

National
Framework for
Doctoral
Education



CONTEXT

Ireland enjoys a centuries-old tradition in scholarship. Today, it is one of the most globalised and open economies in the world. These characteristics fuse to offer an evolving and exciting place in which to undertake research and to embark on doctoral education. Since the late 1990s, the research landscape has developed very significantly, underpinned by the recognition that talented people are at the heart of any national innovation system. Significant investment has resulted in Ireland ascending in international rankings of research capacity, and in the doubling of the number of doctoral graduates.

The quality of the doctorate awarded in Ireland is vital to the development of human and knowledge capital. Irish higher education institutions, as well as offering more doctoral places, have taken action to enhance quality of provision. For example, graduate schools have been established and panel-based monitoring at review- and progression-points is now standard. In this evolution towards structured doctoral provision across the sector, programmes are designed to provide a high-quality research experience and outcome. They are also designed to imbue doctoral graduates with the transferable skills necessary to advance their careers across a broad range of employment sectors and to make significant contributions in any field. The institutions have also embraced an increasing diversity of academic and professional routes to doctoral attainment including collaborative and inter-sectoral approaches, as well as provision for student mobility.

Looking towards the future, Ireland's *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*¹ sets out a clear vision and roadmap for the development of all aspects of Irish higher education. A key Strategy objective is the creation of a coherent and well coordinated system of higher education institutions, each contributing to national economic and social objectives. In order to enhance the international reputation and capacity of Irish higher education for doctoral education, the *National Strategy* calls for the development of a consistent quality framework and for greater collaboration among providers. Through this National Framework for Doctoral Education, Irish higher education institutions are committing to embedding these core principles that will continue to enhance Irish doctoral education. In so doing, and with the wider support of relevant stakeholders, Ireland is positioning itself as a leader in doctoral provision. This reflects the continuing centrality of people and knowledge to Ireland's economic and societal development.

¹ Department of Education and Skills, *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (2011).



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Purpose of the National Framework for Doctoral Education

The key aim of this National Framework for Doctoral Education is to underpin excellence in all forms of doctoral education in Ireland. It provides a set of principles for doctoral education, while recognising the diversity in the Irish higher education system. It is consistent with European and international standards, principles and guidelines, including, for example, the Salzburg principles, the Salzburg II recommendations and the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training.²

The purpose of this Framework is to:

- Facilitate consistent excellence in the quality of postgraduate education and training, including research undertaken at Master's and doctoral levels;
- Enable and encourage higher education institutions to work more closely in the delivery of an improved learner-experience and outcome;
- Maximise the employability of doctoral graduates across a broad range of employment sectors by ensuring that the acquisition of discipline-specific knowledge is complemented by the development of transferable skills;
- Underpin the international standing of the Irish doctoral award.



² European University Association, *Salzburg Principles* (2005) and *Salzburg II Principles* (2010); European Commission, *Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training* (2011).

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Framework Principles

This National Framework for Doctoral Education commits the key stakeholders in Irish graduate education and research to the highest standards in the provision of doctoral education and research through the endorsement of the following principles:

1. The core of doctoral education is deep engagement with a question, problem or hypothesis at the frontier of knowledge, and advancement of this frontier under the guidance of expert and committed supervision. To be awarded a doctoral degree, the candidate must have made an original contribution to knowledge.
2. Successful completion and examination of the research thesis, comprising work of publishable quality, is the basis for the award of the doctoral degree. The thesis can be presented in a variety of formats.
3. Doctoral education increases significantly students' depth and breadth of knowledge of their discipline and develops their expertise in research methodology which is applicable to both a specific project and a wider context. It provides a high-quality research experience, training (including a formalised integrated programme of personal and professional development) and output consistent with international norms and best practice.
4. Doctoral education is conducted in a learning community where sufficient critical mass of internationally recognised research activity exists to allow students to gain access to a training programme of appropriate breadth and to interact with peers engaged in their field, nationally and internationally.
5. Recognising that each doctorate is unique, doctoral education is also flexible so as to support students within individual disciplines or within interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary groups.
6. Doctoral education is conducted in a research environment with a high degree of academic quality and infrastructure and where it is consistent with institutional strategies. Academic quality includes quality supervision and training for supervisors.
7. The admission of doctoral students takes into account preparedness of the applicant, the availability of qualified, competent and accessible supervision and the resources necessary to conduct the research.
8. Doctoral education is supported by established structures with:
 - supervision by a principal supervisor(s), normally with a supporting panel approved by the institution;
 - formal monitoring of progress to completion against published criteria, supported by institutional arrangements;
 - clearly defined examination processes, involving external examiners, assessment criteria and declared outcomes.
9. A robust quality assurance system underpins all doctoral provision.

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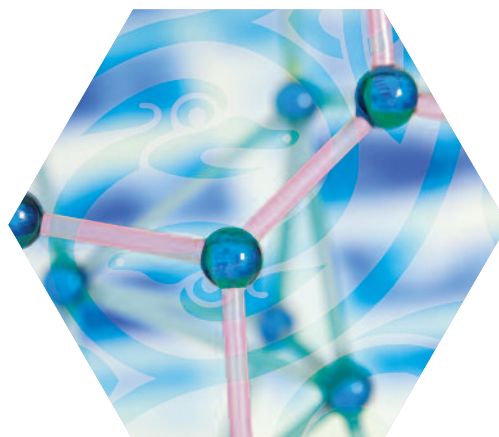
Doctoral Outcomes

(Level 10 of Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications³)

Doctoral education programmes in Ireland educate and develop researchers to the highest skills levels so that they become creative, critical and independent individuals who will advance the boundaries of research. Through the process of doctoral education, the student is provided with opportunities to develop a range of skills to a very advanced level. These skills relate both to the research process itself and to broader professional training and development. The National Framework for Doctoral Education endorses the following skills and attributes, as articulated in the IUA *PhD Graduates' Skills*⁴ statement, as key educational objectives for all graduates of Irish doctoral programmes:

- research skills and awareness;
- ethics and social understanding;
- communication skills;
- personal effectiveness/development;
- team-working and leadership;
- career management;
- entrepreneurship and innovation.

The core and essential component of doctoral education remains the advancement of knowledge through original research—a fundamental societal value in itself, based on freedom of enquiry, the fostering of innovative thinking and the development of advanced critical skills.



³ Quality and Qualifications Ireland, National Framework of Qualifications

⁴ Irish Universities Association, *Irish Universities' Statement on PhD Graduate Skills Statement* (2nd edition 2015).



The successful embedding of this National Framework for Doctoral Education involves higher education institutions and the support of a range of stakeholders. Cooperation will be facilitated through the establishment of a National Advisory Forum, whose agenda will reflect the purpose and principles of the Framework and will be developed collaboratively.

