



GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Draft Minutes of the meeting held at 10am on Thursday 27 September 2018
Boardroom, Provost's House

XX = Council relevance

- Present:** Professor Neville Cox, Dean of Graduate Studies (Chair)
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 John Boland, 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 Keith Johnston, School of Education
Professor Philip Coleman, School of English
Professor Matthew Campbell, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Ashley Clements, School of Histories & Humanities
Professor Justin Doherty, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
Professor Deirdre Ahern, School of Law
Professor John Saeed, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences
Professor Andreea Nicoara, School of Mathematics
Professor Stephen Smith, School of Medicine
Professor Mary Bourke, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Cristin Ryan, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Mauro Ferreira, School of Physics
Professor Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Professor David Shepherd, Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology
Professor Thomas Chadefaux, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy
Professor Paula Mayock, School of Social Work and Social Policy
- Mr Oisin Coulter, Graduate Students' Union President (Ex officio)
Dr Gogoal Falia, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President (Ex officio)
Ms Siobhan Dunne, Sub-Librarian for Teaching, Research and User Experience (in attendance Ex officio)
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary, CAPSL Representative (in attendance Ex officio)
Ms Helen O'Hara, Information Technology Services Representative (in attendance Ex officio)
Breda Walls, Director of Student Services (in attendance Ex officio)



Mr Martin McAndrew, Postgraduate Student Support Officer
(in attendance *Ex officio*)
Dr Jake Byrne, Academic Director, Tangent (in attendance *Ex officio*)
Ms Helen Thornbury (Office of Dean of Graduate Studies)
(in attendance *Ex officio*)
Ms Ewa Sadowska (Academic Affairs, Trinity Teaching and Learning),
Secretary (in attendance *Ex officio*)

Apologies:

Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
Professor Sinéad Roden, Trinity Business School
Professor Richard Reilly, School of Engineering
Professor Fiona Timmins, School of Nursing and Midwifery

In attendance:

Dr Daniel Rogers, Programme Manager (Tangent) for item GS/18-19/213
Ms Beibhinn Coman, Director of Marketing (TCD Global) for item GS/18-19/214
Ms Roisin Smith, Quality Officer, (Trinity Teaching and Learning)
for item GS/18-19/216

The Dean cordially welcomed new members to the committee and invited all members to introduce themselves.

GS/18-19/210 Minutes of 17th May 2018

The minutes were approved as circulated.

GS/18-19/211 Matters Arising

Re: GS/17-18/186 A new interdisciplinary course proposal: MPhil in Medieval Studies: The Dean advised that Council had approved the proposal at its meeting in June.

Re: GS/17-18/189 PhD by publication: The Dean advised that terms of reference of the working group would be expanded and that it would meet shortly.

Re: GS/17-18/193 Structured PhD module in "Research Integrity and Impact in an Open Scholarship Era": The Dean advised that the module was in the final stages of being built, and that he would alert members when it was ready for students to log in. Students were automatically registered on the module and would need to complete it before they were confirmed on the register in their second year.

Re: GS/17-18/197 A new MSc course proposal in Diagnostic Radiography: The Dean advised that Council had approved the proposal at its meeting earlier in September.

Re: GS/17-18/199 Programme Handbook policy: The Dean advised that Council had approved the policy at its meeting in June.



Re: GS/17-18/200 Provost's Project Awards: The Dean advised that the Provost Projects Award scheme 2018/19 was well under way, and that applications had closed. He confirmed that last year's feedback from the committee had been reflected in the new call. Around one hundred and seventy five applications from across the three faculties were submitted for the forty project awards. Applications from each faculty would be initially screened internally by respective faculties. The shortlist of around sixty proposals would be considered by a full committee at the College level by mid-November to enable prompt recruitment of students into the successful projects.

Re: GS/17-18/202 AOB

(vii): The Dean advised that PG examinations would have to be conducted within the College-indicated examination periods but deadlines for assignments on PGT courses were not linked to those periods.

(iv): The Dean confirmed that, from next year, a letter would go out to successful applicants for postgraduate study from his office within 2 weeks of applicant's acceptance of an unconditional offer.

(vii): The Dean thanked everyone who had supported the PG team cycling the Wicklow 200 cycle in June for the Postgraduate Advisory Service (PAS) hardship fund which had raised over €6k for students in dire financial need.

XX **GS/18-19/212 Review of application and admission procedure**

This item involved a review of the experience within schools of the postgraduate application process for the 2018-19 academic year, with a view to identifying systemic concerns that had arisen in order to suggest possible ways to enhance the process going forward. Based on emails received in advance of the meeting with comments reflecting soundings taken within Schools, the Dean referred to the following issues which also attracted discussion from the floor:

Issues pertaining to Reference Requirements

- (i) The Dean noted that, during the summer, he had liaised with the Academic Registry (AR) to ensure that referees would not have to physically sign a reference in order for it to be accepted. It was also agreed that, if this was endorsed by a Course co-ordinator/director, it would be possible for an applicant to submit one academic and one professional reference. The question was raised, however, as to whether, for certain courses, the Dean could, in advance, authorise AR to admit a student on submission of *two* professional references – in circumstances where this was appropriate and also approved by the course co-ordinator/director;
- (ii) The question was raised as to whether a pdf or word file of a standard reference template could be circulated as sometimes firewalls block the template email sent to referees;

Communications to Assessors/Applicants

- (iii) It was suggested that there might helpfully be more detailed instructions generated by the system for applicants and assessors guiding them more



- clearly through stages of the application process; there should be some mechanism within the system for assessors that clearly indicates what is outstanding on the application and prompting them to act;
- (iv) It was requested that AR provide assessors with a clearer timeline for the process i.e. estimated timelines of the steps in the process i.e., after acceptance it may take 'x' amount of days for ATR to pick up and then 'x' amount of days after tuition payment for invite to register to issue, which would help manage student expectations;
 - (v) sometimes conditions imposed on entry by AR are not clear to assessors and they must run a full report which would not need to be required if assessors could be copied into the AR correspondence with applicants;

Miscellaneous

- (vi) It was suggested that processing time can be too lengthy especially affecting applicants who apply late or who need visas; long delays may overturn unconditional offers;
- (vii) the document upload list at the end of the application does not appear to have been updated since it was created in the GeneSIS project; there are a few very similar entries which can mean a document type is not correctly matched - the list should be revised;
- (viii) the Source of Interest list also does not appear to have been updated in a number of years; the list can be useful for planning marketing campaigns as it is a mandatory field – since Schools are using new methods of marketing to students this can show them what is working;
- (ix) It was suggested that AR might set up a facility for special or preferential cases where there is an emergency issue, i.e. where the applicant needs expedited offer to get funding or a visa;
- (x) It was suggested that rather than all forms i.e. transcripts, references, certificates, being produced as individual documents, it might be better if the application was uploaded as a single pdf document with a checklist for the applicant to ensure that all parts are present; applicants would be required to put all parts into one pdf file and upload it or alternatively, AR could combine all documents into one single pdf file for Schools;

Most of the discussion focused on the incompleteness of applications. It was noted that this year the number of incomplete applications appears to have increased. One member clarified that applications might be incomplete for various reasons such as applicant awaiting a degree result or being requested to upload a writing sample. The Dean suggested he would send out an email to outline a preferred way to address the issues raised and to firm up what constituted a complete application that could be sent for review by assessors.

Another member raised an issue of rolling admissions suggesting that recruitment to a fixed deadline in some PGT courses would enhance their international standing. The Dean noted that, in June 2016, Council had approved the current approach whereby non-EU applications had to be considered promptly and on a rolling basis. He further noted that any change to this procedure for an individual course would, therefore, need to be approved by Council.



Finally, it was decided that the issue of accepting two professional references instead of two academic ones as well as other broad questions in relation to PG admissions would be discussed at the next meeting.

A number of comments were also made with respect to postgraduate research students. In particular this flowed from the systems changes last year that mean that, before a continuing PGR student can be registered for a subsequent year, it is necessary that Schools confirm that the requirements of the structured PhD from the *previous* year are fulfilled. It was suggested that rather than filling out spreadsheets, DTLPs should be allowed to input directly into student records. Timing within Schools of confirmation hearings within the first 18 months was discussed at length with some members noting that due to delays with collection of data sometimes the hearing could be moved towards the end of year 2. It was noted, however, that the difficulty with this is that, should a student not be approved during the confirmation process [s]he should have time to write up his or her thesis for a 'lower degree' before the end of his or her second year on the register.

In this regard, an issue was raised that characterising a research MSc or MLitt as a lower degree was highly problematic as it implied that Masters degrees were inferior degrees vis-à-vis a PhD degree whereas in arts and humanities an MLitt is a substantial degree in itself with a word count of 60,000 words against 80,000 for a PhD thesis, and many students enter the Masters register intentionally.

Some confusion to do with research application deadlines was also noted. The Dean recommended that applicants should be directed to respective School websites, and that current information at the College-level should be reviewed to ensure that it clearly advises applicants that even though there is no deadline as such to apply for the research register there are only two registration points to register from. The DTLP from the School of Medicine offered to email members the bespoke information page for research applicants in his School as an example. The Dean noted that, because certain funders start to fund students from January of a calendar year, therefore there was an argument for Trinity operating a *third* starting date for PGR students in January. This issue will be discussed at the next GSC meeting.

Finally, the Dean has undertaken to pass the feedback directly to the AR Director. He acknowledged that the Academic Registry had limited staff resources and TEP was a priority. He extended thanks of appreciation for highly competent and prompt work via the Director of Student Services to Ella Halfacree, Ciaran O'Brien and Kathryn Walsh in processing applications, and to Jennifer Pepper, Head of Operations, for her efficient problem-solving. Overall, while members echoed the Dean's comments about the very helpful assistance provided by individual staff in AR, it was noted that the processing time involved had led to problems retaining applicants, especially non-EU and/or those who applied very close to the final deadline and thus had a limited window to secure visas.

XX GS/18-19/213 Tangent, Trinity's Ideas' Workspace – Overview of a new unit
The Dean welcomed Dr Daniel Rogers, Programme Manager from Tangent. Dr Rogers spoke to his power-point presentation and explained the context and



background in which Tangent operates noting that Tangent was concentrating on the intersection between innovation and entrepreneurship. Tangent aims to become a thought leader in training by 2020. Dr Rogers emphasised that Tangent's goals were aligned with Trinity strategy. The Dean noted that the link between industry and innovation forged by Tangent was a great opportunity for postgraduate students. In response to queries from the floor Dr Rogers explained that Tangent aims to work in partnership with Trinity Research and Innovation unit in College and play a constructive role in the Grand Canal Innovation District. Tangent was set up outside the School structure and was governed by its own Board headed by an academic director. The Dean thanked Dr Rogers for his presentation, and wished the new director, who is also a member of the Graduate Studies Committee, success in the role.

GS/18-19/214 Marketing of postgraduate courses

The Dean welcomed Ms Beibhinn Coman, Director of Marketing (TCD Global) to outline how more successful marketing of PGT courses would grow student numbers. He advised that he would be organising a workshop for all PGT course directors/DTLPs/interested bystanders on the marketing issue in November.

The Director of Marketing spoke to a short power-point presentation. She clarified that the recently developed UG and PGT marketing strategy would go to Board in November. She referred to the strategy aims, outlined current postgraduate marketing activities, explained how to enhance postgraduate courses' websites, and invited members to contribute to the Marketing Forum. She emphasised the importance of digital analytics to be enhanced on every page to make interest in Trinity offerings more measurable. She clarified that there was no marketing budget for PGR in place yet. She encouraged Schools to apply for Gradireland Higher Education Awards with their courses and undertook to find out how the assessment process worked. Finally, she kindly offered to work with all Schools in relation to their marketing of PG courses and in terms of their course webpages. The Dean thanked the Director of Marketing for her concise but inspiring marketing update.

XX GS/18-19/215 Categories of structured modules and their registration in SITS

This item was a continuation of *Re: GS/17-18/198*. Firstly, the Dean reminded members that the committee had confirmed at its May meeting that from the academic year 2018/19 the AR would capture in SITS the registration of incoming PhD students on structured PhD credit-bearing modules which would fall, roughly, into five categories. He subsequently proposed the following ways for submission of the respective module categories to the GSC:

Category 1 Modules offered as part of taught postgraduate courses will be captured in SITS by the Academic Registry as part of a set up for a new course proposal – no change required. Such modules are coded to the School which owns the module as stated in the course proposal.

Category 2 Modules, typically research skills modules offered to student groups in a School or discipline will be coded to the School and continue to be considered by the Graduate Studies Committee on the basis of the existing template normally as an agenda B item.



Category 3 Modules, bespoke modules tailored to individual students' needs will be coded to the School registering the student and will be considered by the Graduate Studies Committee on the basis of a modified existing template normally as an agenda B item. PhD supervisors of individual students will be responsible for inputting into SITS the results for such modules.

Category 4 and Category 5 Modules have no School ownership in Trinity and will belong to the so called "Dean's Basket" to be coded to the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Category 4 Modules delivered by 'non-School' units internal to Trinity will continue to be considered by the Graduate Studies Committee on the basis of the existing template normally as an agenda B item. Module coordinators will be responsible for inputting results into SITS.

Category 5 Modules delivered by 'non-School' bodies external to Trinity will be considered by the Graduate Studies Committee on the basis of a detailed memo/letter from the offering body normally as an agenda B item. PhD supervisors of individual students will be responsible for inputting into SITS the results for these modules.

Categories 2-5 Modules will be recommended by the Graduate Studies Committee for approval to the University Council by way of GSC minutes which, once approved by Council, will provide legitimacy for the Academic Registry for coding them in SITS.

The Dean reminded members that all new modules going forward and modules currently on offer without the GSC/Council approval would have to be submitted to next meetings of GSC before they could be coded in SITS. Finally, he noted with gratitude the work of Ewa Sadowska in dealing with all of these issues and in the preparation of the relevant memo.

XX **GS/18-19/216 QQI Ireland's Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes**

The Dean welcomed Ms Roisin Smith, Quality Officer, Trinity Teaching and Learning, in attendance for the item. The Dean explained that the QQI had produced a draft *Code of Practice* for research degrees for comments but gave HEIs less than two weeks to return their feedback. The *Code* was intended as standard by which HEIs would be judged. The Dean had already collected comments in advance of the meeting in response to his early email and opened the floor for discussion in the presence of the Quality Officer whose task was to compile Trinity's response for the QQI. The following comments were made:

- (i) The *Code of Practice* is a thorough document but by outlining in such details the parameters of the current aspirational good practice model it might be limiting development opportunities in individual institutions going forward.
- (ii) The *Code* model is strongly resource-contingent. Currently, limited resources of HEIs prevent them from implementing all its recommendations. It would be very important for the *Code* to be clear that its objectives were resource dependent.
- (iii) Page 11 "Assessment processes ensure that elements or all of a doctoral thesis is of publishable quality." – that is currently not a requirement across disciplines.



Item 1

- (iv) Page 18 “Research community” – a vibrant research community is not always present in small/niche disciplines and it is normally difficult for such disciplines to have supports in place to enable students to attend conference and facilitate access to research networks.
- (v) Page 33 “Availability of the resources necessary to conduct the research” - student financial supports vary in HEIs and might not match the equivalent to minimum nationally-funded grants as there is wide variability in minimum levels of grant funding across institutions; the research experience of research students varies by their funding status which may be funded, unfunded, adequately funded or inadequately funded.
- (vi) Page 34 “Supervision/The HEI clearly defines the composition of a supervisory team.” – The Trinity Policy on Postgraduate Research Supervision allows for various supervision models depending on the nature of the project or the needs of the individual student.
- (vii) Page 41 “Qualifications required (e.g. normally qualified to at least the equivalent NFQ level of the award sought by the research student)” – might not be possible in a niche discipline where a recognised expert might not have a PhD.
- (viii) Page 42 “A mix of genders is represented across the examiners and Chair.” – the Committee agreed that, whereas, of course, gender balancing was generally desirable, it was not necessary and would be counter-productive in circumstances where the only available internal examiner and the ideal external examiner were of the same gender.
- (ix) Page 15 “The HEI provides appropriate levels of personal and pastoral support for students.” Whereas the committee agreed in principle with this, it was noted that it is not necessarily a good idea to link the supervision and pastoral care processes.
- (x) Page 20 “Provision of opportunities for development”. It was noted that, whereas it was important to provide generic skills training for PhD students, the risk of overloading students with such training to the detriment of their theses should be avoided.
- (xi) Page 24 “the admission of a research student may be required at any time throughout the academic year” – this implies rolling admission throughout the academic year which might not be administratively feasible.
- (xii) Page 24 “There is a mechanism that identifies students who work outside research groups”. It was noted, in this regard, that this description would apply to most students in FAHSS.
- (xiii) Page 28 “Minimum standards for language competence are consistently applied across the HEI, which corresponds to that required to successfully engage with the RDP, allowing for higher requirements, where approved by the HEA, as being appropriate for specific disciplines.” – it is not clear what this recommendation implies as it can be taken to mean that a research student should have minimum basis language competency on entry while language requirements to effectively operate within their chosen discipline of research would be higher.

In a short discussion which followed, the Dean clarified that Trinity had its own research code of practice and should there be a conflict between the QQI *Code* and Trinity *Code* it is the Trinity document which prevails. All members agreed that the



sentiment of the QQI Code was commendable but that it was arguably too prescriptive and very considerably too detailed.

GS/18-19/217 Graduate Studies Committee self-evaluation survey 2017/18

This item was a continuation of *Re: GS/17-18/201*. The Dean thanked members for completing the annual self-evaluation survey, a requirement for each principal Committee in College, of the GSC work in 2017/18. The main conclusion which was drawn from the responses was that the committee wished to be more efficient in doing its business and less distracted by less important issues. The Dean noted that many of the comments in the survey expressed huge admiration for the work of Ms Sadowska and Ms Thornbury – a sentiment that he wholeheartedly endorsed.

XX GS/18-19/218 AOB

- (i) It was agreed to recommend that a course handbook template be set up with generic rubrics automatically populated for use by PGT course coordinators. It was also suggested that inclusion of bespoke professional discipline-specific images should be acceptable on the handbook covers.
- (ii) In response to a request from a member, it was agreed to review arrangements Trinity makes with external bodies *re* external supervision to protect Trinity students when such relationships break down. This will be discussed at the next meeting
- (iii) The Dean extended thanks to Ms Thornbury for her work on the Graduate Studies PG Handbook due to be circulated shortly.
- (iv) The Dean congratulated Prof. Mauro Ferreira, DTLP from the School of Physics on being awarded the Order of Rio Branco, a honorific title awarded to Brazilian and foreign nationals in recognition for their outstanding achievements in the representation of Brazil abroad. The award recognises Prof. Ferreira's numerous connections with Brazilian Universities and Research Centres. Prof. Ferreira has trained a large number of PhD students and postdoctoral scientists originated from Brazil and established a wide network of collaborators in South America which continue to generate an impressive output of high-quality research of huge value to both Ireland and Brazil.

XX Section B for noting and approval

GS/18-19/219 Stand-alone module for internal PhD students “Techniques and Strategies in Molecular Medicine” from School of Medicine and Clinical Research Development Ireland (CRDI)

The committee approved the new 5 ECTS module for delivery from 2018/19 available to postgraduate students registered at any third level institution in Ireland.

GS/18-19/220 Calendar 3 changes 2019/20

The committee approved Calendar part 3 changes for 2019/20 from the School of Creative Arts with respect to the entry on Home Hewson Scholarship.

Section C for noting

GS/18-19/221 The committee noted Careers Advisory Service, Career Management



System - steering group notes from 23rd April, 2018.

GS/18-19/222 The committee noted Minutes of the Royal Irish Academy of Music Associated College Degrees Committee (RIAM ACDC) of 21 February 2018.

GS/18-19/223 The committee noted the QQI Green Paper on Assessment of Learners and Learning (dated March 2018).

GS/18-19/224 The committee noted the Procedure for Electronic Transfer to External Examiners of Student Exam Scripts and Coursework and a memorandum from Ms Roisin Smith, Quality Officer, dated 4th September, 2018.

GS/18-19/225 The committee noted the Cultural Diversity Working Group Report to Board (dated 28 February 2018).

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11.55am.

Prof. Neville Cox

Date: 27 September 2018