

# **School of Law Action Plan**

**November 2025**

# Table of Contents

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>1. Research Culture and Peer Engagement</b>                    | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Actions on Research Culture and Peer Engagement</b>            | <b>4</b> |
| <b>2. Development Opportunities and Career Advice</b>             | <b>4</b> |
| <b>Actions on Development Opportunities and Career Advice</b>     | <b>5</b> |
| <b>3. Funding and Research Resources</b>                          | <b>5</b> |
| <b>Actions on Funding and Research Resources</b>                  | <b>5</b> |
| <b>4. Research Infrastructure and Facilities</b>                  | <b>6</b> |
| <b>Actions on Research Infrastructure and Facilities</b>          | <b>6</b> |
| <b>5. Supervision and Progress</b>                                | <b>6</b> |
| <b>Actions on Supervision and Progress</b>                        | <b>6</b> |
| <b>6. PhD Researcher Wellbeing and Sense of Belonging</b>         | <b>7</b> |
| <b>Actions on PhD Researcher Wellbeing and Sense of Belonging</b> | <b>7</b> |
| <b>7. Engagement and Institutional Responsiveness</b>             | <b>7</b> |
| <b>Actions on Engagement and Institutional Responsiveness</b>     | <b>7</b> |

This action plan summarises key findings from the 2025 Postgraduate Research (PGR) Survey for the School of Law and outlines proposed actions to strengthen the research environment and enhance the overall experience of doctoral researchers and LLM by research students. The response rate of 59% was high, which provides a valuable evidence base for reflection on the strengths and challenges of our PhD community. The findings highlight areas of excellence, including the quality of supervision, as well as areas requiring focused attention, such as funding, wellbeing, peer engagement, and institutional responsiveness. The actions listed below seek to ensure that all PhD researchers in the School of Law, its research centres, and research clusters are supported, connected, and equipped with the skills to transition to professional life post PhD.

## **1. Research Culture and Peer Engagement**

Only 43.5% of respondents from Law agreed that they have frequent opportunities to discuss their research with other researchers (well below the University average of 64.5%). This likely reflects the dispersed nature of the School's research community. PhD researchers are often based across a number of different locations, both the North and South Campus for seminars and other events. In addition, the desk space available for researchers in the Hardiman Building is dispersed meaning that researchers do not necessarily get to know other researchers from the School. There is also research space for some PhD researchers in the ILAS Building. In addition, many PhD researchers are conducting fieldwork internationally. Consequently, this geographical spread means that PhD researchers may not regularly encounter one another in their day-to-day work, which can limit opportunities for informal interaction and peer exchange and support. While 81% of respondents felt that the research ambience stimulates their work, peer-to-peer engagement is significantly lower.

The School of Law seeks to foster a vibrant and sustainable research culture defined by collegiality, intellectual vitality, and global engagement. A strong sense of community underpins the School's success, with researchers at all stages benefiting from mentoring, peer feedback, and collaborative initiatives through clusters, centres, and School-wide events. Activities such as the Research Seminar Series, the annual Law Research Day, the international summer schools hosted by the ICHR and CDLP promote scholarly exchange and interdisciplinary engagement. The flagship Annual Doctoral Seminar in the ICHR (now in its 25<sup>th</sup> year) is a further key support.

Dedicated roles such as the Research Culture Officer further strengthen this inclusive environment, ensuring that peer engagement, research integrity, and

professional development are embedded in the experience of PhD researchers. However, we note that some PhD researchers engage to a greater extent than others in these initiatives. This variation of engagement can influence the extent to which respondents to this survey benefit from peer support within the School and how they experience the research culture.

## Actions on Research Culture and Peer Engagement

- Create more opportunities for informal networking opportunities (e.g., coffee mornings, social events with PhD researchers).
- Encourage greater cross Centre, School, and Research Cluster collaboration and networking, through PhD researcher led peer networking initiatives.
- Enhance communication about upcoming research events and seminars through a centralised calendar or newsletter specifically for PhD researchers.
- Encourage supervisors and Graduate Research Committees (GRCs) to promote attendance and participation in School and Centre events as part of the Personal Development Plan (PDP) process.

## 2. Development Opportunities and Career Advice

Only 65.2% of respondents noted that they have opportunities to become involved in the “wider research community, beyond my department”. Similarly, only 65.2% of respondent from law received career advice compared to higher figures in other disciplines. 73.9% reported receiving transferable skills training, below the College average. Just 39.1% communicated research to non-academic audiences and 47.8% worked as part of a team. In the context of PhD research in Law, the relatively low percentage who worked as part of a team is unsurprising. Doctoral research in Law tends to be a solitary endeavour, with limited opportunities for collaboration unless researchers opt to take modules such as professional work placement or opt into team work / research opportunities. While the structured PhD programme provides transferable skills training and opportunities for engagement through modules such as Law Research Skills 1 and 2, or through participation in activities under the Graduate Studies suite (e.g. GS509 Participation in Workshops/Courses and GS5103 Conference Organisation) there remains scope to strengthen formal and informal supports for career development and interdisciplinary collaboration.

## Actions on Development Opportunities and Career Advice

- Better integrate career development discussions into annual GRC reviews (align with Personal Development Plan requirements under University & CBPPL Guidelines).
- Offer bespoke workshops on legal careers beyond academia (policy, NGOs, justice sector). This could be added through the PhD Methodology Seminar Series and through support from the CBPPL Research and Impact Team.
- Strengthen collaboration with the Researcher Development Centre (RDC) to enhance communication between the School of Law / College, ensuring that PhD researchers (and supervisors) are fully aware of the RDC's role and the range of supports, training, and development opportunities available.
- Create a concise FAQ document for supervisors. In the FAQ supervisors to be reminded of the range of structured PhD and Graduate Studies modules (e.g. Law Research Skills 1 and 2, Professional Work Placement, GS509 Participation in Workshops/Courses, and GS5103 Conference Organisation) that can help PhD researchers develop transferable skills, gain experience of teamwork, and enhance their career development and employability.

### **3. Funding and Research Resources**

Only 33.3% of respondents reported receiving funding for conference travel. 23.8% of respondents reported that their funding covers research materials, both the lowest figures within the College. Further work is needed to understand the implications of this for access to research materials and to identify specific actions required to address these gaps. 34.8% of law respondents were self-funded, which is significantly higher than the University average of 12.4%. There has been limited funding available at School level due to the School of Law being in budget deficit, which has undoubtedly affected the non-pay budget of the School and Centres. This has resulted in reduced discretionary funds both within the School and across its research centres, impacting the availability of financial support for PhD researchers. While researchers funded under Research Ireland schemes have access to dedicated resources for conference attendance and research expenses, others rely solely on College-level funding to support research activities and mobility.

## Actions on Funding and Research Resources

- Ensure supervisors and PhD researchers are made aware of University-level and external funding opportunities (e.g., NUI awards and PhD scholarships)

for conferences such as the Annual Conference of Irish Association of Law Teachers).

- The Head of School, Centre Directors and PhD Programme to engage with the Associate Director of Development, College of Business, Public Policy and Law to explore opportunities to leverage existing partnerships with external partners to provide small grants or bursaries to support PhD researcher mobility.
- Conduct a short survey of PhD researchers to gather evidence on access to research materials and inform action points.

## **4. Research Infrastructure and Facilities**

65.2% agreed there is adequate provision of computing resources (lowest in College). Access to specialist resources, however, is strong (95.5%), as is provision for of library facilities (including physical / online resources/facilities) at 87%.

### Actions on Research Infrastructure and Facilities

- Survey PhD researchers on computing resources to understand issues.

## **5. Supervision and Progress**

95.7% agree supervision is supportive; 90.9% feel supervisors help identify training needs. 91.3% received appropriate induction. QA245 requires all research supervisors, particularly those who have not yet supervised a PhD to successful completion, are recommended to attend supervisor training as part of their professional development, for example through modules provided by CELT or workshops offered by the Graduate Studies Office. Supervisors who have not yet brought a PhD to completion are also strongly encouraged to complete supervisory training during, or prior to, their first year of supervision.

### Actions on Supervision and Progress

- Maintain high supervision standards through annual supervisor training refreshers, in line with QA245 requirements.
- Embed supervisory training discussions within annual workload allocation meetings, with the Head of School and Centre Directors responsible for confirming that all supervisors are aware of, and engaging with, the training requirements set out in the University's PhD policy.

- Encourage co-supervision arrangements for early-career academics to ensure mentoring, shared experience, and continuity of supervision quality.
- The Head of School, Centre Directors, and PhD Programme Director in Law will actively collaborate with supervisors and PhD researchers to promote engagement with the Researcher Development Centre (RDC), ensuring that all researchers are aware of and participate in relevant RDC training, workshops, and development opportunities.

## **6. PhD Researcher Wellbeing and Sense of Belonging**

Only 42.9% of respondents agreed that there is someone they can talk to about day-to-day problems, the lowest figure across the College. This is a particular concern. Satisfaction with work-life balance stands at 52.4%, which is below the University average. These figures suggest that, while the academic and research environment is strong, there remains a need to strengthen the pastoral and social dimensions of the PhD experience within the School of Law and research centres.

### **Actions on PhD Researcher Wellbeing and Sense of Belonging**

- Ask the Student Support Officer for the School of Law to attend the social events committed to in section 1. Ask the Student Support Officer to write to all PhD researchers across the School of Law introducing herself and her role.
- Include a structured wellbeing, belonging, and inclusion “check-in” as part of annual Graduate Research Committee (GRC) meetings, allowing PhD Researchers to raise any wellbeing or inclusion issues in a supportive and confidential environment.

## **7. Engagement and Institutional Responsiveness**

59.1% felt the institution values and responds to feedback. This is very low.

### **Actions on Engagement and Institutional Responsiveness**

- Ensure feedback loops: communicate changes made in response to PhD researcher input via newsletters or PGR meetings with reps etc.