



**Doctoral School 2025  
ENGAGED RESEARCH  
DESIGN FOR  
SUSTAINABILITY**



# ENGAGED RESEARCH DESIGN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

This innovative program is designed to equip early-stage PhD students with the essential skills, knowledge, and tools to address the complex and interconnected challenges posed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through a blend of interdisciplinary learning and place-based experiences, participants will gain a deeper understanding of sustainability, develop critical competencies, and learn how to engage effectively with all relevant research stakeholders to create meaningful impact.



# PROGRAMME RATIONALE

This program offers a unique opportunity for early-stage PhD students to develop the skills, knowledge, and tools necessary to address the complex challenges facing our world today. Through an interdisciplinary, place-based learning experience, participants will gain a deeper understanding of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how their research can contribute to addressing these pressing issues. Engaged research, a central focus of the program, involves rigorous research approaches that emphasise collaboration with stakeholders, including government policymakers, civil society organisations, industry, and the public. The bespoke training package is intended to equip you with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to incorporate an engaged approach in your research, enhancing the societal impact of your work.

## PROGRAMME AIMS

The aim of this training programme is to facilitate you in building transdisciplinary relationships with peers and mentors, to enable collaborative learning, and to introduce you to the ways and means that you can develop more stakeholder engagement in your research. In doing so, we hope to encourage and provoke critical thinking and reflection in an active learning environment, in what we hope will be a meaningful, challenging, and above all, practical, learning experience.

- **Apply Regenerative Practices:**  
Students will demonstrate the ability to design and implement research projects that incorporate regenerative principles, aiming to restore and enhance environmental and social systems.
- **Develop an Engaged Research Approach:**  
Students will apply the principles of engaged research, learning how to create 'impact by design' to achieve greater involvement and societal impact.
- **Understand the dynamics of Place-Based Research:**  
Students will experience place-based research that integrates local contexts into global sustainability efforts, ensuring that their work is both relevant and impactful.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this training programme you will be able to:

- **Develop a Systems Perspective:**  
Students will be able to analyse complex sustainability challenges through the lens of living systems theory, recognising the interconnectedness of global ecosystems and human activities.
- **Collaborate Across Disciplines:**  
Students will work effectively in transdisciplinary teams, leveraging diverse perspectives to tackle 'wicked problems' and contribute to sustainable solutions.
- **Communicate their Research:**  
Students will refine their communication skills, enabling them to articulate complex concepts and research findings to a variety of stakeholders, including policymakers, industry leaders, and the public.

# WORKSHOP OUTLINE

## Program Overview

The program combines immersive, in-person workshops with flexible, self-paced learning. It begins with an intensive week of face-to-face sessions, where students engage in interactive lectures, group discussions, and hands-on activities. These sessions are designed to build a strong foundation in systems thinking, sustainability, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Programme design is based on the principles and best practice in universal design for learning. Resources are available in different formats to suit different learning styles.

## In-Person Residential Week (Physical)

The residential program offers an immersive experience combining expert-led interactive conversations on key topics such as systems thinking, sustainability principles, and the UN SDGs. Participants will engage in small group discussions to explore complex issues from diverse perspectives, alongside hands-on activities like practical exercises, simulations, and case studies that address real-world sustainability challenges. The program also includes place-based visits to explore local sustainability initiatives and opportunities for outdoor, nature-based physical activities.

## Asynchronous Learning Phase - (Online / Digital)

Following the initial week, the program transitions to an asynchronous format, allowing students to explore the material at their own pace. Weekly virtual touch points, led by international experts, provide opportunities for students to participate in guided discussions, share insights, and receive feedback on their progress. Throughout the program, students will work on place-based projects, applying their learning to real-world challenges. These projects culminate in a final presentation, where students will showcase their research and propose solutions to sustainability issues. The delivery approach is designed to foster deep engagement, critical thinking, and the practical application of knowledge.

## Weekly Plan

- **Introduction:** a short synopsis of what's coming up in this week's workshop.
- **Activity Planner:** at a glance summary of the week's workshop, resources and tasks.
- **Workshop Presentation:** workshop content presented and recorded by the subject specialist and available in a variety of forms (audio visual, audio, ppt, written).
- **Workshop Resources:** a combination of required and further reading, plus any other useful written, audio or visual resources for this workshop.
- **Workshop E-tivities:** information and instructions about the week's practical and peer group activities.
- **Feedback Friday:** online or in-person meeting to share experience, insights and learning, including your feedback to us – a simple check-in to let us know how you're getting on with the week's workshop and associated materials that we are providing.

# WORKSHOP TOPICS

This training is designed to supplement your individual academic supervision, and will be delivered online in four parts as follows:



## Part 1 – Principles and Practice of Sustainability

- Workshop 1** Tackling Wicked Problems
- Workshop 2** UN SDGs
- Workshop 3** Living Systems Principles



## Part 2 – Principles and Practices of Engaged Research

- Workshop 4** Practice and Principles of Engaged Research
- Workshop 5** Planning for Impact in Engaged Research
- Workshop 6** Methodological Approaches for Engaging Diverse Stakeholders



## Part 3 – Knowledge Production & Exchange for Researchers

- Workshop 7** Orienting Research for Policy Impact
- Workshop 8** Open Research Data Management and Access
- Workshop 9** Communicating Strategically in the Public Sphere



## Part 4 – Regenerative Futures

- Workshop 10** Expanding Worldviews
- Workshop 11** Acting Regeneratively
- Workshop 12** Plenary – Putting Learnings into Action

# WHAT YOU WILL GET FROM THIS MODULE

This module is not like other classwork. The action research / challenge-based pedagogy allows you to learn by doing. You should regard the time spent with this module as time carved out for your PhD planning and research. The learning and activities training programme provides the equivalent of 12 ECTS credits, and can be used as part of your professional development or elective training in your graduate programme. In order for credits to be awarded, you must complete the e-portfolio of activities that accompany this workshop series.

## WHO SHOULD ATTEND

This training is for motivated doctoral students who are curious to explore the potential for engagement and sustainability in their research design. Early stage PhD Students from all disciplines are welcome and encouraged.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### Physical Component:

Arrival 19th January 2025

Commencing 20th January - 24th January 2025

Departure 25th January 2025

University of Limerick, Limerick Ireland.

### Online Component:

3rd February 2025 - 25th April 2025

### Application Deadline:

Monday 11th or November, 2024



### How to Apply:

Please send a short bio and summary of your research area to [vicky.kelly@ul.ie](mailto:vicky.kelly@ul.ie)

Please get in touch with your local Erasmus+ coordinator to discuss possible funding (travel).

## ENQUIRIES

For further information please e-mail: [vicky.kelly@ul.ie](mailto:vicky.kelly@ul.ie)

Or find our website at: <https://www.ul.ie/sustainability>

### **\*Optional ECT Credits**

This Training Programme provides 12 ECTS credits, and can be used as part of your professional development or elective training in your graduate programme. In order for credits to be awarded, you must complete the e-portfolio of activities that accompany this workshop series.

\*Kindly supported by YERUN and Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Program (BIP).

# PARTNERS

## **YERUN**

The Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN), founded in 2015, brings together like-minded young research universities in Europe, with the primary objective of raising the voice of young universities in Europe via a dedicated strategic representation and lobbying action and strengthening their cooperation, maximising opportunities to collaborate in areas of mutual interest and benefit.

## **Centre for Sustainable Futures and Innovation, University of Limerick, Ireland**

The Centre for Sustainable Futures and Innovation is a dynamic hub dedicated to advancing sustainability through interdisciplinary research, innovation, and education. It plays a pivotal role in supporting the University of Limerick's Sustainability Framework 2030 by driving research and practical solutions aligned with the framework's goals, such as carbon neutrality, sustainable development education, and community engagement. By fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and policymakers, the Centre contributes to addressing complex global challenges, promoting innovative solutions that support the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and translating the vision of a sustainable future into tangible outcomes for 2030 and beyond.

## **UL Engage, University of Limerick, Ireland**

UL Engage aims to integrate civic and community engagement into the University's core missions in research and teaching. It serves as the hub for civic engagement activities across campus and works with all divisions and faculties to amplify the various ways that students, faculty and staff in UL can work to make a difference. UL Engage was established in September 2015 and in 2018 joined the UNESCO-sponsored Knowledge for Change (K4C) global consortium of Higher Education Institutions committed to best practice community-based learning and research.

## **Doctoral College University of Limerick**

The UL Doctoral College oversees the administration and support of doctoral programmes, ensuring high standards of research training and academic excellence for UL postgraduate researchers (PGRs) at PhD and Research Masters levels. Its responsibilities include admissions, facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration, the provision of regulations, and the provision of resources such as scholarships, workshops, and professional development programmes. By advancing a supportive and resource-rich environment, the Doctoral College enhances the research experience of PGRs and their supervisors by promoting academic growth, innovation, and the successful and timely completion of doctoral studies. This structured support helps PGRs navigate their research journey more effectively, while also aiding supervisors in providing effective guidance and mentoring to their PhD and Research Masters candidates.