Item 1

GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE
Minutes of the meeting held at 10am on Thursday 27 February 2020
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 Owen Conlan, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Nicholas Brown, 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 Ashley Clements, School of Histories & Humanities
Professor Justin Doherty, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
Professor Deirdre Ahern, School of Law
Professor Manuela Kulaxizi, School of Mathematics
Professor Kumlesh Dev, School of Medicine
Professor Cian O'Callaghan, School of Natural Sciences
Professor Fiona Timmins, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Professor Mauro Ferreira, School of Physics
Professor Ladislav Timulak, School of Psychology
Professor Gillian Wylie, School of Religion
Professor Thomas Chadefaux, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy
Professor Paula Mayock, School of Social Work and Social Policy

Ms Shaz Oye, Graduate Students' Union President

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

Apologies:
    Professor Linda Doyle, Dean of Research   (*Ex officio*)

Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
    Professor Sinéad Roden, Trinity Business School

Professor John Boland, School of Chemistry
Professor John Saeed, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences
Professor Carlos Medina Martin, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences

Prof. Jake Byrne, Academic Director, Tangent

Ms Giséle Scanlon, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President

Martin McAndrew, Postgraduate Student Support Officer, Senior Tutor's Office

Observers in attendance for all items:
Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary, Head of Trinity Teaching and Learning, (TT&L)
Marie Mc Peak, Education Support Officer, Academic Affairs, TT&L
Fedelma McNamara, Director of Internationalisation, TCD Global
Breda Walls, Director of Student Services

In attendance for individual items:
Professor Clodagh Brook (School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies)
for item GS/19-20/358

GS/19-20/356 Minutes of 23 January 2020
The minutes were approved as circulated.

GS/19-20/357 Matters Arising

Re: GS/19-20/323 (i) AOB: The Dean advised that interviews for the 2019/20 Postgraduate Teaching Awards had taken place in early February and resulted in a selection of three students from the School of English, Social Work and Social Policy and Natural Sciences. The Dean noted an excellent standard of all presentations and exceptional of the winning ones.

Re: GS/19-20/335 Postgraduate Certificate in Orofacial Pain – a new course proposal: The Dean advised that the proposal had been approved by Council in February 2020.

Re: GS/19-20/345 M.Sc. in Cancer Survivorship – a new course proposal: The Dean advised that the proposal had been approved by Council in February 2020.

Re: GS/19-20/346 M.Sc. in Business Analytics – a new course proposal: The Dean advised that the proposal had been approved by Council in February 2020.

Re: GS/19-20/350 AOB

(ii)   The Dean advised that the IRC was due shortly to make an announcement about research stipends which would be discussed by the IUA Deans of Graduate Studies who had therefore delayed writing jointly to the IRC with respect to the issue.

(iii)   The Dean advised that a number of submissions had come from Schools for new conversion postgraduate diploma courses under the HEA Human Capital Initiative Pillar 1. In parallel College is collecting submissions under Pillar 3 to a deadline later in March.

Re: GS/19-20/351 M.Sc. in Development Practice – a revision to the existing course: The Dean advised that the proposal had been approved by Council in February 2020 *via* the January GSC minutes.

Re: GS/19-20/352 The Dean advised that the proposed suspension of MPhil in Music Composition (PTDM-MUSC-1F) applicable to both full time and part time options for 2020/21 had been approved by Council in February 2020 *via* the January GSC minutes.

Re: GS/19-20/353 The Dean advised that the proposed closure of MSc in Occupational Therapy (PTMD-OTHY-1P) from 2019/20 in the School of Medicine had been approved by Council in February 2020 *via* the January GSC minutes.

Re: GS/19-20/354 The Dean advised that the proposed closure of MSc in Cardiology (PTMD-CARD-2P) from 2019/20 in the School of Medicine had been approved by Council in February 2020 *via* the January GSC minutes.

Re: GS/19-20/355 The Dean advised that the proposed closure of MSc in Implementation Science (DPTMD-ISCI-1F09 full time option and DPTMD-ISCI-1P09 part time option) from 2019/20 in the School of Medicine had been approved by Council in February 2020 *via* the January GSC minutes.

GS/19-20/358 Distance-based Postgraduate Research Degrees
The Dean welcomed Professor Clodagh Brook, Head of Discipline of Italian from the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies. Prof. Brook had worked in the University of Birmingham prior to her move to Trinity. She advised members that the University of Birmingham had successfully run a distance PhD model which inspired her to submit a proposal for a similar scheme in Trinity. She thanked the DTLP of her School for bringing her initiative to the Dean's attention.

The Dean reminded members that they had discussed the concept of offering an option for distance-based learning for PGR degrees at the previous meeting, and that he had undertaken to put together a concrete proposal and consequent changes to the *Remote Supervision Policy*, and the *Calendar* part 3 entries and a supplementary application form. This had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.

The Dean underlined that if approved, an opportunity for a distance-based degree option does not constitute an entitlement for applicants to be accepted as non-resident students as there may be Disciplines that rule this out and indeed even in Disciplines where such an option might be theoretically possible, it might not be appropriate in the case of a particular student or a particular project. The proposal is only opening up the possibility for those Disciplines, like Languages, where distant earning would be possible or even advantageous. The proposal stipulates mandatory minimum university controls on distance registration (including measures to ensure the socialisation of distance-based students) acknowledging that Schools will have discretion to add additional conditions. The distance model is distinct from the traditional remote supervision model where, during the course of a student's registration, a student seeks to work away from Trinity and under the tutelage of a local advisor. The Dean noted that whereas a distance model is, in part, a response to economic concerns, equally these concerns, and especially government underfunding of higher education, remain an issue to be dealt with. Furthermore, it is not exclusively a response to economic concerns. Certainly, it might be advantageous for potential students for whom Dublin rents are prohibitive, but more generally it might open up access to education for other applicants (for example those in employment) for whom the notion of living in Dublin would not be possible.

The Dean noted that his proposal is consistent with the approaches in comparator UK universities such as Edinburgh and UCL. He stated that the received feedback by email from members was positive. The Vice President for Global Relations and the Dean of Research are in support of the proposal which could go some way towards addressing declining PhD student numbers in Trinity seen as a result in part of prohibitive living costs in Dublin and research underfunding. However, he underlined that if approved the distant PhD model should not be viewed as an economic measure but as a flexible enabler ensuring greater access to 4th level education for applicants from non-traditional contexts. He opened the floor for discussion.

Prof. Brook advised that three out of six students she had supervised in the University of Birmingham were distance PhDs from European countries and the United States. She explained that the scheme was full time and did not cannibalise the existing PhD recruitment market but opened a new niche for an additional cohort of applicants who would never have applied otherwise given that they were working in their home country and would not be in a position to relocate to Dublin for the duration of their studies. Prof. Brook further noted that the distance scheme should require a robust structure involving regular individual and group meetings to ensure that distant PhD students were not "drifting" through their studies as they would belong to a different cohort to regular PhD students. Distance based students will lose teaching opportunities in Trinity and unless institutionally assisted might not develop a sense of belonging to any cohesive cohort. Prof. Brook suggested that distance-based students should be expected to spend some time on Trinity campus upon commencement of their studies for direct orientation and meeting their supervisors F2F.

During the discussion members made the following comments that

i) the extent to which, if at all, distance-based students should be required to spend time in Dublin should be School and discipline dependent as it can vary in relation to research projects

ii) distance based students should not be admitted to the part time register

iii) availability of comprehensive regulatory documentation for commencing students would be essential and the one produced by UCL and the University of Birmingham can be used as a model

iv) sometimes the scheme might require additional supportive architecture such as affiliating the student with a local 3rd level institution for co-supervision and library access

v) online resources should be expanded in Trinity to compensate for the student's distance from the campus in Dublin

vi) there should not be any rule preventing distance-based students from being afforded university scholarship funding

vii) those students who have to spend time as employees in a company on their research projects should be accommodated on an industrial PhD model

viii) distant students may be likely to raise concerns to do with limited access to Trinity services judging by the feedback from Masters students in the School of Religion who study on Trinity campus in Belfast

ix) Trinity must be open and honest about limitations that the distance model will impose in terms of students' access to services as by definition, such students will not get the same access to on-campus services, facilities and teaching opportunities as residential students and there is no obvious way around this impediment

x) online services such as counselling and library can go a long way towards ameliorating this disadvantage, but it stands to reason that the further away the students are the more difficult it is to provide some services adequately

Action GS/19-20/358.1: The Dean to liaise with Counselling Service and with the Director of Student Services re the AR to explore possibilities for expanding their online provision.

xi) if the proposal is accepted, DTLPs will be applying to the Dean for permission to admit individual applicants to the distance register

xii) it should be possible to move from the standard to the distance PhD register

xiii) fees should be the same for both EU and non EU applicants and a sports levy should be waived

xiv) distance students should be allowed to gain teaching experience by teaching in their local universities and have credits recognised towards their structured PhD requirement in Trinity

xv) PGR External modules could be used for the purpose of capturing outside activities of distance students subject to the supervisor's approval

xvi) the distance model should be implemented initially on a pilot basis.

The Dean summed up the lengthy discussion and noted members' support for the proposed initiative of opening up PGR study to applicants who would not otherwise have access to it subject to making indicated changes to the circulated proposal for Council.

Decision GS/19-20/358.1: The committee recommended that the proposal for a distance PGR scheme be introduced on a pilot basis from September 2020 with review after 2.5 years and that the Dean amend his proposal for Council in line with points agreed during the discussion.

XX   **GS/19-20/359 Revised *External Examiners Policy***

The Dean noted that he was opening the floor for discussion on three broad issues connected to PGR examination.

The first was to loosen the constraints on external examiners attending *viva voce* exams remotely. The proposal is that the procedure would be the same as currently in operation (i.e. application to the Dean), but that there would be a pull back from the existing approach that this should only be permitted in the most extreme circumstances although F2F *viva* remains the norm but the proposed change will remove current inflexibility. In order for a remote *viva* to be permitted (a) the student and examiners would need to confirm, in writing, their consent to this and (b) examiners would need to indicate that, in their view, it was unlikely that the thesis would not pass or be subject or not to minor corrections. The Dean noted that improved technology had eliminated most of the previous risks connected with electronic *vivas*, and that expanding remote *vivas* would underline College commitment to sustainability by reducing carbon footprint due to reduced travel. It would also reduce costs for Trinity connected with flying in the most expert examiners from different parts of the world.

Members were generally supportive of the proposal but noted that
i)   at least one of the examiners must be *in situ* if the other is "remote"
ii)   it must be ensured that the remote *viva* model does not gradually become a new "norm"
iii)   no student has an entitlement to a remote *viva,* and every request needs to be made to the Dean
iv)   research Masters will continue to require a *viva* only if the exam result is uncertain.

The second issue related to the appointment of external examiners. Under the existing policy, it is provided that it is not possible to appoint an external examiner who has any collaboration with supervisor or student and that an examiner cannot be appointed if s/he has examined in Trinity in the previous five years. This was proving particularly problematic in niche areas of research, as it significantly reduced the catchment of potential examiners. It was proposed that the existing policy provisions be replaced, (a) to discourage rather than prohibit repeated use of examiners and (b) to state that whereas collaboration *per se* should not be an impediment to appointing an examiner, it should be such an impediment if it calls the independence of that examiner into question.

The Dean noted members' support for the proposed changes and undertook to further amend the policy in line with the issues agreed on during the discussion.

> **Action GS/19-20/359.1:** The Dean to amend the policy further for Council to reflect points raised during the discussion.

Decision GS/19-20/359.1: The Dean to submit the amend policy to Council.

XX   **GS/19-20/360** *Dean of Graduate Studies' Annual Report 2018/19*
The Dean noted that his 2018/19 document was intended as a commentary to the AR report considered by the committee at the previous meeting. It was based on analysis of statistical data for postgraduate students provided by the AR report as well as commentary on other relevant matters.

The Dean noted that his report was in three sections. Part A was a commentary on the AR-generated postgraduate data in terms of admission, progression and examination. Part B considered other important developments in relation to PG education in Trinity over the 2018/19 academic year discussed by the committee in order to bring Trinity into line with international best practice such as thesis committees, thesis by publication, and electronic submission of PhD theses. Part C focused on highlighting primary concerns connected to future developments of the PG space in Trinity. In particular the Dean focused on (i) financing of PGR students in an era of escalating rents and huge financial daily pressures, (ii) delayed improvements of technological systems, processes and resourcing to be sufficiently cutting edge that their operation can guarantee the quality of service that is expected, and (iii) the vision of the 'Trinity Student' and her or his needs. With respect to number (ii) the Dean underlined huge systemic flaws, and under-resourcing of the AR at critical times of the year when there is not enough staff to ensure that matters are dealt with effectively and promptly. He also pointed to the inadequate functionality within SITS to cater for bespoke needs of PG education.

In a discussion which followed the following points were made:
i)   references to Disciplines should be removed from the section on plagiarism in the report
ii)   more data by gender should be provided in the next AR annual report to enable the Dean to bring them into his report for benchmarking exercise by Schools
iii)   the application system for postgraduate students is unwieldy and this puts Trinity at a recruitment disadvantage in comparison to Trinity's competitor universities
iv)   Trinity should publish a list of supervisors and areas of their research expertise online to attract more PhD applicants
v)   non EU PGR fees should not be a source of revenue for College but Trinity PGR students should be seen as research partners
vi)   EU and non EU fees should be equalised at the EU level to ameliorate to some extent chronic underfunding of PGR students
vii)   for historical reasons, College appears to be set up in relation to its UG student needs which disadvantages PG students: timetable, classrooms, examinations, student life and more broadly the pedagogical mission of Trinity focuses of an undergraduate model
viii)   systems (such as application systems) have been constructed having primary regard to the nature of UG processes but the PG space and the UG space are not analogous and PG students should be seen as a distinct cohort and College should reconfigure its approach to have both cohorts in focus

ix)   adequate resources should be made available to the AR to address its current under-capacity for efficiency

x)   that the Dean's report should contain a summary of recommendations at the end.

The Director of Student Services spoke in reference to the chronic under-resourcing of the AR and underlined that the area is 35% the size of equivalent UK models. The PwC were brought in to analyse the inadequacy of the AR current resource levels, and highlighted that without increasing the funding, the AR will not be in a position to support the projected growth in student numbers and future strategic objectives dependent on Academic Registry participation. The Dean emphasised the remarkable contribution of all AR staff towards achieving PG recruitment targets in inadequately resourced conditions. This appreciation was unreservedly shared by all members of the committee.

> **Action GS/19-20/360.1:** The Dean to amend the report for Council to reflect points raised during the discussion.

> **Decision GS/19-20/360.1:** The Dean to submit the amended report to Council.

XX   GS/19-20/361 PG Strategic Reform

The Dean noted that the February Council had approved the recommended amendments to the PGR examination process.

> **Action GS/19-20/361.1**: The Dean undertook to circulate a sequence of emails over time to PGR students to advise them of the changes until they become imbedded.

The Dean referred then to the new strategic plan 2020-2025 in which Trinity makes a commitment to a fundamental review of all aspects of PG education. The review will start in September 2020 when TEP is fully operational. With the agreement of the Vice Provost, the Dean is in the process of drafting a report to be finalised soon to set out potential starting points for informing discussions of what the reforms mooted in the strategic plan might entail. The report is not binding for College in any way but is intended to be of assistance when the reform process is launched. In preparing this report, the Dean has been holding meetings with DTLPs and, along with the Academic Secretary, focus groups with students. He has set up three working groups to look at the broad themes of PGT, PGR and Career Readiness for PG students. He thanked members for volunteering to take part in the working groups whose meetings will go ahead shortly.

XX   GS/19-20/362 AOB

(i)   The Dean noted that currently PGR examiners' reports are sent to the DTLP and the Supervisor but not officially to the student. Typically, the supervisor passes the report on to the student so that s/he can work out what s/he needs to do in terms of revision/correction. The Dean could not see the rationale for this practice and proposed a change whereby reports go directly to the student as well as to the other named persons. A delay to breaking "bad news" to the student was also agreed on.

Decision GS/19-20/362 (i): The Committee agreed that PGR examiners' reports are sent to the DTLP, the Supervisor and to the student with a delay to breaking "bad news" to the student.

(ii)   Following the move to e-thesis submission, the Dean stated that he had been contacted by a student who seemed aggrieved that he would have to pay for the hard-binding of the finalised thesis (and the hire of gowns for the graduation ceremony). Given the cost for students, environmental concerns, constraints on library space and, the fact that theses are now contained in the online library repository members recommended, and the Sub Librarian for Teaching, Research and User Experience agreed, that Trinity will not require submission of a hardbound copy of a thesis for its research library collection from April 2020. This does not prevent a local arrangement where a student is expected to submit a hardbound copy of the final thesis to his or her supervisor or School. Some members noted that many supervisors in various Schools cover the printing cost of hard binding PhD theses of their graduands.

Decision GS/19-20/362 (ii): The Committee agreed Trinity will not require submission of a hardbound copy of a thesis to the library from April 2020.

(iii)   The DTLP from the School of Religion asked about the possibility of co-supervision across Schools in Trinity. It appears that the current system mitigates against this as students can only 'count' to one School which disincentivises such collaborations. The Dean clarified that co-supervisors across Schools can be appointed and agreed to assess if and how FTSE might be split accordingly across Disciplines and Schools. The forthcoming E3 initiative will benefit from such a mechanism.

Action GS/19-20/362 (iii): The Dean to assess if and how FTSE might be split across Disciplines and Schools.

(iv)   The DTLP of the School of Genetics and Microbiology raised an issue that an SFI-funded project in Genetics has encountered difficulties in registering students in Trinity due to its unique structure. This particular programme requires that all students initially register at NUIG in order to complete laboratory skills training. After a period in NUIG students' primary supervisor and institution are confirmed. Some students will stay in Galway, while others will come to Trinity or other institutions in Ireland. The Education Support Officer clarified that the matter was being looked into in terms of how fees should be dealt with and that a bespoke programme and a code might have to be set up to cater for those students who could be coming to Trinity from Galway.

(v)   A concern was raised to do with a new way of payment for external examiners via the payroll. The Dean noted that more information should be available to Schools once the new process has been finalised.

XX   Section B for noting and approval

GS/19-20/363 Stand-alone/Structured PhD (Category 2) module in School of Medicine: "TILDA-FRAILMatics Advanced Analytics Module" from 2020/21

The Dean advised that the stand alone module was being brought to the committee for consideration in relation to the pilot project approved by GSC at its meeting on 24 March 2016 (GS/15-16/34 and CL/15-16/158).

> **Decision GS/19-20/363**:
> The committee noted the double status of the module to be set up accordingly by the AR and approved it from 2020/21.

GS/19-20/364 Structured PhD (Category 2) module in School of Medicine: "*PGR External* Ageing @ EIT Health Brain PhD School" from 2019/20

> **Decision GS/19-20/364**:
> The committee noted a new module type for the Structured PhD students belonging to Category 2 and called *PGR External* to be made available in the School of Medicine and approved the particular iteration of the new module type titled "*PGR External* Ageing @ EIT Health Brain PhD School" to be set up accordingly by the AR from 2019/20.

GS/19-20/365 Revised *Plagiarism Policy* (February 2020)

> **Decision GS/19-20/365**:
> The committee recommended the revised Plagiarism Policy (February 2020) to Council.

GS/19-20/366 Revised *Timetabling Policy* (February 2020)

The Dean drew members' attention to the revised version of the Timetabling Policy and Procedures documents, along with a cover memo from the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies. He noted that the main changes can be found in section 7.3 *Governance and Operational Management*. These revisions include recommendations for the formal establishment of the Central Timetabling Unit (CTU) and for it to be situated within Academic Services Division for the 2020/21 academic year. Within section 7.4 Roles and Responsibility, the specific roles and responsibility of this unit have been included and slight adjustments have been made to the responsibilities of other areas/units in College in light of the responsibilities assumed by the CTU. It is also recommended that the *Policy* be revisited again in September 2021 to determine where the CTU will be located in the future. The Dean underlined that none of the revisions have a specific impact for postgraduate timetabling for the coming academic year. He further noted, that at the USC meeting on Tuesday 18th February, an additional statement was requested to be added to section 7.4.8 *Commercial Revenue Unit (CRU) (Enquiries, Central Events)* to flag that the CRU will consult with the 'owning' discipline for the booking of locally managed teaching space for non-teaching activities outside normal teaching and learning weeks**.** An agreed statement has been included in the circulated revised version.

> **Decision GS/19-20/366**:
> The committee noted and recommended the revised Timetabling Policy (February 2020) to Council.

XX   Section C for noting

GS/19-20/367 The committee noted the PGR student pilot transition programme and the Memo from Eimear Rouine, Transition to Trinity Officer.

GS/19-20/368 The committee noted the Minutes of the Marino Institute of Education Associated College Degrees Committee (MIE ACDC) of 14th November 2019.

GS/19-20/369 The committee noted the Minutes of the Royal Irish Academy of Music Associated College Degrees Committee (RIAM ACDC) of 16th October 2019.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11.45am.

Prof. Neville Cox   Date: 27 February 2020