A REVIEW OF VALIDATED RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMMES AT THE

Institute of Technology Tralee

QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Draft Terms of Reference

1. Purpose of this document

This document sets out the terms of reference for a review by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) of validated research degree programmes at the Institute of Technology Tralee (ITT) under Section 46 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 - a statutory review. These Terms of Reference are set within the overarching policy for *Core Validation Policy and Criteria (HETAC, 2010); and Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria (HETAC, 2010) (refer to section 2. below) and should be read in conjunction with these documents*. ITT was granted approval by the former Higher Education and Training Awards Council to provide research programmes in the fields attached in appendix 1, table 1.

2. Background

The decision by QQI to review was triggered by the events and outcomes surrounding the recent case of the Chair of the IT Tralee Governing Body and an allegation of Plagiarism. A brief overview of those events is set out below:

- The Institute presented the Chair of its Governing Body, to HETAC for the award of the Master of Arts by research degree. The degree was awarded by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (now dissolved) in 2008.

- An allegation of plagiarism was subsequently highlighted and brought to the Institute's attention by a letter signed by 26 of its academic staff.

- The Institute convened an **external investigation panel (EIP)** appointed, following advice on the panel from QQI, to investigate the allegations of plagiarism. The **conclusions of the report of the EIP** indicated a number of issues relating to research provision in ITT. The report will be made available to the QQI panel undertaking this review.

- The Institute's E**xaminations and Assessments Review Committee (EARC)** accepted the EIP report.

- The Chair of IT Tralee appealed against a judgment made by the Institute's **EARC** that his 2008 MA thesis involved plagiarism (unintentional).

- The Institute referred the matter to its **Examinations and Assessment Appeal Committee (EAAC).** The EAAC found that the Chair of IT Tralee committed "an unintentional and non-fraudulent infraction of an academic disciplinary rule." The EAAC concluded his degree was not attained in an unjustified manner but recommended that "in light of the deficiencies in the thesis which the External Panel/EARC identified, it is appropriate that corrections be made to the thesis by way of the insertion of a corrigenda notification in the official copy of the thesis" and that after the Institute was satisfied that the process had been carried out in accordance with this requirement, the Institute should inform QQI of this fact.

- The EAAC report will be made available to the panel undertaking this QQI review.

- The Governing Body of the Institute considered the report of the EAAC on 2 May, 2013 and unanimously adopted the report.
- The Institute indicated to QQI that the conclusions of the EAAC and EARC have wider implications for the Institute, particularly in respect of its regulations for postgraduate study.

QQI concurred with the Institute that the decision of the EAAC and the conclusions and recommendations of the EARC have wider implications for the Institute and the regulation of its postgraduate research study programmes, in particular. The above case has identified significant deficiencies which will be considered as part of this review including specific items raised by the EARC and EAAC investigation panels.

The discovery of a failing in one area increases the probability that there may be other undetected deficiencies and for this reason the scope of this review shall be broader that the effectiveness of the Institute's *'policies and procedures in place to prevent, detect, combat and deter plagiarism at all levels and by all members in the provider's organisation...'* (Section 4.11, *Assessment and Standards*, 2009).

3. Objectives of the Review

The objectives of the Review are:

1. To evaluate the operation and management of validated research degree programmes against the policy and criteria set out in section 4 below;
2. To make recommendations for the improvements of the research degree programmes.

Following its consideration of 1 and 2 above, the panel may make recommendations , where it has sufficient information, in respect of each research degree programme (see Section 47 of the Act of 2012 on withdrawal of programme validation) as to whether:

a. *'the programme no longer meets the criteria established by'* [QQI] *'under section 44(1),*

b. *a condition referred to in section 45(2) is not being complied with, or*

c. *there are other reasonable grounds for withdrawing the validation of the programme',*

4. Policy and Criteria and Policy for the Purpose of the review

The Institute's research degree programmes shall be reviewed under Section 46 of the Act of 2012 in light of applicable (current) QQI validation policy and criteria:

- *Core Validation Policy and Criteria (HETAC, 2010); the following cited documents are also noteworthy*
  - *Assessment and Standards 2009*
  - *Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards 2012*

- *Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria (HETAC, 2010) the following cited documents are also noteworthy and cited as part of the HETAC Policy and Criteria:*
    - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (published by ENQA, 2005)
    - *Salzburg Principles (published by EUA, 2005)*
    - *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education (published by IUQB, 2009)*
    - *Good Practice in the Quality Assurance of Arts Research Degree Programmes by Practice (published by HETAC, 2010)*
    - *European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of*
    - *Researchers (published by the European Commission, 2005)*
    - *Funding Agency Requirements and Guidelines for Managing Research-Generated*
    - *Intellectual Property (published by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), 2006)*

5. Scope of the review

The scope of this review shall be broader that the effectiveness of the Institute's *'policies and procedures in place to prevent, detect, combat and deter plagiarism at all levels and by all members in the provider's organisation...'* (Section 4.11, *Assessment and Standards*, 2009). The review shall consider the Institute's:

- Research degree programmes at master's and doctoral levels (see Table 1 below);
- General quality assurance procedures for research degree programmes; and
- Discipline-area-level quality assurance procedures for research degree programmes; against QQI's validation criteria (see above).

The review team should note the precise meaning of the term 'research degree programme':.

> *'A research degree programme is a process by which learners develop and demonstrate research skills and attain specified learning outcomes mainly through research but also through taught elements.'* (Research Degree programme Policy and Criteria, 2010)

This review process is necessarily comprehensive—it involves the complement of research-active staff, the quality assurance arrangements, the research environment, the procedures for assessment of learning, the facilities and resources, the general and discipline-specific research training and other aspects. The validation criteria reflect this comprehensive interpretation.

QQI's validation criteria absolutely bound the scope of the review. Within that scope the review is further bounded by the following broad headings:

- Minimum intended, and actual learning outcomes and related education and training opportunities both general and discipline-specific, concerning the following (and the stage in the programme at which the intended learning outcomes are required to be achieved)
  - The academic standards for research degrees
  - Research methods
  - The conduct of academic research
  - Archiving of research records
  - Presentation of a thesis for higher degrees
  - Publication of research

- General, and discipline-specific, Institute capacity to:
  - Supervise research students
  - Provide for the formation of research students
  - Manage supervisor performance
  - Inculcate research integrity among research students and staff
  - Inculcate research expertise among research students and staff

- The Institute's regulations for research degree programmes.
- The Institute's regulations concerning research integrity (for the conduct of research leading to higher degrees).
- Arrangements for the appraisal of the viability of supervising a prospective student's research project.
- Supervision methods education and training opportunities provided to research faculty.
- The research environment.
- Institutional oversight of the operation and management of research degree programmes.
- Criteria for acceptance of a thesis for examination
- Summative assessment procedures for research degrees
- Appeals procedures and grounds for research degrees
- Consideration of any potential occasions for conflict of interest
- All of the above in the context of any collaborative arrangements in place for the provision of research programmes (including joint supervision; collaborative research projects; and such like).

Owing to the limited scope, the panel will not have discipline-spcific expertise in all of the discipline-areas where research is being conducted. This will need to be considered by the Institute when preparing its submission.

This is a broadly based review, particularly because many aspects have to be considered

at the discipline-area level, and it is foreseeable that the review process when implemented might not be able to conclude on some questions at the discipline-area-specific level. In any such circumstances the review shall report the unresolved matters.

6. Review Process

6.1 The Institute will be requested to

- conduct a **critical self-assessment** against the validation criteria in Section 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 of Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria in the light of these terms of reference.

- Notify research collaborators of the review and involve them in the self-evaluation.

6.2 The critical self-assessment together with supporting documents will be submitted to QQI in electronic form. The supporting documents shall include the material listed in Section 3.4 of *Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria*.

6.3 QQI will appoint a panel of reviewers to carry out an evaluation of the self-assessment (following establishment of the Terms of reference).

6.4 The evaluation panel shall consider the self-assessment and supporting documentation and visit the Institute for the purpose of informing its deliberations.

6.5 The panel will in so far as possible establish an agenda and schedule of meetings required for the visit and may interview staff and students involved in research degree programmes. The panel will indicate the groups its wishes to interview in advance of the site visit. Additional requirements may arise during the site visit.

6.6 The panel will prepare a detailed report of its findings against the validation criteria and this will include recommendations for improvements of the research degree programmes. The review report shall, where it has sufficient information, in respect of each research degree programme recommend to QQI (see Section 47 of the Act of 2012 on withdrawal of programme validation) whether

- *'the programme no longer meets the criteria established by' [QQI] 'under section 44(1),*

- *a condition referred to in section 45(2) is not being complied with, or*

- *there are other reasonable grounds for withdrawing the validation of the programme',*

6.7 A draft report will be issued to the Institute for verification of factual accuracy.

6.8 A final report will be published on the QQI website.

6.9 **Timelines:** The Institute will submit the Self Evaluation Report no later than **August 30th, 2013**. The panel will consider the ITT Self-Assessment Report (a period of 4 weeks following receipt will be allowed for this) and will indicate the schedule of events and any additional documentation prior to the site visit to ITT.

6.10 Section 80 of the 2012 Act regarding fees will apply to this review.

7. Additional Documentation

a. The recent HETAC discipline-area research review and 2012 HETAC reports shall be noted by the panel.

b. The ITT Report of the External Investigation Panel (EIP) appointed by the Institute

c.   The ITT Report of the Examinations and Assessments Appeals Committee (EAAC).

d. Correspondence to Dr Oliver Murphy, President, ITT - 10 May 2013.

e. The list of research approved projects– HETAC record of the active register without reference to individual candidates.

Appendix 1

The range of the Institute's research degree programmes is illustrated by the following table of discipline areas and the level of 'research approval' granted. For the purpose of this review each of the bulleted discipline areas can be considered a research degree programme. Research approval at doctoral level implies approval at master's level.

		Master's Degrees	PhD degree
Institute of Technology, Tralee (Approved)	2005 (GC)*	• Computing and Mathematics* • Health Studies & Sports Science* • Nursing* • Social Studies/Care* • Business, Tourism and Entrepreneurship* • Engineering*	• Chemical & Life Sciences* • Mathematics* • Educational Sciences* • Language & Literature* • Arts*

Appendix 2

Criteria and sections of the legislation referenced in the TOR:

1. **Policy and Criteria for the making of Higher Education and Training Awards (Part 2 Section 2.5, 2004)**

    2.5 Revocation of an Award

    HETAC may formally withdraw and revoke an award in circumstances where:

    1. It has come to its attention that the learner has attained an award in a fraudulent or unjustified manner;

    2. The holder of a HETAC award has knowingly allowed a person or persons to use the award or official supplementary documentation describing the award (Diploma Supplement) in a fraudulent or misleading or unjustified manner.

    3. The holder of an award has falsified information in relation to the award or altered the original information on the award parchment in order to mislead and misrepresent the perception of the award and the status of the holder in any way.

    4. Other circumstances where the holder of a HETAC award has misrepresented the award or the information contained on an award parchment or in supporting documentation, such as the European Diploma Supplement.

2. **Assessment and Standards, 2009 (Section 4.11)**

    4.11 Dealing with Plagiarism and Other Types of Academic Misconduct

    Providers should build a culture which values and supports good academic conduct.

There are degrees of plagiarism, ranging from the unintentional and minor to the clearly intentional and extensive. While it can occur in a written examination, plagiarism arises more obviously in coursework and project work.

Tackling plagiarism effectively requires a multi-disciplinary and multi-layered approach. The provider should have effective policies and procedures in place to prevent, detect, combat and deter plagiarism at all levels and by all members in the provider's organisation. As part of this:

- Learners and assessors should receive training in fair dealing with other people's work (understood inclusively i.e. text, ideas, artefacts etc.), and in the general and discipline specific norms for the citation of sources.

- Learners and assessors should receive training in what constitutes plagiarism and the degrees of plagiarism, in the context of total or partial rejection of an attempt at an assessment task.

- Learners and assessors should also receive guidance on the distinction between acceptable collaboration with other learners and collusion in plagiarism.

- Learners should be made aware of the consequences of plagiarism to them and to society.

- Assessors should be made aware of the protocols for investigating cases where plagiarism is suspected and the level of evidence required before an accusation can be considered — accusations should not be made lightly.

- Assessment strategies (including methods etc.) should be designed to minimise the possibility of plagiarism.

- Where necessary, assessors should receive training, guidance and support in the design of assessments to minimise susceptibility to plagiarism and in methods for its detection.

- Providers should have effective, published procedures for monitoring and detecting plagiarism, including appropriate warnings, sanctions and penalties.

Accepting unwarranted support from others (e.g. parents, professionals) in preparing continuous assessment elements which are submitted as one's own work is a form of plagiarism.

3. **Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (Section 47)**

Withdrawal of programme validation.

47.

(1) Upon a review of a programme under *section 46*, where the Authority considers that—

a. the programme no longer meets the criteria established by the Authority under *section 44(1)*,

b. a condition referred to in *section 45(2)* is not being complied with, or

c. there are other reasonable grounds for withdrawing the validation of the programme,

the Authority shall, by notice in writing, inform the provider of the programme that it proposes to withdraw validation of the programme and state the reasons for the proposed withdrawal.

(2) A notice under *subsection (1)* shall state that the provider may submit observations in writing to the Authority in relation to the reasons for the proposed withdrawal as set out in the notice not later than one month after the service of the notice on the provider. (3) Where, after consideration of any observations submitted to the Authority under *subsection (2)*, the Authority continues to consider that *paragraph (a), (b) or (c)* of *subsection (1)* applies, it shall withdraw its validation of the programme concerned, by notice in writing addressed to the provider, from such date (not earlier than the date of service on the provider of the notice of withdrawal) as it considers appropriate and as is specified in the notice having regard to the interests of the enrolled learners concerned. (4) A notice under *subsection (3)* shall state the reasons for the withdrawal referred to in that subsection. (5) Where the Authority, withdraws its validation of a programme of education and training under *subsection (3)*, the provider concerned may appeal against that withdrawal to the Appeals Panel.

4. **Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (Section 44(1))**

44.

(1) The Authority shall, as soon as practicable after the establishment day, establish policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training and shall publish the policies and criteria in such form and manner as it thinks appropriate (including on the internet).

5. **Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (Section 45(2))**

45.

(2) The validation of a programme by the Authority is subject to—

a. the conditions specified in *subsection (3)*, and
b. any other conditions that the Authority thinks it appropriate to impose in relation to the programme.

6. Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria (Section 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3)

3.1 Institutional Criteria

Providers should have quality assurance arrangements for the provision of research degree programmes which are consistent with the relevant guidelines (Section 5.4) and standards (Section 5.1-5.3) especially IUQB's *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education* and with the generic criteria in Section 3 of HETAC's *Core Validation Policy and Criteria*.

3.2 Discipline-area Criteria

3.2.1 General

The provision and quality assurance of research degree programmes at discipline-area level should be consistent with the relevant guidelines and standards in Section 5 especially IUQB's *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education* and with the generic criteria in Section 3 of HETAC's *Core Validation Policy and Criteria.* The following headings from *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education* indicate the scope of this criterion.

- Institutional organisation
- Recruitment, admission and general arrangements
- Induction and communication
- Supervision and supervisor(s)
- The Student
- The Project
- Professional development
- Monitoring progress
- The Dissertation
- The Examination
- The Graduation
- Data records and reporting on PhD programmes

Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards

Where elements of structured research degree programmes lead to minor, special-purpose or supplemental awards those elements should also be validated (either for use in research degree programmes generally or as part of the research accreditation or research approval process for discipline-area-specific use).

- See HETAC's Core Validation Policy and Criteria and HETAC's General Programme Validation Manual for information about how to present such programmes.

Diploma Supplement

Providers of research degree programmes should issue
a Diploma Supplement to each graduate.

- A sample Diploma Supplement should be provided with the application.

3.2.2 Research Context and Strategy

There should be a clearly documented, relevant and realistic
research strategy for the discipline-area concerned.

- This strategy should be consistent with and relevant to the provider's mission and the research strategy for the institution as a whole.
- It should also address the national and international context.
- Collaboration with other providers of research degree programmes and with industry should feature prominently in the strategy.

The planned research should promise an appropriate scientific, social,
economic or cultural impact which is consistent with the provider's mission.

3.2.3 Research Environment and Community

The provider should have an active, supportive academic environment
and research community in the discipline-area demonstrated
by recognised research performance indicators.

- There should be evidence of the presence and active participation of people who can provide academic guidance, authority and leadership in the discipline-area concerned. They should be well connected with the broader research community in the discipline area. They should also be capable of managing the implementation of the disciplinearea research strategy.
- There should be evidence of the presence and participation of sufficient staff who are capable of and have experience of supervising research students in the discipline-area at the appropriate NFQ level.
- There should be a sufficient volume of research activity to create a stimulating environment for research students.
- There should be evidence of co-operative behaviour and collegiality.
- There should be opportunities for research students to interact with other researchers both within and outside the institution and opportunities, where appropriate, for collaboration with other providers, industry and commerce and the public sector.

3.2.4 Research Facilities and Funding

There should be adequate physical resources as well as
technical and administrative support structures and attendant
staff appropriate to the research being undertaken.

There must be adequate informational resources to enable learners to read what other researchers are publishing in relevant discipline-areas.

Research degree programmes should be adequately funded.

3.2.5 Research Degree Programme Structure

The research degree programmes should be structured appropriately to enable the efficient attainment of the intended learning outcomes by the learner (see HETAC's Core Validation Policy and Criteria and Section 5 below which describes the applicable awards standards).

- For each discipline-area the following should be available:
  - General and transferable skills training;
  - Specialised training required to develop a broad understanding of the relevant discipline-area and as dictated by the nature of the research being undertaken;
  - Seminars, both focused and interdisciplinary, to inform and to facilitate the dissemination and exchange of the fruits of research, enabling peer review and quality assessment.

- Ideally the elements above should be integrated into a structured research degree programme. The research apprenticeship is still an important part of a structured research degree programme and distinguishes it from taught programmes. This underlines the need for the presence of active researchers who can provide authoritative guidance and support and an active research community in the discipline area concerned.
- Providers of research degree programmes should consult with other higher education institutions and with industry when developing their programmes.
- Research students should have access to appropriate career guidance and networking opportunities which should include options outside academia.
- PhD programmes in particular always involve the 'advancement of knowledge through original research'[4]. They always involve the production of a thesis. The term thesis here should be understood inclusively to signify a coherent body of original work by the candidate. It consists of a (written) dissertation which may possibly be accompanied by a portfolio or supporting artefacts.
- Structured PhD programmes are becoming increasingly common in Ireland. The IUA definition of a 'structured PhD programme' is endorsed by HETAC and is provided in Appendix 3 for information.

3.2.6 Research Productivity

The unit responsible for the discipline-area should be productive as evidenced by recognised research performance indicators[5] (especially its recent publication record e.g. over the past five years).

- The institution's claims about the quality of its research (regional, national, international recognition) should be justified by reliable evidence.

3.2.7 Duration of Research Degree Programmes

The duration of a PhD programme should normally be four years (fulltime equivalent) which may include time spent pursuing a Master's degree programme (or PhD probation) prior to transferring to the PhD register.

Industrial doctoral programmes where the research student is based in industry may require more time.

The duration of a Master's degree should normally be at least one-and-a-half years (fulltime equivalent) and may be no less than one calendar year.

3.3 Criteria for Procedures for the Assessment of Learning

The following criteria are used when agreeing a provider's procedures for the assessment of candidates for research degrees.

- The provider's formative and summative assessment procedures are consistent with:
    - HETAC's Assessment and Standards 2009 and
    - IUQB's Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education 2009 (particularly Chapters 8 and 10 both of which concern assessment).

- The transfer of a research student from the Master's Register to the Doctoral Register must involve a formal transfer process. The transfer process must involve the external review of the proposed research by an independent expert in the discipline-area concerned. Transfer is only possible within a provider if the provider has (at least) doctoral research approval in the discipline-area concerned.
- Each candidate for a research degree is assessed against the relevant standard in Section 5.2 below by at least two examiners after the thesis has been submitted.
- The provider has formal and robust procedures for selecting and approving external examiners which ensure that the examiners are independent, qualified to the NFQ level of the award sought by the candidate, recognised experts in the field and research-active. There should be procedures for the avoidance of all conflicts of interests (whether real or apparent or potential or actual) and declaration of relevant interests. External examiners for research degrees should be approved by the provider's Academic Committee or equivalent before being confirmed. If a nominated external examiner is not affiliated with a higher education institution then additional procedures are normally required to confirm that the nominee

is competent to carry out the required functions. The procedures for selecting and approving internal examiners should be equally robust.

- Examiners are selected on a case-by-case basis for each thesis submitted.
- At least one examiner should always be external to the provider. The external examiner is independent of the candidate and the provider and is a recognised research-active expert in the thesis topic.

- One examiner may be a member of the provider's staff except where the learner concerned is also a member of the provider's staff. The internal examiner is otherwise independent of the candidate and supervisory team. Providers which do not have the scale required to provide a suitable internal examiner rely upon external examiners (i.e. they appoint two or more).

- The supervisor and all members of any supervisory team are ineligible to be examiners in the assessment of any learner supervised.

- The provider's assessment procedures should detail the internal and external examiner's roles and responsibilities. The examiners' task is to assess the *candidate* against the relevant award standard using the thesis as evidence. See Section 5 on the precise criteria for recommending the award of research degrees.

- Structured PhD programmes may include taught elements which are assessed. Such assessments are enabling assessments (to determine whether or not a learner may submit a thesis) rather than assessments that have a bearing on the PhD result which must hinge on the thesis and the performance of the candidate at the *viva voce*.

- The assessment process is transparent. A viva voce is mandatory for the Doctor of Philosophy degree and professional doctorate degrees and is optional but available if requested by either one of the examiners or the candidate in the case of a Master's degree.

- The assessment procedures (for both Master's and Doctoral degrees) provide for the engagement by the provider of a non-voting chairperson who is independent of the candidate and supervisory team. The role and responsibilities of the chairperson should be made explicit in the provider's procedures and should include (see also the special condition on the nomination of the chairperson for research approved providers in Section 2.2.2):
  - Communicating with the examiners to achieve consensus among them;
  - Ensuring that the process and assessment criteria are properly applied; and
  - Reporting to HETAC where it is the awarding body.

- There should be a procedure which 'can be implemented in

case of examiner disagreement as to the' assessment outcome
(see Chapter 10 of the aforementioned IUQB Code).

- Where required, the chairperson should send his or her report to HETAC as soon as possible after the assessment. The report should include a brief outline of the learning outcome, the names of each of the examiners along with an outline of the assessment (the reports of the examiners may be attached) and a report of the consensus recommendation. The acceptable (for the purpose of consistency) recommendations are:
    - Recommended;
    - Recommended with minor revisions;
    - Not recommended but referred for major
      revision and re-examination; and
    - Not recommended.

- The procedures state clearly that the option to refer the thesis for revision is normally only available the first time the thesis is examined.

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