



## School of Postgraduate Studies

### Quality Improvement Plan – January 2012

The numbering system used below follows that used in the Peer Review Group (PRG) report. The School of Postgraduate Studies abbreviation SPGS will be used throughout the plan and a comprehensive list of abbreviations is included below the plan.

No.	Recommendation	Type	Comment	Action Plan	Responsibility
3.1	The SPGS should develop a strategic long-term plan.	Strategic	An updated RCSI central strategic plan is currently in progress and the SPGS strategy for period 2012 – 2017 will be developed in parallel with this.	Q3 2012	SPGS
3.2	RCSI Senior Management Team (SMT) should address the issue of including all postgraduate information within a database system, which should satisfy internal requirements as well as the reporting requirements for the HEA and other statutory bodies.	Strategic	RCSI is undertaking a review of the student records system to establish immediate and longer term needs and whether the current system is fit for purpose and measures will be taken to future proof it for all student records. SMT has agreed that the SPGS will have representation for postgraduate requirements on the Information Governance and Management Committee.	Q3 2012	SMT
3.3	A forum needs to be established which will identify and implement postgraduate requirements for IT systems and associated processes across RCSI.	Strategic	A forum will be established at two levels: business owner and administrative. This forum will review current needs of the student records system and how these can be implemented practically. It will also take account of medium to longer term requirements and develop a plan for their implementation. In addition, Faculty Centre is working on the establishment of a new Registry function and the SPGS will liaise with Faculty Centre on this.	Q3 2012	SMT

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3.4	Clear terms of reference should be agreed for the SPGS Committee.	Strategic	Clear Terms of Reference (ToR) for this Committee will be developed with reference to Best Practice. The 2012 – 2017 strategy for the School of Postgraduate Studies will include the role of this Committee, which reports to Academic Council, which in turn reports to the Medicine and Health Sciences Board (MHSB). See recommendation 3.1.	Q1 2012	SPGS Committee
3.5	The reporting structure within the SPGS should be altered.	Rectifiable with current resources	Rationalised line management within the School will be implemented by liaising with SMT and HR. This will take account of potential interactions with the new Registry being developed in RCSI.	Q3 2012	SMT/HR
3.6	The SPGS should review PGR recruitment with regard to standard at entry, and take into account the views of supervisors following their interviews of potential applicants.	Strategic	The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for recruitment of research postgraduates (PGR) will be updated to further strengthen the application of academic standards to the entrance requirements. This will be done in consultation with Research Supervisors and appropriate external advisors to ensure Best Practice in this area.	Q1 / Q2 2012	SPGS / SPGS Committee / Research Supervisors
3.7	<p>(i) The training needs of PGRs should be assessed at entry and at regular intervals throughout their research programmes. These skills needs should be matched to short courses and modules, some of which may need to be developed.</p> <p>(ii) As far as possible, taught elements which are available to PGRs on Structured Programmes should be made available to all PGRs.</p> <p>(iii) The necessary resources to provide</p>	Strategic	<p>(i) A template will be developed to ascertain the training needs of PGRs at entry to RCSI and at relevant time points throughout their higher degree programmes, for example at annual progress review meetings. The suite of modules and workshops available to PGRs will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis taking account of PGR needs, feedback from postgraduates, input from teaching staff and other appropriate data from current research.</p> <p>(ii) All relevant taught modules of the current structured PhD programme have been offered to all RCSI PGRs in the current academic year. This will be continued.</p> <p>(iii) We rely heavily on our academic colleagues to deliver</p>	<p>(i) In place for the academic year 2012/2013</p> <p>(ii) Completed and ongoing for future academic years</p> <p>(iii) Ongoing</p>	SPGS

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	this PGR training should be provided.		<p>this training and, if budget permits, we invite external facilitators to deliver relevant professional development and generic skills training workshops. PGRs will be invited through the usual feedback mechanisms to offer suggestions for additional training that they wish to receive.</p> <p>In light of the Hunt report, the SPGS will explore the possible options with RCSI's strategic partners to assist with delivery of this training.</p>		
3.8	Co-ordination of the annual Mini Med School should reside outside the SPGS.	Strategic	Contrary to the PRG recommendation, the SPGS wishes to continue its management of the Transition Year Mini Med School reflecting its enthusiasm for this activity.	Ongoing	SPGS/SMT
4.1	For the current level of activity within the SPGS, the number of staff should be increased. Externally funded posts should be incorporated as core RCSI posts.	Limited Resources	There is one key externally funded post in the School for which funding ends in October 2012. As stated in the PRG report commendation 4.2 "The School is in imminent danger of being overextended as a result of its own success." Therefore to allow the School to function effectively, to further develop and to play a full role in the activities of RCSI SMT will review a business case submitted by SPGS for retention of this post.	Q4 2012	SMT/SPGS/HR
4.2	Staffing levels and the range of activities of the SPGS need to be re-considered if there is any further expansion of postgraduate activity within the SPGS.	Limited Resources	The School would be enthusiastic to expand its range of activities given appropriate resources and recognition that these activities are at the core of RCSI's educational and research mission. See also 4.1.	Q4 2012	SMT/SPGS/HR
4.3	The SPGS should be co-located in a cohesive unit with adequate office space and facilities.	Rectifiable with current resources	SMT commit to accommodating SPGS staff closer to each other pending arrangements for the new Registry function.	Q3 2012	SMT/SPGS
4.4	(i) There should be a clearly defined career structure for staff within the SPGS, to reflect their abilities, efforts	Rectifiable with current	(i) The RCSI Director of HR is developing a HR Strategy which will include more robust Professional & Development opportunities for all staff. He will engage	Immediately	SMT/HR

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	and aspirations.  (ii) Once a clear Strategy and Policy is developed for the SPGS, requirements for the professional development of the members of the School, including skills, should be more evident.	resources	with the Head of SPGS and school staff in this regard.  (ii) Professional development requirements of members of staff in the SPGS will be reviewed in collaboration with HR on an ongoing basis. This will be included in the strategy.	Q2 2012 & Ongoing	SPGS/HR
5.1	The PRG recommends that checking of the validity of international qualifications of prospective students needs some further attention, e.g. possibly involving the use of NARIC ( <a href="http://www.naric.org.uk">www.naric.org.uk</a> ).	Limited resources / Rectifiable with current resources	The SPGS currently uses the NARIC system to check equivalence of qualifications – the responsibility lies with the candidate to ensure that they provide the relevant information to NARIC and then to RCSI. The requirement to check equivalence will be embedded in the updated PGR recruitment policy. See also 3.6.	Q2 2012	SPGS
5.2	RCSI Postgraduate Academic Regulations, fully recognised by RCSI academic structures are required urgently.	Rectifiable with current resources	This is recognised as being a matter of top priority. The current guidelines will be reviewed and updated to the level of Postgraduate Academic Regulations according to Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) Guidelines and best international practice. The process for approval is SPGS Committee → Academic Council → Medicine and Health Science Board (MHSB) (the governing body of RCSI).	In place for the academic year 2012/2013	SPGS / SPGS Committee / Academic Council / MHSB
5.3	(1) RCSI needs an institutional policy on supervisors and supervisory issues.  (ii) A register of RCSI supervisors needs to be established.	Strategic / Rectifiable with current resources	(i) A Working Group comprising a cross section of stakeholders will be established to develop an institutional policy on supervisors and supervisory issues.  (ii) A register of RCSI supervisors meeting strict criteria e.g. IUQB Guidelines will be established.	In place for the academic year 2012/2013	SPGS Committee
5.4	Formal terms of reference are needed for the SPGS Committee and PVAC Committee.	Strategic	The SPGS will work with SMT to develop appropriate ToR for the SPGS Committee including representation, length of time serving on the committee, and so on. The makeup and ToR for the PVAC is currently under	In place for the academic year 2013/2014	SPGS Committee / Academic Council

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			review. It should be noted that PVAC reports to Academic Council and not to the School of Postgraduate Studies.		
6.1	The PRG recommends full implementation of the improvements identified in the SAR.	Strategic / Limited resources / Rectifiable with current resources	A range of quality improvements was identified in the SAR; these can be summarised under three headings: (1) Strategic Planning, (2) Feedback Mechanisms, (3) SWOT Analysis. These include short, medium and long term implementation plans. (1) Strategic planning: see 3.1. (2) Standard mechanisms for obtaining feedback from stakeholder groups will be applied. These will include online questionnaires, focus group interviews and other appropriate tools. (3) We will exploit strengths and opportunities, identify and deal appropriately with threats and remedy weaknesses. All this will be done with due cognisance of the strategic plan.	Ongoing	SPGS
8.1	The SPGS should consider the issues of (i) healthcare, (ii) access to scientific journals and (iii) laptops by PGRs and make the recommendations to RCSI.	Limited resources	(i) SMT has committed to further subsidy of GP costs at the Mercer Centre for full time PhD students. This is based on the metrics produced in a report prepared by the PGSU.  (ii) SPGS will liaise with the Library and the Research Office to deal with access to scientific journals.  (iii) Supervisors will be encouraged to include provision for laptops, if permitted, in grant applications. In addition, we will work with the IT Department to improve support for self purchase laptops.	Q1 2012	SPGS/SMT
8.2	The new Postgraduate Academic Regulations (recommendation 5.2) should include a transparent policy for dealing with problems that	Rectifiable with current resources	Since the review, the School has introduced a mentor scheme for all new PhD students. One of the roles of the mentor is to identify problems at an early stage. The annual progress review will also help in this area.	In place for the academic year 2012/2013	SPGS Committee

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	occasionally arise in student / supervisor(s) relations and supervisory arrangements.		Procedures for dealing with problems will be detailed in a transparent policy in this area (see recommendation 5.3).		
9.1	RCSI management needs to develop a policy on the overall management of PGT programmes delivered by RCSI.	Strategic	Since the Quality Review, a report on the Review of Taught Masters Programmes at RCSI was finalised and presented to Academic Council in October 2011. An implementation plan is being developed in collaboration with the Dean and SMT.	Ongoing / In place for the academic year 2012/2013	SMT
10.1	The relationship of the SPGS with the Research Institute needs to be clarified.	Strategic	The Head of School of Postgraduate Studies is now a member of the reconstituted Research Committee creating an appropriate communication route between SPGS and the Research Institute. Two members of the Research Office are members of the Steering Committee for the structured PhD programme in BioAnalysis and Therapeutics (BioAT). A number of important initiatives between the Research Office and the School of Postgraduate Studies are currently underway.	Ongoing	SPGS/Research Institute
11.1	Members of SPGS should continue to attend regularly at meetings relevant to updating and upskilling in PGR and PGT issues.	Rectifiable with current resources	The SPGS participates in relevant meetings such as those organised by the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) and the Organisation for PhD Education in Biomedicine and Health Sciences in the European System (ORPHEUS). In addition, IT skills and other training requirements are and will continue to be identified in the regular professional development and review process for all members of staff in the SPGS.	Q4 2011 (UKCGE) Q2 2012 (ORPHEUS) Ongoing (Other)	SPGS

## Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HR	Human Resources
IUQB	Irish Universities Quality Board
MHSB	Medicine and Health Science Board
NARIC	National Recognition Information Centre (UK)
ORPHEUS	Organisation for PhD Education in Biomedicine and Health Sciences in the European System
PGR	Postgraduate Research
PGSU	Postgraduate Students Union
PGT	Postgraduate Taught
PRG	Peer Review Group
PVAC	Programme Validation and Accreditation Committee
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPGS	School of Postgraduate Studies
ToR	Terms of Reference
UKCGE	UK Council for Graduate Education