**PhD Scholarship Advertisement**

**Fully Funded PhD Scholarship in Youth Mental Health**

Applications are invited from suitably qualified candidates for a full-time, funded PhD scholarship starting in September 2025 in the School of Psychology at the University of Galway.

This position is funded by the European Commission.

**University of Galway**

Located in the vibrant cultural city of Galway in the west of Ireland, the University of Galway has a distinguished reputation for teaching and [research excellence](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/our-research/).

For information on moving to Ireland please see [www.euraxess.ie](http://www.euraxess.ie/).

**Detailed Project Description**

This is an exciting opportunity to undertake a PhD as part of the EU funded program YOUTHREACH. This research project will focus on the field of digital mental health, and understanding how meaningful engagement with online interventions can improve mental health outcomes. Specifically, it will focus on evaluating the *Moderated Online Social Therapy* (MOST) platform developed by Orygen, Australia’s Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, as a promising digital intervention for young people experiencing mental health challenges. While working as part of a cross-institutional team, the successful candidate will be affiliated with the University of Galway. The supervisory team will include Prof Gary Donohoe as primary supervisor, Dr. Maeve Dwan-O’Reilly and other members of the local YOUTHREACH team.

We (Dwan-O’Reilly et al., submitted) have recently reported evidence that participation in MOST as a digital intervention leads to a reduction in measures of loneliness. Building on this work, the overarching research question being addressed in the present study is ‘how does engagement with a moderated online youth mental health intervention contribute to a reduction in loneliness? Due to the multifaceted nature of this intervention - involving therapeutic content, peer and therapist support, and participation in an online community – further exploration is needed to understand the mechanisms driving these benefits.

**Methodology**

The theoretical/conceptual framework for this work will draw on the *Digital Cumulative Complexity Model*, which seeks to explain how users interact with digital interventions over time, and *The Supportive Accountability Model* which focuses on the role of human support figures (therapists, peer support workers) to enhances adherence to digital interventions.

A mixed methods analysis will be adopted, with quantitative data based on both our recently collected data, and prospective data collected as part of the EU funded YOUTHREACH project. The PhD will aim to produce four key papers: one systematic literature review, two empirical studies, and a qualitative study. The overarching aim is to examine how engagement and connectedness within digital mental health interventions contribute to observed reductions in loneliness.

**Proposed Research Plan & Timeline**

The anticipated timeline for this project is: **Year 1** – Systematic literature review on loneliness and connectedness in digital mental health interventions; **Year 2** – Empirical study on whether reductions in loneliness are dependent/conditional on improvements in clinical symptom severity on measures of mood and anxiety; **Year 3** – Empirical study on whether a reduction in loneliness scores is mediated by human engagement on the platform, and **Year 4** – Qualitative study on participant’s experiences surrounding how digital mental health interventions benefit them to feel less lonely and more connected.

**Living allowance (Stipend):** €24,000 per annum [tax-exempt scholarship award]. Computer equipment and funding for travel (e.g. to conferences) will be provided in addition to the stipend.

**University fees**: €5,370 per annum [fees for EU students]. Non-EU students who are not in receipt of any other scholarship that supports the payment of full Non-EU fees are eligible to apply for the PhD International Merit Scholarship Scheme at University of Galway. If successful, this scholarship award reduces course fees from the full international level to EU level.

**Start date**: 1st September 2025

**Academic Entry Requirements:** AMaster’s degree in Psychology or a closely related discipline to at least a high 2:1 standard. Other evidence that signifies suitability for the programme (e.g. demonstrated interest in mental health and/or mental health research).

**Candidates should demonstrate (essential requirements):**

* Normally a Master’s degree to honours 2:1 standard (or equivalent international qualification) in a relevant area, such as Psychology, or Social Sciences
* Honours 2.1 undergraduate degree in a relevant area, such as Psychology, or Social Sciences
* Experience of independent research
* Excellent written and oral communication skills
* Highly self-motivated
* Ability to work independently and as part of a team
* Willingness to travel

**To Apply for the Scholarship:** Expressions of interest comprising submission of a covering letter, CV, statement of personal research interests, evidence of performance or equivalent and the contact details of two referees, to be submitted via e-mail to Gary.donohoe@universityofgalway.ie .

**Contact Name:** Prof Gary Donohoe

**Contact Email:** Gary.donohoe@universityofgalway.ie

**Application Deadline: Friday 27th April** at 17:00 GMT.

**Primary Supervisor name** Professor [Gary](https://www.nuigalway.ie/our-research/people/business-and-economics/esthertippmann/) Donohoe