COVID-19 - COLLEGE CLOSURE COMMUNICATION PROJECT: SUMMARY

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Background

- In response to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, and in line with Government of Ireland guidelines, Trinity College Dublin closed its doors in March 2020.

- For all College staff and students, this closure represented a sudden cessation of in-person, face-to-face communication for academic, occupational, and social purposes.

- As a result of the College's closure and the ensuing change in the manner and mode of communication, we devised a survey to profile the communication experiences of all those across the College Community.

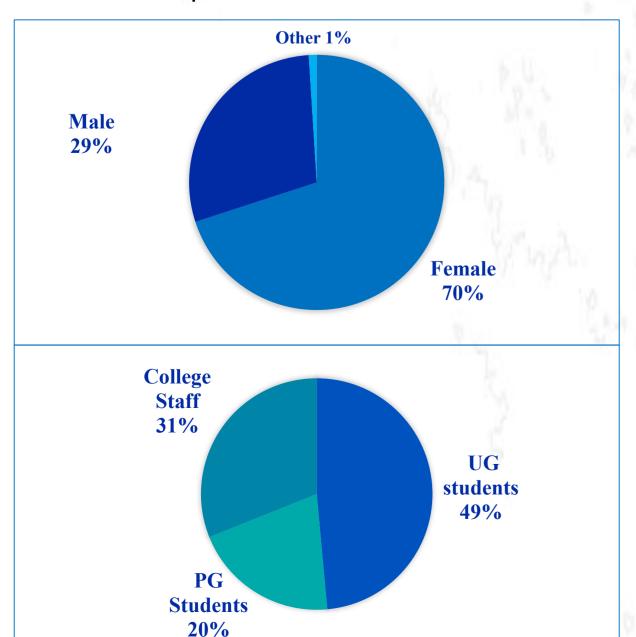## Research Aims & Rationale

To profile:
I.   The **changes** in the nature and form of communicative interactions and people's reactions to those changes

II. The **tools** people used (e.g. online platforms) to communicate and how well these worked for them

III. The **facilitators and barriers** to adopting new modes and styles of communication

Methodology

- Online survey devised via *Qualtrics*, to explore communication experiences during College closure

- Both closed and open questions were included, which collected both measurable outcomes and accounts of participants' experiences

- Survey opened 21/05/2020, closed 01/07/2020

RESPONSE RATES

1698 valid responses received:

Male 29%
Female 70%
Other 1%

College Staff 31%
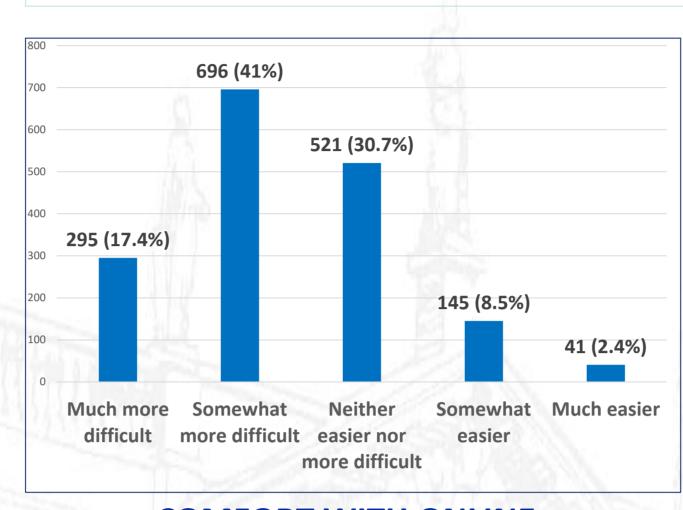UG students 49%
PG Students 20%

Between staff and students, 16% were members of a College club/society/social group that may have been impacted by closure.

Findings & Implications: Quick Glance

I. Changes in interaction amount & quality

COMMUNICATION EASE SINCE CLOSURE

- Much more difficult: 295 (17.4%)
- Somewhat more difficult: 696 (41%)
- Neither easier nor more difficult: 521 (30.7%)
- Somewhat easier: 145 (8.5%)
- Much easier: 41 (2.4%)

COMFORT WITH ONLINE COMMUNICATION

- **45%** uncomfortable

- **39%** comfortable

- **16%** neutral

"It is incredibly difficult to motivate yourself to learn online when you don t have any of the social side of college"

"Collaboration became harder. It's less fluid to have to basically schedule every interaction"

Implications:
➤ Reduced opportunity to socialise was as much an issue as capacity to communicate effectively

➤ College could consider how to compensate for lack of socialisation (not just productivity) during closure

II. Communication tools & success

- **70%** used video calling much more but was not without its problems
- **46%** more easily distracted while on calls
- **75%** more self-conscious about their appearance on video calls
- **67%** made effort to make the background more visually appealing

"The online platform was easy to use… but I found I was easily distracted during the lectures"

"I feel like I'm being watched without knowing the reaction"

" My voice became hoarse and strained very quickly "

Implications:
➤ IT Services to continue to support easy access to video calling and associated software
➤ College to continue to be mindful of staff and student health, including maintenance of a safe home-working environment

August 20th, 2020

Findings & Implications

III. Facilitators and barriers

Facilitators
- Access to a good laptop /stable internet
- Home office space, quiet and separate to maintain work/life balance
- A supportive College community

"With this unprecedented situation Trinity has helped a lot in every way. I am very proud to be a Trinity student"

Barriers
- Less consideration for those with impairments that limit accessibility of online communication
- Difficulties attending online vs in-person lectures
- Managing a suboptimal or stressful home

"Living with mental illness …has hugely impacted my ability to communicate online – issues all play havoc with communication to begin with. An online element adds an extra layer of fear or shame…"

"I found it difficult to sit through an entire lecture at a desk/chair etc rather than in an actual lecture environment "

Implications:
➤ Staff and students need to be mindful of those with difficulties communicating online
➤ Individual home environment and IT setup is pivotal for communication success
➤ Online learning broadly considered more difficult than classroom learning

Summary

❖ Communication more difficult once College closed

❖ IT support invaluable to reduce communication difficulties

❖ Social aspects of College life adversely affected

Conclusions

❖ Action plan needed to support better communication and socialization during closure(s) to maintain the Trinity experience

❖ College should continue to support the physical and mental health of the Trinity Community

Thank you to the College Community for co-operating with this data collection.

A more detailed report will be available in due course.