



GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 9am on Thursday 28th September 2017
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 Rachel Mary McLoughlin, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor James Quinn, School of Business
Professor Dónall Mac Dónaill, School of Chemistry
Professor Owen Conlan, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Paula Quigley, School of Creative Arts
Professor John Walsh, School of Education
Professor Philip Coleman, School of English
Professor Eunan O'Halpin, School of Histories & Humanities
Professor Justin Doherty, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
Professor Deirdre Ahern, School of Law
Professor Lorna Carson, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences
Professor Andreea Nicoara, School of Mathematics
Professor Stephen Smith, School of Medicine
Professor Mary Bourke, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Fiona Timmins, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor John Gilmer, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Mauro Ferreira, School of Physics
Professor Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Professor David Shepherd, Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology
Professor William Phelan, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy
Professor Virpi Timonen, School of Social Work and Social Policy
- Mr Madhav Bhargav, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President
(*Ex officio*)
- Dr Alison Oldam, Director of Services (in attendance *Ex officio*)
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary, CAPSL Representative
(*Ex officio*)
- Ms Helen O'Hara, Information Technology Services Representative
(in attendance *Ex officio*)
Ms Helen Thornbury (Office of Dean of Graduate Studies) (*Ex officio*)

Apologies:



Professor John J Boland, Dean of Research (Ex officio)
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
Professor Michael O'Sullivan, School of Dental Science
Professor Richard Reilly, School of Engineering
Professor Seamus Joseph Martin, School of Genetics and Microbiology

Ms Siobhan Dunne, Sub-Librarian for Teaching, Research and User Experience (in attendance Ex officio)
Mr Shane Collins, Graduate Students' Union President (Ex officio)

In attendance:

Ms Ewa Sadowska (Trinity Teaching and Learning), Secretary (Ex officio)
Ms Orlaith Tunney, Careers Consultant and Ms Jacqueline Pryor, Executive Officer (Careers Advisory Service) for item GS/17-18/123
Prof. Stephen Dooley (School of Physics) for item GS/17-18/124

The Dean cordially welcomed new members to the committee and invited all members to introduce themselves.

GS/17-18/119 Minutes of 18th May 2017

The minutes were approved as circulated subject to the amendment *re* GS/16-17/112 to say that "Prof. Quinn undertook to provide for the September meeting a specific proposal for a change involving alternative modes of assessment to the dissertation on a chosen postgraduate course in the School while the Dean agreed to provide a proposal for a general principle of dissertation substitution applicable throughout College."

GS/17-18/120 Matters Arising

Re: GS/16-17/95 Postgraduate Studentship Model: The Dean advised that June Council had approved the proposed new studentship model, and requested a full review of the scheme after its first year of operation. One hundred ninety nine applications came in the previous week to be reviewed shortly. A committee and an external reviewer to assess the applications were in the process of being set up. In response to a query the Dean clarified that it was intended for the first few years to allocate the new studentships proportionally to the number of PhDs awarded the previous year to the Faculties.

Re: GS/16-17/111 Data curation in a research degree - the roles of supervisor and student: The Dean advised that a small committee was being set up to put together a policy for consideration by the Graduate Studies Committee in October.

Re: GS/16-17/115 Structured PhD changes: The Dean advised of a new 5 ECTS credit PhD module on digital impact on research theses to be put forward jointly by the Library and the office of the Dean. It is intended that this module will come on stream from January 2018.

Re: GS/16-17/118 AOB: With respect to the Wicklow 200 cycle in June – The Dean thanked all members for their support of the sporting event, and especially the



School of English for their motivating piece of poetry sent to the Dean the night before the event. Just over €3,500 was raised to support a PhD student in financial need. Following a draw the winner was the School of Languages, Literature and Cultural Studies.

GS/17-18/121 Graduate Studies Committee self-evaluation survey 2016/17

The Dean altered the order of the agenda for this item (an update in connection with GS/16-17/117) and the one below. The Dean thanked the members for completing the annual self-evaluation of the Graduate Studies Committee work in 2016/17. A main conclusion which was drawn from the responses was that the committee wished to be more efficient in doing its business and less distracted by less important issues. Postgraduate course proposals were seen both as important and requiring a lot of committee time to review them. It was agreed that members would send their comments on course proposals to the Dean in advance of the meeting.

GS/17-18/122 Quality Review of Postgraduate Procedures

This item was an update in connection with GS/16-17/116. The Dean reminded members that an external institutional review of postgraduate procedures of the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies would take place in November 2017. Self-assessment document was being produced. As part of the information gathering process for the self-assessment the Dean would meet locally with the Directors of Teaching and Learning in their Schools to discuss governance procedures in place there.

GS/17-18/123 Demonstration of online *MyCareer* system

Ms Orlaith Tunney, Careers Consultant and Ms Jacqueline Pryor, Executive Officer from the Careers Advisory Service (CAS) attended the meeting for which a document detailing the online career management system *MyCareer* had been circulated. Ms Tunney advised that the system went live during the summer, and that the Careers Management System Steering Group, chaired by the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies with the Academic Secretary as its project champion, requested that she talk to the Graduate Studies Committee about its functionality and to encourage students to use it. Ms Tunney explained that the system enables undergraduate and postgraduate students, graduates, employers, and Trinity staff to engage with the careers service thus allowing CAS to manage, monitor and report on the engagement of its users with careers events and capturing student and graduate levels of career-readiness. Graduates and staff can view opportunities, competitions and employers, postgraduate courses and funding, identify employer and CAS events, and submit queries to the CAS team. Ms Tunney illustrated the online *MyCareer* student functionality using mock student data. Students update their personal profiles and subscribe to daily and/or weekly alerts related to their interests.

The demonstration was followed by a short discussion in which responses were provided to various queries. Members were advised that over three hundred companies from many sectors, over four hundred postgraduate students, had registered with the system and over four hundred vacancies were being advertised. Temporary positions in Trinity that did not go through the HR service, and also



research and teaching positions which went through the HR, could be advertised via the system. Vacancies submitted by employers were subject to an approval process by CAS. Real student data was updated daily directly from SITS but student results were not going into the *MyCareer* system. Employers cannot access student accounts.

Members were advised that graduates of any year were allowed to access the system. For two years post-graduation, graduates can avail of the CV clinic and practice interviews and Job Search Workshops but they could not request one-to-one meetings with careers consultants. Directors were invited to encourage postgraduate students to log into the system and update their profiles in order to receive information relevant to their interests. In reference to the information on scholarships under “Opportunities” Ms Tunney suggested that it could be enhanced with the upload of awards section from the Calendar. Academic staff could also log into the system and post queries. Staff who would like to add an opportunity to *MyCareer*/CAS website could contact the CAS team at mycareersupport@tcd.ie with their email address. They would then be added to the current Trinity “employer” profile and receive an email with a link asking them to “update their password”. Once done, they can upload their opportunities for approval. Staff who would like to include vacancy lists on *MyCareer* should email Nora Moore nmoore@tcd.ie who can follow up with the creator of those lists and ask them to register with *MyCareer*. Once this is done CAS can then associate their vacancy list to that “employer” profile. The Dean congratulated Ms Tunney and Ms Pryor for their excellent work on the system.

XX **GS/17-18/124 A new MSc course proposal in Energy Science**

The Dean welcomed Prof. Stephen Dooley (School of Physics) to speak to the course proposal, distributed in a supplemental circulation, taken as read. Prof. Dooley provided a brief outline and a rationale of the course. He explained that the proposed course had been designed to teach students drawn from a wide range of science and engineering backgrounds the essential science and economics related to current and future energy utilisation. The course gives students the means to understand the science factors enabling and limiting each energy source as well as comprehension of the likely economic factors pertaining to their societal uptake. The course consists of six compulsory taught modules comprising one introductory module and five modules in various energy sources and associated technologies, with a seventh research module. Each taught module is designed to be broad, to allow students to identify the full range of technological and scientific elements contributing to the evolving energy future as well as the current environmental issues. The modules are constructed to allow students from any physical science or engineering background to acquire the energy-essential knowledge from the breadth of physical, earth and engineering disciplines. The introductory module is designed to allow students to improve their basic science knowledge in specific areas pertinent to energy science before embarking on the specialised modules. During the final months of the course, students will undertake a 15 week research project and write a substantial dissertation under the guidance of an academic supervisor based in one of the host Schools. The course will be taught by staff from the School of Physics, School of Chemistry, School of Natural Sciences (Department of Geology) and School of Engineering (Department of Civil, Structural and Environmental



Engineering). A guest lecturer will also be drawn from the Irish Environmental Protection Agency for the topic of Environmental Nuclear Safety. Prof. Dooley advised that the course aims to be accredited to the Energy Institute, the international professional body for the energy industry, in order to enhance its marketability.

In a discussion which followed members expressed their concern with the perceived low level of EU fees which might be under-selling the academically valuable course, and undermining the course financial viability. The Director of Teaching and Learning in the School of Business emphasised that pricing was a marketing decision rather than just financial. The Academic Secretary explained that the course EU fees had to fit in with an established College structure of fee bands, annually reviewed. Prof. Dooley clarified that the course financial viability would be reviewed after a few years of running the course. He also explained that the proposed course was complementary to the existing MSc in Sustainable Energy in the Department of Civil, Structural and Environmental Engineering with which it shared a module on wind energy. Prof. Dooley reassured the Dean that papers for modules IV to VI could be repeated if failed. After the proposer, and the DTLPs from the schools of Chemistry, Physics and Natural Sciences withdrew the committee noted that the course was heavily assessed, and that assessment and examination requirements were very complex. The discussion was concluded by recommending that, subject to bringing the issue of the unusually complex assessment methodology to the attention of the proposer, the proposal should be sent for an external review.

XX GS/17-18/125 Flexibility in the Dissertation space

This item was a follow up of discussion at the last meeting in May (GS/16-17/112) which raised an issue whether it might be appropriate to propose that there be greater flexibility in the “dissertation space” on Masters courses College-wide. This was on foot of a proposal from the DTLP in the School of Business that some of its suite of postgraduate courses might wish to follow the approach of leading comparator business schools in providing non-traditional routes for students to obtain the “dissertation space” credits. It had been decided at the May meeting that alternatives to dissertation might have general application across postgraduate courses in Trinity rather than being limited to the School of Business, and that, the appropriate route would be to consider a general proposal in September and, if it were accepted, to consider a request for that proposal to be applied in the specific context of a business postgraduate course.

The Dean expressed the view that there were considerable advantages to opening up the dissertation space to new formats on the understanding that they would be appropriately academically rigorous and challenging, and that the quality of Trinity Masters would not suffer as a result of such changes. New research formats should enable courses to improve their overall quality and marketability by replacing the traditional written dissertation with an alternative format, for instance a piece of creative work or a company project, that might fit more neatly with the learning outcomes of the course. It was anticipated that new formats would have application in some disciplines only where such flexibility was the norm in the top universities against which Trinity benchmarked itself.



Members discussed the Dean's proposal stated in the circulated memo. Some members noted that their Schools and Disciplines already operate 'innovatively' within the dissertation space. MPhil in Creating Writing in the School of English requires students to submit a portfolio of completed written work or poetry or drama instead of a dissertation. Directors of the MPhil in Children's Literature would be keen to modify the current requirement within the dissertation space. MPhil in Literary Translation in the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies requires a dissertation either as an annotated translation or an academic treatment of a subject in translation studies or comparative literature informed by the research in translation theory. A "dissertation" may therefore take two forms, i.e. a traditional theoretical essay where the student formulates and argues a theoretical argument, using examples found in published translation to illustrate their case or a translation and commentary where the student produces a translation, and uses this as the basis of a critical discussion. MPhil in Film Studies: Theory, History, Practice in the School of Creative Arts offers a Dissertation with Practice option where a practice component to the dissertation, worth 30% of the dissertation of 30 ECTS, reflects the learning outcomes of the course and aligns it with comparable taught Masters in the UK and USA. It appears that the practice option on this course is even more demanding than the traditional dissertation as last year there was only one student who opted for it. The School of Education on occasion, will seek permission from the Dean to allow a student to submit two research papers in lieu of dissertation on its Masters programmes. In all cases it was noted that the 'dissertation' involves a considerable research component and is academically challenging.

Some members expressed concern that to award a Masters degree without requiring a traditional dissertation might devalue the degree in the minds of applicants and external observers, and that it would therefore be imperative to ensure very specific requirements, like underpinning of the practice-based research, and robust supervision for alternative formats to be put in place. The Dean emphasised that the Graduate Studies Committee would therefore enhance its critical role as a gate keeper of quality of postgraduate studies, and each proposal for an alternative dissertation format would need to be submitted to it for approval and might be sent for an external review.

The proposal from the Dean, endorsed by the Committee, therefore, is as follows:

Whereas normally, 30 ECTS within a postgraduate taught Masters course will be awarded for a research dissertation to be submitted by a student, it is possible for an individual course to provide that these 30 credits will be awarded for another exercise, of equivalent academic rigour and with a research component (including, where appropriate, practice-based research), that is consistent with the overall aims and learning outcomes of that course. Proposals in relation to such course changes must be approved, following discussion by the Graduate Studies Committee and by the University Council. Where appropriate, the Graduate Studies Committee may require that the proposed change to the 'dissertation space' be sent for review and comment by an external expert evaluator.



It was decided that the Dean would bring the amended proposal to Council in October in a separate memo in addition to the minutes of the Graduate Studies Committee meeting in September. In the meantime, he will also circulate a memo asking members for feedback with respect to the dissertation space proposal and in regard to alternative dissertation practices in their Schools which could then be passed on to other members for their information.

XX GS/17-18/126 Dissertation Options for MSc in Entrepreneurship

This item was a follow on to the discussion at the last committee meeting in May (GS/16-17/112) which raised the possibility of diversifying the dissertation format on Masters courses in Trinity Business School. The Dean welcomed Prof. Jim Quinn to speak to his circulated memo which was taken as read. Prof. Quinn explained that his School was seeking approval for a revised configuration of the existing dissertation requirement on the MSc in Entrepreneurship which was designed for students aiming to establish a new venture or scale up an existing small business. In order to effectively meet these two broad purposes two new options for the Masters final project were being made available to students. Either students will develop an innovative comprehensive business plan underpinned with theoretical perspectives and team work for a new entrepreneurial venture or they will design and implement a scaling-up strategy for an existing small business (an in-company project). Both options require students to work actively on real-life projects, and to ground their work within the models, theories and frameworks studied in taught modules on the course whose intersection of theory and practice is its key advantage. The supervision of the Entrepreneurship projects will require supervisors to evaluate the work of students through an analysis of both the conceptual and practice-based contribution of the projects in their charge. In the case of a team project, the assessment of students within a team will be ensured through the division of labour within the team and the assignment of specific tasks to each student decided and communicated to the supervisor during the first month of the work. Once created and approved the division of labour cannot be changed. Prof. Quinn emphasised that the proposed alternatives would have a very large research component and strong pedagogical and intellectual strength reflecting the best practice in operation in the UK competitor business schools.

In a discussion which followed an issue of marking of team projects came up. A concern was expressed that without a clear marking protocol of such collective undertakings the course might lend itself prone to frequent appeals by students challenging their individual marks for the same group project. In response Prof. Quinn drew members' attention to the fact that group projects were an established feature of Trinity's MBA, and there were hardly any appeals. He agreed that an assessment methodology of group projects was especially complex, but clarified that there would be an agreed parcelling out of the project of research supervision and each part would be quality-assessed. The course handbook would contain a clear statement how projects were evaluated and assessed. The Academic Secretary suggested that the Academic Developer from CAPSL could assist in developing a policy on assessment of team projects. The Dean summed up the discussion by concluding that in principle Prof. Quinn's proposal gained support from members but that their concern about adequate assessment of group projects would



have to be addressed in an additional expanded clarification from Prof. Quinn outlining detailed assessment rules at the next meeting in October before a submission to Council could be made.

GS/17-18/127 QQI White Paper on Blended Learning: guidelines for discussion

The Dean noted that the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) distributed the White Paper Topic-specific QA Guidelines on Blended Learning in August with a view to opening it for consultation with institutional responses due by 3rd November 2017. The Internal deadline for submission of feedback to the Quality Office was 20th October. The Guidelines pertain to credit-bearing blended learning that leads to an award to the exclusion of programmes leading to awards where the totality of education provision is online. The current White Paper is the second version, and Trinity had previously provided feedback on an earlier draft in November 2016. The Blended Learning Guidelines apply to all providers of higher education and awards. Each provider is legally required to have regard to the Guidelines in its internal quality assurance procedures. The final Guidelines are expected to be published in 2017/18. The Dean was seeking responses from members which might feed into the overall response from Trinity. A view was expressed that the QQI should have issued guidelines to do with online learning before those on blended-learning. Both formats of delivery utilised a strong technological component and members did not feel competent to comment on that. Some members thought that the QQI document should be more specific to outline examples of what technology other institutions were using in support of their blended-learning delivery. A concern was also voiced about assessment in blended-learning. To conclude the brief discussion the Dean asked members to forward comments either from themselves or from their Schools directly to the Quality Officer in relation to the QQI White Paper, especially Section 4, as there were none forthcoming specifically from the meeting. This could be attributable, in part, to the fact that the document refers to courses and procedures generally rather than specifically to the postgraduate space.

GS/17-18/128 Language Competency Requirements for entrants to PGT Courses

The Dean introduced the issue by reminding members that all non-native English speakers applying for postgraduate courses in Trinity are required to submit a certificate of English language competency (with the most common one being a 6.5 in IELTS). Trinity requires applicants to have a 6.5 IELTS overall score but it does not require them to have a 6.5 in each of the test bands. Two suggestions had been brought to Dean's attention during the summer. The first was from the Global Office to seek whether 6.5 should be mandatory in all the bands. The second suggestion was that in certain disciplines, such as the sciences, it might be appropriate on rare occasions to waive the requirement on the basis that, unlike in, for example, AHSS disciplines, language competency was comparatively less important. The Dean noted that, as things stand, the requirement of language competency was never waived although on occasion the Dean may admit students to the register on condition that they produce a sufficient statement of language competency within 3 or even 6 months.



On the recommendation of Prof. Carson from the School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences after a brief discussion the first recommendation was rejected on the grounds that a 6.5 IELTS score for each of the bands across the overall score might be administratively useful but was of no consequence as a more meaningful language proficiency marker for academic purposes.

The second issue was deemed more complex. The Dean recommended that it would be returned for proper discussed at the next meeting where a 'bigger picture' in relation to language competency for incoming postgraduate students will be examined. In particular, consideration will be given to whether the minimum College level of entry be raised (on the understanding that individual courses can set higher requirements for their students) and whether greater flexibility in FEMS subjects could be ensured as less linguistic competence might be necessary there.

GS/17-18/129 Postgraduate and GSC Timeframes for 2017/18

The Dean raised two specific areas where, from the current academic year onwards, stricter time frames would apply in so far as Graduate Studies Committee was concerned.. Firstly, with respect to new course proposals due to commence in September 2018, he explained that for a range of academic, marketing and administrative reasons it was very important that these should be approved by Council early in any calendar year. He therefore recommended that save in exceptional circumstances, the Graduate Studies Committee will not consider any new course proposals to begin in the next academic year (i.e. September 2018) any later than at its meeting in December 2017. The recommendation was approved.

Secondly, with respect to Calendar changes, the Dean stated that it was unrealistic to expect Calendar changes to be considered by the Graduate Studies Committee, reviewed by staff in the Graduate Studies Office and Trinity Teaching and Learning and then inputted, if they were submitted too late in the year. He also noted that many of the proposed Calendar changes that come for consideration were quite oblique from the perspective of the committee as a whole. He therefore recommended that save in exceptional circumstances, Calendar changes for the next academic year will not be considered by the Graduate Studies Committee any later than at its April meeting of the previous year. In addition, prior to coming to the Graduate Studies Committee, the changes must be signed off as having been approved by whichever committee within a School has responsibility for such changes. School Calendar changes must also be accompanied by a memo saying that they *have* been so approved and either that there are no major or unusual changes to the previous rules or, where such major or unusual changes *are* made, summarising the nature of these changes with respect to the courses to which they pertain. The recommendation was also approved.

In response to a query the Dean agreed to send out an immediate email to Heads of School to make them aware of the new regulation in relation to the timeframes agreed for the Graduate Studies Committee consideration of Calendar changes and course proposals. He undertook to re-send that email on an annual basis in April.

GS/17-18/130 AOB



- (i) The Dean reminded members that all PhD theses were now submitted electronically. This development made Trinity accessible to the open access practice. Students still have to submit hard copies, though the system allows a painless way of ordering these; but for the purpose of Council lists, it is the electronic version that is the official one.
- (ii) The Dean noted that nomination forms for PhD students' examiners require impartiality between external and supervisor/student. This means that there should be no recently co-authored publications, no family connections, nor anything else that might, if the matter were to be reviewed, cast doubt on the independence of the examination process. He asked members to be gatekeepers to ensure such impartiality while being sensitive to situations where it is impossible because of the 'niceness' of the area to find someone who has had no contact with the supervisor – in such circumstances an explanatory covering note to the Dean would be very helpful. The Dean also emphasised that under Trinity's external examiner policy, a recent graduate or colleague (typically in the last 7-10 years) or someone who has examined for Trinity within the previous five years may not be appointed.
- (iii) The Academic Secretary advised that new and old postgraduate course proposals were being uploaded onto a repository on the Trinity Teaching and Learning website. The repository would have local access only, and would ensure a central, easily accessible source of postgraduate course proposals for the academic community providing visibility on successful course proposal documentation.
- (iv) The committee agreed to move the time of the December meeting to 10am-12pm to accommodate the Chancellor's use of the Boardroom that morning.

Section B for noting and approval

There were no items.

Section C for noting

Re C1 The committee noted the *Careers Advisory Service, Career Management System - steering group notes* from April 2017, June 2017, and July 2017.

Re C2 The committee noted the "Academic Oversight for Trinity Innovation Academy Delivered Programmes" approved by Council in June 2017.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11.50am.

Prof. Neville Cox

Date: 28 September 2017