

The University of Dublin  
Trinity College

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

11:00, 4 June 2024

Arts Building Conference Room (2026)

MINUTES

**In attendance**

Professor Sinéad Ryan, Dean of Research (Chair)  
Professor Brian Broderick, Associate Dean of Research  
Professor Immo Warntjes, Associate Dean of Research  
Professor Padraic Fallon, Associate Dean of Research  
Professor Catherine Welch, Director of Research, Trinity Business School  
Professor Nicholas Johnson, Director of Research, School of Creative Arts  
Professor Pádraic Whyte, Director of Research, School of English  
Professor Jane Ohlmeyer, Director of Research, School of Histories & Humanities  
Professor Mark Bell, Director of Research, School of Law  
Professor Eburne Garcia Iriarte, Director of Research, School of Social Work and Social Policy  
Professor Benjamin Wold, Director of Research, School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies  
Professor Ed Lavelle, Director of Research, School of Biochemistry and Immunology  
Professor Marco Ruffini, Director of Research, School of Computer Science & Statistics  
Professor Michael Monaghan, Director of Research, School of Engineering  
Professor Frank Wellmer, Director of Research, School of Genetics and Microbiology  
Professor Andrei Parnachev, Director of Research, School of Mathematics  
Professor Sarah Doyle, Director of Research, School of Medicine  
Professor Sharon O'Donnell, Director of Research, School of Nursing & Midwifery  
Professor Rhodri Cusack, Director of TCIN  
Professor Eoin O'Sullivan, Senior Dean  
Ms Mary Tracey, Executive Director, Trinity Innovation & Enterprise  
Dr Gordon Elliott, Trinity Innovation & Enterprise  
Professor Martine Smith, Dean of Graduate Studies  
Dr Sally Smith, Director of Research, Trinity Research  
Dr Raquel Harper, Head of Research Development, Research Development Office  
Ms Doris Alexander, Associate Director for European Engagement, Trinity Research  
Ms Elaine Sharkey, Projects Accounting Manager, Financial Services Division  
Dr Geoff Bradley, Head of Academic Services and Operations, IT Services  
Ms Helen Shenton, Librarian and College Archivist  
Mr Michael Reilly, Laboratory & Research Category Manager, Procurement  
Dr Jennifer Daly, Research Strategy and Policy Manager, Trinity Research

**Apologies**

Prof. Eve Patten; Prof. Aideen Long; Prof. Ortwin Hess; Prof. Athanasios Mantalaris; Prof. Joseph Roche; Prof. Nathan Hill

<b>Section A – Items for Discussion and Approval</b>	
<b>A.1</b>	<b>Minutes</b> Minutes from the meeting of May 7 <sup>th</sup> were circulated in advance and approved by the committee.
<b>A.2</b>	<b>Matters Arising from the Minutes</b> No matters arising.
<b>A.3</b>	<b>Proposal to establish the Trinity Research Institute for Society and Policy</b> Prof. Ronan Lyons  Item held over until the next academic year. Apologies were noted to the committee for the short notice.

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**Section B - Items for Discussion Only**

**B.1**

**College Statement on Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI**

Dr Pauline Rooney, Head of Academic Practice

Dr. Rooney joined the committee for discussion and feedback on a proposed College-level statement on AI and GenAI. During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- The draft statement was being developed in collaboration with academic and professional staff. The aim was to develop overarching principles for staff and students in their use of AI/Gen AI. Any statement would recognise schools' autonomy in defining appropriate discipline-level use. It was confirmed that the statement would also apply to professional services in College.
- It was hoped to have a statement ready for Michaelmas term, with a draft to be presented to USC and GSC before being brought to Council for final approval.
- DOR noted the prudence of linking TCD guidelines to European guidelines rather than inventing bespoke guidelines that might become outdated very quickly. DGS noted there had been a good discussion at GSC and agreed with DOR on the benefits of closely aligning to European Commission guidelines. It was also noted that the EU guidelines were "living" so a statement that adhered to those would be more practical.
- Other suggestions were to aim for fluency in digital literacy rather than just competency. Members of the committee noted some concerns about how to ensure equity of access across schools. Also noted the need to align with IT policies. The committee broadly welcomed the development of an overall statement.
- Concerns around EDI and the bias that can be present in some AI models were noted. Members of the committee noted that any new piece of AI should not be making equity worse and this should be considered in the development of the statement/policy.
- It was noted that there were practical implications in the use of the technology. While there was academic freedom, there is also responsibility to make sure the use of this tech that is compliant with existing policies and with the AI Act when it eventually comes into force. It was noted that people will have to be very careful about how they use AI and that the Data Protection act already includes a section on automated decision making. It was noted that IT Services had an obligation to assess every single piece of software that the college might use. Legislative implications are huge. Any piece of technology is going to have to be vetted by Procurement, legal, and IT. Really powerful tool, but huge implications on the ground. EU guidelines do actually note that own tools should be used in the first instance. TCD about to adopt a federated IT policy that will require schools to approve the use of all tech in their schools. Heads will have to provide a list of software in use in their schools.
- During an extended discussion of IT policies, it was noted that all IT policies had been refreshed in line with the new federated IT policy. It was noted that there was a difference between using a technology and providing a technology. It was noted that when the new legislation is introduced the Secretary's Office would have to introduce new policy based on that, with a research project/risk assessment to be conducted in line with that. It was noted that at present there was no support available to conduct such a project. It was noted that there were enormous implications around personal data and information but it was important to establish how to enable and support research. It was also noted that many of the issues under discussion were longstanding and predated the

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	<p>advent of AI, with many coming to the fore with the implementation of GDPR. It was noted that the AI Act would have a very strong emphasis on enforcement and fines for non-compliance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of the committee noted concern that the language in the statement should not take responsibility for outputs from an AI model. It was noted that many of the models inherently did not respect intellectual property as an essential part of their existence. It was suggested that TCD could take responsibility for using these models collaboratively and responsibly but should not take responsibility for the outputs of the model itself. Members of the committee suggested that the framing of the statement could note that TCD was trying to be a leader in this space and advance an ethical form of engagement with AI.</li> <li>• In relation to transparency, it was noted that there was very strong feeling from other committees that academic autonomy needed to be retained around what constituted appropriate citation or acknowledgement of the use of AI in research and teaching.</li> <li>• DOR noted that there was a distinction between the role that AI/Gen AI played in research and research on AI/Gen AI, and it was important not to negatively impact one in focusing too much on the other.</li> <li>• There was some discussion as to whether TCD should develop its own in-house AI tool. It was noted that there would be a huge amount of work to operationalise something like this. It was noted that a better approach could be to have a tool that was vetted at an institutional level for use in checking assignment for example, rather than multiple different tools being used at local levels. It was noted that TCD was not operating in a vacuum in relation to this, and that other universities would be having similar conversations. DOR noted that during a recent discussion at LERU about the use of AI across all the institutions the approach spanned from nothing to Edinburgh which had developed its own LLM. DOR noted that we all collaborate nationally and internationally and do not want to find ourselves in a place where we've hamstrung ourselves compared to what other institutions decide to do. It was also noted that the TCD did not have the scale to run its own model in terms of set up cost, capacity to manage, and associated power costs.</li> <li>• Members of the committee noted that it would be helpful for national legislation and local implementation in TCD to learn from the introduction of GDPR which saw a much more conservative interpretation of the legislation than other jurisdictions and has impeded some research activity as a result. It was noted that TCD was exploring a sensitive research data store.</li> <li>• Members of the committee queried where responsibility for implementation of any guidelines would sit. It was noted that while there was a lot of focus on how students used AI, a lot of poor practice in the sector was coming from established researchers partly due to ignorance so effective dissemination of guidelines would be essential.</li> <li>• It was noted that GDPR and IT security training would become mandatory for everyone in the university and anything to do with AI would probably be included in that. It was noted that CAP would develop a number of resources with a focus on teaching, learning, assessment, and research and would be launching an open course on AI in September.</li> </ul>
<p><b>B.2</b></p>	<p><b>Spotlight - Social Work and Social Policy</b> Prof. Edurne Garcia Iriarte</p> <p>Prof. Garcia Iriarte presented an overview of the School of Social Work and Social Policy's research strategy and the process used to develop it. It was noted that the</p>

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	<p>vision for the strategy was to build on expertise of academic staff and create a positive research culture. It was noted that resourcing to implement the strategy would be important with the school exploring how to secure a dedicated research impact officer.</p> <p>In discussion with the committee the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Research Impact Officer recruited by the School of Nursing &amp; Midwifery had been a huge benefit for the school.</li> <li>• The School had a number of different approaches for working to inform policy depending on the area. The new strategy wants to further develop interaction between researchers and policymakers.</li> <li>• All colleagues in the school engaged with the process of developing the strategy, although it was noted that the process was optional and entirely dependent on the goodwill of colleagues. Learnings from the process included greater involvement for PhD candidates in the strategy development, and also beginning work on resourcing the strategy much sooner.</li> <li>• Members of the committee noted that exercises like this could sometimes fixate on what is wrong and impeded the development of a clear vision, but it was noted that the process was generally positive for the School of Social Work and Social Policy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>B.3</b></p>	<p><b>Update from the Dean of Research</b> Dean of Research</p> <p>The Dean of Research noted thanks to all members of the committee for their contributions during the year, particularly to those were stepping down from the committee at the end of the year.</p> <p>Congratulations were noted to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prof. Dan Bradley on being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. DOR noted that this was a wonderful achievement and recognition of his work over many, many years.</li> <li>• Profs Ortwin Hess, Poul Holm, Brendan Kelly, Daniel Kelly, Brian Lawlor and Eve Patten admitted to the Royal Irish Academy. 12 Trinity researchers secured awards from SFI's Frontiers for the Future programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prof. Martin Caffrey (Biochemistry &amp; Immunology/TBSI/Medicine)</li> <li>○ Prof. Kingston Mills (B&amp;I/TBSI)</li> <li>○ Prof. David Finlay (B&amp;I/TBSI/Pharmacy &amp; Pharmaceutical Sciences)</li> <li>○ Prof. Igor Shvets (Physics, CRANN)</li> <li>○ Prof. Andrew Bowie (B&amp;I/TBSI)</li> <li>○ Prof. Jane Farrar (Genetics &amp; Microbiology, TCIN)</li> <li>○ Prof. Marco Ruffini (SCSS) and Prof. Dan Kilper (Engineering, CONNECT)</li> <li>○ Prof. Mani Ramaswami (G&amp;M, Natural Sciences, TCIN)</li> <li>○ Prof. Daniel Kelly (Engineering)</li> <li>○ Prof. Rhodri Cusack (Psychology, TCIN)</li> <li>○ Prof. Naomi Harte (Engineering)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>DOR provided an update on the Research Boost Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In total, across both streams 296 applications were received with a total ask of €11,919,248.</li> <li>• Review process was underway, with results expected to be communicated in early July. All applicants had been notified of the indicative timeline.</li> <li>• Once the review process was complete and funds disbursed, analysis would be conducted to aid in lobbying for increased funding.</li> </ul>

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	<p>DOR noted that the volume of applications showed the pent up demand within the university, and the scale of need even with asking people to scale back their requests.</p> <p>The committee noted the recent developments in relation to Prof. Philip Nolan’s dismissal from SFI and the uncertainty around his position as CEO of Research Ireland. DOR noted that this was an extraordinary situation that was impacting the whole sector. The SFI research centres call continued to be delayed which had caused serious levels of distress for PIs and colleagues involved in bids. It was noted that the DOR and Provost had communicated these concerns to the DFHERIS Secretary General and Minister, but it was unclear how aware they were of the situation. DOR noted that the long-term damage to Research Ireland as a result of all this would be significant, and noted that it was extraordinary that this internal upheaval at one agency had been allowed to endanger the new agency before it even started and had destroyed the personal and professional reputation of a senior academic in the country.</p>
<p><b>B.4</b></p>	<p><b>Looking Ahead to 2024/25</b> Dean of Research</p> <p>DOR flagged to the committee that a number of items would be coming to the committee in the next academic year. These included open scholarship, the new College strategic plan, discussions around AI, and a refresh of the Living Research Excellence Strategy. It was also noted that a number of research-related policies were due for review.</p>
<p><b>B.5</b></p>	<p><b>College Strategic Plan</b> Prof. Orla Shiels, Vice Provost and Eimear Byrne, Strategic Projects Officer, Office of the Vice Provost</p> <p>The Vice Provost and Eimear Byrne joined the meeting for this item. The VP noted that this would be the College’s fourth strategic plan. It was noted that a number of new elements had to be incorporated as a result of the HEA legislation which proscribes certain aspects of a plan can be developed and implemented. The committee was informed that responses to the consultation so far covered topics such as the treatment of staff and students; poor digital infrastructure; and climate and sustainability.</p> <p>In discussion with the committee, the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A monthly report was presented to Board in relation to progress on the current strategic plan. It was noted that the current plan had 118 targets of which only 20 were quantifiable. It was noted that the aim for the new plan would be to have clearly defined, quantifiable targets.</li> <li>• Previous plans had the imperative to increase student numbers, but the new plan would require additional levers such as innovation and enterprise.</li> <li>• The plan would not be limited by College’s current financial situation. VP noted that it was important to set ambitious targets in order to have something with which to lobby for greater support. The previous plan had resulted in an increase of commercial revenue which had been intended to be used for “nice” money but was now being used to cover day-to-day costs such as pay.</li> <li>• Members of the committee noted that research needed to be prioritised. TCD had slipped to third nationally for drawdown of EU funding and significant research infrastructure was on the brink of failure.</li> <li>• Members of the committee noted that a clear implementation plan for the new strategy would be crucial. It was noted that colleagues at the committee had been sharing their school-level strategies all year and it would be of benefit to</li> </ul>

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	<p>College to take this work into account. VP noted that while some of those advances could be taken into account, the institution ultimately had to develop a plan that to which schools should align.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of the committee noted systems and policies needed to work better for College. In specific areas, such as recruitment and retention, processes were too slow to be functional and good people were being lost as a result.</li> <li>• Members of the committee asked if Trinity needed to strategically commit to being a “research university” as it was felt that Trinity was some kind of hybrid at the moment. VP noted that the proportion of UG v PG admissions were out of line with the sector. It was also noted that being exclusively research-based was dependent on funding. Members of the committee noted that more could be done to emphasise the research identity of the university, that it was not just a place where students come to get a degree.</li> <li>• It was noted that the Research Themes needed a clearer focus, and that there was significant overlap across many of them.</li> <li>• Members of the committee noted that in general TCD was not very effective at articulating the impact of research, identifying the different groups and the particular skills needed to communicate with each.</li> </ul>
<b>Section C – Items for Noting</b>	
<b>C.1</b>	<b>Items for Noting</b>
<b>C.2</b>	<b>Items for future discussion</b>
<b>C.3</b>	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Scholarship sub-group</li> </ul> <p>Following up on many discussions during the year on open scholarship, the DOR proposed the establishment of an open scholarship forum be designated a formal sub-group of the committee that would report into RC on a regular basis. DOR noted that this would provide a formal mechanism to think about how TCD meets its obligations under the various agreements it has signed up to. The committee approved the proposal.</p>