Introducing a Supervisor – Research Student Agreement at Trinity College Dublin

Quality in HE: Sectoral Findings & Enhancement Showcase

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Renewal themes

Finance

Student/Staff experience

Student Lifecycle

Horizon 1

Structured PhD Programmes

Curriculum & Triple I
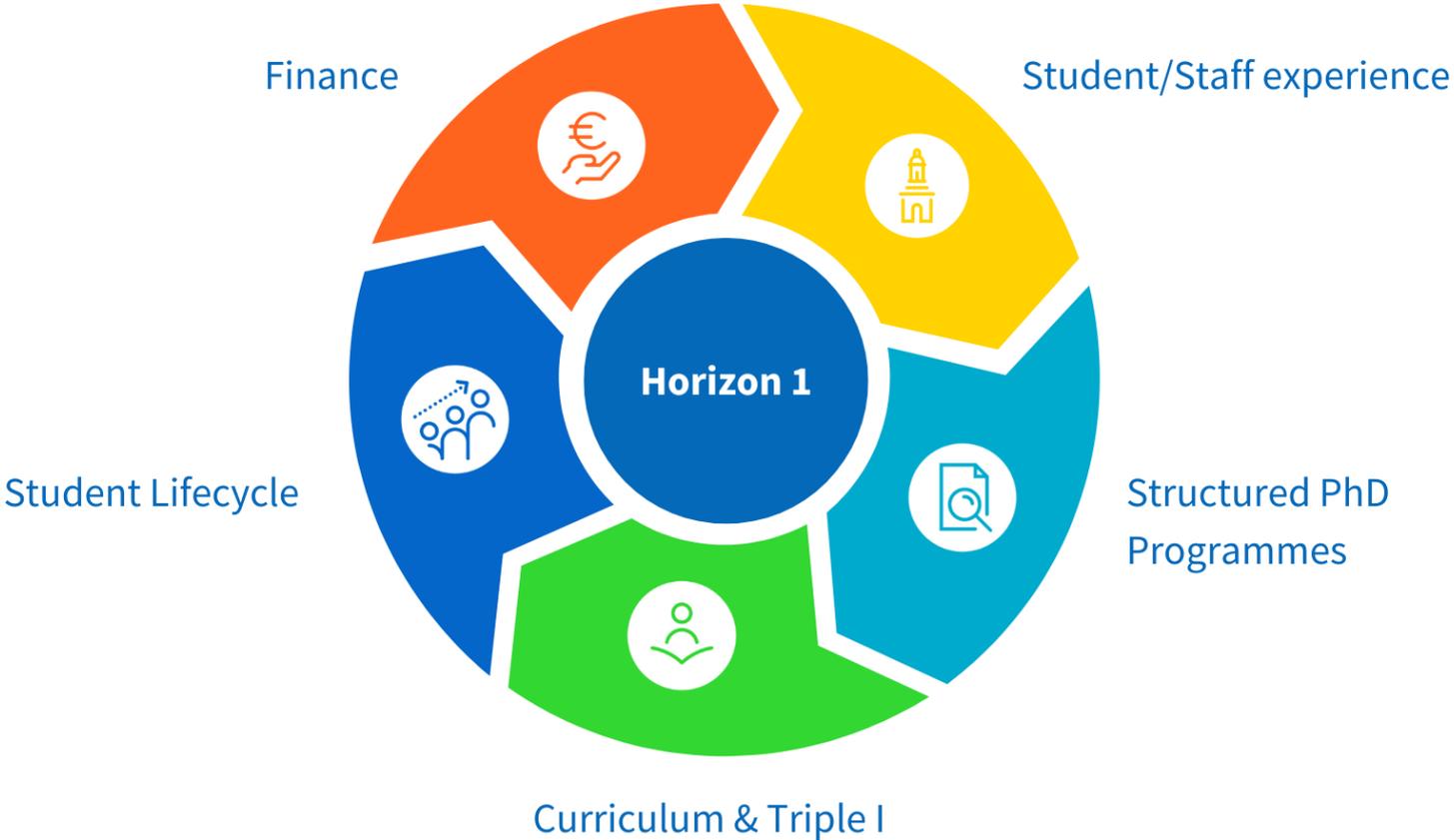
Work Package structure
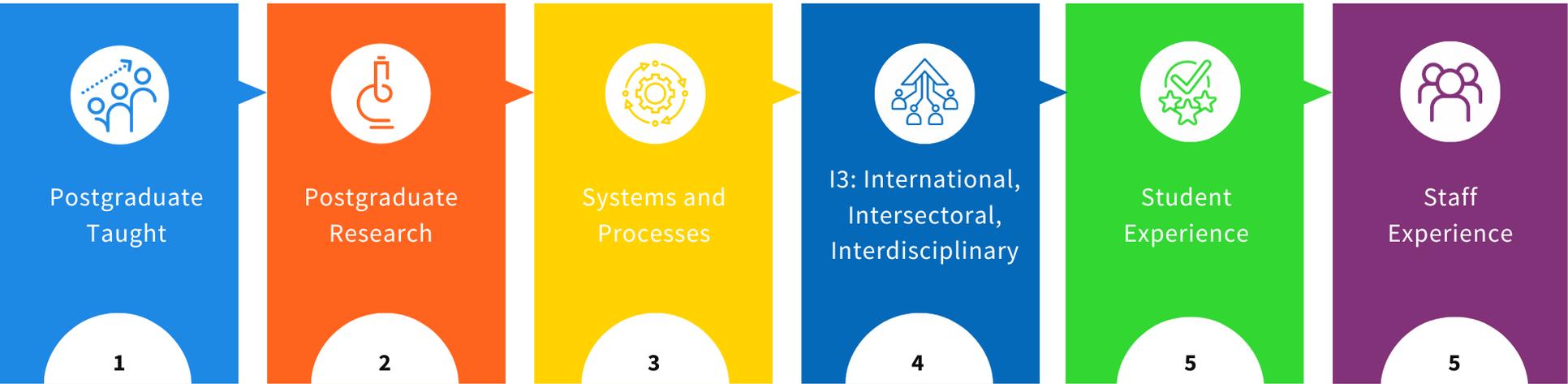
Interim results

Trinity College framework for PGT Research

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

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 masters 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.

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)."

Measuring sentiment towards the agreement

59%

ACADEMIC & RESEARCH STAFF

72.4%
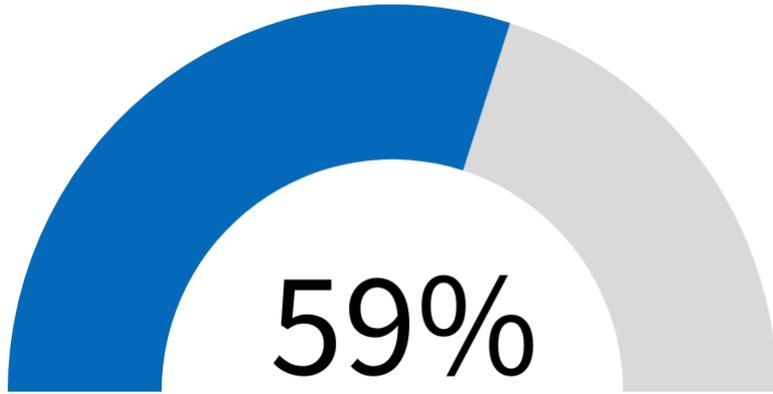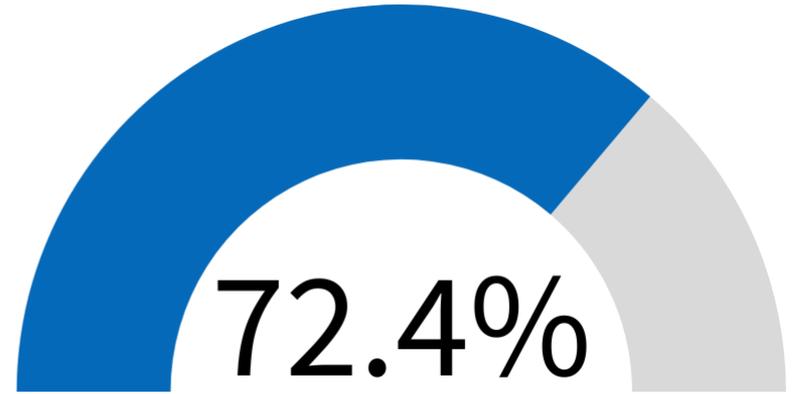
RESEARCH STUDENTS

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

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

Approach to Designing Agreement Template

The Design and Implementation process

Analysis

Development

Consultation & Planning

October 2021

Refinement

Pilot

March 2023 – June 2024

Pilot Implementation
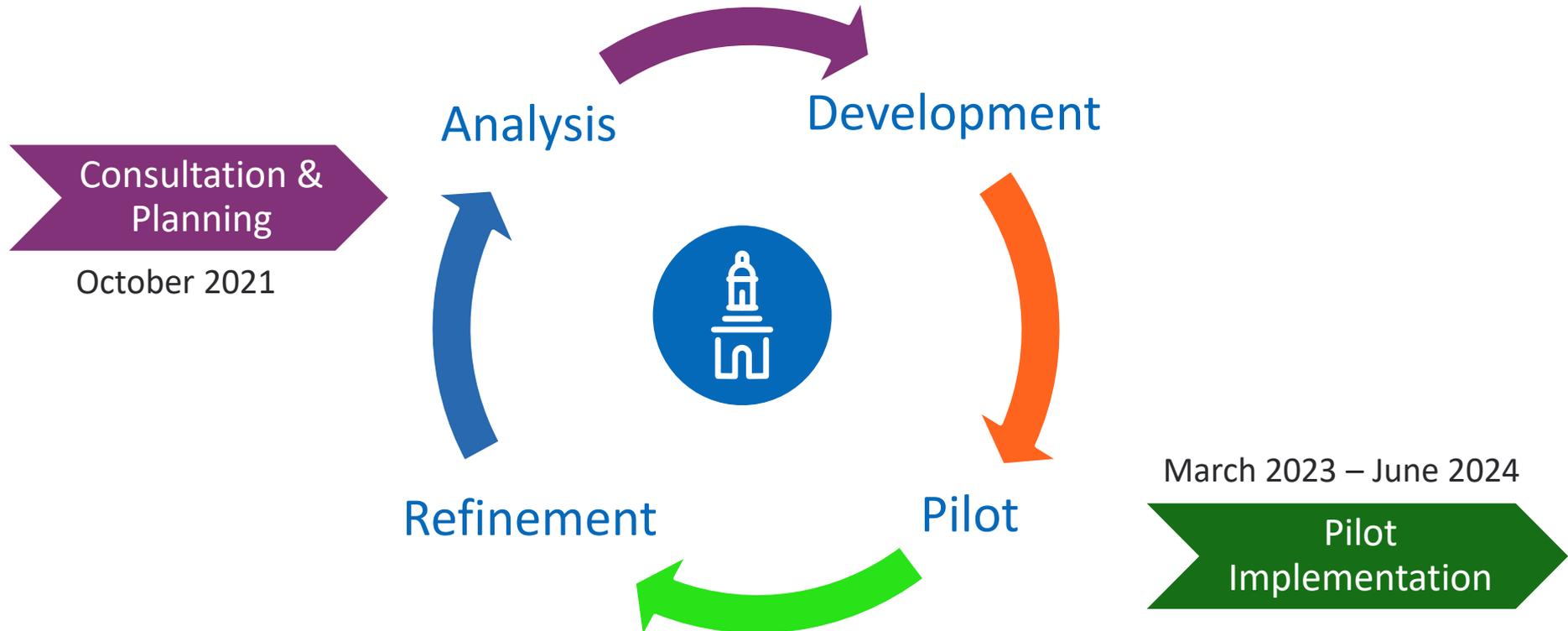
Structure of the Agreement

Academic Development

Managing the Relationship

Professional Development

Wellbeing and Health

Record of Agreement

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
• Attend college-level orientation and review all relevant PG orientation materials available on the Student Life webpages.	• 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.
• Actively seek guidance and feedback on progress.	• Provide regular and timely constructive feedback on research progress, oral presentations, written work and thesis writing.
• 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.	• Be generally aware of academic services in Trinity and encourage help-seeking where necessary.
• Take responsibility for annual registration and progress.	• Regularly review the student's progress.
• Take responsibility for writing thesis.	• Advise on timing of submission of thesis and discuss nomination of potential examiners with student.
• Seek out/follow the regulations (internal and/or external) applying to the research programme and seek clarification when necessary.	• Provide information on regulations (internal and/or external) applying to the research programme.
• Work according to an agreed timetable and display initiative, commitment and work ethic.	• Provide guidance on standards expected for key milestones during research process.
• Review working environment (access to space/computer/etc.) and communicate any problems to supervisor.	• Advocate for adequate space and resources.
• Raise any academic problems /difficulties, so that guidance can be offered.	• Support development of realistic/appropriate research programme with clear aims and objectives.
• Work towards suitable standard of written and spoken English, for all stages of the research programme.	• 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.

Piloting Agreement 2023-24

The Pilot = soft launch of the Agreement

- March 2023 – June 2024.
- Volunteering supervisors and students (at least one pair per School).
- Use of the agreement made a condition of the new Trinity Research Doctorate Award.
- Guidance on how to use the agreement.
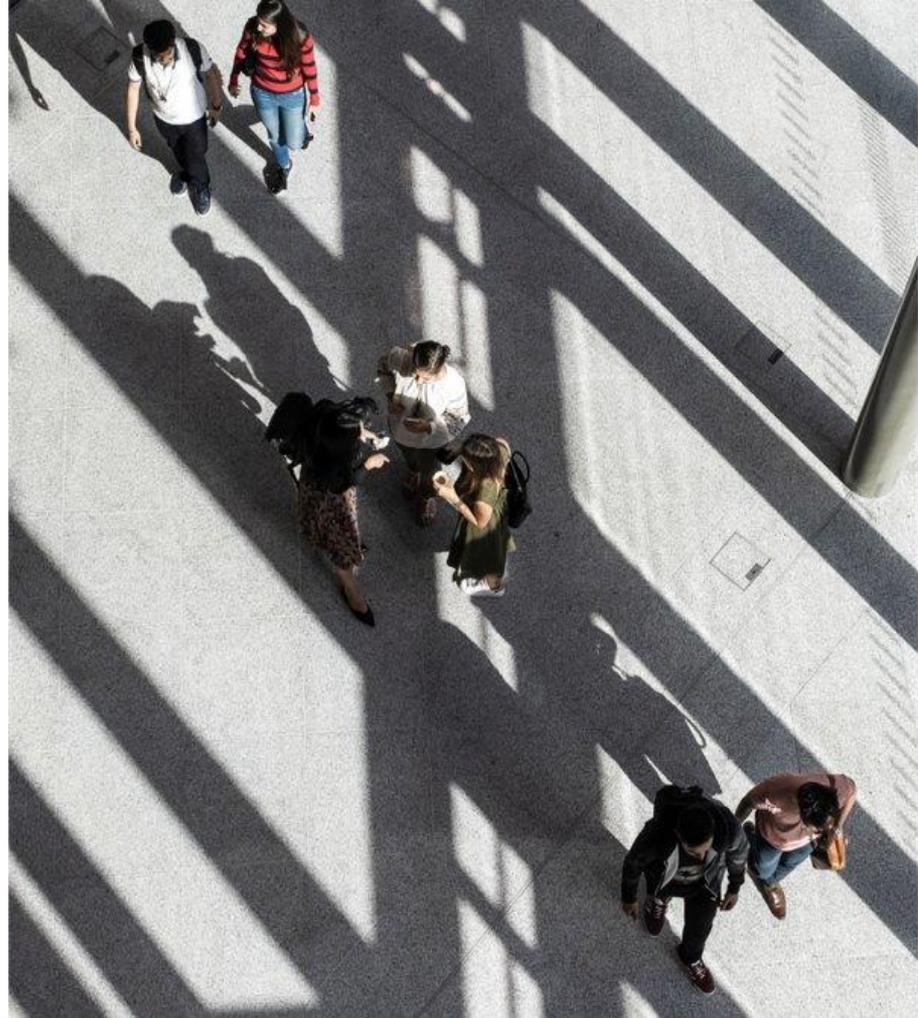
Pilot - Initial Feedback

Next Steps

"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."

- Pilot evaluation: a survey & a focus group discussion with pilot participants.
- Enhancement of the agreement template before college-wide engagement (2024-25).

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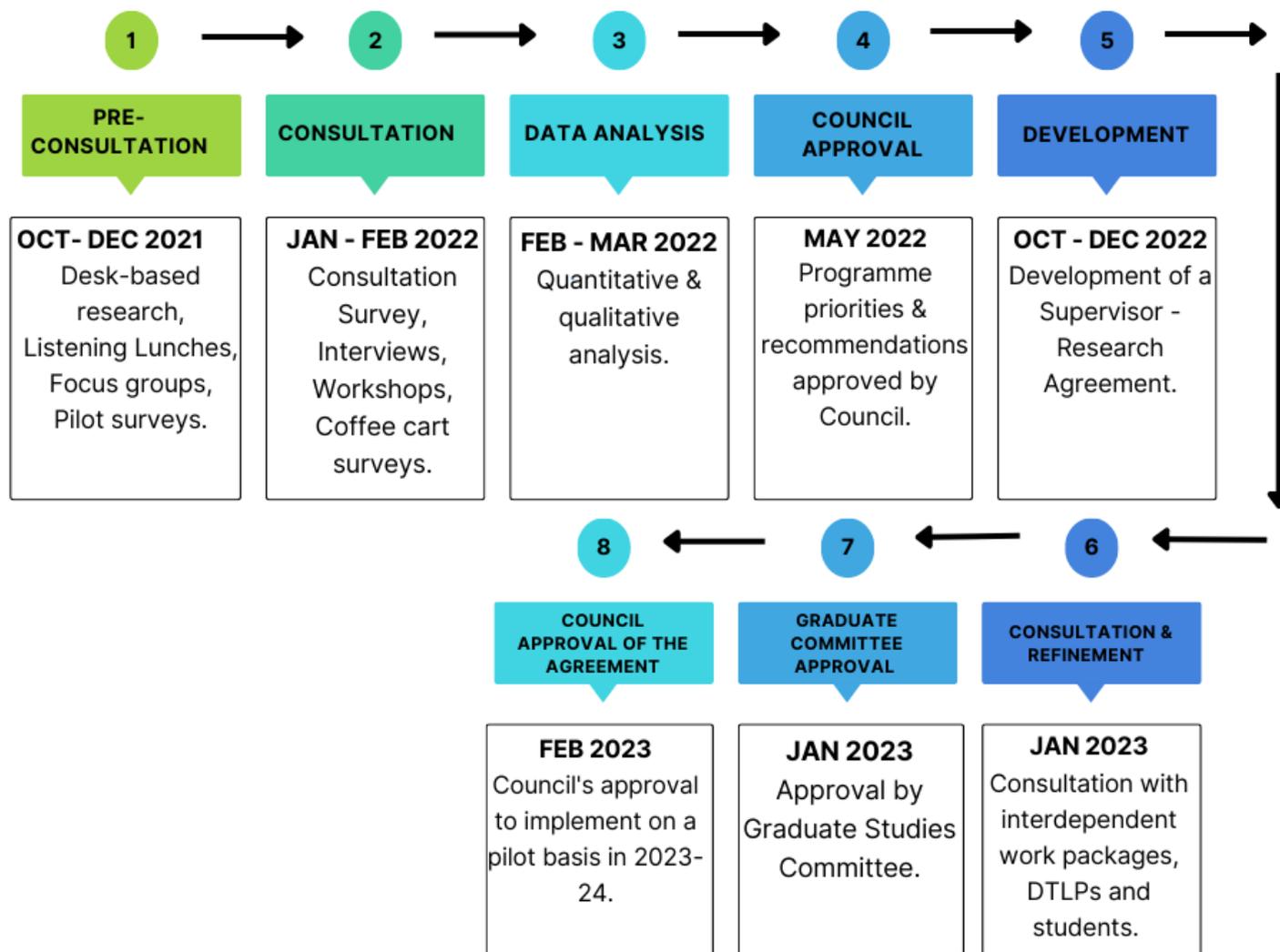### The University of Dublin

Thank you! Questions?

✉ pgrenewal@tcd.ie

🐦 @GraduateTrinity

1

PRE-CONSULTATION

OCT- DEC 2021
Desk-based research, Listening Lunches, Focus groups, Pilot surveys.

2

CONSULTATION

JAN - FEB 2022
Consultation Survey, Interviews, Workshops, Coffee cart surveys.

3

DATA ANALYSIS

FEB - MAR 2022
Quantitative & qualitative analysis.

4

COUNCIL APPROVAL

MAY 2022
Programme priorities & recommendations approved by Council.

5

DEVELOPMENT

OCT - DEC 2022
Development of a Supervisor - Research Agreement.

8

COUNCIL APPROVAL OF THE AGREEMENT

FEB 2023
Council's approval to implement on a pilot basis in 2023-24.

7

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

JAN 2023
Approval by Graduate Studies Committee.

6

CONSULTATION & REFINEMENT

JAN 2023
Consultation with interdependent work packages, DTLPs and students.

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