

Governing Authority Election 2026: Candidate Profile – Professional Support Staff



Sylvia McDonagh
School of Pharmacy and Medical Sciences

Candidate Biographical Details / Sonraí Beathaisnéise an Iarrthóra

Sylvia McDonagh is the School Manager in the School of Pharmacy and Medical Sciences and works with colleagues in the School and three Disciplines to promote and develop opportunities for students to undertake study in the areas of Pharmacy, Physiology and Pharmacology and Therapeutics.

Having joined the University in 2002, Sylvia has supported students and staff through roles in HR, Exams, Research, Schools and Medical Internship.

Sylvia's primary degree is in Commerce from University of Galway. She is a qualified Accounting Technician with a Masters in International Management and an MBA. Sylvia contributes to the University community as a staff coach through the staff coaching initiative and other initiatives such as Leading Ireland's Future Together (LIFT) and staff mentoring schemes.

Sylvia is a current member of the Staff Social Club organising various events such as the Staff Barbeque and Nights at the Movies, placing value on the importance of work life balance and community connections with staff.

Sylvia's love for sport drives her to support young people through coaching girls and boys across multiple age groups as well as through mentorship of other coaches to enable them to develop their skills in a supported environment, promoting positive decision making.

Candidate Statement / Ráiteas an Iarrthóra

I wish to put myself forward for election to Údarás na hOllscoile and would be honoured to serve the University of Galway in this capacity.

I bring to this role significant experience in University administration across a range of roles in my 24 years of experience including governance-related processes, and operational decision-making within a complex academic environment.

Through my professional role, I have developed a strong understanding of how strategic decisions made at governing authority level translate into impacts on staff, students, and the wider University community. Having studied for an MBA in the University of Galway, I am particularly conscious of the importance of good governance, transparency, and accountability in enabling the University to fulfil its academic mission.



My work has required close collaboration with academic and professional staff across a range of disciplines and services, giving me insight into the opportunities and challenges facing the University. I am committed to supporting a culture that values inclusivity, collegiality, and evidence-based decision-making, while also responding effectively to financial, regulatory, and societal demands.

If elected, I will contribute constructively and independently to the work of Údarás na hOllscoile, bringing a balanced perspective that reflects both institutional priorities and the lived experience of staff. I am particularly motivated to support the University's strategic development, its commitment to student success and the wider global community.

I would welcome the opportunity to work with fellow members of the Governing Authority to uphold the values, reputation, and long-term sustainability of the University of Galway.

Candidate Outline of Relevant Competencies / Cur síos an Iarrthóra ar Inniúlachtaí Ábhartha

I am a School Manager in the School of Pharmacy and Medical Sciences with extensive experience supporting academic leadership, governance processes, and the effective operation of a complex higher education environment. My role places me at the heart of academic, operational, and strategic activity, providing me with a strong appreciation of how institutional decisions translate into day-to-day impact across the University.

In my current position, I work closely with the Head of School, academic staff, and professional services to support planning, compliance, and delivery of core academic and administrative functions. I regularly contribute to the preparation of reports, implementation of University policies, and coordination of activities aligned with institutional priorities. This experience has given me a practical understanding of governance structures, collective responsibility, and the importance of evidence-based decision-making at senior level.

I have extensive experience supporting financial administration, including budget monitoring, resource allocation, and adherence to financial procedures. I am accustomed to working with financial information, ensuring accountability, and promoting efficient use of resources in support of academic objectives. I understand the critical role of the Governing Authority in overseeing financial sustainability and risk.

My work requires continuous engagement with regulatory and compliance requirements, including data protection, quality assurance, equality considerations, and risk awareness. I bring a conscientious and ethical approach, with a strong understanding of public accountability and the governance responsibilities of a university.

I am an effective communicator with experience engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including staff, students, and external bodies. I bring a collaborative, respectful approach to discussion and am committed to contributing positively to the work of Údarás na hOllscoile in support of the University's mission, values, and long-term success.