



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Quality Review of the Careers Service

6-8 December 2022

Review Team:

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The Review team met a range of stakeholders from across Trinity, and from external enterprises, and we heard a range of positive feedback on individuals and on the approach of the whole Career Services team to working with stakeholders. There was broad recognition of the challenging landscape externally within which you are operating to support students to achieve their desired career goals. There were also some mentions of particularly successful activity in partnerships, accessibility of the team, and the PhD module.

The Review team also recognise that the Director and the Careers team have accomplished an enormous amount since the last review, in what have not always been fully enabling circumstances in the institution. Our main remit was therefore to consider what the next phase of change and development should be to ensure you are doing the right things in order to achieve your goal of enabling students, and to ensure you actually get and can measure impact from what you are doing.

Trinity College Dublin is one of Ireland's key third level institutions and recognised as so internationally. Its continued success as an academic learning and research institution and contributor to Ireland's economic development can be further enhanced through the delivery of graduates that meet both current and future needs, most importantly, both industry and societal. Trinity's long-established history and reputation for academic rigour is a key element in the attractiveness of its graduates to the Irish and international employment markets, and the Panel has identified a need and an opportunity for Trinity to enhance their graduates' ability to articulate that value to those markets as part of maintaining Trinity's reputation.

We present our findings under these broad themes which include both strategic and more practical recommendations:

1. STRATEGIC INTENT

The quality of the careers service offering to students, academic partners, professional services partners and employers is generally good, and where you get engagement, it is positive. However, the reach of the service both internally and externally is not sufficient due to under-resourcing relative to demand in some key areas, including internships and workplace experience, network-building and co-ordination of external partnership building, and in areas like entrepreneurship where there is currently no service delivery possible due to lack of resource. The team has been very effective in reacting to changes in local demand through a period of expansion and increased need, but will now benefit from establishing

some core common strategic goals that everyone across the service – and across the university – can recognise and work to, and can be appropriately resourced. The focus of the objectives in the Careers Strategic Plan are generally inward-facing to the service and how it operates, and would benefit from a review with the university's senior leadership against institutional goals. This will enable creation of core, high level, integrated, consistent and sustainable goals and related targets that are recognisable across academic and professional services contexts and that will endure in support of Trinity's wider objectives. This in turn will help to identify areas for focus that can help to direct operational resources.

More broadly in the university, the team's strategic position is variable.

- There have been some benefits derived from recent changes in the academic strategy, and there are some clear opportunities for the team to partner more closely with academic departments (see Section 3 below).
- However, the absence of a strong enterprise partnership strategy for TCD is impacting the team's ability to create opportunities for student and graduate employment (see Section 2 below).
- The team's ability to partner effectively within resource limitations with other professional services teams indicates a lack of strategic clarity about how professional services teams collaborate bilaterally or holistically. It would be helpful for Trinity to determine what the core collaboration priorities for all professional services might be, for example international students, students from under-represented domestic backgrounds and so on, so that individual professional services teams can then identify local priorities against that. A good example of this would be the huge opportunity created for Careers by partnership with the Alumni office for mentoring, case studies, alumni speakers for student events and internship harvesting: much of this is currently realised with variable levels of success as it is less clear which student cohorts should be prioritised to benefit from the outputs of that partnership if not everything possible can be delivered.
- The very recent investment in data analytics at TCD creates a significant strategic opportunity for the team to integrate all the richness of career readiness, student engagement and outcomes data into the wider institutional data collection, analysis and planning. This will enable the careers team to be at the forefront of institutional conversations about resource deployment and impact measurement, and will also provide the institutional data team with a clear student-to-graduate data journey to inform their strategic drivers.

Should you choose to define new strategic drivers that are sustainable, integrated and outward-looking as well meeting institutional need, we propose these could be:

- a. To progress students' career readiness and enable students and graduates to recognise and articulate their employability, including the innate transversal or transferable skills from their academic programmes

- b. To work in partnership internally and externally to create appropriate opportunities for all students to develop their work-readiness
- c. To develop a consolidated income stream both to innovate and enable scalability of initiatives to benefit more students
- d. To enable Trinity to contribute impactfully to the national micro-credentials initiative and develop sector-leading approaches to academic/industry partnership
- e. To support Trinity's repositioning of its relationships with enterprise on a national level
- f. To respond more strategically to government initiatives, including HCI and the National Framework for Lifelong Guidance 2022, that support and enable students and graduates

Stakeholder analysis (students, academics, professional services departments, employers) will enable you to create new operational priorities under those core strategic drivers and align your existing operational priorities. Your Partnership Groups would be one way to gather this feedback for analysis. With the operational priorities in place, you can then align all your key functions and stakeholder services, e.g. communications, events, data gathering and analysis, employer engagement, resource development, careers education. This is particularly important for areas where you currently lack staff resource and need to make difficult decisions.

This will also support you when developing any sub-strategies, new work or determining new resource needs, and enable all team members to recognise how they contribute to service strategy across multiple drivers.

The name of the service was identified as a request of the Panel in the original Review questions. The Panel's discussions with the team and with students and graduates indicated that a factually descriptive name including words like 'Careers' and 'Employability' may be off-putting for student engagement, which will create issues for engaging the students the service most needs to reach: those with low levels of career planning and employability self-awareness. The team emphasised the need to tackle misperceptions, particularly by students, about who the service is intended to help and how. The strategic driver around increasing student career readiness would therefore be met by a renaming that was more euphemistic but engaging and actionable for the key student stakeholder; this is addressed further in Section 3. Academic and employer engagement are supported by other strategic approaches in the university, so it is reasonable to prioritise the key student stakeholder in the naming of the service.

Key recommendations are listed below, and operational sub-recommendations are included in a supplementary document.

Recommendations

1.1 We recommend that you define new enduring strategic drivers along the lines indicated above.

1.2 We recommend that senior leadership at Trinity, with the help of the Careers Services, review existing institutional strategies to consider where careers and employability and the delivery of the Careers team is currently absent or not effectively integrated, in order to increase the impact of their work in enabling students to achieve their post-study goals.

2. EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Currently there appears to be pockets of good practice in connecting with Enterprise, mainly through personal relationships and connections. Generally, stakeholders see the benefits for students of external engagements but see access and time to be a challenge in developing those relationships. Equally, Enterprise is willing to engage but is not clear on how this should happen. Enterprise is keen for students and faculties to hear about the extent and scope of roles in their organisations and the opportunities for career development.

Enterprise is also keen to take in Trinity students and very open to providing feedback to Trinity on the overall quality of graduates they take in. As well as giving internships and expertise, Enterprise could add additional value towards building the journey towards employment as a route for students interested in that journey.

Whilst there may be engagement with relevant Enterprise agencies like IDA Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland, the Review Team did not see evidence of a structured and direct ongoing process to harness the benefits of greater links to industry through these agencies. Identifying clearly who the external partners for collaboration could be and those enterprise and agencies that could become partners is key. Once partners are identified, what relationship and outcome you want to have with those partners that can benefit students could be identified. Taking the **Trinity Graduate Attributes** and **The Seven Features of the Trinity Education** could be a good starting point here. How can partners you have identified help students attain the attributes and how can they contribute to the Seven Features? Responding to these two questions for each external partner will provide the basis of a clear and structured employer/agency engagement model. For example, under 'To Think Independently', employers can provide knowledge of the broad emerging trends in business or the enterprise agencies can share their focus for how they support business in Ireland. Both can showcase how digital skills are being used and needed in business (To Communicate Effectively) and both can engage with Trinity how they see lifelong learning being supported. Trinity Careers Service can then utilise this to take advantage of the external infrastructure to support them to deliver services to their students. The rationale would be that:

1. Connections could be created with external agencies that would enable access to enterprise – Enterprise called this the 'bridge into industry'. It would also help signpost to other appropriate insights that could support the ongoing development of the Careers Service.
2. External expertise could be maximised for full benefit beyond internships and contributing to classes or careers fairs etc, but also on sharing knowledge with

Trinity on the future skills needs that they have and the skills they look for from graduates to enable them to be work ready.

3. Promote Trinity as an educational establishment that is not only seen as a research-focused university but also one that supports broad career development and that supports students to succeed beyond university.

This could become a sustainable ‘sweet spot’ for the University. We recognise of course that the management of external partners needs to be resourced and in the first instance, the Director of the Careers Service should lead on this area supported by the work of the Project Team for Careers Strategic Communication. It would, if possible, benefit the services to have a dedicated resource for this purpose as it could be a driver for fee earning and marketing the strengths of the university to the business community. The business community always talk about the need for simple access to institutions and having one key point of contact. It will be very important to make sure external partners are clear on how to contact the university and this resource would be best placed to be that contact. The Careers Service could also analyse and present intelligence they gain from the student body to help employers in Ireland understand better the future employees they are going to be recruiting, so that they can focus their recruitment and retainment strategies more effectively. That would also inform the development of the Trinity micro-credentials strategy.

To show the value of working with external partners, several KPIs could be established to help focus the work here and show added value to support request for further investment. For example,

- The number of additional partners ‘recruited’ to the college and the level of engagement they have that adds value to the students;
- The number of placements/internships generated as a result of the additional business contacts made;
- The level of investment generated as a result of greater understanding of the Trinity offer;
- The number of engagements by Trinity with business to support enterprise in developing their people.

Recommendations

2.1 Develop an external partners engagement plan that includes a stakeholder analysis, the ‘ask’ from the partner, the benefits of these engagements. The overall contribution they can make to the strategic goals set above should be clearly articulated.

2.2 Included in the communications plan, mentioned in Section 3, should be the manner in which the stakeholders will be engaged with, how often and who is the key influencer

2.3 Develop a series of KPIs that shows progress and value created by such engagements for students and indeed the overall university brand.

2.4 We recommend increased staffing to support this key area of the strategic need: see the Team Structure recommendations (see Section 4)

3. INTERNAL PARTNERHSIPS AND COLLABORATION

From the information we've gathered and our own experience we have suggestions that can help in making the efforts of all staff even more effective and rewarding.

We've identified the following 'main' groups within TCD to enhance partnership and collaboration with: Students & Enterprises, Faculty, and Professional Services such as Tangent, the Alumni Office and the Student Disability Service. In the following paragraphs the suggestions per group are stated and further explained.

Students & Enterprises

TCD hosts more than 20.000 students (graduate and postgraduate). At this moment 30% are registered in MyCareer and involved in one way or the other in Careers Service. Although numbers (or Key performance indicators) are not sacred, they do help a team that's (re)forming to focus and make decisions on what they will and will not do. Before diving into these indicators it's necessary to formulate **a shared goal** that can be translated into shared KPI's.

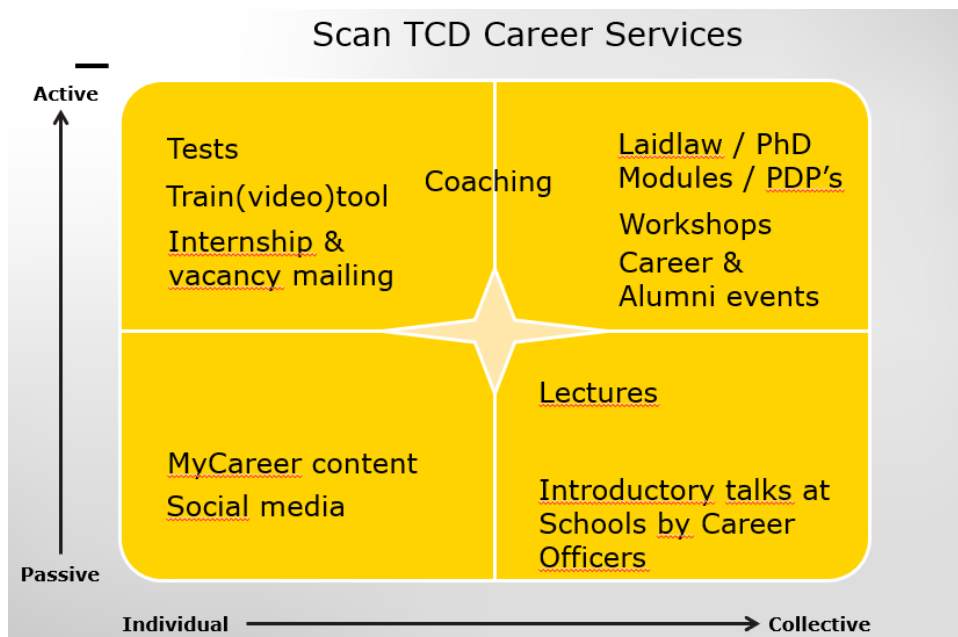
Our suggestion is that the Careers Service thinks about this goal as recommended in Section 1. Does the current stated goal really fit in what we want to be or do?

From the shared goal the team can take the next step: which student or enterprise/partner will hear what about these goals from us and when? Or as stated regarding students in the strategic goals: 'Ensure that every student knows who we are and what we do'. This leads to the fact that you need to have a differentiated, shared & coordinated **communication plan** with **KPIs** you want to reach. This will help to integrate all services and products of the Careers Service.

The first ingredient of the communication plan is to have an oversight of all **channels** students use and plan how and when your content will be presented via those channels to students and other stakeholders. Some of this work has already been undertaken by your Strategic Communications Project Team. Each channel has its own value, impact and costs (in time spend). Using all of them in the right way gives you the highest chance of reaching your KPIs.

To develop and keep the channels relevant you need **content from the whole team** about all the different services and products you offer. The team is already doing a good job, based on the Careers Service Annual Report 21-22, but it is unclear whether the whole team is generating content with the goal to reach as many students and enterprises as possible. The working students that are hired can further support this.

The services and products of the Careers Service align with the needs of the students and enterprises (based on appendix Careers Service Annual Report 21-22). We've plotted them in the figure below.



We don't think that resources should be allocated to developing new/other services or products. Our advice is to **focus on making sure that more students and enterprises use the current services and products**. The communication plan and the execution of it will help to create a greater collaborative intent around the team. This will enable them to be successful and makes the service feel more integrated by students.

When executing the plan, you can also start on gathering and analysing the **data** to see what works and what doesn't work at the time that you communicate it. Make sure you have access to all possible relevant data (pageviews, link clicks, started & completed tests, made and completed appointments, enrolment for trainings & events, division per faculty / school, etc.). When this data is available and a 'zero-measurement' has been made, you can start experimenting and experience what effects they have.

Faculties

We've spoken with delegates from the faculties of AHSS, STEM and Health. All of them said how happy they are with the support they get from their assigned Career Consultant and how impressed they are with the work the Careers Services does with such limited capacity for so many students and schools.

During the conversation, differences between the faculties in career preparation and opportunities emerged. For the Review Team members who work at universities this is known territory, but for members who work in enterprise these differences are not that apparent. Enterprises focus on their own narrative which concentrates on internships and placements. TCD has a neutral policy on internships and certainly not all faculties offer an (credited) internship. Based on this, and the different interests of students we advise a **differentiated approach between the faculties: don't try to get equality because they aren't all the same**. Since the team has limited time to service >20.000 students we think that's it's more pragmatic to work on the goals of the Careers Service within the current culture and shared views of the faculties (instead of focussing on changing the culture within the faculties). This means:

AHSS: structure alumni-experiences and enable students to identify and present their skills.

STEM: decide on the role of the Careers Services management of internship and placements and increase opportunities for students and employers.

Health Sciences: develop a programme for developing leadership skills and work with the School of Nursing and Midwifery I for the development of Micro-credentials.

For all faculties there's an overall chance for the Careers Service: the **graduate renewal project**. The Director of Careers has made sure that the Careers Service is at the designing table. We advise her to decide what will be her main goals: Internships and/or Labour Market Preparation in all curricula?

PhD in general

The Career course for PhDs is very well received and Careers Service colleagues are very knowledgeable and capable of helping. Students stated that an extra bonus is that you get to meet other PhD students and that everybody can learn from each other's experiences. Their suggestion is to organize 2 or 3 times a year a meet-up/outreach with PhDs with some content but also a bit of Career 'stuff', especially about opportunities to have a career outside of academia (perhaps with help of alumni). This will help participants to recognise their employability in sectors of the economy. Supervisors (and possibly Enterprises) should also be invited so they can get a better idea of what's occupying their PhD students beside the research.

Professional Services

One of the strategic goals of the Careers Service in 22-23 is to embed an inclusive and accessible-first approach. We strongly agree with this and see a great chance to connect with other services on this theme. Our first suggestion is to further align with them by setting up special programs or actions together with colleagues from the student services. Our second suggestion is: **please make informed choices in who you will help / work with** (with the gathered data and KPIs in mind).

Recommendations

3.1 Reformulate your shared goal and develop a communication plan including KPIs using all available channels to communicate it. Generate and share content together and focus on making sure that more students use the current services and products.

3.2 Gather and analyse the data from all available datapoints to assess the impact of your actions, redesign, implement and gather & analyse the data again.

3.3 Use a differentiated approach between the faculties: don't try to get equality because they aren't all the same.

3.4 Use your position in the Graduate Renewal project to, based on the societal task of the university, incorporate Labour Market Orientation and/or an internship in all programmes.

4. TEAM STRUCTURE

The team has achieved an enormous amount considering their small size, and the quality of service delivery and partnership is recognised as being high. However, it was obvious to the Panel that the team are extremely stretched already and that the current demand on the team is not sustainable. Reshaping strategic priorities and refocusing operational output will help manage demand, but the current structure and staffing size does also need further review in the light of refreshed and emerging strategic priorities. This will ensure better collaborative working in pursuit of wider strategic objectives and help the team recognise how and when to say 'yes' and 'no' to opportunities.

Some concerns were raised by the Careers Consultant team about inequalities in pay and role with respect to job descriptions. It is difficult for the team as a whole to maintain a credible position on equality when talking to employers and students if they recognise or experience inequalities in their own situation. A review of all staffing in the service with respect to equality of contractual position would be valuable.

There is a need for additional staffing:

- Deputy Director (Careers Education): The Careers Consultant team is a reasonable size comparatively in the sector, though they are clearly struggling to meet demand and need, particularly in partnership with other TCD professional services departments. There are clear pockets of excellent practice delivered by each Careers Consultant, and the key question is how a new Deputy Director to manage this team can support strategic and operational partnerships and also release the Careers Consultants to delivery. This will enable the creation of a leadership team with the Director and other team leaders to share strategic and operational responsibility for the service within all (budget) boundaries. The Director of Careers can then take the lead on academic and professional services partnerships and strategic direction to create synergy between (external) partners and the combination of career, HCI partnerships and Micro credentials.
- As noted above, the Enterprise partnership function of the team is under-resourced in relation to the current operations and to any future need (including developing opportunities for students and generating income). Two additional posts would strengthen the team efforts here – a position that focuses on **external engagements and collaborations** and a position that drives **events and marketing**. These posts could be the drivers of revenue streams to the college by their efforts to educate enterprise on the Trinity offer.
- Data analysis: the team is already harvesting a range of useful and important data to support the strategic and operational delivery of the team. The new TCD Data Analytics team provides an exciting opportunity to integrate and implement data analysis of student and graduate careers and employability data at an institutional level, and ensure appropriate and effective targeting of staff resource towards improved graduate outcomes.

Recommendations:

- 4.1 Recruit a Deputy Director to manage the careers education, operations and employability function of the team (Careers Consultants and Student Employability).
- 4.2 Review the staffing need for enterprise in order to support more strategic partnership and opportunity development.
- 4.3 Recruit a Data Analyst.
- 4.4 Review the contractual positions of all staff in the team with respect to equality.



Careers Service Quality Review, 2023

Response from the Academic Secretary; Head of Trinity Teaching and Learning

Since 2017, the Careers Service under the leadership of the current Director has transformed from being a paper-based traditional careers unit to a systems-based dynamic outward focused and collaborative enterprise, with emphasis on embedding employability in the curriculum, enterprise/industry engagement, delivery of a suite of flexible services, and increasing funding opportunities. The implementation of a Career Management System, MyCareer, in 2017 has been a milestone in this transformation journey. The Review Panel *"...recognise that the Director and the Careers team have accomplished an enormous amount since the last review, in what have not always been fully enabling circumstances in the institution."*

The review report provides food for thought as the Careers Service embarks on the next phase of its transformative journey, which is to coordinate strategic level enterprise engagement to strengthen engagement and realise productive and sustainable long-term partnerships. We are fortunate that this ambition is seed funded through the Human Capital Initiative (HCI) and two senior appointments are currently in recruitment.

The Careers Service has reached a stage of maturity and stability and the review recommendations will be carefully considered in the development of a new strategic plan for the next five years.

I would like to thank the reviewers for a comprehensive report and congratulate the careers team on their considerable achievements since the last quality review in 2015.

Patricia Callaghan
Academic Secretary

23rd March 2023



Response to the Quality Review of the Trinity Careers Service

This Quality Review process has provided the Careers Service with a timely opportunity for self-assessment and critical reflection. This is particularly important as we progress a restructuring to integrate work on micro-credentials, recognition of prior learning, and the new HCI Enterprise Eco-system with that of the Careers Service under the broader careers and development umbrella.

This evaluation of the work and impact of the Careers Service through the lens of experts in the field is welcome. I would like to thank the reviewers for their time, generosity, and consideration of the key areas to be addressed through this review. I would also like to thank our Internal Facilitator, Shumane Cleary, and the Quality Office for their help in running an efficient review process. I would also like to thank our stakeholders (approx. 50 in total from across students, graduates, academics, senior management, employers, and professional services) who gave their time to share their experience of working with the Careers Service.

Response to Feedback and Recommendations

The positive feedback from the Review Team on our engagement with our stakeholders, our success in partnerships, accessibility, and our PhD module, and the acknowledgement of the progress the Service has made since the last review in 2015, particularly in terms of reacting effectively to change, is welcome. It is particularly heartening to hear the positive views of our academic colleagues on their engagement with the Careers Service as this has been an important area of focus for us in recent years.

While we understand the context for some of the recommendations made by the Review Team, we feel that some are not a fit with our current strategic direction and others fall under the broader remit of Trinity rather than that of the Careers Service specifically. The suggestion to focus on the “career readiness” framework for our work with students is timely and will help inform our plans. Several other aspects of the recommendations are already in place in the Service, so we will use the feedback to refine our practice.

In terms of external engagement, we would have liked to have received more developed recommendations on building sustainable strategic partnerships to inform both the work of the Careers Service and that of the HCI Enterprise Eco-system. We had already identified data, metrics and communication as priority areas for development so endorsement of this by the Review Team is welcome.

The Review Team noted that while we have achieved an enormous amount with the resources available, we are under-resourced relative to demand in some areas. We will use their feedback to help determine what investment is needed to deliver most impact for the Service and our stakeholders. Their endorsement of a new position of Deputy Director is welcome and will be progressed as a priority, as will a review of the grading of existing staff across the Service in collaboration with HR.

I look forward to exploring the reviewers’ recommendations in greater depth as we develop our implementation plan and to working with College and all our stakeholders on the next stage of the development of the Careers Service.

Orla Bannon, Director of Careers

23rd March 2023