



## **Guidelines on Quality Assurance of Graduate Training Elements (GTEs)** (Excluding those part of accredited programmes)

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Since 2008 there has been a framework in DCU, under which any research student can take accredited modules, called Graduate Training Elements (GTEs) in parallel with their research.
- 1.2 Where a module has been approved as part of an award programme, it automatically can be chosen by a Faculty as a GTE offered to their students<sup>1</sup>. Such modules are part of normal annual and periodic review process, and come under the oversight of a programme or module external examiner.
- 1.3 This document details the quality assurance guidelines and process for Graduate Training Elements which are not part of an accredited, taught programme. It is guided by the University's *Marks and Standards* and it is intended to ensure that the design and implementation of such modules is subject to the same rigorous and expert scrutiny as other accredited modules in DCU.

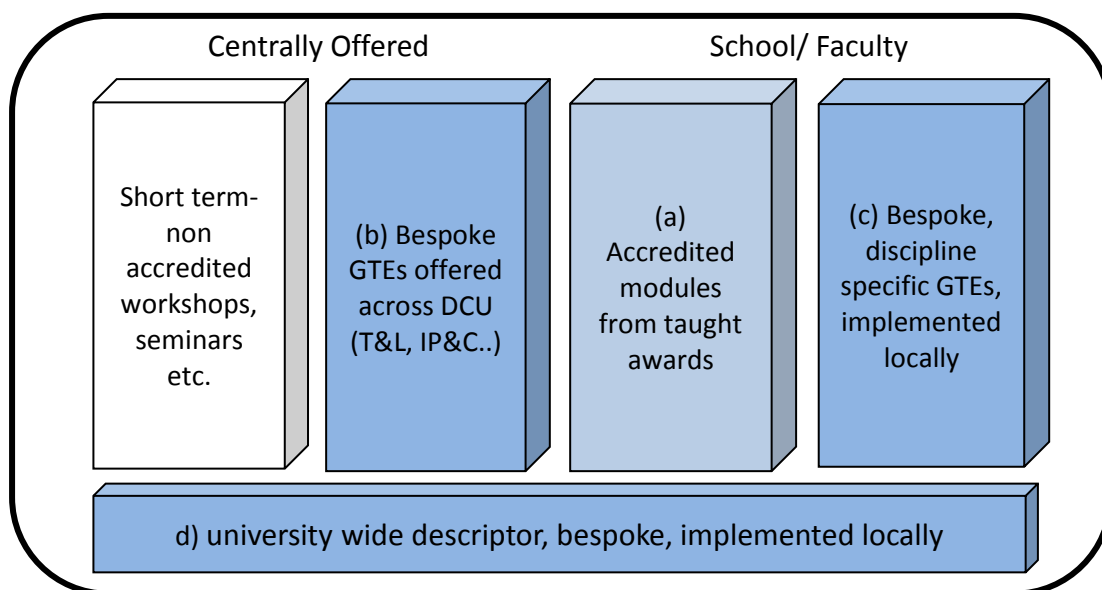
### **2. Accreditation**

- 2.1 Approval of a new GTE module (not part of an accredited programme), is by the Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB) as per *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis*. Descriptors proposed to GRSB have to first have Faculty approval.
- 2.2 This is operationalise as follows:
  - a. The module coordinator submits the proposed module descriptor to the Chair of their Faculty Research Committee (FRC) for approval by the committee.
  - b. The module descriptor must also be communicated to the Faculty Teaching Committee (FTC) for consideration.
  - c. Once approved, the secretary of the FRC submits the necessary documentation to the Secretary of the Graduate Research Study Board (GRSB), at least ten days in advance of the meeting at which it is to be considered.
- 2.3 Modules in the range 5-10 ECTS can be accredited.

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<sup>1</sup> The Graduate Research Studies Board decision March 2013

### 3. Ownership & Administration



- 3.1 There are four categories of GTE's offered in DCU, with ownership as follows:
- Accredited modules running as part of taught programmes, but which are also offered to research students. These are owned by a Faculty, usually one specific School, and administered by the Faculty as part of normal programme administration.
  - GTEs developed specifically for research students, offered across DCU and implemented on a cohort basis for all students who register. University policy is that these modules be owned by a Faculty<sup>2</sup>.
  - Discipline specific GTEs, developed for research students. These GTE's which are owned by a Faculty, usually one specific School, and administered by the Faculty.
  - GTEs developed specifically for research students, offered in a number of Schools across DCU but implemented locally for students in each discipline. These cross-cutting modules are owned by the Graduate Studies Office (GSO).
- 3.2 The Quality Assurance related responsibilities of a GTE owner include:
- Being custodian of the most recently approved module descriptor<sup>3</sup>,
  - Ensuring there is an approved external examiner,
  - Supporting the usual external examination processes,
  - Undertaking a periodic review of the GTE, and contribute to the periodic report to GRSB.
- 3.3 Administrative responsibility for issues such as timetabling, academic structures, uploading of results etc. generally lies with the GTE owner, although may be done in a distributed way in the context of university wide GTEs owned by GSO, as they are implemented in a number of ways locally.

<sup>2</sup> however for historical reasons there are two GTEs for which this is not currently the case and, while uploading of marks is done by the module co-coordinators, GSO supports these modules.

<sup>3</sup> In effect, this means being associated with it on Akari course builder.

- 3.4 Results of modules for students taking all GTEs are reviewed by their Faculties Graduate Research Assessment Board and approved by the Faculty Awards Boards for Research Degree, as per *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis*.

## 4. External Examination of GTEs

- 4.1 External examiners are appointed for approved GTEs, normally prior to implementation, but no later than when first set of assessments are to be considered for the awarding of credits.
- 4.2 It is the responsibility of the GTE owner to nominate an external examiner, and to liaise with the examiner in respect of their duties.
- 4.3 New external examiners are nominated by means of DCU's GURU System (this has replaced the need to manually complete and submit form EE1). The external examiner is approved by the University Standards Committee (USC) and successful nominees are directly informed of their appointment.
- a. University Regulations and guidelines with regard to external examiners for taught programmes/ modules apply, except in such cases as GRSB accepts that the research nature of the module is such that some specific departure from these regulations is justified.  
[https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/ovpaa/pdfs/TAUGHT%20EXTERNS\\_REGULATIONS%20AND%20GUIDELINES\\_APPROVED%20ACADEMIC%20COUNCIL\\_09%20APRIL%202014.pdf](https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/ovpaa/pdfs/TAUGHT%20EXTERNS_REGULATIONS%20AND%20GUIDELINES_APPROVED%20ACADEMIC%20COUNCIL_09%20APRIL%202014.pdf)  
The external examiner report used may be a slightly modified version of that for other taught modules to ensure fitness for purpose.

## 5. Periodic Review of GTE modules

### 5.1 Overview

- GRSB will review those accredited GTEs which are not part of any taught programme, in keeping with a move to cycles of programme review more broadly in the University.
- A Periodic review of GTEs (Graduate Training Modules) at DCU, will take place every three years, and will enable GRSB (Graduate Research Studies Board) and Faculties to monitor the ongoing quality and impact of GTEs. Moving to a five year review cycle may be instigated after the initial review cycle.
- The review will help capture the range of modules designed for researchers, the uptake by students, feedback from students, supervisors and examiners, consistency of implementation and the structure of offerings at School level.
- It will help identify overlaps and gaps in provision that might not otherwise be identified.


### 5.2 Purpose of the Periodic Review of GTEs

- The purpose of a period review of GTEs is to maintain the highest standards in Graduate Training Module delivery, and to make ongoing improvements when and where necessary. This is done by:

- Ensuring appropriate articulation between initial approval of the module and its development over time.
  - Ensuring issues highlighted in the previous review have been appropriately addressed.
  - Ensuring issues highlighted by the external examiners are addressed.
  - Reporting on numbers registering, and numbers obtaining credits.
  - Ensuring module learning outcomes are appropriately being addressed.
  - Ensure there is a consistency of marking standards across groups of thematic modules and across multiple years.
  - Consider any proposed changes to the module structure.
- External involvement in the process will be facilitated.

### 5.3 Main Steps in the Period Review

- Only those GTEs which are not part of a taught programme (and therefore not included in normal annual or periodic programme reviews) will be included in this process.
- GSO will indicate to module owners when a review cycle is forthcoming.
- GSO will collate relevant statistical information, external examiner feedback and student feedback, and this information will be communicated to relevant module owners.
- The module owner will complete and submit a Periodic Review report to GSO (see appendix 1).
- GRSB will appoint a review panel. This panel will include a person external to DCU – an External Reviewer.
- The Review Panel will consider all documentation made available, making reference to the IUA's *Irish Universities' PhD Graduate Skills Statement*<sup>4</sup> and the *National Framework for Doctoral Education*.
- The Review Panel will consider the following aspects:
  - The range of modules designed for research students
  - Uptake by students and credits awarded
  - Feedback from students, external examiners and module owners
  - Consistency of implementation and the structure of offerings at School level
- The steps in the process are outlined in appendix 2.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.iua.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/IUA-PhD-Graduate-Skills-Statement-20141.pdf>



## Appendix 1: Periodic Review Report – Completed by Module Owner

**1. Provide details of any amendments which have been made to the module since the last review or since initial module approval. Include reasons for those amendments.**

**2. Evaluate the extent to which the module has met its stated learning outcomes.**

**3. Indicate any concerns you may have regarding uptake or completion by students.**

**4. Responses to recommendations/comments made by the external examiner.**

**5. Responses to any student feedback.**

**6. Outline the envisaged future developments/changes and prognosis.**

## Appendix 2: Process Steps & Associated Indicative Timings

