Topic-Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for Research Degree Programmes

White Paper Call for Consultation: Individual Submission

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Quality Assurance Experience of Respondent

I have been actively involved in a number of formal Quality Audit and Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) Reviews both in the UK and overseas. This has involved the acquisition of the relevant skills for such events through successful attendance at a number of training sessions organised by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). In 1998 I was invited by the British Council to introduce a formal system of Quality Audit and Assessment Reviews (QAAR) for the Medical Schools in Bangladesh. The published outputs from this project were a set of guidelines for the conduct of QAAR, and a Case Study on a Critical Review. In addition, I have also been involved in an Institutional Review of the Open Learning Institute in Hong Kong on behalf of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). In 2010 I undertook training as an Expert Panellist for the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) of Ireland. As HETAC was subsumed into Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) additional training was undertaken in 2013. This culminated in the appointment as an External Assessor for an institutional Review of the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland.

General Comments

The proposed *Statutory Guidelines for the QA of Research Degree Programmes* represents a very comprehensive and comprehensible document that will be of significant help and support for research degree candidates, research supervisors and associated quality assurance staff in institutions.

Each Section is well labelled and documented and there is a good logical sequence from recruitment and registration to the final thesis assessment.

Specific Comments

I read the proposed *Guidelines* alongside the *Irish Universities' PhD Graduate Skills Statement* as this is referenced in Appendix 2. There were two specific terms I noted were lacking in the proposed *Guidelines* – these being *Competence* and *Innovation*. A review of a number of professional and government agencies recent strategies indicate that they are increasingly signalling the importance of these two outcomes from formal educational provision.

Competence: It was interesting to note that this term did not appear once in the main body of the *Guidelines* document but did feature significantly in the *Irish Universities' PhD Graduate Skills Statement* document. There is increasing evidence of the perceived importance of some form of attestation of competence as opposed to the acquisition of

basic skills. An example of this is the recently launched Pre-Employment Assessment of Competence (PEAC) by the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences. This takes the form of an external assessment of practical skills in forensic science. The PEAC Certificate awarded to successful candidates offers potential employers additional information as to the employability of the candidate as a forensic practitioner. The *Guidelines* makes reference to training and practical skills and links skills training with future employment (Section 6.2) but at no point does it signal the need to assess this aspect of the research degree programme.

Innovation & Entrepreneurship: In a similar way, there does not appear to be a strong drive to promote innovation and entrepreneurship. There are a number of passing references to research development and intellectual property but no specific guidelines on how to promote and encourage innovation and entrepreneurship. There would be the opportunity to include a positive reference to innovation and entrepreneurship in Section 5 or at the end of Section 6.2.

In the *Irish Universities' PhD Graduate Skills Statement* it highlights that the skills identified by the Irish Universities Association's Deans of Graduate Studies Group as relevant to PhD student education is not an exhaustive list. Their relevance to students will vary according to experiential learning, disciplinary and professional development needs. However, they do identify a major focus for research student being able to:

- Understand the role of innovation and creativity in research
- Demonstrate an awareness and understanding of intellectual property issues, appreciate and, where appropriate, contribute to knowledge exchange
- Appreciate the skills required for the development of entrepreneurial enterprises in the public and private sectors
- Understand different cultural environments, including the business world, and the contribution that knowledge transfer can make to society

It might be helpful to have a similar short section in the *Guidelines* document.

As intimated at the outset, the proposed *Guidelines* document represents a very comprehensive and comprehensible resource for research staff and students – the comments offered in relation to competence and innovation/entrepreneurship are hopefully helpful in the context of the consultation process.

Professor Charles F A Bryce **12th September 2016**