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Comments from the RCSI School of Postgraduate Studies on the QQI draft White Paper on Topic-specific QA Guidelines for Research Degree programmes.

Dear Ms Mathews,

In July 2016 QQI submitted a draft quality assurance guideline document for consultation with stakeholders to RCSI. These core QA guidelines are intended to guide providers through their legal responsibilities for the development of quality assurance procedures for the provision of education and training, research and related areas.

A detailed analysis of this draft document by the RCSI School of Postgraduate Studies is included here. A working group was established to consult with stakeholders (supervisors, coordinators, students, graduates and postdoctoral population) and a draft reply was prepared. The draft reply was brought to RCSI Academic Council and further comments were raised. All comments were collated and incorporated into this reply.

In summary, we highlighted 3 issues as requiring clarification with QQI. They are:

1. Clarity of definition of fulltime student:
 - Can QQI provide guidance on what is expected from a full-time student (section 3.1)?*
2. Requirement to provide English language teaching support (pg. 19):
 - We feel that it should not be the role of the academic supervisor to provide English language support. Instead, we set strict access requirements around English language requirements and feel that this is sufficient.
3. Clarity is required regarding the status and absolute requirement for ECTS-accredited course work for all research degree programmes.
 - QQI suggest that all constituent courses for postgraduate research students are assigned ECTS weights, and totals are within limits agreed institutionally or nationally for Masters and Doctoral programmes. Will this include both a minimum and maximum ECTS requirement limit?

*we would like more detail to be provided in the QQI guidelines as to time commitments expected from students (weekly, annual, etc. e.g. 40 hours per week; 45 weeks per year.)? This would help define/make consistent full-time/part-time PhD time commitment issues (e.g. tax free stipend issues). The Irish Revenue office state that tax-free stipends are for full-time students only, and that no work obligation should connect the financial sponsor with the student. Many demonstratorships, clinical educators, industry co-funded students and part-time students do contribute institutionally to undergraduate training, but this is seen as part of their postgraduate training. Clarity from QQI on the definition of each of these student types would help allow students who also do practical-demonstrating/tutorials to keep their tax-free stipends.

In addition, the RCSI review team identified a number of minor items for noting within the RCSI School of Postgraduate studies where improvements must be made to match the QQI guidelines.

We thank the QQI for circulating this document for discussion and are fully supportive of their attempts to ensure the quality assurance of all research degree programmes in Ireland. We look forward to working with you in the future on this and other issues related to Research Degree programmes.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Niamh Moran', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Niamh Moran Ass Prof.
Head of School of Postgraduate Studies