Report of Validation Panel
for a Special Purpose, Minor or Supplemental Award

Date of Meeting: 17 February 2014

Named Award:	Certificate
Programme Title:	**Certificate in Professional Skills for Postgraduate Researchers**
Award Type:	Special Purpose Award
NFQ Level:	9
Intakes Commencing:	March 2014
ECTS/ACCS Credits:	30

PANEL MEMBERS

Name / Function / External Institution OR CIT Academic Unit
Dr Margaret Linehan, Head of School of Humanities, CIT (Chair)
Prof Mary McNamara, Head of the Graduate Research School, DIT
Dr Liam Marnane, Dean of Graduate Studies, UCC
Dr Brendan O'Connell, Head of Department of Biological Sciences, CIT
Ms Eva Juhl, Institutional Review Facilitator, Registrar's Office, CIT

PROPOSING TEAM MEMBERS

Name / Function / Academic Unit
Dr Siobhan O'Sullivan, Curriculum Development Manager & Coordinator, Ed4Life
Dr Eamonn Cashell, Dean of Graduate Studies, CIT
Dr Niall Smith, Head of Research, CIT

BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME

The proposed Certificate in Professional Skills for Postgraduate Researchers (Level 9 Special Purpose Award, 30 credits) was developed under the ægis of Ed4Life, a collaborative initiative for the development of Structured PhD education in the Life Sciences of Cork Institute of Technology, the Alimentary Probiotic Centre based in UCC, and Moorepark Dairy Product Research centre under PRTLI V. While the programme originates with the Life Sciences, the proposers' intention is that it would be made available to postgraduate research students across all Institute areas. Under the requirements of the Structured PhD framework, adopted by Academic Council in April 2013 as an integral part of the Institute's Regulations for Postgraduate Research Study, all students enrolled on a Structured PhD programme are required to earn a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 90 ECTS credits of approved taught learning as an integral part of their Professional Development Plan (PDP).

By offering the proposed Certificate in Professional Skills, comprising 20 mandatory credits of generic skills training (in four 5-credit modules) and 10 ECTS credits of elective modules, the proposers aim to provide postgraduate research students with the opportunity to have the achievement of 30 credits of structured learning recognised through certification.

With the exception of the Free Choice module, all modules included in the schedule are draft modules specifically written for this programme. In addition to making a recommendation on validation of the award, the Validation Panel was also asked to make recommendations on content approval of the draft modules.

FINDINGS OF THE PANEL

*NOTE: In this report, the term "**Requirement**" is used to indicate an action or amendment which in the view of the Panel **must** be undertaken prior to validation and commencement of the Programme. The term "**Recommendation**" indicates an item which the Course Board (or other relevant Institute unit) should implement at the earliest stage possible, and appropriate implementation of which should be the subject of ongoing monitoring.*

The Panel members would like to commend the proposers on bringing this proposal for structured postgraduate research education before the Panel, and would like to thank them for their constructive engagement with the Panel during discussion which clearly evidenced the proposers' enthusiasm and commitment to the development of postgraduate research education at the Institute.

1. Award

Following consideration of the programme documentation and discussion with the proposers, the Panel find that the proposed Level 9 Special Purpose Award Certificate in Professional Skills for Postgraduate Researchers cannot be validated or commence as proposed.

a) Need for the Certificate

The Panel considers that the programme documentation and discussion did not clearly demonstrate the need for addition of a separate Certificate award, which the Panel was asked to validate.

While the PhD is built around flexibility, the introduction of an additional separate award to be given for successful completion of 30 credits of structured elements imposes a much more formal structure and constraints.

With regard to further development of the structured components of PhD education, the Panel is of the opinion that there is no necessity for creating an additional separate Special Purpose Award. In the Panel's view, the requisite formal embedding of relevant approved modules over the four years of the Structured PhD programme will be sufficient to address the aims and objectives of structured PhD education.

b) Programme Structure

Should the proposers however wish to bring a proposal for an additional Special Purpose Award before a validation panel at some future date, to take an informed validation decision the panel would require a more extensive programme document with specific and detailed information inter alia on: Entry requirements / eligible entrants; registration procedures; formal articulation of the SPA with the major award and procedures for progression (including use of the SPA as an exit award); applicable programme marks & standards; actual

timeline and modalities of module delivery, taking into account the needs off-site learners; actual delivery hours per module/workshop and projected student workloads; distribution of module assessment tasks (e.g. for assessments incorporating a learner's own specialised research data); non-achievement of module or programme learning outcomes; conferring modalities; procedures for annual monitoring.

The Panel notes in this context that the Course Builder output is not well suited to representing the structure of a programme of this nature.

c) Programme Outcomes

If a separate Certificate is to be offered, it needs to be ensured that all Programme Outcomes for the SPA are differentiated from the intended outcomes of the major PhD award and clearly reflect the distinct nature and value of the structured skills learning acquired in the modules feeding into the SPA, especially since the work towards achieving the outcomes of the Special Purpose Award is frequently integrated with the research itself.

2. Modules

Requirements and recommendations pertinent to all or several modules are presented first. The Panel recommendation regarding approval of each module is listed under the entry for that module. The Panel notes that successful completion of the internal CIT module moderation process is a prerequisite for full approval.

a) ALL DRAFT MODULES: Coursework Breakdown

Requirement: The Coursework Breakdown across the module descriptors should be reviewed and revised where necessary to clarify the actual assessment deliverables. It should also be ascertained that every module learning outcome is associated with at least one assessment.

b) DRAFT MODULES *Personal Effectiveness* and *Research Methodology* (each 5 ECTS Credits, Expert level) – not recommended for approval

While overall the content of these modules is valid and relevant to the PDP, the Panel considers that the two descriptors are not distinct enough, and the content and title of each module are not fully matched.

Rather than rework the module descriptors separately, the Panel recommends that these two draft modules should be amalgamated into one, tighter 10-credit module, giving thought also to the alignment of module content and new title, before being resubmitted for content approval.

When revising the module(s), under the heading of Research Methodology it would be necessary to acknowledge more strongly the methodologies relevant to the areas of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

c) DRAFT MODULE *Communicating Your Research* (5 ECTS Credits, Expert level) – **recommended for approval** subject to the following requirements and recommendations:

Requirement: A module which incorporates the term 'communication' in its title would be expected to include written communication skills. The Panel therefore asks that the topic of written communication should be specifically covered in the module.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that the 'Networking' heading in the Indicative Content (and use of the term in the Learning Outcomes) should be reviewed, as it might not be the most apt summation of the content included thereunder.

d) DRAFT MODULE *Professional Skills* (5 ECTS Credits, Expert level) – not recommended for approval

The Panel queried the necessity of including a credit-bearing standalone module on professional skills as part of a separate Certificate, as in its view the acquisition of professional skills was part and parcel of a PhD programme. Separate certification of professional skills (with the exception of the material on career development) might also create risks arising from the articulation with the major award, e.g. where a student failed the PhD programme. The Panel therefore does not recommend approval of the *Professional Skills* module as currently presented.

Instead of offering a separate module on professional skills, the Panel suggests that the proposers should consider making the modules *Intellectual Property and Commercialisation*, *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, as well as a general research ethics module mandatory components of the Structured PhD, whether or not they wish to progress the standalone Certificate.

e) DRAFT MODULES *Research Training I* and *Research Training II* (each 5 ECTS Credits, Expert level) – **recommended for approval** subject to the following requirements:

Requirement: It needs to be fully clear from the module descriptors that the research work carried out during work placement periods does not contribute to the PhD, as otherwise the same learning would be counted twice. The Panel therefore asks that the exact relationship between the research work carried out during work placement and the PhD research should be clarified in the module descriptors.

In addition, if the Certificate is progressed, the Educational Aim of the programme would need to be reviewed to ensure the contribution of work placement to the overall outcomes of the SPA is presented accurately.

Requirement: The Panel also asks that the role of the external placement supervisor in the formal assessment of the module learning outcomes should be formalised and clearly specified in the module descriptors and other relevant programme documents (including e.g. the Student Handbook), be it for the Structured PhD or the Certificate.

f) DRAFT MODULE *Research Ethics for the Postgraduate Researcher in Science and Engineering* (5 ECTS Credits, Expert level) – **recommended for approval** giving due cognisance to the following recommendation:

The Panel commended inclusion of a module on research ethics, but queried why this was restricted to Science and Engineering. In the Panel's view, the ability to recognise ethical issues arising is a crucial skill for postgraduate researchers in all areas.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that an additional, generic research ethics module should be created which would cover the fundamentals of research ethics, including recognition of ethical issues, and also the related topic of research integrity. This generic module should be a mandatory component of a Structured PhD, and could be complemented by additional specialised electives which investigated ethical issues pertinent to a specific research field or fields at greater depth. For the existing module, this might mean that some generic material might be removed from the module descriptor to avoid reduplication.

g) DRAFT MODULE *Bioinformatics for the Postgraduate Researcher* (5 ECTS Credits, Expert level) – **recommended for approval** giving due cognisance to the following recommendation:

Recommendation: The Panel heard that this module assumes a certain amount of prior learning at undergraduate level. It therefore recommends that the requisite prior learning should be appropriately specified in the Pre-requisite Learning section of the module descriptor.

h) DRAFT MODULE *Statistics and Data Analysis* (5 ECTS Credits; Advanced level) – **recommended for approval**

i) DRAFT MODULE *Innovation and Entrepreneurship for the Postgraduate Researcher* (5 ECTS Credits, Expert level) – **recommended for approval** giving due cognisance to the following recommendation:

Recommendation: The Panel recommended that some elements on gender differentiation should be included as appropriate, to reflect existing research into this area.

In the Panel's opinion, this module should be a mandatory offering on a Structured PhD programme.

i) DRAFT MODULE *Intellectual Property and Commercialisation* (5 ECTS Credits, Expert level) – **recommended for approval** giving due cognisance to the following recommendation:

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that material on Copyright and other material of particular relevance to research in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences should be included.

In the Panel's opinion, this module should be a mandatory offering on a Structured PhD programme.