

Doctoral Placements: A Co-Designed, Competency-Based Model

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ATLANTIC
OCEAN

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MTU is located in Ireland's south-west, with six campuses across Cork and Tralee Co. Kerry

~ 210km from Galway ~ 3hrs by car

Part of a highly connected national and European research ecosystem

Insights from Times Higher Education Campus

Doctoral Training: A Structural Employability Challenge

THE Oct 2025: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/why-employability-gaps-widen-academic-identity-deepens>

“It’s a strange paradox. The more highly educated someone becomes, the less prepared they often feel for their career.”

“By the doctoral and especially postdoctoral stage, identity and belonging are so tightly bound to the university that stepping outside can feel like stepping outside oneself.”



Reframing Doctoral Placements: From Experience to Career Preparation

Exposure to non-academic career pathways

Working across academic and enterprise contexts

Enhancement of professional skills

Apply research skills in real-world settings

Knowledge exchange and problem-solving

Building professional networks



Research Ireland's Strategic Plan 2026-2030

National policy is reframing doctoral education as a workforce and skills strategy

PhD training is not just academic pipeline — it is core workforce planning!

Programmes are designed to:

- Enable mobility across academia, industry, and public services
- Integrate PhD training within wider innovation ecosystem
- Develop transferable / “T-shaped” skills
- Align with national employability agenda and skills priorities

 **Key Message: This is a system-level shift toward diverse career pathways.**

Preparing Doctoral Candidates for Diverse Careers

Delivers value for:

Researchers

- Enhanced career readiness
- Broader employment pathways
- Stronger professional identity

Enterprise

- Access to research talent
- Innovation and knowledge transfer
- Strengthened collaboration with academia

Universities

- Increased societal impact
- Alignment with regional and national priorities
- Stronger research–enterprise ecosystems

Doctoral Placements:

Key Implementation Challenges

Careful management of the following areas:

Design & Delivery

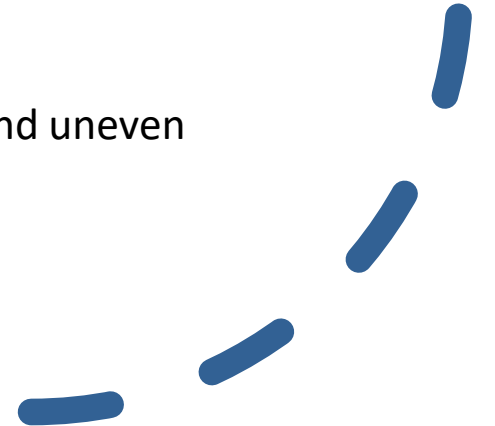
- Alignment between doctoral research project and host organisation needs
- Placements must be designed to meet minimum duration requirements and to have defined learning outcomes

Host Readiness

- Variable host readiness, including understanding of “PhD-level” work

Risks & Constraints

- Potential impact on PhD completion timelines
- Equity of access, including relocation/housing costs and uneven supervisor networks
- Intellectual property (IP) management



How MTU addresses those challenges

Early planning and involving the Enterprise Liaison Officer to broaden host sourcing beyond the supervisor contacts

Clear guidance frameworks (FAQs, PhD level task examples etc.)

Co-creation Student:Host:PI to plan the work. Flexible formats

IP Management assessed by TTO on case-by case basis

Skills development – mapping to learning outcomes

Accredited Doctoral Work Placement

Embedding Research Competence Development

- Aligns placements with recognised standards.
- Demonstrates value for both students and enterprise partners.
- Ensures placement delivers structured competence development.

THE EUROPEAN COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCHERS



(10 ECTS) Research Postgraduate Placement

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Prepare a plan for research to be carried out during work placement (20%)
2. Develop and apply existing and new knowledge, specialised skills and technical training to research in a placement organisation.
3. Exchange new knowledge and skills between the placement organisation and the Institute.
4. Develop a professional report or portfolio evidencing their learning during work placement.
(50%)

At end of placement student presents their research findings (30%)

Principles of the Credited Work Placement Model

Research-led

Support the generation/validation/application of original research
Must align with the PhD project

Structured and Developmental

Supports achievement of Level 10 outcomes

Impact Orientated

Enhances impact, relevance and real-world application

Student centred

Flexible, individualised model

Quality Assured

Defined learning agreement, outputs and assessment criteria

Doctoral career preparation is most effective when it is:

- ✓ Embedded in the doctoral journey
- ✓ Co-designed across sectors
- ✓ Structured and assessed
- ✓ Aligned to competency frameworks



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