

# GMIT NEWS

www.gmit.ie June 2020



INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA NA GAILLIMHE-MAIGH EO

## Backing our Heroes: GMIT supports frontline staff in time of Covid crisis

### Last batch of GMIT face visors delivered to Galway University Hospitals GUH

While the campus doors may be closed, the work goes on. Over the last eleven short weeks, GMIT staff have been challenged in exceptional ways. Whilst having to adapt to new ways of teaching and assessing online, they have also been engaged in the background supporting the fight against Covid. Several initiatives undertaken have included the opening of a contact tracing centre, pioneering the development of open source ventilators, in addition to the production of face coverings.

One particular project was the production of face shields – “GMIT Project Visor” – led Dr Brian de Souza and Eddie Dunbar of the Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering. Faced with unprecedented and immediate demand for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), the project initially targeted the production of PPE for primary care settings before being subsequently expanded to meet the requirements of Galway University Hospitals (GUH). Working both from the Dublin Road campus and from homes all around Galway City and County, the two lecturers, together with GMIT volunteers and their families, assembled over ten thousand face shields.

“We initiated a call for staff within GMIT to volunteer for the project in mid-April and were astounded by the response. We were inundated with offers to help”, says Gerard Mac Michael, Head of School of Engineering, GMIT. “The goodwill and sense of unity was humbling”.

Continued Page 2



L to R: Maura Lyons, Critical Care Audit Nurse; Leonie Cullen, Clinical Nurse Manager 2, ICU; Deirdre Killeen, Services Department, GUH; Caroline Miskell, Clinical Nurse Manager 2, ICU; Gerard MacMichael, Head of School of Engineering GMIT, Dr Brian De Souza, GMIT Project Visor co-lead and lecturer in the GMIT Dept of Mechanical Engineering, and Ann Conroy, Clinical Nurse Manager 3, ICU.

[Photo: Mike Shaughnessy]

### What Katie is doing next



Katie O’ Dwyer, lecturer in aquatic ecology, talks to GMIT NEWS about ethical taxidermy. See page 14

## President pays tribute to GMIT staff and students

GMIT president Dr Orla Flynn has paid tribute to the resilience of GMIT staff and students during the current Covid-19 pandemic, and its “community response” to a national crisis.

In a broadranging interview in this issue of *GMITNEWS* Dr Flynn, formerly Vice President for External Affairs at Cork Institute of Technology, took up her appointment in GMIT on 18 March at the onset of the pandemic.

She has said that the flexibility shown by staff in offering remote tuition and support to students, while also meeting wider needs, is indicative of a confident new era for GMIT.

“Over the past two months, we’ve been together - though apart - working remotely, and demonstrating a strong community leader-

ship role,” she says. This will stand the college to good stead as it plans for a re-opening on 28 September.

When the national lockdown took hold in March, plans were activated for online delivery while GMIT also set up a contact tracing centre for the Health Service Executive (HSE) at the Galway and Mayo campuses.

She recalls how business, engineering, science and computing staff and researchers rowed in, producing PPE and establishing links with teams in other colleges.



Dr Orla Flynn , Interview p8.

“GMIT really came up trumps over the past two months in terms of its community approach, and its commitment to students, both collectively and individually - students who required support no matter where they were,” she says.

“Those instincts, that effort, will stand to us as we plan ahead,” Dr Flynn says.

GMIT is collaborating with Letterkenny IT and IT Sligo in the Connacht-Ulster Alliance application for the first technological university (TU) for the West and North-West, which has been billed by several governments as central to regional growth.

“This pandemic has forced us to think local, and also to think about sustaining communities in which we live,” Dr Flynn says.

WE’RE VIRTUALLY OPEN! ONLINE OPEN DAY COMPLEMENTED BY LIVE Q AND A SESSIONS - SEE PAGE 10

# Kelly's pride as she makes hundreds of face masks for nursing homes

A member of staff in GMIT's School of Design and Creative Arts has been putting her creative skills and resources to great use since April, making hundreds of reusable face coverings for use in nursing homes and more recently for GMIT staff who opt to wear them on return to campus.

Textiles Technician Kelly Roberts is making on average 75 non-medical masks a week while continuing to remotely provide technical support to some 40 students on the BA in Design (Fashion & Textiles Design) and also home-schooling her two young children.

Kelly and colleagues are also busy preparing a plan for the safe return to campus of staff and students, in line with social distancing measures and public health guidelines.

"I really wanted to use my skills and resources to help fight this Coronavirus pandemic but it had to be something I could do

at home around my children's daily schedule and GMIT work. I was lucky to have access to the necessary resources in the Textiles Department and was able to bring a sewing machine and threads home where I set up my workstation."

"I am relying solely on donations of fabric from friends and colleagues. Mostly I use high quality cotton duvet covers and sheets as they are easy to fashion into non-medical masks, and everyone needs an excuse to clean out their hot press! If anyone would like to donate good quality fabric, please feel free to contact me on [kelly.roberts@gmit.ie](mailto:kelly.roberts@gmit.ie)"

"I started by giving them to nursing homes around Galway and people on the front line. Word is spreading through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, etc.. and I am now sending masks to locations as far away as Donegal."

"Our GMIT Health & Safe-



Kelly Roberts at work on the face coverings in her home.

ty Officer Doreen Geoghegan recently asked me to provide reusable face coverings for staff who may opt to use them, as part of GMIT's Return to Campus Protocol plan which includes a risk assessment component. If staff avail of the offer, it will keep me busy for the summer. I would hope to have a reusable mask available for those who wish to use them come September, all going well."

GMIT is currently putting plans in place to ensure public health measures are implemented through social distancing, handwashing and hygiene measures in the first instance. Face coverings are an optional extra personal measure to assist in preparation for winter coughs and colds to prevent the spread of infection.

Celine Curtin, Head of the GMIT Centre for Creative Arts

and Media, says: "We have a wealth of expertise and skills amongst staff and students in GMIT and we are only too delighted to seek every opportunity to contribute to wellbeing of all in these challenging times."

If you would like to know more about GMIT's Bachelor of Arts in Design courses, see:

<https://www.gmit.ie/art-and-design/bachelor-arts-design>

# Praise from HSE as GMIT's Contact Tracing Centre is closed down

Over 110 GMIT staff volunteers trained by public health workers

Dr Seamus Lennon, GMIT Acting Assistant Registrar (left), and Brian Murphy, Assistant National Director, Strategic Planning, HSE, at the GMIT Contact Tracing Centre in the Dublin Road campus' IT Centre.



GMIT's Contact Tracing Centre at the Dublin Road (Galway) campus wound up its operations on Friday 29 May. Over 110 GMIT staff volunteers were trained by HSE public health workers in March to undertake the work of both establishing the contacts of those who tested positive for Covid-19 and to communicate with those contacts.

Dr Seamus Lennon, Acting Assistant Registrar, GMIT and HSE Co-ordinator, says: "We were inundated with offers from GMIT staff members who wished to volunteer to work as contact tracers, and we worked hard to establish the centre as soon as possible to support the national effort during the early part of the Covid-19 crisis.

"Initially we worked 12-hour days, but as time went on, thankfully there were fewer and fewer cases, and the associated contact tracing workload decreased

significantly. Contact tracing in Galway is now being centralized in NUIG, and GMIT staff who wish to continue to work as contact tracers can do so from the NUIG centre."

Brian Murphy, Assistant National Director, Strategic Planning, HSE, who managed the establishment of the Contact Tracing Centre, praised GMIT management and personnel "The leadership shown by all our colleagues in GMIT in making available and fitting out the infrastructure at their campus and mobilising their own colleagues to participate in the Contact Tracing Centre was immense."

"There was a lot of work carried out in an extremely short time with a great sense of purpose. The response was phenomenal and the HSE is grateful for their fantastic support. GMIT's input helped hugely to curtail the spread of Covid-19."

# Backing our Heroes: GMIT supports frontline staff

From Page 1

"Within days, we had over one hundred and seventy volunteers, and received several incredible offers of support from local business, such as Collins' Plastics in Ballina who volunteered their 1,900 sq ft plastics production facility to assist the project, and Standard Printers, Galway, who donated their expertise, materials and services free of charge".

"A major factor in the success of the project was Brian's resolve", added Mr MacMichael. "He solicited the assistance of engineering colleagues with key expertise in manufacturing and materials to complement his own design and computational modelling skills. He also initiated discussions directly with medical school clinicians in primary and tertiary care settings, and hospital procurement staff, to evaluate an initial prototype. The clinical feedback and Brian's computational model informed the final visor specification".

As the number of cases of Covid-19 has reduced, the project is now coming to completion. The last batch of GMIT visors was delivered to GUH staff on 29 May..

Commenting on the project, Ms Chris Kane, General Manager, GUH, says; "The support of our community has been incredible over the past few months. In



Isobel Barnes and Orla Mullins, the Burren Pharmacy, Lisdoonvarna, Co Clare, wearing the GMIT visors.

a very short amount of time we've had to completely change the way we deliver healthcare and every day we need a large volume of PPE to protect our patients and our staff. We are very grateful to the staff and volunteers form GMIT who produced face shields for our hospitals. At a time of great need and supply challenges, it made a huge difference."

In addition to GUH, GMIT face shields have been supplied to the Association of Optometrists, Ireland, assisting with the safe reopening of opticians across the country. Face shields have also been supplied to local charities such as Ability West, nursing homes, pharmacies and primary care centres.

President of GMIT, Dr Orla Flynn, says,

"This project brought to the fore a sense of the character of our institution and the people within it: empathy for and with the communities around us, and the drive to act beyond any narrow definition of duty. We also place enormous value on the external relationships developed as part of this engagement."

Dr Brian de Souza, lecturer in Mechanical Engineering, says; "When we look back at Covid-19 in years to come, we'll no doubt recall the shared feeling of fear and uncertainty concomitant with the arrival of Covid-19 on our shores. Yet, what also should be remembered is the indomitable spirit and resilience of our community, our commitment to the common challenge".

"I would like to thank all the amazing volunteers who participated in this project from across all departments in GMIT, contributing their skills, talents and time to help support our frontline services. The true heroes in this emergency were, and continue to be, the many nurses and doctors and other allied healthcare workers who have selflessly put themselves in harm's way to treat those with Covid-19. In particular, a special mention must go our student nurses from our campus in Castlebar. They deserve our enduring respect and gratitude," adds Dr De Souza.

# GMIT plan to ensure public health measures in place against spread of Covid-19 when staff and students return to campus in September

GMIT is currently working on a plan to ensure public health measures are in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace when staff and students return to campus in September.

A Covid-19 response plan is being developed as per Government guidelines. These guidelines focus on a number of areas including the completion of risk assessments for each area, changes in work practices, relevant physical changes to the workplace as well as social distancing, and promoting hand-washing and hygiene /coughing and sneezing etiquette.

Dr Seamus Lennon, Chair of the Back to Campus Implementation Group, says: "We are working hard to ensure full compliance with the Government guidelines and to make the



GMIT Galway. [Photo: Ros Kavanagh]

workplace as safe as possible for our staff and students".

GMIT Health & Safety Officer Doreen Geoghegan says: "Hand washing with soap for a minimum of 20 seconds is the primary action we can take in protecting ourselves and others. In tandem with this, social

distancing is effective at limiting the spread. Although it is optional to wear face coverings, it is an additional measure to prevent disease spread indoors or when in crowded places."

"People are reminded to observe etiquette around coughing and sneezing, and the wearing

of a non-medical mask can limit the spread should this occur. There will be behaviour modification on the part of everyone

to ensure Covid-19 is controlled and eliminated. Through collaboration and co-operation this will be possible."

## GMITNEWS

**Editor:** Regina Daly  
**Sub-Editor:** Seán Ó Mainnín  
**Design & Layout:** Seán Ó Mainnín  
**Photos:** Aengus McMahon, Mike Shaughnessy, Paul Scannell, Stedman photography, staff.  
**Words:** Lorna Siggins, Colm Gorey, GMIT Staff, Regina Daly,  
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GMIT News is published by the GMIT Communications Office. We welcome your thoughts on this publication. Please send them to: Regina Daly, Communications Officer, GMIT, Dublin Road, Galway. Tel. 00 353 91 742826 / 0879618355 (m) Email: [regina.daly@gmit.ie](mailto:regina.daly@gmit.ie)



Sharon White, Manager of the MET Gateway, GMIT, delivering the MET ventilator to the HSE, Galway.

# Stand and helped to

Lecturers in engineering, science and computing together with academics in GMIT's Medical Engineering Technology (MET) Gateway, built ventilators and produced face visors and shields

The past few weeks have flown by for a large number of GMIT staff who have been working night and day to design, produce and deliver vital personal protection equipment for health care workers in a variety of settings across the west, from hospitals and pharmacies to GP surgeries, in the race to stop the spread of Covid-19.

Amidst adapting to remote teaching and assessments, lecturers in engineering, science and computing together with academics in GMIT's Medical Engineering Technology (MET) Gateway, built ventilators, produced face visors and shields while other researchers collaborated with teams in NUI Galway and UL.

With GMIT campuses closed to students and staff since 12 March, many of the staff worked from their homes across the west and mid-west while others worked from GMIT's Medical Engineering Technologies (MET) Gateway at the Dublin Road (Galway city) campus.

Details of some of the large-scale and research related Covid-19 projects are:

- Sharon White, Manager of the MET Gateway, and Dr Patrick Delassus, MET Gateway Principal Investigator and lecturer in the Dept of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, worked with a team of five MET researchers to build face visors using an open source design and the Centre's 3D printers. Galway University Hospitals (GUH) clinicians assisted in the evaluation process.

- GMIT's MET Gateway has also lent Galway University Hospitals its respiratory ventilator to assist in the treatment of Covid-19 infected patients. The ventilator is normally used in MedTech research and product development.

- Dr Brian de Souza and Eddie Dunbar, Dept of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, led a team producing face visors (GMIT Project Visor) supplying GUH, pharmacies, GP surgeries and voluntary care settings. Brian built a computational fluid dynamics model demonstrating how effective the visor is when used in conjunction with a face mask. Assistance was provided by UL School of Medicine clinicians. He made the first delivery to Galway University Hospital on

A new type of emergency ventilator that can be produced rapidly and inexpensively to assist the medical profession in the treatment of Covid patients has been designed and developed by staff within the GMIT School of Engineering. They are one of numerous teams, nationally and internationally, working towards finding an alternative solution to the anticipated global demand as, currently, certified ventilators can cost tens of thousands of euro upfront.

"This new emergency ventilator automates the squeezing of a manual Bag-Valve-Mask (BVM) resuscitator, so that it can act as a rudimentary ventilator to aid a person breathing, or to replicate some basic ventilation functions," explains Dr Oliver Mulryan and James Boyle, who are leading the project.

"The system is designed out

## GMIT team lead development of low-cost emergency ventilator

of bio-grade, readily available and laser cut material, so that it can be built anywhere or by anyone as a last resort if needed. Ultimately, our objective is to make the calibrated device (flow, pressure and oxygen levels) open source, pending regulatory and governmental approval.

"Regardless of acquiring this certification, several units will be manufactured for demonstration and calibration purposes, and for undergraduate engineering learning and teaching."

"Currently, in conjunction with local company Collins

Plastics we have developed a low-cost prototype and we are in the process of automating and controlling the device so that it can interact with both the physician and patient for assisted breathing, says Dr Mulryan.

James Boyle, Head of the Advanced Craft Certificate Programme for Electrical Installation, GMIT, says "Often the cost of purchasing licences for software to program automation systems makes simple projects unviable. We wanted to make it possible for anyone to recreate our ventilator. Therefore, the automation system was designed

with low-cost controllers that can be programmed using open-source software."

"The breathing cycle and air volume delivery is fully controllable using simple rotary dial controls. We have also included pressure monitoring, which can be applied to BVMs that have a manometer port." explains Mr Boyle.

The project team includes Pat Cassidy from the Dept of Electronic & Electrical Engineering, David McDonnell and Dr Alan Hannon from the Dept of Mechanical & Industrial Engineer-

ing, and Liam Collins and Kate Thompson from Collins Plastics, Ballina, Co Mayo, who provided their time, expertise, materials and machining.

World health experts have stated there are likely to be several waves of outbreaks and that a large increase in conventional ventilator production is still likely to fall short of the global demand, and for some of the associated costs are likely to be prohibitive. Worldwide governments have appealed to people and business to boost ventilator production and are ordering ventilators as part of the efforts

# deliver: the staff who protect health workers



Alan Connors, MET, delivering 35 face shields to the Brothers of Charity, Galway.

Good Friday (10 April) and the last on Friday 29 May. Working from both from the Dublin Road campus and from homes all around Galway City and County, the two lecturers, together with GMIT volunteers and their families assembled over ten thousand face shields. The team included David McDonnell, Dr Alan Hannon, Gabriel Costello and Dr Carine Gachon, Head of Dept.

- Brian O'Shea, Dept of Electronic and Electrical Engineering, worked with a team in the NUI Galway Lambe Institute, School of Medicine, including Dr Atif Shahzad, to develop a split ventilator for use on two or more Covid-19 patients at once. Brian helped develop cross platform software that works with novel sensors to monitor the ventilator performance. Brian has handed over the GMIT App to the team who will be testing it this month (June). The technology used to create the App was React-Native which can be deployed on a variety of platforms."

For further information see: <https://www.galwayventshare.com/> and <https://www.galwayventshare.com/supports>

- Dr Oliver Mulryan and James Boyle, School of Engineering, led a project to build a 'last resort ventilator' prototype (see story below). This new emergency ventilator automates the squeezing of a manual Bag-Valve-Mask (BVM) resuscitator, so that it can act as a rudimentary ventilator to aid a person breathing, or to replicate some basic ventilation functions. The project team included Pat Cassidy from the Dept of Electronic & Electrical

Engineering, David McDonnell and Dr Alan Hannon from the Dept of Mechanical & Industrial Engineering, and Liam Collins and Kate Thompson from Collins Plastics, Ballina, Co Mayo, who provided their time, expertise, materials and machining.

- Mossy Kelly, Dept of Computing and Applied Physics, led an application to the SFI-coordinated Covid-19 research call to develop an app to assist Leaving

and screening.

GMIT's entire inventory of 3D printers - 11 printers in total, from the Centre for Creative Arts and Media, Letterfrack campus and Dept of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, was entered in the NUI Galway Ventilator 3D printer support platform for use by ventilator and other MedTech device manufacturers.

Dr Orla Flynn, President of

**'We have been very encouraged by the numbers who initiated projects and those who volunteered their help... We are immensely proud of their enthusiasm and energy'**

*Dr Orla Flynn, President GMIT*

Cert Physics students in navigating their practical curriculum whilst working remotely.

- Dr Luca Mirimin, Dept of Natural Sciences, applied to the SFI-coordinated Covid-19 research call, submitting a proposal for Development of high-throughput diagnostic protocols to scale up SARS CoV2 monitoring. The proposal focuses on the urgent need for quick turn-around times for testing

GMIT, together with Dr Gerard MacMichael, Head of the School of Engineering, and Dr Rick Officer, VP Research and Innovation, expressed great pride in the response of GMIT staff. "We have been very encouraged by the numbers who initiated projects and those who volunteered their help both with projects and contact tracing. We are immensely proud of their enthusiasm and energy."

to combat the disease.

"In Ireland there are approximately 1,300 ventilators available, and in mid-March the Health Service Executive ordered 900 new ventilators specifically for the treatment of patients with Covid 19," explains Dr Mulryan.

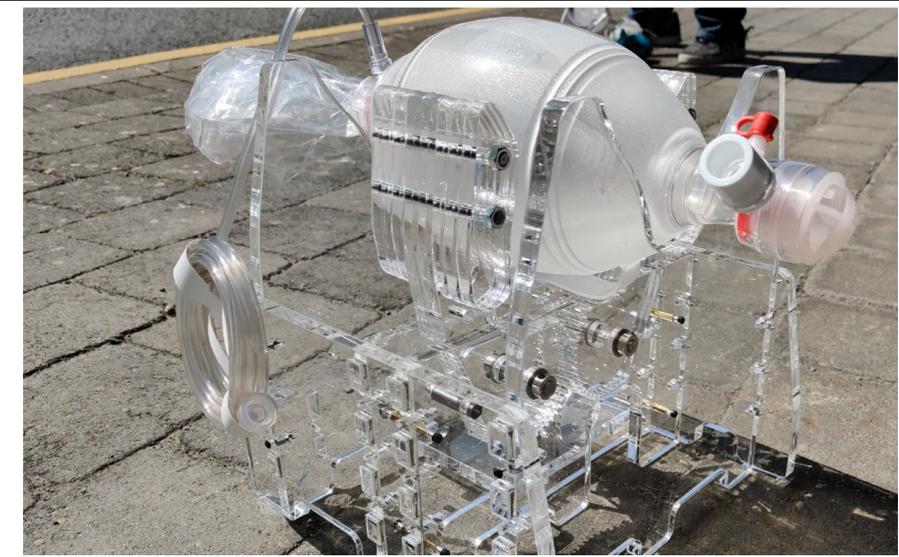
"In the US, by contrast, there is a broad range of forecast estimates on the number of ventilators required, ranging from hundreds of thousands to millions depending on the severity of infections, the transmission rates and the effectiveness of countermeasures."

Gerard MacMichael, Head of the GMIT School of Engineering, says: "Putting a team together to design and manufacture a ventilator within weeks would normally be a challenge in the best of times, but to achieve this during the Covid-19 con-

tainment is extraordinary and is a reflection of the dedication and the enthusiasm of the GMIT engineering staff involved and Collins Plastics' commitment to the project."

For further information about programmes in the GMIT School of Engineering, see: <https://www.gmit.ie/engineering/school-engineering>

**"Putting a team together to design and manufacture a ventilator within weeks would normally be a challenge in the best of times, but to achieve this during the Covid-19 containment is extraordinary"**



Back, L to R: Catriona Fahey (Boyle, Roscommon), Suzanne Carney (Claremorris, Mayo), Lou Brennan (Pontoon, Mayo), Finola McDermott (Westport, Mayo), Olga Kiofac (Charlestown, Mayo), Janine McGinn (Castlebar, Mayo), Louise Loughlin (Galway), Nancy O Reilly (Ballyhaunis, Mayo), Anita Patil (Boyle, Roscommon). Front, L to R: Trainer Claire Scanlon (Galway), Anya Aseeva (Clonbur, Mayo), Deirdre Hardcastle (Ballintubber, Mayo), Asumpta Gallagher (Galway), Aneli Watson (Westport, Mayo), Cepta Mahon (Galway), Maria Staunton, EMPOWER Programme Manager, GMIT.



The women's entrepreneurship programme will be delivered online from this month (June)

# Empower programme expansion a boost for women entrepreneurs

**E**MPOWER, the women's entrepreneurship programme due to be delivered in the iHubs on GMIT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT campuses last month will now be delivered from this month (June) fully online, in line with continuing social distancing restrictions around Covid-19.

The EMPOWER programme has been running in the Galway and Mayo GMIT iHubs since 2017 and was extended to counties Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal last year (2019) under the Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA). It is funded by the Irish Government and the European Social Fund as part of the Programme for Employment, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. The Local Enterprise Offices are also very supportive of the programme.

"Bringing more women entrepreneurs into the economy will help improve economic growth and stability and is particularly needed in the rural and peripheral West and North-West of Ireland," says GMIT President Dr Orla Flynn.

"In Ireland, female-led businesses remain an underdeveloped source of economic growth and jobs. As part of a drive to increase the number of female entrepreneurs in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, GMIT Innovation Hubs set out to increase participation with the launch of EMPOWER in 2017, expanding to Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal last year.

Maria Staunton, EMPOWER Programme Manager,

added: "Since its launch the EMPOWER Programme is helping so many women build confidence, assess skills to implement ideas or scale businesses, and deliver market opportunities. Over 64 women in the West have completed the programme since 2017 and 146 people are currently employed by the businesses full-time and another seven part-time."

"Labour force participation rates for women in Ireland remain low by international standards despite rising wages and more career opportunities and this EMPOWER programme aims to help redress that imbalance. CSO figures indicate that while the gender differential in the participation rates between men and women here is falling, it remains wide – 68.4 per cent for men compared to 56 per cent for women even though women make up over 50 per cent of the population. Women's participation in the economy is vital if we are to get the economy on track again especially after the Covid-19 pandemic."

"The women I have worked with on this programme have shown tenacity and determination to get their business up and running. Whilst I have observed high levels of ambition some lack confidence and have low perceptions of capability. Sometimes aversion to debt and a conservative approach to risk-taking can hamper ambition. Often entrepreneurship is seen as providing more flexibility for women, however work-life balance still remains a challenge, particularly so during this Covid-19 lockdown. The 'guilt' factor often comes into play amongst women

as they spend time on their business whilst having other responsibilities. They face numerous challenges in terms of work-life balance something which shouldn't and cannot be overlooked by policy makers. Women often choose self-employment for lifestyle reasons, particularly when the children are young, while men, to a larger extent, are driven by pecuniary motives".

"One interesting observation is that these women are paving the way for future entrepreneurs. I often remark that female founders teach their children (boys and girls) all about entrepreneurship as they often have to have the kids beside them when on telephone calls or have to bring them to meetings. I know some who involve their kids in helping to pack orders. One person on the programme even brought her four-week old son along on some occasions as she was breastfeeding him. It's important for us on the programme to ensure there are no barriers put in place. In the future the bigger impact – apart from job creation – may be the impression they leave on their children. We talk about implementing entrepreneurship in schools but what better way to learn about entrepreneurship than listening to and being involved with your parents on topics such as new ideas, ordering stock, money, etc. This might be the bigger impact supporting women entrepreneurs has on the economy", says Ms Staunton.

For details see [www.empowerher.ie](http://www.empowerher.ie) [www.facebook.com/empowerher.ie](https://www.facebook.com/empowerher.ie) Twitter @Empowerherie and Instagram empowerher.ie

# Business as usual as GMIT Letterfrack continues weekly webinars



by Dermot O'Donovan, Project Manager, Education and Work Integrated Learning Project (eWIL).

The IWFMN Steering Committee at its most recent National Conference in Trinity College Dublin in October 2019 with Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Heather Humphreys.

[Photo: Stedman Photography]



GMIT's Letterfrack campus has been synonymous with furniture design and wood technology since 1987. This industry is dominated by regionally dispersed, small and micro enterprises involved in areas such as architectural woodworking, cabinetmaking, panel processing, kitchen manufacturing, bespoke furniture, shop fitting and joinery products.

GMIT Letterfrack has developed a network of more 100 industry partners in Ireland and abroad but has estimated that more than 1,000 companies are operating in the sector in Ireland.

At an Industry Forum at GMIT Letterfrack in 2017, a shared vision was reached by GMIT, Western Regional Skills Forum (WRSF) and industry representatives to develop a roadmap to support and nurture this sector.

Soon after, the Irish Wood and Furniture Manufacturing Network (IWFMN) was formally established, prioritising four key strategic pillars:

1. Commercial Development
2. Design and Innovation
3. Manufacturing Excellence
4. Education and Training

The IWFMN has grown from strength to strength, organising two national conferences in Galway and Dublin and facilitating a range of training and peer-to-peer learning experiences for Network members.

When Covid-19 arrived in March this year, it looked like all the work undertaken to date by the IWFMN might be compromised. However, since then the IWFMN has

begun hosting a weekly online forum with industry members. The forum is designed to be open and constructive, where companies can learn from each other and share experiences and expertise to help overcome some of the challenges facing the sector. This writer, as a member of the IWFMN Steering committee, chairs the meetings.

Initially, just a few companies came on board. But gradually the interest grew. Most weeks we bring along an expert in a particular area, followed by a general discussion. A lot of companies are looking at immediate challenges, but also exploring more medium-term responses such as developing circular business models. Embracing digital technologies for marketing products and communications is particularly important now so that companies can continue to connect with customers and suppliers. But equally, practical things like the implementation of social distancing in the workplace and on sites are regularly discussed. For some of the events we have collaborated with WRSF and have had over 50 companies attending, so we definitely see companies responding to the opportunity to stay connected, share information and learn.

Paul Leamy, Head of Department for GMIT Letterfrack says: "For GMIT, it helps us stay in touch with the industry and we have just completed a Training Needs Analysis with the WRSF for the sector. Understanding and meeting the flexible and work-based learning needs of the sector is now more crucial than ever."

The IWFMN has a number of funding applications in the pipeline and its focus is on supporting the industry through the immediate and medium-term challenges posed by Covid-19. In this regard, GMIT Letterfrack have initiated a project called Education and Work Integrated Learning (eWIL) which is focused on transitioning undergraduate programmes to become work-based as they move towards year-long work placements.

To find out about courses at GMIT Letterfrack, see: <https://www.gmit.ie/furniture-design-and-technology/gmit-letterfrack> To see students' work, visit: <https://www.gmit.ie/letterfrack-campus/letterfrack-gallery-0>



# GMITNEWS *Interview*

## An eye on diversity and the future

Lorna Siggins talks to the woman at the helm at GMIT

Main photo: Aengus McMahon

**T**HERE cannot be too many first days at work like that experienced by GMIT's new president, Dr Orla Flynn.

It was 18 March, when a college campus should have been busy – even if it was just after St Patrick's Day. She had anticipated spending the first few weeks meeting staff and students, planning for the next academic year, engaging with the wider business community in the west, and making time for European Capital of Culture events.

However, as she walked into her office that Tuesday, there was little loud laughter, none of the continuous hum emanating from corridors and classrooms, and only an occasional footfall in corridors. The previous Friday, classes had been cancelled as the Government took measures to try and curtail the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Her first academic council meeting involved four people in the board room, while most of the staff participants were linked in remotely on Microsoft Teams. By then, there was much "coming and going" – but of a very different and unexpected kind, she recalls.

Plans had already been activated for online tuition and continuous support for

students, and the college was, like many others, on an emergency footing. GMIT had also been asked to set up a contact tracing centre for the Health Service Executive (HSE) at the Galway and Mayo campuses.

Even as the shortage of personal protection equipment became a national priority, GMIT staff responded. The college's entire inventory of 3D printers was signed up for the NUI Galway ventilator 3D printer support platform.

Business, engineering, science and computing staff and researchers rowed in, building ventilators and producing face visors and shields and establishing links with teams in other colleges. Textile staff on the BA in Design also began making non-medical masks.

"By 27 March, when I had to leave my temporary accommodation in Galway and work remotely from my home in north Cork, I had a sense of what it was like for students who had to pack up quickly and head home. I had also witnessed the most extraordinary effort by staff – and that sense of intense effort has continued right through," she says.

28 September 2020 has been earmarked as "likely" start date for the next academic year, and plans are being made

for a "hybrid approach", she says. This will involve a certain amount of remote learning, but practical work on campus is an integral part of courses in science and engineering, art and design, and culinary and gastronomic skills.

Practical tuition will be catered for in line with public health guidelines, with small groups for tutorials, facilitating contact tracing if necessary. A full picture may not emerge until late August or early September on numbers, as there may be prospective students who had opted to take their Leaving Certificate, and there will be requests for place deferrals.

She is also aware many students could also face severe financial challenges, which will influence their college selection. At the same time, she is optimistic.

"Early on, we had a talk by Prof Philip Nolan – chair of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) Irish Epidemiological Modelling Advisory Group – and he made the point that coming out of a pandemic is very different to the shock of having to go in... so, we know a lot more now than we did in early March about how to address this virus and curtail infection."

Dr Flynn joined GMIT from Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) where she

had been Vice President for External Affairs for the last six years. A graduate of University College, Cork in mathematical physics and computer science, she holds an MA in Management in Education from Waterford Institute of Technology and a PhD from the University of Limerick.

During her time at CIT, she was lecturer in the Department of Mathematics and Computing, head of School of Humanities and of the Department of Media Communications, and latterly head of the Crawford College of Art and Design. She is currently a director on the boards of HE-Anet and Cork Midsummer Festival, and she is now also a member of the regional executive committee of IBEC West.

This gives her a broad perspective on the importance of both science and the arts, and she says she feels that the value of the arts in education is often underestimated. One of her first moves after taking up the appointment was to join what has become GMIT's virtual choir.

Not only did it give her a unique opportunity to interact with staff and students, but she found a "magic in that sense of community online". By late April, musical director Sean Rowland had edited and merged over 80 individual videos for the release of the choir's interpretation of

John Lennon's "Imagine".

To be living in an arts-rich environment like Galway, we need to nurture our artists and our designers," she says.

She is very impressed by the work undertaken at GMIT Letterfrack's National Centre for Excellence in Furniture Design and Technology, and the Centre for Creative Arts and Media at Cluain Mhuire, and on the Mayo campus, where 12 final year part-time students on the BA in Contemporary Arts Practices hosted their first "virtual" graduate exhibition in early June.

As a former camogie player, she is also passionate about the importance of sport, particularly for women, and is well aware of the pattern of "drop-out" from physical activities when young women reach a certain age.

"In the choir, when everything is working well, the combined outcome is far better than the individual parts, and that dynamic is similar with team sports," she says.

"Sport also teaches you how to deal with disappointment, the conditions under which different people can thrive, and about leadership," she says.

"Female leadership is a hot topic now, given how female leaders in New Zea-



“ One of the biggest challenges for the CUA, or whatever the new technological university is called, will be in leaving behind what we were – as in the fact that we will no longer be GMIT ”

Left: Dr Orla Flynn at her new workplace at GMIT and, below, working remotely from her home in north Cork. 'I had a sense of what it was like for students who had to pack up quickly and head home.'



land, Germany and Finland have handled the response to the pandemic, and it's interesting to reflect on the circumstances in society that allow that leadership to blossom," she says.

"Sport has a role to play in nurturing women to be tough and competitive, and to deal with the put-downs in life."

She is one of only a handful of female presidents in higher education in Ireland. Institutes of Technology have appointed a number of women to such senior roles,

but the established universities have not yet broken with traditions spanning 300 years and more.

Diversity is also a priority for her, as the "Black Lives Matter" movement takes hold globally.

"Inclusivity and diversity are core values here at GMIT, and I know from experience that decisions are generally better in the long term when diverse perspectives have been considered," she says.

"I also believe in being aware of your own biases and calling yourself out when needed..."

It is almost two years since Ireland's first technological university – TU Dublin – was formally approved by Government and plans for a similar alliance in the West/North-West have been billed as central to regional growth.

"I have been very impressed by the way the Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA) has approached this challenge, with democratic working groups in the key areas of research and innovation, teaching and learning and so on," she says.

"Given the growth in applied research, we have the potential to become a real resource for the West and North-West, and this is already embedded in our teaching here at GMIT, where there is engagement with business and industry. It is outward looking, and I'd like to think that the IDA and Enterprise Ireland see GMIT as their first port of call."

"One of the biggest challenges for the CUA, or whatever the new technological university is called, will be in leaving behind what we were – as in the fact that we will no longer be GMIT," she says.

"Like a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly, it should be very different, and we hope that our students and staff will embrace it," she says.

GMIT, spread across five campuses from Galway city to Letterfrack to Mountbellew and to Castlebar, Co Mayo, represents a "microcosm" of the CUA, she notes. The geographical area is the largest of any of the other consortia.

"So, whether we are working with a multinational like Boston Scientific or with smaller SMEs and communities, we need to ensure we have a collaborative approach, whether we are supporting knowledge transfer, bespoke course development or student placements," she says.

"The West and North-West is already facing many challenges, with the enormous shift to the east contributing to Ireland's unbalanced growth," she notes.

"This pandemic has forced us to remain local, and to think about sustaining communities in which we live. We have already proven in the past few months that we can teach and work remotely, and I'd be confident we can meet the TU challenge."

Dr Flynn took up beekeeping a year ago, and the life cycle and organisational skills of bees fascinate her, and keep her "grounded", she says. Even as she speaks, she is looking out her window at a rabbit at the gate of the north Cork farm that she and her family will soon be leaving behind. However, she already feels she had found her new home.

"GMIT really came up trumps over the past two months in terms of its community approach, and its commitment to students, both collectively and individually – students who required support no matter where they were," she says. "Those instincts, that effort, will stand to us as we plan ahead..."

## Virtual World

# ‘We’re Virtually Open’ - GMIT site has all the answers for students

GMIT recently unveiled a new microsite hosting everything prospective students need to know in one digital platform under ‘Virtual Open Day’. The virtual platform went live in April at [openday.gmit.ie](http://openday.gmit.ie) and features information about all campuses and courses, advice and guidance for students, personal welcome videos from academics and support staff, and a special video message from GMIT President Dr Orla Flynn.

From 1 May, the Virtual Open Day was complemented by live online Q&A sessions at [www.gmit.ie/livechat](http://www.gmit.ie/livechat) every Friday from 2pm to 4pm where GMIT staff answer queries on courses and services. This livechat will continue for several more weeks each Friday afternoon.

GMIT President Dr Orla Flynn says: “The Virtual Open Day is not a one-off live event, rather a micro-site that will be open 24/7, with no obligation to connect in at any specific time. We invite you to continue browsing our campuses and courses, and get advice on careers, accommodation and our range of services. We look forward to hearing your questions at our live Q&A sessions every Friday.”

GMIT Schools Liaison Officer Lorraine Cunningham and GMIT Marketing Officer Karen Smyth

explain: “We were aware that there were many disappointed students and parents who were unable to attend our Spring Open Day due to Covid-19 restrictions and we want to reassure you all that we are still here for you, so please do connect with us on our ‘Virtual Open Day’ any time between now and the Leaving Cert.”

“While nothing will replace the experience of visiting our campuses, and being in the one physical space together, we hope that this Virtual Open Day will give prospective students and parents a ‘feel’ for GMIT. Together we will try to get through this challenging time until we can welcome you onto our campuses again.”

In the live Q&A chats, prospective students and their parents can get quick feedback from staff about GMIT’s wide range of courses in Agriculture, Built Environment, Business, Computing, Creative Arts and Media, Engineering, Furniture Design, Making and Technology, Nursing, Health Sciences and Social Care, Outdoor Education, Science, Tourism, Hospitality, Heritage and Culinary Arts, Teacher Education, as well as the CAO process, student supports and campus facilities. GMIT offers over [120 courses](#) in a range of disciplines.



Fynn McMahon, Headford, Co Galway, second year student in the BA (Hons) Design at GMIT’s Centre for Creative Arts and Media in Galway. [Photo Aengus McMahon]

## Campus on virtual canvas: students take their art online

**An exciting exhibition of artwork by students on the BA in Contemporary Art Practices course at GMIT Mayo was unveiled online on 5 June, the first in a series of summer virtual exhibitions by GMIT’s design and creative arts students**

The Mayo campus online event <https://padlet.com/jmulloy274rpjnzjagt169vjp> showcases the work of twelve final year part-time students including a dedicated website for each artist and a catalogue of their works <https://issuu.com/john.mulloy/docs/gmit-cat7-final4>

Dr Deirdre Garvey, Head of Lifelong Learning, GMIT Mayo, says: “This year marks the 21st year of our provision of access to part-time art education in the region. In 1999, we enrolled our first students on the Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art and today we celebrate this exhibition with the students of the Bachelor of Arts in Contemporary Art Practices. This four-year part-time degree course is delivered over one full day and one evening per week on campus and culminates in this important end of year degree exhibition – the highlight of their studies and practice.”

Many of the students have responded to the Mayo landscape as their central theme as seen in Emma Donoghue’s paintings, looking at patterns and textures on beaches and hills, while Michael McGuinness is interested in the play of colour and light on the moun-

tains. The weather and its impact on old buildings feature in Rosemarie Norton’s work, while Clare O’Sullivan uses the view of the landscape through a window as a recurring theme in her work. Lisa McDonnell-Gonzales pays tribute to the natural world through paintings and ritualised events inspired by her Navajo-Cherokee heritage. The idea of history is central to Luci Kershaw’s work, exploring traces of the past in paint, video, audio and text through story-telling and image-making.

Several students have engaged in a more abstract approach to painting, such as Mona Curry who explores the very idea of mark-making, and Breda Flynn whose work reveals various cycles of composition, developing a dialogue between abstraction and form. Sharon Whitney Wynne’s paintings are inspired by her love of fashion and textiles, using strong, bright and bold colours, while Oisín Gannon’s paintings and sculptures are part of an attempt to explore himself and his journey through life.

By contrast, Samir Mahmood’s work is conceptual, interdisciplinary and research oriented, engaging with various materials, textures, objects, video, text and unfinished artworks, while Elaine Cunningham’s pieces invite the viewer to examine what is beyond the surface of her suspended translucent woven objects.

For details about this course, email [john.mulloy@gmit.ie](mailto:john.mulloy@gmit.ie) and/or see: [https://www.gmit.ie/lifelong-learning-lifelong-learning-mayo](https://www.gmit.ie/lifelong-learning/lifelong-learning-mayo)

Details of further virtual shows by students Letterfrack’s Centre for Excellence in Furniture Design & Technology and Cluain Mhuire’s Centre for the Creative Arts and Media (CCAM) will be announced next month (July).



Rosie Norton from Westport and, in the background, Emma Donoghue from Ballycastle, working on their pieces for the final year exhibition by students on the part-time BA in Contemporary Art Practices in GMIT Mayo.

## Virtual World

**It was never going to be a case of sitting on your laurels for choir master Seán Rowland and his top choristers**

Award-winning Galway Musical Director Sean Rowland produced an enthralling video of GMIT’s virtual choir singing John Lennon’s “Imagine” back in April - to widespread acclaim! Now he’s gone and done it again with the sequel - his own unique arrangement, a mash-up of M People’s “Search for the Hero Inside Yourself” and the hit single from the 90s musical comedy Sister Act “Oh Happy Day”.

Choir master Sean and Anita Mahony, Chairperson of GMIT Voices (Choir) and Healthy Campus, wasted no time in moving choir practice online after lockdown was announced in March. Over 100 students, staff, alumni, international students and retired staff from all campuses signed up, with family members and even pets joining in.

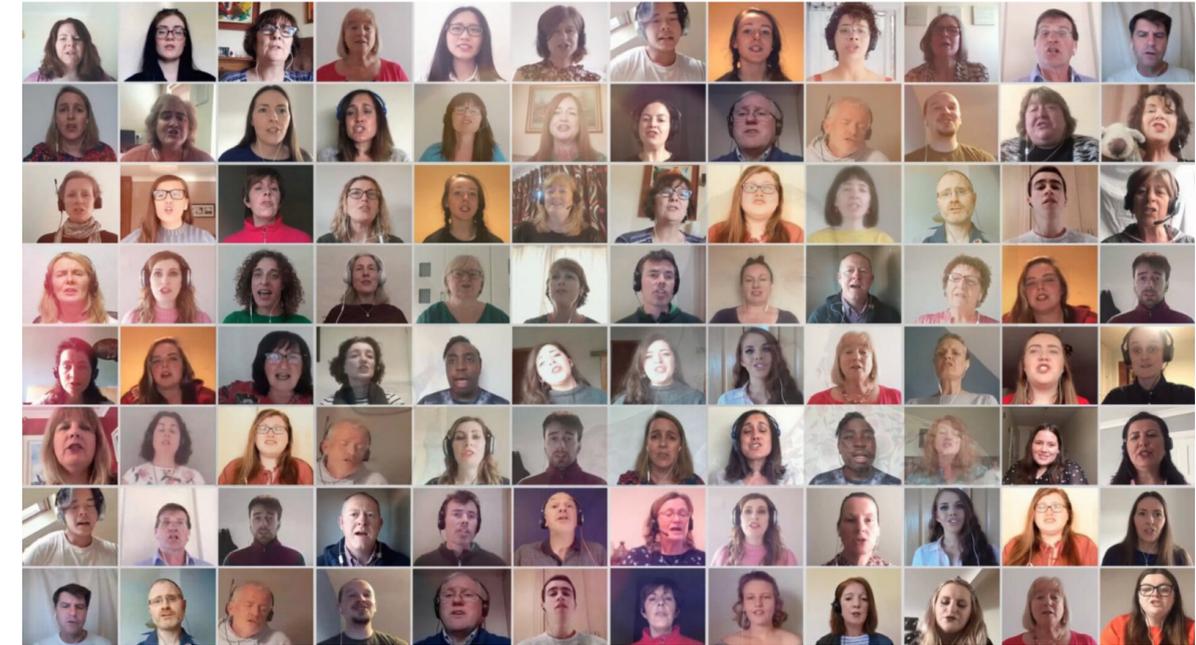
One of the first to join was GMIT’s new President, Dr Orla Flynn. “As a newcomer to GMIT, I didn’t get a chance to get out and meet staff and students due to the closure, so the choir has given me a brilliant opportunity to become part of the GMIT community. Virtually or otherwise, there is something magical about coming together to sing. Sean puts in huge effort to encourage participation, and we are very grateful.”

Sean Rowland added: “I think it’s incredibly brave of all the individuals to step out of their comfort zone and take part in a virtual choir. It takes courage to expose one’s voice even if it is only for my ears initially and I think it has come together wonderfully. There is no substitute for a live performance and the physical feeling we get from singing in a choir, however what The GMIT Virtual Choir has achieved here is astonishing. It was especially uplifting to see everyone’s smiling faces again and to welcome participants from all five of the GMIT campuses.”

“The response to this entire experience has been overwhelmingly positive”, adds Anita Mahony. “The virtual choir is having a really positive impact on everyone’s mental health. It’s amazing to see the reaction and interaction at our Zoom sessions and also on social media. Everyone is clearly enjoying the experience.”

“Happy Day” by GMIT Virtual Choir will be released on the GMIT website and YouTube Channel on Monday 15 June. Watch “Imagine” on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTeVogFfoWc&feature=youtu.be>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/GMITOfficial>



A snapshot of the GMIT Virtual Choir on Zoom. [Image from Sean Rowland]

## Imagine! Seán has a second hit after Lennon song success...



Sean Rowland receiving an Elite Cakes Boutique thank you gift especially delivered to his home, courtesy of GMIT President Dr Orla Flynn.

“ Sean completed a mammoth task - over 80 hours of post-production and editing which is usually done by a team of people. We are so grateful for all the passion he brings to this virtual choir ”



CONNACHT-ULSTER  
ALLIANCE

# Dr Seán Duffy is appointed CUA executive project lead

## Dr Duffy to lead project seeking a Technological University for the West & North-West

**T**he Presidents of the Connacht-Ulster Alliance (CUA) of GMIT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT welcome the appointment of Dr Seán Duffy to the position of CUA Executive Project Lead as the alliance proceeds towards becoming a Technological University (TU) for the West and North-west of Ireland.

Dr Duffy, originally from Sligo, will oversee the progress of the CUA project by bringing dedicated, strategic and executive day to day leadership to ensure the achievement of the CUA's ambition. Dr Duffy has over 25 years' education management experience in the third-level sector having held the post of Head of School of Tourism at Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) for eleven years and Head of Department for seven years. In 2018, he was appointed LYIT CUA Project Manager, leading the €2.85m HEA-funded iNOTE Project, a collaborative initiative to develop innovative digital opportunities that will transform higher education in the West and North-West of Ireland.

Commenting on his appointment, Dr Duffy says: 'Being involved in the development of the new Technological University for the West and North-West is an exciting opportunity as it will be a gamechanger in terms of higher education

in the region, I look forward to working with colleagues across the three Institutes on this project".

Dr Duffy holds a PhD from the University of Limerick, MSc (Distinction) from Ulster University and a BA (Hons) from GMIT, formerly RTC Galway. Prior to joining LYIT he worked as Director of the International Hotel and Tourism Management Institute, Lucerne, Switzerland for six years. He has been actively involved in promoting the tourism and hospitality sector and regional development in Ireland for 20 years, with memberships of Donegal's Tourism Sectoral Forum, Donegal Food Coast Steering Committee (Chair), Local Enterprise Office (LEO), Donegal's Sliabh Liag Development Project, and was a member of the West/North-West Cluster Group (GMIT, LYIT, IT Sligo and NUIG). Recently, on behalf of the CUA, he was a member of Technological University Research Network (TURN) Working Group 1 which focused on TU staffing, grading norms and capacity development.

Dr Duffy is a Fellow of the Irish Hospitality Institute and a member of numerous professional bodies. He was awarded the first Fáilte Ireland Senior Research Fellowship in 2005/2006 for research on technology adoption and SMEs. He has been an external examiner on programmes from Level 6-9 in Ireland and Switzerland and has worked with national and international further and higher education bodies.

**T**he Presidents of GMIT, IT Sligo and LYIT, Dr Orla Flynn, Brendan McCormack and Paul Hannigan, said "We are delighted to have appointed someone of Sean's calibre to lead the TU ambition for the CUA. Sean has great experience of the IT sector together with a strong commitment to bring the three Institutions together as a Technological University."

Dr Duffy brings significant change management experience to the position which was gained from playing a key role in the management of the amalgamation process, which saw the successful integration of the Tourism College Killybegs (TCK) with Letterkenny Institute of Technology in 2007. For further information about the CUA, see: <https://cualliance.ie/>

**"We are delighted to have appointed someone of Seán's calibre to lead the TU ambition for the CUA. Seán has great experience of the IT sector..."**

*Presidents Orla Flynn, Brendan McCormack and Paul Hannigan*



**“ Being involved in the development of the new Technological University for the West and North-West is an exciting opportunity as it will be a gamechanger in terms of higher education in the region ”**



CONNACHT-ULSTER  
ALLIANCE



**L to R (top): Dr Seán Duffy, Executive Project Lead; Dr Shirley Wrynn, GMIT CUA Project Manager; Ann Higgins, IT Sligo CUA Project Manager; Anne-Marie McCormack, CUA Data Analyst; L to R (bottom): Tracy Madden, GMIT CUA administrator; Colm McVeigh, IT Sligo CUA administrator; and Catherine McNally, LYIT CUA administrator.**

# Alliance expands its administrative centre in bid for Uni Tech status

**As part of its plans to become a Technological University, the Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA) has expanded its administrative centre which it originally established in 2014. It comprises staff from the three institutes, GMIT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT**

The new centre is managed by Dr Seán Duffy, Executive Project Lead, Dr Shirley Wrynn, GMIT CUA Project Manager, and Ann Higgins, IT Sligo CUA Project Manager. The office is supported by Anne-Marie McCormack, CUA Data Analyst, based in IT Sligo; Tracy Madden, GMIT CUA administrator, Colm McVeigh, IT Sligo CUA administrator and Catherine McNally, LYIT CUA administrator.

All CUA meetings have moved to Microsoft TEAMS since the Covid-19 lockdown in mid-March. Over 120 CUA staff are engaged on a regular basis in CUA Working Groups and Sub-groups. All have successfully transitioned to working remotely via MS Teams during the current Covid-19 pandemic. The move was made possible as many had already embraced video conference meetings as a regular part of CUA engagement and collaboration.

While supporting the work of the project management team the office also oversees the administration of four working groups and 18 sub-groups which span all functions across the CUA. The office also supports numerous committees and IR forums since its establishment. The CUA Project Management Team has facilitated a number of important gatherings such as the first meeting of all three institutes' Governing Bodies in Donegal in November (2019), and a major Connacht-Ulster Alliance (CUA) Research Symposium in Sligo in January (2020). The CUA's three Executive Boards, Chairs and Management Groups continue to meet and are due to have their formal meetings as a group later this

month (24 June) via MS Teams. The CUA Project Management Team works closely with the CUA Communications Sub-group and produces a monthly update summarising all CUA activity.

Dr Shirley Wrynn, GMIT CUA Project Manager, who is aligned with Working Group 2 (Research & Innovation) outlines some key recent developments: "Over the last two years there has been significant activity across the CUA Working Groups and sub-groups and we have invested great effort in building up our research programme provision and strengthening our research collaboration across the CUA. Following these successes, we are now beginning the important process of compiling the relevant datasets in preparation for drafting a submission document."

"WG2 has successfully appointed a lead writer, Dr John Bartlett, who will be supported and assisted by the members of WG2 and the Enterprise & Knowledge Exchange sub-group. At present, we are focusing on a *CUA Research Outputs Survey* which has been circulated to all staff and which will be critical in capturing the breadth of research activity across the CUA. Importantly, this will capture both peer-reviewed and non-peer reviewed activity which is characteristic of a technological university and I would encourage all research active staff to engage with this process as the data gathered will be central to the international panel's assessment of our current operations and future potential"

Ann Higgins, ITS CUA Project Manager, notes 'Collaboration and parity of esteem is the cornerstone of the CUA project. In a dispersed geographical region, colleagues across the three partner institutes continue to collaborate on a number of quality projects of scale and impact for students, staff and the wider region we serve. Examples range from joint CUA research bursaries, innovative teaching supports for staff and students to building on our leadership position in online learning."

**“ At present, we are focusing on a CUA Research Outputs Survey which has been circulated to all staff and which will be critical in capturing the breadth of research activity across the CUA. Importantly, this will capture both peer-reviewed and non-peer reviewed activity which is characteristic of a technological university and I would encourage all research active staff to engage with this process ”**

**Dr Shirley Wrynn**

# Katie leads the way in marine project

**Aim to merge art with science to highlight pollution impact on seabirds**

GMIT has been awarded funding from the Irish Research Council to develop an exciting marine science outreach project on ethical taxidermy (stuffing and preserving animals found dead) to raise awareness of the effects of pollution on seabirds.

“The art of ethical taxidermy in marine science education” aims to use new techniques marrying art and science to draw attention to issues facing seabirds in their wider environment. It will involve a multidisciplinary team of scientists, artists, registered taxidermists and media, led by GMIT’s Dr Katie O’Dwyer, lecturer in Aquatic Ecology, Dept of Natural Sciences.

The team includes Donal Mulcahy of Glenameade Taxidermy and Aurelien McEvoy-Jean of East Coast Taxidermy; marine biologist and artist Sabine Springer; media producer Peter Cutler and GMIT scientist Andrew Power, both of Crow Crag Productions; and GMIT scientists Drs Katie O’Dwyer, Ian O’Connor and Heidi Acampora, all based at the Marine and Freshwater Research Centre in GMIT’s Dublin Road campus.

Dr Katie O’Dwyer says: “We are very excited to have the opportunity to bring together a very creative team to produce this novel educational project. The seabirds we will be using were exposed to a range of man-made problems in their natural environment, including plastic pollution, oil pollution, and lost fishing gear.”

“By creating thought-provoking displays highlighting the animals’ demise, we plan to promote conservation of the marine environment. As part of the project, we will also produce a video highlighting ongoing issues facing seabirds, along with



©Heidi Acampora, Ian O’Connor, Simon Berrow



**“We are very excited to have the opportunity to bring together a very creative team to produce this novel educational project”** *Dr Katie O’Dwyer*

the process of ethical taxidermy and its application in marine science education.”

“By highlighting these issues through art and media, we hope to shed some light on priority areas targeted in the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals: Preventing and significantly reducing marine pollution;

and, sustainably managing and protecting marine and coastal ecosystems”.

To track this project see: <https://www.facebook.com/MERCGMIT> <https://sites.google.com/site/katieodwyer00/research-topics?authuser=0>

## New MSc in design and innovation co-designed with industry

GMIT have collaborated with a wide range of industry and service sector groups to develop a ground-breaking new postgraduate course for employees in the MedTech, Technology, Manufacturing and Services sectors.

The Master of Science in Design & Innovation was designed by a multi-disciplinary team from departments within the Schools of Engineering, Business, and Design & Creative Arts following consultation with representatives from the IDA and several companies that included Thermo King and Avaya.

The two-year course seeks to address skills shortages in the west of Ireland as highlighted in reports such as “The National Planning Framework: Project Ireland 2040”, explains Dr Gabriel J Costello, Chartered Engineer and lecturer in the Dept of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering,

and Chair of the new MSc.

“The masters employs a “learning by doing” approach inspired by the Stanford d. School’s design philosophy, which is having increasing influence in Higher Educational Institutes around the world. In addition to traditional engineering and product design education, “design thinking” is now being applied across disciplines such as business, law, medicine, the social sciences and humanities.”

“In these challenging times, addressing current business and societal challenges will require skills in creativity and innovation. This Level 9 course is for employees who want to upskill while continuing to work part-time or full-time.” For more details and to apply click [here](#)



**Dr Gabriel J Costello, Chartered Engineer, Chair of the new MSc, and lecturer in the Dept of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering.**

## Dr Luca’s Mirimin’s marine mission

After graduating with a degree in natural sciences from the University of Ferrara in Italy, Dr Luca Mirimin travelled to University College Cork to do a PhD in zoology. After stints as a postdoctoral scientist in South Africa and Ireland, he joined the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) as a lecturer in aquatic ecology.

Mirimin is also a principal investigator and project coordinator for a range of research projects on molecular ecology and conservation genetics at the Marine and Freshwater Research Centre at GMIT. He was recently a participant in the finals of the FameLab Ireland science communication competition.

Read the full article by Colm Goirey in Silicon Republic: <https://www.siliconrepublic.com/innovation/luca-mirimin-gmit-environmental-dna>



**Dr Luca Mirimin is investigating ways to examine marine life without needing to catch them.** Pic: The British Council



**Member of the GMIT Self-Assessment Team (SAT). Back row, L to R: Dr Heather Lally, Dr Seán Duignan, Edel O’Connor, Dr Eugene McCarthy, Tony McDonogh, Prof Graham Heaslip, Garret Jordan, Dr Seamus Morrissey, Diarmuid Ó Conghaile, Jim Fennell, Dr Mark McCarthy, Mary Nestor, Dr Rick Officer, Hilary Molloy, Valerie Butler, Dr Barry McMillan, Renagh Linnane. Front L to R: Dr Cormac Flynn, Dr Amaya Vega, Andrea Moloney, Sharon Walker, Dr Nireeksha Karode, Cait Noone, Aaron Burke.**

## Athena SWAN: the path to removing barriers

**Mary Nestor, GMIT Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Manager, writes about the work of a new team aiming to achieve Athena SWAN recognition and the processes that entail**

Some of the values that underpin the GMIT Strategic Plan 2010-23 and guide the institute’s thinking and actions for its students and staff are respect, integrity, egalitarianism, nurturing and impactful. All of these values relate to one of the priorities set out in the GMIT Strategic Plan 2019-23, which is to create a community rich in diversity and “Embed diversity, equality and inclusion into the governance and management of GMIT which ensures equality of opportunity and transparency”.

The immediate, but not the only, priority with the EDI at GMIT is a focus on gender inequality. This is an internationally observed issue and has been highlighted as a key area by the HEA in the Expert Group Report (2016) and the Gender Action Plan 2018-2020 (2018). The framework used for investigating gender inequality and changing institutional culture in Irish higher education institutions is known as Athena SWAN.

Athena SWAN is a principles-based charter that commits the institute to removing barriers that contribute to under-representation. Since it was introduced in Ireland in 2015, a Bronze award has been attained by 13 HEIs (Apr 2020) including all of the universities and Cork IT, IT Carlow and Limerick IT. It is now a requirement that Irish higher education institutes must have Athena SWAN gender equality accreditation in order to be eligible for research funding. GMIT will apply for an Athena SWAN Bronze award in the November submission round.

By applying for an Athena SWAN Bronze award, GMIT must engage in an honest and meaningful institutional self-assessment process. A Self-Assessment Team (SAT) has been established following an open call to all staff

(Nov 2019), and 33 individuals from various roles and disciplines across the institution are currently working collaboratively on this application.

“This involves surveying the views, perceptions and lived experience of staff in relation to equality and related matters and committing to an action plan to address any barriers to equality that may exist. Improvements as a result of this process will benefit all staff and will be visible in an action plan which will span a four-year period.

In April 2020 a detailed survey captured the views and experiences of staff in relation to matters of equality and diversity in the institute. This was completed by 471 participants representing 59% of all staff. This was followed by a series of focus groups in May 2020 which covered areas such as career progression, flexible working practices, support for staff with caring responsibilities and workplace culture. The survey and focus group findings are currently being analysed to highlight equality and diversity issues that need to be addressed by the Institute through the first GMIT Gender Action Plan. Staff are receiving regular updates on key milestones in the process.

I welcome the opportunity for self-reflection that engagement with the Athena SWAN framework provides to examine our policies, practices and staff experiences in terms of gender equality and opportunity for all staff at the institute and to mainstream EDI into the wider organisational systems.”

For more information on news, events and activities in GMIT EDI, please visit <https://www.gmit.ie/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-edi> - email [edi@gmit.ie](mailto:edi@gmit.ie) or follow on twitter @GMIT\_EDI.



**Dr Marie Connolly, Head of Equality & Diversity at UL with Mary Nestor, EDI Manager, GMIT.**

“ I welcome the opportunity for self-reflection that engagement with the Athena SWAN framework provides to examine our policies, practices and staff experiences in terms of gender equality and opportunity for all staff

By Molly Dunne, GMIT Sports Development Officer

For GMIT Sport the year 2020 is a year we won't ever forget. While Covid-19 has certainly played its part in cutting the season short for many of our teams there were, as always, a number of hugely positive success stories that we will fondly remember. None more so than the launch of our new sports brand, GMIT Falcons.

GMIT unveiled an exciting new identity for its sports activities across all campuses, bringing student teams and individuals together under the one sports brand, 'GMIT Falcons', for the first time in the history of the college.

The new brand was formally launched at a special function in the college on Friday, 14 February, when students wore the new kit and colours during a presentation by Dr Michael Hannon, Acting President of GMIT, attended by students, coaches, staff and representatives from sports organisations across the region.

Central to the new identity is the falcon bird of prey, conveying elements of agility, grace, speed and ferocity while the predominant shades of blue echo the traditional blue of the Connacht coat of arms. GMIT students and staff responded enthusiastically when the new kits, logo and colours were unveiled. Student teams have been wearing the new kit since January (2020) and we have already begun to extend the range to leisure wear and other branded accessories.

On the sporting arena and fields we had another highly successful season. GMIT were crowned league champions in their divisions in Senior Men's Rugby, Senior Camogie, Fresher hurling and Senior hurling. The success continued into 2020 with GMIT Falcons winning six titles in the National Boxing Intersivity's and Gold at the National Cheer-leading Intersivity for the 6th year running.

There were also individual successes in both Handball & Judo. Unfortunately, a number of our team's seasons were cut short due to Covid-19, where we have no doubt, we would have seen many more of our students excel. While we do not know what the 2020/21 season

# GMIT UNITED!

## New GMIT Falcons brand uniting sports across all campuses for first time



L to R: Aaron Burke, GMIT Students Union President, Molly Dunne, GMIT Sports Development Officer, Victor O'Loughlin, SU Deputy President for Education, and Jayne Cooley, SU Vice President for Welfare.



L to R, Damian Curley, GMIT GAA Development Officer, Paul McNamara, GPA scholarship recipient, Molly Dunne, GMIT Sports Development Officer.

in third level sport will look like, our sports students as always will embrace the challenge and represent GMIT Falcons with pride. Check out the GMITSU Life

YouTube Channel for videos from our virtual GMIT Sports Awards, GMIT Falcons Launch and much more - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmFKOk8BSUI>



Pictured right: Sarah Healy (camogie) and Josh Graham (rugby). Pictured below: Sarah and Josh with Eanna Murphy, Cianan Fahy and Rachel O'Connor with league silverware won this season in Camogie, Fresher Hurling, Senior Hurling and Men's Rugby.



[Photos: Aengus McMahon]

ABOVE: GMIT club representatives from 30 sports teams across all campuses, wearing the new GMIT Falcons kit.



L to R, Brian Kenny (coach), Shane Walsh, Matthew Barrett, Wilson Waweru, Brian Laffey (Head Coach), Ray Connolly.

# Our surfers on the crest of a wave after securing national title for third year in a row

**GMIT Mayo Campus Surf club hold off stiff competition from UCC (2nd) and NUI Galway (3rd)**

**G**MIT Mayo Campus Surf club celebrated on the double on the weekend of March 6-8, hosting the 2020 Surf Intersarsity Championship - a gathering of the finest surfers from all over the Island and winning the "Team Event" to secure a 3-in-a-row of national titles.

Attracting over 100 of the country's finest surfers in third-level education to Castlebar and Achill provided a great boost to the local economy and further enhanced Mayo's reputation as a destination of choice for adventure activities and the popular [Outdoor Education degree course](#).

Competition Head Judge Wayne Murphy praised the work of the organising committee, saying: "They kept the event running like clockwork all day as deteriorating conditions forced changes to the format, while fierce wind and rain tested the volunteers to the max but they all were up to the task."

The campus team held off stiff competition from UCC (2nd) and NUI Galway (3rd) to claim the national title in a contest that included UCD, IT Sligo, Queens, Waterford IT, UL, TU Dublin and NUI Maynooth.

Club Captain David Hartley, who received the award from world famous surfer Gearoid McDaid, said "I am so proud of the club for the work they put into creating such an incredible event while keeping a competitive edge



**Back L-R: Siobhain Lane, Maeve O'Sullivan, Shane Flanagan, Oisín Neary, David Hartley (Club Captain), Gearoid McDaid, Josh Naab, Jaggie Whelan, Adam Boal-Quinn, Stephen Ruane, Erika Vansveciute. Front L-R: Peter Fitzpatrick, Daniel Lambe, Joseph Corrigan, Heather O'Connor, Rowan Quinn, Sophie Devereux, Donal Mac Canna.**

to win our third title in a row and establish ourselves as the top club in colleges surfing."

GMIT Mayo Sports Officer Nigel Jennings added: "Yet again the students hosted a hugely successful national event. To win the 3-in-a-row is a brilliant achievement and a testimony to the work and mentoring of Jarlath McHale."

The Club was one of three teams shortlisted for the Student Sport Ireland 'Event of the Year' award for their hosting of this event.

**"Yet again the students hosted a hugely successful national event. To win the 3-in-a-row is a brilliant achievement and a testimony to the work and mentoring of Jarlath McHale"**

*Nigel Jennings*



**L-R: Rowan Quinn, David Hartley, Heather O'Connor, Adam Boal-Quinn, Sophie Devereux.**

## Tribute Dennis Murphy (1950 – 2020)

# A unique person and man of the community who developed links with universities all over the world and was highly regarded by graduates

**D**ennis, originally from Booterstown, Co. Dublin graduated from Trinity College, Dublin in 1972. Before joining GMIT in 1977 (RTC Galway) he first worked with the National Youth Council of Ireland and then spent two years in Waterford RTC and one year in Cork RTC.

He lectured in the GMIT School of Business from 1977 until November 1986 when he became Head of the Department of Hotel and Catering Management. In 2003, the President, Marion Coy, asked him, along with Hugh McBride, to prepare the Institute's application for Delegated Authority and, on the successful completion of this application, he then worked on the alignment of all the GMIT programmes with the National Framework of Qualifications.

Becoming Head of Teaching and Learning in September 2007, a post he held until he retired in 2012, he also had responsibility for the International Office and initiated some very successful links with universities all over the world, which resulted in many foreign students, notably from China and Saudi, attending GMIT. Three GMIT students completed NBA's in Nanchang as a result of his contacts and a number of lecturers had the opportunity to lecture briefly in Nanchang.

During his time in GMIT, Dennis was the Permanent Trustee of the Students Union, a responsibility he took very seriously and enjoyed very much. He was always interested in the welfare of students and, as can be seen from social media since his death, was highly regarded by graduates who would have known him while he was Head of Department.

**D**ennis had developed a keen interest in China and had made many Chinese friends on his travels to China for GMIT. On his retirement, Dennis went to China for a number of years where he lectured in Management in a number of universities including Nanchang University.

Living in Oughterard for over forty years, Dennis was very involved in the local community. He was a founding member and trustee of Oughterard Rugby Club. Each year he was heavily involved in putting up the Christmas lights.

Having a great love of art, Dennis had built up a considerable collection of paintings, some by graduates and staff members of GMIT. His mother and father started the collection and Dennis and his sister Ger added to it. On his retirement, Dennis donated his collection to GMIT and

Ger has now also donated her collection. The paintings will be exhibited in prominent areas of the institute where they will be secure and can viewed, such as the boardroom, the foyer of the New Building and the library.

He was a lifetime member of the Galway Motor Club being secretary for many years and was Clerk of the Course for the Ballyvaughan Hillclimbs for a number of years. He participated in a number of events in a Mini with PJ Gannon in recent years.

Unfortunately, Dennis became gravely ill in June 2019 and spent the last eleven months of his life in Saint Vincent's Hospital. His sister Ger visited him nearly every day until Covid 19 struck and visits had to stop. The care and attention that Ger gave Dennis was fantastic.

Dennis died on 9 May and will be sadly missed by Ger and by

his son Conor. Guards of honour formed at GMIT, at Busypark Church, at Oughterard Rugby Club, and at in Oughterard by his neighbours as his remains travelled home to Oughterard.

Dennis was a unique person who will be sadly missed.



**Written by Gerry O'Neill, retired Head of Dept, GMIT Hotel School.**



**Dennis Murphy: having a great love of art, he had built up a considerable collection of paintings, some by graduates and staff members of GMIT. On his retirement, Dennis donated his collection to GMIT. The paintings will be exhibited in prominent areas of the institute.**