



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

Building research connections across the island of Ireland as an ECR

Brown, K. J. (2024). Building research connections across the island of Ireland as an ECR. In M. Harding, & A. O'Donoghue (Eds.), *Transitioning from PhD to an academic career: Doing Feminist Legal work, Best Practice Guide 5, 2024* (Vol. 5, pp. 7-8). <https://dfw.ie/publications/best-practice-guides/>

Published in:

Transitioning from PhD to an academic career: Doing Feminist Legal work, Best Practice Guide 5, 2024

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

Publisher rights

Copyright the Authors & DFLW 2024

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

Open Access

This research has been made openly available by Queen's academics and its Open Research team. We would love to hear how access to this research benefits you. – Share your feedback with us: <http://go.qub.ac.uk/oa-feedback>

Research Funding

Aisling McMahon

Obtaining research funding can at times feel daunting. As you move from PhD to early career academic, it may take time to understand the research funding landscape, including what schemes may be most suitable for your research, and often it can be useful to discuss with a mentor or academic colleague.

If you are starting out and looking for your first grant, one way to start out can be to apply for funding to organise a conference/workshop, such as by applying for internal university funding or other event funding schemes. If you are developing your first research led project as a PI, consider applying for small grant schemes. Such schemes can be highly beneficial to develop an aspect of a project and to gain experience in applying for and leading funded projects on a smaller scale. Having such a grant, can also enable you to build a track record of managing funding projects, and this may be needed for future larger funding bids.

My other main advice when considering applying for funding is to think about whether the project you have in mind requires funding to deliver its objectives. If it does require funding, think about what type of funding schemes are available and may be the best fit for your work and aims. For example, consider the scale of the project and what you need the funding for. You may want to apply for funding to enable you to have a dedicated block of concentrated time to write and publish on a book on a new area, in this case, a fellowship scheme may be beneficial. Alternatively, you may have a big idea which you want to develop as a large project that requires funding for you to bring together a team of multi-disciplinary researchers to tackle this big issue, in this case, an interdisciplinary funding scheme for large projects may be suitable.

The other thing to remember is that given the highly competitive funding landscape, many bids will end in rejection. Grant rejection decisions can be difficult especially when it is a project you really believe in and have taken time to develop. However, remember most successful PIs often will first have many rejected bids. Moreover, if a bid is rejected, you will often receive feedback on it and this feedback can be useful in developing the idea and shaping it for alternative funding schemes or bids. Writing the research bid can also help develop your thinking in an area, and this may strengthen the research and lead to publications or other benefits.

Priorities

Jane Rooney

This post aims to propose feminist approaches to prioritising research during the teaching year. It is aimed at ECRs who have completed their PhD, are working as a full-time academic, and have completed their first year of getting new teaching materials together and adjusting to a new working environment. A deep breath and sigh of relief follows. When you have filled up the depleted piggy bank of acts of self-love, it is important to find a normal rhythm of working life that includes research. There are so many competing demands on time at this point in your career and one tends to prioritise teaching and administrative tasks to the exclusion of research.

A feminist method of fitting in research during the academic year is to establish an online writing group one or two hours a week during term time. Block out the time in your calendar with a couple of other colleagues and login to a zoom or teams meeting. To begin, briefly state the task you wish to complete within that time, and 5 minutes before the end of the session share whether it was completed or not. The task could be to read and make notes on a book chapter. It could be to write 200 words (any words). You will get better at defining the task with this practice. There is no nonsense: it is not for a chat and catch up. It humanises the research process because there is an honesty about the challenges and difficulty research presents. It builds community, empathy and a more compassionate workplace.

Building Research Connections Across the Island as an ECR

Kevin J. Brown

Jurisdiction matters in law. It shapes what and who we study as undergraduate and postgraduate students. It influences the direction of our research as ECRs and onwards in our academic careers. This is especially true for those of us researching domestic areas of law, in my case criminal law, but even international lawyers tend to view their work through the prism of their home jurisdiction at least initially. The impact of intellectual jurisdictional boundaries is very much felt on the island of Ireland with its two legal jurisdictions. Even when we do look to other jurisdictions in my experience there is a reflexive tendency for academics in both jurisdictions on the island to look eastward to Britain or westward to North America rather than north/south on the island. Whatever your position on the constitutional question I want to make the case here for encouraging all academics on the island to make the effort to reap the benefits of cross-jurisdictional engagement north and south.

Before setting out suggested pathways to greater cross-border collaboration, I would like to establish what I see as the advantages of engaging in such a pursuit. At its core it is intellectual enrichment with the development of broader and more diverse perspectives

on issues which are often common across the island. Through better cross-border relationships opportunities are created for research funding (e.g. through the Shared Island Fund and European level funding awards). Cross-border collaboration also facilitates opportunities for curriculum development including the potential for co-taught doctoral supervisions, modules and even degrees. Networking with those in a different institutional setting also helps provide perspective and an appreciation that our institution's way of doing something is not the only one. It also enhances career prospects by expanding the number of potential employers for an ECR.

In terms of how we facilitate those cross-border connections there are a range of methods and forums. All-island conferences are a great way of building a network across the two jurisdictions. As well as one off events, there are several annual or bi-annual conferences that provide an excellent opportunity to broaden our jurisdictional horizons. The largest such meeting for legal academics is the Irish Association of Law Teachers annual conference which has been running for over 45 years. It is a generalist conference that is hosted by a different university on the island each year. Annual attendance in recent years has totalled over 100 academics from the island ranging from PGRs to established professors. As a former President of the Association, I would strongly encourage colleagues at any stage of their career to attend. For international colleagues based in Irish institutions crossing the border for such events can bring visa complications, although thankfully increasing awareness of this is encouraging organisations to facilitate online attendance.

When it comes to invited speakers to your events or those of your institution, yes, it's important to look beyond the island for diverse viewpoints, but we also shouldn't overlook our academic colleagues from the north or south. There is a wealth of expertise within both jurisdictions that is often highly relevant to the legal and societal challenges we face on this island. Just because a speaker comes from a larger jurisdiction outside the island doesn't necessarily mean they bring more insight or value to the conversation. Those who are invited to give talks tend to reciprocate.

I would also urge people to advertise research events that their school or department is hosting to academics across the island. By broadening the invitation list, we can attract a more diverse range of perspectives, fostering richer discussions and collaborations that might not have been possible within a narrower, localised audience. As ECRs I would encourage you to attend such events in other institutions.

As academics on the island, we can sometimes fall into the habit of taking an insular view of our own jurisdiction while being overly deferential to colleagues in larger jurisdictions to our east and west. In this brief piece, I hope to have encouraged ECRs to recognise the valuable opportunities and benefits that come from strengthening our research connections across the island.

Writing One's First Monograph after a Doctoral Thesis

Professor Devyani Prabhat

It is quite natural to be tempted to instantly produce a book proposal after defending one's thesis; some publishers may be reaching out seeking proposals. However, when it comes to converting your thesis into the first monograph it is important to first pause and take a break from the area of scholarship, or simply the act of writing. Perhaps you are already in your first job in the academic market are you or applying for positions, it is best to shift gears and focus on that first. It is worth looking at other areas of research connected to what you are teaching or follow-on projects from the thesis or engaging in a few short pieces of writing such as articles or research summaries, case notes, or blogs, prior to embarking on the book proposal.

My first monograph *Unleashing the Force of Law* won the Birks Prize for Outstanding legal scholarship from the UK and Ireland Society of Legal Scholars (SLS), and it was also shortlisted as one of two potential winners for best book by Socio-Legal Studies Association (SLSA) in 2017. I defended my thesis in 2012. In between the completion of my PhD and writing out my book, I had changed countries (US to UK) and started my first academic job in the UK teaching completely new areas of law (mainly public law: constitutional rights). I had also applied for a major research grant to the ESRC in this period developing further my interest in migration; a topic only incidentally relevant to my thesis which focussed on human rights work by lawyers in different jurisdictions where national security issues had become critical. Yet I think doing these different activities between the thesis and the book really enhanced my ability to engage with the deeper ideas of the thesis and to understand their relevance for the wider world of legal scholarship. A whole new set of ideas related to the constitutional law aspects I was teaching helped me frame my understanding of the role of law and lawyers much better. I definitely would not have had this depth had I simply embarked on book writing just after defending my thesis.

Unlike a thesis, a book sometimes needs to capture a lot of different doctrinal elements normally the lay of the land for the legal developments in terms of statute, case law and other materials but it can do so with a broadbrush approach. Giving the highlights of the core legal developments and explaining why these matter for the specific arguments of the book is useful for the generalist reader to get a grasp of the field and to understand those arguments in the backdrop of the law.

The book should demonstrate the specific voice of its author. It is not just a summary of the literature, so it needs to have an active forward momentum which introduces the author to the readers. Readers do grasp ideas better if they can see the honest purpose and motivations of an author so no matter what stories you share (academic or personal) have your own authentic voice come through in your work. One thing I always do is read aloud my work and see if it sounds all right; this is a check against use of unnecessary jargons as well as a check for authenticity and simplicity.

Above all have confidence in your ideas; what you have researched for several years would have uncovered interesting and original material which will be appreciated by others. Remember writing is like anything else; it improves with practice. It also involves a lot of reading to fuel it. So, do not begrudge the time it needs to work its way out from your fingertips to the screen and enjoy!