



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

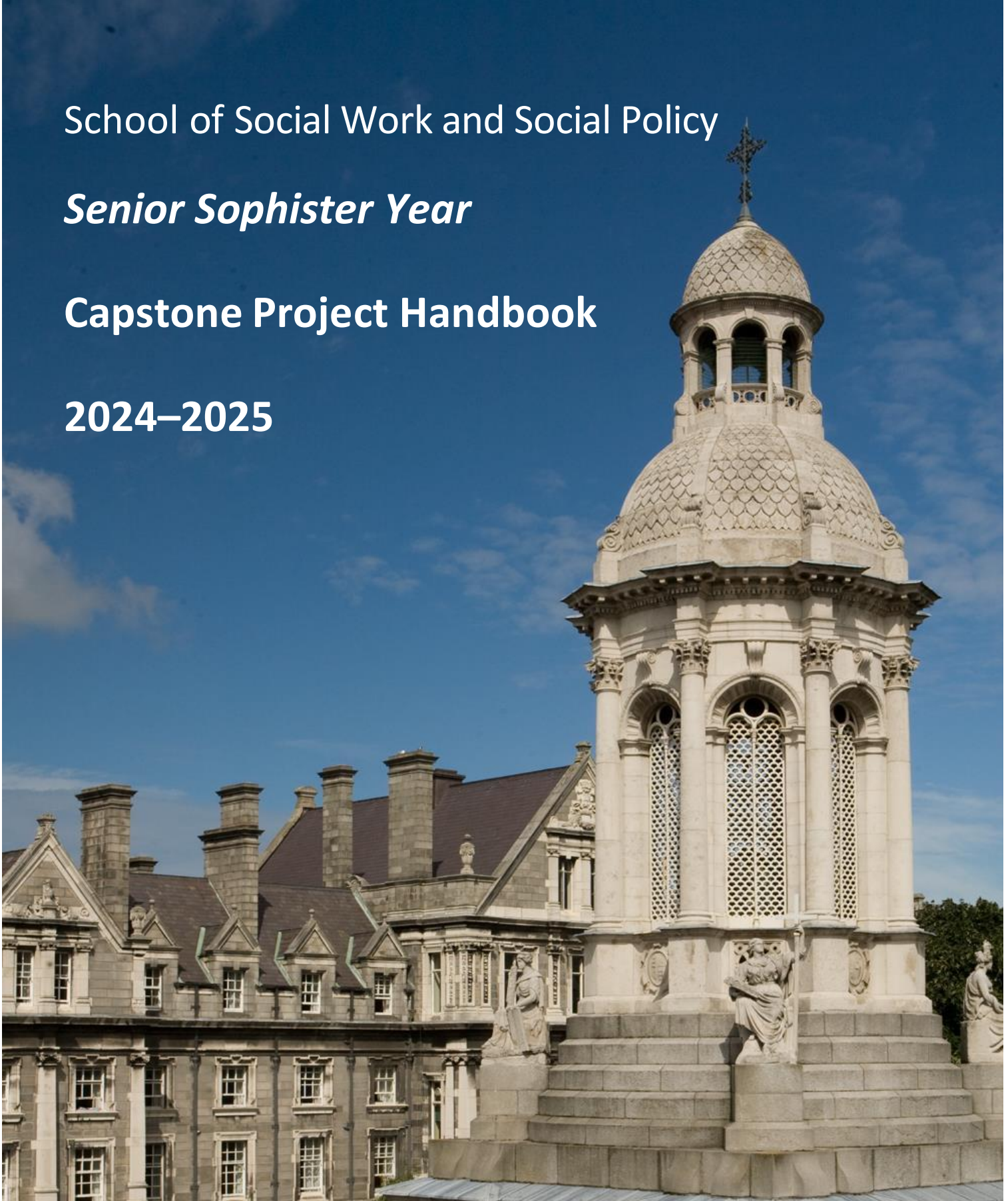
The University of Dublin

School of Social Work and Social Policy

Senior Sophister Year

Capstone Project Handbook

2024–2025



A Note on this Handbook

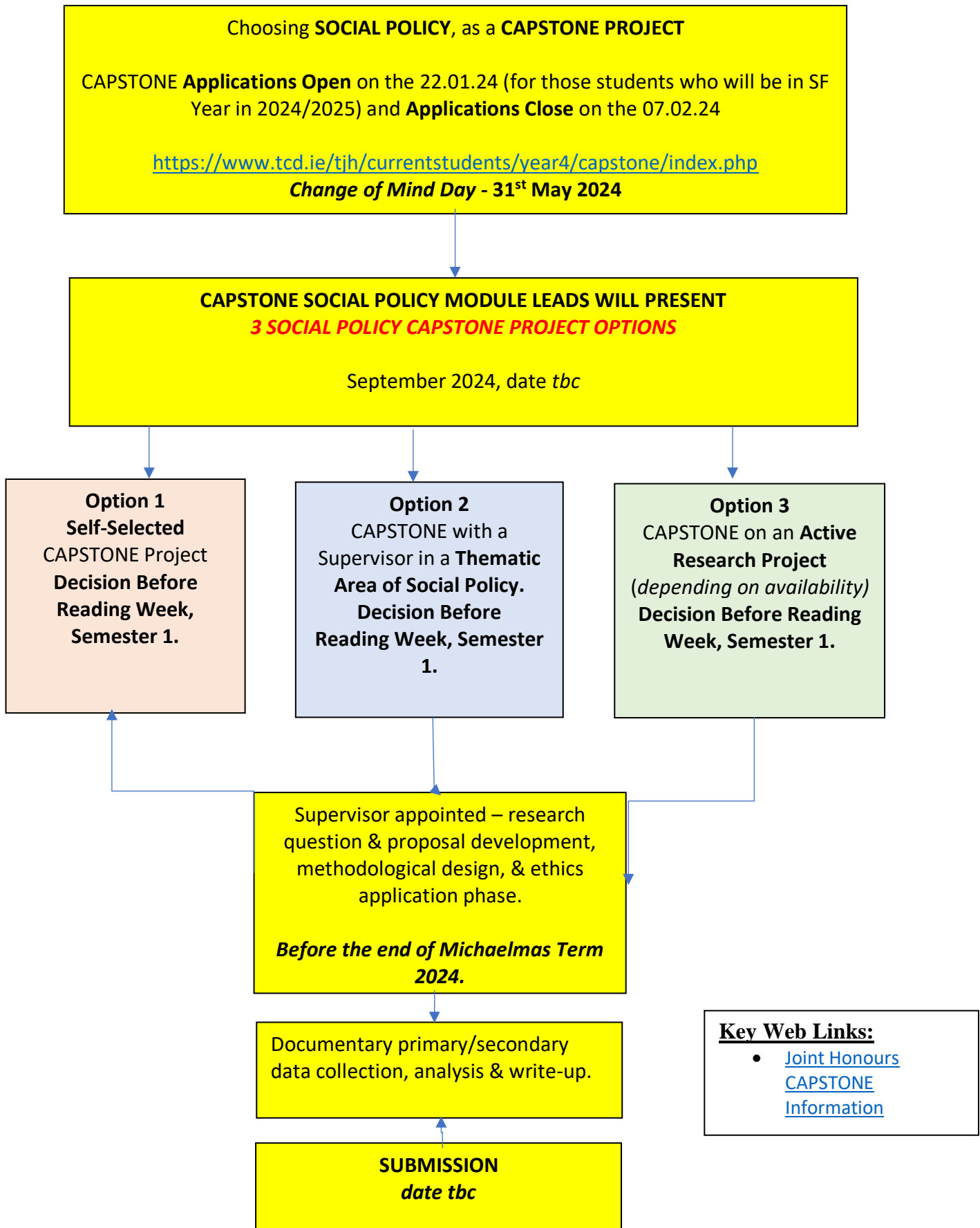
In the event of any conflict or inconsistency between the General Regulations published in the University Calendar and information contained in programme or local handbooks, the provisions of the General Regulations in the Calendar will prevail.

Alternative formats of the Handbook can be made available on request.

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AT A GLANCE - A visual guide to the Capstone Project Process in Social Policy with *Indicative Timelines for Senior Sophisters in 2024/2025*

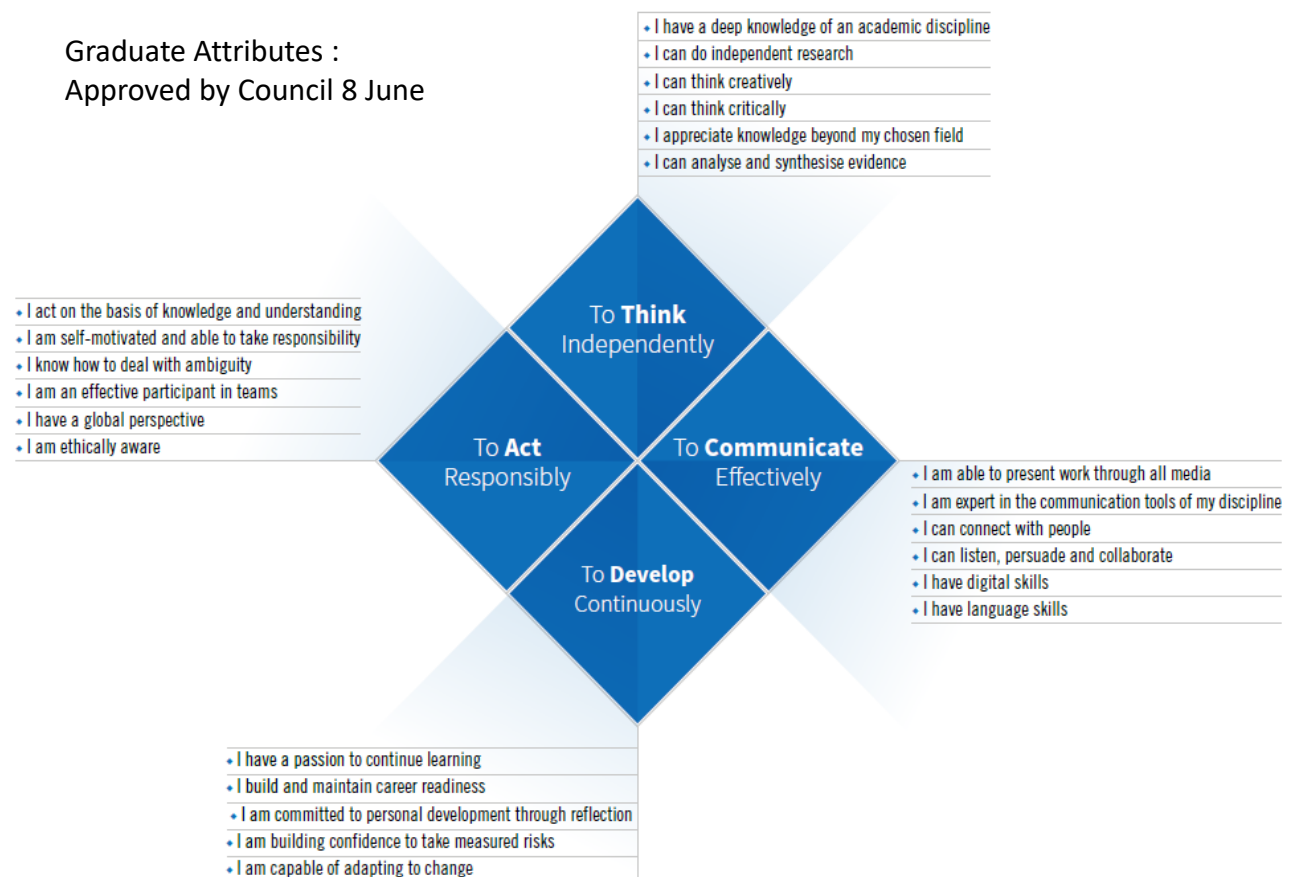


What is a Trinity Capstone Project?

A capstone is a significant (20 ECTS) project or dissertation, undertaken at Senior Sophister level, that provides you with an opportunity to showcase the knowledge, skills and competencies which you have acquired over the course of your undergraduate study.

The Social Policy Capstone project is rooted in the Graduate Attributes laid down by Trinity College Dublin for undergraduate study. [Trinity's Graduate Attributes](#) represent the qualities, skills and behaviours that you have an opportunity to develop as a Trinity student over your entire university experience.

During your time as an undergraduate in Trinity you have the opportunity through your coursework and assessments as well as co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to develop and improve these attributes. The Trinity **Graduate Attributes** are:



Senior Sophister Year Capstone Projects in Social Policy

The Capstone project in Social Policy provides you with an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills you have acquired, as a student of social policy, to a piece of original research presented in an 12,000-word written dissertation or thesis.

If you decide to do a capstone in social policy, you will be required to conduct independent policy research and analysis under the guidance of a Supervisor in the School of Social Work and Social Policy.

Pre-requisites and co-requisites for undertaking a Capstone Project in Social Policy.

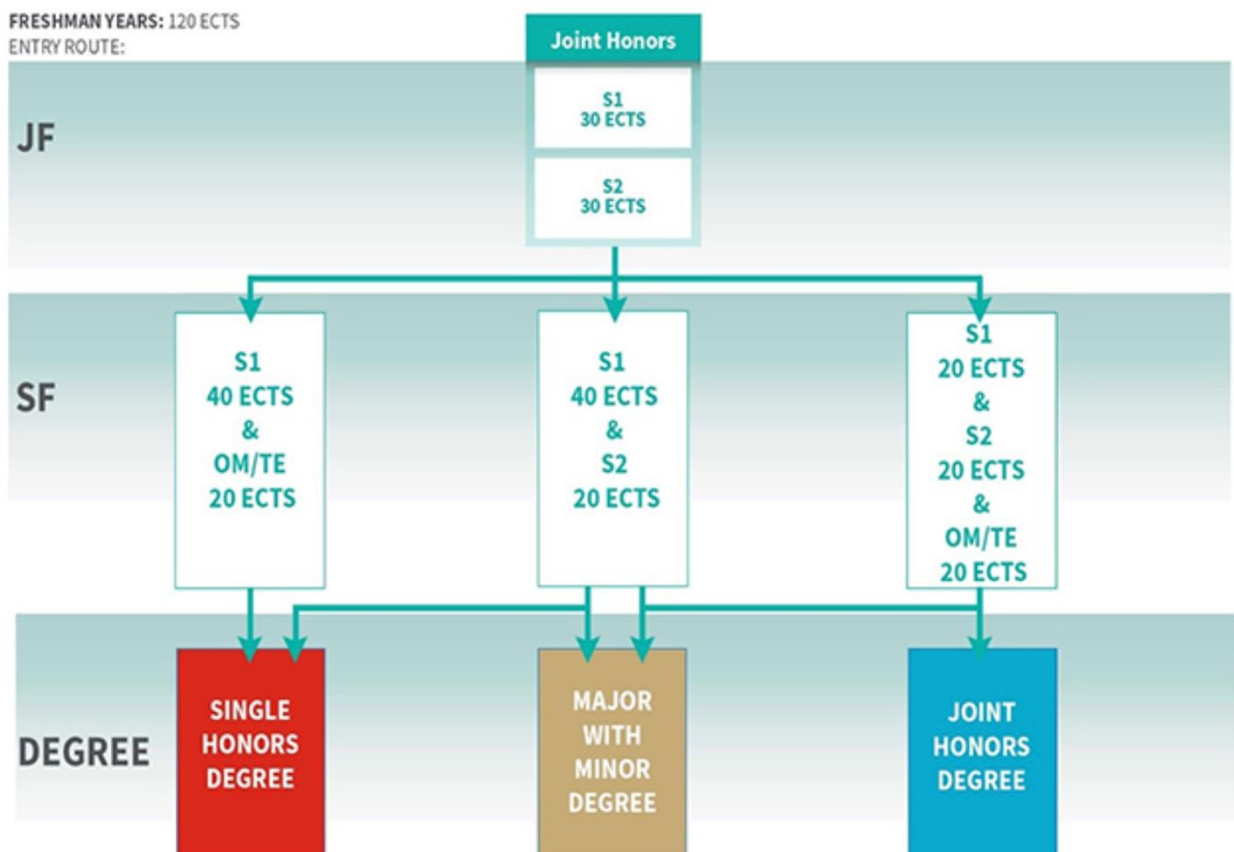
Selection of a Capstone Project in Social Policy is available to the following cohort of students:

- Students on the [Joint Honours Social Policy pathway](#) in 2024-2025.
- Social Policy Major, with Minor (A) Students (Social Policy Capstone is compulsory)
- Social Policy Major, with Minor (B) Students (Social Policy Capstone is compulsory)

All students wishing to undertake their CAPSTONE Project in Social Policy **MUST** take the **Capstone Research Methods module**, which will be taught in Semester 1 of Senior Sophister year.

Common Architecture

FRESHMAN YEARS: 120 ECTS
ENTRY ROUTE:



KEY: S1 - Subject 1 | S2 - Subject 2 | OM - Open Modules | TE - Trinity Electives | JF - Junior Freshman | SF - Senior Freshman

Learning objectives of a Capstone Project in Social Policy

Your capstone project in Social Policy will support you to:

1. Develop practical and critical knowledge of your chosen field;
2. Enhance your skills for identifying a research or policy problem and formulating appropriate research question(s);
3. Strengthen your critical appraisal and analytical skills relevant to undertaking a systematised review of the extant literature in your field and linking it with the research problem;
4. Strengthen your critical appraisal and analytical skills relevant to undertaking primary or secondary research and linking new findings back to existing literature and theories;
5. Reflect on and address ethical issues raised by the research project;
6. Reflect on and address the limitations of the research project;
7. Organise, structure and write a dissertation to a professional standard in the field of social policy.

How to select your topic in Social Policy

There are three options available to students who choose to undertake a capstone project in social policy:

1. You will **self-select** a topic and work with your Supervisor to refine your proposed topic and research questions;
2. You will select to work under the guidance of a Supervisor with expertise in a **thematic area of social policy in the School**;
3. You will select to work with an **active research project** that *may* be available in the School of Social Work and Social Policy¹.

Early in **Michaelmas Term 2024** you will be presented with thematic options or active research projects that you may wish to consider for your capstone project. Alternatively, you may select a topic of particular interest to you.

Allocation of Supervisors

Capstone Supervisors are allocated to guide your independent project by the Director of the Joint Honours Programme in Social Policy, **Dr Ann Nolan**, and the Capstone Module Leads, **Dr Paula Mayock and Dr Kasia Wodniak**. Supervisors will be allocated from among the staff of the School of Social Work and Social Policy. The dissertation is your own piece of work.

¹ Active research projects are grant funding and timeline dependent and may not always be available as a Capstone in Social Policy option.

The Role of the Social Policy CAPSTONE Supervisor

The role of the supervisor *is* to provide effective supervision in your field of study and to assist and provide guidance to you as you undertake your research project.

Your supervisor will advise you on research methods and skills, help you to refine your ideas, and give feedback on drafts of your dissertation.

It *is not* the role of your supervisor to design or execute your research, or to take responsibility for the writing or submission of your Capstone project.

All lecturing staff in the School of Social Work and Social Policy are qualified to provide undergraduate supervision and you may be assigned a supervisor who is not a specialist in the precise topic you have chosen.

While your project is an independent piece of research, your supervisor can decide to meet you on a one-to-one basis or in a group, particularly if your methodologies or themes are similar to other students.

What a Capstone in Social Policy involves

The Capstone project requires a significant level of independent research and is an integrative exercise allowing you to showcase skills and knowledge developed over your four years of study.

Social Policy Capstone projects are written dissertations of **12,000 words** involving, but not limited to,

1. Desk-based in-case and cross-case policy analysis;
2. Rapid Evidence Assessments (REA) or Systematised Reviews of the extant literature on a social policy theme or policy issue;
3. Original empirical research using quantitative, qualitative or mixed methodologies involving either analyses of existing data-sets or primary data collection.

One or more of these methods will be employed to research your topic of interest *or* your research under a thematic area *or* your research as part of an active research project in the School of Social Work and Social Policy.

Structure of the Capstone Project in Social Policy

The structure of the capstone dissertation in social policy will vary from project to project and there are many acceptable approaches among supervisors in the School of Social Work and Social Policy. You should always consult your own supervisor about the recommended structure of your project. Below is a one broad template of how a capstone project in social policy could be structured:

1. Joint Honours Social Policy Assignment Cover Sheet;
2. Abstract of no more than half a page (300 words) summarising the aims, theoretical approaches, methodology and main findings of your dissertation;
3. Table of contents page;
4. List of tables, figures, and acronyms if applicable;
5. Introduction, which states your research aims, and broadly introduces existing literature to justify and explain your research/policy problem or question(s);
6. Literature or scoping review chapter which includes a discussion of how national, regional and international policies, international evidence, and theoretical or conceptual knowledge informs your study;
7. Research methodology chapter with subsections that discuss and reflect on the research strategy/ design, access and sampling, data collection instruments, data analysis technique(s), ethical issues (including your own positioning) and limitations of your research;
8. Findings chapter(s) include the presentation of your results and a discussion that relates your findings to the theoretical aspects and literature identified earlier;
9. Conclusion, which evaluates the main findings, discusses implications for research, theory (and policy if applicable) and outlines avenues for future research;
10. Bibliography, in line with the departmental guidelines;
11. Appendices, including questionnaires, interview guide, coding frames and access letters where applicable.

Capstone Grading

Each capstone project will be read and evaluated by an academic who is not your supervisor and guided by the standards and benchmarks outlined in the School of Social Work and Social Policy's Capstone Assessment Matrix – see *Appendix A*. Senior Sophister dissertations will also be made available to the External Examiner at the Court of Examiners meeting held in Hilary term.

Please note a 5% penalty will be imposed on submissions that are in excess of 10% over the 12,000 allocated word count or 10% under the allocated word count.

Plagiarism

If you copy another student's work, engage someone to write your work, quote material from any published or electronic source without acknowledgement, or extensively paraphrase such material without acknowledgement, you have committed plagiarism.

Trinity College Dublin's definition of plagiarism and specification of its consequences can be viewed here <https://libguides.tcd.ie/academic-integrity>. These webpages are designed to help you to understand what plagiarism is and to employ the principles of academic integrity so as to avoid plagiarizing. They also set out the regulations in Trinity relating to plagiarism offences and how they are dealt with. The College Calendar defines plagiarism, gives examples of the kinds of actions that are deemed to constitute plagiarism, and elaborates on the procedures for dealing with plagiarism cases. It is essential that you read the Calendar entry that is relevant to you as an undergraduate student. You should also look at the [matrix](#) that explains the different levels of plagiarism and how they are dealt with in Trinity.

This is a helpful source of guidance on citation styles:

<https://libguides.tcd.ie/plagiarism/citation-styles>

All students must complete the Ready Steady Write plagiarism tutorial <https://libguides.tcd.ie/plagiarism/ready-steady-write> and sign a declaration when submitting course work, confirming that you understand what plagiarism is and that you have completed the tutorial.

If you read the information on plagiarism, complete the tutorial and still have difficulty understanding what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, please seek advice from your College tutor, your Course Directors, Student Learning Development or your capstone supervisor https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/student-learning/

The Joint Honours Course Administrator will email the plagiarism declaration to you for completion and submission to Blackboard with your capstone project. **All capstone submissions in social policy must have the plagiarism declaration attached.**

Accessibility and Support

The School of Social Work and Social Policy is committed to an inclusive learning environment for all of our students. One of the ways we do this is through working closely with the Trinity Disability Service. If you have a disability, a mental health condition, or an ongoing illness or medical condition, the Disability Service is there to support you.

Through registering with the Disability Service, you will be able to discuss your experience of and needs in College, including accommodations in learning and exams. The Disability Service can then tell us, while respecting your confidentiality at all times, whether there are changes we can make to teaching and assessment which will support you.

For more information on the Disability Service and how to register, please visit www.tcd.ie/disability or contact your Tutor, who will advise and assist you.

Capstone project contacts

Role	Name	Email
Director of the Joint Honours Programme	Dr Ann Nolan	nolana13@tcd.ie
Capstone Module Leads	Dr Paula Mayock Dr Kasia Wodniak	PMAYOCK@tcd.ie KWODNIAK@tcd.ie

Appendix A School of Social Work and Social Policy Assessment Matrix

First class honors | 70-100

First class honors in the School of Social Work and Social Policy are divided into grade bands which represent excellent, outstanding, and extraordinary performances.

A first-class answer demonstrates a comprehensive and accurate answer to the question, which exhibits a detailed knowledge of the relevant material as well as a broad base of knowledge.

Theory and evidence will be well integrated, and the selection of sources, ideas, methods or techniques will be well judged and appropriately organised to address the relevant issue or problem. It will demonstrate a high level of ability to evaluate and integrate information and ideas, to deal with knowledge in a critical way, and to reason and argue in a logical way.

70-76 EXCELLENT

First class answers (excellent) demonstrate several the following criteria:

- comprehensiveness and accuracy.
- clarity of argument and quality of expression.
- excellent structure and organization.
- integration of a range of relevant materials.
- evidence of wide reading.
- critical evaluation.
- lacks errors of any significant kind.
- shows some original connections of concepts and theories.
- contains reasoned argument and comes to a logical conclusion.

This answer does not demonstrate outstanding performance in terms of independence and originality.

77-84 OUTSTANDING

In addition to the above criteria, an outstanding answer will show frequent original treatment of material. Work at this level shows independence of judgement, exhibits sound critical thinking. It will frequently demonstrate characteristics such as imagination, originality and creativity. This answer does not demonstrate exceptional performance in terms of insight and contribution to new knowledge.

85-100 EXTRAORDINARY

This answer is of a standard far more than what is expected of an undergraduate student. It will show frequent originality of thought, a sophisticated insight into the subject and make new connections between pieces of evidence beyond those presented in lectures. It demonstrates an ability to apply learning to new situations and to solve problems. What differentiates a first-class piece of work from one awarded an upper second is a greater lucidity, a greater independence of judgement, a greater depth of insight and degree of

originality, more evidence of an ability to integrate material, and evidence of a greater breadth of reading and research.

Second Class, First Division II.1 60-69

An upper second class answer generally shows a sound understanding of both the basic principles and relevant details, supported by examples, which are demonstrably well understood, and which are presented in a coherent and logical fashion. The answer should be well presented, display some analytical ability, and contain no major errors of omissions. Not necessarily excellent in any area.

Upper second-class answers cover a wider band of students. Such answers are clearly highly competent and typically possess the following qualities:

- accurate and well-informed.
- comprehensive.
- well-organised and structured.
- evidence of reading.
- a sound grasp of basic principles.
- understanding of the relevant details.
- succinct and cogent presentation; and
- evaluation of material although these evaluations may be derivative.

One essential aspect of an upper second-class answer is that it must have completely dealt with the question asked by the examiner. In questions:

- all the major issues and most of the minor issues must have been identified.
 - the application of basic principles must be accurate and comprehensive; and
 - there should be a conclusion that weighs up the pros and cons of the arguments.
-

Second Class. Second Division II.2 50-59

A substantially correct answer which shows an understanding of the basic principles.

Lower second-class answers display an acceptable level of competence, as indicated by the following qualities:

generally accurate.

- an adequate answer to the question based largely on textbooks and lecture notes.
 - clearly presentation; and
 - no real development of arguments.
-

Third Class Honors III 40-49

A basic understanding of the main issues if not necessarily coherently or correctly presented.

Third class answers demonstrate some knowledge of understanding of the general area, but a third-class answer tends to be weak in the following ways:

- descriptive only.
 - does not answer the question directly.
 - misses key points of information and interpretation.
 - contains serious inaccuracies.
 - sparse coverage of material; and
 - assertions not supported by argument or evidence.
-

Fail F1 30-39

Answers in the range usually contain some appropriate material (poorly organised) and some evidence that the student has attended lectures and done a bare minimum of reading. The characteristics of a fail grade include:

- misunderstanding of basic material.
 - failure to answer the question set.
 - totally inadequate information; and
 - incoherent presentation.
-

Bad Fail F2 0-29

Answers in this range contain virtually no appropriate material and an inadequate understanding of basic concepts.

Overall Grade: General

The following conventions apply to all years.

- i. The overall mark (and associated grade) for a year is the weighted average of all module results, using the ECTS credit rating for the weighting of each module.
- ii. To rise with their year, a student must pass (>40%) all modules worth in total 60 credits or pass by compensation. To pass by compensation a student must have an overall arithmetic mean of 40+ and pass modules totaling 50 credits and get a mark of 35+ (Qualified Pass) in any failed module(s).
- iii. If a student has achieved both Fail and Qualified Pass marks in the Semester 1 and 2 assessments, they must present in the supplemental session for reassessment in the modules for which they obtained a Qualified Pass or Fail.
- iv. The marks of the assessments passed in the Semester 1 and 2 examinations are considered together with those obtained in the Supplemental assessments. The standard compensation rules apply to this combined set of results.
- v. In the case of students who have been given permission to withdraw from or defer all or part of the annual assessments and to sit a supplemental assessment in that year, the overall result in the Autumn will be graded.
- vi. In the case of students who are reassessed in Semester 1 or Semester 2, the overall result in the autumn will be graded. Two attempts at the assessment will be recorded on Transcripts of Results.