with the papers. Professor Hussey explained that the policy sets out Trinity's approach to non-EU collaborative and transnational arrangements in line with the College Strategic Plan 2014-19, and outlines the parameters for evaluating proposals for academic collaborations, specifically with non-EU partners. This policy is part of a suite of policies and resources under development to support College's global relations strategy, which include the Dual and Joint Awards Policy and the Education Agents Policy.

Professor Hussey brought the Committee through the policy and drew member's attention to the pathways for approval for Partnership Proposals laid out in section 7.6. In relation to section 5 which outlines the principles to be considered when considering new collaborative and translational education partnerships, a number of points arose for discussion. With regard to the first principle (5.1) a Committee member queried whether Trinity follows guidelines from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade when considering countries for collaborative engagement. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer reported that general guidelines from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade would be taken into consideration but also noted that there are various tiers in terms of assessment of the situation. The Academic Secretary suggested that where diplomatic relations are ceased with a country with which Trinity already has education partnership arrangements, these would have to be dealt with on a case by case basis.

In relation to the second principle (5.2) it was agreed following a short discussion that the policy should explicitly state that the partnership and the terms of its arrangement preclude endorsement by Trinity of any actions that might limit freedom of inquiry or creates a conflict of interest or reputational harm for Trinity.

Following a query from a Committee member, it was suggested that the term 'providers' as referred to in section 6 should be replaced with 'degree awarding bodies' to discriminate between educational institutions and study abroad partners.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Professor Hussey and stressed the importance of the policy in clarifying the process for engagement with international education partners. The Quality Officer undertook to make the suggested changes and circulate the revised document to the next meeting of the Committee.

#### **QC/15-16/053 Overview of academic policy development**

The Academic Secretary spoke to a list of policies circulated to the Committee for information that are currently under development in Trinity Teaching and Learning. She reported that in some cases the development of a policy was straightforward and only required conversion of the relevant Calendar entry. In other cases a more significant reworking was required, or the development of a new policy was necessary. There was some discussion about the difficulty for staff and students to access relevant policies, for example the policy on the return of coursework, and the meeting reiterated the importance of having policies visible and easily accessible. The Academic Secretary reported that work is in-going and that policies will be published on the TTL website in the first instance but that a communication plan will be developed in order that the policies are accessible to an internal and external audience. In response to a query from the Dean of Graduate Studies as to the sequence of approval of the policies, it was clarified by the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer that the relevant academic committees should have an opportunity to discuss and input to the development of policy, but that the University Council was the body that approved academic policies. She also commented that policies developed from existing calendar entries should just go to the relevant Academic Committee for approval.

#### **QC/15-16/054**

There was no other business and the meeting closed.