



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

Quality Review of the School of Psychology

26-28 March 2024

Review Team:

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Trinity College Dublin School of Psychology

Quality Review 2024

External Reviewers' Report

Introduction

The Review Team met on 26-28 March 2024 to conduct a Quality Review of the School of Psychology at Trinity College Dublin. The terms of reference for the review focused on four main areas:

1. The School's management of the cycle of accreditation for the suite of professional accredited programmes; in particular, the identification and response to common themes/ recommendations emerging from the various accreditation processes.
2. The research output and quality of each of the four Research Centres for which the School has administrative responsibility.
3. The quality of the School's research strategy, its engagement with Trinity Research Institutes and the continuous enhancement of postdoctoral development.
4. How the School can maximise its internal resources by, for instance, further developing new and existing Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses.

These and other issues were investigated by the Review Team through consideration of the School's comprehensive Self Assessment Report and via a series of meetings with College officers, School staff and students. The Review Team found these meetings very helpful in understanding the research and teaching activities carried out by members of the School, and would like to put on record their thanks to attendees for their openness and willingness to engage in discussion, as well as for sharing constructive and insightful visions for the future. The Review Team would also like to thank staff associated with the Quality Office, including Roisin Smith, Shane Moore, and Yseult Thornley, as well as Jarlath Killeen, the internal facilitator, for all their help during the review visit.

In this report, we first highlight a number of strengths we identified in the School, as well as some of the challenges it faces, before addressing the focus areas detailed in the terms of reference. Specific recommendations are identified as they first emerge in the report by underlining and when they are re-referenced in italics.

Strengths

The undergraduate teaching programme offered by the School of Psychology is exemplary, both in terms of the structure of the undergraduate programme, the diversity and range of modules on offer and the form of evaluation of these modules. Assessment is innovative and focussed on skills which could be used in the workplace as opposed to being solely academic focussed (e.g. essay writing, poster presentations, etc). The teaching faculty and administrative staff in the School should be congratulated on a superb offering for their students.

We also heard from College officers that the Psychology undergraduates were some of the happiest and most satisfied across the University and had among the fewest student cases.

The presence of the Clinical Psychology doctorate and Counselling doctorate is of key strategic importance within the School and is seen externally as highly prestigious. Universities who do not house professional doctorate programmes within their geographical region are often vying for this. It is seen by the reviewer team to be a strong advantage for Trinity. More should be made of what a valuable asset these professional doctorates are for the School, both internally within Trinity and to the outside world. Emphasising their value might go some way to helping address the cultural differences between different staff and student groups within the School that are detailed further below.

Recommendation 1: use internal and external communications to emphasise the value of the professional doctorate courses

There is a strong and cohesive administrative and technical team, who are based within the School and who are strongly supportive of its aims and objectives. The administrative team told us that they had a significant role to play in pastoral issues for the postgraduate students they supported. We believe that it is important that the administrative and technical team remain located within the School and, for example, are not moved to a centralised University Hub as has happened in other universities, as we believe the sense of identity and belonging to one School is important for effectiveness of roles and for the contentment of these staff. As such, we were pleased that Trinity leadership confirmed there is no suggestion that any School administrative staff move to a centralised hub.

Recommendation 2: keep the administrative and technical team local within the School

The School benefits from a strong leadership team, including the two excellent School managers. Led by the Head of School, who our meetings suggested is liked and respected by all staff, the leadership team comprises Directors of Research, Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies, as well as of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and of Global Engagement. The Review Team were pleased to see that the latter two roles had been elevated to the School's leadership team, evidencing the importance of these critical areas to the School.

Research in the School covers a broad range of areas of psychology, with particular strengths in cognitive neuroscience, developmental psychology, and global psychological health. The School's researchers benefit from close association with the Trinity College

Institute of Neuroscience as well as participation in several other research groupings, such as the Global Brain Health Institute, the Trinity Centre for Global Health, the Centre for Innovative Human Systems, Trinity Research in Childhood Centre, and the Centre for Psychological Health. There are areas of significant research activity in the School, although the achievement of research excellence across all areas is unbalanced, as we discuss below.

Challenges

Staff reported concerns about fairness of workload across the School and the balance of opportunities for research. As promotion for all staff requires achievement across Research, Education, and Service, it is imperative that everyone has the opportunity to engage in the full range of activities. The School is working on a workload model and staff across the School are involved in these discussions. It is to be commended that the EDI lead and members of the EDI committee are playing a central role in this work.

A clear concern was heard about the relative teaching loads of undergraduate and postgraduate focused staff. Examples provided to us included: the lack of opportunity for staff on postgraduate programmes to take sabbatical, the differences of timing of undergraduate and postgraduate courses such that postgraduate staff were unable to take advantage of a 'research term' as they were still supervising dissertations. It is essential that the new workload model allows fair comparisons to be made between staff workloads and that inequities, especially those that create barriers to promotion, are removed.

Recommendation 3: Introduce a new workload model promptly, and use it to identify and address inequities in workload.

The postgraduate taught courses appear to be siloed which contributes to the workload challenges noted above. It also leads to both a lack of resilience for the Masters programmes and a redundancy of effort in taught modules. Resilience of the postgraduate programme is of key importance and each programme should not rely on a single member of staff for its success. Staff need to feel able to go on sabbatical, or to take sick leave, etc, without fear that the course will collapse if they were to do so. The Review Team heard of instances in which staff continued to work through illness and injury because they felt there was no alternative, which is clearly an unacceptable state of affairs. This lack of resilience must also put great pressure on the Head of School to find suitable replacements at times of enforced absence due to sickness or maternity leave, etc.

In terms of redundancy of taught courses, it is apparent that some taught modules (such as research design, statistics, qualitative methods, quantitative methods) are common to all postgraduate teaching programmes and could be shared across teaching programmes if these were to be re-designed. This would free-up teaching resource and enable more time for research or development of new modules.

All staff responsible for the postgraduate programmes seemed to agree that a more resilient model of teaching provision, with less redundancy of provision, would be welcomed. However, it was also recognised that the redesign of the postgraduate programme would be

a large and time-consuming undertaking and there were concerns raised about the ability of the staff team to be able to take on this large programme of work. In order to enable this crucial re-development of the postgraduate programme, recruitment of a temporary fixed term project manager role is recommended. The project manager could work with the Course Directors and Executive Team to facilitate this piece of work on a task and finish basis.

Recommendation 4: recruit a temporary project manager to facilitate reorganisation of postgraduate taught courses

There were concerns raised by students on the MSc taught courses about allocation of research supervisors and how this was mainly left to students to arrange, with Faculty members declining to assist. In the opinion of the Review Team, there should be set expectations of how many undergraduate and postgraduate taught students each member of Academic Staff takes on per year and this needs to be fairly and evenly distributed across the staff team. For example, an identified concern is that all members of the postgraduate team supervise undergraduate projects, but members of the undergraduate teaching team do not necessarily supervise taught postgraduate student dissertations. This concern is with respect to the Masters programmes and not the Doctorate professional psychology programmes.

Recommendation 5: equitable allocation of supervisory responsibilities should be part of the School's workload model

Postgraduate taught students also appear to be expected to develop their own research ideas for their dissertations. We recommend that the School develop a system whereby possible areas of research expertise and/or suggestions for research projects are advertised to all postgraduate taught students from which they can identify preferred projects for their dissertation. This should also improve the quality of the dissertations and may lead to an increased number of postgraduate research projects that are of publishable quality.

Recommendation 6: develop a central system for developing and allocating research projects for all postgraduate students

A number of issues were raised by current students across three of the postgraduate taught programmes. We were unclear to what extent the Director of Postgraduate Education had been made aware of these issues and of the dissatisfaction of the student representatives on these three programmes. This raises issues of the mechanisms of feedback from postgraduate taught students to their respective Course Directors and to the Director of Postgraduate Education so that such issues can be addressed quickly and efficiently. We recommend that the processes for mechanisms of student feedback are examined and improved if necessary. This also raises issues of continuity and resilience of key roles within the School and highlights the benefits of developing role specifications that would facilitate greater understanding of responsibilities and empower leadership.

Recommendation 7: examine and, if necessary, improve mechanisms for student feedback

Many of the Course Directors have been in their roles for a long time and felt unable to develop their experience in a diversity of teaching roles and did not have the capacity to progress their research. This clearly presents a barrier to career development for those staff and for other academic staff who have limited opportunity to gain teaching organisation experience. If this is integral to the contracts of the Course Director staff then this should be addressed with HR to allow staff to rotate between these roles over time and ensure equity of responsibility and opportunity in these roles.

Recommendation 8: address Course Director contracts with HR if necessary, so that these roles may be rotated between staff over time

Focus Areas

1) Accreditation

Five of the nine undergraduate and postgraduate programmes run by the School are accredited by professional bodies. This accreditation is essential to assuring the quality of the content and delivery of the programmes and also ensuring that the programmes attract high quality students. Accreditation is taken seriously by course teams and substantial effort goes into preparing these documents. All accreditation reports make positive comments about the quality of the education provided.

Diversity of professional psychologists is important because of the need to ensure the profession represents different experiences and voices and can appropriately respond to the needs of diverse user groups. Accreditation reports rightly recognise the work already being done at Trinity in these areas, especially around multicultural diversity and socio-economic status. There was commendation of the Counselling doctorate for the multicultural student cohort, which may mean there are examples of good practice that can be shared with other programmes (including non accredited programmes). The EDI committee in the School has a working group on students. This might be somewhere to share good practice on admissions and outreach.

Recommendation 9: share good practice on admissions, outreach, and community building across School programmes.

Concerns about staff levels were raised in both the 2021 Applied Behaviour Analysis and 2019 Clinical Doctorate accreditation reports. Staff: student/trainee ratios are considered vital by these accreditation bodies and there is a risk of losing accreditation if numbers are not maintained. The issue that staff in some roles felt unable to take sabbatical and that the course directorship was fixed were also raised. These issues should in part be addressed by the introduction of the workload model and a review of balance of workload, especially research supervision, across the School.

Recommendation 3: Introduce a new workload model promptly, and use it to identify and address inequities in workload.

Recommendation 5: equitable allocation of supervisory responsibilities should be part of the School's workload model

There are some concerns around sourcing placements for students on accredited courses, with suggestions from accreditation reviewers of expanding the range of placements available. It might be possible to provide more support in this area from support or academic staff, if efficiencies could be identified by sharing resources across the postgraduate programmes. This could be part of the role of the project manager tasked to reorganise the postgraduate taught programmes.

Recommendation 4: recruit a temporary project manager to facilitate reorganisation of postgraduate taught courses

Recent accreditation reports commented on the quality of accommodation for teaching, particularly in terms of noise. One concern is that provision for these students may be overlooked as they are not based full time in the school. Needs of these students and programmes should be included in efforts to improve the physical and social space in the School (see further discussion pages 5,6).

Recommendation 10: accelerate refurbishment work in the main Psychology building, and pursue a longer-term objective to bring the School together under one roof

2) Research Strategy and Research Centres

When it comes to research, many - but not all - of the School's staff and research students are associated with the College's Institutes or Research Centres. Some of these groupings involve many School researchers and are well-funded and productive, whereas others are less well supported and their sustainability is questioned. Some researchers reported that they do not feel part of any research grouping, and would value the benefits of being part of a thriving research group and of new opportunities for cross-group collaboration. It was noted that it was unclear whether mechanisms existed to proactively manage Research Centres that were not working, and to facilitate reorganisation into more effective groupings. The Review Team heard that progress in linking researchers together in innovative ways is held back by a longstanding culture of siloing and limited integration.

To some extent, the Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience (TCIN) dominates the School of Psychology, with 9 out of the School's 11 professors affiliated with TCIN plus around half the postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows. TCIN faculty in the School have been successful in gaining major grant funding (e.g., ERC awards) and producing high quality publications. However, it is apparent that the success of TCIN has led to the School feeling somewhat unbalanced, with the Review Team hearing that non-neuroscientists felt relatively underappreciated and left behind. This partly reflects the physical barriers associated with TCIN being located in the modern and comparatively luxurious Lloyd Building while the rest of the School is housed in older, less well looked after, buildings elsewhere on campus. Accelerating the refurbishment of the main Psychology building's research and teaching spaces should be a priority in the short term, with a longer-term objective being to seek opportunities to bring the School together under one roof, perhaps in the Lloyd Building if

possible. Beyond the physical disparities, however, it is clear that there are also cultural divides within the School that accentuate a feeling of “them and us”, which need to be addressed.

Recommendation 10: accelerate refurbishment work in the main Psychology building, and pursue a longer-term objective to bring the School together under one roof

The School has aspirations to be recognised as a world-leading research institution. One potential approach to achieve this objective might be to focus resource and effort even more on the areas of strength around neuroscience. However, the Review Team believe this would be a mistake and that a more successful outcome will likely result from building on the School’s areas of strength to enhance research activity across the broad range of psychology represented in the School. As such, we endorse the research strategy outlined in the School’s self assessment report which seeks to ensure that the plurality of research in the School is recognised and supported. This approach is much more likely, in our view, to be effective. We will comment below on whether existing research structures enhance or inhibit this strategy.

Another research divide that became evident during our meetings with School staff is between those working on the postgraduate taught and doctorate courses and the rest of the School, who predominantly teach on undergraduate courses and provide most of the postgraduate research supervision. The Review Team heard that clinical faculty feel they have relatively heavy teaching loads and course organisation responsibilities, some of which they have held for many years. As such, it is difficult for these individuals to prioritise research activity on top of their other demands. There had been attempts to increase interaction between clinical and non-clinical colleagues (such as research seminars, away days and other events), but these had met with limited success. The reluctance on the part of some clinical colleagues to engage with such initiatives was reported in part to reflect a longstanding sense of feeling unwelcome in the School, one cited example being a sign stating that a common room was only for the use of staff and research students. Efforts to emphasise further how the School is an inclusive and welcoming environment for all its staff and students should be a clear priority.

Recommendation 11: increase active efforts to ensure the School is inclusive and welcoming to all its staff and students

It is apparent from the School’s self assessment report that the Head of School and Director of Research have developed an integrated research vision in consultation with other faculty in the School. Although some progress has been made to implement this vision, there appears to be a lack of coherent structure or shared buy-in to achieve its stated objectives. Bringing people together with research interests across the whole School should be a key priority, with the potential to provide significant benefits in income generation and research productivity. To achieve these objectives the Review Team recommends a reorganisation of research activity plus a strategic focus on new academic hires. The potential fruits of such an approach for addressing the challenges faced by the School are exemplified by the recent recruitment of a senior computational clinical and experimental neuroscientist, who has already developed a major collaborative funding application that combines researchers across neuroscience, clinical and other areas. This should be a model for what can be

achieved by providing an integrated collaborative environment that can enhance cross-fertilisation and stimulate innovative research activity across all areas of the School.

To achieve this vision requires a reorganisation of the School's research centres, building on those that are successful and merging others, or creating new groupings such that the whole School's research activity across clinical and non-clinical areas is characterised by a small number of research centres covering everyone in the School. Resilient centre leadership teams of 2-3 people should involve academics from across career stages from junior to senior Professors, maximising engagement across the School. It will be crucial to provide sufficient administrative resource to the Centres to facilitate the organisation of events that can bring people together within research centres, start new conversations, generate novel collaborations and move towards innovative interdisciplinary funding applications. The aim of this new centre structure should be to promote collaboration and interaction across the School, contribute to an inclusive and supportive research culture, increase opportunities for researchers to be involved in major funding bids, and enhance possible philanthropy and industrial engagement. If resourced adequately (which may need to come from within the School's own financial envelope), the investment has the potential to produce significant return in income and research productivity across all areas of research activity in the School, taking the School closer to achieving its goal of parity with world-class Psychology departments elsewhere in the world.

Recommendation 12: reorganise the School's research centres to cover everyone in the School, and provide sufficient administrative resource to facilitate greater research integration

3) Innovation and new developments

The presence of the Clinical Psychology doctorate and Counselling doctorate is seen by the Review Team to be of key strategic importance within the School and is seen as being a prestigious presence in Trinity. Universities who do not house professional doctorate programmes within their geographical region are often vying for this. It is seen by the reviewers to be a strong advantage for Trinity.

The new development of the Doctorate in Counselling Psychology with doctoral students being funded by the HSE is seen as a significant achievement. We understand that it has taken the Course Director 18 years to bring this new development to fruition. This achievement is highly prestigious to Trinity in that it will develop new psychologist practitioners who can be integrated into the Health Service, which we understand has significant shortage in terms of psychological practitioners. The Review Team understand that there are challenges in terms of placement provision for the doctorate, particularly in the area of Intellectual Disability. However, the advantages of the professional doctorate courses helping to address the significant workforce issues of the shortage of psychologists in Ireland is seen as prestigious and also has great opportunity to increase and enhance these professional programmes and to attract Governmental and HSE funding.

The Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) programme is seen as another strength in the professional programme within Trinity. We understand that postgraduate students are

accredited as ABA practitioners if they are resident in USA or Canada or as chartered psychologists with the Psychological Society of Ireland. This is seen by the Review Team as another prestigious development, leading to professional accreditation and an increase in provision of chartered professional psychologists for the workforce, that should be prized.

One possible route of developing new and innovative postgraduate courses would be to have the aim for Trinity to be a centre of Applied Psychology with the aim of developing new areas of professional development. For example, Doctorate programmes could be established in Forensic Psychology, Educational Psychology, and/or Occupational Psychology. The established strength in industrial collaborations and the Managing Risk and System Change postgraduate course would lend itself well to such a development in occupational and work place psychology. The strength in research in the area of child development would place the School in a good position to begin to develop a Doctorate in Educational Psychology.

Recommendation 13: explore possibilities for Trinity to be a centre of Applied Psychology and to develop new doctoral programmes for practitioner psychologists

The development of new doctoral programmes in areas of Applied Psychology would, of course, need proper investment but this might attract Government funding via the Department of Education, Institute of Public Health, etc, or could perhaps be funded via an Infrastructure bid to the Research Councils to establish new centres of excellence in Applied Psychology.

A less ambitious strategy may be to consider expansion of students on the undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. This should be possible given the relatively low student numbers across all programmes. However, there appeared to be little appetite for this in the School. This appeared to be due to the view that greater student numbers would not lead to greater income generation for the School and may actually lead to a loss of income if new staff members would need to be recruited to serve these greater student numbers. Perhaps a focus on investigating the possibility for maximising more international and overseas students may be advantageous here.

Recommendation 14: explore possibilities for attracting more overseas students

The Review Team are also hopeful that a more resilient model of postgraduate taught programmes, with less redundancy of effort (as outlined earlier) may facilitate the possibility of increasing student numbers. This would be due to the freeing-up of teaching resource that would be achieved by a more coherent set of postgraduate teaching programmes that shared central resource and with shared core modules.

4) Cross cutting theme, People and culture: Leadership, Career Development, EDI

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion is a central theme in the School. The committee has set up five working groups to focus on different activities and held an EDI away day with good attendance. Psychology has been pioneering in making the EDI Lead a member of the executive committee. It was noted that there are some problems with acquiring data, e.g. for

the Athena Swan application, which is difficult to solve at a School level. In terms of EDI actions, there was a positive sense that members of the School were open to change.

An important role of the school is in supporting staff career development and ensuring that all staff have appropriate capacity to deliver their duties and have opportunities to develop. It is commendable that the most senior 'Professor Of' staff grade is now gender balanced, but the observation that at the time of submitting the self-assessment form there are no female 'Professors In' highlights a risk that female academics may be less likely to be promoted to this level. The EDI representatives were well-informed on this issue and reported that a working group for progression had been set up as well as the Head of School meeting with all staff annually. We endorse the view that an important part of the Head of School role is to provide opportunities for all staff to progress their careers and to actively encourage those who may be less likely to put themselves forward for promotion.

Recommendation 15: Continue to review the gender profile of academic staff grades and take action to support equal progression.

As mentioned elsewhere, the Review Team recognised the leadership from the new Head of School and his efforts to bring the school together. The Head of School is supported by a skilled and dedicated executive committee. With no criticism of this excellent team, the Review Team noted that the committee is primarily made up of relatively junior, female members of staff and that senior professorial staff were not particularly visible in the School leadership (with some notable exceptions and acknowledging that some senior staff will have roles beyond the School). Creating a culture in which senior professors feel they have a valued part to play in School leadership should be a priority.

Recommendation 16: Encourage senior professors to contribute to School leadership.

Support for ECRs (postdoctoral researchers) is strong and there was a sense of great positivity about the school from the ECRs we met with. There is a strong, international, and collegiate group of ECRs who meet socially and support each other. ECRs reported that there was good encouragement to be involved and attend events. All external reviewers were impressed by the innovative scheme to support postdoctoral teaching experience. The scheme is based on genuine mentoring from staff who share resources for teaching, meet with the ECR in preparation for the session and attend the taught session. This makes a very positive contrast with some schemes where ECRs are used as substitute teachers. The ECRs shared interesting ideas around how they could develop even more advanced skills, for example taking greater responsibility for teaching, where this fell within the College's guidelines. ECRs were also positive about support provided by the College for further research skills support, such as grant writing, and by the School research support and culture. The only concern raised in this meeting was that newly appointed ECRs could not always be easily identified and may not be invited into this community. If this cannot be resolved centrally, perhaps PIs could take responsibility for introducing their new staff.

Recommendation 17: explore possibilities for postdoctoral researchers to develop advanced teaching experience

Recommendation 18: develop a system to ensure all ECRs are invited to join the ECR community.

Key Recommendations

1. Develop a comprehensive and transparent workload model that can ensure greater equity in allocation of teaching and administrative duties across all academic staff within the School.
2. Reorganise the School's Research Centres to cover every member of the School, with sufficient administrative resource and inclusive leadership to enhance research productivity across all areas of research activity in the School.
3. Review and reorganise the delivery of the Postgraduate Taught programmes to ensure resilience, leadership and greater efficiency/lack of redundancy of taught modules, recruiting a temporary project manager to facilitate this reorganisation. We are not including the Doctorate programmes within this recommendation, both of which appear to be running efficiently and effectively and have external professional objectives and accreditation criteria that have to be met.

Secondary Recommendations

1. Use internal and external communications to emphasise the value of the professional doctorate courses
2. Keep the administrative and technical team local within the School
3. Introduce a new workload model promptly, and use it to identify and address inequities in workload
4. Recruit a temporary project manager to facilitate reorganisation of postgraduate taught courses
5. Equitable allocation of supervisory responsibilities should be part of the School's workload model
6. Develop a central system for developing and allocating research projects for all postgraduate taught students
7. Examine and, if necessary, improve mechanisms for student feedback
8. Address course director contracts with HR if necessary, so that these roles may be rotated between staff over time
9. Share good practice on admissions, outreach, and community building across School programmes
10. Accelerate refurbishment work in the main Psychology building, and pursue a longer-term objective to bring the School together under one roof
11. Increase active efforts to ensure the School is inclusive and welcoming to all its staff and students
12. Reorganise the School's research centres to cover everyone in the School, and provide sufficient administrative resource to facilitate greater research integration
13. Explore possibilities for Trinity to be a centre of Applied Psychology and to develop new doctoral programmes for practitioner psychologists
14. Explore possibilities for attracting more overseas students
15. Continue to review the gender profile of academic staff grades and take action to support equal progression
16. Encourage senior professors to contribute to School leadership
17. Explore possibilities for postdoctoral researchers to develop advanced teaching experience
18. Develop a system to ensure all ECRs are invited to join the ECR community

Recommendations

1. School Leadership from Head of School, Director of Research, and School Managers in providing an inclusive and strategic vision for the School across all areas of research and teaching.
2. There was clear dedication to teaching and research across the entire staff team and pride in belonging to Trinity.
3. Support staff have developed new ways of working as a team and deliver a high standard of service to the School.
4. The Quality Team provided excellent organisation and management of the process and we are grateful to them for making a difficult and complex task easier.

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18th April 2024

School of Psychology – Quality Review (March 2024)

Head of School Response to the External Reviewers' Report

Introduction

We extend our gratitude to the internal facilitator Jarlath Killeen and external reviewers—Professor Sarah Beck, Professor Nicola Gray, and Professor Jon Simons—for their thorough quality evaluation of our School. This will undoubtedly assist us in advancing the quality of our teaching, research, and overall organizational structure. We welcome the commendations noted in the report and acknowledge the challenges and recommendations outlined. Below, we provide our two-page response, addressing the key areas highlighted in the report.

Strengths and Commendations

We are encouraged by the reviewers' recognition of our *undergraduate program* as exemplary, particularly in its innovative assessment methods and the structure of the curriculum. The feedback regarding the satisfaction levels of our undergraduate students is particularly encouraging, and we will strive to maintain and enhance these standards.

The strategic importance and external prestige of our *Clinical Psychology* and *Counselling* Doctorates were also noted, and we agree with the recommendation to use internal and external communications to emphasize the value of these programs.

The report's commendation of our strong leadership team, cohesive administrative and technical support, and the inclusive strategic vision for the School is highly appreciated. We are committed to continuing this trajectory of leadership and support across all levels of the School.

Challenges and Recommendations

- Workload Model and Equity (Recommendation 3):** We acknowledge the concerns raised regarding the fairness of workload distribution across the School that were highlighted in the self-assessment report. We agree that the implementation of a comprehensive and transparent workload model is critical. A dedicated workgroup has been actively engaged for the past eight months in developing a new workload model, which includes a fair and balanced system for distributing supervisory responsibilities, teaching, and research duties (Recommendation 5). This initiative is designed to ensure that all academic staff have equitable opportunities for promotion and professional development. We are targeting early October for the implementation of this new model, with plans to closely monitor its execution throughout the first year to ensure its success.
- Postgraduate Program Resilience and Redundancy (Recommendations 4 & 6):** The reviewers correctly identified the need for increased resilience in our postgraduate taught programs and a reduction in redundancy across modules. We support the recommendation to recruit a project manager to facilitate the reorganization of these programs. This role will be pivotal in ensuring that the restructured programs are sustainable, with shared modules where appropriate, and that staff are not overburdened by responsibilities that hinder their research and professional growth. The Head of School (HOS) has already organised several meetings with all course directors to ensure their full alignment and commitment to these goals.
- Research Strategy and Centres (Recommendation 12):** The School's research strategy is focused on leveraging our existing strengths while addressing the perceived imbalance between neuroscientific and non-neuroscientific research within the School. While the reviewers have acknowledged our neuroscience group as world-leading, we recognize the importance of extending this excellence across all research centres. To achieve this, we will reorganize our research centres to ensure inclusivity for all faculty members and foster collaboration across diverse research areas. This reorganization will be supported by adequate administrative resources, promoting a more integrated and inclusive research culture.

We also acknowledge the importance of ensuring that the School's research structures support our goal of being a world-leading institution. The recent recruitment successes demonstrate the potential of our strategy, and we will continue to focus on strategic hires that can bridge gaps between different research areas within the School.

4. **Physical and Cultural Integration (Recommendation 10):** We take the disparity in physical resources and the cultural divide between different groups within the School very seriously, and over the past two years, we have made concerted efforts to address these issues. The School has implemented several initiatives aimed at fostering a more cohesive culture and enhancing the working environment for all staff and students. These initiatives include school-funded renovations, team-building activities like away days, a Christmas event, Research Day, and an End-of-Year celebration. We have also accelerated the refurbishment of the main Psychology building to improve facilities and create a more unified space. While the idea of bringing the entire School under one roof remains a long-term goal that would require college-level intervention, we are committed to making meaningful improvements in the interim.
5. **The restructuring and reorganization (recommendation 2 & 12)** of the administration within the School of Psychology aims to streamline operations in alignment with current academic needs and professional standards. By optimizing both administrative and technical roles, enhancing communication, and integrating new technologies, this initiative seeks to foster a more efficient, student-centred approach that better supports academic staff, research, and program development in a rapidly evolving field.

Cross-Cutting Themes: Leadership, Career Development, and EDI

We remain deeply committed to prioritizing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) as a core focus within the School. Building on our achievements, including receiving the Athena Swan Bronze award in 2020, we have now received the Athena Swan Silver Award. We fully acknowledge the recommendation to encourage senior professors to take a more active role in School leadership (Recommendation 16). In response, senior professors have already assumed key roles, such as Director of the Trinity College Institute for Neuroscience and Promotion Liaison. However, it is important to recognize that challenges in this area are not specific to our School but are linked to broader issues at the College level, particularly concerning the current promotion system. The career development of our staff, particularly early-career researchers (ECRs), is a priority. We will explore opportunities for ECRs to gain more advanced teaching experience (Recommendation 17) and ensure that all ECRs are integrated into the School's community (Recommendation 18). We are organising workshops to improve research and teaching and also promoting opportunities provided by college.

Conclusion

The recommendations provided by the Review Team offer a clear roadmap for enhancing the School of Psychology's overall organization. We are committed to addressing the challenges identified and implementing the suggested improvements. The insights from this review will be instrumental in guiding our actions as we strive to meet our strategic goals and maintain our position as a leading School of Psychology.

It is important to acknowledge the complexities involved in obtaining and analysing the data necessary for the self-assessment report. This process required significant effort and coordination, including numerous work hours spent gathering data from various departments within the college. Despite these challenges, this endeavour was essential in providing a comprehensive and accurate overview to support the reviewers' evaluation.

We look forward to discussing these responses in more detail at the upcoming Quality Committee meeting and to working collaboratively with all stakeholders to implement these important changes.



Prof. Sven Vanneste
Head of School of Psychology

13th September 2024



RESPONSE FROM THE FACULTY DEAN

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the external review team for their thorough and insightful evaluation of the School of Psychology, following their visit in March 2024. Their recognition of the School's strengths and their constructive recommendations are highly valued as they continue to strive for excellence in both teaching and research. The reviewers highlighted many key strengths, which stand testament to the hard work and dedication of the School's staff and leadership team. The insights provided are invaluable, and the Faculty is grateful for both the recognition of the School's strengths and the constructive feedback on areas needing improvement.

The School is to be commended for its exemplary undergraduate teaching programme, which reflects the commitment of both academic and administrative staff to delivering high-quality, innovative education. I am particularly pleased with the commendation of the innovative approach to assessment and the alignment of skills development with workplace needs which reflects the School's commitment to providing a modern and practical education for their students. It is gratifying to know that our psychology undergraduates are amongst the most satisfied in the university: a reflection of the hard work of both the academic and professional staff in the School.

Additionally, the strategic importance of the School's Clinical and Counselling Psychology doctorates, which the review team identified as a valuable asset, is to be welcomed. These professional programmes distinguish Trinity's School of Psychology and contribute to its external reputation. I am pleased to see that the School is committed to implementing the recommendation which calls for enhanced internal and external communications to better promote the value of these doctorate programmes. By raising awareness of their significance, they will build stronger internal cohesion and further enhance the School's reputation.

The recognition of the School's administrative and technical team is also appreciated. As the reviewers noted, these teams play a critical role, particularly in the pastoral care of postgraduate students. I am pleased also that the reviewers recognised the strong governance structure within the School. The inclusion of Directors of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, as well as of Global Engagement, within the leadership team is a reflection of the School's commitment to advancing these critical areas.

The School's research strengths in areas such as cognitive neuroscience, developmental psychology, and global psychological health are important pillars of their academic offering. However, as the review pointed out, there is a degree of imbalance in the achievement of research excellence across all areas. I welcome the School's commitment to addressing this issue through undertaking a careful review of their research strategy to ensure greater coherence and support for all research centres, as recommended by the review team.

Moving forward, the challenges related to workload equity and postgraduate programme resilience require attention. The introduction of a fair and transparent workload model, as recommended by the Review Team, will be vital in addressing imbalances between staff and ensuring equitable opportunities for promotion and career progression. Working towards an equitable distribution of supervisory responsibilities across both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as recommended, is also essential to support staff and enhance the quality of student supervision. The Faculty will work with the School to explore accelerating the refurbishment of the main Psychology building and working towards a longer-term goal of bringing the entire School under one roof. This would support creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all staff and students as identified in the report.

I would like to recognise the many significant achievements of the School, as highlighted by the review team, built upon the dedication of its academic and support staff, and the exceptional leadership and strategic vision provided by the Head of School, its Academic Directors and School Managers. It is also a pleasure to read an acknowledgment of the outstanding support provided by colleagues in the Quality Office throughout this review process.

In conclusion, I welcome the comprehensive feedback provided in this report, and the School's commitment to carefully consider all recommendations and take proactive steps to implement the changes that will enhance their research capabilities, support staff and student wellbeing, and strengthen their teaching programmes. These efforts will enhance the School's operational efficiency, research output, and teaching quality, while ensuring that all staff and students thrive in a supportive and inclusive environment.

The Faculty remains committed to supporting the School of Psychology as it addresses these challenges and builds upon the recommendations, strengthening its reputation as a leading institution in psychology education and research. I look forward to seeing the positive developments that will result from this review.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Carmel O Sullivan
Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

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