Implementing the first national survey for postgraduate research (PGR) students

EUA-CDE Thematic Workshop 2019

Emer Cunningham
University College Dublin

Rachel Keegan
Dublin City University

ISSE PGR Working Group
HEA IUA THEA USI

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NATIONAL
SURVEY,
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IMPACT

Context: Irish higher education system

- ❑ 8 universities

- ❑ 12 Institutes of Technology

- ❑ Colleges of education & smaller institutions

- ❑ Private HE providers

- ❑ *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*
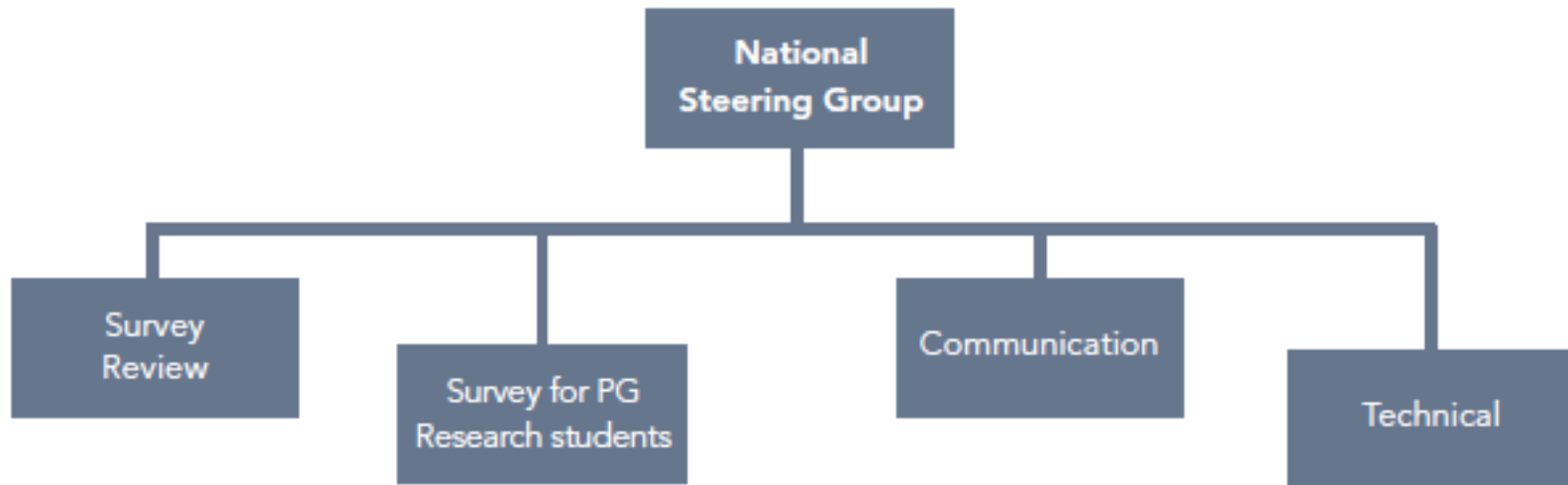
Development of first national survey(s)

❑ Recommendation of *National Strategy for HE to 2030*

❑ 2013 pilot national student survey for taught students (first, final year undergraduate, taught postgraduate)

❑ All state-funded institutions

❑ 163,000 total responses from 2013 to 2018 (28% national response rate in 2018)

❑ Based on international best practice (US National Survey of Student Engagement, "NSSE" -derivatives in Ireland, UK, China, South Africa, Denmark)

National collaborative partnership

❑ Funded by state policy & funding body (HEA) as shared service for institutions under HEA remit

❑ Co-sponsored by institutions' representative bodies and national students' union

❑ Partnership and **working groups** supported by project manager & contracted external company for technical delivery of survey / return of data

❑ Data returned **confidentially** to individual institutions

❑ Collaboration has **achieved more than individual actors could**

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Collaborative partnership

Co-sponsors

National Steering Group

- Survey Review
- Survey for PG Research students
- Communication
- Technical

Representative of institutions and external quality assurance agency

Postgraduate Research – the context

Based on effective practice

Why focus on engagement, not satisfaction?

- *"Other things being equal, the strongest evidence indicated that the greater the student's engagement in academic work or in the academic experience of the college, the greater his or her level of knowledge acquisition and general cognitive growth … academic engagement reduced authoritarianism and dogmatism and increased autonomy and independence, intellectual orientation, and the use of principled moral reasoning"* (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005: 608).

Pilot: process

Desk Research → Consultation → Pre-test with focus groups & cognitive interviews → Review and amend questions → Pilot fieldwork → Independent assessment of data → Amended questions for 2019
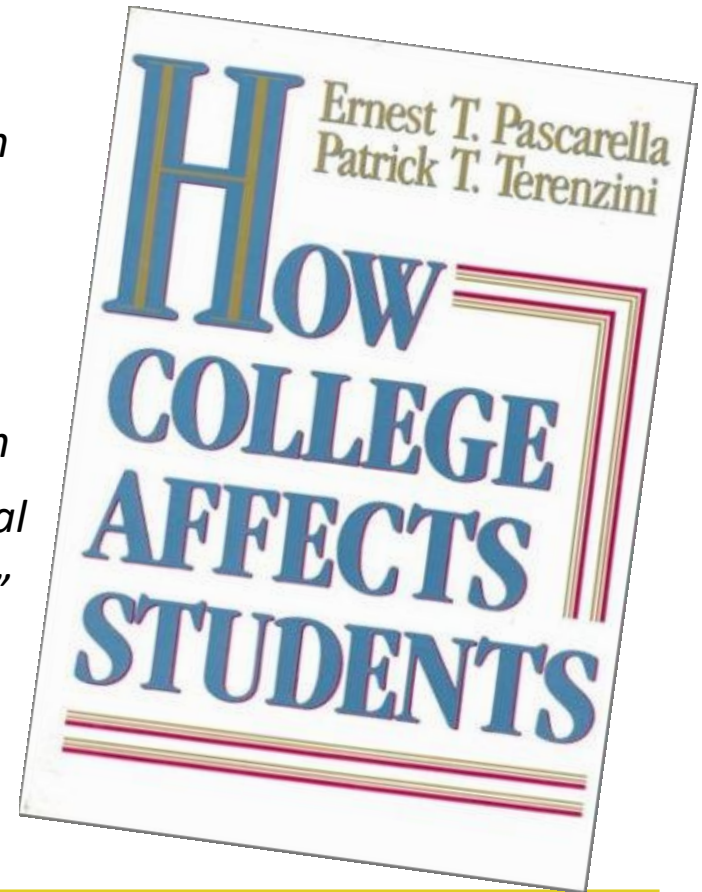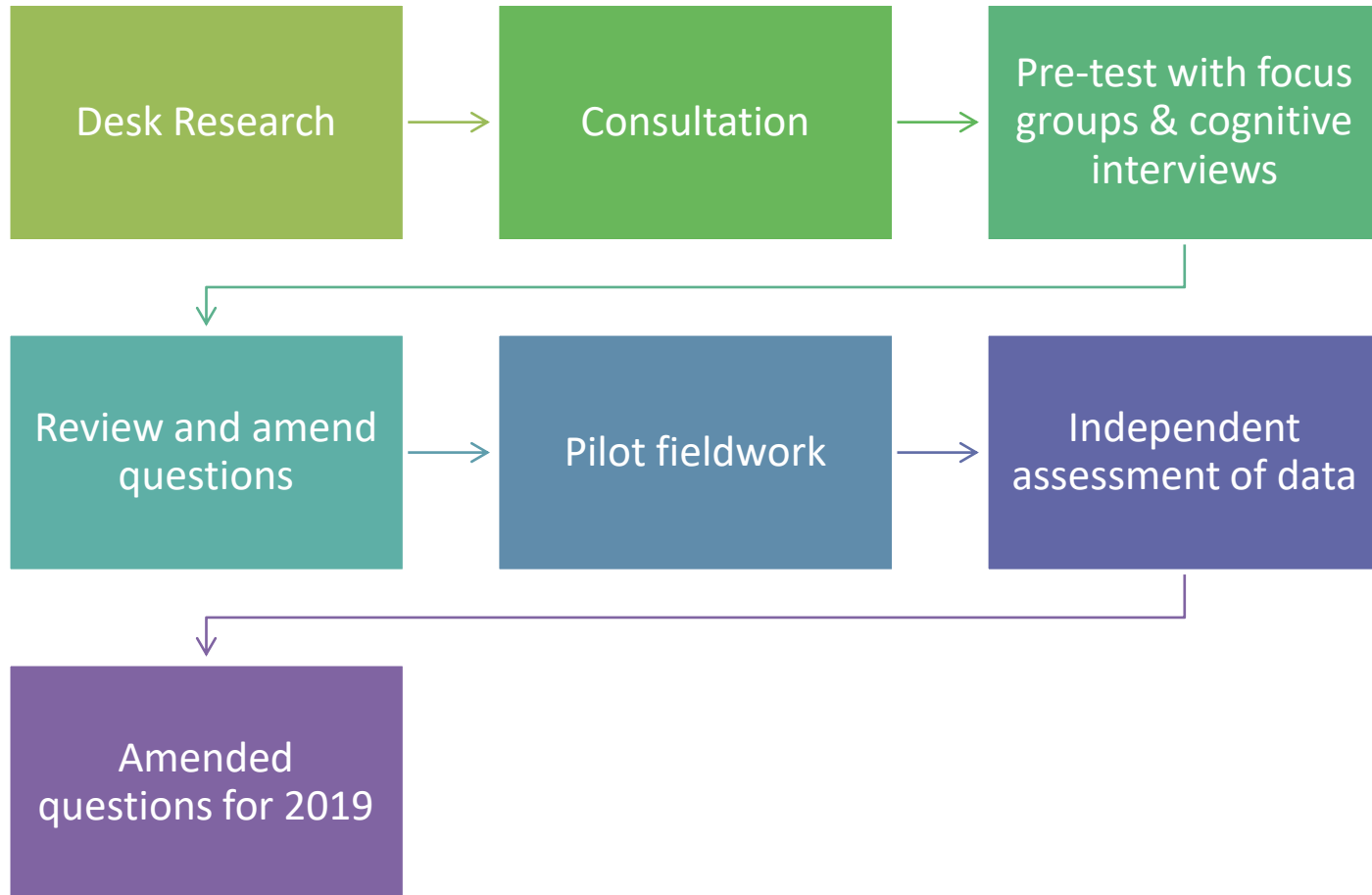
Pilot: sections ("aspects")

- ❑ Research Infrastructure and Facilities
- ❑ Supervision
- ❑ Research Culture
- ❑ Progress and Assessment
- ❑ Research Skills
- ❑ Other Transferable Skills

- ❑ Responsibilities and Supports
- ❑ Motivations
- ❑ Career Aspirations
- ❑ Overall Experience

Questions on each of these "Aspects" with closed responses (disagree -> agree) – commonly 4 such questions, plus one open text for each aspect

Current status

❑ 32.5% national response for pilot

❑ Anonymous aggregate data returned to institutions

❑ National report published November 2018

❑ First "non-pilot" fieldwork in 2019

❑ The transparency challenge

Benefits of Collaborative Approach

❑ Support at a National level

❑ Project Manager

❑ Engaged working group

❑ National data-set

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Thank you – further information

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement for Postgraduate Research Students (ISSE-PGR)

Implementation of the 2018 pilot national survey

www.studentsurvey.ie /

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http://studentsurvey.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ISSE-PGR-Report-2018final.pdf

Discussion

❑ Advantages / disadvantages of approach taken in

Ireland?

❑ Do similar instruments exist in your system? Why /

why not? What lessons can be learned?