Postgraduate Research Students Academic Support Policy

Policy Governing Postgraduate Research Students Involved in Academic Support

Context: In 2022 THEA established a working group to review current arrangements across the Technological University and Institute of Technology (IOT) sectors in terms of postgraduate research students and the delivery of third level academic support within their respective Higher Education Institute. This was in direct response from communication by the Government through the Department of Higher Education with the working group and their deliberations being aligned with the work conducted in the same space by the Irish University Association (IUA).

The primary aims of the THEA working group were as follows:

1. To review current arrangements across the sector with respect to postgraduate research students delivering academic support.
2. To establish a set of agreed high level principles to guide institutional policy.
3. To align with the approach being taken by the Irish University Association and its 'members

THEA High-Level Principles for the Technological University and Institute of Technology Sector

1. *Postgraduate Researchers are enrolled learners on a programme of study leading to a master's by Research or a Doctoral Degree (Doctor of Philosophy).*
2. *Through this programme of study Postgraduate Researchers are provided with the opportunities to develop a range of skills to an advanced level. These skills relate both to the research process itself and to broader professional training and development, acquired through formal and informal learning.[1]*
3. *Engaging in academic support activities is considered part of these broader professional training and development opportunities for Postgraduate Researchers.*
4. *Where Postgraduate Researchers are engaging in academic support activities, they are provided with appropriate training and supervision to support them in delivery.*
5. *Where the Postgraduate Researcher is registered on a full-time or part-time basis, academic support activities should be viewed as a professional training and development activity that is subsidiary to their research work. Therefore, assigned academic support activities should not impact on the Postgraduate Researcher's ability to complete their programme of study.*
6. *Postgraduate Researchers should be remunerated appropriately for the work that is being carried out.*

1. **Context and Purpose**

For the institute to adhere and support the THEA Sectoral High-Level Principles outlined above there is a need to devise and implement an institute policy concerning postgraduate research students, both at level 9 and 10, concerning academic support. The institute implemented a similar policy over a decade ago however it is now timely to review and implement a policy concerning academic support offered by the postgraduate researcher community which is in line with Sectoral High-level Principles. The role of postgraduate research students to the teaching and learning remit of the institute cannot be underestimated whilst affording the individual postgraduate research student the ability for career development through the development of their transferable skills base. This policy only applies to registered postgraduate research students at DkIT who are engaged in their research programmes on either a full-time or part-time basis. Whilst considering the role of individual postgraduate research students within the academic delivery agenda it is important to note that at present within the institute postgraduate research students are registered through a particular academic school/department and are aligned to different support schemes, such as:

- Internally funded full scholarships (i.e., fees plus stipend)

- Internally funded partial scholarships (i.e., fees only)
- Externally funded scholarships (i.e., SFI, IRC)
- Self-funded

2. Academic Support as defined in the PCW Agreement 1998

2.1 The PCW Agreement with the Teachers Union of Ireland in 1998 defined the usage of Post Graduate Students in an academic support role in the Institute sector. The relevant section 5 outlines where students can currently be utilized and is attached as Appendix 1..

2.2 This Agreement is still in place and does NOT cover the usage of Postgraduate Researchers in a teaching role. Any such policy would need to be separate to this policy and agreed with the appropriate staff unions before implementation.

3. Aims

3.1 Where possible and as required by the School, opportunities for the institute's postgraduate research community take part in undergraduate academic support duties aligned to their academic school/department and, appropriate to their skill base should be provided. This will enable important skills development for the postgraduate research community whilst underpinning the institute's teaching and learning mission.

3.2 Academic support duties will be assigned by the relevant Head of Department (following consultation with the relevant Lecturer) to the postgraduate research student on a semester basis with agreement on both the nature and scale of the academic support from the student, their supervisory team, the relevant Head of School, and the Graduate Studies Office in advance of the commencement of the academic support duties.

3.3 The Head of Department has the responsibility for oversight of the academic support duties and ensuring adequate support is made available to the student during these duties.

3.4 All postgraduate research students delivering academic support must be appropriately trained prior to commencement. This shall involve training being provided by the Graduate Research Studies Office and the Teaching and Learning Support Unit (CELT).

3.5 Every postgraduate research student delivering academic support within a particular academic school must be supervised by a member of academic staff, normally their supervising Lecturer whom they can approach for guidance and practical support.

3.6 When allocating academic support duties to a postgraduate research student the research discipline and experience of the individual student will be considered and will be appropriate to their research discipline and experience.

3.7 Suitable materials necessary for the role of providing academic support will be provided to the student of relevant supervising lecturer.

3.8 Feedback should be sought from research students delivering academic support to inform policy and support.

3.9 Annual induction will be provided by the Human Resources Department, Registrar's Office in collaboration with the Graduate Studies Office, to all postgraduate research students delivering on academic support to ensure they are familiar with academic standards, health, and safety issues plus associated regulations.

4. Academic support activities and their scope

4.1 All postgraduate research students undertaking academic support duties will do so normally within the Academic School in which they are based. Where the student is providing academic support to another School the prior agreement of the Head of School with which they are registered must be sought.

4.2 The research students' academic support activities may include any of the following:

- Demonstrating in laboratory sessions
- Delivering tutorials

4.3. No postgraduate research student shall be involved in module development or marking of student assessments

5. Academic Support Allocations and payment

5.1 All postgraduate research students, irrespective of their research support schemes who provide academic support will be paid at the appropriate tutor/demonstrator rate.

5.2 The total workload for all postgraduate research students, regardless of funding support or lack thereof, will not exceed 4 hours of effort per week or 104 hours over two semesters.

5.3 All academic support duties must normally be agreed in advance prior to the commencement of the academic semester. However, it is recognized that this may not always be possible as needs at departmental level can vary throughout the course of an academic semester.

5.4 In the case of externally funded postgraduate research students, the supervisor(s) and/or award holder must ensure the academic support duties of the funded student adhere to the external funding body guidelines.

5.5 A student's supervisor(s) must be consulted with prior to the allocation of any academic support duties.

5.6 It is the responsibility of the student, supervisor(s) and Head of Dept. /School to ensure all academic support duties are appropriately approved as per institute policy and documented.

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[1] As described in the *Pilot Framework for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education*, formal learning takes place through programmes of study that are delivered in an organised, formal way by education providers and that typically attracts credits, or certification or awards, and informal learning takes place through work and life experience.

Appendix 1

Section 5 of PCW Agreement 1998

TUTORS, DEMONSTRATORS, RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

5.1 The proposal is that tutors, demonstrators and research assistants be employed as academic support to lecturers in the Institutes from the commencement of the academic year in September 1998.

5.2 The assignment of tutors, demonstrators, and research assistants would be done in consultation with staff concerned. It is proposed that for each 3 hours of tutor, demonstrator research assistant work supervised by academic teaching staff that member of the academic teaching staff would be allowed a one hour reduction in class contact time.

5.3 It is intended that where possible tutors, demonstrators and research assistants will be postgraduate students of the Institute who will be awarded a scholarship in return for providing an agreed service to the Institute. In circumstances where appropriate post-graduate students are not available tutors, demonstrators and research assistants may be employed directly by the Institute. It is envisaged that such employment will be for a specific purpose requiring particular expertise and will be of limited duration and most likely subsidiary in nature. In limited instances research assistants may be employed on fixed purpose contracts for special research projects for which specific funding is available.