



**PROVOST'S REPORT TO COUNCIL ON
THE REVIEW OF THE TUTORIAL SERVICE**

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the outcome of a review of the Tutorial Service at Trinity College Dublin. An external peer review visitation was conducted on the 8th and 9th November 2007 by Professor Mary Clayton, University College Dublin, Mr. Richard Edwards, University of Bristol and Dr. Sonia Mazey, Keble College, University of Oxford. The internal member of the review team was Dr. Joe Carroll, Trinity College Dublin.

The report is based on (i) feedback from the external reviewers, received on the 4th December 2007, (ii) a submission from the Dean of Students, received on the 19th December 2007 and (iii) a submission from the Senior Tutor received on 21st December 2007.

This was the first review of the Tutorial Service. The main purpose of the review is to help the Tutorial Service and College improve the quality and range of the services that it offers. The primary objectives of the Review of the Tutorial Service were to assess:

- the effectiveness and efficiency of the Tutorial Service;
- the quality of the student experience in relation to the Tutorial Service;
- the possibility for expansion of the supports provided by the Tutorial Service;
- the integration of the Tutorial Service within College (student services, academic & administrative life).

2. OVERVIEW OF THE SERVICE

The Tutorial Service is one of several student services provided by College, and comprises the Senior Tutor's Office and approximately 123 Tutors. The Senior Tutor's office is headed by the Senior Tutor who is elected by the Tutors for a period of three years, renewable once, and formally appointed by the Board. The Senior Tutor is supported by one administrative officer (Student Support Officer) and one executive officer. The main function of the Office is to run the College Tutorial Service. Each undergraduate student in Trinity is assigned a Tutor on entering College. Tutors are members of the academic staff who, in addition to their normal academic duties, are appointed to provide personal and academic support to undergraduate students. Tutors are responsible for promoting the development and welfare of the students in their 'chamber' (the group of tutees allocated to a Tutor). Their main function is to advise, listen to concerns, help tutees deal with concerns as far as possible and refer more serious issues to the appropriate student service or outside agency. The service is confidential. Tutors also act as advocates for students in relation to the institution.

2.1 Mission Statement

'The mission of the Tutorial Service is to provide high-quality opportunities for student development in an inclusive, caring and cost-effective way consistent with the academic mission of College. The Senior Tutor's Office accomplishes this by recruiting, training and supporting a group of Tutors from the College academic community.'

2.2 Aims and Objectives of the Tutorial Service

The aims and objectives of the Tutorial Service are to:

- (i) provide support and advice for individual undergraduate students,
- (ii) organise the Orientation Week for Freshers,
- (iii) run the College financial assistance programme,
- (iv) provide input into a number of College committees, and
- (v) coordinate related services and activities for College.

2.3 Summary Statistical Data on the number of Tutors

Table 1: Composition of the Body of Tutors

| Grade | N° of Tutors | % | N° in College | % in College |
|--------------------|--------------|------|---------------|--------------|
| Lecturers | 79 | 64% | 420 | 56% |
| Senior Lecturers | 36 | 29% | 166 | 22% |
| Ass. Prof. & Prof. | 8 | 7% | 158 | 21% |
| Total Number | 123 | 100% | 744 | 100% |

Table 2: Number of Tutors, resignations and appointments

| Year | 2002-03 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of FT U/G | 10,200 | 10,231 | 10,107 | 10,156 | 10,193 |
| Number of Tutors | 109 | 121 | 120 | 121 | 123 |
| Resignations | 19 | 17 | 12 | 8 | 18 |
| Appointments | 29 | 19 | 12 | 8 | 18 |

The average size of Chambers varies across disciplines and faculties. The average chamber size in the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Humanities is 84, in the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science, 83, and in the Faculty of Health Science, 89.

2.4 Accommodation and Facilities The Senior Tutor's Office is housed on the ground floor of House 27. The accommodation consists of three offices. The Senior Tutor's office doubles as a meeting room used for Tutor Training Workshops, committee meetings and the Student Parent Group. The Administrative Officer's Office incorporates a kitchen, and the Executive Officer's Office is also used as a waiting room.

The offices of individual tutors are distributed around College and vary greatly in terms of size and quality. Some are accessible to students with disabilities, others are not. In those cases Tutors make ad-hoc arrangements to meet their students in an appropriate location.

3. EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW REPORT

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The overall impression of the Reviewers is that the Tutorial Service is *'unique in their experience of higher education in Ireland and the UK'* and *'...it provides an exemplary standard of support for students and is held by staff to be an integral part of Trinity's student experience.'* They found the *'dedication'* of the Tutors and staff of the Senior Tutor's Office *'unfaltering'* and staff demonstrate *'a clear commitment to the values that are inherent to the service aims.'*

'Notwithstanding the exemplary standard of support being provided,' the Reviewers identified some *'potential improvements'* for maintaining the current service and for its future development.

3.1 The effectiveness and efficiency of the Tutorial Service

The Reviewers were of the view that, within its remit, the Tutorial Service provides *'...a broadly effective mechanism for supporting undergraduate students.'* They did feel, however, that the service needs to be promoted more with students as it cannot be as effective if *'...students are not aware of the existence of the service and, in particular, of what it can and cannot offer...'* The Reviewers felt that the Service could be better promoted by having a full description of the services provided in the College prospectus and through *'...more detailed information with the tutor/tutee assignment letter sent in early September to new incoming students and the same in the Academic Diary issued after arrival.'* The Reviewers put great emphasis on the importance of aligning student expectations with those of the College, pointing out this is crucial *'...in order to support students in the best way possible and also to avoid complaints against the Service.'*

The Reviewers noted that the efficiency of tutors delivering a support service naturally varies greatly because of individual styles. While accepting that offering strict office hours minimises interruption, they pointed out that *'... some tutors are of the view that it is impossible for them to offer an effective service if they do not offer a drop-in facility when they are working in their office.'* It was noted that the training programme for new and existing tutors could address this further.

The Reviewers felt that there were *'... probably efficiency gains that could be realised in the Senior Tutor's Office as part of a holistic review of the services it provides.'* It was clear to the Reviewers that the staff are dedicated and committed, offer a wide ranging service not all of which fits within their remit and that they *'...have achieved a great deal with very little.'* However they were strongly of the view that the range of services being delivered by the Senior Tutor's Office *'...be reviewed as a matter of urgency.'*

3.2 The quality of the student experience in relation to the Tutorial Service

The Reviewers met a group of students and also sabbatical officers from the Students' Union and concluded that *'the majority view is a very positive one.'* They were, however, of the opinion that the many rules and regulations operated by the College are confusing and *'...using these effectively is a daunting task for many students.'* They also remarked that the Service is effective in managing the wide range of pastoral and academic issues which the students experience to a varying degree.

It was noted by the Reviewers that some students have experienced minor difficulties with their tutors. One student, for example, pointed out that *'...tutors are not always familiar with College regulations.'* The Reviewers were told many times by students that an easy way to resolve problems is *'...the ability to change tutors without fuss'* in the event of a personality clash. The students view the Senior Tutor's Office as *'...always available to assist if need be.'* In general, the Reviewers were of the view that the *'... Tutorial Service provides a contribution to the student experience of high quality.'*

The Reviewers expressed concern about *'... the 'advocacy' role performed by tutors in the instance of representing students in disciplinary matters.'* The tutors detailed the variations of the practice and the Reviewers were of the view that the use of the term *'advocate'* should be reviewed and that guidance to tutors needs clarification. To avoid the possibility of untrained tutors advising students, they felt that *'... all new tutors should be required to attend all mandatory training sessions prior to their appointment being confirmed.'*

The Reviewers pointed out that *'it is disappointing, but perhaps unsurprising, that training offered is not well attended.'* They complemented the Senior Tutor's Office for responding effectively to the time pressures on academic staff by offering repeat sessions. However, it was noted that *'... recently 30 applications, signed off by tutors, for students to change course of study had been incorrectly submitted to the Senior Lecturer's Area.'* The Reviewers were strongly of the view that an annual update of administrative procedures, prepared in conjunction with colleagues from the Senior Lecturer's Area, *'...be sent as a matter of routine so that if tutors do not attend refresher training, they would still have accurate information in hand.'* They highlighted Frequently Answered Questions (FAQ's) as an easily accessible means of providing this information.

3.3 The future of the Service and its possible extension

The Reviewers highlighted the fact that whilst '*...the range of activities supported by the Tutorial Service has expanded in the past four years, staffing levels in the Senior Tutor's Office have remained constant during this period.*' They felt that whilst both full-time administrative staff presently employed in the Senior Tutor's Office '*... are experienced, committed and highly competent post-holders,*' they also felt strongly that '*... their present workloads are not sustainable.*' The Reviewers emphasised that the future effectiveness of the service is vulnerable, and that the appointment of another full-time administrative officer is vital.

The Reviewers pointed out that at present neither graduate students nor part-time students fall within the remit of the Tutorial Office. On comparison with the levels of support typically provided for graduates in other universities the Reviewers felt '*...this is a significant limitation of the Service, especially given the growing numbers and the diversity of the graduate student body.*' Through their discussions with graduate students and academic staff in the review process, it became apparent to the Reviewers that '*...research supervisors and graduate course directors constitute the principal source of support for graduate students at present.*' Whilst noting that this system works well for many students, the Reviewers emphasised that '*... these academic staff members are primarily responsible for students' academic progress, do not benefit from training provided for tutors, and may lack the necessary knowledge, skills or indeed the time required to counsel students on other, non-academic matters.*'

The Reviewers were strongly of the view that both the graduate and part-time students should have access to the Tutorial Service '*as soon as possible.*' They felt furthermore that a different model for these students should be considered, but urged the appointment of an administrative officer to the Tutorial Office '*...who can provide 'frontline' tutorial support for graduates and part-time students.*' This individual would require appropriate training for the role '*... including managing the type of problems typically experienced by these categories of students...*' They considered such an appointment as being part of the overall strengthening of the Tutorial Office.

The Reviewers reiterate that three full-time support staff '*... one of whom is primarily responsible for dealing with graduate and part-time students...*' may be sufficient for the Senior Tutor's Office providing it is able '*... to shed some 'peripheral' activities in order to focus upon its core functions...*' They were of the view that if the Senior Tutor's Office were to relocate as is recommended in this review, then this new location '*...should be central and accessible for all students, while offering appropriate space for students to discuss confidential problems with staff.*'

The Reviewers felt that the current centralisation of the Tutorial Service works well and should be retained, '*...as it ensures a consistent level of service across the College.*' In their discussions with Tutors the Reviewers found that many Tutors feel that '*...their role is not sufficiently valued by the College,*' and the Reviewers felt that it was vital that this perception be addressed in order for the continued success of the Service to be maintained. They pointed out that '*...explicit inclusion of tutorships within workload models as these are developed may help in this regard.*'

The Reviewers regarded the current process of evaluating tutor performance and deciding on the reappointment of tutors after a period of five years as '*...somewhat opaque.*' They were of the view that while effective performance-monitoring would require some careful thought, '*...the process should be transparent.*'

3.4 The integration of the Tutorial Service within College

The Reviewers were of the opinion that whilst the Tutorial Service is well integrated into the life of the students of the College '*...the same is not true of its place in College structures.*' In fact they stated that '*as a student service headed by an academic, it is anomalous.*' They noted that, as a result of the way the services have grown up in the College, the Senior Tutor is '*...not routinely included in groups where he/she should belong.*' The Reviewers proposed that '*...it is now time for Trinity College to review and change the way in which Student Services are structured and to ensure the full integration of the Tutorial Service within Student Services.*'

Stating that the Senior Tutor *'should be recognised as a Head of Service and have an equivalent status to other Heads of Student Services..,'* the Reviewers went on to endorse the current method of appointing the Senior Tutor by election from the current pool of tutors. They were of the view that having an academic in the post for one or two three-year periods *'...works very well and should be retained.'* It was also felt that the *'the process by which funds are assigned to the Senior Tutor's home academic School in exchange for their time, for example to replace teaching activity, should be made transparent.'*

The Reviewers felt that College should create a new post of Director of Student Services and they were strongly of the view that this Director *'... should be a permanent, full-time senior administrator and his/her office should be adequately resourced,'* and that at the very least *'... a full-time Executive Officer is required, but, ideally, a Project Officer should also be assigned to this Office.'* The Reviewers also stated that *'...some of the functions currently undertaken by the Senior Tutor's Office should in the future form part of the remit of the Director of Student Services' Office as part of a review of Senior Tutor's Office functions.'*

The Reviewers were of the opinion that the new Director of Student Services *'...should be part of the new Senior Administrative Management Group, reporting to the proposed Chief Operating Officer.'* They also felt that the current system, where the Heads of Services report to the College Secretary and the Senior Tutor reports to the Provost or College Secretary, *'...is disempowering for the Services.'* In their opinion, a Director of Student Services *'... would provide strategic leadership to the dedicated and capable heads of Student Support Services.'* The new Director of Student Services *'...should work closely with the Dean of Students, in a partnership analogous to the Senior Lecturer/Academic Secretary relationship.'* The Reviewers also felt that it would be damaging to the success of the proposed new structure *'...if resources for the new Director of Student Services and his/her Office were to be taken from monies currently allocated to Student Services.'*

The Reviewers recommended the inclusion of the Dean of Students on the new Academic Management Group to represent student services' matters at this forum.

The Reviewers noted that while the Tutorial Service is *'highly effective,'* tutors are not the only staff members providing pastoral care to students, and they urged the College to provide basic training for the administrative staff in the Schools who *'...can find themselves in situations where students in stress rely on them in a crisis.'*

The Reviewers proposed a student services organisational structure for College's consideration (see Appendix A).

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the order that they appear in the report text, the Reviewers recommends to the College that:

- 4.1 *The Senior Tutor's Office investigate promotional activity, including appropriate research as applicable, to ascertain where to dedicate resources to this endeavour. This should include careful alignment of student expectations.*
- 4.2 *Examination marks be forwarded to tutors as a matter of routine and in advance of publication to facilitate the timely discussion of progress between tutors and students.*
- 4.3 *The range of services being delivered by the Senior Tutor's Office be reviewed as a matter of urgency and that those services which are not part of the core functions of the Office be moved.*
- 4.4 *The use of the term 'advocacy' in tutor's roles be reviewed and appropriate guidance issued to tutors in an attempt to clarify practice.*
- 4.5 *All new tutors should be required to attend all mandatory training sessions prior to their appointment being confirmed.*
- 4.6 *An annual update of administrative procedures be prepared and circulated to all tutors as a matter of routine.*

- 4.7 *A full-time administrative officer be appointed to work in the Senior Tutor's Office to ensure that staff workloads within the Office are manageable and to facilitate project management and staffing cover.*
- 4.8 *The Tutorial Service be extended to graduate and part-time students as soon as possible by appointing a new administrative officer in the Senior Tutor's Office and a small pool of perhaps six academic tutors to take referrals.*
- 4.9 *Staffing levels in the Senior Tutor's Office be kept under review.*
- 4.10 *Following the recommended appointment of new staff, consideration be given to relocating the Senior Tutor's Office to provide appropriate space for all staff.*
- 4.11 *The perception amongst the tutors that their role is not sufficiently valued by the College be addressed.*
- 4.12 *The Senior Tutor's Office fully consider how to introduce appropriate performance monitoring of tutors.*
- 4.13 *The Senior Tutor's Office be recognised as a Student Service like the other services (e.g. Counselling, Disability).*
- 4.14 *The Senior Tutor be recognised as a Head of Student Service, with status equivalent to the other Heads of Student Services.*
- 4.15 *The process by which funds are assigned to the Senior Tutor's home academic School in exchange for their time be made transparent.*
- 4.16 *A new post of Director of Student Services be created to whom all the heads of Student Services, including the Senior Tutor, should report. The Director should be a full-time senior administrator whose office has adequate resource (an Executive Officer as a minimum, and ideally a Project Officer in addition).*
- 4.17 *Some of the current broad-ranging functions undertaken by the Senior Tutor's Office should form part of the remit of the Director of Student Services' Office (refers to 4.3).*
- 4.18 *The Director of Student Services should report to the new Chief Operating Officer. The Director would work closely with the Dean of Students who could represent student services matters at the Academic Management Group.*
- 4.19 *The Dean of Students be part of the Senior Management Team of the College i.e. of the new Academic Management Group, and a member of College Council, along with the Senior Tutor.*
- 4.20 *The Dean of Students be given additional administrative support to allow this role to be fulfilled effectively.*
- 4.21 *The funds to establish the Director of Student Services position should not be taken from monies currently allocated to Student Services.*
- 4.22 *Front-line School administrative staff be offered basic training in working with students in crisis and to address queries effectively.*

5. RESPONSE FROM THE DEAN OF STUDENTS AND THE SENIOR TUTOR

The Dean of Students warmly welcomed the Report of the Tutorial Service Review and endorsed its recommendations. In his opinion, the Report *'...is comprehensive and thorough and the reviewers recommendations are very helpful in mapping out the future development of the tutorial service.'*

Stating at the outset that the tutorial service provides College with a sterling service the Dean agreed that it is under-resourced and strongly endorsed the recommendation *'...that provision be made for the employment of an additional full time administrative officer in the service.'* He went on to say that this is particularly important *'... in the context of the proposal to extend the service to cover postgraduate and part-time students as such an extension is inconceivable with existing administrative resources.'*

Highlighting the recommendation that College should give serious consideration to the creation of a new post of Director of Student Services, the Dean was of the opinion that *'...employing a full-time, senior administrator in this capacity would greatly facilitate the development of College's student services and the tutorial service in particular.'* He noted with interest that *'...in not having such a post, we lag behind many other Irish universities.'* Furthermore the Dean agreed that the status of the

tutorial service within the College '*...should be clarified by integrating the service fully within student services.*'

In conclusion the Dean of Students fully endorses the two recommendations relating to his own office '*... namely, that the Dean of Students should be part of both the proposed Academic Management Group and of Council and that additional administrative support be provided to the office.*'

The Senior Tutor praised the review report as providing '*...excellent guidance on how to improve and extend the service.*' She acknowledged the '*major contribution*' of her predecessor, Dr. Claire Laudet, in the reviewing process. She welcomed the recommendation that an additional administrative officer be employed in order to maintain the present level of service and '*...to provide for the extension of the service to other members of the student community.*' Pointing out that it may be necessary to move the office to a new location the Senior Tutor stated that, if this were to happen '*It is imperative that this office is centrally situated and accessible by all students.*'

The Senior Tutor agrees with the suggestion that the office review the core services provided. She cautions that '*...careful thought is required here as to what functions should be dropped*' although she points out that it may not be necessary to curtail any services if a new administrative officer is appointed. The Senior Tutor is in '*complete agreement*' with the recommendations that the Tutorial Service be considered as a Student Service.

Commenting on the recommendation that the Tutorial Services be extended to all part-time and graduate students the Senior Tutor is of the view that '*...the appointment of a new administrative officer is key to providing this extension.*' She also feels that the provision of a different model for the Tutorial Service for graduate students '*...requires further investigation in conjunction with the Dean of Graduate Studies.*'

In her concluding remarks the Senior Tutor underlined the uniqueness of the Tutorial Service in Trinity and emphasised that '*...if it is to continue to provide an exemplary service, college needs to have a strong commitment to improving and maintaining the service.*'

6. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL AND BOARD

The review of the Tutorial Service highlights the need for reform of College's administrative and support service areas, and many of the recommendations can only be implemented as part of this reform. It is therefore recommended to Council and Board that:

1. the Tutorial Service address recommendations 4.1: 4.2: 4.4: 4.5: 4.6: 4.11: 4.12: 4.15: and 4.22, and
2. all other recommendations be addressed as part of the reform of the administrative and support service areas.

Provost
1st February 2008

Appendix A: Proposed Student Services Organisational Structure

