



# Handbook for Masters of Research Students 2024-25

This handbook has been written to give practical information for students registered on the Masters of Research Programme at NCAD as well as laying out some tasks and activities required for successful completion of a research degree. It should be read in conjunction with UCD's Academic Regulations which govern the policies and practices at NCAD.

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## Postgraduate Studies at NCAD

The MRes programme was launched in 2023 at NCAD to support writers, artists, designers and educators who wish to develop a new set of research skills and understanding, or engage in experiments with new materials, processes or data.

Individual MRes students are based in specific departments in NCAD and come together for work in progress events and taught classes.

Students on the MRes programme join c. 100 students registered on taught postgraduate programmes offered by all Schools and c. 20 FT and PT PhD students. Details of each programme can be found in the links below:

<a href="#">Doctoral Studies at NCAD</a>	All Schools
<a href="#">MA Art and Social Action (PT)</a>	School of Fine Art
<a href="#">MA Circular by Design (PT)</a>	School of Design
<a href="#">MA Communication Design</a>	School of Design
<a href="#">MA Design History &amp; Material Culture (PT)</a>	School of Visual Culture
<a href="#">MA Interaction Design</a>	School of Design
<a href="#">MA Service Design (PT)</a>	School of Design
<a href="#">MA/MFA Art in the Contemporary World (PT AND FT)</a>	School of Visual Culture
<a href="#">MFA Fine Art</a>	School of Fine Art
<a href="#">MSc Medical Device Design</a>	School of Design
<a href="#">Professional Master of Education (Art &amp; Design)</a>	School of Education

## 1 The Masters of Research Award

The MRes is offered as a single programme with different named awards:

- Master of Research (Craft)
- Master of Research (Design)
- Master of Research (Education)
- Master of Research (Education and Fine Art)
- Master of Research (Education and Design)
- Master of Research Education and Craft)
- Master of Research (Fine Art)
- Master of Research (Visual Culture)

### 1.1 'By Research' and 'By Practice'

The nature of the research and the form in which it will be delivered by assessment is flexible and is negotiated with your Research Studies Panel (see below). It is important you are clear about the form that your work will take, particularly when it departs from conventional academic format such as a thesis. The sooner you resolve this aspect of your work with the support of your supervisor/s, the better.

In general, your work will take one of two forms: 'by practice' and 'by thesis'.

'By practice' describes a mode of research that is compatible with the kinds of creative practices undertaken at NCAD. Typically, an artist, designer, maker, curator, educator or a

‘practitioner’ of another kind will undertake to complete a body of work in their field of practice. This work will constitute research in the sense that it will be an investigation of a defined field or question identified at the outset of the studentship. In undertaking an agreed programme, the student will be developing the skills and competencies required to conduct high level research. While this work will often have deep footings in the research student’s existing field of practice and many ‘by practice’ researchers will have already established significant careers, ‘by practice’ research is not simply a restatement of their professional interests and contributions to date. It will be a new endeavour. As such, a clear research proposal must be made at the outset of study; an agreed number of interdependent research tasks will be undertaken during the studentship; and a clearly defined and resolved body of work be delivered for assessment at the end.

‘By practice’ students will also submit an accompanying text which will be assessed alongside the other evidence of practice submitted for the award. The nature of this text will be negotiated with the supervisors. That said, it should not take the form of a ‘simple’ narrative report outlining the development of the project alone, and needs to achieve the standards of comprehensive knowledge, creativity, contextual/disciplinary understanding and criticality required of the award of MRes.

‘By thesis’ students should also consider their work to be ‘a practice’. This means critical self-awareness of research methods and writing practice. As an institution seeking to stimulate and support creativity, we welcome creative experiments in these, and other, aspects of research. It may also be the case that ‘by thesis’ students will stage events and conduct ‘experiments’ that will generate ‘findings’ which will play a key part in the thesis submitted for assessment.

## 1.2 Modes of Study

The MRes programme at NCAD is offered in full time (FT), part time (PT) and ‘long’ modes:

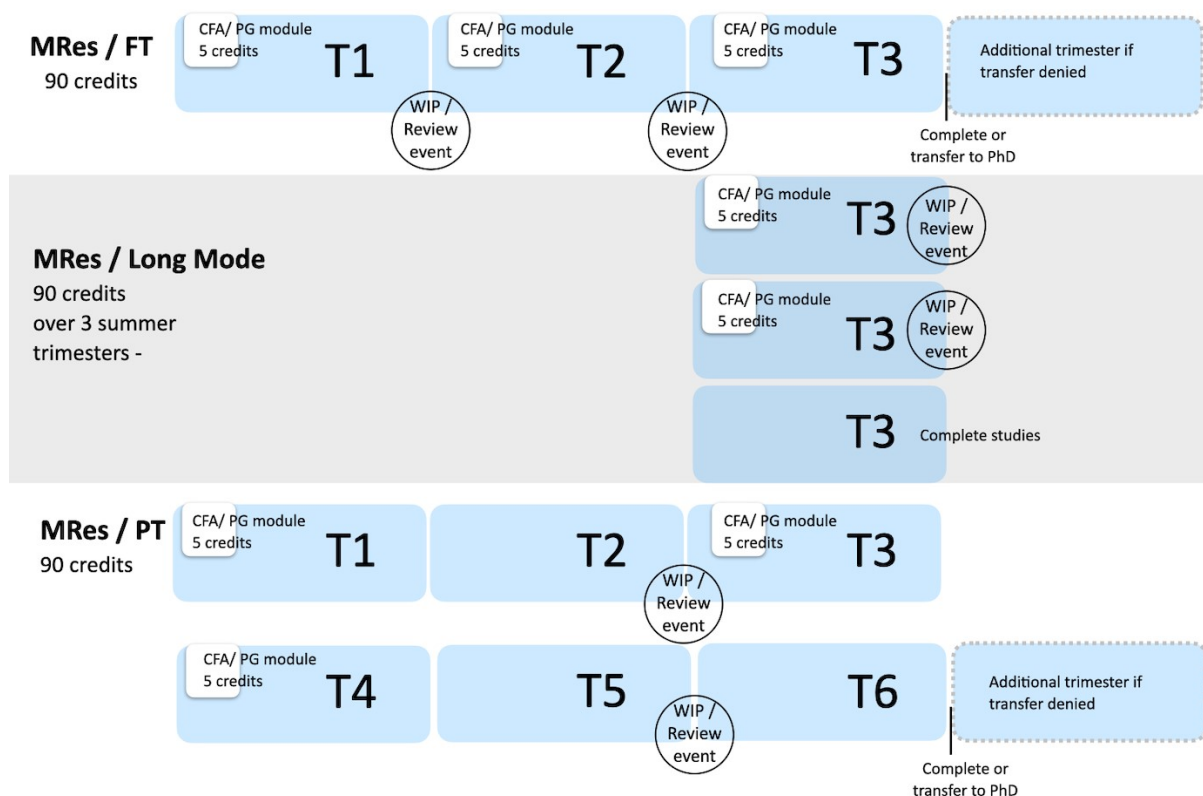
- 90 ECTS credit - FT - 12 months / 3 trimesters (AD450)
- 90 ECTS credit - PT – 24 months / 6 trimesters (AD450P)
- FT - 3 x summer only trimesters (long) (AD450L)

At NCAD, the trimesters run as follows:

Autumn Trimester	September to January
Spring Trimester	January to June
Summer Trimester	June to September

The MRes is a 90-credit programme i.e. 1800 learning hours. The programme is not organised as a series of modules. The majority of the learning (1500 hours) is dedicated to a structured, bespoke programme of study (indicated in blue in the diagram below).

In addition, 3 x 5 ECTS credit modules (i.e. 300 learning hours) will be taken from the suite of short courses by the Creative Futures Academy (see below) or other taught postgraduate programmes. One module will be the 5 credit Research Methods Course offered to all taught postgraduate programmes. Students select what they consider to be the two most appropriate 5 credit modules with the guidance of their supervisor/s.



It is important to note that part time (PT) study is understood to be at 50% of the rate of full time (FT) study. This means committing 2 to 3 days a week to your studies. Your work should be consistent across the duration of your studies and not 'bunched up' at the end. MRes students will need to demonstrate steady development in the work in progress presentations (details below).

### 1.3 Changing from full time studies to part time studies and vice versa

Typically, MRes students will complete their studies in the mode that they registered (FT, PT or 'Long') but it is possible to seek approval to change mode. If you wish to change your mode of study, please discuss this with your Principal Supervisor. The right to change mode of study will need to be balanced with other factors such as the availability of qualified teaching staff, access to workshops, etc.

## 2 Supervision arrangements

### 2.1 Supervisors

All MRes students will be provided with a Principal Supervisor in the department in which they are registered and a Research Studies Panel. Depending on the nature of the research to be undertaken, you may be provided with two supervisors. Where co-supervision is put in place, one of the tutors will be identified as your Principal Supervisor.

The role of the supervisor/s is/are to provide close and regular support for the MRes student.

Occasionally, the college may employ an 'external' co-supervisor, i.e. a suitably qualified academic from another institution to provide expertise which is not available at NCAD. An external co-supervisor will not carry the responsibility for matters relating to progression (scheduling, submission of paperwork to examination board, etc.). They are the responsibility of your Principal Supervisor.

### 2.2 Research Studies Panel

In addition to your supervisor/s, you will also be supported by a Research Studies Panel.

The Research Studies Panel will be made up of

- The principal supervisor
- The co-supervisor (if relevant)
- A number of advisors (at least two but no more than four). These may include external members when the student is engaged in an inter-institutional programme of study. These external members will need to be approved by Academic Council.

The membership of this panel is agreed by the Academic Council of NCAD and cannot be changed without its agreement.

The Research Studies Panel will support and advise the student and supervisor/s throughout the MRes. Panel members may not necessarily have subject expertise in your field of study but will be experienced supervisors.

The Research Studies Panel will meet at least once soon after the student begins their programme of MRes study. The Research Studies Panel should meet to review progress on a regular basis, but at least twice in the year in the case of a FT student and once every year in the case of PT student. Your supervisor will make the arrangements to schedule these meetings. Typically, the second meeting of the panel for PT and FT students will take place in the third trimester of the year.

The Panel will also participate in your work in progress events and, if appropriate, the transfer to PhD event (in the latter case playing a key role in determining whether the transfer occurs).

The role of the panel is to monitor the progress of your research and to support the tutor-student relationship. The members of the panel will be familiar with University regulations and policies pertaining to graduate research and its supervision: they may not necessarily have deep subject expertise your field of study. In the event of any difficulties in your studies that cannot be resolved by your supervisor/s, the Research Studies Panel may play an important supporting role.

## 3 Taught Classes and Credited Modules

### 3.1 Credits

The Masters of Research is largely achieved through independent research and the completion of an agreed body of work. While undertaking their major research project work, the student will also undertake 3 x level 9 5 ECTS credit modules offered by the [Creative Futures Academy \(CFA\)](#)<sup>1</sup> and/or NCAD postgraduate taught programmes.

Typically, such modules will support the acquisition of research skills as well as dissemination practices. CFA modules will provide training in research ethics and other relevant fields.

You will select these modules with your supervisor at the start of the programme of study (see 'Research and Professional Development Plan (Learning Contract)' [here](#)). It is important to consider the timing of the modules in the year and in the week. Some courses will be available in an intensive format.

Each module will be accompanied by an assessment task for which a grade will be awarded. All modules need to be passed in order to be awarded the degree of Masters of Research.

All students are required to complete **Epigeum Online Research Integrity Training**. This is a free course adapted from a UK version to match the needs of Irish researchers. All NCAD students and staff have access to the online course. We strongly recommend that you take

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<sup>1</sup> The Creative Futures Academy is an initiative established by NCAD, University College Dublin (UCD) Humanities and Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) providing opportunities for accredited learning in various fields connected to creative industries. It supports various kinds of learners including mid-career professionals who wish to improve their skills and understanding. Most of the curriculum is delivered in micro-credentialised formats e.g. short courses bearing 5 ECTS credits.

this course at the outset of your studies. Details of how to register and access the content are [here](#).

### 3.2 Taught Modules Available in 2024-25

In 2024-25 the following modules will be available to MRes learners through the CFA

- *Research Methods for Art and Design Research* (5 credits) offered to postgraduate learners via the Creative Futures Academy. In 2024-25 this module will be offered in the second half of the autumn trimester.
- *Art and Design Research Ethics* (5 credits) offered to postgraduate learners via the Creative Futures Academy. In 2024-25 this module will be offered in the first half of the spring trimester.
- *Creative Approaches to Archives* (5 credits) offered to postgraduate learners via the Creative Futures Academy. In 2024-25 this module will be offered in the first half of the spring trimester.
- *Writing for and as Research* (5 credits) offered to postgraduate learners via the Creative Futures Academy. In 2024-25 this module will be offered in the first half of the summer trimester.
- *Making Research Public: Event Organisation* (5 credits) – available when required and supported by mentoring.
- *Making Research Public: By Publication* (5 credits) – available when required and supported by mentoring.
- *Making Research Public: By Presentation* (5 credits) – available when required and supported by mentoring.
- *Proposal Writing* (5 credits) – available when required and supported by mentoring.
- Accredited ‘intensive’ courses offered in partnership with external bodies such as the CFA / IMMA summer school.

Research students can also undertake credit-bearing modules offered as part of NCAD’s taught masters programmes:

<a href="#">MA Art and Social Action (PT)</a>	School of Fine Art
<a href="#">MA Circular by Design (PT)</a>	School of Design
<a href="#">MA Communication Design</a>	School of Design
<a href="#">MA Design History &amp; Material Culture (PT)</a>	School of Visual Culture
<a href="#">MA Interaction Design</a>	School of Design
<a href="#">MA Service Design (PT)</a>	School of Design



<a href="#">MA/MFA Art in the Contemporary World (PT AND FT)</a>	School of Visual Culture
<a href="#">MFA Fine Art</a>	School of Fine Art
<a href="#">MSc Medical Device Design</a>	School of Design
<a href="#">Professional Master of Education (Art &amp; Design)</a>	School of Education

Students who register on the MRes programme who have already successfully completed these modules can offset the requirement to undertake 3 x 5 credit modules.

Further details of many of these modules can be found on the [Programme Information page](#) of the [NCAD website](#) ([www.ncad.ie/students/programme-information/](http://www.ncad.ie/students/programme-information/)).

## 4 Research and Professional Development Plan (Learning Contract)

### 4.1 Learning Contract

Following acceptance of a place on the programme and prior to starting, the applicant will need to complete a 'learning contract'. Blank copies of the form with the title 'Research and Professional Development Plan (Learning Contract)' can be found [here](#).

This is an important document because it requires reflection on the schedule and flow of work as well as the likely form that it will take at the time of the final examination. It also helps you and the Research Studies Panel to be confident that your work can lead to successful completion. We recognise that plans change. If your project changes significantly, you will be asked to update your learning contract and secure the agreement of your Research Studies Panel.

The learning contract is also an opportunity for MRes applicants to specify their needs for space and equipment at the outset (as well as training and other needs). In signing off the contract, the supervisor will confirm the nature and extent of access to workshops and any other resources of this kind. The extent of this access will also reflect the mode of study (in other words part time students will have part time access to these resources).

In the case of 'by practice' students who wish to undertake their studies without using NCAD studio and/or workshop facilities, it will be necessary to make a clear and detailed statement in the Learning Contract about what kind of spaces and resources are available to you off site. You may find that your supervisor wants to review these facilities prior to the start of your studies. This again, is to ensure that we can be confident about the likelihood of successful completion.

## 5 Progression and assessment

As a programme which requires considerable independence on the part of students and an award which is based on a single body of work, we expect all MRes students to meet the progression and assessment requirements laid out below:

### 5.1 Support and supervision

To monitor and record student progress, FT students on the MRes programme are required to have two formal tutorials each trimester with their supervisor/s (in addition to 'ordinary' meetings that take place during the course of studies). These formal tutorials require a written record of work undertaken to date and plans for future activities (see Tutorial Report Form [here](#)). These records constitute a formal log and are required to ensure that the student meets agreed deadlines/targets.

In the case of students who have elected to conduct 'by practice' research using their own workshop/ studio facilities, it is a requirement that at least one of the two formal tutorials is conducted as a studio visit in each FT trimester and every two trimesters in the case of PT students.

### 5.2 Work in progress presentations

In addition, you will present your work to date in 'work in progress' presentations. The audience for these events will be staff and other MRes and research students at NCAD. For full time students, work in progress events will be scheduled at the end of the first trimester (T1) and the second trimester (T2). For part-time students, work in progress events will be scheduled at the end of the second trimester (T2) and the fourth trimester (T4). For students registered on the long mode, these presentations will occur at the end of the summer trimester in the first and second years.

Trimester 2 presentations will be scheduled alongside work in progress presentations by PhD students at the College. It is an important event in the calendar of all research students at the College. The Work in Progress sessions will involve self-review and self-assessment in that learners will be expected to reflect on their learning to date as well as their upcoming plans and needs.

The schedule and format of the event will be announced in advance, but typically students will be invited to present their work for 20-30 mins. This is an opportunity to reflect on their work to date, as well as to sketch plans ahead. The presentation should not be simply a matter of reporting progress but a chance to test ideas and confront intellectual 'challenges'. MRes students may also use the work in progress event to present a 'paper' - this may be a rehearsal for a paper at a scholarly conference. There will be time scheduled

immediately after the presentation for discussion. Presenters should be prepared to answer questions and engage their peers in discussion.

These presentations form key review points and written feedback will be provided by the Supervisor/s. While grades are not awarded for this exercise, they constitute important progression points and if the work presented is inadequate, the student will be notified that they are at risk of not passing the MRes. The Research Studies Panel will be empowered to set referral work and, ultimately, to recommend that a student fails their studies on the basis of poor performance.

MRes student progress will be recorded by examination boards at the end of each trimester. Grades for CFA modules will be recorded, and successful progress in the research project work will be recorded as 'pass and proceed'. In the case of very poor performance, the Research Studies Panel can recommend that the student 'does not proceed'.

### **5.3 Meetings with the Research Studies Panel**

As noted above, students registered on the programme are supported by a Research Studies Panel. Meetings conducted after a significant period of study (i.e. not the first meeting) will play an important role in measuring your progress to date. Prior to meeting the panel, you are required to provide an update of work to date, as well as plans for the next phase of your studies. Changes in focus and method can be recorded and approved here too. This is called the 'Research and Professional Development Plan (Report)' and copies can be found [here](#).

### **5.4 The body of work presented for examination at the end of your studies**

It is important that the work presented for examination at the end of your studies demonstrates your mastery of research. Detailed learning outcomes are listed below. The scale and nature of the work presented for examination is an important matter and needs to be agreed with the supervisor/s but the following can be taken as guidelines:

- A thesis or portfolio of related articles in a distinct field amounting to c. 25,000-30,000 words.
- A series of designs exploring a particular need or function, with supporting written and visual evidence of the research activities undertaken by the applicant.
- A body of artworks capable of being exhibited which, in toto, form a critical investigation of a topic or material supported by written and visual evidence of the research activities undertaken by the applicant.
- A combination of these elements in length / scale that is appropriate for the award.

Typically, the work will form a coherent and fully resolved whole but, by negotiation, it is possible to present part works for examination (e.g. 3 chapters of a planned 5 chapter book or 2 scholarly articles). In such cases, the work must achieve an appropriate level of intellectual resolution.

In all cases, the work will demonstrate a critical and informed engagement with research.

## **5.5 Final assessment**

To be awarded the MRes degree, students will need to present a body of work and to have completed 3 x CFA 5 ECTS credit modules successfully.

The work will be assessed by tutors employed by the college with the additional oversight of an external examiner currently employed by NCAD.

The Examination Panel will include the Principal Supervisor and an examiner from NCAD who has experience of the examination of work undertaken by research students and has not acted as a supervisor or advisor to the student. A viva voce examination (an interview) is not required, except in exceptional circumstances. Such circumstances might include concerns on the part of the examination team that the research methods and tasks undertaken are not sufficiently evident in the material presented for examination. In this instance, the viva voce will provide an opportunity to achieve that understanding.

## **6 Examination arrangements**

Typically, the body of work presented for assessment will be completed in early September (in all modes) for examination soon after. You will be given a clear deadline by your supervisor/s. Extension to that deadline can only be granted in exceptional circumstances (such as illness supported by medical certification).

Supervisors will give clear advice about the appropriate form of the work being presented for examination. In preparing this work, you will need to demonstrate how you have developed and applied your research skills during your studies and met the learning outcomes listed below.

In the case of 'by practice' students, particular emphasis will be placed on documentation. This might take the form of ideation and development sketches in the case of a design project; and it may mean photographic documentation of a performance or site-specific artwork. It is important that such students actively document their practice throughout their studies.

### **6.1 Learning outcomes**

On completion of the degree, MRes students will be able to demonstrate:

- A high level of understanding of appropriate research skills.
- The application of those skills to a self-determined task which results in a sophisticated and expert outcome.
- Critical engagement with new thinking and research in their field;
- Excellent project design and management skills as well as the capacity to work independently to a very high standard.
- The ability to complete and resolve a complex project in an appropriate form.
- Excellent communication skills.

While you are not required to achieve the level of originality expected of doctoral studies (i.e., by making an 'original contribution of knowledge'), it is expected that by the time of completing their studies, all MRes students will be capable of producing work which will meet and 'pass' the scrutiny of the peer review mechanisms that operate in the fields of art, design, education and visual culture. In practical terms, this means reaching the level required by peer review processes for conferences and publication; success in competition and application processes; public commissions.

## 6.2 Results

The work submitted to the final examination is not graded: it is assessed on a pass/fail basis. Students will be provided with written feedback outlining the nature of their achievement in relation to the learning outcomes listed above.

At the end of the assessment process, an Examination Panel will determine whether the work meets the standard required of a MRes. The Examination Panel has the following options; to

- i. Award the Research Masters degree – no corrections required.
- ii. Award the Research Masters degree – corrections required.
- iii. Award the Research Masters degree – revision without re-examination.
- iv. Revise thesis and submit for re-examination.
- v. Do not award the Research Masters degree – recommendation that the candidate transfer to an appropriate graduate programme.
- vi. Do not award the Research Masters degree.

Corrections are minor errors; revisions are more substantial and may require further research or an improvement to the form or presentation of the work.

The reasons for the decision will be recorded on a Degree Report written by the Panel. You will be given a copy of the report. If appropriate, it will also set a deadline for the revisions. Typically, this period in which the revisions are to be undertaken will be no longer than one trimester in the case of full time students or two trimesters in the case of part time students.

### 6.3 The role of the external examiner

The assessment will be conducted by the Examination Panel and their assessment will be subject to the scrutiny of an external examiner. The role of external examiner is not to grade the work or to participate in a viva voce examination, but s/he will need access to the work in a form which is suitable for remote access in order to review the assessment process. This means that the student needs to provide careful documentation of events and activities which have been completed or took place off-site.

The external examiner will be someone that has broad subject expertise but is not necessarily an expert in the precise field of the work being presented for examination. They will be an experienced examiner with a good understanding of processes and standards of postgraduate study. Typically, the external examiner will be drawn from our current pool of examiners reviewing work undertaken on our taught programmes (undergraduate and postgraduate).

## 7 Transfer to PhD

### 7.1 The transfer process

In addition to being a free-standing award, the MRes also functions as the preliminary phase of a programme of Doctoral Studies (i.e. 90 credits of learning prior to transfer). After completing the equivalent of 75 credits of major project work and 3 x 5 credit modules (outlined above), a MRes student can be granted approval to transfer to doctoral studies.

The 'long' mode (3 x summer trimesters) cannot be the preliminary phase of doctoral studies.

To transfer to doctoral studies, applicants will be required to provide the following:

- i. **A Research and Professional Development Plan (Stage Transfer / Transfer to PhD)** which makes clear and credible outline of the doctoral research to be undertaken (including a timeline of key stages in the path to completion. The Research and Professional Development Plan will also need to make credible claims on originality and significance. (A copy can be found [here](#))
- ii. Records of formal tutorials.

- iii. A written progress report from the student's Principal Supervisor.
- iv. Examples of outputs which demonstrates the candidate's ability to work at the standard required for PhD.

In addition to this paperwork, transfer involves a formal event at which the student presents their work to date and maps future research plans before the **Transfer Assessment Panel**. The **Transfer Assessment Panel** has a different make-up to your **Research Studies Panel**. This event allows the Panel to test the potential of the topic and approach being proposed, as well as the readiness of the candidate.

## 7.2 Timing of Application of Transfer to PhD

The possibility of transfer to doctoral studies can be a matter of discussion throughout your studies, but it is important that you notify your supervisor by the start of the third trimester in the case of a FT student and by the start of the fifth trimester in the case of a PT student if you wish to apply to transfer to PhD. Your supervisor/s will set the process in motion and agreed a schedule with you for the completion of the paperwork described above as well as the date of the meeting of the Transfer Assessment Panel.

## 7.3 Transfer Assessment Panel membership

The Transfer Assessment Panel will be made up by three members of the academic staff who have the experience and disciplinary expertise to conduct this assessment. Typically, the panel will be chaired by the Head of Doctoral Studies at NCAD. Another suitably qualified person will undertake this role when the Head of Doctoral Studies is also a supervisor of the candidate.

Suitably qualified 'external' experts can be invited to join the Panel if required (as deemed by the Chair).

The Transfer Assessment Panel does not include your supervisors, though they will play a key role in supporting you to prepare the material required to transfer to doctoral studies. Your Principal Supervisor will also provide a written progress report for the Transfer Assessment Panel to review. This is sent directly to the Chair of the Panel.

The Transfer Assessment Panel is also independent of the Research Studies Panel that supports your work as a research student.

## 7.4 Outcomes of the meeting of the Transfer Assessment Panel

Students who are not granted permission to transfer to PhD will be given the opportunity to:

- i. EITHER Resubmit an application to transfer within six months (this opportunity can only be extended twice after the initial application.
- ii. OR complete the MRes programme and submit their thesis and/or body of 'by practice' work within a further trimester of study for which fees will need to be paid. This is intended to support the student to complete their studies and achieve a significant postgraduate qualification that represents their level of achievement.
- iii. OR the student's registration is discontinued (in line with NCAD's continuation policy and procedures).

Students seeking to transfer to PhD will be advised about the progress of their work at the key review points (indicated above). While students have the right to request transfer, advice will be given about the likelihood of a successful transfer.

The year spent (or equivalent) on the MRes register will be deducted from the minimum / maxim registration period for doctoral study at NCAD (i.e. 3 -4 years FT or equivalent).

## 8 Key points of contact

Professor Alex Milton	<a href="mailto:miltona@staff.ncad.ie">miltona@staff.ncad.ie</a>	MRes contact: Head of School of Design
Professor Nuala Hunt	<a href="mailto:huntn@staff.ncad.ie">huntn@staff.ncad.ie</a>	MRes contact: Head of School of Education
Professor Philip Napier	<a href="mailto:napierp@staff.ncad.ie">napierp@staff.ncad.ie</a>	MRes contact: Head of School of Fine Art
Dr Declan Long	<a href="mailto:longd@staff.ncad.ie">longd@staff.ncad.ie</a>	MRes contact: School of Visual Culture and Head of Doctoral Studies
Dr Siun Hanrahan	<a href="mailto:hanrahans@staff.ncad.ie">hanrahans@staff.ncad.ie</a>	Head of Academic & Student Affairs