



4 Year Fully-Funded PhD: Are plant functional trait relationships stable through time, or are they emergent and context-dependent?

Post Specification

Post Title:	PhD Studentship
Post Status:	Full-time or Part-time.
Research Group / Department / School:	Plant Soil Biogeochemistry Group, School of Natural Sciences, Discipline of Botany, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Location:	Botany Building Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin College Green, Dublin 2, Ireland
Reports to:	Dr Richard Nair
Terms & Conditions:	4 year position, including annual tax-free stipend of €25,000, as well as project costs and international student fees. Expected start date: 1 st September 2026
Hours of Work:	Full Time
Closing Date:	Until filled (first review 18 June 2026)

Post Summary

In this position we are seeking a candidate to perform both fieldwork and cutting-edge data analysis in plant functional ecology, working on both above- and below- ground plant traits.

Plant functional trait ecology has revolutionised our practical ability to link ecology to climate change and biosphere services. You will explore a core assumption in plant functional trait ecology: that relationships between traits within a species are stable through time and context. Plants continuously and plastically adjust their physiology and structure through processes like growth, ageing, and competition, yet this temporal and contextual variability is poorly captured—both above- and below- ground.

You will primarily work on managed grasslands in Ireland, which provide a natural testbed of controlled species study traits of multiple species through time under real environmental conditions. In several of these, our group are installing a network of unique automated ‘minirhizotron’ root cameras and ancillary sensors. You will both benefit from these unique data and assist in providing ground truth for these systems, via both manual and machine-assisted phenotyping, on both leaves and roots. Additionally, you will be able to use community databases of trait data and/or smaller scale manipulative experiments, to examine how trait relationships evolve over time and in different community contexts.

You will work within group spanning ecological science, engineering, and computer science methods. Fieldwork on this project will take place in Ireland but there will also be the potential to assist in other fieldwork in the UK and Spain and incorporate data from these sites into the project. Leaf and root trait analysis, and soil analysis facilities, as well as computing resources are available within the wider research group. International collaborations, conference attendance and research trips are also expected as part of this project.

Standard Duties and Responsibilities of the Post

You will develop aspects of wider project work in the group, bringing expertise in plant trait ecology which will develop in your own PhD project while also contributing to group activity. You will participate in fieldwork, along with other members of the team, perform lab analyses, and work with data.

Funding Information

This position is funded via a Trinity College Dublin Research Doctorate Award (TRDA). Wider project costs are paid primarily from a Research Ireland-Royal Society University Research Fellowship (2023-2031), awarded to Richard Nair. This role is open to applicants without pre-residency or nationality requirements, although please note the person specification and requirement to work locally in Ireland.

Person Specification

Qualifications

A bachelor's or master's degree in ecology, environmental science, plant sciences, or another relevant discipline.

Knowledge & Experience (Essential & Desirable)

Essential

- Experience in plant trait ecology or plant phenotyping, preferably under field conditions, or demonstrable related experience in an academic or non-academic context and willingness to engage with such methods
- Demonstrable capacity to think critically and creatively, and develop into a researcher in control of their own hypothesis-driven project
- Demonstrable quantitative skills, including ecologically-relevant statistical methods
- Good quality written and spoken English.
- Hold a driving license valid in Ireland at, or shortly after, 1st September 2026
- Meet the Trinity College Dublin [postgraduate entry requirements](#) and be able to start a PhD in September 2026.

Desirable

- Demonstrable experience in interdisciplinary projects or similar settings and a willingness to engage cross discipline
- Interest and/or experience in applications of AI in image-based field ecology

Skills & Competencies

- Proven ability to work as part of a team and independently.
- Highly motivated individual with the ability to effectively plan, execute, and deliver project outputs within deadlines.

- Effective communication, interpersonal and organisation skills.
- Excellent team working skills with emphasis on equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Application Procedure

Applicants should submit a full Curriculum Vitae, including the names and contact details of 2 referees and a 1-page personal statement detailing why you are interested in the project, to:-

Richard Nair richard.nair@tcd.ie with the subject line '2026 Plant Traits PhD application'

The first review of candidates will take place on 18th June 2026.

We strive for a bias free recruitment process so we ask you to not send CVs that include a photo or information of a personal nature (e.g. age, marital status, nationality). Statements will be read before CVs. We encourage applications from underrepresented groups in STEM.

Enquiries are welcome in advance of application. Please address all enquiries by email to Dr. Richard Nair, richard.nair@tcd.ie,

Further Information for Applicants

Botany at Trinity College Dublin	https://www.tcd.ie/Botany/
Plant Soil Biogeochemistry Group	https://richardnair.github.io/
URL Link to Area	www.tcd.ie
URL Link to Human Resources	https://www.tcd.ie/hr/

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

Trinity is Ireland's leading university and is ranked 98th in the world (QS World University Rankings 2023). Founded in 1592, the University is steeped in history with a reputation for excellence in education, research and innovation.

Located on an iconic campus in the heart of Dublin's city centre, Trinity has 18,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students across our three faculties – Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; Engineering, Mathematics and Science; and Health Sciences.

Trinity is ranked as the 12th most international university in the world (Times Higher Education Rankings 2020) and is also the highest ranked university in Ireland.

The pursuit of excellence through research and scholarship is at the heart of a Trinity education, and our researchers have an outstanding publication record and strong record of grant success. Trinity has developed 19 broad-based multidisciplinary research themes that cut across disciplines and facilitate world-leading research and collaboration within the University and with colleagues around the world. Trinity is also home to 5 leading flagship research institutes:

- Trinity Biomedical Sciences Institute (TBSI)
- Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience (TCIN)
- Trinity Translational Medical Institute (TTMI)
- Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute (TLRH)
- Centre for Research on Adaptive Nanostructures and Nanodevices (CRANN)

Trinity is 1st in Europe for Producing Entrepreneurs for the 7th year in a row and Europe's only representative in the world's top-50 universities (Pitchbook University Report 2021-2022).

Trinity is home to the famous Old Library and to the historic Book of Kells as well as other internationally significant holdings in manuscripts, maps and early printed material. The

Trinity Library is a legal deposit library, granting the University the right to claim a copy of every book published in Ireland and the UK. At present, the Library's holdings span approximately 6.5 million printed items, 400,000 e-books and 150,000 e-journals. With over 120,000 alumni, Trinity's tradition of independent intellectual inquiry has produced some of the world's finest, most original minds including the writers Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett (Nobel laureates), the mathematician William Rowan Hamilton and the physicist Ernest Walton (Nobel laureate), the political thinker Edmund Burke, and the former President of Ireland Mary Robinson. This tradition finds expression today in a campus culture of scholarship, innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship and dedication to societal reform.

Rankings

Trinity College Dublin is the top ranked university in Ireland. Using the QS methodology we are ranked 98th in the world and using the Times Higher Education World University Ranking methodology we are 146th in the World.

- Trinity College Dublin is Ireland's No.1 University (QS World University Ranking 2023, Times Higher Education Rankings 2022)
- Trinity is ranked 98th in the World (QS World University Ranking 2023)
- Trinity is ranked No.1 in Europe for Producing Entrepreneurs for the 7th year in a row Pitchbook 2021-2022

Full details are available at: www.tcd.ie/research/about/rankings.

The Selection Process in Trinity

The Selection Committee (Interview Panel) may include members of the Academic and Administrative community together with External Assessor(s) who are expert in the area. Applications will be acknowledged by email. If you do not receive confirmation of receipt within 1 day of submitting your application online, please contact the named Recruitment Partner on the job specification immediately and prior to the closing date/time.

Given the degree of co-ordination and planning to have a Selection Committee available on the specified date, the University regrets that it may not be in a position to offer alternate selection dates. Where candidates are unavailable, reserves may be drawn from a shortlist. Outcomes of interviews are notified in writing to candidates and are issued no later than 5 working days following the selection day.

In some instances the Selection Committee may avail of telephone or video conferencing. The University's selection methods may consist of any or all of the following: Interviews, Presentations, Psychometric Testing, References and Situational Exercises.

It is the policy of the University to conduct pre-employment medical screening/full pre-employment medicals. Information supplied by candidates in their application (Cover Letter and CV) will be used to shortlist for interview.

Applications from non-EEA citizens are welcomed. However, eligibility is determined by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and further information on the Highly Skills Eligible Occupations List is set out in Schedule 3 of the Regulations <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/Employment-Permit-Eligibility/Highly-Skilled-Eligible-Occupations-List/> and the Ineligible Categories of Employment are set out in Schedule 4 of the Regulations <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/Employment-Permit-Eligibility/Ineligible-Categories-of-Employment/> . Non-EEA candidates should note that the onus is on them to secure a visa to travel to Ireland prior to interview. Non-EEA candidates should also be aware that even if successful at interview, an appointment to the post is contingent on the securing of an employment permit.

Equal Opportunities Policy

Trinity is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to employment policies, procedures and practices which do not discriminate on grounds such as gender, civil status, family status, age, disability, race, religious belief, sexual orientation or membership of the travelling community. On that basis we encourage and welcome talented people from all backgrounds to join our staff community. Trinity's Diversity Statement can be viewed in full at <https://www.tcd.ie/diversity-inclusion/diversity-statement>.

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