

## Response to HETAC Panel Report:

### Case-by-case submission of candidates for registration on PhD programmes in Engineering and Informatics dated 26 November 2008

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#### 1. Background

In May 2008 the School of Informatics and Engineering at ITB made an application for approval on case-by-case basis to submit candidates for registration on PhD programmes in the areas of Informatics and Engineering. Subsequently a HETAC panel visit took place on October 17<sup>th</sup> 2007 and the panel report was received on 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

The following is the considered response by the School to the panel's recommendations.

#### 2. Response

#	Recommendation	Response
3.1	That the postgraduate regulations be amended to reflect good supervisory practice whereby it is required that at least one supervisor has previously successfully supervised to completion a PhD thesis.	<b>Accepted:</b> In the interim period as we develop our expertise it may be necessary to appoint a co-supervisor who has supervisory experience. Also the appointment of a Mentor who would have a successful track record in research at level 10.
3.2.1	That the Institute provides greater clarity in its documents and procedures on the supervisory responsibilities of individuals versus those subsumed by the 'thesis committee' and in addition provide clarity on the time allocated or remitted in the context of supervision.	<b>Accepted:</b> in conjunction with the Registrar's office a policy document outlining ITB's supervisory policy will be drafted.
3.2.2	That the School seriously considers strengthening their research by the development of greater cross-school research activities. A cross – school single strategy for research may be very helpful. Additionally consideration could be given to research groups or centres.	<b>Accepted:</b> future strategy for the School of I&E will reflect a cross-department single strategy. A number of research centres are currently under consideration.
3.2.3	That the Institute appoints a Director of Postgraduate Studies who has oversight of all the activities of research students and research student supervisors in the School. It is recognised that given the scale of the Institute a dedicated post may not be appropriate, but it is suggested that this role be allocated to a senior member of the School. It is suggested that it may benefit the organisation to consider separating the functions of a Head of Department and a potential Director of Postgraduate Studies whereby responsibilities such as those described on page 6 of the document Research Policy & Strategy not be ascribed to the HOD. The creation of this role may also assist in addressing the recommendation in 3.2.2	<b>Not accepted:</b> whilst this recommendation is in line with the IOT sector framework proposals – at this point in time given the current economic climate, it is not considered that such an appointment in ITB would add value. Our opinion is due to the overall scale of postgraduate research activity, the progress monitoring and tracking offered by the

		activities of the postgraduate subcommittee of Academic Council and the existing timetable allowances to postgraduate supervisors. In addition, there are a range of supports to postgraduate students available in the Learning and Innovation centre, where postgraduate students are based. This recommendation will be kept under review as the scale of activity increases.
3.2.4	That the Institute consider improving the availability of research resources by obtaining access to the IEEE and ACM digital libraries	<b>Accepted</b>
3.2.5	<p>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 School of Informatics and Engineering at ITB, it would be desirable that the Institute fully participate in any available national dialogue to resolve the anomaly.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p><b>Accepted</b></p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> in principle however the caveats regarding contracts of employment apply.</p>
4.1.1	<p><b>Areas for improvement</b></p> <p>Whilst the Institute Strategic Plan does not identify research as one of its five priorities it does set out academic strategies in dealing with research under Priorities 2 and 3. The School of Informatics and Engineering has done good work in its development of the 2 year research Master's. Nevertheless the School does not have its own dedicated research strategy and as stated in the recommendations it would be helpful to create one.</p> <p>The strategy is linked to having a 'champion' and the recommendation to create a Director of Postgraduate Studies role would assist its creation, implementation and a clear focus on good practice research processes and outputs.</p>	<p><b>Accepted</b></p> <p><b>Not accepted:</b> whilst this recommendation is in line with the IOT sector framework proposals – at this point in time it is not deemed necessary (see 3.2.3 above).</p>
	A greater focus and development of training and support for research students would also be beneficial.	<b>Accepted</b>
4.1.2	Yes, but access to online journals needs significant improvement.	<b>Accepted</b>
4.1.3	The research activity taking place would suggest that there is research leadership. There was a good range of funded projects and publications listed. A significant number of individuals presented as leaders of research. Given the activities in the School of Informatics and Engineering the appointment of a Director or nominated 'leader' may strengthen the ongoing work.	<b>Not accepted:</b> whilst this recommendation is in line with the IOT sector framework proposals – at this point in time it is not deemed necessary (see 3.2.3 above)..

4.1.4	<p>Evidence was provided of a number of staff having successfully supervised MSc by research degrees to completion. Less evident was the number of staff who have supervised to completion at PhD level. A number of staff hold PhDs and a further number are pursuing doctoral studies. Over time this will enhance the capacity to supervise. As indicated in the condition of approval, it is essential that a student have at least one supervisor who has supervised a PhD to completion. A mentoring model can be applied with the addition of co-supervisors so that PhD supervisors grow their capacity also. Particular consideration should be given in the regulations governing the level of support required for part-time students. Robust procedures must support their programmes of study.</p>	<p><b>Accepted:</b> In the interim period as we develop our expertise it may be necessary to appoint a co-supervisor who has supervisory experience. Also the appointment of a Mentor who would have a successful track record in research at level 10.</p>
4.1.4	<p>The capacity for success may be strengthened by work to develop to identify more cross-school research activities.</p>	<p><b>Accepted:</b> future strategy for the School of I&amp;E will reflect a cross-department single strategy. A number of research centres are currently under consideration.</p>
4.1.5	<p>Generally the Institute's documentation is excellent. However the issue referred to in 4.1.4 requires an amendment to procedures. The document Operational details for registered postgraduate students needs amendment on pages 8 and 9. See 4.1.6 also.</p> <p>With regard to the teaching load of staff and the remission of teaching hours in respect of research students it was noted by the panellists that the breakdown of hours is radically different to the model employed in universities in general, and may put undue pressure on teaching staff. It is suggested that consideration be given to this dimension and that if possible a greater remission of hours be made.</p> <p>It is further suggested that staff be fully supported in their own PhD studies, attendance at conferences, etc. and that this support be both financial and in respect of time allocated. Clear documentation of such supports would be beneficial.</p>	<p><b>Accepted</b></p> <p><b>Not Accepted:</b> whilst acknowledging the different employment model in the university sector currently ITB academic staff contracts are subject to national agreements.</p> <p><b>Accepted: to date</b> academic staff engagement with the PMDS process is central to managing and supporting their personal development.</p>
4.1.6	<p>There is general compliance with these requirements but greater detail would be helpful on the transfer between the Master's and Doctoral registers. It is unclear whether an independent expert is involved in the transfer, which would be appropriate to this process. Perhaps a form other than that titled PG1 should be evolved for this process.</p>	<p><b>Accepted:</b> new form to be developed in conjunction with the Registrar's office.</p>