

**Post Title: PhD Studentship: Combating the spread of disinformation linked to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) across Europe**

**Location: University College Dublin (Information and Communications Studies (ICS))**

**Closing date: 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

**Interviews with short-listed candidates: Early February 2024**

**Anticipated start date: May 2024**

**Position: 100%, full-time position, tuition fees waived by UCD's School of Information and Communication Studies (ICS).**

**Apply:** <https://www.ucd.ie/registry/prospectivestudents/admissions/graduateapplicants/applying>  
(see below for details)

**Remuneration:** PhD studentship renewable for up to four years and consisting of:

- PhD student stipend of €18,500k per annum (tax free)
- Scholarship students will be prioritised when applying for travel funding and overheads from ICS.
- Some equipment and travel funding will be available from the two Horizon Europe research projects depending on the level of contribution the proposed PhD makes to each.

**Eligibility:** EU and non-EU students are equally eligible for studentships under this award

**Requirement:** Students accepted under this scheme must meet the university entry standards.

## Context

The School of Information and Communication Studies (ICS) at University College Dublin (UCD) is inviting one fully funded PhD scholarship under the supervision of Dr. Brendan Spillane.

The successful candidate will be interested in developing methods and techniques to monitor and counter the spread of disinformation linked to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) across Europe. The candidate will complete a project of their own design. Suggested topics of focus include:

- **Developing methods and techniques to identify common, new, and trending disinformation narratives in countries and regions across Europe.** This may include identifying common markers and cues in disinformation which may indicate whether it is part of a FIMI campaign. Candidates interested in focusing on this or a similar topic would possess strong technical, programming and quantitative data analysis skills.
- **Identifying which countries and regions are the most susceptible to FIMI linked disinformation campaigns.** This would include analysing their cultural, political, media, and regulatory environments to understand the underlying causes of the susceptibility and developing policy, legal, media and societal recommendations to counter it. Candidates interested in focusing on this or a similar topic would have some technical and programming skills and a mixture of quantitative and qualitative analysis skills.

- **Identify common Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) of FIMI campaigns with the aim of being able to attribute them to specific foreign actors.** Candidates would be expected to identify or create their own datasets using real examples FIMI campaigns across Europe and apply standard quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques. Candidates interested in focusing on this or a similar topic would have some technical and programming skills and a mixture of quantitative and qualitative analysis skills.
- **Develop new and innovative methods for policy makers and state institutions to counter FIMI linked disinformation campaigns.** Candidates would review and analyse existing methods to combat disinformation at a national level to understand their effectiveness, identify how they can be improved upon and develop new and innovative methods to counter disinformation. Candidates interested in focusing on this or a similar topic would have some technical skills and a mixture of quantitative and qualitative analysis skills.

Candidates are also encouraged to modify and build upon one or more of these topics, or to propose their own PhD topic which will help to counter the spread of disinformation linked to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) across Europe. There is a preference for topics with an empirical and quantitative focus, but social science and qualitative projects will be considered.

Depending on the topic, the successful candidate should have a background in Computer Science, Information Science, Media and Communications, Journalism, or other related subject areas. The candidate should also demonstrate that they are willing to learn new methods, techniques, tools, and technologies as necessary to undertake research related to this PhD. Candidates should be methodical, rigorous, analytical and have a strong attention to detail. They should be capable of working independently, while also making contributions to the related projects, The School of Information and Communication Studies (ICS) (<https://www.ucd.ie/ics/>), UCD, and to the ADAPT Centre (<https://www.adaptcentre.ie/>).

## Research Area

The successful candidate will be supervised by Dr. Spillane, and will contribute to the ongoing €4m Horizon Europe VIGILANT (<https://www.vigilantproject.eu/>) and a new €3.1m Horizon Europe ATHENA project focused on combatting disinformation in Europe, and to the wider body of knowledge on combating disinformation. The candidate is expected to have a strong general interest in FIMI, misinformation and disinformation (and related forms of problematic content e.g., hate speech, radicalisation, extremist), their effect on society and ongoing efforts to combat it. This PhD will intersect with other related domains including politics, geopolitics, international relations, public policy, security, news and current events, journalism, information studies, and sociology.

Dr. Spillane's work is focused on Human Judgement of Information which is at the intersection of Human Computer Interaction (HCI), Behavioural Science and Information Science. Common topics in his work include Bias, Credibility, Misinformation and Disinformation, News, and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).

The successful candidate will be encouraged to draw upon the interdisciplinary research and expertise within ICS to suggest new and innovative methods and techniques to complete their PhD.

## Responsibilities

The post-holder will be expected to write and successfully defend a PhD thesis focused on the areas listed in the description of the post and meet the degree requirements set by UCD to advance through the PhD programme.

The candidate is also expected to produce research outputs in relation to their doctoral research and attend conferences to disseminate the research findings. The post-holder will collaborate closely with their supervisor to produce outputs on their combined research areas. The candidate will ideally produce single-, first-, and co-authored research by the end of the post. The candidate is expected to take part in seminars, workshops, and events organised within ICS and across UCD that are relevant to the project. The post-holder will be expected to contribute to the intellectual life in ICS and UCD and participate in research activities to the level and extent of their qualifications.

The candidate will also join and contribute to the **Science Foundation Ireland** (<https://www.sfi.ie/>) **ADAPT Centre for AI-Driven Digital Content Technology** (<https://www.adaptcentre.ie/>) in which Dr. Spillane is a Funded Investigator and where he founded a Harmful Information Working Group. The ADAPT Centre can provide significant additional resources to its member researchers who are spread across eight Irish universities.

The candidate will also be expected to complete a total of 30 ECTS credits spread across the post as part of the university's structured PhD path. Finally, the candidate will engage in teaching and tutoring during their PhD.

## Post requirements

Strong written command of English is required. English proficiency at the C2 or C1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is advised.

Candidates are expected to hold a strong Master's degree of 2:1 and above (or equivalent GPA) in Computer Science, Information Science, Media and Communications, Journalism, Political Science, Psychology, International Relations or other relevant subject areas.

The candidate should be able to demonstrate exceptional organisational experience and skills.

Preference will be given to candidates who:

- Can demonstrate experience and skills that match their proposed PhD topic - i.e., Those who propose a quantitative or data focused project should be able to demonstrate that they are technical, analytical, detailed and process orientated. Those who propose a non-technical PhD should be able to demonstrate an understanding of social science and qualitative methods and an ability to integrate or build upon robust theories from the literature.
- Have read some of the main literature related to their proposed topic
- Have a good understanding of the efforts (research, political, social, NGO etc.) to combat disinformation and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).

Applications are open to students of all nationalities and backgrounds. Women and people of colour are especially encouraged to apply.

## Application Process

Applications need to be submitted via UCD's application portal:

<https://www.ucd.ie/registry/prospectivestudents/admissions/graduateapplicants/applying>

**\*The application system opens on the 1st October 2023.\*** See also the ICS PhD Vacancies page for further info: <https://www.ucd.ie/ics/vacancies/phdvacancies/>

The candidate should apply to Programme Code W139 using the UCD Admissions online application portal (a €50 application fee applies). Please see the main ICS and UCD Graduate Studies sites for detailed application requirements:

<https://www.ucd.ie/ics/study/phdresearchprogrammes/> and

<https://www.ucd.ie/graduatestudies/studywithus/applicationprocess/>

Applications will be reviewed through our system of open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment of researchers. Short-listed candidates will be invited to an interview for the position, which will be held online. Candidates will be given at least five days' notice if selected to interview.

For any questions related to this post please contact **Brendan Spillane** (<https://people.ucd.ie/brendan.spillane>) at [brendan.spillane@ucd.ie](mailto:brendan.spillane@ucd.ie).

**\*Prospective candidates can contact Brendan prior to the application system opening\***  
Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Brendan with the following before submitting a formal application:

1. A one-page cover letter describing how you meet the mandatory/desired requirements.
2. A detailed curriculum vitae (CV) including education history, programming skills, research projects/publications and other relevant information.
3. A one or two page outline of a proposed research topic, which may be based on one of the four topics above, or be of their own design on the topics of disinformation or Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).
4. Scanned copies of relevant academic transcripts.
5. English Language Proficiency for non-native English speakers, in line with UCD requirements (<https://www.ucd.ie/registry/prospectivestudents/admissions/policiesandgeneralregulations/gener alrequirements/minimumenglishlanguage requirements/>).

## About the ADAPT Centre

ADAPT is the world-leading SFI research centre for AI Driven Digital Content Technology hosted by Trinity College Dublin. ADAPT's partner institutions include Dublin City University, University College Dublin, Technological University Dublin, Maynooth University, Munster Technological University, Athlone Institute of Technology, and the National University of Ireland Galway. ADAPT's research vision is to pioneer new forms of proactive, scalable, and integrated AI-driven Digital Content Technology that empower individuals and society to engage in digital experiences with control, inclusion, and accountability with the long term goal of a balanced digital society by 2030. ADAPT is pioneering new Human Centric AI techniques and technologies including personalisation, natural language processing, data analytics, intelligent machine translation human-computer interaction, as well as setting the standards for data governance, privacy and ethics for digital content.

## Why ADAPT?

- **Contribute** to the ADAPT research agenda that pioneers and combines research in AI driven technologies: Natural Language Processing, Video/Text/Image/Speech processing, digital engagement & HCI, semantic modeling, personalisation, privacy & data governance.
- **Work** with our interdisciplinary team of leading experts from the complementary fields of, Social Sciences, Communications, Commerce/Fintech, Ethics, Law, Health, Environment and Sustainability.

**Leverage our success.** ADAPT's researchers have signed 43 collaborative research projects, 52 licence agreements and oversee 16 active commercialisation funds and 52 commercialisation awards. ADAPT has won 40 competitive EU research projects and obtained €18.5 million in non-exchequer non-commercial funding. Additionally, six spinout companies have been formed. ADAPT's researchers have produced over 1,500 journal and conference publications and nearly 100 PhD students have been trained.

## Our Research Vision

Governments and civil society are starting to recognise the need for urgent and concerted action to address the societal impact of the accelerating pace of digital content technologies and the AI techniques that underpin them. ADAPT provides an ambitious, ground-breaking, integrated research programme that assembles three interlocking Strands that together are capable of addressing this challenge. Each of these complementary and reinforcing research Strands takes one of the different perspectives on the provision of personalised, immersive, multimodal digital engagement, i.e. the individual's experience and control of the engagement, the algorithms underlying digital content processing, and the balanced governance by enterprise and societal stakeholders.

### **Digitally Enhanced Engagement Strand**

From the individual perspective, research within this Strand will deliver proactive agency techniques that sense, understand and proactively serve the needs of individual users to deliver relevant, contextualised and immersive multimodal experiences which also offer them meaningful control over the machine agency delivering those experiences.

### **Digital Content Transformation Strand**

From the algorithmic perspective, new machine learning techniques will both enable more users to engage meaningfully with the increasing volumes of content globally in a more measurably effective manner, while ensuring the widest linguistic and cultural inclusion. It will enhance effective, robust integrated machine learning algorithms needed to provide multimodal content experiences with new levels of accuracy, multilingualism and explainability.

### **Transparent Digital Governance Strand**

From the enterprise and societal perspective, new structured knowledge frameworks and associated practices for AI data governance will be required to balance the needs and values of individuals, organisations and society when it comes to rich digital experiences. This requires the advancement of research in the areas of data ethics, data quality, data protection, data value, data integration, and multi-stakeholder governance models.

### **Diversity**

ADAPT is committed to achieving better diversity and gender representation at all levels of the organisation, across leadership, academic, operations, research staff and studentship levels. ADAPT is committed to the continued development of employment policies, procedures and practices that promote gender equality. On that basis we encourage and welcome talented people from all backgrounds to join ADAPT.