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

ACADEMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE: FACULTIES REPORT

2013/2014

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1.   BACKGROUND

The Institutional Quality Review of Trinity College, 2012, referring to the 'quality assurance of education' recommended, among other things, that Trinity develop mechanisms "at School, Faculty and College levels to inform the enhancement of education…" Referring to matters of governance, the review team observed that "Faculty Deans had no role in the oversight of academic affairs nor in the enhancement of the student experience within their faculties. They felt that this division seemed somewhat arbitrary and it was difficult to understand how Faculty Deans could discharge responsibilities for strategic planning and staffing without taking cognisance of research, teaching and learning and the student experience." The Review Team also recommended to "review the role of the Quality Committee not only in terms of how it relates to the business of the Undergraduate Studies and Graduate Studies Committees but also in terms of its authority to systematically monitor the implementation of quality assurance and enhancement processes and outcomes."

A number of working groups were established in the academic year 2012/13 to address the recommendations of the institutional review with an aim to devolve greater ownership of quality and implementation of College-wide academic policies to Schools and Faculties. In April 2013 Council (CL/12-13/148) approved the recommendation that annual module and course evaluations by students should become mandatory and be conducted at School or course office level. The remit of the Quality Committee was extended to include the monitoring of quality assurance and enhancement processes and outcomes, and the Faculty Deans appropriated responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement within their respective Faculties.

Arising from this responsibility, each of the three Faculty Deans presented their Faculty's Annual Quality Report[1] covering the period 2013/14, and where relevant 2012/13, to the Quality Committee in December 2014 and February 2015. 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.   Identification of college-wide issues for escalation
viii.   Identification of good practice to be disseminated across Schools in the Faculty.

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

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[1] See Appendices 1-3 for a summary of each Faculty Quality Report and Annual Faculty Quality Reports on the Quality Office Website for full reports.

Table 1: Faculty performance at a glance

	Faculty	Health Science	Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences	Engineering, Maths and Science
1	No. of **UG** Modules taught in 2013/14	362	1114	665
	No. and % of UG Modules evaluated	337 (93%)	1091 (98%)	655 (98%)
2	No. of **PG** Modules taught in 2013/14	446	424	227
	No. and % of PG Modules evaluated	103 (23%) (excludes School of Medicine = 320 modules)	400 (94%)	214 (94%)
3	No. of External Examinations conducted 2012/13 and 2013/14	2012/13 – 91	2012/13 – 96 2013/14 – 90	2012/13 – 31 2013/14 – 31
	% of External Examiner reports returned	2012/13 – 74%	2012/13 – 86% 2013/14 – 69%	2012/13 – 80% 2013/14 – 60%
4	No. of programmes accredited in 2013/14	1	3	N/A
	Accreditation Bodies	Institute of Biomedical Sciences	1. Teaching Council 2. CORU 3. Psychological Society of Ireland	N/A
5	School Quality Reviews in 2013/14	N/A	Social Work & Social Policy in Nov 2013	School of Maths in March 2014
	Quality Review Follow-up at Quality Committee, 2013/14	School of Medicine IP Dec 2013	Social Work & Social Policy, PR March 2014 and IP May 2014	- Engineering RR, Dec 2013 and IP Mar 14; - Biochemistry & Immunology, PR Oct 13
6	2013/14 new entrant % progression and retention 2014/15	93%	91.7%	89.6%
7	Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)	258 respondents Highest scores in 6/11 indices. Strengths: WIL – Work Integrated Learning	719 respondents Highest scores in 5/11 indices Strengths: OVL – Overall Satisfaction	355 respondents Strengths: Final Year cohort scores.

RR-=Review Report: IP= Implementation Plan: PR= Progress Report

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 achievement levels across all Faculties; satisfactory explanations where modules were not evaluated and assurances that all modules would be evaluated in 2014/15;
ii. Demonstration of a wide variety of evaluation methods, which was identified as a strength, including online and paper – based surveys, focus groups, and feedback from class representatives;
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 in place.

2.1.2 Issues

i. The module evaluation format does not lend itself well to all courses/programmes of study, e.g. the Dental Science curriculum is taught in a spiral and integrated fashion and is not amenable to modularisation (59% of modules evaluated);
ii. Many of the programmes in Health Sciences are subject to biennial evaluation by accrediting bodies giving rise to concerns about the burden on students and the potential for survey fatigue;
iii. The evaluation of elective components in the School of Medicine can be more difficult as the educational experience is self-directed and students complete electives in geographically and clinically diverse environments;
iv. Similar to point 3 above, the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science identified gaps in its process with respect to modules taught as Field Trips and modules that are delivered by more than one academic or taught by retired staff. These gaps will be addressed in the 2014/15 academic year;
v. Complying with the directive that all undergraduate modules be evaluated can be difficult to achieve in some instances because of diminishing resources;
vi. Managing negative feedback on individual academic staff can be challenging for some Directors of Undergraduate Teaching & Learning.

2.2   Postgraduate Surveys

2.2.1 Strength

3.1 As can be seen from Table 1 above, there was a high return rate for postgraduate surveys in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and in Engineering, Mathematics and Science and in three of four schools in Health Sciences. The School of Medicine is taking the opportunity to review its postgraduate survey process due to the high volumes of modules (320) across this School.

2.2.2   Issue

The need to survey Postgraduate Research Students was raised by the Faculties of Engineering, Mathematics and Science and Health Sciences. This student cohort is not part of the ISSE cohort group.

Response: The Quality Office, the Faculty Offices and the Dean of Graduate Studies are currently developing a process for the evaluation of research programmes by Postgraduate Research Students.

2.3 External Examiners

Lack of clarity on the External Examiner process, especially in relation to payment, was a common theme across Faculties. The timely return of annual reports is important and their dissemination to appropriate staff within the Schools needs to be addressed (see response in 7.2 below).

2.4 Progression and Retention Statistics

2.4.1   Strength

Progression and overall retention rates are positive, ranging from 89.5% to 93%. However, work needs to be done to ensure that all courses reach a 90%+.

2.5.2   Issue

Schools and Faculties are unable to track comparable retention figures over cohort years due to student information system changes.

3.   COLLEGE-WIDE ISSUES

There are a number of common issues raised by the Faculties that are outside their control.

3.1 Information Systems

I   delays in registering students or in students completing registration mean that students do not have access to course content on Blackboard in the early stages of the semester;

II   some students in joint degrees who are required to register both in TCD and in the partner institution are not complying with this requirement and this misrepresents progression and retention statistics;

III   the absence of a facility to register students to modules only is constraining innovative growth and development at School level;

IV   the transition to SITS from Admin 5 has resulted in an inability to conduct cohort analysis and produce comparable student retention and progression data.

Response:

Board has approved a project to stabilise the Academic Registry and SITS and the issues identified above will be addressed as part of this project.

3.2 External Examiner Process

I   The receipt and distribution of reports and payment of fees is cumbersome.

II Faculties request that a College-wide marking scale be agreed and applied in a consistent manner.

III The turnaround time for exams, court of examiners, court of first appeal and academic appeals is reaching crisis point with the integrity of the appeals process being adversely impacted.

Response:

START has completed a review of the payment process for external examiners and this is now being implemented. Also, the Quality Office has completed a review of the External Examiner policy and procedures and will present recommendations to the Quality Committee for consideration in Trinity Term 2015.

As part of the Strategic Plan 2014-19, the 'Education Project' will review, among other things, the marking scheme and the appeals process**.**

3.4 Teaching and Learning Environment

I   The AHSS Faculty Report raised the quality and amenity of teaching spaces in the Arts block as their primary cause of concern (windowless rooms, small-group teaching rooms).

II FEMs identified budget cuts over recent years as impacting on both the quality of teaching and learning and the maintenance of older stock buildings. FEMS also raised issues on the lack of space for both students and staff including small-group teaching rooms.

Response:

The Bursar, in consultation with the Faculty Dean of AHSS, is reviewing the Arts Block area to assess options for refurbishment to improve facilities and to accommodate larger numbers of students. He is also, in consultation with the Dean of FEMS, investigating options for additional space in that Faculty.

3.5 English Language Competency

Poor level of English language competency of some international students was raised as a concern by FEMS for undergraduate students entering via foundation courses and by AHSS for postgraduate students. This is putting an additional burden on Schools to accommodate the language needs of such students.

Response:

The Director of the Centre for English Language Teaching, School of Linguistics, Speech and Communication Sciences, has developed a 'Trinity Support Pathway' for international students. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Dean of Graduate Studies have considered the proposal and made recommendations. The admissions requirement in respect of English Language competency is strictly applied.

4.   EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE ACROSS THE FACULTIES

4.1 Schools in AHSS have developed a tracking form for the module evaluation process to ensure that responsibility for implementing actions is clearly defined; introduced an Assessment Forum where all staff are encouraged to reflect on how modules are evaluated; introduced an entry-survey for students on Masters Courses, and incorporated discussion of External Examiner Reports as an Agenda item in the first staff meeting of the academic year.

4.2   FEMS introduced Deans Awards for Teaching and Innovation in 2013-14; nine awards were granted at a total cost of €45,000, which train and support Senior Freshman students as learning assistants/peer mentors to deliver Junior Freshman tutorials, to record podcasts on core elements of the course and to develop problem-based teaching methods. FEMS also rolled out the use of clickers across Junior Freshman Science and Engineering as an innovative strategy to engage students.

4.3 Schools in the HS Faculty involve Class Representatives for gathering and disseminating information. An emphasis is placed on 'closing the feedback loop' by conveying outcomes to the student body and to external examiners.

5.   COMMITMENTS BY FACULTIES IN THE CURRENT ACADEMIC YEAR

5.1 The Faculty of HS will monitor timeliness of feedback to students on Continuous Assessment across all undergraduate programmes in 2014-15.

5.2 Faculty wide quality issues and the implementation of best practice identified across Schools will be a standing item on the agenda of the AHSS Faculty Executive Committee.

5.3 The Faculty of EMS plans to survey postgraduate research students in 2014/15, and will also aim to bring its retention and progression statistics for all its courses in line with the College's Strategic Plan target of 90%.

5.4 The Faculty of EMS 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.