18th Annual

GOLDEN BRIDGES

Na Droichid Órga

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GOLDEN BRIDGES CONFERENCE & AWARDS LUNCHEON 2026

Thursday November 12, 2026 • Babson College, Wellesley, MA



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Golden Bridges '26 Returns to Babson College

By Ray O'Hanlon

Golden Bridges is back in Massachusetts for its annual exercise of linking Ireland's Northwest with America's Northeast, specifically Boston and the State of Massachusetts.

As was the case last year the 2026 conference - this year being the 18th annual - is being held in Babson College in Wellesley, a short hop from the conference's Boston location of former years.

This top rated university specializes in entrepreneurship and business, so is a perfect vehicle for the Golden Bridges agenda.

James Lawless, Irish Minister of Higher and Further Education, Research, Innovation and Science, will address all assembled.

His participation will highlight the rich cultural connections between Ireland and its global communities, and the exciting opportunities to strengthen those bonds through innovation, research, and collaboration.

"We look forward to welcoming Minister Lawless and all our guests for what promises to be an inspiring and engaging day celebrating Ireland's vibrant cultural landscape and its global reach," said event organizer Connla McCann.

Golden Bridges, this year taking place on Thursday, November 12, will bring together business leaders and civic champions from Northwest Ireland to forge partnerships with corporations, universities, and Irish American organizations in Boston and right across Massachusetts.

First held in 2008 at the JFK Library, the Golden Bridges gathering, which runs in a conference-luncheon format, is backed by both Invest Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland, as well as the Northern Ireland Bureau.



Minister James Lawless. RollingNews.ie photo.

Connla McCann, who is also conference co-founder, says the Golden Bridges gathering plays a key role in forging partnerships between Northwest Ireland and New England.

"Friendships and alliances built through this conference have proved enduring and mutually beneficial," she says.

"We are delighted to be holding this year's conference once again at the number one university recognized across America and globally for entrepreneurship, Babson College."

This year's Golden Bridges Conference will once again highlight the innovation and collaboration driving tourism growth across Derry and the North West of Ireland. Attendees will hear from leading voices shaping the region's success and strengthening transatlantic connections.

Added Connla McCann: "We are honored to welcome Moderator Alison Metcalfe, Executive Vice President and Head of North America & Australia/New Zealand at Tourism Ireland, along with other important contributors.

"The ocean-spanning connections that have been forged these past eighteen years have proven to be as resilient as girders holding up a literal bridge. They will be strengthened anew in Wellesley this week, and throughout the coming year."



Entrepreneurial leaders can transform communities

By Katherine P. Craven

Entrepreneurship is in Babson College's DNA. For 30 consecutive times, U.S. News & World Report has ranked Babson the No. 1 undergraduate school in the nation for entrepreneurship, recognition of a College that has spent generations redefining how entrepreneurship is taught, practiced, and put to work in the world. At Babson, entrepreneurship is more than launching a business. It is about seeing possibility, taking action, and creating economic and social value.

That spirit makes Babson a natural home for Golden Bridges. Now in its 18th year, Golden Bridges brings together leaders from business, education, government, and civic life across Northern and Northwest Ireland and Massachusetts to turn relationships into ideas, ideas into opportunities, and opportunities into lasting impact on both sides of the Atlantic. We are proud of the special relationship between Babson and Golden Bridges and all that it continues to make possible.

Our ties to Northern and Northwest Ireland extend well beyond this gathering. Babson's longstanding relationship with Ulster University has fostered collaboration in entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial leadership, teaching, research, and exchange. Our growing engagement with Queen's University Belfast is opening new opportunities around innovation, technology, teaching and learning, and the important role universities can play in advancing economic and social progress.

We believe entrepreneurial leadership can transform not only businesses, but institutions and communities. By connecting Babson's expertise with the talent and ambition of universities, businesses, entrepreneurs, and government leaders across Northern and Northwest Ireland, we can develop leaders, strengthen entrepreneurial capacity, and create opportunities for our communities to grow together.

That is the promise of Golden Bridges. A conversation can become a partnership. An introduction can become an opportunity. An idea shared across a table in Massachusetts can create impact an ocean away. We look forward to building on these relationships and expanding the opportunities they create.

On behalf of Babson College, fáilte, guid tae see ye, and a very warm welcome. We are delighted to have you with us and grateful for your friendship, partnership, and commitment to building bridges across the Atlantic.



Katherine P. Craven, Executive Vice President Administration, Babson College

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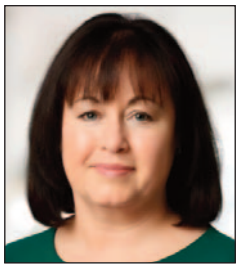


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GOLDEN BRIDGES HONORARY CHAIRS



Alison Metcalfe
Head of North America &
Australia, Tourism Ireland &
Chair; European Travel
Commission, USA



Andrea Haughian
Executive Vice President,
Head of Americas Invest
Northern Ireland



Andrew O'Brien
Partner, Seven Letter
Boston



Brian T. Kelly
Partner, Nixon Peabody
Boston



Cathal Conlon
Vice President of Marketing
& Community Engagement,
New England Revolution



Chyanne Holmes
Deputy Director,
Northern Ireland Bureau,
Washington, D.C



Eugene O'Flaherty
Partner/Ballard Partners,
Washington, DC



Gregory Hanley
Plymouth County
Commissioner,
Massachusetts



John Donovan
Chair of the Boston Belfast
Sister City Initiative



John Philip Foley, Esq.
Attorney at Law



Kathryn Ellis
Board Member Net Zero
Northern Ireland



Kevin J. Sullivan
Vice President of Strategic
Corporate Engagement
Babson College



Kyle Darcy
Author



Laura Hamilton
President, BIBA



Larry O'Toole
President, Gentle Giant



Martina Curtin
Chairperson
Irish Cultural Centre



Mary Sugrue
Chief Execuive,
Irish American Partnership



Maureen Bennett
Retired Partner, Jones Day



Nuala McGowan
Senior Director of Research
Finance & Compliance,
Harvard University



Paul Jennings
Former Head of Product
Advisory Services and Foreign
Exchange, Silicon Valley Bank



Pat Bench
Founder of Benchmark
Strategies



Robert McCarron
President & CEO, Association
of Independent Colleges and
Universities in Massachusetts



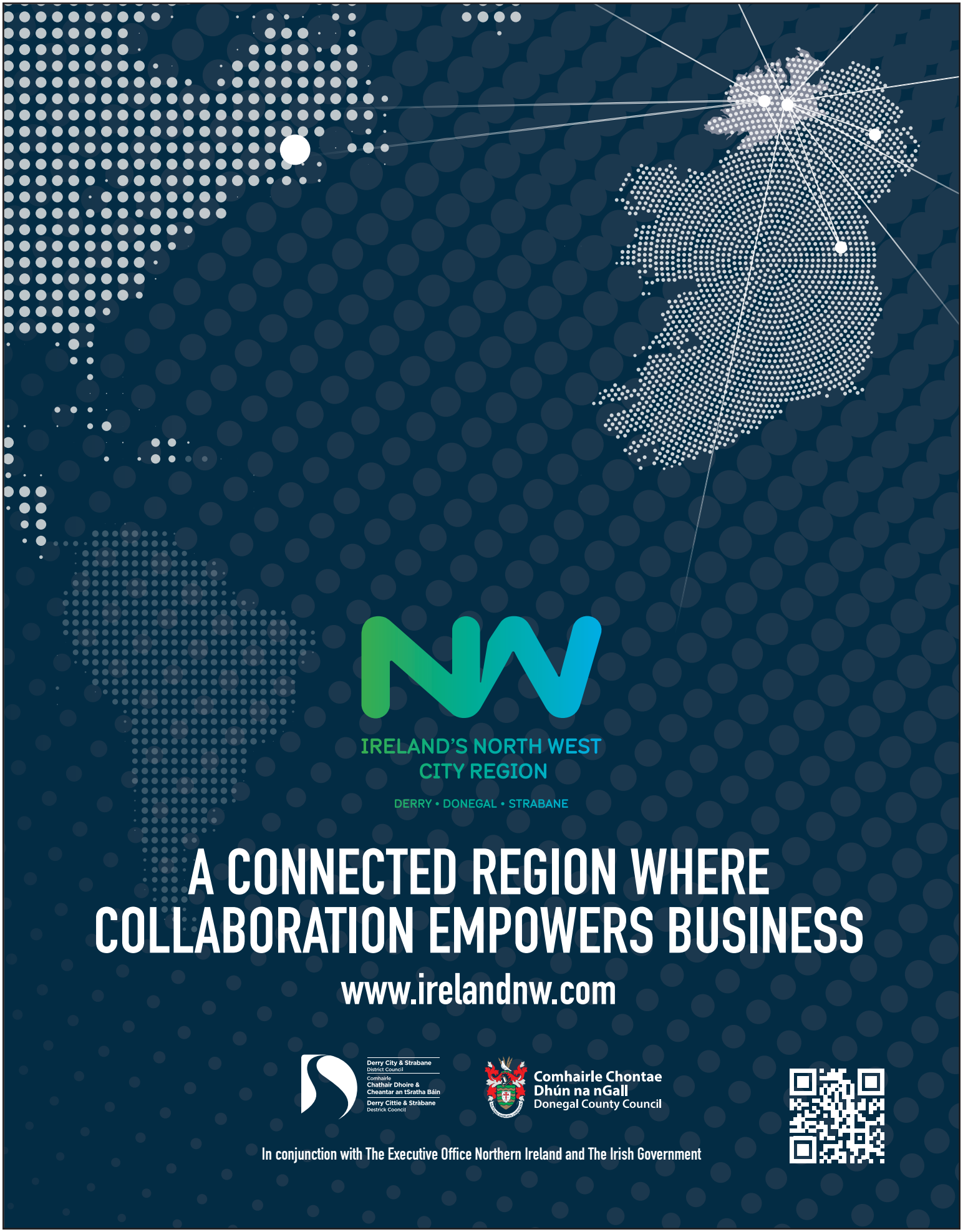
Ryan McDermott
Co-Founder & Partner
of Prism Benefits



Sara Stanton
Managing Director & Owner
Cara Group Travel



Sean P. Moynihan
Founder,
The Moynihan Group


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Donegal County Council
In conjunction with The Executive Office Northern Ireland and The Irish Government



DNA Museum set to forge new connections on the Foyle

History is currently taking shape on the banks of the River Foyle as work progresses on a flagship new tourism project that promises to become one of the most important heritage attractions on the island of Ireland.

Enjoying panoramic views over Ebrington Square positioned on the banks of the beautiful River Foyle, the museum is set to open in summer/autumn 2027, inviting visitors from around the world to take an immersive journey through the rich history and global influence of the North West region.

For American visitors in particular, the museum will offer the opportunity to explore the deep-rooted connections between the North West of Ireland and the United States, tracing the stories of those who left these shores to build new lives across the Atlantic while maintaining enduring links with their homeland.

One of the key focuses of the new attraction will be the emotive story of migration and identity. As one of only two departure ports on the island, along with Cobh, the city has a unique and powerful connection with the United States. For generations, families from Derry, Strabane and the wider North West region embarked on voyages that shaped communities right across the US, helping to forge cultural and economic relations that remain strong today. The DNA Museum will celebrate these journeys while exploring the personal stories and achievements of those who have contributed to the Irish-American experience.



A key feature of the museum will be its dedicated genealogy service, providing expert support for visitors seeking to uncover their ancestral connections to the region. Through specialist advice and extensive archive resources descendants of emigrants will be able to delve deeper into their own family stories and strengthen their connection with the North West of Ireland.

The museum's location at Ebrington is particularly significant. Once a strategic military barracks the site played a crucial role during the Second World War when Derry became one of the most important military and naval bases in the North Atlantic. The city served as a vital hub in the Battle of the Atlantic, offering protection and support to Allied convoys crossing the ocean between Europe and North America.

Today, the space has been reimagined as a vibrant visitor destination and the arrival of the DNA Museum marks the next chapter in that transformation, creating a landmark attraction that will further strengthen the city's international visitor offering. The project has attracted over £15m in investment, supported by a range of dedicated partners including the NI Executive Inclusive Future Fund, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Executive Office, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Department for Communities, Garfield Weston & Galewest Investment and the Wolfson Foundation.

When completed, the museum will feature six immersive galleries, an archive discovery zone, temporary exhibition spaces, and dedicated learning and events facilities. Visitors will also be able to explore collections charting the social, cultural and maritime history of the North West, including artefacts associated with the famous Spanish Armada shipwreck La Trinidad Valencera, alongside collections telling the wider story of Derry and Strabane through the centuries.



Mayor of Derry and Strabane, Councillor Grace Uí Niallais, said the museum would create an important new gateway for heritage tourism in the region.

"Just this month we launched our exciting new Tourism Action Plan for Derry and Strabane, and the DNA Museum is one of the landmark projects set to enhance our profile as a fantastic visitor destination. The museum presents the opportunity to tell the story of our city and region in a way that will resonate with audiences from right across the globe, particularly our friends and family in the United States. This museum will provide a meaningful and engaging way for visitors to explore those connections while discovering the rich heritage, culture and resilience that define this place.

"As a flagship tourism attraction, the DNA Museum will help establish Derry and Strabane as a leading destination for cultural and heritage tourism. We look forward to welcoming visitors from around the world to experience these stories for themselves when the museum opens in 2027.

"For visitors coming from the United States in particular, we want the museum to be more than just a visitor attraction. We want it to become a place of discovery and reconnection, where people can explore their family history, deepen their understanding of their ancestral homeland and create lasting memories."

As construction continues, anticipation is growing for a project that will not only preserve and celebrate the heritage of the North West, but also offer a compelling new reason for travellers to include Derry on their Irish itinerary.

The best of all worlds

By Peter McDermott, Irish Echo

"Donegal has a particular environment in terms of scenery and nature."

So said John McLaughlin, who has been the county's chief executive since July 2020.

It's largely rural — with 180,000 people and 28,000 of those in its biggest town, Letterkenny — and is the most northwesterly county on an island that is itself off Europe's northwestern periphery. Yet, regionally the Northwest has 500,000 people by some measurements. One key to that is Donegal's alliance with Derry City over the border with Northern Ireland.

"It does give us a sizable population," McLaughlin said, which in turn allows access to future potential for the fuel economy and the renewable economy off the coast.

"We've everything that a small city would have, along with the lovely attractions [and] things that people can do in their spare time," McLaughlin said, listing by way of examples surfing, hill-climbing and walking.

The region also has everything, in the chief executive's view, that business could need – but most notably a young population, which is well-served by the third-level educational institutions in Donegal, Derry and the wider region beyond.

"American companies have invested because we're English-speaking, have a high standard of education and have very loyal employees," he said.

"Companies can make money here," McLaughlin said, citing also Donegal's close partnership with nearby Counties Sligo and Leitrim on the Republic side of the border. "And making money is important to companies."

While innovation is, of course, crucial to industrial development in the 21st century, McLaughlin argued that it's long been part of the Donegal way of life, given that it survived on subsistence farming in times past. "People took to new ways of doing things," he said.

"Now we've moved on to the modern age of innovation and new ideas. A lot of that comes out of young people's heads, from universities and so on.

"But we're trying to embrace that and to create the conditions allowing for that in our education system and our companies, and to provide that space and do it right here in Donegal."

McLaughlin himself comes from a farming background. "That in itself would give you a certain amount of skills, as well," he said.

He grew up in Redcastle, "up near the top, closer to Malin Head," he added, referring to the most northerly point of the island of Ireland.

After studying at the Carndonagh Community School and the Regional Technical College in Letterkenny, McLaughlin graduated with a degree in Civil Engineering from University College Galway in 1986. He had brief employment stints with University College Galway and Westmeath County Council, and then emigrated to Los Angeles, where he worked for a large consulting engineering firm.

"California is a massive economy in its own right and all those things that flow with that." McLaughlin said. "What you learn is the importance of communication at all levels, and to be open and honest and transparent at working — and quite often success follows that.

"Californians are very strong on giving people a chance," he said. "And no barriers, and that allows for the progression of innovation. You give people a chance. Not everything works out; that's okay, too.

"California has a great melting pot of cultures," he said. "So you quickly have to have respect for all sorts of backgrounds and treat people as you find them."

McLaughlin remembered a colleague telling him, "You have to be in L.A. for five years to understand the place."

He was there for 13. He left the West Coast at the end of 1999, not long after his father died. "We just decided to do it. My son was 5 years old at the time. So we came back," he said.

McLaughlin adapted quickly to public service and the sturdy structures of local government in his native county. After a year or two, he was appointed director of roads and transportation, a position he held until he became chief executive.

"Local government is the central development agency for all of Donegal and we offer over a 1,000 services to our population," the chief executive said. "Central government depends on us both to roll out and deliver services locally."



John McLaughlin is chief executive of Donegal County Council.



Fanad Lighthouse.© DONEGAL TOURISM

In terms of the environment, the county council has a role internally with its own workforce of 1,200, but also in helping to "shape the behaviors of our citizens." It has developed biodiversity plans for willing participants and is involved with the issue of climate on a number of fronts, including in housing. "We have to lead by example," McLaughlin said.

Donegal County Council also works with the "unique proposition" of being in the European Union and close to the Brexit area.

"It offers co-location opportunities along the border," its chief executive said. "Nobody cares more about the development of Donegal than Donegal County Council," McLaughlin said. "That can be good and bad. Sometimes, it's left to us, and other times we lead out and we want to do it."

The chief executive added, "It requires taking those steps that invest in the future and to plan ahead for major capital projects.

"An example: we're building a new innovation center in Letterkenny, and it's going to attract the starter companies."

The county council built one in Buncrana a few years ago, which let in start-ups of a certain caliber.

"We nurture their ideas," he said of the start-ups. "Out of that, some companies will grow. It's tremendously rewarding for the county council."

There are 37 elected members of the county council. "We work together for the good of the people, and to make it a better place to live and work," the chief executive said.

McLaughlin returned to Ireland when it was booming and then Ireland had its downturn. "We modernized as a society and as a culture over those years," he said. "Ireland is not the same as it was even 20 years ago."

McLaughlin added, "We still have a very stable country when you look at what's going on around the world – a very stable environment for investing, for doing business."



Donegal Airport.

The North West's economic potential must be matched with investment and ambition to drive performance

By Gareth Graham, Chief Executive, BCF Lending

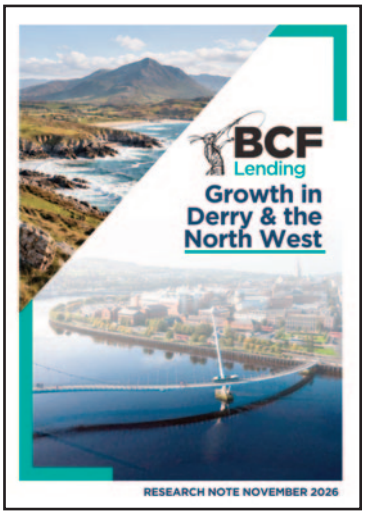
The North West region has enormous economic potential. It has talented people, ambitious businesses and opportunities that deserve greater attention and investment.

I am delighted to launch BCF Lending's Research Note – 'Growth in Derry & the North West', which explores this potential while examining the longstanding challenges that have held the region back. In developing this report, I wanted to understand why that gap exists and, more importantly, work out what can be done to close it.

The report makes five recommendations all of which are practical measures which can fully unlock the potential of SMEs and productivity in the region. These are:

1. A North West SME Credit Fund - the huge reduction in bank lending has not been offset by alternative sources of finance for SMEs in the region. A new North West Credit Fund can provide that much-needed debt support.
2. Widen the range of lenders involved in business support – there should be a co-ordinated work to widen SME access to lending and the possibility of the Credit Review Office model in Ireland employed in Northern Ireland.
3. Improve access to local financial advice and relationships – the closure of bank branches had led to a decline local financial advice. This can be countered by providing dedicated support to SMEs through finance clinics and other support schemes.
4. Establish a formal Cross-Border Infrastructure Forum - building on the widespread cooperation already taking place, the forum should provide a dedicated coordinating role for infrastructure, bringing together relevant departments, councils, transport bodies, utility providers and business representatives.
5. Publish and annual North West Investment & Finance Report - the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland and the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment should jointly publish an annual account of business investment, access to finance and infrastructure delivery across the North West.

One of the most concerning findings in the research is the decline in bank lending to businesses across Derry and Donegal, despite an increase in the number of enterprises. Small and



medium-sized businesses provide employment, support local communities and, given the right opportunities, have the potential to become much larger contributors to regional prosperity. When Ulster's economy flourished, it often did so with the support of lenders who were committed to the region – I want to see a return to that era.

Of course, finance is only one part of the picture. Infrastructure, particularly transport connectivity, is another major challenge. I have long believed that better transport connections are fundamental to economic development. Good roads matter, but so too does reliable, accessible public transport. Better air, rail, and bus connections can open up opportunities for employment, education and business, while bringing communities and markets closer together.

The region is also faced with both opportunity and challenge in its cross-border geography. Derry and Donegal are closely linked economically and socially, with businesses and communities having access to a shared pool of talent, resources and opportunities across both jurisdictions. However, differences in policy, investment and infrastructure continue to create barriers to growth. I believe there is much to be gained from treating the North West as a shared economic region, with greater cross-border cooperation helping to address these challenges and make the most of its potential.

The North West is not short of talent, ambition or opportunity. What it needs is the investment and commitment to make the most of them.





Steve Burke

Founder, Boston to Belfast Youth Empowerment

Steve Burke has been working on improving the relations between the Boston Irish diaspora and the island of Ireland for the better part of the past decade.

As former Executive Director of the Irish Cultural Centre of Greater Boston, Steve was instrumental in keeping the ICC alive and thriving through the most challenging times of the COVID pandemic. While most of the world was forced to stay home, Steve and his team developed and successfully piloted new methods of Irish cultural programming and service delivery, and expanded the relevancy of the ICC beyond merely the Irish diaspora. Outdoor dining for the general public became an instant hit, and the first of now-annual St. Patrick's Day celebrations in downtown Boston and Boston Irish Beer Festivals were launched. The first-ever female chairperson of the ICC, Martina Curtin, was elected with Steve at the helm. When the GAA and Irish Wolfhounds rugby seasons were shut down by strict COVID restrictions, Steve redirected the limited resources the ICC had into substantially improving the conditions of its playing fields, paving the way non-traditional Irish sports like soccer leagues and clinics to generate new revenue streams to support the traditional Irish music, dance, and other opportunities to keep traditional Irish culture alive.

Steve also founded and still directs the Boston to Belfast Youth Empowerment program, an initiative he formulated in connection with Boston Mayor Marty Walsh's sister city agreement with Belfast in the North of Ireland. The program uses the sport of hockey to instill leadership skills, civic engagement, cross-cultural awareness, understanding and respect between and among Boston and Belfast teens. The highlight of the program is a weeklong experiential education and cultural exchange experience for Boston youth in the City of Belfast every November.

Many of the youth chosen for the program have no Irish lineage, and little knowledge, if any, about the Island of Ireland, nor its unique history and cultural traditions. Strong local partnerships with the Irish Institute at Boston College and the Irish Pastoral Center provide an even richer exposure to Irish culture before the kids even step onto the plane. Through these international experiences that Steve's program provides, kids in both countries come away with a much deeper understanding and appreciation for each other's cultures, and moving forward can focus not on what makes them different, but what they have in common.

The Boston to Belfast program is a prime example of Sports Diplomacy and relationship-building between Irish and American relationship-building at the youth level. Long before the Tartan Army invasion and the World Cup brought such enjoyment and good will to Boston this summer, this program has broken down walls and built lasting bridges between Boston and Belfast youth through the power of sport. The program is provided at no cost to the participants' families and is run singlehandedly by Steve on a voluntary basis. Recently, he also launched plans to expand the scope of the program to benefit inner-city Boston youth golfers in the summertime, when the rain in Ireland is warmer.

Steve also serves as a volunteer Strategic Advisor to WorldBoston, a non-partisan non-profit member of the World Affairs Council of America that connects Greater Boston with the world through diplomacy, international exchange, and public education. Drawing on his longstanding engagements with Boston-area youth, college and professional sports organizations, Steve connects visiting international sports delegations with local experts on a variety of global issues, particularly how to utilize sport to strengthen international relationships and advance cultural understanding throughout the world. This platform will enable Steve to help facilitate the activation of the recently International Sports Diplomacy Strategy recently announced by the Government of Ireland's Department of Global Affairs, a comprehensive framework outlining 68 specific actions designed to leverage the unifying power of sport to bolster Ireland's global presence foreign policy, and economic trade.

An active member of both the Boston Irish Business Association (BIBA) and Irish Network Boston, and supporter of several other well-established organizations like the Irish American Partnership, Steve plans to continue doing his part – more often than not behind the scenes – to benefit the Irish American community and improve relations with the island of Ireland for many years to come.



John Harkin OBE

Founder and Board Director, Alchemy Technology Services

John Harkin OBE is the founder and former CEO of Alchemy Technology Services, an insurance technology consultancy established in Derry/Londonderry in 2018. He founded the company to create a Centre of Excellence for insurance software implementation while supporting economic growth in the Northwest. Following Alchemy's integration into NTT DATA, he remains a board member and now holds a global leadership role within the organisation.

Born and raised in Derry, his career spans more than 30 years across technology consulting, insurance software and business transformation. Early roles included KPMG (formerly Peat Marwick) and Apple Computer Europe, where he worked on major technology initiatives in London, Paris and Cupertino.

Under his leadership, Alchemy grew into a leading Guidewire partner, created significant employment opportunities in Northern Ireland, and became a recognised contributor to the region's technology ecosystem.

Alongside his business career, John is active in community and cultural organisations, serving on boards including The Playhouse and Le Foyer des Artistes, while supporting charities such as The Mary Peters Trust and Cancer Fund for Children. John was awarded an OBE for services to the economy and has also received an Honorary Doctorate from Ulster University in recognition of his contributions to business, technology and regional development.



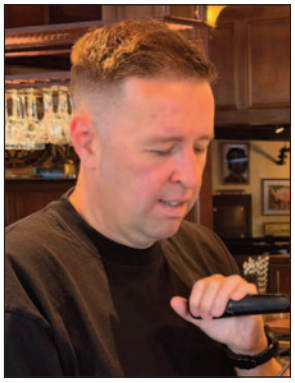
Declan Houton

Musician

Declan was born the youngest of eleven children and began playing guitar at aged 8, moving on to Mandolin & Banjo. His first taste of playing music in public came when he and his brother Leonard began playing music around the local pubs in Donegal. During this time, Declan toured Scandinavia with Derry band 'Thundering Down' playing music in Sweden, Estonia & Finland, and on board the Viking Line cruise ships 'M/S Mariella' & 'M/S Gabriella' on the Baltic Sea.

Back in Ireland, he also giged with his brother-in-law Martin McCabe's band 'Celtic Swing' playing music around the midlands of Ireland, and on a month long trip to New York City. In 2000, Declan moved to Boston, and began playing with local band 'Inchicore' and guesting with local favourites 'Sundays Well' & 'Ruid Eile' before forming 'Devri' in 2007.

He has played at numerous festivals throughout the States, including Chicago, Pittsburg, Cleveland, New York, Miami, Missisippi & Tampa. With fellow Devri member Larry Flint, he has played music with the legendary Derek Warfield of 'The Wolfe Tones' and has shared the stage with Finbar Furey, Paddy Rielly & Tommy Makem.



Oran McGonagle

Owner, McGonagle's Pub

Oran McGonagle is an Irish-born hospitality entrepreneur and creative based in Boston, Massachusetts. He is the founder and operator behind several acclaimed venues in the Greater Boston area, including NY times best restaurant, McGonagle's Pub and world famous Irish Pub, The Dubliner, known for their authentic Irish atmosphere, elevated pub fare, and vibrant live music programs. A hands-on owner with a deep passion for Irish culture, Oran has built his businesses around community, creativity, and experience — from booking top-tier Irish and local artists to World famous artists like Ed Sheeran, Dermot Kennedy, Kingfishr and Amble.



Mary Swanton

Executive Director, Irish Pastoral Center, Boston

Mary Swanton has served as Executive Director of IPC Boston since 2020, leading the organization's strategic growth and expansion of services to the Irish and wider immigrant community in Greater Boston. During her tenure, she has overseen the development of a dedicated Client Services Team, strengthening IPC's capacity to provide case management, advocacy, and support for individuals and families facing challenges related to immigration, housing, healthcare, mental health, employment, and financial stability.

With a professional background spanning nonprofit leadership, education, publishing, and community programming, Mary is committed to building sustainable services, fostering community partnerships, and ensuring the continued presence and vitality of Ireland's cultural, social, and community connections in Boston for future generations.

GOLDEN BRIDGES SPEAKERS



Andrea Haughian

Executive Vice President, Head of Americas Invest Northern Ireland

Andrea Haughian is Executive Vice President and Head of Americas at Invest NI, Northern Ireland's Economic Development Agency.

A recognized expert in Foreign Direct Investment, international trade, offshore development and global business expansion, Andrea Haughian has helped C-Level executives accelerate business growth, maximize profitability and facilitate recruitment, training and R&D.

Andrea's experience spans a diverse range of sectors including creative and digital technology, financial services, legal and professional services, life and health sciences, green economy, manufacturing and global start-ups.

Andrea is proud to showcase the talents of home-grown companies and innovators and to enable entrepreneurs to make connections with advocates and influencers in challenging markets across the Americas.

Andrea is an advocate for the advancement of women and the promotion of diversity and inclusion in the workplace and is a long-time supporter of Young Enterprise.

Andrea received the Global Recognition Award at the Digital DNA Awards 2019. The Global Recognition Award recognizes an individual who has made a significant impact on Northern Ireland's digital and technology sector on a global scale. In 2021 Andrea received the Tom Moran Business to Arts Leadership Award for her success in building successful partnerships between the business sector and arts communities. Andrea is a past Irish Echo Top 40 Under 40 Awards honouree, has been named as one of Irish America's Most Influential Women by the Irish Voice and is a proud recipient of the Belfast International Homecoming Ambassador medal.

Andrea is based in New York, is a graduate of Queen's University, Belfast, has undertaken post-graduate programs in both San Francisco and Chicago and is a graduate of Cornell University's Executive Leadership Programme.



Alison Metcalfe

Head of North America & Australia, Tourism Ireland & Chair; European Travel Commission, USA

Alison has responsibility for leading Tourism Ireland's Marketing Strategy and Operations in the US, Canada & Australia. In June 2017, Alison also assumed responsibility for Tourism Ireland's operations in Australia/New Zealand. She also serves as Chair of the European Travel Commission (ETC), USA Chapter since 2017. ETC is the non-profit organisation responsible for the promotion of Destination Europe as the worldwide number one tourist destination in third markets.



Brenda Hegarty

Head of Economic Development, Donegal County Council

Brenda Hegarty is Head of Economic Development with Donegal County Council with a career dedicated to supporting economic development, social inclusion and regional development across the border region of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Brenda has extensive experience spanning local government, cross-border development and EU funding programmes, working across several organisations including Donegal County Council, Special EU Programmes Body, Fermanagh District Council and Leitrim County Council.

Brenda holds an MBA and a First-Class Honours degree from the University of Ulster and is currently studying for the Institute of Directors Chartered Director's Programme.

A native of the small border village of Pettigo, Co Donegal and now living in Aghyaran, Co Tyrone, Brenda brings both strategic insight and practical experience to her work, with a strong commitment to supporting vibrant, resilient communities where people can live and thrive.



Dr Brendan Jennings

Chief Operating Office, ATU

As Atlantic Technological University's inaugural Chief Officer for Research, Innovation and Engagement, Dr Brendan Jennings has responsibility for the leadership and coordination of research and innovation, enterprise and community engagement, and associated national and international relationships. He previously served as TU Dublin's inaugural Vice President for Research and Innovation, where he led the development of the university's R&I Strategy, strengthened research structures and supports, and helped secure institutional investments including the ARC Hub for ICT, Ireland's first national-scale research centre to be hosted by a Technological University. Earlier, he was Interim Director of CONNECT, the Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre for Future Networks and Communications, and Head of Graduate Studies at Waterford Institute of Technology. An engineer by training, Brendan holds a PhD from Dublin City University and has published extensively on Communications Networks and related fields. He currently chairs the National Research Integrity Forum (NRIF) and the Advisory Committee to the Irish Research e-Library (IReL).



Chyanne Holmes

Deputy Director, Northern Ireland Bureau, Washington, D.C

Chyanne Holmes is Deputy Director of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington, D.C., where she leads efforts to strengthen Northern Ireland's political, economic, and cultural ties across North America. She brings deep expertise in diplomacy and strategic engagement, honed through senior roles in the Northern Ireland Civil Service and over six years in Brussels during Brexit negotiations and COVID-19. At the UK Mission to the EU, she led high-impact campaigns and expanded international networks. Her earlier work in the European Parliament and Northern Ireland Executive Office focused on advancing Northern Ireland's interests on the global stage. Chyanne plays a key role in shaping the Bureau's transatlantic outreach and influence to North America.



Clr Elizabeth (Liz) Breadon

President Boston City Council, MA
Ulster University Alumnus
BSc, Physiotherapy, 1982
PGCert, Physiotherapy, 1986
PGDiploma, Health and Social Services Management, 1993

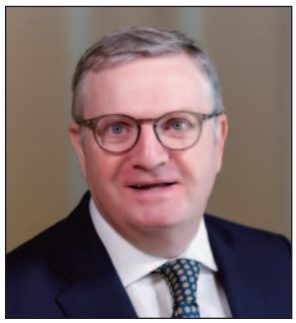
Originally from Fermanagh, Liz studied at Jordanstown for all three qualifications from UU. After working for the NHS, Liz emigrated to Boston in 1995 and began working as a Physical Therapist at the Boston Medical Centre and then the Perkins School for the Blind, where she remained for 16 years. During this time she also attended the Teleosis Homeopathic Collaborative and Simmons University, receiving a Doctorate in Physical Therapy from the latter. Prior to her election to the Council, she launched her own Homeopathy business. Liz was elected as the representative for Allston-Brighton on the Boston City Council in 2019.

Liz has been a passionate activist for the community for over 20 years, contributing to the preserving of The Presentation School Foundation for low-income families and saving the Faneuil Branch of the Boston Public Library from closure. Liz is an advocate for affordable housing, preservation and restoration of green spaces and stronger public schools. As a lifelong environmentalist she has worked to solutions to build a sustainable urban community.

As one of the first openly LGBTQ+ women to serve on the Council, Liz has shown extraordinary courage and leadership, using her platform to advocate for marginalized communities and champion the public good, the following clip is one example:

https://www.universalhub.com/2022/liz-breadon-responds-frank-bakers-hate-speech

Recently, Liz stood on the floor of the Boston City Council to speak powerfully in favour of a resolution declaring Boston a sanctuary city for transgender and non-binary individuals. In a time of growing division, her unwavering stance for human dignity and her commitment to principled governance captured the attention of the press and inspired many across the city and beyond. Her speech was a shining example of public service rooted in empathy and conviction



Gareth Graham

CEO, BCF Lending

Gareth has been a property developer for over three decades. He has developed numerous schemes and has a wealth of experience in relation to funding/financing.

He is the Managing Director of Oakland Holdings, the development company behind Belfast's most exciting commercial development, Merchant Square. The project was completed in Q1 2021, the 9 storey commercial building has transformed the centre of Belfast and is now let entirely to PwC in what will be the Firm's largest premises in the UK outside London.

Gareth lives in Belfast and is a former pupil of St Malachys college. He is committed to the ongoing development of Belfast and to ensuring that the city meets its full potential. Oakland is cuurently developing Northern Ireland's first Aparthotel at the junction of Queen Street and College Street in the city centre. The ApartHotel will feature 189 apartments, a bar and restaurant, gymnasium, meetings rooms and event space.

Gareth has a young family and he enjoys a range of sports including gaelic football where he is an under age coach with with his local club St Brigids

Cllr Gary Doherty

Cathaoirleach, Donegal County Council

Gary lives in Castlefinn with his wife Louise and three children, Darragh,



Aoife and Conor. He holds a BA Honours in Irish History and Politics from the University of Ulster.

He is a lifelong community and political activist and has served on Donegal County Council since November 2013. Gary has served as Cathaoirleach of the Lifford-Stranorlar Municipal District, Finn Valley College and Robert Emmets CLG and Vice-Chair of ICBAN and Donegal ETB.

Gary is a passionate advocate for Donegal and has a proven track record of fighting for the people of the area, including the Castlefinn, Lifford and Twin Towns. Flood Relief Schemes, improvements to health services, 100% Redress for victims of Defective Concrete and social and affordable housing are his election priorities.



Garry Martin

Director of Economic Development, Donegal County Council

Garry Martin is the Director of Economic Development, Information Systems and Emergency Services with Donegal County Council and is, additionally, the designated Director of the Donegal Municipal District.

In these roles he leads the Council's development and application of initiatives supporting economic and business development, manages and leads the Council's response in emergency events involving Fire Service and Civil Defence and has responsibility for the management and delivery of ICT solutions in support of the Council's service delivery requirements.

He has held the Director of Finance position in Donegal from July 2010 until 2018 and has worked both locally and nationally, (as president of the Heads of Finance Association) in leading and developing financial responses to strategic issues challenging both the Council locally and the sector nationally across a range of areas.

Garry is a qualified Chartered Public Finance Accountant, holds a Master of Science Degree in International Business from Ulster University and also holds an Advanced Certificate in Business Counselling from Durham University Business School.



Cllr Grace Uí Niallais

Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council

Grace Uí Niallais, is a mum of three and married to local Derry man, Aidan Nelis.

Originally from Randalstown and past pupil of St Louis Grammar School, and Queen's University, Grace has lived and worked in Derry for the past 20 years. A Gaeilgeoir, Grace has raised their three children as bilinguals, sending them to the local Gaelscoil.

Grace worked as a manager in Primark for many years before moving into the community sector, working as a Business Development Officer at Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin and most recently working at St Columb's Park House as their Heritage Officer.

Grace has been a Councillor in the Foyleside DEA since the 2023 elections and lives in the Foyleside area.

Grace was co-chair of the North West Community Wealth Building Partnership, a board member of Visit Derry and is a Governor for Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir. Grace is an advocate for the Irish language and culture and has a keen interest in local history and built heritage.



Minister James Lawless

Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

James Lawless is the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. He was appointed to this role on 23 January 2025. Before this, he served as Minister of State at the Department of Transport with special responsibility for International and Road Transport and Logistics; and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications with special responsibility for Postal Policy.

James Lawless was elected to the Dáil to represent Kildare North in 2016 and 2020 and prior to that was a member of Kildare County Council, serving as Mayor of Naas in 2015.

He studied Maths and Computer Science at Trinity College and Law at Kings Inns where he qualified as a Barrister. He practiced with a speciality in maritime/freight law.

He first got involved in politics as a commuter activist and remains a strong advocate for improving transport links, rail and bus services, better walking and cycling infrastructure including greenways.

Within the Dáil he has become a strong voice on Technology and Digital Policy introducing ground-breaking legislation on Social Media Regulation and on Cyber Harms. He served as opposition spokesperson on Science & Technology from 2016-2020 and as Chair of the Justice Committee from 2020-2024.



John Kelpie

Chief Executive Derry City & Strabane District Council

John Kelpie has been Chief Executive of the Derry City and Strabane District Council since April 2015. He initially led on the establishment of a new Council as a result of a programme of local government reform in Northern Ireland, with a new, larger geographical area and a range of additional powers, functions and responsibilities than its predecessor Councils. John designed an innovative, flexible and responsive staffing structure with a clear vision and purpose to develop a 'thriving, prosperous and sustainable City and Region with equality of opportunity for all'.

John has led on international best practice examples of place-based leadership within the cross-border North West City Region and the establishment of inclusive, strategic growth partnerships and plans. Recently he also led a City Partnership in securing the largest ever government investment package into the City and Region with the circa £293m City Deal and Inclusive Future Fund to drive innovation and regeneration in Derry and Strabane.

A Derry native and family man, John enjoys hill walking when he manages to secure some free time.



John McLaughlin

Chief Executive of Donegal County Council

John G. McLaughlin grew up in Redcastle, Co. Donegal and was educated at Carndonagh Community School and the Regional Technical College in Letterkenny. He graduated with a degree in Civil Engineering from University College Galway in 1986. He spent a short time working for University College Galway and Westmeath County Council before taking up an appointment in California, USA where he spent 13 years working in engineering and construction. He joined Donegal County Council in 1999 where he worked in the National Roads Office in Donegal Town at Executive Engineer and Senior Executive Engineer level. In 2001, he was appointed Director of Roads and Transportation and held that role until July 2020, when he took up the position of Chief Executive of Donegal County Council.



Katherine P. Craven

Executive Vice President, Administration and Finance, Babson College

Katherine P. Craven is Executive Vice President, Administration and Finance at Babson College, where she leads a broad portfolio of administrative and institutional functions.

She has guided the most ambitious campus renewal and expansion program in Babson's history while helping the College achieve its highest-ever bond rating. In 2020, the Boston Business Journal named her Chief Financial Officer of the Year in the education sector.

A longtime civic, education, and public finance leader, Ms. Craven chairs the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. She previously led the Massachusetts School Building Authority and the University of Massachusetts Building Authority and served as Massachusetts' First Deputy State Treasurer.

Ms. Craven's civic leadership spans education, philanthropy, and public service. She chairs the Boston Public Facilities Commission and Quincy City Building Committee; serves as treasurer of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, Adams Presidential Center, and Needham Bank Foundation; and holds several nonprofit board positions, including at The Roxbury Latin School, University of Massachusetts Foundation, Holocaust Legacy Foundation, among others. She also supports workforce mentoring, disability inclusion, and educational opportunity across Massachusetts.

Ms. Craven earned a bachelor's degree in history from Harvard College and received an honorary doctorate from New England School of Law. A Boston Latin School graduate, she lives in Brookline with her husband, Dr. James Kryzanski, and their five children.



Kathryn Ellis

Board Member Net Zero Northern Ireland

Kathryn is original from Belfast Northern Ireland and has lived in Boston for 30 years. Her career span has been involved in economic development and for 20 years of her career she was Vice President US East Coast for the SouthWest of England Regional Development Agency and was responsible for attracting large Northern American companies into the Region. Kathryn holds a Bachelor Degree in Management and a MBA from Curry College, MA, she is currently completing her PhD in Educational Leadership at the University of Massachusetts. Kathryn is on the Board of the Boston Irish Business Association and past Board member of the British American Business Association.

Continues on page 12

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She has helped organize multiple trade missions to Northern Ireland and Belfast is always a key city included in these programs. Most recently in November 2022 Belfast welcomed two UMass Hockey teams (UMass Amherst and UMass Lowell) as part of the Friendship Four Championships this visit also aligned with a visit by the Governor, Charlie Baker. Kathryn also recently joined as US board member for the Friends of Young Enterprise Northern Ireland and is a keen advocate for helping career paths for the youth in Northern Ireland, she has welcomed multiple visits by Young Enterprise members at the UMass Boston Campus. Kathryn's proudest claim to fame is her Grandfather started Lavery's in Shaftsbury Square and is now an iconic bar in the city.



Maureen Bennett

Retired Partner, Jones Day

Maureen Bennett represents life sciences and health care clients conducting global clinical trials and research collaborations. For more than 20 years, Maureen has advised life sciences companies, CROs (contract research organizations), academic medical centers, health care systems, patient focused organizations, and digital health companies on the contractual, regulatory, and ethical issues associated with clinical research.

Maureen regularly advises clients on emerging issues in clinical research, such as strategies to meet clinical trial diversity and health equity objectives, the design and implementation of compliant decentralized clinical trials and telemedicine networks, the structuring of patient recruitment programs, and the development of complex outsourcing arrangements between sponsors, CROs, and site management organizations. She has assisted several clients regarding the conduct of global trials for therapeutics and vaccines to address COVID-19.

Maureen also negotiates clinical trial agreements, reviews informed consents, and assists with interactions with and inspections by regulatory agencies, including the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA).

She also represents clients in the assessment and mitigation of regulatory risks and the negotiation of liability allocation arrangements in M&A, licensing, and other commercial transactions.

Maureen formerly served as co-chair of the Boston Bar Association's Health Care Section. She was honorary co-chair for the 8th Annual Boston-Northwest Ireland Golden Bridges Conference 2022 and is a regular speaker at health industry conferences.

Maureen is a member of the national Board of Directors for Lambda Legal and is co-chair of the Jones Day LGBTQ+ affinity group. She is a member of the Boston College Women's Softball Advisory Board.



Martina Curtin

Chairperson Irish Cultural Centre

Martina is the Founder of CHC Home Care, a boutique style home care agency that allowed people to remain safely in their homes while receiving nursing care. She grew the business organically to a multimillion dollar company until it was acquired by a publicly traded corporation in October 2020. Martina serves as Board Chairperson of the Irish Cultural Centre of Greater Boston and is the first female to hold this position.She's an active member of the New England Council, Irish Network Boston, Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce and Co-founder of Mná Mheiriceá.

In 2019 she was an honoree at the Irish Echo Small Business Impact Awards honoring Irish American entrepreneurs and business leaders receiving the Care Ambassador Award. Martinahas a deep fondness for her beloved Co. Clare where she was born and raised. She is and avid outdoors person and has completed three Boston Marathons. She is currently an EMBA Candidate at Suffolk University's Sawyer Business School. Martina resides in the Back Bay with her husband Craig.

Her motto to live by is, "Goals are achieved through hard work, high standards and surrounding yourself with good people."

Dr. Michael Gallagher

Innovation Manager, Bord Iascaigh Mhara

Dr. Michael Gallagher is Innovation Manager at BIM (Bord Iascaigh Mhara), where he works with seafood processors, fishers, government agencies, and industry partners to drive innovation and sustainable growth across Ireland's seafood sector. His work focuses on fostering strategic collaboration, advancing the adoption of emerging technologies, and developing commercially viable initiatives that enhance efficiency, value creation, and competitiveness. A particular area of expertise is the blue bioeconomy, where he leads a number of pre-commercial projects aimed at unlocking value from under-utilised marine resources. Michael also serves as Chair of the Northwest Blue Bioeconomy Working Group and Chair of AIMBIO. He holds a PhD in Fisheries Biology from Trinity College Dublin and an MBA specialising in knowledge transfer.





Michael O'Donnell

Island Seafoods, Killybegs, Co. Donegal

Michael O'Donnell has over 25 years' experience in the seafood and food industries, with responsibility for business development, international markets, product development and innovation. His work with Island Seafoods has included developing new markets for Irish seafood, introducing value-added products and exploring opportunities to improve efficiency and sustainability within the seafood processing sector. More recently, Michael has been involved in projects focused on the circular and blue bioeconomy, including biomass energy, wood-chip processing, seaweed drying and renewable energy. He has also worked with industry and research partners to explore new technologies, energy efficiency and opportunities to make better use of marine resources. Alongside his work with Island Seafoods, Michael provides business consultancy services, supporting companies in innovation, product development and strategic planning, with a particular interest in the future development of the blue economy in Ireland's northwest.



Nuala McGowan

Senior Director of Research Finance & Compliance, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University

Nuala McGowan is the Senior Director of Research Finance and Compliance for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the largest school at Harvard University. Nuala supports faculty and administrators in the management of sponsored programs. Nuala has been in Research Administration and Compliance for over 18 years, beginning her higher education career at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), with their Internal Audit division, before moving to Harvard University in 2007. Nuala was the recipient of the Harvard Dean's Distinction Award in 2013.

After completing her education in business and finance, at the North West Institute in Derry, Nuala received her Morrison Visa and traveled to Boston in 1995. She began her career as a financial analyst with Staples, Incorporated, and advanced to a Senior Business Analyst position on their Y2K team. Nuala continued her career in corporate retail with two fortune 100 companies as a Senior Internal Auditor.

Nuala played Gaelic football for Tir na Nog LGFC for many years and was the recipient of the Boston GAA "All-Star" award in 2009. Nuala also played for the Eire Og Camogie Club for seven years and served as chairperson of the club for four years.

Nuala was born in Donegal Town, the daughter of Mary McGowan, and the late Eddie McGowan. Nuala is one of nine and has a sister living close by in New York. The remainder of her siblings reside in Donegal Town, and several play a role in operating their family business, Daytona Heavy Haulage. Nuala currently lives in Arlington, MA with her wife, Erin and two kids, Rónán and Méabh.

Nuala was the recipient of the Golden Bridges Diaspora Ambassador Award in 2016. She served as an Honorary chair for the 2022 Annual Golden Bridges transatlantic conference and is a regular contributor to the conference.



Richard Davey

CEO, Massport

Richard Davey is the Chief Executive Officer of the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport). As CEO, Davey leads an organization with revenue of $1.25 billion and a mission of connecting Massachusetts and New England to the world to support the Commonwealth's economic, transportation and climate goals, while demonstrating a commitment to neighboring communities.

Massport's portfolio includes Boston Logan International Airport, Worcester Regional Airport, Hanscom Field, the public maritime facilities in the Port of Boston including Conley Container Terminal and Flynn Cruiseport Boston, as well as commercial real estate in East Boston, South Boston, and Charlestown. The Authority's facilities generate nearly $22 billion in annual economic impact.

Rich brings over two decades of experience in transportation and infrastructure. Prior to joining Massport, he served as President of New York City Transit, North America's largest transit system. He was also a partner at Boston Consulting Group, advising transportation organizations globally. Earlier in his career, Rich served as Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation under Governor Deval Patrick from 2011 through 2014, and as General Manager of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) in 2010–2011.

Rich is a graduate of the College of the Holy Cross and Gonzaga University School of Law. A native Bostonian, he and his wife reside in the Back Bay.

Sean P. Moynihan

Founder, The Moynihan Group

Sean Moynihan is a 1992 cum laude graduate of Providence College and a 2001 cum laude graduate of Suffolk University Law School's evening division program. He was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in January 2002. He spent over a decade working in the



Massachusetts House of Representatives, including positions as Counsel to the House Ways and Means Committee and Counsel to the House Majority Leader.

As Counsel to the House Ways and Means Committee, Sean analyzed legislative and budgetary proposals to make proper recommendations regarding state constitutional law, annual appropriation bills, inner workings of state agencies, and deciphering legal implications of funding proposals and amendments. Public policy matters that Sean tackled on a daily basis included transportation, energy and the environment, life sciences/biotech, education, and the administration of justice in the Commonwealth.

In 2007 Sean founded The Moynihan Group, LLC, a Boston based boutique law firm specializing in government relations and public policy, corporate law, and transatlantic ventures.

Core services of the firm include legislative counsel, regulatory advocacy, procurement, business development, and business incorporation and compliance. The firm provides a strategic management style plan that is uniquely tailored to clients' objectives. The firm has a history of representing clients in heavily regulated industries in Massachusetts.

The firm's clients have included financial brokers, trade associations, universities, private security and public works related companies, non-profits, international service providers, international governmental bodies, international venture capital firms focused on high tech/innovation, and micro-mobility companies.

Sean is past President of Irish Network Boston (IN Boston) and is currently Vice President of Irish Network USA (IN USA). He also serves on the Irish International Immigrant Center's (IIIC) Internship Advisory Panel working to identify employers for J-1 visa holders.

In the past, he served as "Connector" with the former Boston World Partnerships (BWP), a non-profit organization created by former Boston Mayor Tom Menino, and as a Trustee of the Irish Pastoral Centre in Boston.

Sean lives in Hingham, MA with his wife Lynn and their two children Maeve and Declan.



Stephen Gillespie

Director of Business and Culture at Derry City and Strabane District Council

Stephen Gillespie is the Director of Business and Culture at Derry City and Strabane District Council. The Business and Culture directorate encompasses a range of services such as economic development and job creation, business support and engagement, ICT, tourism, arts and culture, visitor services, heritage and museums and marketing and communications.

Stephen believes that councils have a growing responsibility to ensure that positive growth and development can continue at a local level, and in his capacity as Director of Business and Culture – two key economic areas for the North West – has been working to promote the City and District both on a local and international level.

"This is an exciting time for Derry and Strabane as we work through the next stage of our City Deal bid, making cases for a portfolio of strategic growth projects that will drive innovation, including the delivery of centres of innovation and excellence in data analytics (CARL) and robotics and automation (CIDRA) together with the key smart/digital City and Region initiatives.

"On the business front Council already offers a strong programme of support for entrepreneurship and new business start-ups which provides the expertise needed to nurture fledgling companies and incentivise and inspire new talent. We have also been strengthening our international business links with the City of London, the US and China ensuring that word gets out about our unique proposition as an area ripe for investment and growth."

With the publication of a raft of new strategies in the areas of Arts and Culture and Tourism, Stephen is confident that Derry and Strabane now has the blueprint to develop a thriving creative economy, and become an outstanding visitor destination brimming with heritage and culture.

"Council has been working closely with a wide range of partners to establish the best way forward in supporting and empowering our creative community. We have the potential to become a significant cultural hub, which will also enhance our appeal as a visitor destination with a strong heritage offering celebrating the many historical and cultural assets we have to offer.

"On a broader spectrum, we are also making good progress in the delivery of the Strategic Growth Plan for the City and District with major strides already evident in our first Statement of Progress, showing that we are on track in our overarching plans to transform the North West for the better."

Stephen qualified as an accountant in 1996 having trained in an industrial setting with Desmond and Sons, the clothing manufacturer. He then moved on to become the Financial Controller at Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners. This private sector experience has been invaluable in the current role.

NIBureau
Northern Ireland Executive
North America

The Northern Ireland Bureau is proud to support Golden Bridges 2026 and welcome the Derry City & Strabane District Council delegation to Boston.

As the Northern Ireland Executive's diplomatic mission in North America, we work to strengthen political, economic and cultural connections that create opportunity and deliver lasting benefit on both sides of the Atlantic.

Northern Ireland is globally connected with recognised strengths in:

Advanced Manufacturing | Life Sciences | AI & Cybersecurity | Blue Economy | Creative Industries

Together with partners across North America, we are building relationships that support innovation, investment and sustainable economic growth.

Connecting People. Strengthening Partnerships. Delivering Opportunity.

Get in contact with us at: www.nibureau.com

ATLANTIC TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

Atlantic Technological University (ATU) was established in 2022 following the merger of three institutes of technology – Galway-Mayo (GMIT), Letterkenny (LYIT) and IT Sligo. With more than 30,000 registered students, the vast majority of whom are in full-time undergraduate study, ATU is making good on its mission to become a leader in Higher Education in Ireland through its continuously developing academic offering and collaborative partnerships in the private sector.

ATU is one of Ireland's largest universities with eight campuses across the West and North-West, meaning students can enjoy the benefits of a large-scale university, such as access to emerging technologies and research-driven teaching, with the excellent quality of life provided by the natural amenities along the Wild Atlantic Way.

The university and its more than 2,600 staff offers 600 full and part-time programmes from pre-degree to doctoral level, either on campus or via remote learning. ATU is dedicated to preparing its students for the future of work, with the largest proportion of our graduates coming from courses in science, mathematics and computing, engineering, manufacturing and construction.

Find out more at www.atu.ie

BABSON COLLEGE

Babson College is a top-ranked private business school in Wellesley, Massachusetts, renowned for its focus on entrepreneurship and innovation. Babson was recently ranked No. 1 in undergraduate entrepreneurship by U.S. News & World Report for the 30th consecutive time and, for the second consecutive year, was ranked the No. 2 Best College in the U.S. in The Wall Street Journal/College Pulse 2026 Best Colleges rankings.

Founded in 1919 by entrepreneur Roger Babson, Babson College has built a reputation as a global leader in entrepreneurial education. Located on a 370-acre suburban campus, the college offers a dynamic learning environment that blends business fundamentals with liberal arts. The school fosters a global mindset, ethical leadership, and hands-on learning.

Babson College prepares and empowers entrepreneurial leaders who create, grow, and steward sustainable economic and social value everywhere. We shape the entrepreneurial leaders our world needs most: those with strong functional knowledge, skills, and vision to navigate change, accommodate ambiguity, surmount complexity, and motivate teams in organizations of all types and sizes.

INVEST NI

Invest NI is the economic development agency for Northern Ireland, a business-friendly region with a world class reputation for innovation. With teams all over the world, Invest Northern Ireland is responsible for growing the local economy by helping new and existing businesses to compete globally and by attracting foreign direct investment to Northern Ireland with a particular focus on sectors such as financial services, cyber security, advanced manufacturing and life and health sciences.

North America is Northern Ireland's greatest source of Foreign Direct Investment with companies such as Citi, IBM, Rapid7, Imperva and Aflac having established centers of excellence in the region, benefiting from a highly skilled and educated workforce, superb infrastructure, competitive costs and Invest NI support programs. We work in partnership with councils in the North West to support local businesses and attract investment to the region. International companies such as Seagate, Alchemy, Allstate, Terex and FinTru have flourished in the North West thanks to its pro-business environment, quality of life and strategic importance as a gateway to EU and GB markets.

Following the UK's exit from the European Union, Northern Ireland continues to have access to the GB and the EU markets for goods. It is the only location where businesses can operate free from customs declarations, rules of origin certificates and non-tariff barriers on the sale of goods to two of the world's largest markets.

Invest Northern has a network of offices across the Americas, including New York, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco in the US, Toronto in Canada and Mexico City and Santiago, Chile in LATAM. Invest NI is committed to continuously driving growth and innovation across the North West. Golden Bridges is a remarkable opportunity to nurture existing and new partnerships across the Atlantic and to showcase the North West region as an incredible place to live, work, study, visit and invest

https://www.investni.com

IRELAND NORTH WEST

Who We Are?

Ireland's North West City Region is the fourth-largest population hub on the island of Ireland, uniquely positioned at the crossroads of the UK and EU markets. Our strategic cross-border location provides seamless access to a combined market of 5.14 million people.

The region encompasses the areas governed by Derry City and Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council, home to 350,000 residents. With a proven track record in attracting Foreign Direct Investment, the North West is already home to over 40 international businesses that leverage our strategic advantages to serve global markets.

Ireland's North West offers international businesses a distinctive base from which to access talent, build partnerships and serve wider markets. Its cross-border position, education institutions, digital connectivity and established business base create a strong platform for investment and growth

Why Invest in the Ireland Northwest Region?

- ☐ Strategic Location: Enjoy unfettered access to both EU and UK markets, making the region an ideal gateway for international trade.
- ☐ Skilled Talent Pool: Benefit from a highly skilled, educated, and loyal workforce that provides a robust talent pipeline for your business needs.
- ☐ North West Tertiary Education Cluster: Ulster University, North West Regional College and Atlantic Technological University and Donegal Education and Training Board help support skills development, graduate recruitment and employer-led training.
- ☐ World-Class Digital Connectivity: Direct access to the US and Europe through advanced high-capacity fibre optic cables ensures superior digital infrastructure.
- ☐ Established Industry Clusters: Thrive within dynamic clusters in RegTech, FinTech, MedTech, Tourism, Blue Economy and Advanced Engineering, offering a collaborative ecosystem for innovation.
- ☐ Research & Development Excellence: Leverage state-of-the-art Research and Innovation Hubs supported by leading third-level institutions and private sector partners.
- ☐ Pioneers in Remote & Hybrid Working: The region leads in embracing flexible working models, ensuring access to a broad and adaptable workforce.
- ☐ Collaborative Environment: Benefit from strong partnerships with Government Departments, Local Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, and academia, all committed to your success.
- ☐ Agility in Skills Development: We offer tailored education and skills programs designed to support the specific needs of investing companies, ensuring a smooth integration and operation.

Invest in Ireland's North West City Region – where strategic location, skilled talent, and a collaborative business environment come together to fuel your global ambitions.

https://irelandnw.com/

IRISH AMERICAN PARTNERSHIP

Dedicated to connecting Irish America and friends of Ireland to their heritage through targeted giving – the Partnership invests in education, community development, and peace initiatives across the island of Ireland. Since their inception in 1986, supporters have raised over $57 million for young people and communities, North and South, empowering and educating the next generation of global leaders. The Partnership provides targeted grants to schools, provides university access scholarships, funds education centers for homeless youth, supports peace and reconciliation initiatives in Northern Ireland, and champions Gaelic games, Irish arts, culture, and more.

www.irishap.org

#InvestinginIrelandsFuturewww.irishap.org

NORTHERN IRELAND BUREAU

The Northern Ireland Bureau is the diplomatic mission of the Northern Ireland Executive in the United States and Canada. Based in Washington D.C., our team works to strengthen and expand Northern Ireland's connections across North America – engaging with partners in government, business, universities and the cultural sector.

We are a trusted resource for individuals and organizations seeking to learn more about, and engage with Northern Ireland, whether through trade, education, policy collaboration or culture. Our mission is to showcase Northern Ireland as a confident, outward-looking region that is a great partner for global engagement. We do this by working closely with American and Canadian institutions (governments, universities, investors, cultural groups, and diaspora networks) to build meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships. Each year, we facilitate delegations, policy briefings, academic exchanges, public lectures and cultural events that strengthen transatlantic ties.

Northern Ireland's global profile is rising, driven by its leadership in areas like cybersecurity, conflict resolution, financial technology, and the creative industries. With more than 34 million Americans and 500,000 Canadians tracing their heritage to Northern Ireland, our connections run deep. The Bureau plays a key role in transforming these connections into new opportunities to visit, study, invest and collaborate.

To find out more visit: www.nibureau.com

TOURISM IRELAND

"Tourism Ireland in North America: Connecting the Diaspora and Driving Tourism"

Tourism Ireland is the national agency dedicated to promoting the island of Ireland as a leading travel destination. Through the campaign "What Fills Your Heart with Ireland," we invite travelers worldwide to experience Ireland's stunning landscapes, vibrant cities, and unique cultural heritage. Our mission is to share what makes Ireland special, from its rugged coastlines and charming towns to the rich history that resonates with visitors of all ages.

As an organization, we're committed to supporting Ireland's economy through tourism, and our efforts have a substantial impact. In 2023, Ireland welcomed over 8 million visitors, who contributed €6.4 billion to the economy. With an average stay of 7.6 nights, our visitors immerse themselves deeply in the Irish experience, supporting local businesses and communities throughout the island.

We also place a strong focus on connecting with the Irish diaspora, particularly in North America. Our team in New York builds meaningful connections through events and programs tailored to Irish-Americans and their communities, celebrating shared heritage and fostering pride that inspires visits. Whether travelers come to explore their roots or experience something new, Tourism Ireland ensures that Ireland is always a place that fills hearts, invites exploration, and creates lifelong memories for all who visit.

https://www.tourismireland.com

ÚDARÁS NA GAELTACHTA

Údarás na Gaeltachta is the State agency responsible for the economic, social and cultural development of Ireland's Gaeltacht regions - areas where the Irish language is still spoken as a community language.
The organisation's primary mission is to preserve and promote the use of Irish as the principal language of the Gaeltacht while simultaneously fostering sustainable economic development in these regions. Údarás achieves this through a variety of initiatives, including:

- Attracting investment and supporting local businesses
- Providing grants and financial incentives for job creation
- Developing infrastructure and business parks
- Implementing the State's language planning process
- Supporting an extensive community development network
- Promoting tourism in Gaeltacht areas
- Providing the gteic network of digital co-working spaces

Údarás na Gaeltachta covers seven Gaeltacht regions across counties Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Cork, Waterford, and Meath. These areas face unique challenges, including rural depopulation and limited economic opportunities. By focusing on sectors like technology, marine resources, creative industries, and tourism, Údarás aims to create sustainable employment while preserving the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht.

The agency is governed by a 12-member board appointed by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. With headquarters in Na Forbacha, Co. Galway, Údarás maintains regional offices throughout the Gaeltacht to ensure close collaboration with local communities.

As a key player in Ireland's language revitalisation efforts, Údarás na Gaeltachta continues to adapt its strategies to meet the evolving needs of Gaeltacht regions, balancing economic development with cultural preservation in an increasingly globalised world.

https://udaras.ie/en





Mass travel agency putting down roots in Belfast

Cara Group Travel of Quincy, MA has cut the ribbon on a new Belfast office — a significant milestone that makes CGT one of the first North American travel companies to establish a permanent presence in Northern Ireland. While the new office begins with a team of two, it reflects the company's long-term commitment to the region and confidence in its growing tourism potential.

The expansion comes as the Friendship Four ice hockey tournament in Belfast over the Thanksgiving weekend continues to grow in both scale and impact. What began as a unique collegiate hockey event has evolved into a wider Northwest tourism opportunity, with fan travel programs now extending to Donegal and Derry each November.

That momentum will reach another level in November 2027, when Cara Group Travel fans will take over Donegal Town and Derry to experience everything the Northwest has to offer. From breathtaking scenery and rich cultural heritage to world-class hospitality, the visit will place a well-deserved spotlight on a region that continues to captivate international visitors.

Building on the success of collegiate hockey, Cara Group Travel has also partnered with Galgorm to bring the first-ever regular season NCAA golf tournament to Northern Ireland, introducing yet another new audience to the destination.

"Together, these initiatives are helping to drive tourism growth, attract new markets, and generate meaningful economic impact across Northern Ireland and the Northwest," says Cara Group Travel founder Sara Stanton. "With a Belfast office now established and an exciting pipeline of events ahead, we remain committed to creating lasting connections and bringing new visitors to this remarkable region."



Ballintoy Harbour. Photo by Thomas McMullan.



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Northern Ireland Altogether more

Donegal's Blue Future: An Ocean of Opportunity

In Donegal, the sea is part of our story. For generations, the Atlantic has shaped our livelihoods, our communities and our connections with the wider world. Today, that relationship is opening a new chapter: one that brings fresh ideas to a proud maritime heritage, with rewarding jobs, thriving local businesses and a healthy ocean at its heart.

The 'blue economy' is simply the many ways we make a living from the sea, from fishing, seafood processing and aquaculture to marine engineering, tourism and renewable energy. Donegal has much to build on. In Killybegs, Greencastle, Burtonport, and coastal and island communities across the county, practical know-how and enterprise sit alongside a deep understanding of the waters around us.

One exciting part of this story is the blue bioeconomy. The blue bioeconomy focuses on transforming renewable marine resources such as fish, shellfish and seaweed into higher-value products while minimising waste. This turns what might otherwise be discarded into useful ingredients and products for new markets, such as healthcare and cosmetics.

Work by Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) and Donegal County Council has identified opportunities in pet food ingredients and products that help plants grow. Further possibilities include proteins, collagen and new materials made from marine resources. At its heart, this is about getting more value from what we already have, rather than simply taking more from the sea. It's a 'win-win', as we can create new value opportunities, while also enhancing our sustainability through reducing waste.

Bringing people together will help turn these possibilities into something practical. Donegal's Blue Economy Working Group connects public bodies, education providers and industry. Blue bioeconomy work also brings together BIM, the Council, Atlantic Technological University, the Marine Institute, enterprise agencies and the Killybegs Marine Cluster. For businesses, these relationships can offer aligned access to research, advice and support to bring ideas to market.

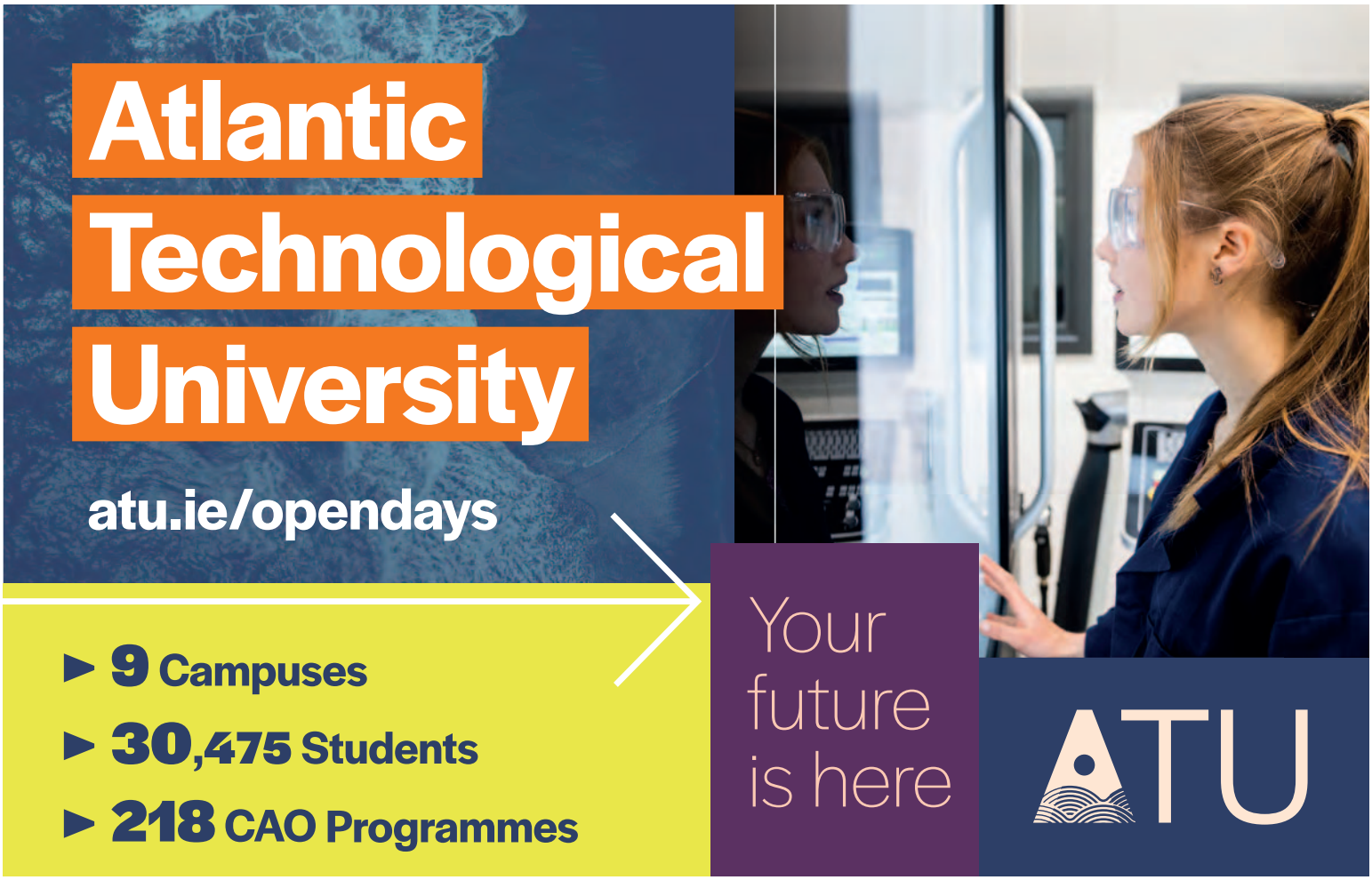
Our aspiration is for Donegal and the wider North West to become a globally recognised hub for marine innovation. That means helping companies test new products, building skills and attracting investment through an enabling support ecosystem. Above all, it means giving young people more opportunities to build fulfilling careers close to home. A proposed innovation facility could help promising research make the journey into commercially viable products.



BIM, Ireland's Seafood Development Agency, in partnership with Donegal County Council, launched a new report assessing the potential of Ireland's blue bioeconomy in Killybegs on June 19th 2026. Pictured in back row from left to right: Helena Deane, Marine Institute, Mairead Carlin, Donegal County Council, Cllr.Micheal Boyle, Cllr.Noel Jordan, Cllr Jimmy Brogan, Michael Gallagher BIM, Vincent Ryan BIM, Devin Ayres Nua na Mara, Brijesh Tiwari Teagasc, Karl Bonner Killybegs Marine Cluster, Niall O Rahelly Enterprise Ireland, Shay Hannon Teagasc. Front row from left to right: Cliodhna Griffin BIM, Cllr. Niamh Kennedy, Gary Martin Donegal County Council, Alexandra Leeper Iceland Ocean Cluster, Eve Savage MTU, Lorraine Arbuckle Donegal County Council, Eve-Anne McCarron ATU.

For the Golden Bridges community, there is an invitation to be part of this next chapter. Closer connections with Massachusetts and Maine could create opportunities for shared research, business partnerships, investment and new customers. There is much to learn from one another, with Donegal offering American partners links to Irish expertise, businesses and opportunities in Europe.

Ultimately, this is a story about people and place: businesses that can thrive, skilled jobs, lively coastal communities and seas we can pass on with pride. By bringing together maritime experience, fresh thinking and friendships across the Atlantic, Donegal can honour its past while opening an ocean of opportunity for the generations to come.



GOLDEN BRIDGES CONFERENCE PROGRAM





GOLDEN BRIDGES CONFERENCE & AWARDS LUNCHEON 2026

Thursday 12 November 2026

9:30am **Boston departs from The Haborside Hotel for Babson College**

10am **Registration and Networking**

10:45am **Golden Bridges Conference and Awards**

Céad Míle Fáilte/A Warm Welcome
Katherine Craven, Executive Vice President Administration, Babson College

Official Opening of Conference - Uniting in Common Purpose
Cllr Grace Uí Niallais, Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council
Cllr Gary Doherty, Cathaoirleach, Donegal County Council

Presentation of Golden Bridges Ambassador Award
Announced by Maureen Bennett, Retired Partner, Jones Day
Presented by Cllr Grace Uí Niallais, Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council
Recipient: John Harkin OBE, Founder and Board Director, Alchemy Technology Services

Keynote
John Harkin OBE, Founder and Board Director, Alchemy Technology Services

Presentation of Golden Bridges Ambassador Award
Announced by Martina Curtin, President Greater Boston Irish Cultural Center
Presented by Cllr Gary Doherty, Cathaoirleach, Donegal County Council
Recipient: Declan Houton, Musician

Presentation of Golden Bridges Ambassador Award
Announced by Nuala McGowan, Senior Director of Research Finance & Compliance, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University
Presented by John McLaughlin, CEO, Donegal County Council
Recipient: Mary Swanton, Executive Director, Irish Pastoral Center, Boston

Presentation of Golden Bridges Ambassador Award
Announced & Presented by Sean Moynihan, Founder, The Moynihan Group
Recipient: Oran McGonagle, Owner, McGonagle's Pub, Boston

Presentation of Dave Burke Golden Bridges Award
Presented by Patricia Burke
Recipient: Steve Burke, Founder, Boston to Belfast Youth Empowerment

Tourism Fireside Chat
Alison Metcalfe, VP North Americas, Tourism Ireland
Brenda Hegarty, Head of Economic Development, Donegal County Council

Funding Inspirational Investments in the Northwest
Gareth Graham, CEO & Founder Belfast Commercial Finance

12pm **Golden Bridges Luncheon & Networking**

1pm **Panel Discussion: Leveraging the Blue Economy**
Chair: Kathryn Ellis, Board Member Net Zero Northern Ireland
Panel: Richard Davey, CEO, Massport
Micheal Gallagher, Innovation Manager, Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Garry Martin, Director of Economic Development, Donegal County Council
Micheal O'Donnell, Island Seafoods
Dr Brendan Jennings, Chief Officer for Research, Innovation and Engagement, ATU

Fireside Chat: Maintaining Momentum
John Kelpie, CEO, Derry City and Strabane District Council
John McLaughlin, CEO, Donegal County Council
in conversation with Andrea Haughian, Head of Americas Invest Northern Ireland

Guest of Honor
Minister James Lawless, Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
Introduced by Clr Elizabeth Breadon, President of Boston City Council

Close
Chyanne Holmes, Deputy Director Northern Ireland Bureau, Washington D.C.

2pm-3pm Closing Drinks Reception
(3pm Bus Departs for Harborside Hotel, Boston)

Business Meeting Rooms: Quiet meeting rooms are available all day for attendee networking, client catch-ups, and one-on-one connections. Sponsored by Benchmark Strategies

5pm All delegates are welcome to join us for the Golden Bridges after party at The Dubliner, 2 Center Plz, Boston, MA 02108

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