

Report of the findings of the evaluation panel engaged to consider the application by The Tipperary Institute for approval to submit applications for registration of research degree programmes in the field of *Business Development*

10 June 2004

1 INTRODUCTION

On 2 December 2003, HETAC received an application from the Tipperary Institute for the registration of a postgraduate research degree student in the field of Business Development.

The Institute was advised that, before such applications could be considered, it would be necessary to arrange for a review of the research environment provided by the Institute in the relevant field of study. It was pointed out that the review would encompass the research profile of staff, the research strategy, the supervisory capacity and the administrative procedures. Reference was made to Section 3, Postgraduate Research Degrees Policy and Procedures (September 2000). The institute was invited to prepare a submission document addressing these areas.

A submission was received on 5 March 2004. Three copies of a revised version were received later in March.

1.1 The Panel

HETAC assembled a Panel of three expert assessors to evaluate the research environment. The institute was invited to submit a list of four nominees for one of the positions on this Panel. In the event the Panel consisted entirely of HETAC nominees.

The constitution of the Panel follows:

Professor Bernadette Andreosso-O'Callaghan, PhD
Head, Department of Economics
Director, Euro-Asia Centre
University of Limerick

Dr John Bartlett.
Head of Research.
Institute of Technology Sligo.

Dr. Jim Frawley
Teagasc Rural Economy Research Centre
Dublin

with Dr Peter Cullen (HETAC).

Each of the expert assessors received a copy of the HETAC document "*Approval submit programmes for registration by the Council in a particular field of learning Issues for Assessors*" prior to being engaged by HETAC. This communication highlighted, among other things, issues (such as conflict of interest) that assessors must consider before agreeing to act.

2 SITE VISIT

The site visit took place on 4 May 2004. The schedule follows (the times are approximate):

09:00 Private assessor group meeting

09:30 Meeting with Chief Executive Officer (Padraig Culbert), Director of Corporate Affairs (Robert Grealis), Director of Rural Development Department (Ciaran Lynch) and Director of Business Development (Moya Breen). The CEO attended for the first part of the meeting.

11:00 Meeting with Business Development Research Group (Moya Breen, Laura Dargan Dr. James Griffin, Breda Kenny, Derek McInerney, Caroline O'Reilly, Dr Eileen Reedy, P.J. Ryan, Craig Walters). Viewing research facilities

13:00 Lunch

14:00 Private assessor group meeting

14:30 Site visit ends.

During the site visit the Institute provided the panel with supplementary documents these included, among other things, a draft quality handbook.

3 FINDINGS

The Panel noted that the Tipperary Institute aspires to provide research degree programmes and appears to have the *potential* to do so i.e. to build an institutional culture of research and provide environment suitable for the education and training of research degree students at Masters degree level. However, the Institute appears, currently, to lack a realistic operational plan for the realization of its research strategy.

The Institute is working on the establishment of a set of policies, processes, structures and supports for postgraduate research degree students. However a sufficiently robust regulatory environment has not yet been established. This is an essential requirement before any applications for registration are submitted to HETAC.

The Institute appears to have established a robust profile of consultancy work with organisations in its region. In contrast, academic research activity is still at an early stage of development. This is made clear, for example, by the very small number of peer reviewed publications by the academic staff.

Whilst it is evident that the research activity at the Institute has not yet reached the point where the institution has sufficient intrinsic capacity to manage extensive postgraduate research degree activity, the Panel felt that it does have the capacity to engage in collaborative programmes for the education of research degree students, under certain, prescribed conditions.

3.1 Summary

1. The Institute needs to review and evaluate its existing research capacities and structures in light of its corporate goals paying particular attention to research leadership at all levels in the organisation. It also needs to motivate increased research activity among its academic staff as a necessary first step to building a research environment and creating the appropriate ethos.
2. The Institute should consider exploring the potential for establishing collaborative links with experienced academic researchers and recognised centres of excellence in relevant fields.
3. The Institute needs to establish policy, criteria and processes for the regulation and management of research degree programmes. This must be done prior to the registration of any research degree programmes.
4. The Institute needs to agree its general QA procedures with HETAC.

5. The Panel, considering that the Tipperary institute aspires to build up supervisory experience and has identified a research project and is keen to register a graduate student to work on this project, suggested that the Council might consider granting approval for the Institute to submit **for consideration a small number of collaborative/joint** applications to HETAC in the field of Business Development, on a case-by-case basis, subject to the conditions that
 - a. the policy, criteria and processes referred to in the preceding paragraph (3) be established **and agreed** before any applications are submitted and
 - b. the research degree programmes should involve formal **collaboration** with another higher education or research institution with a good record of publication in high-impact peer reviewed journals in the general area of business development studies. (Note that collaborative programmes require that a formal agreement be established between two or more institutions and demand special attention in the drafting of regulations etc.)