

**CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE  
QUALITY ASSURANCE OF  
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH**

**Institute of Technology, Sligo.  
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<u>INDEX:</u>	<u>Page No:</u>
<b>1.0 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.0 The Research Process</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1 Research Management	3
2.2 Types of Research	3
2.2.1 Academic research leading to a higher degree	3
2.2.2 Students registered or working at external institutions	4
2.2.3 Commercial research leading to a higher degree	4
2.2.4 Non-commercial staff research	5
2.2.5 Funded research not leading to a higher degree	5
2.2.6 Post-doctoral research fellowships	5
2.3 Types of Research Award	5
2.4 Research Ethics	7
2.4.1 Introduction	7
2.4.2 Ethical principles	7
2.4.3 Ethical practices	7
2.4.3.1 Research involving human participants	7
2.4.3.2 Research involving animals	8
2.4.4 Independent ethical review	8
2.4.4.1 Design and conduct of the study	9
2.4.4.2 Recruitment of research participants, volunteers	9
2.4.4.3 Care and protection of research participants, volunteers	9
2.4.4.4 Protection of research participant, volunteer confidentiality	10
2.4.4.5 Informed consent procedure	10
<b>3.0 Developing and Maintaining a Research Culture</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4.0 Project Proposal and Student Registration</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1 Funding Applications	12
4.2 Selection of Postgraduate Students (including entry requirements and qualifier exams)	12
4.3 Registration of Postgraduate Students	12
4.3.1 The qualifications of the supervisor	15
4.3.2 The academic quality and relevance of the proposed research	15
4.3.3 Student induction	15
4.3.4 Postgraduate training	15
<b>5.0 Project Management and Monitoring</b>	<b>16</b>
5.1 Responsibilities of the Supervisor	16
5.2 Responsibilities of the Student	16
5.3 Routine Reporting	16
5.4 Financial Management	17
5.5 Grievance Reporting	17
5.6 Changes in Supervisory Arrangements	17
5.7 Transferring Between Registers	17

<b>6.0</b>	<b>Thesis Preparation and Assessment</b>	<b>18</b>
6.1	Appointment of Examiners	18
6.2	Making a Submission	19
6.3	Format of Thesis presentation	20
6.4	Assessment	21
	6.4.1 Oral Examination	22
6.5	Result	22
6.6	Award	23

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Research is defined as the production of new knowledge. In higher education, this can happen at a number of levels and through a number of paradigms in different disciplines, including, *inter alia*, traditional thesis based programmes, practice based programmes and professional doctorates. Postgraduate research is a core activity at Institute of Technology, Sligo (IT Sligo) that involves a number of stakeholder groups, including:

- Research active staff
- Contract researchers
- Postgraduate students
- Strategic Research Centres
- The Research and Innovation Committee (Academic Council)
- Admissions Office
- Registrar's Office
- Research Office
- Finance Office
- IT Services
- Student Services
- Academic Schools
- QQI
- Funding agencies
- Partner HEIs (national and international)
- Industry/employers
- The DoES
- Society in general

While the conduct of postgraduate research itself can be controlled *via* the project proposal and by good project management practices, there are many aspects of the research process which interact with other areas of Institute operations (e.g. recruitment and selection, registration, welfare, finance, examinations, etc.), where clear procedures are necessary in order to assure the quality of the overall process.

The objective is to conduct postgraduate research at IT Sligo in accordance with international best practice.

The purpose of this **Code of Practice** is to set out the elements of the postgraduate research process and to describe how each element is assured within the Quality Assurance system of IT Sligo.

This **Code of Practice** should be read in conjunction with information provided on the **website** [www.itsligo.ie/research](http://www.itsligo.ie/research), and the Institute's Intellectual Property Policy. Anyone operating in or with IT Sligo should be familiar with its quality system, as described in **The Quality Manual** (available on the website document store). Anyone whose professional work is primarily based in IT Sligo should read **The Staff Handbook** (available from the Human Resources Office).

The Code of Practice will be reviewed periodically. The latest version will be that on the website.

## 2.0 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

From origin to completion, a postgraduate research project can be shown to have a number of distinct phases (Figure 2.1). Each of these has particular requirements associated in terms of assuring the quality of the overall process.

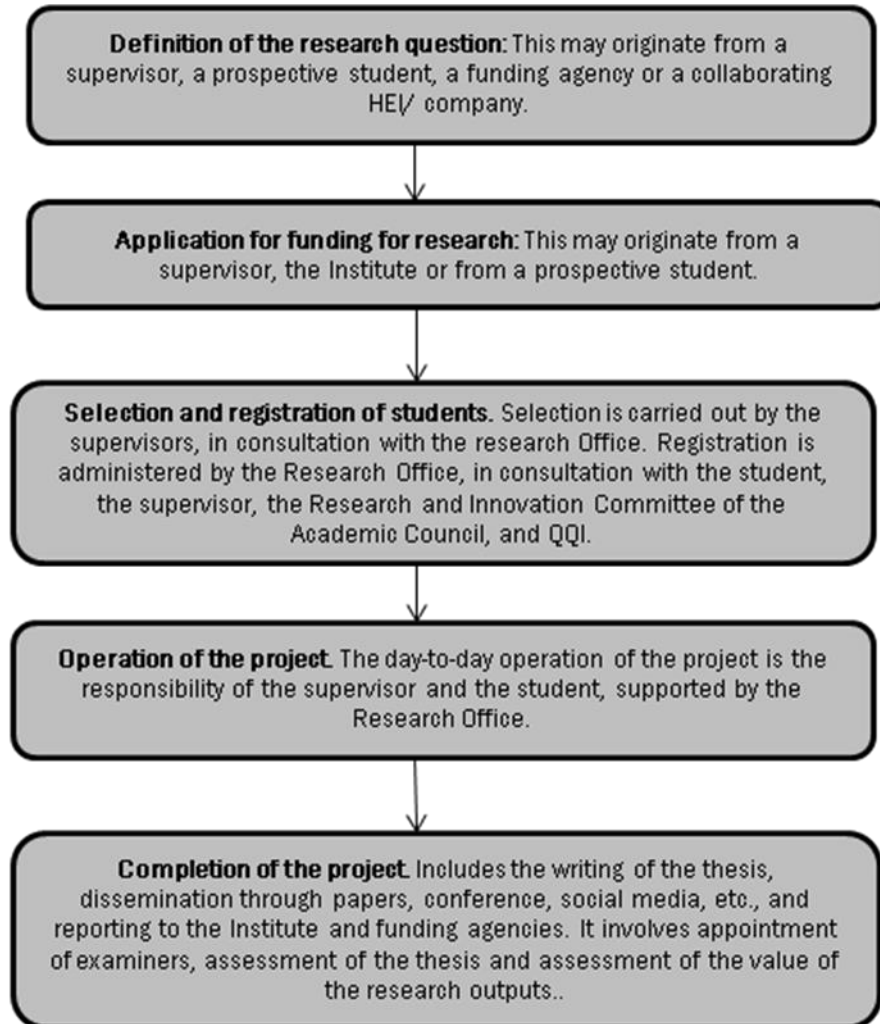


Figure 2.1: Phases in the Research Process.

Research can vary from stand-alone projects to projects within a large, multidisciplinary programme, often involving collaboration with other HEIs or industry, either nationally, or internationally.

The objective of this **Code of Practice** is to present a set of regulations that are fair, consistent and effective in assuring the quality of the postgraduate research activities carried out at the Institute.

## 2.1 Research Management

Research administration at IT Sligo is managed through the Research Office as part of the Registrar's functional area.

In addition, an independent committee of the Institute's Academic Council (the Research and Innovation Committee), exists to make recommendations to the Governing Body on policy and programmes for research. The Research and Innovation Committee comprises, *inter alia*, staff members from each of the academic schools, members of the Research Office and of the post-graduate student body.

The research supervisor(s) and the postgraduate student (the research team) are responsible for the day-to day conduct of the research, management of budgets and reporting on progress and outcomes. The Research Office provides support, as appropriate.

## 2.2 Types of Research

There are a number of different categories of research that can be undertaken at the Institute. These include:

### 2.2.1 Academic research leading to a higher degree

Students may register to undertake research degrees at IT Sligo, on a full-time or part-time basis. The awards are made by the Institute (in areas where the Institute has Delegated Authority, or by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI, in areas where the Institute has Approval status). The terms are two full-time academic years for a Master's Degree and three to four full-time academic years for a Doctoral Degree. These degrees are generally carried out by self-directed study/work, but may also include attendance at certain taught academic programmes. The supervisor(s) for this study will normally be staff of the Institute, but may, in certain circumstances, be external to the Institute.

These projects may be funded or unfunded. In the case of a funded project, it is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that all terms and conditions stipulated by the funding body are met. The Research Office will assist in this regard, wherever possible. Where a commercial partner is involved as a joint funding agent (as opposed to primary funding agent), Section 2.2.3 refers. Additional care should be taken to manage these research projects. The commercial partner also has a vested interest in research outcomes and the relationship between partners must be managed carefully.

There should be a written, signed agreement between the supervisor, the Institute, the funding body and the commercial enterprise defining, *inter alia*:

- The requirements of the project.
- The legal entitlement over the outputs of the project.
- The schedule of payment.
- How the outputs of the project are defined, e.g. timelines, specific deliverables, delivery of data report, software acceptance tests, etc.
- Support required by each party, e.g. equipment, access to premises, access to people, software tools, hardware tools, etc.
- Compliance with the Institute's current Intellectual Property Policy.

The supervisor should negotiate the best terms and conditions for the project. The Institute can assist in any negotiation, as necessary. The supervisor should obtain the approval of their Head of School before signing any contractual agreement.

Where a project is unfunded, or partially funded, the student should ensure that their financial situation will not place them under unacceptable pressure during the planned term of study.

### 2.2.2 Students registered or working at external institutions

Students registered at IT Sligo may undertake research at another institution or industry. In this case, their general terms and conditions are determined by IT Sligo. There should be a nominated contact person at the 'host' institution. Additional terms and conditions for their time at the partner 'host' institution should be negotiated by the supervisor and specified in a written agreement. The permission of the appropriate Head of School is required before signing any such agreement. The Research Office will assist in developing these agreements, where possible. In this case, the research degree is awarded by QQI or the Institute, depending on the subject area.

Research students of other Institutions may carry out work at IT Sligo. In this case, their general terms and conditions are determined by the institution where they are registered. There must be a nominated contact person at IT Sligo. Additional terms and conditions for their time at IT Sligo should be negotiated by the nominated contact person and specified in a written agreement. The permission of the appropriate Head of School is required before signing any such agreement. The Research Office will assist in developing these agreements, where possible. In this case, the awarding body is the responsibility of the institution where the student is registered.

### 2.2.3 Commercial research leading to a higher degree

A commercial partner may be the primary funding agent to fund research towards a higher degree (i.e., excepting schemes, such as the Enterprise Ireland Innovation Partnership Scheme, where a commercial partner funds part of a project, Section 2.2.1 refers). "Commercial" refers to any body, profit making, non-profit, industry or government with which a researcher has a contractual financial agreement (non-grant).

In this case, the supervisor will have agreements with the Institute, QQI (where QQI is the awarding body) and with the commercial partner. The awards are made by QQI or the Institute, depending on the subject area.

In this situation, additional care should be taken to manage the research project. The commercial partner also has a vested interest in research outcomes and the relationship between partners must be managed carefully.

There should be a written, signed agreement between the researcher, the Institute and the commercial enterprise defining, *inter alia*:

- The requirements of the project.
- The legal entitlement over the outputs of the project.
- The schedule of payments,
- How the outputs of the project are defined, e.g. timelines, specific deliverables, delivery of data report, software acceptance tests, etc.
- Support required by each party, e.g. equipment, access to premises, access to people, software tools, hardware tools, etc.
- Compliance with the Institute's current Intellectual Property Policy.

The supervisor should negotiate the best terms and conditions for the project. The Institute can assist in any negotiation necessary. The researcher should obtain the approval of their Head of School before signing any contractual agreement.

#### 2.2.4 Non-commercial staff research

Non-commercial staff research refers to any independent or collaborative research undertaken by staff for their own professional development. This type of research may be funded through public grant schemes or may be unfunded. It will generally result in publication of scholarly books, articles in peer reviewed journals and/or papers presented at conferences. Publication of non-commercial staff research builds reputation among the academic community and enhances the staff member's profile in competing for public and private sector research funds.

This type of research is considered valuable in terms of staff professional development and as a contribution to the research ethos of the Institute. However, as it does not involve students, this particular **Code of Practice** does not apply in terms of quality assurance. Arrangements for managing this type of research are a matter for the staff and School management. The Research Office will assist in matters relating to this research, wherever possible.

#### 2.2.5 Funded research not leading to a higher degree

Staff or management of the Institute may enter into agreements with a commercial partner (non-grant), and/or other funding agencies (grant) to carry out commercial or contract research, either by the staff member, or by hiring research assistants.

This type of research is considered valuable in terms of staff professional development and as a contribution to the research ethos of the Institute. However, as it does not involve students, is covered by contracts between the parties involved and involves paid staff (covered by the Human Resources Office), this particular **Code of Practice** does not apply in terms of quality assurance. The Research Office will assist in matters relating to this research, wherever possible.

#### 2.2.6 Post-doctoral research fellowships

Post-doctoral research fellowships are awarded as paid research contracts in order to encourage and facilitate exceptional researchers or individuals who want to pursue a career in research. Post-doctoral Research Fellows give credibility and experience to research teams. They are career researchers, seen as experts in their field whose knowledge and expertise is sought after. They facilitate access to new and larger research programmes and therefore larger funding schemes.

Senior post-doctoral researchers have a reputation and track record of winning large research funding grants. Post-doctoral research is expected to contribute significantly to the knowledge of the research staff and to the research ethos at IT Sligo.

As this category does not involve students, is covered by contracts between the parties involved and involves paid staff (covered by the Human Resources Office), this particular **Code of Practice** does not apply in terms of quality assurance. The Research Office will assist in matters relating to this research, wherever possible.

### **2.3 Types of Research Award**

Students registered at IT Sligo can pursue the following research awards (awards are made by QQI, or the Institute, depending on the discipline involved):

- **Degree of Master (Research)**

Candidates for the Degree of Master (Research) will be expected to acquire a mastery of the principles and theory underlying their chosen subject and a knowledge and appreciation of the relevant literature. This will be achieved through self-directed work/study programmes. It may also involve



attendance at taught modules where necessary. Academic descriptors and learning outcomes for this Level 9 award are contained within the National Framework of Qualifications ([www.nfq.ie](http://www.nfq.ie)).

Normally, the minimum duration of studies leading to the Degree of Master (Research) is twenty-one months (two full-time academic years) from the date of admission to the Master's Register. In exceptional circumstances, the Research and Innovation Committee of the Academic Council may vary the required and permitted duration of the programme.

Should the Candidate not complete the degree within four years of admission to the Master's Register, registration will lapse. If the Candidate wishes subsequently to present for the degree, application for re-registration is mandatory.

Supervision for a Degree of Master (Research) is normally by a suitably qualified IT Sligo staff member (other models of a suitable supervisory team, including supervisors from other HEIs or from industry, are possible).

- **Doctoral Degree (Ph.D.)**

The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is conferred for advanced levels of achievement, in which the Candidate demonstrates outstanding scholarship and ability. The Candidate must demonstrate that he/she has conducted original, independent research and has a broad knowledge of a particular field of study and a comprehensive knowledge of the specialist area upon which his/her research is focused. Academic descriptors and learning outcomes for this Level 10 award are contained within the National Framework of Qualifications ([www.nfq.ie](http://www.nfq.ie)).

Normally, the minimum duration of studies leading to the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is three to four full-time academic years from the date of admission to the Doctoral Register. In exceptional circumstances, the Research and Innovation Committee may vary the required and permitted duration of the programme.

Candidates will normally register in the first instance for a Master's Degree, and transfer, if successful, after a period of no less than twelve months, through a process described in the *Transfer Between Master's Register and Doctoral Register* procedure (ADM 003, in Part B of this Code). An exception to this is where a Candidate has a recently qualified research Master's in a cognate area. In the case of a Candidate transferring from the Master's Register to the Doctoral Register, the required and permitted duration shall be measured from the date of admission to the Master's Register.

Should the Candidate not complete the degree within six years of admission to the register, registration will lapse. If the Candidate wishes subsequently to present for the degree, application for re-registration is mandatory.

Supervision of a Doctoral Degree is normally by a suitably qualified IT Sligo staff member (or other suitable arrangement, as above). Doctoral research is expected to contribute distinctly to knowledge of the subject, and to satisfactorily display both research competence and originality.

## 2.4 Research Ethics

### 2.4.1 Introduction

All research carried out at IT Sligo must conform to best international practice in relation to its ethical grounding. The following is the process by which such grounding is assured.

### 2.4.2 Ethical Principles

IT Sligo's postgraduate ethics policy is founded on Seven Key Principles:

1. Research should be designed and undertaken with ethical considerations in mind, thus ensuring integrity and quality of all that is done. The research planning process must include explicit reference to any discipline specific national ethics regulations that exist, and compliance with current versions of same.
2. The independence, autonomy and integrity of participants must be respected at all times
3. Research Participants must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their part in the research entails, and what risks, if any, may arise.
4. The confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected and secured, except where they consent to allow their names to be used at the request of the researcher, or where they wish to have them included.
5. Participation must be entirely voluntary, free from any coercion, duress or any offer of inappropriate incentives.
6. Unnecessary harm to research participants, both human and animal, must be avoided. Where the researcher has any doubt about harm being caused, they should consult the Research and Innovation Committee for guidance.
7. The independence of the research must be clear. Any conflicts of interest or partiality, including the roles, rights and responsibilities of outside interests or collaborators should be declared in the research proposal.

### 2.4.3 Ethical Practices

In meeting the standard of the principles outlined above, the following practices will be mandatory at IT Sligo:

#### 2.4.3.1 Research involving human participants:

The Institute expects research to operate with respect for all persons involved directly or indirectly. Researchers must:

- a. Obtain Voluntary Informed Consent of participants who should understand and agree in writing to their part without any duress. They should be advised why their participation is necessary, how the research will be used and how and to whom it will be reported. An appropriately worded Participation Information Document and Consent Form must be supplied to the prospective participant.
- b. Avoid any element of subterfuge or deception.
- c. Advise the participant of the right to withdraw for any or no reason, at any time prior to publication of the research.
- d. Recognise that special and additional ethical issues arise when dealing with persons under the age of 18, or who may be considered vulnerable, from old age, intellectual disability or other reason, which require detailed consideration.
- e. Not use incentives to encourage participation that amount to either undue influence to consent nor contain any element of duress.
- f. Make known in writing to the participants any risks arising from the research or arising from the findings.

- g. Recognise the participants' entitlement to confidentiality of personal information and must afford them anonymity.
- h. Warn participants that information found in the course of the research may be disclosed to the relevant authorities if it is concerned with illegality or may cause harm to participants/others.

#### 2.4.3.2. Research involving animals:

In the case of animal experimentation, the following conditions must be met:

- a. Researchers must implement the accepted practices of *Reduction, Refinement and Replacement* in the use of animal subjects in research.
  - Reduction is achieved by the requirement for statistical justification of proposed animal numbers and by ensuring that only experiments that are rigorously justified are used. Precise repetition of experiments on live vertebrate animals for which published data are available is not acceptable. There is a requirement to maximise the amount of data emerging from animal experiments by judicious experimental design.
  - Refinement is brought about by ensuring that animal welfare is prioritised when designing experiments and by ensuring high standards of training and education of researchers and animal care staff.
  - Replacement and uptake of alternatives to live animals in teaching and research are encouraged.
- b. Persons carrying out procedures involving harm or potential harm to live vertebrate animals for research must hold a license issued by the appropriate Government Department. Such licenses will stipulate conditions in relation to experimental procedures and types and numbers of animals used.
- c. Procedures on live animals may be carried out only in designated, licensed premises.
- d. License holders may carry out work only at the designated premises specified on their license and may only use approved protocols.

#### 2.4.4 Independent Ethical Review

Where, for any individual postgraduate research proposal, consideration of ethical issues by the proposers, reviewers or members of the Research and Innovation Committee conclude that a further, independent ethical review of the proposed research is required; the proposal will be submitted to either:

- A properly constituted ethics committee in a partner HEI. This committee will make observations which will assist the Research and Innovation Committee in coming to a conclusion. Where this is done, the applicants will provide relevant information to the partner HEI in the format that is specified by them
- An *ad hoc* sub-committee of the Research and Innovation Committee which will be established to undertake this work. The sub-committee shall:
  - a. Include discipline specific academics
  - b. Avoid potential conflicts of interest
  - c. Engage external personnel, if required/appropriate
  - d. Ensure that the research proposal is justified by weighing up the potential benefits and risks
  - e. Prepare a report that will assist the Research and Innovation Committee in making its decision on registration

The sub-committee will specifically consider:

2.4.4.1 Design and Conduct of the Study

- a. The thoroughness and completeness of the information submitted and its ability to respond to ethical questions arising within the context of the study
- b. The suitability of the protocol and the data collection forms in relation to the objectives of the study (taking into account rules and regulations), the statistical methodology (including sample size calculation), and the potential for reaching sound conclusions with the smallest possible exposure of subjects and number of research participants/ volunteers
- c. The justification of predictable risks and inconveniences weighed against the anticipated benefits for the participants/ volunteers and the concerned communities
- d. Criteria for prematurely withdrawing participants/ volunteers from the research.
- e. Criteria for suspending or terminating the research project as a whole
- f. The adequacy of provisions made for monitoring and auditing the conduct of the research, including data safety
- g. The adequacy of the site, including the supporting staff, available facilities and emergency procedures, where applicable
- h. The manner in which the results of the research will be reported and published

2.4.4.2 Recruitment of Research Participants/ Volunteers

- a. The characteristics of the population from which the Participants/ Volunteers will be drawn (including gender, age, literacy, culture, economic status and ethnicity) and the justification for any decisions made in this regard
- b. The method by which initial contact and recruitment of participants/ volunteers is to be conducted and its appropriateness to the study
- c. The method by which full information is to be conveyed to potential participants/ volunteers or their representatives and by which means consent is to be obtained
- d. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants/ volunteers

2.4.4.3 Care and Protection of Research Participants/ Volunteers

- a. The safety of any intervention to be used in the proposed research
- b. The suitability of the investigator for the proposed study in relation to his/ her qualifications and experience
- c. The provisions made for receiving and responding to queries and complaints of participants/ volunteers throughout the course of the study
- d. If applicable, any plans to withdraw or withhold standard therapies for the purpose of the research, and the justification for such action
- e. If applicable, the adequacy of health and social supervision and psychological support for participants/ volunteers during and after the course of the research
- f. Steps to be followed if participants/ volunteers voluntarily withdraw during the course of the research
- g. If appropriate, the arrangements for informing the participant's/ volunteer's GP, including procedure for seeking consent to do so
- h. A description of any financial costs to participants/ volunteers
- i. The rewards and compensations, if any, for participants/ volunteers (including money, services and/ or gifts) and a justification for these

- j. The provisions for compensation/ treatment in the case of injury/ disability/ death of a participant/ volunteer attributable to participation in the research
  - k. The insurance and indemnity arrangements covering the liability of the investigator
  - l. A description of any grants, payments or other reward to be made to any researchers or research hosts, related to the conduct of the study
- 2.4.4.4 Protection of Research Participant/Volunteer Confidentiality
- a. A description of the persons who will have access to personal data of the participants/ volunteers, including medical records and biological samples
  - b. The measures taken to ensure the confidentiality and security of personal information concerning research participants
  - c. The extent to which the information will be anonymised
  - d. How samples/ data will be obtained and the purposes for which they will be used
  - e. How long samples/ data will be kept
  - f. Both sub-committee members and investigators should be aware of the provisions of the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 and their obligations as set out in these acts.
- 2.4.4.5 Informed Consent Process
- a. A full description of the process for obtaining informed consent, including the identification of those responsible for obtaining consent and the time frame in which it will occur
  - b. The adequacy, completeness, and understandability of written and oral information to be given to the participants/ volunteers and, when appropriate, their legally acceptable representative(s)
  - c. The content and the wording of the Participant/ Volunteer information sheet
  - d. The content and the wording of the informed consent form and, where applicable, the provisions made for participants incapable of giving consent personally
  - e. Clear justification for the intention to include in the research individuals who cannot consent, and a full account of the arrangements for obtaining consent or authorisation for the participation of such individuals
  - f. Assurances that Participants/ Volunteers will receive information that becomes available during the course of the research relevant to their participation (including their rights, safety and well-being)

### **3.0 DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING A RESEARCH CULTURE**

Teaching, learning and the production of new knowledge are core functions of a higher education institution (HEI). Undergraduate programmes are developed in key areas, based on the current expertise of groups of staff and on planned development into new areas, or to higher levels of provision in existing areas. An important part of a research culture is integration of teaching and research from Levels 6-10.

A range of scholarly activities of staff are fundamental to this development. Amongst the range are many research-linked activities, including:

- Ongoing course development research (including feedback of the results of current institute postgraduate research into undergraduate courses).

- Development and supervision of undergraduate dissertation work and other research based work/ assessment.
- Personal professional development research (ideally leading to publication).
- Practice-based research
- Development and supervision of postgraduate research programmes.
- Involvement in national and international research project, fora and committees
- Reviewing and editing peer reviewed publications and funding applications
- Providing general support and/or mentoring for other staff or for research students, taking part in scholarly meetings such as seminars/ conferences, etc. and providing input to bids for competitive research or academic development funding.
- Activities to promote research locally and nationally, such as Scifest, Young Scientist, etc.
- Staff undertaking higher degrees.

A lively engagement by a significant proportion of staff in these activities contributes largely to a research culture. A healthy research culture leads to a research environment that is conducive to the conduct of high quality research. From this also comes the inspiration and motivation to investigate new research questions, either as one-off projects, or as part of medium to large-sized programmes (preferably multi-disciplinary and involving collaboration with other national and international institutions).

Institute of Technology, Sligo supports the activities listed above, and other appropriate activities, as resources allow. Examples of supports include:

- An allocation of teaching load of 2 hours per postgraduate student supervised, normally to a maximum of six hours (variations to be agreed with local management).
- Provision of research space and facilities.
- A small sums research fund to support professional development research (the Capacity Building Fund).
- Postgraduate funding (The Presidents Bursary and Strategic Research Student Funds)
- Payment of fees for some staff undertaking higher degrees.
- Support for attendance at conferences when the staff member (or postgraduate student) presents a paper (when funds are not available for same from individual project budgets)
- The provision of training programmes in, e.g., supervision, research methods, literature review, writing, etc.
- Organisation of a regular research seminar series.
- Administrative support in preparing research funding applications.
- Administrative support in managing the research process, including quality assurance and finance.

#### **4.0 PROJECT PROPOSAL AND STUDENT REGISTRATION**

This is the stage of the research process where the researcher or research team have formulated a research question, and plan to address it in a formal academic project. From a quality assurance point of view, this stage can be considered to have two distinct parts, namely:

- Application for funding (not necessary in all cases)
- Registration of the student

#### **4.1 Funding Applications**

Many (not all) research projects require funding. Normally, this comes from one of a number of national and international funding agencies, such as the HEA, Enterprise Ireland, the Health Research Board, the Irish Research Council, the EU, etc.

The total cost of the research is always greater than that obtained from the funding agency, as it will always require physical resources and facilities from the Institute.

It is important that, when the research team is submitting an application for funding to a funding agency, the required institute resources are in place, and have been committed to the project. All applications with a value of €50k or over must be notified to the Head of Research before the application is prepared, to allow for reporting of the research pipeline.

#### **4.2 Selection of Postgraduate Students (for funded programmes)**

All student positions arising from research funds won by the Institute, or from investment by the Institute (in, for example, the President's Bursary scheme), must be advertised in the press. Where more than one suitable candidate applies, the student is interviewed by the supervisor and at least one other member of academic staff. It is good practice to use a pre-determined scoring scheme, and to retain the records of interviews and scoring when the interviews are complete.

#### **4.3 Registration of Postgraduate Students**

This is a critical step in the research process, as it is where the standards of student, supervision, proposed research and required facilities/resources are assured.

The entry requirements for Master's and Ph.D. are shown in Figure 4.1 overleaf. Where a Candidate does not meet these criteria, it may be possible, in certain circumstances, to undergo a qualifier examination or RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) process that would allow entry to the research register.

In relation to a qualifier exam, candidates who do not fit the qualifying criteria for the postgraduate degree may, at the discretion of the Registrar and the proposed supervisor, receive notification from the Registrar of a requirement to undertake a qualifier assessment. The format for the assessment is determined on a case by case basis by the proposed supervisor in consultation with an external examiner who is an authority in the cognate area. The assessment material is assessed by the external examiner who reports to the Registrar. The candidate is notified of the qualifier assessment results and, if successful, may apply for entry to the postgraduate register.

The procedures for RPL are set out in: Exam 012/094 (Granting of Exemptions for Modules for Students with Prior Certified and/or non-Certified Learning).

Figure 4.2 shows the general registration process. The research team (supervisor(s) and student) fill out a standard application form which can be found on the Research Office website. In it, the Head of School confirms the availability of supervision and other resources. The Head of Research sends the application to one reviewer from each of an internal and external panel of expert reviewers, along with a set of standard review criteria. Each reviewer reports back to the Head of Research with a recommendation, using a standard report form. If the recommendations, or comments, are such that substantial redrafting of the proposal is necessary, the Head of Research provides the feedback to the research supervisor to allow the team to redraft the proposal. If appropriate, the Head of Research sends the redrafted proposal to the reviewers for additional review.

There are additional requirements for information in cases where the Candidate is transferring from another institution and where the Candidate is a member of staff. These are detailed in the application form.

The Head of Research presents the recommendation of the reviewers to the Research and Innovation Committee, normally at its next meeting, or, by agreement, at interim periods. The Research and Innovation Committee makes a decision on registration and communicates the decision to the Registrar's Office.

#### **DEGREE OF MASTER (RESEARCH)**

The normal entry standard for a Master's degree is an Honours Bachelor Degree (Level 8, minimum 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Honours) in a field of study directly related to the subject matter of the Master's Degree.

A Candidate holding qualifications different from those specified above may be admitted to a Master's Degree programme subject to satisfactory performance at such examination, test or other requirement as defined by IT Sligo, on the advice of its External Examiner(s).

IT Sligo will consider applications from individual Candidates who:

- (a) hold the Graduate Diploma of QQI or IT Sligo at Second Class Honours level in an area of study cognate to the proposed study area, subject to approval by the Research and Innovation Committee
- (b) hold such other qualifications as may be acceptable to the Research Committee for the purposes of proceeding to a specific Master's Degree;

#### **DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Normally, admission to the Doctoral Register is confined to Candidates who have been admitted at least 12 months previously to the Master's Register and whose transfer to the Doctoral Register is recommended by the Candidate's Supervisor(s) and External Reviewer(s) and approved by the Research and Innovation Committee. Direct admission to Doctoral Register may be possible, in the following cases:

1. After assessment and recommendation by an External Examiner appointed by the Research and Innovation Committee in which the nature of the work proposed, the applicant's academic achievement and personal qualities are deemed to be such as to merit direct progression from Bachelor Degree to Doctoral candidate status. In any such case the applicant will be required to hold an Honours Bachelor Degree (Level 8) with First Class Honours in a related subject and to show substantial reason for not registering for a Master's Degree in the first instance.
2. Candidates with an approved professional qualification and an exceptional level of experience and work achievement may also be considered for direct admission to the Doctoral Register.
3. The Research and Innovation Committee may directly admit to the Doctoral Register a Candidate with a good, recently qualified research Master's Degree in a cognate area from a recognised Degree awarding body. The Research and Innovation Committee may obtain an External Examiner's opinion on the applicant's Master's Degree.
4. Candidates shall not be eligible to register for a Ph.D. if, simultaneously, they are registered for another programme with QQI, IT Sligo or another institution, without prior permission from the Research and Innovation Committee.

**Figure 4.1: Entry Requirements for Registration for Research Degrees**

The research team are kept informed about the progress of the assessment, with indicative timescales, etc. Timescales for assessment will vary, depending on requirements for additional information, reviewer commitments, holiday periods, etc.



Typical timescales are:

1. Checking of forms – 1 week
2. Internal/External review 2-4 weeks
3. Committee decision 2-4 weeks

The Research Office writes to the Candidate to advise them of the outcome of the process. During the assessment period, the student may be given temporary registration status, without prejudice, to allow access to the library and other facilities.

In discipline areas where IT Sligo has Delegated Authority, the process is complete at Research and Innovation Committee decision stage. In areas where the Institute has Approval from QQI to operate postgraduate Degree programmes, a subsequent step of validation by QQI is required. While QQI generally accept proposals which have been processed in accordance with agreed procedures, they retain the right to validate the registrations, and could, in some circumstances, not agree to accept the registration. QQI carries out validation assessments twice a year.

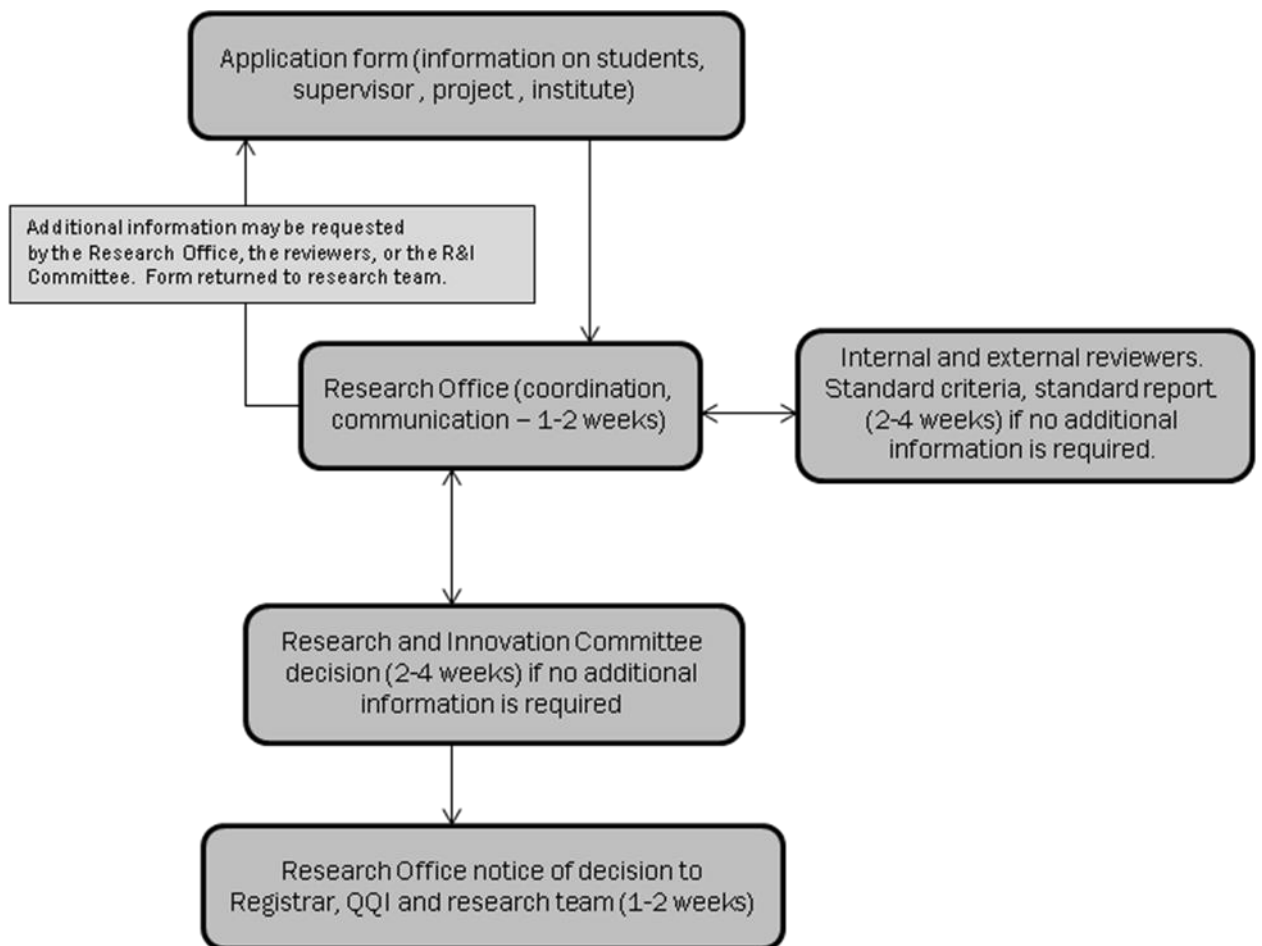


Figure 4.2: The Postgraduate Registration Process

#### 4.3.1 The qualifications of the supervisor

The qualification criteria for staff wishing to supervise research without mentoring or co-supervision are:

- A qualification in the cognate area, to at least the level of award sought.
- Previous experience of supervision to completion at the level of award sought.
- A track record in successful research as measured by traditional research outputs, such as publications, presentations at conferences, patents, etc.
- Current research activity in a cognate area.
- The supervisor must not be currently registered for a postgraduate research award in a cognate area, and at the same level as the Candidate

Where these criteria are not met, the Research and Innovation Committee will require co-supervision, or the appointment of a mentoring supervisor, as appropriate. In such cases, the Research and Innovation Committee will take particular cognisance of the proposed supervisors experience of supervision, and academic/industrial experience.

#### 4.3.2 The academic quality and relevance of the proposed research

The Research and Innovation Committee must satisfy itself that the proposed research is of an academic standard that gives a reasonable expectation that a Candidate can reach the level sought.

The Candidate must: locate the research within the relevant literature; show that the proposed work is founded solidly in the current knowledge ; show that the proposed work addresses a question that is of relevance.

The Candidate must take note of the strategic aims of the Institute, and its local, regional, national and international objectives, as described in the IT Sligo Strategic Plan.

#### 4.3.3 Student induction

From time to time, the Research Office conducts an induction session with new postgraduates, normally in November, but may also be repeated at any other time, if appropriate. The session covers issues such as: background to research at IT Sligo; Institute research architecture; start up; IT Dept. and research; Library and research; project management; Finance Dept. and research; research outcomes; submission/examination; the quality assurance system; the Student Services office and research.

In addition to this, the Head of Research is available on a routine basis to assist with any issues that the student, or the supervisor might have.

#### 4.3.4 Postgraduate training

Through the project assessment process, any project-specific skills-needs for the proposed student will be identified, along with the identification of the source of budget for same. The Institute will provide, on an intermittent basis, general modules on subjects such as research methods, library resources, health and safety, etc.

## **5.0 PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING**

The responsibility for day-to day management of the research project rests with the research team (the supervisor(s) and student). This includes making reports required by funding agencies, or other agreements that the team has entered into (e.g. programme reports, reports to collaborators, etc). All reports issued must include a statement by the supervisor of responsibility (including limitations).

### **5.1 Responsibilities of the Supervisor**

The supervisor shall:

- provide advice to the Candidate in relation to:
  - the nature of the work to be undertaken and the standard expected;
  - the planning of the research;
  - the appropriate literature and sources;
  - attendance at appropriate taught courses in research methodology and requisite techniques to ensure the Candidate has the necessary skills for sustained independent effort;
  - attendance at appropriate research seminars and/or conferences;
  - publication in appropriate journals
- maintain contact with Candidate through scheduled meetings and be available to the Candidate at other appropriate times;
- monitor the progress of the candidate's work on a formal basis by setting appropriate academic standards and milestones to be attained by the Candidate, and by assessing and providing constructive criticism in reasonable time;
- identify, at as early a stage as possible, insufficient progress, in order to allow adequate time for re-orientation and correction;
- manage the finances of the project;
- report on progress to the Institute through such reports as are required in the research quality process;
- make such reports as are required to funding agencies, or other stakeholders

### **5.2 Responsibilities of the Student**

The Candidate shall:

- familiarise him/herself with the Institute's rules and regulations governing postgraduate awards by research;
- agree in advance the programme of work, and the aims, objectives and timeframe for the proposed programme, including the nature and extent of the guidance expected, with the supervisor(s);
- be responsible for carrying out the work, in a timely fashion, to the required standard;
- agree a schedule of meetings with the supervisor(s) and arrangements for the evaluation of progress;
- inform the supervisor(s), as early as possible, of any significant problems and difficulties encountered;
- contribute, as appropriate to reports prepared for funding agencies or other stakeholders;
- submit a thesis in accordance with the schedule of exams of the Institute;
- not initiate formal contact with the external examiner(s);
- be responsible for ensuring that the thesis presentation format is in accordance with regulations.

### **5.3 Routine Reporting**

Students and supervisors are required to report annually to the Institute on the progress of the project. The Research Office will circulate a template form to all students and supervisors in February of each year. The Research Office will compile the responses and

copy the reports to the Heads of School for any required follow-up. These reports are in addition to any reports required by funding agencies, or other research stakeholders. Students and supervisors are also welcome to make ad-hoc reports to the Research Office at any other time.

#### **5.4 Financial Management**

The supervisor is responsible for the financial management of a funded project. Project budgets are prepared on the Agresso financial management system. The Research Office will assist in preparing the requisition on the system. The supervisor must indicate for each order that the amount is available within the appropriate line of the project budget.

Management sign-off is in accordance with general Institute regulations for limits and appropriate permissions.

The supervisor is responsible for reporting to the funding agency or other stakeholders. All reports issued must include a statement by the supervisor of responsibility (including limitations).

#### **5.5 Grievance Reporting**

Where a person has a grievance, not covered by an existing grievance procedure, relating to the conduct of research at IT, Sligo, that cannot be resolved by discussions between affected parties, a report is written by that person to the Head of Research/Registrar, as appropriate, detailing the nature of the grievance, the sequence of events involved, the effect of any actions involved, details of personnel contacted previously with regards to the grievance and including copies of any correspondence relating to the grievance.

If the submission is to the Head of Research, the report is copied to the Registrar and the issues involved are discussed. The Head of Research and/or Registrar, as appropriate determines if other Institute grievance procedures should be invoked. Where this is the case, the appropriate section heads are contacted (finance, human resources, Director, etc.) and the process set out in those procedures is followed.

Where other Institute regulations are not invoked, and a resolution is possible by direct intervention, or by decision of the Head of Research/Registrar, the Head of Research/Registrar addresses the issues raised and reports to the affected parties.

Where resolution is not possible, the matter is referred to the Executive Committee, which decides the appropriate action. A nominee of the Executive Committee prepares a report on decisions made and actions taken.

#### **5.6 Changes in Supervisory Arrangements**

A student or supervisor wishing to change the supervisory arrangements pertaining to their project writes to the Head of Research setting out the reasons for the change. The Head of Research brings the request to the Research and Innovation Committee for discussion and decision.

#### **5.7 Transferring Between Registers**

A candidate wishing to transfer from the Master's Register to the Doctoral Register makes a formal application to the Research Office using the transfer between postgraduate registers form, which can be found on the Institute's website. This must be accompanied by a substantial transfer report which sets out the work done to date, and the work planned to reach the PhD level.

Normally, such application should not be made earlier than one year after admission to the Master's Register, and not later than one year before the expected date of completion of the proposed doctoral programme.

The transfer application is processed in a similar way to the initial registration process, with one exception: the material is reviewed by one external reviewer only.

Candidates on the Doctoral Register who are unable to complete the approved programme, may apply to the Registrar for permission to transfer to the Master's Register.

## **6.0 THESIS PREPARATION AND ASSESSMENT**

It is the Candidate's responsibility to prepare a thesis for submission. No guarantee is given or implied by the supervisor or the Institute on the likely success of the assessment.

### **6.1 Appointment of Examiners**

The Candidate's research is examined by at least two examiners. These are normally one External examiner and one Internal Examiner.

The criteria for the appointment of an External Examiner are:

- The external examiner will be substantially independent of IT Sligo and of the co-operating off-campus organisation, if any, and shall not have acted as the Candidate's internal or off-campus supervisor.
- The external examiner will be a specialist in the subject area, be known for his/her contribution to, and must be currently active in research in, the area of the Candidate's research.
- The external examiner will have academic qualifications to at least the level of the award to be examined.

The duties of an External Examiner are:

1. To ensure that each Candidate's performance is properly assessed in accordance with the standards for the award.
2. To make such suggestions regarding deletions, additions and amendments as appropriate to the draft thesis.
3. To communicate with the appointed Chairperson within one month of receipt of the Candidate's thesis.
4. To conclude the assessment, including *viva voce*, normally within 3 months of receipt of the Candidate's thesis.
5. To work with the Internal Examiner in relation to arrangements for the examination, including the sharing of reports, with a view to achieving a consensus on the result.
6. To take part in a *viva voce* examination in the case of a PhD. This is normally located in the Institute, but may, in some circumstances, and by agreement, take place in another location, or using video conferencing facilities
7. External Examiners are not expected to visit the Institute for a Masters by Research degree, unless they expressly wish to meet the Candidate.
8. To submit a report on the standard form, recording one of the four listed assessment categories/recommendations. They are not normally required to attend the Examination Board where their written recommendations are presented.

Proposed External Examiners will be assessed for suitability by the appropriate School and recommended to the Standards and Examinations Committee of the Academic

Council for approval. Once approved, a contract will be sent for signing. Once this is returned, the thesis may be sent to them.

Where the Candidate is a member of staff, the Institute will not appoint an Internal Examiner, but will appoint a second External Examiner to fulfil the duties of an Internal Examiner. In this case, both examiners will have equal responsibilities and status in respect of the recommendation following the assessment and/or *viva voce*.

The criteria for the appointment of an internal examiner are:

- The internal examiner must not be the Candidate's supervisor.
- The internal examiner must have a qualification in the cognate area to at least the level of award sought.
- The internal examiner must be active in the general area of research of the degree being undertaken by the Candidate and, where practicable, should have experience as a specialist in the topic(s) to be examined.
- Where the previous criterion cannot be met from within the Institute, an Internal Examiner who does meet that criterion may be appointed by IT Sligo from another HEI.
- Where the Candidate is a member of staff of IT Sligo, an examiner will not be appointed from within the Institute. Instead, a further examiner will be appointed from outside the Institute to fulfill the duties normally assigned to the internal examiner.
- The internal examiner has an administrative role in maintaining contact as appropriate with IT Sligo and the supervisor(s) on behalf of the other examiner(s) with regard to assessment.

The duties of the Internal Examiner are:

1. To read the thesis and form a view of the standard.
2. To contact the External Examiner with a view to reaching a consensus on a result, and to make logistical arrangements for the conclusion of the assessment, including a *viva voce* examination, where appropriate.
3. To prepare a report on the thesis for submission to the Institute.

Where qualifier examinations are necessary for registration, or if a Candidate wishes to apply for transfer from the Master's register to the Doctoral register the external examiner(s) may be proposed to QQI at those times.

Where QQI considers it necessary, and subject to IT Sligo's requirements, the external examiner(s) may conduct periodic reviews of the Candidate's progress. In such circumstances the external examiner(s) will be proposed to QQI at the time of registration.

## **6.2 Making a Submission**

There are two main stages to submission. The Candidate initially submits two soft bound copies to the Research Office. These are sent to the Examiners.

An abstract, not exceeding 300 words, should be provided as an integral part of the thesis, and should precede the main text. Each copy of the thesis submitted should include a copy of the abstract. The abstract should be printed or typed in single spacing and should indicate the author and title of the thesis in the form of a heading.

Also integral in the thesis should be a statement, signed by the Candidate and the supervisor(s), indicating that the thesis represents the Candidate's own work, or, in the case of a thesis based on a group project, indicating the extent of the Candidate's individual contribution. In the case of a collaborative project, the statement should make

reference to any other theses submitted or material published by each collaborator in the project.

After comments are received from the examiners, and required amendments made (if any), 1 bound copy and 1 electronic copy are submitted to the Library (as per procedures LIB017154 (PhD) and LIB01653 (Masters))(Figure 6.1).

### **6.3 Format of Thesis Presentation**

The thesis should be in typescript or print (12-point type) on A4-size paper single sided, with pages numbered consecutively (centrally, about 20mm from the bottom edge). The main text should be typed or printed in one and one half or double spacing; footnotes and quotations should be typed or printed (10-point type) in single spacing.

On each page there should be a left-hand margin of at least 40mm and a right hand margin of at least 20mm.

Photographs or diagrams, if any, should, where feasible, be incorporated digitally within the text. Where this is not appropriate or practicable they should be fixed firmly in place. They should be provided with reference numbers and legends.

Where the thesis consists of more than one volume, the pagination should indicate the relevant volume number as well as the page-number on each page.

Appendices should be named alphabetically, and each appendix paginated consecutively but separately from the main text and from each other.

The front board (cover) of the thesis shall contain the following information only:

- the title of the thesis;
- the initials and name of the Candidate;
- the award for which the thesis is submitted, and the year of approval
- the volume number and the total number of volumes where the thesis consists of more than one volume.

The same information (excluding the title of the thesis) shall be printed along the spine of the cover in such a way as to be easily legible when the copy is lying flat with the front cover uppermost. All lettering on the cover and the spine shall be of plain graphic design.

The title page of each volume of the thesis should contain the following information:

- the full title of the thesis, with any subtitles, in 20 point type;
- if there is more than one volume, the total number of volumes and the number of the particular volume;
- the full name of the author with, if desired, any qualifications or distinctions;
- the award for which the thesis is submitted;
- the name of the IT Sligo;
- the names(s) of the supervisor(s) of the research;
- as the last line on the page, in cases where IT Sligo has Delegated Authority to make awards in the discipline area, the statement "Submitted to the Institute of Technology, Sligo, (Month) (Year)".
- as the last line on the page, in cases where IT Sligo does not have Delegated Authority to make awards in the discipline area the statement "Submitted to the Quality and Qualifications Ireland, (Month) (Year)".

Footnotes and indented quotations should be single line spaced. The footnotes in each chapter should be numbered consecutively. A list of references may be included either at the end of the chapter to which they relate, or in a separate reference section located at

the end of the main body of the text, before any appendices. References should be thorough and comprehensive.

The thesis must include a bibliography of the works consulted in its composition.

The Candidate may publish material in advance of presentation of the thesis, but reference should be made to any such publication, including material submitted for publication or in press, in the thesis.

#### **6.4 Assessment**

Each Examiner assesses the work and presents an independent report to the QQI (in cases where the Institute does not have Delegated Authority to make awards in the discipline area) or the Research Office (in cases where the Institute has Delegated Authority to make awards in the discipline area). Examiners are normally expected to carry out their duties within three months of referral to them of the work in question.

The Examiners may, if they consider it necessary, conduct an oral examination of the Candidate on the programme of work and on the field of study concerned. An oral examination is a mandatory requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Examiners will assess and may recommend the award of **Degree of Master (Research)** in accordance with the following criteria:

- the thesis should show evidence of independent thought and research, and must demonstrate a mastery of their chosen subject.
- the Candidate should demonstrate an understanding of methodologies appropriate to the chosen field and show adequate knowledge of the literature of the subject and of the work of other scholars in the field.
- the Candidate should be capable of relating knowledge of particular topics to the broader field of study involved and of presenting such knowledge in a critical and scholarly way.
- the Candidate has met the Learning Outcomes of the National Framework of Qualifications – Level 9.

Examiners will assess and may recommend the award of **Doctor of Philosophy** in accordance with the following criteria:

- the Candidate shall have demonstrated the capacity of pursuing original independent research in the field of study and of exercising critical judgment.
- the thesis must make a substantial and original contribution to scholarship and provide evidence of originality by the exercise of independent critical powers.
- the thesis must contain an acceptable amount of original work by the candidate, which is considered by the examiners to be of publishable standard in the form *inter alia* of:
  - articles in appropriate refereed journals,
  - a book or other scholarly publication,
  - a research/creative or self-expressive work monograph which meets the standard of refereed academic publications.
- the Candidate must present and successfully defend the body of work at an oral examination.
- the Candidate has met the Learning Outcomes of the National Framework of Qualifications – Level 10.

Where there is disagreement between Examiners as to whether a thesis should be recommended (with or without minor revisions) or not recommended (with or without the



option of major revision and re-examination), the Registrar of ITSligo will attempt to get agreement between Examiners on the course to be adopted. If agreement is not achieved, the Registrar will propose a further examiner be appointed who shall have a casting vote. (Note: The additional examiner must be approved by the Academic Council of the Institute for areas where the Institute has Delegated Authority, or be approved by QQI for areas where the Institute does not have Delegated Authority).

#### **6.4.1 Oral Examination**

An oral examination is a mandatory requirement for the award of PhD. The requirement for an oral examination at Master's Degree (Research) level is exceptional, save as outlined previously, and is at the discretion of the Examiners.

The oral examination will normally take place as soon as possible, normally within three months of submission of the work presented.

The oral examination board should consist of the Examiners, and an individual appointed by IT Sligo, who has not previously been involved with the candidacy or the examination process, to act as an Independent Chairperson. Attendance by any other person should be by agreement with the Candidate. The Supervisor(s) may be in attendance (if requested by the Candidate) but cannot take part in the examination of the Candidate's work.

The purpose of an oral examination is to assess the work submitted by the Candidate. It gives the Candidate the opportunity to present and defend the work through high-level debate with experts in the subject. It enables the Examiners to confirm that the Candidate has a thorough understanding of the practical and theoretical aspects and methods involved in the work.

The Chairperson's primary duties are to ensure that the Examiners and the Candidate have adequate time for discussion of issues arising from the work submitted.

The Chairperson will assume responsibility for the organisation of the examination on the day. This includes determining whether the Candidate has any special requirements for the examination such as booking a neutral room.

Before the Examination itself, the Chairperson will ensure that the external and the internal Examiners have had the opportunity to confer.

The Chairperson will agree the approach and broad lines of questioning with the Examiners, allowing the external Examiner(s) the major say in the framing of these. Problematic areas will be identified in advance, in order to ensure that these are adequately explored in the dialogue between Candidate and Examiners.

The Chairperson will introduce the Examiners to the Candidate, briefly explain the purpose of the examination and the procedures to be followed, and advise the Candidate to deal with questions as fully as he/she thinks necessary. The Chairperson's overall aim will be to ensure a fair and constructive dialogue between the Examiners and the Candidate.

If the result is that further work is required, this is detailed in a joint report from the examiners, provided to the Research Office for circulation to the student and supervisor, as soon as practicable after the oral examination.

#### **6.5 Result**

Four grades of result are possible, as set out in the QQI External Examiners Report form, as follows: (a) Recommended; (b) Recommended with minor revisions; (c) Not recommended but referred for major revision and re-examination; (d) Not recommended.

At the end of the assessment process, the Examiners will report formally to QQI, or the Institute (as appropriate) using the standard QQI External Examiners Report form.

The overall process of submission and assessment is set out in Figure 6.1 below. Where a viva voce is required, this will normally be within three months of submission of the thesis.

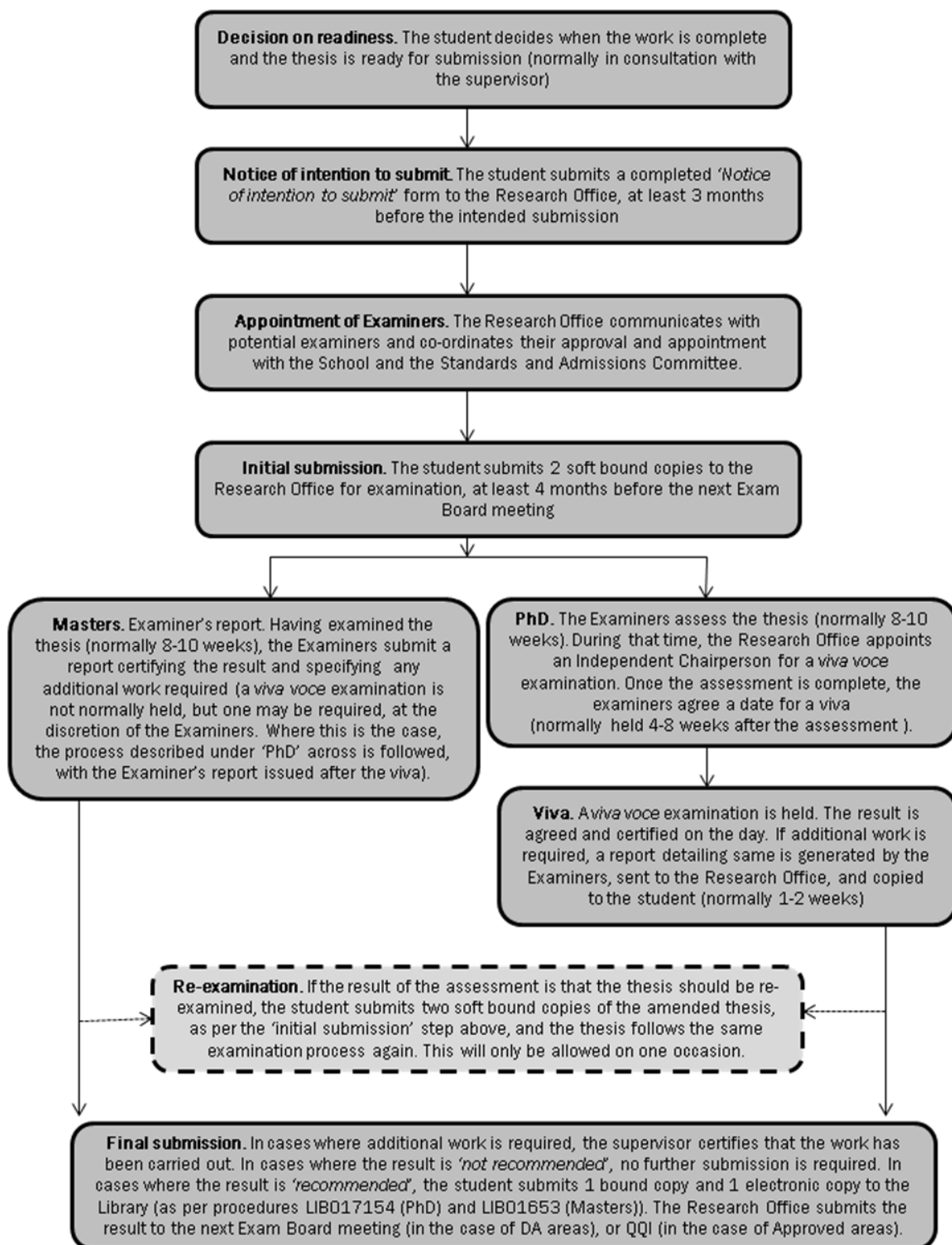


Figure 6.1: The Thesis Submission Process.

## **6.6 Award**

Following receipt of the external examiner(s)' report(s) IT Sligo (in areas of Delegated Authority), or QQI (in areas of Approval) will issue a broadsheet for results. An Examination Board Meeting will then take place, the proceedings which will be conducted in accordance with the provisions of the QQI Marks and Standards document, and IT Sligo's general academic QA processes. Having considered the recommendations of the Examiners, the final determination of the result is a matter for the Examination Board.

A Candidate who wishes to appeal the result of an examination may use procedure Exam 027/200 (Examinations Review and Appeal).

The Degree of Master (Research) is of Honours standard and is awarded without classification. In the case of successful Candidates, the Broadsheet of Results will be annotated "Recommended" and signed by the examiner(s) concerned.

The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is awarded without classification. In the case of successful Candidates, the Broadsheet of Results will be annotated "Recommended" and signed by the examiner(s) concerned.

The Examination Board recommendation as to the award or otherwise of a degree shall be recorded. In the case of a Degree in an area of Delegated Authority, the Candidate may use the title of a Degree awarded from the date of the IT Sligo Examinations Board meeting. In the case of an Approved area, the result of an Examination Board is sent to QQI for validation at a subsequent QQI Board meeting. The Candidate in this case may use the title of a degree awarded from the date of the QQI meeting.