



GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 9am on Thursday 22nd September 2016
Boardroom, Provost's House

XX = Council relevance

- Present:**
- Professor Neville Cox, Dean of Graduate Studies (*Chair*)
 - Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
 - Professor James Quinn, 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 Richard Reilly, School of Engineering
 - Professor Ruth Barton, School of Drama, Film and Music
 - Professor John Walsh, School of Education
 - Professor David O'Shaughnessy, School of English
 - Professor Christine Morris, School of Histories & Humanities
 - Professor Giuliana Adamo, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
 - Professor Caoimhín MacMaoláin, School of Law
 - Professor Jeffrey Kallen, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences
 - Professor Andreea Nicoara, School of Mathematics
 - Professor Stephen Smith, School of Medicine
 - Professor Patrick Wyse Jackson, School of Natural Sciences
 - Professor Elizabeth Fahey McCarthy, School of Nursing and Midwifery
 - Professor Louise Bradley, School of Physics
 - Professor Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
 - Professor John Gilmer, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
 - Professor William Phelan, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy
 - Professor Virpi Timonen, School of Social Work and Social Policy
 - Mr Shane Collins, Graduate Students' Union President (*Ex officio*)
 - Ms Elisa Crespo Miguelez, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President (*Ex officio*)
 - Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary, CAPSL Representative (*Ex officio*)
 - Ms Siobhan Dunne, Sub Librarian for Teaching, Research and User Experience (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 Rachel McLoughlin, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Seamus Joseph Martin, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Benjamin Wold, Confederal School of Religions, Peace
Studies and Theology

In attendance:

Ms Ewa Sadowska (Trinity Teaching and Learning), Temporary Secretary (*Ex officio*)
Ms Helen Thornbury, Office of Dean of Graduate Studies (*Ex officio*)
Ms Elizabeth Donnellan (Administrative Officer, Quality Office) for item GS/16-17/58
Ms Michelle Hogan (Executive Officer, Dean's Secretary in the Office of the Dean of
Graduate Studies)

GS/16-17/56 Minutes of 19th May 2016

The minutes were approved by the committee as circulated.

GS/16-17/57 Matters Arising

Re. GS/15-16/42 A new course proposal MSc in Operations and Supply Chain Management: The Dean of Graduate Studies advised that Council deferred consideration of this course proposal on 8 June (CL/15-16/207) due to insufficient time, and would consider it on 28 September instead.

Re: GS/15-16/49 A new course proposal MSc in Computer Science: The Dean advised that he had received a very favourable external review for each of the four strands from separate experts, and the proposal was submitted to Council in September 2016.

Re: GS/15-16/50 A new validated Master in Education Studies course in Inquiry-Based Learning from Marino Institute of Education (MIE): The Dean advised that the course was still being amended on foot of an external review with a view to being submitted to Council in October.

Re: GS/15-16/51 Policy on remote research supervision: The Dean advised that the Remote Supervision of Postgraduate (Doctoral) Students policy had been approved by Council on 8 June 2016 (CL/15-16/212). The Dean acknowledged that concerns had been expressed with regard to health and safety issues which were being followed up with the Estates and Facilities Department, and that he would update the committee on his findings at the meeting in October.

Re: GS/15-16/52 E-Theses submission: The Dean advised that he was checking with the Academic Registry when the new TARA facility would be launched, and when the research module element would go live in SITS to enable monitoring the progression of research students.

Re: GS/15-16/53 Plagiarism policy: The Dean noted that a new *plagiarism template* had been circulated to the academic staff in College. He also advised that resources were being explored to enable an update of the *Ready, Steady Write*



module. It was noted that students tick that they had completed the module without actually watching it through.

GS/16-17/58 QQI Statutory guidelines for the QA of research degree programmes for consultation

The Dean of Graduate Studies welcomed Ms Elizabeth Donnellan from the Quality Office for this item. He noted that QQI had appointed a panel of national and international experts to review existing quality assurance provisions of research degree programmes in keeping with the *National Framework for Doctoral Education*, with the goal of developing Quality Assurance Guidelines for Research Degrees (National Code of Practice). The Expert Panel reviewed the policies, regulations and procedures relating to the QA of Research Degree Programmes, supplied by institutions offering research Masters and Doctoral Degree programmes, and subsequently, in conjunction with various stakeholders from the higher education and broader research sectors, put together an initial draft of statutory quality assurance guidelines for research degrees. The QQI has now invited the stakeholders to contribute to the consultation process in order to finalise these guidelines. Trinity intends to contribute to this process which has a closing date on 3 November.

The Dean made three general points. Firstly, he noted that even though the QQI guidelines are conducive to quality assurance they cannot guarantee the quality of supervision in all cases. It is widely felt among academics that supervision is a skill that is learned and honed over time, primarily through experience. Secondly, he acknowledged that Trinity *Calendar* already contains procedures to deal with research programmes. These are drawn from when policies are being developed in response to the QQI requirements for readily accessible policy documentation. The Dean emphasised that Trinity was bound to have regard to the QQI guidelines but that they were not prescriptive. Thirdly, he noted that the QQI guidelines appear to have been created in a vacuum without recognising the chronic difficulties with resources in the higher education institutions. Any guidelines or policies for research degree programmes must acknowledge the resource constraints within which academics are working.

The Dean invited the members to share their views on each section of the guidelines.

Re Section 1 Governance and Management of Quality: The Dean noted that the guidelines appear to present a joint research supervision as a norm. In the discussion which ensued a number of points were made for and against such a mandatory practice. It was noted that a joint research supervision was extremely resource-intensive, which would create issues in Schools with small staff numbers. Additionally, all staff in the School may not have sufficient competence in all niche areas to co-supervise research projects locally undertaken. Appointment of a second supervisor may cause uncertainty as to which supervisor receives the grant. Tension may also arise when the two supervisors have a different approach to the supervised thesis which creates a difficulty for the student. Views were also expressed that the mechanism of structured PhD predominant in College, with its strong support and



guidance components *de facto* functions in lieu of the joint supervision understood as supported supervision. Students were also being supported by a mentoring system in some Schools and by the Postgraduate Advisory Service available College-wide. The idea that DTLPs could act *ex officio* as local co-supervisors was raised but it was discounted on account of the already wide brief of DTLPs. A member shared their positive experience of participating in a particular international group supervision arrangement, and suggested that Trinity could be disadvantaged globally if it were not in a position to offer joint supervision. Overall, mandatory co-supervision of PhD students (mentioned more than once in the QQI guidelines) was not considered feasible and advantageous but rather burdensome. It was concluded that the recommendations outlined in this section would require a significant input of resources to implement.

Re Section 2 Managing Partnerships in Research Degree Programmes: A query was raised as to whether the due diligence activities referenced in the first part of this section refer to the individual research project in the partner institution or the partner institution itself. It was clarified that Trinity as an institution, and not individual researchers, is responsible for completing a due diligence check, and that Trinity has no input into how partner institutions conduct their business and internal arrangements. In relation to the provision of supports for co-supervisors based on the campus of partner institutions, and the provision of opportunities for students to gain experience as tutors/demonstrators or to participate in the broader intellectual environment of partner institutions, it was agreed that it would not be possible for Trinity to stand over these.

Re Section 3 Research Students: It was acknowledged that a lot of what was required in the QQI guidelines was already in place in Trinity. It was suggested that section 3.2 on *Responsibilities of research students* should clearly state that the main duty of the research student was responsibility for writing the thesis and that the supervisor can only assist in that task. With respect to section 3.3 on *Progression and transfer* it was noted that it was considered sufficient to have independent internal, rather than external, assessors to review the transfer process of individual students in the departments. It was agreed that inclusion of an external assessor in the transfer process would not be practical from an availability and resource point of view.

Re Section 4 Supervisors and Projects: There was agreement that quality supervision cannot be taught at workshops but grows with individual experience, and the Committee did not support the idea of obligatory training courses for supervisors. Concerns were expressed by the Committee with regard to the requirement for co-supervision, on the following grounds:

- (i) co-supervision doesn't guarantee quality and may conceal issues with the principle supervisor;
- (ii) while the appointment of a co-supervisor may resolve the problem of loss of continuity if one supervisor leaves, it can often be difficult to source co-supervisors due to issues around availability, workload, personality clashes or appropriate area of expertise;



- (iii) the level of involvement of co-supervisors in the supervisory arrangement will vary, i.e. it may not be a straight 50:50 split between supervisors and this may make it difficult to factor this in accurately in workload models;
- (iv) there may be issues as to how grant income is split in joint supervisory arrangements;
- (v) joint or co-supervision in the traditional model may not be practical but if the principle is to broaden the input to the supervisory process then this is already being done in the confirmation process which institutes the philosophy behind this;
- (vi) as the provision of more than one supervisor becomes more normal internationally there may be an expectation amongst students coming to Trinity that this happens in Trinity too.

It was noted that the necessity for co-supervisors had developed in countries where there was a high degree of staff mobility. This may not be such an issue in Ireland and therefore there may not be a similar need for co-supervision arrangements, but rather more for mentoring support. The following views were advanced:

- (vii) The structured PhD may provide sufficient input in terms of coaching, mentoring and collegiality which would reduce the need for supervisory panels;
- (viii) The role of the DTLP in providing advice on career progression may fulfil some of the mentoring elements of a co-supervisory arrangement, but in larger Schools this may not be practical;
- (ix) The postgraduate advisory service has already been set up to assist postgraduate students with non-academic issues that a supervisor may traditionally be asked to deal with;
- (x) With regard to new supervisors, it was agreed that mentoring supervisory arrangements in which less experienced newly appointed junior academics are supported by more experienced supervisors aimed to enable the former to learn good supervisory practices from the latter. It was acknowledged however that this arrangement is different from the traditional joint/co-supervisory arrangement. A member suggested that it would be useful to develop a College Policy around supervision by new academics.

Re Section 5 Induction: The Committee noted that the activities outlined in this section are resource dependant. The Committee felt that there should be no obligation on the supervisor to provide additional financial support for students in terms of their research mobility, participation in conferences and networking.

Re Section 6 Training and Career Preparation: There was agreement that these recommendations were covered in Trinity via the structured PhD module choices and by means of options available in the Innovation Academy. It was reiterated that there should be no obligation on supervisors to assist students financially to network and attend events nationally and internationally.

Re Section 7 Student Progress: There was agreement that provision and scale of additional supports for students depended on available resources. In relation to the provision of a basic schedule of formal assessment meetings for the duration of the individual student research programme, this is covered by the annual reporting process and will be bedded in when the research module becomes live in SITS.



A separate issue was raised to do with the current format of progress reports which was deemed not to be sufficiently probing. It was decided to take up this issue as a separate agenda item at the next meeting.

Re Section 8 Thesis: It was noted in relation to section 8.1 on *Preparation* that it was not possible to determine in advance the time it took from thesis submission to graduation, as that depended on the quality of the thesis and the outcome of the *viva voce*. Re the requirement for deadlines for Masters and Doctoral thesis submissions that may reasonably lead to graduation by particular dates, it was suggested that the word 'reasonably' was important as it is not possible to provide students with definite dates by which they will have graduated, but rather an expected year.

Re Section 9 Final Assessment: It was noted that currently there was no requirement for doctoral theses to be of publishable quality.

Re Section 10 Continuous Quality Monitoring: In reference to section 10.4 on *Thesis quality* various interpretations were advanced but the most likely was taken to mean that the university should review past theses to assure itself that the current ones are of a comparable research quality, and that the academic standards were not slipping with time. It was queried whether this would be practical, who would undertake such a review, and what would the resource implications be. In reference to section 10.6 on *Periodic review* the Academic Secretary clarified that the current periodic School reviews cover a constituent review of research degree programmes.

In conclusion, the Dean invited the members to submit further comments by email to him directly.

xx **GS/16-17/59 Non EU applications process**

The Dean of Graduate Studies explained that Council approved on 29 June (CL/15-16/235) an amended admissions process for Non EU applications which stipulates that the Non EU quota on each postgraduate course must be filled on a first qualified applicant basis. In response to a query the Dean clarified that Trinity was striving to increase its international visibility by recruiting more Non EU applicants and therefore introduced a quota of 20% of the maximum number of students the course can accommodate to go to Non EU applicants.

The majority of Non EU applicants to postgraduate taught courses apply early in the academic year prior to the one in which they wish to study, and they require a prompt decision in order to make an informed choice and set appropriate arrangements in place. All candidates should therefore receive a decision on their application in a timely manner. It appears however that Trinity is not processing Non EU applications in a sufficiently timely manner. By adopting a *first qualified applicant admissions policy for Non EU applicants across postgraduate taught courses*, it was hoped to increase Non EU recruitment and Trinity's international competitiveness. The Dean noted that the above reasoning had underpinned Council decision to approve the rolling admissions policy for Non EU applicants. In line with that new policy each application should be dealt with upon receipt of the application, and



admissions decisions should be issued within two weeks of receipt of submitted application. In the event that the course committees, or director, do not evaluate the applications and recommend offer of places to qualified applicants within the two-week deadline, the Dean of Graduate Studies would instruct the Academic Registry to offer a place to the first qualified applicant/s until the Non EU quota is filled. The Dean noted that the policy does not apply to courses where registration or membership of an Irish Regulatory Body is a mandatory requirement for the course (e.g. nursing courses).

In the ensuing discussion it was noted that the proposal went to Council in June without being discussed by the committee. A number of members also clarified that the waiting to respond to Non EU applicants was frequently due to a delay on the part of the applicants' referees to submit their references to enable the judgment whether the applicants were successfully competitive. It was mentioned that in some Schools with limited staff resources there could be over a hundred of applicants applying for courses, which puts a significant additional time pressure on local staff already fully occupied with other academic and administrative duties. Some courses also stipulate an interview process (by phone or Skype), which is time consuming to arrange. A concern was also expressed as to the definition of the first "qualified applicant". A member also commented that some applicants apply for two or more courses, and the danger in following the new policy would be that it could lead to offering one applicant a place on more than one course.

It was decided to take up the issue of *first qualified applicant admissions policy for Non EU applicants across postgraduate taught courses* as a separate agenda item at the next meeting before bringing it for reconsideration to Council at a later stage.

GS/16-17/60 Postgraduate studentships

The Dean of Graduate Studies noted that the currently available Ussher fellowships and research studentships are in high demand and he was undertaking to identify radical new ways, via fund raising, philanthropy, corporate funding for example, to possibly create new research studentships and prizes for postgraduate taught students. He was seeking volunteers to work with him, and with Trinity Development and Alumni, on this project by means of setting up a small working group. The Dean invited interested members to contact him directly by email.

GS/16-17/61 Graduate Studies Committee Self-evaluation Survey 2015/16: analysis of responses

The Dean of Graduate Studies noted that the annual self-evaluation is a requirement for each principal committee in College and thanked the members for completion of the 2015/16 online survey of the Graduate Studies Committee. He noted that overall members expressed satisfaction with the workings of the committee. In particular he raised a few issues for further consideration such as that the committee should concentrate more on broader policy issues, and that there should be less granular discussion on course proposals. With respect to incentivisation for postgraduate taught programme he clarified that he had already raised the issue with the Vice Provost and would progress it through other available channels and update the committee in due course.



GS/16-17/62 AOB

The Dean of Graduate Studies requested that members note that new course proposals should be brought in for committee's consideration before Christmas. Schools were reminded to submit to the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies their research handbooks. The DTLPs were asked to check if there were any aspects of the new Academic Year Structure proposed under the Trinity Education Project which might cause difficulties for postgraduate taught courses.

In conclusion the Dean of Graduate Studies noted that his Secretary, Ms Michelle Hogan (present at the meeting), was due to leave for a new position in College and thanked Ms Hogan for her exemplary service over the years.

Section B for noting and approval

Re B1. The committee noted and approved *Calendar* III changes for 2017/18 from School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies for MPhil in Literary Translation. The Dean noted that the adjustments proposed aimed to rationalize the course modules, and allow the School to integrate the new Ussher Professor into the teaching of the course.

Section C for noting

The committee noted the below:

C.1 Amendments to the GSC membership for 2016/17

C.2 Draft Minutes of the Associated Colleges Degrees Committee (ACDC) of 11 May 2016

There being no other business, the meeting ended.

Prof. Neville Cox

Date: 22 September 2016