Appendix B – Outline of Strategic Planning Process

The School Executive determined the need for a new strategic plan during its discussions in 2021-22, and agreed to engage in a process to create one during 2022-23 based on School-wide consultation, to incude partners, almumni/ae and cross-College links. This decision and the rationale behind it was presented to the whole School at a **School Committee meeting on 27th April 2022** and *(item 7 in the minutes)* all staff were invited to send suggestions to the HoS for consideration/inclusion re. the strategic plan and the outline planning process during May-June 2022. The rationale as presented at that time was as follows:

Understanding the need for a Strategic Plan.

In 2016-17, the School's predecessor, the Confederal School, underwent an External Quality Review. The Report from the five external reviewers was accepted by Council, and a Taskforce was appointed to oversee the implementation of the Report's 35 recommendations. This work commenced during 2017-18, altering the School's name, governance, organisation and management, and undergraduate offering, among other things. (The full list of recommendations can be found here: https://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/quality/assets/pdf/Report%20to%20Council%20on%20Religions.pdf) The Report of the External Quality Review superseded the extant Strategic Plan of the School's predecessor.

An official Quality Progress Report was presented by the Dean and accepted by Quality Committee in February 2020. It assessed whether and confirmed that all Council's April 2017 recommendations had been implemented and identified further areas in need of strategic attention, including a post in Asian Religions, improved marketing, better linkage between Dublin and Belfast campuses and the need to include the discipline of Peace Studies in the name of the School. (A link to the relevant minutes of that meeting can be found here: https://www.tcd.ie/committeepapers/quality/download/Quality_minutes_20200226.pdf)

The Taskforce determined, and Council approved, that the School should review how the changes were working after five years after implementation. Implementation began 1st September 2017, and so it fell to the School to conduct a review in the 2022-23 academic year. A Strategic Planning Process afforded the appropriate framework in which to do the necessary work. While the work of strategic planning was independent of Quality Office-authorised Quality Reviews, it was a vital instrument in monitoring the implementation of the last Quality Review and ensures that the School is optimally positioned to prepare for the next one (2025-26).

Furthermore, the School needed to be able to demonstrate its alignment with the College Strategic Plan (2020-25), which can be read here: https://www.tcd.ie/strategy/ This was not merely a question of institutional self-understanding or mission alignment; whenever the School relates to the Faculty or College (e.g. requesting permission to fill a job position that is open, or arguing for a promotion for a member of staff, or justifying planned expenditure), it is required to demonstrate how its proposed activities fulfil the University's Strategic Plan. This requires a common understanding and agreed priorities, and should not fall to the Head of School or School Manager to devise these rationales *ad hoc*.

Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the process of creating a Strategic Plan was seen as a great opportunity for the School to mature, to further unite and to flourish in its constituent parts both individually and collectively. The process outlined below was therefore designed to be responsive rather than rigid. Ideas were to be gathered and plans put in place to realise them. Offerings were to be improved. Our understanding of what each other does was to be deepened. Individual ownership of and belonging to the School was to be enhanced.

Premises

Further to the rationale, and the open consultation with staff in May–June, the following premises were presented at the **School Committee meeting on Wed 28th September 2022**:

- The new School Strategic plan will align with the current College one (2020–25).
- The planning process will be completed during the academic year 2022–23.
- The Strategic Plan will be for five years, 2023–28 (2023–24 — 2027–28).
- There will be a mid–term review in 2025–26, to ensure the plan is aligned to the new College Strategic Plan (2025 – 30).
- The School Executive is the Steering Group for creating the Strategic Plan.
- The Steering Group will appoint sub–groups as part of the planning process.
- Certain of the School's activities might need to be addressed as priorities, to enable implementation within College's routine planning timeframes.

Outline of Planing Process

A complete outline of the Strategic Planning Process was also presented to all staff and student reps at the School Committee meeting on **Wed 28th September 2022**. It was agreed that strategic planning would proceed by creating 6 Sub-Groups each under the leadership of a Chair. They would report monthly to the Steering Group (as part of the School Executive meetings).

It was emphasised that it would be important for all of the sub-groups to find ways of engaging everyone with an involvement in their respective areas, not by having everyone as members of the sub-group, but by inviting responses on all critical areas. How each group gained its information was to be decided by the chair of each group, in consultation with academic staff, professional staff and student representatives.

It was further emphasised that EDI and Global/Internationalisation agendas must be explicitly addressed by and integrated into the work of every Sub–Group. Every Sub–Group must also address the question: how shall we better make the wider university aware of what we do?

Sub–groups were charged, wherever possible, to engage as much student participation as possible via focus groups, lunchtime conversations, etc. and not merely surveys/SWOT forms, recognising these have not yielded substantial input of student voice in previous, recent consultative exercises.

The Sub-Groups were to work independently of School-level USC, GSC and Admin Support meetings. Those committees manage the day-to-day implementation of agreed programmes; the role of the sub-groups is to concentrate on strategic analyses, identifying future goals and, in due course, costed projects. The Sub-Groups were identified as:

- UG Strategy
- PG Strategy
- Research Strategy (to include Centres)
- Discipline Perspectives (to include inter-disciplinary collaborations across College)
- Stakeholder Perspectives (including ISE, Loyola, CITI, Marino)
- Infrastructure – to include premises, IT provision, staffing and our visibility in College

The consultative elements undertaken by each sub-group are outlined below.

Further, the Head of School invited anyone at all in the School to be in touch with her directly about anything at all relating to the School with a view to capturing all perspectives within the Strategic Plan and also re. the process of arriving at it. Several people were in touch in response to this invitation during the course of the process, via email and individual meetings on Zoom.

One of the main issues to emerge from this open consultation related to the position of the **Belfast campus.** The School's presence in Belfast remains an intellectual, educational and civic asset, as noted in the University's Strategic Plan. However, the context in which our campus operates has changed considerably due to Britain's exit from the EU (Brexit) and its consequences (e.g. the problems caused by the protocol, visa requirements for international students, differing quality control regimes, border poll politics, etc.). Furthermore, and of serious concern, due to the redevelopment of the building by its owners, we now have access to significantly less space in the premises that we rent than we used to (even as we are charged the same, relatively high, rent); this inhibits current activities (such as PhD workspace, meeting space with project partners) as well as possibilities for collaboration (intra-College, inter-University, cross-border) and growth. It was therefore decided that particular attention needs to be given to the infrastructure of our Belfast operations as a priority within the Strategic Plan.

Articulating our values, vision and mission

Via personal correspondence (5th Oct 2022) and an online survey (https://forms.gle/gf5QNf94i74tK5Fv6), the Head of School invited the entire school to begin to articulate the values of the School and assess whether the mission statement evinced as part of the last Quality Review (2017) was fit for purpose, asking what might be added or edited. The outcomes of this consultation were brought to the Steering Group, and drafts of new mission and (identified as a need:) vision statements were developed through a sequence of four steering group meetings (Oct, Nov, Dec and Jan) and a whole-School discussion of values, followed by workshopping mission and vision statements in small and plenary groups, which took place at the **School Committee meeting on Wed 30th Nov 2023**.

On the basis of this input, the sub-group chairs honed a current mission statement, and articulated key values and a common vision for the School at the **'Away Day' on 25th January 2023.** These drafts were affirmed at the **Steering Group/SEC meeting on 1st Feb 2023**; these then informed the creation of every other aspect of the Strategic Plan.

Overall Timetable of Strategic Planning Process

This was shared with all as the expected outline at the SC on 28th Sept 2022, and ended up being followed to the letter, with the addition of those items noted in *

- School Executive announce planning process to create Strategic Plan, including identification of Priority Projects (28th September 2022)
- HoS to survey whole School re. identity & overview SWOTs (first week of October)
- Strategic Plan Sub-groups to be convened (first week of October 2022)
- SWOTS issued by Sub-groups (second week of October 2022)
- Subgroups to report monthly to the Steering Group (October 12th, November 16th, December 14th 2022)
- Outline of draft mission statement and draft structure for the Strategic Plan presented (November 30th, School Committee meeting)
- Consult stakeholders via focus groups, etc. (by Nov 30th 2022)
- Recommendations from any priority projects to SEC (14th December 2022)
- Steering Group whole-day consolidation of results of sub-groups (December 2022)
- Assess reports from focus groups – possible away day/think-in (February 2023)(*25th Jan*)
- Populate draft of strategic plan (February and March 2023)
- Steering Committee review of all materials (5th April 2023)
- Presentation of draft Strategic Plan to whole School, and consultation (12th April 2023)*
- Final draft to School Executive (3 May 2023)
- *Publish Summer 2023
- *Launch September 2023

* A full draft of the SP was distributed to all staff and student reps one week in advance of the meeting, and everyone was invited to reply to the HoS in writing about absolutely anything in it. Everyone was also specifically asked if they felt the priorities accurately reflected the consultations in which they had participated. The agenda for the SC was decided on the basis of this written input – i.e. the School determining what needed additional discussion. Many helpful amendments to the text were due to those colleagues who engaged in this process.

***This was altered to before the end of Trinity Term by the School Executive at its meeting on 12th March 2023*

Outline of Consultative Elements Undertaken in the Sub-Groups:

- UG Strategy
- PG Strategy
- Research Strategy (to include Centres)
- Discipline Perspectives (to include inter-disciplinary collaborations across College)
- Stakeholder Perspectives (including ISE, Loyola, CITI, Marino)
- Infrastructure – to include premises, IT provision, staffing and our visibility in College.

UG Strategy

- Input from staff who teach UG Modules across disciplines through direct reflection, individual consultative conversations, and some further surveys during Hilary Term. With the five-year Review of the UG Degree ahead, reflection was oriented towards general principles and moving to prepare us for a more-engaged review of the degree. From October to February 2022-23
- Staff were encouraged by the HoS to write directly to Review Coordinators, as part of the process. (School Meeting) Michaelmas 2022
- College Context offered by the Senior Lecturer and Associate Dean for the Undergraduate Common Architecture with a focused College SWOT directly in response to their provocations. 19th October, 2022
- Small SWOT Groups and Submitted SWOT Responses by students in our Undergraduate Programmes during Michaelmas Term: 19th October, 3rd November, 2022
- Student surveys during Hilary Term (with a 60%+ return rate), estimating about an 80% consultative rate. November 2022
- UG Alumni Survey Form (with External stakeholders) November 2022
- Examining previous QS report of information gleaned from Open Modules, Michaelmas Term
- Module Offerings Survey from UG Students, follow up from Michaelmas Term SWOTS. 9 February, 2023
- Further UG Staff SWOT and Survey Feburary 2023
- Research on other 'like' programmes and conversations with programme partners in the University.
- Ongoing Reflection with Dual Degree Programme Colleagues and students in this programme.

PG Strategy

- October 2022 - SWOT re PG strategic planning shared with staff and PG student
- Results from SWOT presented to and discussed at an open session at School PG Committee
- 14.11.22 - Zoom with PG alumni
- 30.11.22 - PG strategy considered in one of the 'rounds' at School Committee - collation of ideas from this session shared with the School Executive 14.12.22
- 1.3.23 - Mapping of emerging strategic priorities in PG (in relation to TCD Strategic Plan and Athena Swan) shared with School Executive.

Research Strategy

Face to face interviews occurred with most R&T staff during October 2022:

- Jude Lal Fernando and Andrew Pierce: October 4 2022
- Ben Wold: Oct 17 2022
- Michael Kirwan and Fáinche Ryan: October 20 2022
- Danielle Pevarello: October 20 2022
- Caitriona Russell and Alexandra Grieser: October 20 2022

A SWOT form was emailed to all academic staff on November 1st 2022.

- All Peace Studies staff, and those Religion and Theology staff who were not interviewed, replied to the SWOT form.
- Those who were interviewed requested not to fill out the SWOT, as they had answered the questions already.

The full feedback and its summary were discussed at the School Executive Committee in November 2022.

Disicplinary Perspectives

- 19-20 October 2022 - Two meetings on designing the SWOT questionnaire and establishing the data collection methodology (Dr Pevarello & Dr Aldrovandi)
- 24 October 2022 - Circulation of SWOT Questionnaire amongst selected colleagues from both disciplines who teach across the school at BA & MPhil Level and supervise PhD students
- 1 November 2022 - Focus Group with Belfast MPhil & PhD students via Zoom call (discussion facilitated by Dr Pevarello & Dr Aldrovandi)
- 1 November 2022 - In person Focus Group with IPS students (Gender War & Peace IPS Module, discussion facilitated by Dr Pevarello & Dr Aldrovandi)
- 3 November 2022 - Focus Group with CT & IR - facilitated in person by Dr Pevarello & Dr Aldrovandi.
- 7 November 2022 - Focus Group with CT & PhD students (Loyola) facilitated in person by Dr Pevarello.
- 8 November 2022 - Focus Group with BA students Religious Studies (Joint & Single Honour Degree) - facilitated in person by Dr Pevarello & Dr Aldrovandi.
- 25 November 2022 - Discussion of data collected and generation of a draft summary of the main findings to be presented at the School Executive (14 December 2022).

Stakeholder Perspectives

Partner Trusts were engaged via the Chairs and members of the Trusts and Director (LI).

- *Loyola Institute* Director October 17th, 2022 Chair of LI Trust November 7th 2022
- *ISE* Steering Committee Chair and Members of Steering Committee December 2nd, 2022
- *Church of Ireland Theological College* Engagement with Director, Programme Co-ordinators, and CITI academic and administrative staff. December 8th 2022

Alumni, UG & PG UG alumni/ae were engaged *via* a survey (thanks to Débora), PG alumni *via* a focus group (thanks to Gillian). November 14th 2022

All alumni/ae were asked: Looking back on your time in Trinity what served you best?, are there things from which you would have benefited, had they been available?; In what ways would you like to be in touch with the School in the future?; Do you have ideas about how alumni can be better connected with the School and its programmes?

Partners providing internships, placement, routes to accreditation were engaged *via* email and with an offer of 1-1 conversation (via Zoom). Organizations contacted were: Adyan Foundation, Beirut, Dublin City Interfaith Forum, Global Action Plan, Healing Through Remembering, Mediation Ireland, R City, Shared Future News, Turas Irish Language Centre. Responses from partners providing placements etc. were shared with steering group December 16th 2022.

Infrastructure

- Re. the Dublin building, the sub-group drew on the extensive discussions already in hand due to the recent work of the Building Working Group, which met in person on 14th February (architect), 24th March 2022 and via Zoom on 25th April 2022. (The Working Group consisted of academic and professional staff and student reps working on the Dublin campus.)
- The chair also met with staff in Estates and Facilities in June and Sept 2023, and with the university Space Manager on 25th January.
- Re. the Belfast campus, the chair met by Zoom with staff in Belfast on 20th Sept 2022 and 28th February 2023.
- Re. IT : see SE minutes over the past three years for a record of conversations re. the School's ongoing and projected needs, particularly for improved linkage via technology between Dublin and Belfast campuses.

How the Sub-Group Work Related to the Whole Process:

The sub-group chairs shared progress reports and, together with the other members of the steering group, reflected upon what was heard, identified priorities, and devised action points via an iterative process that took place through the following meetings:

School Executive: 14th September 2022

School Committee: 28th September 2022

School Executive: 12th October 2022

School Executive: 16th November 2022

School Committee: 30th November 2022

School Executive: 14th December 2022

Strategic Planning Away Day – 25th January 2023

School Executive: 1st Feburary 2023

School Executive: 1st March 2023

School Executive: 5th April 2023

School Committee: 12th April 2023

School Executive: 3rd May 2023