

Dear IARSLCE Participants and Colleagues,

I and National University of Ireland, Galway welcome you the West of Ireland and our campus that hosts the 17th International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement Annual Conference on the theme of *Gateways - Charting New Territories & Forging Authentic Relationships*. It is both our honour and privilege to host the 2017 conference and we endeavour to ensure that this important event will enable the sharing of knowledge and the development of research-led relationships.

We are delighted to welcome participants from Europe, North America, South America, Australia, Africa and Asia to discuss the purpose of our work in university community engagement and service learning from diverse local, regional and international contexts. We anticipate the conference will offer a space to explore, debate, critique and advance the role of universities in society and community through authentic and genuine relationships.

As articulated in the NUI Galway Strategic Plan Vision 2020; *“In 1845, at the height of the Great Irish Famine, the foundation stones of Queen’s College Galway were laid at the edge of the city. From the new Quadrangle building, the first intake of 68 students looked out across empty fields and a city ravaged by fear. But the University founders did not allow those challenges to limit their ambitions. Their work began a tradition of scholarship and discovery that would confront the problems of the day, and empower their city and region to prosper.”* Although contemporary challenges have changed, almost 200 years later NUI Galway remains committed to community and society not least through the development of the Community Knowledge Initiative that ensures that a civic engagement ethos and practice prevails the University. Initially funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies, the CKI over the last 15 years has grown in strength and has developed collaborative and diverse pathways that connect the university, its resources and people to local, regional, national and international communities. Civic and community engagement is a central feature and hallmark of the NUI Galway experience and one that we are proud of.

The CKI is housed in a recently established research institute at NUI Galway, namely the Institute for Lifecourse and Society (ILAS). The Institute engages research that informs policy development and practice to make a positive difference to people’s lives. ILAS brings together existing work in relation to targeted populations, such as older persons, children and families, and persons with disabilities into one domain of research, teaching, and policy and community engagement. The core function of the Institute is the pursuit of interdisciplinary research in the social sciences by creatively integrating the rich and diverse intellectual resources from within the University and

beyond. At the heart of ILAS is SAOL Café which is a partnership between NUI Galway & SCCUL Enterprises to develop a community based social enterprise café working with Employability Galway and other disability support services, to give employment to people traditionally marginalised from employment opportunities, thereby creating a social inclusion model. The Café is the first community-based social enterprise café to exist on a higher education campus in Ireland and emulates the ILAS ethos.

We would like to also thank everyone who make this event possible including the IARSLCE Board, Conference Committees, Tara Luparello, the CKI team, NUI Galway Conference Office, our sponsors the Higher Education Authority, CKI, Campus Engage, Fáilte Ireland, peer reviewers, moderators, and of course, you the attendees and presenters. Thank you for travelling near and far to be here with us. Should you require any additional service or support while you are at NUI Galway please look out for our IARSLCE Student Volunteer team and Staff teams who are here to ensure you have as productive and social a time as is possible.

Yours sincerely,

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