



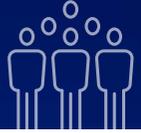
OLLSCOIL NA
GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY
OF GALWAY

An Institiúid Cúrsa Saoil
& Sochaí
Institute for Lifecourse
& Society

ENABLING
EQUITY
ACROSS THE
LIFE COURSE

Institute for Lifecourse and Society - ILAS

Public Policy Innovation Series



Public Engagement for Better Policy

Public Engagement for Better Policy will bring together senior officials from across the civil and public service, civil society leaders and academics to debate the current status and future potential of public engagement for policy in Ireland and how institutions might best respond to enhanced participation.

DATE: Tuesday, 27th May 2025

TIME: 10:00-16:00

VENUE: G018, ILAS, University of Galway

INVITATION

[Register here](#)

Profiling a selection of existing practices, it will critically assess the contribution of public engagement in policy to the goal of social solidarity across the life-course. The seminar will also reflect on the role of higher education in supporting public engagement processes, as part of its evidence-to-policy mission.

Schedule

Time	Speaker
10:00	Registration, Tea and Coffee, Networking.
10:30	Welcome and Launch of Policy Handbook. <i>Taoiseach Micheál Martin - Recorded Message.</i> <i>Elizabeth Canavan, Department of the Taoiseach.</i> <i>Becky Why, Deputy President and Registrar, University of Galway.</i> <i>Prof. John Canavan, MC, Institute for Lifecourse and Society (ILAS).</i>
10:40	Plenary 1: Putting the Public into Public Policy: Engaging for Better Decision Making. <i>Sally Washington, Practice Fellow, Policy Capability and Public Management, The Australia and New Zealand School of Government, (ANZSOG).</i>
11:10	Plenary 2: Codesigning Pathways to a Carbon Neutral Ireland: Putting Democratic Legitimacy at the Heart of Climate Policy. <i>Oonagh Buckley, Secretary General, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC).</i>
11:40	Panel Discussion 1: Moderator: Frances Fahy, Director, Ryan Institute, University of Galway. <i>Tania Banotti, CEO, Creative Ireland.</i> <i>Dr Naomi Feely, Policy Director, Children's Rights Alliance.</i> <i>Prof. Eilionóir Flynn, Director School of Law, University of Galway.</i> <i>Niamh Garvey, Senior Policy Analyst, The National Economic & Social Council, (NESC).</i> <i>Paddy Mahon, Chairman, Local Government Management Agency.</i>
13:00	Lunch
14:00	Plenary 3: The Impact of Public Engagement on Irish Health Policy and Health Service Reform. <i>Muiris O'Connor, Assistant Secretary, R&D and Health Analytics Division, Department of Health.</i>
14:30	Panel Discussion 2: Moderator: Prof. Caroline McGregor, Director, Institute for Lifecourse and Society. <i>Dr Sinéad Hynes, PPI Network Contributor.</i> <i>Dr Avril Kennan, CEO of Health Research Charities Ireland (HRCI).</i> <i>Orla Lynch, Strategic Policy Advisor, DFHERIS.</i> <i>Dr Sarah McLoughlin, PPI Contributor.</i> <i>Joe Ryan, National Director Public Involvement, Culture and Risk Mgmt, HSE.</i>
15:45	Rapporteur. <i>Fergal Lynch, Chair of National Council for Special Education. Former Secretary General, DCEDIY.</i>
16:00	Conference Close. <i>Prof. John Canavan, MC, Institute for Lifecourse and Society.</i>



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Speakers



Prof. John Canavan is the is the UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement at the University of Galway. He is Director of the university's UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC). John's main research interests are Family Support, evaluation theory, and connecting research, policy and practice. His most recent book is *Systems Complexity in Child Protection and Welfare* (Routledge) authored with colleagues from the UCFRC.



Elizabeth Canavan is Assistant Secretary General of the Social Policy and Public Service Reform Division in the Department of the Taoiseach. She is the Secretary to several Cabinet Sub-Committees. She is Deputy Chair of the National Economic and Social Council, Secretary to the Civil Service Management Board and a member of the Public Service Leadership Board. Elizabeth is a career civil servant and has worked extensively in the policy development in the areas of Health, Children & Families and Public Service Reform. She is a native of Galway and a graduate of Dublin City University, from which she holds a BA (Humanities) and Diploma from the Institute of Directors.



Prof. Becky Whay is interim Deputy President and Registrar of Ollscoil na Gaillimhe – University of Galway. She is a member of the University Management Team and Academic Council and she deputises for the President in his absence. In her role Becky has overarching responsibility for academic strategy, academic promotions, and academic quality. She chairs the University's Teaching and Learning Committee, the Academic Promotions Committee, the Quality Enhancement Committee and a range of other committees in the University. Externally, she is a member of the Senate of the NUI and the Board of the Central Applications Office (CAO) and the Irish Universities Association (IUA) Registration Group.



Sally Washington is Practice Fellow (Policy Capability and Public Management) at the Australia and New Zealand School of Government, based in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. She has worked in senior roles in Aotearoa and internationally. She established and was inaugural director of the New Zealand Policy Project, based in the New Zealand Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. She has worked with a range of organisations and jurisdictions seeking to improve their policy capability (including in the UK, States of Jersey, Australia, and Ireland). She spent seven years at the OECD where she managed a network of Heads of Prime Ministers/Presidents Offices from OECD countries and has consulted to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and the OECD. She has also worked as an adviser to a New Zealand Cabinet Minister (Minister for Women) and Prime Minister in policy roles, and in joint central agency teams leading public sector reform programmes. She has a body of publications on a range of topics including public sector innovation, gender issues, fisheries governance, public sector employment, policy capability, and foresight and futures in government.

Speakers



Oonagh Buckley is the Secretary General of the Department of Environment, Climate & Communications. Prior to taking up that role Oonagh served as Interim Chair of An Bord Pleanála, on secondment from her role as Deputy Secretary General in the Department of Justice with responsibility for civil justice matters, including immigration, courts and civil and family law. Oonagh had previously held the position of Director General in the Workplace Relations Commission. Before that she worked at a senior level in a number of Government Departments, including the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform, Environment and Foreign Affairs. In the Department of the Environment she worked for a number of years on planning policy and legislation on wildfire conversation. Oonagh is a graduate of UCC, the College of Europe, Belgium and Poland, and the University of London. She was called to the Bar in 1996. She has an MSc in Business from the Smurfit School in UCD and has been an adjunct professor in the School of Law in UCC since 2017.



Prof. Frances Fahy is Director of the Ryan Institute and Established Professor of Geography. Prof. Fahy's research career to date has been targeted at supporting society, policymakers, and other stakeholders to undertake the necessary and significant transformation of unsustainable social systems. As a leading geographer and energy social scientist, Frances is widely published and has coordinated over 20 funded research projects and several European Horizon projects.



Tania Banotti is Director of the whole of government Creative Ireland Programme established in 2017 and renewed in 2023. It is based in the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport and also reports to the Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach. The goal of the programme is to embed creativity across government policy. It currently works with 8 government departments, 12 state agencies and all local authorities. There are five pillars and a new Shared Island dimension was added to the pillars in 2023; Creative Youth, Creative Communities, Creativity, Health & Wellbeing, Creative Climate Action and Creative Industries. Tania was previously CEO of the Institute of Advertising Practitioners of Ireland and Performing Arts Forum Ireland.



Dr Naomi Feely is Policy Director at Children's Rights Alliance. She is legal and policy lead on the Alliance's child poverty work and represented the organisation on the Food Poverty Working Group chaired by Minister of State Joe O'Brien (2022-2024). Naomi is an experienced social researcher and policy analyst with over 20 years' experience working in the public, private and community and voluntary sectors in Ireland. Prior to joining the Alliance Naomi worked for leading not-for-profit organisations such as Age Action, Barnardos and Start Strong. Naomi holds a BA in Public Administration, an MA in Sociology, a second MA in Political and Public Communications and Doctorate in Social Science.

Speakers



Prof. Eilionóir Flynn is an Established Chair in Law and Director of the Centre for Disability Law and Policy, University of Galway. Her research focuses on disability and social justice, with a particular emphasis on legal capacity, advocacy and reproductive justice. She is passionate about educating the next generation of disability rights scholars and working in active partnership with disabled people's organisations. Her research has received funding awards from the European Research Council, Wellcome Trust and Horizon 2020. Eilionóir regularly advises policy-makers at national and international levels, including providing support to the Secretariat of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



Niamh Garvey joined NESC as Senior Policy Analyst in March 2021 and works in the area of sustainable development and climate action. Recent projects have included a just transition in agriculture and land use, and engagement in phase 2 of the land use review. Niamh was previously the Head of Policy and Advocacy at Trócaire, where she led a team of policy and advocacy advisors working on climate change, sustainable agriculture, business and human rights and international finance. She held previous roles in research and advocacy at Christian Aid and the Institute of Development Studies and has served as Board Director with a number of NGOs, including Debt and Development Coalition Ireland, Friends of the Earth Ireland and the Fairtrade Mark Ireland.

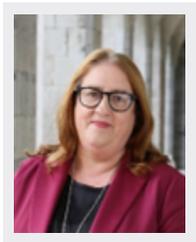


Paddy Mahon Chief Executive, Longford County Council is from Tuam in County Galway. Paddy's background is one of engineering, graduating from UCG in 1984 with a Bachelor of Engineering - BE in Civil Engineering. He also has a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) from DCU. Having worked in construction in London and Sydney in the 1980s, Paddy returned to Ireland to work with Mayo County Council in 1991, progressing to the position of Director of Services with Mayo County Council. Paddy was appointed as Chief Executive with Longford County Council in July 2016.



Muiris O'Connor is Assistant Secretary in the Department of Health where he heads up the R&D and Health Analytics Division. In this role, Muiris has responsibility for evidence-based approaches to policy and to the promotion of research and innovation in Irish health and social care. His responsibilities also include health information policy, health services reform and All-island, EU and international engagements. Muiris is a graduate of Philosophy and 'Soc & Pol' from the University of Galway and as well as a former employee of the college when he worked as a researcher with Professor Eamon O'Shea at the Department of Economics early in his career.

Speakers



Prof. Caroline McGregor is the Director of the Institute for Lifecourse and Society and a Senior Researcher at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre. Her expertise is in social work, with extensive experience in teaching, research and publishing on issues related to children, young people, and families. She co-authored "Support and Protection Across the Lifecourse" (2021) with Professor Pat Dolan. Since 2012, she has collaborated on research focused on persons with direct care experiences, family support, prevention, early intervention, and child protection. Additionally, she has worked as an SFI investigator on a CURAM project focusing on impact orientation of principal investigators and science advocacy training.



Dr Sinéad Hynes is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Galway and a CORU-Registered Occupational Therapist. Her research career has been exclusively in patient-focused, rehabilitation and symptom management with people with multiple sclerosis or dementia. Her research has a strong focus on stakeholder, particularly public and patient, involvement. Public and patient involvement (PPI) is the cornerstone of her research and she is constantly challenged by the PPI contributors she works with. She completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge and from here worked in the NHS as an occupational therapist and trial manager before moving to Canada for a postdoc funded by the US MS Society. Following this, she took up her current lecturing post at the University of Galway in 2015. She is also a member of the Galway Neuroscience Centre and MS Ireland's representative on The European Committee for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis (ECTRIMS) Council.



Avril Kennan serves as the CEO of Health Research Charities Ireland (HRCI), an organisation dedicated to supporting a thriving community of more than 45 charities to engage in all aspects of health research, while also acting as their national advocate. Under her leadership, HRCI runs the Irish Health Research Forum, bringing together all stakeholders to improve health research in Ireland. She also oversees HRCI's management of the Joint Funding Scheme, in a partnership with the Health Research Board, which to date has funded over 150 research projects aligned with the missions of HRCI's member charities. Avril has a PhD in genetics and plays a leading role nationally in PPI, research impact, health data, research funding, genomics and rare diseases.



Orla Lynch is Strategic Policy Adviser at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) where she leads on the Department's Strategy, research engagement and the Tertiary Education Strategy. Before joining the Department, Orla worked for over twenty years in a range of tertiary education state bodies and agencies. She led projects and initiatives for national qualifications and the external quality assurance of universities. She is a Co-Chair of the Task Force on the Future of the Bologna Process. She has been a lead discussant for the OECD accession process, a Board member of INQAAHE and a member of the European Higher Education Global Policy Dialogue Forum. Orla is a Psychology graduate with a Master's in Education.

Speakers



Dr Sarah McLoughlin has a background in biomedical research. Since a cancer diagnosis in 2016, she has contributed to Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) in healthcare and research to bring the voices of those with lived experience into the conversation. She has experience as a member of boards and committees including the HSE board, National Research Ethic Committee for Medical Devices (NREC-MD), UCD's Patient Voice in Cancer Research, Trinity St James Cancer Institute Education Advisory Board, the All Ireland NCI Cancer Consortium Subcommittee on Clinical Trials, and the Irish Association for Cancer Research (IACR). She currently works for the National Office of Research Ethics Committees.



Joe Ryan currently serves as the National Director of Public Involvement, Culture and Risk Management at the HSE. This entails working in close partnership with patients, service users and colleagues across the health system to drive patient and public involvement in the co-design and co-production of health and care services. Joe also leads the organisation culture function to support the wider system in developing and promoting a positive, high quality, patient and public centred service culture. As Chief Risk Officer Joe leads a team, who support the emerging Regions and national centre in risk management, compliance, data protection and protected disclosures. In his spare time Joe is a volunteer emergency first responder in his local community north of Dublin.



Dr Fergal Lynch is Chair of the National Council for Special Education. Until recently he worked in the University of Galway to help foster closer links between policy practitioners and academics in the development, implementation and evaluation of public policy. Fergal was previously Secretary General of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (2015-2022) and Deputy Secretary General of the Department of Health (2012-2015).

Policy Handbook Launch

The theme of the conference, Public Engagement for Better Policy, aligns with a key theme for the recently published Handbook for Policy Development in the Civil Service. The Policy Handbook demonstrates how policy should be initially scoped out, designed and, when approved by Government, implemented. It is intended to serve as the basis for coherent and consistent good practice in developing policy across Government departments. It rests upon three key pillars – evidence, feasibility and legitimacy – which are to be used as a checklist at each stage of developing policy. The Handbook will be available at the conference and a representative of the Department of the Taoiseach will be available to answer any queries in relation to it.



Riailtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Policy Handbook

A 'real world' guide to
policy development

Civil Service Management Board 2024



Register Here

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ILAS Constituent Centres

Centre for Disability Law and Public Policy (CDLP)

Community Engaged Research in Action (CORA)

Community Engagement

Health Economics and Policy Analysis Centre (HEPAC)

Irish Centre for Social Gerontology (ICSG)

Irish Centre for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Research (ICAN)

Speech and Language Therapy

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC)

PPI Ignite Network (PPI)