



**Thematic Review
Doctoral Learning Experience
Peer Review Panel Report
April 2025**



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Scope of Thematic Review

Thematic review is an enhancement-led evaluation of existing University-wide processes, practices or policies to assess their current stage of effectiveness and identify good international practices that can inform future developments.

Specific features of Thematic Review include:

- Applying an institutional lens with a holistic approach moving from policy to practice
- Applying a horizontal perspective involving multiple stakeholders
- Convening and activating an external expert panel
- Strategically aligning and sponsoring the review

This specific Thematic Review centres around the doctoral learning experience in UCC and addresses the following overarching questions:

1. In what ways and how well are doctoral learners enabled to develop the types of wider transversal skills and outcomes that meet the spirit of the IUA Doctoral Skills statement and the corresponding EUA Doctoral Skills Statement through their programmes?
2. How can the UCC culture(s) of supervision be understood in terms of their impact on the quality and equity of the students' learning experience encompassing supervision, support, doctoral community building, peer engagement and disciplinary expertise?
3. In what ways can the academic and administrative interfaces between Dean, the Graduate Studies Office, the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee (ACGSC) and College Vice-Deans most effectively support the doctoral lifecycle from the learner's perspective?

Thematic Review of Doctoral Learning Experience

Panel Report

Review Methodology

A review team of senior international experts was appointed as detailed in Appendix 2. Following the appointment of the Review Panel, briefing meetings were organised with the Dean of Doctoral Studies, Registrar & Deputy President, Vice-President for Research & Innovation and representatives from the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU). These meetings provided an opportunity to outline the strategic context and rationale for the Thematic Review from the perspective of the sponsors, as well as incorporating the overall approach to thematic reviews at UCC. The methodology for thematic review followed the accepted model for quality review as defined by the European Standards Guidelines (2015) as follows:

- Documentary submission;
- External review by nominated peers;
- Panel site visit to UCC;
- Report publication and action planning.

Documentary Submission

The final documentary submission to the Peer Review Panel consisted of the following items:

1. A stand-alone contribution by the Dean of Doctoral Studies, i.e., an overview of doctoral education at UCC.
2. A concise outline of the current international, national and institutional policy context.
3. An outline of the administrative structures, procedures and policies underpinning the doctoral student lifecycle at UCC with a focus on the functions operating at central institutional level and at the local academic level, through the nodal points of the four Colleges.
4. An outline of doctoral programme offerings at UCC, as well as the key findings from an alignment report between the UCC's postgraduate training modules and the IUA Doctoral Skills Statement and a high-order analysis of doctoral student population profile.
5. Insights into doctoral student feedback on their experiences in three ways: key findings against the sectoral score; specificities of international and non-traditional students; results from the 2023 Postgraduate Research Student Survey.
6. An overview of the main doctoral student learning experience themes arising from periodical internal quality review reports since 2020.

This Strategic Overview Report was equipped with appendices including submissions from relevant stakeholders (Dean of Doctoral Studies, the four College Vice-Deans, Head of the Graduate Studies Office and so on).

Panel Site Visit

- The Panel Site Visit was conducted on campus, 25th - 27th March 2025.
- The timetable of meetings for the review site visit was developed and managed by the Quality Enhancement Unit. A copy of the review timetable can be found in **Appendix 3**.
- The Panel's findings were presented online in April 2025. In the absence of the UCC President due to a family bereavement, they were shared first with the Deputy-President and Registrar and, subsequently, with the Dean of Doctoral Studies, Deputy-President and Registrar and the Vice-President for Research and Innovation.

Overall Analysis

The Panel makes eight commendations and eleven recommendations. The first recommendation (i.e., to establish a Doctoral College) should be regarded as the key central initiative around which the other recommendations will cohere in an integrated manner; their purpose is to optimise the effective functioning of the doctoral education ecosystem at UCC. However, recommendation 7 (i.e., development of a comprehensive online portal for doctoral studies at UCC) should be the first one to be implemented in the very short term because of its self-contained scope and immediate benefit. The commendations and recommendations are listed below and subsequently expanded in the following sections.

The term ‘doctoral students’ is used as an inclusive term to accommodate for different types of level 10 research degrees currently available, in addition to the traditional individual PhD model by research.

Overview

Commendations

Summary Commendations

The Panel is impressed by how strongly participants engaged in its Site Visit to UCC, regardless of their role: both students and staff at all levels demonstrated honesty, openness and a desire to facilitate the Panel’s successful conduct of this Thematic Review. There seems to be a high degree of consensus about the need to harmonise and enhance the doctoral education ecosystem at UCC; and, especially, the need to work towards a greater equalisation of opportunities and resources for doctoral students across disciplinary divides and doctoral programme types. UCC staff’s dedication to doctoral students and the enhancement of their experiences, as well as commitment to the strategic priorities of the University, is evident from feedback at the various sessions of the Panel Site Visit. Specifically, the Dean of Doctoral Studies’ plan to launch the Doctoral College and Doctoral Student Lounge at UCC in October 2025 appears to have gained momentum among the University Leadership Team’s stakeholders who met with the Panel; it is also endorsed by attending academic and professional services members at all levels and in all areas of the doctoral education ecosystem and doctoral student lifecycle. However, this enthusiasm is tempered by some concerns about whether adequate resourcing is available to support the implementation process.

The Panel’s key commendations are listed below.

- 1- The Executive Leadership, Vice-Deans and Dean of Doctoral Studies demonstrate a very collegial working relationship and a shared vision for the future of doctoral education.**
- 2- University stakeholders express widespread support for the Doctoral College forthcoming in October 2025.**
- 3- Staff at all levels and in all areas demonstrate deep commitment to and enthusiasm for doctoral education.**
- 4- Many individual staff go above and beyond the normal call of duty to support doctoral students and the student lifecycle.**
- 5- The vast majority of the attending supervisors, especially those recently appointed, endorse the**

introduction of mandatory supervision training.

6- Overall, student attendees are extremely satisfied with the dedication and support of their doctoral supervisors.

7- All attending stakeholders are pleased with the initiatives that the Dean of Doctoral Studies has introduced to support doctoral education, students and supervisors.

8- Attendees appreciate the concept and potential of the recently implemented Graduate Education Manager system (GEM).

Commendations in detail

- 1. The Executive Leadership, Vice-Deans and Dean of Doctoral Studies demonstrate a very collegial working relationship and a shared vision for the future of doctoral education.**

The Panel is impressed with the cohesion and shared vision demonstrated by the University's senior leadership in supporting the Dean of Doctoral Studies' development plans for the future enhancement of doctoral education at UCC. Several senior leaders commended the progress and developments already accomplished by the Dean of Doctoral Studies over the last year since her appointment on a part-time basis. It was evident to the Panel that there was amongst the leadership team a confident willingness to empower the Dean to fully operate within the strategic remit of her role and streamline the governance and administrative structures of doctoral education and its support system.

- 2. University stakeholders express widespread support for the Doctoral College forthcoming in October 2025.**

It is the declared intention of UCC to introduce a Doctoral College in the autumn of 2025, so it was no surprise to find widespread support for this endeavour among staff and among senior officers. Where the Panel had perhaps anticipated resistance, none materialised — at least not among the attendees to its Site Visit to UCC. The Panel met 83 people — 51 UCC staff members and 32 students.

- 3. Staff at all levels and in all areas demonstrate deep commitment to and enthusiasm for doctoral education.**

It is evident from the many conversations held during its Site Visit at UCC that staff at all levels and in all areas are deeply committed to providing quality doctoral education at UCC and to successful experiences and outcomes for doctoral researchers. Staff maintain a high degree of motivation and resilience in the face of the many structural disconnects and difficulties concerning resources and workloads.

- 4. Many individual staff go above and beyond the normal call of duty to support doctoral students and the student lifecycle.**

From both the Strategic Overview Report and the Site Visit, it is apparent to the Panel that the doctoral education system at UCC does function currently because staff put an immense amount of work into it. However, some of the Site Visit attendees outlined the hardship experienced in their daily roles supporting doctoral education. For instance, their work-related administrative

demands were defined as “crippling” and “excruciating”. While this is a commendation of staff’s dedication and selflessness, the Panel also regards this finding as a significant vulnerability for UCC and as a threat to the fulfillment of its strategic ambitions regarding the increase and enhancement of doctoral education and student experiences. This aspect will be further addressed in the ‘Recommendations’ section of this report.

5. The vast majority of the attending supervisors, especially those recently appointed, endorse the introduction of mandatory supervision training.

In three different meetings the Panel met experienced senior supervisors, Principal Investigators (PIs) and recently appointed supervisors from UCC’s four Colleges and Tyndall National Institute. Initiatives already introduced by the Dean of Doctoral Studies were welcomed. Overall, they agreed that CPD opportunities would be beneficial, even though their high workloads make it currently very difficult for them to engage in this endeavour. Some supervisors generally expressed their need for University’s support to manage difficulties in supervisory relationships. Others would welcome CPD opportunities in research integrity and ethics, since it is an area in constant development. However, there was no full consensus among the senior academics on the introduction of mandatory training for all supervisors, and different views were sometimes presented according to experience and seniority. Staff with senior experience welcomed the introduction of CPD opportunities tailored to the supervisors’ needs in various disciplinary fields but were less enthusiastic about one-size-fits-all mandatory training. On the other hand, attendees from the recently appointed supervisor cohort unanimously opted in favour of compulsory doctoral supervisory training. Despite these differences, the Panel commends the overall endorsement of CPD/training opportunities by all academic attendees.

6. Overall, student attendees are extremely satisfied with the dedication and support of their doctoral supervisors.

The Panel met doctoral researchers from the four Colleges and Tyndall, enrolled in different years and different types of programmes. The vast majority was extremely positive about their supervisors, who were praised for their dedication, competence, mentorship and pastoral care. Supervisors appear to be fully supportive of the supervisees’ needs and appear to be their main person-to-go for any query.

7. All attending stakeholders are pleased with the initiatives that the Dean of Doctoral Studies has introduced to support doctoral education, students and supervisors.

The Panel heard praise from many University attendees – both staff and students – for the many initiatives already introduced by the Dean of Doctoral Studies. These included *inter alia* Research Integrity and Ethics, ECTS modules for doctoral students, mentoring, staff training, teaching, problem solving, a monthly PGR clinic and coffee mornings for doctoral students. The momentum built by the Dean of Doctoral Studies around the enhancement of the doctoral education ecosystem is commended by the Panel.

8. Attendees appreciate the concept and potential of the recently implemented Graduate Education Manager system (GEM).

The new Graduate Education Manager (GEM) system was discussed by many of the staff and student stakeholders. Its introduction came as the output from the Research Student

Administration Project (RAP) which is part of the university-sponsored digitalisation of the research administration systems. The Panel learnt that, despite the many difficulties experienced by both staff and students during the recent GEM implementation, there is an overall university-wide appreciation of the potential it offers, provided that resources are allocated for GEM to reach its full functionality. These include the integration of financial management, the creation of digital communities and virtual communication arenas, among others.

Recommendations

Summary Recommendations

Having learnt about the University's strong tradition of decentralisation and devolution, the Panel discovered there is also enthusiasm for greater streamlining and harmonisation of doctoral education across graduate schools and administrative functions.

The Panel's key recommendations, which are listed below, are meant to facilitate this streamlining and harmonisation process ensuring that doctoral education at UCC benefits from consistency of governance and administration; single points of failure and vulnerability should be addressed going forward.

- 1. The University should establish a Doctoral College.**
- 2. All relevant administrative and support structures around doctoral education should be re-examined to optimise efficiency and effectiveness.**
- 3. There should be a concerted university effort to foster an inclusive, supportive and reflective culture of supervision within the institution.**
- 4. The University Leadership Team (ULT) should review resources and ensure that sufficient budget is available for the successful development of the Doctoral College.**
- 5. The University Leadership Team (ULT) should continue to explore ways of increasing student funding and access to infrastructure; it should scrutinise and address inequities of resources that exist across disciplinary areas.**
- 6. The Graduate Education Manager system (GEM) requires appropriate administrative and IT support to attain full functionality. This should be provided.**
- 7. The University should establish a dedicated online portal that covers the entire doctoral lifecycle from prospective students to current students and relevant stakeholders.**
- 8. The University Leadership Team (ULT) should review the available physical space across the institution and enact plans to provide doctoral students with access to adequate working and social space. The provision of the doctoral lounge should be supported.**
- 9. Peer support networks need to be improved to enhance the doctoral community, foster research culture and nurture a sense of belonging.**
- 10. While an increase in doctoral student numbers may be desirable, the University should ensure that sufficient resources and capacity are available to support it.**
- 11. Special attention should be devoted to the specific needs of prospective and current international students, especially in light of the continuing increase in their numbers.**

Recommendations in detail

- 1- The University should establish a Doctoral College. Its successful implementation will depend on the following conditions:**
 - **Appointing a Full-Time Dean of Doctoral Studies who will chair the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee (ACGSC) and be a member of the University Leadership Team (ULT).**
 - **The Graduate Studies Office (GSO) and the four College Vice-Deans should have a reporting relationship to the Dean.**

- **There should be a consistent terminology and clear consistent job descriptions for the Dean of Doctoral Studies, the Vice-Deans of Doctoral Studies and the Chairs of Graduate Studies Committees at all levels.**

The current decentralised and devolved governance structure of doctoral education at UCC was the object of discussion in many of the sessions with the UCC stakeholders at various levels -- from the central to the local. While the democratic and locally tailored arrangements appeared to be the key benefits of such system, discussions with the attendees highlighted especially its considerable drawbacks. These include prolonged and complicated decision-making processes, as well as confusion and inconsistencies of roles, job descriptions, naming conventions, plus workload and resource allocation, to the detriment of transparency, accountability and consistency of staff and student experiences across the institution.

The recent establishment of the role of Dean of Doctoral Studies and its insertion into a governance model characterised by piecemeal growth over the years shows many limitations and blockages. The Panel struggled to identify single decision-making authorities and roles within this ecosystem. While a central role is being played by the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee (ACGSC), procedural arrangements for decision-making appear to be reactive rather than proactive and require approval by Academic Board, Academic Council and University Leadership Team (ULT). The Dean of Doctoral Studies and the four College Vice-Deans/Heads of Graduate Studies Committees/Schools seem to have great responsibilities in terms of policy interpretation and institutional alignment with national and international guidelines surrounding doctoral education. However, they lack decision-making authority. Decisions are made through complicated prolonged processes resulting in an uneven doctoral education ecosystem across the four Colleges. There are currently no financial resources being assigned centrally to the Dean of Doctoral Studies either for the development and delivery of doctoral programmes or for the provision of professional development opportunities for academic and Professional Services staff involved in doctoral education. Administrative support to the Dean corresponding to 0.5 FTE was provided only in January 2025. As a result, the introduction of new initiatives and changes is complicated and not agile enough for a constantly evolving doctoral education landscape at national and international level, with statutory guidelines requiring HEIs to align their doctoral education provision (e.g., IUA Doctoral Skill Statement and the Salzburg Principles).

The Panel believes that the consensus and momentum built by the current Dean of Doctoral Studies to streamline and harmonise the current governance structure should be harnessed, supported and pursued by the University Leadership Team so that the Doctoral College becomes established at UCC as a matter of urgency. This would send a clear message that doctoral education is a core University priority. The establishment of Doctoral Colleges has become commonplace in many universities around the world, especially those with a strong research and innovation focus, where it serves as research hub for postgraduate researchers.

The current governance structure at UCC needs to be strategically and operationally optimised and transformed into 'a one-stop-shop model': an overarching cohesive ecosystem with consistent and comprehensive supports to doctoral students, supervisors and Professional Services staff. The Panel believes that the Dean of Doctoral Studies role needs to be consolidated to become a full-time

university leadership role with recognised institution-wide authority for development of doctoral education with the support of the College Vice-Deans. The necessary strategic policy leadership and management required for this role should be reflected by the Dean of Doctoral Studies acting as Chair of the ACGSC and as an academic functional head for the Graduate Studies Office. All the corresponding Doctoral Education roles across the Colleges should have the same title for the same job description and their workload should be proportionally equivalent to ensure governance consistency, transparency, accountability and fairness across the University.

The Panel is aware of the planning necessary for, and of the difficulties that can be encountered in, establishing the Doctoral College and instances of international good practice and resources have been provided by the Panel in Appendix 1. In addition, the Panel is willing to share its experiential wisdom, since some of the Panel members' institutions of affiliation successfully underwent the same transformative process a few years ago (e.g., Southampton University). This availability extends to the implementation of the following recommendations that are also connected to the establishment of the Doctoral College.

- 2- With the introduction of the Doctoral College, all relevant administrative and support structures around doctoral education should be re-examined to optimise efficiency and effectiveness. Job descriptions should be clearly formulated at all levels; they should be consistent and integrated into a logical, common and coherent structure. Reporting lines and relationships should be made clear.**

During the Site Visit the Panel ascertained that the administrative processes around the doctoral student lifecycle from application and recruitment to graduation are not coherently structured; much variation and many disconnects and blockages occur between the central and local levels. Recruitment is distributed among various university stakeholders including the International Office (IO) and departments and individual supervisors at local level. A few dedicated Professional Services staff within the Graduate Studies Office (GSO) currently manage at central level the whole lifecycle of 1400 doctoral students from admission to graduation (except for the admissions of non-EU domiciled students, which is under the remit of the IO); at local level there are no defined consistent administrative structures or roles to support doctoral students and supervisors, with arrangements varying even among departments located within the same School. It appears that academics and academic supervisors are overburdened with administrative tasks around doctoral education (and beyond), in many cases without significant consistent workload reduction. A few GSO staff members are responsible for the doctoral student lifecycle (including the registration and examination of doctoral students and their ECTS credits); they support the resolution of emerging Quality Assurance issues and have also taken onboard the management of the recently rolled out Graduate Education Manager system (GEM), as well as servicing the rollout of GEM training across the University. While acknowledging the quality work carried out by these GSO members to support doctoral education and lifecycle, the Panel is concerned that their workload is unmanageable in the long-term and constitutes a significant risk and vulnerability for the University. There are also disconnects at the interfaces between the GSO, the Finance Office (Fees Office and Research Grant), doctoral students and 'administrators' at local academic level. Other delays and blockages affect the interfaces between UCC and the Tyndall National Institute, with international students experiencing considerable registration delays between successful recruitment, funding allocation and registration at UCC.

In the face of this, the Panel believes that it is paramount that the establishment of the Doctoral College is accompanied by a comprehensive review of the whole administrative and support system around doctoral education so that it is streamlined, harmonised, consistently structured across the four Colleges and properly resourced to effectively function throughout.

3- There should be a concerted university effort to foster an inclusive, supportive and reflective culture of supervision within the Institution. This would include provision of professional development opportunities for staff involved in doctoral education as well as mandatory training for doctoral supervision for newly appointed supervisors.

Supervision was set at the centre of one of the three scoping questions for this Thematic Review. Quality supervision is recognised by international literature, national statutory guidelines and European principles as one of the key factors affecting doctoral researchers' successful outcomes. While most of the doctoral attendees from the four Colleges and Tyndall National Institute expressed an overall high degree of satisfaction with their supervisors' dedication and support (as was the case with similar findings from the 2023 Postgraduate Research Student Survey), it became clear to the Panel that this depends mostly on the dedication and commitment of individual supervisors rather than on the University's support structures around supervision.

Representatives of experienced supervisors, Principal Investigators and recently appointed supervisors expressed concern at their increasing workload levels and administrative responsibilities for doctoral students within a rapidly evolving doctoral education landscape (e.g., introduction of new software, implementation of Annual Progress Review for all candidates, QQI regulations and IUA guidelines on transversal skills development, funders' expectations and so on). Throughout the Site Visit, it became clear to the Panel that academics who serve as doctoral supervisors go beyond supervision and pastoral care. For doctoral students they seem to act as the main liaison person also for administrative and support issues throughout their academic journeys. As a result, they seem to struggle with increasing responsibilities, with supervision often not being accounted for within their teaching or research workload.

Supervisors attending the Site Visit overall agreed that they need greater institutional support in a range of areas. These include support to deal with difficult situations in supervisory relationships (e.g., crisis or breakdown of supervisory relationships) and opportunities for professional development, supervision training and peer support. Most of the attending supervisors were in favour of introducing mandatory training starting with newly appointed supervisors. More specifically, they discussed the potential of common cross-institutional training in leadership, management and ethics, as well as in discipline-specific areas. Among the experienced supervisors, there was also the view that the already mandatory co-supervision for newly appointed supervisors works as an effective alternative to mandatory training for all supervisors.

It became apparent to the Panel that supervision is not consistently included in workload calculations across the Institution, with variations occurring even within the same academic unit. In addition, whilst academic staff and research staff can supervise doctoral students, differences in expectations exist regarding the involvement of research staff as supervisors. This has implications for how doctoral

supervision is accounted for promotion. In the case of academic staff, it is a key criterium, whereas for research staff this is not the case. This issue is particularly relevant for researchers based at Tyndall National Institute. Another emerging issue is around the student complaint procedures, with difficulties being mostly managed at local level (according to a bottom-up escalation model) without an external independent central process, apart from the Student Ombudsman role, which is not specific to doctoral education.

In light of the above findings, the Panel believes that the already very good individual supervision standards present at UCC need to be further strengthened at institutional level to ensure that they do not depend only on the deep dedication of individual supervisors. Accordingly, a culture of quality supervision should be fostered by the University in many ways and at all levels. Enhancement of supervision requires a broader approach of institutional cultural change so that the concepts are inculcated at every stage and level: faculty hiring, onboarding, promotion, annual reviews, seminars and so on. This would help students and staff understand their responsibilities and rights, as well as addressing how to manage problems with leadership. A Doctoral College would be an essential and necessary asset for the oversight of this cultural transformation around supervision.

Doctoral pedagogy is an area of growing importance for higher education institutions worldwide, given the diversity of doctoral programmes available nowadays and the increasingly diverse pathways of doctoral graduates beyond the academy. Specifically, international literature on doctoral education (Carter et al., 2020; Huet and Casanova, 2020; Smith, 2022) identifies the institutional adoption of a signature doctoral pedagogy as a crucial asset to the success of its programmes. Doctoral supervision is a critically important, unique and rigorous form of pedagogy that is sometimes neglected. It is thus incumbent on those seeking the highest quality of doctoral education to value and shine a light on this relationship and to support the influence of evidence-based expertise on this often-overlooked role. The University needs to reflect at a deeper level about the pedagogy underpinning research education, putting a fair degree of effort into this question by, for instance, forming a graduate research community of practice that can develop a set of professional development principles.

The enhancement of institutional supervision culture also relies on the provision of adequate administrative, IT and research resources and equipment; appropriate opportunities for professional development and mandatory training; adequate recognition and weighting of supervision duties within the workload and promotion processes for all supervisors of UCC students (including those based in Tyndall National Institute); organisation of university-wide initiatives and events that celebrate and reinforce a culture of supervision and critical reflection on the pursuit of its ongoing enhancement.

Potential short-term “low-hanging fruits” for UCC might include the following activities:

- Review and improve the current [UCC list of responsibilities](#) for graduate supervision. It would be highly beneficial if these supervision resources were to be created through a participative process with a broad doctoral community involvement – in the realm of culture this is as important as the outcomes.

- Once finalised, these resources could be launched and celebrated by the University to raise awareness and further promote the desired cultural transformation around doctoral education and supervision.
- Produce a contract-type document outlining expectations to be co-signed by doctoral student and supervisor at the outset of the relationship and periodically revised, as needed (focus is different from the already implemented research learning agreement).
- Institute a graduate mentorship award and publicise it widely.
- Include doctoral education as a stand-alone item within the periodical quality review processes of the University, especially for academic units.

4- The University Leadership Team (ULT) should review resources and ensure that sufficient budget is available for the successful development of the Doctoral College.

Together with the strong enthusiasm for the establishment of a Doctoral College, some University attendees expressed their concerns that there may be a mismatch between the University's strategic ambition for the enhancement of doctoral education and the establishment of the Doctoral College with its actual implementation outcomes. There is some concern that, if the Doctoral College turns out to be only partially implemented, though it is used as a marketing strategy, there is a lost opportunity for achieving a collective institutional transformative quality enhancement initiative in doctoral provision.

The Panel is of the view that a comprehensive and thorough examination of all the required financial and human resources of the Doctoral College needs to be conducted as a preliminary step to its establishment. If new funding sources cannot be generated and/or identified, the University may need to redirect resources from other portfolios to ensure the Doctoral College's optimal functioning at all levels.

5- The University Leadership Team should continue to explore ways of increasing student funding and access to infrastructure; it should scrutinise and address inequities of resources that exist across disciplinary areas.

The Panel is concerned with the limited funding currently available at UCC for level 10 researchers. This was highlighted in the Strategic Overview Report on Doctoral Education and during the Site Visit to the Institution. Only about 65% of doctoral candidates are funded (fees and stipend) and these are unevenly spread across the disciplines (e.g., 83% of CSEFS students in receipt of a stipend in 2023 against only 18% in CACSSS). These facts are quite concerning for the Panel, even though this is an issue shared with many other Irish higher education institutions. Together with that, the Panel notes that, even with the recent increase in stipends for state-funded doctoral students in Ireland, the recently set minimum yearly stipend tends to be lower than in international European HEI counterparts and lower than market salaries paid to professionals in industry. Furthermore, stipends for researchers in the Colleges of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences (CACSSS) and Business and Law (CBL) tend to be systematically lower than in STEM and Medicine and Health.

Funding difficulties have been furtherly exacerbated by UCC's high dependency on exchequer funding for research, combined with the current uncertainty and delays brought about by the still ongoing merger of Irish Research Council (IRC) and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) into Research Ireland commenced two years ago. Financial hardship is also regarded as one of the main factors impacting upon doctoral students' negative outcomes (e.g., ill-health, withdrawal and delayed completion times).

Additional widespread issues concerning UCC doctoral students relate to travel and equipment funding. Inconsistency of access to research resources and infrastructures, equipment, other resources and supports also emerged as a significant issue at UCC. Doctoral students during the Site Visit claimed that such inconsistency also constitutes a potentially divisive source of inequities among peers, not only across disciplinary areas but often also within the same academic unit (School and/or department), depending on the funding sources and arrangements for individual doctoral students.

While the Panel is aware that it is impossible to fully equalise financial distribution, access to infrastructures, equipment and resources for all the doctoral candidates, it believes that there is scope for finding creative and innovative approaches to new funding streams. Overall, the Panel supports the Dean in pursuing the outlined plans to secure stabilisation and increases in external funding streams while also reducing the Institution's over-reliance on exchequer funding (e.g., philanthropy, industry, Irish Research Council, European Research Council and Horizon Europe research grants, UCC Futures-related research grants with scope for doctoral researchers' engagement and so on).

6- The Graduate Education Manager system (GEM) requires appropriate administrative and IT support to attain full functionality. This should be provided.

The Panel recognises that the digitalisation of the research student administration processes at UCC is an important step towards the optimisation of the administrative management of the doctoral lifecycle. This digital transformation of doctoral student administration was recently implemented through the adoption of the Graduate Education Manager system (GEM), which was widely discussed during the Panel Site Visit to UCC by a variety of attending stakeholders – students, supervisors, ULT members, academics and administrators at all levels and in all areas. The Panel found that the overall feedback on its introduction was mixed, with an appreciation of both its positive transformative potential and its current shortcomings.

Among the positives, GEM is appreciated as a source of administrative transparency and accountability; as a recording tool for capturing key doctoral education statistics (e.g., Supervisor/supervisee ratios, Progress and Development Reviews; ECTS credits and so on), as well as identifying risks/vulnerabilities and doctoral journey gaps for individual researchers. It also functions as a depository of doctoral students' research work and as a reminder of deadlines and supervision frequency and so on.

Despite current benefits and future potential, the Panel is concerned with the apparent underperforming of the GEM system and its over-reliance on manual inputs coupled with a scarcity of human, financial and IT resources to achieve its full functionality.

The Panel recognises that some of the issues experienced by doctoral students, academic supervisors and administrators at all levels with the GEM rollout are due to its recent introduction and the deep learning curve associated with that. However, it has gained awareness that substantial difficulties arise from a combination of IT systems' incompatibilities, financial restrictions and the need for the integration of GEM with pre-existing University regulations and functionalities.

The necessity to harmonise GEM with the student recording system in use at UCC (Integrated Tertiary Software - ITS) has emerged as a big obstacle. Currently this integration is carried out manually and requires constant manipulation of the system. No additional human resources have been provided to support this activity.

Furthermore, because of the lack of GEM training-dedicated personnel, the few GSO staff members responsible for the administration of the whole doctoral student lifecycle have been also entrusted with this university-wide task. In some cases, local administrators or academics chairing the School Graduate Studies Committees have also assumed the burden of training their fellow colleagues and research students.

First year doctoral students have encountered difficulties in completing their research learning agreement through GEM because they are required to complete a Data Management Plan, which presupposes the prior knowledge of research ethics (yet this is learnt through a PGR module upon which they can register after becoming doctoral students). Finally, it appears to the Panel that GEM has not been exploited to its full extent yet (e.g., for its skills/trainings function and for fees/grant management; as a digital communication site with potential for creating peer communities).

In light of all of the above, the Panel strongly recommends that the ULT prioritises investment in the provision of the necessary administrative, IT and financial supports for GEM to attain its full functionality and achieve its transformative potential for all the stakeholders within the University's doctoral education community.

7- The University should establish a dedicated online portal that covers the entire doctoral lifecycle from prospective students to current students and relevant stakeholders.

During its review the Panel found out that postgraduate research student recruitment does not happen at central level, unlike the recruitment for taught programmes. Similarly, there is not a professional centralised Postgraduate Research Prospectus for the University nor a centralised up-to-date active supervisor list that prospective postgraduate researchers can search. While there are some discipline- or college-based resources and websites providing some doctoral programme information, they are not cohesive, up-to-date and fully functional in serving the needs of doctoral education stakeholders. Doctoral researchers' recruitment is largely carried out at local academic level, especially by individual supervisors. The Panel has noted the ongoing transition from the IRIS researcher management system to the new PURE system, which will enable a search by keyword for potential supervisors.

Apart from this welcome development, UCC does not seem to have a professionally developed online portal covering the entire doctoral lifecycle. The only currently existing centralised website on [research education and programmes at UCC](#) for prospective students was developed by the Graduate Studies Office to provide general basic information on pursuing postgraduate research at UCC (Master's by research and doctoral programmes), without availing of any dedicated IT professional resources.

The Panel is of the view that this gap in centralised postgraduate research-related information needs to be addressed as a priority, even before the establishment of the Doctoral College. The University needs to immediately invest in the development of a professional centralised portal dealing with all aspects of doctoral education. This needs to look very attractive, be easy to navigate, and function as a one-stop-shop for a range of key stakeholders in doctoral education: actual/prospective supervisors, actual/prospective students, actual/prospective funders, actual/prospective industry and other partners and so on. This portal should cover all the aspects of the doctoral lifecycle and should be professionally managed, regularly serviced and updated and appropriately resourced. It should cover not only information about doctoral education programmes, supervisors and policies at UCC, but also key related aspects such as accommodation, general and specific support services, useful practical advice, events, awards, conferences and so on.

8- The University Leadership Team should review the available physical space across the institution and enact plans to provide doctoral students with access to adequate working and social space. The provision of the doctoral lounge should be supported.

During its Site Visit the Panel became aware of the space issues experienced by doctoral students at UCC, who expressed the feeling of having “nowhere to be”. Many doctoral candidates (especially within CACSSS) do not have an assigned desk at UCC and can avail of hot-desk facilities some of which are located in basements without windows. Alternatively, they have access to other larger spaces which are very noisy and available on a first-come-first-served basis.

Hence, space emerged as a vexed and contentious issue and as a key resource to be provided in a variety of forms according to its purposes: lab-based research practice spaces; non-traditional performance-based and art-based studios and pods; individual study and social spaces for peer networking. Student feedback pertained also to the quality of the available space and its alignment with EDI principles and UCC's strategic sustainability goals.

Accordingly, for the Panel study/research spaces should include: standard quality study areas with desks and natural sunlight; artistic studio pods for art-based installations and participatory performance-based research projects; scientific lab spaces with up-to-date equipment and longer opening hours to suit conduct of experiments; inclusive spaces, equipped to cater for researchers with special needs and learning difficulties; quality spaces with access to daylight (not located in basements without windows).

As for the need of social spaces, the Dean's proposal to develop a doctoral lounge received strong support from the doctoral researcher attendees and staff members involved in doctoral education.

They all agreed that such a lounge would serve the vital purpose of facilitating inter-disciplinary peer networking and would facilitate the emergence of a cohesive doctoral community at UCC. A postgraduate lounge would help to promote feelings of peer solidarity — which is so conspicuously evident among Tyndall respondents with their cohesive environment. A satisfying peer network is important for retention of students and for their mental health.

The Panel believes that space for the doctoral students need not necessarily involve new buildings, but it will involve re-purposing and developing under-used space. Hence, the Panel strongly recommend the University to address spatial issues for doctoral researchers by carrying out a review of existing spaces to make the best use of them.

9- Peer support networks need to be improved to enhance the doctoral community, foster research culture and nurture a sense of belonging.

It appears to the Panel that there is not a strong sense of doctoral community across all doctoral stakeholders groups at UCC, whereas this is the case among doctoral students at Tyndall National Institute. This issue seems to affect not only doctoral researchers, but also academic and professional services staff involved in doctoral education and lifecycle. Indeed, many of the University stakeholders attending the Site Visit had not met before on campus, despite their common roles and experiences. A strong sense of isolation and exclusion was perceivable among researchers themselves and within academic environments (at Departments and Schools). Staff and students at each College seem to face many similar problems and deal with them locally and individually without any collective endeavour and permanent peer support systems in place.

The Panel learnt that the Dean of Doctoral Studies has begun some collective support initiatives such as University-wide orientation events for the October doctoral intake session, monthly coffee morning events with students, as well as clinics with doctoral supervisors. However, doctoral researchers' attendance was reported as being quite low. This is probably due to a combination of factors, including the fact that there are no social or research spaces for most doctoral students on campus, so many researchers do not routinely participate in campus life and events.

For the Panel, the introduction of a buddy system among doctoral researchers is an effective initiative that could be implemented to counter the sense of isolation and exclusion felt by many doctoral researchers. However, the Panel believes that this disconnect needs to be addressed at a broader strategic, cultural and practical level through a range of initiatives aimed at building communities of practice among Professional Services staff, academics and doctoral researchers across the disciplines and Institution. Establishing the Doctoral College; streamlining and harmonising the administrative structures and interfaces around the doctoral lifecycle; launching a doctoral lounge for doctoral students; elaborating a signature pedagogy for doctoral education at UCC with a comprehensive range of valorising initiatives; these developments will certainly make a positive impact in terms of fostering collaboration, a sense of belonging and an increased sense of interdisciplinary solidarity among doctoral supervisors, researchers and Professional Services staff members.

10- While an increase in doctoral student numbers may be desirable, the University should ensure that sufficient resources and capacity are available to support it.

Previous evaluations of the University had made recommendations about doctoral studies: the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme [UCC Report \(2020\)](#) recommended that the University benchmark its arrangements for doctoral studies; the [CINNTE Review \(2023\)](#) recommended to a detailed plan to underpin the planned increase of doctoral student numbers. During the Site Visit, some reservations were expressed to the Panel about the mechanisms and resources for achieving ambitious doctoral student intake targets. While some participants argued that there is a misalignment between ambitions and resource investments at UCC, the Panel believes that increased targets are achievable, if implemented in phases of twenty extra admissions per year, and by exploiting existing niche professional doctorate needs in the region. For instance, there is an important role for UCC to play in enabling staff in Technological Universities to attain their doctorates. However, the Panel recommends the University to adequately resource this increase in enrolment for a successful outcome. Otherwise, there is a risk of increased frustration among staff and student cohorts, creating additional stress and inefficiency.

11- Special attention should be devoted to the specific needs of prospective and current international students, especially considering the continuing increase in their numbers. The University should review and address any deficiencies in the support provided to them. This includes timeliness in processing their applications.

International students, approaching 44% of UCC respondents to the 2023 PGR Student Survey, provided feedback on specific difficulties that impact negatively on their student experiences. One issue that came up repeatedly across the four Colleges and Tyndall international cohorts is the complaint about short-term visas in the Schengen area, which require annual renewal despite students' four-year research programme award. Longer-term visas are needed to study with stability, enjoy peace of mind, and be enabled to attend international conferences and research events.

More broadly, another frequently reported common issue for international non-EU researchers (especially those based in Tyndall National Institute) is the disconnect and delay between the successful recruitment processes, funding award and actual UCC registration. Some students stated that they had to wait between 6 to 12 months before registration to start their research project, whereas others even failed to register. Recruitment and advertising were also highlighted as areas that require further improvement. Many international students seemingly heard about the UCC and Tyndall research vacancy opportunities through individual academics at their home institutions. However, they believe that the vacancies should be broadly and officially advertised and visible on websites. Funding issues also tend to affect international students more harshly than Irish and EU students, since the latter can at least apply for the SUSI fee-waiver grant. Other key areas of need include accommodation support and socialization opportunities. Given that there is a generalised housing crisis in Ireland, it is even more demanding for international students to find quality affordable lodgments in Cork. Feedback from international Site Visit attendees is that they tend to arrive at UCC during the summer break when a good proportion of staff is on annual leave. Students may need help with managing bureaucratic matters, finding their way on the campus and its many Professional

Services offices and, more simply, settling in Cork and establishing supportive social ties. The establishment of a 'Peer Buddy' System may be of practical and emotional support to international students upon their arrival in Cork.

On the plus side, international students' satisfaction with their supervisors reached almost 78% in the latest national survey - about 10 percentage points higher than that of Irish-domiciled doctoral researchers.

Conclusions

The Panel would like to thank UCC for the opportunity to undertake this review. The Panel is greatly encouraged by the enthusiasm of the staff involved in the provision of doctoral education and by doctoral students' overall resilience, determination and passion for research. This is admirable considering that the doctoral education system currently functions because staff compensate for the institutional doctoral systemic shortfalls with an immense amount of work.

It seems to the Panel that the practice of devolution that has served well in the past may be less serviceable in the future. To streamline and harmonise the UCC's doctoral education ecosystem, resources of money and space will need to be redeployed, and priorities may need to be re-ordered, to promote high achievement at doctoral level for UCC.

UCC, similarly to many other HEIs, is currently experiencing many internal and external challenges that also impact on doctoral education: financial restrictions, recent digitalisation of the research student recording system and adoption of the Graduate Education Manager system, changing doctoral student profiles and needs, increasing internationalisation of higher education, a highly competitive national and international funding landscape, increasing external statutory regulations and industry-funding requirements, plus a deep housing crisis, locally and nationally. Yet, it is the Panel's belief that UCC is well-positioned to respond to the challenges ahead and progress with the quality enhancement of its doctoral education.

The Panel's view is that recommendation 7 (development of an online portal for the whole doctoral studies lifecycle) should be first addressed in the short-term because it can be implemented relatively smoothly and it will bear immediate benefits for doctoral education, the doctoral community at UCC and its external stakeholders. The implementation of a comprehensive online portal for doctoral education should be accompanied by an evaluation of its resource implications, to ensure its appropriate resourcing (in human, financial and IT terms). After recommendation 7, recommendation 1 should be prioritised so that the newly established Doctoral College's governance functions would take primary responsibility for rolling out and implementing the remaining recommendations.

With regard to the scoping questions that underpinned the review, many of the Panel's dialogues focused on addressing the questions of supervision and governance/administrative

infrastructure to support the doctoral learning experience. The Panel is of the view that the question on transversal skills and the issue of doctoral pedagogy remains a central part of the doctoral learning experience at UCC and will require further attention following enhancements of the infrastructures for doctoral education.

The UCC Strategic Plan 2023-28 'Securing our Future' places great emphasis on the centrality of research and innovation for the Institution, as well as aiming at increasing the doctoral student enrolments and enhancing the quality of student experiences and supports by 2028. The achievement of a doctorate is the highest qualification in Irish/British academia. It sits at the apex of the system, particularly in an institution like UCC which is constantly aspiring to improve its research. Currently it is the top Irish university for highly cited researchers in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU, the Shanghai ranking). With a quality enhancement spirit, the recommendations made by the Panel are intended to help UCC implement its ambitious goals in research and innovation excellence through the enhancement of its doctoral education ecosystem.

The Panel looks forward to hearing of UCC's future developments pertaining to its Doctoral Education ecosystem and welcomes the UCC leadership to remain in contact.

Appendix 1 – Good Practice Samples from Panel Members’ Institutions & References

Below are included some indicative resources which were generously provided by Panel Members. They are not intended as an exhaustive list of existing international good practices on doctoral education. The University is thankful to the Panel for highlighting good practices implemented in their institutions that may serve as useful reference points for UCC while engaging in strategic enhancement to its doctoral education ecosystem. The peer reviewer from University of Southampton indicated a willingness to share further relevant resources and expertise post-review with UCC colleagues. At the Panel’s closing presentation, the Deputy President & Registrar accepted this generous offer which will be followed up as part of the post-review activities.

a. Doctoral College Online Portal Examples

Ulster University

- [Find a PhD](#)
- [Doctoral College](#)
- [Handbook](#)

Erasmus University Rotterdam

[PhD Vacancies](#)

Ghent University

- [Doctoral Research Resources for Candidates](#)
- [Doctoral Research](#)

University of British Columbia

- [UBC Graduate School](#)

b. Doctoral College Governance and Administration

University of British Columbia Graduate School

- [Forces and Forms of Doctoral Education \(2019\)](#)
- [Central Graduate Schools](#)

c. Doctoral Pedagogy

University of British Columbia Graduate School

- [Postformal Learning for Postnormal Times](#) (Journal Article)

d. Doctoral Supervision

University of British Columbia Graduate School

- [Supervision](#)
- [Principles of Graduate Supervision](#)
- [Enhancing Graduate Supervision](#)
- [Awards for Excellence in Mentoring](#)
- [Supervision Expectations Contract Template](#)
- [Proposal for Supervision Evaluation](#)
- [Fostering Excellence in Graduate Supervision at UBC](#) (Journal Article)
- [Doctoral Supervision in Canada](#) (Journal Article)

Ulster University

- [PhD Supervisor Development Programme](#)

Utrecht University Netherlands

[Good supervision - Graduate School of Life Sciences - Utrecht University](#)

Leiden University

- [Golden rules for PhD Supervision](#)
- [Roadmap for Transparency \(V2\)](#)
- [Roadmap for Transparency \(empty\)](#)

e. Peer Supports and Networks

- [The Netherlands PhD Association Website](#)
- [PhD Supervisor Conflict Roadmap](#)
- [Promovendi Netwerk Nederland](#) (The National Interest Group for and by Doctoral Candidates)
- [PhD Policy: Recommendations and Best Practices](#) (Promovendi Netwerk Nederland)

f. International Article Resources

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Appendix 2 - Members of Review Panel

Doctoral Learning Experience

Panel Members

The external reviewers bring a depth and breadth of experience and expertise in the area of doctoral education.

Emeritus Professor Rosalind Pritchard (Chair)	<p>Emeritus Professor of Education at Ulster University where she was Head of the School of Education and Co-ordinator of Research. She holds an Honours degree in Modern Languages and Literature (German and French from TCD) together with two Master's degrees, one in Education and one in General and Applied Linguistics.</p> <p>She is a Senior Distinguished Research Fellow of her University, a member of Royal Irish Academy and of the British Academy of Social Sciences, an Honorary Member of the British Association for International and Comparative Education, and a Distinguished Member of the European Association for Institutional Research. She has held grants from the Leverhulme Trust, the Economic and Social Research Council, the UK Council for International Education, the German Academic Exchange Service and the Higher Education Innovation Fund. Her research interests are in higher education, especially institutional mergers and linkages; gender issues; German education; language teaching. She has extensive experience of editorial work, and recently (09/2023) published a co-edited book (with A. Sahlane) entitled English as an International Language Education: Critical Intercultural Literacy Perspectives. She founded a book series with Brill on Higher Education and contributes to it as an author.</p>
Professor Christopher Howls	<p>Professor Chris Howls is Professor of Mathematics within Mathematical Sciences and Director of the University Doctoral College at the University of Southampton. He gained a First in Joint Honours Mathematics and Physics at Bristol, before going on to obtain PhD in Mathematical Physics under Professor Sir Michael Berry FRS. Following on from winning one of only 6 SERC (the then EPSRC) postdoctoral fellowship in the UK, he has held permanent lectureships at the University of Manchester and at Brunel before coming to Southampton where he is now Professor of Mathematics. He has served as head of the ~50 strong Applied mathematics group, curating RAE and REF submissions. He set up and ran the Faculty Graduate School in the former Faculty of Social Human and Mathematical Sciences, during which time he also took over and steered an E(no P)SRC DTP through its mid-term review. He is currently Director of the</p>

	<p>University Doctoral College, responsible for policy, training and development of ~3,000 PGRs across all 5 Faculties, ex-officio chairing the Doctoral College Board and sitting on most University-level research and education committees. The main area of Chris's research works is in asymptotic analysis, including pioneering the development of exponentially accurate techniques. In over 70 published works he has also applied these techniques to identify and/or explain novel physical features in areas as broad as quantum mechanics, general relativity, nonlinear wave formation and (most recently) upstream beaming of aeroacoustic engine noise in work co-sponsored by Rolls Royce. He has supervised PhDs and postdocs across Maths, Physics and Engineering. He is PI on around £35m grants/budgets. He is chair of the Standing Committee of the British Applied Mathematics Colloquium (the largest annual mathematics meeting in the UK). Among his editorial board appointments includes serving the maximum two full terms on the editorial board of Proceedings of the Royal Society of London A. He has given over 70 invited talks and has held several visiting chairs in the US, Europe, Japan and Australia. He is an associate Editor of the US Government Digital Library of Mathematical Functions. He co-founded the EPSRC Meet the Mathematicians outreach events and the EPSRC MathsTaught Course centres. He has served as UG/Masters external examiner and Tripos reviewer at Cambridge, Oxford, Imperial, Bristol and as external REF assessor for Russell Group Maths departments. He is a member of the London Mathematical Society, Institute of Physics, Fellow of the Institute of Mathematics and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.</p>
Dr Susan Porter	<p>Dr Susan Porter is Dean Emeritus and Vice-Provost of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC), the Past President of the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS), and a Clinical Professor in Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at UBC. A strong focus throughout her administrative career has been the preparation of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to thrive and to contribute meaningfully through their work after graduation or fellowship completion. She has led a concerted effort over the past eight years towards a rethinking of the core of doctoral education — students' research, their dissertation, and the ways in which they learn and are mentored. At UBC, she has been leading a "Reimagining the PhD" conversation and series of initiatives, most notably a multiple award-winning "experiment" (the Public Scholars Initiative) that is demonstrating the immense value and legitimacy of broadening doctoral research that fosters students' holistic development to better address today's urgent needs. She has also co-led a national CAGS task force on the subject, and is working to further the conversation and to provide support and resources for the graduate community across Canada and beyond.</p>

Professor Karin van Wingerde

Karin van Wingerde holds a chair in Corporate Crime and Governance at Erasmus School of Law, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. She earned her doctorate in Criminology in 2012 at Erasmus School of Law. Her research is situated at the intersection of regulation, governance, and compliance and addresses the interplay between various public, private, and hybrid modes of governance and corporate, white-collar, and organised crime and harm. Between 2014 and 2019 she was Dean of Education of the doctoral programme at Erasmus School of Law. Since 2021 she is Director of Erasmus Graduate School of Law.

Appendix 3 – Virtual Review Site Visit Timetable



Fheabhsú Cáilíochta
Quality Enhancement

Thematic Review of Doctoral Learning Experience

Peer Review Panel Site Visit

25TH March - 9TH April 2025

In Summary

04/03/2025 – Panel Briefing:	There is a preliminary (online) Panel Briefing from the Director of Quality Enhancement for the Panel to outline the review scope and modalities. This also constitutes an opportunity for the Panel to discuss its first impressions on the University’s strategic overview report on its doctoral education.
25/03/2025 - Site Visit Day 1:	Panel meets Dean of Doctoral Studies, a sample of doctoral students and supervisors from across the four Colleges and Tyndall National Institute.
26/03/2025 - Site Visit Day 2:	The Panel meets with a range of senior staff responsible for the strategic planning, governance and management of doctoral education and research at UCC. This includes operational administration of the doctoral student lifecycle, learning resources and service provision for a diverse range of programmes, including relevant members of the University Leadership Team (ULT), Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee (ACGSC), Academic Council Research and Innovation Committee (ACRIC) and key internal and external stakeholders for doctoral education programmes offered across the University. There is also a conclusive meeting with the Dean of Doctoral Studies, the Deputy-President and Registrar and the Vice-President for Research and Innovation.
27/03/2025 - Site Visit Day 3:	The Panel prepares their key commendations and recommendations. Panel members depart.
09/04/2025 (09.30 - 10.00) Via Ms Teams	The Panel Chair delivers the Closing Presentation (online) to the Deputy-President and Registrar (Acting President).
09/04/2025 (14.30 – 15.00)	The Panel Chair delivers the Closing Presentation (online) to the Dean of Doctoral Studies and the Vice-President for Research and Innovation.

Panel Briefing

Tuesday 4 th March 2025 (via Ms Teams)	
10.00 – 11.30	Briefing of the Panel by the Director of Quality Enhancement and the Review Co-ordinator <i>Panel to discuss Strategic Overview of Institutional Doctoral Education Report</i>

Site Visit to UCC – first week

Monday 24 th March 2025	
During the day	Panel members arrive in Cork
19.00	Dinner for Panel members hosted by the Director of Quality Enhancement and the Dean of Doctoral Studies Venue: Perrott's Garden Bistro Restaurant, Hayfield Manor Hotel

Day 1: Tuesday 25 th March 2025		
Venue: Seminar Room, Boole Library		
09.00 – 09.30	Convening of Panel – private meeting <i>Objective: Panel agree issues to be explored in forthcoming meetings.</i>	
09.30 – 10.30	Meeting with the Dean of Doctoral Studies Dr Lynch to give 5-minute introduction detailing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UCC's doctoral education overview - Vision for doctoral education at UCC going forward <i>Objective: Discussion regarding UCC's doctoral education developments to date and strategic priorities going forward</i>	
10.30 – 10.55	Coffee Break	
10.55 – 11.00	Walk to the Student Hub for next meeting	
11.00 – 11.55 (two simultaneous sessions)	Meetings with Doctoral Students (two simultaneous sessions for College of Science, Engineering & Food Science 'SEFS' & College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences 'CACSSS') <i>Objective: Discussion with doctoral students on the quality of their overall experiences and of support services and resources available to them at school, college and university-level.</i>	
	Meeting with Doctoral Students (SEFS) Venue: Student Life Meeting Room,	Meeting with Doctoral Students (CACSSS) Venue: Áine Hyland Room, Hub

Day 1: Tuesday 25 th March 2025				
	Hub			
11.55 – 12.00	Panel members walk to respective venue for second parallel meeting with doctoral students			
12.00 – 13.00	<p>Meetings with Doctoral Students (two simultaneous sessions for College of Business and Law ‘CBL’ and College of Medicine and Health ‘CMH’)</p> <p><i>Objective: Discussion with doctoral students on the quality of their overall experiences and of support services and resources available to them at school, college and university-level.</i></p> <table><tr><td>Meeting with Doctoral Students (CBL) Venue: Student Life Meeting Room, Hub</td><td>Meeting with Doctoral Students (CMH) Venue: Áine Hyland Room, Hub</td></tr></table>		Meeting with Doctoral Students (CBL) Venue: Student Life Meeting Room, Hub	Meeting with Doctoral Students (CMH) Venue: Áine Hyland Room, Hub
Meeting with Doctoral Students (CBL) Venue: Student Life Meeting Room, Hub	Meeting with Doctoral Students (CMH) Venue: Áine Hyland Room, Hub			
13.00 – 14.00	<p>Lunch for the Panel</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Venue: Seminar Room, Boole Library</p>			
14.00 – 15.00	<p>Meeting with Doctoral Students (Tyndall National Institute)</p> <p><i>Objective: Discussion with doctoral students on the quality of their overall experiences and of support services and resources available to them at school, college and university-level.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Venue: Seminar Room, Boole Library</p>			
15.00 – 15.45	<p>Meeting with Doctoral Student Supervisors and Principal Investigators (PIs)</p> <p><u>College of Science, Engineering and Food Science</u></p> <p><u>Tyndall National Institute</u></p> <p><i>Objective: Discussion with supervisors on the quality of their overall experiences, resources and professional development opportunities made available to them as supervisors, as well as key supervision trends and patterns – positive aspects and common issues encountered by supervisors and doctoral students</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Venue: Seminar Room, Boole Library</p>			
15.45 – 16.30	<p>Meeting with recently appointed Doctoral Student Supervisors</p> <p><u>College of Science, Engineering and Food Science</u></p> <p><u>College of Medicine and Health</u></p> <p><u>College of Business and Law</u></p> <p><u>College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences</u></p> <p><u>Tyndall National Institute</u></p> <p><i>Objective: Discussion with supervisors on the quality of their overall experiences, resources and professional development opportunities made available to them as supervisors, as well as key supervision trends and patterns – positive aspects and common issues encountered by supervisors and doctoral students</i></p>			

Day 1: Tuesday 25 th March 2025	
	Venue: Seminar Room, Boole Library
16.30 – 17.00	Private Meeting of Panel Venue: Seminar Room, Boole Library
18.30	Informal dinner for members of the Panel Venue: Perrott's Garden Bistro Restaurant, Hayfield Manor Hotel

<p align="center">Day 2: Wednesday 26th March 2025</p> <p align="center">Venue: Conference Room, Boole Library</p>	
09.00 – 09.30	Convening of the Panel – preparation for the day ahead
09.30 – 10.15	<p>Meeting with University Leadership Team Members of Strategic and Operational Pertinence</p> <p><i>Objective: Discussion regarding the University's strategy and priorities especially concerning the potentiation of doctoral education, the planned increase of doctoral student enrolments, the enhancement of doctoral learning experience and outcomes through digital innovation, transversal skill development and provision of comprehensive support services</i></p>
10.15 – 10.45	<p>Meeting with the Graduate Studies Office Stakeholders</p> <p><i>Objective: Discussion on the effectiveness of administrative processes supporting the doctoral student lifecycle with a specific focus on the interfaces between Dean, the Graduate Studies Office, ACGSC, College Vice-Deans and on the prospected benefits arising from the recent implementation of GEM – how can they most effectively support the doctoral lifecycle from a learner-centred approach?</i></p>
10.45 – 11.10	Coffee Break
11.10 – 11.40	<p>Meeting with Representatives from Finance Office / Fees Office</p> <p><i>Objective: Discussion of the interfaces between the Graduate Studies Office, the Finance Office and Fees Office in relation to the processes of registration and funding of doctoral students.</i></p>
11.40 – 12.10	<p>Meeting with Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee (ACGSC) and Academic Council Research and Innovation Committee (ACRIC)</p> <p><i>Objective: Discussion on institutional governance and communication structures and processes involved in doctoral education provision with a particular focus on the interfaces and synergies between ACGSC and ACRIC with regards to the mechanisms for ensuring effectiveness and identifying and addressing issues concerning doctoral student lifecycle statistical trends (e.g., enrolment numbers, progression and completion rates and timelines), experiences and needs.</i></p>
12.10 – 13.00	<p>Meeting with Heads/Vice-Deans of College Graduate Studies</p> <p><i>Objective: Discussion on governance, operational and communication structures and processes involved in doctoral education provision, with a specific focus on the role played by the college graduate schools as nodal points in supporting the potentiation of doctoral education, the planned increase of doctoral student enrolments and the enhancement of doctoral learning experience.</i></p>
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 14.45	<p>Meeting with a Sample of School Graduate Studies Committee Chairs</p> <p><i>Objective: Discussion on governance, operational and communication structures and</i></p>

Day 2: Wednesday 26th March 2025 Venue: Conference Room, Boole Library	
	<i>processes involved in doctoral education provision, with a specific focus on the role played locally by School Graduate Studies Committees in supporting doctoral students academically and administratively and ensuring the enhancement of their experiences throughout the student lifecycle.</i>
14.45 – 15.15	Meeting with the HR Business Manager for Research <i>Objective: Discussion around synergies between HR Research, Dean of Doctoral Studies and OVPRI in the provision of support services and professional development opportunities to doctoral students across the University</i>
15.15 – 15.30	Coffee Break
15.30 – 16.00	Final meeting with the Dean of Doctoral Studies, the Deputy-President and Registrar and the Vice-President for Research and Innovation <i>Objective: Opportunity for the Panel to seek clarifications, if required.</i>
16.00 – 17.00	Private Meeting of Panel - Summative meeting to discuss key emerging themes and topics of importance for Panel Report
18.30	Informal Dinner for the Panel Venue: Perrott's Garden Bistro Restaurant, Hayfield Manor Hotel

Day 3: Thursday 27th March 2025 Venue: QEU Office, 6 Carrigside, College Road	
09.00 – 11.30	Convening of the Panel - Meeting to draft recommendations and commendations
11.30 – 11.45	Coffee Break
11.45 – 12.45	Panel finalises recommendations and commendations

Wednesday 9th April 2025 (via Ms Teams)	
09.30 – 10.00	Closing Presentation to Deputy-President and Registrar (Acting President) by Panel Chair and a Panel Member <i>Closing presentation to be made by the Chair or other member(s) of Panel as agreed, summarising their principal findings</i>
14.30 – 15.00	Closing Presentation to Dean of Doctoral Studies and Vice-President for Research and Innovation by Panel Chair and a Panel Member <i>Closing presentation to be made by the Chair or other member(s) of Panel as agreed, summarising their principal findings</i>

Appendix 4 – Index of documentation made available to the Review Panel

- [Securing our Future - UCC Strategic Plan 2023-2028](#)
- [UCC's Sustainability and Climate Action Plan 2023 – 2028](#)
- [UCC Futures - Securing our future through Research Brochure](#)
- Strategic Overview of Doctoral Education at UCC (Report)
 - Appendices
- Useful Resources (Additional Information)
 - UCC Key Functions Table (including Function name, acronyms, Title & Hyperlink to relevant UCC website)
 - Literature Review Doctoral Learning Experience
 - Thematic Review of Doctoral Learning at UCC (Scoping document)
 - Links to relevant Policy Resources including:
 - [QQI Ireland's Framework of Good Practice Research Degree Programmes \(2019\)](#)
 - [IUA Doctoral Skills Statement \(2021\); QQI National Framework for Doctoral Education \(2023\)](#)
 - [QQI National Framework for Doctoral Education \(2023\)](#)
 - [HEA National Framework for Doctoral Education](#)
 - [EUA Building the Foundations of Research: A Vision for the future of Doctoral Education in Europe \(2022\)](#)
 - [The National Framework for Doctoral in Ireland: Report on its Implementation by Irish Higher Educational Institutions, EUA Solutions \(2021\)](#)
 - Presentation from the Dean of Doctoral Studies (*for meeting on 25/03/2025*)
 - Presentation from representatives of the UCC Boole Library (*for meeting on 26/03/2025*)
 - [Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee \(ACGSC\) Terms of Reference](#)
 - [The Odyssey Report 2022](#)
 - [Visa & Immigration Information](#) via the International Office, UCC Website
 - [Disability Support](#) via the International Office, UCC Website
 - UCC Campus Map
- Panel Briefing & Preparation
 - Panel Briefing Slides
 - Panel Aide Memoir
 - Panel Member Questions
- Panel Membership
 - Panel Profiles
- Draft Timetable of meetings for Site Visit

Appendix 5 - Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym / Abbreviation	Full Name
ACGSC	Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee
ACRIC	Academic Council Research and Innovation Committee
ARWU	Academic Ranking of World Universities
CACSSS	College Arts Celtic Studies & Social Sciences
CBL	College of Business and Law
CMH	College of Medicine and Health
CSEFS	College of Science, Environmental and Food Science
EDI	Equality Diversity and Inclusion
ERC	Educational Research Centre
EU	European Union
GEM	Graduate Education Manager
GSO	Graduate Studies Office
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HR	Human Resources
IO	International Office
IRC	Irish Research Council
IUA	Irish Universities Association
OVPRI	Office of Vice-President for Research and Innovation
PGR	Postgraduate Research
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
QEU	Quality Enhancement Unit
RAP	Research Student Administration Project
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland
Tyndall	Tyndall National Institute
UCC	University College Cork
ULT	University Leadership Team