The Emergence of the Grattan Scholars
Personal Reflections by Professor John O’Hagan, Emeritus Professor of Economics

I have always believed that PhD students are essential to a successful academic department. They energise research, leading very often to a win-win situation in terms of high-quality publications; the academic supervisor providing the oversight, direction and experience to bring the intensive research work of the student to fruition.

But they provide more than this. The undergraduate programmes of many departments could not function without the teaching assistance that PhD students provide. I have such good memories of those who helped me so much with Economy of Ireland tutorials, including several Grattan Scholars. Yes, sometimes student evaluations gave them a much higher rating than the lecturer, but that was a ‘price’ worth paying!

It was the above that prompted me, when funding for PhD students was in serious doubt a decade ago, to become enthusiastically involved with the Grattan Scholars programme, wonderfully supported by Helen Murray (School External Relations Manager) and Eileen Punch (Trinity Development & Alumni Office).

There followed the Annual London Grattan lectures, the purpose of which was engaging with the many alumni located there. The high-profile speakers, the lectures set in the packed ballroom of the very fine Irish Embassy building, followed by a generous reception hosted by the ambassador, are memories I will forever cherish.

Funding for twenty Grattan Scholars followed this and other endeavours. There was the added advantage that these Scholarships could be promoted internationally and hence draw on a greater pool of talent. The arrival over the last eight years of twenty young PhD students from all over the world followed. Their role, like that of other PhD students, was, as described above, providing excellent teaching assistance and research of which the School can be very proud. Indeed, many of the Scholars have already gone on to considerable career success.

The generosity of the donors in establishing this Programme amazed me. How could people be prepared to provide such significant funding for Scholarships, ‘investing’ now in young people as well as in buildings. But, they did, graduates with such fond memories of Trinity going back from the 1950s to the 2000s. One particularly stands out for his exceptional generosity, namely John Pearson. Captain of the Boat Club in 1954, he kept insisting that he wanted to give ‘something back’ to the college and particularly to support students. There are so many other good memories from meeting the donors, including one who though recently graduated felt that she should give a substantial sum back to the college in recognition of the role that a Trinity education played in her career success. So many others felt that way also.

The name Henry Grattan has iconic status in Ireland, and especially in Trinity. Looking to the future then it might be opportune to build on the programme’s success and develop the Grattan Scholars model across the wider College.

The Grattan Scholars programme honours the Irish statesman Henry Grattan, a celebrated graduate of Trinity

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The Grattan Scholars in Pictures

Inaugural Scholars Christina Kinghan (left) and Sara Mitchell (right) with Provost Dr Patrick Prendergast and their supervisors Professor Carol Newman and Professor John O’Hagan

Benefactor John Pearson with the Grattan Scholars’ donor board

Katharina Bergant (third from right) receives 2018 European Capital Markets Institute (ECMI) Best Paper Award

First scholarship in philosophy awarded to Victoria Iugai – the 20th Grattan Scholar – in 2020

Sara Mitchell selected to attend the 5th Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting on Economic Sciences

Margaryta Klymak presented with 2017 Dermot McAleese Teaching Award by Dean of Graduate Studies, Professor Neville Cox

Grattan Scholars in economics, political science and sociology