



NFQ LEVEL 9 RESEARCH DISCIPLINE AREA VALIDATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

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Extension of delegated authority from QQI to GMIT to make Masters awards for research degree programmes:	16th December, 2015

NFQ LEVEL 9 RESEARCH DISCIPLINE AREA VALIDATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

1. Context

'Level 9 Research Discipline Area Validation Policy and Procedures' sets out the procedures to be followed in seeking to validate new research degree programmes (OECD/Frascati Specific Field of Science Codes) arising from Delegation of Authority to award research degrees at level 9 from Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The quality assurance policies and procedures described herein are part of a broad institutional Quality Assurance System which supports or makes direct provision for the:

- Linking of particular research degree programmes to the Institute's Strategic Plan and Research Strategy, and to relevant national strategies.
- Formation of postgraduate students as work-ready graduates and/or early career researchers through structured research training
- Building of individual and institutional research capability in a collegial and stimulating environment
- Building of the necessary research infrastructure
- Maintenance of award standards.

The Institute will validate new discipline areas where there is a sustainable capacity to provide relevant Masters Degree programmes.

This policy was informed by the following documents:

- Institutes of Technology Ireland *Sectoral Protocol for the Awarding of Research Masters Degrees at NFQ Level 9 under Delegated Authority (DA) from Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) (2015)*
- National Framework for Doctoral Education (2015)
- QQI (formerly HETAC) *Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria (2010)*
- QQI (formerly IUQB) *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education (2nd ed., 2009)*
- Technological University Quality Framework (TUQF), *Quality Enhancement and Assurance of Research (2014)*
- *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015)*
- EUA's 'Salzburg Principles' and 'Salzburg II Recommendations'
- European Commission Directorate-General Research and Innovation, *Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (2011)* The EU European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

2. Award Standards

The learning outcomes of Masters by Research degree programmes in the Institute are consistent with the NFQ Award-type descriptor 'M', and the second cycle qualification descriptor of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). Programmes are structured to enable the attainment of the intended learning outcomes, and include:

- general and transferable skills training
- specialised training to foster a broad understanding of particular discipline areas, including research methods

- seminars and other activities to enable the dissemination and exchange of the outputs of research and scholarship and to foster peer review and quality assessment.

Masters by Research degree programmes may be designed in consultation with business, industry, and other stakeholders and, where appropriate, in consultation or collaboration with other higher education institutions. Programmes are normally of 1½ to 2 year's duration.

3. Principles and Practices underpinning the validation of Masters by Research Degree Programmes

3.1 Institutional Research Strategy

The Institute's Research Strategy demonstrates that research activities, including the development of research programmes, are visible and integrated features of the Institute's vision and mission. The Research Strategy provides a development path for institutional research-related activities and specifies the connection between the provision of research degrees and its wider research and innovation activities.

3.2 Research Capability and Research Support Infrastructure and Systems

The Institute has priority research areas and developed research capability around them. The Institute has clear pathways which enable the development of individual researchers to achieve specialist research expertise, via access to peers, research groups, research centres, and external collaboration opportunities. It ensures that postgraduate provision is aligned with the development of researcher capability in the Institute's prioritised specialist areas of expertise, and takes place within a high quality research environment with appropriate laboratory or other space, equipment and support infrastructure.

Appropriate management and information systems and structures exist to ensure quality-driven postgraduate provision and research capability.

3.3 Researcher Formation and Postgraduate Programmes.

The Institute is committed to supporting and promoting all aspects of the academic formation of postgraduate students and early-career researchers. Postgraduate research is, and will be, carried out under the supervision and guidance of appropriately qualified members of academic staff of the Institute or, where appropriate, the work place, and other HEIs who are experienced in the research field involved. All Research Degree students are required to undertake formal research training.

3.4 Monitoring and Evaluation of Performance

The Institute will regularly evaluate all its Research Degree provision as part of its normal programmatic review cycle, based on the Self Evaluation Template (Appendix (i)). Research Degrees will be evaluated against internal and external benchmarks, including relevant international benchmarks. Performance in providing Research Degrees is evaluated through an analysis of feedback from students, industry, collaborators, employers, funding agencies, projects sponsors and, external and internal examiners.

4. NFQ Level 9 Research Discipline Area – Validation Process

The validation process consists of an internal review and an external validation.

A proposal to validate a new research degree discipline area should come from the relevant Head of Academic Unit¹ to:

- (a) the Executive for strategic and resource consideration and
- (b) Academic Council for alignment with the research strategy.

On approval by the Executive and Academic Council the Head of Academic Unit progresses with an internal review process.

4.1 Internal Review Process

This review (conducted by an Internal Review Panel) will comprise of two elements: an effectiveness review of the strategic alignment of the proposal with relevant Institute strategies and a Self-Evaluation Report as detailed in Appendix (i) of this policy.

4.1.1 Internal Review Panel

The Internal Review Panel will consider the alignment of the new research degree discipline area with the Institute's Research Strategy and Strategic Plans. It is required to make an impartial judgement on the standard, content and conduct of the proposed research degree programme.

The internal review panel must satisfy itself that:

1. The link between research activity in a research unit and the Institute's Research Strategy has been established;
2. There is support for the new research degree discipline area from relevant external stakeholders;
3. The infrastructure, staffing and resources for the new research degree discipline area will be made available;
4. The Academic Unit, Research Centre or Research Group has the research capability; level and range of competencies and expertise necessary to deliver the Research Degree Programme(s) in the discipline area.
5. The programme maps to the appropriate NFQ award standards.
6. Organisation, sustainability and the research unit's growth trajectory were evaluated.

4.1.2 Composition of Internal Review Panel

On behalf of Academic Council the Registrar will convene the Internal Review Panel. The Head of Academic Unit may propose panel members.

The membership of the Internal Review Panel, all of which are external to the proposed discipline area, shall consist of the following:

- Head of Academic Unit or Head of Research/Development (Chairperson);
- One nominee from the Research Committee;
- One academic staff member from Academic Council;
- Academic from a national HEI with research expertise in the proposed area;
- One postgraduate research student.

Panels will be constituted cognisant of gender representation.

With the exception of the Chairperson, all panel members will normally be research active.

¹ Head of Academic Unit can be at Head of School level or Head of Department level

4.1.3 Report of Internal Review Panel

A draft interim report will issue from the Chair of the Internal Review Panel to the Head of Academic Unit who will have an opportunity to respond to panel findings. The findings may include conditions and/or recommendations. The report should address the evaluation criteria identified in section 4.1.1.

The report will make one of the following overall recommendations in relation to the proposed research degree area:

- a) Recommend approval to proceed to external validation;
- b) Recommend conditional approval;
- c) Not recommended to proceed to external validation.

The Chair of the Internal Review Panel submits the report to Academic Council in the case of recommendation (a); in the case of recommendation (b) when confirmation is received from the Head of Academic Unit that conditions are addressed; and in the case of recommendation (c) the report is submitted to Academic Council for information.

Academic Council approves submissions compliant with recommendations (a) and (b) to go to external validation.

4.2 External Validation Process

4.2.1 External Validation Panel

The External Validation Panel will consider the alignment of the new research degree discipline area with the Institute's Research Strategy and Strategic Plans. It is required to make an impartial judgement on the standard, content and conduct of the proposed research degree discipline.

The External Validation Panel must satisfy itself that:

1. The link between research activity in a research unit and the Institute's Research Strategy has been established;
2. There is support for the new research degree discipline area) from relevant external stakeholders;
3. The infrastructure, staffing and resources for the new research degree discipline area will be made available;
4. The Academic Unit, Research Centre or Research Group has the research capability; level and range of competencies and expertise necessary to deliver the Research Degree Programme(s) in the discipline area.
5. The programme maps to the appropriate NFQ award standards.
6. Organisation, sustainability and the research unit's growth trajectory were evaluated.

4.2.2 Composition of External Review Panel

On behalf of Academic Council the Registrar will convene the External Validation Panel. The Head of Academic Unit may propose panel members. Panels will be constituted cognisant of gender representation.

The membership of the External Validation Panel shall consist of the following:

- Chairperson shall be an external Registrar / Head of Research;
- International academic with research expertise in the proposed area;
- Academic from a national HEI with research expertise in the proposed area;
- Industry representative with experience relevant to the research area;
- External Research Degree student.

Ethical guidelines in relation to the selection and participation of persons selected apply and such persons must declare any personal, professional, academic or business interests that could conflict with their panel membership responsibility.

4.2.3 External Validation Event

A site visit to the Institute will be undertaken by the External Validation Panel to assess, clarify and verify the self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation (ref Appendix (i)) on the basis of the criteria for delegating authority to make awards.

4.2.4 External Validation Panel Reporting

At the end of the External Validation Event, the chairperson of the External Validation Panel will normally make an oral presentation of the findings and conclusions of the Panel to the President, the Registrar, the Head of Research/Development and the Academic Lead for the proposed new research degree programme area.

The External Validation Panel drafts a written report which is sent to the Registrar of the Institute. The report, signed by The Chair, will address the evaluation criteria (see Section 4.2.1) and include a rationale for findings.

1. The draft report is forwarded by the Registrar to the Academic Lead for the proposed new research degree area for a response.
2. If the report from the External Validation Panel sets conditions or makes recommendations requiring the submission to be modified, the Academic Lead arranges for the proposing team to be reconvened and additional work to be carried out in response to the findings of the panel.
3. A response from the Head of Academic Unit is forwarded to the Chair for approval.
4. The final report from the Chair is submitted to Academic Council for approval.
5. The approved report is submitted to Governing Body for adoption.
6. The final report is published on the Institute's website.

4.3 *Joint Validations*

The Institute may put in place arrangements with other higher education institutions to run single validation events where two or more institutions are seeking to validate Level 9 Research Programmes in the same discipline areas(s). In such cases, the collaborating institutions will establish a formal agreement setting out the process that will be followed. The process will be consistent with the validation process outlined in this policy and the QA policy on Collaborative and Transnational Provision for Joint Awards.

Self-Evaluation Report (SER) Structure

Part A: (Institute specific)

- Overview of the Institute
- Institutional Context
- Institute Quality Assurance

Part B: Proposal (Unit Specific)

Introduction

- Description of the Discipline Area covered by the submission.
- Link between the proposed research activity and the Institute's Research strategy
- Support for the new research degree discipline area within the region and from relevant external stakeholders;
- The staffing and resources for the new discipline area / programme(s).
- Evidence that the programme maps to the appropriate NFQ award standards.
- Description of the Self-Evaluation Process undertaken

Research Capability

- Description of existing research capability and expertise within the Unit.
- Supervisory capacity including possible mentoring arrangements where new supervisors are envisaged.
- Existing facilities and their adequacy for the initial stages of development
- Existing collaborative links and their potential in assisting the development of the unit
- Extent of inter-disciplinarity and connectivity especially in relation to novel areas and projects

Organisation and Sustainability

- Management of Unit (e.g. within academic unit, research centre etc.)
- Plans for the Unit especially in relation to the Stages of Development as outlined in the Technological University Quality Framework for Research.
- Additional resource requirements

Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement

Show how the research area is structured to enable the attainment of level 9 learning outcomes, and include:

- general and transferable skills training
- specialised training to foster a broad understanding of particular discipline areas, including research methods
- seminars and other activities to enable the dissemination and exchange of the outputs of research and scholarship and to foster peer review and quality assessment.
- identify the strengths and the areas for improvement in research in these discipline-areas
- identify specific actions to enhance this research area

Include the following documents as appendices:

- Institute Research Strategy;
- Institute QA Research Policy/Postgraduate regulations;
- Detailed staff CVs

List of academic staff who are available to supervise students in these areas						
Name	Highest academic qualification	Specific Field of Science Code(s) (OECD) for individual	Research output level	Research leadership	Discipline-areas covered (use the labels assigned above)	Number of students supervise
						Master-level

Courses available for research students			
Course title	Course provider	Number of ECTS credits	Indicate whether specialised or general

Research collaborations with other higher education institutions		
Institute	Type of collaboration- formal or informal (including co-supervision)	Objectives of collaboration