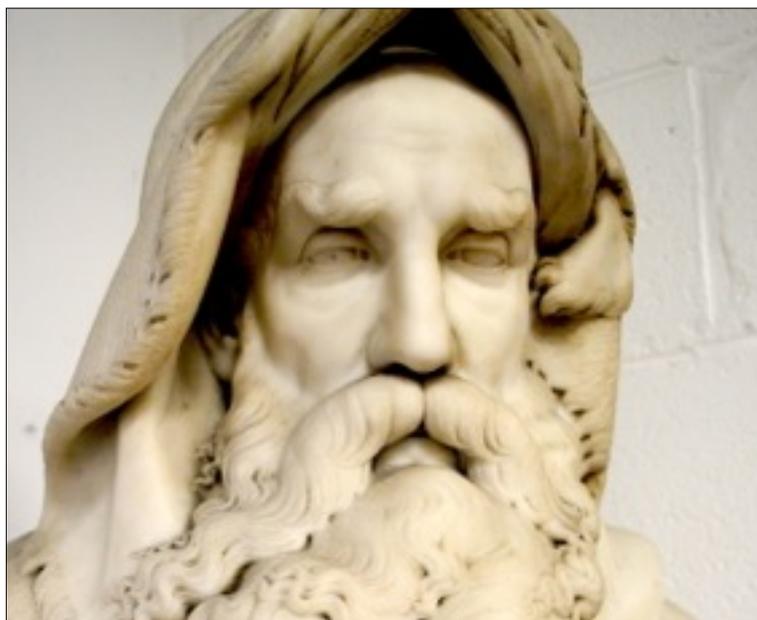


Thinking of undertaking a PhD?

Here are some recommendations, information, and things to think about if you're considering a PhD at UCD. This is a personal guide I've created to help you consider whether undertaking a PhD is right for you, that answers many common questions I receive.



Winter, our School's (unofficial) mascot

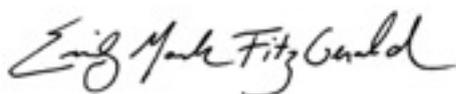
All of the information in this document should be considered supplementary to UCD's official information about PhD research, which can be accessed here: <https://www.ucd.ie/graduatestudies/researchprogrammes/>. Every School and supervisor is slightly different, so what follows is derived from my own experiences and perspectives, that will hopefully help you make an informed decision.

Contents:

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| PhD in a nutshell | 2 |
| Practicalities | 5 |
| Process & experience | 8 |
| Next steps | 9 |

Feel free to get in contact at any time to discuss your research ideas or answer any questions you may have! I'm always happy to meet in person or chat via Skype/Facetime, no matter what stage you are at in your thinking.

Best,



Dr Emily Mark-FitzGerald

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PHD IN A NUTSHELL

In the beginning...

Thanks for getting in touch to enquire about undertaking a PhD with me here in the School of Art History & Cultural Policy. Working on a PhD is one of the most challenging endeavours you will ever undertake. It will test you intellectually (and often emotionally), push you to develop your thinking and writing to an advanced degree, and demand much of your time, attention, and energy. It is also extremely rewarding and a major personal and professional achievement, that demonstrates your capacity to research and write at the highest level. It's not a decision to be taken lightly, so do take care to prepare yourself financially, psychologically, and with all the supports in place that will help you to succeed. Having a clear expectation and understanding of the process (and outcome) is a great first step!

Working with me

I've supervised many successful postgraduate students over the years, both as a PhD panel member and direct supervisor, and examined PhD students both here at UCD and other universities, in addition to mentoring postdoctoral scholars. As I work across art history, cultural history, Irish studies, and cultural policy, the areas where I can offer supervision are broad, and best addressed through discussion. My particular areas of research expertise are Irish art history & visual culture from the 19th c. - the present; cultural histories of famine, poverty, diaspora, and migration; memory studies; public art and commemoration; museum and heritage studies; and Irish cultural policy. I also work extensively across the cultural sector, especially the visual & performing arts. I've been one of the Directors of the Irish Museums Association for ten years; I'm on the board of Arts & Disability Ireland, and previously on the board of Irish Theatre Magazine. Taking on a PhD student is a major commitment for me, as well as for the student, so my priority is that it's the right fit for both of us. If I am not the right fit for you as supervisor, I'm happy to discuss with you alternative possibilities (and universities/programmes). Come in for a chat if you haven't already! For more details of my work and publications, here are links to my research profile, and the academic blog I maintain in cultural policy:

- <http://www.ucd.ie/research/people/arhistoryculturalpolicy/dremilymarkfitzgerald/>
- <https://artsmanagement.ie/>

Practice-based PhDs

We have recently formalised a co-supervision option with NCAD, that can accommodate PhDs that are part practice-based. The final outcome is a jointly awarded PhD between the institutions. If this is your interest, I'd be happy to speak to you further about what's involved.

Research idea

The core of any PhD is a strong research idea. Some students begin with their research question fully formed; others begin with a defined research area, and need a bit more time to finalise their precise topic. Either way, you need to begin a PhD with *either* a clear question or field of research, that can be concisely stated in a few sentences. Some things to think about:

- **Is this question or idea new?** A major benchmark of a PhD is that it's an original contribution to knowledge. A close reading of a text or series of images isn't enough: you have to be progressing knowledge or understanding in a new way, and aiming to make a serious contribution to your chosen field, however you define this.
- **Have you reviewed the literature?** It's essential to know where your idea and concept sits in relation to broader scholarship. Undertaking an initial literature review is a key first step as you develop a proposal (see 'Next Steps' later in this document for more detail).
- **What do you want to be an expert on?** That's essentially the endpoint of a PhD: emerging as an expert on a particular topic, located in a specific discipline, and situated within a defined field of practice (which itself may be hybridised or cross/inter-disciplinary). Consider how you might 'map' what this position will look like at the end of the doctorate, at each of these three levels.
- **What 'community' will your research speak to?** Any PhD has to meet academic standards, but beyond the assessment process, who is the audience for your research? Is it a scholarly community (if so, in what disciplines?) Is it creative practitioners (in visual art, theatre, etc.)? Is it professionals in the museum or heritage community? Is it policy-makers? Another way to visualise this is to imagine yourself speaking at a conference or seminar in a few years' time: who is your ideal audience? This can help define what methodology and approach you ultimately adopt in the work.

Goals

Everyone has a different motivation for doing a PhD. For some, it's a route into a career as a researcher or university lecturer. For others, it's a chance to switch careers (often from professional practice to academia). And some people opt to do a PhD for the pure pleasure of research (this is the case for some mature students, for example). I encourage all of my students to be honest with themselves with why they are doing a PhD, since it requires such a long commitment. In so doing, it's important to be aware of the following:

- **The PhD is not a guarantee for academic employment.** Academia is an incredibly difficult career path with a tiny number of job openings annually internationally, and many well-qualified applicants. I *always* encourage my students to have a plan 'B', and to think more laterally about what other career options might be available post-PhD. If you are interested in an academic career, we will do everything we can to support you and prepare you for this — but it's in your own best interest to check out job listings (see for example www.jobs.ac.uk or <https://www.universityvacancies.com/>) and search for online post-PhD communities

(discipline-specific) to find out more about folks' lived experience.¹ The Guardian's Higher Education network is also very useful: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/higher-education>. I'm happy to have a conversation with you at any time about your career aspirations, and how the PhD matches up with them.

- **Will the PhD get you to where you want to go?** The PhD isn't the ideal preparation for all careers: in fact, it might be overkill for some. Consider that you will be spending the next 3-4 years out of the job market concentrating on a singular piece of research work, immersed in academic life: will you emerge in the right place for where you hope to be afterwards? Do people in your desired profession have PhDs? What are your goals for how you will develop during the PhD years, both in research and in personal terms?
- **Prepare for 4 years, and aim for 3.** The university (and funding agencies) will tell you the PhD should take 3 years: in my experience, students often take 4, as life etc. interrupts. So in your planning for the PhD: prepare for 4, aim for 3.

Preparation

Any student undertaking a PhD must have a strong undergraduate and postgraduate qualification in place, either in Art History or a cognate humanities subject. Exact requirements for undertaking a PhD are somewhat flexible (especially if you're coming from a background of professional practice), but it's my job to ensure you have the academic background and writing skills that will enable you to undertake a PhD successfully. We will also require CVs, writing samples and references before admission. Apart from academic preparation, consider if you have other supports in place before starting a PhD. This will include financial support, caring responsibility support (for children, ageing parents, etc.), and a good network of family and friends who will be there for you along this journey. We will of course assist you in any way we can throughout your time with us at UCD, no matter what arises along the way.

¹ Here are a few suggestions: Facebook groups including [PostgRAD Study Gang: School Of Hard Thinkin'](#); [New Researchers' Network](#); [Women* PGRs Support Group](#); useful Twitter accounts to follow include @ThomsonPat, @thesiswhisperer, @PhDForum and #phdchat

PRACTICALITIES

Supervision

The system of supervision works as follows: students are assigned a primary supervisor, who is responsible for working most closely with the student, having regular meetings, reviewing writing and research, and assisting the student with navigating all aspects of PhD life. The primary supervisor is supported by a supervision panel, made up of another 2-3 members of staff (some of whom can also be drawn from NCAD if desired/applicable), who meet approximately twice a year (formally) to review the student's work, and also provide additional support and advice. Every pattern of supervision is slightly different: if you elect to work with me, we will discuss in advance what style and type of supervision suits you best, although this will likely change over the years as your work progresses. I do not generally co-supervise, as I feel the primary supervisor + panel system works most effectively, but exceptions are occasionally made.

Fees

(last updated January 2019)

Fees for the PhD are set by the university; see <http://www.ucd.ie/students/fees/index.html> for details and updates.

| Research degree fees | Cost |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Non-EU students (full-time) | € 11,885 |
| Non-EU students (part-time) | € 7,955 |
| EU students (full-time) | € 6,170 |
| EU students (part-time) | € 4,080 |

NOTE: I generally recommend students pursue a PhD full-time if possible; in my experience, immersion in the research and writing produces quicker and better results. Most students find it very difficult (if not impossible) to hold down full-employment whilst also researching, but part-time work is typical.

Funding

Securing funding is often one of the most challenging aspects of a PhD. For the most part, no internal funding is available at UCD to support PhDs. This requires students to seek external forms of support, or self-fund the PhD. Be aware of the financial burdens this will impose, and plan carefully. Here are the options that are generally available:

-
- **Irish Research Council (IRC) Postgraduate Awards:** the IRC is the main funding body of postgraduate research in Ireland (<http://research.ie/funding-category/postgraduate/>) Its awards are broken down into a few types:
 - **IRC Govt. of Ireland Postgraduate Fellowship:** this is the main type of PhD funding available in Ireland. It's very competitive, but also very generous. Deadlines are in November for the next academic year; applications must be undertaken with the guidance and assistance of your proposed supervisor.
 - **IRC Employment based / Enterprise partner fellowships:** these are fellowship awards where the PhD is co-funded by the IRC and another organisations (can be for-profit or non-profit). We have been successful with previous applicants with this scheme, but it is under-utilised by cultural organisations at present. The organisation does have to commit to a certain degree of matching funding, but it can potentially be a good fit for a candidate, whose project dovetails with the interest of a specific organisation. Come speak to me if this is of interest to you.
 - **Teaching/tutoring:** If you have a background in Art History, you may be eligible to undertake paid work for us as a tutor in our BA programme. This is an excellent way to gain teaching experience and learn the basics of lecturing, assessment, and running modules. We can discuss opportunities further, as these change annually. Keep in mind the remuneration is not high, and usually isn't enough to fully support a student with fees as well as living costs, although many PhD students use it as a form of partial support.
 - **Working:** most (if not all) of our students also undertake part-time work of some kind, both academic and non-academic. Part-time work is absolutely manageable alongside a full-time PhD, but be aware that there may be times when complete focus is needed (especially in the run-up to submission).
 - **Personal funds / loans:** many of our students rely on their own funding, support from parents, or student loans to support their study. Again, it's important to be realistic about job prospects afterwards, and be careful with your financial planning.
 - **Other scholarships:** from time to time, specific scholarship opportunities become available (such as the Thomas Dammann Award for research in Irish art); we will of course let you know if any opportunities for which you are eligible arise. Travel and conference funding is also regularly available at the university.

Other support

- **Humanities Institute:** I encourage all of my students to take desk space in the Humanities Institute, which is a community of postgraduate students housed in a building on campus. In exchange for a desk space in a communal office, free printing, and administrative support, you must commit to participating in and attending the lecture series and workshops offered by the HI. This is an excellent way of learning more about other disciplines and exposing yourself to new ideas and ways of thinking; many of the academics brought to the HI are world-class. All of my students who've worked in the HI have found it one of their most rewarding experiences. It enables you to build a postgrad community that extends beyond the School, run your own conferences and events (with funding available), and form friendships that will last long past your time at UCD. Desk space is competitive and highly sought after, so it's really only suitable if you plan to spend a significant amount of time in your office on campus

Visas & issues for international students

UCD has an excellent International Students Office that can assist with issues and concerns around immigration, visas, housing, etc.: <http://www.ucd.ie/international/> . As a former non-EU student myself, I can also assist with queries you may have; we have had many international students in the School over the years.

A few common questions:

- **Working:** Students from the EEA are free to take up full-time or part-time employment in Ireland while studying. Students from outside the EEA are entitled to take up casual employment up to 20 hours part-time work per week, except for holiday periods when it is permissible to work full-time (i.e. up to 40 hours per week). Check with the international office for more details.
- **Graduate visas:** obtaining a postgraduate degree in Ireland entitles you to apply for a 2-year extension on your student visa, if you would like to stay in Ireland and continue working beyond graduation (see here for more info and any updates to the scheme: https://www.icosirl.ie/eng/student_information/third_level_graduate_scheme.html). Many of our students have availed of this benefit, which is quite generous in comparison to other countries (eg the UK, for example, which is much more restrictive.)

PROCESS & EXPERIENCE

Supervision meetings

In general, students meet with their supervisor several times a semester to review research work, discuss pieces of writing, etc. Meetings are quite individual and take different forms; the frequency of meetings also varies depending on the student's schedule, location, and stage of work. If you decide to work with me, we will have a conversation in advance in terms of what schedule will suit you. I am also always contactable via email.

Coursework

UCD offers a 'structured' PhD programme, which is outlined in detail here: <https://www.ucd.ie/graduatestudies/researchprogrammes/structuredphd/>. As part of the PhD a certain amount of coursework 'credit' is required. This can be obtained flexibly in several ways: by taking postgraduate level taught modules for pass/fail credit; by publishing; by presenting conference papers; or by teaching. Taught coursework *is not* a major portion of the PhD, however, which is assessed based on the dissertation only.

Transfer Panel Assessment

After 12-18 months of registration, PhD students undergo the Transfer Panel Assessment (TAP). Here a significant piece of writing (usually a draft chapter), the research plan, and a presentation are assessed by a panel that consists of an external assessor, and some of the panel members (the supervisor does not take place). The majority of students pass this 'checkpoint' and proceed to Stage 2 of the PhD; a small minority are advised that the PhD should not progress, and recommendations made for an exit strategy (often submitting work to date for an MLitt degree). This is an important stage of the PhD ensuring that the work is progressing as expected, and that the PhD is viable from both the student and university perspective.

Examination and Viva

The examination of the thesis takes place after final submission, and consists of a review of the dissertation and an oral examination. An external examiner will lead this process, who will be an academic expert in your field from another university, and will be joined by an internal examiner from UCD, as well as a chair. Together the viva panel will recommend whether the PhD has been achieved, and/or the extent of revisions required.

Format of the PhD

The PhD generally consists of a written dissertation of 80-100,000 words. We do have some flexibility with the format of the PhD, but this must be discussed and negotiated with your supervisor in advance. Some students have opted, for example, to include an exhibition or other form of creative work in part-fulfilment of the PhD. Please note however that we do not accept fully practice-led PhDs.

The student experience

I'm always happy to put applicants in touch with current and previous PhD students, who can speak candidly about their experience - just email me for details.

NEXT STEPS

Still interested? Here are the next steps to follow:

(1) Arrange for a meeting

If you haven't already, email me for an appointment so we can discuss the PhD process and speak more about your ideas (emily.mark@ucd.ie).

(2) Develop a research proposal

A full research proposal (c.1,500-2,000 words) will be required before any student will be accepted. This should contain:

- A research question
- A proposed methodology
- A preliminary literature review and bibliography
- An outline of the contribution this research will make to knowledge

Contact me for a template format, and for sample PhD proposals. You may wish to submit this in advance of a one-on-one meeting, but it's up to you.

(3) Provide a writing sample

I require all of the students applying to work with me to submit an example of previous academic writing; please contact me for details.

(4) Decide on a start date

Students may begin in September, January, or May of each academic year. Applications must be lodged about 2 months before your intended start date.

(5) Make a formal application

Information about the formal application is here: <https://www.ucd.ie/graduatestudies/researchprogrammes/applicationprocess/>. You will need to make an online application, which will require:

- A research proposal
- A short personal statement
- Transcripts
- References
- English level proficiency requirements (if needed)

This will be reviewed by the School and the Graduate Board of the College; however, ensuring your supervisor's acceptance of your application *before* you make the formal application is key.

I hope you found this useful; don't forget to get in touch with any questions: [**emily.mark@ucd.ie**](mailto:emily.mark@ucd.ie)