



## GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 10am on Thursday 28 March 2019

Boardroom, Provost's House

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### XX = Council relevance

- Present:** Professor Neville Cox, Dean of Graduate Studies (Chair)  
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:  
Professor Paula Quigley, School of Creative Arts  
Professor Michael O'Sullivan, School of Dental Science  
Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education  
Professor Biswajit Basu School of Engineering  
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 Andreea Nicoara, School of Mathematics  
Professor Stephen Smith, School of Medicine  
Professor Mary Bourke, School of Natural Sciences  
Professor Fiona Timmins, School of Nursing and Midwifery  
Professor Mauro Ferreira, School of Physics  
Professor Jean Quigley, School of Psychology  
Professor Carlo Aldrovandi, School of Religion  
Professor Thomas Chadefaux, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy  
Professor Paula Mayock, School of Social Work and Social Policy
- Dr Jake Byrne, Academic Director, Tangent (in attendance *Ex officio*)  
Dr Gogoal Falia, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President (*Ex officio*)  
Mr Martin McAndrew, Postgraduate Student Support Officer  
(in attendance *Ex officio*)  
Ms Helen O'Hara, Information Technology Services Representative  
(in attendance *Ex officio*)  
Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services (in attendance *Ex officio*)  
Ms Siobhan Dunne, Library (in attendance *Ex officio*)  
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary, CAPSL Representative  
(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:*



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 Joseph McDonagh, Trinity Business School  
Professor John Boland, School of Chemistry  
Professor Owen Conlan, School of Computer Science and Statistics  
Professor John Saeed, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences  
Professor Cristin Ryan, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences  
Mr Oisin Coulter, Graduate Students' Union President (Ex officio)

**In attendance:**

**GS/18-19/273 Minutes of 28 February 2019**

The minutes were approved as circulated.

**GS/18-19/274 Matters Arising**

*Re: GS/18-19/263 A new MSc course proposal in Genomic Medicine: The Dean advised that Council had approved the proposal at its meeting in mid-March.*

*Re: GS/18-19/264 The Dean advised that Council had approved the New Timetabling Policy and Procedures having noted the concerns from the February GSC meeting expressed by the Dean and those raised by the Graduate Students' Union Vice-President.*

**XX GS/18-19/275 Dean of Graduate Studies' Annual Report 2017/18**

The item was carried over from the previous meeting (GS/18-19/267) which discussed parts A and B of the report. The Dean advised that he had revised the report in line with the feedback received at the previous meeting including a suggestion from the Dean of Research to introduce a summary of recommendations at the beginning of the report, so the version circulated for the meeting was the official one. The Dean invited members to concentrate their discussion on part C of the report around five items.

**1. Finances**

The first item was financial in nature. Multiple Schools report problems arising from the fact that, the fees that Trinity charges for PhD students are in excess of the amount of money provided by various external funders (such as SFI or IRC) for fees. Traditionally, where this had happened, Schools made up the shortfall in fees from their own reserves, but this is no longer possible in various Schools and, as a result, the difference between the fees charged and the monies provided by external funders towards fees is made up, in some way, by the student – typically either through deductions from stipend or, more usually, through requiring the student to



provide free teaching assistant/demonstration work. Indeed, this problem is becoming more acute as our fees increase, and thus the gap between these fees and the funders' 'fee allowance' gets larger (and is now roughly €2.5k p/a in some Schools). It is further notable that every other university in Ireland has a mechanism in place for dealing with this issue – either by pitching their PGR fees at the level provided by funders or, alternatively by waiving the fee differential in question. The fact that Trinity has no such mechanism means that it is at a serious risk of rendering itself uncompetitive in attracting top PhD students.

The Dean noted that of course this particular financial issue was contextualised by the reality that for many students, particularly in AHSS, there was the bigger problem that they had *no* external funding. Equally he noted that at least the issue pertaining to shortfalls in fees paid by external funders was more manageable than the broader issue of the absence of funding for students generally. He also pointed to the significance to the university generally of being able to attract grants of this kind.

In a discussion which followed it was noted that in the past there was a match between Trinity PGR fees and the SFI funding but gradually Trinity fees went out of line with what was provided. It is hoped that the IUA Dean's group will lobby funders to increase student stipends, but it is unlikely that Trinity could be successful in persuading funders to match *its* fees.

It was also noted that the SFI (for example) is pushing HEIs to increase their international profile, but does not pay Non EU research fees. Some Schools reported that their PIs turn down deserving Non EU applicants because they cannot afford to pay the difference between the EU and Non EU fees that IRC/SFI provide. Indeed some PIs do not apply to the SFI/IRC for grants because of fee related issues. It is also known that students have refused to accept research grants for the same reason.

Some members remarked that some universities mark *all* PGR students as EU for fee purposes. It is notable that such students do not create more institutional costs than EU and Irish students and hence there is no particular logic (other than seeking fee income) not to do so. The Dean expressed the view that there was considerable force to the argument that all PGR students (EU or Non-EU) should be charged the same fee, pitched at EU levels, as this would help to attract the best possible students. The Postgraduate Student Support Officer noted that some service areas like his own receive additional funding from College to enhance the international student experience and it is therefore essential to ensure that that provision is not affected. The Dean noted, however, that there was no question of abolishing the EU/Non-EU fee distinct in relation to PGT students.

The Dean reported that some students had confided in him that self-funded students frequently find themselves in a financial hardship situation and might appreciate a voucher for College catering or to be allowed to eat on *commons* for free. The latter would have an additional benefit of bringing PGR students into the Scholars' community. The DTLP from the School of English noted that *commons* is a particular kind of institution in Trinity and it might not be possible to accommodate hardship-



affected students in this way but that vouchers for College catering (of the kind that are afforded to Scholars who do not take up the option of eating on *commons*) *would* be a welcome development.

## 2. Equalising the PG space

The Dean expressed the view that, from the perspective of the University centrally, there is a vision of the “normal” student and of ‘the educational model’ and this is based exclusively on the undergraduate student and the undergraduate education model. As was displayed in the context of both the academic year structure and the fixed timetable policy, both of which derived from TEP but were applied (without consultation) both to UG and PG students/curricula, there is, moreover, an assumption that the PG space can be expected to fall in with and is the same as this model. In other words, there is no recognition of the fact that postgraduate education and postgraduate students have different issues, needs and concerns that are not analogous to the undergraduate. The Dean argued that it is critical that the University seek to equalise between the UG and PG spaces – and not least because it is its PG students who pay the most money for their education. As things stand, PG students receive considerably less favourable treatment than their UG counterparts in multiple ways.

- a) Unlike UG students, PG students do not have personal tutors because of limited resources to pay for that and due to an assumption that PG students are older and hence able to better manage in College on their own. This is however short-sighted especially with respect to Non EU students who have proven to require significant supports in College.
- b) Unlike UG students who have the option of sitting *Schol*, PG students do not have the opportunity to receive an equivalent university wide recognition for academic and scholarly achievements.
- c) The extra-curricular life of the University is centred on student societies, but, in the main, these are constructed with the needs and interests of UG students in mind (and are run by and aimed at UG students). There are no centralised efforts to provide an equivalent extra-curricular space constructed for and aimed at the bespoke interests of PG students.

There was agreement that on all those counts, the PG student experience and opportunities should be equalised to those of the UG. The Graduate Students’ Union Vice-President noted that there was only one Postgraduate Student Support Officer in College whereas Non EU students required four times the resources to ensure provision of adequate services to cater for their needs than EU and Irish students. He reported that PGT students had shared with him their impression that Trinity welcomes them primarily as “cash cows”.

In response to a query the Dean explained that to the best of his knowledge LERU universities offer a more satisfying student experience than Trinity in terms of providing bespoke social events for PGR and PGT students. Trinity students do not, in general complain about the quality of education received (or the manner in which they are dealt with at School level) but are profoundly dissatisfied with the way in which they are treated at a central University level. The DTLP from the School of English interjected at that point stating that his School had already candidly



discussed the importance of ensuring quality PG student experience in view of declining student numbers and decided that each new PGT course proposal would have a designated section on how to integrate student experience in with a PGT offering. On a proposal from the Dean it was agreed that, from now on, all new PGT course proposals should have such a section. It was agreed that Schools should share examples of similar good practice.

A suggestion was made that there should be more transparency in budgetary reporting to enable Schools to ring-fence money for events aimed at PG students.

It was also noted that unlike the UG academic year which, effectively, ends following exams in April, the PG year continues until end of August with students being required (at Masters level) to submit dissertations during the summer and PGR students continuing to work on their theses throughout the summer. In other words, it is necessary for the PG extra-curricular space to be a twelve-month thing – and not least because the summer can be an especially lonely time for PG students. In this regard the Dean noted that he was seeking to organise monthly social events for all PG students.

The Director of Student Services reported that a huge number of applications had already come in and that work was going on in the AR to ensure its smooth processing in collaboration with Schools. She stressed the importance of ensuring quality of services and expeditious processing of applications in so far as applicant satisfaction was concerned, and emphasised the role of course directors/primary assessors in this regard. Members expressed their appreciation for individual staff in the current admissions team, especially Kathryn Walsh, Ella Halfacree and Rebecca Brady, for their constructive approach to deal with incoming applications in a timely manner.

### **3. Symbolic messages**

The Dean reported that many academics had expressed their concern that Trinity uses the UG as a main target while leaving the PG as an afterthought and that this message is reinforced in multiple ways by actions that carry clear symbolic messages. This is evident for example in the naming of the recent reform of undergraduate education broadly as Trinity Education Project although it did not cover the PG area. It is also evident in the location (away from front square) of the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies. Members further expressed concern at the fact that, whereas the education group in relation to the *last* strategic plan was co-chaired by the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the education pivot playing into the new College Strategic Plan is chaired only by the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies in spite of its focus on the forthcoming reform of the PG education. Similarly, whereas there is Student Union representation on that group there is no representation from the *Graduate Students' Union*. The Dean noted that these facts carry a deeply unfortunate message as to the respective values of UG and PG education in so far as the University is concerned.



#### 4. Reform

It was agreed that both PGT and PGR are in need of urgent reform. All agreed with that statement, and views were expressed that examples of good practices need to be looked for by making international analyses and comparisons. A PG reform needs to be undertaken without waiting until TEP becomes embedded and should be spear-headed by the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is not possible to predict what outcomes the reform would bring as this would only emerge through a concerted process of consultation and analysis. Concern has been expressed though that academics might not find the time to attend to both UG teaching within the new TEP framework and commit to the time consuming PG reform in parallel. It was acknowledged that it might be difficult to find space for both but thinking and planning could be initiated.

#### 5. Governance of PG Education

The Dean expressed the view, with which members agreed, that the current approach to governance of PG education is dysfunctional and impoverishing. He noted the importance of ensuring that issues arising in the context of PG education would be resolved promptly and effectively. Thus, he recommended that the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies be reconstituted with adequate staff to deal with such issues. He further recommended that the complex business of PGR examinations also be moved from the Academic Registry to the graduate studies office. Finally, he recommended that the new office would have a dedicated administrative officer to manage the staff in this office and also to work with the Dean who is responsible for academic policy in relation to graduate education. All such staff should report to the Dean who should be exclusively responsible for determining their workload. Members supported this view. The Director of Student Services undertook to review the operational aspect of this area in so far as AR is concerned.

**Action GS/18-19/275.1:** The committee recommended Schools should share examples of good practice to organise PG socialising activities.

**Action GS/18-19/275.2:** Schools proposing new PGT courses must include a section on integration of student experience into their PGT course proposals.

**Action GS/18-19/275.3** Director of Student Services to bring the issue of delays with student cases and thesis examination process for review in the AR.

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#### GS/18-19/276 The 1252 award scheme update

The item was carried over from the previous two meetings (GS/18-19/255 and GS/18-19/265). The Dean thanked all members who sent through comments on the awards. He summed up the prevalent suggestions:

- (a) the awards should be for four years. There was a widespread view that College should waive the 4th year tuition fee but, if this were not possible, many members felt that the fourth year fee should come from the stipend.
- (b) the 'one award per School' model should be retained or rather that there should be no fewer than one award per School. Some members recommended abolishing the stipend and doubling the number of awards where they would simply cover fees.



- (c) stipend could be commuted into accommodation offer (or more accurately, students should be given a choice between the two) on the understanding that this suggestion is not in the committee's gift but can only be recommended for consideration by relevant authorities in College.

The Dean noted that it would not be possible to estimate the total value of the awards on an annual basis as the award covers both Non and EU fees and the number of new admissions in each category every year cannot be pre-determined. The difficulty is that the actual stipend is paid out in cash and the amount so paid out since the introduction of Provost's awards has substantially increased as College direct costs. It is therefore unlikely that College will fund any increase in the value of the 1252 stipend, and any change could only be made on the fees' side. However, the current stipend is an issue in any event: it is low, but it creates an impression and an expectation in new coming students that it constitutes a living wage. Thus it would make sense that the concept of the 1252 stipend would need to be reviewed anyway.

It was agreed that the best way forward with the 1252 award scheme would be to recommend that fees should cover four years with the fourth year covered by the 'pot' from which the stipend is drawn. On this basis, the stipend would be re-branded to make it clear that students could not subsist on it. Moreover, the Calendar should be amended to make it clear that PGR students in receipt of 1252 awards would not be required to do any free teaching in Schools. Schools could top that up with additional benefits locally. The recommendation should be passed on for consideration to the Planning Group in the hope that it could be implemented if not from 2019/20 then from 2020/21.

**Decision GS/18-19/276.1:** The committee recommended changes to the 1252 award scheme.

**Action GS/18-19/276.1:** The Dean to liaise with the VP/CAO with the view to this recommendation being brought to the Planning Group and advocate that it should be implemented from 2019/20.

The issue of the 25<sup>th</sup> "1252" award was raised by the Dean and it was agreed to retain it within the Dean's discretion for genuine financial need. The committee voted in favour of the award to be allocated in 2019/20 in the first instance to continuing students especially rising to the 4<sup>th</sup> year. The Dean is to email members with details how Schools can apply for this award to the deadline in May.

**Decision GS/18-19/276.2:** The committee recommended to retain the 25<sup>th</sup> award within Dean's remit for hardship purposes and allocate it to a rising 4<sup>th</sup> year student in the first instance.

**Action GS/18-19/276.2:** The Dean to email application details to members.

## XX **GS/18-19/277 Report of Working Group on Thesis Committees**

The item was carried over from the previous meetings (GS/18-19/244 and GS/18-19/266). The Dean noted that the report of the working group that had been sent out last month and recirculated for the meeting remains the focus for discussion. He



referred to the recent LERU meeting in Dublin in which it was clear that many of our LERU colleagues actually provide PhD students with additional supports on top of the thesis committee or panel supervision model. In other words, the existence of a thesis committee model or equivalent is seen as a standard thing – and a basic measure of best practice. He emphasised that it is a bad practice to have only one supervisor responsible for the student's academic career and pastoral needs. Instead, he advocated that

- a) it works better for students if there are different people catering for their academic and pastoral needs;
- b) there is an inherent risk factor in a power dynamic (that exists within the single supervisor model) whereby only one supervisor is in charge of the student's destiny. He is aware of situations where supervisors are abusing their powers in a way which flagrantly breaches the University's dignity policy, but where it is difficult to take steps because the nature of the power dynamic in the relationship means that the student does not feel that s/he can complain about his/her supervisor.

Members acknowledged that Trinity is resource-constrained, and it would be difficult to ask academics to take on an additional supervisory role. However, means must be found to address the two recommendations of the working group namely that

- (i) all PGR should have pastoral tutors. Given that there are fewer PGR students than PGT students resource implication for College would be less significant. Putting in place pastoral tutors would differentiate the academic responsibility from the pastoral one between two academics who might be from different disciplines. Some members queried whether it might be possible to ask existing UG tutors to take on PGR students into their chambers. Others thought that some academics might want to become PGR tutors even though they are not currently UG tutors.
- (ii) Thesis committee should exclusively deal with academic progress and not with pastoral needs thus providing an extra academic safety net for PGR students. Should it not be possible to set up such a committee a confirmation panel should be appointed as an alternative consultation source to the supervisor from the very start of the student's time on the PhD register to deal with issues of academic progress (this was the primary recommendation of the working group on thesis committees). The role of such a confirmation panel would need to be clarified.

Some members advised that their Schools already had in place double supervision arrangements such as a panel approach in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, doctoral committee in the School of Engineering and confirmation panel in the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy.

The Dean accepted that whereas there was agreement in principle with the suggestions of the working group, equally it would be necessary to have more detail on what the role of an 'early constituted confirmation panel' would entail and, in particular how its advisory and evaluative functions would operate. He agreed to draft a document in this regard for discussion at the next meeting.



**Action GS/18-19/277.1:** The Dean to bring a draft in relation to the details of how the proposals from the working group would operate to the next meeting.

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**GS/18-19/278 AOB**

- (i) The Dean advised that the venue for the 18<sup>th</sup> April meeting would be changed to the Global Room in the Watts Building due to Honorary Commencements taking place in the Provost's Boardroom that day.
- (ii) The Dean updated members on the LERU meeting which took place in mid-March in Dublin. As part of that meeting a seminar on future developments in research supervision was organised in Trinity in the Global Room, and the Dean advised members that the event was well attended.
- (iii) The Dean advised members that he would write to members seeking suggestions as to amendments to the next iteration of the PPA scheme. This will be discussed at the next meeting. He noted that, in one definite amendment, and in order to promote gender equality, the 2019 applications for Provost's PhD Project Awards would be considered anonymously.
- (iv) The Dean thanked members who had volunteered to review applications for the prestigious LERU Research Summer School 2019. Five nominations were made to LERU, and it is expected that at least one would be successful.
- (v) The Dean congratulated the Graduate Students Union on having organised a very successful Research Week.
- (vi) The Dean advised members that the four winners of the PG Teaching Awards were Maedhbh Nic Loclairinn (School of Natural Sciences), Declan Cahill (Trinity Business School), Samantha Fazekas (School of Social Sciences and Philosophy) and Shelley Stafford (School of Chemistry).
- (vii) The Dean advised that from the current year the format for seeking Calendar III changes has been revised and that there is a new template to be used. He obtained committee's agreement that, this year, the Calendar entries would be reviewed in April by a sub-committee that he would appoint.

**Decision GS/18-19/278(vii).1:** The committee agreed for the Dean of Graduate Studies to review Calendar III entries for 2019/20 and to set up a sub-committee to approve such changes.

- (viii) The Dean advised members of the forthcoming annual sponsored cycle for the Student Hardship Fund and invited to take part in the cycle in the Wicklow mountains in June.

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**Section B for noting and approval**

**GS/18-19/279 Cessation of MPhil in Literatures of the Americas from 2019/20**

**Decision GS/18-19/279**

The committee approved the proposed cessation of MPhil in Literatures of the Americas from 2019/20 required by Section 7.4.2 of the Programme Suspension and Cessation Policy.

**GS/18-19/280 Change of validated Master in Education Studies course title from Intercultural Education to Intercultural Learning and Leadership from 2019/20 as per ACDC/18-19/311(b) on Agenda C.**



**Decision GS/18-19/280**

The committee approved the proposed change to the validated MES course title from Intercultural Education to Intercultural Learning and Leadership from 2019/20 as per ACDC/18-19/311(b) on Agenda C (GS/18-19/281).

**XX Section C for noting**

**GS/18-19/281** The committee noted Draft Minutes of the Marino Institute of Education Associated College Degrees Committee (MIE ACDC) of 14<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

**GS/18-19/282** The committee noted a memo from Dr Ciara O'Farrell (Head of Academic Practice) on minimum allocation of 25 student effort hours to 1 ECTS.

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

Prof. Neville Cox

Date: 28 March 2019