



## GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 10am on Thursday 28 February 2019  
Boardroom, Provost's House

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### XX = Council relevance

**Present:** Professor Neville Cox, Dean of Graduate Studies (Chair)  
Professor Linda Doyle, Dean of Research (Ex officio)  
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:  
Professor Rachel Mary McLoughlin, School of Biochemistry and Immunology  
Professor Joseph McDonagh, Trinity Business School  
Professor John Boland, School of Chemistry  
Professor Owen Conlan, School of Computer Science and Statistics  
Professor Paula Quigley, School of Creative Arts  
Professor Michael O'Sullivan, School of Dental Science  
Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education  
Professor Philip Coleman, School of English  
Professor Matthew Campbell, School of Genetics and Microbiology  
Professor Ashley Clements, School of Histories & Humanities  
Professor Justin Doherty, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies  
Professor Deirdre Ahern, School of Law  
Professor Andreea Nicoara, School of Mathematics  
Professor Stephen Smith, School of Medicine  
Professor Fiona Timmins, School of Nursing and Midwifery  
Professor Cristin Ryan, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences  
Professor Mauro Ferreira, School of Physics  
Professor Jean Quigley, School of Psychology  
Professor Carlo Aldrovandi, School of Religion  
Professor Thomas Chadeaux, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy  
Professor Paula Mayock, School of Social Work and Social Policy

Dr Jake Byrne, Academic Director, Tangent (in attendance Ex officio)  
Mr Oisín Coulter, Graduate Students' Union President (Ex officio)  
Dr Gogoal Falia, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President (Ex officio)  
Mr Martin McAndrew, Postgraduate Student Support Officer  
(in attendance Ex officio)  
Ms Helen O'Hara, Information Technology Services Representative  
(in attendance Ex officio)  
Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary, CAPSL Representative  
(in attendance Ex officio)



Ms Helen Thornbury (Office of Dean of Graduate Studies)  
(in attendance *Ex officio*)  
Ms Ewa Sadowska (Academic Affairs, Trinity Teaching and Learning)  
Secretary (in attendance *Ex officio*)

*Apologies:*

Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:

Professor Biswajit Basu School of Engineering  
Professor John Saeed, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication  
Sciences  
Professor Mary Bourke, School of Natural Sciences

Ms Breda Walls, Director of Student Services (in attendance *Ex officio*)  
Ms Siobhan Dunne, Library (in attendance *Ex officio*)

***In attendance:***

Profs Ross McManus & Shigeki Nakagome (School of Medicine) & Prof. Russell  
McLaughlin (School of Genetics and Microbiology) for item GS/18-19/263  
Prof. Kevin Michell (Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies) & Mary  
McMahon (Project Officer Trinity Education Project) for item GS/18-19/264

At the start of the meeting, the Dean welcomed Professor Joseph McDonagh who replaces Professor Sinéad Roden until the end of Michaelmas Term as the DTLP in the Trinity Business School and Professor Carlo Aldrovandi as a new DTLP in the School of Religion replacing Professor David Shepherd.

**GS/18-19/261 Minutes of 24 January 2019**

The minutes were approved as circulated.

**GS/18-19/262 Matters Arising**

*Re: GS/18-19/241 A new Postgraduate Diploma course proposal in Healthcare Innovation:* The Dean advised that Council had approved the proposal at its meeting in mid-February.

*Re: GS/18-19/242 A new MPhil course proposal in Identities and Cultures of Europe:* The Dean advised that Council had approved the proposal at its meeting in mid-February. He further noted that the Provost had raised a question whether the course could be expanded in the future with an Irish strand as it might be appealing to applicants. The Dean had already brought the feedback to the course director who advised that a possibility of Irish Writing as an optional module was already being discussed.

*Re: GS/18-19/244 Postgraduate student mental health and wellness:* The Dean noted that the February seminar on mental health and wellness for research supervisors was well attended by staff dealing with the issues in College. He thanked members for advertising the seminar in their Schools.



*Re: GS/18-19/253 A new strand proposal in International Development for MSc in Economics:* The Dean advised that Council had approved the proposal at its meeting in mid-February via the GSC January 2019 minutes.

*Re: GS/18-19/254 A new MSc course proposal in Immunotherapeutics:* The Dean advised that Council had approved the proposal at its meeting in mid-February.

*Re: GS/18-19/256 (i) AOB* The Dean restated that for all PGT courses, the closing date for applications is the 31 July. In terms of requests for blanket exemptions for certain courses from the 31 July deadline he stated that he would be in touch with individual Schools that had made applications for courses to be so exempt, directly the following week.

*Re: GS/18-19/257 New Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma in Managing Risk & System Change (new entry and exits points to current MSc in Managing Risk & System Change):* The Dean advised that Council had approved the proposal at its meeting in mid-February via the GSC January 2019 minutes.

*Re: GS/18-19/258 and GS/18-19/259* The Dean advised that Council had approved both bespoke Category 3 PhD research skills modules at its meeting in mid-February via the GSC January 2019 minutes.

## **XX GS/18-19/263 A new course proposal: MSc in Genomic Medicine**

The Dean welcomed Prof. Ross McManus, prospective Course Director, Prof. Shigeki Nakagome, prospective Course Coordinator (both from the School of Medicine), and Prof. Russell McLaughlin, prospective Course Coordinator (School of Genetics and Microbiology). He then provided a brief outline of the new course which focuses on the emerging area of genomic medicine which links life science research with medical practice teaching students how to generate, evaluate and apply genomic data with a view to enhancing understanding, diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

The Dean noted that the course was of one year full time or two year part time duration worth 90 ECTS comprising 60 credits of taught modules. He underlined that the course was the first collaboration between the two Schools and the first PGT course to be delivered by the School of Genetics and Microbiology. The course will be owned by the School of Medicine and primarily administered there but since both Schools recognise the need for parity of administrative effort there is also a deputy administrator in the other School. The course committee represents both Schools. Applicants should have a primary degree in a biological science or relevant health or related science area. Those with a science degree should have at least a 2.1 or equivalent. The Dean clarified that that requirement might not always apply to graduates from medicine whose awards are sometimes issued on a pass basis. There is provision to consider applicants with other appropriate qualifications especially with relevant professional experience.



In reference to the course structure the Dean stated that the course has four mandatory modules (totalling 30 ECTS) and offers a choice of six electives. Three modules are shared with the existing MSc in Molecular Medicine. Students are also required to do the structured PhD Research Integrity and Impact in an Open Scholarship Era module (5 ECTS) from the Dean's Basket, and the Dean noted that he had had discussions with the DTLP from the School of Medicine as to possible difficulties arising if the university did not have available Epigeum licences for students on the proposed new course to take the 'research integrity' element of this module. In terms of the 30 ECTS Research Project module, the Dean noted that projects can be supervised in either School. Projects will be either lab-based or computer-based and could be carried out in partner institutions both in Ireland or outside e.g. in Eurolife universities. Finally, the Dean noted that the course uses standard progression rules and provides for a Postgraduate Diploma exit award.

After his summary, the Dean invited Prof. McManus, Prof. Nakagome, and Prof. McLaughlin to take questions from the floor but none were forthcoming. The DTLPs from both Schools confirmed that their Schools welcomed the new course proposal. The Dean noted that the course proposal had already been sent out for an external review and the report was expected to be in the following week.

The committee approved the course proposal subject to a positive external review.

Before withdrawing the course proposers took the opportunity to thank Ewa Sadowska for her assistance with the course proposal.

**Decision GS/18-19/263.1:** The committee recommended the new course proposal for Council approval subject to a positive external review.

## XX **GS/18-19/264 New Timetabling Policy and Procedures**

The Dean thanked all members who had fed through their feedback with respect to the circulated new timetabling policy and procedures and stated that members' concerns could be divided into *conceptual* (i.e. with the concept of the postgraduate space being bound by policy and procedures that arose out of reform of the undergraduate curriculum) and *practical* (i.e. in relation to bespoke concrete difficulties arising out of the operation of this policy and its processes).

The Dean then introduced the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Project Officer Trinity Education Project to speak to the circulated policy. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies thanked the Dean for the opportunity to appear before the committee. He explained that the new policy came from three sources. First, from the Bursar's recent review of Estates and Facilities which underlined inefficiencies in the timetabling system and led to the Board mandate that all teaching spaces be visible in the central timetabling system and that all teaching spaces be centrally bookable. Secondly, from a recent review of timetabling practices at Trinity by SUMS Consulting (a not-for-profit organisation specialising in supporting change in the higher education sector) which gauged timetabling performance in Trinity against a timetabling maturity model and concluded that the performance currently devolved to Schools shows inconsistent



and inefficient approaches to recording timetabling data, resolving clashes and utilisation of teaching spaces. Thirdly, from the Council approved (1) a new approach to timetabling for the shared curriculum of years 1 and 2 of the new Common Architecture in TEP; and (2) the phased implementation of the fixed timetable commencing in 2019/20 for year 1 of the shared curriculum within new Common Architecture. The first two reviews revealed inefficiencies both to do with UG and PG timetabling, and the new policy aims to address those. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies stated that the policy would be reviewed after the first year.

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that the circulated policy had been amended with respect to Section 3.3 of the processes document which appeared to have suggested that the PGT timetabling would take place after all the other UG timetabling had been done. The most recent version of these processes, circulated for the meeting, has removed this stipulation. The Dean stated that those UG courses that cause particular timetabling concerns due to their shared curricula are dealt with first and, from mid-April-July 2019, all other room allocation, for both UG and PG teaching will be done in parallel. He also made an additional point that although the policy is an interim document for the next year, there is in practice unlikely to be much change from existing approaches to accommodate timetabling needs for PGT. He then opened the floor for discussion and asked members for their concerns to do with practical aspects of the new timetabling process.

A number of issues were raised, and clarifications were obtained from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Project Officer Trinity Education Project as follows:

- (i) *is it correct to think that the new policy presupposes that there be sufficient and fit for purpose space in College?*  
There is sufficient capacity, but space is currently inefficiently used, however it is expected that the new practices will create more availability and flexibility for both UG and PGT users and significantly more transparency and visibility of available space in the system for current and new usage;
- (ii) *will there be a scramble for venues when all bookings are cleared from CMIS in mid-April?*  
consultations with Schools are ongoing and evidently some room usage will be shifted for both UG and PGT users with slots to be repopulated with new bookings as some events will be cleared to make room for new bookings but not all current bookings will be affected; timetabling will be carried out in collaboration with School timetablers in order to better re-fill the venues and events and ensure a better fit between the venue capacity and its usage across College;
- (iii) *will there be a similar review of spaces for examinations to avoid resorting to external venues?*  
evidently the forthcoming timetabling exercise will be a useful learning opportunity to learn from and to inform the timetabling of examinations, but the new policy is not aiming to affect the latter;
- (iv) *how will the process of liaising with School timetablers be managed?*



the Project Officer Trinity Education Project has already met with School Managers and advised that Trinity elective modules will be timetabled first to be followed by those in the Pillar subjects; School Managers will be providing the data for this stage of the process to enable the shared UG timetable to be in before the rest of the modules can be considered; it is planned to complete the first stage of the new timetabling process by mid-April for College release; subsequently, there will be on going administrative support in place to continue the timetabling process to completion; once all the timetabled slots are in they will be carried over to the following year creating the basis of the fixed timetable; it is understood that the first few years of the implementation of the new timetabling will be a transition period allowing for new roles and practices to develop and settle across College;

- (v) *will flexibility in terms of 2-3 hour slots be available?*  
the new policy encompasses 2-3 hour slots and evening events and their timetabling will continue as normal unless change is required to rebook the venue for the shared UG curriculum;
- (vi) it was noted from the floor that currently some events are not timetabled although venues are used. The Project Officer Trinity Education Project advised that all local specialist space in College must be in the timetable to give visibility to all events including one off ones to be accommodated and all activities have to be captured and no events should continue to be outside the timetabling system as the policy mandates that all usage should be in CMIS and there may not be no non-timetabled activities in Schools;
- (vii) clinical places and venues in St James's hospital will not be affected by the new policy;
- (viii) *will external lecturers from industry be accommodated and adjunct professionals who may only come in at a fixed time?*  
the policy allows for that, but venues might have to be changed;
- (ix) the policy also allows for the last minute change of venue required to accommodate a late request from a School to ensure access for a student with disability;

The Dean questioned whether the impact of the policy and procedures (and the coming into being of a fixed timetable) might inhibit future and radical reform of PGT offerings. In particular, he referred to (a) the possibility that such reform might involve the normalisation of modules being shared across programmes and (b) the possibility that such reform might involve a large number of PGT offerings generally moving from a timetable modelled on the undergraduate, to one involving intensive block teaching. He raised a conceptual issue whether the new policy and its related practices might constitute an inherent constraint on possible reforms of that nature – in other words, could the timetable policy and processes actually inhibit the breadth of the pedagogical developments of PGT. The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies was of the view that such constraints were impossible to predict at this stage but that the policy was designed to benefit both UG and PG teaching needs. The Dean thanked the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate



Studies and the Project Officer Trinity Education Project for facilitating a very constructive discussion and they both withdrew at that point.

A discussion then followed mainly around the theme of the intended review of the PGT space. The DTLP from the School of Histories and Humanities wished it to be minuted that in the recent survey of Masters student in the School a strong preference was expressed for block teaching instead of spread of teaching across the semester. Generally, members expressed concern that the new timetabling policy might bring inherent constraints into the PGT review. It was recognised that the cost of living in Dublin and the lack of affordable accommodation might require a change in the manner of course delivery towards block teaching on chosen weekdays and on weekends. It was feared that such a change might not be possible because of the constraints imposed on the PGT space by the new policy: once the fixed timetable underpinning TEP gets established it will be here to stay and although it might be possible to modify it slightly on the edges it would not be possible to radically dismantle it to accommodate new PGT needs.

A number of concerns and suggestions to do with the Fixed Timetable and Procedures were articulated:

- (i) members support the proposed rationalisation of the timetable;
- (ii) the new policy document should flag the PGT needs as an essential component of the teaching offering and the PGT should be integrated;
- (iii) consideration should be given to enlarge dedicated PG teaching space to accommodate bespoke needs of the PGT students whereby venues need to be set up or fitted with facilities in a particular way and cannot be replaced by other casually chosen alternatives;
- (iv) there might be a stressful scramble for venues after the mid-April release of the shared UG curriculum timetable and Schools are concerned that all current bookings will be cleared and they will have to start from scratch;
- (v) the planned review of the PGT in 2020/21 will coincide with the first review of the new policy and the latter should take into account the needs of the former;
- (vi) it looks as though the new policy has inherent constraints which will restrict the freedom of the upcoming PGT space review in that instead of creating an opportunity to allow free discussion it will necessitate a priority to maintain the fixed timetabling structure;
- (vii) it should be possible to work out now the subsequent boundary conditions of the new fixed timetable for future reform of the PGT and this should be analysed now and made public;

In general, members concluded that it was not possible for the committee to support the new policy as it is so silent about the PGT space. In other words, the UG focus of the document means that there is very little for the GSC to endorse. Moreover, there is an ongoing concern that the needs of PGT education are simply not considered but rather it is simply assumed that the PGT space can be led by references to concerns with the UG. It was further felt that, as a College policy, the PGT space should be mentioned in it in all appropriate places to protect the integrity



of the PGT programmes. A number of statements have been formulated to sum up members' views expressed during the meeting:

- 1) GSC recognises the value of a modernised timetabling system.
- 2) GSC is not prepared to endorse the fixed timetable policy and documents and Council should be notified of this.
- 3) The principal reason why GSC does not endorse the policy is because it is unable to assess whether it is future-proofed against radical reform of PGT teaching. In other words, the policy does not really consider PGT issues or PGT development, hence there is no basis on which GSC could endorse it.
- 4) GSC further notes the limited consultation with those working in the PG space (particularly the Dean and the GSU) in the development of the policy and is concerned that this is reflected in the manner, in which potential bespoke concerns of PGT education have not meaningfully informed the new policy. GSC requests that the policy be amended to include express reference to PGT education.
- 5) The GSC is concerned as to what possible impact the policy might have in the future. In particular, the committee wonders whether, if it was determined that, pedagogically, PGT education merited a radical 'timetabling' reform such as widely shared modules or a move to block teaching, would the university prioritise the needs of the new PGT pedagogy or would it prioritise the safeguarding of the fixed timetable?
- 6) A member suggested that there must, scientifically, be a readily available algorithm that could be used to predict now the future availability of timetabling space under the proposed fixed timetable model. Such information would greatly facilitate assessing the impact of the fixed timetable on possible future PGT developments.
- 7) Whereas GSC has these concerns and is not prepared to endorse the timetable Policy as is, equally it does not believe that its non-endorsement thereof should necessarily be a determinative reason why Council should decline to endorse it.

The Dean thanked members for a constructive discussion and undertook to convey members' recommendations to the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Council.

**Action GS/18-19/264.1:** The Dean will bring the committee feedback to the attention of the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies and to Council.

## **XX GS/18-19/265 The 1252 award scheme update**

The item was carried over from the previous meeting (GS/18-19/255). The Dean advised that more substantive discussion would take place at the next meeting and that he had been receiving numerous and varied feedback from Schools about how to reform the 1252 award scheme. He noted that no requests came in to reduce the number of these awards, and all were in favour to maintain the current minimum of one per School. The Dean advised that he would welcome clear recommendations from GSC at the next meeting in relation to what the best future of these awards





would be. Should any recommendations involve money, he would need to liaise with those College bodies that would be responsible for giving effect to them.

**Decision GS/18-19/265.1:** To defer discussion on the item to the next meeting.

**XX GS/18-19/266 Working group on thesis committees**

The item was carried over from the previous meeting (GS/18-19/244). The Dean advised that more substantive discussion would take place at the next meeting and that he had been receiving excellent feedback from Schools which appears to converge around two recommendations namely that all PGR students should be assigned a personal tutor (like UG students) to look after their pastoral needs and who would not be their supervisor and that the thesis committee should be acting like a confirmation panel appointed at the very start of a PhD student's time on register.

**Decision GS/18-19/266.1:** To defer discussion on the item to the next meeting.

**XX GS/18-19/267 Dean of Graduate Studies' Annual Report 2017/18**

The Dean noted that his 2017/18 report was the second one in a new format based on analysis of statistical data relevant for postgraduate students provided by the AR as well as commentary on other relevant matters. The Dean's report was normally intended as a commentary on the AR report, but the AR report was not yet available, and data used in his report was obtained directly from the relevant AR sections. He thanked Helen Thornbury for collation of the data for the report.

The Dean noted that his report was in three sections and advised that due to the shortness of time members were asked to consider only the first two parts. He stated that the first part focuses on the AR-generated postgraduate data in terms of admission, progression and examination.

The Dean noted that whilst there has been a 39% increase in the number of overall applications submitted by candidates between 2016/17 and 2018/19 there has only been a 10% increase in the number of new entrant (that is, in year 1 of their course of study) PGT students registering (235 more students registered in 2018/19 than in 2016/17) in the same period. This implies a significantly widening gap between the number of applications and the number of offers made (as well as between the number of offers made and the number of students registering). The Dean noted that more applications received than offers made allows for a better choice of candidates. However, overall the application data presented indicates that approximately 1 in every 3 applications to PGT Programmes in Trinity will receive an offer of a place.

In terms of the PGR applications, a dramatic drop was noted with respect to the current year against the overall continuous decline in the last five years. As possible explanations a reduced individual research funding was referred to as well as more vibrant labour market offering real jobs to young people who might have gone to do a PhD during the last economic slump. The Dean of Research confirmed, that there was more research funding available to research centres rather than to individual research students. Some consideration was given to the issue whether an optimal number of PhD students might be approximated for Trinity but the prevailing view



was that cutting edge research requires a high number of PGR students. A particular concern as to the current low number of research students was expressed by the DTLP from the School of Mathematics – namely that it significantly reduces the number of teaching assistants and demonstrators available for undergraduate teaching. A query was then raised about the accuracy of the statistical data capturing the types of research students in the School of Medicine. Members' attention was also drawn to the declining number of PhD students who had their examinations approved in 2017/18 by Council and generally long duration of the PhD examination process, and a number of possible administrative reasons for that was identified. Members wondered what the length of the PhD examination process was in other universities and the Dean undertook to raise the issue at a forthcoming LERU meeting the following week. A brief discussion followed with respect to the rather high number of sixty five fails recorded in Table 3 for PGT courses.

Finally, the Dean noted that in the second part of his report, he considers other important developments in relation to PG education in Trinity over the 2017-2018 academic year that were not covered by the data analysed in part one, such as Graduate Studies Committee, DTLPs, Course Directors/Course Co-Ordinators and Course Administrators, Supervision Workshops, development of the Structured PhD, PG student communications, Trinity's membership of LERU and IUA, Provost's PhD Project Award Scheme, Student Hardship Fund and last but not least cycling. The Dean concluded that the third part of his report outlining challenges for the future would be carried over to the next meeting. The Dean of Research thanked the Dean for his substantive report. She noted that in the current draft recommendations are spread over the whole report and suggested that they should be collected in one place in a bullet-pointed way to give them visibility for discussion.

**Decision GS/18-19/267.1:** To defer discussion on the third part of the report to the next meeting.

**Action GS/18-19/267.1:** The Dean to revise the report in the light of comments made at the meeting.

**XX GS/18-19/268 AOB**

- (i) The Dean advised members of the forthcoming LERU meeting due to take place the following week in Dublin. As part of that meeting a seminar on future developments of research supervision will be organised in Trinity in the Global Room, and the Dean asked members to advertise the event widely in their School to ensure good attendance.

**XX Section B for noting and approval**

**GS/18-19/269 An amended annual registration period for Drama in Education and Music in Education strands of the Master in Education (MEd) programme to commence from 1 July (School of Education)**

**Decision GS/18-19/269**

The committee approved the proposed amended registration period to the two strands on the MEd course as outlined in the proposal circulated for the meeting.



**GS/18-19/270 Changes to PG Dip in Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapy from 2019/20 (School of Medicine)**

**Decision GS/18-19/270**

The committee approved the proposed alignment of the course structure to semesters from 2019/20 and a resulting Calendar entry.

**XX Section C for noting**

**GS/18-19/271** The committee noted Minutes of the Royal Irish Academy of Music Associated College Degrees Committee (RIAM ACDC) of 25<sup>th</sup> October 2018

**GS/18-19/272** The committee noted Minutes of the Marino Institute of Education Associated College Degrees Committee (MIE ACDC) of 15<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11.55am.

Prof. Neville Cox

Date: 28 February 2019