



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Quality Review of the Secretary's Office

03-05 September 2024

Review Team:

1. Ms Isabella Balmer-Dietiker, University of Zurich, Switzerland
2. Dr Regina Sachers, University of Cambridge, UK
3. Mr Ed Brophy, Amazon, Ireland

Internal Facilitator:

Professor Paula Murphy, TCD

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Secretary's Office Quality Review: Report of the Review Group

November 2024

1. Scope of the review

The external review of the Secretary's Office (SO) at Trinity College Dublin (Trinity) took place from 3-5 September 2024. The external review panel included:

- Isabella Balmer-Dietiker (General Counsel, University of Zurich)
- Ed Brophy (EU Strategy & Head of Public Policy, Amazon)
- Dr Regina Sachers (Director of Governance and Compliance, University of Cambridge)

Consultations and materials

We, the panel, met with a number of stakeholders and groups throughout the three days, including

- The Provost and the Academic Secretary
- The College Secretary
- College Officers
- The Governance Team
- The team at the Legal, Freedom of Information and Data Protection Office
- The team for the University Calendar, the Irish Language Office and the College's Art Collections
- The Risk Team
- Members of the Board
- Administrators, Managers in Faculties, Schools and Divisions
- Members of the Financial Services Division
- Senior Managers/Heads of Units in Corporate Services Division
- Senior Managers/Heads of Unit Student Services
- Members of the Research Division and Trinity Innovation and Enterprise
- Pro-Chancellors and Statutes WP

We were accompanied during our meetings by Professor Paula Murphy, the Internal Facilitator. Yseult Thornely was present as a note taker. We previously received supporting documentation, including the Secretary's Office Self-Assessment Report (Annex 1). We also received replies to a small number of follow up questions by email on the days of the review.

We wish to record our thanks to all those involved in the review. We greatly appreciate the spirit of openness and trust in which all stakeholders shared their views with us. We also wish to thank the Quality Office for the excellent organisation of the review and for making our stay in Dublin so comfortable. Last but not least, we owe our gratitude to Paula, who gave up her time to spend three days with us answering a multitude of questions and helping us to understand how Trinity works.

Terms of reference

The Terms of References of the Review included the following three questions:

- (i) Overall effectiveness of the provision of the services of the Secretary's Office and each of the functions contained within, i.e., Risk Management, Data Protection, Legal Services, 2 Governance/Secretariat, Art Collections, Oifig na Gaeilge/Irish Language Office, Policy Management and the University Calendar.

- (ii) Strategic positioning of the Secretary's Office in the context of the University, recognizing that in general terms, the Secretary's Office supports strategy rather than initiates it, providing legal advice and advice on governance, data protection, Irish language, policies and risk that underpin the University's strategies.
- (iii) New opportunities or initiatives that could be embraced by the Secretary's Office, including new ways to enhance and/or modernize the procedures used to deliver services by the Office.

Structure of the report

Our report responds to the questions in two parts. The first part includes observations and recommendations which apply to the SO more broadly. The second part includes observations and recommendations which are specific to the respective units in the SO. A list of recommendations is included as Annex A.

2. Observations and recommendations on the overall operations of the SO

General Operations

The Secretary's Office (SO) is seen as a highly capable and responsive team. Colleagues frequently seek advice on complex governance, legal and compliance issues. Some commented that "they feel safe" to describe the level of comfort they feel when they get advice from the units in the SO. Others commented that staff at the SO always take the time to answer ad hoc requests, often at short notice. They do so with diligence and collegiality.

The transition to the new College Secretary has been smooth. It is all the more remarkable as this period of time coincided with the transition to new institutional governance arrangements following new national legislation. The SO successfully led on this piece of work.

Overall, we heard a strong desire for more proactive, strategic, and user-centric approaches from the SO. The current operations are perceived as reactive and mainly compliance-focused. Colleagues did not want this to be understood as a criticism of the work of the SO. Rather, they saw it as an acknowledgement of how much potential there is for a different kind of service if the team is given the chance to develop in this direction.

The SO has become a victim of its own success. There is an ever increasing demand on their services but no corresponding increase in resources. However, we are also conscious that more resource is not the (only) answer. We believe that the focus for now could be on better prioritisation, planning of work streams, handling of competing demands and clearer articulation of timelines for routine requests to free up resources for activities that improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the SO in the medium to long term. We see this as a team led exercise, whereby the College Secretary works with the teams in the SO. Staff development as well as staff well-being should be included in the aims of this process.

Strategic positioning/branding

The SO is often the first point of contact for requests where owners of processes are unknown. Such queries take up time and resources. There is a strong feeling that the SO could better and more strongly communicate what they do and what is within their area of responsibility as well as change its name to better reflect the actual areas of responsibility they cover. Better communication could e.g. be done on the new website (which is already under way) or by using request forms triaging the requests and sending them to the responsible entity (automation).

In addition, the SO could make the staff in Trinity more self-reliant by putting meaningful and easy to access guidance material out there.

It was repeatedly pointed out that the SO is providing excellent support with regard to elections, which have been moved to an electronic process. Questions were raised whether elections could be simplified throughout all University using the same procedures. Also, it would be highly appreciated if SO could provide simple, easy to understand guiding material to guide the Faculties and Schools through the election procedures. Thereby avoiding that recurring questions come back to SO. It appears that policies and statutes which prescribe the procedures are difficult to digest for non-specialists.

Being a long-standing unit, the responsibilities of the SO have developed and grown over time and a clear definition of the mandate is missing. It could be helpful for the SO to sit down with their internal and external clients and define what services are needed and how they can be provided, the timeframes and levels of detail - given the available resources and actual circumstances. By doing so, there could also be risk considerations made and it can be avoided that insignificant questions derail from the actual

important work the SO provides. The SO could even think about defining KPI to clarify the service level and be able to measure the amount of work it provides.

Prioritisation

As the role and work of the SO has expanded, it has found itself taking on more responsibilities without a commensurate increase in the level of resources available to the office. Given the increased legislative and regulatory obligations that the college faces pursuant to the Higher Education Authority Act 2022 and other government and EU policies and programmes, the review panel anticipates that the compliance burden that the SO will face over the period ahead is likely to increase significantly.

The SO will face capacity challenges in meeting this compliance burden, absent an increase in resources which may not be forthcoming. While increased use of technology and automation to improve workflows and processes as set out in the preceding section can alleviate some of these capacity challenges, the review panel believes that the SO should also consider a new approach to the prioritisation of its activity, which tiers its work according to a simple and well-understood mechanism (e.g. traffic light system). This will enable the SO to allocate work according to its urgency and importance, allowing it to prioritise urgent and important activity over lower priority activity.

Another important dimension of this approach would be for the SO to assess what activities it should deprioritise or cease in any given year. One way in which this could be achieved would be for each function within the SO to propose one activity each year that it would cease doing as part of its annual planning process. The review panel believes this would be an important aspect of maintaining the SO's capacity to meet ever-increasing demands.

Recommendation 1 and 2:

1: Consider clearer prioritisation of workstreams and responsibilities for the teams at the SO and communicate them to stakeholders.

- *Agree two to three priorities for each unit within the SO as part of an annual appraisal process.*
- *Put in place more formal mechanisms for reactive routine business (matrix/ expected timelines, KPIs).*
- *Clarify roles and responsibilities in processes with stakeholders of the SO.*
- *Empower staff to communicate priorities and to be firm on timelines for routine business.*
- *Offer professional training to develop a confident team of specialists and enable career progression.*

2. Implement a routine process to free up time for new tasks. Ask each function within the SO to identify one activity per year that it would cease doing as part of the annual planning process.

Use of technology

Throughout the review, it was clear to the panel that the SO places a high degree of importance on the provision of an efficient, responsive and professional service to its internal customers. We were provided

with many examples of how the staff of the SO go above and beyond the call of duty in their pursuit of excellence. However, we were also left with the impression that this commitment can place a significant burden on the staff of the SO, with an impact on work-life balance given the limited resources available to the office. With this in mind, we believe that the SO should look to develop its processes and work more efficiently through a better use of technology, the adoption of better workflow tools and automation.

At present, much of the work of the SO is heavily manual, and email and spreadsheet-driven, with limited use of modern case management and other enterprise solutions. Furthermore, the lack of centralized, integrated information systems has led to data quality issues and sometimes a duplication of effort. There is also a need for more sophisticated data analytics and reporting capabilities to support decision-making. The review panel was also convinced that deployment of tools like chat functions and AI assistants on the SO's website would lead to a considerable reduction in the incoming queries that the staff of the office would have to address, freeing up time for more valuable activities.

In our discussion with the College IT staff, we understood that the technology function within Trinity is focused more on mitigation and troubleshooting than development. However, given the distinct position of the SO within Trinity, there was also a willingness to explore a potential technology development programme that could deliver some of the efficiency and effectiveness improvements that the panel would anticipate.

Recommendation 3:

3: Commence a technology development programme to improve the efficiency of work processes within the SO

- *Agree a statement of requirements with the college IT function*
- *At a minimum this should include: a case management system, data analytic capabilities and chatbots and an AI assistant for website queries*
- *As the development of these solutions is likely to lead to a more efficient and effective service provision to the SO's customers, any investment costs will be recouped and should therefore be supported by college leadership*
- *If the technology development programme cannot be delivered internally, the SO should procure it through an external provider.*
- *Consider dedicated resource in the SO for the end to end management of such a programme.*

3. Observations and recommendations for the units with the SO

Governance/Secretariat

The College Secretary and the Governance Team played a key role in the past few years when Trinity navigated the changes resulting from new national legislation for higher education. The transition to new governance arrangements also coincided with changes to key personnel in the Executive Group. In our conversations, it became clear that the Secretary and the Governance Team managed this period of transition extremely well. This is a remarkable achievement, given that some of the changes to the governance of Trinity were probably met with skepticism by some in the community. Many stakeholders commented on the diplomatic skills of the Secretary and her team in bringing parties together to resolve difficult issues.

The next couple of years will be the test whether what had been envisaged in theory also works in practice. There is likely to be more work to do to refine the relationship between the Board and its new committees to ensure that each body understands its role and that there are no gaps or duplication of effort. All those involved seem to be aware that the new structures need time to bed down and that it needs efforts on all sides to continue on this journey.

There was a suggestion that the SO could step back from supporting some of the newly created committees. I.e. that support for these committees could be transferred to the respective specialist units. It is clear that the SO does currently not have the resources to support the new committees in the medium and long term. However, we think that significant efficiencies could be made if the SO is given adequate resources to support these committees in the long term.

We heard that one of the main reasons for feeling overworked and generally feeling of lack of control over their time by the governance team was that papers for the Board would often come in very late and/or unexpected. We also heard feedback from members of the Board who noted that the volume of papers for a meeting was almost unmanageable (upwards of 600 pages) and circulation of papers was often too close to the meeting. The Governance Team mentioned that hardly any meetings happened without late or additional circulation of papers.

We think that the new governance structure is a unique opportunity to address these issues and improve the experience of committee members as well as those supporting the committees. If the Governance Team continues to support the Board as well as the new committees, it could ensure that the schedule of meetings allows business to progress from the committees to the Board in a timely and coordinated manner, and that committee business which is likely to have to be considered/approved by the Board is identified early and agendas are coordinated accordingly. Committees and the Board could work from the same template of papers so that time to adjust papers can be minimized. The Secretaries of the Committee and the College Secretary could take a more prominent role in coordinating the flow of business to and from the Board. This could free up the time of the Chairs of the Committees and the Chair of the Board.

It might be helpful if the College Secretary, working with the Chair of the Board, draws up a set of principles (e.g. deadline for provision of papers, late circulations limited to unexpected and(!) urgent business, details on what information should be provided in papers and maximum length of papers, etc.) for those supplying papers to the new committees and the Board. These principles could then be used by the Governance Team to instill greater discipline in the support processes across the new Committees and the Board. Lastly, we heard comments that the minutes of the Board are overly long and detailed, and that this can have unintended consequences for the work of colleagues in other offices. We understand that there had been a preference for extensive minutes in the past. However, there might now

be an opportunity to re-set expectations and to show that shorter minutes can be equally transparent about the collective work of the Board.

Recommendation 4 and 5:

4: Consider whether the SO should be given additional resources to continue to support the new committees in the long term, and whether this could be a more efficient approach with significant benefits for the overall governance support processes.

5: Agree a set of principles for the operations of the committees and the Board to improve the experience of the members and the team supporting those bodies. Empower the Governance Team to enforce these principles to instill greater discipline in the governance support processes.

Risk Management

There is a general consensus that risk management took a step forward in the last year. A new risk management system (Decision Time) was introduced and a new Risk and Compliance Committee was established. Both changes were perceived very positively. A number of stakeholders noted that the new system allowed them to work more efficiently. It is now possible to capture risks more systematically and comprehensively across the institution. In addition, the system enables easy interaction between the central Risk Team and local entities. The Risk Team was generally commended on the roll out of the system and on the provision of training and guidance. The new Risk and Compliance Committee oversaw a comprehensive review of the risk register and determined the University's statement on risk appetite.

There is further work to do to mature risk management across the institution. As next steps, robust processes need to be developed and implemented to escalate risks, to properly monitor the mitigations of risks, to ensure adequate and timely reporting to the relevant committees (including the Board). There also needs to be a link to the budgeting process. Discussions with stakeholders revealed a lack of understanding of the principles of risk management. Further training for those involved in risk management at local level is needed to ensure that processes are properly understood.

The Risk Team showed an admirable effort to communicate the importance of risk management to generalists across Trinity (e.g. conferences on a selection of institutional risks). While such efforts are clearly borne out of a desire to make risk management more accessible, we felt that that there is a risk that such activities result in confusion about the role of the Risk Team and institutional risk management in general. We saw evidence of such confusion in our discussions with stakeholders. We encourage the Risk Team to focus on established principles of risk management and on maturing the processes overall in line with professional standards in the public sector. All members of the Risk Team should also have access to professional training where needed. This will ensure that the process for maturing risk management across the institution is grounded in current market knowledge.

Lastly, we felt that there might be some duplication of effort in the current risk processes. We were impressed with the work of the new Risk and Compliance Committee. We were less sure about the role of the Risk Management Group.

Recommendation 6:

6: Focus the work of the Risk Team on maturing risk management across the institution.

- Ensure greater focus on materiality in the identification of risks across the institution.*
- Ensure that risks are mitigated in line with the University's overall risk appetite, that mitigations are properly tracked, and that progress of mitigating the risks is regularly reported to the relevant committees including the Board.*
- Ensure that risk management is linked to annual financial planning.*
- Provide training on the principles of risk management to non-specialists at local entities.*
- Ensure access to professional training for the Risk Team so that further development of processes is firmly based on current market knowledge.*

Data Protection

During the review panel's engagement with college officials, it became clear that compliance with data protection requirements is one of the critical functions carried out by the SO. Overall, the Data Protection team (DP) is perceived as very knowledgeable, and responsive but also very stretched, in particular with regard to data protection impact assessments (DPIAs) relating to research applications. A DPIA is a process designed to identify risks arising out of the processing of personal data and to minimise these risks as far and as early as possible, and they are a critical compliance requirement of most research grant applications.

There is increasing regulation covering research, particularly regarding health data. Ireland has implemented secondary legislation next to GDPR, which the research community in Ireland must follow. This places a large burden on researchers and the DP team when doing the necessary DPIAs.

For the time being, there appears to be no formalized system or technology to place the research requests with the DP team. As the applications vary significantly in terms of the quality of information provided, this causes lengthy back and forth to gather the necessary information for a meaningful review. A pipeline of upcoming requests is missing as well as an overview of pending cases. DP – as Legal – has no comprehensive case management system in place.

There is some criticism about the research ethical approval process, particularly regarding health data. Due to long response time, the DP Research team is perceived by some clients within the Research function as a bottle neck. In particular, the Research function expressed concerns that the process for data protection approval for projects seeking ethics approval through the health research ethics committee are out of line with timelines for data protection approval outside of the department of health.

The Research function and the DP team do not appear to have arrived at a consensus on how research DPIAs are to be carried out, and there do not appear to be clear timelines, service level agreements or an alignment on the extent and depth of DPIA required for different types of research applications. At present, it seems that there is a uniform approach taken to all research DPIAs, irrespective of the level of risk or materiality involved.

Given the important of the DPIA process to the efficient processing of research grant applications, the review panel recommends that the DP and Research functions should commit to a Lean Transformation

process in order to address the current issues with the processing of research DPIAs. This should be facilitated by an external expert, and would involve the following steps:

- The Research function should clearly specify the value in an efficient processing of DPIAs
- There should be a mapping of all the steps in the research DPIA process, eliminating whenever possible those steps that do not create value (focus on materiality of risk)
- The DP function should commit that the steps in each DPIA occur in tight sequence

As the process improves, wasted steps should be removed.

Recommendation 7:

7: The DP and Research functions to commit to a Lean Transformation process in order to address the current issues with the processing of research DPIAs.

Legal Services and Information Compliance

Our conversations with stakeholders showed that the Legal Services and Information Compliance team (Legal Team) provides an excellent service to colleagues across the University. The quality of their work was universally praised; their service is quick and very responsive. The team is small. It includes two solicitors and one recently hired administrator who deals with FOI work.

The Legal Team is mainly focused on student related matters. Other areas of activity, such as research/technology transfer, property or commercial, do not tend to feature much, if at all, in their portfolio of work. The Legal Team tends to be involved in matters which are perceived to be complex at the outset. However, there do not seem to be clear rules of escalation in what matters and at what point in the process the Legal Team becomes involved. We heard about cases where earlier involvement of the Legal Team could have led to quicker resolution of issues, or where early consultation with the Legal Team could have avoided risks materialising later in the process. We also heard differing views to what extent the Legal Team becomes responsible for the administrative handling of matters beyond the provision of legal advice.

The Legal Team's work is predominantly reactive. There is little, if any, capacity to improve processes and services which could free up time in the medium and long term. The lack of a case management system also impacts negatively on the operations of the Legal Team. The recent hire of an administrator to help with FOI work alleviated some of pressure on the solicitors. Most groups noted that they feel well supported in the handling of FOI requests. Suggestions for further improvements included the provision of general guidelines on FOI law including when exemptions apply. This could help generalist at local level to make better decisions and to avoid having to escalate matters if they are in doubt whether any exemptions should be applied.

We believe that there is an opportunity to consider the size and remit of the Legal Team more generally. A number of Universities have built up in-house capacity across a number of different areas of activities in the past few years. There could be long term cost savings if an in-house team becomes the single point of contact for all legal matters (including for matters which require external legal advice). There are different operating models, some of which include legally qualified staff who are part of the central legal team and seconded to the specialist area (e.g. estates or research) for their day to day activities. We also

believe that investment in technology will provide a good return. We heard that Student Services are in

Recommendation 8 and 9:

8: Consider the size and remit of the Legal Team including whether a larger in-house team as a single point of contact for all legal matters across the University could provide better value for money in the medium and long term.

9: Consider investing in technology to facilitate the work of the Legal Team, in particular a case management system. (See recommendation 3).

the process of procuring a case management system. Such a system could also benefit the Legal Team.

Other areas of activity: Irish Language Office, University Calendar and the College Art Collections

The SO includes the Irish Language Office, the production of the University Calendar and the College Art Collections. Overall, we felt that these areas of activity were operating well. The following section shares our observations on these units and includes a number of thoughts on aspects that could be developed further and/or improved. With the exception of one recommendation (highlighted at the end of the section), we do not see an urgent need to act. We hope that some of our thoughts can provide useful if and when opportunities arise.

Irish Language Office

The Irish Language Office engages with students and staff across Trinity. There are good collaborations with the Department of Irish and Celtic Studies which provides Irish language evening classes. Like in many other public institutions, the Irish Language Office at Trinity is small. We wondered whether there is an opportunity to reach out to other officers at public institutions across Dublin to share ideas and experiences. This could provide the individual with a peer group beyond colleagues at the SO.

University Calendar

The University Calendar is published annually and serves as a record of activity at Trinity. While dissemination has moved from print to digital, the gathering of material and the production processes are still heavily manual. All material needs to be reviewed to ensure accuracy by the member of staff at the SO. This requires attention to detail, long-standing knowledge of the University and an ability to work under pressure. There is currently only one member of staff at the SO who understands all the processes involved in the production of the University Calendar. This is a risk as a single point of failure for a high profile activity that is cherished as a traditional element of the culture at Trinity. It might be worth to consider whether bringing this activity into the governance team could address this risk. Other members of the team could familiarize themselves with the production of the Calendar, while the existing member of the team becomes involved in other activities of the Governance Team. This would result in greater resilience within the team and create development opportunities for members of staff.

College Art Collections

The College Art Collections is led by a very committed and enthusiastic team. Its activities span from curation and education to administrative tasks and are largely distinct from the other areas of activity at the SO. The team aims to do long term planning but, in practice, most of the work of the team is reactive. They respond to needs and requests, often at short notice. The 2021 review mentioned that there had been an oversight board but that it had not met in the last 18 months. This situation seems to have

continued throughout the last decade. As a consequence, no priorities are set for the team and there is a general lack of direction. We also heard that there had been plans to move the College Art Collections to the Library to better reflect the curational element of the work of the team. These plans didn't seem to have come to fruition. We agree that better collaboration with other units of the College is a good way forward. We are reluctant to make recommendations on the size and shape of such collaborations. This will require more detailed discussions and planning with internal stakeholders to ensure that it is a mutually accepted plan for the future. However, we are of the view that, as a first step towards such a plan, there should be a body overseeing the work of the College Art Collections and setting priorities for and overall strategic direction of the unit. This could be an existing committee, which also oversees other similar entities, to enable discussions about joining up activities across Trinity.

Recommendation 10:

10: Ensure that the work of the College Art Collections is overseen by a relevant committee. The committee should set the priorities and overall strategic direction for the College Art Collections.

Annex A

List of Recommendations

1. Consider clearer prioritisation of workstreams and responsibilities for the teams at the SO and communicate them to stakeholders.
 - Agree two to three priorities for each unit within the SO as part of an annual appraisal process.
 - Put in place more formal mechanisms for reactive routine business (matrix/ expected timelines, KPIs).
 - Clarify roles and responsibilities in processes with stakeholders of the SO.
 - Empower staff to communicate priorities and to be firm on timelines for routine business.
 - Offer professional training to develop a confident team of specialists and enable career progression.
2. Implement a routine process to free up time for new tasks. Ask each function within the SO to identify one activity per year that it would cease doing as part of the annual planning process.
3. Commence a technology development programme to improve the efficiency of work processes within the SO,
 - Agree a statement of requirements with the college IT function
 - At a minimum this should include: a case management system, data analytic capabilities and chatbots and an AI assistant for website queries
 - As the development of these solutions is likely to lead to a more efficient and effective service provision to the SO's customers, any investment costs will be recouped and should therefore be supported by college leadership
 - If the technology development programme cannot be delivered internally, the SO should procure it through an external provider.
 - Consider dedicated resource in the SO for the end to end management of such a programme.
4. Consider whether the SO should be given additional resources to continue to support the new committees in the long term, and whether this could be a more efficient approach with significant benefits for the overall governance support processes.
5. Agree a set of principles for the operations of the committees and the Board to improve the experience of the members and the team supporting those bodies. Empower the Governance Team to enforce these principles to instill greater discipline in the governance support processes.
6. Focus the work of the Risk Team on maturing risk management across the institution.
 - Ensure greater focus on materiality in the identification of risks across the institution.
 - Ensure that risks are mitigated in line with the University's overall risk appetite, that mitigations are properly tracked, and that progress of mitigating the risks is regularly reported to the relevant committees including the Board.
 - Ensure that risk management is linked to annual financial planning.
 - Provide training on the principles of risk management to non-specialists at local entities.
 - Ensure access to professional training for the Risk Team so that further development of processes is firmly based on current market knowledge.
7. The DP and Research functions to commit to a Lean Transformation process in order to address the current issues with the processing of research DPIAs.

8. Consider the size and remit of the Legal Team including whether a larger in-house team as a single point of contact for all legal matters across the University could provide better value for money in the medium and long term.
9. Consider investing in technology to facilitate the work of the Legal Team, in particular a case management system. (See recommendation 3).
10. Ensure that the work of the College Art Collections is overseen by a relevant committee. The committee should set the priorities and overall strategic direction for the College Art Collections.

Quality Review of the Secretary's Office

Response from the Secretary to the College/Director of Governance

Overview

The Secretary's Office greatly welcomes the external reviewers report. We genuinely appreciate the time and energy they have contributed to this process; the clarity of their recommendations and their willingness to share their best practice and experience for the benefit of the Office and Trinity. Their combined experience and expertise were invaluable to this process. We appreciate the positive feedback in relation to the recognition of the professional advice and supports provided by the team.

We also greatly appreciate the engagement and really supportive input from our colleagues across the university who gave their valuable time to meet with the reviewers and in particular the support and knowledgeable assistance of the Internal Facilitator, Professor Paula Murphy. We are also very grateful to have had the guidance of our colleagues in the Quality Office.

The entire process has been a very positive one and we look forward to progressing the recommendations made.

General Comments on Recommendations

The reviewers report had several recommendations which covered a broad spectrum of both generic recommendations for the overall enhancement of the work of the office and then specific recommendations for each of the distinct units which comprise the office.

The recommendations in respect of the following are of particular interest and we are keen to progress these:

- Strategic Positioning/Branding
- Prioritisation
- Use of Technology.

In an environment of increasing complex issues, legislative compliance and mandatory reporting smarter ways of working and possible ways to take back time are hugely welcomed.

Each of the units in the Secretary's Office have also welcomed the more specific recommendations and are committed to trying to progress these with a view to enhancing the service to colleagues across the university.

It is noted that all of the recommendations are wholly consistent with the self-assessment report and are helpful to progress many initiatives the team had already been considering.

Conclusions

Overall, the Secretary's Office has found the Quality Review Process and the subsequent report and recommendations to be extremely beneficial with really helpful suggestions for further consideration. I look forward to working with the Provost and the team to address fully the recommendations arising from the report to enhance the performance of the function and to serve the best interests of Trinity.

The team and I will prepare a detailed Implementation Plan outlining the timeframe for implementation for consideration at a future meeting of the Quality Committee.

Ms Victoria Butler

Secretary to the College/Director of Governance

Quality Review of the Secretary's Office Response from the Provost

Introduction

I would like to begin by sincerely thanking the reviewers for the depth of their engagement in the quality review of the Secretary's Office. The Secretary's Office in Trinity offers an extremely broad range of services to the university community and I welcome the reviewers' consideration of the potential for process enhancement and further efficiencies to support its mission. The detailed report prepared by the reviewers shows a deep understanding of the role and place of the Secretary's Office within Trinity, its continued importance in providing professional supports to colleagues, as well as the challenges that it faces.

Overall response

The recommendations made by the reviewers are clear and concise and in very many cases support the findings of the office's own detailed self-assessment. Many recommendations merit further and deeper reflection and I know there is great openness in the Secretary's Office to engage meaningfully with these.

The Secretary's Office plays a vital role in supporting and advising colleagues on matters relating to governance, compliance, legal and risk. These are areas of specific, and often strategic, importance for the university. With an increasing focus on such matters, and the continued emergence of new legislation and compliance requirements, the report's recommendations identify many items for the team to consider in respect of meeting future demands in a resource-constrained environment.

At the highest level, the Secretary's Office is an experienced team of experts providing advice, solutions and support to the College community. This often requires extensive collaboration across many areas of the university to ensure compliance, further embed good governance and minimise potential risks. While individual staff have a role to play at different points, it is important that the office is structured to provide a seamless service to the university and for it to embrace emerging technologies.

Conclusion

In summary, I look forward to working with the Secretary to College and her team to plan and ensure the implementation of the key recommendations made by the reviewers.

Dr Linda Doyle

Provost and President
Trinity College Dublin