# Handbook

# Postgraduate Research Students

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

The School of Mathematics and the closely associated Hamilton Mathematics Institute sustain a strong research programme in the two disciplines of the school, Pure Mathematics (PM) and Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics (AMTP). A central role is played by the postgraduate research students, and this handbook is meant as a guide for incoming and continuing students in the school, and their supervisors. The general rules governing research degrees at Trinity College Dublin[1] can be found in the University Calendar Part III. Students should familiarise themselves with Section I – General Academic Regulations for Graduate Studies and Higher Degrees (12 pages, articles 1-116) and Section II – Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research Only (7 pages, articles 1-72) of the Calendar. The purpose of this handbook is to provide additional information specific to the School of Mathematics, and to serve as a – hopefully useful – starting point for current students looking for information.

> **Disclaimer:** In the event of any conflict or inconsistency between the General Regulations published in the University Calendar and information contained in programme or local handbooks, the provisions of the General Regulations in the Calendar will prevail.

Trinity College Dublin has a variety of university offices that govern, contribute to or are in some way involved with postgraduate studies and research, or student support. To

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[1]Trinity College is the only college which constitutes the University of Dublin. Although the University of Dublin and Trinity College Dublin are, strictly speaking, different entities we here follow local customs and treat both terms as synonymous.

avoid duplication we refer to the university-wide research student handbook for comprehensive information on all these aspects. It is published and maintained by the Graduate Studies Office (GSO), which is headed by the current Dean of Graduate Studies, Prof. Martine Smith. The Dean of Graduate Studies oversees the academic aspects of postgraduate degrees and also chairs the university-wide Graduate Studies Committee (GSC). The GSC meets once a month to discuss regulations and policies, some of which will make their way into yearly updates of the College Calendar. The committee papers of the GSC meetings are available online on the Dean's webpage given above. The GSC comprises the Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) (DTLPGs) of the 24 schools in TCD, who report back to their respective schools. There is also representation on the GSC by postgraduate research students. For details on the representation please consult the webpages of the TCD Student Union. Note that the Student Union takes care of both undergraduate and postgraduate students, since the demise of the Graduate Student Union in 2022.

Within the School of Mathematics, postgraduate studies are overseen by the DTLPG, who is part of the school's executive committee. The executive committee takes decisions at the school level. Current academic staff members of the executive committee are listed on the school's webpage; further members are the school's manager and student representatives.

The DTLPG also chairs the school's postgraduate studies committee, which currently comprises the two course directors of the taught M.Sc. programmes in "High performance Computing" and "Quantum Fields, Strings and Gravity", a representative of pure mathematics, a school of mathematics administrative officer and a student representative.

The administration of the school is ensured by the school manager, Ms. Karen Doherty; administrative officers Emma Clancy and Jennifer Murray; and finance officer, Ciara Scanlon. In particular, Jennifer Murray is taking care of most postgraduate matters. She is currently on leave, so Bob McLarnon has taken over her duties on a temporary basis.

Members of the School of Mathematics come from a broad range of diverse backgrounds and this is seen as an opportunity to learn from each other. The school strives to create and maintain a stimulating scholarly atmosphere, based on mutual respect. All members of the school are expected to be aware of the College's dignity and respect policy.

# Chapter 2

# Structured Ph.D.

In Trinity College Dublin *all* research students are considered part of a structured Ph.D. programme. At the basic level, the structure is provided by the establishment of a thesis committee for each student, and the requirement of an annual review in years 1 and 3, and the confirmation/transfer procedure in year 2, respectively; see below. As part of their education, students are expected to fully take part in the events organised by the school, as appropriate for their discipline. This includes attendance to public lectures, colloquia, research seminars, journal clubs or workshops, if relevant to their discipline or research project.

We note that the university-wide research student handbook states, on page 19, that "Under our structured doctorate model, students are required to participate in taught modules and obtain between 10 and 30 ECTS before they present at the mid-point for confirmation on the PhD register. " We note that this statement is not supported by the official College regulations in the Calendar, which prevails over statements in any handbook. Hence, the only mandatory module in the School of Mathematics is the online module CA7000 on "Research Integrity and Impact in an Open Scholarship Era". By default, every new postgraduate research student is registered for this module and must complete it, preferably in the first year but in any case prior to the confirmation procedure in second year.

With this proviso, there are a number of modules on offer across the College, which might be of interest. A comprehensive list is linked from here. Furthermore, the School of Mathematics runs two taught M.Sc. programmes, with some modules that may be of direct relevance to research projects of our students. The same applies to modules offered by other schools. It may thus be beneficial to attend some of these modules, even if this is not mandatory. However, before doing so, permission by the relevant lecturer or course coordinator should be sought by the student. It is also obvious that the students registered for a given taught M.Sc. programme take precedence in case of capacity issues. In any case,

it is highly advisable to discuss any plans to attend a taught module with the supervisor, as the research project should always take priority.

## 2.1   Ph.D. and M.Sc. register

As per college regulations, research students normally register on the Ph.D. register, unless they directly aim for an M.Sc. degree by research, in which case they are placed on the M.Sc. register. The initial placement on the Ph.D. register is conditional and must be confirmed during the second year by the confirmation procedure. Likewise, students on the M.Sc. register, who decide to continue towards a Ph.D. degree, must undergo the transfer procedure. Both confirmation and transfer procedures have exactly the same format in the School of Mathematics; see below. A research student may decide to submit an M.Sc. thesis instead of going through the confirmation or transfer procedure. Furthermore, research students who do not pass the confirmation/transfer procedure may submit an M.Sc. thesis, depending on the state of their research project. Note, however, that transitioning from the M.Sc. to the Ph.D. register and vice versa requires prior approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies, with the application forms to be found here, requiring the signature of the DTLPG.

## 2.2   Duration of Studies

The normal duration of a full time Ph.D. or M.Sc. research project is four, respectively two years. For part time students different limits apply, cf. calendar part II for details. Students may interrupt their studies for parental leave, medical or other reasons. In this case, a student can apply for an off-books period during which the clock stops as far as submission and other deadlines are concerned. It is important that any intention to go off-books is communicated at the earliest possible stage and that the funding agency is contacted and informed about it. Usually, funding agencies are helpful and will strive to accommodate reasonable requests, whereas failure to engage with them may result in losing the funding. It should also be noted that an off-books period means, in most cases, that the stipend payments are put on hold for this period with no entitlements for payments covering for example parental leave. A thorough assessment of all aspects should therefore precede any such decision and definitely a discussion with the DTLPG and the supervisor.

## 2.3   Start Dates

The official start dates for new research students are either September $1^{st}$ or March $1^{st}$. The majority of students start in September ("September entrants") in line with the academic

year structure. The start date subsequently determines the deadlines for the annual review, the confirmation procedure, and thesis submission.

## 2.4   Student Supervisor Relationship

The student supervisor relationship is central for a successful completion of a research degree. The Graduate Studies Office has issued an extensive best practice guide on this subject. At the beginning of the Ph.D. the student and supervisor agree on the basic terms of the supervision, e.g. weekly meetings and written summaries when appropriate milestones are passed. This agreement can remain either informal or formalised, e.g. using this template of a supervisor-research student agreement. Note that such an agreement is requested by the Dean of Graduate Studies for those students who are funded by a College award. This supervisor research student agreement was subject to heated discussions in the GSC in the Academic year 2023-24, when it was introduced. Its proponents argued that it just brings clarity as to what the expectations are from either side, with the signatures implying a certain level of commitment. Others said that the agreement was just stating the obvious, but its formalisation, together with required signatures, resembled very much a formal contract that could take on a life of its own and generate an undesirable entitlement culture. Whatever the take on this agreement, the items listed there may help to reflect on the various aspects in this relationship.

As with any relationship, there can be ups and downs and cases where some form of mediation by a third party may be required. We refer to the best practice guide mentioned above for further reading.

## 2.5   Thesis Committee

For every postgraduate research student, a thesis committee will be created in the first few months following registration. To quote from the terms of reference: "A Thesis Committee shall be formed no later than six months from the first registration of a PhD student to monitor and advise in relation to the progress of the student throughout the lifespan of the structured PhD." The supervisor, in discussion with the student, will nominate the thesis committee members and communicate their names to the DTLPG. A thesis committee consists of two academic staff members, normally (but not necessarily) selected among the members of the School of Mathematics. At least one of the two should be an expert in a field close to the student's research project. For more information, consult the terms of reference linked above. The thesis committee will have its role in the annual review and the confirmation/transfer procedure; see below.

## 2.6 Progression

Progression refers to a student's transition from one year to the next, which is subject to either the annual review (years 1 and 3) or the confirmation procedure (year 2). Please consult the Graduate Studies Office webpage for general information.

### 2.6.1 Annual Review

At the end of their years 1 and 3 every postgraduate research student must go through the annual review. All information required for the annual review is in Annual Review Form found here, but starting the academic year 2025-26, this information needs to be filled in SITS according to the following procedure:

1. The student enters their part of the information into SITS. Every student receives a message from SITS explaining how to do so.

2. Once a student has uploaded their part of the annual review, the supervisor is notified by SITS.

3. The supervisor then makes a recommendation and inputs their feedback into SITS as it would have been entered in the form.

4. SITS then notifies the other thesis committee members.

5. The student and the two thesis committee members apart from the supervisor agree on a date for the interview, which is entered into SITS. The supervisor is not required to attend the interview.

6. The thesis committee members then conduct an interview with the student about the research project and the plans for the next year on the agreed date and time.

7. Once this interview has taken place, the designated lead on the thesis committee enters into SITS the committee recommendation and feedback to the student.

8. The supervisor and the thesis committee members are then invited by SITS to sign off on the recommendation.

9. Once that part of the process is complete, the DTLPG is notified to sign off on the recommendation as well.

10. That part done, the recommendation goes to the Graduate Studies Office.

If the recommendation is to continue on the PG register, then the student is invited to re-register for the following academic year; otherwise, the student can choose to appeal the decision. Note that annual reviews must be completed by 31 January or June 30 of a given academic year, for March and September entrants, respectively.

### 2.6.2 Confirmation/Transfer Procedure

In year 2 and with a June 30 (January 31) deadline for September (March) registrants, postgraduate research students are required to pass a procedure to either confirm them on the Ph.D. register or to transfer from the M.Sc. to the Ph.D register[1]. Only those students who aim for an M.Sc. by research are exempt from this procedure.

The confirmation/transfer procedure is a more elaborate version of the annual review described above. The differences are:

- The student prepares a written report of circa 30 pages describing the status of the research project and the plans for the future. The student uploads in SITS this report and the rest of the information that appears in the confirmation/transfer procedure form, similar to the annual review form. The deadline is the end of March for September entrants and the end of September for March entrants. This step replaces step 1 above.

- The confirmation interview has to be attended by the student, the supervisor, the rest of the thesis committee, and the DTLPG.

- The student presents their research for 20 minutes, which is followed by questions from the thesis committee members and the DTLPG, who will chair the presentation.

- The rest of the steps are identical to the ones for the annual review described above.

Possible outcomes of the confirmation/procedure are

- Recommendation to be confirmed on the Ph.D. register;

- Recommendation to be confirmed on the Ph.D. register subject to improvement of the transfer report within the 4 weeks following the decision.

- Recommendation not to continue on the Ph.D. register.

In the latter case the candidate may either attempt to obtain an M.Sc. degree, or decide to withdraw from postgraduate studies. The decision can be appealed though, and in this case an appeals subcommittee will be set up by the DTLPG of the School.

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[1]Note, however, that transitioning between the M.Sc. and Ph.D. registers requires explicit permission by the Dean of Graduate Studies, in either direction.

## 2.7 Thesis Submission

Postgraduate research students who plan to submit a thesis are strongly advised to discuss this with their supervisors at an early stage and allow enough time for the supervisor to provide feedback on a draft thesis. While the submission is at the discretion of the student alone, it can be embarrassing, if an external examiner is made to read through a poorly written thesis. The student should carefully read through the College calendar regulations, in order to make sure that all necessary declarations are included and that all the typesetting rules are followed[2] and that the format is according to College requirements. Note that the submission of a thesis may have practical consequences for funding: for instance, a College studentship is discontinued after submission of the thesis. Hence in some cases a delay of the submission may be advisable. Furthermore, it is good practice (and often mandatory) to include an acknowledgement for any funding or other resources received to carry out the research project.

### 2.7.1 Academic Integrity

One of the required declarations in the thesis relates to academic integrity; the Ph.D. candidate states that the thesis is their own work and that all work and ideas by others are properly referenced and acknowledged. Academic integrity is of utmost importance and students and supervisors should familiarise themselves with the relevant section in the calendar part III (items 50–55), and with the College's Academic Integrity policy, which replaces older policies on plagiarism. This webpage of the Academic Affairs office provides further links. A research thesis is a publication and should adhere to the same standards as a research paper. Depending on the research community, there may be differences in conventions, and it is the task of the supervisor to convey the proper way of referencing and citing the work of others pertaining to their field of research. If plagiarism or other breaches of academic integrity are detected, even at a future stage, there may be severe consequences.

### 2.7.2 Intention to submit, deadlines and Dean's grace

In anticipation of a thesis submission, the postgraduate research student should submit the Intention to Submit Form, no later than one month before the planned submission, by email to the DTLPG with copy to `ethesis@tcd.ie`. Once an intention to submit is received, Academic Registry will set up a one-drive folder with documents for the examiners. This folder will also be used to share the thesis with the examiners. During the academic year

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[2]A Latex template for a Ph.D. thesis in TCD has been informally circulated among the postgraduate research students of the school for many years and its perusal may save considerable time.

2025-26, the intention to submit procedure will move to SITS just like the review process has. More information will be provided once the Graduate Studies Office implements this change.

Deadlines for the submission of the thesis are, in principle, at the end of February (March entrants) and end of August (September entrants). However, a 1-month extension, known as Dean's grace, is nowadays granted automatically, so the true deadlines are shifted by one month to 31 March and 30 September, respectively.

For further details and explanations please consult the GSO webpages, where a timeline is given and links to the regulations at the bottom of the page.

## 2.8 Nomination of examiners

Once a thesis is submitted the Graduate Studies Office (GSO) notifies the DTLPG of the school and requests the nomination of both an internal and an external examiner, preferably within 2 weeks. The DTLPG in consultation with the supervisor identifies suitable examiners and submits the nomination form to the GSO, together with a short CV of the nominated external examiner, which details the experience with supervision of Ph.D. students and includes a list of recent (i.e. last 5 years) publications. The same applies for the internal examiner if they are not a staff member of Trinity College Dublin. The Dean of Graduate Studies will normally approve the examiners provided

1. the examiners have demonstrated experience in postgraduate research supervision (hence the need for a CV);

2. the examiners are not closely linked to the supervisor or the candidate (e.g. through direct collaboration and common publication during the last 5 years; hence the need for a list of publications);

3. The external examiner should not have been an examiner in the last 3 years for TCD. If it is not obvious to the supervisor that this condition is satisfied, confirmation should be sought from the intended nominee.

Approval of the examiners by the Dean of Graduate Studies is normally obtained within a week or so; however, occasionally it may take longer. In time critical situations, it may be possible to pre-approve an examiner, in order to shorten the time between thesis submission and the viva voce. Once the examiners are approved, the internal examiner is in charge of the organisation and will consult with the candidate and the extern regarding date, time and venue for the viva voce.

Please note that this process is due to be conducted on SITS starting at some point during the academic year 2025-26, and this handbook will be modified to reflect the changes.

More information on the rules governing the appointment of external examiners and the pre-viva and post-viva reports can be found here.

## 2.9 Viva Voce

The viva voce in the School of Mathematics is organised as follows for candidates of both Ph.D. and M.Sc. by research, though it is not required for a M.Sc. by research degree:

- The internal examiner is responsible for organisation of the viva voce, in particular for choosing a suitable date and place.

- The viva voce is chaired by the DTLPG or their nominee.

- The viva begins with a 20 minutes public presentation by the candidate of their thesis. At the end of the public presentation, the general public may ask questions to the candidate. The public is then asked to leave; only the candidate, the chair and the two examiners remain in the room. The supervisor may choose to attend the viva voce as an observer, if the candidate agrees. If present, the supervisor may be consulted by the examiners for clarification during the viva voce.

- There is no explicit time limit on the duration of a viva voce. The role of the chair is to ensure that the candidate is treated fairly and to clarify College regulations, if necessary.

- At the end of the viva voce, the candidate is asked to leave the room (together with the supervisor, if present). The examiners then discuss both the candidate's performance at the viva voce and the thesis and reach their conclusions. In theory, the possible outcomes are as follows:

  1. The degree is awarded for the thesis as it stands;
  2. The degree is awarded subject to minor corrections made to the thesis;
  3. The degree is awarded subject to a major revision of the thesis;
  4. A lower degree is awarded, possibly subject to minor corrections to the thesis;
  5. fail.

  In practice, the second outcome with minor corrections is most common, by far.

- The candidate is asked back to the room and informed of the outcome.

- The examiners had written separate pre-viva reports on the thesis, which were exchanged among them and sent by email to `gsothese@tcd.ie`. Now, they compile a common post-viva report taking account of the candidate's performance at viva voce and submit to the Graduate Studies Office as soon as possible (preferably within 24 hours). The Graduate Studies Office then sends a letter of notification to the candidate. If minor corrections are required (this is the most frequent outcome), the internal examiner provides a list with the minor corrections, and the candidate has 2 months from the date of notification for their implementation. Once the internal examiner is satisfied that all corrections have been implemented, they notify the Graduate Studies Office that the final version of the thesis can be submitted. In case a major revision is required, the candidate must re-register for a period of up to 6 months (which carries a fee) and the thesis is re-examined by the external examiner after the revision has been carried out.

# Chapter 3

# Financial matters

## 3.1 Funding through fellowships, research grants and College awards

Most students in the School of Mathematics receive some kind of funding, which covers their tuition fees and a student stipend. Current sources of funding are

- EU: the School has a successful record in obtaining EU funding for postgraduate students, either through Marie Curie individual fellowships or through networks with other universities.

- Irish funding through Research Ireland as the merged entity consisting of the Irish Research Council (IRC) and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) is now called. Funding for Ph.D. students is either obtained through the former IRC schemes or as part of research project formerly with SFI.

- College awards: In the past few years, 1 College award per year was given to each school in TCD and then assigned following a competitive recruitment process. Further College awards are awarded by the Dean of Graduate Studies according to criteria that may vary from year to year (e.g. theme based, interdisciplinary projects, etc.).

- IBM Research Ireland has started a cooperation with TCD, and some students are funded through this initiative.

- Occasionally, international students bring their own scholarship, e.g. funded by the government of their home country.

- The Hamilton Scholarships are funded by benefaction funding to TCD or directly to the School of Mathematics.

Note that College awards cover a stipend of $25,000$ Euros per year and the fees. This amount is matched by School awards and the Hamilton scholarships. However, despite intense lobbying efforts, other funding sources could fall short of this amount and also do not always cover the full fees. The College is running a pilot scheme, now in its second year, whereby the fee differential is waived by College for new grants funded by Irish funding agencies (formerly SFI and IRC, now merged into Research Ireland). A decision by College whether this practice will continue to include the grants held by external institutions (like the Dublin Institute of Advanced Study) has not yet been made.

The School of Mathematics has committed to top up stipends from funding agencies to $25,000$ Euros per year.

## 3.2 Teaching by Postgraduate Students

As is typical for mathematics departments in the UK and Ireland, the TCD School of Mathematics generates a major part of its income from service teaching, ie. the teaching of students from other schools and departments. These are often large groups (e.g. engineering or bio-sciences students) with hundreds of students. Weekly tutorials for groups of 40-50 students are held to discuss homework assignments. Postgraduate research students are teaching such tutorial groups and are involved in the marking of both homework assignments and exams in the fresher years. They also conduct tutorials and mark homework assignments for the students of all years in the school's own disciplines, Pure Mathematics and Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics.

Hence, postgraduate research students in the school make a very important contribution to the School and substantially contribute to its functioning. Aside from generating additional income, the experience is also valuable and may enhance the student's employment opportunities at a later stage. However, it should be clear that the research project for the Ph.D. must be prioritised, and it may be wise to abstain from teaching in the final stages of the thesis write-up, or during a critical phase of the Ph.D. project. In general, it is a good idea to inform the supervisor of teaching duties, as e.g. the marking of exams is time critical and may require a full time commitment for up to a week during which no progress on the research should be expected.

In general, work by the students is allocated by the school's office, who maintain a list of all postgraduate students and assign teaching/marking duties in coordination with the relevant lecturers. The work is paid at an hourly rate, with the lecturers signing off on the hours worked. **Please note that all postgraduate students are expected to help in**

**the delivery of at least one module per year, and all such work is paid.** This proviso represents a change of policy compared to previous years.

## 3.3    Travel to Conferences

Students travelling on college business should remember to fill in the travel insurance form **before** their trip. Students funded through a research grant will often have a budget available for travel to conferences, workshops or summer schools in their discipline. Those who do not have a travel budget can make a case and apply to the College Postgraduate Travel Reimbursement Fund (beware of the deadlines). In any case, students should try and minimise the costs; for instance, some conference organisers have a small budget to enable student participation, e.g. through reduced/waived conference fees or subsidised accommodation. For reimbursement there are various rules that apply. In particular, the college has a preferred supplier list which includes the travel agency "Club Travel". You can go through them if it is really required[1], however, it is often much better to book a flight yourself and later get reimbursed. Note that you can do this by buying **directly** from the airline's web page. Beware that buying from online travel agencies such as Expedia, Opodo, etc. would be in breach of College policy and the expense may then not be eligible for reimbursement.

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[1]Warning: they are expensive and not too helpful; they may even charge you a fee for a simple inquiry.