



Dear undergraduates, dear postgraduates, dear students,

As we approach reading week, Trinity College Dublin's constant disregard for our needs continues to decimate our community. Our mental health and the impact of an uncertain and compromised educational experience again this year sees many of our community struggle. The time has come for action, the time has come for us to demand a partial refund.

Students 4 Change (S4C) alongside the Trinity college Dublin Graduate Students' Union (TCDGSU) are organizing a joint Undergraduate-Postgraduate protest on the 16th of October to show our support for anyone who is feeling forgotten and anxious in these times.

We will be marching from TCD's Front Square starting at 4pm to the Dáil, where we will join other groups in Ireland to protest against our institutions in public. You are invited to join as we challenge our College publicly and demand our contractual rights, make our voices heard for in-person lectures or refunds and call out Trinity's disregard for our mental health.

We demand that Management:

- Issue a partial refund to any student who suffered unnecessarily In 2020/2021/2022.
- Allow jobs currently managed by the TCDGSU to remain in place until the end of Semester 1 so as to allow a smooth transition to a post-pandemic year. Mask wearing should have peer-to-peer support and this employment has saved lives.
- Use the same exam format as last year, both for standard assessment in Semester 1 and for Schols. Open-book exams are a holistic way of assessment and should be encouraged all-around. Listen to our anxiety and don't challenge our mental health.
- Make sure that in all cases, assessments are the least stressful possible, and adequate training be given to students for Semester 2's in-person exams. For example, put a permanent end to the use of the invasive Proctorio monitoring software, which is racist, does not work for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and has serious data privacy issues.
- Reverse the 2.3% and 4% rent hike in Trinity Accommodation for students and staff respectively. Some of us are struggling to pay this and can't afford three meals a day.
- Take steps by the end of Semester 1 towards ethical investment and ethically-sourced research and provide an official commitment for this, decrying its links with Israel, the war-industry and Declan Ganley.
- Give College security the respect they deserve and not have them chasing students who carry alcohol in their bags to have a social drink with friends on campus.

- Commit itself to a student to counselor and student to mental health nurse ratio of 1:1000.
- Give money from Trinity Ball to mental health services.
- Install proper hybrid learning systems within College, at no extra cost to professors and teaching assistants and commit to make sure that face-to-face education remains a vital part of our education, while allowing choice for students for inclusivity reasons.
- Compensate undergrads and postgrads for last year. Compensation which can be given immediately in the short-term are as follows, which we demand:
 - Make the Buttery free for this year
 - Per-module refund for this year, for every online class
 - Refund of services and facilities cost that we did not get to use last year
 - Postgrads for one-year courses / exchange students who left: give permanent access to digital library resources
 - Give access to students to *all* online education resources on BlackBoard from their respective Schools
 - LinkedIn Learning packages for Business school students
 - Membership to students who wish to use the gym who didn't get to use it ,ast year
 - Cover the cost of graduation gowns at commencements as an apology

This list is to be understood as a reiteration and an expansion on the earlier one, not as a replacement.

With no significant changes made in the Budget 2022 to publicly fund the third-level sector or accommodation, we are faced with a continuing academic year which will bring continued uncertainty and anxiety. Our mental health is severely impacted; we are living in hostels in groups, unable to afford better accommodation, we are struggling to keep up again this year and we're aggrieved that we were lured to Dublin, when we could have stayed with our families and learnt online for the first semester at home? If we have no face-to-face learning currently on campus why are we here?

We have been cheated again like last year's students (2020/21) who had the worst student experience in history and are currently being refused refunds. The GSU has pressed College hard for six months for percentage refunds for the students of 2020/21 working on real data from a Survey conducted by the GSU.

The decision to call this protest has not been taken lightly, but was made due to our institution's neglect of students' needs and specifically in light of no real progress being made with regards to the issue of #ReturnOrRefund and lacking mental health support.

Firstly, both undergraduate and postgraduate students have expressed in clear, democratic and justified terms a demand for a refund of the student contribution fee from 2020-2021.

For undergraduates, this is evidenced by TCDSU Council's motion in April where the union adopted a position in support of refunds for the academic year in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. For postgraduate students, the GSU "Postgraduate Student Experience Survey" of last year, in which 1,246 students took part, expressed that 78% support refunds as

compensation for the reduced value for money, e.g. lack of access to services (e.g. paying the sports centre contribution fee throughout the whole pandemic and not getting access), during the pandemic. At the April 14th GSU EGM, postgraduate students voted for a motion demanding refunds.

Across the three faculties of AHSS, EMS, and HS, postgraduate students expressed above 90%+ disapproval of the overall student experience across the aspects of learning, social life and financial matters.

Similarly, students all the way from Freshers to PhD candidates are dissatisfied with the chaotic and essentially non-existent re-opening plan of our College for the Semester 1 of the 2021-2022 academic year. Just recently, 200-300 protested on Front Square, while thousands more interacted with the social media posts of the organizers as a general outpouring of discontent swept across campus that the experience of last year looks set to be repeated for Semester 1, again without any compensation.

This is also evidenced by an independent survey, in which 866 students took part in as of September 17th 2021. Out of those 866, 83% said that they were dissatisfied with our College's reopening and 42% said that this affected them financially, as for example they had to take up expensive accommodation in expectation - and eventual disappointment - of an in-person learning experience. Despite the first independently-organized protest, College still looks to not have their ducks in a row, as evidenced by TCDSU's open-letter on the necessity of re-timetabling and the lack of a plan from the Provosts' Office.

Secondly, and closely tied with the the issue of #ReturnOrRefund, is the mental health of students, staff and of our community.

In 2020-2021, the counselling services of our College averaged, at peak times - build up to exams - over 100 on the waitlist and several weeks to see a 1-1 counsellor. For the 11.4% or so of the total student population who relied on this service during the trying times of the pandemic, this could have, and probably has led to long-term negative consequences. Not only were students used as cash cows and had no educational experience, there were no robust support systems in place to make last year manageable for many students stuck at home. Many reported increased feelings of anxiety, but not just students, staff reported work intensification (65%), loneliness (43%) and emotional exhaustion (51%).

Recently, it has come to light that our College's re-opening plan will leave many students doing their exams in-person, in the RDS, as they continue to have online lectures. The Senior Lecturer also said on the 12th of October 2021 in an email that exams and Schols will be in-person. This proposal is an affront to students. After one-and-a-half years of online learning and digital note taking, many students will suddenly be told to sit in the RDS as if nothing happened. Outrageously, this plan has no regard for the immense stress that our 17,000 or so students faced last year, and with the same disregard to student wellbeing has absolutely no support structures in place. Similarly, postgraduate students who are employed as TAs, and professors in general, have recently reported that they are under 'unprecedented pressure' with the continuation of online learning due to the technological complexities associated with lecture delivery - our College could easily invest in automatic

lecture recording software *in situ*, which would ease stress for the whole community, but this would require investment.

Regarding recent developments, Budget 2022 provides a 5 million € investment for mental health, but this is not enough. According to the USI's pre-budget submission for 2022, they asked for 28 million €, and according to them, "a third of students at 33.94% feel that their mental health has worsened as a result of COVID-19". This is to ensure that student to counsellor and student to mental health nurse ratio is 1 per 1000 at 17.5 and 11 million € respectively. There are also non-budgetary asks in USI's document, such as adopting the holistic Lancet Model, which are also very important.

Our College has 8 counsellors at the moment, which is roughly 1 per 2000. Out of the 5 million €300,000 was given to our College, but this is not anywhere near enough to fix the ratio. This is the government's fault, but College should be speaking up more loudly and not pretending that our counselling services are in good shape. They could equally re-prioritize their budget away from capital projects (i.e. fancy buildings, which, in this time of crisis, are a luxury) to the community's needs.

Recently, an article in the University Times claimed that our College has cleared the waitlist on their counselling services. According to the Provost's email to us on September 22nd 2021, the waitlist was clear a couple weeks back too. It has 40+ days during the build up to exams, which is the issue. "We have no one on the waiting list" does not mean a lot if support systems fail when they are actually needed.

In essence, our College has consistently put increased revenues in front of our community's well-being. It is time to make our voices heard and demand that we be treated as humans, not as cash cows.

We thus invite you to march with us on the 16th of October at 4pm, starting from TCD's Front Square, as we demand that the College provide us a proper educational experience, refunds for last year and Semester 1, and that they take into consider students' wellbeing and immediately invest in better mental health supports.

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