



Request by Dundalk Institute of Technology for approval to submit, on a case-by-case basis, applications for registration of PhD programmes in the areas of:

- Smooth Muscle Research
- Freshwater Studies
- Social Networks, Environments and Technologies for Wellness and Ageing-in-place (Netwell Centre)

Responses to Report of HETAC Panel.

General Recommendations

3.1 The Institute has recently appointed, 1st September 2008, a Head of Research and established the Research Office on campus. It is located in the Regional Development centre where the majority of the Institute's research activity is embedded. The HOD has commenced the implementation of the goals and objectives set out in the Institute's research and strategic plans.

3.2.1 The Institute's approved Policies and Procedures for Research are available on the Institute web site at:

http://ww2.dkit.ie/student_life/admissions/postgraduates/documents_and_policies

Following the HETAC site visits referred to in this Report, a full safety statement with risk assessment procedures is currently being drafted for the Freshwater Centre and includes:

- Safety induction
- Manual handling
- Fieldwork including boat handling
- Biological agents
- Chemical agents (including mushroom compost, radioisotopes)
- Biological agents

The Institute's draft Code of Good Conduct in Research is to be tabled at the next meeting of the Academic Council on 15th November 2008. Since the beginning of the 2008/09 academic year, supervisors have met to provide feedback on the draft code and their views will be incorporated into the final draft. A meeting of postgraduate research students scheduled for 9th October 2008 will also be asked for their input to this document.

The Institute's Intellectual Policy is as approved by the Council of Directors in 2006 for the entire sector.

Training for supervisory staff for 2008/09 will be organised by the newly appointed Head of Teaching and Learning and will include guidance for supervisory staff who may be the

subject of any student complaint. The Institute's Complaints' Procedures seek to provide support and fair process to all parties involved when a complaint is lodged.

3.2.2 A new reporting structure for the Institute's research centres is currently being developed. In essence it involves the construction of an institutional wide research centre reporting and evaluation committee. Its primary role shall be to monitor the implementation of each centre's strategic objectives and their compliance with the Institutional Research Strategy. It is this committee that the individual centres shall report to. The committee shall be chaired by the Head of Research with associated Heads of School and Departments. This committee shall then report directly to the Institute's Executive Board.

In addition to this, the Research Office is currently undertaking a strategic review process of all existing centres on campus. This shall involve the establishment of clear policies and procedures regarding the Research designation process, its evaluation mechanism and the centre's reporting responsibilities. It is envisaged that this shall be ratified by the Research sub committee and Academic Council by the end of 2008 or early 2009. The strategic review process for each centre shall then take place with external evaluation of each centre in the 1st or 2nd quarter of 2009.

3.2.3 The Research Office is currently drafting a policy and procedure for Postgraduate Supervision. This is due to be considered by the Research sub-committee at its next meeting, with submission to Academic Council thereafter. The main aim of this policy is to ensure that all staff actively involved in research attain remission of their teaching duties. It is not the aim of the Institute to completely remove researchers from their teaching. It is the view of the Institute that Academic Supervisors shall have a minimum of 30% of their teaching allocation associated with formal taught teaching programmes within their respective departments. This will enable the sustainment of the research-teaching linkage.

3.2.4 The full access to online journals is not just an Institute issue but a sector one. 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 IOT sector. This issue can only be solved by the Irish government and the HEA due to the large cost implications. The IOT sector has lobbied the HEA in this respect recently with no positive outcome as of yet. The Research Office shall continue to do this on an ongoing basis in conjunction with the other Institutes. The Institute is committed however to continuing their current suite of on line access material until this issue is resolved in a satisfactory manner.

3.2.5 Enrolment of postgraduate research students will continue to be possible on a more flexible timeframe than is the case for undergraduate enrolment. This is due to the fact that funding opportunities arise throughout the year. Students will be provided with sufficient information through the Institute website and through contact with their proposed supervisors to enable them to successfully register. The registration process is already clearly documented and has the ISO9001:2000 quality approval mark since January 2008.

3.2.6 Currently the Research Office is liaising with the Registrar's Office to agree a common approach to a fee rate for postgraduate researchers. It is the view in the Institute that this will be finalised over the next few months and published as appropriate

3.2.7 The Research Office is currently working in tandem with the Institute's library to resolve this issue in the short term. Currently the research office in conjunction with the librarian is gathering information concerning the list of publishers and journals that DkIT researchers with a view to establishing an Institutional repository

Smooth Muscle Research Centre

4.1.1 Co-operation between the Centre and senior management is addressed through the establishment of the Research Office and the Research Centre Reporting Committee as detailed in section 3.2.2. In addition the Research Office is currently working with the individual Schools to refine their research strategies.

4.1.2 The Institute is committed to solving its research space issue. The Smooth Muscle Research Centre has been prioritised as the Institutional HEA PRTLI Cycle 5 proposal with a view to submitting a proposal which shall allow the attainment of 750m² additional research space for this team. The Institute will be submitting future capital proposals to the HEA Refurbishment Scheme whereby current Institutional space is refurbished so as to allow the generation of additional research space on campus. In addition, the Institute is committed to undertaking a regular space audit programme across the Institute.

4.1.3 See response to 3.2.4

4.1.4 The SMR are in the process of formally joining the National Biophotonics platform, an initiative led by RCSI. Currently a memorandum of understanding (MOU) is being drafted between the various research offices of the partnering institutes. This shall enable the formation of a strategic partnership between the SMRC and the various partners within the NBP. Of the many benefits this will bring to SMRC, the ability of SMRC to secure high quality postgraduate students will be a key driver.

4.1.5 The Research Office, in conjunction with the Registrar's Office, are currently developing a new policy regarding the transfer of postgraduate students to the PhD register. This shall involve the submission of a report by the student, subsequent evaluation in conjunction with a possible viva and supported by an independent testimonial.

Social Networks, Environments and Technologies for Wellness and Ageing-in-place

4.2.1 The issue of the recruitment of a permanent programme director for this centre is an Institutional one. Due to the current budgetary constraints on all Universities and Institutes of Technology it is difficult to see how this can be solved in the short term. However the Institute is aware of this issue and through liaising with the Research Office it is reviewing how a solution can be found. However in the meantime it is envisaged that the Institute shall be applying for various SFI Stokes Lectureships and Professorships across the Institute in its prioritised thematic research areas with Netwell being central to this. The scheme is due to be relaunched shortly by SFI with a projected closing date of February 2009. If successful this would allow the recruitment of SFI lecturers and professors for periods of 5 years to be employed in these thematic areas whilst being embedded in the Schools so as to allow a strong research-teaching linkage. The ultimate aim of this scheme is that staff approaching retirement are replaced by these SFI Fellows as permanent members of staff. An additional

point would be that Institutional research leadership is in place for all Centres with the appointment of the Head of Research.

4.2.2 Netwell is currently comprised of seven active research supervisory staff. Five of these already possess their PhD with one currently in the thesis preparation stage. The remaining member is due to embark on their PhD shortly. The latter staff member will be actively encouraged to complete this process as would any new staff members of Netwell who may not possess a PhD. To help build supervisory capacity all Netwell Centre supervisors have access to a DkIT training event on Effective Research Supervision, due to commence October 2008. In addition, two research staff are planning to work towards a masters degree qualification in Teaching and Learning at DkIT which is due to commence February 2009. In addition the Research Office is currently developing a suite of training workshops for supervisors, such as, research ethics and IP.

4.2.3 The Institute is committed to solving its research space issue. The Netwell Centre has been prioritised for significant research space in the P.J.Carroll's building which the Institute is currently redeveloping. It is envisaged that this will be completed in 12 – 18 months so as to allow the transfer of Netwell's research activity. The Institute will be submitting future capital proposals to the HEA Refurbishment Scheme whereby current Institutional space is refurbished so as to allow the generation of additional research space on campus. In addition, the Institute is committed to undertaking a regular space audit programme across the Institute.

4.2.4 The allocation of library space at present in the current climate is difficult to accomplish. However with the move to the P.J. Carroll's building due to be completed in 12-18 months it is envisaged that additional space within the library will be allocated for a research room where students and supervisors can work together. In addition, since the HETAC panel visited the Netwell Centre staff and students have attained a subscription to the PsycINFO database. The access to greater on line facilities is an Institutional and sector wide issue; see answer to 3.2.4 for more details.

Freshwater Studies

4.3.1 The Freshwater Centre operates a strict booking system for all vehicles, field equipment and instrumentation using a dual system of:

- a shared calendar attached to the email system which is accessed daily by all research team members and,
- individual logbooks for each instrument/vehicle/piece of field equipment.

4.3.2 As part of a wider Health and Safety Management Audit being carried out on behalf of the School of Nursing, Midwifery, Health Studies and Applied Sciences by Integrated Risk Solutions Ltd., the Freshwater Centre was fully inspected on 22nd September 2008. From that inspection, a full safety statement with risk assessment procedures is currently being drafted for the Freshwater Centre and includes:

- Safety induction
- Manual handling
- Fieldwork including boat handling

- Chemical agents (including mushroom compost, radioisotopes)
- Biological agents
- Vehicles (servicing, visual checks, licence requirements)
- Use of PCs
- Equipment (including requirements for portable appliance electrical testing).

4.3.3 Currently the issue regarding principal investigators who can supervise postgraduate students within the Freshwater Centre is being considered. At present the Freshwater centre is run by Dr Suzanne Linnane so the need for additional principal investigators who can act as supervisors is high on the agenda. There are a number of funding initiatives that the Institute and the Freshwater Centre can apply to, to solve this problem. These include, Stokes Lectureship programme (as described in section 4.2.1), the launch of the new Applied Research Enhancement programme by EI in November 2008. The latter scheme is particularly attractive as it would allow the recruitment of a dedicated research manager within the centre for a 4-5 year period. In addition, the attraction of existing newer permanent lecturing DkIT staff into the Freshwater Centre is happening on the ground. This shall be aided through possible research initiatives being currently designed by the Research Office. In addition, Dr McCormack, Head of Research, who is placing three of his researchers involved in nanostructured materials for environmental monitoring into the Freshwater Centre, could act as a mentor supervisor to newer staff members of the Freshwater Centre along with perhaps co-supervision of some projects.

4.3.4 A full-time technician is currently being recruited by the Freshwater Centre and will be *in situ* from 3rd November 2008. This technician will take over responsibility in ensuring that all equipment and instruments have fully up-to-date SOPs. In addition, all new researchers (and existing ones, as required) will be trained in fully and training signed-off on by the technician prior to beginning field or laboratory work on all equipment/instrumentation relevant to their course of study.

4.3.5 The Research Office has recently sent out a reporting template for all staff within the Institute with the sole aim of capturing the research metrics for the Institute. This will be a bi-annual process and a key requirement for all centres to participate in.

4.3.6 The Freshwater Centre requires all research MSc students to attend and present at least one national conference and to publish a minimum one peer-reviewed publication. PhD researchers are required to attend and present-at at least two national conferences and if possible and appropriate one international conference. In addition, they must publish in all proceedings, in addition to a minimum of one further peer-reviewed publication. This system has been fully adhered-to with no exceptions since January 2006.

Additional items

SMRC

5.1.1. The Research strategy is currently being considered as part of the research strategy review process taking place at present

5.1.2 Addressed in points 3.2.4 and 4.1.2 above.

5.1.3 Addressed in point 3.2.2 above.

5.1.6 The Research Office is currently working with the Registrar's Office, the Research & Development Committee and supervisors in amending current policies and procedures and well as devising new ones, i.e undertaking research off campus. This is an ongoing process and it is envisaged that the amendments will be passed through Academic Council and the Research sub Committee in early November 2008.

5.1.8 See response 5.1.6. These points are currently under consideration by the Research sub committee.

NETWELL

5.2.2 Addressed in points 4.2.3 and 3.2.4 above.

5.2.3 Addressed in point 4.2.1 above.

5.2.4 Addressed in point 4.2.2 above.

5.2.6 At present the Registrar's Office is finalising this document for circulation in the short term. See 3.2.1 above.

5.2.7 Addressed in point 4.2.2 above.

The Freshwater Centre

5.3.1 As part of the centre redesignation process (see 3.2.2), each research centre shall have to possess a clear strategic plan in terms of its planned expansion, research activity and teaching and learning initiatives.

5.3.2 Addressed to some extent in point 3.2.4 above. In addition the Research Office is currently working with the Institute's IT department on redesigning the research centre's websites.

5.3.3 Addressed in 4.3.3 above.

5.3.8 Addressed in 4.3.5 above.

5.3.9 Addressed in 5.1.6 above.

5.3.11 Addressed in 4.1.5 above.

Signed:
Stephen McManus, Registrar
Dundalk, 3 October 2008