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

Report to Board on the Quality Review of the Student Counselling Service

May 2015

Reviewers:

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Dr Sue Starfield, University of New South Wales, Australia.

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Quality Review of the Student Counselling Services (SCS), Student Learning Development (SLD) and Student2Student Peer Support and Mentoring (S2S) programs at Trinity College, University of Dublin

February 21, 2015

Report from External Reviewers:

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1. **Introduction /Executive Summary**

   Background of the Review

Trinity College Dublin (TCD) founded in 1592 is considered the premiere university in Ireland and one of the outstanding institutions of higher education in Europe. It has excellent faculty and very talented students. The current undergraduate and graduate student enrollment is approximately 17,000. It has a rigorous curriculum, which may be contributing to the increased stress exhibited by students.

In 1972 TCD hired one counsellor to address the mental health needs of students. It was not until 1993 that TCD invested in hiring a director to develop their mental health services. SCS provides a variety of therapeutic approaches in a short term model as well as group counselling and on line services. Since 1993, SCS has expanded its services to include student learning development services and the S2S mentoring program based on the needs they witnessed. In 2013-2014, the SCS assisted over 11% of the student body through its counselling services and over one-third of the student population through its combined counselling, learning and mentoring programs. In a 2014 survey, there was an average student satisfaction rate of 88% according to the data supplied by the SCS. Last year, SCS achieved the highest student satisfaction score in the International Student Barometer among all European counselling services that participated.

A previous quality review of the SCS was conducted in 2005. The review addressed three areas needing improvement: the inadequate accommodations, the high proportion of staff on insecure contracts and insecure funding. They also suggested that if the three areas (SCS, SLD, and S2S) were to remain together, a change in their name was necessary to adequately represent all the services provided through the SCS.

The SCS is an integral part of the mission of the College as it has aligned its services and practices to support student retention and success. In its literature the SCS state that it "provides support for students to maximize their potential both personally and academically, contributing to a positive student experience and successful completion of their studies. This is achieved through three service teams: clinical support (Counselling), academic skills support (Student Learning Development), and peer mentoring and peer support (Student2Student), with a central administrative team." (Student Counselling Services, Strategic Plan, p. 1)

Its vision is "to contribute to an inclusive, compassionate college community supporting student success". It views its mission as "a confidential, student-centered service that assists the College by supporting student mental health and wellbeing and promoting positive learning …

operating to standards of excellence using evidenced-based, short-term interventions to assess and support students." (Student Counselling Services, Strategic Plan, p. 3)

General Impressions

The review team was impressed with the leadership of the SCS. The creative efforts to sustain a quality and responsive service with committed staff despite the limitation in resources and uncertainties should be applauded. There is a general ethos of hard work, innovation and resourcefulness. At the same time, there is consistency in the SCS's responsiveness, intentionality and purposefulness. Their work is clearly linked to the mission of the institution and its desire to see their students succeed. They focus on quality, evidenced-based interventions and, most importantly, on the students' welfare.

SCS is well respected among members of the TCD community and also its peer institutions in Ireland. In fact, they are seen as the leaders in innovation and in bringing new ideas to colleagues campus-wide and nationally. There is a spirit of collaboration within the SCS as well as across other units of TCD.   SCS management takes the lead in providing excellent training to its staff as well as to the TCD community, such as in its continuous training programs for the campus' Psychological Response Team, the S2S mentors and many other entities. The professional opinions of SCS staff are highly respected by faculty members who routinely request consultation regarding helping students of concern.

Despite the growing concerns around the challenging economic circumstances facing the College, and the limited resources available to them, there is a genuine desire and determination for SCS to serve every student who seeks its services.

The Director and staff should be commended for serving as such a critical and broad-reaching resource for TCD as well as for the rest of the institutions of higher education in Ireland.

The physical facilities have much improved since the last review. The review team was impressed with the distribution of space, location of the various services, the amount of natural light and quality and comfort of the offices. TCD should be commended for providing students a safe, confidential and comfortable place to address their academic and psychological needs.

The review team is concerned with the existing funding model, which cannot sustain the current student needs much less those that will arise with the target populations within TCD's strategic plan. Other sources of revenue must be identified to ensure students are receiving the services that will support their social adjustment, psychological needs and academic development.

As a result of three days of interviews with a wide span of staff, faculty, administrators and students and the review of multiple documents and data, the Review Team developed a number of recommendations. These recommendations are based not only on the current state of the SCS, but also on the projected increases in student cohorts known to utilize these services at a higher rate.

Finally, the review team's recommendations are grounded in the current model of service delivery as well as in TCD's strategic plan. They revolved around the following issues: resources, staffing, operational issues, potential funding source, relocating services and accreditation. Please see section Reviewers' Recommendations for details.

2. Organizational structure and management

Structure

SCS is located within the Corporate Services Division and currently reports to the Chief Operating Officer (COO). However, this direct reporting line soon will change. There is a search underway to fill a newly created position, Director of Services. This position will report directly to the COO; the SCS, along with several other student services, will report to this newly created position. The COO is relatively new to the University and has expressed strong support for SCS. She conveyed that her intent in creating this new position was to insure that SCS would receive adequate support toward fulfilling its critical role in contributing to the mission of the University. The new reporting line to the Director of Services, however, does reduce the direct access of the Director of SCS to higher administration. Under this new alignment, it will be important that the Director of the SCS continues to maintain periodic, direct access to the COO and other higher administrators given the critical role of student counselling to the academic success and progress of students and to the mission of the College.

Management

SCS is headed by a Director who is highly regarded by the staff of SCS, by colleagues across campus, and by peers in the field of student counselling. She has built the Service from its inception to one that now is considered the flagship counselling service in Ireland. The Director is responsible for the management, resources, policies and strategic development of the Service. She also oversees the Service's clinical activities to ensure that they incorporate professional best practices and that they are in compliance with legal and ethical statutes and standards. The Director also serves on a number of campus committees to insure that SCS is closely linked throughout the College. These committees include the following: Student Life Committee, Student Services Heads Forum, Dean's Consultation Group, Student Case

Consultative Group, and Chief Operating Officer Heads of Services. The Director also serves on a number of working groups such as the Major Emergency Management Team of the College Emergency Response Plan and the College Critical Incident Psychological Response Team.

The Director is supported by a strong management team consisting of an Administrator and five coordinators: the Clinical Coordinator, the Groups and Training Coordinator, the Evaluation and Research Coordinator, the Student Learning Development Coordinator and the Student2Student Coordinator. The Clinical Coordinator is responsible for the management of the direct counselling work of the Service. She also oversees the recruitment, coordination, monitoring, reviewing and training of all counselling staff members and training staff members (e.g. interns and trainees). The Groups and Training Coordinator is responsible for the administration of counselling groups and workshops as well as the oversight of all training and continuing professional development activities. The Evaluation and Research Coordinator is responsible for oversight of all research within the Service and for the implementation of assessment and evaluation measures such as psychometric, outcome and client satisfaction assessments. The Student Learning Development Coordinator manages the planning and operations of the Student Learning Development Service (SLD) and is responsible for the strategic placement of SLD services within the College Community. The Student2Student (S2S) Coordinator manages and oversees all the functions and activities of student volunteers in both the S2S Society and the Peer Mentoring Service. The Administrator assists the Director in the administrative management of the Service and is responsible for supervising the Front Office staff. The Administrator and the five Coordinators all report directly to the Director of SCS. This organizational structure appears to work well in developing, delivering and monitoring such a comprehensive, professional service organization.

One of SCS's critical roles is providing prevention and outreach services to students and to the campus community. This function is particularly important to effectively meet the needs of underrepresented and underserved student populations, especially those who may consider it stigmatizing to seek out counselling services directly. The Groups and Training Coordinator currently manages the oversight and strategic development of the Service's activities in this area. However, the title of this Coordinator role does not reflect or recognize this broader and substantial function. Furthermore, it was unclear from this review whether this coordinator had adequate time to devote to this function in addition to her responsibilities for groups and training. A further analysis is recommended to assess whether there is a need to create an additional coordinator role, such as a Coordinator for Outreach and Prevention to insure this function is given adequate attention within the Management Team.

3. Resources

Staff composition

SCS staff is comprised of professionals with expertise in a variety of fields related to mental health, learning development, community development and mentoring. They are appropriately qualified for their roles. The mental health professionals either have qualifications as psychotherapists, registered with the Irish Council for Psychotherapy or are counselling psychologists registered with appropriate professional bodies. There are a wide range of theoretical orientations represented among the mental health providers. The SLD team members have professional backgrounds ranging from Information Technology, Educational Psychology, Occupational Psychology, and Occupational Therapy. The S2S staff also has backgrounds from various disciplines including community development, volunteer management, systems and administrative processes, and data management.

There is one director who supervises the staff composed of mostly mental health professionals. There are coordinators who oversee specific functions relevant to the operation of the SCS. In the mental health area there are coordinators for clinical matters, group and training, and evaluation and research whose duties also include providing mental health services. There is also a coordinator for SLD, S2S, and administrative matters.

The staff is on a variety of contracts: permanent, secure contracts (COID) and fixed-term/unsecured contracts. Nearly 50% of the staff is on fixed-term/unsecured contracts. There are also retired volunteers who contribute to the service on a part time basis. Total FTE is 10.32 down from 12.5 in 2013-2014. Furthermore, there are only six mental health professionals on permanent contracts; only 1.4 FTE of the SLD team are on COID, not including the SLD Coordinator, whose post changed from 1.0 FTE to 0.5 fixed-term. There are no staff members on permanent contracts in S2S.

The reduction in the SLD staff in 2013-2014 had an impact on the number of students served based on the data collected by SCS. The decrease was significant as the number went from 4162 students served in 2012-2013 to 3017 in 2013-2014. However, there is no indication that the actual need decreased. According to the SCS data, 40% of clients stated that their SLD consultations were a factor in remaining enrolled at TCD. Reduction in the mental health services has created a waiting list for access to care. Furthermore, it is more common that students are seen every two to three weeks instead of weekly. Likewise, S2S experiences ongoing challenges in maintaining adequate supervision and providing leadership to the student mentors as a result of having only one full time person managing the program. However, the positive effects of the program on social integration, orientation to the campus,

knowledge of the library, and college work are supported by the majority of the participants who responded to the survey.

Another way in which the SCS staff members are integrated into the College is through their roles on a variety of College wide committees: they provides insights into students' psychological and academic needs and are well respected among their colleagues.

Staff training and development

The SCS is committed to providing training to staff in an effort to continuously enhance the quality of their work with students, broaden skills and assist in their career progression. SCS has a five year strategy on continuous professional development which includes both bringing training to the SCS and also allowing staff to participate in external professional development. These trainings are funded by the SCS's budget as well as the TCD Staff Development Unit.

Funding for these professional development opportunities have been limited due to the financial constraints of the department and College and to time constraints resulting from increased student demand for services. It is important to note that continuous professional development is part of the requirements for professional registration and will soon become a statutory requirement for all mental health practitioners.

Physical facilities/infrastructure

Since the last review in 2005, the SCS has acquired an excellent location directly across the street from campus. Being off campus does not appear to have hindered student participation in any of the three services. The suite has a number of individual and shared offices, a group room and meeting space for training and meetings. However, the number of offices, while adequate for the current staff size, is not adequate to accommodate any growth. A spacious waiting room is adjacent to the administrative staff. There is also an area where students can sit at a computer to complete the intake forms prior to seeing a therapist. The SLD and S2S offices are located at the front of the suite, which makes these offices readily available to students seeking support from the S2S or SLD, while at the same time protecting the privacy of counselling clients who proceed past these offices to the SCS waiting room.

The current suite of offices is well appointed, comfortable and inviting. It has sufficient natural light and the colors are soothing.

Financial resources, budget, including self-financing activities

Adequate funding is one of the biggest challenges facing the SCS. The total SCS expenditure in 2013-2014 was approximately €1,266,794, the majority of which was for salaries. 95% of these funds emanate from the *cista communis* and are allocated by the Chief Operating Officer (COO)

from funds given to her to run the Corporate Services Division. Another 5% of the SCS budget comes from a Service Level Agreement with Marino Institute of Education. This agreement will be renegotiated in 2017. There are no other sources of revenue at this time.

In 2012-2013 the SCS budget was increased by €100,000. These additional funds served to address the increase demand in services and appointments and to reduce the waiting list. SCS also developed an intern program, which has been a cost effective strategy to provide additional appointments at a lesser rate.

However, the demand still exceeds the number of staff available to provide necessary services. Based on the SCS 2013-2014 annual report, a waiting list for counselling remained throughout the year, with over 50 students waiting over three weeks for a first appointment.

There is much concern among the review team members that this funding model will not sustain the level and quality of service delivery without a potential negative consequence to the College.

4. Systems and Processes

SCS has developed and thoroughly documented comprehensive policies and procedures that guide the work of the Services. The practices and structures are fully in alignment with professional Codes of Ethics in Ireland. They also are in alignment with the standards recommended by the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS). Twice yearly reviews insure that the unit's strategic objectives regularly attend to stakeholder and client feedback. Furthermore, the leaders of SCS actively participate in national and international professional associations to keep systems and processes up-to-date with best practices. The evaluation of existing business processes is commendable. Client satisfaction surveys, stakeholder feedback and clinical outcome measures are regularly collected; in addition, performance of the Services is measured against both national and international benchmarks. A student advisory group for SCS is not currently in place, however. The creation of such a group would strengthen the system for gathering non-client, student feedback and insure that student voices are incorporated into annual strategic planning.

A high level of security and protection of the confidential records of SCS is achieved through the implementation of detailed policies and procedures that are in alignment with laws and professional ethics. The Services use Titanium Software, an internationally well regarded electronic counselling records management system, for both scheduling appointments and managing students' records. The records for students of SLD and the records for students in counselling are kept in the same electronic system. There is no firewall between the services to prevent staff of SLD from viewing appointments and notes of students in counselling, however. This arrangement compromises the confidentiality of students' counselling records. Students

should be informed in writing and verbally during their initial counselling session that their records are shared in this manner, or, preferably, a firewall needs to be created to keep the counselling records confidential and accessible only to counselling staff.

Check-in kiosks for students using both the learning and counselling services are located very close together; they include privacy screens that prevent one user from seeing the private information of adjacent user. However, counselling students complete questionnaires with highly sensitive, personal information and they may question whether an adjacent student can observe their responses. Separating the kiosks for further privacy, or raising the barriers between them is recommended if both SCS and SLD clients continue to share check-in kiosks.

University policy states that confidential information should never be transmitted through email. However, current practice includes occasionally sending unencrypted email messages that include client names or references to client appointments. This practice compromises the confidentiality of students' records. An encrypted email system is needed to support this practice. Alternatively, SCS needs to discontinue this practice and adhere to its written policy.

Administrative support staff members who manage the timekeeping functions for SCS do not have access to an electronic time keeping/attendance system. Currently, significant time is spent tracking staff time sheets through manual systems. Implementing an electronic system for this function would increase efficiency and reduce stress placed on an already taxed and understaffed unit.

The College has begun to implement a strategic, online initiative as part of its 2014-2019 Strategic Plan and has been considering whether to offer on-line counselling services to students enrolled in on-line degree programs. However, the current IT systems are not adequate to offer confidential, distance counseling services. Furthermore, moving in such a direction would require a significant investment in staffing and technology to insure such services are delivered within professional and ethical guidelines for confidentiality and record keeping. SCS currently offers online psychoeducational and assessment tools that involve minimal counsellor intervention and, with additional staff, these limited services could be offered and expanded to support the counselling and learning needs of online degree students.

5. **Alignment to Strategy**

Central to the vision of the 2014-2019 TCD Strategic Plan is the fostering of an 'ever more diverse student community, providing a distinctive education based on academic excellence and a transformative student experience'.

The activities of the SCS seem particularly well aligned to support the mission and objectives of the College in as much as they are aimed at enabling all students to achieve their full academic potential regardless of background. The SCS aims to support student engagement, progression and retention and has provided evidence of its impact on student retention and enhanced wellbeing. For example, in 2013-14, 187 students stated that counselling was a key factor in their decision to remain at TCD.

In terms of the College's strategic goals of widening access and participation; increasing internationalization and online student recruitment the SCS would seem, on the basis of the strengths outlined in this report, admirably placed to assist the College achieve its strategic goals. The two key goals of strengthening community and promoting student life are clearly aligned with the goals of the SCS. The SDS mentoring scheme articulates strongly with the vision of an expanded orientation and a first-year experience office. Stakeholders consulted viewed the SCDS scheme as contributing significantly to retention and transition.

The Strategic Plan also articulates a clear vision of the integration of local and global wellbeing and community as central to the College mission. The SCS therefore has a key role to play in enabling the College to realize its goal of improving student wellbeing and students' awareness of their strengths and abilities.

As the College's Strategic Plan points out, higher education internationally is challenged by decreased public funding and growing demand; the SCS has developed a range of student focused programs that are extremely cost-effective and successful and could be scaled up to meet the growing student demand at a relatively low cost.

The ambitious nature of the strategic goals carries attendant risks; the rapid projected increase in international student numbers from outside the EU from 7.8% - 18% and the increase in online learners from 0-1000 within the same five year period, increasing the percentage of underrepresented groups enrolled in undergraduate courses to 25% by 2019, as well as the goal of increasing retention from 84% in 2012 to 90% by 2019 will all demand more SCS resourcing. All these groups are known to be high users of the types of services SCS provides.

An opportunity also exists with the proposed investment in digital technologies for a planned, strategic approach to embedding academic skills within the curriculum, not only in the new online courses but also in on-campus courses which will no doubt move more into the 'blended' space with the affordances of the new technologies. The Review Team heard from academic departments which were already successfully embedding these skills into the first year curriculum in certain subjects through online provision. At present these are ad hoc arrangements, contingent on individual relationships and motivations. With a well-resourced, planned strategy large numbers of students could be reached at a relatively lower cost and

academic skills contextualized into large first-year courses. In this way the strategic goal of adding transition and study skills to the first-year curriculum can be realistically met. The admirable goal of embedding 21st century learning skills such as critical thinking within the curriculum could also be supported in this way by a well-resourced SLD.

It is quite remarkable that given its current resourcing, SLD is able to deliver the diverse, comprehensive and high quality services that are on offer. The Review Team finds that in the absence of additional resourcing, the SLD will not be able to deliver services to meet the goals of the Strategic Plan.

In 2013-2014, over one third of the student body were supported by SCS in some way but it remains unclear how, in the absence of increased resourcing and with cuts proposed to existing provision, the SCS can continue to sustain the current levels of service. A proposed 10% cut to 2014/15 funding is likely to affect all contract positions in SCS and will result in a reduction in the number of counselling sessions; reduced SLD workshops and one-to-one sessions, and a reduction in the S2S mentoring program to one Faculty per year. Increasing service provision to meet the changing demographics outlined above will not be possible.

6. Performance

SCS provides a broad array of programs and functions to students and to the campus at large. Each of the three services, SCS, SLD and S2S engage in a range of services. The counselling services include individual and group counselling; crisis intervention and after-hours emergency services; outreach and prevention programming; consultation services to faculty, staff and administration; referrals and coordination of care with community resources; professional training; on-line resources; program evaluation and professional development activities. SLD offers additional drop-in services, one-to-one sessions, workshops and S2S offers mentoring, student support programs and campus wide trainings. All activities appear to be conducted according to high ethical standards and with vigilance to risk management. In particular, the confidentiality of counselling and of counselling records is highly monitored and protected.

SCS is strongly linked to the campus community and has strong relationships with other student affairs units, faculty and higher administration. Interviews with a wide range of campus partners revealed that the staff and director of SCS are held in the highest regard; the services of SCS are highly valued and have an excellent reputation for both responsiveness and quality. Several tutors, for example, agreed that they would not be willing to take on the role of tutor if SCS staff members were not as available, responsive and supportive as they have been. Most campus partners wanted even more from SCS. For example, several mentioned the frequency of student appointments as a problem; they described a need for many students to be seen weekly for counselling, rather than every two or three weeks. They also expressed concern over

long waitlists for counselling, given their limited supportive roles, and given how strongly students' learning and performance are impacted by mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety.

Counselling benchmarks:

Benchmark data comparing the student utilization and range of services of SCS with other Irish and international university counselling services show that SCS is operating at a level similar to the highest ranked Centers in the United States and above other Centers in Ireland. It is also noteworthy that students' measured levels of psychological distress are higher than average levels of students in the United States but similar to those found at top ranked American universities. Staffing levels, however, are well below those in comparable universities in the United States, and below the level recommended by the International Association of Counselling Services.

These comparisons demonstrate a highly efficient use of resources by SCS but at a level that probably is not sustainable. The workload for counselling staff is a serious concern. SCS service data indicate increasing numbers of students are requesting services and their presenting concerns show increasing severity and complexity. In addition the University has been increasing the enrollment of international students, residential students and non-traditional students. These particular student populations have unique counselling needs and will continue to put added stress on SCS given the specialized interventions and supports these students need to succeed. Sending students to off-campus, community counselling resources is not a realistic option for most students given that few have private insurance and that public counselling services have extremely long waits. Counselling staff members appear to be highly committed and efficient in fitting urgent students into the margins of their schedules, but at the cost of giving up lunch hours and working longer hours than scheduled. The staff have been innovative in attempts to address increased student demand; they have expanded web-based resources, limited the number of sessions per student, and implemented interns and trainees to expand counselling hours. One, additional efficiency to consider is expanding SCS's group therapy program to more efficiently serve large numbers of students. Group treatment could be offered in place of individual counselling, particularly for students with a range of interpersonal concerns. Nevertheless, at the current pace, counselling staff members are at high risk for burnout.

SLD benchmarks

SLD provides individual consultations and workshops to approximately 4% of the student population. The services of SLD have been benchmarked to eight universities in Australia and the UK; the scope of SLD services is similar to these universities. The services of

SLD also meet the best practice criteria for learning support and development set forth by the Learning Centers in Higher Education. It was noted that the staff of SLD have, in the main, qualifications that are psychological in orientation which may be explained by the Service's development in SCS. Equivalent centers in Australia tend to be staffed by advisers with backgrounds in education, TESOL and applied linguistics who may be better prepared to assist the growing numbers of international, non-English speaking background and non-traditional students with their needs in areas such as academic writing. If additional staffing is provided, it is recommended that consideration be given to diversifying the profile of advisers.

S2S benchmarks

The services of S2S have been benchmarked to parallel services both nationally and internationally. S2S has a much lower staff-to-student ratio than almost all comparison institutions, yet, offers a comparable breadth of services.   Compared to many institutions, S2S is operating on a "shoestring" budget, yet it reaches almost 4,500 students annually, which include mentees and volunteer mentors, and these numbers are trending upwards. S2S has been exploring ways to increase its services through stronger collaborations with other campus mentoring and support services.

7. Communication

The 2014 SCS SWOT analysis and staff stakeholder survey identified a lack of awareness in College of the full extent and nature of the services available. The Review team acknowledges the real difficulties facing a small, resource-strapped center like SCS in communicating across a large complex organization such as TCD and finds that the SCS makes use of a range of communication channels and networks to communicate efficiently with users and stakeholders.

It does however need to be pointed out that this perceived lack of awareness may be in part due to identity issues at the heart of the SCS. The SCS comprises three distinct services, student counselling, learning development and peer mentoring which in many contemporary higher education institutions have quite distinct identities and function as separate entities, often, but not always, under a broad student services' umbrella. This was noted as an issue of concern in discussions with SCS staff who have been considering name changes for the Centre for some time to better reflect the range of services on offer and in the 2005 review this suggestion was also canvassed. The 2005 External Review also considered the separation of SLD and SCS into two separate units and the relocation of SLD to CAPSL. This latter option was not recommended by any of the stakeholders consulted by the Review Team or in any of the documentation reviewed the Team was cognizant of the important synergies for students that result from the current colocation of services. At the same time, the Review Team heard some students were deterred from accessing learning support through negative association with

Counselling. International students were felt to be particularly reluctant to access a service labelled Counselling.

On balance, the Panel feels that significant benefits would accrue to the College through the creation of an Academic Support/Development Service with a distinct identity that would incorporate SLD and other services such as math support. The demographics targeted in the TCD strategic plan will require well-resourced, well-marketed academic support services that are seen to be valued and owned by the institution. Defining and communicating more clearly the distinct identities of each service as suggested will enhance awareness of the full range of support services.

The SCS website appears to be the main form of communication with students and the wider community of the College. Anonymous email mailing lists are also used as well as leaflets, signage, posters and use of electronic TCD communication listings. Students are clearly informed early in their contact with the SCS about its policies on confidentiality, limits to the services, child protection and record-keeping procedures.

The web interface is attractive and clearly laid out with much helpful information clearly communicated. The identity issues noted above of the different services clearly emerge on the website. Potential confusion arises with the overall SCS – Student Counselling Services logo being the overarching one and the welcome message stating 'Welcome to Student Counselling Service'. Student Learning Development is not a main heading on the left hand menu and appears under an 'academic support' heading elsewhere on the page. Students seeking learning support may not immediately realize that they are at the right page as the Counselling message dominates. It is felt that a more distinct academic support identity or learning development identity needs to be created online so that students can clearly and immediately be directed to the appropriate service. Similarly the S2S website could benefit from a more distinct identity though this is perhaps less urgent as it is fairly clearly visible on the home page. Depending on the overall direction taken in terms of the three services, the website may need some rebranding.

The SLD self-assessment against best practice states that Facebook and Twitter are used to communicate with students but there were no links to either of these social media sites on the SCS home page. A link to Facebook was found on the SLD site. Social media could fruitfully be used to enhance communication and promote awareness of learning development and mentoring in particular. Again though, maintaining a social media presence has resourcing implications.

Numerous publications about mental health, wellbeing and learning skills are freely available at the SCS. In addition, many resources are available for downloading online; high quality podcasts

and power point slides on many key academic skills are also freely available and through Blackboard.

The SCS appears to have an excellent network of communication with its various stakeholders within the College community. We met with a range of academic and administrative staff who were all very aware of the range of services offered and who had open lines of communication with the SCS staff, particularly the Director.

The SCS is also well networked through a number of highly functional committees including the Student Life Committee, Student Services Heads Forum, Dean's Consultation Group, Dean of Students' Consultative Group on Medical Students Cases, and Chief Operating Officer Heads of Services that facilitate communication across TCD. The Review Team did feel that internal communication could be facilitated by having ex officio representation of SCS on all key university committees including the Undergraduate Studies committee where direct SLD membership could be appropriate. Communication re SLD activities could be further enhanced by filling the position of SLD coordinator.

The Director is also a member of several working groups such as the Major Emergency Management Team of the College Emergency Response Plan and the College Critical Incident Psychological Response Team. The provision of consultancy and training by the SCS through the year to a range of stakeholders who support students such as new tutor training and warden training functions is an additional communication mechanism. Although the director and the S2S Coordinator meet regularly with the Welfare Officer of the Students' Union and the President/Vice-President of the Graduate Students' Union, as noted above, there is currently no student advisory group which might facilitate communication and feedback with client groups. It must however be pointed out that active participation in these committees, networks and training falls to the same small group of staff who take on these roles in addition to their daily SCS functions and raises concerns re sustainability and burnout.

SCS internal communication strategies appear highly functional. Regular meetings and reviews are held and there is an annual planning cycle

8. **Governance Compliance**

The SCS is part of the TCD structure and all staff members are employees of the College. The SCS is therefore governed by the policies and procedures of the College and ensures that it complies with clearly defined policies and procedures as laid out in the SCS Policies and Procedures Manual in regard to confidentiality, relevant legislation such as Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Child Protection and adheres to guidelines of professional bodies such as PSI or ICP, including accreditation of all relevant staff.

The SCS currently sits within the COO's portfolio and the COO and her team are very conscious of the SCS' resourcing issues and their potential impact on service provision. With a view to strengthening the SCS reporting line and access to resourcing, the COO intends to appoint a Director of Student Services to whom the Director of SCS will report. This position is currently under advertisement. It was not clear to the Reviewers whether this change in reporting lines would have a completely positive outcome for the SCS as they would be at a remove from the COO.

The SCS has well set out internal governance policies and procedures detailed in the Policies and Procedures Manual which is regularly updated and a clear management structure. The Director has overall clinical and administrative responsibility for the service and manages the Senior Management Team and the S2S coordinator. Coordinators meet monthly to discuss issues of risk management, resource planning and management, quality assurance and legal and professional compliance. SCS has detailed policies and procedures relating to IT systems, in particular the security and protection of confidential records.

The Director represents the SCS on the Committees identified above and works to align the SCS' systems and processes with the broader TCD goals and best practices both locally and internationally. The Management Team coordinator positions report directly to the Director and include the Clinical Coordinator, the Training and Groups Coordinator, the Evaluation and Research Coordinator, the Administrative Coordinator and the SLD coordinator.

The SCS is committed to transparency and monitors compliance closely with any breaches reported and investigated internally and then externally if appropriate. Risk management processes in place include internal and external supervision; weekly clinical meetings; weekly reviews of the at-risk register; on the spot consultations where necessary with the Clinical Coordinator, Director or other team member; and referral procedures to College Health including a psychiatrist or directly to hospitals for assessment. The 'red flags' on the Titanium system are used to monitor students at risk. Concern was expressed that monitoring of compliance with statutory legislation and assurance of confidentiality could be affected by failure to renew an Admin AO3.1 post.

The SCS publishes an Annual Report, available on its website that outlines accountabilities, and provides data to the TCD community on its performance over the year.

As will be evident throughout this report, the greatest risk identified when reviewing all documentation provided and in intensive discussion with stakeholders and SCS staff was the consequence of inadequate resourcing of the three services. TCD staff feedback in the 2014 Staff Stakeholder Survey continually referred to the services being 'stretched to their limits' and provided evidence of waiting times for counselling appointments that did not meet acceptable

benchmarks. In the light of the ambitious targets for growth articulated in TCD's new strategic plan the Review Team has identified significant reputational risk to the College if adequate resourcing for services is not found. The student populations targeted for growth under the Strategic Plan are already high users of SCS and it is the opinion of the Review Team that the demand for learning development resources will increase substantially. In particular, academic staff across TCD will be challenged by the increased diversity of the students in their classes and will turn to Learning Development for assistance. In its current shape and size the service will not be in a position to respond adequately. It is important to note that the recommended IELTS level of 6.5 (most commonly used language proficiency test for international student entry) is not considered sufficient to prepare students for academic study in linguistically demanding courses (the majority of academic courses). IELTS itself provides guidance to institutions that for an overall band score of 6.5 the student will require further English study. (http://www.ielts.org/PDF/Guide_Edu-%20Inst_Gov_2013.pdf p. 13)

A full-time position for an SLD Coordinator on an extended contract is essential for the proper functioning and development of this service and to mitigate the risks identified here.

Further risks have been identified in ensuring client confidentiality in the counselling services. These are noted in Section 4.

9. **Reviewers' Recommendations:**

Introduction

The review team spent three full days interviewing numerous members of the Trinity College-Dublin community regarding the Student Counselling Services (SCS), the Student Learning Development (SLD) and the S2S program. The discussions highlighted and underscored the excellent service being provided by these three entities. These services are perceived as integral to the academic progress and social integration of enrolled students. There was wide consensus that these services were essential in addressing the mental health, academic and social challenges that students often experience. Members of the institution depend on these services to provide training to staff and faculty, mental health and academic support services to students, consultation to faculty and staff and to assume a leadership role in the College's response to emergencies. SCS is also perceived as being responsive to the growing academic and social needs of students through the growth of two important initiatives, the SLD and the S2S mentoring programs. Members of the external community perceive the SCS to be a leader in the field as well as among the third level institutions. Trinity College should be commended for the talented staff it has recruited to serve its student population. At the same time, some concern was expressed that the decision makers of the institution were not aware of the increased mental health and academic skills needs of their students which directly impact their

retention. Trinity is in fact witnessing student mental health trends similar to those of its peer institutions around the world. There was strong agreement among those interviewed that current levels of funding were not adequate. From their perspective, these services needed additional resources to maintain the pace and quality of their activities as well as to respond to the projected increases in targeted student populations, which are high utilizers of these services. Examples of such clients within the College's 2015-2019 strategic plan include: 1) an increase in international students from 7.8% to 18%; 2) an increase in under-represented student population by 25%; and 3) an increase in on-line students by 1,000 who are expected to have similar access to all services. There is also a desire to increase the transition from first to second year from 84 % to 90% by 2019.

Therefore, the review team's recommendations are based on the articulated challenges these services are currently experiencing as well as the future strategic target areas of Trinity College enumerated above. The team is also keenly aware of the potential consequence of error associated with the existing funding model and lack of appropriate resources. With the College's intended goals, the review team would like to suggest changes in its structures that would enhance the student experience, organize its services with similar missions and facilitate its ultimate goal of retaining a high percentage of its future student population.

Recommendations:

Student Counselling Services

Adequate resources must be appropriated to ensure students are receiving the mental health care necessary to progress academically and become socially integrated in the College. At this time, they are not able to fully respond to the students' mental health needs due to the shortage in staff. There is concern that possible cuts are pending. Any cuts to the budget would be problematic and potentially put the Service and the College at risk.

Staffing:

    a) Staffing levels and composition: The number of therapists currently employed is not sufficient to maintain SCS's superior service or to respond adequately to the growing mental health needs of the students. The current staff composition includes very dedicated volunteers, interns, and staff that are not in permanent lines. The size of the staff leaves the center quite vulnerable to burn out and potential treatment error. Students are being seen every 2-3 weeks. The recommended model would suggest a student be seen every week for the period of time allotted. According to the International Accreditation of Counseling Services (IACS), the ratio of counselors to students should be 1:1,000-1,500. This ratio includes the Director in the count of counsellors but

does not include interns, trainees or volunteers. The SCS has only 7.4 FTE counsellors, with a resulting ratio of approximately 1:2261. There should not be any cuts to the staff. In fact, more therapists are needed to reach the recommended ratio. Securing increased, stable, staffing levels is essential to maintaining SCS' responsiveness and quality of care. Furthermore, staff not in full time permanent position should be made permanent and volunteers should be replaced with permanent therapists when they complete their service to the SCS. With this in mind, the Director's recommendations seem very appropriate and they are as follows:

• At a minimum, the counselling team should maintain its' current staffing levels to keep pace with anticipated student need and needs to build staff resources over the next 5 years as outlined below:
  o Appoint 3 interns (post doc in counselling psychology pre-registration) on rolling two-year training contracts.
  o Review staff salaries as they are not competitive (starting salary in the HSE is €48,585/€53,983) and current levels will result in high staff turnover with negative impact on clients;
  o Appoint 0.6 FTE additional counsellors (senior post – admin 1 over the bar) with specific responsibility to develop the trainee program, including evening appointments, thereby increasing service availability (2015);
  o Appoint 2 additional Assistant Psychologists (2015);
  o Recruit 1 FTE Deputy Director of SCS to ensure competent handover and secure sustainability of services (2018-19).

b) Increase the diversity of the staff in the SCS to reflect the demographics of the projected student body. Currently, the majority of staff is white females. Some staff members speak different languages besides English, but ethic and racial diversity among staff, interns and trainees is lacking. Given the projected increases of international students, it is necessary to have therapists that culturally reflect the anticipated student population.

c) A minimum of two additional psychiatrists should be hired for the campus to address students' growing needs for psychiatric evaluations and medical management, and so that staff of SCS can access timely psychiatric consultation. There is a six week waiting list for students to receive a

psychiatric appointment. This is not adequate given the nature of psychiatric illnesses that need timely attention.

d) A case manager is needed to manage the complexities inherent in students with serious mental health problems. This position would provide services designed to minimize the impact of mental illness or emotional distress on the academic and personal pursuits of students through effective case management. This individual would also coordinate care between campus and community resources. The position would also be responsible for assisting with aspects of clinical administration regarding triage/intake/crisis systems, and quality assurance. Also, the position would be involved with crisis intervention, consultation and psychological programming to the Trinity College community. This is a best practice that is growing in the USA. It allows the therapist more time to see clients rather than spend time working out details for referrals, hospitalizations, etc.

e) It would be advisable to hire an expert in alcohol and drug abuse to complement the current staff. There is a need to address the binge drinking among students and the ills associated with it. Most counselling centers have a therapist with this expertise.

f) In terms of the administrative team, renewal of the full-time staff is strongly recommended. The time and investment associated with training new staff that can handle crises and understand confidentiality is often underestimated.

g) Given the staff configuration and the demands that currently exist, providing counselling services to the projected increase of online students should be deferred until the above mentioned issues are addressed.

Operational Issues:

a) An after-hours on call system is needed. Currently the director is on call 24/7, 365 days a year. This model is not sustainable. Most programs include a rotation system where different therapists are on call during a period of time during the cycle year. Given the increase in residents that is projected with the construction of 1,000 more beds, this system needs to be implemented. On most campuses, therapists are provided a stipend for this work that takes place after hours.

b) Therapeutic groups should be increased to reach larger numbers of students. This method of treatment is often the treatment modality of choice for students given the issues they deal with at this stage of their development. Currently, the Center does offer this service in a limited amount. Group therapy was very helpful according to the students interviewed.

c) Confidentiality in the management of records, emails and other kinds of electronic communication is imperative. Currently they are not operating with encryption between

desktops and the server. These issues should be addressed as soon as possible in order to provide the protection of student privacy.

d) Confidentiality of students' identity receiving treatment from the SCS is of utmost importance. Students receiving therapy from the SCS and those being served by the SLD should not be sitting in the same waiting room. There needs to be a separate area where students receiving services from SLD may sit while they wait to be served.

e) The university would benefit from reviewing the standards set by the JED Foundation related to the prevention of suicide and mental health issues. They recommend a framework for college campuses to assess where they are as an institution in preventing suicide and caring for those with mental illnesses. The link to the JED Foundation is https://www.jedfoundation.org.

Accreditation:

a) The SCS should consider seeking accreditation from the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS). IACS offers counselling centers a thorough review of policies and practices and provides guidance and recommendations to ensure counseling centers are in compliance with best practices. The link to IACS is http://www.iacsinc.org//home.html.

Professional Development:

Additional levels of professional development should be made available to the staff on an annual basis. Given the importance of providing high quality care to students, the staff must continuously enhance their knowledge and skills. At this time, the budget to allow staff to seek professional development is inadequate.

College Policy Development:

The review team recommends the Director of SCS be involved in campus committee discussions that impact policies around curriculum, exams, and any matters which influence the students' academic progress. The Director can provide insights and data related to the impact such matters can have on the stress, anxiety and potential retention of students.

Potential Funding Sources:

a) Similar to the recreational sports levy, it is strongly recommended that Trinity College in Dublin consider initiating a health and counselling levy that would cover the costs associated with any funding increases in both the Health Services and the SCS. This levy would need to be ring-fenced to serve solely the mental and physical health needs of the enrolled students. Annual increases to the health levy would be reviewed by a

committee composed of students, administrators and faculty to determine the percentage of the annual increase for each department. Based on the discussions with the student leaders, it appears they are keenly aware of the mental health needs of their peers and would possibly support this levy. This is a common practice on campuses in the United States.

b) There could also be some consideration of billing a fee for treatment sessions after the allocated eight session provided by the SCS. However, this fee might discourage students from accessing the service. Further study of the issue is warranted.

c) There are a number of fundraising opportunities that should be explored. Based on practices in the United States, many parents and alumni are very receptive to giving toward the mental health services provided to students. Parents should be identified and approached with the idea of funding some aspect of the SCS. Many alumni who have been in similar situations are very willing to give back to their alma mater, in particular to a service that once assisted them in their academic progress. Annual fund efforts dedicated to the mental health services can be an effective way of receiving these funds and should also be considered.

Structural Recommendations:

a) To enable the realization of TCD's strategic goals referred to in this report, it is recommended that the SLD and S2S separate from SCS to develop and create new units that address the needs of first-year students and that provide centralized academic services for students. However to make such a separation effective, establishing strong leadership for SLD and S2S would be essential. Otherwise, it would be best to maintain these two programs within the SCS given the support they receive from the current Director of SCS.

b) SLD could be an integral part of a comprehensive academic support service unit that also provides advising, tutoring, and study skills. There may be pre-existing academic needs students have on arrival to the College that SLD is not equipped to address, such as learning disabilities. These particular needs and others similar should be served as part of a larger academic service function. Given the increase in the student populations projected for the future, SLD will be very beneficial to the retention of these students. Having a one stop shop for these academic services could be ideal.

c) S2S could become a strong component of a First Year Experience unit that focuses on the first year students. This program which started as a pilot has had a very broad reach and is a recognized brand with its signature red hoodies. The first year students as well as the student volunteers who serve as mentors can articulate numerous benefits associated with their academic progress and personal

development. There are over 700 student volunteers that are trained annually and serve as mentors who support and provide peer guidance to the first year students. It is apparent their programs and interventions help with integration into the College and reduction of social isolation. Data provided indicate this program is having a positive impact on these two factors. Given that one of the target areas for TCD is to increase the transition from first to second year from 84% to 90% by 2019, it would behoove TCD to find effective ways to sustain this program.

<u>Student Learning Development and S2S</u>

 With either scenario posed above, the number of staff dedicated to these programs is woefully inadequate. The current staffing model is not sustainable and the quality of services will suffer if more resources are not provided soon. The review team concurs with the director's assessment of the need for the following:

<u>Student Learning Development</u>

- Reinstate the SLD Coordinator's post to full-time by academic year 2015-16
- Renew the SLD Coordinator's contract to a Contract of Indefinite Duration/5-year minimum (2016-17)

<u>S2S</u>
- Renew the contract of the S2S Coordinator to a Contract of Indefinite Duration (May 2016)
- Replace the S2S Research Assistant with an Executive Officer 5-year contract (June 2015)
- Expand the S2S service by appointing a Training Officer at Admin 3

<u>Additional recommendations:</u>

a) Develop a secure platform for the delivery of online support.
b) Develop a S2S database for recording volunteer activities- currently this is done inefficiently by hand.
c) Create a Coordinator of Training. Currently, there is one coordinator that does training and groups.
d) Create a Coordinator of Prevention and Outreach. Currently these functions are not identified as a separate set of services and are lacking the strategic leadership they need.

2. Response from the Director of Student Counselling Services

Student Counselling Services' response to Quality Reviewers' Report, 2015

Student Counselling Services wish to thank the Review Team of Dr. Prince, Dr. Starfield and Dr. Telles-Irvin, as well as the Internal College Facilitator Prof. Gerry Whyte, for their considerable work throughout the review process. SCS are also grateful to the students and staff who participated in what was a comprehensive review, which benchmarked the SCS against international best practice.

The SCS welcome the Report of the External Reviewers, noting its resounding affirmation of the services' high-quality, integral place in College and strategic alignment with the College's core mission. The report acknowledges the strong links SCS have with the College Community, its responsiveness to College's needs, and its highly efficient use of resources. SCS also recognise the Reports' serious concern that both the Services' quality standards and its ability to continue contributing to College's strategic goals will be compromised without increased resources.

Specifically, SCS wishes to respond to the following areas covered by the Report.

Alignment to Strategy: The SCS garnered high praise from the reviewers for its alignment to strategy and overall strategic planning: *"The activities of the SCS seem particularly well aligned to support the mission and objectives of the College in as much as they are aimed at enabling all students to achieve their full academic potential regardless of background"* (p. 10). Last year the SCS drafted a 5-year Strategic Plan to ensure it remains aligned to TCD's strategic goals of recruitment of international and non-traditional students, improving retention of first year undergraduates, expanding online learners, and embedding 21st Century learning skills in the curriculum. The reviewers are supportive of the SCS Draft Strategic Plan.

Staffing: The reviewers point out that nearly 50% of SCS staff are on insecure contracts and believe that this threatens service quality. S2S and SLD staffing levels are seen as unsustainable and the reviewers acknowledge that key activities will need to be dropped if resources are not provided for these programmes soon. The report criticises SCS's counsellor to student ratio as being well below international recommendations (1: 1,000), and raises concerns about the possibility of staff burnout, the danger of neglecting student needs, and the significant risk to College's reputation if this ratio is not improved. SCS's 5-year Strategic Plan proposes the staggered creation of key strategic positions to continue delivering its goals and prevent the scenarios envisaged by the reviewers.

Funding: The reviewers state that *"the existing funding model … cannot sustain the current student needs much less those that will arise with the target populations within TCD's strategic plan"* (p. 3). The SCS agree its current budget allocation is inadequate in this respect. The reviewers suggest a ring-fenced Health and Counselling Levy to cover increases, as well as fundraising initiatives (such as charitable donations from alumni). In order to protect accessibility for all students – a quality indicator the reviewers praise – the SCS favour a universal levy to fund services rather than a service charge at point of delivery.

Professional development: The report highlights the professionalism of the current SCS Team as well as the need for an increased continuous professional development (CPD) budget to ensure both

ongoing quality and minimum CPD requirements for staff to comply with forthcoming statutory registration laws.

Accommodation: While the reviewers are very impressed with the quality of the SCS premises, they highlight that the number of offices is not adequate to accommodate required growth. The SCS Team has worked creatively to exploit its excellent physical infrastructure (e.g. evening opening hours, lunchtime opening) and will continue to do so. However additional office space will be required in the medium to long term.

Operational issues: Operationally, the reviewers feel the SCS is largely aligned with best practice internationally. Reviewers' recommended operational changes include: expanding outreach to marginalised students, and a range of necessary I.T. improvements to ensure security of all records. These I.T. enhancements would require College resources and support (such as I.S. Services). Expanding outreach and prevention programmes is feasible by implementing the SCS 5-yr Strategic Plan.

Structural changes: The reviewers believe that *"significant benefits would accrue to the College through the creation of an Academic Support/Development Service with a distinct identity"* (p. 14) incorporating SLD and other TCD services. They also believe S2S could become a strong component of a First Year Experience Unit. The SCS recognise there are advantages and disadvantages to these recommendations, and understandably the SCS Staff have mixed feelings on these suggestions. SCS fully endorses the reviewers opinion that sufficient resources and a strong management structure are essential for these changes to be effective.

Conclusions

Student Counselling Services support the findings of the reviewers. The Director and the staff of the Counselling Team, SLD Team, and S2S Team welcome the reviewers' recommendations and hope to progress these in collaboration with College. The SCS exists to serve College in achieving its Strategic Plans, and remains steadfast in its commitment to support retention, progression, internationalisation, recruitment of underrepresented students, online learners, and embedding 21st Century learning skills in the curriculum. The SCS looks forward to revising its 5-year Strategic Plan and to preparing an Implementation Plan in light of the Quality Review Report.

Dr. Deirdre Flynn
Director
Student Counselling Services
Trinity College Dublin

15 April 2015

3. Response from the Chief Operating Officer

Introduction/overview:

As Chief Operating Officer I wish to sincerely thank the review group for its comprehensive assessment and review of the overall operations and strategic challenges facing the Student Counselling Service of Trinity College. I would like to acknowledge the depth and breath of the review and its recommendations. They focus on the Student Counselling Services' great strength and its delivery to students whilst also recognising the need for additional funding to ensure standards are maintained with growth in international student numbers, continued professional development and the challenge of maintaining services. Additionally they recognise the needs of staff, accreditation developments and the value which could be generated by reviewing the funding model and the actual structure itself.

Main body of the response:

In reviewing the report finding and the general assessment by the review group of the successes and challenges faced by Student Counselling Services I was struck by the range and number of issues raised. I propose dealing with these areas in my response and greatly welcome the clarity they provide to me and the Director and Staff of the Student Counselling Services. Key emerging issues highlighted for me were:

- Staffing;
  The Report is very useful in outlining the benchmark ratios for staff/student engagement and the challenge of the existing staffing cadre to meet these needs with further staff appointments, organisation development and a more strategic use of interns to support existing and new clinical staff. The report also addresses the issues of pay and contract type and the needs of having a more long term and sustainable staffing arrangements in place and these recommendations will be included in future planning.

- Alignment to Strategy;
  Clearly the College's revised strategy 2014 to 2019 and its ambition for growth in student numbers through internationalisation and online courses will see an influx of new students with the consequent demand for services from Student Counselling Services (SCS), the Student Learning Development (SLD) and the S2S program. The challenges of supporting this new student cohort will be a critical element of the Services future strategic direction and a holistic approach to dealing with these challenges by the team will be critical.

- Operational issues;
  In reading the report and its comparison to the last review the improvement in facilities and student infrastructure is clearly recognised. Clearly more work is required to be done in ensuring that data integrity is enhanced and that data protection practices such as encryption is implemented. We will address this need in our overall Digital Strategy. In addition the 'after hours' needs will be another element of our future plans which will need to be addressed.

- Accreditation;
  I was very pleased to see the concept of accreditation to an organisation like the International Accreditation of Counselling Services (IACS) being recommended as I believe

such a process would further enhance our ability to show to all stakeholders the great value being delivered by our services.

- Professional development;

  The on-going professional development of our staff is one of my key priorities and will form a strong element of the University's new Leadership and People Development strategy which will be a part of the revised HR strategy currently being completed. It is clear that retaining our talented staff and continuing their development on an annual basis is good practice and it would be a critical deliverable for our staff from the implementation plan.

- Funding;

  The past four years have seen funding available for Student Counselling Services and other Student Services become very constrained and regrettably the future funding environment in our sector remains extremely challenging with further funding cuts envisaged for services division in 2015 – 2016 College year.   This makes the challenge of delivering more services, hiring more staff and enhancing our service quality even more difficult. We will need to work to identify funds, funding models and new operating cost models to allow us deliver this critical student service and it is intended as part of the Corporate Services Division strategy that we address these real and difficult challenges head on. While the report identifies a model of 'student levy' similar to Sports as possible model it is my view that even more creative and innovative models will be required for us to deliver what our students need and expect.

- Structural changes.

  The final recommendation addresses the structure of the Student Counselling Services (SCS), the Student Learning Development (SLD) and the S2S program and will need to be fully examined to more clearly understand any implications for existing service provision. The recently initiated Education Project is one such opportunity where this may be considered.

The Reviewers' recommendation will obviously be addressed in detail in the Implementation Plan.

Conclusions:

I am pleased to confirm my commitment as Chief Operating Officer to work with the Director of Student Counselling Services and with other appropriate College Officers to address the recommendations arising from the report and prepare a detailed Implementation Plan. I remain deeply appreciative of the work of the staff of Student Counselling Services and the work carried out by the review group. I look forward to participating in the resolution of the issues identified in the best interests of our students, staff and the College vision and mission.

Geraldine Ruane,
Chief Operating Officer.
21st April 2015.

QC/14-15/039   Quality Review of Student Counselling Services
The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Director of the Student Counselling Services (SCS), Dr Deirdre Flynn to the meeting and invited her to speak to the Reviewers' report for SCS. Dr Flynn welcomed the report and the Reviewers' recommendations. She noted that the Reviewers commended the high quality of service provision and that they were confident that the activities of SCS were aligned to TCD's strategic goals of recruitment of international and non- traditional students.

Dr Flynn drew attention to the Reviewers' concerns regarding staffing levels and short-term contracts. She noted the Reviewers' criticism of the SCS's counsellor to student ratio as being well below international recommendations (1: 1,000). This raises concerns about the possibility of staff burnout and a reduction in the quality of service to students. The SCS's 5-year Strategic Plan proposes the staggered creation of key strategic positions to continue delivering on its goals and prevent the scenarios outlined by the reviewers. In the interim, SCS has attempted to maximize efficiencies within existing resources by extending supports for students over a longer time-frame and though the use of interns. This is not however a sustainable model for service delivery and Dr Flynn stressed the need to make key decisions regarding resources in order to address these issues. Any further reduction in resources would have serious consequences in terms of the quality of the service provided to students; the ability of SCS to continue to support key activities; and deliver on the College's Strategic goal of producing productive and well-rounded students.

The Reviewers' recommended the introduction of a ring-fenced Health and Counselling levy to generate additional income. In response, Dr Flynn stated that in order to protect accessibility for all students, the SCS favoured a universal levy to fund services rather than a service charge at point of delivery. She welcomed the recommendation that SCS should seek accreditation from the International Accreditation of Counselling Services (IACS) but felt that the staffing ratio would need to be addressed before any international recognition could be sought. Concerning the recommendation that SLD and S2S should operate as standalone services, Dr Flynn cautioned that this proposed restructuring would have resource implications in terms of staffing, as a strong management structure would be required to support both.

The Chief Operating Officer praised the Reviewers' very comprehensive report and agreed that the issues of staffing and resources raised by the Reviewers would need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. She reported that the data integrity issues and data protection practices in the Service would be addressed in the College Digital Strategy, and that the professional development requirements of staff would also be addressed. The Dean of Students agreed with the concerns expressed regarding the risk of staff burnout and a reduction in the quality of service to students posed by the existing operating model. He suggested that the SCS will be impacted by an increasingly diverse student population to a greater extent than some of the other student services, as international students are traditionally more frequent users of the Service. In terms of the Education Project and the development of both academic and non- academic attributes in our graduates, Dr O'Kelly proposed a closer partnership between student services and the College's academic structures in order to ensure that difficulties are identified and addressed early on in a student's career.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer invited comment from the Committee and in the ensuing discussion the following issues were raised:

- The current pressure on the Service and any consequent reduction in the quality of care to students has serious implications;
- The human cost of failing to invest in the SCS is very high;
- The impact of the Service on student retention and the associated savings to College have not been adequately assessed;
- Consideration should be given to alternative funding sources such as once-off funding from government or philanthropic funding through the Trinity Foundation;
- The introduction of a levy to fund student services must ensure that the Service continues to be free to students at the point of delivery.