



**QQI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann



**Ireland's Framework of  
Good Practice for  
Research Degree Programmes**

# Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes

**This Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes is published by Quality and Qualifications Ireland on behalf of and in consultation with the Irish higher education institutions involved in research provision. It was developed by Professor Lisa Looney of Dublin City University.**

**The Framework of Good Practice is a result of collaboration with universities, technological universities, institutes of technology, the National University of Ireland, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, the Union of Students in Ireland and other stakeholders. The topics selected are a result of this collaboration and the Framework of Good Practice is organised and driven by the principles of the National Framework for Doctoral Education. The effective practice set out in the Framework of Good Practice will inform the development of quality assurance processes by higher education institutions. This Framework of Good Practice will also supersede "Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education, 2nd edition, 2009" - A booklet produced by the legacy agency IUQB (Irish Universities Quality Board).**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

## Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established with the enactment of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012. QQI is the statutory authority for quality assurance and qualification recognition with a broad remit across education and training in Ireland, including higher education (HE), further education and training (FET) and English Language Education (ELE). QQI is the main awarding body for the private HE sector and both the public and private FET sector. In its external quality assurance role, QQI issues statutory quality assurance guidelines to HE and FET providers, approves the quality assurance (QA) systems of providers, to validate programmes of education and training based on specified award standards and reviews HEIs. All Providers are expected to have regard to the statutory guidelines when they are developing their own internal QA procedures and independent providers are required to submit these procedures to QQI for approval while autonomous providers submit these procedures for agreement.

In March 2017 QQI published the Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Research Degrees. The Framework of Good Practice was developed by the HE sector to complement the statutory QA guidelines and to support the principles of the National Framework for Doctoral Education.

### Acknowledgements

QQI would like to acknowledge the significant work undertaken by Prof Lisa Looney, Dublin City University, in developing the Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes in consultation with the higher education sector. The document was made possible due to the input of research students, research and academic leaders, and representative groups and bodies in higher education and all of the contributors to the consultation process.

QQI would also like to thank the stakeholders who engaged with all of the consultation efforts which led to the eventual development of QA guidelines for the sector and the decision to develop and publish this separate Framework of Good Practice.

## Abbreviations

<b>ACGR</b>	Australian Council of Graduate Research
<b>CDE</b>	Council for Doctoral Education
<b>CRTs</b>	Centres for Research Training (SFI funded)
<b>D.Litt.</b>	Doctor of Letters
<b>D.Sc.</b>	Doctor of Science
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
<b>EPR</b>	Expert Panel Report (on the Quality Assurance of Research Degree Programmes in Irish Higher Education Institutions), QQI 2016
<b>EPSRC</b>	Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council UK
<b>EQF</b>	European Qualifications Framework
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUA</b>	European Universities Association
<b>Eurodoc</b>	The European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers
<b>FAQs</b>	Frequently Asked Questions
<b>FTE</b>	Full Time Equivalent
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulation
<b>HASS</b>	Humanities, Arts, and Social Science
<b>HEA</b>	Higher Education Authority
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>IP</b>	Intellectual Property
<b>IRC</b>	Irish Research Council
<b>IUA</b>	Irish Universities Association
<b>IUQB</b>	Irish Universities Quality Board (legacy institution)
<b>ISCED</b>	International Standard Classification of Education
<b>LL.D</b>	Doctor of Laws
<b>M.D.</b>	Doctor of Medicine
<b>NFDE</b>	National Framework for Doctoral Education
<b>NFQ</b>	National Framework of Qualifications
<b>RD</b>	Research Degree
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>QAA</b>	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK
<b>QF – EHEA</b>	Qualification Framework in the European Higher Education Area
<b>QQI</b>	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
<b>RGAM</b>	Recurrent Grant Allocation Model
<b>STEM</b>	Science Technology Engineering and Maths
<b>THEA</b>	Technological Higher Education Association

## Introduction

It is of national importance, recognised by all key stakeholders in Ireland, that we maintain recognisably high standards of research degrees in a changing research context. Significant growth has taken place over the last 15-20 years in the numbers of students undertaking research-based-study and considerable progress has been achieved in the design, support and quality assurance of Research Degree Programmes. Commitments in *Innovation 2020*<sup>1</sup>(manifest in recent Science Foundation Ireland funding of Centres for Research Training (CRT<sup>2</sup>) and joint Centres for Doctoral Training (CDT<sup>3</sup>), and the emphasis on building research capacity more broadly in the National Strategy for *Higher Education to 2030*<sup>4</sup>, point to research degree education remaining a priority in Ireland.

Ongoing improvement and inter-institutional collaboration, which Ireland’s *Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* is intended to support, is how we secure and build on developments to date. Revisiting our quality assurance resources for research degrees is also demanded by the increased sophistication, scale and extent of partnership involved in such education in Ireland (including partnership on research student placements), the increasingly diverse student body and diverse graduate careers.

### Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide benchmark statements, against which those involved in delivering Research Degree Programmes can consider their own practice, and identify areas where enhancement effort and/or resources might be focused. It is anticipated that it will support autonomous awarding bodies and other providers of research degree programmes. The statements are not a set of rules, regulations or obligations; the minimum requirements are clearly set via statutory guidelines<sup>5,6</sup>. The document does not address the issue of resources which arises for everyone working to enhance quality. It does however aim to establish and promote effective practice in key areas of graduate researcher education, to complement and support the further development of internal quality assurance processes in the institutions providing research degrees. In this, it is a direct successor to *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education*<sup>7</sup>.

In a fundamental sense, each student follows his/her own unique programme and is responsible for their project, and this should always be the case in principle and in practice. The inadvisability of generalising about the educational experience of a research student, given the range of factors which impact on an individual’s route into and through a programme is internationally recognised<sup>8</sup>. Nonetheless, certain elements are common and key, often determined institutionally and at the levels of Faculties/Colleges and disciplines, and it is certainly possible to make statements about what represents good practice in regard to them. Institutional context cannot remove the requirement for very significant student effort to complete a research degree, but it is important in ensuring that student success does not depend at all on happenstance, but is supported by valuable supervisor input and effective structures, policies and procedures.

<sup>1</sup> *Innovation 2020*, Irish Government Interdepartmental Committee Report on Science, Technology and Innovation, December 2015

<sup>2</sup> *Announced* by Science Foundation Ireland March 5th 2019.

<sup>3</sup> *Announced* by Science Foundation Ireland Feb 4th 2019, in partnership with the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) in the UK.

<sup>4</sup> *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*, Irish Government Department of Education and Skills, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> *Core, Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*, QQI, April 2016.

<sup>6</sup> *Topic Specific, Research Degree Programmes, Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*, QQI, March 2017.

<sup>7</sup> *Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education*, 2nd edition, IUQB (legacy organisation), 2009.

<sup>8</sup> UK Quality Code for Higher Education, *Characteristics Statement, Doctoral Degree*, QAA, 2015.

## Target Readers

The target readers are all of those interested in (and particularly those working to improve or facilitate) postgraduate researcher education in Ireland including:

1. Persons charged with the development and review of institutional policies, regulations and guidelines related to research degree programmes.
2. Persons charged with the development of more discipline- or area-specific policies, regulations and guidelines related to research masters and doctoral education.
3. Individual students, supervisor(s), professional support staff and others.
4. Persons charged with developing policy and funding instruments for research degrees.

## Context

The context for developing *Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* includes a deepening national consensus on the principles and outcomes of doctoral education, reflected in the publication of the *National Framework for Doctoral Education (2015)*<sup>9</sup> for which this Framework of Good Practice is a supporting document. The context also includes significant work at European level in defining and exploring the nature of doctoral education and the changes and challenges such education faces , .

*Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* draws extensively from the aforementioned guidelines published by the former IUQB (*Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education*)<sup>6</sup>. It also builds substantially on the *Report of the Expert Panel on the Quality Assurance of Research Degree Programmes in Irish Higher Education Institutions*<sup>12</sup>. The Expert Panel engaged in extensive consultation across a range of stakeholders and considered international practice. In effect this mirrored and brought forward groundwork done in the preparation of the IUQB booklet. While identifying good practice, this report also identified gaps in policies, criteria and guidelines in Ireland. The Expert Panel not only identified the need for this Framework of Good Practice (reporting that the opinion that it was needed was “expressed repeatedly and by a wide variety of stakeholders”), but also undertook the first phase of preparatory work. The Expert Panel report pointed out the need for “straightforward and consistent yet flexible practices”, and that emphasis is carried through to this document.

Subsequent to the publication of the Report of the Expert Panel, and following a specific period of consultation, QQI published statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes (2017)<sup>5</sup> as part of a suite of QA guidelines which include QQI's Core Statutory QA Guidelines<sup>4</sup>. While QQI's Core Guidelines provide the general quality assurance guidance required, additional sector-specific and topic-specific guidelines address the particular responsibilities of providers based on the sector and the types of provision.

<sup>9</sup> Irish [National Framework for Doctoral Education](#), 2015.

<sup>10</sup> [Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training](#), the European Commission, June 2011,.

<sup>11</sup> European Universities Association (EUA), Council for Doctoral Education Salzburg statements: Salzburg Principles (2005); Salzburg II Recommendations (2010) and Taking Salzburg Forward-Implementation and New Challenges (2016). Available at <https://eua-cde.org/reports-publications.html>

<sup>12</sup> [Report of the Expert Panel on the Quality Assurance of Research Degree Programmes in Irish Higher Education Institutions, QQI](#), 2016.

Additional procedures specifically relating to the assessment of research degrees are set out in the QA Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes and are consistent with the NFQ award type descriptors for research degrees<sup>13</sup>.

*Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* also draws, sometimes very directly, from other publications nationally (the Technological Higher Education Quality Framework<sup>14</sup>) and internationally (the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education<sup>15</sup>, the Australian Good Practice Principles<sup>16</sup> and Framework for Research Training<sup>17</sup> and the outcomes of the European Universities Association ARDE project<sup>18</sup>). International benchmarking of practice is very important to support high standards but also helps to ensure Ireland will continue to attract strong international applicants, while also supporting mobility of students within programmes and after graduation.

In the development of *Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes*, further consultation with the HEIs involved was undertaken to agree the areas which needed to be further addressed, and draft structure and content were discussed with a wide range of stakeholders. QQI would like to acknowledge the commitment to excellence of leaders of research education in Ireland and the hard work that led to the development of this document, which indicates the ongoing commitment to continuous improvement, international standards and a positive graduate research student experience - all central to the key areas in this Framework of Good Practice.

## Using this Framework of Good Practice

*Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* is structured in accordance with the principles of *Ireland's National Framework for Doctoral Education*, with each section building on one of the principles. The impact of this approach is the foregrounding of fundamental and broad issues relating to the basis for research-based programmes and degrees, and the environment and community in which they are undertaken (sections 1-4). Subsequent sections address matters pertaining to specific aspects of the programmes including admission, monitoring progress, professional development, assessment etc. Most readers will dip into the document when they have a specific aspect of research degree education they want to consider. There is an extensive index at the back of the document to aid with identification of statements relevant to specific key topics.

<sup>13</sup> These are award type descriptor 'M' for the Master's degree; and award type descriptor 'O' for Doctoral Degrees, presented in Appendix 1.

<sup>14</sup> [Technological Higher Education Quality Framework, D. Part III: Internal Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Research](#), The Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), April 2017.

<sup>15</sup> UK Quality Code for Higher Education, [Research Degree Chapter](#) (B11), QAA 2013 and [Characteristics Statement, Doctoral Degree](#), QAA, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Council of Graduate Research, [Graduate Research Good Practice Principles](#), Dec. 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Australian Council of Graduate Research, [Good Practice Framework for Research Training](#), July 2018.

<sup>18</sup> [Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education](#) – results of the ARDE project, EUA CDE, 2013.

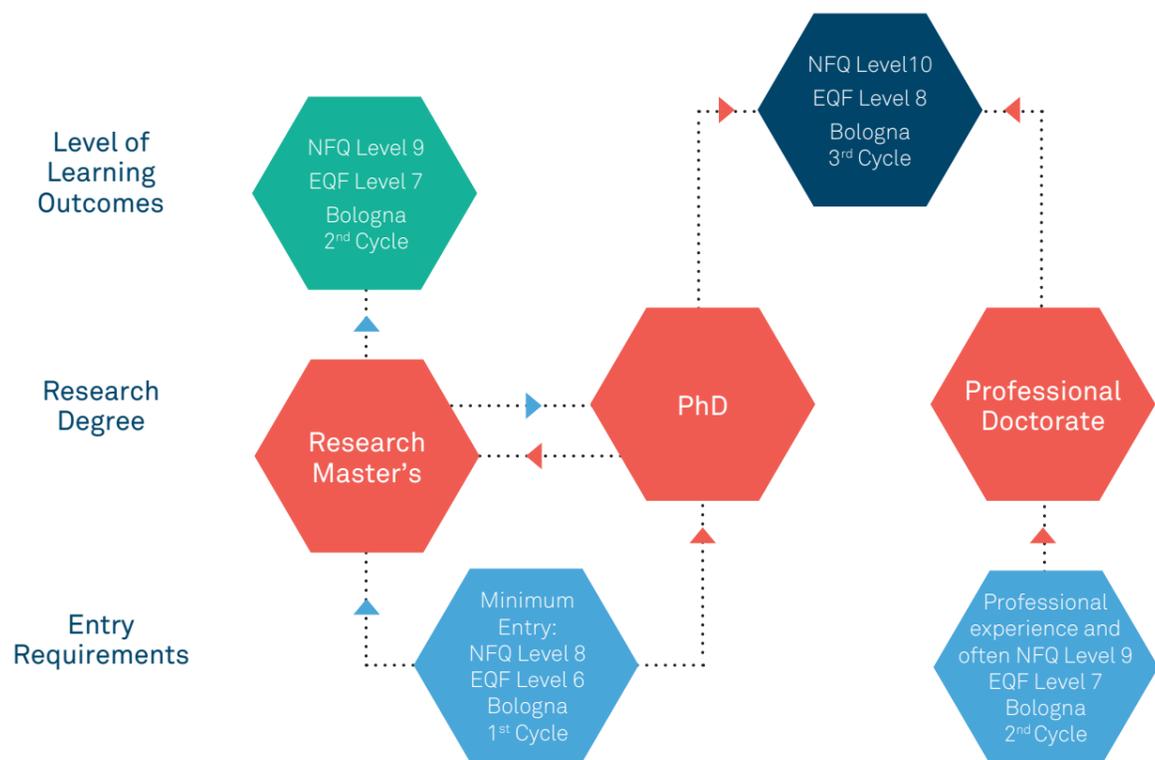
In each section, a brief introduction is followed by a statement of the related principle, and then a set of statements of effective practice. In some instances, the statements are grouped according to a particular stage or aspect of the Research Degree Programme. Statements marked with an asterisk overlap significantly with guidelines in the *QQI Topic -Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes*. The inclusion of an asterisk is intended to aid users of this Framework of Good Practice only. The QA Guidelines remain the primary source of such statutory requirements.

### Scope

This Framework of Good Practice applies to programmes for research degrees included at level 9 or 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (described in Appendix 1). This includes doctoral programmes (PhDs (Doctor of Philosophy) including those which are practice-based, and professional doctorates) and research master’s programmes. All of these are categorised as research degree programmes because student learning is very substantially or completely rooted in the process of undertaking research (see figure 1).

*Ireland’s Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* also applies to all contexts in which these programmes are undertaken: students may study part-time or full-time, be campus-based, enterprise-based or largely studying at a distance (either under a collaborative partnership, or as an individual) be funded or financially self-supporting (partially or fully), they may be pursuing programmes run in partnership across institutions and enterprises (which may be international), they may be early career researchers or later career practitioners.

Figure 1: Programmes which fall within scope of the Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes



The document also applies to all formats of assessment used to award such degrees.

In Ireland, and internationally, a significant majority of research degrees pursued are PhDs, and this is used as the basis throughout the document. Because of the common context of learning rooted in doing research, most statements in *Ireland’s Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* apply also to research master’s and professional doctorate degree programmes. Where differences between programmes impact on the relevance of statements, or a statement specific to one type of degree is required, this is alluded to in the document.

### The types of research degree differ in terms of:

- a. The level of learning outcomes.  
Research master’s degrees align with descriptors for level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications, and both types of doctoral programme with those for level 10;
- b. Emphasis.  
In this context, PhD and research master’s programmes are closely aligned and, while they can be undertaken in a wide variety of circumstances they are rooted in an academic discipline.  
Professional (including performance) based degrees are intertwined with professional practice, as well as within an academic discipline. Such degrees are typically associated with a small number of practice disciplines (including, but not limited to education, psychology and performance). Research projects can advance professional practice or use practice as a legitimate research method . At doctoral level such degrees provide an opportunity for individuals to situate professional knowledge, developed over time, in a theoretical academic framework. Projects often result in direct organisational, policy or practice related change. A professional doctorate is often a post-experience qualification (although not always, depending on discipline area) and is frequently the doctoral degree of choice for mid-career professionals in professional practice disciplines.
- c. Entry requirements.  
Specific performance in a level 8 degree is the usual entry requirement for a research master’s programme. PhDs may require either a level 8 or a level 9 qualification. Professional doctorate entry requirements usually include professional practice experience and typically students are required to have a relevant level 9 degree.
- d. Assessment.  
All research degrees involve assessment specific to the individual, and assessment of a substantial thesis, or thesis with an artefact or portfolio of performance practice. At master’s level, assessment can be based wholly on an examination of the thesis (without an oral), whereas a viva voce defence is always part of the process at doctoral level. In Professional Doctorates, assessments of taught elements or minor research related projects may act as incremental hurdles for the student as part of his/her progress towards the substantive independent research project.

<sup>19</sup> [Characteristics Statement Doctoral Degrees](#), UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Part A Setting and maintaining academic standards, QAA, Sept 2015.

## e. The nature of articulation between programmes.

It is not unusual for a student to transfer into a PhD programme at an advanced stage of a research master's, and PhD students sometimes exit with a research master's. Transfer between the level 10 programmes (equivalent on the NFQ) is not common because of their very distinct emphasis. Depending on accumulated achievement at exit, a professional doctorate student may be awarded a master's in the field. This however is likely to be a research masters only if the substantive learning demonstrated was gained through doing research.

## It is of note that:

- At master's level, a clear distinction between taught and research programmes is not made in all countries. While most Irish degrees at level 9 encompass some learning through research, a master's programme is considered a research degree programme only when the considerable majority of learning is through research<sup>20</sup>. Research master's programmes, even those organised for a cohort of students, are generally managed and administered quite differently to taught programmes.
- Higher Doctorates, including D.Litt, D.Sc. and LL.D. are awarded to applicants who already have a doctorate, in recognition of an excellent and distinguished body of contributions to knowledge. They do not derive from a planned programme of education and so fall outside the scope of Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes.

Persons concerned with the administration and delivery of research programmes are also advised to consider this Framework of Good Practice, and to apply it insofar as is relevant and practicable.

<sup>20</sup> Defined, for example, in the [Technological Universities Act 2018](#) Pt 2, Section 28, 2(a) as "training where not less than 60 percent of the available credits are assigned in respect of a thesis or theses prepared by the student based on research conducted by him or her."

# 1 The Core of Research Degree Education

Research is a process to discover new knowledge, through systematic investigation. Through research, hypotheses are investigated, facts are established, or new interpretations of data or texts suggested. It is a process of gathering and analysing information, designed to develop or contribute to knowledge, increase or revise knowledge.

Research accommodates the range of activities that support original and innovative work in a variety of academic, professional and technological fields, including traditional and performing arts. As such, research can be discipline or practice-based but is understood to involve the integration of rigour, reflection and critique.

*Related National Framework for Doctoral Education Principle: The core of doctoral education is deep engagement with a question, problem or hypothesis at the frontier of knowledge, and advancement of this frontier. To be awarded a doctoral degree, the student must have made an original contribution to knowledge.*

## As a result of undertaking their Research Degree Programme:

- Doctoral graduates should have the ability to discover, analyse, evaluate, manage, conserve and communicate an ever-increasing volume of knowledge from a range of sources and think critically about problems in order to produce innovative solutions and create new knowledge.
- Professional doctorates should have the particular ability to advance professional practice or use practice as a research method.
- Research master's graduates should have a mastery of principles and theory of their discipline, competence in appropriate research methods, an ability to manage complexity, integrate knowledge and may contribute to the literature in a field.

## Good Practice Statements

- 1.1 The HEI cites the objective of undertaking a research programme, whether it be at master's or doctoral level, so that it is clearly understood by all stakeholders.
- 1.2 The HEI cites developing research competence as the core element of Research Degree Programmes.
- 1.3 The HEI designs Research Degree Programmes to facilitate learning which is achieved through the process of undertaking research, supported by related studies.

## 1. The Core of Research Degree Education

- 1.4 The student experience studying for a research degree at the HEI is substantially one of doing, as well as learning about, research.
- 1.5 There is a mechanism to make clear to students the demands for intellectual rigour, creativity, sustained commitment, a willingness to engage fully with the research project and with supervisor(s), and to participate fully in the other activities associated with his/her programme (e.g. professional development, dissemination).
- 1.6 The HEI accepts research students only into an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research to a high standard, and where excellent research, recognised by the relevant subject community, is occurring.
- 1.7 Research students are dealt with individually, each having a specific research project, individual intermediate progress evaluations and a personal examination process. This reflects in individualised planning, flexibility in approaches to addressing the research question, management of resources, of time and of risk specific to the project or context.
- 1.8 Admission procedures include an assessment of the project and set out minimum parameters required including feasibility. These ensure that a suitable research question, problem or hypothesis is identified, which is specific to the programme of an individual student and addresses a specific or a coherent set of important issues and problems. For doctoral students, the project is required to be at the frontier of knowledge, and presents a realistic opportunity to advance that frontier. These procedures are in place whether the student is defining the research question themselves (according to standard practice in many discipline areas including the arts and humanities), or the topic is pre-defined by a supervisor, as is more typical in STEM and externally funded research, led by supervisor(s).
- 1.9 Each programme of study gives the student the opportunity for prolonged engagement with their research. This includes
- + requiring a sufficient registration period, consistent with international norms for the research degree being sought (and reflecting mode of study), to allow for background study, experimental work and/or fieldwork, sharing work in progress, seeking feedback from the research community, reflection and refinement and 'deep dive' analyses.
  - + reasonable and flexible timing, where possible, of other activities required of students throughout the year.
  - + Avoiding incentives or internal pressures which would undermine students having the minimum necessary time to undertake research.
  - + Ensuring the currency of research included in the thesis is not compromised by particularly long timeframes of study.

## 2. The Basis of Research Degree Awards

## 2 The Basis of Research Degree Awards

As research degrees are awarded for learning achieved through the process of doing research, it is the quality and contribution of that research, and the skills attained which form the basis of the award. This applies to both master's and doctoral research degrees. Evidence of achievement which underpins or parallels the research may be acknowledged in many different ways, but only a substantive piece of research output can justify awarding of a research degree. The NFAQ award descriptors and the relevant European second and third cycle descriptors (the Dublin descriptors), given in Appendix 1, elaborate the specific learning outcomes required.

*Related National Framework for Doctoral Education Principle: Successful completion and examination of the research thesis, comprising work of publishable quality, is the basis for the award of the doctoral degree.*

### Good Practice Statements

- 2.1 The rigour and format of the final assessment process reflect the importance of a single major research project in making the award.
- 2.2 Assessment procedures require a substantive written document which, fully or in part, contextualises and evidences research attainment. In some cases this thesis may include an accompanying portfolio of publications, artefacts or practice.
- 2.3 Procedures ensure that the thesis, irrespective of format, is held to a consistent standard: i.e. that of a master's or doctorate.
- 2.4 Procedures ensure that the evidence accepted by the HEI
- + Demonstrates and justifies the research question.
  - + Displays appropriate depth and breadth of understanding of the relevant field(s) of study.
  - + Illustrates expertise gained with respect to basic and advanced methodologies and techniques and
  - + Provides a critical evaluation of the extent to which the research question has been addressed.
- 2.5 Appropriate consideration is given by the HEI, in managing and in assessing multidisciplinary projects or projects in multidisciplinary environments, to the fact that expectations of individual supervisors and examiners may be discipline-based.

- 2.6 Approval of an award requires that the quality of thesis and research illustrates that the student can
- + Plan, manage and deliver projects, selecting and justifying methodological processes.
  - + Exercise professional standards in research and research integrity, and engage in professional research practice including ethical, legal and health and safety aspects.
  - + Recognise, evaluate and minimise the risks involved in a research project including possible impact on the environment.
  - + Appreciate the need to engage in research with impact.
- 2.7 Assessment for the award of a research degree is based only on the research output as defined by the HEI regulations.
- 2.8 Assessments in related studies or transferrable skills may form a formal part of progression through a programme, but these milestones do not contribute to the overall assessment of the award.
- 2.9 Procedures are in place which ensure that neither the length of time of registration, funding context nor the specific number of publications generated by the student are central to the decision to examine for a research award.
- 2.10 Procedures ensure that it is the volume and complexity of study and research which the output reflects, and not the length of a thesis which is taken into consideration against the required standard.
- 2.11 There are procedures in place which assist with detection of breaches of academic integrity, including research malpractice and plagiarism.
- 2.12 Nomenclature of the award reflects the model of programme and is consistent with accepted international norms as to the use of various titles.
- 2.13 Processes ensure that the HEI accepts for a doctoral award only work demonstrating original thought based on independent study and of publishable quality. The student must have generated new knowledge, undertaken original research, or applied existing knowledge in a new way.

## 3 Research Environment

To achieve a goal of providing all research students in an institution with an excellent research education requires both that the level of research being undertaken by supervisors in the HEI is of a high quality, and that the institutional structures, resources, administrative environments and supports for both students and supervisors are appropriate, efficient and comprehensive.’

*Related National Framework for Doctoral Education Principle: Doctoral education is conducted in a research environment with a high degree of academic quality and infrastructure and where it is consistent with institutional strategies. Academic quality includes quality supervision by expert and committed supervisors and training supervisors.*

### Good Practice Statements

- 3.1 The HEI strategic objectives include an explicit commitment to the high quality education of research students (including associated high quality research outputs), and to the provision of the necessary supports and resources to achieve this.
- 3.2 There is a strong link between the assessment of the research of an institution, and the assessment of the research environments that form the basis of research-based education.
- 3.3 The HEI views a positive approach to research integrity and a proactive approach to prevention of research misconduct as central to its research mission.
- 3.4 The HEI’s approach to research integrity is founded on basic principles of good research practice relating to Reliability, Honesty, Respect, and Accountability, as outlined in the Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland (2019)<sup>21</sup> and in line with other examples of international best practice<sup>22,23,24</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> [National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland](#) (revised edition 2019)

<sup>22</sup> [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#). Published by the All European Academies (ALLEA), March 2017,

<sup>23</sup> [Singapore Statement on Research Integrity](#), 2010.

<sup>24</sup> [Montreal Statement on Research integrity in Cross-Boundary Research Collaborations](#), 2012.

**Academic Environment**

- 3.5 Assessment of the academic quality of research education is based on peer review and sensitive to disciplinary differences.
- 3.6 Procedures ensure that the research environment for each project and student is intellectually stimulating and supportive.
- 3.7 All academic graduate research supervisors are active scholars and researchers with good records of publication.
- 3.8 The environment is enabling and instructional and is conceived of as a place of learning as well as of research productivity.
- 3.9 The environment is capable of supporting the range of research students being recruited.
- 3.10 While the primary research environment and infrastructure can be provided in industry, or across several HEIs, all are expected to provide a suitable context for the conduct of the kind of research in question.
- 3.11 Supplementary arrangements are put in place when the needs of a particular project or student are not fully met within the primary research setting. Such needs may relate to access to kindred researchers, specific training on a technique, or to understand particular contexts or approaches.

**Infrastructure<sup>25</sup>**

- 3.12\* The HEI is transparent in providing guidance to all current and prospective students regarding resources, infrastructure, and support that is available<sup>26</sup>.
- 3.13\* HEI procedures for research provision for all research students include:
  - + Access to human, physical, academic, information, training and financial resources to sustainably support their research degree project, and facilitate its completion in accordance with high ethical and professional standards.
  - + Access to expert advice on legal and commercial matters such as intellectual property, as appropriate.
- 3.14 The HEI provides the resources required for students to complete a high quality research project. The resources available are appropriate to the agreed project and location of the student.
- 3.15 Each school/department, in planning for the recruitment of research students ensures that local facilities are appropriate to a high quality education.
- 3.16 Resources provided include library support, information services and IT infrastructure.
- 3.17 The HEI provides access to a student advisor, and access to appropriate mediation, complaints resolution or grievance procedures that enable students to express their concerns in a safe, fair and equitable context. Resources are provided which support student wellbeing.
- 3.18 The HEI provides, where appropriate, post-thesis submission support until graduation.

<sup>25</sup> also considered in section 7.5

<sup>26</sup> Statements marked with an asterisk overlap significantly with guidelines in the QQI Topic -Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes. The inclusion of an asterisk is intended to aid users of this Framework of Good Practice only. The QA Guidelines remain the primary source of such statutory requirements.

**Institutional Structures**

- 3.19 Structures supporting Research Degree Programmes are developed at the appropriate level of governance within the HEI. Academic staff take ownership of these structures through inclusive procedures.
- 3.20 Research students are represented on important policy making and administrative committees, and at institutional and at discipline and/or thematic level on other committees with direct relevance to graduate research programmes.
- 3.21 There is a senior officer (for example, the Dean of Graduate Studies) with overarching responsibility for Research Degree Programmes in the institution, with sufficient reserved time and resources allocated for this role. Where responsibilities are shared between a central officer and officers in individual sections or graduate schools, coherence and effectiveness are assured.
- 3.22 In a HEI with larger numbers of research students, the senior officer with overall responsibility for Research Degree Programmes (e.g. the Dean) is normally full-time and supported by a sufficient complement of staff. Where numbers are lower, there is an equivalent part-time officer and appropriate support.
- 3.23 The senior officer has primary responsibility for the preparation of clear, comprehensive policies, regulations and codes of practice.
- 3.24 Through monitoring the overall effectiveness of Research Degree Programmes, the senior officer acts to ensure that policies, regulations and quality assessment procedures are coherent, consistent and up-to-date. When necessary, s/he acts on behalf of research students and supervisors to ensure that institutional, college/faculty and service-related procedures are adjusted to serve better their common needs.
- 3.25 The senior officer and other relevant officers work under terms of reference that expect and facilitate effective co-operation in support of all research students, prospective students and supervisors.
- 3.26 Where justified by numbers of students, responsible officers are also appointed at the levels of colleges/faculties and schools/departments or programme.
- 3.27 Where the senior or other responsible officer is advised and supported by a 'graduate studies' board or committee, this includes research student representatives as full members.
- 3.28 Each body and officer with roles directly related to research degree programmes or students has a formal job description that covers these roles, and all relevant procedures are supported by up-to-date regulations and documentation.
- 3.29 The HEI has regulations that define the purpose and functions of the Graduate School(s) and its (their) relationship with the relevant internal academic (schools/departments, colleges/faculties) and administrative (Graduate Studies Office, Research Office) units, and with the institution as a whole.
- 3.30 Unless otherwise allowed for in the statutes and regulations of an institution, every research student is registered with an academic school/department and his/her association with a graduate school takes that into account.
- 3.31 The HEI provides appropriate levels of personal and pastoral support for students.

### Supervision

- 3.32 Developing and maintaining a common strong supervision culture shared by supervisors, graduate school leaders and students is a stated priority of the HEI.
- 3.33 The HEI recognises that the research student's supervisor(s) is (are) an essential partner in the student's education and development, advising during the long process of mastering concepts, specialised topics and methodologies, and conducting original research.
- 3.34 Qualified research-active staff are provided with professional development opportunities, support and structured training as research degree supervisors. These are informed by available resources<sup>27</sup> and may include elements relating to:
- + Understanding the Irish research degree education system
  - + Good professional practice, research integrity, the open science agenda and performance norms in research supervision
  - + Internal guidelines, regulations, structures and procedures for research degree programmes including assessment, examinations and expectations regarding quality assurance
  - + The challenge of supporting students while promoting their independence
  - + The skills needs of students, and preparing appropriate training programmes
  - + Student diversity, including awareness of the cultures of specific nationalities or groups
  - + Research leadership and conflict resolution skills
  - + Workshop sessions to share experiences and discuss solutions to issues
  - + Guest lectures/seminars on issues related to research supervision and research management.
- 3.35 Procedures for research provision for all research students include supervision by researcher/s, qualified at least at the level of the award, with demonstrated ability to make original contributions to the relevant field.
- 3.36\* Procedures in place for the appointment/establishment of supervisors:
- + Recognise that being a supervisor is a professional role that requires both being an active researcher in the relevant area, as well as particular skills regarding supervision.
  - + Include clearly defined formal responsibilities, criteria on the eligibility of persons having specific roles in a supervisory team, and mechanisms to ensure supervisors are making themselves aware of these.
- 3.37 Co-supervisory arrangements are facilitated, so that less experienced supervisors, or those with very specific expertise relevant to an aspect of a project can gain experience in supervision and/or make a contribution.
- 3.38 The HEI recognises formally the contributions of senior (contract) research staff to the supervision of research students, and has a mechanism which allows qualified and experienced research staff to act as principal supervisors where appropriate.

<sup>27</sup> Examples include: National Academy for Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL), [Developing an institutional framework for supporting supervisors of research students-a practical guide](#), 2012, and subscription-based materials such as Vitae's [Supervising a Doctorate](#).

- 3.39\* Supervisors that are external to the HEI have access to information and training relating to their role, responsibilities and the institutional requirements for the research degree programme.
- 3.40 Specifically tailored education and support in respect of Research Integrity are provided for senior researchers and academics who are key influencers in defining acceptable research practice for research students.
- 3.41 Methods of providing support and training on research supervision for new supervisors include, as appropriate:
- + Obligatory structured training courses with a range of activities (where possible, these are modules in larger programmes leading to a formal qualification in higher education practice).
  - + A mentoring system with experienced members of staff.
  - + An experienced co-supervisor.
- 3.42\* These supports are available to enhance and support student supervision and project management by first time, on-going, and re-start-up supervisors. Inexperienced supervisors are obliged to avail of these at the early stages of supervising.
- 3.43 All supervisors participate in support and refresher activities that are relevant to their previous experience, the backgrounds of students to be recruited, the stages of their careers and their research fields.
- 3.44 The institution participates actively in relevant national and cross-institutional programmes which support supervisors, including appropriate modules and short courses, live and on-line.

### Provision and monitoring of supervision

- 3.45 An adequate amount of academic and, if relevant, work- or practice-based supervision of an appropriate quality is provided to each student.
- 3.46\* Procedures allow for continuity of adequate supervision in cases such as those related to supervisors being removed from the role, being absent for significant periods or leaving the HEI employment.
- 3.47\* Procedures are in place to record all ongoing staff roles as supervisors, or as members of a supervisory team.
- 3.48 In respect of supervisors, up-to-date records are kept of individual supervisory workloads and student completion times (both weighted by student registration mode: full time or part time), completion rates and formally notified issues.
- 3.49 Responsibility for oversight of individual supervisor records is clearly designated.
- 3.50 Procedures exist which ensure that high standards and adequate levels of supervision are maintained. To maintain these high standards, a supervisor may have supports or development opportunities provided or required, or extra conditions imposed.
- 3.51 Procedures ensure that the designated supervisor's role (principal, joint, secondary) is consistent with actual activity.

**Communication**

- 3.52 A range of mechanisms is used to ensure effective, ongoing, two-way communication between the institution and its constituent units, research students and research supervisors.
- 3.53 Effective communication of a wide range of documentation, guidelines, codes of practice and procedures related to Research Degree Programmes is facilitated by
- + Clear designation of responsibility for this function
  - + Documentation being maintained up-to-date
  - + Documents being collectively and individually clear, comprehensive and readily available in 'soft' and 'hard' formats
- 3.54 Information on research degree programmes (RPDs) point to a comprehensive, up-to-date central repository of associated policies and procedures which is easily accessible to potential applicants, students and other stakeholders. This may take the form of a handbook for research students and
- + Ensures transparency in relation to the expectations and the duties of all parties in the Research Degree Programme and
  - + Covers all matters relevant to research students, supervisors, institution officers and the examination process.
  - + Details policies, regulations, guidelines, appointment criteria and lists of responsibilities relevant to matters dealt with in this Framework of Good Practice.
- Also included (or readily available elsewhere) are information on general organisational structures, process and options, and information and advice on the realities of a life of research and scholarship (e.g. sustained commitment needed, typical setbacks, working independently), and general advice on the diverse career pathways and prospects for research degree graduates.
- 3.55 All such information is published by the HEI and readily accessible via the website of the 'Graduate Studies' Office' or an equivalent unit's website.
- 3.56 All research students (and supervisors) can easily obtain informed advice and help at the appropriate level with respect to all relevant procedures and common issues.
- 3.57 The existence of *Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* is made clear in institutional documents, and copies are made available to students, supervisors and staff via the website of the HEI, and in printed form on request.
- 3.58 The institution and its officers use both modern technology and traditional means to ensure that research students, supervisors, advisors/mentors and relevant staff are fully informed or have easy access to all relevant information. The importance of being able to communicate emergency or transient information by a range of media (including e-mail and SMS) to specific groups of students and staff is recognised.
- 3.59 Information on matters such as training, deadlines for annual reviews, and submission targets is communicated in a timely manner to students, supervisors and administrators responsible for their co-ordination and management.

# 4 Research Community

Research student success is linked to a sense of belonging to the research community in a discipline or institution, to an ability to quickly understand the norms and expectations of that community and to the quality of the research community. The initial weeks and months are key to a high quality student experience in this regard, but ongoing activities, which involve a critical mass of senior internationally recognised researchers, contribute to building and maintaining a positive culture of excellent scholarship.

*Related National Framework for Doctoral Education Principle: Doctoral education is conducted in a learning community where sufficient critical mass of internationally recognised research activity exists to allow students to gain access to a training programme of appropriate breadth and to interact with peers engaged in their field, nationally and internationally.*

**Good Practice Statements****Introduction to the community of researchers, expectations & disciplinary norms**

- 4.1 The HEI provides an induction for all new research students at various times during the academic year to ensure all students experience a timely introduction.
- 4.2 Induction combines guidance and information relevant to all research students, with significant discipline-relevant elements.
- 4.3 At institution or discipline level (as appropriate), induction includes information about
- + The expectations and responsibilities of supervisors and students
  - + The degree requirements, performance monitoring and progress procedures
  - + Research integrity, ethics, good research practice, intellectual property, data management
  - + Grievance procedures
  - + The availability of support from careers and other student services
  - + Health and safety procedures
  - + Research planning
  - + Professional development planning and opportunities
  - + Guidance on managing study workload
  - + Students' academic support duties (e.g. duties in support of teaching in the HEI) and associated training and
  - + Basic study conditions including arrangements for annual leave.
- 4.4 Research students are given access to information on the resources available to help facilitate timely completion of a quality research project.
- 4.5 An initial advisory meeting is held between a new student and their supervisor, at the end of which a checklist is completed indicating that the student has participated/will participate in specific induction activities (or has acquired relevant information under set headings),

and that a range of basic topics have been discussed. The student and supervisor each retain a copy of the completed checklist. For a professional doctorate student this may happen when s/he embarks on the substantive research project.

- 4.6 Registered students avail of induction and familiarisation activities, and their participation is recorded and monitored.
- 4.7 Strong and responsive feedback mechanisms (involving students, relevant sub-groups of students, and supervisors) ensure that the effectiveness and cohesiveness of the induction activities are monitored, that less effective elements and courses are improved or discontinued and new elements introduced as required.

#### Community within the HEI, inclusive of research students

- 4.8 There is a dynamic culture of creativity/scholarship/research in the institution and in each research group in which research students participate actively.
- 4.9 There is recognition that a period of orientation is necessary (after induction) for a student to begin to feel part of, and operate effectively within their research community. Responsibility for this is taken by supervisor(s), and discipline leaders.
- 4.10 Accommodation is made to include students studying at a distance from the institution in this culture, using digital technologies where appropriate.
- 4.11 The HEI provides opportunities for students to be actively involved with the intellectual culture and to interact with other researchers, both within their HEI and globally.
- 4.12 The concept of quality of whole student experience is applied to research students.
- 4.13 The HEI actively embeds research student perspective in institutional decision-making adopting the Principles of Student Engagement<sup>28</sup> as appropriate for the context of research students. These relate to democracy, student as a partner, inclusivity and diversity, transparency, students as co-creators, collegiality and parity of esteem, professionalism and support, feedback and feedback loop, self-criticism and enhancement, and consistency.
- 4.14 The HEI formally considers the outcomes of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement for Postgraduate Research Students (ISSE-PGR)<sup>29</sup>.
- 4.15 The institution facilitates student-initiated societies and peer-mediated supports for research students, and facilitates the development of local, institutional and national networks for research students and researchers.
- 4.16 All students (externally funded or not) have some access to supports to attend conferences.
- 4.17 The HEI provides opportunities for students to engage with other students and academic staff in informal settings.
- 4.18 The HEI recognises that excellent research does not automatically translate into a good or broad experience for research students, and has mechanisms in place to promote community inclusive of research students, to identify contexts where students are having a poor experience and to address this.
- 4.19 The general student support and advice centres within the HEI make themselves aware of the needs of research graduate students and take them into account when planning and delivering their services.

<sup>28</sup> *Enhancing Student Engagement in Decision Making*, Report of the Working Group on Student Engagement in Irish Higher Education, Higher Education Authority, April 2016.

<sup>29</sup> ISSE-PGR, first piloted in 2018. <http://studentsurvey.ie/>

## 5 Researcher Development

Supervisors take primary responsibility for guiding and providing opportunities to a student to develop their depth and breadth of knowledge of their discipline. However, research students require support, beyond that which can be provided by supervisors, in order to develop as researchers, advance an existing career or prepare for career opportunities which build on having attained a research degree. Discipline leaders and supervisors have a strong role to play in identifying developmental needs and in delivering aspects of the required education including opportunities to practice and embed skills and knowledge. There is also a clear institutional role in ensuring consistency of opportunity, quality of learning experience and appropriate oversight. Cooperation across HEIs and other providers is a key mechanism to broaden the opportunities available to students.

*Related National Framework for Doctoral Education Principle: Doctoral education increases significantly students' depth and breadth of knowledge of their discipline and develops their expertise in research methodology which is applicable to both a specific project and a wider context. It provides a high quality research experience, and training (including a formalised integrated programme of personal and professional development).*

### Good Practice Statements

#### Guidance & Planning

- 5.1 The HEI articulates at institutional or discipline level the (non-research specific) skill sets that each student will acquire by the completion of their studies.
- 5.2 National and international models inform the definition of such skills sets. Examples include the IUA's Irish universities PhD *Graduate Skills Statement*<sup>30</sup>, the *Eurodoc Report on Transferable Skills and Competences*<sup>31</sup>, the Vitae Researcher Development Framework<sup>32</sup>, and *ACGR Good Practice Framework for Research Training*<sup>33</sup>.
- 5.3 Supervisors support the development of discipline specific research skills, general academic skills, transferrable skills and, from an early stage, career planning.

<sup>30</sup> Irish Universities Association (2nd edition 2015) <https://www.iua.ie/publication/view/iua-graduate-skills-statement-brochure-2015/>

<sup>31</sup> *Identifying Transferable Skills and Competences to Enhance Early-Career Researchers Employability and Competitiveness*. The European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc), Oct 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Vitae Researcher Development Framework, 2011. <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/rdf-related/researcher-development-framework-rdf-vitae.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> *Good Practice Framework for Research Training*, particularly Section 8, Employability Skills Development, Australian Council of Graduate Research (ACGR), July 2018.

- 5.4\* Individual development plans (e.g. personal development plans) are established for each research student. Plans are informed by assessment of the prior learning and skill level of students (who come from diverse educational, employment and cultural backgrounds) and their career aspirations. The development plan is jointly developed and agreed by the research student and his/her supervisor(s) early in the period of study or early phase of the substantive research project in the case of professional doctorates. It is designed to:
- + Meet the general, specialist and, if feasible, future professional needs of the student
  - + Take account of the student's research commitments and interests, and discipline norms
  - + Facilitate the acquisition of particular skills at appropriate times
- 5.5 The process for establishing the development plan facilitates full ownership by the student of the plan.
- 5.6 Each plan is revised as necessary during the duration of the programme.
- 5.7 Research Degree Programmes designed for a specified group or cohort of research students provides for the identification and provision of optional as well as required courses and other appropriate educational and training activities so that individual needs and career ambitions are accommodated.
- 5.8 Any sanctions in place for non-attendance in planned formalised training is made known in advance to students.

#### Provision of Opportunities for Development

- 5.9 Students are able to access education or training courses which deepen or broaden their specialist domain knowledge, as required by their project and subsequent independent research career. These address theoretical, practical and relevant industry/enterprise/sector knowledge.
- 5.10 Students are able to access fit-for-purpose training in research skills appropriate to the discipline, but broader than the requirements of their specific project. This supports them to advance their research projects and grow their effectiveness as a researcher. Such opportunities include, but are not limited to
- + Rigorous research design, research methodologies and analysis methods
  - + Appropriate experimental or fieldwork-related skills
  - + Academic Writing
- 5.11\* Where appropriate to the discipline, procedures refer to scientific rigour and how it is adhered to. Scientific rigour will ensure robust and unbiased experimental design, methodology, analysis, interpretation and reporting of results. This includes full transparency in reporting experimental details so that others may reproduce and extend the findings.

- 5.12 Students are able to access training which supports them in meeting the standards of conduct set for research professionals in their disciplinary field, including, but not limited to those relating to
- + Research Integrity (avoiding plagiarism and research fraud, intellectual honesty in attributing the authorship of shared works etc.)
  - + Obtaining ethical approval
  - + Managing health and safety issues
  - + Research data practice and management
- 5.13 Students are able to access training courses in appropriate, transferable skills, including for example:
- + Written, oral and visual communication skills relevant to diverse audiences, including the public
  - + Project management
  - + Team work and leadership
  - + Teaching and learner support skills
  - + Knowledge transfer, innovation and entrepreneurship (including management of copyright and intellectual property)
- 5.14 Students understand their primary responsibility as researchers for observing good practice in the use, storage and retention of data, and are supported to fulfil this responsibility by the HEI. They are made aware of the provisions of Data Protection legislation (which sets out the conditions for usage of sensitive and personal data) and procedures are in place which ensure they operate in accordance with these.
- 5.15 All students are alerted to the importance of developing their career management skills, and supported by supervisors and others from the early stages of study to acquire such skills. They are given informed advice on employment possibilities and prospects (including careers outside academia reflecting the propensity of opportunities in many disciplines), and of courses and sources of information and support.
- 5.16 Education in pedagogy is provided for all research students engaged in learning support activities in the HEI, in advance of the commencement of such activities.
- 5.17\* Students are able to access opportunities to develop their networking and collaborating skills. Procedures in place for facilitating research mobility and networking:
- + Maximise opportunities for research students to experience different research environments, that are beneficial for accessing relevant information or acquiring specific skills.
  - + Facilitate students in making contacts and networking, as appropriate, with others, nationally and internationally, who are active in similar fields of research.

5.18 Formal or informal learning opportunities to reinforce research and transferrable skills development are provided.

- + Regular presentations and activities involving the defence of evidence and conclusions are facilitated throughout every student's time on a Research Degree Programme and include local, national and/or international forums
- + Supervisors ensure that research students have opportunities to participate individually (or substantially in the case of joint publications) in the preparation of research papers and articles for publication in peer-reviewed journals and, where relevant, to the discipline are given training on (and/or supervised experience of) applying for grants.

Procedures facilitate work placement/experience as tutors / demonstrators / internships where applicable.

#### Provision of developmental opportunities through partnership

- 5.19 Students are supported to develop skills and gain experience of diverse research environments through collaboration, partnerships, internships, and national and international conference participation.
- 5.20 Formal arrangements are in place for cooperation among institutions and with non-academic partners to share and/or facilitate access to training resources. These support efficient provision of access to specialist knowledge, equipment, experiences or thought leaders in a discipline and are supported by mechanisms to recognise attainment in courses undertaken in other providers, and to provide evidence of attainment for students of other providers.
- 5.21 Procedures are in place to approve student mobility for experience or training, including both inward and outward mobilities for these purposes, and to monitor student experience and outcomes. Such mechanisms involve the relevant supervisors, and oversight at disciplinary and/or institutional level.
- 5.22 Approved mobilities, placements or internships have a clear purpose and deliverables for both the student and host and are of a duration consistent with the activity and also timely completion of the student's primary project. They are underpinned by an agreement which is commensurate in complexity with the nature of the activity but which, where appropriate, addresses financial, insurance and IP related issues.
- 5.23 Where programmes designed for a cohort of research students span a number of institutions, there are appropriate arrangements to facilitate students' mobility and the recognition, credit assignment and the assessment of modules. Systems exist to facilitate the updating of the students' records with information of formally accredited achievement from the different contributing institutions.

#### QA mechanisms & Recognition of attainment

- 5.24 The professional development of students is overseen by an appropriate body in the institution. Supervisor(s) and supervisory panels have access to reports from the associated recording system (See also sub-section 8.1).
- 5.25\* Robust quality assurance measures are in place in respect of professional development courses provided to research students in order to ensure consistency, relevance and outcomes of a high international standard. These include formal assessment procedures and student/supervisor feedback. Courses are revised accordingly.
- 5.26 There is a mechanism to make known emerging or growing training needs at a disciplinary and institutional level, so as to inform planning of the HEI training program.
- 5.27 The HEI supports appropriate balance between the primary goal of pursuing research, and the supporting studies.
- 5.28\* The HEI provides programmes of professional development for research students with appropriate frequency to facilitate take-up at relevant stages of progression.
- 5.29 Opportunities for development are provided in such a way that students can avail of them with the least disruption to their primary work programme.
- 5.30 The HEI makes all relevant regulations, curricula and timetables relating to professional development opportunities available to all applicants, students and supervisors.
- 5.31 Courses with significant workload are formally accredited and attributed ECTS weightings, and overall student workload managed in this context. Any minimum amount of ECTS credits, stipulated by the HEI as a requirement for a research student, is proportionate in the context of the overall duration of the Research Degree Programme.
- 5.32 Individual accredited courses are subject to specific quality assurance procedures. Principles of QA for assessment of learning applied to taught programmes are applied to accredited elements of the Research Degree Programme.
- 5.33 Completions and grades in accredited professional development courses are monitored and recorded on each student's file. They are:
- + Recorded
  - + Recognised (formally or informally)
  - + Acknowledged for registration and for funding purposes
- 5.34 Procedures allow for a coherent collection of ECTS credits undertaken by research students to be approved for a formal award and, in this context, regulations allow for concurrent registration of research students on such a certified programme. It is ensured that the pursuit of such an award aligns well with the primary purpose of securing a research degree. Evidence of learning which contributes to the second award does not form part of the assessment for the research degree. (e.g. if a literature review or other section is part of the research thesis assessed for a research degree, the same piece of work of itself, does not contribute to an element of the other award).



# 6 The Bespoke Nature of Research Degree Programmes

The research student population is diverse. Many students are at the early stage of their career but a high proportion are mid- and late-career professionals; the population is highly internationalised; the fields of study are many and norms within those differ significantly. Students engage with their study with differing levels of time commitment, with different degrees of integration with other professional work, from different locations and from different starting points. As such, operation of research degree programmes, while supporting common standards of attainment, has to be flexible to the needs of individual students and projects.

*Related National Framework for Doctoral Education Principle: Recognising that each doctorate is unique, doctoral education is flexible so as to support students of different types, undertaking different modes of study, in a broad range of individual disciplines or within interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary groups.*

## Good Practice Statements

### Student diversity

- 6.1 Provisions are made to ensure that individuals from diverse backgrounds and disability status are not disadvantaged by recruitment, application, or registration processes, can be included in induction activities and are supported equally to their peers throughout their studies.
- 6.2 Since the admission of a research student may be required at any time throughout the academic year, the appropriate procedures are flexible in this respect.
- 6.3 Provision of post-entry supports and services (both academic and non-academic) is designed to accommodate a diversity of student backgrounds, acknowledging that they are particularly important in helping students who may be atypical in their discipline, fulfil their potential through successful participation and progression.
- 6.4 General supports for students with disabilities within the HEI explicitly take the needs of research students into account.
- 6.5 Institutional procedures (including recruitment) take into account the needs of international students including provision of:
  - + Supplementary documentation with key passages repeated, if appropriate, in a number of languages
  - + Deadlines that take special processes into account, e.g. immigration processes etc.
  - + Supplementary support measures and training (including advanced English language training).

- 6.6 There is a mechanism that identifies students who work outside research groups, or whose project is unique in the faculty/college or institution with respect to its subject or methodology. This mechanism also facilitates the provision of appropriate supports to such students.
- 6.7 The recruitment process and all relevant subsequent processes allow both for applicants who are self-funded/bring their own funding and research proposal (more typical in HASS) and those who are recruited to focus on a supervisor-specified project in which their contribution will be funded (more typical in STEM disciplines).

#### Diverse modes of engagement

- 6.8 All relevant institutional regulations and procedures and supporting documentation explicitly allow for part-time research students as well as full time students.
- 6.9 The criteria defining engagement as part-time are defined by the HEI as a specific minimum proportion of the typical effort required for full time study. Guidance is provided as to possible realistic levels of engagement given other work, study or personal commitments.
- 6.10 Provision is made that supports and facilities are available to part-time students.
- 6.11 There are formal guidelines which take into account the definition of part-time in the calculation of fees, registration timeframes, work plans, estimations of progress and target completion times.
- 6.12 Procedures are in place to facilitate, over a period of study, a mixed profile of registration (Part Time/Full Time).  
Application of maximum or minimum registration periods is based on equivalences, weighted according to an individual student's registration history.
- 6.13 Oversight is maintained on the total time span of each student's registration, and this is limited so as to ensure the currency of research.
- 6.14 Projects that require experience, training or extended periods at suitable external locations are facilitated by the HEI. There are regulations governing externally-located research projects and students.
- 6.15 Explicit institutional regulations and procedures apply to contexts where a student wishes to study remotely for duration or a substantial period of their programme. Due regard is given to considerations relating to the provision of supports, supervisor access to primary data and fieldwork, matters relating to research integrity, safety, and welfare, communications, student access to professional development and specific skills development opportunities.

#### Change in institution

- 6.16 Procedures are in place to admit a student who has completed part of a Research Degree Programme in another HEI. In addition to usual considerations for admission (e.g. availability of appropriate supervision etc.), such procedures establish
- + The equivalence of the programme at the original HEI
  - + That the applicant does meet the HEI own minimum entry criteria
  - + That the applicant has been approved for progression, and to what stage of the programme
  - + Whether the applicant leaves the former institution in good standing
  - + Whether permission for the change in affiliation has been sought and granted by the relevant funding agency (where applicable)
  - + Agreement from the original HEI on Intellectual Property associated with the work to date.

## 7 Planning for Success

The recruitment and admission of research students is different in many fundamental ways from that of students to taught programmes. Research students must be dealt with individually, as each will have a particular supervisor (and supervisory panel or committee), a specific research project, individual intermediate progress evaluations and a personal examination process. Work which is done, and information which is shared, before a student starts a research degree can influence success hugely. The rigour of processes applied to assessing applicant suitability, the quality and range of information provided and the objective, informed assessment of availability of the appropriate academic and other supports and resources, all combine to ensure that those registered on Research Degree Programmes can complete successfully and in a timely manner. Delays and problems can be avoided by accurate, clear and complete information, and by fundamental requirements (available supervisor, funding, resources and space) being in place before offers are made.

*Related National Framework for Doctoral Education Principle: The admission of doctoral students takes into account preparedness of the applicant, the availability of qualified, competent and accessible supervision and the resources necessary to conduct the research.*

### Good Practice Statements

#### 7.1 Preparedness of the Applicant

Elements which contribute to the preparedness of the applicant include the quality of information available to prospective applicants (during recruitment), the quality of decision making related to admission of students, and the quality of planning and transparency of arrangements for the context of the specific project.

#### Ensuring potential applicants can be well informed

- 7.1 All appropriate central and academic units of the HEI act to ensure that information on what it means to undertake a research degree programme (whether internally or elsewhere), the challenges of research and the wide range of possible and most likely career paths, is communicated to prospective students.
- 7.2 Appropriate, adequate and up-to-date information is available to help prospective students make informed choices when considering options which relate to the research degree, project topic, supervisors and financial plans.

Procedures are in place to establish and publish this information.

The information available to prospective students emphasises fundamentally important options and aspects of each research route and programme in terms of:

- + The unique nature of research degrees
- + What areas of research are offered (including links to specific academic teams, units)
- + How student-supervisor-project combinations may be formed or developed
- + What research students can expect from the programme, emphasising the demanding learning objectives and specific programme requirements
- + General student responsibilities, for example, on programme costs, typical, and therefore likely time commitment, obligations around group ownership/co-authorship of a project
- + Intellectual property and related areas
- + Institutional supports including those in finding accommodation, travel information and visa requirements etc.
- + Practical information on living as a student in the relevant part of Ireland, (including advice from established students)
- + Clear information on career tracks and realistic likelihood of particular options.

7.3 The HEI and potential supervisors welcome prospective students who wish to visit in advance of a decision, to explore the proposed project and facilities and to talk to appropriate established students. Students who cannot visit are facilitated in all possible ways to gain a similar understanding of the context of their prospective study.

7.4 Procedures are in place to ensure potential applicants are dealt with efficiently (avoiding multiple parallel equivalent conversations) and consistently.

7.5 Documentation that applicant research students can access readily includes:

- + All of the institution's relevant regulations and guidelines, including brief guidelines on recruitment
- + Requirements for registration on a research degree programme and processes for progression, including possible outcomes at each stage
- + Sample research graduates' biographies that include accounts of the commitment needed for success
- + FAQs with complete answers
- + Lists of 'questions' that could be put to potential supervisors in different discipline areas
- + Information on the research and publication records of all relevant academic staff
- + Clear, concise and easily understood descriptions of the HEI fees which apply to research students and other costs they may typically incur in the pursuit of their studies.

7.6 Prospective applicants and registered students have access to clear information on what they have to achieve to graduate, and to optimise their subsequent career success.

7.7 For programmes which involve a third party (industry, sponsor, collaborative delivery) specific information as to how the partnership impacts on the student is provided.

7.8 There is information in place for students where the HEI intends to make a collaborative research award, or implement the research degree programme in collaboration with one or more third parties. Such information is in place prior to the commencement of studies and communicated in advance to the student. (see also statements 7.37-41)

7.9 Fee descriptions include situations where a student starts or withdraws, defers or takes leave of absence at various times in the academic year. They specify whether bench fees apply, what concession may be available for a 'write-up period' and the conditions applying, and fees applicable in the event of a requirement to undertake further work and re-submit a thesis following examination.

7.10 Potential applicants are provided with information on funded research opportunities and associated conditions.

7.11 The institution's policies and procedures for the allocation of HEI funded scholarships are widely available and include clearly defined eligibility and selection criteria as well as information regarding scholarship conditions.

7.12\* Procedures are in place to make research students aware of their responsibilities, for example with respect to commitment, integrity, ethics, attendance, engagement with supervisors and developmental opportunities, reporting on the progress of their research projects and the requirements for attaining the overall standards necessary to graduate.

7.13 Applicant and student expectations are informed by clear descriptions of the roles of those involved in supervising their project or having oversight responsibility.

7.14 The responsibilities, duties and entitlements relevant to a graduate research programme are communicated clearly to each applicant who agrees that he/she understands them fully.

## 7.2 Decision-making related to admission of students

7.15 A senior officer is explicitly responsible for oversight, policies and procedures relating to the admission of research students and for ensuring institutional standards and consistency. This responsibility extends to admission of research students to Research Degree Programmes run in partnership with third parties.

7.16 The HEI has a clear description of admission criteria and processes for entry into each graduate research program.

7.17 Normally, the minimum entry requirement for entering a doctoral-level programme at an Irish HEI is an upper second class honours grade (a 2.1 grade or an overall mark of 60%) in a suitable honours bachelors degree (level 8 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications) or equivalent. Holders of first cycle bachelors degrees, or degree qualifications at European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level 6 may be registered for Irish Masters degrees. Applicants with other qualifications are considered on a case-by-case basis.

7.18 Policies and procedures are consistently applied and only appropriately qualified and prepared applicants are admitted.

7.19 The HEI requires formal admission and the registration of Research Degree Programme students at the outset, before the project is embarked upon.

- 7.20 Admission decisions involve at least two members of staff who have received relevant guidance and training where necessary.
- 7.21 Information on admission requirements includes that on qualification equivalence for applicants who have not got a relevant Irish qualification.
- 7.22\* Procedures ensure expertise is in place to assess qualifications presented from domestic and international students as evidence of meeting admission criteria. This is consistently applied across the HEI.
- 7.23 Minimum standards for language competence are consistently applied across the HEI, which corresponds to that required to successfully engage with the Research Degree Programme, allowing for higher requirements, where approved by the HEI, as being appropriate for specific disciplines.
- 7.24 Language competency is established as part of admission procedures. This evaluation of competency is carried out independent of the discipline, using appropriate internationally accepted credentials or equivalents in the case of applicants for whom the language of study (English) is a secondary language. An equivalent procedure is in place for those pursuing a research degree through Irish or other languages.
- 7.25 Exceptions to applying the minimum language requirements are rare, and subject to a clear approval process which ensures that supports are provided until such time as the student meets the standard and which monitors outcomes.
- 7.26 There are procedures in place to allow for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in admission decisions for Research Degree Programmes. This is applied, in the main, to admission to master's level research programmes, and is exceptional in the case of direct entry to PhD programmes. In exceptional cases, procedures allow for admission with advanced standing in the Research Degree Programme.
- 7.27 RPL for admission is implemented based on clear institutional guidelines and is rigorous in requiring a detailed portfolio which enables evaluation of equivalence with having met the entry requirements.
- 7.28 RPL assessment is undertaken as a separate exercise from evaluating suitability to pursue a research degree, and involves academics who are independent of the applicant and proposed supervisor, and have expertise in evaluating evidence of equivalent learning.
- 7.29 RPL is for admission with advanced standing, addresses equivalence with entry requirements, as well as assessment of relevant work claimed as equivalent to the early stages of the programme. RPL is not applied to more than 50% of the Research Degree Programme.
- 7.30 There is a process to consider readmission of a continuing student who has failed to register for more than 1 year, or who had previously formally withdrawn. Such process assesses the currency of research work previously undertaken and includes an evaluation of the appropriate stage of registration on re-admission.
- 7.31 There are procedures for unsuccessful applicants that supply reasons for decisions and allow for appeals.

- 7.32 Formal procedures are in place so that admission decisions ensure:
- + Good match between an applicant's capabilities and previous education and the anticipated needs of the proposed research project
  - + High quality hosting and training research environment
  - + Adequacy and availability of the required specific resources and facilities and,
  - + Capacity to provide expert supervision.
- 7.33\* Oversight mechanisms ensure that the research projects agreed with students are of high quality, realistic and appropriate with respect to:
- + The level of the degree programme. In cases where the project proposal has already been peer-reviewed (e.g. when funding has been secured for a proposal written by a supervisor), an appropriate level of assessment is undertaken to ensure it aligns with the level of the research award.
  - + The qualifications and capabilities of the research student, the experience and competences of the principal (and other) supervisor(s)
  - + Facilities, resources and training available within the HEI and, if any, in (the) cooperating external organisation(s)
  - + Measures planned to deal with any limitations with respect to facilities, resources and training otherwise available
  - + Compliance with the ethical and safety requirements of the HEI.
- 7.34 A formal mechanism approves the make-up and membership of the student's supervisory panel, as appropriate.
- 7.35\* Records of all supervisor appointments are available to officers making decisions on specific supervisor nominations.
- 7.36 Applicants with special needs are encouraged to disclose those needs in advance to ensure that a research project is suitable to them and that necessary supports are available. Such information is handled in accordance with good practice and without prejudice to decisions on admission.

#### Admission to Research Degree Programmes involving third parties

- 7.37 Policies, regulations, processes and inter-institutional agreements exist to manage cross-institutional provision of research education and training, related quality assurance measures, management of research integrity and IP issues and the awarding of any joint research degrees.
- 7.38\* Where a research degree is pursued in the context of collaboration, partnership or sponsorship:
- + Planning for how this will be operationalised takes place prior to registration
  - + The HEI has access to expert advice on legal and commercial matters relating to national and international partners in other jurisdictions
  - + HEI processes are in place for entering into such partnerships include standard and explicit due diligence activities including those indicated in the Core Statutory QA Guidelines<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#), Section 10.2. QQI 2016.

- + There are clear written agreements underpinning the arrangement, approved at an appropriate level within the HEI
  - + Written agreements are established in advance of any research student commencing their studies and allow for monitoring and review of the effectiveness of the arrangements and procedures in place. This agreement clearly outlines respective responsibilities of partners ensuring continuity of duty of care and oversight as the student moves between locations, indicates which policies and procedures apply in which contexts and includes mechanisms to ensure quality of supervision at all partner locations
  - + The HEI ensures the legality and recognition of a collaborative award and has access to the expert opinion and information this necessitates
  - + The standards, training requirements and norms for research degree programmes are applicable and include formal assurances on students' welfare and wellbeing in all settings in which they will be based
  - + External supervisors, and the research environments in which they work, are in accord with high ethical, continuous professional and safety standards including norms on training requirements. Arrangements are in place for continuous improvement
  - + Where research students pursue their projects on the campus or premises of partner organisations, effective provisions are in place for training, resources, supports and access to norms of the broader intellectual research community e.g. experience as tutors or demonstrators
  - + The HEI ensures arrangements are in place with partners for regular, effective communication, conducive to successful completion of the research project in line with good research practice
  - + There is a mechanism whereby a student can raise concerns with the HEI regarding their experience of implementation of the agreement
  - + Effective provisions are in place that apply in circumstances where funded research students are also employees of a partner organisation. Such procedures are clear and facilitate agreement on boundaries, for example on student/employee status in respect of disciplinary and grievance procedures, performance evaluation, ethics approvals and conflict of interest matters
  - + The specific context of the partner organisation is recognised and due regard given to international models of good practice and toolkits for collaboration<sup>35</sup>.
- 7.39 The supervisory panel appointed includes a principal supervisor at the awarding institution who takes overall responsibility for the student and the project. Supervisors based in third parties are offered training for the role and provided with a clear description of their responsibilities.

<sup>35</sup> An example of which is the Australian Council of Graduate Research publication [Enhancing industry university engagement through graduate research students: a guide for universities](#), Dec 2018.

- 7.40 Where a student is being admitted with the intention of pursuing a joint Research Degree Programme and receiving a joint award, there is an officer of the HEI with designated responsibility to advise on negotiating and drafting of the award agreement. The agreement makes clear
- + The legal basis of each partner to enter into such an agreement
  - + The specific contexts in which each partner institutions' policies and procedures apply
  - + Where responsibility lies for maintaining the student register and retaining records for the purpose of issuing of transcripts.
- An approval mechanism is in place to ensure the legal status of the joint award, and to assess any other barriers inherent in the Research Degree Programme to its recognition in all jurisdictions in which research awards of the respective partner institutions are recognised. This requires expert advice.
- All such procedures are completed before the student is admitted.
- Relevant expertise is applied to the design of the joint award parchment, so as to ensure that all requirements for award recognition are met.
- 7.41 The HEI ensures that any third party arrangements that affect the student and the proposed research are stipulated prior to enrolment and that the student is advised of any changes that will impact on the conduct of the research project or their candidature.

### 7.3 Availability of qualified, competent and accessible supervisors

#### Qualified Supervisors

- 7.42 Admission procedures ensure that supervisors are active researchers who possess relevant scholarly expertise and meet the eligibility criteria for their specific supervisory role.
- 7.43 The HEI provides guidance on the management of supervisor appointment, expected level of experience, supervisory loads, and appropriate supervisory conduct.
- 7.44 When appointing supervisors the HEI considers the expertise of the person, the duration of their appointment, other work tasks and any conflict of interest or privileged relationships.
- 7.45 Special attention is taken in the appointment of a supervisor for a staff member of the HEI, such that the appropriate degree of independence is ensured between individuals' peer and line management relationships, and that of supervisor/student. Consideration is given to registration elsewhere in cases where this cannot be ensured.
- 7.46 The HEI provides necessary and appropriate professional development and performance review for supervisors<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Supports and professional development for supervisors are addressed under the section on 'Research Environment' of this Framework of Good Practice.

**Accessible Supervision**

- 7.47\* Supervision is appropriately attributed and recognised as a specialised, workload-bearing academic function that has educational and research dimensions. Agreed, context- and discipline-appropriate, flexible standards and criteria as to the relative weights of workload associated with various supervisory roles are in place.
- 7.48 Workloads associated with the supervision of research students are determined and interpreted in the context of overall workloads for academic staff.
- 7.49 In ensuring accessibility of supervision, evaluation by the HEI of the total supervisory loads of academic staff take into account:
- + Experience as a supervisor
  - + Composition of the research group (number and stages of existing research students, numbers of post-doctoral researchers and other support staff)
  - + Support provided by principal or secondary supervisors with whom they are co-supervising
  - + Maximum FTE student-to-supervisor ratios agreed for specific disciplines and circumstances.
- 7.50 Access to supervision is in place for the majority of the academic year, and there are no extended periods during which supervision is not available to the student.
- 7.51 There are discipline sensitive guidelines governing norms in terms of frequency of contact with students by supervisors, and supervisors and students in each general discipline area are aware of ranges of frequency and durations of contact that are regarded as reasonable.

**Procedures to identify and remedy issues related to supervision**

- 7.52 There are institutional guidelines for conflict resolution in general.
- 7.53 There is a clearly understood procedure whereby, at any time, a student may raise issues related to their research programme or related services, and to make informal complaints, including on matters such as insufficient contact with a supervisor and long delays before tasks to be undertaken by a supervisor are completed.
- 7.54\* Supports are in place to allow research students to avail of confidential, independent and objective advice in respect of these complaints and appeals procedures. Such supports may be via a dedicated service, but will involve trained and suitably experienced individuals and anticipate a range of possibilities for access to such supports.
- 7.55 There are also complaints and appeals procedures linked to research degree programmes that can be used by supervisors.
- 7.56 Fair, safe, clear and robust formal grievance and appeals procedures are in place, and applied consistently, to situations where an informal approach has not been successful in resolving matter, or the issue is of sufficiently serious nature to require a formal approach.

- 7.57 Procedures are in place to make students and academics aware of the definitions relevant to complaints and appeals, and the difference between informal and formal approaches and the relevant processes; and between complaints (which relate to specific matters, including conduct), from appeals (which concern procedures leading to specific outcomes or decisions).
- 7.58\* Procedures are in place to facilitate research students or supervisors to make allegations of academic dishonesty, discrimination and harassment.
- 7.59 Serious complaints by research students or supervisors of misconduct concerning harassment, bullying or discrimination are dealt with through separate relevant institutional procedures (either staff or student).
- 7.60\* Procedures are in place to implement follow-up actions required where complaints are upheld.
- 7.61 A specifically constituted panel, charged with finding a solution is put in place for serious and intractable issues.
- 7.62\* Procedures are in place to capture relevant information related to formal student complaints. Complaints and appeals are logged and reported for quality improvement purposes and trends are addressed. Such procedures preserve student anonymity and confidentiality and are in line with data protection legislation and HR policies.

**7.4 Clarity regarding the student's role**

- 7.63 The institution states explicitly that every student is responsible for all aspects of his/her education that are within his/her full control, and has a formal list of explicit responsibilities of research students which may include:
- + Working sufficiently and effectively on the research project and keeping — in so far as it is feasible — to agreed deadlines
  - + Keeping accurate and adequate records on all relevant aspects of the project, and preparing reports on progress as required and on time
  - + Participating and contributing to seminar series, journal clubs etc.
  - + Being an active contributing member to a larger research group, if appropriate
  - + Communicating frankly on successes and difficulties with his/her supervisor and supervisory panel
  - + Becoming familiar with the institution's regulations and guidelines on research degrees and any relevant college/faculty guidelines
  - + Acquiring necessary specialist and generic skills as agreed with the supervisor and supervisory panel, and as required for the project and for preparation of the thesis
  - + Becoming familiar with norms and guidelines on professionalism, ethics, plagiarism and the correct usage of quotations, and the importance of the explicit acknowledgment of others' work
  - + Following relevant codes of behaviour and practice.

### 7.5 Availability of the resources necessary to conduct the research

These resources may be physical (buildings, equipment, space, infrastructure such as IT networks) or intellectual/academic (IP, published research).

- 7.64 All research students have access to minimum academic resources and physical facilities. These include library access, book borrowing and inter-library loans facilities and, depending on the discipline, may include access to a dedicated writing space, access to computer hardware and the internet.
- 7.65 Adequate funding and support are in place for an inter-library loans service, other library resources and maintenance of basic physical and IT infrastructure.
- 7.66 Procedures ensure that specific project requirements are identified at an early stage.
- 7.67 Procedures for admission evaluate the availability of the specific requirements for the academic work. This includes evaluation of the availability of relevant standard books and journals and collections.  
It also includes evaluation of access to required intellectual property, premises, IT resources, technical and administration support, materials, consumables and both specific and basic equipment and accommodation conducive to research (including write-up of thesis).
- 7.68 Research students are not admitted unless they have access to the necessary resources and property (consistent with statement 7.33).
- 7.69 Each school/department ensures that local facilities are appropriate to a high quality research education. Essential pieces of equipment are in place and tested before students who depend on them are admitted. If, due to unforeseeable circumstances, essential equipment is not in place, a student is given the option of a change of project.
- 7.70\* If aspects of the Research Degree Programme are supported or provided at more than one location, each location independently meets the location-specific resource requirements, and procedures are in place for use of external off-site resources in the context of partner collaborations.
- 7.71 Times and rates of access to facilities are conducive to timely completion.
- 7.72 The needs of part-time students and students with disability are taken into account in facilitating access to resources.

#### Student financial support

- 7.73 The objective of the institution is that studentships funded internally (taking into account the associated duties) are at least at levels equivalent to minimum nationally-funded grants in the discipline(s).
- 7.74 Research scholarships cover the full typical registration period for the intended research award (e.g. four years for a full time doctoral programme).

## 8 Supporting Progress and Achievement

Once admitted to a research degree programme, student success is supported and academic standards upheld where there is appropriate supervision, effective monitoring of progress and addressing of issues, and assessment in line with international criteria. Section 3, *Research Environment* addresses the institutional culture of supervision, including the supports and professional development opportunities provided to supervisors. Section 7, *Planning for Success* includes issues relating to the appointment of qualified competent and accessible supervisors and mechanism for issues relating to supervision to be raised. The focus, in terms of supervision in this section therefore is on supervisory structures and responsibilities.

Careful and formal monitoring of progress is essential to ensure high standards, good completion rates and times and to also maintain high examination success rates. Formal meetings of students with their supervisors and formal reviews are key elements in motivating progress, identifying problems early and avoiding indecision. Such processes help to promote motivation and focus, and when well conducted, minimise unnecessary stress. Most importantly, they need not undermine the frequent meetings and discussions that underlie the essential trust and bond with the supervisor(s) that is characteristic of good research education. In practice, for research students to fail at the final examination and not graduate is relatively rare. Students sometimes leave the programme without submitting for examination, or standards are sometimes maintained by extending the time allowed for completion. Effective monitoring of and support of progress should avoid both situations.

*Related National Framework for Doctoral Education Principle: Doctoral education is supported by established structures with: - Supervision by a principal supervisor(s), normally with a supporting panel approved by the institution; - Formal monitoring of progress to completion against published criteria, supported by institutional arrangements; - Clearly defined examination processes, involving external examiners, assessment criteria and declared outcomes which allow for the thesis to be presented in different formats.*

### Good Practice Statements

#### 8.1 Supervision

- 8.1\* The supervision of each research student is the collective responsibility of the supervisor(s), the department/school/other appropriate research unit and the HEI.
- 8.2\* Procedures in place for the supervision of research degree students ensure that students receive effective supervision of their research.

- 8.3\* The HEI clearly defines the composition of a supervisory team.
- 8.4 The HEI clearly defines the role and formal responsibilities of each member of a supervisory team.
- 8.5 The clearly defined criteria on the eligibility of persons having specific roles in a supervisory team include required qualification(s), level of research activity, experience and training.
- 8.6 Mechanisms are in place to ensure supervisors are making themselves aware of their own role, responsibilities and rights with respect to the students they work with, of the responsibilities and entitlements of their students, and of the regulations governing the operation of research degree programmes and examinations.
- 8.7\* All research students have a principal supervisor who is a member of academic staff in the HEI<sup>37</sup> and who takes full responsibility for the overall management of the student's progress and an appropriate level of responsibility for supervision of the project.
- 8.8 In situations where joint ownership of the principal supervisor role is justified, both principal supervisors have overall responsibility, and procedures ensure that how this is managed is made clear to all involved.
- 8.9 Criteria and protocols for arrangements relating to secondary/co-supervisors are defined. Such supervisors contribute in a substantial way (e.g. with specialist expertise on major aspects of a project, as an active supervisor external to the HEI or one who lacks the required experience to be a principal supervisor) but is not given full responsibility for the overall management of the student or project progress.
- 8.10 All of those qualified individuals who provide very substantial input into the supervision process are recognised as supervisors appropriate to their level of input and responsibility (principal or secondary/co-supervisor). Supervisory teams do not exceed a number which is consistent with coherent, efficient and effective supervision.
- 8.11 Only those actively providing supervision to the student are designated as supervisors, e.g. a mentor to a supervisor or an academic providing access to equipment, materials or datasets, are not the student's supervisors, unless also actively engaged directly in supervising the student.
- 8.12 Supervision of each student is supported by a qualified panel or committee, the criteria for which are approved at the level of the HEI<sup>38</sup>. The panel monitors the student's progress and makes the important decisions concerning progression etc. The panel includes at least one academic member who is not a supervisor, ensuring at least two academic staff members support decision-making over the duration of each candidature. There is continuity in panel membership.
- 8.13 Each student has an independent advisor (who may be a member of his/her supervisory panel other than the principal supervisor) to whom he/she can go to discuss issues that arise.

<sup>37</sup> In exceptional cases, a principal supervisor may be external to the organisation, but is formally recognised by the HEI as being suitable, and enters into a formal agreement relating to the responsibilities of supervision, accountability to the student and the HEI and oversight mechanisms.

<sup>38</sup> Two models are used: a. A committee (e.g. at the level of a school/department/group) consisting of experienced and qualified academic staff who act along with the supervisors as the panel for each student assigned to it or b. The formal appointment for each student of an independent advisor/mentor who participates with supervisors in formal decision-making with respect to the student's progress. In principle in this case, every student may have a different supervisory panel.

- 8.14 There are defined criteria on the eligibility of persons to act as advisors to research students.
- 8.15 There is a formal procedure, available to students and to supervisors, which facilitates changes in supervision.
- 8.16 Procedures allow for continuity of adequate supervision in cases such as those related to supervisors being removed from the role, being absent for significant periods, or leaving the HEI employment.
- 8.17 Supervisors provide:
- + Guidance to research students in the design, conduct and timely completion of the research project,
  - + Support in publication and dissemination of research findings, and
  - + Advice on the acquisition of a range of research and other skills as appropriate to the discipline and the background of the student.
- 8.18 Supervisor(s) actively support students in taking ownership of their projects, including in cases where projects are pre-defined.
- 8.19 Supervisors ensure that individual projects are managed professionally, with matters concerning safety, ethical approval and intellectual property being taken into account in advance of commencement and throughout the duration of the project.
- 8.20\* Procedures are in place to facilitate supervisors and supporting panels/committees to:
- + Identify and source necessary extra support for students where required
  - + Identify and address inappropriate or insufficient student work practice, style of research or deficiencies in writing which may require redress or a formal warning
  - + Implement alternative courses of action which may be necessary for students, for example, to exit the programme, or transfer to another programme
  - + Raise any issues relating to the supervision of students, be they based on or off the campus

#### Support for and monitoring of timely progress toward completion

- 8.21 Support for graduate research students focuses on facilitating a successful completion within a reasonable timeframe.
- 8.22 Systematic protocols for the monitoring of student development and progress of the research are in place.
- 8.23 The timing and the number of reviews and formal meetings over the whole of each student project is managed to avoid the process becoming over-burdensome or a meaningless exercise. However, a sufficiency of formal processes is in place to ensure timely action.
- 8.24 Procedures for monitoring the student's progress respect the student's principal responsibility for the project and its success, and also respect the roles of the supervisors.
- 8.25 The HEI alerts research students and their supervisors to the requirements of formal progress monitoring and review processes, including knowledge of their respective responsibilities and with adequate notice being given to students and supervisors etc. at all stages.

- 8.26 Procedures for monitoring progress facilitate HEI identification of problems and support constructive corrective actions in relation to those issues identified.
- 8.27 Requirements for monitoring progress include informal and formal meetings.
- 8.28 Work-plans are drafted by students as soon as is practical after initial registration and revised with input from the supervisors.
- 8.29 At the first formal meeting of students and supervisors:
- + A schedule of 'formal' meetings is agreed for at least the first year. If relevant, the process leading to definition of the student's research project is discussed
  - + Procedures for decision-making reviews and their associated criteria are clarified.
- 8.30 As the student moves into a second and subsequent years, the future schedule of reviews and formal meetings is confirmed or revised to meet ongoing circumstances, but is always in compliance with guidelines.
- 8.31 Institutional and local regulations/guidelines specify:
- + Acceptable ranges of frequencies for informal meetings between students and supervisors
  - + Periodic formal meetings of students with their supervisors and their normal frequency
  - + Formal reviews related to progression and their normal times
  - + That acquisition of generic as well as subject-specific skills is monitored and assessed as part of progress review
  - + A mechanism that allows earlier than specified formal meetings or reviews at the request of the supervisor(s) or the student
  - + That all formal monitoring processes are conducted in a manner that provides an opportunity for students (and supervisors) to report on and discuss their work and to receive feedback and encouragement.
- 8.32 Research students, supervisors and other relevant staff are made aware of the need to maintain appropriate records of the outcomes of review meetings and related activities. HEI guidelines make explicit reference to the recording of minutes of formal meetings. Records typically address recent progress, important decisions made and an updated work plan for the next period. Students' professional development and overall commitments are also considered
- 8.33 It is understood that agreed work plans and written reports by the student and by the supervisor(s) form part of review processes to:
- + Reduce ambiguity when subsequent progress is being assessed
  - + Help ensure student motivation and focus
  - + Give students and supervisors confidence that a due process is being followed
  - + Provide protection to supervisors and to students should difficulties arise.
- 8.34 Formal and informal processes for monitoring progress are supplemented by regular presentations by all research students on their research and interim findings in a range of different settings, such as to research groups and to school/centre/departmental colloquia.

- 8.35 Each relevant academic unit reports annually on its research degree programmes to the appropriate body in the HEI. These reports include information and data on performance, progression and completion and are used in regular assessments of the effectiveness of research degree programmes.
- 8.36 There are clear definitions that differentiate between full-time and part-time students and there is a specific timetable with respect to expected completion time etc. for each part-time student.
- 8.37 Allowance is made for formally-recognised periods of absence such as prolonged illness compassionate leave and other defined circumstances in judging progress and calculating completion time.

## 8.2 Formal Monitoring of Progress

- 8.38\* Procedures set out that final decisions related to student progression are made by appropriate bodies in the HEI in accord with the regulations of the HEI.
- 8.39 The HEI sets out clear criteria against which formal progress review is undertaken.
- 8.40\* There are adequate opportunities for all relevant students to become aware of the procedures relating to progression.
- 8.41\* There are robust procedures and clear criteria related to student progression or transfer to another register. These include procedures for systematic formal assessment of progress which involve supervisory teams; ensure objectivity and/or competence through the involvement of independent experts; identify and address issues that may require additional attention, resources or other support and allow for extra assessment if requested by supervisors or students.
- 8.42 Potential outcomes of review for progression are each supported by written criteria and may include:
- + Progression to the next scheduled formal review
  - + A caution to student and/or supervisor(s), with advice on adjustments to be made and another review after a specified time e.g. in three months
  - + Continued registration on the Research Degree Programme
  - + Transfer to a different Research Degree Programme (i.e. to or from a master's)
  - + A change in supervision
  - + Write up and submission for a specific research degree.
- 8.43\* Progression procedures deal with matters that impact on the duration of student projects, including:
- + Arrangements for maternity, paternity and adoptive and parental leave
  - + Students transferring from part-time to full-time study or vice versa
  - + Arrangements for suspension of study
  - + Procedures (where appropriate to the degree type) for transfer between and exit from research degree programmes.
- 8.44 Where progress is judged to be unsatisfactory, there is a transparent process identified for remedial action by the student and/or supervisor(s) and/or conditions by which candidature discontinuation may occur.

- 8.45 Progression procedures (with locally or institutionally-defined time limits) and relevant supports for students and supervisors ensure that prolonged research degree projects are brought to timely, and if possible, successful conclusions.
- 8.46 There are formal processes to manage the progression of students to a higher research degree register, which involve independent expert review and defined criteria.
- 8.47 Since the examination of a research student for progression or transfer to another register may be required at most times throughout the academic year, the appropriate procedures are flexible in this respect.
- 8.48 When the outcome of a review is a recommendation that a student not continue toward their intended degree, the process includes a second stage which is independent of the supervisors, but informed by review records, before a final decision is made.
- 8.49\* Procedures are in place to allow significant decisions, including those on progression and transfer to be reviewed or appealed. This procedure involves appropriate objective expertise and allows for decisions to change arrangements with respect to supervision.
- 8.50\* All progression and transfer decisions are recorded and relevant documents retained.
- 8.51 Every non-completing student is asked for feedback and his/her case is examined with a view to identifying measures that may ensure higher rates of and shorter times to completion.

#### Preparing to submit a thesis

- 8.52 Students and supervisors are aware that the efficient writing of a research thesis requires advance preparation, guidance and models, early feedback, a wide range of specific skills, attention to detail, and a determination to complete the task.
- 8.53 Timely training and supports are available to aid students in efficient thesis writing. These may include:
- + Additional or refresher training on work planning, appropriate writing styles, information technologies and document processing
  - + Supplementary writing-up facilities
- 8.54 All supervisors recognise that timely feedback on drafts of a thesis is a basic duty.
- 8.55 Procedures for advice on readiness to submit, or permission to submit are clear.
- 8.56 Procedures ensure that advice as to readiness to submit a thesis provided by supervisor(s), either positive or negative, does not prejudice the examination process.
- 8.57 Readiness to submit a thesis is linked to the requirements for the degree, and not those of a specific funded project. This is clearly stated to supervisors and students to guard against inappropriately delayed guidance to submit.
- 8.58 There are clear processes in place to address incidences where a student wishes to submit a thesis for examination against the advice of supervisors. Information shared with examiners as to this circumstance is restricted, so as to not prejudice the examination process.
- 8.59 Students are strongly advised not to submit against the advice of their supervisor. In cases where they do, the supervisor's advice to the student is formally recorded.

### 8.3 Examination Processes

#### Assessment Procedures and Criteria

- 8.60 Final assessment procedures are clear and operated rigorously, fairly and consistently.
- 8.61 Assessment procedures are communicated clearly to students, supervisors and examiners.
- 8.62 The HEI defines clear criteria to assess research degrees.
- 8.63 The HEI assessment criteria and processes for determining the outcome of the examination are readily available to students, supervisors, examiners and others.
- 8.64\* Criteria for the assessment of research degrees are consistent with the NFQ award type descriptors for research degrees – award type descriptor 'M' for the Master's degree; and award type descriptor 'O' for Doctoral Degrees (Appendix 1), and take into account the wide variety of disciplines in which the research degrees are awarded.
- 8.65\* Procedures for assessment for research degrees include clarification of research output, most often a thesis (here meaning a coherent body of detailed written work on a specific topic particular to the student). However it may also be a written submission (critical commentary) with a selection of published papers<sup>39</sup>, performance practice or research artefact (such as computer programmes, portfolio, multimedia product). Format of research output relates to the candidate's subject area, rather than the form of degree programme.
- 8.66\* Procedures are clear on the variety of formats for capturing research contribution available to students, consistent with international norms in the disciplines in which programmes are offered. Guidelines detailing particular matters to consider when preparing or examining each format are provided. Specific contexts are identified in which formats other than a monograph may be appropriate. All permitted formats facilitate assessment against an equivalent standard. Clear guidelines are available to students, supervisors, examiners and members of an examination board on each format, including considerations to be taken into account in choosing it, at what stage a student can indicate the intended format, who can approve the format, standards, length and presentation and conventions and protocols for student vetting of their draft thesis using appropriate software.
- 8.67 Assessment of a professional doctorate may include incremental hurdles as part of progress toward independent research project work, but assessment (appropriate to doctoral level) of the research output, is integral to assessment for the award.
- 8.68 Assessment considers the depth and breadth of understanding of the relevant field(s) of study displayed by the student, and the expertise gained with respect to basic and advanced methodologies and techniques. A doctoral degree is normally awarded on the basis that a body of work carried out by the student makes a substantial contribution to knowledge or is suitable for publication in whole or in part.

<sup>39</sup> Defined in the [UK's QAA Characteristics Statement, Doctoral Degrees](#) (p 7), which is part of their Quality Code for Higher Education as "A series of peer reviewed academic papers, books, cited works or other materials that have been placed in the public domain as articles that have been published, accepted for publication, exhibited or performed accompanied by a substantial commentary linking the published work, outlining its coherence and significance".

- 8.69 Procedures for the assessment of research degrees ensure that the student's research practice adhered to the principles of research integrity as stipulated in the National policy statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. Issues may relate to authorship, plagiarism and research ethics, data storage and retention, or statutory obligations such as those relating to GDPR and the Freedom of Information Act.
- 8.70 Thesis guidelines recognise disciplinary differences in norms and requirements, with limitations on thesis length allowing ample scope for discursive subjects.
- 8.71 The preparation of electronic copies/digital format versions of the dissertation that meet defined standards is required.
- 8.72 Institutional guidelines on thesis preparation cover issues such as plagiarism and the correct usage of quotations, and make clear the importance of the explicit acknowledgment, at all relevant places in the thesis, of the contributions of others to the work.
- 8.73 There are policies in place which govern the use of copy editors in the preparation of the thesis which align with the requirement that the thesis is the student's own work.
- 8.74\* Procedures are in place which require that theses include a statement of originality incorporating an acknowledgement of others' contributions, editorial assistance, and copyright provisions and approvals.
- 8.75 Processes for submitting the research output are clearly outlined.
- 8.76 There are guidelines that indicate preferred deadline dates for thesis submission and give estimates of the normal time allowances for examination, implementation of required (minor or major) corrections and the processing of the reports of the examiners, leading (if there are no excessive delays) to graduation at a particular time.

### Examination

- 8.77 Assessment procedures are flexible to allow for the examination of a research student for award at most times throughout the academic year.
- 8.78 A designated officer of the HEI is empowered to make decisions regarding adaptation of processes in truly extraordinary circumstances which impact on the normal execution of an examination. Procedures ensure that such cases are escalated to this officer for decision.
- 8.79 Specific institutional approval is required for a departure from usual examination processes which is necessitated by the requirements for an integrated examination process in the context of a joint award. Such adapted processes retain the integrity of the principles of assessment, including involvement by experts external to the partner institutions, a layer of decision-making independent of the supervisors, and an opportunity for the student to revise the thesis in light of examiner comments.
- 8.80 Safeguards exist to avoid substantial administrative delays (e.g. more than two months) between submission of a thesis for examination and the oral examination. A maximum period for the fixing of the oral examination date is specified, beyond which action is taken to ensure quick completion of the examination, including activation of a fast procedure for appointment of (an) alternative examiner(s).

- 8.81 Confidentiality of the examination process is maintained and the candidate and supervisor do not communicate with examiners during the examination process, except during a viva voce.

### Examiners

- 8.82\* Procedures relating to assessment/examination boards for research degrees indicate who comprises the assessment board (external and internal (if any) examiners; independent chair; and others) and the circumstances where additional members may be required (e.g. circumstances that require the appointment of a second external examiner or other additional examiners).
- 8.83\* Procedures indicate the role and responsibilities of each of the examination board members in the context of all elements of the examination including circumstances where the opinions of external examiners are given particular weight in final assessment decisions and recommendations.
- 8.84\* The HEI has clear and transparent procedures indicating the arrangements and conditions for formal nomination and appointment of examiners and other board members including:
- + Qualifications required (e.g. normally qualified to at least the equivalent NQF level of the award sought by the research student); experience and type of research activity required (standard, degree of relevance and recency)
  - + Those excluded from involvement in the assessment; defining what is considered to represent a conflict of interest or raise concerns of a perceived conflict, restrictions on repeat appointments or clusters of appointments from specific schools, departments, research units; what constitutes appropriate independence from the student, project and/or institution
  - + The criterion for being considered 'external' or 'internal' (with external generally understood and accepted as independent and external to the HEI)
  - + What qualifications and experience are required for those members of the board that are not involved in the examination of the student (e.g. independent chair).
- 8.85\* Arrangements include a robust mechanism for
- + ensuring appointments of examiners and other board members are in line with the stated conditions and requirements and
  - + review the effectiveness of the procedures for appointments and outcomes required.
- 8.86 An independent Chair is appointed to the examination board, who is not an examiner, and who manages the examination process.
- 8.87 Assessment includes input from at least one external examiner who is an active researcher, publishing in the field of study relevant to the student's project.
- 8.88 Internal examiners are required to have at least broad relevant expertise in the discipline in question, be sufficiently senior with adequate experience of relevant examining and act to maintain consistently high internal standards.
- 8.89 Procedures ensure that collectively, the examination board has substantial experience of RD examinations, and sufficient expertise of the relevant fields for inter-disciplinary projects.

- 8.90 A mix of genders is represented across the examiners and Chair.
- 8.91 Where the candidate is a member of staff of the HEI, or the research is multi-disciplinary or local expertise is limited, procedures ensure that an extra external examiner is added to ensure a fully competent examination board is provided.
- 8.92\* Records of all examiner appointments are available to officers making decisions on examiner nominations or confirmations, and are consulted when new appointments are being considered in order to avoid overly frequent appointments within a broad academic/discipline area of an individual or of examiners from one specific institution.
- 8.93\* Candidates are informed of possible examination board members in advance of their appointment and afforded an opportunity to raise concerns known to them regarding a proposed nominee.
- 8.94 External Examiners, particularly those based in countries with very different traditions (and approach to oral examination in particular) are fully briefed about the regulations under which the candidate is being examined, the assessment process as a whole and the role they are expected to play.
- 8.95 Training is made available to novice internal examiners which addresses published research on international trends and issues regarding assessment of research degrees, how standards are established and the policies and procedures of the HEI.

### Oral Examination

- 8.96 Assessment for doctoral degrees always includes an oral examination (viva voce). Other circumstances in which a viva voce is required, available on request, or not facilitated are clearly outlined.
- 8.97\* Procedures are clear with regard to the impact on the overall result of the thesis evaluation and the performance of the candidate at the viva voce where applicable. Descriptors of assessment make clear the purpose of the oral examination within the totality of the examination.
- 8.98 Procedures make clear the implication of a student withdrawing from the examination process prior to an oral examination being held.
- 8.99\* Clear procedures are in place for the conduct of oral examinations which outline:
- + Who is responsible for arranging and communicating the date and location of the exam
  - + What mode of engagement is permitted
  - + Expected duration, typically normal minimum (e.g. one to two hours) and maximum lengths (e.g. four hours)
  - + Acceptable locations
  - + Who may be present, and who (if anybody aside from the student and examiners and independent chairperson) may contribute, and under what circumstances (see also statements 8.106 and 8.107)
  - + The circumstances, if any, in which the examination may be conducted with an examiner at a location remote to the student, and the conditions relating to how this is done, including a requirement that the student, chairperson and other examiner are together in person
  - + How feedback is delivered to the candidate at the end of the examination.

- 8.100 These procedures are made available to all concerned with the examination.
- 8.101 The examination takes place in a good environment, in a suitable location and with all standard facilities readily available. Reasonable accommodation is made available for students with disabilities.
- 8.102 Oral examinations are organised to ensure that each runs smoothly and all reasonable precautions are taken against incidents that might reasonably be expected to occur.
- 8.103 Candidates and examiners are given good notice of the (confirmed) date and time of oral examinations. There is a procedure that ensures that the student is kept informed of arrangements and, as soon as possible, of any unavoidable changes.
- 8.104 Where at all possible, all examiners are physically present for the oral examination. Use of videoconference facilities for extraordinary circumstances where an examiner cannot be present, is governed by procedures which assure a high quality of examination is facilitated.
- 8.105 A preliminary short report on the dissertation is prepared independently by each examiner and exchanged before the oral examination. These serve to facilitate the operation of the examination and normally do not form part of the official record of the examination.
- 8.106 If local regulations permit the principal supervisor to attend the oral examination, he/she contributes to the process only on request from the chair or with his/her permission. In all such cases, the candidate is consulted as to the presence of the supervisor and may choose to be examined in the supervisor's absence. If absent from the examination room, the principal supervisor is always available at short notice for consultation by the examiners.
- 8.107 If local regulations permit an observer to attend the oral examination, for the purposes of staff development for example, there is a clear description of the circumstances in which this is allowed, and they play no part in the examination process.

### Assessment outcomes and revisions

- 8.108\* All potential outcomes to research degree assessment and examinations are clearly worded and communicated in advance to students, supervisors and examiners. Outcomes provide sufficient options to examiners and support the maintenance of standards, and may include:
- + That the degree be awarded
  - + That the degree be awarded subject to clearly specified textual amendments
  - + That the degree be awarded subject to clearly specified revisions to content
  - + That no degree be awarded but that the candidate be allowed to re-submit for examination, normally within one year
  - + That the thesis be considered for the award of a different research degree, and re-submitted or re-formatted for this purpose
  - + That no degree be awarded.
- 8.109\* Outcomes which require a full re-examination are made very distinct from those which require specific revisions to a thesis (but no re-examination) and the process and timelines for re-examinations are clearly defined.

- 8.110 There is an option to award a master's level research degree if that is more appropriate to a doctoral candidate's achievement, provided that such an award is made for reaching positively defined learning outcomes, on the basis of a thesis amended to reflect the new award.
- 8.111\* Examiners provide written reports to the HEI on whether or not the thesis meets the award criteria, and what outcome they recommend. The HEI defines the minimum basic characteristics for such reports, which are considered by the relevant HEI examinations board.
- 8.112\* The HEI has processes to deal with cases of examiner disagreement.
- 8.113\* Final decisions related to the outcomes of research degree assessments, and where appropriate decisions that a student may progress to graduation, are made by appropriate bodies in the HEI in accord with the regulations of the HEI.
- 8.114\* The HEI has a defined appeal mechanism that is available to any research degree candidate who wishes to appeal the decision of his/her assessment board. The description of this mechanism is clear, comprehensive and is readily and openly available to students and staff.
- 8.115\* Assessment boards communicate clear and succinct rationales to candidates for the outcome of their examination and, in cases where revisions are stipulated, candidates are given specific details as to what is required of them. No further issues or revisions are introduced subsequently by the examiners in this instance.
- 8.116\* The process and specific maximum timeframes to complete and verify completion of required corrections are indicated in cases where amendments, revisions or resubmission of either a revised, or re-purposed thesis are the recommendation.
- 8.117 Candidates are advised as to the level of effort typically required subsequent to the examination in order that a thesis is finally approved, and take responsibility for completing the work required.
- 8.118 The principal supervisor supports the student in implementation of corrections, revisions or amendments to the dissertation that were prescribed by the examiners.
- 8.119\* Arrangements are in place to deal with situations where research degree students do not carry out satisfactorily, or within a reasonable time, specified changes/resubmission of a thesis; the consequences for students of such circumstances are stated and made known in advance.
- 8.120 In cases where the conclusions arising from an examination associated with a re-submitted dissertation are not entirely satisfactory, the examiners are aware of which examination outcomes are still available to them.

**Subsequent to approval of a research award:**

- 8.121 The format, attributes and number of copies (and/or electronic copy) of the final dissertation to be lodged to the HEI library are specified.
- 8.122\* Procedures are in place for access to, disclosure, dissemination and archiving of the thesis, subsequent to award. Normally, open access to the final thesis is provided by the HEI. There may be reasons including public interest, copyright, commercial-in-confidence, intellectual property or ethical sensitivities that require an embargo for a designated period of time.
- 8.123\* Matters regarding the certification<sup>40</sup> of qualifications and criteria for the withdrawal of an award, including the standing of the award documentation and other matters relating to research outputs, are in place.

<sup>40</sup> QA Guidelines for Certification are set out in the [Sector Specific Statutory QA Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies](#) (July 2016 section 6.1) and [Sector Specific Statutory QA Guidelines for Institutes of Technology](#) (July 2016, section 6.1).

# 9 Quality Assurance Systems

This section considers the effectiveness of organisational structures and practices supporting quality assurance of research degree programmes.

*Related National Framework for Doctoral Education Principle: A robust quality assurance system underpins all doctoral education.*

## Good Practice Statements

### 9.1 Institutional Priority and QA Procedures

- 9.1 The HEI has guidelines governing the operation and expectations regarding quality assurance, of research degree programmes, assessment, and examinations.
- 9.2 The monitoring and improvement of the quality of research provision is recognised by the HEI as a priority. A core priority of the monitoring procedures in place involves monitoring across the HEI as a whole (cross-institutional monitoring).
- 9.3 The quality assurance system for research degree programmes in the HEI is coherent, integrated into the wider internal QA system, with an overall institutional structure and approach to the quality assurance of research degrees. The system is an integral part of the institutional research culture.
- 9.4 Oversight involves a specified senior officer (such as a head/dean of graduate studies) and a range of administrative structures (e.g. graduate research school, postgraduate studies office or registry).
- 9.5 The senior officer
  - + Oversees all relevant institutional and local policies, regulations and quality assessment procedures
  - + Monitors that they are applied consistently and effectively across the HEI
  - + Ensures that any policy, regulation or procedure that is ineffective in achieving or maintaining good practice is identified, changed or replaced as soon as is practicable.



- 9.6\* Procedures are in place to oversee all aspects of the provision of research degree programmes and related services which:
- + Are clearly described in comprehensive and integrated documentation, which is publicly and easily accessible
  - + Involve representatives of those most closely involved, including research supervisors and research students and other research active staff intrinsic to the research environment and community
  - + Take cognisance of evolving requirements related to ethics, research integrity, scientific reproducibility, commercial and legal sensitivities and matters such as intellectual property that impact on research projects following their conclusion
  - + Include transparent robust and objective procedures to respond to accusations of research misconduct where they arise
  - + Apply across the HEI, adding to the consistency of quality of research degrees while respecting the integrity of disciplines
  - + Take cognisance of any potential conflicting requirements between those of external stakeholders and funding bodies and internal HEI procedures
  - + Have regard to the sustainability of research degree programmes within fields of learning
  - + Provide for opportunities for research students and graduates to give feedback on their experience (including through the National survey<sup>41</sup>) and evaluate the effectiveness of the supporting procedures
  - + Are effective but also efficient and avoid overly-intensive management (potentially of small numbers of students), or using staff-intensive procedures at overly senior levels.
- 9.7\* The quality assurance procedures for research degree programmes:
- + Enable the achievement of those elements of the mission and objectives of the HEI related to research degree programmes including academic and research integrity, and acceptable academic standards and effective processes
  - + Consider risks that arise in the context of research provision. Procedures are developed to mitigate the range of risks identified and risks that may arise in the context of research provision. Such risks may be varied and include fraud, malpractice and plagiarism; difficulties with funding of projects; issues with inadequate supervision; a disconnect with research partners or a breakdown of working relationships; complications with employment-related research projects; student and staff wellbeing
  - + Give due consideration to all feedback and self-monitoring processes, relevant data and statistics, and the findings of internally and externally initiated evaluations for research degree programmes and related services.
- 9.8 QA procedures for governance include provision for circumstances where the HEI chooses to act in cooperation with one or more other competent research bodies, to ensure adequate governance, comprehensive up-to-date policies and procedures, objective and informed decision-making, and necessary services and supports for administrators, supervisors and research students.

<sup>41</sup> ISSE for Postgraduate Research Students, first piloted in 2018. <http://studentsurvey.ie/>

## 9.2 Review and Monitoring

- 9.9\* The ownership of quality monitoring and review of research degree programmes is identified, at both HEI management level and discipline level.
- 9.10 The outcomes of institutional monitoring and review are considered at the level of institutional governance. Decisions on appropriate responses and actions are timely and are followed up.
- 9.11\* Regular procedures are in place across the HEI for:
- + Monitoring the consistency of eligibility requirements applied across the HEI including procedures for the recognition of accredited and non-accredited prior learning
  - + Systematic monitoring of HEI level trends in the progress of research students, including completion rates and times to progress through key stages of the research degree
  - + The recording and periodic analysis of all supervisor and examiner appointments, including the frequency of appointment
  - + Monitoring the effectiveness of supervisors with the objective of identifying and addressing ongoing recurring issues
  - + Ensuring that arrangements for research degree assessment are robust, formal and applied consistently across the HEI for all research degrees
  - + Regular reviews of the effectiveness of assessment procedures, involving research students and graduates, including:
    - benchmarking with those used in other research HEIs and
    - periodic reviews in each broad discipline/research area of research theses, external examiner reports, and published output from theses, with the objectives of evaluating the ongoing quality of research theses and ensuring continuous high standards
  - + Monitoring the careers of research graduates, for so long as this is feasible.
- 9.12\* In addition to ongoing monitoring, the standard and quality of all Research Degree Programmes are assured by agreed regular review procedures. These include systematic evaluations of research degree programmes being carried out across the institution at intervals not exceeding five years.
- + Procedures are in place to carry out such periodic reviews and are defined in accordance with national and international practice
  - + The goals of Research Degree Programme periodic reviews include assurance that good practice is being implemented and institutional indicators of quality achieved. This requires that the HEI has developed indicators of quality based on institutional priorities (such as individual progression, completion time, dissemination of research results, transferable skills profile and career outcomes)
  - + Reviews allow institutional or discipline performance to be benchmarked against national and international performance
  - + Periodic reviews use complementary instruments (surveys, quantitative data, careers statistics, analyses of trend of recurring issues or concerns)

- + Review teams include international and national experts, representatives of employers and recent research graduates
  - + Reviews are sensitive to the disciplinary context
  - + Reviews facilitate evaluation across the entire institution, at the level of discipline, individual research groups and supervisors.
- 9.13\* Procedures for ongoing monitoring and review are core features of all collaborative and partnership arrangements for research degree programmes and related services. These apply to joint awarding relationships; work placements; off-campus delivery; transnational provision; employer partnerships and other scholarly institutions. Any of these partnerships may be national or international.

### 9.3 Records, Data and Administration Underpinning Quality

- 9.14\* The HEI accepts the use of data, statistics, records and outcomes of reviews relating to research degree programmes as being essential to effective governance and good decision-making, risk assessment and continuous quality improvement, and related procedures are therefore supported by management.
- 9.15\* Data collection related to research degree programmes and decisions on what is recorded, how and by whom, are managed at a high level within the HEI.
- + Systems are in place to capture and maintain quantitative data on research degree programmes
  - + Data capture differentiates individual students and records essential histories
  - + Decisions on policies, regulations and procedures inform requirements for the systematic collection of relevant data
  - + Access to relevant basic numbers and statistics is available to relevant stakeholders.
- 9.16\* Research student information systems facilitate the tracking of individual students through all stages of registration, transfer, monitoring and examination and assessment.
- + Each research student is registered in a Faculty (or college), and also in an appropriate constituent department or school
  - + The area of study of the student is categorised according to those used for the HEA annual returns, which are based on the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) standards and RGAM (Recurrent Grant Allocation Model) subject areas
  - + Registers distinguish clearly between full-time and part-time; continuing and students 'in examination'
  - + The student's supervisory team is included in the record, distinguishing between roles as appropriate
  - + A student's participation in formalised training is recorded
  - + Data includes failed examinations, non-progress decisions, and tracks student who formally decide to withdraw or do not re-register
  - + The historical registration status of students who change their registration status following a review or a transfer process is recorded
  - + Registration records show, where appropriate, that a student has transferred onto the PhD register from a PhD programme in another institution
  - + The HEI maintains separate research student and graduate registers

- + Students are formally removed from the student register and placed onto the graduate register as soon as they have graduated
  - + Sufficient information is contained on these registers, to enable the HEI to monitor and analyse completion rates and completion times broken down by department or school and faculty.
- 9.17\* Reliable and robust procedures are in place for the systematic monitoring and tracking of individual research student data, with a view to identifying, for example, any issues relating to satisfactory supervisory arrangements or facilities or difficulties relating to students working remotely from the main campus or overseas. While respecting confidentiality and anonymity, procedures are in place to record information on substantive matters raised by individual research students and others.

#### Collective data and trends

- 9.18 Reliable and robust procedures are in place for the systematic monitoring and tracking of collective student record and feedback data, with the objective of identifying and addressing ongoing recurring issues arising from supervision, examination, facilities, research practices or processes.
- 9.19\* Processes are in place to regularly seek and capture information that complements organisational data - structured feedback on the concerns of registered students, early leavers and those who transfer elsewhere and of supervisors. This feedback is supplemented with feedback from industry collaborators, employers, funding agencies, project sponsors, internal and external examiners and other supporting/administering staff and core national and international partners and collaborators. These data are applied in order to identify areas for enhancement.
- 9.20 In each broad academic area, records of the involvement of individuals as external examiners are maintained and are available for consultation when new examiners are being considered for appointment.
- 9.21 Student and examiner feedback on the examination process is sought routinely, the times taken for different stages of each examination process are recorded and these and other relevant information are summarised by the HEI in an annual report in which the analyses are broken down by 'academic unit'.
- 9.22 Annual statistics are calculated and recorded in relation to:
- + The number of allegations of research misconduct involving a research student, and the number upheld
  - + Completion times for Research Degrees awarded
    - By faculty (or college) and for the institution overall
    - For full-time, part-time and mixed registration students
  - + Completion rates for appropriate cohorts

## 9.23 Completion rates and completion times:

- + Are calculated separately for full-time and part-time students
- + Take into account unusual circumstances such as the formal de-registration of the students (for maternity or family leave, for instance) the mid-project transfer of a student from another institution.

The following definitions are used when compiling completion data:

**Completion rate:** In the case of PhD students, completion rate is defined as the percentage of those students who having, at any stage, been registered in a higher educational institute as a PhD student (including the category of 'PhD track' student), are subsequently awarded a PhD. It is appropriate to set a timeframe from initial registration within which a student must complete in order to be counted, and to consider cohorts who first registered in a given year.

**Completion time:** The completion time for an RD is: The time between initial registration of the student for a Research Degree Programme to; The time when the final corrected thesis has been accepted by the HEI less; Any period of formal de-registration (such as, for example, certified illness, maternity leave etc.) where such de-registration is permitted by specified institutional regulations. Where the student transferred to a doctoral register having initially registered on a master's register, the first start date is used. A definition of 'accepted by the HEI' is adopted to best reflect the time when sign-off of the outcome and receipt of all related requirements is received. The aim is to accurately reflect completion of the requirements of the programme for the student. Leave of absence for reasons of ill health etc. is defined formally and granted according to an agreed procedure. Only formally granted 'leaves of absence' are subtracted when completion times are being calculated.

### Forms and Administration

- 9.24 Administrative processes are streamlined, and supported by automated systems where appropriate.
- 9.25 Efficient administration is supported by written procedures and clear, concise and easily understood forms that facilitate the multiple steps and stages of a student's progress from application through each major stage of progression to graduation, with every student being treated individually at all stages.
- 9.26 Forms and relevant procedures are completed on-line where appropriate.
- 9.27 The needs of students, supervisors and staff with disabilities are taken into account at all stages as documentation and forms are designed and made available.

## Appendix 1: Qualifications Frameworks and Research Degrees

Qualifications, including research degrees, are included in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) on the basis that an awarding body 'ensure[s] that a learner acquires the standard of knowledge, skill or competence associated with the level of that award in the framework'<sup>42</sup>. In 2006, the Irish NFQ was certified as compatible with the Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and, in 2009, the Irish NFQ was referenced to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF). Formal alignments between qualifications frameworks, facilitates international benchmarking and recognition of research degrees and enhances the mobility opportunities for research graduates.

Public confidence in research degrees depends on robust peer review featuring professional judgement by practitioners and disciplinary communities. Qualifications frameworks articulate the generally accepted norms concerning the nature and complexity of knowledge, skill or competence expected from holders of research degrees. The priority attached to the implementation of qualifications frameworks in national and European arrangements for quality assurance in higher education strengthens the system of trust in research degrees.

Section 3.1 of the QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016)<sup>43</sup> require providers to develop programmes in line with the requirements of the NFQ and associated policies on Access Transfer and Progression. Higher Education Institutions are expected to ensure that programmes leading to research degrees are specified in terms of intended learning outcomes.

Section 1.2 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015)<sup>44</sup>, articulates the required standard for the design and approval of programmes:

'Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area'. (ESG, 2015, p. 11)

<sup>42</sup> Section 43 Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012

<sup>43</sup> [Core, Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#), QQI, April 2016. Developed by QQI for all Providers. Section 3.1 on Programmes of Education and Training.

<sup>44</sup> [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#) (ESG). (2015). Brussels, Belgium.

Annex IV of the 2017 Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework<sup>45</sup> sets out quality assurance principles for qualifications that are part of a national qualifications framework or systems linked to the EQF. These principles reflect European practice in quality assurance in higher education, drawing attention to the establishment of effective internal and external quality assurance procedures; the design of qualifications and the application of the learning outcomes approach; valid and reliable assessment systems; mechanisms for ongoing and periodic review; and publication of review findings.

Qualification framework levels or cycle descriptors, together with award type descriptors, reflect nationally and internationally agreed graduate attributes of research degrees. These generic expectations are neutral and not restricted to any academic, vocational or professional field of learning. Qualification framework descriptors are not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive, rather they should be interpreted and used by the relevant community of scholars, to design, develop, deliver and assess research degree programmes. The Irish Universities Association, PhD Graduate Skills Statement (2015)<sup>46</sup> is a good example of how the NFQ award type descriptor for doctoral degrees, has been elaborated to promote new and emerging skills attributes of PhD graduates.

The concept of ‘cycle’ has been used in the Bologna Process to refer to stages in higher education, incorporating qualifications, programmes, and phases of learning. The term ‘level’ is more commonly found in documentation on national frameworks of qualifications<sup>47</sup>.

Within the Bologna process the word ‘research’ is used to cover a wide variety of activities, with the context often related to a field of study; the term is used here to represent a careful study or investigation based on a systematic understanding and critical awareness of knowledge. The word is used in an inclusive way to accommodate the range of activities that support original and innovative work in the whole range of academic, professional and technological fields, including the humanities, and traditional, performing, and other creative arts. It is not used in any limited or restricted sense or relating solely to a traditional ‘scientific method’<sup>48</sup>.

The QF-EHEA includes descriptors for three cycles agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process. The three-cycle system has since been endorsed at Ministerial conferences, most recently in the Paris Communiqué<sup>49</sup>.

Table 1 sets out the graduate learning outcomes associated with Masters and Doctoral Degrees at levels 9 and 10 of the NFQ and the second and third cycle descriptors<sup>50</sup> of the QF-EHEA.

<sup>45</sup>The European Council [Recommendation of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning](#) Official Journal of the European Union, May 2017.

<sup>46</sup>IUA (2015) <https://www.iua.ie/publication/view/iua-graduate-skills-statement-brochure-2015/>

<sup>47</sup>[A Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area See page 61 for commentary on this distinction.](#)

<sup>48</sup>(Ibid, p. 195)

<sup>49</sup>[The Paris Communiqué](#) (2018) renewed the political mandate for the three-cycle system compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA.

<sup>50</sup>These ‘[Dublin Descriptors](#)’ were adopted as the cycle descriptors for the framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

<p><b>Masters Degree Award Type Descriptor NFQ Level 9</b></p> <p>[Normally carry 90-120 ECTS credits - the minimum requirements should amount to 60 ECTS credits at NFQ level 9.]</p>	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the <b>Bologna second cycle</b> are awarded to students who:</p> <p>[Normally carry 90-120 ECTS credits - the minimum requirements should amount to 60 ECTS credits at the second cycle level.]</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A systematic understanding of knowledge, at, or informed by, the forefront of a field of learning.</li> <li>• A critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning.</li> <li>• Demonstrate a range of standard and specialized research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry.</li> <li>• Select from complex and advanced skills across a field of learning; develop new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques.</li> <li>• Act in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional levels and ill-defined contexts.</li> <li>• Take significant responsibility for the work of individuals and groups; lead and initiate activity.</li> <li>• Learn to self-evaluate and take responsibility for continuing academic/professional development.</li> <li>• Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context;</li> <li>• Can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem-solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;</li> <li>• Have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;</li> <li>• Can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;</li> <li>• Have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Doctoral Degree Award Type Descriptor, NFQ level 10</b> [Volume not Specified]</p>	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the <b>Bologna third cycle</b> are awarded to students who: [Volume not Specified]</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of a field of learning.</li> <li>• The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy review by peers.</li> <li>• Demonstrate a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials which are associated with a field of learning; develop new skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials.</li> <li>• Respond to abstract problems that expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge.</li> <li>• Exercise personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent contexts.</li> <li>• Communicate results of research and innovation to peers; engage in critical dialogue; lead and originate complex social processes.</li> <li>• Learn to critique the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts.</li> <li>• Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;</li> <li>• Have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;</li> <li>• Have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;</li> <li>• Are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;</li> <li>• Can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;</li> <li>• Can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge-based society</li> </ul>

National and European qualifications frameworks and their associated quality assurance provisions play an important role in promoting the international recognition of research degrees. Other important European transparency and recognition instruments include the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention<sup>51</sup>, the Diploma Supplement<sup>52</sup>, European Credit Transfer Scheme<sup>53</sup>, Europass<sup>54</sup>, the ENIC and NARIC Networks<sup>55</sup> and the work of individual recognition centres.

<sup>51</sup> The Lisbon Recognition Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc\\_EN.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc_EN.asp)

<sup>52</sup> The Europass Diploma Supplement is issued to graduates of higher education [http://www.europass.ie/europass/euro\\_dip.html](http://www.europass.ie/europass/euro_dip.html)

<sup>53</sup> ECTS represent workload and defined learning outcomes. See [https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources/european-credit-transfer-accumulation-system\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources/european-credit-transfer-accumulation-system_en)

<sup>54</sup> A set of tools to make skills and qualifications more visible in a European context. See <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>

<sup>55</sup> Established to support national arrangements for the recognition of foreign qualifications and to promote international academic and professional mobility. See <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>

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This index is included as an aid to navigation of Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree and should not be considered a substitute for detailed consideration of the text of the Framework.

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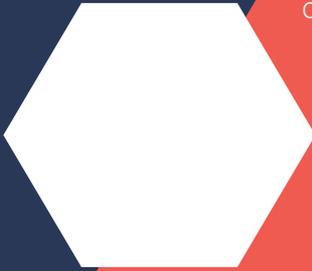






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Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

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