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

CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL FACULTY QUALITY REPORT **2023/24**

1. Introduction

The Annual Faculty Quality Reports (AFQRs) were introduced in 2013/14 as part of the Framework for Quality at Trinity. The Framework brings together the self-evaluation and monitoring elements that form the focus of quality assurance activity in Trinity. The development process is led by the three Faculty Managers (AHSS, STEM and HS), in consultation with the Faculty Deans, the Schools and the Quality Office. The draft reports are discussed at a designated Annual Faculty Quality Executive meeting before being submitted to the Quality Committee (QC) for consideration. Following Quality Committee, a Consolidated Quality Report is submitted to Council for approval. The AFQRs and the Consolidated Quality Report are published on the Quality Office website.

Key themes discussed at the Quality Committee on the 1 May 2025 include perennial issues such as:

i. poor quality of some teaching and research space and the impact on the student and staff experience.
ii. key infrastructure and critical equipment failure and lack of an income stream to repair and replace equipment required for capstone projects and research activity.
iii. lack of interoperability across key systems (SITS, CMIS, VLE, LENS), which results in duplication of effort on the part of staff.
iv. lack of clarity in the centralised and devolved aspects of the management of external examiners (initial setup, annual reports), and the related challenges in recruitment and retention arising from this management and their remuneration.
v. highly variable response rates to student surveys, including module and programme evaluations.
vi. difficulty recruiting elected postgraduate student representatives on Faculty and School Executive Committees.
vii. constrained examination grading and moderation turnaround times.

New themes that arose in 2023/24 include:

viii. challenges to accessing LENS reports, and the increasing complexity and volume of 'reasonable accommodation' scenarios requested of the schools without any additional resource allocation. Schools have reported challenges of meeting the increasing varied accommodations to a consistent standard.
ix. poor accessibility to some physical spaces, particularly laboratories.
x. the limited social spaces for students, especially as student enrolment numbers continue to expand.
xi. the lack of adequate infrastructure on clinical placements to support students, particularly staffing levels in placement-support roles.

The following initiatives were commended:

i. the introduction and expansion of student support spaces for learners with additional needs, by the Disability Office, such as quiet spaces in the Hamilton building.
ii. the ongoing positive work of the Postgraduate Renewal Project and its impact across schools.
iii. the streamlining of the garda vetting application process by Academic Registry.
iv. the revision of the Finance interface systems to be more user-friendly and intuitive

v. the continued return to College-based exam venues was noted as providing a positive experience for students and staff.
vi. the Faculty of Health Sciences' use of the Faculty Quality Metric allocation for addressing limited student social space challenges.
vii. the creation of the College Strategic Initiatives Fund, enabled through the Planning Group, through which the School of Maths developed an accessible space in their library as a help-room.

2. Issues for escalation by the Faculty Deans to Council

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

2.1 Issues in 2023/24

i. Staff-Student Ratios.
ii. Physical Infrastructure (maintenance and capacity for both teaching and social spaces).
iii. IT infrastructure and specifically interoperability of IT systems.
iv. Tight turnaround times in Assessment in Semester 2.
v. Limited policy and guidance regarding generative artificial intelligence.
vi. Access to and capacity to meet the accommodations set out in LENS reports.
vii. Undergraduate timetabling clash management.

2.2 Contemporary issues of concern 2023/24

i. PG application processing turnaround times for offers.
ii. Student Placements – standardisation and capacity of placements from placement partners.
iii. Retention and replacement of administrative staff.
iv. External funding changes impacting the number and size of grants, and approval timelines.
v. Cost of doing research (inflation, disrupted supply chains, carbon footprint considerations).
vi. Programme-specific assessment regulation derogations to meet professional body accreditation requirements.
vii. Faculty workload management, at the potential expense of research activity.

3. Faculty-specific enhancements and challenges

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Key enhancements

EDI - eight out of the twelve AHSS Schools have a Bronze Athena Swan Award, and the School of Psychology was awarded a Silver Athena SWAN Award. The School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies was awarded funding for a decolonising the curriculum 'Reading List Review', while other Schools implemented further assessment and pedagogy enhancements and learner accommodation supports for inclusive practice.

Curriculum reviews – seven Schools reviewed their undergraduate or postgraduate programme offering for curriculum enhancements, including the integration of SDGs, and programme structure adjustments in response to learner feedback.

Research management – the development of research strategies, policies, and centralised application processes have streamlined and better supported research activity and collaboration, with the Department of Clinical Speech and Language Studies' ResourceFULL clinical resource repository a particular achievement.

Teaching Assistant supports – The School of Social Sciences and Philosophy improved Teaching Assistant induction and supports, and the Business School revised policy to standardise workloads.

Student Engagement initiatives – The School of Law appointed an Engagement and Inclusion Officer, and the School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies introduced interdisciplinary PhD seminars to enhance PhD student integration.

Specific challenges

IT Systems and lack of interconnectivity across key systems – access to LENS reports and errors in corresponding SITS records; some unclear SITS progression code rules for graduate programmes; non integration of Study Abroad into OME and between OME and timetabling (CMIS).

Inadequate IT Infrastructure and support - blended/online teaching equipment of varying standard across campus, and reduced IT technical support leading to lecture cancellation and disruption.

Inadequate Physical Infrastructure remains challenging across the Faculty, with quality and capacity as recurring concerns, and a lack of social or common areas for learners for some Schools.

Staff:Student Ratio – stretched teaching resources resulting from large class sizes, challenges in faculty retention, and heavy reliance on Teaching Assistants who are increasingly difficult to recruit.

Undergraduate timetabling – clash constraints for undergraduate modules identified by the School of Law, and the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies.

Timeframes around Reassessment in Semester 2 - tight turnaround times place considerable pressure on examiners and External Examiners.

Health Sciences

Key enhancements

EDI and accreditation – The School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences achieved a Bronze Athena Swan Award, and My Green Labs certification.

New Appointments – a new Biostatistician position in the School of Dental Science was appointed to support undergraduate and graduate student research projects.

Programme and curriculum review – the School of Medicine and School of Nursing and Midwifery undertook reviews of multiple courses and CPD and micro-credential offerings, to meet the evolving medical education standards, regulatory requirements, and changing healthcare landscape.

Alliance Membership – the School of Medicine joined the M8 Alliance, a prestigious, globally recognised network of academic health centres, universities and research institutions.

National Competency clinical practice feasibility study – the School of Nursing and Midwifery conducted a feasibility study for the introduction of T-CAD, an electronic version of the paper based National Competency Document for student assessment during their clinical practice placement, with a pilot to follow.

Information initiatives – the School of Nursing and Midwifery introduced new information initiatives including a bi-annual newsletter, a Health Service Provider Annual Report, and podcast initiative created by, and for, student nurses.

Review of Learning Outcomes – clinical pediatric competencies and clinical learning outcomes were reviewed across multiple Schools.

Specific challenges

Physical Infrastructure - suitability of teaching spaces and clinical training facilities is a constraint on plans for expansion for the Schools, especially as student numbers grow. Accessibility in some venues for wheelchair access remains limited.

Lack of student space and amenity – a lack of student space which adversely impacts the student experience and wellbeing, including venues off the main campus, e.g. the Trinity St James Centre and Tallaght Hospitals.

IT Infrastructure – equipment and software in teaching spaces, with accessible IT technical support; interoperability and functionality of systems.

Staff:Student Ratio – stretched teaching and supervision resources, particularly with growing student numbers. Financial challenges continue to play a role in hindering maintaining staffing levels.

Placement capacity and quality assurance – student number growth is resulting in limited availability of clinical training placements, and quality assurance of placements across centres is consequently strained.

Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics

Key enhancements

EDI – three of the Faculty's Schools (the Schools of Chemistry, Natural Sciences, and Physics) have a Silver Athena Swan Award, while a further four have a Bronze Award.

Assessment feedback and support – the School of Genetics and Microbiology implemented a new detailed feedback form for student projects, fostering Assessment FOR Learning principles, while the School of Mathematics introduced more transparent undergraduate marking models.

Staffing for student supports – the School of Physics appointed a Physics Undergraduate Lab Coordinator role to standardise training, marking and feedback processes for undergraduate learners, and the School of Biochemistry and Immunology has a support staff member dedicated to ensuring material is available to learners on Blackboard.

Interdisciplinary activities – an industry seminar series introduced for students across multiple years of multiple Engineering courses brought industry guest speakers to present across specialisms. The School of Genetics and Microbiology introduced two new modules shared by all moderatorships to bring different expertise together within the School.

Demonstrator and supervisor allocations - The School of Computer Science and Statistics refined their web-based Demonstrator and Teaching Assistant Allocation (DAS) system, introduced in 2022-23, and the School of Engineering redesigned their MAI project allocation process to maintain student choice and equal allocation of projects to academics.

Specific challenges

Quality of Physical Infrastructure - inadequate teaching spaces, including access to lecture, classrooms, computer rooms and labs for large classes, with corresponding impacts to timetabling e.g Goldsmith lecture theatre constraints requiring running lectures twice. This is compounded by growing student numbers and the delay in the E3 Learning Foundry and access to suitable venues in other buildings where access is restricted to one school e.g., Trinity Central. Investment in physical infrastructure (both general and specialist) is urgently required if STEM is to remain competitive with national and international universities.

Staff:Student Ratio – stretched teaching and supervision resources, particularly with growing student numbers. The national cost of living challenges and limited professional staff promotional opportunities hindering the recruitment and retention of both academic and professional staff.

Generative Artificial Intelligence guidance – limited discipline-specific guidance or policy from College on the use of generative artificial intelligence and managing the integrity of assessment, leading to some Schools forming working groups to address this locally.

Graduate learner recruitment – external challenges to recruiting Masters and PhD students (including the cost of living in Dublin; limited funding or stipends; centralised processing of parts of the application process) resulting in smaller pools of demonstrators or Teaching Assistants.

Funding for Fieldtrips and Capstone Projects remains a challenge for STEM Schools e.g., School of Natural Science.

Analysis of quantitative data (Refer Table 1)

Module evaluations

Undergraduate module evaluation rates in 2023/24 varied across the Faculties, with 100% evaluated in AHSS (same as prior year), 97% in HS (1% lower than the prior year) and 80% in STEM (-4% from prior year). The rate of postgraduate evaluations was 100% in AHSS (same as prior year), 93% in HS (same as the prior year) and 92% in STEM (same as prior year).

All Faculties noted low student response rates as an ongoing issue. Schools continue to explore ways to engage students and enhance student feedback mechanisms, with some reverting to in-class paper evaluations to achieve higher response rates.

Open Module evaluation was reported by STEM and AHSS (FHS do not offer Open Modules, as the curriculum content in FHS programmes are subject to professional body accreditation requirements). Where non-eligible visiting students may be present in Open Modules, and mixed cohorts might not distinguish the module as core to their study programme or as an Open Module, the administration of separate module evaluation surveys in large classes is administratively difficult. Trinity Elective Modules evaluations, conducted in 2023/24, show 13% response rate in Semester 1 and 20% in Semester 2.

Progression & Retention

In 2023/24, AHSS had a retention rate of 97.87% (0.13% lower than the prior year); HS had a retention rate of 98.20% (0.76% higher than the prior year), while STEM had a retention rate of 96.79% (0.37% higher than the prior year). Multi-faculty programmes had a retention rate of 97.08%.

External Examiner reports

Response rates for Undergraduate External Examiner (EE) Reports in AHSS were 87.69% (10.31% lower than the prior year); HS 90% (2% lower than the prior year) and STEM 78% (13% lower than the prior year). Postgraduate response rates were slightly higher for AHSS 89% (approximately the same as the prior year) and 92% in STEM (4% lower than the prior year), and HS 78% (8% lower than the prior year). 2023/24 was the second year of the online External Examiner Report Form introduced by the Graduate Studies Office, and the new automation processes will continue to be reviewed for opportunities to improve report return rates and closure of feedback loops. A majority of Schools (23/24) reporting responding to EE recommendations in writing.

Blackboard access for External Examiners remained a challenge for some Schools in 2023/24, however it was less frequently reported across Schools than in prior years. Discussions between the Quality Office and HR improved some facets of the process, and further work is expected to continue to reduce the challenges experienced.

Of interest is that for the AHSS, approximately 50% of External Examiners attended the Court of Examiners (CoE) online or joined a hybrid session, while STEM facilitated 50% online attendance at postgraduate level, but a majority of undergraduate CoE remained in person. FHS hosted approximately 46% of External Examiners at in person Courts of Examiners.

Accreditation

A number of accreditation visits by professional or statutory bodies were held in 2023/24, with AHSS engaging with The Teaching Council, CORU and the Psychological Society of Ireland, and STEM completing a review with the Institute of Physics, which resulted in recommendations for reinstating assessment capping. HS completed a review with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, while the School of Medicine's first micro-credential achieved multi-accreditation (NMBI, RCPI, EACCME).

Table 1 – Overview of key metrics

	Faculty	Health Sciences	Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
1	**Feedback from students**			
a	Percentage (and number) of UG Modules evaluated	283/293 (97%)	1,455/1,455 (100%)	424/534 (79%)
b	Percentage (and number) of PG courses/ programmes evaluated	52/56 (93%)	78/78 (100%)	24/26 (92%)
2	**External Examiner process**			
c	Percentage (and number) of External Examiner reports received	UG - 47/52 (90%) PGT – 35/45 (78%)	UG 57/65 (88%) PGT 79/89 (89%)	UG 25/32 (78%) PGT 22/24 (92%)
d	Did Schools respond in writing to the External Examiner recommendations?	3/4	10/12 (UG only)	5/8
	Did the External Examiners have or request access to Blackboard	3/4	11/12	5/8
3	**Accreditation Programmes**			
a	No. of programmes accredited in 2023/24 and the accrediting body	• D.Ch.Dent. (*Strands*: Oral Surgery; Orthodontics; Special Care Dentistry; Public Health Dentistry) (SoD) - Dental Council • M.Sc./PG. Dip Nursing - Child Health and Wellbeing (SoM) - NMBI	• Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (School of Psychology) - Psychological Society of Ireland • Master and PGDip in Social Work (SoSWSP) - CORU	N/A

Table 2 – Progression and Retention data 2023/24

Metric	COLLEGE overall	Health Sciences	Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics	Multi-Faculty
Total Enrolment	13,301 [+2,263 from 22/23]	n=3,049 [-2 from 22/23]	n=4,328 [+148 from 22/23]	n=3,836 [+29 from 22/23]	n=2,088
Progressed*	**73.52%** (n=9,779)	**75.73%** (n=2,309) [-0.47% from 22/23]	**71.63%** (n=3,100) [-3.37% from 22/23]	**72.18%** (n=2,769) [+1.18% from 22/23]	**76.68%** (n=1,601)
Repeated	**1.49%** (n=198)	**1.51%** (n=46) [+0.66% from 22/23]	**0.95%** (n=41) [-0.05% from 22/23]	**2.09%** (n=80) [-0.51% from 22/23]	**1.48%** (n=31)
Transferred	**1.11%** (n=147)	**0.75%** (n=23) [-0.07% from 22/23]	**0.83%** (n=36) [-0.17% from 22/23]	**1.46%** (n=56) [-0.84% from 22/23]	**1.53%** (n=32)
Completed their course**	**20.41%** (n=2,715)	**20.20%** (n=616) [+0.6% from 22/23]	**24.45%** (n=1,058) [+1.45% from 22/23]	**17.67%** (n=678) [+0.67% from 22/23]	**17.39%** (n=363)
Completed their course (Exit)	**0.98%** (n=131)	**0%** (n=0)	**0.02%** (n=1)	**3.39%** (n=130)	**0%** (n=0)
Not retained	**2.49%** (n=331)	**1.80%** (n=55) [-0.76% from 22/23]	**2.13%** (n=92) [+0.13% from 22/23]	**3.21%** (n=123) [-0.37% from 22/23]	**2.92%** (n=61)
Total retention rate	**97.51%**	**98.2%** [+0.76% from 22/23]	**97.87%** [+-0.13% from 22/23]	**96.79%** [+0.37% from 22/23]	**97.08%**

*Progression is primarily from Years 1-2, 2-3 and 3-4. Within STEM, there is also progression from Year 4 to 5.

**Course completion is primarily in Year 4, but some completion occurs in Year 3, and Year 5 for STEM. Percentage is of overall leaner enrolment figures, not a percentage of graduating cohort.