



UCD School of Politics &
International Relations (SPIRe)

Politics and International Relations Handbook 2025-26

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Welcome to the Pol & IR Programme

Welcome to the Politics and International Relations PhD programme! We are delighted to meet you and look forward to working with you over the next years.

Most of the information you will need for your studies at UCD is in the latest version of the [Graduate Research Student Handbook](#).

This brief document points out items and additional information specific to the Pol & IR PhD programme.

While studying at UCD, you will notice that there are PhD students in a large variety of different specializations within SPIRe, as well as specialized thematic PhDs that cross disciplines. Within SPIRe, we have students working on comparative politics, international relations, social science methodology, British-Irish studies, European studies, Asian politics, Middle Eastern studies, political theory, human rights, development studies, nationalism and ethnic conflict, et cetera.

There are also two thematic PhD programmes that fall under the SPIRe remit: Quantitative and Computational Social Science (QCSS) and Global Human Development (GHD).

The course requirements for these students can differ, but there is significant overlap with those in the PhD Politics and International Relations.

If after reading this handbook you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us or anyone listed under contact details below.

David Farrell (SPIRe PhD Programme Director and Graduate Director)

Dara Gannon (SPIRe School Manager and PhD Administrator)

Programme Structure

SPIRe's PhD Politics and International Relations programme spans four years. Entry to the Politics and International Relations programme is usually in September but there are also some very exceptional January start students.

In addition to writing the PhD thesis (either monograph or set of integrated papers format), the programme includes substantial coursework in research methodology and substantive areas in politics and international relations. Furthermore, primarily through the Graduate Studies unit, additional courses and workshops are available to help you with your thesis and professional development.

The MLitt is a 15-month programme and serves as an exit-option for people who choose not to complete their PhD programme. It includes at least 20 credits from the PhD taught modules plus the remainder in the form of a thesis (approximately 20,000-40,000 words).

Stage 1	September Start	January Start
Initial RSP Meeting	Trimester 1	Trimester 1
1st RSP Progress Assessment	By end of trimester 2	By end of trimester 2
1st PhD Workshop Presentation	Trimester 2	Trimester 3
2nd RSP Progress Assessment	By end of trimester 4	By end of trimester 4
2nd PhD Workshop Presentation	Trimester 4	Trimester 4
Course work (at least 40 credits with a minimum B grade on average)	By end of trimester 4	By end of trimester 4
Research Integrity Training	Before end of Year 1	Before end of Year 1
STA	Beginning of trimester 5	Beginning of trimester 5
Attendance in the SPIRe Seminar Series	Continuous	Continuous

Stage 2	September Start	January Start
Course work (any remaining to a total of 50 credits)	By submission	By submission
Regular RSP meetings (at least 2 per year)	At least 2 per year	At least 2 per year
Presentation in the SPIRe Seminar Series	Year 3	Year 3
Attendance in the SPIRe seminar series	Continuous	Continuous

RSP = Research Studies Panel

STA = Stage Transfer Assessment

Coursework

SPIRe PhD candidates in Politics and International Relations must complete **50 credits** of coursework, at least 40 of which should be completed by the time of the transfer to Stage 2.

Please note that in accordance with UCD regulations, this differs from the university minimum requirement of 30 taught credits. Of these 50 credits, 30 will be devoted to methodologically oriented courses (focusing on research design, quantitative methods, and qualitative methods). The remaining 20 required credits (and any additional credits beyond 50) can be filled with modules selected in consultation with your supervisor.

There is a wide range of modules available throughout the University. The university's Graduate Studies unit also offers a range of both taught PhD modules and PhD professional training workshops: details of these can be found [here](#).

All PhD candidates on the Politics & International Relations programme must complete the three core modules.

Core Modules 2025-26

Autumn Term

- [POL50070 Quantitative Methods I](#) (Dr Yoo Sun Jung) – **CORE**
- [POL50220 Social Science Methodology](#) (Dr Thomas Daubler) - **CORE**

Spring Term

- [POL50200 Qualitative Research Methods](#) (Dr Lucia Tiscornia) – **CORE**

Option Modules 2025-26

Autumn or Spring Term

[POL50230 PhD Professional Development](#)* (Professor Ben Tonra) – **5 Credits**

*Registration to this module must be with approval of the supervisor **and** RSP. **It is only available to Stage 2 students.**

For more information on the module, [click here](#)

There is also a broad range of option modules available across the School and the College:

[Click here to access these modules.](#)

Collaboration with Trinity College Dublin

SPIRe collaborates with the Department of Political Science in Trinity College Dublin (TCD), with the sharing of certain modules.

TCD operates a Coding camp for incoming students, as a preparatory course for Quants I. This is not compulsory.

This year's Coding Camp will take place from Monday 8th to Friday 12th September 2025.

Additionally, SPIRe PhD students can take **one** substantive module at the Department of Political Science in TCD over the course of their degree. Available modules will be communicated by email before the start of the academic year.

Research Integrity Training

Research Integrity Training is a compulsory element of all research degree programmes for students admitted after August 2019. For more information, follow the link [here](#).

Completion of this training is a prerequisite for transfer to Stage 2 and you must provide a screenshot of a 'PX' grade in this module.

Research Ethics

Research ethics applies to all members of the UCD community who conduct research that involves human and/or animal subjects. Prospective researchers must read the policies and guidelines on the [research ethics website](#).

It is the responsibility of every PhD researcher to ensure appropriate ethical approval or an exemption thereof before engaging in any relevant research activities.

Research Studies Panel (RSP)

One of the first tasks on starting your PhD is to select suitable people for your RSP.

The function of your RSP is twofold: First and foremost, it is an advisory panel that will provide you with feedback on different aspects of your project. Secondly, during Stage 1 it also is an assessment panel charged with evaluating whether you make sufficient progress on your project (see below: Progress assessment).

In addition to the requirements set out in the [Graduate Research Student Handbook](#), please note the following SPIRe-specific regulations:

Membership of RSP

The panel comprises the principal supervisor/co-supervisor and at least two (but normally no more than four) advisers, one of whom must be a UCD faculty member. The RSP will appoint a chair independent of the supervisor/co-supervisor. Research Studies Panel Advisers may include faculty, adjunct, visiting or research staff or relevant professional staff of the University or external to the University.

While the inclusion of academics from other schools might be helpful especially in the context of interdisciplinary projects, ordinarily no more than one RSP member should come from outside SPIRe, unless there are a minimum of four advisers on the panel.

Establishment of RSP

You should engage with your supervisor within the first few weeks of your first trimester to establish the full membership of your RSP. When you know the makeup of your RSP, you should email the PhD Administrator so that the details can be entered on your record.

Meeting Frequency

RSPs should meet at least twice per academic year throughout the entire PhD process. During stage 1 there should be at least the following three meetings:

Initial meeting

You should meet your RSP by the middle of the first trimester to become acquainted with them and to give you access to the additional expertise to support your work.

First progress assessment meeting

The purpose of this meeting is to ensure that students have a viable proposal and viable research timetable. If a student is to complete within three-four years, then it is essential to ensure the project is defined at an early stage. By the relevant deadline in the above table, students must submit:

- A detailed research proposal (approximately 2500 words);
- A detailed work schedule;

- A piece of substantive work, for example a literature review or methodology section (up to 5000 words).

The panel must report its assessment of the student's progress in the RPDP for this meeting.

Second progress assessment meeting

The second progress meeting should take place by the end of trimester 4. The RSP must have received and reviewed one chapter of the student's thesis before this meeting.

The panel must report its assessment of the student's progress in the RPDP for this meeting.

STA preparation meeting

The RSP should meet roughly two months before the STA application to provide feedback as well as prepare the RPDP that is submitted as part of the STA application. (See below for details).

The panel must state whether or not they support the student's progression into stage 2 in the RPDP for this meeting.

Meeting Reports

For each RSP meeting a [Research and Professional Development Plan](#) (RPDP) should be developed and uploaded to the student record on SisWeb by the student. A copy with all signatures should also be forwarded to the PhD Administrator.

Progress Assessment

PhD candidates on the PhD programme in Politics and International Relations are required to participate in assessments of their progress at two points (students on other structured programmes should consult with their programme director).

Transfer From Stage 1 to Stage 2

In order to progress from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of the Politics and International Relations PhD Programme, a formal assessment of the student's progress takes place at the end of Stage 1.

The formal assessment is conducted by a Stage Transfer Assessment panel. The Principal Supervisor, and any co-supervisors, are not normally members of the panel. The purpose of this meeting with the School's nominated STA committee is to provide a detailed and rigorous check on the student's progress and the quality of their work. For this transfer assessment the PhD candidate must have completed **40 credits of coursework**, including all core modules, with a minimum of B grade on average; they also must have presented twice at the PhD workshops (see below).

According to UCD regulations the STA must be completed within five trimesters.

The Transfer Assessment Panel base their judgement on the following materials:

- One piece of substantive written work which will comprise either a draft chapter or a draft paper (5000-8000 words)
- An updated research proposal/work plan briefly stating the core research problem, relevant research questions, and research strategy, and including a detailed chapter structure and work
- A copy of the student's latest transcript
- A written statement of progress from the Principal Supervisor
- A copy of the latest RPDP. Please ensure that an RSP meeting is held at least two months prior to your transfer assessment.
- Proof of a PX grade on the Research Integrity Training module

Please note: the student will be required to make a brief presentation (3-5 mins) to the panel.

After careful review of the documentation and a meeting with the candidate, the STA Committee will make one of the following recommendations to the UCD Graduate Research Board (GRB):

- Transfer to Stage 2 of the PhD programme.
- Resubmission of revised materials at a later date, with a timeline agreed between the RSP and the STA committee (maximum 6 months).
- Transfer to another graduate programme, utilizing, where possible and where appropriate, the credits accumulated.
- Termination of the registration with a certificate for any modules for which credit has been awarded.

The recommendation will have to be formally agreed by the GRB and any proposed transfer to another programme will have to be agreed with that board.

SPIRe Seminar Series

SPIRe organizes a seminar series for all staff and graduate students in the school. Attendance at these seminars provides an excellent opportunity for you to develop your presentation skills, learn about research that takes place across the school, and practice providing constructive feedback in an academic setting. For these reasons, this is a **core requirement** of the SPIRe Politics and International Relations PhD programme and all PhD candidates with supervisors in SPIRe are expected to attend all seminar sessions.

These seminars will take place in the school boardroom (F301) on Wednesdays from 12-1pm. The Series programme can be found [here](#).

After the transfer to Stage 2 of the PhD programme (during the 3rd year of the programme for full-time students), all PhD candidates will be required to present at the regular weekly seminar series.

At the beginning of your 3rd year, please contact the SPIRe Seminar Series Coordinator, to ensure that you are included in the presentation schedule.

PhD Workshop

In the first stage of the PhD programme, there will be a workshop session scheduled at the end of each trimester. All PhD candidates with a supervisor in SPIRe will be required to present at these workshops, according to the timeline on P.2. The first of these two presentations could potentially take the form of presenting your research design. The second should take the form of a proper academic research presentation, i.e., either a paper or a chapter of your thesis. These presentations are required for transfer to Stage 2. For each presentation, one of the academic staff members of the school will be assigned as discussant.

Early Career Researcher Forum

The SPIRe Early Career Researcher Forum is a new series of events at the School of Politics and International Relations. The PhD Forum provides guidance to early-career researchers and facilitates informal discussions between SPIRe faculty and PhD students.

Two SPIRe faculty members will provide a short overview of the topic and reflect on their experiences. The remaining time will be devoted to questions and answers.

More information can be found [here](#).

Thesis Preparation

Different theses have very different forms, please work with your supervisor and RSP on determining which thesis form (monograph or in the alternative thesis by papers format), structure, and length etc. is best suited for your project.

You can find the general requirement for a PhD thesis [here](#).

Thesis as a Collection of Papers

The current Graduate Research Board guidelines on thesis formats can be accessed [here](#).

However, in the case of the multiple-paper format thesis there are some subject-specific requirements which apply to PhD candidates at SPIRe. These must be also taken into account and can be found on the FAQ section of the 'Current Student' webpage.

If you intend to pursue this thesis format, this should be discussed in advance with your supervisor.

For non-SPIRe students, please check with your supervisor to determine if there are other, school-specific requirements.

If you intend to pursue a multiple-paper format, this should be discussed in advance with your supervisor.

Thesis Submission and Viva Voce

Please plan well ahead for your submission as setting up the exam committee and getting it approved by the Graduate Research Board can take several months.

For information on the process of submitting the thesis, please see [here](#).

Please also keep an eye on the [SPIRe PhD FAQ](#) section for up to date information.

Funding Opportunities

SPIRe Fund

SPIRe has a very limited amount of money available to fund participation by its own postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers in Irish and international conferences and summer schools each year. Applications will be announced and reviewed by the UCD SPIRe Research Committee. Funding calls will be communicated via the SPIRe email ListServ, along with the application form and guidelines.

Irish Research Council (IRC)

See [this page](#) for postdoctoral opportunities.

Political Studies Association of Ireland (PSAI)

The Political Studies Association of Ireland set up a funding support scheme for PhD researchers to attend national and international conferences. The covers costs for conference registration and/or travel expenses of up to €1,250. Note that applicants need to be PSAI members. See [here](#) for more information.

General Information

Important Dates

For UCD term dates, [see here](#)

Please note teaching dates for TCD modules may differ from those in UCD. You should consult the TCD website for further information.

Class Reps

The class reps for the SPIRe PhD cohort are **Ciaran O'Brien** (ciaran.obrien3@ucdconnect.ie) and **Linette Lim** (linette.lim@ucdconnect.ie). Class Reps are invited to attend the SPIRe school board meetings, which typically take place twice per trimester. Please contact your class reps at any stage if you have issues/queries and, if needed, these can be brought to that forum. That does not preclude you from contacting the PhD Director or PhD

Administrator personally.

Desk Space

F302 is the school's PhD room and is available to any PhD student **whose supervisor is based in SPIRe**. It has wireless connectivity and space for working on laptops. Space in the room is limited and the PhD class reps have taken on the task of access allocation.

Research students may apply, with the support of their supervisor, for a workspace in the College of Social Sciences and Law research student rooms or in UCD Geary Institute. Space in these locations is limited but the School will endeavour to ensure that all research students who need workspace on campus will be accommodated.

Subject to the opening hours of the building you will have access to F302 at all times via the key code (which will be provided to you at induction). Do not divulge this code to anyone outside of the School. Please ensure that the door is kept locked when unoccupied. In addition, the last person to leave in the evening should ensure that the equipment is switched off and the wall sockets are also switched off.

It is also possible to get '**out of hours**' access to the Newman Building. Please ask the PhD Administrator for more information.

Welfare Resources

[UCD Dignity & Respect Support Service](#)

[UCD Student Counselling Service](#)

[UCD Student Health Service](#)

[UCD Student Advisers](#)

UCD Careers Network

The main webpage of the UCD Careers Network can be found [here](#). You can also book a 20-minute 1-2-1 consultation with one of the Belfield-based Career and Skills Consultants.

Click [here](#) for more info.

Administration

The PhD Administrator for the Pol & IR programme is Ms Dara Gannon, who is available to provide administrative advice and information to all research graduate students (contact details at the end of this document).

Computer, photocopying, fax and other facilities

Please consult with Dara Gannon about access to photocopying and printing facilities.

Library

When you register with the University, you will be given a UCD student card. This also acts as your Library card. You will need your card to enter and exit the James Joyce Library. A UCARD system has been introduced, which provides an electronic purse for making purchases within the University.

[UCD Library](#) has access to a vast range of online journals and electronic databases, many of them accessible from remote locations as well as on-campus. A dedicated information session will be arranged for SPIRe research students during the first semester.

ALCID

This is a co-operative scheme between a group of participating Irish university libraries, which enables postgraduate students (Doctoral, Masters by research and by exam) to have access and reference rights to the stock of participating libraries. The library of Trinity College Dublin is particularly useful as it is a Copyright Library and contains a wide range of books, journals and other publications.

You can apply for an ALCID card at the Information Desk in any UCD Library or download the application form: www.ucd.ie/library/use/visitlibs/

ILL - Inter Library Loans

Many publications not available directly from the Library are obtainable via the Inter-Library Loan Service. This service is available to all staff and registered students of the College and to registered external borrowers. Staff and students are charged €6.00 per application. Journal

articles from branch libraries can be obtained for readers on payment of €2.50. More information can be found [here](#)

SPIRe has a limited amount of funding available to assist PhD students with inter-library loans. This can be accessed on a case-by-case basis by contacting the PhD administrator, Dara Gannon.

Contact Details

Pol & IR Programme Director

Professor David Farrell
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Administrator, PhD Programme

Ms Dara Gannon
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Dean of Graduate Studies and Deputy Registrar

Prof Emma Sokell
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Graduate Research Administrator (Graduate Studies)

Dr Jennifer Sullivan
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Please do not contact Jennifer directly – go through the PhD administrator

Head of School

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