

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This document outlines quality assurance (QA) guidelines established by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) for all providers of research degrees and related services. These guidelines are “statutory” guidelines: QQI must publish QA guidelines under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 (referred to as the 2012 Act in this document). The 2012 Act further requires providers to “have regard to” QQI’s quality assurance (QA) guidelines when establishing their own quality assurance procedures.

These guidelines supplement the QQI *Core Statutory QA Guidelines* published in April 2016. While the *Core Guidelines* provide the general quality assurance guidance required, the guidelines in this document address the specific responsibilities of providers regarding the quality assurance of research degree programmes. These responsibilities are set out in general terms in the 2012 Act. Providers of research degree programmes should also refer to QQI’s other sector-specific and topic-specific quality assurance guidelines as appropriate.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with QQI’s policy on QA Guidelines.

These topic-specific QA guidelines supplement and are in addition to the core QA guidelines.

### 1.1 To whom do these guidelines apply?

These guidelines are applicable to all types of providers providing research degrees at levels 9 and 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). They are produced for the attention of, and use by, providers establishing quality assurance procedures under the 2012 Act. The legal context varies between providers as follows:

- Previously established universities and the National University of Ireland (NUI) are recognised as autonomous and must have regard to QA guidelines in the development of their internal QA procedures.
- Other awarding bodies, namely the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and institutes of technology, must have regard to the QA guidelines prior to the approval of their QA procedures by QQI.
- Independent or private providers providing research degrees that come voluntarily to QQI to seek approval of their QA procedures and access to QQI research awards. Such providers must have regard to the QA guidelines prior to the approval of their QA procedures by QQI.
- Linked providers must have regard to these QA guidelines prior to the approval of their QA procedures by a designated awarding body.

Providers concerned with the administration and delivery of other research-intensive degree programmes with significant taught elements are advised to consider these guidelines and apply them insofar as relevant.

## 1.2 What is the purpose of these guidelines?

### These guidelines are to be used:

- by providers when designing, and reviewing, institutional quality assurance policies and procedures for research degree programmes
- as a basis for the approval by QQI of a provider's relevant quality assurance procedures (other than for previously established universities)

### These guidelines are not intended:

To prescribe **how** providers are to operate research degree programmes or how they establish their internal procedures. Rather, providers are expected to have internal systems of quality assurance for research degree programmes and related services which are appropriate to their individual contexts and include mechanisms that successfully monitor the effectiveness of those systems.

By providing a common standard these guidelines are devised to promote and enhance an active and supportive academic research environment and community in all providers offering research degrees.

## 1.3 Scope and relevance

These guidelines refer directly to the quality assurance of research degree programmes and related services and the associated awards of Masters Degree (by Research) and Doctoral Degrees.