



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

Quality Review of Academic Practice

10-12th March 2021

External Reviewers:

1. Professor Manon Kluijtmans, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
2. Professor Klara Bolander Laksov, Stockholm University, Sweden
3. Dr Jon Turner, University of Edinburgh, UK

Internal Facilitator:

Associate Professor Sheila Ryder, Trinity College Dublin

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Introduction

The review of Academic Practice took place between 10th and 12th March 2021 through a series of online meetings. This was the first time that Trinity had run these reviews virtually rather than on-campus. The review ran smoothly and we were able to have in-depth discussions with a good range of staff, students and other stakeholders. Quality Office and Academic Practice colleagues, together with our internal facilitator Associate Professor Sheila Ryder, did an excellent job in organising and supporting these meetings. Together with the self-assessment and other documentation provided in advance, these meetings allowed us to develop a clear understanding of the work and impact of Academic Practice, and scope for future enhancements.

The review team comprised:

- Professor Manon Kluijtmans, Vice-rector Teaching and Learning & Director of the Centre for Academic Teaching, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
- Professor Klara Bolander Laksov, Director of the Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching, Stockholm University, Sweden
- Dr Jon Turner, Director of the Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh, UK [Chair]

All three external reviewers lead or have responsibility for centres similar to Academic Practice in internationally leading research-intensive Universities.

This report and recommendations have been agreed unanimously by the review team.

The terms of reference for the review were set out for the team as follows:

1. The extent to which the Special Purpose Certificate remains fit for purpose as a professional qualification in teaching and learning, responding to the needs of the diversity of participants. How to measure its impact effectively, both in the short and long term. How can it improve? What recommendations for programme provision should be considered to meet future needs?
2. The extent to which Academic Practice can contribute to the strategic educational development needs of the University.
3. The extent to which other professional development activities meet the development needs of staff working in a leading research-led university.
4. The extent to which the resources (human, physical and financial) and governance achieve the strategic objectives of Academic Practice.

These terms of reference were first established in early 2020 before the Covid-19 pandemic had taken hold. The review team were asked to consider two further themes as a result of this: the emergency pivot to online teaching and implications for academic practice, and our experience of running this as a virtual review.

The report begins with a summary of our overall findings. We then look in more detail at each of the Terms of Reference and the emergency pivot to online teaching, as well as our experience of the virtual review. Our comments are structured around commendations (what we see as excellent practice), affirmations (where we recommend continuing or intensifying specific actions or approaches), and recommendations (for consideration to inform future change and enhancement). The report ends with some reflections on our experience of running this as a virtual review and a summary of our recommendations. Appendix 1 includes links to practice elsewhere relevant to these recommendations.

Summary of Findings

We encountered a highly reflective and learning organisational culture at Trinity College, with people sharing their experiences and vision in a very open and welcoming atmosphere. All of the colleagues we met praised the expertise, commitment and approach of Academic Practice as a team and as individuals. We encountered a high level of respect and confidence in their expertise and effectiveness, a view shared by the review team. We were impressed by the range, scale and quality of activities presented in the self-assessment document and discussed in review meetings. This is an exceptional level of achievement for such a small team, particularly over the last year.

The contribution that Academic Practice can and does make to the College as a whole can be summarised as:

- To increase the professionalization of pedagogic practice and teaching; and
- To support positive culture change around the status and quality of teaching & learning

The key questions for the review panel are the extent to which Academic Practice is meeting these objectives now, whether there is scope to increase their positive impact in the future, and what changes would enable this to happen.

The review team saw clear evidence of success across all areas of Academic Practice activities. Academic Practice training and development programmes (e.g. Special Purpose Certificate and Graduate Teaching Assistant Programme) are highly valued and result in transformational changes in teaching practice for many participants. There are encouraging signs of a positive impact on School and College cultures linked to participation on the Special Purpose Certificate, partnership working with Schools and linked to specific projects (e.g. Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology - TIET).

A key area of concern is that the take up of places on core Academic Practice programmes, like the Special Purpose Certificate and provision for Graduate Teaching Assistants, is variable across the College, with low levels of engagement from some disciplines. A potential consequence of this is the establishment of different cultures around teaching and learning that may cause conflict and difficulties in terms of collaboration and strategic work as well as communication across the College. Furthermore, the size of the Academic Practice team limits the potential to support increased interest in the Special Purpose Certificate, and their capacity

to expand partnership working with Schools. A further area of concern is the lack of staff continuity as a consequence of the reliance on external, project-based funding for a significant proportion of Academic Practice staffing historically.

There was strong support from all those we spoke to for steps to be taken to increase take up of Academic Practice provision and build capacity for Academic Practice to work in partnership with Schools and academics. The key barrier to this is Academic Practice capacity and the instability of Academic Practice funding & staffing. While modest increases in Academic Practice activity could be achieved through steps to optimise and make adjustments to current provision and priorities, the review team agrees that there is a strong case for additional and stable investment in this area. It is difficult to see how Academic Practice can operate at scale and influence College wide culture change without addressing the capacity and stability of Academic Practice staffing. Consideration should also be given to the importance of School level capacity, including learning technology & pedagogic expertise, academic educational leadership (e.g. champions or ambassadors), and the role of Academic Practice in supporting this. Investment in this area would be well timed. The impact of the pivot to online teaching due to Covid-19 has raised the profile of teaching and pedagogic considerations amongst staff. Many colleagues had their first ever contact with Academic Practice as a result of this and it has been a positive experience. There is also a clear desire from many of those in leadership roles to work in partnership with Academic Practice on strategic initiatives (e.g. linked to the Trinity Education Project, particularly around assessment and course design). Academic Practice also has the potential to play an important role in helping Trinity respond to international trends to rebalance the value of Teaching and Research.

Specific areas for development discussed in our recommendations include:

- Scope to grow the take up across all Schools of the Special Purpose Certificate, Graduate Teaching Assistant and other programmes, and consider modest adjustments to increase the efficiency and scalability of these programmes.
- Potential to develop advanced programmes and support, aimed at experienced teaching-focused academics and build a community of educational leaders.
- Grow partnership working with Schools (tailored provision, contribution to School events/activities, advice and consultancy)
- Consider options to provide time for disciplinary academics to work with Academic Practice (e.g. local champions, building on Trinity Education Programme Fellows scheme)
- Support, fund, share results and celebrate disciplinary teaching innovation and SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching & Learning)
- Contribute to the developing College culture that values and rewards teaching excellence (e.g. academic promotions)

Plans for the development of a Curriculum Hub were shared with the review team during our meeting with College Officers. This is an exciting initiative with significant potential to provide more holistic support for teaching and learning excellence across the College, to provide better integration of College level services (including Academic Practice) and discipline-based support

by engagement with and between academic colleagues in Schools. Care will need to be taken in how this Hub is structured and developed. At the moment Academic Practice is predominantly seen by those who work with them as enabling, developmental and collaborative. The positive impact of Academic Practice risks being diminished if a location within the Curriculum Hub structure became or was perceived as top-down, with an enforcement and bureaucratic rather than developmental role. An informing and supportive positioning is advisable for Academic Practice to meet its professionalization and culture change aims.

ToR 1 - Reflections and recommendations on Special Purpose Certificate

The Special Purpose Certificate in Academic Practice (SP Cert) is a professional, accredited, teaching and learning qualification. It is offered in a highly flexible personalised way, catering to individual preferences and needs. Participants can take up to 5 years for full completion. Numbers have been increasing steadily and a waiting list now applies. The programme is mostly attended by early career academics. It is highly praised by participants as truly informative and transformative. Several components have been adapted to online formats to adjust to and cater for the COVID situation, and this has proved popular and effective.

Currently there is an uneven spread of uptake across departments and schools. There are limited structural incentives or obligations for individual academics to participate. This runs the risk of attracting already enthusiastic teachers and not reaching those who need it most. It seems, however, that some faculty managers (e.g. from health sciences) push for participation in a more direct way than others.

The elements in which participants truly interact with each other are highly valued but infrequent, while the highly individual routing limits cohort community building. The time period of 5 years was considered rather long, potentially carrying a risk for some of losing focus and momentum. While the positive impact on individuals seems clear, the impact on peer academics and at organisational levels seems less certain, very much depending both on the individual participant and the community in which s/he belongs academically.

This is a successful programme and does not require fundamental change. Our recommendations are focussed on the potential to enhance and increase its impact and reach.

Commendations:

- Highly valued by its participants
- Great standing and quality

Affirmations:

- Build on the COVID-forced online offering of some programme elements to move towards a blended set-up for the whole programme.

Recommendations

- Keep the flexibility but consider a shorter time period to finish
- Strengthen participant interaction during the programme to enhance peer-to-peer learning and build a community of educators within academic Schools and across the College
- Foster community of educators after the programme by involving alumni in Academic Practice activities (through
 - dedicated events or roles)
- Aim to increase participation from the currently underrepresented faculties
- Consider making participation obligatory (and/or look at other ways of encouraging participation), particularly for new faculty
- Consider how the programme could become a vehicle for interaction in departments around teaching and learning through assignments that engage participants in dialogue with local communities of practice.

ToR 2 - Reflections and recommendations on potential contribution to strategic educational development

Through its expertise and support role Academic Practice has contributed towards strengthening the culture of teaching and learning within the institution. Requests by schools for contributions to local education meetings are willingly accepted and highly valued. The Head of Academic Practice and team express a strong wish to contribute to strategic educational development across the College. Academic Practice collaborations are referred to in very positive terms by all those involved. Academic Practice staff are seen as knowledgeable, adaptable, inspiring and pleasant to work with. However, capacity limits current activity in this area and hampers proactive and structural extension of these important school- or discipline-based teaching competence enhancing activities. Student involvement is currently enthusiastically received and students could increasingly be involved in signalling and addressing teaching and learning development needs.

The restructuring of Trinity Teaching and Learning has enabled Academic Practice to act as a change agent in a more directive role. A substantial focus of Academic Practice's workload over recent years has been on the Trinity Education Project (TEP). This change agent role played by TEP has been positively received by most but has also been perceived by some as counterproductive: diminishing the sense of autonomy and empowerment that academics

experience from the department in their advisory and competence development capability. When it comes to the question of Academic Practice being viewed as a service or 'driver' of change there are differing opinions. A key consideration seems to be the issue of trust, for some colleagues, in initiatives or steers seen as coming from the centre of the University and the possible lack of a structure for lifelong learning in terms of academics' role as teachers. There is a challenge and opportunity to find a discourse that is more inclusive and collegial in relation to experiences from educational departments and other disciplines, such as health sciences departments, where the community around teaching and learning seems more 'advanced'. Trinity's Strategic Plan 2020-2025: Community and Connection, now seeks to embed and mainstream TEP. Educational priorities derived from TEP will need to be supported by Academic Practice expertise in the future. This will require careful planning, resourcing and capacity-building, as well as thinking on where Academic Practice should sit in the College organisational structure.

Academic Practice participate in external and international strategic activity, both through the provision of support and development, and expertise exchange. These support and development projects are externally funded and highly valued. They contribute to Trinity College's reputation and collaboration. It also allows for expertise building in the Academic Practice department, yet this is hampered by the incidental and external nature of funding for these activities. Expertise exchange aimed at quality enhancement of the staff and supported by Academic Practice is seen as important yet is limited in scope because of capacity restrictions.

An important dimension of the legitimacy of those who work within the centre is that they are considered experts and peer academics with expertise in the area of higher education. Currently research in the area of higher education is carried out as 'evening-and-weekend-work' and based on individual willingness to work extra hours. This is not a sustainable solution and risks both individual stress levels and continuity. One option would be to directly align this research and development work with institutional strategic priorities.

Commendations:

- Pedagogical expertise and contributions to strategic projects is greatly valued and seen as indispensable
- Expertise is currently built on academic developer's engagement and background in research, all have PhDs or Professional Doctorates.

Affirmations:

- Continue current openness to take on requests to provide input from faculties and schools. This could be strengthened by supporting a group of key contacts for Schools, either aligning individual Academic Practice staff to specific Schools, seconding or otherwise linking School academic staff to Academic Practice.
- Continue work with networks and on community building
- Continue and intensify collaboration with students

- Continue establishing a strong link between practice and research, using strategic projects as opportunities for research and publication.

Recommendations

- Develop role as catalyst & facilitator of innovation and enhancement, rather than leader or driver of change (to prevent perception of imposing changes)
- Extend AP capacity to provide highly valued pedagogical expertise in support of the realization of Trinity College strategic priorities
- Consider how students can play a strategic role in cultural change work.
- Consider how opportunities for research can become included in the work of academic developers at Academic Practice, either aimed at evaluation of the Academic Practice offer, linked to institutional strategic priorities or by guiding scholarly education projects of academics (SoTL).

ToR 3 - Reflections and recommendations on other potential professional development activities

From the interviews and documents that were provided to us we have received a very positive account of the other professional development activities that Academic Practice provides. The Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) programme clearly fulfils its purpose by introducing junior academics into their roles as teaching assistants or tutors. By designing the programme longitudinally over a 12-week term, participants get a chance to apply what they learn and undergo transformative change. The research supervisor program is also appreciated and addresses a specific need. The review team is very positive about the concept of Academic Practice fellows and considers it a pity this had only been offered linked to a specific project context and concomitant funding. Lunchtime seminars and school-based incidental activities are highly valued and contribute to continuous learning and institutional teaching cultures.

Despite the success of current activities, a major gap signalled and recognized by all groups is the lack of an advanced development offer. Currently Academic Practice has no such offer, nor the funds or capacity to develop and deliver advanced programmes in educational leadership or scholarship. Other ways to encourage and support grass roots educational activity would be the provision of innovation grants, focussed support for practice sharing and disciplinary pedagogic innovation. An important vision expressed in the first interview was that teaching is a core activity that needs professionalization, and that Academic Practice plays a significant role in that professionalization and work to increase the status and profile of teaching alongside research. This aspect of the Academic Practice role could be further developed and emphasised, for example connected to academic promotions. These activities would all require an increase in Academic Practice capacity.

Collaboration and the strengthening of collaborative links should continue to be a key focus for Academic Practice. In addition to links with academic Schools, this should include links with the

School of Education, IT Services, local learning technologists and other areas of Trinity Teaching and Learning. The Curriculum Hub initiative may provide an opportunity to make it easier for academic to access support based on their needs rather than support service structures. The development of this central support should be aligned with a focus on School level requirements for learning technology support and pedagogic expertise.

Commendations:

- Highly valued GTA Programme (transformative for some)
- Highly valued faculty/school based invited/incidental contributions (e.g. invited speaker @ School Education Forums)

Affirmations:

- Continue international work with Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology and/or other international institutes

Recommendations

- Extend and diversify offer, especially advanced and specialized programming
- Develop and offer an educational leadership program
- Draw from the structure of the work with Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology, and consider models to build expertise and capacity locally (e.g. train the trainers or Academic Practice Fellowship models)
- Create funding opportunities as well as capacity in Academic Practice to administer and provide expert advice/mentoring to support projects initiated by schools or individual academics, either aimed at innovation or educational scholarship.
- Scaffold an institution wide teaching community

ToR 4 - Reflections and recommendations around resources and governance

There is a shared concern that Academic Practice is under-resourced in its current setting. Stakeholders at all levels in the university raised this concern. There is also little continuity in funding. Most funding is project based and often comes from external sources. Although we applaud the efforts and success of Academic Practice in acquiring external funding, such funding should come on top of a stable and significant base. This is crucial for the department to be able to plan long term.

Several funding models could be considered. This includes increasing central University funding. Another option would be to look at ways to recover costs from Schools, potentially linked to the use of Academic Practice support, a needs assessment (e.g. from evaluations) or

fees in relation to individual use of AP 'services'. There are, however, drawbacks with fee-based approaches. Firstly, it may not result in stability over time when faculties or departments find themselves in constrained budget situations. Secondly, it may be difficult to deal with institution wide initiatives and hinder collaboration. One could think about a combination, a basic service (e.g. the current programmes plus a new educational leadership offer) which is centrally funded, providing an incentive for all departments to 'use their share', with a fee based approach for dedicated services on top of that.

Plans for the development of a Curriculum Hub were shared with the review team during our meeting with College Officers. This is an exciting initiative with significant potential to provide more holistic support for teaching and learning excellence across the College, to provide better integration of College level services (including Academic Practice) and discipline-based support by engagement with and between academic colleagues in Schools. Care will need to be taken in how this Hub is structured and developed. At the moment Academic Practice is predominantly seen by those who work with them as enabling, developmental and collaborative. The positive impact of Academic Practice risks being diminished if a location within the Curriculum Hub structure became or was perceived as top-down, with an enforcement and bureaucratic rather than developmental role. An informing and supportive positioning is advisable for Academic Practice to meet its professionalization and culture change aims.

Commendations:

- Academic Practice clearly has managerial support for its expertise, engagement and services.
- There is a strong concern about the sustainability of Academic Practice in relation to funding

Affirmations:

- The collaboration with different stakeholders, and constant communication which result in both bottom-up and top-down approaches

Recommendations

- Academic Practice or the university needs a strategy to build engagement with the broader College academic community
- To support long term culture-change Academic Practice needs stability in funding
- Consider new funding models
- Formalise roles and responsibilities for educational development at different levels in the organisation to increase visibility of educational development
- Consider the signal value of working both bottom-up and top-down

Reflections and recommendations from response to digital pivot

Academic Practice responded rapidly and effectively to the requirements of teaching staff linked to the digital pivot necessitated by Covid-19. Their response and the support provided was highly praised by all those we spoke to. They adapted courses and workshops for online delivery, focussed on the immediate and urgent needs of academic colleagues and reached a large number of colleagues across the College. This support benefitted both participants and, in some cases, their peers in Schools. This resulted in a significant boost for the visibility of Academic Practice, with many colleagues engaging for the first time with Academic Practice and having a positive experience of this engagement. There is an opportunity to build on this positive engagement for the future.

While we were not able to explore this in great depth, we had some interesting discussions about the respective roles of Academic Practice, IT Services and local School learning technologist support. Those we spoke to emphasised that the connection between learning technology and pedagogy is a holistic support need and it is beneficial for it to be presented and provided in this way. Our impression was of relatively low levels of local learning technologist support and this may be an area to explore.

Commendations:

- Visibility increased

Affirmations:

- Proactively offering help (given capacity), is being very much appreciated
- Resources linked to and provided very valuable
- Collaboration with different actors, e.g. IT Services.

Recommendations

- Rethink current organization of different expertise and resources for teaching: holistic provision focussed on teachers' perspective
- Consider establishing fora for continuous collaboration
- University to explore potential to invest in or develop additional learning technology support at School level.

Reflections on experience of virtual review process

This was the first time that the Trinity College Quality Office had run a review wholly online and we were asked to reflect on our experience and highlight any learning for future reviews.

All aspects of the review, including advance documentation, responding to queries, organising and facilitating the online meetings, were well organised. Our experience as reviewers was straightforward and positive. We were particularly impressed with how smoothly the online meetings went, some of which involved >10 participants in addition to the review team. All contributors seemed relaxed, comfortable and able to contribute. We felt like we got to know some of these colleagues even in the short time we spent with them. This must reflect a huge amount of work behind the scenes to brief and prepare colleagues and make arrangements to ensure that the technology worked so smoothly.

There were some advantages of the virtual review process. We were able to use the chat function in zoom meetings to gather additional reflections and views. As a review team we have been able to make effective use of online collaboration tools (including google docs and what's app before, during and after the review). The lack of a need to travel to a campus location also meant that we had a large audience for the end review presentation. It would be interesting to see if some of these advantages could be retained when returning to on-campus reviews.

The downside of the Virtual Review was that it was harder to support some elements of the large group meetings. We also missed out on the benefits of the informal conversations that often take places around the on-campus meetings. The review days themselves were long and quite intense, and it is more tiring chairing these meetings online than on-campus, although this was not as significant an issue as we had anticipated in advance. We were also sorry not to be able to visit the Trinity campus and spend more time with Trinity colleagues.

Overall, we had a positive experience and we are confident that our findings and insights are as robust as those from an on-campus review. We greatly appreciated the welcome and support we had from all of the colleagues we met, particularly our internal facilitator and colleagues from the Quality Office and Academic Practice.

Summary of Recommendations

ToR 1 - Special Purpose Certificate

- Keep the flexibility but consider a shorter time period to finish
- Strengthen participant interaction during the programme to enhance peer-to-peer learning and build a community of educators within academic Schools and across the College
- Foster community of educators after the programme by involving alumni in Academic Practice activities (through dedicated events or roles)
- Aim to increase participation from the currently underrepresented faculties
- Consider making participation obligatory (and/or look at other ways of encouraging participation), particularly for new faculty
- Consider how the programme could become a vehicle for interaction in departments around teaching and learning through assignments that engage participants in dialogue with local communities of practice.

ToR 2 - Contribution to strategic educational development

- Develop role as catalyst & facilitator of innovation and enhancement, rather than leader or driver of change (to prevent perception of imposing changes)
- Extend AP capacity to provide highly valued pedagogical expertise in support of the realization of Trinity College strategic priorities
- Consider how students can play a strategic role in cultural change work.
- Consider how opportunities for research can become included in the work of academic developers at Academic Practice, either aimed at evaluation of the Academic Practice offer, linked to institutional strategic priorities or by guiding scholarly education projects of academics (SoTL)

ToR 3 – Other professional development activities

- Extend and diversify offer, especially advanced and specialized programming
- Develop and offer an educational leadership program
- Draw from the structure of the work with Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology, and consider models to build expertise and capacity locally (e.g. train the trainers or Academic Practice Fellowship models)
- Create funding opportunities as well as capacity in Academic Practice to administer and provide expert advice/mentoring to support projects initiated by schools or individual academics, either aimed at innovation or educational scholarship.
- Scaffold an institution wide teaching community

ToR 4 – Resources and governance

- Academic Practice or the university needs a strategy to build engagement with the broader College academic community
- To support long term culture-change Academic Practice needs stability in funding
- Consider new funding models
- Formalise roles and responsibilities for educational development at different levels in the organisation to increase visibility of educational development
- Consider the signal value of working both bottom-up and top-down

Response to digital pivot

- Rethink current organization of different expertise and resources for teaching: holistic provision focussed on teachers' perspective
- Consider establishing fora for continuous collaboration
- University to explore potential to invest in or develop additional learning technology support at School level.

Appendix 1: Links to examples of external practice

Leadership programmes

- Educational leadership programme: <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/centre-for-academic-teaching/educational-leadership-programme> (for design and research into the effectiveness of the programme see <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1078906>)
- Paper on educational leadership: Bolander Laksov, K., & Tomson, T. (2017). Becoming an educational leader—exploring leadership in medical education. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 20(4), 506-516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2015.1114152>

Connecting academics as ambassadors

(various models, with and without funding for their roles)

- Teacher community: <https://tauu.uu.nl/over-de-tauu/>
- Fellows: <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/centre-for-academic-teaching/community-network/senior-fellows>
- Secondments to Institute for Academic Development (Edinburgh): <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/work-with-us/secondments>
- Description of Pedagogical ambassador programme at Stockholm University: Laksov, K. B. (2020). The Pedagogical Ambassadorship Programme as an approach to academic development. *Högere utbildning*, 10(2), 16-20.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23865/hu.v10.2383>

Practice sharing, support for Scholarship of Teaching & Learning

- Blog site to promote, discuss and celebrate teaching (Edinburgh): <https://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/>
- Funding to scheme to support disciplinary educational innovation projects (Edinburgh): <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/learning-teaching/funding/funding>
- Web based resource for academics writing their teaching portfolio: <https://www.su.se/ceul/english/education/teaching-portfolio>

Governance / financial models

- Centrally funded 'drawing rights' for both faculties and individual teachers for didactic support <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/centre-for-academic-teaching/advice-support/professional-consultation>

The review of Academic Practice

It is very encouraging to know that the work of Academic Practice is held in high esteem by the reviewers and, especially, by our colleagues across Trinity. The reviewer team comment that they “...were impressed by the range, scale and quality of activities ... an exceptional level of achievement for such a small team, particularly over the last year.” The team comprises two permanent academic developers, one part-time and two short-term contract academic developers, and two part-time permanent education support officers.

Many of the recommendations are implementable with limited resources and support the strategic direction of Academic Practice, but as with so many of these reviews, the opportunity to resource some of the more transformational recommendations is not easily found especially in the current financial environment. The Strategic Plan 2020-25 commits to developing a ***‘new centre for continuous pedagogical renewal’*** to support the research-based and constantly evolving nature of Trinity’s curriculum and pedagogic practice. The review and on-going work of Academic Practice will help inform the development of this centre, and I hope that the recommended ‘stability in funding’ and the ‘reach’ of Academic Practice across the whole university may be realised.

I am delighted that the work of the team and Academic Practice’s contribution to ‘strengthening the culture of teaching and learning within the institution’ has been recognised so unreservedly.

Patricia Callaghan
Academic Secretary and
Head of Trinity Teaching and Learning

Response to the Quality Review of Academic Practice

Introduction

This Quality Review process has provided Academic Practice with a timely opportunity for self-assessment and critical reflection. This evaluation of the work and impact of Academic Practice through the lens of experts in the field is a welcome one. The reviewers' recommendations for future enhancements will provide an important roadmap for Academic Practice to continue to strengthen teaching and learning in Trinity. I would like to thank the international reviewers for their enthusiasm, their insightful comments and their thoughtful consideration of development opportunities for Academic Practice. I would also like to thank the Internal Facilitator, Associate Professor Sheila Ryder, and the Quality Office for their valuable assistance. Finally, I would like to thank all the stakeholders (52 in total) who gave their time so generously in order to share with the reviewers their experiences of Academic Practice. Informed by this review process, Academic Practice looks forward to the next stage of its development.

Commendations

The reviewers note the important contribution that Academic Practice makes in increasing the professionalization of pedagogic practice and teaching, and in supporting positive culture change around the status and quality of teaching & learning. They commend highly the achievements of our unit across all areas of academic practice activity, making particular reference to:

- The quality, value and standing of the Special Purpose Certificate in Academic Practice;
- The high value and transformative nature of our suite of development programmes;
- The pedagogical and research expertise within Academic Practice;
- The indispensable contribution Academic Practice makes to strategic projects;
- The high value of our contributions at School and Faculty level.

Review Findings

A. Special Purpose Certificate in Academic Practice (SP Cert)

The reviewers endorse the SP Cert as 'transformative' and of high value to its participants. I am pleased they have affirmed our current strategy of establishing a blended context for the programme. They also commend the programme's flexibility but recommend a shorter completion period, which I agree with. Recognising how lack of capacity within Academic Practice limits our potential to support increased participation in the SP Cert, they nonetheless make welcome suggestions on community building. The reviewers also recommend that consideration is given to making programme participation obligatory, particularly for new academics. I look forward to considering this recommendation in discussion with College Officers.

B. Contribution to strategic educational development

The reviewers commend the scope and influence of our unit's external and international strategic leadership in spite of the 'incidental nature' of our funding. I am pleased the reviewers endorse our strategic approaches and I welcome their advice on developing our role as catalyst and facilitator of innovation, and on increasing opportunities for research within Academic Practice. Contribution to strategic educational development is a core priority of Academic Practice and I view these recommendations as a means of consolidating our strengths in strategic education research and development, both within Trinity and internationally.

C. Other Professional Development Activities

The reviewers were very complimentary of all programmes led by Academic Practice, but referenced a gap in the lack of an advanced development offering due to the current lack of capacity in Academic Practice to develop and deliver programmes in educational leadership or scholarship. Increasing our scope to further support teaching and learning leadership is of high strategic importance to the unit and I welcome the opportunity to reflect on the reviewers' suggestions. They also give consideration on how the Academic Practice role could be further developed, and suggest that the strengthening of collaborative links should continue to be a focus for Academic Practice. I look forward to considering these all suggestions and recommendations in the context of the opportunities afforded by the development of the proposed Centre for Continuous Renewal as outlined in the Trinity Strategic Plan 2020-25.

D. Resources and Governance

The reviewers express strong concern about the sustainability of Academic Practice. While they applaud the team's success in acquiring external funding, they recommend that such funding should come on top of a stable and significant base. I endorse their recommendation that sustained funding is crucial for Academic Practice to plan long term and formalise roles and responsibilities in support of College's educational mission.

E. Response to Digital Pivot

The reviewers commended our Unit's rapid and effective response to the requirements of staff during the digital pivot. They recommend the establishment of fora for continued collaboration with Schools and suggest exploring areas such as additional learning technology and pedagogic expertise support at School level. This level of support at School level would require significant investment. However, with more modest investment Academic Practice could develop models for increased digital pedagogic partnerships with Schools and academics. This is an area of high priority for Academic Practice which I am introducing as part of our new strategic project, *Digital by Design*.

Conclusion

This was an overwhelmingly positive and reaffirming review of Academic Practice, which acknowledges Academic Practice as a highly valuable resource to Trinity. The key barrier Academic Practice face is lack of capacity and instability of funding & staffing. As the reviewers state: 'It is difficult to see how Academic Practice can operate at scale and influence College wide culture change without addressing the capacity and stability of Academic Practice staffing.' I look forward to engaging positively with College in the next steps of this review process and to exploring the reviewers' recommendations, some of which require significant funding and others which can be addressed with more modest increases in staffing.

Dr Ciara O'Farrell
Head of Academic Practice
6th May 2021