

## Research approval for Dundalk Institute of Technology at Level 9 in Creative Media and at Levels 9 and 10 in Music

*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 Music and master's degree programmes in the area of Creative Media.*

Assessors: Prof Fiona M. Palmer (chair), Dr Kia Ng, Prof David Cox, Dr Fionnuala Conway, Mr Conor Lynch.

### 1 Introduction

Dundalk Institute of Technology (The Institute) applied to HETAC on 20 May 2009 for approval to submit Level 9 research degree programmes in Creative Media and Level 10 research degree programmes in Music for registration on a case-by-case basis in the Department of Music and Creative Media.

The application was supported by the following documents:

- Dundalk Institute of Technology Department of Music and Creative Media Self-evaluation Report *plus* Appendices
- Department of Music and Creative Media Research Staff CVs.

Additional documentation was provided during the course of the visit.

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

The site visit took place between 09:00 and approximately 16:00 on 25 September 2009 at the main campus of the Institute and the panel held a private meeting the previous evening. Assessors met and had discussions with the senior management team; research active academic staff; and current postgraduate research students; perused research outputs; and viewed relevant facilities.

### 2 Summary of Findings:

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

- *Late 19th- and 20th-century music with particular reference to Irish music including analysis, editing and performance practice where relevant*
- *Composition*
- *Irish Traditional Music*

and master's degree programmes in the area of Creative Media in two areas:

- *Alternate Reality Gaming*
- *New Media Narrative Forms*

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 master's and doctoral graduates attain or are likely to attain a standard that is equivalent to the standard typical of universities in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

## 3 Findings and recommendations

### 3.1 General

The Panel's visit included meetings with senior officers, academic staff from Music and Creative Media, and current postgraduate students. The panel perceived a strong sense of purpose and dedication among all those with whom it met. The students and academic staff evidently work well together and are supportive of the proposed developments.

There is currently some concern among academic staff about balancing the development of research with the teaching contract demands. This relates to the feasibility of managing additional supervisory work and personal research activities. The problem of ensuring that ideals (enabling staff to be research active and providing support for personal development in this area) are balanced against the actualities of pressing demands on time from teaching and administration (see pp. 17-19) remains an issue for the Institute.

**Levels of Data:** In the application documentation, and in the verbal presentations during the site visit the various projections and statements could have been more fully substantiated by relevant supporting data. It would have been helpful to have had greater depth in statistics concerning the areas currently supported and the sustainability of same. There should have been a more realistic self-assessment of the extent to which new developments will depend on the expertise of available staff. The application documentation could have better characterised that expertise. For example, Appendix 1 of the self-assessment could usefully have provided job titles for staff and lengths of time in post. Equipment lists were not included and, when requested, were out of date. Figures showing enrolled numbers within each programme would also have helped (p. 8). All of this did not help the panel to reach its decision easily particularly in relation to Creative Media.

**Institutional Research Strategy:** The Institute is actively reviewing its detailed research strategy. It is making a significant investment in Music and Creative Media as one of its thematic research areas. The panel would endorse this strategy although it will have to be supported by more cutting edge research in the area of music technology. The application documentation demonstrated an awareness of areas in need of development and some of the plans needed to ensure that that the necessary progress is made.

**Environment:** The physical environment is likely to be very good when new facilities become available soon (see also statements on p. 54-55 of submitted documentation). The acquisition and development of the P. J. Carroll's building which is due to open in January 2010 shows a strong and admirable commitment on the part of the Institute to support the development of Music and Creative Media. This impressively refurbished building affords dedicated space for both disciplines. It should provide a highly suitable environment for research in both Music and Creative Media, and for collaborative possibilities between the disciplines. Indeed the move to this building presents an exciting opportunity to refine and develop the research. The planned research amenities are excellent and address many of the areas proposed for development. They include:

- music technology: a large recording studio, laboratories, and dedicated music editing suites are intended for use in the building.
- video editing: dedicated editing suite.
- screening room
- dance studio
- artists' studio

**Library:** The panel toured the main library including the sections dedicated to Music and Creative Media. On this evidence, access to research journals needs to be improved, as well as

access to other academic texts associated with both Music and Creative Media. However, the Department of Music staff indicated that there are more resources (access to books, scores and audio) at the (off-campus) site where Music is currently located. The panel did not visit that site. **Staff Development:** the dedication of a week (in Feb/Mar p. 51) for staff development is good practice. Comments from staff during discussions underlined the value of this provision.

**Established agreed institutional regulations and procedures, code of good research practice and administrative support:** The proposal document details the institutional regulations, code of good research practice and administrative support for research in the Institute. Staff are aware of these regulations and procedures. They are made available as a handbook for staff and students (page 43). The panel did not see this handbook.

A Research Programme Board has been established and meets once or twice in a semester. The relevant structures are appropriate (pp. 35-36).

Induction and training of postgraduate students is offered. Students who were interviewed reported that they have attended these training sessions.

Effective supervision protocols are established. Plans for regular meetings are clearly outlined (pp. 39-45). Sample logs of research meetings were provided. The panel found that not all current research students use such logs. All students and their supervisors should be encouraged to maintain a log of research meetings to establish an agreed record of objectives, targets and achievements. The Institute should consider adding the date for the next meeting to the log template.

#### Recommendations

**The panel recommends that the Institute takes appropriate action to establish research as a core element in its academic activities, with appropriate resources (time and money) being given to research active staff: the category "research active" to be established not just by the supervision of research students but by the significant contribution to, and the dissemination of knowledge through appropriate publication in, the chosen discipline.**

**More focused and realistic research strategies need to be developed for both areas these should be consistent with the developing Institute research strategy.  
The library facilities for research should be enhanced.**

**Note:** the panel was instructed to focus on the discipline-specific issues because this Institute is already approved in some areas and has already been revised against the more general criteria. The more general criteria are:

1. Are there established agreed institutional regulations and procedures, code of good research practice and administrative support?
2. Does the institution comply with the general requirements set out in Appendix C?
3. Are the assessment procedures for candidates for research degrees which are fair and consistent and for the purpose of compliance with standards determined by HETAC (Appendix D)?
4. Does the Institute implement procedures for access transfer and progression as determined by the Qualifications Authority under Section 8(2)(d) of the Act?

Any observations or recommendations relating to these will be included in the commentary under the other criteria.

### 3.2 Music

#### Is there a clear and realistic research strategy?

The section on the Institute's Strategic Plan provided in the application documentation has been superseded. The Institute should work towards the achievement of the critical mass in Music needed to sustain a graduate school through a regular programme of induction training and research symposia, and the development of increasingly strong links with other institutions.

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

There was significant evidence of student-focussed teaching and a collaborative research environment.

The Institute recognises the need to develop its library's research resources (p. 30). The Library is a conducive working space with a dedicated and well-informed, helpful staff. The lack of extensive hard copy resources for music was evident. It is understood that some music scores etc. are held in another location at present.

#### Is there adequate research leadership?

Much of the work of real quality has been supervised by two or three experienced staff, most of the other staff (many of whom are at the earlier stages of their academic careers) are still finishing their own PhDs.

The panel explored the meaning of following statement from the application documentation (p. 3) '*a well established research base in a range of thematic areas in Music with a large number of research active staff*'. The 'research base' in fact relies particularly heavily on the high quality of the work of small group of committed individuals.

Research outputs were hard to measure: (p. 24 – 2.9.2 Publication Activity) The self-assessment should have done more to provide information on the relative academic standing of the listed research outputs: Appendix 1 does not differentiate in these terms. It is not clear what has been peer reviewed and/or assessed as being of international standing.

Appendix 1 lists a Music lecturing staff which, with three current exceptions, does not currently have doctoral level qualifications. However, seven (p. 24 2.9.3) are currently enrolled in doctoral programmes.

External links are good and there is clearly enterprising work being done to strengthen these (pp. 62-63).

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

There are such staff in the areas recommended for approval.

#### Is there a capacity for research success?

The panel noted good quality work in the research dissertations submitted for review; specifically:

- (MA) *The Clarinet Works of Elizabeth Maconchy & Nicola Le Fanu*
- (PhD) *Schoenberg: Das Buch der Hängenden Gärten*

both involving music analysis and performance practice.

It also commended, for its significance to scholarship in the area of Irish Traditional Music,

- (MA) *A Critical Evaluation of the contribution of Johnny Doran and Irish Travellers to Irish Traditional Music* (in progress)

#### Recommendations

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

- *Late 19th- and 20th-century music with particular reference to Irish music including analysis, editing and performance practice where relevant*
- *Composition*

- *Irish Traditional Music*

With regard to *Composition*, it is recommended that consideration be given to the submission of a scholarly commentary on the portfolio of creative works.

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### **3.3 Creative Media**

#### **Is there a clear and realistic research strategy?**

The research strategy is in its infancy but developing. The application document listed a wide range of research topics. The Institute cannot currently support such a breadth of activity. It needs to be more focused. It should plan to expand from a base that is supported by the skills and experiences of its current staff.

Strategically, the unit needs to analyse the staff skills and availabilities as well as sustainability and workload considerations. This should help it identify and target an appropriate scale of research activity. A risk analysis may be in order. The matter of arrangements for the replacement of a supervisor might need consideration particularly in the area of Alternate Reality Gaming, as it would seem that there is only one expert in this area in the Institute.

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

See Section 3.1.

#### **Is there adequate research leadership?**

The panel was impressed with the expertise and passion displayed. However, there is not yet a sufficient number of senior researchers for the breadth of activity envisaged by the Institute. Staff development and new staff recruitment is necessary to build leadership capacity particularly in new media technology.

#### **Are there research-active staff who can supervise research students?**

There are such staff in the areas recommended for approval.

The Institute needs to improve the research capacity in this area to make it viable in the longer term. The programme to support current staff to pursue relevant PhD degrees is an appropriate strategy

The Institute needs to enhance staff interaction with international research community in this field (e.g. familiarity with work of other researchers, dissemination of their own work, and collaborations). The existing research symposium is a step in the right direction for local dissemination. However, this needs to be complemented by external dissemination and collaborations. The Institute should, for example, encourage researchers to actively participate and/or publish at relevant international events.

#### **Is there a capacity for research success?**

Adequate training, direction, support and supervision by research-active staff to facilitate the successful completion of a degree is in place in a limited number of areas identified by the panel.

#### **Recommendations**

The panel recommends that HETAC approve Dundalk Institute of Technology to submit, on a case-by-case basis, applications for registration *master's degree programmes in the area of Creative Media in two areas:*

- *Alternate Reality Gaming*
- *New Media Narrative Forms*

The panel recommends that the Institute:

- **Enhance staff interaction with international research community in this field.**
- **Enhance research capacity in Creative Media by staff development and recruitment and develop the academic resources for this area.**
- **Focus, building on the current expertise and consulting and**
- **collaborating as appropriate with experienced providers.**
- **Look for ways of expanding the range of the research in Creative Media when**

growing the research capacity.

## 4 The panel

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Prof Fiona Palmer (Chairman),    | Head of Department, Music Dept., NUI Maynooth;  |
| Prof David Cox,                  | Head of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Science, UCC;                        |
| Dr Fionnuala Conway,             | Course Director, Music & Media Technologies, TCD;   |
| Dr Kia Ng,                       | Director of Interdisciplinary Centre for Scientific Research in Music, University of Leeds; |
| Mr Conor Lynch,                  | CEO, Connector.ie   |
| Dr. Peter Cullen (in attendance) | HETAC   |

### Declarations

Prior to agreeing to join the panel Professor Palmer declared (31 July 2009): 'I have recently been approached, and agreed, to act as external examiner for DKIT's undergraduate music programme. This work commences in the autumn (although my understanding is that the first visit will be in December).' HETAC is of the opinion that this does not indicate a substantial conflict of interests.

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