North West Tertiary Education Cluster

ATU | Ulster University | north west regional college | etb

NW 2026: Realising our Digital Potential Conference

Guildhall, Derry~Londonderry

20 October 2026



PEACEPLUS
Northern Ireland - Ireland
Co-funded by the European Union | UK Government
Rialtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland | Northern Ireland Executive

North West DEPTH
Digital Employment Pathways Training Hub

NW 2026: Realising Our Digital Potential Conference

The annual North West Digital Employment Pathways Training Hub (NW DEPTH) Digital Conference is a unique opportunity to bring together leading national and international experts to explore the opportunities and challenges arising from the accelerating pace of digital transformation.

NW DEPTH is an ambitious learner-centred digital skill initiative – supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) – that will deliver flexible study opportunities for upskilling and reskilling the North West's workforce.

NW DEPTH is a key strand of activity progressed through the well-established strategic alliance of all four publicly funded tertiary education providers in the North West City Region. The North West Tertiary Education Cluster (NWTEC) involving Atlantic Technological University (ATU), Ulster University (UU), North West Regional College (NWRC) and Donegal College of Further Education and Training, managed by Donegal ETB has been working closely on a broad agenda encompassing skills pathways, innovation, research, and community engagement activities since 2018.

This conference is the second in a series of four conferences that form a key commitment within the NW DEPTH project which will be hosted each October alternating between venues on both sides of the border:

- NW 2025: Shaping our Digital Futures (ATU Letterkenny – 23/10/2025)
- NW 2026: Realising our Digital Potential (Guildhall Derry~Londonderry – 20/10/2026)
- NW 2027: Connecting our Digital Worlds
- NW 2028: Securing our Digital Tomorrow

As digital technologies continue to reshape industries, workplaces and communities, the conference will provide a platform for discussion, collaboration and knowledge sharing on the trends that will influence the future of thecross-border North West City Region.

Whether you represent a large organisation, a small business, a start-up, a community enterprise, or are simply interested in developing your own digital skills and career opportunities, the conference will offer valuable insights and networking opportunities for all.

Over the series of four annual conferences, the series will examine emerging digital developments and identify the key trends most relevant to the region's economic growth, workforce development and digital innovation over the medium to long term. The aim is to build on the success of each conference and to assist in achieving the vision for the North West City Region as set out in the revised North West Strategic Growth Plan:

A Shared North West - connected, thriving, competitive and sustainable cross- border city region



Introductions



Conference Opening and MC

Sean O'Rourke - Broadcaster, formerly RTE

Sean is one of Ireland's best known print and broadcast journalists, having worked in journalism for over 50 years. For over three decades Sean worked with RTE, as a programme editor and then as Presenter of the News at One on Radio 1. He also presented The Week in Politics on RTE One television for ten years. He is a three time winner of the News Broadcaster of the year, and was conferred with an honorary Doctorate of Laws by the University of Galway in recognition of his contribution to journalism.



Welcome

Grace Ní Niallais - Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council

Originally from Randalstown and past pupil of St Louis Grammar School, and Queen's University, Grace has lived and worked in Derry for the past 20 years. Grace has been a Councillor in the Foyleside DEA since the 2023 elections and lives in the Foyleside area. She was co-chair of the North West Community Wealth Building Partnership, a board member of Visit Derry and is a Governor for Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir. Grace is an advocate for the Irish language and culture and has a keen interest in local history and built heritage.



Introductory and closing remarks on behalf of NWTEC

Prof Malachy Ó Néill, Director of Regional Engagement, UU & Chair of the Governing Body NWRC

Malachy is Director of Regional Engagement and Professor of Irish at Ulster University. He previously served as Provost of the University's Magee campus (2016–21) and Head of the School of Irish Language and Literature (2012–17). He has played a leading role in major regional and cross-border initiatives, including City and Growth Deals, the Shared Island initiative, the establishment of Ulster University's School of Medicine, the North West Cross-border Tertiary Cluster, the Manchester United Foundation Hub, and Derry and Strabane's designation as a UNESCO Learning City Region.



Introducing the North West Strategic Growth Plan

John Kelpie Chief Executive, Derry City & Strabane District Council

John is the Chief Executive of Derry City and Strabane District Council. Established in April 2015 as a result of a programme of local government reform in Northern Ireland, the Council area comprises the vibrant and youthful City of Derry/Londonderry, the busy market town of Strabane. John led on the creation of the new organisation designing an innovative, flexible and responsive staffing structure with a clear vision and purpose to develop a thriving, prosperous and sustainable City and Region with equality of opportunity for all.



Closing remarks

Dr Orla Flynn - President Atlantic Technological University

Orla was appointed inaugural President of Atlantic Technological University in April 2022, having served two years as President of Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology. Prior to this she was Vice President for External Affairs at Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) for six years, and previous academic leadership roles in CIT included Head of CIT Crawford College of Art & Design and Head of School of Humanities. Orla commenced her academic career as a Lecturer in Computer Science, holding undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in Mathematical Physics and Computer Science from University College Cork, an MA in Management in Education from Waterford Institute of Technology, and a PhD from the Kemmy Business School at the University of Limerick. She is a current Director on the Boards of HEANet and the Technological Universities Association and has previously held Director positions on both Cork and Galway Chambers of Commerce.

Keynote Speakers

Morning Keynote Address - Silicon Valley Perspectives



Matt Regan, Chief Policy Officer Bay Area Council, San Francisco

Matt Regan is Chief Policy Officer at the Bay Area Council; a public policy and advocacy organization representing 400 of the San Francisco/Silicon Valley region's largest employers. HIs responsibilities include promoting the Bay Area Council's legislative and political agendas at the local, state and federal levels specializing in housing and land use, business climate/economic development and workforce issues. Matt has over 20 years experience working in the political arena and prior to joining the Bay Area Council Matt worked as a lobbyist, VP of Government Affairs for a Fortune 100 bank, a State Assembly legislative aide and a field organizer for several high profile elections across the Bay Area. Matt is a native of Ireland. He attended the Middlesex University School of Law in London where he earned his LLB and the University of Ulster School of Business where he graduated with a Post Graduate Diploma in Marketing. Outside the office he enjoys fly fishing with his daughter in the Sierra Nevada and falling off mountain bikes.



Kelly Cure, Vice President, Public Policy, Bay Area Council, San Francisco

Kelly is Vice President, Public Policy focusing on the future of work, workforce development and education. She joins the Bay Area Council with 17 years of global work experience spanning a variety of sectors. In 2019, during her MBA program at UC Berkeley Haas School of Business, she founded and launched Skillful.ly – the equitable employment platform, as a VC backed Public Benefit Corporation, which she led for 4 years before stepping down to advise the company externally. Much of Kelly's workforce background centers on connecting candidates from historically marginalized populations with higher quality employment for the future. Kelly's previous work experience spanned Europe, the UK and Africa, where she started as a management consultant with Deloitte before launching her entrepreneurial journey. She's founded two businesses, both still in operation today and enjoys guest lecturing for visiting global entrepreneurial groups and at UC Berkeley each semester. In her spare time Kelly choreographs and teaches dance, she's a competitive trail and ultramarathoner and served as a commissioner on Oakland's Public Safety and Services Violence Prevention Oversight Commission.

Keynote outline

The San Francisco Bay Area, Silicon Valley Perspective: AI's impact on our economy, and future of work

Chief Policy Officer of the Bay Area Council, Matt Regan and VP Kelly Cure share a cross-sector perspective covering AI's impacts on the economy, policy, business and workforce, straight from the epicenter of AI development in the Bay Area.

This session will cover the economic impact of AI, including global implications, and how it has shaped policy, affordability, jobs and education in the Bay Area and beyond. The Bay Area Council is the region's largest business member consortium (400 active members), a public policy organization and think-tank known for its legacy as "the civic voice of business". Often tasked with tackling the region's largest cross-sector challenges and systems-level opportunities, the organization has been at the center of policy, programming and education reform in the Bay Area for over 80 years. With all of the frontier labs as active members and partners, the presenters will cover the various perspectives, challenges and incentives at play, and how this shapes our work, lives and systems. This session will also cover the future of work and education, what skills we expect to be most essential, and the complexities of our changing political environment in California and the US at large.

Keynote Speakers

Afternoon Keynote Address - AI Development to Deployment



Bronagh Lanigan, Principal AI Engineer
Ulster University's Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC)

Bronagh is Principal AI Engineer at Ulster University's Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC), specialising in the development and delivery of AI solutions, applied research, and industry-focused innovation. With a First Class BEng in Electronics and Computing Systems and a research background in Pervasive Computing, Bronagh has extensive experience spanning AI, data science, software engineering, and cybersecurity. Her career has included roles across academia and industry, contributing to advanced research, enterprise security solutions, and manufacturing innovation projects. Bronagh works closely with organisations to translate emerging AI technologies into practical, impactful applications while championing the responsible and effective adoption of AI.

Keynote outline

From initial idea to real-world implementation, this session explores the key decisions involved in developing and deploying AI solutions. Using practical examples, attendees will gain an understanding of technology selection, Responsible AI, and the steps required to transform AI concepts into impactful applications.

DfE Strategy Address - The importance of Digital Skills to Support Economic Growth



Louise Long Director (Acting) Strategic Policy and Services Division, Skills and Education Group DfE representing Minister Caoimhe Archibald

Louise is a CIPFA-qualified accountant and currently serves as CIPFA Regional President for Northern Ireland. She has spent 26 years in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, building much of her career in economic policy and finance while working on a wide range of strategic and public service priorities. Louise recently joined the Department for the Economy's Skills and Education Group, following a year helping to establish the Office of Science and Technology in support of Northern Ireland's first Chief Scientific and Technical Adviser. During that time, she played a leading role in developing Northern Ireland's AI Strategy and supporting its launch for public consultation. A graduate of Ulster University, Louise is passionate about public service, innovation and helping shape policies that support people, communities and the economy.

Panel Discussion 1: North West Digital and Technology Innovators



Chair

Gavin Killeen MBE DL, MD Nuprint Technologies, Chair of NWTEC Smart Industry Board

Nuprint is the Lead Company for the NW based Advanced Manufacturing Cluster, GEMX. As Managing Director of Nuprint Technologies, Gavin has led the company through a period of significant change and investment which has resulted in growth, improvements in business efficiency and profitability. Gavin was awarded the honour of Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the New Year Honours List 2023 by His Majesty The King for services to Further Education in Northern Ireland.
He was also awarded an Honorary Degree, Doctor of Science (DSc honoris causa) by Ulster University in June 2025 in recognition of outstanding contribution to the business and commerce sectors.



Donagh Kelly, Deputy CEO of Circet Group

Donagh is from Donegal Town and currently serves as Deputy CEO of Circet.
Circet is a global contracting business specialising in the deployment and construction of telecoms, power and energy networks in both public and private sectors. Following a successful startup of KN Group in 1994 Donagh built the business to become a formidable force in the above sectors. The decision was taken in 2018 to merge with Circet, the market leader in France to embark on a journey of European and Global expansion and the journey is ongoing.



Maria Mc Keever, Chief Operating Officer, Awaken Hub

Maria is Chief Operating Officer of AwakenHub, the social enterprise supporting women founders across the island of Ireland, and its sister company AwakenAngels, Ireland's women-led angel investment syndicate. As a core consortium partner in Women TechEU, the Horizon Europe and EIC-funded programme backing women-led deep tech startups, Maria leads the Programme of Services, shaping the support founders receive across cohorts, and investor matchmaking work, connecting founders with angels, syndicates and early-stage VCs across Europe. A Chartered Marketer, she brings experience spanning tech startups, the public sector, manufacturing and transport to building stronger routes to capital for women in deep tech



Gerry Kindlon, former Director of Government Relations Europe at Seagate

Gerry retired last year after a 32 year career with Seagate Technology. He has wide experience across Operations, Engineering and Product Management. Prior to his retirement he led Seagate's Government Relations team in EMEA. He has worked closely with digital and technology policy makers in Brussels, UK and Ireland. Gerry is a current board member of Catalyst and a former president of Derry~Londonderry Chamber of Commerce.



John Harkin OBE, Managing Director Integration & Growth, Global Insurance, NTT DATA Inc.

John is the founder and former CEO of Alchemy Technology Services, an insurance technology consultancy established in Derry/Londonderry in 2018. He founded the company to create a Centre of Excellence for insurance software implementation while supporting economic growth in the Northwest. Following Alchemy's integration into NTT DATA, he remains a board member and now holds a global leadership role within the organisation. John's career spans more than 30 years across technology consulting, insurance software and business transformation. Early roles included KPMG and Apple Computer Europe, where he worked on major technology initiatives in London, Paris and Cupertino. John was awarded an OBE for services to the economy and has also received an Honorary Doctorate from Ulster University in recognition of his contributions to business, technology and regional development.



William Mc Colgan, Director McColgan's Quality Foods

William's Career began as a trainee actuarial consultant with Mercer in Dublin and segued into the technology of actuarial valuations, a role which took him from Dublin to Germany to America. Whilst working in Philadelphia, William emerged from the Wharton School with an MBA in Entrepreneurial Management. A move to Boston followed with roles in the Insurance industry, as well as 5 years growing an artificial intelligence start-up. William returned to Ireland in 2020 when he and his sister purchased a family business. This transaction completed in 2022 and they have been transforming the company since then.

Panel Discussion 2: Supporting Digital Transformation



Chair

Paul Hannigan, VP for Cross-border Engagement at ATU & Head of College for ATU Donegal

Having graduated from UCD with a Bachelor of Commerce and Masters of Business Studies, Paul worked in Dundalk IT from 1987. In 1992 Paul became Head of Department of Business Studies at Dundalk, until his appointment as President of Letterkenny IT in 1998. He subsequently completed an MSc in Management Practice at Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and in January 2008 was appointed as President of LYIT for a further ten years. Paul commenced a further five-year contract as LYIT President in January 2018 and after the designation of the Atlantic Technological University (ATU) on 1 April 2022, he now holds the role of VP for Cross-border Engagement/Head of College at ATU Donegal.



Donal Travers, Executive Director, IDA

Dónal is Executive Director at IDA Ireland, the Irish government's Investment Development Agency. He joined IDA Ireland in 1997 from the food sector and has worked in a number of locations for the agency, including five years in the Silicon Valley office in Mountain View, California. As Executive Director, Dónal has oversight of a number of IDA Ireland's operations and services remits. These include client-facing activities in Technology, Financial Services, Emerging and Scaling Business, and Industrial Engineering. He also has responsibility for the organisation's Corporate Services, Regions, and Property activities, with a focus on the delivery of IDA Ireland's five-year strategy, Adapt Intelligently: A Strategy for Sustainable Growth and Innovation. Dónal is a graduate of Dublin City University.



Dr Vicky Kell, Director, Innovation, Research & Development, Invest Northern Ireland

Since graduating from Queen's University Belfast with a B.Sc (Hons), M.Sc. and Ph.D.; Vicky has gained significant business experience working with companies in both a strategic and operational capacity. She has been in senior leadership roles in industry, advisory and economic development. Vicky's significant experience in both private and public sectors has developed her expertise in innovation, technology and international commercialisation. She is passionate about Northern Ireland and her aim is to facilitate the economic development of NI PLC through the growth and global competition of local businesses.



Michael Mc Quillan, Chief Executive of Enterprise Northern Ireland

Michael is Chief Executive of Enterprise NI, representing Northern Ireland's Local Enterprise Agencies and supporting enterprise development, access to finance and workspace provision. Its Enterprise Barometer is now the region's largest longitudinal study of micro and small businesses, informing policy and business support. Michael has a background in entrepreneurship having established and grown several businesses, most notably, as Co-founder of The Streat coffee chain. Michael grew the business significantly, through franchising, before its acquisition in 2010. He previously led Ulster University's Business Institute and Centre for SME Development and was appointed as Visiting Professor in 2010. Over the past 12 years Michael has served on the boards of Invest NI, Tourism NI and South Eastern Regional College.



Anne Lanigan, Head of Local Enterprise & Regions, Enterprise Ireland

Anne is a member of the Senior Leadership Team in Enterprise Ireland, the Irish government agency responsible for the development of Irish owned enterprise. She is currently Divisional Manager for the Local Enterprise & Regions division. Anne joined Enterprise Ireland in 2003 and has held a number of management positions, including Manager of the Tokyo office, Head of the Brexit Unit, Regional Director for Europe and most recently Divisional Manager for Technology, Services and Consumer Sectors. She is a mechanical engineer by profession and previous to joining Enterprise Ireland worked in software development, banking, medical device manufacturing and international consultancy. Anne passionately believes in the potential of Irish enterprise across all regions and the expanded role it can and must play in Ireland's future.

Panel Discussion 3: Future of Skills and Work



Chair

Dr Catherine O' Mullan, Interim Principal and CEO North West Regional College

Catherine has over 35 years of experience in the Further and Higher Education sector, with expertise in leading curriculum development and planning for all types of professional and technical provision in the sector including FE, HE, Apprenticeships (including HLAs), Essential Skills, Entitlement Framework, Community and Economic Engagement bespoke training. Her experience extends to leading and developing staff and teams, resource and budget planning and data analysis for performance management and quality improvement. With a background in Genetic Engineering, Catherine has a specific interest in STEM and the parity of esteem between professional and technical qualifications and traditional academic pathways.



Dr Tara McIndoe Calder, Senior Research Officer, ESRI

Tara's research interests are in applied microeconomics (firms and households) and macro-micro linkages. She has a particular interest in the joint distribution of household income, spending and wealth, including labour market dynamics, spending and saving decisions, indebtedness, and inequality. She has worked on credit risk modelling and Small and Medium Enterprise credit allocation as well as a broad range of development economics issues including factor flows, trade, migration, capital flows and macro finance (inflation, government revenue, financial institutions). Tara is the chair of the Irish Society for Women in Economics (ISWE), a standing committee of the Irish Economic Association that works to enhance the diversity and representation of the profession in Ireland.



Kathleen O' Hare OBE, Chair of Northern Ireland Skills Council

Kathleen is Chair of the Northern Ireland Skills Council and a Co-Lead on the Minister's AI Advisory Panel. A former headteacher of two large post-primary schools, including St Cecilia's College in Derry, she has extensive experience across education, curriculum, skills and leadership.
She has served on the boards of CCEA, Queen's University Belfast and Belfast Metropolitan College and has worked internationally with the British Council. Her work in Northern Ireland focuses on strengthening collaboration between education, government and industry, and supporting upskilling and reskilling for a rapidly changing economy and world of work.



Brenda Hegarty, Head of Economic Development, Donegal County Council

Brenda's career has been dedicated to supporting economic development, social inclusion and regional development across the border region of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Brenda has extensive experience spanning local government, cross-border development and EU funding programmes, including previous roles as Head of Enterprise with Donegal County Council, Programme Manager with the Special EU Programmes Body, Leader Manager with Fermanagh District Council, Senior Executive Officer with Leitrim County Council and Development Officer with the Association for the Development of Pettigo & Tullyhommon (ADOPT). In addition to her professional career, she holds several other roles with Pobal, Donegal Sports Partnership CLG, Donegal County Enterprise Fund CLG and Donegal Food Coast CLG. Brenda holds an MBA and a First-Class Honours degree from the University of Ulster and is currently studying for the Institute of Directors Chartered Director's Programme.



Michael Callaghan, Reader, School of Computing, Engineering and Intelligent Systems, UU

Michael is a Reader at Ulster University and the founder and co-conference chair of the National Conference on Generative Artificial Intelligence in Education (GenAIEdu) series of conferences. His research interests include educational games, virtual worlds, Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, remote and virtual laboratories, 3D scanning and rendering, and generative AI in education. He has secured funding from the AHRC, DETI, INVESTNI, INTERREG, JISC, Garfield Weston Trust and carries out regular consultancy, academic enterprise activities and invited talks.

Panel Discussion 4: Delivering a Smart North West



Chair

Anne Mc Hugh, Chief Executive of Donegal Education and Training Board

Anne is Chief Executive of Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB). She has spent her entire career in education initially as a teacher of Geography and Gaeilge before becoming Deputy Principal in Crana College, Buncrana, followed by her Principalship of Errigal College, Letterkenny. Both jobs were with the former Co Donegal VEC and in 2012 she joined as Education Officer and proceeded to her current role as Chief Executive in 2016.



Kathryn Harkin, Head of AI at NTT Data

Kathryn is Head of AI Northern Ireland at NTT DATA and Chair of the Advisory Board of the Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC). With over 25 years of experience in technology, data and AI, she has led the development of AI capabilities, specialist talent, and technology-enabled transformation across global organisations. Prior to joining NTT DATA, Kathryn held senior AI leadership roles at FinTrU and Allstate Northern Ireland. She is a recognised advocate for AI innovation, skills development, and industry-academic collaboration across the North West.



Dr Clare Ryan, Founder ITUS Protect

Clare is the founder of ITUS Protect, a cyber risk management solution for SMEs with embedded cyber insurance. She holds Certified Data Protect Officer (CDPO) status in addition to her PhD and MA. She has extensive experience in data governance and project management. She has previously worked with a wide range of stakeholders including lobbying for societal changes in higher education policies. ITUS protect is an award-winning start-up, being named Zurich's Innovation Champion in Ireland, NCSC Cyber Den winner (UK) and a Lloyds Labs Cohort 16 Alumna.



Fiona Bennington, Director of Entrepreneurship and Scaling, Catalyst

Fiona is Director of Entrepreneurship and Scaling at non-profit Catalyst, the Financial Times-ranked number one start-up hub on the island of Ireland. A three time founder, award winning design engineer and entrepreneurship leader, Fiona brings over a decade of experience in product development, entrepreneurship, innovation and commercialisation. She has led inclusive entrepreneurship initiatives, created systems to support early-stage and scaling companies, and contributed to regional ecosystem development through Catalyst's work with MIT REAP. Fiona is passionate about entrepreneurship as a vehicle for rapid positive development, change and opportunity creation, and about building practical, founder-centred support that helps entrepreneurs validate ideas, access networks, build confidence and scale internationally. The impact of her work, supported by her team has resulted in over half a billion capital raise, 1400 new jobs and sustained growth of 10% year on year.



Paul Phelan, Vice President External Affairs, Optum

Paul is a member of the International External Affairs team with accountability for Optum Irelands policy positions relative to government approval and implementation of legislation and regulatory guidelines. Paul organises and participates in forums with government and regulatory officials to review business activities and potential legislation that may affect Optum Irelands licence to operate. He ensures positive, professional relationships with legislatures, Government officials, Government bodies, industry bodies and third level institutions. Paul provides advice and perspective to the Ireland leadership team of pending legislation and regulatory issues that could impact the company, and partners with product development management to ensure compliance. Prior to joining Optum, Paul held various senior positions in the tech industry at Apple and Intel Corp. He has a blend of experience and expertise in operations management, corporate affairs, communications and government affairs

Panel Discussion 5: AI for a Digital Island



Chair

Prof Jim Harkin Head of the School of Computing, Engineering and Intelligent Systems, UU

Jim is Head of the School of Computing, Engineering and Intelligent Systems at Ulster University. His research focuses on neuromorphic computing, biologically inspired embedded systems and intelligent hardware architectures. He has secured over £25M in research funding from UK, European and international funding bodies, working extensively with academic and industry partners. A strong emphasis of his work is the translation and commercialisation of research, supporting innovation and creating pathways for advanced technologies to move from research into real-world applications.



John Durcan, Chief Technologist, IDA

John is the Chief Technologist for Technology at IDA Ireland. His background is in ML/AI and currently looks after the sectors of Quantum Software, Telecoms, Semiconductors, Cyber Security, AI. His role is to work with companies to develop out their R&D capability in Ireland and help grow collaborations both between industry and academia. John also works on a number of large European funding programmes, such as Horizon Europe and Import Projects of Common European Interests (IPECIs). He works with government on key technology strategies and regulation, such as the EU AI ACT and Ireland's national strategies in Quantum, Semiconductor and Digital. He is board member on two Irish researcher centres, ADAPT (AI focus), Lero (Software research).



Dr Debbie Rankin, Senior Lecturer in Computer Science, UU

Debbie is a Senior Lecturer in Computer Science and Programme Director for the MSc Data Science & AI at Ulster University. She is a member of the Human Centred Computing research group, with research and teaching interests spanning Artificial Intelligence, Synthetic Data, Health Informatics, Immersive Technologies and Computer Vision. Debbie is Ulster University's Principal Investigator for the €14 million Horizon Europe LUCIA project, which is investigating lung cancer-related risk factors and their impact, and is a Co-Investigator on a number of other externally funded projects, including the Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC). She teaches across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and supervises postgraduate research in AI, data science and health-related applications.



Dr Mick Mc Cann, Senior Lecturer ATU, Academic Director JANUS Research Centre

Mick is Senior Lecturer for Research Development at Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and a Principal Investigator in Rínn AI, Ireland's national research centre for Data Science and AI. He is also Academic Director of ATU's JANUS Research Centre for AI, HPC and Emerging Technologies. His work focuses on building AI research and innovation ecosystems, connecting advanced infrastructure and research talent with industry, healthcare and public-sector partners. He leads major national and cross-border initiatives including ONEHEALTH and Data2Sustain EDIH, and has secured over €8 million in competitive funding within collaborative programmes valued at more than €45 million, with a strong focus on translating AI and data science into societal and economic impact.



Joe Dunleavy, Regional CTO for Europe and Global Head of Dava.X AI group at Endava

Joe is an AI, Innovation, Software Delivery, Design, Product and Business lead experienced c-suite executive with 20+ years professional experience. He is European CTO and Global SVP, Head of Dava.X AI group at Endava (NYSE: DAVA). During his 16 years at Pramerica (now TCS), he held several leadership roles including Regional CTO, Global SVP, Global Innovation Head, Interim Global Product Acceleration Head, US based Interim CIO, Software Development Lead and Technical Project Manager. Joe holds an MA and Post Grad in UX & Applied Innovation, an MBS in Innovation & Leadership and a BSc in Computer Science. He is a certified Amazon Cloud Practitioner and Microsoft Azure Fundamentals professional.

AI Demonstration: Unlocking Digital Potential Through AI



Ezekias-Okupevi, Data Scientist, AICC

Ezekias is a Data Scientist at Ulster University's Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC), where he works with businesses to explore how artificial intelligence can solve real-world challenges and create practical value. His work involves understanding business problems, identifying opportunities for AI, and developing data-driven solutions and proof-of-concepts across areas including machine learning, generative AI and computer vision. With an MSc in Data Science and a BEng in Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Ezekias brings experience spanning both industry and research, with previous work in areas including fraud detection, smart manufacturing, GenAI and agentic AI. He is particularly interested in the practical application of emerging AI technologies and helping organisations adopt AI effectively.



Dr Leigh Johnston, Research Fellow, AICC

Leigh is a Research Fellow at Ulster University's Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC), with expertise in User Experience (UX), Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Data Visualisation, and the responsible adoption of emerging technologies. She holds a PhD in Data Visualisation, underpinned by UX and AI, alongside a First Class BSc (Hons) in Interactive Multimedia Design. Her experience includes applied research across digital health, smart manufacturing, AI, and data-driven innovation, including roles with Ulster University's Human Centred Computing team, the Smart Manufacturing Data Hub, and Hewlett Packard Enterprise. Leigh works closely with organisations to explore practical applications of AI and emerging technologies, with a focus on how people interact with, understand, and use them. Her work aims to create clear, accessible, and actionable experiences that support responsible innovation and meaningful change.



Dr Matthew Manktelow, Research Fellow, AICC

With an academic background intersecting the physical, biological and computational sciences, Matthew has over ten years experience in undertaking quantitative and data driven applied research for and in partnership with a wide range of commercial and public sector organisations across the process industries and the health and social care sector. A keen interest in the interactions of data, systems, and people, as well as in how insights gleaned from quantitative data can be developed into practical applications to the benefit of organisations, mean that Matthew is enthusiastic to have recently joined the AICC team.

Demo 1: Second Unit Scene Scout

A location scouting firm in the film/TV industry, Second Unit spend a lot of time manually trawling their proprietary database of filming locations across NI to identify suitable sites. AICC helped them develop a dynamic, interactive visual database. AI tools describe the images, which can then be searched using well-tested and low latency text search tools. At every stage the human user remains in the driver's seat - they can add their own notes to alter/improve the AI's first draft. Using this bespoke search engine reduces their turnaround time for customer requests.

Demo 2: Arclyte

A research intensive consultancy firm who want to leverage the power of modern AI tools to help generate research reports without falling foul of AI hallucinations and related pitfalls. Arclyte worked with AICC to embed their years of experience into a workflow that channeled the power of frontier AI tools into the most profitable research directions and ensured that the resulting report was entirely and consistently grounded in a set of trusted and pre-vetted data sources. The resulting tools will significantly cut the time taken to write a report.

Demo 3: Nemo Energy

Nemo install and manage renewable energy technology - solar panels, wind turbines, batteries etc. - in domestic properties. They are aware customers are losing money by charging batteries to a higher level than they need to, either because they won't use the energy or they could get it from their solar/wind. By leveraging historic energy usage data for the household and live weather forecasts, AICC built a stochastic probabilistic forecast model that optimises battery charge level on a rolling 24 hour basis - the resulting dynamic charging recommendations can support more cost-effective energy use for homeowners.

Session 1		
Opening and Welcome		
Indicative Times		
9.20 am – 9.50 am	Conference Opening, Welcome, and Introductions	Conference Opening: MC Sean O Rourke, journalist and broadcaster
		Welcome: Grace Uí Niallais, Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council
		Introductory remarks on behalf of NWTEC: Professor Malachy O'Neill, Director of Regional Engagement, Ulster University
Panel Discussion 1: North West Digital and Technology Innovators		
9:50 am – 10:30 am	Chair: Gavin Killeen MBE DL, MD Nuprint Technologies, Chair of NWTEC Smart Industry Board	1. Donagh Kelly, Deputy CEO of Circet Group 2. Maria McKeever, Chief Operating Officer, Awaken Hub 3. Gerry Kindlon, former Director at Seagate 4. John Harkin OBE, NTT DATA 5. William Mc Colgan, Director McColgan's Quality Foods
Morning Keynote Address		
10:30 am – 10:55 am	Title: Silicon Valley Perspectives	Matt Regan, Chief Policy Officer, Bay Area Council, San Francisco Kelly Cure, Vice President, Public Policy, Bay Area Council, San Francisco
Panel Discussion 2: Supporting Digital Transformation		
10.55 am – 11.30 am	Chair: Paul Hannigan, VP for Cross-border Engagement at ATU & Head of College for ATU Donegal	1. Donal Travers, Executive Director, IDA 2. Dr Vicky Kell, Director, Innovation, Research & Development, Invest Northern Ireland 3. Michael McQuillan, Chief Executive Enterprise Northern Ireland 4. Anne Lanigan, Head of Local Enterprise & Regions, Enterprise Ireland
Coffee Break 11.30 am – 11.45 am		
Session 2		
Panel Discussion 3: Future of Skills and Work		
11:45 am – 12:20 pm	Chair: Dr Catherine O'Mullan, Interim Principal and CEO NWRC	1. Tara McIndoe Calder, Senior Research Officer, ESRI 2. Kathleen O'Hare, Chair of Northern Ireland Skills Council 3. Brenda Hegarty, Head of Economic Development, Donegal County Council 4. Michael Callaghan, Reader, School of Computing, Engineering and Intelligent Systems, UU.

Panel Discussion 4: Delivering a Smart North West		
12:20 pm – 1:00 pm	Chair: Anne Mc Hugh, Chief Executive of Donegal Education and Training Board	1. Kathryn Harkin, Head of AI at NTT Data 2. Clare Ryan, Founder ITUS Protect 3. Fiona Bennington, Director of Entrepreneurship and Scaling, Catalyst 4. Paul Phelan, Vice President External Affairs, Optum
LunchBreak:1.00pm –1.40pm		
Session3		
Afternoon Keynote Address		
1.40 pm – 2.00 pm	Title: AI Development to Deployment	Bronagh Lanigan, Principal AI Engineer at Ulster University's Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC)
DfE Strategy Address		
2.00pm – 2.10pm	The importance of Digital Skills to Support Economic Growth	Louise Long, Director (Acting) Strategic Policy and Services Division, Skills and Education Group, DfE representing Minister Caoimhe Archibald
North West City Region Discussion		
2:10 pm – 2.20 pm	Introducing the North West Strategic Growth Plan	John Kelpie, Chief Executive, Derry City & Strabane District Council
Panel Discussion 5: AI for a Digital Island		
2.20 pm – 2.55 pm	Chair: Professor Jim Harkin Head of the School of Computing, Engineering and Intelligent Systems, Ulster University	1. John Durcan, Chief Technologist, IDA 2. Dr Debbie Rankin, Senior Lecturer in Computer Science, UU 3. Dr Mick Mc Cann, Senior Lecturer ATU, Academic Director JANUS Research Centre 4. 4. Joe Dunleavy, Regional CTO for Europe and Global Head of Dava.X AI group at Endava
AI Demonstration		
2.55 pm – 3.20 pm	Title: Unlocking Digital Potential Through AI	Ezekias-Okupevi, Data Scientist, AICC Dr Leigh Johnston, Research Fellow, AICC Dr Matthew Manktelow, Research Fellow, AICC
Conference Closing		
3.20 pm – 3.30 pm	Conference closing on behalf of NWTEC: Dr Orla Flynn, President ATU & Professor Malachy Ó Néill, Ulster University	

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- Understanding AI - The AI Board L2 Award
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- Information Technology Applications (Word + Excel) - OCN NI Level 3 Award
- Information Technology Applications – Podcasting - OCN NI Level 3 Award
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- CompTIA CySA+
- Introduction to Artificial Intelligence - NFQ Level 4

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- Fundamentals of Artificial Intelligence - Level 7, postgraduate - 20 credits
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Further information on individual courses and the application process is available through each partner's NW DEPTH webpage:

- **ATU**: https://www.atu.ie/nw-depth
- **Ulster University**: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/nw-depth
- **North West Regional College**: https://www.nwrc.ac.uk/special-projects/depth
- **Donegal College of Further Education & Training**: https://donegalcollege.ie/course

Be Part of the 2nd North West Learning City Region Lifelong Learning Festival!







The **North West Tertiary Education Cluster**, **Derry City and Strabane District Council**, and **Donegal County Council** are delighted to announce the **2nd North West Learning City Region Lifelong Learning Festival**, taking place from **3-7 March 2027.**

Celebrating learning in all its forms, the festival will showcase exciting opportunities for people of all ages across the North West City Region, including the Derry City & Strabane and Donegal areas. From formal education to informal learning experiences, the festival aims to inspire curiosity, creativity, and lifelong growth.

Get involved!

We invite organisations, community groups, education providers, businesses, and cultural organisations to host events as part of this vibrant festival. Whether you're planning a workshop, class, performance, exhibition, demonstration, open day, or something completely unique, we'd love to hear from you.

Already have an event scheduled during the festival week? Fantastic! We'd be delighted to help promote it through our extensive networks and showcase the incredible learning opportunities available across the region.

Showcase your event, reach new audiences, and help inspire a culture of learning across the North West.

Everyone has something to learn.
Everyone has something to share.

Comhairle Contae Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council

North West Tertiary Education Cluster

Derry City & Strabane District Council
Comhairle Chathair Dhoire & Cheantar an tSratha Báin
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An Roinn Geilleagair
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For further information contact Collette Cassidy: c.cassidy1@ulster.ac.uk

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Niamh McLoone 2026