

TUQF - Intro

- I have been asked to consider a number of things ahead of today, some of which are really core questions.
- However one core question precedes all of these when considering student involvement in Quality Assurance. Why should academics even bother? Notwithstanding legal requirements, some of which I will touch on later.
- We need to be crystal clear from the get-go that the student voice is **relevant** and it will almost always be **informed**. it might be a challenging concept for some to accept, but students are fully capable of representing the interests and views of their peers and this needs to be met with parity of esteem.
- If there is to be an enhanced role for the student in the Technological Universities then our voice needs to be treated as equal to that of those already at the table.

Defining “Quality” to the Student

- We cannot define quality simply by content, facilities or even a positive grade.
- Quality to the student is only able to be evaluated by the students’ experience and interaction with his/her education.
- Highly personal and subjective, like most forms of engagement with education.
- May be difficult to give a “one size fits all” answer but we can all buy into an approach.

How is student involvement in QA organised at present and what should be different in future?

- I can only really speak for my interaction with DIT but at present, i would surmise that our QA system here at present are reasonable.
- Student involvement in QA is guaranteed through the Bologna Process. This is backed up by internal policy and a structure that allows for student input to an extent.
- Our Students Union elects in and around 500 class reps every year. We provide training and support so that they can effectively air the views of their class to their peers.
- If we want the unfiltered student voice to play an active role in Quality Assurance then there are three key things that we have to allow for,
 1. A strong and independent Students Union is the only thing that can be trusted to help class reps assert themselves.
 2. Student-friendly structures that allow for engagement and effectiveness.
 3. Universal buy-in to the concept that the student voice is indeed relevant, informed and equal.
- These three components are essential. Without one, we are just paying lip service to students who expect to be taken seriously. Regulations are nigh on impossible to enforce across a multi-campus institution with a few thousand staff. I have seen this first hand with varying degrees of practice and attitude towards student representatives, despite the perimeters and regulations being unequivocal.

What objectives should now be set and how can they be evaluated?

- Some things naturally need to happen, such as comparing the varying degrees at which students are integrated into Quality structures nationwide, across and inside the three IT's. All of this analysis needs to happen by way of a partnership of academics and students, accepting from the get-go that there needs to be respect and purity of esteem.
 1. This means that some people may have to open up and trust student representatives. Management will need to ensure that Students' Unions are adequately resourced to organise themselves.
 2. It also means that Student Unions need to set a very high standard going forward. If we are to ask to be treated like equals then a certain level of responsibility comes with that.
- We need a vision, we need to be ambitious and declare that our Technological Universities will be the champions of democracy in the Irish Third Level spectrum.
- We need to leave behind traditional notions of student incompetencies and facilitate real student consultation.
- You can't "window-dress" an institution as being student-friendly. It's pretty black and white and students will know if they are not considered as key stakeholders.
- Closing the loop is essential. Our feedback mechanisms need to be unquestionable. This isn't the case at present, with many feedback exercises simply 'box-ticking'.
- I'm here today in good faith that politicians, management and academics are committed to seeing us as equals.
- I welcome any questions or inputs at this stage, and Thank You.