
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

**STUDENT
SURVEY.IE**
NATIONAL
SURVEY,
LOCAL
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)

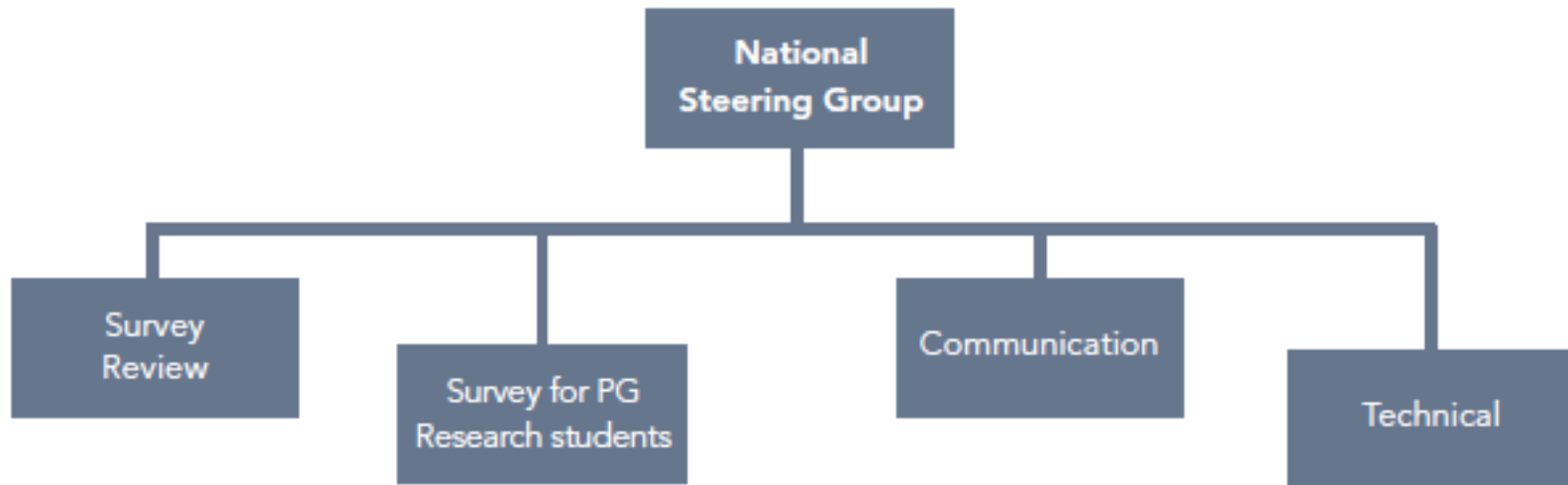
- ❑ Recommendation of *National Strategy for HE to 2030*
- ❑ 2013 pilot national student survey for taught students (first, final year undergraduate, taught postgraduate)
- ❑ All state-funded institutions
- ❑ 163,000 total responses from 2013 to 2018 (28% national response rate in 2018)
- ❑ Based on 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

Collaborative partnership

Co-sponsors



Representative of institutions and external quality assurance agency

Postgraduate Research – the context

IRISH UNIVERSITIES' PHD GRADUATE SKILLS STATEMENT

2ND EDITION 2015

IRISH UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION

National Framework for Doctoral Education

The composite image features a photograph of a young woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue sweater and a patterned scarf, sitting at a desk in a library and writing in a notebook. To the right of this photo is a large graphic with a blue geometric background of hexagons and lines. The graphic contains several smaller images: a person's hands holding a pen, a woman in a graduation cap, a globe, a person in a lab coat, and a building. The text 'IRISH UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION' is in the top left, and 'National Framework for Doctoral Education' is in the top right of the graphic.

Topic Specific

Research Degree Programmes

Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines
developed by QQI for Providers of Research Degree Programmes

March 2017/QG6-V1 © QQI

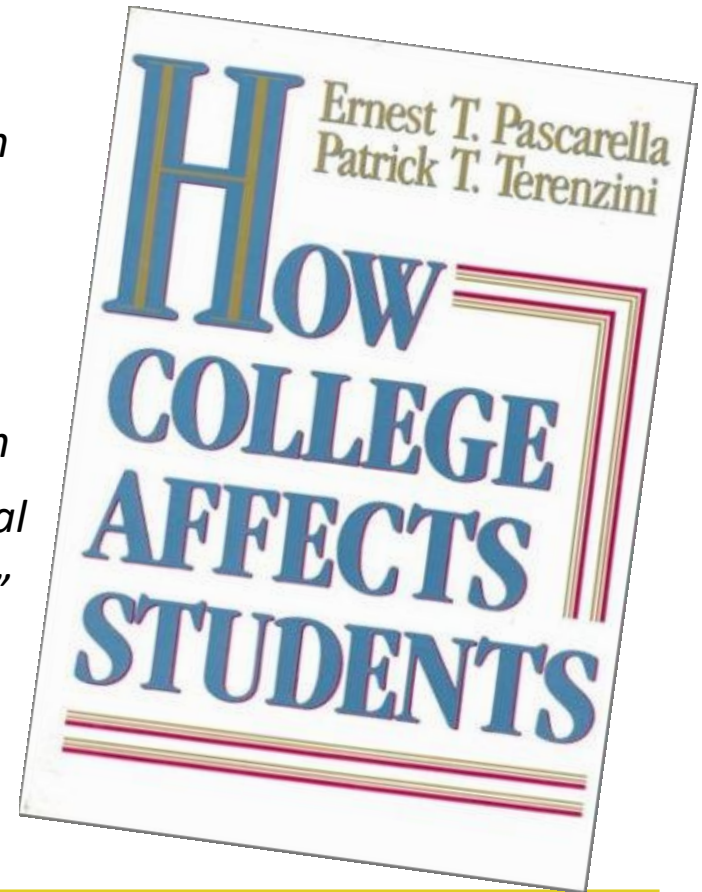
QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhí Calaisíne agus Ceilochta Éireann

The image shows the cover of a document titled 'Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines' for 'Research Degree Programmes'. It features a purple header with the text 'Topic Specific' and a green section with the title. The QQI logo is in the top right corner, and the date 'March 2017/QG6-V1 © QQI' is in the bottom right corner.

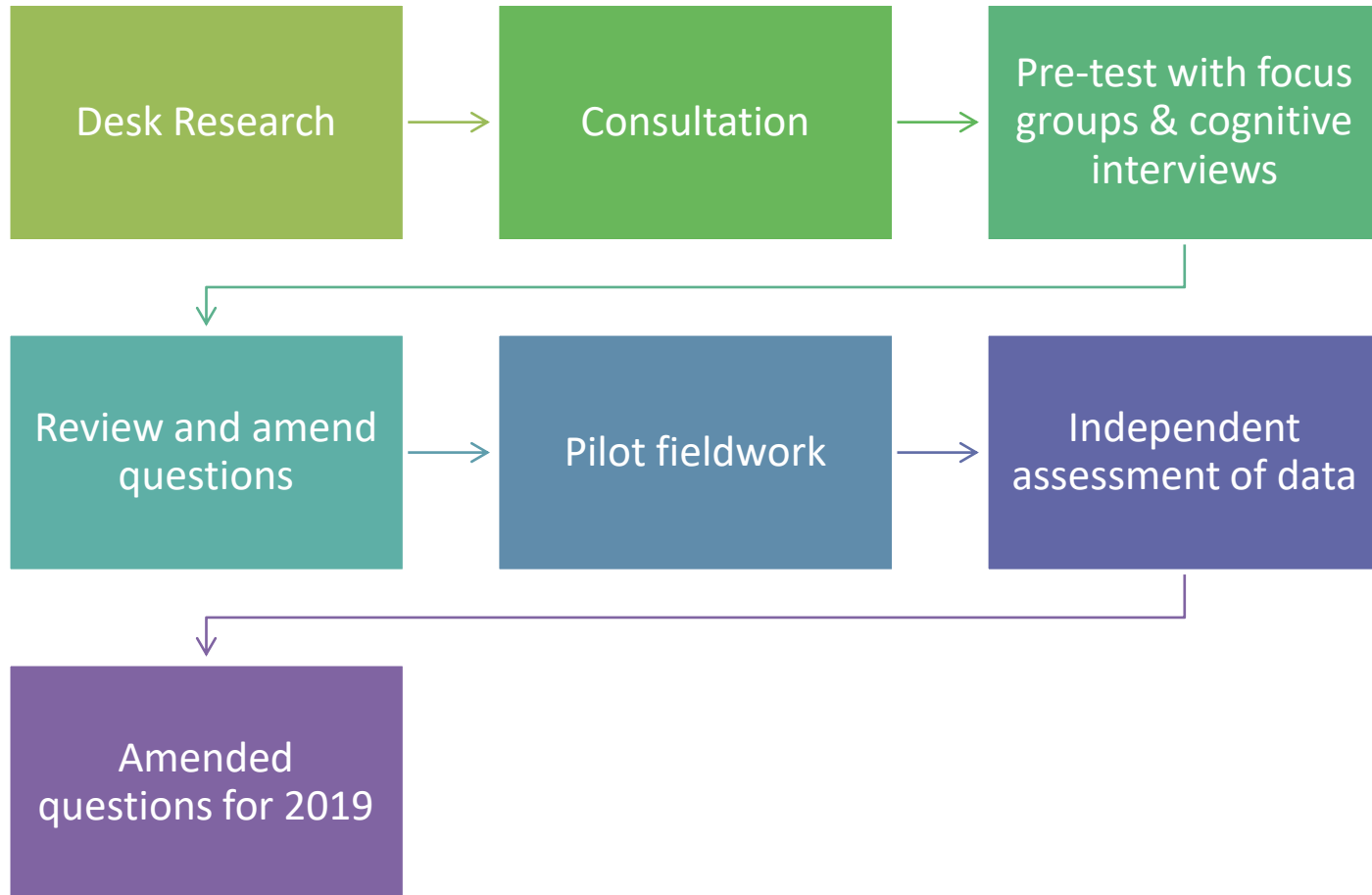
Based on effective practice

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



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

Thank you – further information



www.studentsurvey.ie /

@StudentSurveyIE

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

HEA HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN ADOIRNÁS UCHTARAÍOCHAS

IRISH UNIVERSITIES
UNIBERSITÉIBÍ ÉIREANN

thea

USI
UNIVERSITY STUDENT INSTITUTE

STUDENT
SURVEY.IE

@StudentSurveyIE

Discussion

- Advantages / disadvantages of approach taken in Ireland?
- Do similar instruments exist in your system? Why / why not? What lessons can be learned?