

## Round-table Discussion - Theme A

Monday 9th November, 12.15 - 13.00

### Supporting Mentoring of the Professional Doctorate

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Janet Carton has recently taken up a new post in UCD as Graduate Programmes Manager, supporting and facilitating the continued development of 4th level education in the University, who are leaders in this field. She previously headed up the Strategic Research Initiatives Unit in the Directorate of Research and Enterprise, DIT. Having completed a PhD and postdoctoral fellowship in Biomedical Research, she has worked in graduate research education for ten years, primarily in the areas of research supervisor development, 4th level graduate training, research policy and strategic development. She was responsible for the design and implementation of Ireland's first Research Supervisor Support and Development Programme which ran successfully in DIT for nine years. She publishes regularly on graduate educational matters and not forgoing her scientific interests, acted as Centre Manager for the Radiation and Environmental Science Centre (RESC) in DIT before taking up her new post in UCD in February 2009.

The emphasis on streamlining 4th level education in Ireland has naturally progressed to the professionalization of support for supervisory staff. Although not compulsory, the implementation of structured supervisor development programmes is seen as a complementary step which will run in parallel to the evolution of research degrees. There is considerable expertise surrounding best practices in research supervision, this is however in line with the requirements for a 'traditional' research degree. The introduction of professional doctorates to the mainstream 4th level curriculum, challenges a university's thinking on the development of structural and operational

frameworks while delivering a quality, market relevant product.

University College Dublin (UCD) is the largest fourth level educational institute in Ireland. Having recently and successfully introduced the first university-wide *Structured PhD Programme*, expertise in the design, delivery and implementation of alternative educational models has been garnered. Within the current unstable global economic climate, emphasis on educational programmes with direct impact on existing as well as future employment opportunities placed outside of academia is a must. Development of the Professional Doctorate

is seen as one such vehicle towards enhancing opportunities and meeting market demand.

The ethos of the Professional Doctorate demands collaboration, normally between academia and industry or the professions. The recent EUA publication on *Collaborative Doctoral Education (2009)* highlights the significance of joint degrees and the requirement for clear and standardized regulations with respect to admission, selection of research topic, monitoring and assessment. The stakeholders in a collaborative project, including the university, industrial/professional supervisors and the doctoral candidate, have to integrate and operate with different goals and cultures and in a non-linear relationship, even though the process towards earning a doctoral degree is indeed quite linear. While higher education institutes debate the structure and content of these profession-oriented programmes, tailoring to institute and employee / employer needs, the critical role of the supervisor in these degrees has consequently arisen and has rarely, thus far, been accounted for.

Scott *et al* identified eight defining features of the Professional Doctorate in 2004, none of which address supervisory frameworks or practice, but do include;

- A focus on professional work
- A focus on the development of the individual in relation to their professional work
- A significant taught element
- The specification of learning outcomes
- Cohort based pedagogies (not universal)
- A shorter thesis length than that required for PhD but with the same requirement for originality
- Close relation of the Professional Doctorate to the development of practice within the profession concerned which may involve accreditation by a professional body resulting in a professional qualification
- Reference to the profession is usually made in the title of the Professional Doctorate award

In addition, specific issues relating to the successful implementation of the Professional Doctorate have arisen, the degree being treated by universities and government agencies as a variant of doctoral education. Furthermore, existing best practice guidelines in Ireland address PhD's only, leading to a level of ambiguity about the status of Professional Doctorates. A shift in the supervisory practice and framework of traditional and professional doctorate candidates is again not addressed in the following issues which are seen as specific to the award (*Review of Professional Doctorates, 2006*);

- Distinctions between the Professional Doctorate and the PhD
- Qualifications Descriptors
- Level of Study
- Title of Award
- Entry Requirements
- Recognition by Professional Bodies
- Structure of the Professional Doctorate
- Distinctions between the Professional Doctorate and traditional PhDs
- Overarching issues concerning doctorates

Supervision of professional doctorates with respect to monitoring/assessment, guidance and the facilitation/support of an appropriate skills base requires specific attention. The EUA's recent report on *Collaborative Doctoral Education (2009)* highlights the contexts, trends and strategies with respect to doctoral programmes and in employability perspectives, the mobility and skill requirements of these graduates is addressed. The IUA Skills Statement (2008) has clearly identified the skills base recognized as relevant to PhD student education. However, this skills base will require some modification when addressing relevance in the Professional Doctorate context especially in the area of supervision.

Disciplinary norms, as well as the extent to which a Professional Doctorate holds currency within a specific subject area or in a professional capacity, may also dictate the nature of the various components of a Professional Doctoral programme. These include ratios between taught and research activity, levels of clinical teaching, in addition to, or as part of the taught and research activity, mechanisms for ongoing assessment, the relative weighting of all components and their contribution to the final degree award, as well as the mode of supervision.

This paper examines key issues surrounding effective supervision of Professional Doctorate programmes and proposes a model for best supervisory practice which may be of value in developing international guidelines. The *crucial role of supervision* is one of the ten guiding Salzburg Principles (Bologna Seminar, 2005) but what model of supervision is optimal? Should doctoral panels include mandatory external representation? Who is qualified within the traditional academic arena to supervise professionals in this context? How can supervisors translate effort into departmental and or professional recognition? How can quality assurance and standardization of supervisory practice be maintained? What skills training will professional doctorate candidates require and are supervisors equipped to deliver? What institutional structures will optimally support and develop research supervisory

capacity? With increased national awareness of the requirements for effective research supervision on existing traditional programmes, the specific needs of the Professional Doctorate supervisor cannot be underestimated.

## References

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