Educational Oversight Review

Trinity College Dublin at Belfast

July 2025

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Educational Oversight Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Trinity College Dublin at Belfast.

EOR consists of a number of components. The Full component is a review of a provider's arrangements for maintaining the academic standards and quality of the courses it offers against the 12 Sector-Agreed Principles contained within the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2024) (the UK Quality Code). A Full component review will assess a provider against the core requirements of the Home Office in relation to educational oversight and the UK Quality Code as common UK framework. Further information about the Full component of EOR can be found in the [Educational Oversight Review Guidance for Providers](#).

The review took place from 18 to 20 June 2025 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Mark Langley (reviewer)
- Dr Richard Samuels (reviewer)
- Mr Matthew Kitching (student reviewer)

The QAA Officer for this review was Dr Roshani Swift.

In Educational Oversight Review (Full component), the QAA review team:

- determines an outcome against each of the Sector-Agreed Principles outlined in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- identifies features of good practice
- makes recommendations
- identifies areas of enhancement activity
- determines an overall judgement as to whether the provider is fully aligned with the Sector-Agreed Principles of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission. A dedicated section explains the method for [Educational Oversight Review](#) and has links to other informative documents. QAA reviews are evidence-based processes. Review judgements result from the documents review teams see, the meetings they hold, and drawing upon their experience as peer reviewers and student reviewers.

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. QAA's review methods are [compliant with these standards](#), as are the [reports we publish](#). More information is available on our [website](#).

This review was conducted in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Executive summary

Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is an integral part of the School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies (the School), which itself is part of Trinity College Dublin's (the College) Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (the Faculty). As an integral part of the College, there is no need for a Service Level Agreement or similar document, and there are no delivery partners.

The curriculum consists of two postgraduate programmes - a Masters in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation and a Doctoral research programme, and is primarily taught in Belfast, although students can opt to take up to two modules in Dublin.

There are two full-time academics, as well as a part-time librarian and a part-time administrator. All staff are part of the whole School staff team, under the remit of the College Head of School.

In the 2024-25 academic year there were two PhD students, and six MPhil students – four full time and two part time. Both the MPhil and PhD programmes attract mainly international students, with a small number of students from Ireland and the UK. Staff advise that the downward trend of applications in recent years appears to have been reversed, and more students have both expressed an interest and, in nine cases, accepted a place for the 2025-26 academic year.

There have been no major changes since the previous QAA review in 2021, apart from the change of name from School of Religion to School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which Trinity College Dublin at Belfast meets the Sector-Agreed Principles, the QAA review team followed the evidence-based review procedure as outlined in the guidance for Educational Oversight Review (July 2024). Trinity College Dublin at Belfast provided the review team with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence. During the review visit, which took place from 18 to 20 June 2025, the review team held a total five meetings with the senior management team, academic staff, professional support staff, students and alumni, and external stakeholders.

In summary, the review team found two examples of good practice and identified two recommendations for improvement.

Conclusions

The QAA review team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at Trinity College Dublin at Belfast

The QAA review team determines that Trinity College Dublin at Belfast:

- **is fully aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principles of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice**:

- The range and depth of specialist support provided to students which allows them to excel, as is evident in the high levels of student achievement. (Sector-Agreed Principle 11)

- The contextual opportunities made available in a unique socio-political environment which significantly enrich the students' learning experience. (Sector-Agreed Principle 11)

Recommendations

For recommendations that relate to areas for development and enhancement that do not impact on the Sector-Agreed Principle being met the QAA review team makes the following recommendations:

- Take steps to explore how it can better signpost for students what data the College holds about them, and their rights surrounding that data. (Sector-Agreed Principle 4)

- Develop further the course evaluation process to include a rolling Action Plan to enhance programme evaluation approaches. (Sector-Agreed Principle 5)

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) check has been **satisfactorily** completed. The outcome of the FSMG check for **Trinity College Dublin at Belfast** is that **no** material issues were identified.

Explanation of the findings – Sector-Agreed Principles

Principle 1: Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards

> **Providers demonstrate they have a strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality that is embedded across the organisation.**

Findings

1   A detailed and clear narrative, and an easy-to-read structure diagram, explain the formation of the provision in Belfast and its role as part of Trinity College Dublin's (the College's) Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The Belfast Campus is part of the College's School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies (the School), which operates over two sites. The Belfast Campus delivers two postgraduate Peace Studies programmes: a Masters in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation; and doctoral research leading to PhD. The Belfast Campus programmes are the College's programmes, delivered on the College's Belfast Campus, so follow the College's processes and procedures and require no partnership agreement. The College is responsible for the student learning experience and as the degree-awarding body has ultimate responsibility for the qualifications offered in its name.

2   The entire School is mid-way through its Strategic Plan 2023-28 which aligns with, and builds on, the overarching College Strategic Plan 2020-25. A new College strategy is currently in preparation. Some of the priorities in the current strategy are relevant to the Belfast Campus, such as developing the multi-disciplinary identity of the School. Responding to this, the School's Athena Swan action plan underpins the strategic aim to create a more inclusive community, with the Belfast Campus achieving a bronze award for its 2022 application. To support the Athena Swan and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), processes, staff and students can access online detailed training materials. This demonstrates the School's aim to embed EDI processes at a strategic level, as does the establishment of an EDI committee with student representation that meets twice yearly, and the introduction of an EDI student forum. The March 2024 Forum provided an opportunity to discuss school strategy. Although the discussion was more applicable to the whole student body, rather than issues specific to one area, Belfast Campus students attended and valued their involvement. Students are very positive about the EDI meetings that focus on issues, such as decolonising the curriculum. The College's strategic approach is embedded in the culture and practices of the Belfast Campus provision.

3   Part of the school-wide strategy is its 'CORE' acronym, with the 'C' representing the first strategic priority of Civic Action, Climate Action and Global Action. The College's Vice-Principal for Climate and Sustainability aims to combine strategic and pedagogic approaches, to ensure that sustainability is woven into the school strategy. For the programme in Belfast, with its academic focus on civic and global action, the staff believe their commitment to the College's strategy is a constant. Across the School, with some colleagues being climate and environmental specialists, there is also a sharing of teaching and research between Dublin and Belfast. The Belfast Campus provision engages with the College's sustainability agenda.

4   Clearly delineated charts indicate that the current Head of the Peace Studies discipline (and Course Coordinator for the master's programme), a lecturer, a part-time librarian, and part-time administrator work on the Belfast Campus. The Head of School, based in Dublin, oversees these staff, who access the Dublin-based professional support staff managed by School Administration Manager. All School office holders, such as the Belfast Campus

academic staff, attend College academic committees, such as those for Graduate Studies, Research, and Global Engagement. Minutes from the School Executive Committee demonstrate strategic discussions at executive level, overseeing its implementation, and reviewing the impact of, its actions. The committee meets monthly. The approach to strategy is fully embedded and wholly responsive to the needs of the College and its students.

5   The College's comprehensive and transparent governance framework, set out in the Trinity Framework for Quality, contextualises the operation of the Belfast Campus provision. The College maps all its degrees and awards to Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications, fulfilling its requirement to ensure that standards are aligned with the appropriate level descriptors. This aligns with the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union, and therefore with the precepts of the UK Quality Code. The Quality Office provides a list of legislative, regulatory and other national and international references and the College website also provides descriptors for postgraduate awards and regulations for postgraduate study. This comprehensive list of all programmes provides a useful summary of each.

6   The framework also succinctly details processes for quality enhancement and assurance, enabling the Belfast Campus to engage fully with the College processes surrounding quality and standards. Through an institutional Annual Quality Report (AQR), Trinity College reports to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) on quality assurance processes and enhancements. The QQI publishes the AQR on its website and the College Quality Office publishes the report similarly. Annual Faculty Quality Reports (AFQR) inform the AQR, ensuring that institutional actions draw on the needs of each faculty. The AFQR meets the QQI requirements and guidelines for completing the report and the focus of the College's quality process is to review student evaluation and external examiner feedback at faculty level, rather than review programmes holistically and at programme level. However, following previous engagements with QAA, the Belfast Campus team analyses the programme holistically through an annual Course Review and Planning meeting. The Belfast Campus provision therefore balances the needs of both Irish and UK quality assurance systems.

7   The College's School Review Procedure is a periodic process that encourages Schools to critically reflect on their activities and development plans. The combination of annual review and the comprehensive regulatory and quality processes detailed on the College's website ensure that a strategic approach to securing academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement is published and communicated clearly. It is accessible to staff, students and external stakeholders. The inclusion of external expertise throughout this process is a key element. The process of annual review at faculty and college-level indicates that the College monitors and evaluates its strategic approach on a regular basis.

8   In 2021 there was a full QAA Higher Education Review (Foreign Providers) review which concluded that the quality of student learning opportunities 'meets UK expectations'. The only notable change since has been the title change from the School of Religion to School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies. The School has followed the resulting Action Plan and continued the good practice to broaden the student experience and develop resources to maximise learning opportunities. The School has fulfilled the recommendation to provide clearer and more consistent feedback on student coursework by implementing a marking rubric and grading criteria for the Master's courses. Subsequently, this has rolled out across the School. The application of the action plan exemplifies a robust approach to managing quality and standards.

9   Overall, the review team concluded that the wider College has a clearly articulated strategic approach, which is embedded across all areas including the Belfast Campus, and thereby secures academic standards and assures the enhancement of quality. Therefore,

Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is **aligned** with Sector-Agreed Principle 1 – Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards.

Principle 2: Engaging students as partners

> **Providers take deliberate steps to engage students as active partners in assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. Engagement happens individually and collectively to influence all levels of study and decision making. Enhancements identified through student engagement activities are implemented, where appropriate, and communicated to staff and students.**

Findings

10   The College has a range of suitable student engagement mechanisms in place that are clearly communicated to students during orientation, including the different avenues for student feedback, and incorporated in each Course Handbook.

11   The School has an established Module Evaluation Process and students are encouraged by email and in person to complete module feedback forms. Recent feedback has led to changes, including the introduction of earlier assessment in the first semester to aid transition and the use of more varied forms of assessment, including Podcasts and photo essays. Feedback is then considered by the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) and integrated into the Annual Faculty Quality Report (AFQR). The review team found that the AFQR covers a wide range of discipline areas but that there is a clear delineation between programmes, albeit not delivery locations for the MPhil in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (CRR). For example, the 2022-23 report for CRR discusses feedback from students about the targeted use of guest lecturers. Feedback was very positive regarding learning experiences, lecturing style, resources/VLE and inclusive classroom practices, and comments that some guest lecturer inputs would be more appropriate to another module have been actioned.

12   The Belfast Campus informed the review team that student representation is embedded in all levels of governance in the college. Each Master's course in the School has a student representative in place. Elections for student representatives are organised independently by the Students' Union. Representatives attend a range of College committees, including the Postgraduate Studies Committee and EDI Committee. Recently the student representative for the CRR programme in Belfast has been co-opted to the EDI Committee. Staff at the Belfast Campus also hold regular meetings, which are attended by student representatives who can ask questions and raise issues. Students confirmed that their opinions are listened to and acted upon, for example, changes are being made to module evaluations forms to enable more qualitative feedback.

13   The MPhil in CRR programme at Belfast Campus also holds an annual focus group with students to gather and discuss student feedback. The review team noted that minutes from the 2024 meeting demonstrate that staff and students discussed pre-arrival arrangements, student services, course content, community placement and the library. There was also clear evidence of action taken in response to student feedback, for example changes to assessment deadlines, provision of previous dissertations, and the earlier communication of field trip dates. Students confirmed that they found the focus group to be an effective forum for raising issues.

14   Overall, the review team concluded that there is a suitable and proportionate range of mechanisms in place to engage students as active partners in assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. Students are aware of the methods for providing feedback and consider their views are taken seriously by the institution. Therefore, Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is **aligned** with Sector-Agreed Principle 2 – Engaging students as partners.

Principle 3: Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience

> **Providers plan, secure and maintain resources relating to learning, technology, facilities and staffing to enable the delivery and enhancement of an accessible, innovative and high-quality learning experience for students that aligns with the provider's strategy and the composition of the student body.**

Findings

15   Current arrangements ensure that students have access to a wide range of physical and electronic resources that are suitable for both taught and research students. The School's commitment to resourcing the Belfast campus is evident in the establishment of a Buildings Committee to oversee premises and monitor its suitability. Current premises are located in the grounds of Belfast's University Quarter and include teaching rooms, meetings rooms and a specialist library. Teaching is delivered in a suitable environment with modern technology incorporated into classrooms.

16   Students receive information on educational resources and facilities through the course Handbook which is available on the School's webpage. Student orientation ensures that students are familiar with the full range of resources available to them. The library on the ground floor is managed by a part-time librarian and contains a wide range of subject-specific books and dissertations which are available to borrow. Students highly value the library and the support that the librarian provides. Students are also associate members of Queen's University Belfast (QUB) which allows them to access the QUB physical library and study areas. Upon orientation students are provided with a tour of QUB premises and the learning resources that are available to them. Students who met with the review team confirmed that the learning space at QUB is being utilised. In addition, students have access to the wide range of physical and electronic resources available at the College in Dublin.

17   With respect to digital resources, the Belfast Campus utilizes the College's Learning Management System (LMS). The LMS is currently being upgraded and is used to share preparatory material for lectures, including readings and videos, for announcements, and for the distribution of marks. It also includes an academic and research skills area which provides students with information on how to maintain academic integrity. Also, for coursework submission, plagiarism software is integrated into the LMS and used to identify cases of academic misconduct. In addition to the LMS, an electronic system has recently been introduced which provides PhD students with an enhanced method of applying for ethics approval.

18   Belfast Campus has effective internal processes and structures to review and enhance its provision of facilities and learning resources. Students are able to provide feedback into the effectiveness of educational resources and facilities through a number of methods. Feedback can be provided by student representatives at School Committee, individually through module evaluations and through end of year focus groups. The feedback is mainly positive which provides assurance of the usefulness of resources. The Belfast Campus library stock has been strengthened to mitigate difficulties identified by the students in borrowing books from the Trinity College Dublin library. It was also noted that recently published electronic resources in Ireland are not accessible in the UK due to licensing laws. Despite these disappointments, students believe that they are able to access an extensive range of resources, and had been made aware of obstacles in advance of starting their course. The channels of communication also enable Trinity College in Belfast to explain to students why access to certain resources may be limited. A recent commitment by the School has been the allocation of a fixed 10% of the School budget to learning resources in Belfast. Academic staff in Belfast select the resources which are ordered through the Belfast

Campus library and supplied by the College library in Dublin.

19   Staff at the Belfast Campus are integrated into the formal structures of the School, and are part of the School line management structure led by the Head of School. The staff subsequently share the same promotional and professional development opportunities as any other member of staff within the College. Training opportunities are offered online and in person. IT Services provide training relating to technology and the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning (CAPSL) provide training which showcases best practice. Examples of recent training activities in which Belfast staff have engaged include an introduction to the functionality of the upgraded LMS, GDPR, Cybersecurity and the completion of a Generative AI module. In addition, for professional development within their specialized subject areas, academic staff are provided with an annual conference grant which requires approval from the Head of School. In this context it is noted too that both academic staff at the Belfast Campus have recently been promoted to Associate Professor via the Senior Academic Promotions process.

20   Overall, the review team concluded that the prevailing approach ensures that students access a wide range of specialist learning resources and high-quality facilities which are suitable for both taught and research students. Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is therefore **aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle 3 – Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience.

Principle 4: Using data to inform and evaluate quality

> **Providers collect, analyse and utilise qualitative and quantitative data at provider, departmental, programme and module levels. These analyses inform decision-making with the aim of enhancing practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the wider student experience.**

Findings

21   As part of Trinity College, the Belfast campus is not in a partnership arrangement, so does not require any data sharing agreements and reporting requirements. The College's comprehensive data protection processes employ a consistent, coherent, and evidence-informed strategic approach to the collection, storage and management of data. The College publishes this information online and staff and students can access these webpages from the course handbook. The College's strategic approach to data is thorough and clearly defined.

22   A Data Analytics and Strategic Initiatives team monitors data and provides reports to enable robust decision-making. The College uses four key data systems to record and process data around students, finances, human resources and research support. From these systems, and to underpin the AFQR process, each school receives data such as application rates, conversion trends and entry points. For example, data sets provided to the course team provide access to student retention and achievement data. The Belfast Campus Course Leader discusses data at the Postgraduate Committee as part of a broader discussion. The AFQR, as described in Paragraph 6 above, reflects on qualitative data, and feeds into the College's AQR report. Each AQR outlines an institutional context and latest developments surrounding data and information management.

23   The College gathers module and course feedback anonymously but also gathers verbal feedback from students through student focus groups. Staff introduce students to the course handbook during induction highlighting how the College seeks feedback through module and course evaluations. These meetings occur at the end of the academic year, giving the programme team the opportunity to explore any issues raised in the anonymous module evaluation feedback. Any data gathered from the module evaluation is gathered centrally through the online system and then informs the AFQR process. Separately, and to fulfil an action from a previous QAA engagement, the Belfast Campus course team consider all feedback in an annual review and course planning meeting. If any issues identified by that meeting require further attention, the course leader raises these at the Postgraduate Committee, where both qualitative and quantitative data is fully considered.

24   Students who met the review team understood that the School keeps data about them, but they could not articulate when and how they were told. Many students are international, so their familiarity with UK laws around data cannot be assumed. However, students confirmed that the administrative staff in Belfast are very supportive, and they would seek support from them if required.. The administrative staff in Belfast understand that they, and not their colleagues in Dublin, must gather any visa-related data because they must report that data to the UK, not Irish, government. Students state they are happy with how the School uses any data it keeps about them. The orientation process does not make explicit reference to the kind of data the College gathers about students, and the students' data rights. The link in the Course Handbook to the College's data webpages is not clear, but the processes described online detail the type and level of data the College utilises on an individual personal level, at modular, programme, and departmental levels. The site references the range of policies and processes that inform the College's use of data in the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance and enhancement of quality. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the course team take steps to explore how it

can better signpost for students what data the College holds about them, and their rights surrounding that data.

25   Policies covering any third-party use of data, require the College to ensure that External Examiners are aware of GDPR considerations. This is part of a considered and detailed website where the 'Responsibilities of External Examiners' section and the Terms and Conditions of Data Processing by External Examiners are clearly defined. The template for external examiner reports reminds examiners of their duties regarding data disposal. The thoroughness of this supports the clarity of the documentation and guidance, demonstrating that the College considers and carefully manages policies around third-party use of data.

26   Any staff who collect, manipulate and analyse data for reporting, quality assurance, and enhancement purposes receive training to enable them to undertake their activities effectively, ethically and securely. For example, Belfast Campus staff have recently completed mandatory Data Protection and Cyber Security training with the aim of raising awareness about their responsibilities and the requirement to comply with data protection legislation. Together with the oversight of the Data Analytics and Strategic Initiatives team, staff and students adhere to ethical and data protection requirements relating to gathering and submitting data for national data sets, regulatory purposes, and internal monitoring and evaluation.

27   The College has established an EDI office enabling it to collect and analyse data to understand and respond to the needs of its student population, and to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. This office provides support to programme and school teams, for instance, in advance of the 2025 intake, for students who required a UK visa, the School Manager and Belfast Campus administrator introduced a process to obtain consent for sharing students' personal data outside the organisation. This demonstrates a responsible approach to data management that supports students and indicates an understanding of EDI requirements. The College is about to launch a new strategy that incorporates stronger focus on sustainability, and will have appropriate key performance indicators, ensuring that data supports its strategic aims. The College recognises that when storing additional data for UKVI records, which it would not usually hold, it does so securely online and deletes any such information once students complete their studies, as required by Sponsor Licence guidance. The use of data to promote equality, diversity and inclusion is rigorous.

28   Given the School's focus on research, an institutional research ethics review process ensures that staff and students document their awareness as researchers of the responsibilities regarding data protection and data storage. The academic members of the Belfast provision sit on the School's Research Ethics Committee which oversees the processes involved in applying for research ethics approval. These requirements are detailed on a school-specific research ethics web page. These requirements then underpin the research processes and documentation the programme team use to support students, for example the student research agreement. This approach to data therefore underpins and enhances approaches to research.

29   Overall, the review team concluded that by observing the overriding Trinity College systems, the School in Belfast collects, analyses and utilises qualitative and quantitative data to inform decision-making with the aim of enhancing practices and processes, this is especially evident in the management of research ethics. Notwithstanding the recommendation made, Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is **aligned** with this Sector-Agreed Principle 4 – Using data to inform and evaluate quality.

Principle 5: Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision

> Providers regularly monitor and review their provision to secure academic standards and enhance quality. Deliberate steps are taken to engage and involve students, staff and external expertise in monitoring and evaluation activity. The outcomes and impact of these activities are considered at provider level to drive reflection and enhancement across the provider.

Findings

30   The Belfast Campus aligns to the quality assurance and review structures of Trinity College, which is under the auspices of the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). Trinity College's Annual Quality Report is the document that provides information on the broad range of monitoring and review processes and provides QQI with evidence that Trinity College conforms to regulatory requirements. Processes that feed down to the Belfast Campus include annual monitoring of student feedback and processing of external examiner reports. The Belfast Campus is required to report the outcomes of the monitoring and review processes to the School. School officers subsequently report on their outcomes to Faculty, which are presented in AFQ reports.

31   The Belfast Campus benefits from being fully integrated into the School's quality review structures. The Course Coordinator engages in the Postgraduate Studies Committee and through this Committee is actively working on the design of the marking rubric and student feedback forms. Also, the Belfast Campus engages in the School's cyclical quality review designed to facilitate critical self-assessment and promote continuous quality improvement. A quality review is scheduled for the 2025-26 academic year and is to include a visit to Belfast from an External Reviewer.

32   Committee structures created by the School are promoting equality, diversity and inclusion within the Belfast Campus. The School's Strategic Plan 2023-28 includes the creation of a more inclusive community and multi-disciplinary identity. The strategic aim for an inclusive community relates to the School's Athena Swan Action Plan which has led to targeted Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) structures and processes. An EDI committee which meets twice a year includes student representation and has led to the establishment of the EDI student fora. Students have provided feedback on the learning environment, culture, physical environment and digital environment. Matters such as implicit bias have been raised and lecturers encouraged to adopt a more inclusive approach to course materials and engagement.

33   Deliberate steps are taken at course and modular level to engage and involve external examiners and students in monitoring activity. The Belfast Campus is required to comply with the School's Module Evaluation Policy. The Module Coordinators on the MPhil programme review and provide a note on student feedback. Module Evaluation Forms are numerically not very significant due to low student volumes, though staff highlighted the value of the surveys due to their anonymity. Focus Groups provide course feedback upon completion of the MPhil programme. The minutes of the Focus Groups evidence that students highlight matters of interest that concern them or that they believe will enhance the programme. The Course Coordinator is responsive to this feedback, such as by separating deadlines in the 2024-25 academic year following concern that essays are due at the same time. Engagement with external examiners is the main method by which the Belfast Campus monitors and strengthens assessment standards. A recent external examiner report highlights the wide range of assessment methods and their suitability to the learning outcomes, with marking praised for accuracy and strength of feedback.

34   The Belfast Campus has introduced a Course Review and Planning Meeting involving Belfast members of staff to develop the MPhil programmed. Whilst this Meeting provides the

opportunity to review the programme, the resulting notes are limited. The Belfast Campus would benefit from developing further the course review structure to draw together feedback from the various sources and ensure that outcomes and impact of Actions are considered. The review team **recommends** that the Course Coordinator takes steps to develop further the course evaluation process to include a rolling Action Plan to enhance programme evaluation approaches.

35   Overall, the review team concluded that the Belfast Campus's approach to monitoring and reviewing provision ensure that the principle is met. Deliberate steps are taken to engage students, staff and external expertise with a view to enhancing provision. Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is therefore **aligned** with Sector-Agreed Principle 5 – Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision.

Principle 6: Engaging in external review and accreditation

> Providers engage with external reviews to give assurance about the effectiveness of their approach to managing quality and standards. External reviews offer insights about the comparability of providers' approaches and generate outcomes that providers can use to enhance their policies and practices. Reviews may be commissioned by providers, form part of a national quality framework or linked to professional recognition and actively include staff, students and peers. They can be undertaken by representative organisations, agencies or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with recognised sector expertise according to the provision being reviewed.

Findings

36   Underpinning the strategic approach to managing quality and standards outlined in Principle 1, the Belfast Campus provision draws on four main approaches to external review. These are annual external examining; educational oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency; external review of the school in which the provision is situated every seven years; and external engagement in the development of new courses. These four external elements ensure the approach to external expertise functions as a catalyst for ongoing improvement and strategic enhancement of the student learning experience, and it ensures the provision engages with the relevant national regulatory and legislative contexts. The programmes require no formal accreditation by an external body, and the provision is not run in partnership.

37   External examiner policies for the School's taught programmes and research programmes are directly aligned to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications and the Quality and Qualifications Ireland Act 2012. This is evidenced by the stated aim of both policies to maintain and enhance the quality of the content, organisation, and assessment of the College's programmes. External examiner reports for master's provision require examiners to respond to a series of questions and to provide analysis of the programme delivery and assessment. For example, analysis records the high-quality of the master's provision, but also highlights areas for continued scrutiny, such as how, with the advance of generative artificial intelligence, the traditional use of essays might need to change. External examiner reports for doctoral degrees also ensure that external scrutiny is central to awarding of the final degree. The document templates for both qualifications delivered in Belfast enable external examiners to provide clear and focused analysis.

38   The College's AFQR process ensures institutional acknowledgement of external examiner reports and the development of any necessary action planning. External examiners submit their reports centrally, from which the Course leader receives the report for consideration. The course leader is not required to respond to the external examiner, but the AFQR does so for the entire school. In the AFQR, the examples provided are those that inform an action the faculty wishes to highlight. For example, the 2022-23 report includes an action to sustain the marking rubric that originated with the Belfast provision. It does not name Belfast Campus directly because the actions are applicable to all courses. The responses to external examiner reports are considered and actioned accordingly, and Appendix 4 of the AFQR outlines these in detail.

39   The College regards its interaction with QAA review as something long embedded in its practice. Belfast staff meetings and Postgraduate Studies Committee have a standing agenda item about quality review processes, and through head of school reports discuss these matters at School Executive Committee meetings. Staff meetings discuss pending QAA reviews, and Head of School Reports within School Committee minutes. School

Executive committee minutes and Postgraduate Studies Committee minutes indicate that key issues are raised with and discussed at higher levels within the institution. The action plan from the May 2021 engagement with QAA demonstrates that review outcomes are considered from programme to executive level with responses being monitored robustly.

40   The College operates a quality review process for its provision on a seven-year cycle. The School's next Quality Review is scheduled for November 2025 and will be conducted by a panel of three external reviewers. The College sets out this process in a series of detailed and easily accessible webpages. The process requires the formation of a review panel drawn from institutions of comparable standing, and for the forthcoming review College has agreed that one of the three reviewers will visit the Belfast campus and that Belfast staff will be involved throughout the review. A purpose of the review is to 'ensure that quality and standards in teaching, research and administration are being maintained and enhanced, and that any areas of concern are identified and addressed. This approach underpins the College's commitment to continuous enhancement and improvement.

41   An overview document helpfully defines the process of programme development at the College and a detailed breakdown of the process. This process ensures that after detailed proof of concept, and curriculum planning stages, then approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies, every programme is reviewed by external advisors. The Belfast programme has not been approved recently, but the process described has a clear commitment to the inclusion of external expertise.

42   Given the content of the subject, staff teach with international colleagues and share research with them too. The School in Belfast has also hosted visiting researchers from South Korea on a South Korean government-sponsored training programme. Staff also regularly host international scholars, students, and other visitors who seek their advice. The School therefore actively supports the engagement of staff with different aspects of international expertise.

43   Overall, the review team concluded that as part of Trinity College, the Belfast Campus engages with external reviews to ensure it manages quality and standards in a manner comparable with the practices and policies of similar providers and in line with the appropriate national frameworks. There are no accreditation requirements associated with the Belfast Campus provision. Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is therefore **aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle 6 – Engaging in external review and accreditation.

Principle 7: Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes

> **Providers design, develop, approve and modify programmes and modules to ensure the quality of provision and the academic standards of awards are consistent with the relevant Qualifications Framework. Providers ensure their provision and level of qualifications are comparable to those offered across the UK and, where applicable, The Framework of Qualifications for The European Higher Education Area.**

Findings

44   The College's Academic Awards Policy confirms that Trinity College Dublin is a Designated Awarding Body recognised nationally by the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. The awards align with the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union, and therefore with the precepts of the UK Quality Code. A Qualifications and Awards section on the College's Quality Office website details all of this, demonstrating that the College publishes detailed policies and processes to support the design, development, approval, and modification of programmes and modules on its website. All key stakeholders can access these pages easily. The programmes delivered in Belfast do not have to meet professional body or accreditation requirements, or apprenticeship standards. Alignment with the Irish National Framework of Qualifications and the Quality and Qualifications Ireland Act 2012 ensures that programmes and modules meet academic standards consistent with relevant national qualifications and credit frameworks.

45   The College oversees the creation of, and holds centrally, a set of definitive documents produced throughout the process of design, development, approval and modification. These documents are the primary source of information for each programme, as evidenced by the College's Calendar Part III which provides all the general course descriptors for all taught award types. A section of this Calendar lists all the courses in the School. Each descriptor lists the European Credit Transfer System totals ensuring that each award can be translated to the wider European system. The regulations concerning research are in the second section of the Calendar. There is no separate PhD programme in the School or in Belfast, doctoral students in Belfast join the Trinity research register. Definitive programme documents are held securely, are easily accessible, and are the primary source of information for staff, students, and any key stakeholders.

46   Staff and students for the master's programme can access the programme content on the College's website where they can access a course overview that details the programme at module level. Doctoral students can explore the content of their programme on a postgraduate research page. Once enrolled on the master's programme, students receive a copy of the course handbook which they can also access online, the content is set out clearly and in detail. For doctoral students, they receive a copy of the postgraduate handbook which is also available online. Programme content is clear to all students and staff involved in the teaching, learning, and evaluation of the programmes and modules.

47   The School uses its virtual learning environment to communicate information to students, who can access learning outcomes and other programme details. The orientation process ensures students have access to the materials and online content is shared with students in Dublin too. Students receive copies of the course handbooks and staff talk them through the content of each module and module choices. Students are clear that the staff make them fully aware of the course content throughout the processes of application and delivery.

48   Given that the Belfast campus delivers only one master's course, for which the

modules are clearly established, there has been no need to create new courses or modules over the last four years. The School does not expect to change the format for the foreseeable future. However, should the Belfast campus choose to introduce a new programme, the College outlines the newly revised programme development process in two core documents. As noted in Principle 6, paragraph 41, these documents outline a detailed process of development and approval. The AQR provides an annual update to the programme development process with links to the College's Academic Affairs web pages. These provide all the guidance and documentation for the process of developing a new programme which includes the meaningful involvement of students throughout the process of designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes and modules. These documents are supported by comprehensive online support for staff who are looking to develop a new programme. Although the Belfast team has not needed to develop a new programme, a secure and well-tested process is in place should it need to do so.

49   The College's programme design, development, approval and modification processes utilise external engagement and evaluation. The programme evolves with each year and if there are major changes to modular delivery, such as changes to the word count for the final dissertation module, then the School would follow the processes outlined. In this instance the matter was discussed and agreed across the School at committee level. Students that met the review team spoke about being consulted at school meetings about changes to the dissertation word count, indicating that staff seek student opinion about proposed changes before instigating any modular change.

50   The School engages students in course development through module evaluation and student focus groups. Given the nature of the programme content, issues around environment, social and economic sustainability are fully embedded in the programme and therefore discussed in the educational setting, ensuring that students are engaged in a dialogue about them. Both processes happen annually and give students anonymous and verbal opportunities to give feedback on the academic content and structure of the taught master's programme. Staff and student recognise that the year duration of the programme means that students will not directly benefit from any changes the student feedback initiates. Student representatives can also use the School Committee and EDI Committee meetings to offer feedback about programme content. This ensures that the programme design, development, approval and modification processes align with the College's policies and practices around equity, equality, diversity and inclusion and, given the programme content and emerging College strategy, environmental sustainability too.

51   Overall, the review team concluded that as part of Trinity College, the Belfast Campus team are aware of the well-developed process of programme development, and would utilise it should it need to do so. Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is therefore aligned with Sector-Agreed Principle 7 – Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes.

Principle 8: Operating partnerships with other organisations

> **Providers and their partners agree proportionate arrangements for effective governance to secure the academic standards and enhance the quality of programmes and modules that are delivered in partnership with others. Organisations involved in partnership arrangements agree and communicate the mutual and specific responsibilities in relation to delivering, monitoring, evaluating, assuring and enhancing the learning experience.**

Findings

52   The Belfast Campus collaborates with institutions to provide MPhil students with the opportunity to undertake a credit-bearing internship module named Community Learning and Reflective Practice. The internship provides the MPhil students with the opportunity to work in organisations engaged in the fields of conflict resolution and reconciliation. The internship requires a minimum of 96 hours of work with the aim of the module being to link theory to real-world experience in peace, reconciliation or community transformation. Examples of the types of internships offered include working in segregated communities in Belfast and publishing articles in an online magazine relating to reconciliation, dialogue and diversity.

53   The Belfast Campus complies with Trinity College procedures in the organisation and management of internships. Throughout the process students are central to arrangements. Clear information on the purpose and choice of internships is provided to students. In selecting the most appropriate internship, each student states their preference based on professional interests. Their preference is subsequently assessed for its suitability by the Module Coordinator. Students are interviewed in advance of the internship to ensure their suitability and are required to have an individualised work plan to clarify work expectations. A tripartite Internship Agreement is written up which includes the student's signature. The Agreement outlines objectives, duties, insurance arrangements, review procedures and a risk assessment. Upon completion of the work, the Internship Coordinators are required to complete a form that confirms student attendance and provides a short evaluation of the work performed. The Internship Provider is not directly involved in the final assessment, which is on a pass/fail basis. Rather, the assessment is based on a Community Placement Reflective Portfolio written up by the student and marked by the Module Coordinator using an assessment rubric.

54   The internship module is a popular elective and all students who the review team met had chosen to take it. The students viewed their internship experience as a valuable part of the MPhil course which had provided them with relevant work experience and contacts.

55   Three main internship providers are used by the Belfast Campus. During the visit the review team met one of the three providers. The provider stated that arrangements are clear, communication with the Belfast Campus strong and the quality of students high. Students have expressed a preference for a greater choice in the number of internships available, though the limited choice reflects the number of students on the MPhil programme. In addition, the Belfast Campus can organise internships with providers that students identify independently.

56   Overall, the review team found that internship arrangements ensure an effective working relationship with the provider which results in enhancing the students' learning experience and supporting them in future employability. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, and that Trinity College Dublin at Belfast therefore is **aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle 8 – Operating partnerships with other organisations.

Principle 9: Recruiting, selecting and admitting students

> Providers operate recruitment, selection and admissions processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive. Providers maintain and publish accurate, relevant and accessible information about their provision, enabling students to make informed choices about their studies and future aspirations.

Findings

57   Academic Registry are responsible for administration of the student lifecycle and issue a range of related guidance to students, including regarding admissions. Students can also access the Registry service desk on campus to access support. The review team found that the institution provides clear and accessible information for prospective students and other stakeholders, including international, Erasmus mobility, undergraduate, postgraduate and online learners.

58   Programme pages for the MPhil Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation provide a course overview, information about the programme structure and content, entry criteria and the application process. Applicants should normally have an Honours degree at second-class level or GPA 3.2 or above. Students not meeting these criteria may be considered at the discretion of the Dean of Graduate Studies. Applicants are also required to possess Band B (Standard Entry) English language requirements.

59   The Global Relations section of the website provides resources for international students that includes information on accommodation, scholarships and fees, careers and pre-orientation programmes. Further, bespoke and contextualised information is also provided to students intending to study in Belfast. Prospective students also have a personal point of contact through the Belfast Campus office for the whole student lifecycle, from initial enquiry. Academic staff make themselves available for online conversations with potential applicants wishing to explore if the programme is suitable for them. Students are also provided with the opportunity to attend an online Q&A session and webinars at various points during the academic year. In addition, a course overview is circulated to incoming students to ensure they are informed of module availability and requirements. Students confirmed that having a dedicated point of contact throughout the admissions process helped to ensure smooth admission and that any queries were answered.

60   Staff involved in the application process receive training according to their role, including mandatory data protection training. For taught MPhil courses at the Belfast Campus, the Course Coordinator is the 'primary assessor' who makes recommendations for acceptance. Academic Registry carry out a further check on whether entry requirements have been met and are responsible for issuing decisions and offers according to college regulations. Primary Assessors receive a handbook on the process and staff in Academic Registry are available to answer any queries.

61   The institution has an established Recognition of Prior Learning Policy. The policy distinguishes between formal, informal and non-formal learning, explicitly states the maximum volume of credit that will be recognised and articulates the College's assessment principles for recognition of prior learning. The policy also outlines the responsibilities of course directors and Academic Registry. The institution has recently adapted the postgraduate taught application form to ensure applicants now have the opportunity to complete a section on prior learning. No recent RPL applications have been received for the programme, however staff clearly understand the process.

62   Prospective PhD students are advised to discuss their research proposal with a relevant member of academic staff prior to submitting a formal application. Applicants can access staff research profiles and contact details on the School website. PhD proposals are

submitted to the Graduate Admissions Office and should be approximately 1500 words and address the research question, methodology and work plan. When assessing the initial proposal for a prospective PhD candidate, a second member of staff in the relevant subject area and the Director of Teaching and Learning assess applications, in addition to the potential supervisor. Information on fees and scholarships are also clearly accessible on the website and applicants have access to postgraduate handbooks. PhD students confirmed that the application process was clear and consistently applied.

63   Support is available to prospective students with a disability who can contact Disability Services to talk through any concerns they may have prior to submitting an application. Once accepted, students can also register with the service to receive the necessary support in liaison with the Course Coordinator. Admissions are monitored internally through the Postgraduate Committee and also through the Annual Quality Report submitted to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

64   Overall, the review team concluded that there are clear criteria governing admissions at the College, which are adhered to throughout the process at the Belfast Campus. Students have access to a range of support to assist them with their application and confirm that queries are responded to promptly. Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is therefore **aligned** with Sector-Agreed Principle 9, Recruiting, selecting and admitting students.

Principle 10: Supporting students to achieve their potential

> **Providers facilitate a framework of support for students that enables them to have a high-quality learning experience and achieve their potential as they progress in their studies. The support structure scaffolds the academic, personal and professional learning journey, enabling students to recognise and articulate their progress and achievements.**

Findings

65   The College has a wide range of support services in place for students, including career support, libraries and health, safety and wellbeing support. The institution informed the team that Belfast-based students are also able to access substantial online provision across student support services such as Counselling, Student Learning, and the Postgraduate Advisory Service. In addition, students can avail themselves of services from Queens University Belfast, including Associate Membership of the library, where students can also benefit from study space. Associate Membership fees are reimbursed by the College.

66   General information about support services provided online has a strong focus on the Dublin Campus. However, the senior staff informed the review team that it runs supplementary webinars to contextualise information for students studying in Belfast. Student support is also a feature of orientation and discussed in student handbooks.

67   Support offered from the Careers Service includes individual career guidance appointments, CV and LinkedIn profile clinics, practice interviews and mentoring. Appointments can be booked through the MyCareer portal, which also contains information about vacancies, bursaries and employer events. The institution also informed the review team about School wide career events that brought Belfast and Dublin based students together..

68   In relation to international students, the Senior Executive Officer provides a point of contact in the School in Belfast to assist with enquiries from applications through to course completion and ensures resources for international students are kept current and made available to incoming students. The institution publishes a Guide for International Students, which forms a key pre-arrival resource. The School website also has a dedicated page providing guidance for students studying in Belfast that includes information about healthcare and travel. The institution informed the panel that some students struggle to avail themselves of optional opportunities in Dublin because of visa requirements and the institution has responded by ensuring students are provided with timely information about the dates of activities in Dublin to apply for any required visas.

69   Students are kept informed of 'extra-curricular' events happening in Belfast throughout the year that are relevant to the course, such as Good Relations Week, the Four Corners Festival, Imagine Festival, and other one-off events. Teaching staff are primarily responsible for organising co-curricular activity. However, administrative staff have also organised student walks, involving alumni where possible, to support community building among the cohort.

70   Students have access to a well-resourced, dedicated library facility on campus, with small but adequate study space. This is supplemented by the Associate Membership at Queens University Belfast and extensive electronic resources, including databases, available through the College's online library.

71   All students at the institution have access to an Academic Skills for Successful Learning module. The module covers a wide range of topics including study skills, self-

management, writing skills, critical thinking skills and postgraduate skills. Content includes written resources, webinars and videos. Staff intend to use the module to complement the Research skills module in the master's programme, using the latter to focus on higher order skills and discussion.

72   Students informed the review team that some services, such as careers, can have a stronger emphasis on Dublin than Belfast. Senior Staff articulated that while some students may seek to work in Belfast on graduate visas, the cohorts tend to be highly international and interested in global careers and that careers support is modelled to recognise that context.

73   The institution informed the review team that the primary mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness of student support services at the Belfast Campus is the annual focus group. Staff provided examples of changes made following student feedback that included the introduction of tours of the Queens University Belfast library during induction and more co-ordinated liaison between students in Belfast and the Global Relations department in Dublin.

74   Overall, the review team concluded that Trinity College Dublin at Belfast provides a wide range of appropriate support services that are available on campus and remotely from Dublin. Support provision is clearly communicated to students and bolstered by students' entitlement to access services at Queens University Belfast. Staff receive suitable training and support services are subject to feedback and monitoring. Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is therefore **aligned** with Sector-Agreed Principle 10 – supporting students to achieve their potential.

Principle 11: Teaching, learning and assessment

> Providers facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach that enables students to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally.

Findings

75   Qualifications at the Belfast Campus are required to map on to QQI's National Framework of Qualifications. The Quality Office at Trinity College has the role of ensuring that statutory obligations with regard to quality are met. To support this process the Quality Office provides links to statutory QA guidelines and QQI policy documents.

76   Staff are appropriately qualified and supported by Trinity College with students benefitting from the specialised research-led environment at Belfast. The academics are active researchers who publish, including the publishing of a Peace Studies text book used on the MPhil programme. Academic staff are also provided with an annual conference grant.

77   Students receive clear information about the MPhil programme and PG Research through handbooks and module outlines which are accessible to students through the School website. The handbooks and module outlines provide students with detailed information, such as library access, learning outcomes, assessment requirements and supervision. Students receive a detailed Orientation Pack including a Library Guide and a list of services available to them, such as employment advice. Because of the physical distance from Dublin, most support services such as PG Advisory Service and Student Learning Development are offered online. The LMS provides detailed learning materials and an Academic Skills area which covers topics such as academic integrity. Students additionally have the opportunity to engage with alumni who share experience of the course, including internships and career experience.

78   Formal channels of student feedback show widespread satisfaction with the learning experience, which was mirrored in the comments made by students who the review team met. The students informed the review team that they had got much more out of the programme than they expected, which contributed significantly to the context of their learning experiences. They highlighted in particular the richness and diversity of their experiences in relation to mediation and peace-building skills, including specialist guest speakers bringing contextual expertise, and a broad range of media perspectives. Carefully planned and targeted visits were also cited, including Peace and Conflict in NI, and several walks in Londonderry. This is augmented by the skills of a specialist Library and Librarian, both at the Belfast Campus, and as guests of Queens University. Students on the MPhil course appreciate the different teaching styles of academic staff. Both MPhil and PhD students highlighted that academics are approachable when they are struggling or requiring advice. One-to-one sessions are available to students in-person or online, with PhD students meeting their supervisor monthly. Staff are also able to direct students to appropriate support materials on the Trinity College website. Most students are international and have access to a significant number of targeted resources embedded within the Student Learning Development site. Resources that target international students include learning about the academic culture, language support and the study of English for Academic Purposes. The range and depth of specialist support provided to students which allows them to excel is evident in the high levels of student achievement, and the review team consider this to be **good practice**.

79   Belfast as a location provides students with an immersive experience in a unique post-

conflict environment. Learning opportunities are provided through field trips, guest practitioner lectures and internships. The immersion is viewed by students as inspiring future research themes and providing valuable contacts for future employment. Students who the review team met viewed themselves as privileged to be able to study in a Belfast context and that the experience prepares them effectively for professions in the fields of peace and conciliation. The opportunities made available in a unique post-conflict environment significantly enrich the students' learning experience and are considered by the review team to represent **good practice.**

80   Assessment regulations align with Trinity College's Assessment and Academic Progression Policy. The alignment ensures that assessment design and methods on the MPhil programme are appropriate to programme and module learning outcomes. External examiners provide an independent review of the quality of assessment and assessment methodologies. External examiner reports state that marking is accurate and the range of assessment methods is both effective and suitable. Staff at the Belfast campus continue to develop assessment and have recently introduced new types such as the photo essay.

81   Students express broad satisfaction with the quality of assessment feedback that they receive from teachers, which is modelled on a clear and consistent rubric. The rubric provides detailed grading schemes for essays and presentations and is available to students through the MPhil Handbook. Those who the review team met stated that, as international students, they had to become accustomed to a different assessment structure and UK marking boundaries in particular. Concern has been expressed that a lot of assignments are due at a similar time and that students would prefer a more even spread of assignment deadlines that includes earlier in the academic year. Actions have been taken to rectify this issue, which was acknowledged by students who the review team met.

82   Advice and guidance about academic integrity ensures that staff and students understand what is expected of them. Trinity College has specific initiatives relating to academic integrity which are highlighted in the AQR. The Centre for Academic Practice has run events and workshops for staff with a focus on generative AI and a series of Faculty-based assessment clinics. Students build an understanding of the issue of academic integrity through various channels of communication. Guidance and policies on plagiarism and AI are in the Course Handbooks. Plagiarism is covered at induction, in an online tutorial and is a theme covered in the Research Skills module. Students are able to monitor the extent of replication in their coursework through plagiarism detection software that is integrated into the LMS. Furthermore, to ensure accountability, the essay cover sheet requires students to confirm that they have engaged in an online tutorial on plagiarism and provide a Generative AI declaration. Students who the review team met stated that from induction the College stresses the importance of academic integrity to their studies.

83   Overall, the review team concluded that the Belfast Campus is effective in supporting students become highly effective learners, embodying the values of academic integrity. Therefore, Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is **aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle 11 - Teaching, learning and assessment.

Principle 12: Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes

> Providers operate processes for complaints and appeals that are robust, fair, transparent and accessible, and clearly articulated to staff and students. Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are regularly reviewed and the outcomes are used to support the enhancement of provision and the student experience.

Findings

84   The College has an established Student Complaints Procedure in place and a separate Appeals Policy for considering academic appeals. These arrangements are articulated to students in relevant handbooks that contain a summary of the appeals process and links to the institution's complaints procedure. They apply to all areas of the College, including the Belfast Campus.

85   The complaints procedure clearly sets out the scope of the formal process and its interrelationship with other extant College policies. The process comprises informal, formal and appeal stages and contains clear timescales for each stage and responsibilities. Students are encouraged to initially seek advice from their College Tutor or Postgraduate Student Support Officer – for Belfast Campus, this is the Course Leader. Formal complaints must be submitted using the College's Complaints Form, which is accessible on the website. The procedure also clearly states that students can be accompanied to investigation interviews by a representative. Appeals are considered by a group, chaired by the Registrar, that contains appropriate, senior College officers. Complaints are subject to the institution's monitoring arrangements with regular reports submitted to the Quality Committee.

86   The Appeals Policy specifies the grounds on which a student can submit an academic appeal. The College has different stages of the appeal process according to whether the programme is at undergraduate or postgraduate level. In both instances students are encouraged to try to resolve the concern with their course tutor in the first instance. However, where the student remains dissatisfied postgraduate taught students can appeal the decision of the course committee to the School's Appeals Committee. The decision of the School's Appeal Committee is communicated to the student, who can appeal the decision to the Dean of Graduate Studies and beyond this to the Academic Appeals Committee for postgraduate taught provision. Postgraduate research students can submit appeals to the Dean of Graduate Studies and following this to the Academic Appeals Committee for postgraduate research students.

87   The senior staff informed the review team that there has not been a complaint or appeal relating to provision delivered at the Belfast Campus in the past 5 years. Students who met the review team confirmed that they knew of the processes and procedures to be followed in respect of both complaints and academic appeals.

88   Overall, the review team concluded that there are established policies and procedures for complaints and appeals that are robust, fair, transparent, and clearly articulated to students and staff. Trinity College Dublin at Belfast is therefore **aligned** with Sector-Agreed Principle 12 – Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes.

Enhancement initiatives

Commentary on institutional approach to enhancement

The enhancement of the provision at the Belfast Campus is part of a wider focus at School Level, encompassing both Dublin-based and Belfast Campus provision. The Annual Quality Review (AQR) is the strategic means by which Trinity College Dublin as a whole reports to Quality and Qualifications Ireland annually on quality assurance processes and enhancements. The Trinity College Dublin AQR Report 2024 sets out the most recent strategic overview of the institutional management of quality and standards. In May 2023, a five year School Strategic Plan was published after an in-depth, year-long process of consultation across the School. The Trinity Framework for Quality shows the key areas and processes which are the focus of quality enhancement and assurance.

Local responsibility for the Belfast Campus rest with the Course Coordinator - MPhil Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation who is responsible for contributing to and actioning the enhancement priorities of the School. Going forward, the School is preparing for a scheduled review in 2025-26 which will be conducted by a panel of external reviewers in November 2025, one of whom will specifically visit the Belfast Campus. Amongst the objectives of the review are 'to promote the enhancement of the School's provision as part of a strategy for continuous quality improvement'.