



The award-winning newsletter from
students and staff of UCC's Department
of Government and Politics

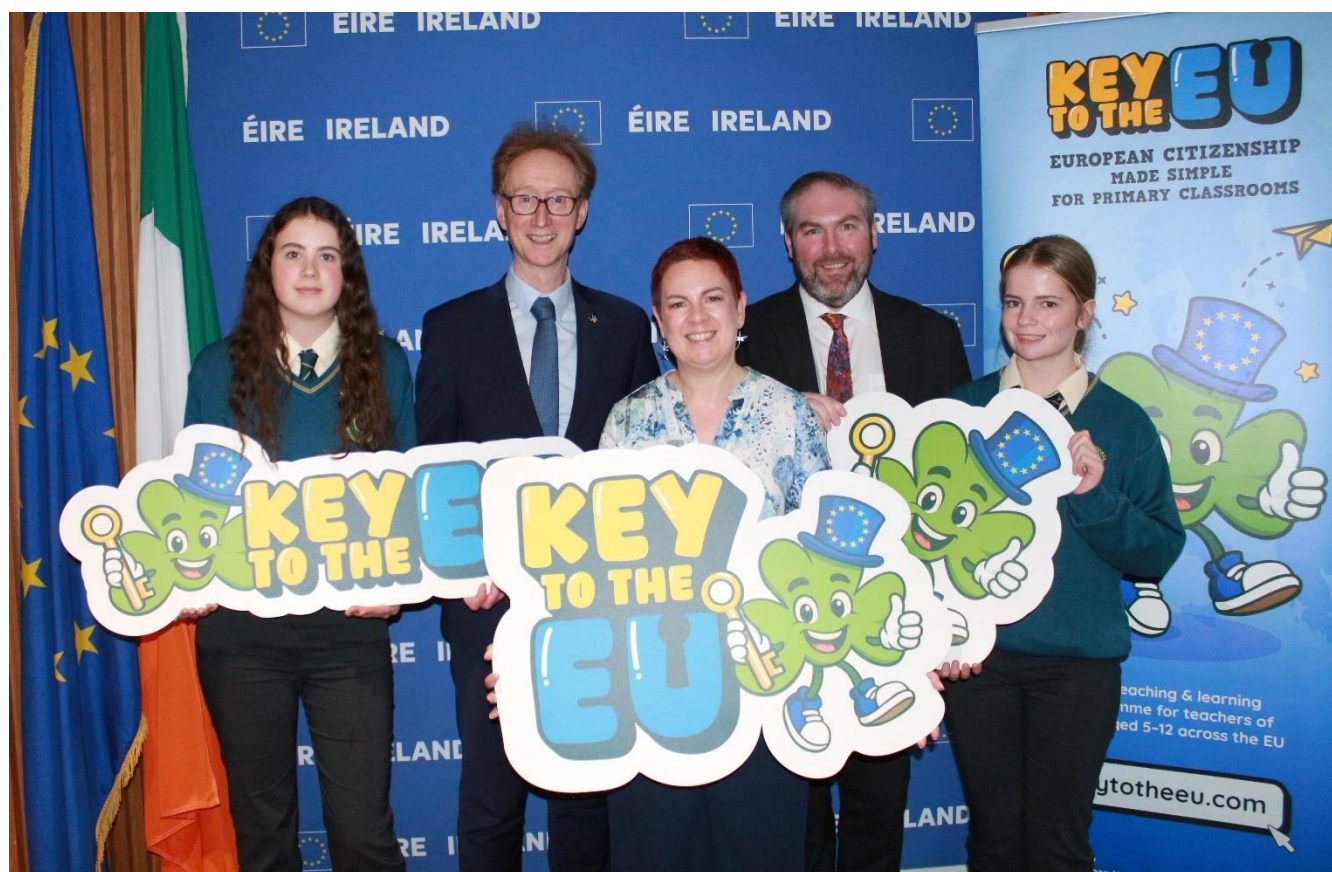
Issue 87, Monday 6 April 2026

**Covering the period from 20 January to
6 April 2026.*

GOVERNMENT TIMES



DOUBLE LAUNCH OF 'KEY TO THE EU' IN CORK AND DUBLIN

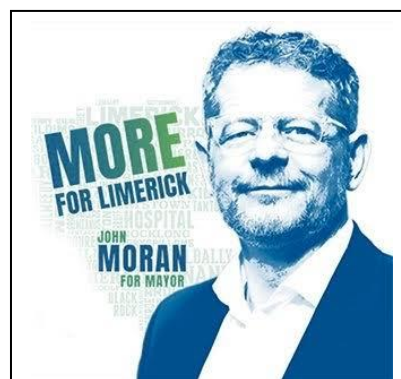


At the Dublin launch of 'Key to the EU' on 5 March - Sarah and Ailsa, Transition Year students in Glanmire Community College; with Fearghas Ó Béara (Head of the European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland), Barry Ward TD (Cathaoirleach of the Committee on European Affairs) and Dr. Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan (Hub in Active European Citizenship, UCC).

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The Limerick Mayoral Model – designed to fail?
See pages 23-25.



It has been another hectic semester for students and staff of UCC's Department of Government and Politics, as captured by Issue 87 of *Government Times*. Our cover story (see also pages 4 and 5) celebrates the launch of the innovative 'Key to the EU' programme which is already having a significant impact in national schools across Ireland and Europe. The programme provides teachers with everything they need to bring active European citizenship to life in their classrooms - lesson slides, lesson plans with curriculum links, printable resources, short videos, and even online games. Across this 42-page issue, we also reflect on the wonderful Philip Monahan Memorial Lecture 2026 delivered by Nicola Sturgeon, and we congratulate our various student award winners. Our Government and Politics Society have been very busy, with a successful Annual Ball, a trip to the national parliament, and hosting the visit of former President, Dr. Mary McAleese. Additionally, we have two interviews as part of the 'Ahern Files' series – with Dr. Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan and Senator Garret Kelleher (an alumnus of our department). Enjoy Issue 87!

***Government Times* is a joint collaboration between students and staff. Therefore we encourage students of the Department of Government and Politics to get actively involved.**

Please e-mail a.quinlivan@ucc.ie with any ideas you might have.

Issue 88 of *Government Times* will be published in the autumn of 2026.



***Dr. Aodh Quinlivan (Department of Government and Politics) and Hugh Ahern (BSc Government and Political Science, First Year) are the editors of *Government Times* for the 2025/2026 academic year.**

COVER STORY



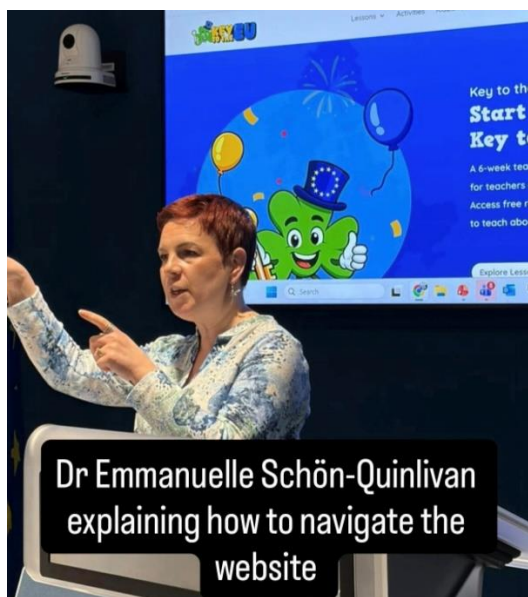
What does it mean to be a citizen of the European Union? And how do you teach that meaningfully to a five-year-old — or a twelve-year-old? *Key to the EU* (www.keytotheeu.com) is a free six-week teaching and learning programme, innovative and engaging, designed to answer exactly that question. Created by **Dr Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan** (UCC) and primary school principal **Trish Collier**, the programme gives teachers across Europe everything they need to bring active European citizenship to life in their classrooms — lesson slides, lesson plans with curriculum links, printable resources, short videos, and even online games for pupils. All free. All ready to use.



At the Cork launch in UCC on 4 March - Edmond Hussey (Director of Cork Education Support Centre) Councillor Dan Boyle (deputising for the Lord Mayor), Dr. Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan, Trish Collier (Principal of Kilmurry National School), Holly Dwyer (5th class teacher in Rochestown Educate Together school), and Senator Garret Kelleher.

What makes *Key to the EU* stand out is its philosophy: it's not about promoting the EU — it's about understanding and questioning it, empowering students to make their voices heard. It replaces *My Big Friendly Guide to the European Union* as Ireland is about to take on the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Given the economic, environmental and geopolitical context, young people in Ireland need more than ever to understand the rights and responsibilities that living in the EU grants them. This new programme includes many more functionalities when it comes to activities with the option of filtering according to time, class level and topic.



Dr. Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan (left) and Trish Collier (right) speaking at the respective launches.

Grounded in competence-based approaches to citizenship education and aligned with the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), the programme moves deliberately beyond civic knowledge transmission. Its explicit aim is to foster the critical thinking, deliberative skills, and participatory dispositions that underpin meaningful democratic engagement — empowering students to question the EU, not simply celebrate it. A section of the website focuses on creating ad hoc projects that put into practice the Laura Lundy model and give an influence to children when it comes to their civic engagement.

Crucially, the programme addresses a persistent gap in European civic education: it frames European citizenship education as relevant to all people living in the EU, regardless of passport or nationality. Key to the EU recognises that European citizenship education requires both powerful knowledge and agonistic deliberative skills which allow for conflict to be dealt within the democratic forum of the classroom rather than the yard. In providing teaching resources and tailor-made activities, it aims to support teachers in delivering impactful citizenship education.

If you are interested in the programme, register your interest on our website: www.keytottheeu.com





EUROPEAN COMMISSION ADVISORY BOARD APPOINTMENT

On foot of her work since 2017 on active European citizenship education, **Dr. Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan** has been invited by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) to join the Advisory Board of the project "**Enhancing Democratic Citizenship Education: Supporting Member States with Resources and Tools.**"

This 14-month (*January 2026–March 2027*) project supports the implementation of the 2023 Council conclusions on strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship. The project aims to deliver two interconnected outputs:

- **EU-level Guidelines on Democratic Citizenship Education**, addressing pedagogy, curriculum content, assessment, teacher education, and whole-school approaches, among others.
- **An EU Competence Framework on the European Dimension of Citizenship Education**, building on the Council of Europe's RFCDC and (possibly) aligning with the wider EU Competence Framework family.



The work responds to growing concerns about democratic resilience, disinformation, declining trust in institutions, and uneven implementation of citizenship education across Member States, among others. The project is led by a multi-disciplinary team with strong expertise in democratic citizenship education (its various strands), competence frameworks (including RFCDC), and stakeholder engagement.

The Advisory Board will consist of around 15 members representing research, policy, practice, civil society and international organisations. Its role is to act as a **strategic sounding board and critical friend**, ensuring:

- Conceptual clarity regarding the ‘EU dimension’ of citizenship education and broader aspects of democratic citizenship education
- Coherence and complementarity with existing frameworks (RFCDC in particular)
- Policy relevance and practical feasibility for Member States
- Credibility and legitimacy among key stakeholder communities, by helping us make sure that the framework (1) resonates with learners, teachers, school leaders and families, (2) is sensitive to diverse political and cultural contexts, and (3) is perceived as pedagogically meaningful and balanced.
- Relevance and usefulness of wider consultations (with research, policy, practice, youth, etc.) planned in the course of the project. - by advising on which stakeholder groups to prioritise, which contested questions require deeper exploration, and how to ensure that inputs from research, policy, practice and youth consultations are meaningfully reflected in the final Guidelines and Framework.

‘It is a tremendous honour to be invited to become a member of this prestigious Advisory Board. I am very much looking forward to contributing to defining EU-tailored standards for citizenship education’ – **Dr. Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan.**

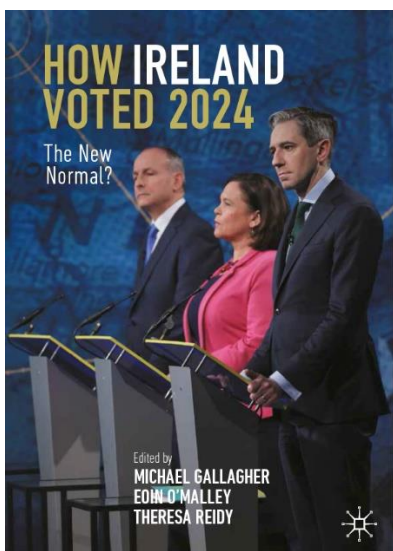




Launch of **HOW IRELAND VOTED: THE NEW NORMAL?**



Hodges Figgis in Dublin was the venue for the launch of *How Ireland Voted 2024: The New Normal?* on Wednesday 21 January. This is the tenth edition in the popular series, and it makes such a great contribution to our understanding of politics. The 2024 edition of posits the question are the results of the latest election the new normal? It seeks to answer this question with analysis of voting behaviour, gender quotas, and government formation. The books editors are **Theresa Reidy** (UCC), Michael Gallagher (TCD) and Eoin O'Malley (DCU). Pat Leahy of *The Irish Times* launched the book to a large and enthusiastic audience.



Congratulations to Theresa!

As well as co-editing the book, Theresa contributed a chapter entitled: 'Candidate Selection: Many, Many More of the Same Kinds of Candidates' (pp. 67-98). Pictures above: Theresa speaking at the launch of the book; with her co-editors and Shane Moynihan TD.



POLICY, POWER AND PARTICIPATION: WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN IRISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Aodh Quinlivan
Research Seminar
Tuesday 27 January 2026



The first Department and Government and Politics research seminar of 2026 was held on Tuesday 27 January. **Dr. Aodh Quinlivan** addressed the topic *'Policy, Power, and Participation: Women's Representation in Irish Local Government'*. This presentation examined the history of female representation in Irish local government and discussed current trends and policies.



'We cannot be complacent in our belief that there is no electoral bias against woman; it is a statement that needs to be constantly interrogated. In 1999, 12% of the candidates for election to Cork Corporation were women; they claimed 13% of the council seats. In 2024, 36% of the candidates were women, but they only took 16% of the seats.'

CLRG partners with the LGIU



At the end of January, **Dr. Aodh Quinlivan** (Director of the CLRG) hosted a visit from Jon Gleek (Head of Research) and his colleague Dan Godley (Senior Researcher) from the UK's Local Government Information Unit (LGIU). The LGIU is an independent, not-for-profit membership organisation working to make local democracy around the world collectively stronger, through shared ideas, resources and connections for local government. Founded in 1983 by councils in England, the LGIU has member organisations – including local government, academic institutions, third-sector organisations and other stakeholders – across the UK, Ireland and Australia. The discussions at UCC focused on developing a research capability and capacity for local government in the South-West of Ireland, with a focus on Cork City Council, Cork County Council, and Kerry County Council. A pilot programme is being developed with the input of the three councils, an academic oversight group, and an oversight and monitoring steering group, including current and former Chief Executives.

WATCH THIS SPACE!



BSc Government Graduate Appointed Vice-President of the Bank of America



Patrick Barr graduated with a BSc Government (and Political Science) from UCC in 2009. He then remained in UCC to complete a Masters in Planning and Sustainable Development. Following spells with Sun Life Financial (2012-2014) and State Street (2015-2017), Patrick took up a position as a Senior Tax Analyst with Merrill Lynch. He stayed with Merrill Lynch from 2017 to February 2026.

Last month, Patrick was appointed as a Vice-President with the Bank of America, in the area of Tax Operations.

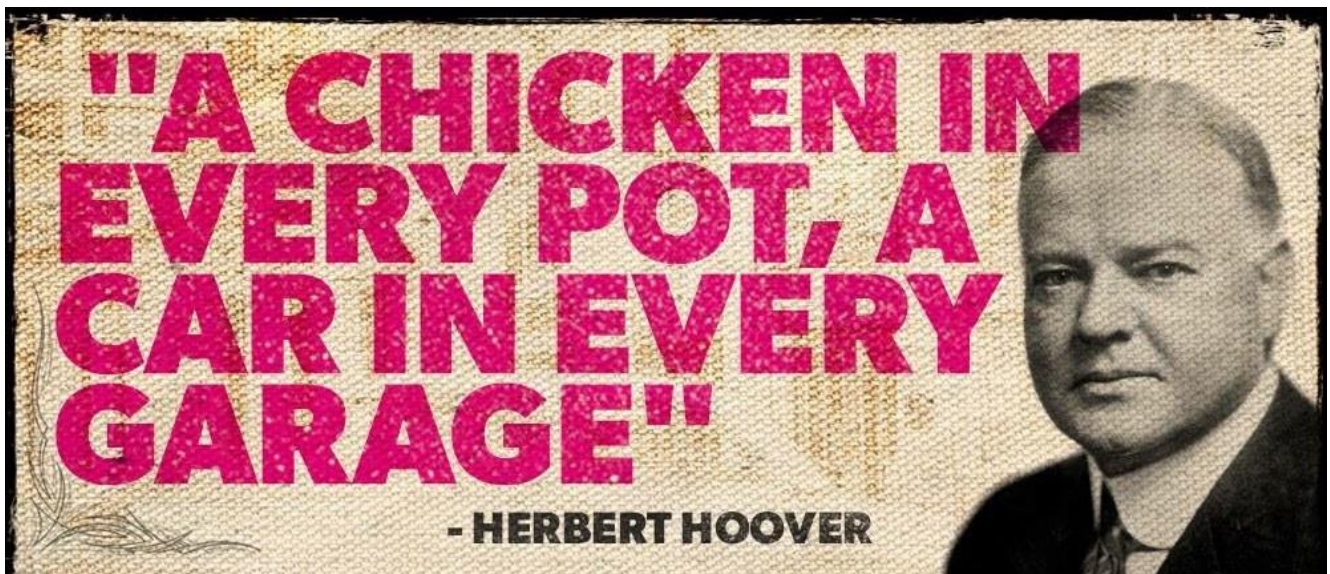
Bank of America is one of the world's largest financial institutions, serving individuals, small- and middle-market businesses and large corporations with a full range of banking, investing, asset management and other financial and risk management products and services. The company serves approximately 56 million U.S. consumer and small business relationships. It is among the world's leading wealth management companies and is a global leader in corporate and investment banking and trading.

Congratulations Patrick – best wishes for your new role.

SEE MORE GRADUATE PROFILES ON PAGES 27 & 28.



LATEST EPISODE OF 'A CHICKEN IN EVERY POT' PODCAST - TRUMP GOES TO WAR



The latest episode of the podcast 'A Chicken in Every Pot' was released on 19 March. UCC's **Dr. Clodagh Harrington** (who teaches History and Politics) and her co-host, Dr. Alex Wadden (University of Leicester), were joined by Professor Scott Lucas (Professor of American Politics, University of Birmingham, and the UCD Clinton Institute) to place the US-Iran war in a broader context.

The episode, entitled 'Trump goes to War' is available through Spotify at the link below.

<https://creators.spotify.com/pod/profile/alex-waddan/episodes/Trump-Goes-to-War-e3gm5jp>

PHILIP MONAHAN MEMORIAL LECTURE 2026

Former First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon delivered the 26th Annual Philip Monahan Memorial Lecture at University College Cork on Monday 9 March, reflecting on her career in public service and the challenges facing modern democracy. Hosted by UCC's Department of Government and Politics, the annual lecture invites leading voices in politics and public life to share insights on contemporary political issues, leadership and governance. Drawing from her acclaimed memoir *Frankly*, Sturgeon reflected on the motivations that shaped her political career, the realities of leadership, and the pressures facing democracy in uncertain times.



She addressed the growing influence of misinformation and disinformation in politics, the impact of social media on public debate, and rising political polarisation, emphasising the importance of trust, transparency and evidence-based decision-making in public life. She also considered the wider international context, including geopolitical instability and conflict, and the challenges leaders face in communicating complex policy decisions to an increasingly fragmented public sphere. Sturgeon further reflected on significant constitutional change may lie ahead, predicting that Scotland could become independent as part of a broader 'shake-up' in how the UK is governed, pointed to the potential for further devolution in Wales and growing discussion around Irish reunification.

Dr Liam Weeks, Head of UCC Department of Government and Politics, said: ‘It was a privilege to welcome Nicola Sturgeon to UCC to deliver this year’s Philip Monahan Memorial Lecture. As a political leader who has played a central role in shaping public debate, she brought valuable insight into the realities of leadership, democratic responsibility and public service at a time when democratic institutions face increasing pressure. Her reflections offered powerful and thought-provoking perspectives for our current and prospective students.’



As the Head of the Department of Government and Politics, Dr. Liam Weeks chaired the proceedings; Alice Bogue (Chair of the Government and Politics Society) introduced Nicola Sturgeon.

The Philip Monahan Memorial Lecture honours the legacy of Philip Monahan, widely regarded as a pioneer of modern public administration in Ireland. Monahan served as Cork’s City Commissioner and later City Manager from 1924 to 1959, playing a central role in shaping local government and public administration in the early decades of the State.

As part of the event, awards were presented to UCC’s Government and Political Science BSc students and UCC Arts-Politics BA students in recognition of their academic achievements.

The award recipients were:

- Tom Whalen BSc Student of Year: Rory Reen
- Dick Haslam BSc Graduate of Year: Ognjen Uzelac
- BA Politics First Year: Tadhg Holland
- BA Politics Second Year: Samuel Foody
- BA Politics Final Year: Róisín Therese O’Connor
- BA Politics Dissertation Award: Róisín Therese O’Connor
- Patrick O’Sullivan Essay: Maria Grant
- IPPD Student of Year: Aoife Power
- Active Citizenship Prize: Aoibhe Cubie (St. Al’s)



Award Winners (top row, left to right) – Rory Reen, Ognjen Uzelac and Tadhg Holland.

Award Winners (middle row, left to right) – Samuel Foody and Róisín Therese O'Connor.

Award Winners (bottom row, left to right) – Maria Grant, Aoife Power and Aoibhe Cubie.

Dr Aodh Quinlivan, UCC Department of Government and Politics, said:

‘Our students bring a remarkable range of interests, perspectives and experiences to the study of politics, and they are never afraid to ask difficult questions or challenge accepted ideas. That culture of curiosity, rigorous debate and critical thinking is exactly what our programmes are designed to foster. It is also fundamental to the health of any democracy. We are extremely proud of the commitment, insight and energy our students bring to their studies.’

An abridged version of Nicola Sturgeon's lecture

(For a copy of the full lecture, please e-mail a.quinlivan@ucc.ie).

Looking back over the span of my political career, it is mind-blowing to think of the communication revolution that has taken place. Of course, in many ways this has been hugely positive. But the impact on political decision-making has been, in my view, more bad than good. I am definitely about to highlight my age here, but I vividly remember the day – in the late 80s – when the SNP got its first fax machine. Before then, news releases had to be posted out. Suddenly they could be dispatched on a same day basis - even if, in those days, if a release was being sent to 50 media outlets, the same piece of paper had to be fed into the machine 50 times! Still, it seemed transformational – and at the time it was. It would have been hard to imagine today's reality of information being communicated and published in mere seconds. And as the pace of communication has accelerated, the length of the news cycle has shortened. In fact, there isn't really a news cycle anymore – news is continuous, never-ending. In my early days in politics, there were still only four TV channels. Papers came out in the mornings – and a couple in the evening. News bulletins were three times a day. It was the gaps in between that gave politicians the time to think properly about how to respond to a story. There is no time to think today. When a story breaks on social media, you probably have half an hour at most to respond before you are accused of dithering.



This is not good for the quality of decision-making. Nor is the way in which technology has obliterated the space for nuance in political communication. Returning to my reminiscences of the olden times – I remember when it was the 20 sec TV sound bite, perfected back in the day by Tony Blair, that was said to be distorting debate. Now we measure our responses not in seconds, but in characters. Even the most complex issues have to be boiled down into a couple of sentences – and these sentences have to be couched in the most sensational terms possible if they have any hope of getting attention. All of this is contributing to the erosion of trust in the democratic system. Technology has also changed – fundamentally so – how we interact with each other as human beings. The hours we spend staring at screens is making us much less social – and research show, much less likely to trust each other. And having captured our attention, the social media companies use algorithms to drive us into tribes, feed us with information that reinforces our own views rather than challenge them. They manipulate our emotions and make us angry. Populist politicians and mercenary big tech companies are certainly causes of the problems the world is facing today. But that is an analysis that only takes us so far. The harder fact to confront is this one. Politicians who are committed to liberal democracy haven't been doing enough to fight for it or to prove its worth. For those of us – still in the majority, thankfully - who do care about nurturing a healthy democracy, the current moment is posing challenges that we are not yet rising to. The most pressing question, then, is what to do about it.

I don't pretend to have all the answers, but I do want to offer some thoughts - from my new, and undoubtedly easier, perspective as someone on the way out of politics – on how these challenges can be better met. First, we need to better understand the changed and changing nature of politics. Politics is no longer just a battle between various parties with different outlooks and ideologies, but all fundamentally committed to democracy and to the norms and traditions on which it depends. Politics today – globally - is also a battle between forces committed to democracy and those that are not. That means that for all the disagreements that exist between established parties – and no matter how important it IS in a democracy to debate these robustly – we also need at this moment in history to remember and give some priority to working together to protect the democratic principles which unite us. That is not comfortable territory for politicians, but it is vital. Second, we must guard against being the unintentional accomplices of those who want to drag democracy down. It is very tempting to adopt an attitude of ‘well, if they don't abide by the rules, neither will we’. Or – and I have fallen foul of this myself – ‘if they hurl abuse at me, I'll hurl it straight back’. These attitudes simply take us all on a downward spiral. Ultimately, they suit the purposes only of those who want people to lose faith in democracy. Third – and, in my view, this is the most pressing point of all – it is not enough to simply deride the populists. We must acknowledge and effectively address the question of why so many more people than ever before are opening their ears to what the populists have to say. Remember the old Churchillian adage? Democracy is the worst form of government except for all the other forms. For a long time, simple assertion of that truth was sufficient. No more. There is polling evidence aplenty – certainly in the UK – that while nowhere near a majority, there is now a growing number of people, especially young people, who do not believe that democracy is the best form of governance; they believe, instead, that it is the autocratic, strong man, breed of leader which is more capable of getting things done. It is an updated version of the grim, old, unfunny joke that at least Mussolini made the trains run on time.

It is no longer good enough for any politician to assert the merits of liberal democracy in rhetoric. It is vital and urgent to, firstly, to make and win the principled argument for it. Too many centre left politicians today seem scared of their own shadow. And secondly, the worth of democracy has to be demonstrated in practice. The hard truth of the matter is that none of us – and I include myself during my time as FM in this criticism – have been or are doing any of that effectively enough.

Scotland will be independent. Wales will be more autonomous, possibly independent. The north and south of Ireland will be united again which means the north will no longer be part of the UK. And of course all of this will make England independent too. The relationships between all these countries will continue to be extremely close and intertwined but the wiring between them will be different. Different and better. Some of the trends driving this have deep historical roots. A reality that is – understandably – not always well understood in other countries is that the UK is not a unitary state but a construct of four distinct and separate countries – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



‘Scotland will be independent ... Brexit has illustrated the structural flaw at the heart of the UK – the imbalance between England and the other three countries, which leads to a deep democratic deficit.’

Wales joined with England in 1536. Scotland – formerly an independent country – became part of the UK in 1707 – and came very close to reclaiming its independence in the referendum of 2014. And, of course, Northern Ireland stayed with the UK when the Irish Free State was established. There are strong ties that bind the four nations of the UK – a strong, shared sense of British identity. But each of the four countries has a very strong national identity of its own. And that can and does give rise to different views and at times tensions about the direction the UK should be going in. Now that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have parliaments of our own with powers over significant but not all aspects of governance – that has become more pronounced. And recent developments have accentuated that. Brexit is very much at the heart of it. While the factors driving what I believe will be the break-up of the UK as currently constituted are many, Brexit is the factor which has accelerated the process – and in my view rendered it all but inevitable. Broadly speaking, the Brexit effect has operated in two ways. First, it has made us poorer. Many of the economic and fiscal problems afflicting the UK today are down to Brexit. Secondly, and more pertinently for the purposes of my remarks today, Brexit has illustrated the structural flaw at the heart of the UK – which is the imbalance between England and the other three countries, which leads to a deep democratic deficit. To put it bluntly, England – because of its size – can outvote Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

That has often meant one or more of the three smaller countries have ended up with governments we didn't vote for. For example, not once in my life has Scotland voted – even by a plurality – for the Conservatives. And yet for very significant periods of my life we have had Conservative governments – because that is what England has chosen. I came of age when Margaret Thatcher was PM and doing real economic damage to Scotland even though we had never voted for her. But for all that this has led to tension, it has been Brexit that has truly illustrated the democratic deficit. In the referendum of 2016, Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU. So did Northern Ireland. And yet we lost EU membership because England voted to leave. Even if Wales – which voted narrowly to leave – had chosen to remain, England's view would still have prevailed. In a nutshell then, from a Scottish perspective, which is what I know best, it became crystal clear that – as part of the UK – Scotland does not control its own destiny.

THANK YOU TO OUR MARVELLOUS STUDENT HELPERS WHO DID SUCH A GREAT JOB TO ENSURE THAT #MONAHAN26 RAN SMOOTHLY.





ANNUAL BALL

This year's annual society ball - held in collaboration with the Economics and WIBL Societies – was held on Wednesday 28 January and proved to be another resounding success. Themed *A Night in the Big House*, the event drew inspiration from the recent presidential election, offering 200 guests an immersive and memorable evening of electoral celebration, incorporating voting, brown envelopes, and all the drama that entails. Held at the Metropole Hotel, the evening brought together students from the political, economic and business programmes, with brilliant music provided by BABYRAT and DJ Rowan Meegan.



VISIT TO DÁIL ÉIREANN

Twenty Members of the Government and Politics Society visited Leinster House on Tuesday 10 February for an engaging trip to the Dáil. The group had the privilege of observing Leader's Questions, which covered pressing issues such as the cost of living, the detainment of Séamus Culleton, and postnatal care. This was followed by a tour of the historic building and the Seanad. The trip offered a unique insight into the functioning of daily Irish politics, and it was incredible to see strong representation from first and second year Government and Political Science students. Sincere thanks to TD Michael Collins and Valerie Ward for their assistance in making the visit possible.



MARY McALEESE, BUILDING BRIDGES



On Friday 27 February, former President of Ireland, Dr. Mary McAleese, was inducted as Honorary President of the Government and Politics Society.

Professor John O'Halloran opened the event and **Dr. Fiona Buckley** facilitated a conversation with Dr. McAleese.

Congratulations to all involved on a wonderful event.



Hugh Ahern interviews Dr. Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan

What is your role in UCC? I am the Director of the BSC Government and Political Science and am also the Director of the *Hub in Active European Citizenship*. I created the Hub with European Commission funding and – though not necessarily recognised in UCC – it is something that is very important for partnerships on European projects funded by Erasmus. For example, we are currently collaborating on projects in Denmark and France but, ironically, at UCC level the Hub does not have a high profile.

Describe your average day. An average day starts early because as well as being a Senior Lecturer in European Politics, I have four children and it involves some juggling between personal and professional life. When I arrive at the office, I usually answer a lot of e-mails from European partners as we have lots of deadlines on deliverables. What is great about European projects is that they involve a lot of collaboration. So there's a lot of back and forth, but it's fascinating. I also really enjoy my lecturing and fostering some really interesting conversations with students who have a different experience than I have. And then it will involve doing some administrative work, which can be correcting papers or supervising students. I try to wrap up around 5 o'clock and then there is a lot of running around for activities with the children.



Emmanuelle received an
Exceptional Citizen UCC
Staff Award in 2019.

How did you end up in UCC? I had completed my Master's in Edinburgh; my flatmate was from Ireland. She had family in Cork and was visiting them at the turn of the century, literally. We came on 31 December in 1999 ... and I never left Cork after this! At the time, Ireland was in a slightly different position than now. It was just at the rise of the Celtic Tiger, and I walked into UCC with a CV in my hand. The Head of Department, Professor Neil Collins, offered me a job on the spot, to work on a consultancy project.

From there, I was hired as a lecturer on a short-term contract. I then went back to France for a while to commence a PhD which I completed in UCD. At that point, I was rehired in UCC.

What is the biggest achievement of your professional career? I hope I haven't had my biggest achievement yet! My biggest achievement will be to see *Key to the EU* - a primary school programme on active European citizenship - rolled out across Ireland and beyond. This is what I've been working at for 10 years now. I am very proud of having started this idea in 2017 from a very small pot of funding that the European Commission made available. With my colleague, Trish Collier (a primary school principal) we created the *Big Friendly Guide to the European Union* which has now been rebranded as *Key to the EU*. At a European level, we are very well known because we are one of the very few ones, if not the only ones, to have developed a structured programme for the primary school level. So, I'm very proud of what we have done so far, but let's put it this way, I don't think we're done yet, and I'm hoping we're not.



Emmanuelle at the inaugural **Europe Day Festival** in Cork City Hall, May 2023.

Who is your role model? I have a role model politically - Margrethe Vestager who served as the European Commissioner for Competition from 2014 to 2024. I think she is what women in leadership roles should be like. She is the one who took on Apple She's the one who took on Google and Starbucks. She had this idea, which I hugely subscribe to, that the European Union isn't only for big businesses and that it should be there to protect citizens as well. She started in the European Parliament as well, which I acutely admire.

What are you reading and watching now? I've started *Nobody's Girl* by Virginia Giuffre, and I watch a lot of documentaries on Netflix. Students have recently said to me that I am obsessed with current affairs, and it is true that I read as much as I can on current issues, factual articles and opinion pieces. It's very important for me. And my absolute programme that I will listen to every single day is a French programme called *C Dans L'air*. It's been on air for 22 years now, and it has all the best experts on the French scene, from academia, from banking, from economics, from politics etc. etc.

How would you describe politics in one word? The first word that comes to my mind is 'challenging'. Let me change that to 'essential'. Essential because politics is about solving our disagreements through discussion rather than violence. And right now, as Nicola Sturgeon explained at UCC, we are in a period where the bully or the one that shows the greatest force seems to win or have the ascendancy. And this is not actually politics the way we've practised it in our liberal democracies.

WAS THE LIMERICK MAYORAL MODEL DESIGNED TO FAIL?

Dr. Aodh Quinlivan, Centre for Local and Regional Governance

***This opinion piece ran in the *Irish Examiner* on Friday 27 March.**

At present, in 30 of our 31 local authorities, mayors are elected by their fellow councillors to serve for a 12-month period. Mayoral elections are usually pre-determined based on the political power in council chambers, and it is not uncommon for pacts and voting arrangements to be in place. The alternative model of directly elected mayors is an appealing and popular one and is a traditional feature of local government in the US, Canada and Japan. In recent years, directly elected mayors have been introduced as a reform measure in England, Italy, Poland, Hungary and Germany. The core idea is that a mayor would be elected to lead their local authority, voted directly into power by citizens/residents, typically for a five-year term. It is difficult to argue against directly elected mayors on democratic grounds, given that we are talking about electing leaders directly by popular vote. Proponents of this model portray directly elected mayors as being more visible, more accountable, more legitimate and more powerful than any other sorts of local leader. This all sounds eminently sensible, but why has the introduction of directly elected mayors to Irish local government been so problematic?



Aodh Quinlivan speaking at an event in advance of the 2019 mayoral plebiscite in Cork.

It is worth noting that legislation was passed in 2001 to introduce directly elected mayors, for a five-year term, with executive powers from 2004. The 2001 Act was noteworthy for its lack of detail about the precise functions of the mayor and how the office would impinge on the traditional role of the city/county manager (now called chief executive). These issues were never clarified, and, in a dramatic shifting of positions, the government repealed the directly elected mayor proposal two years later. The matter was put on hold until 2007 when a coalition government was formed with Fianna Fáil, the Green Party and the Progressive Democrats. The parties produced a Programme for Government, which pledged to introduce a directly elected mayor for Dublin with executive powers by 2011. By the time the government left office nearly three years later, no legislation had been produced in this regard. It was a further three years before the issue of directly elected mayors came forward again in legislation, this time under Minister Phil Hogan's Local Government Reform Act, 2014. The legislation proposed the holding of a Dublin plebiscite on the issue on the same day as the 2014 local elections. However, the Minister controversially included a provision that each of the four local authorities which constitute the Dublin Metropolitan Area would firstly have to individually adopt a resolution in favour of holding the plebiscite.

The insertion of this veto power for any one of the four Dublin local authorities was a curious move and always had the potential to open the proverbial can of worms. And so it proved. Three of the four Dublin local authorities comfortably adopted resolutions in favour of the plebiscite, but Fingal County Council did not and that was the end of it. That is, until 2019 when it was announced that there would be local plebiscites on the matter in Cork city, Limerick and Waterford, with Dublin to get a Citizens' Assembly as an initial step. Limerick said YES by 52.4% to 47.6% while Cork and Waterford narrowly said NO.



Minister Phil Hogan's half-hearted attempts in 2014 did not lead to a directly elected mayor for Dublin.

The Local Government (Mayor of Limerick) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act was only signed into law in March 2024, and it was announced that the historic election in Limerick would take place on Friday 7 June, coinciding with the local elections. An impressive total of 15 candidates were on the ballot paper, seeking to become the first directly elected mayor in Limerick (and Ireland). Independent candidate and former Department of Finance Secretary General, John Moran, topped the poll with 18,308 first preference votes and was eventually elected after the 12th count.

It has not been smooth sailing for Moran since taking office. At the heart of the problems afflicting the Limerick mayoral experiment are three essential issues – the cautious nature of the legislation, the failure to build relationships, and the weakness of the Irish local government system itself. The Limerick legislation is centred on the establishment of a three-pillar structure comprising the mayor, the elected council and the director general (formerly the chief executive). The reserved functions of the council were not altered, meaning that Moran is answerable to the council. There has been a limited transfer of executive functions from the director general to the mayor. Overall, the legislation is cautious, with the government taking the option of granting limited powers to the mayor that could be reviewed later. Moran has soft powers – for example, the Limerick Mayoral and Government Consultative Forum (established by the legislation) facilitates formal engagement between the mayor and central government by way of regular meetings. Unfortunately, this perpetuates the 'begging bowl' mentality inherent in Irish local government; rather than giving actual powers to the mayor and the council, access has been granted to ask for things from ministers. This is essentially the definition of centralisation. Moran has a mandate but does not have the means to deliver.

The relationship with the council's director general Pat Daly has been difficult – to the extent that Moran alleges that he was 'physically manhandled' by the former chief executive. Equally, there is an obvious jostling for power between the mayor and the councillors. This was exemplified by the fractious council meeting in February when Moran left County Hall, saying that he felt unwell. In his absence, the elected members reconvened at 10.45 p.m. and passed the local authority's corporate plan. The 'co-habitation' between the mayor, councillors and the director general require adaptability from all but, to date, this has not been apparent. Many councillors oppose the concept of directly elected mayors; one obvious reason for this is that it denies five councillors (most likely drawn from the main political parties) having a go at the mayoralty under the traditional system. If a directly elected mayor and the councillors cannot work together, everything falls apart. This happened in recent years in Bristol where councillors felt sidelined and triggered a referendum that saw the role of directly elected mayor scrapped in the city.



John Moran delivering the 2025 Philip Monahan Memorial Lecture at UCC.

Limerick has been afforded a unique opportunity to lead the way and set an example for the rest of the country to follow. However, Limerick is also the guinea pig for a mayoral model that has taken a quarter of a century to implement. This brings pressure and intense scrutiny. As Minette Walters wrote in *The Scold's Bridle*, 'I am only interested in beginnings for there is so much hope at the beginning. The end has no merit but to demonstrate how badly that hope was misplaced.' We may be at the beginning of a new dawn for local government in Ireland or we may be guilty of grafting an unnecessary mayoral layer on top of a weak and dysfunctional system. In 2023, the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities produced a damning report on local democracy in Ireland, citing intense centralisation and tellingly noting: 'There are no signs that central government supervision is about to be relaxed' and 'the range of responsibilities handled under local self-government is clearly fewer than in most European countries.' Until we loosen the vice-like grip of centralisation which continues to suffocate local autonomy, will a directly elected mayor in Limerick really be able to shine and make a meaningful difference?

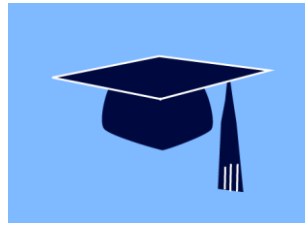
In my view, an urgent review of the Limerick mayoral legislation is needed – we cannot wait until next year. By that point, the Limerick experiment will probably have failed. This will give the government – already showing no enthusiasm or urgency on the issue – an excuse not to proceed with the mayoral model in Dublin or elsewhere.

WORK PLACEMENT STUDENTS THRIVING IN NEW YORK



The Department of Government and Politics at University College Cork (UCC) offers a highly regarded work placement programme, featuring a long-standing partnership with the New York State Legislature in Albany. As part of the **BSc Government and Political Science (CK122)** degree, students in Year 3 can participate in a prestigious 5-month internship in the New York State Assembly or Senate, working directly for Assembly members or Senators. Our current group of students in Albany have settled in well and are greatly enjoying their experiences.

GRADUATE PROFILES



Peter Horgan graduated with a BSc Government degree in 2010, having completed a placement in the New York State Assembly in 2009. He then undertook a Masters in Journalism in Galway before working in the *Munster Express*, *Connacht Tribune* and *Cork Independent*. From 2013 to 2024, Peter worked in Leinster House as a Parliamentary Assistant and Policy Advisor to Deputy Seán Sherlock. In June 2024, he was elected to Cork City Council, representing the South-East Ward of Cork city. He is chair of Transport and Mobility Strategic Policy Committee, a member of the Board of *Visit Cork* and Everyman Palace Theatre and a member of committees on Climate Action, Environment and Water, Finance and Estimates.



Jayne Ronayne graduated with a BSc Government degree in 2012 and then she joined UCC's Ignite programme and started the successful **UrYearBook** company. Her second start-up company was **KonnectAgain** which she co-founded with Helen Flynn, also a UCC graduate. Jayne was the CEO of KonnectAgain and the mission of the company was to provide a new online platform to help both institutions and alumni. Jayne's latest successful start-up company is **OAC Snacks** - <https://oacsnacks.com/>.

GRADUATE PROFILES



Colm Diamond graduated with a BSc Government and Public Policy degree in 2009 and then completed a Masters in Environmental Policy and Regulation at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He started work as a Business Development and Supply Chain Manager at Biossence, a start-up renewable energy company in London. From there, he moved to Zurich to Deloitte. For the last six years, he has worked as a Procurement Team Leader with Roche Global in Switzerland.



Deirdre Kingston graduated with a BSc Government and Public Policy degree in 2005. She later completed an MA in Political and Public Communication at Dublin City University. After a spell in communications at Bank of Ireland, Deirdre spent four years as the Media Officer for Gorta, followed by four years as a parliamentary advisor in Dáil Éireann. She was elected as a councillor to Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council in 2014; during the following years, she combined her elected role with a position as Communications Officer with the Irish Cancer Society. Currently, Deirdre is the Head of Communications and Public Affairs with Statkraft (a leading company in hydropower internationally and Europe's largest generator of renewable energy).



MSc IPPD Alumnus new Head of European Movement Ireland

European Movement Ireland has announced the appointment of David Geary as its new Chief Executive Officer. David brings a wealth of experience in public affairs, communications and European policy to the role. David completed the MSc International Public Policy and Diplomacy in 2011.

He is currently serving as Assistant General Secretary and Director of Communications at the Irish National Teachers' Organisation and is a former President of the Public Relations Institute of Ireland. David previously worked as Deputy Head of EU and International Affairs at the Federation of Small Businesses and also served within the European Movement network, having worked as Communications and Policy Manager with European Movement UK.



In October 2024, David presented Mary Robinson with the President's Medal) awarded by the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII), recognising her social impact and advocacy for justice and climate action.

Following the announcement of his new role, David Geary: 'It is a great privilege to be appointed CEO of European Movement Ireland at such a pivotal time in Europe and as Ireland prepares to assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union later this year. This presents a timely opportunity to broaden and deepen public engagement and strengthen active citizen participation in EU affairs. I am committed to championing a fairer and democratic EU, with economic and social benefits for all, now and into the future.'

Chairperson of European Movement Ireland, Julie Sinnamon stated: 'European Movement Ireland is delighted to have appointed David Geary as our new CEO. David will lead European Movement Ireland at a crucial time as Ireland assumes its eighth EU Presidency amid many geopolitical challenges including Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, heightened concerns about European security and defence and increasingly challenging transatlantic relations.'

THE MSC IN INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY & DIPLOMACY (MSC IPPD) AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK IS AN INNOVATIVE, INTERDISCIPLINARY, TAUGHT MASTER'S COURSE THAT PROVIDES GRADUATES WITH THE EXPERTISE REQUIRED FOR SUCCESSFUL CAREERS IN INTERNATIONAL POLICY ENVIRONMENTS.

OFFERING CORE MODULES FROM GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS, HISTORY, LAW AND FOOD BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT, WE GIVE STUDENTS ACCESS TO EXPERTISE ACROSS A DIVERSE RANGE OF SUBJECTS. THE MSC INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY & DIPLOMACY PROGRAMME IS STRONGLY ORIENTATED TOWARD VOCATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING, THROUGH COURSEWORK AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO UNDERTAKE A WORK PLACEMENT.

THE MSC WILL BE OF INTEREST TO YOU IF YOU ASPIRE TO A CAREER IN, OR ARE ALREADY WORKING IN, DEPARTMENTS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND OTHER GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES, INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL ORGANISATIONS, THE ARMED FORCES, AID AGENCIES, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS, THINK-TANKS, AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESSES.

AS PART OF THIS PROGRAMME STUDENTS MUST COMPLETE A RESEARCH DISSERTATION. SOME STUDENTS WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMPLETE THEIR RESEARCH DISSERTATION IN A WORK PLACEMENT SETTING THAT CAN RANGE IN DURATION FROM THREE TO FIVE MONTHS.

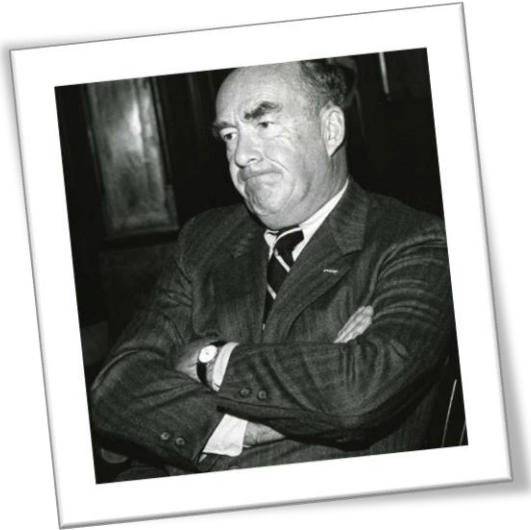
STUDENTS WHO UNDERTAKE A WORK-BASED RESEARCH DISSERTATION, DO SO WITH A VARIETY OF ORGANISATIONS/INSTITUTIONS WORKING IN AREAS RELATED TO INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, SUCH AS GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES, INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS, THE OFFICES OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES, THINK TANKS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS. STUDENTS HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CITIES, SUCH AS BRUSSELS, LONDON, AND WASHINGTON DC, AS WELL AS IN CORK AND DUBLIN.

CHECK OUT -

[HTTPS://WWW.UCC.IE/EN/CKD56/](https://www.ucc.ie/en/ckd56/)

STUDENT AWARDS

On the occasion of our 26th Annual Philip Monahan Memorial Lecture, the Department of Government and Politics student awards were presented for BSc Government and Political Science and BA Politics programmes. Congratulations to the students whose names were added to these prestigious lists.



BSc GOVERNMENT & POLITICAL SCIENCE - THOMAS WHALEN STUDENT OF YEAR AWARD

2000	Holly Hardwicke
2001	Elizabeth Harrington
2002	Peter Ryan
2003	Hannah Lane
2004	Ann-Marie Tierney
2005	Denis Twomey
2006	Andrea Merrigan
2007	Darragh Mehigan
2008	Patrick Higgins
2009	Tracey O'Rourke
2010	John Kenny
2011	Pádraig Mac Consaídn
2012	Louis O'Keeffe
2013	Jack Corbett
2014	Michael Lyons
2015	Richard Creedon
2016	Anja Tossenberger
2017	Lewis O'Shea
2018	Colum Buckley
2019	Luc O'Leary
2020	Sinéad McMahon
2021	Jennifer Flynn
2022	Conor Brennan
2023	Robert Palmer
2024	Cian Walsh
2025	Rory Reen

Cian Walsh receiving the Student of the Year Award for 2024 from Councillor Honore Kamegni, Deputy Lord Mayor of Cork.



**BSc GOVERNMENT
& POLITICAL
SCIENCE -
RICHARD HASLAM
GRADUATE OF YEAR
AWARD**



- | | |
|------|----------------------------------|
| 2003 | Holly Hardwicke |
| 2004 | Elizabeth Harrington |
| 2005 | Jeremiah O’Sullivan |
| 2006 | Brenda Keating |
| 2007 | Tim McCarthy |
| 2008 | Matthew Ryan |
| 2009 | Colm Diamond |
| 2010 | Neepa Sodhi |
| 2011 | Laura Murphy |
| 2012 | Tracey O’Rourke |
| 2013 | John Kenny |
| 2014 | Pádraig Mac Consaidín |
| 2015 | Jack Barry |
| 2016 | Eoin Quill |
| 2017 | Michael Lyons |
| 2018 | Laura Cummins |
| 2019 | Amy Brett |
| 2020 | Ciaran Dineen |
| 2021 | Sami Chakchouk and David Collins |
| 2022 | Laura O’Keeffe and Luc O’Leary |
| 2023 | Sinéad McMahon |
| 2024 | Sarah Collins |
| 2025 | Ognjen Uzelac |

Sinéad McMahon receiving the Graduate of the Year Award for 2023 from Councillor Kieran McCarthy, Lord Mayor of Cork.



Sarah Collins receiving the Graduate of the Year Award for 2024 from Councillor Honore Kamegni, Deputy Lord Mayor of Cork.



PATRICK O'SULLIVAN ESSAY PRIZE WINNER



2002	Andrew O'Leary
2003	Donal Holohan
2004	John O'Sullivan
2005	John O'Sullivan
2006	Cormac Cahill
2007	Ian Mawe
2008	Niall Duggan
2009	Andrew Aherne
2010	Declan Keating
2011	Pádraig Mac Consaídn
2012	John Somers
2013	Pádraig Mac Consaídn
2014	Don O'Neill
2015	Luke Foley
2016	Emily O'Regan
2017	Nathan Board
2018	Nathan Board
2019	Diarmaid Hanley
2020/2021	Robert O'Driscoll
2022/2023	Ava Ní Loingsigh
2023/2024	Sarah O'Mahony
2024/2025	Alexiy Sologub
2025/2026	Maria Grant

A youthful Niall Duggan receives the Patrick O'Sullivan Shield from Dermot McCarthy, Secretary General to the Irish Government, in 2008.



Alexiy Sologub receiving the Patrick O'Sullivan Shield for 2025 from Councillor Honore Kamegni, Deputy Lord Mayor of Cork.



BA POLITICS FIRST YEAR AWARD

- 2018/2019: Cian Lynch and Maeve McTaggart (Joint winners)
2019/2020: Meadhbh Brennan
2020/2021: Mary Elizabeth Hayes and Mia Tobin Power (Joint winners)
2021/2022: Shane McCormick
2023/2024: Luke Tiernan McDonnell
2024/2025: Tadhg Holland

BA POLITICS SECOND YEAR AWARD

- 2018/2019: Emma O'Donoghue
2019/2020: Maeve McTaggart
2020/2021: Stephen Christopher Moynihan
2021/2022: Clodagh Perrott
2023/2024: Michael Francis O'Shea
2024/2025: Samuel Foody

Maeve McTaggart, a BA Politics award winner in 2019, 2020 and 2021.



BA POLITICS FINAL YEAR AWARD

- 2018/2019: David Walsh
2019/2020: Eimear Buckley
2020/2021: Maeve McTaggart
2021/2022: Deborah McMullin
2023/2024: Lina Roßner
2024/2025: Róisín Therese O'Connor

David Walsh, final year award winner in 2019.



BA POLITICS DISSERTATION AWARD

2018/2019: Niamh Sheehan
2019/2020: Beth O'Reilly
2020/2021: Lauren Alice Hearne and John Anthony O'Doherty (Joint winners)
2021/2022: Deborah McMullin
2023/2024: Lina Roßner
2024/2025: Róisín Therese O'Connor



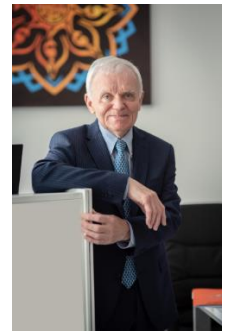
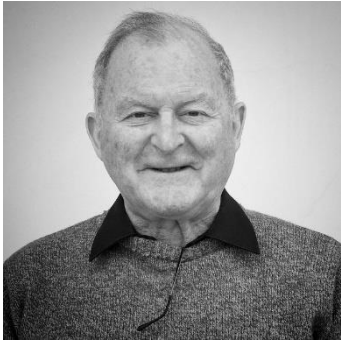
Emmanuelle presents conference paper in Tokyo



On 25 March 2026, **Dr. Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan** presented her research entitled 'From participatory to agonistic: Designing European Citizenship Education for Primary Schools Through Design-Based Research' at the IAFOR Asian Conference on Education & International Development in Tokyo. She reported on her design-based research developing European citizenship education for Irish primary schools. Responding to a gap between curriculum intent and classroom practice, she co-designed and piloted the **BFGtoEU** programme across multiple Cork schools (102 students, ages 5–12). Questionnaire data showed significant gains in EU knowledge and identity.

Key findings revealed teachers defaulted to consensus-driven, socialisation-based approaches, suppressing dissent and deliberation. Drawing on Mouffe, Rancière, Westheimer & Kahne, and Biesta, the study argues for embedding *agonistic* deliberative skills and powerful knowledge on the EU into a revised programme — now titled **Key to the EU**.

ANNUAL MONAHAN LECTURE – A RICH HISTORY



1. **Professor Tom Garvin**, Department of Politics, University College Dublin (1997/1998)
2. **Dr. John Hume**, Nobel Peace Prize Winner (1998/1999)
3. **Francesco Rutelli**, Mayor of Rome (1999/2000)
4. **John Dennehy**, Secretary General, Department of Education and Science (2000/2001)



5. **Professor Robert Putnam**, Professor of Public Policy, Harvard University (2002/2003)
6. **Dr. Mary McAleese**, President of Ireland (2003/2004)
7. **David Begg**, General Secretary, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (2005/2006)
8. **David Norris**, member of Seanad Éireann (2006/2007)



9. **Robert Faucher**, Deputy US Ambassador to Ireland (2007/2008)
10. **Dermot McCarthy**, Secretary General to the Irish Government (2008/2009)
11. **Ivana Bacik**, member of Seanad Éireann (2009/2010)

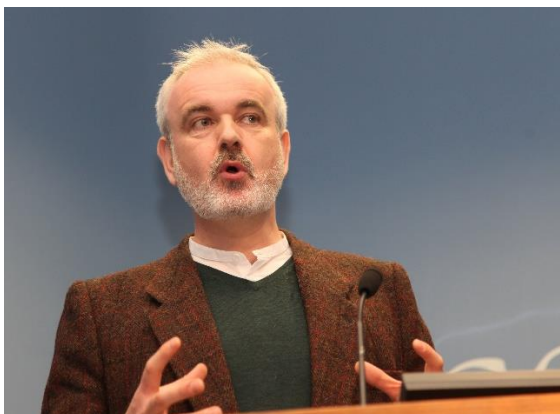
ANNUAL MONAHAN LECTURE – A RICH HISTORY



12. **Charlie Bird**, RTÉ broadcaster (2010/2011)
13. **Emily O'Reilly**, Ombudsman and Information Commissioner (2011/2012)
14. **John Bercow MP**, Speaker of House of Commons (2012/2013)



15. **Enda Kenny TD**, Taoiseach (2013/2014)
16. **Professor Brigid Laffan**, Schuman Centre, EUI (2014/2015)



17. **Colm O'Gorman**, Amnesty International Ireland (2015/2016)
18. **Vice Admiral Mark Mellett**, Chief of Staff, Defence Forces (2016/2017)
19. **Carol Monaghan MP**, Scottish National Party (2017/2018)

ANNUAL MONAHAN LECTURE – A RICH HISTORY



- 20. **Professor Fiona Mackay**, University of Edinburgh (2018/2019)
- 21. **Fr. Peter McVerry**, Peter McVerry Trust (2019/2020)
- 22. **Brian O'Donovan**, RTÉ Washington Correspondent (2020/2021)



- 23. **Professor David Runciman**, University of Cambridge (2022/2023)
- 24. **Máiréad McGuinness**, European Union Commissioner (2023/2024)
- 25. **John Moran**, Directly Elected Mayor of Limerick (2024/2025)



26. Nicola Sturgeon
Former First Minister of
Scotland
(2025/2026)

**THE AHERN
FILES**



Hugh Ahern interviews Senator Garret Kelleher

What is your role? I am one of 17 Fine Gael Senators, and I have been given responsibility for Justice and Northern Ireland. In the recent past, for example, we had many lengthy debates on the Defamation Bill.

What does the average day look like? I look at it more as an average week! Typically, I would get a train to Dublin early on Tuesday morning. I could be in the Seanad or at other kinds of committee meetings or group meetings all day Tuesday and possibly until 9 o'clock on Wednesday evening. Thursday tends to be a shorter day and the Seanad business would normally be done by mid-afternoon. I try to get the train back to Cork in the evening. It is then a case of trying to balance constituency work with family commitments. We have four small children at home, all under the age of 12, so things can get hectic!



The newly elected senator,
Garret Kelleher, signing
the 27th Roll of Members
Seanad Éireann in Leinster
House,
4 January 2025.

What was it like to be elected for the first time? First of all, it's an enormous privilege. There are only 234 people, 235 if you include the President, but you have 174 in Dáil Éireann and 60 in Seanad Éireann. So it's an enormous privilege to be a member of that relatively small group of people. I have had a mixed record at elections, some successes and a few failures. I was an unsuccessful candidate in the General Election; rather than dwelling on it, I commenced my Seanad campaign immediately. It is an entirely different kind of campaign because you are primarily focused on the 949 local councillors who are a significant portion of the electorate.

Who has been your biggest role model or influence? I would say Garret FitzGerald and John Hume. I was actually named after Garret FitzGerald! John Hume is probably the person that I admire most. He was a man of great conviction and courage and took stands that weren't necessarily the most popular, but I think that he recognised what needed to be done to create a better future for the people that he represented. He was also a passionate European and made powerfully strong contributions in the European Parliament in both English and French. Closer to home, literally, I learned a lot from my Dad about all kinds of political matters.

What are you reading or watching now? I'm reading a book called *Politics on the Edge* by Rory Stewart; I find he has a lovely writing style, and he is witty and self-deprecating. I'm not watching anything at the moment; I don't really have the time to get involved or to start something new on Netflix.

What has it been like transitioning from local political life to national politics in such a short period of time? Funnily enough, on the representational side of things, there are massive similarities between being a councillor and being a senator. You still get similar phone calls about local issues. People contact me about local issues, and it could be something as simple as getting a tree cut in an area that's impacting on the light. The big readjustment is having two nights most weeks in a hotel in Dublin. As a councillor, whenever the council meeting finished, you'd be going home to your own bed and there might have been time to read the kids' bedtime stories or help to brush their teeth. Whereas getting the train up to Dublin on a Tuesday morning and not coming back until Thursday evening, is a significant change. There's a bit of guilt involved there as well, being away from home and not being able to help out.



Garret and his wife, Leona, with Siún, Cormac, Cian and Sibéal.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to work in politics? If there's something that's important to you and an objective that you'd like to achieve at some point in the future, if you are unsuccessful at your first attempt, don't turn your back on it. Try again.

This applies not only in politics, but in life generally.

Advice on writing your undergraduate dissertation

By Catriona Reid, BSc Government and Political Science graduate 2023

Dissertation: 'An analysis of climate change message framing and its implications for levels of motivation for collective climate action in young people living in Ireland' (supervised by Dr. Clodagh Harris)



When I think of my motivation for choosing this degree, it was because I wanted to help effect real change on the issue that is closest to my heart, which is the climate emergency. At the time, I thought that party politics was the way to do that (I was in the Green Party for 8 years and ran as a candidate in 2019), and while I still feel that party politics is an essential part of the equation, by fourth year, my interest in politics developed into an interest in political and social research – specifically, how social research could help address climate change.

The research dissertation at the end of fourth year was my favourite part of the degree. I loved the freedom it gave me to explore the intersection of society, politics and climate change and I chose to approach the topic by examining the role of climate communication in engaging young people in climate action.

I held a focus group to capture a debate between a group of young people on their thoughts on climate change and what messages would motivate them to action – picking up precious experience and skills along the way which helped me a lot down the road.

Communication is so much broader than just what we read in the press or what we see on social media – there is a wider question around how best to engage meaningfully with the public and communities. I have been very lucky to have had the opportunity to delve deeper into this question in the last few months working as a research assistant in MaREI, the SFI centre for climate, energy and the marine.

Since I started in MaREI the main project I have been working on is called Teaching Resources for Youth-informed Biodiversity Education (TRYBE for short!). This is a legacy project from the 2022 Children and Young People’s Assembly on Biodiversity Loss – on TRYBE, we have been co-creating educational resources for primary and post-primary schools on biodiversity in Ireland informed by the Assembly recommendations.

This includes an activity book, lesson plans, and an activity calendar – all of these resources have had direct input and guidance from children and teachers, and I can honestly say that it has been incredibly meaningful and fulfilling to be a part of this wonderful team.

Thinking back, my dissertation was a vital stepping-stone to where I am now, so my best advice to current students is:

- **Pick your topic as early as possible** – start brainstorming in second year, then pick your topic in third year and chat to a lecturer to double check that it is suitable and realistic – then you go into fourth year already knowing what your dissertation will be about, and in fourth year you can fine-tune the details and approach.
- **Find a gap in the existing research** – this means doing a lot of background reading and you’ll have time to do this in third and fourth year. Sites like [Connected Papers](#) are invaluable for doing this.
- **Don’t be afraid to work with people** – conducting focus groups or interviews is a fantastic way to learn new skills and apply the theories you have been learning about in the classroom to real life, and it demonstrates initiative and originality.
- **Timing is key!** – you’ll get about 10 weeks to do your dissertation, so plan out those weeks before Christmas and arrange to meet your supervisor in the first week of classes. Come prepared with questions and anticipate the questions they might ask you!

For any more advice, or if you’re interested in research as a career, you can always reach out to me at creid@ucc.ie (and very best of luck!) 😊

Catriona works as a Research Assistant in MaREI - the SFI Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine – at University College Cork. Currently, she is working on the TRYBE project where she has been assisting with the co-creation of education resources for primary and post-primary children on the themes of biodiversity and climate action - <https://www.marei.ie/people/catriona-lulia-reid/>