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Proposal

Title: Internationalisation and Ireland's International Education Mark: Reflections from Trinity College Dublin

Abstract: This paper will reflect on internationalisation in the context of Ireland's International Education Mark from the perspective of Trinity College Dublin. Ireland's Quality and Qualifications Authority (QQI) is introducing the International Education Mark (IEM), a new quality mark and part of a set of legislative measures to protect international learners. The IEM will be awarded to higher education and English language education providers who demonstrate that they meet national standards to ensure a quality experience for international learners from enrolment through to the completion of their education programme.

It is in this context that this paper will examine recent developments at Trinity College Dublin. Over the course of the last three years, Trinity introduced several new impactful measures as part of its own commitment to quality assurance for international students, and also in anticipation of the introduction of the IEM. These developments also emerged in the context of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its policies and procedures. Measures included:

- Admissions and Student Enrolment:
 - One of the first universities in Ireland to develop an English Language Policy – triggered by the IEM
 - Development of an Admissions Matrix which allowed Trinity to put a framework for benchmarking on diverse international qualifications and expand opportunities for access globally
 - Education Recruitment Agents policy to ensure quality assurance and prospective student experience
- Student Experience:
 - Sustaining International Students during Covid-19 and meeting government health and safety compliance requirements
 - Expanding opportunities for Peer-to-Peer student contact through and pre-arrival engagement as part of expanded pre and post arrival opportunities
 - Role of technology in supporting the student journey
- Partnerships:
 - Partnership Toolkit for Higher education institutional partners globally

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
1. Introduction To Quality Assurance in International Higher Education in Ireland	4
2. Trinity in the context of internationalisation and key data	4
3. International Education Mark (IEM), purposes, benefits and requirements for Irish Higher Education Institutions	5
4. Trinity's approach to meeting the IEM requirement	6
5. Key measures introduced by Trinity in quality assurance and IEM preparation	7
5.1 Recruitment and Admissions	7
5.2 Student Experience and Student Supports	8
5.3 Partnerships	10
6. Measurable impacts to date and future impacts expected	11
7. Future Quality Assurance Developments in internationalisation at Trinity and conclusion	11
References	12

Executive Summary

This paper reflects on strategic internationalisation at Trinity College Dublin in the context of Ireland's International Education Mark (IEM). For context, Ireland's Quality and Qualifications Authority (QQI) is introducing the IEM, a new quality mark and part of a set of legislative measures to protect international learners. The IEM will be awarded to higher education and English language education providers who demonstrate that they meet national standards to ensure a quality experience for international learners from enrolment through to the completion of their education programme.

Over the course of the last three years, Trinity had already introduced a range of new impactful measures as part of its commitment to quality assurance and experience enhancement for international students. More recently these measures have been developed in anticipation of the introduction of the IEM. Some developments also emerged as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic on its policies and procedures.

In the recruitment and admissions context, Trinity has developed an English Language Policy in response to the IEM. It has also developed an Admissions Matrix which allowed Trinity to put a framework in place for benchmarking diverse international qualifications in the context of undergraduate admissions and expand opportunities for access globally. Furthermore, it has developed a comprehensive Education Agents' policy to ensure quality assurance particularly in the prospective student experience.

Student Experience has also been a focus of measures to support quality and experience optimisation. Specific measures were introduced to support International Students during Covid-19 and to ensure compliance with government health and safety requirements. Taking a broad look at the needs of prospective and accepted international students, Trinity has been leveraging new educational technologies to support the student journey. This has included expanding opportunities for peer-to-peer student contact and pre-arrival engagement as part of expanded pre and post arrival opportunities through the use of the 'Goin' to Trinity' community platform app and also via 'Pathway to Belonging,' a new suite of pre-arrival webinars and associated supports. The Trinity 'Global Room' delivers targeted supports to international students throughout their student journey while also supporting integration and cultural adaptation through a range of engagement activities.

A Partnership Toolkit for Higher education institutional partners globally has been developed to support quality in the development of Global Partnerships, another key element of university internationalisation strategies.

1. Introduction to Quality Assurance in international higher education in Ireland

This paper explores quality assurance in higher education internationalisation from the perspective of Trinity College Dublin and in the context of the upcoming roll-out of Ireland's International Education Mark (IEM). The IEM, introduced by Ireland's Quality and Qualifications Authority (QQI), is a quality assurance mark aimed at safeguarding international learners. It sets national standards for higher education and English language education providers to ensure the quality of education across the entire student journey from prospective student stage through to enrolment to programme completion.

Prior to the establishment of QQI as a state agency under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, quality assurance was conducted by number of other bodies. QQI represents an amalgamation of Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC); the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC); the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). (QQI,2015)¹.

Quality assurance in international education contexts is of particular importance. Not only does it ensure the academic excellence of an institution within the context of a quality assurance framework of accreditation and validation including quality audits, it also focusses on enhancing the student experience in all contexts of their engagement with the institution. Currently, this is governed by Trinity's adherence to QQI's extensive [Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners](#).²

2. Trinity in the context of internationalisation and key data

Trinity College Dublin, founded in 1592, by Queen Elizabeth I, is one of the world's ancient universities. As Ireland's highest ranking leading university and ranked 81st in the Times Higher Education World University rankings in 2024, Trinity's commitment to quality in internationalisation provides a valuable perspective on quality assurance. The institution's commitment, including a diverse student body, ethical marketing and recruitment, positive student experience, and extensive global partnerships and mobility, align with the IEM's goal of promoting excellence in international education and also demonstrate some of the key hallmarks of quality internationalisation in higher education.

¹ Quality and Qualifications Ireland unveils New Award brand identity (2015) Quality and Qualifications Ireland. Available at: (QQI, 2015). (Accessed: 02 November 2023).

² <https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2021-11/gp-15-code-of-practice-for-provision-of-programmes-of-education-and-training-for-international-learners.pdf> The current Code of Practice from 2021 is under review with a revised version expected in late 2023/early 2024.

Trinity's approach to internationalisation has evolved in the last decade into a deliberate strategic approach starting with the establishment of the Global Relations division in 2012 and the delivery of three Global Relations strategies to date.

Recent data illustrates the success of Trinity's internationalisation strategy in key metrics. In 2023, Trinity has over 21000 students. Approximately 34% of the student population are international students hailing from 125 countries. This growth is of recent vintage – as recently as 2010, there were fewer than 1200 students coming to Trinity from outside of the EU.

Trinity is ranked 16th most international university in the world according to the 2023 THE University Rankings. In 2022-23, 37% of Trinity's 3rd year undergraduate students undertook a mobility experience as part of their academic programme. Trinity works with over 300 universities around the world offering opportunities from exchange programmes to joint educational partnerships. For example, Trinity has more than 250 Erasmus and European partners in 28 countries.

3. International Education Mark Purposes, Benefits and Requirements for Irish Higher Education institutions

3.1 Purpose and Benefits of the IEM

The IEM quality mark assures the quality of Irish providers delivering education and training programmes to international learners. The IEM will be awarded to providers who show that they meet national standards to ensure a quality experience for international learners.

According to a recent QQI policy document seen by Trinity, the IEM will provide the following guarantees for **international learners**:

- a reliable guide to quality assured providers of HE and English language programmes in Ireland
- ensure ethical recruitment by providers
- affirm that the qualifications learners present to HE providers for the purpose of admission will be assessed in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention
- contribute to ensuring the quality and consistency of their learning experiences through the provision of good quality academic and other service supports by their providers
- guarantee the protection of their interests in circumstances where their chosen provider ceases to trade or ceases to deliver their chosen programme

For **providers of education and training**, the IEM will:

- attest to the quality of providers and their programmes
- support their marketing and promotional activities
- establish nationally agreed standards for the care of international students (QQI, 2023)³

³ From the unpublished Policy on Authorisation to use the International Education Mark (QQI, 2023)

3.2 Expected structure of the IEM Higher Education Code

The IEM code will cover the following areas (with further information on additional areas upon publication of the final Code of Practice):

- Access, Transfer, and Progression
- Programmes and Awards
- Statutory Due Diligence Assessment
- Requirements Relating to the Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL)
- Collection of Fees; Tax Compliance of Providers; Management of Provider Human Resources

In addition, the IEM code contains the following Principles and Criteria under which quality assurance will be assessed:

1. Marketing and Recruitment
2. Admissions and Qualifications' Recognition
3. Fees, Refunds and Subsistence
4. Supports and Services for International Learners
5. English Language Policy Statement and International Foundation Year Programmes
6. International Learners outside the State ⁴

3.3 Expected application process and roll-out

QQI is expected to launch the IEM application process at the start of 2024 with two application windows (one in 2024 and one in 2025). Once launched, education providers such as Trinity will have up to 24 weeks to submit their application. The application will be in the form of a self-evaluation report. It is understood that once the assessment process begins, it will take approximately 28 weeks, if no further documentation is requested, to reach a decision. IEM assessments will be conducted by panellists recruited by QQI with relevant experience.

There will be a series of communications from QQI and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to ensure that relevant stakeholders are aware of the new process involved and the transition from the previous Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP) process which is an interim measure pending the introduction of the IEM. ⁵

4. Trinity's approach to meeting the IEM requirement

Over the last three years, Trinity has introduced several new impactful measures as part of its own commitment to quality assurance for international students in the context of comprehensive and ethical internationalisation but also in anticipation of the introduction of the IEM. These developments also emerged in the context of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its policies and procedures from 2020 onwards.

⁴ From the unpublished Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners (July 2023)

⁵ From the unpublished Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners (July 2023)

Trinity has focused on excellence and innovation while embedding a student-centred approach while taking a deliberate approach to build systems, processes, and initiatives that can evolve and adapt to change and expansion as required in the years ahead. This has served to create positive opportunities which have seen valuable impact in early data.

New measures focussed on the following areas in particular:

- Recruitment and Admissions
- Student Experience and Student Support
- Partnerships

5. Key measures introduced by Trinity in quality assurance and IEM preparation

This section will focus on the three key areas where Trinity has introduced new measures in anticipation of the introduction of the International Education Mark. It highlights Trinity's innovative measures in admissions, student experience and support, and partnerships. Diverse admissions pathways, transparent processes, cultural integration, comprehensive support services, and global collaborations are key components of Trinity's approach, reflecting its commitment to internationalisation and quality assurance. Some of the new developments outlined below have been delivered by a close collaboration between Student Recruitment and Student Experience teams at Trinity Global highlighting an important recognition that a collaborative and joined up approach will deliver enhanced experiences to prospective and current international students.

5.1 Recruitment and admissions

5.1.1. English Language Policy

Trinity is one of the first universities in Ireland to develop an **English Language Policy** which was triggered by the forthcoming IEM. The purpose of this policy is to outline Trinity's fair, transparent and consistent requirements, and standards for evaluating the English language ability of international learners applying for admission to Trinity, and to describe Trinity's policy and process for English language support for international applicants in receipt of a conditional offer to study at Trinity and to international learners once they are registered. ⁶

Benefits of the English language policy include:

- Supports the enrolment and admission of suitably qualified students and the creation of a diverse student body

⁶ <https://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/academic-policies/assets/english-language-policy-june2023.pdf>

- Complements the existing suite of policies, procedures and process that ensure the quality of international recruitment and engagement and specifically complies with the Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners (2023)

5.1.2 Admissions Matrix

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for transparency and accountability in Trinity's dealings with education recruitment agents, and to ensure ethical business practices from the agents with which Trinity enters into formal arrangements.

Benefits of the Admissions Matrix include:

- Allowed Trinity to put a framework for benchmarking on diverse international qualifications and expand opportunities for access globally
- Education Recruitment Agents policy to ensure quality assurance and positive prospective student experience e.g. inclusion of the London Principles governing ethical behaviour in all Education Agent agreements

5.2 Student Experience and Recruitment collaboration

From Trinity's Global Engagement Office perspective, a range of measures have been introduced in recent years (notwithstanding other areas of development within Trinity's extensive range of student support services outside of Trinity Global) which focus on meeting statutory requirements while also expanding and delivering on Trinity's already extensive supports to international students as part of pre-arrival, onboarding and during their studies.

5.2.1 Expanding opportunities for Peer-to-Peer student contact and pre-arrival engagement as part of expanded pre and post arrival opportunities

In recent years, Trinity Global has introduced a series of strategic initiatives designed to give prospective and incoming international students greater insight into the student experience at Trinity and offer an enhanced student experience throughout the student journey. Trinity has created new pathways of support through peer-to-peer solutions delivered through by education technology solutions and through increasing programmes of pre-and post-arrival engagement webinars with international students.

5.2.2 'Goin to Trinity' community platform app

In 2023, Trinity Global introduced the Goin' to Trinity community platform on a pilot basis. Designed to help prospective and incoming students connect each with other and the institution through multiple points of connection and enable conversations that prospective EU and Non-EU students find valuable in their journey to Trinity, it focusses on creating a sense of belonging, connection, and community. By working with an experienced and quality assured educational technology provider, Goin' Connect, Trinity has recognised the value of harnessing technology to support the student journey and in facilitating peer to peer contact in an innovative way, it is enabling students to connect and share valuable information to assist with improved integration into the Trinity

community before and after arrival. As a Trinity-branded space, the app complied with Trinity's marketing and branding regulations. Students connecting with others prior to enrolment are more likely to go on to have a positive university experience and onboarding (and early engagement) plays a key role in the quality of future student experience, complementing Trinity's existing Orientation programme. The success of the community platform can be measured by the high percentage of students who joined the app and 96% of those surveyed said it improved their candidate experience. An analysis of the pilot project is currently underway.

5.2.3 'Talk to a Student' student engagement platform

Trinity has also utilised technology solutions in its 'Talk to a Student' online tool in collaboration with educational technology provider, Unibuddy, which was introduced in 2020. Staffed by Trinity's Global Ambassador team – students trained to support prospective and current international students – and by Trinity Global recruitment staff, this platform facilitates prospective international students to interact with a current student from their region, course, or background. As with Goin' to Trinity above, the 'Talk to a Student' platform provides prospective and current students with the opportunity to connect with a peer which is highlighted as a key decision-making factor by international students in recent studies on best practice in international student recruitment⁷.

5.2.4 Pathway to Belonging – 8-week pre-arrival programme

In 2023, Trinity Global introduced an 8-week pre-arrival webinar programme, Pathway to Belonging. Through a series of weekly 1-hour webinars on a range of relevant orientation-related topics, a core professional team delivered content to incoming full degree undergraduate and postgraduate international students. Topics covered included visas and immigration, practical support on finding accommodation, opening a bank account, purchasing health insurance, managing health and well-being, academic and English language adaptation, finding community at Trinity, and advice on cultural transition. The webinars also featured extensive input from Trinity's Global student Ambassador team ensuring that student voice was present, as well as all important peer to peer engagement. Trinity Global ensured that content mapped onto the more traditional in-person orientation programmes at the start of the academic year to ensure consistency.

Pathway to Belonging also had the development of community and belonging at its core. Strayhorn's (2012) definition of sense of belonging as "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)." Feedback on the initiative from participants indicated 90%+ positive responses to the programme. Future innovations planned for 2024 include developing video content and expanding the programme to students on inbound global mobility programmes.

5.2.5 The Global Room: Supporting the International Student Journey

Supporting and enhancing the student experience has been a key focus of the Global Room since its establishment in 2013, as a core element of Trinity's first Global Relations Strategy (2012). The Global Room is a focal point for student-facing activity within Trinity Global. It offers specialist advice

⁷ [https://monitor.icef.com/2020/02/peer-to-peer-effect-in-international-student-recruitment/#:~:text=More%20than%20half%20\(57%25\),family%20were%20the%20most%20helpful.](https://monitor.icef.com/2020/02/peer-to-peer-effect-in-international-student-recruitment/#:~:text=More%20than%20half%20(57%25),family%20were%20the%20most%20helpful.)

to support the international student journey from prospective to current student, a range of student cultural, social and orientation engagement activities through the Global Room space, while also highlighting and creating opportunities for international and intercultural engagement for all students, including domestic students.

The Global Room's specialist advisory services cover travel; supports and resources on accommodation, banking, health, and travel insurance; and socio-cultural adaptation.

An essential element of the Global Room is the inclusion of student voices through its Global Ambassador programme. Ambassadors support current students, deliver campus tours, and engage with prospective students.

The Global Room fills a niche space in Trinity as the only area of the institution providing international students with specialist advice and services and will continue to grow in line with our strategic goals to enhance student experience.

5.2.6 Sustaining International Students during Covid-19 and meeting government health and safety compliance requirements

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, Trinity put in place measures to support a higher education sector 'Greet and Transfer' programme to support the safe arrival in Ireland of international students. This programme was mandated by the Irish government to ensure that institutions receiving international students, such as Trinity, were adequately supporting their students and ensuing compliance with COVID-19 protocols at that time including quarantine. Trinity's measures included coordination of internal and external communications, extensive arrival supports for international students (including COVID-19 travel and immigration compliance, airport logistics including collection from airport and transport to student accommodation of 2500+ international students) and post-arrival quarantine student accommodation supports including food and medical etc.)

5.3 Partnerships

5.3.1 Partnership Toolkit for Higher education institutional partners globally

Trinity works with over 300 universities globally, offering opportunities from exchange programmes to joint education partnerships. By providing extensive resources and support in the development of international partnerships and networks, Trinity academic staff interested in developing a partnership can consult the relevant step by step guidelines of the International Partnerships Toolkit. The toolkit is an interactive resource and covers exchange guidelines, articulation agreement guidelines, dual and joint award programme guidelines, and advice on multidimensional partnerships.

6. Measurable impacts to date and future impacts expected

To date, Trinity Global is seeing the impact of new measure in the following key areas: increased international enrolment, high student attendance at events and satisfaction in surveys, increased participation in global mobility programmes.

As part of a service-oriented and student experience approach, Trinity Global has also created new staff positions to support the enhancement of student experience such as the recruitment of an Immigration and Support Officer and an Engagement Officer in addition to new roles in Recruitment with the expansion of in-country team members in India, China, Malaysia, UAE and the US to provide on the ground support to prospective students.

7. Future Trinity developments at Trinity in quality assurance in internationalisation and conclusion

This paper has outlined Trinity's drive to optimise the prospective and current student experience, through its commitment to ongoing quality assurance, embracing technological advancements, data-driven decision-making, and adaptation to new educational models arising in the fast-moving field of internationalisation in higher education.

Trinity's future developments also include a focus on continuous improvement and adherence to international best practices particularly through our global networks and alliances. These developments illustrate a forward-looking approach to quality education in the context of internationalisation.

As Trinity enters 2024, it looks forward to engaging with QQI on its IEM application.

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