



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Trinity College Dublin at Belfast, May 2024

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the desk-based monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Trinity College Dublin at Belfast (the College) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [May 2023 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There have been no substantive changes since the previous monitoring visit to the College. 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 the same as in the previous year, and there are three MLitt/PhD students, down from five the previous year.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 This annual monitoring visit was undertaken via a desk-based analysis and 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. This evidence confirms that the College consistently monitors, reviews and enhances the quality of its higher education provision. Findings confirm that the College continues to develop the three features of good practice identified in the 2021 Higher Education Review (Foreign Providers) (HER(FP)) (paragraph 4) and continues to address and enhance the response to the recommendation made (paragraph 5).

4 The College has further worked to develop and implement its May 2021 action plan with progress being monitored by the Postgraduate Studies Committee. This action plan specifically highlighted good practice in respect of a diverse range of learning opportunities, and the use of well-qualified practitioners and academics from around the world. The College has worked to expand this by a wide range of learning opportunities including field trips, internships and practice-based modules, and the practice has been further enhanced with new well-known guest speakers and additional acquisition of specialist library materials. Students have access to the College's Belfast and Trinity College Dublin libraries and to the services of a professional librarian, as well as associate membership of Queen's University Belfast library.

5 The one recommendation from the HER(FP) report in 2021 - to provide clear and consistent feedback on all assessed student work to support students on their academic development - has been addressed through the introduction of a new marking rubric agreed

by the Postgraduate Studies Committee in October 2021 and implemented in September 2022. Students have provided feedback on the impact of these developments, and this has informed further enhancement of the marking rubric - now complemented by a detailed grading scheme for essays and presentations, helping students to further understand grading criteria. The external examiner's report in January 2024 welcomes the helpful introduction of a more detailed grading scheme for essays and presentations, and notes that it will further assist with transparency and accountability. This report also recommends that, for dissertations, a similar detailed grading scheme should be introduced and consideration of introducing blind double-marking for dissertations should also take place. The recommendation was considered at the School Postgraduate Committee, and it was agreed that an email trail was to be kept and made available to the external examiner of the correspondence between markers arriving at the agreed mark.

6 Annual programme monitoring continues to be 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 summaries of the end-of-module surveys indicate high levels of student satisfaction, though, in many cases, the response rates are low. The annual student focus group made specific recommendations which were adopted, resulting in significant enhancements to the pre-arrival information as well as to the orientation information provided to incoming students aiming to assist them in connecting with each other and settling better to their academic studies. Additionally, and in response to student feedback, greater emphasis was placed on the practicalities of obtaining work placements in the Community learning module. In response to past external examiner reports, two main improvements were introduced in the current academic year: more diverse assessments and a detailed grading scheme. The College submits an annual report to Trinity College Dublin for inclusion into the School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies report which, in turn, informs the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Quality Report. There is clear evidence that the quality of provision continues to be effectively assured, and the End of Year Course Review considers relevant data sets to establish priorities and actions for the forthcoming academic year.

7 As noted in paragraph 2 above, there have been no new programmes or courses added since the previous annual return. Recruitment to the MPhil was similar to the previous year, with eight full-time students on the course in 2023-24, all international. In 2022-23, there was a 100% completion and pass rate for the MPhil. All but one student achieved Distinctions. Three PhD students completed successfully and there are three continuing students.

8 Admissions continue to be managed in accordance with Trinity College Dublin postgraduate regulations. Information on entry requirements can be found on the course's website and international prospective students have access to tailor-made guidance information produced by the School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies, and are signposted to a [specific website](#) with relevant information.

9 Assessment requirements, module learning outcomes and submission dates continue to be clearly outlined in module handbooks. The external examiner confirms that the standard of the course is high, that assessments align with the learning outcomes, and feedback provided to students on assessments is well structured, helpful and sufficient.

10 Recommendations from external examiners are reviewed by the Postgraduate Committee and the Postgraduate Court of Examiners, who also oversee any developments related to these recommendations. In response to the recommendations made by external examiners, more diverse assessment methods were introduced, more detailed grading

schemes were implemented, and a new system was put in place to ensure more timely access to materials for external examiners.

11 Clear complaints and appeals procedures continue to be provided to students in the MPhil Handbook, the Postgraduate Research Handbook, and online in the Trinity College Dublin Calendar Part III. Further advice and guidance are available from the Postgraduate Advisory Service, whose role and function are explained to students during their orientation.

12 Students continue to have access to appropriate support and resources to facilitate their achievement, including online student support services and in-person access to academic and support staff in Belfast. A specialist library and a librarian are available in Belfast, as well as access to online resources and databases through the Trinity College Dublin library. Additional information and research guidance are provided through the Research Skills module, which assists MPhil and PhD students in conducting their research. Learning resources and support are comprehensively discussed during induction and orientation.

13 PhD research students continue to be allocated an appropriate supervisor and are required to undertake a minimum of 10 ECTS credits of taught modules, covering research ethics and integrity. The Research Handbook sets out clear regulations and opportunities to connect with research centres and networks, and to access appropriate guidance and support.

14 Students benefit from being taught by well qualified and experienced lecturers, supported by eminent guest speakers, alumni and field trips, and are enabled to participate in international conferences, events and community placements. The Mediation and Peacebuilding Skills module plays a crucial role in supporting the Community Learning and Reflective Practice module, as well as meeting the 96-hour placement requirement. These modules collectively help students further develop their practice-based learning, and reflective practice skills, thus supporting their continuous professional development.

15 The course continues to evolve academically. For example, in 2023-24 additional ethnographic field trips were scheduled for the Conflict and Peace in Northern Ireland module, and a new podcast assessment introduced in Transitional Justice. Furthermore, the Community Learning and Reflective Practice module offers students the chance to gain contemporary practice-based experience, working alongside practitioners in the local conflict resolution field. An annual School careers evening has also been established involving alumni and recent graduates to benefit current students.

16 Student engagement continues to be effectively facilitated through different opportunities for students to provide feedback to the College. Methods such as student surveys, focus groups and committee representation ensure that the student voice influences programme reviews, thereby enhancing the curriculum and overall student experience.

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

17 The College 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.

18 The College reports to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) primarily through the production of an Annual Quality Report (AQR), which demonstrates its compliance with QQI statutory regulations and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The ESG requirements are specifically mapped to the QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines. These requirements are underscored by the College Quality Policy Statement and reviewed during regular cyclical reviews by QQI, next due in 2025-26.

19 Trinity College Dublin's awards are recognised in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and internationally on equivalent frameworks. This is supported by an Assessment and Academic Progress Policy which addresses assessment design to ensure maintenance of academic standards and awards in line with the NFQ.

Background to the monitoring visit

20 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.

21 The monitoring visit was carried out by Stella Diamantidi, Reviewer, and Dr Roshani Swift, QAA Officer, on 24 May 2024.

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