



Trinity College Dublin Living Space Framework

April 2024

1. Context

One of the nine overarching goals of the current university Strategic Plan 2020-25 *Community & Connection* is to ***‘develop and inhabit our space responsibly’*** (Goal 7).

Space is not only a premium resource in short supply, but a resource which provides an opportunity to greatly contribute to the university’s strategies and responsibilities. In the Strategic Plan’s Goal 5, we have committed to *‘shape our organisation and focus research around the challenge of achieving a sustainable and healthy planet.’* Massive savings in **carbon footprint** are available through retrofitting our building stock, and better utilisation of space will lessen our need for new construction at all.

In addition, the isolation and negative impact on mental health caused by Covid-19 showed how vital it is for **communities** to come together in-person and on-site. Trinity’s community engage together on our campuses in formal teaching and research activity, and for informal learning, deep work, recreation and socialising. Optimising our approach to space management provides an opportunity to contribute to a transformative student experience (Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan), to support our diverse users including those with disabilities, and to make the experience of Trinity the best it can be for our entire community of students, staff, collaborators and visitors.

The Estates Strategy 2018 was Trinity’s first comprehensive framework for the university’s campus infrastructure and utilisation development. Since its publication, Trinity’s relatively small physical footprint has continued to face increasing **pressures**. Student numbers, based on currently known business and other plans, are expected to grow this year from 21,380 in 2022/2023 to 22,120 in 2023/2024, the highest enrolled number in our history. Reflecting the hard work, and quality of our research community, Trinity continues to be highly successful in securing research funding across a multitude of disciplines. This results in a space requirement for additional academic staff, researchers and research laboratories, which we need to plan for and develop systems to ensure we meet this need.

Furthermore, the extent of the climate emergency has become clearer and ever more urgent. Geopolitical factors such as Brexit and the war in Ukraine have had a significant negative impact on the costs of construction and materials. Nationally the focus upon estates planning has been seen, for example, in increasing HEA scrutiny and reporting requirements. Globally the Covid-19 crisis accelerated movements towards more online and hybrid education and work, with developments in the areas of AI and virtual reality opening up **possibilities** beyond the traditional bricks and mortar campus paradigm.

We therefore have many reasons to look at the way we approach space in general, not just to address challenges but to contribute to Trinity being the best it can be. In this regard, Trinity could become a leader in new approaches to space usage and management, an idea which we will further explore in benchmarking work.. This document sets out a **framework** to approach the management of space as a strategic resource to support Trinity’s academic mission, to enable our community, and to play a significant role in addressing the major sustainability challenges facing Trinity and the planet today.

2. Purpose of this Framework

This Space Framework is intended to be an iterative living framework. The possibilities for optimising our use of space will change over time as ideas and technologies develop, and as users' space needs progress through different career stages, strategies and projects.

The Framework's **broadest aims** are to:

- Support Trinity's academic mission;
- Provide a framework for decision-making in the intervening period during which the university is preparing a full Estates Development Framework (i.e. masterplan);
- Communicate the ambition for and maximise engagement on the development of space in the short-term.

The **main reasons** for producing this living Framework stem from four overarching challenges – to improve sustainability and our climate impact; to improve the student and staff campus experience; efficiently manage our space; and meet evolving space needs.



- (1) The **Climate Emergency**: how to maximise use of existing space as a key sustainability principle, and minimise or eliminate new development which uses natural resources in their creation and operation;
- (2) **Experience**: how to provide a quality-built environment to meet the needs of a student population of 22,600, and a growing community of staff and researchers, in support of our vision to enable a student and staff experience commensurate with a Top 100 global university;
- (3) **Financial**: how to most effectively use our space to ensure funding is prioritised to decarbonise and improve existing spaces.
- (4) **Agile response to space requirements**: While our buildings evolve slowly, over time, the activities contained within are dynamic and constantly evolving. This requires us to

consider new ways and models to manage, allocate, share and use our space to ensure that our evolving teaching, learning, research and innovation needs are met.

This Framework sets out criteria and guidance for all decision-makers and users of space in Trinity. Some high-level principles are set out in the next section, followed by four overarching goals which will guide our future efforts and actions.

3. Principles

The principles set out below will underpin the university's approach to sustainable space use. All stakeholders will adhere to these principles to ensure fair, equitable space allocation and usage:

- (1) All space is university space and is not owned by any officer, individual role-holder, unit, School or area;
- (2) Contiguity should be prioritised wherever possible, e.g. we should plan to co-locate or maximise physical proximity of departments, schools or units which share similar resources;
- (3) All spaces should be designed and used in a way that optimises utilisation and enables flexibility to meet evolving needs.

4. Overarching Framework Goals

Four overarching strategic goals will address the challenges set out above. These goals focus on Teaching Space, Non-Teaching Space, Quality Improvements, and Engagement, and will be achieved through actions and targets to be further explored and committed to in the immediate future.

Examples of initial actions and target are set out in Appendix 3. As further data and information becomes available, for example through utilisation surveys, consultations, and work on the Estates Development Framework (i.e. estates masterplan), this living Framework and its associated action plan will be further developed.

Framework Goal 1: Increase Teaching Space Utilisation

Teaching spaces (lecture theatres, classrooms and undergraduate laboratories) make up approximately 20% of our non-residential space and are a vital resource in providing a quality experience for students, lecturers and other teaching staff.

In October 2023, the University undertook a physical utilisation survey of all teaching spaces on campus, the first to be conducted at this scale. Frequency of use (the % of available time in a week that the space was in use), and Occupancy being the % of people in a space relative to its capacity) was recorded for all teaching spaces on campus. Frequency multiplied by Occupancy produces a 'utilisation' figure for each space on the campus, which can be combined and reported on a building, space type/configuration or at a campus level. The results are also

compared to our timetabling data. A second survey of the same spaces was undertaken in February 2024.

The general international benchmark for a ‘good’ level of utilisation is between **31-35%** for ‘generic’ or non-specialist teaching spaces (see Condition B in the HESMG grading table below¹.) During these two week-long 2023/2024 surveys, Trinity’s actual average teaching space utilisation was recorded as follows:

Semester 1 Results (Actual)				Semester 2 Results (Actual)			
Type	Frequency	Occupancy	Utilisation	Type	Frequency	Occupancy	Utilisation
Classrooms	53%	37%	20%	Classrooms	36%	48%	17%
Labs	39%	36%	14%	Labs	37%	37%	14%
Combined	50%	38%	19%	Combined	36%	45%	16%

While there is considerable variation in the utilisation across locations, and the results require further detailed exploration, our utilisation appears low, with capacity for improvement. This first overarching framework goal will examine the reasons behind the existing low utilisation rates and address Trinity’s considerable room for improvement in terms of Teaching Spaces utilisation with initial actions and targets set out in Appendix 3.

Table 1: HESMG Utilisation Grading Tool

Higher Education Space Management Group (UK)		
Utilisation Grading Tool		
A+	38% and above	Outstanding
A	between 35% and 37.99%	Excellent
B	between 31% and 34.99%	Good
C	between 26% and 30.99%	Fair
D	between 20% and 25.99%	Poor
E	between 13% and 19.99%	Very Poor
F	12.99% and below	Unacceptable

Framework Goal 2: Commence groundwork for improving the utilisation rate of Non-Teaching Spaces

Of course, other space types also impact the experience that community members have of Trinity. Research space, office space, informal and community spaces, collaboration space, and green or quiet spaces support in different ways various activities beyond teaching.

Engagement forums conducted in Q2 of 2023/24 repeatedly brought up the need to make available more of these types of spaces, with an understanding that some cultural and behavioural changes will be required by everyone in the context of the pressures of an ever-

¹ UK Higher Education Space Management Project (2006), *Space Utilisation: practice, performance and guidelines*

growing Trinity population, and the opportunities provided by increasing online education and blended working practices.

Utilisation data is not yet available for these other types of spaces, but much can be done in the meantime. Appendix 3 sets out some initial actions and targets which will work towards this overarching goal.

Framework Goal 3: Increase the quality of all our spaces

It is hard to imagine a transformative experience for our students, staff and wider community if their physical environment is uncomfortable, unsuitable, ill-maintained or inaccessible for some. Increasing the quality of space is a key enabler in increasing the utilisation rates which are the subject of the first two overarching goals above.

In addition, improving spatial quality provides an opportunity to contribute towards sustainability and carbon footprint targets, as well as cost reduction. For example, well-insulated spaces not only provide more comfort for users, but also require less heating and therefore less carbon usage and smaller energy bills.

Providing an inclusive experience for students and staff is of the utmost importance to the University, as outlined in our Strategic Plan and Strategy for Diversity and Inclusion. Our physical estate can either be a barrier or enabler to this experience. Every effort will be made to ensure that when considering the location of new activities, reconfiguration of space or design of new space, we will consider the needs of our diverse community.

Currently, only **29%** of Trinity's gross internal area is in Condition A or B as per HEA categorisations. On benchmarking Trinity against a number of comparator universities² for which data was readily available, the next smallest percentage was **70%** in the University of Liverpool, evidencing a significant deficit in Trinity's spatial quality. Many of these universities were based in the UK which has a better core-funded higher education system than Ireland, and Trinity's building stock is old compared to other Irish universities.

While funding would be required and is severely constrained both in Ireland and in Trinity itself, a number of actions are outlined in Appendix 3 to begin addressing this quality deficit, including exploring sources of funding.

Framework Goal 4: Communications and Engagement on Space Management

The nature of this living Space Framework is one that will iterate over time, taking in consultation from the university community, other stakeholders, and updated data. To facilitate this and ensure up-to-date information is disseminated to the community, overarching Goal 4 of this Framework focuses upon space management communications and engagement.

² 17 universities including the Russell Group of universities for which data regarding space was readily available were benchmarked against Trinity in terms of size, income levels, age and nature of campus such as how dispersed their sites were. The following 5 were selected on this basis as comparators: University of Bristol, Cardiff University, University of Liverpool, Newcastle University, and University of Sheffield

The Engagement Forums of Q2 2023/24 showed just how integral space is to the experience of Trinity and its contribution to culture and community. Indeed, many of the themes that emerged referenced the need to ensure space is used equitably and well, and accepted the mindset changes that may be required, for example those relating to sharing space, facilitating bookings and multiple uses, and even removing carparking spaces.

Communication, consultation, engagement and continued open conversation will be critical to enabling these cultural and mindset shifts, and to ensuring this Framework flexes over time to meet developments and technologies. Appendix 3 sets out initial actions and targets under this overarching goal.

5. Next Steps

The following actions have already commenced to advance achievement of Framework Goals 1-4 above:

- **Student Social Spaces review:** This project is underway in Semester 2 2023/2024 and will review all existing student social spaces on campus, identify where there may be deficits in buildings or quality, and explore how we can improve this space type which is crucial to the student experience.
- **Teaching Space Utilisation study:** The results from both physical surveys will be explored in more detail with Schools and timetabling teams and opportunities for improvement identified.
- **Engagement forums:** Two staff engagement forums were held in January and February 2024 in conjunction with the Vice-President for Biodiversity & Climate Action, and will be followed by an all-staff survey building upon the forums and facilitating those who could not attend. Student and other stakeholder engagement will follow in developing further iterations of this living Framework.

There are also a number of projects being developed as part of the capital programme which will contribute to further development of this living Framework including:

- E3 Learning Foundry
- Trinity South Renewal Programme
- Portal, and the wider Trinity East programme

These projects provide opportunities for increased sharing of teaching and collaboration spaces, piloting approaches to carbon reduction, and exploring ideas involving office space configuration.

Detailed policies will be created, enhanced or refreshed as necessary and communicated to the community as part of Framework Goal 4, providing clarity for all users and decision-makers involved in the area of space.

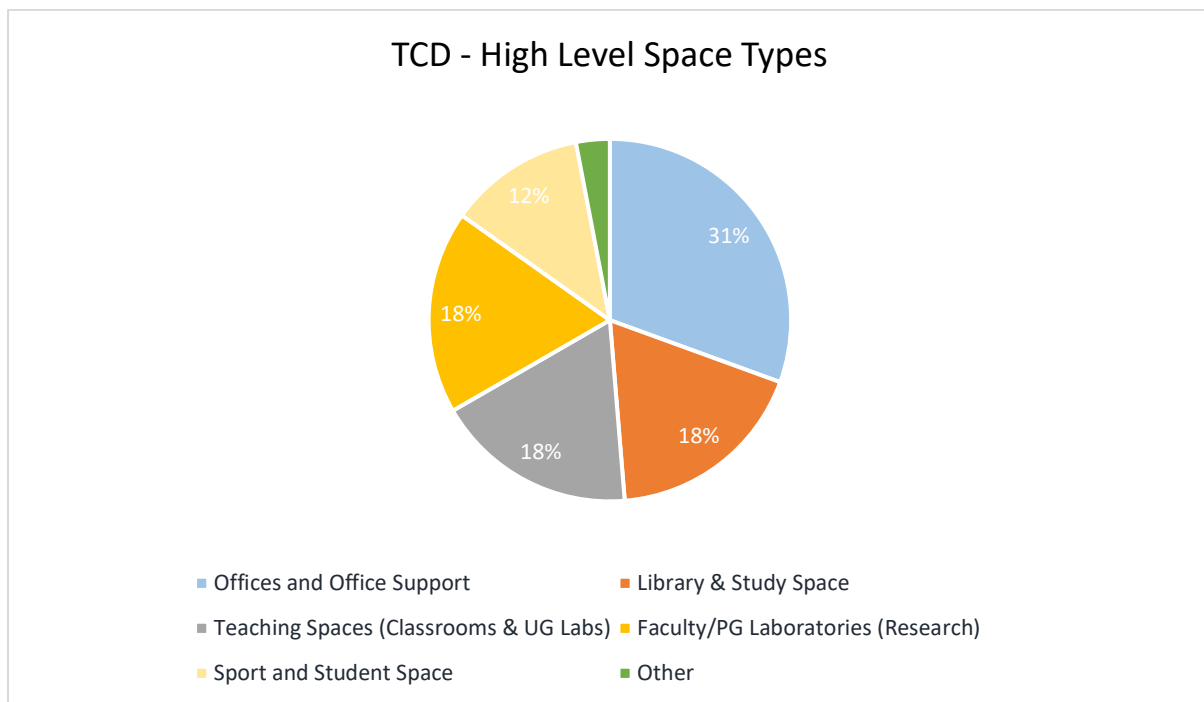
Finally following approval of this Framework, project planning will commence to assign its actions and targets to owners, track progress and implementation, and ultimately work towards achieving the four overarching goals of this current Framework version. This will

continue on an ongoing basis as further iterations of the Framework are developed and adopted by Trinity.

6. Appendices

- Appendix 1: Background on Campus Space Types
- Appendix 2: Action Plan – Initial Actions and Targets

Appendix 1: Background on Campus Space Types



Workspace

Globally, the traditional workplace or “office” has seen significant changes over the last number of years, as a result of new ways of working, such as blended and hybrid work. In many organisations, there has been a reimagining of the workplace, with a new focus on “activity-based working”, and providing a variety of spaces to collaborate, to conduct teamwork, meeting space to meet both formally and informally, as well as providing quiet places for focused work.

Office and associated support space equates to approximately 31% of the non-residential estate and is an essential resource to further the teaching, research and innovation ambitions of the University. As our work patterns evolve, we must also ensure that our workspace responds to meet our needs and aligns with wider goals including sustainability and decarbonisation targets.

We will continue to work with Schools and Departments to reimagine our existing space to meet our community’s workspace needs while simultaneously striving to improve space utilisation. For new buildings and major refurbishments, high quality and sustainable spaces, flexibly designed to facilitate high levels space of utilisation will be progressed.

Teaching Space

For both undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, our formal teaching space is a central component of the student experience. High quality, seminar rooms, lecture theatres and undergraduate laboratories facilitates teaching and learning, and enable a variety of pedagogical approaches and experiences.

Teaching space equates to approximately 20% of our academic estate, and given their value, and in line with our sustainability goals, it is essential they are used effectively and to the greatest benefit of

our community. From our initial physical surveys, our utilisation figure for non-specialist teaching space is approx. 17-20% at a campus level. We will develop a workplan for how we improve to a 'Good' level of utilisation of 31-35% in the coming years. This will involve regular surveying of actual usage and comparing with timetabled data, working with the Central Timetabling Unit (CTU) and School timetabling staff to refine processes and procedures around timetabling. Sharing of generic, non-specialist teaching spaces should become the norm, rather than the exception.

A review of the quality and functionality of teaching spaces will also be undertaken during the lifetime of this strategy. This review will include consultations with students and staff relating to experiences and views, identifying areas for improvement in both condition and functionality and exploring opportunities for delivering new spaces which enable new styles of teaching through varied and flexible layouts and interactive technologies.

Given the institutional level stakeholders and implications of this work, consideration will be given to how this is coordinated, managed, and reported, e.g., through the formation of a cross-departmental working group.

Informal Student Spaces

The third-level student experience is constantly evolving, and our estate needs to respond to these changes. New ways of learning, including peer-learning, blended teaching and project work, pressures relating to the costs of living and commuting distances, and increasing awareness around the importance of a holistic experience which includes, academic attainment, social interaction and a positive physical and mental health all translate to different needs at an estate level.

In response, we are in the process of undertaking a review of all informal student spaces, and all student support settings on campus. This review will consider shortfalls in certain areas, accessibility issues as well as condition and functionality.

A new vision for informal student spaces will be identified, and a funding strategy developed providing necessary spaces to relax, learn, socialise as well as providing support services in easily accessible and coherent locations.

Research and Innovation Space

As Ireland's leading research University, the provision of high-quality research laboratories and space for our research staff and students to work is crucial to our continued success. A new masterplan is currently being developed for the university which will consider research infrastructure and how we can better support our research community in terms of space provision.

Portal will come on stream in Q1 2025, providing new space for spin-outs, spin-ins and to foster linkages between our research community and the business world. Further investment in the Trinity East campus will be phased to further meet our needs for new research and innovation space.

Appendix 2: Action Plan - Initial Actions and Targets

Framework Goal 1: Increase Teaching Space Utilisation rate

As an initial target to aim for under Framework Goal 1, Trinity will work to identify opportunities to achieve the a 'Good' level of generic teaching space utilisation 31-35% by 2027.

To achieve this the following actions are proposed:

- 1.1 A review will be conducted involving Schools and the Central Timetabling Unit (CTU) to identify opportunities to improve Teaching Space utilisation rates, exploring in particular the potential to transition more spaces into (centrally allocated) Senior Lecturer pooled rooms subject to funding. Principles of allocation including the use of 'first-call' allocation and allocation of spaces in proximity to the School will all be considered as part of this review. The funding of upkeep and maintenance of centrally timetabled spaces will also be considered as part of the review.
- 1.2 A second review will be undertaken focusing upon current and future teaching space demand. This will identify deficiencies or mismatches in our teaching portfolio in terms of class sizes, locations and configurations. Better matching of demand and supply, including reducing the occurrence of modules being scheduled into spaces with larger capacity than required, will improve utilisation rates thereby contributing to Framework Goal 1.

Consideration will be given to how this work is coordinated and managed, including the potential formation of a Working Group to oversee the targets, initiatives, and implementation.

Framework Goal 2: Commence groundwork for improving the utilisation rate of Non-Teaching Spaces

To lay the groundwork for plans to improve the utilisation rate of Non-Teaching Spaces such as research, office or informal spaces, the following actions will move Trinity towards achieving this goal:

- 2.1 Increase data on utilisation rates on all types of university space beyond Teaching Spaces. This will include physical surveys and the use of smart technologies such as anonymised people-counters to facilitate targets for inclusion in future iterations of this Framework.
- 2.2 Analyse the implementation of policies such as the blended working policy, sabbatical policies, etc., and assess their impact on various categories of space usage such as office space. Engage with the Faculty Deans and Heads of Divisions/Units to develop policies for space usage taking into account these types of policies.
- 2.3 An assessment of international best practice, including those relating to sharing of space, buildings, labs, and equipment, to inform future consultation and actions to improve space use.

- 2.4 Development of guidelines and decision-making criteria, for example adopting the principle that no postgraduate students, post-doctoral researchers or retired staff should be housed in single occupancy offices, or that any offices with a floor area of 12sqm or over should be designed for and should accommodate more than one occupant.
- 2.5 Commence exploration into IT app solutions to allow real-time booking of space across the campus, and also for making space available to non-Trinity users during off-peak times such as Summer or evenings.

Framework Goal 3: Increase the quality of all our spaces

Acknowledging the severe constraints in available funding, the following actions will begin closing the gap between Trinity's 29% Condition A and B rates of spatial quality with comparator universities which are reporting 70%+ rates:

- 3.1 An assessment of options including possible disposals within the university estate to specifically free up funding for improving quality in the remaining estate.
- 3.2 To review how we currently use space and propose upgrades to furniture, technology, layouts and decor to improve the staff and student experience.
- 3.3 Development of strategies around funding sources to enable the improvement of existing infrastructure, maintenance, and decarbonisation, such as philanthropy and naming rights.
- 3.4 An assessment of international best practice in relation to improving quality in a resource-constrained institution with a large number of historic buildings with a view to informing further actions.

Framework Goal 4: Communications and Engagement on Space Management

To achieve the aims of Framework Goal 4 in facilitating cultural and mindset change, disseminating information, and seeking engagement for future iterations of the Framework, the following actions will be undertaken:

- 4.1 A strategy for communication and consultation will be developed including a comprehensive stakeholder plan. This will include actions such as the documenting of processes including Standard Operating Procedures to provide clarity for all.
- 4.2 A review of governance structures and processes regarding space management, including the committees and management groups involved, and the impact of the university's Estates Development Framework ("masterplan") and the Sustainability Strategy 2023-30.
- 4.3 Develop a framework for planning and facilitating future space needs, such as for research space or dedicated decant space, to allow for flexible responses and less reactionary decision-making.