Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

The magazine for University of Galway alumni, staff and friends

Cois Coiribe

WINTER 25 I NEW HORIZONS EDITION

In this edition...

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

Cois Coiribe *Impact.*

Winter 2025
New Horizons Edition

The online publication for views and opinions from University of Galway's top academics, researchers, and alumni.

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Editor's Note

New Horizons

Fáilte is fiche go dtí eagrán an gheimhridh d'Iris Alumni Ollscoil na Gaillimhe, *Cois Coiribe*.

Agus muid ag teannadh i dtreo dheireadh na bliana, léirítear in eagrán an gheimhridh seo de Cois Coiribe, New Horizons pobal Ollscoil na Gaillimhe atá ag breathnú chun cinn le muinín agus le cuspóir. Is mór iad na hathruithe atá tarlaithe le bliain anuas san Ollscoil féin agus sa tír go deimhin. Cuirimid ár mbuíochas ó chroí in iúl do Mhícheál D. Ó hUigínn, alumnus agus iarUachtarán na hÉireann, as an gcion eisceachtúil atá déanta aige, agus tréaslaímid ó chroí le Catherine Connolly, alumna agus Uachtarán nua-insealbhaithe na hÉireann. Is léiriú é go bhfuil beirt Cheann Stáit i ndiaidh a chéile tagtha as an Ollscoil seo ar thiomantas buan na Gaillimhe don tseirbhís phoiblí, don smaointeoireacht neamhspleách agus don cheannaireacht phobail.

As 2025 draws to a close, this winter edition of *Cois Coiribe, New Horizons*, captures a University of Galway community looking forward with confidence and purpose. It has been a year of significant transition for both the University and the nation. We extend our deep gratitude to Michael D. Higgins, alumnus and former President of Ireland, for his exceptional service, and we warmly congratulate Catherine Connolly, alumna and newly inaugurated President of Ireland. To have two successive Heads of State emerge from our University speaks to Galway's enduring commitment to public service, independent thinking, and civic leadership.

Across the edition, the concept of *New Horizons* is reflected in our research, leadership, philanthropy, innovation, and alumni impact. Collectively, these stories reveal a University adapting to new opportunities with intent and creativity.

An interview with University of Galway's recently appointed President, Professor David J. Burn, highlights his vision for research excellence, global engagement, and an enriched student experience, setting a purposeful direction for the years ahead. A tribute to Michael D. Higgins, featuring a *Message for Cois Coiribe* and an article by an tOllamh Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, reminds us that intellectual curiosity and cultural imagination continue to evolve and expand throughout a lifetime.

Our alumni features continue this sense of momentum. Pat McLoughlin reflects on leading through change at Chanelle Pharma; Maurice McQuillan discusses widening impact through the Lifes2Good Foundation; and Dominic Feeney, CEO of CBE, highlights how alumni philanthropy is shaping the future of the Learning Commons. Deirdre Ní Choistín, Director of TG4, demonstrates how new cultural and linguistic horizons grow from strong foundations in Gaeilge and creative media.

The astrophysics and space research section brings this edition's theme into sharp focus with Dr Aaron Golden outlining Galway's growing international role in astrophysics. The discovery of new planet WISPIT 2b, told by Dr Christian Ginski and PhD student Chloe Lawlor, shows how breakthroughs emerge when students and experts collaborate with shared purpose.

Our alumni, including Dr Catarina Alves de Oliveira, Dr Éamonn Harvey, and Dr Deborah Malone, are contributing to the global space sector in ways that bring Galway's influence to the fore on an international stage, while Dr Liz Coleman and Dr Damien Martin tells us of the role of Mace Head Atmospheric Research Station in Ireland's contribution to climate and atmospheric research globally.

Across every article, a single message stands out: that the University of Galway community is not merely observing new horizons, it is actively creating them. This edition reflects a University stepping confidently into its next era, strengthened by the achievements and generosity of those who carry its values far beyond campus. We are '*Of Galway, For Galway*.'

As we move into 2026, I hope these pages inspire you to explore your own new horizons, and to stay connected with a community that continues to imagine and shape the future.

Le gach dea-ghuí don bhliain atá romhainn.

Bríd Seoige,
Head of Content, Content Unit,
University of Galway

In Conversation With Professor David Burn, President of University of Galway

Professor David Burn is President of University of Galway. He became the 14th President of Ollscoil na Gaillimhe – University of Galway in September 2025.

Cois Coiribe (CC): First of all, welcome and congratulations. You are no stranger to the West of Ireland; how does it feel to return now as President of the University?

David Burn (DB): Very good indeed! I was just reflecting this morning that I probably first came to Galway around 34 years ago, before the main road was built. I was with my wife and mother-in-law, and I absolutely went on record saying that this is my favourite city in Ireland. It was just so fantastic, the buzz, the vibe, I obviously got the feel of the students being an essential part of the whole scene. If you said to me back then that I would return in the future as President of University of Galway, I wouldn't have believed you. So, it's a lovely feeling and a dream come true.

> For me, trying to make a difference to the population in the west/north-west of Ireland would be priority one and I hope that would ripple out and have benefits across the island of Ireland and internationally.

CC: What do you think are the core obligations of University of Galway as a centre of knowledge and research? How are those obligations evolving in today's context?

DB: I'm reminded of something a vice chancellor over in England once said: 'It's not what we're good *at*; it's what we're good *for*.' That encapsulates my approach.

We're obviously a seat of great learning, great at research and education, but that is just part of the equation. If we're not adapting to what this part of the world, in particular, needs, but also Ireland more broadly and indeed internationally, if we're not equipping our students with the skills they need, what the labour market requires, actually we're failing them. So we have to be agile and adapt to the new technologies, the new demands, the multidisciplinary approach, which is much more prominent these days from a research perspective. It's great to do good research at whatever level on the translational spectrum between discovery right through to population-based research, but you should always have an eye on impact. For me, trying to make a difference to the population in the west/north-west of Ireland would be priority one and I hope that would ripple out and have benefits across the island of Ireland and internationally.

CC: As you begin your tenure, how do you plan to navigate the evolving challenges of higher education, from pressures on HEA funding and the increasing reliance on alternative income sources to increasing demand for accountability and global competition? Is this a core challenge for leadership today?

DB: I come from a system in the UK which is under severe pressure at present, and indeed I had a very difficult last few months in my role at Newcastle University, where we did have to make cost cuts and that translated to staff losses. I know that is not the situation here in Ireland and I'm thanking my lucky stars for that, but the system here is under pressure and chronically underfunded. So, there are things we can do at multiple levels.

The first thing is to give my full informed input to the Irish Universities Association and help, as a key member, to lobby the government for greater investment in higher education. But we know there are serious pressures on the fiscal situation, so our system is likely to remain underfunded for the foreseeable future. That means boiling it down to the university level. From my NHS background, where you had fixed-amount payments, you were always thinking: What other sources of income can we generate? ▸

What efficiencies can we make, what expenditure can we reduce to balance the books? Often universities do forget the efficiency bit, so I am sure we can definitely do better in that regard.

If I start with the systems and processes, we can do a lot to try to offload work from our very hard-pressed staff, particularly professional service staff, who are just fantastic. The colleagues I've met are amazing. But they're under pressure and we could make their lives easier through better systems and processes. I particularly mean Information Solutions and Services (ISS) and investment in Artificial Intelligence (AI), which could free up good staff to do more productive things.

In terms of income, clearly we need to look at international student recruitment, but we need to learn from the UK and not put all our eggs into one basket, one market. One would hope the Irish government will always take an enlightened view toward immigration rather than trying to restrict student ingress. We have challenges here in Ireland and the events recently in Dublin have not helped; that does send negative messages out, but hopefully Ireland is still regarded as an extremely welcoming and friendly country. If we can diversify where students are coming from, it would give us greater resilience.

The other big area is advancing philanthropy targets. Given where we are, with our Atlantic face to the US, we can do more in that space. I see it as a key mission to boost our income from donors who want to support the University through capital investment and through people as well.

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CC: What strategic opportunities do you see for the University to thrive within this changing international landscape?

DB: I see huge potential in this University. We've got fantastic people, and I've met wonderful colleagues. I see where their hearts are; they want to do well for the University, and I regard my job as unleashing that potential and allowing them to flourish. I'd like to ensure we are aligned in a general sense of direction and common purpose.

Prior to joining, I had come to a conclusion about the University's areas of strength which aligns well with our new strategy, and the four strategic pillars of research excellence really encapsulate these strengths (Innovation of Health; Creativity, Culture and Society; Sustainable and Resilient Environments, Earth and Ocean; Transformative Data and AI). I know that strategy was heavily consulted upon, a lot of people fed in from all levels.

I would love if, whenever one of us was abroad and someone asked, 'What are you good at?', anyone from University of Galway could instantly name the four pillars and give a few examples of each. A lot of universities might struggle to articulate areas of strength, and what I like about those pillars is that they are rooted in genuine substance and strength, based on our history, our people, and our place.

This comes back to the systems and processes. There is a clear sense that colleagues are wading through an awful lot of processes and compliance, and I want to make their working lives a bit easier. We are regulated externally, we have to be compliant of course, but is there anything we can do internally? There are things we can do for our own processes, which are more amenable to simplification.

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CC: We're seeing increasing debate around the balance between technical skills and broader human attributes, like creativity, collaboration, and cultural awareness. Do you believe we're moving toward a more holistic model of education? What role do you see for arts and humanities in this?

DB: This is a really hot topic in the UK; a negative narrative is emerging in some quarters about disinvesting in arts and humanities. For me that would be an absolute disaster, for the sector as a whole. For University of Galway it would be particularly damaging given our heritage, our absolutely vibrant arts and culture scene, and our bilingual nature. A recent conversation with an academic working at the intersection of art, computing, and AI reminded me that you simply can't separate science from the arts.

It's important to recognise how environment and art can affect mental health. I recall a research project showing how issues like litter or neglected spaces can lower mood, while art therapy can help manage conditions like dementia. That's why giving students an interdisciplinary outlook is vital, especially today, with the pressures of social media and shrinking attention spans – that breadth of knowledge and awareness is vital. Personally, though I come from a STEM background, I've always loved music for its power to evoke memories and emotions; I'd feel truly lost without it.

The study of language is absolutely essential. It's easy to live in a bubble and assume English is enough, but language shapes how we see the world. Here at University of Galway, in the heart of the Connemara region, Irish has a special place and I'm fully committed to it. I know there was some concern about appointing a president who isn't a


University of Galway

> Here at University of Galway, in the heart of the Connemara region, Irish has a special place and I'm fully committed to it.

native speaker, but I'm determined to learn. In fact, this morning I opened an event in Irish, and I'm working hard to deepen my knowledge.

It's wonderful that students here want to learn Irish. In terms of languages here at the University, there is the pure-language approach that happens in the College of Arts, Social Sciences, and Celtic Studies, and another approach is to connect language study with other disciplines, for example, pairing French with marketing or French with business studies. That kind of hybrid course we have at the University really makes a difference. Having language skills makes our graduates much more marketable, as well as widening their minds to the beauty of language.

CC: Knowing what we know about the rapid evolution and applications of AI technologies and robotics, what do you think are the implications for third-level education? How do you strategically balance the growing demand for job-ready skills with the enduring mission of higher education to foster deep knowledge, critical thinking, and adaptability?

DB: It's a fact that attention spans are diminished and young people are finding information in ways that I don't understand. I think that instead of standing up in front of a lecture theatre, in the future it will be more a case of a flipped-classroom approach where the students are doing a lot more self-directed learning, and learning where to find information. There will be smaller classes with more discourse and interchange of information. This is a great way of learning and keeps students engaged. We have to move with the times.

Regarding how medicine will be taught in the future, there will be massive changes. Again it's down to *where do you find things*, not *what do you know*. As an example, as a student I must've spent nine hours a week doing dissection and I have no idea what I learned from that other than how it's very difficult to wash the smell of formalin from under your fingernails! It moved on to a process where an expert would do a dissection, and students could follow where the ulnar nerve or the median nerve runs. Now it's 3-D reconstructions or 3-D printing through software programs or simulation facilities.

The other aspect that I notice with the medical curriculum and that I welcome is putting the patient at the heart of the education experience, looking at issues from a patient's perspective, and that's not something back in the day we had much of at all. ▸

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CC: As the new President, how do you see the role of the alumni community shaping the future of the University, from strengthening global connections to supporting students and advancing our strategic goals?

DB: In my recent conferring speeches, I commented that our graduates are joining a community of over 130,000 alumni. I encouraged them to stay in touch and let us know, wherever they are, how we can support them better. One model I'm keen to explore is alumni ambassadors, where alumni based internationally could share their experiences with students who are thinking about studying at University of Galway, and recommend us. This not only gives current students a positive perspective on their future but also provides alumni with a sense of purpose and achievement.

Equally important is offering alumni opportunities for continued professional development or online learning. By providing accessible online courses, we can help alumni advance their careers wherever they are in the world. These courses could be offered for a modest fee and would keep alumni engaged with the University while potentially encouraging future support, such as donations.

Another important advancement area is for the President to travel and meet groups of alumni. Where we have a high density of alumni, perhaps in the States, it would be great to host events to bring alumni up to speed with their alma mater and get their input. That's on the radar; we're already planning things in that direction.

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CC:: Looking ahead, if you were to walk through University of Galway campus in 10 or 20 years, what would you hope to see and feel? How might the physical and social environment evolve?

DB: Obviously, that will be beyond my term as president. Hopefully, I'll still be able to walk the campus in 15 or 20 years, though, depending on technological advances, I might even arrive via an autonomous vehicle! More importantly, I hope we haven't overdeveloped this beautiful campus and still have the green spaces, and an eye on biodiversity. The proximity to the Corrib, the river, that beautiful scenery, it's really special, and I hope future generations can enjoy it as we do today.

I would like to see the Quadrangle beautifully preserved. We need to have a good look at our estate, and there may need to be quite an investment. I would like to be a president who ensures the fabric of our University is taken care of for posterity.

Other things over that period of time, and depending on where the autonomous vehicle took me, we probably would not see lecture theatres; the style of education will change. I would like to see labs by function. There would probably be fewer labs because we might be outsourcing. There would probably be more large computing facilities where we're doing clever things with the processing of data.

I would like to go through the campus and have my senses assailed by the smells of different foods, because we would have a bigger international student population and it would be lovely to offer a wide range of ethnic foods.

In terms of learning, as I said, attention spans are shorter, and students access information in ways that were unimaginable when I was a student. Flipped-classroom approaches, guided self-directed learning, and smaller group sessions focused on discussion and problem-solving are already here. This approach sparks curiosity, keeps students engaged, and aligns with how people learn best today. Balancing these practical, technical, and human-centred elements is essential for modern higher education and will impact how we, as a University, will evolve.

Professor David Burn is the 14th President of University of Galway. He previously served as Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Newcastle University since 2017, where he led transformative change initiatives to restructure faculty, accelerate research performance, advance equality, diversity and inclusion, and drive internationalisation. Prof Burn is a former Director of an Academic Health Science Centre, and in October 2025, he became President of the International Parkinson & Movement Disorder Society. A native of the Northeast of England, Prof Burn has strong ties to the West coast of Ireland through his wife Aileen, who hails from Limerick.

Michael D. Higgins: A Legacy Reflected Through University of Galway

Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh,
Professor Emeritus in History and former Dean of Arts and Vice-President of University of Galway

As Michael D. Higgins concludes his term as Uachtarán na hÉireann, the moment invites a warm and thoughtful look back at the extraordinary public life of one of University of Galway's most distinguished alumni. Few are better placed to offer such reflection than Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, Higgins's lifelong friend and colleague, who provides a rare and personal glimpse into the man behind the office and the depth of his enduring connection to the University. Through public achievement and private loyalty, Higgins's long association with University of Galway emerges as a defining thread in a remarkable life of service, intellect, and moral commitment.

Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland, speaking at the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation Conference, 2013.

> It was here in Galway – in the 'Aula' of UCG, as it then was – on an autumn day in 1962 that Michael D. began his lifelong association with UCG, when he registered as a First Year student in Arts and in Commerce.

The completion of Michael D. Higgins's term as Uachtarán na hÉireann offers an opportunity for a brief backward glance at select aspects of the extraordinary public life of one of our University's most distinguished alumni, considered in the light of his long association with University of Galway.

The early life and family history of Michael D. – the profound effects of the revolutionary years and their aftermath on his family, and their enduring imprint on Michael D.'s own memory and on his understanding of struggle and sacrifice, of the brute facts of power, of life itself – will be familiar to many readers of *Cois Coiribe*. He has in the past spoken and written movingly and reflectively on the experiences of these years from childhood to early adulthood.

But it was here in Galway – in the 'Aula' of UCG, as it then was – on an autumn day in 1962 that Michael D. began his lifelong association with UCG, when he registered as a First Year student in Arts and in Commerce. Having already worked for a number of years in the city, he was a few years older than most First Years. I may note in passing that it was in the very early days after registration that I first met Michael D.: we found that we had mutual acquaintances and friends in an earlier generation and we recognised some common features of our cultural and social hinterland, and some shared interests. A friendship was forged early.

In considering the student days of those who later advanced to illustrious careers, there is a

Michael D. Higgins with East Galway/Roscommon Extra-Mural Group Graduation, 1971.

temptation to look for intimations of future directions and achievements. There is normally a need for caution in indulging this 'backward glance'. In this particular instance, however, this is a temptation which need not be too strenuously resisted!

Michael D.'s impact as a student was immediate and powerful, notably in Debating. For students of the College in 1962, social life centred on campus activities to an extent scarcely imaginable today. In a compact campus, the 'Lit and Deb' (Literary and Debating Society) was the central forum, the Greek Hall in the Quad packed for its weekly debates. It was something of a bear-pit, in which the Auditor pleaded for good manners and speakers at the rostrum strove to master the boisterous crowd. Michael D. established such mastery from the earliest of his appearances. His assured declamatory style of advocacy and argument had an immediate impact. But there was more than passionate oratory in his armoury of persuasion. There was an agility of tone and temper when required: the sweeping hand gestures, the wry smile that regularly presaged the dispatch of a generous helping of irony in the direction of his adversary.

The performative talents were not confined to debating: he graced the boards in Dramsoc's staging of Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* in the early 1960s. Additionally, his early essays in writing – creative as well as critical – also date from his undergraduate years.

And, of course, the political instinct was also stirring, with Michael D.'s election as President of the Students Union in 1964/5. As President, he was assertive on behalf of students, in what was a solidly deferential culture of student politics in Galway at that time.

> **On the national stage in the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), it is fair to say that he was the trailblazer in forcing Galway to the centre of national debates and prominence within USI, on student welfare issues in Ireland and on certain international issues.**

As for later Galway student leaders – whether or not they went on to have careers in national politics, as some of them did – all were indebted to Michael D. for the path he had cleared.

May I also recall that, like many others, Michael D. worked the summers of his student years in England, earning the money to pay his way in College, and taking the opportunity for reading and writing poetry: then, as later, the quest was for bread and roses.

Postgraduate study in the University of Indiana and in Manchester was very important in Michael D.'s academic and intellectual development. Sociology was still a fledgling academic discipline in 1960s Ireland: strongly inflected with Catholic social thought in the NUI, as reflected in curricula and academic appointments. Indiana and Manchester exposed Michael D. to a wider span of ideas, concepts, and methodologies, generally fortifying his theoretical grounding. This would stand to him, in his later political, no less than in his academic, career.

On his return to Galway as a lecturer in Sociology in 1968, Michael D., not surprisingly, quickly acquired an

Michael D. and Sabina Higgins with supporters following his election as a T.D. for Galway, 1981.

enviable reputation as an inspiring lecturer. Again, in his research and publications, theoretical approaches were combined with engagement with concrete examples of contested social domains of power: teaching Durkheim did not exclude the study of working conditions and labour relations on Galway docks.

The academic years as lecturer coincided with his progressive engagement with political activism and electoral contests – and there were areas of overlap. He was among the founding cohort of the academic branch of the Workers' Union of Ireland in UCG; at the time, many staff considered it unseemly for academics to be joining a trade union, not to mention a general workers union.

But the early stage of Michael D.'s entry into national politics was a turbulent time – the 1970s and 80s; locally there were the big beasts and formidable political machines of the two main parties to contend with. But he established his bridgehead, built his support base, and through his national profile in the Seanad and, ultimately, in the Dáil, by the later 1980s had a 'secure' (one never speaks in Ireland of a 'safe') Dáil seat in Galway.

In the context of his long university association, we may briefly draw attention to one particular aspect of Michael D.'s political career. The notion of 'the intellectual in politics' was (and perhaps still is) for some synonymous with 'the impractical', conjuring up a stereotype easily ridiculed, the absent-minded lodger in the mythical ivory tower.

Michael D. had to contend with this prejudice. But he did contend with it. As in his student days, he knew that passionate advocacy for rights, and justice and fairness, had to be seen to apply (and to have a demonstrable impact) in Shantalla or Seanaphéistín no less than in El Salvador.

And, when, in time, ministerial office came his way, those who felt that being at ease with theoretical issues or abstract ideas on 'culture' or 'empowerment' was incompatible with the practical ('sleeves up') application needed to 'get things done', were soon confounded by Michael D.'s record of 'delivery' when in office during 1993–97.

The post-ministerial years – the first decade or so of the early 21st century – were years in which, as President of the Labour Party and Labour Spokesman on Foreign Affairs – Michael D. enjoyed a certain 'eminence' : being by then a survivor of bruising battles, with a successful ministerial record, the gravitas of age and political seniority was beginning to return a dividend. But 'eminence' was not synonymous with a staid, quietist, or 'über-circumspect' disposition. On the contrary, the passion for championing 'just causes' (at home and globally) remained undiminished; evidenced by the forward positions taken by him on universal human rights and equality, and by his exertions in creating conditions for the nurturing and flowering of the creative instinct and capacity inherent in all people.

In seeking election to the Presidency in 2011, Michael D. promised that, if elected, his would be a 'Presidency of ideas'. During the past 14 years he has been as good as his word. One might instance the continuing advocacy for human rights, the major Ethics Project, the 'Machnamh 100' programme, the flow of substantial publications, the inexhaustible championing of artists and creativity, and his insistence that 'welfare' is not only a material issue but a more ample set of requirements for humans striving to live in dignity. Reflections on the historic experience of Famine in Ireland have informed his challenging contributions to the global debate on food security, notably in Africa.

Agus, níl deireadh ráite ná déanta aige fós. Anois agus an saol ar a chomhairle féin aige arís, táim cinnte nach mbeidh sé díomhaoin. Beidh sé i mbun machnaimh agus pinn, agus cloisfear uaidh.

I think we may be confident that the ferment of ideas and the passion for advocacy will continue in the post-Áras next stage of Michael D.'s remarkable personal *camino* of public service.

Prof Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh is Professor Emeritus in History and former Dean of Arts and Vice-President of University of Galway. He was appointed to the Council of State by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, in 2012. Prof Ó Tuathaigh graduated with a BA from the University followed by an MA. He completed his postgraduate studies at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, and he received an Honorary Doctorate from University of Galway in 2017.

Message for *Cois Coiribe*, University of Galway Alumni Magazine

By Michael D. Higgins

A chairde,

Táim fíorbhuíoch as an deis a fháil alt a sholáthar do *Cois Coiribe*, foilseachán Ollscoil na Gaillimhe a chuireann béim ar thuairimí cuid de na léachtóirí agus taighdeoirí is mó le rá san ollscoil.

I welcome your invitation to provide an article for *Cois Coiribe*, University of Galway's publication highlighting the view of some of the University's top academics and researchers. It is a testament to all those who contribute to the publication that it continues to flourish as a great source of opinion and analysis.

Is pobal scoláireachta agus carthanais é Ollscoil na Gaillimhe a raibh nasc gar do mo chroí trí mo shaol ar fad. Tá an nasc seo fite fuaite trí mo bhlianta mar dhalta, múinteoir, ionadaí poiblí agus, ar feadh na gceithre bliana déag dheireanacha, mar Uachtarán na hÉireann.

University of Galway is a community with whom I have maintained such a cherished bond throughout my life. My connection to this University has been a continuous thread woven through my years as student, teacher, public representative, and, for the past 14 years, as President of Ireland, and it is the alma mater of Sabina and our children.

I first came to Galway over 60 years ago in January 1961, hitching my way from Ballycar, Newmarket-on-Fergus. The atmosphere that prevailed in University College Galway at the time was one of curiosity and openness.

It was possible, indeed encouraged, not only to pursue satisfactory results from one's study but also to participate fully in the life of the societies that animated the campus. I became Auditor of the Arts Society, a year later, Auditor of the Literary and Debating Society, and then President of Comhairle Teachta na Mac Léinn. Others followed similar paths, among them my dear friend Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, and we shared a commitment to the idea of a university as a place of democratic encounter, a place where ideas could be tested, reshaped and, when necessary, reimagined.

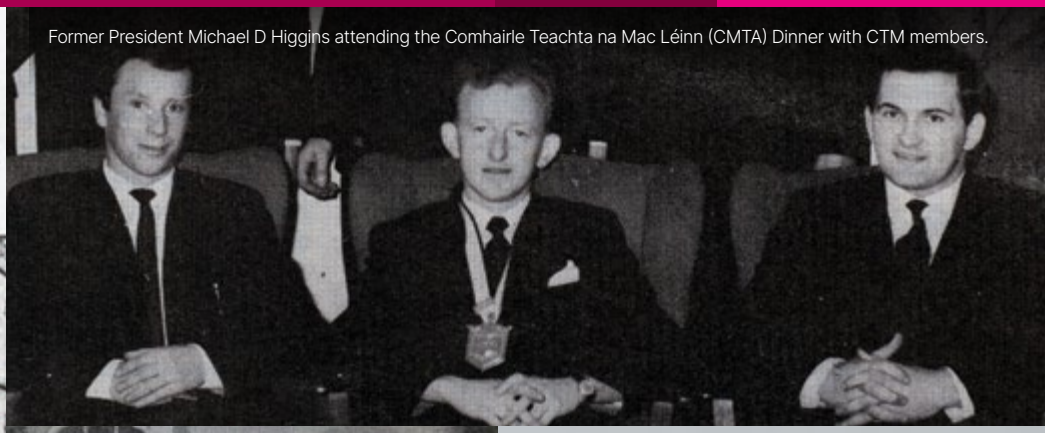
I am proud of the fact that with colleagues we founded the University Teachers section of the Workers' Union of Ireland all those decades ago after so many of us were appointed at the exciting end of the sixties.

From the first time I stood for election in Galway in 1969, I have found in the city a respectful reception for new, even radical, ideas. This willingness to engage in debate, to place questions of justice, culture and society at the heart of discourse, has always distinguished Galway. The University and the wider city have continued to embody that spirit. It is a spirit that has informed every step of my public life.

It is deeply personal honour that the Aula Maxima, the beloved and iconic space of the Quadrangle, now bears at one of its sides the name 'The Michael D. Higgins Auditorium'. To have my name associated with a site of memory, learning and debate is a gift of extraordinary significance, one I have received with the deepest appreciation of the honour that it confers.

No matter where life has taken me, Galway has become and will always be my home. Indeed, nowhere do I feel more at home than in University of Galway. I look forward to returning to Galway after my Presidency and hopefully to have the opportunity of resuming a regular rhythm of engagement with the University community, and to continuing the conversations that have enriched my life for over six decades.

I am pleased to be collaborating with University of Galway in depositing material from my



Former President Michael D Higgins attending the Comhairle Teachta na Mac Léinn (CMTA) Dinner with CTM members.

Unity 24 November 1965 Literary and Debating Society, UCG.

Former Students' Union President Michael D Higgins – as he appeared on his Students' Council card.

Above Left: Michael D Higgins, one of the founding cohort of the academic branch of the Workers' Union of Ireland in UCG (University of Galway).

presidential archive – writings, speeches, research, and preparatory documents – for their custodianship. University of Galway Library Archives and Special Collections will provide both sanctuary and accessibility for this material, ensuring that future generations of researchers may draw from it, contributing to their ongoing discourse on our shared past and future.

It was my great pleasure, too, to mark the wonderful discovery by scientists led by Dr Christian Ginski of the Centre for Astronomy, who recently identified a new planet which they have named 'WISPIT 2B'. In recognition of this remarkable achievement, I am gifting to the University the large, colourful Sunburst painting from Áras an Uachtaráin. I am delighted that it will be displayed at the entrance to the Physics Department, where I have no doubt that it may offer inspiration to generations of students as they journey through the Arts Science Concourse in the years ahead. It was commissioned from the Chinese artist Zhao Shao Rou to celebrate my inauguration as President of Ireland. An eleven-year cycle is something I share with the surface of the Sun! It was gifted by Philip Kelly, my godson, son of two graduates of the University, Fonsie Kelly and Margaret Curran.

May take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt good wishes to Professor David J. Burn on his recent appointment as President of University of Galway. He takes on this role at a time of challenge but also of opportunity, and I am confident that, under his stewardship, the University will continue to flourish as a place of creativity, critical thought, and compassionate scholarship.

Mar fhocail scoir, may I express my deepest gratitude to the University of Galway community, the graduates, students, faculty, and staff, who have consistently offered their support, friendship, and companionship throughout my life. Our relationship has never been passive; it has been a dynamic dialogue, a shared endeavour to imagine and realise a better, fairer society.

As I look toward the years ahead, I do so with hope. The universities of Ireland remain vital centres for ethical inquiry, innovation, and inclusion. They are key to shaping futures where human rights, social justice, ecological responsibility and cultural flourishing are guiding principles. I know that the global community of Galway graduates will continue to make profound contributions towards such futures.

Leanaimis orainn ar ár mbealach féin ag tabhairt faoi shaol fiúntach, lán de chomhbhá, arb í an obair phobail a bhun agus a bharr.

May we all continue, in our varied ways, to pursue lives of meaning, of empathy, and of engaged citizenship.

Le gach dea-mhéin agus buíochas ó chroí.

Michael D. Higgins
9th November 2025
Uachtarán na hÉireann (2011–2025)

Using the Innate Creativity of Physics To Solve Complex Problems

Professor Aaron Golden,
Director of the Centre for Astronomy,
University of Galway

Cois Coiribe catches up with Interdisciplinary Physics Professor Aaron Golden, Director of the Centre for Astronomy here at University of Galway. We explore the versatility of physics, ranging from studying the vast unknown of galaxies and star systems to understanding the complex interactions of medical treatments. As we find out, creative problem-solving applies to both, with there being more in common between stars and the clinic than you might think.

Cois Coiribe (CC): Your career spans both astronomy and clinical genomics. How does that journey reflect the interdisciplinary culture and research opportunities at University of Galway?

Aaron Golden (AG): This University has always had a strong sense of collegiality. In Ireland, people like to talk of course, there's a sheer joy in communicating. Here that joy feeds into the opportunities that crop up serendipitously – being able to talk to someone, for example, who's working across the road in the hospital, through the connections we have through jointly teaching our MSc in Medical Physics. I might hear that person describe a problem that, from a physicist's point of view, I've come across before. It may sound a little crazy but it's actually an easy jump for me to go from studying the Crab Nebula using a high-speed camera to analysing a patient's genome or MRI dataset. It's the same fundamental type of data problem, where the data follows the rules. Once you figure out the rules, you can understand the problem and come up with a better idea of what's actually happening.

CC: Physicists are trained to get to the heart of a problem and ask: How can I conceptualise and solve this problem? What's available to help me figure it out? Or do I need to invent new ways of solving it?

AG: This combination of creativity and innovation combined with a sort of fearlessness for tackling the unknown provides you with incredible transferable skills. Fold in being able to connect with, and learn from, terrific colleagues across campus, well you have endless opportunities to transfer skills to other contexts. That's a fantastic benefit of working here; I don't think I could have been a genomics professor 'on the side' anywhere else in the world.

The fun is the joy of discovery and that chimes with the essence of this University, that 'Galway Magical Realism' in the air, which I think is a real thing. I gave a talk in UCD recently to their Master's in Space Science students on work that I have been doing in Earth Observation, and I could spot the three Galway graduates in the class. In the old days of course, they'd be wearing woolly jumpers... but this time it was on account of the types of questions they asked in the Q&A session after, they had a different take on what I had spoken about, and could immediately see opportunities to take their physics skills and apply them to areas like climate science. That's a fabulous thing – our graduates are very distinct in their creatively practical approach to their lives. I love finding out what they get up to after they graduate.

CC: How does the University inspire physical science students?

AG: With academics, if you ever want to start up a conversation, you ask: what are you researching? You'll always get their full attention, as it's always something they're passionate about. When we set up research projects for students, we always try to sprinkle on top that enthusiasm, that passion. So when our students work on these cutting-edge problems, they get a sense that they're part of a wider community, part of the 'action'. It really enhances their development, both as people and as scientists.

We have a tendency to sell ourselves short a bit here in Ireland. Undergraduate students might go to a public talk, and they'd tell me 'X was there', and 'You know, X wrote the book on exoplanets' or whatever. And I'd feel like asking them: how would you feel about being X one day? It's taken as a given, this idea that amazing things only happen somewhere else – at NASA, or somewhere exotic in California instance – but amazing things are happening *here* too, and more often than not, our students are in the thick of it. This sort of student experience enhances their development as physical scientists – and also as people. That's part of the value system intrinsic to this University. It's not something you have on a slogan, but it's real.

CC: What kind of facilities do we have access to in Ireland? Can you give us a snapshot of those types of interesting projects that our students work on?

AG: I've been interested in radio astronomy for my entire career, using telescopes designed to study the Universe in radio 'light'. If you remember the rabbit ears on those old TVs, when there wasn't a signal, you saw the black and white fuzz – that's the ghostly radiation of the Big Bang. What you actually observe there in that static is the billions of years old birth pangs of the Universe.

To do radio astronomy we use aerials as telescopes, except on steroids. So for example, think ▸

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I-LOFAR, based in Birr Castle, also home to the Leviathan of Parsonstown.

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satellite dishes, except 10s to 100s of metres in diameter weighing thousands of tonnes. Or alternatively, fields full of souped-up rabbit ears, also known as dipole arrays. We're incredibly fortunate to have one of these operating in Birr, County Offaly. It's called I-LOFAR (Irish Low-Frequency Array), and it literally looks like, well, a field full of TV aerials... It's operated by a consortium of Irish universities, with myself in University of Galway and Dr Evan Keane from TCD - another Galway graduate - doing most of the astrophysics research. For five days of the week, it's connected over fibre-optic cabling with 51 other LOFAR stations throughout Europe, with all of these signals funnelled to a huge supercomputer in Groningen, Holland for processing. For the remaining two days, it's all ours!

The LOFAR telescope is amazing for motivating students. We drive to Birr, into the grounds of Birr Castle. You go past the Leviathan, which was the largest optical telescope in the world from 1845 to 1917. Around the corner is the I-LOFAR telescope and its nearby Discovery Centre. When we tell students their project is going to be based around using the I-LOFAR radio telescope, they're hooked. It's really hands-on, since the telescope was built by astronomers and radio engineers, so the students have to get stuck in the weeds down at the hardware level, understanding computer networks, developing programming skills... not to mention studying the physical Universe! It's an incredible way to learn so many transferable skills.

I'll give you two examples of student projects. Former PhD student, Sai Susarla, just finished his doctorate using I-LOFAR. He was studying gravitational waves, predicted to exist from Einstein's theory of general relativity, and which are in effect ripples in the fabric of spacetime. Sai studied radio pulsars, which are collapsed stars that broadcast precisely pulsed radio beams, and by observing incredibly subtle wobbles present in the radio signals from these cosmic clocks, he could identify the fingerprints of gravitational waves

Dr Sai Chaitanya Susarla presenting his PhD thesis work at the Discovery Centre, Birr, Co. Offaly.

caused by supermassive black holes smashing into each other aeons ago. Sai's work also had an incredibly practical outcome, as the same radio 'clocks' could be used to detect, measure, and study plasma explosions from the Sun – the same events that result in the Northern Lights, when the Earth's magnetosphere reacts to being 'hit' by what's called a coronal mass ejection. Really bad impacts can be incredibly serious, knocking out satellites and power grids. Studying cosmic gravitational waves... and space weather affecting the Earth, a fantastic demonstration of how Sai's work could transfer to something with immediate impact.

The second example is a student called Szymon Kozak, who recently graduated with a degree in computer science. I've been collaborating with an organisation called the Breakthrough Listen Foundation, set up by billionaire Yuri Milner as part of his Breakthrough Initiatives program. It's a $100M funded project to search for extraterrestrial 'technosignatures' and involves scientists and engineers working at universities and radio observatories around the world. Companies like Nvidia are also heavily involved, as searching for these types of radio signals is an excellent innovation challenge to develop their hardware infrastructure. Szymon was recently selected as part of Breakthrough Listen's Summer Internship programme to work with me, and he applied his outstanding computer science skills to the problem of being able to use AI to detect the presence of the same signal in two LOFAR telescopes observing the same part of the sky 2000 km apart. This is a very, very hard problem – LOFAR operates at low frequencies (the same frequencies as car radios and electrical appliances) so the background is incredibly noisy, but very local, so you won't see the same 'stuff' when you compare both telescopes' outputs... But how to separate the 'stuff' from something unusual and common to both every millisecond? You need an expert in AI & signal processing for that – like one of our brilliant students, in this case, Szymon.

CC: Physics and data science are becoming increasingly intertwined. In what ways has the University evolved to address this? What about wider applications?

AG: We're already intertwining disciplines institutionally, certainly in the College of Science and Engineering, where we host three of the University's institutes: the Ryan Institute, the Institute for Health Discovery and Innovation, and the Data Science Institute. One common denominator to all their work is the analysis and interpretation of empirical data – and that's where physicists can play a role.

Many people with physics backgrounds are already working in the Institute for Health Discovery and Innovation or the Ryan Institute. One of my current roles is Director of the Centre for Astronomy, and I'm exploring how our centre might affiliate to the Ryan Institute with Director Professor Frances Fahy. Some people might think this is a bit of a stretch, given the Ryan's focus on the marine and the ▸

environment... but the Earth is no different to the many exoplanets my colleagues study when you think about it. Of even greater value is the transferable skills we bring, and there's a huge opportunity for the Ryan Institute's research community to avail of our remote sensing expertise particularly in the synthesis and fusing of different types of image data, such as optical and radar data.

Only this November, the European Space Agency (ESA) launched its latest Copernicus mission, Sentinel 1D, an Earth observation satellite that maps the Earth's surface using radar. This satellite joins an existing constellation that regularly makes both optical and radar observations of our home planet, and there is a lot of interest in trying to combine both image modes, as radar can see through clouds but the 'things' it sees aren't the same things we would immediately recognise in an optical image of the same field of view. 'Fusing' an optical image with a radar image for a lot of folks would be a complicated data stitching problem... but for an astrophysicist, it's pretty straightforward as we're used to taking images in different parts of the electromagnetic spectrum and merging them... and then going about decoding what the merged image tells us.

What we now call 'data science' is something astronomers and physicists have been doing for over 20 years. To answer our own scientific questions – is there weather on a distant exoplanet, for instance – we have to build the instrument to do the experiments, make the observations, extract all of the data from the observations (usually TBs of it), figure out how to analyse it all using new algorithms and advanced computing infrastructure as usually no one has ever obtained data quite like it before, and then add high-level thinking to the semantic thinking and put scientific shape on what the data is telling us. This approach to solving problems is baked into our students' training. When they graduate, they are 'de facto' data scientists, even if they don't know it. I remember when I graduated, I thought: I can tell you about Schrodinger's equation but how's this going to work in the real world? I didn't realise at that time that I'd been trained to get to the core of a problem using data: that mindset and ethos to 'get stuck in' with whatever tools are to hand is just as important as programming ability for a data scientist.

Let me give you an example. A couple of years ago I was fortunate to win the Science Foundation Ireland Innovator Prize as part of their Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Societal Good Challenge, which involved combining Earth observation data and AI to build models to improve agri-food production in the developing world. It's difficult to find 'turnkey' experts in this area, so I hired an astrophysicist, an expert in solar astronomy, Dr Pearse Murphy, to help us out. Within six months, he had produced a top-quality research paper on analysing radar data taken from the Sentinel earth observation satellites mentioned to figure out – from 700 km above! – the soil moisture in several agricultural regions in the central African country of Malawi. It was a bigger challenge for him to understand the effects of surface biomass and soil moisture than to figure out the physics underlying the back-scattered radar signals and cook up the software to do the data analysis, but he did, and just like that he went from being a solar physicist... to a climate scientist!

CC: Where have some notable graduates from the programmes ended up?

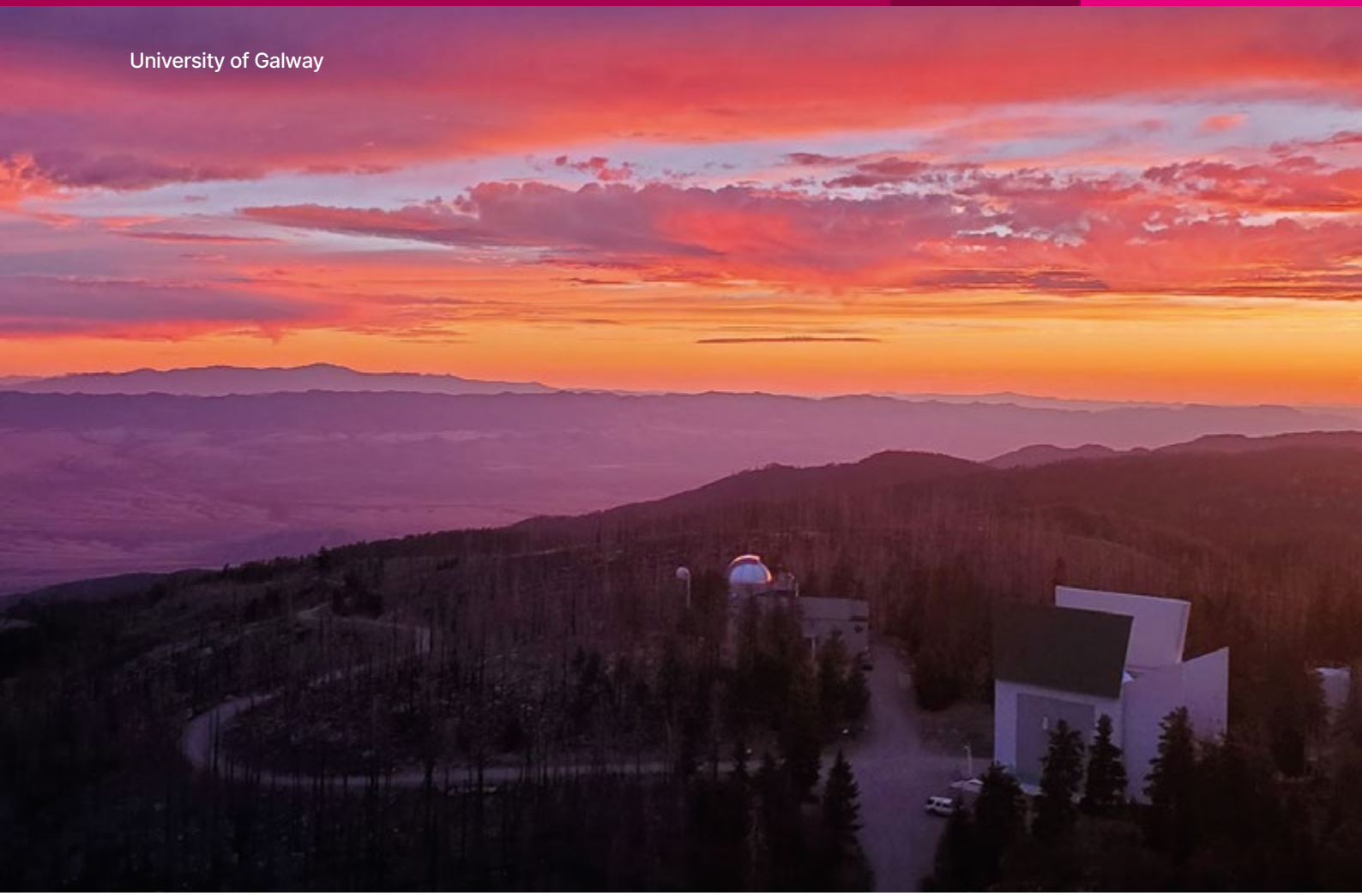
AG: Well, they go everywhere and do all kinds of things... For example, Dr Alison Boyle, was recently appointed Director of the RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences's new public health gallery, the first of its kind in Ireland. Another would be Dr Colm Lynch, who is Imaging Operations High Resolution Tech Lead for Planet, the global leader in earth observation satellite innovation. And one of our most recent graduates, Sam O'Neill, went off and founded a technology startup providing high-performance analytics to rowers. For those that have stayed in astronomy and space sciences, some have gone on to work at the very top of their game. These include graduates like

An excellent example is the recent discovery of WISPIT 2b, a new planet 437 light years away, which University of Galway astronomer Christian Ginski and his PhD student Chloe Lawlor were involved in. The now former President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins was so inspired by this announcement that he honoured and marked the discovery with the gift of a remarkable work of art to the University, titled 'Sunburst'

Dr Gregg Hallinan, Full Professor of Astronomy and Director of the Owens Valley Radio Observatory at the California Institute of Technology, and Dr Leon Harding, a Senior Staff Engineer and Mission Architect responsible for a whole portfolio of space missions at Northrop Grumman. One of our visiting Erasmus students, Dr Catarina Alves de Oliveira, is currently Head of the Science Operations Development Division at the European Space Agency. I have to include current astrophysics undergraduate Adam Mullins, who has somehow managed to balance his studies with setting up and running the University of Galway Student Pantry, which redistributes surplus food from local supermarkets to the student community; food that would otherwise would be destined for landfill. I am in awe of all of them.

CC: Ireland has a rich astronomical heritage and a growing research infrastructure. How do telescopes, observatories, and international collaborations shape your work, and inspire the next generation of physicists?

AG: The word heritage both refers to the past but also looks to the future. Our ancestors were acutely attuned to the heavens – the great burial complexes and solar



The Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope of the Vatican Obaervatory at sunset, with the Pinaleño Mountains of south-east Arizona in the background.

observatories along the Boyne Valley, at Newgrange and at Knowth, are testaments to their observational astronomy expertise and also speak to how studying the natural world was intimately part of their cultural lives. I feel very strongly that this urge to explore, to discover, and this deep need to understand through our senses that we do as physicists mirrors the same deep motivations that is the engine for what people think of as 'culture' here in Ireland – in the arts, humanities, and literature. An excellent example is the recent discovery of WISPIT 2b, a new planet 437 light years away, which University of Galway astronomer Christian Ginski and his PhD student Chloe Lawlor were involved in. The now former President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins was so inspired by this announcement that he honoured and marked the discovery with the gift of a remarkable work of art to the University, titled 'Sunburst'. Amazingly creative things happen here in Ireland; we all know that. It seemingly bubbles up from the land itself, creates this incredible vitality... that also inspires the phenomenally creative work that's happening in STEM here. I think things are particularly special for anyone working in the astronomical sciences. Astronomy speaks to the divine in a sense; anybody who's looked up on a dark night can feel almost taken out of themselves. That sense of wonder is the real creative engine for us, the thing we go back to when we are stuck in the weeds of working with complex instruments or seemingly impenetrable observational data.

On the subject of the divine, I have to mention the 'Pope's Scope' – this is the nickname given to the 1.8m Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope which is operated by the Vatican Observatory and is located high up in the mountains of Arizona. We – as in University of Galway – have a very specialised camera as what's known as a 'Visitor Instrument' there since 2008. Known as the Galway Ultra Fast Imager or GUFI (of course), when combined with the telescope it's possible for us to observe all kinds of bizarre and wonderful celestial objects – from brown dwarfs to flare stars, comets and asteroids. How it ended up there is a terrific story of chance and circumstance, but what started out as an experimental 'spare part' for Emeritus Professor Chris Dainty's Applied Optics group was transmogrified into a high-speed imaging camera by our graduate students. I don't know where I got the idea to cut a deal with the Jesuits to host our camera on their telescope 'for free'... but it continues to be a wonderful collaboration – most especially for our students who get to travel to the Mount Graham International Observatory outside Tucson to conduct their awe inspiring research, and who get to use the facility cost-free on account of our continuing MoU with the 'Pope's Scope'!

Modern astronomy needs big telescopes – period – and for that we need large mirrors, to soak up as much of that faint ghostly light from the deepest recesses of the cosmos and to focus it all down onto a detector maybe the size of a smartphone. It's probably the best ▸

Delegates next to the Big Yellow Thing during the Irish National Astronomy Meeting held at University of Galway August 29th-30th 2024 (photo: R.F. Butler).

kept secret on campus that University of Galway is part of the select few consortia currently building the European Southern Observatory's Extremely Large Telescope (ELT) on a top-sliced mountain top high up in the Chilean Andes. The ELT, when it becomes operational in 2029, will be the biggest telescope ever built, with a mirror 40-metres in size, held within a building the size of the Aviva Stadium. This will be nothing less than a 'discovery machine', and due to our University's involvement, we'll have guaranteed time on the telescope, to be a part of the discoveries of the century... that is such an exciting prospect!

My colleague here in Physics, Dr Nicholas Devaney, leads our University's team in building the 'applied optics' instrument for the ELT, known as MORFEO, as part of a wider European consortium involving research institutes in Italy, France and Canada. MORFEO will be the size of a small detached house, and it will use advanced optics to in real-time remove the atmospheric turbulence that makes stars twinkle – pretty for us on a clear night, a disaster if you want to obtain the crispest images from deep space. Galway was explicitly invited to join the MORFEO consortium on account of our long tradition of applied optics excellence, with amazingly successful spin-out companies like MBRYONICS and FotoNation all having their origin in Emeritus Professor Chris Dainty's Applied Optics Research Group.

CC: How does creativity drive learning, discovery, and research across the physics community? What does that look like at the University?

AG: Recently I had a tour of the Croker Nuclear Laboratory at the University of California Davis, just outside Sacramento, where they operate a cyclotron (basically a particle accelerator in cylinder surrounded by powerful magnets) for nuclear physics research. There was a small, boxed room in this big industrial lab space whose door opened up into a bright, comfortable space in which was a chair, a head mask and a tube going all the way back to the cyclotron. I found out that this was where proton beams were diverted to treat patients with uveal melanoma, a rare cancer of the eye. Medical Physics is one of my other interests, and it's a fascinating and incredibly important problem to try to figure out the best way to optimise a given patient's radiotherapy treatment. You need to use particle codes developed originally by astronomers and particle physicists to understand how beams of radiation interact with matter. It may sound crazy but from a physics point of view, it's not a million miles away from studying the effects of particle beams slamming into a planet's atmosphere... and I've already seen that movie. Back in 2007 graduate student Gregg Hallinan led a study which detected for the first time aurora – what we'd call the Northern Lights – around another world, a brown dwarf some 35 light years from us. The underlying auroral currents that make the light show we observe are actually incredibly powerful electrical processes, creating very high-energy particle

Graduation of Mr. Rob Ferguson with a M.Sc. on radio pulsars on 17th August 2023. L–R: Aaron Golden, PhD student Sai Chaitanya Susarla, Rob Ferguson, and PhD student Deirdre Ní Chonchubhair.

beams that are so powerful above these brown dwarfs that they actually result in measurable atmospheric effects. Having worked on that kind of problem, I immediately saw the connection with a proton beam going into a patient's eye and have started thinking about coming up with new ways to make such treatments more effective. I think this a great example of how physicists can seemingly move from one completely different area to another, mainly because we can see the same basic physical processes common to both.

Our students have this unique opportunity to build capacity in transferable skills, through taking problems from astronomy and applying them in other contexts, particularly in the medical field, an area that complements the strong health sciences mission of the University. This connection with medical applications isn't accidental. University of Galway was the first to set up a clinically accredited MSc in Medical Physics degree programme – our graduate qualification is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Physics Education Programs, which means they can practise in a clinical setting. I'm constantly thinking how to take what works in astrophysics and apply it in ways we can give back, apart from sharing the wonder of what we do as astronomers. It's this mindset that keeps me grounded.

Our students have this unique opportunity to build capacity in transferable skills, through taking problems from astronomy and applying them in other contexts, particularly in the medical field.

Dr Aaron Golden is the Director of the Centre for Astronomy and Professor in Interdisciplinary Physics in the School of Natural Sciences at University of Galway. He is an astronomer and experimental physicist interested in applying advanced data analytics to contemporary societal challenges in healthcare, the environment, and planetary climate. He currently serves as the Vice-Dean for Research and Innovation for the College of Science and Engineering at the University of Galway, where he leads the Golden Lab, an interdisciplinary physics group working primarily on large scale and complex astronomical data, and in solving real-world problems in areas as diverse as medical imaging and climate science.

University of Galway Researchers Explain Just How It Feels To Discover a New Planet in 2025

Dr Christian Ginski,
Lecturer Above the Bar,
University of Galway

Chloe Lawlor,
PhD Student, Physics (Astrophysics),
University of Galway

It's not every day that researchers discover a new planet, but that's exactly what happened to researchers at the Centre for Astronomy. Using the latest iterations of the world's largest telescopes, they were able to study a dust disk, allowing them to eventually discover the planet lurking within. Through collaboration with other universities, the hard work of many student researchers … and maybe a sprinkling of magic dust? … a new planet was found, to the amazement of the scientific community, the media, and even the then President of Ireland.

> And there it was, the planet, sitting right in the gap, exactly where we expected it to be!

Cois Coiribe (CC): Chloe and Christian, thank you so much for joining us this morning. Chloe, could you just please introduce yourself, and tell us if you were always interested in this field of work?

Chloe Lawlor (CL): I'm currently a second-year PhD student, and my research journey actually began with binary stars – systems made up of two stars orbiting around each other. I started out modelling their orbits and their interactions, but since the discovery of WISPIT 2b, my focus has shifted toward dust studies. Now, I'm researching the properties of dust in systems where we know planets already exist. When you know there's a planet there already, you can study the types of dust present to infer which types are more efficient at forming planets in similar environments. It's really exciting!

Interestingly, I didn't always plan to study physics. It wasn't really until my Leaving Cert that I started considering physics as a career; but I didn't even do physics in the University originally. I actually began studying art and design because I wanted to work in animation, but I realised it wasn't quite the right fit. So, I decided to switch to physics and see how that goes. And sure, here I am!

CC: Christian, can you introduce yourself, please? What did you study in university? Were you always interested in this field?

Christian Ginski (CG): I'm Christian Ginski, and I'm a lecturer in the School for Natural Sciences, within the Physics Unit, specifically in the Centre for Astronomy here at University of Galway.

I joined University of Galway in early 2023, so I'm still relatively new here. Before that, I did postdocs in the Netherlands at the University of Amsterdam and Leiden University.

Pictured (L–R) are Richelle van Capelleveen (Leiden University), Professor Frances Fahy (Director, Ryan Institute), Jake Byrne and Dan McLachlan (Astrophysics PhD students), Sabina and President Michael D. Higgins, Dr Christian Ginski (Astrophysics), Chloe Lawlor (Astrophysics PhD student), Dr John Caulfield (President's Office) and Dr Ann Ryan (College of Science and Engineering).

When I completed my university degree, there was no difference between Bachelor's and Master's programmes; it was essentially an integrated Master's in Physics, or the equivalent. I completed that degree and my PhD in the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany, which is around halfway between Berlin and Munich.

I have been interested in astrophysics for as long as I can remember. Even in high school, before I began my physics studies, there was this book that had a huge influence on me *Black Holes and Time Warps* by Kip Thorne, the Nobel Prize-winning cosmologist and theoretical physicist at Caltech. This book explores black holes, time warps, and the history of physics and cosmology leading up to our understanding of these phenomena. This sparked my interest in and passion for astrophysics to the point that I realised this was the direction I wanted to go in.

Funnily enough, my current research is quite different from what first inspired me in astrophysics. I very much come from the observational side of astrophysics, using large telescopes to collect data and interpret what it tells us about the universe.

Throughout my career, I've been working on high-contrast and high-resolution imaging, which means that I try to see faint things that appear very small on the sky due to their large distances to us. My goal has always been to discover new planets or to study the environment where planets form. These two areas have been a constant in my research.

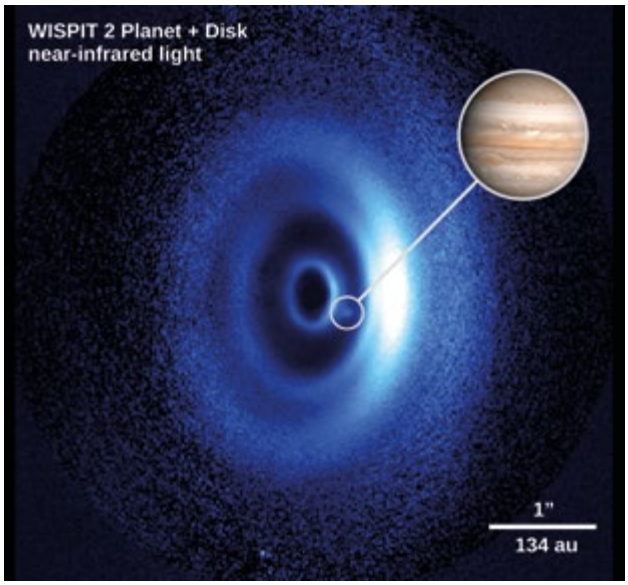
CC: That brings me nicely on to discovery of this new planet, WISPIT 2b. Maybe I will firstly ask Chloe; can you talk us through your part within this discovery as a PhD student?

CL: It kind of led on from what I was doing in my undergraduate final year project, where I modelled the orbits of binary stars. For the discovery of the planet WISPIT 2b, I applied similar methods, this time modelling the orbit of the planet around its host star. A few months earlier, Dr Ginski had published a paper in which I calculated whether a planet of a particular size could create a gap of a specific size within a system. The work I did for WISPIT 2b built on that, showing that this planet could theoretically open such a wide gap, and is likely the primary cause of it.

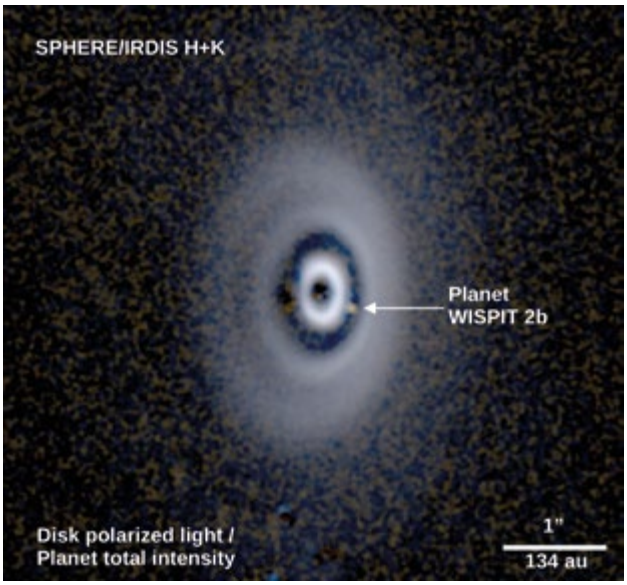
It was really exciting at the time but hard to keep it a secret! It didn't quite feel real until the paper was published and all the media attention started. Suddenly, we were doing interviews, I was seeing myself on the news, and people I knew and people I didn't were coming up to congratulate me. They'd say things like, 'Oh, I saw you on TV!' It was a bit surreal, and I'd end up saying something like, 'Oh, that's nice!'

CC: Christian, can you talk us through the process and discovery of WISPIT 2b?

CG: To me, this was a really fun discovery, because it was completely unexpected. The project initially discovered the surrounding dust disk, before detecting the planet itself. It's part of a study called WIde Separation Planets In Time, or WISPIT. ▸



WISPIT 2b + Disk, near-infrared light with Jupiter example. ESO Very Large Telescope composite image of the WISPIT 2 system with its dust disk and the embedded young planet WISPIT 2b. The planet WISPIT 2b is a gas giant similar to Jupiter in our own solar system (shown in the inset as illustration).



SHERE/IDRIS H+K | Disk polarized light / planet total intensity, WISPIT 2b.

WISPIT was the same name that was given to the star system and the planet. The study itself is led by colleagues at Leiden Observatory. It uses quite literally the Very Large Telescope (VLT), which has an 8-metre main or primary mirror size, to study planetary systems around young nearby stars. This is one of the largest near-infrared and optical telescopes currently available on Earth.

We figured out that by pointing this telescope at a young star for just a few minutes, we could detect whether a very wide separation planet was orbiting it. That's how the study got its name: WIde Separation Planets In Time. The 'in time' part comes from our aim of observing stars of different ages, to find out whether planets can form very far from their stars, at distances of hundreds of astronomical units, meaning hundreds of times the distance between the Earth and the Sun.

This wasn't something that theory had originally predicted. Only a few planets have been found at such large separations, and we wanted to understand where they originate from, whether they form out there or form much closer to their star and are later scattered outward through dynamical interaction or similar processes. That's why we wanted to observe both very young stars and older stars for comparison, to see whether planets appear in one population or the other.

Richelle van Capelleveen, a PhD student at Leiden Observatory who is leading the study, contacted me to say that she had somewhat unexpectedly found a dust disk around one of the stars we were observing. This was significant. She had only a few minutes of integration time, so the image wasn't especially striking, as the short exposure time and lack of optimisation meant it was hard to get a detailed disk image.

> To suddenly see that little dot of light, sitting right exactly where the physics predicted it should be, was absolutely exhilarating. I was quite literally, over the moon.

Since most of the stars we were studying were old enough that their disks should have already dispersed – they typically disperse after a few million years – it was quite unexpected to find a star that still had an extended disk.

From there, things started to spiral and take off. I realised that this was a very extended disk and would be a very good target to check whether a planet might currently be forming within it. I convinced Richelle to give up a little bit of her observation time; she traded observation time planned for four or five stars, and instead caried out a long observation sequence on this disk. At this stage, we didn't have the planet yet, but we now had an image of this beautiful dust disk.

As luck would have it, I still had some telescope time left, and I thought, this is the perfect chance to see if there's a planet lurking in one of those gaps in the disk.

So I submitted a request to use some of my remaining telescope time to observe it. Then, one beautiful Saturday morning, while I was having breakfast, I decided to check the observation logs, something I probably shouldn't be doing on a Saturday morning, admittedly. That's when I saw it: the observation was in! It only takes a few minutes to run the data processing on my laptop, so I

> **We can't look back in time, but by studying young stars and planets around other systems, we get glimpses of how our own story started. We're looking up, but in many ways, we're also looking back at ourselves.**

started it up while I was eating. And there it was, the planet, sitting right in the gap, exactly where we expected it to be!

You know, I've been searching for an object like this for nearly 10 years, something as clear and as compelling as what we found here. Nothing even close had materialised in my research before. So, to suddenly see that little dot of light, sitting right exactly where the physics predicted it should be, was absolutely exhilarating.

I was, quite literally, over the moon.

CC: Was it the collaboration with other universities and parts of the world that made that happen?

CG: Very much so. Without the work done in Leiden, we would have never looked at this particular star. It is in a somewhat obscure region of the sky. It was definitely not on anyone's bucket list of a must-observe system.

It was only through Richelle's diligent work that we learned that there was a dust disk there. Through our discussions and shared telescope time, we were then able to identify the planet. We also collaborated with a partner in Arizona, who carried out complementary observations. They observed the planet in a different way, looking at wavelength of light that signifies different physical effects occurring in and around the planet.

That partnership came about thanks to a University of Leiden faculty member who had previously worked in Arizona. Through his contacts and this international collaboration, we were able to gather so much data on this planet in a very short time. You know, observational cycles operate on a yearly basis, but our timeline was very short.

From the moment that Richelle first showed me the disk image in November or December, to the follow-up observation in March, and finally the planet's discovery in April, everything happened really fast!

CC: The story of WISPIT 2b's discovery has been covered by the media as groundbreaking research. How old do you think the planet is; can you estimate? Can you talk us through the impact of this discovery?

CG: I think WISPIT 2b is about 5 million years old. That's the number what we ended up with. It might sound incredibly old to anyone who isn't used to operating in astronomical timescales, but 5 million years is basically the toddler stage for a star. For comparison, the Sun is around 4.5 billion years old, so a few million years makes WISPIT a very young system.

When I said I was hunting for a case like this for about 10 years, it's not just me. Many astronomers have been observing these beautiful dust disks around young stars, but we've only been able to capture such detailed images for roughly the past decade. This is thanks to advances in telescope and detector technology. It's a fairly new field of research, and it gives us an opportunity to study structures in dust disks, spiral arms, and rings.

There are so many beautiful images – which people think are AI generated – but the fact is they're not. How exciting is that!

The entire field has been trying to prove what we've long suspected: that when we see spiral arms in a disk or gaps in a disk, it's because a planet is in effect shaping the dust, or when we see a gap, that the planet is sort of vacuuming up material, clearing a gap as it's growing. It's a nice theory, but for a long time we had very little observational evidence to back it up.

Until we found this particular planet, there was only one other system where the entire community agreed that we had detected the planets. This system was called PDS 70. It's very famous in our field, discovered in 2018, and contains two planets inside a large cavity in a dust disk with a single ring. Since that discovery, we've been trying to find more systems like that, because one case does not prove a general trend.

We can't say: 'We found this planet in one singular system; that means all of the structures that we are seeing in dust disks are caused by planets.' That would be far too big a leap. We are trying to find more examples of those planets, which has proven very difficult for various reasons. Dust can partially obscure the planets, making their thermal emission and infrared light difficult to detect.

We have to apply a lot of image processing to remove the light from the central star, which is many orders of magnitude brighter than the disk or planets we might hope to see.

These complex disk structures can also lead to false positive detections that might look like planets but are artifacts from image processing. This is a common problem.

That's why discovering this planet was so exciting! It really was one of the clearest cases of a planet that forms in a disk, and because the dust disk has multiple rings and gaps, we believe it is quite likely that there is even a multi-planet system forming here. We are witnessing planet formation in action.

Since the paper there has been a hive of activity, sparking a flood of observation requests across major telescopes. The entire field is very excited and for good reason.

CC: You mentioned observation time. Can you explain what that is, and tell us if you've scheduled time since appearing on RTÉ?

CL: Yeah, so there are only so many hours in the year, and only so many hours in a night, yet everyone wants to observe the skies. It used to be twice a year for the Very Large Telescope (VLT), but now it's once a year. You submit a proposal justifying your case and why you want to observe. There are probably hundreds of applications, so not everyone will get the time they request but they must take into ▸

account what is most feasible and likely to have the greatest scientific return.

CG: Telescope time is heavily oversubscribed. It's extremely competitive. Chloe and I are putting significant effort into writing observation proposals to secure more time.

We are searching for more planets in other systems based on this discovery. In fact, we have selected a number of systems that we think are also likely to contain planets.

Chloe has put together a really innovative proposal looking at multiple-ring systems using the James Webb Space Telescope. If she's awarded the time, we think it could lead to genuinely breakthrough results. We're looking forward to it.

CC: Christian, you came to the University in 2023. What attracted you to University of Galway?

CG: The honest answer is that opportunities in astronomy and astrophysics are incredibly competitive. There are many brilliant people in the field, and only a limited number of permanent positions. After completing my PhD, I spent about 10 years in postdoctoral roles and eventually began applying for permanent positions. University of Galway was recruiting to replace a researcher whose work was in a similar area to mine. There was a clear interest in strengthening research in planet formation, young stars, and related topics, which made it a natural fit for my expertise. One standout factor made Galway unique: my colleague Dr Nicholas Devaney's involvement in the development of instrumentation for the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT), the next iteration of large telescopes. It will be the absolute biggest optical near-infrared telescope in the world! He is involved in building an instrument for this telescope, which means that University of Galway already has guaranteed time on the ELT when it comes online. That was a major attraction and a rare opportunity in my field. To put it in context, the current telescopes have an 8-metre main mirror size, where the ELT will have a 40-metre main mirror size.

To elaborate: the clean room where this instrument is being built is in mainland Europe. Dr Devaney is leading much of the optical design work from Galway and travels over when needed – so it's not being assembled in a lab on campus. The project is part of the European Southern Observatory, the same organisation that runs the Very Large Telescope.

So while the role itself initially drew me in, it quickly became clear that Galway's faculty and projects made it the ideal place for me to be in Ireland.

CC: I've seen the pictures of that beautiful mural donated to the University as a result of this fantastic discovery. Maybe I'll start with you, Chloe; is there anything else that you would like to add?

CL: I thought it was really amazing to be invited up to Áras an Uachtaráin to meet the then President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins. It's not something you ever expect to happen because of your research. I mean, we think our research is very groundbreaking, but it doesn't directly affect people's everyday lives, it's not as pressing as presenting cures for cancer. It was a wonderful and memorable experience to meet him.

CG: Yes, the appreciation shown by the former President and the Irish national media uptake was amazing. I think the genuine interest was not only in the research itself but because young researchers were at the heart of it. The first planet ever identified was discovered by a PhD researcher. But here, for WISPIT 2b, perhaps uniquely, the entire research team was basically made up of students. That helped make this discovery bigger and a lovely feel-good story.

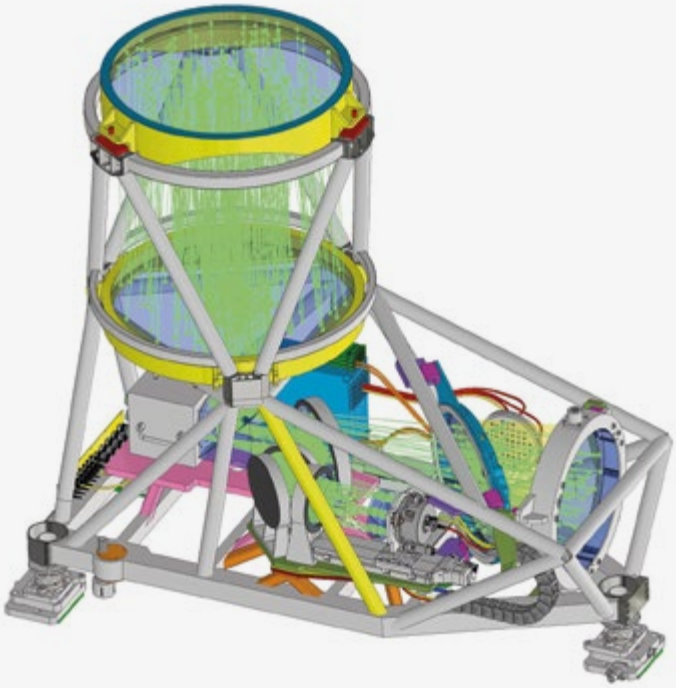
For me, it's the most rewarding research I've ever been part of, not just scientifically, but because we wrote the paper together as a group of five, all in one lecture hall. It was genuinely fun, and the students' contributions were central to that.

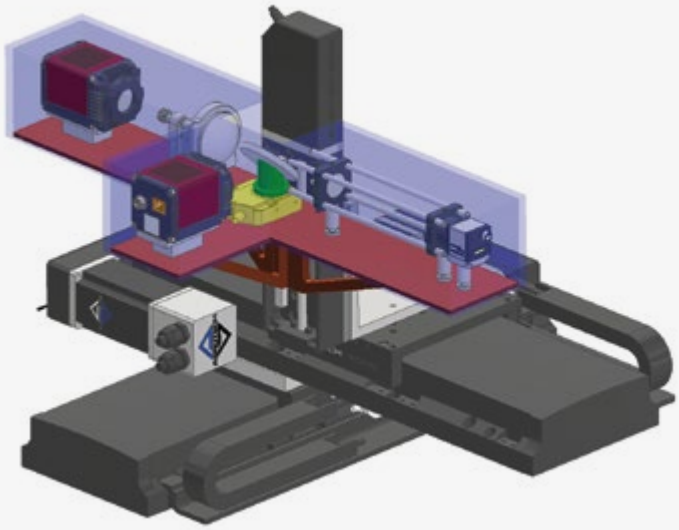
As for the former President of Ireland's event, as Chloe said, Michael D. Higgins is such a lovely man, and we're grateful to him for showing such appreciation. I'm not sure I've fully processed that the mural was gifted as an appreciation of our work. It's an incredible honour.

Our work tries to answer something deeply human: how planets form, how life begins, and ultimately, where we come from. We can't look back in time, but by studying young stars and planets around other systems, we get glimpses of how our own story started. We're looking up, but in many ways, we're also looking back at ourselves.

Dr Christian Ginski is a Lecturer Above the Bar at University of Galway. His main focus is high-contrast imaging of extrasolar planets and circumstellar disks. Dr Ginski uses instruments around the globe, but chiefly the extreme adaptive optics instrument SPHERE at the ESO Paranal observatory, located in the Atacama Desert in northern Chile. He has a Master's in Physics from The Friedrich Schiller University in Jena and was awarded his PhD from the Astrophysical Institute and University Observatory Jena in 2012, going on to complete several postdoctoral projects in Germany and the Netherlands, including at Leiden University and University of Amsterdam.

Chloe Lawlor is a PhD Physics student at University of Galway, completing a specialisation in astrophysics. She contributed to the discovery of the planet WISPIT 2b and co-authored a groundbreaking paper alongside Dr Christian Ginski and fellow University of Galway students Jake Byrne, Dan McLachlan, and Matthew Murphy.





Astronomical Instrumentation

When the ELT starts observing the universe in a few years, University of Galway astronomers will have the chance to make discoveries that will inspire the next generation of Irish scientists and engineers – this will be the reward for our deep involvement in designing and building the MORFEO instrument.

Nicholas Devaney
Senior Lecturer, School of Natural Sciences, Physics, University of Galway

From Galway to the Galaxy: An Erasmus Alumna's Journey to the European Space Agency

Dr Catarina Alves de Oliveira,
Astrophysicist and Head of the Science Operations Development Division at the European Space Agency

Cois Coiribe had the chance to reconnect with University of Galway Erasmus alumna, Dr Catarina Alves de Oliveira. Here, we retrace her journey from Erasmus student at University of Galway to Head of the Science Operations Development Division at the European Space Agency. Discover how her Erasmus year helped propel her into a career in space science.

> My research focuses on finding and characterising the tiniest stars that can form, objects so cold they cannot sustain hydrogen fusion in their cores, known as brown dwarfs.

Meet Dr Catarina Alves de Oliveira...

I'm an astrophysicist working at the European Space Agency. I am Portuguese, from Portugal, and I've lived and worked abroad for over 20 years. I now live in Spain with my husband and two children. In my free time, I like to play table tennis and go running; on the weekends, we hike the hills around Madrid and play ball sports as a family. I have been trying to learn how to surf for many years, with mixed results, but I love returning to my hometown by the seaside and paddling out with my family. Music has always been another of my hobbies. I am a violinist and played in several amateur orchestras, but these days I am content with playing much simpler pieces or grabbing a guitar for some cover song singalongs.

Cois Coiribe (CC): You are Head of the Science Operations Development Division at the European Space Agency (ESA). Can you explain what this role encompasses?

Catarina Alves de Oliveira (CAO): As Head of the Science Operations Development Division at the ESA, I lead the teams that are studying and developing the Science Operations Centres for all of ESA's future science missions. Science operations encompass all the activities needed to optimise on-sky observations of our telescopes when they fly. This comprises programming each instrument to deliver the data as requested by scientists and monitoring their health status, while also processing that data to be archived and available so that it's ready to use for future research. We work with more than a hundred partner institutions across Europe, as well as other Space Agencies, to prepare the systems that enable these activities, and we train the teams who operate them. We're currently supporting 13 future science missions; it is an incredible effort over many years to ensure every system is ready when each mission launches into space. ▸

Catarina Alves de Oliveira visiting the Cliffs of Moher, County Clare, before the start of the year 2002/2003 at University of Galway as an Erasmus student.

CC: While completing a Physics/ Applied Maths degree at the School of Sciences, University of Porto, you participated in a Physics Erasmus programme at University of Galway. Can you walk us through this process?

CAO: I was very curious about living and studying abroad, and I knew several friends who had taken part in the Erasmus programme. When I saw the opportunity to go to University of Galway, I didn't hesitate. I had never been to Ireland, and that was also part of the appeal, a truly new experience. I believe I was the first student from University of Porto to participate in the exchange, and I remember meeting several professors to ensure my curriculum was aligned so that I could complete the 3rd year of my Physics & Applied Mathematics degree. It all worked out very well. At the end of the year, I took the exams, which I passed with flying colours, and all my results were fully recognised back in Portugal.

CC: Are there any specific memories that come to mind when you think back to your time at University of Galway?

CAO: I have many fun memories of my time at University of Galway. I was rather worried during my first days before the term started, as I struggled to get used to the Irish accent, but after many funny misunderstandings, I quickly became proficient. I very fondly remember Professor Michael Redfern from the Centre for Astronomy, and his students, who welcomed me to their group. That year, students were encouraged to pursue summer research internships, and I was allowed to apply as well. It was that process that led me to my first research experience at the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh the following summer.

While in my Erasmus year, I also joined the University of Galway Chamber Orchestra, where I played violin and met many fellow musicians. I liked going into Galway City with friends, exploring the small shops, the pubs, and ending nights out in the Cuba nightclub *(does it still exist? Editor's Note: an interesting history to this one! It was closed for over a decade, reopened in 2024, and has since shuttered its doors once more)*. I cherish that year for what I learned about living in a different country, experiencing different ways of teaching, and making new friends abroad.

CC: In your career thus far, what are some standout projects or discoveries? Can you explain what sort of collaboration took place across disciplines and expertise to make these possible?

CAO: Scientifically, I have been trying to understand how stars form in our galaxy, using observations from ground and space-based telescopes. My research focuses on finding and characterising the tiniest stars that can form, objects so cold they cannot sustain hydrogen fusion in their cores, known as brown dwarfs. Together with my collaborators, we have discovered objects with masses a few times that of Jupiter. This discovery challenges the current theories of star formation processes, as it's still unclear how these objects came to be. I continue to design observational programmes to characterise the chemical composition and atmospheres of these planet-mass brown dwarfs, hoping to uncover more clues to solve this puzzle.

Another highlight of my professional career has been my time working on the James Webb Space Telescope, where I led the calibration of the near-infrared spectrograph NIRSpec, one of the ESA's contributions to this mission. I dedicated 10 years of my career to this project, working side by side with incredibly talented people, who share a passion for building the best instrument possible to address some of our fundamental questions about the Universe. I remember receiving the first on-sky data and confirming through analysis that everything was working as expected; it was an incredible feeling. Even now, when reading the great discoveries made with the NIRSpec instrument, I feel immensely proud that my small contribution helped make it possible.

Both in research and instrument-development projects, collaboration has played a central role in my career. At the ESA, for example, I work daily with colleagues from different areas: engineering, science, finance, law, administration, management. The complexity of the space telescopes we are trying to build for the scientific community is really high, and the sense of responsibility is immense. We want to ensure we provide the best possible missions through exceptional science, delivering on the investment of ESA's Member States. I really enjoy working in this multi-cultural environment across disciplines, where I am constantly learning something new.

CC: Your career is an aspirational one for many studying in the fields of astrophysics, astronomy, and space science. What inspirational guidance might you provide for budding scientists seeking to unravel the mysteries of the universe?

CAO: Thank you for those kind words! I am happy to share what has been key in my career, in the hope that it may resonate with others. I'm celebrating 20 years in space science, and with that perspective of time, one of the things I have learned is that contributions to scientific advancement happen in both small steps and large leaps, and that both approaches are needed and valuable. I've also learned that rejection and failure are part of a research career. Every senior professional likely has several rejected grants, proposals, and job applications alongside their successes. I am very thankful to the mentors who shared their own failures and setbacks with me; this was key to helping me contextualise my own shortcomings, and to keep me focused on improvement and growth.

I'm celebrating 20 years in space science, and with that perspective of time, one of the things I have learned is that contributions to scientific advancement happen in both small steps and large leaps, and that both approaches are needed and valuable.

I've always tried to remain open to opportunities. This approach has taken me to live and work in many countries in Europe, as well as South Africa and the USA, and to visit some of the most amazing places for astronomers, such as the telescopes of the European Southern Observatory in the Atacama Desert, Chile. Along the way, I've made very good friends and met many colleagues, with whom I keep in regular contact. Even if research is a competitive field, what I enjoy most is collaboration and the exchanging of ideas.

In my day to day, I strive to be as best prepared as possible, to work in an open and transparent way, and to share what I learn with others. I have always considered it a privilege to work in science and never took it for granted. Over the years, I have placed great care to strengthen my capacity to focus, to endure and search for solutions to complex and challenging problems, and to keep learning and not give up. Finding something new about the Universe or seeing a telescope launch to space and work flawlessly brings immense professional satisfaction and achievement. For me personally, when shared with a team, those same moments are pure joy.

Dr Catarina Alves de Oliveira (born in Portugal, 1982) is a scientist at the European Space Agency (ESA), currently leading the Science Operations Development Division for future ESA science missions from the European Space Astronomy Centre (ESAC), near Madrid. She holds a degree in Physics/Applied Mathematics (Astronomy) from the University of Porto (2004), during which she was an Erasmus student at University of Galway, and a Master's from the International Space University (2005). She earned her PhD in Astronomy at the European Southern Observatory and Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich (2008), followed by a Marie Curie fellowship on star formation research at the Institute for Planetary Sciences and Astrophysics, Grenoble. Since joining ESA in 2011, and prior to her current role, she worked on several space missions, such as Herschel, James Webb Space Telescope, SMILE and Ariel.

Stars in His Eyes: An Interview With Dr Éamonn Harvey

Dr Éamonn Harvey,
Optical Engineer at the UK Astronomy Technology Centre at the Royal Observatory Edinburgh

Cois Coiribe catches up with alumnus Éamonn Harvey, who now works at the UK Astronomy Technology Centre, Royal Observatory Edinburgh. Éamonn dives into his childhood motivations, discusses several influences and muses from his time at the University, and reminisces about his nostalgia for Galway City. He also talks about his role as an Optical Engineer, the instrumentation he uses, and how collaboration is what moves science forward.

Meet Dr Éamonn Harvey...

I am the middle child of five, with parents from Donegal and Carlow. I grew up in Cork, after moving there from France when I was young. Eventually, for one reason or another, Galway's gravity pulled me in.

I have a four-year-old son, Joel, with my wife Ariel, and most of my time outside work is spent playing and drawing with him. Ariel and I met while studying physics together in Galway, although we didn't date until I returned from doing a Master's in Paris, shortly before we started our respective PhDs.

For over 25 years, I was a keen skateboarder, spending my evenings exploring the ledges, steps, and rails of our fair isle. Since our son arrived, I've been trying to avoid injuries; however, I have come down with late onset athleticism in recent years. So, I now spend my time outside of work and family swimming, running, and cycling – and a bit of fiddle playing in the evenings. I also have an amateur interest in photography, archaeology, and folklore.

Cois Coiribe (CC): What inspired you to study astronomy and astrophysics? How did this lead you to pursue a PhD at University of Galway?

Éamonn Harvey (ÉH): One of my favourite books as a child was *The Little Prince*; it added the grain that slowly fermented my imagination toward other worlds. Then, when I was 11, I got two books for Christmas: *Hubble Images Revisited* and *Sun, Earth and Sky*.

I remember poring over them, enthralled by the life of stars and the mesmerising beauty of nebulae. I needed to better understand these things. But, looking back, I had a general interest in the natural world closer to home as well, and I was unsure if I wanted to study the stars or our ocean at university level. However, I now find myself in a position where I build the instruments that may allow the 11-year-olds of today to explore the oceans of alien planets when they grow up.

After secondary school, I left Cork for Galway, as it offered the most established astronomy undergraduate programme in Ireland. The undergraduate trip to Loiano Observatory and classes in optics, signals, and astronomy, along with a grounding in physics, gave me a solid foundation.

This route of study opened a door to an MSc in Astrophysics and Space Engineering at l'Observatoire de Paris, followed by a few months' internship under Dr Olivier Chesneau at l'Observatoire de la Côte d'Azur in Nice, which sharpened my view of the field. But Galway kept calling me back.

My final-year project had already put me in close working contact with University of Galway's Prof Matt Redman, and that relationship turned into an Irish Research Council PhD fellowship. The real gift of that time was the freedom to design a PhD that fitted my mix of interests in observation and modelling of space clouds created by exploding stars – a rare luxury. Matt's deep expertise and relaxed style, and the University's flexible structure, allowed for the crafting of a project that felt authentic rather than prescribed.

CC: Are there any standout memories you have of your time at the University and in Galway City? Any individuals who acted as a mentor or muse?

ÉH: I made lifelong friends in Galway, having spent my late teens and the majority of my 20s there. From good times with college friends, housemates, to the local skate and music scenes, the memories are too many to choose from. But remembering events like the Macnas Halloween Parade and camping trips to Connemara will always bring a smile.

In terms of mentors, I would reference my PhD supervisor, Prof Matt Redman, although many in physics helped along the way. I particularly enjoyed a lab that involved analysing photographic plates on a light box to identify star formation regions. It was the sort of thing that gives you a real feel for the subject and the evolution of instruments over the past century.

My final-year project on the modelling of a supernova remnant, again with Matt, helped me to begin compiling a box of analysis tools that would prove useful later in my career development. I learned important observational and data reduction skills from Dr Ray Butler, and I also benefitted from formative and insightful lectures on optics and electromagnetism from Drs Devaney and Goncharov.

During the PhD, I was appreciative of University of Galway's reach and diaspora, such as the close working relationship with the Greek astronomy community, namely Dr Panos Boumis, who acted practically as a second supervisor, and Dr Aaron Golden, who would pop up as support during a talk I was giving at the American Museum of Natural History in New York before his return to Galway.

Not least, the help from and conversations with the other physics PhD students at the time were invaluable, and I will be forever grateful to and thankful for that community. We truly shared the highs and lows that are part and parcel of such a journey.

CC: You now work at UK Astronomy Technology Centre, Royal Observatory Edinburgh as an Optical Engineer. Can you explain what led you to this role, and what type of work you do?

ÉH: After my PhD in Galway, I did an interim postdoc in Cork, with the native Galwegian Prof Paul Callanan, before moving to a full postdoc as Instrument Scientist on the New Robotic Telescope project at the Astrophysics Research Institute in Liverpool John Moores University. There I learned to translate scientific goals into realistic requirements, balancing what astronomers wanted with what could be manufactured. ▸

During the PhD, I was appreciative of University of Galway's reach and diaspora, such as the close working relationship with the Greek astronomy community, namely Dr Panos Boumis, and Dr Aaron Golden, who would pop up as support during a talk I was giving at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

It was also in Liverpool that I first truly practised the art of optical design and tolerancing, having unknowingly gleaned a background in the downstairs tearoom in the astronomy corridor at University of Galway, specifically with fellow alumnus Dr Eoin O'Connor. Over five years, I learned to write specs that engineers could build, and scientists could use, as well as designing the optics that can deliver this. This allowed me to develop myself in the pragmatic translation layers that sit at the heart of instrument engineering.

My day to day now can be quite varied. I use CAD-based software for optical design, and develop scripts, mostly in Python, for analysis. I can largely attribute my coding skills to fellow University of Galway alumnus Dr Karol Fitzgerald, with whom I developed a software package for modelling nebulae. I am also involved in the procurement, integration planning, build and testing stages of the astronomical instrument development cycle. I have the privilege of working on some of the future instruments for the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT), a 40m-class telescope currently under construction in the Chilean Atacama Desert. The telescope will be large enough to observe nearby Earth-like planets around Sun-like stars.

My main projects are two first-light integral field spectrographs – a spectrograph basically makes a rainbow out of incoming light, and incorporating integral field means that it can make a rainbow out of every part of a picture – this allows for temperature, density, velocity, elemental, and molecular diagnostics of whatever you might be pointing your telescope at. One of the spectrographs will be operating in mid-infrared light (the METIS instrument) and the other observing in the near infrared (HARMONI). These parts of the spectrum of light are important for observing key indicators of life on other planets, as well as diagnosing the strange things lurking at the edge of the Universe and everything in between.

CC: We know from classic media that space is 'the final frontier'. What does collaboration look like in the field of astronomy and astrophysics, and how can it facilitate progress in this area of scientific study?

ÉH: I mentioned earlier working with the Greek astronomical community; I cannot begin to describe how invaluable this was to my development. But each new collaboration I became a part of strengthened my research immensely. To name a few, these included collaborations with people from South Africa, Italy, Lebanon, Turkey, Hong Kong, India, China, Nepal, Chile, France, UK, USA, Mexico, Iran, Iraq ... a truly international mix that is hard to come by in other disciplines. And there is good reason for this.

One of the truly wonderful things about astronomy is that we are all under the same sky, and politics and borders have no effect on the beauty of Saturn or the phases of the Moon.

I can draw from my own experience here, in the world of transient astronomy (the study of things that go 'bump in the night', such as supernovae and other explosive phenomena). Take, for example, a new type of stellar explosion being discovered in Chile's northern sky; it can then be monitored after sunrise in Chile, and from Brazil, then from the Canary Islands, to Namibia, and on to South Africa, India, China, Australia, New Zealand, and back to Chile again. Such collaborative approaches allow us to probe the evolving physics of exciting objects daily without interruption.

One of the truly wonderful things about astronomy is that we are all under the same sky, and politics and borders have no effect on the beauty of Saturn or the phases of the Moon.

CC: Finally, what excites you most about discovering the secrets of the Universe? Any fun facts you'd like to impart for those interested in studying the stars?

ÉH: In terms of fun facts about the stars, one of my favourite things to think about is how we can tell what types of stellar ingredients, processes, and events were needed to create our solar system and all the elements within it. One such

The solar system in which we live our daily lives has had several sets of grandparents, and likely great grandparents, dating back to the birth of the first stars in the Universe.

fact is that we would have needed around three classical nova systems feeding the pre-solar nebula in order to get enough lithium on Earth for the mobile phones and electric cars we use today.

These ingredients would have needed to have been swept up into a system, likely by a supernova blast wave, which would also have held heavier elements, such as gold and uranium. From the chemistry of our solar system alone, our Sun would need to be a third- or fourth-generation star to develop and sustain us. So, the solar system in which we live our daily lives has had several sets of grandparents, and likely great grandparents, dating back to the birth of the first stars in the Universe.

Dr Éamonn Harvey received a BSc in Physics and Astronomy from University of Galway, an MSc in Astrophysics and Space Engineering from l'Observatoire de Paris, and a PhD in Astronomy from University of Galway. Dr Harvey then worked for five years as Instrument Scientist on the New Robotic Telescope project at the Astrophysics Research Institute at Liverpool John Moores University. For approximately three years now, Dr Harvey has been working as an optical engineer at the UK Astronomy Technology Centre based at the Royal Observatory Edinburgh. He has worked on some of the world's largest and most exciting astronomy projects, such as the HARMONI and METIS spectrographs for the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT), which is currently under construction in Chile.

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Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

An Leabharlann
Library

Join us for a day of celebration and fond farewell to the James Hardiman Library — Summer 2026

The doors of the James Hardiman Library first opened to students in November 1973. Now, over 50 years later, construction of the greatly anticipated new Library is well underway.

This will be an inspirational, welcoming, high-tech space of learning and creativity, enabling new generations of students to learn, share knowledge and succeed in their university experience and beyond.

In summer 2026, we will host a special event to honour the history and impact of the current library as we look to the future of the new Learning Commons, due to open in 2027.

Would you share your Library memories with our team as part of the preparations for this event? From your favourite seat to the start of a love story and everything in between — we would be delighted to hear from you.

Email **mary.chambers@universityofgalway.ie** with your story today.

Learn more

Perfect Harmony: Studying the Universe Through Advanced Astronomical Instrumentation

Dr Deborah Malone,
Postdoctoral Research Associate, Centre for Advanced Instrumentation, Durham University

We explore Dr Deborah Malone's journey through her University of Galway PhD in Astronomical Instrumentation, with particular focus on her research that involved working at the European Southern Observatory (ESO) with the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT). She discusses her entry into the University via the Foundation Course, moving into a BSc and finally a PhD before joining the Centre for Advanced Instrumentation at Durham University as a Postdoctoral Research Associate. She also speaks to the importance of international collaboration and offers advice for aspiring researchers.

> Passion is what drives research forward, and without it, nothing new would ever be discovered or invented.

Meet Deborah Malone...

My name is Deborah Malone, and I am a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Centre for Advanced Instrumentation at Durham University.

I completed both my Bachelor's degree and PhD at University of Galway, in Astrophysics and Astronomical Instrumentation, respectively. I have always had an interest in astronomy and astrophysics since I was young. Growing up in rural Mayo meant many a night enjoying the beautiful dark skies, which, as a kid, always made me wonder what was out there.

In school, I had an interest in science, but not much in anything else! It ended up frustrating me, and I left school in fifth year. After a couple of years of odd jobs and living abroad, I decided I wanted to go to university and applied for the Foundation Course in Science, Technology, and Engineering at University of Galway. Doing that course was possibly the best decision I ever made; it re-ignited my love of science and sparked a new appreciation for mathematics.

I decided I wanted to carry on in my education and applied for the BSc Physics with Astrophysics course at the University. During my Bachelor's degree, the astrophysics group had the opportunity to visit an observatory in Italy and do some real, hands-on astronomy practice. On one of those evenings, our group had a tour of the telescope. I never really thought about the technology behind the science before that night, but this really piqued my interest. When an opportunity came up to pursue a PhD in Astronomical Instrumentation, I had to go for it!

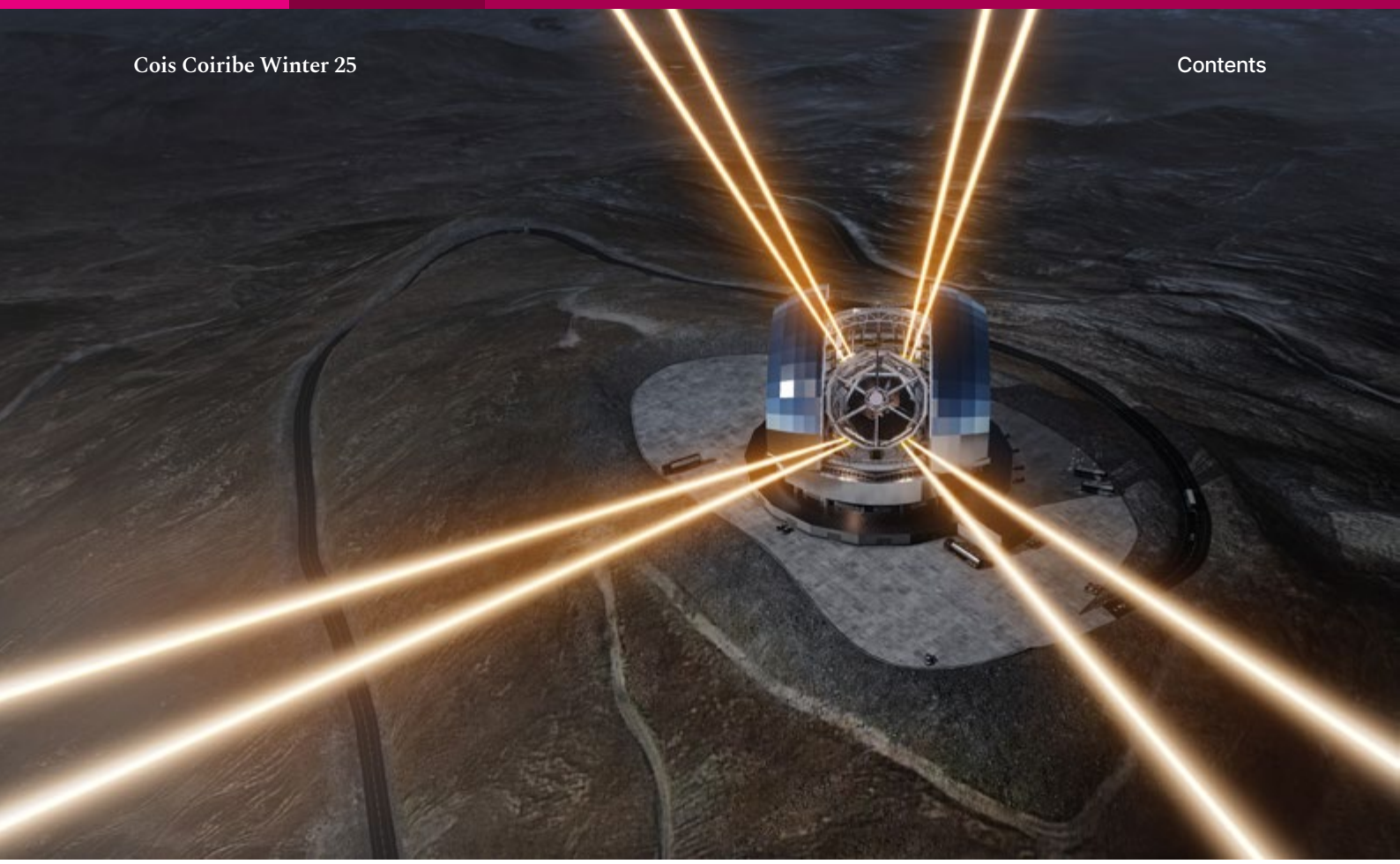
Cois Coiribe (CC): While pursuing your PhD in Astronomical Instrumentation at University of Galway, you had the chance to work at the European Southern Observatory (ESO) in Garching, Germany. Can you walk us through this process?

Deborah Malone (DM): While completing my PhD at University of Galway, the Irish Research Council, who funded my work, had a partnership with the European Southern Observatory. Each year, the IRC would fund up to two students to spend one or two years of their PhD undertaking research at the ESO headquarters, either in Germany or Chile. I applied for a technology and engineering studentship for one year, based in Germany. I had one of the most nerve-wracking interviews of my life but was, thankfully, successful and began my studentship in November 2021. I ended up staying at ESO for 14 months in the end, and I loved my time there. It was a fantastic experience to work with some of the best experts in Adaptive Optics, and I still collaborate with many of them today.

CC: Can you elaborate on any particular projects you took part in using the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT)?

DM: I have been involved in two instruments for the ELT. During my PhD, I worked on developing calibration methods for the Multiconjugate adaptive Optics Relay For ELT Observations (MORFEO). University of Galway is part of the consortium which is developing the test unit to ensure the instrument works as expected before it is delivered to the telescope. While participating in this project, I looked at using new technologies to simulate atmospheric turbulence, which the instrument would be expected to correct. ▸

A good example of [collaboration in astronomy] is the first ever picture of a black hole in 2019. The image was captured by the Event Horizon Telescope; a network of eight radio telescopes located around the world which worked together to create a 'planet-sized' telescope.



This artist's rendering shows a night view of the Extremely Large Telescope in operation on Cerro Armazones in northern Chile. The telescope is shown using lasers to create artificial stars high in the atmosphere. Credit: ESO/L. Calçada.

For my Postdoctoral research at Durham University, I am working as an Adaptive Optics Scientist for the High Angular Resolution Monolithic Optical and Near-infrared Integral Field Spectrograph (HARMONI). The role of an AO Scientist is interesting; we are somewhere between the astronomers and the engineers on the instrument, and our main job is to translate the requirements the astronomers place on the instrument, in terms of image quality, into mechanical requirements on the hardware. For example, if we need to achieve a certain sharpness on our images, what does that mean for how accurately we need to align our components?

CC: How important do you think international collaboration is in the fields of astronomy and astrophysics? Why?

DM: International collaboration is fundamental in astronomy and astrophysics. The scale, complexity and cost of modern astronomy projects go far beyond the capabilities of any one institution, or even nation. Scientifically, the universe is vast and complex, and understanding it requires a diverse range of expertise, perspectives, and technologies. Different research groups and institutes bring different strengths, whether that's theoretical modelling, advanced computing, data analysis, or instrument design.

The universe is also seen through different wavelengths – radio, infrared, optical, x-ray, etc. Each instrument specialises in a specific wavelength, and the telescopes around the world work together to create a more complete picture of the cosmos than any single observatory could capture alone. Collaboration also allows for the cross checking of data, ensuring accuracy and reproducibility.

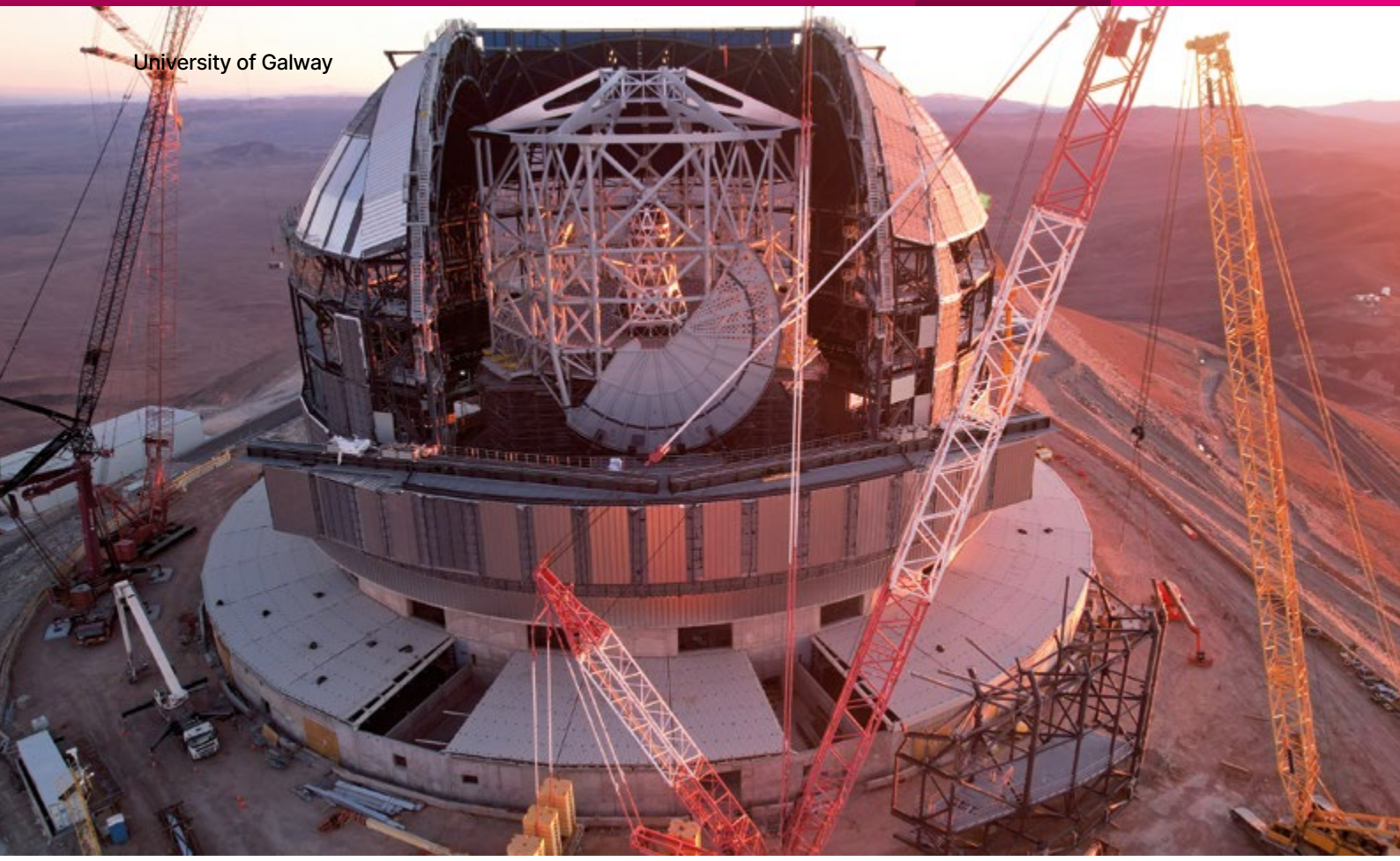
A good example of this is the first ever picture of a black hole in 2019. The image was captured by the Event Horizon Telescope; a network of eight radio telescopes located around the world which worked together to create a 'planet-sized' telescope. The data was then processed by independent teams, who later presented the results to each other to ensure accuracy and agreement amongst the groups before releasing such a monumental result to the public.

For instrumentation, the ELT is a fantastic example of international collaboration. The project is being funded and manufactured by 18 nations. The different instruments which will be installed on the telescope are themselves built out of sub-systems, being manufactured by different teams around Europe and beyond. These all need to work together, which requires an enormous amount of effort on behalf of everyone to ensure mechanical and software interfaces are compatible.

Ultimately, international cooperation strengthens the scientific process itself, turning competition into collaboration and accelerating the pace of discovery.

CC: What advice would you give to aspiring researchers or those considering a career in your area of expertise?

DM: In general, I always advise researchers to stay curious and find a research topic that they love. Passion is what drives research forward, and without it, nothing new would ever be discovered or invented.



ESO's Extremely Large Telescope is a monumental project. Green light for the construction of the largest optical telescope on Earth started in 2006. As this image, taken in early January 2025 shows, the telescope is nearing its completion, step by step. Credit: ESO/G. Vecchia.

But it's not always easy to find your passion. It may take years working in a field you enjoy to find that one thing you want to focus on above all else, and that is perfectly normal. Research is a marathon, not a sprint, and not one we can do alone.

Enjoy the process, learn new skills, meet new people, foster new collaborations, and always be open to new ideas. In my experience, and specifically thinking about the world of astronomical instrumentation, there is such a massive variety of expertise needed to work on projects such as these. Our team has astronomers, optical scientists, software engineers, mechanical engineers, electronics engineers, construction workers, managers; the list goes on and on.

No matter who you are, or what you do, or where you want to go, there is always a place for you in research.

Our team has astronomers, optical scientists, software engineers, mechanical engineers, electronics engineers, construction workers, managers; the list goes on and on.

Dr Deborah Malone is a Postdoctoral Research Associate based in Durham University and an Adaptive Optics Scientist for the HARMONI instrument on the Extremely Large Telescope. She completed her Bachelor of Science in Astrophysics at University of Galway in 2019 and went on to complete her PhD in Astronomical Instrumentation at University of Galway in 2023.

Follow on:

ICOS in Carna: Observing the Atmosphere From the Edge of the Atlantic

Ireland's Clean Air Sites as Global Benchmarks

Dr Damian Martin,
Senior Researcher and Technical Officer,
Mace Head Atmospheric Research Station

Ireland is home to some of the cleanest environments in the world, from crystal-clear waters to abundant green spaces and a consistently strong Air Quality Index (AQI). People enjoy a healthy lifestyle on this island from low exposure to human-induced climate hazards, which results in less health and safety concerns in relation to the environment.

> **In 2022, Ireland officially joined Integrated Carbon Observation System (ICOS), funded by the European Union.**

The conservation of Ireland's natural landscapes, along with people's preference to live close to nature, plays a key role in the country's sustainable progress. With very few urban centres, a blend of medieval Europe with modern convenience, and its size, geography, and location bordering the Atlantic, Ireland makes the perfect place to study the baseline. It's a natural laboratory for studying and modelling the quality of air.

In 2022, Ireland officially joined Integrated Carbon Observation System (ICOS), funded by the European Union. While many European countries suffer from worsening air quality, due to rapid urban expansion and modernisation, Ireland has preserved its air quality, especially in less populated regions. This makes the country an ideal location to observe the atmosphere.

Under ICOS, Ireland hosts four atmospheric monitoring stations, with Mace Head serving as the oldest and most important 'supersite'. Established in the 1950s, Mace Head has become a leading global site for atmospheric observations. From this remote Atlantic coast vantage point, our scientists capture clean maritime air masses as well as air influenced by continental Europe, offering a unique window into global background conditions and pollution transport. Scientists at Mace Head measure a wide range of atmospheric components, including carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), nitrous oxide (N_2O), ozone (O_3), radon, and aerosols. These data streams are crucial for assessing how effectively international treaties and conventions are protecting the atmosphere.

Complementing Mace Head are three other key Irish ICOS sites, which form the national observation network. Valentia Observatory, operated by Met Éireann, has a long history of meteorological and atmospheric measurements and serves as an important regional reference site. Elsewhere, in collaboration with the EPA and Teagasc, new greenhouse gas (GHG) and air pollution monitoring stations have been established at Carnsore Point, Co. Wexford, and Malin Head, Co. Donegal. Collectively, these stations provide a comprehensive picture of the gases and particles entering and leaving Ireland, offering an essential dataset for understanding both local emissions and transboundary air pollution.

Mace Head Atmospheric Research Station

Observations gathered at these sites are not just about data on a screen; they reflect decades of expertise, innovation, and international collaboration. Researchers across this network of stations use cutting-edge technology, from high-precision gas analysers to LiDAR systems and advanced meteorological sensors, all calibrated to ICOS standards. Increasingly, machine learning techniques are being applied to a vast number of datasets, uncovering new patterns, improving the accuracy of atmospheric models, and enabling faster, more reliable analysis.

The importance of this work reaches far beyond Ireland's shores. Clean air sites like Mace Head serve as global benchmarks, helping researchers to detect subtle shifts in the background concentrations of greenhouse gases and trace pollutants. In a rapidly changing climate, maintaining a stable, long-term reference record is invaluable. When a new emission trend appears in Europe, Asia, or North America, researchers often look first to baseline sites, like those in Ireland, to determine whether it represents a true global atmospheric signal or a regional anomaly. ▸

Researchers across this network of stations use cutting-edge technology, from high-precision gas analysers to LiDAR systems and advanced meteorological sensors, all calibrated to ICOS standards.

International Monitoring Programmes

Global Atmosphere Watch (GAW)

Integrated Carbon Observation System (ICOS)

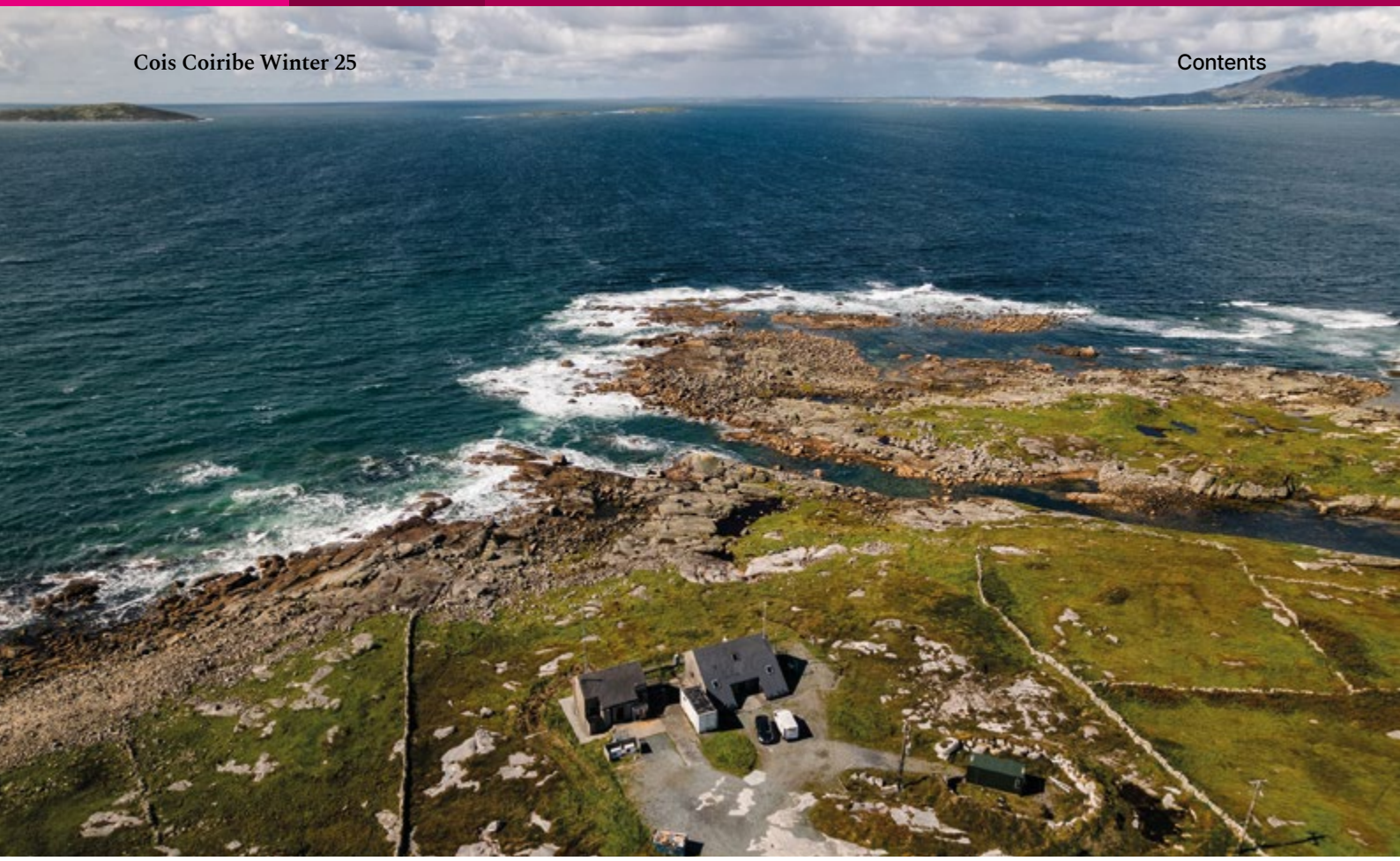
European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (EMEP)

Advanced Global Atmospheric Gases Experiment (AGAGE)

Global and regional Earth-system (Atmosphere) Monitoring using Satellite and in-situ data (GEMS)

Global Earth Observation and Monitoring of the atmosphere (GEOmon)

Tropospheric Emission Monitoring Internet Service (TEMIS)



It's important to say that behind these sophisticated instruments is a dedicated team of scientists, engineers, and technicians who keep the stations operating year-round, often in harsh and challenging coastal conditions. Their work requires precision, patience, and a deep curiosity about how the planet breathes.

At Mace Head, for example, instruments are monitored through fierce Atlantic storms, ensuring a continuous stream of data, even as salt spray and high winds batter the coastline. Many pioneering scientists have spent decades maintaining these long-term records, training the next generation of atmospheric scientists, and collaborating with international partners.

For them, every data point tells a story, of shifting winds, distant pollution plumes, or the quiet background of a clean Atlantic breeze. Their commitment ensures that Ireland's contribution to global atmospheric science is not only accurate but enduring, a testament to human persistence in understanding and protecting our clean air.

Through ICOS, Ireland is now poised to establish a long-term greenhouse gas database and analysis system that will make these high-quality observations accessible to scientists, policymakers, and the public. This effort will strengthen Ireland's role in international climate research while supporting national policy development across air quality, agriculture, and renewable energy.

In an era when the world is under mounting pressure to meet climate targets, Ireland's clean air sites offer something rare: a glimpse into what an unpolluted atmosphere looks like, and how it behaves.

They remind us that understanding the natural state of our planet's air is the first step toward protecting it. From the windswept coast of Mace Head to the southern tip of Carnsore Point, Ireland's atmospheric observatories quietly watch over the air we all share, measuring, documenting, and safeguarding our collective future.

ICOS supports international climate targets under the Paris Agreement and provides scientific data to underpin the IPCC reports and the annual COP under the UNFCCC. ICOS represents the scientific ground-truthing, tracking our international success (or not) in reducing levels of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to slow down climate change.

Follow on:

Dr Damien Martin is a Senior Researcher and Technical Officer at Mace Head Atmospheric Research Station, and also a Research Fellow for the Centre for Climate and Air Pollution Studies at University of Galway. Dr Martin holds a PhD in Atmospheric Chemistry. He has worked mainly on monitoring and remote sensing projects investigating Green House Gases (GHGs) and related subjects.

Mace Head Atmospheric Research Station

Mace Head is an atmospheric observational facility situated on a rocky headland, just outside Carna in *Conamara*. It sits at the interface between the vast, stormy Atlantic and Western Europe. A jewel in the crown of University of Galway's outpost research facilities, it is the only World Meteorological Organisation and Global Atmosphere Watch station located in mid-latitude Western Europe and is, thus, a vital monitoring location of global, regional, and national significance. Mace Head monitors the composition and the changing state of our atmosphere, working with national and international partners to identify the cause and impact of air pollution, and to further our understanding of the processes affecting our changing climate.

Historically, the first measurements were taken at Mace Head in the 1950s by Kildare native Tom O'Connor, who became faculty at University College Galway in 1956. Tom was interested in measuring Condensation Nuclei, tiny particles that act as 'cloud seeds', which initiate cloud formation. In the summer of 1957, Tom cycled around the coast of Connemara in search of an ideal sampling site to study cloud formation in clean marine air. When he came upon Mace Head on the Ard peninsula, Tom found an abandoned WWII lookout post, which could provide shelter to facilitate the first field measurements at Mace Head.

From these humble beginnings grew a remarkable scientific legacy that would go on to contribute substantially to our current understanding of the atmosphere and climate.

Current Projects

O3I

The Centre for Climate and Air Pollution Studies (CCAPS) is investigating changes in atmospheric composition and how they influence local to global pollution, impacting human and planetary health.

EPIC-AIR

Fingerprinting Climate Change and Air Pollution Culprits (EPIC-AIR) is a pioneering research initiative dedicated to tackling the intertwined challenges of air pollution and climate change.

TownAir

TownAir is a groundbreaking initiative focused on identifying and quantifying the sources of particulate matter (PM2.5) that affect air quality in Irish towns.

NuClim

NuClim evaluates nuclear observations to improve climate research and GHG emission estimates.

ENCORE

EmissioN verifiCation fOr nitRous oxide (ENCORE) is conducted by The Centre for Climate and Air Pollution Studies (CCAPS) and dedicated to investigating changes in atmospheric composition and their implications for pollution, with consequences ranging from local to global scales.

COAST VOC

COAST–VOC links coastal marine biodiversity to climate through the study of volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions, determining how these productive and diverse ecosystems and their emissions can impact atmospheric aerosol particles, cloud formation, and subsequent climate regulation.

Carna Research Laboratory Through the Years

1960s

The University carries out research projects on early mussel raft culture experiments along Ireland's west coast.

1969

3 July 1969, Irish Government finances the **University's Shellfish Research Laboratory** near Carna, to strengthen applied marine science capacity.

1975

6 Oct 1975, **Shellfish Research Laboratory** officially handed over to the University.

1975–77

Gael Linn Oyster Development Project progress reports issued from the Shellfish Research Laboratory, Carna (evidence of active hatchery / stock enhancement work and the SRL name in official use).

1980s

Multiple Marine Institute / Irish Fisheries Investigations cite Shellfish Research Laboratory, Carna in technical references; reinforces the SRL name in this period.

Early 2000s

European lobster juvenile ecology / nursery experiments run **at the Shellfish Research Laboratory, Carna** (field and lab work).

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

Institiúid Uí Riain
Ryan Institute

Mid 2000s

Cod aquaculture R&D ramps up locally; by **2006–2007** cod cohorts for a Connemara cage trial were **hatched and weaned at the MRI Carna Laboratory**.

2000s–2010

Facility identity consolidates as Carna Research Station (CRS), the Ryan Institute's off-campus marine lab, expanding beyond shellfish into finfish/seaweed and pilot-scale systems (new Marine Innovation Development Centre Built).

2024

Memorandum of Understanding signed between Údarás naGaeltachta and University of Galway regarding development in the Gaeltacht (including Carna Research Station).

2007–2013

EIRCOD selective breeding and farming programme led by the University and the Ryan Institute with major activity at Carna under Ireland's **Sea Change** strategy.

2017

20 October 2017, fire broke out at the marine research facility at Muigh-Inis, causing damage to the storage facility and research laboratories.

1969

The Ryan Institute's Carna Research Station continues to provide a research infrastructure platform, enabling research projects to be conducted with both commercial and academic partners within the aquaculture sector.

Agallamh le Deirdre Ní Choistín

Cois Coiribe (CC): Bronnadh Ard-Dioplóma sa gCumarsáid Fheidhmeach ort ó Ollscoil na Gaillimhe. An féidir leat beagán cainte a dhéanamh faoi do chuid ama san Ollscoil?

Deirdre Ní Choistín (DNC): Rinne mé an tArd-Dioplóma sa gCumarsáid Fheidhmeach in 1998 -1999. Bhain mé mo bhunchéim sa Ghaeilge agus Fraincis amach ó Choláiste na Tríonóide i mBaile Átha Cliath. Bhí mé sa tríú bliain den chéim nuair a seoladh TnaG, ar oíche shamhna 1996. Bhí mé i mo rúnaí ar an gCumann Gaelach agus d'eagraigh muid cóisir mhór d'scailt TnaG sa Fleet trasna ón gcoláiste agus bhí an-oíche ann. Chuaigh cara liom, Róisín Ní Chéilleachair go Gaillimh chun tabhairt faoin gcúrsa cumarsáide nuair a chríochnaigh sí an chéim agus is mar gheall uirthi go raibh eolas agam faoin gcúrsa agus gur chuir mé isteach air.

Ba é Rónán Ó Dubhthaigh a bhí mar Stiúrthóir ar an gcúrsa ag an am, suaimhneas síoraí lena anam. Bhí an-bhliain againn ar an gcúrsa, chaith muid mí ar an gCeathrú Rua mar chuid den chúrsa. Bhí an-bhéim ar oiliúint ar ghnéithe praiticiúla a theastódh sa saol oibre. Ba é an 'cúrsa cumarsáide' mar a ghlaodh muid air an cúrsa le déanamh an t-am sin le post a fháil sna meáin.

Bhain mé an-taitneamh as an modúl Dlí na Meán le Marie McGonagle, agus as Léiriúchán Teilifíse le Ciarán Ó Cofaigh, Micheál Ó Catháin agus Brían Ó Donnchadha. D'fhoghlaim muid cén chaoi le clóscríobh freisin ar an gcúrsa, scil atá an-úsáideach sa saol oibre agus nach mbeadh foghlamtha agam murach an cúrsa cumarsáide. Rinne mé taithí oibre tar éis dom an cúrsa a chríochnú sa seomra nuachta in RTÉ i nDomhnach Broc faoi stiúir Phádhraic Uí Ghaora.

Rinne mé cairde saoil ar an gcúrsa agus casann muid ar a chéile go minic. Tá go leor againn ag plé le saol na Gaeilge ar bhealach amháin nó bealach eile go fóill.

CC: Tá obair shuntasach déanta agat le linn do thréimhse ag obair sna meáin in Éirinn. Céard iad na spriocanna is mó a bhain tú amach sular ceapadh thú mar Ard-Stiúrthóir ar TG4?

DNC: Tá mo shaol oibre ar fad caite agam le TG4. Tá mé ar dhuine den bheagán a d'oibrigh le gach ceannaire a bhí ar TG4 ó bunaíodh é. Thosaigh mé ag obair le TG4 i mí na Samhna 1999, go gairid tar éis don chainéal athbhrandáil ó TnaG go TG4. Bhíodh Rónán Ó Dubhthaigh ag rá linn an Irish Times agus Foinse a cheannach mar is ann a bhíodh na fógraí poist. Ní raibh an t-idirlíon in úsáid mórán an t-am sin. Bhíodh na fógraí poist ar chúl na nuachtán. Is cuimhin liom go raibh roinnt postanna fógartha ag TnaG mar go raibh TV3 tar éis teacht ar an aer in 1998, agus d'fhág roinnt den fhoireann i TnaG le dul ag obair leo. Fuair mé post mar Mhaor Craolacháin agus bhí mé chomh sásta. D'fhoghlaim mé an leabhar 'The Grammer of the Edit' a thug Brían Ó Donnchadha dúinn de ghlanmheabhair don agallamh. Bhí mé bíogtha post a fháil le TnaG. Post teicniúil a bhí ann, thosaigh mé i dtosach mar mhaor fuaime ag plé le fuaim ar chláracha beo ar nós Cúla4 agus Nuacht TG4, agus ansin bhí mé i mbun físmheasctha agus láithreachais ag coinneáil an stáisiún ar an aer.

Tógadh stiúideo nua i TG4 chun dul i mbun léirithe stiúideo agus bhí postanna nua ann do Léiritheoirí / Stiúrthóirí. Bhí mé sásta ceann acu a fháil nuair a bhí mé 26 bliain d'aois. Chaith mé ceithre bliana déag i mbun léirithe sa stiúideo. Thaitin an stiúradh liom i dtosach, is stiúradh ilcheamara a bhí i gceist agus thaitin sé liom a bheith ag plé le cláracha beo, ach tar éis píosa, chuir mé i bhfad níos mó suime sa léiriú agus san ábhar agus d'fhoghlaim mé mo cheird faoi stiúir Mhichíl Uí Mheallaigh a bhí mar bhainisteoir agam agus a bhí mar Stiúrthóir Coimisiúnaithe, agus thug Pól Ó Gallchóir Ard-Stiúrthóir TG4 an-chomhairle dom freisin. Bhí an-suim aige sna cláracha beo, go háirithe cúrsaí toghcháin agus sna léirithe inmheánacha stiúideo. Léirigh mé sraitheanna ar nós Comhrá, Róisín, 7 Lá, Bean an Tí sa Chistin, Ó Cuisine, Léirmheas Leabhar agus cláracha toghcháin ar fad.

In 2017, chuir mé tús le Molscéal, ardán nuachta agus siamsaíochta ar líne atá dírithe ar phobal na Gaeltachta agus na Gaeilge. D'eascair an smaoineamh do Mholscéal ón eolas agus taithí a fuair mé ag cruthú míreanna beaga do na meáin shóisialta do na cláracha Róisín agus 7 Lá. Bhí an-suim agam riamh sna meáin shóisialta agus bhí sé le feiceáil go raibh pobal na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta thar a bheith gníomhach ar na meáin shóisialta agus gur thaitin an t-ábhar a bhí á chur ar fáil dóibh. Is cuimhin liom sular chuir

muid tús oifigiúil le Molscéal, gur léirigh mé scéal gearr faoi na comharthaí bailte nua a bhí crochta i gCois Fharraige, ba é Breandán Ó Tuairisg a labhair linn faoi agus d'fhéach na mílte ar na bhfíseán sin. Scéal simplí ach a bhain go smior le pobal na Gaeltachta, ba léir go raibh bearna ann don phobal a bhí Molscéal in ann a chur ar fáil agus is ardú croí dom an tóir atá ar Molscéal i measc an phobail féachana agus cé chomh maith agus a d'éirigh leis faoi stiúir Dhonncha Mhic Con Iomaire i mo dhiaidh agus anois faoi stiúir Katie Ní Mhuircheartaigh.

Chaith mé cúpla bliain mar Bhainisteoir Cumarsáide TG4 ina dhiaidh sin, post a thaitin go mór liom. Chuir mé straitéis cumarsáide ilardáin i bhfeidhm a bhí dírithe ar chlúdach poiblíochta ar líne mar thosaíocht agus ag tógáil ar bhranda agus glór TG4 ar na meáin shóisialta. Is de bharr na cuir chuige sin gur tháinig an pearsa 'Intern TG4' chun cinn trí thimpiste ar bhealach ar na meáin shóisialta.

Fógraíodh post mar Cheannaire Nuachta agus Cúrsaí Reatha nuair a ghlac an rialtas le moladh i dTuarascáil an Choimisiúin um Thodhchaí na Meán go mbeadh ceannas eagarthóireachta neamhspleách ag TG4 ar a sheirbhísí nuachta. Bhain mé an-taitneamh as tús a chur le seirbhís nuachta do pháistí ar Nuacht Cúla4, agus coimisiúnú ar chláracha cúrsaí reatha Iniúchadh TG4.

Tá cúpla gradam buaite ag an tsraith agus go leor ainmniúcháin faighte aige. An rud is tábhachtaí faoi Iniúchadh TG4 ná go mbíonn ábhar nuachta agus cainte ó gach clár sa tsraith, agus go minic is scéalta Gaeltachta iad a théann i bhfeidhm ar an bpobal náisiúnta. Is sprioc straitéise é do TG4 cur lenár seirbhísí nuachta agus cúrsaí reatha ar gach ardán chun freastal níos fearr ar mhianta an lucht féachana. Táimid i mbun plé le Coimisiún na Meán agus RTÉ maidir le neamhspleáchas eagarthóireachta don tseirbhís nuachta *Nuacht TG4* a chuireann RTÉ ar fáil. Is próiseas casta é ach tá mé dóchasach go mbeidh dul chun cinn ann go luath ar mhaithe leis an lucht féachana agus TG4.

CC: Tá féiniúlacht ar leith ag TG4 mar chraoltóir Gaeilge, cén fhís atá agat do ról an stáisiúin i gcomhthéacs athraithe atá ag tarlú sna meáin?

DNC: Tá ról ar leith ag TG4 do phobal na Gaeltachta agus na Gaeilge in Éirinn agus ar fud an domhain. Bunaíodh TnaG an chéad lá mar gheall ar fheachtasaíocht ón bpobal a bhí ag lorg ionadaíocht orthu féin sna meáin. Is é mana TG4 ná *Súil Eile* agus tá tábhacht níos mó ná riamh le *Súil Eile* anois sa ré ilardáin nuair atá an oiread rogha ar fáil don phobal féachana ar gach meán agus ar gach scáileán.

An fhís atá agam ná go mbeadh an chruthaitheacht mar thosaíocht straitéiseach ag TG4 agus go mbeadh muid ag tógáil ar an gcruthaitheacht atá ag pobal na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta agus iad a thabhairt i dtreo an scáileáin. Ag Oireachtas na Samhna i mbliana, sheol TG4 scéim forbartha nua atá dírithe ar scríbhneoirí agus scéalaithe Gaeltachta chun pobal cruthaitheach taibhealaíne na Gaeltachta a mhealladh agus a ghríosadh i dtreo scríobh don scáileán. Tá gá le roinnt scéimeanna mar sin chun deiseanna nua a chur ar fáil do phobal cruthaitheach.

Beidh mé ag cur béim freisin ar thuiscint níos fearr ar mhianta an lucht féachana sna cinntí cruthaitheacha atá á ndéanamh agus díriú orthu ar an mbealach is fearr. Beidh i bhfad níos mó béime ar léargais agus taighde lucht féachana sna cinntí coimisiúnaithe atá á ndéanamh don sceideal agus beifear ag díriú ar nósanna féachana an lucht féachana agus ar na hardáin atá in úsáid acu. Tá a fhios againn mar shampla go dtaitníonn sé leis an lucht féachana a bheith ag breathnú ar dhrámaíocht ar an seinnteoir ina n-am féin. Is de bharr sin gur ghlac mé cinneadh Ros na Rún a chur ar fáil ar an seinnteoir an lá roimh chraoladh le freastal ar mhianta an lucht féachana. D'éirigh thar cionn ar fad leis an tsraith CRÁ ar an seinnteoir agus ar iPlayer an BBC, de bharr an eolais sin, an samhradh seo, rinne TG4 athcheadúnas ar sheansraitheanna drámaíochta TG4 don seinnteoir ionas go mbeadh a thuilleadh rogha ar fáil don lucht féachana. Tá ag éirí an-mhaith leo. Tá súil againn dhá shraith drámaíochta nua a fhorbairt in aghaidh na bliana i gcomhar le Fís Éireann agus cómhaoinitheoirí eile.

Tá gá dul i ngleic le teicneolaíocht na craoltóireachta don todhchaí agus beidh sé sin mar phríomhsprioc agam freisin. De réir taighde atá déanta do TAM Ireland, beidh laghdú 60% ar lucht féachana a fhéachann ar an teilifís beo idir seo agus 2035, agus beidh fás mór ar sholáthar teilifíse ar an idirlíon seachas ar shatailít nó cábla. Ciallaíonn sé sin go mbeidh cuma dhifriúil ar an leagan amach a bheidh ar an teilifís, b'fhéidir nach mbeadh na cainéil in ord 1-4 mar shampla, go mbeadh na cainéil teilifíse leagtha amach ar nós leathanach baile Netflix. Beidh gá a chinntiú go mbeidh TG4 éasca le teacht air ar aon leagan amach nua agus go mbeidh na cláracha feiceálach. Tá go leor plé ag siúl ar na hathruithe sin leis an rialtas agus le Coimisiún na Meán agus táim chun a chinntiú go mbeidh TG4 lárnach sna roghanna agus sa phlé atá á ndéanamh. Beidh muid ag breathnú ar áiteanna eile a bhfuil deiseanna nuálacha do TG4 ar nós cluichí ríomhaireachta Gaeilge, beochan nua agus úsáid AI don chruthaitheacht chun a chinntiú go mbeidh an Ghaeilge lárnach i saol digiteach an phobail.

CC: Cén fáth go bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar theanga, chomh tábhachtach don earnáil agus cén chaoi a bhfuil TG4 ag cur leis an bhfás leanúnach?

DNC: Tá an Ghaeilge lárnach i TG4, is é an príomhchúram atá orainn ná freastal ar phobal na Gaeilge ach freisin go dtugann muid bealach isteach don Ghaeilge do dhaoine a bhfuil suim acu foghlaim faoin teanga agus faoin gcultúr ar bhealach nach bhfuil á chur ar fáil dóibh in áiteanna eile. Mar Ard-Stiúrthóir, beidh cumasú na cruthaitheachta san earnáil léiriúcháin lárnach san obair a bheidh ar bun ag TG4 chomh maith le cur le fás na hearnála go háirithe sa Ghaeltacht. Tá go leor le déanamh fós againn le bonn láidir a chur faoin earnáil i gceantair Ghaeltachta taobh amuigh de Chonamara agus le tacú le léiritheoirí neamhspleácha fás. Tá TG4 éagsúil ó go leor de na meáin teilifíse eile mar go ndéanann muid infheistiú agus forbairt i smaointe nua seachas formáidí agus leaganacha de smaointe idirnáisiúnta. Tacaíonn muid le 'maoin intleachtúil' na Gaeilge agus na hÉireann agus tá sé sin fíorthábhachtach. Ní gá gur cur chuige logánta é sin mar atá feicthe againn leis an tsraith drámaíochta CRÁ atá díolta le hochtó tír ar fud an domhain agus cláracha faisnéise ar ardchaighdeán atá á dtaispeáint ag féilte idirnáisiúnta faisnéise chomh maith leis na scannáin atá forbartha trí scéimeanna CINE4 agus Gealán. Tá na comhpháirtíochtaí straitéise atá againn le Fís Éireann, Coimisiún na Meán agus Ciste Craoltóireachta na Gaeilge fíorthábhachtach le fás a chur faoin earnáil chomh maith agus le chéile tugann muid stádas don chruthaitheacht agus don teanga mar a chonaic muid le Kneecap agus An Cailín Ciúin. Tá naoi scannán léirithe anois ó scéim CINE4 agus leanfaidh an obair sin ar aghaidh.

CC: Cén cur chuige atá agat le lucht féachana atá níos óige agus níos éagsúla a mhealladh, agus tú ag fanacht dílis do mhisean TG4 ag an am céanna?

DNC: An-simplí, caithfear ábhar a chur ar fáil ar na hardáin a bhfuil daoine óga ag breathnú orthu, agus tuiscint a bheith againn ar céard atá á lorg acu ó TG4. Tá suim ar leith ag an aois óg sa Ghaeilge, san athbheochan atá ag tarlú agus tá an oiread ábhar á chruthú acu féin ar TikTok agus ar Instagram. Tá daoine óga ag lorg cláracha agus ábhair ar ardchaighdeán. Tá dualgas ar TG4 a chinntiú go bhfuil glór acu. Beidh mianta agus léargais lucht féachana

an-tábhachtach chun an aoisghrúpa seo a shásamh agus freisin go bhfuilimid in ann bogadh chun léirithe go tapa le freastal orthu. Tá freastal ar dhaoine óga mar cheann de spriocanna straitéise TG4 agus tá sé i gceist agam é sin a chinntiú trí a thuilleadh maoinithe a chur i dtreo cláracha agus ábhar don aoisghrúpa seo.

CC: Céard is mó a spreagann thú maidir le todhchaí TG4 agus na meáin chumarsáide Gaeilge tríd is tríd?

DNC: Sílim go bhfuil pleananna an rialtais agus Coimisiún na Meán an-dearfach do na meáin ar fad trí chéile, go mbeidh córas nua maoinithe ann a chinnteoidh go bhfuil dóthain maoinithe ag na meáin a n-aidhmeanna agus a gcuspóirí a chur i gcrích. Tá leasuithe á ndéanamh ar an mBille Craolacháin atá ag teacht leis an nGníomh Eorpach um Shaoirse na Meán agus beidh na leasuithe sin an-dearfach do na meáin agus don phobal féachana. Táim dóchasach go mbeidh bonn láidir faoi na meáin agus go mbeidh deis pleanáil chun cinn níos fearr a dhéanamh agus díriú ar an éagsúlacht ábhair atá á chur ar fáil don lucht féachana.

Maidir le TG4, tá an oiread suime ag an bpobal anois sa Ghaeilge gur buntáiste mór do TG4 go bhfuil muid in ann freastal orthu agus rogha eile, rogha tharraingteach, shainiúil a chur ar fáil. Sílim go bhfuil an rud céanna i gceist do na meáin Ghaeilge eile, agus go bhfuil iolrachas agus rogha dhifriúil ag teastáil idir na meáin Ghaeilge éagsúla agus gur rud maith é go bhfuil rogha dhifriúil ar fáil.

CC: Mar fhocal scoir, cén chomhairle a chuirfeá ar mhic léinn nó ar chéimithe nua a bhfuil suim acu gairm bheatha a bhaint amach sna meáin, sa chraoltóireacht, nó sa tseirbhís phoiblí?

DNC: Mholfainn do mhic léinn gach deis a fhaigheann siad a thapú más rud é go bhfuil suim acu a bheith ag obair sna meáin. Mholfainn a bheith oscailte faoi cén treo gur mhaith leo a dhull, mar go bhféadfadh siad a bheith go maith ag gnéithe éagsúla den obair agus gur fiú triail a bhaint as réimsí difriúla. Is obair chrua é agus bíonn go leor éiginnteachta ann ach tá sásamh ar leith le baint as má chloíonn siad leis. Sa ré ilardáin ach go háirithe, nuair atá gá le bheith in ann ábhair a fhoilsiú ar iliomad ardáin, mholfainn do mhic léinn a gcumas scríbhneoireachta i nGaeilge a chleachtadh, a fheabhsú agus a fhorbairt mar gur buntáiste mór é cruinneas agus cumas cruthaitheachta scríbhneoireachta i nGaeilge.

Pat McLoughlin Takes the Helm as General Manager of Operations at Chanelle Pharma

Pat McLoughlin,
General Manager of Operations
at Chanelle Pharma

Cois Coiribe took a moment to catch up with University of Galway MBA alumnus Pat McLoughlin, now General Manager (GM) of Operations at Chanelle Pharma. Headquartered in Loughrea, Co. Galway, Chanelle Pharma is Ireland's largest manufacturer of generic pharmaceuticals for human and animal health, with operations across Ireland, the UK, Portugal, and Jordan. Its world class R&D and manufacturing facilities support a global supply chain reaching 80 countries. In April 2024, Chanelle Pharma was acquired by Exponent PE, a leading European private equity firm, with Pat taking on the role of GM of Operations in January 2025.

Cois Coiribe (CC): So, Pat, tell us a bit about yourself.

Pat McLoughlin (PMcL): I am the General Manager of Chanelle Pharma. I live in Claremorris, Co. Mayo, and I'm married with two children. Both of my children have studied at the University of Galway; my daughter is graduating with a Bachelor of Commerce (Global Experience) in October 2025, and my second child is currently in his second year of Commerce. I've been in my chosen career for some time now and completed a Master of Business Administration (MBA) 20 years ago, at the Cairnes School of Business, University of Galway.

CC: You joined Chanelle Pharma as General Manager (GM) in January 2025, bringing over 20 years of experience from organisations like B. Braun and GlaxoSmithKline. As a University of Galway MBA graduate, how did your time at the University influence your leadership style and approach to change management?

PMcL: That's a great question. I originally graduated as a Chartered Certified Accountant but transitioned into operational roles early in my career. I went from managing a small furniture manufacturing plant to working in Dublin, where I was involved in implementing ERP software, just before the year 2000 and the infamous "millennium bug", when many feared systems would crash. After that, I ended up managing the IT department for a US multinational, Stiefel Laboratories, and later transitioned into the manufacturing side of the business.

As I progressed in my career, I became increasingly aware of the ceiling that can emerge, especially in the early years, when you're valued for being a subject matter expert. But as your career advances, it becomes less about technical expertise and more about leadership. That's when I started looking into an MBA.

I noticed that many of the senior leaders I respected had completed an MBA, and I felt it was the right next step. So, in September 2006, I enrolled in the MBA programme at University College Galway, as it was known then, now the University of Galway. I was delighted to be accepted, especially with the support of my company; it was a big step for me, and it was also a significant commitment for my family, as we had very young children at the time. Really, the whole family was part of the journey, and that experience gave me a deep understanding of what leadership really means. ▸

> The MBA gave me that opportunity, not just to develop myself, but to reflect. One thing that really stood out to me was the idea of leadership style and approach.

It was amazing to study something and then be able to step out and apply it. Often, we jump straight into doing, without taking time to step back and understand the mechanics of how and why things work. The MBA gave me that opportunity, not just to develop myself, but to reflect. One thing that really stood out to me was the idea of leadership style and approach. It made me ask myself: if I had to define it, what kind of leader am I?

My class was very diverse; we had a Priest, the future Garda Commissioner, the Head of HR from one the country's largest banks, some very successful entrepreneurs, and a few from multinationals like me. It was a broad and enriching experience, and I can confidently say it was truly eye-opening.

Early on, my leadership style was rooted in deep subject knowledge and a need to have all the answers. Over time, I shifted toward developing people, driving results through others, and building leadership capacity, changes that required two key adjustments in my leadership approach.

First, I had to be a better listener through active listening. Second, I needed greater self-awareness, recognising the impact of my responses and focusing on supporting staff by understanding their challenges and offering guidance where I could.

> Digitalisation and AI are transforming how we work, but every competitor is doing that. The real differentiator is our people, our talent.

CC: What does a typical day look like in your role as GM? What are your key priorities from morning to evening, and how do you balance strategic oversight with operational demands?

PMcL: There's no typical day for me as a GM, and I imagine it's similar whether you're managing a chip shop or a pharmaceutical plant. My day usually starts early – around 6 AM at home – when I check emails and handle any urgent matters, since we operate 24 hours a day. I then commute to work and am typically on site by 8 AM.

I don't have a physical office on site; instead, I work from an open plan desk and don't follow a fixed routine or workspace. I usually start in the laboratory at 8:30 AM with team check-ins, reviewing the previous evening's manufacturing performance. One of our priority KPIs is delivering high-quality products to our customers on time, and one of the final stages in getting our product through is quality control, which plays a crucial role to ensure everything is in order.

It is important to understand the previous 24 hours, and to identify key issues and where we need to focus our resources and problem solve. This helps me stay on track and prepare for the challenges ahead.

My focus is site safety and performance, resolving issues quickly, maintaining quality, and hitting KPIs. In pharmaceuticals, using only top-quality materials and preventing defects is critical, especially with 40% of our products for human health and 60% for animal health.

Thinking of the end user, many of our human health products include heart medications and pain management drugs, and it's vital that patients receive exactly what they need on time. We take this responsibility very seriously, earning the trust of both our customers and shareholders.

As a GM, my role involves a lot of variety. That's just part of the job.

CC: How do you distinguish between operational and strategic work, and how do you balance prioritising strategy with handling governance issues?

PMcL: It is important to put time aside for both strategy and operations. Balancing strategic and operational demands is one of the biggest challenges, especially in a fast-paced, highly regulated industry.

The prior 24 hours and next 24 hours is important to focus on operationally, however, I do carve out some time to focus on shaping the business for future growth. I make time to meet with the teams, i.e. commercial or engineering, to look at how our facilities and our services will evolve in the next 5 to 10 years, and I also block out time to focus exclusively on strategy, usually Fridays. This allows me to stay ahead of upcoming regulatory changes, pipeline priorities, and investment opportunities.

I prioritise talent development by empowering my leadership team and creating space for coaching and mentoring. Attracting and keeping great talent really comes down to thinking about the future. In fast-moving industries, where technology and innovation are always changing, the big question is: how do we stay ahead?

Yes, digitalisation and AI are transforming how we work, but every competitor is doing that. The real differentiator is our people, our talent.

Chanelle Pharma has a diverse workforce representing over 25 countries, united by a shared purpose and driven by the vision of its CEO and senior leadership team. While every role contributes to our success, a select number of positions are critical to shaping and sustaining business growth. To ensure we have the right talent in these key roles, we follow a structured talent and succession process, aligning emerging talent with development plans using our "Ready Now, Ready Soon, Ready Later" framework to build the next generation of leadership.

Minister Grealish visits Chanelle Pharma's FDA-approved, state-of-the-art laboratory and manufacturing facility in Loughrea.

> The Loughrea plant is our global headquarters, and it houses three of our manufacturing facilities and two of our four R&D centres

CC: Chanelle Pharma is Ireland's largest manufacturer of generic pharmaceuticals for human and animal health, with operations in Ireland, the UK, Portugal, and Jordan. How do you ensure regulatory compliance across all these markets, and what role does the Loughrea headquarters play in driving international growth?

PMcL: We're proud to be Ireland's largest manufacturer of generic pharmaceuticals for both humans and animals, something that's quite unique, as it's not often you see both areas under one company. Chanelle Pharma is structured across three independent business units: Animal Health, Human Health, and Wholesale. This allows us to focus regulatory efforts and product strategies based on the unique needs of each sector.

The Loughrea plant is our global headquarters, and it houses three of our manufacturing facilities and two of our four R&D centres. The site maintains EU-GMP and FDA-approved standards, which enables us to meet the rigorous regulatory requirements in markets such as the EU, US, and beyond.

Of course, with that comes the challenge of ensuring compliance and governance across the different sites. A very good management system and communications process is key.

We hold weekly cross-operations management meetings to stay aligned and use technology tools, like Workvivo, to keep colleagues connected across cultures and geographies. Our Employee Engagement Survey, supported by an Appreciative Inquiry approach and 'Heat Map' analysis, helps us identify strengths and address gaps in real time. We foster a positive work environment with strong staff engagement, including regular 'Pizza Days'.

Our global quality and regulatory teams ensure compliance across jurisdictions through robust systems and collaboration. Equally important is our culture; we are all "Channellers", committed to serving our patients and customers.

It's worth noting that although human and animal health are regulated differently, the processes are largely aligned. Many compounds initially used in human health are later adapted for use in animals, so the overlap isn't conflicting.

At Chanelle, we work with over 90 molecules used in both human and animal products.

CC: With a significant amount invested annually in manufacturing and R&D, how do you strike the right balance between strict compliance, high-quality standards, and innovation? Can you share a recent example of this balance in action?

PMcL: Our heritage is primarily in animal health, and we've invested significantly in manufacturing and R&D, positioning us well for future growth. While our portfolio spans both human and animal health, much of the innovation is emerging from animal health, where we see ▸

significant opportunities, particularly at our Galway plant. At the same time, our human health capabilities remain strong and continue to play an important role in delivery. Galway is well known for its strong MedTech reputation, home to one of the five global hubs, making it an ideal location for research, talent, and collaboration.

We operate four dedicated R&D centres with full-spectrum pharmaceutical capabilities, from product synthesis to technical consultancy, and maintain FDA- and EU-GMP-compliant quality systems. Across our sites, we produce approximately 1 billion tablets annually and 1.2 million litres of liquid across over 7 million units.

Being within the European Union is also a significant advantage, offering access to common regulatory pathways and a strong market base. That said, operating across regions brings both opportunities and challenges. Within the EU, regulatory processes are relatively standardised, and we have EU-GMP and FDA standards; however, once you move into the rest of the world, complexity increases. We hold regulatory licences that allow us to supply globally, with our main markets being the EU and the US. Still, differences across regions mean we must stay agile, and there is consolidation happening across the globe.

When it comes to competition and R&D, we have a strong foundation. Our facilities produce over 1.2 billion tablets a year, along with liquids and specialty formats. We cover both animal and human health, with a wide range of manufacturing technologies, development, and regulatory capabilities. What makes us unique is our ability to scale products for multinational companies, while also maintaining flexibility and exceptional quality standards.

CC: Chanelle Pharma has seen impressive growth since its founding. How is the company evolving under new leadership, and what are the key strategic priorities driving its next phase of expansion?

PMcL: Michael Burke, who founded the business in 1985, did an incredible job bringing the business to where it is today. Now, as leadership has transitioned, we're focused on taking Chanelle Pharma to the next stage of growth, with ambitions to double its size in the coming years. That goal requires a different focus.

We're expanding into markets that haven't traditionally been a priority, supported by a strong pipeline and ongoing product innovation, particularly in the animal sector. That's an exciting part of our evolution, as we move from an individual-owned, entrepreneurial business to a shareholder-owned company. That transition involves global expansion into new geographies, launching global products, and rethinking how we reach customers and replicate success more effectively. This requires us to refocus and evaluate the effectiveness of our products and services.

With a portfolio spanning 90 different molecules and a unique footprint in Ireland, we stand out in an ecosystem dominated by US multinationals. Developing and growing our own capabilities here isn't just good for business, it's vital

for the Irish economy. We have our own trusted brands, and growing these is a priority.

Like many Irish companies, we're impacted by global trade challenges, including the 15% tariffs on Irish and European exports. Businesses like ours need to respond by driving greater productivity, not just to stay competitive but to offset rising costs and support sustainable growth. The imposition of tariffs has accelerated our focus on digitalisation.

We're making a significant investment in digital transformation. For example, we used to generate over 750,000 sheets of paper every quarter. Processes like that are now being digitised to improve efficiency and sustainability. By leveraging digital technologies and AI, we can increase output from the same facility, reduce inefficiencies, and become leaner overall.

Alongside digitalisation, we're reviewing our portfolio strategically, investing where we can see the best return on investment, and creating new opportunities, rather than waiting for them to appear. That is a different mind-set. Where we don't yet have the capabilities – whether in facilities, skills, or technologies – acquisitions will be a key part of our strategy for growth over the next three to four years, and we are already making progress here.

> When it comes to competition and R&D, we have a strong foundation. Our facilities produce over 1.2 billion tablets a year, along with liquids and specialty formats.

CC: As a University of Galway alumnus now leading a global pharma business from the West of Ireland, what advice would you give to current MBA students and fellow graduates aiming for executive leadership roles?

PMcL: When I'm asked about advice for graduates, whether from an MBA or a commerce background, my guidance is simple: don't map your career too rigidly.

An MBA gives you exposure to all aspects of business; HR, finance, operations, and strategy. The interdisciplinary project that you undertake as part of your MBA provides a broader perspective and allows you to utilise that breadth.

Explore, stay adaptable, and seize opportunities as they come. Your career path will likely evolve in ways you can't predict today. I think pushing yourself outside your comfort zone is one of the biggest parts of growth. Staying in your comfort zone can slow down your learning opportunity.

Looking back, if there's one thing I would have done differently, it's investing earlier in cross-functional experience. Near the start of my career, I was focused on domain expertise, but in hindsight, stepping outside that comfort zone into operations, commercial, or regulatory roles sooner, would've accelerated my readiness for broader leadership.

Senior leadership roles are challenging, and you must balance multiple priorities, just as you will balance work, family, and MBA study. My MBA was a two-year course with full days on Fridays and Saturdays, plus a heavy load of projects and exams. It prepared me well for leadership, especially in building resilience.

Work-life balance isn't always a perfect 50-50. At different stages, it might look more like 70-30 or even 80-20. The key is to stay adaptable and intentional with your time and energy. One of the most valuable experiences in my career was working across functions. It gave me a broader perspective, where I built expertise and strategic outlook, and ultimately made me a more effective leader. I highly recommend this kind of skill diversification.

Also, there is no such thing as failure, see it as a learning opportunity. Find mentors. Seek challenges that stretch you. And remember that leadership isn't about having all the answers. It's about asking the right questions, creating clarity, and empowering others to perform at their best.

CC: Is there anything else you would like to add?

PMcL: At Chanelle Pharma, we offer graduates a broad learning experience because we believe in developing well-rounded talent. We give exposure across all areas of the business, not just a narrow or niche focus, which can sometimes happen in larger multinationals. This approach is especially beneficial when progressing into senior leadership roles. Our location in Galway also offers a real quality-of-life advantage, with less commuting into the city and lighter traffic.

On a personal level, I truly do find my role as GM at Chanelle Pharma deeply rewarding. At times, it can be intense, almost like athletic training, but incredibly motivating. I feel privileged to have always worked in healthcare and pharmaceuticals. Knowing what we do helps improve or change lives drives me every day. While I don't often meet patients directly, the impact of our work in hospitals and research is tangible, and that's important.

Pat McLoughlin is an MBA alumnus from University of Galway and has over two decades of experience in senior leadership roles at renowned organisations such as B. Braun & GlaxoSmithKline. He has extensive experience in leading global manufacturing sites, spearheading major business transformations, and advancing safety and compliance standards. His expertise spans business growth through strategic leadership, process optimisation, and team development, with a strong emphasis on operational excellence and quality improvements.

From University Rugby and Lifelong Friendship, Through Athenry To Afghanistan

Maurice McQuillan,
CEO Lifes2good Foundation

Maurice McQuillan is the current CEO of Lifes2good Foundation. The Foundation was set up by James and Maria Murphy after business success in Lifes2good. He recollects his experiences prior to and throughout his tenure as CEO of Lifes2good Foundation while he prepares to pass the baton to the next generation, CEO-appointee Philip Murphy.

> If I was hit by a bus and died tomorrow, I would have to admit that I have had a very lucky life. Most importantly, I have a wonderful wife, children I am proud of, and great friends.

During my career in the army, I was involved in active soldiering on the border in the 1980s. I served overseas in Lebanon, Somalia, and Bosnia, and I had the privilege of working with John Bruton (now deceased), when he was Taoiseach in the 1990s.

In the early 2000s, my brief career working for a political party ended with the worst general election result ever for that party – but I took this in my stride, and I learned a lot and had great fun along the way.

It was my subsequent career in international development, working with some of the most vulnerable people on our planet, from Afghanistan to Sudan, that gave me the most satisfaction, and eventually led me to philanthropy and my current role as CEO of Lifes2good Foundation.

Philanthropy can be a powerful force for social change. It will not solve all society's problems, but it can act quickly and nimbly, unfettered by the bureaucracy that often constrains large-scale donors. And it can support innovation and leverage government funding to sustain impactful programmes long after philanthropic funding has ended.

That belief has guided my work as CEO of Lifes2good Foundation since 2017. The roots of this journey go back much further, to my student days in what was then University College Galway (UCG), now known as University of Galway, where I met James Murphy, from Athenry.

The current primary focus of the Foundation is on the environment, but the Foundation also continues with two programmes from the first strategic planning cycle, which focused on women and children in situations of vulnerability. To facilitate this, the Foundation works with diverse organisations, from Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) to CAMFED, who specialise in girls' education and empowerment in the developing world.

Early Lessons

While in university, I was lectured by none other than Micheal D. Higgins, the current President of Ireland. His classes had a lasting impact and exposed me to the reality of global inequality and the importance of human rights. That influence never left me. I went on to work in UN peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia, and later with the EU in post-war Bosnia. After a job in politics, I took on the role of Humanitarian Director at the international development agency, Trócaire, before, eight years ago, I took up the position of CEO of Lifes2good Foundation.

Despite 20 years of army experience and 16 years of international development experience, this was something new – working for James Murphy, a lifelong friend!

James and I played on the same U20 University of Galway (then UCG) rugby team. We didn't win much, but the experience forged a strong friendship. Subsequently, James, together with his wife, Maria, built a highly successful global business in clinically proven health and beauty brands.

In 2017, as James and I cycled from Malin to Mizen for a cancer charity fundraiser, he turned to me and said, "Maurice, I want to set up a foundation that gives away €20 million over the next 10 years. I want to do something meaningful, that will make an impact."

When first approached, I told James that I would never work for a friend. But James Murphy can be very persuasive. And here I am, eight years later, reflecting on my time as CEO of Lifes2good Foundation. ▸

I went on to work in UN peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia, and later with the EU in post-war Bosnia.

The Initial Vision

Together with James and Maria, we explored why they wanted to establish a foundation and discussed the differences between general charitable giving and giving through a formal foundation. Considering the scale of the funds they were prepared to commit, we agreed that a foundation would allow for a more strategic approach to facilitate the planning and evaluation of their giving.

We established a company limited by guarantee with charitable status; an official foundation, with a clear vision, enabling the family to engage in more structured and impactful giving.

In the early days of 2017, I spent time with James and Maria as their thinking evolved from "we want to give back and make a difference" to "we would like to support women and children in situations of vulnerability, primarily in the west of Ireland, but also in the developing world."

They were drawn to place-based giving but also recognised global inequality and wanted to make a contribution in the global south. Early on, one of our larger overseas programmes contributed to advancing girls' education in pre-Taliban Afghanistan. One of our smaller Irish initiatives paid for a state-of-the-art tartan running track for boys and girls in Athenry.

Considering the scale of the funds they were prepared to commit, we agreed that a foundation would allow for a more strategic approach to facilitate the planning and evaluation of their giving.

Strategic Planning
Mission, Values, Approach

Once the focus was narrowed, we engaged in a strategic planning process to define the foundation's vision, mission, values, and approach. Over my tenure, I've found the values to be the most important guiding light, something I regularly revisit. While they may sound a little clunky (and technically they are not all "values"), they have served us well. They are:

- Respect
- Partnership
- Impact
- Integrity
- Innovation

Of these, I've found Respect to be the most important, particularly given the inevitable power imbalance between the funder and the recipients of grants, our partners.

Early Days

In 2018, we supported COPE Galway in building a state-of-the-art refuge for women on the site of the former Magdalene laundry on Forster Street, near Eyre Square, Galway. In 2019, we established a multi annual partnership with Cathy Connolly and the Galway Rape Crisis Centre to establish Galway's first dedicated teenage counselling programme, a vital initiative that continues today with State support.

We also recognised the positive impact that sport and music can have on young people. Working with Sport Ireland, the Federation of Irish Sport, and DCU's School of Health and Human Performance, we developed a coaching course specifically tailored to the needs of girls and young women.

One smaller project I'm especially proud of is the video we created encouraging support and attendance at matches when Galway women reached three All Ireland finals in one year. See Galway Sporting Heroes.

We learned that giving money away is easy, but giving it away *well* is much harder. Unsurprisingly, we made some mistakes along the way. When it came to failure, James brought his business mindset to the table. He advised me, "If you're going to fail, fail quickly, move on, and use the learning."

That advice has served me well, especially during the early pilot years.

Key Advice and Working For a Friend

The most valuable early advice came from my former manager at Trócaire, Mary Healy, who had gone on from Trócaire to run a private foundation. When I reached out to her, she shared two simple pieces of advice that I've returned to often:

1. Always remember, it's their money
2. If it were your money, would you spend it this way?

As CEO, I couldn't simply rely on my own experience in the sector. It's been important to fully understand the founders' motivations and their preferences around grant-making. Mary's advice has helped guide many of my decisions.

Working for a friend naturally added complexity. I needed to respect the views of both founders, whilst simultaneously bringing my own professional expertise to the job.

James often came to me with ideas, at speed, and sometimes from left field. Some were brilliant; others needed more reflection. But in every instance, he brought energy and passion. He trusted my expertise, loyalty, and commitment, and I trusted that, no matter how unconventional his idea might seem, his intentions were grounded in doing the right thing.

In 2019 James Murphy & Maurice McQuillan visited the girls education programme that Lifes2good Foundation was supporting in Malawi. James was impressed with the small micro businesses that some of the girls were trying to establish after school. He has now invested in a new five year, almost €2 million euro, multi annual programme, supporting 1000s of girls to establish small, self-sustainable, and profitable, micro enterprises, across Malawi.

In fairness, a number of those unusual ideas turned into real successes.

That willingness to take risks, and move from risk to reward, clearly served him well in business, and he brought that same mindset to his philanthropy.

To succeed in the role while preserving friendships, I had to make careful judgement calls. I knew we wouldn't always agree. The key was knowing which battles were worth fighting and which weren't. And through it all, former manager Mary Healy's voice remained in my ear: "Remember, it's his money."

> I needed to respect the views of both founders, whilst simultaneously bringing my own professional expertise to the job.

Exemplar Programme
Active* Consent

The Active* Consent programme was created in University of Galway in response to the crisis of sexual violence in our society, grounded by the belief that everyone has the right to consent – the right to say "yes" or "no" to sexual intimacy.

With support from Lifes2good Foundation, the Active* Consent programme has grown from a grassroots initiative established in 2013 into a national programme. It brings practitioners from drama, psychotherapy, health promotion, social work, and psychology to develop research-based outreach resources for young people.

How did Lifes2good Foundation get involved?
In the wake of the high-profile Belfast rugby trial in 2018, and the toxic WhatsApp messages that surfaced during it, Maria Murphy reached out to me. She asked if I could identify an organisation addressing the attitudes and behaviours of young men. After an extensive search, I found myself back at University of Galway, speaking with Professor Pádraig MacNeela, who at the time was leading the campus-based initiative called Smart Consent.

With the Foundation's support, Smart Consent evolved into Active* Consent. Since then, it has gone from strength to strength, becoming a nationally recognised programme working at the intersection of research, education, and cultural change. ▸

> With support from Lifes2good Foundation, the Active* Consent programme has grown from a grassroots initiative established in 2013 into a national programme.

Maurice McQuillan, Maria Murphy, Mary Mitchell O'Connor (Minister for Higher Education at the time) and James Murphy officially launch the Lifes2good Foundation / UG Active Consent partnership in January 2019.

Conor Murphy, Chair of Lifes2good Foundation, speaking about the Lifes2good Foundation / Active* Consent Partnership.

Across Ireland, education professionals and student leaders now deliver Active* Consent workshops in post-primary schools, further education and training settings, and universities.

The programme has influenced national policy and is referenced in key national strategies, from the Programme for Government to the National Strategy for Ending Gender-Based Violence. Active* Consent advocacy played an important role influencing the appointment of Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Managers in every Irish university.

Active* Consent has proved to be more than a programme. It represents a vital ideology for building a culture of respect. Its impact is evident in the national shift over the past decade, from a culture of silence around consent to its standing as a national priority. The programme's reach now extends beyond Ireland, with its resources being adopted by colleges in the United States and the UK.

Strategic Plan Number Two and the Next Generation

When James and Maria established the Foundation, they hoped their adult children might one day become involved and learn about philanthropy through direct engagement. In 2022, they asked me to meet individually with each of their four children to explore their views and aspirations for the Foundation. What emerged was unanimous: all were interested in becoming more involved, with the caveat that the Foundation shift its focus primarily to the environment, a cause they each identified as a defining global issue for their generation.

We took their views on board and consulted with the founders, board, and partners. Together, we made the decision to make a considered pivot, placing the environment at the heart of our second strategic plan, while continuing to support our two strongest legacy programmes from the first strategic plan, including Active* Consent at the University of Galway.

James Murphy, CEO Lifes2good & Maurice McQuillan, CEO Lifes2good Foundation.

Now more than two years into this phase, we are supporting a range of initiatives in the sustainable land use space in Ireland, identifying organisations working at the intersection of nature, food, and farming. It's an exciting sector, rapidly evolving, and led by inspirational and committed leaders.

We support *Hometree*, a nature restoration charity in the West of Ireland, and we recently committed to multi-annual funding toward their ambitious landscape restoration goals. We've also partnered with the *BurrenBeo Trust* and *Farming for Nature*, both of which work closely with farmers to manage their land holistically, providing benefits for nature, communities, soil, climate, food systems, and rural economies simultaneously.

A proud milestone in 2024 was our support of *An BurrenBeo's* Hares Corner initiative, which helped create over 1000 new Hares Corners, from ponds to orchards to mini forests, across seven different local authority areas.

Equally important for the Foundation's future is the deepening involvement of the next generation of the Murphy family. Dr Conor Murphy, another University of Galway graduate, is now Chair of the Board. Philip Murphy, an engineer, left his role working in the renewables sector in Scotland to become the Foundation's full-time Programme Manager. All of the Murphy siblings are now engaged at project level in various capacities, each contributing to the Foundation's work in their own way.

As of July 2025, Philip Murphy has taken over operational control of the Foundation, while I have stepped into a transitional capturing learning role.

It has been a pleasure working alongside Philip over the past two years as he found his footing. I've learned a great deal from a highly inquisitive, bright and committed young man. It has been an enjoyable and fulfilling journey. From where I stand, Philip brings inherited traits and qualities that will serve the Foundation well into the future. He's patient and reflective, but also adventurous and willing to take calculated risks.

Every transition reaches a point where it's time to step aside. For me, that time is fast approaching. As it does, I take satisfaction from what the Foundation has achieved to date, and I am confident that it will continue to flourish into the future.

I feel lucky to have enjoyed a varied, exciting, and fulfilling working life, from Afghanistan to Athenry, and from girls' education in rural Malawi to addressing issues around consent in Mountbellew Agricultural College.

It has been a unique privilege to help establish Lifes2good Foundation and oversee its growth over the past eight years. I owe a debt of gratitude to James and Maria Murphy for entrusting me with this opportunity, and to my wife, Ann, for supporting me throughout the journey.

Above all, I owe the biggest thanks to the committed, hardworking, innovative, and impactful partners who continue to drive positive change in Irish society, and beyond.

Maurice McQuillan, the current CEO of Lifes2Good Foundation, has spent time in Irish politics and spent a year in Bosnia with the EU. He is a former Irish army officer, and he has been deployed in peacekeeping roles with the United Nations. He worked in the international development and humanitarian sector for 14 years, and he was Global Security Manager for Catholic Relief Services (CRS) – a large American INGO operating in over 100 countries. Prior to that he was the Head of Humanitarian Programming in Trócaire in Ireland. He worked in Syria, Somalia, and Afghanistan, and in both CRS and Trócaire, where he delivered extensive training at board and senior management level.

In the Spirit of Giving: Community and Connectedness With Alumnus Dominic Feeney

Dominic Feeney,
CEO of Central Business Equipment (CBE)

Cois Coiribe had the opportunity to connect with Dominic Feeney, CEO of Central Business Equipment (CBE). For over 45 years, CBE has been a leading innovator in retail and hospitality technology in Europe, and they proudly offer EPoS solutions in Ireland and the UK. Markets CBE supplies EPoS solutions for include: supermarket, convenience, forecourt, hospitality, pharmacy, and general merchandise sectors.

> I have many fond memories of my University of Galway experience. It was an incredible period of learning and maturing, both academically and personally.

CBE recently made a generous philanthropic commitment to the new Library at the University of Galway campus. With works currently underway, this facility will be an inspirational, welcoming, high-tech space of learning and creativity. Bringing diversity and mixing disciplines, this common gathering place will enable interaction, discovery, innovation, and new partnerships as a vibrant scholarly and social space.

Meet Dominic Feeney...

Hi, my name is Dominic Feeney. I am a married father of three and am very fortunate to live where I grew up – outside Westport in Co. Mayo.

I am the CEO of Central Business Equipment (CBE), a family run business based in Claremorris Co. Mayo. CBE was set up by our Chairman, Gerard Concannon, and his wife Catherine in 1980. It is an Irish technology company that specialises in Electronic Point of Sale (EPoS) solutions.

Over the years, CBE has grown to become one of Europe's leading innovators in retail and hospitality technology. We are the first choice for EPoS solutions across a wide range of sectors, including supermarkets, convenience stores, forecourts, hospitality, pharmacy, and general merchandise.

Cois Coiribe (CC): Your academic background includes an Honours Degree in Commerce and a Post Grad in Systems Analysis. Can you walk us through your experience as a student at University of Galway?

Dominic Feeney (DF): I began my studies at the University of Galway (then known as UCG) in 1987, completing my Bachelor of Commerce (Hons) degree in 1990, followed by a Postgraduate Diploma in Systems Analysis in 1991. I have many fond memories of my University of Galway experience. It was an incredible period of learning and maturing, both academically and personally.

The University has changed enormously since those days – there were about 4,000 students back then, maybe less. Significantly fewer compared to the vibrant and much larger community today. The campus itself has transformed beyond recognition. It's wonderful to see how it has developed over the years, with all the new buildings and facilities, and this is in no small part because of the University's vision and the continued support of its global alumni network, something I'm proud to be part of. ▸

An illustration of the new library building, a view from the bridge.

CC: As an alumnus of the University, how would you describe the positive impact your experience and studies had on your life and career?

DF: My time at the University of Galway had an enormously positive impact on both my life and career. The building blocks provided to me by University of Galway, combined with the foundations set by my parents, enabled me to develop the career I have today. After completing my Postgraduate Diploma in Systems Analysis, I entered the technology sector at a very exciting time – the early 1990s, when IT and computing were still in their infancy and new business in Ireland.

When I started in CBE, we were just 16 people. Today, I'm proud to lead a team of over 250 employees, including 25 based in the UK. Across more than 30 years, I progressed from systems support engineer to management to director and now CEO as of 2022. It's been a rewarding career, built on steady growth, hard work, and great people, all the while applying the principles learned during my time at University of Galway.

While the academic grounding I gained at the University was essential, the practical and life skills were equally important. Starting my studies at just 17, I became resourceful and self-reliant. Those years taught me how to manage on my own while also being open to and accepting support from other people. I solved problems, worked hard, and kept an open mind – all of which proved invaluable in my professional life.

I learned that success comes not just from academic knowledge, but from resilience, teamwork, and the willingness to seize opportunities when they arise.

When I started in CBE, we were just 16 people. Today, I'm proud to lead a team of over 250 employees, including 25 based in the UK.

CC: CBE and its chairman have shown a strong commitment to supporting resilient communities in the West of Ireland. Can you expand on this philosophy of support as well as the culture within the company that facilitates it?

DF: CBE has a long-standing tradition of supporting communities and organisations throughout the West of Ireland – and indeed across the country. Being a West of Ireland company, that connection to place and people has always been central to who we are.

As a family-owned business, we have always believed that with success comes the responsibility to give something back. Our growth and achievements have been built in partnership with local businesses and communities, so it's only right that we reinvest in them. Whether it's supporting local charities, schools, sporting clubs, or community fundraisers, we see these contributions as a way of saying thank you. And honestly, what we give always comes back to us many times over in goodwill and loyalty.

The culture within CBE reflects that same family ethos, and it is prevalent at every level of the company. We are one team working together, and that sense of belonging has been a major factor in our success and our high staff retention over the years.

Of course, like any company, we've evolved and welcomed new faces along the way, but our core philosophy remains strong: we're one

> **Being a West of Ireland company, that connection to place and people has always been central to who we are.**

CBE family. We work hard, we support one another, and we share in our successes; that spirit of unity drives our commitment to giving back to the community that helped us grow.

CC: CBE recently made a major philanthropic commitment in support of the University's new Library. Can you talk about the motivations for CBE to support this particular project?

DF: CBE is very proud to be involved with University of Galway's new Library project. We've always placed a strong emphasis on supporting community initiatives, and this partnership felt like a natural extension of that philosophy.

We've had a long and positive relationship with University of Galway over the years. Many of our employees are graduates of the University, and we've regularly welcomed students on placement and internships. The University has consistently provided us with exceptional graduates across a range of disciplines – from Business, Computer Science, Software Development and Engineering.

From a strategic perspective, it's incredibly important for a company like CBE to have access to skilled graduates who want to build their career in the West of Ireland. The University plays a key role in making that possible. Supporting this project is a way to strengthen that connection and ensure that this vital pipeline of talent continues for future generations.

> **CBE is very proud to be involved with University of Galway's new Library project.**

CBE is very fortunate to be in a position to contribute at this scale. The Library will be at the heart of student life, a place where young people learn how to access information, research, think critically, and collaborate – all vital skills for the future.

I have vivid memories of my own time at the University, particularly when it came to finding space in the library. Access was always a challenge, especially around exam time. We'd be scrambling to get a seat in the James Hardiman Library or in the reading room, and there was an unwritten rule that if you left your notes on the desk and were gone for less than 15 minutes, your spot was safe. But any longer and it up for grabs!

Back then, before the library and reading room was extended, the facilities were limited. The new Library marks the next step in that expansion evolution; a truly state-of-the-art space designed to support the needs of modern students.

Learning has changed enormously over the past 30 years, and this new facility reflects that progress. It's wonderful to see the University continuing to invest in the student experience, and CBE is delighted to support such a forward-looking project.

On a personal note, I'm especially proud to have my eldest now studying at my alma mater, stomping around in some of my old haunts. I genuinely believe that she will spend more time in the library and reading room than I did.

CC: Both as CEO and from a personal standpoint, why might you consider it important for companies, such as CBE, to provide philanthropic leadership in this way? What mutual benefit is gained by doing so?

DF: As both a CEO and a graduate of University of Galway, I believe it's incredibly important for companies like CBE to show philanthropic leadership. Giving back has always been part of CBE's DNA, and it's something we take great pride in continuing.

When businesses support their communities – whether that's a local sporting club, a school, a charity overseas, or in this case, a university project – the benefits are felt far beyond the immediate contribution. These organisations do vital work on the ground, and funding allows them to continue and expand that work. Stronger community organisations mean stronger communities, and when communities thrive, individuals do too. They succeed, they grow, and they give back in turn.

So, the benefit is truly mutual. By supporting University of Galway, we're helping to provide resources that will shape the next generation of graduates – talented individuals who will go on to strengthen not just the West of Ireland, but the country as a whole. That's something we can all take pride in.

For CBE, being part of that ecosystem of growth and progress is both a privilege and a responsibility. It's about contributing to a cycle of opportunity – one that ensures the region continues to develop, innovate, and succeed long into the future.

Dominic Feeney has vast experience in all aspects of Retail IT. With an Honours Degree in Commerce and a Post Grad in Systems Analysis, both obtained from University of Galway, he started with CBE in 1993 and worked in various project and management roles before joining the board as Systems Director in 1999. Having held the position of Managing Director for a number of years, Dominic was promoted to CEO in 2022.

Follow on:

The Deirdre and Irial Finan Archives and Special Collections Reading Room

When Irial and Deirdre Finan made a significant philanthropic gift to the University of Galway Library, they not only supported a major capital project but also strengthened their long-standing connection to the University. Irial, a University of Galway alumnus, and Deirdre have consistently championed opportunities for future generations, and their gift reflects their shared commitment to education and public knowledge.

In recognition of the Finans' gift, the University has renamed the Archives and Special Collections Reading Room as **The Deirdre and Irial Finan Archives and Special Collections Reading Room**. The naming reflects not only the scale of their support but also Deirdre's deep and personal interest in archives, rare materials, and cultural memory.

The Reading Room is the gateway to some of the University's most treasured collections; literary archives, historical documents, political papers, theatre collections, and unique materials that safeguard the intellectual and cultural memory of Ireland. It is a space where students encounter history at its source, where researchers make discoveries that reshape our understanding of the past, and where the University's heritage is held in trust for future generations.

As University of Galway moves toward the creation of its new Library, a vibrant hub for learning, research, innovation, and community, the Finan name will stand as a testament to vision, partnership, and enduring commitment.

Changing *Lives*, Driving *Discovery*

Our **Donor Impact Report 2024** is a celebration of the incredible generosity and commitment of our donors, whose support is vital in advancing our vision of excellence in education, research and community engagement.

Read how philanthropic giving is making an impact at University of Galway

Galway University Foundation

A Year in Sports

It has been a year to remember for sport at the University of Galway. Our students and alumni excelled across a wide range of disciplines, from world rowing championships and national athletics podiums to GAA glory and leadership on the international rugby field. Their successes is a testament to the strength of our sporting tradition and the passion that drives our community to succeed.

Fiona Murtagh
MBA Alumna and World Champion Rower

MBA alumna Fiona Murtagh has carved a path defined by discipline and drive, both on the water and in the boardroom.

In 2025 she added silver at the European Rowing Championships in Plovdiv and the World Rowing Cup in Lucerne to her list of achievements, all while completing her postgraduate studies. She most recently claimed gold in the women's single sculls at the 2025 World Rowing Championships in Shanghai.

In June she was named Irish Times Sport Ireland Sportswoman of the Month, in recognition of her resilience in stepping from team boats into the single sculls at international level.

> **As a competitive, high-performance athlete, I have an innate drive to seek out medals. But in the last year, I have started to appreciate everything that surrounds the wins.**

Rowing
World-Class on the Water

Rowing continues to be one of the University's standout sports, producing world-class athletes and memorable performances.

Fiona Murtagh crowned World Champion and European Silver Medallist, led a wave of success for Galway crews. Donagh Claffey and Martin O'Grady added to the medal haul with an impressive bronze finish at the World U23 Championships.

At world level was Brian Colsh who competed at the senior World Championships in the men's quad while Emma Waters competed in the women's coxless 4.

University club members powered the men's quad scull at the U23 World Championships, with Donnacha Keeley, Shane McLoughlan, Ciaran O'Sullivan, and Shane Rafferty in the crew.

At the European U23 Rowing Championships, Donagh, Martin, Donnacha, and Shane competed in the men's eight, while Emma Fagan and new scholar Sibéal Ní Fhleathbheartaigh rowed in the women's eight. Both crews were coached by our own Eoin Finnigan.

At home, University of Galway rowers dominated the National Championships, claiming 6 titles.

Women's Senior 8+, Men's1x and 2x, Men's Intermediate 4+, Men's Intermediate 2-, and Men's Intermediate 4+

Internationally, the club shone at the London Metropolitan Regatta, with victories in the Championship 2x, Championship 4x, and Women's Academic 4- categories.

Athletics
New Records and Rising Stars

On the track and field, University of Galway athletes made headlines at both national and European level. Aisling Lane captured silver in the race walk at the National Senior Championships before making her senior international debut at the European Team Race Walking Championships near Prague. She later claimed gold in the 3k race walk at the U23 Nationals, marking her as one of the brightest prospects in Irish athletics.

At the European U23 Athletics Championships, Andrew Egan and David Mannion were key members of the Irish 4×400m relay team that set a new Irish U23 record. Andrew was later called up to the Irish senior team for the European Team Championships in Maribor, Slovenia, alongside former student Finley Daley.

There was also podium joy for Fiona Everard, who finished third at the National Track and Field Championships, and then went on to win the Senior Cross Country Championships in November. We also celebrated Padraig Faherty, who claimed bronze in the 3k steeplechase at the U23 level.

Rugby
Leading from the Front

It was a proud moment for the University when Jane Neill was selected to captain the Ireland U20 Women's Rugby team for the Six Nations Summer Series — an honour that highlights both her talent and the calibre of leadership being developed within the university's rugby programme.

GAA
Success Across the Codes

In Gaelic games, University of Galway students and alumni were central to success at every level. Sam O'Farrell achieved huge success winning a senior All-Ireland hurling title with Tipperary. Matthew Thompson earned a prestigious GAA/GPA Young Player of the Year nomination.

The Camogie team made a triumphant return to the top division, reaching the Ashbourne Cup semi-final after several years away from the competition's upper tier. Though narrowly defeated by UL, the campaign marked a strong resurgence.

Beyond the University, Carrie Dolan proudly captained the Galway senior camogie team to All-Ireland success, leading a side filled with University of Galway students and alumni.

The Ladies Football team also enjoyed an excellent season, reaching the O'Connor Cup semi-final after a series of standout performances. Ava Noone starred on the day, supported by fellow scholars Kate Slevin, Aoife Staunton, and soccer scholar Muireann Devaney.

Hockey

The Women's Hockey Club capped off the year with a brilliant Connacht League victory, while the second team impressed with a strong fourth-place finish, reflecting the club's growing strength and participation.

A Community of Champions

From record-breaking achievements to inspiring comebacks, this year's results have captured the enduring spirit of sport at University of Galway, which is rooted in teamwork, resilience, and pride. Our athletes embody the values that unite past and present students: determination, excellence, and the shared joy of representing Galway on national and international stages.

For our alumni, sport has always been about more than competition, it's about belonging, leadership, and striving for something greater together.

Soccer

In soccer, University of Galway men's team reached the Collingwood Cup Final in February 2025, only to fall narrowly 1–0 to Maynooth, with the decisive goal coming in the fourth minute. Despite the heartbreak, the team showed tremendous character and commitment throughout a tournament that was played in miserable conditions.

Since then, the team have won the CU FL in December 2025, defeating Dundalk IT 4-0.

While success didn't come for the women's team this year, we are very proud of our past and present students, especially Kate Slevin and Muireann Devaney, who were part of the Athlone team that enjoyed a great run in European competition and secured both the National League and Cup titles.

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

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In the News

May

15/05: Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill T.D. launches a €4 million charitable funding investment by National Breast Cancer Research Institute (NBCRI) for research into life-changing advancements in patient care and outcomes at University of Galway.

16/05: Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science James Lawless T.D. launches the University's Strategic Plan 2025-2030 and the new Pharmacy programme (MPharm).

21/05: Researchers in the School of Natural Sciences reveal that spider venom potency, analysed across 70 species, depends on the spider's diet.

26/05: Professors Kieran Conboy, Anne O'Connor, and Abhay Pandit elected as members of the Royal Irish Academy for their exceptional contribution to sciences, humanities, and social sciences.

26/05: Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science James Lawless T.D. turns the sod to mark the start of the construction of the new Learning Commons Building.

June

06/06: Michael D. Higgins donates his Presidential Archive and book collection to the University at a celebratory event that also marks the renaming of the historic Aula Maxima as The Michael D. Higgins Auditorium and the unveiling of his portrait by artist Colin Davidson.

18/06: University of Galway is Ireland's No.1 university for sustainable development for the fourth consecutive year and ranks third in the EU, according to the 2025 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings.

18/06: A study led by researchers in the School of Natural Sciences finds that Ireland's native red squirrels can detect and respond to the returning natural predator, the pine marten, explaining their resilience compared to the declining invasive grey squirrel.

26/06: The University will serve as the headquarters for a new €34 million ARC Hub for HealthTech, part of Research Ireland's programme to accelerate research to commercialisation, leading 23 projects in partnership with ATU and RCSI aimed at advancing healthcare technology and improving patient outcomes.

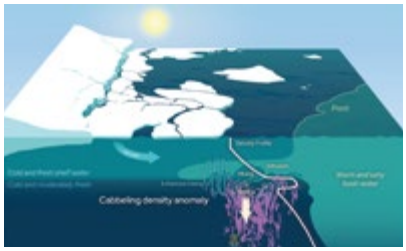
July

02/07: The University launches its first Widening Participation Strategy, which aims to enhance educational opportunities for traditionally underrepresented groups.

20/07: Archaeologists confirm Rathgurreen Ringfort, in the Maree area of Co. Galway, as a high-status Early Medieval settlement for rulers and nobles, with new excavations suggesting it may be up to 1,000 years older and showing evidence of connections with Rome, Scotland, France, and Scandinavia.

29/07: A €11.9 million grant from the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund will support University of Galway-led clinical trials of a pioneering neutrophil-based immune-cell therapy targeting treatment-resistant solid tumours.

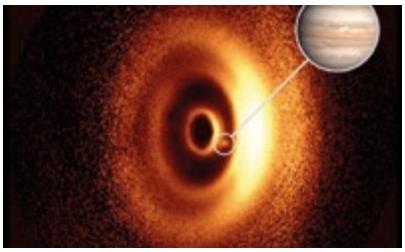
August



05/09: Using a robotic instrument called the Air-Sea Interaction Profiler, researchers observe the rare cabbeling process in the Greenland Sea, improving understanding of how ocean mixing affects Arctic sea-ice melt.

12/08: A new study led by University of Galway in partnership with the University of Melbourne, University College Cork, and Climate Resource finds proposed Irish climate targets protect methane emission privileges at the expense of poorer nations' development.

21/08: A new digital oral history archive, 'Voices of the Showmen', celebrating the lives, experiences, and legacy of Irish show people involved in variety, fit ups, travelling cinemas, fairgrounds, circus, sideshows, and more is launched.



26/08: An international team of astronomers, co-led by researchers in the School of Natural Sciences, makes the unexpected discovery of a new planet, WISPIT 2b, detected at an early stage of formation around a young analogue of our own Sun.

September

04/09: Researchers secure funding from the European Commission's prestigious Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Doctoral Network programme, allowing the University to lead three new projects focused on advancing safer, faster, and more effective medical treatments.

05/09: IEEE formally dedicates an IEEE Milestone to the Anderson Bridge, which was developed at the University in 1891 by Professor Alexander Anderson.

07/09: The Paddy McMenamin Collection is launched – a new digital archive of Long Kesh prison journals that offers a rare glimpse into life inside the internment camp during the 1970s.

22/09: The University is named Ireland's European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) Champion for 2025–2027 for a flagship digitalisation project to simplify and secure recognition of academic credentials, promote student mobility, and foster inclusion.

October

13/10: The University's Irish Centre for High-End Computing (ICHEC) will host Ireland's new supercomputer, CASPIr, following a collaboration agreement by the Government and the European Commission.

14/10: A new international study led by Professor Emer McGrath finds that earlier menopause is linked to a higher risk of dementia, while post-menopausal hormone replacement therapy (HRT) appears to reduce that risk.

20/10: A new research study reveals the results of a world-first study into how bowel cancer shuts down the immune system, and how this can be reversed to improve treatment.

28/10: The University becomes the only site in Europe with a unique combination of ground-breaking microscopy and imaging technologies following a landmark agreement with ZEISS, a pioneer of scientific optics.

November

03/11: The J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics becomes EY Luxembourg's first higher education partner in Ireland and the UK.

10/11: Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science James Lawless T.D. launches a new cybersecurity executive education programme.

11/11: The University celebrates the 50th anniversary of Druid with a special symposium, a new book launch, and an exhibition of materials from the Druid archive.

18/11: A consortium led by University MedTech startup Spiorad Medical secures a €1.7 million investment through the Government's Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund to develop a next-generation vascular closure device to simplify cardiovascular procedures and improve outcomes and recovery.

25/11: The University's empathy education programme, Activating Social Empathy, a practical classroom resource for developing empathy skills in Senior Cycle students, is expanding into Transition Year classes nationwide.

December

03/12: University of Galway has been awarded an institutional Silver Athena Swan award – a milestone in the University's commitment to advancing equality and fostering an inclusive culture.

Your *Legacy*, Their *Future*

A legacy gift to University of Galway is a powerful way to make a lasting difference. It reflects your values, supports future generations, and helps create transformative opportunities for students and researchers.

James and Elaine share a lifelong connection with the University of Galway – first as undergraduate and postgraduate students, and later as proud alumni with enduring ties to the School of Law.

> "The University was formative in our development as lawyers and throughout our respective careers. It also gave us a sense of duty to society and to help those less fortunate than ourselves."

Inspired by their belief in the power of education to change lives, James and Elaine have chosen to include a legacy gift in their Will in support of the School of Law.

> "Having received so much from the University, we are grateful for the opportunity to give something back and to support the education of future generations."

Their legacy will ensure that future Law students benefit from the same transformative experience.

If you'd like to discuss your legacy gift, contact Stephanie at +353 (0) 86 206 1503 or **stephanie.neylon@universityofgalway.ie**

Alumni Events

20th and 25th Anniversary Reunion

University of Galway welcomed over 200 alumni and guests back to campus on 29 August for the Reunion of the Classes of 2000 and 2005.

Aoife Higgins, Katie Mannion, Aoife Toner

Celebrating 50 Years Since Graduation

30th, 35th, 40th and 45th Year Reunions

Graduates from the BComm Class of 1985 marking their reunion on campus

Graduates from the BComm Class of 1995 marking their milestone anniversary

1995

2025

Prof Laoise McNamara welcomed the BE Class of 1975 back to campus

2025 Arts Festival BBQ

Della Brennan, Caroline Forde, Siobhain Hawkins and Caroline Horgan

Eric Mortimer and Padraic De Burca

Gearóidín Holmes, Vincent Mac Thómais, Judy Alymer Conroy and Mike Conroy

Jonathan Cahill, Clodagh Hartigan, Eoin Hartigan with Pater and Ger Keane

Fiona Gavin and Aengus Munnelly

Frances Dockery and Maria Smyth

Lucy Browe, Priscilla Nic Chonmara Mullen and Gemma McGill

Maria Scanlon, Emer Feeney, Angela Mulgannon and Denis Mulgannon

Julie Baxter, Eamon Loughlin and Carolina Batista

Therese O'Halloran, Michael Martyn, Elaine Naughton and Clodagh Higgins

Sorcha Nic Dhonnacha and Cherrelle Johnson

Ruadhán Cooke and Grainne Finn

2025 San Francisco Event

In May 2025 we were delighted to be hosted by the Consul General in San Francisco, Micheál Smith at his resident in Pacific Heights. The trip to San Francisco was the first in a number of years and it was great to see such an engaged, dynamic and successful group of alumni living and working in the Bay Area and beyond.

Group welcomed by Consul General Micheál Smith

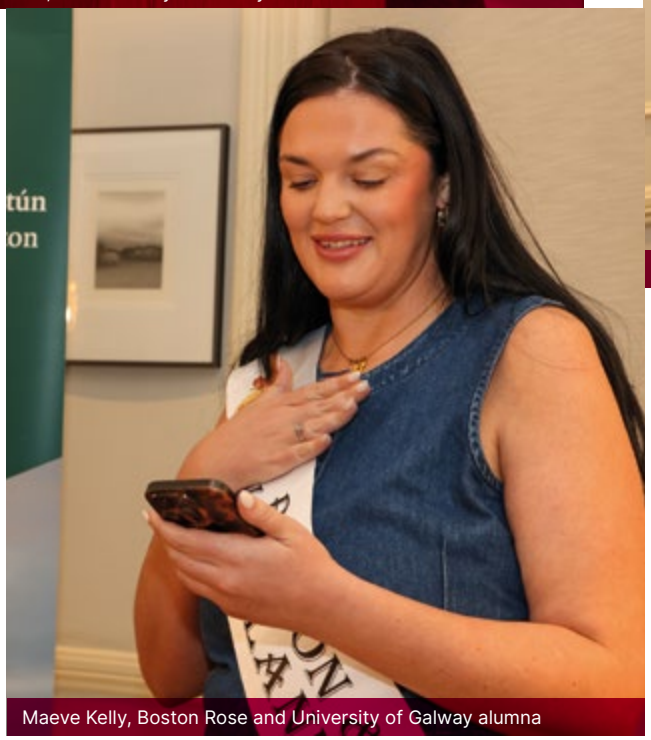
2025 Boston Event

In October 2025 a small group of University of Galway graduates in Boston were hosted at a special event at the private residence of Consul General of New England, Síghle FitzGerald with support from Vice Consul General Paul Rooney, both also graduates of University of Galway. The group represented the over 1500 alumni in the New England region and gathered to hear from Chair of Galway University Foundation, Boston resident James McGlennon and the Vice President for International, Alex Metcalfe on the University's plans in the US and the broader vision for Galway.

Julie Stafford, University of Galway, Alex Metcalfe, University of Galway, Dr Joe D'Alton (Galway University Foundation/Alumnus), Consul General Síghle Fitzgerald, Betsy Cornwell (University of Galway), Vice Consul Paul Rooney and James McGlennon (Chair Galway University Foundation)

James McGlennon, Chair Galway University Foundation US

Finn Hawkins and Kari Espenes



Maeve Kelly, Boston Rose and University of Galway alumna

2025 London Alumni Event

Eamonn Conway, Stefaan Verbruggen, Sonya Iovieno and Jack Stenson

Alan Ahearne, Sonya Iovieno, Bryan O'Carroll, Margaret McEvoy and Tony McDonnell

Irene Bond, Emer Lynam and Mary Casserly

Helen Beausang and Paul Carr

Fergus Redican and Susan Whyte

Emer O'Connor and Deirdre O'Malley

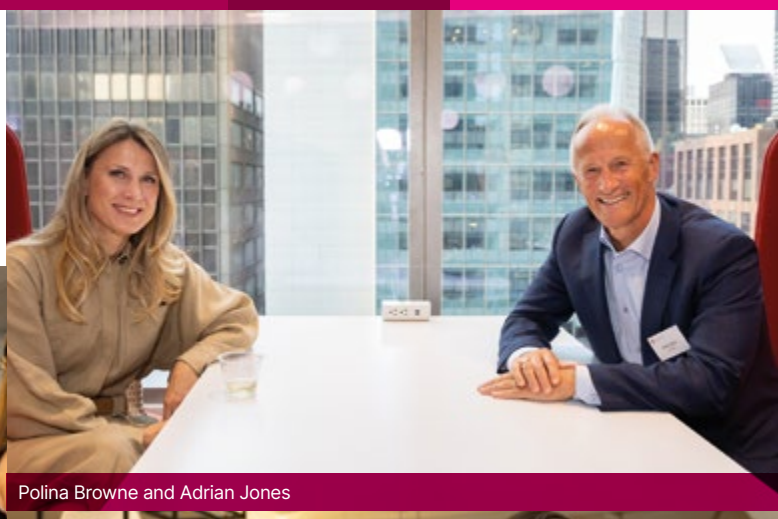
University of Galway

2025 New York Event

Anastasia Buchholz, Seán Walsh and Sreeja Varghese

Darragh Flaherty, Aedhamar Hynes and Prof Alma McCarthy

Kristen O'Connell, Declan Ryan, Cathy Melia, Anne Diamond and Orla Naughton



Polina Browne and Adrian Jones

Anne Geraghty and David Frankland

Joe Gaughan, Kevin Kelly, Karthikeyan Shanmugasundaram

Polina Browne, Mick Browne and Orla Lenihan

2025 Christmas Event

Alumni Ensemble

Belén Carolina Fernandez, Yun Wei, Sofía Fernandez

Caroline Duggan. Eilís Ní Loingsigh

Janet Colgan Eileen O'Gorman

Davinia Conlon and Aisling Lennon

Francesca McAllister and Gina Rocca McAllister

Mairead ni Nuadháin, Pascal malone and Anne Bracken

Mubin Farid Muhammad Waqas Nawaz

mins

Thomas Lynch Mona Joyce Mary Rose McCarthy Eamon Gilmore

Sarah Breun & Donna Cummins

Jason Gaynor Sarah Nash

Andrea Gilligan in conversation with Irial Finan

Andrea Gilligan in conversation with Irial Finan

President David Burn

Dominic Burke, David Dillon and Oliver Wall

Enda McDonagh, Irial Finan, Enda O'Coineen

Henry Anderson Danny McCoy Roddy Feely

Julie Stafford, Andrea Gilligan and Jeremy Skillington

Karl Croke and James Murphy

Michael Lohan Martin Hogan

Deirdre Courtney and Brendan Jennings

2025 Honorary Conferring Degrees

Congratulations to...

Brian Bourke
Doctor of Arts (honoris causa)

Award-winning painter and visual artist.

Distinguished painter and visual artist, born in Dublin and living in County Galway for many years. He studied at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin and St Martin's School of Art in London and has exhibited in Ireland and internationally. He has won multiple awards for his work and is best known for his mythic west of Ireland landscapes, distinctive portraits and self-portraits. He is a member of the Aosdána and an honorary member of the Royal Hibernian Academy.

Anna Heussaff
Doctor of Literature (honoris causa)

Award-winning novelist writing as Gaeilge for adults and teenagers.

Award-winning novelist and translator writing as Gaeilge for adults and teens, recognised for her literary achievements and advocacy in cultural and climate issues.She has translated several books into Irish and taken a leading role in a number of literary projects. A frequent broadcaster on Raidió na Gaeltachta, on current affairs, literary, and climate issues. She is an award winner at the annual Féile an Oireachtais Literary Awards and is a regular at Cúirt, Dublin Book Festival, Ennis Book Club Festival, Seachtain na Gaeilge, Children's Book Festival, Dingle Literary Festival, and Kildare Book Readers' Festival.

Kathleen Loughnane
Doctor of Music (honoris causa)

Renowned harpist, teacher and founder of Dordán, acclaimed for her role in preserving and promoting Ireland's harp tradition.

Kathleen is an award-winning harpist, renowned traditional musician and harp teacher. Co-founder of Dordán, an all-female group whose mix of Irish and Baroque music received widespread acclaim. Dordán received the 1993 RTE National Entertainment Award for Traditional Music. She recorded CDs with Dordán and also in her own name. She has published harp arrangements for her CDs and rescued much harp music from obscurity, collaborated with Music for Galway, International Harp Summer School, Cruit Éireann (Harp Ireland), Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, etc.

Peadar Mac Fhlannchadha
Doctor of Laws (honoris causa)

Former Advocacy Manager and Deputy General Secretary of Conradh na Gaeilge, who worked tirelessly for the promotion of Irish as a community language.

Retired Advocacy Manager, National Organiser and Deputy General Secretary of Conradh na Gaeilge, 1981–2022. Peadar worked with Irish language and community groups throughout Ireland to promote the development of the Irish language as a community language and to provide communities with the opportunity to develop Irish language strategies to enable them to achieve their own local targets.

Back Row L–R: Kathleen Loughnane; Pádraig Ó Céidigh; Professor David Burn, President of University of Galway; Micheál Ó Cuaig; and Brian Bourke. Front Row L–R: Peadar Mac Fhlannchadha and Anna Heussaff. Photo: Andrew Downes, Xposure.

Pádraig Ó Céidigh
Doctor of Economic Science (honoris causa)

Entrepreneur, business leader, and former Senator, accountant, solicitor, and teacher who scaled companies, shaped public policy including Aer Arann.

Former accountant, solicitor and teacher who scaled companies, governed national bodies and shaped public policy including Aer Arann. He was EY Entrepreneur of the Year (Ireland, 2003); World Finals finalist and judge (2004–2005); Chair, EY Ireland judging panel (8 yrs), Business Alumni of the Year, University of Galway; Galway Person & Waterford Person of the Year; and Údarás na Gaeltachta, Businessperson of the Year. He was appointed as member of An Seanad, 2016–2020.

Micheál Ó Cuaig
Doctor of Music (honoris causa)

Poet, singer, and founder of Féile Joe Éinniú, who has nurtured and performed the sean-nós tradition, mentoring generations and helping drive its revival.

Retired primary school teacher, published poet, accomplished singer and Founder Director of Féile Joe Éinniú (1985–2025). Custodian and architect of the vernacular song tradition, he is a consummate performer of traditional song and a generous teacher and mentor to several generations of singers and one of the key contributors to the revival of sean-nós since the turn of the millennium.

"Our honorary degrees recognise individuals whose achievements reflect the values and aspirations of our University community. This year's recipients represent excellence across creative, cultural, academic, and civic life, and we are honoured to welcome them into our University community."

Professor David Burn,
President of University of Galway

Be part of *our* progress.

Our alumni form a vibrant, diverse global community dedicated to supporting each new generation of University of Galway students.

The Alumni Fund plays a vital role in this continued commitment. It allows us to award scholarships to the brightest minds, regardless of their means, and helps fund initiatives that support our students' mental health and wellbeing. It enables students who are facing financial hardship during their studies to remain at university and provides significant funding for our researchers.

100% of all donations to the Alumni Fund go directly towards supporting projects that deliver these aims. Every gift, no matter the size, contributes to a collective effort that allows us to plan ahead and shape a brighter future for our students, our researchers, and our university.

If you would like to support the work of the University, please get in touch today by calling Mary Chambers on +353 (0) 91 49 3750 or email **mary.chambers@universityofgalway.ie**

For more information visit
Galway University Foundation

Living and working in the US? Did you know a donation to University of Galway is tax-deductible?

As a registered 501(c)(3) organization, contributions to the university may reduce your taxable income – meaning you can support education, research, and student success while potentially lowering your tax bill.

It's a meaningful way to give back and benefit in return. Donate today at guf.ie/donate-us

Acknowledgements
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