



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Introducing a Supervisor – Research Student Agreement at Trinity College Dublin

UKCGE Annual Conference 2023

Ms Ewa Adach

Dr Rionnagh Sheridan

Trinity in numbers

20,430
Students

1,846

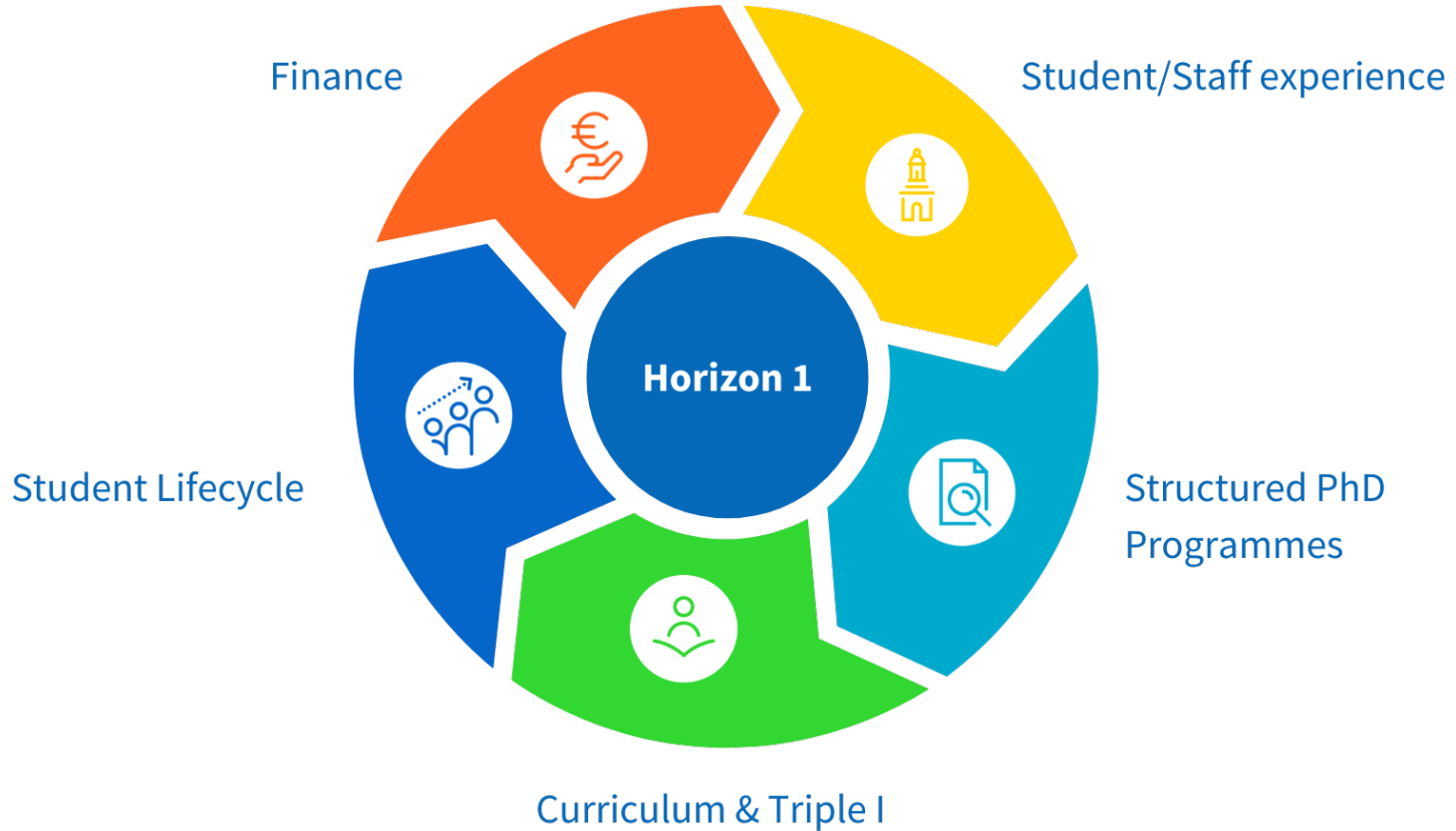
Postgraduate Research

4,208

Postgraduate Taught

24
Schools

Renewal themes – Horizon 1



Interim results

Trinity College framework for PGT Research

1. Models for PGT Research		
The table below describes the research models that will be associated with PGT research projects. Within a programme, the model(s) for PGT research should be selected by the course director. In the interest of exposing students to a broad range of research practice, or to offer students choice in the research output, more than one model may be employed per course.		
Model 1	Dissertation	This model applies to research projects in all disciplines and normally constitutes an extended piece of academic writing on a specific topic using a research methodology agreed between the student and the course director.
Model 2	Performance	This model applies to research in the creative arts which involve a significant component of live performance or exhibition as the research output.
Model 3	Digital artefact	This model includes research presented through a digital medium or where a digital artefact is constructed in answer, or part-answer to a research question. The artefact can be composed of audio, video, code, database, AR/VR, and/or other elements as required by the nature of the research.
Model 4	Portfolio	This model is suitable for applied disciplines where a portfolio of original work is required to satisfy the research element of the <u>masters</u> degree. Examples include, but are not limited to, creative writing (poetry, fiction, screenwriting, playwriting). Composition of the portfolio should follow the rules laid down in the course handbook.
Model 5	Practice	This model applies to disciplines in which there is a professional practice through which research can be carried out and analysed, and where the research output is produced in a format other than a written dissertation, e.g., a case study, clinical audit, journal article.

THE IRISH TIMES

21°

Education

Trinity to boost pay for PhD researchers to €25,000

University's move follows warnings that low pay and cost-of-living issues threaten postgraduate studies

Expand



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CLASSROOM CENTRAL



**A STIMULATING, INCLUSIVE, AND
SUSTAINABLE RESEARCH AND
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT,
WHERE CURIOUS MINDS AND
CREATIVE THINKERS THRIVE.**



Supervisor - Research Student Agreement: Identifying the need

Research Students

Mismatch of expectations

“My own supervisor was **not clear** on what he **expected** from me or on **what he was offering as a supervisor**, and sometimes that was difficult when there was **a mismatch of expectations with actual experience.**”

“We need **clarity of expectations** and **responsibilities** for both the student and the supervisor.”

Academic & Research Staff

Lack of mutual understanding

“There is **no clarity and understanding** (...) **Set academic expectations for students**, especially international ones **clear at the beginning.**”

“(…) **students also need to understand their supervisor’s positions**, and I think that if we help students to understand their position, and where they are coming from, maybe that relationship could be strengthened in some way.”

Student Services Staff

Insufficient processes to support good practice

“(…) There’s **no mutual sharing of expectations nor an agreement on the supervision process** (i.e. on the purpose and frequency of supervision meetings, how and when feedback, documents, or meeting notes would be shared or if they were shared, and what direction or input the supervisor would give to the student).”

Benchmarking best practice

Fifth Salzburg Principle:

“The crucial role of supervision and assessment: in respect of individual doctoral candidates, **arrangements for supervision and assessment should be based on a transparent contractual framework of shared responsibilities between doctoral candidates, supervisors and the institution** (and where appropriate including other partners).”

EUA Salzburg II Recommendations, 2010



LERU's view on holistic doctoral supervision

Dr Helke Hillebrand, Dr Claudine Loysinger

INCEP for
Higher Education

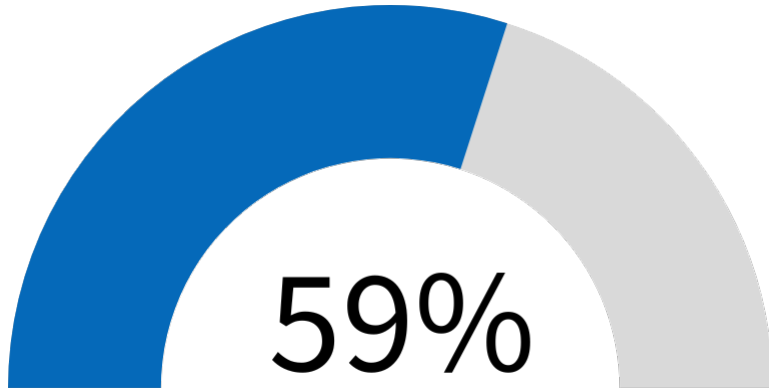
RESEARCH SUPERVISORS NETWORK: RESOURCE

ENHANCING PRACTICE IN RESEARCH SUPERVISION

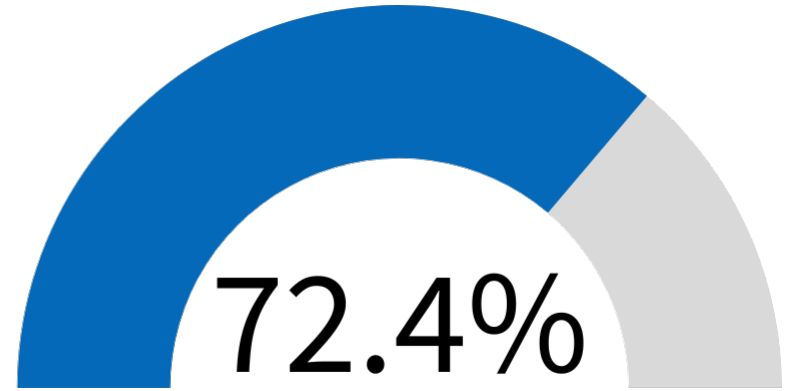
DR STAN TAYLOR

RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

Measuring sentiment towards the agreement



ACADEMIC & RESEARCH STAFF



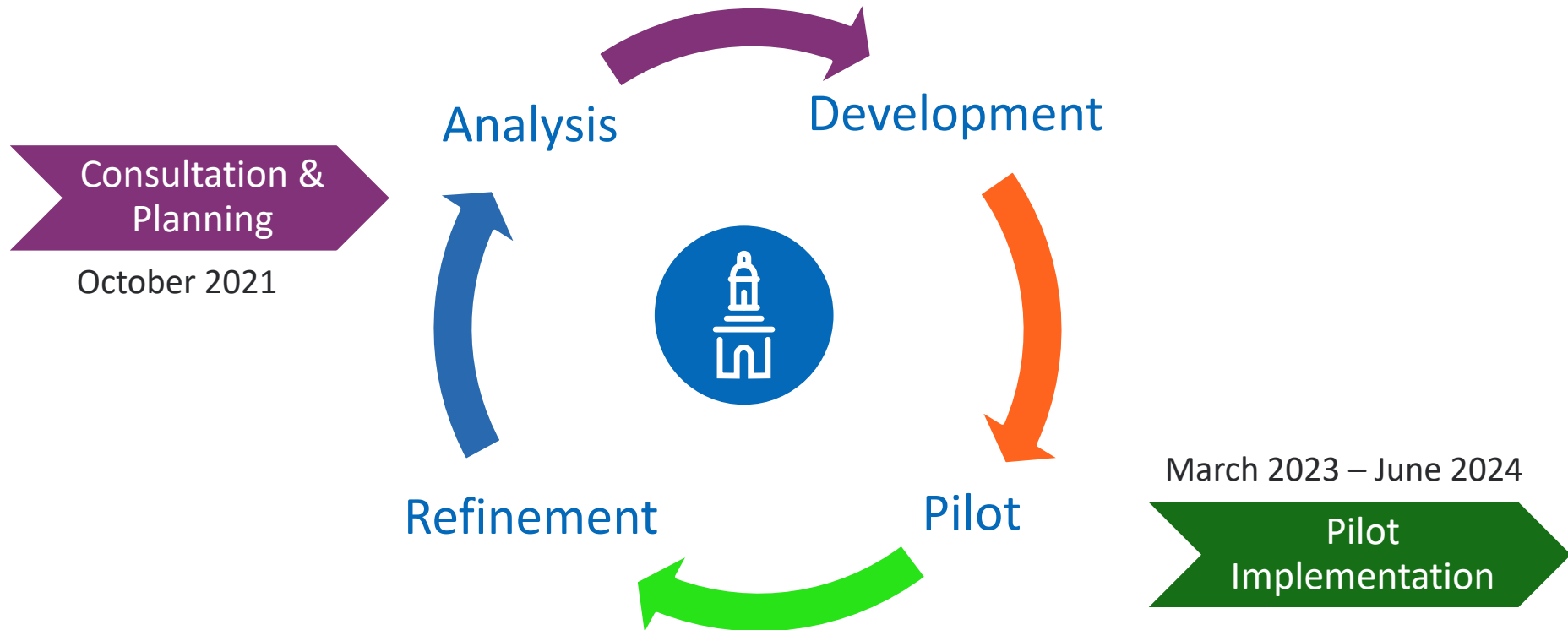
RESEARCH STUDENTS

Agree that **introducing a formal agreement** setting out the responsibilities **would be beneficial.**



Approach to Designing Agreement Template

The Design and Implementation process



The Challenges

The Reaction	Our Response
Do I have to sign it?	Yes.
Is it a legally binding document?	Consulted the College Solicitor.
The wording is too prescriptive / threatening.	'Softened' the language e.g. 'advocate for adequate space' instead of 'ensure adequate space.'
I am not an expert at ... I don't know how to guide on career planning.	Bespoke training programmes will be available to supervisors and students.
Why should I use it?	Focus on the anticipated benefits. It promotes best practice. We have made it a condition of the new Trinity Research Doctorate Award.

Structure of the Agreement



Academic Development

Managing the Relationship



Professional Development

Wellbeing and Health



Record of Agreement

The Agreement template



Supervisor - Research Student Agreement

The Supervisor - Research Student Agreement outlines roles and responsibilities of postgraduate research students and supervisor(s) and is designed to act as a prompt for discussions between the student and supervisor(s) on their expectations of each other within the supervisory relationship. It draws on relevant [University policies](#), some of which are linked in the [Relevant College Policies](#) section at the end of the agreement document.

The aim of the agreement is to facilitate the establishment of an effective partnership between a supervisor and a research student from the start. As it is a living document, it should be reviewed and updated at the start of each academic year but can be re-visited more frequently if necessary or appropriate.

Good communication between the student(s) and supervisor(s) is crucial to managing relationships and [maximising](#) opportunities for successful collaboration. The agreement should be discussed and jointly completed by a research student and the supervisor. It may be adapted, if required, for individual research projects to suit the requirements of the project, [student](#) and supervisor(s). There are no compulsory elements, but it is recommended that each section (Academic Development; Managing the Relationship; Professional Development and Wellbeing and Health) is considered. Key areas for discussion and agreement are suggested at the end of the document.

Before using this document, supervisors are advised to familiarise themselves with [Trinity's Supervision of Research Students Best Practice Guidelines](#) (under review). Students and supervisors are also advised to [familiarise](#) themselves with their School's Handbook for Postgraduate Students as well as the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies [Postgraduate Research Student Handbook](#) (currently under review).¹

Student / Supervisor Details

Name of Registered Student:	
School where Registered:	
Title of Research Project:	
Name of Primary Supervisor:	
Academic Year:	

¹ This document is provided by the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies for guidance purposes only. It should be adapted for individual research projects to suit the requirements of the project, student and supervisor(s). Nothing in this plan should be construed as an intention to create legal relations.



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Academic Development

Student	Supervisor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend college-level orientation and review all relevant PG orientation materials available on the Student Life webpages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate attendance at orientation and encourage students to review all relevant PG orientation materials available on the Student Life webpages. Facilitate attendance at relevant workshops or programmes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively seek guidance and feedback on progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide regular and timely constructive feedback on research progress, oral presentations, written work and thesis writing. Be generally aware of academic services in Trinity and encourage help-seeking where necessary.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify relevant academic supports which may be useful from the outset and across the lifecycle of the programme of research including the relevant Subject Librarian and Student Learning Development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly review the student's progress.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take responsibility for annual registration and progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise on timing of submission of thesis and discuss nomination of potential examiners with student.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take responsibility for writing thesis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide guidance on standards expected for key milestones during research process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek out/follow the regulations (internal and/or external) applying to the research programme, and seek clarification when necessary. Work according to an agreed timetable and display initiative, commitment and work ethic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide information on regulations (internal and/or external) applying to the research programme. Advocate for adequate space and resources.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review working environment (access to space/computer/etc.) and communicate any problems to supervisor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support development of realistic/appropriate research programme with clear aims and objectives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise any academic problems /difficulties, so that guidance can be offered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support development of written and spoken English for all stages of the research programme. Point to relevant English language support services to facilitate development of academic writing skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work towards suitable standard of written and spoken English, for all stages of the research programme. 	



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend safety/technical/research training as required to progress research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate and support appropriate training in safety, research and technical skills (including health and safety).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read key literature in field. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide guidance on how to access and critically review literature.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep accurate records and notes of research and progress, including development of data management plan where appropriate. Develop critical thinking skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide guidance on record-keeping, data management, etc. Support development of the student's critical thinking skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake training in academic writing and presentation skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support development of academic writing and presentation skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comply with College Academic regulations and policies (see Relevant College Policies below). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss College guidelines on policies and procedures (see Relevant College Policies below)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure adherence to Trinity's IP regulations (Policy, Practice and Regulations on Intellectual Property) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure awareness of Trinity's IP regulations (Policy, Practice and Regulations on Intellectual Property) and promote compliance as relevant.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Module CA7000 Research Integrity and Impact in an Open Scholarship Era before your confirmation interview (mandatory). Where applicable, draft research ethics application forms and manage the submission through REAMS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw attention to any ethical issues and the requirements for ethical approval. Where applicable, review and approve student's research ethics application forms before submission.

Managing Our Relationship

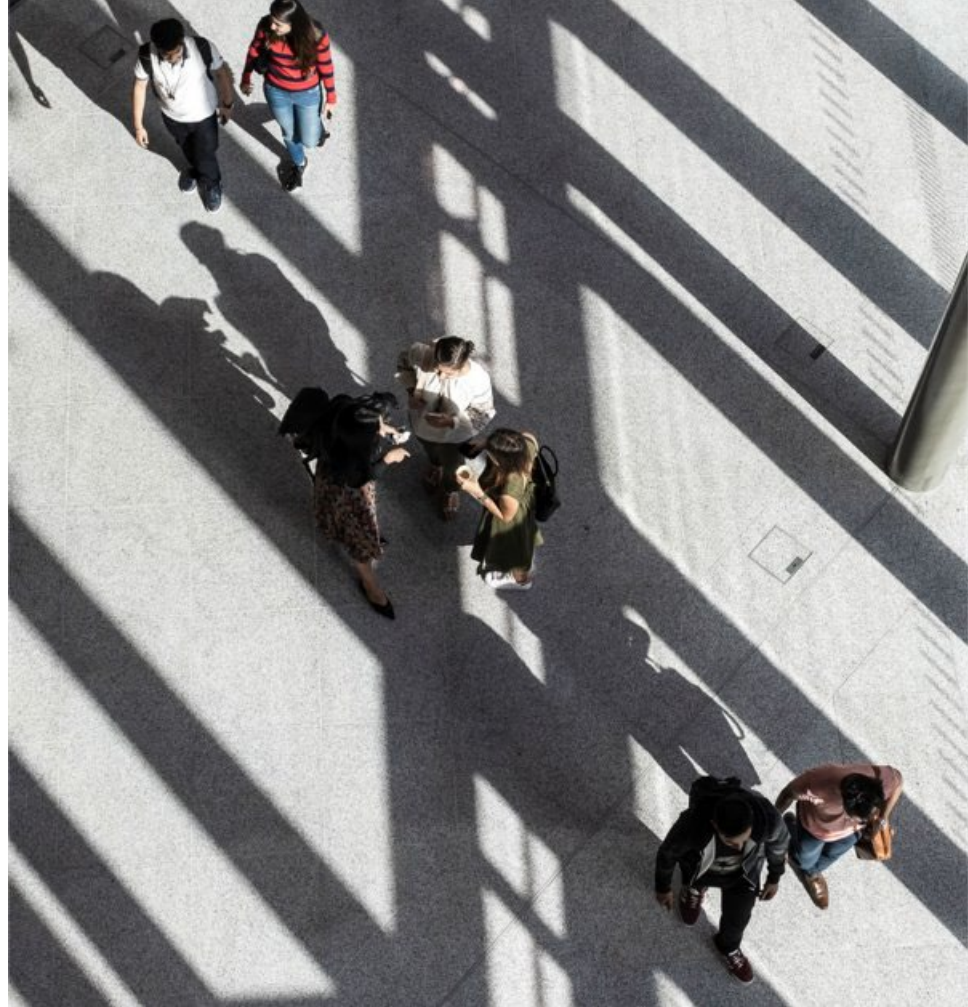
Student	Supervisor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be punctual and prepared for meetings, seminars and other activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be available for planned meetings as agreed below.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree frequency and purpose of supervisory meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree the frequency and purpose of supervisory meetings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise in advance if not available to meet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise in advance if not available and if necessary, ask colleague to support student.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree most suitable form of communication/meeting (online/in-person). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree most suitable form of communication/meeting (online/in-person).



Piloting Agreement 2023-24

The Pilot = soft launch of the Agreement

- Volunteering supervisors and students (at least one pair per School).
- 27 pairs so far and growing.
- First students started in Mar-2023.
- Copy of the signed agreement is kept locally at a School office.



Communication focused on the anticipated benefits of the Agreement



Clearly defined roles & responsibilities of both parties.



Improved management of expectations of students & supervisors.



Enhanced transparency & accountability throughout the different stages of student journey.

How should the Agreement be used in the pilot?



WHAT THE AGREEMENT IS?

- A menu of possible discussion points.
- A 'living document' that should be adapted to best suit the specific supervisor and student.
- A statement of what each partner in the agreement commits to as a reasonable expectation of each other.
- A potential tool for self-reflection.



WHAT THE AGREEMENT IS NOT?

- A prescriptive set of rules and regulations.
- A perfect document/tool.
- A legally binding agreement.
- A solution for all the challenges that might be encountered.
- A box-ticking protocol.

Pilot - Initial Feedback

“Students were quite surprised at some of the details that they weren't really aware of, so it **helped them to be aware of certain things.**”

“It's **really helpful and informative** and definitely **expanded their (students') understanding** of everything.”

“We all felt that it's a **really good development.** You know, this is something that's **really helpful** for both supervisors and students.”

“It really helps us (supervisors) to **see the wider picture of all the responsibilities,** but also the sort of links to the wider College structures and development of the student.”

Next Steps

- Workshops at PGR orientation & inclusion in the supervisor development programme.
- A short survey.
- A focus group discussions with pilot participants: students and staff.
- Enhancement of the agreement before college-wide engagement (2024-25).



Trinity College Dublin


Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Thank you! Questions?

pgrenewal@tcd.ie

Anticipated Impact of the implementation

IMPACT	METRIC	FINANCIAL €	TIME 	QUALITY ★★★☆☆
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Structured tool for supporting supervision relationship. 2. Improved communication. 3. Enhanced expectation management. 	Reduction in number of student cases and student appeals.	Reduced demand on student support services.	Staff: Less need for supervisors and support staff to prepare and submit student cases/appeals. Fewer cases for Dean and Registry to process.	Improved quality of experience for supervisors and PG students.

