



*Conversations with*

# LEADING NUI GALWAY BUSINESS ALUMNI



1915 **100 YEARS** 2015  
*of Business Education*



**NUI Galway**  
**OÉ Gaillimh**

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J.E. Cairnes School of  
Business and Economics  
*Leading, Innovating, Inspiring*



# 1915 100 YEARS 2015 *of Business Education*

## *Conversations with Leading NUI Galway Business Alumni*

### *Introduction*

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Celebrating 100 years of the Bachelor of Commerce degree at NUI Galway, the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics (formerly the Faculty of Commerce, also celebrating its centenary, since its establishment in 1915) felt it was an opportune time to acknowledge the wonderful graduates of this programme. Today they work in all areas of business and contribute to our communities, be they local, regional, national or international. In their daily working lives, they lead, innovate, create, manage, execute, generate, facilitate, and inspire new and existing businesses, ideas, ventures and projects. In doing so they deliver on the mission of NUI Galway and the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics, namely, to foster a vibrant community of students and staff, where distinguished learning, impactful research, and creative thinking are shared with the world.

In compiling a list we put together a mix of Bachelor of Commerce/Bachelor of Commerce International graduates from diverse backgrounds and working in different environments (private/public, SMEs/large corporations, Irish/multinational, traditional/new, etc.), from different industry sectors (agri-food and drink, aviation, education, financial services, pharmaceutical, etc.) and with different experiences (young/retired, home/abroad, employed/self-employed, manager/worker, etc.). In the end we have a list of fifty graduates with domestic and international business experience, representing some of the biggest companies and brand names in the world (for example, adidas, Coca-Cola, Deloitte, J.P. Morgan, Medtronic, Pernod Ricard and others), as well as many of Ireland's success stories, including, among others, Avolon, Collins McNicholas, Connacht Rugby, Connacht Tribune, Davy, Dubarry, ESB Group, MERC Partners and Uniphar. The book includes graduates who are CEOs, founders of business start-ups, social entrepreneurs, managing partners, marketing/finance directors and economists, not to mention a World Athletics Champion! Reflecting the global dimension to business education today and NUI Galway's commitment to internationalisation, the graduates in this book work and live in cities around the world, including Dublin, London, Brussels, Prague, New Delhi, Atlanta, New York, and of course, Galway.

After compiling the list we asked our graduates a set of predetermined questions that we felt would help capture their individual and collective stories. To set the scene we began each conversation with an opening question on each graduate's early days and family background. This was followed by the one thing that all contributors to this book have in common, namely their 'student experience' of undertaking a Bachelor of Commerce degree at NUI Galway. We

then turned to exploring the careers, to date, of these graduates. Given the extraordinary careers of many of our contributors, we asked our alumni to keep the description to a maximum of 250 words, for the sake of consistency and brevity. Contributors were then asked a series of questions relating to business and education. More specifically, the graduates were asked to comment on three of four topics, namely, business education, the Irish economy, NUI Galway and Galway City, and finally, enterprise and entrepreneurship. With the selection and interpretation left to the graduate, the only direction given was the word limit, partly in the knowledge that at least one subset of our business graduates, namely the entrepreneurs, don't take instructions well! The final question, namely personal reflections on work, business and success, gave the contributors an opportunity (undoubtedly not their first, or their last!) to reflect on their business education, and to mull over their career with a view to providing some advice (our word, not theirs) on matters relating to work, business and success. As with other questions, the wording was left rather general and deliberately vague, so as to allow the contributors as much freedom as possible in writing their stories.

In the research and editing of this book, we wish to thank a number of people. Our thanks to colleagues in the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics and particularly those who nominated graduates; to Padraic de Burca, Ann Walsh and Leanne Dunne for help at various stages throughout the book; to Tom Acton, Kieran Conboy, Willie Golden and John McHale for their support. We wish to thank Snap printers (most especially Clíodhna Ní Churraidhín) for doing such a fine and professional job in bringing the book to market, as we would say in the business school!

Finally, and most importantly we wish to thank all the contributors who 'volunteered' their profile so that we could publish this book commemorating 100 years of the Bachelor of Commerce degree at NUI Galway. Although this book is about them and their stories, it is also about the thousands of third level business and economics students who have graduated from NUI Galway over the past century. As for this selection of graduates, without exception all fifty of them were eager, helpful and delighted to contribute, with many describing it as an honour to be included in the publication. Despite their very busy lives, all were gracious in delivering their written profiles in the template that we provided. Not only did they submit and on time, many also offered to contribute and 'give back' to the business school and their alma mater (still UCG, for many) in other ways. This is a testament to the energy, dedication and character of these graduates. On behalf of the Bachelor of Commerce programme board and the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics we wish to thank one and all for giving us the opportunity to tell their story, as part of the 100 year celebrations of the Bachelor of Commerce degree at NUI Galway.

We look forward to continuing to deliver a high quality business education in a high-impact scholarly environment over the next 100 years, and in doing so, turn out future business graduates of the calibre and standard profiled in this commemorative book.

Dr. Gerard Turley, editor  
Director, Bachelor of Commerce  
J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics  
NUI Galway



## Nicola Barrett

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
2002

Current job and title:  
**INTERNATIONAL  
MARKETING MANAGER,  
JAMESON IRISH WHISKEY  
INNOVATION, IRISH  
DISTILLERS PERNOD  
RICARD**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

As a proud Galwegian, born and raised in a small village outside of Galway City, there was always only one option for me when selecting my university of choice. I come from a large farming family and from a very early age, it was my heart's desire to go and complete my studies at NUI Galway. I spent over five years at the university – and still to this day, cite them as the best years of my life so far. The friendships I made in those days, along the Concourse or in the Halls of Saint Anthony's, still remain as strong to this day. We regularly meet up and look back in fondness at our days at NUI Galway. Currently living and working in Dublin, I return to Galway regularly to top up on all the magic the City of the Tribes has to offer.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I started my B. Comm adventure in 1999 and graduated with first class honours in 2002. It was an amazing three years, full of both educational and personal discoveries and experiences. Like many other students, I started the B. Comm not knowing exactly what route the degree would take me, but I quickly found myself enthralled by the team of Marketing lecturers and their passion for consumers and first class marketing principles. In my final year, I specialised in as many Marketing subjects as possible, as well as completing a voluntary diploma in the Irish language in Áras na Gaeilge. I was delighted to be awarded the Thermo King Scholarship post my degree, which facilitated me extending my studies to undertake the MBS in Marketing at NUI Galway. This was yet another wonderful year where I deepened my understanding of the discipline and its strategic impact and importance to the

business world. On completing my Masters in NUI Galway, the team of lecturers in the Marketing Department put me forward to compete for a highly coveted graduate role with Unilever, the consumer goods giant. Fortunately I was successful, and so began my career in Consumer Marketing. Also in that first year of working at Unilever, I completed the Higher Diploma in Marketing Practice in NUI Galway (I didn't wish to give up my student days just yet!) and have remained a loyal supporter of this programme ever since.

## CAREER TO DATE

### 2002 – 2010: I

spent eight years at Unilever which was a fantastic learning ground to cement the educational theory I attained in NUI Galway with practical experience and leading edge consumer-orientated brand strategies. I started working on their ice cream portfolio (HB and Ben & Jerry's) and then moved to their Personal Care division – where I spent a further five years working across their Deodorants, Hair and Skin Care categories, working on various brands such as Dove, Lynx and Sure. During this time, I completed the Unilever Marketing Academy and various Leadership Programmes across the globe.

**2010 – 2011:** Upon leaving Unilever, I joined another Dutch Marketing powerhouse – Heineken - and worked in the area of Sponsorship Brand Management. Heineken is a world leader in bringing Sponsorship partnerships to live via compelling experiences so I had the fortunate opportunity to work on the Rugby World Cup

2011 held in New Zealand and produced a suite of Above the Line and Below the Line assets for Heineken Cup activations here in Ireland.

**2012 – Present:** In 2012, I joined Irish Distillers Pernod Ricard and commenced working on its fantastic portfolio of brands.

Irish Distillers is a company steeped in heritage and history ranging back to 1780 when John Jameson first set up his distillery in Dublin. Today, it is full of passionate people who work tirelessly to continue this craft and creativity instilled by its founding father, so consumers from

all over the world can enjoy our wonderful brands. Currently I work as an International Marketing Manager on the Jameson Team – an Irish brand that is experiencing phenomenal growth globally and leading the resurgence and interest in Irish whiskey and brown spirits across the world.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

Often referred to as a 'chicken or egg' debate, the question around experience versus education often pops up today when we are seeking out new talent to join our teams. There is no question to the validity of a strong bank of experience, but I am a firm believer that if one can be fortunate enough to attain a solid business education, there is no better foundation stone upon which to launch your business career.

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### THE IRISH ECONOMY

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The resilience of the Irish has never gone away. We are not known as ‘The Fighting Irish’ for nothing. Our light may have been quenched somewhat but it never fully extinguished. I believe the future is bright and it is the collective spirit of the Irish people that will ensure this.

### NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

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For me, NUI Galway is like the beating heart of Galway City – all the time injecting new blood and vibrancy throughout its surrounds. The two are so intertwined and interdependent on each other. The university and the city have stood the test of time, constantly striving to improve but not forgetting their roots or heritage either. It has been long said that the people of Galway make the city what it is – and the same can be said of the staff and students at NUI Galway.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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My mother has always said ‘what is for you, won’t pass you’ and constantly reminds me that I have so much to be grateful for. I have been extremely fortunate to work with amazing people and brands all over the world in my career to date – and look forward to continuing on this path with passion and energy. Life is too short to work somewhere that makes you unhappy – so spend your time working on something that you truly love and believe in. Keep it real and when the chips are down, always remember what truly matters – your health, happiness and loved ones.



**Rory Bluett**

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**2009**

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Current job and title:  
**BRAND DEVELOPMENT  
COORDINATOR,  
JAMESON IRISH WHISKEY  
(INDIA)**



## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Born in Ireland, matured abroad is the line that best sums me up. Graduating in 2009, a 4 year degree in Commerce with French tucked in my back pocket, I set off. My first stop was a brief stint in Dublin with PricewaterhouseCoopers – a great company undoubtedly but not the right role for me, I handed in my papers in January 2011 and headed for South Korea. I spent a year there teaching English in a public elementary school where I developed a whole new set of skills that I was previously unaware of. After a few months backpacking around South East Asia, I headed to New York where I spent a year honing my bartending skills at an upscale Irish bar in Manhattan. My Dad, presumably thinking that I was lacking in some career direction, sent me a link to an article in the Irish Times advertising the Jameson Brand Ambassador programme. I knew instantly that this was the kind of role that I had been waiting for – an opportunity to work for an ambitious Irish company in an international capacity and in a challenging and exciting role. I spent a year working on Jameson in France and am approaching 2 years as Jameson Brand Development Coordinator in India.

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

Native to Galway City, having completed both my primary and secondary schooling in the city, it was the natural progression for me to apply for a place at NUI Galway. Passionate about business but also having a flair for languages, the B. Comm International degree was the right option for me. I specialised in French language studies but I also took a lot of modules in Economics, Accounting & Finance so from an academic standpoint, I was well equipped to enter the working world

when graduating in 2009. Equally important at NUI Galway was the very active social life I enjoyed there. I was a member of the university soccer team throughout and flirted with the table tennis, pool, chess and debating clubs on occasion. The academic facilities on campus are excellent and the extra-curricular activities are to match. I used to love playing football or frisbee with mates on the NUI Galway sports grounds at the foot of the River Corrib. In my opinion, Galway is the best city in Ireland in terms of the quality of student life. The city is small enough to get around by foot or by bike and at the same time the city is large enough to have loads of events and activities going on to keep students entertained.

## CAREER TO DATE

For better or for worse, I am one of those people who have ended up trying out a few different job/career paths before settling on one. It might not be the recommended post-graduation career plan and it certainly wasn't planned from my perspective, it just unfolded that way.

I started out at PricewaterhouseCoopers in Dublin in October 2009. I was assigned to the Audit department specifically banking. PwC were great to me, I think my managers realised from early on that I was unsettled and that I wanted to travel and gain international experience. They encouraged me to hold out until the end of my contract in April 2013 when I would be qualified as a Chartered Accountant. I left in January 2011 – I'm impatient like that.

I hadn't decided what field I wanted to work in but I knew I wanted to go to Asia and that I wanted a challenge. And I certainly got it. In fact, I probably got more than I bargained for. Before leaving Ireland, I managed to secure a

job working as an English teacher in a public elementary school in Seoul, South Korea. Not having any formal teaching experience, I had to get up to speed quickly. The school were paying good money to bring me out there and their expectations were high. I put my head down and worked through it. I challenged myself to deliver engaging lesson plans to the enthusiastic students. I didn't miss a class that year and I was never late for a class. That is something I'm really proud of.

While I loved my year in Korea, I wanted to try other things. During a stint bartending in New York, I came to know of the Jameson Brand Ambassador programme. I've always had a keen passion for bringing Irish products to an international audience so I knew this role was for me. Almost 3 years on and I'm still with Jameson. I've been here in India for 18 months now and I've learned much more than I could have imagined. The market is so diverse here and things change rapidly so you have to be very adaptable. People work around the clock here so I never really get to switch off – there is no such thing as a weekend! That said, I'm loving it. The experience, growth and learning I'm getting out here will put me in good standing going forward and under my stewardship, Jameson is getting a step closer to becoming an iconic brand here in India.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

My education in business started at a very young age. My father has always been involved in business in one form or another so I used to follow him around closely. I remember as a child he used to take me along into his

office on a Saturday. I used to love playing around with the printing machine, picking up what I could from the stationery store and getting a handle on one of the early versions of the internet in Ireland – I think the connection was called DDSN dial-up. While I was probably more interested in just playing around, it gave me some exposure to a business and office environment. By the

*One of my favourite quotes is by our very own Samuel Beckett. This quote best represents me and my philosophy in business - "Ever tried? Ever failed? No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."*

time I arrived in NUI Galway in 2005, I had already managed to get a couple of internships under my belt. I followed that up with a summer spent working at a well-known financial services firm in Galway and another summer working at a

start-up operating out of an incubation unit in Renmore. This work experience coupled with the education I received at NUI Galway and enhanced by the Erasmus year I spent in France left me with a solid grounding in business on graduating. Since then, I have experimented with a couple of different job and career paths but I have always made it my business to keep up to date with what is going on in the world of business, both domestically and internationally. For me, my business education is ongoing.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

You always hear of people proclaiming how proud they are to be Irish. I am of course too but I would go a step further and say that I'm also very proud of the economy that we have. When I think of our economy's performance and our workforce and how things have unfolded over the past 7-8 years, the term that always comes to my mind is

bouncebackability. As a nation, I think it's fair to say that at times in the noughties we mismanaged our finances, both public & personal. What I think is admirable, however, is that to a certain extent I think we have acknowledged our errors and taken the necessary action to respond to adverse economic conditions. The public have accepted the universal social charge and increased rates of PAYE & PRSI, those out of work have retrained and upskilled while others moved abroad in search of better employment opportunities. This reactivity and the underlying factor that in general Irish people have a hardworking nature has brought about a second wind in our economy. From what I can gather, we've steadied the ship and are on the way to full sail again.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In my opinion, enterprise and entrepreneurship, along with innovation, will continue to be the critical factors in succeeding in business in the 21st century. At a time when marketplaces are cluttered and consumers spoilt for choice, being enterprising and entrepreneurial is what will bring about a competitive advantage. Whether you run your own start-up from your attic or you work for a multinational organisation, taking an enterprising approach is crucial to being able to better respond to your customers' needs. Living in India, a country with incredible competition in every aspect of life, I have become distinctly aware of the importance of differentiating yourself from your competitors. For Jameson the brand here, we get a lot of merchandise made. There are any number of vendors vying for the business I can offer them. I always choose to work with the vendor who is most

enterprising and can offer me clutter-breaking merchandise customised for my brand. The vendor who can best deliver on the brief by offering innovative and enterprising solutions is the vendor who will win the contract.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

My career is still very young so I'm yet to fully prove myself in business. I am proud of what I have achieved to date in that I continue to challenge myself and I continue to put myself into situations where I can learn. I've always had a keen interest in business and all things international – it just took me a few years to find a role that allows me to combine these two passion points. I am now comfortable with my career path, for now at least, so I want to continue to grow in the field of international business. Outside of my job, I have dabbled in the stock market with mixed results and I have had some small business projects, some failed and others with moderate success. However, I've learned a lot and I've loads to learn. For me, that provides motivation. One of my favourite quotes is by our very own Samuel Beckett. This quote best represents me and my philosophy in business - "Ever tried? Ever failed? No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."



## Carmel Brennan

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1991

Current job and title:  
**HEAD, DEPARTMENT  
OF ACCOUNTING &  
INFORMATION SYSTEMS,  
GALWAY-MAYO INSTITUTE  
OF TECHNOLOGY**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I grew up in Lanesborough, Co Longford, where I received my primary and secondary education. Both my parents strongly value education and over the years would have emphasised (to me and my siblings) the need to achieve your potential, whilst also doing something which you enjoyed. My secondary education also promoted academic achievement, and I was well prepared for further education during my five years in the Convent of Mercy, Lanesborough. Going to college was probably a given for me, and thankfully the course and college choice were mine. I considered following my mother into a career in primary teaching, but luckily for Irish four year olds I changed my mind. A positive experience of Business Organisation at second level with Mrs Brennan (no relation), made the B. Comm the natural choice for me, and UCG was THE place to go to college, at least in my head.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

Arriving in NUI Galway (UCG as it was then) was a culture shock, especially coming from a secondary school with 110 pupils. The first year of the B. Comm, as is standard for all business degrees, covered the fundamentals of many of the main branches of business. Initially I considered specialising in law, but then I discovered marketing in year 2; I knew I had found my passion. The psychology and the strategy of marketing, and the obvious applications of it, fascinated me. I was in NUI Galway at the time that student numbers had outgrown the physical infrastructure of the campus. Eating while sitting in corridors outside the canteen was normal, and leaving a 'Back in 10 minutes' note on your library desk to prevent it being commandeered was

essential. Despite this, I really enjoyed my time completing the B. Comm, both the academic and social aspects. The Lit & Deb was a Thursday evening staple, not that I was ever brave enough to speak! The Film Society and Amnesty International which I started attending in UCG, are groupings that I have continued to attend since college. My positive experience of the B. Comm and NUI Galway was evident by the fact that I chose to remain in the university and continue my education by undertaking the MBS (Marketing). During the B. Comm, I learned a lot about business and the application of that knowledge to the 'real world'.

### CAREER TO DATE

My career to date has mostly been in higher education, having gained experience in business development, community development and consultancy. When I left college the recession meant jobs were scarce with unemployment and emigration still high. My first position after university was for an independent college in Limerick, where I had the opportunity to be actively involved in every aspect of the organisation – marketing, operations, management and teaching. I left education for a number of years but my love of teaching brought me back to the sector, and Galway was a magnet, which resulted in me accepting a position in Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) in 2001. Initially I worked in GMIT as a Marketing lecturer, and since 2007 I've been a Head of Department in the School of Business. GMIT has provided me with lots of opportunities to learn and develop, and to get involved in progressing

and developing a myriad of aspects of the college. Soon, I will take up a college-wide position focussing on student engagement and retention, which will undoubtedly be both challenging and interesting; I am ready for it.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

A business education should have a very applied focus, and my work has taught me the importance of transferable as well as discipline specific skills. Employers assume

that graduates have discipline knowledge and skills, but seek those who also have transferable skills. Transferable skills are often called 'soft-skills', but they are the hardest skills to teach.

Nevertheless, they need

to be embedded in and assessed as part of business qualifications, to adequately prepare graduates for the workplace. I believe that there are benefits of a broad based business education. Filling out my CAO form at 16, I didn't really know what I wanted to do, and a broad business degree opened up lots of specialisms to me that I knew nothing about. Business education should give students the opportunities to explore a range of disciplines, but develop an appropriate depth of expertise in one area. Given that most lecturers initially teach as they were taught, it is important that students have a positive learning experience, and are exposed to lecturers with diverse styles and methodologies. Lecturers in third level are hired because of their discipline knowledge and experience, rather than their teaching ability. It is not clear to me why we insist that those who teach at primary and secondary level must have a teaching

*A business education should have a very applied focus, and my work has taught me the importance of transferable as well as discipline specific skills.*

qualification, yet we do not demand the same for third level. It is not sufficient that third level lecturers are familiar with their discipline, it is essential that they should also be able to communicate effectively and motivate learning.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

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Galway, a student city, proudly houses its educational institutes at the core of the city's life, giving the City of the Tribes a colourful vibrancy that other cities long for. The university has in many respects helped shape the city, its graduates becoming the entrepreneurs who have created many of Galway's start-ups, and the well educated workforce, instrumental in attracting key multinationals. In addition, the city's strong cultural scene has both fed and been fed by Galway's students and graduates. NUI Galway brought me to Galway City, and Galway City brought me back. Galway is a city, but feels like a town. It is a city that is both urban and cosmopolitan, familiar and friendly. In addition to being on the cusp of the ocean home to some of the most scenic areas of Ireland, the draw of 'Galway' for students, has never surprised me. As Galway has developed and expanded, so too has NUI Galway. The campus has changed beyond all recognition from when I was a student. St. Anthony's which opened to commerce students in my final year in NUI Galway, is now overshadowed by the impressively modern Cairnes Building. While a lot has changed, I still meet familiar faces when I visit the university, and particularly so in the Marketing Department.

### **ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

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I think that we generally have too narrow a view of entrepreneurship, and specifically of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are considered as those who establish new enterprises. While undoubtedly those are special and important people, I believe that we should take a broader focus, and consider the development of entrepreneurial skills. These are skills which are necessary and valued in all roles in both the private and public sector. Those with an entrepreneurial mind-set look for opportunities, show initiative, solve problems and think strategically. We need to develop entrepreneurial graduates who will both set up businesses in the future and transform how existing businesses work. Entrepreneurship should not be confined to business students, nor should business students pursue their studies in a silo, never to mix academically with engineering, science or arts students.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

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Work consumes a large part of my life, possibly too much! Therefore, I have long ago concluded that work needs to be something that I find interesting, motivating and challenging. I enjoy the opportunity to influence and drive change, and there are inevitably chances to do so if you are proactive and seek them out. I have been lucky to receive the education I did, and have been relatively successful in my career, therefore, I view it as important to give back to society, and this is something that I also encourage my students to do. I view my success through the mirror of others' success. When my students and graduates succeed academically and personally, I have succeeded; I am happy.



## Eamonn Brennan

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1978

Current job and title:  
CEO,  
IRISH AVIATION  
AUTHORITY

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Born in Salthill (1957) and educated at Scoil Fhursa, Scoil Eanna National Schools and St. Joseph's College (The Bish) prior to zealously studying for a B. Comm in UCG (1978). Qualified as a Chartered Accountant in 1982. My parents (both from Roscommon) ran a building company in Galway and I gained valuable work experience working on sites throughout the county during my summer holidays. Concrete mixing was my speciality. Married to Mary Gannon, we have three wonderful children, Cian, Sakinah and Conor.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I loved every minute of UCG. It was a small campus so across faculties we all knew each other well. The intrigue of student politics attracted me and I was involved in all kinds of student politics, rising to the dizzying heights of Treasurer of the Student Union. Political debate centred around the Cellar Bar and Skeff and I am sure now we all took ourselves far too seriously. College (Rag) Week was a big event and we all trekked the town's pubs and discoed in Salthill at the famous Rivelinos! We

*I loved every minute of UCG. It was a small campus so across faculties we all knew each other well.*

had great lecturers, Tom Boylan, Jim Doolin and Michael D. Higgins, to name but a few and lecturers were mainly held in the old quad and terrapin huts on the canal. We never suffered the stress of continuous assessment but rather a big push in third term when some serious work was undertaken, burning the candle late. I have lifelong friends from UCG and bump into fellow students all over the world.

## CAREER TO DATE

After leaving UCG in 1978, I worked for Oliver Freeney & Co. (Articled Clerk) and qualified as a Chartered Accountant in 1982. I worked in a local accountancy practice/consultancy in Galway until 1988. I then worked as a management consultant in London with Horwath/PFF specialising in tourism and during that time I completed a tourism master plan for Malta and a number of hotel/brewery mergers. I then worked 1989-1994 as a tourism consultant for ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and completed a range of training/marketing projects, including tourism marketing plans/access development for Indonesia, Malaysia,

*Being open to new ideas is important to me and I like to think that I display the characteristics I espouse of flexibility, innovation and change.*

Macau and the Philippines. I worked closely with airlines and gained my private pilot's licence. I returned to Ireland in 1995 and was appointed Business Manager for the newly formed

Irish Aviation Authority and I was appointed CEO in 2003. I have also served as Chairman of various European Aviation bodies and trade associations.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

I have learned over the years that flexibility and the ability to embrace change are the keys to success and if you can combine these two strengths with the ability to make decisions quickly then success follows. Business education in Ireland in my view is

overly process focused and this often loses the opportunity. Third level institutions are now much better at forming links with business and giving students experience but I feel we should also give them the opportunity for some involvement in risk-based projects which will add to the quality of their business expertise. Ireland as an open economy has to educate business innovators that can capitalise on the new technology industries that are now using Ireland. In my view, less emphasis on accounting and traditional management theory and a lot more on developing the skills of risk taking and entrepreneurs, new generation technology-based marketing and understanding the business culture of key markets. As business changes, education needs to evolve quickly but I'm confident that Ireland is up to it. The single biggest constraint is our national fear of foreign languages. Our educational system has not excelled in making us all learn a second European language. We need to tackle this systematically.

*I have learned over the years that flexibility and the ability to embrace change are the keys to success.*

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

The Irish economy is unique in Europe in that we don't benefit from the Eurozone as much as we could in that our currency is the Euro but our major trading partners are UK (sterling) and US (dollar). We have great advantages: English speaking, low corporate and employment taxes, strong legal framework and treaty network, great skills base. Our reliance on the UK/US market and inward investment is not going



to change in the next 20 years but we can proactively expand our market base to Asia/South America and most importantly develop our own indigenous multinationals based on Technology, Bio Science and Genetics and niche international services. When we have a great idea we can make it the best and Ryanair is a great example of how we can lead. Half the world's leased aircraft are managed from Ireland and again we lead because we have a strong niche skill base. The future is in high end/high value niche employment and all our efforts should focus on nurturing it.

*At the end of the day, it's all about how you get on with, respect and communicate to everyone. The only advice I have for new graduates is – don't be afraid, push on.*

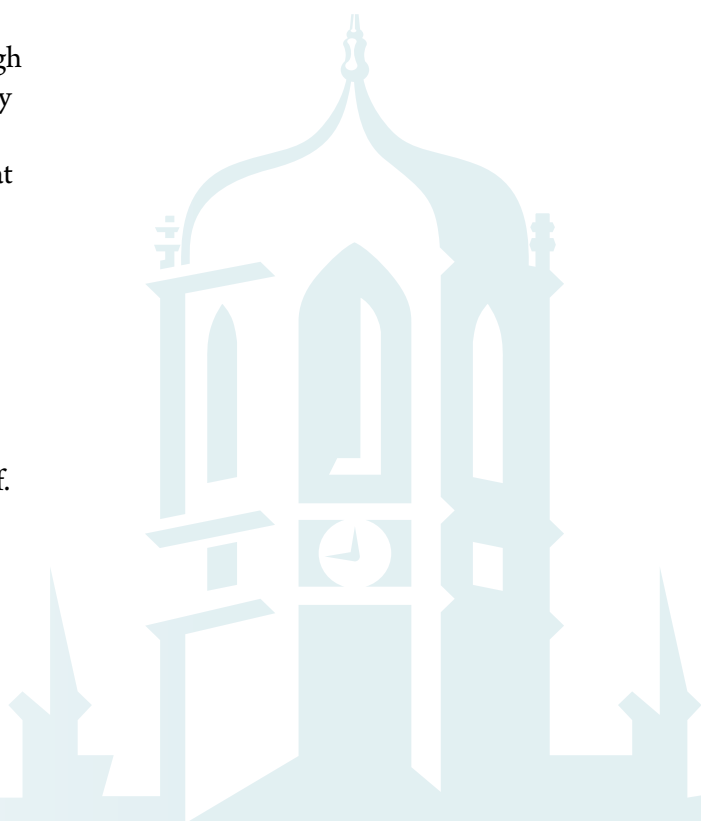
### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

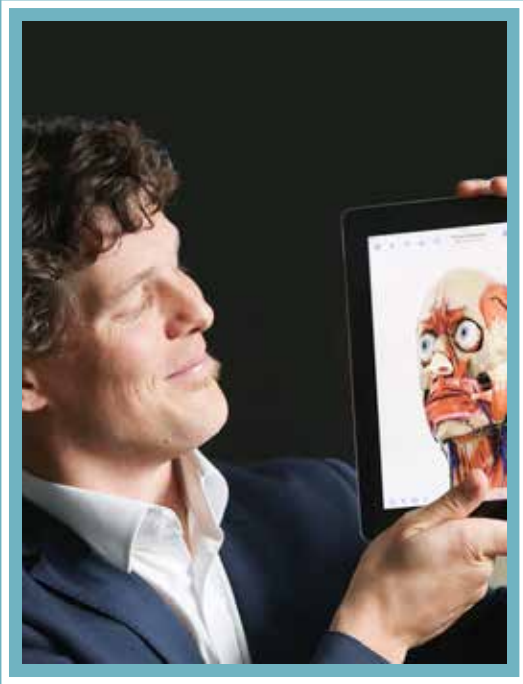
As a Galwegian, I really love the atmosphere and culture of my home town. Galway is unique in that the university, tourists and locals form a great mix that keeps the city alive all year round. The links with the river and the bay provide a great backdrop. Even though we have been successful in attracting industry in the past, future opportunities are even greater. Combine a modern university, a great place to live with modern communications and a flexible workforce and we have a winning formula. Galway needs to adopt Shannon as its local airport and help the development of international links with the Airport. The transatlantic Shannon linkage and the Wild Atlantic Way offer an attractive tourism mix that Galway can be the centre of.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

Life flies by very quickly and it is hard to envisage where it leads when you were a student in UCG in the 1970s. There is a spirit of adventure involved in every success story and you need to be willing to work abroad, travel and experience how other cultures do business. Being open to new ideas is important to me and I like to think that I display the characteristics I espouse of flexibility, innovation and change. At the end of the day, it's all about how you get on with, respect and communicate to everyone.

The only advice I have for new graduates is – don't be afraid, push on.





## Mark Campbell

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**2000**

Current job and title:  
**FOUNDER & CEO,  
POCKET ANATOMY**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Mark Campbell is a leading interaction designer, video, web and mobile software application specialist. His passion for user-centred design and education spans a successful career of 15 years to date designing, developing, and managing international multimedia and software projects in healthcare. In 2012, Mark set up a mobile app development company, Pocket Anatomy, to improve meaningful patient education in national and international healthcare systems. Why? Receiving medical treatment is a stressful experience, and studies have shown that patients retain as little as 14% of the verbal medical information their doctor provides. Pocket Anatomy creates interactive 3D medical anatomy software solutions that provide a visual aid for doctors to explain medical procedures and conditions, and to record these sessions for later reference. The Pocket Anatomy software has won numerous international awards, as it combines Mark's passion for education, healthcare and technology. As a recognised innovator in this space, Mark is also a regular guest speaker at national and international technology and education events, including keynote addresses at the Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT) annual digital media conference, Pictelín, plenary discussion presenter at the 2015 NUI Galway's annual CELT Symposium on Higher Education 'Getting Real about Virtual Learning', and showcase presenter at the 2014 Healthcare Reimagined summit hosted by Google in New York.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

When asked about Galway City and the friends I made at NUI Galway, I really feel privileged. Privileged that I was not only rubbing shoulders with classmates in the B.

Comm but also making friends with students in Humanities, Science, Engineering and Medicine. Privileged that our lecturers were more like teachers and knew many of us by our first names. Privileged that we lived and learned in a vibrant university city. A city, that no matter where on earth you're from, is your city for those years. NUI Galway's B. Comm opened up many doors for me to travel, work and see the world. After first year my friends and I went working and inter-railing around Europe, after second year we all went on the J1 to San Francisco, and then in third year, I was lucky enough to live and study in France on Erasmus with fellow B. Comm classmates Vikki Cullen, Leona Crean and Michael Hough. You never really think about all of the benefits of college when you're in college, do you? I think that it's only when you look back and see that each of the formative building blocks in your personality, business approach, and outlook on life took shape in NUI Galway, that you think, wow - those were great years!

### CAREER TO DATE

Since graduating from NUI Galway in 2000, I have spent the last 15 years working in eLearning and medical multimedia production, and have the privilege of working alongside the brightest minds in this field. People and the importance of relationship building have opened many doors for me and have enabled many collaborative business journeys here in Ireland, with the

Galway Clinic, to the NHS in the UK, and more recently to Yale University's School of Medicine.

When writing the word career, however, I get uneasy. It may have something to do with the fact that my parents' generation had a "job for life", and now, one generation later, people are lucky if they get a two-year job contract...so when I talk about a career or working life, it is with the understanding that the current set of norms and rules are not going to last. They are going to change, and based on how best we can innovate throughout this change,

will determine the future paths in each of our working lives.

A good friend and mentor, the late Rory O'Connor, used to bring a Toblerone bar into brainstorming sessions both in Hewlett Packard in Galway (where he was MD) and to new product development advisory board sessions with us in Pocket Anatomy. The three corners of the chocolate pieces, he'd say, represented each of the important tenets of innovation: People, Business and Technology, and to remember each of these in collaboration, not isolation, when innovating. In many ways, my working life to date is also represented by these three areas.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

Seeing a stronger emphasis being placed on work placements throughout the B. Comm degree is remarkable. In particular, reading that after second year students can now apply

*You never really think about all of the benefits of college when you're in college, do you? I think that it's only when you look back and see that each of the formative building blocks in your personality, business approach, and outlook on life took shape in NUI Galway, that you think, wow - those were great years!*

to spend an additional year on study abroad/ internship in the US, Europe or Asia is a great leap forward and an opportunity I would have jumped at if it were available during my time in NUI Galway. Another vital component of business education, in my opinion, is the ability to gain exposure to real world case studies - not just by way of business review journals, but by way of meeting and hearing the stories from people who have tried, failed, and tried again at making a success out of business. It's also very encouraging to see the vibrant entrepreneurship society on campus playing its part in business education and how they host entrepreneurship events, invite guest speakers and encourage its members to get involved in startups while in NUI Galway. What can NUI Galway do to continue to make more meaningful changes and enhancements to their undergraduate programmes? Beyond the resources available to students within NUI Galway itself, such a wealth of knowledge and business acumen also exists within its alma mater. What about tapping into this network and regularly bring some of these people back to NUI Galway to tell of their business experiences?

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

I remember hearing references to “Town and Gown” when growing up in Galway, and I have to admit that I never really liked that phrase, as it seemed a bit separatist, a bit like us and them. I prefer to think of our university as what it truly is - an inclusive and dynamic life force within the city. Former NUI Galway President Iggy Muircheartaigh put it nicely

*Former NUI Galway President Iggy Muircheartaigh put it nicely when he said “...there are no gates in NUI Galway”, no barriers to movement between the University and the city of Galway*

when he said “...there are no gates in NUI Galway”, no barriers to movement between the University and the city of Galway, and I believe that this is one of the great many attractions of our university – the University in the City – with open gates, footbridges, and

cycle lanes running to the heart of the city. Can NUI Galway do more in this role? Of course. I am really encouraged by the possibility of a greenway from Galway to Connemara, and the role NUI Galway will play in this. Equally I am thrilled with NUI

Galway’s support for entrepreneurship on campus through initiatives such as Explore, Blackstone’s Launchpad, the Business Innovation Centre, and Stanford University-modeled approaches to design-based-innovation, such as BioInnovate and TechInnovate.

### **ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

At Pocket Anatomy, we often come up with three-letter acronyms (TLAs) to describe our software at tradeshow and sales pitches. One such TLA, was B.I.C - our software was Beautiful and aesthetically pleasing to our users, it was Intuitive to use, and it was Comprehensive in its learning content. Well, when thinking about entrepreneurship, I’d like to use another TLA: N.R.G. - when starting a business or developing a business idea, I recently thought about the concept of energy and the role of the founder’s passion and energy, and the truth is - it’s never enough. Entrepreneurship requires N.R.G.

**Niche:** the ability to segment the market place, and begin by truly satisfying a niche market first, and then expanding from there. Taking this concept one step further, I am a huge proponent of user-centred design and an advocate of bringing members of this niche audience into your design process and co-developing with them.

**Recurring:** particularly in software, the ability to identify a software-as-a-service (SaaS) business model is ideal.

**Global:** Taking our locally produced software and placing it in the hands of doctors and patients worldwide has always been the ambition of our company. Piloting our software with physicians in Galway University Hospital and Galway Clinic has helped us achieve this and thereby improve the end result for patients, globally, in better understanding their diagnosis and treatment plans.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

**Work:** In my early days of starting out as a company founder, I remember working six and a half days a week on various projects, and (in hindsight) equated business success with being busy. Meeting my life partner, Fiona, and currently raising two children has since brought perspective. I would say that I still retain my strong work ethic, but I have since focused more on working smarter rather than harder.

**Business:** Relationship building is key to my approach to business. Two ways in which I have managed to increase the number of these 'success-celebrating-events', is by surrounding myself with people who challenge me, and push both me and the company forward. Secondly, forging strategic partnerships has helped us save time and reach more of

our core markets quicker. Could we do it ourselves? Possibly, but not as effectively as creating symbiotic alliances with others, as the adage "strength through unity" and our own Irish seanfhocal "ní neart go cur le chéile" suggest.

**Success:** In business (as in life), we have our ups and our downs. Well, I feel that many successes in business can be short lived, overlooked, or worse still, not celebrated. Instead of waiting for the huge win, we should recognize success in its smaller amounts and celebrate these wins, before we get distracted with the next challenge or fire-fighting exercise.





## Jim Clarcken

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1992

Current job and title:  
**CEO, OXFAM IRELAND;  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
OXFAM INTERNATIONAL**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Married to (Dr) Regina (Dee) Codd, also an NUI Galway Alumnus (1998) with three young children Anna, Jack and Sarah. Grew up in Askeaton, Co. Limerick and educated in Crescent College Comprehensive, Limerick. Father (William Clarcken) also a UCG graduate as are also brothers Ian, Bill and Brian and sister Sinead. I have a keen interest in rugby, drama, swimming & athletics.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I had a wonderful time in UCG during my four years (B. Comm & HDip in Marketing Practice). The course was ideal for someone who wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do (and the circuitous route I took to my current role will bear witness to that). B. Comm gives you a great basis for business more broadly and as you specialise a great opportunity to focus on the areas that you really enjoy. The Marketing Practice Diploma gave a tremendous first job experience and I was fortunate to be placed in a company with an inspiring entrepreneur who gave me tremendous latitude to develop the role in so many ways. Having said that, the NUI Galway experience itself, beyond the academic element was truly transformative in developing the person that I became. There was such great scope and openness to become whoever you wanted to be and to get involved in so many wonderful extra-curricular activities. In my first year, I was involved in setting up the Simon (Homeless) Society working with Galway Simon Community. I became Captain and Chairperson of the Athletics Club and had the great honour of representing UCG in Intervarsity events all around Ireland including Queens, UCC, UCD, Maynooth etc. I was elected as Auditor of the Commerce and Economics Society and organised high profile

business events in the university as well as a broad range of social activities including a Cooperation North debating competition with the University of Ulster (their first visit to UCG). The college was incredibly supportive and engaged in all of these activities and the skills acquired in organising these events were as important perhaps as the academic learning (don't tell the Professor!)

### CAREER TO DATE

My first job came as the (Mkting Practice) intern in a small manufacturing company in West Cork and I stayed long enough to be part of its exponential growth. I also started a Craft Brewery (in 1996 – about 20 years too early!) producing ales and stouts locally. Following completion of an MBA at UCC, I was recruited as Commercial director to a company in the steel industry based in Waterford.

A lifetime ambition had always been to spend some time volunteering in a developing country and an opportunity came up to work in South Sudan so I quit my job (as well as various other directorships I had acquired) and went to live in a mud hut in a remote rural war torn area. It was a defining experience living amongst inspiring people who were determined to move on from the civil war and try to build a life for themselves and their families. Having worked in that environment, I found it very difficult to return to an exclusively commercial environment so following a stint working on child rights and disability issues in eastern Europe, I was recruited to lead Oxfam Ireland and to lead the global change process in the Oxfam organisation.

Oxfam works in 90 countries across the world and in 2015 supported 25 million people through emergency response and

long-term programming. My role has meant running large scale development and humanitarian responses working with teams of inspirational people across the world, as well as engaging in high level advocacy at UN, EU and Irish government level as well as at key international platforms including the OECD etc.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

Business education needs to continue to evolve at a rapid pace and to ensure that it meets business where it is at rather than where academia may like it to be. As we know, some of the most successful business people had little formal academic training so fully understanding their successes and building flexible agile programmes to meet those needs will be essential to ensure that education and entrepreneurship can complement each other. It goes without saying that digital business education needs to be core to any programme and using externals as well as well qualified academics is needed to provide the right mix of theory and practice. Business is ultimately a practical pursuit so ensuring that educational institutions continue to build their very strong links with the business community is essential whilst making sure that the definition of what constitutes a 'business' encompasses all opportunities for graduates. We know that a huge percentage of careers that graduates will have in ten years or less don't formally exist today so the challenge for business education is to be constantly evolving and exploring new horizons.

### THE IRISH ECONOMY

It is great to see that the Irish economy is turning from the devastating collapse in 2008 although it is clear that the recovery is not evenly spread and many parts of the country

are not experiencing the improvements yet. It looks like we are on a positive trajectory for the coming years but must be mindful that Ireland's economy is still hugely dependent on external factors. I hope that political and other powers have learned from the extraordinary mistakes that led to the crash and that we will nurture an economy that has gradual, consistent growth across the entire country. We are fortunate to have some excellent indigenous industries that need to be nurtured and supported. We need to be far more challenging when it comes to governance across all strands of society and business. We must ensure that our country bridges the inequality gaps that are growing to ensure that every citizen has a real opportunity to grow and succeed and that we protect the most vulnerable in our society. It's not just the right thing to do, it is also the sensible thing to do. Let's not make Ireland 'the best little country to do business in'; let's make it 'the best little country to be born in, grow up in, have a career, a family, a good life and grow old in'.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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It is very exciting to see the emergence and confidence of young entrepreneurs in Ireland now. We have people succeeding in biotech, IT, digital and software at a global scale as well as a wonderful food and hospitality industry that continues to expand. We need to continue to invest in innovation. We need to ensure that our academic offering continues to be integral to real business practice. We need to encourage risk taking and acknowledge that failure is an essential part of success. I started my first business in my mid-twenties and although it was not a success, I possibly learned more relevant experience from that

failure, than a lot of other work I was doing in parallel at that time. I believe that Irish people have an innate ability to network and do business across a wide range of cultures. The earlier that young entrepreneurs are exposed to international business environments the better. I was very fortunate that at a very young age in my first job, my employer had me flying around the world to develop new markets for Irish made products and I learned that we can compete with anyone. I continue to require those skills in complex global advocacy today.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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There's no nice way to say it but hard work is essential! That ethic and being open to the many opportunities that will cross your path – they will not always be obvious. And you need to take risks. You will fail sometimes but you will always learn from the experience. And as you work hard, make sure you are doing something that you love, that you feel passionate about, that you are good at. Don't worry if you find that the thing that you always thought you wanted to do isn't for you. There is no such thing as one career. No jobs for life, no single path. Tear up the rule book in your mind – you can do anything. You will meet amazing people along the way and allow them to push you outside your comfort zone – it is good for you. Don't be afraid to lean on others. None of us can survive without this. And remember that whatever you do, you can make a real impact in the world. And finally a quote from Michelangelo! "The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it".





## Rory Coll

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1985

Current job and title:  
**MANAGING PARTNER,  
COLL & CO, CHARTERED  
ACCOUNTANT; MANAGING  
DIRECTOR, PARADIGM  
LEARNING EUROPE**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

My father was a Schools' Inspector so we moved around a lot in our early years, Ennis, Sligo, and Dublin before we finally settled in Galway when I was 12. I was one of six children with two sets of twins in the family. So with 6 children under the age of 8, feeding time at our house was always interesting. I have an identical twin, Brian so that always caused confusion growing up with teachers, friends and on the rare occasion girlfriends. We also had many cousins in Galway and my uncle Frank was Professor at NUI Galway so it was always on the cards to attend university in Galway. We grew up in Salthill and I still find it difficult to live away from the coast having experience of living in Pittsburgh and Budapest over the years. I completed my secondary education at Coláiste Iognáid (The Jes) in Galway. I have moved many times in my career having spent nine years in the US but returning to live in Galway. I am married to Carol and we have three daughters, Stephanie, Sophie and Abbie and I currently work and live in Barna, Galway.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I was attracted to the B. Comm degree primarily due to the influence of my teachers at 'The Jes' where I had opted for business subjects from an early age. NUI Galway was a much smaller university than it is today and a large number of Jes pupils also went on to do a B. Comm so the switch from secondary to third level life was minimal. The subjects in first year were broad but provided a good insight into my preferred options for year 2. Lectures were spread out so I was able to do part-time work teaching swimming which was great for pocket money. My main focus was on accounting subjects and a future career as a

Chartered Accountant as the range of career options then were quite limited. College sports and social life was very active and I enjoyed all sports but in particular swimming and Kayaking where I represented NUI Galway and also was lucky enough to win the Irish Intervarsity Men's Open Kayaking championship two years running. The B. Comm degree from NUI Galway was a great platform for my career and was well respected by all future employers both in Ireland and overseas.

### CAREER TO DATE

After graduation from NUI Galway, I was lucky enough to be offered a trainee position with KPMG in Galway. After qualifying as a Chartered Accountant I successfully applied for KPMG's International Career Development programme and transferred to their US offices for a 21 month assignment. On my return from the US, I was assigned to the KPMG office Budapest, Hungary where I undertook corporate finance projects.

On my return to KPMG in Ireland I was appointed as Manager in the Galway office. I left practice and subsequently worked as European Director of Finance for a joint-Venture between a US and French multinational. I then transferred to PPG Industries Corporate HQ based in Pittsburgh, PA as European Treasurer. Subsequently, I was promoted to Chief Financial Officer (CFO) for the global Joint Venture of Transitions Optical Inc based in Florida, US. As CFO, I was responsible for the Worldwide

Global Finance & IT functions with major manufacturing and commercial Operations in Asia, Europe and The Americas.

During my time in the US, I was extremely lucky to attend Executive Education classes at Harvard and Wharton Schools of Business. I was also master certified to facilitate Zodiak®: The Game of Business Finance and Strategy. On my return to Ireland I established two businesses, a local practice specialising in tax and an International Training company where I am responsible for the delivery of business finance and strategy simulations to a range of publicly quoted international clients.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

The Irish Times reported in August 2015 that the number of degree courses requiring

500 points or more had jumped by more than 25%. Of 834 level-8 courses offered, 75 were filled by between five and nine students and 27 were filled by fewer than five students. Just 45 courses or 5% had an intake of

100 students or more. This 'points creep' puts incredible and unnecessary pressure on Leaving Certificate students. Students need to go to third level to be educated and not to acquire a degree specific to a particular job. A recent research report from John Hopkins University summed it up as follows: *'A well-educated business student should be able to go out into the world of business and move about within that world—learning and retraining for new positions as they arise within the workplace. He/She will do this with ease because he/she was given a solid well-rounded, quality business*

*The subjects in first year were broad but provided a good insight into my preferred options for year 2. Lectures were spread out so I was able to do part-time work teaching swimming which was great for pocket money.*

*education at the university. Don't get a credential, get an education. Go forth with knowledge rather than mere know-how. Demand that your college educates you and that your employer trains you, exactly the way things were done for centuries before all this mess'.*

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

The Irish economy has shown a great ability to rebound from the recession as evidenced by employment and GDP growth. The Central Bank estimates that Gross Domestic Product grew by 6.5 to 7% in 2015, and is estimated to grow by around 5% in 2016. This was the fastest economic growth in Europe last year. Ireland is well positioned to continue to grow strongly but we need to have strong political leadership that plans ahead for the normal 'Boom and Bust' cycles that happen to a small open economy and avoid the devastating effect on families when the inevitable downturn in the global economy happens. 'Boom and Bust' cycles are normal and need to be planned for. The second challenge we face is the dominance of the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) in the economic activity in Ireland. 42% of Ireland's GDP is accounted for by Dublin. In comparison, London accounts for 20% of the UK's. In addition, the Greater Dublin Area accounts for almost 40% of the state's population with 1.8 million people currently living there. This figure is set to grow to 2.2 million by 2031. This overreliance on Dublin puts unnecessary pressures on roads, housing and education and a much greater emphasis on capital

*Success: This definition is very individual but the one I like was by the late poet and civil rights activist, Maya Angelou whose take on success stated that: "Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it."*

investment needs to be put in place to address this imbalance over the next number of years.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

SMEs are currently the largest providers of employment in Ireland and account for around 70% of private sector employment in the state. Ireland needs entrepreneurs more than ever and in my opinion, in order to do so two key items need to happen:

### A. Reduce the risk and fear of failure

A CSO report showed that up to 80% of start-up companies fail within their first five years of trading, one of the reasons being is that they did not have the necessary blend of management, technical and sales skills. In my experience the individuals with the best chance of success i.e. skilled employees with > 10/15 years work experience (e.g. from multinationals) rarely

make the move to self-employment as they now have costs such as mortgage, childcare etc. to cover and most businesses breakeven or lose money at the outset. Irish people by their nature are entrepreneurial so there is a great opportunity to convert individuals if the above can be addressed.

### B. Improved access to finance

Lack of access to cash is another key impediment in starting any new business. Bank financing is just not an option for most start-ups and increased availability of equity financing needs to be encouraged.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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**Work:** One of my early bosses once said that ‘If work was meant to be enjoyable every day, they would not pay you to be there.’ The work environment is continually changing as unlike at the start of my career, the advantage of working in larger firms meant you had access to information that other firms did not. Today Google has all the information anyone needs so it’s not the information you have, it’s what you can do with that information that makes the difference.

**Business:** I have seen many superbly written business plans over the years but the only time a business plan is truly validated is when someone is willing to pay you for the product or service you are offering. Business is difficult and no matter what anyone says, it is not easy to make money. Anyone can offer a product or service that loses money, the real challenge is to run a profitable business.

**Success:** This definition is very individual but the one I like was by the late poet and civil rights activist, Maya Angelou whose take on success stated that: “Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it.”



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**Nicola Commins**

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**2006**

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Current job and title:  
**ANALYST, NATIONAL  
TREASURY MANAGEMENT  
AGENCY**

## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I'm a 30 year old Galway City native, currently living and working in Dublin as an analyst with the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA). The Funding and Debt Management team, of which I am part, is responsible for borrowing on behalf of the Government and managing the National Debt. Some of my responsibilities include interactions and monitoring of primary dealer banks, managing the rating agency relationships, bond issuance and operation of the ELG Scheme. I completed the B. Comm in NUI Galway in 2006, followed by a Masters in Economic Science in 2007. Following this I spent 2 years as a Research Assistant with the ESRI. Outside of work, my other interests include photography, travel, music and reading.

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

I completed the 3 year B. Comm degree in 2006. I chose to study Commerce because it offered career opportunities in a range of areas from accounting and marketing to HR, law and economics. I was unsure which area I wanted to specialise in but ultimately chose economics as I enjoyed it from the beginning. While the B. Comm is a large and wide-ranging course, I always found the lectures to be relevant and focused on real-world and practical applications of the concepts being thought. Lecturers were also accessible and open to questions and discussion from students. The wider NUI Galway staff were also helpful to me during my time there, and encouraged student wellbeing as much as academic success.

## CAREER TO DATE

On completion of the B. Comm, I chose to specialise further in economics, and undertook the Masters in Economic Science in NUI Galway. During that year I also worked as an economics tutor and completed a three month work experience placement. On graduation, I was lucky enough to join the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) as a Research Assistant. My work was largely focussed on environmental and transport economics. I published a number of research papers and presented at several conferences during my time in the ESRI. It was an enjoyable role and a great organisation to start my career with and learn from other experienced and enthusiastic researchers.

In 2010, I joined the NTMA in the Funding and Debt Management division. As a member of the primary bond team, my work has been interesting and varied, during a time of rapid change in the Irish economy and global bond markets in general.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

My experience of business education was very positive, and I felt it provided a combination of both theory and practical skills. The B. Comm gave me a good basic understanding of many aspects of business and how they are connected. Other essential skills such as excel, presentation skills, report-writing and research have also been important for my career to date. The nature of business in Ireland is changing rapidly, and business education will need to adapt to focus more on ICT skills and global market trends. Language skills are also becoming increasingly important. I think more business courses should offer work experience and the opportunity to spend some time studying abroad. This would give students a more

realistic idea of what to expect once they graduate, and also give them the experience and connections to help them secure employment.

### **THE IRISH ECONOMY**

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The Irish economy has been through a period of rapid change in recent years, from the boom years to a rapid decline. While the recovery was slow and difficult for many, I think it has also offered some useful lessons. Ireland has many strengths, from the diversity, education and varied skills of the people, to the natural geographical advantages of a small, English-speaking country within Europe. We also are lucky enough to have a wealth of natural resources. In an increasingly globalised market, where the fortunes of the larger countries ultimately impact the rest of the world, it is important for Ireland to further invest and diversify in order to stay competitive. Entrepreneurship, research and the ability to adapt to a changing economic environment will be important, which of course requires high quality graduates with business, organisational and language skills along with real-world experience.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

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I really enjoyed my experience as a student at NUI Galway. Being from Galway City, I already knew what both the city and the university had to offer. All of my family members also attended NUI Galway, so I was looking forward to having the same positive experience I had heard so much about. While the B. Comm was a very large group with several hundred students, some small classes and tutorials, along with clubs and other social events made it easier to meet new people and settle into college life. NUI Galway is a welcoming university which offers both a

high quality education and a fun atmosphere. Galway City itself is the best of both a big city and small town, which is geared towards students during term time. There are activities and events to suit almost everyone, with a particularly strong arts and music scene.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

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My career so far has been as much a result of luck and good timing, as it has been hard work and patience. It has always benefitted me to be a bit more patient in waiting for the job I really wanted. I have been lucky to have the chance to work on a range of different projects and with different individuals since graduating. From a research and academic environment to finance and banking, these have all provided different insights and useful experiences. This has helped me to get a range of perspectives on a topic and I have learned skills and knowledge which I have been able to apply in other areas of my work also. Success to me is the opportunity to work in a role that is interesting, rewarding and useful. I enjoy working in an environment that is challenging and encourages me to improve my skills and adapt to my role. I think it's important to continue your business education throughout your career, and I hope to further develop my knowledge and experience in the coming years.



## Kieran Conboy

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**2000**

Current job and title:  
**DEAN, COLLEGE OF  
BUSINESS,  
PUBLIC POLICY & LAW,  
NUI GALWAY**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I was born in UCHG - the hospital across the road from the university and grew up in Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo. My parents, originally from Mayo, spent 20 years in Yorkshire, before returning to Mayo when I was born. This has left me a supporter of both Mayo and Leeds United – an unenviable combination if one is looking for success but the greatest if one is looking for two armies of continually disappointed but eternally optimistic groups of people. My school years were spent in Tooreen N.S. and Ballyhaunis Community School. One of the highlights of my job as Dean is presenting certificates to the Junior Cert students in the region that receive an A grade in business studies, and a particular highlight for me is presenting awards to the Ballyhaunis students and indeed their fellow Mayo comrades that do what the county team strive to do and make the A grade.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

My UCG experience consisted of the B. Comm and subsequently the MBS in eCommerce. I had a very enriching and positive experience in the university, making friends that I still hold dear all these years later. The lecturers were fantastic and enlightening. I was going to say that I will not embarrass any by name, mostly as they still work with me. However one exception I must make is Professor Seamus Collins who sadly passed away in 2014. Seamus was an inspiration to me as a lecturer and in the coming years as my manager. Seamus was the epitome of professionalism, transparency and honesty, with an unwavering focus on the best interests of the student and possessed the innate ability to make the most complex thing simple and to bring even the most mundane content to life.

## CAREER TO DATE

After finishing my Masters, I joined Accenture Consulting. The role was varied and took me to many parts of the world over a three year period including all European capital cities and a mini-version of the J1 experience in Chicago, New York, Boston, San Francisco, Washington and Miami. I started my PhD while in Accenture and returned mid-way through that to NUI Galway – this time as a member of staff - teaching business information systems topics such as innovation, agile and lean project management, portfolio management, and newer methods of innovation such as crowdsourcing and crowdfunding. Through Science Foundation Ireland and European funding I've been able to build a group of researchers in the information systems area, and being a part of the SFI funded Lero national software research centre has allowed me to work with some of the most esteemed researchers in the software arena. I have been fortunate to still work closely with industry through collaborative research projects, working with Atlassian, Cisco Systems, Suncorp, and Fidelity Investments, as well as many SMEs in the region. Recently, we have received funding to grow the group to over 20 PhD and postdoctoral researchers over a 6 year period. We have achieved a lot in terms of industry impact and publications, and I am particularly proud of hosting international conferences where we have brought the research community to Galway. Aside from industry partners I also work on national funding agency policy here at home as well as with the EU Commission

*Taking time out from the everyday cut and thrust of work and study to identify and help people should be a part of every graduates criteria for success.*

and funding bodies in the US and Australia. Peppered through my time in NUI Galway has been a Fulbright award in 2009 which allowed me to spend time at Carnegie Mellon University and the Software Engineering Institute. I also spent two very special years in the University of New South Wales in Australia in 2011 and 2012. Upon returning to Galway from UNSW I have been Head of the School of Business & Economics and more recently Dean of the College of Business, Public Policy & Law.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

We often hear and read about the business world's need for graduates that can lead, that can communicate effectively, that can think critically, that imbue ethical and morale standing in their thoughts and actions, and have a grounding in and appreciation of multiple disciplines and the perspectives that each brings. Of course all of these things are undoubtedly true. Something that we strive for at NUI Galway is to produce 'agile' graduates. Today's graduates need, not just to possess the aforementioned skills but to apply them in an agile manner in order to survive and indeed flourish in turbulent business environments. To be the very best they will need to thrive in high pressure environments with tight and constantly shifting deadlines. They need to be resourceful, drawing on the fluid knowledge environment around them and need, not just to think critically as many state, but also to think laterally and 'outside the box'. Although many graduates will learn the theory of these key concepts and how they are applicable to



industry, many lack an exposure to real world application. At NUI Galway we convey these skills by creating assignments and a learning environment that immerse the students in these types of activities.

## ENTERPRISE & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A lot is written on enterprise, entrepreneurship, and innovation – and rightly so. There are so many positive drivers in terms of innovation-particularly where technology is concerned.

- a. Advancements in technological capabilities give us the potential to do what our ancestors would consider godlike, - or in atheistic terms simply an ability beyond the capabilities of man. In the 21st century, our technologies knock at the gates of heaven. Modern technologies give us the power to manipulate the very axes of nature: space, time, energy, matter and life.
- b. We now have a tech-savvy digital native society with an insatiable appetite for technology that permeates all aspects of their lives.
- c. Increased access and ability to contribute to technology: Technology increasingly diffuses across society for a variety of reasons such as constantly reducing cost and design with broader use in mind. As more and more of the population access a technology, and as its power grows, the potential for huge leaps to benefit society increases.

However, academic literature, popular press, and anecdotal evidence highlight the increasingly prevalent negative or misanthropic aspects of IT. Obvious examples include the negative potential of modern weaponry, and security and privacy

concerns. Several studies demonstrate unhealthy technology overuse and addiction particularly with regard to internet and mobile technology use. ICT is responsible for increased stress levels in individuals (known as technostress) resulting in issues of work exhaustion, productivity and organisational commitment. This issue has clearly reached a level of malevolence whereby technology is on occasion developed not just with an awareness of the negative impact but specifically with that negative impact in mind e.g. modern weaponry. As mentioned a lot has been written on entrepreneurship, and I doubt I can add much to this debate - while I embrace the emergence of new technology and the excitement that surrounds innovation and entrepreneurship in this regard, perhaps one statement on the downsides of this topic may be the most value I can add.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

I have been to many universities in many cities, and it is only as I see more and more that I really start to appreciate the close and embedded ties between NUI Galway and the city within which it resides. Its geographical centrality in comparison to the satellite proximity of other universities to their host town or city is often noted but often taken for granted both by students and staff. We have seen incredible growth in the university - through a greatly increased campus footprint, a fleet of 21st century buildings, new staff that are not just learning about but driving cutting edge research in their respective fields. This has been matched by similar growth in the city. The city footprint has dramatically increased, the cityscape is new and 21st century while still maintaining all the historic of the city. The cutting edge research in the university is matched at city level by the

presence of large multinational leaders at the forefront of their field – Boston Scientific, Medtronic, Cisco and Fidelity Investments as examples - along with a plethora of SMEs that are making similar strides. The growth of the university is intrinsically linked to the growth of the city through these organisations, through education and through research.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

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One aspect of my role as Dean that I particularly enjoy is graduation day where graduates and their families and friends get to celebrate the fruits of their hard work over the previous few years. However, the scroll that each graduand walks away with is based on two things. The first is their academic standing already demonstrated through their performance in exams. The second, and often less known given most of us are not fluent in Latin, is that they commit to uphold the morale standing of the awarding university. I always remind every graduand of this expectation at their graduation ceremony. To demonstrate this aspect of success in their future endeavours, work or otherwise, they need to be cognisant of colleagues who are finding things difficult - due to mental illness, loneliness, personal circumstances and a susceptibility to the complexities and pressures commonplace in today's business world. Taking time out from the everyday cut and thrust of work and study to identify and help just one of these people – through extra help, through inclusion in work or social activities, or even just through being a person to talk to - should be a part of every graduates criteria for success.



**Andrew  
Conlan-Trant**

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1984**

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Current job and title:  
**EXECUTIVE DEAN, DUBLIN  
BUSINESS SCHOOL**

## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I am originally from Quin, Co. Clare and grew up there on a small farm along with my brother and three sisters. The income that my parents derived from the farm was never huge but I was very fortunate that they placed a lot of value in education and ensured that I had every opportunity to access learning. I spent five very happy years at St. Flannan's College in Ennis and from there gained access to the B. Comm at UCG. After finishing college in Galway I moved to Dublin and some time later met Miriam Trant, whom I married in 1991. We have two daughters; Rebecca is in her final year at Trinity College and Ruth who sat the Leaving Cert this year. We now live in Co. Meath in a lovely rural place called Culmullen. About 5 miles from Dunshaughlin this is a farming area that preserves a link to my farming roots and values but is still 45 minutes from where I work in Dublin.

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

It is now almost 35 years since I joined first year of the B. Comm at what was then UCG. I was 17 when I started college and my main memories of that time were the change I experienced in moving from my home to Galway. It was difficult to start with but by the end of the first semester I was well settled. I have very warm memories of my lecturers, particularly Leo Hawkins who lectured in Accounting; Tom Boylan in Economics, Ciaran Murphy, my MIS lecturer who also tried to teach me pitch-and-putt one time; and Leo Smyth, who ultimately became a very close friend, right through to this day. It's funny, as you go through life, you meet and become friendly with people who, in that period in time, are your friends but with the passage of time and a change in location,

you just lose contact. I have good memories of people who were with me in college, most in the B. Comm, such as Sinead Mannion, Con Quigley, Emer Mulligan and Seamus Kilbane; and others who had come through St. Flannan's College with me, such as Garry Shannon, Alan Carr and Michael O'Shea. After graduating with the B. Comm. I went on to complete the H.Dip in Education with a view to becoming a secondary teacher. It was difficult to get a teaching job in the mid-80s so I went on to complete an MSc. in Management at Queen's University Belfast.

## CAREER TO DATE

My first job was in Telecom Eireann, now Eir, which I joined through a graduate programme. I was there for over 10 years and this is where I grew up from a business point of view. I held a number of posts at Telecom, most in the Commercial and Marketing areas, including Advertising & Promotions Manager for a few years. When I left Telecom I worked in Excellence Ireland (Irish Quality Association) for a year and then joined Ocean Communications, a joint venture between British Telecom and ESB, holding the post of Director of Marketing & Products. I was there during the period when BT acquired the shareholding of Esat Telecom and bought out ESB's share of Ocean. Following that, when times were good, I left and became self-employed as a consultant, for about 8 years. During that time I learned that Consultant is sometimes another word for Unemployed! Overall, though, it was a good period as we entered the 'Celtic Tiger' years. I worked with some excellent organisations and was introduced to the social care, charity sector. Consequently I took a role in the UK that turned into a full time arrangement as Chief Executive of TBG Learning, a training and

employment-support organisation that was a subsidiary of the Rehab Group charity. This was particularly interesting and challenging as it had many contracts with UK government departments that were hugely impacted by the change of government in 2010, requiring significant changes to the strategy of the company. I left there in 2013 and returned to Dublin to take up my current role as Executive Dean at DBS.

## **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

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My view on business education is influenced, at least in part, by my role as Dean at Dublin Business School. The best programmes we have at DBS are those that are heavily influenced by business itself. For example, we run a Level 7 programme in Retail Management that has been developed in partnership with a leading retail brand. It has the highest progression rates and employment rates of any programme we run. We have created postgraduate programmes in ICT where a credit bearing work placement is an integral part, and employers have even attended with the academic team presenting the programme to Quality & Qualifications Ireland for validation. In my view, the most successful business programmes will have very close ties to industry and its different sectors. And many employers say to us that while a good knowledge of the technical subject matter is important, teaching students how to work is critical. All business programmes should include an element of employability skills such as teamwork, communications, self-management and adapting to a business culture. There are, in the main, very high standards of business education across all third level institutions in Ireland. The most successful are probably those who work with employers and with the Expert Group on

Future Skills Needs, ensuring that the needs of the market place are reflected in graduates. If there is a criticism it is that the lifecycle of a business programme in some disciplines is too long, particularly those with a basis in technology. Programmes traditionally have turned over every 5 years and this needs to reduce to maintain recency with a fast-moving business market.

## **THE IRISH ECONOMY**

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I have a story that can be read as a metaphor for the Irish economy. Up to 2008/9 only a small proportion of people understood or even cared about the economy. There were plenty of jobs, income and cash, and asset values were rising. In my own case, I went so far as to spend a few thousand euro on two cases of wine. It was a solo decision; I didn't tell my wife, I did very little analysis but it seemed like a good idea. It's no wonder the economy went pear-shaped when people like me – generally perceived to be practical and sensible – made mad decisions like buying wine. Like every other speculative asset, it lost huge value when the economy contracted, and soon after buying it, its value fell by 40%. Then I took an interest in the economy! I had to look at my choices; do I sell it on and cut my losses or hold on to it and ride out the storm? Or do I drink it? I decided not to drink it as the guilt alone would sour the taste. So the sensible thing to do was hold on to it and watch its value over the next 4 years, which I did. Like the Irish and global economies, the value of my wine started to increase and by 2013 it had surpassed my original investment, the guilt had passed and the story turned from one of stupidity to one of incredible investment competence!

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship is a kind of nebulous thing. We generally associate it with very successful business people but it is a trait, or a competence, that can and should be applied to any aspect of life. It is hard to define exactly what entrepreneurship is, as it is hugely influenced by the personal character and traits of the individual entrepreneur. Any definition has to comprise a mix of different traits, such as tenacity, knowing what you want, knowing what you don't know but where to get it, amongst others. And while we often measure entrepreneurship in profit and asset value, social entrepreneurship is every bit as valuable. I have known people who, through good ideas, good management, a bit of risk taking and a lot of perseverance have been very successful, not in the traditional business based definition of entrepreneurship but in the social definition, where they have genuinely helped people who were, for example, homeless, unemployed, in care or had a disability. A good entrepreneur will, however, know his/her own limits and will seek out people who can take on a recently established idea and make it sustainable. Entrepreneurship is an incredible asset to any aspect of life but the capacity to sustain momentum, post initiative, is every bit as valuable.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

I sometimes stop and think of my roots in a small farm in Clare and compare that to places I have been or things I have done as a result of my work. Would you believe, I was invited to attend the Queen's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace a few years ago; I can well

imagine a few of my ancestors turning in their graves when I was there! I had a few trips to Saudi Arabia which were pretty unforgettable, including a nighttime visit to the desert about an hour from the centre of Riyadh. I had a very long, cold and terrifying taxi ride in the centre of Poland which probably brought me closer to God. I visited St. John's in Newfoundland where it misted constantly for three days as if it were the west of Ireland in December. And I met the UK Prime Minister for about an hour one day where we discussed how the Irish-owned company I was managing was going to help reduce unemployment in the UK. Success comes in different forms and is defined differently for different people. From my experience, success is most likely when you try to take learnings from things that have gone well for you as well as your mistakes. I have had the benefit of great variety in my work and from that I have met many very different people with different perspectives on life and on doing business; most have been positive but some have been just awful. You don't have to keep a log or a diary of all this but my advice to people much younger than me is to take a challenge when you see it because you will always get something from it; business success, a new business experience, a new cultural experience, new contacts and acquaintances or just some new learning for or about yourself. And think about where you've come from; it will help keep your feet on the ground.



## David Connern

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
2009

Current job and title:  
**INVESTMENT BANKING,  
J.P. MORGAN (LONDON)**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I am from Tuam, so was very familiar with what Galway city had to offer from both an academic and social perspective! Growing up I was probably less concerned with academics and focused my efforts on playing Gaelic football for Tuam Stars and St. Jarlath's, and when reminded by a well-meaning teacher that there wasn't going to be a career in that for me (or anyone) I became increasingly interested in business and economics, helped by my involvement from a young age in a business run by my father. Business was the only subject that really grabbed my attention in school, so a B. Comm was the obvious choice (although I did briefly consider doing a Sports Management degree in Dublin until I was talked out of it... probably for the best!). It was quite late in my time at NUI Galway before I realised that investment banking was something that really interested me as a career choice, and therefore I had to take the long way around by first taking a graduate job in corporate banking before an opportunity arose (initially through my boss at the time and later through another NUI Galway alumni) to get a start in the industry.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

A B. Comm suited as I was interested in a career in "business" (in the broadest sense) but unsure of exactly what I wanted to do. Studying a wide range of modules (economics, finance, HR, management, law etc.) in first year helped me figure out what I was really interested in, and I chose the economics route owing to how topical it was in 2008/2009 and also some really good lecturers, in particular Cian Twomey whose door was always open (more often than not for questions on potential career paths). Spending my first year living in Corrib Village meant there was never a shortage of

candidates for a night out, and some of my closest friends are guys who I met and lived with in that first year (and each year after that – I have only managed to get rid of them very recently!) The culture at NUI Galway meant that you meet a wide variety of people, across all degree types and faculties which was great. I was also involved in the men's gaelic football club along with a great bunch, many of whom I played against at various times and levels prior to starting college. A few of us even managed to talk the great Hass (Adrian Hassett) into letting us manage the fresher's team, over whom we reigned with an iron fist for a year!

### CAREER TO DATE

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Learning about business models and markets was something that I wanted to continue into my career, so investment banking has been a great fit in that regard. Unfortunately, when I came to explore it as a serious option I was some way behind the curve in a very competitive jobs market in the industry (largely London based and fairly slow in 2009). My first graduate job was in corporate banking, where I tried to pick up as many transferable skills as possible to facilitate a move into IB at some point. While there, I was lucky enough to work for a great boss who was full of advice and encouragement and introduced me to a number of people in the IB industry.

Luckily, an entry level opportunity eventually came my way, through a NUI Galway alumni, to join Davy as part of the Corporate Finance team. This was an excellent experience and provided an opportunity to work on a range of equity fundraising, M&A and debt restructuring transactions for Irish corporates (both public & private). After a couple of enjoyable years there I was drawn

to London, joining a US investment bank called Jefferies where I was focused on equity transactions for corporate and private equity clients across Europe. After spending nearly 2 years there, an opportunity arose to join J.P. Morgan's UK & Irish investment banking team which focuses on equity (IPOs, rights issues, placings etc.) and M&A transactions for UK and Irish clients, across all sectors.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

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In my opinion, there needs to be a greater focus on providing students an opportunity to gain practical experience alongside classroom based learning. Since coming to London I have been involved in intern and graduate recruitment and am always very impressed by the level of practical, hands on, experience that UK and European students tend to accumulate during their undergraduate years. This is often down to a compulsory work placement, but can also be gained through assignments/modules that force them to put theory into practice, for example through project work with external mentoring/grading or by working alongside local enterprises to develop business/marketing plans. This tends to provide students with a greater appreciation of the day to day challenges facing businesses and help them build a skillset that is relevant to jobs that they are applying for. Unfortunately strong academic results are a prerequisite to even getting to interview stage for most graduate jobs, so anything that a student (or university) can do to build practical experience into a CV should be a priority.

### THE IRISH ECONOMY

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When I left Ireland a couple of years ago, you could sense that consumer and business confidence was starting to rise after a pretty

grim couple of years. Particularly in Dublin, where a number of new businesses were opening up and people were starting to spend again in pubs and restaurants. You could see that international capital was very keen to get involved in the consumer recovery, initially through property and then investing (through debt and equity) in small and mid-sized businesses. The newsflow and economic headlines (falling unemployment rate, business confidence hitting peaks, tax receipts above forecast, top 10 services exporter globally etc.) continue to impress and have (deservedly) attracted kudos from the international economic community. That said, it will be interesting to watch how the economy performs as the “easy wins” become less effective and the focus shifts towards ensuring that the regions, which do not benefit from the buoyant services industry to the same extent as Dublin, can also benefit and grow sustainably. In this regard, it is encouraging to see IT, Medtech, Pharma sector clusters going from strength to strength in the secondary cities. The country’s ability to capitalise on the openness of the economy is, and should remain, its biggest strength - whether that is exporting goods, services or indeed people. That said, the vote by Britain to exit the EU has sparked a very interesting debate at home....

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

Having grown up in Tuam and spent many weekends and holidays working and hanging around Galway growing up, I was well aware of what to expect from both a social and academic standpoint, and it didn’t disappoint on either front (post ball / exam celebrations in the college bar remain unmatched to this day). The university felt like a core part of the city (most of the time a positive impact!),

and that greatly contributed to the overall experience. Galway has a reputation as a laid back and friendly city and that transcends into the university, and I was lucky to meet people from different counties, courses and faculties who I still count among my closest friends. I think there is a real comradery amongst people who went to NUI Galway, probably to a greater extent than any other university in Ireland, and in my experience its alumni are always willing to help. There is a willing and able body of former students that are happy to give back to the university and the business school to ensure that students can benefit from a vast array of experiences and feedback.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

On leaving university, the traditional “milkround” route into investment banking was not an option for a number of reasons (mainly my own lack of preparation!), so I explored jobs in areas where I felt I could get relevant skills to have a chance at moving laterally into IB in the future, meaning I was prepared when I eventually ended up in the right place at the right time. Networking is a buzzword that I am not overly fond of, but the principle holds that if you are personable, polite and genuinely interested in what someone has to say or what they do, then it is very easy to build relationships and a group of contacts who are willing to provide guidance and a welcome leg up when it is needed most. I have been very lucky in my career to date that I have had people willing to take the time to help and guide me, and I hope to continue to bounce things off these people for a long time. Social capital is just as important as human capital in being successful and building a career in any field.





## Ruth Curran

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1993

Current job and title:  
**MANAGING PARTNER,  
MERC PARTNERS;  
GLOBAL CHAIR,  
IIC PARTNERS**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

The middle of five children, I grew up in a house filled with books where the importance of a strong education was always high on the agenda. My father was from a farming background and had excelled in his Leaving Certificate, winning a scholarship to university. He chose UCG and settled there with my mother, having met her at a bus stop in Galway City when he was a final year Masters student in Maths! After ten successful years in London, both my parents returned to Galway and carved out very successful careers in UCG; my mother, Phil, was a professor of Marine Mycology in the Science faculty and a mentor to many students over the years and my father, Bobby (Michael) initially as a senior academic in the Maths Department. He subsequently led the Computer Services team and served on the Governing Authority for 30 years, elected by past alumni. He was also heavily involved in Sigerson football for UCG, both as a player and latterly as a coach and mentor. Given their backgrounds, they were passionate about education and ensuring that children were inspired to learn, particularly in the areas of maths and science. As a result, university was an inevitable part of my upbringing and UCG was familiar territory by the time I started my studies there. Luckily for me, it was also where I came to meet my entrepreneur husband Darren, a UCG graduate in Commerce in the same year and Founder/CEO of Inflection Bio (an innovative cancer drug development start-up company). We now live in Dublin with our four children, Michael, Jack, Rachel and Sara, but return to Galway at every opportunity.

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

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I completed a Bachelor of Commerce degree in 1993 and it was during this time that I developed a particular interest in organisational behaviour and the psychology of organisations, which ultimately led to me completing a Masters in HR and Organisational Behaviour at the Michael Smurfit School of Business. Commerce was a great course; it gave me the opportunity to gain an insight into how all areas of business work and the skills and experience that are necessary for success – all of which is very useful in my current career. Overall, I have really happy memories of UCG; I had a lot of fun and made friends who are still part of my life today. It was also the place I met my husband Darren, a fellow Galwegian - and as a Cunningham, he sat in front of me in the exam hall for every exam – so I will always have very fond memories of my time at university!

## CAREER TO DATE

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When I left UCG, I went into private practice qualifying as a Chartered Certified Accountant before working for one of the Asia-Pacific's largest organisations in Media, Entertainment, Telecommunications and Publishing. These roles gave me valuable insights into how organisations behave and the importance of appointing the right talent into key leadership positions. In 1999, I joined MERC Partners, Ireland's leading executive search firm, where I began to specialise in senior executive, C level and board appointments across all industry sectors. Appointed Managing Partner in 2014, I also lead the board practice of MERC Partners. MERC Partners have been at the heart of key leadership appointments in Ireland for almost four decades, and continually strive to be the undisputed leader

in the provision of executive search services in Ireland, recognised and trusted for our insight, expertise and excellence in delivery.

In 2013, I was elected Vice-Chair EMEA of IIC Partners, one of the world's largest executive search organisations, and became Global Chair in October 2015. In this capacity, I am also a member of the IIC Global Financial Services Practice Group and sit on the Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC) Diversity Committee. In addition, I was invited to join the Board of the National Maternity Hospital Foundation, Holles Street, in October 2015. I was delighted to be elected to the Governing Authority of NUI Galway in February 2016.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

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I am a firm believer in education in all of its different guises, both formal and informal and recognise that there is merit to being exposed to both. Personally, I was fortunate to grow up in a home that greatly encouraged further education; this has served me and my siblings well. Education has helped me to unlock my potential and has enabled me to think, speak and behave in ways that support the growth and effectiveness of organisations and make a real impact in business and I feel, in life. From my perspective, there are three primary benefits of completing any business course; they are knowledge, accreditation and the ability to make contacts and build a network, an essential ingredient to my success at MERC Partners. In a world where nearly 50% of those born now may live a very long life, a greater number of us will hold down more jobs, over a longer period. In doing so and cognisant of our rapidly changing world, it is essential that we continue to find ways of staying current and delivering competitive advantage in our place of work. As such, I believe business education

will have an even greater role to play in the future as people re-train, re-tool and re-fresh their thinking, when moving from role to role or across industry.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

Galway is an aesthetically beautiful, inspiring, vibrant city and is a wonderful place to study, live and work. The air is different in Galway! Over the last 170 years NUI Galway has been inspiring the next generation of business leaders to achieve their potential. It is now ranked in the top 2% of universities and four of its researchers have been recognised within the ranks of the World's Most Influential Scientific Minds, both of which are testament to the quality of its research and the calibre of its teaching staff.

### **ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Ireland is uniquely positioned to carve out a role for itself as the best small country in the world in which to do business. The entrepreneurial eco-system, is well supported comparatively to some of our European neighbours and is thriving. It was very encouraging to see a new Dublin Commissioner for Start Ups being appointed in 2015 to provide a voice and a platform for Dublin as a great start up city, nationally and internationally. In 2014, c.20,000 individuals started a new business in Ireland. We have many impressive entrepreneurs in Ireland but we need to foster entrepreneurial activity more and particularly encourage those under 35 to create their own ventures. The strength of our education system is one of the factors that sets us apart as a country to do business with; our entrepreneurs have the highest level of training and education in 25 countries. I would encourage us to do more

at an earlier age, perhaps even at secondary school to engender entrepreneurial behaviours; encourage those business ideas to germinate and flourish! Equally, opportunities exist to reform government policies, particularly in the area of tax relief and the availability of more government funded programmes, so as to encourage established entrepreneurs to remain in Ireland.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

We live in a competitive and fast moving society, which can place a lot of emphasis on winning. It's important to be cognisant, that whatever you do in your personal and business life, there's always a need to 'keep trying and fail forward' and that is as important as winning. When I consider what has contributed to my success in business, I can also attribute it to a lesson that was instilled in me from a young age. I was advised to give more to a relationship than you take and this has been one of the guiding principles I have used throughout adulthood, which I'm now imparting to my own family. In addition, I pride myself on giving MERC clients the very best experience possible and I really care about them, their business challenges and how I can play a role in improving that. I also care deeply about the candidate experience and believe the organisations that invest well in this will gain competitive advantage. As with any relationship, if you invest in it, it will only improve over time. I make it a priority to consistently seek new ways of improving our offering and how we do business. I also appreciate the importance of feedback and I never under-estimate the importance of saying 'thank you', in the old fashioned way of a hand written note.



## Oliver Daniels

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1978

Current job and title:  
**CEO,  
INSIGHT CENTRE FOR  
DATA ANALYTICS, IRELAND**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

A Salthill native, schooled in the Jes, I loved growing up in Galway, and was always told that I would go to UCG, and get a degree – it wouldn't do me any harm (quote Margaret Daniels – mother). University life was brilliant back in the '70s and I embraced it completely. Judging from my results, maybe a bit too energetically. I joined Nortel (then Northern Telecom), and it was a great place for a young person to start work in the early 1980s. The multinational sector offered lots of opportunities for anybody with ambition who was looking for a challenging and fulfilling career. I started in the finance department in 1981 but I soon realised that I was more suited to customer service, or marketing than accounting, and the company encouraged me to explore different roles. I worked in the commercial world for over 30 years and I hope I can now bring that knowledge and my people skills to head up the research centre and deliver real impact for Ireland and for our people. I'm also involved within the community and sporting initiatives with Salthill Devon FC and clubhouse development at Drom. I'm a supporter of Galway United, and have a passionate interest in the development of the game nationally. In the past I have also been a director of the Galway Arts Festival and Fáilte Ireland. I married Patricia and we have three children, who came along for the journey. With Nortel I got to work and live in France, the UK and the US.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

The B. Comm delivered for me in so many ways, but mostly in the fact that I had the benefit of a broad range of disciplines – my favourites being marketing and economics. I had the fortune to have really good lecturers and a group of fellow students who were hungry to learn. We got pushed hard by guys like Jim Ward, Tom

Boylan and many others. Passionate about the teaching and looking to drive the growth of the individual, but also the discipline, many of my fellow classmates picked up on that and used it as a catalyst within their own careers.

## CAREER TO DATE

After university, I joined Oliver Freaney & Co, and took the first steps into the real world. I moved to Northern Telecom Finance Dept, under the watchful eye of Gerry Staunton. From there I progressed through that organisation in a variety of management roles. I held roles in Customer Service, Manufacturing, Product Management, Marketing and R&D. I learned where my skills actually lay and the groundwork of the B. Comm was really useful.

In 1999 I left Nortel to join a small start up, Saville Systems and within six months we had been acquired by another multinational ADC, where I remained for five years running their Professional Services & R&D units, before heading out to start another business Accendo. I was headhunted back to Nortel to rebuild their R&D team, and I was part of the team who convinced Avaya to buy us when Nortel went into Chapter 11. I led the Avaya R&D team, with teams in the US, UK, India, Russia, Vietnam and Ireland.

After that, I joined Insight, a joint initiative between researchers at DCU, NUI Galway, UCC and UCD, and other partner institutions. Established in July 2013, it has brought together a critical mass of more than 400 researchers to develop a new generation of data analytics technologies in a number of key application areas.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

In my opinion we need to broaden the education emphasis in business, specifically in how we build networks and relationships. The results

need to be about developing the individual for a career that will be outwardly facing, and will involve change and more change. More emphasis needs to be placed on developing people with stronger design led thinking, who can at the start of their careers, think with an end in mind.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

The Irish economy is going through massive change, and leadership is required if we are to see counter balancing centres/cities develop to ensure we have jobs and opportunities across the island. Joined up thinking - public, private and expats need to feed into a hyper local focus wherever people live. Counter balance doesn't mean competing with, it means complementing, and developing what's unique where we are. We also need to prepare for the rapid deployment of IoT into industry, which will drive a new form of "outsourcing of jobs" in certain sectors. This will drive new opportunities, but will demand new skills.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

We are a potentially powerful city, which is an important hub to a huge area. We have an amazing reputation internationally, as a cultural and education leader, and we need to continue to grow the relevance of this city as a place to do business, particularly to create. We need a structure that integrates the city and the university. I include here the management and operation of the whole city, an integrated entity would include Education, Enterprise and the People. We have the finance, the business and political connections to enable us to secure, plan, and develop a city comparable with the best in the world. There is local, national and International recognition and support for Galway. It's time to start helping ourselves. It is time to be serious about change and

take ownership for building the trust of our stakeholders.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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**In my view there are four key pillars that can drive change:**

1. **Innovation & Enterprise** – we are blessed in Galway with the breadth of companies we have here, but we can't afford to be complacent. Money and access to same comes from the continuing growth of our enterprise base, and if we look at our city today, we lack a key component that will allow us to continue to grow, and that's the second pillar:
2. **Infrastructure** – we've started to see the delivery of decent roads, particularly the motorway to Dublin, and the soon to arrive Tuam to Shannon road completion. We are seriously short when it comes to an integrated plan for the city, linking traffic management, housing, work, schools, university and a centre city hub – an Innovation District. The newly created Galway City Innovation District, with the Porterhouse as its centre piece is a great start, but the City (planners, management, and Councillors) need to get together with the other key stakeholders to plan a city that can sustain us into the future.
3. **People Development** – Ireland has the youngest population in Europe (bar Cyprus) and the quality of our educational system is of major importance to pupils, parents and the wider society. Education is also critical to Ireland's economic future, increasingly Ireland is competing for foreign direct investment on the basis of talent and its reputation for innovation. Irish enterprise also needs skilled workers and the major

constraint for local development particularly in rural Ireland is a lack of skilled workers. Our educational system, which has served the country well and played an important role in economic development, but we need to improve the system and in particular to address issues such as the distorting impact of the points race on secondary school education and the need to build a stronger system of further education.

4. **Network & Clusters** – we have a huge advantage in this country in our size, but we haven't turned it in to enough of a competitive advantage, particularly when we could be become the "pilot" or "trial" location for the development of many of the next generation products that will be truly interdisciplinary.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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- a. Start by building Trust – in all aspects of life – family, fellow workers, all have to trust each other
- b. Organisations – keep yourself relevant - stay curious
- c. Drive the completion of things you are passionate about
- d. Branding – know what you stand for
- e. Finance – create an industry less dependant on the success of the FDI sector
- f. Facilities – share, look for synergies
- g. Attract the brightest and best to our country, but ensure we have roles for all forms of intelligence in our workforce
- h. Be proactive and focus on what you can control and change
- i. Remember what my father taught me: Sell it before you make it, make it, deliver it quick, send the invoice and collect the cash. The rest is marketing...



## David Donoghue

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
2008

Current job and title:  
**SENIOR ANALYST WITH  
PRIVATE EQUITY AND REAL  
ESTATE SERVICES,  
J.P. MORGAN**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Secondary school, Boyne CS, Trim, Co. Meath. Sibling of six in Kiltale, Co.Meath. Attended NUI Galway from 2005 to 2009, completing the B. Comm and M.Econ.Sc. Economic Policy Evaluation & Planning. GAA enthusiast, representing my county and country in hurling. Joint captain with Meath senior hurlers and Gaelic Players Association representative. Also play Gaelic football at club level. Striving to cover off as many continents and countries on my travels.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

Attended from 2005 to 2008. Without a doubt the most enjoyable three years I have spent. My best friends are all from the 2005 year and have not regretted one minute taking the plunge and leaving Meath for Galway. They have all done extremely well in the business and finance sectors both here and abroad, reflecting how well regarded a B. Comm qualification is. From an academic side, my only regret is not spending more time in the company of the economics professors I had over the three years but that is easy to reflect on 10 years later with a wiser head on my shoulders. The economics lecturers and Friday guest speakers were a favourite during those years. The B. Comm certainly provided me with a solid grounding in all areas and I would have no hesitation in recommending to any CAO applicant. What other course would provide you with teaching in economics, financial maths, accounting and computer science in a city that is built around its university. These subjects are all key areas in the financial services sector. Since leaving NUI Galway, I have been welcomed back as a mentor to graduates joining the Master classes and it has always been a pleasure to return to the university.

## CAREER TO DATE

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Began my professional career in 2010 with J.P. Morgan Hedge Fund Services as an analyst in the hedge fund asset pricing division. In 2012 I joined KBC on their medium to large corporate loan restructuring team, completing rotations in Dublin and Galway offices. In 2013 I returned to the J.P. Morgan Private Equity and Real Estate Services division. Based in Dublin, I have spent time in offices in Jersey, London, New York and most recently Bangalore on different projects. Roles include financial reporting, investor relations, portfolio administration and capital event planning to execution. I have continued my education since leaving, completing a professional course through UCD as a Qualified Financial Advisor. I have also completed Level 1 of the Chartered Alternative Investment Analyst with expected Chartership in 2016.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

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From an education perspective, using the B. Comm as an example, the layout is perfect in the first two years. This provides a broad education on all aspects of business and finance opening the way for so many different career paths graduates to take when they finish. It allows those who may not know what they want to do in business an opportunity to take multiple classes while also focusing on core topics of accounting, economics and business studies. Final year allows the student focus on one (or more depending on their choice of classes) area that they believe suits their skillset the best. This allows them to focus on what area and jobs might suit them and start actively looking for jobs or alternatively a postgraduate qualification in that field. The one area that requires more attention was around the technical side i.e.

soft skills like MS Excel. Every company has their own software built around their needs but Excel still plays a huge part in how this information is interpreted and re-engineered to extract certain information. A core topic of this and other software that is popular amongst graduate firms throughout the three year cycle would certainly provide an edge. In the ever changing world of business and finance it is also worth reaching out to companies and finding out what they expect from their graduates and trying to keep the course current.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

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Having graduated in 2009, it was slim pickings in the jobs market. Unless you had secured a graduate position in one of the big four accountancy firms you were looking at the dole; B. Comm and M.Econ.Sc. held little weight when no jobs were available. The change in a relatively short period of time, given the level of debt and low consumer confidence has been exceptional. With the tax take rising, partially reflecting more people working and a rise in consumer spending which is what the country badly needed. The big issue now for the government is being able to sustain this with a healthy balance sheet (a short memory and return to excesses is always a danger). They need to sort out the supply/demand in housing as a priority especially in the cities. 2016 and 2017 may also see a return of some of the emigrants which would be huge boost to the country. It was not such a bad thing for some of the brightest to leave and gain experience in other countries, the challenge for the government will be to tempt them back. The big companies are all here. From a banking, accounting and finance perspective, the jobs market is flooded with vacant positions, a nice problem compared to



2009. There have been certain social classes that have been hit harder than others and are still far from recovery mode. Working on those has to be part of stabilising the economy. Overall I believe the outlook is bright.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

Brilliant and unforgettable four years in NUI Galway and Galway is how I would describe my college life and experience. Galway from my time spent there embraced the college and student life and recognises the contribution it makes to the city. If I had my time all over again I would make the same decision and put the college on top of my list. In a university like NUI Galway and the connection it has with the city, it was easy to meet people in a college setting and also on a social basis. The lecturers were very approachable and this definitely helped around exam time. Having returned on a couple of occasions you can see the massive construction projects that have taken place and you only have to look across the river from Terryland to see the state of the art engineering building and sports centre to see the development that is taking place to meet the demands of students and the academic world for teaching and research. I was lucky to have the Cairnes Business and Economics School available when I began. The Cairnes Building was one of the first refurbishments and developments and provided excellent facilities to those studying in the business school.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

I got my first banking job with J.P. Morgan on a short term contract which luckily turned permanent. With a large scope of services in Dublin I got fantastic exposure to the hedge

fund services industry, with their main EMEA servicing team. Working as an analyst for almost 2 years in the hedge fund asset pricing division, I gained great experience with the hedge fund industry and also professional development. In 2012 I joined KBC Bank to see if consumer and business banking was something that would interest me. I spent 1.5 years dealing with the corporate restructuring team on bad loans. It was brilliant exposure to face to face dealing with clients and what was a relevant industry in Ireland at that time. On a human level, it was difficult working on repossessions and receivership cases. Since returning to J.P. Morgan on private equity fund services, I believe I have found my niche and really enjoying the ever changing landscape in the private equity world. I've had some really good managers who have put me in positions for promotion and career development. The opportunity to travel to the different offices around the world on projects has been a bonus.





## Gavin Duffy

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
2003

Current job and title:  
**SPONSORSHIP MANAGER,  
CONNACHT RUGBY**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

From Ballina, Co Mayo a town with a proud sporting tradition and a great place to grow up for a young fella like me who just wanted to play sport morning, noon and night. Having attended the Quay NS I then went to secondary school in Cistercian College, Roscrea. With the constant support of my parents and of the school I managed to achieve my goals both on and off the football fields as I gained the necessary points to do the B. Comm in NUI Galway with the belief that one day I would go back into helping the family business (Duffy's Bakery) in Ballina.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

Six of my friends from Roscrea all entered the B. Comm with me in 2000 - perhaps it was a safety in numbers thing - at least one of us would get to lectures to get the notes! Upon leaving school I signed an IRFU academy contract and a contract with Galwegians RFC who were playing division 1 of the AIL. In my second year of college I signed my first full time contract with Connacht so I probably relied on my friends for notes more than they relied on me! Thankfully though after many hours in the library around exam time I got through the B. Comm in one go as did the lads but I think they might have enjoyed and experienced the whole social scene associated with college life a little bit more than me due to my rugby commitments!

### CAREER TO DATE

Professional rugby players are constantly reminded that the "dream job" does not go on forever. Always conscious of preparing for a future career I went on to do a BA in Strength and Conditioning to give myself

further options and finished that in 2012. I thoroughly enjoyed my rugby career with two spells at Connacht sandwiching four years playing with Harlequins in London. Not long after retiring in 2014 an opportunity arose within the Commercial Team at Connacht and having my B. Comm degree gave me the confidence I needed to apply for the job. My initial role was as Business Development Executive. I started my current role in November 2015. Connacht Rugby is a growing and ambitious organisation both on and off the field and I'm delighted to still be a part of it.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

I believe people who are ambitious and driven are always looking for an edge or an advantage in order to achieve their goals. Opening up and exposing yourself to new ideas and perspectives can sometimes be the most important element to finding that edge. The education system and universities can play a vital role in that be it through the traditional route straight out of college or later in life after establishing what it is you really want to do. I may have initially thought that I was going to put my B. Comm to good use in our family business but as the course is so broad it allows you to develop an understanding in many areas so it really can open many doors for you.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

The benefits of sport to the individual and the community are well established with countless reports highlighting the positive impact of sports participation on physical wellbeing and mental health. With a growing global industry worth €350 to €400 billion it's also fair to say that the sports industry has a major role to play in the Irish economy as well

contributing some 2.4% to gross domestic product each year. Figures reported by the Irish Sports Federation in 2015 indicated that the sports industry supports up to 40,000 jobs in Ireland, that there was €1.9 billion in household spending on sport and over €1 billion in tourism spending on sport. Out of a sports programme allocation of €126 million in 2016 the Irish Government announced a €4 million investment in the newly launched National Activity Plan with the Health Minister recognising the fact that eating healthier along with more regular exercise is the best way to tackle rising health costs in the future. Local, national and international brands continue to see the value of spending significant amounts to support and associate themselves with sport in Ireland. Whilst sport is an industry for some, for many others in Ireland it's a hobby, a past time, a passion, and a way of life. In my opinion sport will continue to generate 'big business' for as long as those vital elements remain.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

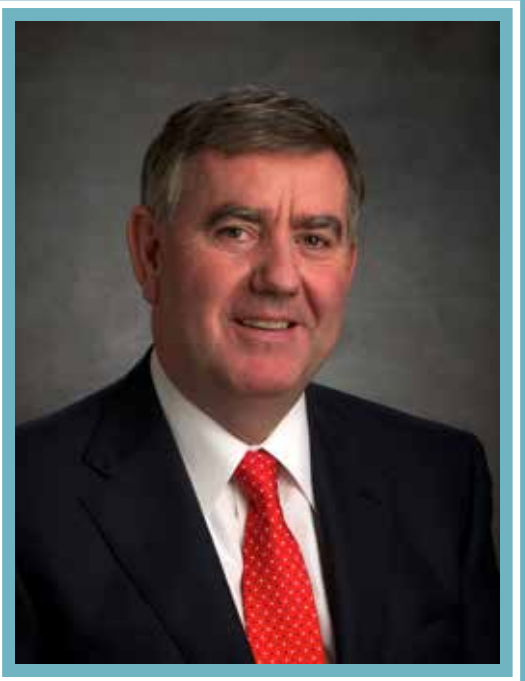
Whilst I will forever be a proud Ballina and Mayo man Galway really is like a second home for me. My mother Dorothy (maiden name Egan) grew up in Salthill and attended NUI Galway herself. Many days were spent down the prom with my grandparents as a youngster and now I'm bringing my two girls Jessica and India down the prom! There is a great 'can do' spirit in the town. Yes it has a great reputation as a party town and as a festival town but it can also boast of a strong presence in the medical device industry and a growing Tech industry. I'm always amazed and inspired by the many business people whom I meet who have started, developed and grown their business into international competitors from a base here in the city and the West of

Ireland. We are also lucky to still have so many local retailers on our “shop” streets which again adds to the uniqueness and attractiveness of the city. The university obviously attracts thousands of new students every year and it’s not hard to see why so many find it tough to leave when their studies are complete.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

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I feel very fortunate to have achieved many of my boyhood dreams through sport. Many hours were spent down on Cregg’s Road (home of Ballina RFC), up in the Stephenites (home of the local GAA team) and countless more chipping a rugby ball over the tree in the middle of the back garden and running around in an attempt to catch it again with thoughts of being in Lansdowne Road or Croke Park filling my head. I would stop short of calling it “practicing”. That sounds too formal or planned. I was just purely and simply doing something I loved. Being a professional rugby player was never a career choice as such. It just became something I progressed into. Was it always the dream job? No. I lost far more games than I won. I missed out on a lot of important occasions with family and friends and, at times, I probably took it all a bit too seriously! Yet I achieved far more than I ever dreamt, travelled the world playing in some great stadiums, met some great people and took part in and enjoyed some very memorable occasions. I wouldn’t change any of it (apart from a few results!!) No matter how good or bad things were going one lesson that sport teaches you is that there is always another challenge around the corner and I’m currently enjoying and looking forward to many more in my “new” life outside of playing professional sport.



**Irial Finan**

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1986**

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Current job and title:  
**EXECUTIVE VICE  
PRESIDENT,  
THE COCA-COLA COMPANY;  
PRESIDENT, BOTTLING  
INVESTMENTS GROUP  
(ATLANTA, US)**

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

I hold a Bachelor of Commerce degree from National University of Ireland, Galway and am an Associate (later Fellow) of the Institute of Chartered Management Accountants. I was recently conferred with an honorary Doctor of Laws Degree from NUI Galway in Ireland.

## CAREER TO DATE

Irial has over 35 years of experience in The Coca-Cola System. From 2001 to 2003, he served as Chief Executive Officer of Coca-Cola HBC, during which time he managed the merger integration of Coca-Cola Beverages plc and Hellenic Bottling SA, and led the combined company's operations in 26 countries. Irial joined the Coca-Cola Company in 2004 as President, Bottling Investments and Supply Chain and was named Executive Vice President of the Company in October 2004.

From 1995 to 1999, he was managing director of Molino Beverages, with responsibility for expanding markets, including the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Romania, Moldova, Russia and Nigeria. Prior to that role, Irial worked in several markets across Europe. From 1991 to 1993 he served as managing director of Coca-Cola Bottlers Ulster, Ltd., based in Belfast. He was finance director, Coca-Cola Bottlers Ireland, Ltd., based in Dublin from 1984 to 1990.

Irial currently serves on the board of directors for Coca-Cola FEMSA, Coca-Cola HBC, Coca-Cola East Japan, The Coca-Cola Foundation, the Supervisory Board for CCE

AG (Germany), G2G trading, Smurfit Kappa Group and The American-Ireland Fund. He is non-executive director for Co-operation Ireland and NUI Galway Foundation. He is a recipient of the Leslie C. Quick Jr. Leadership Award in recognition for his professional and personal commitment to Ireland.

He and his wife, Deirdre, live in Atlanta, US and have two daughters, Ciara and Róisín.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

I've always believed that education is the cornerstone of a vibrant and successful

*Looking at the period of recovery between the Celtic Tiger and today, the foundation of every change made to bolster our economy was built on improving education across Ireland.*

economy. That is one of my principle reasons for giving back to Ireland. NUI Galway afforded me the opportunity to achieve a third level education that was affordable and I'll always feel indebted to Ireland. In fact, this is one of the reasons I give back. Education should

be both affordable and available to those who seek it because it forms the building blocks for success. As the Irish economy continues to evolve, so must our educational offerings ... in fact educational opportunities should evolve ahead of the changes in Ireland's economy. Future graduates of NUI Galway and all of Ireland's institutions of higher learning are what will ensure Ireland prospers in the future.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

I spend a great deal of time traveling overseas and I've discovered that one must be careful when sharing an opinion about your country, especially when you no longer reside there. Looking from the outside in, it is important people understand that people all over the

world are once again looking at Ireland as a success story largely built on our ability to build from the bottom up. The Irish recovery was built on a solid focus of investing in innovation, job creation and exploiting our core industries like agricultural exports.

Looking at the period of recovery between the Celtic Tiger and today, the foundation of every change made to bolster our economy was built on improving education across Ireland. Looking forward, to the next 20 to 25 years, Ireland's ability to keep evolving and innovating will depend upon our ability to provide the best educational opportunities to all. Education is truly one of the key variables in Ireland's development. I remain optimistic that we will keep doing the things that we know will work. Ireland will continue to innovate and remain focused on attracting new areas of business into Ireland to keep us ahead of the game.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

My recollections of Galway City are fantastic. I had a great time in university and was challenged more than I had ever been, up until that point. More importantly, the community and the city were open and friendly, where students were treated warmly. It is great to hear from students of my generation and those who followed that the university continues to foster a culture of openness and hospitality. Having been involved with NUI Galway Foundation for quite some time, I remain excited and impressed as I meet graduates of the school and recognize their potential to be great leaders and watch them give back to ensure we create future

generations of Irish leaders.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

I've been very fortunate in that I have never looked at my career as work. Every step in my professional life has been an opportunity to learn something new. As I've progressed, I've gained the ability to continue to learn and share experiences

with others. It is more of an honour than an obligation. Students should never look at professional opportunities in terms of the biggest financial gain or career progression for the sake of gaining a title... it is a hollow pursuit. Look for opportunities to learn and expand your thinking. In doing that, remuneration and recognition will most certainly follow. Yates is often cited as saying that education is not the filling of a pail, but a lighting of a fire. It couldn't be more true. For me, NUI Galway was the spark that started that fire, but Coca-Cola has allowed that fire to burn for quite some time but my experience is not unique. There are many opportunities for today's graduates to stoke their fires with learning opportunities around the world.

*There are many opportunities for today's graduates to stoke their fires with learning opportunities around the world.*



## Donal Flynn

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1994

Current job and title:  
**CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER,  
ESB**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I grew up near Ballina in County Mayo with my two brothers and sister. My secondary school education was in St Muredach's College in Ballina and I loved my time there. I enjoyed the business subjects I studied in school but was not sure what I wanted to do afterwards – a broad based business degree like a B. Comm allowed me to explore accounting, marketing, economics, IT, etc. and discover what I enjoyed most. Galway had always appealed to me as a place to attend university and several school alumni had been very successful after completing NUI Galway's B. Comm. It was an easy decision for me to choose the programme.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I really enjoyed the B. Comm in NUI Galway. I specialised in accounting and this prepared me well for my masters – I had anticipated that. What I had not expected was how active student clubs and societies are in NUI Galway. I rarely missed the Literary and Debating Society on Thursday evenings and I was auditor of the Commerce and Economics Society during my final year. The subjects I enjoyed most were financial accounting and economics – the analytical approach in both is probably the skill I most use today. NUI Galway gave me a fantastic combination of great learning, enjoyable college life as well as friendships that have lasted a long time after graduation - I have very fond memories of my time in NUI Galway.

### CAREER TO DATE

#### 1995-1998 - Arthur Andersen

I joined Arthur Andersen as a trainee accountant and spent three years with the firm in London and Dublin. It gave me excellent training and taught me about focusing on the

needs of the firm's clients. I loved living in London and the network of friends I have from my Andersen days is something that is still with me today.

#### **1998-2003 - General Electric**

General Electric (GE) was a client for whom I did a lot of work while I was with Arthur Andersen. I was offered a role in GE's internal audit team and the opportunity for international experience across GE was something that really appealed to me. I travelled around Europe and the US for three years and met my wife who worked with GE at the time too – we were both working on a project in Italy so I have to thank GE for an awful lot more than just being part of my career. I moved into a financial analyst role for my last two years with GE.

#### **2003-2010 – Airtricity**

I worked with Airtricity for seven years and spent the last three there as CFO. I think that it is one of the great Irish business success stories and I am really proud to have had the opportunity to work there. I learnt what a really entrepreneurial company is and being part of a rapidly growing business was very exciting.

#### **2010 to date – ESB in Dublin as CFO**

The past five years of my career have been with ESB. It is a business that has roots in every community in Ireland and is proud of its role in the Irish economy – it invests over €600m a year in Irish energy infrastructure. ESB is very much a values-based organisation – those values mean a focus on things like the long term future of Ireland's energy infrastructure and of safety. The emphasis of my role since joining has been on (1) ESB's long term funding programme; (2) investment appraisal and (3) ESB's cost and change programme.

## **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

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I studied for a Masters in Accounting after the B. Comm in NUI Galway and I thought that that would be the end of my business education. My learning has continued through work and more formal programmes every year since then – the jobs I have done, mentors I have had and professional qualification programmes have all been part of that learning. There is a broad recognition that life long learning is essential to any person and any career and I would like to keep learning and developing for the rest of mine. The development that a person needs evolves and changes throughout their career – it may start out as being mostly technically focussed but as leadership opportunities start to open up, it is much more about connecting with people, building teams and leading change. Quite rightly, a lot of business education is focused on those broader skills as well as narrower more technical topics.

## **THE IRISH ECONOMY**

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ESB has given me an opportunity to learn about the Irish economy that I have not had previously. We are a large investor in energy infrastructure, have 1.2 million customers and contribute over €2 billion to the economy in total every year. We have been seeing very encouraging signs of improving economic activity since 2015. The demand for electricity has increased by 2-3% - the first increase since a 10% decrease in 2009. The number of new connections to the electricity network has increased from less than 10K a year to 14K – a very encouraging indicator of construction activity. In addition many small and medium sized enterprises are requesting an increase in the size of the electricity connection they have – another encouraging indicator of growth. At the same time, I expect the nature of the



electricity industry to change significantly in the coming years – from centralised fossil fuel based generation to distributed clean generation, much more engaged and empowered customers all connected to a smart electricity network. So it is an exciting time to be in the industry and in Ireland.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

My seven years in Airtricity gave me great exposure to what it takes to be an entrepreneurial company. There can be a mystique around entrepreneurship and for someone who had his training in a large accounting firm and global multinational like GE I was not certain that I even knew what entrepreneurship was before joining Airtricity. A focus on exactly what the business strategy is and what it is not is important – Airtricity was focused on being the best wind energy business in the industry – nothing else. So it had to have the best project development team, leading edge wind analysis capability and the ability to fund large capital expenditure programmes. It developed processes around those essential competencies and relentlessly improved them. There was a great tenacity and determination to succeed no matter what challenges arose and an appetite and preparedness to learn. The founders of the business had a vision for renewable energy before the rest of the industry and the courage to take an early risk on it. I think that all of those qualities are what entrepreneurship is about and I was fortunate to be exposed to them.

*I believe you need a combination of ability, hard work, some good fortune and adaptability to succeed.*

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

I believe you need a combination of ability, hard work, some good fortune and adaptability to succeed. I have been very fortunate in the people for whom I have worked in my career – they have given me the space and encouragement to grow and be stretched even when there were times I was not sure if I was able for that stretch. My very first job was a summer job with a neighbour's business – I helped deliver wine and spirits to pubs and restaurants in Mayo and Sligo. I had that job for eight years all through school and college and I loved it – the owner of the business, John Peoples, was the first great boss I had. I got to learn all the things fundamental to any business – acquiring new customers, getting orders out the door and collecting cash. Who you work for matters as much as the organisation that employs you and the job themselves. I hope that I can pay back some of this good fortune that I have had during my career to others. Adaptability also matters – I have had the opportunity to work in different industries, different countries and cultures for companies with very different kinds of shareholders and objectives. That breadth of experience gives you a broad perspective that can be brought to any challenge.



## Kieran Foley

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1999

Current job and title:  
**GROUP MARKETING  
DIRECTOR,  
DIGICEL GROUP**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Having graduated from NUI Galway with an Honours B. Comm and a Higher Diploma in Marketing Practice (DMP), my career saw me move from Compaq, to a start-up IT agency in Dublin, to a consultancy business in order to facilitate my pursuit of a career in the League of Ireland, returning to work on the business side of life at O2, before making the move to the Caribbean and Digicel Group almost 10 years ago. That move has seen me span several roles and be part of an expansion from operating in 14 countries to 31 today in 2 continents, and from a GSM business to a Quad-play company. It has also allowed me to co-create and develop the only third-party owned franchise based cricket league in the world. Marrying an Italian, living in New York and raising three children has brought a lot of meaning to the realities of life while giving reason to ensure the next success in business is mine.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I entered UCG in 1996 on the second attempt and received one of the first sports scholarships the University provided for soccer. My sporting career in the university was made all the better by the personalities and friends I made along the way. Personal honours and representations on Irish University sides, were surpassed by team efforts in bringing glories back to the university in obtaining the National League and Collingwood Cup competitions. My class was competitive but supportive and I was proud and delighted to work and learn alongside so many fantastic minds in my days majoring in marketing in the B. Comm and then furthering my marketing experience by taking the DMP. I felt stronger suited to marketing and legal courses which proved to be more suited to my strengths and led to me furthering my

career and education in the hands of a DMP course after the B. Comm. My experience in university has served my career well and luckily the majority of my academic decisions at university bode me well.

### CAREER TO DATE

Starting at Compaq and continuing after my work placement from the DMP, I quickly moved to Dublin to a very small IT marketing services start up agency. From there I started my own consultancy business which allowed me to be more flexible with my League of Ireland career. Following that I moved to Telecoms Company O2 which allowed me to stay in the business of sport as I was appointed Sponsorship Manager. This brought me closer to sports stars and major sporting properties, but, now, with a focus on linking them with customers through our company. Following that, I had the opportunity to move to Digicel Group which had launched in 2001 and was quickly growing across the Caribbean region. On joining in 2006, Digicel was in 14 countries, which very quickly became 31 across 2 continents and allowed me to grow through several roles. The company has now transformed from a GSM led business to a Quad-play company, leading the third world markets with first world services and supporting community programmes. While highlights have been many, including launching our business in markets like Haiti or leading a high court action in London to a successful conclusion, the one that stands out was co-creating a franchise based cricket league. The Caribbean Premier League is a 50 year sanctioned event and the only third-party owned cricket league in the world. Amassing 100 million broadcast viewers after Year 3, and tens of millions in revenues, it is arguably the second biggest league in the world behind

the multi-billion dollar valued Indian Premier League. Having driven that from inception, through contracting, selling, managing and structuring, it is a source of pride in seeing what can be achieved.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

My education at third level allowed me to understand a proper structure of business life. Every university first year student should try to strike a balance with the new found “freedom” as well as the responsibilities. An understanding of the world through the lens of economics, law, accounting, marketing and IT was structured and assembled into a proper mind-frame to allow me grow. One of the best ways to develop, in my opinion, is through the on job experience that you develop as you progress from a large company to a small start-up, to a self-run position to a growing company. The best form of education is always learning from others and appreciating a better way to do business across so many various cultures. In today’s world this is especially true as communications and transportation make the number of countries not completely open and accessible small enough to count on one hand. The biggest aspect of education in business is the need and requirement to develop contacts, associates and friends across the business world, while ensuring an honesty in ones transactions, your reputation will lead to your invaluable education as you learn more and have more industry methods opened up to you.

### NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

Being born and raised in Galway, my goal was always to attend the university I lived so close to. My first attempt was not successful so after repeating the Leaving Cert I had my choice of courses but chose Commerce as

I believed it gave me the greatest chance to develop my potential. The University and Galway has always been a proud aspect of my life which has grown and developed over the years, so much so that it is a massive source of pride. Having been very lucky to experience various cultures and businesses, it is obvious that Galway can achieve so much more, support more entrepreneurship, widen more opportunities for people coming out of university to develop business and bring a heightened focus of international trade to the city. While NUI Galway is more impressive with greater developments of more buildings every time I visit Galway, it will always have a responsibility to, and be at the forefront of, entrepreneurial endeavours.

### ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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The greatest asset NUI Galway gave me was the broadest understanding across the facets of business and how to try and structure the opportunity to develop this. In a competitive world, more and more opportunities arise in the opening years as you start your career with limited resources, while the inverse seems to be true as you get older. The reality is that more and more opportunities need to be honed, understood, cultivated and supported by a stronger network of greater minds. Far too many entrepreneurs fail because of the reality of bad luck simply, while some don't appreciate the need to bring in other minds to complement with strengths they don't have. With more diverse businesses coming more and more online, there are more opportunities than ever before for entrepreneurs to take risks, and more importantly, hit high volumes faster than ever before. The hard work and "brass neck" would always be a corner stone for any business start-up but the greatest

aspect will be relying on a wider network and trusting in the understanding of others who know more than you. The trick is always how to involve, when and for what. True success will be accomplished with a greater sense of appreciating how to manage all components and bringing them together. With more and more entrepreneurs leaving the shores of Ireland, it is becoming more and more imperative that, as a city and country, we understand how to bring more opportunity back to facilitate better "luck" for those who dare to dream a great opportunity and know they can make it better.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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Life can move quickly and you never believe you are going to be too far gone to make change, but the choices we make in university come at a stage in your life when you are likely setting the structure for how you develop throughout your professional and personal career. Realising that may come too late but one needs to always be open to reverse their thoughts and not be afraid to try, to be brave enough to take that new route. Moving from university and into the real world can sometimes be daunting mainly because the goals and objectives are not as clear as they were before ending university. The objectives and dreams you hold have a lot more influence from third parties and require a greater strength and stamina in a relentless pursuit to achieve one's goals. Success is always driven from a personal perspective of satisfaction, while to be truly great you often have to remove a lot of the personal satisfaction which is a trade-off that is forever in conflict with your balance between work and family life.



## Erika Fox

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
2013

Current job and title:  
**SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER,  
VINCE CAMUTO  
(NEW YORK)  
& FASHION BLOGGER AT  
WWW.RETRO-FLAME.COM**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND CAREER TO DATE

Erika Fox is 24 years old and originally from Co.Kerry. She is a Fashion Blogger, Social Media Consultant and Commerce graduate currently living in New York City. Throughout the past five years, she has completed a Commerce degree in which she received a 1.1 Honours degree, spent her summers interning in the fashion industry and has now been working full-time in New York City for the past year. Throughout her time in New York, she has worked in Fashion PR & Sales, at New York Fashion Week, in the marketing department of [www.refinery29.com](http://www.refinery29.com) and most recently with [www.oliviapalermo.com](http://www.oliviapalermo.com). She is now the Social Media Manager at one of New York's fashion powerhouse, Vince Camuto.

Erika has gained vast experience in Digital Marketing and as well as working full-time,

*I'm a big believer in education. I 100% feel that not only does it teach you necessary skills, but it also teaches you discipline.*

also runs her own Fashion & Lifestyle website ([www.retro-flame.com](http://www.retro-flame.com)) which has gone from strength to strength over the past three years. Through blogging, she has worked with brands such as Pepe Jeans, Brown Thomas, Warehouse

& Asos and has been featured in a wide range of national and international publications including Teen Vogue, Seventeen and The Sunday Times STYLE Magazine.

In September 2015, Erika won 'Ireland's Young Entrepreneur' competition in her home county Kerry with her business idea, SA Digital. As well as winning her category, she also earned the overall title of 'Kerry's

Best Young Entrepreneur'. 5A Digital is set to launch in 2016.

### **B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE**

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I thoroughly enjoyed my time in NUI Galway. The B. Comm is a course which enables you to gain an insight into each different aspect of business. In my final year, I specialised in marketing and this is where my love for the course doubled. I gained an in-depth insight into the area of business which I was most interested in and it opened my eyes to everything I wanted to work towards in the future. Another highlight from the course was, undoubtedly, the Entrepreneurship module. Every week I looked forward to this class and I still to this day use everything I learned.

### **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

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I'm a big believer in education. I 100% feel that not only does it teach you necessary skills, but it also teaches you discipline – something which is vital in both a person's personal life and business. Business education along with genuine work experience is the perfect mix for long-term success.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

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I'll always have a soft spot for both NUI Galway and Galway City, after three wonderful years spent there. Galway is a very special place. The people, the friendliness, the atmosphere, the homely feeling – everything combined makes it Ireland's gem. Embarking on your college journey can be a very overwhelming time of your life, but my time spent at NUI Galway was anything but that. I was welcomed with opened arms and it's an experience that I will never stop speaking highly of. I couldn't recommend it enough!

### **ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

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In life, if you don't build your own empire, somebody else will hire you to build theirs and so my opinions on entrepreneurship are very strong. Since a very young age, I've known that I wanted to be an entrepreneur. The same year I began my B. Comm, I set up my website – Retro Flame - with the hope that it would be the start of the journey of building my own brand. 3-4 years later, this website is about to become my full-time job here in New York City. Yes you need education, but you also need courage, bravery and the ability to take a chance. If you're passionate about something, you just never know what might happen.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

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My motto is and always will be, 'The harder you work, the luckier you get.' Good things take time and a lot of determination, but there's no better feeling than being proud of yourself and what you do. Anything is possible when you 100% focus on your goals and I'm extremely excited about what lies ahead.





## Karen Golden (née Kenny)

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1990**

Current job and title:  
**MANAGER,  
KENNYS BOOKSHOP AND  
ART GALLERIES LTD.**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I grew up in Barna, 6 miles West of Galway City. It was an idyllic childhood in many ways – we had fields, Barna Woods and Silverstrand as our playgrounds and wonderful neighbours to play with. I was given a present of a SLR Camera when I was only 12 (a big deal in the early 1980s) and I have loved taking photographs ever since. My father worked with his parents and siblings in the family business – Kennys Bookshop and Art Gallery – and, along with my cousins, I helped out from a young age. We were lucky to grow up in Galway and, when we were still young, Dad often brought us to Druid plays and Galway Arts Festival Events - some of which others may have considered inappropriate for children our age. And so I grew up with a love of the Arts and especially the often bohemian nature of the Arts in Galway in the 1980s and 1990s. The topic of my 1991 MBS Thesis was ‘The Marketing of the Galway Arts Festival’, and that summer was a mix of volunteering with the Festival and conducting over 50 interviews with artists, performers, managers, sponsors and other volunteers. After a number of years away, I returned to Galway and followed my father into the family business. I would regularly collect him and then my grandmother on the way to work. It was a privilege to bring up the rear of three generations working together on a daily basis. Kennys was the second bookshop in the world to go online in 1994 and I now manage our website, Kennys.ie, along with our listings on other portals such as Amazon and AbeBooks. I live in Barna with my husband Willie and our three children Anna, Dara and Sam.

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

It took me a little while to settle into UCG. Being from Galway meant a lot of my school friends started in college at the same time and I initially found myself accompanying them to their Science and Arts lectures for the fun, rather than going to my own Commerce lectures. I nearly dropped out after Christmas in first year, before meeting what were to become lifelong friends.... and I have never looked back. Stand out moments include Keith Warnock's Management Accounting in the HBlock and Health Economics with Eamon O'Shea – they were both inspirational lecturers. We had a fantastic social life – while the College Bar in the Aula was small and not exactly plush, we loved the romance of being in the historic part of the University, especially sitting on the lawns in the sun after the summer exams finished with fellow students from all disciplines. We had our own lingo – are you going 'out' (to the pub) or 'out out' (usually to The Oasis or The Warwick in Salthill); are you going 'home' or 'home home'?! I spent my summers working in a restaurant near the Central Bank in London, chamber maiding in a hotel in Stuttgart and working two jobs – in a drug store and conducting marketing research – in Orlando. It was great to have the freedom to travel for months at a time. I had never heard of the Westinghouse Fellowship in Marketing until Professor Jim Ward told me that I had won it, and that encouraged me to

*My experience, and that of some of my peers, would suggest that this creativity is extremely significant in business as it contributes to the critical areas of problem solving and design. I am not a great fan of rote learning - I would much rather see innovation and problem solving nurtured in education.*

stay in UCG to do the MBS in Marketing - a very different UCG experience, but equally enjoyable.

## CAREER TO DATE

My first professional job was on a graduate programme at the Irish Trade Board (now Enterprise Ireland). I was based in the Engineering Department in Dublin and loved the contact with all of the offices around the world, with everyone working towards the same goal – promoting Ireland Inc. There were three of us from UCG and we were the envy of graduates from other colleges around the country, as UCG had such a fantastic reputation as a wonderful University to be a student in.

I gained invaluable experience working as a Marketing Executive with mid-tier accountancy firm Farrell Grant Sparks (FGS), one marketing person among over 50 accountants and tax advisers! The partners in the firm were very innovative and FGS would have been one of the first professional firms in the country to hire a Marketing Executive. I was given great freedom to design the role and it became fantastically varied – running a full marketing programme for the firm, assisting smaller clients with their marketing strategies and working on major consultancy reports in areas such as tourism.

My uncle Conor rang me one day to ask if I would like to run an Art Gallery in Spiddal. Seated in my Dublin 8 office, nothing could



have been further from my mind! However, the idea germinated and I returned to Galway in the summer of 1994 to open An Dámhlann, a Kenny Gallery. We hosted eight solo and group exhibitions every year in addition to running a framing service and wholesaling antiquarian maps and prints of Ireland to gift shops in Ireland and overseas. In 1999, I closed the Spiddal Gallery and moved into Kennys Bookshop and Art Gallery in Galway. I have worked in almost every business function in Kennys – Retail Management, Project Management, IT, Finance, HR, Physical Resources and Marketing. I often find myself drawing on modules that I did during my B. Comm that I never expected to use in my career!

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to study business at UCG - the range of subjects provided a super grounding for a business career. I specialised in Marketing, and thoroughly enjoyed the mix of analytics and creativity that the subjects provided. I have carried the mix into my work in Kennys – working with ‘big data’ (we list millions of books on our website) on the one hand and the creativity of branding and social marketing on the other. There were 13 of us in my MBS class. When discussing a case study in Jim Doolin’s Business Strategy class one day, 12 of us recommended bringing the company in one direction while the 13th member of the class – who was the only one of us to have come back as a mature student – opted for a completely different business decision! While

*this critical focus on people and experience more to the forefront of business education and I believe this is hugely positive for the development of business graduates.*

he was playing devil’s advocate to liven up the class, his life experience prompted him to focus (correctly!) to a much greater degree on the personalities at play in the case and to follow a different path based on the human interactions of the case study marketing team. Jim Doolin likened the class to the movie

‘Twelve Angry Men’! I think the addition of work experience modules to a lot of business courses in recent years brings this critical focus on people and experience more to the forefront

of business education and I believe this is hugely positive for the development of business graduates. We are a creative and innovative nation. My experience, and that of some of my peers, would suggest that this creativity is extremely significant in business as it contributes to the critical areas of problem solving and design. I am not a great fan of rote learning - I would much rather see innovation and problem solving nurtured in education. My grandmother graduated with a B. Comm from UCG in 1939 and I followed in her footsteps, graduating in 1990. Perhaps the greatest change over the decades has been access to a wealth of information. We had far greater resources available to us in the late 1980s than my grandmother had in the late 1930s, via an expanded library and inter library loans etc. For students and practitioners alike, the challenge today is to be able to filter and distil the vast resources available to us online in order to use our time efficiently and effectively. While the basic principles of economics and marketing in a bookshop have remained unchanged over the decades, the importance of new

online channels continues to provide new opportunities. It is challenging to stay on top of the rapidly changing trends and new phraseologies. Attending seminars (with, for example, Enterprise Ireland and Online Marketing in Galway) is a great way to keep up to date with Digital Marketing and other trends.

### THE IRISH ECONOMY

There is no shortage of comment available on the Irish economy. My personal experience has been that the fate of many small family businesses has mirrored the economy. While I was young, and largely protected from the stress of the recession in the 1980s, I remember the tension among family members struggling to make wages and meet bank obligations. Life was a little easier in the relatively normal period of the mid-nineties and early noughties. Then came the craziness of the Celtic Tiger years when some bankers actively targeted family businesses who had traded from the same city or town centre buildings for decades and encouraged them to 'release the equity in the asset' - i.e. to borrow against the value of their building. While the growth in the Celtic Tiger years was artificial, and at times farcical, I don't think anyone could have foreseen the extent of the crash.

When it came, those who had taken the advice to borrow against their building were unable to sustain the repayments on their loans. It was heart breaking to watch established and respected businesses fail. The personal toll on some of our business colleagues was immense.

Kennys was extremely fortunate to make it through this recent recession. We have had a number of bankers, many bank meetings and countless sleepless nights. Banking and business survival became all-consuming at times. We were lucky to have solid advice and support to help us through. Thankfully, as the economy stabilised again, so did our business and, while it's no walk in the park to be competing against Amazon and other online shops who have marketing budgets we could hardly dream of, we are back to a positive growth curve. We have recently been shortlisted for a number of business awards and I was delighted to collect the Marketing Institute's 2016 All Ireland Marketing Award for Small Business on behalf of Kennys.

### NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

NUI Galway is more closely linked to the heart of its city than most other campuses in the country – the entirety of the main campus is within walking distance of the city centre.

This has huge positive spin offs for both the University and the city. We walked and cycled everywhere when I was in College. All of our key haunts – cafés, bars, shops, part time jobs, the prom – were easily accessible. On the Friday evenings of Exhibition Openings or Book Launches in Kennys, I would walk

*I'm very thankful for having had the opportunity to study Commerce at UCG. I thoroughly enjoyed the four years that I spent in university and loved life as a student in Galway. The experience continues to influence my life in so many positive ways.*

into town with some friends and we would all help out serving drinks and clearing glasses. The University is so important to Galway and to the entire region. As a major employer, the spin offs to the local economy are significant. Students from Galway and from the north

western seaboard are fortunate to have NUI Galway easily accessible to them. It's wonderful to see the University evolving and responding to what is happening in the local area. First we had TG4, Telegael and Ros na Rún and now we have the Huston School of Film and Digital Media. The founders of Druid Theatre were all UCG graduates and now we have Drama and Theatre Studies available in Galway. Some of the newer business courses have been designed after consultations with local business leaders to discuss the kind of graduates they are looking to recruit. NUI Galway sponsors many local sports events and some local sports stars are also students. The University has also been closely involved with the successful Galway 2020 bid for the European Capital of Culture. There are many other examples of the close relationship between City and University which is so mutually beneficial.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

Success means different things to different people! For me it's a healthy mix of family, friends, work, exercise, play, a positive environment and the ability to give something back. And I could hardly be more fortunate! All of my close family live in Ireland and I get to see them often. With one exception, my closest friends also live in Ireland and we meet up regularly. I enjoy working in Kennys, adapting to the constant change of our business environment and retaining our core values while developing new strategies. I love love love living in Galway – the Atlantic, Connemara and the Burren all on our doorstep. I walk, swim, take photographs and enjoy the Festivals – Cúirt, the Arts Festival, the Galway Races, Baboró. We regularly attend Connacht Hockey, Connacht

Rugby, Barna and Galway GAA matches. I am really looking forward to Galway 2020! I volunteered on the Board of the Galway Simon Community for eight years and I am currently a Director of the Galway Rape Crisis Centre. I have probably gotten more from working with both charities than I have been able to contribute – it has been a genuine privilege to work with the amazing teams of staff and volunteers.

I'm very thankful for having had the opportunity to study Commerce at UCG. I thoroughly enjoyed the four years that I spent in university and loved life as a student in Galway. The experience continues to influence my life in so many positive ways. My closest friends are those I met in the B. Comm. I have used all of the business modules that I completed, in particular the marketing modules, throughout my career and in my volunteering roles. The wonderful cultural scene in Galway in the late eighties and early nineties combined with the opportunity to travel abroad at an impressionable age, fostered a very strong local pride and an international outlook. I hope that all of this, in turn, has had a positive influence on our family business. When our small independent bookshop was shortlisted for the 2015 Book Retailer of the Year – alongside large British chains Waterstones, Blackwells and Foyles - The Bookseller magazine in the UK said that "Kennys remains family owned and run, but has an outlook that goes well beyond its Galway shop.... It refined its website further in 2014 to better compete with Amazon, adding more topical features and recommendations and better search functions.... Kennys takes the fight to Amazon in Ireland with its revamped online offer." Granny would be so proud!



## Joe Greaney

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1981

Current job and title:  
**DIRECTOR, WESTBIC, THE  
EU BIC FOR THE WEST  
REGION OF IRELAND**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

A bi-lingual Mayo native, I now live back in my home village on the family farm with my wife Regina and daughter Róisín. I hold/held several Directorships, including:

- Founding Director: Galway Tech Centre, 50K sq. ft of International ICT incubation facilities
- Founding Director the Irish BiCs Seed Capital Fund, the first Seed Fund in Ireland
- President Emeritus and Director of EBN, Brussels, EU BIC and Innovation Network
- Galway Airport
- Twice President and Director, Galway Chamber of Commerce
- Director Chambers Ireland
- Director ADM Ltd at the Dept of An Taoiseach
- Founding Director Gaillimh le Gaeilge Teo: Irish language movement among business
- For many years I've been a policy contributor and international, technical expert on innovation enablers at EU level and outside and I'm an advisor to several Cross-Border, EU Commission and Government institutions in countries including Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, Jordan and Lebanon. My natural habitats and other passions include farming, acting, the GAA, nature, social justice and music.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

In first Comm when I was a student you could pick an 'optional other subject' that would be dropped in second year. I picked Geography! I loved the human geography lectures about how the Cree Indians lived! I suppose I should have admitted to myself that the academic versions of economics, accountancy and finance were not really for me. But times and my upbringing were such that you soldiered on and lasted

the course, literally. No surprise that my final degree subjects had marketing as the ‘major’ as opposed to accountancy. The practical applicability and interpersonal components appealed to me. Several of the friends I made back then are still good friends, thankfully. I really valued the whole process of learning how to think, validate and form opinion on how the world and societies function. Mind you, that vital piece of personal development was nurtured at Lit and Deb Society meetings or on the floors of flats at 3.00am or in Smokey Joes or in the Cellar nursing yellow-topped pints! Come to think of it, the Cree Indians did something similar!

### CAREER TO DATE

I worked initially (1981) as the Commercial Manager of a Gaeltacht manufacturing company. Bought materials and sold products, managed cash, pricing etc. and developed new customers and set in train the development of a new product to include premises extension, equipment planning, finance, prototypes, materials, pricing, customers etc. Moved to the wholesale food business selling to grocery, restaurant and general catering trade – buying and selling as a self employed, ‘tied agent’. Moved to financial services sector: again selling financial products. Moved to Consultancy and Training in the start up business and finally back on UCG campus to work on the first Business Plan of the, newly formed, EU Business and Innovation Centre (EU BIC) in 1988, WestBIC. [www.westbic.ie](http://www.westbic.ie) Built that WestBIC brand, corporate structure and team of 14 delivering Incubation Infrastructure (4 locations) and systems, next practice project validation and ‘investor grade’ business planning services. Pioneered Seed Capital Funds in Ireland and formal private equity funding networks and systems which

precipitated the, now Central Bank regulated, plethora of funding instruments. WestBIC is a Quality Accredited EU BIC and is a strong brand in the Republic and Northern Ireland and across the EU and among EU Institutions. I held the Presidency of the Brussels based, EU Network of BICs ([www.ebn.eu](http://www.ebn.eu)) from 2010-12 and am a regular contributor to EU policy on the design and delivery of support interventions in innovation, regional smart specialisation strategies and regional economic development.

During this time, I also performed the role for 5 or 6 years of Head Lecturer and Examiner of the ‘Enterprise Planning Project’ for final year B. Comm and Masters in Rural Development classes at NUI Galway and delivered a huge range of training modules on entrepreneurship throughout the Region and in Northern Ireland.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

Like several other areas, the process of education to help prepare people for employment in the world of business really needs a heavy emphasis on ‘learning by doing’. Campus activity, lectures, projects etc., no matter how practical in approach, are still limited to helping the student understand certain basics, develop the ‘language’, demystify concepts and terms and develop a confidence for the ‘jungle’ that is business and commerce. However, the science of mathematics (accountancy for example) is replicable and purchasable from location to location, project to project etc. whereas the very human-centric process of ‘doing business’ is not. 100 different people using 100 different methods can be equally successful! So, where’s the science?

The entrepreneurs and entrepreneurially minded people, generally, are the oxygen of

the world of business. When they get it right, there is trade so there are jobs for accountants, for example, to 'count' and report. When they get it wrong, it all falls apart. Getting it right in today's global markets means mobilising and capturing creativity and converting it to value...value as validated by the market (my definition of Innovation). This is the new and incremental wealth that generates higher value employment and drives a net inward flow of capital for an economy. Those who are the 'stars' in this endeavour are the real national heroes and the question now is 'are we set up in our education institutions with the curricula and culture we foster to really deliver on this agenda?' My fear is, we are not there yet!

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

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Where to begin? The changes in the Irish economy from when I left college in 1981 to present days are enormous. Thankfully, there is now a very significant, indigenous cadre of companies trading on products and services that are global brand leaders and 'poster boys' for the success of the economy. There is a momentum and critical mass of activity in serious and innovative entrepreneurship that is very impressive. There are competent knowledge intensive service providers (legal, IP, tax etc.) and state support mechanisms that are the envy of the lots of economies we looked up to not so long ago and the FDI performance by the IDA is probably the best in the world. Additionally, the R&D capability in the FDI sector is also 'bedding in' to our economy which, in turn, generates no small amount of value-added spin-offs. So what else do we need?

**Decentralise:** the haemorrhaging of human and other resources all into the greater Dublin area is a mistake in spatial planning.

Ultimately, the imbalance in general pricing indices (labour, housing, public services, business inputs) will do damage. The brain drain is a dangerous trend and the vast potential in so many areas around the country based on natural advantages (food, culture, environment, topography/scenery, energy, maritime) will remain untapped or poorly developed, at best. The false and pointless competition for talent, for example, renders the 'lagging behind' to continue to do just that and the over reliance on the GDP of one area is a higher risk strategy. The risks are compounded when lots of the tax Euros are harvested in the virtual economy made up of increasing numbers of jobs not based on added value with the inevitable increase in public sector administrators, support staff and all the overheads and spin off from that. It's fine in the microcosm world and for those who can benefit from it over a short term but a regressive strategy for the wider economy and leaves too many tax Euros vulnerable to global trends when an agile productive sector across a multi strand, well blended economy is the only bulwark to withstand such external forces.

**Smart Specialisation:** Investing in areas and sectors of natural advantage to optimise the cluster effect and build world class eco-systems blending natural advantage with technology and global R&D communities and behaving as a magnet for the best talent and smart private capital in the world. Sounds obvious? Not really happening. We are not the leaders in wind or hydro energy. We still export so much food 'on the hoof'. We have no marine cluster to compete globally on marine research and related spin offs. One of the biggest rivers in Europe (the Shannon) is merely seen as a flood threat! We are not leaders in harvesting and recycling rain water...

while we politically implode around water charges! And so on.... There's much to do.... there's thinking to reengineer.....! We can start with the governance frameworks to foster smart specialisation strategies.

### NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

The symbiotic relationship between the City and the University is centuries old now. It has many facets. From rent payments by the student body to all the consumables and supplies and wages that are purchased annually. The deeper more remarkable footprints now include the spawning of the world famous Druid theatre company. Other impact areas could include the amenities at Dangan for the City to enjoy, the preserved access to the Corrib and the campus 'skyline' from the Quad to the new buildings popping up all the time. Maybe less visible but of utmost importance is the merging of the University Hospital with the university's medical faculty. This is a vibrant community of researchers and innovators who are developing new technology and applications in health care to world class standards. This most desirable bi-product from the education world is forging a renowned MedTech cluster reputation for Galway and is attracting talent and capital and is creating jobs....higher paid jobs! We can drive this further and we can replicate it to other sectors. The impending decision on the improvements at Galway Harbour suggests a role and presence for the university and its oceanography and marine related faculties. The dream is to have a world class campus at the harbour with deep sea access for research vessels and teams. This can be replicated again and again to the benefit of the City and the University. A win/win and the University would be even more 'mingled' with the city. The old, high 'wall' around the

Quad and its symbolism of 'separateness' from the city might even be sacrificed...!

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

Where to begin? How do work, business and success now all sit comfortably together with feelings of wellbeing and fulfilment as I approach 60? I doubt if there is a formula that can be shared, published even. It is a very lucky person who gets to know him/herself early in life and truly values that and remains true to it. The excesses of the Celtic Tiger era showed me how easily people can be tempted to move into a fairly unnatural state of being. Not only money but mentality and even language was so easily borrowed and deployed as a fashion without any connection to the soul, to the real person who has worked out what constitutes success. My 'magic' now, with the benefit of 35 years of work behind me, is primarily based around the social contract that emerges between me and the world around me, how I can get along with people, influence some, be influenced by others. Try to be consistent with all classes and avoid any hint of career pride. Work and business is merely interacting with the world and, hopefully, taking some satisfaction from that. The result for some is measured in sales revenue, balance sheet value, etc. For me now, it's measured in more human centred indicators, the balance sheet of self, so to speak. Do people gravitate towards me, have I anything interesting to contribute to society, is there anyone glad I'm walking the earth? I feel the more we blend life with work and study and the earlier we engender that as a cultural norm, for our young people, the better. The balance sheets will work themselves out as a consequence!



## Dave Hickey

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1980

Current job and title:  
**GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE,  
CONNACHT TRIBUNE LTD.**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I grew up in Galway wondering what ‘College’ was about. To me it seemed a place that changed people. Some of our neighbours went there and, while they had been perfectly friendly to us younger kids before, they now appeared to inhabit a different, distant world as they went to and from University. I had no idea what went on there or how you ‘got in’ and I didn’t know anybody well enough to ask. My mother went to UCG in the 1930s, but you never asked your mother about important things like this. I remember in first year of secondary school, cycling with my best friend Tom around the expanding campus, wondering how all those buildings could be filled and what went on there. This was when construction on the current library building was just starting. ‘It’ll take a lot of books to fill it’, said a labourer, delighted with the break. ‘Maybe you’ll be there yourselves someday,’ he said, doubtfully. As I worked my way through the Bish, a clearer picture emerged. I was ‘good at sums’ and had no interest in science subjects so I opted for Accounting and Economics for the Leaving Cert: thus a path to ‘College’ opened.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

Of course, no sooner had I attended my first lecture in Terrapin V (Sociology with Michael D) than I disdained the ‘long-haired hippies’ who spent all day in Smokey Joe’s discussing Danté or Marx and listening to folk music. This was 1977! In reality I was intimidated by the place. I couldn’t get my head around the freedom and apparent lack of structure. Most of my close friends were doing other courses, or in the RTC (now GMIT), so there was only a small number of us ‘townies’ in first Comm. I was also working part-time to help pay my way. I was rescued by lectures (!) and The Jam. With the exception of Sociology –



the compulsory Arts subject I dropped as soon as I could – I enjoyed my lectures and tutorials, although some of Leo Hawkins' Theory of Accounting baffles me still. I was good at it and this gave me a lot of confidence going into second year. Early in second year, the day before my 19th birthday, The Jam played a gig in Leisureland and I was hooked on live music. I went to every gig by new and emerging bands like Rocky DeValera and the Gravediggers or the Virgin Prunes as well as stalwarts like Dr Feelgood or Horslips. Second and third year were great! The hippies didn't seem so bad after all. My only regret is that I didn't dive into college life from the start and open myself to most (not all) of the new experiences available – something I encouraged our three sons to do in their time in NUI Galway.

### CAREER TO DATE

Following the B. Comm (Hons) in 1980 I wanted to stay in Galway because I had just met my future wife so I started a training contract with local accountancy firm Deacy, Concannon & Co, qualifying in 1983. Moving to London in 1984, I started with Peat, Marwick, Mitchell (now KPMG) before joining Ernst & Whinney, Kuwait in 1986. I took up a role as Finance & Admin Manager with Reuters in Dubai in 1988 and subsequently became Deputy Finance & Admin Manager for the Middle East & Africa region based in Cyprus but with a lot of travel. In 1994 I was appointed Business Director with one of Reuters trading divisions in London with responsibility for Finance, Customer Service and Client Training. By 1996 we had three young boys and decided to move back to Galway before Reuters asked us to move further afield again. I was lucky enough to find a Business Analysis & Planning role with Nortel in Mervue and remained with the company until 2002 in various finance and business

leadership roles, some with European and global responsibilities. For 18 months I was Finance Manager with Chanelle in Loughrea before becoming Finance Director of Galway Clinic during its first year of operations. Having been a director of The Connacht Tribune for a couple of years, I was asked to become Chief Executive in 2005, becoming Group Chief Executive when we acquired 100% of Galway Bay FM the following year.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

Firstly, with a third-level qualification now viewed as the Leaving Cert was in the 1970s and 1980s I think that a student's choices at this level are less important than what she chooses to do as a postgraduate, whether it is further academic studies, a professional qualification or joining the workforce. Undergraduate courses should offer students as wide a range of subjects as possible to allow them get a taste of as many aspects of business life as possible. Once a student has narrowed her focus, work experience should form an integral part of a postgraduate course to provide a deeper understanding of the subject in a working environment. To make placements like this attractive to employers they need to be for a minimum of six months. To make it work for the students and colleges the roles must be clearly defined and ideally include at least one project which students would be expected to deliver. They should also be remunerated. Secondly, no business can survive without sales. But I'm not aware of any third-level institution in Ireland that includes sales or selling as a major module, let alone a full course. There are few people who are 'natural' at sales; the rest of us have to learn it. Sales can and should be taught as part of most third-level business programmes.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

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Galway benefits hugely from having the university at its heart. Not only does it bring thousands of students to the city every September and help local businesses thrive during the long winter it also provides a steady stream of graduates who can add significantly to the local workforce with multinationals or SMEs. NUI Galway has global programmes such as the Regenerative Medicine Institute and leads many areas of study nationally such as in Gerontology and Data Analytics, all of which attract national as well as international staff and students. The university hosts innovation centres for business, technology, bio-medical and many others together with business incubation units. All of these contribute significantly to making Galway an attractive place to live and work. However, Galway is not a young city. It is an old city, or an institution, full of young people – not unlike NUI Galway itself. Like all institutions it tends towards stasis and loses some of the vibrancy of youth – a bit like me in fact. A major challenge for Galway, and one which both third-level institutions can play a key role in addressing, is how to re-introduce some of that youthful energy into the DNA of the city. This is important as we compete for business, students, tourists and residents with other growing cities across Europe and the world such as Riga, Vilnius or Dubai. NUI Galway should consider how it can help Galway, and in turn itself, regain that energy and drive.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Galway is establishing a strong business start-up culture thanks, inter alia, to the innovation centres and incubation units at NUI Galway as well as GMIT, together with the development of the Galway City Innovation District in the PorterShed off Eyre Square. The J.E.

Cairnes School of Business and Economics and Whitaker Institute are very active in encouraging entrepreneurship at the University. Irish culture is changing slowly and recognising that entrepreneurship is not the same as being a ‘cute hoor’: that honest endeavour, even if it is not successful, should be encouraged and rewarded. Failure at business should be recognised as a valuable part of learning and that the only real failure is not to try again. ‘Try something. Fail early. Try again. Fail better. Try again...’ Failure at business, following honest endeavour, should not be a label to be worn forever. It should be a badge worn with pride. Entrepreneurship, and the strong possibility of failure, should be introduced into our second-level schools and continued right through third-level, to encourage more business start-ups and remove the stigma of failure.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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One of our lecturers in the B. Comm told us that the most important thing to take from our University education was an attitude of mind not just our degree. In my earlier career it was something I’d say at job interviews and it always impressed – helped by the fact that I had a good degree and a professional qualification. Later in life, it’s something I look for in potential recruits at all levels of an organisation. If someone has demonstrated an ability to learn – initially with a degree or qualification and subsequently through career progression – and continues to show a thirst for learning, even well into the twilight of working life then he or she will have a significant advantage over others in the jobs market. Combine that with flexibility, energy and a drop of discipline then you have a strong candidate for most business roles.



## Brian Joyce

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1962**

Current job and title:  
**RETIRED**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

A native of Headford, Co. Galway, prior to entering university I had been in boarding school for 5 years, where I disliked the lack of freedom and discretion. I was a keen follower of sport before going to boarding school but newspapers were not permitted. I use that as an example of the micro management that went on at that time.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

In contrast your success or lack of it in university was entirely in your own hands and I enjoyed my years in NUI Galway. I had an interest in business affairs before arriving in NUI Galway and I read extensively about companies and markets that extended far beyond the curriculum material during my college years. This had the effect of broadening my horizons and provided me with an understanding of how the decision making process worked within companies long before I went to work in any of them. NUI Galway was relatively small at that time (early 1960s) with less than one thousand students. The great advantage of it was that you got to know the Engineering, Medical and Science students who had different perspectives which contributed to the broadening of your mind and helped to prepare you for the big bad world of post University life. The subject I most enjoyed was Logic, a component of the Philosophy course. In subsequent business life it proved exceptionally useful. I have encountered many people in business who did not have the ability to approach a business problem in a logical fashion and as a consequence would come to a wrong conclusion.

## CAREER TO DATE

I started business life with Ford Motor in Dagenham, UK. At the time there were about 30,000 people working on the one site. I was attached at the outset to the Chassis, Transmission and Engine Division. Reorganisations were a very regular occurrence and usually followed a poor performance. Those of us that were further down the food chain enjoyed the musical chairs performance amongst the higher echelons. I spent a lot of my time there preparing capital projects related to forward models. It was a good place to cut your eye teeth. You learned as much as you were able to absorb and the four years I spent there were really worthwhile and made a major contribution to a subsequent successful career.

I was keen to return to Ireland and took a job in RTÉ for two years as Financial Accountant. I moved from there within two years to the post of Chief Accountant at Bord Baine. That represented the start of a twenty one year stint in the dairy industry. I moved to the UK to manage their UK business two and one half years after joining them and spent six years building that business. My boss in Dublin decided to retire in 1978 and I returned to Ireland to head up the worldwide business. I served as Managing Director of Bord Baine for eleven years until 1989. At that stage I made a total career change.

I decided I wanted to pursue the rest of my business career as a non-executive Chairman/Director. I was offered many Directorships and developed a nice portfolio of companies

in a diverse number of sectors. The portfolio included the Mater Private Hospital, EBS, Williams Group in Tullamore, Cow and Gate baby food, Allegro Holdings and others. Later I took up other positions including a five year stint as Chairman of CIE from 1995 to 2000. I had some experience as a non-executive before that time as I had served on the Board of Irish Life in the late seventies and I served on the Irish National Petroleum Corporation while I was Chief Executive of Bord Baine. I really enjoyed the non-executive role. I provided an overview for many of these companies that proved useful to them.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

The Irish economy had a very unpredictable course during most of my life in business. Having said that we made a lot of progress since I entered the workforce in 1963. We have come to understand better what a small open economy like Ireland needs to do to attract industry and create more employment.

We are still vulnerable to worldwide movements and such swings should no longer surprise us. There was a significant expansion in second and third level education in the seventies and eighties

and that was a major contributor to economic expansion. The religious orders remain unrecognised for the contribution they made to second level education in those years.

*The Irish economy had a very unpredictable course during most of my life in business. Having said that we made a lot of progress since I entered the workforce in 1963.*

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

It is a wonderful experience to return to NUI Galway and contrast its size and scope today with what it was in the early sixties. We had about 1,000 students and today there

are over 17,000. The university is pivotal to the success of Galway. I understand the population of Galway City is now 75,000 whereas in my student days it was less than 20,000. Unfortunately, the infrastructure has not moved in tandem with this expansion. Galway desperately needs an outer ring road to relieve congestion and a concerted effort is required to move this forward on the agenda. The present congestion will damage the tourism industry and make Galway a less attractive location for new industries.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The climate for entrepreneurship has improved over the years but much more needs to be done. We need to give far more consideration to the fact that our domestic market is very small and makes life difficult for start-up situations. The larger community market is vast but you have geographic and language barriers which can be daunting for a start-up operator. People with good ideas and even good products don't always succeed because they can't find a route to market. More effort needs to be made to engage people who have been there and done that to mentor younger folk who are trying to get ahead. Many mistakes can be avoided if the young entrepreneur is acquainted with the pitfalls and the real amount of capital required to succeed.

*Many mistakes can be avoided if the young entrepreneur is acquainted with the pitfalls and the real amount of capital required to succeed.*

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

I never had any regrets about moving into business as I had found out in a HDip year that teaching was not for me. My years in Ford Motor Company in Dagenham gave me confidence that I could compete with graduates from any of the British universities. I soaked up as much experience as I could in those years and left there feeling I had a good perspective on business in general. My first few years in business were finance orientated and I qualified as an Accountant during those years. I entered general management in 1972 when I was given the opportunity to manage the UK arm of Bord Bainne with 500 employees at the time. The company needed a new strategic direction and the introduction of a lot of new skills at the time. It resulted in six years of hard work for me during which I changed its focus and broadened its horizons. I felt well equipped at the end of those six years to head up the worldwide businesses of the Bord. It was an exciting time as it was a period of rapid expansion in the dairy industry and it involved running like hell to stand still. We traded with Russia and China for the first time in 1979. We developed markets in South America and we were probably the first Irish company to do business in some of them. We had a very good squad in those years and we took pride in our achievements.



## Maeve Joyce

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1990

Current job and title:  
**ENTERPRISE  
DEVELOPMENT EXECUTIVE,  
ÚDARÁS NA GAELTACHTA**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Having spent my childhood in Connemara and my teenage years in Galway City, I've experienced the benefits of city and country life. Our home had always been a place of commerce and conviviality. In the seventies, we lived and worked in Ireland's largest craft shop. So, much of my time was spent dealing with American tourists in plaid trousers. They paid by credit card and I was allowed to fill in the "docket" and scrape the handle across the metal plate. In those days, payments took months to process – how things have changed. I've always had a job of some description – I've flipped burgers in Salthill, sold sheep-dip systems in Roscommon and supplied wedding dresses in Knocknacarra. During college, my summer work took me to London and Canada. In Toronto, I worked for the immigration and refugee board, processing applications for international refugees. That was in 1990, when we didn't know what a refugee was. I've had some great adventures, too, including teaching Spanish to a Japanese woman in Bangkok. Most recently, I travelled to Cuba on my honeymoon. The arrival of our daughter has clipped our wings somewhat, but we hope to visit my brother and sister-in-law in Cambodia very soon.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

Every moment of my time during the B. Comm was wonderful. I learned so much, both inside and outside the classroom. Having focused on science subjects for my Leaving Certificate, I entered the B. Comm knowing very little about balance sheets, demand and supply, or market concepts and business theories. From the outset, everything was new and intriguing. I

remember the excitement of sitting in the large lecture theatres, feeling very grown-up and mature. That said, I still managed to get exiled to the front row of the O’Flaherty theatre for talking! I liked the sound of marketing and I couldn’t wait to get started. It was my favourite subject throughout my time in university. I loved learning about the many ways that products or services could be bought and sold. As an impressionable teenager, I was lucky enough to make friends with six wonderful classmates who remain my best friends today. They were

*Every moment of my time during the B. Comm was wonderful. I learned so much, both inside and outside the classroom.*

intelligent and entertaining women who taught me how to learn and get the most out of my college years. They

kept me on the straight and narrow. I was very happy with my final results. I wasn’t quite an A student, probably because I was also learning about boys and beer. Well worth dropping a grade or two for that – skills for life!

## CAREER TO DATE

I’ve worked in a diverse range of businesses from sheep dipping to taxi driving, from film production to running my own wedding dress enterprise. For over ten years, I worked in the film and television sector. I had a starting role in setting up a Hollywood film studio in South Connemara. Concorde Anois Teoranta, established by renowned Hollywood producer Roger Corman, produced low-budget TV films for the US market. At

Telegaél Teo in Spiddal, I produced a broad range of corporate videos for the private and public sectors. This gave me a unique perspective into a broad range of business sectors, from medical devices to calf hutches, and provided the motivation to undertake a MBA at NUI Galway.

Having worked for others, I was keen to set up my own business. After attending a franchise show in the United Kingdom, I set up a bridal wear business in my home. It was a wonderful experience that allowed me to call on my full range of marketing, publicity and promotional skills. Unfortunately, the Master Franchisor wasn’t as successful in attracting franchisees. When he closed his doors, I had to close mine!

I’ve learned a lot about business and now I’m utilising that knowledge to assist existing and start-up companies to develop their full potential through my work in Údarás na Gaeltachta. To create employment in the Gaeltacht, we assess business plans and design support packages that include everything from Research & Development support to production space.

*I’ve learned a lot about business and now I’m utilising that knowledge to assist existing and start-up companies to develop their full potential through my work in Údarás na Gaeltachta.*

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

My thoughts on the economy, just like the economy itself, are mixed. The last ten years have been a rollercoaster. People's personal economic health depends on when they joined that rollercoaster. While we have now returned to a growth economy, the scars of the last ten years remain in many areas. Large mortgages and personal debt haven't disappeared. The rural economy still struggles. Producing, buying and selling goods and services are what fuel the economy, it's a simple equation. So while cities (and we only have a handful) are now thriving, the jobs in rural areas, along with related spending locally, haven't fully recovered. When a draper or a corner shop closes in a small town, will it ever reopen? The owners have emigrated, their children will grow up elsewhere and the loss is felt in the classroom, on the sports field, at church and felt by all the other businesses that benefitted directly and indirectly from the local spend. So while a pat on the back is well deserved for a country that's taken an economic battering and for a taxpayer that's been overburdened in the last few years, we're not there yet. We need more money in our pockets to spend, and more jobs in local economies. Less personal taxes and greater incentives for the self-employed would be a good start.

***Continuous innovation is essential. Innovation isn't just for high-tech international companies, it's for everyone. The challenge is to foster innovation. Where does this begin? Perhaps in school – to challenge young people to look at things differently and to question norms. But this should also be done in universities and in the workplace.***

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

NUI Galway has grown with the city and the campus is almost unrecognisable from my time there in the late eighties. The capital expansion programme is enviable and, as each new building sprang up over the last 20 years, the university has filled them with a broad spectrum of students and staff who brought with them renewed excitement and innovative areas of learning. The economic value alone (not to mention the knowledge shared with students) has had an extraordinary impact on Galway and has played a large part in making the City of the Tribes a unique environment in which

to live and work.

Many of my clients in the Gaeltacht have a strong relationship with the university, and the connection between academia and industry gives the community access to world-renowned researchers. This offers Galway businesses and entrepreneurs great advantages when competing

internationally. The kudos of the university is also important when attracting investment to the city and county.

Galway, let's be honest, is a small city by international standards. However, with a population of only 75,000, we can punch well above our weight with NUI Galway in our corner.



## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

My role at Údarás na Gaeltachta is to deal with entrepreneurs and business owners in existing and start-up initiatives in the Gaeltacht. This gives me a first-hand insight into the challenges faced by business owners. I also see the challenges faced by the State in providing an environment conducive to starting and running a business. Over the last few years, great strides have been made in terms of support for business. But more needs to be done. Starting a business isn't easy. But for those who do, they believe it's the only option for them and they should be afforded every support. Continuous innovation is essential. Innovation isn't just for high-tech international companies, it's for everyone. The challenge is to foster innovation. Where does this begin? Perhaps in school – to challenge young people to look at things differently and to question norms. But this should also be done in universities and in the workplace. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) tends to be for those who are required by their profession to undertake it. Everyone in the workplace should challenge themselves from time to time, so they can acquire new skills. Entrepreneurs aren't just those who run their own companies – they can also be found working within companies. Either way, it means generating and implementing new ideas that will grow the business. All for the benefit of Ireland Inc.

*Entrepreneurs aren't just those who run their own companies – they can also be found working within companies. Either way, it means generating and implementing new ideas that will grow the business. All for the benefit of Ireland Inc.*

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

The most important thing I've learned as I've progressed in my career is to be true to myself and to my beliefs, values and personality. This means being myself and not taking on traits and attributes that I believe others expect. The challenge is knowing when others are not being honest; after all, people like that can lead you astray. I have been inspired by a few remarkable colleagues during my career – what struck me most about them was their honesty and respect for everyone they worked with. That, along with their willingness to teach and to share their knowledge, made them exceptional mentors. If I can do this for my colleagues and clients, I will have achieved a great deal. I wish I'd read more, because it's such a great way to learn. It's always a challenge to find the time to read; but if others can do it, so can I. Continuous learning and expanding your knowledge is essential for professional success. And what does professional success look like? I'd like to think when someone mentions my name they'll say, "Oh, Maeve Joyce, I know her. You couldn't have someone better on your side".



## Rónán Kennedy

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1992

Current job and title:  
**LECTURER IN LAW,  
NUI GALWAY**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I have a knack for choosing the hard way to do things and I came to the B. Comm by an unusual route. Originally from West Kerry, I grew up in Dún Chaoin, a small village of about 200 people on the Atlantic coast. I wanted to see somewhere bigger and more lively and therefore rather than going directly from secondary school to university, I spent a year in Paris, learning French and travelling around Europe. I came back to Ireland to begin a degree in business studies in Dublin City University. I had an interest in business subjects in school, particularly economics, but taking the subjects at degree level made me realise that my real interest was in figuring out how human systems worked rather than being a business person. That realisation and the influence of an inspirational lecturer, Ray Byrne, made me re-orient myself towards law as a better career fit. This created the practical challenge of how to obtain a law degree without starting all over again. The Galway B. Comm, with its strong focus on law, offered an option and I was able to transfer into second year.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I came to the B. Comm “late”, arriving into second year after friendships and social circles had already formed. However, although my particular background was a little unusual, I was warmly welcomed into the class and I formed strong friendships which have lasted until this day. I now work with some of my former classmates, keep in touch with others around the globe, and my daughter’s best friend happens to be the daughter of one of my Commerce classmates, which shows how life can sometimes go in circles. I enjoyed the mix of subjects in the B. Comm, and have found the varied education useful, but my focus was

always on law. I gravitated towards those who had a similar interest, as the LLB was a popular goal, and we formed study groups for the subjects that most interested us. I took the opportunity to spend a semester as an Erasmus student in Strasbourg, which was an interesting experience and enabled me to deepen my language skills. Environmental protection has been a very important value of mine since I was young. As an undergraduate I set up the Ecology Society and was heavily involved with it at different times in my studies. I went on to graduate study in UCG and later NUI Galway, as it became part-way through my time there, completing the Diploma in Systems Analysis (with several B. Comm graduates in my class), the LLB, and more recently the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

### CAREER TO DATE

I spent most of the 1990s as a programmer, systems analyst, and network administrator in several companies and spent two years in what was then Computer Services (now Information Solutions and Services) in what was still UCG. The information technology industry went from bust to boom and back again. When I first graduated, jobs were scarce. By 1997, I was hearing of peers quitting because they wanted longer holidays than their employer was willing to give, as they were confident they could find something else when they came back from their travels. By the end of the decade, the market had collapsed once more. I wanted

*The resilience and capacity of the Irish people to recover from these problems is to be applauded. However, our economic difficulties need to be understood in the context of our weak political and legal structures.*

a change and moved to New Zealand for a year. I enjoyed the climate and lifestyle there very much. I came back to Ireland for “a short while”, intending to return as soon as possible,

but somehow found myself on a path which has kept me here. I worked as Executive Legal Officer to the Chief Justice of Ireland, Mr Justice Ronan Keane, for a number of years. This was an

interesting and varied role – a combination of researcher, personal assistant, and “special projects” person.

I then went to New York University to complete a Masters in Law. On returning to Ireland, I became an academic – still trying to figure out how things work – spending a year in the University of Limerick before the happenstance of the jobs market brought me back to NUI Galway. I now lecture in the School of Law, specialising in Information Technology Law and Environmental Law. I have also been very involved in the Cloughjordan eco-village project.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

Business education has much to offer Ireland but also much to learn. The country is now much more open, dynamic, and properly served by infrastructure than it was in the 1980s and 1990s. Education offers an opportunity to create new and innovative solutions to old problems, particularly in an increasingly connected economy, one of flows rather than transactions. However, as environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and resource scarcity begin to bite, sustainability is an

issue. This was not part of my education as an undergraduate student, but should be a key element of business education in the 21st century.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

The Irish economy is in much better shape than it was in the 1980s. The recession has certainly taken a real toll, and the recent recovery is grounded on a lot of human suffering with many excellent recent graduates having to emigrate, and those who have remained dealing with reduced services. The resilience and capacity of the Irish people to recover from these problems is to be applauded. However, our economic difficulties need to be understood in the context of our weak political and legal structures. Some aspects are particularly Irish, such as weak regulation, a dysfunctional legislative process, and a lack of joined-up thinking at the higher levels. Some are universal, particularly the human tendency for oversimplification of complex problems. Together, these mean that without significant political and legal reform, another crash is inevitable.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

A common thread between the various universities that I have studied in is their close physical, economic, and mental integration with the surrounding city, which is a substantial reciprocal benefit. Galway and NUI Galway are very fortunate to have each other so close by. As both the city and university set their sights on a higher

international profile, it is important not to forget about the need to cultivate the links between the two. Schemes such as the Community Knowledge Initiative and various industrial partnerships are tangible evidence of the positive possibilities and should be encouraged and strengthened from both sides. Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

*Experience has taught me that success requires a combination of hard work, good luck, and pragmatism. The cliché is to “follow your heart”, and while that is often a good idea, it is frequently not sufficient. Success is often the result of random factors.*

Experience has taught me that success requires a combination of hard work, good luck, and pragmatism. The cliché is to “follow your heart”, and while that is often a good idea, it is frequently not sufficient. Success is often the result of random factors. I have from time to time been congratulated on putting together a CV which

places me well to work at the intersection between law, information technology, and (more recently) environmental protection. In fact that life story was not planned in advance. Even some of the more careful decisions that I made seemed to me to be a mistake within a few years. Later, these would open new opportunities that I was able to capitalise on. Long-term visions must be tempered with a degree of pragmatism, and a willingness to put in hard work. Openings will often arise because of factors outside of one’s direct control. To make a success of these, it is necessary to have the ability to recognise them and then to follow through with the effort necessary to make the most of the new possibility.



## Cathal Kilcline

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**2005**

Current job and title:  
**LECTURER OF FRENCH,  
SHANNON COLLEGE OF  
HOTEL MANAGEMENT,  
NUI GALWAY**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I was raised on a farm in Roscommon and educated at Roscommon CBS. My father (Ambrose, BScAg, 1966) and mother (Helen, née Maher, BA, 1980) are both alumni of NUI Galway, as are my sister (Amy, BA, 2002 and HDip Ed., 2003) and brother (Kevin, B. Comm. International, 2007 and M. Econ. Sc., 2008), so it was a logical choice for me to follow in their footsteps. I'm a proud Roscommon man, and keep close links to my community there through my family and my involvement in local organisations, especially the GAA. Nonetheless, I've been calling Galway home since I started in NUI Galway almost fifteen years ago!

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

It seems like most students have a good time at NUI Galway, and B. Comm students are no different. It helps a lot if you are lucky enough to be studying subjects you enjoy, as I was. Studying the B. Comm at NUI Galway gave me a grounding in the fundamental principles and methods of economics and accounting, as well as a better understanding of the world of business generally and contemporary changes in Irish and international commerce. Perhaps most importantly for me, I developed my investigative, analytical and communicative skills over the course of my four years. My personal highlight was my third year at University, which I spent as an Erasmus student in Montpellier, France. All Commerce International students must spend their third year (of 4) in a partner university, studying the relevant language. This was a wonderful experience for me personally and intellectually. I think that a lot of students of this particular programme would feel the same about Erasmus experience. I would heartily recommend

studying a B. Comm at NUI Galway. The course offers an excellent and diverse range of employment opportunities. I would recommend the B. Comm International programmes in particular – studying a language as part of your degree will further enhance your options in the future.

## CAREER TO DATE

Following graduation, I worked as a postgraduate researcher in French Studies at NUI Galway, funded by the Arts Faculty and later by Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and obtained a PhD in 2009. Later I studied for the Postgraduate Diploma in Education and worked as a secondary school teacher of French and Business in schools in Roscommon and Galway. From 2011 to 2015 I was employed by the EU Commission and the Irish Research Council as a postdoctoral researcher through the Marie Curie programme. My research focuses on French society and culture, and I was based at Université Claude Bernard in Lyon for two years before returning to work in the same capacity at NUI Galway. During this time I also taught French on the BA programme in NUI Galway before moving to the Shannon College of Hotel Management, where I have been teaching French since the College has been fully integrated into NUI Galway in September 2015.

*I and fellow graduates with whom I remain close, believe that we were prepared at NUI Galway to a level that rivals the most prestigious institutions nationally and internationally.*

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

In my experience, business education in Ireland is relatively sophisticated, well adapted to the world of work, and applicable in people's daily lives. The Leaving Certificate courses in accounting and economics, for example, are quite rigorous and prepare students well for further studies at third level. Similarly, the B. Comm programme at NUI Galway prepares students well for top jobs in the worlds of accounting, economics, finance and policy. Reflecting on my own experiences, I feel that these curricula at second and third level portray only one particular way of organising society: according to the free market and the profit motive. Someone who

leaves the study of economics after year 1, will know only of the neo-classical approach, for example. I believe that greater insight into ways of doing business and organising economies in different locations and over time would have positive consequences for the business world

and society in general. Nonetheless, I and fellow graduates with whom I remain close, believe that we were prepared at NUI Galway to a level that rivals the most prestigious institutions nationally and internationally. Increasingly, work placement is becoming a part of every degree programme and that can only further strengthen business education in Ireland. Opportunities to carry out this work placement abroad – happily I benefited from an Erasmus year through the B. Comm International programme – would also be a positive development as students would benefit greatly from exposure to a different working environment.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

Recent history has reinforced how exposed Ireland is to global markets as a small open economy. Successive Irish governments have proven quite astute in attracting foreign direct investment to Ireland, and in positioning Ireland as an attractive place for Ireland as a base for high-tech multinationals. This does not, however, make Ireland any less vulnerable to external shocks. Reducing Irish government debt would seem like an obvious and important way to tackle this exposure. Apart from attracting FDI, I believe many of Ireland's indigenous strengths lie in tourism and high-quality agricultural production. A careful fostering of Ireland's natural resources and heritage is vital to maintaining these strengths. Hence, a clear vision of our environmental priorities and a nationwide strategy on how to deal with climate change will be necessary if Ireland is to protect our natural advantages in these areas.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

Everyone knows that Galway is a great place to have a good time. It is a glorious location: beside the sea, on the Corrib, at the doorstep to Connemara and the Gaeltacht, as a setting for the summer festivals. And NUI Galway, in making Galway a student-oriented city, is perhaps the driving force in Galway preserving its distinctive appeal and bringing together its diverse charms. The crucial role NUI Galway plays in Galway City – as an employer and a centre for learning and research, means that the city and university are effectively locked in a symbiotic

*Having worked in education in a variety of contexts and locations, it is clear that among the foremost challenges all for educators, schools and universities, is how to measure their performance.*

relationship. This should be a competitive advantage for both the university and the city. Both face similar challenges in the short to medium term (housing and transport most obviously) and they will need to tackle these together. Partnerships between local businesses and cultural and sporting organisations (the university's engagement with Druid Theatre and Connacht rugby being contemporary examples) represent the best way forward for both the city and the university.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

Having worked in education in a variety of contexts and locations, it is clear that among the foremost challenges all for educators, schools and universities, is how to measure their performance. Such measures are, in turn, vital in enabling individuals and institutions to attract the resources that will help them achieve their objectives. It will be interesting to see how models and metrics may develop to give more sophisticated measures of success in education.



## Jennifer Kilroy (née McDermott)

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**2003**

Current job and title:  
**SENIOR BUSINESS PROCESS  
MANAGER, MEDTRONIC**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Originally from Ballina, Co. Mayo, I attended school in the local St. Oliver Plunkett N.S., better known as “the Quay”. I received my secondary education at St. Jesus & Mary Secondary School, Crossmolina. My father, Tony McDermott was from Crossmolina, and my mother, Mary, has relations who live in nearby Keenagh. I enjoyed six happy years, travelling daily by bus to “Gortnorabbey”, with two of my three younger siblings, Antoinette and Sean. I played hockey and basketball in school (mainly on the bench), but my love was choral singing. At a young age, I joined the Ballina Cathedral Choir and remained an active member until I left for NUI Galway in 2000 to study Commerce. Fifteen years later, my youngest sister has returned to study Occupational Therapy, haven chosen NUI Galway for her studies also. I am based in Oranmore with my husband, Kevin Kilroy from Caltra, and my daughter Pippa. In my spare time, I like to visit my godson Ben, continue to sing with the Galway Baroque Singers, participate in coaching forums and events. I enjoy learning about performance in sports, with a special interest in GAA teams.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

Arriving at NUI Galway in 2000, I stayed in full board accommodation or ‘digs’ (as it was called) on Inchagoill road. During first year, I met a great bunch of people who I still consider to be my closest friends today. Forming friendships and networks at NUI Galway was one of the highlights of my time there. The B. Comm was a rich learning course, as many other disciplines attended commerce modules. I



met a diverse range of people across many disciplines including Engineering, IT, Law, and Arts. At NUI Galway, I joined the Choral Society and enjoyed many concerts at venues in Galway, Cork and Italy. The student union facilities provided a great social setting for playing cards, losing pool competitions and post exam celebrations. The social scene complimented strong academic foundations, where the centrally located library became a meeting point for study groups and group assignments. The NUI Galway library continues

to innovate in its service to students today. As a recent PhD graduate, it was one of my most valued resources. The on-site chapel also provides a safe haven for last hope prayers, when library contributions are exhausted! Some key academic memories from my B. Comm include: understanding the Irish economy through the witty words of Dr. Kane, exploring the nuances of change management with the case-study based teachings of Ms. Maureen Maloney, and crunching numbers with Mr. Warnock and Mr. Currie in accounting.

### CAREER TO DATE

Following a first class honours B. Comm, I had a choice of the higher diploma in education (qualification for secondary teaching) at NUI Galway; some graduate jobs; or, a progression to masters level. I decided on the one-year Masters in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations. After starting the Masters programme, I was lucky enough

to receive the NUI Galway fellowship award which enabled me to stop working and focus on my studies. In 2004, Medtronic (my current employer) opened a graduate opportunity to NUI Galway. I started at Medtronic as an associate HR specialist. After one year, I received

a permanent contract as a HR generalist, and progressed to Senior HR generalist in 2006. The B. Comm and masters programme provided superb preparation for a career in HRM, especially with CIPD accreditation. While at Medtronic, I had the opportunity

to complete Green Belt Lean Sigma certification, building an expanded skill set in continuous improvement. From this platform, I moved to a continuous improvement role, transferring to a traditionally engineering function as a Lean Sigma Black Belt. For the past seven years, I have worked in the area of lean culture change, continuous improvement and six sigma problem-solving. As a senior manager now, I sit on the Medtronic Galway New Product Development and Customer Innovation Centre leadership team, as well as the Minneapolis-based Global Operational Excellence team. In this role, I work daily on expanding lean thinking along the value stream to Manufacturing, New Product Development, Suppliers, Distribution and Hospitals.

*Business education could benefit, in my opinion, from greater hands-on experiment based learning where cause-and-effect can be explored in advance of real-world introduction.*

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

In my view, recognising that business education has evolved significantly over the past century, a set of new challenges now lies ahead. Firstly, the rate of learning in the business environment must be exceeded in business research, if education is to add value. The natural and physical sciences have evolved to an experiment based paradigm that enables advancement of knowledge in un-tested or new fields. Business education could benefit, in my opinion, from greater hands-on experiment based learning where cause-and-effect can be explored in advance of real-world introduction. Secondly, business education must recognise its responsibility to the employee. Many courses are taught from a management perspective, often underpinned by the flawed assumption that “management knows best”. Given the challenges now of work-life balance, workplace stress, atypical work arrangements and the mobile office, it would appear that the contribution of business education to the employee experience may need to be higher on the agenda. For example, what type of principles and values should businesses adopt to ensure the talents of employees are nurtured in all global locations? Finally, competitive pressures will require all business functions to ‘earn their keep’ in organisations. I would suggest that teaching ‘business for business sake’ is no longer viable – in fact

*Given the challenges now of work-life balance, workplace stress, atypical work arrangements and the mobile office, it would appear that the contribution of business education to the employee experience may need to be higher on the agenda.*

it is a constraint to growth. Connecting business to value, either service or product will be key. Business education may be challenged with how traditional business processes can readily adapt to changing customer value propositions in future.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

My favourite place in Galway City has long been NUI Galway. NUI Galway represents in many ways all that is wonderful about Galway. The city’s history can be felt in the beautiful architecture of the quadrangle. The diversity of academic courses mirrors well the diversity in people and sectors evident in the local Galway economy. The arts and cultural aspects, for which Galway is famous, are evident in the James Hardiman Library archives and displays, as well as in the many music, cultural and art events held at the beautiful Aula Maxima. In addition, the university’s relationships with local industry represents well the collaborative ‘small town’ feel of the relatively (at least in Ireland) large city of Galway. I am always proud to recommend the city of Galway for a short visit or for a longer term residential move. I have adapted the city as my home since coming to university here. I enjoy its restaurants, music and theatre, shops and friendly streets. However, when it comes to GAA football, as a Mayo native, I know where to draw the line between my first home and my

second. With sincerity though, I hope NUI Galway continues to thrive and adapt at a rate that meets the needs of its students, and likewise the city, for its residents.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In my opinion innovation is the lifeblood of enterprise and entrepreneurship. I have been fortunate in my career to witness the power of innovation in treating life-threatening and life-limiting illnesses through innovation in medical devices. Connecting innovation to real human needs offers significant growth opportunity, as well as the opportunity to be part of something that makes a real difference to the lives of others. From my perspective, cross-functional collaboration, close connection with the human need (the patient in the case of medical devices), carefully applied problem definition, solution generation and design processes are key to success. I am continuously amazed by the creativity of the human mind. I have found that groups have a special creative ability that supercedes those of the individual. Unleashing the synergy of diverse groups, be it functional, cultural, gender or ability differences, is an iceberg, that I believe, the world is just now touching the tip of.

*Connecting innovation to real human needs offers significant growth opportunity, as well as the opportunity to be part of something that makes a real difference to the lives of others.*

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

For many people, work makes up approximately 50% of their waking hours. In my opinion, that amount of any human time is precious. As such, it is important that people are nurtured, valued and supported in work and business. I have benefited from help and support of others, as well as the space to grow my strengths to feel successful. I aspire to do the same for others, so that they can have positive experiences that carry over into their health, self-esteem and home life. The B. Comm provided an excellent launch pad for my career. NUI Galway has continued to have a connection with me since I graduated. I hope I can return the assistance to those staff that supported me so far in my career, and provide future students with the opportunities that I have received.



## Marguerite Larkin

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1991

Current job and title:  
**PARTNER – HEAD OF  
AUDIT & RISK ADVISORY,  
DELOITTE**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I am originally from Portumna in county Galway and studied Commerce in UCG as it was then known from 1988 to 1991. After I left NUI Galway I completed a Masters in Accounting sponsored by Deloitte as part of their graduate programme and joined Deloitte in 1992. I now live and work in Dublin. I am extremely lucky to have three beautiful children, two girls and a boy, ranging from age 3 to 9 and the support of a great partner who understands the demands of balancing professional career and family life. I have a close affinity to Galway and we spend a lot of time over the summer and during holidays in Connemara with the kids. There is nothing quite like a bracing walk along Gurteen beach in Roundstone to clear the mind!

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

Both academically and socially I have nothing but fond memories of UCG. I believe UCG is a fantastic university and in particular the B. Comm – in those days (and still does!) the course included a number of broad business subjects as well as the more specialised accounting stream subjects. I received an excellent business learning which gave me the grounding and ability to specialise in later years. I was inspired by many of my lecturers who strongly encouraged the development of an enquiring mind. From a social perspective there is something really special about Galway – having lived in a number of cities since – there is a uniqueness to Galway perhaps because it is a University city that is very special.

## CAREER TO DATE

I completed my Chartered Accountancy training in Deloitte and received an excellent training across a broad range of clients in a number of sectors ranging from consumer business, manufacturing and technology. I spent a brief time working in the financial services sector but I personally enjoyed consumer and technology businesses and have specialised in these sectors over the majority of my career to date. I worked in Chicago with Deloitte US in my early professional career which was a great personal and professional experience – it was my first real exposure to global teams and diversity of culture and thought me the importance of adaptability and the need to respect different cultures. I have been fortunate in my career to work with, and advise, great clients from an early stage that were raising finance, acquiring business or generally expanding internationally. A key part of my role is mobilising international teams and leading and coordinating services across multiple jurisdictions to support clients in completion of complex cross border transactions. Deloitte recognises ambition and talent and I was fortunate to be promoted early through my career from manager through to, director and partner. In fact, I was the youngest female partner at the time at 30 in 2002. In 2008 I was appointed leader of the Consumer Business and Technology Audit Group.

I have been a member of the Leadership team for the last five years serving initially as Clients & Markets leader, focusing on our

external market positioning and industry client propositions. In 2015 I took up the role of Head of Audit & Risk Advisory. Deloitte Ireland employs approximately 2,000 people and our audit practice is c. 700 people including 30 partners. It is a great time to take on this role and a great challenge

in the context of the regulatory changes and other market dynamics. I spend approx. 70% of my time working with many of the firms largest and most complex clients across a range of industry sectors with the balance of my time spent on this management role.

Outside of my role in

Deloitte I also sit on the Board of Irish Youth Foundation, a charity focused on improving the welfare of disadvantaged and vulnerable children through funding access to education and support.

*In my view it's important that the education provided to business students equips students with the skills to think outside the box and be comfortable to deal with uncertainty rather than black and white answers.*

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

In my view it's important that the education provided to business students equips students with the skills to think outside the box and be comfortable to deal with uncertainty rather than black and white answers. Part of me worries that students have become very focused on professional exams and are losing the ability to develop a problem solving capability. It is important that business education equips graduates with relationship building skills – critical to be effective in business. As the well-worn phrase goes “people buy from people”, from people that they trust and have a connection with regardless of business sector.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

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After a deep economic crisis, recovery is certainly underway in many sectors. My personal view is that despite growth of in excess of 7% in 2015, the economy is still fragile given high borrowing levels by government and in many segments of the indigenous sector – which will take a number of further years of growth to get overall debt to sustainable levels. In 2015 our exports sector in particular has grown significantly but has arguably experienced a bounce from the weak euro which has positively impacted many exports particularly in the pharma sector priced in US\$ - I wonder how sustainable this is and points to our vulnerability as an economy to external factors. We need to strive to continue to balance FDI which undoubtedly is of critical importance to Ireland, with the equally important indigenous industry. It is also encouraging to see positive trends in unemployment levels. There is certainly a more positive consumer sentiment and confidence which in turn is fuelling increased consumer spending and growth in service and retail sectors.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

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NUI Galway has changed significantly since the 1990s – the investment and sheer scale of the campus is impressive. As alumni it is wonderful to see the University's increased position in the World University Rankings which is a testament to the focus the University has on investment and quality. As the Leader of the Deloitte Ireland audit practice I am impressed by the quality and calibre of business students from NUI Galway and it is one of the universities we focus on for a source of smart talented graduates. Galway City is a vibrant city and has benefited

over the years from a strong FDI presence both in Galway and the western region. Like all major cities Galway suffered during the financial crisis but the recovery signs are positive. In my view there is significant opportunity for growth in the West and in fact Deloitte recently opened an office in Galway as we want to have a strong local presence in the West. To continue to ensure Galway is attractive for FDI I believe continued investment in infrastructure and ease of access is extremely important to ensure that Galway and the western region can positively compete for FDI investment.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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I have a simple motto that my father passed to me as a young student, at the time to engender a strong work ethic, "simply be the best that you can be". Today as I reflect on my career to date probably what has stood to me the most is a drive to continue to learn and be exposed to new situations that challenge me personally. I really enjoy working with people and helping clients to succeed – building strong relationships are important to me and gives me great satisfaction. My work and my ability to succeed is all about the people on the team – having really good talented people who enjoy what they do, deliver to high standards, and have some fun along the way is a key to success. My family is hugely important and success to me is to be happy both personally and professionally – I am incredibly fortunate to have three wonderful children, a great husband and a challenging career to boot.



## Olive Loughnane

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1996

Current job and title:  
**STATISTICIAN,  
CENTRAL STATISTICS  
OFFICE**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I was born in Cork and lived in Douglas Cork until our family moved to the parish of Kilconieron in Co Galway when I was four. I am the oldest of seven children and I attended St Joseph's National School Carrabane, St Raphael's College Loughrea and St Brigid's Vocational school Loughrea. As a second level student I knew from an early stage that I wanted to study Commerce. I was fortunate to have an establishment of the calibre of NUI Galway on my doorstep. The tales I told of life in the University obviously had an impact as I was followed to NUI Galway by my sister Ann who completed a BA and a HDipPsych. I moved back to Cork in 1999 when I joined the CSO. I now live with my husband Martin Corkery and our three young children in Coachford, 30k from Cork city. I enjoy life in Coachford and I am an active member of the community here.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I was 17 when I started studying for my B. Comm in UCG, as it was then known. I was a bit shell shocked to find myself on campus with 6,000 students and it took me a while to adjust. I commuted from home when I first started university. This helped to ease the transition but it wasn't until I moved into Baile na Coiribe that I became truly immersed in student life and had an opportunity to enjoy the city. As a 12 year old I joined Loughrea Athletic Club so the Women's Athletic Club was a natural choice when clubs day came round. At the time there were two athletics clubs, a women's and a men's. When I queried the logic, I was told that it was a decision taken purely to bolster funding and in reality we were one. I was proud to wear the maroon and white on the podium a number of times in the Intervarsity Championships and

I still hold one of the University records. My aforementioned sister gleefully grabbed the other. I thoroughly enjoyed all the subjects that I studied during my B. Comm. I found it hard to make a choice on which area to specialise but eventually my analytical side prevailed and I majored in Economics. I was disappointed to be leaving HR and Marketing behind. I graduated in 1996 and I was sorry to say goodbye to Galway.

### CAREER TO DATE

It's safe to say that my career to date has been different to that of my B. Comm classmates. When I left University I was delighted to get a job as a trainee Management Accountant in Kerry Group. After Kerry I spent a short period working with the Comptroller and Auditor General before joining the CSO as a Statistician in 1999.

In the background my athletics career was progressing rapidly. I surprised a few by qualifying to represent Ireland at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. I finished a creditable 35th of 52 competitors despite being ranked 50th on the start line. I was happy but I wanted more. I set myself a target of a podium finish within 10 years. I put a plan in place to achieve my goal and took a career break from CSO. Success came at the 2009 World Championships where I became World Champion. I was honoured to represent Ireland at four consecutive Olympic Games and six World Championships during my sporting career.

I retired from sport in 2013 and returned to work in CSO where I work in the company

of a number of fellow Galway graduates. I have had some very interesting opportunities in CSO and my current responsibility is Crime Statistics. I am member of the Athletes Commission of the Olympic Council of Ireland, the High Performance Committee of Sport Ireland and the Healthy Ireland Council.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

When I attended the UCG open night as a Leaving Cert student I had pretty much made up my mind that Commerce was for me. My group were met by Professor Jim Doolan who proceeded to discuss the options

that studying for a B. Comm would open up for us. Jim concluded by saying that even if we didn't work in any of the subject areas of the degree, a B. Comm was a wonderful addition for life in general. As a 16 year

old I felt that three years of study was a fairly large undertaking just to have it in my back pocket and I wasn't quite convinced as to how applicable it was to life in general in any event. It's been over 20 years since I heard Jim speak but I have a much greater appreciation of the point he was making. I don't think Jim had a career in sport in mind when he made the statement but my degree certainly had a huge impact on my sporting career. Without my B. Comm I may not have had the inclination or ability to research what best international practise was in my event nor I may not have focussed on building a world class support team around me to assist me in my endeavours. Without either I would not have enjoyed the success I was fortunate enough

*The need for entrepreneurs and enterprise in general is unquestionable... It's not just about large companies. On a smaller scale entrepreneurs are increasing employment across a variety of economic sectors...*



to experience. Jim was correct, business and a business education is not just about thriving in the corporate world. Fundamentally everything revolves around business and my career is a strong example of its universal applicability and relevance.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

I have great memories of my time in NUI Galway. I am fortunate enough to return on a semi regular basis and I am always struck by the extent to which it has developed and continues to develop. As a 17 year old I was overawed by the size of the student body. In the 20 years that followed the number of students has almost tripled. As an athlete I trained in “the Bubble”, a pressurised inflatable structure that would allegedly deflate if the outer and inner doors were simultaneously left open. Current sporting facilities include a pool, a climbing wall and an elite gym. Development on the scale of the current €400 million capital investment programme is only possible through the vision of the University staff and management. As an educational institution the importance of academic achievement is obviously to the forefront in the minds of those attending and working there. However, the relaxed manner in which academic excellence is nurtured and developed is hugely beneficial to all. NUI Galway is fortunate to be situated in one of the most vibrant, cultural and exciting cities in the world. The City and the University are closely intertwined making it a wonderful place to work and study.

### **ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

The need for entrepreneurs and enterprise in general is unquestionable. Some of the most successful Irish companies such as

Chanelle in my hometown of Loughrea, would not be in existence were it not for the passion, vision and tenacity of their founders. It’s not just about large companies. On a smaller scale entrepreneurs are increasing employment across a variety of economic sectors and creating employment in regional areas that are not touched by multinational investment. Entrepreneurs are the people who leave tradition behind and effect social change. Companies such as Animated Language Learning who work with the research team in NUI Galway are making real changes to peoples’ lives. Entrepreneurship is not without its challenges. Personally I would struggle with the level of risk that’s often required to set up and build a business and have huge admiration for those who do. I believe that it’s imperative that entrepreneurship is encouraged by society in general but more specifically by government and policymakers. I hope that the appointment of fellow B. Comm graduate Pádraig Ó Céidigh to Seanad Éireann will give a voice to those with the courage and commitment to start a business.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

Although my career to date has taken a different direction to that of my fellow B. Comm graduates I believe that the personal attributes that I needed to develop a successful career in sport are the same as those that my classmates would have required in their careers. I reflect fondly on my time in NUI Galway and I have a high level of gratitude for the education I received there.



## Johannes Luik

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
2012

Current job and title:  
**EUROPEAN EQUITY SALES,  
DAVY CAPITAL MARKETS**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I was born in 1988 in Tallinn, Estonia. My father was a drama actor and my mother a civil servant. My brother had just started school and my parents were working most of the day so I spent a big part of the first 6 years of my childhood living with my grandparents in the countryside. I went to Tallinn French School and studied French, English and Russian as foreign languages. Truth be told, I never strived to be the best in my class at the time; most subjects came quite easy to me so I ended up not putting in much effort. I spent my free time playing in a rock band and taking drama classes. After graduating with rather average grades, I decided to leave home in 2007 and moved to Ireland to start studying hotel management in Shannon College. The hotel industry seemed like a good fit to my personality and I thought that I could make use of the languages I learnt in school. I got some initial exposure to economics and accounting in Shannon, became more interested in business and knew I wanted to learn more about finance in the future. After a placement year in a hotel in Brussels and a year out of college to do my military service I decided to move on to NUI Galway to focus on economics in my final year.

*I had the pleasure of meeting students from all over the world - some of my best friends now were among the visiting Erasmus students at the time.*

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

I ended up in the B. Comm course in NUI Galway in an unusual way. I started my studies in Shannon College of Hotel Management and thanks to a joint programme between the two colleges I was able to transfer my credits over to Galway after two years and finish the course with the rest of the class. Moving between colleges was definitely a challenge as Shannon was a very small college and I was always used to knowing most of the students and faculty by name. But it was also a great opportunity because I had the pleasure of meeting students from all over the world - some of my best friends now were among the visiting Erasmus students at the time. Galway was also different in the sense that I was totally independent. In Shannon, the lecturers made sure that students attended classes and finished their coursework but in Galway I felt a lot more responsibility on my shoulders and it actually pushed me to work harder on my subjects to achieve better grades. I enjoyed the Galway life so much that after graduation from the B. Comm I decided to do a masters course in economics and the M EconSc (International Finance) seemed like the perfect fit to what I believed is interesting in the world of economics. I spent a lot of my free time giving tutorials to undergraduates, which was a great way for me to force myself to catch up on the economics subjects that I never had the opportunity to take.

*I got to witness the revival of the Irish banking sector, the recovery of commercial and residential real-estate markets and an emergence of a number of strong indigenous businesses. Ireland was back on the map and smart money was flowing in from all over the world.*

## CAREER TO DATE

I think I joined equity capital markets at a very interesting time. As I was in the last semester of my master's degree in the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics I had already started looking for an entry level position in financial markets and by the end of the 2012/13 school year I had secured a graduate programme position in Institutional Equity department in Davy Capital Markets in Dublin. My choice to stay in Ireland was mostly because of the belief that the economy had turned a corner and the opportunities to learn and grow professionally would be the best as the recovery was taking place. It turns out that I joined the company at a very opportune time – 2013 was the year of the first IPO in the Irish market since the financial crisis started and since then there have been a number of memorable events in capital markets that I have been involved with very closely. I got to witness the revival of the Irish banking sector, the recovery of commercial and residential real-estate markets and an emergence of a number of strong indigenous businesses. Ireland was back on the map and smart money was flowing in from all over the world. I quickly moved on from the graduate programme in 2014 and I am continuing my career in Davy by providing Irish and European stock ideas to institutional clients in the UK, Europe and the United States.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Business education is a very topical subject in the area of finance. A top class MBA will set you back over \$100k and an additional opportunity cost of 2 years. At the same time the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) charter is becoming as highly, if not more valued in the financial community and it can be completed over a number of years without having to attend any lectures or take time off work.

Most importantly, the CFA can be obtained for a fraction of the cost of an MBA and is in most cases more applicable for positions such as analysts and portfolio managers. Most investment firms already require that candidates have

passed at least one of the three levels so it is clear that the CFA increases employability of a candidate. It is not to say that the MBA has lost its value; it just seems that in areas, such as finance, there are alternative options out there, which is great news for prospective students. From a general business perspective and for moving up in the management chain, the MBA will still be the qualification of choice but hopefully a meaningful alternative will help to reduce its outrageous costs in the future.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

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Ireland has recovered strongly from the recession it entered in 2008 and although it was helped by the strong flow of foreign direct investment by US multinationals,

I believe that the building blocks for a strong economy were always there. The low corporation tax is of course a great benefit and should not be disregarded, but it is only one part of the “Irish equation”. I witnessed first-hand the quality of the Irish education system and having a well-educated, English speaking workforce is a key selling point for a foreign company looking to expand its operations on a global scale. Being a member of the Eurozone is helpful in comparison

to the UK and in light of the recent Brexit result, it seems that Ireland is politically a safer country in which to do business. Ireland is well placed for the years ahead – its main trading partners are growing and most other members of

the Eurozone are still struggling to achieve growth. Therefore, the ECB is likely going to keep monetary policy loose for the foreseeable future and that will lead to a weaker currency which should help boost both exports and tourism. As an open economy, Ireland will always be vulnerable to external shocks but the competitive advantage within Europe will help its economy grow in the long term.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

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Galway is by far my favourite city in Ireland and has been a big influence on my personal development from an academic and a cultural perspective. I have yet to come across another town that is home to so much

*Ireland is well placed for the years ahead – its main trading partners are growing and most other members of the Eurozone are still struggling to achieve growth. As an open economy, Ireland will always be vulnerable to external shocks but the competitive advantage within Europe will help its economy grow in the long term.*

talent, be it musicians, actors, poets, painters or performers. A few months after moving to Galway, I was fortunate enough to meet a group of young artists who organised open mic nights at the Róisín Dubh pub on Lower Dominick Street. Many of them were locals, but there were also those from other parts of Ireland or even abroad who had taken up performing at the event as a past time activity to their studies in NUI

Galway. There is something about Galway city that brings out the artist in students and visitors alike and whereas it is tough to put it into words, the free spirit of Galway can definitely be felt when walking past the buskers on Grafton street. I ended up playing in the Róisín Dubh every Sunday night for almost two years and it provided a great balance to my daily studies in NUI Galway. I have made a pledge to myself that I will make my way down there again in the future.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

As one of the more recent graduates of the commerce course, I am probably not yet qualified to write about success. That said, I have had the opportunity to meet and talk to many successful people in the Irish and international business community and there is a clear common denominator among all of them - a strong work ethic. The chief executives I have met in my career so far are constantly thinking about their business, trying to find ways to make it

*As one of the more recent graduates of the commerce course, I am probably not yet qualified to write about success. That said, I have had the opportunity to meet and talk to many successful people in the Irish and international business community.*

more efficient and take it to the next level. Another prevalent characteristic amongst successful businesspeople that I have noticed is planning - both short and long term. Frankly, I have always been quite terrible at it in the past, but ever since I started working in a fast pace environment with a constant feed of information coming in from different angles, I have noticed that it helps a lot if I put my daily and weekly goals

down on paper and do my best to follow them. I also try to think about where I would like to be in my studies or career in the next 2 and 5 years. Whereas my plans have not played out exactly as expected, it has definitely been helpful to have a guiding idea in the back of my mind that in some way influences every decision I make.





## Daniel McCarthy

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1998

Current job and title:  
**HEAD OF UNIT FOR  
RESOLUTION PLANNING  
AND DECISIONS, SINGLE  
RESOLUTION BOARD  
(BRUSSELS)**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I am an early beneficiary of a far-sighted collaboration between NUI Galway and Shannon College of Hotel Management (now nearly 20 years ago). This unique programme enabled students to combine a Bachelor of Commerce degree at NUI Galway with a Diploma in Hotel Management. The programme provided students with international placements in Europe, the US and beyond. This provided an opportunity to develop both vital cultural awareness and the foreign language skills with the academic knowledge needed to succeed as a graduate. Following the Bachelor of Commerce degree, I was offered a position in the US working for a large hotel and leisure group. I accepted the role and after eighteen months returned to Ireland to complete a Master's degree in Business Studies and subsequently became a chartered accountant. The knowledge and skills acquired through the unique Bachelor of Commerce programme have proved pivotal throughout my career-to-date in consultancy, banking, financial services and regulation.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

Studying in NUI Galway offers students a wide variety of subjects and specialisms matched with a strong core curriculum. The university created a strong sense of belonging and life-long friendships that have acted as an important network of support and

*Studying in NUI Galway offers students a wide variety of subjects and specialisms matched with a strong core curriculum.*

encouragement. The ethos of the university provided a close connection between the lecturers and students that enabled sustained personal and academic development. Notwithstanding the size of the university it still manages to maintain an intimate learning culture. The structured nature of the programme builds students' confidence, ambition and skill-set to succeed in a highly competitive marketplace.

*To succeed in the global economy, commerce graduates must invest in developing and understanding a global perspective. The NUI Galway programme provides the necessary academic knowledge and skills to compete in this environment.*

## CAREER TO DATE

In November 2015, I moved to Brussels as Head of Unit for Resolution Planning and Decisions at the Single Resolution Board (SRB). This role is responsible for ensuring that resolution plans are developed for some of the largest banking groups operating in the Eurozone. These plans are designed to ensure that in the event of a bank failure, professional investors and bondholders incur losses while protecting the taxpayer and maintaining critical economic functions for depositors and other customers. Prior to this, I was employed as a Bank Expert at the European Banking Authority in London, responsible for prudential supervision and risk management. In addition, I covered Crisis Management Groups (CMGs) focused on recovery and resolution planning for globally systemic financial institutions based in the EU.

In 2010, I was employed by the Central Bank of Ireland and led the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Supervision Team. This was the largest credit institution in Ireland

providing off-shore financial services in capital markets corporate lending and private wealth management including through a network of 12 overseas branches and subsidiaries. While at the central bank, I also worked on a range of issues relating to the financial crisis, new credit institution licencing, merger and acquisitions and specialised business model reviews.

In June 2006, I was appointed Divisional Director of Strategy responsible for corporate development at Bank of Scotland Ireland. I was subsequently appointed as a Divisional Director of Finance for Commercial and Corporate Banking, responsible for internal financial management and planning. Prior to this, I worked for six years at PricewaterhouseCoopers corporate finance and strategy division focusing on a wide range of projects including feasibility studies on a number of commercial and hotel ventures, market entry strategies in financial services, as well as a financial review of an airline joint-venture.

On completing the Bachelor of Commerce, I worked as an Executive at Club Corporation of America, a large US hotel and leisure group at their facility in Austin, Texas, US.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

To succeed in the global economy, commerce graduates must invest in developing and understanding a global perspective. The NUI Galway programme provides the necessary academic knowledge and skills to compete in this environment. To continue to succeed

graduates need a point of differentiation. One potential avenue that could be examined in the coming years is the growing importance of an undergraduate internship programme. While NUI Galway offer internships to students, further opportunities to expand and develop these programmes should exist. For an island economy in a globalised world, it is more important than ever to gain perspective and experience in an international environment. The well-known advantages of these internship programmes not only broadens the horizons of students and their knowledge of international community, it opens new possibilities for success, early networking and the likelihood of securing that vital first role on graduation in a competitive employment market.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

Despite the impact of the global financial crisis on Ireland, its competitive position remains intact. The structural and geopolitical advantages of time-zone, English language, educated work-force, infrastructure, currency, commercial legal system, proximity to the UK and Europe, competitive corporate taxation policy and a long and successful track-record working with multinationals, all remain relevant. Ireland, as a small open

economy has demonstrated an ability to respond quickly to both opportunities and threats. In the coming years, these market forces will continue to evolve and present new competitive realities. The challenge is to spot the right opportunities and position Ireland as an economy that provides 'answers' to a changing world. This will certainly include continuing to forge links as a pivotal bridgehead between the US and Europe. It also requires careful analysis as to how Ireland should best position itself to a changed relationship between the UK and the rest of Europe. More long-term, the rise of China as the second-largest economy in the world, and notwithstanding the recent downturn, provides untapped potential as it repeats what the US did in the 1960s, in establishing European headquarters as it expands globally. If Ireland can achieve the same level of success as a European hub for China, the

future of the economy will be very strong. However, to succeed with China will take more effort. It will require a willingness to invest and engage with a less familiar culture. Australia has already demonstrated what can be achieved through investment in education and building cultural understanding and appreciation among its twenty four million citizens. This changed

*The challenge is to spot the right opportunities and position Ireland as an economy that provides 'answers' to a changing world.*

*Having worked in a variety of organisations, the key differentiators that I have observed that clearly mark out successful people are (a) advanced communication skills, (b) ability to quickly build trust and (c) strategic thinkers that engage with stakeholders to understand their current and future problems and to identify leading solutions that work.*



outlook has resulted in huge dividends for the Australian society and its economy. Ireland can similarly position itself as a reliable trade partner and bridgehead without the geopolitical rivalries faced by other competitors. In economic terms, it is worth noting that a similar level of success achieved with China to that of US companies operating in Ireland would contribute more than €3bn per annum in taxes, 140,000 jobs among just 700 firms.

*If Ireland can achieve the same level of success as a European hub for China, the future of the economy will be very strong.*

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

Galway is a city like no other and the university sits right at its heart. To its west, Galway looks out on the vast Atlantic Ocean towards the US, while to the east, the European continent beckons with all its history, diversity and global marketplace. Galway's location and the university's strong academic record lend themselves to an education environment where it is possible to observe and understand emerging trends. Having gained this vantage point as an undergraduate, it has remained with me in helping to analyse and make sense of business challenges. As an undergraduate Galway offers a great place to live and study. The university has a vibrant student spirit and social scene with a full range of sports clubs and facilities all set in an amazing landscape with an accessible seafront. The university campus comprises both state-of-art buildings and historic architecture that offers a great learning environment. The popularity of NUI Galway is easy to recognise with a high-proportion of European and global students attending and completing programmes.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

Having worked in a variety of organisations, the key differentiators that I have observed that clearly mark out successful people are (a) advanced communication skills, (b) ability to quickly build trust and (c) strategic thinkers that engage with stakeholders to understand their current and future problems and to identify leading solutions that work.

On a personal level, I found the critical life-skills of perseverance, flexibility and self-awareness vital in dealing with set-backs. Equally, those same skills ensured I could build on my foundation. To be successful you must believe in your own self-worth and be prepared to take measured risks. As the quotation says "The biggest obstacles to success are the barriers our mind creates" [anon].



## Felicity McCarthy (née Leavy)

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1994**

Current job and title:  
**FOUNDER,  
SPARKDIGITAL**

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### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

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Brought up in Mullingar, I have always considered Galway as a second home after spending my B. Comm and subsequent three years in Galway. I now live in Dublin and am married with two children. I was brought up in a family run business, so it's not surprising perhaps that after many years of working in the multinational tech world, I have started up my own business, SparkDigital, in 2014. SparkDigital was borne from a desire to bring my highly coveted skills to more Irish organisations, large and small, through consultancy, training and mentoring.

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### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

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I specialised in Marketing and French in my B. Comm years, both of which have stood me in good stead. I have continued a career in marketing to this day, although it is fair to say that marketing has changed dramatically in the years since graduating with a B. Comm! I went on to participate in the Postgraduate Diploma in Marketing Practice (DMP) at NUI Galway in 1995. During that year I completed a work placement at Nortel Galway, where I worked for three years and met many lifelong friends, including my (now) husband! Fast forward to 2016, and I have now completed my upgrade Masters from the DMP, having been awarded an MSc in Marketing Practice in Oct 2015.

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### CAREER TO DATE

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#### **1998 – 2006 Dell**

Held a range of roles at Dell including Online Marketing Manager, UK & Ireland. Progressed to Head of Digital Marketing team for EMEA, and also held other EMEA roles including Brand Manager EMEA.

**2006 – 2009 eBay**

Head of Marketing, based in European HQ in Dublin. Responsible for acquiring and retaining demand and supply side clients through Digital Marketing tools and campaigns.

**2009 Acorn Marketing, Client Services Director**

Lead client facing interactions for Direct Response Marketing Clients, from campaign initiation and ideation, to execution and measurement, across a range of marketing channels online and offline.

**2010 – 2014 Facebook, Head of Marketing EMEA**

Lead Marketing team for EMEA with responsibility for Small and Medium business clients. Lead European and Global projects to innovate and activate 1M+ Small and Medium sized business. Responsibilities included acquiring new business customers, retaining business customers, educating existing customers and marketing communications to the Small and Medium Business audience.

**2014 Present, Founder & Owner, SparkDigital**

Digital Marketing & Social Media Marketing - Consultant & Trainer. Clients include Daft.ie, Bank of Ireland, Microsoft Ireland, 123.ie, Gigaset Europe, Irish Times Training, Digital Marketing Institute, TopOil, Lumafit, Irish Internet Association. SparkDigital has clients in UK, Germany, Austria, Australia. Projects include launching new business, entering new overseas markets, full transition from traditional marketing business to digital marketing business model, complete digital marketing strategy, Social media strategy, and growing/upskilling teams.

I started SparkDigital as I felt strongly that there is a significant knowledge gap between

the skills in the multinational tech sector and indigenous Irish businesses. SparkDigital works closely with businesses to understand their digital marketing challenges and areas where there may be skill or knowledge gaps. SparkDigital address those requirements by developing frameworks and strategies for business growth via digital channels, and if necessary upskilling and developing teams, to drive measurable results.

**BUSINESS EDUCATION**

Business education is extremely challenging as technology is changing the landscape so dramatically. This makes it challenging for those who are already in business, and have had traditional business education without the latest technology focus, and perhaps struggle to embrace current technologies. The good news is that there are many high quality education options for those who need to upskill, albeit challenging to fit into our busy working schedules. In my opinion, languages continue to be an area where there is much work to be done, to close the gap with some of our European counterparts in the business environment. This is becoming ever more important in an increasingly global village, with high levels of mobility in our workforce. Having worked for multinationals for many years, I have seen first hand how difficult it can be to hire high calibre digital marketing roles, with strong language capability.

**THE IRISH ECONOMY**

I believe the Irish economy is currently recovering well due to high levels of Foreign Direct Investment – which is fantastic and something I have benefited from myself. However, the sustained growth and health of the economy will be driven by indigenous business, and I would like to see continued

investment in this area of growth. Starting up a business requires access to funding, access to expertise/advice and access to infrastructure (especially broadband outside larger urban areas), all of which can be challenging for new businesses. Even the taxation system can be difficult to negotiate for a start up business. These factors create significant barriers for people who might consider starting their own business – in my opinion, it is important that the mechanisms in place should genuinely support indigenous business creation, for sustained economic growth.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

I love Galway – have wonderful memories and lifelong friends scattered across the country and the globe, from my time in Galway. I couldn't recommend anywhere more highly to live or visit. NUI Galway is a great university to attend, both socially and academically. I would love to see NUI Galway get even more credit for the academic achievement which has been earned and well deserved.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

I received excellent advice from Prof Jim Ward (NUI Galway) shortly after I graduated with a DMP in 1995 – I had just changed role at Nortel and was wondering if I should have stayed in my first role there, which I had come to know very well. He said “When you get comfortable in a role, you've stopped learning, it is time to move on, as quickly as possible. You must continue to change, in order to learn.” I have valued this advice highly in my career since. In fact I've come to embrace change and move toward it, rather than away from it!



**Danny McCoy**

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1987**

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Current job and title:  
**CEO, IBEC**

## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Born in 1967, I grew up in Circular Road Tuam, Co. Galway, the youngest and only son of Tony and Mary McCoy and brother of Geraldine and Deirdre. I'm now living and working in Dublin, married to Ailish and have four children – Toby, Sam, Eve and William. I attended school in Tuam; at first with the nuns of the Presentation Convent and then at the Christian Brothers School. My childhood friend and neighbour was Tom Acton now a senior faculty member of the NUI

Galway's School of Business and Economics. Growing up my interests were in basketball and athletics, although you couldn't escape playing GAA football in North Galway. Tuam was a great town to grow up in with lots of boarders from across Ireland in the three schools Jarlaths, the Pres, and, my personal favourite, the Mercy giving it a cosmopolitan air. My academic interests were always towards business subjects as I particularly enjoyed political and economic current affairs. The 1980s were a very depressed economic time for Ireland and Tuam in particular, but the opportunity to go to "the uni" was a lucky timing for me as my generation was among the first to have relatively easy access. For this I remain grateful.

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

My first experience of the then UCG was the summer of 1982 when my late sister Ger brought Tom Acton and I into the Arts Building. It was exhilarating, and somewhat

daunting, but the seed was sown to come back as a student to "the uni". I had spent most of my Leaving Cert years thinking about joining the Army Cadets but it didn't work out. In any case it was always going to be the B. Comm as my preferred course. Arriving in UCG in

*In any case it was always going to be the B. Comm as my preferred course. Arriving in UCG in October 1984 was an exciting time and certainly a rite of passage. Lectures were stimulating enough but all the new friends and social life were the true revelation.*

October 1984 was an exciting time and certainly a rite of passage. Lectures were stimulating enough but all the new friends and social life were the true revelation. The concept of the "Thursday Night in Salthill" still remains as evocative today as

it was wondrous then. The three years passed far too quickly but I enjoyed academic life focusing mainly on economics subjects. The Comm classes in the mid 1980s were cursed with semesters, unlike the rest of the college, so we had to study for Christmas exams much to the derision of our friends in other faculties. Graduation day in October 1987 was a proud day, made memorable by a speech by the legendary Michael Smurfit offering a "greed is good" type oration much to chagrin of the now President Michael D Higgins who was on the podium that day too.

## CAREER TO DATE

After graduating from Galway, I went to UCD to do a Masters in Economics. Whilst there I also tutored in the then NIHE, Dublin. A lectureship in economics opportunity arose in NIHE in 1988 and I stayed there until 1990 during which time it had been renamed Dublin City University. I then moved to the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) as a research assistant between

1990-92. I worked on macroeconomic models of the European economy with application to environmental issues. On the back of this research I moved to University College London from 1992-96 where I lectured environmental economics and joined the Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment (CSERGE). In 1995 I also lectured a masters course at the University of Oxford. Returning to Ireland in 1996 I joined the Central Bank as a senior economist working on the macroeconomic impacts of European Monetary Union. In 2000 I returned to the ESRI to lead its short-term economic forecasting as Editor of the Quarterly Economic Commentary. During that time I led a European Forecasting Network of eleven research institutes working for the European Commission. In 2005 I moved to Ibec, the Irish business representative organisation, as Director of Policy before becoming CEO in 2009. I have been a member of many public grouping including the Commission on Taxation, the National Economic and Social Council, the National Competitiveness Council as well as a part time lecturing post in Trinity College Dublin.

## **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

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Business education has certainly developed greatly since the mid 1980s with many more professionals taking MBAs and charter director courses. The professionalisation of business and management requires

*Modern management is more likely to occur in networked environments which require much more nuanced people skills. The better business schools place heavy emphasis on personal development and so called softer competencies like empathy.*

solid educational underpinning which allows practitioners the analytical basis for developing and executing business strategies. Modern management is more likely to occur in networked environments which require much more nuanced people skills. The better business schools place heavy emphasis on

personal development and so called softer competencies like empathy. I had the pleasure of being an adviser to the NUI Galway Executive MBA programme and it is clear that the leadership there are aware of the international trends and delivering a best

in class programme in Galway.

## **THE IRISH ECONOMY**

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The Irish economy is set for the next phase of its remarkable growth story. The predicted potential growth rate is 4% per annum in volume terms over the next two decades. This is made up of 2% productivity growth and 2% employment growth. The productivity is a result of the substantial investment in capital investment over the last decade which has transformed the underlying capital/labour ratio and the investment in human capital driven by education and skill developments. The employment prospects will come from a significant growth in the population that will be underpinned by strong fertility rates and large inward migration. The ambition for the island of Ireland should be for a population of 10 million by the 200th anniversary of the Great Famine. This ambition will overcome the historic failure of the State to sustain

our population. In order to achieve this we need to invest in public infrastructure and redirect an economic over-reliance on the eastern seaboard. The most potent symbol of that intent will be a commitment to build a motorway network connecting our Atlantic cities from Cork to Derry.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

Economic geography demonstrates time and time again that regions can benefit from increasing returns to scale. Galway and NUI Galway have grown significantly over the last thirty years on the back of foreign direct investment in growth sectors like medical devices and an indigenous arts environment that combine to give the conditions for creative cities. This global trend towards urbanisation and creative industries means that Galway should witness even stronger growth in the coming decades but it requires vision and public investment, not least in the higher level educational institutions.

*This global trend towards urbanisation and creative industries means that Galway should witness even stronger growth in the coming decades but it requires vision and public investment, not least in the higher level educational institutions.*

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

Reflecting on my experience since leaving Galway, the trait I most admire in business is resilience. Entrepreneurs require it to follow their ideas, policymakers require it to pursue long term policies that matter over short-term expediency and university faculty require it to adjust to fast changing environments to remain relevant. All plans hit problems, so resilience and adaptability are key. It is these traits I most value from my time in the Commerce faculty in Galway. The range of subjects and topics; the experience of meeting people from different disciplines and backgrounds; all helped to hone adaptability. The resilience was certainly boosted by the incessant rain of Galway life but in the round these were formative experiences which I was honoured to have had.



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## Tom McDermott

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**2006**

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Current job and title:  
**LECTURER,  
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS,  
UCC;  
VISITING FELLOW,  
GRANTHAM RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE ON CLIMATE  
CHANGE AND THE  
ENVIRONMENT, LONDON  
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS**

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## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

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I was born and raised in Moycullen, on the outskirts of Galway City. The youngest of six, I have three brothers and two sisters. Both my parents are also from Galway – my dad from the city and my mother from Dunmore in north County Galway. They met in NUI Galway as students in the 60s. My dad was a maths lecturer in NUI Galway until he retired in 2008. My mother was, among other things, an Irish teacher, co-founder of the Galway Fair Trade Shop, and a long-term campaigner on issues of social and environmental justice, with groups including Trócaire, Amnesty and the Labour Party. With that background and inspiration it's hardly surprising that I ended up teaching and researching in the area of the environment and economic development in poorer countries. In 2012 I married my long-term girlfriend (then of 12 years!), Caoimhe, and in 2014 our daughter Maria was born in St George's Hospital in London. We also have a pet dog named Woody. Outside of work and family, I have a love of music and Galway hurling – for my sins!

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## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

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Before choosing to study for the B. Comm I had an interest in economics, but also wanted to try other things, so the B. Comm seemed a good fit as it offered the opportunity to try a range of subjects before specialising. I took a while to settle in and found some of the material challenging at first – especially as I hadn't taken any business subjects for the Leaving Cert. I gradually found my feet and really enjoyed it by my final year. I also appreciated that the lecture schedule was not too demanding, leaving some time for extra-curricular activities! I loved my year on Erasmus in Italy as part of the B. Comm



International programme. I really enjoyed being part of a smaller class taking the B. Comm with Italian as we got to know each other very well. I particularly enjoyed my final year, when I specialised in economics and got to choose a number of modules that I was interested in studying – development economics, history of economic thought and environmental economics in particular – which were taught by great lecturers. I loved the atmosphere in NUI Galway, which is very relaxed and friendly and lots going on with clubs and societies. I got a great grounding in economics, in particular, which was my specialism in final year. The B. Comm was the starting point for a successful career (to date!) in academia. I also learned to speak Italian, which was a nice bonus!

### CAREER TO DATE

Immediately after the B. Comm I went on to the MSc in Economics in NUI Galway. From there I worked briefly in the private sector before taking a job as a lecturer in DCU. I started my PhD at Trinity College Dublin in 2009, under the supervision of Frank Barry and Richard Tol, and following completion of my studies in 2012 I got a position as a post-doc at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics, where I was later promoted to Research Officer. I moved back to Ireland at the end of 2014 to take up a position as a lecturer at the School of Economics in UCC. I am now also a Principal Investigator at the Environmental Research Institute in UCC, and a Visiting Fellow at the Grantham Research Institute at LSE.

My research focuses on the economic impacts of extreme weather events such as floods and storms, and how economies – particularly in the developing world – can

adapt to the uncertain future risks posed by climate change. In 2016 I am leading a new research project at UCC – in partnership with colleagues from LSE and funded by the Environmental Protection Agency – on the economic impacts of floods in Ireland and the options for managing flood risk – which has become very topical given recent flooding! I am also co-editor of a book on *The Economics of Climate Resilient Development*, to be published by Edward Elgar in 2016.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

Teaching is one of the most rewarding parts of being an academic, and the interaction with students is a regular source of learning, insight and inspiration. Unfortunately, my own discipline of economics can sometimes seem daunting to a novice, with its equations and graphs, models, laws etc. The academic elite in economics have even been accused of using mathematical sophistication to obscure rather than illuminate important policy debates. Without wanting to downplay the importance of intellectual rigour, what inspired me to study economics was ideas – and the possibility of using economics to understand the world around me. A good introduction to economics should encourage students to use the economic way of thinking. That is, to apply simple economic concepts and logic to everyday problems. The discipline is evolving rapidly – for example through the emergence of new sub-disciplines, such as ecological, behavioural and complexity economics – partly in response to perceived failures in not predicting the last financial crisis, but also in response to a growing awareness of the challenge of achieving sustainable patterns of economic growth and prosperity. These issues are gradually making their way on to the economics courses taught to undergraduate

business students. It is an exciting time to be a part of the discipline.

### THE IRISH ECONOMY

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Ireland's economic recovery appears to be gathering pace. The economy (as measured by GNP) grew by 6.9% in 2014 and by 5.6% in the first three quarters of 2015. This puts Ireland among the fastest growing economies in the world, rivalling growth rates in the likes of China and India. But with the recovery comes a number of concerns familiar to any student of Irish economic development; an over-reliance on foreign owned tech companies; the regional and spatial imbalance of development patterns; and of course further symptoms of a deeply dysfunctional housing market. From an astonishing housing bubble and bust less than 10 years ago, we are now once again in a situation of chronic undersupply resulting in rapidly rising house prices. National house prices in late 2015 (Sep-Nov) were rising at between 6 and 9% year-on-year, compared with a consumer price index that was falling by between 0.2 and 0.3% over the same period. As a society, we seem unable to build an adequate quantity and quality of accommodation in the places where people want to live. This has non-trivial consequences for the economy – not to mention social impacts. High accommodation costs push up wage demands and other business costs, resulting in a loss of competitiveness; a lack of affordable housing in our cities forces people into hugely wasteful and unsustainable commuting patterns, creating additional pollution and congestion, stress and above all wasting time. Poor planning also exacerbates the misery and financial cost of flooding, as witnessed in the recent past. Creating a more sustainable version of economic recovery will be an

important challenge over the coming years.

### NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

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NUI Galway attracts students from all over Ireland and beyond. Its openness and diversity reflects the culture of the city – Galway's history as a commercial trading hub and port has left its mark in the ease with which it welcomes outsiders.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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To me success is being able to work at something that makes you happy, that you are proud to tell your friends and family about, and that still leaves you with time to enjoy life.





## (Anthony) Val Mc Nicholas

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1969**

Current job and title:  
**RETIRED**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I was born in Swinford Co. Mayo, went to secondary School in St. Jarlath's Tuam and did my Leaving Cert in St. Patrick's Swinford. I was the youngest of 5 children and 6 years young when my father died. I got engaged in Philadelphia to a Swinford girl Vera Tuffy and we married after graduation in '69. I was one of the first of 2 graduates hired by the Ford Motor Co. on its Management Trainee programme and worked as a Labour Relations officer. I studied 2 nights a week and obtained my Cert in Personnel Management. Moved back to Ireland. We have 1 son and 2 daughters, and 7 grandchildren. All of our children are business graduates, married and have very successful careers in Ireland buiochas le Dia.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I did my degree tre Gaeilge under the direction of An tUllamh O Buachalla, was Auditor of the Cumann Trachtala agus Geileagar and Secretary of the Athletics Club. The principal subjects then were Economics, Accountancy and Commercial Law. My college education was paid for by working each summer in London and Philadelphia on a building site during the day and 4 hours in a factory at night. I loved college life as it was vibrant, exciting and culturally stimulating. We had a wonderful cross country team that ran 5 nights a week and danced 2 nights in Seapoint after a cup of coffee and a chocolate cream bun. Very few students had money for drink then and most of us were Pioneers and have remained life long friends in Galway since. Whilst the B. Comm did not make us "experts" we certainly got the benefits of a very extensive education that prepared us for the real world. I did my MBA at weekends in UCG graduating in 1977 which extended our group of friends in Galway and helped my career enormously.

## CAREER TO DATE

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My career has been primarily in the Personnel Management and Training world (HR today) in several multinational companies e.g. Ford Motor Co., General Electric, Asahi Chemicals, Wang Laboratories and Baxter Healthcare. I worked for those companies in the UK, America, Japan and Ireland and received outstanding management training and development from them. I also spent 7 years in Logistics Management covering the entire globe. In 1990 Colman Collins and I set up a Management Consultancy partnership in Galway and every 2 years expanded it to other offices in Dublin, Cork, Sligo and Athlone. In 2003 I sold my 50% to my partner which facilitated an MBO for other staff subsequently. For several years I kept up to date by lecturing on a part time basis in GMIT and the National College of Education. I then devoted my time as a volunteer with Accord (Marriage Guidance Counselling Service), Galway Youth Federation and St. Vincent de Paul. I also took to golf as I had done my 10th marathon for charity when I was 60.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

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While I believe that there will always be people who will be successful in business because of their innate abilities, being in the right place at the right time etc. through my extensive experience in Human Resources Management, Training and Consultancy I am in no doubt that this and future generations of business people must have initial professional training, regular continuous professional development, a variety of cross functional roles and organisations if they are to have the tools, skills and interpersonal experiences that will ensure that Irish business punches above its weight in the international business world in the future. Irish mothers believed that education was the passport out of poverty and that education was not a heavy load

to carry.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

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Our Galway friends will say that when we climbed Cruach Padraic and looked South what did we see? Answer: The Promised Land! As one of those who was fortunate enough to go to secondary school in St. Jarlath's, study most subjects in Gaeilge and then get to UCG to do my primary degree tri Gaeilge all my birthdays came together. Even though I am a proud Mayo man I and my Mayo wife loved our initial years in UCG/Galway so much that we always wanted to work and live in Galway. We eventually did so and over the last 30 years have had a truly wonderful life here. Galway is of course sometimes erroneously described as "the graveyard of ambition" but what a graveyard? UCG has been NUI Galway for some time now and it has grown from a small university to a very large one with numerous faculties/colleges and important ties to industry while doing important research work in several fields. Given the exceptional focus on education in the West of Ireland I have no doubt that NUI Galway and Galway will continue to strive to be 'best in class' and the best place in Ireland to work, live, play and bring up a family. For myself the lyrics of the song "My soul to soar for ever more above you Galway Bay" is my Cre na Cille le Mairtin O Caidhain.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Having acquired wonderful opportunities to have worked in several really excellent multinational companies in Ireland and abroad and by them trained, developed and promoted to the highest levels of my principal profession (HR) I played a major role as a Fellow in the development of my professional organisation in Ireland the Chartered Institute of Personnel

and Development. My business partner and I took the leap and set up Collins McNicholas HR Consultants in Galway and because we were so successful we opened new offices every 2 years in Dublin, Cork, Sligo and Athlone. I believe that the path I made with my wife and with my business partner was built on a solid and progressive business education B. Comm 1969, Cert in Personnel Mgmt. 1971, AnCO Training Mgr 1974, MBA 1977, Higher Dip. In Mediation Studies 2002 and numerous management courses. In turn with the education and experiences we were ready to launch our own business. As we developed our own business we continued to see the significant ever changing activities of our customers and their competitors. We as HR consultants in turn helped numerous Irish entrepreneurs to launch, expand and survive in very competitive businesses. Being an entrepreneur is hard, hard work, is almost 24x7, definitely not for the faint hearted but in the final analysis a challenge to be risked but not missed.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

The '60s was a wonderful time to be a teenager and being in college was a real bonus on top. As the song goes "We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee" as we were so taken up with Rock and Roll, football (Galway's three in a row), politics and Save the West campaign with Fr. McDwyer from Donegal, emigration and student visas to go to the US. With Rock and Roll we danced on average 2 nights a week, we stayed in Galway every weekend apart from going home to get 'free' supplies of food from our mummies. We were very involved in politics and some of my best friends included Seamus Brennan RIP, Ralph O' Gorman both in my B. Comm class, Pat Rabbitte, John Flannery, Vera Kirrane (married to Christy Tyrell) and many

more. We protested peacefully in marches to Dublin and the trade union movement and the Students Union were extremely active. We protested and prevented or persuaded the college authorities to leave the pitch/track in front of the Quad as they planned to put the 'new' Science block there which would have removed a major student facility with a modern unbecoming structure at the heart of UCG. Gaeilge was much in evidence throughout UCG as the college was to the forefront of a language revival movement in the '60s with our Cumann Trachtail agus Geilleagar and Cumann Eigse agus Seanachas debating almost weekly. Virtually every lecturer could and did speak some Gaeilge and our current Uachtaran Michael D Higgins was our lecturer at the time which I have no doubt helped him to prepare for his current role and use of Gaeilge. Although Ireland was beginning to see the benefits of Dr. Whitaker and Seán Lemass's 2nd Programme for Economic Expansion which saw foreign investment creating the likes of Shannon, emigration was resulting in an average of 40,000 having to leave home to find work abroad. This included many students who funded their college education in this way. Trade unions were particularly active as was the Labour Party and industrial strife was in keeping with what was happening in the UK in particular. I was offered my first real job by the Workers Union of Ireland as a TU Official but as the Ford Motor Co. offered me 30% more as a Management Trainee I took the boat to England. I returned as the economic life of Ireland continued to improve and as "The Troubles" made me feel I should be at home and I could use my new found expertise to help sort out our own industrial relations difficulties. Yes, I have very fond memories of my teenage years in UCG and Galway which is why we made our way back and why we will have to be carried out as we look over Galway Bay.



## Teresa Morahan

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1994**

Current job and title:  
**PARTNER, BDO**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I am a native of Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo where I attended the Marist Convent School. Subsequent to my time in Galway, I lived and worked in Castlebar, Co. Mayo for a number of years before moving to Dublin in the late 1990s. I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to spend 2 years living in London during the noughties before returning to Dublin where I now reside while still getting back to the west of Ireland as much as possible.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

Having been reared in a family business and always having had an interest in the area, my choice of degree course was relatively easy. When it came to where I would like to go to college, I considered my various options and UCG (as it was then) was the clear winner for me particularly due to the size of the college and classes, and the excellent reputation it had for both academia and culturally. From the moment, I started in Galway, I knew that I had made the right choice for me. The structure of the B. Comm course allowed me to gain a wider knowledge of business which I wanted while also allowing me to specialise in my chosen field, accountancy in my case. The knowledge which I had gained meant that I was very well prepared for the professional accountancy exams which I subsequently completed. From my first day in UCG, I made great friends who are still some of my closest friends to this day and had some great times. The wide range of social societies meant, there were always outlets for your own interests outside studies. My experience in UCG was very positive and something I remember fondly.

## CAREER TO DATE

While at school, I thought that accountancy was the direction which I would take and this was clarified for me while in UCG. Following graduation, I completed an accountancy training contract with James Jennings & Co. in Castlebar, where I successfully completed the Chartered Accountants Ireland exams and qualified as a Chartered Accountant. I then made a move to join BDO, with the intentions of obtaining post qualification experience and ultimately making a move to Industry. 18 years later, I am still with BDO, so I obviously didn't make that move. My role in BDO has changed over the years progressing from an audit senior to my appointment as a Partner in 2011. I work as an advisor and auditor with companies ranging from start ups to large listed multinational companies primarily in the technology, life sciences and international business sectors. This has given me a great insight into how organisations of different sizes operate. I enjoy dealing with the potential/ real issues and challenges that companies face from a business perspective on a day to day basis and helping find solutions to the issues where possible. My chosen career has also afforded me the opportunity to work in London for two years, to travel to all continents and work with people of different cultures. This experience has been invaluable both from a career and personal perspective.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

Like all things in life, business education has seen many changes over the years. The days of business education being based on theory alone are gone. It has become more practical with many courses now including greater levels of project work and on the job experience through internships and the like. This is important in order to ensure that we

are producing people with the skills required by employers or for individuals to set up their own enterprises. Business education does not stop once an individual leaves college – in my view you need to continue challenging yourself over your career whether it is how you can improve your effectiveness in business or just stay ahead of the curve in a constantly changing business environment. In my view, the form of this education should be a mix of formal and informal education. Significant knowledge and benefit can be gained from the use of a mentor, someone who can share their experiences and provide insight which can help you as your career develops. I have found this invaluable mixed with more formal education.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

While the Irish economy has faced a challenging time over the last 8 years, I am very optimistic about the future. Ireland is and continues to be a very attractive location for international businesses to invest in due to in part our education system and the historical availability of key talent. A strong ecosystem exists to support these companies and we have seen the benefit to our economy of this investment particularly in the hi-tech and pharmaceuticals sectors. Part of our challenge in continuing to attract these companies, I see, is the continued availability of the right talent to meet the changing requirements of these companies. On a local level where areas such as retail and the hospitality sector were particularly heavily impacted, consumer confidence appears to be returning slowly. This bounce back is most evident in the larger urban areas. The regional economies continue to be challenged following the loss of many local businesses and jobs. In my opinion, investment in the regions needs to be one of the priorities from a national perspective.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

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NUI Galway and Galway City have changed so much over the years with increased levels of investment such as the new University facilities and new companies continually moving to Galway. This investment has ensured that Galway continues to be an attractive centre for students and business alike. It is apparent to me that the courses offered by NUI Galway continue to evolve with new courses being added all the time to meet the changing demands of today's and more importantly tomorrow's world. This is essential for NUI Galway to remain relevant. The real positive I see from speaking to recent graduates or current students is that despite the increase in its size, NUI Galway has retained the culture and identity which first attracted me to it as a student many years ago. Galway City continues to be a thriving city with the various cultural, educational, business and commercial offerings of a large city while maintaining its sense of community which distinguishes it from others in my view. Each time I visit Galway I always feel at home.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

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In work and business, I think it is important that you always do your best and give it 100% while considering those people around you, your colleagues and your clients. Business is not about one person, in order for it to be successful; it is about people pulling together with a common goal. To me, success is a very personal thing and very different to everyone. When I think of personal success, the main things for me are am I happy, have I done my best and have I left my own personal mark, no matter how small it is?



**Richard O'Brien**

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**2011**

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Current job and title:  
**TALENT ACQUISITION  
SPECIALIST,  
ADIDAS GROUP  
(DUBAI, UAE)**



## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Born and raised in Galway, I am the youngest of four children and son of Gerard and Denise O'Brien of Wellpark Road. It was inevitable that I would further my education at NUI Galway coming from a family that put a great emphasis on third level education. Keen on sport, I had been a member of the Galway Judo club in the Claddagh since the age of seven, where I fought in the martial arts on a national level, winning four gold all-Ireland medals, a handful of Connacht championships and several medals at the community games. Balancing sport with academic studies (as well as Galway city's attractive social life) proved challenging but very much so enjoyable at the time. I trained regularly in the Galway Judo Club as well as with the University in their top class facilities. As part of my university masters dissertation, I took the opportunity to travel to the Middle East to conduct first hand research with top executives within the airline industry in both Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. I was instantly fascinated and drawn to the thriving country of the UAE through promising career prospects for western educated and ambitious expatriates, where I began my journey to Dubai in August 2012.

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

For many students starting out in university, it can be trial and error until you find a course you really enjoy and excel at. As was the case with some of my friends at the time, where they enrolled in courses in local institutes of technology and soon realised it wasn't for them. This can be a daunting experience for both parent and student especially with the cost of education on the rise! The unique thing about the Bachelor of Commerce

course is that you gain exposure to a variety of subjects and modules from the outset including but not limited to; accounting, economics, human resources, marketing and BIS. For me I quickly took a shine to human resources and marketing and really enjoyed the group-based assignments we were tasked with. In my final year I was given the option to streamline my study to one core focus from which I chose human resources. I found the university lecturers very friendly and approachable, one such gentleman in particular I would like to mention is Dr. Paul Ryan, who greatly inspired me during both B. Comm and MSc. Strategy, Innovation and People Management degrees. When I wasn't in a lecture hall on the concourse or studying for upcoming exams in the James Hardiman library just off the concourse, I was usually found in An Bhialann canteen chatting with friends or in the Kingfisher gym working out. Occasionally after lectures on a Thursday we would venture into the college bar for a pint or two and listen to the live music before heading into the city for a student night out.

## CAREER TO DATE

Having gained an insight to the Middle East during my academic studies, I was luckily able to secure an internship from Ireland to be based in Dubai with the UAE's leading five star hotel chain, Jumeirah Group, as a Marketing Management Trainee, situated in the iconic Jumeirah Beach Hotel, where I gained my first experiences in the corporate business world. Here I worked on many prestigious campaigns and projects for Jumeirah Group's award winning projects, including the Burj Al Arab, unofficially known as 'the world's first seven star hotel'.

After my stint as an intern, I was introduced by an acquaintance to

management at Irish owned multinational recruitment consultancy Morgan McKinley. I entered Morgan McKinley as a researcher and was quickly promoted to Consultant building and managing my own desk, recruiting for high-end clients within the construction industry for the UAE and Qatar.

Here after I decided to make the move to an in-house recruitment role, where I was fortunate enough to find myself as the successful candidate during a thorough interview process for adidas Group. adidas Group is comprised of three main brands, adidas, Reebok and TaylorMade Golf, where I head up the entire back office recruitment for the UAE as the Talent Acquisition Specialist reporting into the TA Director within the HR Department. Our Dubai office is considered the headquarters for Emerging Markets (MENA, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, India, South Africa, East and West Africa). The best thing about working for adidas Group is the encouragement of cross-functional and international opportunities to move internally within the group. Watch this space for my next internal move!

## **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

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It is important to stand out from the crowd when seeking employment – make sure to highlight your academic achievements on your CV. As a recruiter myself I can share with you the harsh reality is that unless you hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree from a reputable university, the odds of even securing a telephone interview in this highly competitive market is slim to none. Chances are the recruiter will by the click of a mouse send an automated rejection email to the candidate and discard the CV and cover letter they had spent hours drafting. When taking a brief from the Hiring Manager

on all new job vacancies, regardless of the department I am recruiting for, it is essential to discuss the main criteria they are looking for to help in my candidate search, what is non-negotiable, what is desirable and what can be overlooked. One such 'tick the box' criteria that is usually non-negotiable I find is the level of education. Some line managers go to the extreme of requesting candidates with post graduate/Masters degrees only. The main reason may not always be the skill set or acquired knowledge from the university that the candidate has attained, however is the fact that this candidate has showed the ability to absorb and retain knowledge, learn, work as part of a team, and successfully pass a series of gruelling examinations, hence has the ability to be trained and moulded to fit that organisation. Long story short, if you don't have a degree on your CV you must be able to compensate with something else more impressive!

## **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

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There goes a saying about Galway, many of whom misinterpret the meaning however - 'Galway is the graveyard of ambition.' What is your initial interpretation of such a quote? Let me tell you. This dates back to the 1950s and that of a banker's career path in Ireland. A typical banker may start out in a small branch in Limerick let's say, and then moved on to Galway with the eventual hope of being transferred to the big city of Dublin. The story goes that once the banker moved to Galway, they would not want to leave regardless of the career opportunity offered thereafter. Galway city certainly has all the attractions for students young and mature. The NUI Galway campus is a few minutes' walk from the vibrant city full of cafes, bars and restaurants, shopping centres and the

infamous Spanish Arch, where you will be sure to see students chilling out and sunning themselves (in the rare case we see sun in the west of Ireland!). If you chose to live off campus, there are many affordable residential accommodations to choose from, nearly all accessible by bus into the heart of Galway's Eyre Square. It is important for all students to enjoy their time in university and socialise to some extent during the week or at the weekends, all in moderation however. I saw many of my friends repeat exams, years and even drop out of courses, all because Galway city's temptations took a hold!

### ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

One thing I always admire in people is entrepreneurship and a willingness to take a risk. It is true to a certain extent that you need money to make money, however all you really need is a great idea and you will surely find backing one way or another. Ireland, although slowly picking up and recovering after the recession is in need of entrepreneurship and some new start-ups. When I was back home for the Galway races last year I heard everybody raving on about a new local pizzeria in the city set up by two brothers from Galway, the Greaney's also known as 'The Dough Bros'. The Dough Bros didn't exactly reinvent the wheel or anything but their story fascinated me involving the eldest brother, Eugene losing his job in sales and marketing. After a family holiday to Naples they fell in love with the traditional means of cooking wood fire pizza. The brothers approached the banks with their thought out business plan and behold were granted the funds to start their business, taking it from a street stall to the high streets. If Eugene had not lost his job in sales and marketing would

he have ever taken the risk and follow his passion? It can be difficult to resign from a job, walk away from a comfortable fixed salary and other benefits attached with a full time employment contract. Ireland still has this taboo however around failing in business – we need to change the perception on this to encourage younger generations to take a risk, it may just pay off – as the saying goes “If at first you don't succeed try and try again”.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

The mind is a fragile thing, it is easy to feel anxious and overwhelmed in stressful and demanding environments. Stepping into a managerial role and managing a team is a catalyst for such stress. In order to succeed in business you need to control your thoughts during the day with rational thinking and decision making, but more importantly come the night to be able to completely switch off and rest the mind. I struggled a lot with sleeping disorders in my first couple of years in business, brought on through stress and overthinking of the unknown in my role. A work life balance is critical in business to avoid burn-out. Stay active during the week by exercising either in the mornings if you are an early bird or after work in the evenings if you are one of those who struggle to get out of bed in the morning. Exercise has really helped me excel in my role. It releases endorphins into the body and helps you mentally cope during stressful times, not to mention the positive physical effects it has on the heart and the rest of the body. One thing my father used to always say to me, no matter how bad a work day can be is; get up, dress up and turn up.



## Pádraig Ó Céidigh

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1978

Current job and title:  
**ENTREPRENEUR, SENATOR**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I was born in Spiddal in the Connemara Gaeltacht. Irish was our primary language at home and in the local primary school. Like most young Connemara people at that time, both my parents emigrated to England to find work. However, they returned after getting married in order to raise a family. Following primary school in Spiddal, I enrolled in Coláiste Iognáid secondary school in Galway city. This was a very different way of life and a culture shock for me. However, I created a number of life long friends in the school and quickly embraced the Jesuit philosophy of life and learning. My summers were spent working on local building sites. Most evenings I played football and hurling with my local GAA club, An Spidéal. It became the focus not only for exercise but more so for socialising and building friendships. I also played many sports in the Jes, however, I was most passionate about rugby. Some of my proudest and happiest days were playing Under 18 Gaelic football with Galway while also playing schoolboy rugby with Connacht. Those were the days.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

My teachers suggested that I go to university after the Leaving Cert and study Commerce. I was fortunate that a few of my secondary classmates were also in the class. I quickly learnt the ropes of student life. Sports again became a significant part of my student life. I played Gaelic football, hurling and rugby in first year. However, hurling now became my passion. This was mainly due to the fact that one of my sporting heroes, Joe Connolly was heavily involved with the hurling club. Joe and I spoke Irish regularly and, in fact the hurling club at that time had a number of fluent Irish speakers as well as fantastic session singers and

musicians. I also captained the Commerce Football team to win the Interfaculty competition. Looking back on my time in university my strategy was simple – to get my exams at the first time of asking and to enjoy college life as much as possible. I therefore made sure that I attended almost all lectures and tutorials while, at the same time playing sports, enjoying student night life and making new friends. College night life was particularly good with The Cellar Bar and The Skeff as the main student pubs in town. Salthill was a buzz of activity at that time with discos and night clubs beginning to become a major part of the scene. It was all innocent fun.

*Looking back on my time in university my strategy was simple – to get my exams at the first time of asking and to enjoy college life as much as possible.*

### CAREER TO DATE

After finishing the B. Comm I was offered a job as a trainee accountant with SKC (now called KPMG). So, I went to Dublin and worked in their Harcourt Street office for a few months and then transferred to their Limerick office. There, I shared a flat with another NUI Galway friend, Jack Hayes from Kerry. Then, one day I met my old headmaster from the Jes, Fr. Paddy Tyrell and he suggested that I consider teaching as a career. I was around 24 years old at this time when I began teaching in my old alma mater, Coláiste Iognáid. I spend 11 wonderful years in the Jes. I had the pleasure in being one of a team of wonderful and dedicated teachers. There is nothing that gave me greater satisfaction than making a small contribution to a young person on his/her journey to achieving his/her potential.

However, I decided to take a career break

from teaching and, in 1992 I set up my own solicitor's practice in Galway city. Many of my clients were former students and friends from college. Then in 1994, together with a friend Dr Eugene O'Kelly we purchased Aer Arann, a small airline flying to the Aran Islands. This resulted in me selling my practice and concentrating on growing this fledging airline. In 2001, Eugene

sold his shares to me and I began to focus on growing the airline into an international regional airline during the years that followed. We created a fantastic team of highly committed people who helped create and execute our vision. The airline grew very fast and, within a few years we were operating approximately 800 flights every week within Ireland and, to the UK and France. In 1997, I started a new company to publish Foinse, a weekly newspaper in the medium of Irish. We were based in Carraroe and, again, we had a small team of wonderfully committed people who produced a first class newspaper week in, week out. During the following 10 years or so, I founded or acquired a number of other businesses in areas such as outsourcing, printing, airport management, aircraft maintenance and others. I still enjoy the challenge and excitement in creating and building new businesses.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

Our educational system has been the foundation for much of the successes we benefit from in our society. Our standards are among the highest in the world and we have record numbers availing of this opportunity. This is especially true for mature students

returning to develop new skills and gain new knowledge. Having said that, I believe that we need to revisit our educational model and look for areas of improvement. One of the greatest challenges we face is the fact that many businesses fail to invest adequately in creating ongoing education and learning for their employees. I believe that we should create the environment whereby talented business people and entrepreneurs should be encouraged to attend world class executive programmes on a regular basis. Those programmes can be in Ireland or on any campus in the world. The business skills required to create business success are changing and getting more competitive. In particular, soft skills are becoming more relevant. The MBA qualification was, and still is an important and valuable qualification. However it is not enough in the current business environment. Continuous learning and education is essential. In my view, business managers and entrepreneurs should spend between 5 and 10 percent of their working year dedicated to formal learning. That means that they should budget on between 12 and 24 days annually in a structured educational environment that promotes their business and personal skills. All business is now global and we have to create a culture of continuous learning in order to compete successfully in this new arena. Our formal education model needs to integrate the process of learning with the gaining of factual information. Our Leaving Certificate exams are highly focused on exam results and the resulting points system. This process forces students into a tunnel vision perspective. Unfortunately, as a result we are losing the key elements of teaching, which is to create the environment in which students can learn and use effective tools for life long

learning and thereby contribute to their communities and society. Our focus should be on teaching students how to learn rather than on “what to learn”. Academia and business should create integration strategies whereby students have a double exposure both to the academic and the “hands on” application side of learning.

### THE IRISH ECONOMY

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The Irish economy is again one of the fastest growing economies in the western world. However, our people have seen a significantly negative impact on their standard of living due to the recent global economic downturn. We are starting again from a lower base. An economy has people at its core and we have again illustrated the collective resilience of the Irish people when faced with a major challenge. Unemployment grew to almost 15%, wages were slashed in order to keep both public and private services operating and normal bank loans and funding almost dried up. This year, in 2016, unemployment will be less than 9%, our economy will grow by over 4% and, banks have started lending again. Another positive is the diversity of our economy. Over the past 20 or so years, we have focused on specific industry clusters which, together have created an economic balance reducing the downside risk of a global failure in any one industry sector. Our strategy of attracting foreign direct investment, IT/IS, pharma, supporting tourism, our export and food industries, all paid dividends. However, there are still obvious significant fault lines in our economy. We have a two tier economy – Dublin and, the rest of the country. The recent economic upturn is best seen in parts of Dublin and, to a lesser degree in some of our smaller cities like Cork and Galway. However, there are large

areas of our country that are still struggling with the chill of recession. In my opinion, we require a different economic strategy for the rest of Ireland - one that focuses on regional strengths such as tourism, food, tech clusters etc. Fáilte Ireland's successful creation of the Wild Atlantic Way is one example of focused attention on the tourism strengths of a region.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There is a need to empower people to create their own businesses and invent their own future. Our world is changing fast, and the collective creative abilities of people will be the key to both creating and sustaining a viable society and economy. We need to create a coherent strategy of entrepreneurship. Unfortunately, many of the organisations tasked with entrepreneurship and employment creation seem to operate in silos. This creates artificial barriers to the most effective use of limited resources. I believe that entrepreneurship can be learnt. It is similar to any other skill. Research indicates that a 10,000 hour commitment is required as well as good teaching and coaching to effectively master any skill. This is where universities can lead and become the catalyst. The most effective means in achieving great results is where the educational institution works closely with entrepreneurs and business people active in the community to co-create learning modules.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

Work was very much a part of our family ethos. Both my mother and father were hard workers and believed in doing a good day's work, every day. This work ethic was and, still is a significant part of who I am as a person.

Like most things in life, what you get out of work is often directly related to the effort you make. Most of the time I enjoy work, however, like anyone else, there are times whereby work can frustrate and drain my energy. It did not take me long to understand that there is no point in spending your time working in an area you do not enjoy, make a contribution and, develop as a person. It is equally important to enjoy and are comfortable being part of a team of co workers. If either of those two aspects are missing from your workplace, then its time to reconsider and use the experience as a learning process in moving on. I believe that success is not a target to try to reach or achieve. Success is the process we create on our way to striving to reach the target or goal. A significant part of success involves the people who support you in this process of achievement. Therefore, one should consider carefully those people who will journey with you on this road called success. You need people who will help and not hinder you – people who will pull you out of the pothole rather than push you in to one. I use a few basic measurements to carry out a reference check on my success rate. I often ask myself the question – did I make any real difference today? And, if so, how, where and for whom? If not, why not – what did I learn? I believe that I am setting a too high a target for myself if I think I can make a real difference every day. Some days the sun shines and it rains on other days. Each day is equally important. Because, at the end of the day – success is who you are and, not what you have.



## Enda O' Coineen

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1975

Current job and title:  
**CHAIRMAN,  
KILCULLEN KAPITAL  
PARTNERS;  
PRESIDENT,  
ATLANTIC YOUTH TRUST**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

After finishing college I sailed across the Atlantic to the US where I worked and travelled. Subsequently while working with an inflatable boat company (Zodiac) I developed ideas on the design of a sailing life craft and crossed the Atlantic home in one as the result of a bet. I wrote about my adventures, became a published author and a journalist with the Irish Times. I then founded AFLOAT Magazine, Security World Magazine, a marine insurance brokerage and a travel agency. In 1987 I founded Sail Ireland and we were Ireland's first entry in the Whitbread Round the World Race and a £5m project. In the early 1990s I went to Central Europe and from a Prague base developed a financial information and publishing company, a telecoms company and a credit reference agency. The most successful was my Telecoms company where following an investment in 1996 of \$250,000 we had an exit 4 years later for \$35m. This was the basis for Kilcullen Kapital Partners which transformed me from an ideas person to a person with capital to risk and make things happen. Kilcullen Kapital as a platform developed as an asset management and financial advisory business leading several acquisitions, restructurings and syndicated investments in manufacturing, services and property. It included the establishment of Enercap, a €100m renewable energy fund and the Global Village Fund investing in the hospitality sector. Ranging from founding and leading, on a totally voluntary basis, the Volvo Ocean Race project I have been lucky to reconnect to my home time in recent years. I am proud that this activity was reported to generate over €100m direct benefit to the economy and my most recent commitment is the ATLANTIC Youth Trust Charity.



## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

It was very character forming where I participated in college life to the full. Rag weeks were most memorable, coming third in the pub crawl and winning the Boatless boat race. I also founded the college sailing club and was elected to the students Executive as Sports Chairman. And while studying hard academically and I was proud to earn my degree, it was a diverse range of activities from the chess club, to the mountaineering club and the broad spread of college life that was the most formative. A third level college needs to be a place for free thinking, new ideas, challenging the norms and the establishment, to harvest the idealism of youth and to perpetuate it until we depart the earth.

## CAREER TO DATE

While at the start I expected to perhaps become a chartered accountant and then get into business, my career has taken me to places I had no idea I would ever end up in Finance, Property, Technology and General Management. Mostly I have worked for myself, taken a lot of risk and I have been lucky. In fact from a career perspective I have become unemployable and would never give myself a job. However I have always liked to work in partnership on an equal basis and success has come from being a smaller part of something bigger rather than the proverbial 'big fish in a small pond'.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

The best education is in doing. However business, as indeed modern society, is becoming more complex and while a basic schooling used to be sufficient to get into business, now a basic degree is a fundamental.

Namely economics, psychology, law and management and so forth. With this, and most important are links with the 'real world' and developing a market led entrepreneurial culture. As for enterprise and business education, entrepreneurship is not a 'subject' but rather a way of thinking and a way of life. It needs to be integrated into the education system from primary level through to the highest level of education.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

The Irish economy needs to decide which 'model' it should follow. The traditional socialism versus capitalism argument is dead. Likewise as a small open economy we need to be constantly dynamic and reinventing. Unfortunately we have tended to follow the Anglo-Saxon US/UK Boom-Bust model. We need to move towards more of a Scandinavian model. Also how we tax and reward needs to be radically restructured and we need to understand human nature.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

Unlike Dublin and Cork, NUI Galway (together with other third level colleges) is a very dominant part of the city. Likewise many of the students are not 'from Galway' which means they socialise more around the college and the city meaning they become fully engaged in 'college life' rather than going home to their 'mummies and daddies' every evening. While I love pubs, the atmosphere and the community, we need to move away from the 'drink' culture and a realization that you do not have to 'drink your head off' to have a good college life.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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Work and what I do is a way of life and it is about doing, achieving and making things happen. In the first two decades of the 21st century the nature of work has radically changed and has been revolutionised by technology. And while it is necessary to earn enough to live and have personal freedoms, increasingly on a personal basis it is about what I can contribute in my own small way to society to make the world a better place. On a personal basis I have been very lucky. However you can never expect luck to 'happen'. You have to go out and grab it. Clearly we cannot take whatever we make with us so, once our loved ones are looked after, we all have a responsibility to do our 'bit' whatever that may be and sure we'll all be a long time dead...



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### Catriona O'Farrell

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1985**

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Current job and title:  
**FORMER CEO,  
FINTRAX GROUP**



## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

As a seventeen year old, I faced the choice of studying primary teaching in Dublin, or the B. Comm. at UCG. I chose the latter and with a large cohort from the local schools entered the B. Comm class in 1982. We enjoyed three fabulous years and made lifelong friends with classmates from all over the country - we even fitted in time to read for our degree!

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

The campus was much smaller then. The Aula discos were legendry, Smokey Joe's was still in operation! The basement restaurant was the meeting point, the centre for campaigning and as the venue for the 'Comm Ball'. I remember that the computer lab operated on a 'first come first served' basis - there was a definite lack of those huge desktops to cater for our programming module. We didn't mind though, in the era before mobiles and social media, the waiting around was an opportunity to chat and socialise. We had marvellous lecturers who inspired through great teaching in their subject areas: Keith Warnock, Jim Ward, Leo Smith, Aidan Daly, Iggy Ó Muirheartaigh and I still recall the passion that Paddy McNutt brought to Economics. The final year Enterprise 'Start your Own Business' project, was a very practical module that developed key skills in group working, problem-solving and business planning. Our lecturers were very generous with their time over the three years. They were accessible and gave great advice in terms of career and postgraduate options. This level of connection provided great support to achieve our potential. I return regularly to NUI Galway to mentor undergraduates and on the MBA programme, as a way of giving something constructive back to my alma mater.

## CAREER TO DATE

After graduating in 1985, I did a postgrad in Marketing Practice at NUI Galway (the precursor to the current MSc in Marketing Practice). It was while on this course that in 1985, I became the first employee of a start-up company CashBack Ltd. In 1986, I launched this start-up to market and was responsible for the research, development and growth of this pioneering tourist tax-refund company. Over the next number of years with a team of fellow NUI Galway graduates, we developed the start-up to become market leaders in tourist tax refund services. Over the next twenty years, I travelled and gained international experience. In Sydney I held a senior management role in I.T., with responsibility for marketing technical IT software across the South East Asian region.

In 1990, I entered the publishing industry as General Manager of the Galway Advertiser newspaper Group. In conjunction with doing the Executive MBA, I managed an operational and strategic transformation programme that included: a transition to new technology, the newspaper's redesign and its launch as the first regional newspaper to print in full colour. In the new millennium I graduated as a primary teacher, a personal ambition since leaving school.

In 2011 I was appointed Chief Executive of the Fintrax Group. Fintrax was launched and funded from the sale of the original tax refund company Cashback Ltd in 1989. Over the years, the international growth and expansion of the tax refund company positioned Fintrax as the world's second largest processor of tourist VAT refunds and multicurrency transactions on behalf of retailers and governments. In this role, I oversaw annual revenues of more than \$75 million, a staff of more than 400 and offices spanning the

Americas, Asia Pacific and Europe. Servicing over 80,000 retailers worldwide, the company processes on average 3.7 million tax refund transactions per annum under the Premier Tax Free brand, at the Group's headquarters in Baile na hAbhainn in Connemara. Under my tenure, I successfully led the sale of the Fintrax Group. In 2012, Fintrax was purchased by UK Private Equity company Exponent PE for €170m - the transaction was the highest value sale of an Irish-owned company in recent years. Following the sale, I transitioned the Fintrax management team and its worldwide staff over the next two years, which ensured the successful integration of operations under the new ownership, until departing the Group in 2014. In 2015, Eurazeo one of the leading listed investment companies in Europe, acquired Fintrax for €550m. Today, many senior roles across the Fintrax Group globally are held by NUI Galway graduates.

## **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

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Globally, business education is changing rapidly to reflect the everchanging nature of the workplace across all industries. Whilst students experience a broad range of subjects before specialising in their chosen speciality, areas of particular interest to future employers include: ethics and corporate governance, big data management and mining, research and innovation and problem-solving. Students require opportunities for skills development and practical industry experience before entering the workplace as graduates. Today's most successful companies have blurred department divisions, agile inter-disciplinary teams with collaboration, where skillsets complement each other. Companies now often seek out graduates with a non-business degree to engage in research, problem solving and innovation projects. They need employees

to be creative, tenacious global thinkers, problem-solvers, flexible and decisive. These are the skills that business graduates of the future will need to demonstrate.

## **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

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Galway is a young, vibrant, diverse city. Since its foundation in 1845, the university has been a key driver for the economic development and competitiveness in Galway and across the region. There are strong linkages and close collaboration between the university and the city and its various sectors. A research-led university where ideas are fostered, encouraged and discussion welcomed, NUI Galway supports and develops researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs. A key strategic aim for Galway is to position itself as a world-class city of innovation and creativity. NUI Galway is at the forefront in achieving this goal. The Whitaker institute, the Marine Institute, CUAM, REMDI, ILAS and others, provide a breadth and depth of research. They are formidable resources in Galway and provide far-reaching benefits to the City. Galway is developing into an international niche ICT hub, due to a combination of top tier multinational companies, indigenous ICT firms, a growing start-up culture and significant research capability at NUI Galway. The world-class medical device cluster in Galway is the result of university/industry linkages and the continuous development of a skilled labour pool and knowledge- transfers establishing new start-ups. NUI Galway's strategic plan, Vision 2020, aims to bring NUI Galway into the top 200 universities in the world while securing €100 million in competitive funding from the EU under the Horizon 2020 programme. As a result of the commitment of research across many areas, from biosciences to the social sciences, NUI

Galway is on track to meet these ambitious targets by 2020. As a result, the economic development and competitiveness of Galway will continue to flourish.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Business schools worldwide are increasing the number of entrepreneurship programmes available to undergraduate students. The EU Commission has stated that entrepreneurship is essential for sustainable job growth and economic development (Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan). Business students, the leaders of the future need a new set of skills: global thinking, entrepreneurial and innovative talents, and decision-making based on practical problem-solving.

The development of next generation entrepreneurs means preparing students to enter the modern workforce with a flexible, entrepreneurial mind-set.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

Achieving a work-life balance is key to success. Managing time for competing priorities is a challenge for each one of us in this 'always on' digital era. Someone once said: 'If you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life' – I agree, it is important to work in a career that you enjoy. My career was not planned, it evolved based on responding to challenges and opportunities, taking risks and being true to myself. I was very lucky to meet key mentors early in my career: Gerry Barry (founder of Cashback Ltd. and Fintrax Group), Ronnie O' Gorman (Chairman of the Galway Advertiser Group) and Jim Ward (Professor Emeritus, NUI Galway). I'm very lucky to call each of them a friend today. Success comes from hard work, a bit of luck

and from enjoying whatever you do. For me personally, success is measured by having no regrets.





## Paul O'Hara

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1999

Current job and title:  
**FOUNDER & CEO,  
CHANGEX**



### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I grew up in Castlebar, County Mayo, the eldest of five children. I was very close to my immediate and extended family and feel extremely fortunate to have had so much love and support growing up. Sport was a big part of life for all of us, especially Gaelic football, athletics and tennis. I represented county and province in several sports over the years and, though I never mastered any one sport in particular, I have so many happy memories, learned so much and met so many great friends. I still run a little and have ambitions to get back golfing at a respectable level at some stage. My father is an Accountant and my mother a primary school Principal. Four of the children in our family went to study at NUI Galway, following in my father Brendan's footsteps, who graduated with a B. Comm in 1971. I did enough in school to get by and pursued a B. Comm myself in the absence of knowing what else to do. I married a Cork lady, Lucy O'Connell who is a Barrister in Dublin. We have a beautiful two year old daughter, Elizabeth.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I remember well my first day on campus. I was dropped near the tennis courts by my mother and proceeded to walk around the Quad, over and over, thinking I was exploring the entire University without realising it was only a tiny part! I didn't really know anyone starting that year so, when I met a few classmates on that first day in the queue for registration, I was relieved to find others in the same boat. We clung onto one and other for dear life. In particular, I think that joining the freshers Gaelic football team was an incredible experience - there was such depth of friendship, respect and serious football talent. I played golf

for the University and had some memorable adventures at various intervarsities. We were always unforgettable but not necessarily for our prowess on the course! I loved the freedom, the sport, the social life, the friendships and the occasional lecture. As regards study, my priority was to do as little academically as possible to get by. Despite myself, and thanks to the help of several classmates, I managed to learn a reasonable amount along the way. That said, I do remember sitting amongst the crowd at our graduation ceremony and feeling regret and guilt that I wasted the opportunity to immerse myself academically. The then President, Professor Patrick Fottrell, unknowingly provided me with words of comfort from the podium, explaining that above all else, we were now equipped for a life of learning. I have held onto that deeply ever since and feel like I am learning more and more with each passing year.

## CAREER TO DATE

I pursued a major in marketing and after completing a Masters in UCD, I spent five years at Unilever and Cadbury working in various commercial roles. I loved the challenge of growing business. In my mid-twenties I became more aware of social challenges around me, in Ireland and abroad. Against this backdrop, I began questioning the meaning and value of my work. Did more people need more chocolate bars? Was this the best use of my time and energy? It all came to a head on a holiday in Zimbabwe where I came into contact with extreme poverty for the first time in my life. It was impossible to look away and so began a new journey.

On returning to Ireland I started a bottled water company with the aim of distributing

profits to water projects within Africa. When Coca-Cola and Tipperary Water pursued a similar project, it was time for me to move on. To better understand how to really change society, I decided to immerse myself in Ashoka - the world's leading network of social entrepreneurs. I was a co-founder of Ashoka in Europe where we raised over €50m and invested it in 400 social entrepreneurs across 20 countries, building the field as we went.

I was so encouraged by the breadth and depth of innovation in the social sectors across the world, but frustrated by how slowly ideas spread from one region to the next. Accelerating the speed at which proven social innovations spread is my focus. I founded Change Nation in 2011 and more recently ChangeX.org - an online marketplace that connects the proven ideas of social entrepreneurs with people in local communities looking to solve problems. Our ambition is to build the change platform for the world, ensuring every community thrives by empowering people with the best ideas, tools and resources to drive the necessary changes.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

I was fortunate to participate in one of the first 'learning by doing' masters at UCD. It was a M.Sc. in Marketing Practice which effectively serves as a research house for Industry - we worked on several real life projects throughout the year. Ever since, I've been a strong believer in learning by doing - I don't know a better way. Of course reading and studying case studies can teach you a lot, but they become so much more relevant and memorable when practically applied in the real world. Most of my learning today comes from experimentation, reading blogs/books of experienced practitioners or seeking council

of experienced practitioners. There is so much content available on every subject and the pace of change in areas such as marketing is such that an essential skill is quickly finding quality sources so no time is wasted. If I were teaching an undergraduate or postgraduate degree today, I would see my role as curator of inspiring content while ensuring opportunities for real world application of those learnings. Ashoka's founder Bill Drayton thought me about the importance of social and emotional intelligence as critical skills for effective leadership. They represent recruitment criteria at Ashoka, at ChangeX and before long, most employers will seek them out. Google's recent study on building the perfect team highlights empathy and communications as the two critical skills. As well as being critical to team work and leadership, they are critical to our everyday relationships, from friendships to marriage to parenting. These skills should be at the forefront of education from birth, through school, university and our entire careers.

### THE IRISH ECONOMY

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The Irish economy is thankfully experiencing a period of strong growth. However, that growth is neither well distributed nor sustainable and remains highly dependent on the exports of foreign multinationals. Our economy should serve the greater goal of improving wellbeing for all people. As long as we have working poor and rising inequality, our economy and related policies are failing. We have done a tremendous job of attracting and retaining foreign multinationals, but we do so at a great cost to the world. Ireland facilitates massive tax avoidance that costs societies many billions in revenues that would otherwise be destined for education and healthcare among other areas

of need. Of course Ireland should compete, and if not Ireland, then some other low tax destination wins, but we have long since crossed a line of fairness and we must play a proactive and constructive role in ensuring that global corporations pay fair levels of tax and in appropriate jurisdictions. The only sustainable source of economic growth is from indigenous companies, and thankfully, the outlook is promising. Imagine if the talent pools working at low-tax paying foreign corporations were refocused on starting and/or building indigenous export lead companies? That I believe will represent the greatest legacy of the foreign multinational to Ireland - talent pools with the knowledge and skills to build massive global companies. We still must ensure that investment is focused on industries and companies that are good for the world and environmentally sustainable.

### ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Entrepreneurship is a practice - made up of several learned skills. Like any area, some people are blessed with more natural skills than others, but the more you practice the better you get and most anyone can become an entrepreneur, or social entrepreneur, if they commit. When you study the life history of successful entrepreneurs, you will almost always find that they started practicing in their teenage years or earlier. We have an entrepreneurial culture in Ireland as measured by percentage of population self employed - most are sole traders and SME's and form the backbone of the economy. There is a huge opportunity to multiply the number of entrepreneurs in any given society, including Ireland. The key is getting more and more people practicing in their teenage years, so they build the skills and confidence required.



Another huge opportunity is growing the ambition of Ireland's entrepreneurs - there are companies growing out of Silicon Valley that are bigger than all the startups in Ireland combined, indeed bigger than the total value of the ISEQ Index. With international capital increasingly accessible and a global talent pool in Ireland, there is no reason we can't build much bigger companies out of Ireland. We need more people in the ecosystem with the ambition and courage to go after the big opportunities.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

The pursuit of happiness is what unites us. Work consumes such a significant part of our lives, it is essential that we pursue work that makes us happy, work that is purposeful. So many of us pursue money, status and/or fame in the quest for happiness, but the research suggests this is not the place to look. There is little correlation between income and happiness beyond satisfying ones basic needs. The world's longest study on happiness was recently published and shows that the people with the strongest social connections to family, friends and community are happiest and live longest. I see business as a most powerful force for good and evil in the world. As more and more people seek out purposeful work, which is happening faster than anyone appreciates, we will see business create tremendous economic and more importantly, social and environmental value in the decades to come. Elon Musk is leading the way with SpaceX, Tesla and Sun City. Capitalism has been a tremendous driver of innovation and progress, but where uncontrolled, it continuously fails us - destroying people, communities and our precious environment. The most successful businesses of the future

will be purpose driven, working on the world's most important problems and focused on maximising social and environmental value, not just economic. Success for me is living life well with family and friends and building something of value along the way.





## Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1988

Current job and title:  
**PROFESSOR OF  
ACCOUNTING AND DEAN  
OF BUSINESS, UCD**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I was born in Dublin and grew up in Galway, my family having moved there in 1969. I went to School in Coláiste Iognáid (the Jes). I took part in debating there, which gave me my first encounter with UCG when, having been given a motion on socialism, I went to interview Michael D Higgins, the only socialist I knew at the time. I lived in Newcastle, ten minutes walk from the NUI Galway campus. This meant I could leave the house when lectures were supposed to start and be there when they did (those days, ten minutes after the hour)! I also had the great benefit of my mother's cooking while others, away from home, lived on beans on toast and bananas. Tógadh mé i dTeaghlach Gaelach i nGaillimh. Bhí mo athair in Údarás na Gaeltachta agus chaith sé seal mar Uachtarán ar Chumann Tráchtála na Gaillimhe (1985). Is mór an onóir don clann anois go bhfuil Gradam Sheosamh Uí Ógartaigh a aithníonn úsáid na Gaeilge i measc gnólachtaí na Gaillimhe ainmnithe ina dhiaidh. I met my late wife Margaret (née Whelan) in UCG: she was studying Arts (History & English) – and was more active than I was in the 'Lit & Deb'. She always cheered me up. We had wonderful years of adventures and married life together before she passed away with cancer and all its complications in December 2014. UCG not only gave me an education but many years of subsequent love and happiness.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I came to UCG intending to study law through the B. Comm and BL. However, early on, I was profoundly influenced by the teaching of the late Professor Seamus Collins and of Keith Warnock. I particularly remember two papers we read, 'The Politicization of Accounting' by David Solomons (1978) and 'The Rise of

Economic Consequences’ by Stephen Zeff (1978). These brought accounting out of itself. They gave the sense that accounting and business are about politics and working with people and for people and that decisions made in accounting – and business – have real social and economic consequences. These made accounting a social science for me and brought it to everyday life. Seamus’ PhD was from Northwestern University and I now realise that the content and possibly his style of teaching was influenced by his time there. This gives me a sense of the importance of tradition and the seminal influence we as academics are privileged to have on future generations. Bhí an t-ádh orm go raibh mé in ann Geilleagar and Matamaitic a thógaint tré Ghaeilge sa chéad blian Tráchtála. Bhi sé mar phribhléid agam go raibh Séamus Ó Scanláin, Diarmuid Ó Cearbhaill, Martin Newell agus Tony Christofides mar léachtóirí sa Gheilleagar agus sa Mhata araon. Taobh amuigh den seomra ranga, bhi mé mar chaptaen ar an fhoireann díospóireachta a ghnóthaigh craobh na hÉireann Gael-Linn i 1987. I also remember being part of Lit & Deb’s World Record Debate. This was a great diversion on campus and I can still recall warbling on about aardvarks as the debate moved from the Arts Block to the Aula.

### CAREER TO DATE

I majored in Accountancy and went on to train as a Chartered Accountant with Arthur Andersen. I was always interested in being an academic and joined the faculty at DCU in 1992. I completed a PhD in Accounting under the supervision of Kevin Keasey and Phil Moon at the University of Leeds. I chose my topic – the decision framing of accounting information – having thought about aspects outside the discipline which I

enjoyed and was inspired by the discussion of the psychology of information in Ciarán Murphy’s Management Decision Systems class at UCG. The title – *Through a Chink Too Wide* – came from Patrick Kavanagh’s Advent hankering back I think to an interest manqué in English.

My late wife Margaret and I were both Fulbrighters in Boston in 2000-2001. I was at Northeastern and she, having completed a PhD in History at UCD, was at Boston College (BC). This has UCG connections as well as BC had been suggested to me in UCG as a potential postgrad opportunity. However, in 1980s Ireland, the lure of employment had been too strong but it was good to think of what might have been while with Margaret in Chestnut Hill. I went to Victoria University of Wellington in 2006, returning to Ireland and UCD as Professor of Accounting in 2008. I was appointed Dean of UCD Business in August 2011 and have been confirmed for a second five-year term to 2021.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

The building which now houses the UCD Smurfit School was, prior to this, Carysfort, a teacher training college. Seamus Heaney, the Nobel Laureate in Poetry, taught there between 1976 and 1981. I have recently finished reading *Stepping Stones – Interviews with Seamus Heaney* by Dennis O’Driscoll (2009). There, Heaney says that when he was in Carysfort he would say to his students ‘we are here to develop your capacities, your destinies are your own’. This, to me, is a very powerful framing of education and business education. When we think about the capacities we should be developing as educators, invariably three things come to mind: knowledge, the capacity to be critical and the ability to analyse; the ability to

communicate; and attitude. The first two of these we develop in the classroom, in the groups we develop and in the assignments we design. The third gives us pause for thought as educators: how do we develop ‘attitude’? Setting high standards for ourselves and for our students is one way. Teaching by example is another. However, employers are also increasingly telling us that they favour graduates who are willing to travel. To me, this is not only travelling to different places and parts of the world. It is the ability to see over the horizon and imagine that those different places exist. Pushing our horizons and theirs is therefore important, through the questions we set, the research we do, the books we read. I also say to our students that, in business, they can see the world and they can change the world – for good or (as we know from our recent past) for ill. They can not only make money. This is not enough. They also have the privilege of being able to leave the world a better place than how they found it, which is the responsibility of us all.

### THE IRISH ECONOMY

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The Irish economy is now a story of resilience. Our return to economic growth is based on a strong, underlying exporting economy which was there throughout the crisis. Selling to ourselves does not an economy build: selling to others makes our economy. We shouldn’t lose sight of this as we come out the other side. We also shouldn’t lose sight of the memory that business decisions can have profound social and economic consequences. Ireland has a strong international profile in areas such as digital business, food, and international financial services. For example, more than half of the commercial aircraft leased in the world are leased out of Ireland. With the support of Ireland’s economic

ecosystem, our ambition is that students sitting in Boston, Berlin or Beijing thinking of studying digital business, food, and/or international financial services (including aircraft leasing) will think ‘Ireland has an expertise in these, codified in its curriculum, I’ll go there’. As a country, these export-led sectors – and others – provide us with the engine for future economic growth and social stability.

### NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

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I remember my father bringing home Diarmuid Ó Cearbhaill’s *Galway: Town and Gown 1484-1984*. He had attended the book launch in his Chamber of Commerce role and was profoundly aware of the symbiotic relationship which was suggested by the title, a relationship which by virtue of size and proximity NUI Galway has more deeply than any other university in Ireland. Similar to our thinking around digital business, food and international financial services, Galway is served by a strong ecosystem in (for example) medical devices and marine science. It can also crack what we find more difficult in Dublin, that secret sauce of what it is to be Irish, that cultural *je ne sais quoi* which people find alluring about Ireland and which Galway has in the air it breathes.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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I teach the imaginatively-named Financial Accounting 3 module to final year Commerce students at UCD. In our parting class, I tell them the story of Flann O’ Brien’s *The Third Policeman* (1967). In this post-modern novel, the policeman regularly cycles the country roads of Ireland on his bike and, as a consequence, becomes part-man, park-bike. I suggest to our accounting students

that they should not become what they do, they should be who they are. Only they can be who they are and they are all they have to give. The world responds to authenticity. Being an authentic leader, a servant leader, is a profound basis for success individually and institutionally. Our recent economic experience also suggests that we need the wisdom of individuals rather than the foolishness of crowds. We bring with us only ourselves: UCG shaped me agus tá mé buíoch.





## Pádraic Ó Máille

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1982

Current job and title:  
**FOUNDER, SMÁCHT**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I was reared in Shop Street, and for national school ran daily the gauntlet of O'Briens bridge or Wolf Tone bridge past the 'Bish Mugs' en route to school in Scoil Fhursa and The Jes. I attended boarding school in Cistercian College, Roscrea before doing a B. Comm in UCG. I am a former President of Junior Chamber Galway, a Senator of Jaycees International and I was Chairman of the Galway International Oyster Festival for three years. I'm married to Annie Carroll (B. Comm 1983) from Renmore and we have four children Shane (B. Comm 2011), Sarah, Harry and Oige. What I love about Galway still is the water, the Irish and its character. My hobby is writing and to date I've written two books, '*The Midas Power*' and '*Rocking Horse Sh\*t - The Ultimate Problem Solving Manual*'.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

Emerging from the strict confines of boarding school life into the liberal freedom of UCG life in the late 1970s and early 1980s was nirvana in itself. I assaulted university life with gusto and joined just about everything that moved - Cuman Eigse, the Canoeing club, Com & Econ, Dramsoc, Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Labour, played bad rugby, hurling and snooker and loved the Sailing Club. That halcyon hurling summer of 1980 was when our graduate, Joe Connolly, deliriously brought the McCarthy cup back to Eyre Square. And how we all celebrated! I upheld a proud and long standing tradition and duly failed accountancy in my first year. It would be many years later that I heard JK Rowling's wish for first year students in Harvard that 'they fail early.' Paradoxically, I agree with her that failure and success are part and parcel of the same equation and the earlier both are experienced, the better. In addition,

I believe the UCG of the late '70s and early '80s provided a balance of academic and emotional education that has been squeezed out by our contemporary value and emphasis on points and exam results at all costs. During my second and third year in UCG I became heavily involved in drama, debating and public speaking. Although not a part of the formal academic agenda I believe these disciplines are incredibly valuable for our personal and professional development.

### CAREER TO DATE

I was in the second class ever of the pioneering AnCO/UCG Diploma in Marketing Practice programme that has now become a MSc in Marketing Practice. It had a profound impact on my career giving me immediate and invaluable hands on experience in sales, marketing and general management. That industry experience enabled me to consult to the knitwear industry at a young age and it was a career that appealed to me greatly. I joined the Irish wing of the Synectics International Consulting company and became exposed to the power of process consulting and facilitation. With them I worked with some of the world's leading organisations such as Baileys, Coca-Cola, Digital, IBM and Unilever.

In 1995, I returned to Galway and set up the training wing of Envision Marketing Consultants, the brainchild of Professor Jim Ward and Dr. Aidan Daly, my former marketing lecturers in UCG. Their approach to management development was pioneering and we quickly became one of the biggest providers of management training in the country.

In 1998, I set up my own business, Ó Máille Group, which provided training and consulting to clients. In the jaws of the

recession in 2011, a group of my clients and I co-founded a Mastermind Alliance called Smácht. It simply was a group that met on a monthly basis to set goals and hold each other accountable. The results were awesome and Smácht Alliances are now nationwide.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

I believe the impact that Professor Jim Ward and Dr. Aidan Daly had on the legacy of marketing in the West of Ireland is massive. What they created was a model of applied learning. They taught marketing and sales principles from a global context but created a model where these principles could be applied locally. It was win/win. The student acquired meaningful employment and industry gained valuable marketing expertise. I am heartened that this initiative now has the status of a Masters degree. My own approach to business education has always been that we learn best via discovery rather than via instruction. I believe implicitly in the power of action learning and peer feedback. In addition, I believe hugely in the power of Mastermind Alliances. Success in business is as much a function of accountability and motivation as it is of education. Combined together, all three are a dynamic triumvirate.

### NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

One of my all time favourite books is 'Na Lig sin i gCathú' by the late Breandan O hEithir. In it he chronicles the journey though UCG of a typical student in the late 1950s. It portrays beautifully and wonderfully the connection between 'Town and Gown.' I'd love to think that intimacy still exists and thrives in Galway today. The economic value of NUI Galway to Galway City is colossal. I once had an astute client who arrived into Galway with a business plan that targeted just one customer. It took

him a full three years to secure business in NUI Galway. Now that he's secured it, he's never looked back. It's a client of 17,000+ needs. Robert Louis Stevenson once said that 'books are good enough in their own way but they're a mighty bloodless substitute for life.' Inherent in that statement is the importance of combining 'Town and Gown.'

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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The debate will continue as to the source of impactful enterprise and entrepreneurship. Some maintain it's learned. Others that it's innate and intuitive. My view is that enterprise and entrepreneurship are developed and nurtured from within. NUI Galway has a significant responsibility in influencing and inspiring enterprise. I believe there exists the potential for Galway, through the intervention of NUI Galway, to become a centre of excellence for entrepreneurs globally. Dr. John Breslin has assumed a noble leadership role in this respect in recent times. There needs to be more.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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I still recall that day when I set a group of twelve struggling and desperate business people the task of identifying the one characteristic that would enable them survive the recession. After much debate they concluded that the ultimate bridge between aspiration and achievement is discipline. Essentially the mantra is that you can accomplish any goal provided you back it up with the requisite discipline. The Irish word 'Smácht' is an infinitely richer word than discipline. I recall my uncle Stíofáin proclaiming to my horrified mother that he could put 'smacht on my fishing in as little

as one week.' Smácht translates directly as discipline but it also connotes manners and shape and control. The four biggest challenges facing society currently are obesity, marital breakdown, depression and debt. Each one of them has at their core an absence of Smacht. And the alarming thing is that modern marketing, which I'm an advocate of, fuels the fire of instant gratification and the quick fix. It's desert before dinner. Why eat in moderation when you can get a pill to alleviate heart disease? Why stick with the marriage when a quick fling is so seductive? Why save when you can borrow? My goal is to promote the notion of 'Smacht' to the world. Contrary to the view that 'Smacht' is what deprives us of our freedom, 'Smácht' is what actually creates our freedom.







## Ronan O' Sullivan

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1995

Current job and title:  
**OPERATIONS MANAGER,  
CPL-GALWAY**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Born in Corr Na Mona in Co. Galway a long time ago. Attended St. Jarlath's College boarding school in Tuam for 6 years (includes 1 lap of honour) and started an Arts Degree at NUI Galway in 1991. By good fortune, the whole CAO points system changed in 1991 and all of a sudden I had enough points for a B. Comm so I transferred back to first Comm after completion of first Arts. Thanks to my clever (fortuitous) selection of Arts subjects I had lots of subject exemptions for first Comm. That was a good year! Majored in two streams (HR & Marketing) as was the way then for my final year B. Comm. I'm married since 2005 and living in Galway with my wife Fiona (whom I met in NUI Galway) and two daughters Grace (2½) years old and Alison who is two weeks old as I write this. We are also guardians to my late sister's children. Anna is currently in first Arts at NUI Galway and David is in fifth year in the Bish.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I loved UCG (later NUI Galway) when I got there in 1991. I was in digs (remember those?) with 7 other lads for my first year and I remember we got very involved in various clubs and societies early on. This was a great way to meet new friends and learn some valuable life lessons outside of all the academic stuff that was going on. I was very involved with Music Soc. and along with another B. Comm graduate (Paul O' Kelly) we set up a very successful talent competition, the final of which became the centre piece for the annual societies night. This is well before X Factor etc. was ever dreamed up, so we were well ahead of our time! We had great fun with the Saints & Scholars Society and I hope a few people remember our late night contribution to the record breaking

Lit & Deb debate of 1995 (28 days of continuous debate). I managed a brief stint as an elected officer of the Students' Union but that is a very long story which the confines of this short bio cannot accommodate! Believe it or not we actually managed to do some study as well for the B. Comm, and I made some very good friends in the class, many of which I still meet regularly. A few of us formed a study group in our final year and we whiled away many a day second guessing which questions would come up in exams and debating the merits of supply side economics (interspersed with ½ hour intervals of Blackadder on video). I enjoyed my time so much I went back to NUI Galway twice more: once for my postgraduate in Systems Analysis and again to complete a MBS by research, and I've been a regular guest lecturer since 2004 to the MBS class.

### **CAREER TO DATE**

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My first job was with Bank of Ireland as a bank assistant and I worked with them during any holiday time from the B. Comm. After I graduated in 1995 I remained with BOI and worked in most of the branches in Galway at some stage. Eventually I became part of the team that established a centralised back office support function for the BOI branches in Galway. To be honest I never felt my career would go anywhere in the Bank and FÁS (as they were at the time) were offering the possibility of returning to college to train in systems analysis and computer programming. I thought I might be good at that so I quit the Bank and returned to NUI Galway. I found out quickly that I wasn't a programmer and never would be! After completing the course I wandered into a recruitment company that was just establishing itself in Galway called CompuStaff. The MD there saw I had a B.

Comm with HR and Marketing, coupled with a postgrad in IT and he figured I might be good at recruiting IT professionals so he hired me!

After 4 years there, the dot com bubble burst and it was time to move on so I joined IRC to set up their IT recruitment function and also established their psychometric product offering. They allowed me to work from home, which gave me the opportunity to do a research Masters part time in NUI Galway. (Back again!). I was headhunted from IRC to Richmond recruitment to manage their Galway office and they were subsequently bought out by CPL. Presently I manage a team of 10 people recruiting professionals across a range of industries for the Western market.

### **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

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Whenever the word "education" comes up I'm always reminded of John Henry Newman, and his famous writing over 150 years ago on "The Idea of a University". It's a big read with big ideals and I don't claim to be any sort of philosopher, but from my understanding education, be it business or any other discipline, should shape the whole individual. (Business) education is not simply a matter of being taught to do business things and then doling out a qualification to certify this. In a university context it should endow the student with an all-encompassing view on life, society, ethics, justice, and social progress and an ability to think critically and more deeply about these things, albeit from a starting point of the business objective. I think I was lucky in that, while I got a great grounding in business from my B. Comm studies, I also involved myself in lots of other activities and societies while at university which gave me a broad perspective on things and taught

me to view ideas, problems, issues etc. from lots of different points of view. I suppose my point here (finally!) is that as a student at NUI Galway you should immerse yourself in lots of other activities and events outside your own sphere of study in order to gain a fuller education in the true sense of the word. Given my experience in business it will stand to you.

### THE IRISH ECONOMY

“An economist is an expert who will know tomorrow why the things he predicted yesterday didn’t happen today.” – Lawrence J. Peter.

I remember starting out in the B. Comm, our economics lecturer shared his view that the Irish economy has rarely followed any of the rules as laid out in the various models of economic theory. So at best we are left guessing as to the state and direction of the Irish economy. In my experience things are a bit simpler though because the Irish economy goes up and goes down. Not exactly a very profound statement I guess, but knowing this gives you the opportunity to prepare for the downturn;

- a. Always have at least 6 months salary saved
- b. Don’t borrow money against a depreciating asset
- c. Try to stay relevant! If your skill set is wiped out in this cycle then retrain. It’s never too late to return to education and start a new career.

The recruitment industry is a great bellwether for the state of an economy because one of the first things to be effected when confidence is down, is recruitment. It’s also one of the first things to recover, and right now the recruitment market is very buoyant which is a good indicator that the economy is

growing....for now... ..until, the next time!

### NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

Galway city has often been referred to as “the graveyard of ambition” and some people might construe this as a negative statement. I think however, that people in Galway view this statement with a level of understated pride. Galway is such a fantastic place to live that some people may forego future career progression in order to remain living here. This belief about Galway started back in the 1950s (talk to any senior Banker about this legend) and perhaps then you may have had to forego great opportunities to remain here. These days however Galway is a worldwide hub for medical device research and manufacturing, IT and software development, food technology, the arts, and also has a vibrant start-up ecosystem. These days you can have the career and the lifestyle of the West of Ireland. NUI Galway has played a major part in the growth and success of Galway and I think part of this is due to the location of the campus at the heart of our city. NUI Galway is part of the DNA of what makes Galway great. We sometimes forget that the students make up about 20% of the population of Galway and they add so much to the vibrancy, curiosity and energy of the city. It’s also important to remember that NUI Galway is a major employer for Galway city and currently employs about 2,400 people, many of which are based in the heart of the city and not miles away in an industrial estate! The University also helps to maintain and grow the various industries in Galway by providing a ready-made talent pool of bright, well educated, and ambitious graduates. I know from experience this has been instrumental in attracting foreign direct investment to Galway in the past and will

continue to help attract more investment in the future.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS**

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This is a hard one to write about! As I've worked in recruitment for 18 years now I've discovered that peoples' journeys through their working lives rarely follow any sort of predetermined plan that they laid out for themselves. My advice here is to be flexible on what you expect from work but always keep an eye out for opportunities to progress and learn new things. A positive attitude and a determination to achieve will take you much further than being the smartest person in the room. In business I've always found that it's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. What is success? To some it's the job title, the position of power or influence, the big house, the new car. To others it's doing something they love regardless of the pay packet. Success is too subjective to define in one sentence. It's up to you to define what success will be, and it's up to you to attain it. A quote that has always stuck with me is one attributed to Marilyn Monroe where she said "A career is a wonderful thing but you can't curl up with it on a cold night." My interpretation of this is that while achieving a career and success are important things in life it should never be to the detriment of the friends, family and the people you love. What's the point of success, however you define it, if you have no one to share it with?



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## **Gerard Rabbette**

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1983**

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Current job and title:  
**CEO, UNIPHAR PLC**

## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I am from Castlebar and went to St Gerald's College where my strengths were very much in the business subjects rather than languages or anything else. From an early age, I worked in our family retail business and that's really what gave me the taste for commerce. The 1980s were tough in Ireland, but I enjoyed working in the business despite the many challenges we faced. When I look back, this was a very formative time where I learned many valuable lessons that still stand to me today - the challenges for small local businesses and a big international business are surprisingly similar: it's about having a clear strategy and the finance and management expertise necessary to implement it.

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

Always having been interested in how companies operated and became successful, I saw the B. Comm in Galway as a great degree which would allow me to prepare myself for a career in business. Both academically and socially, it proved a great choice. There was a fantastic atmosphere around the university and the semester system worked really well. The university was small enough for you to get to know not only your class mates but students from other faculties as well and I made lifelong friends during those years. We were able to have a really good balance between academic and personal life, which I think is very important in terms of helping you to mature and develop your view of the world. This was the first time I'd lived away from home, so I had to learn to look after myself - the university and the city were really friendly and that made it easy to settle in quickly and start the important business of developing as an individual. I think NUI Galway produces graduates that are well

rounded - who are not only able academically but have learned how to think for themselves and be confident in their point of view, both very important in the workplace and life in general.

## CAREER TO DATE

I left UCG to join EY in their Dublin offices and worked in audit for three years, before moving into management consultancy for two more years. I knew pretty early on that I had good commercial sense and wanted to be on the client side where the decisions were made and you could actually make your ideas become a reality. After 5 years in practice, I joined Cahill May Roberts, a newly listed Irish PLC in the pharmaceutical distribution sector, where I worked in a variety of commercial and finance roles. After the acquisition of Cahill May Roberts by Celesio, I moved into Operations and took on a major re-organisation of the Group for our new parent company, which resulted in a significantly streamlined business with a 30% efficiency improvement. I then moved into General Management to take on the challenge of an underperforming Business Unit and managed to turn this business around, before taking on a European role for Celesio to develop a significant pan European business. Interesting as those roles were, I was looking for a new challenge and in 2009, I was appointed CEO of Uniphar Group plc and took on the job of turning around a large Irish business which had expanded too rapidly during the Celtic Tiger years and found itself loss making, with €200m in debt. I put together a new senior team and we have completely turned the company around. Today, Uniphar is a great Irish success story and one of the top 30 Irish indigenous companies with annual revenues in excess of €1b, making acquisitions in UK and Ireland

and growing profits. Uniphar plans to list on the Irish and London Stock exchanges in 2018.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Business education is often underestimated as an academic discipline. While other disciplines get more credit for their contribution to building a strong economy, it's really important for any economy that there are enough people who are properly financially and commercially literate – they are usually the ones who can turn a start-up with a good idea into a successful employer or advise policymakers about what structures and conditions we need in place to make Ireland an attractive place to build and grow a business. While experience is what is most important in business, a sound business education gives you a strong platform on which to build your career.

## THE IRISH ECONOMY

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I am very bullish about the Irish economy and believe that strong growth will resolve our legacy debt challenge and that our export sector will continue to outperform. We are fortunate to work in a very open and dynamic economy that in the main is very pro-business and has good infrastructure. As a country I hope that we have learnt the lessons of our dramatic fall in 2008 and now have a more stable tax base and a focus on continuing to be more and more competitive. However, we do face a number of challenges driven by demographics with the unsustainable public sector pensions bill and the growing cost of healthcare. These are two areas that need dramatic reform, particularly healthcare, where the State needs to engage more with primary care and the private sector.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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The speed of change in business, like everywhere else, has increased exponentially in recent years. Even formerly stable industries, like pharmaceuticals, are experiencing significant change. In this type of environment, entrepreneurship, (and by this I mean having the ability and the willingness to find innovative or ground breaking solutions, despite the risks), becomes ever more important. Even if you work in an established business, you need the ability to develop an entrepreneurial approach to solving problems.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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I've always believed that if you do something you love, you will be successful at it. It can take you a number of years to find out what makes you passionate and drives you on, so I would encourage students to try as many different areas as they can, whether it's through summer jobs or working at weekends or just asking someone to show you around and talk about what they do. And if your first choice or first job proves not to be the right avenue for you, don't be afraid to change. A career is 40 or maybe even nearer to 50 years as retirement ages rise – you really don't want to spend that amount of time doing something that you only tolerate. Even after more than 25 years in business, I still get a buzz when my team comes up with a new solution to an old problem, when we find a new piece of tech that can improve our margins or when I sit across the negotiation table from a worthy counterpart and know that we can get a mutually beneficial deal over the line - it's a great feeling. So do what you love, work hard at it and success will come your way.



## Nakul Sharma

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**2005**

Current job and title:  
**FOUNDER & CEO,  
HOSTMAKER**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I am originally from Mumbai, India. Since moving to Ireland to complete an undergraduate degree in 2001, I have been a world citizen, with my professional career taking me to London, Dubai, Fontainebleau, Singapore and back to London, where I currently reside with my wife, close to Regent's Park. I balance my work life with a morning game of squash, a weekend box set binge of Netflix drama series or experiencing the vibrant London food and drink scene with friends.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/ UCG EXPERIENCE

I decided to take a leap of faith as the first member of the Sharma family to travel outside the country and landed in Shannon in 2001 to join the Shannon College of Hotel Management. The College's outstanding reputation in the hospitality industry to produce top drawer hotel professionals and the strong Irish tourism industry was a big draw and became the first step to explore the hotel business. As part of the course, I completed a year's internship at the Clontarf Castle Hotel in Dublin. In the final year, I transitioned to a B. Comm degree at NUI Galway where I took up courses in marketing and strategy. As an international student on campus, it was a fantastic all round experience in a young and vibrant Irish

*I graduated with an honours degree and a scholarship from Shannon College of Hotel Management with the best academic record in the class. This was a great launchpad to a career in the hotel industry.*

town. While there I played an active role in the Badminton Club. I graduated with an honours degree and a scholarship from Shannon College of Hotel Management with the best academic record in the class. This was a great launchpad to a career in the hotel industry.

### CAREER TO DATE

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I was hired as part of a select group of graduates by Starwood Hotels and Resorts (the company that runs renowned brands like Sheraton, Le Meridien and W Hotels) onto their management training programme. I thoroughly enjoyed the exposure to hotel operations and specialised into a role in the revenue management team in London. The first position of responsibility came up at the age of 24 when I grabbed the opportunity to launch two new Starwood hotels in Dubai with a revenue generation responsibility of \$40m. I built a team of ten and in challenging times following the financial crisis of 2008, I took the hotels to leading marketshare.

Following a year out in 2010 for a MBA from INSEAD, a leading international business school, I joined the commercial strategy team at Intercontinental Hotels Group. Operations and strategy experience armed me with the confidence to take the leap into becoming an entrepreneur. I founded Hostmaker (www.hostmaker.co) in 2014, a hospitality management business for Airbnb homes. Hostmaker has grown rapidly over the last two years with operations in London, Paris, Rome

and Barcelona – raising over £1.5m from a group of venture capital funds and senior travel industry executives. Hostmaker was featured by Forbes magazine as a one of five new British businesses to watch in 2016.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Taking business and management courses at NUI Galway laid an excellent foundation for understanding how the business world works. From managing people to technology to finances, a B. Comm degree coupled with a diploma in hotel management equipped me with the toolkit to enter the professional environment with confidence.

### NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

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My time at NUI Galway was a fantastic period of personal, professional and

educational discovery.

I was in Galway for only one year while the other years in Ireland were spent in Shannon and Dublin through Shannon College of Hotel Management. That year in Galway was an experience in

proper university life with students from different walks of life.

### ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Founding Hostmaker and growing the business across four cities to a team of over 50 employees in just under two years has given great insight into all the challenges of entrepreneurship. Building a new business brings all the classes from business

*Building a new business brings all the classes from business school in management decision making, competitive strategy, creative thinking and people management to the fore.*



school in management decision making, competitive strategy, creative thinking and people management to the fore. It is a rapid iterative process in identifying a business opportunity, building a team around a vision, raising funds from investors and continuously evaluating priorities to stay ahead of the competition. The landscape changes continuously and staying abreast of developments gives a great adrenalin rush. Some of the most important factors for success are probably timing of the idea, execution of the business plan and quality of team who bring the vision to life and take it forward.

*In all instances, it took a lot of courage to believe in my abilities and make a decision against conventionally held views. Advice from the “more experienced” elders should be taken, but also challenged. Once a decision is taken, the determination to see it through to completion is the harder bit that builds character and prepares one better for the future.*

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

Personally, there have been some turning points in the last fifteen years that I can look back on and pin point as defining moments in my career so far. In all instances, it took a lot of courage to believe in my abilities and make a decision against conventionally held views. Advice from the “more experienced” elders should be taken, but also challenged. Once a decision is taken, the determination to see it through to completion is the harder bit that builds character and prepares one better for the future. What is unique to Hostmaker and my entrepreneurial adventure is that my wife of five years is also my business partner for the last two. The line between personal and professional time gets blurred and there are positives and negatives to that. The biggest upside is that we spend more time with each other than most couples our age would get to spend and we know exactly how each person’s day is going so we can support each other through the rough patches and celebrate the little victories together.



## Dómhnal Slattery

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1988**

Current job and title:  
**FOUNDER & CEO,  
AVOLON**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Much of my career has been spent in the aviation industry, initially in marketing roles with Guinness Peat Aviation (GPA) and GECAS, to now, leading the world's fourth largest aircraft lessor, Avolon. Over the past 27 years in the industry, I have developed a passion for Ireland's unique and fascinating aviation heritage. I am proud of what our island nation has achieved from the very first transatlantic flight, to now being at the forefront of the global multi-billion dollar aircraft leasing sector. In 2014, we at Avolon, commissioned a documentary, *Pioneers & Aviators, A Century of Irish Aviation*. The documentary tells the story of the pioneering individuals whose vision, passion, successes and failures helped forge Ireland's unique aviation landscape and, in many respects, inspired my career. Investing in and supporting initiatives outside of the business and aviation finance sectors is also important to me and, in particular, supporting the Arts and Media. I founded the Irish regional newspaper, *The Clare People* and also co-founded Newgrange Pictures which rapidly established itself as one of the leading (film and television) independent production companies in Ireland.

I am a native of Ennis, County Clare and a proud supporter of Clare Hurling and Munster Rugby.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

In 1980s Ireland, a very different country than the one we know today, the vast majority of career opportunities were abroad. The B. Comm in UCG (as it then was) was regarded as a business degree which would nurture and develop the skills needed to capitalise on the business opportunities internationally. Looking back, that has proven to be a fair

assessment as so many of my colleagues have been successful in their careers all around the world. Studying at NUI Galway was a learning experience - both academically and personally. It engendered an ideal balance of business skills and life skills, the combination of a course grounded in reality together with the atmosphere within the university. We took our work seriously but not ourselves seriously. In fact, this is the approach we embrace in Avolon today and is, we believe, a key element in our ability to build a strong team; and, to build and sustain strong relationships with our customers.

### CAREER TO DATE

Although I was awarded a Fulbright scholarship, I was fortunate to find an opportunity at GPA, run by Tony Ryan. At the time GPA was Ireland's most exciting and fastest growing international company. It had a culture of high achievement; was an exciting place to work; and, one which built on the skills I had begun to develop during my time at university. Following GPA, I formed my own business, IAMG in 1994, which we built and subsequently sold to Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) in 2001. IAMG was the foundation for RBS Aviation Capital which we built into the world's third largest aircraft finance business. In 2010 I identified an opportunity to build another world class aircraft leasing company: Avolon.

Today, Avolon is the world's fourth largest aircraft leasing business by asset value, with a fleet at the end of December of 420 aircraft. Following 5 years in private ownership, Avolon listed on the New York Stock Exchange in December 2014 in what was the largest ever listing on the NYSE by an Irish founded company. Less than 9 months after the listing, we announced an

agreement to be acquired by Bohai, a Chinese leasing company. The transaction completed in January 2016 with an enterprise value of US\$7.6 billion – a significant milestone for the company of which we are very proud. We have now entered an exciting phase of growth under Bohai's ownership.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

Studying a business degree at NUI Galway helped me develop both academically and personally. It gave me a balance of business skills and life skills which have been integral to my career. I have always been a strong supporter of education and Irish universities. It is a fundamental part of our philosophy at Avolon. We continuously encourage our employees to further their education and heighten their business acumen. Ireland has become the global hub for aircraft leasing, however, there has never been a university course focused on the finance/business aspect of the aircraft leasing industry. It is an important sector to the Irish economy and I am passionate that it should be an option for perspective business students entering third level education. I have been a driving force behind, and sponsor of, Europe's first ever postgraduate masters degree in Aviation Finance. The UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School in Dublin has launched a postgraduate MSc in Aviation Finance with the first students enrolling in September 2016.

### THE IRISH ECONOMY

When the Government took office back in 2011 the country was almost bankrupt. Fine Gael and Labour took us back from the brink and have now positioned us as the fastest growing economy in Europe. We are again a trusted nation on the world stage. We should be proud of that. The austerity of the past

five years was an unfortunate necessity of the profound negative situation we were in. The next five years will be as different as night and day because this country is getting back on its feet. Those positive effects are already happening. There are more people employed, taxes are coming down, capital expenditure is rising, banks are lending, more new cars are on the road, all these key indicators make me profoundly optimistic for the Irish economy. While the political outlook post our recent election is uncertain, I am confident in the outlook for the economy and believe the outgoing Government has positioned us well for future growth.

### ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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In Ireland, I think we have a true entrepreneurial spirit which is unique to our nation. My father was a green grocer in Ennis and this was my first glimpse at what it meant to run your own business. I also used my entrepreneurial spirit to get me by; I worked as a DJ to pay my way through university in Galway. In 1994 I saw an opportunity to start my own business and determine my own path. Since then, I have built and rapidly scaled three market-leading aircraft leasing platforms; IAMG, RBS Aviation Capital and Avolon, through three different business cycles. There have been times, particularly in the midst of the economic downturn, when certain business ventures didn't work out as I had planned. An important business lesson that I would like to pass on to other entrepreneurs is; don't be afraid to fail. It is through these failures that I have learnt some of the most important business (and life) lessons. As Winston Churchill once summarised "success consists of going from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm."

In the end, I believe conviction, consistency and determination are rewarded.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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As I reflect on my career, so far, I look back with immense pride and appreciation on the achievements that myself and the team around me have delivered. Together, the three companies we have established and built, over the past 20 years have raised and deployed c. US\$25 billion of debt and equity capital to finance aircraft for airlines and aircraft investors around the world. A central tenet of each of the three businesses I have founded has been a focus on risk assessment, oversight and long term relationships. Our business is primarily about building strong, long-term customer relationships. The foundation of that skill (or blend of skills) was formed in NUI Galway and is perhaps one of the most valuable skills anyone can nurture. I believe conviction, insightfulness and a focus on long-term growth are key to success. It is also important to accept failings and learn from your past mistakes and those of others! Building a successful business is not easy, it takes sheer hard work, long hours and the belief that, together, you can make impossible things happen.



## Margaret Sweeney

B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1981**

Current job and title:  
**NON-EXECUTIVE BOARD  
DIRECTOR**

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Born in Kilcar in South West Donegal, I am from a small farming/fishing background and was the third eldest of 12 children, 6 of whom graduated from NUI Galway. I was educated in a two teacher country primary school, Derrylahan National School and thereafter Carrick Vocational School to Leaving Certificate in 1978. I graduated from NUI Galway with a First Class Honours B. Comm degree in 1981 and moved to Dublin to join KPMG (then Stokes Kennedy Crowley) as a graduate trainee to do accountancy. In 1985, I married Paraic Lavelle, an army officer. We have two sons, David, born in 1991 who is training to be an Accountant, and Patrick, born in 1994, who is a Trinity Scholar and studying Economics and Political Science.

### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

I started a B. Comm degree in UCG in October 1978, graduating with First Class Honours and achieving 1st place in my B. Comm class of 1981. I didn't have the opportunity to study accountancy at school, but achieved the McQuillan Kelly prize in second B. Comm for getting first place in the accountancy exam that year. I valued the opportunity in first year B. Comm to study German. With hindsight, this was invaluable, as later in my career I sat on the Board of Directors of Dusseldorf and Hamburg Airports in Germany. The current President Michael D. Higgins was my lecturer in Sociology class in first year and he opened my mind to our responsibility to society generally and its development, which influenced somewhat my involvement in activities in later life. I travelled on a JI visa to Chicago and also to Munich in Germany during summer holidays. All of these experiences and in particular the lecturers, professors and friends

from NUI Galway, greatly shaped my future life. I was honoured to receive the 2009 NUI Galway Alumni Award for Business, Public Policy and Law.

### CAREER TO DATE

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In 1985 I qualified as a Chartered Accountant with KPMG, and shortly thereafter was promoted to Manager and subsequently a Director in KPMG. In all, I spent 15 years with the firm and had the opportunity to work with companies such as General Electric, US pharmaceutical companies that started manufacturing operations in Ireland in the 1980s, GPA, Aer Rianta (now daa) and the Irish Aviation Authority that were at the forefront of innovation in the aviation sector and many successful indigenous companies in the agri-food sector. I worked closely with Aer Rianta at the time on their development of Airport Retail operations in Russia, opening its first shop in Moscow Airport in 1987.

I joined Aer Rianta in 1996, subsequently becoming Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Executive during my eight years with the company. I was Chief Executive of Postbank Ireland and have been an adviser to a number of Irish private and state owned companies during my career. I am also a former Board Director of Teagasc, Shannon College of Hotel Management, Birmingham Airport and other companies and have been a mentor to the Ryan Academy for Entrepreneurship.

I am currently a Non-Executive Director on the Boards of a number of public and private companies, including Dalata Hotel Group plc, Irish Residential Properties REIT plc, the Irish subsidiary of Intellectual Ventures and a number of other companies. I am a Member of Council of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland and the Governing Authority of DCU. I also give my time to

support and assist not-for-profit organisations including the Dublin Neurological Institute and Women for Election.

I am a former President of Dublin Chamber of Commerce and a member of International Women's Forum, a Global Network of Women Leaders of significant and diverse achievement from 33 countries worldwide. I have contributed as a speaker at many Irish and international conferences on business topics and women in leadership.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

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I have been privileged to have the opportunity to have insight into the shaping of education for young people in a number of different ways over the last 15 years, as a member of Governing Authority of Dublin City University (for nearly 15 years), appointed by the Minister for Education to the new Board to restructure FÁS and develop the strategy for Further Education and SOLAS and more recently as Chairman of a Taskforce for Chartered Accountants Ireland looking at whether the education and training provided for today's young trainee Chartered Accountants and the organisations they will work with in the future, is relevant and appropriate. I believe a quality business education is the foundation for developing the strong business leaders of the future who have to lead and navigate organisations in a complex global world, regardless of the size of the organisation or its location. This requires not just technical and specialist knowledge but also the development of hard and soft skills such as critical analysis, innovation, decision making and effective execution, influencing and communications and, very importantly, encouraging reflection and self-awareness. Overarching this, a good business education should provide the foundations for

developing strong ethics and values in all of our young business graduates of the future. This is a big ask, and if business education is to have the impact it should have in shaping our economies and societies of the future, it needs to adopt a collaborative approach to providing a combination of research, academic, practical and entrepreneurial learning. Education also needs to embrace the model that it is a lifelong process and to encourage this understanding in everyone from a young age. We shouldn't see our degree or Masters as the finish point.

## ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Enterprise and entrepreneurship is at the heart of any thriving society and economy. We see it every day in the towns and communities across the country where people have adapted from the traditional crafts based entrepreneurship to artisan producers, skills based businesses in technology, pharmaceuticals, etc. One of the challenges for the survival and growth of today's enterprises is having an appropriate cost and financing structure fitted to their business models which can be leveraged as they grow. The market opportunity for growth for any business, even in an island economy, is much greater due to the evolution of technology and online access to the world. Unfortunately, there is still a lot to be done in Ireland to provide the necessary infrastructure to enable a thriving entrepreneurial business culture in Ireland – broadband and IT connectivity, tax structures that support entrepreneurs, making funding and investment in enterprises attractive options and supporting indigenous companies on a level playing field with international companies coming to Ireland. Importantly, we need to re-establish the

importance of corporate legal structure for business to separate business risk from major impacts on families, something that has been eroded with the advent of personal guarantees for funding businesses.

## NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

Foremost, I have to say that NUI Galway and Galway City are very close to my heart and I visit frequently. In the early 1980s (and most likely still today), Galway City was an extension of the UCG Campus, particularly for the extensive social life that all students enjoy, from The Cellar Bar and the Skeff to the nightclubs in Salthill. When I first arrived in UCG, I lived in Salthill and frequented the Aula Maxima and Smokey Joes. I first got to hear Christy Moore, Paul Brady, and some other great concerts and music sessions in Galway and saw some great drama in Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe. This opportunity for arts and culture still thrives today in Galway. My lectures were mostly held in lecture halls along the Concourse which was very new and modern in those days. The university has since seen some extensive growth and development and is now a leading University campus. Galway in my view has a strong culture of innovation and entrepreneurship allied with a personality of loving life and enjoyment. In my days Digital was a major player in business in Galway and it spawned a lot of the early stage Tech companies in Ireland. Likewise, with GPA in Shannon, which was the creator of what is now, a world leading aviation leasing industry out of Ireland. After Donegal, Galway is my second favourite place in the world!

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

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I have had so many wonderful opportunities in my working life to date with great companies and great people. I credit my successful navigation through the corporate world with having a family background that instilled a strong sense of equality with everyone regardless of gender, race, wealth or otherwise. My success, on reflection, is also due to many people over the years who gave me opportunities, dumped me in at the deep end on challenges and offered their wisdom and advice. I only realise now that these were my 'mentors'. I always worked with a few simple personal rules – keep my life simple, family is priority and do things I enjoy, this includes work. I also have an innate curiosity and have pushed myself outside my comfort zone to learn new skills and take on challenges. Observing and learning how organisations and businesses, mainly male led, functioned was also important for my generation of women in business. I think that there is a tremendous opportunity in business to release the talent and expertise of its female workforce. This is a complex issue as organisations are based around structures, designs, working patterns, behaviours and a social model for males and females, all of which have evolved over centuries. It is probably the biggest change and transformation project for the 21st century. There is a tremendous opportunity available now, as never before, for women to progress to leadership across the business world and providing all women with this opportunity, if they so desire it, requires a collaborative engagement of all men and women in business.



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### Michael Walsh

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
**1985**

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Current job and title:  
**MARKETING DIRECTOR  
AND CO-OWNER,  
DUBARRY OF IRELAND**



## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Born in Athlone, County Westmeath and educated at Marist College. My father was a newsagent. I am the eldest of four children with two sisters and one brother. I had a very keen interest in all sports at school especially rugby, playing with both Marist College and Athlone R.F.C.

## B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

Being from Athlone it was a toss-up between going to college in Galway or Dublin. Having holidayed in Wards Hotel Salthill with my grandmother I always had a soft spot for Galway and the Salthill Promenade and that swung my decision. In first year I continued

*I believe that business education needs to become much more relevant and up to date with the new landscape that is digital marketing. It is a rapidly evolving space and third level educational institutions need to dedicate resources to keep pace with the developments.*

to play rugby with Athlone and travelled home for training and weekend matches unless against Galway opposition. Then for second and third year I played with UCG following a record transfer fee at the time! Having initially entered Comm with a view to doing Chartered Accountancy I “saw the light” following a chat with Prof. Jim Ward about career options in marketing, which was a relatively new discipline within the business school at that time. While in second year I

became the first Guinness Campus Rep for UCG. Up until then they operated only in Trinity, UCD and UCC. This was a great experience working with the local sales office and going to quarterly meetings in St. James Gate to discuss branding strategy. It involved sponsorship and product placement of the then key brands of Guinness, Smithwicks and Harp.

## CAREER TO DATE

Following graduation with a B. Comm in 1985 I participated in the then AnCO/UCG Marketing Practice programme on a placement with Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) in their Dublin based Irish Sales & Marketing HQ. Over the years 1986-1988 I worked with both Elan Couriers (part of DHL Group) and Galway based Woodland Investments. Since then, the following:

**1989 – 1991** Brand Manager with Almarai Food Company – Saudi Arabia

**1991– 1993** Marketing Manager Almarai Food Company – Saudi Arabia

**1994 – 1995** Regional Marketing Manager AT Cross Writing Instruments for Middle East, Africa and Sub-Continent

**1995 – 1997** Marketing Manager Dubarry of Ireland (<http://www.dubarry.com>)

**1997 – Present Day** Marketing Director Dubarry of Ireland

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

I believe that business education needs to become much more relevant and up to date with the new landscape that is digital marketing. It is a rapidly evolving space and third level educational institutions need to dedicate resources to keep pace with the

developments. I also believe that students need to focus on familiarising themselves with contemporary business matters and at a very minimum be reading business journals and quality newspapers on a regular business. The ability to “talk the talk” is key to building business relationships and a good general knowledge, in particular of the business environment, is a very good starting point. There is no substitute for on-the-job experience and training and I believe that this should be an integral part of all degree level courses. Business students should also bear this in mind when targeting part-time and summer jobs. In marketing knowing what your customer wants and delivering it to them by exceeding their expectations is crucial and in this context experience gained in the retail/service/hospitality sector offers a very good grounding to young undergraduates. Travel is also a great education and learning the essentials of a foreign language will always be looked upon very favourably.

### NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY

As a regular visitor over the years to the NUI Galway campus I have seen it develop beyond recognition since my days in college when it effectively ended at the Bank of Ireland and the college bar was nestled in one corner of the quadrangle. State of the art academic, student, leisure and playing facilities have now stretched along the shores of the Corrib as a result of a well thought

*There is no substitute for on-the-job experience and training and I believe that this should be an integral part of all degree level courses.*

*Our educational system is only now beginning to create structures to foster a spirit of entrepreneurship, despite the recent recessionary period, and it needs to be continuously encouraged.*

through strategic development plan that is paying dividends today and the envy of many other educational institutions. Galway City has also changed since the 1980s, in some

cases for the better but in others for the worst. On the negative side is the road and traffic infrastructure which is a hindrance and major inconvenience

to business, tourism and people going about their daily lives. Planning has in many cases been dysfunctional and displays a fundamental lack of any strategic vision. On the positive side it is great to see the continued existence of many family businesses on the main streets of Galway that have stood the test of time with many passed through several generations. They co-exist and compete favourably alongside the many international retail chains that have arrived in recent years. One of the greatest assets that Galway possesses is a compact city centre with a vibrant social and festival culture along with excellent restaurants and pubs. It is also a great place to rear a family with excellent schools, sports facilities and, of course, The Prom!

### ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There is a very strong culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship in Ireland. These range from local artisan food producers and start up restaurants to larger scale entities in the medical device, IT and manufacturing sectors. The many local and

national agencies that support, mentor, encourage and advise start-up businesses go about their work under the radar and deserve great credit. Thankfully gone are the days when the local bank manager was the sole arbiter of whether funding was made available. There is also a great spirit of support and mentoring in a voluntary capacity from many who were fortunate enough to have achieved their own success. This is a very valuable network for up and coming entrepreneurs to tap into. Our educational system is only now beginning to create structures to foster a spirit of entrepreneurship so maybe it comes from our generational roots in farming but it's very much alive, despite the recent recessionary period, and it needs to be continuously encouraged. The stigma or fear of failure needs to be tackled to help remove the barriers that prevent some people from progressing their ideas and dreams. At a local level we should all actively support our butchers, bakers and candle-stick makers by buying local and avoiding the mega-retailers for our entire weekly shop.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

I think personal happiness and success at work are intertwined. Working with a product/brand/service that you really believe in and are passionate about certainly leads to a much more rewarding career and being part of the building and re-positioning of a brand like Dubarry has been a hugely satisfying experience. Our philosophy has always been to start with the consumer and

*I think personal happiness and success at work are intertwined. Working with a product/brand/service that you really believe in and are passionate about certainly leads to a much more rewarding career.*

work back internally rather than the other way around. We spend a lot of time listening to our end users and key retailers to drive our new product development and improvement

programmes. A little levity also helps make the workplace and business environment more enjoyable and as Hunter S. Thompson once said "Life has become immeasurably better since I have been forced to stop taking it seriously." Our home is

a B. Comm "overload zone". My wife Melita and I graduated from UCG in 1985 with B. Comms, my eldest son Mark is third year B. Comm International (Spanish) and daughter Keena is first year B. Comm International (French) – both in NUI Galway. PaddyPower odds are strong that the youngest, Lauren (currently Junior Cert in the Jes) will also join the ranks for a Grand Slam of B. Comms.





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## Sean Webb

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B. Comm Graduation Year:  
1984

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Current job and title:  
**CEO, CABOT FINANCIAL  
IRELAND**

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### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

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I am one of nine children born to Joe and Rita Webb in Ballyhaunis Co Mayo. My father was a cattle dealer and my mother was very busy rearing the six girls and three boys in our family, as he pitted his wits against the farmers of Connacht trading in cattle, sheep and calves. I went to primary school in Ballyhaunis where life revolved around Gaelic football, athletics and in general a very outdoorsy and fun life. Secondary school was St Jarlath's College Tuam, Co Galway, which I attended with my two brothers Ted and Joseph. I loved my time in St Jarlath's and was lucky enough to play Gaelic football at all grades for the college including at senior level-when we lost an All Ireland final by one point in 1979. I joined the army as a cadet in 1979 and upon commissioning went to NUI Galway in 1981 to start my B. Comm. I later completed a MBS in UCD and returned to NUI Galway in 1991 to complete a MBA. I retired from the Defence Forces at Captain rank in 1993 to move into business life. I am married to Louise and we have two wonderful children, Jack and Lucy, and we live in Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin.

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### B. COMM AND NUI GALWAY/UCG EXPERIENCE

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My memories of my B. Comm in NUI Galway are all good ones. I was one of those cadets walking around the college in a green uniform, which was initially a barrier to communication with my fellow classmates, however after a while everything settled down. Having gone to secondary school in St Jarlath's and being from Mayo I knew a lot of my B. Comm class and other students in NUI Galway. I found the lecturers in NUI Galway very approachable and very professional. The course had just moved to the semester system, with exams in January and June, and this certainly curtailed our social

lives but improved our exam technique. In our first year we had the option of taking one Arts subject and I decided to take Sociology. One of our Sociology lecturers was Michael D Higgins and even though his lectures were early on a Monday morning I never missed one, as he was a passionate and inspirational teacher. I smile to myself when I see him on television in his role as President of Ireland with his aide de camp, as I was aide de camp to President Paddy Hillary in the early 1990s. I found the B. Comm to be a great degree in that there was lots of variety of subjects initially, which led to specialisation in the third year. I specialised in marketing and finance and there was a lot of project work and presentations being introduced to the course. I particularly remember the pioneering work of Jim Ward in Marketing; he had us working with businesses outside the college and placed a big emphasis on presentation skills.

### CAREER TO DATE

My first business job on leaving the Defence Forces in 1993 was as Sales Director in Nissan Ireland. One of the questions at my interview for the job was to compare myself to Kieran Fitzgerald, the former captain of the British and Irish Lions, who a few years earlier had left the Defence Forces and joined Toyota Ireland. I must have answered the question in a satisfactory manner as I got the job. I spent four years at Nissan and gained invaluable commercial experience working with the fifty Nissan dealers throughout Ireland. The car business is one of the few remaining businesses in the world where you trade an asset to get a replacement one, be that a new or used car. This requires great skill in the areas of pricing, cash and stock management. Car dealers are true entrepreneurs who trade high value assets at relatively low margins

and therefore it is essential that they retain the parts and service business with their customers. After four years I left Nissan and I joined GE Capital where I held various leadership positions including CEO GE Money Ireland and CEO GE Home Lending UK. Working for the largest company in the world (by market capitalisation) during those years was both very challenging and rewarding. The learning was constant and the focus on the delivery of results was relentless. In 2006 I decided to go the entrepreneurial route and set up Cabot Financial Ireland which is now the largest consumer credit management business in Ireland. We provide credit management services for all the banks, over one hundred credit unions and several utilities.

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

Having completed three degrees in the business area I am more convinced than ever that there needs to be a strong mix of the academic and the practical in business education. The academic aspect gives you the necessary grounding in the technical and theoretical aspects of your chosen discipline but of equal importance is the application of this knowledge. All of the colleges are now focused on having their students complete some sort of practical element to the courses that they offer and this is essential for the preparation of students for their working life. In Ireland I think that we can do better in the area of cultivating entrepreneurs. There are many types of entrepreneurs and they are not just limited to those who invent some very clever widget that no one has come up with before. Entrepreneurs do invent products but entrepreneurs also spot openings in the market and put together finance, technology, people and all of the other elements required

to create a business. I think that we can learn from the American view of taking risks and putting businesses together to create wealth and employment. We are an island nation on the periphery of Europe and we need to be clever in the manner in which we produce products and services which can be traded throughout the world. We are getting better at this but we still have some way to go and it is vital that our education system supports this entrepreneurial activity.

### **NUI GALWAY AND GALWAY CITY**

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My memories of both NUI Galway and Galway City are all positive ones. The unique feature of going to college in NUI Galway is the position which the university holds in the city. One is intertwined with the other, and this makes for a great college experience. While Galway has grown since I completed both my B. Comm and MBA the university still holds a prominent position in the city. I visit Galway on a regular basis and often stroll through the grounds to admire the many new buildings which have sprung up as the university continues to grow. During my B. Comm years in NUI Galway the economy in Ireland was in poor shape and it was almost taken for granted that the majority of graduates would be moving east to Dublin or leaving Ireland for the UK or America. Sadly since the onset of the financial crisis in 2008 in Ireland this is again the case for many new graduates. One big difference I observe in today's graduates is that they are much more confident and possess a more insightful view of the world. While my generation had an equally good education, today's generation through travel, the internet and the proliferation of global businesses operating from Ireland have higher expectations and this is a good thing. The city of Galway has

developed a substantial industrial and services sector particularly in the healthcare, IT and manufacturing areas. These industries need top class graduates to grow and enable them to compete on the world stage and it is vital that NUI Galway reviews and develops the content of their degree programmes to support this growth. The city of Galway enables businesspeople to develop their careers and their businesses while at the same time living in one of the most vibrant and culturally rich cities in Europe, if not the world.

### **ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

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In my working life to date I have worked in the public sector as an army officer, in the corporate sector with Nissan and General Electric and latterly as an entrepreneur in establishing Cabot Financial in Ireland. All three sectors are very different but the one that stands out as being unique is entrepreneurship. Whether you open a newsagent with two staff or you build a business and float it on a stock exchange some principles remain the same. In both situations you are putting yourself out there to potentially fail with the consequential financial and personal pain that follows. I have great respect for businesspeople who conceive of an idea and have the passion and determination to bring it to fruition. In order to do this you have to truly back yourself and be convinced in the merits of your idea and your own personal ability to make it happen. A small businessperson has to come up with the idea and in addition find the finance, manage the marketing, human resources, staff, customers, regulation, accounting etc. A key point in all of this is that the businessperson must have the ability to

live with and in fact thrive in the uncertain world of entrepreneurship. I would not consider myself a classic entrepreneur in that it was not my abiding passion to establish my own business from early on. What has worked very well for me is the years I spent in corporate life and in the army; both experiences taught me the importance of planning, structure and the ability to form teams and to optimise the performance of these teams. Another key discipline in entering the world of the entrepreneur is the ability to assess risk. By this I mean taking the time and putting the work into fully assessing a business opportunity. This may mean not running with the opportunity and this takes great discipline as you will have probably invested significantly both financially and emotionally in the idea. Even after completing a detailed due diligence and considering the opportunity from every angle the business may still fail, but you gave it every chance.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORK, BUSINESS AND SUCCESS

I have enjoyed the variety of my career in the army, corporate life and entrepreneurship. In addition having worked overseas has been very beneficial in experiencing different business cultures and industries. Key to all of this is the people that you work with and the benefit of working in and leading successful teams. The most important element of any business is its people and I have found that a key to the motivation of all teams is good communication. Good businesses work at communication with their staff and this is not just for communicating the good news, but also for communicating the challenges which the business faces. Rejection and failure-while very painful at the time-are great sources of learning. I have been rejected for several jobs

and Cabot Financial Ireland hit a very rocky patch in its first two years of operation which led to many sleepless nights. When I picked myself up and dusted myself down I found that I could have prepared better on several occasions and I didn't make the same mistakes again. In addition some external factors can impact on your business which are completely outside your control and you have just to accept this and make the best of the situation. Everyone has a different perspective on what the optimum work life balance is. For me it is finding the balance between business and the amount and the quality of the time I spend with my family. I certainly do not always get this balance right but when you have a personal and financial stake in a business it influences your perspective on the amount of time you spend driving the business. Success for me is the satisfaction of building a sustainable business, winning new clients and delivering a top class service to these clients. This can only be achieved through creating and leading successful teams who have the passion and the determination to succeed.

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### About the Editor

Gerard Turley is a faculty member of the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics at NUI Galway, where he lectures Economics and is the course Director of the Bachelor of Commerce degree. He holds Bachelor and Masters degrees from NUI Galway and a Doctorate from Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. As an academic he has worked in Ireland, UK, Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, Central Asia and the US. He is the author of several books, including *Principles of Economics: An Irish Text* (with Maureen Maloney and Fran O' Toole), *Transition Economics: Two Decades On* (with Peter Luke), and *Transition, Taxation and the State*. He lives in Salthill, Galway City with his wife, Monica and son, Kieran.

