



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

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The University of Dublin**

**Minutes of the Quality Committee**

6 February 2017, 11.30 – 13.30, Boardroom House 1

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**Present:**

Professor Chris Morash, Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer (Chair)  
Professor Darryl Jones, Dean of Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Professor Mary McCarron, Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences  
Professor Vinny Cahill, Dean of Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics & Science  
Professor Gillian Martin, Senior Lecturer  
Professor Neville Cox, Dean of Graduate Studies  
Ms. Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary  
Ms. Roisin Smith, Quality Officer  
Professor John Walsh, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Professor Peter Crooks, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Professor Sheila Ryder, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Professor Catherine Darker, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Professor Aonghus McNabola, Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science  
Professor David Lewis, Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science  
Mrs. Jessie Kurtz, Deputy Librarian  
Ms. Laura Conway-McAuley, IT Services  
Ms. Victoria Butler, Secretary's Office  
Vice-President, Graduate Students' Union  
Education Officer, Students' Union

**Apologies:**

Ms. Geraldine Ruane, Chief Operating Officer

**In attendance:**

Dr Alison Oldam, Director of Student Services (for item QC/16-17/024)  
Ms Valerie Smith, Faculty Administrator, AHSS (for item QC/16-17/026)  
Ms Sandra Kavanagh, Faculty Administrator, EMS (for item QC/16-17/027)  
Professor Mani Ramaswami, Director of the Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience (for item QC/16-17/029)

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The Senior Lecturer, acting as Chair, opened the meeting.

**QC/16-17/020 Draft minutes of the meeting of the 1 December 2016**

The draft minutes of the meeting of the 1 December 2016 were approved.

**QC/16-17/021 Matters arising**

The Chair reported that the Review of the School of English, the Implementation Plan for the B.Sc. in Human Nutrition and Dietetics and the Implementation Plan for the School of Education were approved by Council on the 18 January 2017.

The Deputy Librarian, referring to a previous Quality Committee discussion (QC/16-17/12), reiterated the benefits to the Library of an ISSE report highlighting Library-related issues. The Quality Officer undertook to liaise with the Deputy Librarian regarding Library-related issues arising from the 2017 data.

The Academic Secretary reported that in relation to the review of Carlow College (QC/16-17/20), a revised programme proposal will be resubmitted to Trinity in September 2017, at which stage it will be evaluated to see whether it meets the standards for validation by Trinity.

**QC/16-17/022 Proposed changes to the Quality review process**

The Academic Secretary spoke to a memorandum which outlined a proposal to review the current practice in respect of 'entertaining' external reviewers conducting a quality review of units. The current procedure is that College Officers meet the review panel on the morning of the review to set the context of the review. The panel meet College Officers on the evening of Day 1 for dinner, where reviewers are afforded the opportunity to discuss any local or institution-wide issues that have arisen during the course of the day. A practice grew over the years where the unit under review invites the panel to dinner on the evening of Day 2, possibly stemming from existing practices in respect of external examiners. This is now thought to be out of alignment with good practice as it introduces an air of informality and may lead to a perception that the process is not sufficiently objective.

A review of practices in other institutions and recent informal feedback from review teams also suggests that this practice is not aligned with the sector generally. Ms Callaghan reported that the reviewers would welcome time alone to formulate their thoughts and to work on their draft report and recommendations. For these reasons she recommended to the Quality Committee that the practice whereby the unit under review invites the panel to dinner on Day 2 of the review be discontinued.

Following a brief discussion the Committee approved the proposal.

*The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer joined the meeting*

**QC/16-17/023 Quality Committee performance**

The Academic Secretary spoke to a report on the outcome of the annual evaluation of the Quality Committee, which was undertaken in May 2016. She explained that presentation of the report to the Committee had been delayed until the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer was available for the discussion.

The Academic Secretary spoke to the functions and role of the Committee as outlined in its Terms of Reference, and considered whether these functions are currently being fulfilled. She suggested that while the Committee had been very active in engaging with QQI regarding policies arising from

quality legislation, and had recommended revised quality review procedures to Council and Board for approval, it had not considered quality issues in respect of the College's Strategic Plan.

The terms of reference require the Committee to review the effectiveness and outcomes of quality review processes on an annual basis, and the Academic Secretary reported that this is achieved through the Annual Faculty Quality Reports, the thematic analysis of Quality Review Reports, and the External Reviewer Survey. With regard to the requirement to ensure that College policy and procedures are consistent with national policy regarding quality in education, she referred to the considerable work undertaken by the Committee in engaging with and providing feedback on QQI White Papers. She concluded by emphasising that while the Committee is generally performing its role well, the unavailability of key spokespersons to attend the Committee has led to delays in bringing review reports through to Council for consideration, and this needs to be addressed.

The Chair invited comments from the Committee and in the ensuing discussion the issue of low attendance by Committee members was raised. Suggestions for how this could be addressed included the provision for College Officers to send a representative to meetings if they are unable to attend.

In response to a suggestion in the report that greater emphasis should be placed on the Committee's role in monitoring the effectiveness of quality policies and procedures on the ground, the Academic Secretary reported that the Committee already plays an active role in this regard. A review of the effectiveness of the revised External Examiner process was undertaken in 2015/16 and a project is currently underway to review and improve the module evaluation process, raised as an issue of concern in a number of quality reviews in 2015/16 and in the Annual Faculty Quality Reports. The Quality Officer re-iterated the importance of the Annual Faculty Quality Reports in providing a conduit for communication with Schools on issues arising from the implementation of College-level policies at local level.

In terms of the skill-set of Committee members, a query arose as to the type of skills that were sought in the recruitment of new members. The Quality Officer responded that new members were recruited on the basis of particular areas of expertise of interest to the Committee, and with a view to contributing to projects outside the scheduled Committee meetings in the lead up to next Institutional Review. A member suggested that broadening the representation to include contract research staff and external members should be considered. The Academic Secretary concluded the discussion by asking members to consider the Committee's terms of reference with respect to Policy. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer suggested that the Committee's current role is more one of interpretation of policy than devising policy. The Academic Secretary reported that the role of the Committee in this regard needs to be considered and that she would revert to the Committee with recommendations as to how this should be addressed.

Action: The Academic Secretary to revert to the Committee on how the role of the Committee with regard to policy development should be addressed.

#### **QC/16-17/024 Progress report for the Disability Service**

The Chair welcomed the Director of Student Services, Dr Alison Oldam, to the meeting to speak to the progress report for the Disability Service.

Dr Oldam spoke to the implementation of the key recommendations arising from the review. She reported that a 'Fitness to Study' policy (being led by the Dean of Students) which aims to ensure that disability issues for students are identified and addressed, will be considered by the Student Life Committee in March 2017. With regard to identifying sources of funding for the service, the Director reported that she is looking to provide secure funding via (i) possible Commercial Revenue avenues, (ii)

introduction of a Student Services levy (iii) health partnerships and (iv) philanthropy. She emphasised that discussions regarding any potential Student Services levy will take place with the Student's Union.

A review of the Service's core business practices and interdependencies has been completed and the main areas for reallocation of activities were identified as (i) universal access (relocated to Estates and Facilities) and (ii) support for staff with disabilities (relocated to Human Resources). With regard to improving infrastructure, a redesign and re-organisation of space was completed in June 2015 pending the relocation of the Service to the new Oisín House facility. Since the start of 2015/16 all new projects must be assessed by the Project Management Office and the Disability Service to ensure that Universal Access has been considered. Access works on existing buildings are funded on an *ad hoc* basis.

The Chair thanked Dr Oldam and noted that the Chief Academic Officer has been actively trying to source sponsorship for student services.

In the discussion that followed, the following points were made:

- The Disability Service plays an important role in underpinning the student experience in an environment where mental health and spectrum disorders are increasing in the student population;
- The implementation of Trinity's strategic objectives with respect to Equality and Diversity (Section C8.2 of the Strategic Plan), which the Disability Service has a role in implementing, would ideally have strategic funding attached to it;
- Recent reductions in HEA Access funding and the requirement to implement the National Access Plan require alternative funding sources to be investigated;
- A reliable database from which to draw data is essential in order that a strong case can be made for increased funding for disability support;
- There is a case to be made for conducting a cost per head calculation for students with a disability. The next Institutional Strategic Plan needs to look at the cost associated with accommodating a changing student demographic; ideally all new project planning should include a costing to support students with a disability;
- The implementation of the universal curriculum design as part of the Trinity Education Project and the work done under the Trinity Inclusive Curriculum (TIC) initiative will benefit all students, not just those presenting with a disability;
- The Trinity Education Project will also have a positive impact on students with a disability as it addresses different types of assessment methods.

The Chair thanked the Director of Student Services, and the Committee referred the progress report to Board for noting and approval.

*Dean of FEMS joined the meeting*

#### **QC/16-17/025 White Paper on Statutory Guidelines for the QA of Research Degree Programmes**

The Chair invited the Dean of Graduate Studies to speak to the revised White Paper on Statutory Guidelines for the QA of Research Degree Programmes. The Dean reported that an original draft of the guidelines had been withdrawn by QQI in July to look at two categories – unregistered schools and universities. The aim is to produce a minimalist white paper which deals with all providers, and for the IUA Dean's group to produce a companion document which will outline in more detail the implications for DABs. The Dean expressed concern that the revised document is still too prescriptive and that it doesn't recognise resource constraints. He reported that the document would be considered by the Graduate Studies Committee the following week.

The Chair thanked the Dean of Graduate Studies and invited comments from the Committee. A member suggested that the document would be more useful if it focussed on broad principles rather than detailed requirements. He expressed concern that the recommendation to include independent experts at progress interviews would have resource implications and would reduce the pool of potential external examiners. With regard to mandatory training for inexperienced supervisors, he suggested that it would be more useful to encourage rather than oblige supervisors to attend, and to focus on the positive effect of on-going support and professional training for new supervisors. The Dean of Health Sciences reported that there are a variety of activities already taking place that fulfil the requirements outlined in the white paper, and cited the mentorship programmes and supervision workshops operating in the School of Nursing & Midwifery as examples. The Dean of Graduate Studies also cited the postgraduate supervision workshops run in conjunction with UCD.

The Vice-President of the Graduate Students Union commented on the requirement to provide appropriate research facilities for students and noted that in some areas of College, space is at such a premium that research students don't have a desk of their own.

The Quality Officer suggested that the proposed companion document from the IUA Deans will be useful in terms of providing context for DABs. She stressed the importance of demonstrating that we have processes in place to address these guidelines in advance of the next institutional review.

The Chair thanked the Dean of Graduate Studies, who closed by reporting that the document would be considered by the Graduate Studies Committee, after which a response would be produced for QQI. The views of the consultations would inform a planned Policy on Research Supervision (QC /16-17/05) to be brought to the Committee this academic year.

#### **QC/16-17/026 Annual Faculty Quality Report – Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS)**

The Chair welcomed the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty Administrator, Ms Valerie Smith, to present the Annual Faculty Quality Report. The Dean drew the Committee's attention to the fact that rates of module evaluation had increased slightly from last year, that undergraduate retention from JF to SF (96%) remains well above the College target of 90% and the External Examiner system is working well. He reported that some schools are using educational technology to allow lecturers to pose questions within their lectures. The Faculty Administrator, Ms Valerie Smith, reported that the three Faculty Administrators, in conjunction with IT Services, have negotiated a one year trial site licence of a ResponseWare system called 'Turning Point', to be initiated at the start of 2017/18. The system allows lecturers to gather feedback and assess students' understanding throughout their lecture or presentation. As the system uses downloadable mobile phone apps, there is no cost to the students. The system is also compatible with existing 'clickers', for those who have already purchased these. Ms Smith undertook to provide a project plan to the Committee for consideration.

An issue of concern for Schools in the Faculty who are running online courses is that College processes have not been amended to accommodate on-line students. In particular, the Dean cited the requirement for on-line students to pay for on-site services and facilities and reported that the School of Psychology had lost two confirmed online students due to this. He suggested that it would be reasonable that students who are living outside the country be exempted from paying these charges. Space remains an issue in the Faculty and the Dean welcomed the Bursars work on developing a space and facilities strategy.

The Chair thanked the Dean and opened the discussion to the floor. In relation to grading of taught postgraduate courses, it was reported that students increasingly expect to have their work graded and that there have been repeated requests from External Examiners for the introduction of a grade between pass and distinction in order to acknowledge work of a very high standard, but that

does not merit 'Distinction'. A member reported that their School had moved away from numerical marking and cautioned against its use as a significant number of appeals were generated.

In relation to the use of 'clickers', a member queried how the effectiveness of clickers can be assessed. The Dean of Health Sciences reported that it is possible to build features into the clickers to assess their effectiveness. The Dean of FEMS reported that clickers had been piloted in the Faculty in 2015/16, and reported that there were issues around deploying clickers at scale and sustaining the initiative in terms of the lifetime of the devices and the cost of replacing them. He also expressed concern that the use of mobile phone apps would be distracting for students.

The Vice- Provost/Chief Academic Officer recommended that the use of clickers as an evaluation tool be followed up on. The Academic Secretary noted that it was useful that the Faculties were working together on this and supported the development of a project plan around the pilot to be brought back to the Committee at a later date.

Action: A project proposal around the piloting of a ResponseWare system to be brought to the Committee for discussion at a later date.

### **QC/16-17/027 Annual Faculty Quality Report – Engineering, Mathematics and Science (EMS)**

The Chair invited the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science and the Faculty Administrator, Ms Sandra Kavanagh, to present the Annual Faculty Quality Report. The Dean opened by thanking the Schools in the Faculty and the Faculty Administrator for their work on the report. He reported significant change in the Faculty in 2015/16, noting in particular the re-imagining of science education following the TR071 review and the very active engagement of the Undergraduate Science Education Working Group with the Trinity Education Project (TEP) which will result in a greatly improved experience for undergraduate students. He also cited the work undertaken on engineering and natural science teaching as part of the E3 project, and reported that the multidisciplinary nature of the initiative would promote linkages between the schools involved.

The Dean reported that retention in UG courses in the Faculty is high (90.2%), meeting the College's Strategic target of 90%. Where individual course retention falls below that level, it is in small-intake courses where one student retiring from a course can have a significant impact on the retention rate. Schools across the Faculty are employing a diverse range of methods to evaluate their undergraduate and PGT programmes. The use of clickers to enhance existing feedback mechanisms is being explored, and consideration is being given to the merits of programme evaluation rather than module evaluation in certain circumstances.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean for his report and commended the Dean's Award for Teaching and Innovation as a useful method of highlighting innovative teaching practice in the Faculty. In relation to the proposed enhancements to the feedback mechanism for students, the Academic Secretary emphasised the importance of responding to feedback and making the required changes in a timely fashion in order for students to be able to witness the response to their feedback.

The Chair thanked the Dean of FEMS and the Faculty Administrator for their report and closed the discussion.

## **QC/16-17/028 Implementation Plan for Computer Science and Statistics**

The Chair invited the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science to speak to the Implementation Plan for Computer Science and Statistics.

The Dean spoke to the key issues arising from the review. He reported that the School's Strategic Plan was a focal point for the review as the Reviewers felt that it failed to articulate a coherent vision for the School. He reported that the School has re-drafted the Plan to better articulate the School's intellectual vision, research strategy and its link to the educational programmes delivered and future faculty hiring. This has resulted in a refocusing of activity around the School's core strengths and alignment of its activity around areas of expertise.

The Dean reported that the School is reformulating and streamlining its undergraduate programmes, and is actively working to align them with the E3 teaching strategy and the Trinity Education Project. He noted that the Discipline of Statistics has emerged as a particular vulnerability, and that the successful filling of the Chair in Statistics will be critical. He reported that significant opportunities will arise from the implementation of the E3 strategy but that the lack of space to facilitate new courses will be an issue. The E3 strategy allows for a 14% expansion in student numbers but additional space to house these students will be a critical component in successfully facilitating these developments. The School has secured additional space on South Leinster St which will require refurbishment, but further facilities will be required and talks are on-going in this regard. The terms of reference for a review of the internal management of the School and the role of disciplines, as per the School's strategic plan, are being agreed pending the appointment of a new Head of School in July 2017.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Dean and invited comments from the Committee. With regard to the appointment of a new Head of School, the Dean reported that as the School has a predominance of junior staff it may be difficult to source senior candidates for the role. In response to a query from the Committee as to how the School links in to E3 strategy reporting lines, it was clarified that the Head of School is on the E3 Steering Committee and the School is represented on the E3 working groups. Updates on the implementation of the E3 strategy are received at Council and a report will eventually go to Board.

In terms of the space issues highlighted in the Implementation Plan, and in the Annual Faculty Quality Reports, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer recommended that the Bursar be invited to attend the Committee to speak to the work that she is doing for the Estates and Facilities Strategy, and this was supported by the Committee. Dean of FEMS reported that it was planned that the E3 Strategy would unlock further space over time.

With regard to the deferral of the Postgraduate Diploma in Statistics and the planned development of an on-line version of the course, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer reported that a review of Trinity on-line education was planned. With regard to the termination of the evening BSc programme in Information Systems, the Academic Secretary responded that she would discuss the suspension and closure of programmes with the Head of School off-line.

Concerning the Reviewers' comments on the feasibility of the Computer Science and Psychology programme it was noted that this would be considered as part of the E3 strategy to assess the feasibility of a number of 'Computer science and' programmes.

The Academic Secretary reported that the next step would be to send a revised School Strategic Plan to the Reviewers for comment and that the Implementation Plan would be presented at the next meeting of Council for approval.

Action: The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer to invite the Bursar to attend the next meeting to provide an update on the Estates and Facilities strategy

## **QC/16-17/029 Implementation Plan for the Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience (TCIN)**

The Chair welcomed the Director of the Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience (TCIN) (Professor Mani Ramaswami) and the Dean of Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science to speak to the Implementation Plan for TCIN.

The Director spoke to the key recommendations arising from the review. He reported that a strategy for the Institute is under development for launch in the first half of 2017, and that goals are being defined with associated lead PIs. With regard to the recommendation to appoint a Scientific Advisory Board, the Director reported that a functioning Board is currently in place and that external scientific advisors are being sought in addition to an external Chair. Two potential Board Chairs have been approached to date with no success, and the Director is in contact with a third. It is planned to build the Board around the Chair, who will be fully engaged with achieving the Institute's goals and act as a champion for the Institute.

A number of new initiatives will be housed in TCIN and will provide the opportunity for TCIN to expand what it is currently doing. The Director reported that there will be opportunities for a number of cross-cutting areas arising from the Global Brain Health Initiative (GBHI), which has a major international teaching component, and also in the area of autism which spans across a number of schools. A new Masters in Neuroimaging is being designed and a potential new "broad curriculum" course in Neuroscience is also being discussed. International joint undergraduate and postgraduate training programmes will also be considered. The animal facilities require upgrading and TCIN has developed short and long term proposals for the improvement of animal research. The short term improvements will be managed through shared space management and preparation of small grant applications for equipment upgrades. The Director reported that all animal-use procedures in TCIN are approved by a local ethics committee and by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), the Irish regulatory body for animal use in research, which enforces EU regulatory measures. Additionally, the Faculty Dean is the compliance officer for College with respect to animal-based research.

The Dean of FEMS reiterated the impact that the Global Brain Health Initiative (GBHI) will have on the TCIN, noting that a high number of new PIs will be recruited as part of the initiative. With regard to the development of a strategy for the Institute, he stressed the importance of ensuring that TCIN is centered as an Institute rather than a collection of PIs. He echoed the Directors concern regarding space and noted that the lack of space limits our potential to attract staff.

The Chair thanked Professors Ramaswami and Cahill, and opened the discussion to the floor. In response to a query from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer regarding progress with the appointment of the external members of the scientific advisory board, the Dean of FEMS reported that there is a Board in place and that efforts are being made to secure a Chair who is engaged with and will champion the Institute.

The Dean reported that the demand for animal-based research is increasing and that additional space to house the facilities to support this will remain an issue. The Director highlighted the possible benefits from the co-location of the Institute's staff, and the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer suggested that the Bursars attendance at the Committee would provide an opportunity to discuss the space audit and how to use space smarter.

The Chair thanked the Director of TCIN and the Dean of FEMS, and reported that the Implementation Plan would proceed to Council for approval.

**QC/16-17/030 For information**

The Quality Officer drew the Committee's attention to (i) the revised terms of Reference for Marino Institute of Education (MIE) Associated Colleges Degrees Committee (ACDC) and (ii) *Procedures for focused reviews by QQI of the Implementation and Effectiveness of Provider QA Procedures* and the IUA response to QQI dated 27 January 2017, which had been circulated for information.

**QC/16-17/031 Any other business**

There was no other business and the meeting closed.