Trinity College Dublin,
The University of Dublin

Quality Committee

Minutes of the Quality Committee meeting of the
2 April 2020, 3.00 – 5.00pm,
Trinity Boardroom via ZOOM

Quality Committee

Present
Professor Jürgen Barkhoff, Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, *Chair*
Professor Gail McElroy, Dean of Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Professor Sylvia Draper, Dean of Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics & Science
Professor Orla Sheils, Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences
Professor Kevin Mitchell, Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies
Professor Neville Cox, Dean of Graduate Studies
Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services
Ms. Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary
Ms. Roisin Smith, Quality Officer
Ms Vickey Butler, Secretary's Office
Mrs. Jessie Kurtz, Deputy Librarian
Ms. Marie Gore, Interim Director, Project Management Officer
Professor Ciara O' Hagan, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Professor Breiffni Fitzgerald, Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science
Professor Jan de Vries, Faculty of Health Sciences
Ms. Gisele Scanlon, Vice-President Graduate Students' Union
Ms. Niamh McKay, Education Officer Students' Union

In attendance
Dr Liz Donnellan, Quality Office, *Secretary*
Ms. Linda Darbey, Assistant Academic Secretary
Ms. Amhairgin Ni Laoi, Project Administrator Institutional Review

Apologies
Ms. Geraldine Ruane, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Julia Carmichael, Chief Risk Officer
Professor Mary Rogan, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

In attendance:

Professor Kevin O' Kelly, Dean of Students for QC/19-20/027: National Student Survey PGR

Professor Paula Murphy, Registrar for QC/19-20/028: Review of RIAM Quality Assurance Procedures

QC/19-20/025   Draft minutes of the meeting of the 26 February 2020
There were no amendments to the minutes, and they were approved.

QC/19-20/026   Matters arising

(i)   **QC/19-20/013**: **Quality Risk Register**

The Quality Officer reported that the revised Quality Risk Register would come to a future meeting of the Committee.

(ii)   QC/19-20/020: Progress Report on the School of Religions

The Quality Officer reported that the Progress Report for the School of Religions was approved by Council on the 11 March 2020.

(iii)   **QC/19-20/021: Implementation Plan for Nursing and Midwifery**

The Quality Officer reported that the Implementation Plan for Nursing and Midwifery was approved by Council on the 11 March 2020.

(Iv)   **QC/19-20/022: Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR)**

The Quality Officer reported that Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR) had been approved by Council on the 11 March 2020 and by Board on the 25 March 2020**.**

QC/19-20/027   Report on the National Student Survey PGR
The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Dean of Students to the meeting to speak to a report on the National Student Survey PGR. Professor O'Kelly noted that the later than normal circulation of the report was fortuitous as it permitted alignment with the new College Strategic Plan. He spoke to the high-level results of the survey, informing the Committee that Trinity's response rate was 27.9%, slightly below the national average of 28.7%. He noted that Trinity's institutional comparators for the purposes of the survey were institutions with more than 250 PGR students and that the breakdown of respondents match the demographic of the PGR research student population in Trinity in terms of gender, domicile, and mode of delivery. In comparison to the UG and PGT survey, this survey uses domains rather than indices and the Dean reported that Trinity performs best in the areas of supervision and research skills, both core elements to the provision of research degree programmes.

In terms of the factors that motivate PGR students, there was a difference between the Faculties. A predominance of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences students cited 'interest in subject' (81%) and 'improving prospects for research/academic career within HEI' (44%) as a motivator. In contrast, Engineering, Mathematics and Science students and Health Sciences students cited 'improving prospects for a career outside academia/research' (59% and 38% respectively) and 'available funding' (20% and 18% respectively) as their motivating factors. Professor O' Kelly outlined a number of developmental opportunities arising from these results that he suggested could be aligned to objectives in the new Strategic Plan.

With regard to students' 'overall experience', the results were not just compared to the national average but evaluated in absolute terms. Where 30% of students or more responded negatively to a question, these areas were targeted for further investigation. Issues identified included students knowing who to approach with their problems (53%), knowing who to approach other than their supervisor (58%), opportunities to become involved in wider research community (51%), and appropriate induction/orientation (43%). The Dean noted however that the survey did not take into account the new PG orientation initiatives launched in 2019/20 which may now address this issue. The survey shows that 28% of PGR students didn't think that Trinity values or responds to their feedback, and while this compares well to the national average of 42%, it is still of concern and must be addressed. When asked whether they had ever considered withdrawing from Trinity, the majority of students who said 'yes' cited 'financial' (22%) as the primary reason. Of these students, 33% were from AHSS and the Dean suggested a link between this result and the fact that 41% of AHSS students are self-funded. Professor O' Kelly concluded by noting a number of initiatives introduced to address the results of the 2018/19 survey. He stressed that while the introduction of thesis committees in

2019/20 would help to provide broader support for PGR students, the augmentation of the PG advisory service was the single biggest issue to address. At this point the internet connection to the Dean was lost.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean of Students and invited comments from the Committee. The Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences agreed that levels of funding and access to suitable workspaces can be a problem for students in the Faculty. She noted, however, that there can be considerable variation between Social Science disciplines and Arts & Humanities disciplines in this regard and that students find this inequity difficult to deal with. The Dean of Health Sciences expressed concern that an increasing number of Postgraduate students are citing health as a reason for leaving College, and she queried whether it was possible to determine if these students had accessed any of the student services provided by the College. The Deputy Librarian further queried if it is possible to ascertain whether the reported health problems are stress-related and if so, whether any of these students had accessed the Student Counselling Service. The Director of Student Services reported that it was not possible to cross-reference early leavers against those who had accessed student services due to data protection regulations. The Quality Officer referenced initiatives to address mental health and stress-related issues in PG students as positives. Examples are the mental health first aid training for supervisors initiated by the Dean of Health Sciences and now mainstreamed by Human Resources and the dedicated seminar delivered by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Academic Practice, in conjunction with UCD, under the 'Research Supervisor Development Programme', that was well attended. The Dean of Graduate Studies elaborated further, reporting that there was an arrangement with Student Counselling to re-run a series of seminars for supervisors on supporting students.

A Committee member provided anecdotal evidence of research students reaching a crisis point several years into their project and suggested that, for some students, this may be precipitated by a lack of skills development (e.g. research methods or writing skills) rather than mental health issues. He highlighted the important role of the supervisor in supporting students at this critical point in their project whilst also ensuring that the quality of the student's work is not compromised. He also noted that many students have additional responsibilities, for example as care givers, that may contribute to their overall stress levels. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that this observation aligns with the Dean of Students' recommendation to augment the postgraduate advisory service and resonates with recommendations arising from quality reviews and student surveys. He suggested that the survey had highlighted a lack of awareness amongst students of whom they can talk to and that this could be addressed by effecting a culture and attitude change that may not require additional resources. Another Committee member highlighted the fact that the supervisor's role is to provide academic and not pastoral support, and that in some cases students may need to speak to someone regarding their relationship with their supervisor. This further emphasizes the importance of having adequate postgraduate supports available.

The Dean of Health Sciences wondered whether the training provided for HS staff might be an influencing factor in the smaller number of students citing health as a reason for withdrawing, if these health problems relate to mental health/stress issues. The Dean of Graduate Studies suggested that the new thesis supervisory committee model, introduced in September 2019, would have a positive impact on students as it shifts the dynamic balance between the student and the supervisor. Another member pointed to the transferable skills training available under the new structured PhD model.

The Vice-President of the Graduate Students' Union praised the Dean of Graduate Studies for his work in supporting postgraduate students, particularly student parents, and wondered whether it would be useful to interrogate the data further to identify particular student cohorts (e.g. mature, part-time etc.) and target supports accordingly. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Committee members for their input and undertook to pass on the points raised to the Dean. He stated that the learnings from the survey will feed into Trinity's strategic commitment to renew its postgraduate education, one of the implementation targets of which is to develop robust procedures for following-up on the findings of student surveys. He thanked the Dean of Students *in absentia* as the Dean had been unable to re-join the meeting due to technical issues, and he closed the discussion.

Action/Decision:
027.1: The Quality Committee referred the Report on the PGR National Student Survey to Council for approval.

QC/19-20/028   Review of the Quality Assurance Procedures of the Royal Irish Academy of Music

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Registrar to the meeting for the discussion of the review of the Quality Assurance Procedures of the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM).

Professor Murphy began by informing the Committee that Trinity, as a Designated Awarding Body (DAB), is required under the QQI (Education & Training) Act 2012 to approve the quality assurance procedures of its Linked Providers, of which RIAM is one. This initial approval process is a 'once-off' requirement under the Act and is outlined in Trinity's Policy on the Approval of Linked Providers' Quality Assurance Procedures (January 2017). Only new policies or procedures developed by RIAM will need to undergo this process in the future. The Registrar acknowledged the work involved by the Quality Office and the Linked Provider Working Group in reviewing the documents and noted that each policy/procedure had been reviewed by at least two people. She also reported that RIAM had engaged with a number of external experts and with TUSLA and IBEC to review the non-academic policies and those policies with a statutory basis. The process had, she though, been a good learning experience for RIAM in terms of its own governance. She concluded by recommending that the Quality Committee approve the policies.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Registrar and invited comments from the Committee. The Deputy Librarian noted that the Terms of Reference for the Learning Resources Committee had been removed from the suite of policies/procedures following the initial submission and queried this. The Quality Office administrator reported that as a result of feedback from the Linked Provider Working Group on the initial submission, a rationalisation of Committees had been undertaken. A number of Committees had been discontinued and/or subsumed into other Committees in this process.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Registrar and the Linked Provider Working Group for their work in bringing the policies and procedures to this point. He closed the discussion, noting that Trinity's other Linked Provider, Marino Institute of Education (MIE), was due to submit its final QA Policies and Procedures in the coming weeks.

Action/Decision:
028.1: The Quality Committee referred the report on the review of the RIAM QA Procedures to Council and to the College Board.

QC/19-20/029   Revised Framework for Quality
The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer invited the Quality Office administrator to speak to the revised Framework for Quality that had been circulated with the papers. Dr Donnellan reported that the Framework document, initially approved in September 2018, had been developed to capture all of Trinity's quality assurance processes in one, easily accessible graphic. Recent feedback from the Audit Committee, however, arising from a review of quality assurance processes, had indicated that the document was confusing and difficult to interpret. An undertaking was given to revise the document in advance of the institutional review. In the revised version, circulated with the papers, the content was not substantially changed but rather re-organised.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked Dr Donnellan and invited comments from the Committee. The Deputy Librarian queried whether there was scope to extend the graphic to a second page to facilitate a more spacious layout and Dr Donnellan undertook to address this suggestion.

Decision/Action:
029.1   The Quality Committee approved the revised Framework for Quality.

The members of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Team (ISET) joined the meeting at this point.

QC/19-20/030   Draft Institutional Profile (IP)

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer (VP/CAO) welcomed the members of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Team (ISET) to the meeting for the discussion of the Institutional Profile (IP) document. He noted that this was the second of the key deliverables to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) as part of the Institutional Review process, the first being the Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR) submitted to QQI at the end of February 2020. The other key deliverable is the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER), due to be submitted to QQI in September 2020.

The IP is a high-level document that aims to give the review team an overview of Trinity through key facts, figures and graphics.

The Quality Officer thanked colleagues for their input to the development of the IP and invited further comments and corrections, stressing the need to ensure that the information contained in the document was accurate. The VP/CAO clarified that all sections in the IP had been approved by the relevant College Officers.

The President of the Graduate Students' Union queried whether the student experience should be referenced in the document and the Quality Officer reported that it would be included in the ISER, which was intended as a more reflective document. A member queried the length of the document, noting that the IPs of some other institutions were shorter. The Quality Officer reported that the QQI guidelines on the length of the IP had been interpreted in different ways by the various institutions. She suggested that the graphic design process would produce a more streamlined document that was easier to read and to navigate. The VP/CAO agreed that the graphically designed document would have a reduced page count. He emphasized the importance, however, of ensuring that the review team receive sufficient information to allow them to get a full understanding of the university. In that regard, he supported the production of a comprehensive document.

In response to a query as to whether people should be named in the document, the Quality Officer reported that College policy was not to include people by name but rather by role, and she undertook to amend the document accordingly. The Secretary to the College queried whether COVID-19 was referenced in the document, and the Quality Officer clarified that it was referenced in the Finance and Sustainability section. The Registrar suggested that the document should outline the role of the Senate and the Chancellor, and the Quality Officer undertook to include this. Members provided more detailed comments on specific sections of the report during the discussion, which the Quality Officer undertook to address in the final document.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the members of the ISET for their input. He sought the approval by Quality Committee and the ISET to submit the IP, following incorporation of the discussed amendments, to Academic Council on the 8th April 2020. Thereafter the IP will be submitted to College Board on the 22nd April 2020, prior to being submitted to QQI on the 23rd April 2020.

In closing, the VP/CAO reported that the Institutional Review of the University of Limerick, due to take place in March 2020, had been postponed due to COVID-19. He reported that Trinity was proceeding on the basis that the site-visit scheduled for 23-27 November 2020 would go ahead as planned, noting how difficult it would be to secure reviewers on alternative dates.

Action/Decision:
030.1: The Quality Committee (QC) and the Institutional Self-Evaluation Team (ISET) recommended the Institutional Profile (IP) to Council and the College Board for approval.

There were no other issues and the meeting closed.