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Trinity College Dublin
The University of Dublin

Minutes of the People and Culture Committee

Thursday, 25th September, 14:00-16:00

Arts Building Conference Room 2026, Arts Building Faculty Office.

Present: Prof Darryl Jones (Chairperson), Mr Séamus McManus (Committee Secretary, Director of Human Resources), Mr Noel Gorman (Chief Operating Officer), Prof Sylvia Draper (Dean of FSTEM), Mr Andrew Duffin (Group of Unions Rep), Ms Paula Hicks (College Staff Member), Prof Lorraine Leeson (Associate Vice-Provost for EDI), Prof Rachel Moss (College Staff Member), Prof Eoin O'Sullivan (Senior Dean), Ms Kathryn Whyte (External Member – Head of Corporate Services, Office of Public Works)

Apologies: Mr David Treacy, Mr Lucky Khambule, Ms Neha Omprakash Deshmukh

In attendance: Prof Orla Sheils (Vice Provost / Chief Academic Officer) for item B.1, Ms Michelle Hogan, Ms Lara McKeown, Ms Niamh McKeown

Section A – Standing Items

Section A.2   Minutes and Matters Arising

PCC/25-26/01   Minutes

People and Culture committee approved the draft minutes of 21st May 2025.

PCC/25-26/02   Outstanding Actions

It was noted that there were outstanding questions from the meeting held on 21st May, which are currently with HR, awaiting response.

PCC/25-26/03   Matters Arising from the Minutes

The Chair advised there were no matters arising from the minutes to note.

The Vice-Provost /Chief Academic Officer joined the meeting at this point.

PCC/25-26/04   To receive a verbal update from the Vice-Provost/ Chief Academic Officer Prof. Orla Sheils on the Senior Academic Promotions Review Project

The committee agreed that Item B1 would be taken in advance of Item A3 and A4.

The Committee received a verbal update from the Vice-Provost on the Senior Academic Promotions Review Project. Prof. Sheils outlined the current approach to senior academic promotions, which aimed to balance the pursuit of academic excellence with necessary financial constraints and a predictable promotions cycle. The importance of arriving at a revised process that would appropriately recognise,

and reward academic distinction was emphasised. It was noted to the Committee that the review process had been ongoing for some time. An external facilitator, engaged through LERU connections, had been involved in gathering feedback from colleagues on their experiences. In parallel, a steering committee had been established, alongside faculty working groups and an additional group chaired by the Senior Dean, the Process and Procedures working group, to examine the promotions process.

Feedback received to date had indicated that the current process failed to fully capture the nuanced experiences of academics across the institution. Heads of School had been asked to consult with staff regarding appropriate criteria for grading, with varying levels of engagement across schools. It was noted that IFUT had raised concerns that some Heads of School had engaged more than others resulting in some staff feeling that their voices had not been fully heard. As a result, there had been delays in progressing the review.

IFUT had requested that a memo be brought to Board outlining the delay and proposing that a final version of the current process be drawn up, with a view to implementing a further interim call under the existing system to allow development of a revised system that would be fit for purpose. A proposed modification to the current scoring system was discussed. It was noted that scoring some pillars out of ten had proven difficult to apply consistently. Adjusting this structure should improve the system. It was confirmed to the Committee that a request regarding the financial envelope would be brought to Board.

Over the summer, the Vice-Provost worked with Prof Keith Gull, drawing on his experience at Oxford and the Royal Society to clarify key issues. Following input from various committees, the Steering Committee recommended principles including a rolling application process with a single evaluation point. It was acknowledged that the process must operate within a defined financial envelope and as a direct consequence would be competitive in nature. A key proposed change would be the introduction of a narrative CV, focusing on the significance and impact of achievements. Further decisions were pending, and the Steering Committee were set to reconvene. Feedback on the current process had highlighted the need for improved communication, particularly in the letters sent to applicants.

Following the Vice-Provost's update, the Committee engaged in a detailed discussion on the proposed changes to the promotions process. Members welcomed the news regarding the financial envelope and expressed interest in how the revised system would be implemented. Points were made about the uneven ways in which Schools consulted staff members across Schools. There was discussion around the proposed narrative CV format, with some members expressing concern that it may lack space for metrics and could discourage applicants from sharing personal circumstances. It was suggested that a separate section might be needed to address such issues, and that training may be required to support applicants in preparing narrative CVs effectively.

The Committee considered the handling of Personal Circumstances forms. It was acknowledged that managing sensitive information while ensuring fairness in scoring

presents challenges. On the topic of whether such information should be visible to the full panel or limited to specific reviewers, comparisons were made with practices in other institutions, where broader visibility is sometimes permitted. However, it was noted that this may deter applicants from disclosing personal details.

The importance of scoring achievements relative to opportunity was emphasised, and it was noted that further clarity would be needed in the revised process. The Committee discussed the need for structured career frameworks and mentorship to support academic development. Some reservations were expressed about workload models and the uneven application of the four-pillar framework across Schools. It was suggested that this issue be considered in tandem with the promotions review.

The Committee noted that previous iterations of the process had operated on a principle of clearing backlogs, however further engagement with IFUT and the Steering Committee would be required to clarify this aspect for the new process.

The Vice-Provost /Chief Academic Officer left the meeting at this stage.

PCC/25-26/05   Verbal Update from Committee Secretary & HR Director, Séamus Mc Manus

The Secretary to the committee provided an update on recent HR activities and developments. It was noted that HR had been particularly busy with academic inductions. Approximately 50 new joiners had participated in the process, while a further 65 had joined the central online induction. It was further noted that 373 new IT accounts had been created for recent joiners. The significant efforts of all teams involved in supporting this work were acknowledged. The committee were advised that HR would be reviewing and streamlining internal processes over the coming months to improve efficiency.

The committee was informed that recruitment for the role of Deputy Director of HR was currently live, with interviews scheduled to take place mid-October. Interviews for the role of Head of HR Partnering and Resourcing would take place within the next fortnight.

An update was provided on staff learning and development opportunities, and three programmes currently open for registration were highlighted: Early Career Manager (LD1), Mid-Career Leader (LD2), and Senior Leader (LD3). HR had developed a self-directed development pathway in partnership with LinkedIn Learning, which formed part of a broader progression framework. It was noted that this resource was available to all staff, and that HR was working with the Postgraduate Centre to promote this to PhD students. Committee members were asked to encourage colleagues to engage with these opportunities.

There was discussion of whether line manager approval would be required for staff to participate in the development programmes. The committee concluded that staff should discuss this with their manager, who would need to be aware of any commitments. It was further noted that uptake of these programmes had been low

in previous years. A committee member proposed extending the timeframe of the programmes to two years to make them more manageable for managers. It was noted that the Aurora programme had already been expanded, and that uptake was beginning to increase. Another committee member suggested that the low uptake might be due to a limited number of managerial roles currently available. The committee were advised that staff should still consider participating in the programmes as preparation for future opportunities.

PCC/25-26/06   **Verbal update from Chair of EDI Sub-Committee & Associate Vice-Provost for EDI, Prof Lorraine Leeson.**

The Associate Vice-Provost for EDI provided a verbal update on recent EDI-related activities. It was noted that no minutes from the May meeting of the EDI Sub-Committee would be presented at this meeting; however, two sets of minutes would be submitted to the next PCC meeting in November.

The Committee received a summary of key activities since the last update. It was noted that a Race Equality Officer had been recruited and commenced. The timing of this appointment was considered particularly important considering recent complaints of racism. A listening meeting had been held for staff in this regard.

It was reported that Trinity had taken the lead on an Erasmus+ project focused on the development of aspiring and established leaders from a multifaceted perspective. The project had been described as incredibly successful, with significant engagement. There had also been strong participation in the Aurora programme and the Embrace project in collaboration with the HEA, reflecting high levels of enthusiasm and willingness to engage.

It was noted that the Equality Officer role was currently being advertised, having recently received approval to be made permanent. Two Irish Sign Language interpreter staff had been appointed positions until February 2026, and a submission had been made to Planning Group to seek approval to make these roles permanent. The Committee was informed that a new EDI Leads Group would be established in future.

Recent political developments in the UK and US were briefly referenced and it was noted that Trinity was preparing a declaration confirming its commitment to equality. A document was signed by university presidents across the EU.

It was further noted that four additional schools within Trinity had successfully achieved Athena SWAN accreditation, reflecting significant institutional engagement. The Committee received an update on the National Speak Out programme, led by Trinity, with a report expected to be published by Minister James Lawless TD.

The committee were advised that discussions had taken place regarding the accessibility of heritage campuses. Trinity would host a symposium on this topic in May, however, it was noted that the lack of a dedicated space and associated costs

remained a challenge, emphasising the need to create an accessible space for future use.

Following the update, the committee congratulated the EDI team on their work.

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Section B – Items for Noting / Approval

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PCC/25-26/07   **To Review and Approve the Proposed Project Plan for the People Projects Presented by the People Projects Manager, Ms Michelle Hogan.**

The Secretary to the Committee informed the committee that, subject to their approval, the People Projects workstreams would get up and running during the current term. It was noted that the plan had not yet been presented to EOG, but would be brought to EOG on 7th October, with potential feedback to follow.

The Committee received a verbal update from the People Projects Manager, Ms Michelle Hogan, on the proposed project plan. Ms Hogan outlined the background to the Initiation Plan, noting that extensive consultation had taken place across the University in 2023. This process shed light on issues around reward and recognition, contract inconsistencies affecting various staff groups (e.g. teaching fellows, adjunct and research staff), and the need to align with the University's values under the "Thriving Workplace" framework.

The Committee was presented with the proposed management structure for the People Projects, which included the establishment of a management group and a request for additional resources to support the delivery of workstreams. A request for two staff members to assist with the workstreams has been submitted. The importance of a clear communications plan was emphasised, particularly considering staff uncertainty around project developments.

The Committee reviewed the implementation document, including proposed workstream membership, stage plans, timelines, and draft scope. It was noted that each workstream would have a designated Chair and Lead, and that a TOR would be developed for each group. While the TOR had been discussed, they had not been made available on Decision Time. The Committee agreed to review these remotely and submit comments by 1st October at 12pm.

During discussion, members highlighted the need to ensure representation from the research community, particularly STEM research staff, and suggested links to the Postdoctoral Academy. The inclusion of union representation within the management group was also raised.

PCC/25-26/08   **To Note a Memo from the Secretary of the Professional Staff Review Committee regarding Update to Committee Membership**

Professor Alan Eustace, School of Law is to replace Professor Quentin Crowley as Deputy Chair of the Committee, effective from 01 September 2025 for a three-year term ending 30 August 2028, for onward submission to the Board for approval.

PCC/25-26/09 **To receive an update from Committee Secretary & HR Director, Mr. Séamus McManus and Senior Dean, Prof Eoin O'Sullivan on the Strategic Plan and the Strategic Planning Management Group (SPMG) and discuss draft implementation plan for the staff commitment.**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Committee Secretary and the Senior Dean on the Strategic Plan and the work of the Strategic Planning Management Group (SPMG), with particular emphasis on staff commitment outcomes and the draft implementation plan.

The four outcomes relating to the staff commitment of "Thriving Workplace" were briefly discussed. It was noted that while there had been good progress made with the People Projects, the university had further work to do to strengthen reward and recognition. The Committee was then divided into four breakout groups to discuss each outcome in detail.

Each group was asked to consider the following questions:

1. Is there a clear enough link to the mission and vision?

2. Are the success measures clear and specific enough?

3. What else would you like to see? What could be changed?

4. Any other comments?

Following the breakout discussions, the Committee received feedback on each of the four outcomes. Outcome 4.3, "A workplace that is easy to navigate", was discussed first. The group suggested that new processes are put in place across the institution and must align and simplify processes. The possibility of delegating authority to simplify processes at different levels was suggested to support this. In terms of success measures, it was noted that the time taken to complete tasks could serve as a tool to measure employee success. There was a discussion around the need to improve communication between different areas in the college experiencing similar local challenges, so that staff could learn from each other.

For outcome 4.2, "A workplace where values are fully lived", it was noted that the outset section of the Strategic Plan should reflect benchmark data, such as findings from staff wellbeing surveys. It was proposed that the first two behavioural values listed, "Respect and Care" and "Nature Positive", should not be included in the outset box as they were not a current state assessment, and they were also not supported by previous data unlike the remaining three values which were.

In relation to the outcome 4.1, "Good Employer", the Chair discussed the need for a clear and explicit linking statement between this outcome and the mission and vision. The Committee also considered the timing and means of communicating the outcomes and that the associated success measures must be communicated more clearly.

For outcome 4.4, "A workplace where we are always learning", the committee noted that Trinity's mission and vision did not explicitly reference staff. The committee

considered the importance of creating initiatives under this outcome that were inclusive and fit for purpose. There was also discussion around how the structuring of this outcome appeared to be skewed towards academic staff, and that further revisions were necessary to ensure it was relevant to all staff groups.

The committee was informed that the Strategic Plan was to go to the next meeting of the Strategic Plan Management Group, which was to take place on the following Monday 29th September 2025. The plan was also scheduled to go to Board on 15th October 2025. The committee were invited to submit any further feedback in the coming days.

Section C – Items for Discussion

PCC/25-26/10   Initial Discussion on Proposed Template for Regular HR Project Updates

The Committee received an initial presentation of the proposed template for regular HR project updates. Committee members were advised that the template would be used as a tool to track progress and provide updates once the People Project workstreams were up and running. It was also noted that there was potential for a dashboard to be incorporated.

It was suggested that the PPM tool could be used to ensure consistency. The Chair invited the committee to share any further suggestions or amendments to the template by sending them to the Secretary to the Committee.

PCC/25-26/11   Any Other Business

The committee was informed of an upcoming event taking place as part of European Researchers' Night featuring a lecture and panel discussion on the topic of Accentism. The session would explore how accent bias, particularly among middle-class educators, can impact working-class students.

Signed: ………………………………

Date: …………………………………