Trinity College Dublin
The University of Dublin

Minutes of the People and Culture Committee

Thursday, 14 May 2026, 14:00-16:00

Arts Building, Room 2026

Present: Professor Darryl Jones (Chairperson), Mr Séamus McManus (Committee Secretary), Director of Human Resources), Professor Rachel Moss (College Staff Member), Professor Eoin O'Sullivan (Senior Dean), Mr Noel Gorman (Chief Operating Officer), Mr Andrew Duffin (Group of Unions Rep), Mr Lucky Khambule (External Member), Ms Kathryn Whyte (External Member), Ms Paula Hicks (College Staff Member), Professor Lorraine Leeson (Associate Vice-Provost for EDI)

Apologies: N/A

In attendance: Professor Orla Sheils (Vice-Provost / Chief Academic Officer), Mr Eoin O Cinneide (Risk Manager), Mrs Lydia Brazil (Deputy Director of Human Resources), Ms Michelle Hogan (People Projects Manager), Ms Lara McKeown (Committee Secretariat), Ms Megan Josling (Committee Secretariat)

Section A – Standing Items

Section A.2 Declaration of Conflict of Interest

PCC/25-26/54 *No conflicts of interest were declared*.

Section A.3. Minutes & Matters Arising

PCC/25-26/55 *The meeting minutes of 2 April 2026 were approved*.

PCC/25-26/56 To note for the minutes the online circulation dated 21 April 2026 for the committee to approve the updated wording to the new appeals mechanism added to the Probation Policy

It was noted that the final wording to the new appeals mechanism added to the Probation Policy was circulated to the Committee on 7 May 2026. The policy was scheduled for final approval by Board in June 2026. A Committee member advised that they had received a response from the author which referenced disciplinary procedures which they didn't think would be linked to the Probation Policy. It was agreed that this could be considered as part of future policy reviews.

PCC/25-26/57 Outstanding Actions

The Chair noted that, at the April meeting, a workshop on Risk had been planned for the May meeting of the Committee, and this was now included on the current agenda (Item C1). It was also noted that a more detailed update on the AO1 review had been indicated at the April meeting, and this was now included on the current agenda (Item B2).

In relation to the Gender Pay Gap report, queries had been raised at the April meeting regarding whether staff outside of teaching time had been included in the data, noting that some staff return in June and that certain Teaching Fellows were employed from September to May. Additional queries had also arisen from the EDI sub-committee, including whether the data related specifically to hourly pay (including craft roles and associated allowances). It was noted that an update would be provided to the Committee at the next meeting or circulated by email.

In relation to role grading, it was noted that a further update would be provided. The Chair noted that the Committee had requested further information including the number of roles as a proportion of the size of the function (CSD), and clarification that not all roles were eligible for grading. It was confirmed that further information would be brought forward in due course.

The Chair emphasised the confidentiality of the final item on the agenda (Item D2) and noted that it would be discussed further at the end of the meeting.

PCC/25-26/58 Matters Arising from the Minutes

A Committee member referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 2 April, and a reference made to promotions for professional staff having ceased in 2017 (PCC/25-26/51), noting that related Procedure 47 remained on the website as late as November 2020. It was suggested that this may have led to a perception that promotions were still possible. The Secretary clarified that the procedures had ceased in 2017 following Board approval in 2016 and confirmed that the minutes accurately reflected this. The Secretary acknowledged that maintaining accurate and up-to-date information on the website was important. Another Committee member noted that the issue of outdated website content was separate from the accuracy of the minutes. A suggestion was made that an additional line could be included to clarify this. It was also noted that in section 47A an appeals process associated with the procedure remained accessible online. The Secretary requested that the relevant link be shared for further review. It was further noted that, at the time that promotions ceased, a final round of progression had been conducted, and this had been clearly communicated to the College.

PCC/25-26/59 To receive a verbal update from Committee Secretary & HR Director, Mr. Séamus McManus.

The Secretary advised that he would defer a separate update, as an update on the People Projects, the Senior Academic Promotions Review, and of the Administrative Officer 1 (AO1) grade and pay scale review would be addressed later in the meeting.

PCC/25-26/60 To receive a verbal update from the People Projects Manager, Ms. Michelle Hogan, on the People Projects

An update was provided on the Good Employer Programme. It was noted that three of the four workstreams had held two meetings, while the Good Employer/Wellbeing workstream had held one meeting to date. Meetings had also taken place with all workstream chairs and leads. A number of possible "quick wins" had been identified and shortlisted across each workstream, and an overview of progress to date was provided.

- Career Development: It was noted that a staff mobility style project was being explored to understand how different areas of the University operate and collaborate.
- Good Employer / Wellbeing: Initiatives such as the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), flu vaccinations, and staff welcome packs were highlighted as potential initiatives.
- Reward: It was noted that an initial list of 132 proposals had been refined to eight potential quick wins, with the next step being to assess their feasibility.
- Recognition: The Dean of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Prof Carmel O'Sullivan, has been acting as interim Chair of this workstream. The group has been progressing initiatives including the potential reintroduction of a version of the Provost's Professional Staff Awards. Work is ongoing to review existing staff awards and associated processes across the University, and to explore how the Provost's Awards could be closely aligned with the University Values.

It was noted that the Employment Contracts and Working Patterns project was closely linked to the Academic Titles Review. Work relating to Teaching Fellows and Adjunct Staff had been intentionally paused pending this review. Work is ongoing across all staff categories identified in the Employment Contracts and Working Patterns report: researching work completed since the report's production, what has yet to be implemented, and prioritisation, is also taking place.

A Committee member queried how staff would be kept informed of progress across the People Programme. It was noted that each workstream would develop a communications plan with Communications following the next management group meeting, with updates to be shared as progress is made. A Committee member also noted that many staff would value financial reward. In response, it was clarified that reward and recognition are two core yet distinct workstreams, with reward relating more to financial elements and recognition focusing on experiential initiatives.

The Chair indicated that item B1 would be taken next.

PCC/25-26/61 To consider Senior Academic Promotions Review outcomes for approval from Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, Professor Orla Sheils.

The Chair welcomed the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, who presented the Senior Academic Promotions (SAP) Review and the associated report, *Senior Academic Promotions Review: Problem Analysis and Proposals for Fairness, Excellence, and Sustainability*.

The Committee noted the following key points from the presentation:

- The review has been structured across three phases:
  - **Phase 1:** Extensive University-wide consultation.
  - **Phase 2:** Formal review supported by a governance structure (Steering Group, Process and Faculty Working Groups, and an Integration Group). Board and Council approval had also been secured to address the 2018–2021 backlog and to run promotion rounds in 2024 and 2026.
  - **Phase 3 (proposed):** Development and implementation of revised processes and procedures, subject to approval.
- The principal recommendations of the review include:
  - **Financial allocation:** Greater transparency, including publication of budget and number of promotions by grade.
  - **Applications:** Open and competitive process, incorporating narrative CVs.
  - **Promotion Committee:** Continued involvement of external experts, interviews for competitive Professor Of-level applicants, and provision for disclosure of personal circumstances.
  - **Readiness for promotion:** Development of a structured mentoring approach.
  - **Scoring framework:** Introduction of revised pillars, scoring out of 100, and updated weightings.
  - **Academic titles:** Award of Associate Professor title on successful completion of Tenure Track or Merit Bar, with the rank of Senior Associate Professor given to successful applicants to the Senior Academic Promotions Committee.

It was noted that the Phase 2 report had been approved by the Steering Group (May 2026) and, subject to Committee approval, would be noted by Board, following which Phase 3 would commence. Matters relating to retention, raised during consultation, will be addressed separately through a dedicated review.

The Committee welcomed the report and the significant body of work undertaken. It was noted that engagement with IFUT and the University had informed a number of the recommendations. The Vice-Provost confirmed that the document only covers Phase 2 of the review, with detailed procedures and the policy to be developed in Phase 3.

Clarifications were provided as follows:

- The narrative CV example included in the report is indicative only and not the final agreed format.

- Wording relating to proposed amendments to academic titles (page 11) would be revised to avoid ambiguity; it was confirmed that the recommendation in the report was that moving to Senior Associate Professor would occur through promotion and will be linked to the relevant pay grade, while the title (only) of Associate Professor would be conferred on successful completion of Tenure Track or Merit Bar.

The Committee held a detailed discussion on the financial envelope, emphasising the importance of securing the highest possible level of certainty from the Board regarding ongoing funding for promotions. While recognising current financial constraints and a challenging global environment, the Committee agreed that a consistent baseline commitment is critical to support credibility, planning and staff progression.

The Committee also highlighted:

- The potential value of piloting elements of the revised process.
- Consideration of multi-year funding approaches to maintain opportunity while avoiding future backlogs.
- The importance of alignment between promotions processes and broader retention strategy.

61.01 The Committee approved the report for submission to Board (June meeting). After Board notes the approval, phase 3 would commence.

The Vice-Provost/ Chief Academic Officer, Prof Orla Sheils, left the meeting at this point.

PCC/25-26/62 To receive a verbal update from Chair of EDI Sub-Committee & Associate Vice-Provost for EDI, Prof. Lorraine Leeson

It was noted that good progress had been made in the delivery of anti-racist leadership training, with engagement achieved through various of face-to-face sessions. Funding under PATH 4 from the HEA had been secured dedicated to a targeted area. A target had been set for 100 staff to complete the training by the end of the year, with approximately 30 colleagues having completed it to date. It was noted that progress in this area is part of the reporting EDI provide to the HEA. An update was given on the Public Sector Duty, which is being progressed in collaboration with the Secretary's Office. It was noted that this relates to human rights and equality obligations, and that the University had moved from non-compliant to partially compliant following recent review. Work was ongoing to achieve full compliance.

The Committee noted that the Equality Policy was currently under review, reflecting huge shifts in landscape. It was also noted that a new legal resource would join the Secretary's Office in July and would support this work. Updates were provided on disability-related initiatives, including a target for 6% of staff to disclose a disability. Current disclosure rates were below this target. The recent appointment of a Staff Disability Liaison Officer was noted as a positive development, providing a key point of contact for staff. The establishment of an EEDI Group was noted, in line with Athena Swan requirements, with its inaugural meeting having recently taken place. It was noted that this group was being convened by the Equality Officer.

An update was also provided on the EDI staff survey, which represents the second and final survey within the current Athena Swan phase. A target response rate of 36% had been set, with approximately 30% achieved to date. It was noted that survey outcomes would inform broader People Projects. To encourage participation, a €1 donation to the student hardship fund was being made for every survey submission.

The Athena Swan Action Plan was progressing, with 22 of 24 Schools currently holding Athena Swan awards. A number of Schools were progressing applications for Silver or Bronze awards. Finally, the Committee was advised of an upcoming HEA-funded initiative focused on higher education institutions as inclusive environments, including consideration of accessibility in heritage buildings. A symposium involving internal and external stakeholders, including staff and students, was scheduled to take place in the coming week.

Ms Paula Hicks, left the meeting at this point.

Section B – Items for Noting / Approval

PCC/25-26/63 To receive an update on the review of the Administrative Officer 1 (AO1) grades and payscales from Committee Secretary & HR Director, Mr. Séamus McManus.

The Committee noted that the Terms of Reference for the review had been issued the previous day, and that they were invited to provide comments following review. The Committee was reminded that the Executive Officers Group had approved the AO1 grades and payscales review in September, and that work had been progressing since then. The review was commenced partly in response to recommendations arising from a collective grievance report issued in August 2025.

The current AO1 structures were outlined, noting that two distinct work levels were in operation: AO1 to the bar (points 1–3) and AO1 full scale (points 1–6). The Secretary noted that anomalies existed within the scale, particularly between points 2 and 3, where there was a significant increase (of ca. 25%) between annual increments.

Although the merit bar remains published in the payscales, it was noted that it is no longer possible for the bar to be practically applied. Historically, staff could apply to progress beyond the merit bar via a recognised process, Procedure 47; however, this Procedure was removed by Board in late 2016. There is considerable dissatisfaction with the current arrangements and there is an opportunity to address any current anomalies, improve clarity for staff, and review future salary scales. It was noted that any proposed changes would require engagement with relevant external bodies, including DFHERIS.

The Committee noted that a review group had been established within HR. Phase 1 of the work programme had been completed and had included a review of contracts and other key documentation. Phase 2 was currently underway and involved consideration of the existing AO1 scales and structures, benchmarking of equivalent scales and grades in other institutions and engagement with DFHERIS and other external stakeholders as needed. Phase 3 would focus on communicating outcomes, recognising that any changes would need to go through appropriate industrial relations and governance channels.

Of approximately 400 AO1 staff, a subgroup of 38 individuals has been identified as a subgroup of further focus based on the documentation reviewed. To date engagement has taken place with AO1 colleagues, their managers, Heads of Area, SIPTU representatives, and senior leadership, with further engagement with key stakeholders planned. An email update has been issued to the full AO1 cohort in late April, and a survey is being finalised for circulation in the coming weeks. Modelling of potential scenarios is underway, and engagement with SIPTU is also ongoing in relation to both current staff and future proposals of the grades and payscales.

A Committee member queried the implications for staff outside the identified subgroup. In response, it was clarified that further engagement would be required with affected staff and relevant stakeholders, and consideration would need to be given to whether any changes to payscales could apply or be available to existing staff, to new employees, or both. A Committee member acknowledged the complexity of the review on a long-standing issue, and commended the work undertaken by HR to date.

Reference was made to historical discussions from the HR Committee regarding the merit bar and earlier commitments to address progression from points 3 to 4 for a number of people, some of which had been actioned but others had not. The Secretary invited this Committee member to identify the minute or area that hasn't been actioned and requires further review. It was also noted that some staff may decline progression due to potential impacts on leave entitlements. The Secretary noted that related policies would be reviewed in due course. A Committee member requested that appreciation for the contribution of the Head of Employee Relations, Ms Mary Leahy, supporting the AO1 review and other relevant work be recorded in the minutes.

Section C – Items for Discussion

PCC/25-26/64 Risk management workshop with Risk Manager, Mr. Eoin O Cinneide, as relevant to the remit of the Committee.

The Chair welcomed the Risk Manager to the meeting and noted that, due to time constraints, the workshop might need to be continued at a future meeting. The purpose of the session was outlined; to provide insight into risks relevant to People & Culture and to bring a university-level view to these issues. The Risk Manager shared his appreciation for the contribution of HR colleagues in supporting the development of the workshop. It was noted that, under the Thrive People

Commitment 4, Trinity is committed to delivering a thriving workplace and a common sense of purpose. Two areas relevant to the remit of the Committee were identified as being critical to achieving this objective: Leadership Capability, and Culture, Conduct and Employee Experience.

The purpose of the workshop was outlined as follows: to review these areas, challenge assumptions and identify potential risks, consider where delivery of Thrive Commitment 4 may come under pressure, and identify areas requiring further focus, action or oversight. It was emphasised that risks and strategies are intertwined and that the Committee should consider what actions could be taken to prevent risks from materialising. The Committee was divided into two groups, with each group asked to consider what could prevent them from achieving objectives in these areas, whether current controls are sufficient, and what actions or indicators may require further attention. Each group was provided with a discussion guide and was allocated time to work through the questions.

Following the group discussions, a spokesperson from each group presented key themes and observations. In relation to culture, conduct and employee experience, the objective was identified as living organisational values and creating a pluralist organisation. Risks identified included inconsistency in the demonstration of Trinity's Values, lack of succession planning, moral toxicity, high staff turnover, “glass door” effects, absenteeism and burnout. It was noted that these factors could result in loss of institutional knowledge and increased recruitment and retention costs, and that they represented important indicators of emerging risk.

In relation to leadership capability, discussion focused on clarifying leadership expectations across different staff cohorts. It was noted that perceptions of leadership vary between academic and professional staff in the College, and that this can lead to inconsistency in leadership behaviours and experiences. Challenges were identified in relation to line management capability, devolved governance structures, and the absence of a consistent framework for evaluating leadership roles, particularly for academics. The importance of honest and straightforward conversations between line managers and staff was noted, alongside the need fully to recognise institutional citizenship and to foster desired leadership behaviours as part of the Senior Academic Promotions process. . It was suggested that future work could explore clearer leadership objectives and development pathways. It was noted that the outputs of the workshop could help to develop risk statements and controls to put in place in the future. The Chair concluded the item by noting that a further session dedicated to risk management may be scheduled to allow further discussion of these issues.

The Chief Operating Officer, Mr Noel Gorman, the Senior Dean, Mr Eoin O’Sullivan, and Mr Lucky Khambule left the meeting at this point.

PCC/25-26/65 Any Other Business

The Chair outlined the proposed actions and plan for the next meeting. This would include a review of decisions taken and business considered by the Committee during 2025/2026. The Chair also highlighted that planning would begin for 2026/2027, including confirmation of meeting dates for the next academic year, Committee membership, and a review of the Committee’s Terms of Reference. It was noted that a tracked-changes version of the Terms of Reference would be circulated to members for comment and input via email between meetings.

Signed: ………………………………

Date: …………………………………