The University of Dublin
Trinity College

RESEARCH COMMITTEE
11:00, Tuesday, 20 October 2026
Boardroom, Trinity Business School

MINUTES

Prof. Sinéad Ryan (Chair); Prof. Marco Ruffini; Prof. Hal Duncan; Prof. Joseph Roche; Prof. Tríona Lally; Prof. Stefanie Van de Peer; Prof. Joanne Banks; Prof. Susan Flavin; Prof. James Hanrahan; Prof. Valentina Colasanti; Prof. Claire Gillan; Prof. Gaia Narciso; Prof. Benjamin Wold; Prof. David Loane; Prof. Declan O'Sullivan; Prof. Michael Gibbons; Prof. Nicky O'Boyle; Prof. Manuela Kulaxizi; Prof. Susan Murphy; Prof. Ortwin Hess; Prof. Suzanne Cloonan; Prof. Lorraine O'Driscoll; Prof. Mark Little; Prof. Patrick Geoghegan; Prof. Rhodri Cusack; Vincent Coole; Prof. David Hevey.
In attendance: Dr Sally Smith; Tadhg Caffrey; Dr Fiona Smyth; Doris Alexander; Emma Kelly; Michael Reilly; Dr Jennifer Daly
Apologies: Prof. Valeria Nicolosi; Prof. Catherine McCabe; Prof. Stefano Sanvito; Helen Shenton; Prof. Bidisha Ghosh; Prof. Ed Lavelle; Prof. Mary Rogan; Prof. Catherine Welch; Prof. Sarah Doyle; Elaine Sharkey; Chris Keeley; Prof. Tomás Ryan.

Section A – Items for Discussion and Approval	
A.1	**Minutes** Minutes accepted as circulated.
A.2	**Matters Arising from the Minutes** A minor correction to the membership list in the Terms of Reference to include the Associate Dean of Innovation was noted. No other matters arising.
A.4	**Living Research Excellence Strategy (LRES)** Tadhg Caffrey, Head of Research Strategy & Policy The committee received an update on the LRES following a presentation in June. Feedback from committee informed the draft that was circulated for this meeting. Three main points of feedback were the role of PhD candidates, centrality of research excellence, and acknowledging existing research supports. DOR noted the huge amount of work that went into the development of the updated strategy. Noted that while research excellence is not specified as part of HR recruitment, a strategy that articulates research excellence helps to emphasise its importance to the institution. Members of the committee noted that the connection to a forthcoming innovation strategy should be emphasised more. It was also noted that stronger commitments on protecting time for research would be welcome. It was noted that the action plan to accompany the LRES would allow more scope for specific initiatives in that regard. The Committee agreed to approve the strategy for noting at other committees and approval at Council.
A.5	**TRI Proposal: LONGLIFE** DOR noted that the proposal had been approved in principle by the Committee at the June meeting subject to the completion of a final round of review. DOR advised that this had now concluded and all stakeholders had confirmed they were happy for the proposal to proceed to the next stage.

	DOR noted that approving a new Trinity Research Institute is a major undertaking, and noted the invaluable contribution of the Research Committee to the process how this had shaped the proposed institute to be something much stronger. DOR also noted that Trinity Research had learned a lot throughout the process, and the TRI policy which is currently under review will be much stronger as a result. It was noted that the next steps for the proposal would be to travel through College governance and presentation to Council so it would be some time yet before the TRI is fully operational. The committee approved the proposal to establish the LONGLIFE Trinity Research Institute.
A.6	**Update of College's Authorised Signatories** The committee approved a request to update the College's authorised signatories for research contracts to be updated to Vincent Coole (Director of Innovation) and Carol McCusker (Head of Legal for Research & Innovation).
Section B - Items for Discussion Only	
B.1	**Research Security: Context and Implications** Dr Joey Gaynor, Knowledge Security Manager *Joey Gaynor joined the meeting for this item.* The committee received an update on the policy context and institutional implications of research security, including Trinity's emerging response. It was noted that research and innovation are increasingly regarded as economic security assets and that dual-use considerations are expected to feature prominently in Horizon Europe (FP10) and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF). Research security is becoming a cross-cutting issue across funding streams. Ireland has adopted a National Research Security Framework. While a co-creation process had taken place during 2024 and 2025, the published guidelines differed significantly from the version discussed through that process. The guidelines are principles-based and non-regulatory, and seek to support open and responsible research, protect academic freedom, maintain international collaboration and promote proportionate risk management. The strengths of the framework include its emphasis on academic freedom, international collaboration, proportionality and risk management rather than risk avoidance. However, it was noted that substantial implementation challenges remain. Responsibility would now rest primarily with institutions, without corresponding national support or additional funding, while the specialist capability assumed by the guidelines is still developing across the sector. It was also noted that defence research is outside the scope of the guidelines. It was noted that Trinity is comparatively well positioned following the appointment of a Knowledge Security Manager. Work is under way to develop a proportionate process for dual-use research and to establish internal governance arrangements. During discussion with the committee, the following points were noted: • The description of the national process as "co-design" or "co-creation" was questioned, as published guidance did not reflect key sectoral feedback. It was noted that further national workshops had been agreed but no guarantee that

	feedback would be acted upon. It was also noted that a community of practice had been established. • Members of the committee queried how the effectiveness of the framework would be evaluated and how institutions could identify "entities of concern" without access to national intelligence or a clear feedback mechanism. • A knowledge-based rather than solely research-based approach was suggested, recognising that risk can arise across the full range of university activity, including international travel and wider institutional engagement. • A proposed Research Security Group would have a policy remit and report to the Research Committee and other relevant governance structures. • Further clarity is required on the distinction between defence research and dual-use research, including who determines these classifications and how potential dual use identified after research has commenced should be treated. • The inclusion of biotechnology among the four critical technology areas was understood to reflect EU-level priorities and international concerns regarding potential biological applications. • Members noted that placing responsibility solely on HEIs could increase rather than mitigate risk, as universities cannot independently identify the full range of national security concerns. *Dr Joey Gaynor left the meeting.*
B.2	**Sustainability Action Plan** The Sustainability Action Plan was circulated for information and feedback. Members of the committee noted that the wording of actions 2.3 and 2.7 could be read as exclusionary for some disciplines. It was agreed this would be fed back to the Sustainability team.
B.3	**Update from the Dean of Research** DOR reported on recent research funding successes. Three researchers from the School of Medicine, Mark Cunningham, Martin Barr and Michelle Spirtos, secured funding under the HRCI-HRB Joint Funding Scheme, part of a €3.1 million national investment in research shaped by the priorities and experiences of patients, families and communities. Seven Trinity-led projects secured support through the HRB's €12 million investment in investigator-led research. Awards were made to Ursula Fearon, Viviana Marzaioli, Máire Ní Leathlobhair, Clair Gardiner, G. Jane Farrar, Mikel Egaña and Gerry Hughes. Two further awards were made to Gary Moran and Peter Kinnevey at Dublin Dental University Hospital. Congratulations were noted to Dr Corentin Flament-Loron, School of Natural Sciences, on receiving an ERC Starting Grant. His project, eugene, will investigate when complex cells first emerged on Earth by combining fossil analysis, machine learning, fossilisation experiments and molecular techniques. DOR reported on the visit of the EU Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation to the Trinity Innovation Hub, following an invitation from the Student Entrepreneurship Office. The visit was followed by a roundtable at Europe House. The committee was advised that university governing authority chairs had appeared before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, where they reiterated that the Government had not fulfilled its commitment to close the funding gap in the sector. DOR noted the importance of

	maintaining pressure on Government and expressed disappointment that the recent Budget contained little for universities. No update had yet been received on INSPIRE Phase One, although an outcome was expected by the end of October. There remained no call document for Phase Two and uncertainty continued regarding Research Ireland's handling of Expressions of Interest. DOR noted reluctance to ask colleagues to invest significant effort in the absence of a call document. It was also noted that Phase One funding would run for 24 months from 1 January 2027, with all funded infrastructure required to be operational by the end of that period, creating considerable pressure for Procurement. DOR drew attention to the open call for Chair of the Research Ireland Academic Council and encouraged members to consider applying or to encourage suitable colleagues to apply.
B.4	**Update on EMPOWER** Dean of Research The committee received an update on the Empower programme. The committee was advised that Trinity's funding envelope is €7,891,076 to €10,850,229 per cycle. Submission deadline for proposals was November 6th with notification expected early January 2027. It was noted that there was no overhead, but up to 5% of the baseline could be claimed as admin costs. It was also noted that Trinity must now reserve a portion of Empower funding for supplementary funding (maternity, sick leave etc) of all Research Ireland awards, including RINN centres. It was noted that these requests had typically never involved the institution. Institutions could also apply to the Empower Strategic Growth Fund; it was noted that details related to this fund were extremely vague beyond the total funding of €1,000,000 for the entire sector. During the presentation, the DOR noted that it had been very difficult to get satisfactory responses to queries from Research Ireland and that there were multiple apparent contradictions between the stated aims of the call, the information requested as part of the proposal, and the expected outcomes Research Ireland has for Empower. DOR noted that the Working Group had been tasked with the specific remit of identifying options for the allocation of PhD and postdoc awards. It was noted that the group met three times and a summary and recommendations were being presented to EOG later that day. DOR noted that the whole process was placing significant pressure on institutions and all across the sector were struggling with it. It was noted that there was only six weeks from call to submission, with significant and detailed information requested on ALL PhD and postdoc numbers in the university including funding sources. DOR noted that a 'briefing call' on Oct 1st saw a number of questions posed to Research Ireland, with further queries submitted by email and no response had been received to either until just yesterday. It was noted that the FAQ Research Ireland had circulated answered just six questions, two of which were the same question. It was noted that the process was significant additional work for the Research Strategy & Policy team, slowing other important work for the university. During discussion with the committee, the following points were noted: • A consistent approach to faculty assessment panels was encouraged. Members expressed concern about any expectation that awards should follow historical distributions or a predetermined curve.

	• Clear guidance would be required on interdisciplinary applications. The role of TRIs in supporting interdisciplinarity was discussed, while recognising that awards would normally be linked to a supervisor or mentor based in a School and could still be hosted in a TRI. • The scheme was expected to be broadly researcher-led, supported by a letter from the proposed supervisor or mentor. DOR noted the decision to limit one application per PI reflected significant concerns about the potentially high volume of applications. It was noted that this could be reviewed after the first year when there would be a clearer sense of Trinity's capacity to manage the call. • Trinity did not currently have a dedicated system for administering a call of this scale. Conflict-of-interest arrangements and the composition of assessment panels were still under development. Members expressed concern about finalising panel composition after the call had opened, with many stressing concerns about how conflict of interest would be managed during review. • It was noted that Research Ireland had confirmed that currently enrolled students could apply to this call, but their intention was to transition Empower to solely funding students for the full duration of their degrees. DOR noted it was unclear how Research Ireland could do this when they no longer manage the application process. • It was suggested that the application form should clearly identify EU and non-EU fee status. It was noted that institutions would have to cover the non-EU fees. • Members discussed the timing of the call in advance of confirmation of Trinity's allocation. DOR noted that it was felt that an early process was necessary to remain competitive in recruiting candidates, particularly as universities in other jurisdictions make offers well in advance. • A range of options for managing application volume would need to be considered. Any use of AI in shortlisting would require transparency and applicant consent. • If Trinity secured the maximum allocation, current average award levels could potentially be maintained. Nonetheless, the scheme would generate a significant workload across academic and professional services areas. • It was also confirmed that the Enterprise Partnership Scheme was not included in Empower and was expected to be relaunched separately. • It was confirmed that the TRDA would be separate from Empower.
Section C – Items for Noting	
C.1	**Items for Noting** No items for noting.
C.2	**Research-related policy updates** It was noted that Liam McKervey, recently appointed as Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity would present an update to the committee at the next meeting on work to update the policy suite.
C.3	**Items for future discussion** No items for future discussion.
C.4	**AOB** No AOB. *Meeting was adjourned.*