Item 1

GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE
Minutes of the meeting held at 10am on Thursday 19 September 2019
Trinity Boardroom, Trinity Business School

XX = Council relevance

Present: Professor Neville Cox, Dean of Graduate Studies   (*Chair*)
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
Professor Nigel Stevenson, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
Professor Joseph McDonagh, Trinity Business School
Professor Owen Conlan, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Paula Quigley, School of Creative Arts
Professor Ioannis Polyzois, School of Dental Science
Professor Keith Johnston, School of Education
Professor Biswajit Basu School of Engineering
Professor Philip Coleman, School of English
Professor Matthew Campbell, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Joseph Clarke, School of Histories & Humanities
Professor Justin Doherty, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
Professor Deirdre Ahern, School of Law
Professor John Saeed, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences
Professor Kumlesh Dev, School of Medicine
Professor Mary Bourke, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Fiona Timmins, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Mauro Ferreira, School of Physics
Professor Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
Professor Thomas Chadefaux, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy

Prof. Jake Byrne, Academic Director, Tangent

Shaz Oye, Graduate Students' Union President

(*in attendance Ex officio)*
Siobhan Dunne, Sub Librarian for Teaching, Research and User Experience
Dr Geoffrey Bradley, Information Technology Services Representative
Ewa Sadowska (Academic Affairs, Trinity Teaching and Learning)
                                                  Secretary to the Committee

Apologies:
Professor Linda Doyle, Dean of Research
Giséle Scanlon, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:

Professor John Boland, School of Chemistry
Professor Manuela Kulaxizi, School of Mathematics
Professor Carlos Medina, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
Professor Carlo Aldrovandi, School of Religion
Professor Paula Mayock, School of Social Work and Social Policy

Observers in attendance for all items:
Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary, Head of Trinity Teaching and Learning (TT&L)
Fedelma McNamara, Director of Internationalisation, TCD Global
Breda Walls, Director of Student Services
Martin McAndrew, Postgraduate Student Support Officer, Senior Tutor's Office
Helen Thornbury, Office of Dean of Graduate Studies, TT&L

In attendance for individual items:
Joanna Harney, Student Counsellor from the Student Counselling Service for item
GS/19-20/302

At the start of the meeting, the Dean extended a special welcome to new and continuing members and observers. The new members included DTLPs from the Schools of Dental Science, Histories and Humanities, Medicine, Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, the Graduate Students' Union President and the Graduate Students' Union Vice-President, and Dr Geoffrey Bradley from the IT Services. Fedelma McNamara, Director of Internationalisation from the TCD Global Office joined as a new observer.

GS/19-20/300 Minutes of 23 May 2019
The minutes were approved as circulated.

GS/19-20/301 Matters Arising

Re: GS/18-19/275 Dean of Graduate Studies' Annual Report 2017/18: The Dean advised that his annual report had been approved by Council (CL/18-19/183.1).

Re: GS/18-19/278(iii) In relation to the current iteration of the PPA scheme, the Dean advised that the new call was closed the day before and applications would be reviewed at a Faculty level from the following week in the expectation that the whole selection process would be completed by the November Council. The Dean of Graduate Studies from the University of Edinburgh was the external representative on the selection committee.

Re: GS/18-19/289 Thesis Committees: The Dean advised that his proposal for the establishment of PhD Thesis Committees for all incoming PhD students from September 2019 had been approved by the last Council (CL/18-19/213.1) together with the associated Calendar changes (CL/18-19/213.2). The Dean

will be amending the annual progress report applicable to all students coming in from September 2019 to make space for comments by the thesis committee. In response to a query he clarified that in the case of all first and third year PGR student meetings to be taken place in advance of the submission of the progress report, the two 'non-supervisor' members of the thesis committee would decide which was to take the role as Chairperson recognising the possibility, where appropriate, that a third party could be asked to chair. The chair may not be the student's supervisor. There was also no appetite to allocate the role to DTLPs in the Schools as that would overburden them given that some Schools may have around eighty PhD students at any one time to go through the process. There was a view that the chair could only be put in place once it has been acknowledged that the meeting will concern a student in an academic difficulty. It was noted that membership of these thesis committee panels would not prevent the academic from acting as an internal examiner as in some, especially small Schools, this might be necessary. The Dean undertook to amend the draft document circulated the previous week to reflect the recommendations from the discussion.

Re: GS/18-19/288 Policy on Internships and Placements: The Dean noted that the item had been deferred again to the following Council.

Re: GS/18-19/294 Electronic Theses: The Dean advised that his proposal for electronic submission of PGR theses in pdf for examination had been approved by Council via the GSC minutes (CL/18-19/224). Final logistical issues in relation to software, security, GDPR etc were being sorted out before implementation.

Re: Action GS/18-19/294.3 Viva Guide: The Dean thanked members who had returned feedback on the *viva* guide during the summer and noted that it was being incorporated to be forwarded shortly to a designer and disseminated to students.

Re. GS/18-19/297(iv).1: The Dean advised that Council had approved the derogations for the Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching and Learning and the MSc in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy to allow teaching outside of teaching term (CL/18-19/224.1).

GS/19-20/302 Facilitated peer support for graduate students & supervisors in 2019/20

The Dean welcomed Joanna Harney, Student Counsellor from the Student Counselling Service, and Martin McAndrew, Postgraduate Student Support Officer from the Senior Tutor's Office, to speak to the issue of facilitated peer-support for PG students & supervisors in 2019/20 and PG student support group 'Grad Chats' respectively. The Dean expressed satisfaction that the Student Counselling team accompanied by the PG Student Support Officer would be leading bespoke training workshops during the academic year for supervisors which would focus on how to ensure that supervisors get the best out of their relationship with their students and stay mindful of student mental health issues. The Student Counsellor noted that the

past two years had seen renewed focus on the PG student experience in both the national and international higher education sectors. Recent academic studies have highlighted in particular systemic issues for the wellbeing and mental health of research students. Consequently, ensuring timely access to quality pastoral support especially for PGR students has been identified as a priority for Trinity.

The Student Counsellor explained that the five themes to run through the workshops would be setting up the supervisory relationship, communication, responding to distress, repairing the relationship and resources available to underpin it. She further noted that all workshops would be stand alone with a maximum capacity per workshop of eighteen participants and applicants would register with the Dean's Secretary. In a discussion which followed members expressed their support for the proposed initiative, suggested that the current target capacity might be too small and that more workshops might have to be offered, were advised that workshops would not only be aimed at existing supervisors, but also at prospective supervisors, and undertook to notify colleagues in their Schools and encourage them to attend. The Dean confirmed that the workshops were aimed *at* supervisors and not at students. There was some discussion about the idea of a learning contract to be covered by the workshops. It was noted that many universities in Europe employed it as a standard practice helpful in defining roles and responsibilities in the supervisory relationship successfully pre-empting conflicts and embedding the culture of mutual respect. The Dean commented that Trinity might consider such a practice but given that supervisory relationships evolve over time spent by the student on the research register the terms of the learning contract would need to be sufficiently broad to allow for that. In conclusion the Dean thanked the Student Counsellor on behalf of committee members and all the students.

The Postgraduate Student Support Officer was invited at that point to provide an overview of the 'Grad Chats' PG peer support group. He explained that the group had been in operation for some time and one of key learnings from this initiative included the provision of workshops for supervisors during the current academic year referred to by the Student Counsellor above. He noted that it appears that even though 'Grad Chats' meetings were attended in equal numbers by PGR and PGT students but when asked about their benefits the PGR students valued them more than PGT students. The meetings were perceived as a good way of combating isolation which plague PGR students more than the PGT ones who participate in many more collective teaching activities. The view of the Postgraduate Student Support Officer was that, ideally, there should be two separate 'Grad Chats' groups for PGR and PGT respectively. In response to a query about their brief he explained that 'Grad Chats' groups are not solution-centred but a platform for a chat and sharing concerns. Should students need to identify a remedy to address their concerns they would need to meet the Postgraduate Student Support Officer one to one. In conclusion, the Postgraduate Student Support Officer asked members to note and disseminate the 'Grad Chats' flyer circulated with his agenda item. The Dean thanked the Postgraduate Student Support Officer for his hard work and ask members to relay his messages back to their Schools.

The Dean advised members that he had had very preliminary conversations with the Senior Tutor to discuss the recommendation contained in the report of the working group on Thesis Committees, that all PGR students should be assigned a personal tutor, but would seek to meet with him to have more discussions in the near future. The Senior Tutor had noted that there were not enough academics who act as tutors even for UG students. The Dean suggested that ideally PGT students should also have a tutor but acknowledged that currently this would not be feasible. He stated that, at a recent meeting of the LERU doctoral studies group, the group had spoken positively of the concept of someone other than the supervisor being assigned to the student in a pastoral capacity.

The Dean asked members to email staff in their Schools to enquire (a) whether, if they were already a tutor, they would be prepared to add some PGR students to their tutorial chamber or (b) if they are not a UG tutor, would they be prepared to act as a PGR tutor. He would then refer to this information in further discussions with the Senior Tutor. He pointed out that, in general, and where a supervision relationship works well, PGR students tend not to need the kind of pastoral support that UG students do. The PGR students that would use a pastoral tutor, on the other hand, tend, because they might be isolated, to have more need for one than any other cohort of students. In other words, a tutor taking on PGR students could be reasonably advised that this would not represent a big addition to workload (as PGR students do not take annual exams and there are not annual academic appeals connected with them). On the other hand, the symbolic and, occasionally the substantive importance of this would be huge.

> **Action GS/19-20/302.1**: Members are to email academic colleagues in their Schools if they would be up for taking on a few PGR students as tutees – positive response would enable the Dean to revert to the Senior Tutor to progress the initiative of setting up a tutorial system for PGR students.

XX   GS/19-20/303 Research theses examination forms

The item was a follow on to Action GS/18-19/294.2 from the previous meeting in May when some members had suggested that it would be helpful to have a template for examiner reports with a pre-agreed set of changes to be returned and structured in such a way that it accommodates the different types of PhDs submitted across College. Accordingly, the Dean had circulated for discussion a draft standard examiner's report including a 'pre-*viva*' and 'post-*viva*' sections as a possible form to be used for all research theses aimed to eliminate current situations with inadequate exam reports frequently requiring the Dean to ask examiners to clarify their recommendation by amending their reports, thereby incurring further delays for students. The Dean emphasised that the reason for changing the current practice for the new form was mainly the rational to ensure the quality of individual reports of importance to PGR students and for Trinity record keeping.

In a discussion which followed on the merits of such a mandated examiner's report form various views were expressed that
  (i)   in some universities internal/external examiners were required to fill out a joint report on the day of the *viva* which sometimes however, created a

time problem for an external examiner who would want to rush off to catch a plane

(ii) a joint report produced on the day of the *viva* would be a significant burden for both examiners to find the time to work out their differences to produce a version satisfying them both in a situation where the views of the two examiners were very different

(iii) both examiners would be notified in advance that they would need to stay on for, normally, an hour extra after the *viva* to complete a joint report with a *proviso* that in exceptional circumstances more time might be required for resolving differences to ensure that the student receives coherent feedback

(iv) draft reports might be asked of examiners to be submitted before the *viva* as a basis for the final report to save time

(v) perhaps two separate reports might be preferred to a joint one as examiners frequently do not see eye to eye and may have radically different views on the student's thesis

(vi) the external examiner is the recognised expert and s/he would be deferred to should there be disagreement between the two examiners

(vii) pre- *viva* could be an independent report identifying issues for discussion at the *viva'*

(viii) some members had no experience of ever being asked as externals to submit a pre-*viva* report or to do a report on the day of the *viva* and would be unwilling to support such an initiative

(ix) requesting a separate pre-*viva* report would add extra bureaucracy to the examination process

(x) the *viva* might be drastically different to expectations and the two examiners might not agree on a joint report

The Dean summed up the discussion by noting that members were generally in favour that

(a) all examiners be given a standard exam report form to fill out

(b) examiners be asked to write their individual preliminary reports pre-*viva* and to exchange them not less than one week *before* the *viva*

(c) examiners be informed that, following the *viva* they will be asked to stay for 30-60 minutes longer to work on agreeing result/changes

(d) after *viva*, the examiners will agree a summary of comments on the student's performance at the *viva* and an agreed list of changes (if result is pass with corrections) or an agreed list of high-level recommendations (if the result is referral)

(e) internal examiner emails the two individual pre-viva reports and the agreed document to the AR on the day of the *viva*.

The Dean stated that If this model were to be put in place it would lead to a more focused *viva*; it would align with best practice internationally; it would provide students with a defined list of what changes they have to make and would also eliminate the current need of having to chase examiners for late reports months after the *viva*. The Dean undertook to summarise these points and send them to members, and asked them to discuss them at School level, and to feed back the

outcomes of these discussions to him. The matter would then be discussed again at the October meeting of the GSC.

The Dean noted that he had also received comments in advance of the meeting, and even suggestions earlier during the year, on the issue of adding one more possible result to the PhD result spectrum. Currently, there are five potential results for a PhD (as it stands, minor changes, referral, lower degree and fail. Some members feel that there is too big a gulf between the second and third of these options, i.e. getting 'minor changes' and being referred where the former is a pass while the latter is perceived negatively as the need to substantially rewrite the thesis for re-examination. Furthermore, the Dean noted that having read hundreds of exam reports over the term of his office, he noticed that the line between what constitutes minor corrections and what constitutes a referral can be blurred as he has seen examples of recommended 'minor corrections' which were enormously extensive. In addition, he also saw cases when a thesis had been referred, despite the examiners really liking it, because they did not believe that the changes required could be completed in a two-month period.

The Dean opened therefore the floor for another discussion to consider introducing a middle result between 'minor changes' and 'referral'. The proposed new result would be appropriate where the examiners feel that, whereas significant but specific changes are needed to the thesis, equally, once these changes have been made the candidate merits the award – and thus the candidate's result would be along the line of 'Pass subject to significant prescribed changes. A revised PhD 'middle range' results' spectrum was proposed for discussion as follows:

Pass with minor changes: this would be appropriate where the changes were genuinely minor – i.e. typographical or amending figures or the likes. The candidate would have two months to submit and this would only need to be approved by the internal examiner.

Pass with significant prescribed changes: This would be appropriate where the thesis were worthy of the degree if defined significant changes were made.

Referral: This would be appropriate where the thesis merits the degree but where it is so fundamentally flawed that whereas high level suggestions can be made as to future directions that could lead to it being brought up to shape, equally it would not be possible simply to delineate changes and say 'do these things and you have got the award'.

In a discussion which followed various views were expressed as follows:
  (i)   the period for minor corrections could be extended from 2 to up to 6 months
  (ii)   the designation of "minor" corrections should be removed (that is, they should simply be termed 'corrections') and the period to make the corrections be adjusted to 3 or 6 months by being determined by the examiners on their report

(iii)   extending the corrections period might become the norm by default lengthening the student's examination period even further

(iv)   introducing individualised durations for carrying out corrections might be difficult to implement as the current IT system is not set up to deal with that and a new level of bureaucracy would need to be introduced to manually monitor every student

(v)   current lack of access to College Services and the Library for PGR students working on corrections need to be reviewed

(vi)   if students passed their thesis with corrections, they may not be sent back to the lab to carry out additional experiments; a pass means that the thesis is not to be re-written and there is to be no engagement with any new research

The Dean summed up the discussion by noting that there was no support for a 'new result' between 'minor corrections' and 'referral' but that members were in favour of removing the word 'minor' and re-designating the result as 'Pass with Corrections'. Members also appeared to have supported flexibility to extend the time period for corrections with four suggestions

- to extend to six months
- to extend to four months
- to allow the examiners to determine whether it is two, four or six months
- to have two boxes under the 'Corrections' heading - one for two and one for four months and get the examiners to tick what they recommend.

The Dean asked members to forward their views on all the issues raised in relation to this agenda item so that a conclusion could be reached on them at the next meeting. He undertook to liaise with the IT Services, the Library etc to see about improving the position of PGR students making corrections to theses in so far as access to student services is concerned. Finally, in relation to both of the last two items (i.e. the mandated exam report form and re-designation of the research exam result as 'Pass with Corrections', the Dean undertook to redraft the guidelines sent to examiners, both to incorporate the proposed changes to the exam report and also to make it clear as to the criteria for corrections/referral. In this regard, the critical decision is not how long it will take to make corrections, but rather whether, in the view of the examiner, the thesis deserves the award (i.e. it passes) albeit with corrections. The matter will be discussed again at the October meeting of the GSC.

> **Decision GS/19-20/303.1**: The committee approved a mandated exam report form and re-designation of the research exam result as from 'Pass with Minor Corrections' to 'Pass with Corrections'.

> **Action GS/19-20/303.1**: The Dean to liaise with College services re PGR students' access while doing corrections to their thesis, to re-draft guidelines to examiners and exam report form.

XX   **GS/19-20/304 Review of postgraduate education**

The Dean reminded members that the new strategic plan will contain some focus on postgraduate offerings in Trinity. He suggested that it would be very helpful if members could consider how PG offerings in Trinity should be reformed. From the

Dean's perspective and having had regard to the approach in other top universities, it seems that there are three logical strands to such reforms namely a reform of PGT offerings, a reform of PGR offerings, and a reform of governmental structures. The Dean anticipated that working groups to consider existing deficiencies and to introduce innovative solutions would be set up in due course, and that input from the GSU, the AR, TT&L, the Library, the IT services etc will also be sought.

> **Action GS/19-20/304.1**: A standing item on the GSC agenda on the review of PG education will be set up for this academic year.

GS/19-20/305 Graduate Studies Committee self-evaluation survey analysis 2018/19

The Dean thanked members for completing the annual self-evaluation survey, a requirement for each principal Committee in College, of the GSC work in 2018/19. The main conclusion which was drawn from the responses was that the committee was well chaired and efficiently run in doing its business. The Dean undertook to ensure that meetings remain to the point, streamlined and interesting for the current year. It was also notable how many members referred to the exceptional work of Ewa Sadowska and Helen Thornbury in relation to these meetings.

XX   **GS/19-20/306 AOB**

(i)   The Dean thanked members and extended his appreciation to course directors and administrators throughout College, for their incredible work over the summer in dealing with matters connected to the whole PG space singling out the PGT admissions team for ensuring that the deadline for applications of 31 July was met. He emphasised the unbroken remarkable pleasantness in all communications with him, despite the extraordinary administrative burdens place upon everybody. Via the Director of Student Services, he extended special thanks to the admissions team in the Academic Registry, acknowledging in particular contributions of Kathryn Walsh, Ella Halfacree, Rebecca Brady, Naomi Baldwin and Ciaran O'Brien.

(ii)   The Dean referred to communications he had received from Schools asking to re-instate the PG Open Day in the current academic year. He noted that when consulted in advance of the meeting, the Marketing Director Beibhinn Coman undertook to support strong attendance at an on-campus Postgraduate Fair in March/April 2020 through a digital advertising campaign promoting the event if it were reinstated. Members supported the idea.

Decision GS/19-20/306(ii).1: Committee approved reinstatement of the Postgraduate Open Day in 2019/20.

Action GS/19-20/306(ii).1: The Dean to advise the Marketing Director Beibhinn Coman accordingly.

(iii)   Martin McAndrew, Postgraduate Student Support Officer from the Senior Tutor's Office raised the issue of PGR Pilot Transition Programme. He explained that given that PGR students enter the register at different times of the year, the standard orientation week run in September does not fully

capture this cohort. He alerted members to a pilot three-phase model proposed by Transition to Trinity Officer, Eimear Rouine, to be implemented from mid October 2019, based on offerings currently available in College through Orientation, PG Advisory Service, Student Learning Development, Student Counselling Services, Careers Advisory Service, the Library, and the GSU. Phase I would focus on the initial needs of the PGR student on entrance; Phase II would cover the needs of the PGR student on confirmation on the research register and Phase III would deal with the needs of PGR students as they approach the end of their thesis. Each of the phases would be offered one morning or afternoon per semester (max 3 hours), followed by a social event organised by the GSU.

Action GS/19-20/306(iii).1: Members undertook to disseminate the information on the new pilot initiative in their Schools.

(iv)   The Dean congratulated Martin McAndrew, Postgraduate Student Support Officer from the Senior Tutor's Office on having won one of the Provost's Professional Staff Award in the category of Enhancing the Trinity Experience.

(v)   The Dean reminded members of the Great Dublin Bike Ride on September 29, to raise money for the PG Student Hardship Fund which helps PG students in direst financial need. Amongst the Trinity cyclists on the day will be the Provost. The Dean asked members to encourage Schools and colleagues to sponsor the bike ride.

(vi)   The Secretary to the Committee advised members that there would be a change over from the current Boardpad to the Diligent board management software from the October meeting. Instructions how to install and operate the new system would be circulated shortly.

(vii)   Finally, the Dean noted that the September meeting would be the last one for Helen Thornbury, Administrative Officer based in the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies, who would be moving to take up a new role as School Manager in the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences from October. An earlier invited group of three previous Deans of Graduate Studies Prof. Aideen Long, Prof. Veronica Campbell and Prof. Carol O'Sullivan entered the meeting room as did Ms Michelle Hogan and Ms Catherine the former and current executive officers in the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies. The Dean extended a warm "thank you" to Ms Thornbury for having generously assisted him throughout his term of office with prudent advice and broad knowledge of PG regulations. In particular, he acknowledged with gratitude her compassion for students. The Dean was seconded in his unreserved appreciation by each of the former Deans. Ms Thornbury acknowledged great professional opportunities she got while in her role and thanked all the academic staff with whom she worked for their kindness and goodwill. In conclusion, the Dean extended especial good wishes to Ms Thornbury also on behalf of the committee members in her new role with a round of applause.

XX   **Section B for noting and approval**
GS/19-20/307 Postgraduate Certificate in Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship – deferral of first entry to January 2020
The committee noted that funding for the programme had been acquired very late the previous academic year via the HEA/Springboard initiative and that the course had been approved late in July 2019 under the summer procedure in order to facilitate a September 2019 intake. However, in order to successfully recruit the target number of 32 students onto the programme it was agreed within Tangent that a greater lead time would be required to market and recruit a full cohort of students. The committee supported the request that the entry be moved to January 2020.

> **Decision GS/19-20/307**:
> The committee approved the proposed deferral of first entry to January 2020.

GS/19-20/308 Cessation of MSc in Advanced Radiotherapy Practice from 2019/20

> **Decision GS/19-20/308**:
> The committee approved the proposed cessation from 2019/20.

GS/19-20/309 Stand-alone/Structured PhD module in School of Medicine (Category 2): "Assessment and management of frailty in aging adults"

> **Decision GS/19-20/309**:
> To hold back the module consideration until a further meeting.

GS/19-20/310 Stand-alone module in School of Medicine: "Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease: Foundational biological, clinical and socioeconomic factors"

> **Decision GS/19-20/310**:
> To hold back the module consideration until a further meeting.

GS/19-20/311 Stand-alone module in School of Medicine: "Intervention & impact: leadership, communication, & research skills"

> **Decision GS/19-20/311**:
> To hold back the module consideration until a further meeting.

GS/19-20/312 Postgraduate Research Supervision Policy (i) and Remote Supervision of Postgraduate (Doctoral) Students (ii) - revised August 2019

> **Decision GS/19-20/312**:
> The committee approved the revised policies for Council consideration.

XX   **Section C for noting**
GS/19-20/313 The committee noted the QQI *Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* (dated July 2019).

GS/19-20/314 The committee noted the EUA Report: *Student-centred learning: approaches to quality assurance* (dated September 2019)

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

Prof. Neville Cox   Date: 19 September 2019