CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR THE PROVOST’S PROJECT AWARDS 2020-21

Introduction
1. Applications are now sought for 40 awards, known as the Provost’s Project Awards to be awarded to Principal Investigators (PIs) in all disciplines throughout the university. The award is made in relation to a particular research project which the PI in question is undertaking or proposes to undertake. The awards will be used by successful applicants to fund a PhD student to work with them on the project in question for four years. The award will cover fees (either EU or non-EU) for the recruited student as well as an annual stipend of €16,650. The successful PI will act as the Principal Supervisor for the student in question. For the avoidance of doubt, the award is made to the PI rather than to their school or directly to the student. The award is made on a competitive basis.

Applying for an Award
2. Applications are welcomed from assistant and associate professors in all disciplines who, under calendar regulations, are entitled to be a Principal Supervisor of a PhD student. Previous recipients of a Provost’s Project Award are ineligible to apply for an award in 2020-2021 unless their previously funded PhD students are anticipated to have completed their studies before September 2021, when a new PhD student is expected to be able to register. Joint applications, including joint applications from professors in different disciplines are welcomed (although in such circumstances it is necessary to indicate who will be the PI/Principal Supervisor and, where appropriate, to name the discipline in which a student funded under an award is to be based). Only one application (to be a principal supervisor) may be submitted per professor annually.

3. Applications for these awards will be considered on an anonymous basis. Anyone wishing to apply for an award should, in the first instance, email the relevant email address on the application form (i.e., by Faculty), seeking a unique application number. This number must then be used as the Identifier in the application form. Prospective applicants are encouraged to register their interest and seek an application ID number as soon as possible.
4. Applications should be submitted to the Dean of Graduate Studies via the relevant email address provided on the application form. Please note that these addresses are only for applications to the scheme and not for queries in relation to it. Such queries should be sent directly to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Evaluation Scheme for Applications

5. The purpose of the scheme is three fold. First, it is aimed at rewarding and encouraging excellence of research; Second, it seeks to galvanise and enhance the research trajectories and career development of assistant and associate professors and, ideally, to be a ‘game-changer’ for them; third it is aimed at ensuring that Trinity can attract the very best PhD students. The evaluation scheme for applications, detailed below, reflects these broad policy concerns.

6. As is outlined in the application form, applicants are asked to submit the following

(a) A lay abstract of the proposal in question (max 400 words). Applicants should be aware that their proposal may be reviewed at any stage in the process by someone who is not located in their discipline or familiar with their field of research; if the proposal moves to the second stage of evaluation (see below), it will be reviewed by academics from all three faculties and by an external reviewer. As the lay abstract may also be used in wider public dissemination, it is essential that it clearly outlines the focus of the proposal and that it is comprehensible and accessible to people who have no knowledge of the relevant field.

(b) A detailed statement of the proposal in question (max 2000 words). In this section, applicants should outline in ‘non-lay’ terms, the nature of their proposal. Applicants should note that, whereas it is not prohibited, there is no need for them to footnote relevant publications etc. in relation to their proposal. The evaluation panel are particularly concerned with (a) the innovative nature of the proposal, its overall significance and potential impact, and the robustness of the proposed methodology and (b) the potential for research outputs and other measures of impact arising from the proposal. The proposal should outline the vision and ambition of the programme of work, rather than detailing the PhD element, as this aspect is to be addressed in section (c):

(c) The role of and impact for the student (max 400 words) In this section, applicants should focus on the manner in which a student funded under the award will be involved in the project and the extent to which such involvement will be of benefit to them beyond mere funding of their PhD. Careful consideration should be given to explaining how researcher development and training will be incorporated into the overall project plans and the supervisory arrangements.

(d) A statement of the impact that an award would have on the applicant’s own research trajectory (max 500 words). One of the policy imperatives behind this
awards scheme is to galvanise and significantly enhance research careers of successful applicants, so that the awards can act as game-changers for the research trajectories of successful PIs. Thus applicants are asked to outline in this section the reasons why they, personally, would be appropriate recipients of an award given this policy imperative.

(e) A statement of current and future (over the next five years) research funding plans of the applicant including any funding already committed/anticipated (max 500 words). This information is sought for two reasons. First, reviewers may consider it as one of the many relevant factors in assessing the degree of impact that a Provost’s Project Award may have on an applicant’s career. Second, some projects in respect of which applications are made will involve significant infrastructural or consumable costs that are not covered under the scheme, and it is important, in deciding on such an application, that the evaluation panel is confident that this additional funding is in place.

7. Applications are evaluated on the following basis (as outlined on the application form).
   (a) All applications are scored out of a total of 70 marks.
   (b) Of these 70, 20 are allocated for the section in relation to the impact of an award on the applicant’s research trajectory.
   (c) The remaining 50 are awarded for the project itself, comprising the lay abstract, the more detailed project description, and the statement of involvement of the student.
   (d) Of these 50 marks, 30 are awarded for the overall significance and degree of innovation of the project, 10 are awarded for the potential for research outputs and 10 for the extent to which the student will be involved in the project and will benefit from such involvement.
   (e) Of the 30 marks for the overall significance and innovation of the project, 15 are awarded for project design and methodology and 15 for demonstration of innovation.

Finally, it is worth noting that some previous reviewers have expressed disappointment at the level of errors and omissions within some applications. Any perceived carelessness in the preparation of an application risks creating an unfavourable reviewer predisposition that may impact on the overall evaluation of the proposal.

Evaluation process

8. Applications will be reviewed by a committee comprising three representatives (at either Professor in or Professor of level) per faculty as well as the Dean of Research and an external reviewer and chaired by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

9. The evaluation process operates on a two-stage basis. In the first stage, the three representatives from each panel will review, and agree an aggregated mark for each application from within their faculty, scoring the applications on the basis of the
marking scheme outlined above. In the second stage, the top 25%\(^1\) of applications (having regard to the marks allocated) from each faculty panel will be reviewed (a) by one panel member from a faculty other than that of the applicant (b) by the Dean of Research (c) by the Dean of Graduate Studies and (d) by the external reviewer. All shortlisted projects will then be given a total mark comprising the marks from the three faculty reviewers and the four people who reviewed the application following the shortlisting process. Thereafter, the 40 applications that receive the highest marks will receive the Provost’s Project Awards. The decision as to which applications will receive awards is at the sole discretion of this committee whose decision on the matter is final.

10. All applicants will be contacted by the Dean of Graduate Studies at the end of the application process and will receive feedback in relation to their application.

Timelines
11. The final date for receipt of applications is November 16\(^{th}\), 2020, at 16.00. Late applications will not be considered. It is expected that the results of the application process will be known by the end of January, 2021. Applicants will be contacted thereafter, and the list of successful applicants will be published on the Graduate Studies Office website.

Process following a Successful Application
12. Successful applicants may, immediately after being notified of this fact, start to look for a PhD student to be funded under their grant. PIs are encouraged to advertise the grant as widely as possible. The call for PhD students to apply to work with the successful PI will also be advertised centrally by Trinity, through the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and on various social media fora.

13. An award may only be used to fund a new entrant on the PhD register (in other words, it may not be used to fund the duration of the studies of an existing PhD student).

14. The decision as to the identity of the PhD student who is selected to work on a particular project is at the sole discretion of the PI on the project (subject to the fact that discretion as to whether to admit any student to the PhD register rests with the relevant department/school and ultimately with the Dean of Graduate Studies). Where a student who has been hired to work on the project is, for whatever reason, unable to continue to be in receipt of such funding (for example because they discontinue on the PhD register/obtain alternative external funding) then the PI may

\(^{1}\) This is an indicative percentage and may vary having regard to the total number of applications received to the scheme.
hire another PhD student (including an existing student whom they are supervising) for the duration of the four year award. If the PI is unable to continue to work with the student (for example if the PI leaves the university), then the funding will remain with the student and the school may transfer them to work on another, cognate research project either with their new supervisor or with another member of staff.

15. In the unlikely event that a successful PI is unable to hire a PhD student to work with them on the project in question then the PI may apply to the Dean of Graduate Studies to suspend the award for one year. The decision as to whether or not to do so rests with the Dean, though in normal circumstances this will not be possible and the award will simply not be made.

16. For the avoidance of doubt, the operation of the Provost’s Project Award scheme is distinct from and does not affect any other funding schemes within the university (for example the 1252 scholarships, the Ussher awards etc).

Obligations of Successful Applicants

17. In the operation of the scheme, it is important that successful applicant professors are cognisant of the balance between the student’s work on the project and their need to obtain a PhD. What precisely this will entail is context dependent – thus it may be that in disciplines where a student’s PhD is customarily drawn from their supervisor’s project different procedures will apply than in disciplines where a student’s PhD work is distinct from the project of his or her supervisor.

18. In some disciplines, particularly perhaps in the sciences, the student’s PhD will be drawn directly from the project in question. In others, the student’s PhD will be ancillary to the project. In this latter scenario, the PI/supervisor must ensure that the student does not spend so much time working on the project that their PhD work is impoverished. In such circumstances, a student cannot work more than 24 hours per month on the project per se, save to the extent that this work also constitutes work towards their PhD. Moreover, the supervisor must ensure that they remain committed to supervising the PhD.

19. Similarly, the student must work both on the project and on their PhD thesis to the satisfaction of the PI/Supervisor. A student who is making unsatisfactory progress in relation to the PhD is subject to the normal college rules whereby they may be withdrawn from the register on this basis following submission of an unsatisfactory annual progress report in their first or third year or following the confirmation process in their second year. If a student is not working adequately on the project then this should be dealt with, in the first instance at school level. If the matter is not resolved at this level, the PI/Supervisor may apply to the Dean of Graduate Studies to have the
funding removed from the student for the duration of the award and transferred to another student. This will only happen in the most extreme circumstances and at the sole discretion of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

20. Furthermore, the PI/Supervisor must be cognisant of the fact that the student must be able (i) to produce a PhD which is an original piece of research and (ii) at least have the capacity to publish from that PhD either alone or jointly with their supervisor or others. In some disciplines, where the convention following completion of a PhD is that the student publish an original monograph, or a series of single-authored journal articles, this may mean that it will be necessary for a PhD student to be hired to work on the project but to do their PhD in a cognate but non-identical area. Finally, students hired under this scheme and their supervisors, are subject to normal college procedures in relation to (a) the fulfilment of the structured PhD including taught modules on the structured PhD (b) data curation and (c) data management.

21. Where a student is recruited by a successful PI, it is entirely possible for the student to be co-supervised by that PI (who must be the student’s Principal Supervisor) and by another member/members of staff (including staff at “Professor of” or “Professor in” level). Indeed this will inevitably be the case where the successful application for a Provost’s Project Award is a joint one. In such circumstances, however, it is not permissible for the student to be expected to do additional, unpaid research work for that co-supervisor.

22. Whereas a student hired under the scheme may do a reasonable amount of teaching assistance/demonstration work in the school in which they are based, this cannot be on an unpaid basis.

23. Successful PIs will be expected to complete a report following the four-year process outlining the progress of the research project and the manner in which the hired student has contributed to and advanced the project. Finally both successful PIs and hired students may be asked to meet with interested alumni or to work with the Communications Office to discuss the project.