



Ollscoil Chathair  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University

# Voices

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE DCU ALUMNI COMMUNITY

## Dare to Dream

OLYMPIAN SOPHIE  
BECKER: FROM  
DCU TO THE  
GLOBAL STAGE



### ALUMNI EVENTS

Key connection events  
across the calendar

### FEATURES

DCU Alumni Give Back  
Guiding the Leaders of the Future  
Diversity and Inclusion

### ALUMNI INTERVIEWS

DCU graduates share their  
inspirational stories

### DAY IN THE LIFE

2024 DCU Alumni Awardee



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**so you can**  
 explore the  
 possibilities ahead

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COVER IMAGE:  
 Sophie Becker  
 competing in  
 the National  
 Track & Field  
 Championships at  
 Morton Stadium,  
 August 2025.  
 Photo by Sam  
 Barnes/Sportsfile.



# Voices

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE DCU ALUMNI COMMUNITY

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# Welcome

PROFESSOR DÁIRE KEOGH, DCU PRESIDENT



**W**elcome to **DCU Voices** magazine, showcasing the impact and achievements of DCU's global alumni community.

The new format of **DCU Voices** reflects the energy and ambition of our graduates and highlights their diverse pathways and perspectives – from robotics innovators to fashion leaders, sporting heroes to social media trailblazers, maths wizards to inspiring teachers. We also review some University milestones, such as the opening of Polaris, our state-of-the-art STEM facility that has already become a North Dublin landmark.

This edition also captures the lively calendar of events organised by our Alumni Office team. This includes our international chapter meet-ups, mentorship initiatives and Emerging Leaders programme, and the annual DCU Alumni Awards.

It is always a pleasure to connect with DCU graduates in Ireland and around the world, and I look forward to engaging with even more of you in the years ahead. Wherever you are, stay in touch – you are part of DCU's story, and our shared future.

Professor Dáire Keogh, DCU President



LAURA MAHONEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ENGAGEMENT

**A**s Executive Director of Engagement, I am proud to highlight the vital role our alumni play in shaping the life and future of our University. Alumni engagement is a cornerstone of DCU's success, fostering a vibrant community that inspires current students and strengthens the University's impact at home and abroad. By sharing these stories of successful and diverse career journeys, our graduates serve as role models, motivating our current students to pursue their ambitions with confidence. Our partnerships with enterprise, employers, and the local community, are essential in building networks of support that benefit our students and alumni alike. Through initiatives like our mentorship programmes and international chapters, we seek to cultivate these meaningful connections that enhance both the graduate and student experience and open doors to new opportunities. Together, we can create a dynamic ecosystem of collaboration and innovation, helping DCU continue to transform lives and societies. Stay connected – your impact matters!

Laura Mahoney, Executive Director of Engagement

## ENGAGEMENT

For over 40 years, Dublin City University (DCU) has been committed to engagement. We've built strong partnerships locally in North Dublin through businesses, schools, and community groups, nationally through state bodies and enterprises, and globally through our alumni, industry partners and international academic networks.

Our Engagement team helps to support a variety of partnerships – including; Industry Partnerships, Cultural Arts programmes, student volunteering, and community outreach – which are designed to deepen these connections and make us a partner of choice. We're also actively expanding our global presence to strengthen our reputation and enhance our appeal as a top destination for students and researchers from every corner of the globe.

Find out more at [dcu.ie/directorofengagement](https://dcu.ie/directorofengagement) or go to our engagement hub to find out how we can work with you. [dcu.ie/engage-with-dcu](https://dcu.ie/engage-with-dcu)



Executive Director of Engagement Laura Mahoney, student category winner of the President's Award for Engagement 2025 Malha Muhammed and DCU President Professor Dáire Keogh



DCU Culture Night Celebrations on our St Patrick's Campus in Drumcondra

# Out and About

ALUMNI EVENTS OFFER A GREAT WAY TO MAKE CONNECTIONS AND CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENTS! HERE IS A SNAPSHOT OF SOME RECENT EVENTS...

## ALUMNI AWARDS



Alumni Awardees: Michael Lanagan, Daniel Davern, Dr Anne Dolan, Máire Kearney, Billy Hann, Caron McCaffrey and Barry Doyle.

Alumni Council Member Gaye White, Awardee Fiona Lodge and Alumni Council Chair James Corcoran.



## INTERNATIONAL CHAPTERS



The Launch of the DCU Alumni London Chapter at the London Irish Centre. Alumni enjoyed refreshments, music and a guest panel featuring Laura Whitmore and Medb Riordan. L-R: Ross Munnelly, DCU Director of Alumni Relations, DCU alumna Laura Whitmore, Rosaleen Blair CBE, Professor Dáire Keogh, DCU President, DCU alumna Medb Riordan and Séamus MacCormaic, CEO of London Irish Centre.



Director of Alumni Relations Ross Munnelly and Executive Director of Engagement Laura Mahoney meet DCU graduates in Washington DC for a special St. Patrick's Day celebration, marking the 2025 Alumni Chapter event.



DCU Alumni based in London gathered for a vibrant summer meet-up in Covent Garden, celebrating the growth of the UK Alumni Chapter.

## ALUMNI REUNIONS

Mater Dei Institute Class of 1984 reunite on St Patrick's Campus for their 40th anniversary celebration, with thanks to class organiser Prof Anne Looney.



The St Patrick's College Class of 1975 gathered on St Patrick's Campus for their 50th Anniversary Celebration. With over 100 in attendance, classmates traveled from all over Ireland to reunite once again as a class.



Congratulations to the St Patrick's Class of 1964, who marked their milestone 60th anniversary with a joyful return to campus, celebrating decades of friendship.



## ALUMNI AFFINITY!

Fairway connections: DCU alumni tee off at the annual Alumni Golf Outing.



DCU Alumni enjoy music, laughter, and GAA chat before kickoff at annual All Ireland Brunch.



Former Taoiseach Enda Kenny, alumnus of the St Patrick's College Class of 1969, receives an honorary doctorate from DCU.

# Giving Back

THE CONTINUATION OF THE TIES BETWEEN DCU AND ALUMNI HAS MANY GUISES – ONE OF WHICH IS WHEN ALUMNI TAKE THE TIME TO GIVE BACK TO THE UNIVERSITY WITH THEIR TIME AND EXPERIENCE. HERE, WE TALK TO **NEIL REDMOND**, DIRECTOR OF CYBERSECURITY AT PwC IRELAND, ABOUT HOW AND WHY HE GIVES BACK TO HIS ALMA MATER

**H**aving completed a degree in Electronic Engineering – a subject that Neil was interested in since he was a young boy, curious as to how and why components worked in radios, TVs and cars – Neil returned to DCU and achieved an Executive Masters in Business Administration. “This was an excellent course that provided me with the necessary tools to manage products, teams and clients in an effective manner,” he explains. Since then, Neil has led a varied and interesting career, which has seen him work as an engineer with Intel, moving into telecommunications and finally specialising in cybersecurity; an area he has worked in for the past eight years. Today, Neil is Director of Cybersecurity at PwC Ireland, advising clients on how to manage their risks associated with EU regulations and also developing the products and reporting structures that provide clients with ways to articulate their managed risk and benefits to their key stakeholders. Looking back on his time at DCU, Neil has fond memories on campus and believes that having DCU as his chosen place to study has benefited his career path: “I chose DCU as it was the top technical university in Ireland. On the social side, the engineering society was in its infancy, but I was the class rep for first year. Being a DCU graduate helped provide me with good understanding of an industrial environment through the INTRA programme\* and this led directly to a



Mentors and mentees at the Closing Ceremony of the DCU Career Mentoring Programme 2025

Image Credit: Kyran O'Brien

## DCU CAREER MENTORING PROGRAMME

Jointly the Alumni Office and DCU Careers Service, the programme matches students with alumni mentors based on shared career interests, DCU courses and professional expertise. Mentors are encouraged, where possible, to offer a Work Shadow Day to their mentee providing invaluable real-world insight. Mentorship is a powerful way to give back; sharing your experience and helping students build confidence and networks. In return, mentors gain network support and the chance to reflect on their own journey.

job on graduating. The course provided confidence to problem solve, mix with different people, and acquire new skills that were directly applicable to the job I took up on graduating. Alongside the EMBA, I have made life-long friendships through DCU and, in addition, I have been a mentor for DCU undergrads for the last five years, something that I take enormous pride in.”

On the topic of mentorship, Neil continues: “The mentoring programme is a way of providing insights to undergrads on what the reality of their degree will look like in a future job. As an alumnus, I support the current undergrads and provide insights that are useful on reflection. For example, CV structures, ideal jobs and companies, as well as opening eyes to new industry sectors that may not have been considered. On the latter, I believe at least two mentees are now in jobs that they never would have considered if it weren't for the programme. I have kept in touch with all since their

To find out more about the DCU Graduate to Student Mentorship Programme visit: [dcu.ie/alumni](https://dcu.ie/alumni)



## MENTOR OF THE YEAR

**Laura Miskella** is the current holder of the Mentor of the Year award for the DCU Career Mentoring programme. Commenting on why she gives back, she says:

“I have always been a very proud alumni, having completed both my undergraduate and postgraduate courses at DCU. The support and encouragement from my lecturers was outstanding and has continued long into my post-graduation years, affording me many opportunities to work on research projects. I wanted to show my appreciation to DCU and give back to the university that helped shape my teaching career. It was an honour to be accepted on the programme as a mentor for the last number of years. I have met many inspiring mentors and mentees throughout my time on the programme. To be chosen as Mentor of the Year was a such a privilege. I have thoroughly enjoyed every mentee session and mentor meet up and have made some lasting connections on the programme. I'm very excited for the 2025/26 programme year to begin!”

## FROM THE CHAIR

**James Corcoran**, Chair of DCU's Alumni Council, helps to guide and shape the DCU alumni strategy in mission. On the importance of mentorship, he says: “My time in DCU formed and shaped my career. Giving back to the university is a way of expressing my gratitude for all that it gave to me but is also a way of supporting current students to fulfil their potential and to achieve their goals. In giving back to the university in my role as Chair of the Alumni Council, and in other roles I have held in the university, I have always received more from the university than I have ever given, through new experiences, friendships, networks and insights into how such a successful university operates and engages with its many stakeholders.”



# A Voice for Philanthropy

TWO DCU ALUMNI DISCUSS THE POWER OF PHILANTHROPY AND SHINE A LIGHT ON HOW DONATIONS CAN TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF STUDENTS NOW AND INTO THE FUTURE

## ULTAN DOYLE

Ultan Doyle graduated from DCU Business School in 2001. Since then, he has enjoyed a successful career in banking and finance, but his passion lies in volunteering and raising money for charity. Currently a Programme Manager at global power management company Eaton, Ultan supports the DCU Excellence and Opportunity Fund – which helps the university create new research opportunities and support transformative student scholarships - through monthly giving. He has also advocated for his employer to take part in the DCU Access To The Workplace Programme, a professional summer internship programme for Access and neurodivergent students: "As a proud DCU alumnus I know firsthand the impact that access to education and opportunity can have. Every donation – big or small – plays a big part in creating a more inclusive, supportive environment for the next generation of DCU graduates."

Talking about his own experience at DCU, Ultan notes: "I loved my time at DCU – I found the course excellent, the facilities were great and I made so many friends on campus. I transferred from Carlow in second year, as I thought some of the subjects being offered in DCU were more relevant to what I wanted to do, and everyone was so welcoming: I remember one of my lecturers bringing all of the transfer students out for tea and coffee so we could get to know each other. It was so thoughtful." Having set up his own business after leaving college, Ultan went on to work for Bank of Ireland and then Eaton. At Eaton, he has become centrally involved in driving the company's charitable work, specifically for Dublin Simon Community: "I helped start the first community support committee in Eaton's World Headquarters in Ireland and in 2018 we started the relationship with Dublin Simon Community. We have a 'bring centre' where staff can donate clothing or items that could be sold in charity shops and we have lots of fundraising activities. For example, we arranged for all the electrics to be done by Eaton at a new 100-bed facility for Dublin Simon Community."



This drive to give back has also led Ultan to set up monthly donation to his alma mater. "It is so easy to set up a monthly donation – it doesn't matter how small it is; the cumulative effect of a small amount on a regular basis can make a real difference. I think it is incumbent on me to do something for DCU as I feel that I was really lucky to get the opportunity to study there. I know the people that this helps will be contributing to this country in the future, economically, for sure, but also socially to the community. I suspect, because they were given help themselves, there will be a snowball effect. It grows legs, it builds and gets bigger. I would encourage other alumni to get involved and help the DCU students of the future."

"The Alumni Fund is a collective effort – an example of our alumni community's deep commitment to transforming lives and societies. The support of our graduates helps us advance DCU's world-class research and maintain scholarships that empower students to reach their full potential."

**Deirdre Hannigan, Chair of DCU Educational Trust**



“ I would encourage other alumni to get involved and help the DCU students of the future.

## CAROL GREWAL

Carol Grewal, originally from Dublin, is living in San Francisco and working as Associate Superintendent for Governance and Operational Vitality for the Department of Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Carol moved to the US in 1994 after completing her B.Ed in DCU: "It was a great place for education rather than teaching: I grew intellectually and in all other areas. I came from a school that had previously spoon-fed me and did not encourage critical thinking. But at DCU I was forced to think critically and creatively and that stood me in good stead when I came to the US, as there is a huge emphasis on that here. I was very involved in the drama programme, where I made lifelong friends: it was a big part of my growth." This positive experience, which she notes gave her a great foundation to pursue her teaching career in America and led to a successful and enriching career, was part of the decision-making around becoming a donor to the University. "I was principal at a former school and I was involved in cultivating philanthropic relationships. I am a big believer in giving back to your alma mater. When my nephew started attending DCU, I got in touch and signed up to donating on a monthly basis. I firmly believe that these funds help people who might otherwise not have access to a college education. I don't see it as transactional – I see it as transformative. It is about paying it forward."

Graduates can find out more about DCU Alumni Fund at [dcu.ie/trust](https://dcu.ie/trust)

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# Breaking Barriers

**KEVIN DUDLEY ON HIS GROUNDBREAKING JOURNEY TO BECOME ONE OF IRELAND'S FIRST EVER DEAF IRISH SIGN LANGUAGE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER**

completely different, so inclusive. The teachers and staff made a real effort. Many of them even learned basic ISL before we started. That really showed me the commitment DCU had to inclusion." Surrounded by fellow deaf students, full-time interpreters, and a strong support network, Kevin naturally flourished. "The inclusivity, the friendships, and the interpreting support made the journey so much easier compared to my previous experience in higher education."

## ISL TEACHER

Kevin recalls a defining moment during his school placement. "After my lesson, one of the students came up to me and asked, 'who are you?'. When I explained, he said: 'you can't be a teacher... you're deaf'. Up to that point, there had never been deaf primary school teachers in Ireland. Fast forward to the end of fourth year... I saw him and asked, 'who am I?'; straight away he replied: 'you're a teacher.' And I said: 'deaf people can be teachers.' Now he knows that." According to Kevin, becoming one of the first qualified ISL primary teachers in Ireland has had a profound impact. "I felt like finally the door is open, not just for me, but for the future of deaf education in Ireland. It still feels surreal sometimes."

## LESSONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Teaching in the deaf community brings unique challenges, according to Kevin. "Resources are a huge challenge for us. The materials we have, especially textbooks, aren't really suited for some deaf students. My students face some struggles with the newer, text-heavy books, so I need to adapt to almost everything. This is all time-consuming, but it's also become one of my strengths," he explains. But, he says, the rewards are equally powerful. "I'd say one of the most important is empathy. I've been in a deaf school myself, so when my students struggle, I can recognise it because I went through the same things."

Kevin's message for anyone following in his footsteps is simple. "Don't give up. There were so many times when I wanted to quit, but I kept going. My advice would be to prepare yourself, have the right mindset, and know that it will be hard. But if you really want it, keep pushing. Looking back now, I'm happier than I've ever been. I have my dream job. So, when I say don't give up, I mean it."

**S**ince childhood, football was at the centre of Kevin's life. He became an under-20 player, lining out for Bohs and later for Shamrock Rovers. His path seemed set, but an unfortunate injury took him in a new direction. "Growing up, football was everything. Unfortunately, while playing for the Shamrock Rovers, I got a bad injury. After that, my football career was essentially over and that forced me to look at new directions," recalls Kevin. "Once football was no longer an option, I focused on education, studying Sports Performance and Coaching at Blanchardstown." After graduation, Kevin worked as a fitness instructor and personal trainer. It was during this time that he stumbled upon a new passion. "There was a woman who was a PE teacher at a deaf school and she went on maternity leave. The school contacted me to see if I'd cover her classes for a year... Once I started, something just clicked. Teaching through ISL and supporting their learning in ISL for the first time, it was an incredible experience. That's when I realised I loved teaching," he says. When the contract ended, Kevin returned to the gym, but something was missing. "I missed teaching. That's when I started asking about primary school teaching pathways." At that time, there was no clear route for deaf teachers. Kevin looked into DCU, but the ISL pathway had yet to be established. He waited several years until it finally received approval in 2019.

## THE DCU EXPERIENCE AND INCLUSION

Looking back, Kevin remembers his time at DCU as transformative. "When I look back to my first degree and the campus experience there, I felt very alone. In DCU, it was

## SHAPING SHARED FUTURES IN STEM EDUCATION

**Dr Eilish McLoughlin is an Associate Professor at Dublin City University with a passion for physics education and physics teacher education. In 2016, she founded the globally unique STEM Teacher Internship (STInt) Programme, which has become a national initiative, led by DCU and funded by Research Ireland, Skillnet Ireland and Intel Ireland.**

"DCU is leading a global change in STEM teacher education by providing primary and secondary teachers with first-hand experience of STEM roles and careers. STInt partners with over 70 industry organisations and seven universities across Ireland to provide pre-service and early-career STEM teachers with 12-week paid summer internships. STInt bridges the gap between education and industry through empowering teachers to develop their understanding of real world contexts and global technological and societal challenges.

The STInt partnership has provided internships to 371 teachers (2016-2025) and continues to support these teachers with resources and professional learning opportunities as in-service teachers. This isn't just another initiative: STInt raises the standard for what STEM teacher education should be, to prepare future students to live and thrive in a complex global society."

Find out more at [www.stemteacherinternships.ie](http://www.stemteacherinternships.ie)



## BEYOND BORDERS – ONE TEACHER'S JOURNEY TO INSPIRE

**Ryma Halfaoui is revolutionising education. She made history as the first foreign national to complete a Bachelor of Education at DCU, breaking immigration barriers and paving the way for greater diversity in Irish classrooms.**

Born in Algeria and raised in Ireland from the age of one, Ryma grew up with a deep appreciation for cultures and diversity. "In the classroom, and in my career, I've seen the positive impact my background can have. Children from all kinds of backgrounds relate to me, and parents have been super positive and accepting. It makes me feel that my experience is an asset in education," she explains. Reflecting on her time at DCU, Ryma recalls a hugely positive experience. "I got to network and connect with some great lecturers and researchers and made some good friends. The Gaeltacht, for me, was a positive experience; a great way to immerse myself in the language and spend quality time with my peers," she says. "There was so much growth for me as a teacher and as a young person within the course."

She also credits her mentor Meg Offiah for shaping her outlook in teaching. "Meg showed us that teachers could be different, that they could have a different way of teaching and supporting their students."

Ryma acknowledges Ireland still has progress to make. "Integration and diversity are essential, but society grows into them and that comes with growing pains. More teacher training, funding, exposure, and resources are needed. And I do think that will naturally happen, because the need is there."

Now teaching senior infants while preparing a master's thesis at DCU, Ryma also lectures on citizenship and education. Her advice to future educators: "Find your voice, listen to it, and don't be afraid to be different or expressive. Stay different, be different: that's not only okay, it is valuable."

## CHAMPIONING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

**Aoife Merrins Gallagher always knew she wanted to be a teacher – but not just any teacher. From a master's degree to a PhD, she has pursued higher education to explore innovative ways of supporting junior primary school children with English as an Additional Language (EAL).**

"I was taught from a young age that education was the most important gift in life. I looked to my teachers across primary and secondary school for guidance throughout my education journey and got it in abundance. What better way to live up to the importance of education than to help pass that torch on to other children like me whose parents want them to go further than they did," says Aoife. Aoife's work focuses on children for whom English is not spoken at home. Her research has led to the creation of 'Tell-a-Tale, Inis Scéal', a programme designed to strengthen oral language skills in linguistically diverse classrooms. "When completing my Master's research, I was intrigued by my non-native English-speaking students' natural ability to acquire and use the Irish language. I knew then that there was potential for using a bilingual English Irish oral language programme to enable such learners to develop their language skills in a plurilingual way," she explains.

The innovative, child-centred programme uses traditional tales to create engaging, interactive lessons that improve narrative retell skills. "I was conscious that I could never fully appreciate the experience of attending school where the language spoken there was not my home language. I felt compelled to upskill in an area that already lacked adequate supports," she adds.

Having completed her undergraduate, Master's and PhD at DCU, Aoife recalls one standout memory: "I was blown away by teachers who signed up to participate in my research at a time of extreme uncertainty. Teachers do not get enough credit for their commitment to excellence in education," she says.

Looking back, Aoife highlights both personal and professional lessons. "On a personal level, I feel not only adequately equipped at the highest level to support learners in my school but also know that I have made friends for life," she reflects. "Professionally, the research has taught me that teachers want and need more by way of professional development opportunities to support EAL learners."



# The Robots who Care

DCU ALUMNA **NIAMH DONNELLY** IS A FOUNDER OF AKARA ROBOTICS – A COMPANY ESTABLISHED TO HELP HEALTH SERVICES UNLOCK GREATER EFFICIENCY. FOLLOWING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIAL CARE ROBOT NAMED STEVIE – WHICH GRACED THE COVER OF *TIME* MAGAZINE IN 2019 – AKARA ROBOTICS HAS DEVELOPED A DISINFECTION ROBOT THAT AIMS TO TRANSFORM OPERATING ROOMS AND CLINICAL SPACES IN HOSPITALS THROUGH THE USE OF AI-DRIVEN INSIGHTS AND ROBOTIC AUTOMATION.

**G**rowing up in Bayside, Dublin, Niamh showed an interest in science and engineering from a young age: “My dad was an engineer and we used to do little science projects together when I was young; I was always interested in how things work – I would take things apart like light plugs as a child – and both of my parents fostered that curiosity. My dad was also an entrepreneur and I watched him build a business from scratch, which I think had an influence on me and my ambitions for the future.” With a natural talent for subjects like science and maths in school, Niamh was also creative: “I think engineering and art go hand-in-hand; I was always trying to solve problems by making things with my hands.” When Niamh was 13 years old, she was given the opportunity to attend a robotics programming summer camp in DCU, which ignited her interest in robotics. “After that camp, I was keen to go to DCU when I finished school and it lit the spark for me to do mechanical engineering. It was a really positive experience.”

## RISING INNOVATOR

Niamh Donnelly was recognised at the EU's Prize for Women Innovators awards in December 2022, taking the 'Rising Innovator' award. Her success in a field in which women are a minority also secured the Irish Tatler Women of the Year STEM award 2023.



Image Credit: Kyran O'Brien

## FOSTERING TALENT

After her Leaving Cert, Niamh studied mechanical and manufacturing engineering at Dublin City University. Not only was she excited to start her Bachelor's Degree but she also threw herself into the social aspect of the DCU campus, enrolling in various societies: “I spent all my money during Freshers Week joining every society I could! I ended up going on a skiing trip with DCU and getting involved in the DCU Fashion Show. I had always been quite a shy person, but at DCU I felt my personality really blossomed. I became much more social and outgoing; I gained the ability to walk into any room and speak confidently. I believe these soft skills are only going to become more and more important as we move forward with AI and I would encourage people to take advantage of extra-curricular activities at university, because doing this has served me so well.” During her degree Niamh realised that, while she really liked mechanical engineering, she was also very interested in the software and maths side of the course work. “DCU was really supportive to me when it came to moving towards specific areas of interest. In fourth year, we usually do a project suggested by the lecturer but my professor at the time, Lorna Fitzsimons, was happy for me to suggest a different project outside of my core coursework. I requested to work on developing my own software project, which was a sound monitoring device that I built in my dad's company. DCU is great at fostering what you are good at and what you want to get out of your course and I was really appreciative of that.”

## BUILDING ROBOTS FROM SCRATCH

Before going on to do a Masters in AI and Machine Learning, Niamh worked with global online marketplace Etsy, which was setting up a software team in Dublin. In this role, Niamh built internal tools for the software team and had the opportunity to travel to San Francisco, New York, Berlin, Paris and London. While doing her Masters, Niamh became aware of a research team in Trinity College Dublin that was building robots from scratch: “A lot of other research teams were buying robots off the shelf and programming them, so this was unique and interesting.” The robotic work was also linked to healthcare, an area that Niamh was very interested in specialising in: “I was always interested in how technology could benefit the healthcare system – I almost considered doing biomedical engineering for my degree.” She linked up with some of the researchers and the end result was the establishment of Irish start-up Akara Robotics, developing robotics and AI technologies for use in hospitals.

## MEET STEVIE

The first robot built by the Akara team was Stevie – a social robot deployed to work in nursing homes to combat isolation and loneliness among residents. Niamh spent three months living in a care home in Washington DC with Stevie: “Stevie's job was to interact with older adults to help battle loneliness amongst the elderly and those living in care homes. Stevie could sing songs, run bingo and basically free up the staff to manage their key duties.” The innovative service attracted worldwide attention and Stevie ended up on the cover of *TIME* magazine in 2019. The next move by Akara robotics was equally innovative. Just before Covid-19 hit, the Akara team began researching the development of a robot to tackle disinfection within operating rooms and hospitals. “Infections are a huge problem within the hospital system. How we disinfect a hospital has not changed since the Spanish Flu Pandemic – we are still using bleach. The initial idea came from our work with Stevie; during the day Stevie was focused on social duties and at nighttime the robot would clean the retirement home using UV light, which can break down viruses at a higher rate than bleach. When Covid arrived we realised this was our chance to help and we jumped at the



When Niamh was 13 years old, she was given the opportunity to attend a robotics programming summer camp in DCU, which ignited her interest in robotics.



Image Credit: Kyran O'Brien

opportunity build on our work.” The company was successful in raising a European Innovation Council (EIC) grant and private funding of five million euro to bring this idea to life and look to sell this new product to hospitals in Ireland, the UK and the US.

## THE HOSPITAL OF THE FUTURE

Stevie currently exists as a research platform: “We have a loneliness epidemic and, in the future, this technology I believe will be really prevalent. The technology has seriously advanced even in the past five years. But the concept remains that our robots are only there to aid staff and not to replace human interaction. I am passionate about that. In Akara, when we deploy any technology we do an assessment as to what impact it will have on society, will it replace or change roles etc. Our disinfection robot will act as an aid to hospital cleaners and the hope is that they will be more efficient through managing the work the robot does. It is so important to make sure that our technology is adding to society and not having a negative effect.” Akara's disinfection technology is being used in a hospital in the US and also in Donnybrook Royal Hospital and there are plans in the pipeline to scale up. “We aim to reduce the manual tasks in an operating room by two hours a day with our technology. Using AI in hospitals also means that important data can be captured and fed directly back to the relevant teams. We are moving from cleaning robots to ultimately creating the 'smart hospital operating room of the future.'”



**DIMITAR OUZOUNOV** BEGAN WRITING CODE IN 5TH GRADE: THIS CHILDHOOD PASSION HAS LED TO AN EXCITING AND INNOVATIVE CAREER AS AN ENTREPRENEUR IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

# Master Mind

“

DCU supported me in every way it could, so without it there would have been no company, no acquisition and none of this success I have enjoyed

**A** fascination with the world of computing as a child, Dimitar developed a keen interest in programming from an early age. In college, studying computer science in his native Bulgaria, he shifted his focus on creating technology that would solve real-world problems and, while working as a software developer, he decided he wanted to further his studies – and his horizons – by doing a Master’s abroad.

“We Bulgarians are a nation of emigrants: it is really common to live, work and study in other countries. Many go to places like Germany but I wanted to go somewhere different. I didn’t know anything about Ireland but I had a strange feeling it was going to be a good move for me. I knew it was a real IT hub, with Google and Facebook based there.” Dimitar undertook an MSc in Software Engineering at DCU in 2010. “There was a very high employment rate for graduates and the software engineering programme seemed like a perfect fit for me. Every single course I covered was great – nothing was boring or not useful. In fact, if I had to plan a software engineering curriculum now, I would probably choose exactly the same. DCU really raised the bar for me. I had to focus, turn around a lot of work and meet deadlines, but if you want to be successful you have to work very hard. I learned a lot about managing my time. It was a great experience – everyone worked together and pushed each other on.”

One of Dimitar’s professors encouraged him to pursue a thesis in records management, which he could work on in Norway: “When I arrived in Norway to start my thesis I was supposed to be working on a module for an existing open-source records management system but soon realised the system was not great so I had to rewrite it completely.” This Master’s thesis ended up being the seed for the establishment of Documaster in 2014 – an innovative Norwegian-

based provider of digital infrastructure for streamlined document management and e-archiving, which was acquired earlier this year by Main Capital Partners in a multi-million-dollar deal.

“Documaster was a start-up that I co-founded, based in Norway. We opened an office later in Bulgaria and over 10 crazy years we built something amazing!” The services provided by Documaster, Dimitar explains, simplify the processes of capturing, storing, organising and retrieving documentation, addressing the common issue of time-consuming searches for business-critical information within disorganised document systems. Today, Documaster serves approximately 750 customers, over 90% of which are public sector organisations, complemented by clients in highly regulated private sectors.

“A few months ago our company was acquired by a large software investor: I am so proud of what we achieved in ten years. Most start-ups last around two years. We created a company with great people, who became true leaders – turning over €11m in annual revenue!” After so many years of growing the business, I wanted to step back, take some time for myself and figure out the next step. I am not sure what that will be – I might start another business, or go back to my programming roots, or even write a book! But I know without DCU and my time in Ireland I really don’t think Documaster would have been born: my life would have been very different. The university supported me in every way it could, so without it there would have been no company, no acquisition and none of this success I have enjoyed.”

**TIKTOK STAR AND DCU ALUMNUS JAMES DOYLE** HAS GARNERED A LARGE AUDIENCE WITH HIS AUTHENTIC VOICE ONLINE UNDER THE ‘PROTEIN BOR PAPI’ HANDLE. ACCORDING TO JAMES HIS SUCCESS CAME ABOUT BY ACCIDENT, BUT THERE ARE MANY THINGS AT PLAY THAT HELPED TO PAVE THE WAY TO HIS VIRAL FAME

**O**

originally from Westmeath, James moved to Drumod in Leitrim when he started school. Although James performed well academically, his school years were difficult for him: “I struggled a lot in school, not in terms of education but, mentally, I battled with body dysmorphia and eating disorders. It came out of the blue for me as a teenager and, looking back, I now realise that I didn’t know what I was going through until I was over it.” James says that at 14 years old he began to obsess over how his body looked, and it impacted on his diet and how he consumed food. “I have a really supportive family and great friends but I just think there is a lot of societal pressure on young lads, as well as girls, and unfortunately it’s very common. It made me miserable: I lost my love of sport – I wanted to be a professional rugby player but I



wasn’t performing well in training sessions and I was also falling asleep in class. I knew absolutely nothing about proper nutrition.” Getting involved in the gym was a turning point for James: “I gained an education around nutrition, around how the body actually works and I learned that it is perfectly normal to store weight on your hips! The gym saved me: it made me feel confident in my own skin and I even started playing rugby again.”

James moved to Dublin when he got accepted into DCU: “I didn’t know what I wanted to do in life: I wanted to be a rugby player; a teacher; and then an electrician! But I had my sights set on living in Dublin and decided to do Communications Studies in DCU because I knew this degree would allow me to move in a lot of different directions. I had a great college experience, hanging out with the lads and going to the gym.” His online career, he says, happened somewhat randomly: on a lunch break from his part-time job on a building site, James bought a protein shake and decided to review it and post the review online. “I realised quickly that I really enjoyed creating online content – recording and editing – so I started to post gym content, nutrition content... everything and anything really! I also wanted to show people that if I can turn my life around, educate myself and transform my health, anyone can.” While it seems to have happened without much planning, James’ skills in content creation were clear from early on: he won an award for his public speaking in secondary school and he says he honed his communication skills while studying at DCU. “I studied a lot of theory-based work about audience engagement and a lot of what I learned carries over into my work now.” With over 1 million followers on TikTok, James says he has enjoyed amazing experiences and opportunities: “From going to the Champions League Final to doing work with Red Bull: you never know what the next day will bring and it is super interesting.”

Concluding, he reflects: “I feel a responsibility to be honest and not hide the struggles I had. But you can’t preach to people: it has to be a natural conversation. 95% of my content is simply about having fun, the other 5% is where I talk about my motivations.” So where to from here? “I went into this for the love of it and to have the craic so, as long as that remains, I will keep going. I want to improve and expand onto other platforms, maybe get into TV... I might even get a notion and become a pop star! Who knows?”

*For anyone affected by an eating disorder, or needing support, visit [www.bodywhys.ie](http://www.bodywhys.ie)*

Social Science



# Glory

**OLYMPIAN  
SOPHIE BECKER  
DISCUSSES  
DREAMS,  
COMPETING ON  
THE GLOBAL  
STAGE AND HER  
LOVE OF SCIENCE**

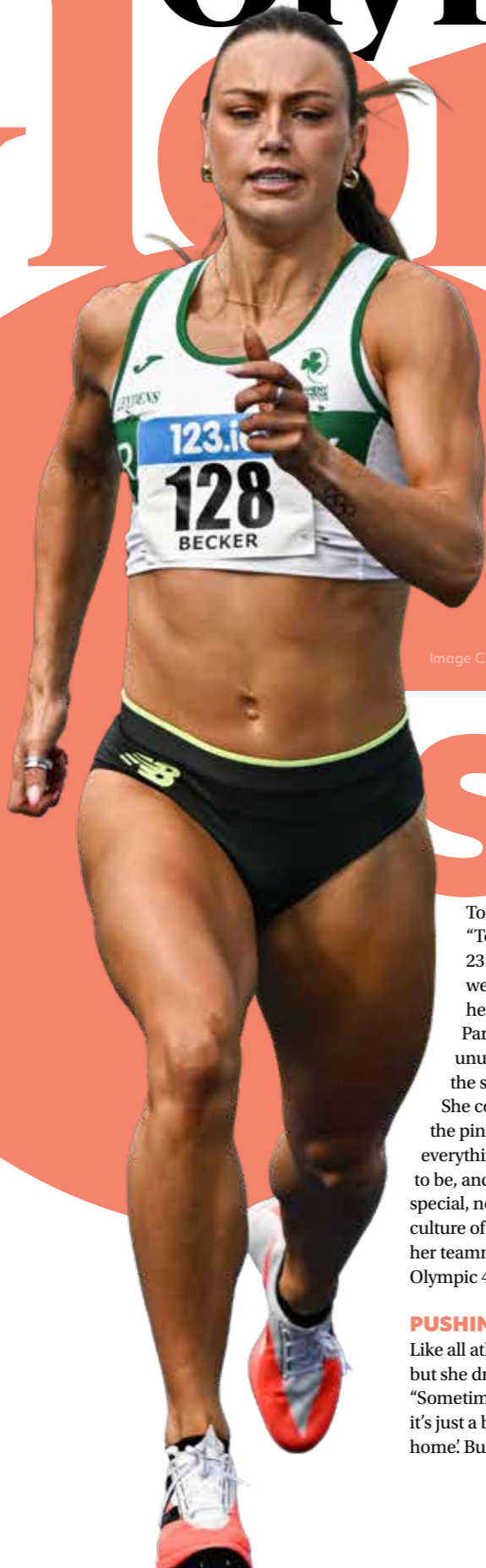


Image Credit: Sam Barnes, Sportsfile

Sophie has represented Ireland at both the Olympic Games and the World Championships, and in 2024 she and her teammates won silver at the European Athletics Championships in the women's 4x400m relay. She describes her first Olympic Games in Tokyo as the beginning of something special. "Tokyo was unique - my first games, I was only 23 and because it was a Covid Olympics there were no spectators in the stands. That probably helped with the nerves in a way, but now having Paris to compare it with, I can see now how unusual Tokyo was; and how important it was as the stepping stone for what has come since. She continues: "The Paris Olympics was probably the pinnacle of my life, my career, everything. It was everything I had imagined a proper Olympic Games to be, and more. It really was the start of something special, not just for me personally but also for the culture of relays and 400m running in Ireland." She and her teammates finished an impressive fourth in the Olympic 4x400m relay final.

#### **PUSHING THROUGH**

Like all athletes, Sophie has also faced setbacks, but she draws motivation from her successes. "Sometimes nothing drives me through. Sometimes it's just a bad day and I think: 'I hate this, I want to go home.' But when I really need to dig in, I think back

on moments like Paris, moments of success and how I felt when I won a medal or when I set a personal best and I know I want to feel that again."

Despite her success, she knows athletics can be a very physically demanding career, which is why she values her degree from DCU as much as her medals. "I never wanted to just have athletics. Number one, I enjoyed working; and number two, I always wanted to make sure that if something happened, if I got a really bad injury, I'd have something solid to fall back on. I really enjoyed getting my degree," says Sophie of her Genetics and Cell Biology Degree from DCU. "I also think it's important as an athlete not to sit around all day just waiting for training. Having a job or something else in your life means you're not solely focused on athletics, which is healthy up until a certain level."

#### **THE DCU JOURNEY**

Sophie grew up in a small rural community in County Wexford before moving to Dublin in 2016 to begin her career. "I can say, without a doubt, I would not be where I am today if I hadn't gone to DCU: the people, the facilities, the experiences, just all of it," she recalls. "When I started, I was sporty but I wasn't extremely good or anything... more of a good national-level athlete. That helped me get a scholarship into DCU. I picked DCU based on the course I wanted rather than athletics, which feels funny to say now because athletics ended up becoming my whole college experience." Through her scholarship, Becker stayed in the athletes' house. "Living in the athlete's house gave me a base and helped me settle in so much quicker than friends who were just in normal student houses," she says. "Looking back, I think living in House 14 really moulded me. I had role models around me, and it gave me stability during such a time of change."

#### **FINDING HER COACH**

Soon after her arrival at DCU, Sophie met coach, Jeremy Lyons. He prepared her for her historic run to the Olympic final in the women's 4x400m relay. Sophie describes meeting Jeremy as pure luck. "Honestly, I think a lot of my story comes down to luck. I was lucky to get the points for my course in DCU, lucky to get the athletics scholarship and live in the athletes' house, and then lucky again to find Jeremy. We just clicked and that's pure luck, because I know people who have gone through three or four coaches, always searching for the right fit," she tells us. She describes training with Jeremy as a huge step up. "I went into six days a week compared to just twice a week with my old coach in Wexford. The facilities made such a difference too. Back home I'd only see a track maybe once a month. Suddenly, I was on the track five or six times a week, and that high-performance environment really spiralled my whole career forward."

#### **BETWEEN SCIENCE AND SPORTS**

While athletics was always part of her journey, Sophie was also very much committed to her science career. "I stayed away from sport academically and went fully down the science route," she says. Her four-year degree included a work placement, after which she split her final year into two to allow space for Olympic training ahead of Tokyo 2020. Her career led to roles with Murphy Engineering and later Pfizer. Most recently, she has committed to being a full-time athlete. "I've always studied and worked alongside training, so this past year has been my first time just focusing on athletics as my job. I've really enjoyed it and I think I've earned it after all these years."



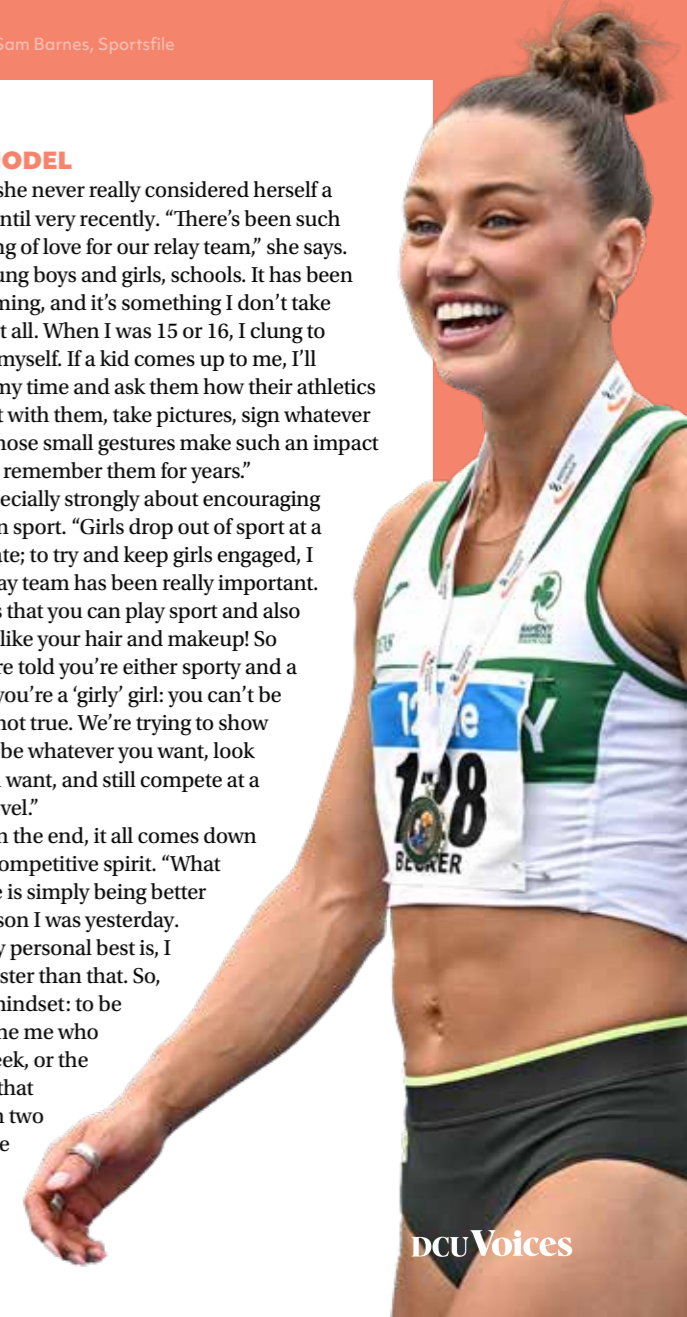
“What fuels me is simply being better than the person I was yesterday.”

Image Credit: Sam Barnes, Sportsfile

#### **A ROLE MODEL**

Sophie says she never really considered herself a role model until very recently. "There's been such an outpouring of love for our relay team," she says. "Parents, young boys and girls, schools. It has been so heartwarming, and it's something I don't take for granted at all. When I was 15 or 16, I clung to role models myself. If a kid comes up to me, I'll always take my time and ask them how their athletics is going, chat with them, take pictures, sign whatever they want. Those small gestures make such an impact and kids will remember them for years." She feels especially strongly about encouraging girls to stay in sport. "Girls drop out of sport at a really high rate; to try and keep girls engaged, I think our relay team has been really important. It shows girls that you can play sport and also enjoy things like your hair and makeup! So often, girls are told you're either sporty and a 'tomboy' or you're a 'girly' girl: you can't be both. That's not true. We're trying to show that you can be whatever you want, look however you want, and still compete at a really high level."

For Becker, in the end, it all comes down to having a competitive spirit. "What also fuels me is simply being better than the person I was yesterday. Whatever my personal best is, I want to go faster than that. So, I carry that mindset: to be better than the me who raced last week, or the me who did that same session two days ago," she concludes.



# Innovation in Action

**DAVID CARR'S PASSION FOR MATHEMATICS, NURTURED AT DCU, HAS DRIVEN HIM TO DEVELOP A NEW PLATFORM AIMED AT MAKING MATHS FUN. HERE, HE TALKS ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCES AT DCU, HIS RECENT MASTER'S DEGREE IN THE STATES, AND THE LAUNCH OF THE Pi<sup>2</sup> APP**

**D**avid Carr completed his degree in Actuarial Mathematics at DCU in 2004 before doing a Master's degree through the Naughton Fellowship at the University of Notre Dame in Engineering, Science and Technology Entrepreneurship (ESTEEM). Currently based in Michigan, working with human resources service provider AEBetancourt as their Director of Strategic Insights and Innovation, David is also the founder of the Pi<sup>2</sup> app – a fun, competitive maths app that was recently launched.

## THE DCU EXPERIENCE

Reflecting on his time at DCU, academically and personally, David says: "I'm a big fan of DCU. The atmosphere and the vibe around campus is great. People are doers there. There are societies for everything, and everyone feels at home because there's something for everyone. In the maths department, I probably had a small circle of about 20 lecturers over the four years and built close relationships with them. These were the people who wrote my reference letters and were there for me when I needed to talk about what I wanted to do after college. They were more than just teachers – almost like big brothers – always looking out for you," recalls David.

That sense of support, he says, extended beyond the classroom: "There was a real family kind of vibe. Everyone wanted the best for each other, especially when it came to balancing sports and academics," he says. "The teachers were really understanding, and so were the sports managers. When I was balancing being on the Division 1 soccer team, my manager was always supportive of my studies. And if I had to miss a class for a match, my professors were happy to share notes or help me catch up." For four years, David threw himself into all aspects of student life from tutoring, to sports to travel. "I was playing on the Gaelic football, hurling, and soccer teams at DCU. I was one of three people who set up the DCU Chess Club. I also competed in the DCU Boxing National Championships. I went on the ski trips and the surf trips, and I was involved with the different societies. I really enjoyed my time there."

## THE NAUGHTON FELLOWSHIP

The Naughton Fellowship provides a unique opportunity for aspiring ESTEEM graduate students from Ireland to experience this innovative graduate program and immerse themselves in Notre Dame campus life.



## THE US EXPERIENCE AND THE LAUNCH OF Pi<sup>2</sup>

As someone who is passionate about maths, David was keen to use that gift to help others overcome their struggles with the subject. "Maths always has a bad rep: most people would say it's their least favourite subject. I went to America on a scholarship for a year and that gave me the freedom to try something new." It was there, as part of the ESTEEM graduate programme at Notre Dame, that his idea for Pi<sup>2</sup> was born. "I had built up years of maths knowledge through tutoring and I reached a point where I felt like the brick-and-mortar model was too limited. I could only teach so many students in a physical classroom. I knew I needed to take it online. The original idea was a bit like Duolingo for maths. My first job through DCU was tutoring maths and that experience gave me the motivation. I got to see first-hand the struggles students have with maths: the lack of motivation, the disbelief, the low confidence. That really pushed me to try tackle the bigger issue – people's attitudes towards maths, and how difficult they find it," says David.

From idea to launch, it took months of determination, data and user insight. "We made the app available for students to download on their phones. Every time we pushed an update, we gathered feedback from them. We had around 300 students involved in what we called our beta phase; they were using the app, getting interviewed, hopping on calls with us, giving feedback about what worked, what didn't, and what they wanted to see improved. What was interesting was that sometimes students would say they liked a feature, but when we checked the data, they weren't actually using it. So, we really tried to balance the feedback with the usage data to understand what was truly valuable." Initially aimed at Leaving Cert and A-Level students, the app has evolved. "We added a daily challenge feature; six trivia-style maths questions a day...kind of like a fun mini game. There is a leaderboard and the idea was to get students logging in daily. We thought once they were on the app, they might stay and study. But what we found through interviews and tracking usage was that most people weren't using the study resources as much, but they kept coming back for the daily game. We had to listen to that data and adjust accordingly." Pi<sup>2</sup> is currently available on the App Store. "We put a lot of work into it and we're constantly improving it," says David.

## GIVING BACK

Even while based in the United States, David still finds time to stay connected with his alma mater. "I'd still be around watching the sports when I'm home, and I keep in touch with people. But the main way I've been giving back is through the Open Days. I usually give the talk for the Actuarial Maths course to potential students. Every year at the virtual Open Day, I put together a slideshow and talk through the course, answer their questions and try to offer whatever advice I can. I definitely don't know it all, but I'm happy to help in any way I can," he says.



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**CAITRÍONA PERRY, BBC NEWS CHIEF PRESENTER AND FORMER RTÉ NEWS SIX ONE ANCHOR, IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF GLOBAL NEWS TODAY. HERE, SHE TALKS ABOUT HOW HER TIME AT DCU SHAPED HER CAREER PATH AND OFFERS SOME INSIGHT INTO HOW JOURNALISM IS EVOLVING**

**A**s one of Ireland's most well-known faces in news media, Caitríona Perry is on a career path that she always hoped to follow: "It's really all I ever wanted to do. I loved storytelling... writing stories and poetry from a young age, and hosting radio shows with my teddies and dolls. Once I was old enough to realise that journalism was actually a job I could have, I knew that was the one for me." With a clear view to become a journalist, Caitríona decided to do her undergraduate at DCU. "At the time, it was the only university in Ireland offering a degree in journalism, and I wanted that campus university experience. I also wanted to learn my craft as best I could to prepare myself for 'the real world'. DCU's faculty was then - as it is now - packed full of smart people with real industry experience. The mix of academic learning and practical training was really interesting as a student, and also really useful in the early years of my career. I felt I arrived at my first job (an INTRA placement in Newstalk) with the practical skills to dive into all aspects of working at a radio station, and also with a good

### LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH

Commenting on previously being an ambassador for the DCU Let's Keep in Touch campaign, Caitríona says: "I am a big believer in giving back in whatever way you can to the people or organisations that have helped you get to where you are in the world. And it's helpful to know about changes in the education sphere of your own industry."

knowledge base of the industry, legal issues and the political workings of the Irish State. I later returned to DCU to do a Masters Degree in International Relations, studying part-time while also working full-time at RTÉ. Again, the reputation of the course and the teaching staff, and the flexibility that DCU offered mature, part-time students really appealed to me."

### IF YOU DREAM IT...

Since being a student at DCU, Caitríona has held many key positions in media, including being RTÉ's Washington Correspondent, RTÉ's Six One news anchor and now working as a presenter with the BBC in the U.S. So, did she ever imagine this career journey in her student days? "Well actually, yes I kind of did! When I got the Washington Correspondent job, one of my classmates reminded me that we had all joked at our graduation in the Helix that I would end up as the RTÉ Washington Correspondent and a few years later there I was! I did not however imagine that I would go on to be one of the chief presenters with the BBC, broadcasting to the world on the BBC News channel, with a global audience of nearly 120 million people watching me. Nor could

I have dreamed that I would front the BBC's 2024 US election results programme on BBC One, BBC News and BBC's international platforms. But it's amazing where ambition, hard work and a good education can get you!" Commenting on her experience working in the US, Caitríona notes the impact that covering recent elections has had: "I would say that Irish people tend to be very well informed ahead of elections, a lot of people make a point of watching debates, reading articles, grilling those who call to the doors, examining the different policies and reading the various leaflets. I have not encountered the same depth of knowledge in some parts of the US. Some people feel very detached from the decision-making process and the decision-makers. Professionally, it has been extraordinary and also a privilege to watch, up close, two seismic elections in this country - 2016 and 2024. We always talk as journalists about getting to witness the first draft of history in person; those elections have shaped the story of the US."

### BOOK WORM

Caitríona's career path has also seen her become an author and she has written two critically acclaimed best-selling books: *In America: Tales from Trump Country* and *The Tribe: The Inside Story of Irish Power and Influence in U.S. Politics*. "I have lots of plans for more books - I just need there to be a quiet news

day so I can actually write them! I loved writing those books. It was truly a dream come true the first time I saw 'In America' on a bookshelf. The first book was all about explaining the Trump phenomenon in 2016, so maybe there might have to be a 'Back In America' follow-up to that one!"

### THE CHANGING SHAPE OF MEDIA

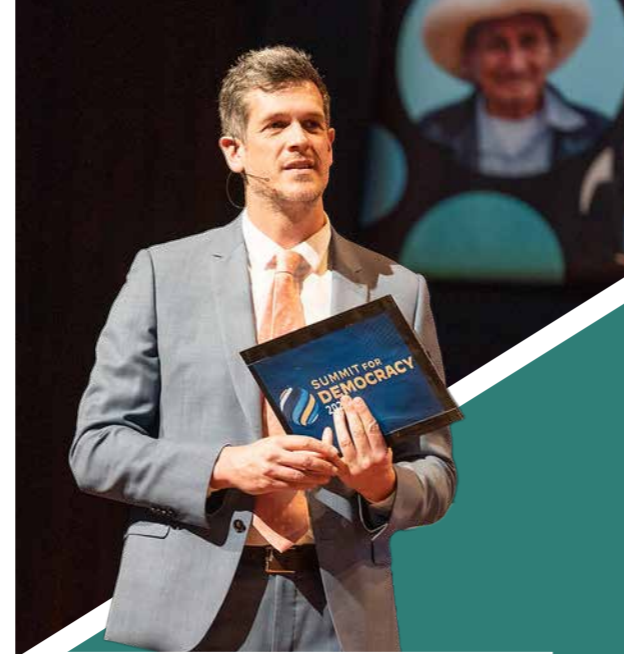
Traditional media has undergone huge change in recent years, in particular with social media and new technologies changing the shape of news reporting. Caitríona stresses the importance of trust and truth within media: "How we do our job as journalists has changed massively since I left DCU. Technological developments have completely disrupted it - for better and, in some ways, for worse. We now provide news and updates 24-7 and can do so from anywhere, and our output can be watched and read almost anywhere too. But it is becoming harder for some news consumers to distinguish accurate and impartial news from content with an agenda, or commentary from an individual who is not held to the same fact-checking and rigorous standards. A person with a mobile phone, internet connection and a ring light can set themselves up as a 'news service' but they are not subject to the same rules that existing impartial media companies are." Caitríona continues that trusted sources and fact-checking is a key issue right now: "We have a very strong Verify unit at the BBC and they spend a lot of time doing just that. It is getting increasingly hard to tell whether some things are fact or fiction. Some of the generated fake images and videos, especially using the voice of real individuals, are so convincing and we've already seen them pop up in some election campaigns here. So-called 'legacy' or traditional media has to work hard to build and keep trust, especially in younger audiences, and one way is to be able to do the fact-checking and verifying for our audience." Concluding, Caitríona urges aspiring journalists to 'dream big': "The road might be long and windy but I do believe that hard work, honing your craft, developing your talent, constantly relearning and building on your skills will ultimately get you to where you want to be. Take every opportunity that comes your way, even if it doesn't seem like it is what you're necessarily interested in at the time. And be nice to everyone. This industry, especially in Ireland, is really tiny. People who are your peers now will probably be your boss one day. Tell everyone you meet what you want to do; you never know who might be able to help you or know someone who can. Get as many skills into your toolbox as you can - technical skills, language skills, general knowledge. You have to have a thick skin and a brass neck as a journalist; be pushy, don't take no for an answer, but move on quickly from rejection, and be prepared to work long and anti-social hours. Journalism is a vocation rather than a profession! It won't make you rich, but it will give you amazing life experiences, and no end of stories to bore people with!"



# Building a Sustainable Future

**DAVID DEARMEY IS PROGRAMME DESIGNER DIRECTOR FOR WATER MISSION – AN ENGINEERING NONPROFIT THAT BUILDS SUSTAINABLE, SAFE WATER SOLUTIONS FOR PEOPLE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, REFUGEE CAMPS AND DISASTER AREAS. HERE, HE SHARES SOME INSIGHT INTO HIS CAREER JOURNEY AND HOW HIS TIME AT DCU ALLOWED HIM TO PUT INTO PRACTICE HIS AIMS TO BUILD BETTER SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS FOR THOSE IN NEED**

**T**he importance of ensuring sustainable water systems globally has never been greater than it is today. Having spent nearly 12 years as Director of International Partnerships at Water for Good, David is currently Programme Design Director at the global engineering nonprofit Water Mission. Talking about this work, David explains: “At Water for Good, I spent nearly 12 years building partnerships and trying to answer one of the toughest questions in the water sector: after the infrastructure is built, then what? Who maintains it, and how? In fragile contexts, where institutions are weak, it takes creativity, collaboration and a lot of persistence to even begin to practice answer that. My role was to bring together NGOs, governments, and funders to work toward sustainable solutions. “It was also during my time there that I decided to study at DCU. In 2013 I took on an MSc Management for Sustainable Development and my dissertation focused on the role of spare parts supply chains in the reliability of water services in the Central African Republic, an issue I had seen firsthand in my work. That research gave me a stronger framework to connect practice with theory and it changed how I approached these challenges.” “At Water Mission, my focus has naturally evolved into programme design. I now work on district-wide Master Planning and professionalising water services. In many ways, it’s been about embedding systems thinking into an organisation with a strong reputation for quality infrastructure and shaping the conditions where service providers can succeed. For me, it’s been a shift from asking who will maintain this water system to helping create an environment where reliable water services can thrive long-term.” Ten years before David came to DCU, he visited Central Africa on a volunteer medical mission. It had a lasting impact on his life and was a driving motivation for him to learn more about sustainable development: “I joined a group of surgeons on a volunteer trip to Chad and, although I knew very little about development at the time, the experience left a deep impression on me. What struck me was that the medical issues I witnessed were not isolated – they were part of a much wider web of problems tied to the fragility of the state



“Development work requires more than passion. It calls for patience, commitment, and the right tools to navigate complexity in a way that creates lasting impact

itself. In places like Chad, governments struggle to provide reliable services because of layers of interconnected challenges. Even though I didn’t yet have the language of ‘systems thinking,’ I could sense that these were systemic issues. That experience stayed with me for years.” Commenting on this time at DCU, David says: “It gave me a strong foundation in management and sustainable development, which has been essential throughout my career. One of the most important lessons I learned was that sustainable development is not just about what an organisation achieves externally. It also begins internally, in how it treats its employees, how open it is to cultural change and how responsibly it manages procurement and resources. The programme gave me the tools to address complex challenges, especially in the water and sanitation sector. It’s a sector that is often described as broken or unsustainable. Many organisations know what change should look like, but struggle to implement it because of their own internal complexities. I was fortunate to have strong mentors at DCU. Colum Foley, in particular, pushed me to always connect theory with practice. That mindset has stayed with me and continues to shape how I approach my work.” David has kept ties with DCU, returning as a guest lecturer: “It was both a joy and an honour to return to DCU. I felt as though I had come full circle; moving from being a student eager to learn, to someone able to share my own experience in the hope of encouraging others. Development work requires more than passion. It calls for patience, commitment, and the right tools to navigate complexity in a way that creates lasting impact. That was the message I hoped to leave with students: hold onto your inspiration but equip yourself to face the realities of the work.”

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# In the Spotlight

AS A JOURNALIST, A RADIO AND TELEVISION HOST, AN AUTHOR, AN ACTOR AND A MODEL, **LAURA WHITMORE** HAS ENJOYED A VARIED CAREER TO DATE. HERE, WE CHAT TO LAURA ABOUT HER JOURNEY AND HER TIME AT DCU



Image Credit: George Gottlieb

**W**hile Laura has enjoyed many roles, she notes that her motivation across all of them can be boiled down to one thing: the ability to tell stories. “Whether it’s journalism, writing a book, acting on stage or presenting: it is all about telling someone’s story. Whether it’s your story or someone else’s, it’s a privilege,” says Laura. “Speaking up for someone who is voiceless and using your voice to tell someone’s story is so important.”

### OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Laura was born in Dublin and grew up in County Wicklow, where she attended secondary school before studying journalism at DCU, graduating in 2007. Her television journey began just a year later when she competed to become the face of MTV News in Europe, opening a pathway into the news world that lasted until 2015. Since then, she has appeared on several series, including *Strictly Come Dancing: Survival of the Fittest*, as well as being a host on *Love Island*. In 2023, she began hosting her chat show *Laura Whitmore’s Breakfast Show* and later released her ITVX documentary series *Laura Whitmore Investigates*.



But her career hasn’t been confined to journalism. You may have seen her modelling, making headlines with her self-branded clothing range, and gracing several high profile magazine covers. For Laura, one size doesn’t fit all. Reflecting on her early days, she recalls going from an internship at *Newstalk* to interviewing *Coldplay* on her very first day at MTV. “What I learned from the basics of the internship was important because it was tough. It is where I met my good friend, Sam Barry, who is now the Global Editorial Director and Editor-in-Chief of *Glamour* magazine,” says Laura.

### TRUE CRIME

Her roots in journalism and an interest in true crime has led to more recent developments in podcasts and television series. Since 2023, she has co-hosted a BBC Radio podcast alongside

her husband, Iain Stirling – *Murder They Wrote* with Laura Whitmore and Iain Stirling – which delves into true crime cases. “I’m very lucky because we get to do it remotely from a studio in our home, so I’m blessed that it works around my schedule,” says Laura. “The podcast is very niche, working in the true crime area, which comes from my journalism background. I do it with Iain, who’s known as a brilliant comedian, but his background is in law so it was nice for us to use the other sides of ourselves and showcase sides that people don’t necessarily know us for.”

Most recently, she presented and produced Britain’s *Killer Teens*, a new series, which launched on ‘Crime+Investigation’ in early September, exploring why some teenagers turn to murder. “I had done three separate films two years ago on incels and cyberstalking and I had so many more questions, talk about asking the ‘why’ that I wanted to explore. We made Britain’s *Killer Teens* at the end of last year off the back of a 300% increase in homicides by young people,” she explains. “This was before Netflix’s *Adolescence*, and I thought, ‘I’ve made the real-life version of this.’ It gripped people because it was so real. I learned a lot: I learned that no two cases are the same and that there is no way to know that someone is going to do something terrible. It also gave me a lot of compassion for the families of the victims and how they keep going afterwards. I am proud of what we made.”

### FROM BOOKS TO THEATRE

Laura’s work as an author and actor also feed into her interests and passions. Her first book, released in 2021, *No One Can Change Your Life Except For You*, draws on personal experience. “I had written a lot before coming from a journalism background, and from my time at DCU writing for the *College View*. I had already written for publications like the *Huffington Post*, *Elle Magazine*, *Glamour* and *Grazia*, and I wanted to put a collection of all these together in one,” says Laura. “I had written a poem called *She* for International Women’s Day, and I ended up using each line of that poem for each chapter heading and that brought it all together. I wrote the book in 2020, so I had plenty of time to sit down and write.”

She also speaks about her love for live theatre, something that was sparked during her time at university. “I love live theatre; I just love it! It goes back to my DCU days. I was quite overwhelmed and when I first started at DCU I felt quite lonely as I didn’t know anyone else living on campus, so I joined the drama group. I met Maeve who cast me in *Antigone* and that was my first experience of doing theatre at DCU. Then I ended up being in the Scottish play as *Lady M*, as well as *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, and a big role in *Sweet Charity* in the *Helix*. I did a lot of acting on stage at DCU which I loved; it was what I did for fun and now I get to do it as a job.”

### LOOKING BACK

Reconnecting with her alma mater is important for Laura and she reminisces with great affection on her time at DCU. “I look back at those years with such great fondness but also to appreciate the importance of them; not just from an academic point of view, but also they were such important years for my growth as a person.” She continues: “[Being at DCU] enabled me to do things for myself, living away from home. It taught me to take every opportunity you possibly can. I met some of my best friends by living on campus and I’m still friends with them today.”

And even though she now spends much of her time in the spotlight, she still makes sure to give back to her alma mater. In November 2024, she returned to DCU as a panel guest for the launch of the London Alumni Chapter. “It was lovely to reconnect with people, classmates and professors from all over the world. I grew up in Wicklow and the closer ones were Trinity or UCD, but they didn’t have a journalism course and so I took a chance going to DCU which people weren’t so familiar with. Now it’s grown so much with its academic and extracurricular offering.”

# Fashion Forward

**ASHLEY McDONNELL LANDED HER FIRST HIGH-END FASHION JOB WITH LVMH AT JUST 22. TODAY, SHE IS THE PARIS-BASED GLOBAL CONSUMER ACCELERATION DIRECTOR FOR LUXURY GROUP PUIG AND HOST OF THE AWARD-WINNING TECH POWERED LUXURY PODCAST**

**A**s a business-woman, entrepreneur and fashionista, Ashley is a driving force and has carved out a career path that has allowed her creativity to flourish alongside her business savvy.

"I've been with Puig for almost five years, three years in Geneva and two in Paris," Ashley explains. "It's a company with more than 110 years of history." Her day-to-day work involves shaping digital strategies for global brands. "I love using both sides of my brain," she says. "I can appreciate the beauty, design, and quality of a fashion brand, but I also ask: how is the business running? Are they active in e-commerce? What tech stack do they use?"

Ashley's ambitions extend beyond Puig. She has launched her own ventures, including a soon-to-be-announced luxury project – to build Ireland's first luxury group by acquiring and developing premium Irish brands. "In Ireland, there's a big gap in luxury. My mission is to incubate brands, grow them, and give them the systems they need so creativity can shine while operations run smoothly in the background."

## THE EARLY DAYS

Ashley's journey began with persistence. A huge advocate of internships, she built her career by spending every summer in France gaining experience. "Most of my friends were in the U.S. on J1 visas having fun and sometimes I was jealous," she admits. "But I knew if I wanted to make it in the industry, I had to work 10 times harder than my French colleagues."

Her determination paid off. By 22, she landed a management role at Dior within the LVMH Group. "Momentum is everything



Image Credit: David Carson



Image Credit: David Carson



Image Credit: David Carson



Image Credit: David Carson

in careers, especially in luxury fashion in France. Because I was already working within the LVMH Group, stepping into Dior was as easy as it was ever going to be," she recalls.

From Dior, Ashley made the leap into tech with Google, a transition she calls "the biggest culture shock" of her career. "At Dior, everything was done to the highest luxury standard. Google was the complete opposite: very startup-like, transparent, informal. It took some adjusting, but it also taught me faster, more efficient ways of working." Those lessons later became assets when she returned to luxury later in her career.

## THE DCU IMPACT

Ashley tells us about her time at DCU, the place that first set her on the fashion path. "I picked DCU because I wanted to be a fashion designer," she says. "I got into all the design schools, but I realised two things. One: you can't study languages in most fashion schools. And two: if I wanted to really go big with fashion, I knew I needed to understand how to run a brand."

Then she came across a Global Business and French course at DCU. "One of the quotes on the DCU website was from a graduate who said it was the perfect platform to then do a Master's in fashion buying in London. I thought, this is it. I never even visited campus, I just put it as my Number One choice."

Ashley says DCU gave her two invaluable skills: professional fluency in French and the chance to gain real-world experience through internships. "It's ironic, because it's a university, but DCU gave me two life skills you can't necessarily learn in the classroom," she explains. "By the time I was on my third internship, I already had an advantage."

Outside of the classroom, Ashley was highly involved in extracurricular activities, including sports. An athlete, she lived in the sports house on campus, ran track and field, and threw herself into societies. "There was a really strong sense of community among athletes and footballers.

I was also involved in so many clubs and societies; not just athletics, but the Raising and Giving Society, the Arts Society, Surf and Sail, Ski Club. Honestly, I did everything."

She transferred to France after two years for her double degree but kept close ties to DCU. "I missed it so much that I came back every year around midterm to catch up with friends. They're still my closest friends today."

## KEEPING THE CONNECTION ALIVE

That connection remains strong in her professional life. Of the seven people currently on her team, three are DCU graduates. "It's happening organically," she says. "The programme produces well-rounded business people with language skills, international experience and independence. I love working with people like that."



Image Credit: David Carson

Looking back, Ashley attributes much of her success to persistence and determination. "Anything worth pursuing is worth putting in the work. We often assume success comes easily when we see someone achieve something, but that's rarely true. For me, every role, every big opportunity – whether it was producing a fashion show or a major event – was 99% pushback and rejection. You just need that 1% of 'yes' to move forward and make it happen." She continues: "For every project that came to life or every role I've had, there were 10 that didn't work out. I try to be transparent about that because the story behind success isn't always glamorous. It's about perseverance and hoping that things can work out if you keep going."

## FINAL THOUGHTS

She shares simple advice for those looking to break into a similar industry. "Make a plan. Decide what you want, then work backwards. What do you need to do each day, week, month to get there? That's exactly how I've approached my career. So far, it's worked!"



DCU ALUMNA,  
**CARON McCAFFREY**  
IS THE DIRECTOR  
GENERAL OF THE IRISH  
PRISON SERVICE. HERE,  
SHE OFFERS A GLIMPSE  
INTO HER DAILY LIFE,  
HER PASSIONS AND  
HER GOALS

# A Day in the Life

**Q. What's the first thing you do when you wake up?**

**A.** I begin my day with a strong cup of coffee and a quick scan of my emails and morning news — it helps me get grounded before the day begins. My mornings are a blend of structure and urgency: I start by getting my children ready for school, packing lunches and managing the usual flurry of activity that comes with the school run. Once they're out the door, I shift focus to my workday. I review my schedule, go over any key documents or briefings, and prepare for meetings ahead.

**Q. What does your workday entail?**

**A.** No two days are the same. My role involves strategic planning, policy development, stakeholder engagement, and overseeing operations across the prison estate. I also spend time visiting institutions and speaking directly with staff and prisoners. In addition to my responsibilities within the Irish Prison Service, I serve as President of EuroPris, the European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services, which allows me to collaborate with colleagues across Europe to promote professional prison practice and share innovations in rehabilitation and correctional policy.

**Q. What is your favourite part of the working week – and the most challenging?**

**A.** I love the moments when I get to see the impact of our work, whether it's a successful rehabilitation story or a new initiative taking shape. Those are the days that remind me why I do what I do. Balancing urgent operational demands with long-term strategic goals can be challenging. There's always a need to respond quickly, but I try to keep sight of the bigger picture.

**Q. What are your current strategic priorities in your role?**

**A.** I am committed on modernising the prison system, enhancing rehabilitation services, and improving staff wellbeing. Creating safer, more humane environments is at the heart of our strategy. Unfortunately, the severe overcrowding that we are currently experiencing is hampering our ability in this regard, building significant new capacity has emerged as the most pressing strategic priority and where a lot of my focus is. However, we shouldn't and don't use this as a reason to haul change and innovation and some of our more exciting strategic priorities currently includes using technology.

**Q. Where does the Irish Prison Service excel; and where do improvements need to be made?**

**A.** The Irish Prison Service excels in its commitment to rehabilitation and innovation, with education and work programmes that rank among the best in Europe. Individual transformation by people in custody is only possible through the dedication of our staff, whose daily interactions foster dignity, structure, and hope for a better future away from crime. Irish Prison Officers are widely recognised as among the finest in the world due to their exceptional blend of professionalism, compassion, and adaptability. However, we continue to face challenges around overcrowding and infrastructure capacity, which places pressure on our ability to deliver humane conditions. The Irish Prison Service must accept into custody all people committed to prison by the Courts. As such, the Prison Service has no control over the numbers committed to custody at any given time. As of, 05 September 2025, there were 5,445 (117%) prisoners in custody with a bed capacity of 4,675. On the same date, there were, 413 prisoners sleeping on mattresses. Since 2022 capacity across the



Education is transformative. It opens doors, broadens perspectives, and empowers people to shape their own futures.

prison estate has been increased by 380 new spaces, with 126 delivered in 2024, 43 delivered to date in 2025 with plans to deliver a further 98 additional spaces this year.

**Q. How can we all contribute to ensuring safer communities across Ireland?**

**A.** Much of the time the discussion about rehabilitation happens within the criminal justice system and oftentimes recidivism is seen as a measure of how successful our prison services are. I get quite exercised when I'm told that relatively high recidivism rates in Ireland are an indication that prison isn't working. The facts are that prison works, while people are in our custody all of their needs are met in a holistic way, health, mental health, education, social, spiritual etc. and people can make huge strides in terms of self-development. For me, what doesn't work is the lack of a similar holistic service post release and many times the gains made in prison are lost; if you are returning to homeless accommodation, it's very hard to stay drug free and avoid your old peers. For people living chaotic lives the simple task of attending an appointment can result in failure. We need a whole of government, whole of society approach to support desistance. This is not the role of any prison service on their own.

**Q. What is your proudest achievement to date?**

**A.** Leading the Irish Prison Service through the Covid-19 pandemic is, without question, the proudest achievement of my tenure to date. From the earliest stages of the crisis, we mobilised a whole-of-service response, establishing an Emergency Response Planning Team, implementing rigorous infection control protocols, and taking the difficult but necessary step of reducing the prison population to enable safe physical distancing. These actions were not just operational, they were deeply human. We also accelerated the introduction of digital technologies to support communication, education, and healthcare across the estate, modernising how we deliver services and laying the foundation for long-term reform. In recognition of this work, the Irish Prison Service was honoured with a Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Award in 2021 for 'Leading Reform during Covid-19.

**Q. What's the best advice you ever received?**

**A.** Back yourself, believe in your own vision, potential and capability. Often, we are our own biggest critics and don't choose to celebrate our inner strengths and our achievements I find this particularly true of senior women in leadership.

**Q. How do you wind down?**

**A.** I enjoy the gym, reading, and spending time with family. I also love to travel – it's a great way to decompress or switch off.



## MY COLLEGE LIFE - DCU REFLECTIONS

**How did your time at DCU shape your career path?** I completed a Master's degree in International Relations at DCU, graduating in 1999. It was a dynamic and formative time. DCU offered me a forward-thinking academic environment that encouraged critical engagement with global issues. The experience helped shape my perspective on public service and international cooperation, which has remained central throughout my career in the justice sector and my current role as President of EuroPris.

**Did you have a mentor at DCU?** Professor Gary Murphy was the person I most admired and looked up to during my time in DCU.

**Have you any connection to DCU since graduating?** Yes, I've maintained a strong connection with DCU through alumni events and professional collaborations. Most recently, I had the pleasure of hosting Professor Yvonne Daly, Dr Lorraine Boran, and Ms Lynn Clarke-Hearty at the Dochas Centre our female prison. It was a valuable opportunity to engage with DCU academics on issues of criminal justice and evidence-based practice.

**You were an alumni awardee in 2024 – can you comment on receiving this recognition?** It was an achievement that I hold very highly in my career to date and I was humbled to receive the award given the incredible achievement the 100,000 plus graduates of DCU have made across the country and indeed the globe.

**Can you comment on the importance of education, and continuing education across life?** Education is transformative. It opens doors, broadens perspectives, and empowers people to shape their own futures. I've seen first-hand how continuing education across life can change the trajectory of someone's story, especially in our prisons. It is sobering to remember that 70% of people in custody are early school leavers and the average school leaving age is 14 in terms of people in prison in Ireland today. Many of the people in our custody left school before the age of 15. For them, education isn't just about qualifications, it's about dignity, confidence, and hope. When someone picks up a book, learns a new skill, or earns a certificate, they begin to see themselves differently. They begin to believe they have something to offer. That's why lifelong learning matters. Not just in childhood or early adulthood, but throughout life, especially for those who were failed by the system the first time around. In prison, education becomes a second chance. And for many, it's the first time they've ever felt seen, supported, and capable. We must never underestimate the power of learning to heal and to rehabilitate.



# Building Change

DCU'S 'NORTH STAR' GUIDES THE LEADERS OF THE FUTURE

**U**nveiled at the beginning of 2025, Polaris is a landmark building which sits proudly at the Collins Avenue entrance of the DCU Glasnevin campus. Housing the Faculty of Science and Health, and the Faculty of Engineering and Computing; the structure is also a hub for the entire campus, offering a modern and sustainable facility for students and staff to enjoy.

Alan Mangan, Senior Project Manager in the Estates Team at DCU and a graduate from the MSc Sustainable Development (2013), was centrally involved in bringing the project to life: "I got involved in 2018; at that point it was simply a list of room names on a sheet of paper with a description of what the room would be and the basic requirements of the lab, but to even get that list done took a huge amount of work." The big driver behind the project, explains Alan, was the need to expand the School of Health & Human Performance, as well as the fact that DCU had to cater for an increasing number of students. "The School of Health & Human Performance was spread across the campus, located in two different places and in the DCU gym also. Having everything under one roof was a big driver. Then, the fact that student numbers were growing meant that we needed more teaching spaces."

Polaris now includes a High Performance Lab focused on high performance sports research, a Life Lab (supported by the Sunflower Charitable Foundation) to help students develop improved health literacy, and a Movement Lab that uses state-of-the-art indoor sport facilities. Meanwhile, active learning spaces include the Industry Robotics Lab and Immersive Visualisation Suite.

Creating collaborative spaces was also central to the project, as Alan notes: "We involved a lot of input from the end users in the design phase – for example, the Faculty of Engineering was expanding here, with a large technical innovation lab, and we involved the Faculty during the design process. There was a big emphasis on collaboration with this project and creating collaborative spaces: places for students to sit down and take a break. This was something very new – I think in the past we would

have taken every spare space for offices and lecture theatres. But having large corridors, really good 'break-out' areas and social spaces was a priority: it helps the building to perform like a live building, filled with students and activity." Boasting an A Energy Rating, Polaris is designed to be a Net Zero Energy building. "This is key, because very early on we decided we didn't want to burn any fossil fuels when we heat and cool the building. We have an excellent BER rating and we have been monitoring the energy use against projections and, do far, we are spot on. It is important that we commit to staying on this sustainable route."



- ▶ Polaris covers 10,000 square metres
- ▶ Architects were Mullarkey Pedersen Architects and Sheppard Robson
- ▶ Construction cost approximately €80 million
- ▶ With an A Energy Rating, Polaris is designed to be a Net Zero Energy building
- ▶ The building boasts 300 square metres of PV solar panels

# Leading the Way

DCU'S AWARD-WINNING EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAMME (ELP) FOR ALUMNI IS GUIDING THE WAY FOR GRADUATES, HELPING TO PUT THEM ON THE RIGHT PATH TO SUCCESS



Angel Cassin receives the Emerging Leader Participant of the Year award from Programme Director Katie Keogh at the 2025 Closing Ceremony.

**T**he programme – now in its sixth year – offers leadership, coaching and mentoring support to recent graduates from all five faculties at DCU. The programme consists of both in-person and virtual engagements, alongside executive coaching hours tailored to each participant and a mentoring relationship with a graduate from the programme.

Commenting on the achievements of the programme to date, Katie Keogh, Programme Director says: "I am thrilled that the DCU Alumni Emerging Leaders Programme is already living out DCU's mission to transform lives and societies. Seeing our alumni grow in confidence, leadership and impact has been inspiring, and I can't wait to see how the programme continues to evolve and empower even more leaders in the years ahead." The DCU Alumni Emerging Leaders Programme facilitates the next generation of leaders from our alumni community through a schedule of innovative professional and personal development opportunities (see 'How to Apply').

## AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

Demonstrating the success of the programme, it was awarded the Learning and Development Institute's 2024 Excellence Award for Best Mentorship or Coaching Initiative. Speaking about the award, the President of DCU, Professor Dáire Keogh said: "I want to congratulate the programme team, led by Ross Munnely and Katie Keogh, on being awarded this prestigious prize. The award is a recognition of the innovation and impact of the Emerging Leaders Programme, which is a great example of how graduates pulling together can develop each other. It has delivered really significant benefits for the professional and personal development of our alumni participants."

## EMERGING LEADERS CLOSING CEREMONY 2025

The recent Emerging Leaders 2024-2025 Programme Closing Ceremony was not only a celebration of this cohort's growth, but the growth of the programme over five years. The event featured a fireside chat with Professor David Collings and Sinead Heneghan, a reflection from Gaye White, and an acknowledgment of Katie Keogh's work on the programme culminating in the success achieved to date. Congratulations to Angel Cassin who was awarded the Emerging Leader of the Year, and to Andrew McGrane and Derrick Moloney as Emerging Leader Mentors of the Year.



Pictured at the L&DI Awards are (L-R): Gaye White, Kean Hortillo, Niall Behan, Jennifer McGarry, Karena Flynn Thai, Ross Munnely and Katie Keogh.

## HOW TO APPLY

This Leadership development opportunity is available to graduates who:

- ▶ Are seeking the development opportunity to move to the next level of their career
- ▶ Are advanced enough in their career to bring strong experience to the table in relation to their own functional area
- ▶ Are a graduate from any of our five DCU faculties
- ▶ Have high potential for future development

Applications for the 2025-2026 Cohort are now closed. Applications for the 2026-2027 Cohort will open in Summer 2026. Learn more about the DCU Emerging Leaders Programme here: [dcu.ie/alumni/alumniemergingleaders](https://dcu.ie/alumni/alumniemergingleaders)

# Until Next Time...



## ROSS MUNNELLY, DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI RELATIONS, OFFERS A CLOSING MESSAGE TO READERS AND ENCOURAGES CONTINUED SUPPORT AND CONNECTION

I am delighted to share the closing message of this year's magazine and I hope you have enjoyed a snapshot of the impact and achievements of our global community.

We have 120,000 graduates located all over the world and we are growing every year. Our alumni engagement continues to expand and strengthen, with more and more graduates experiencing our events, engaging with our communications and volunteering to help the university in so many different ways.

One of my favourite moments from the last 12 months was the success of our Emerging Leaders Programme. Winning the L&DI Best Coaching & Mentoring Award is a huge testament not only to the quality of the emerging leaders who participated in the programme over the last five years but also, in particular, to the volunteering of so many graduates and staff to deliver this exceptional leadership experience for our graduates.

The affinity to our university has never been higher and we are deeply committed to enhancing the graduate experience at every turn. If you are interested in mentoring a student, leading change in your industry, reuniting your class or nominating future alumni awardees, let us know by emailing [alumni@dcu.ie](mailto:alumni@dcu.ie). By staying in touch and volunteering, you are building a stronger and more connected alumni network for everyone!

On the topic of volunteering and leadership, I want to sincerely thank our outgoing Chancellor Bríd Horan for her amazing support and commitment to engaging graduates at home and abroad, and I wish our new Chancellor, Cathal Marley, himself a DCU graduate, the very best in the role. Finally, I want to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to our DCU Voices magazine committee, our supporters and to everyone who contributed to this edition. Their teamwork and collaboration have really encapsulated how our graduates transform lives and societies.

Thank you for being part of our global DCU Alumni community.

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