

The University of Dublin
Trinity College

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

10:00, Tuesday 17 September 2019
Arts Building Conference Room 2026, Arts Building

MINUTES

Attendees:

Professor Linda Doyle, Dean of Research (Chair)
Professor Andrew Bowie, Associate Dean of Research
Professor Lorraine Leeson, Associate Dean of Research
Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Professor Brian Lucey, Director of Research, School of Business
Professor Orla Flanagan, Director of Research, School of Creative Arts
Professor Joseph Roche, on behalf of School of Education
Professor David O'Shaughnessy, Director of Research, School of English
Professor Daniel Geary, Director of Research, School of Histories & Humanities
Professor Roja Fazaeli, Director of Research, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
Professor Redmond O'Connell, Director of Research, School of Psychology
Professor Agustín Bénétrix, Director of Research, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Professor Benjamin Wold, Director of Research, School of Religion
Faculty of Engineering, Maths and Science
Professor Declan O'Sullivan, Director of Research, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Professor Caitríona Lally, Director of Research, School of Engineering
Professor Adrian Bracken, Director of Research, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Professor Stefano Sanvito, Director of Research, School of Physics
Faculty of Health Sciences
Professor Jeff O'Sullivan, Director of Research, School of Dental Science
Professor Joan Lalor, Director of Research, School of Nursing & Midwifery
Professor Helen Sheridan on behalf of School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Trinity Research Institutes
Professor Aideen Long, Director of Trinity Translational Medicine Institute
Professor Kingston Mills, Director of Trinity Biomedical Sciences Institute
Professor Jane Ohlmeyer, Director of Trinity Long Room Hub
Professor Mani Ramaswami, Director of Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience
Professor Stefano Sanvito, Director of CRANN
In attendance
Shaz Oye, President, Graduate Students Union
Ms Doris Alexander, Research Development Manager, Trinity Research & Innovation
Mr David O'Shea, Director of Operations, Trinity Development and Alumni
Dr Geoff Bradley, Head of Academic Services, Innovation and Digital Platforms, IT Services
Ms Helen Shenton, Librarian and College Archivist, Library
Mr Leonard Hobbs, Director of Trinity Research & Innovation
Dr Jennifer Daly, Research Strategy Officer, Office of the Dean of Research

Apologies

Professor Ann Devitt, Director of Research, School of Education
Professor Mary Rogan, Director of Research, School of Law
Professor Irene Walsh, Director of Research, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Studies
Professor Trevor Spratt, Director of Research, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Professor Emma Creagh, Director of Research, School of Biochemistry and Immunology

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Professor Thorfinnur Gunnlaugsson, Director of Research, School of Chemistry
 Professor Stefan Sint, Director of Research, School of Mathematics
 Professor Marcus Collier, Director of Research, School of Natural Sciences,
 Professor Lidia Tajber, Director of Research, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences

Section A – Items for Discussion and Approval	
A.1	<p>Minutes Minutes of previous meeting in May were accepted as read.</p>
A.2	<p>Matters Arising from the Minutes Matters arising would be addressed if needed during the meeting.</p>
A.3	<p>Update from the Dean of Research Dean of Research welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the academic year and provided an update on activities over the summer months.</p> <p>The Research Excellence Strategy was officially launched at the Douglas Hyde Gallery in June. A smaller launch event was also held at MISA in St. James’s and reinforced the view that more must be done to reach out to off-campus locations. DOR noted that the Strategy would be used as a template to guide the work of the Office of the Dean of Research for the next year.</p> <p>DOR advised that SFI received 500+ applications for the Frontiers of the Future awards, with 104 alone from Trinity. This was despite very strict rules in place to limit the number of applications. 44 Trinity applicants proceeded to second round, with an expectation that around 13 will be funded (based on previous years). Further proof that there is a lot of talent in the system. News on SFI centre renewals is expected in October. DOR also noted that there was further consultation on SFI’s strategy over the summer which generated a wide range of input.</p> <p>408 ERC Starting Grants were awarded with just 1 to an Irish institution. It was also noted by the committee that 7 Irish researchers received STGs for projects that are not hosted at Irish institutions. The committee expressed concern at these developments and it was also noted that the relevant EU Commissioner no longer has the word “research” in their title, and that lobbying is already occurring to move funds from Pillar 1 (covering Marie Curie, excellent research etc) to Pillar 2 which funds innovation. It was noted that the exceptional hires process has worked reasonably well for ERC-holders who have approached Trinity with the intention of relocating. DOR noted that the process is an appendix in the recruitment document and will be circulated again to the committee.</p> <p>With regard to hiring, DOR noted that work is ongoing to streamline the Chair hiring process. It was also noted that the government’s Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) is open for proposals, with a deadline of October 18th.</p> <p>DOR attended the Research Development Office’s away day recently, noting that it was a very productive event. It was noted that a position would be advertised soon to fill the Research Development Manager position left vacant by Doris Alexander’s recent appointment to Associate Director for European Engagement.</p> <p>DOR noted that a ‘research awards’ event is being organised jointly by ODRS and TR&I and updates will be provided to committee when more details are available.</p>

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	<p>It was noted that Andrew Bowie is now a member of the space allocation sub-committee. There previously was no representation for research on this committee and there is now a good opportunity to get a better insight into the space planning processes around Trinity.</p> <p>The DOR noted that efforts were being made to create better support structures for early career researchers around college. Approximately 850 people fall into this category and the levels of support vary widely across schools. The Office of the Dean of Research will provide support for some events over the coming year, and dedicated space is being sought. Various other initiatives across teaching and learning are being examined. The committee discussed the challenges this cohort faces and also noted internal barriers to providing support that are at odds with national career framework and best practice elsewhere.</p> <p>It was noted that Fiona Killard has conducted a review of all Trinity policies in order to create a matrix of research-related policies, and more clearly identify those in need of update. DOR also attended a celebration of student research publications recently, noting the great work being produced in those journals.</p> <p>DOR noted congratulations to Aideen Long for her appointment as Director of Trinity Translational Medicine Institute and Kingston Mills as Director of Trinity Biomedical Sciences Institute.</p> <p>Dr Joseph Roche from the School of Education spoke to the committee about PROBE, Trinity's European Research Night event, taking place on Friday, September 27th. Noted that with the change in the academic year there will be more of a focus on encouraging undergraduates to attend as they will be on campus.</p> <p>Re RS/18-19/19 it was noted by the committee that further revisions had been made to the NORF document that could continue to pose problems for many researchers.</p> <p>ACTION: Dedicated discussion on conditions for early career researchers, particularly with HR. DOR asked Directors of Research to gather own schools' reflections to input to the discussion as well.</p> <p>ACTION: Appendix B and FAQ on exceptional hires to be circulated.</p> <p>ACTION: NORF to be placed on the agenda again for further discussion.</p> <p>ACTION: DOR asked the directors to ensure that relevant updates from the committee are passed on to their colleagues in a meaningful fashion so that they are hearing about the relevant issues for their community.</p>
Section B - Items for Discussion Only	
<p>B.1</p>	<p>Spotlight on the School of Genetics & Microbiology Prof. Adrian Bracken</p> <p>Prof. Bracken presented an overview of the activities of the School of Genetics & Microbiology which is based in two buildings on the main campus. It was noted that the school has been making notable contributions to research for a long time. Some of the work currently underway in the school includes developing a European map that can</p>

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	<p>show where a person is from based on their genetics, and Prof. Dan Bradley’s work on historic data.</p> <p>Prof. Bracken noted that curiosity driven research is vital to the work of the school and is what fuels most of the major breakthroughs. How research is funded is crucial because it has an impact on how discovery happens, and noted that most researchers do not start out with a specific goal in mind – they are simply curious about something and the work starts from there.</p> <p>The school is a pioneer in computer genomics, leaders in cell and development biology. It also has good links with hospitals around the city, and expects to build stronger links with St James’s and the new cancer institute. Its researchers also have very good citation rates. Prof. Bracken noted that despite the current funding environment, the school is doing ok, but pointed out that the school is fortunate to have excellent PIs who are interested in projects that are currently fundable and are also good at securing grants. It was noted however that the ongoing decline of PhD students impacts on PIs abilities to push their research further.</p> <p>In light of the pressures on the system, Prof. Bracken made some suggestions about how excellent research can be better supported. Noted that research is part of an ecosystem and unless all parts of the system are supported and working well then the whole thing can’t function properly. Suggested that smaller project grants would be very impactful. Also noted that there is a negative perception abroad about doing scientific research in Ireland. Prof. Bracken noted that while the system might not be fully broken, it does certainly need a lot of attention to reach a point where it works well for everyone.</p> <p>The committee thanked Prof. Bracken for his presentation and discussed a number of the issues he raised. Problems with the current funding model were noted. It was noted that there used to be an internal start up fund for new academics which was considered to be hugely beneficial. The committee also noted that if a general election were to take place soon, there would need to be a coherent message from universities about how to get research on the agenda.</p>
<p>B.2</p>	<p>Sex and Gender in Research (Gendered Innovation) (RS/19-20-2) Anna Drozdowska</p> <p>Held over for a future meeting so adequate time could be given to item B.3 University Rankings (RS/19-20/1).</p>
<p>B.3</p>	<p>University Rankings (RS/19-20/1) Dean of Research</p> <p>The committee discussed university rankings in detail and at length with contributions from all members. The discussion was wide-ranging, covered a number of topics and the summary below captures the main points.</p> <p>DOR noted that in light of the recent developments regarding the Times Higher Education World University Rankings and the subsequent commentary about Irish universities, it was felt that an extended discussion would be beneficial. Noted that there was a huge response to DOR’s internal communications which spanned the whole spectrum of extremely negative to motivated and eager to do something to address the problem. DOR also noted that what the university chooses to do has to be meaningful and not just driven by rankings.</p>

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	<p>DOR provided the committee with an overview of the recent THE rankings. Noted in particular the specific information that Trinity returns to ranking agencies and emphasised that all of the analysis on citations, reputation scores etc is conducted by THE and the universities have no control over this. It was also noted that the data THE use to produce its ranking is always a year behind so issues that are presenting themselves on the ground may not yet have manifested in the official rankings. The committee discussed in detail issues relevant to each of the factors that go into producing the THE ranking: Teaching, Research, Reputation, Citation impact, Industry Income, and International Outlook.</p> <p>The committee noted issues such as the cost of living in Dublin and increasing fees. It was noted that the decline in PhD students was already having an impact. It was noted that there is pressure to increase undergraduate numbers without any attendant increase in resources to support this which will further damage the staff/student ratio. Problems with the shortfall in fees for PhD students on grants was also noted, as was the ability of other universities to waive these fees. Issues with the student experience of application system, inflexible approach to progression etc were also noted. In discussing the decline in PhD student numbers, members of the committee also observed that there is an ethical responsibility to ensure that such students are adequately prepared for post-PhD life given the drastic decrease in academic positions.</p> <p>It was suggested that the rankings are also an indicator of internal issues in Trinity beyond the lack of government support: perhaps new projects have taken focus from ensuring that core support services continue to function well. It was also noted that reputation is a complicated factor that cannot easily be solved. Negative experiences of postdocs and research fellows affect this. Difficulties in bringing large international conferences and events to Trinity were also noted with the complexity of internal structures noted as a particular stumbling block. It was noted that several Irish researchers hold ERC grants outside of Ireland and issues with the ease of relocating to Trinity, internal processes, and the national research landscape were noted as problems in this regard.</p> <p>The committee noted that the citation rate was a complex issue. Incorrect listing of affiliations should be addressed. It was also noted that while citation rates are important and the university will always want to recruit excellent people, it was also important to encourage and recruit creative, original thinkers whose work might not be captured by traditional metrics and to have the confidence in the university's mission to make the case for such hires.</p> <p>DOR noted that while the university rankings can create some political pressure to address the problems facing the Irish system, they also contain useful signposts to issues that can be addressed internally in Trinity.</p>
Section C – Items for Noting	
C.1	Items for Noting
C.2	Items for future discussion
C.3	AOB