



TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
STUDENTS' UNION

State of College Counseling and Health Services

Draft 1.0
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President 23/24

Introduction	2
College Counseling	3
Sources	3
International Students	3
Off-Campus Students	3
Basic Waitlists Since 2017-2018	4
Basic Waitlists in November 2021	4
Detailed Waitlists 2022-2023	4
Breakdown of People Seen in 2022-2023	5
Number of People Seen Since 2016-2017	5
Peak Times in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022	6
Clinical Load Index (CLI) in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022	6
Staffing Since 2014-2015	6
Emergency Appointments Since 2017-2018	7
Surveys	7
Press	8
Breakdown of Staff	8
Analysis	9
College Health	10
Sources	10
International Students	11
Staffing 2023-2024	11
Number of Students and Staff Seen 2022-2023	11
Waiting Times 2022-2023	11
Michaelmas Term (September 1 - January 1)	11
Hilary Term (January 1 - June)	12
Surveys	12
Press	13
Breakdown of Staff	13
Analysis	13
Funding Mechanisms	14

Introduction

This report addresses a matter of utmost importance to our university community: the state of our counseling 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. In the following report, we will delve into the critical issues of staffing, waiting lists, and service usage within these departments, with a firm commitment to securing 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. This report serves as the first step in our journey to advocate for the resources necessary to continue providing outstanding care to our university community.

College Counseling

Sources

In response to Freedom of Information Request 1292¹ as well as 1382² as well as 1484³, we have been able to secure information below.

College Counseling reporting is consistent each year and is presented to the Student Life Committee (SLC), which reports to the Board of Trinity College Dublin⁴. The reports contain service usage, waiting lists, feedback and staffing information. Thanks to the reports presented to the Student Life Committee (SCS) since 2016-2017⁵⁶⁷⁸⁹¹⁰, as well as the 2014-2015 Board report on Student Counseling¹¹, we have been able to learn additional information.

International Students

TCDSU understands that one-fifth of non-EU/EEA postgraduate students use College Counseling, and 17% of all non-EU/EEA students use Counseling. This information is gathered from the October 12th 2023 Mental Health Event held by the Risk Office¹².

Off-Campus Students

TCDSU understands that there is a need for a dedicated off-campus student counselor, but at the moment there is none.

¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TsPNA8NGQpRQheKTc9qi4bRzB7ryQPDs/view?usp=drive_link

² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hVEFknoqD9IFO-cpZBjGn_Aq7n7aQiMy/view?usp=drive_link

³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SlcGOMQCZ2x9eBLrItO3i1A839PeZJU9/view?usp=drive_link

⁴ https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/assets/pdf/SCS-SLD-S2S-Annual-Report-2021-22.pdf

⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/13a3Q22IQEoRF8-czs_-36JFXIlwKZxS0/view?usp=sharing

⁶ https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/assets/pdf/SCS-SLD-S2S-Annual-Report-2021-22.pdf

⁷ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cUldKHjCt0qxvNnjX_mKqvg-l_xd4Bb/view?usp=drive_link

⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cUldKHjCt0qxvNnjX_mKqvg-l_xd4Bb/view?usp=drive_link

⁹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P2mku4axRelIpOCF4cWurYg-yn_2i62W/view?usp=drive_link

¹⁰ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V691k6RVWxLUTVbJ08mVGlo5tJXzo81V/view?usp=drive_link

¹¹

<https://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/quality/assets/pdf/Report%20to%20Board%20on%20the%20Review%20of%20Student%20Counselling.pdf>

¹² https://www.tcd.ie/news_events/events/event/mental-health---its-all-our-business.php

Basic Waitlists Since 2017-2018

Year	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Average wait time for an assessment appointment (working days)	5.4	8.4	10.8	9.6	10.3
Average wait time for counselling after assessment (working days)	15	15	23.5	41.8	27.9

Basic Waitlists in November 2021

For students on the waiting list between 1 - 30 November 2021, the average wait time for an assessment appointment is 16 days (range = 0 days to 30 days) and the average (Mean) days on the waitlist following assessment & prior to follow-up counseling is 32 working days. Emergency appointments are not included in these calculations, and these are seen on the day.

Detailed Waitlists 2022-2023

	1st Semester (July 1 2022 - December 31st 2022)	2nd Semester (January 1st 2023 - June 30th 2023)
Avg. Wait Time time for assessment appt	10.3 working days	8.7 working days
Counselling Avg. Wait time (post intake)	24.8 Working Days	23.5 Working Days
Min Wait Time Assessment	0 Days	0 Days

Max Wait Time Assessment*	25 working days	21 working days
Min Wait Time Counselling	0	0
Max Wait Time Counselling*	54 days (NB: waiting times may have carried over into 2nd semester)	49 Days (Wait list cleared May 2023)

* wait time for same-day emergency counselling for students in crisis = 0 Working Days throughout the year

Breakdown of People Seen in 2022-2023

0 staff members and 2,657 students used the Counselling Service in 2022/2023.

Postgraduates	650 [428 PGT, 232 PGD, PGR, etc.] - (10.1% of cohort)
Undergraduates	1,990 (13.4% of cohort)
EU	2,090 (12.2% of cohort)
NEU	561 (13% of cohort)

Number of People Seen Since 2016-2017

2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
1,892	2,008	2,236	2,257	2,160	2,998

Peak Times in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022

In 2021-2022, wait lists rose in December 2021, and declined after, and then rose again in March 2022, and declined after. Peak times in 2020-2021 follow the same patterns as in 2021-2022, meaning that they rise before exams, and decline after exams, in December 2020 as well as March 2021.

Clinical Load Index (CLI) in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022

Trinity counselors see more clients per year than counselors in 96% of student counseling services in the dataset in 2020-2021.

Trinity counselors see more clients per year than counselors in 99% of the 626 student counseling services in the dataset in 2021-2022.

Staffing Since 2014-2015

Year	Admin	Assistant Psychologists	Counselors	Director	Sessional Counselors	Case Coordinator
2022-2023	5.30 FTE	Included in "Counselors"	13.43 FTE	Included in "Admin"	2.87 FTE	0.71 FTE
2021-2022	4.30 FTE	2.92 FTE	10.38 FTE	1 FTE	3.49 FTE	0.5 FTE
2020-2021	4.22 FTE	2.25 FTE	10.68 FTE	1.20 FTE	2.99 FTE	0.21 FTE
2019-2020	4.74 FTE	1.63 FTE	9.71 FTE	1.20 FTE	2.42 FTE	0.20 FTE
2018-2019	4.17 FTE	1.46 FTE	9.2 FTE	1 FTE	2.79 FTE	0.40 FTE
2017-2018	5.22 FTE	N/A	11.41 FTE	Included in "Admin"	1.87 FTE	0.30 FTE

2016-2017	5 FTE	N/A	11.1 FTE	Included in "Admin"	Approx 3 FTE	N/A
2015-2016	N/A	N/A	Approx 9 FTE	N/A	Approx 3 FTE	N/A
2014-2015	N/A	N/A	7.4 FTE	N/A	N/A	N/A

We know that the 2015-2016 FTEs are approximately 9 and approximately 3 for counselors and sessional counselors because in the 2018-2019 report it is stated on p.13 that *"Counselling / Sessional Counselling staffing FTEs have remained at around 11.9 for the past 3 years"*.

Emergency Appointments Since 2017-2018

Year	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Emergency Appointments Attended	588	721	553	593	1,109	919
Number of Clients Attending Emergency Appointments	440	540	406	413	698	605

These clinics in 2021-2022 saw a sharp 86% increase in the number or requests for urgent support from the previous year 2020-2021 and a 53% increase on the previous pre-pandemic peak of 2018-19.

Surveys

Students4Change ran a survey in 2022/2023 asking students directly of their experiences with the College Health and College Counseling services¹³.

“I waited for 4 weeks”

“2 months”

“I have struggled with my mental health for years and only now am seeking help. I sent an email on February 14th and the next appointment that had available for me was March 14th, one month later.”

“I was offered a place within a couple of days because there was a cancellation”

“Asked for appointment February 10th. Appointment March 8th”

“I haven’t queried recently but last year I had to wait about 5 weeks for an appointment.”

“2 months 10 days”

“6 weeks for initial consultation”

“One month”

“Yes, it took about 9 days to receive an appointment”

Students4Change later protested for more funding to the College Counseling and College Health Services¹⁴.

Press

In a University Times article, data above has been reiterated¹⁵.

Breakdown of Staff

¹³

https://students4change.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/College-Counselling-_-Health-Service-Survey-Responses-Form-responses-1-2-4.pdf

¹⁴ <https://students4change.eu/pictures/>

¹⁵ <https://universitytimes.ie/2021/08/trinity-students-waiting-40-days-on-average-for-counselling-sessions/>

As recommended at the BAME Advisory Group on the 18th of October 2023, this report should contain an exploration of the ethnic breakdown of College Counseling staff. All College Counseling staff members are white¹⁶.

Analysis

We note that there has been an increase of counseling staff from 7.4 FTE in 2014 to 13.43 FTE in 2023 which represents an increase from a ratio of 1:2300 to 1:1550, yet issues remain. We note that assistant psychologists are not counselors, and we also note that sessional counselors are only brought in at peak times, but we note a general improvement since 2014. For reference, the recommended safe ratio is 1:1000 to 1:1500^{17,18}. We note that the Clinical Load Index remains to be high, which can be attributed to various administrative, staffing or logistical challenges.

We note that despite the FTE increases, the waitlists show a steady, and then a significant, increase since 2015. This suggests that the service is not resourced to handle the influx of student demand, which has undoubtedly increased because of the pandemic and will keep being high due to external socioeconomic factors, such as the cost of living and housing crisis, as well as high-pressure assessments like in-person examinations. Indeed, pinch points are around assessment times. The external review stated that the demand for the College Counseling service increased to 14% of the student population as opposed to 11-12% in previous years (p. 10). The over 1 million people on HSE waiting lists undoubtedly contributes to a higher use of College services as well. Staffing numbers have not increased adequately as student numbers increased. Particularly worrying is the 54 and 49 days maximum waiting time in Semester 1 and Semester 2 of 2022/2023, showing that the service is not equipped to handle all student needs. Qualitative evidence from the survey backs this up, with many expressing concern about the cruel waiting times at this service.

The College Counseling service exists on the assumption that it is not there for significant long-term support, which is understandable given that students are in College for a predefined period of time. However, there would be an expectation that support is given quickly within these constraints. Students undergo a SNAP assessment, following which they have to wait for a counselor, and the waiting lists are too long as a backlog forms each year.

College must also support international students who are shown to be using the service more than non-international students. The pressure being placed on the service is also evident from

¹⁶ <https://www.tcd.ie/collegehealth/about/>

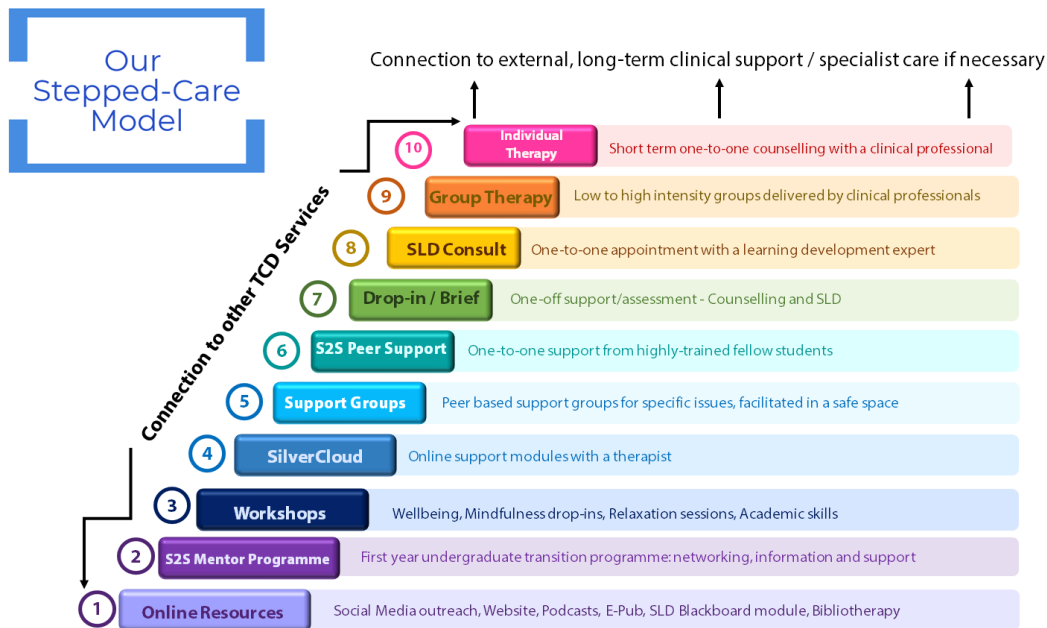
¹⁷

https://ccmh.psu.edu/index.php?option=com_dailyplanetblog&view=entry&category=new-findings&id=18:the-alignment-model-using-the-clinical-load-index-cli-to-guide-counseling-center-staffing

¹⁸

<https://iacsync.org/staff-to-student-ratios/#:~:text=Since%20the%20standard%20ratio%20of,as%20the%20center's%20ratio%20increases.>

the external review¹⁹ which said that “many students are seen every 2-3 weeks instead of weekly” at the present moment (p. 10). Despite this, it is important to note that the College operates a stepped care model, which alleviates some of the issues around the understaffing and waitlists of College Counseling²⁰.



However, concerns around understaffing and waitlists remain as the Stepped-Care Model is not a substitute for a well-resourced counseling service. This remains a key priority for the Students' Union.

College Health

Sources

In response to TCD Freedom of Information Request 1472²¹ we have gathered the following pieces of information, relating to staffing and waiting times.

¹⁹ Recent review of the Disability Service, College Counseling and College Health presented to University Council on the 1st of November 2023.

²⁰ <https://student2student.tcd.ie/support/>

²¹

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1158x-v_wM2rxUqN6kfFkisI5JXEaJzb9/edit?usp=sharing&oid=108854824415518884661&rtpof=true&sd=true

As opposed to College Counseling, reporting is sorely lacking for College Health. This is despite the information being supposed to go to the Student Life Committee, that feeds into the Board of Trinity College Dublin. This is not happening nor are there reports publicly available. The lack of reporting is partially attributable to a lack of IT Infrastructure as hinted at by TCD Freedom of Information Request 1472²², which stated in response to a request for a detailed student type breakdown the following.

“We are currently trying to build this data into our software systems and it is currently being developed by our software provider.”

The request was for a breakdown of student visits to the College Health service by type of Irish, EU, NON-EU/EEA, also UG, PGT, PGR. This was a disappointing response. It can be therefore concluded that better IT infrastructure is needed for reporting purposes at College Health.

International Students

Nevertheless, TCDSU understands from approximations that the College Health service is used 3.5-4.5 times more by international students.

Staffing 2023-2024

Admin	Practice Nurse	Psychiatric Nurse	Psychiatrist	GP	Physiotherapist	Medical Director
3 FTE	2 FTE	1 FTE	0.7 FTE	4.4 FTE	0.6 FTE	1 FTE

Number of Students and Staff Seen 2022-2023

The College Health service saw 5462 students and 416 staff in 2022-2023.

Waiting Times 2022-2023

Michaelmas Term (September 1 - January 1)

²² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1B3yUhSaBjwu5pTqYdtOzWOpaAdVb8zhz/view?usp=drive_link

There were 8637 appointments. 3109 were seen in the emergency clinics, which means that they were seen on the same day as they requested appointments. The wait times for appointments are as follows.

5528 booked consultations, for which the average wait was 13 working days.

Min	Average	Max
0	8.3 days	14 working days

Hilary Term (January 1 - June)

There were 7361 appointments. 2668 were seen in the emergency clinics, which means that they were seen on the same day as they requested appointments. The wait times for appointments are as follows.

Min	Average	Max
0 days	5 days	8 working days

4693 booked consultations, for which the average wait was 8 working days.

Surveys

Students4Change ran a survey in 2022/2023 asking students directly of their experiences with the College Health and College Counseling services²³.

“They didn’t answer my calls to make an appointment for about two days and they told me I could come in in 3 months to get a prescription for a chest infection”

“They couldn’t get me an appointment for 2 weeks.”

23

https://students4change.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/College-Counselling-_-Health-Service-Survey-Responses-Form-responses-1-2-4.pdf

“I need to get my asthma medication from College Health as private GP services are too expensive for me. I requested an appointment and eventually spoke to a doctor over the phone (not even in person) about 3-4 weeks later.”

“Hard to even get a response from them on the phone”

“3 hours”

“3 weeks unless it was an emergency”

“I enquired about assistance to gain access to antidepressants with a letter from my psychologist, I requested an appointment in the middle of December, and I was only seen recently [in February 2022]”

Students4Change later protested for more funding to the College Counseling and College Health Services²⁴.

Press

In an article that appeared in the University Times in January 2022²⁵, the Director of the College Health Service Dr. David McGrath spoke up for more funding to the service, as well as this students spoke of their experiences of having to ring 30-40 times to get an answer from the phone and face long waitlists. One student mentioned over 6 weeks to be diagnosed with a syndrome, another 4 months to wait for a psychiatrist. As to email responses, one student mentioned 2-3 days to receive a reply. It was furthermore noted that in 2020/2021, over 20,000 appointments were conducted, and 4.3 GPs were employed. A “log jam” for obtaining prescription medication was highlighted, as well as the fact that appointments are often offered during peak lecture times, which poses an issue for some students.

Breakdown of Staff

As recommended at the BAME Advisory Group on the 18th of October 2023, this report should contain an exploration of the ethnic breakdown of College Health staff. All College Health staff members are white²⁶.

Analysis

²⁴ <https://students4change.eu/pictures/>

²⁵ <https://universitytimes.ie/2022/01/students-feeling-effects-of-log-jam-in-college-health-service/>

²⁶ <https://www.tcd.ie/collegehealth/about/>

The ratio of GPs to students falls short of the recommended standard set by the World Health Organisation of 1:1000. The WHO estimates that at least 2.5 medical staff per 1,000 people²⁷, so this is 52.5 medical staff for 21,000. Trinity has an equivalent of 8.7 FTE per 21,000.

The WHO estimates a 1:1000 doctor to patient ratio²⁸. The current ratio at Trinity is around 1:4750 for GPs alone, and 1:2500 if other medical staff are included. International best practice sets a high standard for Trinity College Dublin to meet. For example, in the University of Edinburgh, for a student population at the time of 23,000, they had 16.5 full time equivalent GPs²⁹. With GPs alone this is a ratio of 1:1400. The difference rests on funding, but also in the different health services in Ireland and in the U.K. For example, in Ireland, the universities fund the health services, whereas in the U.K., the NHS funds the health services. The service has long waiting times, logjams and is severely understaffed, contributing to issues in accessing health supports for both students and staff.

The external review³⁰ recommended a ratio of 1:2000 student to GP and called the service severely under-resourced:

There is a clear need to significantly increase staffing levels in the CH Service. All staffing areas need to be considered given the broad mandate, increased demand, and new premises now able to properly support and accommodate the needed increase in CH Service staff.

The Students4Change survey shows that the College Health services can be in some cases quick, especially in emergency cases, but are in many cases slow and unable to respond to student needs. According to the external review, only 2 staff are on phone duty. There is a hidden waiting list which is not accounted for in the figures released under the 2014 FOI Act, and that is the phone not being picked up. While we understand that the figures gathered from the survey may reflect edge cases and not the average student, we still believe it to be concerning.

Funding Mechanisms

27

[https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/health-nutrition-and-population-statistics/series/SH.MED.PHYS.ZS#:~:text=The%20WHO%20estimates%20that%20at,%2C%20World%20Health%20Report%202006\).&text=The%20WHO%20compiles%20data%20from,%2C%20census%2C%20and%20administrative%20records.](https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/health-nutrition-and-population-statistics/series/SH.MED.PHYS.ZS#:~:text=The%20WHO%20estimates%20that%20at,%2C%20World%20Health%20Report%202006).&text=The%20WHO%20compiles%20data%20from,%2C%20census%2C%20and%20administrative%20records.)

28

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6259525/#ref1>

²⁹ <https://universitytimes.ie/2022/01/students-feeling-effects-of-log-jam-in-college-health-service/>

³⁰ <https://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/quality/assets/pdf/thematic-quality-review-report-for-qc.pdf>

According to the Union of Students Ireland (USI), third-level institutions in Ireland currently have only one counsellor for every 2,240 students, even though it is recommended by the International Accreditation of Counseling Services that there should be one counselor for every 1,000 to 1,500 students. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has increased student mental health funding from €3 million to €5 million, but that figure has only been allocated on an annual basis, leaving these services unable to plan for the future. TCDSU supports USI's calls to immediately commit to multi-annual funding of €6 million a year to maintain core counselling services and to implement the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework. We furthermore support USI's demand to increase this funding by €11.5 million in order to reach safe counsellor to student ratios to combat the mental health crisis currently affecting our young people, including our students. This crisis was shown in the Jigsaw My World 2 survey where 8,290 of those surveyed were students, and of the over 8,000 student respondents, 10 per cent said that they had attempted suicide. Of those who tried to take their own lives, 54 per cent said they tried to get help afterwards, and of those, 48 per cent said they found it 'difficult/very difficult' to access help.