



GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 9am on Thursday 22nd February 2018
Boardroom, Provost's House

XX = Council relevance

- Present:** Professor Neville Cox, Dean of Graduate Studies (*Chair*)
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
Professor Sinéad Roden, School of Business
Professor Dónall Mac Dónaill, School of Chemistry
Professor Owen Conlan, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Paula Quigley, School of Creative Arts
Professor Michael O'Sullivan, School of Dental Science
Professor John Walsh, School of Education
Professor Philip Coleman, School of English
Professor Eunan O'Halpin, School of Histories & Humanities
Professor Justin Doherty, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
Professor Lorna Carson, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences
Professor Deirdre Ahern, School of Law
Professor Andreea Nicoara, School of Mathematics
Professor Mary Bourke, School of Natural Sciences
Professor John Gilmer, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Mauro Ferreira, School of Physics
Professor Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Professor Agustin Benetrix, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy
Professor Virpi Timonen, School of Social Work and Social Policy
- Mr **Shane Collins**, Graduate Students' Union President (*Ex officio*)
Mr Madhav Bhargav, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President (*Ex officio*)
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary, CAPSL Representative (*Ex officio*)
Dr John O'Neill, Director of Academic Affairs, TT&L (in attendance)
Ms Helen Thornbury (Office of Dean of Graduate Studies) (*Ex officio*)
Ms Ewa Sadowska (Academic Affairs, Trinity Teaching and Learning), Secretary (*Ex officio*)

Apologies:

- Professor Linda Doyle, Dean of Research (*Ex officio*)
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:



Professor Rachel Mary McLoughlin, School of Biochemistry and Immunology

Professor Richard Reilly, School of Engineering

Professor Seamus Joseph Martin, School of Genetics and Microbiology

Professor Stephen Smith, School of Medicine

Professor Fiona Timmins, School of Nursing and Midwifery

Professor David Shepherd, Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology

Ms Siobhan Dunne, Sub-Librarian for Teaching, Research and User Experience (in attendance *Ex officio*)

Ms Helen O'Hara, Information Technology Services Representative (in attendance *Ex officio*)

In attendance:

Leona Coady (Director of Academic Registry)

for item GS/17-18/155

GS/17-18/156 Minutes of 25th January 2018

The minutes were approved as circulated.

GS/17-18/157 Matters Arising

Re: GS/17-18/138 A new course proposal: Postgraduate Certificate in Biological Psychiatry: The Dean advised that a positive review of the course had been returned by an external reviewer, and the proposal would be submitted to the next Council.

Re: GS/17-18/141 A new course proposal: MSc in Electronic Information Engineering: The Dean advised that a positive review of the course had been returned by an external reviewer, and the proposal would be submitted to the next Council.

Re: GS/17-18/142 A new course proposal: Dental Public Health strand of Doctorate in Dental Surgery (D.Ch.Dent.): The Dean advised that a positive review of the course had been returned by an external reviewer, and the proposal would be submitted to the next Council.

Re: GS/17-18/148 A new course proposal: MSc in Addiction Recovery: The Dean advised that the course proposal had been sent out to an external reviewer.

Re: GS/17-18/149 A new course proposal: MSc in Mechanical Engineering: The Dean advised that an external reviewer was being identified for this course proposal as two experts approached declined the request. Concern was raised about the resulting delay, and the Dean advised that going forward it should be possible to approach an external examiner at the same time as the proposal was going to the GSC.



Re: GS/17-18/150 Fitness to Study Policy: The Dean advised that Council approved the policy at its last meeting.

XX GS/17-18/158 A new MEd strand proposal: Psychology of Education

The Dean explained that Prof. Stephen Minton was not in a position to attend, and that the new strand proposal would be presented by Prof. John Walsh, DTLP from the School of Education, from the floor. The Dean explained that he felt that a more formal discussion was needed about the proposal than would normally be the case because there were a significant number of new taught credits within the course. By way of background, the Dean noted that the School of Education had two types of postgraduate taught qualification in place, namely the Professional Master of Education (PME) for students wishing to work as post-primary school teachers in Ireland, and the MEd programme for those who wish to develop their own knowledge and practice in the general area of education. The new strand belonged to the latter programme.

The Dean briefly summarised the strand, taking the proposal as read. He noted that the new strand would lead to the same degree award as the existing 'parent' MEd course, would have the same course structure, duration and delivery formats, admissions criteria, assessment model, fees, the same external examiner and would be coordinated by the same course committee. It was for that reason that the Dean proposed that the proposal could be regarded as a strand (rather than a new course), and would not need to be submitted for an external review. He further noted that the strand would have its own strand coordinator, and its structure would comprise 55 new credits allocated to four new taught modules in the area of psychology of education.

Prof. Walsh clarified that the new strand fits in well with the broad MEd programme already comprising eleven specialisms. He noted that the new strand fulfilled the School's commitment to introduce four new strands within three years to make the MEd course distinct from the PME course. The new strand would foster a critical understanding of educational research, policy and practice in psychology of education. Prof. Walsh noted that classroom teachers would have studied psychology in their initial teacher education but due to the nature of that provision, the depth and breadth of psychology covered in such programmes were introductory in nature. In contrast, the strand had been designed to promote deeper, broader and more critical engagement with the subject studied in the first year of the programme. In the first of bespoke taught modules, the individual, and the psychology of individual differences, was approached. In subsequent modules, the various psychosocial contexts in which individuals were embedded were considered. With methods particular to psychological research, including experimental and survey design, and quantitative and qualitative research and analysis, having been studied in the taught components, in their final, ordinarily second, year of study, students would undertake a 20,000 word dissertation.

In relation to a query from the Academic Secretary, the DTLP from the School of Psychology confirmed that the new strand did not compete with any modules or



programmes offered by the School which welcomed it as a very coherent offering directed towards educational practitioners.

The committee recommended that the strand proposal be submitted directly to the next University Council, and that it would not need to be submitted for external review.

XX **GS/17-18/159 Academic Registry Annual Report 2016/17**

The Dean welcomed Leona Coady, Director of Academic Registry, to speak to the circulated *Academic Registry Annual Report 2016/17*, already considered by the last Council. By way of background, the Dean noted that in previous years, the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies had produced annual reports which were compilations of data relevant to their area of work. In late 2016, it was decided that, from the 2017/18 academic year onwards this would change, because the data tended to be generated from within the work of the Academic Registry (AR). Thus for 2016/17, the Academic Registry had just produced its own first annual report, and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Dean of Graduate Studies were tasked with producing their own reports for that year containing, amongst other things, an analytical narrative in respect of the data contained in the AR 2016/17 report. These reports were being brought to the USC and the GSC, respectively, for discussion and, subsequently, to the University Council. The AR report was also going to both the GSC and the USC but from next year, it would go to those committees before proceeding to the University Council.

The AR Director referred firstly to the structure of the report, and then concentrated on the evolution of the AR since its establishment in 2013, its subsequent period of consolidation and enhancement, with restructured activities providing for closer integration in 2016, and a break-through year 2017 as a service-focused area. She highlighted the wide spectrum of AR services and key achievements of the area, including improvements to the processing time for, especially, student cases, the registration continuous improvement project, and the *people first programme* for the AR staff.

The AR Director drew members' attention to the postgraduate admissions data, and stated that overall, PGT programmes had a conversion rate of approximately 43% and PGR applications had a conversion rate of 39% in 2016/17. She also noted a swing in the composition of the postgraduate student body of 3% towards PGT and 2% towards PG Non-EU students. The AR Director further noted the need for a College-wide integrated admissions strategy to enhance operational efficiency within the AR, and enable better delivery of the College strategic plan as the concern was that a new budgetary model to be introduced would further fragment current admissions practices on the ground. She would welcome closer collaboration between the AR and the Global Relations, and noted that in terms of study abroad, postgraduate exchanges were very de-centralised and their visibility should be promoted centrally to enhance the student experience.



In terms of key messages resulting from the work on the first AR report, the AR Director drew members' attention to a significant amount of data collected after the implementation of the new plagiarism policy in 2016 which offered an opportunity for an insightful analysis, and that there had been a continuous four-fold increase in the number of graduation ceremonies, which would need to be monitored in terms of staff availability and venue capacity. She concluded her presentation by noting that the report had been a positive learning experience and a significant learning curve for the AR staff, and that she welcomed additional feedback with a view to further improving future reports.

In a discussion which ensued a number of issues were raised and comments made.

In response to a query whether the AR planned to roll out to Schools guidelines how to respond to the forthcoming General Data Protection Regulation to ensure that they conformed to the legislation, the AR Director stated that College had recently appointed an Information Compliance Officer who would assist the College and its staff in complying with the data protection.

With respect to a query about her view that there should be a more integrated admissions strategy, the AR Director explained that there were currently a number of strategies in place separately covering recruitment within the domestic undergraduate market, postgraduate research, postgraduate taught and Non-EU targets, and that there were no clear postgraduate quotas unlike the UG CAO ones. She advised that it would be useful to hold a discussion about a future preferred composition of the student body to provide a sound basis for the proposed College-wide strategy. A comment was made that different policy dictates were appropriate for different recruitment cohorts, and that one strategy might be too inflexible and therefore counter-productive.

In response to a query seeking explanation why a five year window was taken as a basis for data comparison (between 2012/13 and 2016/17), the AR Director explained that data swings were very small when compared on an annual basis. She also clarified that data referring to external examining of research theses was excluded from the AR report as the process did not belong to the AR.

The issue of KPIs in the AR came up for a broader discussion. It was noted that a lot of reporting had been around the KPIs in the AR but concerns were raised in some Schools that tickets appear to have been closed down before issues were clarified. The turn-around of processing Non-EU applications mandated by Council based on the 10/10 split i.e. ten days in the Schools and further ten days in the AR was deemed unduly long and resulting in the loss of applicants. The view was that the bulk of the work was being done at the School level, and the AR should not require another ten days to send out an offer to School-approved applicants even accounting for time needed in the AR for extra checks on the recommended offers in terms of their compliance with admissions criteria. Competition for Non-EU applicants was extremely intense globally, and Trinity should be in a position to issue offers much sooner than it currently does. The AR Director assured members that KPIs were being reviewed going forward. A general view was expressed that if



College was serious about expanding PGT student numbers, the admissions team in the AR would have to be correspondingly expanded.

Some concern was raised about the length of time it took for postgraduate student cases to be dealt with in the AR. The AR Director explained that the activity leader of the postgraduate team had recently moved to another position in College, and the team was being skilled up to adequately support postgraduate student cases.

The AR Director also highlighted the increase in tuition fee income and the significant reduction in tuition debt over the prior year. In response to a query, she clarified that that had been possible due to a much more active engagement of the AR team with students to follow up on their outstanding debt.

The Dean thanked the AR Director for the report and noted the usefulness of having all the data presented in one report. Members were invited to provide further comments or requests for more granular analyses in the future reports directly to the AR Director.

XX GS/17-18/160 Dean of Graduate Studies' Annual Report 2016/17

The Dean noted that his 2015/16 report was the last one presented in the old format and that, from the current academic year, statistical data relevant for postgraduate students from the AR report would be taken as a basis for the Dean's report intended as a commentary on the AR report.

The Dean drew members' attention that his report was in a draft form. He noted the report's format consisting of three sections; the first focuses on the AR elements and other pertinent data; the second considers other aspects of the work of graduate studies in the 2016/17 year; the third looks speculatively ahead to challenges that are emerging. The Dean asked for comments on the report so that they could be included before it went to Council in March.

The Dean went through the Sections commenting on issues of particular interest.

He noted that whilst PGT application numbers had increased, across all three faculties the percentage of candidates who were made an offer and then proceed to register as a student in Trinity had fallen. The reasons for the decline in registrations were unclear as there was no data gathered on the reason/s why candidates declined their offers or failed to register. He stated that one might speculate that applicants would possibly have applied to more than one university or might have applied and only subsequently appreciated the living costs in Dublin but without actually surveying such applicants to discover what the issue were definite reasons were unclear.

The Dean noted very positive feedback from the Global Relations team that the upshot of the 2016 University Council's *ten days turn-around rule* had been a marked improvement in the speed with which applications were processed by Schools.



The Dean focused on the comparative data on PGR applications, offers and registrations for 2012/13 and 2016/17 which showed that whilst there had been an increase in applications for the research register across all faculties the percentage of candidates who accepted their offers and registered for year 1 in 2016/17 had fallen from 57% in 2012/13 to 39%. Part of that decrease might have resulted from the unavailability of adequate funding in the sciences where PhD candidates were normally fully funded for the duration of their studies. For normally self-funding candidates in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences fields the reduction in the amounts payable under the local authority/SUSI grants coupled with the significant increase in living costs in the period between 2012/13 and 2016/17 might have contributed to the lower take up of offers. Two additional suggestions were made namely that the concept of PhD as a career enabler had faded, and that in the current post-recession age with plentiful job opportunities there was more motivation for candidates to find a job rather than commit to four years of demanding PhD study. The disturbing shortage of funding for pure science might also lead PIs of grants to decide that it would make more sense to fund a postdoctoral employee than a few PhD students. IT was also possible that PIs of grants might prefer to employ a post-doc than to hire a few PhD students to work on a project. In any event, the fall in the number of PhD students was a concern. The Dean further noted that PhD students were always integral to research in Trinity and employed as teaching assistants in Schools.

In a discussion which followed concern was expressed that the pool of PGR applicants had been shrinking whereas targets in the new forthcoming budgetary model were increasing penalising Schools for underperformance. The relentless pressure could exacerbate the already existing feeling that “weak” research applicants were being accepted.

The Dean referred to a number of PGT courses which continued to run with fewer than ten registered students annually. The majority were undergoing internal strategic review with a view to restructuring small individual courses into specialised strands of an overall parent course. The Dean emphasised that the PGT landscape should be re-imagined and re-positioned to ensure an alignment with the requirements of markets.

Members generally recognised that PGT students were bringing significant income to College, but emphasised that the growth would need to be quality-led covering not only academic quality but also quality of facilities, and therefore income raised from that source should be re-invested into the services to enhance Trinity’s reputation as a provider of quality education.

A broad discussion ensued about postgraduate research examinations data where more granularity would have been preferred. The Dean noted that when compared with the 2015/16 data from *Dean of Graduate Studies Annual Report 2015-16* fewer students were completing the examination process within the optimum six-month period, and there had been a slight increase in the percentage of examinations that were taking over one year to complete. It was noted that research examinations data were currently gathered manually but should be gradually going into SITS enabling automatic downloads for more in-depth analysis in the future.



A number of concerns were raised by the DTLP in the School of Pharmacy in that PGT courses in Trinity were 20% more expensive than those offered by Trinity's competitors, and the number of applicants, especially from Ireland, was continuously going down. In order to compensate for the loss of the revenue more Non-EU students were being accepted as part of the Global Relations strategy. This domination of the Non-EU contingent on Pharmacy PGT courses, however, appears to have a negative impact on the learning experience of Irish students who complain about the non-native level of English of the Non-EU cohort and its generally lower academic ability. The DTLP also noted that the number of research students was down in Pharmacy by half to 30 students. Increasingly, it appears that the School was taking on students who could afford doing PhD rather than the best applicants given the lack of adequate funding for all eligible applicants. He suggested that some linkage should be set up between the GSC and the Research Committee where such issues were being discussed in more detail.

A DTLP from the School of Dental Science expressed a deep concern with unduly protracted completion of the research examination process. He explained that doctoral programmes in dentistry were professional, and until candidates formally graduated they were not eligible for employment. Serious reputation damage was being inflicted on Trinity due to the delays especially when candidates were based over-seas. He stated that he had already discussed the issue with the AR Director but was still to see any improvement to the current delays.

An issue of a high number of PG admissions was raised in relation to the "Recognition of Prior Learning" policy implemented in 2016/17. The Dean explained that no distinct applications were made on the basis of the RPL policy but the longstanding practice whereby Course Directors and PIs presented a case to the Dean in support of admitting applicants who did not meet the standard PG minimum requirements for entry remained in place. There were between three and four hundred such cases received and reviewed annually in support of admitting applicants.

The Dean concluded by welcoming more direct comments, thanked the administrative officer of the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies for her assistance with the report, and acknowledged with utmost gratitude the huge amount of work carried out by all DTLPs and course directors/coordinators on behalf of postgraduate students in College.

GS/17-18/161 New Academic Year Structure (AYS) and courts of examiners

The Dean noted that the issue had arisen at the last meeting and, as agreed, he had spoken to the VP/CAO in relation to particular matters then discussed. One big concern pertained to the submission dates for both taught dissertations and research theses under the new AYS. He confirmed that all postgraduate students would continue to be registered from September 1 through to the following August 31, and therefore, the new AYS would have no impact on submission dates for dissertations/theses nor on the availability of Dean's Grace.

The Dean stated that the new AYS would however have an impact on examination dates. The topic of scheduling supplemental examinations was of concern for postgraduate students who might need to sit supplemental examinations in the early



summer where the results of those examinations would determine whether, under course examination rules, they were permitted to proceed to submit a dissertation. However, many postgraduate courses hold their official Court of Examiners *after* the supplemental session, i.e. any time in Michaelmas Term the following year. This timing was problematic in that it would mean that students were deemed to have failed taught modules and were required to re-sit them in the supplemental session but their marks had not been approved for that by courts of examiners. The Dean advised that there should be interim courts of examiners following each exam session. The interim courts would not need to be attended by external examiners if they had already reviewed examination scripts but they would consider student marks moderated by external examiners to determine if taught modules were passed and to enable supplemental exams if they were not. There should be a final court of examiners in Michaelmas Term to approve dissertation and finalise all the marks for a final award. External examiners would have to be present at the final court as a student who fails a dissertation would need to be given the chance to defend his or her work in a *viva voce*. He promised to circulate a memo in relation to this agenda item.

The Dean asked members to consider whether the new AYS poses any particular further concerns in so far as postgraduate courses in their school were concerned. Some DTLPs, from the Schools of Psychology, Business and Education, had indicated that there were issues in their Schools. The Dean suggested he would invite the Head of Business Support & Planning in the AR to the next meeting.

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GS/17-18/162 AOB

- (i) The committee approved a request from Fionnuala Healy, the CEO in the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Hub for an additional entry in March 2018 to the Postgraduate Certificate in Creative Thinking, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (DPCIA-CTIE-1P09) as a result of additional funding from the Springboard initiative.
- (ii) The Dean asked DTLPs to continue encouraging course directors to deal speedily with applications to postgraduate courses and especially from Non-EU applicants.
- (iii) The Dean underlined that acting as an internal examiner of a research thesis is an onerous commitment. He expressed appreciation to colleagues who do so. He noted that the vast majority of theses passed with minor corrections, but frequently examiners were not explicit in their examiners' reports as to the corrections that were required. He asked DTLPs to encourage staff in their schools who were writing such reports, that when minor changes were required, the report be concluded by a clear list of required changes. He noted that when such changes had been marked up in an annotated copy of the thesis returned to the student, the examiner would make this fact clear in his or her report.
- (iv) The Dean advised that the forthcoming highly prestigious LERU doctoral summer school would take place in Leuven from 9-13 July. Trinity was allowed nominate up to five students to go in the hope that one or two would be selected. Three students were selected last year. The Dean expressed his appreciation to Prof. Rachel McLoughlin and Prof. Jean Quigley who would



assist him to review the applications. The Office of the Dean would pay all the costs of the two selected students. The Dean had sent out a call for applications to all students, and he asked DTLPs to encourage applications from within their schools. The summer school's topic would be on *The Global Society - The Importance of Interdisciplinary Collaboration to Tackle Societal Challenges* which should favour a good range of applications.

- (v) The Trinity Graduate Students' Union President sought DTLPs' support in promoting the forthcoming Multidisciplinary Research Showcase event collaboratively organised in mid-March by Trinity Graduate Students' Union and the Dean of Research.

Section B for noting and approval

XX GS/17-18/163 Digital Scholarship Skills

The committee approved changes to the HH7025 module *Digital Scholarship and Skills*, originally approved in October 2017. The module was successfully taught in Michaelmas Term 2017, and would be delivered in a revised format in Hilary Term 2018 with new workshop contents. The proposed changes had been approved by the School of Histories and Humanities on Tuesday, 30 January 2018.

XX GS/17-18/164 Calendar III Change: a new section 5.37. Students with Disabilities

The committee approved a request from the Director of the Disability Service to include a new short section in Calendar Part III regarding students with disabilities. On 17 January 2018, the University Council after consideration by the GSC and the USC, approved the new *Trinity Reasonable Accommodations Policy for Students with Disabilities*, and an associated code of practice as the mechanism by which reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities were to be agreed and implemented. The new Calendar section gives expression to this policy change and reflects College's commitment and legal obligation to ensure that as far as is practicable, teaching, learning and assessment practices in Trinity were inclusive of students with disabilities.

Section C for noting

GS/17-18/165 Disability Service Guidelines for requests for Examination Accommodations 2018/19

The committee noted dates and changes in granting examination accommodations for the 2018/19 academic year as indicated in a memorandum jointly submitted by the Director of the Disability Service and the Director of the Academic Registry in response to the new academic year structure.

GS/17-18/166 The committee noted Minutes of the Marino Institute of Education, Associated College Degrees Committee (MIE ACDC) of 29 November 2017.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10.55am.

Prof. Neville Cox

Date: 22 February 2018