



**QQI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

# Review and Enhancement of Quality Assurance Resources for Research Degree Programmes:

## Terms of Reference

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to specify the Terms of Reference for a review and enhancement project to be carried out by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) on the quality assurance policies, criteria and related guidelines currently in use by HEIs for research degree programmes (RDP) at levels 9 and 10 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. The review will comprise one element of the National Doctoral Framework being implemented jointly by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and QQI in conjunction with the higher education sector.

In collaboration with the sector, QQI will conduct a comprehensive and inclusive review of the existing policies, criteria and guidelines for quality assurance of research degree programmes in use in Irish Higher Education with a view to developing a national Code of Practice for quality assurance of research provision which will have national and international acceptance and understanding.

QQI recognises that research provision at levels 9 and 10 is delivered and quality assured by a variety of HEIs in a range of different contexts. Many HEIs have well developed procedures and, in addition, have adopted international guidelines to suit the particular context in which they operate and which they have found to support effective practice. Any such guidelines should be included in the review so as to ensure that all existing resources which will inform future good practice are identified and can contribute to the Code of Practice.

This will be a collaborative project and recognises that quality assurance in this context is the responsibility of the HEIs. Its success will depend on the involvement and contribution of HEIs and other stakeholders involved in research provision.

This is not a review of research practice itself but, similar to the QQI [Review of Reviews](#), is a meta-review, the subject of which is the quality assurance resources supporting research practice.

## 2. Objectives of the Project

The objectives of this project are as follows:

- 2.1. To understand the purpose and intended outcomes of the quality assurance of research degree programmes (RDPs).
- 2.2. To compile a comprehensive directory of resources, in particular guidelines and criteria, for quality assurance of research degree programmes available to and referenced by Irish HEIs in the variety of contexts in which they operate, which they have found to support effective provision in research degree programmes at levels 9 and 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).
- 2.3. To identify gaps in current policies, criteria and guidelines for the quality assurance of RDPs, taking into account the most recent national and international experience, stakeholder views and the evolving higher education landscape in Ireland.
- 2.4. To make recommendations for enhancement of current policies, criteria and guidelines for quality assurance of RDPs.
- 2.5. To establish a national Code of Practice for Irish HEIs in the quality assurance of RDPs.

## 3. Scope and Structure of the Project

The following is an outline of the staged structure and the scope of this project:

### 3.1 Phase 1: Panel review of fitness for purpose of existing national policies, criteria and guidelines for QA of Research Degree Programmes

QQI, with the collaboration of HEIs and other stakeholders, will compile a listing of current quality assurance resources i.e. policies, criteria and guidelines, currently in use to support research provision at levels 9 and 10 on the NFQ.

QQI will establish a panel of suitably qualified persons, with national and international recognition in a range of research disciplines and in quality assurance, to evaluate the relevance, currency and comprehensiveness of these resources and to provide recommendations for the development of a Code of Practice for quality assurance of RDPs to incorporate best current national and international practice.

It is critical that the panel appointed to this role has the academic standing necessary for meaningful engagement with the higher education sector and for impactful recommendations. HEIs and other stakeholders will be consulted on the composition of the panel.

All HEIs involved in provision of RDPs and other stakeholders will be asked to contribute and engage with the panel to provide feedback on the effectiveness of current policies and criteria and to

provide suggestions for enhancement. It is the intention of QQI to involve a wide a range of stakeholders, to include:

- a. Thesis supervisors, researchers, principal investigators and Deans of Research
- b. HEI Registrars and Deans of Graduate Studies
- c. Doctoral student representatives
- d. Other quality assurance practitioners
- e. Research funding bodies
- f. Advisory committee for the National Doctoral Framework
- g. Agencies that influence research policy and criteria
- h. Government departments
- i. Employers of research graduates
- j. Professional bodies
- k. International organisations with relevant input e.g. European University Association (EUA)

A range of methodologies will be used to gather stakeholder views, including meetings, focus groups, web consultation etc.

The panel will be requested to focus on specific aspects of the current national quality assurance resources, taking into consideration the national HE landscape, the international and inter-sectoral context of provision and drivers such as the Innovative Training Networks (ITN) funding instrument.

i.e.

1. The purpose of QA of RDPs i.e. what it is that quality assurance of RDPs is intended to deliver.
2. Fitness for purpose of existing guidelines, policy and criteria of HEA and former agencies such as Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) as well as any other such guidelines in use in the context of existing research practices.
3. Conflicts, if any, between the requirements and criteria of funding and other agencies and the quality assurance criteria for RDPs.
4. International developments and effective practice in quality assurance of RDPs that could be usefully incorporated into national policies and criteria.

<b>Deliverable:</b> QQI will publish a report of the Expert Panel's findings and recommendations.
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### 3.2 Phase 2: Development of Code of Practice for Quality Assurance of Research Degree Programmes

It is intended that the panel review will deliver comprehensive and objective findings on the fitness for purpose of current resources for quality assurance of research programmes and provide recommendations for their enhancement. These findings will be incorporated into a Code of Practice reflecting the contributions of all core stakeholders.

The Code of Practice will:

- i. Be consistent with the principles for research education set out in the National Doctoral Framework.
- ii. Be of relevance to and accepted by all sectors within Irish higher education

QQI, as the national agency with responsibility for quality assurance in education and training, undertakes to develop this Code of Practice in collaboration with the HEIs and other stakeholders and using external independent expertise as appropriate and necessary.

In the development of the future Code of Practice, due cognisance shall be taken of existing good quality assurance practice across Ireland's universities and institutes of technology.

It is intended that the new Code of Practice will form the basis against which QQI, within its remit, will review the quality of research degree programmes in the future. HEIs will have regard to the Code of Practice when developing / amending their procedures for quality assurance.

<b>Deliverable:</b>	QQI will publish a Code of Practice for Quality Assurance of Research Degree Programmes
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## 4. The Expert Panel

QQI will appoint a panel of independent experts to carry out the review i.e. Phase 1. The experts will be selected based on their ability to demonstrate current or recent senior level experience in most of the categories outlined below:

- Engagement with effective practice in quality assurance of RDPs at a senior policy level in a national and / or international setting.
- Extensive direct knowledge and experience of RDP quality assurance processes in more than one country.
- Extensive experience of supervision of research degree programmes.
- Extensive experience of assimilating a large amount of disparate information as the basis for making judgments.

A range of research discipline expertise will be sought for the panel.

## 5. Indicative Schedule

As an established part of the National Doctoral Framework, this QQI initiative will have national significance. The approach to be taken by QQI in facilitating this work will be highly collaborative and the core HE stakeholders will be involved to ensure national ownership and acceptance of the new QA guidelines and Code of Practice for RDPs which emerge.

An indicative schedule for the project is outlined in the table below. It is important that the timelines remain indicative as the panel will be provided the opportunity to determine its own schedule of meetings and methodologies as it deems appropriate.

Stage	Indicative Dates
<b>Phase 1</b>	
Draft Terms of Reference devised	October 2014
Consultation on the draft ToR with HEA, HE representative bodies and other stakeholders	December 2014
Adoption of Terms of Reference by QQI	January 2015
Appointment of Expert Panel	May 2015
Planning Meetings for Expert Panel	2 September 2015
Expert Panel Activity: Research (blended methodology) Consultation	27 -30 October 2015
Report writing, including consultation	October 2015 – January 2016
Report adopted by QQI	January 2016

<b>Phase 2</b>	
Development of Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes	February – April 2016
Consultation and further development	April – May 2016
Code of Practice published by QQI	June 2016

QQI will provide full support and guidance to the Expert Panel in carrying out its work.



## Appendix A –National Policy and Guidelines for QA of RDP

QQI	<a href="#">Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria 2013</a>
QQI	<a href="#">Core Validation Policy and Criteria 2013</a>
QQI	<a href="#">NFQ Award Standards 2014</a>
QQI	<a href="#">Policy for Collaborative programmes transnational programmes and Joint Awards 2012</a>
IUA and others	<a href="#">Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland</a>
IUA	<a href="#">Irish Universities' PhD Graduates' Skills 2008</a>
<b>Dept. of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation</b>	<a href="#">Putting Public Research to Work for Ireland: Policies and Procedures to help industry make good use of Ireland's public research institutions</a>
Forfás	<a href="#">The Role of PhDs in the Smart Economy December 2009</a>
Forfás	<a href="#">Research Prioritisation Steering Group Report 2012</a>
HEA	<a href="#">Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape 2012</a>
HEA	<a href="#">Towards a Performance Evaluation Framework 2013</a>
IOTI	<a href="#">Sustaining and Growing the Delivery of Strategically Oriented, Impact Focused Research, Development and Innovation in the Institutes of Technology 2013</a>
SFI	<a href="#">Funding Agency Requirements and Guidelines for Managing Research-Generated Intellectual Property 2006</a>
IHEQN	<a href="#">IHEQN Guidelines on Collaborative Provision 2013</a>
IOTI	<a href="#">Technological Universities Quality Framework 2013</a>
IUQB	<a href="#">Good Practice Guide - in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education 2009</a>
QQI:	<a href="#">Good Practice Guide - For Institutional Research in Irish Higher Education 2009</a>

## Appendix B – Other Policy and Guidelines for QA of RDP

**ENQA** [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\) 2015](#)

**European Commission** [European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers 2005](#)

**European Commission** [Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training 2011](#)

**European University Association** [Salzburg Principles: Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society 2005](#)

**European University Association** [Salzburg II Recommendations European Universities' since 2005 in implementing the Salzburg Principles 2010](#)

**European University Association** [Doctoral Programmes in Europe's Universities: Achievements and Challenges 2007](#)

**European University Association** [EUA DOC-CAREERS Report: Collaborative Doctoral Education 2009](#)

**European University Association** [Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education – results of the ARDE project 2012](#)

**European Science Foundation and ALLEA** [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#)

**QAA** [UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Research Degrees](#)

## Appendix C – Stakeholders in Irish Research Degree provision

### Higher Education Institutions and Representative Bodies

Athlone Institute of Technology  
Carlow College\*  
Coláiste Mhuire Marino  
Cork Institute of Technology  
Dublin City University  
Dublin Institute of Technology  
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology  
Dundalk Institute of Technology  
Froebel College of Education  
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology  
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown  
Institute of Technology Carlow  
Institute of Technology Sligo  
Institute of Technology Tallaght  
Institute of Technology Tralee  
Letterkenny Institute of Technology  
Limerick Institute of Technology  
Mary Immaculate College  
Mater Dei Institute of Education  
National College of Art & Design  
National College of Ireland\*  
National University of Ireland Galway  
National University of Ireland Maynooth  
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland  
St. Angela's College  
St. Patrick's College  
Trinity College  
University College Cork  
University College Dublin  
University of Limerick  
Waterford Institute of Technology  
Irish Universities Association (IUA)  
Institutes of Technology Ireland (IoTI)  
Union of Students in Ireland

\* Research degrees currently awarded by QQI

### **Agencies with a role in Research**

Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies  
Enterprise Ireland  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Forfás  
Health Research Board  
Industrial Development Authority  
Irish Research Council  
Royal Irish Academy  
Science Foundation Ireland  
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland  
Teagasc  
The Marine Institute

### **Government Departments**

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine  
Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources  
Department of Education and Skills  
Department of Environment, Community and Local Government  
Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation  
Department of Health

### **Other significant stakeholders**

Irish Business and Employers' Confederation  
Health Service Executive

QQI will welcome feedback from any other stakeholder with an interest / role in research education.