

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and  
Social Sciences  
Quality Report 2014

## 1: Statement from Dean

The Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Quality Report 2014 was compiled using submissions from each of the Faculty's twelve Schools, and was discussed at length at a special meeting of the Faculty Executive on Thursday 27 November 2014, with the participation of Roisín Smith, the College Quality Officer. The Faculty Executive found this exercise to be a valuable process as a way of gathering and discussing ideas and ensuring best practice.

As a Faculty, we are generally happy with the quality assurance procedures in place. The percentage of modules being evaluated is very high: 98% at UG level and 94% at PG. We were satisfied with the explanations provided for why certain modules were not evaluated at this relatively early stage of the process, and note that procedures are in place to ensure that all modules are evaluated from 2014-15 onwards.

In keeping with its large and diverse nature, the Faculty has adopted a wide range of data gathering methods, from online surveys to class feedback sessions to much else besides. The Faculty is happy with this methodological diversity, feeling that it has grown up in response to the specific needs of its wide variety of modules. By the same token, the Faculty has developed a wide variety of methods for discussing results, and for providing student feedback, each of which works in relation to the specific needs of its discipline or module. (See Report below for more details.)

In receiving its submissions from the Schools, the Faculty compiled an extensive list of best practice suggestions. These were discussed at length in the Faculty Executive Quality meeting, with a view to implementing certain practices more broadly across the Faculty as a whole. The Faculty Executive agreed to set aside part of the remaining meetings this year, and meetings in subsequent years, to discuss Quality issues, and particularly the implementation of best practice, which we understand as an ongoing conversation between Schools.

However, the Faculty also identified a set of concerns raised by the Quality process which are clearly beyond our competence as a Faculty to deal with, and which therefore need to be escalated to College level. One particular area of concern discussed was the timely return of External Examiners' reports. These can come in very late indeed – far too late to be acted upon in any timely fashion for the following academic year. Sometimes this is because of the tardiness of individual examiners, but sometimes this appears to be because the reports are not being swiftly processed by the College, or not being sent to the appropriate members of staff.

Prof Darryl Jones  
Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

## 2: Issues to be escalated to College Level

- 2.1 A number of schools reported ongoing complaints from students with regards to appropriate teaching and learning spaces in the Arts Building. Complaints were received about windowless rooms and facilities being inadequate. There is also need for more small-group teaching rooms. Also, students would prefer to have all lectures in Arts Building (this could be improved with improved timetabling system/procedures).
- 2.2 English skills of PG students – one Chinese student has to have another one translate to her during lectures. UCD has just introduced skype interviews in an effort to tackle this problem, however schools would need support to initiate and organise the logistics of this.
- 2.3 External examiners frequently characterise TCD's (I / II.1 / II.2 etc.) marking scheme as 'irrational' (and worse), particularly since the First bracket encompasses 31 marks where the others encompass only 10. However, the Faculty's understanding is that this is an institutional issue outside its control. A College-wide marking scale should be agreed.
- 2.4 Feedback on College-wide services to students is not currently picked up through School evaluations.
- 2.5 It is proving difficult to schedule External Examiners visits due to i) late examination slots for some key examination papers ii) the need for the Department to run two examination systems simultaneously (SITS + Excel) in order to prepare marks for the Departmental Exam Board iii) having to comply with five different programme deadlines, none of which takes the others into account. Problems associated with SITS must be recognised and dealt with at College level.
- 2.6 More help should be offered to international students (particularly from outside EU) on a college level with practical guidelines and tips on living in Ireland.
- 2.7 Timely receipt of feedback on assignments submitted was raised as an issue. While the Faculty welcomed the new College Policy, there may be difficulty in returning timely feedback with increasing student numbers and student-staff ratios.
- 2.8 There is often too much of a time lag in receiving External Examiners reports. Greater streamlining of the provision of reports is necessary. Also further clarification of who External Examiners reports should be circulated to from central college – one suggestion is that all reports should be copied to School Administrators who are best placed to know who they should be forwarded to within their own school.
- 2.9 The turnaround time for exams, Court of Examiners, Court of First Appeals and Academic Appeals is reaching crisis point. The Faculty is concerned that the integrity of the Appeals process is being affected by the huge rush to get cases through.

### 3: Summary of best practice across the Faculty

Examples of good practice from Schools within the Faculty include, but are not limited to the following:

- 3.1 Having a School-wide policy of responding to emails from students, setting out target response times.
- 3.2 Introduction of an Assessment Forum where all staff are encouraged to reflect upon how modules are assessed.
- 3.3 Increased emphasis on dynamic and interactive methods of engagement with students.
- 3.4 Programme level student evaluation introduced for BESS and to be extended to other programmes.
- 3.5 Development of a form for tracking the process of module evaluation to ensure that responsibility for implementation of necessary actions is clearly identified.
- 3.6 Students given an Entry Survey (paper-based survey) on entry to a Masters course. This survey seeks information on their primary motivation for undertaking the Masters, what they would like to achieve at the end of the Masters and the challenges that they foresee in completing the course.
- 3.7 One school reported that this year it is introducing a session, as part of its research methodology tutorial series, in which colleagues will introduce the kinds of topics that they conduct research on and/or have supervised in the past. This is by way of guidance to students on feasible dissertation topics, and will be delivered at a time when they are seriously turning their minds to topic choice (end of MT).
- 3.8 Introducing item on agenda of first staff meeting of academic year where external examiner reports are discussed with academic staff.
- 3.9 External examiners meeting student representatives, introduced in response to a recommendation by one external examiner.
- 3.10 Including specific evaluation questions on student evaluations to determine the extent to which online teaching tools were used and student satisfaction with same.
- 3.11 Issues highlighted through evaluations to be discussed at Course Directors Forum set up between two schools running a joint programme.
- 3.12 Where external lecturers are used, Course Directors make a point of seeking private feedback alongside the survey data. This has proven very effective from the point of view of coaching some instructors, and in some cases terminating appointments.
- 3.13 One School is reviewing how it uses its Masters External Examiners in much the same way that it has traditionally used External Examiners on the undergraduate programmes. That 'traditional' Trinity model involves sending all module examination papers for review each semester, expecting externals to review too many scripts and in some cases to adjudicate on grades where internal Examiners present grades at the margin of grade classes. This School feels that this model of External Examiner engagement has occurred without sufficient thought as to effective use of External Examiners at Masters level. In a multi-discipline Masters, an External Examiner will (typically) not have expertise on more than two of the modules being examined. It feels that it should restructure entirely the way that it engages with Masters External Examiners. Instead of reviewing proposed module examination papers, and reviewing scripts across all modules, it believes that the External Examiner should be reviewing the module content, the course curriculum, the subject coverage, and

the overall standards. For example, the review of examination papers can be conducted during the External Examiner's visit (after the examination has been sat), and advice about the style/structure of examining taken on board for subsequent examination papers.

- 3.14 For term-long and year-long courses, to improve response rates, a change has been instituted in 2014-15 to open surveys from Reading Week onward and send various reminders of the possibility of feedback.
- 3.15 Introduction of a Peer Mentoring programme in which students from a higher year support students from a lower year within a particular course.
- 3.16 Student Engagement during full day lectures (7 hours) increased through the use of group project work, multiple-choice quiz reviews in pairs to recap each topic covered, video footage and case formulation in-class activities, and student handbooks to accompany specific practical modules.
- 3.17 External Examiners informed about changes made as a result of their (or previous external examiner's) recommendations.
- 3.18 One School reported having a Quality Assurance sub-committee in the School (Academic Standards and Quality Control) to approve changes to modules and new course proposals and to receive detailed reports on each subject area, including external examiner's feedback and action points in response and this committee will handle student feedback and evaluation issues next year.

Many other excellent enhancements were mentioned, but were not transferable across other departments (e.g. changes to specific modules, or assessment weightings), so are not included.

#### 4: Proposed improvements in the quality process at a College and Faculty level for 2014-15

- 4.1 The Faculty Executive agreed that Postgraduate Research students should be included in this process in the future, with Schools being asked to report on their quality procedures around this category of student.
- 4.2 Schools should be asked to report on how they capture feedback from external examiners during the Courts of Examiners.
- 4.3 The Faculty Executive would prefer it if it could report to a later Quality Committee, as October/November is a very busy period in Schools and Faculties. Some PGT evaluations are only completed early in October, and many external examiner reports have not yet been received.

## Section 5: FAHSS at a glance

### 5.1 Undergraduate summary

Number of UG modules running in AHSS in 2013-14	1114
Number of UG modules evaluated	1091 (98%)
Are procedures in place to ensure all modules are evaluated in 2014-15?	Valid explanations were provided for all evaluations not carried out in 2013-14. The Faculty Executive confirmed that procedures are in place to ensure all modules are evaluated in 2014-15.
Types of data gathering used	There are a wide variety of methods used for student evaluations within the Faculty. Some schools use online surveys, but in general the response rate tends to be lower for these. Many schools also use classroom-based paper surveys. There was some discussion around whether the lecturer should be present while the surveys are being filled out. The UG student representative reported that students like to discuss these as they are filling them out and may be less willing to do so if the lecturer is present, although she did also express concern that some students may not complete the forms if they are not being supervised. The timing of the surveys was also discussed, and some schools have started opening the surveys in the middle of the term to increase response rates, or having mid-term reviews as well as end of term module evaluations. Students also provide feedback through their student representatives, who attend various committees within Schools.
Where are results discussed?	Results are discussed in a wide variety of forums within different Schools, and the Faculty Executive felt that Schools should continue to be allowed to decide this for themselves. The PG student representative wondered whether student feedback fed into staff promotion procedures, but the AHSS Faculty Executive would not welcome or support that in TCD.
Feedback methods to students	The Faculty Executive felt that this was a weakness within the College in general. This was supported by the UG student representative, who felt that more regular feedback would improve response rates for evaluations. Some innovative ideas were highlighted, such as the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy's 'You said...we did' section on their website. Feedback is also passed back to students via student representatives. Due to the timing of many evaluations at the end of the academic year, some schools provide feedback to the incoming cohort about changes made as a result of feedback from the previous cohort of students. Schools, of course, reserve the right not to make changes requested by students, but the reasons for this should where possible be fed back to the students.

## 5.2 Postgraduate summary

Number of PG modules running in AHSS in 2013-14	424
Number of PG modules evaluated	400 (94%)
Are procedures in place to ensure all modules are evaluated in 2014-15?	Valid explanations were provided for all evaluations not carried out in 2013-14. The Faculty Executive confirmed that procedures are in place to ensure all modules are evaluated in 2014-15.
Types of data gathering used	The same types of data gathering were used as for undergraduate students. However, many schools do not carry out evaluations of PGR students and quality assurance processes for these students should be improved.
Where are results discussed?	Results are discussed in the same way as for the UG students.
Feedback methods to students	Feedback methods are the same as for UG students.

## 5.3 External Examiners Summary

Number of External Examinations conducted	2012-13: 96 2013-14: 90
Number of external examiners reports returned	2012-13: 86% 2013-14: 69%
Summary of how external examiners are appointed	The methods by which external examiners are appointed varied at a School level, although all are approved by Senior Lecturer/Dean of Graduate Studies. The Faculty Executive did not raise any issues around this procedure.
Summary of how feedback is given to stakeholders	The methods by which feedback is given to stakeholders varied at a School level. The Faculty Executive felt that the process could be improved at a College level, as there are often delays in receiving the reports, and they are not always sent to the correct people. One suggestion is that School Administrators are copied, as they know the correct people to forward them to.

#### 5.4 Accreditation summary

Discipline/Programme		
MBA	Date of visit	2010
	Accrediting Body	AMBA
	Duration of accreditation cycle	5 Years
PME	Date of visit	Sept 2013
	Accrediting Body	Teaching Council
	Duration of accreditation cycle	3 years
B.Mus.Ed	Date of visit	June 2013
	Accrediting Body	Teaching Council
	Duration of accreditation cycle	3 years
Doctorate in Counselling Psychology	Date of visit	20 June 2014
	Accrediting Body	Psychological Society of Ireland
	Duration of accreditation cycle	Accredited until 2018
Bachelor in Social Studies	Date of visit	March 2012
	Accrediting Body	CORU
	Duration of accreditation cycle	5 Years
Masters in Social Work	Date of visit	April 2014
	Accrediting Body	CORU
	Duration of accreditation cycle	5 Years

**Note:** As the Speech and Language Therapists registration process opens for the first time in October 2014, the initial phase of accreditation, **Approval of Qualification** by CORU took place in the academic year 2013-14, with full accreditation processes to follow in 2014-15. It is likely that the professional association, the IASLT will also undertake an accreditation process in 2014-15.

### 5.5 Quality Review summary

List of Schools/Programmes subject to Quality Review in 2013-14	School of Social Work & Social Policy (Review date 4-6 November 2013)
List of Review Reports presented to Quality Committee in 2013-14	School of Social Work & Social Policy - presented to QC on the 20 March 2014
List of Implementation Plans presented to Quality Committee in 2013-14	School of Social Work & Social Policy - presented to QC on the 22 May 2014
List of Progress Reports presented to Quality Committee in 2013-14	None
List of Schools/Programmes scheduled for a Quality Review in 2014-15	School of Education (Review date 9-11 February 2015) School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies (Review date 12-14 November 2014)

#### College-wide issues identified in Quality Review Reports in 2013-14:

School of Social Work & Social Policy (Review date 4-6 November 2013)

##### HR/staffing

- Impact of staff retirements on teaching commitments

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##### Space

- Conduct space needs analysis