

PPGN Information for Supervisors and DTLPs

Overview

The **PhD Peer Guidance Network (PPGN)** is a new pilot initiative delivered under the **Postgraduate Renewal Programme** in collaboration with the **Postgraduate Advisory Service** and **Student Counselling Service**. It aims to strengthen the support framework for doctoral students at the University, aligning with institutional strategic priorities to enhance postgraduate wellbeing and foster an inclusive, thriving research community. The initiative is co-funded by Trinity Development & Alumni.

Growing evidence highlights significant mental health challenges among PhD candidates (Evans et al., 2018; Nature, 2024). The PPGN initiative seeks to address transitional and developmental challenges faced by new doctoral researchers (academic pressures, social integration and work-life balance) while providing experienced PhD students with opportunities to develop leadership and mentoring skills.

The PPGN pilot project is due to run for 15 months from November 2025 to February 2027, with mentoring activities taking place between March-December 2026.

Mentoring Programme

The PhD Peer Mentoring programme is a **faculty-based, group mentoring** initiative designed to support new doctoral researchers during the early stages of their PhD journey. The programme connects experienced PhD students (mentors) with new PhD students (mentees) in a structured, supportive group model.

The programme will run for eight months (April-November 2026) and aims to complement academic supervision by providing peer-led support, community building and practical insight into doctoral study.

The Peer Mentoring Programme seeks to:

- Support new PhD students in their transition into doctoral study.
- Foster a sense of belonging and community within faculties.
- Provide informal, experience-based guidance from senior doctoral researchers.
- Reduce isolation and promote wellbeing.
- Develop leadership and professional skills among mentor volunteers.

How the Mentoring Programme Works

Recruitment and Training of Mentors

- Volunteer mentors (current Yr2+ PhD candidates) apply via application form.
- Selected mentors complete mandatory training prior to the programme launch.
- During training, mentors co-design elements of the programme content and session topics.

Support Structures

Mentors are supported throughout by:

- The Programme Officer
- Postgraduate Advisory Service
- Student Counselling Service

Clear guidance, resources and escalation pathways are in place to ensure mentors understand boundaries and refer students to appropriate services where needed.

Group Mentoring Model

- Mentoring takes place in faculty-based groups, not one-to-one pairings.
- Each mentor team (approximately three mentors per faculty) works with a group of new PhD students from the same faculty.
- All new March 2026 PhD students are automatically enrolled in the mentoring programme ('opt out' model).
- The programme begins with a launch event, bringing together all mentors and mentees.

Programme Activities

Over the April-November period mentors will:

- Organise three informal social meet-ups.
- Facilitate three structured themed discussion sessions on topics relevant to PhD life. (e.g. managing workload; navigating research culture; wellbeing; building networks).

Over the period of the programme, approximately one event per month will take place (with a break over the summer).

The programme concludes with a final event where mentors and mentees come together to mark the completion of the programme. Mentors are rewarded a certificate in recognition of their contribution.

Relationship to Academic Supervision

The Peer Mentoring programme does **not** replace academic supervision. Rather it:

- Provides informal peer support.
- Offers practical insight from lived PhD experiences.
- Encourages open discussion of common challenges.

Mentors **do not** provide academic direction, formal research feedback or counselling. Supervisors remain the primary and crucial sources of academic guidance and oversight.

Role of Supervisors and DTLPs

Supervisors and DTLPs are invited to:

- Inform new doctoral students about the opportunity to participate.
- Encourage new doctoral students to engage with the mentoring programme.
- Support students' engagement/involvement where appropriate.

Participation by students is voluntary. While the time commitment is moderate, supervisors are encouraged to view mentor participation as valuable professional development.

Benefits for Doctoral Researchers

For Mentees:

- Increased confidence and sense of belonging.
- Reduced isolation.
- Practical insight into navigating the early stages of doctoral study.

For Mentors:

- Development of leadership and facilitation skills.
- Experience in group coordination and communication.
- Formal recognition through a mentor certificate.

Further Information

For additional details, questions or suggestions, please contact:

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Or see: <https://www.tcd.ie/graduatestudies/peer-mentoring/>