



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



Shared Island  
Initiative

# Shared Island Dialogue

## Accommodating National Identities

## **Introduction**

### ***Shared Island Dialogue series***

Inclusive dialogue with all communities and political traditions is central to the Government's Shared Island initiative.

Over the last three years, the Shared Island Dialogue series has brought together more than 3,000 citizens and civic representatives to discuss how cooperation and interaction can help address challenges and take up opportunities that concern and connect the whole island.

The Dialogue series has sought to include as broad a range of experience and perspective as possible, including traditionally underrepresented voices in the Peace Process of women, young people and ethnic minority communities on the island.

Through the Dialogue series, the Government is listening to people's views on a range of common concerns, on how we can work across communities and borders for a shared future, in practical, meaningful ways.

Reports and highlights from the Shared Island Dialogue series are available online [here](#).

### ***Accommodating National Identities***

A Shared Island Dialogue on *Accommodating National Identities* was convened on 25 October 2023, held at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

Tánaiste Micheál Martin TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence, participated in the dialogue, delivering the keynote address.

The dialogue was moderated by RTÉ broadcaster Miriam O'Callaghan, and saw participation by over 300 political, civic society and cultural representatives from North and South.

The first session looked at the diverse national identities on the island, how and where these have been well-accommodated, and how and where not, in different areas of society, North and South.

The second session looked at how national identities have changed over recent decades, and what actions could make the island more accommodating of national identity diversity.

This report sets out the main themes and issues raised at the Dialogue which will help inform further development of the Government's Shared Island initiative and as a contribution to broader discussion on how we share the island of Ireland across all communities, today and into the future.

## Shared Island dialogue- *Accommodating national identities*

25 October 2023, Abbey Theatre, Dublin

### Agenda

- 10:00 Registration and networking
- 11:00 Opening by moderator, Miriam O'Callaghan
- 11:05 Welcome address by Mark O'Brien, Co-Director, Abbey Theatre
- 11:15 Keynote address by Tánaiste Micheál Martin TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence

### Session I: Reflections on national identity on the island of Ireland

#### 11:35 Panel discussion

- *Where in society is national identity diversity well-accommodated; where not - sports; politics; public and private sectors; the arts; civil society; faith communities? Why are there differences?*
- *How could the almost 20% of residents who were not born on the island be better recognised?*
- *What can be learned from the Decade of Centenaries on acknowledging others' identities?*
- *How well is race, ethnic, faith and other diversity acclaimed as part of Irish and British identities?*
- *What are the challenges and opportunities of linguistic and cultural diversity for the island?*

#### *With panel speakers:*

- **Professor Jane Ohlmeyer**, *Erasmus Smith's Professor of Modern History at Trinity College Dublin*
- **Dr. Maurice Manning**, *Chair of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations and Chancellor of the National University of Ireland*
- **Gillian Kingston**, *Former President of the Irish Council of Churches*
- **Darren Murphy**, *Dublin based playwright, lecturer in creative writing at Dublin City University; former associate artist at the Abbey Theatre, and former Ciarán Carson Writing and the City Fellow at the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queen's University Belfast*
- **Karyn Devenney**, *Deputy Principal, Manorcunningham Primary School, Board member of the Ulster Scots Agency*

### Session II: What does a truer accommodation of national diversity require?

- 13:20 Guest contribution by **John Toal**, Broadcaster
- 13:30 Panel discussion
- *Have Irish and British identities changed in recent decades? What were the drivers of change? What role has European identity and experience played in that change?*

- *How has a zero-sum view of Irish and British identity been transcended in Northern Ireland? How not?*
- *To what extent in the South is complexity of national identity accommodated, including Protestant, Unionist, Anglo-Irish or British identity and background? How could these dimensions of national identity and experience for some be better acknowledged?*
- *How does cultural confidence play into a more plural national identity? How can that be fostered, North and South?*
- *What actions could make the island more truly accommodating of national identity diversity?*

***With panel speakers:***

- ***Dr. John Kyle***, High Sheriff of the County and Borough of Belfast, Former Councillor
- ***Sabrina Baptista***, Shared Island Youth Forum member; Politics in Action Northern Ireland
- ***Brendan McAleer***, Regional Director, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann
- ***Very Reverend Dr. William Morton***, Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin

14:30

Closing remarks by moderator

## Opening contributions:

**Dialogue moderator Miriam O'Callaghan opened the dialogue** noting that national identity can be a sensitive, even a contentious topic. For many, national identity is a profoundly important factor personally, and for their sense of community and connection to their home place.

This Shared Island Dialogue is asking where in society is national identity diversity well-accommodated, and where is it not. What lessons have we learned from recent years on acknowledging and nurturing more plural national identities?

The dialogue is to look honestly, fairly and in a constructive spirit at how, across all communities, we could stretch in the future to overcome the challenges we still face; and to move from mere acceptance to genuine accommodation, even celebration, of our different national identities.

The themes and questions raised will inform how subsequent events in this dialogue series are shaped.

This discussion is about getting the most fundamental issues and the most searching questions to the fore, for a deeper and continuing conversation in the time ahead - one which is fully inclusive and respectful of all communities and political traditions on this shared island.

**Mark O'Brien, Executive Director and Co-Director of the Abbey Theatre gave a welcome address**, reflecting on the Abbey Theatre's history and role in Irish society and discussed how the National Theatre, the first state-funded theatre in the English-speaking world has throughout nearly 120 years in operation, shaped and explored the idea of a nation, and sought a paradigm that contains all people and stories despite how divergent those stories may seem. He emphasised the capacity of theatre, as a shared experience, to challenge established views, and inspire new ways of looking at old narratives.

On the theme of the dialogue, Mark O'Brien said, "I believe it is our shared responsibility to ask not just what our shared future might look like, but also how we might get there, and how we can create an equitable future where all identities can flourish,"

Mark O'Brien's welcome address can be viewed [here](#).

**Tánaiste Micheál Martin TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence gave the keynote address.**

The Tánaiste's address can be viewed [here](#) and the full text is available [here](#).

The Tánaiste in the keynote address to the Dialogue said:

“Overcoming the divisions that remain on this island - including in how we accommodate different national identities - is one of the great challenges of our time.”

“I want to raise three themes that are central for today's dialogue, and for achieving a deeper reconciliation of our national identities on this island in the time ahead:

- the significance and complexity of history in shaping national narratives
- the evolution of Irish identity and dynamics today; and
- the missed opportunities of the Good Friday Agreement so far, and how we can respond.”

*History and remembrance:*

“We are not yet at the point of drawing together the full legacy of the remarkable and wide-ranging activity of the centenary commemorations over the last 10 years. But the approach taken and the experience gained have borne out important principles and lessons on the interplay of history, identity and politics, that can now help inform how we look to the future.”

“Among the steps forward achieved through the Decade of Centenaries programme have been:

- including in our national remembrance the terrible losses of the first World War
- better recognition of the roles of and treatment of women during that period and since; and
- more considered scholarship and public discussion of the drivers, dynamics and legacy of the Civil War - including the significance of the wider European and colonial context.”

“It is vital to support an open and challenging approach to history, that is plural, rigorous, and not afraid to evolve, or to recognise previous blindspots.”

“This is the only way we can properly understand the complexity of the shared but contested history of this island, and the identities that it informs.”

“The more we look, the more we see how little our past conforms to any credible reading of it as a single and solitary pathway to the present.”

“Many diverging, intersecting and parallel paths have led those of us who call this island home to the point at which we are today – and none of those paths is at its end. They will continue to wend their way collectively mapping out the Ireland of tomorrow and the longer term.”

“Right through our history, there are important cultural, social and political elements often understood as a fixed part of the story of one type of Irish identity, which are actually far more dynamic or where the very fore-grounding of those elements deliberately downplays other elements.”

“Equally, how can our narratives accommodate those whose traditions are distinct, but also part of the warp and weft of this island? The Orange tradition is not mine, but understanding and respecting that tradition informs my sense of the complex, overlapping or distinct identities of those who call this place home.”

“We could draw far more on the mutuality of heritage and experience that is an under-told part of the story of this island.”

### *Evolution of identity*

“The evolution of national identity is something that we should be much more upfront about.

This isn’t saying that there are no defining dimensions of Irishness, or any other nationality. But it is to recognise that collective identity, and national stories - are by no means closed or fixed. This is apparent however you focus the lens.”

“Look, over the last hundred years, at how Irishness has changed from being defined internationally, for instance, by features such as poverty or emigration; to an international profile today more associated with music, prosperity, and a success founded on education and connection to the global economy;”

“and, how through 50 years of EU membership, not only our economy but also our State and society has been transformed. Now for many, many people in Ireland, European citizenship and identity is part and parcel with how they identify; entirely complementing other identity markers.”

“what we think of as Irishness has changed too to be more inclusive of the diaspora. When President Robinson put a candle in the window of Áras an Uachtaráin in 1990, she started an important conversation about our relationship with (as she put it) “our exiles and our emigrants”

“and over the last 10 years, Irish society has taken significant steps forward in embracing diversity and equality. We are rightly proud, for instance, to be the first country in the world to introduce marriage equality through a referendum;”

“clearly too, the more than 20% of residents today who were born abroad, have helped to make Ireland a more successful and vibrant society. Their contributions play a significant role in the emergence of a more diverse Irish identity, for which we are better and stronger.”

“Because Irishness is not necessarily something based on ethnicity or religion or even on a single nationality. It is both a civic and a personal concept which continues to evolve. And, as individuals, any reflection shows that our identity develops over time and through experience. That too is a strength. To have the confidence and conviction to change.”

“I believe that we need to bring the experience of positive change over recent decades, and a broader conception of what really underpins our identity to the continuing challenge of accommodating each other on this island. Because, while there has been immense progress, clearly the vision of the Good Friday Agreement for a reconciliation of all communities and traditions has not yet been achieved.”

### *Good Friday Agreement*

“Through the Good Friday Agreement, we have consolidated an enduring peace. That is of utmost importance and it gives me great hope for what can be achieved in the years ahead.”

“But too much time has been squandered over the last 25 years without fulfilling the potential of peace. Connected to that, there has never been sufficient, sustained focus on tackling entrenched sectarianism and disadvantage in Northern Ireland.”

“And, we have simply not done enough to get to know and understand each other more since 1998. To build new connections over the barriers that grew up over centuries and during the Troubles.”

“Beyond family relationships and individual connections, the fact is that we know too little of each other across the border and our different communities.”

“Reconciliation has been the great miss in the twenty-five years since the Agreement. Many communities are as far apart today as they were in 1998. It is only by recognising this failure, by calling it out, that we can make the efforts to address it.”

### *Shared Island*

“That is why the Shared Island initiative - which I established as Taoiseach three years ago - is such a political priority for me. For the first time ever, we are undertaking a comprehensive programme of published research about the whole island, in economic, social, cultural and political terms.”

“And this dialogue series, has so far brought together over 3,000 citizens and representatives from across all communities. With a priority on hearing from new and underrepresented voices, on how in practical ways we can better share this island.”

“The conversation is also being developed through the new Youth Forum which commenced in September, with 80 young civic representatives aged 18 to 25.”

“And the research and civic interactions are informing the largest programme of cross-border investment cooperation undertaken by any Irish Government in history, enabled through our €1 billion Shared Island Fund.”

We are supporting a flourishing of new connections between people across this island.

### *Conclusion*

“Today’s dialogue is necessarily challenging. It poses questions on matters that can be intensely personal and intensely political.”

“So my ask is that we are authentic and kind to each other as we set to the task and strive to find generous, inclusive answers to questions such as:

How do we take undimmed pride in our own traditions and culture, while making it unacceptable that they are ever used to exclude, diminish or divide people?

Can we do better at highlighting the common values and connected heritage of our distinct traditions?

Can we be confident enough to encompass in our respective national identities, symbols and traditions that at this moment in time seem challenging, but matter for others?

How do we harness our greater ethnic and cultural diversity today, so it is an integral part of Irish identity?

and, How can we affirm a collective identity for all on this island - Irish, British, both and neither - that is deeper and broader than any community, creed or political aspiration?”

“Through the Decade of Centenaries, North and South, we sought and found better, more inclusive ways to remember who we were at a pivotal and tragically divisive times in the history of this island.”

“Now with commitment and generosity, we have a chance to look to tomorrow, to take a similar approach and to accommodate diverse identities on this island, in ways that are truly transformational for all, and transformational for our country.”



## Panel 1: Reflections on national identity on the island of Ireland

*The first panel session was moderated by Miriam O'Callaghan with the following panellists:*

- Professor Jane Ohlmeyer, Erasmus Smith's Professor of Modern History at Trinity College Dublin
- Dr. Maurice Manning, Chair of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations
- Gillian Kingston, Former President of the Irish Council of Churches
- Darren Murphy, Dublin-based playwright, lecturer in creative writing at Dublin City University
- Karyn Devenney, Deputy Principal, Manorcunningham Primary School, Board member of the Ulster Scots Agency

*Themes raised by panel members and other contributors were:*

- It was noted that history is a core part of the discussion on accommodating national identity and meaningful dialogue requires going back to difficult topics in history, including those beyond the last hundred years and the centenary commemorations period. Emphasis was placed on the importance of having an **informed discussion based on evidence and respect for all traditions and histories**.
- Panellists recalled that through the Decade of Commemorations, the narrative could not be attached to any one point of view, given different perspectives on key historical events. Instead, **truth and respect** were the key principles. For example, the space to explore every point of view with respect was, in itself, a cathartic process. Furthermore, **grassroots and local groups**, North and South, bringing together their communities to examine their collective past enabled more informed and honest conversations on events that had divided communities for so long.
- There was agreement that more work is needed to bring different and wider historical perspectives into school curriculums, and indeed ensure that history has a place on curriculums, both North and South. A source of optimism was the availability of new and restored archives, enabling historians to look at past events in new ways. The important role of public service broadcasting in educating and informing the public on our history was also noted.
- On the **role of religion**, it was noted that dividing lines between Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Loyalist were clearly perceived but not always accurate historically or today. It was said that churches had tended to dictate identity for people growing up, which contributed to quite insular communities, however, it was also noted that churches can and do facilitate the fostering of mutual respect and understanding, which are integral to the process of reconciliation.
- The **decline in church attendance** was discussed, and whether this was born out of disillusionment with institutions as distinct from people's beliefs. It was generally agreed that it is difficult to know the effect this change has had on relationships across religious identity lines. It was said that if children of all religions and none were educated together the continuing challenges with separation of communities and deepening reconciliation would be easier.

- The **role of the arts and theatre** was discussed, with a contributor noting that theatre allows for complexity and involves active listening which enables a connection between audience and creators. Panellists noted theatre's ability to allow an interrogation of one's identity and of others, and theatre and the arts can help bring history into the present, putting audiences in the shoes of the characters. The arts offer unique and powerful ways for people to see and understand more of different, opposing, or inaccessible perspectives and experiences. However, it was noted there is a need to **make theatre more accessible to** all members of society.
- Participants also reflected on the **significance of language in cultural identity**, noting that language can be a person's first cultural expression. Often language and culture have been instrumentalised to differentiate and demarcate communities, but there is no need for that to be the case and indeed it doesn't reflect the reality of overlapping and connected identities, experiences, and interactions. One contributor spoke of Irish language and Ulster Scots language being part of their identity. Linguistic diversity is part of the heritage of the island of Ireland and should be recognised and celebrated as such.
- The importance of **including all identities** in the conversation was highlighted, i.e not just Catholic, Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist. For instance, a contributor noted that traveller communities have a very different perspective, not based on land and borders.

#### Guest contribution

- In a guest contribution between the two panel sessions, broadcaster John Toal gave a personal reflection "Everybody Should have their Day", written to mark 25 years of the Good Friday Agreement.
- John recalled his grandfather, Frank who had fought in the War of Independence and been an anti-treaty republican and who lived all his life in Keady, County Armagh. In his final days, on his deathbed in 1979, on 12 July, his grandfather had asked for the window to be opened to hear the local Orange parade pass. As he listened to the bands he said to his surprised family "sure everybody should have their day." This was "an extraordinary statement" and "grandad's words were taken seriously and often quoted".
- John then spoke of his own experience of growing up, his family's and his own Irish cultural identity, the experience of the Troubles, and of everyday cross-community relationships in Northern Ireland. John described the hope he and others felt when the peace process began to make progress in the 1990's and how, eventually, in the Good Friday Agreement, two narratives, nationalist and unionist, were recognised as equally valid. "What Frank Toal had described as 'everybody having their day' in 1979, got the much grander title of 'parity of esteem' in 1998."
- The referendum result approving the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland was a moment of happiness and hope. But the 25 years since, have seen "an imperfect and fragile peace." "Better than what was there before, but there are still open wounds. And those voices of tolerance and compromise and respect can sometimes get drowned out".
- Reflecting on these enduring challenges for community relationships, John concluded, "I really feel my grandad was on to something...yes, we have to be true to ourselves, but from Ballymena to Ballincollig, whether you're singing Derry's Walls or An Poc Ar Buile - everyone should have their day."

## Panel 2: What does a truer accommodation of national identity diversity require?

*The second panel session was moderated by Miriam O'Callaghan with the following panellists:*

- Dr John Kyle, High Sheriff of the County and Borough of Belfast, former Councillor
- Sabrina Baptista, Shared Island Youth Forum member; Politics in Action Northern Ireland
- Brendan McAleer, Regional Director, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann
- Very Reverend Dr. William Morton, Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin

*Themes raised by panel members and other contributors were:*

- Panellists reflected on a sense of **greater freedom for individuals in recent years to think about, and grapple with, identities for themselves**. Referenda on social issues in Ireland in recent years have been an opportunity for people to deliberate more about questions of identity diversity, both personal and collective. Positive changes in terms of more fluid, and less binary, ways of thinking about British and Irish identities were identified. It was noted that more people in Northern Ireland may now identify as Northern Irish, and many from a Protestant or British identity tradition also view themselves as Irish as one part of their identity.
- **The diminishing significance of religious differences** was highlighted. One example given was that in times past attendance of Catholics at Protestant funerals, or vice versa, would have been a big issue, but that is no longer the case.
- It was said that many unionists perceive progress on relationships under the Good Friday Agreement has gone backwards since Brexit and the related political challenges. Many unionists and loyalists perceive interaction on a prospect of a border poll or a united Ireland as an existential threat. It was suggested that from a unionist and loyalist perspective the emphasis should be on living together on the island of Ireland respectfully and collaboratively.
- It was discussed that **binary identities** (e.g. unionist/nationalist, catholic/protestant, Irish/British) are no longer necessarily as important to younger generations, including for the a more ethnically diverse population, although many young people do still inherit more traditional approaches to identity from family, and prejudices are still apparent.
- Participants considered how to move forward from a focus on talking about history and traditional identity issues to talking about contemporary identity issues in Northern Ireland and across the island, including for instance to address rising instances of racism and discrimination experienced by immigrants.
- The place and contribution of ethnic minority communities and those from other countries on the island of Ireland today was discussed. A contributor described how in the decades since coming to Ireland from South Africa, she has felt it necessary to 'dim' her own identity so as not to discomfit or 'threaten' others. By virtue of their different experiences and understanding of what it is to be in a minority, people of different ethnic backgrounds living on the island today have so much to bring to the task of reconciling all communities.

- It was noted that **inclusivity and personal relationships** need to continue to be nurtured to help combat prejudice, intolerance and discrimination, especially towards minority groups. The importance of **improving education** in this sphere was highlighted and it was recommended **to promote the political participation and representation** of people from ethnic minorities to improve enfranchisement.
- The importance of **promoting cultural confidence** was highlighted and the need for people to feel their cultures, identities and traditions are respected so that they can move forward as equals. It was suggested that cultural confidence requires support, investment and prioritisation by governments, especially post-Brexit. Inclusive cultural events play an important role in ensuring everyone's traditions and culture is respected, such as the successful Fleadh in Derry in 2013 that attracted over 430,000 people.
- A panel contributor reflected on a **disconnect between older and younger generations** in Northern Ireland and political disillusionment, caused by the prolonged lack of functioning power-sharing institutions and a lack of political trust. It was suggested that politicians' engagement with young people in Northern Ireland can feel tokenistic and patronising and that genuine dialogue needs to be nurtured to ensure young people feel their interests are represented.
- It was also suggested that **civil society and the Civic Forum** envisaged under the Good Friday Agreement **could help generate more dialogue** in Northern Ireland post-Brexit to move beyond recurrent political impasses and breakdowns in trust.
- The **significant role of sport** in accommodating different identities and promoting respect across the island was discussed. Many sports, including rugby and GAA are organised on an island-wide basis, and are examples of the positive role of sport in bringing people of different backgrounds together.
- Participants also highlighted **the significant role of music for communities across the island**, including Irish traditional music and Protestant bands culture, and the importance of facilitating and funding opportunities to support cross-community musical interaction and collaboration.

## Participant Biographies



### **Tánaiste Micheál Martin TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence**

Micheál Martin TD is the Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence. He was appointed to these roles on 17 December 2022. He served as Taoiseach from 27 June 2020 to 17 December 2022.

Previously, he has served as Lord Mayor of Cork in 1992-93, and on the Fianna Fáil front bench and in four cabinet posts:

- Minister for Foreign Affairs (2008-2011)
- Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2004-2008)
- Minister for Health (2000-2004)
- Minister for Education (1997-2000)

Micheál Martin was born in Turners Cross, Cork. He attended University College Cork where he qualified with a Bachelor of Arts degree.



### **Mark O'Brien, Co-Director, The Abbey Theatre**

Mark O'Brien is Executive Director and Co-Director of the Abbey Theatre, Ireland's National Theatre. Before taking up this role in July 2021 Mark was Director of Axis Arts Centre in Ballymun which he led for over ten years to become an organisation and space of local, national and international renown, that created, facilitated and produced new and significant work, across theatre, arts development and engagement contexts.

From Bray, Co Wicklow, Mark studied at University College Dublin, graduating with a master's degree in English Literature. He has had over 25 years' experience in the theatre and wider culture sectors, as a leader, facilitator, actor, sound designer, administrator, and theatre director.



### **Moderator Miriam O'Callaghan**

Miriam O'Callaghan is one of Ireland's most well-known and respected presenters in television and radio. A winner of many awards for her work including IFTAs, Celtic Media Torcs and Justice Media Awards, Miriam works today primarily as a Broadcast Journalist with RTÉ.

Born and raised in Dublin, Miriam went to University College Dublin aged just 16 to study Law and qualified as a solicitor. She also holds a postgraduate Diploma in European Law from UCD.

After being interviewed by the BBC as a young lawyer in Dublin, Miriam got the urge to change career and to go into broadcasting. Her first job was in UK television working as a researcher on ITV's *This is your Life*. In 1987, she joined the BBC as a BBC producer working on shows such as *Kilroy* and *Family Matters*. In 1989 she was headhunted by BBC *Newsnight* and became a reporter on that programme for almost 10 years.

In 1996, Miriam began to present RTÉ's current affairs flagship programme *Prime Time*, while continuing to cover the Northern Irish peace process for *Newsnight*. In August 2000, Miriam co-founded Mint Productions, an independent production company that specialised in documentary with her husband Steve Carson, who is currently the Director General of BBC Scotland. Mint won many awards for its documentaries including for landmark series such as *Haughey*, *Bertie* and *Our Lady's*.

Miriam anchored RTÉ's coverage of the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement that brought peace to Northern Ireland and also President Biden's recent visit to Mayo.

Miriam is also particularly proud of one moment in her career when she helped to win the accolade 'Ireland's Greatest' for the incredible peacemaker John Hume by making a documentary for RTÉ on John and championing him in a public vote.

Miriam also presents her own radio show on RTE Radio 1, *Sunday with Miriam*, which is one of the Top Ten of Ireland's most listened to radio shows. *Sunday with Miriam* has also won a PPI award for best Speech Driven Magazine Show. For fourteen years, Miriam also presented the RTÉ television summer chat show *Saturday Night with Miriam*.

Miriam is a patron of many charities including Ireland's only Hospice for children Laura Lynn, Carers Ireland, Cliona's Foundation and The NMH Foundation. Miriam also supports many other charitable causes throughout the year.

## Panel 1 – Reflections on national identity on the island of Ireland

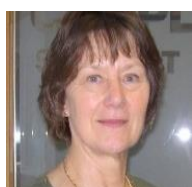


**Professor Jane Ohlmeyer**, Erasmus Smith's Professor of Modern History at Trinity College

Professor Jane Ohlmeyer, MRIA, FBA, FTCD, FRHistS, is Erasmus Smith's Professor of Modern History (1762) at Trinity College Dublin.

She was a driving force behind the 1641 Depositions Project and the development of the Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute. In 2023 she received an Advanced ERC for VOICES, a project on the lived experiences of women in early modern Ireland.

She is the author or editor of numerous articles and 11 books. Her latest *Making Ireland: Ireland, Imperialism and the Early Modern World* (Oxford, 2023) is based on the 2021 Ford Lectures in Oxford. In 2023 she was awarded the Royal Irish Academy Gold Medal in the Humanities.



**Gillian Kingston**, former President of the Irish Council of Churches

Gillian Kingston is an active member of the Methodist Church in Ireland, both locally and at national level. She was the first Lay Leader of the Conference of the Methodist Church, a position created in 2010.

She is currently Vice President of the World Methodist Council. She served on the Council's team for theological dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church for twenty years.

She is a past President of the Irish Council of Churches and Co-Chair of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. She has held a number of other ecumenical positions both in Ireland and further afield.

Gillian is Chair of the Board of Governors of Wesley College, Dublin, and President of the National Bible Society of Ireland. A secondary teacher by profession, she was, for ten years, on the chaplaincy team at University College, Dublin. Born and educated in Cork, Gillian is married to Tom, a retired Methodist minister; they live in rural Co. Offaly. They have four adult children and eight grandchildren.



**Darren Murphy**, Dublin-based playwright, lecturer in creative writing at Dublin City University; former associate artist at the Abbey Theatre, and former Ciarán Carson Writing and the City Fellow at the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queens University Belfast

Darren Murphy is a Dublin based playwright, essayist, and academic, originally from Aldershot. He has been produced in the West End, Off-Broadway, Dublin, Derry, and Edinburgh. Part of the New Playwright's Programme in 2012 at the Abbey, he is currently under commission to them, and was an associate playwright in 2018. He's also currently under commission to the Lime Tree in Limerick.

His essay, *The Playwright & the Pugilist*, was published in The Tangerine, and his recent article about authenticity and the London-Irish play was published in the Irish Times. His plays include: *X'ntigone* for Prime Cut at the MAC, Belfast; *Bunny's Vendetta* (commissioned for the inaugural UK City of Culture, Derry, 2013); *Irish Blood, English Heart*, for Trafalgar Studios, West End; and *Tabloid Caligula*, at the Arcola in London and as part of the Off-Broadway Festival at E59E, New York.

He completed a creative practice PhD at Queen's University, Belfast in 2021, where he was appointed a *Ciaran Carson Writing and the City Fellow 2022-23*, for the Seamus Heaney Centre. He has taught playwriting at Queen's University, for the Irish Writers Centre, the Abbey Theatre, the Griffith College for CAPA – the Global Education Network, and is an Assistant Professor in creative writing at DCU. His plays are published by Methuen and Oberon.



**Dr. Maurice Manning**, Chair of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations and Chancellor of the National University of Ireland

Dr Manning has been Chancellor of the National University of Ireland since 2011. He was a member of the Oireachtas for over twenty years serving in both Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann.

He was President of the Irish Human Rights Commission from 2002 until 2012. He has written several books on Irish politics and has had two novels published. He lectured in politics at UCD from 1966 to 2002. Dr Manning has been chair of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations since its establishment in 2011.



**Karyn Devenney**, Deputy Principal, Manorcunningham Primary School, Board member of the Ulster Scots Agency



I was born in East Donegal into a rural farming community . My early education was local, however a move to Dublin to do my leaving certificate after third year followed. I attended Coláiste Moibhí, an Irish speaking Church of Ireland secondary school in Rathmines. The reason for this move was my love of the Irish language.

I completed a Bachelor of Education with drama and english at Stranmillis College in Belfast. The reason for this move was quite simply the opportunity to explore my other great passion, drama. During my time at Stranmillis, I was afforded the opportunity to teach in rural Kenya with World University Services

Upon finishing my degree, I moved to La Coruna in Spain to teach English. I really embraced the rich culture in Galicia as I could identify many parallels between my Irish culture and this exciting region of Spain. My teaching career started in the drama department of St Louise's girls school on the Falls Road, Belfast.

My teaching career to date has been wonderfully diverse and my passion for education has never diminished. I am currently part way through an MA in applied theatre at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London.



**Guest speaker, John Toal, Broadcaster**

John Toal is a multi-award winning broadcaster who recently won Gold for Best Magazine Show at the 2023 IMRO Awards. He is a regular contributor to Sunday Miscellany.

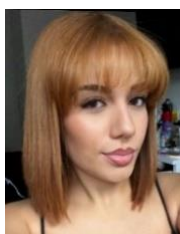
## Panel 2 – What does a truer accommodation of national diversity require?



**Dr. John Kyle**, High Sheriff of the County and Borough of Belfast, former Councillor

John Kyle is currently the High Sheriff of the County and Borough of Belfast. He was Deputy Leader of the Progressive Unionist Party 2010-2021 and served as a Councillor on Belfast City Council 2007-2023. He chaired the Council's Shared City Partnership from 2015-2023, a working group of elected members, community and statutory partners which advises the Council on good relations issues. He joined the Ulster Unionist Party in 2022 and was nominated by them to the Board of the Education Authority.

John Kyle trained in medicine at Queens University Belfast and worked as a General Practitioner in London and Belfast. He was senior partner in the Lewis Square Practice, East Belfast for 25 years.



**Sabrina Baptista**, Shared Island Youth Forum member; Politics in Action, Northern Ireland

Sabrina Evelyn Maia Baptista is a first-generation immigrant born in Portadown, Northern Ireland and is a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

She is currently taking Politics, History and English Literature at A level, and hopes to study Law with Politics at University. She is part of the Shared Island Youth Forum representing Politics in Action (PIA) and has been involved in many political activities such as the cross-border project 'Poreto for Progection' run by PIA. She aspires to be involved politically not only in the UK and Ireland but in the EU as well.



**Brendan McAleer**, Regional Director, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

Brendan McAleer is a Reachtaire with Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann for the Meitheal Uladh region based at their Regional Resource Centre, Dún Uladh, in Omagh. From here Brendan has been delivering the organisation's strategy across Ulster since 2006 and was a member of the Fleadh Executive Committee during the historic hosting of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Derry in 2013.

The Dún Uladh centre in Omagh has been instrumental in delivering Comhaltas' Community Engagement Outreach & Liaison (C.E.O.L.) programme through funding from the Executive Office. Brendan has also been a member of the recent Dept. of Communities Ministerial Taskforce for Culture, Arts and Heritage which made recommendations for sectoral development and investment within the Culture, Arts and Heritage sector for Northern Ireland.

More recently Brendan's role within Comhaltas has expanded to include responsibility for Diaspora and International development as well as assisting with delivery of the organisation's new Prospectus 2030. Through his current role Brendan is seeking to expand the organisation's reach globally and connect more communities through our culture.



**Very Reverend Dr. William Morton, Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin**

Dr. William Morton is Dean & Ordinary of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, the National Cathedral of The Church of Ireland. A native of County Armagh, Dean Morton served for some years as a journalist before being accepted for training for ordination in 1984.

He became Curate-assistant of the Parish of Drumachose, Limavady, Co Derry in 1988, moved across the Border as Rector of Letterkenny and Gartan in 1991, before being appointed seven years later as Dean of St Columb's Cathedral in Derry.

A few days into his ministry there, Dean Morton witnessed some of the worst rioting Derry experienced over the years of the Troubles and vowed to help people on both sides of the community find a better way through his engagement with loyal orders, Apprentice Boys, police, Bogside residents, traders, church leaders, etc. In 2018 he was awarded an honorary degree by the Ulster University for his work in reconciliation and peace making. His PhD from Queen's University Belfast, centres upon the healing of community memories in the peace process.

Dr Morton was elected Dean of Saint Patrick's, Dublin, in May 2016 where he continues to minister. He contributes to newspapers, radio and television.

As part of the Shared Island Initiative  
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