

**The University of Dublin  
Trinity College**

**RESEARCH COMMITTEE**

**11:00, Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2025  
Boardroom, Trinity Business School**

**MINUTES**

Prof. Sinéad Ryan (Chair); Prof. Brian Broderick; Prof. Padraig Fallon; Prof. Nicole Grimes; Prof. Joanne Banks; Prof. Lindsey Earner-Byrne; Prof. James Hanrahan; Prof. Mary Rogan; Prof. Valentina Colasanti; Prof. Sonia Bishop; Prof. Nicola Carr; Prof. Benjamin Wold; Prof. Tomás Ryan; Prof. Marco Ruffini; Prof. Susan Murphy; Prof. Sarah Doyle; Prof. Eilish Burke; Prof. Ed Lavelle; Prof. Mark Little; Prof. Patrick Geoghegan; Prof. Rhodri Cusack; Prof. Martine Smith; Dr Nicole Volmering; Lorraine Byrne; John Hickey.

*In attendance:* Dr Sally Smith; Tadhg Caffrey; Dr Fiona Smyth; Doris Alexander; Emma Treacy Matunga; Dr Geoff Bradley; Dr Jennifer Daly.

*Apologies:* Prof. Anne Marie Healy; Michael Reilly; Helen Shenton; Elaine Sharkey; Prof. Catherine Welch; Prof. Carol Newman; Prof. Stefano Sanvito; Prof. Mathias Senge; Prof. Bidisha Ghosh; Prof. Prof. Frank Wellmer; Prof. Joseph Roche; Prof. Eoin O'Sullivan; Prof. Andrei Parnachev; Dr Chris Keely.

<b>Section A – Items for Discussion and Approval</b>	
<b>A.1</b>	<b>Minutes</b> Minutes from last meeting in November were approved as circulated.
<b>A.2</b>	<b>Matters Arising from the Minutes</b> No matters arising.
<b>A.3</b>	<b>Update to Committee Membership</b> DOR noted that Trinity Innovation & Enterprise would now be represented at committee meetings by Vincent Coole and Chris Keely.
<b>A.3</b>	<b>Policy on Trinity Research Institutes</b> Tadhg Caffrey, Head of Research Strategy & Policy, Trinity Research  A draft of a proposed update to the Policy on Trinity Research Institutes was circulated to the committee in advance of the meeting. The DOR advised the committee that approximately a year of review and consultation has gone into the development of new policy and noted that it was widely agreed that the current policy was not fit for purpose, was unclear in some places and did not address other issues. DOR advised the committee that the policy was being presented with a series of appendices which were not intended to be a formal part of the policy but which would be listed separately and would allow for more flexible updates to processes and procedures related to the implementation of the policy. Any updates to the appendices would be noted to the Research Committee.  Tadhg Caffrey presented the committee with an overview of the policy review process. It was noted that the policy was first published in 2012/13 with the last update in 2018/19. The following points were noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The intention with this latest update was to move operational detail out of the policy itself.</li><li>• Drafting process involved reviewing similar policies at other institutions, and substantial input from all TRI Directors and Executive Directors.</li><li>• It was hoped that the new policy would provide the appropriate scaffolding for TRIs to operate. The proposed changes to the policy maintained the academic freedom of TRIs, made no changes to current provisions by College, and was conscious of the diversity of the TRIs.</li></ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It was noted that while the appendices contained suggestions for governance, terms of reference etc it was still intended that TRIs would identify the best model for themselves.</li> </ul> <p>In discussion with the committee, the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members of the committee noted that the policy did not draw a clear distinction between Trinity Research Centres and Trinity Research Institutes and suggested that some clarification related to the larger scale of TRIs would be helpful.</li> <li>There was some discussion of shortfalls on PhD fees. It was noted that arrangements for this should be incorporated into local agreements between TRIs and their constituent schools. DOR noted that it was part of a broader discussion around fees.</li> <li>It was noted that p.15 of the appendices noted that TRIs will lead recruitment of academic staff with schools but members of the committee noted that this was not the case. It was noted that TRIs can recruit core administrative staff. It was suggested that wording should be added to the policy that TRIs should be consulted where appropriate on the recruitment of academic staff. Members of the committee also noted that it would be good if TRIs were able to recruit research fellows without those posts having to be aligned with a school.</li> <li>Members of the committee suggested that TRIs could house large grants (eg. ERCs) while a more permanent arrangement at school level was identified. DOR noted that the expectations of the candidate needed to be considered and what they might expect in terms of a permanent appointment. It was noted that a lack of agility or flexibility at school level in relation to recruitment had seen Trinity lose out on recruiting and retaining ERC awards.</li> <li>There was some discussion around academic titles; DOR noted that this was part of a broader HR project around recruitment and academic titles.</li> <li>Members of the committee noted that the policy review would allow for TRIs to work more closely together to identify shared areas of interest.</li> </ul> <p>GOR noted that most of the feedback was related to content in the appendices and asked the committee to approve policy as presented up to the 'document control' section with the understanding that Trinity Research would revise the appendices in line with the committee's feedback. They would then be brought back to committee for further discussion and approval so that policy proper could be moved through approval stages. The committee approved this request.</p> <p>GOR noted thanks to TC for leading the review, to the committee for the input and discussion, and to the TRI Directors and Executive Directors for engaging so constructively in the review process.</p>
<b>Section B - Items for Discussion Only</b>	
<b>B.1</b>	<p><b>Reform of Research Assessment: Impact on Doctoral Students</b></p> <p>Dean of Graduate Studies</p> <p>The committee received an overview of a workshop on the impact of research assessment reform on doctoral students which was organised by the HEA, NORF, National Research Integrity Forum, National Framework for Doctoral Education Advisory Forum, and the CoARA National Chapter. The report from the workshop was circulated to the committee in advance of the meeting. During the update and in discussion with the Dean of Graduate Studies the following points were noted:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trinity had signed up to the challenge of considering how it approaches research assessment. It was noted that at least 30% of current students will move back to where they originally came from where and could face career disadvantage from having engaged with a model of assessment that is not relevant for where they want to be. DGS noted that there were many tensions that needed to be considered for this cohort.</li> <li>• At least a quarter of the workshop attendees were PhD students. DGS noted that one of the asks from the workshop was that doctoral candidates would become ambassadors at their institutions. DGS noted that this was a massive responsibility to ask of someone at such an early stage of their career. The committee agreed that this was not an appropriate request to make of PhD students.</li> <li>• DGS noted that all supervisors and academic staff needed to be aware of the discussion and issues arising from it. It was not an appropriate conversation for doctoral students to be leading as they had the least agency to affect change, and that cultural change needed to be supported from multiple different angles beginning with leadership.</li> <li>• The workshop report was a summary of suggestions and did not constitute any sanctioned or approved changes to assessment methods as they currently stand. DGS noted that there was no appetite to change the viva examination. It was noted that some systems had added new elements to the viva such as public engagement. It was noted that something for consideration in the future would be to consider how to incorporate the development of the researcher and not just the examination of the thesis into the viva process.</li> <li>• DGS noted that bringing this update to the committee would be reported to the HEA. DOR asked the DGS to feedback on behalf of committee that it was agreed that it was not appropriate to task PhD students with this kind of work.</li> </ul>
<b>B.2</b>	<p><b>Update from the Dean of Research</b> Prof. Sinéad Ryan</p> <p>Congratulations were noted to the following researchers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seven newly announced research projects funded via Research Ireland's <b>Frontiers for the Future Programme</b>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tomás Ryan, Professor in Trinity's School of Biochemistry and Immunology, and the Trinity College Institute of Neurosciences, will lead the latter.</li> <li>○ Chris Batchelor-McAuley, Assistant Professor in the School of Chemistry.</li> <li>○ Gareth Brady, Ussher Assistant Professor in Clinical Medicine.</li> <li>○ Maureen O'Sullivan, Clinical Professor in Histopathology.</li> <li>○ Plamen Stamenov, Associate Professor in the School of Physics.</li> <li>○ Richard Nair, Assistant Professor in the School of Natural Sciences.</li> <li>○ Shigeki Nakagome, Assistant Professor in Psychiatry, with co-PI Lara Cassidy, Assistant Professor in the School of Genetics and Microbiology.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Prof. Shane O'Mara and colleagues from Dublin City University, De Montfort University and Tilburg University, secured a €10 million <b>European Research Council (ERC) Synergy grant</b> for their project entitled 'JUSTICE: Joining Unique Strategies Together For Interrogative Coercion Elimination.'</li> </ul> <p>DOR noted that Dundalk Institute of Technology (IT) was to become a university college of Queen's University Belfast. Students enrolling DKIT next September will graduate with a Queen's degree or postgraduate qualification. DOR noted it was an unexpected</p>

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	<p>announcement and would be interesting to see how it developed. DOR also noted that despite the press announcements, Trinity was actually the first all-island university with a Belfast campus for several years!</p> <p>It was noted that DFHERIS had launched the INSPIRE programme, a successor to the PRTLI. DOR advised that there was still not much detail but noted the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Between 2026 and 2031, €750 million will be invested, with an initial €100 million in 2026, aligned with national priorities such as competitiveness, productivity, digitalisation and decarbonisation.</li><li>• Overarching budget of at least €500m from 2026 to 2031 to support two broad categories of research equipment:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Local Institutional Infrastructure: equipment used routinely for both teaching and research purposes within a higher education institution, typically costing between €25,000 and €500,000.</li><li>○ Shared Advanced Infrastructures: costing in excess of €500,000, these refer to larger-scale more advanced equipment appropriately shared across a number of institutions and also with external users.</li></ul></li><li>• The Programme will be implemented in two phases, with Phase Two building progressively on Phase One.</li><li>• In Q1 2026, the HEA and Research Ireland will simultaneously open INSPIRE Phase One for complementary applications from each higher education institution.</li></ul> <p>In discussion with the committee, the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DOR noted that it was not yet known how much would be received for the institutional allocations. The committee was advised that the Associate Deans of Research have been tasked with working with their faculties to identify needs and map current capabilities.</li><li>• DOR noted the advantage of a defined timeline over 5 years which would allow for more strategic planning at an institutional level, particularly in light of the impending announcement regarding the Research Ireland centres call.</li></ul> <p>DOR noted that Trinity was ranked 29th in the 2026 QS World University Rankings for Sustainability. Trinity ranked first in Ireland and 16th in Europe for sustainability, according to this global ranking of 2,001 institutions. DOR noted that it was a relatively new ranking and noted congratulations to the sustainability team and the hard work that had been independently done around sustainability policies and initiatives. DOR then provided the committee with an update on rankings more broadly using the recent Times Higher Education World University Rankings as an example. In discussion with the committee, the following points were noted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DOR noted that it was important to have a sense of the trend even though much of the rankings is out of our control. It was noted that action plans would help to identify 'low-hanging fruit' that would feed into performance more broadly.</li><li>• The committee was advised that a competitiveness group would be convened which would have broad representation across all the functions that are relevant to the specific metrics in global rankings such as teaching, innovation, and global as well as research.</li><li>• Members of the committee noted the dissonance between the discussion on the reform of research assessment and the focus on rankings performance. DOR accepted the point, but noted that Trinity would be ranked and did not have a choice in the current system but to engage. However, this could be done more strategically and in a more considered manner than has been done to date.</li></ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Members of the committee noted a lack of respect for university rankings generally, citing problematic indicators, opaque metrics, and reputational elements that were beyond the control of the university. It was also noted that while all of this was true, government departments, funding agencies, and international peers did use rankings as an indicator of quality.</li><li>• DOR also noted that a version of the presentation would also be given to the Faculty Deans and Heads of Schools so they would all be aware of the current situation and proposed plans.</li><li>• Members of the committee noted issues with recruitment processes for academics, noting that there was no specific requirement for research excellence. DOR noted that staffing decisions and hiring was a school-led process but that examples of better practice could be gathered.</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>	<b>AOB</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Members of the committee raised a query in relation to researchers who had experienced funding cuts following the shuttering of USAID. DOR advised the query would be followed up outside of the committee.</li></ul>