Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

School of Postgraduate Studies

Strategy 2007 – 2012

Last updated 13-06-07
Vision for the School of Postgraduate Studies

To develop RCSI postgraduates as competent and inspiring leaders capable of making significant contributions to human health.

Mission of the School of Postgraduate Studies

To market, recruit, support and retain a world class postgraduate community at RCSI. To train versatile postgraduates for success and to maximise the influence of RCSI postgraduates in a range of careers. To support internal and external providers of postgraduate training and to establish stronger links with national and international peer institutions in the pursuit of postgraduate excellence.

1 Introduction

Postgraduate education is critically important to the international reputation of RCSI and, in recognition of this, the School of Postgraduate Studies was established in September 2006 to pursue a strategic agenda for 4th level education. This will be channeled using appropriate links with relevant constituencies through which high quality communications will be promoted and supported to the benefit of our present, future and past postgraduates.

1 Internal links – the School will provide a centralised, cohesive infrastructure to recruit, support, monitor and retain world class postgraduate students.

2 External links – the School will maintain, improve and establish new links to national and international peer organisations as well as other relevant policy and funding agencies.

3 Alumni links – the School will foster dialogue with postgraduate alumni and will organise regular events to evolve the relationship with its chief constituents.

RCSI’s research strategy focuses on healthcare, biomedical and clinical research and the integration of these, so that advances in medical science are translated as quickly as possible into patient treatments.

http://www.rcsi.ie/index.jsp?1nID=93&2nID=96&pID=127&nID=680

It has been widely acknowledged that the apprenticeship model no longer provides sufficient training for PhDs in the 21st century and a more structured approach to postgraduate training is necessary to improve the employability of our postgraduates. Therefore we anticipate that by 2012 all postgraduate research students at RCSI will be enrolled in a structured programme containing the elements outlined in the diagram below. This structured programme will represent a successor programme to the current MRes/PhD Programme, which will be adapted to accommodate the requirements of all research PhD candidates regardless of their discipline. It is our recommendation that PhD candidates should be funded for four years full-time and the School of Postgraduate Studies will work to move this recommendation forward at local and national level.
2 Management of the School

The School of Postgraduate Studies sits within the RCSI Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences and reports to Faculty Board. The Head of School is a senior academic who is research active with a strong interest in the welfare of postgraduates. The Postgraduate Programmes Manager, working full time in the role, is responsible for day-to-day management of the School, deputising for the Head of School when appropriate. The current Head of School is Professor Kevin B Nolan, PhD DSc (NUI) FRSC, and the current Postgraduate Programmes Manager is Dr Helen McVeigh. A full time secretary will provide administrative support to the School.

The two primary committees working directly with the School are as follows:

- the School of Postgraduate Studies Committee, which oversees School activities
- the Postgraduate Course Assessment Committee, which is responsible for approving new postgraduate courses for which a certificate, diploma or degree is awarded
The School liaises with various RCSI functions as shown in the diagram below.

Figure 2: Organisation Chart of School of Postgraduate Studies

3 Linking with Other Institutions

RCSI already has strong links with several Irish third level institutions, working closely with its partners to provide advanced postgraduate training courses. These links will be strengthened by targeted meetings with appropriate personnel to further develop opportunities for postgraduate training including providing career development workshops. Opportunities to establish inter-institutional Graduate Schools in specific research themed areas will be explored including the delivery of training through electronic mechanisms such as Moodle, where appropriate.

RCSI primarily attracts postgraduates who have completed their undergraduate degrees elsewhere and therefore relies heavily on recruitment campaigns through standard advertising plus access to contacts at our peer institutions both nationally and internationally. Strengthened links with these other institutions, plus hosting a Postgraduate Open Evening, will assist in recruiting the best postgraduates.
4 Funding Postgraduate Education

Currently the majority of our postgraduates are funded for three years by one of three mechanisms:

1. Principal Investigators (PIs) attract funding for a studentship and invite applications for the project defined in the grant application. External funding agencies that have funded postgraduate studentships at RCSI include Science Foundation Ireland; Health Research Board; Enterprise Ireland; IRCSET; Wellcome Trust; Irish Aid (Dept of Foreign Affairs); the EU. Internal funding opportunities include those advertised by the RCSI Research Committee.

2. RCSI attracts funding for PhD programmes and invite applications from individuals for a variety of research projects.

3. Students are self-funded either personally or through scholarships received outside RCSI for which they are eligible to pursue a higher degree at RCSI.

It is our aspiration to progress to a 4-year PhD Programme for all our PhD students in a 1 + 3 year model comprising taught courses, mostly in the first year, external examination of progress within the first two years and the inclusion of professional and career development training to prepare our postgraduates for a variety of work opportunities. We will examine mechanisms to attract the additional funding that will be required to achieve this goal.

As part of delivering on this strategy for postgraduate education, currently RCSI has secured two PhD Scholar Programmes, to the value of €5 M each, funded by the Health Research Board. One programme, managed through the School of Postgraduate Studies is in the area of Diagnostics and Therapeutics for Human Disease. The programme led through the Division of Population Health Sciences is in the area of Integrated Healthcare: from Research to Policy and Practice.

5 Meeting National and European Objectives for Postgraduate Education

Irish Government policy on fourth level education proposes to double the number of postgraduates by 2012/2013 in line with recommendations in the OECD Review of Higher Education in Ireland (2004)

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/oecd_review_national_policies_education.doc

RCSI plans to participate in this national strategy by recruiting world class postgraduates from Ireland, the EU and beyond. Postgraduates will be funded through significant grant applications to relevant funding bodies and the School of Postgraduate Studies will work with the relevant lead PIs in coordinating the postgraduate training for such funding proposals.

The Bologna agreement (1999) seeks to achieve parity of qualifications and enhance the provision of comparable degrees by cooperating in quality assurance of education and encouraging mobility within Europe. In order to meet these objectives, the School will introduce a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for postgraduate degrees and, in the case of higher degrees by research, the majority of credits will be allocated to the research thesis. Credits towards the postgraduate degree will be based on recommendations in the Bologna process (http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/doc/guide_en.pdf) and in accordance with the Irish National Framework for Qualifications (http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/).

It is envisaged that in future, all PhD training will encompass taught courses, in both specific research topics and business topics, in addition to the substantial research project in a 4-year programme. It is recommended that postgraduate courses at the level of PhD should aim to cover the seven core academic competencies for PhDs outlined by the UK Research Councils and
6 Postdoctoral Training and Career Development

The School has responsibility for coordinating training and career development opportunities for postdoctoral fellows. Currently the School is working with the School of Healthcare Management and Molecular and Cellular Therapeutics to develop a structured programme of Professional Development Training for postdoctoral researchers. This programme will be rolled out in the 2007 – 2008 academic year.

This innovative approach to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) at the postdoctoral level will also be delivered in a series of CPD activities during years 2 to 4 of the four-year scholars programmes.

School of Postgraduate Studies Committee 2007
Professor Kevin Nolan (Chair)
Professor Hannah McGee
Professor Niamh Moran
Dr Samuel McConkey
Dr Kevin McGuigan
Dr Fergal O’Brien
Dr Helen McVeigh
Dr Kate Johnston
Ms Orlaith Brennan (PGSU President until May 2007)
Mr Liam Tuffy (PGSU President from June 2007)