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

CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL FACULTY QUALITY REPORT 2020/21

1. Introduction

The Annual Faculty Quality Reports (AFQRs) were introduced in 2013/14 as part of the Framework for Quality at Trinity which brings together the elements that form the focus of quality assurance activity in Trinity in terms of ongoing self-evaluation and monitoring. The draft reports are discussed at a designated Annual Faculty Quality Executive meeting before being submitted to the Quality Committee (QC) for consideration. Individual AFQRs along with a Consolidated Report are submitted to Council for approval and published on the Quality Office website.
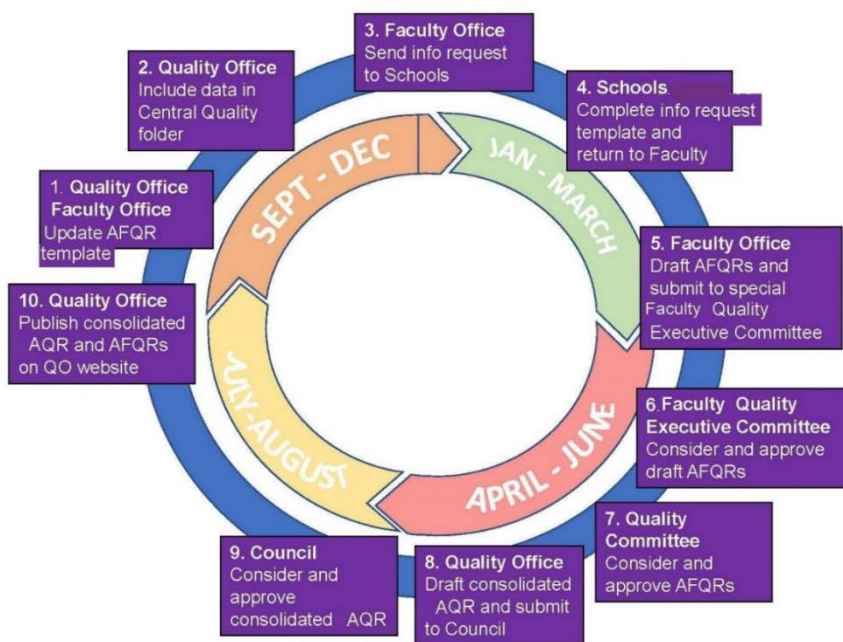

Figure 1: Process for the development of the Annual Faculty Quality Report (AFQR)

Figure 1 above outlines the cyclical process that supports the development, reporting and approval of the AFQRs. The development process is led by the three Faculty Administrators (AHSS, STEM and HS), in consultation with the Faculty Deans, Quality Office and the Schools.

In Michaelmas Term 2021, the annual review of the information request template to Schools (which informs the AFQR) resulted in (i) a significant reduction in the volume of data requested for 2020/21 to reflect the increase in workload arising from the pandemic and to refocus the reports on quality and (ii) a request that Schools highlight three key high-level issues for escalation to College and three quality enhancement initiatives in their 2020/21 reports.

The 2020/21 AFQRs were considered by the Quality Committee on the 14 April 2022. In May 2022, following Council's considerations and decision *(CL/21-22/006.1; QC/21-22/006.ii)* arising from the 2020/2021 Consolidated Report, the Faculty Deans, in consultation with the Quality Office, agreed on a number of key, high-level issues raised in the reports for escalation to Council, detailed in section 2 below.

2. Issues for escalation by the Faculty Deans to Council

The Faculty Deans identify the following key issues as having a negative impact on the ability of Trinity to deliver on its academic mission:

2.1   Maintenance of Physical Learning Spaces

2.1.1   The impact of the poor quality of some teaching/learning, social and breakout spaces on the student experience and on Trinity's reputation.

2.1.2   A lack of clarity around who has responsibility for funding the ongoing maintenance of existing teaching/learning and social spaces, particularly those that are shared between Faculties.

2.1.3   Identification of funding for mid-size capital upgrade/maintenance projects to address long-standing issues with e.g. Goldsmith Hall that have a negative impact on high numbers of freshman students in Sciences and Health Science disciplines.

2.1.4   The restriction to growth in student numbers resulting from the inability to provide additional new space or to reconfigure current space.

> The Deans would like to highlight the difficulty around how shared spaces are maintained and used, particularly in a multi usage and cross-school/faculty occupancy building, to Council for consideration.
>
> The Deans would welcome a long-term, workable strategy to address the use, access and sharing of space. They would also like to have oversight of the Faculty's accommodation footprint via the College's space atlas and to determine the density of occupation and the population of existing spaces.

2.2   IT Infrastructure and systems

2.2.1   The inflexibility of Trinity's IT systems and system processes, which are based around programme architectures rather than around modules, leading to implementation challenges to module enrollment, modular billing, fixed timetable etc.

2.2.2   The standard of the IT Infrastructure in teaching spaces - including equipment, software upgrades, that impact on the delivery of teaching and highlights the need for readily accessible IT technical support for academic teaching staff/venues.

2.2.3   As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic experience, the following IT system issues have been exacerbated:

   2.2.3.1 The functionality and storage capacity of the VLE;

   2.2.3.2 Provision of Proctoring software for online exams.

   2.2.3.3 Standardisation of processes for recording of lectures and the length of time they are available for.

The Deans would like to recommend that a College-level root-and-branch review of some IT systems is undertaken and a protocol developed for the standard expected for the physical and IT infrastructure for teaching spaces across all sites, for the benefit of all staff involved and to improve the overall student experience.

2.3 Recruitment and retention of External Examiners

2.3.1. Faculties report difficulties in the recruitment and retention of External Examiners arising from a perceived increase in workload resulting from semesterisation and an increase in multi-disciplinary programmes requiring input/attendance at multiple Courts of Examiners.

2.3.2. The level of remuneration paid to External Examiners has not been increased since 2015 and is further eroded by the new Irish Revenue requirement for non-Irish examiners to apply for a PPS number.

The Deans acknowledge a commitment by the Senior Lecturer and Dean of Graduate Studies to review the External Examiner Policy and supporting practices and processes to address the recruitment and retention of External Examiners in 2022/23.

2.4 Student Evaluation System

2.4.1. The Deans identified capacity issues to support mandatory student module evaluations as an issue for Schools, in particular the energy expanded on this process, in light of recurrent low response rates to module evaluations.

2.4.2. 2020/21 was the first year that Open Module evaluations were undertaken. Schools identified (i) low response rates to Open Module evaluations; (ii) implementation challenges arising from the use of a separate student evaluation survey for Open Modules (USC approved) as students taking Open Modules are in the same class as students taken the module as a Core Module in their programme.

The Deans would like system support for Student Module evaluations.

2.5 Issues of concern to the Faculty Deans that require ongoing monitoring

The Faculty Deans would like to highlight the following additional issues as requiring ongoing monitoring at College level.

2.5.1. Resources – this includes process issues around staff recruitment and retention; staff:student ratios particularly in some Schools/disciplines; the ability to support sophister student capstone projects with Supervisors; and funding support for Capstone projects in STEM.

2.5.2. Academic Year Structure – semesterisation has led to an increased number of exams, which has led to increased pressure on External Examiners and on Schools to meet the tight turnaround time for marking and conduct of Courts of Examiners.

2.5.3. Timetabling challenges arising from the TEP architecture, in particular for some disciplines.

2.5.4. Provision of additional resourcing to the Student Counselling Service to support student mental health.

3 Faculty-specific enhancements and challenges

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Key enhancements

Seven Schools in AHSS have been awarded Athena Swan Bronze awards since 2020.

The Faculty reported that one advantage of the move to online teaching was being able to offer courses, particularly PGT, to a wider audience. Another was the ability to engage international guest speakers who might not usually be accessible.

Many innovative methods of communication were used to keep students engaged and reduce social isolation during the pandemic. For example, the **School of Creative Arts** engaged with PGR students through a dedicated WhatsApp group and online Research Forum. The School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences (LSCS) had a weekly drop-in Zoom space, where a staff member was available.

The **School of Social Work and Social Policy** (SWSP) developed a hybrid module of placement practice, which was adopted by all Irish Universities, led by the team in Trinity.

A new Research Design module was developed in **Histories and Humanities** in response to External Examiner (EE) recommendations, which has had a positive impact on the quality of dissertations.

The **School of Social Sciences and Philosophy** developed a pilot for a non-credit bearing internship programme, aimed at enabling students to apply their studies outside academia and to bring relevant real-world experience to bear on their studies.

Specific challenges

- One of the items which raised the most concern at the Faculty Executive was the **poor response rates to student evaluations** and whether or not data could be used to draw any conclusions. The Faculty also urges a review of student feedback for open modules, as return rates for these were particularly low.
- In 2020/21, the **School of Education** reported variation and inconsistency of approach in different schools to the role of students on initial teaching training placement, which was challenging for them. This included whether they were going to be face-to-face or online, whether the role included taking on additional duties such as corridor and yard supervision or taking on additional teaching cover when teachers were out sick.

Health Sciences

Key enhancements

Health Sciences was very responsive to Covid-19 vaccine requirements for students on clinical placements during the pandemic. A Policy on Covid-19 Vaccination for Students in Clinical Placements or Placements in Allied Settings, developed in 2020/21 by the then Dean of Health Sciences, allowed clinical placements to continue.

The **School of Medicine received its bronze Athena SWAN award in 2021**, the first School in the Faculty to do so. School of Medicine staff were awarded two of the six Provost's Trinity Excellence in Teaching Awards for 2020-21.

In 2020/21, the **Dental School** developed a module on resilience to prepare undergraduate students for the clinical workplace environment, with funding from the National Forum for Teaching & Learning.

Significant enhancements were made by the **School of Nursing and Midwifery** to their online offerings throughout the pandemic, including the development of simulated learning modules to compensate for specialised clinical placements that could not be accessed due to Covid-19. The School developed and implemented a comprehensive Blackboard Module Template Procedures and Guidelines document designed to support a systematic and efficient approach to module management, delivery and navigation within and between Blackboard modules.

The **School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences** embarked on the digital transformation of its MSc/Dip in Pharmaceutical Manufacturing in 2020/21 and the new online programme commenced in January 2022. A voluntary innovation masterclass in Tangent was introduced in 2020/21 for Year 5 students on the integrated M.Pharm. It aims to reinforce and enhance learning in innovation and leadership already embedded in the degree for future pharmacists.

Specific challenges

- Medical Schools have been approached by Government to take **an additional 20 Irish/EU students**, replacing the same number of Non-Eu students, but at half the funding. If accepted this would lead to a loss of €2-3M per year, with a subsequent knock-on reduction in the quality of the course. A sectoral response from the IUA and the IMSC has rejected the offer, while remaining in favour of an increase in Irish/EU students.

- The new consultant contracts being promoted under SláinteCare do not contain any **contractual obligation or support for consultants to engage in teaching**. Without such a contractual provision, the ongoing difficulties in ensuring quality across all clinical teaching sites remains a risk. Currently, many clinical staff provide critical teaching to Trinity students, without payment, but it is uncertain whether this will continue under the new contract.

- **Poor Wi-Fi coverage** on satellite sites has been identified as a risk to the students' learning experience, particularly with an increased reliance on online course materials. Wi-Fi coverage is particularly poor within DDUH, impacting on undergraduate and postgraduate students alike. The provision of Trinity WiFi in the Coombe Women's & Children's Hospital is now underway after more than four years lead time to resolve this critical quality issue.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Key enhancements

Three Schools were awarded Athena SWAN bronze awards in 2021 – Engineering, Computer Science and Statistics and Biochemistry and Immunology.

The Faculty continued to drive a number of significant capital (e.g. E3 Learning Foundry) and infrastructure projects (e.g. those funded through SFI and the Ryanair Sustainable Aviation Centre) in 2020/21.

Existing and potential partnerships are being developed with Global relations (e.g. targeting MENA and South East Asia) and many of the Faculty's activities are gaining philanthropic (6 philanthropically supported posts created across the Faculty) and industry support (e.g. Microsoft Ireland MSc and THREE UG student scholarships).

In 2021, the Power Bi tool for checking, recording and visualizing registered student FTEs in courses across the Faculty was introduced. This has provided a valuable source of data for School planning and for a consistent review of data across multiple years. It has also allowed schools to identify errors in the distribution of SFTEs in open and shared modules, particularly as they effect the different Science course streams in freshmen years.

Schools in the Faculty adapted and innovated in response to the pandemic. In **Physics**, the role of Year Head was re-defined and re-energised in order to improve rapid communications to students. **Chemistry** prioritized the delivery of practical laboratory classes for students and doubled the number of laboratory sessions, so that that student numbers in each lab were reduced. **Mathematics** provided final year project students with one-to-one online zoom sessions to support them during their projects. Hamilton Summer internships and an online poster session were run remotely in 2020/2021. The School of **Engineering** invested in an upgrade of teaching facilities to accommodate an improved space for face-to-face delivery in the Museum Building.

Specific challenges

• The **recruitment and retention of external examiners** (EEs) is becoming more difficult due to the increased workload associated with the role, the administrative burden required for applying for a PPS number, and the small fee that EEs receive. Additionally, the move to online courts of examiners has reduced the opportunity for EEs to meet with peers and to network professionally.

• There are a number of **timetabling challenges** faced by some Schools in the Faculty arising from the TEP architecture and the lack of a student-first approach by the central timetabling unit (CTU) in the allocation of lecture or practical slots

• STEM schools would welcome a resolution of the **issues preventing well qualified postdoctoral staff from undertaking teaching and supervision duties**. It is felt that students would benefit greatly from an exposure to the work of the post-doctoral staff and many such staff are keen to gain essential teaching experience to advance their academic careers.

• The **closure of food outlets** in the East End of College (e.g. Hamilton Building and Science Gallery Café), which house STEM student lecture theatres and teaching activities, has resulted in a deterioration in the student experience and a reduction in availability of facilities. These closures and the on-going building and construction work at this end of campus are not providing an environment conducive to learning.

Analysis of quantitative data (Refer Table 1)

Module evaluations

Undergraduate module evaluation rates in 2020/21 varied across the Faculties, with 95% evaluated in AHSS, 90% in HS and 79% in STEM, a significant reduction on the 92% evaluated in 2019/20. This may be explained by the increase in UG modules in STEM from 511 in 2019/20 to 598 in 2020/21 and the use of face-to-face feedback (e.g. by meeting class and student representatives), which can be difficult to quantify. The rate of postgraduate evaluations was above 90% for all three Faculties.

A range of feedback mechanisms was reported across all Schools and the Health Sciences Faculty suggested that an audit of this range be undertaken with a view to sharing best practices, increasing response rates and developing internal consistency. The Faculty also requested that institutional investment in a centralised student evaluation system be considered.

Actions taken in response to issues raised by students included a workload mapping exercise of Student CA workload in Year 3 ICS (CSS) and a restructuring of the Private Law Remedies module in Law, separating it into two separate 5 ECTS modules, one of which is a skills-based mooting module.

Response rates to evaluations of undergraduate and postgraduate modules were low. Feedback mechanisms and response rates were two of the main areas of concern at the Faculty Quality Executive and suggestions for improvement included (i) shortening the online surveys; (ii) ensuring that the first question is whether the student is happy with the module, and giving the option not to provide further feedback if they don't wish to; (ii) having one survey per year of a course, with questions relating to different modules included; (iv) use of Student/Staff liaison groups rather than surveys; trying different survey software, e.g. Qualtrics

This was the first year in which Open Modules were evaluated and while the response rates were generally low, useful feedback from students obtained. For example, the Constitutional Law II module is the only "Law" module offered as an Open Module. 50% of the cohort found it too challenging and the majority would not recommend it. Feedback from students taking it as an Open Module differed greatly from Law student's experience of it and they seemed to struggle with it. Accordingly, it was not offered in 2021/22 as an Open Module.

External Examiner reports

External Examiners from all Faculties were highly complementary of Schools' ability to mobilise online platforms during Covid-19 and to support their students.

The percentage return of UG EE reports was lower in HS and STEM in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20 (64% vs 93% and 94% vs 100% respectively) but largely unchanged in AHSS (93% vs 92%). In Health Sciences, this was due to a low rate of return in Medicine (38%) at the time of compiling the AFQR as External Examiners in Medicine don't submit their reports until after supplemental pass/fail vivas at the very end of the academic year. In STEM, the Faculty reported issues in relation to numerical agreement between the number of EE Reports expected by the Quality Office and the number expected by the Schools. They suggest that, in some cases, this is due to an examiner providing one report in relation to a multi-school programme. A possible resolution of this issue might be the creation of a centralized system to manage External Examiner Reports (thereby avoiding any duplicate counting of reports relating to multi-school programmes).

Most External Examiners had or requested access to Blackboard modules, and Courts of Examiners took place online in 2020/21. This reduced costs for Schools and also lowered the carbon footprint. All Faculties, however, reported difficulty in securing and retaining external examiners.

Progression & Retention

In 2020/21, there was an overall retention rate of 96%, which was consistent with 2019/20. Retention is defined as students who progressed, repeated year 1 or who transferred to another course within Trinity. A lower proportion of students progressed to the same course in 2020/21 (92%) compared to the prior year (94%) while a higher proportion (2%) repeated the same course (2019/20: 0.4%). In 2020/21, 2% of students transferred to another course, consistent with 2019/20.

In 2020/21 the overall progression rate by Faculty was relatively unchanged from 2019/20. The proportion of STEM students who progressed to the same course was 90% in 2020/21, a 3% decrease from 2019/20. HS achieved a rate of 94% (2019/20: 97%), and just under 2% of all students in this faculty repeated the year, an increase on 2019/20.

Accreditation

Many Accreditation visits by professional or statutory bodies scheduled for 2020/21 were deferred due to the pandemic. However, some took place remotely. In AHSS, accreditation of programmes in the School of Psychology by the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) were conducted virtually and re-accreditation granted from September 2021 for 5 years. The Trinity Business School was reaccredited by AMBA in December 2020 for a five-year period, without conditions and in February 2021 by the AACSB, following virtual accreditation visits. In the School of Nursing and Midwifery, some programmes had their approval period extended with permission to submit for accreditation in 2022.

Table 1 – Overview of key metrics

Faculty	Health Sciences	Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
Feedback from students			
Percentage (and number) of UG Modules evaluated	90% (*295 of 328*)	95% (*1264 of 1325*)	79% (*470 of 598*)
Percentage (and number) of PG courses/ programmes evaluated	91% (*53 of 58*)	96% (*69 of 72*)	92% (*22 of 24*)
External Examiner process			
Percentage (and number) of External Examiner reports received	UG 64% (*36 of 56*) PGT 72% (*36 of 50*)	UG 93% (*53 of 57*) PGT 95% (*69 of 73*)	UG 94% (*33 of 35*) PGT 87% (*20 of 23*)
Did Schools respond in writing to the External Examiner recommendations?	33% (3 of 9)	75% (*9 of 12*)	86% (6 of 7)
Did the External Examiners have or request access to Blackboard	45% (4 of 9)	75% (*9 of 12*)	100% (7 of 7)
Accreditation Programmes			
No. of programmes accredited in 2020/21 and the accrediting body	• Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) (2)	• PSI (4) • AACSB (whole-school accreditation) • AMBA (1)	None – postponed to March 2022
Retention data			
New entrant progression & retention 2020/21 (*Data from Senior Lecturer's Annual Report 2020/21*)	725 students (93.5%) progressed same course 13 students (1.7%) repeated 7 students (0.9%) transferred 30 students (3.9%) not retained Total progression rate = 96.1%	1131 students (94.1%) progressed same course 10 students (0.8%) repeated 17 students (1.4%) transferred 44 students (3.7%) not retained Total progression rate = 96.3%	872 students (90.4%) progressed same course 20 students (2.1%) repeated 29 students (3.0%) transferred 44 students (4.6%) not retained Total progression rate = 95.4%