



**Trinity College Dublin**  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

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The University of Dublin**

**Quality Committee**

Minutes of the Quality Committee meeting of the  
9 November 2017, 3.00 – 5.00pm, Boardroom House 1

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**Present:**

Professor Chris Morash, Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer (Chair)  
Professor Vinny Cahill, Dean of Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics & Science  
Professor Gillian Martin, Senior Lecturer  
Professor Neville Cox, Dean of Graduate Studies  
Ms. Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary  
Ms. Roisin Smith, Quality Officer  
Professor David Lewis, Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science  
Professor Aonghus McNabola, Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science  
Professor Sheila Ryder, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Professor Peter Crooks, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Ms. Victoria Butler, Secretary's Office  
Ms. Laura Conway-McAuley, IT Services  
Mrs. Jessie Kurtz, Deputy Librarian  
Vice-President, Graduate Students' Union

Dr Liz Donnellan, Quality Office (Secretary)

**Apologies:**

Professor Mary McCarron, Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences  
Professor Darryl Jones, Dean of Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Ms. Geraldine Ruane, Chief Operating Officer  
Professor John Walsh, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Professor Catherine Darker, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Education Officer, Students' Union

**In attendance:**

Mr John Coman (Secretary to the College) for item QC/17-18/013

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### **QC/17-18/10 Draft minutes of the meeting of the 5 October 2017**

The minutes of the meeting of the 5 October 2017 were approved.

### **QC/17-18/11 Matters arising**

*QC/16-17/043 Update on review of Trinity's Online Education provision-* the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer reported that the Chief Operating Officer has been invited to attend the December meeting to speak to the status of Online provision.

*QC/17-18/003 Implementation Plan for the School of Dental Science and QC/17-18/007 Implementation Plan for the Law Programmes –* the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer reported that both were approved by Council on the 25 October 2017.

*QC/17-18/004 Approval of Linked Provider Quality Assurance Procedures* will be considered by Board on the 15 November 2017.

### **QC/17-18/12 Quality enhancement projects- identification of enhancement themes**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer invited the Quality Officer to speak to the item. Ms Smith reported that in preparation for the Institutional Review in 2020/21, Trinity will be required to demonstrate how it uses the feedback from quality assurance processes (Postgraduate Research (PGR) Survey, the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE), Quality Reviews, Annual Faculty Quality Reports (AFQR), and the International Student Barometer (ISB)) to inform the prioritisation and selection of enhancement initiatives.

In this regard, she advised that Ms Amy Murray from the Quality Office would present the findings of the PGR Survey (2016/2017) and the ISSE Survey (2017), and Dr Liz Donnellan would present themes arising from Quality Reviews in 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Ms Murray reported that she was presenting the data on behalf of the Dean of Students, who was unable to attend the meeting. She emphasised that by launching the data at this meeting it was hoped to encourage its use across College. She spoke to a presentation on responses to the nine ISSE indices each of which were scored out of 60. The results were presented as (i) the overall Trinity score versus the average ISSE University score, (ii) Faculty comparisons within Trinity and (iii) cohort comparisons within Trinity.

The survey population for the ISSE Survey is all Trinity First Year, Final Year and Postgraduate Taught Students (8,313), the response rate across these cohorts was 25% (2,047). The gender profile of respondents was noted (64% F: 36% M) as reflecting the student population across College.

The key findings of the report were discussed and it was noted that, while Trinity scores compare favourably to the ISSE average, the ISSE university scores nationally are not high. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer suggested that a breakdown of results by University or University Faculty across the ISSE universities would be useful. In response, the Academic Secretary advised that the ISSE Univ score is the combined score of the other six Irish Universities and that individual university scores or discipline scores are not provided. Therefore, it is not possible to compare individual institutions or performance across disciplines in individual institutions.

The Dean of Graduate Studies queried whether response rates below 30% are statistically significant and cautioned against making inferences based on low response rates. The Vice-Provost responded that 25% response rate was reasonable. The Quality Officer reported that there are multiple sources of information to support the findings of the ISSE data. She acknowledged the work of the Student Union in increasing awareness of the survey and improving participation rates, with the result that Trinity was one of the higher responders across the University sector.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer highlighted the low scores for Student-Faculty interaction as an issue of concern particularly as, according to HEA data, Trinity invests more per student than other Irish Universities. A breakdown by cohorts revealed that Student-Faculty interaction is very low for Junior Fresh across all faculties (AHSS 7.9/60, FEMS 5.3/60, HS 10.9/60) and the Dean of FEMS suggested that large class sizes in first year may be a contributing factor. He also commented that the high percentage of respondents who say that they have never discussed their performance with academic staff is worrying, particularly in FEMS (51%), and this may also be related to large class sizes and staff:student ratios. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer suggested that the impact, if any, of staff:student ratios on individual ISSE University scores at institution and Faculty level would be interesting to investigate further however, noting that this information is not available in the public domain.

Other indices that attracted discussion by Committee members include the (i) Quantitative Reasoning Index which pointed to low engagement by students in faculties other than FEMS with the use of numerical/statistical data to reach conclusions and evaluating conclusions reached by others; and the (ii) Effective Teaching Practice Index, where Trinity scores continue to be impacted by student perception on the timeliness and effectiveness of feedback on coursework, indicating that the timeframes outlined in the Return of Coursework Policy - 20 days (UG) and 30 days (PG) are not being met.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer enquired if it was possible to check Trinity ISSE scores against the Global index scores i.e. against the US National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The Quality Officer confirmed that comparators at the national level on individual questions had been provided in recent years in the National ISSE Report and undertook to enquire further if the information requested by the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer was available and revert to the Committee.

*Action: The Quality Officer undertook to check with the ISSE Project Manager if data were available whereby Trinity could compare its index scores against global index scores and revert to the Committee.*

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Ms Murray and invited her to present the findings of the Postgraduate Research Survey. The Academic Secretary reported that the survey had been designed by Directors of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning, and piloted with students in 2016 and 2017. Ms Murray reported that there are plans to pilot a PGR question-set survey as part of the fieldwork for ISSE in 2017/18. The PGR question- set was developed by a working group of the IUA Deans of Graduate Studies Group and testing is ongoing across the sector in November 2017.

The key findings of the 2016/17 research survey revealed that participation by students in courses to improve their teaching and learning practice (Graduate Teaching Assistants) continued to be relatively low overall (40%) but had increased from a low of 30% in 2015/16. AHSS reported the highest level of engagement (55%) in courses to improve teaching and learning practice, compared with the FEMS and HS (31% each). It was noted, however, that opportunities to engage in teaching and demonstrating is higher in FEMS (76%) and HS (60%) than it is in AHSS (49%).

A committee member noted the response options to the question of taught modules under the Structured PhD programme and recommended to include an option for 'have already completed' in the response. The Quality Officer suggested that the response options to this question were impacted by the fact that students can complete their taught module credits at any time during their years of study. The Academic Secretary asked that the survey question be reviewed by the Directors of Postgraduate Teaching & Learning that had developed the survey.

*Action: The Quality Officer to liaise with the Dean of Graduate Studies and Directors of Teaching & Learning Postgraduate to review the survey question and response options prior to the next administration of the survey instrument.*

With respect to the variety of modules available in the structured PhD Programme, the findings suggest that students have a low level of awareness of courses available to them and in particular of modules that are run outside the Discipline – School – Faculty structure. The Dean of Graduate Studies reported that supervisors may have an influence, as they are in a position to advise students on module options available to them. The Quality Officer noted that skills attainment in Innovation and Entrepreneurship received the lowest score in 2016/17 and 2015/16, even though the College Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy seeks to deploy curricula options in this area. The Academic Secretary advised the Committee that a review of the Joint Certificate in Innovation & Entrepreneurship programme had been undertaken in October 2017. The initial findings suggest that the graduate disciplines highly value the programme but that more effort needs to be put into publicising it. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer wondered whether these modules are considered useful. A survey question on the usefulness of taught modules found that 66% of AHSS, 56% of HS and 48% of FEMS PGR respondents found the taught modules useful.

The Academic Secretary stressed the need to have input into the development of a national PGR survey to be incorporated into the ISSE Survey as it will be used for benchmarking purposes and the results will be in the public domain. The Quality Officer agreed, noting that the test question-set did not include a question on the Structured PhD.

*The Dean of FEMS left the meeting*

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer expressed concern that eight students had reported having scheduled meetings with their supervisor only once in 2016/17, and that seven had met their supervisor less frequently than once a year, particularly as there is a Calendar regulation in this regard. The Dean of Graduate Studies suggested that a distinction needed to be made as to whether the supervisor was not available to meet the student or whether the student was not availing of the opportunity to meet the supervisor. In other cases students may see their supervisor on a daily basis in a laboratory team setting rather than through scheduled meetings with their supervisor. He reported that in some cases students do not report problems with their supervisor for fear of it impacting on their future career. The wording of the question was highlighted by a Committee member who noted that, in a related question, a high percentages of students reported that they had access to their supervisor outside planned scheduled appointments.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer recommended that the findings regarding the student-supervisor relationship be raised at the Graduate Studies Committee.

*Action: The PGR survey findings in relation to student-supervisor meetings be raised at the Graduate Studies Committee.*

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer invited Dr Liz Donnellan from the Quality Office to speak to a report on the themes arising from Quality Reviews. Dr Donnellan reported that seven School reviews, four programme reviews and two Trinity Research Institute (TRI) reviews had taken place in 2015/16 and 2016/17. Key themes arising from the recommendations included (i) supports for students (transferable skills training, training for teaching assistants, supports for international students, supports for research student, and opportunities for integrating postgraduate students into school and college life), (ii) systems issues (Blackboard, SITS), (iii) supports for placements/exchanges, (iv) space and facilities and (v) staffing.

Dr Donnellan reported that many of these issues were being addressed through existing strategic initiatives such as the Estates Strategy and through the work of CAPSL, Student Learning Development (SLD) and the Centre for Language Learning and Teaching (CELLT). She drew the Committee's attention to areas of overlap with themes arising from the ISSE and PGR such as improved supports for Postgraduate Students.

The Quality Officer thanked Ms Murray and Dr Donnellan and outlined a number of potential enhancement projects for consideration by the Committee and noted that the issues relating to External Examiners, Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning had already been raised at Council. She undertook to bring a more detailed proposal to a future Committee meeting for consideration.

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

### **QC/17-18/13 Progress report for the Chaplaincy**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Secretary to the College to speak to the progress report for the Chaplaincy. A key recommendation from the review was to broaden the use of the Chapel space in order to deepen the connections with College and the local community, and to explore the potential for additional revenue generation from the space. The Secretary reported that the use of the Chapel for choral bookings in July and August has been agreed with College and that a proposed increase in the fee for weddings to €1000 is currently under discussion.

The Reviewers' recommendation to either appoint a Head Chaplain with executive authority or extend the tenure and authority of the rotating Chair is not supported by the Chaplains or by the Secretary to the College, as the current arrangement is viewed as suiting the unique ecumenical nature of the Chaplaincy. Concerning the recommendation that the gender and lay balance be taken into account in the selection of Chaplains, the Secretary to the College reported that a general job description for the Chaplains would be drawn up which would assist the parent churches in nominating a representative.

With regard to the Reviewers' recommendation on the need to address the future faith requirements of a more culturally and religiously diverse student and staff population, the Secretary reported that a process is under way, in consultation with the Chaplains and Global Relations, to appoint faith co-ordinators from among staff of other faiths to liaise with students. He reported that the Chaplains would participate in an advisory capacity.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Mr Coman and invited comments from the Committee. In response to a query regarding the affordability of the fee increase for weddings, the Assistant Secretary reported that the increase did not bring the fee above the upper limit for similar spaces such as the Public Theatre, which charges €1500 for use as a wedding venue. In response to a query from the Academic Secretary about the potential role of nuns in the Chaplaincy service, the Secretary suggested that there may be scope in the future to consider filling one of the two Catholic chaplaincy roles with a non-ordained representative to undertake some of the pastoral responsibilities. A member queried whether provision is made for humanist pastoral support and Mr Coman reported that the Chaplaincy is involved with many pastoral activities beyond the services associated with the Chapel, noting the very well attended free student lunch in House 27 every week.

The VP/CAO asked whether there is scope to provide worship spaces for other faiths on campus and Mr Coman reported that a Muslim prayer room is located in Goldsmith Hall. He added that while College is willing to accommodate other faiths, space constraints on campus and the inability to accommodate the particular requirements of some faiths in terms of orientation of their prayer rooms etc. present obstacles. He also noted that some faiths prefer to refer their students to existing places of worship in the community.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Secretary to the College and requested that the Committee be kept up to date on the development of plans to address the interfaith requirements of a more diverse student population.

*Action: The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer requested that Secretary continue to provide the Committee with progress in relation to the interfaith recommendation.*

#### **QC/17-18/14 Linked Provider Appeals Procedure**

The Quality Officer spoke to the Linked Provider Appeals Procedure which was circulated with the papers. She reported that under the 2012 Act, Designated Awarding Bodies (DAB) can withdraw their approval of a Linked Provider's QA procedures and that the Linked Provider has the right to appeal this decision. She reminded the Committee that previous drafts of the procedure had been considered by the Quality Committee in 2015/16 and that the procedure had been amended to reflect the Committee's recommendation that the appointment of an Independent Appeals Person (IAP) be deferred until such time as an appeal arises, in order to ensure that an appropriate person is identified to hear the specific appeal.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Quality Officer and queried whether the grounds for appeal were based on the substance of the decision or on the procedure under which the decision was made. The Quality Officer advised that the Act was silent on the grounds of the Appeal, just that the Linked Provider had the right of an appeal to the decision by a DAB to withdraw approval of quality assurance procedures, she undertook to seek clarification and revert to the next meeting of the Committee.

#### **QC/17-18/15 Student Complaints Policy**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer invited the Assistant Secretary to the College to update the Committee on the number and nature of student complaints received since the publication of the Student Complaints Policy in July 2016, as required under the policy. Ms Butler reported that five complaints had been received in 2016/17 which is low compared to the UCD average of 15-20 per year. She suggested that this indicted the need to create more awareness of the policy across College.

Of the five complaints received, three were postgraduate and two undergraduate. The complaints primarily involved the Academic Registry, with one related to the Faculty of Health Science and one relating to funding. All complaints were dealt with within the allowed time-frame bar one, which was delayed due to difficulties accessing relevant information. Four of the five complaints have been resolved, and the fifth has gone to the ombudsman and is still pending. In the current academic year there are three complaints under consideration.

The Assistant Secretary reported that she has worked with IT Services to develop an on-line complaints form which is currently being user tested with a view to going live by Christmas. An official launch of the online form will help to raise awareness of the policy.

The Vice Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Ms Butler and closed the discussion.

#### **QC/17-18/16 Any other business**

The VP/CAO reported that the review of postgraduate education had been postponed until a future date.

In response to a query it was confirmed that because of a change in the Dean of Research position the review of the Long Room Hub will come to the Committee in the New Year.

#### **QC/17-18/17 Blended Learning Guidelines**

The Quality Officer drew the Committee's attention to Trinity's response to QQI White Paper – Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning