

The Wild Atlantic Alliance: New cooperation opportunities between Brittany and Ireland



Wild Atlantic Alliance Symposium, March 29, 2023.

Strengthening and reaffirming historical links between Brittany and Ireland in a post-Brexit context

As part of the Memorandum of Understanding signed in August 2021 with the Irish universities of the Atlantic coast, representatives of the 4 Breton universities embarked on Tuesday, March 28th on a Brittany Ferries boat sailing to Cork, to join their Irish counterparts for the kick-off symposium of the Wild Atlantic Alliance (WAA). This meeting, conceived jointly with the Irish institutions and with support from the passenger and freight company Brittany Ferries, was aimed at strengthening university collaboration in the post-Brexit context.

In his opening remarks, Nigel Healey, Vice President for Global and Community Engagement at the University of Limerick, wished the 160 academics in attendance well. *"Today we bring our teams together to meet physically, to befriend each other, to explore the potential for a common future of research and teaching. In order to lay the foundations for a future European Union that will be a foundation for projects of all kinds, we hope that by this evening we will be able to agree on the next concrete steps to be taken to deepen our alliance, be it through shared cultural events, joint research projects or new partnerships in teaching."*

In a video, Loïg Chesnais-Girard, President of the Brittany Region, addressed the teacher-researchers on board: *"I want to say the confidence I have in you, the confidence I have in your work and the importance of the link you are creating for our youth, for our students of today and tomorrow, who will be able, through your work, to continue to cross the sea, the ocean, as you are doing, to be able to learn, to acquire knowledge, to pass degrees and to sail all over Europe and the world in the service of the future of our society."*

The purpose of the conference was to facilitate interactions between academics and professional staff in an effort to establish educational and/or research cooperation activities. The workshops that were held focused specifically on themes shared by all WAA partners:

- Celtic and Irish Studies,
- Ports Sea and water,
- Environment and sustainability
- Digital transformation

The experts were able to share their knowledge and discuss their ongoing work in order to initiate new collaborations that may result in joint research projects, webinars, joint degrees, shared modules, summer schools, shared research facilities or the creation of a common database.



From left to right, David Alis, President of l'Université de Rennes, Virginie Dupont, President of l'Université Bretagne Sud, Christine Rivalan Guégo, President of l'Université Rennes 2, Pascal Olivard, President of l'Université de Bretagne Occidentale.

Among the numerous participants on board, were:

- Virginie Dupont, President of l'Université Bretagne Sud (University of Southern Brittany)
- Pascal Olivard, President of l'Université de Bretagne Occidentale (University of Western Brittany)
- David Alis, President of l'Université de Rennes (University of Rennes)
- Christine Rivalan Guégo, President of l'Université Rennes 2 (Rennes 2 University)

Mrs. Deirdre Forde, Lord Mayor of Cork, and Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien, Deputy Mayor of Cork County, both came to meet the members of the symposium. The two ambassadors, Niall Burgess, Irish Ambassador to France and Vincent Guérend, French Ambassador to Ireland were also present to provide their support to the alliance.

Niall Burgess, Irish Ambassador to France, recalled the historical ties that unite the two countries: "*What I appreciate about this initiative is its ambition; and the natural link between our two coasts. The relationship between Ireland and France is incredibly strong, deeper and more historic than most of us realize. Although we speak different languages, we think alike, we are driven by the same ideas, we face the same changes and we are capable of the best when we work together.*"



Speaking to the WAA group, Dr. Lesley Lelourec, Vice-President in charge of Internationalisation at Rennes 2 University.

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