Report on request by Dundalk Institute of Technology for approval to submit, on a case-by-case basis, applications for registration of PhD programmes in the area of

Informatics

22nd January 2009

1 Introduction

In September 2008 HETAC received an application from Dundalk Institute of Technology for approval to submit, on a case-by-case basis, applications for registration of PhD programmes in the area of Informatics in the Department of Computing and Mathematics.

The application included the following documents:

- *Self-evaluation report for an application to the Higher Education and Training Awards Council for approval to submit PhD research degree programmes for registration on a case-by-case basis in the Department of Computing and Mathematics*

The following additional documentation was provided during the course of the visits:

Admissions Handbook, Entry 2009
DkIT Strategic Plan 2006-2011

A panel of expert assessors was assembled by HETAC to evaluate the case for approval by perusing the documentation submitted and visiting the College. Details of the panel are provided in the final section of the report.

A site visit took place between 09:00 and approximately 14:30 on October 24th at the DkIT campus. The panel also held a private meeting during the previous evening.

Assessors met and had discussions with the senior management team; research active academic staff, graduates and current postgraduate research students; perused research outputs; and viewed relevant facilities.

2 Summary of findings

The panel recommends that HETAC approve Institute of Technology, Dundalk to submit, on a case-by-case basis, applications for registration of PhD programmes in the area of

- Informatics

subject to the standard conditions that

1. The Institute produce a response detailing how it will address the issues raised by the assessors and which is considered satisfactory by HETAC.

2. Approval be granted for a period of *five years*.

The panel is confident that the graduates of these programmes will attain the HETAC doctoral standard. This will entitle them to an award at Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

3 General comments and summary of specific recommendations

3.1 Approval to submit candidates is recommended based on a suitable Institute response to the following recommendations:

3.1.1 that the Institute consider improving the availability of research resources by obtaining access to the IEEE and ACM digital libraries.

3.1.2 The nature of the contract of employment for lecturing staff in the IOT sector is unhelpful in supporting research. Whilst it is unambiguous that the terms of the contract do not hamper individual staff member's commitment or the support of students in the Department of Computing and Mathematics it would be desirable that the Institute fully participate in any available national dialogue to resolve the anomaly. In this context it is recommended that prior to the acceptance of a candidate on a PhD programme the Head of Department and the Research Supervisor meet to agree that the staff member will be available over the Summer months for supervision and secondly that the Institute agrees to ensure appropriate supports are in place for students over the Summer period.

Additionally a review of practices pertaining to balance between the number of teaching hours and research hours should be undertaken to ensure that the optimum model is obtained. Currently the teaching load is very high compared to balances in universities.

3.1.3 Additional and more focussed training should be provided to staff to support them in initiating and developing their research work.

3.1.4 With regard to progress monitoring of students it is recommended that particular care be given to those studying part-time. A reduction in contact time with these students from a supervisory point of view may not be helpful and it is recommended that consideration be given to this with the possibility of the guidelines being amended.

4 Other comments - Detailed Reports and Recommendations

4.1.1 Is there a clear and realistic research strategy?

Yes.

4.1.2 Is there a suitable research environment including facilities (i.e. library, access to research journals, computer facilities, laboratories etc.)?

Yes, but access to online journals needs significant improvement.

Strengths

During the site visit the panel had the opportunity to view the facilities available to research students. The location of the facilities in the enterprise building may provide stimulation for both teaching and research.

4.1.3 Is there adequate research leadership?

Yes. There is a focussed and effective strategy in chosen research areas.

4.1.4 Are there research-active staff who can supervise research students?

Yes. Both the documentation provided and the meeting with research leaders demonstrated that there is a good group of research-active and motivated staff.

Improvements

Consideration of the teaching load of staff members in contrast to time available for research and professional development is recommended. The current balance of hours is not conducive to excellence in research.

4.1.5 Is there capacity for research success?

Yes.

There is an evident commitment and enthusiasm of staff around their respective research areas.

4.1.6 Has the institution established agreed institutional regulations and procedures, code of good research practice and administrative support?

Yes. The stipulation that at least one member of the supervisory team has successfully supervised to completion and that at least one member is currently engaged in research in the relevant discipline is good practice, and supportive of both staff and students.

Areas for improvement

The arrangements in place for part-time students, as indicated above, may need to be reviewed. Part-time students may need more support rather than less and a reduction in the supervision hours available to them might not be helpful. Additionally flexibility around the numbers of hours made available to PhD candidates to allow longer sessions but fewer in frequency when required would be helpful.

4.1.7 On the compliance with the general requirements set out in Appendix C.

These are well covered, in particular the care given to student monitoring.

4.1.8 Research performance indicators

4.1.8.1 Research Administration and Quality Assurance

No issues other than those in 4.1.6

4.1.8.2 Access to research degree programmes

No issues

4.1.8.3 Transfer between the Master's and Doctoral Registers

No issues

4.1.8.4 Other Appendix C criteria

No issues

4.1.9 On the assessment procedures for candidates for research degrees which are fair and consistent and for the purpose of compliance with standards determined by HETAC.

These criteria are addressed.

4.1.10 On the implementation of procedures for access transfer and progression as determined by the Qualifications Authority under Section 8(2)(d) of the Act.

No issues.

5. Conclusion

A significant portion of work has been undertaken in Dundalk Institute of Technology in preparing the research area of Informatics and in supporting the students in their study. There is a sound basis for future development.

6. The Panel

Professor Christine Choppy, Laboratoire d'Informatique de l'Université Paris Nord

Professor Michael Ryan (Chairperson), Dublin City University (*Retired*)

In attendance
Ms Tara Ryan, Higher Education and Training Awards Council

7. Declarations of Interest

None were made.