Introduction from the Provost

It’s hard to pick among the many highlights of the academic year 2017/18, which has seen such stand-out initiatives across the full range of our college activities. However, one of my favourite images of the year is the stack of books on my ‘to read’ list, all published by Trinity people in recent months – books by staff on history, literature, science and neuroscience, prize-winning novels and nonfiction by graduates; an essay by our Chancellor, and a memoir by one of our Senators. It’s not easy trying to keep on top of what Trinity people are doing! And I’m also very proud of the news that Trinity secured €100.6 million in research funding in 2017. Four years ago, in 2013, that figure was €74 million, which means that in less than five years, we increased our research revenue by one third - and it was already by far the highest of any Irish university.

This achievement comes thanks to our significant success with national, EU and international funding bodies including the Irish Research Council (IRC), Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), Horizon 2020, the European Research Council (ERC) and the Wellcome Trust. Trinity has won half of all Irish ERC grants.

Research and scholarship is the foundation of our reputation as a university, which is why I pick out these achievements. Excellence in research enables world-class education, innovation, industry link-ups and public engagement and it gives us confidence to approach benefactors with the message that Trinity is worth supporting because it performs so competitively and contributes so decisively to the world of knowledge.

In this Review, we give a brief snapshot of Trinity research - in Chapter 4, Research Case Studies, twelve of our researchers across our three faculties detail some of their research activities – from addressing social exclusion in the Irish higher education system to nanophotonics (light-matter interaction on the nanoscale); from how political-legal constitutions work to targeting MRSA; from digitizing bardic poetry to gauge theories from superstrings. And in Chapter 12, New Professor Interviews we talk to our four new professors - in Botany, Neurophysiology of Epilepsy, Translational Cancer Medicine and French – and hear about the exciting research they’re doing in their disciplines.

Research and education are inextricably intertwined in Trinity, and that’s education in its broader sense - what happens inside and outside the lecture room and library. This year was transformative for education – we signed a partnership agreement with Columbia University for a Dual BA programme, allowing students to graduate from both universities with two degrees over four years. The initial cohort of 40 students started in September 2018. In Chapter 3, Trinity’s Global Engagement we look at the Columbia partnership and our other global student exchanges and research collaborations.
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Through the generations, Trinity students have always helped shape college traditions and transform campus life. That was certainly true this year when students voted to end single-use plastic on campus and successfully protested over a supplemental exam fee in the “Take Back Trinity” campaign. In Chapter 8, The Student Experience we focus on the many ways that students contribute outside the classroom, while in Chapter 10, Developing a Sustainable Campus, we look at college-wide efforts to live and work more sustainably. In February Trinity became the first university in Ireland to join the International Sustainable Campus Network, ISCN, a global forum of leading colleges, universities and corporate campuses exchanging information, ideas, and best practices for achieving sustainable operations and integrating sustainability into research and teaching.

In Chapter 13, Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement, we celebrate alumni engagement across 150 countries worldwide and the support that they and our benefactors give the college. This year saw the single largest private philanthropic donation in the history of the state to Trinity, a gift of €25 million from the Naughton family for our ambitious new Engineering, Environment and Emerging Technologies Institute, E3, which will bring together engineers alongside natural scientists and computer scientists to strive for solutions to some of the greatest challenges facing our planet today.

E3 will be built in two stages – work on the E3 Learning Foundry will shortly commence on the site of the old Biochemistry building at the East-End of the campus. It will be followed by the E3 Research Institute which will be the lynchpin of a new Trinity tech campus on Grand Canal Quay – this will be developed as part of a new innovation district for Dublin. We talk about our plans for this new district in Chapter 5, Trinity at Grand Canal Quay.

As ever, public lectures, symposia, talks, exhibitions, films and performances were some of the key ways in which Trinity delivered on our commitment to engage wider...
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society. We talk about some of these in Chapter 7, Public Engagement. Some of my favourite events - choosing from a very competitive field - include Hillary Clinton’s inspirational public lecture in June addressing challenges to democracy, the role of women in politics and the power of young people to shape the future; also the Long Room’s exhibition on Oscar Wilde in October showcasing Wildean letters, photographs, theatre programmes, books and memorabilia from the Library’s collection; and Science Gallery Dublin’s spring exhibition FAKE, which looked at all the ways and things that we fake – not just news but taste, emotions, chemical signatures, facts, and trademarks.

It’s been another exceptional Trinity year. My thanks to the whole community - staff, students and alumni - for always achieving above and beyond expectations.

Dr Patrick Prendergast
Provost & President
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