



Peer Review Group Report

2021/22

Of

Dundalk Institute of Technology

**DCU-DKIT Graduate School
Graduate Research Programmes**

Date: 5th April 2022

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1 Introduction and Context

The broad approach to quality assurance and enhancement DCU aims to promote and develop is a culture of quality throughout all aspects of the University. The framework derives from the spirit of Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement enshrined in the Universities Act (1997), which is the legislative basis for quality throughout the Irish University sector, and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

The DCU processes for quality reviews at DCU are further aligned to the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the published guidelines of Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI).

This Report presents the findings of a quality review of the Dundalk Institute of Technology Graduate Research Programmes in the DCU-DkIT Graduate School, following a visit by the Peer Review Group undertaken on 23-25 February 2022.

1.1 Overview of the Graduate Research Programmes at DkIT

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) is an important higher education provider in the North Leinster-South Ulster region (serving Cavan, Monaghan, Louth, Meath, North County Dublin, Armagh and Down). Set in a state-of-the-art 87 acre campus, DkIT provides quality learning and teaching to circa 5,500 students across four Schools in Business & Humanities, Health & Science, Engineering, and Informatics & Creative Arts at undergraduate and postgraduate degrees from NFQ Level 6 to 10 (doctorate), in addition to its track record of excellence in apprenticeships.

The Institute has always been recognised as one of the leading research-performing Institutes of Technology across the sector. The research performance of the Institute has been on an upward trajectory, especially since the establishment of the Research and Graduate Studies Office in 2008 where internal investment by the Institute ensured that support structures were put in place to expand the research activity across the campus. The research within the Institute is primarily consolidated into three main thematic areas of strength, (i) the ICT, Health and Ageing Cluster, (ii) the Climate and Natural Resources Cluster, and (iii) the Creative Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Cluster. These clusters are further divided into various Institute-recognised research centres and groups and have inputs from a number of the academic Schools and Departments within the Institute.

The Research and Graduate Studies Office assists the wider DkIT research community through the provision of dedicated supports in the areas of career development, preparation of funding strategies for both individuals and research centres/groups, the delivery of training, and the provision of pre- and post-award administrative support, as well as in the provision of supports for graduate students, both in terms of processes and in terms of more individualised support.

Prior to the establishment of the DCU-DkIT collaborative partnership relationship in 2014 the Institute awarded research degrees at both NFQ Levels 9 and 10 in a small select number of prioritised research domains principally located within two of the Institute's four academic schools. Research degrees were awarded by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and the Institute had NFQ Level 9 and 10 approval to register postgraduate research students in a limited number of defined research domains, which restricted the growth of postgraduate research provision, and research across the campus. The creation of the DCU-DkIT Graduate School opened up research supervision at both NFQ Levels 9 and 10 to all academic Schools irrespective of research domain, and thus was a significant step in enabling growth of this activity across the entire Institute.

In July 2012 Dublin City University (DCU) and Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the framework for a Strategic Alliance. The aim in progressing the DCU/DkIT MOU was to facilitate a coherent and efficient approach to fulfilling the

education, research and innovation requirements of the region. One specific commitment made in the MOU was to explore options in respect of cooperation in graduate research education at NFQ Levels 9 and 10. This was the first strand of discussions to reach a mature stage which involved the Registrars of both Institutions, the Dean of Graduate Studies (DCU), the Head of Research (DkIT), and the DCU and DkIT Presidents. A phased approach to the establishment of the DCU-DkIT Graduate School was negotiated between the Registrars of both institutions, the DkIT Head of Research and the DCU Dean of Graduate Studies, and was approved by the Presidents. This was supported by the DCU Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB) on May 22nd 2014. The engagement was envisaged as taking place in two phases, of which the first phase was rolled out. The details are summarised below:

Initially DCU will enter into a linked provider arrangement with DkIT whereby DCU becomes the awarding body for new research students registered from Sept 2014. Implicit in this, is a proposal that:

- *All QA oversight required under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 be put in place, and reported upon through GRSB (Graduate Research Studies Board) at DCU.*
- *The current practice for linked colleges, whereby the DCU GRSB approve confirmation/transfer and appointment of examiners, be extended to DkIT students.*
- *The terms of reference of DCU GRSB membership be amended to include a DkIT nominee (the DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies).*
- *GRSB consider accreditation of Graduate Training Elements (modules) being delivered by DkIT.*

The practical realisation of this first phase is that the DCU regulations and processes (including for progression, and examination) for postgraduate degrees by research were adopted and implemented (*mutatis mutandis*) by DkIT, with advice and support from the relevant DCU offices (in particular the Graduate Studies Office) and a general intent to align with DCU graduate research structures where possible and desirable. High level boards such as the Graduate Research Studies Boards in the two institutions have representation from the other partner to enable effective communication and sharing of knowledge at a board level, in addition to less formal communication pathways between colleagues in the various offices in the two institutions.

The students, upon successful completion of their studies, become graduates of DCU. During their studies, the students have some limited access to certain DCU facilities (e.g. walk-in access to the DCU Library), but do not have the same level of access to facilities as DCU students (e.g. to DCU Library electronic journal resources).

Since the commencement of the DCU DkIT Graduate School in the academic year 2014/2015 there have been 119 first year registrations with 101 (85%) of these being aligned with two of the Institute's four academic schools, namely the Schools of Health and Science and Informatics and Creative Arts. The latter two academic Schools contain five of the six Institute research centres which are composed of experienced research supervisors. The vast majority of these registrations are on a full-time basis.

As of January 2022, the Institute has 77 research students registered through the DCU-DkIT Graduate School with a further cohort being recruited. Of the 77 current students, 28 are registered on the PhD track, 30 on the PhD register and the remaining 19 on the Masters register. The table below provides an overview of the students across each academic School, and the postgraduate register they are aligned with. A small number of students remain registered under the QQI register, but these fall outside the scope of the present review. A graduating cohort of circa 25 students is anticipated for the end of the 2021-22 academic year, and an incoming cohort of 35-40 new students is expected.

The funding of the students comes from a variety of sources, including competitive national and international research funding, as well as internal DkIT funding streams (including both fees and/or stipends).

Academic School	Total Student Cohort	Masters Register	PhD Track Register	PhD Register
Informatics and Creative Arts	27	13	5	9
Health and Science	36	3	15	18
Engineering	8	0	5	3
Business and Humanities	6	3	3	0

Postgraduate Student Profile by School

Procedurally the graduate research provision at DkIT is managed at a variety of levels across the Institute. There is a Graduate Research Programme Board (GRP) in each of the four Schools, primarily responsible for monitoring the progress of postgraduate research students, approving the annual renewal of registrations, managing the PhD transfer process, nominating examiners and ensuring Institute regulations on training are followed. The GRP in each School usually meet three or four times per year. Each Academic School also has a School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) which is established by the Head of School, in line with the Institute's Ethics Policy. Complementing the School GRPs is the DkIT Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB). This sub-committee of the DkIT Academic Council was established by the DkIT Academic Council on the 20th February 2015, consistent with the intent of aligning with DCU graduate research structures. The DCU Dean of Graduate Studies sits on the DkIT GRSB, and the DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies sits on the DCU GRSB. In addition to these board- and committee-based structures, local provision (including around allocation of supervision, training, space etc.) is managed at school-, departmental, research centre and research group level.

In terms of the remit of the peer review group (PRG), in particular the review focused on the following issues, following the initial guidance from DCU:

- The management, planning and resourcing for postgraduate research provision at DkIT
- The effectiveness of the implementation of quality assurance processes and procedures relating to the admission and programmatic progression of postgraduate research students at DkIT
- A review of the learning, research and supports provided to postgraduate research students at DkIT
- The effectiveness of the collaborative relationships between DCU and DkIT in relation to ongoing quality assurance of postgraduate research programmes at DkIT

2 Approach to Self-Assessment

2.1 Quality Review Committee

The self-assessment phase of the Quality Review was led by quality review committee at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT). Specifically DkIT established a Quality Review Committee (QRC) Committee whose membership was as follows:

Name	Role
Dr Brendan Ryder	Chair (Head of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance, Registrar's Office)
Dr Tim McCormac	Vice Chair, Head of Research and Graduate Studies
Mr Pat McCormick	DkIT Graduate Research Studies Board (Chair)
Professor Joseph Stokes*	DCU Dean of Graduate Studies, DCU Graduate Studies Office <i>*Advice only, not formal role</i>
Dr Edel Healy	Chair, DkIT GRPB (School of Health and Science)
Dr Gerard (Bob) McKiernan	Chair, DkIT GRPB (School of Informatics and Creative Arts)
Dr Thomas Dooley	Chair, DkIT GRPB (School of Engineering)
Dr Patricia Moriarty	Chair (Head of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance, Registrar's Office)
Professor Keith Thornbury	Director, SMRC Research Centre
Professor Fergal McCaffery	Director, RSRC Research Centre
Professor Eleanor Jennings	Director, CFES Research Centre
Dr Daithi Kearney	Co-Director, CARC Research Centre
Dr Julie Doyle	Director, Netwell/Casala Research Centre
Dr Fergal O'Rourke	Director, CREDIT Research Centre
Orla Lynch	Research and Graduate Studies Office Manager
Dr Breda Brennan	Head of Department Representative (School of Health and Science)
Dr Ronan Lynch (replaced Dr Adele Commins currently on maternity leave).	Head of Department Representative (School of Informatics and Creative Arts)
Mr Coleman Ledwith	Head of Department Representative (School of Engineering)
Dr Brian Boyd	Head of Department Representative (School of Business and Humanities)
Ms Aine Brady	1 st Year Postgraduate Student Representative
No nomination	Final Year Postgraduate Student Representative
No nomination	Early Career "Emerging" Research Supervisor
Mr Stuart Quinn	DkIT Finance Officer

DkIT Quality Review Committee (QRC) Membership

DkIT received notification of the DCU-DkIT Graduate School Quality Review from DCU (from the DCU Dean of Graduate Studies, i.e. Dean of the DCU-DkIT Graduate School) on 29th July 2021. An initial meeting took place on 23rd August 2021 with DkIT representatives (from DkIT Research and Graduate Studies Office, Registrar's Office) and DCU representatives (from DCU Graduate Studies Office, DCU Quality Promotion Unit) in preparation for the quality review. The quality review timelines and process were then agreed between the collaborative partners. The quality review process was documented in the support documentation provided by DCU to DkIT. This included the quality process background and guidance and Self-Assessment Report (SAR) template.

DkIT established a Quality Review Committee (QRC) to conduct and oversee the quality review self-assessment/reflection activities. The QRC was comprised of representatives from all stakeholders involved with postgraduate research at DkIT and included the DCU GRSB representative (see Table above for membership) and DkIT GRSB Chair, Heads of School at DkIT who are the Chairs of the respective School Graduate Research Programme Boards (GRPBs) (see above) and postgraduate student representatives. The self-assessment process was led by the QRC Chair (Head of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance, Registrar's Office) and Vice-Chair (Head of Research and Graduate

Studies) with inputs as appropriate from all involved with postgraduate research at the Institute. The major milestones are summarised in the table below.

Date(s)	Description
<i>Week ending 10th September 2021</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalisation of the membership of Quality Review Committee (QRC) (DkIT). • Provision of nominations for Peer Review Group (PRG) to DCU Quality Promotion Unit (DkIT). • Confirmation of contents of Self-Assessment Report (SER) with DCU (DkIT and DCU).
<i>Week ending 1st October 2021</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation of membership of Peer Review Group (PRG) (DCU).
<i>7th October 2021</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCU Quality Review Support Briefing (DCU and DkIT). A collaborative support session with DCU where the DCU quality review process was discussed in detail with the QRC. • Confirmation of membership of the PRG to DkIT (DCU)
<i>Thursday 27th January 2022</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission of Self-Assessment Report (SAR) (DkIT).
<i>Friday 28th January 2022</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission of Self-Assessment Report (SAR) to Peer Review Group (DCU).
<i>23rd, 24th and 25th February 2022</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Review Group (PRG) visit. Review event to take place on the DkIT Campus (subject to COVID-19 public health guidelines; contingencies to be put in place for a virtual quality review event). • Confirmation of PRG visit schedule (DCU with DkIT).
<i>March 2022 – April 2022</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of Self-Assessment Report (SAR) report and response.
<i>June 2022</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of Quality Review completed (DCU and DkIT).

DCU-DkIT Quality Review Timelines (Major Milestones)

The QRC primarily reported to the DkIT Academic Council through the DkIT Academic Quality Sub-Committee (AQSC) but also through the DkIT GRSB. The DkIT AQSC is responsible for the development and review of academic quality assurance policies and procedures. The DCU-DkIT Graduate School review was a standing item on the DkIT AQSC (and Academic Council) for the duration of the quality review. The membership of the QRC was confirmed by the DkIT AQSC on the 1st October 2021.

Once the QRC was confirmed, with oversight from Dr Sheila Flanagan (DkIT Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar), DkIT agreed the contents of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) with DCU. The QRC completed the self-assessment/reflection activities between October 2021 and January 2022. There was a total of 9 consultations and meetings (Table 8) relating to self-assessment activities, all of which the QRC were aware took place in advance of the submission of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR):

The self-assessment analysis was informed by feedback from various stakeholders involved with postgraduate research activities at the Institute. This involved both continual feedback gathered annually as part of the Institute's continuous improvement processes associated with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework and feedback specifically gathered for the quality review.

Date	Description
28 th September 2021	Nominations sought from Heads of School (Chairs of School GRPBs) from Heads of Department who manage resourcing.
5 th October 2021	Briefing with QRC and confirmation of membership.
7 th October 2021	DCU support session with QRC on Quality Review process and self-assessment/reflection activities.
October 2021 – January 2022	Drafting of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR).
7 th – 14 th January 2022	Stakeholder Feedback (postgraduate research students, postgraduate research supervisors, DkIT Management, DkIT GRSB).
13 th January 2022	Stakeholder Feedback (DCU collaborative partner). Subset of QRC met with DCU representatives.
21 st January 2022	Stakeholder Feedback (DkIT GRSB).
27 th January 2022	Meetings with QRC to finalise feedback on SAR before submission to DCU.

Table 8: DkIT Self-Assessment Meetings and Consultations

From a communications perspective, briefing notes were drafted periodically during the period of time the self-assessment was being conducted, by the Registrar's Office in collaboration with the Research and Graduate Studies Office and circulated as appropriate across the Institute. The QRC reported to the DkIT Academic Council through the DkIT Academic Quality Sub-Committee (AQSC). Reporting through the DkIT Academic Council ensured that the quality review had visibility across the entire Institute. Members of the QRC also promoted and communicated the quality review across the Institute. The DkIT Registrar's Office met regularly with the DCU Quality Promotion Unit to provide updates over the time period that the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) was being prepared as part of the quality review (August 2021 – February 2022).

2.2 The Self-Assessment Report

The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) provided an excellent foundation for the work of the Peer Review Group (PRG) in conducting the site-visit and in exploring the operation of the Graduate School through discussion with a wide range of stakeholders. It was clear that the SAR was developed through a well-structured and consultative process. Following agreement of the Quality Review scope and timeline between the partner institutions, DkIT established a broad-based Quality Review Committee (QRC) including academic and administrative colleagues, a student representative, a DCU representative, Directors of Research Centres, Heads of School and Chairs of the relevant governing Boards. The QRC was chaired by Dr. Brendan Ryder (Head of Academic Planning & Quality Assurance), and its work was overseen by Dr. Sheila Flanagan (Vice-President for Academic Affairs). During the self-assessment process (Oct. 2021-Jan. 2022) the QRC reported regularly to the DkIT Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB) and Academic Council. The self-assessment process drew on a range of sources of feedback including student & staff surveys, the outputs of annual postgraduate research monitoring activities and a specific feedback process undertaken in preparation for the Quality Review. This latter process took the form of a series of meetings with postgraduate research students & supervisors, GRSB representatives, DkIT senior management and DCU colleagues to gather feedback on the draft SAR. It was clear to the PRG that the SAR presented a thorough, analytical and self-reflective evaluation of the DCU-DkIT Graduate School.

3 Approach Taken by Peer Review Group

3.1 Peer Review Group Members

Membership of the Peer Review Group for the Quality Review was,

- Professor David Croke, former Director of Quality Enhancement, Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI) – Chair.
- Dr Huw Lewis, Former Dean of Graduate Studies, University of Limerick (now retired).
- Dr Jane Wellens, Head of Graduate School, Financial and Business Services, University of Nottingham.
- Christina O' Keeffe, Doctoral student and member of DCU Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB) – Student reviewer.
- Professor John Costello, School of Physical Sciences (former Dean of Faculty of Science and Health), Dublin City University (DCU).
- Professor Enda McGlynn, School of Physical Sciences, DCU and member of DCU Quality Promotion Committee (QPC) – Rapporteur.

3.2 Overview of Approach Taken by Peer Review Group

The members of the Peer Review Group (PRG) received the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and were given access to the library of supporting documents some weeks in advance of the site-visit, and were afforded the opportunity to submit their initial impressions using a useful template circulated by the DCU Quality Promotion Office (QPO). The PRG members gathered at DCU on the morning of Wednesday 23rd February and, following a briefing by the Director of Quality Promotion & Institutional Research, held a private meeting during which the Chairperson was selected, and primary responsibility for leading the discussion of the main themes/sections of the SAR was assigned to individual PRG members. The PRG then discussed each section of the SAR and, based on their initial impressions, identified and listed the key areas for discussion with stakeholders. The remainder of the day involved meetings with key DCU stakeholders, following which the PRG travelled to Dundalk. The schedule for Thursday 24th & Friday 25th February involved a series of meetings with stakeholders at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) followed by an exit presentation on Friday afternoon. The PRG used their private meeting times within the site-visit schedule to record their impressions from previous meetings, to identify primary & secondary discussants to lead the dialogue in upcoming stakeholder meetings and to identify the key areas for discussion in those meetings. On Thursday afternoon and evening, the PRG drafted their key commendations and recommendations which were revised and further elaborated on Friday morning in parallel with the development of the exit presentation. The PRG also took time on Friday to consider the template for their report and, facilitated by the Rapporteur, agreed individual responsibility for drafting the sections of the report and the time-line for its completion. Following a briefing meeting with DCU colleagues, the PRG presented their key recommendations to DkIT senior management and then the Chairperson delivered the exit presentation. The PRG found the site-visit tremendously useful as a vehicle to explore the many issues raised in and by the SAR. In particular, the ability to carry out the site-visit in person made for a much more engaged and satisfying experience for the PRG and arguably also for the stakeholders. The PRG members were impressed by the cordial, frank and open engagement of all the stakeholders whom they met at DkIT and at DCU, in particular the impressive group of postgraduate research students. Communications with the QPO and with senior DkIT & DCU colleagues were excellent throughout, and everything was done to ensure that the PRG had access to the relevant information and people throughout the process, and that the site-visit ran smoothly. The PRG members were most grateful for the warm welcome extended to them by DkIT & DCU staff, and for the excellent arrangements put in place for the site-visit (including adherence to public health protocols).

4 Findings of the Peer Review Group

4.1 Academic Governance of Postgraduate Research Programmes

Academic governance of postgraduate research programmes (Academic Governance) in this case is the process of overseeing the decisions made during the research student journey at DkIT from application to examination, culminating in a Level 10 award (and Level 9 in some instances) being conferred by DCU. To allow this to occur a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two institutions was agreed, which is due to expire in the current academic year, and will thus need to be addressed (see **Recommendation 1**).

Decisions in regard to the research student journey are made based on the relevant policies and regulations in place, and are controlled and overseen by the DkIT Registrar's Office and the Research and Graduate Studies Office at DkIT, in collaboration with the academic Schools, who in turn report to, for approval where necessary by DCU's Graduate Research Studies Board .

Whilst cognisance is given to the need for a wide range of policies and processes that may affect the project/research requirement, welfare, financial, safety, health, employment and general wellbeing of the research student during their time at DkIT, this section is restricted to the academic journey alone.

Academic decisions are made at defined stages, namely:

- Application to be registered at the Institute to pursue research towards an award.
- Progression on a yearly basis.
- Transfer from a Masters to a PhD programme, including the members of the examination panel.
- Examination of the research outcomes as presented by the research student in the form of a thesis, including the members of the examination panel.

The decisions that can be made at these points are defined in the postgraduate research academic regulations, with the inherent processes for the Institute to record the decisions being controlled by the DkIT Research and Graduate Studies, with approval at the DkIT GRSB and final approval (where applicable) at DCU GRSB.

In reviewing the Academic Governance, it was evident that a strong working relationship at Graduate School level has been forged between the two institutions, (**Commendation 7**), with DkIT adopting the research policies defined by DCU; and adapting and developing the research academic regulations in agreement with DCU (**Commendation 9**). This was supported by the positive outcomes of meetings with academic/support staff and research students. However, the panel did note the lack of a transparent complaints procedure for research students (not to be confused with the academic appeals process).

Further to this it was noted that there was limited interaction between other functions of the institutions (e.g. Finance), resulting in **Recommendation 2**, indicating a wider interaction between the institutions for the duration of the MoU.

The process of reviewing and recording the academic decisions made is well defined, with DkIT schools making academic decisions via their Graduate Research Programme boards (GRPBs), which are reviewed and recorded by the DkIT Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB) and reported and approved at DCU Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB), and subsequently both Academic Councils (evidenced by submission of a hard copy paper trail of one students academic journey). The process prior to approval by DCU is administered and controlled by the Research and Graduate Studies Office at DkIT.

The DCU-DkIT Graduate School has adopted and adapted the process required for the seamless transition of research students through the system. The Research and Graduate Studies Office is also involved in the wider elements of student life, such as pastoral care etc., which was mentioned by both support staff and research students. The professionalism of the management of the Graduate School by

the Research and Graduate Studies Office and especially the Postgraduate Officer is noted (**Commendation 6**). However, if this post is compromised in anyway, the institutional knowledge and professionalism exhibited by the post holder will be lost (**Recommendation 3**).

The panel note and support (subject to a suitable timeline) the planned improvements for Research Governance indicated in Section 5 of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR), and would like to reiterate the **commendations (6, 7, 9)** and **recommendations (1, 2, 3)** associated with this section.

4.2 Management of Resources for Postgraduate Research Provision

Adequate physical and human resourcing of research is key to successful research outcomes and a high quality research student experience. In this context the DCU-DkIT Graduate School has managed to raise significant research support from a variety of sources including Science Foundation Ireland, Horizon 2020, Interreg, the Marine Institute, the Irish Research Council, as well as the Landscape and Technological University Transformation Fund (TUTF) schemes. It has also supported research students via internal schemes along with Landscape and TUTF PhD Scholarships. The balance between internally and externally funded scholarships naturally varies from year to year but has been weighted slightly in favour of internally funded/managed schemes recently. The ambition to grow research numbers and provision is stated as a strategic objective throughout the SAR, starting at paragraph one, sentence one of the executive summary, "Sustaining and expanding provision of postgraduate research education up to doctorate level (NFQ Level 10) at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) is one of the key strategic objectives identified in DkIT's strategic plan.". The PRG, in considering resources and their management for graduate research, were acutely conscious of the strong coupling between this key strategic driver at DkIT and its specific resourcing needs, as articulated in **recommendations 2, 3, 4 and 9** of this report.

In that context the PRG note that three specific needs were highlighted in the DkIT SAR, and in the interviews with supervisors and graduate students, namely adequate time for supervision, adequate (and ideally fully dedicated) space for research (including desk space) and finally, access to facilities, e.g., library research holdings and specialist facilities, but also materials handling, which was raised with the PRG during the site visit (**Recommendations 3, 4, and 9**). The issue of the current academic contract and the high teaching contact hours is one for the senior management of DkIT and other stakeholders. Suffice to state that these teaching contact hours are about a factor of two above the pre-Hunt report¹ university sector norms and could potentially impact the quality of the supervisor and/or research student experience. As some of the commendations imply, it is clear that current supervisors are doing much to avoid that potential downside. See also section 6.3 below.

One resource deficit that did arise within the SAR and within discussions with stakeholder groups at DkIT was research space. This referred not just to access to existing space outside normal business hours, but also to dedicated space (from desks to highly serviced laboratories) for activities ranging from data analysis to high-end measurements. Although out of hours access for some students (e.g. in the RDC building) has been achieved, much more needs to be done to find innovative solutions to increase such access (**Recommendation 4**). The extension to the STEM building was appreciated by the PRG but its understanding is that it will mainly account for a projected increase in undergraduate numbers and associated teaching. Hence, the PRG is of the opinion that, in the medium to long term, the Institute's aim to grow research activity along with supervisor and graduate school numbers will need additional and significant growth in dedicated research space and facilities. The DkIT stated ambition is to reach 5,000 m² of research only space within the coming five years. The PRG fully support this aim which would ideally result in a single space with co-located laboratories and offices. Early planning in a structured fashion for the resources (highly serviced laboratory areas, high end instrumentation suites, data/IT processing and management systems, etc.) needed to meet this key element of the Institute's strategic plan for research is strongly supported by the PRG (**Recommendation 9**). In relation to facilities library research holdings were mentioned in the SAR and during the PRG visit. Although DCU cannot make its

¹Harkin, S. & Hazelkorn, E. (2015). Restructuring Irish Higher Education through Collaboration and Merger. In Curaj, A. et al. eds Mergers and alliances in higher education: International practice and emerging opportunities. Springer, 2015, pp.105-121.

electronic access², available to DkIT, research students may visit the DCU library and take advantage of a 'day visitor card'-type mechanism to access research articles and other sources. The PRG became aware that DkIT graduate students felt that the lack of access to library resources at DCU (its degree awarding body) put them at an unfair disadvantage with respect to DCU registered graduate students. It is hoped that DkIT can find a solution to this issue.

It should be noted that the PRG were impressed with the efforts to date of all concerned, i.e. senior management along with school, department and research centre heads, to provide for the development of a research culture, research training for supervisors, funding for graduate students, facilities and the current research space footprint of 2,750 m². They were especially impressed with the demanding work undertaken by all supervisors to ensure an excellent experience for students (**Commendation 1**) while undertaking 16-18 teaching contact hours per week at NFQ levels below 10 (**Commendation 2**). It was also clear from interviews with students that the DkIT group of supervisors support not just the academic needs of their graduate students, but also their pastoral and other needs if/when they arise (**Commendation 3**). The same interviews also made clear the very positive experiences of the current cohort of graduate school students (**Commendation 4**) and their desire (along with that of supervisors) to continue the development of a number of fora at centre level, while building these out to the wider Institute for research culture expansion and to grow the overall number of supervisors (**Commendation 5**).

Finally the PRG noted one particular human resource risk to the Institute's ambitions for growing graduate research numbers and activity relating to administrative support in the Research and Graduate Studies Office at DkIT. Hence the PRG makes a very specific recommendation in relation to this risk (**Recommendation 3**).

4.3 Postgraduate Research Student Experience

The perspectives of students were collated in the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) alongside further meetings with the postgraduate student body at DkIT. The following areas were identified as key features of the student experience based on the above consultations.

4.3.1 Supervision

The postgraduate students encountered during this process spoke very highly of their research experience, in particular the level of contact, academic, and indeed non-academic, support from supervisors. The PRG **commends** the above practices in contributing to the students' research experience (**Commendations 1-6**).

Recommendations

Students openly welcomed the role of the independent panel member (IPM) in the provision of pastoral support. However, there were some discrepancies surrounding students' experiences of their assigned IPM, as noted in section 4.5. Therefore, the PRG recommends that existing good practices and processes for IPMs are applied consistently across the Institute (**Recommendation 10**). This may be especially relevant given the reported postgraduate research student withdrawals.

4.3.2 Research Community

The PRG **commends** the students' enthusiasm and desire to build a sense of research community across the Institute, as mentioned in section 4.5. Students within some departments spoke extremely highly of opportunities to engage in school-level initiatives such as research days in addition to 'in-house' research training opportunities such as writing support groups (**Commendations 4 and 5**).

Recommendations

The PRG recommends expanding on these local initiatives to enable valuable opportunities to share research knowledge across the Institute (**Recommendations 5 and 6**). This will further support the development of a sense of community among postgraduate students, as identified in the SAR

²<https://irel.ie/about-irel/>

improvement plan. Students also spoke of the benefits of informal opportunities for peer support and networking. Therefore, the PRG recommends planning for opportunities for formal and informal student gatherings going forward, as identified in the SAR improvement plan.

4.3.3 Allocation of Resources and Supports/Infrastructure

The PRG **commends** efforts made by individual supervisors and departments in relation to the provision of resources for postgraduate students. Students were happy that they had access to desk space, a testament to the efforts of staff given reported space constraints within the Institute (**Commendations 1 and 2**).

Recommendations

Although students appeared content with available desk space, as noted in section 4.2, supervisors emphasised the barriers surrounding access to desk space in recruiting additional PGR students going forward. Although hot-desking has been identified as a solution, this was met with reservations regarding the lack of flexibility for students.

There were several other concerns outlined by students in relation to wider research infrastructure within the Institute, as noted in section 4.2, and the associated impact on their postgraduate research: 1) Students strongly emphasised the need for consistency surrounding building access outside of normal working hours and, in particular, during weekends; 2) Certain students also highlighted the need for access to specialised research equipment, in addition to the regular maintenance of current equipment to allow their research to progress; 3) Students emphasised space constraints regarding the long-term management of samples and research materials; 4) Students called for access to increased library supports specifically the range of databases and journals.

In light of these concerns, it is important to consider further development of research infrastructure across the Institute (**Recommendations 4 and 9**).

4.3.5 Training/Researcher Development

The PRG **commends** efforts made by supervisors and departments regarding the provision of research training opportunities for students. This was reflected during interactions with supervisory staff and staff at DkIT Research and Graduate Studies Office. Students openly welcomed opportunities for discipline specific research skills and general academic skills in addition to ongoing induction training opportunities (**Commendations 1, 2 and 6**).

Recommendations

Although training opportunities appeared to be incorporated within the annual student review, some students were less familiar with this approach and there appeared to be ambiguity regarding students' training opportunities across the Institute. Students, in particular, called for additional opportunities for the development of transferrable skills and career planning. Therefore, the PRG recommends that efforts are made to ensure consistency across the Institute in the provision of existing research and non-research specific skills (**Recommendation 7**), as highlighted in the SAR improvement plan. The Institute could consider incorporating an explicit framework as part of the annual student review (see for example, [QQI Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#), [DCU Graduate Researcher Guide](#), [DCU IoE Postgraduate Researcher Development Framework](#)) to ensure transparency surrounding this process.

Finally, as noted in section 4.5, students who joined DkIT during the pandemic referenced the need for in-person induction programmes to supplement the online induction process. Ongoing students also welcomed an annual 'refresher' on available facilities and supports such as library services (**Recommendation 8**).

4.4 Effectiveness of the Collaborative Partnership

The panel explored the effectiveness of the collaborative partnership between DkIT and DCU considering both the effectiveness of the strategic and operational aspects.

4.4.1 Strategic Effectiveness

The panel discussions with senior leaders from both institutions confirmed the value placed on the strategic relationship between DkIT and DCU, and the role that the joint DCU-DkIT Graduate School/linked provider/ collaborative partnership arrangement has played in this since 2014. For DkIT, the collaboration with DCU has enabled the institution to extend its PGR offer to all its research clusters and teams, compared with the more limited provision that was available through QQI accreditation. This has facilitated the recruitment of 77 PGR students, in line with the original objectives set out in the agreement, with the potential further recruitment of up to *circa* 40 more students for the 2022/2023 academic year.

The collaboration has also supported growth in the pool of DkIT staff who are involved in supervision of PGR students. Since 2014, DkIT have been successful in securing a wide range of external research funding (*circa* €35.3M) which has supported this recruitment of PGR students as well as enabling staff to complete their PhD studies. There have been 495 DkIT peer reviewed publications since 2014 and there has been a slight increase in the proportion of these that have been joint with DCU staff. The strategic success of this collaboration is acknowledged in **Commendation 10**.

However, throughout the review meetings, many stakeholders expressed concern and lack of clarity about how the relationship would evolve particularly in light of the rapidly changing sectoral landscape, especially for Institutes of Technology. It was also noted that the current Collaborative Partnership Schedule is due to expire soon and that this urgently needs to be addressed particularly in light of the planned PGR recruitment for 2022/3 at DkIT. The PRG recommends that DkIT plans how it will continue to provide level 10 awards seamlessly into the future in the context of a rapidly changing sectoral landscape (**Recommendation 1**).

The PRG also considered that it would be helpful for DkIT and DCU to establish a regular cycle of senior management meetings which could help to progress issues related to, but outside the governance and quality arrangements (**Recommendation 2**).

4.4.2 Operational Effectiveness

To successfully implement the collaborative arrangement, in 2015 DkIT replaced their previous PGR regulations with new ones aligned to those of DCU. They have also aimed to synchronise any updates to these regulations in line with DCU. In total seven approvals related to the PGR regulations have been approved by DkIT Academic Council since 2015. PGR governance, policies and procedures are also closely aligned to those of DCU. Each school has a Graduate Research Programme Board (GRPB) that reports into the DkIT Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB), a sub-committee of DkIT Academic Council. There is also representation of DCU staff on the DkIT GRSB and vice-versa. All the DkIT staff stakeholder groups reported that the alignment of the PGR governance arrangements, regulations and policies was working well and had brought benefits in terms of sharing and development of PGR processes and supervisory practice. Some concerns were expressed by supervisors about the DkIT internal system used to implement the PGR processes and the speed of some decision making. However, the PGR administrative staff highlighted that it was often the submission of incomplete documentation that resulted in delays.

In the SAR document and in the discussions with the stakeholder groups there was recognition that it had taken some time for DkIT supervisors and administrative staff to become familiar with all elements of the new regulations and their implementation. DkIT supervisors and administrative staff expressed the opinion that they now have a standardised process to manage PGR processes and those initial issues have been ironed out. It appears that, as DkIT have experienced the different phases of the PGR lifecycle from admissions to graduation under the new regulations and increasing numbers of PGRs have worked through the system from across different schools, this has increased familiarity with the processes, and these have increasingly been integrated into practice. The PRG also noted that DkIT's expertise in the delivery of PGR programmes in Creative Practice has fed into the development of DCU regulations for such programmes. The PRG commends the progressive alignment and implementation by DkIT of the DCU regulations and policies and how this is working effectively (**Commendation 9**).

There was considerable appreciation from DkIT, particularly GRPB and GRSB members and the Research and Graduate Studies office, for the considerable help, support and advice that DCU Graduate Studies/School staff provide to them. It was highlighted and acknowledged by both parties that this had been time-intensive and that some aspects were not necessarily foreseen in the original agreement. For example, the need to set up arrangements for a DCU dual PhD to support a DkIT Marie Skłodowska-Curie Network research grant “MANTEL”. The panel observed a good working relationship between Graduate Studies Offices at DCU and the Research and Graduate Studies Office at DkIT (**Commendation 7**) and the flexible approach taken by DCU in meeting additional, unanticipated needs arising from the relationship with DkIT (**Commendation 8**).

4.5 Communication and Provision of Information

The SAR noted that there is a good working relationship between DkIT and DCU staff from the respective President’s Offices (DCU President’s Office), Registrar’s Offices (DCU Office of the Vice-President Academic Affairs, and DCU Registry), the Research and Graduate Studies Offices (DCU Graduate Studies Office), all of whom have responsibility for aspects of processes and/or documentation associated with postgraduate research provision. Documentation is managed on secure shared repositories, Institute websites and more recently in the collaboration platform, Microsoft Teams. This forms the basis of **Commendations 6 – 8**.

The self-assessment activities identified the need to manage documentation in a consistent manner and ensure that relevant Institute staff, both academic and administrative, have access to the documentation as appropriate for both day-to-day operational activities and for reporting purposes. The DkIT GRPB and DkIT GRSB schedule of meetings were circulated via email but were not available centrally on the DkIT website. This is part of a wider issue relating to the management of documentation associated with the DkIT Quality System. Also, there is a need to revise and annually update the Institute’s online provision of information and policies regarding postgraduate provision in collaboration with the DkIT Registrar’s Office and DkIT Communications and Marketing Office, as well as working to align the timing of relevant DkIT and DCU processes.

The PRG noted that there had also been some issues in the past in terms of incomplete forms and other gaps in information in terms of processes, but also that both parties feel that the situation has improved considerably of late.

The SAR noted a number of specific issues concerning management of documentation, but at the review visit it was also clear that in some instances manual transfer or data between systems and/or cross-checking of such data was required, which added an additional burden to the already very busy individual in the DkIT Research and Graduate Studies Office, as well as other colleagues in other DkIT offices. The PRG also heard that for certain processes many individuals only have access to a portion of the information. For example, in the case of the annual progression process (PGR2), if the SmartSimple process stalls (for whatever reason), it can be quite difficult to discover exactly where in the process flow the issue has arisen (e.g. if certain inputs have not been properly submitted by a supervisor). Again a manual intervention seems to be required, whereby already busy individuals need to make contact with other stakeholders to identify the hold-up. A great deal of the “local knowledge” pertaining to these issues appears to reside in a small number of individuals in DkIT (in some cases perhaps a single individual) which naturally carries a risk in terms of potential for loss of key institutional knowledge. This comment is reflected in **Recommendation 3**, recommending a prioritisation of the provision of additional full-time administrative support in the DkIT Research and Graduate Studies Office to mitigate the risk inherent in the current situation where knowledge and expertise regarding postgraduate student processes are concentrated in one person.

The Registrar’s Office and Research and Graduate Studies Office, in collaboration with academic Schools, primarily have responsibility for communications relating to postgraduate research provision both internally and externally. Academic Schools also communicate with staff and the wider Institute regarding postgraduate research. The self-assessment identified the need to review and enhance the communications strategies and timing of such communications relating to postgraduate research

provision. The development of student and staff handbooks specific to postgraduate research provision would enhance communications relating to postgraduate research, as noted in the SAR. The establishment of a postgraduate researcher alumni society was also identified as an enhancement in this area.

The PRG commended DkIT on the progressive and collaborative manner of alignment and implementation by DkIT of DCU policies and procedures for the management of postgraduate students and their research degrees (**Commendation 9**). A related issue, and another aspect of communications and provision of information, concerns the dissemination of knowledge with respect to processes more broadly within DkIT (i.e. beyond the main administrative offices with responsibility for the processes). The PRG felt that there was possibly some confusion at times in terms of the actual specific and detailed requirements of the DCU-DkIT regulations. This includes the requirements around chairs for viva-voce examinations and the approval processes for those, as well as the examiners for transfer/confirmation and final examination. The PRG had a sense that DkIT was applying a somewhat higher bar (perhaps based on former QQI experience) than was required under the newer partnership, and that this was generating some additional pressure for both supervisors and administrators which might not be necessary. The DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies, supported by DkIT GRSB, should engage with DkIT staff to discuss these issues. The DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies could then seek clarification with the DCU GSO if required. These comments are partially reflected in **Recommendations 5 and 6**.

The PRG noted that the development of a sense of shared identity and community amongst postgraduate researchers (perhaps researchers more generally) is important and is clearly recognised as such by the Institute. This is reflected in both the areas for improvement identified in the SAR and was also evident to the PRG at the review visit. This issue is a broad one but is crucially dependent upon effective communication and provision of information. At the review visit the PRG met with students and while it is clear that in general excellent local supports are in place, including around pastoral care, that there was great appetite amongst the students to be involved (and indeed lead) efforts to further build a sense of research community across the Institute to create such a sense of Institute-wide research culture and community. These comments are reflected in both **Commendations 1 – 4**, and **Recommendations 5 and 7**. The Institute should consider leveraging this resource and how appropriate tools for communication and information provision might be made available (e.g. generation of email lists, handbooks for students etc.)

Excellent local initiatives such as the research communication fora run by the Research Centres and Groups within DkIT (eg: mini-conferences, opportunities for presentation of students' research, etc.) are instrumental in building the local culture of research and in broadening the pool of research supervisors among the academic staff (**Commendation 5**). By broadening these local initiatives and enabling effective communication and sharing of information (perhaps including staff handbooks for supervisors), one could contribute to a number of important aims, including the development of an Institute-wide research culture and identity, as well as ensuring consistency across the Institute in provision of generic and transferable skills training and ensuring that existing good practices and processes for Independent Panel Members are applied consistently across the Institute. The PRG recommends that DkIT continue and/or broaden their existing efforts (**Recommendations 6 and 10**).

Finally the PRG noted that induction/orientation programmes had continued online during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it was also clear that it would be desirable to offer in-person induction programmes for postgraduate research students who joined DkIT during the earlier part of the pandemic in order to supplement the online induction that they received, and also to provide an annual "refresher" for continuing students on available facilities and supports. For example, while some students were aware that they could visit the DCU Library in-person to access certain facilities which cannot be accessed by DkIT students remotely, not all students were aware of this (**Recommendation 8**).

5 Plans for Improvement Identified by DkIT

Area for improvement identified by DkIT

The areas for improvement under both DCU-DkIT and DkIT columns are referred to by number, referring to their ordering in the SAR, and an extract of the wording is provided.

Strategic Context

DCU-DkIT & DkIT:

1. Revisit and review the context and intent of the collaborative partnership/relationship between DCU and DkIT. There was general consensus from both collaborative partners that this needs to take place as a matter of urgency.
2. Broaden the scope of the research collaborations between both partners as envisaged in the initial agreement (MOU 2012) when the Graduate School was established.

The PRG welcomes strongly both the points made under the heading of “Strategic Context”. From a quality perspective the PRG feels it is important that DkIT ensure that the Institute plans how it will continue to provide level 10 awards seamlessly into the future in the context of a rapidly changing sectoral landscape. A review and revisitation of the context and intent of the collaborative partnership/relationship in light of the experience over phase 1 is both timely and important.

The PRG also feels that the two parties should establish a regular cycle of meetings at senior management level (including finance directors) for the duration of the relationship. This should help ensure the continuity of provision mentioned above.

Recommendations 1 and 2 align directly with these points.

Research Governance and Management

DCU-DkIT:

1. Align DkIT GRBSB meetings with DCU’s GRBSB.
2. Align DkIT’s Examination Boards with DCU’s Awards Board for Research Degrees.

The PRG agrees with these areas for improvement, albeit noting that these alignments seem to be largely completed at this stage. The PRG felt that while the main administrative board-level meetings were well aligned, there was possibly some confusion in terms of the actual specific and detailed requirements of the DCU-DkIT regulations. This includes the requirements around chairs for viva-voce examinations and the approval processes for those, as well as the examiners for transfer/confirmation and final examination. The PRG had a sense that DkIT was applying a somewhat higher bar (perhaps based on former QQI experience) than was required under the newer partnership and that this was generating some additional pressure for both supervisors and administrators which might not be necessary. The DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies, supported by DkIT GRBSB, should engage with DkIT staff to discuss these issues. The DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies could then seek clarification with the DCU GSO if required.

Recommendations 6 and 10 align to an extent with these particular points.

DkIT:

1. Review School research governance structures to ensure they are fit for purpose.
2. Ensure that documentation submitted by the DkIT GRPBs to the DkIT GRBSB is complete before submission.
3. Review the role of researchers on the GRBSB sub-committee to ensure their voice is consistently represented (standing student voice item on agendas).
4. Ensure DkIT GRBSB meeting agendas include national and institutional policy and procedural updates with respect to postgraduate research provision.
5. Encourage academic staff to participate in postgraduate research governance structures as appropriate (GRPB, DkIT GRBSB (of Academic Council), Research Sub-committee (of Academic Council), Institute and School Ethics Committees).

6. Develop of a risk mitigation strategy in relation to postgraduate research studies completion by students.

The PRG agrees with these areas for improvement, and in particular sees the importance of numbers 3 and 5, in the context of the comments above, and which align with recommendations 6 and 10 to an extent. Number 6 aligns directly with recommendations 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10.

Quality Assurance and Enhancement

DCU-DkIT:

*The words in brackets are additions to the text in the SAR to ensure clarity.

1. Enhance the information, quantitative and qualitative as appropriate, being provided in the (DkIT)* Annual Report to DCU GRSB. This would involve...
2. Postgraduate research student feedback report(s) have not been included in the (DkIT)* Annual Reports to date. Also, the...

The PRG would be happy to see this enhancement of information in the annual report, based on discussion and agreement between the two parties, although it did not note either as an issues of major concern. There are no directly or partially aligned recommendations.

DkIT:

1. Ensure consistent implementation of postgraduate research student feedback mechanisms in accordance with DkIT policies and procedures.
2. This includes the annual postgraduate research student feedback survey and the bi-annual PGR StudentSurvey.ie survey, neither of which were implemented consistently during the quality review period 2014 – 2021.
3. Ensure outputs of annual monitoring activities are circulated and reviewed by the appropriate research governance structures (DkIT GRSB and Academic Council).
4. Ensure that the updating of the DkIT postgraduate research degree regulations, and subsequent approval at the DkIT Academic Council, is better aligned with that of DCU's updating of the regulations and approval at DCU's Academic Council.
5. Ensure full adoption, where appropriate, of all DCU Postgraduate Research (PGR) forms and supporting policies.
6. Implement specific training to the postgraduate research and supervisory communities regarding the quality assurance processes associated with postgraduate research provision.

The PRG would be happy to see these suggestions implemented, and especially number 6, which aligns with recommendations 7 and 10. In the case of number 2, this would seem to be something which students would support, given the quality of feedback derived from engagement with the student body as part of the review visit.

Research Supports and Training

DCU-DkIT:

1. Explore access to DCU accredited postgraduate research training for DkIT students.

The PRG note that this access would be a point to discuss in respect of Phase 2 of the partnership evolution, and hence could be raised under the engagement suggested in recommendations 1 and 2. The benefits to DkIT, DCU and the associated costs all need to be discussed in a holistic manner. There are no direct recommendations, while noting the comments about recommendations 1 and 2. Slight alignment to recommendation 7.

DkIT:

1. Ensure all postgraduate research students have annual skills training audits with their supervisory teams through provision of training to research supervisors.
2. Monitor the annual training audits and link to annual progression.

3. Review research training programmes for staff and students annually and implement enhancements as required in accordance with best practice and stakeholder feedback.
4. Enhance policies and procedures training for postgraduate research students.
5. Implement a research supervisor mentoring or "buddy system" for new academic staff.
6. Enhance postgraduate research policies and procedures training for staff involved with postgraduate research (including targeted awareness campaigns).
7. Prioritise interview training for all current and potential research supervisors.

The PRG would be happy to see these suggestions implemented, and especially numbers 1, 2, and 3, which align with recommendations 7 and 10.

Research Culture and Community

DCU-DkIT:

1. Ensure DkIT registered postgraduate research students receiving a DCU award are connected to the DCU-DkIT postgraduate researcher community.

The PRG agrees strongly with this point and feels that measures to build a greater cross-Institute sense of connection would be very positive. This aligns directly with recommendations 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10.

DkIT:

1. Re-establish the DkIT postgraduate research society.
2. Create a centralised postgraduate researcher space.
3. Organise institutional formal and informal gatherings across the postgraduate research community.
4. Re-establish the Institute wide postgraduate researcher conference.
5. Provide career planning for all postgraduate researchers.

The PRG agrees strongly with these points and feels that measures to build a greater cross-Institute sense of connection would be very positive. These align directly with recommendations 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10.

Research Resources

DCU-DkIT:

1. Explore access to DCU postgraduate research resources for DkIT students....
2. Explore access to DCU accredited postgraduate research training for DkIT students.

The PRG note that this access would be a point to discuss in respect of Phase 2 of the partnership evolution, and hence could be raised under the engagement suggested in recommendations 1 and 2. The benefits to DkIT, DCU and the associated costs all need to be discussed in a holistic manner. No direct alignment with recommendations, while noting the comments about recommendations 1 and 2. Slight alignment to recommendation 7.

DkIT:

1. Ensure Institute management (middle management and senior management) take cognisance of the resources (e.g. space, facilities, lecturer buy-out) required to expand postgraduate research provision and strategically plan accordingly in the short to medium term.
2. Develop policy to allow the required access to full-time research facilities for the research community.
3. Audit current and future space requirements per academic School for expansion of postgraduate research provision and advise senior management of same for strategic planning purposes.
4. Revise the Institute's workload model and HR policies and procedures to ensure research supervision is valued.
5. Implement Institute postgraduate and career researcher teaching policies across all schools.
6. Revise research supervision time allocation model whilst conducting an audit regarding current School/Department resources for supporting research supervision time allocation.

7. Ensure all student supports are accessible to the postgraduate researcher community and are available for the full duration of the calendar year.

The PRG agrees strongly with these points and feels that measures to develop research resources in a manner which will support the research ambitions of the Institute are extremely important. These areas align directly with recommendations 4, and 9, and to an extent with recommendation 3. We also refer to our comments in section 6.3 below.

Research Communications and Provision of Information

DCU-DkIT:

1. Communicate the operation and governance structures of the DCU-DkIT Graduate School to all staff and students in particular underlining the equal nature of the collaborative partnership.

The PRG agrees with these recommendation, and notes that there are some overlaps with the point under “Research Governance and Management”. The most efficient and effective operation of the DCU-DkIT structures will result from the broad dissemination of the key points and processes. The PRG noted that DkIT presented some examples of the Institute being involved in the development of new processes within the partnership to suit the particular needs of certain disciplinary areas. Recommendations 6 and 10 align to an extent with these particular points.

DkIT:

1. Review the management of postgraduate research information (policies and procedures, governance meetings documentation, etc.) to ensure consistency both internally and externally.
2. Reinforce with Institute staff the importance of the role of the DkIT research community in the DkIT registered postgraduate students lifecycle and in the collaborative partnership.
3. Ensure that governance meeting documentation (agendas, minutes, etc.) management is consistent across the Institute.
4. Ensure that DkIT GRPB and DkIT GRSB schedule of meetings is published on the DkIT website (part of a wider issue relating to the management of documentation associated with the DkIT Quality System).
5. Review and enhance the communications strategies relating to postgraduate research provision. For example ensure a regular email bulletin informing all students about developments and opportunities for funding, training/support and career development.
6. Develop a student and staff handbooks specific to postgraduate research provision.
7. Revise and annually update the Institute’s online provision of information and polices regarding postgraduate provision
8. Ensure timely communication to all internal stakeholders regarding policy and procedure changes, etc. with relating to postgraduate research provision.
9. Establish a postgraduate researcher alumni society.

The PRG agrees with these areas for improvement, and in particular notes the importance of 2, 5, 6, and 9, which align directly with recommendations 5, 6, 7, and 8.

Alignment of DkIT identified areas for improvement with PRG recommendations

In general there was good alignment between the DkIT identified areas for improvement, and those identified by the PRG in its recommendations. The main area where the PRG would identify a notable gap between its suite of recommendations and the DkIT identified areas for improvement is in respect of PRG recommendation 3. Recommendation 3 appears quite urgent to the PRG (“...provision of additional full-time administrative support in the DkIT Research and Graduate Studies Office...”) and we do suggest that this issue be addressed in the DkIT Quality Improvement Plan.

Summary of Key Findings and Identified Areas for Improvement

The PRG welcomed the opportunity to conduct the quality review of the DCU-DkIT Graduate School. The establishment of the DCU-DkIT Graduate School built upon a well-established tradition of research and scholarship at DkIT, and the commitment of DkIT staff to research and postgraduate supervision. It is clear that the Graduate School has been a key enabler of the trajectory of growth in the quality and effectiveness of postgraduate research supervision and provision at DkIT. The PRG felt that the review was timely given the stated ambition on the part of DkIT to continue the relationship with DCU in a changing higher education landscape and in the context of limited resources within the higher education institutions nationally.

5.1 Identified Areas of Good Practice

The Peer Review Group **commends**:

1. The excellent postgraduate supervision by DkIT staff and their focus on the quality of the research experience
2. The dedication and commitment of research supervisors considering the high teaching loads and other time and space constraints
3. The clear focus by DkIT staff on excellent pastoral care and welfare provision in the supervision of postgraduate research students
4. The quality, commitment, enthusiasm and open articulation of the positive experience of the postgraduate researchers we spoke to, and their desire to further build a sense of research community across the Institute
5. The research communication fora run by the Research Centres and Groups within DkIT (eg: mini-conferences, opportunities for presentation of students' research, etc.) and their role in building the local culture of research and in broadening the pool of research supervisors among the academic staff
6. The DkIT Research and Graduate Studies Office, and the Postgraduate Officer in particular, for the professionalism and care with which postgraduate student processes are managed
7. The effectiveness of the working relationship between the Graduate Studies Offices at DCU and the Research and Graduate Studies Office at DkIT in ensuring the delivery of quality postgraduate research programmes, and the manner in which this relationship has underpinned the growth and development of research postgraduate provision at DkIT
8. The flexible approach taken by DCU in meeting additional, unanticipated needs arising from the relationship with DkIT
9. The progressive and collaborative manner of alignment and implementation by DkIT of DCU policies and procedures for the management of postgraduate students and their research degrees
10. The role of the collaborative relationship between DCU and DkIT in supporting the strategic objectives of DkIT in relation to research
11. The comprehensive and thorough self-evaluation conducted by DkIT and reported in the SAR, in preparation for the review

5.2 Identified Areas for Improvement

The Peer Review Group **recommends** that DkIT:

1. Ensure that the Institute plans how it will continue to provide level 10 awards seamlessly into the future in the context of a rapidly changing sectoral landscape
2. Establish a regular cycle of meetings at senior management level between DkIT and DCU (including finance directors) for the duration of the relationship
3. Prioritise the provision of additional full-time administrative support in the DkIT Research and Graduate Studies Office to mitigate the risk inherent in the current situation where knowledge and expertise regarding postgraduate student processes are concentrated in one person
4. Focus on the further development of research infrastructure (particularly space; access, especially outside of normal working hours; and Library services), to ensure they keep pace with the Institute's ambitions for research and supervision

5. Continue efforts to develop a culture of research and supervision across the Institute
6. Broaden local initiatives (such as research days and local training) to enable Institute-wide engagement and sharing of knowledge and expertise in research
7. Ensure consistency across the Institute in provision of existing generic and transferable skills training
8. Offer in-person induction programmes for postgraduate research students who joined DkIT during the earlier part of the pandemic in order to supplement the online induction that they received and an annual “refresher” for continuing students on available facilities and supports
9. Plan for the consistent long-term management of laboratory space, research materials and data across the Institute, taking cognisance of the projected growth of postgraduate research student numbers and ambitions for research
10. Ensure that existing good practices and processes for Independent Panel Members are applied consistently across the Institute

5.3 Other Findings

Many of the initiatives proposed by DkIT in the SAR and also mentioned during the PRG visit focused on changes to internal systems in general, and to workload allocation in particular, in order to allow academic staff to increase their research activity and to incentivise a broader base of staff to become involved in research and postgraduate supervision. These initiatives are strategically important, but by their nature are system-level changes for the Institute and are somewhat beyond the focus of the current quality review³.

For this reason we have not included specific formal recommendations in respect of these in section 6.2 above. However we recognise that such system-level changes would have a major impact on postgraduate research provision. While it is hoped that the forthcoming OECD report on teaching contracts in the Institute of Technology and Technological University sectors will lead to increased central funding and more flexible teaching contracts, the PRG recommends that DkIT continue to develop workload allocation models and associated financial models and supports to incentivise research activity among its academic staff.

³The initial briefing documents from the DCU Quality Promotion Office specified the following areas of focus for the review:

- The management, planning and resourcing for postgraduate research provision at DkIT
- The effectiveness of the implementation of quality assurance processes and procedures relating to the admission and programmatic progression of postgraduate research students at DkIT
- A review of the learning, research and supports provided to postgraduate research students at DkIT
- The effectiveness of the collaborative relationships between DCU and DkIT in relation to ongoing quality assurance of postgraduate research programmes at DkIT

6 Appendices

DCU-DkIT Graduate School Quality Review Peer Review Group (PRG) Visit, 23rd – 25th February 2022; Schedule of activities.

Time	Peer Review Group (PRG) Activity/Meeting	Venue
Day 1- Wednesday 23rd February 2022 - Hosted at Dublin City University (DCU)		
10:00-10:30	Arrival of Peer Review Group (PRG) Members: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr Huw Lewis, Former Dean of Graduate Studies, University of Limerick (now retired). 2. Dr Jane Wellens, Head of Graduate School, Financial and Business Services, University of Nottingham. 3. Professor David Croke, former Director of Quality Enhancement, Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI). 4. Professor John Costello, School of Physics (former Dean of Faculty of Science and Health), Dublin City University (DCU). 5. Professor Enda McGlynn, School of Physics, DCU and member of DCU Quality Promotin Committee (QPC) - Rapporteur. 6. Christina O'Keffee, Doctoral student (and member of DCU Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB)) - Student reviewer. 	AG01 Albert College, DCU Glasnevin Campus
10:15-11:00	Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion and Institutional Research, Quality Promotion Office (QPO), Dublin City University (DCU), Ms Aisling McKenna: <p><input type="checkbox"/> Guidelines provided to assist the PRG during the visit and in developing its report.</p>	AG01 Albert College, DCU Glasnevin Campus
11:00-12:30	PRG Private Meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRG selects a Chair. • PRG discusses key themes, areas for exploration based on the SAR. • PRG assigns tasks and responsibilities amongst PRG members. 	AG01 Albert College, DCU Glasnevin Campus
12:30-13:15	Lunch with Director of Quality Promotion Office (QPO) (light lunch)	Albert College, DCU Glasnevin Campus

13:15-14:10	<p>PRG Initial Meeting with DkIT Representatives (including 15 minute presentation):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr Sheila Flanagan, DkIT Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Registrar. 2. Dr Tim McCormac, DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies. 3. Dr Brendan Ryder, DkIT Head of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance. <p>Consideration of the SAR including the identification of key findings.</p>	AG01 Albert College, DCU Glasnevin Campus
14:15-15:00	<p>PRG Meeting with DCU Representatives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Lisa Looney, DCU Vice-President for Academic Affairs. 2. Professor Joseph Stokes, DCU Dean of Graduate Studies/Graduate School. 3. Ms Karen Keating, DCU Graduate Studies Manager, Graduate Studies Office. 	Albert College, DCU Glasnevin Campus
15:00-15:30	<p>PRG Meeting with DCU Senior Management Team:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Daire Keogh, DCU President. 2. Professor Lisa Looney, DCU Vice President for Academic Affairs / Registrar. 3. Professor Anne Sinnott, DCU Deputy President. 4. Ms Laura Mahoney, DCU Executive Director of Engagement. 5. Mr Ciaran McGivern, DCU Director of Finance. 6. Others as determined by DCU. 	Albert College, DCU Glasnevin Campus
15:45-16:30	PRG Private Meeting Time.	Albert College, DCU Glasnevin Campus
16:30-17:45	<p>Transfer to Crown Plaza Dundalk (by car)</p> <p>DkIT representatives greet PRG on arrival:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr Sheila Flanagan, DkIT Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Registrars. 2. Dr Tim McCormac, DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies. 3. Dr Brendan Ryder, DkIT Head of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance. 4. Ms Louise McCaul, DkIT Administration Officer. 	-
18:30-20:00	PRG Private Dinner and Discussion.	Crowne Plaza Hotel, Dundalk

Day 2 - Thursday 24th February 2022 – Hosted at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)

09:00-09:40	PRG Private Meeting Time.	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus
09:45-10:30	<p>PRG Meeting with Staff - DkIT Academic Governance:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr Tim McCormac, DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies. 2. Dr Brendan Ryder, DkIT Head of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance. 3. Dr Thomas Dooley, DkIT Head of School of Engineering, Chair of School Graduate Research Programme Board (GRP), Member of DkIT GRSB. 4. Dr Patricia Moriarty, DkIT Head of School of Business and Humanities, Chair of School Graduate Research Programme Board (GRP), Member of DkIT GRSB. 5. Dr Gerard (Bob) McKiernan, DkIT Head of School of Informatics and Creative Arts, Chair of School Graduate Research Programme Board (GRP), Member of DkIT GRSB. 6. Dr Edel Healy, DkIT Head of School of Health and Science, Chair of School Graduate Research Programme Board (GRP), Member of DkIT GRSB. 7. Mr Pat McCormick, Chair of DkIT Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB). <p>Heads of Academic Department(s):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Dr Arjan Van Rossum, Department of Life and Health Sciences, School of Health and Science. 9. Dr Martin McHugh, Department of Visual and Human Centred Computing, School of Informatics and Creative Arts. 	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus
10:30-11:00	PRG Tea & Coffee/ Private Meeting Time.	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus

11:00-11:40	<p>PRG Meeting with Staff - Research Centre and Research Group Directors:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Keith Thornbury, Director, Smooth Muscle Research Research Centre (SMRC). 2. Professor Fergal McCaffery, Director, Regulated Software Research Centre Research Centre (RSRC). 3. Professor Eleanor Jennings, Director, Centre for Fresh Water and Environmental Studies (CFES). 4. Dr Daithi Kearney, Co-Director, Creative Arts Research Centre (CARC). 5. Dr Kieran Nolan, Co-Director, Creative Arts Research Centre (CARC). 6. Dr Julie Doyle, Director, Director, Netwell/CASALA Research Centre. 7. Dr Fergal O'Rourke, Director, CREDIT Research Centre. 8. Dr Annaleigh Margey, Research Group Director, Humanities Research Group. 	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus
11:45-12:30	<p>PRG Meeting with Staff - Research Supervisors:</p> <p>Emerging:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr Wayne Doherty, Emerging Supervisor, School of Engineering. 2. Dr Kate Johnston, Emerging Supervisor, School of Business and Humanities. 3. Dr Joseph Lynch, Emerging Supervisor, School of Health and Science. 4. Dr Roisin Loughran, Emerging Supervisor, School of Informatics and Creative Arts. <p>Established:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Dr Fergal O'Rourke, Established Supervisor, School of Engineering. 6. Professor Mark Hollywood, Established Supervisor, School of Health and Science. 7. Dr Valerie McCarthy, Established Supervisor, School of Health and Science. 8. Professor Gerard Sergeant, Established Supervisor, School of Health and Science. 9. Dr Kevin McDaid (provisional), Established Supervisor, School of Informatics and Creative Arts. 	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus
12:30-13:00	<p>PRG Meeting with Staff – Administration Staff involved with Postgraduate Research Students:</p> <p>Registrar's Office:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ms Teresa Ward. 	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus

	<p>2. Ms Louise McCaul.</p> <p>Research and Graduate Studies Office:</p> <p>3. Ms Aideen Gaynor, Postgraduate Officer. 4. Ms Orla Lynch, Research and Graduate Studies Manager.</p> <p>School Administration Offices (DkIT GRPB support):</p> <p>5. Ms Deirdre Mulligan, Administration Representative, School of Business and Humanities. 6. Ms Orlagh Devine, Administration Representative, School of Engineering. 7. Ms Caitriona Maguire, Administration Representative, School of Health and Science. 8. Ms Alice Hoey, Administration Representative, School of Informatics and Creative Arts (unable to attend but submitted feedback in writing for consideration by the PRG).</p>	
13:00-14:00	Lunch / PRG Private Meeting Time.	Hospitality Restaurant, Faulkner Building, DkIT Campus
14:00-14:40	<p>PRG Meeting with Staff - Professional Support Staff:</p> <p>1. Ms Linda Murphy, DkIT Academic Administration and Student Affairs Manager. 2. Ms Lorna O'Connor, DkIT Head Librarian (Acting). 3. Mr Gerald O'Driscoll, DkIT Human Resources Manager. 4. Ms Aideen Gaynor, Postgraduate Officer. 5. Dr Tim McCormac, DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies.</p>	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus
14:45-15:30	<p>PRG Meeting with Postgraduate Research Students:</p> <p>1st Year Postgraduate Research Student Representatives:</p> <p>1. Zak Hawthorne, School of Engineering. 2. Ryan Smazal, School of Health and Science. 3. Blondel Blanchard Ndoukeu Tchatat, School of Health and Science. 4. Misheck Nyirenda, School of Informatics and Creative Arts.</p> <p>Final Year Postgraduate Research Student Representatives:</p> <p>5. Yohanca Diaz, School of Health and Science.</p>	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus

	<p>6. Stephen Kneel, School of Health and Science. 7. Emily Xin Rui Lim, School of Health and Science. 8. Maurice Mullen, School of Informatics and Creative Arts.</p> <p>DkIT Postgraduate Research Graduate Representative(s):</p> <p>9. Dr Michael Wilson, Netwell-Casala.</p>	
15:30-16:30	PRG Private Meeting Time/ Coffee	F221, Faulkner Building (upstairs from Student Services), DkIT Campus
16:30-17:00	<p>PRG Tour of the DkIT Campus</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr Tim McCormac, DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies. 2. Dr Brendan Ryder, DkIT Head of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance. 3. Dr Sheila Flanagan, DkIT Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Registrar. 4. Representative from Marketing and Communications. 	DkIT Campus
17:00-17:30	<p>Clarification Meeting with DkIT Representatives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Dr Tim McCormac, DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies. 6. Dr Brendan Ryder, DkIT Head of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance. 7. Dr Sheila Flanagan, DkIT Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Registrar. 	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus
18:30-20:00	PRG Private Dinner and Meeting.	Crown Plaza Hotel, Dundalk

Day 3- Friday 25th February 2022 - Hosted at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)		
09:00-09:15	PRG Private Meeting Time.	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus
09:15-10:00	PRG Meeting with DkIT Leadership Team: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr Michael Mulvey, DkIT President. 2. Dr Sheila Flanagan, DkIT Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Registrar. 3. Ms Irene McCausland, DkIT Vice President for Strategy, Communications and Development. 4. Mr Hugh Nolan, DkIT Vice-President of Finance, Resources and Diversity. 5. Dr Thomas Dooley, DkIT Head of School of Engineering. 6. Dr Patricia Moriarty, DkIT Head of School of Business and Humanities. 7. Dr Gerard (Bob) McKiernan, DkIT Head of School of Informatics and Creative Arts. 8. Dr Edel Healy, DkIT Head of School of Health and Science. 9. Dr Tim McCormac, DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies. 	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus
10:00-10:30	Additional Meeting Requests/ Follow-up as required.	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus
10:30-12:30	PRG Private Meeting Time Final discussion on recommendations.	Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus
12:30-13:15	PRG Working Lunch and Finalisation of Exit Presentation	F221, Faulkner Building (upstairs from Student Services), DkIT Campus

<p>13:15-13:30</p>	<p>Briefing with DkIT Quality Review Leads on Key Recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ms Aisling McKenna, Director of Quality Promotion and Institutional Research, Quality Promotion Office. 2. Professor Joseph Stokes, DCU Dean of Graduate Studies, DCU Graduate Studies Office. 3. Dr Tim McCormac, DkIT Head of Research and Graduate Studies. 4. Dr Brendan Ryder, DkIT Head of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance. 	<p>Boardroom, T.K. Whitaker Building, DkIT Campus</p>
<p>13:30-13:45</p>	<p>PRG Exit Presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Review Group (PRG). • Ms Aisling McKenna, Director of Quality Promotion and Institutional Research, Quality Promotion Office (QPO). • Professor Joseph Stokes, DCU Dean of Graduate Studies, DCU Graduate Studies Office. • DkIT Leadership Team. • DkIT Quality Review Committee (QRC). • Participants from the sessions over the three days of the quality review. 	<p>TK Whitaker Theatre (W153), Faulkner Building, DkIT Campus</p>