



**Trinity College Dublin
The University of Dublin**

**Minutes of a meeting of Student Life Committee
16 December 2025, 11am, TBS Boardroom**

Present: Present: Prof Richard Porter (Dean of Students, in the Chair), Dr Stephen Smith (Senior Tutor), Ms Grace McNally (President, Students' Union), Ms Deirdre Leahy (Equality and Welfare Officer, Students' Union), Mr Eoin Connolly (representative, Scholars' Committee), Rev Peter Sexton (Chaplaincy), Ms Orla Bannon (Director, Careers Advisory Service), Ms Trish Murphy (Director, Student Counselling Services), Dr David McGrath (Director, College Health Centre), Mr Declan Treanor (Director, College Disability Service), Ms Michelle Tanner (Director of Sport & Physical Activity), Ms Louise Staunton (Associate Director of Trinity Global), Ms Jane Prendergast (Chair of Trinity Sports Union), Mr Conchúr Ó Cathasaigh (Chairperson, Central Societies Committee), Mr Maximillian Evans-Schmid (Chairperson, Trinity Publications), Ms Eimear Rouine (Transition to Trinity Officer), Mr Martin John McAndrew (Postgraduate Student Support Officer).

Apologies: Ms Breda Walls (Director of Student Services), Dr Dónal MacDónaill (Junior Dean & Registrar of Chambers), Mr Nigel Stevenson (Warden of Trinity Hall), Mr Aziel Zafar (Postgraduate Taught Officer, Students' Union), Mr Peter Dudley (Deputy Head of Readers' Service), Mr Joel McKeever (Equality Officer), Ms Susan Kirwin (Coordinator, Student Learning Development).

In attendance: Ms Cristina Boccoardo (Secretary), Ms Rachel Skelly (Dignity, Respect & Consent Response Manager), Ms Wendy Crampton (Director of Trinity Access Programmes).

The Dean of Students welcomed members to the third meeting of the academic year 2025/26.

SECTION A: Policy and Implementation Matters

SLC/25-26/22 A.1 Minutes

The Committee approved the minutes dated 18 November 2025.

SLC/25-26/23 A.2 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes or from the previous SLC meeting.

SLC/25-26/24 A.3 PhD Peer Guidance Network Pilot

The Committee received a presentation and briefing note on the proposed PhD Peer Guidance Network Pilot, delivered under the Postgraduate Renewal Programme. The Programme Director and Programme Officer attended for this item and outlined the rationale, scope, and proposed implementation of the pilot.

The Committee heard that a part-time Programme Officer has been appointed to lead the initiative, which aims to establish a structured peer guidance network for doctoral

students. The pilot is being developed in collaboration with the Postgraduate Advisory Service and Student Counselling Service and aligns with institutional strategic priorities to enhance postgraduate wellbeing and foster an inclusive and supportive research community.

Members noted that the initiative responds to growing evidence of the mental health and wellbeing challenges faced by PhD students, particularly during the early stages of doctoral study. The pilot seeks to support first-year PhD students through peer guidance while simultaneously providing experienced doctoral candidates with opportunities to develop mentoring and leadership skills.

It was outlined that the pilot will draw on existing institutional expertise from peer-led initiatives, including undergraduate transition programmes, and will be developed through a cross-institutional collaborative model supported by a small working group. Schools and Units with existing or complementary PhD mentoring initiatives will be invited to share their experiences to inform the design of the network.

The Committee noted that the pilot will target approximately 100 first-year PhD students supported by 12–15 trained peer mentors, with a proposed start date of March 2026 and a duration of 15 months. Funding for the pilot has been confirmed through a combination of support from the Postgraduate Renewal Programme, the Trinity Alumni Fund/ASD, and the Director of Student Services.

Committee members mentioned potential to offer the Conflict Resolution Skills training to the groups as well as the opportunity that volunteers should inform their supervisors of their intention to become mentors.

ACTION: SLC members welcomed the initiative and noted its potential to strengthen doctoral student wellbeing, community engagement, and peer leadership across the University. Depending on how the pilot project performs, the potential for expansion was widely recognised.

SLC/25-26/25

A.4 Revised Student Capacity / Capacity to Study Policy

The Committee received a presentation and briefing note on the revised Student Capacity / Capacity to Study Policy, presented by the Postgraduate Student Support Officer.

It was noted that the policy, formerly known as the Fitness to Study Policy, has been revised to ensure alignment with recent statutory updates to the Consolidated Statutes on Student Conduct and Capacity introduced in the 2024–25 academic year. Members were reminded that, as the policy is made pursuant to the statutes, statutory provisions must prevail in the event of any inconsistency, necessitating the present review.

The Committee heard that the revised policy retains the core purpose of supporting students whose complex medical, mental health, or disability-related circumstances may impact their ability to pursue their studies or, where relevant, to live independently in College. The overarching aim remains to support students to continue in, or return to, their

course of study wherever possible, while balancing individual student needs with the wellbeing and safety of the wider University community.

Key revisions were outlined, including the change in terminology from “Fitness to Study” to “Student Capacity / Capacity to Study”, the removal of the former Committee on Student Conduct and Capacity, and the confirmation that appeals under this policy will now be considered exclusively by the Academic Appeals Committee. It was further noted that cases must now commence at Level 1 or Level 2, with Level 3 accessible only by way of appeal, in line with statutory requirements and established practice.

Members noted the expansion of the list of decision-makers under the policy to include, where appropriate, the College Secretary, Registrar of Chambers, and Warden of Trinity Hall, particularly in cases involving access to campus, facilities, or College accommodation. The revised provisions relating to imminent risk were also highlighted, whereby the Senior Lecturer / Dean of Graduate Studies and the College Secretary may temporarily suspend a student from their course or from campus where there is a reasonable and imminent risk to the student or others.

The Committee welcomed the retention of supportive and student-centred language within the policy’s guiding principles and noted the introduction of clearer case management steps, including a mechanism allowing the Dean of Students, on the advice of the Student Capacity Advisory Group, to refer cases directly to Level 2 where it is evident that School-level management is not appropriate. The revised policy also codifies practices developed through operational experience, improving transparency and consistency for staff and students alike.

It was noted that Student Life Committee was not being asked to approve the policy at this stage. The revised draft will remain open for consultation with stakeholders until 14 January 2026, after which it will return to Student Life Committee for formal approval before progressing to Undergraduate Studies Committee, Graduate Studies Committee, and onward, as appropriate.

ACTION: Members thanked the Postgraduate Student Support Officer and colleagues involved in the review for the clarity of the presentation and welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback as part of the ongoing consultation process. Once fully approved and operational, the Committee suggested and recommended a student-friendly guide of the policy to be prepared for the student body as well as adequate training for staff members.

SLC/25-26/26

A.5 Student Partnership Agreement

The Committee considered a memorandum and draft documentation relating to the Student Partnership Agreement between Trinity College Dublin and the Trinity College Dublin Students’ Union (TCDSU/AMLCT), presented by the Dean of Students and representatives of the Students’ Union.

Members were reminded that the Student Partnership Agreement is a standing, annually renewed agreement which sets out the shared principles, structures, and priorities underpinning the relationship between the University and the Students’ Union. The Committee noted that the Agreement is grounded in the ten principles of student

engagement articulated by the Higher Education Authority and the National Student Engagement Programme, including partnership, inclusivity, transparency, collegiality, and continuous improvement.

The Committee noted that a number of core elements of the Agreement remain stable year-on-year. These include the recognition of TCDSU/AMLCT as the sole representative body for students, the statutory framework for student representation on College and School committees, the roles and responsibilities of both parties, and the commitment to respectful engagement, democratic participation, and regular dialogue between students and the University. Members further noted the continued emphasis on formal structures of representation, including sabbatical officers, part-time officers, class representatives, faculty and school convenors, and postgraduate representation.

It was highlighted that the Agreement is also deliberately designed to allow for annual revision and renewal, reflecting the priorities of the newly elected Students' Union and emerging institutional and student-facing challenges. In this context, members noted that Section B, which outlines the annual partnership themes and associated projects, is reviewed and refreshed each year. For the current iteration, the overarching theme of *Gach Mac Léinn, Gach Lá* continues to frame collaborative work between Trinity and TCDSU/AMLCT, with a particular focus on enhancing student engagement, promoting Universal Design for Learning, and embedding inclusion across the student experience.

The Committee welcomed the continued integration of postgraduate representation within TCDSU/AMLCT structures, including the distinction between postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students, and noted that the Agreement commits both parties to ongoing engagement to ensure sustainable and effective postgraduate representation at both College and local School level.

Members also noted the governance arrangements for the Agreement, including its approval through Students' Union structures and College committees, and the commitment to annual reporting on progress and outcomes. It was confirmed that the Agreement will be reviewed and renewed annually by the Vice-Provost / Chief Academic Officer and the TCDSU Education Officer, with oversight through Student Life Committee and onward reporting to University-level committees, as appropriate.

ACTION: The Committee welcomed the collaborative tone of the Agreement and reaffirmed its role as a key framework for partnership between Trinity and its students, however some Committee members noted that the document, as it is currently designed seems to lack a sense of purpose, direction and accountability. Perhaps it might be worth considering the document original intention and framework, i.e. to be composed of 3 sections a, B and C: how the SU and College interact; how the SU and Services interact and, lastly, each SU mandate and how this aligns with College strategy and priorities. Sections A and B should mainly remain unchanged, while C would be informed by each year's new sabbatical officers' programme.

SLC/25-26/27

A.6 Dean's report

The Dean updated the Committee on ongoing work relating to the implementation of the College Strategic Plan *Thrive*, noting in particular the role of the Strategic Plan Management Group, chaired by the Provost, and parallel engagement with senior colleagues across

Student Services. The Committee was informed that the Dean's current focus is on Commitment 3: Enhancing Student Belonging and Connection in an Engaged and Healthy University, which encompasses four interconnected strands of activity: a fully supported student journey; the development of a student centre and network of student spaces; transformed sport and healthy living; and the promotion of a socially connected university.

Members noted that work is ongoing to establish a Student Space Advisory Group, with confirmation of its remit and membership subject to discussion with the Bursar in January 2026.

The Dean also reported on the introduction of a new recognition award, The Dean of Students Award for Student Bravery, which was presented for the first time at the Civic Engagement Awards held on 5 December 2025 in the Global Mediation Building. The inaugural recipients were two Zoology students who, while on a field trip in the Wicklow Mountains, provided first aid and coordinated the rescue of a school student in serious difficulty. Members welcomed the introduction of the award and its alignment with the University's values of civic responsibility and student leadership.

The Committee further noted recent student achievements, including the success of Trinity's Three Minute Thesis winner for 2025, who subsequently achieved runner-up status at the national competition and was also awarded an international prize for her presentation. Congratulations were extended to the student for this achievement.

An update was also provided on Póstaeirs san Oireachtas / Posters in Parliament, an initiative enabling undergraduate students to present their research to parliamentarians. The Dean noted that the event took place in Leinster House on 12 November 2025 and was hosted by the Chair of the Oireachtas Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Members noted with appreciation that two Trinity undergraduate research projects from the School of Genetics and Microbiology were selected as winning posters.

Finally, the Dean advised the Committee that the Student Partnership Agreement, subject to any final updates, is expected to be submitted to the Undergraduate Studies Committee at its meeting on 27 January 2026, with a view to progressing to Council on 11 February 2026.

ACTION: Student Life Committee noted the Dean's report with thanks.

SLC/25-26/28

A.7 Any other urgent business

There was no other business raised.

Section B: Report from SLC Working Groups

SLC/25-26/29

B.1 Student Centre Working Group

The Dean of Students updated the Committee on progress with the Student Centre Project. The Dean of Students reported that the project remains on track, with architects having

been appointed and a meeting expected to happen in January 2026, on which the Committee will receive and update at the next available meeting in the new year.

SLC/25-26/30

B.2 Orientation Working Group

The Committee received a memorandum and presentation reviewing the Michaelmas Orientation programmes, presented by the Transition to Trinity Officer.

Orientation delivery in 2025 continued to adopt a hybrid model across postgraduate, visiting and Erasmus cohorts, while undergraduate Orientation was delivered fully in person. Overall engagement and participation increased significantly compared to the previous year, with postgraduate Orientation recording a 33% increase in participation and visiting and Erasmus Orientation a 30% increase.

The Committee heard that the expanded postgraduate Orientation programme included hybrid general sessions, skills workshops, campus and library tours, social events, and a Provost's Welcome, supported by additional pre-recorded online content and the Exam Hall Orientation Hub. Visiting and Erasmus students benefited from a similar hybrid model, with strong in-person attendance at campus-based activities, despite module enrolment meetings being largely delivered online. Undergraduate Orientation achieved near full attendance at general sessions, with a wide programme of course meetings, peer mentor meet-ups, lunchtime talks, and online content.

Members noted the effectiveness of the Orientation communications strategy, including social media campaigns such as *What Would You Like to Know Wednesday?*, which achieved substantially higher engagement than in previous years. The Committee welcomed the strong visibility of College Officers within Orientation communications and noted the particularly high engagement with the Dean of Students' CAO congratulatory messages.

The Committee also noted a number of operational challenges, including the overlap of Fresher's Week with teaching, pressure on S2S mentors, and ongoing difficulties securing appropriate teaching and meeting spaces. Areas identified for further development included the provision of skills workshops for undergraduate students, earlier publication of Orientation information on the website, and clearer presentation of module enrolment information.

Looking ahead, priorities for 2026 include a review and renewal of the undergraduate Orientation programme, continued development of social media engagement, and the planned migration and redevelopment of Orientation web content.

Members thanked the Transition to Trinity Officer and colleagues involved for the comprehensive review and welcomed the continued evolution of Orientation provision in response to student feedback and institutional needs.

Section C: Items to note and/or approve

SLC/25-26/31

C.1 Student Life Committee Membership 2025-26

Student Life Committee noted updates to its membership for the 2025–26 academic year, including a new ex-officio member.

SLC/25-26/32

C.2 Financial Assistance Committee Minutes

The Committee approved the draft minutes of the Financial Assistance Committee meeting held on 9 December 2025 and noted the revised Financial Assistance Protocol.

It was also announced that 80% of students who applied to the Senior Tutor’s Office student assistance fund had been paid before Christmas.

SLC/25-26/33

C.3 Student Life Committee circulation and meetings dates 2025-26

Student Life Committee noted upcoming dates for the current academic year.

The meeting ended at 12:24 pm and the Dean wished all participants a very happy Christmas break.