



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Trinity College Dublin at Belfast, May 2023

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Trinity College Dublin at Belfast (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the May 2022 [Educational Oversight annual monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There have been no substantive changes since the last desk-based monitoring visit to the College in Belfast. No new programmes have been added in the last year and there have been no staff changes. Recruitment to the MPhil Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation with eight international students is down from the previous year's total of 13. The College also has five PhD students in Belfast, two of whom are in their final year.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The annual monitoring visit was undertaken via a desk-based analysis and online meetings with senior staff and postgraduate students. The desk-based analysis involved scrutiny of documentation including external examiner reports; minutes of Trinity College Dublin meetings within the School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies; minutes of Postgraduate Studies Committee meetings; data on retention and achievement; internal and external quality reports; and evidence of the student voice. Consideration of the evidence confirmed that the College in Belfast consistently monitors, reviews and enhances the quality of its higher education provision. Findings indicate that it continues to develop the three features of good practice identified in the 2021 Higher Education Review (Foreign Providers) (HER(FP)) (see paragraph 4) and to address the recommendation made by the QAA review team (paragraph 5).

4 The College in Belfast has continued to work on its May 2021 action plan with progress being monitored by the Postgraduate Studies Committee. Good practice continues to be enabled through the provision of a wide range of learning opportunities including field trips, placements and practice-related modules. The College continues to employ well-qualified staff, including full-time and visiting academics with a wide range of international expertise, and invites well-known guest speakers. Students have access to the College's Belfast and Trinity College Dublin libraries as well as associate membership of Queen's University Belfast library. Together, these provide a wide range of resources to support students' studies.

5 The one recommendation from the HER(FP) report was to provide clear and consistent feedback on all assessed student work to support students in focusing on their academic development. A new marking rubric was agreed by the Postgraduate Studies Committee in October 2021 and implemented in September 2022, though the impact has yet to be fully evaluated. The development and implementation of a more detailed rubric to provide clear and consistent feedback has, in part, addressed the recommendation. However, students had experienced some uncertainty about the UK approach to grading

and felt that more guidance would be valuable. Further, external examiner reports continue to highlight the need for more detailed grade descriptors to support students' understanding, along with consistently constructive feedback on areas for improvement, including where higher grades can be achieved. In recognition that many students are unfamiliar with the UK and Irish grading system, the reviewers heard that a new form is being introduced to provide more detail to international students about grading.

6 Annual programme monitoring is undertaken in accordance with Trinity College Dublin's Framework for Quality as set out in the Quality Policy Statement. The MPhil programme is reviewed annually in line with the Postgraduate Committee procedures based on end-of-module student surveys and an annual focus group, with key outcomes noted in the End of Year Course Review. The end-of-module surveys indicate a high level of student satisfaction, though in many cases the response rates are low. Nevertheless, it is evident that students are appreciative of high-quality teaching, the use of guest lecturers with experience of international reconciliation and expertise in human rights and social justice, and field trips and meetings organised with institutions in Dublin. There is evidence of responsiveness to student feedback, with the Conflict Transformation module which had been taught online being replaced with a face-to-face taught module on Transitional Justice. The College in Belfast submits an annual report to Trinity College Dublin for incorporation into the School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies report that, in turn, informs the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Quality Report. While it is clear that the quality of provision is effectively assured, the reviewers noted that no formal action plan of priorities is developed and monitored at the Belfast site.

7 As noted in paragraph 2, the College in Belfast has eight international students enrolled on the MPhil in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation programme - a reduction from the 13 students recruited in the previous academic year. All the previous year's MPhil students successfully completed their programme. There are also five PhD students - two of whom are expected to complete in the current academic year. There were no withdrawals from either programme.

Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

8 The College in Belfast continues to engage with a range of external reference points including the core principles and practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, as well as the policies and procedures of Trinity College Dublin.

9 Admissions are managed in accordance with Trinity College Dublin postgraduate regulations. While the programme page on the Trinity College Dublin website does not reference a specific level of English language proficiency for international students, this is covered on the webpage for postgraduate admission requirements. English language qualifications are also checked as part of the admissions process. Students confirmed that the admission criteria are clear, that relevant processes are transparent and effective, and that helpful information about course content is provided.

10 Assessment requirements including submission dates, are clearly set out in module handbooks, with reminders posted to the virtual learning environment. Students are also provided with an assessment calendar. The external examiner confirms assessments as appropriate for the course and the learning outcomes. However, and as noted above, while marking bands are briefly outlined in the MPhil Handbook, and an essay-marking rubric has now been introduced, grading criteria are not included in the module handbooks. Students confirmed that they would appreciate more grounding in the grading system when submitting their early assessments, particularly given contrasting systems operating in their home countries.

11 External examiner recommendations are discussed by the Postgraduate Committee and the Postgraduate Court of Examiners who also monitor developments linked to recommendations. In response to a recommendation by the MPhil external examiner, dissertation marking now always involves two markers agreeing the final grade.

12 Clear complaints and appeals procedures are made available to students in both the MPhil Handbook and the Postgraduate Research Handbook, as well as online through the Trinity College Dublin Calendar Part III. Additional advice and guidance is also available from the Postgraduate Advisory Service whose role is explained to students as part of their induction.

13 Appropriate support and resources are available to enable student achievement, including through online access to student support services and access to academic and support staff in Belfast. There is a specialist library in Belfast and students also have access to physical, though not online, resources in Queen's University Library. Online resources and databases are accessible through the Trinity College Dublin library, though students indicated that they would value additional database access. Further information and guidance is provided through the Research Skills module which supports MPhil and PhD students in undertaking their research. Learning resources and support are appropriately covered as part of induction.

14 Students continue to benefit from teaching by highly qualified and experienced lecturers, guest speakers and alumni, and from learning contexts including field trips, attendance at international conferences and events, and community placements. The Mediation and Peacebuilding Skills module effectively underpins the Community Learning and Reflective Practice module and the 96-hour placement requirement. Together, the modules support students to develop practice-based learning and reflective practice skills, as well as their ongoing professional development.

15 PhD research students are allocated an appropriate supervisor and are also required to undertake a minimum of 10 ECTS credits of taught modules to include coverage of research ethics and integrity. The Research Handbook sets out clear regulations and opportunities to participate in, and connect with, research centres and networks, and to access guidance and support.

16 Student engagement is effectively managed with a range of available opportunities for students to provide feedback to the College in Belfast. Student surveys, focus groups and representation on committees ensure that the student voice informs programme reviews and therefore the quality of the curriculum and the wider student experience. Reflecting on Trinity College Dublin's Student Partnership Agreement, student representatives can also attend staff meetings, allowing them to bring any matters affecting their learning experience to the attention of relevant staff. Students explained that the size of the cohort also allows them to raise many issues quickly and informally.

Background to the monitoring visit

17 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Miranda Hobart, Reviewer, and Dr Neil Casey, QAA Officer, on 23 May 2023.

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