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

ACADEMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
CONSOLIDATED FACULTIES REPORT

2014/15

Contents

1.   BACKGROUND

The Annual Faculty Quality Report forms part of the Framework for Quality at Trinity College Dublin. It provides data that assist in monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of College quality assurance policies and procedures and inform the production of the Annual Institutional Quality Report to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and the Self- Assessment Report for Trinity's next institutional quality review in 2019/20.

The consolidated report summarises quality assurance issues and good practice at School and Faculty level and also highlights issues for consideration at College-level which are outside the remit of the School and Faculties. Annual Faculty Executive Quality meetings, which are attended by the Quality Officer, were introduced in 2014/15. These meetings facilitate discussion at Faculty level of issues arising from local quality assurance processes, and inform the Annual Faculty Quality Reports.

The inaugural 2013/14 consolidated report was presented to Council in April 2015 (CL/14-15/148). In January, March and May 2016, each of the three Faculty Deans presented their Faculty Annual Quality Report[1] covering the period 2014/15 to the Quality Committee. All three Deans reported that the overall process had been worthwhile and served to highlight good practices across Schools as well as local and institutional constraints to on-going quality improvement.

2.   CORE AREAS COVERED IN THE FACULTY REPORTS

The core areas covered in each report and summarised in this report include:

  i.   Evaluation of undergraduate modules
 ii.   Evaluation of post graduate taught surveys
 iii.   Evaluation of External Examiner findings
 iv.   Professional Accreditation cycle
  v.   Quality Review cycle
 vi.   Progression and Retention figures
 vii.   Student evaluation surveys
viii.   Identification of college-wide issues for escalation
 ix.   Identification of good practices.

Table 1 below provides an outline of Faculty performance in areas (i) – (vii) above.

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[1] See Appendices 1-3 for each Faculty Quality Report, also available on the Quality Office Website here.

Table 1: Faculty performance at a glance 2014/15

	Faculty	Health Science	Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences	Engineering, Maths and Science
1	No. of **UG** Modules taught	393	930	534
	No. and % of UG Modules evaluated	379 (96%)	832 (89%)	497 (93%)
2	No. of **PG** courses/ programmes taught	41	64	23
	No. and % of PG courses/programmes evaluated by Faculty Office/School	40 (98%)	55 (89%)	3 [2] (13%)
3	No. of Programmes Externally Examined	2014/15 UG –17 2013/14 [3] PG - 44	2014/15 UG – 66 2014/15 PG - 67	2014/15 UG - 35 2014/15 PG - 23
	% of External Examiner reports returned	2014/15 UG – 81% 2013/14 PG – 86%	2014/15 UG – 68% 2014/15 PG – 84%	2014/15 UG – 77% 2014/15 PG – 91%
4	No. of programmes accredited in 2014/15	5	2	0
	Accreditation Bodies	Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU) (2) Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (2) Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (1)	Association of MBAs (AMBA) (1) Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU) (1)	N/A
5	School Quality Reviews	N/A	Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies Nov 2014 Education – Feb 2015	N/A
	Quality Review Follow-up at Quality Committee	N/A	Review report for Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies Progress report for School of Social Work & Social Policy Review report for Education	Review report for Maths Progress report for Engineering
6	2013/14 new entrant % progression and retention	94.5%	96.5%	90.8%
7	Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) (annual survey of 1st & final year UG students, and post graduate taught course students)	414 respondents Highest scores in 9/11 indices. Strengths: Work Integrated Learning General Learning Outcomes and General Development Outcomes	806 respondents Highest scores in 8/11 indices Strengths: Academic Challenge and Higher Order Thinking	523 respondents Strengths: Higher Order Thinking and Overall Satisfaction

[2] Administered by the School of Computer Science & Statistics
[3] Not all PG External Examiner reports for 2014/15 had been received at the time of writing so figures for 2013/14 are presented

2.1 Undergraduate Module Evaluations

The experience of implementing mandatory evaluation of undergraduate modules resulted in the identification of the following strengths and issues:

2.1.1 Strengths

i. High rates of module evaluations across all Faculties were achieved; satisfactory explanations were provided where modules were not evaluated, and assurances that all modules would be evaluated, where possible, in 2015/16; Schools in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences employed a number of methods to reach the target of 100% module evaluation including reminders at school meetings, email reminders to module leaders, and mentioning the requirement for evaluations at adjunct staff induction days;

ii. Demonstration of a wide variety of evaluation methods, including online and paper–based surveys, focus groups, in-class feedback sessions, the extension of module feedback throughout the Summer; and, in the School of Biochemistry & Immunology, the use of Blackboard to get feedback from students for evaluation purposes;

iii. Demonstration of clear processes for the dissemination of student evaluation findings through School Executive Committees, Directors of Teaching & Learning Undergraduate and Postgraduate and Course Directors;

iv. A variety of 'closing the loop' student feedback mechanisms are in place.

2.1.2 Issues

i. Concern was expressed by the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science and the Faculty of Health Sciences regarding the continuing decrease in the response rates to student course and module evaluation surveys, which both Faculties attribute to the introduction of on-line surveys. Response rates in the School of Nursing were so low in 2014/15 as to be of no use in reviewing and developing individual modules or the programme as a whole. As a result the School is proposing to revert to administering surveys during class time in 2015/16. The Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences noted, however, that while it is generally accepted that in-class evaluations produce higher response rates, this is not feasible in Schools with large numbers of undergraduate modules.

ii. Course and module evaluation in the School of Medicine remains complex due to the size of the School and the varied nature of the programmes;

iii. Over-assessment of students and concern as to the usefulness of evaluating all undergraduate modules annually was raised by the Faculty of Health Sciences for the second year.

2.2 Postgraduate Surveys

2.2.1 Strengths

i. There was a high return rate for postgraduate surveys in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and in Health Sciences (see Table 1 above).

ii. Postgraduate taught students in the Faculty of Health Sciences were invited to provide feedback on clinical placements, where relevant;

iii.   School of Genetics and Microbiology reported that they conduct a panel review with research students every March and September, providing students with an opportunity to discuss their experience with staff members who are not involved in their supervision;

iv.   The Schools of Dental Science and Medicine supplemented their online surveys with other feedback methods such as focus groups, attendance by student representatives at monthly Course Executive Committee meetings and the provision of feedback from the class to course Committee meetings;

v.   The School of Nursing and Midwifery provided feedback to incoming students at the start of each postgraduate module on changes made on the basis of feedback (via on-line surveys) from the previous cohort;

vi.   Following comments in the 2013/14 Annual Faculty Quality Reports highlighting the absence of any evaluation of the postgraduate research experience, a survey of postgraduate research students was developed in 2014/15 for implementation in 2015/16, an initiative welcomed by all Faculties.

2.2.2   Issues

i.   In the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science no postgraduate taught programmes were evaluated by the Faculty Office due to a change in administration (three programmes were evaluated by the School of Computer Science & Statistics).

ii.   Low student numbers on some postgraduate courses in the Faculty of Health Sciences presents difficulties in terms of interpretation due to sample size, and Schools considered the feedback in this context.

2.3   External Examiners

2.3.1   Strengths

i.   Procedures are in place across all three Faculties to provide feedback to External Examiners on actions arising from their comments/recommendations.

2.3.2   Issues

i.   The requirement for more work experience elements was raised by some External Examiners, and this would require significant changes to the structure of the curriculum and additional resources to source and vet work experience opportunities;

ii.   The delay in the implementation of anonymous marking at PGT level was raised by the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences;

iii.   External Examiners in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences suggested the introduction of a grade between 'Pass' or 'Distinction' which would acknowledge work of a very high standard, but not at the level that would merit 'Distinction'.

2.4   Accreditation cycle

2.4.1   Strengths

The Faculty of Health Sciences reported that the reflective process that is required to go through an accreditation process is beneficial.

2.4.2 Issues

There is a danger of duplication of information required for other processes e.g. quality reviews. The Quality Office is working in the first instance with the Schools of Pharmacy and Dental Science to streamline reporting requirements where possible.

The QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016) contains new requirements for quality assurance of off-campus learning i.e. professional placements, and this will need to be discussed at several fora with a view to making provision for this.

2.5   Progression and Retention Statistics

2.5.1   Strengths

College achieved a retention rate of 95% for 2014/15, exceeding the Strategic Plan target of 90% for transition of undergraduate progression (for new entrants). This 90% target was also met by all Faculties including Multi-Faculty and Two Subject Moderatorship (TSM) programmes.

2.5.2   Issues

Schools and Faculties are unable to track comparable retention figures over cohort years, or obtain completion statistics for PG due to student information system changes. Reporting completion rates is a requirement of the QQI Core and Research Programme Quality Assurance Guidelines. The Quality Office is engaging with the Academic Registry and IT Services to ensure that these reporting requirements can be configured in SITS.

3. COLLEGE-WIDE ISSUES
There are a number of issues raised by the Faculties that are outside their control.

3.1   Information Systems
i.   Timetabling was identified by FEMS as an issue, particularly for visiting students – the need for a fixed College timetable was highlighted;

Response: The issue of a fixed timetable is to be addressed through the Trinity Education Project.

ii.   Feedback from Health Sciences is that roll-over on Blackboard is too late in the year and that Blackboard training is required over the summer for new Lecturers who take up post each July;

Response: This issue was referred to IT Services who have taken over responsibility for upload to Blackboard and the matter is being resolved, though there are still procedural issues to manage.

iii. Full access to the Library for postgraduate certificate students remains an issue in AHSS.

Response: The issue of Library access for PG Certificate students was referred to the Library and Information Policy Committee (LIPC) and was considered as part of the work of a LIPC Task Group on staff and student Library & IT access and borrowing privileges. The Task group noted that these students are properly identified and flagged and that their access to the Library for 'in-Library use' was appropriate to their needs. In tandem the Library is reviewing,

during 2016/17, a number of student categories, including the PG Certificate students, to determine if Library borrowing privileges are necessary and that extended access will not adversely affect the availability of resources for degree students, researchers and academics.

3.2 External Examiner Process

i. The introduction of new procedures for External Examiners by the Quality Office has helped to address concerns raised in last year's Annual Faculty Quality Reports (AFQR) regarding the timely return of External Examiners' reports and the escalation of issues raised by External Examiners to the Senior Lecturer and relevant Heads of School. The Faculty of Health Sciences reports however that some delays still exist in the submission of External Examiner reports.

    Response: Changes to the External Examiner process continued to be embedded in 2014/15, and these have proved more effective in reducing delays in submission of reports on undergraduate programmes. Further streamlining will be considered in 2016/17, however without system support to automate some parts of the process e.g. an External Examiners portal and tracking capability in SITS, delays cannot be eradicated. The required system support has not been possible while the enhancement programme for SITS was in progress.

ii. A number of External Examiners in the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics & Science commented on the fact that students who have passed a year overall can be deemed to have failed the year based on the introduction of harmonisation rules.

    Response: This issue was raised to the attention of the Senior Lecturer who met with the relevant School to discuss, and asked that a response be provided to the External Examiners.

3.3 Teaching and Learning Environment

i. HS reported feedback from Nursing & Midwifery students that the location of the School off-campus is isolating and impedes full engagement with the undergraduate experience. Also, the deteriorating physical environment in D'Olier St. is having a negative effect on the student experience as classrooms fail to meet the standards required to support modern teaching & learning practices;

    Response: The issue is to be addressed under the Estates Strategy and will require funding.

ii. The FEMS report highlighted the unsuitability of some lecture venues in the Faculty e.g. Goldsmith Hall, and reported serious overcrowding in some laboratories in the School of Chemistry which may impact accreditation by the Royal Society of Chemistry;

    Response: The issue in relation to Goldsmith Hall is to be addressed under the Estates Strategy and will require funding.

    With respect to laboratory space, the School of Chemistry is working with the Royal Society of Chemistry to determine what is considered as practical hours across the curriculum in Chemistry in addition to laboratory hours.

iii. The quality of teaching and social spaces continues to be an issue in AHSS.

Response: The Estates Strategy project is currently addressing space matters across all Schools, including an assessment of the forecast of need and an audit of the current condition and suitability of the space. The Bursar will commission a feasibility study for the Arts Building in the coming weeks with a view to improving the quality of teaching rooms and break-out spaces.

3.4   Curriculum and Assessment

i. The Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences reported a preference among students for exams after the first semester;

Response: Semestarisation of exams is being considered in the Academic Year Structure under the Trinity Education Project.

ii. Schools in the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science continue to experience difficulty in meeting timeframes for the return of assessed course-work.

Response: The issue of return of assessed work within 20 days for UG and 30 days for PG continues to be reported negatively by students in internal and external student surveys e.g. In the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) 22% of students in 2014/15 and 29% of students in 2015/16 report that they have never received timely written or oral feedback on their assessed work.

3.5   Quality Review Process

i. The Faculty of Health Sciences asked that a holistic approach be taken to the various quality assurance processes at Trinity to avoid duplication of information and resources required for the Accreditation Process, Quality Review process and annual Quality Report.

Response: The Quality Office has initiated work with both the Schools of Pharmacy and Dental Science to address streamlining of reporting requirements for Accreditation and Quality Reviews. The Quality Office will publish the Annual Institutional Quality Report (July 2016) on the Quality Office webpage as a resource to Schools that are subject to Professional and Statutory Body Accreditation.

QQI has commissioned a survey in 2016/17 on the impact and effort required by all HEIs (public and private) to achieve and maintain professional accreditation or regulation and how this may correlate to/overlap with internal and external quality assurance activities.

4   EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE ACROSS THE FACULTIES

4.1 Schools in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences successfully introduced clickers in some classes; are using peer-observed teaching, group work and peer assessment; have introduced standard feedback sheets for assignments. The School of Social Work and Social Policy introduced the College's first fully on-line course in 2014/15.

4.2 Two projects were undertaken in the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics & Science in 2014/15 arising from the introduction of the Deans Award in 2013/14 – (i) the Learning Assistant Programme whereby Junior Sophister students in the School of Biochemistry &

Immunology work in pairs to facilitate small-group tutorials, and (ii) the use of clickers in practical classes. Arising from the review in 2014 of the common entry Science undergraduate programme (TR071), the Undergraduate Science Education Working Group was established in 2015 to define the future shape of science education in Trinity in conjunction with the Trinity Education Project (TEP).

4.3 In 2015 the Faculty of Health Sciences introduced the Dean's Award for Innovation in Teaching, which saw the investment of €40,000 across seven teaching innovations in the Faculty. The Faculty continued to provide inter-professional learning opportunities for students in 2014/15 - students from various disciplines (dentistry, physiotherapy, medicine, pharmacy etc.) worked together on complex cases which simulate the real working environment of healthcare professionals. A two-year Associate Professor post to drive inter-professional learning in the Faculty has been established.

5   COMMITMENTS BY FACULTIES IN THE CURRENT ACADEMIC YEAR

5.1 The Faculty of Health Sciences, in consultation with the Quality Office, will undertake a thematic review of clinical placements with a view to gaining more oversight of the audits of clinical placements, including what training is currently provided and what is being done to address identified gaps. The Dean plans to introduce a Deans medal to award to clinical colleagues in recognition of their work;

5.2 The Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences is committed to addressing the issues raised by External Examiners in relation to marking (ungenerous marking, standards not being comparable across two subjects, bunching of grades, dealing with borderline marks etc.) and intends to advance this at Faculty Executive level. As discussed at the Faculty Quality meeting, the Faculty Office will explore the possibility of having a repository for Schools to share common forms such as feedback sheets.

5.3 The Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics & Science plans to expand the roll-out of clickers to Senior Freshman modules by engaging SF academics in the use of the technology, and to disseminate knowledge to academics in the other two Faculties.