

Application 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 in the Department of Computing and Mathematics.

Responses to Report of HETAC Panel

Section 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 considers improving the availability of research resources by obtaining access to the IEEE and ACM digital libraries.

(Also raised in Section 4.1.2 – “...access to online journals needs significant improvement”)

Response

The problem of gaining full access to on-line journals is not just an Institute one but also impacts on the whole Institute of Technology (IOT) sector. The fact that IOTs do not have full access to the Irish Research Electronic Library (IREL), whereas the universities do, is a major issue for the sector. This issue can only be solved by the Irish government and the HEA due to the large cost implications. This Institute, in conjunction with the other Institutes, continues to lobby the HEA in this respect. There has been a recent positive development with the HEA having funded, in January 2009, the provision of Ebsco's Academic Search Premier and Business Source Premier for all IOT libraries, to be reviewed after an initial period of one year.

The Institute is, therefore, committed to enhancing the current suite of on-line access material at every opportunity. In particular, the Computing and Mathematics department is working closely with the Institute's library to maximise the amount of informatics related literature available on-line.

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 an 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.

Response

The panel report acknowledges that contracts of employment for lecturing staff are agreed nationally. In that respect, the Institute is fully engaged in the national process of examining contracts, as part of the Action Plan for the Institute sector, arising from the Towards 2016 national agreement. Part of that dialogue also involves the issue of co-operation with, and adoption of, new, more flexible work patterns as well as the efficient use of resources.

The Institute is particularly pleased to note from the panel report that “There is an evident commitment and enthusiasm of staff around their respective research areas” and “Both the documentation provided and the meeting with research leaders demonstrated that there is a good group of research-active and motivated staff”. The Institute is confident that such staff, in the Department of Computing and Mathematics, are fully committed to supporting students and will continue to provide a professional and comprehensive supervision regime.

The Institute provides support for students over the summer period with library and other facilities being fully available.

3.1.2 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.

(Also raised in Section 4.1.4 – “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”).

Response

Recently the Institute has implemented a Supervision Policy, which is directed at addressing the imbalance between the teaching loads as opposed to the research duties of academic staff. Key points relating to this policy are as follows:

- ◆ **All academic supervisors are expected to safeguard a minimum of 30% of their current teaching hours for the delivery of formal taught teaching programmes, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels;**
- ◆ **Two hours per postgraduate student shall be afforded to the student’s supervisory team;**
- ◆ **The maximum time duration that a supervisor can claim any hours for postgraduate supervision is 30 months for Masters (level 9) and 54 months for Doctoral (Level 10), from initial registration dates;**
- ◆ **All academic directors of research centres who possess formal teaching duties are given an additional time reduction in their teaching loads, amounting to 25% of their contracted hours, for the administrative duties associated with the running of their respective centres;**
- ◆ **Schools and Departments should consider the valuable contribution that both postgraduate and postdoctoral fellows can make to the teaching mission of their School and Department.**

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

Response

Particular training needs for research staff are identified as part of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) process, carried out annually by the Head of Department. The totality of training needs identified are then used to better inform the training programmes subsequently provided.

The Research Office, in conjunction with the Institute's training unit and the Registrar's Office, is in the process of developing generic transferable skills training for both postgraduates and supervisors alike. Key workshops, already organised, and directed at supervisors to support them in developing their research work are as follows:

- ◆ Effective Research Supervision workshop by Prof Tony Fell, UK (March 2009)
- ◆ Intellectual Property and Research Commercialisation workshop by INVENT centre in DCU (April 2009)
- ◆ National Funding Bodies, Dr Tim McCormac (HOR, DKIT), (March 2009)
- ◆ TSR Strand 1 Research Proposal workshops, Dr Tim McCormac (HOR, DKIT), (January and February 2009)

In addition to these, the Institute is further investigating the possibility of the delivery of on-line modules for researchers including supervisors, through the purchasing of on-site licenses from the UK. There are 15 modules, which would be of great benefit to all staff, who are actively involved or wish to be involved in research.

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.

(Also raised in Section 4.1.6 – “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.)

Response

These issues have been recognised by the Institute with the newly implemented Supervision Policy (3.1.2 above) making the following commitment, in this regard:

- ◆ **The supervision of part-time researchers by academic supervisors and the associated time allowances this may attract is an issue which is solved at the relevant school / departmental level in consultation with the supervisor (s).**

Signed:

**Stephen McManus, Registrar
Dundalk Institute of Technology
6th March 2009**