

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IRISH SOCIETY FOR
IMMUNOLOGY
(CUMANN NA HÉIREANN UM IMDHÍONEOLAÍOCHT)**

**BY
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The Irish Society for Immunology is essentially a young society,
established in 1984

Prior to that time, a variety of Irish scientists and clinicians were studying and practicing Immunology, or using immunological methods but it is unlikely that many would have called themselves Immunologists. The founding of the Irish society for Immunology is largely due to a small band of people who were enthusiastic about the potential for the this discipline to shed light on the fundamental aspects of basic science and to contribute to human health. Foremost among this group was John Greally, a consultant Immunologist from St James' Hospital and Trinity College, Dublin, who was to become the society's first president.

However, other scientists and clinicians such as Denis Reen, Cliona O'Farrelly, Hugh McLoughlin, Alex Whelan, and Con Feighery put a tremendous effort into the formative not isolated despite being geographically on the periphery of Europe. The membership during that period numbered between 20 to 30, and the debate at the time focused on whether the society was viable as a separate entity, or whether an approach should be made to become a region of the British Society for Immunology.

The turning point in the Society's fortunes probably came during the presidential term of Hugh McLoughlin in 1990, when John Greally with the help of Denis Reen and Alex Whelan organised a very successful meeting on autoimmunity in Galway funded by the EU. This attracted speakers of the highest international calibre including Hugh McDevitt and Jean Francois Bach. The resulting boost to the self-confidence of Irish Immunologists transformed the working of the Society.

The 1990's saw radical changes to Ireland in general and these were reflected in the scientific community. Traditionally, large numbers of the high quality graduates and post-graduates who were educated by Irish Universities and medical schools emigrated to the US or the UK, often never to return. The improvements in the research environment and economy during the mid-1990's

saw this trend begin to be reversed. During the presidencies of first Denis Reen and then Con Feighery the society started to expand as scientists began to return to Irish Industries and establish or transfer research laboratories. This period also saw an expansion in the scientific scope of the society, which began to broaden from its early clinical base and saw scientists such as Dermot Kelleher, Kingston Mills, Luke O'Neill, Jacinta Kelly, Bernard Mahon, Jaythoon Hassan, Aideen Long, Derek Doherty, Philip Newsholme and Tina Deignan contribute greatly.

The start of the new millennium is an exciting period for Immunology in Ireland, there is a growing cohort of very talented post-doctoral and post-graduate Immunologist building careers in Ireland. Furthermore developments such as the Conway Institute at University College Dublin and the Institute of Immunology and NUI Maynooth are likely to propel Irish Immunology to the forefront of International research. The core membership of the society is now approaching 100, and the emphasis is no longer focused on the viability of Immunology in Ireland but on supporting the career development of postgraduates and established scientists. This takes the form of travel bursaries for students and in organising high quality scientific meetings that allow Irish Immunologist to interact with the finest scientists from home and abroad. We enjoy close links with our colleagues in Ulster Immunology Group and the British Society for Immunology and indeed throughout Europe (Via EFIS) and worldwide (Via IUIS).

Irish Immunology has come a long way in a short period of time, but the talent and opportunity available in Ireland suggest that the future looks promising indeed.

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