

National College of Ireland

**Response to the panel of Assessors report on PhD Programme
in Technology Enhanced Learning – November 2007**

1. Introduction

National College of Ireland would like to thank members of the panel for their report which has helped us to improve the overall quality of the PhD programme. The College is fully committed to running the PhD programme from autumn 2008, subject to HETAC approval.

2. Changes made to the submission document in response to HETAC recommendations

The following provides a summary of the changes that the School of Computing (formally School of Informatics) has made to the PhD document. The College is submitting to HETAC the revised PhD programme, with all the changes made, with a view to being able to launch the programme in autumn 2008.

i. PhD Programme Description

The College has amended, on the basis of the suggestions, the overall programme description. The College has discussed a number of issues identified by the panel and has addressed them in the revised programme description.

The College will work closely with HETAC to ensure that it meets any requirements concerning academic regulations and quality matters identified.

All research applications will be externally reviewed by academic assessors prior to enrolment of applicants onto the PhD programme. Such a process should ensure that candidates receive excellent academic support and advice at the outset of their research degree programme.

In response to the Panel's advice in section 3.2 of the report regarding greater depth around pedagogy, a mandatory module on pedagogy has been introduced into the programme. This module is entitled "Theories of Learning and Cognition" and is already an approved module at HETAC Level 9 (e.g. Post Graduate Diploma in Learning and Teaching). This will ensure synergies between the two programmes and provide an opportunity for greater interaction between the Masters and PhD students. The School also has regular weekly seminars on aspects of learning as part of its professional development programme which postgraduate research students have to attend. This will help the postgraduate students to develop a greater knowledge and depth around the relevant pedagogic areas.

The challenge of supporting cross-disciplinary research will be addressed by the School, where the staff have a strong technology focus, but also a broader understanding of learning and teaching theories and pedagogy (along with colleagues in the School of Business). There are four permanent staff members with formal education and expertise in learning and teaching related discipline. The supervisory teams will consist of a mix of staff with expertise in both technology enhanced learning and who have a strong pedagogical knowledge (e.g. in the psychological and sociological fields) to support cross-disciplinary research. In addition to its own staff expertise, the College works in close collaboration with colleagues in a number of other third level institutions in Dublin (e.g. TCD, DCU, NUIM and St Patrick's College, Drumcondra), where there will be opportunities to engage in networking and exchange of experience.

ii. Research Supervision

The School is aware that the research output of some faculty members may not be optimally high in the context of research supervision for PhD students. The School has agreed as a priority that all faculty will aim to publish in high impact journals and conferences. As a part of the ongoing performance management system, the Head of School will agree annual goals and objectives, including placing an emphasis on the publication of research in leading journals in the appropriate areas.

In order to grow supervisory expertise in the School, faculty who are in the early stages of their careers will be included as associate supervisors, alongside experienced researchers, as part of the supervisory teams.

A systematic approach to PhD supervisory training will be adopted through the following mandatory measures:

- All supervisors will be required to attend a two day intensive programme, based on the course delivered by the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE). (Those who have supervised doctorate to completion or have already completed such a programme may be exempted);
- Inexperienced faculty will be teamed-up with an experienced mentor with supervisory experience of PhD completions;
- Two faculty members are presently completing an online programme in research supervision from University of Sydney. The effectiveness of this programme will be evaluated and the School will decide accordingly, whether this programme should be made mandatory or not for all faculty.

The supervision of research students is a demanding task and the College proposes to use experienced supervisory teams in line with best international practice to ensure that the highest standards of research supervision are maintained. If the principal supervisor has not supervised a PhD student to completion, the College will require that one of the associate supervisors has supervised a PhD to completion. The proposed student research projects will be carefully considered at the outset to ensure that the necessary expertise is available in the College to provide appropriate supervision. A full-time, experienced NCI faculty member will be identified as the **principal supervisor** in the case of each research student. The College has identified 5 School of Computing lecturers who have completed their PhD who can act in this capacity

In addition, the College would envisage that a number of academics in the School currently completing PhDs in this area would have the opportunity to be members of the supervisory teams, as associate supervisors. The objective is to ensure that such individuals gain experience of supervision and will in the long term be in a position to become involved in supervision once they have completed their own PhDs and are actively publishing.

Finally, the College wishes to use as **associate supervisors** two faculty members from the School of Business who have considerable experience in teaching methodology at postgraduate level on NCI's MA postgraduate programmes in HRM and Finance.

These faculty members have strong IT backgrounds, with particular specialisms in quantitative methods and use of IT in learning, which will also support greater cross-disciplinarity.

National College of Ireland's quality assurance handbook has been updated to reflect these recommendations. Ref: section 5.5.2.4

iii. PhD Programme Director

The College notes the panel's recommendation that a qualified and experienced director of the doctoral programme be appointed and will ensure that such a person is in position prior to the start of the programme. The College has identified Dr Dietmar Janetzko as the Programme Director for the PhD programme. Dr Janetzko has two PhDs one in Psychology and the other in Pedagogy. Dr Janetzko has previously been an Assistant Professor at University of Freiburg in Germany for a period of 9 years (1994–2003). He has supervised many students up to and including at PhD level in the area of Learning and Technology. Dr Janetzko has also published extensively in this area and had been one of the recent additions to the School of Computing. Currently Dr Janetzko is actively involved in Technology Enhanced Learning and has good academic standing both nationally and internationally. He had been an invited speaker to international conferences in Europe and US. Last year he was invited by the Royal Society for an invited talk in his research area, which is a recognition of his standing in academia. The College believes that he is competent and qualified to run this programme, capable of providing the required research leadership and has the necessary supervisory experience.

iv. Number of PhD Students

The College is cognizant that PhD research students require considerable supervision and support. It proposes that the total number of PhD students at any one time will not exceed the capacity of the School to ensure high quality supervision. It is envisaged that the School would have no more than a total of 10-12 PhD students at any stage of the programme, reflecting our commitment to ensuring a high level of supervisory support and the view that this is a niche market area. In essence, each of proposed principal supervisors will be responsible for 2-3 research students at any one time, with the support of external co-supervisors and additional associate supervisors, as a part of the overall supervisory team. Given that the College is starting from a low baseline, these numbers would not be achieved until 2011-12.

v. Performance Indicators

The School has reviewed and revised its research performance indicators taking into account the recommendations of the report. The College agrees with the suggestion that the current indicators may be overly ambitious, although it should be noted that publication and research funding targets for 2007 have been exceeded, with significant recent research awards by Enterprise Ireland, the Department of Education and Science and Science Foundation Ireland.

The most significant indicator of research success is obviously the number of publications, in particular in peer-reviewed journals. Steady progress was made over the past year towards this goal and even more emphasis has been placed on this type of publication, with 9 journal articles published in 2007. Moreover, the School produced 25 conference and

workshop papers, all of which were peer-reviewed. While it is acknowledged that standards of conferences vary, some of the targeted conferences had acceptance rates as low as 15-20% (e.g., EC-TEL07 and UM07).

Secondary, performance indicators include the amount of acquired external funding, the number of faculty with PhDs and the number of post-graduate research students. All indicators show a positive trend. Despite having met the targets for 2007 the School will strictly observe that the number of postgraduate research students will not exceed the available supervision capacity. Also, the School is undertaking a comprehensive review of the funding it has received in recent years. A School level committee has been formed to do this and will examine the various sources of funding, plan for funding applications, and create research teams to ensure optimal success in future funding applications.

Section 3.3 provides the revised research targets and performance indicators for the school. Table 3.2 displays the research targets. The School has also identified priority journals & conferences and the same are listed in Table 3.3 and Table 3.4.

vi. Collaboration with other HEIs

Faculty in the School are currently working with colleagues in other colleges on a number of different individual projects. Most of these projects are funded by European Commission, FAS, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland. These partnerships are continuously evolving and the School aims to establish formalised agreements in the near future.

The Panel's report does not make any explicit references to research collaboration with other academic institutions, although the College is currently exploring the possibilities of forming strategic partnerships with 2-3 other third level academic institutions. In establishing such partnerships in the area of technology enhanced learning, it is envisaged that the partnerships will enhance the institutions research capacity in this area, as well as paving the way for developing joint research activities, including funding applications to the HEA's PRTL process (Please refer to Section 3.9 of the revised submission document).

3. Other recommendations

3.1 Research Administration and Quality Assurance (3.8.2 of HETAC Panel report)

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of the NCI Quality Assurance Handbook describe how deviations from the standards are to be detected and how practise is to be improved. These sections describe the academic monitoring and quality processes for the programmes at NCI.

3.2 Qualifications for entry to PhD programme (3.8.3 of HETAC Panel report)

Qualifications for entry to PhD programme have been revised. Arrangements for prior learning will be given due consideration at the time applications are reviewed to widen access opportunities. The School recognises and appreciates that not all candidates starting research projects in a broadly-based Master's programme may be facilitated to progress to PhD level in the School, and some may have to go elsewhere to pursue their doctoral studies. Those students who are unable to attain the standard for the award of a PhD will be recommended for a Master's degree award, subject to the standard being met for a Master's award (please refer to Sections 4.4, 4.6, 4.7 of the revised submission document).

Criteria for transfer from the Masters' Register to the Doctoral Register has been explained clearly in Section 4.4 with additional diagrams for both full-time and part-time programmes.

Assignment of 315 ACCS credits – Only taught component of the degree has credits at level 9 now. The dissertation component does not have credits.

The length of the proposed doctoral programme will normally be up to 5 years full-time and 7 years part time. This is referred to in Section 4.4. Two diagrams have been produced and added to the submission document so that the description of the programme is absolutely clear. A detailed path of progression for part time students has been included in a diagram and has been attached.

The rationale for the proposed selection of taught modules and the associated teaching, learning and assessment methods will be elaborated in the programme handbook.

3.3 Practical difficulties in providing taught modules to a small number of students:

The Level 9 taught modules will be delivered with the same modules on the MSc Learning Technologies and MA in Learning and Teaching programmes. This will ensure that the programme is run efficiently and without further financial implications. This will ensure that the required social collaborative learning takes place between the different cohorts of students.

3.4 Collaborative Activities:

Issues arising from collaborative activities (collaboration in the design of individuals' research projects) will be addressed as per the collaborative projects policy of the School, which is presently being developed.

3.5 Schedule of seminars to support Research Methods:

A structured schedule of seminars is to be introduced to enhance the support for PhD students in the areas of research methods as envisaged by the panel.

3.6 Reading List:

The required reading list for Qualitative Research Methods modules has been revised.

It has been specified that the literature review should not be restricted to the reading list, given that at this stage during the research problem domain should be explored as extensively as possible prior to research being commenced.

Assessment for the modules has been reviewed and assessment methods are adequately specified and appropriate to learning outcomes have been made explicit.

3.7 General/Transferable skills:

An e-portfolio has been introduced as part of the PDP (Personal Development Plan) process. This portfolio facilitates assessment and recognition of learning outcomes of structured activities such as student engagement with the proposed series of seminars. The link between PDP and the progress report has been created. The College has also considered whether it is necessary for all taught modules to be mandatory for all students. As the award for MSc or PhD is based on the respective dissertation the taught modules may be exempted by the PhD programme board on individual basis if a student can demonstrate appropriate prior learning and competence.

The documented assessment procedures now show a clear link between the learning outcomes and assessment.

3.8 Affect of assessment criteria and procedures on part time students.

The assessment criteria and procedures will not affect the part-time students any differently to full-time students, as the modules will be delivered at a time to suit both the classes. The part time students will be following a reduced number of modules, so they can cope with the time demands of the programme. In the projects and seminars for assessment, full use will be made of their work experience/expertise to create synergies between their working life and academic life.
