Research Degree Prospectus

Find out about the various research degree opportunities available at Ulster University

ulster.ac.uk/doctoralcollege
We are delighted that you are considering Ulster University for your research degree. Ulster University offers postgraduate research opportunities in a range of subjects at all of our campuses across Northern Ireland – Belfast/Jordanstown, Coleraine on the North Antrim Coast and Magee in Derry.

As part of the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment, internationally renowned experts independently judged Ulster University as being in the top 10% of UK Universities for 4* and 3* research impact. 87% of Ulster’s research is rated as either world leading or internationally excellent. These outstanding results illustrate the positive impact our research makes on global economic sectors and society.

Postgraduate research study at Ulster University provides access to world-class experts and facilities, links to business and industry, and the chance to push the boundaries of your research knowledge to find solutions to real-world issues.

A variety of research degree programmes are available at Ulster University:

- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
- PhD by Published Works
- Master of Research (MRes)
- Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Full-time and part-time modes are available for many of our programmes as well as the option to study from anywhere in the world (self funded only). Applicants should hold an Upper Second Class Honours degree (or equivalent) for admission.

In the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2021 (PRES 2021), Ulster University ranked 2nd in the UK for postgraduate researcher satisfaction with an overall satisfaction rate of 88%.

Feedback from researchers highlighted the excellent levels of support received from our supervisors, faculty staff and from the central Ulster University Doctoral College. As a valued member of our research community, Ulster University offers:

- At least two experienced supervisors
- Access to dedicated social space for researchers at The Doc on each campus
- Access to laboratory and office workspace
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Our researchers enjoy the benefits of a bespoke induction and an exceptional Researcher Development Programme, which offers workshops and training designed to enhance and support professional and research skills.

Researchers can also showcase their research at events such as the annual Ulster Festival of PhD Research. Each year the Three Minute Thesis (3MT®) competition also offers PhD Researchers the chance to develop and demonstrate their research communication skills. We also encourage researchers to take opportunities for teaching and demonstrating, publishing their research, and getting involved in conferences and seminars.

PART-TIME OR SELF FUNDED?

Browse our research subject areas to find a potential supervisor and apply online.

Applications are welcome at any time of the year and you are advised to contact the named supervisors before applying to discuss your research interests and potential research proposal.

FUNDED PHD STUDY

Over 120 funded scholarship opportunities for three-year full-time PhDs in all research areas are advertised every year in the Annual Scholarship Competition. Launching around the end of November each year, the Competition is open to applicants from the UK, Europe and overseas and offers:

- 3 years of PhD tuition fees
- An annual non-taxable maintenance allowance of approx. £16,500 per year
- A Research Training and Support Grant of £900 per year

All our current scholarship opportunities are advertised on our website and details of eligibility criteria and shortlisting requirements are provided.

HOW TO APPLY

The application process is fully detailed on our website and you should ensure that you review all guidance to ensure that your application is successfully submitted by any stated deadlines.
Research Supervision at Ulster is available across the following subject areas:

Please note for the annual scholarship competition, specific project titles or thematic areas will be advertised from within these research areas.

- Architecture, Built Environment and Planning
- Art and Design
- Biomedical Sciences
- Business and Management
- Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management
- Computing
- Education
- Engineering
- English Language and Literature
- Geography and Environmental Studies
- History
- Intelligent Systems
- Law
- Medicine
- Modern Languages and Linguistics
- Music, Drama, Film and Screen, and Heritage/Museum Studies
- Nursing and Health
- Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
- Social Work and Social Policy
- Sport and Exercise Sciences
100% of our research environment has been judged as being conducive to producing research of world-leading or internationally excellent quality and enabling outstanding impact in terms of its vitality and sustainability. 100% of our research impacts have made exceptional and very considerable impacts locally, nationally, and internationally. The dynamic research culture within the Belfast School of Architecture and the Built Environment strives to support PhD researchers to ensure a positive and progressive experience for all researchers within the School.

We offer our PhD researchers excellent training support and research facilities to facilitate research of world-leading and internationally excellent quality. The 2021 PRES returned excellent results with an overall PhD researcher satisfaction rate of 88%, making Ulster 2nd in the UK for PhD researcher satisfaction and professional development and resources. Our PhD Researchers are delighted with the quality of their supervision and the supportive school research environment.

Our Research Centres/Groups:

- Centre for Sustainable Technologies (CST)
- Research on Property and Planning (RPP)
- Hydrogen Safety Engineering (HySAFER)
- Fire Safety Engineering Research and Technology (FireSERT)
- Studies Allied to Built Environment Research (SABER)
- Architecture Research Group (ARG)

Research areas include:

Sustainable design; retrofitting building technologies; alternative energy sources; renewable energy technologies; net-zero carbon building; fire safety of building and materials; safety of hydrogen and fuel cell technologies; resilience of infrastructure; urban regeneration; housing and real estate; future well-being of urban environment; digital construction; Practise Based Research, and Drawing: methodology, making and media.
The Belfast School of Art has established the most mature Art and Design research environment on the Island of Ireland, which REF2021 recognises as 100% internationally excellent (joint 1st within the UK). Ulster's focus on practice and applied research holds deep register in this subject area, with 100% of Art and Design research impact being rated as world leading and internationally excellent. Art and Design submitted the 2nd highest percentage of 4* star outputs of any unit within Ulster University and ranks in the top 20 for 4* outputs of any Art and Design submission in the UK. Independent assessment places Art and Design at Ulster in the upper percentiles of over 80 UK institutions for grade point average score, quality index and proportion of staff submitted.

We reside in a state of the art building in Belfast city centre, located in the Cathedral Quarter, an area that is known for its vibrancy, where the University plays a central role in the creative and cultural life of the city. The PhD community at Belfast is a vibrant one. Their PhD research space is in the heart of the research hub for the School and within the wider Art & Design community of Undergraduate and Postgraduate students.

Our PhD researchers have their own peer reviewed, in-house Journal Publication called Intersections as a print and digital edition. It nurtures interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge sharing across the Faculty of Arts Humanities & Social Sciences, which is the home of nine different Research Units. We enjoy strong relationships with the cultural sector and industry for example Collaborative agreements with the Ulster Museum, long
standing engagements with national galleries, collaborative PhD’s with NI Pain Forum, and a key stakeholder in the AHRC funded Creative Cluster, called Future Screen NI and Studio Ulster, a Belfast City Regional Deal pillar project. These specialist centres bring together industry and academic research across animation, film & broadcast, games, and immersive technology and virtual production. We have access to the excellent facilities across the Belfast School of Art course subjects which includes a new facility for Screen broadcast and immersive technology.

We welcome applicants interested in researching across the spectrum of Art & Design disciplines. We encourage interdisciplinary research with other sectors. Our staff also co-supervise PhD Researchers in other research units including Computer Science, Business & Management and Arts & Humanities in particular.

Our main thematic groups are:
- Arts, Conflict & Society
- Art, Design & Health
- Art, Space & Place
- Creative Industries

Biomedical Science at Ulster University has an outstanding and sustained record of success in research, recognised in the most recent REF2021 to be internationally excellent, world leading and ranked 5th out of 89 UK universities within the category of Allied Health Professions which encompasses the disciplines of biomedical sciences, nursing, nutrition, pharmacy, optometry, health sciences and personalised medicine. Our research is not only producing outputs of world leading quality but also credited with having significant global translation, impacting positively on health professionals, industry, the general public and specific patient groups. We are proud to have externally recognised world-leading research environment which scored 100% 4*rating in REF 2014 and 2021.

Our Research Centres:
- Diabetes
- Food & Health (through Nutrition Innovation Centre for Food and Health (NICHE))
- Genomic Medicine
- Pharmaceutical Sciences & Practice
- Personalised Medicine
- Optometry & Vision Science
Multi-disciplinary collaboration between the research groups is strongly encouraged and is widespread with research into, for instance, anti-diabetic and antioncogenic aspects of nutrition, the genomics of vitamin receptors, visual deterioration or cancer, imaging of neovascularisation. Our research investigates the interaction between cardiovascular disease and vision and the impact of health and disease, diet, diabetes on dementia, hypertension, autoimmunity, vascular and inflammatory disease, to name a few.

The research groups collaborate both internally and internationally on a range of prioritized multi-disciplinary themes in functional foods, gene-nutrient interactions; pregnancy and early life; healthy ageing, musculoskeletal health; drug discovery and delivery, personalized medicine and genomic medicine. The BMSRI has strong collaborations with regional and global pharmaceutical and diagnostics companies and many of our graduates and postgraduates gain employment in the government bodies, pharma, diagnostics, and health care sectors as well as academia and through self-employment.

The Biomedical Sciences Research Institute (BMSRI) offers a “state-of-the-art” research environment for high profile researchers to undertake internationally agenda setting research in strategically prioritized areas of biomedicine. This research environment within Biomedical Sciences at Ulster has been continually judged as exceptional and world-leading and awarded the highest 100% ranking within the RAE2008, REF2014 and REF2021. Furthermore, in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) awards, it was ranked 2nd in the UK, with an overall satisfaction rate of 88%.

Our research is carried out in well-equipped laboratories allowing the latest methods to be applied to individual projects. Our infrastructure is managed as Core Facility Units (CFUs) with equipment and laboratories dedicated to supporting pre-clinical studies, controlled human trials with expertise in vascular research, advanced molecular bioimaging/microscopy, bioinformatics, cell technologies, cellular biology, chemical analysis, genomics, proteomics/metabolomics (including mass spectrometry & NMR analysis), ocular imaging and psychophysics, transgenics, physiology and pharmacology.
Accounting and Finance

Research focuses on efficiency and performance measurement and the analysis of structural change in the financial sector. Current areas of research include: public sector/charity accounting and gender/board diversity issues; understanding financial decision making and generational renewal in Irish agriculture; banks and credit unions as well as other Corporate Social Responsibility and Organisational Governance issues.

Marketing

Research areas include: Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), focussing on knowledge management and decision-making in entrepreneurial firms, internationalisation and SME performance, and innovation and economic development in food production; the role of the internet and social media in firms’ marketing; branding innovations; services and retailing marketing, and consumer behaviour.
Operations and Contemporary Organisational Issues

Operations Management research investigates supply management and innovation in business processes, organisational innovation, corporate social responsibility and ethical issues. Researchers in this sub-discipline also study contemporary organisational issues linked to international business and the future of work, ethical and post-conflict tourism, enhanced strategies for HRM/people management and employee behaviour, value co-creation and technology transfer and the delivery of business educational development interventions.

Our Research Centres

The Food and Drink Business Development Centre (FDBDC) and the Economic Policy Centre (EPC) focus their research on the food supply chain and the development of the NI economy in terms of skills development, innovation and competitiveness in the region.

In the 2021 UK Research Excellence Framework (REF), Ulster University Business School had 90% of its research recognised as either World Leading or Internationally Excellent. This placed the Business School in the top twenty of UK Business Schools for research outputs and Top 10 (Joint 1st) for the Impact of our Research.

Another indicator of the satisfaction of our current PhD Researchers is reflected in the latest results from the 2018 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) where our PhD Researchers highlighted very high satisfaction levels (87% overall satisfaction). This recognition shows that our facilities, procedures and practices are up to the high standards that they expect.

COMMUNICATION, CULTURAL AND MEDIA STUDIES, LIBRARY AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Contact: Dr Robert Porter

Ulster University pioneered the development of Communication and Media Studies in higher education, introducing one of the first communication and media studies degrees in the UK and Ireland in 1978. In REF 2021 an impressive 77% of our research was judged either world-leading or internationally excellent. We are particularly proud of our quality profile of our research outputs, nearly tripling the amount of our world leading outputs during the last REF cycle, placing our research unit 2nd of the 9 research units in the faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and 4th overall of the 18 research units across Ulster University as a whole.
The REF 2021 panel were keen the emphasise the 'world leading' quality of our research outputs in the areas of 'Cultural Studies', 'Television', 'Film' and 'Screen Studies' and we very much welcome applications in these related areas (broadly construed). We also particularly welcome applications in Psychosocial Studies, Radical Politics and Social Movements, Cycling Cultures, The Politics of Everyday Life and Popular Culture, Emerging Media, Media Policy and Political Communication.

COMPUTING

Contact: Dr Ian Cleland

The School of Computing at Ulster conducts internationally excellent and world-leading research in, assistive technologies, next generation networks, and semantic analytics, within our two highly active research centres; Artificial Intelligence Research Centre (AIRC) and Pervasive Computing Research Centre (PCRC).

School of Computing has a long history of conducting excellent research. As part of the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment, internationally renowned experts independently judged research on computer science and informatics at Ulster University as being in the top 10 of UK Universities in terms of research power. Over 86% of Ulster’s research on computer science is rated as either world leading or internationally excellent. Both research impact and research environment have attained a 100% world-leading and internationally excellent rating, offering unparalleled research facilities and environments. These outstanding results illustrate the positive impact our research makes on global economic sectors and society.
Artificial Intelligence Research Centre (AIRC)

AIRC aims to develop cutting-edge AI theories, algorithms and tools, and to create state of the art AI solutions for practical problems through engagement with stakeholders and users, and alignment with University, local, national and European initiatives.

The main research themes in artificial intelligence are: data engineering; knowledge engineering; semantic analytics (making sense of unstructured data such as image, video, spectra and text); biomedical informatics; and mathematical modelling and optimisation.

Applications include work on multimodal biometrics (including face/palmprint/iris recognition); text and video information retrieval; food authentication; reliable decision support (e.g. medical and transport); soft sensor design; software complexity metrics; text mining to extract argumentation structure and application to document reuse and software defect analysis; remote sensing data analysis and anomaly detection; mathematical and computational modelling of complex systems; and biomedical applications.

Pervasive Computing Research Centre (PCRC)

Research within the PCRC incorporates networked environments (structure and sensors in buildings, clothing and personal devices) and intelligent processing (data mining, pattern recognition, decision support, context prediction, data fusion, and multimodal interaction).

Much of the research focuses on behavioural monitoring (through environmental and biometric sensors) and activity recognition, with application to assistive technologies for smart homes, independent living, and healthcare monitoring and diagnosis.

Research is supported by new laboratory facilities for deployment of sensing technology in connected health care, including body scanner, eye-tracking, and other state-of-the-art devices.

EDUCATION

The research strategy of the School of Education focusses on Education in Society. In the recent REF 2021, Education at Ulster was ranked joint first in the UK for research impact and the majority of our research outputs are ranked as world-leading and internationally excellent.

Contact: Dr Una O’Connor-Bones

Current Funded Opportunities
The PhD programme is an important part of the overall research environment within the School and we welcome applications to the PhD programme from interested individuals. Successful applicants will be joining a rich and vibrant unit that places a great emphasis on collaborative work and the sharing and development of ideas through regular research seminars, conferences and other events. They will particularly benefit from being able to learn from and share ideas with a range of other research students and academics working in related areas. In the application, applicants will be expected to illustrate clearly how they intend to interpret their chosen topic in terms of a clear set of aims and objectives and an appropriate research methodology.

Our research expertise is around the following six themes:

- Impact of Digital Learning in Education
- Multicultural and Language Education
- Education in Conflict and Crisis
- Improving Information, Educational and Social Mobility
- Children, Young People and Adults: Educating for Inclusion
- Teacher Education and School Leadership

**ENGINEERING**

Contact: **Professor Dewar Finlay**  
Current Funded Opportunities

With research centres on Belfast and Magee Campuses, our vision for Engineering Research is to continue to exploit our unique ability to merge the disciplines of health and wellbeing technology and advanced future materials & manufacturing. In turn, creating world leading research with impact in important global challenge areas and promoting a healthy and sustainable future for all citizens.

PhD researchers form an integral part of our Research Environment working across a broad spectrum of research areas. From computational modelling, through to production and characterisation of nanomaterials, microsensors and large composite structures, we provide state of the art facilities and technical assistance to support our researchers in conducting world-leading research. Our facilities include a broad range of managed open-access equipment that include dedicated suites for advanced materials characterisation (including TEM), rapid prototyping and additive manufacturing, microelectronics, composites (3D-woven materials), general chemistry and both tissue engineering and microbiology laboratories.
Over the past decade, Engineering research at Ulster has continued to grow both in terms of scale and quality. The 2021 Research Excellence Framework has judged that 100% of our research has outstanding or very considerable impact in terms of its reach and significance. An outstanding 94% of our research was judged as world-leading or internationally excellent, with 100% of our research environment described as being conducive to producing research of world-leading and internationally excellent quality. These attributes underline Ulster as an excellent choice when considering pursuing postgraduate research studies in engineering.

Our current research activity is conducted in a vibrant, collaborative research environment consisting of a multi-disciplinary group of over 150 researchers (academic, contract researchers and PhD researchers) with expertise in:

- Aerospace composites
- Biomaterials
- Healthcare technology
- Manufacturing
- Materials characterisation
- AI and machine learning for engineering applications
- Nanotechnology
- Photocatalysis
- Plasma science and engineering
- Tissue engineering

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Contact: Dr Frank Ferguson

The English subject at Ulster University forms part of the School of Arts and Humanities in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences. It is a vibrant and diverse centre for the study of English literature and creative writing and hosts an active and thriving body of postgraduate researchers.
Individual scholars within the department are engaged in an extensive range of research fields which maintain and enhance the broader scholarly practice of English Studies across the globe, from Early Modern, Eighteenth Century and Victorian literature and culture, through to Modern, Contemporary, and Creative Writing, as well as Critical Theory.

The value of the department’s research as a whole is nationally and internationally recognised by the numerous monograph publications produced by English staff with scholarly presses, as well as the frequent output of articles in highly ranked academic journals. The department also regularly supports and hosts major conferences and symposia, as well as the appointment of eminent visiting scholars.

English encourages and sustains an energetic research culture and offers an interdisciplinary environment to scholars working in a variety of different research areas. English is the base for the Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies and the Ulster Centre for Literary Biography.
The School of Geography and Environmental Sciences draws together researchers who investigate a wide range of both human and physical environments to address the most important international and regional challenges and impacts facing society today. We have an international research outlook with a research presence in five continents, 31 countries and three world oceans, providing a firm foundation to solving and exploring global issues. We consistently produce research judged as being world-leading or internationally excellent and in REF2021, 84% of our research publications and 100% of our research impact was scored as being world leading (4*) or internationally excellent (3*) and 88% of our research environment was rated as being internationally excellent.

In the 2021 Advance HE Postgraduate Research Experience Survey we achieved an overall satisfaction score of 83.6%, exceeding the sector average of 79% in the Geography and Archaeology category, reflecting the vitality of our high-quality PhD research environment.

Environmental Processes, Management and Sustainability

Research in this cluster is focused on understanding the interlinked physical, biological and chemical processes operating in the Earth’s crust and surface to enable a better understanding of the sustainability of environmental systems and their management. Key research themes are freshwater security, catchment dynamics, earth surface processes,
glaciation, palaeo-climate, sea-level change, coastal processes, planetary geomorphology and marine ecology.

Heritage, Conflict and Society

Research in this cluster champions the delivery of innovative research on peace and conflict, economic disparity, health, mobility and cultural heritage and the interdisciplinary boundaries that span these.

HISTORY

Contact: Professor Ian Thatcher

We offer a strong and serious research environment for our postgraduate community. History at Ulster has consistently produced 4* (world-leading) and 3* (internationally excellent) research. In REF2021 60% of our publications, 75% of our research environment, and 75% of the impact of our work on policy and practice beyond Ulster was rated at these levels. History has an outstanding PhD completion rate, which increased by 52% in REF2021 from REF2014.

History is home to the Centre for the History of Medicine in Ireland (CHOMI) that has won several competitive research awards and has a thriving and growing postgraduate community.

The University welcomes applicants interested in researching:

- Early Modern and Modern Irish history;
- Modern British history; European history;
- Mediterranean history; Russian and Soviet history; Social history; Medical humanities;
- Social history of medicine; Labour history;
- Diaspora and migration, and Imperialism and decolonisation.
Our mission is to understand how the brain works at multiple levels, from cells to cognition and apply that understanding to create realistic models and construct technologies that solve the complex issues that face people and society. To accomplish our mission we use a variety of research strategies that include big data and machine learning, brain imaging and neural interfacing, human-computer interaction and robotics.

We have made significant improvement in all areas assessed since the REF2014. An outstanding 92% of our research has been judged as world-leading or internationally excellent. Our world-leading or internationally excellent research has increased by 27% since REF2014.

**Research Impact**: 100% of our impact case studies have been judged as having outstanding or very considerable impacts in terms of their reach and significance with an increase of 50% in our research impact being rated as either 4* or 3* since REF2014.

**Environment**: 100% of our research environment has been judged as being conducive to producing research of world-leading and internationally excellent quality and enabling outstanding impact, in terms of its vitality and sustainability, an improvement of 10% since REF2014.

**Research Outputs**: 86.2% of our research outputs have been judged as world-leading or internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance, and rigour. Our world-leading or internationally excellent research outputs have increased by 23% since REF2014.

Our cross-disciplinary research focuses on six interrelated research themes:

- **Computational Neuroscience and Neuromorphic Engineering**
  To model cellular and network level brain function to understand intelligence and pathology and create biologically inspired algorithms and hardware.

- **Cognitive Neuroscience and Neurotechnology**
  To develop intelligent signal/image processing to probe and understand brain dynamics, structure and function and produce technologies that maintain, enhance, augment and restore physical and cognitive function.
• Cognitive Robotics
To create robotic ecologies that have human-like sensing capability for seamless interaction through complex object recognition, vision and tactile sensing, task allocation, manipulation and more.

• Intelligent Data Analytics
To achieve fundamental advances in AI and scalable computing to solve the most challenging data analytics problems faced by people, industry, society and government.

• Spatial Computing and Future Human-Computer Interaction
To study people’s interaction with text, voice, gesture, Augmented Reality/Virtual reality (AR/VR) and develop new contexts for computing through wearables and technology everywhere.

• Cyber Security and Web technologies
To develop secure and connected technologies that operate intelligently to deliver context aware knowledge and actions in real-time.
According to the UK’s independent review of research excellence, 46% of the Law unit’s research has been rated as world-leading (REF2021). In REF2021 Law submitted case studies on real-world impact, including work on embedding dignity in the Scottish social security system; and as well as monographs and journals articles, the Law submission included an award-winning film (It Stays With You).

We welcome applications for post-graduate study by research in a wide range of areas including access to justice, administrative justice and judicial review, commercial law, employment, gender and law, human rights law, intellectual property law, international law, law and media, law and technology, law and medicine, legal innovation, socio-legal studies, social security, transitional justice, transformative justice.

Law is home to three centres of excellence:

The Transitional Justice Institute (TJI) is a world-leading law-led multidisciplinary research centre focusing on transitional justice - how societies deal with the transition from conflict or oppression - human rights, gender, international law, peace and conflict.

The multiple-award winning Ulster University Law Clinic is an in-house, public facing law clinic staffed by postgraduate students on the LLM Access to Justice and staff are keen to support research projects in the areas of socio-legal studies, access to justice, social security, employment, and judicial review.

The Legal Innovation Centre is at the forefront of understanding and facilitating the innovation of legal services and welcomes opportunities for collaboration, partnership and knowledge-exchange, and look forward to working with you to enhance the work of the legal services profession and to promote access to justice.
As part of the REF2021 submission, the Allied Health Professions research area ranked 5th in the UK for Research Power and joint 1st in the UK for Research Environment. Research in the new School of Medicine seeks to make a difference in the lives of local people through innovative high quality research methods.

Our multi-disciplinary research is led by world-leading academics and covers areas including medical education, paediatric cardiology, public health, health-related behaviours, endocrinology and obesity.

Collaboration is central to our approach, and we partner with a wide range of stakeholders including community and voluntary groups, local health services including general practice and hospitals, and government departments and the Public Health Agency.
In REF 2021, Modern Languages and Linguistics research at Ulster was assessed as having:

- 100% outstanding or very considerable impact in research
- 79% of overall research world-leading or internationally excellent
- 85% of research environment internationally excellent or world-leading

The work of our experts in the areas of Multilingualism, Irish Language Policy and Planning and Computer-Assisted Language Learning has been 100%-rated as internationally excellent (Joint 1st in the top 10 UK Universities).

In the last PRES 2021 survey, the satisfaction rate of our PhD researchers with regard to the supervision quality was 95% (University average 91%) and with regard to the supporting structures at 86% (University average 83%).

Our world leading or internationally excellent specialisms include the study of medieval Irish language and literature, palaeography and the research into the Gaelic manuscript tradition, Classical Irish bardic poetry, place-names research on the island of Ireland, dialectology, Modern Irish lexicography, minority languages, language policy and planning, sociolinguistics, creative writing, Modern Irish literature and poetry in translation, applied language studies (CALL, digitization, language corpora) and Irish ethnography, folklore, oral tradition and heritage studies.

Work in the linguistics group spans a range of areas in the discipline from syntactic and semantic theory to applied linguistics. In particular, colleagues supervise in synchronic and diachronic syntax, syntax/morphology interface, speech and language therapy, first and second language acquisition, language processing and language development, and bilingualism. Another key research area involves the application of discourse and conversation analysis to understand issues of health, communication and interaction.
Research at Ulster in subjects related to performing and practice-based arts, creative technologies, museum and heritage studies and associated cultural contexts is combined within this unit. PhD research can be pursued in the following individual subject areas and around priority topics including:

**Film and Screen**
- Contemporary Filmmaking Practice
- Modern and Contemporary Cinema
- Alternative, Amateur and Resistance Media
- Horror: Theory, Practices and Cultures
- Immersive Media and Cinematic VR

**Drama**
- Performance and Gender
- Performance and Violence, Performance and Trauma
- Applied Theatre and Disability Arts
- Theatre and Ritual
- Storytelling
Heritage and Museum Studies

- Material culture
- Collections interpretation and collection history
- Conflict testimony in museum interpretation
- Interculturalism and the museum
- Museums and the everyday
- Digital heritage interpretation
- Dark Tourism

Music

- Composition and the Composer-Performer
- Improvised Music
- Music and the Visual
- Music Technology and Electronic/Electroacoustic/Sound-based Composition

We are a research-intensive unit with a vibrant research culture within and across the disciplines above, along with collaborations with a wide range of external partners. REF2021 saw us being ranked alongside leading UK research-intensive university and conservatoire departments. We were placed joint first in the UK for research impact, in addition to our research environment being recognised as 100% ‘world-leading’ and ‘internationally excellent’, with more than half of our publications and practice-based outputs rated within these top two categories.

Our collaborative grouping of music, drama, film/screen and heritage contributes to a vibrant research culture which encompasses both theory and practice, as well as interdisciplinary opportunities.

NURSING AND HEALTH

Contact: Dr Donna Brown

Postgraduate Research Education within the School of Nursing and the School of Health Sciences is organised and delivered through the Institute of Nursing and Health Research. The Institute is well known nationally and internationally for providing world leading research training, which is relevant to nursing and health practice.

Nursing at Ulster University is in the premier league of universities in the UK and in terms of 4* research (research that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour) we are ranked among the top 5 universities. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 results show that our research environment is 100% world-leading (4*); 83% of our research publications and 95% of our research impact is world-leading or internationally excellent (3 and 4*).
The Institute of Nursing and Health Research provides a unique experience for doctoral researchers who wish to develop their research skills and knowledge in order to make a significant contribution to knowledge in their chosen fields. Supervision is available to support improvements in Nursing and Healthcare across the life course, from before birth to bereavement support.

The University welcomes applicants interested in working within one of our three centres:

**Health and Rehabilitation Technologies** (themes of research include technologies for enablement, physical activity for health, and rehabilitation, healthcare practice and education)

**Caring for People with Complex Needs** (themes of research include intellectual and developmental disabilities, older people and their carers, palliative care and person-centred practice research, cancer care and diabetes)

**Maternal, Fetal and Infant Research** (themes of research include midwifery and maternal health and perinatal epidemiology)

Contact: Dr Orla McBride

PSYCHOLOGY, PSYCHIATRY AND NEUROSCIENCE

Postgraduate research is located within the Psychology Research Institute. The Institute is a world-leading centre for applied psychological research drawing upon our cutting edge expertise in qualitative and quantitative methodologies and our theoretical rigour. Researchers are committed to multi-disciplinary approaches to help address complex psychological research questions and have developed extensive collaborative partnerships International centres of excellence to produce findings which translate to real societal benefit.
**Mental Health**

Researchers associated with this theme use large data sets to understand the nature of mental health conditions, the prevalence of mental health problems, and resilience and risk factors of mental health issues. In addition, there is a strong research program in health services provision, prevention, and intervention. Specific areas of interest include psychosis, trauma, and post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide and suicidal ideation, addictive behaviours, and the impact of childhood adversity on future mental health outcomes.

**Health and Aging**

Researchers associated with this theme investigate topics that impact on our aging society and how healthy aging can be promoted. Specific areas of interest are the impact of food supplementation on aging and the use of physical activity to maintain healthy communities. Our researchers are also interested in interventions that may be applied to aging populations such as drug therapy for dementia, service provision for individuals with cognitive decline and motor rehabilitation after stroke. This theme uses varied research methods such as the analysis of epidemiological data, laboratory based measurements of fitness, brain stimulation and standardised assessments of cognition.

**Children, Young People and Schools**

The majority of researchers in this theme investigate the impact of environmental, social and societal factors that impact on child development. Specific areas of interest include early predictors of developmental outcomes, atypical development (specifically Autism), health interventions in schools, children’s learning and educational achievement.

**SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY**

**Contact:** [Dr Conor Murray](mailto:DrConorMurray)  
**Current Funded Opportunities**

The School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences has a vibrant and multi-disciplinary research environment, which is home to a wide range of research projects that tackle important questions in the social sciences. We have an excellent international reputation for producing high quality research which has global impact. Our work is centred around three key themes: persistent and emerging socio-economic challenges, policy and practice in divided societies, and global social justice.
Social Work
Potential projects include: substance and alcohol dependency, domestic violence, children’s rights, bureaucracy in social work, relationship-based social work, ICT in social work, social work education, personal educational plans for children in care, self-directed support, understanding capacity in children with learning disabilities, autism (an evidence and gap map), family involvement in youth justice, practitioners’ decision making and risk management, and practitioner resilience and burn-out.

Sociology
Our expertise falls into the following main themes: Inequalities and Injustices, Past and Present; Identity and Representation, and Conflict, Peace and Security. We particularly welcome applicants interested in pursuing doctoral research in areas such as: justice and truth recovery; institutional abuse, gender, conflict and peace; social justice and human rights; politics of memory; language rights; legacies of conflict; heritage, museums and minorities; sporting identities; refugees and forced displacement.
Criminology and Criminal Justice

The Criminology and Criminal Justice team draw upon a broad range of research expertise and experience of supervising diverse projects across the justice, security and civil society spectrum. We particularly welcome applications in the following areas: prisons and punishment; desistance from offending; restorative justice; victims and survivors of violence; youth justice; policing and accountability, State violence; terrorism; drug policy, and transnational crime.

Politics

Some of our core areas of interest relate to: identity politics, memory politics, political violence and terrorism studies, urban politics, and the politics of inequality.

Social Policy

Research themes include: adult social care policy, addressing poverty and disadvantage, analysis of social policy making under devolution in the UK, the role of civil society actors in social policy and the policymaking process, health and social care structures and impact on delivery of care, migration, race and social policy, migrant workers, and abortion policy and the legal reform of abortion in Northern Ireland.

Public Administration

Key areas of interest include: language use in public administration; International Governance; Governance in contested societies; Regional administration; Bureaucrat behaviour, and Gender within large public organisations.

Youth and Community Studies

Research areas include: grassroots experience of post-conflict transition and transitional justice studies, the impact of disadvantage and widening participation, adult education transforming individuals and communities, community relations and peace building, professional development in community development, and social justice.
Research in sport and exercise science is conducted through the Sport and Exercise Sciences Research Institute (SESRI) and is comprised of a multi-disciplinary team of staff and postgraduate PhD researchers. Given the applied nature of the research conducted by SESRI, we have developed a range of research collaborations at international, national and local levels involving governing bodies of sport, hospitals and medical facilities and practitioners, local and national government and other key stakeholders in sport, exercise and physical activity.

In the recent national assessment of research quality (REF2021), 89% of our research and 100% of the environment for sports related research at Ulster University was ranked as internationally excellent or world leading. The impact of our research locally and internationally was also acknowledged by REF 2021 with 100% of our impact rated as internationally excellent and world leading.

**Centre for Sport in Society**

Research areas include: social sciences of sport including sport for development and peace; sport and migration; sport and inclusion; pain and injury in sport; sport and identity politics; sport and disability (intellectual and physical), and sport management, sports gambling, and sport and children’s rights.

**Centre for Exercise Medicine, Physical Activity and Health**

Research areas include: adolescent lifestyle and health, health benefits of physical activity, sport and exercise psychology, physiology and biomechanics, sport technology, sports medicine and physiotherapy, exercise biochemistry, and concussion.
Contact the Ulster Doctoral College

Have any questions? The Ulster Doctoral College is on hand to answer queries.

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