



TUS

**Technological University of the Shannon:
Midlands Midwest**

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Sionainne:
Lár Tíre Iarthar Láir

www.tus.ie

**Athbhreithniú Straitéiseach ar Sheirbhísí Tacaíochta do Mhic Léinn
Strategic Review of Student Support Services**

Report of the Peer Review Group

Peer Review Group Visit, 25th January 2024

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report outlines, in summary form, the proceedings of the external peer review panel visit for the Strategic Review of Student Support Services and the findings and recommendations of the *Peer Review Group* conducted on 25th January 2024. The external visit was undertaken in accordance with the [TUS Policy on Strategic Review of Service Delivery Units 2019 – 2024](#), as published on the TUS website.

2.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

2.1 Higher Education Provider

Provider	Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest
Service Unit	Student Support Services
Date of Visit	25 th January 2024

2.2 External Peer Review Panel

Name	Affiliation
Dr Billy Bennett	Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar, Atlantic Technological University - Chairperson
Dr Claire Bohan	Dean of Students, Dublin City University
Mr John Hannon	Director of Student Services, University of Galway
Ms Janice Hughes	Stakeholder of Student Services, Faculty Office Manager Faculty of Science and Health, TUS.
Ms Aisling Burke	Student Representative

Secretary to Panel: Dr Brendan Murphy

Supporting Panel: Claire Frawley

2.4 TUS STAFF

Name	Role
Prof. Vincent Cunnane	President TUS
Frances O'Connell	Vice President Student Education and Experience (VPSEE)
Linda Barry	Academic Administration and Student Affairs Manager
Sinéad Denby	Student Support Service Administrator
Edel Barrett	Student Support Service Administrator
Jenny Burke	Access Service
Dr. Carolann Bargary	Access Service
Anna Murphy	Access Service
Broze O'Donovan	Access Service (Disability Officer)
Emer Connolly	Learning Support
Emer Coughlan	Learning Support
Roseanne Dunne	Learning Support
Joseph Walsh	Pastoral Care
Nurse Laura Tully	Student Health
Nurse Lorraine McCarthy	Student Health
Teresa Fox	Student Counselling
Dr. Seán O'Connell	Student Counselling
Apologies	
Sarah La Cumbre	Student Resource Centre Manager
Anna Fitzgerald	Tipperary Campuses Administrator
Lisa Hanlon	Disability
Nurse Eimear O'Riordan	Student Health
Niamh Murphy	Student Counselling

TUS STUDENTS

Name
Peter Donohue
Molly Carleton
Kevin Walsh
Massimiliano Zanotto
Amy McMahon
Jack O'Doherty
Tikambechi Mwalughali
Richard Butler
Liam Conlon
Caoimhe Lalor
Eve Morrison
Darren Crehan
Aine McCarthy
Eimear Walsh
John Riordan

3.0 OVERVIEW OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AT TUS

Student Support at TUS encompasses a group of services that provides key supports to students during the different stages of the Student Lifecycle. These include the:

- Access Service;
- Counselling Service;
- Student Health Service;
- Disability Service;
- Chaplaincy/Pastoral Care;
- Learning Support;
- Connect and Engage Programme

Student Support Services for the purposes of the current Strategic Review do not constitute a single management unit, rather a thematic entity that takes a holistic view of individual student supports at TUS. Accordingly, while the majority of services listed report to the Head of Academic Affairs and Student Administration Manager, the Retention and Careers Services report to the Head of Quality, Teaching and Learning and Careers and Employability Services Manager, respectively.

3.1 Access Service

The TUS Access agenda flows from a philosophy of equality and social inclusiveness and is informed by the HEA National Access Plan and the TUS Strategic Plan, promoting equitable access to and successful participation in higher education for all members of society. Through its work, targeted strategies and initiatives are delivered to facilitate entry to and successful participation in higher education for underrepresented students. The Access Service is committed to promoting access for under-represented groups and operates initiatives in partnership with schools, community organisations, and Further Education providers.

3.2 Student Counselling Service

Through the Counselling Service, the University offers a free confidential and professional counselling service to all registered students. The service is staffed by professional, qualified and experienced psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors. The service aims to provide accessible, available and student-friendly support for students when a personal issue or crisis arises which affects their wellbeing, happiness, their capacity to cope, relationships or learning. An associated website provides information on support services in the community,

helpline numbers and out of hours services. Counselling services provided include short-term individual counselling for personal issues, including daily crisis and emergency appointments; Support groups e.g. mindfulness and overcoming anxiety; Wellbeing workshops in self-esteem, enhancing social skills, relaxation and managing stress; Positive mental health promotion initiatives and mental health awareness campaigns; and referral to other mental health and other specialist support services.

3.4 Student Health Service

The Student Health Service provides a confidential and caring Health Service to all full-time registered students and apprentices throughout the academic year, with an emphasis on preventative medicine and health promotion, whilst responding to the needs and concerns of all our students. The service operates as an addition to a student's own family doctor or specialist medical service. There is a nurse-led service which is free and confidential. A doctor's service is provided within a 3km radius of each of the 6 campuses in the Midlands and the Midwest. Students are also informed of the Out-of-Hours Doctor Service for evenings and weekend cover.

3.5 Disability Service

TUS Disability Services provide a range of supports for students across the full range of disabilities/specific learning difficulties/ongoing health conditions. Services include, facilitating individual learning support, dyslexia screening, assistive technology training, alternative assessment formats, examination supports and provision of transport. Supports are determined through the completion of an individual needs assessment which informs an individual learning plan for the student developed in accordance with the evidence presented.

3.6 Pastoral Care

The Pastoral Care service works across our campuses to create a caring and supportive community for our students and plays a significant role in delivering a person-centred education for our students. This service, by its nature, works quietly and often unseen but provides a very effective bridge to other services and supports both within TUS and in the communities we serve. Reflection rooms are available for prayer and meditation on our Moylish and Athlone campuses to cater for our larger student populations on these campuses. A Chaplain, from the Diocese is based in TUS Midlands, while a staff appointed, Pastoral Care Co-ordinator, is based in TUS Midwest campuses.

3.7 Learning Support Service

The primary aim of the Learning Support Service is to promote retention through progression with supports targeted to students struggling to pass assessments and to students who are aiming to achieve honours grades. The Service is available to all students on a no-cost basis with approximately 20% of students availing of support every year. Support can be organised via referral from lecturers and professional services or more commonly, self-referral by the students individually or through their class reps for group support. During their time in TUS students can avail of one-to-one consultations, group workshops and seminars to help improve their academic skills. The support delivered is underpinned by the principles of active learning, with the student leading the process.

TUS Student Induction and Orientation programme: 'Connect & Engage'

Connect and Engage is TUS' eight-week Induction and Orientation programme. The programme includes an array of curated events and activities ranging from support services to essential information and all created to support students' transition to college and towards a positive student experience. The programme is delivered in a blended format, both onsite and online, across all campuses and has 8 themed weeks.

3. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF PEER REVIEW PANEL

3.1. Main Findings

Main Findings

The Peer Review Panel Notes:

- that TUS Student Support Services are strongly committed to ensuring that services are accessible, student-centred, progressive and are linked to the core values of TUS.
- the significant progress achieved in integrating the provision of support services across TUS is notable;
- the personal and professional commitment and student-centred ethos of staff to the quality of the services and supports is outstanding.

Commendations

The panel commends:

1. the evident highly student-centred approach in TUS as exemplified through the commitment of support services staff, management and senior leadership;
2. TUS and the Support Services for leading the way in conducting a strategic review, particularly at a time of considerable change associated with integration;
3. the comprehensive and inclusive self-evaluation and review process undertaken with stakeholders across TUS, including self-identified recommendations;
4. the inclusion of students as key stakeholders during all stages of the review process and the very positive feedback from students on the services provided;
5. the honest and constructive engagement of staff with the peer review panel;
6. the recognition by TUS of the importance of the Student Experience with its representation of Student Services at VP level.

Recommendations

The panel identified a range of recommendations in order to consolidate and improve the capacity of the services to continue to support TUS Students, Staff and Stakeholders.

Recommendations are classified as Grade 1 and Grade 2 in accordance with the *TUS Policy on Strategic Review of Service Delivery Units 2019 – 2024*.

The panel encourages TUS and the Support Services to take due cognisance of the recommendations contained in this Peer Review Group Report. The panel particularly highlights the importance of Grade 1 recommendations to enhance and realise the ability of the services to deliver for its stakeholders and actively contribute to the wider strategic goals of TUS.

Grade 1 Recommendations

1. Develop a TUS Student Experience Strategy that will be supported by a Student Services Action Plan. As part of the TUS Student Experience Strategy, clearly identify the priorities for student support services and define the associated KPIs.
2. Conduct a thematic analysis across the self-identified recommendations of the SER to identify core themes and pillars to inform further strategic development: e.g. Strategy; Structure; Resourcing/Funding; Physical Facilities; Systems; Branding/Communications and Integration/Change.
3. Develop a structure for the Student Supports based on key Student Service functions/pillars: e.g. (i) Access and Widening Participation; (ii) Health and Wellbeing, (iii) Learning Support; and (iv) Student Experience/Success. Develop a five-year vision with phased implementation including clinical governance where appropriate. The structure should be aligned to identified and agreed pillars (e.g. Directors of Service). Consider how the provision of Retention Support/Clubs and Societies can be integrated with Student Services/Student Success.
4. Implement a centralised CRM/Client Management System to support greater efficiency of provision, including capture of associated data.
5. Support the TUS Student Experience Strategy with a holistic *Communication Strategy* for *Support Services*. The communication strategy should consider issues such as:

- a) communication to students of available services across all campuses and how services may be accessed;
 - b) communication to Heads of Department/academic staff and empowering staff to communicate to students with respect to the services;
 - c) how tailored and targeted communication to specific campuses and student/staff cohorts can be enhanced; consider alternative tools to email to engage students e.g. Posters.
 - d) inter-departmental and inter-function communication;
 - e) review of branding considerations and development of contemporary and appropriate branding (including services and roles).
 - f) review of website, balancing service orientation with a student needs orientation.
6. As part of campus development planning, work with corporate services and estates to develop a long-term plan for the provision of centralised student service hubs where front facing student services are co-located in a central space. This should ideally reflect the centrality of the student and the need to maintain the dignity of students and staff as they avail of and provide a required support, respectively.
 7. Conduct external benchmarking, using identified KPI's, to support the business case for new resource requirements. This may include comparative HEIs and nationally available data (e.g. relevant access/disability/socio-economic data). Plan for additional resource requirements based on the evidence of increased complexity and demand for services which is benchmarked nationally.
 8. Build on existing successes to develop further approaches to health and well-being promotion (prioritised appropriately) including a developmental/preventative approach. Engage other departments and functions where appropriate to support implementation.
 9. Explore and identify how Student Support Services Staff can avail of relevant CPD and enhance their well-being.

Grade 2 Recommendations

1. Formalise engagement with academic units including Faculty Offices and Academic Faculties/Departments including their associated key QAE Bodies (e.g. Faculty/Dept/Programme Boards). Support these engagements with appropriate communication and reference resources with respect to services.
2. Develop a series of unified Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the respective support services across campuses. Include formal functional area planning meetings as part of this.
3. Identify and prioritise key annual data requirements for reporting purposes and engage, to enable early planning, with TUS Data Offices. Develop the related data processing capacity with the Student Services function.
4. Explore how greater collaboration can be promoted and enabled between support services staff across campuses. Consider how the staff of individual services can be enabled to participate and contribute at various fora/meetings.
5. At an institutional level, consider how the following issues can be appropriately raised and communicated at a national/sectoral level:
 - a) limitation and impact of short-term funding;
 - b) onerous reporting requirements;
 - c) the importance of core and multi annual funding.



Signature of Chairperson

Date: 4 March, 2024.