

AMLCT/TCDSU Submission to the Trinity College Dublin Strategic Plan 2025-2030

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Introduction

The Trinity College Dublin Students' Union (AMLCT/TCDSU) would like to submit to the Trinity College Dublin Strategic Plan 2025-2030 consultation and outline our areas of concern and proposed improvements in our university.

Universal Design for Learning

The adoption of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles is a process which the Students' Union as well as Trinity-INC, Disability Service and others have been keenly engaging with College on. UDL is an educational framework that aims to accommodate the diverse needs of all students by providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. One key aspect of UDL is the incorporation of lecture recording, which allows students to review material at their own pace and revisit complex concepts as needed, thereby enhancing

understanding and retention as well as accessibility of education. Additionally, UDL emphasises flexible assessment methods, moving beyond traditional exams to include various forms of evaluation such as projects, presentations, and portfolios. This approach acknowledges different learning styles and provides students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, promoting a more inclusive and effective learning environment. The TCDSU would like to bring to the attention of the College multiple pieces of research on this.

- Report on Lecture Recording at Trinity College Dublin¹
- Open-Book Versus Closed-Book Assessments - Student Preferences at the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy of Trinity College Dublin²

TCDSU would like to draw College's attention to the recent successful task force in Queens' University Belfast, which involved management, students and trade unions, to develop a lecture recording policy that is satisfactory to all parties.

Wellbeing Supports

TCDSU calls upon the College to bring its attention to one of the issues that is of the utmost importance to our university community: the state of our counselling and health services. While these vital support systems have consistently proven their excellence in assisting our students' mental and physical well-being, they face a formidable challenge – chronic underfunding leading to excessively long waiting lists. There are critical issues of staffing and waiting lists within these departments, and a firm commitment is needed to secure the necessary funding to further enhance their effectiveness. Our aim is not only to maintain the excellence these services currently offer but to ensure they are accessible to all students and staff when they are needed most. TCDSU is advocating for the resources necessary to continue providing outstanding care to our university community. The TCDSU would like to bring to the attention of the College a piece of research on this.

- State of College Counseling and Health Services³

TCDSU will support and work with the new Consent Team and considers this of crucial importance, while highlighting that service provision of the in-person consent training should be maximised for incoming students.

Diversified Revenue Streams

¹ <https://www.tcdsu.org/images/pdf/publications/Report-on-Lecture-Recording-at-Trinity-College-Dublin.pdf>

² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366983120_Open-Book_Versus_Closed-Book_Assessments_-_Student_Preferences_at_the_School_of_Social_Sciences_and_Philosophy_of_Trinity_College_Dublin

³ <https://www.tcdsu.org/images/pdf/publications/State-of-College-Counseling-and-Health-Services.pdf>

AMLCT/TCDSU has successfully fought fee and rent increases on campus this year. There has been a tendency from the College over the years to plug the funding gap by treating students as cash cows, which plays right into the hands of the government's policy of marketization, and which is making education elitist, classist and inaccessible. AMLCT/TCDSU stresses both the importance of lobbying the government as well as making links with opposition parties, as well as the need to diversify our revenue streams. In respect of these, AMLCT/TCDSU shows the way.

- Tourism-based Alternatives to Raising Master's Degree Program Fees for Trinity Students⁴
- AMLCT/TCDSU Anti-Government Voter Registration Campaign⁵

AMLCT/TCDSU continues to stress that students should not bear the brunt of government underfunding and so we join the chorus of calls on Patrick O'Donovan TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, who is ultimately responsible for the chronic underfunding of higher education to provide the adequate resources to support our higher-education institutions, students and academic and professional workers.

Vulnerable Student Categories

AMLCT/TCDSU remains extremely concerned about off-campus and placement students, who are not getting the necessary support, face exhaustion, unfair grading, bullying and additional costs as well as exclusion from College life. We are also concerned at the lack of student facilities in off-campus locations, whether that be social, study or catering places. We call on the College to take every possible step to improve the situation of these students, and call to attention the following pieces of research.

- P.M.E Survey Report⁶
- Social Work Survey Report⁷
- Health Sciences Survey Report⁸

AMLCT/TCDSU also remains concerned about the lack of recognition for student parents and issues surrounding L.E.N.S reports for students with disabilities and is committed to working with the College to rectify these issues.

⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S2XCdVbq0dr28UN5lbHHs5PthOr5KTEi/view?usp=drive_link

⁵ <https://trinitynews.ie/2024/01/tcdsu-launch-anti-government-voter-registration-campaign/>

⁶ <https://www.tcdsu.org/images/pdf/publications/Sink-or-swim-TCDSU-PME-Survey-Report-2023-2024.pdf>

⁷ https://www.tcdsu.org/images/pdf/publications/TCDSU-Social-Work-Survey-Report-2023_2024.pdf

⁸ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1aacHEIRcrCFFM4TVP3DQ0LHnrLeEzDtEg3DDktCB1eI/edit?usp=sharing>

- Report on Supports for Student Parents and Carers⁹
- Report on LENS Student Reasonable Accommodations¹⁰

AMLCT/TCDSU calls on College to engage in political lobbying jointly with AMLCT/TCDSU when it comes to the Back to Education Allowance for student parents.

- A Fair Deal for Mature Students: TCDSU Report on Back to Education Allowance¹¹

AMLCT/TCDSU calls on the College to take meaningful anti-racism action such as permanent institutional funding for the Ethnic Minority Support Group that was launched in 2024/2025, mandatory equality training for students and staff which covers areas such as bullying, consent and racial issues, and we also stress the importance of awareness around anti-Palestinian racism.

Hygiene Products

With the exception of a few, higher-level institutions in Ireland do not provide free period products, despite repeated requests from our campus communities. There is a clear demand for these initiatives, from students and staff. The initiative needs to be streamlined and supported on a governmental level. By tackling period dignity head-on, we can directly tackle stigma and shame around periods for students and staff, thus making our campuses more inclusive places for members of our academic community from all backgrounds. Quality of learning and teaching is affected by menstruation - and we do not want anyone to get caught out by not having adequate products in those moments. By ensuring access to free period products, especially as the housing and cost-of-living crises worsen, we can ensure that those from worse-off socioeconomic backgrounds are supported throughout their education. AMLCT/TCDSU has done multiple initiatives.

- “Free Sustainable Period Products in Trinity” Application to the PLANNING GROUP STRATEGIC INITIATIVES FUND¹²

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<https://www.tcdsu.org/images/pdf/publications/TCDSU-Report-on-Supports-for-Student-Parents-and-Carers-at-Trinity-College-Dublin.pdf>

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<https://www.tcdsu.org/images/pdf/publications/Report-on-LENS-Student-Reasonable-Accommodations-at-Trinity-College-Dublin.pdf>

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<https://www.tcdsu.org/images/pdf/publications/A-Fair-Deal-For-Mature-Students-Tcdsu-Report-On-Back-To-Education-Allowance.pdf>

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<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ux8aM6op2BX4UBFIhS3o35WYyYbBylDw/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115390938181696454380&rtpof=true&sd=true>

- AMLCT/TCDSU Petition that garnered over 3,300 signatures¹³ and led to Minister Patrick O'Donovan to expand funding¹⁴ for the period product programme.

Support for Capitated Bodies

AMLCT/TCDSU continues to remain concerned as to the lack of funding of certain Capitated Bodies, and in this instance highlights the Trinity Sports Union (TSU) which has raised concerns as to funding for sports on campus and calls on the College to engage with the TSU on this front, possibly via the introduction of a new levy or additional funding via other means. AMLCT/TCDSU also calls on the College to engage with the CSC as well as Trinity Publications to ensure that all Capitated Bodies are adequately financed. AMLCT/TCDSU is happy that the Capitations Committee has had a very productive and collaborative year in 2023/2024.

Support for Postgraduate, Academic and Professional Workers

AMLCT/TCDSU stresses that workers' rights and an employment-based model is the only way forward for postgraduate research programmes. Postgraduate researchers (PGRs) have no parental leave, almost universally earn below a living wage, and are often not provided a dedicated work space (despite having in-person, on-campus duties). PWO TCD and PWO Ireland, have campaigned tirelessly over the last 2 years for change. Yet the most severe problems we face (especially for non-EU and disabled PhDs) have gone largely ignored both in Trinity College and nationally. College, at the least, should formally endorse the employment-based model on a national level.

AMLCT/TCDSU calls on the College to support the campaign to allow all Non-EU/EEA postgraduate researchers to access the hosting agreement¹⁵. Lack of access to the hosting agreement to most Non-EU/EEA doctoral research students means that their time in Ireland is not reckonable and creates potential red tapes to access employment in the future. In addition, the current system creates other issues too such as the inability for the researchers' spouses to access employment opportunities, creating additional stress for the researcher. All in all, it creates inequality between different postgraduate researchers and this should not be allowed to happen.

AMLCT/TCDSU highlights its solidarity with precarious academic and professional workers in the College and urges action on this front.

¹³ <https://my.uplift.ie/petitions/free-period-products-in-all-higher-education-institutions>

¹⁴ <https://trinitynews.ie/2024/05/government-to-fund-free-period-products-for-students-following-tcdsu-petition/>

¹⁵ <https://my.uplift.ie/petitions/hosting-agreement-for-all-non-eea-phd-students-in-ireland>

Gaeilge

Following the recent passing of the Gaeilge Initiative with an overwhelming 90% referendum win¹⁶, AMLCT/TCDSU will work with College and the Capitulated Bodies through the Gaeilge initiative. The referendum was won on the back of a campaign focused on the provision of equity and rights for the Irish language in all aspects of College life. College has legislative obligations (Official Languages Act, 2003¹⁷, 2021¹⁸) toward providing services through the medium of Irish as a public body. In the previous Strategic Plan (2020-2025), there was only one sentence pertaining to the Irish language: “Further improve the status of the Irish language in College life through services, training and events in the spirit of the Official Languages Act (2003).” This one sentence is highly vague and provides little specificity on goals regarding increasing the presence of the language in College life. In light of the new provisions passed in the 2021 amendment of the Official Languages Act as well as widespread calls for the decolonisation of curricula, it is clear that specific and detailed planning and policy are needed. AMLCT/TCDSU would like to see firm commitments regarding the following areas:

- An Irish language module as part of the curriculum for courses that feed directly into the civil service including but not limited to health sciences, law, and business
- Modules taught through the medium of Irish in disciplines outside the school of Irish
- Irish language skills taken into account in hiring processes across College in line with Official Languages Act 2021 as a public body
- Irish language versions of student portals including MyTCD and Blackboard
- A fully functional Irish language version of Trinity’s website
- Purchasable merchandise with the Irish name of the college
- Full implementation and official use of Trinity’s logo as seen on College stationery¹⁹ in which “Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath” is first and equal in size to “Trinity College Dublin”
- Full bilingual rebrand of the Book of Kells and Book of Kells Experience as Leabhar Cheanannais and Eispéireas Leabhar Cheanannais

In addition, AMLCT/TCDSU is concerned that the services advertised by College as being available in Irish are often not, including correspondence with Residences, the Academic Registry, and the library services. There is also a considerable amount of incorrect signs around campus²⁰ which have been put up without consultation of the Irish Language Office. Furthermore, while the work done by the Irish Language Office of the College is excellent and commendable, this office consists of only one officer. Further development of Irish language services and language planning in College will require more staff to attend to the wide range of

¹⁶ <https://trinitynews.ie/2024/02/gaeilge-initiative-referendum-passes-by-landslide-90-majority/>

¹⁷ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2002/24/>

¹⁸ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2019/104/>

¹⁹ [https://www.coimisineir.ie/userfiles/files/NaRialachainfaoialt9\(1\)datheangach.pdf](https://www.coimisineir.ie/userfiles/files/NaRialachainfaoialt9(1)datheangach.pdf)

²⁰ <https://trinitynews.ie/2021/11/comharthai-militrithe-ar-an-gcampas-easpa-measa-ar-ghaeilgeoiri/>

responsibilities regarding the Irish language in college from monitoring the implementation of legislation to translation to the Scéim Cónaithe to laying the administrative foundations for Irish-medium education of other subjects. AMLCT/TCDSU would therefore like to see the expansion of the Irish Language Office to accomplish the above listed objectives. The legislation and mandate just given by the students demand College take action on Ireland's indigenous language.

Academic Partnership

The Student Partnership Policy (SPP) reinforces the joint commitment of the university and AMLCT/TCDSU to developing and supporting effective student partnership, engagement, and representation, serving as an academic agreement of quality assurance through student representatives and their interaction with the College. While the remit of the agreement is primarily academic, it also encompasses student services and student spaces. Updates may be necessary in light of the HEA Act 2022, to clarify points and responsibilities/rights articulated within the Act. The agreement remains in effect, having been officially revised in 2021-2022, and is available on the College and AMLCT/TCDSU websites²¹. However, awareness of the agreement among staff and stakeholders is limited, and various measures are proposed to address this.

There is a proposal to expand the signatories to include all 24 Heads of Schools and potentially the 3 Faculty Deans. Strengthening the agreement would benefit class representatives and School/Faculty Convenors, ensuring relevant staff members are aware of its provisions.

The agreement requires updates and additional deliverables. Inspiration can be drawn from Queens' Students Union's recent success in establishing a lecture recording policy through collaboration between management, students, and trade unions.

Civic Engagement

AMLCT/TCDSU is satisfied and will continue to work with the College to ensure that the divestment process from Israel is carried out as well as that the student scholarships are increased for Palestinian students as per the Free Trinity encampment agreement.

AMLCT/TCDSU remains concerned as to the sustainability practices of the College. The past 8 years have been the warmest on record. Climate change drastically impacts people all around the world and it might be the biggest threat to a stable present and future for young people today and to avoid further global warming, carbon emissions must be stopped. About 91% of global CO2 Emissions originate from the burning of fossil fuels. The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, signed by the WHO and more than 3,000 scientists, calls for an end to the expansion of new fossil fuel infrastructure and production, to phase out existing production and

²¹ https://www.tcdsu.org/images/pdf/publications/Student_Partnership_Agreement.pdf

use, and to fast-track solutions and ensure a just transition. AMLCT/TCDSU therefore calls on the College to implement sustainability policy, review its ties with CHR and Ryanair as well as adopt the Fossil-Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty following the example of the University College Cork. We support the College's efforts towards sustainability education through the ESD Fellows, in collaboration with Trinity's Centre for Academic Practice (Trinity Teaching and Learning) and Trinity Sustainability, who have been co-creating a vision and programme for Trinity which aims to empower students and staff to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to act as agents of change for a sustainable future.

AMLCT/TCDSU encourages the College to engage with the local community in the city and is committed to supporting efforts on this front.