



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Quality Review of the Quality Office, Trinity College Dublin

21–23 February 2023

Review Team:

1. Professor Tina Harrison, University of Edinburgh, UK
2. Mr Dan Derricott, University of Warwick, UK
3. Mr Eltjo Bazen, HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, Netherlands.

Internal Facilitator:

Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services, Trinity College Dublin

Review Report

Introduction

01. As part of the seven-year cycle of Quality Reviews of academic and administrative units at Trinity College Dublin; the University of Dublin ('Trinity' or 'the University' hereafter), a review of the Quality Office was undertaken between January and March 2023, centred on a site visit in Dublin between 21 and 23 February 2023. This report summarises the findings of the External Reviewers appointed to undertake the review.
02. The review commenced with the development of a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) by the Quality Office, underpinned by a range of supporting evidence detailed in Appendix A, and our appointment as a panel of three External Reviewers:
 - **Professor Tina Harrison**, Assistant Principal – Academic Standards and Quality Assurance, University of Edinburgh, UK
 - **Mr Dan Derricott**, Director of Education Policy and Quality, University of Warwick, UK
 - **Mr Eltjo Bazen**, Chief Product Owner – Quality Assurance, HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, Netherlands
03. We were aided wonderfully throughout our site visit by Breda Walls, Director of Student Services, who acted as Internal Facilitator for the review, by the staff of the Quality Office and Academic Secretary's Office in organising the review – with particular thanks to Helen Tonra for her outstanding management of logistics for the site visit, and by our notetaker, Yseult Thornley.
04. The SAR and supporting evidence were available in good time for initial review by the External Reviewers ahead of the site visit, which comprised 17 fruitful meetings with Quality Office staff, leaders in the Academic Services Division (ASD), executive leaders of the University, staff from across academic and administrative units, senior representatives of Linked Providers, and staff from sector bodies – as detailed in Appendix B.

Terms of Reference

05. We were asked to specifically evaluate the following areas through our review and these form the structure and focus of our report:
 1. The extent to which the existing structure and staffing of the Quality Office can meet internal and external expectations, with regard to quality assurance and enhancement.
 2. How the Quality Office can work with other units within Trinity Teaching and Learning and across Schools and Divisions to provide confidence to the Academic Council and College Board that Trinity is meeting its statutory responsibilities and strategic objectives in respect of Quality and Qualifications.
 3. Investment in Quality Office system supports to improve quality processes to benefit stakeholders and enhance their experience of Quality.
 4. Steps that can be taken to communicate the relevance of quality to the College Community and embed a culture of quality.

Terminology

06. The following terms, abbreviations and acronyms are used frequently throughout the report:

Quality Office

The administrative unit of the University responsible for ensuring that Trinity is aligned to national and international standards and regulations for quality, and supporting the engagement of staff, students and stakeholders in quality assurance and quality enhancement activity.

<u>Quality Officer</u>	The senior member of staff heading the Quality Office.
<u>Trinity Teaching and Learning (TTL)</u>	The broader organisational unit within which the Quality Office is located, headed by the Academic Secretary.
<u>Academic Services Division (ASD)</u>	One of four institutional divisions alongside the Corporate Services Division, Financial Services Division and Provost's Directorate. Trinity Teaching and Learning, and in turn the Quality Office, form part of the Academic Services Division, which is headed by the Vice-Provost / Chief Academic Officer.
<u>Quality Committee</u>	The Quality Committee is a compliance committee of Board and Council. It is chaired by the Vice-Provost / Chief Academic Officer and oversees the development of quality assurance policies, processes and procedures to ensure quality provision, and their implementation across academic, research and administrative areas of College, and under collaborative arrangements with Linked Providers.
<u>Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)</u>	QQI is the state agency responsible for promoting the quality, integrity and reputation of Ireland's further and higher education system. Trinity College Dublin is regulated by QQI.

Section 1: Structure and Staffing

Focus of evaluation: The extent to which the existing structure and staffing of the Quality Office can meet internal and external expectations, with regard to quality assurance and enhancement.

Findings

Internal and external expectations

07. Over the meetings with the stakeholders, several views surfaced on what is expected of the Quality Office. Although not all expectations have been made explicit, it was clear to the panel what these were when analysing the answers to questions for what people were satisfied about in the services the Quality Office provided to them. There is a great deal of respect and appreciation for the work and expertise of the Quality Office across the university and beyond. The panel heard countless examples of colleagues tangibly benefiting from a high level of support and a can-do attitude. The praise that was heard more than once is a strong indication that the Quality Office overdelivered on the expectations.
08. On the minimalist side internally, the Quality Office is expected to deliver proof of compliance with external regulations as coming down to the University from the national agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). Several internal voices raised the aspect of quality enhancement, following the devolved model of quality assurance the role of the Quality Office here was thought to be mainly a stimulator since quality enhancement itself is in the hands of the owners of the business itself, being either academic or professional support units. The final role of the Quality Office that was mentioned, both internally and externally, was that of an expert contributor in policy debates. The Quality Office is looked at for their insights and understanding of quality assurance processes, and sharing these is clearly highly appreciated by an array of stakeholders.

Existing structure and staffing

09. Lots of colleagues in the University recognise the wide, demanding remit of the Quality Office given the small number of staff. The Quality Officer is widely known throughout the University, and accessible when needed.
10. The Quality Office seems to have a position on its own within TTL. From the meeting with TTL colleagues, it was understood that there is not much cooperation going on between the Quality Office and adjacent teams. Although the Quality Officer is well-known, the interaction between the Quality Office on the one hand and

the other teams in TTL on the other hand seems to be limited. The panel couldn't observe many examples of mutually strengthening each other's work for the University.

Evaluation

Internal and external expectations

11. In other universities, a Quality Office would most probably contribute to the monitoring of implementation and the review of strategic educational priorities put in place by the institution itself on top of external requirements, but here this wider context and direction is missing. The panel was slightly surprised by this dominance of external expectations, but it is of course not an external requirement to impose one's own ideas of what quality is and should be.
12. The panel thinks the precise role and expectation of the Quality Office should be better defined. Using a strict idea of the role of the Quality Office, as mainly compliance oriented, the panel feels a lot of value would be lost. Several tasks supporting enhancement are or would be very useful for the University, and the current staff of the Quality Office seems to be up to this task.
13. To be able to improve the clarity of the role of the Quality Office, one fundamental step that might need to be taken is to come to a shared understanding of what is meant by 'quality'. On two axes it seems to be debatable, and indeed debated, what quality is and derived what the role of the Quality Office should be. These are on the one hand the already mentioned question of compliance-driven or having a second focus on enhancement, and on the other hand looking at quality of only learning, teaching and research versus the broader remit of including organisational quality of all units and activities. Both these are well-known dilemmas in the world of quality assurance, both in and out of the context of higher education. Many organisations are struggling on these fronts, and it might be a consolation that the perfect solution has not been found so far. The way to reach an optimal way is clear though and lies in a broad conversation with all main stakeholders in order to understand the pros and cons of the different views and come to a common view on the best fit with the University in its current context.
14. Although the panel does not want to prejudge the outcomes of such a process, it feels having no role in enhancement would be a loss for the University as stated in the beginning of this paragraph. In terms of purpose, the panel thinks there is a clear need for an academic Quality Office in ASD – focused on enabling staff and students to assure academic quality, and informing the focus on enhancement. This does not however have to be married with quality of corporate functions in the same office or process – there are options to detach this and do it differently – and to position quality reviews as part of a wider framework of quality in corporate functions.

Existing structure and staffing

15. The structure of the Quality Office in the University and within TTL will be addressed under the second section.
16. On the internal structure and staffing of the Quality Office, most noticeable is the fact that the Quality Officer herself is very well known both inside and outside of the University, but that hardly anyone knows other staff members. Some people did not know that there are more people working in the Quality Office or who they were. According to the panel, staff in schools and faculties would welcome the opportunity to interact more with other members of the team, specifically in relation to annual quality reporting. Having the rest of the staff be more visible and interact more with the stakeholders would be beneficial for several reasons. First, it would mitigate the risk of the possibility of the Quality Officer becoming unable to fulfil her tasks for whatever reason. Secondly, the panel sees the current staff of the Quality Office have the knowledge, the skills and the attitude to help the organisation in its quality work when they would reach out to other units. Finally, the panel believes having more contact throughout the University and applying one's competences in more direct contact with the stakeholders would result in an enriched work environment.
17. The SAR notes that to close the gap between compliance and enhancement additional resourcing levels and diversification of skills would be required, e.g. project management, business analysis, data analytics, data visualisation). These skills already exist in other areas of within TTL and the newly created DASI, and it would

be more effective to work with these areas drawing on their capacity rather than attempting to diversify skills within the Quality Office – keeping the Quality Office focused on the core business of understanding the quality landscape.

18. The Quality Office is small and limited in what it can do. We recognise the financial constraints of the University. We won't therefore get into suggesting growth or new posts, but we think there are opportunities to find efficiencies and have a more focused remit, which gives cause to think carefully about the purpose and remit of the team, and interrelations with other teams in Trinity Teaching and Learning.

Conclusion

19. From what the panel has seen and heard, it is clear that the Quality Office can meet both internal and external expectations with existing structure and staffing. The Quality Office is well-placed to provide oversight and advice with respect to the external expectations of bodies such as QQI.
20. From the considerations above, it might as well be clear that the panel sees at the same time quite some room for improvement. Partially this improvement would not be a task that falls directly on the Quality Office, but in rethinking the concept of quality the University aspires to and aligning the remit of the Quality Office accordingly there is an important role for the Quality Office as initiator and facilitator of this process. Depending on the outcomes of such a process, it might turn out that possible additional tasks would not lead to a growing number of staff if the remit of the Quality Office would be more focussed or synergies with other TTL units would be realised.

Commendations

- COM-01 The Quality Office can rightly be proud of the work it is doing, the value it is bringing to units in the University and should take more time as a team to celebrate its success.

Recommendations

- REC-01 Initiate and facilitate a conversation on what quality and quality assurance are and should be for the University, and how these can become less dominated by a compliance-oriented approach. Include all important stakeholders in this process, including student representatives when the student experience is deemed central to the idea of quality.
- REC-02 Align the remit of the Quality Office with the University's renewed vision for quality and quality assurance, in the context of it being a unit in the Academic Services Division.
- REC-03 Identify opportunities to work more effectively with other administrative departments to utilise their specialist skills (e.g. work with DASI to identify the data and analysis required for quality reporting).

Section 2: Collaboration Across Departments

Focus of evaluation: How the Quality Office can work with other units within Trinity Teaching and Learning and across Schools and Divisions to provide confidence to the Academic Council and College Board that Trinity is meeting its statutory responsibilities and strategic objectives in respect of Quality and Qualifications.

Findings

21. Where staff, both academic and professional services, have worked with the Quality Office, they spoke positively about the Quality Office, appreciating and valuing the expertise and support provided. However, there does not appear to be a shared understanding across the University of the Quality Office's remit. Staff

are largely familiar with the aspects of the remit that relate to their area of work, but do not necessarily have a wider appreciation of what else the Quality Office does.

- 22. A lack of clarity of the Quality Office's remit may lead to an underutilisation of the Quality Office's expertise, or the risk that the Quality Office is not involved or consulted where they may be able to make a useful early contribution to matters of quality assurance.
- 23. The lack of clarity of the Quality Office's remit is perhaps not surprising, given the way in which its activities have evolved organically over the years to cover a wide range of academic and non-academic areas. There is some debate about the nature of the Quality Office's work – whether it is compliance, assurance or enhancement focused – as well as its position within Trinity Teaching and Learning. This is currently the subject of discussion within the Academic Services Division. It is, therefore, timely to review and clarify the role and remit of the Quality Office to ensure it supports the University in continuing to meet both external statutory responsibilities and the University's strategic objectives.

Working with other units within TTL

- 24. The Quality Office is one of five areas within Trinity Teaching and Learning (TTL) which is part of the broader Academic Services Division (ASD) under the remit of the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer. In discussions with staff from TTL, it was evident that the Quality Office works closely with Academic Affairs in matters of policy and regulations, but collaboration with the other units within TTL seems to be fairly limited. Heads of other TTL units referred to the Quality Office as keeping them up to date on guidelines and compliance matters, but there was also a lack of awareness among some of the TTL unit heads of the full scope of the Quality Office's remit.
- 25. The work of the Quality Office is primarily focused on education quality and qualifications, and the quality of the student experience. Given this focus, there are opportunities to break down the apparent silos, strengthen the links and build synergies between the Quality Office and the other TTL units. There is a particular opportunity to build synergies in relation to the connection between quality assurance and quality enhancement. The Quality Office's primary role is quality assurance and compliance, although the Quality Office staff expressed a desire to be more involved in enhancement activity. The function of quality assurance, and the Quality Office, does have a key role to play in terms of enhancement. However, the Quality Office does not have to be responsible for managing or driving enhancement activity forward alone. Indeed, the Quality Office is not resourced to do so.
- 26. The Quality Office can play a key role in providing evidence for enhancement via insight from quality assurance monitoring and review activity. It is best placed to advise, guide and shape enhancement activity in conjunction with or to be taken forward by other relevant TTL units, whether that is working with Academic Services to revise or develop policies or identifying the need for academic development activity to be taken forward by Academic Practice. For this to work effectively, there need to be clear roles, remits and responsibilities agreed across all TTL units in relation to quality enhancement activity and how the Quality Office will work with the other TTL units in support of enhancement activity. There also needs to be a structure in place that allows for more regular interaction between the TTL units, and for the Quality Office staff (not only the Quality Officer) to be involved in such interactions.
- 27. There is also an opportunity to work more closely with the newly established DASI. The self-evaluation report suggests a lack of business intelligence and data analysis capabilities within the Quality Office beyond work on student surveys. Our view is that these skills and capabilities do not need to be embedded within the Quality Office team but can be secured by working more closely with the newly established DASI. The Quality Office has a key role to play in identifying the data and analysis required for quality reporting. Working more closely with DASI, the Quality Office can identify appropriate data and analysis that is required and when, to feed into quality monitoring and review activity.

Working with Faculties and Schools

- 28. In discussions with School and Faculty staff, staff generally reported value from the annual quality reporting and quality review processes, having gone through them, but also noted the burden on staff with aspects of

the process. The Quality Office staff were perceived to be supportive in this process. There are opportunities for the Quality Office to work more closely with staff in Faculties and Schools to help alleviate some of the burden experienced. Colleagues welcomed the streamlined approach during Covid. We suggest the Quality Office reflects on the lessons to be learnt from this.

29. Annual quality reports in particular are perceived as onerous, largely due to the burden of having to pull programme and module data together. Staff described the annual quality reports as a “data-gathering exercise.” There is a role for the Quality Office to further support data gathering (beyond that already provided via the Central Quality Folder) and alleviate the burden on schools, thus shifting the emphasis from data gathering to reflection on the data. By working more closely with DASI and the academic annual officers, the Quality Office can help to identify and facilitate the development of the additional data reports needed for annual quality reporting and make these available to Schools and Faculties. Similarly, the Quality Office is well placed to identify where the standardisation of systems could further streamline data collection and reporting. This would help to alleviate some of the burden Schools and Faculties perceive in gathering data when preparing Annual Quality Reports and preparing for Quality Reviews. There is also a benefit in having standardised reports agreed at a university level, providing consistency in the reporting of data.
30. Another area where the Quality Office might work more closely with Schools and Faculties is in relation to external PSRB reviews. Schools undergoing an external accreditation review feel under additional pressure from review activity. The Quality Office’s involvement in the accreditation process was appreciated by staff, who value the professionalism and leadership of the Quality Office. We heard examples in the meetings with staff where the Quality Office had worked effectively with some schools to streamline their quality reviews, by only focusing the review on those areas not covered by the accreditation review. This seems to have a positive effect in terms of lightening the load for both the School and the Quality Office. The University has signed up to the QQI Accreditation Principles that offers the opportunity for such collaboration with PSRBs, and we encourage the Quality Office to continue to identify further opportunities for streamlining the Quality Review process where external accreditation reviews take place, whilst maintaining assurance and reducing the burden on schools and the Quality Office.
31. The review panel were made aware that a number of Quality Reviews have fallen out with the seven-year cycle. There may be an opportunity for external accreditation review outcomes (where they have taken place in the interim period) to be taken in lieu of or in part towards a Trinity Quality Review to allow Trinity to re-set the clock on the regular cycle of Quality Reviews.
32. A further area where the Quality Office may work more closely with Schools and Faculties is in the area of module and programme evaluations. Responsibility for UG module and PG programme evaluation is devolved to Schools, and Schools have discretion as to how modules are evaluated. The Quality Office supports this process through the provision of resources, including question banks and survey design guidance. This has resulted in Schools taking differing approaches and using different surveying software to administer their surveys. Schools emphasised the value in local management of surveys, in particular being able to customise survey questions to their modules/programmes. There is also benefit in taking local ownership of the issues arising from surveys, but there is an opportunity to agree a consistent framework within which devolved module evaluation occurs.
33. The Quality Office should therefore seek to work more closely with staff in Schools and Faculties to agree a consistent University-wide approach to module evaluation. This may include the University agreeing the nature of the evaluation (surveying, focus groups or a mixed methods approach), whether module evaluation should be mandatory for all modules annually, for new modules only or on a risk-based approach (subject to the necessary governance approvals). Low response rates are a concern for the University. Some staff reported administering a single survey including a range of modules, thus reducing the number of surveys.
34. There would also be benefit in considering a consistent approach to the surveying software to be used. There are currently a few different survey tools in use. This potentially increases the burden on students in completing surveys with different set-ups and may contribute to already low response-rates. It also increases the burden on staff and the Quality Office in working with multiple systems. A single surveying tool would enable the Quality Office to provide greater support to Schools and allow for a degree of consistency in surveying approach. The University has signed an enterprise-wide contract with Survey Monkey, although this

is not used by all Schools. The University needs to decide whether Survey Monkey should be the University-wide survey tool.

University-wide projects

35. We observed specific examples of the University benefitting from the Quality Office's specialist expertise in quality assurance and compliance in University projects. One particular example is CHARM-EU, an Alliance of Partner Universities under the European Universities Initiative. CHARM-EU is the first of 17 Alliances approved in 2019 to bring a Master's programme through to delivery using the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.
36. Trinity, under the leadership of the Quality Officer, took over as lead of the Quality and Accreditation Working Group and was responsible for leading the initial accreditation of the Master's programme and developing the underlying quality assurance policies and procedures. The Quality Officer not only advised Trinity staff, but also directly collaborated with and led institutions across the Alliance to develop the QA model for the joint Master's programmes that navigates the various and complex national regulatory frameworks. The Quality Officer's leadership was praised by partners in the Alliance as being a key factor in the success of the project and the initial accreditation of the joint programme.

Externally

37. The expertise of the Quality Office, specifically the Quality Officer, was recognised externally by QQI, Irish Universities' Association (IUA), and the National Steering Group for the National Student Survey. QQI specifically welcomed the involvement of the Quality Officer in external quality work. The Quality Officer is the visible face of quality at Trinity and recognised as a key facilitator in Trinity's engagement with external quality matters. The Quality Officer was praised for her efforts in actively engaging Trinity in the NSS, although external stakeholders observed internal challenges in getting traction and less visible senior support for quality in comparison to other universities. The Quality Officer's (as well as other colleagues, e.g. Global Office) engagement in the development of the International Education Mark was also appreciated.
38. Trinity has two Linked providers: Marino Institute of Education (MIE) and the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM). We found a variety of experiences and lessons to date in the experiences of quality assuring these providers in line with QQI's stricter requirements now in force. There is an opportunity to reflect on these going forward as the University's overall approach to quality assurance evolves.

Working with other Trinity Divisions

39. The Quality Office's reach into other Divisions (particularly administrative units/corporate services) is limited to the conduct of quality reviews on a seven-year cycle. Concerns about the remit of the Quality Office unhelpfully spilling into oversight of corporate services therefore seem to be overstated. This is a small part of the team's work. Much of the work of the Quality Office is focused on academic activities – specifically in relation to education and students.
40. The Academic Services Division is not responsible for corporate activity. However, it may be appropriate that the Quality Office is involved in matters of administrative units' quality insofar as that has a bearing on education and the student experience. This would be consistent with the remit of quality under the QQI Act 2021 that includes "education, training, research and related activities."
41. Quality reviews of corporate services could realistically be managed by another part of the University and be more clearly positioned as part of a framework for service quality and effectiveness in corporate services that doesn't need to wait another seven years for the next engagement. The SAR notes that there is clear devolution of quality to Faculty Deans for matters of academic quality, but the formal devolution of quality for administrative units is less clear. Separately, the Audit Report on Quality Compliance (March 2020) suggests "the need for reporting from administrative areas on an annual basis should be considered". We recommend that the University identifies how best to take forward annual and period quality reviews for administrative units that allows for formal devolution of quality to administrative areas and with appropriate University oversight.

42. Making this change would allow the Quality Office to refocus as an academic Quality Office and to align itself more closely with the other TTL units.

Conclusion

Commendations

- COM-02 The great deal of appreciation around the University for the Quality Office, for its expertise, for the support it provides – this is something to be proud of.
- COM-03 The external recognition of the expertise of the Quality Office and the Quality Officer specifically and contribution to the sector.
- COM-04 The way the Quality Office engages with Schools to discuss the Terms of Reference for reviews and involves them in shaping the review.
- COM-05 The way the Quality Office worked with Schools undergoing accreditation by external professional bodies to try to streamline the process.
- COM-06 Throughout the University the idea and importance of quality of work is felt.

Recommendations

- REC-03 Identify opportunities to work more effectively with other administrative departments to utilise their specialist skills (e.g. work with DASI to identify the data and analysis required for quality reporting).
- REC-04 [Recommendation to the Academic Secretary] Review the roles, remits and responsibilities of Trinity Teaching and Learning and its constituent teams in relation to quality enhancement activity, and facilitate opportunities for leaders and staff across the teams to collaborate more routinely.
- REC-05 Work more closely with schools and faculties to seek a consistent University-wide approach to module evaluation, and lead the provision of a shared software solution that they can opt-in to.
- REC-06 [Recommendation to Vice-Provost / Chief Academic Officer and the other Heads of Division] Identify how best to take forward annual and periodic quality reviews for administrative units that allows for formal devolution of quality to administrative areas and with appropriate University oversight.
- REC-07 Reflect on the current approach to the quality assurance of Linked Providers and consider opportunities to evolve this going forward.

Section 3: Systems and Data

Focus of evaluation: Investment in Quality Office system supports to improve quality processes to benefit stakeholders and enhance their experience of Quality.

Findings

Using data in quality assurance and enhancement

43. Through the Self-Assessment Report and in discussions with the Quality Office, there was a clear view that stakeholders across the University are 'put off' quality assurance activities because it often involves the

onerous collation and organisation of information for onward reporting. We found this view to be confirmed by staff in schools and faculties – to the extent that discussions became dominated by the process and lost sight of the purpose, the value and the people involved. The clearest example of this involved the annual school, faculty and institutional quality reports, where data from a range of sources had to be compiled and analysed at each of those levels, much of which goes on to inform the Annual Quality Report (AQR) to QQI. We heard that the lack of standardisation in systems and process made it difficult to simplify, centralise and automate the reporting of these data ready for school, faculty and university leaders to focus on understanding and using the data to assure and enhance quality. The consequence of this is too much time spent on the process of compilation, and not enough attention being given to substantive issues being monitored.

44. We also found several instances of schools being asked to collect data, especially student progression and outcomes data, that was readily available in reports or dashboards using data from the student records system. There is a disconnect between the work of the Quality Office and the Academic Registry which, if remedied, could achieve meaningful efficiencies for staff in schools and faculties.
45. The University recognises a broader need to improve its information systems infrastructure, its data architecture and its capability for data analytics. For example, the considerable devolution and autonomy afforded to academic schools means there is still variability in their quality-related processes, information systems and division of responsibilities and this limits the potential for automating the aggregation, reporting and analysis of certain data across schools. Some progress has already been made in the creation of a Data Analytics and Strategic Initiatives (DASI) unit in the Office of the Vice Provost / Chief Academic Officer, with the Head of unit recruited and now scoping strategy in this area. We found this work to be in the very early stages and there were not yet concrete actions that would benefit the Quality Office's work with schools, faculties and the corporate services, but there was a commitment to these emerging in due course.
46. Representatives of corporate services responsible for data and systems, together with representatives of academic schools and faculties, expected it would be for the Quality Office to perform a convening and leading role in specifying the data and insight that would be most useful to produce via reporting tools (such as Power BI Dashboards, which are commonplace at the University). We did not find that the Quality Office recognised this as a role for itself, that it would feel the agency necessary to perform this role or that senior leaders in the Academic Services Division saw potential for the Quality Office to provide operational leadership to the university in this way.

Improving efficiency and effectiveness through technology

47. There is considerable appetite in the Quality Office to simplify and reduce the time spent on routine business processes through investment in technology.
48. For example, the appointment, administration, reporting and payment of External Examiners remains a largely manual task that consumes considerable amounts of time, risks human error and requires considerable effort to produce insight from the data captured through the process. Many universities manage such processes through systems that manage records, automate approval and reporting workflows, and enable analysis of the process and reports from External Examiners, resulting in a smoother experience for everybody involved, substantial time (and therefore, cost) savings, and increased resilience and data protection assurances.
49. We found universal recognition among those familiar with the management of external examining that the status quo was unsatisfactory and unsustainable. However, we found limited evidence of the business case for investment and improvement being made, and therefore no evidence of progress on this matter. The desire for investment in a system for managing External Examiners could therefore only be described in general terms, not in terms of specific requirements and the measurable benefits being sought.

Shared solutions

50. Through questions posed in the Self-Evaluation Document, the Quality Office invited us to explore and reflect on approaches to student evaluation of teaching and learning. The opportunity to make more use of student feedback in working with schools is addressed elsewhere in this report, but there is relevance to the issues of technology, systems and data covered in this section of the report. Specifically, we spent more time than

expected during the review visit discussing student feedback on modules as it was a topic that elicited many strong views, often coalescing on themes of low levels of student engagement, high levels of staff workload in setting up school-based approaches and the onerous task of monitoring the percentage of modules evaluated each year. Concerningly, we heard very little about the issues raised by students in such feedback or the impact this feedback has had on the quality of education: the attention was almost exclusively on issues of process and engagement.

51. We found an appetite from a number of schools for a centrally supported technology solution for student module feedback, which could include a small number of standardised questions and space for additional questions specific to schools or disciplines. However, the policy decision to devolve responsibility for student module feedback has created a reluctance in the Academic Services Division and the impression that it might be improper for the Quality Office to introduce a shared solution like this. This appeared to be predicated on a narrow, binary view that responsibility could either be centralised or devolved, whereas we identified demand for a third way that offered a good quality shared solution that schools could opt into.

Evaluation

52. The Quality Office recognises the potential of making better use of data and technology, and the need for action, as evidenced by the inclusion of these issues as a focus of this review. Their desire to seek improvement is wholly positive and shared by colleagues at all levels across the University, and aligns with the technology-driven developments in quality assurance and academic administration at universities across Europe.
53. As a review panel, we wholly endorse the spirit and ambitions of the Quality Office in seeking to improve both the effectiveness of quality assurance processes and its own operations through better use of data and technology. If successful, such change will release the time of staff across the University to focus on more meaningful activities and, most importantly, will allow quality assurance to focus on matters of academic quality rather than being dominated by process issues.
54. These ambitions have not yet resulted in meaningful, tangible progress. We observed that this is, in part, because the Quality Office have not yet been able to partner with specialist functions (i.e. Business Analysts in IT, DASi) to translate their high-level needs into specific requirements and business cases that can be considered seriously for investment as part of the university's resource prioritisation processes. The case for investment is at best, being lost in translation, or at worst, not yet being made in a meaningful way. We recognise the Quality Office is not staffed with specialists in technology platforms, workflow automation, data architecture, systems integration or other domains relevant to these discussions, and nor should it need to be, however there is a need to develop the literacy of Quality Office staff in the process of business analysis and systems development generally so that they can more shrewdly navigate the relevant processes and more effectively fulfil the role of 'Business Owner' in order to effect the change they want to see. This may come more easily with the introduction of a Data Management Group, of which the Quality Officer is a member, and it is timely for the Quality Office to again request support from IT colleagues to initiate a project.
55. Furthermore, there is a need for the Quality Office to fulfil an operational leadership role for the University in specifying, commissioning and maintaining the provision of shared tools to support education leaders in schools and faculties to establish, uphold and improve quality. There is already demand for this to manifest in the development of reporting tools (dashboards, for example) for data used to monitor educational quality (including through annual quality reports), and in the development of a shared platform for student module feedback. Providing this leadership requires a change of mindset from developing policy expectations on schools' local quality assurance processes and monitoring their compliance, to actively partnering with schools to understand and evaluate education quality. Providing this leadership will also require careful consideration of the skillsets needed in the Quality Office to fulfil a Business Owner role for technical products.

Conclusion

56. Our evaluation has confirmed the need for investment in technology and data to improve the quality processes and that there is a consensus in support of this across the University. The Quality Office is focused on areas that will likely yield significant benefit – including external examining and student module feedback – and

should expand this to reap the significant potential of data-related products that replace manual reporting and collations processes currently underway. However, the likelihood of these ambitions being realised will remain limited without the Quality Office developing its understanding of how to progress formal technical projects and feeling empowered to convene and lead as a Business Owner for shared technology and data solutions, and without the University attaching a greater sense of priority to such projects.

Recommendations

- REC-08 Professional development provision for staff in the Quality Office should recognise the increasing need for quality professionals – as clients – to understand and have some literacy in data architecture and analytics, information systems development, and IT project management.
- REC-09 The Academic Services Division, IT Services and Human Resources should collaborate to propose and implement a vision for the more effective management of external examining for all taught programmes across the University, including processes managed in schools, through a programme of business, process and technology change.
- REC-10 The Quality Office should be recognised, empowered and accountable for articulating the University's requirements for data reporting and analytics tools in relation to educational quality, and for empowering educational leaders across the University to use these in assuring and enhancing educational quality.

Section 4: Quality Culture

Focus of evaluation: Steps that can be taken to communicate the relevance of quality to the College Community and embed a culture of quality.

Findings

Communicating relevance of quality

- 57. When it comes to the relevance of quality, the University community does not seem to be in need of having a better understanding. As said before in this report, there might not be a clear and common view of what quality means, but that the community finds quality important and acknowledges its relevance is clear to the panel.
- 58. From the range of people met by the panel, a strong set of relationships between the Quality Office and various parts of the University was observed. For example, the working relationships with University and Faculty office holders appeared to be excellent and collaborative. This will partly stem from the long service of Quality Office staff and the broad remit covered by a small team, which has given them a high level of exposure and built a deep understanding of the institution. Colleagues and sector bodies especially value and rely on the Quality Office's role in scanning, understanding and navigating national and international regulatory landscapes – as demonstrated by recent work on QQI's introduction of the International Education Mark, which Trinity have helped to shape via the Quality Officer.

When it comes to quality assurance (QA) however, a different image was painted. Quality assurance is oftentimes perceived by the stakeholders of the Quality Office as yearly reporting and intermittently undergoing reviews. The idea that QA should first and foremost be compliance-oriented is not agreed upon by the broader University community, and as well not by the representatives of QQI met by the panel. Moreover, mixed feelings were found about the adaptability of the Quality Office and its ability to contextualise its work for each school. For example, there were different practices in adjusting Quality Reviews for schools that have undergone accreditation by an accrediting or regulatory body, as reflected above.

Embedding a culture of quality

59. Following the different views on the core tasks of the Quality Office, and the prevailing idea of accountability being dominant over stimulating a culture of quality, it cannot be of any surprise that the stakeholders do not experience the Quality Office to be a leader in the development of a culture of quality.
60. At the same time, the panel heard the wish coming from the University community, units but as well the Quality Committee, to lend a helping hand in this regard. The panel felt the need for the Quality Office to play a role in establishing a culture of quality by for instance providing units with best practices.

Evaluation

Communicating relevance of quality

61. As noticed in the findings above, the panel does not hold the opinion that the relevance of quality should be more or better communicated to the University community. If and when a broad discussion on what quality means has been finished with clear conclusions, there will of course arise a new need to communicate this new reality to the community. The Quality Office should, together with university senior leadership, play a central role in these communications.
62. In the meantime, the aspect of which the University community could improve its consciousness on is the relevance of quality assurance. Here the Quality Office is the main actor. In the eyes of the panel, QA should be much more than reporting and a review. Quality assurance (QA) would be understood as a combination of structures for quality on the one hand and a culture of quality on the other. Oftentimes these are connected with accountability for compliance (structures) and enhancement (culture).
63. The work on student surveys is a good example of the opportunities for the Quality Office to go beyond administering processes and producing information to genuinely develop insight and help educational leaders to use that insight. There is work underway with the Dean of Students to review and better organise the use of student surveys – the Quality Office should use this opportunity to think about how it can add more value and do so consistently across the different surveys so that schools become familiar with the support available.

Embedding a culture of quality

64. In the balance of compliance-oriented verses enhancement-oriented, the approach to compliance with QQI requirements is too narrow, risk averse and dominant. The important point is that internal processes assure and improve the quality of academic and related activities. If you focus on that and do it well – for the benefit of your students and staff – you will naturally comply with QQI requirements. It seems the beneficiary of students and staff have been lost in an approach that has started with and over-interpreted the national requirements. This approach has lost sight of the people and purpose in and amongst the process, legal concerns, and limited risk appetite. This is not necessary and not likely to engage anybody in creating a quality culture.
65. The panel sees great potential for truly starting to work on embedding and/or strengthening a culture of quality, however. Signals are coming both from within the Quality Office, where the which was expressed to spend more time and energy on this aspect of quality assurance, and from several units that asked for activities that usually would be described under the guise of a culture of quality. This would not have to be direct involvement of enhancement activities for several reasons. The devolved nature of responsibility for quality in the University would not permit these activities coming from the Quality Office, but even under a more centralised system the Quality Office would simply not have time to engage in these activities everywhere.
66. The role for the Quality Office is in supporting enhancement activities, since they are well placed to produce analysis and advise leaders (university, faculty and school) on where there is need for enhancement. The work can then be delivered by specialists in other teams. One good example of this is a huge opportunity to more widely communicate about the lessons learnt from the thematic analysis from Quality Reviews, to provide insight into the key institutional areas for development and enhancement. A different example is connecting the people in units responsible for quality in a Community of Practice around QA, and feed this community

with the relevant knowledge, skills and good practices in order to equip the relevant people with the relevant tools to make enhancement activities successful.

Conclusion

67. From what the panel has seen and heard, it understood that although the relevance of quality is clear to the community, the meaning of quality on the one hand and a broader and therefore more stimulating idea of quality assurance could use a freshening up in the University community. On the topic of a culture of quality the first thing that would need to happen for the Quality Office to engage more in stimulating it, is a change in the interpretation what is important in dealing with quality. This change is a change of culture in itself and should be prepared in togetherness of the main stakeholders, i.e. senior institutional leadership, the QC and the Quality Office, and communicated throughout the institution and its partners. If and when this happens, the panel presumes this aspect of the Quality Office's work to be relatively successful relatively fast, since both from the side of the providers and from the side of the users of this service the enthusiasm is already present.

Commendations

COM-06 Throughout the University the idea and importance of quality of work is felt.

Recommendations

- REC-01 Initiate and facilitate a conversation on what quality and quality assurance are and should be for the University, and how these can become less dominated by a compliance-oriented approach. Include all important stakeholders in this process, including student representatives when the student experience is deemed central to the idea of quality.
- REC-11 Communicate more widely about the lessons learnt from thematic analyses, using the findings from completed Quality Reviews to provide insight that informs quality enhancement activities.
- REC-12 Connect people in the University tasked with the responsibility for quality, for them to learn from and with each other through a Community of Practice.

Section 5: Broader Observations

68. The Quality Office is shaped by its environment, one whereby academic strategy and leadership are heavily devolved matters. This promotes a reticence among institutional officers to lead and set direction on matters of educational quality and student experience, beyond setting minimum standards and monitoring compliance with these, but this does not need to be the case. Educational character and matters of pedagogy can still be matters for disciplinary discretion at the same time as having 'golden threads' through and shared ambitions for the experiences and outcomes of students.
69. The Quality Committee plays a key role in maintaining institutional oversight of quality and assuring compliance with QQI requirements but may be attempting to do too much. In discussion with Quality Committee members, there appears to be a large volume of business and detailed reports. The Committee provides feedback on reviews, but members of the Committee were unclear how the feedback loop is closed. The Committee seems to lack oversight of the bigger strategic picture. A broad risk and compliance committee could consider an annual report on compliance with QQI requirements, taking an institutional view. An Academic Quality Committee could then focus on strategic development of quality – setting expectations, championing those within Faculties, developing the assurance processes and enabling sharing of good practice.
70. We were disappointed not to meet a single student during our review and to observe the apparently limited role students have as stakeholders or participants in the work of the Quality Office. While we heard that student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement is well-established across the University, working more closely with a range of students may help to shift the focus of QA activity from process-driven compliance

to enabling staff to deliver good quality education for the benefit of students, i.e. shifting to a more people-focused approach. Quality processes are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end – that end is to assure and enhance the quality of the student learning experience.

Recommendations

- REC-13 Review the role of the Quality Committee and consider the potential to separate out compliance matters from academic quality.
- REC-14 Consider further ways in which students can be more involved in quality and help to keep the focus on the quality of the student learning experience.

Summary Conclusion

71. Throughout the Quality Review of the Quality Office, we encountered thoughtful, passionate people committed to Trinity College Dublin being a university of high quality in all that it does. There is a recognition that this requires an organised approach through quality assurance policies, processes and practices, and there is an appreciation for the work to date of the Quality Office in its work to reconcile these requirements with the centuries-old traditions of Trinity. We also encountered an appetite and curiosity – and in some places, a pressing demand – to reflect on whether the arrangements that have evolved in the ten years since QQI was formed are fit-for-purpose and adding the value they could. The Quality Review of the Quality Office has fallen at an opportune time as these debates are happening and the implications for the Quality Office are considered.
72. This report addresses the Terms of Reference set for our review. In conclusion, we have drawn together the following cross-cutting themes throughout the report and encourage the Quality Office, the leadership of the Academic Services Division and senior College Officers to reflect on them holistically and strategically to ensure that the actions taken next are informed by a shared vision and principles for quality and quality assurance – across academic and non-academic domains – at Trinity going forward.
- The University's interpretation of QQI guidelines and approach to demonstrating compliance with national expectations may be overzealous and counterproductive. There is potential for the University's Quality Framework to now evolve, ensuring a focus on supporting the people responsible for quality and quality assurance to deliver good outcomes is central, and letting this speak for itself to demonstrate compliance, rather than starting from the need to evidence compliance and working back from there. This could be hugely empowering across the University and enable more of Quality Culture to emerge.
 - There are strong views that the remit of the Quality Office has spilled out beyond the academic sphere into the domain of corporate and administrative services, and that this raises questions of where in the organisation the Quality Office should be situated. The core of the Quality Office's work pertains to academic quality, specifically educational quality. Undertaking a small number of Quality Reviews of corporate services is creating a disproportionate amount of anxiety and, in our view, this activity could easily be detached and moved elsewhere, leaving the Quality Office to fulfil a more traditional role as an Academic Quality Office.
 - There is a great deal of appreciation for the work of the Quality Office across the University, but this is not always recognised or celebrated by the team and senior leaders in ASD. Take more time to celebrate this so that any developments in the team's work build on the strong foundations already in place. There are not fundamental problems to solve in the Quality Office, but rather there are strategic opportunities to pursue in how quality is assured and enhanced at Trinity, which will set the framework for the Quality Office to evolve going forward.
 - There are no consistent or shared expectations of the Quality Office's remit at present: stakeholders only see the parts relevant to them and there are contrasting views on the nature and boundaries of the work undertaken by the team. It is timely to review and recast this remit, recognising it must be articulated as

a coherent part of Trinity Teaching and Learning's wider remit for supporting the assurance and enhancement of educational quality across the University.

- There are opportunities to draw more value from and build the resilience of the Quality Office by breaking down silos – both within the staff team of the Office itself and with other teams in Trinity Teaching and Learning more widely.
- Quality professionals around the world are grappling with the opportunities and challenges of data-driven approaches to quality assurance, and of the opportunities that technology bring in automating processes previously administered manually. This is no different at Trinity and there is ample opportunity to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Quality Office's work, and in turn to build strong engagement from those 'on the receiving end' across the University.

Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

We have commended the following practice after the review:

# Ref	Commendation	Report Section
COM-01	The Quality Office can rightly be proud of the work it is doing, the value it is bringing to units in the University and should take more time as a team to celebrate its success.	1, 2
COM-02	The great deal of appreciation around the University for the Quality Office, for its expertise, for the support it provides – this is something to be proud of.	2
COM-03	The external recognition of the expertise of the Quality Office and the Quality Officer specifically and contribution to the sector.	2
COM-04	The way the Quality Office engages with Schools to discuss the Terms of Reference for reviews and involves them in shaping the review.	2
COM-05	The way the Quality Office has attempted to work with Schools undergoing accreditation by external professional bodies to try to streamline the process.	2
COM-06	Throughout the University the idea and importance of quality of work is felt.	2, 4

We have recommended the following actions be taken after the review:

# Ref	Recommendation	Report Section
REC-01	Initiate and facilitate a conversation on what quality and quality assurance are and should be for the University, and how these can become less dominated by a compliance-oriented approach. Include all important stakeholders in this process, including student representatives when the student experience is deemed central to the idea of quality.	1, 4
REC-02	Align the remit of the Quality Office with the University's renewed vision for quality and quality assurance, in the context of it being a unit in the Academic Services Division.	1
REC-03	Identify opportunities to work more effectively with other administrative departments to utilise their specialist skills (e.g. work with DASI to identify the data and analysis required for quality reporting).	1, 2

REC-04	[Recommendation to the Academic Secretary] Review the roles, remits and responsibilities of Trinity Teaching and Learning and its constituent teams in relation to quality enhancement activity, and facilitate opportunities for leaders and staff across the teams to collaborate more routinely.	2
REC-05	Work more closely with schools and faculties to seek a consistent University-wide approach to module evaluation, and lead the provision of a shared software solution that they can opt-in to.	2
REC-06	[Recommendation to Vice-Provost / Chief Academic Officer and the other Heads of Division] Identify how best to take forward annual and periodic quality reviews for administrative units that allows for formal devolution of quality to administrative areas and with appropriate University oversight.	2
REC-07	Reflect on the current approach to the quality assurance of Linked Providers and consider opportunities to evolve this going forward.	2
REC-08	Professional development provision for staff in the Quality Office should recognise the increasing need for quality professionals – as clients – to understand and have some literacy in data architecture and analytics, information systems development, and IT project management.	3
REC-09	The Academic Services Division, IT Services and Human Resources should collaborate to propose and implement a vision for the more effective management of external examining for all taught programmes across the University, including processes managed in schools, through a programme of business, process and technology change.	3
REC-10	The Quality Office should be recognised, empowered and accountable for articulating the University's requirements for data reporting and analytics tools in relation to educational quality, and for empowering educational leaders across the University to use these in assuring and enhancing educational quality.	3
REC-11	Communicate more widely about the lessons learnt from thematic analyses, using the findings from completed Quality Reviews to provide insight that informs quality enhancement activities.	4
REC-12	Connect people in the University tasked with the responsibility for quality, for them to learn from and with each other through a Community of Practice.	4
REC-13	Review the role of the Quality Committee and consider the potential to separate out compliance matters from academic quality.	5
REC-14	Consider further ways in which students can be more involved in quality and help to keep the focus on the quality of the student learning experience.	5

Appendix A: Supporting Evidence

- Appendix A: SWOT Analysis conducted in June 2022
- Appendix B: Internal Audit Review of Quality Compliance Oversight (April 2020)
- Appendix C: Benchmarking Survey of Quality Offices in Irish Universities conducted in July 2022
- Appendix D.1: Undergraduate External Examiner Survey 2022
- Appendix D.2: Postgraduate External Examiner Survey 2022
- Appendix E: Survey of Trinity Elective Coordinators conducted in July 2022
- Appendix F: Feedback from Quality Reviewer evaluations
- Appendix G: Summary of Key Themes Arising in Quality Reviews (2020-2022)
- Appendix H: Quality Committee Evaluation Survey (2017-2022)
- Appendix I.1: Framework for Quality in Trinity 2016
- Appendix I.2: Framework for Quality in Trinity 2018
- Appendix J: Quality Office Process Manual
- Appendix K: Quality Risk Register 2022
- Appendix L.1: MIE ACDC Terms of Reference
- Appendix L.2: RIAM ACDC Terms of Reference
- Appendix M.1: Terms of reference for IUA Quality Committee
- Appendix M.2: Terms of Reference for Quality Officers Group
- Appendix N: Policy Register of Academic Policies
- Appendix O: Case Study Template
- Appendix P: External Examiner Memo to Council (October 2022)
- Appendix Q: Quality Office Engagement with QQI Activities
- Appendix R: External Examiner Memo to USC (November 2020)
- Appendix S: External Examiner Issues Escalation Matrix

Appendix B: Review Visit Schedule

Time	Meeting	TOR Ref	Location
Day 1: Tuesday 21st February 2023			
09.15-10.00	Meeting 1 Introductory Meeting with College Officers		West Theatre Meeting Room
10.00-10.30	Meeting 2 Meeting with Quality Officer		West Theatre Meeting Room
10.30-11.15	Meeting 3 Meeting with Quality Office staff		West Theatre Meeting Room
11.15-11.30	Private Meeting Time		West Theatre Meeting Room
11.30-12.15	Meeting 4 Meeting with Trinity Linked Providers representatives	ToR 1,3	West Theatre Meeting Room
12.15-13.00	Meeting 5- Academic Quality Reviews Meeting with HoS and School Administrators who have undergone a Review Hybrid	ToR 1,2,3,4	West Theatre Meeting Room
13.00-14.00	Private Meeting Time and Lunch		West Theatre Meeting Room
14.00-14.45	Meeting 6- Evaluation of Student Experience - Module and Programme Evaluation - National Student Survey - International Student Barometer	ToR 1,2,3,4	West Theatre Meeting Room
14.45-15.30	Meeting 7- Quality Reviews- Administrative Support Units Meetings with Divisional and Unit representatives who have undergone a Review.	ToR 1,2,3, 4	West Theatre Meeting Room
15.30-16.00	Private Meeting		West Theatre Meeting Room
16.00-16.45	Meeting 8 Meeting with College Officers with responsibility for Quality under the Framework for Quality	ToR 2	West Theatre Meeting Room
16.45-17.00	Private Meeting - Debrief end of Day 1		West Theatre Meeting Room
Day 2: Wednesday 22nd February 2023			
09.15-10.00	Meeting 9 Meeting with Quality Committee representatives	ToR 1,3,4	West Theatre Meeting Room
10.00-10.45	Meeting 10 Meeting with Faculty Deans and Faculty Administrators	ToR 1,2,3,4	West Theatre Meeting Room
10.45-11.15	Private Meeting Time		West Theatre Meeting Room
11.15-12.00	Meeting 11- Directors TTL	ToR 1,3	West Theatre Meeting Room
12.00-12.30	Meeting 12 Quality Office Surveys	ToR 2,3	West Theatre Meeting Room
12.30-13.30	Private Meeting Lunch		
13.30-14.00	Meeting 13 External Stakeholders	ToR 1,3,4	West Theatre Meeting Room
14.00-14.30	Meeting 14- CHARM EU Hybrid	ToR 1	West Theatre Meeting Room
14.30-15.00	Private Meeting		

Time	Meeting	TOR Ref	Location
15.00-15.45	Meeting 15 – Data and Systems	ToR 3	West Theatre Meeting Room
15.45-16.15	Meeting 16 – Accreditation		
16.15-17.00	Meeting 17- Professional Staff		West Theatre Meeting Room
16.45-17.00	Private Meeting-debrief Day 2		West Theatre Meeting Room
Day 3: Thursday 23rd February 2023			
09.15-12.00	Reviewers break and work on draft report and review findings		
12.00-12.30	Meeting 18- Wrap-up meeting with Quality Officer		West Theatre Meeting Room
12.30-13.15	Meeting 19- Wrap-up meeting with College Officers		West Theatre Meeting Room
13.15-13.30	Exit Presentation		West Theatre Meeting Room