



UNIVERSITY OF  
**LIMERICK**  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

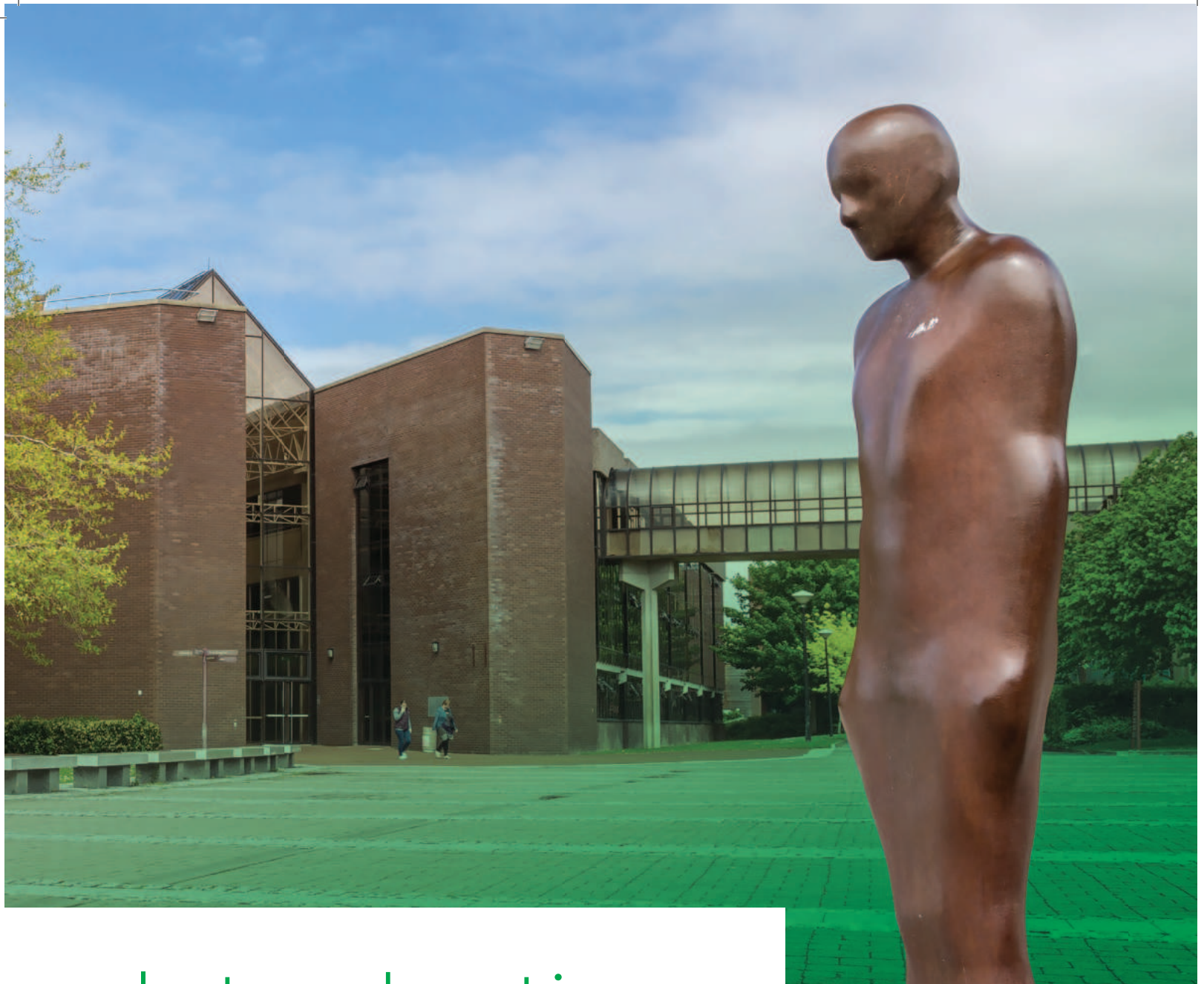
Coláiste  
Dochtúireachta  
Doctoral  
College

# Developing the **UL Doctoral College**

February 2024–February 2025







# Introduction

On behalf of the **University of Limerick (UL) Doctoral College**, I am pleased to present this second report on the Doctoral College's progress. While the first report (February 2023–February 2024) focused on establishing a doctoral college, this report captures a sense of what has been achieved in the second year and focuses on developing doctoral education for all.

The Doctoral College offers an exciting and important opportunity for more than 1,000 postgraduate researchers (PGRs) in UL – research master's, PhD and professional doctoral students. There is a need to centralise, as well as deepen, the doctoral education experience by supporting a meaningful, relevant and worthwhile doctoral education ecosystem for all stakeholders. The Doctoral College advocates for delivering quality education (programmes and training), increasing infrastructural efficiencies, accommodating diverse research and research needs, and providing networking opportunities as part of a community of researchers.

Three overarching principles capture the essence of the Doctoral College – equity, internationalisation and sustainability – each of which aligns the work of the Doctoral College with many of UL’s strategic publications, including UL@50 Strategic Plan 2019-2024, Wisdom for Action Research Strategy 2022-2027, Sustainability Framework 2030 and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2022-2027. As part of UL’s commitment to establishing the Doctoral College, five Doctoral College PhD scholarships were awarded to PhD candidates undertaking full-time doctoral-level research – one in each of the four faculties plus an interfaculty award. The awardees’ proposed research aligns with UL’s research strategy and with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

As was explained in the first report, the activities of the Doctoral College are captured in five work packages to openly address expectations, needs and prospects from the very beginning of the doctoral education journey through to successful completion.

The five packages are:

- i. **Communication, exchange and dissemination**
- ii. **Effective research supervision**
- iii. **Equitable allocation of opportunities**
- iv. **Training and career development**
- v. **Wellbeing of postgraduate researchers and research supervisors**

In this report, for each work package, we select activities that have been completed and identify how the Doctoral College intends to move towards maximising doctoral education for all in the next year.

The Doctoral College has now been established for two years, and in that time, the extent to which PGRs and UL colleagues have conveyed support for the college’s ethos and work as we strive to heighten the doctoral education experience has been very much appreciated. The Doctoral College has been facilitated in numerous activities by PGRs and UL colleagues who are interested in sharing their expertise with a view to advancing the opportunities provided within the doctoral education space. Serving as both a foundation for advancing specialised knowledge and a catalyst for innovation through rigorous endeavour and academic inquiry, doctoral education occupies a critical tier within the broader UL research ecosystem.

**The Doctoral College thanks everyone who continues to support this vision.**

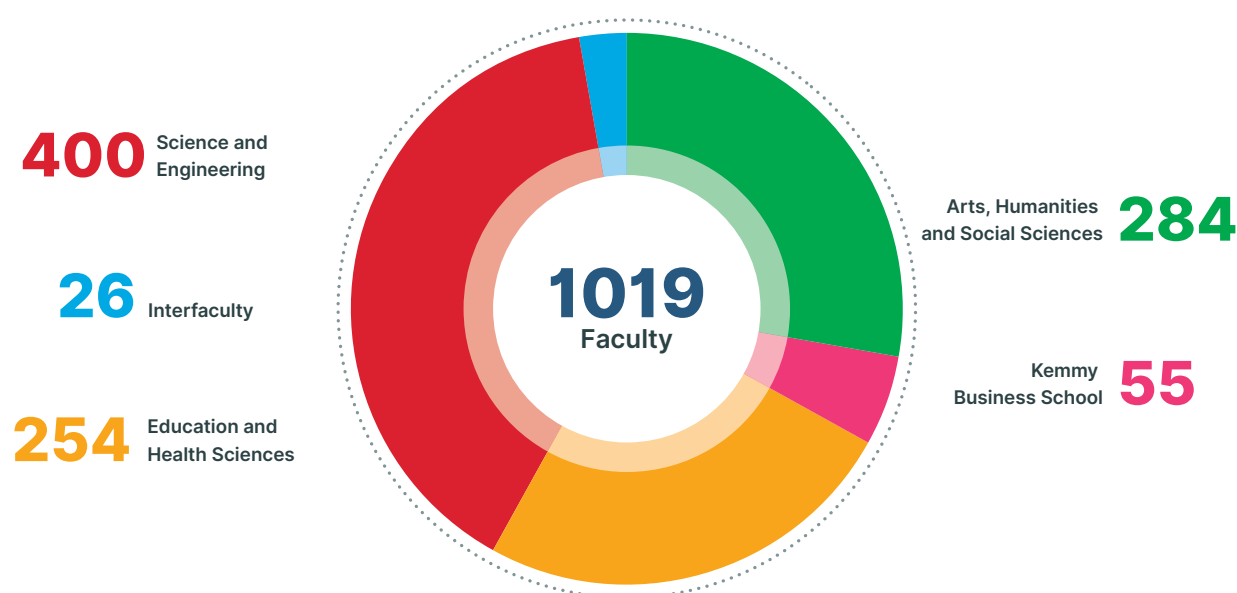


Ann MacPhail

**Professor Ann MacPhail**

Associate Vice President  
Doctoral College

# Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) Metrics



**63** Research Masters / **846** PhDs / **110** Professional Doctorates

**630** EU / **389** Non-EU

**565** Female / **454** Male

**853** Full-time / **126** Part-time / **40** Distance Education PGRs





## Work package 1



# Communication, exchange, and dissemination

### UL Student Sustainability Challenge 2024/25

In collaboration with the Centre for Sustainable Futures and Innovation, the Doctoral College launched the UL Student Sustainability Challenge 2024/25. This initiative empowers UL students (undergraduate and postgraduate) to design sustainability-focused projects that align with the UN SDGs. It provides an excellent opportunity for students to work in interdisciplinary teams; collaborate with mentors; and gain real-world experience in addressing local, national or global sustainability challenges.

The sustainability challenge aims to equip students with key skills, including developing compelling project proposals, managing projects, recruiting teams, collaborating with expert mentors and end-users, and expanding their professional networks. Student teams could choose their own topic or draw inspiration from a bank of suggested topics from industry sponsors. Two of the five finalist teams include PGRs, and the winning team will be chosen during UL Research Week 2025.

### UL PGR Open Science Lunches

The Doctoral College is keen that PGRs have opportunities to meet on a regular basis as well as share their ongoing research. Following on from the successful first year of the lunch seminars, which focused on sustainability, the Doctoral College is currently running a second year of lunch seminars around the theme of 'open science'. Five extended lunch slots are scheduled across the 2024/25 academic year.

PGRs are asked to share their experiences with elements of open science, such as publishing in open-access journals; using reprint servers; sharing data and data management plans; and working with open-source software, reproducible workflows, transparent peer review, public involvement, open educational resources and open science communities. At each lunch seminar, two PGRs present their research in no longer than seven minutes and no more than three slides. The students use their first two slides to summarise the research topic and the third to discuss how they have considered open science.

### Inaugural Doctoral College Research Showcase 2024

Seventy participants attended the Inaugural Doctoral College Research Showcase in June 2024. The theme of the event was 'Research with Impact – An Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Showcase'. PGRs played a central part in organising the Showcase, and the programme included two keynote addresses, parallel oral sessions, '5 slides in 5 minutes' presentations and poster sessions.

## Electronic Doctoral College Handbook

The Doctoral College Handbook centralises all aspects of the PGR journey in one place. The information and links in the handbook make it much easier for PGRs and supervisors to locate information than having to search across the Doctoral College web pages. The handbook comprises 10 sections: Doctoral College Committee Structure, Postgraduate Research Degrees, Admission and Early Stages, Postgraduate Research Student, Supervision/Supervisor, Researching and Writing the Thesis, Training and Professional Development, Annual Postgraduate Research Progression, Completing and Submitting the Thesis for Examination, and Student Supports.

## Moving towards maximising doctoral education for all

### Podcast Series

The Doctoral College has begun recording a PhD podcast series for UL PGRs. Entitled 'PhD Voices: UL Postgraduate Research in Focus', the weekly podcast series is available on Spotify and aims to showcase the research of the UL PGR community. Conducted in the Glucksman Library's audio studio, each episode features a 15-minute interview with a UL PGR with a view to offering a brief, yet insightful, look at their work.

The podcast series has several benefits for PGRs in terms of making complex research accessible to a wider audience as well as enhancing their professional development, public engagement and outreach. The series also offers opportunities to PGRs to connect with professionals and stakeholders outside academia who might be interested in their research.

The podcast series prepares PGRs for interactions with the media, such as interviews or public talks. This is essential for both academic and non-academic career advancement and helps PGRs to understand how to adapt their message for different audiences – a skill that is highly valued in both academia and industry.

### PGR Testimonials

The Doctoral College PhD Testimonial Series for PGRs involves doctoral candidates speaking about their research in a short interview. The series is designed to help PGRs develop presentation skills, boost confidence and expand networking opportunities. Participants get the opportunity to communicate and disseminate their research, increase their visibility, reach a broader audience and receive valuable feedback.

An episode of the Testimonial Series will be posted monthly on the Doctoral College YouTube account.

## Work package 2



# Effective research supervision

### PhD Supervision Lifecycle Programme

The inaugural UL PhD Supervision Lifecycle Programme was launched in December 2024. In the absence of any formal doctoral supervisory training at UL, the programme contributes to Goal 2 (Research Excellence) of UL's strategic plan, which prioritises implementing a high-performance research support infrastructure (for PGR supervisors who contribute significantly to the research culture and metrics of UL).

Over 140 staff expressed an interest in joining the programme, which involved participating in two workshops. To accommodate the demand, the first workshop, which was held in January 2025, was repeated later that month. Following the completion of the second workshop in April or June 2025, approximately 80 staff will be awarded with a digital badge.

This comprehensive series of workshops is designed to enhance the effectiveness and impact of supervision, which both benefits the supervisor's professional growth and promotes the success of their doctoral candidates. The programme is a valuable investment in the future of doctoral education at UL.

## Moving towards maximising doctoral education for all

### Code of Practice for PGR Supervision Workload

The Doctoral College will produce a code of practice for PGR supervision workload. The intention is that such a code of practice will optimise the PGR and supervisor experience by providing guidance on (i) the number of research supervisors attached to each PGR, (ii) the respective roles and responsibilities of each, (iii) the language used to capture differing supervisory roles and responsibilities, and (iv) the complement of PGR supervisors involved in formally supervising.

### Research Supervisory Excellence Awards

The Doctoral College will launch the Research Supervisory Excellence Awards in 2025 to acknowledge and celebrate the support provided by UL research supervisors. PGRs will be encouraged to nominate supervisors who have provided them with exceptional guidance and support during their research journey.





## Work package 3



# Equitable allocation of opportunities

### Student Charter

Along with other UL units, the Doctoral College is involved in revising and updating the UL Student Charter, which encompasses all UL student cohorts. The charter describes what students can expect from UL and what UL expects of its students. The following areas are under consideration for inclusion in the revised charter: student-focused value statements, community-based values, academic success values, student responsibilities, responsibilities to the community, and UL's responsibilities to students.

### Supervisor/PGR Memorandum of Understanding

An effective PGR-supervisor relationship is central to ensuring that the doctoral education experience is positive for all parties. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) template has been developed to facilitate the PGR and supervisor to develop a sound and productive professional working relationship through enhanced communication. The MoU will be a central element of a career planning resource that is currently being finalised between the Doctoral College and the Library and Information Services Division (see page 11 for details).

## Moving towards maximising doctoral education for all

### Quality Assurance

With a view to heightening quality assurance and ensuring that the respective roles of PGRs and their supervisors are clearly articulated in the academic regulations, the Doctoral College is revisiting several procedures, including those relating to the Research Review Panel, Research Confirmation Panel and Research Progression Appeal Panel. The Doctoral College is also considering devising a quality assurance process for *viva voce* examiner reports.







## Work package 4



# Training & career development

Entitled 'Engaged Research Design for Sustainability', the inaugural doctoral school between UL (Doctoral College and Centre for Sustainable Futures and Innovation) and the Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN) took place at UL in January 2025. This 12-credit (ECTS) programme offers a unique opportunity to early-stage PhD researchers to develop the skills, knowledge and tools necessary to address the complex challenges facing our world today. Through an interdisciplinary, place-based learning experience, participants gain a deeper understanding of the SDGs and how their research can contribute to addressing these pressing issues.

The programme contributes to Goal 2 (Research Excellence) of UL's strategic plan, which prioritises building partnerships and collaborations by extending our national and international reach. Given the programme's potential to expand flagship postgraduate research programmes that highlight UL's areas of strength, it also contributes to the 'Research with impact' Goal 2 priority.

The 2025 programme included a face-to-face component at UL from 19 to 24 January and a digital component, which ran over 12 weeks from 3 February to 25 April. The programme brought together 26 researchers from YERUN universities across Europe.

### Doctoral College Webinar Series

The 2024/25 Doctoral College Webinar Series for PGRs was designed to provide UL PGRs with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate the complexities of their doctoral studies. The weekly series addresses various aspects of the PhD journey, from the initial stages to the final steps of submitting the thesis and preparing for the viva.

By offering webinars on topics such as writing funding applications, dealing with imposter syndrome, managing wellbeing and mental health, and demonstrating research impact, the series ensures that PGRs are well-prepared for both academic and professional challenges. Additionally, the series emphasises the importance of effective communication, critical thinking and the use of technology in research, thereby providing PGRs with a skill set that could benefit them throughout their respective careers.



## Moving towards maximising doctoral education for all

### **PGR Career-Planning Portfolio**

In partnership with the Library and Information Services Division, the Doctoral College will finalise a new resource to support the professional and academic growth of PGRs. The aim of the resource – a career-planning portfolio – is to identify the training opportunities available to UL PGRs. The resource will use the European Competence Framework for Researchers to organise the various competences PGRs are expected to acquire. By featuring seven areas of competence, each with specific sub-competences and learning outcomes across a range of proficiency levels, the framework helps researchers to assess and develop their transversal skills. It is envisioned that the portfolio will guide PGRs to reflect on their current skills and knowledge, identify the skills they need for the future, and discuss these with their supervisor(s) with a view to planning a bespoke training programme.

### **PhD Professional Development Supplemental Awards**

A supplemental award will formally recognise research-related and professional development activities undertaken by PhD PGRs in addition to their research thesis. It is proposed that the PhD Professional Development Supplemental Award will be given by the Doctoral College to UL PGRs who maintain a record of their accomplishments and performance in research-related and career-enhancing areas and reflect on how they can advance and improve their own professional development. By reflecting on, taking an active role in and formally assessing their own professional development, UL PGRs will be better prepared for careers both outside and within academia.

## Work package 5



# Wellbeing of postgraduate researchers and research supervisors

## PGR Wellbeing Workshop

The Doctoral College devised a workshop programme in recognition of the fact that promoting wellbeing supports a balanced life for doctoral students. Evidence shows that PGRs face various challenges throughout their studies, such as pressure to publish and to actively engage in scholarly activities, financial difficulties, uncertainty, poor relationships with supervisors, working in isolation, social isolation and cultural differences while striving to maintain a work-life balance, all of which can negatively impact their wellbeing.

The focus of the PGR wellbeing workshop was on raising PGRs' awareness of wellbeing, which research shows is closely related to efficacy, and supporting personal and academic social interactions outside of the traditional PGR-supervisor relationship. The intention of the workshop was to empower PGRs to develop an understanding of the importance of wellbeing and identify strategies to support their wellbeing. The workshop ran in November 2024 and is scheduled to be repeated in March 2025.

## Moving towards maximising doctoral education for all

### Photovoice

Understanding the wellness needs of PGRs is crucial to fostering a supportive academic environment. By employing a participatory approach to exploring PGR wellness, the photovoice project enables researchers to visually document and reflect on their experiences. The aim of the project is to use photovoice methodology – a qualitative research approach that empowers participants to document and reflect on their experiences through photography – to investigate aspects of the research journey that PGRs and supervisors wish they had known about before embarking on their respective journeys.

### Leave of Absence

Working with Academic Registry, the Doctoral College will determine how best to manage leave of absence for PGRs who are currently on leave for at least two years. Decisions will then be made about communication procedures with PGRs and their supervisors and about removing from the student records system any PGR who has not returned to their studies.







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doctoralcollegeul



DocCollegeUL



doctoralcollege@ul.ie

[ul.ie/research/doctoral-college](https://ul.ie/research/doctoral-college)