



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

**Trinity College Dublin, The
University of Dublin**

Quality Committee

Minutes of the Quality Committee meeting of the
20 May 2020, 10.00 am – 12.00 noon 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 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

Apologies

Ms. Geraldine Ruane, Chief Operating Officer
Professor Mary Rogan, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Professor Breiffni Fitzgerald, Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science
Ms. Julia Carmichael, Chief Risk Officer

In attendance:

Ms Lena Doherty, HS Faculty Administrator for QC/19-20/034 (i) HS Annual Faculty Quality Report
Ms Katie O' Connor, EMS Faculty Administrator, for QC/19-20/034 (ii) EMS Annual Faculty Quality Report
Ms Valerie Smith, AHSS Faculty Administrator for QC/19-20/034 (iii) AHSS Annual Faculty Quality Report
Professor Michael Gill, Head of School of Medicine for QC/19-20/035: Review of the School of Medicine
Dr Julie Uí Choistealbha Ed.D., Dean of Education, MIE for QC/19-20/036 Review of B.Sc. in Education Studies.

QC/19-20/031 Draft minutes of the meeting of the 2 April 2020

A Committee member suggested that the first sentence of the second paragraph on page 3 (QC/19-20/027 Report on the National Student Survey PGR) should be amended to read '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.' The Committee agreed to the suggested change.

QC/19-20/032 Matters arising

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

The Quality Officer reported that the revised Quality Risk Register would come to the June meeting.

(ii) **QC/19-20/027: Report on the National Student Survey PGR (2018/19)**

The Quality Officer advised that report on the National Student Survey PGR had been deferred from the May Council meeting and will be considered by Council at its meeting on the 3 June 2020.

(iii) **QC/19-20/028: Review of the QA Policies and Procedures of the Royal Irish Academy of Music**

The Quality Officer reported that the review of QA Policies and Procedures of the Royal Irish Academy of Music was approved by Council on the 13 May 2020 and would be considered by Board at its meeting on the 27 May 2020.

(iv) **QC/19-20/030: Institutional Profile**

The VP/CAO advised the Committee that the Institutional Profile had been approved by Council on the 8 April 2020 and by Board on the 22nd April 2020, and that the final version was being graphically designed ahead of submission to QQI.

QC/19-20/033 Update on the Institutional Review

The Quality Officer reported that work on the development of the Trinity Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER), the key document for submission to the Institutional Review Team, had commenced. She advised that discussions were ongoing at sectoral level through the Irish Universities Association Quality Officer Group (IUAQOG) as to how institutional reviews might progress on schedule in 2020 using an online or partly online format, if Covid-19 restrictions prevent the reviewers from attending the campus in person. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Quality Officer and expressed concern at the prospect of a fully remote review, noting that the visits of the review team to Trinity are a key element of the process as they familiarise the team with the university and its processes, and allow the individual members to get to know each other and to 'gel' as a team.

QC/19-20/034 Annual Faculty Quality Reports (AFQR) 2018/19

The VP/CAO welcomed the three Faculty Administrators to the meeting for the discussion of the Annual Faculty Quality Reports 2018/19. He noted that the reports were of particular importance this year as they would inform the documentation for the Institutional Review.

(i) *Annual Faculty Quality Report (AFQR) Health Sciences (HS).*

The Dean of Health Sciences (HS) presented the HS Faculty report, which was circulated with the papers. She began by thanking the Faculty Administrator, Ms. Lena Doherty, for compiling the report and praised the input from the individual Schools. She noted that the Faculty's size belies the complexities arising from the requirements for clinical placements, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level, a key element of which is the relationship with clinical services. Response rates to online surveys continue to be a concern across the Faculty and the Dean cited the example of the move from paper-based to online surveys for Interprofessional Learning (IPL) sessions, which resulted in a drop in response rate from 100% to 39%. She stressed that more innovative ways to gather student feedback would be required in the post Covid-19 environment as more teaching would be delivered remotely and there would be a greater reliance on online feedback methods.

The implementation of the Trinity Education Programme (TEP) generated an increase in workload for the Schools in the Faculty. The Dean reported that many of the principles of TEP, in particularly the Academic Year Structure (AYS), were not implemented in-full, in Health Sciences due to the requirements of the professional bodies and this remains a continuing difficulty. The conversion of all undergraduate and postgraduate courses to online platforms has proved to be both a challenge and an opportunity. Existing FHS Online programmes had a good uptake with healthcare professionals as they provide flexibility to study while working full time or working in a shift-based environment, and there are opportunities to develop this via micro-credentialling.

A Faculty-level application to Athena Swan in 2019 was unsuccessful and a School-level approach is now being taken, with Schools applying in sequence and sharing their experiences with Schools applying after them. The Faculty of Health Sciences continues to expand and embed its Interprofessional Learning (IPL) activities across all schools and disciplines. The Dean reported that in 2018-19 she funded six workshops on Responding to Distressed People for Faculty of Health Science staff, and invited staff from clinical and professional sites to attend. There was a good uptake and the Faculty funded additional courses in 2019-20. Student feedback highlighted a gap in terms of access to the College Counselling Service for some Health Sciences students who attend placements outside Dublin, and this was addressed through the provision of a telephone counselling service for all such students which has been extended to all interns in light of Covid-19. The Dean reported that the Faculty had been impacted disproportionately by the Covid-19 outbreak due to the requirement by professional bodies for students to have undergone a certain number of clinical hours. While the Faculty has managed to convert large volumes of teaching and assessments to online, she stressed the need for adequate supports at a strategic, College-wide level in order to sustain the new online operations. Other issues raised in the report included access by External Examiners to Blackboard, provision of suitable space for the School of Nursing and Midwifery and the lack of availability of sufficient placements in the area of children's Nursing resulting from the closure of Tallaght Hospital's children's unit.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and, noting that low response rates to online evaluations can negate their use, queried whether it would be worth reverting to paper-based surveys when students are back on campus. Professor Sheils suggested that the use of clickers in a classroom setting could be used to supplement evaluations, in a hybrid/blended model. The Faculty of HS Administrator reported that in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, lecture time is scheduled for students to complete an online survey which boosts the response rate. She suggested that a similar interactive online solution might be preferable to paper-based surveys. The Dean of AHSS expressed concern that low student attendance rates, particularly towards the end of the academic year, might impact the response rate for classroom-based evaluations. Noting that students receive multiple surveys from varying sources, she recommended that surveys be shortened to five key questions and queried whether every module needs to be surveyed. The Dean of HS suggested rotating student evaluations between the schools or to schedule them for every second year.

The Senior Lecturer agreed with the suggestion to reduce the length of the surveys. He reported that the issue of access for External Examiners to Blackboard had been resolved. The Academic Secretary reminded the Committee that student evaluations are owned by the Schools and that the format can be amended to suit the School. The Faculty Administrator noted that the AFQR template for 2018/19 had changed, and that Schools were no longer asked to outline the survey methods that they had used. She suggested that this method of sharing good practice be reinstated. The Quality Officer undertook to consider this for next year.

The Director of Student Services acknowledged the comments from the School of Medicine regarding the timing of supports and change of personnel in the Academic Registry (AR), and clarified that the underlying issue in AR is a lack of resources. She was heartened, however, to note a reduction in the number of issues raised in the Faculty reports this year concerning the AR. The Faculty Dean acknowledged the work of Academic Registry staff, noting the complexity of the Faculty and the resulting accommodations required. A Committee member noted that, to date, much of the work to address the impact of Covid-19 while effective in the short-term, had been reactive in nature and he suggested that a longer-term solution was required which would necessitate an investment in resources and effort in order to mitigate the risk to the quality of our education provision. Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and the Faculty Administrator for their input.

(ii) Engineering, Mathematics and Science (EMS)

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer invited the Dean of Engineering, Mathematics and Science to present the EMS Annual Faculty Quality Report (AFQR). The Dean advised the Committee that the most up-to-date version of the report had not been circulated to the meeting. She stated that as both she and the Faculty Administrator, Ms. Katie O' Connor, were new to their roles, they had taken a slightly different approach to the report than had been done in previous years. She stressed the importance to Schools in the Faculty of supporting and developing the careers of postgraduate researchers, and in connecting the undergraduate and postgraduate environment. Undergraduate students are hosted in research labs for their capstone projects and postgraduate research students are involved in undergraduate teaching. Undergraduate students also have an opportunity to be involved in the peer-reviewed undergraduate science journal, the Trinity Student Scientific Review (TSSR), which is edited by students for students and celebrates scientific reviews written by UG sophister science students on research topics inspired by their capstone projects of summer work experience in research labs.

With regard to the Athena Swan programme, the Dean reported that a Faculty Athena Swan programme officer had been recruited and was working with Schools to generate competitive Athena Swan applications. Athena Swan action plans have been developed and these have helped Schools to approach the Athena Swan process in a different way. With regard to the results of the National StudentSurvey.ie, a low participation rate by Trinity students (22%) meant that when school-level data was extracted the numbers were too low to be meaningful. To counter this, the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) agreed to share the Faculty-wide National Student Survey data and the International Student Barometer (IBS) data to all schools jointly. This allowed them to discuss commonalities in the findings and to progress these. Two issues were identified – more advice and engagement with the Careers Service and provision of timely/ critical feedback to students.

The Dean advised that the numerical data presented at the back of the report was presented according to the Quality Office templates but she suggested that next year the Faculty would propose a way of integrating quality data and written analysis under different headings. She stressed that Schools in the Faculty are often doing quality activities that are not always documented, such as double and anonymous marking, and one-to-one and face-to-face feedback on essay assignments, and that processes are being constantly modified at School level to address issues like GDPR, plagiarism and safety.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and the Faculty Administrator and asked the Dean what she thought was the biggest issue that the report had surfaced. The Dean of EMS cited a request by students for more personalized career guidance as being one of the key issues arising from the report. She reported that the Faculty is addressing this by inviting industry representatives to speak to UG students. In addition, some Schools have invited the Trinity Careers Service to speak to students on the supports they provide, as many students are not aware of the Service. She also raised the decline in the number of Postgraduate Research students due to reduced SFI funding as an issue of concern, as PGRs are key to providing demonstrating and teaching to UG students. The Faculty has instigated the PG teaching awards to encourage PhD students with an interest in teaching and to foster a greater connection between undergraduate students and postgraduate research.

The Academic Secretary, commending the report, queried how the high response rate to UG module evaluations (50%) had been achieved. The Dean reported that Blackboard chats and in-class 'clickers' had been used to gather feedback mid-module and that student representation on staff:student liaison committees, Faculty Executives, School committees and through class reps had also helped to bring forward systemic issues in a timely way. The Senior Lecturer noted the risk posed by a decrease in research funding to the supervision of capstone projects, noting an optimum ratio of 4/5 students to one supervisor. He suggested that research funding needs to be considered in terms of its impact on the whole research ecosystem and that this needs to be stressed to government and the funding bodies. He reported that concerns raised about the impact of the new academic year structure are prompting some changes (e.g. to the timing of the scholarship exams). He noted that feedback on the academic year structure contained in the AFQRs should re-invigorate those efforts, noting that some of the issues raised may be solved by the move to online provision.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that the intention with the new academic year structure was to preserve research time for the summer period but suggested that this may need to be negatively impacted by Covid-19. With regards to the introduction of capstone projects, the VP/CAO was pleased to see that significant problems with capstone projects did not emerge in the reports this year. Responding to query from the Quality Officer on the Teachmeet initiative, the Dean reported that the initiative, established and driven by two FEMS academics, meets every month and provides an informal setting for academics to discuss and share good practices, and to rehearse new teaching and learning methodology and pedagogy before using it in the classroom. She reported that it had been particularly valuable for younger assistant professors and that a couple of publications had resulted from the group. The VP/CAO commended the initiative and suggested that it could be rolled out across the other Faculties.

(i) Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS)

The Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) thanked the Faculty Administrator, Ms. Valerie Smith, for her work on the report and outlined the high-level points. She reported that while there was almost complete coverage in terms of module evaluations conducted in 2018/19, response rates remain quite low. To counter this, some Schools have set up staff:student liaison committees and others, such as the School of English, have utilized focus groups to engage with their students.

She reported that eleven of the Faculty's twelve Schools implemented TEP in 2018/19 and that, in general, Schools reported quite a smooth transition and welcomed the opportunity to review curricula and assessment methods. Concerns were expressed, however, about the tight turnaround times between exams, marking, Courts of Examiners and Appeals, and the possible consequent risk to the quality of the marking and the accuracy of the student's progression results. There was an improvement in the number of external examiner reports received in 2018/19 (UG: 94%, PGT: 90%) however, concerns were raised about the possible increased difficulty of recruiting External Examiners due to the new government regulations requiring them to have Irish PPS numbers. The Dean reported that there is good engagement with the External Examiners during the courts of examiners and that the court discussions are minuted. She highlighted the important role of External Examiners in providing an international benchmark for Schools and suggested that the formal response to examiners should be more systematic. The Faculty would welcome an online report submission facility for External Examiners. She reported that access to Blackboard had been an issue for some examiners.

With regard to internationalization, the Dean reported that the key issues identified by Schools in relation to non-EU students are provision of language and cultural supports, access to affordable accommodation and difficulties navigating the Garda National Immigration Bureau system. Funding for postgraduate research students and the consequent impact on recruitment of PhD students was also an issue of concern. The Dean notified the Committee that the first AHSS school to submit an application was the School of Histories and Humanities in November 2019. Four more schools are on track to submit in the current submission round (April -June 2020).

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and invited comments from the Committee. The Senior Lecturer highlighted the need to formalize the requirement for systematic reporting on feedback, noting variation between Schools in how they engage with feedback. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer suggested that the action plans submitted with the AFQRs should include timelines for implementation, and that the actions should be brought back to School Executives in a call-over log to ensure that they are being systematically addressed. This should also apply at School and Discipline level for recommendations arising from External Examiner reports. He suggested that the Quality Committee recommend that systematic follow-up on action plans is pursued, and this was approved by the Committee.

Responding to the comments from the Dean of AHSS regarding the impact of the Trinity Education Project (TEP), the Deputy Librarian reported that the library had been encouraged by TEP-related collaborations regarding the research collections. The Vice-President of the Graduate Students' Union reported a substantial improvement in the way in which student cases were managed by the Academic Registry in 2018/19, and in functionality. It was noted by the Director of Student Services that the number of student cases doubled from 2017/18 – 2018/19, primarily due to the impact of the new academic year structure, and that a business case for additional resources was under development.

The HS Faculty Administrator welcomed the recommendation to establish a process for monitoring the implementation of the quality action plans. She suggested, however, that in order to minimize duplication and streamline the process, the actions should be incorporated into the risk register for each School and monitored as part of these risk registers, which are already a standing item on Faculty Executive Committees. The Quality Officer welcomed the suggestion, noting that the key requirements are that the actions are documented and followed up on. She stressed the need to be able to extract the actions from the risk register, however, and the HS Faculty Administrator reported that there is a facility to have subsections within the register which could be used. The Academic Secretary queried the connection between the action plans and the risk register, noting that many of the actions are commitments, not risks and would therefore not be appropriate to include on a risk register.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and asked the Faculties to identify what they felt were the key issues across the three reports. The Faculty of EMS Administrator highlighted that External Examiners are still having difficulty accessing Blackboard, noting that only 1 in 8 can access Blackboard. The Dean of FEMS stressed that next year would be interesting as there has been so much change. Space had been an issue but maybe this might change with the move to online. She agreed with the suggestion to separate risk and quality.

Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the three Faculty Deans and the Faculty Administrators, acknowledging the enormous amount of work required to develop the reports. He praised the fact that the reports were self-critical which, he said, demonstrated that our awareness of key quality issues is improving.

Action/Decision:

034.1: The Quality Officer to engage with the Faculty Administrators to review the information request to Schools for 2020/21.

034.2: The Quality Office to circulate the final version of the FEMS report to the Committee.

034.3: Action plans to be systematically followed-up at School and Faculty Executive level to ensure closure of the feedback loop.

034.4: A progress column to be added to the AFQR Action Plan template and timelines included.

034.5: External Examiner recommendations to be discussed at School and Discipline Committees to ensure follow up.

034.6: There should be a formal requirement for student reps to attend School committee meetings when the results of evaluations are discussed.

QC/19-20/035 Quality Review of the School of Medicine

The VP/CAO welcomed the Head of the School of Medicine, Professor Michael Gill, to the Committee. Professor Gill, taking the report as read, welcomed the recommendations, some of which he said could be implemented without resource implications despite the impact of Covid-19. The Dean of Health Sciences also welcomed the report. She stated that the undergraduate medical curriculum was not included in the terms of reference of the review, as it had recently been reviewed by the Medical Council. The Reviewers' report, however, had highlighted the need for a major reform of the undergraduate medicine curriculum in order to maintain competitiveness. The Dean suggested that this recommendation should be considered in the light of the School's own recommendation to restructure staff assigned to curricular redevelopment and the recommendation of the Medical Council for curricular reform. Regarding the recommendation to heighten the profile of the Head of School, the Dean noted that the current Head of School had transformed the role but she cautioned against formally assigning additional duties to the role without ensuring that adequate supports were in place to assist with the increased academic and strategic functions proposed. The Dean noted that some of the governance-related recommendations, if implemented, would challenge the governance structures of the university and she stressed the importance of remaining aware of what could be done within our existing framework. Other key recommendations included fostering greater engagement with clinical partners in order to maximise the School's growth potential, streamlining the School's postgraduate courses and streamlining the School's thematic research priorities to maximise impact.

The VP/CAO thanked Professor Gill and Professor Shiels and noted that the review acknowledged the key role of the Head of School. The Academic Secretary queried the recommendation for major reform of the undergraduate curriculum, given the fact that the curriculum was outside the scope of the review, and wondered if it could impact the School's competitiveness. The Head of School noted that the Reviewers were aware of the Medical Council report and of the School's own identified need to reform the management of the UG programme. He noted that feedback on the student experience has been poor and, while not unique to Trinity, this issue will be addressed through the development of student spaces and additional development in the curriculum. He advised that while the School is adapting and reacting to the Covid-19 pandemic, it faces a strategic decision as to whether it reduces its provision in response to the limitations of the Covid-19 restrictions or proceeds with its expansion plan, which includes recruitment of non-EU students.

A Committee member highlighted the recommendation to improve the relationship with health service partners and queried what type of improvements were envisaged. The Head of School clarified that the School had a 'grace and favour' relationship with the teaching hospitals whereby 500 staff have access to Trinity libraries and other services and in return they deliver a considerable amount of teaching in an apprenticeship model, i.e. bed-side teaching, medical rounds etc. These staff are not given any working space, and there is also a need to improve promotion pathways for these colleagues. Professor Gill highlighted the Review recommendation that the Head of School have a more prominent position on hospital boards, noting that it is a key role that is valued by the hospitals. The Assistant Secretary clarified that the composition of the hospital boards is prescribed and any appointment of the Head of School of Medicine to these Boards would require the Hospital's approval. The Dean of AHSS suggested that a title change for the Head of School would set a precedent and Professor Gill clarified that most other universities have a Dean of Medicine. He suggested that the title would reflect the School's additional complexity and contributions to the College's research income.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Head of School and the Faculty Dean and recommended the report to Council, noting that implementation of the recommendations must have due regard for College structures.

Action/Decision:

035.1: The Committee recommended the review of the School of Medicine to Council for approval.

QC/19-20/036 Quality Review of the MIE B.Sc. in Education Studies

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Dean of Education at MIE, Dr Julie Uí Choistealbha to the meeting to present the review of the B.Sc. in Education Studies. The Dean outlined the background to the programme, noting that it originated in 2010 from a Fulbright scholarship to create a new degree in education without a teaching accreditation aimed at those who wanted to explore an interest in education. The first intake was in 2011. The programme underwent its first review last year using the existing MIE procedures for review of validated programmes, but these were updated as part of the review of MIE quality assurance procedures and the follow-up stages of the review have been progressed through the updated procedures.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and praised the review report that has a focus on strengthening the identity of the programme and identifying the career paths of its students. A Committee member drew the Committee's attention to the recommendation to remarket the course and queried whether there was a concern regarding the overall direction of the course and where it fits in the market. The Dean clarified that communication around the identity of the programme is a greater issue than the marketing and highlighted the important role of Alumni in this regard. Referring to the recommendation for a root and branch review of modules, the Academic Secretary queried whether improved marketing was required or whether a total reform was planned. The Dean suggested that it was a combination of both, advising that a root and branch review had already been conducted and that other aspects of the curriculum were being explored such as sports education, media education etc. The Senior Lecturer queried how the course could be explained to potential students and how its branding could be aligned to the curriculum change. The Dean explained that as part of the review a graduate survey had been conducted which had informed the programme's new thematic pillars. The survey had identified a range of careers including education research and adult/further education, roles in human resources and entrepreneurship, and careers in the NGO sector.

The Senior Lecturer noted that many companies have education and training officers, and that the programme provides opportunities for a range of careers that many students would not previously have considered. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and advised that the report and the implementation plan would go to Council for approval with the Quality Committee minutes.

Action/Decision:

036.1: The Committee recommended the review of the MIE B.Sc. in Education Studies to Council for approval.

QC/19-20/037 Any other business

A Committee member suggested that a quality review of the move to online teaching and assessment should be conducted to inform what will be implemented next term. She highlighted the importance of managing quality and risk, noting that staff had managed to upload material as part of the initial response to Covid-19 but that there was a need to gather staff and student feedback in a systematic way to inform future developments. The Academic Secretary informed the Committee that a project was underway with the Senior Lecturer and the Dean of Graduate Studies to capture high level experience to date and identify what the requirements are for 2020/21. She stressed that a move to fully online provision would require time and resources and wouldn't be in place for 2020/21. The Senior Lecturer reported that the issue had been discussed at USC and that the goal was to identify changes that could be easily implemented in the short-term and that would improve staff and student experiences. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer recommended that the Quality Committee consider the quality assurance of the move to online provision at its next meeting.

Action:

037.1: The Quality Committee to consider the quality assurance of the transition to online provision in the light of Covid-19 at the next meeting.