



## GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 9am on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2016  
Boardroom, Provost's House

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XX = Council relevance

- Present:**
- Professor Aideen Long, Dean of Graduate Studies (*Chair*)
  - Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
    - Professor Amir Khan, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
    - Professor Frank Barry, School of Business
    - Professor Dónall Mac Dónaill, School of Chemistry
    - Professor Lucy Hederman, School of Computer Science and Statistics
    - Professor Michael O'Sullivan, School of Dental Science
    - Professor Ruth Barton, School of Drama, Film and Music
    - Professor Damian Murchan, School of Education
    - Professor Roger West, School of Engineering
    - Professor David O'Shaughnessy, School of English
    - Professor Anne Dolan, School of Histories & Humanities
    - Professor Christer Gobl, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences
    - Professor John Stalker, School of Mathematics
    - Professor Stephen Smith, School of Medicine
    - Professor Joan Lalor, School of Nursing and Midwifery
    - Professor Louise Bradley, School of Physics
    - Professor David Hevey, School of Psychology
    - Professor Patrick Wyse Jackson, School of Natural Sciences
    - Professor John Gilmer, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
    - Professor Benjamin Wold, Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology
    - Professor Virpi Timonen, School of Social Work and Social Policy
  - Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary, CAPSL Representative (*Ex officio*)
  - Ms Jessie Kurtz, Deputy Librarian (in attendance *Ex officio*)
  - Ms Helen O'Hara, Information System Services Representative (in attendance *Ex officio*)

**Apologies:**

- Professor John J Boland, Dean of Research (*Ex officio*)
- Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
  - Professor Seamus Joseph Martin, School of Genetics and Microbiology
  - Professor Giuliana Adamo, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
  - Professor Caoimhín MacMaoláin, School of Law



Professor William Phelan, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy  
Ms Katie Crowther, Graduate Students' Union President (Ex officio)  
Dr Gianna Hegarty, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President  
(Ex officio)

**In attendance:**

Ms Ewa Sadowska (Trinity Teaching and Learning), Temporary Secretary (Ex officio)  
Ms Helen Thornbury, Office of Dean of Graduate Studies (Ex officio)  
Dr Fáinche Ryan (Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology)  
for item GS/15-16/40  
Dr Sinéad Roden (School of Business) for item GS/15-16/42  
The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer & Ms Sarah Coyle (Trinity  
Teaching and Learning) for item GS/15-16/44  
Ms Roisin Smith (Quality Officer) & Ms Amy Murray (Quality Office)  
for item GS/15-16/45

**GS/15-16/38 Minutes of 24th March 2016**

The minutes were approved by the committee as circulated.

**GS/15-16/39 Matters Arising**

*Re: GS/15-16/33 A process for dealing with restructured postgraduate student cases in Academic Registry:* The Dean of Graduate Studies provided the committee members with a short update on her follow up with the student cases team in the Academic Registry on the design of the student cases forms.

*Re: GS/15-16/34 Postgraduate Modularisation Pilot Project:* Professor Lawlor wished it to be minuted that both stand-alone specialist nursing modules i.e. in *Vascular Health and diseases* and in *Anaesthesia/Recovery Room Nursing for Nurses/Midwives* approved at the last meeting under Section B would require the Academic Registry to set up designated online entry points for recruitment purposes.

*Re: GS/15-16/35 A new course proposal MSc in Community Health:* The Dean of Graduate Studies advised that the proposal had been approved by the University Council on 13 April 2016.

*Re: GS/15-16/36 Non-pay budgets for postgraduate courses:* The Dean of Graduate Studies acknowledged that some committee members had been in touch with the Chief Financial Officer by email subsequent to the last meeting, and that the Chief Financial Officer undertook to respond directly to those communications. She also advised that Professor Phelan had sent his apologies with a query for the Chief Financial Officer asking him, on behalf of the committee, if any monies at all had been disbursed to Schools under the "new and incremental" arrangements for fee-paying postgraduate degree courses, and seeking detailed examples where this had been the case.



**XX GS/15-16/40 A new MPhil course proposal in Christian Theology**

The Dean of Graduate Studies welcomed Professor Fáinche Ryan (the Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology) to talk to the circulated course proposal taken as read. Professor Ryan explained that the proposed M.Phil. in Christian Theology will be led by and located in the Loyola Institute, but will also draw on theological expertise across the Confederal School. It will be designed to provide a comprehensive, broad-based taught graduate programme in Christian Theology with the emphasis on critical thinking, and independence of mind of students in its subject areas and on educating students to be leaders in intellectual, cultural, social, political and economic life and in public debates. Since its establishment in 2012, the Loyola Institute has attracted inquiries of interest in postgraduate study from a great variety of people, in Ireland and internationally, especially from the United States. This popularity is due both to Trinity's historic reputation in the academic study of theology and to the strong research profiles of the current Loyola staff, who have international standing in their specialisations. Trinity, though a research-based university, producing PhDs in a variety of theological sub-disciplines, does not currently offer a Masters level qualification that provides students with a comprehensive immersion across the major fields of theology, and that the new course will address this notable gap. Professor Ryan explained that the development of new postgraduate programmes is an important part of the strategic plan of the School (2015-2019), and that the modules offered in the proposed MPhil will be among the portfolio of modules from which the School will develop further initiatives at postgraduate taught level, and which will also enable the Loyola staff to engage in teaching at Masters level.

Professor Ryan briefly outlined the structure of the course, emphasising the opportunities for synergy in the Confederal School. Three optional modules will be shared with the existing MPhil in Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies delivered by the Irish School of Ecumenics.

In a discussion which followed a number of issues were raised. Professor Ryan explained that the Global Relations Office had been contacted for support in developing a marketing plan for the new course. The targeted number of applicants has been set at a conservative level for the first year but the ambition was to increase the uptake to match the maximum targeted figures. She hoped that the course could be approved by June so that it could be launched at the forthcoming major international interdisciplinary conference held by the Loyola Institute on the role of Church in a pluralist society, aimed at investigating the Church's mission in contemporary society. The presence of a larger number of postgraduate students will provide an excellent opportunity for promotion and marketing the proposed MPhil to local and international audiences. Professor Ryan also clarified that the areas of expertise of the Loyola staff were very different to those of the staff from the competitor Pontifical University at Maynooth which did not offer modules on Theology and the Celtic Church and Classical Theology. She also expressed the hope of setting up collaborative links with the arts areas in College, in particular with the history of art where significant synergies lie to develop Trinity into an interdisciplinary global centre for Theology and the Arts. The committee approved the new course without any changes.



**XX GS/15-16/41 A new Master in Education strand proposal in Mathematics Education**

The Dean of Graduate Studies welcomed Professor Damian Murchan (School of Education DTLP) to talk to the circulated strand proposal taken as read. Professor Murchan explained that the proposed Mathematics Education strand of the Master in Education course is an opportunity for the School to respond constructively to a significant reform drive in mathematics education, both nationally and internationally. This reform impacts on the structure, content, and core principles of mathematics curricula in many countries around the world. Ireland saw a reform of the secondary school mathematics curricula in 2010 with a further one planned for 2018. Accordingly, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) recommended in 2014 that structures be put in place to facilitate practicing mathematics teachers to achieve postgraduate qualifications at Masters Level. The proposed Mathematics Education strand will therefore specifically address the NCCA recommendations in all of its four modules, along with embedding content that will be attractive to international students. Given that one fifth of the reformed secondary mathematics curriculum in Ireland is now focused on Geometry and Trigonometry, the new strand is offering a bespoke module in this field to be delivered by the School of Mathematics. A Frontier Research and Current Debates in STEM Education module targets another topical area of mathematics. Professor Murchan emphasised that as a strand within the MEd, Mathematics Education is subject to all the regulations pertaining to the umbrella MEd course.

In a discussion which followed a number of issues were raised. Professor Murchan explained that the course targets in the first instance teachers in active employment with the solid mathematics competence. It is therefore intended that lectures and tutorials would be scheduled to take place in the evenings to enable attendance after work. He also clarified that an assessment requirement for a “portfolio of electronic resources for teaching” (on page 9) was referring to an outcome of the student’s own work, rather than to a library resource, as part of the student’s CPD commitment. In response to another query he explained that there would be twenty five contact hours per each 15 ECTS module with an overall 300 total hours of student effort.

The committee approved the new strand without any changes. The Dean of Graduate Studies confirmed that the strand would not be reviewed by an external assessor as the MEd is a long established course with numerous strands already in existence, and each one is subject to regular annual reviews by the MEd external examiners (2 times annually). The committee agreed to put forward the strand for approval by the next University Council *via* the GSC minutes.

**XX GS/15-16/42 A new MSc in Operations and Supply Chain Management**

The Dean of Graduate Studies welcomed Professor Sinéad Roden (School of Business) to talk to the circulated proposal taken as read. Professor Roden explained that the course was one of a portfolio of courses proposed by the School in furtherance of the School of Business Strategic Plan agreed by College Board. The rationale for offering a specialised Masters programme in Operations and Supply Chain Management was to enable Trinity to answer the market demand, take



full advantage of its unique location and reputation while achieving economies of scope and scale. Operations and supply chain management are important areas for businesses to understand in order to deliver their products and services as effectively and efficiently as possible. Trinity Business School has a strong, research active staff in this area with relevant expertise to offer such a dedicated MSc. A shortage of graduates suitable for operations and supply chain management positions was identified by a market analysis completed by Professor Roden. In terms of course structure, some core modules are already on offer as part of other PG courses in the School, but new specialised modules will be taught in both Michaelmas and Hilary Terms. Professor Roden emphasised that the Research Methods module was especially tailored to the specialism of Operations and Supply Chain Management.

In a discussion which followed a number of issues were raised. Professor Roden explained that the course was full time only as it was targeting pre-experiential candidates. She indicated that a part time delivery format tailored to the candidates in employment might be put in place in the future but would require further curricular development (particularly in light of the fact that some modules are shared with other courses). She commented on the “TBC” in reference to staffing in a number of modules by explaining that the new MSc was scheduled to start in 2017 and the School was still recruiting academic staff. The proposal was submitted for approval at this early stage as the School was preparing its promotional material for the 2017/18 recruitment cycle over the summer and was keen to include this programme.

In a subsequent discussion after the proposer had left a query arose about a lack of explicit allocation of any proportion of the course income to *cista communis*. The Dean of Graduate Studies commented that the remit of the Graduate Studies Committee is oversight of the academic content of the course proposal and the financials were the remit of the Faculty Dean. The committee approved the new course without any changes but said they would welcome clarification on the apportioning of the new course funds to the *cista communis*.

## **XX GS/15-16/43 Non-EU Collaborative and Transnationals Education Policy**

The Dean of Graduate Studies welcomed Ms Patricia Callaghan, the Academic Secretary, to talk to the circulated policy taken as read. The Academic Secretary explained that the policy had been prepared by the Trinity Teaching and Learning in collaboration with the Global Relations Office staff. The policy sets out Trinity’s approach to collaborative and transnational arrangements in line with its 2014-19 Strategic Plan and outlines the parameters for evaluating proposals for academic collaborations specifically with non-EU partners. The Academic Secretary took the committee members through the sections of the policy draft and focused on the terms of engagement, strategic and academic considerations, and the approval process for partnership proposals. Moving on to the supporting documents, the Academic Secretary concentrated in particular on a reference to a “*Toolkit on Collaborative and Transnational Education Partnerships*.” She explained that the toolkit was a collection of tailored documents that aim to guide academics through the preparation of a new partnership proposal. The Academic Secretary emphasised





that academics would be supported in that task by the Trinity Teaching and Learning the Global Relations Office staff. A member of the committee asked if the document could be extended for use with EU partnerships. While the Academic Secretary felt that this was not entirely appropriate, members of the committee felt that there was an urgent need for an equivalent document and process map for EU partnerships.

In a discussion which followed a specific concern was strongly expressed how best to ensure that Schools are informed of a new proposed partnership from the early stages of the negotiation process to avoid a situation where a partnership might be agreed with the focus on one particular School which might diminish opportunities for other Schools attempting to use that collaboration to their own ends in the future. It was therefore recommended to write it into the policy that new partnerships must be channelled through the Faculties in order to ensure that all Schools are kept in the loop about proposed collaborations. The committee approved the draft policy subject to the amendment.

## **XX GS/15-16/44 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy**

The Dean of Graduate Studies welcomed the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer and Ms Sarah Coyle, Trinity Teaching and Learning, to the meeting. She explained that a working group had been set up in Michaelmas Term to define Trinity's position with respect to the recognition of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning (RPL), taking into account current practice in relation to undergraduate and postgraduate admission, and credit exemption. The Dean of Graduate Studies and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer co-chaired the working group and Ms Coyle was its secretary.

The Dean of Graduate Studies explained that the RPL policy draft had already been considered by the Undergraduate Studies Committee, and that the members of the Graduate Studies Committee should note that the proposed policy is a high-level document in response to a legal directive of the European Council of December 2012, which states that all countries must have RPL procedures in place by 2018. The Dean of Graduate Studies took the committee members through the sections of the document. Under the proposed policy, registered students applying for an exemption from coursework completed elsewhere could receive a credit exemption – up to a limit of 10 ECTS at postgraduate level.

The discussion which followed was positive about the introduction of the new policy. Difficulties involved in identifying and quantifying prior learning of both a formal and an informal nature were acknowledged in terms of the increased workload the RPL could bring and the requirement for support and training for staff involved in the assessment process. An uncertainty about possible numbers of applicants to avail of exemptions under the new policy was also brought up as was the need to identify RPL exemptions clearly in SITS. It was clarified that the Academic Registry would collect the data and put the information on the RPL exemptions into SITS.

It was confirmed that the final responsibility for allowing RPL exemptions lay with the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer in their respective postgraduate and undergraduate areas but that they would be



acting on the recommendations from the relevant academic staff based in the Schools. The Dean's decision is final and there is no appeal mechanism. Schools should discuss and agree appropriate assessment locally but if they were unsure as to whether it was suitable, the matter should be discussed with the Dean of Graduate Studies or Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer as appropriate. A particular concern was expressed as to how best to ascertain whether applicants had achieved the required learning outcomes, particularly in the case of module exemptions. It was confirmed that assessing academics would have to assure themselves that applicants had achieved **all** learning outcomes of the relevant modules in order to be granted an exemption (based on RPL). It was further noted that similar courses in various universities frequently express their learning outcomes in different ways which makes cross-comparisons for RPL eligibility between institutions a complex matter. It was agreed that modules based on collaborative learning would not lend themselves to an exemption under the RPL policy. The committee approved the draft policy on RPL.

### **GS/15-16/45 Postgraduate Research Survey Report**

The Dean of Graduate Studies welcomed Roisin Smith (Quality Officer) and Ms Amy Murray (Administrative Officer from the Quality Office) to talk to the circulated report taken as read. Ms Murray explained that the survey was introduced in response to the Annual Faculty Quality Reports for 2013/14 which highlighted the absence of evaluation of the postgraduate research experience in Trinity. Consequently, a working party chaired by the Dean of Graduate Studies was set up in 2014/15 which designed a survey instrument first piloted in November 2015 and then finally released in February 2016.

The survey attracted 445 responses which accounts for 26% of research students enrolled in Trinity in 2015/16. The highest proportion of respondents were PhD students (87%, 389) with MSc by Research students accounting for 10% of respondents (45) (analyses in the report are based on these groups). Very small numbers of respondents were recorded in other Masters courses (11, 2.4%) and Doctoral programmes (6, 1.5%) and they are excluded from the analysis in the report. The main findings were as follows: 80% of respondents reported they were satisfied with the research programme in Trinity. Approximately 70% of respondents were satisfied with the support provided by their supervisor. Elements addressed in this question received the highest scores in the survey overall e.g. supervisor skills and subject knowledge (4.16 /5); quality of supervisor feedback help direct research activities (4.12 /5) and availability of supervisors outside planned scheduled appointments (4.10 /5). In terms of research environment 70% of the respondents reported access to suitable work space, computing resources and specialist resources. FEMS received the highest scores in this area with all three questions receiving a score of greater than 4.0 /5. In terms of professional skills development, opportunities to develop core research skills and transferable skills-sets were scored higher than opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. 26% of PhD students that responded viewed taught modules as not being relevant to their research and were disappointed with the choices on offer. 70% of respondents who taught or demonstrated had not attended any course to develop their teaching or demonstrating skills. In terms of funding, 32% of all respondents were self-funded



and the highest proportion of funded students were in FEMS. The presentation was concluded with a strong commitment to improve the survey instrument and further strengthen its analytical capacity. It was proposed to modify: question 3 on attendance at orientation programmes to which 60% of students responded “not applicable”, by specifically targeting new research students entering Trinity in this question. A question on the weekly number of teaching and demonstration hours should be reviewed as it was not responded to by nearly 40% of students.

In a discussion which followed, the need to improve communication strategies to meet the informational needs of students in terms of, for example, the structured PhD, funding opportunities, and clarity on relevant regulations was strongly emphasised. For example, research students should know that all level 9 postgraduate taught modules are available to PhD students, that all students on the PhD register are on a structured PhD programme and that completion of front-loaded taught modules (10-30 ECTS) is therefore mandatory. Another concern was that there was no visibility of a ‘menu’ of taught modules available to PG research students in College and therefore students were not aware of what was out there for them. It is also not currently possible to capture all student achievements into SITS for the purposes of a transcript. Work is currently in progress to enable registration of PhD students on modules (particularly those offered by non-academic areas), and the Dean of Graduate Studies undertook to seek an update from the Academic Registry on this for the next committee meeting.

The Dean stated that students should be actively encouraged by staff to take up modules outside of their comfort zone which contribute to their academic and personal development. Committee members were concerned that CAPSL training opportunities were too limited for the College-wide needs. The Academic Secretary indicated that relevant opportunities in this area would significantly expand next year. It was also proposed that CAPSL offerings should be made more discipline-specific and perhaps they might liaise directly with Schools to establish their needs. It was suggested that Schools could design/develop modules specifically tailored for their PhD students (for approval by GSC). An example being a module proposed by the Children’s Research Centre and recently approved by the committee.

A committee member expressed concern about the legitimacy of conclusions drawn from the survey which had attracted only a 26% response rate while the respectable norm is usually an uptake at 60%.

**GS/15-16/46            AOB**

There was none.

**Section B for noting and approval**

B.1 The committee members noted and approved *Calendar* III changes for 2016/17 from the School of Nursing and Midwifery.

**Section C for noting**

There was none.





There being no other business, the meeting ended.

Prof. Aideen Long

Date: 21 April 2016