



MASON MELIA
Page 5



OUTSIDERS
Page 6



POSTER PRIZE
Page 11

Delivered to 44,500 homes & businesses

DELIVERED TO HOMES & BUSINESSES IN: SHANKILL, ENNISKERRY, BRAY, GREYSTONES, DELGANY, KILCOOLE, NEWCASTLE, KILQUADE, ASHFORD, KILPEDDER, NEWTOWNMOUNTKENNEDY, KILMACANOGUE, LARAGH, MONEYSTOWN, ROUNDWOOD, RATHNEW, WICKLOW, GLENEALY, BRITTAS BAY, AVOCA, WOODENBRIDGE, ARKLOW, SHILLELAGH, TINAHELY, REDCROSS, BALLINACLASH, AUGHIRM, RATHDRUM, DONARD, DUNLAVIN, CARNEW, COOLATTIN, BALTINGLASS, BLESSINGTON.

Tuesday 11th February 2025 First Floor, The Boulevard, Quinsborough Road, Bray. A98 R6D7. Tel: 01 - 2869111 E-mail: wicklowed@localtimes.ie www.wicklowtimes.net

BEACH SAVED BY BORD

An Bord Pleanála has decided to uphold Wicklow County Council's refusal of planning permission for a proposed €40 million development at Magheramore Beach, it was announced last week. The council had rejected the application on seven separate grounds, citing environmental concerns and zoning restrictions.

The application from Creatively Pacific, a subsidiary of Oakmount, sought permission for a tourism leisure complex consisting of 48 'accommodation pods', surf school, gym, sauna, pool, cinema, bar and restaurant.

A petition on Change.org asking Creatively Pacific to withdraw their plans and sell the land to the Council, on the grounds that the develop-

ment would eradicate wintering grounds for the Curlew, received over 12,000 signatures. Ninety submissions were also made to the Council during the planning process.

It was announced in November 2023 that ABP's decision on the appeal by developers against a refusal to allow a tourism development to go ahead at Magheramore had been delayed as it could not provide the

decision within the statutory timeframe of 18 weeks due to a backlog of cases.

In May 2023 Wicklow County Council had refused the permission on seven separate grounds. The core arguments against the development which were upheld by the council in their decision to reject the application are that it is in an environmentally sensitive area as it is adjacent to



Linda McCormack and Lynda McElheron at Armelle's Fun Fashion Fundraiser in aid of the Wicklow Hospice, in Laura's Health & Dance Fitness studio, Arklow. Pic: Michael Kelly.

Surprise!
New Loan Rate
9.5% (9.92% APR)

Standard Loan Reduced
from 11% (11.57% APR)

**Apply online
or in branch
today!**

eastcoastcu.ie
loans@eastcoastcu.ie
01 286 2624

Loans are subject to approval. Terms and conditions apply.

If you do not meet the repayments on your loan, your account will go into arrears. This may affect your credit rating which may limit your ability to access credit in the future. East Coast Credit Union Limited is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.

Magherabeg Special Area of Conservation. Also, that the site is not zoned for commercial activity in the Wicklow County Development Plan.

John Brady TD, who made a submission to Wicklow County Council opposing the development highlighting the negative impact the development would have on the adjacent Magherabeg Dunes Special Area of Conservation, has praised the decision by ABP and emphasised the importance of preserving the site. He called on the Government and the Council to move immediately to acquire the environmentally important site.

Deputy Brady said "I welcome the decision by An Bord Pleanála to uphold the council's refusal of planning permission for this development. This is a significant win for our environment and for the local commu-

nity. The arguments I put forward, alongside nearly 100 other submissions, were clearly taken into account, re-inforcing the need to protect this ecologically sensitive area."

Brady has long advocated for public ownership of the site to ensure continued public access to Magheramore Beach and the conservation of the surrounding area. Wicklow County Council had previously attempted to acquire the land but was outbid by the current owner who paid €500,000 over the asking price. I believe the best way to secure this site's future is for it to come into public ownership. Wicklow County Council must now immediately engage with the current owners to explore the possibility of acquiring the site. I will also be writing to Minister Darragh O'Brien, urging him to work with the council to protect this

vital environmental asset. The decision marks a critical step in safeguarding

the unique natural beauty of Magheramore Beach, and sustainable public reinforcing the need for

long-term protection of Magheramore Beach, and sustainable public access."

Schnittger Bourne
Property Services

Schnittger Bourne Property Services, based out of Greystones in Co. Wicklow, is incredibly proud to be sponsoring the Annual Local Hero Award again this year.

"It's lovely to be able to support and highlight the amazing people and personalities we have in Greystones, as a local Company it's something very close to our hearts"

- Residential Block Management
- Commercial Estate Management
- Sales & Lettings (Residential & Commercial)
- Asset & Portfolio Management



www.schnittgerbourne.com

Care And Repair Action

The free CARA - Care And Repair Action service run by Bray & North Wicklow Area Partnership carries out small jobs for older and vulnerable people living in the Bray and North Wicklow areas. Typical jobs of this friendly and reliable service include: hedge and grass cutting; minor carpentry; small paint jobs; replacing light bulbs; installing smoke alarms and moving light furniture. The service is free, any materials required you pay for yourself, and voluntary donations are gratefully accepted. Staff are Garda vetted and carry ID cards. Call (01) 286 6080 and ask for the CARA service or email careandrepair@bnwap.ie.

Purple House Annual Cycle 2025 Information Evening

Purple House's Annual Fundraising Cycle is taking place in Spain from July 4th to 10th 2025, cycling from Santander to Santiago. Take part in this cycling adventure of a life-time and raise vital funds for families living with cancer. Information evening taking place at Purple House on February 13th 2025 at 7.30pm. Come for a cuppa and hear all about this incredible trip with the Purple House team. All are welcome.

Open Door coffee morning

Open Door is hosting a coffee morning in the centre on the Vevay Road, Bray, on Thursday 13th of February, 11.00am to 12.30pm. There will also be a raffle with some lovely Valentine's gifts to be won. This is an opportunity to meet with members, staff & volunteers at Open Door and also to see the various activities available to adults with physical disabilities. Email info@opendoor.ie or call Suzanne on 01 2867123 for further details. All are welcome.

Anam Cara Wicklow Monthly Meeting for Bereaved Parents

Monday, 17th February 2025; Parkview Hotel Newtownmountkennedy; 7:30 pm. Anam Cara supports all bereaved parents, regardless of the age of their child or the circumstances of their death. This informal and gentle evening gives an opportunity to meet with other parents. Meeting is in a safe and comfortable place with people who understand the milestones and challenges of grief and loss. The evening is free and open to all bereaved parents. Further information is available in relation to: Online Group; Bereavement Information Evenings; Family Remembrance Events; Anam Cara Information Pack. Full details from 085 2888 888, info@AnamCara.ie.

Greystones Archaeological & Historical Society Talk

This talk on 19th February will be on The Minute Books of Wicklow. It will take place in Kilian House, behind Holy Rosary Church in Greystones; 7:30pm. Talk will be given by Therese Hicks. The Minute Books of the Wicklow Burrough Council begin in 1662. Therese has many interests and has written widely, including the story of the Kennedys of Newtownmountkennedy. All welcome for a most interesting evening. There will be a small charge of €3 per person to defray the costs of the venue.



There was a record breaking attendance and full house for Greystones Active Retirement Association's talk on Enduring Power of Attorney. Aine Ryan, Director of the Decision Support Services, gave an enlightening presentation. The DSS was established to help Irish people make important decisions in their lives. These decisions include making legal arrangements for their wishes. The Enduring Power of Attorney is for people of all ages, not just for older people. Pictured is the GARA Committee with Aine Ryan, Director DSS: Pauline Kenny, Sadie O'Shea, GARA Greystones Chair, Madeline Brady, Anne O'Neill, Aine Ryan, Kathleen Redmond, Hilary Taylor, Maureen McKeown and Kathleen Kelleher.

Aware's free wellbeing programmes open

Aware, the organisation providing support, education and information services for people impacted by depression, bipolar disorder and related mood conditions has announced that its popular Life Skills Group Programme, Relatives & Friends Programme and Living Well With Bipolar Disorder Programme are available to attend in virtual group settings. Registration is now open at <https://www.aware.ie/programmes/>

Aware Life Skills Programme

This programme, nine hours over the course of six weeks, will teach attendees how to better cope with the stresses of everyday life, recognise and manage unhelpful thoughts and ultimately begin the journey to a healthier and more confident life. Developed by the renowned cognitive behaviour therapy specialist (CBT), Dr. Chris Williams, the programme is specifically designed to help people learn more about how we think and how this can influence our actions in helpful or unhelpful ways.

Aware Relatives & Friends Programme

This psycho-educational programme, six hours over the course of four weeks, is designed to equip people with the tools to understand and support a loved one experiencing depression or bipolar disorder, while also focusing on the self-care of the supporter. The content addresses the signs and symptoms of depression and bipolar disorder, offers practical advice on self-care, teaches coping tools, communication skills, and addresses the issues that arise for people who are supporting a loved one.

Aware Living Well With Bipolar Disorder Programme

This programme is designed for people with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder and aims to equip participants with opportunities to understand and effectively manage the condition. It's delivered workshop style in 90 minute sessions each week over eight weeks. Participants are invited to bring a supporter to the 7th session which is a two-hour session. This programme is followed by a dedicated Support & Self Care Group for a period of six weeks to enable participants to reflect on the programme and support each other as they further explore or implement the learnings.

Online registration for these programmes is now open at www.aware.ie and places are available to anyone over 18. There are

a limited number of places available for each programme to ensure that everyone can benefit from the sessions. The programmes are delivered in workshop style to offer a participative learning environment. Each session is 90 minutes long. The workshops provide an opportunity for discussion but at no stage is anyone asked to share information if they do not wish to.

Birdwatch Ireland events

Tuesday February 11th at 19:30. 'Vagrancy in Birds', a talk in which Niall Keogh will discuss the phenomenon of rare birds and the various reasons they occur. The cultural impact rare birds have on the birding community will also be discussed. Venue: Ashford Community & Heritage Centre (Eircode A67 DH34). For public transport options see, TFI Journey Planner. Admission is free, a voluntary contribution to cover the cost of room hire would be appreciated.

Saturday February 15th. Bird Ringing event in the East Coast Nature Reserve, Newcastle from 08:30 to 12:30. Drop by to see the BirdWatch Ireland Ringing Group catching birds to monitor their populations through the winter. At this event you'll have a chance to see common garden and woodland birds up-close and, in the hand. Please note this event is weather dependent and cannot take place in excessive rain or wind. If the weather is not favourable on the 15th the event will be postponed by

24 hours, when again it will be weather dependent.

Tuesday March 11th at 19:30. 'On the Road, tips to improve your wildlife photography' by Mark Carmody, photographer and joint author of The Birds of Ireland a Field Guide. Venue: Ashford Community & Heritage Centre (Eircode A67 DH34). For public transport options see, TFI Journey Planner. Admission is free, a voluntary contribution to cover the cost of room hire would be appreciated.

Saturday March 29th at 11:00. Birding for Beginners: An outdoor workshop at Arklow Ponds for anyone, young or not-so-young, who wishes to get to grips with some basics of bird identification (until 13:00). Meet at the car park at the end of Seaview Avenue at 11:00. Bad Weather Protocol: If a Met Eireann Orange or Red warning is in force at the location where and when a branch outing is due to take place then members should assume that the outing is cancelled.



Gina Farrell at Armelle's Fun Fashion Show fundraiser in aid of Wicklow Hospice, in Laura's Health & Dance Fitness Studio in Arklow.

Benville Robinson LLP SOLICITORS

- Property Solicitors
- Probate and Elder Law Solicitors
- Commercial Litigation Solicitors
- Medical Negligence Solicitors
- Planning and Environmental Solicitors
- General Litigation Solicitors

Brian Robinson
B.B.L.S., L.L.M.
State Solicitor
Eilish Bradshaw
B.A., L.L.B., L.L.M.
Clare-Ann Temple L.L.B.

Ciara O'Sullivan
B.B.L.S., (Euro)
Hannah Stockwell-Quinn
B.C.L., L.L.M.
Peter McQuillan
B.A. (Mod) Leg Sc TCD

24A Florence Road,
Bray,
Co. Wicklow.
Tel: 01 276 1330
E-mail: info@benvilleroobinson.ie
Web: www.benvilleroobinson.ie

*In contentious business, a solicitor may not calculate fees or other charges as a percentage or proportion of any award or settlement

WICKLOW
LOCAL Times

is published by Wicklow Times,
First Floor, The Boulevard, Quinsborough Road, Bray. A98 R6D7. Tel: 01-2869111

Shay Fitzmaurice, Managing Editor - shay@localtimes.ie

Ian Colgan, News Editor - ian@localtimes.ie

Sales / General enquiries - info@localtimes.ie

Whitmore calls out Go-Ahead over BusConnects issues

Social Democrats TD for Wicklow, Jennifer Whitmore, has responded to overwhelming feedback from constituents regarding the recent roll-out of BusConnects. Since the launch the week before last, Deputy Whitmore has received over 100 emails and messages expressing dissatisfaction with the new services.

"The comments I heard the most were about last-minute and late-night cancellations, huge delays, disruptions caused by changing stops, suggestions for more logical routes, and the inconvenience caused by the removal of certain connections," said Deputy Whitmore.

In a meeting with Go Ahead, she raised these issues directly. "They confirmed that last

Monday and Tuesday were the two worst days for the L routes they operate. The main problem is a shortage of mechanics, which was exacerbated over Christmas due to a spike in absences. They are currently 6 mechanics short but are actively recruiting. They've also outsourced some work and brought in engineers from the UK to help get vehicles back on the road. They're working on get-

ting vehicles ready, but they also have issues with parts. They have made some improvements, with a 40% reduction in cancelled and delayed services, and hope to fix the issues within two week," Deputy Whitmore explained.

"Go Ahead assured me that they have a policy not to cancel the last service of the day and are reviewing any instances where this has happened.

I'll be updating them with stories that I hear about any future instances of this, as it is completely unacceptable and dangerous. They also assured me that they keep their app updated with cancellations, and I'll be monitoring and reporting on this," Deputy Whitmore stated.

"I raised my concerns about Go Ahead's ability to run an efficient and reliable bus service in the Dail last year and my concerns with them winning the BusConnects contracts. They have a poor track record and poor customer trust in Wicklow, which has now been made worse by their lack of preparedness for the roll out of BusConnects," Deputy Whitmore added.

"Change is disruptive enough without these issues, and I'm really concerned about their lack of preparedness and their ability to provide a reliable bus service for Wicklow and beyond," Deputy Whitmore concluded.

Deputy Whitmore also mentioned that she has written to the NTA about issues with Go Ahead, and she will be pursuing a meeting with Dublin Bus to discuss issues with the X and E routes.



Jennifer Whitmore TD met with GoAhead to convey the frustrations of Wicklow commuters.



Ethel Hudson and Cee Jay Cassin at Armelle's Fun Fashion Fundraiser in aid of Wicklow Hospice, at Laura's Health & Dance Fitness Studio in Arklow.

New Figures show 14% increase in number of domestic violence orders

Wicklow town sees a 61% increase in the number of domestic violence orders sought between 2022 and 2023, going from 90 in 2022 up to 145 in 2023.

Figures released to Fianna Fail MEP Cynthia Ní Mhurchú by the courts service show that in county Wicklow 599 people applied for a domestic violence order in 2023, up from 527 people in 2022. Up until September 2024, 408 people applied for a domestic violence order in Wicklow.

Wicklow town saw a 61% increase in the number of domestic violence orders sought, Bray saw a 5.9% increase and Arklow district court recorded a small decrease of 1.7% in the number of domestic violence orders sought between 2022 and 2023.

Wicklow's district courts granted 68% of domestic violence orders that were applied for in 2022 and 65% of domestic violence orders that were applied for in 2023. The figures, up until September 2024, show that 72% of domestic violence orders applied for in Wicklow in 2024 were granted by our district courts there.

Ireland South MEP Cynthia Ní Mhurchú herself a former family law barrister, has described these figures as concerning.

She questioned why some Irish

towns have recorded enormous increases in the number of victims seeking protection from our district courts. Ní Mhurchú has called on the incoming Justice Minister, Jim O'Callaghan, to prioritise investment in the area of domestic violence and she called for:

1) More district court judges to deal specifically with family law cases.

2) Consider allowing victims of domestic violence to apply for initial protection orders online.

3) More consultation rooms for victims in our district courts

4) Continued and ongoing training for district and circuit court judges in areas such as domestic violence, coercive control and violence against women.

According to Ní Mhurchú "So many victims, mostly women, are

enduring unthinkable nightmares in their own homes. We need a more victim centred approach. I represented many victims of domestic violence in my past career as a barrister and most were afraid and sometimes didn't turn up in court. I often had to hold consultations with women on my knees in the foyer of the court-house - often times with the alleged abuser on the other side of the room. We need to reform our courts to make them more victim centred."

Ní Mhurchú has said she will be requesting a meeting with the incoming Justice Minister, Jim O'Callaghan, to discuss what further actions can be rolled out to ensure we prioritise the victims of domestic violence in our courts service.

Short Part-time Day Courses at BIFE

FREE to Eligible Participants

Starting from 2.5 Hours per week

COURSES

- ICDL (Any Morning or Afternoon)
- Python Programming (Mondays)
- Nail Technician (Thursdays)
- Reflexology (Fridays)
- Growing Organic Vegetables (TBA)
- English as a 2nd Language (Thursday & Friday Afternoons)
- Bookkeeping-Manual & computerised (Fridays)

Apply now at www.bife.ie or scan the QR code :

bife

BRAY INSTITUTE OF FURTHER EDUCATION
Dedicated, Professional, Passionate

For further Information, contact BIFE on 01-2829668 or email bifeenquiries@kwetb.ie

www.bife.ie **01 2829668**

New project aims to improve habitats for bats

Bat Conservation Ireland today announces the launch of **GardeningForBats.com**. This project, supported and funded by The Heritage Council, provides tips and guidance to gardeners and those involved in community gardening or Tidy Towns initiatives to help improve habitats for bats.

Niamh Roche, Bat Conservation Ireland's lead on the project, said today: "I'm so excited by the launch of this initiative. This project began because people often ask us what they can do to help bats? Gardens cover a huge area of land in Ireland and bats depend on them when foraging for their insect prey, particularly in urban areas.

The good news is that it is easy to help bats. Really simple measures such as turning off outside lights when they are not needed, composting garden waste, avoiding pesticides, including native plants and choosing garden varieties that attract nocturnal pollinators to your garden, will all help. By helping bats, you will also be doing yourself a big favour since bats are some of nature's best insect pest controllers."

On Tuesday February 4th, we will launch the first phase of this Gardening for Bats project. We have developed a website that hosts short videos and other information. The videos are beautifully filmed pieces, that explain some techniques and features that can be incorporated into outdoor spaces to benefit bats and other wildlife. They are divided into the following topics:

- Easy Techniques,
- Features for Bats,
- Choosing Plants and
- How Bats Help Gardeners.

Niamh Roche pointed out the important role of gardeners in Ireland: "While people can often feel paralysed in the face of biodiversity loss and the climate crisis, we are saying that if you are involved in the management of any outdoor space, then there are really easy measures you can implement that will be of benefit. With this project, we are encouraging anyone who has an outdoor space - be it a large garden or tiny balcony - to take up the baton, get their hands dirty, and play an active role in bat conservation!"

Bat Conservation Ireland is currently planning the second phase of this Gardening for Bats project to begin in 2025. It wants to collaborate with Irish nurseries and garden centres to introduce a 'bat friendly' logo for suitable plants. It will also be developing posters and other materials for garden centres. Members of the public, garden centres or nurseries who are interested in finding out more can check out gardeningforbats.com, watch the videos there and sign up for more information as the project progresses.

Bat Information

There are nine species of bat found in Ireland. Sadly, these amazing and valuable creatures can be portrayed negatively by the media and they often get a bad rap

- for example, for sucking blood or getting tangled in hair - both fake facts! The priceless ecosystem services they provide to humans include seed dispersal, pollination and pest control.

All Irish bats are insectivorous. They eat a range of invertebrates including spiders, moths, dung flies and beetles. Our nine species of bats can readily be spotted over our houses, fields, hedgerows and waterways feasting on midges, mosquitoes and other biting insects that interfere with our enjoyment of warmer evenings and nights.

In Ireland, all bats are protected under wildlife law, but they are threatened by habitat loss, climate change, pollution and insecticides. The consequences of losing our bats could be enormous. In the U.S., the economic value of bats, in terms of pest control, is estimated to be worth \$22.9 billion per annum. Here in Ireland, it is vital we encourage bats through nature friendly gardening techniques etc.

About Bat Conservation Ireland

Bat Conservation Ireland is a registered Charity and a member of the Irish Environmental Network. It has approximately 600 dedicated volunteers and acts as an umbrella group for county bat groups and are a central repository for bat records nationwide.

Funding available now for heritage projects in Wicklow

The Heritage Council is now accepting applications from voluntary or community groups and not for profit non-governmental organisations in Wicklow for its Community Heritage Grant Scheme 2025.

In 2024, the scheme funded the Wicklow Uplands Council to provide dry stone walling and biodiversity training workshops and the Donard Graveyard Group and Donard Tidy Towns were awarded funding to undertake a conservation plan for Donard Church and Graveyard.

A broad range of project types are eligible for funding under the scheme including:

- Conservation works to collections, objects or places, including natural heritage projects e.g. control of invasive species or habitat restoration works; conservation works to buildings, including churches; stabilisation works to ruined structures;
- Surveys, reports, plans, and audits to inform the future management of buildings and monuments, habitats, collections, or objects.
- Accessibility projects that make heritage activities more accessible

for people with disabilities e.g. building ramps, automatic doors, handrails, tactile interpretation

- Projects that help people engage more with their heritage e.g. interactive maps, videos, virtual exhibitions, podcasts, websites
- Purchase of specialised equipment e.g. archival boxing for vulnerable documents, monitoring equipment for humidity or light, interpretation/multimedia equipment, specialised software
- Projects that address the heritage of minority groups e.g. an oral history project documenting Traveller heritage
- Training in traditional skills and crafts e.g. workshops on skills such as roofing, thatch, dry stone walling etc.
- Citizen science projects on environmental conservation

The minimum grant that can be requested through the scheme is €500. The maximum is €25,000.

The variety of applicants who

successfully secured funding in 2024 demonstrates the positive impact the scheme has across the heritage spectrum.

A full overview of eligibility criteria and other relevant details are available from the Heritage Council's website <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/funding/community-heritage-grant-scheme-2>

The closing date for applications is Friday, 14th of March 2025 at 11pm. Applications must be made via the Heritage Council's online grants management system. Funded projects must be completed by 14th of November 2025.

The Heritage Council will host a Zoom information webinar on the scheme at 12 noon on Friday the 7th of February with general application advice followed by a question and answers session. The event will be recorded and available on our website for viewing afterwards.



Laura Gannon, Claire Alexander and Vickey Cumiskey are pictured at Armelle's Fun Fashion Fundraiser event in aid of Wicklow Hospice, in Laura's Health & Dance Fitness Studio in Arklow.

Marrakesh

Marrakesh Ltd is a family run business specialising in Construction and Demolition Waste Management & Recycling, Site Clearance and Supply of Material from 4" down to Blinding, Recycled Screened Soil, Sand, Gravel etc.

EPA LICENCED FACILITY • ALL TRUCKS CARRY WASTE PERMITS

Recycled:

- Screened Soil
- Screened no 2 soil
- 4" Down Crushed Concrete
- 4" Clean Crushed Concrete
- 3" Down Crushed Concrete
- 3" Clean Crushed Concrete
- Crushed Concrete Fines
- Crushed Tarmac Fines
- No 2 Stone

Also available:

- Granite • Pebble • Sand

We also accept for recycling: • Clay • Stone • Concrete • Tarmac • Sand

We can organise SITE CLEARANCES - no job too big or small

Tel: 01 286 8119 Mobile: 087 664 1866
www.marrakeshltd.com

Wicklow teen breaks League of Ireland transfer record

Melia shines, earns move to Tottenham Hotspur

The transfer window in early February 2025 saw a new chapter written in the story of Irish football, with 17-year-old Mason Melia from Newtownmountkennedy making history by securing a high-profile move to Tottenham Hotspur. The striker's transfer from St. Patrick's Athletic to Spurs has broken the transfer record for a League of Ireland player, with the deal reportedly worth £1.5 million, potentially rising to €4 million with add-ons. The contract will keep him at the Premier League club until 2031.

Manchester City, Everton, Chelsea, Brighton & Hove Albion and Bayer Leverkusen were also reportedly interested in the Wicklow teen, whose rise to prominence has been nothing short of meteoric. A product of Coláiste Chraobh Abhann in Kilcoole, he was captain of the school's under-

15 team, leading them to victory in the 2022 Leinster U15s Shield. It wasn't long before his talent began to turn heads, and he found his way through the youth ranks of Newtown Juniors, St. Joseph's Boys, and Bray Wanderers before arriving at St. Patrick's Athletic's academy in the summer of 2022.

The 2023 season would be his breakthrough. Melia earned a place in the senior squad after impressing in the youth ranks, making his debut in a Leinster Senior Cup match in January. At just 15, he became the youngest-ever player and goal-scorer for St. Patrick's Athletic when he found the net in a 3-1 loss to Wexford. That was just the start; later that year, Melia made his league debut in May, becoming the youngest-ever league debutant for the club and the third youngest in League of Ireland history.

In June 2023, the whispers about Melia's potential escalated when he became the youngest-ever goalscorer in the League of Ireland Premier Division, scoring his first league goal at just 15 years and 281 days old in a dominant 7-0 win over UCD. His performances had already drawn attention from top English clubs, and in July, he spent time on trial at Manchester City. The momentum continued as he netted decisive goals in high-pressure situations, including a penalty to win the FAI Cup quarterfinals in August and a last-minute penalty to seal a 3-1 win over Dundalk on his 16th birthday.

By November 2023, Melia had signed his first professional contract with St. Patrick's Athletic. His contributions didn't stop there - he became the youngest-ever player to appear in an FAI Cup Final, coming on as a sub-

stitute to help his team defeat Bohemians 3-1 in front of a record-breaking crowd at the Aviva Stadium.

The year 2024 marked the year Melia truly announced himself on the national stage. He continued to perform at a high level domestically, securing important goals for St. Patrick's Athletic and consistently impressing his managers and teammates. Highlights from the season included a crucial equaliser in a Dublin derby against Shamrock Rovers, a match-winning header against Galway United, and his European debut for the club in a 3-1 win over Vaduz in the UEFA Conference League.

As his stock soared, so did the individual accolades. Melia was named Young Player of the Year at St. Patrick's Athletic's awards night and claimed the prestigious PFAI Young Player of the Year



Mason Melia.

award-the youngest ever to do so. These performances culminated in his well-deserved move to the Premier League.

On February 4th, 2025, St. Patrick's Athletic confirmed that Melia had agreed to join Tottenham Hotspur, with the move set to take place in January 2026. Internationally, Melia had been representing Ireland across various youth levels, from the under-15s all

the way to the U21s.

His performances included a hat-trick to secure qualification for the UEFA European Under-17 Championship and several goals in the UEFA U-17 Euros, solidifying his place as one of Ireland's brightest young talents.

As he prepares for his next big leap into England's top flight, it's clear that Melia's journey is just beginning.



Mason Melia signing for Tottenham Hotspur.

KING KOIL **Sealy** **ODEAREST** **REST ASSURED** **kaymed** **RESPA** **Silentnight**

Comfort
SINCE 1981
BED OUTLET

All the
LEADING BRANDS
at
OUTLET PRICES...

Deposit secures for 8 weeks
w: bedoutlet.ie

Tallaght Outlet
phone: 01-4940200

Opening Times
Mon - Sat (10.00am - 5.00pm)
Sun & Bank Holidays - Closed
Unit B7, South City Business Pk, Tallaght, D24

FREE PARKING

Ballybrack Outlet
phone: 01-2720788

Opening Times
Mon - Sat (10.00am - 5.30pm) Thurs 7.30 pm
Sun - Closed (Bank Hols 2.00pm - 5.30pm)
Church Road, Ballybrack, Co. Dublin

FREE PARKING

Wicklow dominates nominations at Outsider Awards

Outsider.ie has announced a list of more than 90 nominees for its annual People of the Year Awards. These awards celebrate ordinary, yet extraordinary, people that have achieved amazing feats on the Irish outdoor and adventure scene in 2024. The awards are supported by title sponsor Sport Ireland.

These incredible folk and their fellow nominees will be feted at Outsider's 10th annual awards ceremony which take place on Thursday 27 February in the Sugar Club, Dublin.

Some of the amazing Wicklow people who are nominated are:

Corinna Nolan - Most Devoted Nominee

Passionate, persistent and positively unstoppable! The Most Devoted To The Outdoor Scene 2024 award, sponsored by Sustainable Tourism Network, recognises those who live and breathe the Irish outdoors, dedicating their time and energy to growing the adventure community in 2024. This award celebrates the people who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make the Irish outdoors what it is. They volunteer at races,

lend a hand and share expertise when required. Let's dive in and read all about them!

Corinna Nolan is a cornerstone of the open-water swimming community in Wicklow, where her contributions as a coach, mentor, and athlete have left an indelible mark on countless swimmers.

Corinna, who hails from Bray, has inspired many to move from the pool to the open sea. As a swim instructor, she has introduced children and adults to the joys of swimming, often coaxing hesitant newcomers to try it out. Her dedication extends beyond coaching; she has organised water safety awareness talks, volunteered her time to teach refugees introductory swimming lessons, and worked with Enable Ireland to help children with special needs experi-

ence the freedom and joy of water.

Corinna's achievements as a swimmer are equally remarkable. She is the only Wicklow woman known to have completed the prestigious Irish Triple Crown of open-water swimming, conquering the North Channel, Fastnet and Galway Bay. Her North Channel swim alone raised over €20,000 for Enable Ireland, a charity close to her heart.

Corinna is also a talented photographer, capturing the triumph and relief on swimmers' faces at the finish lines and bringing the beauty of Wicklow's waters to life. Always happy to share her experience, she provides invaluable guidance to aspiring Channel swimmers, offering advice on nutrition, overcoming the cold and other challenges unique to long-distance open-water swimming.

Through her tireless efforts, Corinna has built a vibrant and supportive community of swimmers in Bray and Greystones. Her humility and constant encouragement make her a true beacon in the world of open-water swimming.

Angela Flynn - Most Devoted Nominee

Angela Flynn is a cornerstone of the Irish mountain running community, dedicating countless hours to the Irish Mountain Running Association (IMRA) and advancing the sport in Ireland through innovative, inclusive and sustainable initiatives.

When Angela - from Kilmacanogue - first became involved with IMRA, her passion for the mountains and her commitment to fostering a thriving outdoor community quickly set her apart.



Corinna Nolan, nominee for the Most Devoted to the Outdoor Scene award.

Over the years, she has contributed tirelessly to the association, serving on the committee, developing new races and volunteering at countless events to ensure everyone can enjoy the mountains safely.

Angela's sustainability efforts within IMRA are transformative. She introduced multi-use flags for race marking, which reduces waste, and encouraged race attendees to cycle or carpool to events, even facilitating carpooling groups from her home. She also spearheaded the link between IMRA and the Pure Mile initiative, ensuring the Sugarloaf remained pristine until the responsibility passed to local volunteers. Beyond this, she has organised tree-planting days using IMRA's carbon offset fund, personally hosting and catering for volunteers.

Her commitment to inclusion has also been remarkable. She has hosted junior development days in community halls and championed events like women-only night races, promoting safe running spaces for women. Most recently, she ran up and down the Sugarloaf every day to raise funds for charity, inviting friends, family, and strangers to join her in this inspiring endeavour.

Angela's dedication to the future of Irish mountain running includes working on partnerships between IMRA and universities to establish athletic scholarships for young Irish mountain runners, fostering the next generation of talent.

Angela's enthusiasm, innovation, and unwavering commitment to IMRA make her an integral part of Ireland's mountain-running community. Her advice to others looking to contribute? "Be present, think big, and always remember the value of community."

East Wicklow Rivers Trust - Eco-Hero Volunteer nominee

Green, groundbreaking and globally conscious! This award honours the

Eco Volunteers who are leading the charge for sustainability in the Irish outdoors, and the nominations were as inspiring as they were innovative.

The East Wicklow Rivers Trust (EWRT) - which formed in 2019 - came together to remove a weir at Ballinglen due to concerns about the impact on water flow on the Vartry River and the effects this has on fish movement.

"The fragmentation of rivers has been identified as one of the greatest global threats to freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity," says Faith Wilson on behalf of the EWRT. "Man-made barriers, such as weirs and dams, break up a river's continuous flow from source to sea and this can interrupt the movement of migratory species, especially those that need to move between freshwater and saltwater to complete their life cycle, such as our iconic Atlantic salmon."

In 2012, Inland Fisheries Ireland completed a survey of barriers to fish migration on rivers in County Wicklow and Ballinglen Bridge - a beautiful three-arched stone bridge from around 1790 - was identified as a priority for action.

In 2021, the EWRT received funding from the IFI Salmon & Sea Trout Rehabilitation, Conservation & Protection Fund to try and tackle this barrier in the form of an engineered rock ramp. This is a series of stepped rock weirs that mimic the natural conditions in a

river creating a series of pools and steps, raising the water levels in the river to allow fish to pass beyond the bridge apron when migrating. It was given the green light and completed in 2024.

"We look forward to welcoming our special river inhabitants back to the Ballinglen Valley," says Faith, though she also notes the project is one small step in the restoration of river habitat for a suite of protected species.

Spur Outdoors - Eco-Hero Professionals and Companies nominee

Sustainable, strong, and striving for change! The Eco-Hero Professionals and Companies award, sponsored by the Sustainable Tourism Network, celebrates groups championing eco-friendly practices in the Irish outdoor world. Their efforts are shaping a better future for us all.

Spur Outdoors - a small but impactful Irish brand founded by James Bresford - is revolutionising the outdoor clothing industry by offering secondhand gear that's as kind to the planet as it is to your wallet.

James's journey began with a vintage clothing business, where he developed a keen understanding of the secondhand market. Driven by his passion for the outdoors, he launched Spur Outdoors to provide adventurers with a sustainable alternative to fast fashion. "I wanted to offer a more sustainable choice

for people shopping for outdoor gear," says James. Inspired by alarming statistics - like the 121 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions generated by textile consumption in 2020 - James saw an opportunity to make a difference.

"Overconsumption is one of the biggest challenges in the textile industry," he explains. "Only 1% of used clothes are recycled into new clothes." Spur Outdoors addresses this by sourcing gear from textile recycling houses, charity shops, and, most recently, directly from customers. This approach minimises waste and supports a circular economy, offering adventurers the chance to equip themselves responsibly.

But Spur Outdoors is about more than just sustainability. "We want people to get outside, connect with nature, and feel good about their gear choices," says James. By making quality gear affordable, the brand breaks down barriers to entry for outdoor activities, encouraging more people to explore and protect the natural world.

"Every piece we sell has a story, and every item traded in helps reduce the need for new production," James explains.

With a growing range of secondhand outdoor clothing available on their website, Spur Outdoors invites everyone to join their mission to protect the planet while enjoying its beauty.



Jennifer Whitmore TD with the East Wicklow rivers Trust, Eco-Hero Volunteer award nominees.



Spur Outdoor are Eco Hero Professional award nominees.



Angela Flynn, nominee for the Most Devoted to the Outdoor Scene award.

Whitmore highlights delays in ACRES payments



Jennifer Whitmore TD.

Social Democrats TD Jennifer Whitmore has called for immediate clarity on the payment schedule for over 300 farmers in Wicklow who are still waiting for their ACRES (Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme) payments. This issue was highlighted following a parliamentary question submitted by Deputy Whitmore to the Minister for Agriculture last week.

"Farmers in Wicklow have been left in limbo, waiting for payments that are crucial for their livelihoods," said Deputy Whitmore. "These payments are intended to support environmental and biodiversity measures on their farmland, yet the delays are causing significant financial strain. It's encouraging to see so many farmers participating in the ACRES scheme to improve biodiversity on their lands. However, for it to be effective and continue attracting participants, it must ensure timely payments. Many farmers have incurred upfront costs to take part in the scheme and are now waiting over a year for payments.

"The Department must sort out its payment systems and ensure that the thousands of farmers receive the financial relief they've been waiting so long for," Deputy Whitmore concluded.

Deputy Whitmore is urging the Minister for Agriculture to take immediate action to ensure that these payments are made without further delay.

Wicklow childminders urged to avail of equipment grant

Norma Foley, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is calling on all childminders in County Wicklow to avail of the 2025 Childminding Development Grant. The Childminding Development Grant provides up to €1,000 to assist both registered and unregistered childminders who are providing a childminding service in their own homes.

In 2024, the grants Childminders in County Wicklow received assisted them in enhancing the quality and safety in their service through the purchase of toys, childcare equipment, safety equipment, equipment to support inclusion and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Maths (STEAM) education. The grant was also used for the purchase of IT equipment to assist childminders to engage with training and registration processes.

The grant scheme is open to all childminders, including

those who are planning to open a childminding business during 2025. 75% of the grant is paid in advance to help childminders with the upfront costs of purchasing equipment.

The total budget of €500,000 reflects the high demand for the grant in previous years.

In line with the National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028, regulations written specifically for childminders came into effect for the first time in September 2024, making it possible for all childminders to register with Tusla and take

part in the National Childcare Scheme (NCS).

Those childminders who were previously exempt from regulation have a three-year transition period until 2027 during which they are now able to register with Tusla but are not yet required to do so.

For further information about the Childminding Development Grant or the National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028, visit www.gov.ie/childminding or contact your local City or County Childcare Committee.

Adrienne Slater from Wicklow County Childcare Committee, said: "The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's Childminding Development Grant has been a huge benefit to many childminders in County Wicklow. Any childminder with any questions about applying for the grant is welcome to contact us on 0404 64455."

Applications for the 2025 Childminding Development Grant opened on Tuesday, 4th February and will close on Friday, 4th April.



Ciaran Byrne as Barnaby in Roundwood Variety Group's panto production 'Puss in Bots' in the Brockagh Centre, Laragh.



Tom Murphy, Kathleen Ormonde and Ann Gregory at the Arklow RNLI Hurry to the Curry event in the Arklow Bay Hotel.

Beacon
CAREfertility

National Institute for Reproductive Genetics

**Considering IVF?
Over 35?**

**IVF with Genetic Testing is the
gold standard option**



**Where Science
Meets Life**



INFO

Greystones property management company going for back-to-back national awards

Schnittger Bourne Property Services in Greystones is looking to secure back-to-back wins at the Management Company of the Year 2025 awards which take place on 27th February. Last year, the company took home the award for National Property Management Company of the Year.

"Having first opened its doors in 2007, Schnittger Bourne is a distinguished leader in property management services in Ireland. For almost 20 years, we have proudly set the standard for excellence in the industry, catering to a discerning clientele with our bespoke and pragmatic approach to property management. As one of Ireland's largest property managing agents, we take great pride in our small yet highly personalised team, ensuring that each client receives the individual attention and exceptional service they deserve.

"We are thrilled that our dedication and expertise has been recognised on a national level, as we

actually won the National Property Management Company of the Year 2024 award. This prestigious award underscores our ongoing commitment to delivering exceptional service and best-in-class property management solutions. We have just recently been shortlisted as part of the finalists for the National Property Management Company of the Year 2025 award, with the award ceremony taking place on

Thursday 27th February 2025 in the Intercontinental Hotel, Dublin. Hopefully we can make it back-to-back wins!

"Schnittger Bourne manages approx. 6,500 units across our entire portfolio - a mix of

Residential, Commercial, Office and Mixed-Use space. We manage and collect over €12million per annum in service charges and have over 5million m2 of serviced common area space under our control. Working with a variety of different clients, all with different needs and requirements, from smaller bespoke schemes to some of the biggest residential and commercial developments in the Country.

"We are a small team but a big company. We have less than 15 employees but see this as a huge strength, and actually something that sets us apart from our competitors - having continuity of service and personnel is extremely impor-



The Schnittger Bourne Property Services team at last year's National Property Management Company of the Year awards.

tant for our Clients, knowing the history of any development is half the battle, understanding the personalities involved and building relationships for the future.

Schnittger Bourne Property Services have four main divisions:

1. Residential Block Management;
2. Commercial Estate Management;
3. Sales & Lettings (Residential & Commercial);
4. Asset & Portfolio Management.

Schnittger Bourne Property Services is once again sponsoring

the Annual Greystones Local Hero Award this year. "It's lovely to be able to support and highlight the amazing people and personalities we have in Greystones, as a local Company it's something very close to our hearts," they said.

44% growth in value of Ireland's prime country homes market

The prime country homes market in Ireland saw an impressive 44% increase in the total transaction value in 2024, reaching €275 million, according to a new report from property advisor, Savills Ireland. This surge highlights a robust demand for luxury country homes, with the market far exceeding the 10-year average transaction value of €139 million.

Using Property Price Register data, Savills examined prime country home transactions, which are defined as transactions greater than one million euros and located outside of Dublin, the major regional cities, and north Wicklow. Wicklow gener-

ated €21.6 million from 18 deals.

Savills report noted that despite economic uncertainties and fluctuating global conditions, the luxury segment of Ireland's real estate market has shown remarkable resilience and attractiveness. The aver-

age transaction size held steady at €1.6 million across 168 deals, underscoring a stable high-end market.

Cianan Duff, Associate Director at Savills Ireland commented, "The 44% growth in transaction value this year is a testament to the enduring appeal of Ireland's prime country homes. Buyers continue to value the unique combination of luxury and privacy that these properties offer."

The report indicates that the proximity of counties

like Kildare and Wicklow to Dublin contributes significantly to their popularity, accommodating buyers who favor a hybrid working lifestyle with easy access to urban centers.

This significant growth in the value of prime country homes in 2024 is indicative of a broader trend in Ireland's real estate sector, where both domestic and international buyers are drawn to properties that offer expansive living spaces, modern amenities, and natural surroundings.

SCSI estate agents expect property prices to rise 6%

Scenarios show affordability gap of over €35K for Wicklow couple on combined salary of €107K

Estate agents who are members of the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI) expect national property prices to increase by an average of 6% over the next twelve months. This is up on the 4.5% increase which SCSI agents forecast for the market in the summer of 2024.

The SCSI's Annual Residential Review and Outlook report - now in its 42nd year - found that 83% of agents now believe current property prices are either 'expensive' or 'very expensive'.

When asked where they

believe we are in the market cycle, 61% of respondents believe prices are rising but will level off soon.

Gerard O'Toole, Vice President of the SCSI described current rates of property inflation - the CSO estimates annual rate

of inflation at circa 10% - as unsustainable.

"Our survey responses suggest agents believe there will be a shift towards more balanced growth expectations with less emphasis on rapid price increases. Given the afford-

ability challenges facing all buyers, particularly first-time buyers, a slowdown or period of market stabilisation would be most welcome."

Three out of four agents (76%) reported low stock levels - up slightly on last

year - with the majority of agents indicating that the lack of supply was the main factor influencing expectations around house price movements.

Mr O'Toole said the lack of supply will remain the dominant issue until annual completion levels are ramped up to 40,000 plus.

"A year ago, 40% of agents identified the lack of supply as the main issue affecting price movements, now that number is around 60%. That and the fact three out of four agents (76%) are continuing to report low stock levels, reflect the reality of the Irish property market. The other main factors, which our members believe are influencing price movements include lower interest rates and the availability of credit (12%), access to schemes supporting house purchases such as Help to Buy (8%) and changes in the state of the economy (8%). Fifty-three percent of agents report a slight improvement in credit conditions and believe this was the main factor impacting the higher than anticipated price movements in late 2024.

Current Affordability Scenarios

With property prices nationally having increased by 155% from their low point in early 2013, the SCSI included five scenarios for a couple earning a combined income of €107,000 and availing of the Help to Buy scheme towards their 10% deposit in its latest report.

The scenarios, demonstrate the affordability gap, if any, which exists between the total mortgage purchase limit available to a couple on average incomes looking to buy their first home and average new house purchase prices in five different locations. The scenarios included new three-bedroom semi-detached, two bedroom terraced and three-bedroom terraced homes.

The analysis revealed that all house types across Meath, Cork, and Galway were affordable for this FTB couple while in Kildare and Wicklow the two-bed terraced and three-bed terraced houses were affordable. However, three-bed semi-detached houses remain unaffordable in both

Kildare and Wicklow, with affordability gaps of €13,900 and €35,500, respectively.

Mr O'Toole says analysis of trends across the five counties indicates that rising prices are making affordability more challenging.

"These trends suggest that the pace of property price growth is higher than income growth in several regions, especially Dublin's commuter counties, creating pressures for prospective buyers. While the housing market remains active and resilient, there is a growing need to address these emerging affordability concerns. A balanced approach to increasing housing supply and reducing housing delivery costs could help to alleviate these pressures, fostering a more sustainable and inclusive housing market in the long term.

"In addition, the introduction of higher densities, more broadly integrated housing mix which better reflects the needs of modern Irish society will be required if we are to address the housing supply crisis.

"While Dublin is not included in the scenarios, based on house prices in the capital, it's clear they are not affordable based on the income thresholds within the study. It's also clear that unaffordability is restricting employment opportunities for many newly qualified professionals with many job vacancies remaining un-filled, particularly in education and health.

"It's important to note that couples on lower incomes will struggle to purchase a home within the private market with their only realistic prospect seeking to qualify for either social or affordable housing.

"In the long term the only way to moderate and gradually lower the affordability gap is by ramping up the supply of new homes. At the moment new housing supply is being curtailed by infrastructure deficits in water, electricity and sewerage. Zoned lands cannot be developed without these essential connections and considerable additional resources need to be applied by the state in this area as a matter of urgency."

County	House type	Average property purchase price (A)	10% deposit (B)	Average combined gross salary (C)	LTI 4 times salary (C x 4 = X)	Total purchase limit (X + B = Y)	Affordability result (Y - A)
Meath	3-bed semi-detached	€445,000	€44,500	€107,000	€428,000	€472,500	€27,500
Kildare	3-bed semi-detached	€491,000	€49,100	€107,000	€428,000	€477,100	-€13,900
Wicklow	3-bed semi-detached	€515,000	€51,500	€107,000	€428,000	€479,500	-€35,500
Cork (city and county)	3-bed semi-detached	€452,000	€45,200	€107,000	€428,000	€473,200	€21,200
Galway (city and county)	3-bed semi-detached	€414,000	€41,400	€107,000	€428,000	€469,400	€55,400

*The locations considered in this report differ from those in previous SCSI Residential Market Monitors, as new developments are emerging in different areas. Most of the locations in Cork and Galway included in the study are within a 30-40km radius of their respective city. All property price and gross salary figures are rounded off.

Five scenarios. The purchase prices listed here are average purchase prices of 3 bed semi-detached homes based on new housing developments in the five counties analysed.

Dare to Believe Olympic Schools Programme expands

The Olympic Federation of Ireland has announced the addition of twenty-one new Olympic and Paralympic athletes to the Dare to Believe Olympic Schools Programme, bringing the total number of athlete ambassadors to forty-four across fifteen sports, including Olympic Champions and medallists. This milestone coincides with Allianz Ireland becoming the official sponsor of the programme.

With a near-equal gender balance, there are now twenty-one female and twenty-three male ambassadors sharing their stories with and inspiring school children around Ireland. The programme centres on the Olympic values, and since its launch in 2019, students have enjoyed, not only athlete visits, but the wider activations of the programme, such as the Road to Paris,

Olympic Movement Breaks and the hugely popular Olympian Live! events.

Following on from the reveal of Allianz as the top sponsor of Team Ireland, the sponsorship of Allianz of the Dare to Believe programme supports their goal of keeping young people in sport, and their #StopTheDrop campaign. In 2024, 131,636 students benefited from the Dare to Believe programme, across 3,548 schools. This incorporated 132 Olympic ambassador school and club visits, with 82% of the schools being DEIS schools. The Olympian Live! Webinars were reached by 59,447 children across primary and secondary schools.

Olympic boxer Grainne Walsh has been a Dare to Believe ambassador since 2019, and speaking about the impact of the programme on the community from a school visit to Mullingar Educate Together National School, Walsh said,

"I've been a Dare to Believe ambassador since day one, and my journey has grown so much since then. I love visiting the schools to inspire kids because I know how much I would have valued this at their age. It's all about paving the way for the next generation, passing the baton, and showing them that anything is possible with belief and hard work. Honestly, I get as much from these visits as the kids do. I leave every school feeling fully of positivity and ready to smash my next challenge, so it works both ways."

"I try to share with the students that setbacks happen, I've had my fair share of them, but you have to find a way of getting over them, and believing in yourself. When you do that, success is all the sweeter."

Programme coordinators Roisin Jones and Roisin McGettigan are looking forward to launching into a new year of school visits,



Dare to Believe ambassadors, Two-time Olympic Champion Fintan McCarthy and Olympic boxer Gráinne Walsh at Mullingar Educate Together National School as part of the Dare to Believe programme to inspire the next generation, sponsored by Allianz. Photo by David Fitzgerald/Sportsfile.

"We are delighted to announce 21 new Dare to Believe ambassadors today, to join some of our more seasoned ones. It's really exciting to see how much this programme has evolved, and we are very

grateful for the support of Allianz, whose values align so closely with ours around the value of sport to young people.

"We are looking forward to what the future holds. We know from

research that having sporting role models positively impacts activity levels for children, and we have great Olympic and Paralympic ambassadors on our programme."

Registration for the Dare to Believe programme is free of charge and all details can be found on www.dareto-believe.ie for both primary and secondary curriculums.

Leading the charge for inclusive angling in Wicklow

The Federation of Irish Sport is proud to announce that Brian Whelan has been named County Wicklow's 2024 recipient of the Volunteers in Sport Awards. Brian will be honoured at a special awards ceremony on Friday, 28th February 2025, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Blanchardstown, alongside a volunteer from every county in Ireland (four in Dublin) in recognition of their dedication and passion for their local club.

Brian Whelan's commitment to angling in Ireland through his work with the Irish Federation of Sea Anglers (IFSA) has been exemplary. As the current treasurer, Brian has contributed in all aspects of the IFSA for over 10 years, from boat angling manager to mentor, with a special focus on engaging younger generations and people with disabilities.

Brian led the organisation of World Shore and Boat Angling Champ-

ionships, earning global recognition for Ireland as a premier destination for angling. He also runs local and national events and, despite a busy personal and professional life he continues to strengthen the community ties through his work with the IFSA.

Honouring Volunteers Who Keep Irish Sport Thriving

Throughout November and December 2024, the Federation of

Irish Sport called on the public, sports clubs, Local Sports Partnerships and Governing Bodies to nominate volunteers whose contributions have made a meaningful difference. This year's awards saw a record number of nominations from over 53 sporting disciplines, reflecting the incredible diversity of volunteering in Ireland.

Every week, 460,000 volunteers dedicate their time to support 1.47

million club members around the country to keep them engaged and active, making a social and economic contribution valued at €1.5 billion annually. These volunteers are the backbone of Irish sport, keeping communities active, healthy, and connected.

Speaking about the importance of the awards, CEO of the Federation of Irish Sport, Mary O'Connor said: "The Federation of Irish Sport is proud to celebrate our volunteers in sport and to pay tribute to these incredible individuals who give their time and energy to enrich Irish sport and strengthen communities. These awards are

a vital nationwide recognition of the scale of volunteering that is required every week to support 1.47 million club members around the country."

Sport Ireland CEO Dr Úna May said: "Volunteers are the lifeblood of Irish sport, driving participation across all disciplines. Sport Ireland research reveals unprecedented levels of engagement, with nearly two million adults participating in sport weekly. That's a real testament to the tireless efforts of volunteers. They don't merely contribute - they transform aspirations into achievements, making sport accessible and

enjoyable for all. We all owe them a debt of gratitude and we're happy to play our part in recognising their dedication."

Head of Louth Sports Partnership, representative of the National Network of 29 Local Sports Partnerships and member of the judging panel, Graham Russell said: "The National Network of Local Sports Partnerships work closely with volunteers in the community and see the impact they have at grass roots level and in breaking down boundaries to participation. We are proud to champion the unsung heroes of sport."

ÁIT DUIT FÉIN

Tá campais againn i bPort Láirge, i gCeatharlach agus i Loch Garman. Anois an t-am is fearr chun d'áit a aimsiú ag Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta an Oirdheiscirt.

setu.ie



Jennifer Whitmore TD.

Whitmore demands immediate action on delayed HRT Scheme

Social Democrats TD Jennifer Whitmore, has called for urgent clarity and action regarding the delayed roll-out of free Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) access.

"In the run-up to the election, both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael pledged to prioritise women's health. This delay is yet another example of their failure to deliver on those promises," said Deputy Whitmore. "The lack of clarity and ongoing delays are completely unacceptable. Former Fianna Fail Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly, promised that the scheme would

be operational from the start of January 2025. January has now been and gone."

Speaking in Dáil Éireann last Thursday, Deputy Whitmore emphasised the impact on women who have been counting on these reduced costs for their personal finances and health-care. "Many women have already factored these savings into their budgets, and the delay,

which is the result of inadequate planning, is causing significant distress. In order for the HRT scheme to be effective and continue to attract participants, it must be reliable and timely. The current situation undermines the trust and confidence of those it aims to support. We need clarity on the delay and the action being taken to get the scheme up and running. The Department

should also seriously consider reimbursing women for any HRT costs they incur between now and the eventual introduction of the initiative.

"It's time for the Minister to take decisive action and ensure that this vital scheme is implemented without any more setbacks. Our women deserve better," Deputy Whitmore concluded.

Wicklow communities urged to be clear on seizure first aid

With International Epilepsy Day 2025 taking place this week on February 10th, Epilepsy Ireland is calling on the people of Wicklow to be clear on Seizure First Aid through their key words of TIME, SAFE, STAY.

"With an estimated 1,230 people living with epilepsy in Wicklow, knowing how to correctly respond to a seizure is important. Every moment counts when someone is experiencing a seizure and the words TIME, SAFE, STAY serve as a clear and memorable guide. Our new campaign for International Epilepsy Day highlights how seizure first aid becomes clear when you know these three words and the background to them," said Epilepsy Ireland Advocacy & Communications Manager, Paddy McGeoghegan.

But what is meant by TIME, SAFE, STAY?

TIME - The first thing you

should do is TIME the seizure. This is because if a seizure goes over 5 minutes, an ambulance should be called.

SAFE - Keep the person SAFE during the seizure. If a person is having a convulsive seizure, cushion their head with something soft if possible and remove any harmful objects, e.g. furniture from their vicinity. NEVER put anything in a person's mouth or restrain them during a seizure.

Be aware that there are also types of seizures where the person does not experience convulsions. Instead, they may zone out or stare blankly, become confused or agitated,

display behaviours like chewing, smacking their lips, fiddling with their clothes, or wandering aimlessly. In this type of seizure, the person's awareness of their surroundings is affected, and it is important to gently guide the person away from any danger. As with convulsive seizures, NEVER restrict the person's movements.

STAY - During the seizure and after it passes, STAY with the person. Often after a seizure, a person with epilepsy will be confused and, in many cases, exhausted. Make sure to stay with them until recovery is complete, explain what has happened and gently

reassure them. The person may have experienced an injury if they have fallen, so, ensure normal first aid steps are taken.

Aside from when the seizure goes over 5 minutes, there are other instances where an ambulance should be called:

- Call an ambulance if a person having a seizure briefly comes out of it and goes into another one.

- Call an ambulance if you know it's a person's first seizure or if you're not sure whether the person has epilepsy or not (often a person with epilepsy will have a bracelet or card in their wallet/purse

indicating they have epilepsy.)

- Call an ambulance if the person is physically injured e.g. if they have taken a heavy fall during their seizure.

- Call an ambulance if the person is pregnant.

- Call an ambulance if you're in any doubt if this is the most important point of all.

Nobody is going to be annoyed at you for calling an ambulance out of real concern; not the person who's having the seizure and not the ambulance crew.

For more details on TIME, SAFE, STAY, International Epilepsy Day, epilepsy and Epilepsy Ireland, visit www.epilepsy.ie.



Epilepsy Ireland Advocacy & Communications Manager, Paddy McGeoghegan.

Over €6.5k raised for the Irish Blue Cross

An animal welfare charity that provides veterinary services has received a donation of €6,565.64 through the latest Maxi Zoo 'Together for Pets' campaign.

The Irish Blue Cross, which is celebrating 80 years in existence in 2025, receives 17,000 to 20,000 visits a year from people who can't afford private veterinary fees. Along with its head clinic in Inchicore, the charity operates 10 mobile clinics across Dublin. The Irish Blue Cross also provides a horse ambulance service across the country.

Maxi Zoo, Ireland's largest pet speciality retailer, raised the money for The Irish Blue Cross through its annual 'Together for Pets' campaign in late 2024. Customers across Maxi Zoo stores purchased a Together for Pets Tote Bag, with proceeds from the sales going to the charity.

Commenting on the donation, Paul Halpin, Fundraising Campaigns Manager with The Irish Blue Cross said: "This money will help fund our frontline services, and pay for important equipment to carry out surgeries, and perform day to day procedures in our mobile clinics like ultrasounds, vaccinations and microchipping. While we receive some government funding, we could not continue to operate without public donations and corporate partnerships with fantastic companies like Maxi Zoo. We are so grateful to them, and all their customers, for this donation that will be put to great use in keeping our services up and running."

In November, The Irish Blue Cross also carried out a Microchipping Roadshow at Maxi Zoo's Finglas, Liffey Valley, Tallaght Arena, Leopardstown and Nutgrove stores in Dublin, providing microchipping for pets in-store at a heavily discounted rate; promoting responsible pet ownership.



Richard Smith Coordinator The Irish Blue Cross and Rosie the dog, pictured at Maxi Zoo Finglas for the handing over of a cheque worth over €6.5K to the charity, through the Maxi Zoo Together for Pets campaign. Photo: Barry Cronin.



Louise Carter, Kaci Flanagan and Claire Alexander pictured at Armelle's Fun Fashion fundraiser in aid of Wicklow Hospice, in Laura's Health & Dance Fitness Studio in Arklow.

St Gerard's Junior School student takes top prize at Green Schools Poster and Photography Competition

Students share their vision for the future use of the marine environment

A St Gerard's Junior School student was among students from 12 schools who were honoured at an award ceremony yesterday celebrating the winners of this year's Green-Schools Marine Spatial Planning Poster and Photography Competitions: 'You, Me and Our Future Seas'. Cassie Colbear was named a regional winner for the Junior Primary category. Fourteen students in total were awarded for their posters and photographs depicting their vision for the future of Ireland's ocean and coast.

In partnership with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, Green-Schools asked students to create posters showing how they would like Ireland's seas to be used in the future. The competition ties in with the National Marine Planning Framework, which aims to balance the different demands for using Ireland's marine territory, including the need to protect and conserve the marine environment. It's about planning when and where human activities take place at sea and ensuring these activities are as efficient and sustainable as possible. The competition was open to schools taking part in the Green-Schools Marine Environment theme, which encourages schools to learn about the importance of the ocean, and to take action to reduce marine litter and raise awareness in their local community about ways we can help the marine environment.

The artwork entered into this year's poster competition depicted the many ways we interact with the marine environment. The posters showed images of marine wildlife, fishing boats, submarines, scuba divers, offshore wind farms, sea kayakers, litter clean-ups and more. The students embedded important messages in the artwork as well, including 'reduce plastic pollution', 'less car-

bon emissions', 'no overfishing' and 'sea life matters'.

From the twelve regional poster competition winners, three national winners were selected: Ryan Quintino Schulze from 2nd class at St Mochulla's N.S., Tulla, Co. Clare, was selected as the national winner for the Junior Primary Category; Basheer Ahmed Avesh, 6th class, St Francis N.S., Blackrock, Co. Louth, won the Senior Primary category, and the overall winner of the Secondary School category was Alyssa Minto, a 3rd year student at Ashbourne Community School, Co. Meath.

Meanwhile, for the first time this year, secondary school students were invited to submit entries to a new photography competition category. The national winning entry 'Gone fishin' by Charlotte Agnew, St Vincent's Secondary School, Co. Louth, captures fishermen on a beach during a beautiful sunset, while the highly commended entry was 'A seagull in the city' by Jason Cronin Murphy from Scoil Bernadette in Cork. Overall the entries showcase both the incredible talent of the entrants, but also their awareness and care for the marine environment.

Minister for Climate, Environment and Energy, Darragh O'Brien, congratulated the winners of the Green Schools Marine

Spatial Planning Competition following the event. Minister O'Brien said: "I am delighted that the Department partners in this event and I would like to congratulate everyone who took part. As an island nation, Ireland has a deep connection to the surrounding seas, so it's no surprise that so many young people understand and care about the marine environment and the challenges it faces. This understanding came across vividly in the entries received in the 'You, Me and Our Future Seas' competition, showcasing exciting new young talent and capturing everything from plastics to pollution to renewable energy to marine life and habitats."

This is the fourth such competition and the number of entries increases year-on-year which shows our school children, our future leaders, are aware of the challenges and are willing to participate in finding solutions to protect our seas for the future.

Speaking at the awards ceremony, Green-Schools National Manager, Joanne Scott, said: "I am so inspired by the winning entries. The students have captured the theme with incredible creativity, colour, and passion. Their artwork beautifully showcases unique ways to protect and appreciate our seas. A huge thank you to everyone who participated."



Niamh Leonard and Liz Bermingham at the Hurry to the Curry event for the Arklow RNLI in the Arklow Bay Hotel.



HSE INJURY UNITS

Visit your nearest HSE injury unit for recent injuries that are not life-threatening such as breaks, sprains, dislocations and minor burns.

St. Columcille's Injury Unit Loughlinstown
D18 V9K1

Monday - Sunday: 8am - 7pm
For ages 14+
Phone: 01 211 5048

Check hse.ie/injuryunits before you go.



Cassie Colbear from St Gerard's Junior School was named a regional winner for the Junior Primary category.

Wicklow sisters urging community to 'Go All in against cancer this Daffodil Day'

Last Tuesday on World Cancer Day, Wicklow sisters Lucey Hayes, Pauline Hughes, Bernie Hughes and Elaine Hughes from Arklow urged their community to turn daffodil yellow on Daffodil Day March 28th and go all in to raise vital funds and give hope to cancer patients.

Averil Power, CEO, Irish Cancer Society said: "This year alone, its estimated that 42,000 people will be diagnosed with cancer in Ireland. There isn't a family that hasn't felt the devastating impact of a cancer diagnosis. But no matter what cancer brings, the Irish Cancer Society is here to help."

"All of our essential services, like free counselling, Daffodil Centres, Night Nursing, and patient travel are fueled by fundraising. Today, on World Cancer Day, we are delighted to launch a new range of holistic free services for those affected by cancer, including our new Diet & Exercise programme and our Welfare & Supports service. We simply would be unable

to provide this support without the public's generosity.

"The more we raise on Daffodil Day, the more help we can give to children and adults going through cancer. The more lifesaving research we can fund. And the sooner we can ensure all cancer survivors have the support they need to live life to the full. We're all in because you are. Join us this Daffodil Day and help us do more."

Daffodil Day takes place on Friday March 28th. Whether you want to get involved with your school, company, or in your community, there are lots of ways to go all in and support cancer patients across Ireland. Visit cancer.ie to get involved or learn more.



(L-R) Four sisters Lucy Hayes, Pauline Hughes, Bernie Hughes and Elaine Hughes with Irish Cancer Society CEO Averil Power (middle).

Bray charity shop wants you to 'Break Up With Your Stuff'

Enable Ireland's annual 'Spring Clean' campaign has launched, asking Bray residents to donate once-loved items to support vital services for people with disabilities.

This month, Enable Ireland is taking a cheeky twist on the Valentines theme. The non-profit organisation, which provides services to over 13,000 children and adults with disabilities, is encouraging the public to declutter their homes and 'break up with their stuff'.

Throughout February Bray locals can 'break up' with their stuff by donating once-loved items that are cluttering your home to the Enable Ireland shop on 29 Main Street, Bray. Those concerned about a loss of romance need not worry. Enable Ireland will help these items find love again when sold. 100% of profits from items donated to Enable Ireland support their local disability services. These include vital therapy and support services.

Showing love to the planet, donations to Enable Ireland contribute to the circular economy. Every year, they recycle over 2,000 tonnes of donated textiles and clothing via their 28 charity shops and network of over 170 textile banks throughout Ireland. This extends the life cycle of garments and prevents clothing from entering landfill waste, contributing to a greener way of living.

Commenting on the campaign, Oonagh O'Connor, Commercial Manager at Enable Ireland said: "February is a month associated with love and romance. It's also a time when many people choose to declutter their homes with a Spring Clean. This year, we're uniting the two by encouraging the public to 'break up' with their

once-loved items, and then fall in love with second-hand.

Go through your wardrobes, kitchen presses, and chest of drawers. What may no longer have use for you, could be exactly what someone else is looking for. We'll help your donations find the perfect match and you'll help raise funds to benefit our vital services!"

Enable Ireland is accepting donations of items at their store on Bray. Members of the public can also donate to one of the charity's 174 textile banks located across the country. Alternatively, to any TK Maxx store nationwide, or directly into any Enable Ireland charity shop.

Enable Ireland loves to accept

donations of clean, good-quality clothes, shoes, handbags, and accessories. They also accept towels, linens, homeware, and glassware. As well as collectables, books, loose toys and unwanted gifts. Unfortunately, the charity cannot accept donations of electrical items, dirty or soiled items. Neither broken items, mattresses, duvets or pillows. This is due to the high cost of disposal.

The Enable Ireland Charity shop in Bray helps the public fall in love with second-hand all year round. It offers a wealth of preloved treasures. From designer clothes and handbags, to trendy shoes and accessories. They also sell classic books, beautiful homewares and more.



Catherine and Ella Lynch at the Arklow RNLI Hurry to the Curry in the Arklow Bay Hotel.

Extension approval for Scoil Chaoimhín Naofa Glendalough

Additional classrooms and special education teaching room will be provided

Fine Gael Deputy for Wicklow Edward Timmins TD has welcomed the news that the school building unit in the Department of Education have approved an extension to Scoil Chaoimhín Naofa (St Kevins National School) Glendalough.

Additionally, the newly elected Fine Gael Dail Deputy has taken the opportunity to highlight measures undertaken to understand the real challenges faced by schools in Wicklow with his first parliamentary question in the Dail Chamber relating to the new secondary school in Blessington. Speaking last Tuesday from Dail Eireann, Deputy Edward Timmins stated: "I am delighted to receive the good news for Scoil Chaoimhín Naofa Glendalough from my colleague, Minister for Education and Youth, Deputy Helen McEntee. This important project will include one new classroom to provide a class for children with special education needs, a special education teaching room for one-to-one teaching or group work, and a mainstream classroom."

On the need to ensure meaningful supports to students with additional needs, Deputy Timmins



Edward Timmins TD.

noted: "Within a few weeks of being elected as a new TD for our county, I met with the Educate Together Secondary School Wicklow (ETSSW) in order to fully understand the challenges being faced by mainstream schools

trying to provide support to students with additional needs. This is an area I am very passionate about delivering on for Wicklow because one in four children in Ireland requires additional supports to participate in education."

Regarding the new secondary school for Blessington, Deputy Timmins pointed out: "My first parliamentary question here in Dail Eireann asked the then Minister for Education Norma Foley when construction of the new secondary school in Blessington will commence. This is a project I will be most rigourously pursuing in terms of a timeline until a shovel is in the ground."

Deputy Timmins concluded: "It is essential that we provide state of the art schools and teaching facilities across county Wicklow. Together, with my colleagues Minister for Education and Youth Deputy Helen McEntee, and my constituency colleague, Tánaiste Simon Harris, I am enthusiastic about what we will achieve in Government for Wicklow, and will ensure the timely delivery of projects to meet the needs of school children across our county."



Lucy Shortt as Princess Poppy and Shay Nolan as Queen Marigold in Roundwood Variety Group's panto production of Puss in Boots in the Brockagh Centre, Laragh.

€8 million funding for Further Education and Training sector

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science James Lawless TD has announced €8 million in funding in further education capital grants for the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

The devolved capital grant will help ETBs carry out small-scale works and infrastructure upgrades, ensuring projects are advanced quickly and efficiently.

Minister Lawless said: "I am very pleased to announce the continuation of this vital funding stream to the ETBs, to support FET provision nationally.

"The devolved capital grant allows ETBs to address a range of small-scale capital needs across their FET estates, including minor works and procurement of equipment.

"This funding is an essential part of the overall funding framework to support ETBs in the delivery of FET."

Funding is provided under

Project 2040 and forms part of the ongoing investment in the further education and training (FET) sector.

Using this grant, ETBs will be able to carry out work such as upgrades to computer labs and science labs, replacement of apprenticeship equipment, roof works and planned improvement works of FET buildings.

Minister Lawless added: "The National Development Plan, part of Project Ireland 2040, provided a dedicated capital envelope for the FET sector.

"The Devolved Capital Allocation allows ETBs to respond to the most pressing FET capital needs within their respective regions.

"ETBs can prioritise maintenance

and upgrading works across their existing capital stock, ensuring value for money while enhancing the FET learning environment."

Avril Behan, Director of FET College of the Future in SOLAS, said: "SOLAS is delighted with the announcement of continuing support for Education and Training Boards (ETBs) through the Devolved Capital Grant for FET.

"This grant enables ongoing improvement in the quality and capacity of learning facilities, as well as providing learners with access to equipment and supports which are vital for their skills-focused education and training."

The funding will be distributed through SOLAS.

Take WICKLOW TIMES with you...

WHEREVER you go

on your Phone, Laptop or Tablet !

✓ NO PASSWORDS

✓ NO PAYWALL

✓ NO PROBLEM!

PLUS access to over a year's worth of back issues!

www.wicklowtimes.net

or email info@localtimes.ie and we will email you a copy!



Survey reveals Wicklow students' fears over CAO choices, housing availability, emigration and use of AI

Wicklow's commuter students see home-living as a necessity, but many worry about local housing and jobs

Studyclix, an Irish teaching and learning tool, is calling on the government to better resource essential career guidance after a nationwide Studyclix survey of 1,300 sixth-year students revealed that many are failing to get sufficient one-on-one time with their guidance counsellor, while four in ten say they are unsure whether their CAO choices are right for them.

Luke Saunders, a former secondary school teacher and co-founder of Studyclix, believes the survey results showing the level of uncertainty in young people are 'no surprise' given cuts to guidance counsellor hours in recent years. The survey also highlighted that some students are turning to private guidance counsellors due to the lack of support in school.

The Studyclix Student Survey 2025 offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by school students in Ireland. The results highlight a pessimism among students in terms of their prospects of owning a property in their home county when they start work, a sense of inevitability around emigration after they finish university, and a lack of engagement with apprenticeship programmes.

Guidance counsellors

Leaving Cert students are struggling to get adequate one-to-one time with their guidance

counsellor, according to the Studyclix survey, with six in ten (60%) reporting having only one meeting with their guidance counsellor since beginning sixth year. Almost one in five (18%) said that they have either had no meeting with their guidance counsellor or met them only in a group setting.

With four in ten (40%) saying that they are unsure if they're making the right choice on their CAO form, uncertainty is driving some to pursue alternative options. More than one in six (15%) said that they have worked with a private guidance counsellor outside of school to help them decide on their choices on the CAO form.

Luke said: "The guidance counsellor is a vital member of school staff, with responsibilities for teaching careers classes, helping students with CAO and UCAS forms, supporting student with mental health issues. The fallout of the 2008 economic recession saw dramatic cuts to guidance counsellor hours in

many small schools, with guidance counsellors also forced to take on a certain number of subject teaching hours. It's no surprise that most students feel they do not have enough time with their guidance counsellor.

"This has created a situation in which students are embarking on the wrong college courses, leading to drop outs. The government should invest in giving schools a greater allocation of guidance counsellor time so that counsellors can provide sufficient support to students."

ChatGPT and other AI tools

Seven in ten (71%) students reported having tried ChatGPT or other AI tools. However, the number who said that they have used ChatGPT or other AI tools for school-related tasks is nearly six in ten (58%), more than double the figure from the 2022 Studyclix survey, with almost one in five (18%) using it for projects that contribute to the overall

Leaving Cert grade.

Luke said: "As a former teacher of agricultural science and geography, both subjects requiring Leaving Cert project work, I am aware of the potential impact of using AI to write student projects. The finding that almost one in five (18%) have already used ChatGPT for project work is, in my view, alarming. It means that it is impossible to guarantee the academic legitimacy of project work done at home."

Housing and cost of living

The Studyclix survey revealed a lack of optimism among students that the housing crisis will alleviate in the coming years, with two thirds (66%) saying they do not believe they will be able to afford a house in their home county when they start work. In Wicklow and Dublin, the figure is 75% reflecting the rising property values of recent years.

The survey also found that students are factor-

ing into their plans for third-level education, with one in three (34%) reporting that rent, and the cost-of-living are major factors in where they choose to attend university. Indeed, these concerns are more acute for students from rural counties such as Roscommon (50%) and Waterford (56%) but less so in Wicklow (43%).

More than half (55%), meanwhile, say that they plan to live at home while attending third-level education. The figure is higher in counties Dublin (84%), Wicklow (73%) and Meath, where 70% plan to stay at home during college.

Commenting on the findings, Luke Saunders said: "The survey results indicate that young people are disillusioned about the prospect of owning their own home in their home county when they start work. The national figure is 66% but 75% in Wicklow. Interestingly, when we look at the data from the cities, students become even more pessimistic with just 4% of Dublin students and 0% of Galway students feeling they will be able to afford a home.

"Living in Sligo, I am

aware of the growing popularity of the Atlantic Technological University where more and more students from the Midlands, the West of Ireland, and elsewhere, are commuting into while continuing to live at home. There is also a growing trend of city students moving to regional colleges where there's a greater availability of accommodation."

Apprenticeships

The survey highlights a collective disinterest among sixth-year students in apprenticeships or trades, partly as they are not getting enough information about this important career choice.

Just one in 20 respondents (5%) say they are considering apprenticeships or trades. And despite a massive Government push in recent years to promote them, more than four in ten (44%) students say that they haven't been given enough information about alternatives to university.

Luke said: "The last government was very vocal about the need for a good supply of skilled tradespeople to maintain a healthy economy, but

Other key national findings:

- Four in ten (40%) said it was either highly likely or likely that they would find work in their home county when they finish university.
- Almost four in ten (39%) feel confident that they will get their first-choice course
- More than three in ten counted study workloads as their biggest source of stress during sixth year, with another 35% blaming pressure to achieve high points
- Almost seven in ten (69%) report giving up a sport or hobby to focus on the Leaving Cert
- More than six in ten (61%) reported feeling optimistic about getting a good job after completing their education

the survey reveals a failure to engage young people in apprenticeships. Unfortunately, this will have serious implications for not just the housing crisis, but also the prospect of Ireland meeting its home retrofitting and greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets set out in the Climate Action Plan."

Emigration

More than half (54%) of sixth-year students surveyed said that they were or highly likely to emigrate after finishing university.

This figure was highest in Waterford (70%), Roscommon and Louth

(65%), Donegal (64%) and Mayo (61%).

Luke said: "While the survey question does not ask respondents to account for the length of time for which they plan to emigrate after finishing university, it's interesting that more than half plan to spend at least some time abroad to begin their professional careers.

The above-average figures for rural counties highlight the need to invest in regional development and better resource third-level institutions outside of the biggest cities, to ensure that students can aspire to remain in their local community if they wish."

Uversity scholarship applications now open

Applications opened for Uversity Scholarships for the 2025/26 academic year on Saturday 1st February. Prospective students can apply at www.uversity.org

Uversity is a registered charity providing scholarships for mature students, from less advantaged backgrounds, to pursue their dreams of achieving a bachelor's degree in any of the third-level institutions in Ireland.

Scholarships are awarded based on an online application, successful interview process and on demonstrated financial need to those over 23 years old who wish to study for a bachelor's degree for the first time. The deadline for applications is March 31st, 2025.

Uversity Programme Director, Gretta FitzGerald said: "We are delighted to open the application window for Uversity Scholarships for the upcoming academic year. Uversity has awarded over 270 scholarships to date and has seen the positive impact of adult education on the individual, their family and the wider community.

"We are inviting prospective students from all 32 counties to apply ahead of the 2025/26 academic year. If you are interested in pursuing a bachelor's degree and meet the eligibility criteria, we would love to hear from you."

Uversity has been awarding third level scholarships to adult learners since 2018 and has awarded over 270 scholarships to date. A high percentage have subsequently graduated with first class honours degrees. In 2019 Uversity was awarded Income Disregard status by the Department of Social Protection.

For further information and eligibility criteria, please visit www.uversity.org.



Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland announces annual waiting list opening for 2025

Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland (AADI) has announced the opening of their annual intake process for families seeking life-changing assistance dogs. This year, they will open earlier than ever before with the process beginning on February 11th when families will be invited to register for webinars to be held on February 25th and 27th.

AADI is expanding their capacity to take on more families, a reflection of their ongoing commitment to supporting autistic children and their families.

AADI provides assistance dogs to children aged 5-12 who have a diagnosis of autism and are at risk of flight. These specially trained dogs enhance the safety, independence, and inclusion of children, transforming not just their lives but the lives of their families.

In previous year's the charity has welcomed 30 families onto their waiting list, however as a result of the continued high demand for the fully free service they are increasing their intake to

45 families in 2025.

Before the list opens, families are required to attend an online information session. These sessions provide vital details about the role of assistance dogs, the training process, and what life is like with an assistance dog in the family. The sessions also include a live Q&A to address specific questions.

Attendance at an information session is compulsory before applying, and registration details will be advertised on our website, social media channels, and via our general mailing list.

David McCarthy, Head of Fundraising and Communications

at AADI, commented: "Opening the process earlier and expanding the number of families we support are significant steps forward in addressing the growing need for assistance dogs. We're proud to help transform the lives of autistic children, providing greater safety, independence, and confidence. We provide our services fully free to our Clients and so rely heavily on the amazing support of our donors and corporate sponsors. The demand is immense, and while the process is competitive, we encourage all eligible families to apply."

The waiting list opens following the completion of the informa-



tion sessions in March 2025. Eligible applications will be entered into a lottery if the number of applicants exceeds the available places. Successful families will proceed to phone and home assessments with an assistance dog instructor, followed by the matching process, which typi-

cally takes 18-24 months from application.

Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland is a national charity dedicated to transforming the lives of autistic children and their families. Through its specialised training programmes, AADI's assistance dogs provide children with greater independence,

safety, and inclusion, while offering invaluable companionship and support to families across Ireland. For further details and to stay updated, visit our website at www.aadi.ie. Families can also learn more about assistance dog programmes at www.assistance dogsinternational.org, our accrediting body.

IMNDA brings back Caregiver's Programme for 2025 and introduces new peer support initiative for people with MND

Due to high demand in 2024, the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association (IMNDA) has announced the launch of its fourth seven-week Caring for Caregiver's Programme starting 11th February 2025. The programme, funded by the Charlie Bird Development Fund and led by psychotherapist Mary Scarff, is designed to support those who care for someone living with Motor Neurone Disease (MND), offering practical advice and emotional support.

The programme covers topics including anticipatory grief, trauma and anxiety, relationships and self-care. Feedback on the care-

giver programme has been excellent with one participant commenting, "As the carer of a newly diagnosed person, I was delighted to get the

opportunity to take part in this course. It has given me the tools I need to look after myself from the beginning while caring for

my husband."

In addition, IMNDA will introduce a new Peer Support Programme starting with its first meeting in Cork on

25th February. This group will allow people living with MND to meet and connect with others who are going through a similar jour-

ney and share an understanding of their experiences. This programme is a direct result of a survey in 2024 where the IMNDA asked peo-

ple with MND what would be of most value to them, with a huge number of respondents 85% stating that networking with peers is of interest and the majority of those saying that they view it as an information sharing opportunity.

Kevin Burn, CEO of the IMNDA, said, "Caregivers are vital in the lives of those with MND, and it's clear from last year's programmes how much they benefit from this kind of support. It's equally important for

people living with MND to connect with others, which is why we're thrilled to launch this new peer support group and we plan to announce more locations later this year."

The Caregiver's Programme, facilitated by Mary Scarff, will run for seven weeks, and the Peer Support session will take place at a central venue in Cork on February 25th.

For more information or to register, visit the IMNDA website www.imnda.ie or email services@imnda.ie.

SETU's Family Carers project partners with the Irish Deaf Society

SETU's 'Supporting Family Carers Across Ireland' project, coordinated by the University's School of Education and Lifelong Learning, in collaboration with the Irish Deaf Society, is delivering a level 6 Certificate in Advocacy to Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HoH) family carers.

The 12-week course forms part of the ongoing collaborative project between SETU and Family Carers Ireland (FCI), which is funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). It offers students the opportunity to learn more about leadership, communication, advocacy, rights and responsibilities and sociology.

Nicola McEntee, Project Co-ordinator, at SETU explained, "The provision of accredited programmes to family carers recognises the invaluable contribution they make to Irish society. Through the project, we provide Deaf and HoH family carers with a unique experience of higher education that is not often accessible to them. This collaborative initiative with the Irish Deaf Society recognises additional challenges Deaf and HoH family carers experience in accessing higher education opportunities. Through

delivering bespoke transformative tertiary education programmes in Irish Sign Language, such as the Level 6 Certificate in Advocacy, Deaf and HoH family carers can engage in relevant higher education opportunities contributing to equal access to educational opportunities for all."

The objective of this course is to allow learners to develop a skill set that will allow them to advocate for their own needs or to advocate for others. Advocacy constitutes a critical element in protecting and progressing the rights of those people who have traditionally been marginalised from mainstream activities in Irish society.

Brian Crean, the Irish Deaf Society's Further Education and Training Manager, shared his thoughts on the collaboration stating, "We are thrilled to see more bridges being built between the

Deaf and HoH community, and the wider population through this exciting collaboration. In Ireland, many Deaf and HoH carers go unrecognised despite their remarkable dedication to caring for their families. These carers often face significant challenges, particularly in accessing information and services in Irish Sign Language. There are still misconceptions within the wider population about the abilities of Deaf and HoH people, which only increases the number of barriers facing these carers. The Certificate in Advocacy will empower Deaf and HoH carers, helping them raise awareness for their rights and build confidence in advocating for their own needs and the needs of their family. While this initiative alone cannot solve all challenges, it plants a vital seed for greater inclusion and equity."

When speaking about the course, Caroline Poole,



National Lead for Partnerships and Innovation at FCI said, "Family Carers Ireland welcome the opportunity to invite Deaf and HoH Family Carers to the Level 6 in Advocacy, delivered through our partnership with SETU. Family Carers are the backbone of our society, the invisible army who support

people who are, for example, frail in old age or living with disabilities. Family Carers provide care in the home to people of all ages, from cradle to the grave. They provide care that is often very rewarding but can also lead to issues for the Carers themselves, such as isolation brought about by their caring role or

increased poor health. Deaf and HoH Family Carers face even more challenges in their daily lives. We are delighted to support their journey into third level education through the IDS, and hope that this is the beginning of an exciting new partnership for them with SETU. No-one should have to care alone."

The Irish Deaf Society (IDS) is the only national Deaf-led representative organisation of the Deaf, and it serves the interests and welfare of the Deaf community with a strong focus on Irish Sign Language, education, families and equal opportunities.

FCI is the national charity supporting the

500,000+ family carers across the country who care for loved ones such as children or adults with additional needs, physical or intellectual disabilities, frail older people, those with palliative care needs or those living with chronic illnesses, mental ill-health or addiction.

The course commenced in January 2025.

Avonmore Musical Society presents: Shrek the Musical

Avonmore Musical Society has announced that tickets are now on sale for their highly anticipated production of Shrek the Musical! This spectacular show, filled with laughter, adventure, and unforgettable musical numbers, will take place at St. Mary's College, Arklow, from Tuesday, April 22nd to Saturday, April 26th.

Based on the beloved DreamWorks animated film, Shrek the Musical brings everyone's favorite ogre, Shrek, to life as he embarks on a journey to rescue the feisty Princess Fiona, with his ever-loyal (and hilarious) sidekick, Donkey. But with the villainous Lord Farquaad standing in his way, this fairytale adventure promises excitement, heart, and plenty of laughs for audiences of all ages.

Meet the Talented Cast & Production Team

Leading the cast is Andrew Docherty as Shrek, Ellie Willoughby as Princess Fiona, Orlagh Sunderland as Donkey, and Sen Hendley as Lord Farquaad. They are joined by a host of vibrant fairytale characters, including Christine Dunne Firmo as Dragon, Kevin Macken as Pinocchio, and Fionn Oí Chonchuir as Gingy & Papa Bear.

The production is helmed by a fantastic creative team, including Director Amy Penston, Choreographer Martina Lynch, and Musical Director Conor McCarthy. Their combined expertise promises a visually stunning, high-energy performance that will delight audiences.

Show Dates & Ticket Information

Performances will take place nightly at 8:00

PM from Tuesday, April 22nd to Saturday, April 26th, with a special matinee performance on Saturday, April 26th at 2:00 PM.

- Opening Night Special (Tuesday, April 22nd): €15
 - Standard Tickets (Wednesday, April 23rd - Saturday, April 26th): €22
 - Child (U12) / OAP / Student Tickets: €17
- Tickets are available now from gr8events.ie/



avonmoresshrek or by calling 089 222 2128. Early booking is advised to avoid disappointment!

A Word from the Chairperson

Chairperson Patrick Bracken shared his excitement about the upcoming

production, stating: "We are beyond excited to bring the magic of Shrek to the stage in Arklow. This show is bursting with humor, heart, and a message about embracing who you are. Our committee, cast and crew have been working incredibly hard, and we can't wait to share

this magical experience with audiences. It's a show for all ages, so come along and be transported to the land of Far Far Away with us. A big thank you to our main sponsor Ryan Neary Motors, without the support of local businesses and audiences, our shows would not be possible."

Don't Miss Out!

Whether you're a long-time fan of Shrek or experiencing the story for the first time, this production is guaranteed to entertain and inspire. Don't miss your chance to see this larger-than-life musical - get your tickets today!

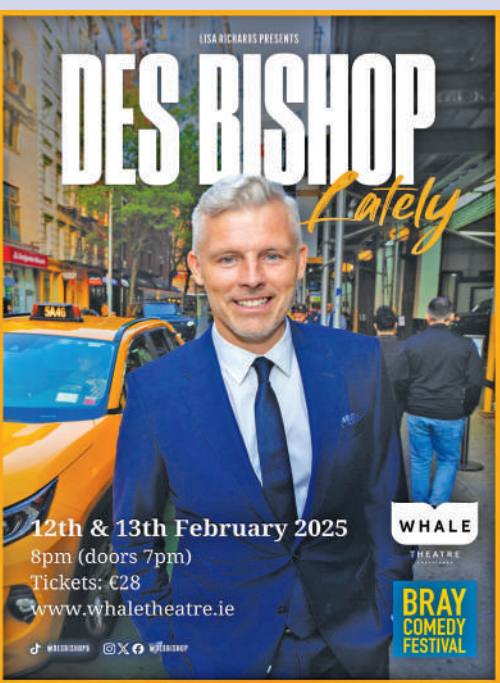
Des Bishop: Lately

Whale Theatre, Wednesday 12th and Thursday 13th February 8pm (doors 7pm)
Sold out but register at www.whaletheatre.ie or call the booking office on 01 2010550 for returns.

The world has changed, Ireland has changed and Des's life has changed... A LOT.

Lately is an hilarious, in your face stand-up show that talks about all this and more as Des tried to make sense of all the changes in his life and all our lives.

Presented as part of Bray Comedy Festival 2025!



Karl Spain: The One Show

Whale Theatre, Friday 14th February at 8pm (doors 7pm) Sold out but register at www.whaletheatre.ie or call the booking office on 01 2010550 for returns

The one show you need to see. A story of how we got to where we are.

Karl's NEW show is full of insight, fun and lots of laughs.

Presented as part of Bray Comedy Festival 2025!



Karl Spain.



Dylan Moran: A Work in Progress Wander

BAFTA and Perrier award-winning comedian Dylan Moran is returning to The Whale Theatre as part of Bray Comedy Festival on Saturday 15th February 2025 at 8pm (doors 7pm). Sold out but register at www.whaletheatre.ie or call the booking office on 01 2010550 for returns.



Norman McGee as Tennant and Conor Power as Taggart in Roundwood Variety Group's recent production of the panto 'Puss in Boots' in the Brockagh Centre, Laragh.

Judy Carroll Deeley Mine Lands: Glendalough and Glendasan

Mermaid Arts Centre, 24th Feb - 10th May. Reception with Opening Address by Dr Angela Griffith. 2-4pm Saturday 22 February- all welcome

Post-extractivist landscapes conjure up images of industrial wastelands devoid of nature, evoking depictions of William Blake's 'dark Satanic Mills'. Yes, this terrain is the focus of new work by Dublin-based painter Judy Carroll Deeley, who explores the former lead and silver mining sites at the Glendalough and Glendasan valleys.

Offering a juxtaposition of the area's historical, religious and industrial heritage, Carroll Deeley has long been interested in the legacy of human activity on the land. Her research with UCD Humanities Institute on their international study 'Post-Extractivist Legacies and Landscapes' (2022 - 2024) has led to field trips

in Estonia and South Africa, informing the recent series Capitalocene: From A Time of Ambition (2023), and now these lush depictions of Wicklow's famed valleys.

Painting what she terms 'popular scenes', the works are informed by the artist's deep knowledge of the valleys through her years of

hiking and 'slow walking' through a landscape we tend to think of as wild, though it has been worked and managed for hundreds of years.

The scenes, painted in oils and captured as pen and ink drawings, are both pastoral and industrial, albeit an industry where the tools of extraction are dis-

solving back into the landscape. Rusting machinery blends into heather and bracken while earthworks made by man become apparently 'natural' hills.

Through looking at these layers of intervention, the artist invites us to dismantle preconceptions of the natural world, embracing its

complexity and nuance.

The exhibition is accompanied by a free booklet with a specially commissioned text by Dr Angela Griffith (Department of the History of Art and Architecture, Trinity College Dublin).

Biography

Judy Carroll Deeley is a visual artist living and working in Dublin. She is passionate about ideas, people, the environment, economic and social change. Her professional art practice encompasses painting, drawing, collage, mixed media, installation, and collaborative projects.

She holds a BA (Hons) in Fine Art (Painting) from the National College of Art and Design in Dublin (2008) and an MA (Hons) in Visual Art Practices from the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin (2011).

She is a recipient of Arts Council of Ireland Bursaries (2021 and 2022) and is part of the artists collective AtHomeStudios. Her work is held in private and public collections including University College Dublin, Villanova University, and the OPW.



View from 'Van Dieman's' Land Glendalough, oil on canvas 100 x 140 cm 2024.



Pictured are the Wicklow County Winners from the Someone Like Me Art Competition being presented with their awards at the national final in Dublin City Hall: Above; 3rd class pupil Zoe Cliffe from Kiltegan National School, Junior County Winner, pictured with Linda Cliffe, Director of the National Disability Authority, and Dr Aileen Hartney and below, 6th class pupil Alex Doran Keenan from All Saints National School, Senior County Winner, with Marge Doran Keenan and Dr Aileen Hartney, Director of the National Disability Authority). Teachers and pupils from 52 primary schools attended the ceremony for the 9th year of the competition, which is organised and funded by the National Disability Authority and allows Ireland's young people to learn about inclusivity and diversity through the medium of art.

Wicklow front and centre on new children's show

What was it like to live in the 'olden times'? What were the clothes like? What games did they play? What did they have to eat? And, did they have more fun than kids have now?! These questions are answered in the new TG4 history series, SIAR LINN!

After a hugely successful first series last year on TG4's dedicated new children's channel, CÚLA4, this Irish language show for 8-12-year olds, has just launched its second season... and Brittas Bay, and Greenan Farm and Maze, are the stars in Episode five and eight, which airs this Tuesday, February 11th on CÚLA4 at 7:17pm.

Each episode of SIAR

LINN ("Back with Us") sees children from around Ireland get a chance to go and explore another era and see what it was like to be a child in a different time. We are thrown into multiples eras, from the legendary Fianna warrior period to the harmonious 60's Woodstock festival. The aim of the series is to gently explore history and folklore in an inter-

active way, with our young viewers being entertained, whilst also happening to learn some fun facts along the way.

Each week, a group of 'Abhatáranna Eachtra' (Adventurer Avatars) aka - four children - take on a new era. With the help of some magic of television, our friends travel to another period, and face a number of tasks and challenges along the way. In

our studio, our 'Scuad Staire' History Squad - Harry, Joshua, Pippa & Luisne, play the Siar Linn game - where they must win as many gold badges as possible with the help of their Adventurer friends who are busy trying to win badges in the Past! The show is fronted by well-known children's TV presenter, Ray Cuddihy, who many will remember also as Múinteoir Ray on Home School Hub.

Join the children on a legendary adventure as they give us a glimpse into the typical 1980's family holidays, and the 1969 Woodstock festival, completing a variety of tasks and challenges, with the incredible era-inspired backdrop of Brittas Bay and Greenan Farm and Maze.

SIAR LINN Series 2 runs for 12 episodes and features children from around Ireland, including Westmeath, Kildare, Dublin, Laois, Clare, and Wicklow.



Wicklow means business in France

Tourism Ireland hosts Lunch & Learn events in Bordeaux and Toulouse

Eleven tourism companies from Ireland - including Russborough House - joined Tourism Ireland's Lunch & Learn events in France this week. The events took place in the cities of Bordeaux and Toulouse.

The Lunch & Learn events - which include presentations about Ireland as well as networking opportunities - are a valuable opportunity for the tourism companies from Ireland to connect with French travel agents and tour operators, who bring valuable tourists to the island. The aim is to inspire the French travel professionals about all that Ireland has to offer and to win a greater share of their business for 2025 and beyond.

Ana Luis, Tourism Ireland's Trade Partnership Manager France, said: "We are delighted that so many key French travel agents and tour operators took the time to come and meet with our partners from Ireland in Bordeaux and Toulouse this week. Our roadshow is a valuable platform for our partners from Ireland to showcase and sell their products and services, to ensure they win a greater share of the travel agents and tour operators' business for 2025 and beyond."



Tourism companies from Ireland with Christine Blanc (fourth left), Ana Luis (fifth left) and Olivia Scullion (sixth left), all Tourism Ireland; and Jill Robins, Russborough House (sixth right), at Tourism Ireland's Lunch & Learn event in Toulouse.

RECRUITMENT

PART-TIME OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR JOB AVAILABLE

-20 hours per week.

General office duties:
Answering telephone, invoicing, typing quotations, filing
Cash collection. Must have at least 12 months office experience. Salary negotiable.

Apply only to:
info@leinstershutters.ie

LEINSTER SHUTTERS & SHOPFRONTS

Atlanta Nursing Home
Sidmonton Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow is looking for

2 Full Time HEALTHCARE ASSISTANTS

Flexible (day and night duty) for 39 hours per week with annual remuneration of €30,000.

Submit CV to
visiting@atlantanursinghome.ie



Deirdre Keogh and Matthew Hudson at the Arklow RNLI Hurry to the Curry event in the Arklow Bay Hotel.

PLANNING

WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL	WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL	WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL
Niall and Leonie Byrne are applying for full planning permission for an attic conversion consisting of removal of hipped roof, alteration to roof profile, build-up of front Gable wall, additional front gable window, roof lights to north and south facing roof and all associated works at 167 Charlesland Court, Greystones Co. Wicklow. The planning application may be inspected or purchased at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy at the offices of Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Wicklow during its public opening hours and a submission or observation in relation to the application may be made to the authority in writing on payment of the prescribed fee within the period of 5 weeks beginning on the date of receipt by the authority of the application.	Planning permission is sought by Tim and Emma Lennon for Construction of a new single-storey infill extension to the front, a storey-and-a-half extension to the rear, internal renovations, and all associated site works at Brookhaven, Lodge Lane, Lacken, Blessington, Co. Wicklow, W91 H673. The planning application may be inspected or purchased at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy at the offices of Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Wicklow during its public opening hours and a submission or observation in relation to the application may be made to the authority in writing on payment of the prescribed fee within the period of 5 weeks beginning on the date of receipt by the authority of the application.	Ailsa McCreadie & Pedro Ontivero seek planning permission for: Two Storey Extension to Side and Single Storey Extension to Rear of Existing Dwelling at 116 Heathervue, Greystones, Co. Wicklow A63 NY06. The planning application may be inspected or purchased at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy at the offices of Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Wicklow during its public opening hours and a submission or observation in relation to the application may be made to the authority in writing on payment of the prescribed fee within the period of 5 weeks beginning on the date of receipt by the authority of the application.

ATTENTION
Architects, Planners & Builders

Reach the widest readership for your planning notices in County Wicklow with Wicklow Times

Call **01 286 9111** or email
pauline@localtimes.ie

Wicklow records over 1660 new domain registrations

The latest .ie Domain Profile Report 2024, launched last week, gives a glimpse into future economic activity in Ireland, highlighting the value of a strong online presence in response to the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

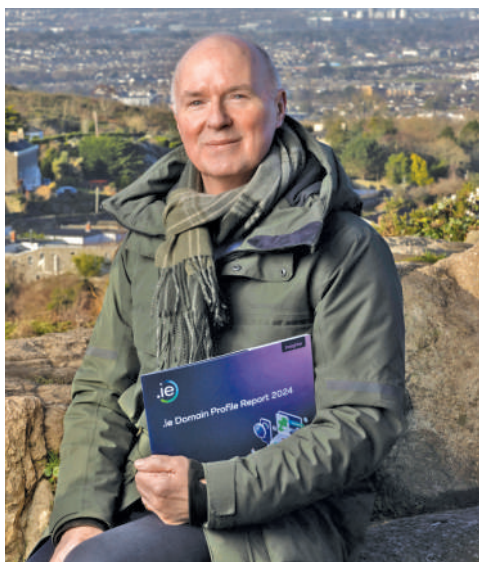
The report reveals that .ie continues to hold majority share of Ireland's hosted domains (54.2%) followed by .com (29.43%) and .uk (7.33%) with a 16% increase in the total .ie database over the past five years, despite marginal decrease in total database vs. 2023 (0.5%).

Both nationally and globally, changes in the way consumers engage with eCommerce (for instance via social media platforms) highlights the importance of establishing a stable digital presence via a controlled and secure website.

Now in its tenth year, the report is an annual exploration of the .ie database and is published by .ie, the national registry for .ie domain names. It also highlights the challenges and opportunities faced by internet users, businesses and government within Ireland's online ecosystem.

Digital Intention vs. Digital Growth

ie's flagship Digital Readiness Monitor report published last August revealed that one in three (36%) websites in Ireland have a low or very low level of sophistication. A website and the associated technologies it uses, serves as an indicator of how digitally advanced an organisation is. If the website is modern, functional, and user-friendly, it reflects that the overall



David Curtin, Chief Executive of .ie is pictured at the launch of the .ie Domain Profile Report 2024.

must invest more in infrastructure and supports for SMEs to take them onto the next step of digitalisation.

Overcoming the Digital Divide

The Domain Profile report also emphasises that digital technologies have the ‘potential to reduce the death of distance’ and bridge the gap between rural and urban areas and unlock new opportunities for Irish businesses, regardless of location. However, the report identifies evidence of an ongoing digital divide based on location, size and sector, in particular for micro-SMEs with fewer than 10 employees.

According to Eurostat, rural areas are falling behind when it comes to digital literacy across the European Union. In Ireland, 35% of people living in rural areas and 37% of people living in Irish towns and suburbs reported having above-basic overall digital skills, while 46.5% of the Irish population living cities reported having these skills. The digital divide does appear to be lessening in commuter areas such as Kildare.

Meath and Limerick where new .ie domain registrations continue to rise, however Connacht and Ulster largely recorded a decline in new registrations in 2024. .ie want to work with government to lessen this divide and

ensure businesses can thrive and prosper online regardless of location.

Importance of a Website and Omni-Channel Approach

There has been a notable decline in domain creations on a global scale. CENTR, the association of European country code top-level domain (ccTLD) registries, has highlighted notable shifts in recent years, particularly post-Covid. One potential reason for domain registration decline may be due to a recent surge in social selling - where social media apps such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok now have eCommerce capabilities on the app. Reuters reported in December last

year that TikTop Shop sales had reached \$100million last Black Friday as bargain hunting American consumers spent big online. While social media presents SMEs with an excellent opportunity to promote products and services, the recent US TikTok ban has revealed just how volatile it can be to use social selling as a business' sole eCommerce platform.

ie's David Curtin advises "When it comes to building a credible, trustworthy digital presence, websites should be seen as 'prime real estate'."

for any business online.

While social media is an excellent tool for increasing visibility and capturing audience interest, these platforms are limited in their ability to build lasting relationships with customers and, more importantly, convert them to sales. An "omni-channel" approach that offers customers more than one way to engage with business is best - where social media is used as a tool to drive traffic to a secure website. It is crucial that SMEs have control over their own eCommerce channels and are not solely reliant on third party selling platforms such as TikTok Shop which has been proven to be extremely volatile over the past few weeks.

A .ie website also provides reassurance for business owners that their main point of contact with consumers is safe from cyber threats as .ie websites boast significantly lower levels of spam and cyber threats, when compared to other top-level domains like .com. .ie continuously works to reduce the impact of security threats to the .ie namespace. This includes manually reviewing .ie applications; continuous security scanning the .ie database; and ensuring consumer protection protocols are in

line with national regulators and agencies.

Additional Domain Database Findings

Leitrim recorded the largest percentage growth (+51%) in new .ie domain registrations compared to 2023, followed by Tyrone (+20%) and Meath (+19%). Fermanagh has the smallest number of total .ie domain registrations in the country as just 191 total domains are registered there.

Keywords used in domain registrations continue to provide insight to public interest as Ireland, Dublin, Home, Design and House were among the top keywords used in registrations last year.

Cork pride appears to be strong as the longest .ie website address at 63 characters is corkcork-

corkcorkcorkcorkcork-
corkcorkcorkcorkcork-
corkcorkcork.ie; and the
shortest web address with
just 4 characters is 9.ie.

CLASSIFIEDS

THE MIRACULOUS PRAYER

Dear Heart of Jesus in the past I have asked for many favours. This time I ask you this very special one. (Mention request) Take it, dear Heart of Jesus and place it within your broken Heart where your Father sees it. Then, in his merciful eyes it will become your favour not mine. St Anthony and St Jude, helper of the hopeless, aid me in my distress. Amen. Say this prayer for three days. Promise publication and favour will be granted. Never known to fail. Thank you. S.M.

Gospel John 6: 35-40

Jesus said to the crowd: 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst. But, as I have told you, you can see me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away; because I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me and that I should raise it up on the last day. Yes, it is my Father's will that whoever see the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and that I shall raise him up on the last day.'

LOCAL BUSINESS

ALLSHADES BLINDS

- Roller • Vertical • Wood Venetian
- Pleated • Velux • Roman

Tel: 087 2201600

FACTORY: Unit 10, Block 1, Broomhall
Business Park, Rathnew. Tel: 0404 20344



RED LEAF

Tree Services

Call Us: 086 166 3728

Bray, Co. Wicklow.

- **Tree Services**
- **Hedge Work**
- **Gardening Services**

www.rltrees.ie

A beautiful well maintained garden can transform your property

Red Leaf Trees are
NPTC Qualified
and Fully
Insured Tree
Surgeons





O'Donnell
ROOFING
ARKLOW
*ROOFING SPECIALISTS WITH
3 GENERATIONS OF EXPERIENCE*
☎ 083 363 3133 ☎ 0402 20655
✉ antonodonnell@hotmail.com

 **KUL BEANS**
Kaffe

GREAT COFFEE  DELICIOUS BAKES 
& A WARM WELCOME 

**GRAB A SPECIALTY COFFEE AND TASTY TREATS TO
GO - PERFECT FOR A BUSY DAY OR A QUICK BREAK.**

Convenient parking available right beside us.
 Find us on Yellow Lane, next to TJ O'Mahony's Car
Park - Arklow, Wicklow

We're open daily - come say hello!
Stay tuned... exciting news coming soon!
Follow us @kulbeanskaffe





INTERNATIONAL

roofing and guttering

★★★★★

ESTABLISHED 1985

**Get Your
FREE QUOTE**

Call: 0858152741

Roofing contractor 35+ years in business • Wicklow • Open 24 hours

Ph: 085 815 2741 / 0404 78101

www.iroofing.ie Email: info@iroofing.ie

- Loft ventilation
- Gutter installation
- Gutter repairs
- Roof inspection
- Roof installation
- Roof repair
- Roof repair for storm and wind damage
- Skylight installation
- Skylight repair
- Asphalt Roofing
- Extension Roofing
- Facials and soffit
- Felt Roof Replacement
- Flat Roof Systems
- Flat Roofing Dublin
- Full Roof
- Guttering and Downpipes
- Home Roofing
- Lead Flashing
- Leaky Roof
- Moss Removal
- New Roofs Installed
- Pitched Roof
- Roof Leaks
- Roof Tiling

Sparrow's Nest

089 208 1836

Our Thursday special offer will continue for another few months :

Two course	€20.95
Two course and glass of wine or pint	€25.95
Three course.....	€25.95

(Thursdays only)

Market Square, Wicklow, Ireland  brideshead@yahoo.com

MAC'S FISH

"Kilmore Quay's Finest"

We carry an array of fresh local fish from Kilmore Quay.

We are in Kilcoole and Blessington every Thursday from 9.30am until 2pm.

- In **Kilcoole** we are parked by the Circle K garage, near the church.
- In **Blessington** we are parked in the square, near the Lemon Tree (which is now closed)

Starting Wednesday, we are in Newtownmountkennedy from 9am until 1.30pm. Parking somewhere on the main street - come find us

A white van with a blue circular logo on the back that says "MAC'S FISH" and features a stylized fish. Below the logo, there is a sign that reads "FRESH LOCAL FISH". The van is parked on a street, and a person is visible in the driver's seat.

DERMOT FORTUNE
**PAINTING &
DECORATING**
20 Years Experience
REASONABLE RATES
NO JOB TOO BIG OR SMALL
FREE QUOTE ON:
086-861 3651



ROOFING DUBLIN

Fully insured & vat registered

FREE QUOTES

CALL OUR EMERGENCY ROOF CARE LINE ON 087 394 8346

- New Roofing
- Lead Valleys
- Emergency Repairs
- Attic Insulations
- Flat Roofs
- Fascia & Soffits
- Guttering/Downpipes
- Chimney Repair
- Ridge Pointing
- Roof Cleaning

Call: 01 908 1455

www.roofing-dublin.com

ANTO'S TREE SERVICES

Fully Insured Tree Surgeon

*Pruning, Reductions
and Removal*

*All Aspects of
Tree Surgery*

Tel: 087 610 9128

A photograph showing a person's arm and hand holding a chainsaw, cutting into a tree stump. The chainsaw is orange and black. The background is a blurred green, suggesting a wooded area.

Flanaghan Kerins®

‘Furniture for Life’



**Cloud 2 Seater Power
Recliner Sofa
WAS €1945**

**NOW
€895**



**Storm 3 Seater Power
Recliner Sofa
WAS €1795**

**NOW
€1195**



**Kamala 180cm Dining Table and
6 x Anna Blue Dining Chairs -
Bundle Deal
WAS €1493**

**NOW
€699**



**Lola Round Dining table and
4 x Blue Oslo Dining chairs -
Bundle Deal
WAS €811**

**NOW
€495**

FIND US
Take Exit 7 on the N11.
We're just 5 minutes
from the exit!



Ask about our
interest free credit
available with
hummm
T&Cs apply



Flanaghan Kerins®
‘Furniture for Life’



www.flanagankerins.ie



+353 1 281 3338



sales@flanagankerins.ie

Unit 3, Bray Retail Park, Southern Cross Rd, Bray, Co. Wicklow, A98 W985