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Maynooth University

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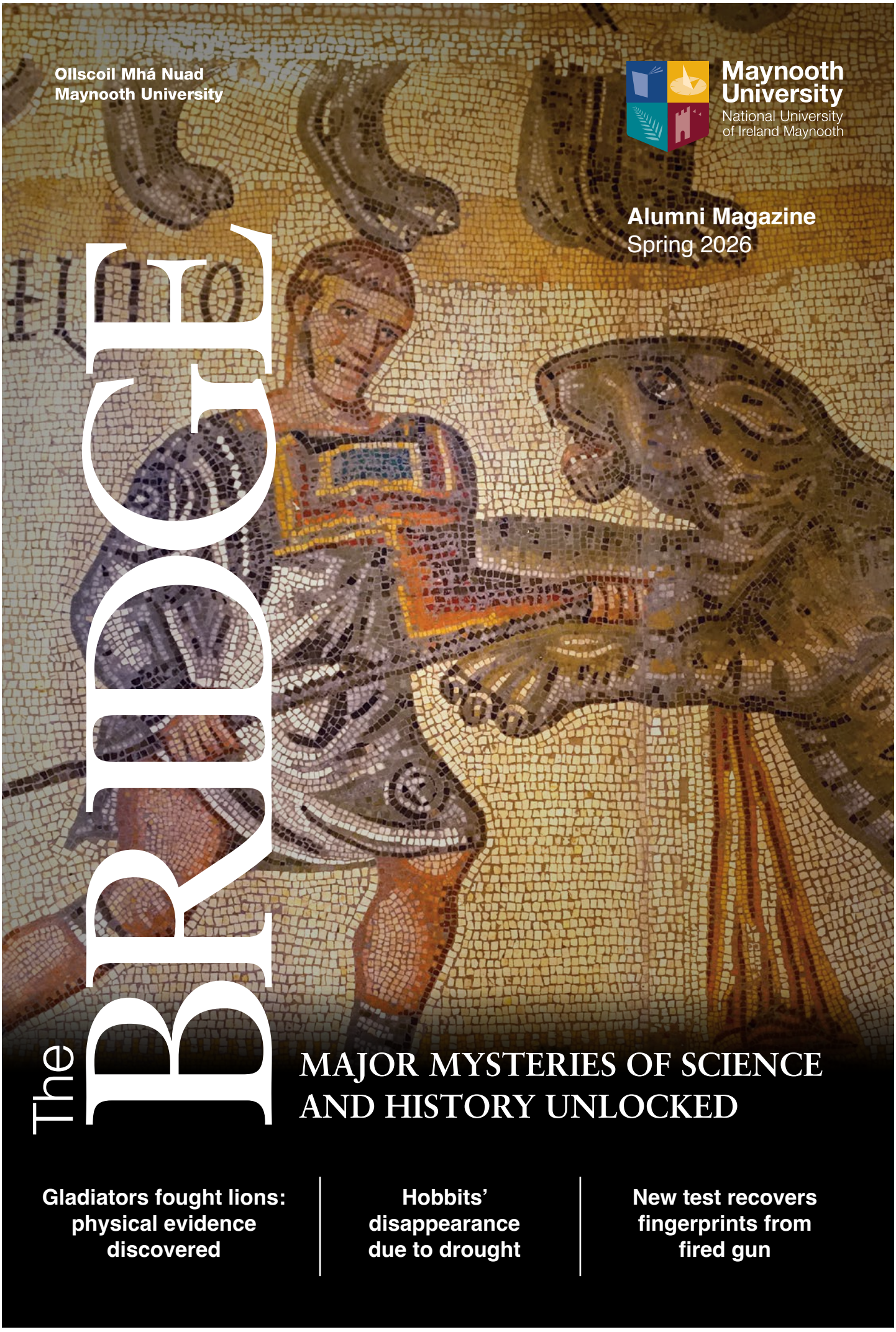
Alumni Magazine
Spring 2026

The BRIDGE



MAJOR MYSTERIES OF SCIENCE AND HISTORY UNLOCKED

Gladiators fought lions: physical evidence discovered

Hobbits' disappearance due to drought

New test recovers fingerprints from fired gun

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Editor's Note

Rebecca Doolin *Vice-President External Affairs*

A chairde,

Welcome alumni, friends, supporters and partners of MU. It's my pleasure to invite you to delve into *The Bridge* 2026.

Inside represents a snapshot of stories that speak to an incredibly productive and inspirational year of milestones at Maynooth University. Among them, ground-breaking discoveries that are both internationally significant and historic in nature. An MU-led study found the first physical proof of the long-held theory that Roman Gladiators fought large cats like lions. Incredible, right? Another finding: there was once a species known as "hobbits" (who knew?) in Indonesia whose disappearance can now be linked to drought, thanks to a team that includes an MU geographer.

Not only are these findings of global importance, they also, to me, seem quintessentially Maynooth. They wouldn't be possible without a highly-skilled, interdisciplinary approach to enquiry that includes history, science and social sciences knowledge and technique. Maynooth has always valued the full breadth of academic disciplines and believes that non-siloed approaches are the only way to take on the questions and challenges the world faces today.

In fact, the MU School of Nursing—Ireland's newest nursing school which welcomed its first 27 students this year—is adopting an integrated approach to its curriculum. And MU offers its students hundreds of unique subject combinations, many of which can't be studied together anywhere else.

Our MU alumni are living validations of this academic approach. In the pages ahead, you'll read about grads from Kildare to New York to Vancouver putting their unique subject combinations and hallmark Maynooth education to work. A leading health care executive and a professional drummer on the world stage. A data scientist and a Major League Soccer facilities manager seconded to FIFA for the World Cup. A designer combining AI with sustainable design.

In recent years, MU has established itself as a university that connects the global and the local – bringing global knowledge to our local community and, likewise, sharing locally generated knowledge through our global networks. We are very good at this (look for that theme in the pages ahead too). Still, it's particularly gratifying for all of us who love this institution to see how these strengths lead to the kinds of impacts mentioned above and in the pages ahead – in the mysteries we solve and the Maynooth people who solve them.

Le meas,

Rebecca Doolin
Vice-President External Affairs

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To Maynooth University colleagues and alumni for their valued contributions

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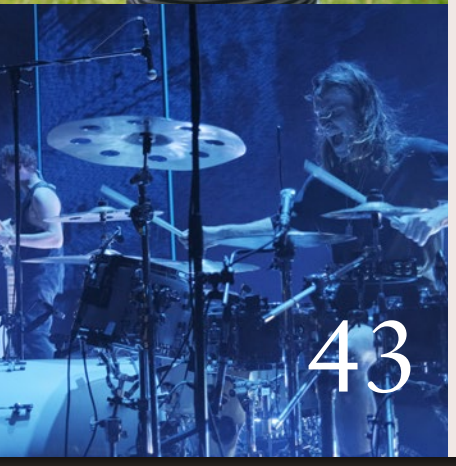
Continue your MU conversation
mu.ie/alumnicommunity

12


14


20


37


43

CONTENTS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Professor Eeva Leinonen *President, Maynooth University*

A chairde,

This past year has been one of real momentum and meaningful achievement at Maynooth University. From opening new learning and living spaces to research discoveries capturing international attention, we have turned ambition into action together. That progress has been made possible by our students, staff, partners, stakeholders and you, our alumni, working toward a shared vision of excellence and impact.

In this edition of *The Bridge*, we share the stories behind that momentum and the people making it happen. The issue reflects the steady delivery of our Strategic Plan and our purpose: to imagine and create better futures for all.

Several milestones stand out. We opened Teach Uí Bhuachalla (Buckley House) in the centre of Maynooth, providing 116 new student beds and strengthening our efforts to create accessible, student-centred campus living.

We are proud that Maynooth University was the first in Ireland to deliver this accommodation under the Government's National Student Accommodation Strategy. We also launched our new School of Nursing, a major step in the expansion of health and medicine at Maynooth. Formally opened in October by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, James Lawless TD, the launch featured leaders in nursing together with a keynote address from Michael J. Dowling, CEO Emeritus of Northwell Health. It was also a wonderful day of celebration for Head of School, Professor Fintan Sheerin and his team, and our first cohort of nursing students.

In November, we launched the National Centre for Inclusive Higher Education, Ireland's first centre dedicated to advancing equity, inclusion and access in higher education, with addresses from the Secretary General of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Dr Colm O'Reardon, and the Centre's Director, Professor Katriona O'Sullivan. The Centre brings research, practice and policy together to drive lasting change.

Our commitment to student life and wellbeing continues with our new €19 million Sports Science Centre, a three-storey extension to our existing sports facilities, now underway. The Centre will support teaching and research and enhance health and fitness across our university community.

This edition also highlights research led by our academic community that is shaping understanding and delivering real-world impact. Our lead feature profiles Professor Tim Thompson, whose internationally collaborative forensic work in the UK uncovered the first physical evidence of gladiators fighting animals in the Roman period. We also feature researchers in our Department of Chemistry who have developed a new method to recover fingerprints from fired ammunition casings, a major advance for forensic investigation. Together, these stories reflect the breadth and ambition of Maynooth researchers working across disciplines, from artificial intelligence and robotics to sustainable agriculture and climate action.

Alumni engagement remains central to university life. Our reunion and anniversary events this year celebrated the strength of lifelong connections with Maynooth graduates. We also recognise the achievements of our alumni around the world. This year, Maynooth alumna Zoë O'Sullivan was named the Irish national winner of the James Dyson Award for her innovative medical device design - a powerful example of how Maynooth graduates continue to make a difference.

As you explore this edition of *The Bridge*, I invite you to celebrate the achievements of our university community and the opportunities ahead. Through shared purpose and collaboration, Maynooth continues to deliver meaningful impact locally and globally.

Go raibh maith agaibh,

Professor Eeva Leinonen
President


MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY
ALUMNI
REUNION

1


Ollscoil
Mhá Nuad
Ollscoil na hÉireann
Má Nuad

2

3

September Celebrations

Maynooth University Alumni Reunion 2025

The 2025 Maynooth University Alumni Reunion took place on Saturday, 6 September 2025. This celebration marked the milestone anniversaries of graduates from 2015, 2005, 1995, 1985 and 1975.

Alumni and guests gathered in Renehan Hall on the historic South Campus for a welcome reception with light refreshments and lively music from guitarist and singer Mickey Joe Harte. This was followed by a three-course luncheon in Pugin Hall, accompanied by a performance from harpist and MU alumna Alida Loftus (2019 BA Music).

Vice President for External Affairs Rebecca Doolin welcomed guests, sharing updates on recent University developments and achievements.

A wide range of departments were represented, with Biology, History, Classics, Geography, and the International Office each hosting tables. The event also welcomed a strong presence of both current and retired staff. The Office of Equality and Diversity joined the celebration, with Equality Officer Sam Blanckensee addressing the audience and highlighting the importance of the University's Excellence in Exile initiative, a set of programmes and scholarships that support at-risk academics and students from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds.

The reunion reflected Maynooth University's commitment to fostering lifelong connections and served as a reminder of the strong bonds within the MU alumni community.

Images:
1 *L-R: Jacqueline Maher, Prof Kevin Kavanagh Maynooth University Department of Biology, Anne Madden (1994 MSc), Pauline McLernon (1987 BA), Stephanie Ledwith (1984 BSc), Barry Hetherington (1984 BSc), Jacintha Pidgeon (1985 BSc), Breda Cooney (1985 BSc), Mairéad Glennon (1985 BSc), Gordon Maxwell (1985 BSc)* **2.** *Sam Blanckensee, Equality Officer, Maynooth University* **3.** *Anuoluwapo Ogun-Ajala (2016 BA), Olabioye Adeyemo (2018 MSc)* **4.** *L-R: Nicola Sheridan (2021 BA), Amy Miller (2003 BSc), Natalie Noone (2005 HDip)* **5.** *Guitarist and singer, Mickey Joe Harte* **6.** *Shane Devereux and alum and Director General at Maynooth Students' Union, Dillon Grace (2015 BBL)* **7.** *Harpist and MU alumna Alida Loftus (2019 BA Music)*

Join us for MU Alumni Reunion 2026
Find out more by visiting
mu.ie/alumnireunion

4


5


6


7

Festive harmonies at

Maynooth Carol Service

On 16 December 2025, alumni and guests embraced the holiday spirit at the annual Maynooth Carol Service, which took place at St. Patrick's College Chapel, Maynooth. During the service, there were outstanding performances by Maynooth University Chamber Choir under the direction of Dr Michael T. Dawson, St Patrick's College Chapel Choir and Maynooth Choral Society, directed by Dr John O'Keeffe, and the Schola Gregoriana, led by Dr Darina McCarthy. Following the service, the Development and Alumni Relations Office hosted a festive Alumni Reception in Renehan Hall with mulled wine and mince pies.

Photos:

Top – L-R: *Alum Ollie Conlan (2010 MA) and his son Colm Conlan; Rob Lewin and Gareth Maguire*

Left – L-R: *Alumni Joanne Barry (1994 HDip) and former Students' Union President Mags Murphy (1993 BA), guest Upile Khongono, and former Vice president Students' Union Ronan Barry (1994)*

Right – L-R: *Alum Barry Hetherington (1984 BSc), Fergus Conaghan, and Tom Fee (1986 MSc)*

MU Career Mentoring Programme

96 alumni mentors volunteered their time to take part in the 2024/25 Career Mentoring Programme - a collaborative project between the Development and Alumni Relations Office, Careers and Employability Service and Maynooth Access Office. The aim of the programme is to empower current MU students with future-focused skills and to enhance their career readiness. On Friday, 6 June 2025, the Development and Alumni Relations Office welcomed alumni mentors to a special Thank You Reception for their contributions and participation in the programme. To take part in the Career Mentoring Programme, update your details and subscribe to the Career Mentoring Programme mailing list: **mu.ie/update-your-details**.

L-R: *Student mentee Ventsislav Stoyanov with alumni mentor Leo Hannon (1993 BA)*

MU arts alumni share advice at Career Speed Networking event

On Tuesday, 18 November 2025, 10 alumni from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities returned to MU to participate in a Career Speed Networking event for current arts and humanities students. The event was organised by the Careers and Employability Service in collaboration with the Development and Alumni Office and supported by the THRIVE initiative 'Student Success Project Fund'.

Pictured L-R: *Mike Gilmartin (2007 MA), Sharon Geoghegan (2006 BA), Jennifer Nyhan (2011 BA), Tara Gilleece (1992 BA), Mark O'Toole (2008 BA), Aislinn Ní Chuinneagain (2001 BA), Dean Fagan (2018 BA), Rachel Raftar (2019 MA), Rút Ní Theimhneáin (2018 MA), and Edie May Hand (2023 MA)*

Hats off to the Class of 2025

Maynooth University conferred more than 3,800 students at graduation ceremonies in March, September and October last year, including the first students to graduate from three new Business degrees.

More than 2,500 undergraduate students joined the MU alumni ranks in 2025 across a wide range of disciplines, with over 2,000 conferred in September alone. They received their parchments in the TSI Building on MU's North Campus before celebrating afterwards in beautiful autumn sunshine.

The ceremonies included the first 12 students to graduate from the University's new business programmes - Business Management and Global Cultures, International Business and Global Cultures and Marketing and Global Cultures.

On the postgraduate front, 606 students were conferred with master's degrees, while 86 researchers were awarded doctorates across a diverse range of subjects including Chemistry, Computer science, Geography, Finance and Music.

Maynooth University President, Professor Eeva Leinonen celebrated their achievements: "I extend my warmest congratulations to all of our graduates. At Maynooth University, we take immense pride in equipping our students to lead with purpose and step forward with the skills, integrity, and resilience needed to thrive in an ever-changing world."

"As you embrace the opportunities ahead, we are confident that you will shape the future with creativity and conviction."

Go n-éirí an bóthar libh!

Pictured: 1. *MU students celebrate after their conferring in September* **2. L-R:** *Caoimhe Browne, Michael Hanly, Adam Noone and Ayodola Adekunle, who were awarded BA degrees last year* **3.** *Prof Ronan Foley of the Dept of Geography with Dr Alexis O'Reilly who received his PhD*


1


2


3

The official opening of Teach Uí Bhuachalla

Brand-new student housing

Teach Uí Bhuachalla Student Accommodation was officially opened by James Lawless TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, on Tuesday, 9 September 2025. Located on Leinster Street, in the heart of Maynooth town, the 4,000m² complex spans four floors and provides 116 self-contained, en-suite student rooms, supported by communal kitchens designed for social cooking and dining.

This state-of-the-art development was the first project to be delivered under the Government's Short-Term Activation Programme to help with the supply of student accommodation.

The building includes seven accessible rooms, is heated by heat pumps and has a BER cert rating of A2. Designed by Demesne Architects and delivered by Vision Contracting, the project strengthens the connection between the University and the wider community. It is situated in the middle of Maynooth town on the historic site of the original Buckley House — a detached, three-bay, two-storey residence dating back to the early 1800s.

Maynooth University President Professor Eeva Leinonen said: "We are delighted to officially open Teach Uí Bhuachalla, providing 116 high-quality new student beds right in the heart of Maynooth. At a time when there is a well-recognised shortage of student accommodation across Ireland, this development reflects our commitment to supporting our students with safe, modern, and accessible housing that enhances their university experience."

L-R: *MU President Prof Eeva Leinonen, James Lawless TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education and former MSU President Maeve Farrell*

Celebrating 40 years of excellence

Maynooth University Chamber Choir

On Friday, 8 May 2026, Maynooth University Chamber Choir will proudly celebrate 40 years of excellence with a special anniversary concert. Former choir members will return to MU to take part in a special performance to mark this incredible milestone. The programme will include performances of Leonard Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms", Eric Whitacre's "I thank You God for most this amazing day" and Z. Randall Stroope's "Caritas et Amor".

After the concert, the celebrations will continue with a large reunion party in Maynooth with overnight accommodation available on campus for alumni who wish to stay.

If you are a former MU Chamber Choir member and would like to take part in or attend the anniversary concert, you can register your interest by joining the MU Chamber Choir mailing list **here**.

MU opens National Centre for Inclusive Higher Education

On Wednesday, 12 November 2025 Maynooth University officially opened the National Centre for Inclusive Higher Education (NCIHE), Ireland's first national centre dedicated to advancing equity, inclusion, and access in higher education.

The new Centre will be led by award-winning academic, advocate, and author, Prof Katriona O'Sullivan, and aims to create solutions to reduce inequality and expand opportunity across Ireland's higher education system. It will lead a coordinated national effort to understand and implement what works to support students and staff from underrepresented and underserved communities to access, succeed in, and progress beyond higher education.

The NCIHE aims to fill a vital gap in Ireland's education landscape by creating a hub where the equity and inclusion work that is currently happening across Irish universities and colleges can be shared and strengthened.

Speaking about the launch, Centre Director Prof O'Sullivan said: "At Maynooth University, we have always believed that equity, empowerment, and excellence go hand in hand. The launch of this Centre is our commitment to proving - through evidence and action - that equity strengthens the whole system."

The launch event took place in Maynooth University and was opened by the Secretary General of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Colm O'Reardon.

Attendees heard from keynote speaker Prof Penny Jane Burke, Director of the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education at the University of Newcastle, Australia, followed by a panel discussion.

L-R: *Secretary General of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Colm O'Reardon; Keynote speaker Prof Penny Jane Burke of the University of Newcastle, Australia; MU Governing Authority Chair Dr Mary Canning; NCIHE Director Prof Katriona O'Sullivan; MU VP for Equality and Diversity Dr Gemma Irvine; and MU President Prof Eeva Leinonen*

Gladiators fought lions

From National Geographic to the New York Times, MU Professor's ground-breaking finding draws international attention

Roman gladiators fighting lions is the stuff of legend, but what hard evidence is there that it actually happened?

A definitive answer came this year, in research led by MU's Professor Tim Thompson reported around the world by outlets as prestigious as *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *The Guardian* and Sky News.

"We have found the first physical proof that men and big cats did battle in Britain, in a far-flung corner of the Roman Empire," says Professor Thompson, a forensic anthropologist.

"The crucial clue we uncovered was a set of deep bite marks on a single, battered skeleton recovered at a quiet housing development in northern England," says Prof Thompson.

This story begins not in Rome, but at Driffield Terrace, a row of Victorian townhouses in York. In 2004, building works triggered a large archaeological excavation. Over several seasons, 80 burials of mostly young to middle aged men dating from the second to the fourth century were found.

There were signs of extreme violence written into the men's bones with some 70 percent of the skeletons having been decapitated and many showing healed fractures to the left side of the skull – the kind of injuries associated with face-to-face mortal combat against a right-handed opponent.

The DNA signatures of the dead men showed they came from across the Empire, as far away as the Middle East and Scandinavia. The age profile, signs of physical trauma, racial diversity and other contextual information suggested the men were Roman gladiators.

One skeleton, called 6DT19, belonged to a man aged in his twenties or thirties who had unusual puncture wounds on his hip bones. These were large, deep and strongly curved.

"When I first encountered this man's remains in 2017, I immediately realised that his wounds were not the usual gnaw marks that are left by scavenging dogs or other animals," said Prof Thompson.

"These were inflicted around the time of death, judging by the colour and pattern of the fracture lines. That means that they were associated of a final, fatal encounter."

Prof Thompson and his collaborators reached out to a number of zoos to try and prove the wound on 6DT19 was inflicted by a bite mark from a particular animal. They used 3D scanning to examine the marks left on carcasses fed to lions, cheetahs and other carnivorous animals known to be used in gladiator shows.

"The closest match came from lions," says Prof Thompson. "The size and curvature of the punctures, and the distances between them, fit the jaws of a large cat, rather than a human weapon. Blades, spears and other weapons were ruled out as none fit the shape and angle of the injuries."

The position of the bite marks, low on the body, suggested an attack on a man who was already down, and was either dragged or mauled as he desperately tried to crawl away. A marble relief in the British museum showing a lion biting into the hip of a fallen man now appears to depict real life.

The bite-mark on 6DT19's backside goes against the long-held assumption by Roman historians that 'beast hunts' that pitted humans against exotic animals were confined to the grand amphitheatres of Rome and a few other major cities.

It turns out that York, a damp provincial town, situated at the outer edge of the empire, staged such events. This would have required serious investment and logistical support as lions had to be acquired and shipped by a network of traders.

This research is not the only Maynooth connection to the story as local actor, Paul Mescal, faced down beasts in his role for Ridley Scott's Gladiator 2. Mescal's character Lucius and 6DT19 are similar - each of them in their physical prime and working in an arena where the crowd expects and demands drama.

Lesion on the left iliac spine of 6DT19

Marble relief with lion and gladiator © The Trustees of the British Museum

The York study, led by Prof Thompson, offers a template for scientists to identify big-cat attacks in other archaeological bones, and there is a good chance that re-examinations of old collections of bones will turn up more victims of big cats.

"New cases would help archaeologists and historians better understand how often and where animal-human fights took place, and how these may have changed over the centuries as imperial fashions and finances ebbed and flowed," says Prof Thompson.

The position of the bite marks, low on the body, suggested an attack on a man who was already down, and was either dragged or mauled as he desperately tried to crawl away. A marble relief in the British museum showing a lion biting into the hip of a fallen man now appears to depict real life.

IN THE PRESS: International reporting on the gladiator-lion discovery:

National Geographic
'The best evidence yet that Roman gladiators fought lions: a bite mark'.

The New York Times
'A Roman Gladiator and a Lion Met in Combat. Only One Walked Away'.

The Guardian
'Bite marks on York skeleton reveal first evidence of 'gladiators' fighting lions'.

Smithsonian Magazine
'Bite Marks on Ancient Skeleton Reveal First Physical Evidence of Roman Gladiators Fighting Lions'.

New Scientist
'First evidence of gladiator fight with lion seen in Roman-era skeleton'.

Sky News
'Bite marks found on Roman skeleton prove gladiators fought lions, experts say'.

BBC
'Unravelling the tale of a gladiator bitten by a lion'.

CNN
'A bite from a lion likely led to the demise of a gladiator, new research finds'.

AI and the Future of Learning

Science Week 2025 features MU grads at the forefront of the AI revolution

For Science Week 2025, the Development and Alumni Relations Office in collaboration with the Faculty of Science and Engineering, hosted a timely discussion entitled, "AI and the Future of Learning" at MU on Thursday, 13 November.

The event featured three alumni working at the forefront of the global AI revolution: Mark Hennessy (2007 PhD) from Microsoft, Marie Taylor-Ghent (2001 BSc) from PwC, and Adrian Trenaman (1999 PhD) from Google. It also featured two academics from the Faculty of Science and Engineering who are preparing students for a changing world of work: Professor Rosemary Monahan from the Department of Computer Science and an affiliate of the Hamilton Institute, and Professor John Keating, Science and Engineering Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning, Professor in the Department of Computer Science, and also an alumnus of MU. President of Maynooth Students' Union, Charli Middleton (2025 BA), a recent Politics and Philosophy graduate, also shared a student perspective on the opportunities and challenges AI presents.

The public event featured Mark Hennessy, who brought with him a piece of scientific history: the actual GPU used to train ChatGPT 3. Hennessy, who is based in the Microsoft headquarters in Seattle, worked with the OpenAI team on the burgeoning technology three years before ChatGPT launched in November 2022 so was able to share his experience from the AI infancy with the audience, many of whom were keen to snap a photo of the artifact after the event.

Moderating the panel, Rebecca Doolin, Vice President for External Affairs at Maynooth University, said the event was an opportunity to bring together MU graduates working with AI and hiring the next generation of employees who will use it, with the academics tasked with preparing students for those very workplaces where AI literacy is expected: "Few technologies have transformed society as quickly or as profoundly as AI. Since the launch of ChatGPT, every industry - including higher education - has had to confront fundamental questions about its purpose and future. In universities, AI has sparked urgent conversations about academic integrity, teaching methods, and how we prepare students for an entry-level job market experiencing so much change. It's both a challenge and an opportunity – and at Maynooth University, our goal is to make sure our graduates are ready to navigate the technical and the ethical aspects of AI they will encounter in the future."

Below left: Marie Taylor-Ghent (2001 BSc)

Below: Mark Hennessy and Rebecca Doolin MU Vice President External Affairs, with the GPU that trained ChatGPT3

Bottom: L-R: Mark Hennessy (2007 PhD), Marie Taylor-Ghent (2001 BSc), Adrian Trenaman (1999 PhD), Professor John Keating, Professor Rosemary Monahan, MSU President Charli Middleton (2025 BA), and Rebecca Doolin VP External Affairs

Click the preview above to watch the alumni panel discussion AI and the Future of Leaning.

How alum Mark Hennessy helped shape Microsoft's AI breakthrough

Mark Hennessy
PhD Computer Science
Partner, Software Engineering Manager at Microsoft

Alum Mark Hennessy didn't have an exact plan after he graduated with a PhD in Computer Science in 2007. But with bills to be paid, he took an hourly contract IT role and happened to be placed with Microsoft Ireland in Leopardstown. What began as a purely practical decision became the catalyst for a remarkable career in global technology.

Mark spent five years working in Microsoft Ireland, developing a strong knowledge of working in the tech industry. Reflecting on that period, he notes: "Unlike the pace and velocity of today's tech scene, it was a time and place where people could go deeper and learn their trade, as there were so many opportunities to influence and lead."

That environment fostered his ambition, and in 2013, Mark made the decision to leave Ireland and move to the company headquarters in Seattle.

In hindsight, his move to Seattle was one of the most defining moments of his career - joining right at the start of Microsoft's Cloud product Azure's expansion into both tech features and customer install bases. Working in an area that was initially unrelated to his skillset and knowledge, he was entrusted with significant responsibility. This created learning and career development opportunities, and in 2018, Mark began to lead a team that would end up being in the right place at the right time to help launch the infrastructure that powered the first AI revolution launched in 2022.

Mark was part of a big group inside Microsoft that in 2019 helped build the 'Odyssey' supercomputer which was used to train ChatGPT 3.0 and 3.5, and was used in the initial big public launch in November 2022. Since that pivotal moment in tech history, he has been able to shape technology to satisfy their growth and scale working with many other peers in Microsoft.

Still closely connected to his Maynooth classmates - now spread across the globe – Mark recently reconnected with his alma mater. He returned to campus to participate in an alumni Science Week 2025 panel discussion titled, "AI and the Future of Learning". Mark shared his personal experience of working on the ground floor of the Microsoft/ChatGPT revolution, and offering invaluable advice to MU students as AI changes the work place they'll encounter post-graduation.

The Department of Psychology celebrates 25 years

In 2025 the Department of Psychology celebrated its 25th anniversary - a quarter of a century of teaching, research, and community engagement by the esteemed MU department. To mark the milestone, the department hosted a series of public talks and seminars, welcoming staff, students, alumni, and members of the community to take part in the celebrations. Events began with a talk entitled "Beyond Resilience: How Education Gave Me the Life of My Dreams" by neuroscientist, author, motivational speaker, and Maynooth University alumnus Dr Brian Pennie. Founder of Change is Possible, a platform dedicated to helping individuals and organisations embrace change, build resilience, and achieve personal and professional growth, Dr Pennie shared his powerful story of transformation from addiction to academic success with a full lecture theatre.

In December 2025, the department held a capstone event on the future of psychology by Dr Sarah Cassidy, President of the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) and also an MU alum, followed by a panel discussion with alumni and distinguished guests, including former PSI presidents Dr Anne Kehoe and Dr Ian O'Grady.

Established in 1999, the department has grown into one of MU's largest and most dynamic disciplines, with more than 1,500 students studying psychology each year in areas such as neuroscience, psychophysiology and sleep research. After 25 years, the department has expanded steadily into a vibrant and internationally recognised centre of high-quality teaching and research whose graduates are making their marks on society in Ireland and beyond.

Pictured L-R: *Prof Deirdre Desmond, Dr Rebecca Maguire, Dr Sadhbh Byrne, Prof Sean Commins, Dr Anne Kehoe (panellist), Dr Peter Murphy, Dr Sarah Cassidy (speaker), Dr Emma Farrell, Prof Andrew Coogan, Dr Tara Kealey, Dr Ian O'Grady (panellist), Prof Richard Roche, Prof Bryan Roche, Dr Joanna McHugh-Power, Ms Brenda Carroll, and Dr Siobhán Woods*

MU hosts 2025 Science Night and Sensory-Friendly Science Night

In November 2025, MU welcomed families, students, and science enthusiasts for two very special events: Science Night 2025 and MU's fourth Sensory Friendly Science Night. Together, the events reflected the University's growing commitment to inclusive education and inspiring the next generation of scientists - ensuring that curiosity has a place to flourish in everyone.

The O'Brien brothers Alex (11), Luke (8) and Ben (5) from Celbridge

Fionn Reilly (6) from Kilcock

Sophia Hennessy (6), Annabelle Lillis (6) and Isabelle Hennessy (8) from Maynooth

Frances Tinley (Technical Officer Maynooth University), Seyi Olanrewaju (PhD student) and Dylan Novak (6) from Maynooth

Science Night 2025, which was organised by the Faculty of Science and Engineering, took place across the TSI and Callan Buildings on Friday, 14 November. The event offered a hands-on exploration of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics for all ages, as part of Ireland's national Science Week 2025. Over 2,400 people attended Science Night, enjoying a wide range of interactive activities and live demonstrations. Robot Soccer drew crowds as autonomous robots competed on the pitch, showcasing the engineering behind their behaviour. Maths Through Magic Tricks combined illusion with number patterns, while CSI Maynooth invited attendees to step into the role of forensic investigators solving a fictional campus mystery. The chemistry and biology zones captivated guests with experiments highlighting MU research on greener energy solutions. Meanwhile, astronomy enthusiasts gathered for 'When Ireland Looks Up: Irish Adventures in Astronomy,' a series of talks exploring Ireland's contributions to our understanding of the cosmos.

On Friday, 28 November, Sensory Friendly Science Night, which was hosted by the Biology Department, supported by colleagues in the Department of Chemistry, welcomed 20 fantastic young scientists aged 5 to 16 who spent the evening exploring, discovering and experiencing the wonder of hands-on science in a calm and supportive environment. The event saw the introduction of the STEM Passport, a hugely successful addition. The passport allowed children to navigate the experiments at their own pace, collecting sticker stamps as they went. It also included a QR code linking to follow-up materials at home, such as fun facts and simple science activities, extending learning beyond the event itself. At the heart of the evening's success was the bond formed between each child and their individual volunteer buddy. This one-to-one support is a cornerstone of the event.

The volunteers' patience, empathy and enthusiasm fostered an environment where children felt safe, included and inspired.

Nathan Smyth (9) from Maynooth

Hobbit drought extinction has lessons for humanity

The first evidence that a group of our ancient hominin cousins – Homo floresiensis – were wiped out after suffering thousands of years of drought on a remote Indonesian island has been uncovered in research by MU Research Fellow Dr Nick Scroxton. Subsequent news of the findings was widely reported globally.

"About 50,000 years ago, one of our last fellow survivors in the human family tree disappeared from Flores, an island in Indonesia, after more than one million years spent living there in isolation," said Dr Scroxton, who is based at Maynooth University's ICARUS Climate Research Centre.

These diminutive hominins were nicknamed 'hobbits' because they stood just 1.1 metres, or 3 foot seven inches, tall. They crafted stone tools, despite having small brains, and somehow made it across open water to this volcanic island outpost without using any obvious boat technology.

Cave Dwelling

Hobbit remains, along with tools, were found in Liang Bua, a highland cave whose discovery in 2003 upended previous assumptions about what makes us uniquely human.

Dating of cave sediments indicated that hobbits lived there between 50,000 and 190,000 years ago, long after other ancient humans had vanished elsewhere.

Researchers found a clue to why the hobbits disappeared in a stalagmite in a cave called Liang Luar, located 700 metres upstream from Liang Bua.

As water dripped and the stalagmite rose up from the cave floor, growing layer by layer, it recorded subtle chemical changes that revealed how rainfall patterns changed over tens of thousands of years.

The caving team in the deep, brooding interior of Liang Luar in 2006. Photo: Garry K. Smith

Scientists analysed two geochemical signals: a form of oxygen called d180, which reflects monsoon strength, and the ratio of magnesium to calcium, which reflects rainfall.

These two signals were matched against precise dates. This permitted the scientists to reconstruct summer, winter and annual rainfall in great detail, and build a seasonal weather archive covering the hobbits' last days.

The archive revealed three big climate chapters during the hobbits time living on Flores. From 76,000 to 91,000 years ago, the conditions were wetter than today, all year round, while from 61,000 to 76,000 the monsoon became strongly seasonal, with lush wet summers and much drier winters.

That second weather phase appears to have been a 'Goldilocks' climate – not too hot or too cold – that perfectly suited the hobbits and their main prey, a pygmy elephant called *Stegodon florensis insularis*.

Climate 'tipped'

The trouble came later for the hobbits, between 47,000 and 61,000 years ago, when the climate tipped against them with summers turning far drier, similar to the conditions seen today in Australia's southern Queensland.

The scientists analysed d180 in the tooth enamel of pygmy elephants found at Liang Bua. This revealed a pattern that aligned with the stalagmite record, and it enabled them to better pin down the age of the *Stegodon* and hobbit fossils.

The data suggested that around 90 percent of the pygmy elephant bones belonged to the 61,000-76,000 years ago window, when grazing was good and water flowed reliably.

However, as the rainfall declined, the elephants and the hobbits vanished from the fossil record. This suggested that ever dwindling resources drove the hobbits into a slow painful retreat from their cave-dwelling strongholds.

The scientists suspect that the key 'pinch point' was freshwater, particularly from the Wae Racang river that supplied the area with water during the dry season.

As river flows dropped, the pygmy elephants, researchers believe, may have been forced to migrate in search of water. Meanwhile, the hobbits, who were dependent on juvenile *Stegodon* as prey, were forced to follow them. The last traces of *Stegodon* and hobbit stone tools in Liang Bua are abruptly capped by a thick layer of volcanic ash dated to around 50,000 years ago. It's possible that this was a 'death blow' to the hobbits, say researchers, but it could also have just simply sealed the archaeological record of a population already driven up to the brink of extinction.

Crossed Paths

Evidence for the presence of *Homo sapiens* – us – appears in cave sediments laying above this ash layer. This suggests that modern humans arrived on Flores only after the hobbits had gone, or at least after they had left Liang Bua.

That said, fresh archaeological and DNA studies show that our species were island-hopping across Indonesia towards the ancient supercontinent of Sahul (today's Australia and New Guinea) 60,000 years ago, or less, which would put humans and hobbits together in the same neighbourhood, and suggesting that their paths may have crossed.

"There is a real possibility that the two species met," says Dr Scroxton. "If the ecological pressure pushed *Homo floresiensis* out of its upland refuge and towards the coast."

In this scenario, competition for food, exposure to new diseases, or predators could have helped seal the hobbits fate, though for now, evidence remains circumstantial.

However, the story of *H. floresiensis*, is not just a quirky evolutionary footnote about miniature humans living in caves along with pygmy elephants, says Dr Scroxton.

"It is also a warning from prehistory that humanity's wider experiment in survival has always been closely tied to rainfall, rivers and the delicate balance of climate on a changing planet."

The research was published in the journal *Communications, Earth and Environment*.

"About 50,000 years ago, one of our last fellow survivors in the human family tree, disappeared from Flores, an island in Indonesia after more than one million years, spent living there in isolation."

Homo Floresiensis "Flores Man" or "hobbit". Island of Flores, Indonesia

Where design meets invention

This MU alum is using immersive tools to transform how outdoor spaces are imagined

Maynooth University 2014

Darragh Collopy
BSc in Product Design, Marketing and Innovation
Owner of Duir Design and consultant for Woodies

Darragh Collopy, originally from Lucan, Dublin, runs his own studio, Duir Design, an award-winning virtual reality and mixed reality garden and architectural design company. Through immersive technology, Duir Design enables clients to step into their dream garden before it's even built, offering a cost-effective and intuitive way to visualise plans, refine ideas, and make confident design decisions.

The name Duir is derived from the ancient Irish word for oak tree, a symbol of strength and significance in early Irish culture. For Darragh, it reflects a deeper philosophy: designing outdoor spaces that feel grounded, meaningful, and lasting, not just visually impressive.

"I love using new tools to solve old problems," he explains. "In garden design, it's notoriously hard for people to visualise organic spaces from a flat plan. Extended Reality (XR) lets me fix that. Being able to show someone exactly how their garden will feel before sod is turned is incredibly rewarding."

A Duir Design 3D concept showing a proposed planting scheme and structural layout

As a child, Darragh was constantly inventing, fixing things, and testing ideas - sometimes with mixed results. "My parents used to say, 'Oh, you'll be an engineer,'" he laughs, recalling ideas for automatic pantry lights and even a heated pyjama warmer. One experiment nearly electrocuted a neighbour. "It was a bit chaotic," he admits, but that creative drive led Darragh to Maynooth University, where he studied a BSc in Product Design, Marketing and Innovation.

At the time, the course was relatively new and appealed to him as a more flexible and creative alternative to traditional engineering. It combined design thinking, technical skills, and entrepreneurial practice - an approach that suited his way of working.

A pivotal influence during his studies was Paul Donegan, industry mentor and founder of Intensity, one of Europe's leading lighting design consultancies. Paul guided Darragh during the 'Downlight Challenge,' a sponsored six-week industry project with LED Group that tasked third-year students with designing the next generation of downlight products for international markets.

The result was formative: Darragh was named as an inventor on an EU patent arising from the student project. "It was a massive confidence booster," he says.

Darragh made such an impression that he secured an internship with LED Group and later joined Intensity as Lead Product Designer. "We did some mad stuff," he recalls, "from artistic lighting sculptures to major retail projects like Brown Thomas."

Darragh describes his time at MU as "a sandbox where I had the freedom to fail, learn, and build the confidence to go out on my own."

One of the most valuable lessons he took with him was learning how to handle critique. "You had to pin up your work and justify it while people picked holes in it. Learning not to be precious about an idea is a skill I use every day now."

That perspective also has personal roots. He remembers his late father's favourite phrase during DIY jobs: "A blind man on a galloping horse wouldn't notice it." "If I was stressing over a tiny imperfection, he'd remind me of that," Darragh reflects. "It reminds me that good is often good enough - and knowing when to stop is a skill in itself."

After graduating with first-class honours, Darragh spent five years travelling and working across South East Asia. He developed hands-on experience in horticulture and permaculture, working on a hydroponic farm in Thailand and attending permaculture courses at the Royal Flora Ratchaphruek Park in Chiang Mai. There, he worked among thousands of plant species spread across 80 hectares of landscaped gardens, experience that would later inform the naturalistic, human-centred spaces he now designs.

Today, Duir Design brings together all strands of Darragh's journey: technical experimentation, immersive technology, deep respect for nature, and a design philosophy shaped by learning, critique, and lived experience.

By blending XR innovation with an intuitive understanding of how spaces should feel, Darragh is redefining how people engage with their landscapes, inviting them not just to see a design, but to step inside it, imagine it fully, and shape it with confidence.

https://duirdesign.ie/

Ireland's home of the future: made in Maynooth

Project shows the power of community partnership and academic expertise to drive change at scale

On an ordinary suburban street in Maynooth, a standard three-bed semi-detached council house has become a local and national 'DemoHouse' for imagining what a typical energy-efficient, sustainable Irish home might look like.

From the outside, the Kildare County Council property, which was built in the 1990s, is unremarkable. The type of house where the windows are starting to show signs of wear and tear, and where winter heating bills carry a sting.

Step inside, however, and the house and visitors will see something more notable. The house has been transformed into an A-rated, Sustainable Energy Demonstration House – a collaboration of a passionate research team at MU and an equally committed group at Kildare County Council (KCC).

Reluctance

The project team was keen to address the reluctance among some social housing tenants to sign up to retrofit schemes. They noted that even when the terms offered were generous there was a reticence to take part, perhaps originating in urban legends about heat pumps that "don't work" and electricity bills going "through the roof" after upgrades.

MU researchers and council officials realised that to combat these perceptions, people needed to visit the house, to see, touch and question the technology for themselves.

Members of the public can walk through the house by appointment. The home is deliberately not presented as a pristine showhouse, but as a familiar semi-D, which has been upgraded to demonstrate what's possible, by way of retrofitting Ireland's real existing house stock.

The initiative received €2 million in Research Ireland funding under the RENEW project, which aims to cut household electricity bills in Ireland by 20-25 per cent per month, through smart technology and behaviour change. The idea is to keep things simple. "The technology will give people prompts on how they can make small changes in their daily lives," says Dr Amy Fahy, project co-lead and Assistant Professor of Business and Management, Deputy Director of the International Renewable Energy Research Group (IRESI) at MU.

The other co-lead is Fabiano Pallonetto, Professor of Information Systems and Director of IRESI. "The DemoHouse gives local residents, schools and community groups a unique opportunity to visit a real-life house environment and learn what changes they can make in their own homes, from both a practical and a financial perspective," says Professor Pallonetto. "We are delighted to have this space to bring industry, government, community and researchers together to co-create and pilot new solutions for sustainable energy transition."

Creativity

The house is part of the Co-Creative Lab, a partnership between MU, Creative Ireland and Kildare County Council, which is exploring creative approaches to climate action. Research from the Lab has revealed that energy is the sustainability topic people are most likely to avoid. This is not down to people not caring but arises because they can feel under-informed and intimidated by the subject.

To overcome such avoidance behaviour, the researchers developed ingenious, simple tools. Perhaps most notably, a plug-in device that changes colour depending on real-time energy consumption and price and shows exactly when electricity is most expensive and at its cheapest.

Kildare County Council DemoHouse Opening with Renew Team, Youth Committee, MU Community and Youth Representative Student and Maynooth SEC Chairperson

Garden

The garden has been re-designed to encourage sustainability and biodiversity using bee-friendly plants, a discreet covered pond and permeable drainage. "Everything to do with the house is kind of easy, accessible things that people could do in their own homes, but it could help with sustainability measures," says Dr Fahy.

Accessibility

The house includes a chair lift, an adjustable-height hob and an accessible bathroom as part of its design, and it is expected that it will be allocated to a tenant with additional needs. For the team, there are questions to consider about how to involve future residents in the research - without putting pressure on a potentially vulnerable household.

Community

Members of the public, Sustainable Energy Communities and local Tidy Towns groups have visited the house to see the measures first-hand. The goal is to demystify retrofits, build confidence in technologies like heat pumps and smart controls, and to help households cut their bills during a cost-of-living crisis.

On a national level, the ambition is that other county councils across Ireland will develop their own demonstration homes, using the Maynooth model as a template.

Future

"People may support decarbonisation in principle, but what really changes behaviour is when solutions are easier and cheaper," says Dr Fahy. "If this very ordinary house in Maynooth can show that a low-carbon home can also be a more comfortable and affordable one, it may become one of the most influential energy projects in the country," she says.

Tiny telescope helps MU astronomer become a ‘star witness’

A telescope the size of a suitcase – launched in November – is enabling MU astronomer Dr Emma Whelan to be a witness to the birth and formation of planets around young stars.

A Space X rocket taking off

Mauve, an ultraviolet space telescope weighing just 19kg, was developed by Blue Skies Space, a start-up founded by three astrophysicists at University College London.

It was launched into space last November from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket and will monitor ultraviolet light emissions from stars on a day-to-day basis in order to track how these might change.

"In terms of size, it's not very impressive, but it was designed to do a very particular thing, which is to monitor stars, and it will be able to do that really effectively," said Dr Whelan. "It is a really powerful, little telescope."

Why Mauve matters

The continuous monitoring of space is something scientists want to do for a number of reasons, but which is almost impossible, currently, given that key telescopes like the Very Large Telescope of the European Space Laboratory or NASA's James Webb Space Telescope are oversubscribed. There are too many astronomers for too few top telescopes.

To secure viewing time, astronomers must write detailed scientific proposals and compete against colleagues. Then, even if successful, a research team may only secure a few hours observing time, months, or even a year down the line.

"With Mauve I'm going to be looking at stars for maybe two or three months continuously," said Dr Whelan. "Every day we'll get data on them to see how they change and how they behave on these timescales. I would never get access to data like that from one of those big telescopes."

Netflix for satellites

Instead of competing for free but scarce observing time, researchers like Dr Whelan are effectively subscribing to Mauve's data stream. "We pay for the data," she said. "There's a subscription for one year's worth of data."

Research funding is used by Dr Whelan to buy access to Mauve for her team, including doctoral students who are getting front-row experience planning a space mission, navigating a launch and handling fresh data from orbit.

The Mauve 'business model' is comparable to streaming. "It's kind of like Netflix for satellites," said Dr Whelan. "You pay, and you have your subscription, and this can open doors for researchers who might be otherwise shut out."

For MU, and for Ireland's wider and growing astronomy community, Mauve is proving that a telescope the size of average 'hand luggage' can deliver truly cosmic ambitions.

"Mauve will lead to science being done that might not have been done before, good ideas being seen through and new discoveries made that we didn't expect," said Dr Whelan.

Space weather forecasting

A big focus will be 'space weather', which arises from flares and eruptions from stars, like our Sun, that disrupt the working of satellites orbiting the Earth, and power grids.

"We want to understand how the Sun behaves because these emissions can really impact on the technology we have in space," said Dr Whelan. "What Mauve will do is study other stars to understand the physics of how these flares and eruptions occur, and how space weather comes about."

Seeking new worlds

Dr Whelan is using Mauve to watch very young, massive stars – known as Herbig Ae/Be stars – for subtle dips in their light that could signal planets forming in dusty discs around them. The stars are only about a million years old, yet they already host the raw material of future planetary systems.

"At the very early stages, maybe the planets aren't fully formed, and we have these clumps of material in the discs," said Dr Whelan. "As it orbits around the star, it causes periodic dimming, so that the light from that star, as it comes to us, gets blocked by all of this material that's in the very early stages of forming planets."

By measuring the brightness of these days every day and plotting 'light curves' over months, Dr Whelan's team hopes to link those flickers to the birth of planets.

"We know a lot about stars like our own Sun, and how planets form around them, but these more massive stars – we don't know a lot about them. Mauve gives us the opportunity to do this."

5*S project - using space to inspire students

The 5*S project (Space, Surveyors & Students: STEM and the Sustainable Development Goals) has gained national recognition for transforming satellite data into an engaging, hands-on digital learning experience for schools, showing how spatial data connects to real issues like food security, flooding, and climate change.

Led by Dr Conor Cahalane (Department of Geography; National Centre for Geocomputation; ICARUS Climate Research Centre), in partnership with Dr Angela Rickard and Dr Zerrin Doğança Küçük (Department of Education), the project was selected by the Higher Education Authority as an MU Impact Assessment Case Study and formed the basis for the University's success in securing HEA Performance Funding for 2025. The 5*S project, which links satellite data to real-world challenges aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, secured €1 million in performance funding for its impact on education, inclusion and sustainability.

Since its launch, 5*S has reached approximately 40,000 students and more than 300 teachers and student teachers across 22 counties. It has produced more than 155 StoryMaps, each exploring a different theme through data and storytelling, and created a free augmented reality app called SatelliteSkill5, which has been downloaded more than 14,000 times. Supporting teachers also has been central to the project's success. More than 180 student teachers have taken part in 5*S training, learning to integrate spatial data and mapping tools into their lessons. Follow-up surveys with practising teachers show that teacher confidence in using satellite data nearly doubled after taking part.

Learn more at 5sdiscover.maynoothuniversity.ie

Breakthrough:

Maynooth scientists develop test to recover fingerprints from a fired gun

Fingerprints are rarely recovered by scientists from a fired gun, or its ammunition casings, but a Maynooth University breakthrough is set to change all that.

Police investigators know that even when crime perpetrators leave their fingerprints on guns or casings they are usually destroyed by the high temperatures, abrasive friction and gaseous blowback after a gun is fired.

Criminals know this too, and it often means that casings, or the gun used to commit a crime, are dumped at the crime scene with no effort to hide them.

Such carelessness might in future, if Maynooth University researchers have their way, prove to be the undoing of many criminals around the globe.

Technique

Two scientists, while working at MU's Department of Chemistry, have developed a unique electrochemical method that can visualise fingerprints on brass casings even after they have been exposed to the high temperatures that normally destroy biological evidence.

The new process created by **Dr Eithne Dempsey**, and her recent **PhD student Dr Colm McKeever** – the details of which were published in a **leading forensic science journal** – could revolutionise global forensic investigation techniques.

"The Holy Grail in forensic investigation has always been retrieving prints from fired ammunition casings," said Dr Dempsey.

"Traditionally, the intense heat of firing destroys any biological residue, making fingerprint detection nearly impossible. Our technique reveals fingerprint ridges that would otherwise remain imperceptible."

This research project, which was funded by Research Ireland, emerged from conversations about forensic challenges between Dr Dempsey and Dr McKeever, formerly at MU and currently an analytical chemistry lecturer at the TUS Midlands campus – both of whom have a background in forensic chemistry.

The team found they could deposit specialised polymers onto brass surfaces using a low-voltage electrochemical method - it proved to be an ingenious way to reveal fingerprint ridges that would normally remain invisible.

The existing methods that aim to expose fingerprints on surfaces require the use of high voltage equipment or toxic chemicals. The Maynooth University process, however, uses readily available polymers and minimal amounts of energy to quickly, almost magically, reveal prints from seemingly blank surfaces.

It works by placing the brass casing of interest in an electrochemical cell containing specific reagents. A reagent is a substance that chemical scientists add in to start or test a chemical reaction, or to pick up the presence of a specific substance.

When a small voltage is applied, chemicals in the solution are attracted to the surface, coating the spaces between fingerprint ridges and creating a clear, high contrast image of the print.

"Using the burnt material that remains on the surface of the casing as a stencil, we can deposit this material in between the gaps, allowing for the visualisation," said Dr McKeever.

Crucially, the technique works even on casings subjected to high temperatures, simulating the conditions of a fired weapon.

The team tested prints that had been aged for up to sixteen months, demonstrating remarkable durability.

"We're not claiming we've solved this forensic challenge," said Dr Dempsey. "But, we have made a significant contribution to a notoriously difficult area of forensic investigation."

Investigations

The research has significant implications for criminal investigations, where the current assumption is that firing a gun eliminates fingerprint residues.

"Currently, the best case of forensic analysis of ammunition casings is to match it to the gun that fired it," said Dr McKeever. "But we hope a method like this could match it back to the actual person who loaded the gun."

The existing methods that aim to expose fingerprints on surfaces require the use of high voltage equipment or toxic chemicals. The Maynooth University process, however, uses readily available polymers and minimal amounts of energy to quickly, almost magically, reveal prints from seemingly blank surfaces

The team focused specifically on brass ammunition casings, a substance that has been traditionally resistant to fingerprint detection and is the most common type of material used for casings globally.

While promising, the new technology faces hurdles before it could potentially be adopted by law enforcement agencies worldwide.

"New technologies must prove themselves repeatedly, undergoing rigorous testing and validation, before being accepted in the forensic community," said Dr Dempsey.

Future potential

The researchers believe that the test for fingerprints on brass they have developed could be adapted for other metallic surfaces, expanding its range of potential forensic applications, from firearm related crimes to arson.

A piece of equipment called a potentiostat is required for the job. This is a device used to control the voltage of a metal electrode and measure its current. A potentiostat can be as portable as a mobile phone, and, as such, the researchers believe it could be commercially adapted into a forensic testing kit.

"With this method, we have turned the ammunition casing into an electrode, allowing us to have the chemical reactions happen at the surface of the casing," said Dr McKeever.

Every contact leaves a trace, and this new technology sends a message to criminals hoping not to leave trace evidence of their crime: innovative scientists are always one step ahead.

The published findings are available in the leading science journal, **Forensic Chemistry**.

Maynooth University Foundation

A year of progress, partnership, and impact

Maynooth University Foundation exists to support the University's mission of imagining and creating better futures for all. Through philanthropy, partnerships, and development initiatives, the Foundation helps advance key strategic priorities that enhance the student experience, support research, and expand the University's societal impact.

Over the past year, the Foundation has continued to build momentum. Our efforts have centred on enabling students to enter, progress through, and complete their studies; securing philanthropic support to deliver and scale transformative education and career-development programmes; and supporting academics as they pursue research with national and global significance.

This has been a period of growth, reflecting the value our donors see in contributing to so many important initiatives across Maynooth University where philanthropy can accelerate our impact.

A major highlight was the Alumni Giving Appeal 2025, which once again demonstrated the generosity and commitment of the Maynooth community. Contributions from graduates and friends of the University are already helping to fund scholarships and bursaries, with a particular emphasis on supporting students from underserved backgrounds or those experiencing significant barriers to accessing and progressing through higher education. These funds directly open doors, ease financial pressures, and allow students to focus on achieving their academic and personal potential.

Our sincere thanks to all alumni, individual donors, corporate partners and charitable foundations who have supported Maynooth University through the MU Foundation. Your generosity is creating opportunities, supporting excellence, and driving meaningful change. Your belief in Maynooth University, and in the students and researchers who are shaping its future, truly makes our community a better place for all. Thank you.

At a glance 2025: With support from generous donors and supporters, MU Foundation has:

Awarded
€163,000
directly to 96 MU students as scholarships and bursaries, including academic achievement and needs-based awards

Secured more than
€70,000
for the Maynooth Access Programme, supporting its education programmes and outreach initiatives for students from underserved communities to, through and beyond third level study at Maynooth University

Collaborated with the award-winning
STEM Passport for Inclusion programme
securing support from over 15 corporate partners to expand across Ireland in 2025–2026, empowering 5,000+ students from underserved communities to become STEM-ready

Received
€490,000
to support research projects and outreach programmes led by Maynooth University academics

Launched the
Alumni Giving Appeal 2025
providing opportunities for alumni to give back and support students in 2026 and beyond

MU Foundation: Advancing Excellence, providing Opportunity, achieving Impact

Impact Story

How a Maynooth University law student found her sense of belonging

4th Year Law and Criminology Student, Hollie Clarke

Hollie Clarke's journey to Maynooth University is one shaped by self-determination, and support that made higher education possible. As a 22-year old law student with a passion for how legal systems affect people's lives, Hollie's path to university was guided not only by academic ambition, but by practical realities.

Here is Hollie's story in her own words:
My interest in law began while still in secondary school. I competed in the National Mock Trial Competition, held in Dublin's Criminal Courts of Justice, working in teams to prepare and argue cases against schools from across Ireland. That experience made me certain I wanted to pursue a legal career.

At Maynooth University, I found a course that challenged me to step outside my comfort zone. Starting with no clear idea of which field of law I would pursue, the flexibility of the law programme allowed me to grow in confidence while discovering where my interests truly lay. Along the way, I developed strong teamwork skills through group assignments and projects. In my second year, I was thrilled to receive offers for both Erasmus and a third-year internship, choosing the internship as an opportunity to gain practical experience. What excites me most about the law is its constant evolution - seeing how laws are shaped and modernised through real-life cases. The law is not static; it's a living instrument which we all must use to protect ourselves and our interests.

Financial pressures
Financial pressure was a constant worry for much of my early student experience. Living at home made college possible, but as a student, even everyday costs caused so much anxiety. Before receiving the scholarship, I often left campus straight after lectures, as I was unable to afford lunch and didn't want to explain why to friends. I worried about missing out - not just on events, but on friendships and the sense of belonging that makes college such an important time.

Moment of change
Everything changed when I learned I had been awarded the Dowling McAtamney Bursary.

I was ecstatic when I heard the news and immediately told my mum. The relief was immediate. For the first time, I felt I could participate fully in university life without the same financial concerns. Buying law textbooks in the bookshop with ease and less worry, staying on campus for coffee with friends, and attending ticketed clubs and society events all became possible - transforming both my personal and academic experience.

For the first time, I felt I could participate fully in university life without the same financial concerns. Buying law textbooks in the bookshop with ease and less worry, staying on campus for coffee with friends, and attending ticketed clubs and society events all became possible - transforming both my personal and academic experience

Impact
I am so grateful for the opportunities the scholarship has opened up for me. I have attended the Law Society Ball and the Intervarsity Law Summit event, travelled to Vienna, Austria to take part in a Law Summer School on Alternative Dispute Resolution and participated in a Model UN Competition in the United Nations HQ in New York City. These experiences showed me what was possible.

Beyond academics, I take part in many law societies, attend yoga classes and I am currently participating in the Career Mentoring Programme.

What I am most proud of is the fact that I always put my best foot forward – making my studies a priority and always doing my best.

For me, donor support was more than financial assistance - it was the gift of belonging, which has made my college experience so fulfilling and meaningful. The scholarship removed barriers that quietly excluded me, replaced anxiety with opportunity, and allowed me to move my perspective from simply getting by to truly excelling. My CV is full of experiences and skills that have been developed thanks to this scholarship.

Future plans
Looking ahead, I hope to continue my studies with a master's degree at Maynooth. After that, I plan to complete my FE-1s and begin my career in the legal field. Ultimately, I want to build a meaningful career where I feel valued, challenged, and able to make a real difference.

If you would like to support students like Hollie and help the next generation of MU graduates fulfil their potential, you can donate to Maynooth University Foundation today or contact the Development and Alumni Relations Office for more information.

In Memoriam: Brendan McAtamney, Class of 1984

Maynooth University remembers Brendan McAtamney, an alumnus whose generosity continues to shape student opportunity. Through the Dowling McAtamney Bursary, Brendan and his wife Caroline have helped reduce and remove financial pressures for students experiencing barriers to university, supporting them into Maynooth University and through their studies towards graduation. Brendan sadly passed away on 21 Dec 2024.

From Maynooth to Manhattan

Alum Stephen Farrelly's meteoric rise has positioned him as a leading figure in global healthcare finance

From his office in the sky, high up above the Avenue of the Americas in Manhattan, Stephen Farrelly is rightly proud of his post-Maynooth trajectory. He attributes a handful of key factors to his success, those within his control: a relentless work ethic and ambition to influence; and those beyond his control: luck and good timing.

At 39, Farrelly is Managing Director and Global Lead of Pharma & Healthcare at Dutch banking behemoth ING. He is the youngest MD of a global management team for the healthcare and technology sectors at ING, where he oversees the company's pharma & healthcare business. He is responsible for $10 billion in assets across three continents and has overseen the redesign of ING's global pharma & healthcare strategy.

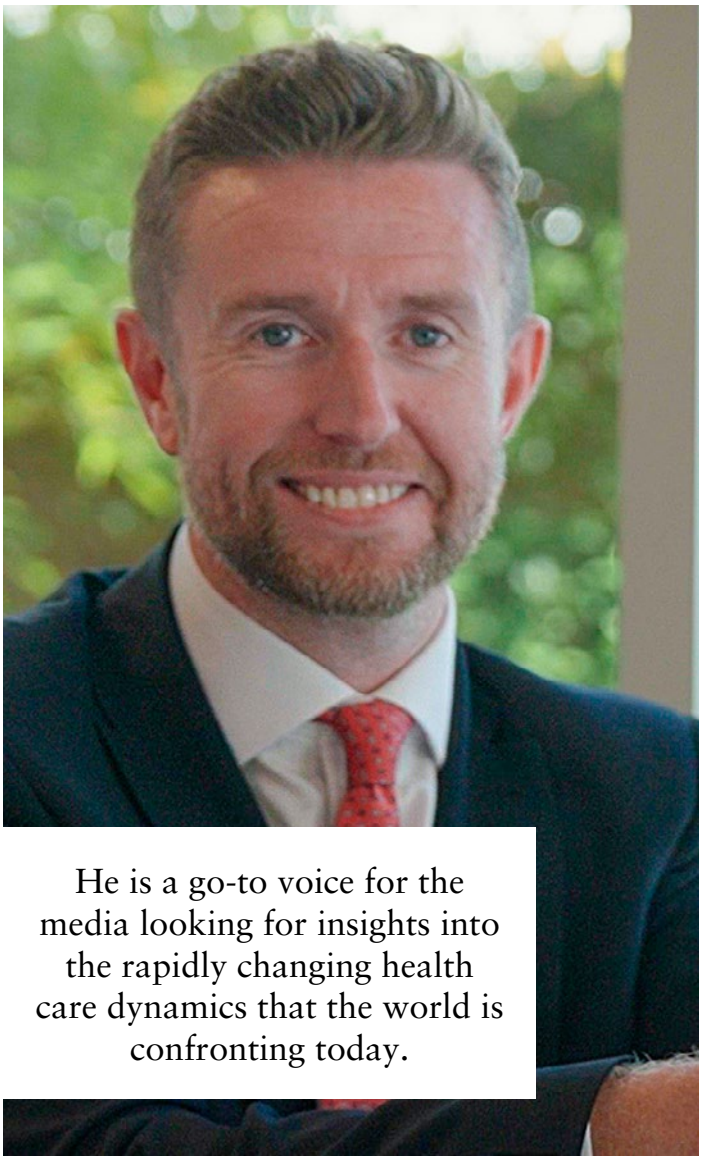
To achieve so much at a young age reflects a meteoric rise that Farrelly said really took off during the financial crash. He had moved to London to work for AIB, having graduated Maynooth with a joint honours degree in Economics and Finance in 2006 and MA in Finance in 2007. It was then that a senior executive randomly selected Farrelly to work with him side-by-side as a wave of corporate debt restructurings took hold across the industry.

The lessons he learned from those early experiences catapulted his knowledge trajectory and career path. Today, from a leadership position, he is careful to acknowledge that younger employees in the banking world have not experienced such an economic downturn. He says it's critical to try to impart those lessons and share the stories of what unfolded, in the event of a future downturn, because they have no way of having learned the hard lessons personally.

Farrelly himself started at Maynooth University quite young. "I was 17 when I arrived at Maynooth, too young to even drink in the SU." Maybe that was a plus for his studies.

Today, he's constantly learning. He is a go-to voice for the media looking for insights into the rapidly changing health care dynamics that the world is confronting today. Whether it's appearing on Sky News or speaking with CNN or Politico to discuss the latest US pharmaceutical tariffs, or meeting clients in five plus countries across two continents over the last three months (at the time of writing), Farrelly is continuing to study and learn, while also sharing and strategising about potential solutions in life sciences, care delivery, technology and workforce shortages as the global population ages.

Originally from Lucan, Farrelly married an American, Amanda, who also graduated from MU with a degree in law in 2016. Together, the couple have three children (and two dogs).



He is a go-to voice for the media looking for insights into the rapidly changing health care dynamics that the world is confronting today.

Maynooth University 2007

Stephen Farrelly

MA, Economics and Finance

BA Economics and Finance

Managing Director and Global Lead of Pharma & Healthcare, ING

New York

One test, thousands of lives

MU alum Julia Nowak is part of a global project that could change how the world fights neonatal sepsis

Julia Nowak
BSc, Biological and Biomedical Sciences
Molecular Biotechnology Research Scientist NeoSepsis Team
Maynooth University

Julia Nowak graduated from MU in 2022 with a degree in Biomedical Sciences and jumped straight into life-saving research as a research assistant in Professor Sean Doyle's Molecular Biotechnology Lab in the Department of Biology. She joined the NeoSepsis project, an Irish Aid and Research Ireland-funded collaboration with Makerere University in Uganda, to tackle one of the deadliest and underdiagnosed infections in newborns: neonatal sepsis.

Globally, neonatal sepsis claims up to 800,000 lives each year, with 99% of deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries. Uganda alone sees 17 neonatal sepsis-related deaths per day. Such high mortality rates are due to non-specific clinical symptoms and a lack of laboratory facilities and affordable, rapid diagnostics.

The NeoSepsis team proposed a rapid, point-of-care diagnostic test that can detect a biomarker of infection in human blood, aiding clinicians to detect neonatal sepsis in minutes, rather than days. The team successfully secured €1 million by winning the first Research Ireland-Irish Aid Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Challenge. Since then, they have conducted ethically approved clinical evaluations, testing 2,000 newborns and 1,000 mothers. The test proved to be successful in detecting neonatal sepsis and even out-performed the currently available diagnostic tests.

Throughout her time working on this project, Julia has been driven by one goal: to bring a life-saving diagnostic to the babies who need it most. She says the test holds potential to save lives by reducing diagnostic delays and enabling timely intervention. The next goal is to gain regulatory approval and implement the test into the Ugandan healthcare system and beyond.

Throughout her time working on this project, Julia has been driven by one goal: to bring a life-saving diagnostic to the babies who need it most

Julia has proudly presented these findings and represented the project at national and international conferences, worked on raw materials, quality control, data analysis, and prepared the test for regulatory certification — all while collaborating closely with clinicians, nurses, policymakers, and government bodies. In just three years since graduating, she also is co-first author on a manuscript detailing the team's results in the high-impact, peer-reviewed journal, PLOS One.

In addition to NeoSepsis, Julia's research in the lab spans proteomics, molecular and fungal biology, and biochemistry, with a focus on fungal secondary metabolites, protein biology, and immunoassays.

Julia says she has found her passion: transforming lab-based research into real-world, life-saving tools.

Community, conversation, connections and culture

Arts and Minds Festival 2025 had it all

Arts and Minds Festival has become a staple in MU's annual calendar of events. From performances by Irish National Opera, to movie screenings with acclaimed directors, live music performances, Irish-language arts events, poetry masterclasses, literary discussions and readings with world-famous authors, each May the festival brings an increasingly varied and interesting programme for curious culture vultures everywhere to enjoy. Here are just a few highlights from the 2025 festival.

The 2026 festival will take place from Thursday, 7 May until Saturday, 9 May in a variety of locations at the University and in Maynooth town.

1. L-R: *Prof Katriona O'Sullivan and Niall "Bressie" Breslin explored mindfulness during "Where is My Mind?", a live podcast* **2.** *The MU Chamber Choir and Choir Director, Dr Michael T. Dawson* **3.** *One of the local choirs who took part in 'Sing Your Art Out' at The Big Sing* **4. L-R:** *MU's Aoife Ní Ghloinn in conversation with fiddle player, sean-nós singer, academic and broadcaster, Doireann Ní Ghlacáin in St. Mary's Church of Ireland, Maynooth for 'The Say a Song Project', an immersive re-imagining of the ancient tradition of sean-nós song* **5.** *The inimitable Sharon Shannon and her band entertaining the audience at the sold-out Aula Maxima bringing the 2025 festival to a memorable close*

To find out more about this year's programme, keep an eye on this page:
mu.ie/artsandmindsfestival

Where creativity found its home

Discovering her creative voice through practice, people and place

Finn Reddy
MA Critical and Creative Media
BA Media Studies
Artist, graphic designer, and administrator at MentorsWork, a Skillnet Initiative

Finn Reddy thrives on creative momentum, balancing a part-time role with MentorsWork (a Skillnet mentoring and learning initiative), tutoring in design in the Media Studies Department at Maynooth University, alongside a freelance practice as a graphic designer and artist. This blend of teaching and making reflects her commitment to collaboration, learning and creative exchange.

Drawn to advertising and design from an early age, Finn has built a richly varied portfolio spanning screen design, zine-making and queer expression workshops with organisations including IMMA, Pride events, private collage and art classes, and research roles exploring creative identities and women's histories. Her artistic practice brings together digital and traditional techniques, resulting in commissioned work and illustrations for children's books.

Community, creativity, inclusivity and lasting friendships were defining features of her time at Maynooth, which Finn describes as a true home. Her time with the Drama Society saw her take to the stage in two productions, work behind the scenes as a stage manager on multiple shows, serve a year on the committee, and write and direct two original plays.

While providing a strong creative community, Maynooth was also a source of vital support for Finn, who is neurodivergent and experienced anxiety during her studies. She was able to access free counselling through MU Student Services. And it was where she discovered that her intense hyper-fixations were actually her superpower: "I found my strength and my passion at Maynooth," she said, and that enabled her to achieve high grades and immerse herself deeply in research.

Having pursued a diverse career path to date, bridging academic insight with hands-on creative practice, Finn believes the common thread is research. Her ability to "go down a rabbit hole" makes every role easier and more impactful because she knows how to gather, interpret, and apply information effectively - skills honed at Maynooth University.

What drives her professionally? Learning. She proudly calls herself a "massive nerd" who thrives on gaining and sharing knowledge.

For Finn, Maynooth was transformative. "It's where I learned who I am and what I love," she reflects - giving her the confidence, community, and skills to transform creative curiosity into craft.

https://www.finnreddy.com/

Maynooth Through the Ages

Local history series brings hundreds to campus

Maynooth College, County Kildare, Ireland, 1900. Artist: Unknown

Maynooth University Library, in collaboration with the Department of History and St Patrick's College, Maynooth, hosted the third instalment of the successful Maynooth Through the Ages lecture series in 2025. Free to attend, and open to the public, the series has attracted more than 2,000 attendees in its first three years.

Speakers explore aspects of the history of the University, St Patrick's College, the town of Maynooth and the wider hinterland of north Kildare from the 1600s to the present day. The tours have opened up public access to places such as the College Chapel, Library, the Science & Ecclesiastical Museum and most recently the college graveyard.

The extraordinarily popular programme has featured staff and alumni speakers from diverse disciplines, including Mathematics and Statistics, Geography, Modern Irish, and Physics, showcasing the wide-ranging expertise within the University that contributes to local historical knowledge.

The series commenced in 2023 as part of the Communiversity initiative, which championed the idea of return to education. Since then, the series has prompted a number of attendees to return to learning and in 2024, regular attendees have commenced study in the Department of History, including some in the MA in Local History programme.

At the 2025 President's Awards, the Maynooth Through the Ages team - led by Dr Ciarán Reilly, Assistant Professor in the Department of History, Elaine Bean, Senior Library Assistant for Facilities and Events, was awarded the 2025 Vice President's Special Award for Public Engagement. Vice-President External Affairs Rebecca Doolin said the series "demonstrated the essence of what a university can mean to its local community."

Conor McCarthy: A global food-tech disrupter

Chances are that if you've ordered take-away food you have used Flipdish. That's the name of the app and company set up in 2015 by MU grad Conor McCarthy and his brother which is now one of Ireland's leading food technology companies.

Conor, who is a Stillorgan native, did a master's degree at MU more than a decade ago. This practical course on web development, he said, helped him to build Flipdish, an app powering online restaurant ordering in some 15 countries.

Conor's recollections of student life in Maynooth – where he achieved an MSc in Software Engineering - are less about late nights spent in pubs and more about a transformational module that he took, given by another Irish tech pioneer.

Des Traynor, then a PhD student, who would go on to become a co-founder of the Irish tech unicorn, Intercom, taught a short, two-week course on web development that, Conor recalled, landed in his life at exactly the right moment.

"I went from not knowing how to do web development to knowing how to do web development," said Conor. "In those two weeks we covered regular expressions, cookies, storing information in databases – all the things I had no idea how to do before."

The impact on Conor's trajectory was profound. Having spent years trying to teach himself how to build "useful software" it was in Maynooth that it all came together.

At the start of his working career, while at Virtual Access, a small Dublin company making routers and networking equipment, Conor was also pursuing his passion for poker. As an avid player, Conor understood that the odds were far better for the owners of online poker businesses than the individual customers who used these services. "I counted the number of very successful poker players and then the number of successful businesspeople and realised I shouldn't be spending my time playing poker to make money," said Conor. He began to build software for poker players, 'scraping' game data so that users could analyse their opponents' behaviour. This led him to work with Pocket Kings, the company behind one of the world's largest online poker sites at the time.

Though learning a lot, the poker world left him feeling uneasy, as he saw its effect on some. "You could see people who had problems with gaming. They'd ask to be blocked, then the next day ask to be unblocked, and then come back saying they'd lost money and had asked to be blocked two days ago." Conor decided he didn't want to spend his working career encouraging people to lose money. "I didn't really like the gaming industry. I wanted to do something a bit lighter."

Instead, he sought out his brother, James, who also had entrepreneurial flair: he had launched a successful business selling lighter and less sweaty alternatives to the ubiquitous, traditional Christmas jumper in 30 countries.

The brothers began looking for an idea they could work on. Conor's mind returned to the web module he took at MU in 2007. Back then, when tasked with building a site to practice databases and logins, he had thought about making a basic restaurant ordering platform, as he realised that while restaurants had websites, most

Maynooth University 2008

Conor McCarthy

MSc Computer Science and Software Engineering

CEO & CTO at Flipdish

were "really, really bad". He forgot about the idea, but when he went back in 2014 for a second look he was stunned to see how little had changed. "Everything else seemed to be getting better – taxis, hotels, flights," said Conor. "But when I was ordering a takeaway, I still rang people because it was easier than the websites."

This frustration became the seed of Flipdish.

Initially the McCarthy brothers imagined Flipdish as an app with one standardised menu per cuisine type, where customers in every part of Ireland would get the same dish.

Investors were sceptical of this, so they pivoted it over to be a food marketplace app that was like Just Eat but had slicker mobile technology. This new app could place an order in less than 20 seconds, while Just Eat took two minutes or more.

The Flipdish app launched in 2015, even though restaurants had not signed up to it yet. Customers placed orders through the app, the McCarthy's received a text, and then placed a phone call with the specific restaurants to fulfil the order. Conor spoke to many restaurant owners, while placing orders. The owners told him they were tired with orders from their customers being funnelled through third-party apps, which charged them 13-14% commission per order and listed them side-by-side with all their local competitors.

"They felt their customers were being moved away from them to this middleman and then sold back to them," said Conor. They changed tack again and offered Flipdish as an app that enabled restaurants to take online orders directly themselves, and stay close to their customers as a result. The new app model clicked immediately with restaurants who wanted their own app, their logo on a customer's phone, the ability to send notifications and control their own brand.

Flipdish expanded quickly beyond Ireland, into the UK, France, Spain, Germany and the USA. After initially finding it difficult to raise money, the brothers secured a €2 million investment through Elkstone, a market specialist in Ireland. After Covid-19 hit, the business doubled, then tripled annually, as millions of consumers were pushed towards online ordering. Today, Flipdish is valued at €1.25 billion.

Flipdish continues to innovate. They recently launched a voice AI system that answers the phone when customers ring a restaurant, takes their order, and – in time – will be able to tell them where their food is without clogging up staff time.

Conor gives a lot of credit for Flipdish's stellar global success back to what he learned at MU, and he is unequivocal when asked if he'd recommend the University today. "Absolutely. For me it was pivotal. I learned a huge amount in a couple of weeks of super-relevant stuff that set me on my way."

Disability advocate Sinéad Burke calls for greater inclusion in higher education

L-R: *CEO of Tilting the Lens Sinéad Burke, VP of Equality and Diversity Gemma Irvine, MU President Prof Eeva Leinonen, and Sam Blanckensee MU Equality Officer*

At the Equitas 2025 Conference, which was hosted at Maynooth University, disability advocate Sinéad Burke called for increased access and inclusion for staff as well as students across all areas of the third level sector. In her keynote, titled *'Accessibility is a framework, not an outcome'*, Ms Burke, the founder and CEO of Tilting the Lens, a global strategic accessibility consultancy, said: *"When accessibility is confined to student services, we replicate the very hierarchies we aim to dismantle. Staff, particularly disabled staff, deserve systemic inclusion: in hiring, promotion, research funding, and leadership."*

The Equitas - EDI in Practice in Higher Education Conference is an annual event open to EDI practitioners, academics, researchers, graduate students, managers, administrators and all who are interested in ensuring equality, valuing and celebrating diversity, and promoting inclusion in higher education. The two-day conference which took place from 18th to 19th June on campus, coincided with the publication of the *Times Higher Education (THE)* Impact rankings, with Maynooth University among the top 5% of international universities for reducing inequalities.

Maynooth University is among the top 5% of international universities for reducing inequalities

King Sitric Silkenbeard

Greatest Dubliner of all time?

Photo: *Brian Boru faced King Sitric at the Battle of Clontarf (1014)*

History may not have been kind to Sitric Silkenbeard, but as King of Dublin he was responsible for building it into a rich, thriving, cosmopolitan European city, writes Dr Niamh Wycherley of the Departments of Early Irish (Sean-Ghaeilge) and History.

At Easter in the year 1014, Sitric (aka Sitriuc Silkbeard or Sigtryggr Ólafsson Silkiskeggi in Old Norse) cemented his reputation as one of the baddies of Irish history due to his (lack of) performance at the Battle of Clontarf.

According to the epic saga, Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh (the War of the Irish against the Foreigners), Brian Boru and his Killaloe dynasty of the Dál Cais defeated Sitric's Dublin-based Viking army.

This literary extravaganza is populated by fearsome Scandinavians coming to take our land and our women. Unlike the heroic Munstermen, one of whom who is explicitly described as an Irish Hector (of Trojan War fame), wielding a sword in each hand as he defends Ireland, Sitric is depicted cowering within the dún of Dublin.

In reality, Sitric was Irish born and bred; Brian Boru was both his father-in-law and stepfather; some of his strongest allies were the Leinstermen, his mother's family, amongst whom he was raised; and he was probably just protecting home base, which had previously been burnt by various Irish kings to subjugate and subsume the growing economic powerhouse of Dublin.

Because 1014 later became a tent pole date in Irish nationalistic notions of 'us versus them', it was necessary that the so-called 'Viking' Sitric be portrayed as the foreign fraidy-cat foil to Brian Boru's brave Irish hero. Of course, these binaries are often created by historians and storytellers (both medieval and modern) while real events and trends are complex, nuanced, gradual and rarely possible to recreate with objective accuracy.

Sitric would get my vote for greatest Dubliner of all time. He ruled Dublin for over four decades, until he seemingly abdicated in 1036, and from the late 990s onwards he built it up into a cosmopolitan, rich, thriving, 'European' city.

Following the example of English kings such as Aethelred the Unready, Sitric minted the first coins in Ireland. A public statement of his sophistication and authority, these silver pennies were inscribed with Sithric Rex Dyflinn or Sitric, King of Dublin, and featured both a typical profile of a (beardless!) king and a Christian cross.

On return home from a high-profile pilgrimage to Rome in 1028, Sitric visited the great city of Cologne and apparently founded Christ Church Cathedral back in Dublin in its image. An architectural stunner, it soon became one of the most powerful churches in Ireland.

While all men like Sitric are necessarily nepo babies, given the fundamental nature of how aristocracies operate, he was not just handed a kingdom to rule without opposition. His father Amlaíb Cuarán had his cap set at the royal seat of Tara, but after his definitive defeat by Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, supposed High King, at the Battle of Tara in 980, he retired in pilgrimage to the monastery of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland.

It took Sitric many years and the convenient death of his older half-brother Glún Iarainn to consolidate his position as King of Dublin. When Brian Boru had the audacity to march through Ireland demanding and negotiating his own position as 'Emperor of the Irish', Sitric repeatedly refused to submit to him, resulting in, of course the Battle of Clontarf, and many other clashes besides.

> For me, Sitric exemplifies the multicultural nature of Irish medieval society and, indeed, of Ireland today

For me, Sitric exemplifies the multicultural nature of Irish medieval society and, indeed, of Ireland today. He was last of the great dynasty of the Uí Ímarr, descendants of influential Scandinavian king, Ivar, who was active in the Irish Sea region in the second half of the ninth century.

Ivar's descendants dominated rule of Dublin for the guts of two centuries, give or take a few coups, lost battles, assassinations and periods in exile. By the time Sitric was born to Gormlaith, daughter of the King of Leinster, and the Norse Amlaíb, it is difficult to discern any clear ethnicities or identities for these rulers.

While many scholars are generally tolerant of the use of term 'Viking', the cultivated Christian Sitric, who likely spoke both Irish and Norse, and potentially also Latin and English, has little in common with the men who raided island monasteries 200 years earlier.

Instead of Viking or Scandinavian, should we use instead Hiberno-Norse? Scandi-Irish? The lack of agreement from academics indicates there is much work to be done on understanding Irish identity, and that the boxes we try to squeeze people into, whether today or in the past, are not always fitting or necessary. Nevertheless, King Sitric, immortalised by the great Howth pub, was a Dubliner above all else.

Tune into the Medieval Irish History Podcast, hosted by Dr Niamh Wycherley, to find out more about Sitric Silkenbeard.

Facing fear head-on

Maynooth University 2001

Joanne Berry

BA, Economics and Mathematical Studies

SVP, Global Head Business Information & Advanced Analytics

Sompo, New York

Joanne Berry says her time at Maynooth University was formative in shaping the resilience and leadership style that would define her career.

Like many students, Joanne faced personal challenges during her time at MU, and her academic performance initially reflected that. What made the difference was the understanding shown by her lecturers, as she recalls: "The support and flexibility of my lecturers made it possible for me to complete my degree and show that one tough chapter early on doesn't define the whole story." That experience laid the groundwork for a mindset she carries today: persistence matters, and setbacks don't determine outcomes.

One moment stands out: her first experience of public speaking at an economics debate. "I was terrified," she recalls, "and I was the only one on stage preaching doom and gloom about the future of the economy."

While it didn't win her many fans during the debate, it did teach her a crucial lesson: facing fear head-on. She says that willingness to step into discomfort has served her well throughout her professional life.

Campus life offered Joanne both community and inspiration. The Students' Union bar became a hub for discovery, where afternoons spent watching cult classics like Monty Python and the Holy Grail, Withnail & I, 12 Monkeys and Fight Club with other students opened up "a whole new world".

Since graduating, Joanne has built an impressive career across finance, data and analytics. In her role as Senior Vice President, Global Head Business Information & Advanced Analytics at Japanese insurance company Sompo in New York, she is leading global functions through complex change.

The foundations for that work, she says, were built at Maynooth University, where she learned there are no shortcuts, and that persistence and curiosity are what deliver results. One of her biggest professional challenges has been leading teams of specialists in areas far outside her original background and comfort zone. Embracing that challenge required her to ask questions, learn quickly and focus on enabling experts rather than trying to be one herself - a shift that reshaped her leadership approach and opened up new opportunities.

Today, Joanne is motivated by continuous learning, particularly exploring new technologies and ways of working that reduce frustration and help organisations run better.

One piece of advice that really hit home and has had a lasting impact is: "Don't be afraid to blow your own trumpet". This advice was shared with her by a former boss, who was an inspiration to her when she first moved to the US. As Joanne says herself: "Irish people, especially women, tend to be self-deprecating and humble, and I was no exception". This feedback challenged her natural humility and changed how she shows up professionally.

In her own words, Maynooth University was her "gateway to social mobility and the opportunities that followed".

The art of words

From Irish roots to global luxury, one alum's journey of crafting stories that captivate

Maynooth University 1998

Gavin Manley

HDip Cultural Tourism

ACD & Copywriter, Co-Founder of Sō

With over two decades in the luxury and lifestyle space, Gavin Manley has built a reputation for crafting language that moves people. His portfolio spans national campaigns, global rebrands, digital experiences, and editorial storytelling. But where did it all begin?

After completing a BA in History of Art and Philosophy, Gavin sought a postgraduate programme that would let him explore Ireland's rich heritage while preparing for the professional world. Maynooth University's Higher Diploma in Cultural Tourism was the perfect fit. The course attracted a small, diverse mix of students from varied backgrounds, and living on campus gave Gavin the chance to fully immerse himself in university life. Field trips across Ireland added depth to his studies and helped forge lasting connections.

A work placement requirement eased the transition into the workplace. Gavin secured a role at the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks, starting in the education department before moving into marketing, a shift that sparked his passion for building audiences through storytelling. After five years, he was ready for new horizons.

In 2003, Gavin moved to New York City and stepped into the world of fashion advertising. His first role was as executive assistant to two of the industry's most respected creative directors. Joining one of the leading agencies was "an eye-opening experience for a young Dubliner," he recalls. The agency handled campaigns for iconic brands like Valentino, Versace, and Dolce & Gabbana. "I still remember feeling starstruck meeting names like Donna Karan and Bradley Cooper. I worked hard and steadily rose through the ranks as the agency grew."

Immersed in a world of creativity, Gavin set his sights on copywriting. When the chance came to lead copywriting at a boutique agency, he seized it. Today, he has launched Sō, a brand storytelling venture with Marie Kelly, a renowned features writer for *The Irish Times* and *The Sunday Times*, serving Irish luxury and lifestyle brands.

Though Manhattan is now home, Ireland remains his deepest connection. Reflecting on his time at MU, Gavin says: "I graduated with clarity — for the first time since leaving school, I knew where I was heading."

https://so-consulting.ie/

Filleann an Dochtúir ar Ollscoil Mhá Nuad tar éis blianta fada ar shiúl

Ba mhór an onóir do Chuallacht Cholmcille, cumann Gaelach na mac léinn in OMN agus an cumann Gaelach ollscoile is sine in Éirinn, i gcomhpháirt le Cumann Drámaíochta Ollscoil Mhá Nuad, an scigdhráma ceolmhar dátheangach An Dochtúir le Séamus Ó Beirn a léiriú mar chuid de cheiliúradh na hOllscoile ar Sheachtain na Gaeilge 2025.

Le tacaíocht ó Oifig na Gaeilge in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad, thug an comhthionscadal seo leis an gCumann Drámaíochta deis luachmhar do Chuallacht Cholmcille an oidhreacht shaibhir a bhaineann leis an gCuallacht a aithint. Is léiriú úrnua é seo ar dhráma de chuid Uí Bheirn ón mbliain 1904 a léiríodh roimhe seo ag muintir na Cuallachta dhá bhliain agus nócha ó shin san áit chéanna cheannann, ár n-Aula Maxima stairiúil ar ár gCampas Theas álainn. Téann an traidisiún de dhrámaí Gaeilge á léiriú ag mic léinn na hOllscoile agus baill de Chuallacht Cholmcille san Aula Maxima siar go tús an fhichiú haois i gcroílár Athbheochan na Gaeilge.

Is léiriú úrnua é seo ar dhráma de chuid Uí Bheirn ón mbliain 1904 a léiríodh roimhe seo ag muintir na Cuallachta dhá bhliain agus nócha ó shin san áit chéanna cheannann, ár n-Aula Maxima stairiúil ar ár gCampas Theas álainn

Ag trácht ar thréimhse na hAthbheochana ina raibh sé scríofa, tá eilimintí aoracha agus scigdhrámata fuaite fite lena chéile in An Dochtúir, a bhaineann le Patrick O'Leary, dochtúir óg soineanta saonta ó Bhaile Átha Cliath gan aon Ghaeilge atá ag iarraidh bualadh in athuair lena ghrá geal Máire atá ina hathbheochanóir Gaeilge díograiseach agus a ghlacann le post, mar sin, in íoclann iargúlta i gConamara, beag beann air nach labhróidh a chuid othar ach Gaeilge. Ag cur lena thríoblóidí agus é ag iarraidh chuile shórt a oibriú amach, tá muintir na háite nach bhfuil puinn sásta, an mháthair chéile a d'fhéadfadh a bheith aige a bhfuil éirí in airde ag baint léi go mór agus deargnamhaid mórtasach an dochtúra a bhfuil sé mar uaillmhian aige Máire a phósadh.

Sa léiriú fíor-chliste seo ar dhráma an-ghreannmhar, spreagúil, rómánsúil agus mothúchánach Uí Bheirn, chuala na sluaite áille a bhí san Aula Maxima dó i mí an Mhárta 2025 comhrá i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla agus cuireadh an-oíche shiamsaíochta ar fáil do chách, is cuma cén saghas caidrimh a bhí acu siúd i láthair leis an nGaeilge. San fhoireann aisteoireachta bhí mic léinn reatha Ollscoil Mhá Nuad amháin a thaispeáin don lucht féachana a gcumas aisteoireachta chomh maith le taispeántais de cheol traidisiúnta, amhránaíocht ar an sean-nós agus damhsa ar an sean-nós, anuas ar amhráin chlasaiceacha ó thús an fhichiú haois agus amhráin chomhaimseartha óna leithéid de Sabrina Carpenter, Chappell Roan agus Kneecap.

Sa phictiúr ar chlé tá foireann aisteoireachta agus stiúrthóireachta An Dochtúir nuair a léiríodh é san Aula Maxima ar champas Mhá Nuad sa bhliain 1933 agus sa phictiúr ar dheis tá foireann aisteoireachta agus stiúrthóireachta An Dochtúir nuair a léiríodh é san Aula Maxima anuraidh i mí an Mhárta 2025

Photo: *Myriam Riand*

Amhránaí, scoláire, cláirseoir

Roinneann Síle Denvir as Conamara ó dhúchas traidisiúin cheoil a ceantair leis an domhan mór

Bhí glór binn, ainglí Shíle Denvir le cloisteáil thar timpeall Chaisleán Bhaile Átha Cliath ar 11 Samhain 2025 ag casadh "Ár nAthair" sa stíl shean-nósach tar éis di glacadh le cuireadh pearsanta ón Uachtarán Catherine Connolly an leagan áirithe sin den phaidir a chasadh agus dhá phíosa a sheinnt ar an gcláirseach ag a searmanas insealbhaithe. Ba mhór an onóir do Shíle páirt lárnach a glacadh sa searmanas ach ní haon ionadh gur iarr ár nUachtarán nua, a bhfuil an-mheas aici ar an nGaeilge agus ar an gcultúr agus ar na healaíona a bhaineann léi, ar amhránaí agus cláirseoir chomh haitheanta agus chomh ceiliúrtha le Síle bheith i lathair ar an lá speisialta úd.

Is cainteoir dúchais í Síle ó Ghaeltacht Chonamara atá tiomanta don amhránaíocht ar an sean-nós agus don cheol Gaelach a chaomhnú agus a chothú agus a thabhairt do lucht éisteachta i gcóngair agus i gcéin sa 25 bliain ó bhain sí céim amach ó OMN sa Nua-Ghaeilge agus sa Cheol. Ní hamháin gur cleachtóir í Síle a ainmníodh mar Amhránaí na Bliana ag Gradam Ceoil TG4 sa bhliain 2023 agus a d'eisigh albam aoibhinn ardmholta dar teideal Anamnesis an bhliain chéanna ach is scoláire idirdhisciplíneach agus Ollamh Comhlach in DCU í chomh maith atá tar éis saineolas a bhaint amach i dtraidisiún an tsean-nóis agus sna hamhránaithe óna ceantar féin mar aon le Tom an tSeoighe agus Ciarán Ó Fathartha.

Ag breathnú siar anois uirthi, aithníonn Síle gur tréimhse an-thábhachtach ina saol a bhí sa seal a chaith sí in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad mar fhochéimí a thug an-bhunús go deo i léann na Gaeilge di agus a d'oscail an saol mór di agus í ina mac léinn óg agus a chabhraigh léi a féiniúlacht féin a aimsiú agus í ag teacht in inmhe mar dhuine fásta. Is minic a fhilleann sí ar an gcampas le haghaidh imeachtaí, an Fhéile Ealaíne agus Eagna i mí na Bealtaine san áireamh, agus spreagann gach cúinne den bhaile agus den champas cuimhní cinn iontacha inti agus is cuimhin léi ach go háirithe an bhliain a chaith sí féin agus a dlúthchara go dtí an lá atá inniu ann, an ceoltóir Valerie Casey, i gceannas ar an gCumann Ceoil Traidisiúnta; "Nach againn a bhí saol an mhadra bháin agus muid ag eagrú ceolchoirmeacha sa seomra Bewerunge ar an gcampas agus ag eagrú seisiúin cheoil i Brady's i mbaile Mhá Nuad!"

Singer, scholar, harpist

Connemara's own Síle Denvir shares Irish music traditions with the world

The sweet, ethereal singing voice of Síle Denvir could be heard all around Dublin Castle on the 11th of November 2025 singing "Ár nAthair" in the inimitable sean-nós style after she accepted an invitation from President Catherine Connolly to both sing that particular musical arrangement of the prayer and to play two pieces on the harp as part of her inauguration ceremony. Síle recalls the occasion as a great honour for her, although it is hardly surprising that President Connolly, who famously has great respect for the Irish language and the arts and culture associated with it, would ask a singer and harpist as renowned and celebrated as Síle to participate in the day's events.

A native Irish speaker from the Connemara Gaeltacht, Síle has spent the 25 years since she graduated from MU with a degree in Modern Irish and Music preserving, nurturing and bringing sean-nós singing and Irish music traditions to a wider listenership all over the world. Not only is Síle a practitioner herself who was named Singer of the Year at Gradam Ceoil TG4 2023 and released her beautiful, critically acclaimed album Anamnesis that same year, but she is also an interdisciplinary scholar and Associate Professor in DCU, an expert in the sean-nós singing tradition and singers from her own area, such as Tom a' tSeoighe and Ciarán Ó Fátharta.

Reflecting on her time as an undergraduate in Maynooth, Síle acknowledges it as hugely significant for her, not only giving her a remarkable foundation in Irish-language studies but also opening the wider world to her and helping her find her own identity as she was growing into adulthood. She often returns to campus for cultural events, including the Arts and Minds Festival, and every corner of both the town and the campus stirs wonderful memories for her. She remembers especially fondly the year she spent in charge of the Tradsoc with her very good friend to this day, the musician Valerie Casey: "Hadn't we a charmed life really going from organising concerts in the Bewerunge room on campus to organising trad sessions in Brady's down the town!"

Maynooth University 2002

An Dr Síle Denvir
BA Nua-Ghaeilge agus Ceol
Amhránaí agus Cláirseoir
Éire

Dr Síle Denvir
BA Nua-Ghaeilge and Music
Singer and Harpist
Ireland

Abdallah Aljazzar, a student who was evacuated from Gaza to take up a scholarship in Maynooth University. Photo: Dara Mac Dónaill/The Irish Times

‘Take care of mum, okay?’ These were my last words to Gaza before I left for Ireland

At night, I dream my brother Nour is looking for me. ‘I’m in Ireland, Habibi’ I say to him. ‘Everything is green and lovely’

“I need a haircut,” I told my barber, Mohammed.

“Okay. The usual?”

“No, I am proposing to my love tomorrow.”

The lie came easily. I’m single. I have been for a long time. But I needed the barber’s hand to move with extra purpose and care, because this was no normal haircut.

A little while before, the Irish Government had called me. It was a Tuesday in August. “Prepare to leave Gaza for Ireland. Maynooth University is ready.”

For more than a year, I had rehearsed my departure from my home in Gaza like my little brother Ali practises flying kites. Now, the rehearsal was over.

I had big plans, but how do you leave your life? How do you give up your home? I wanted to leave with my spine straight, my dignity intact. One of my American friends told me, “Stay focused.” Great. Focused on what? I didn’t want to feel like I was running away. But to leave home with “dignity”? The word has lost all meaning.

For a start, I finally decided, it means how I look.

In the barber’s mirror, I saw the image of my brother, Nour – a mirage, because he was missing since one of the earlier evacuations. “How do I look?” I asked him silently. “Do I look human enough for Ireland?”

As I left the tent for home, I could hear noise and people laughing. My whole world had come to say goodbye.

For my entire life, I had been the one left behind, watching others disappear into the possibility of elsewhere: cousins, friends, acquaintances. But this time, I was the ghost preparing to vanish. I felt what they must have felt, and my joy was shrouded in fear, like a second skin. What if one Israeli soldier woke up on the wrong side of hatred at Kerem Shalom (the exit from Gaza into Israel) crossing? This is Gaza logic – I knew then, and I know now, that excitement only means getting ready to be disappointed.

That evening, I carried two gallons of water to my makeshift bathroom, and poured it over my body. My skin slowly remembered the feel of being clean. No one would see me cry there, bathed in water and sand, salt and soap, and my own grief.

I dressed in my only clean clothes and moved through the hugs, saving my mum for last. My mother is pure love, incapable of hatred even though hatred has claimed so many of her own. I breathed in the scent of home one final time. Then, stepping outside my tent, my family accompanied me into the street, following like a funeral procession.

I found a taxi instead of a donkey cart to carry me from Al Aqsa’s downtown area to the middle area, where the evacuation bus would pick me up at 3am, even though now it was only 4pm.

At the final moment, it struck me that this might be the last goodbye. My last words would be my final message to Gaza. What should I say? Before climbing in, I looked at Ali and said, “Deer balak ‘ala ammak” (Take care of mum). I wasn’t sure if he got me. “Ali, you take care, and take care of mum, okay?”

These were my last words to Gaza.

I didn’t turn back to see my family again. I felt too ashamed. I was leaving for peace, and all they had was famine and war. I wished to tell myself that I leave so that one day I can bring them out too. Except I didn’t believe that either.

That night, I lay on asphalt, using my backpack as a pillow. But I stayed awake, following the Irish instructions with the devotion of a monk. At 3am, I stepped on to the bus, into the unknown, with a group of more than 40 other scholars.

As the bus lurched forward, all I could see was a landscape of ruin, Gaza in fragments, Ali’s eyes with heavy responsibilities, and beautiful Nour’s absence.

By 7am, we had reached Rafah, the place where I was born. The war had turned it into a red zone, occupied by forces that made it a graveyard.

Still, I searched through broken concrete. Maybe Nour was trapped somewhere, waiting.

Nour’s name means light in Arabic, and without him, my life is shrouded in darkness.

At Kerem Shalom, one of the Gaza co-ordinators offered me a cigarette. In August 2025, a single cigarette cost a day’s wage. I had quit smoking, but took one anyway, for the ritual of this fellowship. Soon I found myself in a circle of fellow exiles, puffing smoke into the morning air, and watching it drift over the border.

Finally, we crossed to the Israeli side. The Irish embassy staff were waiting like angels. They gave us edible food and water that was not rationed. I also witnessed the magic of my visa emerging from a printer. When I looked at it, my eyes lost focus. This one little piece of paper was all it took?

The rest of that journey to Jordan, then to Turkey, to Dublin, is still a blur. Yet, in and out of sleep, Nour’s voice kept coming to me: “Carry me with you, not as your weight, but as your wings.”

Now I am in Maynooth, the ceasefire announcement this week felt surreal, like a “pinch me” moment. I believe it is real, but I am racked by questions. Will I be able to bring my family here to Ireland?

During the 2014 war, we lost our family business. A few years later, we rebuilt it, but in 2021, it was partially destroyed. Now, it’s completely gone, along with my house and farm and maybe Nour too. All I can think about is getting my family somewhere outside to ease their burden, help them find comfort, process the trauma, and start over, but I don’t know how.

At night, I dream Nour is looking for me. “I’m in Ireland, Habibi,” I say back to him. “Everything is green and lovely. I have moved into my accommodation in Maynooth. Just one room, but big enough for two. I saved a place for you by the window. Just tell me where you are, Habibi. I will come get you.”

I wonder whether he is alive somewhere in the Israeli prisons and couldn’t reach out to us. Will he be released as part of the agreement? Will I wake up to a call from my tent back in Gaza, to find Nour Facetiming me and saying, “I miss you too, big brother”?

And then, last Tuesday, I was sleeping and woke up to my family calling me. “Abdallah, guess what happened?” They had met three Palestinians who had just been released, and they said they had seen Nour. He is alive. He is okay. I found myself on the ground crying. Just tell me where you are, Habibi. I will come get you.

Abdallah Aljazzar (26) is studying for a Masters in Literature of Engagement at Maynooth University, where he is the programme co-ordinator for Palestinian students coming from Gaza.

This article, written by Abdallah Aljazzar, was originally published in The Irish Times on 18 Oct 2025 and is reproduced here with permission.

MU launches Ireland's newest School of Nursing

A landmark development for MU and Irish healthcare

On Friday, 24 October 2025, MU's new School of Nursing was officially launched. This official opening marks a significant development for both the University and Irish healthcare. The new School represents a major contribution to the Government's Sláintecare vision for community-based care and to the future of healthcare education in Ireland.

MU's BSc in General Nursing welcomed its first students in September, following full approval by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland during the summer.

Established by Prof Fintan Sheerin with colleagues Dr Adeline Cooney, Dr Myles Hackett and Emma Guyatt, the programme reflects the recommendations of last year's Expert Review of Nursing and Midwifery Curriculum, giving MU an early lead in implementing a new national model for nursing education.

Delivered in partnership with the HSE Dublin and Midlands Region, the programme incorporates inclusive pathways and flexible progression routes to enable learners from diverse backgrounds – including mature and further-education entrants – to enter, advance and specialise in nursing. The curriculum reflects the national shift toward community-based models of care, preparing graduates for roles across integrated care hubs, minor injury units, and community settings.

The launch event took place at Maynooth University and was officially opened by Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, James Lawless TD.

Commenting on the launch, MU President, Prof Eeva Leinonen said: "When we launched our Strategic Plan in 2023, we made a commitment to launch a new School of Nursing at Maynooth University and today it is a reality. This School represents not just a new academic unit, but the foundation for a broader School of Health and Medicine – a new way of preparing healthcare leaders of the future, grounded in compassion, scientific rigour, digital innovation, and community partnership."

The launch event also featured an inspirational keynote address by healthcare visionary Michael J. Dowling, CEO Emeritus of Northwell Health, who highlighted the strategic affiliation agreement between MU and Northwell Health announced last year to advance innovation in nursing education.

A panel discussion followed, featuring Rachel Kenna, Chief Nursing Officer at the Department of Health; Carolyn Donohoe, CEO of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland; and Kate Killeen White, Regional Executive Officer of the HSE Dublin and Midlands Region.

The School of Nursing is based in the Eolas Building and will expand in the years ahead to include research, innovation, and postgraduate programmes - such as the Level 9 Special Purpose Certificate in Advanced Clinical Assessment and Physical Examination, which commenced in February 2026 with a cohort of 10 students. The first intake of 27 undergraduate students began the BSc in General Nursing in September 2025, with numbers due to rise to 100 within four years to meet national demand for nursing education aligned with Sláintecare.

Photo: L-R: *James Lawless TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education; Kate Killeen White, Regional Executive Officer of the HSE Dublin and Midlands Region; Prof Fintan Sheerin, Founding Head of the School of Nursing; Rachel Kenna, CNO at the Department of Health; Carolyn Donohoe, CEO of the NWBI; Michael J. Dowling, CEO Emeritus of Northwell Health, and MU President Prof Eeva Leinonen*

MU Product Design grad wins James Dyson Award for breast cancer recovery device

MU alum Zoë O'Sullivan (2025 BSc Product Design) was named National Winner for Ireland at this year's prestigious James Dyson Award for her groundbreaking invention, Lymphia.

Her fellow MU product design graduate, Kate Brown, was named runner-up in the Irish category for Gotcha, an innovative make-up opener designed for people with limited hand or arm mobility.

The dual success highlights MU's growing reputation for people-led innovation.

Lymphia is a handheld portable device that teaches and guides patients through manual lymphatic drainage massage. It is designed to support recovery and help prevent lymphoedema, a chronic condition caused by fluid build-up after breast cancer treatment.

Breast cancer treatment often damages or removes lymph nodes, putting patients at high risk of lymphoedema. If untreated, lymphoedema can become a lifelong condition. By providing accurate, real-time feedback, the device enables patients to perform genuine Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) at home, reducing reliance on physiotherapists, conflicting online information, and trial-and-error approaches.

Zoë developed Lymphia during the final year of her BSc in Product Design and Innovation at MU, where she was tasked with producing an original design that was subsequently prototyped and manufactured on campus.

Welcoming the award, she said: "I am thrilled about winning the national Dyson award for Lymphia. It feels great to have my work acknowledged and so highly praised, and I am grateful for the awareness it will raise about lymphoedema and breast cancer." She plans to use the prize money from the award to fund a patent application for her innovative design.

Congratulating Zoë on the achievement, Dr Iain Macdonald, Head of the Department of Design Innovation at MU, said: "Zoë is an inspiration who has shown the power of human-centred design to improve the lives of people, which we proudly teach at Maynooth University."

"Zoë is an inspiration who has shown the power of human-centred design to improve the lives of people, which we proudly teach at Maynooth University."

– Dr Iain Macdonald, Head of the Department of Design Innovation

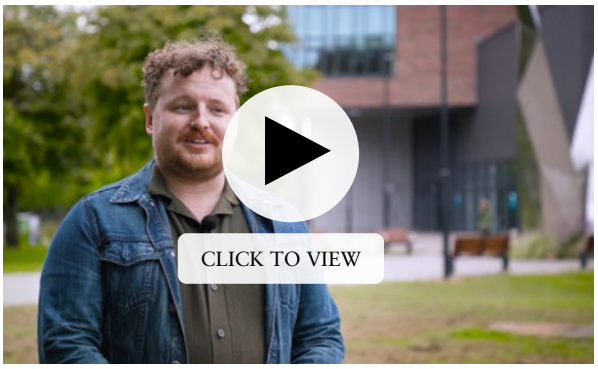
Photo and video courtesy of James Dyson Award

From MU to the Whitecaps and the World Cup

Maitiú Costello's journey from Maynooth University to the global stage of professional sport is a story about ambition and following your dreams.

Originally from Celbridge, Maitiú studied Business Management at MU. He credits the University as setting the foundation for his career, his work ethic and for providing clarity about his future: "Maynooth is the place that allows you to find what you want to do, what you don't want to do, and sets you on your path for life" he reflects.

After graduating, Maitiú started his professional career with Irish Life as an income protection administrator. In 2018, he and his wife – also a Maynooth University Business alum – made the decision to emigrate to Australia. By mid-2019, they had relocated again, this time to Vancouver, with a clear goal: to build careers and a life that aligned with their ambitions.



In Vancouver, Maitiú joined BDO, an investment bank and tax firm, where he worked his way up to team lead. His long-standing passion for sport remained a driving force and his dreams became a reality when he landed a role with the Vancouver Whitecaps, one of Canada's leading professional football clubs, as an administrator.

Now Senior Manager of Facilities, Operations and Administration, Maitiú oversees a vast portfolio. He is responsible for facilities management, day-to-day operations, administration, sustainability, and works closely with legal teams on leases and contracts. He manages operations across the main stadium in Vancouver and a large training stadium that supports more than 220 athletes - from the age of 14 to the professional Major League Soccer team - as well as academy centres across the country.

"Any day can be different" he says. "The benefit of my job is that I was able to go and get a broad range of experience in Vancouver."

That breadth of experience has led to an extraordinary opportunity: a secondment with FIFA for the upcoming World Cup. This June, Vancouver will host four national teams and seven World Cup matches, welcoming an expected influx of visitors equal to the city's population of 1.1 million. Maitiú was selected, alongside another Whitecaps FC colleague, to join the local organising committee – responsible for everything from security and transport to health, nutrition, and player services for up to 42 players.

Building a global event like the World Cup in a relatively small city is a very high-skill operational challenge, and he credits his MU education with preparing him for the demands of such a role. The broad range of topics, strong emphasis on work ethic, and the adaptability he developed during his studies have been invaluable and gave him the confidence to always feel prepared walking into any situation: "The education and work ethic we got in Ireland set us up to succeed." He notes that other MU graduates that they have met in Vancouver over the years had similar experiences.

Now a permanent resident of Canada and soon to be a citizen, Maitiú is grateful for the opportunity to work in an industry he has always dreamed of being part of.

Maynooth University 2016

Maitiú Costello

BBA Business Management

Senior Manager, Facilities Operations & Administration for Vancouver Whitecaps FC

A strong year for MU sport

National accreditation, team success and sporting achievement across the University

Sport has long been part of everyday student life at Maynooth University. This year, that approach was recognised through full accreditation under Sport Ireland's Accreditation for Student-Athlete Support (ASAS), a national framework that recognises how institutions support students balancing high-level sport with their studies.

The accreditation reflects the structures in place at MU to support student-athletes in practice, with close collaboration between the Sports Office, academic departments and professional services to provide flexibility around assessments, exams and coursework when students are competing at elite or international level. It also highlights the University's growing role in supporting dual-career athletes across a range of sports.

Alongside this, MU supports student-athletes through its Sports Scholarships programme, which operates across multiple disciplines and focuses on helping students manage the combined demands of training, competition and study.

In the 2025/26 academic year, 207 students are part of the programme across GAA, golf, rugby, snooker and soccer. GAA accounts for the largest cohort with 77 scholars, followed by 68 in rugby and 47 in soccer, alongside 13 in golf and 2 in snooker, with students represented from first year through to postgraduate study.

Recent sporting successes across the University reflect this wider culture of support, with teams and individuals recording strong results during the 2025 season.

MU Soccer

It was a strong year in soccer, with success across men's and women's squads.

Men's Senior Squad:

Progressed to the CUFL semi-final following an unbeaten group stage and in February 2026, the squad successfully retained the Irish Universities Football Union Collingwood Cup, securing back-to-back titles following a three-day tournament hosted at the University of Limerick's Jackman Park from February 16-18.

Women's Senior Squad:

Crowned CUFL Premier Division Champions, defeating SETU Carlow on penalties after a 0–0 draw in the final. The team recorded emphatic wins throughout the competition and also reached the Kelly Cup semi-final earlier in the year.

Men's Fresher A Squad:

Won the CUFL Division 3 Championship and reached the Harding Cup Final, hosted at MU.

International representation:

Daragh Murtagh, Osaze Irkue and Andrew Stuart Trainor were selected for the Third-Level International Men's Squad, while first-year scholars Taylor McCarthy and Sorcha Melia represented Ireland at U19 level.

MU senior men's soccer squad celebrating their Collingwood Cup win

Stuart Grehan with the Irish Men's Close Championship trophy, 2025

Golf

Golf produced notable achievements from both alumni and current scholars during 2025.

Stuart Grehan (Entrepreneurship, 2017):

Named Irish Men's Amateur of the Year after winning both the Irish Men's Amateur Open Championship and the Irish Men's Close Championship, and representing Great Britain & Ireland in the Walker Cup at Cypress Point.

International competition:

MU scholars competed in the Pan Pacific University Golf Super League in Tokyo, with Aodhagan Brady finishing tied third individually.

Intervarsity success:

MU golfers secured team and individual titles at the Irish Intervarsity Championships, continuing a strong domestic record.

Individual honours:

Anna Dawson was named Ireland Women's Amateur of the Year, while both Anna Dawson and Anna Abom were selected for Golf Ireland's Women's High Performance Squad.

GAA

GAA remained a major part of sporting life at MU, with success across ladies football, camogie, hurling and men's football.

Ladies Senior Football:

Won the Division 2 League, defeating ATU Donegal 3–12 to 1–08 in the final, reflecting the continued strength of ladies football at MU.

Fresher Camogie:

Won the Fresher Camogie All-Ireland Blitz, marking a standout achievement at fresher level.

League campaigns:

MU teams reached the latter stages of several Division One competitions across football, camogie and hurling.

Participation:

During Semester One, the MU GAA Club fielded 16 teams with 635 registered members. Teams completed 137 training sessions and played 114 competitive matches, highlighting the scale of GAA activity on campus.

Ladies Division 2 League final or Fresher Camogie Blitz

Rugby

MU Barnhall poised for promotion

Led by Rugby Officer Thomas McKeown and Director of Rugby Sam Cawley, the MU Barnhall Rugby Academy now includes 68 students, among them 17 female scholars. The women's team has enjoyed an outstanding season in the Leinster League Division 1, recording nine wins and one draw and securing the Energia All-Ireland Junior Cup for a fourth consecutive year, underlining growing ambition to reach the senior ranks of the Women's All-Ireland League.

At under-20 level, most academy players compete across MU Barnhall's two teams in Leinster Rugby's highly competitive JP Fanagan League. Having progressed from earlier struggles in Premier 2, the side now sits among the leaders in Premier 1, with a record of nine wins and two losses, marking significant development for both club and University.

This progress is also reflected in the performance of the MU Barnhall First XV in the Energia All-Ireland League, where an unbeaten run of 13 wins has placed the team firmly on course for promotion to Division 1B. The selection of Luke Fogarty (2nd year, BSc Economics) and Sean Walsh (2nd year, BA Arts) to the Ireland U20 Six Nations squad further highlights the calibre of talent emerging through the programme.

MU Barnhall U20s in action against Lansdowne during their Premier 1 campaign, February 2026

As a hybrid university–community club, MU Barnhall provides a clear pathway from student sport to lifelong participation, with around 80% of representative players drawn from current students or graduates. For prospective students and young players, the club offers both a place to compete and a lasting connection to MU.

A club for life at MU

Former rugby scholar Rob Holt on MU, Barnhall and staying connected

Rob Holt arrived at Maynooth as a rugby scholar, combining his studies with high-level competition from the outset. More than a decade on, that connection continues through his role as captain of MU Barnhall.

Rob's rugby journey started with Edenderry RFC while he was a student at Maynooth Post Primary School. From there, he progressed through the Leinster underage system, representing Leinster at Under 18, Under 19 and Under 20 level, as well as Ireland at Under 18s.

"The scholarship brought me to Maynooth, but the club kept me involved long after."

During his time at Maynooth, Rob balanced training and competition alongside his academic work, completing both an undergraduate degree and a master's. After graduating, he continued to play with MU Barnhall, becoming one of the longest-serving players in All-Ireland League history. He made his senior debut more than 15 years ago as an 18-year-old school leaver and has since accumulated over 200 first-team appearances in the league.

Maynooth University 2014

Rob Holt

MSc, IT Management

BA, Geography and Business

Former MU rugby scholar, captain of MU Barnhall

Now living locally in Ardclough with his wife Amy and their newborn son Tadgh, Rob remains closely involved with the club. This season, at the time of writing, the MU Barnhall men's first XV sit top of Division 2A, unbeaten after 13 matches, as they work towards promotion to Division 1 for the first time in the club's history.

As a former rugby scholar, Rob came to Maynooth through sport and went on to build a long-term connection with MU Barnhall. His continued involvement reflects a commitment that has lasted well beyond graduation, and he remains a valued part of our community.

Photo: ©Isobel & Roy Walsh/iaw.sportsphotos

Taking the next step

MU student Ellie Brady on study, sport and signing with Collingwood

Ellie Brady has taken a major step in her sporting career after securing a two-year rookie contract with AFLW club Collingwood. A Sports Science student and MU GAA Ladies Football Scholarship recipient, Ellie will move to Melbourne in summer 2026, trading the familiar floodlights of the North Campus GAA pitch for the next stage of her career in Australia.

During her time at Maynooth University, Ellie has been a central figure with the MU Ladies Senior team. She played a key role throughout their Division Two league campaign, which culminated with a Curran Cup final victory over ATU Donegal in December. Before leaving for Australia, she remains firmly focused on finishing her time at MU on a high and has set her sights on helping the team claim this year's Giles Cup.

"My time at MU is a bit part of why I feel ready for what's next."

Ellie's achievements at inter-county level underline the consistency and commitment she has shown throughout her career. She captained the Cavan minor team to All-Ireland success and enjoyed a standout 2025 season with Cavan, winning the Division Three National League and the Ulster Intermediate Championship. Regarded as one of the brightest prospects in Cavan ladies football, she is known for her strong fielding, her impact in both attack and defence, and the standards she brings to every training session and match.

Ellie Brady

BSc Sport Science and Health

Current MU Student and MU GAA Ladies Football Scholarship recipient

As an MU scholarship athlete, Ellie balanced the demands of study and sport over several seasons. Her move to Collingwood reflects the work she has put in over many years, and it's one the MU community will follow with pride.

Thanks to Paul Davis, Jenny Duffy, Thomas Mckeown, Barry Prenderville, Barry Fennelly, student run committees supported by Mary MacCourt and Mary Banahan in the Clubs and Societies Office, and all the coaches and support staff for their leadership and hard work in supporting these achievements, as well as bringing sport to our students and staff.

Reaching for the stars

MU grad at the forefront of global astronomy

Matthew Birney

BSc Physics with Astrophysics, PhD

Postdoctoral Researcher at the European Southern Observatory (ESO)

Matthew Birney is a postdoctoral researcher at the European Southern Observatory (ESO) in Germany, an organisation that brings together scientists, astronomers and engineers from across the globe to explore the secrets of the Universe by designing, building and operating world-class observatories.

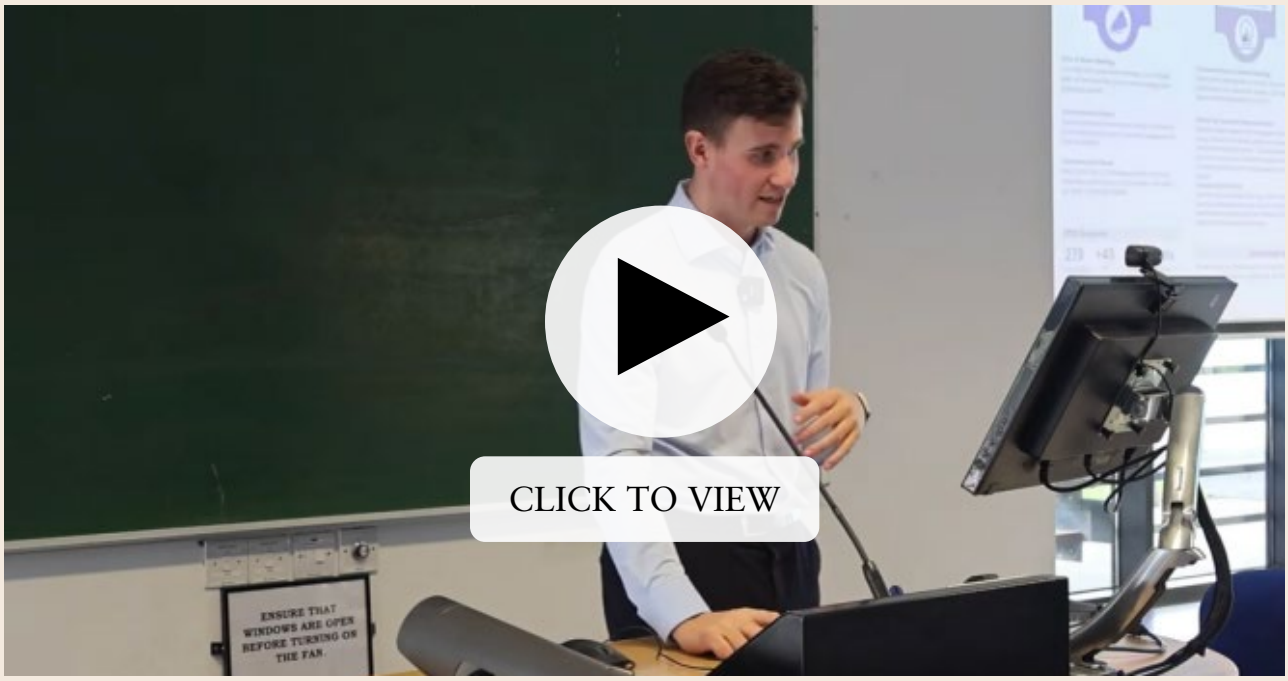
ESO is currently constructing the Extremely Large Telescope (that's its real name!) in Chile, the largest telescope ever built - taller and wider than the Colosseum in Rome. Matthew's research focuses on observational star formation.

This fascination with space began during Matthew's teenage years. He wanted to be a physicist and was drawn to space science. MU stood out because of its highly reputable Physics with Astrophysics programme. Recommendations from friends and family, combined with the welcoming environment of a smaller university town "where people really get to know one another and build long-lasting friendships," helped cement his decision.

Matthew quickly immersed himself in campus life. Living on campus fostered close friendships, while staff in the Science and Mathematics departments were welcoming and enthusiastic. Engaging in clubs and societies offered further opportunities to learn beyond the classroom.

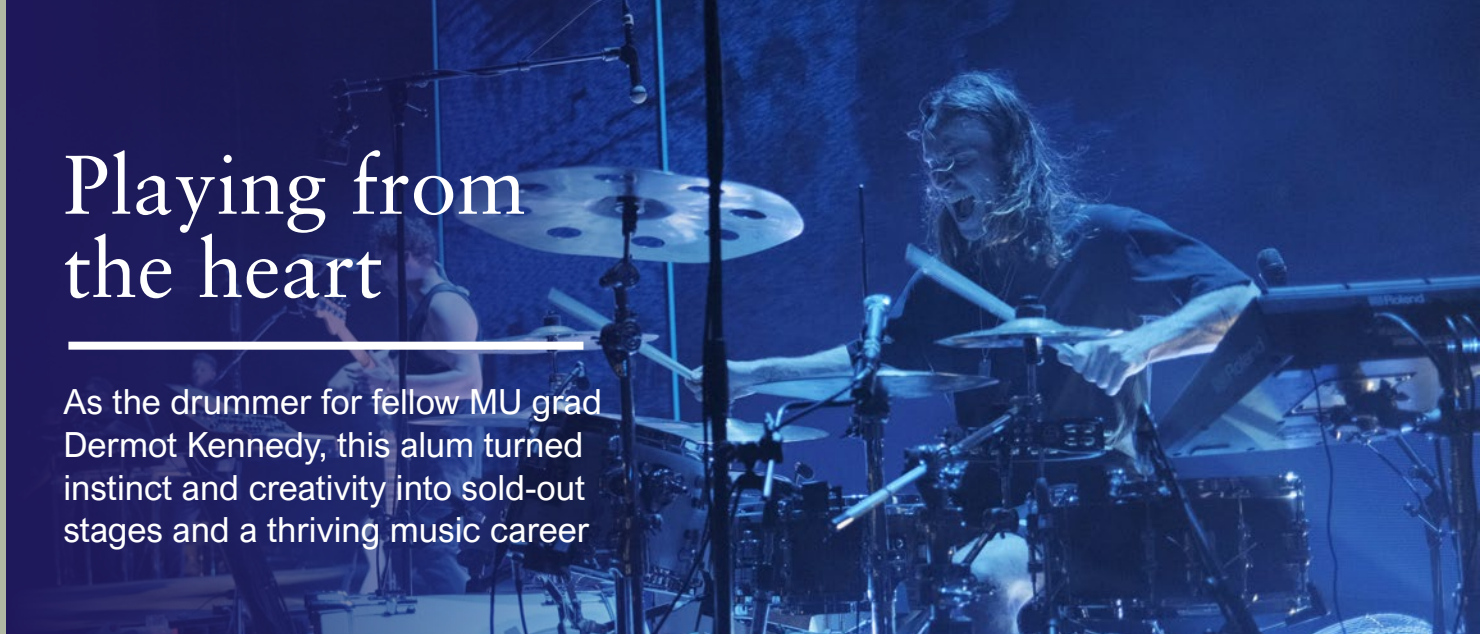
Matthew graduated in 2020 with a BSc in Physics with Astrophysics, graduating at the top of his class. He was awarded the Nicholas Callan Memorial Prize and the IOP Earnshaw Award 2020 for the best undergraduate physics thesis in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

A PhD was calling his name, so Matthew explored high-energy astrophysics while gaining valuable teaching experience through undergraduate labs, lecturing, and exam correction. He published new research, collaborated with international institutes, and attended conferences worldwide. Matthew participated in outreach events such as MU's Space Science Week, hosted lab demonstrations and observation nights, and enjoyed inspiring younger audiences. He says these years offered his first real immersion in astrophysics research, work that closely reflects his day-to-day role now.



Careers with Classics

On 17 September, the fifth edition of Careers with Classics was hosted by the Department of Ancient Classics and the Employability Service in the Arts Annex. This initiative, designed to bridge the gap between third level institutions and secondary schools, was launched in 2021 with the goal of showcasing the broad range of professional paths that are open to a Classics graduate. This year we welcomed Maynooth Classics graduates Niamh FitzGerald (MU Development and Alumni Office), Ruth O' Hara (MU Library) and Sean Hodgins (Goodbody), as well as international graduates Sarah Coviello (Russborough House) and Leonardo Biagini (National Library of Ireland), who shared their professional experience with pupils, teachers and guidance counsellors from Wexford CBS, Bremore Educate Together Balbriggan, and Loreto Abbey Secondary School only to name a few.



Playing from the heart

As the drummer for fellow MU grad Dermot Kennedy, this alum turned instinct and creativity into sold-out stages and a thriving music career

Music has always been an integral part of alum Micheál Quinn's life. From early childhood memories of AC/DC blasting through the car stereo in the back seat of his parents' car, to the towering double bass of his Mount Temple School music teacher, Mr. McKenzie - music made a lasting impression on him.

Memories of his first experiences playing music remain tangible. He vividly remembers the sensation of playing the piano during his first music lessons, recalling how the "the physical feeling of pressing the keys stayed with me more than the sound itself."

It was the freedom he found in drumming that would define his relationship with music. Drumming allowed him to play along with any song instinctively, without needing to learn it note by note. By his early teens, Micheál was deeply absorbed in rock albums and bands. He noticed that every band he admired had a drummer and that being one himself was the path he should follow.

By the time he finished secondary school, his understanding of drumming had deepened, and with his skills and dedication steadily growing, the idea of pursuing a career as a drummer no longer seemed far-fetched. Encouraged by his parents to seek a formal musical education, he chose MU's BMus degree for its diverse curriculum.

His MU classmates had a huge impact on him. He formed the experimental electronic post-rock band Meltybrains?, known for their energetic live shows, with fellow MU music students. In his first few weeks of college, sitting beside each other in choir, Micheál met a soon-to-be globally famous Dermot Kennedy - now one of Ireland's most successful singer-songwriters. They hit it off immediately and within days, the pair were at Micheál's parents' house, with Dermot's brand-new guitar and amplifier in tow, playing his songs together.

"I knew from the moment I heard his first song that his voice was something special," Micheál recalls. "He sang from his soul, and I play drums from mine. From that moment, I allowed myself to dream… and that dream came true."

Their connection has endured, with Micheál drumming alongside Dermot for much of his professional career.

Although rewarding, the life of a touring musician comes with challenges. With relentless demands and little time for personal wellbeing, pressures that can often lead to breakdowns. Micheál believes that nervous system regulation is key to keeping up with the pace. His pre-show ritual grounds him: playing along to music, mostly hip-hop, on a practice pad kit, followed by stretches to get his heart pumping, and then back to the kit until it's time to go on stage.

Reflecting on performing to a packed venue, he says: "Being the drummer in a sea of people, and knowing that when my foot hits the kick drum or I strike the snare with all my might, everyone around feels it, is a powerful space to be in."

Outside of drumming, Micheál has many creative pursuits, including electronic music, painting, and visual art, and he runs his own small clothing brand, Yo Buddy What's Up. Over the years, he has played with countless other acts. In 2014, he joined Irish post-rock legends Enemies - touring and recording with them and contributing to their third and final album, Valuables. In 2018, his work with Dermot Kennedy gained momentum, dominating much of his life over the next seven years. During breaks, he lived in Venice Beach, California, soaking up creative influences, and recently he returned to Ireland, playing with iconic post-rock band And So I Watch You From Afar and auditioning for major American rock acts.

For Micheál, home exists in multiple places: in the center of his chest, on a drum stool, and in quiet moments when he reconnects with his inner world. It's in meditation, the pause between life's hectic experiences. Being from Ireland often makes him feel like an outsider, especially in touring circuits dominated by American and UK musicians, but he takes immense pride in his heritage, particularly in extraordinary situations.

Dedication, obsession, and love have been central to his success. "No matter what you want to do, if you give it your all, you will see positive results," he says. "You have to ask yourself, 'Would I do it if no one ever saw me do it?' You have to answer yes to that question to begin the journey."

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Micheál Quinn

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