



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

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**Quality Committee**

15 April 2021, 2.00 - 4.00pm

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## **Quality Committee**

### **Present**

Professor Jürgen Barkhoff, Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, *Chair*  
Professor Sylvia Draper, Dean of Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics & Science  
Professor Orla Sheils, Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences  
Professor Gail McElroy, Dean of Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Professor Martine Smith, Dean of Graduate Studies  
Professor Kevin Mitchell, Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies  
Ms. Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary  
Ms. Roisin Smith, Quality Officer  
Professor Breiffni Fitzgerald, Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science  
Professor Jan de Vries, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Mrs. Jessie Kurtz, Deputy Librarian  
Mr. Henry Wallace, Interim Chief Risk Officer  
Professor Gizem Arikan, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences  
Ms. Megan O' Connor, Education Officer Students' Union  
Ms. Abhisweta Bhattacharjee, Vice-President Graduate Students' Union  
Ms. Breda Walls, Director of Student Services  
Ms. Linda Darbey, Assistant Academic Secretary

### *In attendance*

Dr Liz Donnellan, Quality Office, *Secretary*

### **Apologies**

Ms. Vickey Butler, Secretary's Office

### **QC/20-21/044 Draft minutes of the meeting of the 11 February 2021**

The draft minutes were approved.

### **QC/20-21/045 Matters arising**

i. *QC/20-21/041 Annual Quality Report (AQR) 2019/20 to QQI*

The AQR was approved by Board on the 24 March and submitted to QQI on the 26 March 2021.

ii. *QC/20-21/040 Updated Quality Policy Statement*

The updated Quality Policy Statement was approved by Council on the 10 March and will be considered by Board on the 21 April 2021.

iii. *QC/20-21/042 Quality Risk Register*

Feedback from the last Quality Committee meeting was incorporated into the final version of the Quality Committee Risk Register, submitted to the Office of the Chief Risk Officer on the 13 February 2021.

iv. *QC/20-21/039 The Case Studies in Quality* document will be considered by Board on the 21 April.

**QC/20-21/046 Update on the Institutional Review**

The Quality Officer reported that following the submission of the Annual Quality Report and the Case Studies in Quality, the key focus was now on the development of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER). She advised that the Quality Office had engaged a copywriter who has started working through early drafts of some ISER chapters. A template structure for each chapter has been agreed which will incorporate signposting to other relevant documents, such as the Annual Quality Report, the Institutional Profile and the Case Studies in Quality to reduce duplication. Appendices will be prioritized to further reduce the size of the document.

The proposed timeline for approval of the ISER is (i) consideration by the ISET on the 7 May, (ii) consideration by the Quality Committee on the 13 May and (iii) consideration of a final draft (incorporating feedback from both the ISET and the QC) at a joint meeting of the ISET/Quality Committee on the 20 May before submission to Council for approval on the 2 June. The focus will then turn to the development of the schedule of meetings for the site visit. The Quality Officer reported that she is still awaiting confirmation that the review will proceed as planned in October 2021 and that the format of the site visit will be determined by whether it takes place virtually or onsite. She concluded by reporting that the report on the *We value your opinion of Quality in Trinity* survey is in the final stages of development and that two research focus groups had taken place to consider the findings in relation to research staff.

**QC/20-21/047 Annual Faculty Quality Reports (2019/20)**

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

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Faculty Dean and the Faculty Administrator to the meeting and invited Prof. McElroy to speak to the report. The Dean began by commending the hard work of Schools in the Faculty over the past two years in implementing TEP and managing the impact of Covid-19. She spoke to the executive summary of the report and concluded by thanking the Faculty Administrator and Heads of School for their work on the report.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and invited comments from the Committee. The Senior Lecturer, commenting on the transition to online, queried whether there had been any discussion in the Faculty regarding the pedagogical benefits of retaining some elements of online assessment. The Dean reported that there were diverse opinions regarding this in the Faculty and that it would be discussed with Heads of School. She noted that there had been no significant problems with plagiarism or quality regarding the online assessments. The Academic Secretary queried why some Schools in the Faculty reported that their External Examiners did not have access to Blackboard (pg. 6). The Faculty Administrator responded that some Schools had used

alternative online sharing formats for the External Examining process. Noting that the School of Histories and Humanities had identified the need for better preparation of international students for Trinity's teaching and learning style, the Academic Secretary queried whether this was a cultural issue. The Dean responded that the difficulty lies in the different learning styles of some international students. She suggested that provision of information for these students on Trinity's teaching and learning style, pre-arrival, and the early availability of resources such as reading lists might help to address the issue. She noted that the Student Counselling Service has also reported issues arising out of the increasingly diverse student population and she suggested that an institutional approach to this was required. The Quality Officer reported that she had provided information to Global Relations on this topic, and specifically regarding the differences between the Irish and US grading systems and managing the expectations of American students in this regard.

In response to a query from the Deputy Librarian as to why the implementation of TEP had the effect in some Schools of limiting students' career options, the Dean explained that single honours Schools were used to filling their ECTS complement entirely with modules in that subject. The requirement under TEP to take a module in a different subject has been seen in some Schools (e.g. Law) as limiting the variety of modules that would most benefit students in terms of their future careers. Commenting on the MyReadingList resource, the Deputy Librarian noted that some Schools had remarked that a considerable amount of time was required to convert existing reading lists to the MyReadingList format. She undertook to check with subject librarians whether this time can be reduced. The Dean of Graduate Studies commended the richness of information provided in the report. With regard to support for non-EU students, she suggested that it would be useful to check with the Academic Registry whether it is possible to track the impact of English language competency at entry on academic outcome. The Vice-Provost thanked the Dean and the Faculty Administrator and suggested that the use of boxes in the report to highlight important issues should be retained as a feature for future reports. He queried why only 10 of the 12 schools had contributed to the postgraduate summary and the Faculty Administrator responded that submissions on PG had not been received for those schools. With regard to the reported student:staff ratio for German (pg. 51) of 12:1, he stated that this was, in fact, 14:1. The Director of Student Services, speaking to the numerous references in the report to issues with online module enrolment, clarified that this function had been under the direction of IT Services as part of the DT2 programme and not managed by the Academic Registry in 2020/21. She reported that AR would, however, provide assistance with the process for 2021/22.

The VP/CAO expressed concern at the appropriateness of language used in a very small number of passages of the report and suggested that it should be moderated before the report is published. The meeting agreed that some moderation of the use of language was warranted but that this should be done without diluting its messages and approved the report overall.

*The Senior Lecturer left the meeting at this point.*

#### **(ii) Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)**

The VP/CAO invited the Dean of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) to present the STEM report. The Dean began by thanking the Faculty Administrator and the Heads of School for their work on the report and gave the Committee the apologies of the Faculty Administrator who could not attend the meeting. She spoke to the executive summary of the report, noting that the Faculty had taken a different approach to the report this year in terms of the layout and the inclusion of images.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and invited comments from Committee members. Referencing page 11 of the report, Prof. Fitzgerald queried how the HCI initiative would impact student numbers. The VP/CAO clarified that funding per student under the HCI initiative is, on average, twice that for 'normal' students. Commenting on the completion rates for postgraduate research students, the Dean of Graduate Studies reported that a HEA-costed extension which runs in parallel with the fees extension, available by request through student cases, had resulted in an increase in 6-month fee extensions which was not necessarily being captured in the report. The Academic Secretary expressed concern regarding the language used in sections of the report and the VP/CAO concurred, noting that in some cases it bordered on offensive and did not serve the School concerned. The Academic Secretary noted the wealth of information contained in the report concerning the response to and impact of Covid-19 and queried how this was being captured for the institutional review. The Quality Officer reported that there would be the opportunity to capture this in the consolidated AFQR to Council. Commenting on the lack of a dedicated Quality Faculty Executive meeting in STEM in 2020, Ms. Smith emphasised the importance of the meeting as an opportunity for the Quality Officer to engage with Heads of School in a two-way dialogue and also the need to have consistent practices across all three Faculties. The Dean remarked that quality discussions were included routinely in all STEM Faculty Executive meetings and the VP/CAO suggested that consideration should be given to roll this out across all the Faculties, but that the practice of a dedicated Faculty Quality Executive to which the Quality Officer is invited needed to be upheld. He also commended the inclusion of a 'Faculty Quality Actions at a Glance' section in the report which he felt was useful in capturing enhancement issues. He concluded by thanking the Dean, the Faculty Administrator and the STEM Schools for the report.

### **(iii) Health Sciences (HS)**

The VP/CAO welcomed the Faculty Administrator to the meeting and invited the Dean of Health Sciences to present the HS report. The Dean summarized the key issues in the report contained in the executive summary.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and queried why the action plans were not being used as a tool by Schools. The Dean responded that content within the action plans was being managed and addressed through usual School mechanisms, but that Schools found that the compilation of the plan was cumbersome.

The Academic Secretary highlighted the issue raised on page 25 of the report regarding the lack of availability of External Examiners in some niche areas due to the regulation that external examiners cannot be reappointed unless six years have elapsed since the end of the previous appointment, and queried how this could be addressed. The Dean reported that an increase in the number of PhDs had also added to the difficulty in finding suitable EEs in niche areas. The Faculty Administrator reported that an unintended benefit of the move to online examining was a general increase in the availability of External Examiners from around the world who previously may not have been willing to travel to Dublin. Regarding communications with accrediting bodies on accommodations that were made to respond to Covid-19, the Academic Secretary queried whether the discussions on these had been resolved. The Dean confirmed that they had but reported that communication with accrediting bodies was ongoing while teaching continues to be impacted by Covid-19. The Academic Secretary concluded by remarking that the report contained good observations but highlighted the need to see whether the issues raised had been resolved and if not, how they could be addressed.

The Dean of Graduate Studies reported that a considerable amount of discussion had taken place with Dental Science regarding the sourcing of external examiners and that the six-year rule could be waived on a case-by-case basis. She stressed however, that she didn't want to make a blanket change to the regulation as it had been possible, up to now, to reach accommodations with the School as required. The Director of Student Services, referencing the AR delays to conditional offers reported on page 80, advised that the Dean of Graduate Studies had introduced cut-off points that had helped the situation. With regard to the processing of PG applications, she reported that applications go to Schools initially and then AR does the minimum requirement checks. As a result, academics need to review the bulk of applications. She queried whether this is the best use of their time and wondered should the process be flipped. She noted that some schools in HS batch their applications and this can have a further impact on AR and the turnaround times for processing the applications. With regard to the report's reference to standardizing the quality of student placements, the Quality Officer reported that the Quality Office does not have the required relationships with hospitals to monitor this but stressed the Faculty's need to respond to this and find a long-term solution. The Dean agreed and expressed the expectation that the appointment of the Clinical Academic Officer for the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group would help to address this.

The VP/CAO thanked the Dean and the Faculty Administrator and opened a general discussion of the reports by asking whether the reports contained the correct balance of the descriptive and the analytical and whether the balance between College-level issues (underfunding, staffing, space) and issues that can be addressed at school-level was appropriate. The Chief Risk Officer noted that many issues raised in the reports had made their way on to the College Risk Register, and she stressed the importance of ensuring that risks identified in quality reviews should be included on School and Faculty Risk Registers. With regard to wellness and support during the pandemic, she suggested that Faculty supports should be highlighted and queried whether HR can be approached for additional support. The Dean of Graduate Studies remarked that the 2020/21 report will be a different report as the full impact of Covid-19 will be captured. She suggested that it would be useful to be able to draw together a narrative on how we responded to the crisis and what have we learned from it that might inform how we prepare for the next crises. It also provides an opportunity to look at how the experience will impact our quality into the future. She noted that Zoom is the preferred platform for teaching and that while there is some resistance from IT services to support it, the needs of academics who prefer it should be considered.

The AHSS Faculty Administrator asked whether Terms of Reference for the AFQRs were available and the Quality Officer reported that the TOR as described in 2015/16 are available and could be refreshed and circulated with the templates to Schools next year. The Academic Secretary also queried whether there was enough analysis in the reports and suggested that the information could be distilled. The VP/CAO suggested that this should be addressed for next year. In response to a suggestion from the Deputy Librarian that a formal report that pulls out the main themes would be useful, the Quality Officer advised that the consolidated report to Council fulfilled that function, and that the report would be brought to QC for noting this year. Commenting on the inclusion of numerous inaccuracies regarding the Academic Registry contained in the reports, the Director of Student Services suggested that an annual presentation to the Heads of School by AR would be useful. The VP/CAO agreed that to include this on the Heads of School agenda. The Dean of AHSS queried whether the Schools were fully aware of the purpose of the AFQRs and suggested that it was important to show that the feedback loop was being closed in terms of the issues that they raised. An action plan might be useful in this regard. The Dean of HS endorsed this suggestion.

The VP/CAO thanked the Deans and Faculty Administrators for their contributions. The meeting agreed that a factual accuracy and language check would be conducted on the reports before they are published. The consolidated report will look at whether issues are being addressed/resolved and will be brought back to QC for discussion and noting in Michaelmas Term.

**Actions:**

1. The factual inaccuracies in the reports to be addressed and offensive language, where identified, be moderated pre-publication.
2. A better balance between descriptive and analytical elements and a better articulation of what is within the remit of Schools and College be considered in the approach to the 2020/2021 reports.
3. The Terms of Reference for the Report to be updated accordingly and provided to Schools with next years' School information request.
4. Quality to be added as a standing item on agendas for Faculty Executive meetings and all three Faculties to adhere to the requirement for a dedicated Annual Faculty Quality Executive.
5. Academic Registry to be invited annually to the Heads of School Committee.

The remaining items on the agenda were deferred to the next meeting.

**QC/20-21/048** There was no other business and the meeting closed.