



180
YEARS

universities
ireland

UNIVERSITIES IRELAND CONFERENCE 2025 COLLABORATING FOR CHANGE

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST
THURSDAY 9 AND FRIDAY 10 OCTOBER 2025



A cross-border summit on collaboration between Higher Education Institutions across the island.



PROFESSOR SIR IAN GREER

President and Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University Belfast

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Queen's University Belfast for the 'Collaborating for Change' Universities Ireland 2025 conference.

This gathering comes at an important moment. Across the island of Ireland, universities are playing an increasingly vital role in shaping the societies and economies we serve. We are educators, researchers, innovators and anchors in our communities. But we are also facing shared challenges: the pressures of constrained funding, the impact of geopolitical change and the need to support mobility and opportunity for all of our students.

In this context, the mission of Universities Ireland and the aim of this conference is more important than ever – reinvigorating the network by bringing together universities across the island. This conference will be a cross-border platform for dialogue, partnership and innovation between higher education institutions across Ireland, north and south.

The objectives set are ambitious but necessary. We want to unify around the challenges and opportunities that affect us all, from the sustainability of research funding to the mobility of students and staff. We want to foster the exchange of knowledge and best practice, recognising that while no single institution has all the answers, collectively we have the expertise and creativity to find new solutions. And we want to demonstrate how our universities can act as engines of inclusive economic growth, working together to deliver prosperity while also strengthening cohesion and resilience, as well as social wellbeing.

I am particularly encouraged by the range of voices represented in this programme. From government and policy leaders to researchers and partners, this conference is a chance to listen, share and build momentum. The conversations we have here will, I hope, spark practical initiatives and durable partnerships that extend well beyond these two days.

For Queen's, it is a privilege to host this important gathering. Our university has a proud tradition of cross-border engagement and of working with partners across these islands and beyond. We know from experience that collaboration drives excellence and amplifies impact.

I want to thank the current Chair of Universities Ireland and President of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Eeva Leinonen, as well as all of you for committing your time and expertise to this summit. By working together openly, ambitiously and creatively, we can ensure that higher education continues to serve as a force for positive change on this island.

I wish you an engaging and productive couple of days here at Queen's that continues to inspire you long after the conference ends and the real work begins.



PROFESSOR EEVA LEINONEN

Chair, Universities Ireland and President of Maynooth University

It is in this spirit of collaboration that we gather at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) for the Universities Ireland inaugural conference. This event provides us with a rare and valuable opportunity to come together across borders, institutions, and disciplines, not only to reflect on the challenges we face but to exchange ideas, forge meaningful partnerships, and set in motion outcomes that will shape the future of higher education across the island.

As Chair, I see this conference as a pivotal step in re-energising Universities Ireland (UI) as a platform for meaningful collaboration. Established in 2003, UI is the all-island body that promotes cooperation in higher education, north and south. Its mission is to strengthen collaboration in teaching, research, and innovation; to support student and staff mobility; and to represent Irish higher education internationally. The Centre for Cross-Border Studies provides its secretariat. Our membership includes Atlantic Technological University, Maynooth University, Queen's University Belfast, The Open University in Ireland, Technological University Dublin, Ulster University, University College Cork, University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Limerick, and the University of Galway. Together, these institutions embody the spirit of collaboration, mobility, and impact — ensuring that higher education remains a powerful driver of progress, innovation, and cohesion across our island.

That is why this year's theme, Collaborating for Change, is not aspirational — it is imperative. Ministerial perspectives, keynote reflections, and panel discussions will provide us with a strategic lens, while case studies and breakout sessions will ground our dialogue in lived experience and tangible practice. Together, these voices remind us that the challenges we face are interconnected, and so too must our solutions be.

As we move through this conference, I encourage each of you to approach every session as an opportunity: to spark new ideas, to open doors for cooperation, and to imagine fresh approaches to our shared challenges. Collaboration is not only about joint projects or policies — it is about trust, connection, and a willingness to learn from one another.

On behalf of the Universities Ireland, I want to extend sincere thanks to Professor Sir Ian Greer, President and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, for his leadership and generous support in hosting the conference. Let us leave Belfast with renewed energy, a shared purpose, and commitment to ensuring that higher education continues to serve as a vital force for progress on this island and beyond.

CONFERENCE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: Reinvigorating Universities Ireland (UI)



Re-establish UI as a Central Platform for Collaboration

Position UI as the leading forum for cross-border dialogue, partnership, and innovation among higher education institutions across the island of Ireland.



Unify Around Shared Challenges and Opportunities

Identify and address key issues—such as research funding, student mobility, and geopolitical shifts—that resonate across institutions, fostering a collective response to shared concerns.



Promote Knowledge Exchange and Institutional Learning

Facilitate the sharing of best practices, research insights, and operational strategies to support continuous improvement, especially in the face of constrained funding environments.



Leverage Higher Education for Inclusive Economic Impact

Explore and promote the role of universities as drivers of regional and national inclusive economic development, identifying collaborative opportunities to influence policy and practice which will deliver economic priorities whilst also strengthening social cohesion and community resilience.



THURSDAY 9 OCTOBER

UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE

COUNCIL CHAMBER, LANYON BUILDING

17.30–18.30 **CLOSED MEETING**

University Leadership

PRE-CONFERENCE DINNER

GREAT HALL, LANYON BUILDING

18.15–18.45 **WELCOME RECEPTION**

18.45 **CALL TO DINNER**

19.00–19.15 **WELCOME REMARKS**

Professor Sir Ian Greer
President and Vice-Chancellor,
Queen's University Belfast

Professor Eeva Leinonen
Chair, Universities Ireland

19.15–20.30 **DINNER**

20.30–21.15 **IN CONVERSATION**

Wendy Austin in conversation with **Simon Coveney**, Former Tánaiste

21.15 **CLOSING REMARKS**

John D'Arcy
Vice-Chair, Universities Ireland and
Director, The Open University in Ireland

FRIDAY 10 OCTOBER

CONFERENCE

LECTURE ROOM 3, RIDDEL HALL

9.00–10.00 **ARRIVAL, REGISTRATION AND NETWORKING BREAKFAST**

THE ISDELL COURTYARD, RIDDEL HALL

10.00–10.15 **WELCOME AND SCENE SETTER**

John D’Arcy (host)
Vice-Chair, Universities Ireland and
Director, The Open University in Ireland

Professor Sir Ian Greer
President and Vice-Chancellor,
Queen’s University Belfast

Professor Eeva Leinonen
Chair, Universities Ireland and
President, Maynooth University

10.15–10.40 **MINISTERIAL INSIGHTS**

Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA
Minister for the Economy

James Lawless TD
Minister for Further and
Higher Education, Research,
Innovation and Science

10.40–11.25 **KEYNOTE SPEAKER – BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION**

Cat McCusker
Regional Market Leader, PWC

11.25–12.30 **FLASH TALKS – STRENGTHENING THE ECONOMY
THROUGH COMMUNITY LED INITIATIVES**

Queen’s Community and Place Project:

Professor Kathryn Higgins
Director, QCAP

Dr Andrew Grounds
Deputy Director, QCAP

University of Limerick – the Greentown Project:

Dr Catherine Naughton
Research Fellow,
University of Limerick

12.30–13.30 **NETWORKING LUNCH**

13.30–14.30 **ALL-ISLAND COLLABORATION IN ACTION**

Facilitator –
Professor David Rooney
Dean of Internationalisation
and Reputation,
Queen’s University Belfast

Mike Nesbitt MLA
Minister for Health

Professor Donna O’Shea
NSRP – Cyber Unite,
University of Limerick

Professor Eileen Gibney
Co-Director, Co Centre for
Sustainable Food Systems

Dr Brian Dixon
Ulster University, Co-Create
Art and Design Research
Network with UU and NCAD

Marie Doyle
Partner, Deloitte and British
Irish Chamber Commerce

14.30–15.00 **EXPERIENCES OF COLLABORATION**

Dr Diana Beech, Director
Finsbury Institute and City St George’s,
University of London

15.00–15.45 **PANEL DISCUSSION –
UNIVERSITIES AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIETAL IMPACT**

Chair: **Triona McCormack**
Vice-President for Strategy
and External Engagement,
University College Dublin

Dr Ruth Freeman
Director of Research for
Society, Research Ireland

Professor Natalia Szablewska
The Open University UK

Fergal O’Brien
Executive Director, Lobbying
and Influence, IBEC

15.45–16.00 **CLOSING REFLECTIONS**

Professor Eeva Leinonen
Chair, Universities Ireland

CONFERENCE ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Chair



Dr Ryan Feeney

Vice-President, Governance, External Affairs
and Registrar, Queen's University Belfast

Secretary and Conference Co-Ordinator



Caroline Walker

Senior Engagement Manager (Strategic Projects),
Queen's University Belfast

With thanks to

Dr Peter Gilleece

Assistant Director and Head of Strategic Policy
and Analysis, Queen's University Belfast

Dr Ciara Leonard

Head of Public Affairs and Advocacy,
University College Dublin

Dr Anthony Soares

Director at The Centre for Cross Border
Studies, Secretary to Universities Ireland

Universities Ireland Council

Professor Eeva Leinonen

Maynooth University (Chair)

Dr Orla Flynn

Atlantic Technological University

Professor Dáire Keogh

Dublin City University

John D'Arcy

Open University

Professor Sir Ian Greer

Queen's University Belfast

Dr Linda Doyle

Trinity College Dublin

Dr Deirdre Lillis

TU Dublin

Professor John O'Halloran

University College Cork

Professor Orla Feely

University College Dublin

Professor David Burn

University of Galway

Professor Shane Kilcommins

University of Limerick

Professor Paul Bartholomew

Ulster University





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