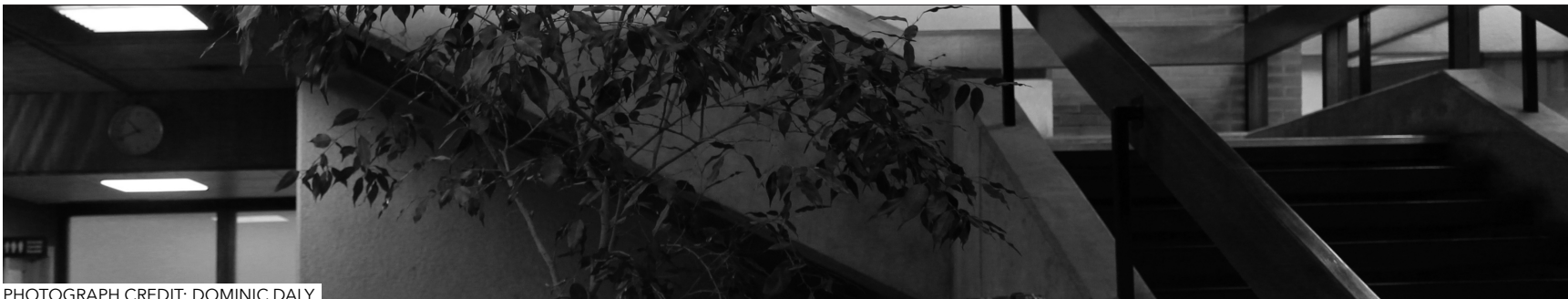


THE UNIVERSITY OBSERVER

16TH FEBRUARY 2021
VOLUME XXVII ISSUE 6
UNIVERSITYOBSERVER.IE



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: DOMINIC DALY

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SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN CLASS SIZES AT UCD SMURFIT

ANDREA ANDRES



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: SINÉAD MOHAN

The University Observer has found that there has been a significant increase in the class sizes in the UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School, particularly in MSc Business Analytics and MSc Digital Marketing, based on records obtained by Freedom of Information Requests. The overall number of students has also increased from 1064 in the academic year of 2018/2019 to 1072 in the academic year of 2019/2020, to 1505 this year, 2020/2021.

MSc Business Analytics currently has 114 students compared to 70 students in the academic year of 2019/2020 and 50 students in the academic year of 2018/2019. According to the UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School's website, the typical class size of a MSc Business Analytics class is advertised to be 64, based on a four year average. According to their website, MSc Business Analytics students pay €14,440 in fees if they are an EU student, but non-EU students pay €19,900.

An anonymous MSc Business Analytics student said that class sizes were a factor for them "because when they teach you on campus it matters if you are just going to be a part of the mob or you will get the required attention. And people who are introverts and shy really need that because

otherwise I would never ask or say anything myself."

A friend had "helped" them realize "that they just doubled the size of the class, which means that they were already planning to do the course online. Otherwise how would that have been possible? As the class size is huge, it's really difficult to connect with your whole class. And then the increased size of the class means that more people are going to graduate at the same time and thus more competitiveness for jobs," they said. "If they didn't increase the faculty size or the class size. How would they have accommodated everyone if the classes were on campus?"

MSc Digital Marketing has also experienced a jump in the number of students. In 2018/2019, the degree had 50 students, in 2019/2020 it had 62 students, this year it currently has 133 students. MSc Digital Marketing EU students pay €14,460, like non-EU students from MSc Business Analytics, they pay € 19,900 according to the graduate school's website. This has caused some elective classes to have substantial class sizes. *The University Observer* has seen the elective Social Media Marketing has 91 students. As stated by the UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business

School website, the class sizes, based on a four year average, is 58. The large class size "doesn't add up at all" said an anonymous MSc Digital Marketing student. "It doesn't make sense. The only logical explanation I can come up with is that they *knew* it was going to be virtual. So, they took advantage of that."

Like the MSc Business Analytics student, they echo the same sentiment of being unable to connect with their classmates due to the big class sizes; "I don't know half of my class because we are like 120, 130 people. If we had a smaller size of classes, we would be more familiar with who we are because we are doing a lot of teamwork projects... Someone messaged me on LinkedIn and I was like, who is she? And then I realized that we are actually in the same course. We're in the same class for the past four months"

According to the website, one of the benefits of studying MSc Digital Marketing was that "students receive consistent feedback and guidance" with its "limited class size". The student said that feedback "was the biggest problem that we had as a class. We had this teacher and we never got feedback from them. We were doing weekly assignments for them. They said in the beginning that they wouldn't be able to give individual feedback, but they can give general feedback of the assignment and they never did it. We asked our programme manager, they said that they will try to look into it, but nothing happened."

"I'm not going to be able to enjoy a classroom if I'm not there, because at the end it's kind of a private school, you're paying for it," they said. "They're taking your money. So, they better make good of your money, but they don't."

An Msc Aviation Finance student, who wished to remain anonymous, also came forward. Bigger class sizes have caused "less supply and more demand now" for

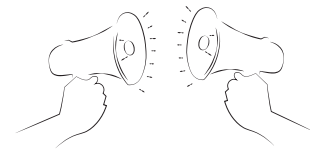
internships. As part of completing a degree, students can opt to do an aviation industry internship. "It's a small industry and they have I'd say four [companies] that actually sponsor the market. And then they offer internships as well. The only reason anyone does the Masters is to get an internship from those companies and it helps get a job out of it..." they said. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, "It's a hard hit industry so it's kind of hard to get those companies to offer internships anyway and then that means that the other companies aren't obliged to offer an internship."

The University Observer reached out to The UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School to ask the following questions:

1. At what stage was the decision to increase class sizes in Smurfit this year?
2. Has there been an increase in the number of academic and support staff to maintain student:teacher ratios?
3. Students who have spoken with *The University Observer* have stated that they have been informed by lecturers that individual feedback is not possible for all assignments for Digital Marketing. They further claim that they have not received even general feedback from lecturers, and while they have notified their programme manager, no changes have yet been made. What, if any, reassurances can be offered these students over the lack of feedback?
4. Several students chose Smurfit for their education based on the average class sizes listed on the website, who now feel that they should have been informed that there would be a drastic increase in class sizes this year. What, if any, is the Smurfit response to this criticism?

At the time of publication, The UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School had not responded to the request for comment

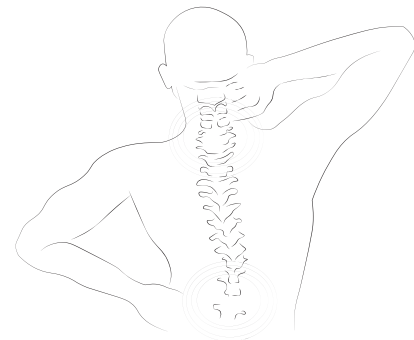
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COMPANY LINKED TO UCD PROFESSOR STILL SELLING HOLIDAYS, DESPITE LOCKDOWN EXTENSIONS.

NATHAN YOUNG

ON the 28th of January 2021, it was reported in *The University Observer* that Professor Dolores Cahill was to be the host of a package holiday to Ireland being offered, as well as the "Irish Founder" of the company offering the holiday, Freedom Airway and Freedom Travel Alliance (FAFTA).

Since the publication of this story, Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly has stated that it is still "too early" to announce when lockdown level 5 will end, making it a near certainty that Ireland will still be in level 5 come the 17th of March, St. Patrick's Day. The Holiday is still being advertised. The text of the advertisement reads "Ready to celebrate Freedom & Saint Patrick's Day in Ireland? Nothing is more Irish than this trip hosting[sic] by our very own Freedom Fighter, Dr. Dolores Cahill!".

An Garda Síochána declined the

opportunity to comment on specific individuals or companies currently operating under level 5 lockdown but did share a link to information regarding current Covid restrictions for international travellers visiting Ireland, and for domestic travel in Ireland. They also highlighted the current use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) for non-essential travel. At present, FPNs of up to €500 can be issued for those flouting lockdown rules. These rules include a 5km limit on non-essential travel. Holiday-making is not deemed essential.

There is also a requirement for all international travellers arriving in Ireland, save those arriving from the Northern Ireland, to produce a negative or 'not-detected' result from a pre-departure Covid-19 Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test, which was carried out no more than 72 hours prior to arrival in Ireland. Those unable to produce such a result are barred from boarding the ferry or aircraft to

Ireland, and upon arrival, this result must also be provided to Irish Immigration Officers. Those arriving without such results or a valid exemption can face fines of up to €2,500 and/or up to 6 months imprisonment. They will also be required to take an RT-PCR test at their own expense upon arrival, and failure to do so will be a second offence.

Speaking on *The Corbett Report*, Professor Cahill stated "Freedom Airways will leverage now the network we have of lawyers, so that if you fly on freedom airways, so that you can be covered. That is the idea. That if you come to a passport or immigration, the idea would be that you either have something printed out to say you cannot force me to do a test, or potentially ideally we would like to have hotlines of lawyers, say, in Canada or potentially the ideal thing would be if you fly on Freedom Airways that we would have been able to pre-negotiated that, or potentially take legal cases, precedence

cases in the country so if you were flying from Dublin to Toronto, or Dublin to Miami, that we could take precedence cases to ensure our inalienable rights". Neither Professor Cahill nor FAFTA have responded to queries from *The University Observer* as to what, if any, plans have been made regarding the legality of the trip, or of plans for compensation for customers should the journey be prevented from happening due to lockdown.

All international passengers arriving in Ireland, save for essential supply chain workers such as airline or maritime staff, must also complete a "Passenger Locator" form. Failure to complete this form may result in a €2,500 fine, 6 months imprisonment, or both. It is unclear if FAFTA regards this measure as a violation of "natural law", due to them being an impediment to unrestricted travel.

(CONTINUED, PAGE 2)



OTWO INTERVIEWS:
RODDY DOYLE: THEN & NOW
FRONT PAGE
OTWO

(CONTINUED. COMPANY LINKED TO UCD PROFESSOR STILL SELLING HOLIDAYS, DESPITE LOCKDOWN EXTENSIONS.)

Despite previous claims on their website, FAFTA is not registered in the UK. On January 28th, *The University Observer* contacted the company, which lists UCD Professor and Irish Freedom Party candidate Dolores Cahill as their "Irish Founder", with a query regarding the registration of the Company. At the time the website stated "FAFTA is registered in the UK and USA as a British American joint venture", although there did not seem to be any record of the company's existence in the UK at the time. Although the query was, and still is, unanswered, the website has since been updated to state "FAFTA is set to be registered in the UK and USA as a British American joint venture".

The University Observer also contacted Professor Cahill with the same query. While FAFTA is not registered in the UK, records available from the UK Government's Companies House show that she is the Director of HAPPENMEDIA LTD, as of 27 January 2021. The company was registered this year and to an address in Brighton, England.

Professor Cahill did not respond to queries about her involvement

in HAPPENMEDIA, although she is involved with happen.network, a self-described "forward-thinking digital media and social platform". Currently, the happen.network website displays a box stating "coming soon", and space to enter an email address so that interested parties can be informed "as soon as we launch".

Happen.network is also the group who created *The New Normal*, a conspiracy theory documentary film which, according to happen.network, asks "Will the new vaccine allow our lives to return back to normal or does it mark a pivotal point in the evolution of humanity (one that is driven by artificial intelligence, will reimagine capitalism and be governed by extreme tyrannical laws that are dictated by global elites)?" The documentary promotes the debunked conspiracy theories that Bill Gates had prior knowledge of Covid-19, that the vaccines produced by Pfizer and BioNTech skipped the animal testing stage, and that the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns are to ensure the smooth global rollout of 5G.

Professor Cahill appears in the film and promoted it on her Facebook page. On her Facebook post, she described the film as "A great documentary that investigates The Fourth Industrial Revolution". She did not mention any other aspect of the documentary.

Facebook users have alleged that their comments critical of FAFTA have been deleted on the FAFTA Facebook page. One Canadian user who had posted critical comments told a journalist for *The University Observer* "She [one of FAFTA's founders] is constantly deleting people's comments, even legitimate questions on the FAFTA page". FAFTA themselves have posted screenshots of Facebook messages claiming the business is illegitimate, on a post titled "Don't Feed the Trolls". FAFTA did not respond to a request for comment asking if they had deleted comments.

When asked what advice can be offered to potential customers should lockdown prevent their holiday taking place, a spokesperson for the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) stated:

The CCPC as an enforcement body cannot comment on the trading practices of individual businesses. However, generally consumer law requires that businesses provide adequate and accurate information so that consumers can make informed decisions when undertaking transactions. The CCPC's role is to enforce consumer protection law. If a consumer believes that they have been misled by any businesses we encourage them to contact us through our website ccpc.ie or by calling us on 01 4025500.

Consumers who book holidays or tickets should be prepared that at the very least their plans may be disrupted and they will lose money. If a consumer chooses to proceed with their non-essential travel and is stopped by An Garda Síochána outside their 5km, they risk a substantial fine and potentially the cost of their holiday. If a consumer chooses to book travel plans, we would advise them to carefully read the terms and conditions of all contracts (such as package holidays or car hire) they may have entered into so they are aware of the terms and conditions particularly around cancellations.

For your information, in response to COVID-19, the CCPC developed a dedicated COVID-19 Information Hub which details, in one place, all relevant information on consumer rights and current issues such as: package holidays and travel, insurance, online shopping and cancelled contracts. It also provides information to businesses particularly in relation to their obligations under consumer protection law.

The UCD School of Medicine did not respond to a request for comment as to whether they were formally aware of Professor Cahill's involvement in business ventures linked to Covid denial.

The counselling team - a new Head of Counselling was hired in 2019. Tighe outlined that she hired an addiction counsellor during her tenure, and increased the psychiatric provision with a Psychiatrist as part of the Student Health team. The team also developed STI clinics and increased provision for contraception including implantation fitting.

Dr Tighe outlined that the aspects of the job she most enjoyed were "working as part of a great team," and "helping students through difficult times in their lives and seeing them come out the other side of it". Tighe stated that she "enjoyed having the privilege of hearing about young people's lives and making a difference to them."

Tighe described working through Covid as a "challenge", but stated that she is "proud that we worked through it as a team". The health service had to change how they worked "almost overnight", changes involved "switching to telephone consults, rearranging rooms to make them safer for staff and students, managing our own fears about risks to ourselves while ensuring we maintained the service to students". Tighe outlined that the service "remained open through all the lockdowns".

Tighe outlined that what she is most looking forward to in her retirement is "travelling a bit initially around Ireland." Outlining that she would like to "visit and stay in every county". Tighe will also pursue her other areas of interest; walking, archaeology and history.

DIRECTOR OF STUDENT HEALTH RETIRES AFTER 24 YEARS

SOPHIE FINN

Dr Sandra Tighe has ended her tenure as Director of student health at UCD. She has held the position from 1997-2021. The new Director has not yet been appointed, Dr Eadaoin Lysaght is currently acting medical Director.

Dr Tighe spoke to the *University Observer* on her time in the role. When asked about her experience as Director, Dr Tighe said "I worked in Student Health as Director for 24 years and I very much enjoyed my time there", adding that "the students are a great group of people to work with and I noticed that they got younger every year." She noted that "it was great working with students from all over the world."

Dr Tighe outlined that when she began as Director

in 1997 "the Student Health and Counselling Service was in a very small space downstairs... there were 2 doctors' rooms, one cupboard like room for a nurse, and one room for the counsellors with a tiny office and waiting room". The service staffed "1.5 doctors, 1 nurse, two part-time counsellors, one admin, and a visiting Psychiatrist". When asked about developments she helped implement during her time in the role, Tighe stated that she is "most proud that during my tenure we moved to purpose-built premises in the Student Centre with a spacious waiting room", and that the centre was computerised in 2000.

Dr Tighe stated that the amount of staff at the health service has "grown significantly" since she began, and there has also been a "significant increase" in

UCD SET TO PAY 70K IN FINES FOLLOWING SEVERAL PERSONAL DATA BREACHES OF UNIVERSITY EMAIL ACCOUNTS

LUCY O'CONNELL

UNIVERSITY College Dublin has been fined €70,000 following several personal data breaches of University email accounts. The fine came after the Data Protection Commission (DPC) received 7 separate breach notifications by UCD between August 2018 and January 2019.

The seven occurrences involved the unauthorised access by third parties to UCD email accounts. In some cases, these login credentials were posted online, others 'involved' users "furnishing their credentials" from external websites, the DPC has reported. UCD was unable to identify how other accounts had been compromised. These breaches were discovered by

UCD when spam was reported to have been sent from University email accounts. The online application haubenepwired.com was also used in identifying the source of this unauthorised activity.

The investigation, some of which took place on-site, officially reprimanded and fined UCD for failure to implement appropriate General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) measures, for storing data longer than necessary, and finally for failure to appropriately notify the DPC following these occurrences. The further infringement of GDPR occurred when UCD failed to bring one of the cases to the DPC for 13 days after its occurrence, breaching Article 33 of GDPR, which states that the

controller must notify the supervisory authority no later than 72 hours after having become aware of the breach.

The breaches have occurred following the revised General Data Protection Regulations, which came into legislation in May 2018 and are designed to strengthen and unify the protection of personal data across the EU. This is the sixth GDPR fine imposed by the Data Protection Commission (DPC), which is the Irish supervisory authority for GDPR.

A UCD spokesperson commented that the college "accepts the decision of the Commissioner for Data Protection" and that the university has addressed the

decision ordered by the DPC with a "programme of action" following this breach of UCD security systems.

The occurrence has placed University College Dublin as the first third-level institution to receive a fine from the Data Protection Commission. Separate investigations are underway concerning other third-level institutions, namely the University of Limerick and Maynooth University.

If students suspect any unusual activity regarding their UCD accounts, there are several resources available to investigate such issues, with contact services listed on the UCD website.

UCDSU RELEASE STATEMENT TO MINISTER FOR HEALTH URGING THE REOPENING OF THE GMHS

AOIFE ROONEY

LAST Wednesday UCD Students' Union released a statement, referencing a letter that was sent to the Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly, calling for the reopening of the free HIV testing services that are facilitated through the Gay Men's Health Service (GMHS), a service that has been suspended for many months. This comes after a mandate was passed at the February 1st council mandating that the Welfare and C&E officers lobby for this.

SU President Conor Anderson spoke of the important work the GMHS service does in the de-stigmatisation of STIs, through screening and PrEP services; "I consider access to STI testing and sexual health services to be of critical importance".

The cost of HIV screening and the PrEP service were once a barrier to access, but with the introduction of the GMHS, both services were made free, and as stated by Welfare Officer Ruairi Power, "the lack of availability of such services free at the point of entry has created

a two-tier system where service access is determined based on availability to pay rather than clinical need".

In the letter to the Minister for Health, the Students' Union highlighted the growing concern facing students as a result of the continued closure of the GMHS. It warns of the "risk of undermining the gains made in the provision of PrEP services, rapid HIV tests, rollout of the HPV/hepatitis vaccinations and full STI screening" associated with the continued closure of the service.

The Students' Union contended that it was unacceptable that third-level students be without the service, in particular those who are unable to access testing as a result of the cost now associated with private consultations. This may mean that those who are in most need of testing and treatment may have no way of accessing it, and no timeline with which the GMHS is expected to reopen.

It also warns of the possible harm of the closure of the essential service, noting the progress the GMHS has made, and to keep the service non-operational is to undo much of this work "the continued closure of the busiest PrEP service in the state may well precipitate a major impact on HIV rates in the short term". The Gay Men's Health Service, which was founded 29 years ago, "offered testing, treatment, vaccination and prevention services to nearly 12,000 gay and bisexual men and trans people in 2019". This figure is up from 7,553 in 2016, exhibiting a need for the service among its clients in Ireland.

The SU outlined how the service is of vital necessity to both third-level students and those who face a cost barrier. The GMHS addressed and assisted people in both of these groups, and there is concern that with the service closed, there may be an inability to access this healthcare, the letter reiterating the work the GMHS does "services are absolutely vital to LGBTQ+ young people, particularly those who would struggle with the

cost procuring private screening and PrEP services".

It mentions the successful STI home testing kits service launched by the HSE, but is critical of its suspension, especially given such interest from those who need testing. They urge the minister to see the urgent need to restore services like this and others that are vital to maintaining the health of the clients of the GMHS.

Fair allocation of funding was the bottom line, and is what is being asked of the Minister; the letter urging the government to "redesignate the GMHS and related services as essential healthcare provision, provide the required resources for reliable provision of home testing kits, and to ensure that the meaningful gains are made towards eradicating HIV and reducing the prevalence of STIs in Ireland".

STUDENT NURSING PLACEMENT TO RESUME ON A PHASED BASIS

KATIE LARKIN

PLACEMENT for student nurses resumed on a phased basis from the 8th of February.

On the 16th of January, it was announced that over 2,000 student nurses and midwives were to have their clinical placements postponed by two weeks. On the 28th of January, the placements were further postponed until the 8th of February, with a phased return set to take place. The initial postponements were initiated to free up qualified supervisory staff for the front line, who would have been assisting students otherwise.

During the first wave of the pandemic, students on placement were converted to health care assistants (HCAs) and were paid €14 an hour for their work. Sources say that the HSE had informed the Department that they did not want mass amounts of unqualified students to be transferred into HCA posts, as they need experienced staff on the wards at this time.

UCDSU released an open letter to Minister Stephen Donnelly on January 20th seeking clarification for students going on clinical placements. The SU questioned how students can require the minimal practice hours set in the EU Directive 2005/36/EC, to avoid being unable to progress in their programmes.

The SU proceeded to ask if 4th-year students on placement will be offered the €14 HCA rate as they were last year. The SU also stated: "We are in complete agreement with the INMO that in light of the increased risk and workload of undertaking placement this time it is entirely reasonable that the rate would be increased to the Healthcare Assistant Grade as it was in March."

Finally, the SU asked for greater consideration for 1st to 3rd year students to be given a health care assistant role in order for students to meet living expenses. The full letter can be read on the UCDSU website.

Speaking to *The University Observer*, first-year General Nursing students outlined the lack of clarity by both the Government and UCD regarding placement. After the placements were initially cancelled, there was no contingency plan in place for general nursing students, who have been left doing nothing for the past few weeks.

Placements for first-year general nursing students are now set to happen on the 15th of March and continue until early May, however, students are unsure if this will definitely happen. Students do not have to make up the 170 hours lost since the initial postponement of placements but are left unsure about any other potential lost hours. It is also unclear whether students have to complete placement during the summer in order to progress to Stage 2. However, some students studying children's and general nursing as well as mental health nursing have been allowed to start their placements.

The University Observer spoke to a representative for the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) on the matter. The spokesperson outlined that "information and certainty is a priority for student nurses and midwives at the moment, as disruptions to placements have knock-on effects in their lives. Not only do students have to worry about when their placements will go ahead, but changes to the training structure can mean changes in how people plan their finances and accommodation throughout the year too." The representative emphasised that "student nurses and midwives have made a huge contribution to the health system during the pandemic, and it's important that we recognise the stress and strain they're under, and limit any additional anxiety that might be caused by uncertainty around their training and education."

MINISTER TO HAVE POWER TO SUSPEND UNIVERSITY BOARDS

CARL GANNON

NEW legislation proposed by the Minister for Higher Education, Simon Harris will give him the power to suspend and replace the governing bodies of publicly-funded higher education institutions (HEIs).

The rebranded Higher Education Commission (HEC) will be given greater powers to investigate and discipline HEIs where there are operational concerns. This will include the imposition of financial and non-financial penalties. Only "in very serious circumstances" will the Minister intervene, a spokesperson has said.

The HEC's strengthened regulatory role will include statutory codes of governance for HEIs and statutory performance frameworks for state-funded HEIs.

Minister Harris acknowledged the importance of college and universities maintaining their academic freedom and autonomy but believed that proper oversight and accountability were a just concern for the government and taxpayer, alike.

The Wicklow TD hopes to bring the new Higher Education Governance Bill before the Dáil in the coming months and have it passed into law by year's end.

Some academics are worried that this continues a trend of state-led reform and a reduction in the independence of the academy. Emeritus Professor of Sociology at UCD, Patrick Clancy feared that minor scandals of university mispending money could be used as an excuse by government to exercise more power over third-level institutions.

While stressing the importance of fiscal accountability on the part of universities, Professor Clancy added: "There needs to be clear lines of authority and autonomy drawn between the department, the HEC and universities".

In 2018, the chief executive of the HEA, Dr Graham Love resigned after just a year and a half in his role citing a lack of autonomy and micro-management from the then responsible Department of Education.

Current legislation around the governance of universities dates back to 1971. The minister told a seminar on governance in higher education that the bill was "not fit for purpose" due to the drastic changes in both society and education since that time.



ILLUSTRATION CREDIT: LAOISE TARRANT

In 1971 there were 12 higher education institutions, there are now 33 which receive funding from the state. Similarly, the 1971 student population of 40,000 is dwarfed by the current number which is closer to 250,000.

Labour senator Annie Hoey voiced her concern around

the independence of institutions stating that the HEC "must not be used as a stopgap to showboat for the minister". While supporting the streamlining of governing bodies, she emphasised this mustn't hamper the student voice on such boards.

CAO APPLICATIONS SET TO SURPASS 80,000 AS 2021 GEARS UP TO BE THE MOST COMPETITIVE YEAR FOR LEAVING CERT STUDENTS

KERRI PENDER

CAO applications have reached almost 80,000 so far this year. This is the highest number of applications ever made, surpassing the 2016 record of 76,000.

On Tuesday the 2nd of February, students from all parts of the country received the results of the November Leaving Certificate exam. Of the 2202 students, it was found that 1136 of these candidates received marks higher than their original grades which were determined by calculated predictions of teachers and awarded in August. For students who received higher marks, the new mark will automatically supersede the lower calculated grade and they are permitted to go forward with their CAO application for the 2021/22 academic year. Minister for Higher Education, Simon Harris announced that 554 level 8 college offers will be made to students who sat the exam in November, along with 37 level 6 and 7 offers

Although 39% of those who sat their exams scored higher than their predicted grades, it does not prove that sitting the Leaving Certificate exam will assure a better mark for students. The figures show that 34% of students scored lower than their predicted grades, while 28% of candidates scored the same as their original grade. The State Examinations Commission has assured students who received a lower grade in their written exams that they are still entitled to use the highest mark they achieved even if that is the original calculated grade received in August. As for students who deferred their original CAO place and did not receive higher marks in this round of results, they must pay €60 to accept their deferral offer and continue with their original course in September. Although disappointment may cloud these students, they may be consolidated in the certainty of having a desirable course offer for September 2021, as nearly 7,000 additional applications were received to

the CAO this year in comparison to last year's figures.

This year the CAO has reached almost 80,000 applications for third-level college admissions, which is the highest number of applications ever, surpassing the previous record of 76,000 in 2016. This academic year is set to be one of the most competitive as Leaving Certificate students, PLC students, and mature students are all hoping to secure a place in their desired college course and further their education. The revelation of this has once again raised the discussion as to how the Leaving Certificate should be handled for the 2021 exam students. It is still unclear if predicted grades or an amended leaving certificate will constitute the final secondary exams for the class of 2020. Many feel a special allowance should be made for the current sixth years who have missed out on an in-class education for both of their core Leaving Certificate cycle years.

With the coronavirus pandemic affecting the conventional education of thousands of students across the country, the Irish government will have all eyes on them as they decide on their next move regarding the current sixth year students and the Leaving Certificate. Talks regarding the progression of the Leaving Certificate were held on the 11th of February. The Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI) withdrew from these talks over concern there was not enough work done to assess the students in a Calculated Grades system. Minister for Higher Education Simon Harris branded the move "beyond unhelpful", however the Union have since agreed to meet the Minister for Education, Norma Foley again.

APPLIED GEOSCIENCES RESEARCH CENTRE AT UCD RECEIVES €28 MILLION INVESTMENT FROM SFI

NICOLA KENNY

THE Irish Centre for Research in Applied Geosciences (iCRAG) at University College Dublin has received €28 million in funding from Science Foundation Ireland (SFI).

This funding is part of a €193 million investment announced by Minister for Further and Higher Education Simon Harris TD, in SFI Research Centres across Ireland for the next six years. "I am delighted to announce this significant Government investment in five SFI Research Centres, which reflects Ireland's position as a world leader in research and innovation," said Minister Harris.

SFI Research centres support research across a wide range of sectors at varying levels: iCRAG is an SFI research centre for Applied Geosciences focussed on developing innovative science and technologies to create solutions for a sustainable

society. "The investment will ensure that we are prepared for the changes and disruption that we are facing in addressing global societal and economic challenges" explained Minister Harris.

This SFI investment has additional support from 200 industry partners who have committed a further €91 million in contributions. The acquisition will benefit 17 Higher Education Institutions across the country, partnering with the Centres.

Dr Fergus McAuliffe, iCRAG Communications Manager, described how "SFI's new funding investment to iCRAG means that we can expand our research efforts to help Ireland reach carbon neutrality by 2050". "The investment will allow iCRAG to continue to work with industry partners from across Ireland and the world to help meet global environmental targets and the

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals," he said.

The increased funding will fund iCRAG's work in addressing critical challenges including those of "Earth System Change, Earth's Resources and Earth Science in Society" added Dr McAuliffe. Specifically, the investment will allow iCRAG to continue vital research in various areas such as climate change mitigation and adaptation and the sustainable discovery of energy resources and raw materials required for decarbonisation.

Additionally, the investment will support approximately 1,060 graduate and postdoctoral students and research fellows employed by the Research Centres. Dr McAuliffe outlined how "this [investment] will allow for the hiring of over 130 researchers

across eight Irish Higher Education institutions, with many of these positions to be based in UCD, including Masters, PhD and Postdoctoral researcher positions." The investment will also fund state of the art equipment and research infrastructure.

The funding will support a range of activities including work on oceans, energy transition, and the interaction between society and the earth. In the coming weeks, iCRAG researchers will be carrying out offshore site investigations for wind farm developments in the Irish Sea. This will provide important information for engineers to design infrastructure projects on the seabed.

NEGATIVE ONLINE RESPONSE TO SHAG WEEK ADVERTISEMENTS

JANE MATTHEWS

UCD Students' Union has received multiple negative comments in response to Instagram and Twitter advertisements it shared promoting Sexual Health and Guidance (SHAG) Week events.

One tweet, promoting the SU BDSM Workshop received a particularly strong response. The tweet read "While this workshop is designed with those who'd like to explore kink based relationships in mind, there are lots of tips for even the most vanilla among you." While some Twitter users poked fun at the SU in response, others took issue with their use of the word vanilla, and the implication that those not interested in BDSM were "boring".

In response to the criticism, Campaigns and Engagement Officer, Leighton Gray has said that part of the goal of the workshop was to educate and move away from the unhelpful perception of BDSM in mainstream media. "The aim behind SHAG Week events, as it is every year, is to educate people on consent, safety, and sexual health. The BDSM workshops are important in particular, as although a somewhat taboo subject, it is a very popular sexual activity. BDSM has become popularised in the recent decade, possibly due to '50 Shades of Grey' and its discussion in mainstream media. The BDSM community has been vocal that this franchise is a gross misrepresentation of BDSM, and following its

footsteps could lead to serious injury, abuse and even death. It is our responsibility during SHAG week to provide students with the tools to protect and empower themselves in their sexual encounters. Our workshop focused on consent and safety within BDSM, and how they could experience pleasure through this lens".

Despite the negative comments online, the uptake of SHAG week events has surpassed the SU's expectations. The first BDSM workshop had more than 160 people on the waitlist with a second workshop scheduled for next week. Over 150 people also attended a workshop with sex and relationship expert, Dr Caroline West. The workshop covered the topics of consent, STI prevention, and safe sex practices. Welfare Officer, Ruairi Power was keen to emphasise the importance the SU are placing on the topic of consent this year and expressed his delight at the Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Third Level Education (ESHTE) committee's decision to endorse the SU's calls for the introduction of mandatory consent training for students. Currently, sexual consent classes are offered to first-year students but the classes are not mandatory.

Speaking to *The University Observer*, Power said, "Moving SHAG online has been a big challenge but engagement has been fantastic so far. We're also working with the Association of Medical Students in



PHOTOGRAPHY CREDIT: SINEAD MOHAN

Ireland on their 'Let's Talk about Sex' Symposium, a DRAG workshop with our LGBTQ+ Campaign Co-ordinator Josh, an anti-HIV stigma video campaign, a panel discussion on the review of the repeal legislation and have been lobbying TD's for the re-opening of the

Gay Men's Health Service [and the] provision of home STI testing kits."

More information on all of these events is available from @UCDSU on Twitter and Instagram.

UN INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SCIENCE LAUDED BY UCD AND PRESIDENT MICHAEL D HIGGINS

SOPHIE FINN

THE 11th of February marked the occasion of the United Nations International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

President Higgins delivered a message to celebrate the day, describing it as “a most appropriate occasion on which to celebrate the contribution of women to the field of science”, as well as acknowledge the importance of that contribution, and “above all” encourage young women to consider a career in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

The President outlined that although “significant progress” has been made in encouraging women and girls in STEM “much remains to be achieved”. President Higgins stressed “a considerable gender gap still exists” in STEM fields. The President outlined that in most countries “fewer women than men complete STEM university degrees. Less than 30 percent of researchers worldwide are women, and less than a third of all female students globally select STEM-related fields in higher education.” Higgins described that statistics for Ireland as “only slightly more encouraging”, stating that “just over 35 percent of all those engaged in STEM research in Ireland in 2016 are female”. The President stated that the “exclusive” domination by men in the field of STEM has been “much to the detriment of science and society’s loss.”

President Higgins said that in order to address the gender gap, society “must go beyond quantification and identify those qualitative factors that at the very outset deter women from pursuing careers in STEM fields” Higgins stressed that despite these challenges, Irish women in science are playing a “courageous role”, using the battle against Covid-19 as an example. Higgins outlined that the day is an appropriate

day to recognise the feats of women in STEM by “making a commitment to investing in inclusive STEM education and research and the re-structuring of career paths in science and technology in such a way that they do not exclude women and girls at any stage of their career”.

President Higgins stated that his message to “every young girl who is wondering if a future in science is for her” is “to have faith, to take inspiration from the many talented women who have excelled in science and technology” and to “carry your knowledge and skills with pride.”

The *University Observer* spoke to Colin Scott, Chair of the Gender Equality Action Group in UCD. Scott described the challenges of male dominance within STEM disciplines as “complex”. He outlined that a “significant part” of the challenge arises from “social structures and ways of thinking that tend to encourage boys to study STEM subjects at school to a greater extent than girls”, stating that “the tendency to gender segregation in schools has historically reduced opportunities for girls to discover and study the full range of STEM subjects.”

Athena Swan is a framework used within higher education to further gender equality. Scott outlined that all Schools in the College of Engineering and Architecture secured Athena Swan Bronze recognition in 2019, “indicating that the College understands the challenges and has a credible plan to address the challenges”. Scott stated that UCD has been “heavily involved” in measures to encourage women applicants into STEM disciplines, outlining that at undergraduate level “female participation has risen in the Engineering disciplines from 19% to 26%” between 2015 and 2018. He further noted that



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: DOMINIC DALY

female intake to Engineering was 30% in 2018, which is higher than HEA engineering data of 25%, and the total enrolment of female students in Computer Science has grown from 15% in 2015 to 19% in 2018.

Scott stated that in 2019 UCD received funding from Science Foundation Ireland for the project ‘Girls in DEIS Schools: Changing Attitudes/Impacting Futures in STEM’, which was led by Professor Judith Harford, Rachel Farrell, and Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shuilleabhain. He noted the academic role models for women in engineering, for example, Professor Orla Feely, Vice President

for Research, Impact and Innovation, and Professor Aoife Ahern, Dean of Engineering and Principal, UCD College of Engineering and Architecture.

Scott stated that “at UCD we are keen to encourage more women into studying STEM disciplines and to support them successfully through their studies, transforming opportunities”. He further outlined that UCD “are taking a wide range of other measures to remove barriers to gender equality throughout academic careers, detailed in our Gender Equality Action Plan, submitted as part of the successful Athena Swan Bronze renewal in 2020”.

BRITISH GOVERNMENT TO ANNOUNCE “FREE SPEECH CHAMPION” FOR STUDENTS AND UNIVERSITIES

NATHAN YOUNG

UK Universities that “stifle freedom of speech” could face fines, according to *The Sunday Telegraph*.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson is expected to announce the plans to name a “Free Speech Champion” with powers to sanction universities or student bodies which “cancel, dismiss or demote people over their views”. The Free Speech Champion is understood to work under the Office for Students, the student regulator. *The Sunday Telegraph* also reported that Williamson is set to announce “new measures to strengthen the existing legal protections for free speech in higher education”, ensuring that Students’ Unions, as well as universities, will have a legal responsibility to “promote free speech”. It is understood their powers will include the ability to impose fines on bodies that “restrict speech unlawfully” and to order redress “if

individuals have been dismissed or demoted for their views”.

It is understood that this new policy is in response to “Cancel Culture” and “wokeness”. Separately, the British Government has been fighting the culture wars in other areas. Culture secretary Oliver Dowden has called a summit of 25 of the UK’s largest heritage bodies, including museums, trusts, and charities, where he will tell them “to defend our culture and history from the noisy minority of activists constantly trying to do Britain down”.

This comes as a response to a *Sunday Telegraph* story on the ‘Colonial Countryside: Reinterpreting English Country Houses’ project, a National Trust project which examined links between the trust’s stately homes and

the British Empire. The project was funded by £99,600 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and £58,331 from Arts Council England.

The project was run by Professor Corinne Fowler at the University of Leicester. According to the Universities’ website, the project examined “a range of colonial links, including slave-produced sugar wealth, East India Company connections, black servants, Indian loot, Francis Drake and African circumnavigators, colonial business interests, holders of colonial office, Chinese wallpaper, Victorian plant hunters, and imperial interior design”.

Conservative MP Sir John Hayes stated: “It is abhorrent that hard working patriots should fund the enormously costly, damaging and unpatriotic projects

of well-heeled privileged left wing activists”. Tory MP Andrew Murrison stated; “Lottery money should not be diverted from good causes to right-on pedagogy that takes as its starting point the worst possible view of this country and its history”.

Given the context of the academic freedom of Professor Fowler and her legitimate work with the National Trust being attacked by supporters of the Government’s stance on culture war issues, it is as of yet unclear what effect this move will have on the academic freedom and free speech of academics whose work takes the opposition to government positions on culture war issues, such as the consequences of Britain’s Empire.

EXAM RESULT RELEASE CHANGED TO PREVENT APPEALS

AOIFE ROONEY

Aoife Rooney examines the change to the examination appeals process and speaks to several students about their experience.

TRIMESTER one module results were made available to students via a personalised link on Friday the 29th of January. While many students have taken issue with the way UCD have dealt with assessment since in-person academic restrictions came into effect in the previous trimester, these issues have been seemingly exacerbated by the announcement that UCD has removed the provisional grade period that typically lasted two weeks before grades became final.

“...if there is disappointment with a grade due to the result not reflecting the work put in during the trimester, students should be within their rights to question this.”

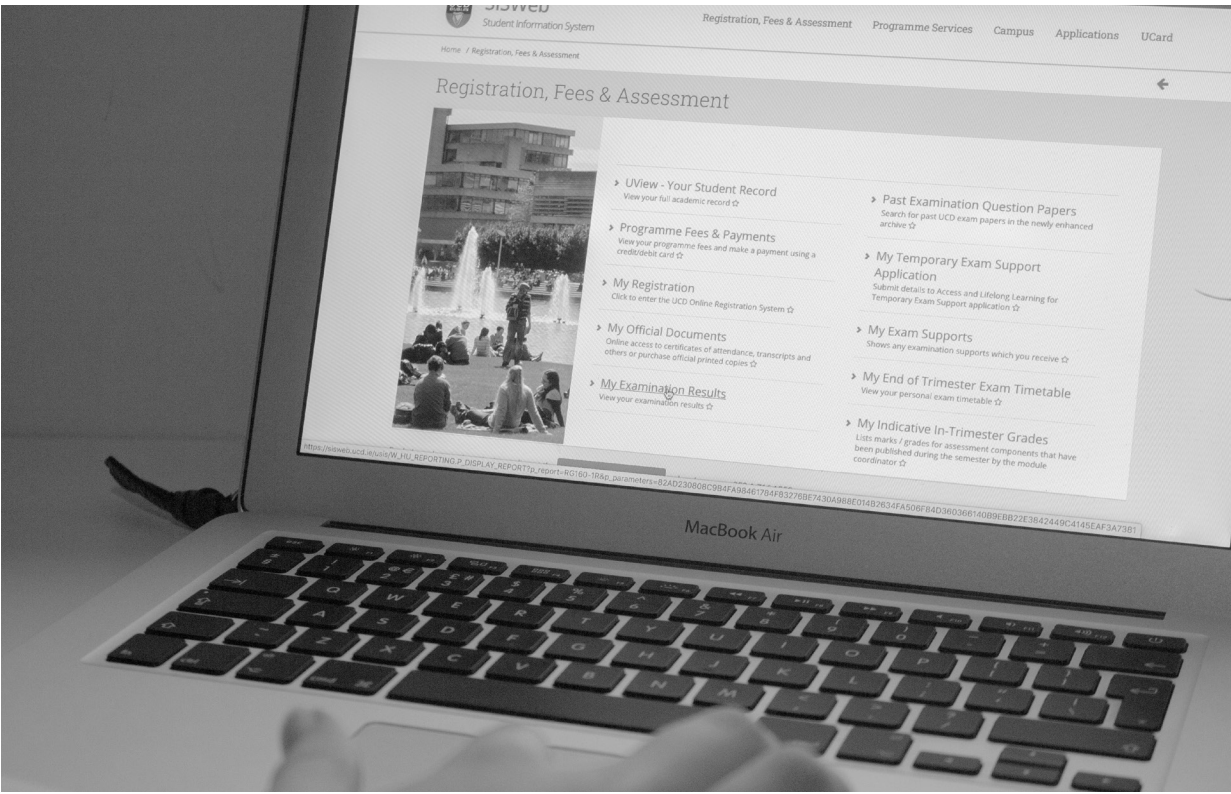
In this period, students had the right to contest or ultimately appeal specific module results. This time allotted to give students space to rectify any issues with grading identified. In the new structure, the approach is very much ‘get as many concrete results as possible out, then deal with the fallout of students dissatisfied with grades after’. From this viewpoint, it can be seen as a way to expedite the process, compounded with the fact that students were encouraged to apply for extenuating circumstances throughout the semester if they needed it. While this sounds like a reasonable response from management, it is undermined by an outpouring of criticism by students, citing little to no support, particularly among lecturers and module coordinators, leading to a breakdown in promised assistance.

This issue stemmed from the previous trimester, with the introduction of a seemingly ‘no detriment’ policy, which promised a student’s GPA would not suffer as a result of in-person classes endings and the transfer to online classes. Many felt as though this promise was not upheld by management, and the consequences are still being felt over halfway through the next academic year. This is an important factor to note, as it is not that big a leap to link this new change in policy to the overwhelming backlash received with the release of Spring 2020 results.

While the abolition of provisional grades does not prevent students from appealing their marks, it has been a source of stress for students who do wish to make use of the assessment review or appeal options available to them. In a statement released by UCDSU, the reasoning behind the decision was made “mainly to affect staff and the way the grade approvals process was carried out”.

One student detailed how they thought that “the appeals process is unfair this year”, a sentiment that has been echoed throughout the discourse on the topic over the past week. Despite this, Graduate Officer Carla Gummerson did make clear in a statement released on behalf of the Students’ Union that she has “not seen an increase in appeal support. I think this is because we encouraged students to apply for extenuating circumstances last trimester”. The statement went on to clarify: “those that felt they were struggling would have more than likely used this process”. While again, this is sound in theory, it depends heavily on the cooperation and willingness to help of lecturers – a task maybe not rigidly adhered to in previous years. One student I spoke to is in a lockjaw in terms of options: “I have asked a few of my module coordinators for feedback, but they haven’t been particularly forthcoming”. While this in isolation is worrying, the basis for appeal is even more problematic. The statement, which can be found on the UCD Student Engagement, Conduct, Complaints and Appeals page is as follows: “Dissatisfaction or disappointment with a result of an assessment is not a ground for an assessment appeal”.

While it should be understood that a grade cannot be appealed if a student simply disagrees with a result, if there is disappointment with a grade due to a result not reflecting the work put in during the trimester, students should be within their rights to question this. This is where students are finding themselves at a loss for support. Despite the Dean of Students Jason Last sending an email to all students on Friday, 5 February detailing the supports available to the everyone with particular regard to exam results, there seems to be very little room for manoeuvre when it comes to establishing a fair rubric for how assessment should be divided in terms of making sure students feeling fairly evaluated. This is amplified by the fact that while in-term application of extenuating circumstances is advised for students who need it, it is hugely dependent on the support of the lecturers responsible for setting fair assessment and giving equitable feedback, and many students are of the opinion that this part of the deal is not being upheld. One second-year student felt that they “were not given clear assessment guidelines for the assignment” and that there was a “lack of clear



PHOTOGRAPHY CREDIT: SINÉAD MOHAN

guidelines”. The student also received poor support and evaluation from their lecturers, a gave a damning report, stating that “feedback was non-existent”.

From the literature published from the various offices of the university, UCD seems to have complicated a fairly straightforward course to ensuring integrity within fair assessment is maintained. The original format of dealing with grade disputes had its faults, such as having to wait until the semester has ended to get assessment issues that had arisen throughout the semester remedied, but on the whole, it was fairer to students, allowing them to move on to the current semester without the baggage of worrying about last trimesters modules. It is also worth noting that because so many students were unhappy with end of year assessment and results last year, many of them were still dealing with issues associated with the previous year when the responsibilities of this trimester started to mount.

The final day for submitting an assessment appeal, which brings with it a cost of €75, was Friday, February 12. From this date, students can expect to wait up

REALLY-RAE?: THE HEALY RAES KNOW NOTHING OF WORKING CLASS STRUGGLE

MICHAEL TUOHY

With recent discourse surrounding the Healy Rae family, *Michael Tuohy* shows us who they really are

Recently in the Dáil, Duncan Smith TD levelled a chain of shots towards the Healy Rae Brothers, TDs from Kerry. The row took place during a Dáil motion on The Labour Party’s “National Aggressive Suppression Strategy” for Covid-19, which called for the “maximum suppression” of the virus. The Healy Raes had set about attacking this motion. Smith later criticised the contributions of the Kerry-based brothers, accusing the pair of pretending to understand sections of society they were not from. “They said that we [The Labour Party] didn’t understand working people and said we didn’t understand a carpenter coming to the house having to fix a job,” he said. “Well, I’m the son of a carpenter. I’m not the son of Fianna Fáil privilege and millions and millions of Euro.” “...they drive their Mercedes into their big plant hire shops walking past all of their machinery worth hundreds of thousands, to count all their money?” Smith said. “I don’t have to put on a political costume and a caricature to pretend I’m working class like some”. The Labour Party do have their issues, and absolutely can be criticised by the working classes for not supporting them, but not by the millionaire Healy-Rae brothers.

Ireland has a tradition of mocking people from Kerry as clueless hillbillies, a baseless caricature repeated in a thousand jokes. The Healy-Rae family has fuelled the ridicule – intentionally or not – by creating a political dynasty in the county with PR stunts, outlandish proposals and controversial statements. They lead tractor convoys and torch-lit processions, dance jigs on car bonnets, and

“They lead tractor convoys and torch-lit processions, dance jigs on car bonnets and argue for the right of rural people to drink and drive.”

argue for the right of rural people to drink and drive. Many Dubliners scoff at the mention of the family. But the Healy-Raes, who hold three county council seats and two seats in parliament, tend to have the last laugh. They are savvy populists who have not lost an election since entering politics four decades ago – a remarkable record given the fact they run as independents. The more Dublin snickers, it seems, the better for the Healy-Raes, who alchemise metropolitan disdain into votes at home.

It all began with Jackie, the Healy Rae father. He was a farmer and County Councillor who quit the Fianna Fáil party, won a Dáil seat in 1997, and distilled the Kerry-man archetype – flat cap, melodic accent, folksy phraseology – into a potent formula. He opened the plant hire business and owned the pub that his sons now run. In 2007, Jackie signed a Confidence and Supply agreement with Fianna Fáil, the details of which were never made public but ended up with Jackie voting for controversial cutbacks and austerity measures which only made the financial situations of those he represented worse, while his plant hire business made even more in profit than it previously had. Michael and Danny now emulate their late father’s approach to helping constituents 24/7 with matters big and small – medical cards, heating allowances, cataracts, planning permissions, phone bills, internet connection. A permanent campaign.

The family has elevated patronage and personal connection – venerable traditions in Irish politics – to high art. “The first commandment in Healy-Rae land is: thou shalt not turn off thy mobile phone” Donal Hickey, wrote in a biography of the family. Michael and Danny have a kinetic schedule of constituency clinics, canvasses, speeches, media interviews, ribbon-cuttings, lobbying, and funerals – lots of funerals. Irish politicians often show up at wakes, removals and burials but the Healy-Raes attend so many they are said to have the gift of bilocation. The Irish Times reported in 2016 that the Healy-Raes bring their own pens – green and red – so their names stand out when they sign condolence books.

The Healy Raes aren’t all “kissing babies and making appearances” though. They’ve both had their fair share of absolutely idiotic moments and hold downright immoral views. Danny has publicly denied global warming, is pro-life, and against same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption, calling it unnatural for a gay

“The more Dublin snickers, it seems, the better for the Healy-Raes, who alchemise metropolitan disdain into votes at home”

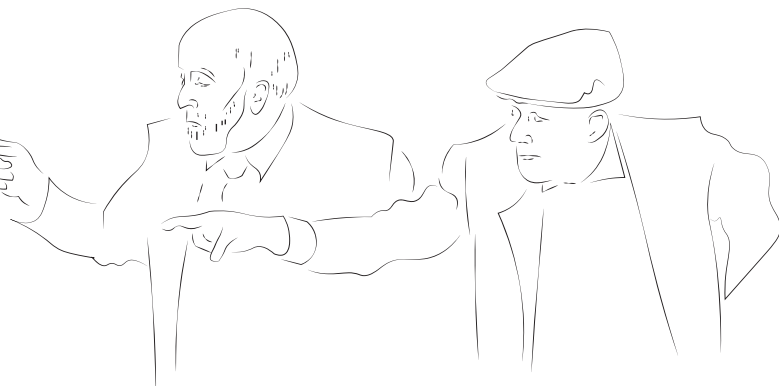


ILLUSTRATION CREDIT: LAOISE TARRANT

couple to adopt a child. He’s also highly in favour of drink-driving, which I am sure is purely coincidental with him being a publican. Danny isn’t really the brains behind the operation though, and largely can be ignored, which is sadly very dangerous as we shouldn’t just have to ignore someone who votes daily on the laws that affect our nation.

The brains behind everything is Michael. Michael inherited the farm, the plant hire business and the pub. Michael also owns 21 other properties which are available for letting or rental. He owns a shop in his local area, and owns another pub which he’s trying to turn into a co-living apartment, the planning permission for which has been knocked back on several occasions due to the 6 rooms he wishes to build “lacking in personal space and natural lighting, and not living up to amenity standards” The plant hire business is contracted to work for the HSE and also provides fuel for the Kerry County Council. He also owns a 25% stake in “The Skellig Hotel Experience”, which owns a hotel that is being let out for use as a Direct Provision Centre. He is yet to admit he owns this stake, despite it being the law that all shareholding investments over €13,000 be declared to the Oireachtas Register of Interests. Nothing there that would affect his and his brother’s voting records. No companies that they use to leverage their positions in their local area. And that’s not the end of it. Michael has been involved in his own controversies, like in 2007 when he took part in a reality TV Show on RTÉ and a phone in Teinster House made 3,636 votes for him over 31 hours at a cost of over €2,600 to the taxpayer. His two sons were convicted of assaulting a British tourist on multiple occasions on the same day in 2019 and got away with suspended sentences, with Jackie Jr. refusing

to step down from his seat as a Councillor after the conviction. Before the assault, Kevin Healy-Rae stated “This is My Town”, and that sums up the Healy-Raes in general – delusions of grandeur, brought up in a world away from the area they live in. They are millionaires that use their millions to leverage their position in Kerry in order to further their positions as politicians and drive cashflow into their family through government contracts. They’re homophobic, anti-choice, and only work to preserve their own positions. They know nothing of the struggle of the working-class. They put on false accents, wear their farmers’ caps inside the Dáil so that the “common man” can see their typically “common outfits” and then are driven home in their large expensive estate cars.

It will be a great day for Kerry when they finally lose their hold in the region. Their constant rhetoric of “Us vs Them” against those that live in the large cities and towns of Ireland serve only to further their own careers and do nothing for the people of Kerry. Farmers in rural Kerry have more in common with most people living around North Central Dublin than they do with the Healy Raes. Until their dynasty is run out of the county and these people are guided through the constant false messaging and can find the common ground, they hold with the lower classes living day to day in the cities of this nation by some intelligent party which does not yet exist, the working classes of Ireland will struggle to find any strong foothold to drag ourselves up with.

REDDIT SAYS THE BUCK “STONKS” HERE

E. KEOGH

E. Keogh takes us through the GameStop stock affair and how this shows that the one-percent can be rattled.

The recent news about a Reddit page bringing down multiple billion-dollar hedge funds has taken the world by storm. The fact that multiple working-class people managed to invest in a failing company and come out on top was almost unthinkable. For years, the upper classes have told anyone below them if they want to get rich, they should invest in stocks, in crypto, in anything they can. Now that the common people decided they would and came out on top, the rich are angry.

So how exactly did it all happen? Well, to put it as simply as it was explained to me, hedge funds are created, clients can invest in hedge funds, and this pooled wealth is used to invest in a wide variety of stock. Hedge funds are unregulated which means they are risky to invest in. This also means that hedge funds can do something called “selling short”. This means that investors borrow shares and immediately sell them to other investors, hoping that they can rebuy the shares when the stock falls in price. This is done to companies that are not doing so well. Enter GameStop.

GameStop's shares were worth around 13 USD up until the 5th of January of this year, going up to 20 USD near the end of the month. GameStop's fall had been bet on for a long time before this major event on the 12th of January. R/Wallstreetbets had organised an army for taking down the hedge funds when they realised the power they possessed as a collective. Reddit users invested in GameStop stock, and this posed a major problem for the hedge funds. They rely on stock prices falling so that they make back their money and more, but when Redditors started investing, the stock price skyrocketed. The shares that were originally worth around 20 USD wound up with a value of 483 USD. These same hedge funds now had to buy stock in order to give back borrowed shares that had gone up in value, so much so that the stock rose just above 2300% during its peak.

“Unlikely does not mean it will not happen, as we have seen the strangers on R/Wallstreetbets are not afraid to take risks when the prize is taking down hedge funds..”

So, is this an example of how we the common people can fight back at wealth inequality? Or was this a once-off? It is definitely possible to do again, but now that the rich have seen it been done, a combination of legislation, more careful planning on the hedge funds parts, and the fact that they will not underestimate the power of the people, it will make it so much more difficult and unlikely. Unlikely does not mean it will not happen, as we have seen the strangers on R/Wallstreetbets are not afraid to take risks when the prize is taking down hedge funds and proving just how much the common people can affect the stock market in such a short period of time.

The reason this event was able to take place was because of the fact that the people in the subreddit

exploited the stock exchange the same way that these rich hedge fund investors did. It was unregulated, risky, and made them a lot of money. It meant that the hedge funds were now billions of dollars in debt. As it was seen very shortly after, trading companies like Robin Hood halted trading altogether on GameStop stock. Other companies followed suit, as massive amounts of people tried to invest. This was the first tell-tale sign that the same event would not be allowed to happen again if it could be avoided. Trading was halted for the supposed reason of SEC safety nets, with many on both sides of the American two party-system calling for companies like Robinhood to resume trading as they only stopped trading to protect the hedge funds and their investors.

This already made the trading companies allegiances extremely apparent to everyone involved, and the fact that the hedge funds were effectively bailed out meant that they were not only protected by the companies but were also backed by multi-billionaire organisations that offer them a financial net to fall back on should their attempts to short sell fail. The regular people spending parts of their stimulus cheques do not have anything to fall back on. If their investment falls in value, that is it, they have lost their money with no help in sight. No organisation will help, no government assistance. However, the subreddit members, even those that joined their efforts to both to invest in a company that they believed in and cherished as a seller of all things gaming, and to make a big dent in the rich investors' pockets, proved that the risk was worth it.

So, can this happen again? Absolutely, the people involved came against insurmountable odds and most came out on top. GameStop stock has decreased as the winners want to cash in on their earnings, and legislation is gradually being introduced so that the 'one percent' can stay the one percent. The caps that were present this

“...this is just the start of the working class realising the effect they can have on the pockets of the rich.”

time around will still be present the next time a group acts, there will probably be more restrictions to save the hassle of having to bail out hedge funds, but as far as I am concerned this is just the start of the working class realising the effect they can have on the pockets of the rich. The question is, will there be another opportunity for all those people to invest again? The price of GameStop stock has dipped down to about 70 USD, and with many anxious investors completely new to trading stocks, many wary Redditors will most like sell the stock they own before it dips too low to yield any profit, or even just to break even for that matter.

The wounds will be felt by the investors who are a part of the hedge funds, and they will be felt as they recuperate their losses for years to come while they pay back their loans and bailouts. This will not be the last time working-class people will demonstrate our ability to seriously mess with how the stock market functions and how the rich take advantage of the stock market.

UCDSU SHOULD DEBATE MORE MOTIONS.

NATHAN YOUNG

With UCDSU Council on Zoom being remarkably more quiet than the in-person sittings, *Nathan Young* wonders whether this is due to a unified front in troubled times, or a dereliction of duties.

EVERY second Monday, 100 or so members of UCDSU's council meet to discuss any and all business of the Union. Current events have forced the meetings to be held over Zoom, where once they took place in either one of Newman's lecture theatres or the Fitzgerald Chamber in the student centre. And the shift from the debating chamber seems to have had an effect. The commitment to, or rather appetite for, open debate and discussion seems to have ended.

For every motion, the Chair allows the proposing member to outline the motion, before asking if any speaker would like to speak against the motion. The Chair even points out that he encourages debate and would, no matter the topic, really like to hear if anyone disagrees with any aspect of the motion. About half the

eco-friendly packaging for the eco-conscious was as important as any dietary requirement. Education Officer Hannah Bryson pointed out that, with the Commercial Officer let go due to Covid cutbacks, there was no one in the company left to ardously research the impact of each and every product and source eco-friendly alternatives. This is hardly a battle over principles or ideas, or steering the direction of the union.

In previous years there had been long discussions and debates over motions. Class reps questioned in droves the wisdom of removing the mandate to provide drug testing kits. The conception of the Union as a largely apolitical lobbying body was alive in some constituencies, whereas others saw the adding of correct positions to the policy book as insufficient, and called on campaigns of radical action such as divesting entirely from the fossil fuels industry. After the controversial hosting of Pretty Little Thing led to division over where the Union's politics and their financial interests rank in relation to each other, all kinds of proposals were put forward and struck down.

Even the reports, at least of the Sabbatical Officers, were discussed. Granted, it was usually some fresher economics student questioning the need for a Sabbat to pay for a taxi between Belfield and Smurfit or some other mundane expenses claim, but it was at least something. It showed that reports were read and that members of council cared about something, even if they had a fundamental misunderstanding of the value of basic expenses. The Sabbat in question, in this case, then-graduate officer Conor Anderson, retorted that if the student can find a public transport route that would allow for travel between the campuses along with several boxes of pamphlets, condoms, and newspapers, then he would use that.

There is a potential argument to be made that the reason for the lack of debate is that all the reports are good and the motions positive and thorough. Given the large number of college officers who feel the need to read their reports out in full, only to reveal that they have done the bare minimum and communicated with constituents and staff, there is reason to doubt the critical thinking skills of each and every member of Council.

Further, and even more obviously, is that members of Council should surely disagree on ideological grounds sometimes. If the self-professed marxism of President Anderson has not yet butted heads with the politics of a single business Class Rep in Council (and it hasn't) then there are two possibilities: the motions, despite the promise of a radical SU, are milquetoast enough to ruffle no feathers, or the less Marxist members of Council haven't been paying attention. Even if the majority of this year's radicalism has been in supporting the GEM students and other non-SU entities, that should still end up in council reports which get passed unanimously without question.

None of this is to say that simply having more conservative opinions would improve council meetings



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: DOMINIC DALY

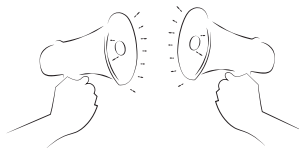
by itself. It would mean that people elected to represent their classes were actually bringing forward the views of their cohort, and it would mean that any motion put before Council would have to be defended. Even if the framework is that all members of Council are activists on the political left, the complete lack of discussion and debate is unlike any leftist gathering to have ever happened before. All members share the goal of some general "betterment for the lot of students", but tactics, efficacy, and priorities, the topics that start arguments in even the smallest leftist tendencies are treated as moot points that we do, after all, agree on already.

With any motion or policy, critique is good. Even if one considers themselves to be of the far left, discussing a motion calling for something anti-capitalist, the ideological opponents need to speak. First of all, they might have a point. Perhaps what is being called for undermines the interests of the Union. When lobbying for a total divestment from fossil fuels was proposed last year, many members of council pointed out that such industries pay for many PhD programmes, and thus the Union must protect those PhD students first. Perhaps the solving of the climate crisis is so important that this PhD

funding would be worth losing, but advocates must be prepared to accept that, in public. If the motion needs more work before it can deliver on its promises, this kind of questioning will force that to happen. Even if the motion is well thought-out and for an important change in policy, this baptism of fire will serve as an education for members. They can leave the chamber knowing full well why it is that they support what they support.

The controversial motions, and the expressing of unpopular opinions, benefit movements. That's the point of having a Council, and if these debates are no longer needed, then neither is the otherwise tedious tradition of logging in to Zoom to listen to reports.

HEAD TO HEAD



WOULD YOU RECOMMEND UCD TO FUTURE STUDENTS?

NATHAN YOUNG AND MICHAEL BERGIN

YES

NATHAN YOUNG

THERE are a few criteria for recommending a University. What they want to study, what they want to get out of studying, where they currently live, and how much money they have all come to mind. This is all stated by way of disclaimer, that is to say - UCD is not inherently "better" than any other Higher Education institution in Ireland, merely that it is the best option for at least some people. UCD degrees look great for employers, so if improving one's chances of getting a job is the aim, UCD is a good shout. University rankings published by organisations like Times Higher Education consistently put UCD near the top of Ireland's rankings. TCD usually ranks higher, of course, but TCD also tends to have tougher entry requirements, so having UCD somewhere on the CAO form is not a poor shout.

None of this is to dismiss the reasons current students may resent UCD. The University is poorly managed, the Library is underfunded, the PhD workers are underpaid and overworked, and the fundraising missions get far too much attention. Some claim this is because UCD has become too focused on profit. While it is the case that certain financial decisions in UCD are frankly stupid, such as the €7.5m office renovations for President Deeks' office, the problem is in fact sector-wide. In 2014, The Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education was established "to identify and consider issues related to the long term sustainable funding of higher education in Ireland and to identify funding options for the future". In 2016, the group's findings were published in what became known as the Cassells report. Without simply reprinting the entire document, the next best thing is to publish these points from the executive summary of what is needed:

Core Funding: Additional annual funding of €600 million by 2021 and €1 billion by 2030 to deliver higher quality outcomes and provide for increased demographics. This will allow an improvement in student:staff ratios, better engagement with students, and improved support services for teachers and students. This will underpin the quality of teaching and learning, the relevance of graduates' competencies and abilities and improve completion rates.

Capital Funding: A capital investment programme of €5.5 billion is needed over the next 15 years to sufficiently cater for increased student numbers, capital upgrades, health and safety issues, equipment renewal and ongoing maintenance.

Student Support: An additional €100 million is needed to deliver a more effective system of student financial aid.

Since 2016, there has been an abject failure from the government to act on these findings or anything else in the report. In fact, in 2019 it was sent to the European Commission for consideration, as if kicking the can further down the road was a viable solution. That €5.5 billion capital investment is not only not on track to

being funded, but the Pandemic has only added to the strain placed on the sector. Far more money is needed for Health and Safety than was originally foreseen.

Then, what about UCD's unique nonsense with its own money? It was recently reported in this paper that the Library would need €200,000 to resume full operating hours under Covid-19 restrictions. This is money UCD has. Surely, then, UCD should cough up and open the libraries for longer? Perhaps. It's also true that UCD hasn't resumed funding the libraries to pre-'08 levels. However, almost every other university has closed their library for this lockdown. The opening and running of the libraries would also be achieved a lot easier if that core funding from the Cassells report was introduced, wouldn't it?

The next point is that the issues in UCD may seem unique, but they are not. In NUIG, for example, the repeat fee is €295, well over UCD's €230. This isn't to say UCD is any better than NUIG, simply that once one looks outside of one's own immediate surroundings might lead one to see that the grass is not always greener. Last year's efforts to fight back against 4% year-on-year increases to on-campus rent were mirrored in NUIG, DCU, and UCC. UL was planning on combining its rent increases with a change from individual rooms to shared dormitories.

Then, there are simply aspects of UCD life that are brilliant. Very little to do with the administration of course, but they are nevertheless part of why one may pick their preferred university. For wannabe journalists, campus media has an excellent track record, with alumni of campus media dominating the country's newspapers and broadcasters. UCD's Student Advisors provide a world-class service that is not bested by any other university, and a nation-wide adoption of the Student Advisory services would benefit all students. While all other institutions have their Student Societies, it's hard to deny that the facilities and activities of UCD are among the best also.

Ultimately, a student may well do better to pick a different college because it performs better at the course they want, or because it is closer to their home, or because Dublin rent in general is high. But to think of UCD as some uniquely dreadful college is to ignore not only the world-class teaching that happens here, but also the simple fact that the monetary issues are symptoms of years of sector underfunding. It is simply naïve to think otherwise.

REBUTTAL YES

MICHAEL BERGIN

WITH regard to UCD's suitability as a university that I would recommend to future students, I think the fact that the proposing argument raises just as many reasons not to go to UCD as I did, is all you need to know.

However, I had decided to take a comical approach, while my colleague decided to get some cold, hard facts. Boy, do they speak for themselves.

The financial mismanagement at the top of UCD seems to have extended to a level that even ex-FIFA Chief Sepp Blatter may call "a bit much". €7.5 million for an office renovation? They don't advertise that figure quite as much as they advertise being the second-best university in Dublin.

Though my colleague argues that this is nothing out of the ordinary, as other colleges in Ireland are just as shaky with their finances, I was still left wondering: Is that enough to warrant a recommendation? If UCD truly wanted to be worthy of recommending, it should clean up its act, and lead from the front, not tag along behind because 'well, everybody else is doing it'. This kind of ad populum embrace of

structural problems is a joke, and a sick one at that.

Finally, while UCD shares some aspects of financial mismanagement with other colleges, my colleague argues that this does not make it a "uniquely dreadful college". However, my colleague then goes on to examine UCD's "Unique nonsense with its own money". Forgive me if this sounds a little UCD-specific, or am I just being naïve?

To conclude, UCD has some enjoyable elements, though not enough to overpower its downsides. And not even nearly enough to warrant a recommendation to a poor, unsuspecting fresher.

NO

MICHAEL BERGIN

COLLEGE, fundamentally, is a place that is fuelled by the asking of questions, the insatiable curiosity that young people possess for the world around them, and the desire to find answers to once-unanswerable problems. However, since arriving in UCD, one question seems to have played on my mind far more than any other.

Is that it?

Is this what all the excitement was for? Congratulations, you've arrived in UCD, a place so big you're not even a small fish in a big pond, you're a bottom feeder in the ocean. Get ready to give up your name for an eight-digit student number, cause there's absolutely no chance any of your lecturers will know you by anything else. You're in Dublin's second-best degree-printing institution now, and an expensive one at that.

To begin with, UCD is probably the ugliest campus in Ireland. It must have been some sort of sick practical joke to locate an architecture department on a campus that looks like the Death Star, if the Death Star was constructed by the Soviet Union during an economic crisis. You will find there's nothing more relaxing than a break overlooking our trademark square lake, with water so rancid falling in will earn you a tetanus shot. Still, at least it makes a decent, if somewhat disgusting, background for grad photos. Perhaps, if you're more artistically inclined, you could visit UCD's prime sculptural achievement, the massive egg outside the science building, or the pointless, multi-coloured squiggle outside the Student centre. Revolutionary stuff.

Alas, it is probably unfair to judge a book by its cover, even if the cover is extremely off-putting (the bloody logo says UCD Dublin). What UCD should pride itself on is the notable academics that have come from the University, and credit where credit is due, some of the greatest figures in Irish history have passed through the college. A fact you'll find, UCD is only too aware of.

Should you ever have the misfortune to be invited to an awards ceremony in UCD, brace yourself for a barrage of ceremonial pomp that would make even the royal family blush. The ridiculous robes, with different colours for different school heads, the floppy crown adorned by our dear President Deeks, even the string quartet that plays as these academic deities march into the O'Reilly hall. It all just smacks of self-aggrandisement rather than a genuine appreciation of academic achievement. It's a congregation of teachers, not the council of Elrond.

Perhaps, though, teachers may be the wrong word. 'Lecturers' is probably far more suitable. It is quite likely that Google will teach you the vast majority of the material on your course. In most cases, however, the lack of a close engagement felt with course material and lecturers is not the fault of said lecturers. It is simply the sheer scale of the place. In a college of 30,000 people, it

takes a very loud voice indeed to be heard.

And who have we to listen to our voices, then? Our Students' Union, an institution that puts the bananas into Banana Republic. A glorified hoodie-ordering committee, they seem to have markedly more interest in carnal affairs (such as last week's seminar on how BDSM works) than in college affairs. Not that they even have a mandate to challenge any decisions the powers that be in UCD make. At the last SU elections, the eye-wateringly low figure of 4% was given as the official turnout. The contest for president was unchallenged. All this means inadequate student representation when big decisions are made in UCD, which leads to farcical decrees such as the recent plan to hike fees by 12%.

This brings me nicely to my next point, the cost of the place. Dublin is one of the most expensive cities in Europe (somehow), and despite this, little or no effort is made to alleviate these costs. In fact, as the recent rate hike has shown, the powers that be in UCD actively couldn't care less. And have fun trying to keep up your weekend job too. Most lecturers will expect you to care only for college work at the weekend, and if you can't afford to go without a job, well that's your fault for being poor I guess.

All told, UCD is a college of exclusivity, with a degree of self-importance that it has no right to hold. It does not rank within the top 100 Universities worldwide by most measures, and it also rarely even ranks as the best university in Dublin. Incassant bragging about being the biggest college in Ireland invites only ridicule and highlights the structural focus on quantity over quality.

Of course, UCD is not all bad. There are a plethora of student societies that can offer real friendships and meaningful connections. The problem is that UCD's incompetent side, its administrative, bureaucratic, condescending, self-serving and over-confident side, very often seems to drown out the joys that these societies can offer.

There are good people in UCD. Some of the finest friends you will ever meet, you will meet in UCD. But at an administrative level, at an institutional level, and ultimately as a college, it will leave many more questions frustratingly vague than it can ever hope to answer.

REBUTTAL NO

NATHAN YOUNG

WELL, there's actually relatively little substance to disagree with here, although I don't know if that means the argument is over or not.

A prospective student is almost certainly looking at going to college, and so a lot of the points are mute. Being given a student number is a pretty bog-standard practice, so that certainly isn't a point against UCD. If not being recognised by your lecturers is an issue for any particular student, then perhaps said student should sit at the front and ask interesting questions. Everyone else seems to understand that first-year classes aren't where academics make friends. Again, this is not unique to UCD, although it's well worth adding that most undergraduates who care to engage have become at least acquainted with a few members of faculty by the time they leave.

As far as campus being ugly is concerned, brutality is good. Actually, and one would do well to learn that a university is not measured by how closely it shares its aesthetic with Hogwarts.

The pomp and circumstance of the very start and very end of one's degrees are quite ceremonious, but

1. no more so than any other University in Ireland and 2. happen twice a degree, once at the start and once at the end. If these two ceremonies are too much to bear for a prospective student, then they are dodging the bullets of tutorials, lectures, and essay deadlines by skipping on Higher Education.

Finally, the critique of UCDSU. A singular BDSM workshop does not an indictment make. There is plenty to criticise and plenty they do wrong, but again that's no reason to avoid UCD in its entirety. The makeup and nature of the Students' Union change from year to year, and therefore the SU that will represent any prospective student will not be the current one anyway.

UCD is terrible in so many ways, but they are almost all systemic issues in Higher Education. Fight against those instead, because they will follow you to any and every college in Ireland.

FEATURES

GOING DUTCH: STUDYING IN THE NETHERLANDS DURING COVID

CAOILFHINN HEGARTY

Caoilfhinn Hegarty speaks to three university-goers about their experience of the pandemic in one of Irish student's favourite destinations

"The most popular European destinations for Irish students are the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany", that's according to Qualifax.ie, the national learner's database for Ireland. It probably comes as no surprise to anyone who has been following the trends in Irish students' college applications that the Netherlands ranks so high in preference. Since 2017 there has been a marked increase in interest in studying in the lowlands country. The feeling is reciprocal, with groups of Dutch universities hosting events such as 'OMG We're Going Dutch' aimed specifically at attracting Irish college-goers. According to the European University Central Application Support Service (EUNICAS), tickets for this event sold out for it's December 2020 dates, prompting a second round of (online) talks in January of 2021 to cater for demands. As it stands, there are currently 1,200 Irish students enrolled in Dutch universities, with lower costs and entry requirements, as well as higher-ranking institutes, being the main pull-factors.

"Enyoazu mentioned that she had noticed a generational skew in terms of participants towards older age groups, which she understands as being due to the fact that 'it reminded them of the wartime.'"

Unfortunately and inevitably the pandemic put the breaks on the plans for many people hoping to spend the 2020/2021 academic year in the Netherlands.

Clodagh Johnston's original hope for the year "was to study English Literature in UvA for the Spring Semester".

She says that "Getting the email to say that UvA were cancelling their exchange students placements, while an email I expected, was still a roundhouse kick to my emotions. So much had already been cancelled and altered due to Covid and having Erasmus cancelled was this final event that cemented in my mind that I was never truly going to get the full college experience I'd been promised. Even when we're 'back', I can't re-apply, I just have to move on and hope it was all for the best".

Johnston is quick to add "that UCD were very helpful and offered other spots in other universities that hadn't been filled, but I figured they were going to be cancelled so I declined", before continuing that "It's safe to say that seeing that some of those placements weren't cancelled and watching people currently on Erasmus, going out and doing Erasmus things, sucks. I can't think of a more eloquent way to sum up my emotions than saying that it sucks that the college experience as I knew it, and was promised it to be, no longer exists and cannot be reclaimed".

For those who did manage to make the move, the experience is not quite what they'd envisioned. However, these students have a unique perspective on the Coronavirus pandemic both at home and abroad.

Ugochi Enyoazu, Patience Jumbo, and Niall Torris are all young Irish people attending universities in the Netherlands, and all three have had the opportunity of experiencing the reaction of two different governments to an unprecedented global health crisis. Until last Autumn, when the Dutch government began to take more intense health measures, the Netherlands and Ireland had diverged quite widely in their handling of the virus. When Jumbo's plane touched down in the Netherlands last August she remembers that "I thought there was no pandemic". She was "shocked because no one was wearing masks" and "when I went into the shops no one was social distancing". In a televised address on the 16th of March last year, just as COVID-19 was beginning to rear its head in Europe, the then Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte declared that "The Netherlands is an open country" which would be taking the approach of pursuing 'population immunity' by allowing the virus to spread in a controlled manner.

Ireland had already entered its first lockdown the week prior to Rutte's statement.

Ugochi Enyoazu had "always wanted to go abroad". A student of International and European Law, she first arrived in the Netherlands last August to commence a full degree at the University of Groningen. Having just spent the Summer of 2020 at home in Ireland, she found the Dutch approach to the virus, when she initially arrived, to be an adjustment. "The Dutch government really didn't want to go into lockdown" she recalls, "so they came up with this idea of the 'partial lockdown'" which involved "almost all the elements of [a] lockdown" but kept most retail open. "It was like normal life" she says, "It was really weird". In particular, she notes how different the attitude to masking up was; "the Dutch government said that you're not supposed to wear a mask and that if you [did] it [meant] you had Covid". Niall Torris, a Masters student in Clinical Psychology, is also attending the University of Groningen. Of the

was made mandatory in the Netherlands last December to cope with rising numbers, it was "explained really well (...), and they waited until they had good evidence before they asked people to do it", whereas with the curfew it was "very different" and "there were kinda these vague notions about why people were not being able to be out (...)" a lot of the reasoning behind it seemed to be based more in vagaries". When describing the riots, Enyoazu mentioned that she had noticed a generational skew in terms of participants towards older age groups, which she understands as being due to the fact that "it reminded them of the wartime". Indeed Mark Rutte had himself made a point of saying last March that measures prompted by the virus were "unprecedented in peacetime". These comments highlight the vastly different social context to lockdowns that exist in the Netherlands as opposed to the historically neutral Irish state.

Despite the unrest, the students view the positives of living in the Netherlands to be outweighing any negatives. Jumbo explains that she did not meet the requirements to study Social Work in Ireland as "Trinity wouldn't accept a PLC course" to get onto the programme she wanted. Her current university in Nijmegen not only accepted her qualifications, but was a cheaper option than the UK. Torris also cites vastly cheaper fees and cost of living as big factors, as well as a more accessible programme: "Normally you do a masters in Psychological Science or Applied Psychology and then you would move towards Clinical Psychology as a specialisation", but this was not a necessity in the University of Groningen, allowing him to "get on that path a little bit earlier". Enyoazu points out that the law course in Groningen is "one of the best". Despite the added complications and frustrations to living abroad, along with the restrictions to their college experience, the attitude of these three young Irish people is summed up by Jumbo, who states with certainty "I don't regret moving".

three, he is the only one to have spent time living in the Netherlands prior to the pandemic. As he observed it, the debate over mask-wearing was "as to whether or not the masks were of material benefit". He notes that, in his experience, Dutch citizens are more likely to respect the reasoning for measures if they are explained clearly. His case in point is the anti-curfew riots which took place in late January in several Dutch cities after a 9pm to 4.30am curfew was initiated. Torris agreed, when asked by *The University Observer*, that he had found the riots alarming but made the point that when mask-wearing



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: SINÉAD MOHAN

them. Third-year English with Creative Writing student Jodie Doyle did an internship at Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) in Trimester One. Her role consisted of research projects, working with workshops, and other opportunities. In her role, she discovered that she enjoys working with kids and found the support from her superiors crucial to her success, stating MoLI was the first place she had experienced "a healthy work culture. The people there were super encouraging and were interested in me as a person and professionally and really wanted to help me succeed. Part of MoLI's ethos is to be a stepping stone into bigger things and help you think out of the box and give you new opportunities. I would definitely recommend doing an internship because it pushes you so far out of your comfort zone and it's a really fun way to spend a semester of college. You really learn about yourself, especially through the weekly journals."

Internships can also help you expand your professional contact list and build your confidence in all aspects of your life. It gives students "this narrative that

FEATURES

THE FUTURE OF THE LEAVING CERT

GRACE DONNELLAN

As concerns regarding this year's Leaving Certificate examinations rise, *Grace Donnellan* examines the current system and provides alternatives.

"The government needs to overcome its paralysis regarding education policy not only when considering the pandemic but also the long term future."



PHOTOGRAPHY CREDIT: DOMINIC DALY

students were facing intense class tests while in school as teachers tried to ensure they would have a body of work to base a predicted grade on if needs be. On the topic of online exams, Leydon says: "Can we get online models that replicate conditions of no cheating and no plagiarism which we get when we have students sitting in the exam hall?" Online exams are also not the most accessible as they require students to have a computer, a quiet room, or a stable wifi connection.

An alternative to the current Leaving Certificate that is often proposed is continuous assessment. However, this also comes with some challenges. The idea of having some exams at the end of 5th Year was put forward in the NCAA 2019 Draft Consultative Report. However, in some subjects, skill development occurs over the 2 year period and so this was not considered an ideal solution. Additionally, the question arises as to whether this would actually solve any current problems or just lead to two sets of stressful Leaving Certificate exams. Other suggestions put forward in the NCAA report include allowing students to use different methods of assessment such as audio-visual or PowerPoint, moving away from a one-size-fits-all written approach.

Leydon explains: "one of the key policy concerns that the ASTI has been raising is that we need to review the admission system to higher education, are there other ways that colleges could supplement data coming from the CAO with other information?" She continues

that "creating supplementary & more nuanced measures in addition to the CAO would create a more flexible system". These concerns have been echoed by the OECD and the NCAA. In the 2019 NCAA Draft Report, many advocated for a reform of the current CAO system. One parent/guardian described the Leaving Certificate as "a rat race in pursuit of CAO points". An alternative could involve personal statements or interviews that allow students to demonstrate their suitability and interest in a particular course, instead of relying solely on grades in subjects that might have no relevance to their chosen degree. A practice like this is used in the US. However, it comes with its own problems as wealthy students have used various techniques to game the system.

"The ASTI believe the externally assessed Leaving Certificate exams are the best option. We acknowledge the critiques, but these can best be solved by looking at admissions to college. As well as providing greater capacity for students to have wider learning experiences and so students can make post-school choices that are not all funnelled into higher education" says Leydon. Again, this has been brought up in the NCAA draft report, where consultative feedback emphasised the need for a broader learning experience. The report also recognised the limited pathways available to people who do not wish to take the traditional senior cycle or proceed into conventional higher education.

The current Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

programmes take a different approach to the Leaving Certificate. LCVP allows students to prepare for the world of work and utilises continuous assessment with a portfolio making up 60% of a student's final grade. However, teachers of LCVP have argued for a review of the module in order to make it more attractive to students. The LCA programme also employs practical and continuous assessment elements. Nonetheless, concerns have been raised over the lack of progression opportunities for LCA students. The OECD also recommended an enhancement of the current vocational options available during and after the Leaving Certificate.

In previous Action Plans and Statements of Strategy, the Department of Education has reaffirmed its commitment to managing a learning experience that is of the highest international standards. It is clear that our system is not providing this calibre to current senior cycle students. Reflecting on the continuing uncertainty surrounding this year's Leaving Certificate, Leydon says "There should have been a decision in principle made by the government once it became clear that there would be waves of the pandemic, as seen globally". The government needs to overcome its paralysis regarding education policy not only when considering the pandemic but also the long term future.

UCD INTRODUCES AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME TO THE FOUR-YEAR BA HUMANITIES DEGREE

ANNA BLACKBURN

Anna Blackburn discusses UCD's new Humanities Internship programme with some of the people who helped get it off the ground

In the Autumn of 2020, the UCD College of Arts and Humanities implemented a trimester-long internship programme into the curriculum of BA Humanities students pursuing a four-year degree.

Dr Jaime Jones, Deputy Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies for the College of Arts and Humanities, and Bronwyn Salmon, the Employability & Internship Manager, have been developing this programme for over five years and were excited to finally incorporate it into the curriculum. All third-year students at UCD who have successfully completed their Stage 2 requirements are eligible to apply for internships and, upon successful fulfilment of workplace expectations and academic requirements, completing an internship is worth 30 credits and is GPA neutral, so it does not affect students' overall graduated GPA.

"In her role, she discovered that she enjoys working with kids and found the support from her superiors crucial to her success, stating MoLI was the first place she had experienced a healthy work culture."

Originally, the programme was set to begin in January of 2021, but the plan changed when Salmon found there was an "appetite" for both students and companies to begin in September. Arts and Humanities students have a wide range of skills, from creative writing and arts and culture, to marketing, communication, and research, so the internships offered through UCD consisted of a wide variety of companies and roles. "I think that speaks to exactly what Arts and Humanities students are good at" said Dr Jones, "they apply skills rather than necessarily kind of specific business-related training, to jobs that they come into. And so because of that, when you look at our portfolio compared to other colleges and other degree programs, it's just much more diverse. They can write, they can research,

they can communicate and those are incredible skills in the workplace". Salmon sourced internships from companies who advertised on the UCD Careers portal, such as Museum of Literature Ireland, Newstalk, Off the Ball, Fighting Words, TodayFM, The National Library of Ireland, STAND, Balls.ie, and several others. This year the programme placed twenty-five students, fifteen in Autumn and ten in Spring.

There is also an option for students to source their own internships, both locally and internationally, online or in-person since the internship replaces their trimester. This year was smaller than Salmon and Dr Jones had anticipated due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as many companies opt-ed out due to requiring an in-person intern, however, they are working to expand the programme and offer the opportunity to go on internships to as many students as possible next year. Self-sourcing an internship through UCD makes the company more likely to accept an intern, as the students have the support of the University making companies more secure in their decision to take on a student intern. Dr Jones works to "make it clear to the companies that we're working with that while it's definitely of benefit to them [...] part of the benefit is that they're engaging with the students' experience. It's not just about what the student could bring to their organization, but rather how they can help foster that student... and all of the organizations that we work with are really interested in that part of it actually, helping the students to develop the skills that they need in the workplace, so that's something we really look for in our employers, that open-mindedness to nurture the students who are going into the positions."

Choosing an internship can be very difficult, but there are a lot of supports available in UCD to help students prepare. With any and all questions, emailing Bronwyn Salmon is the place to start. You can also ask the Careers Office for advice and Dr Jones recommends talking to your pathway coordinator for "a more general discussion of how a specific internship would fit into their specific academic trajectory." The Career Readiness module is also a good way to prepare yourself for interviews and what to expect in the workplace. Dr Jones and Salmon also take the time to hold an induction session with all incoming interns and check-in with them during the trimester.

Internships are a good way to improve your CV, gain workplace and interview experience, and help direct students on their path to finding a career that is right for



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: SINÉAD MOHAN

WITH the onslaught of Covid-19, the distance between those who are homeless and those who aren't appears sharper than ever before. The homelessness crisis has reached unprecedented heights, with the number of homeless families increasing by 232% since July 2014 according to Focus Ireland. Notably, these figures do not include those squatting, 'sofa surfing', women and children in domestic violence refuges, nor, crucially, those sleeping-rough. Numerous publications have cited misconceptions and stigma around homelessness as pivotal in producing barriers to accessing services. Facing this ever-growing divide, those who work in homeless services choose to cross this imaginary line every day. Discerning shame second-hand, their experience indicates the true extent to which stigma affects homelessness in Ireland. Ceolan

"Homelessness itself is not the sole cause [of stigma]... it is a result of intertwining issues that are already stigmatised... intergenerational poverty, low-income jobs, mental health and addiction...there are layers to homelessness and to the stigma around homelessness."

McMullin, the auditor of UCD St Vincent De Paul, noted the strong impact of stigma in certain areas, an element of homelessness encountered on the society's regular Street Outreach programme.

"When training new volunteers, [we emphasise that] the food and supplies that you hand out come secondary to the talk. You have to come to their level and ensure you are not 'othering' them."

He stressed that in their work, it is important to establish a relationship of equals, rather than superiority or condescension. "Many people may not have spoken to anyone for the entire day. People are walking past them. They may be embarrassed to take advantage of homeless services because of the stigma... If we break down what homelessness is, it is people. People experiencing homelessness [are] like you and I."

However, he admitted that the issue is increasingly multi-faceted, and stigma is just one of the numerous obstacles faced, from inadequate education to language barriers for non-nationals. While some may not want to admit to being homeless, others may not even be aware of the services that are available, a deficit UCD SVP tries to counteract when directing those affected towards further assistance.

In conversation with another person who worked in homeless services for two and a half years, she indicated the deeper dimensions to stigma from her perspective; "Homelessness itself is not the sole cause [of stigma]... it is a result of intertwining issues that are already stigmatised... intergenerational poverty, low-income jobs, mental health and addiction...there are layers to homelessness and to the stigma around homelessness."

She reinforced the idea that social disgrace alone is not the primary hurdle for the homeless to cross. Instead, shame seems to be a symptom of a wider lack of understanding around homelessness and the structural roots underlying the issue.

"The main barrier is mental health and the lack of knowledge around that. I was working with young people who are very unwell... they will refuse support and there's no rationalising why... they may miss meetings with the welfare office because of their condition and if you don't attend, there's no way in..."

Mental health services are just one of the array of social structures that are not built around the "complexities of how someone ends up in these situations." The most pressing illustration is that of the Housing Assistance Provision (HAP) and Rent Allowance Schemes, a social housing substitution she describes as a "crutch used by the government."

"It's not feasible nor sustainable. There's no reason why social housing has to be stigmatised - my Mam grew up in one in the 60s/70s! Rather than shame, it's the same pattern of the "State never taking accountability for its people. The government are not doing their job. It shouldn't be up to charities and homeless services to house people... We could do better as a society. In an ideal world, there wouldn't be [homeless charities]!"

Concern was raised around a possible surge in homelessness following the pandemic, where landlords could potentially remove people from emergency accommodation when others return to Dublin's working sector. This is a stark reality and sums up the true instability of the current climate.

The unfortunate fact is; many people are homeless. While neither had all the answers, the central point proved that they should not be expected to. Both sources did stress that Ireland must start having this conversation. Be it battling misconception around mental health, questioning the responsibility of the State or simply comprehending the real diversity of this problem. "Education is key - I never knew how multi-layered it is until I started working with it!"

FEATURES

LOCKED OUT OR LOOPED IN? NAVIGATING ONLINE LEARNING WITH A DISABILITY

SOPHIE FINN

Sophie Finn investigates how the switch to distanced learning has impacted UCD students with disabilities

ONLINE learning has presented obstacles to all university students, however, students with a disability have had to face more complex challenges caused by the disruption to college. These challenges are experienced in different ways and every student needs a different level of assistance. Third level institutions in Ireland vary regarding the level of support offered to students with a disability, and Covid-19 has put the dedication and resources of colleges to the test.

The University Observer spoke to Dara Ryder, Chief Executive Officer of AHEAD, a non-profit organisation

“Students have reported that they do not feel part of UCD and have yet to make friends with other UCD students.”

aiming to promote access to third-level education for people with disabilities. When asked what challenges are faced by those students who have disabilities studying remotely, Ryder said that “every student’s experience has been different - some have found big positives in the move to online learning while others are struggling to cope”. He further commented that major challenges, including inconsistent levels of accessibility of learning materials, inconsistent captions and recordings of online lectures, unfamiliar and sometimes inaccessible online exam practices, and a lack of motivation to learn. Ryder also emphasised the difficulty of isolation and increased continuous assessment on top of the ordinary factors at play when studying at home.

Research conducted by AHEAD in the early phase of the pandemic indicated that students with disabilities face “significant challenges” learning from home and adapting to changing teaching and learning practices, however, Ryder stressed that “it’s important not to generalise and to highlight that the experience has been different for everyone”. He points out that for some students moving online has made their learning experience more accessible, for example, “students with

physical disabilities represented in that research were twice as likely to say they are coping well with learning from home than those with a mental health condition.”

Ryder commented that in the experience of AHEAD staff, Irish universities have made “huge efforts” to adapt and “really worked hard to try and give students the best possible experience”. He particularly emphasised the efforts of those in disability services, describing the endeavours made across the country as “awe-inspiring”, but notes that “there’s still so much more to do to improve accessibility and inclusion”. Ryder says that organisations such as AHEAD have supported students with initiatives such as the “introduction of a Students with Disabilities Advisory Group, the building of a new assistive technology resource to help students find technologies to support their digital learning, and development of national platforms to raise issues such as the AHEAD/USI Power of Disability conference.”

Regarding what more could be done to support students, Ryder stated that there must be “much more significant attention paid by institutions to mandating disability awareness and digital accessibility training”. He outlined that efforts need to be made for the recording of all live lectures and provision of captions, as well as reducing the assessment burden, and banning “inequitable and inaccessible assessment practices like the use of proctoring”. Ryder also emphasised that institutions must check in with students “on a one-to-one basis”, and stressed that “one clear message” he would give is to “ensure students with disabilities are consulted in decisions made about key issues that affect them adversely”. Ryder believes it is important to “learn from this pandemic and hold on to the many positive things that came out of our response in order to build a more inclusive education system,” such as the flexibility of online learning and “the sense that anything can be achieved if the collective will is there to do it.”

The University Observer also spoke to Julia Tonge, Disability Officer at UCD Access & Lifelong Learning Centre (ALL). Tonge reported that, throughout the pandemic, ALL has “worked with students with disabilities and faculty on an individual basis to assist them with challenges that they have experienced with remote learning,” and reported that “student engagement with the supports that are being offered online has increased by over 18% relative to the same trimester the year before.”

ALL has created a variety of different supports for students with disabilities. They replaced the standard ALL Welcome Programme with an online alternative which allows students to hear about available supports and meet other students in their course, they also developed a Brightspace module to support students in



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: SINEAD MOHAN

their learning, and have hosted a series of live academic skills and well-being workshops. Tonge described how the online Brightspace module “contains a section on learning online which was developed to help students with the move to remote learning.. and addresses some of the most common challenges: staying motivated, juggling demands and feeling disconnected.” ALL also moved all the services for students with disabilities online, including occupational therapy and one-to-one learning support.

Tonge emphasised that ALL provided students with additional assistive technology tools to assist with remote learning, for example, note-taking and read-aloud software, as well as providing training to faculty to ensure online content is accessible and facilitating the Covid grant scheme and distributing devices to eligible students. ALL has also facilitated the Digital Ambassador programme, which aims “to help all students in UCD gain the skills they need with technology to succeed.” Tonge outlined that the Access Centre is hosting “ALL in Common” online sessions to help students to meet and get to know others in their programme in response to the social isolation that some students have reported.”

Tonge highlighted that students with disabilities have experienced many of the same challenges as all students, but drew attention to the “increase in students

with disabilities reporting challenges with managing time”. Tonge described the overall online learning experience of students with disabilities as “varied,” with some students feeling it has benefited their studies, and others finding the experience isolating and difficult to stay motivated throughout. “Some students with disabilities have noted that they understand that the situation is challenging for everyone but for them, it is even more challenging.” She reveals that that “students have reported that they do not feel part of UCD and have yet to make friends with other UCD students” and emphasised that “support will need to be provided for students when there is an opportunity to return to campus,” as “many students will be very apprehensive about this and all students will need support in making social connections and orienting the campus.”

Since the *University Observer’s* conversation with Julia Tonge, UCD has been allocated an additional €400,000 funding from a €5.4 million grant aimed at assisting students with disabilities in higher education.

THE MEDICINAL CANNABIS ACCESS PROGRAMME AND THE CASE FOR CANNABIS LEGALISATION IN IRELAND

SIMON DOBEY

Simon Dobey speaks to politicians and on-the-ground activists about the movement to legalise cannabis in Ireland

The Medicinal Cannabis Access Programme is now a part of the HSE, however some activists have been critical. Amongst them is Gino Kenny, a People Before Profit TD who has been actively involved in highlighting the issue since entering Dáil Éireann. In an interview with *The University Observer* Kenny claimed that the parameters set out under the scheme are too narrow and that the legislation should be extended to include those suffering with ‘chronic pain’. This would allow for a broader interpretation by medical practitioners. In its current form, the medicinal cannabis can only be prescribed for treatment in three circumstances: cases of spasticity caused by Multiple Sclerosis, intractable nausea caused by chemotherapy and treatment-resistant epilepsy. During an interview with *The University Observer*, Natalie O’Regan, a University of Limerick law graduate and drug law reform activist agreed with Kenny that the parameters were too narrow. O’Regan also stated that in many cases cannabis could only be prescribed as a treatment as an absolute last resort. Additionally, she stated that those who have been deemed eligible to avail of cannabis under the scheme have been left to their own devices in regards to sourcing their medication. This has involved expensive round trips to The Netherlands.

Many of those who cannot avail of the scheme have been forced to seek out other alternatives by purchasing cannabis via the unregulated black market. One of those is Ruairi*, who sources cannabis for his father with stage four oral cancer. He asserts that cannabis has resulted in “pain relief, better sleep, and an improved appetite which has benefits for his father’s overall mental health”. Ruairi is living in constant fear of law enforcement. The pandemic and the increased presence of Garda checkpoints has added an extra layer of complexity in transporting cannabis for his father. He added that the rollout of the medicinal cannabis access programme has been far too slow and that the

“Many of those who cannot avail of the scheme have been forced to seek out other alternatives by purchasing cannabis via the unregulated black market. // Gardai also raided the home of the cafe owner, James O’Brien, during the week. James then-pregnant wife subsequently miscarried.”

programme itself is unfit for purpose.

Stephen*, who lives in County Dublin, has suffered from Crohn’s disease since being diagnosed at the age of nine. For him cannabis offers an effective fast-acting pain relief from intense cramping and stomach pain. He doesn’t use cannabis as a substitute for any of his other prescribed medication but purely to relieve symptoms and to improve his appetite. Stephen told *The University Observer* that he would prefer to have a safe and reliable access to cannabis which was less potent (higher in

CBD content and lower in THC content) to alleviate pain during his sporadic bouts of illness which can last several months at a time.

Businesses selling cannabis with a high CBD content and a THC content below 0.2% have begun to spring up across Ireland. This has been possible due to a European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling in November of 2020. The case which was referred to the ECJ by the court of appeal in the Aix-en Provence in France deemed CBD oils used in electronic cigarettes as non-narcotic and therefore covered by the free movement of goods. This meant that no national government could restrict their sale.

Last week the independent vegan cafe, Little Collins, which sells CBD and hemp products was raided by Gardai and their product seized at their store in Kilkenny. Gardai also raided the home of the cafe owner, James O’Brien, during the week. James then-pregnant wife subsequently miscarried. Gardai told the owner the product was being seized under the Misuse Of Drugs Act 1977. When asked about the seizure, Gino Kenny TD admitted that there is somewhat of a legal grey area in regards to the sale of CBD in plant form. The ECJ ruling specifically related to oils for E-cigarettes. The owner of the cafe is currently taking a legal challenge to the High Court in relation to previous charges stemming from the sale of plant-based hemp products with a THC content below 0.2%.

Natalie O’Regan and Nicole Lonergan of the Cork Cannabis Activist Network spoke with palpable horror and indignation in regards to the raids. They believe it will be “the straw that broke the camel’s back” in mobilising calls for legalisation and drug reform. They consider the targeting of this small business as reprehensible, citing the presence of organised crime gangs who sell far more potent cannabis products in the unregulated market. The raids coincided with an Irish

based company Jazz Pharmaceuticals purchase of GW Pharmaceuticals in a deal worth seven billion euro. GW pharmaceuticals lead product is Epidiolex, a cannabidiol based oral solution which is used to treat rare forms of epilepsy. They asserted that not only were the raids hypocritical but highlighted a malicious effort to deliver the sale of cannabis to big business at the expense of the small.

Frank Feighan, the Minister of State responsible for the national drugs strategy declined to be interviewed. However, he issued a statement which stated that decriminalisation of cannabis was not a workable strategy, owing to the fact that it might lead to de-facto legislation. The statement went on to assert that the government was pursuing a health-based approach to drug use. Kenny, Natalie and Nicole all argued that a health-based approach was impossible without legalisation. They claimed that in its current form the unregulated market produces far more harmful cannabis, sprayed with various dangerous and addictive substances like fentanyl and PCP. Natalie and Nicole also underscored how the criminalisation of recreational users contributes to negative perceptions of law enforcement and results in criminal records which can seriously impede career opportunities.

Speaking to *The University Observer*, Kenny said that he plans to bring forward a bill during this year proposing the legalisation of cannabis. In his perspective legalisation would cut off a key source of funding for criminal gangs operating throughout the country while ensuring that people had the ability to make informed decisions in regards to consumption. Kenny said that the bill would be similar to the bill proposed by Luke Ming Flanagan back in 2013 which received only eight votes in favour. He was not overly optimistic about the prospects for success this time around.

*Names have been changed

ONLINE AG WEEK A WELCOME RESPITE

NOEL BARDON

This January has brought one of the strongest starts to the sheep sector in years. 2021 looks to be the best year for sheep in memory, with Spring lamb prices upward of €6.20/kg up to 23kg, seeing record prices for hoggets hitting €163 per head at marts. *Hannah Woods* investigates

PREPARATIONS for Ag Week 2021 began late, as the hopes of in-person events held on campus diminished with the return of level 5 restrictions in January. The committee of the Agricultural Society succeeded in organising a series of online events over week three of the academic term, raising funds for Embrace Farm and the Strange Boat Donor Foundation in the process. At the time of writing, monies raised by the society’s GoFundMe page stood just shy of €7,400, with the stream of donations continuing, albeit at a slower pace than witnessed previously. This fund will close in the coming days with donations to be split equally between the two charities.

The week began on February 1st with Diarmuid Lee, current Ag Soc Chair, taking over the Irish Farmers’ Journal Instagram account to advertise the week’s events, with particular emphasis on the charity fundraising efforts of the society. Over 6,000 viewers tuned in to the updates delivered live from Lee’s home farm in Co. Galway. Monday also saw the launch of the society’s “Round Ireland Run”, a week-long effort to have members complete a walk/run whilst logging the distances completed via the Strava app. The initial target of 3,171km, the approximate circumference of the island of Ireland, was surpassed when a total of over 3,500km had been registered by Strava on Sunday the 7th. ‘County colours’ were donned by participants on Friday’s leg of the challenge, in lieu of the in-person event’s feature. The traditional event is synonymous with the rural community’s estranged sons and daughters of Belfield.

Sean Tonra, in acting as Chair of the Ag Soc Careers

subcommittee, organised two virtual panel discussions over the week. The discussions took place over Zoom with in excess of 100 students logging on to the talks on both days. Tuesday featured a webinar entitled ‘Transforming your business through technology’ with three progressively minded graduates of the UCD School of Agriculture & Food Science informing viewers of their extensive and varying experiences of the topic. Thursday’s discussion heard from eight representatives from the *Irish Farmers’ Journal* team. A broad industry-wide conversation on the challenges and opportunities emerging in the sector was steered by the *Farmers’ Journal’s* Lorcan Allen. The webinar featured a lengthy question and answer session with students engaging with the speakers on the most pressing issues experienced at farm, research, and legislative levels. The specialists covered a range of subjects varying from upcoming changes expected in European legislation to the practical challenges in meeting farming climate obligations.

The society’s social media accounts were of paramount importance in providing coverage of the week’s events to students across the country. The viewing of the society’s Instagram story peaked at approximately 1,100 views during the week, with some society tweets reaching 11,500 feed appearances - both statistics are impressive demonstrations of the wider online engagement achieved by the society’s social media team. ‘Instagram and Twitter were the main modes of contact used to inform members of events. Without social media, I really don’t think there would have been an Ag Week at all this year’ commented society Chair Diarmuid Lee.



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: SINEAD MOHAN

The Ag Soc Instagram following has almost doubled since the beginning of Ag Week, with this growth spurred on by the ‘Milk Neck Nomination’ initiative.

The trend encouraged students, faculty members and industry figures to record themselves downing a pint of milk before nominating three others for the challenge. The effort was accompanied by an appeal for donations to the designated Ag Week GoFundMe page. The respective missions of the Embrace Farm and Strange Boat Donor Foundation charities are to “support rural communities in grieving the loss of

loved ones from farm accidents”; and to “meet the humanitarian needs of donor families and recipients”.

Instagram was also chosen as the venue to host the virtual talent show. Sligo’s Darragh Giblin, a fourth-year student, clenched the title from the eight other contestants with a vocal performance. Over 200 votes were cast in the poll that followed the posting of all entries to the page’s story feature. The well-known influence of the Irish traditional music scene on Ag week was shown in the proportion of trad entries that were received by Ag Soc.

RESEARCH PUBLISHED ON LIME HAS POSITIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

HANNAH WOODS

Recently published Teagasc research on the importance of soil pH in reducing grassland GHG emissions signal a win for both policy makers and producers, should farm practices change in accordance with the recommendations. *Hannah Woods* reports.

WITH research into liming shining light on potential nitrous oxide emission reduction strategies emerging from Teagasc in Johnstown Castle, County Wexford, the potential for a more sustainable future for Irish agriculture lies ahead. The research sets out a plan where, in tandem with liming, an adequate supply of phosphorus looks to have a major impact on the composition of the microbial community structure in the soil, while alleviating nitrous oxide emissions. These simultaneously increase nitrogen uptake and thus lead to increased crop yields.

This new research comes at the perfect time. The recently published *Ag Climatise Roadmap* by the Department of Agriculture seeks to bring Ireland to a climate-neutral status by 2050. Although this deadline is far into the future, Minister of State in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Senator Pippa Hackett said: “Greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions from the sector have been going in the wrong direction. We need a clear pathway to reverse this trend, and this roadmap sets us on that path.”

The results from the study show that applying five tonnes of lime per hectare every three to four years,

has the potential to increase soil pH from 5.1 to 6.9, reducing nitrous oxide emissions by 39%. Farmers can simultaneously improve soil pH for agronomic benefits while also reducing N2O emissions, ultimately a win-win for both the farmer and the environment. Senior Research Officer in Johnstown Castle, Dr David Wall stated that: “using an existing long-term intensive grassland liming and phosphorus trial, this research investigated the effect of longer-term lime and phosphorus management and their interaction on N2O emissions and grassland productivity”.

All the while, applying lime to soils of an acidic pH, less than 6.5, looks to increase soil biological activity, while raising soil respiration rates and organic matter mineralization, sequentially resulting in increases in plant productivity. From the study, long term liming works to increase returns of organic matter to the soil whilst exhibiting a linear decrease in nitrous oxide emissions with the increase in soil pH from the application. In an intensive grassland plot located in a humid, temperate climate, the study found that a soil limed to a pH of 6.9 emitted 36% less nitrous oxide per ton of DM yield under the same management and fertiliser regime compared to the same soil with a pH of 5.1.

It was observed that the year prior to liming and phosphorus application, reseeded of the grassland showed a very positive effect on sward establishment and yield. The study shows by adjusting the soil pH above the agronomic optimum of 7 for most crops, in combination with optimal phosphorus supply, the most favourable outcome from the study in terms of both environmental and agronomic benefit can be obtained. This is again another finding that is not only good for the environment but is also of benefit to the farmer. Through the application of good farming and grassland practices, the outcome can result in a considerable nitrous oxide mitigation potential in temperate grasslands.

While livestock numbers are still the main driver of agricultural greenhouse gas emissions with approximately 80% of emissions associated directly to the animal, fertiliser nitrogen accounts for 12%, with soils and carbon dioxide from lime manufacturing making up the remainder. Under the government’s *Ag Climatise 2050* roadmap, a reduction of nitrous oxide emissions by 40-50% is sought. This new research by Teagasc would point towards a brighter future for policymakers, whereby their overall goals can not only be backed by scientific knowledge but put into practice by producers

whose production targets will align with policy.

The research findings are undoubtedly indications of a step in the right direction for sustainable farming in Irish agriculture. Farmers and advisors should not only take the initiative to follow this new research but to encourage and educate those that may not have access to the scientific writings. Sustainability is not only on producers’ minds but also policymakers, whereby in the coming years’ new research and findings such as these may be drawn into legislation. It is within every farmer’s interest to get ahead of the game and start putting this research into practice.

FURTHER STUDY POPULAR AMID “SLUGGISH” DEMAND FOR GRADUATES

NOEL BARDON

Graduates from the UCD School of Agriculture & Food Science’s class of 2020 spoke to *Noel Bardon* about the challenges and opportunities encountered following the completion of their degree programmes last year.

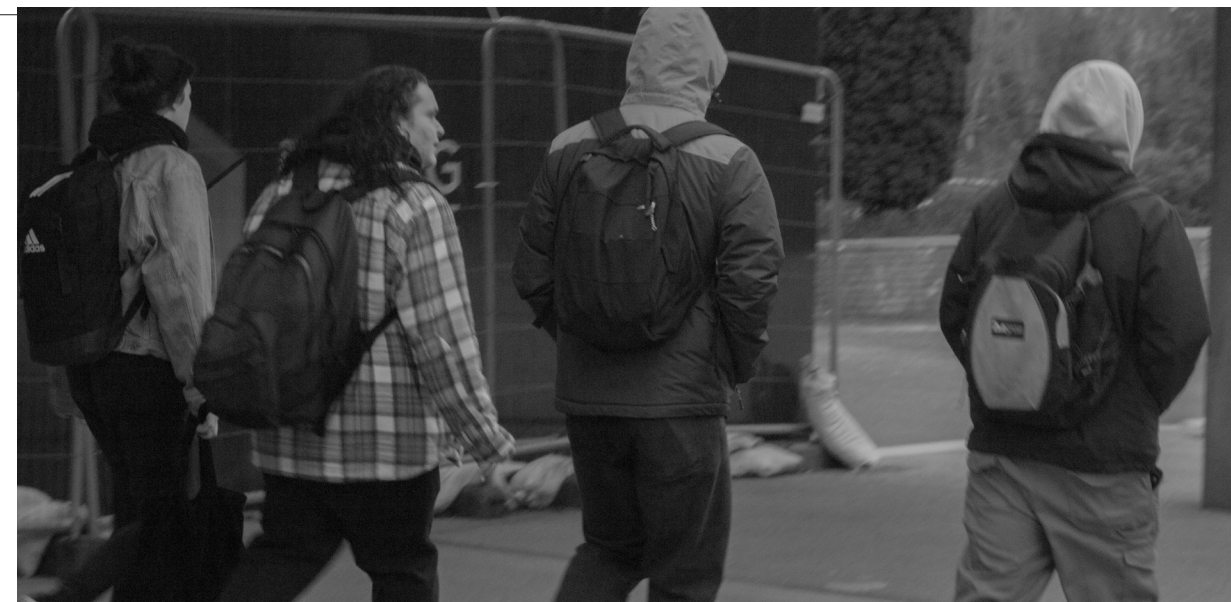
STAGE-Four students in the School of Agriculture & Food Science find themselves nearing the end of their undergraduate studies, almost a third of the way through the Spring trimester. An atmosphere of uncertainty pertaining to potential opportunities for further study or employment has shadowed many undergraduates’ exploration of possible progression options. Some graduates have succeeded in overcoming the challenges posed by the current reduction in industry career offerings, forging an opportunity to develop career prospects through the completion of postgraduate study. Many others have opted to bring technical knowledge back to the home farm, helping family members and neighbours in running their enterprises while weathering the temporary lull in graduate demand at sectoral level.

Reports indicate that many companies have advertised positions and offered interviews with intentions of expanding their workforce, only to then find employee training too difficult to implement in line with extended government restrictions. Clodagh Forbes, a recent Animal & Crop Production graduate, commented on her experience of the application process for roles in industry: “Whilst the need for graduates grows, the companies are just reluctant to take new people on and introduce new bodies into the working environment”. This challenge of equipping fresh graduates with the applied skills they require in the working environment is made difficult by the high degree of in-person client-customer contact many roles in the sector entail. The completion of PWE programmes will likely aid UCD agricultural graduates, as many elements of such on-the-job training regimes have been completed in the third year of study.

Clodagh also mentioned the re-emergence of an optimistic outlook amongst recent graduates as the volume of positions advertised has begun to increase. “Things are picking back up, with companies showing that there are ways and means around the obstacles of Covid”. She commented on her relief, with the benefit of hindsight, to have begun a part-time Diploma in Leadership for the Agri-food Sector in UCC.

One element of the Stage-Four study experience that current final year students will miss out on is the Ag Soc Careers Fair held annually on campus. The graduates interviewed have commented on the immense value of employer-student exposure at such events and the understanding of the jobs market that can be gained from the personal resources offered at job fairs. Any online event will face serious challenges in generating the same degree of engagement and relaxed atmosphere that

“Sources involved at various levels of industry and education have aired a word of caution to those whose plans are entirely reliant upon applications for industry-provided graduate programmes”



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: SINEAD MOHAN

the changing circumstances of many. Patrick had always hoped to complete a Masters in the area of knowledge transfer, and with the full-time taught course moved online, the decision was made to opt for the two-year part-time course. This course is normally delivered online and, as a result, has faced little disruption with changing government restrictions. The part-time programme has also allowed him to work alongside his studies.

Christopher Heffernan, a Kerry native pursuing a research-based PhD in animal nutrition through Teagasc and UCC revealed the immense strain placed on studying, at this academic level, remotely. An inability to work from his research centre in Teagasc Moorepark has hindered, Chris believes, the capacity of him and other PhD candidates to access resources and engage with fellow researchers. Whilst agricultural research is deemed an essential service under current government guidelines, many educational and research institutions

are reluctant to increase the volume of interpersonal contact, be these contacts on-site or in the wider farmer community relied upon in research studies. Christopher, like many postgraduate students, is hopeful that he will continue to put his time spent away from campus in Cork and the research centre in Moorepark to constructive use in working through his literature review.

One aspect of the application process that the graduates who spoke with the *University Observer* believe has improved, following an initial period of adaptation, is the move to remote interviewing for job openings. Interviewers and job applicants alike have reached a level of familiarity in the operation of online communication platforms that have reduced the disparity in the experience of interviewing on the digital interface, in comparison with traditional face-face interviewing methods.

INTERNET COOKIES AND THEIR EFFECT ON OUR PRIVACY AND RIGHT TO INFORMATION

JANA JOHA

Jana Joha discusses the overwhelming presence of internet cookies in your browsing life and the effect that they have on our privacy and right to information.

INTERNET cookies have become an essential and inescapable part of how we browse and search on the internet today. Every time we visit a website we are prompted with a notification asking for our consent to accept cookies. Internet cookies can be useful by helping web developers give users a more personal and convenient experience on their websites. The most common function of cookies is that they let websites remember users' login details and the items placed in their shopping carts. All this information allows for an enjoyable experience when web browsing but are there hidden dangers?

The modern-day internet cookie or HTTP cookie is a small piece of data that gets stored on a computer's hard drive whenever a user visits or browses a webpage that uses cookies. Cookies are used to identify your computer whenever you log onto a website. They have various functions but the most simple function is to let websites remember your log in details, allowing you to reopen a webpage if you closed out of it without having to log in again. Cookies also allow websites to track a user's browsing activity and history in order to serve up targeted ads. That's why, for example, if you were to search for something on Amazon you might see ads related to what you searched for on your Facebook feed later that day. In addition, cookies are used by website owners to track exactly how many unique users visit and use their website. This is possible due to the fact that cookies stored on a user's computer have unique IDs. Therefore, if you were to visit the same webpage multiple times in a day it would recognise you as one user instead of multiple. This allows website owners to collect more accurate data about their website traffic.

The modern-day cookie was invented back in 1994 by 24-year-old web browser programmer Lou Montulli. At the time, Montulli was working for Netscape Communications which was having trouble storing shopping cart data while consumers were browsing their website. The company couldn't cope with the overwhelming amount of data and therefore, Montulli was tasked with finding a way to store that data on users' computers instead of on the company's servers.

“Concerns over the use of third-party cookies have spurred the European Union to introduce regulations on data protection and privacy.”

Montulli was successful and used an old tool called 'Magic Cookie' as inspiration for developing the HTTP cookie. Magic Cookie is an old computing term referring to the data that is shared when a user logs into a system. This small piece of data is shared between the user's computer and the server. Montulli took this idea and repurposed it for internet browsing. The company was then able to save space on their servers and in turn save money. Cookies today are still used to identify computers but now they have the added function of tracking user activity. This can be very helpful - or it can be a breach of privacy depending on how the website decides to use the information.

There are different types of HTTP cookies which have specific features. Session cookies and persistent cookies have different expiry dates. Session cookies only save data in a computer's temporary memory while the user is browsing a website. These cookies are sometimes called transient or non-persistent cookies and are automatically deleted when the user ends a

session. However, persistent cookies do not delete after a session ends. Instead, they remain on the computer and expire at a specific date or after a certain period which is determined by the website. During its lifespan, it will send data to the server every time a user visits the website it belongs to, or every time a user views a resource which belongs to that website, such as an advertisement. Therefore, these cookies are called tracking cookies and are used by advertisers or website owners to track and record user activity and browsing habits over longer periods of time. This tracking helps websites to suggest items or ads that might interest users based on their browsing history. Gradually, a profile of the user is created.

Another important type of cookie is the third-party cookie. Unlike a first-party cookie that is directly created by the website that the user is viewing, third-party cookies are generated by other websites which are completely different from the web page that the user is currently browsing. These cookies typically appear on web pages that have content, such as banner advertisements, or ones that are linked to other websites. For example, you might be browsing a website that has a button to like or share on Facebook embedded into it. Having this feature means that the website is able to communicate with Facebook, allowing Facebook to send their own cookies through this website, which get stored on your computer to track your activity. Facebook tracks your activity on a completely unrelated site in order to serve up targeted ads on your Facebook newsfeed later. Visiting a website that has, for example, 10 ads may generate 10 different cookies, even if the user never clicked on those ads.

A more concerning type of third-party cookie is a zombie cookie. These cookies are generated by other websites and are permanently installed onto users' computers, even when they opt not to install. They are incredibly difficult to remove and can even reappear after being deleted, hence the name 'zombie' cookie. Web analytics companies use these cookies to track internet usage and user browsing histories. In addition,

they allow web traffic tracking companies to retrieve unique user IDs and track their personal browsing habits.

Concerns over the use of third-party cookies have spurred the European Union to introduce regulations on data protection and privacy. The General Data Protection Regulation or the GDPR aims to give individuals control over their personal data. Websites are now required to be GDPR compliant which involves informing users of the website's cookie policy and giving the option to opt-out of cookies.

It's worth pointing out that not all cookies aim to create a privacy breach, however, concerns over the use of cookies speak to a greater issue of data protection and privacy. Recently, the Irish government decided to ban access to all records related to the Mother and Baby Homes Commission for a period of 30 years. Critics of this bill have argued that the right to access these records is determined by the EU privacy law, GDPR. However, under Irish legislation, access rights can be restricted in certain circumstances if they would potentially impede the operation of commissions or future witness cooperation. The Data Protection Commissioner has asked for the government to demonstrate why it's necessary to restrict rights of access.

On October 25th 2020, President Michael D Higgins signed into law the controversial Mother and Baby Homes record legislation that protected access to the records and only allowed those with personal connections to access their information. Recent events and the use of internet cookies raise the question of whether or not we have real control over our personal data. How can we ever be sure what our cookie data is used for and can the GDPR truly protect our privacy and rights?

FACIAL RECOGNITION AND ITS ROLE IN CHINESE POLICE STATE

SAM KEANE

Sam Keane discusses the impact of state-enforced surveillance in China and the dystopian possibilities of such technology.

“Cameras at pedestrian crossings analyse the faces of jaywalkers and display them on large screens along with the offender's name and address... Public bathrooms in Beijing require facial identification in order to publicly shame patrons who use what is perceived as an excessive amount of toilet paper.”

are encouraged to use facial scanners to check-in at airports, withdraw money from ATMs, and use public transport. Some apartment complexes have done away with keycards entirely, requiring facial recognition to gain access to the buildings.

These measures may simply seem inconvenient but the government has also employed this new technology in a more sinister way: public humiliation. Cameras at pedestrian crossings analyse the faces of jaywalkers and display them on large screens along with the offender's name and address. Similar methods are also used to dissuade citizens from the seemingly inconsequential indiscretion of wearing pyjamas outdoors. In this case, offenders are picked up by face-recognising cameras and instantly receive a hefty fine via SMS text message. Public bathrooms in Beijing require facial identification in order to publicly shame patrons who use what is perceived as an excessive amount of toilet paper. These initiatives blatantly indicate that the Chinese Communist Party is actively pursuing a policy of "behavioural engineering"; combining technology and psychology to influence that actions of its 1.4 billion citizens.

In no way are these actions hidden or "behind the scenes". China's estimated 2.5 million CCTV cameras are intentionally placed in prominent locations, with the aim of creating the feeling that someone is always watching. Simply put, the Chinese government is sending out the message, loud and clear, that stepping out of line is futile and dangerous. The classic tagline of "nothing to hide, nothing to fear" is used to counter any detractors of the state-enforced surveillance. Nowhere is this toxic climate of near-constant fear and suspicion more evident than in the far-flung northwestern province of Xinjiang. The autonomous region is mainly inhabited by the Uighurs, a Muslim people of Turkic descent who possess their own cultural identity and history, distinct to that of the majority "Han" Chinese. In 2014, the Chinese government launched what was dubbed the "People's War on Terror"; a massive security and surveillance operation targeting this region under the auspices of fighting Islamic extremism. Over a million Uighurs currently reside in internment camps dotted around the province (euphemistically referred to as re-education or deradicalisation centres) where they are exposed to a regimen of physical and psychological abuse, forced sterilisation and, according to a recent BBC report, systematic rape. Outside of the prisons, the government has attempted to entirely erase the Uighur cultural identity, bulldozing historic mosques and relocating families from neighbourhoods that they have occupied for generations. It is a concerted effort by state authorities to homogenise China into a cultural and ideological monolith; a nation where every citizen

Facial recognition technology has been incorporated into almost every facet of life in China, due in large part to heavy-handed government regulations that require a facial record for even the most trivial of tasks. Newly installed vending machines on university campuses refuse to dispense snacks without first receiving a facial scan. A recently enacted law, which the government claims is intended to tackle identity theft, mandates that all sim cards purchased in China must now be accompanied by a facial record. Citizens

“[Surveillance technology companies] operations are not limited to China, security and surveillance software have been sold to governments and corporations (including Amazon) in sixty-three countries. Most recently, Chinese facial-recognition developer CloudWalk was awarded a \$301 million contract to install a mass surveillance system on behalf of the Zimbabwean government”

conforms to the norms laid out by the Communist Party, or faces the consequences.

Underpinning this abhorrent persecution is a surveillance operation that utilises technology on a scale that dwarfs similar systems found anywhere else in the world. All Uighur citizens are required to report to police stations for mandatory "health checks" where fingerprints, blood samples, facial scans at various angles, and voice recordings are obtained. This data is used to build a biometric profile of each and every Uighur citizen. "Nanny Apps" must be installed on all phones in the province, granting police unrestricted access to calls, texts and internet history. Deep-learning artificial intelligence software can allegedly detect "suspicious behaviour" online, allowing police to pre-emptively flag any perceived troublemakers or dissidents. The seemingly innocuous act of sending messages in the Uighur language instead of Mandarin is enough to land citizens in the suspicious category. Biometric data and internet activity is combined with information gleaned from educational, health, and

financial records into a system known as the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP). IJOP functions as a database and classifies every citizen as either "safe" or "unsafe". CCTV cameras in the Xinjiang region are equipped with facial recognition technology and can sound an alarm if those deemed "unsafe" are observed entering public spaces such as shopping centres or universities.

Artificial intelligence software also purportedly allows cameras to determine and flag suspicious behaviour, alerting authorities of citizens dressing in an Islamic fashion or looking uninterested at Chinese flag-raising ceremonies. At the root of the surveillance infrastructure is several Chinese tech start-up companies who turn eye-watering profits developing these systems for the government. Surveillance technology companies have received state investments of over \$7.9 billion since 2014. Their operations are not limited to China, security and surveillance software have been sold to governments and corporations (including Amazon) in sixty-three countries. Most recently, Chinese facial-recognition developer CloudWalk was awarded a \$301 million contract to install a mass surveillance system on behalf of the Zimbabwean government, another example of China exporting its macabre system of state control to other despotic regimes around the world. Tech giant Huawei came under intense scrutiny in January of this year when the company's patent for a CCTV system capable of determining ethnicity was leaked to western journalists. This software could be used to categorise citizens based on racial features, acting as an "Uighur Alert"; informing police if an ethnic Uighur strayed more than 300 metres from their home. Similar patents were filed by two other Chinese tech companies; Sensetime and Megvii. All three companies removed mention of such software from official documentation and issued mealy-mouthed apologies, vowing to review their code of ethics for all future endeavours. These revelations have led to sanctions and blacklisting by western governments. However, so long as consumers continue to choose cheap electronic products from the likes of Huawei and turn a blind eye to the company's role in an active genocide, it seems very little will change.

The concept of facial recognition and its integration into everyday life is an exciting one for technology developers in Europe and America. Its incorporation into areas such as banking would undoubtedly make life more convenient for the average citizen. However, it is vitally important to be aware of how this burgeoning technology can be used to persecute and control.

ESTIMATING THE FATALITY BURDEN OF SARS-COV2

JADE NORTON

Statistics on Covid-19 are a constant presence in our new normal. *Jade Norton* looks at novel metrics developed by Professor Barry Smyth and whether a change in how we measure Covid-19 affects our view of the pandemic.

EVERY night the government of Ireland releases new statistics on COVID-19 which are a culmination of individual reports from across the country. These reports are the basis of statistical analysis and allow statisticians to model the progression of the pandemic. New novel metrics have been developed by Professor Barry Smyth, of the School of Computer Science UCD, that compare the historical death rate with the current death rate to see the effect COVID-19 is having in the wider timeframe.

The mortality rate caused by COVID-19 is used as a daily statistic to measure how we, as a population, are adhering to lockdown rules. These statistics are representative and not presented relative to general mortality rates which makes interpretation of whether they are a minor or large deviation from the large, difficult to know. In his paper in *The Association for Computing Machinery*, Smyth has developed a pair of novel fatality metrics that use historical mortality rates to normalise the current statistics and provide a comparable statistic between countries.

The two metrics developed were "the COVID-19 burden" and the "COVID-19 rank". The former is defined by an equation which multiplies the proportion of COVID-19 deaths since the start of the pandemic with the expected death per day that gives the total number of fatalities across a historical axis. The former looks at how the death rate caused by COVID-19 compares to the effect of COVID-19 to historical causes of death in countries across the globe. The relative rank of COVID-19 in Ireland was 0.17 as of November 2020, which made it the 5th most common cause of death under cardiovascular disease (9,600 deaths per year), cancers (9,500 deaths), dementia (2,700 deaths), respiratory diseases (2,225 deaths), and lower respiratory infections (1,371 deaths).

One of the main ways of comparing the successful suppression of COVID-19 is to look internationally. The number of cases per capita is the most common variable used to measure a country's relative success at suppressing the spread of the virus. The way that each country reports a death varies between countries and is either: by the date of death, or the date on which the death was reported. Some countries such as Sweden choose to report deaths on a weekly rolling basis, which has made their spikes average-out as a day is left incomplete until all the data has been collected. The death rate per capita in Sweden, which opted to not implement harsh lockdowns, is several times lower than several European countries that opted for strict lockdowns.

Smyth used data from 174 countries to calculate both metrics, allowing an international comparison to be performed. It was seen that the COVID-19 burden increased over the winter months, especially in Europe where the effects of the first and second wave entailed efforts to fight the next wave. The guideline burden across countries represented a single month of annual deaths, and approximately 80% of countries have a burden less than this. The worst cases of COVID-19 have been seen in a subset of 12 countries in Central and South America, which have a significantly higher

“The importance of developing statistics that accurately reflect the effect of COVID-19 on health is essential to understanding and building ways of living with it in society. Looking at the impact of COVID-19 in a wider context is important, as is looking at it with a combination of statistical and epidemiological expertise”.

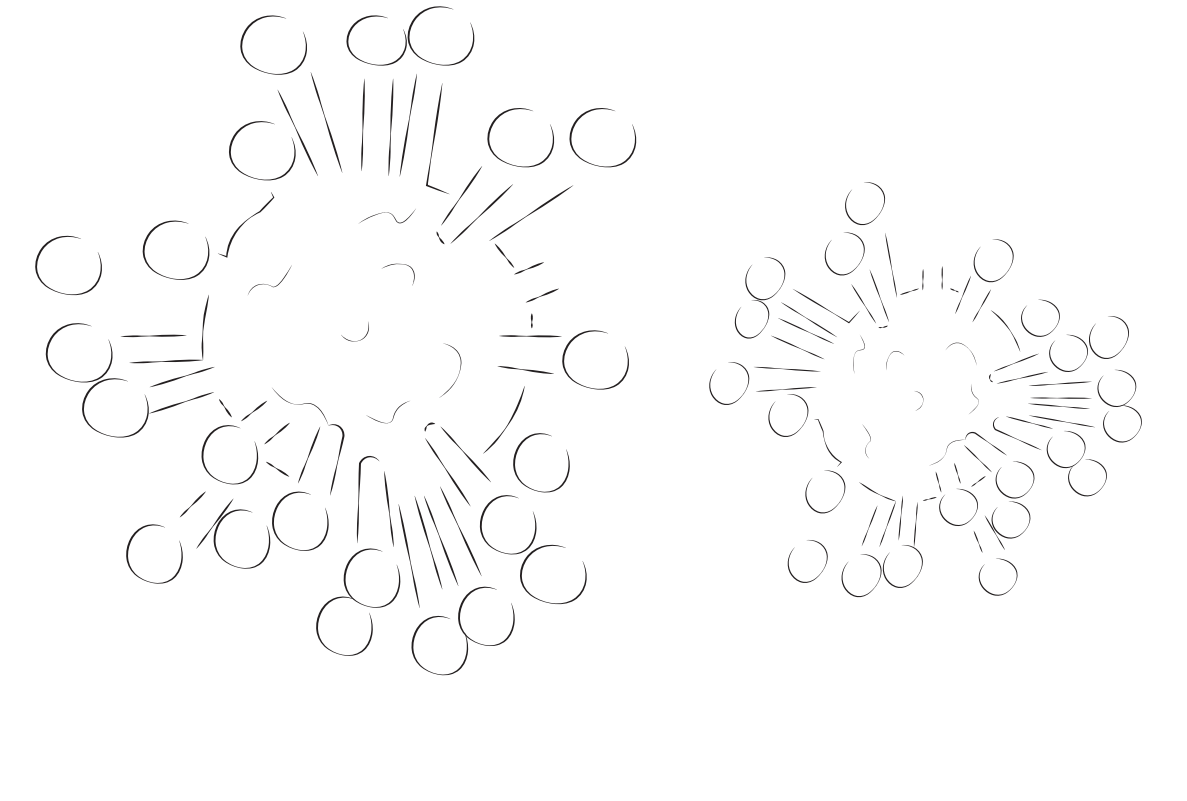


ILLUSTRATION CREDIT: LAOISE TARRANT

burden representing almost two full months of deaths. Ireland has an expected death rate of ~400 per 100k people and COVID-19 represents 40 of these deaths, which is just under 1 month of deaths or 6% of yearly death rates.

Smyth's model found that the large scale of the outbreak in South America accounted for 14% of historical deaths making it the 7th highest cause of death. However, the outbreak has significantly differed across the globe, and across the African continent, COVID-19 deaths account for just 1% of historical deaths. There has been speculation that this may be to do with the younger population present - the median age is 20 in Africa whilst it is 39 in much harder hit locations such as in the US.

The population spread has a larger impact on mortality rates as countries with older populations are far more susceptible to the virus. The historical deaths are not as consistent though, as with an ageing population the deaths have slowed over the last century due to increased access to healthcare and improved services.

The importance of developing statistics that accurately reflect the effect of COVID-19 on health is essential to understanding and building ways of living with it in society. Looking at the impact of COVID-19 in a wider context is important, as is looking at it with a combination of statistical and epidemiological

“Real-time data is important in this effort, but it is essential that the data given to the public is correct and that the meaning behind it is clear”.

expertise. This allows the healthcare system better capabilities to deal with the increased pressure and can help in the process of developing better strategies and more focussed attempts at balancing public health and economic stability. Real-time data is important in this effort, but it is essential that the data given to the public is correct and that the meaning behind it is clear.

Metrics such as this will be of more use in the further as they will allow governments to come back and "assess how countries responded and performed during the pandemic". The COVID-19 burden metric is useful here as it allows the state of the country to be measured over an extended period, not just in the present. Smyth states that "Fortunately for us, the government's modelling group is well suited to the task at hand and brings together both disciplines so I'm pretty comfortable with, and have confidence in, the current state of our statistical modelling in Ireland".

Additionally, Smyth has been working on other metrics to estimate the 'exposure risk' of COVID-19, which is "the likelihood that we will come into contact with an infected individual and it is based on an estimate of the number of undetected infected individuals at a given point in time". And he believes that this could possibly be more useful than the conventional metrics as it would help people to calibrate their behaviour in real-time.

AELA O'FLYNN

Protein sequences have been discovered which facilitate the entry of the Covid-19 virus into human cells. *Aela O'Flynn* learns what this means for us, and how these proteins could form the basis of anti-COVID drug treatment.

We've heard about the virus, we've heard about the vaccines, but we have heard very little about any potential treatment for COVID-19. The vaccine was the first and most important step to stem the spread of COVID. As vaccination programmes are rolled out across the globe to prevent the infection, science can now turn its attention towards finding more effective measures to treat those who are infected by SARS-CoV-2.

Professor Denis Shields of Clinical Bioinformatics at UCD has recently published an exciting paper that could accelerate our ability to do just that. As part of an international research group, Professor Shields identified proteins that aid the entry of SARS-CoV-2 into cells, allowing them to infect human hosts. Knowledge of these proteins could now be used to develop a targeted anti-COVID drug therapy.

To develop a new drug for COVID-19 that is effective, safe, and approved for use across international borders is complicated, to say the least. Drug development can take years, and even decades, before reaching manufacture and distribution to market. For this reason, therapeutic trials during the pandemic have focused on repurposing drugs currently authorised to treat other diseases, such as Remdesivir, an anti-viral drug for Ebola, and Baricitinib, a drug used to treat rheumatoid arthritis.

It is unlikely that any new drugs developed as a result of Dr Shields's research will be used to treat COVID-19 patients during the current pandemic. However, drug development now could play an extremely important role in future-proofing against future, inevitable pandemics. Dr Mike Ryan, head of the WHO Emergency Response, told us late last year that this pandemic is "not necessarily the big one". To protect ourselves,

“If we can block these proteins and prevent the virus from entering cells, we limit the ability of COVID to take take hold of its host”

infrastructure and science must prepare not just for this pandemic, but for those that are yet to come.

SARS-CoV-2, the virus, causes COVID-19, the disease, by binding to proteins on the cell surface that allow it to enter the cell and hijack cell machinery to produce copies of itself. Once the virus replicates, it goes on to infect other cells, and the cycle continues. Professor Shields and the research team used powerful computer analysis to identify what proteins facilitate SARS-CoV-2 viral entry into human cells. The identification of these proteins can tell us about the spread of COVID-19 in the body, how it enters cells and replicates, and the kind of cells it prefers to attack. It also establishes potential targets for anti-Covid drugs. If we can block these proteins and prevent the virus from entering cells, we limit the ability of COVID to take hold of its host.

The paper has identified a number of proteins on host cells that allow the virus to enter cells, as well as patterns of amino acids called "short linear motifs" that enable proteins to communicate with each other. These "short linear motifs", or SLiMs, come into play inside the cell, and enable the virus to gain control of the cell's equipment and use it for its own purposes. The virus depends on both mechanisms to mount its attack.

Now that these proteins and SLiMs have been identified, Professor Shields and his team will design mimic peptides that are structurally identical to the original proteins and SLiMs, but block the entry of SARS-

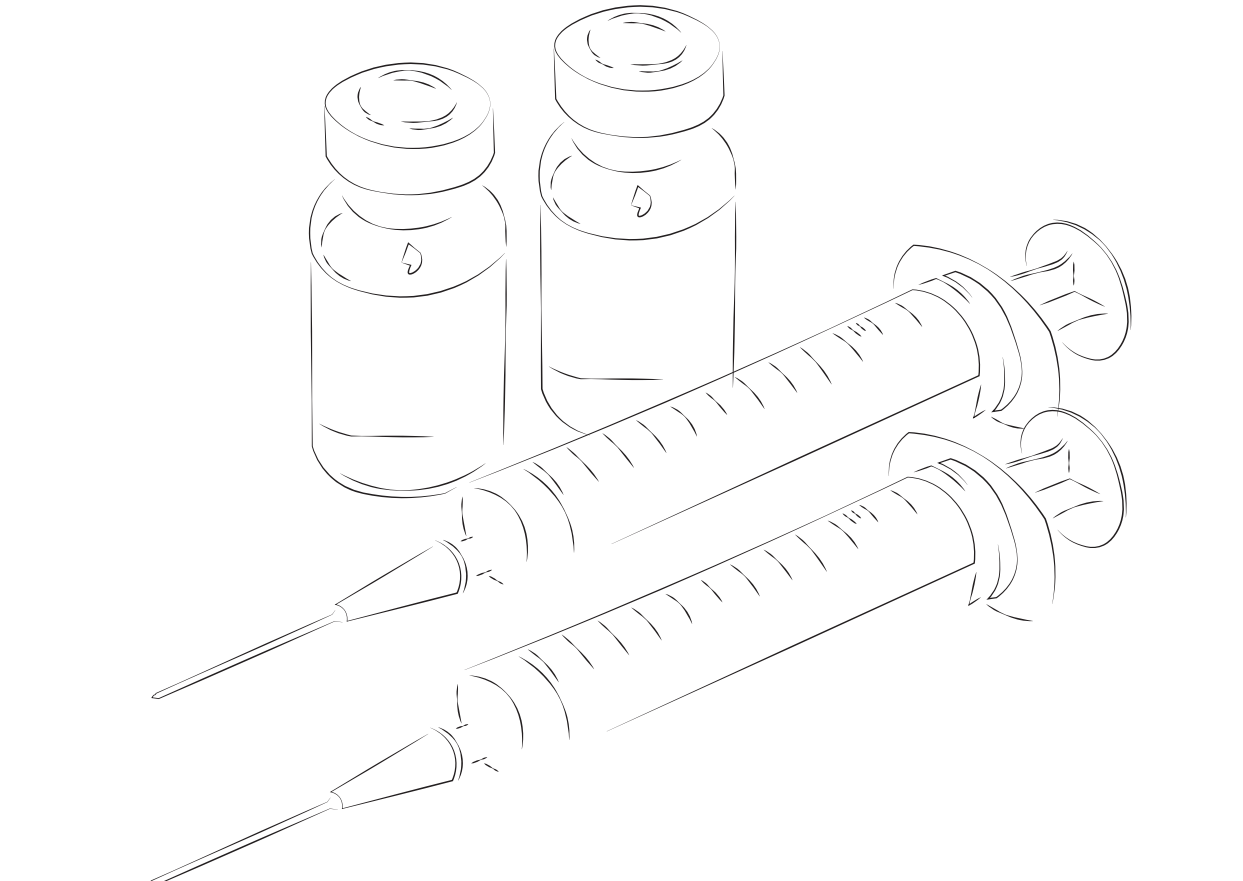


ILLUSTRATION CREDIT: LAOISE TARRANT

CoV-2 into cells, rather than permitting it. These will then be recreated in a lab and tested to see if they can, in reality, prevent the virus from entering cells. This new project, led by Professor Denis Shields in collaboration with Dr Marc Devocelle, Associate Professor of Chemistry at RSCL and Dr Virginie Gautier, Associate Professor of Virology at UCD, has been funded by the Science Foundation of Ireland and is currently ongoing.

Shields describes the project as bringing "together three UCD and RSCL research teams in computational biology, virology and peptide chemistry". Professor Shield's role is to design the peptide mimics. Dr Devocelle will then manufacture the designed peptides in a lab. Finally, Dr Gautier will test these manufactured peptides to study how they behave, and how they respond to different molecules and potential therapies. The Centre for Experimental Host Pathogen Research, the lab where the peptides will be tested, has been enhanced to achieve level three biosafety clearance due to the risk associated with

studying COVID-19 molecules. This multi-step research is a true collaboration across individuals, disciplines, universities, and campuses, and could play a major role in the response to pandemics present and future.

Research taking place both internationally, and right here on the UCD campus, has significant potential to inform our treatment not only of COVID-19, but also of emerging viruses that we will face in the coming years and decades. While this may not be "the big one", the coronavirus pandemic has created space for science and technology to accelerate, to collaborate, and to educate in a way that barely seemed possible just one year ago. Pay attention to the hum of scientific activity on campus, because the UCD research community is certainly not shying away from the challenges and opportunities that come with this new scientific frontier.

LAW AND POLITICS

A DIFFERENT INSIGHT INTO LIFE IN IRISH PRISONS

MOLLIE BREEN

Mollie Breen reflects on the impact of Covid-19 within the Irish prison system.

THE Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) launched their fourth instalment of Progress in the Penal System (PIPS) in 2020. PIPS 2020 assesses progress during the pandemic, acting as a framework for penal reform. PIPS noted that the Irish Prison Service's first priority when dealing with Covid was "to establish physical distancing among prisoners." The Department of Justice and the Irish Prison Service acted early. Temporary release resulted in a 10% decrease in prison population within a month of the pandemic being declared. Those released were serving a sentence of less than 12 months or had fewer than six months left on their sentence. However, Irish prisons may have been able to reduce numbers further as other countries reduced their prison population by a greater percentage. Turkey reduced its prisoner numbers by 35%, Cyprus by 16% and Portugal by 15%. The IPRT welcomes the decline in prison numbers but highlights such a reduction has been recommended for many years. The reduction has not been implemented through policy reform which the IPRT advocates for, it was instead a result of a health emergency.

The IPRT finds that the reduction in prison numbers did not compromise public safety. Of 652 prisoners released from March to June 2020, only 6% returned to prison. The IPRT advocates for imprisonment as a last resort in legislation and sentencing principles. This comes from the need to keep prison numbers low to ensure the human rights of prisoners are protected. The small percentage of offenders who returned to prison outline the need to rethink responses to less serious offending. The IPRT believes less serious offending should result in community service, as opposed to imprisonment.

Reduction in prison numbers was necessary to eradicate overcrowding and to prevent the arrival of Covid. The IPRT finds that overcrowding was present prior to the declaration of the pandemic with 75 prisoners sleeping on mattresses in March 2020. This was reduced to nine within a month. By the 1st of June, there was only one prisoner on a mattress. Overcrowding was alleviated as a result of Covid. The IPRT recognises that the pandemic provided an opportunity for the Irish Prison Service to implement necessary positive changes in Irish prisons. The reality seems to be that without the threat of a virus, prisons would still be overcrowded, and less serious offenders would still be imprisoned. The IPRT stresses the need for these changes to be implemented through policy reform.

The Covid pandemic has caused three national lockdowns to date, with severe restrictions placed on the whole population. Life in Irish prisons is no different. Restrictions have been implemented; family visits have been restricted, out-of-cell time has been reduced, there is limited access to education and training, prisoners are cocooning, and there are increased levels of anxiety and depression among prisoners. Children's rights to direct contact with their parents who are in prison have been severely impacted by the pandemic. As a result, challenges over the reduction in prison visits have been brought to the High Court.

Some measures have been brought in to try and make lockdown in prison more tolerable. Video calls have been introduced and prisoners quarantining have access to in-cell telephones. Cork Prison has installed



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phones in cells. Such positive developments help prisoners combat loneliness.

The pandemic has exacerbated the harshness already associated with prison life. PIPS records that prisoners feel "doubly punished" as the current restrictions placed on prisoners could not have been predicted in their initial sentencing. The Inspector of Prisons and Maynooth University have carried out research on individuals cocooning in prisons. One cocooner said: "this virus has sucked the life out of everything, even prison." Another reported: "I have become so

depressed since being cocooned: I feel that I am isolated and solitary." This cocooner felt suicidal as a result of the imposing restrictions.

PIPS describe the assessment of mental healthcare as "mixed." A Taskforce has been established between the Department of Health and the Department of Justice to address the prison population's mental health needs. The IPRT sees this as positive. It hopes that the Taskforce addresses the mental health impact of Covid on prisoners and their families.

The IPRT believes further restrictions should be considered on initial sentencing. Recent court cases in England, Wales and Scotland have shown the courts' consideration of the impact of Covid restrictions as a relevant factor in sentencing. The IPRT notes, however, there has been no debate in Irish courts on this issue.

Irish prisons have been faced with the difficult task of keeping Covid out of prisons. The IPRT commends their ability to do just this. Nonetheless, it is clear that the negative effects of Covid have been exacerbated in prisons. The pandemic has brought about positive changes for Irish prisons and long-sought achievements for the IPRT. The question remains as to whether these positive changes will continue after the pandemic.

THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE INSTAGRAMMED

GRACE DONNELLAN

Grace Donnellan looks at the pros and cons of Instagram activism.

SINCE its formation, social media has been utilised by activists. No wonder, as it is an accessible tool that can get your message across to millions. Social media has played a prominent role in a number of uprisings and protest movements, such as the Arab Spring, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the Hong Kong protests. Over the past year, one of the most popular forms of this socially conscious appropriation of social media has been aesthetic Instagram slideshows. These slideshows are often in pastel or other eye-catching colours, use a clean font and feature short definitive statements such as "10 Steps to Non-Optical Allyship". They are easy to share your Instagram story and often have thousands of likes. This kind of PowerPoint activism has thus become popular among ordinary users and celebrities alike who feel that they can no longer ignore political issues on their feeds.

These slideshows are usually made in good faith by individuals, activists and advocacy groups. They present social issues in a visually appealing and digestible manner. This is not the first iteration of images being utilised by activists. At the 1900 World Fair W.E.B. Du Bois presented infographics displaying data on the socio-economic conditions experienced by Black people in America. He used this media form in order to simplify complicated information and make it accessible to the Black people in the communities that he had worked in.

Additionally, they shed light on issues that may not be given sufficient attention in mainstream media.

Instagram has made activism accessible. Anyone can share their lived experiences and their knowledge with millions of others. This allows even the most marginalised to get involved in a way that is not overly laborious or time-consuming. This is a welcome change as often these individuals are left out of mainstream media coverage or may not have the time or money to devote themselves to full-time activism.

There is a problem, however, in condensing what are usually very complicated and nuanced issues into a few sentences. The ten image slideshow does not provide a means to critically analyse and contextualise a situation. Users may read a slideshow that tells them "Here's What You Need To Know About Yemen" written by someone who has never even been to the country and feel as if they now know everything they need to know about it. It is very easy to create one of these slideshows and so they could potentially be used to share misinformation or a subjective account of a situation. While Instagram has cracked down on the spread of misinformation, it is harder for an algorithm to locate it in an image than in text.

Additionally, the question arises as to whether it is even appropriate to aestheticise human rights abuses and other tragedies that impact people's real lives. Turning important causes into memes, such as what happened with the death of Breonna Taylor, may desensitise people to the injustices at play. Additionally, it may lead people to believe that by sharing a post they are doing something important to help. And while



PHOTOGRAPHY CREDIT: SINÉAD MOHAN

they are shining a spotlight on an issue, sharing a post alone is not enough to make a difference. This kind of performative activism plays into the hands of people who want to maintain the status quo.

It has been noted that these slideshows share similarities with marketing materials used by corporations, causing almost a branding of progressive politics. Many of the movements these slideshows advocate for, such as BLM, promote an anti-capitalist agenda. These slideshows demonstrate a confluence between aesthetic corporate branding and political education. While this form of political messaging has raised concerns, refracting capitalist tools through a moral lens is not necessarily a bad thing. The subversion of marketing strategies is what allows these posts to reach such a large audience as they appeal to the Instagram algorithm.

Instagram slideshows are a good starting point. Anything that attracts attention to important social justice causes is worthwhile. However, we cannot end our education and action there. This kind of activism can only go so far. Individuals need to take responsibility to ensure they seek out other resources beyond those found on the gram. Additionally, exposure and awareness don't pay the bills. The most important and vital kind of activism is done on the ground and through fundraising. After you post the story consider what you will do next.

WHEN DEMOCRACY GOES DARK

MEGAN SKINNADER

In the wake of recent internet blackouts in Uganda and Myanmar, Megan Skinnader examines the impact of online censorship on democracy.

RESTRICTIONS on internet access always warrant questions on the fragility of democracy and both the freedom of expression and the freedom of association. Over 35 countries had restricted access to the internet or social media at least once in 2019. These are often justified by authorities as a measure to minimise growing unrest, ensure national security, or stop the spread of fake news. Internet blackouts have been observed recently on the eve of the Ugandan election and during the Myanmar military coup. There have also been major disruptions to networks in Russia amid the protests surrounding Alexei Navalny's detention. Combined with the coronavirus pandemic, these blackouts are not only impeding protest and the criticism of despotic leaders, but also denying people crucial health information and guidance. Beyond emergencies, they are denying people connection and communication in a time of heightened isolation.

The Myanmar military coup at the start of February is a recent widespread internet blackout where netblocks had reported "a near-total internet shutdown". The broad outage followed a military order to block Twitter and Instagram. Facebook had also been partially blocked earlier in the week. According to NetBlocks, a website "mapping net freedom", national connectivity fell initially to 75% then to 50% on Monday the 1st of February, extending the problem beyond internet access and restricting any telecommunication. This increasingly popular tactic by autocratic leaders was already adapted in Myanmar in 2019 in what was declared by Human Rights Watch as the "world's longest internet shutdown" in the Rakine and Chin states.

In 2013, Article 77 of Myanmar's telecommunications law was passed enabling the government to cut off all telecommunications during a national emergency. The article empowers the Ministry of Transport and Communications, with the approval of Union Government, to not only temporarily suspend telecommunication services but also collect any information and communications from telecom operators and internet service providers.

This law has been heavily criticised by human rights organisations due to its unclear definition of blocking and its inability to ensure democratic oversight and transparency. It is inconsistent with international laws and standards of freedom of expression placing many businesses in the difficult position of complying with their licensing conditions or complying with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). Telecom companies could essentially deny the government order and it technically lies in their hands. To say this, though, would undermine the governments had to on the media and the fact that journalists are still persecuted under Article 66, a strict defamation law essentially forcing state media to function as a propaganda outlet.

Again, the same strategy was adopted during the Ugandan election in mid-January and is a regular occurrence during election time in Uganda. The internet shutdown occurred a day before the presidential election and the blackout was lifted only 4 days after the election. The authorities claimed the blackout was to avoid interference in the election and again, in the interest of national security. The government were lucky

"Combined with the coronavirus pandemic, these blackouts are not only impeding protest and the criticism of despotic leaders but also denying people crucial health information and guidance."

with their timing as Facebook and Twitter had taken down phony accounts promoting Museveni and were essentially handing the rhetoric of the West unfairly dictating foreign election results. The blackouts were allegedly supposed to be targeted but nearly 25% of Ugandans were affected on the eve of the election. The election ended one of the most violent campaigns in decades and saw the deaths of at least 54 people. Yoweri Museveni, who has served as president since 1986 won the election against Bobi Wine who claimed, "widespread fraud".

Despite authorities attempting to justify the necessity of the blackout to avoid election tampering, there have been widespread claims of ballot-box stuffing. The US cancelled a diplomatic observed mission after too many of its staff were denied permission to monitor

the election. Although not an isolated innocent in Uganda, it presents a worrying direction in terms of muzzling democratic discourse and online media scrutiny. Questions must be asked about the onus on social media companies to address online incitements while balancing the possibility of playing right into the rhetoric of authoritarian leaders looking for any good reason to further censor online criticisms.

While many countries use the excuse of elections or national security threats for these internet blackouts, Facebook, Twitter and Google services have been banned in China since 2009. Provoked by riots in Xinjiang, the shutdown was meant as a method of restricting communications among the activists. The omnipresent censorship regime is called the 'Great Firewall' for a reason. The thoroughness of the control on online communication and expression extends to keyword filtering and arrests of those who somehow manage to post on sensitive political issues. The blatant and unapologetic censorship in China is a dangerous endgame that many countries edge towards. Reporters Without Borders rank China's freedom of press situation as 'very serious', the worst possible ranking on their scale.

Internet blackouts have a direct correlation to the strength of democracy and as more leaders and regimes use this as a tactic to retain power, we further struggle to uphold democracy.

Read more on the personal impact of the Myanmar military coup in our Columns section.

ENACTUS UCD

SALOME HAYES-SHUPTAR

Salome Hayes-Shuptar outlines the business and entrepreneurship potential of Enactus UCD.

ENACTUS is a unique student society, fusing together entrepreneurship and volunteering to create an experience flexible for many backgrounds and interests. The key phrase is 'social enterprise' - business orientated around positive, sustainable impacts on the community. This mind for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and community footprint provides an outlet for meaningful involvement, while the entrepreneurial aspects serve as an opportunity to bolster soft skills and business knowledge. As a branch of the global organisation, Enactus UCD also puts forward its best projects in the competitive arena. Projects nationally and potentially internationally compete for funding, recognition, and collaborators, with the prospect of travelling for the World Cup (or in these times, attending it from home). Members can also take part in a myriad of events throughout the year, although some of the society's ambitions have been curtailed this semester due to the ongoing pandemic.

The society is structured around individual projects which are designed to be self-sufficient. While Enactus is a non-profit organisation, businesses cannot rely on donations to break even. Team Leader Nikita Fernes specifies that should a business make more than enough to cover expenses, any extra funds being reinvested into the business to increase sustainability and impact. The term 'projects' is a loose definition, as each of the five currently under Enactus' purview vary in scale, impact, and business model.

Within Enactus there are three main bodies: the committee, the teams, and society members. The committee oversees logistics and organisation; project leaders head each of the teams, and society members do not necessarily need to work on a project but can contribute and participate in events. The leadership liaises with business advisors who provide a predominant source of guidance for the society, according to Chairperson Adi Bhattacharya. Larger affiliates include Enactus Ireland and business partners such as KPMG, Bank of Ireland, KPG, and Unilever, who sometimes offer internships that society members can apply for.

Team sizes and leaders differ from project to project. Longer running businesses usually change hands when the society leadership turns over, such as the workshop-based HeadstARTs, while the self-start-up Dilate has been running under its founder, UCD alumna Padraig Spillane, since its inception. Those who might not be ready to commit an academic year to a project can participate on a voluntary-basis or simply attend events.

There are several avenues through which to join Enactus: being a member of the parent Investors and Entrepreneurship Society at UCD ("I&E"), competitions, or contacting Enactus through its social media. As a partner of the I&E, membership to the former grants access to all Enactus UCD events. Enactus also hosts competitions which offer an introduction to the society's structure and environment for prospective members.

The 2020 Summer Accelerator in collaboration with BioSoc had five teams of four to five members each innovate a STEM-based solution addressing a social issue. Under the guidance of an Enactus or BioSoc mentor, each team had to put together a business plan that would contribute to at least three of the SDGs. A €350 prize was then awarded to the best project - as judged by a panel of business advisors and

"[A] large part of Enactus is addressing social issues and innovating creative solutions, which involves perspectives from all backgrounds."

professionals working in STEM fields.

Individuals with their own start-up ideas can also pitch directly to Enactus either through their Team Leader Nikita Fernes or Chairperson Adi Bhattacharya. According to both, Enactus UCD is open to new ideas and projects, particularly those with a focus on sustainability, impact, and scalability. Fernes says that Spillane, the founder of Dilate, approached Enactus UCD two years ago with the idea and since then Enactus has provided the project with guidance from its business advisors, exposure, and assistance filling positions.

Fernes and Bhattacharya each spoke about Enactus' accessibility. They emphasised that students do not need a business or finance background, nor do they need to have prior entrepreneurial experience to get involved in the society. Fernes added that a large part of Enactus is addressing social issues and innovating creative solutions, which involves perspectives from all backgrounds. Ambitious individuals wanting to run a project and engage with the business aspects of the society have the guidance of Enactus UCD's business advisors at their disposal. Experience on the job is the best teacher and students will learn the necessary skills as they progress. Alternatively, those wanting to get involved in the community, volunteer, or help one of the pre-existing projects can do so at their discretion. As all these projects are non-profits, it can be difficult to recruit the necessary labour and all the projects are happy to have volunteers. Fernes added that Enactus UCD often gives updates on volunteering opportunities, open positions, and project reviews via its social media pages, Enactus UCD on Facebook and @enactuscd on Instagram.

There are currently five projects running under the banner of Enactus UCD: HeadstARTs, Dilate, Buyrith (formerly Shop Glas), Digital for Youth (formerly Social Boost), and Green Brew.

Started in 2018 by Padraig Spillane, Dilate is a free-to-download app that connects rough sleepers in the city centre with homelessness organisations such as Inner City Helping Homeless Dublin. App users would be able to send a homeless individual's location to organisations which could dispatch staff providing food, bedding, or clothing. In the future, Spillane hopes to expand the radius of coverage beyond the city centre. However, whilst the app was scheduled to launch in early December 2020, they suffered from setbacks and delays, although Bhattacharya hopes that

it will launch soon.

HeadstARTs provides those with intellectual disabilities classes in the arts, crafts, and theatre. This year it has proved difficult, as it was necessary to shift all activities online. In partnership with St. Michael's, Goatstown, Enactus spoke with supervisors who personally knew the participants and were able to cater to their best interests and needs, according to Fernes. Through Zoom, team members and volunteers hosted dance classes and kept the participants company. Volunteers are required to be Garda vetted; however, Enactus can also organise this for those without it.

Digital for Youth, formerly Social Boost, is an initiative to train young people, primarily in Transition Year, in digital marketing as well as other useful skills such as self-financing. Schools pay a nominal sum for the classes and students benefit from learning skills that can help improve their chances at employment. Normally students are paired with charity organisations to put their skills in practice and gain experience in a voluntary internship. Of course, with the ongoing pandemic, this has proved a challenge, and Bhattacharya says that these internships will continue, but there is no specified date.

Started in 2020 as the winning project in the Summer Accelerator, Buyrith, formerly Shop Glas, is an alternative to the notoriously unethical brand giants. Its aim is to support local sole traders, Irish business, and those who have been hit by the pandemic, satisfying SDGs such as climate action, life on land, and responsible consumption and production. Customers would be able to shop from the site with the knowledge that they are doing so ethically and supporting the local economy. Currently, it is in a development phase and is looking to get its website started.

Green Brew is another project which was restarted again recently by Enactus UCD. The project finds different uses for old grain and is currently in the development phase. Both Fernes and Bhattacharya say that Enactus is currently looking for people willing to work on the project. While a background in biology would be useful, it is not a prerequisite.

Fernes advises that students are always welcome to join a project they find an interest in either full time or temporarily.

Enactus hosts a range of events throughout the year, although the pandemic and necessity for remote events have dampened participation. Last year, Enactus hosted its Speaker Series, bringing members talks about social entrepreneurship from CEO of ReCreate Clodagh O'Reilly and CEO of Enactus Rachael Jarosh. It also ran an Incubator in April and May with 100 participants from over 10 countries. Around 10 teams were assigned to one of the seven projects under Enactus at the time and were tasked with brainstorming solutions to problems the projects were facing. Bhattacharya discussed the great exposure the event provided, allowing people to connect internationally despite the circumstances.

Pre- (and hopefully post-) pandemic, Enactus hosted Accelerator competitions in person with occasional speakers during the weekly meetings. Talks generally had a focus on social enterprise. However, this semester the leadership is hoping to get feedback from students on the workshops or talks they would like to attend.

HEROING A UCD COMPANY; GAEILGHEANSÁI

HANNAH RYAN MURPHY

Aiming to highlight some of UCD's most promising local businesses; Hannah Ryan Murphy examines the progress of 'Gaeilgheansaí'

Gaeilgheansaí is a business that does exactly what it says on the tin - sells geansaíthe (jumpers) with an Irish language (Gaeilge) motto on them, designed to promote Irish and encourage people to be proud of having any knowledge of the language, however little. It was founded here in UCD in 2019 by Cecily Nic Cionnaith, then an undergraduate Irish and economics student, and has grown from strength to strength since then, with Gaeilgheansaí now encompassing a range of products from t-shirts to hats, in four different mottos, all in a variety of colours.

It all started in January 2019, when Nic Cionnaith got the idea for Gaeilgheansaí and started selling through Instagram. By March, she had entered the UCD Investors & Entrepreneurs Society's Dragon's Den competition, making it all the way to the final. This was a turning point for the business, as it "enabled [her] to put together a business plan and figure out what [her] priorities were" and apply structure while it was still in its formative stages. The competition itself was a learning curve, but it also went a long way in motivating Nic Cionnaith to continue with Gaeilgheansaí. Speaking to *The University Observer*, she had "no expectations" when she started the business, but she saw the potential and demand "quite quickly", so from there, she immediately put to use the skills she'd learned and positive feedback she received from judges to ensure Gaeilgheansaí prospered.

Starting a business during the final semester of an undergraduate degree and running it throughout a master's degree proved to be a challenge, even becoming "overwhelming" at times. But Nic Cionnaith managed to balance work and study by focusing on Gaeilgheansaí in the evenings and weekends, and through being organised, filling out thank you notes and order labels in advance and planning social media content ahead of time. In the end, all the stress proved worth it. Gaeilgheansaí is now a household name in the Gaeilge community, with products being ordered to countries as far away as Canada. Now graduated,

she works full-time and manages Gaeilgheansaí on the side. She takes care of everything herself, and has done since Gaeilgheansaí began: designing products, contacting manufacturers, managing marketing and social media and even hand-packing and posting every order. Having total independence with working hours, being able to multitask during the day, getting to be personally involved in every step of the business and seeing customer feedback (good and bad) first-hand are advantages for Cecily in her one-woman operation. However, as with anything, there are also drawbacks. Having complete responsibility for an entire business can be "very stressful", "very busy" and "time-consuming". The process can also be lonely, as since she doesn't "have a team to talk to... it can be hard to get that second opinion", and if something is achieved with the business, "it can be hard to celebrate it because nobody else knows the work that was behind it and how hard it was".

In terms of sustainability, it is something that Gaeilgheansaí is "super-conscious of". Her manufacturer in the UK ensures high-quality products, but she hopes to eventually source a manufacturer in Ireland (the problem currently is finding an Irish manufacturer who can "produce [Gaeilgheansaí's] scale" with four different mottos in her range of colours and sizes). She also hopes to source more sustainable packaging but has found it difficult so far as one biodegradable option's requirements meant that it would most likely just be thrown out by customers, and additionally "it's hard to get sustainable packaging that is durable". These are things Nic Cionnaith hopes to work on throughout 2021, alongside hopefully releasing new mottos (though in keeping with sustainability, she doesn't want to release products with new mottos "for the sake of them"). She also plans on releasing a new product this year that is "not an item of clothing" and eventually hopes to stock Gaeilgheansaí products in shops, as she did in 2019 with An Siopa Leabhar. However, she doesn't see Gaeilgheansaí ever opening an in-person shop, as the cost and logistics would

"By March, she had entered the UCD Investors & Entrepreneurs Society's Dragon's Den competition, making it all the way to the final. This was a turning point for the business, as it "enabled [her] to put together a business plan and figure out what [her] priorities were" and apply structure while it was still in its formative stages"

prove too much of a hindrance, nor does she envision Gaeilgheansaí ever becoming her full-time career due to the limits and disadvantages of running a small business alone. Nevertheless, there's no end in sight for the growing enterprise.

For any current UCD students looking to start their own business while in college, Nic Cionnaith advises "to start small and give it a whirl, use social media... build up an audience, share your message and get feedback". Take inspiration from the home-grown success story that is Gaeilgheansaí and "learn by doing", use resources



PHOTOGRAPHY CREDIT: DOMINIC DALY

such as YouTube tutorials for marketing and building websites and "invest your time in it if it's something you're interested in and go for it". But in the meantime, treat yourself to a Gaeilgheansaí and support a UCD business at www.gaeilgheansaí.com/

ENVIRONMENTALISM
SHOULDN'T BE A CHOICE

GAVIN CASSELLS

A friend of mine writes a great newsletter called *Gentle Decline*. It presupposes that as a society we will be unable to tackle climate change and that we must prepare for the inevitable bleaker future that will be a consequence of our inaction. If they are right, environmentalism, as it is mostly practised today, is just a tax on the behaviour of good actors, whether they be individuals, companies or governments.

Making pro-environment choices is still something that many people want to do to make themselves feel better, maybe just less guilty. If people recycle, well at least they are not making the world worse as much as those that do not. Of course, how much recycling is doing to help with the problem of global warming is very much up for debate. Recycling, when left to the moderately informed individual, is often done poorly and has historically exploited foreign countries who have just dumped much of it into their landfill instead of ours. There have been plenty of reports recently on how the recycling system in various countries is falling apart because more and more companies are extracting the valuable parts of goods before it gets to recyclers, and so recyclers are just glorified dumping grounds for many materials. Global crisis has also played a role. The fall in the oil prices due to Covid-19 has led to the price of virgin plastics falling, which makes recycled plastics less economically viable.

More than ever, we need to move away from individual actions nibbling at the edges of the problem and take massive state-wide action that will inevitably hurt but will involve everyone and so will achieve the scale required and will be fairer. But how do we make this happen when the people who should care the most, environmentally conscious voters, feel free to vote for parties who do not deliver green policies.

We are treating the environment as if it is just another charity. People make contributions to the cause to make themselves feel good, or to look good in front of others. But the environment is not just another charity, it is as important as Health and Education, areas in which governments take big roles. The Irish government has been particularly slow to do its part, only just rolling out the lowest possible carbon tax to meet its international obligations. It has a history of kicking the can down the road on environmental issues.

When you think about the environment and the rate of government action you should be mad. If making small changes yourself is making you feel better about the

A VOICE FROM MYANMAR

THAN SIN

I am from Myanmar, and I woke up to a military coup d'état in my own country earlier this month. I am safe and sound here in Ireland, but the same cannot be said for my fellow Burmese back home. Their voices have been silenced – and I am their voice.

Myanmar is now under military dictatorship again after a slow, yet steady track towards democracy. My father grew up under the military regime and has renewed hope after the democratic reforms of the 2010s. I was born into an era of hope; an era of dreams. However, this potentially would not be the case for my niece, for whom I was happy to know would grow up in a better Myanmar.

As a student of Information Communications and a scholar in Performance and Media Studies, I am terrified of the recent political developments in Myanmar. I am well-aware of the power the military has through controlling the media and the telecommunications industry. Narratives can flip within moments through suppression of information which unfortunately is already in the process of happening.

I am proud of my fellow citizens. I am inspired by their bravery. I am encouraged by their resilience. This is not the first time it has happened. This is not something new—but this must end. What has started in the generations of my parents and grandparents need not to be the case for mine nor my children's generation. However, they have messed with the wrong generation. We do not stand for this.

Throughout the country, peaceful protests in the form of civil disobedience are taking place. We do not wish history to be repeated: we do not want this to be the second 8888 Uprising in which thousands of people were shot in cold blood by the very military that has taken over the country in recent days.

People are banging pots and pans every night at 8pm on the dot to shoo away the evil. People are honking their car horns to show their disdain of the current situation. People are lighting candles in solidarity for those who are detained. People are risking their livelihoods by not going into work as a form of civil disobedience.

Hundreds upon thousands of people are taking the streets to peacefully protest the military dictatorship with oftentimes humorous slogans. Everyone is using social media to raise awareness. We are screaming as loud as we can. As one protester said: "Our country is just a bird, learning how to fly. Now the army broke our wings."



situation is that really that useful? Yes, we can practice good policy at home and attempt to lead by example, but individual action will not get us where we want to go, we need to demand that action is taken at scale by all large actors but especially by governments. I watched a report by the economist that claimed that airlines were willing to pay more for biofuels, up to 50% more, but not up to 300% more which is what they currently cost. Airlines could be contributing up to 22% to the world's carbon emissions by 2050, so there is a lot of pressure on the industry to go green. However, politicians are not aggressively pursuing the kind of carbon taxes that would make companies consider lower carbon alternatives favourably.

There are issues around carbon taxes that worry poverty experts, but these can be addressed through welfare systems. Some proposals suggest that everyone should get a yearly carbon tax dividend which is, importantly, not tied to your energy consumption, so that the net effect of the tax should be low, and the incentives to reduce carbon production remain. Similarly, the impact of carbon taxes on prices concerns many. However, these price signals are important. Airline travel should be more expensive as long as it is a high carbon producer, it's the price signal that reduces consumption. In some countries people have started flight shaming, forming demonstrations at airports, but a much better way for governments to tackle the pollution of aircraft would be to make sure that the airline ticket includes the price of that damage - that is what carbon taxes are for, they are meant to dissuade people from taking the environment harming action in the first place.

I know many of you are going stir crazy in this lockdown and are saving for foreign trips when things open again. Take a moment to consider how one flight undoes years of good environmentalist behaviour. If you are thinking, 'well I've done well for a few years, I deserve this flight', this is what economists refer to as moral accounting, good behaviour can lead to bad actions. What we need is to take that choice away. The government should take aggressive action that prices in the costs of environmental damage into our everyday lives so that we are all incentivised to make pro-environment decisions.

When you think about the environment and the rate of government action you should be mad. If making small changes yourself is making you feel better about the

RETHINKING ILLNESS

ADESEWA AWOBADEJO

THERE are things that are that just shouldn't be. Things that, in my opinion, no worldview can clearly give account for. Disease is one of these things. I'm yet to hear of an explanation that would make me think "yeah that makes sense" or provide me with that "ah ha" moment. Nothing can adequately explain away the mystery that is disease and I think it cannot be made sense of no matter how you try to reason with it. I'm not talking about scientific or medical explanations but just an explanation as to why. What is the point? In my little imagined utopia, sicknesses wouldn't exist. The heartbreak, fear, embarrassment. I find it hard to reconcile anything positive with suffering in our bodies. However, I do recognise that it is just a natural part of life, despite how unnatural it may seem to me.

Tony Kushner's 'Angels in America' was my first insight into the HIV/AIDS epidemic in such an artistic way. The play does a good job in portraying the pain and confusion the crisis brought as the characters tried to navigate their way through a mysterious disease that no one knew anything about.

I remember being particularly interested in the response to the disease at the time and finding out that it was classified as a 'gay disease' or some sort of cosmic punishment. It sounds archaic and weird but my mind goes to the start of Covid-19. The myths about the causes sounded similar, they either profiled communities or made it out to be some sort of inside joke or punishment crafted by the powers that be.

Something that is interesting about this pandemic is it has shown how connected the world is as we all feel the effects of it. However, I still think it is a too simplistic assessment of the pandemic to claim that we are all affected by it equally. I'm thinking about people who live paycheck to paycheck and have lost their jobs. Or people in the poverty capitals of the world compared to the few countries that actually are handling this pandemic well. In the same way, I think that there is a disparity in how disease affects marginalised people either by stigmatising them or by the treatment they receive.

One of my most poignant memories of Church as a child was wandering around after service and barging into one of the rooms in the building. There I was, this embarrassed little girl looking up in curiosity.

I had obviously interrupted something but it took me a while to realise what. It was my mum and some



other women huddled around my brother, they were praying for him before I interrupted mid-sentence. Around that time he had developed weird patches around his body that seemed untreatable. After many hospital consultations and different creams brought by family friends to soothe my mum's desperation, nothing worked. Things were getting worse and after months of worry and pain. These mysterious patches were later confirmed to be eczema. Eczema. To this day I always wonder why no qualified professional could detect something apparently so common.

About 13 years later I had a similar experience which led to me being prescribed the wrong medication for a rash. The steroids in the cream ultimately caused unnecessary inflammation and prolonged the healing process which left me with a massive scar. I remember thinking "I followed all the right steps, I sought help on time and didn't self medicate" but something still went wrong. I've heard more stories like this about patients not being listened to or having pain minimised and I'm not surprised as to why I've seen a lot of people resort to religion for healing as opposed to healthcare professionals.

I know a lot of people who have been failed by healthcare systems in one way or the other. I know human errors happen but I also think certain groups of people have been neglected and forgotten about in trials, in teaching manuals and in practice. I do think certain communities are forgotten about and otherwise not cared for adequately.

I think it's important to reshape how we understand illnesses. I'm hoping that moving forward post-pandemic, we can adopt a more empathetic approach that does not attach unnecessary meaning to illness or stigmatise certain groups because of something that cannot be controlled. My hopes are particularly geared toward better treatment. My encounter wasn't life-threatening, it can actually be an interesting conversation topic when people ask me about my scar. However, I know people who have been seriously impaired by similar mistakes. I'm thinking about people who have been shamed for their ailments or their disability and have also been let down by professionals on top of everything. I see a growing skepticism, particularly in my own community, of medical treatment and I can understand how history can support these fears but this shouldn't be the case.

This is a real concern: the military has released a draft of a new legislation titled 'Cyber Security Law' in which most of the internet usage which we take granted here in Ireland would be deemed illegal in Myanmar. It is set to take effect from February 15. If this law were to pass—and it is nearly certain that it will, there will be communications blackout. Circulation of information within the country will be impossible. Those who are not in Myanmar will not know the atrocities occurring inside its borders.

This is not the only censorship that is occurring. The military has already blocked Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, and WhatsApp—these cannot be used in the country without a VPN. Facebook is the whole of the internet in Myanmar. The majority of people rely on Facebook to get information, to contact their friends, to make a livelihood through the Marketplace. Cutting off Facebook means effectively getting rid of small businesses and the circulation of information.

I, myself, have lost contact with my father once already—for twenty-four hours, within the span of two weeks. I woke up expecting a 'good morning' text from him—only to see him not be online. Within the country, news channels are off-air except for the military-controlled MRTV and MWD. MRTV and MWD are airing military propaganda and false news 24/7.

The very organization that is supposed to protect us are abusing our human rights. There are armoured vehicles patrolling the streets of Myanmar. Martial law has been enacted across the nation, meaning citizens are not allowed to leave their residences from 8PM through 4AM without the risk of getting shot or arrested. It is during this time the military raids houses of those who speak up against their regime without a warrant. These have included student leaders, lawyers, teachers, and influencers.

The military has also released a statement claiming that they will prosecute activists on social media speaking out against the regime. They can prosecute those speaking up about the coup on social media. It does not mean they have the right to do it, but the scary thing is that they can—and they will do it. After all, this is the very military that said, "when the army shoots, it shoots to kill" during the 8888 Uprising where thousands of people were shot dead while protesting.

I am aware that the international public are very critical of Aung San Suu Kyi's decision to defend the military in the International Court of Justice regarding their campaign involving the persecution of the Rohingya minority. However,

EDITORIAL

THE phrase "UCD did not respond to requests for comment" is becoming the most common phrase in campus media. With very few exceptions, student journalists, as well as the Students' Union and groups representing students more generally, are ignored. While this may help keep UCD stories from gaining traction and protect the reputation of the University, it does nothing for current students who are affected by the decisions of management.

The stories reported on in campus media are, more often than not, stories that come from students. Not only are we, the journalists, students of UCD, but so are many of our sources. It is the concerns of students that guide the stories, that show us what needs to be investigated. It is the students of the Michael Smurfit Business School who are affected by this year's increase in class sizes. It is the Medicine students studying under Professor Cahill who are concerned about

her grasp of the dangers of this pandemic. Journalists in UCD constantly are told of issues affecting students' experience, from under-funded support units to programmes not living up to advertised expectations. For stories across our paper and other campus outlets, this trope of student concerns guiding journalists to investigate UCD and its management is constant.

The letters and communications sent by UCDSU to senior management that go unanswered are dutifully documented on their website and at council meetings, so, as with news and investigative stories, those affected can see that UCD has been made aware of the issue, and has simply chosen not to address it. Whatever criticism you might have of the Students' Union, it is still the body which most legitimately represents students as a whole. Low turn-out to protests, something which President Deeks has historically cited to dismiss

Union concerns, has no bearing on the legitimacy of the concerns presented by the Union, often on behalf of students with no history of participation in the Union.

It is understandable that this year is a difficult year to manage a University. Of course not all students will agree with all of management's decisions, and even in the best run and best-funded institutions, some students would fall through the cracks. It is, however, the view of *The University Observer* that there is a responsibility on management to address student concerns, publicly, be they presented to management by journalists, the Students' Union, or campaigning groups. These issues are most certainly not resolved by an official response, but it is impossible to see how anything will improve if management can't address concerns honestly.

TALLEYRAND

CHARLES MAURICE DE TALLEYRAND-
PÉRIGORD

Hear ye, hear ye,

The week just past filled me with joy as I experienced the Union's Penile Health And Girth, (PHAG) Week. At Council, my fifth favourite Officer Ruairí Powerless told fellow attendees he had nice plans for PHAG. And boy, did he! From what I gather, not only did 800 people attend the interactive BDSM workshop, but also ~~XXXXXX~~ ~~XXXXXX~~ looked much better in a gimp mask. Who needs to bring in sexperts when the Sabbatical team are already so proficient?

My informants from the Codswallop & Excrement tell tales that Gayton Leigh is ready to enthuse students about Sabbatical elections. Excellent idea! Hopefully they start by making the website navigable, or at least readable. Failing that, they could try to film a video where they don't speak in monotone. Too much to ask?

A little birdie has told me that Connor O'hAndersáin takes his marching orders from the IRA army council, so Deekies boy: Watch out, he knows where you live. Mind you, if his terror is as effective as his union, you're safe as. 'Tíochaid áir lá' indeed.

Carla Bumbblin'-on wasn't around this week, as the over 85s are advised to stay home during the cold upon being given the first round of the vaccine. But don't fret - time to get buzzin'! Sarah Michalek has invited The Happy Pear, as if UCD isn't gay enough already. Tally feels left out as a mostly heterosexual sort-of christian in this PC Union.

Hannah Bryson's tenure so far has been as good as her campaign video, and she is still working hard, as she promised, to play board-games. Thankfully Bryson and Powerless have put their petty squabbling behind them, and have agreed to have a full on fight behind the Student Centre once lockdown ends. Watch yourself boy, those nordies know how to fight dirty.

Slanderous rumours aside, I can confirm that absolute buffoons who run this rag are in fact technically braindead. As of yet they haven't actually read an article they have published. To demonstrate: "Cock".

And with that unpublishable filth,

Tallyho and Tally out!

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir/Madam,

It is galling to read and hear of the extremely high salaries of those broadcasters in RTE; it is not justifiable and should be rendered Ad Nauseam immediately. Have people in authority no conscience when you see those same people. Especially in relation to our overworked, lower paid "nurses and carers" in our hospitals. Who have to fight tooth and nail to just get a pittance of a wage increase?

Let us be realistic; we do not need Broadcasters in RTE to keep the Nation alive in health. But we do require "nurses and carers" to help us in sickness. Another thing that galls me is that R.T.E. is always putting on the poor mouth... that they need more funding; for what to pay those Broadcasters, I sincerely hope not?

The government should immediately step in here and direct RTE to not pay those unjustifiable high salaries to those Broadcasters and put that money towards paying our "nurses and carers" a justifiable wage. As Roland Barthes, the late "Critical Theorist" would say; "What would Readers consider to be a just wage for Broadcasters in RTE".

Yours faithfully,

Edward Mahon.

Letters, corrections, and clarifications pertaining to articles published in this newspaper and online are welcomed and encouraged. Letters should be addressed to: The Editor, University Observer, UCD Student Centre, Belfield, Dublin 4 Correspondence may be sent to editor@universityobserver.ie



16TH FEBRUARY 2021
VOLUME XXVII ISSUE 6
UNIVERSITYOBSERVER.IE

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SHOULD THE TOKYO OLYMPICS GO AHEAD?

CAHAL MCAULEY

Cahal McAuley takes a look at the most recent plans for the rescheduled Olympic Games and considers whether it should go ahead at all given the current state of affairs.



PHOTOGRAPHY CREDIT: ATOS INTERNATIONAL VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, FLIKR

THE summer Olympic and Paralympic games, postponed from 2020, are due to commence on July 23 in Tokyo, Japan. Despite the continued threat of Covid-19 and rising opposition from the Japanese people, the International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government have vowed that the games will go ahead as planned. Should the world's largest sporting event take place in the midst of a global health crisis?

The consensus among the people of Tokyo is that it shouldn't. According to a poll taken last month by Japanese news agency Kyodo, 80% of Tokyo residents expressed that they wanted the games to be postponed again or cancelled altogether. This is hardly

surprising from a city that was placed into a one-month state of emergency on 7 January after recording higher numbers of Covid-19 cases than when the games were first postponed last year.

It seems in conflict with the spirit of the Olympics to force the games on a people that appear so vehemently opposed to them taking place, but the IOC and Japanese government are hoping that public opinion will swing back in favour of the games as virus cases decrease in Japan and worldwide.

With the production of vaccines increasing, it is likely that the situation will be much improved by July but even so, the pandemic will still be a very serious threat

and thousands of foreign visitors flocking to Japan for the games seems unfathomable. Japan's inoculation programme is not expected to begin until the end of this month, meaning it is unlikely that the majority of Japan's population will be protected from Covid-19 by the start of the games. This, coupled with the fact that many of the world's countries have also not yet started distributing shots makes it seem far-fetched that vaccines will be the key to achieving the games that the organisers are hoping for.

The Tokyo Olympics are estimated to have cost over €12 billion, the most expensive in history, meaning that there is a clear financial incentive prompting organisers to plough ahead with the games, as well as a sporting one. Although the likelihood of limited or no crowds reduces the lucrative ticket sales for the Japanese government, the money generated from the broadcasting of the games will still allow for some of the money invested to be recouped. This leaves the Japanese people to wonder if their government is prioritising saving face and minimising their losses over public health by allowing a potential super-spreader event into their nation's capital.

Sporting events with large numbers of participants have been performed safely during the pandemic. Last month the World Men's Handball Championship took place in Egypt with teams from 32 countries coming together in a bubble of 3,000 people.

Of course, events like this are nowhere close to the scale of the Olympics where over 11,000 athletes are due to compete from over 200 countries. Factoring in the requisite number of judges, officials, and other support staff make the Tokyo Games an event the likes of which has not been attempted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In an effort to provide clarity on what will be expected from participants in Tokyo, the IOC, the International Paralympic Committee, and the Tokyo 2020 organising committee released the first of their playbooks last week, resources which outline the measures that will be taken to ensure as safe an Olympics as possible.

Some of these measures include the prohibiting of singing and chanting at events, mandatory testing for athletes every four days, and restricting visitors from using public transport. Breaking these rules may result in ejection from the games. Vaccines will not be mandatory as the IOC has repeatedly stated that it is not in favour of athletes getting priority.

The playbooks give us an insight into the type of Olympics we might see come July, but so far the IOC still has many questions to answer in order to reassure the Japanese public that the games can go ahead safely including whether or not spectators will be allowed to attend and what will happen to participants who return a positive test.

In theory, the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games can go ahead safely, but complete cooperation from all involved is required. The people of Tokyo need answers and progress in order to come on board with the plan and they need them quickly.

Japanese President Yoshihide Suga and his predecessor Shinzo Abe have both said that the Olympics will be a celebration of humanity's victory over Covid-19 but with the games' current status of being devoid of cheering, singing, and possibly spectators at all in a city that does not want to host, this sentiment is sure to ring hollow.

RETURN TO PLAY- THE PHYSIO'S PERSPECTIVE

CHRISTINE COFFEY

Christine Coffey chats all things return to play and physiotherapy during lockdown with Niall McNelis, physiotherapist with UCD RFC and Old Belvedere's rugby teams, as well as the Dublin Back Clinic (DBC), located on the UCD campus.

UNIVERSITY Observer: How has your work as a physiotherapist changed since the beginning of the first lockdown?

Niall McNelis: From a sports physio point of view, normally, we'd be coming into a post-Christmas block, kind of business end of the season. Any knocks that are more than 8 weeks would end a player's season. It would be high pressure, short timelines, with a focus on getting lads and ladies back on the pitch and back available for selection as soon as possible. Now we're seeing less injuries, but different types of injuries, so I suppose the role of the physio has changed. One of the main principles of injuries, particularly in over-use or soft-tissue injuries like hamstring strains... it would be someone trying to do something that they're not able to do after too long of doing nothing - too much after too little. Or, alternatively, too much after too much. The role of the physio at present is making sure that lads and ladies have access to a plan that they can follow, and that's where it's really important to be linking up with the S&Cs (strength and conditioning coaches). When it comes to return to play, particularly for a sport like rugby, given its attritional nature...players are going to need to be really, strong, really robust. At the moment, its keeping lads and ladies at a sort of an 'even keel' which allows them to maintain fitness and which should lead into a 5-week training block (when it does happen) to allow players to get back to normal.

Since there's no rugby to play, the focus of the physio has moved away from performance and return-to performance, and towards return to activity and quality of life. For a physio like me, it's taken some time to get used to that, that lack of pressure. You can treat each injury as it should be rather than, say, turning an ankle around in two weeks or strapping him/her up and getting them back on the pitch. An ankle sprain could take 4-6 weeks...you have the luxury of not only rehabbing the ankle but also then bringing the player through a prevention plan and a maintenance plan and thereby reducing the risk of injuries both up the kinetic chain as well as down the kinetic chain.

UO: What sort of injuries are you seeing at the moment?

NMcN: From my point of view we're seeing a lot of tendinopathies from training too hard - hamstring tendinopathies, Achilles tendinopathies and patella tendinopathies. Given the sort of change in working habits, we're seeing a lot of people with neck and back stuff because lots of people aren't used to working from home. The real benefit that comes with the lack of contact is you're seeing [fewer] concussions [and] car crashes, which is always nice.

UO: In relation to these types of injuries, is there any advice you'd give to athletes returning to sport?

NMcN: In Ireland, the sports that are most common would be your rugby, GAA, hurling, your soccer. What those sports all have in common is [that] they're high-intensity intermittent sports. They're going to require a lot of short blasts of high-speed running, a good bit of change of direction and things like that. Regardless of whether it's a concussion or an Achilles tendinopathy one of the big, big risk factors is fatigue, so if you are physically less conditioned you are more likely to get injured. Ensuring that you have a decent base of cardiovascular fitness is important. It's not just a question of going for a 20-25-minute run or a 5k, (though all movement is good, all exercise is good) - that particular set of runs, that particular exercise, is good for your aerobic fitness, but may not transfer as nicely to games. Having a mix of aerobic, anaerobic - higher intensity shorter sessions combined with longer lower intensity sessions, so that you're hitting all your benchmarks with regards cardiovascular fitness [is important].

In addition, regardless of the sport, be it hurling or cricket or anything, you need to make sure that you've got a really good strength base-really focussing on

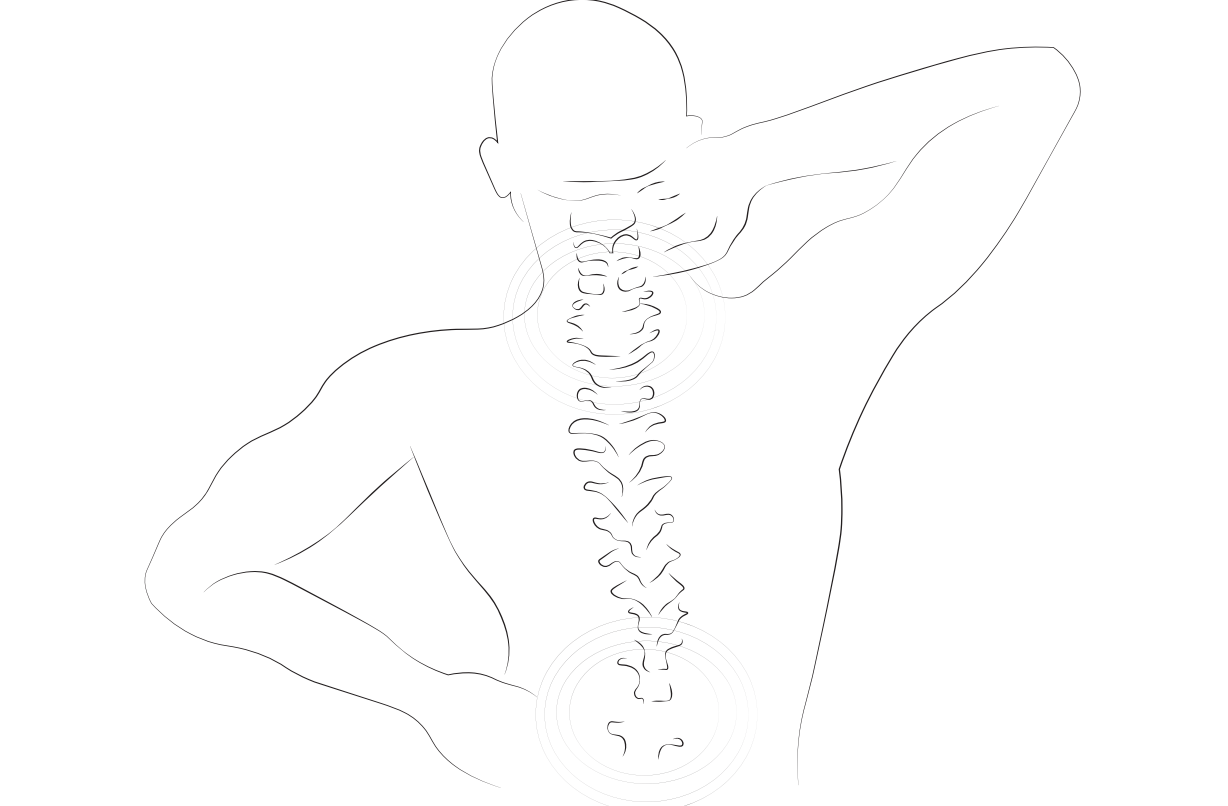


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the lower limb. If you look at any injury, be it ACL, be it concussion, be it hamstring; lower limb strength, particularly glute and hamstring strength, if that's reduced, you're going to be in trouble. Hamstrings are most active - they're most strained - during high velocity running when they have to slow the forward movement of the shin and work eccentrically in a lengthening capacity to slow us down.

It doesn't just mean squatting or deadlifting or Bulgarian split-squatting; it's making sure that if you're working the muscle in the front you're also working the muscle in the back. If you're doing a Bulgarian split squat, you could super-set that with a glute bridge, you could super-set that with an RDL, you could super-set that with sliders or the Nordic exercise. [The] hamstring is the most common soft-tissue injury in any sport really - probably the most common injury that's going to happen now. We've seen in the German Bundesliga and all the competitions where epidemiological studies have been carried out, that injury incidence is through the roof, particularly soft tissue injuries, particularly soccer after lockdown...players trying to do too much after too little. Making sure your hamstrings are worked, that your glutes are worked, will reduce your risk of injury. Nordics are often theorised to be a fantastic exercise for injury prevention, which they are, but there's no one exercise that is a silver bullet for preventing injury. How you prevent injury is making sure that cardiovascularly, as well as strength-wise, you're as strong as you can be.

"In addition to that, you're also making sure that your training week is not every day. You see these motivational videos "I hit the gym an hour every day" - that shouldn't happen. For the people I'm working with, it's 3 days on, 1 day off, 2 on, 1 off. Also, ensuring that during the days off that it is a day off. Very minimal exercise, you might go for a walk or a short cycle. So you don't have a consistent stimulus (muscle activation/ muscle strain) -that's when tendinopathies occur, that's when you put yourself at more risk of injury. You may find that, when it comes to getting back to performance, that I'm not hitting my PBs on the squat, I'm not able to sprint as fast as I can, [that is] because you're fatigued and you're risking things like overtraining syndrome.

UO: This discrepancy between one side and another, or one muscle group and another, is something you'd

be concerned about with players getting back on the field?

NMcN: Oh, 100%. There are many studies into the 'anterior pelvic tilt' - where the muscles at the front, like your quads, will be more developed. The body moves as it wants to, in the easiest way possible, so, by logic, that would be using big muscle groups that are already well developed. When we're kids and we're growing up and running, we're predominantly using our quads and our lower back. You go to kindergarten and you go to primary school and you sit down for 6-8 hours a day. You go to secondary school you sit down for 6-8 hours a day. On our days off we watch TV, which is sitting. You might go to college and you're asked to sit down for however many hours a day. That seated position will shorten your hip flexor and pull you into that anterior pelvic tilt - basically, your pelvis is going to be tilted forward ever so slightly and this has been found in 85-90% of the general population. It's not necessarily a bad thing, but what it does do is it places more of a load on, or it stretches, the hamstrings. If a muscle is stretched it has to work much harder to produce the same force. If it has to work much harder, it will fatigue more quickly, it puts itself in a danger zone, where it's easy for a strain to occur. That's why hamstring strains are so, so common: because of just how the hamstrings function and living in that anterior pelvic tilt.

If you look on Instagram, the most common things you'd see are, say, squats, Bulgarian split squats or deadlifts, because they're easy to do and you can shift a serious amount of weight very, very easily with them. Whether the technique is correct or not you can still do a fairly heavy weight. If you're building up the quads, the hamstrings and the glutes can be left behind. A lot of the studies done on lower limb injuries in general, hamstring, ACL, MCL, any other common injury, a discrepancy between quad and hamstring strength is to the fore, and if you're reinforcing that imbalance with squats, with deadlifts, with even Bulgarian split squats, the body is going to move as it wants to in the easiest way possible, it's going to use those big muscle groups that have already developed. You have to make sure you're working the glutes and the hamstrings. They're exercises that you don't see as often, they're less valued.

I suppose that is me talking with a sports physio hat

on. As a general physio and a medical professional, movement is medicine and if you're doing something, that's great. If you're playing sport, you need to make sure that your gym plan isn't something you've drawn up yourself or something you've just seen on Instagram. You need to make sure it's equally balanced, both front and back.

UO: You mentioned this distance or disconnect between physio and player and there are some obvious challenges associated with these lockdowns. Are there any positives or benefits to be taken from this time as a physio?

NMcN: I would say it really challenges your clinical reasoning. For example, in the last lockdown, I had a really complex shoulder injury that I was dealing with, an auxiliary nerve injury, that you'd have loved to have gotten your hands on. I've had some really bad backs, just disk injuries from lack of activity more so than anything else and you'd love to be able to get there, get your hands on and improve their symptoms, but, given that you're talking to someone through a computer screen or over a phone, you don't have that luxury. It's also more challenging in terms of building a relationship with people, more challenging in terms of trying to get your message across.

I don't like being negative with regards Covid and injuries, but I see quite few 'benefits' apart from the normalisation of online sessions, whereby athletes can just hop on a Zoom and we're all much more au fait with that. Rather than needing to be near the Dublin Back Clinic (DBC) to get physiotherapy treatment, I can now get access to physiotherapy anywhere in the world, as long as you have an internet connection, and if you don't, you can use the phone.

People are becoming more and more aware of what physio is. If you come to DBC, you get exercises, you get stretches, you get mobility stuff, you are given the tools for recovery. I think that's another benefit, seeing how you can help more, so rather than saying I can just give you a massage, we can give people the tools for their own recovery, to give people the tools to deal with pain. And from a psychological point of view, that's really, really valuable.

If you have neck or back pain in normal times. You could go to the cinema; you could go out for a few drinks and forget about it. However, what we're now seeing with this social isolation and with this working from home, pain comes on and there's no distraction to get away from it. Pain is getting to people because people can't escape pain. The big thing with regards lockdown, it's tough on everyone... that sense of isolation.

If you twist your ankle, you understand why your ankle is sore. With your back it's a lot more insidious... literally anything can feed into back pain. It can go from a bit of tension to a bit of stiffness, a bit of stiffness to a bit of reduced motion, reduced motion to discomfort, discomfort to pain, pain to disability, disability to just not being able to get out of bed and then feeling (not good) because you can't run, you can't walk, you can't do anything, and then you might start to gain weight, and then that feeds into everything. I suppose that ability to still be able to give someone the tools for their own recovery is really essential.

I think the first thing you should look at is rather than focusing on sport, [is] focus on the physical activity. The cardiovascular, the metabolic, the mental health benefits of physical activity are sensational. The big thing is to enjoy it. If you're not enjoying your physical activity then try change things up, if you hate going for a 5k then grand, try a bike. If you don't have access to a bike, try interval training or Pilates or yoga. Physical activity is no longer something that is just for gym rats and marathon runners and that's it. It's literally for everyone.



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Pictured Above // Roddy Doyle
Credit // Roddy Doyle

OTwo Interviews

Roddy Doyle: Then & Now

Interview: Anna Blackburn, Natalia Duran
Article Author: Anna Blackburn

Anna Blackburn and Natalia Duran chat with beloved Irish author Roddy Doyle about his time at UCD, controversy in his early work, and how he has evolved as a writer over the past 35 years.

1970s Dublin was a very different place. Rock & Roll and the Blues dominated the music scene, many students left school early for apprenticeships or secretarial work and even fewer attended university, and authors like Virginia Woolf, Flann O'Brien, Laurence Sterne, and Charles Dickens began to inspire a young man at UCD who would become one of the most well-known and influential writers of our time. After spending a semester on an internship at Fighting Words and working alongside co-founder Roddy Doyle on several projects, Natalia Duran and I were eager to sit down and chat to Doyle about writing, controversy and his life.

Doyle described himself as an "avid reader" as a child, while simultaneously dreaming of becoming a professional footballer. In school, he befriended a group of boys who all enjoyed football, reading books, and listening to rock and roll; "We always saw them as more or less the same thing. You know, there was no contradiction between liking football and reading Flann O'Brien or *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*." But unfortunately for the young man, he was "really such a bad footballer, the words haven't been invented to describe how bad it was" and so he pursued his love of literature at university.

He attended University College Dublin from 1976-1980, studying English and Geography and later earned his diploma in Education. Doyle spent 14 years teaching at a community school which inspired much of his early work. "It was the best decision I ever made, really..." Doyle told us, "teaching 13, 14, 15-year-olds, just being in their company, and I was teaching in the middle of a working-class area on the northside of Dublin, around the corner from where I grew up."

Over the years, his observation of the classroom and "getting to know the rhythms of the life" in the area gave him the voices for his characters and sparked the idea for *The Snapper*. Doyle noted that during his time teaching, a few of the girls became pregnant while in school, another thing that was "quite revolutionary given Ireland at the time". The girls would be pregnant in school, and afterwards, but leave the child at home with its grandparents which Doyle described as: "such a great thing to witness, a lesson for me and in a way it inspired my second novel, *The Snapper*". But, as Doyle said, it wasn't teaching that made a writer out of him, it merely gave him his subject matter.

Two years after he had begun teaching, he spent the summer months in London and got into the habit of writing by forcing himself to write every morning. He knew that if he was going to continue writing in his spare time, it would have to become a discipline; "You kind of have to nail yourself to a desk and for a while. It's a bit like learning to drive and after a while you stop thinking about it." By the time he had finished teaching, Doyle had already written four novels, two screenplays, two stage plays, and was in the middle of filming a television series. "I didn't stop because I didn't want to teach anymore, I stopped because I really didn't have the time." When he stopped teaching, he explained that he "worried that [he] was cutting off [his] creative artery." Luckily for the reader, it did not work out that way.

Doyle said he spends a lot of time with his new characters: "Starting [to write a new character] is a little bit like getting to know somebody. When you first meet, everything about them is brilliant. Then reality starts to intervene and

“ it's about a woman taking control of her own circumstances and I could have no problem justifying it that way ”

you realize that they're human after all". He allows them to occupy his thoughts and thinking about what they might buy at the supermarket or what phrases they may use based on their age, gender or race. Doyle said he really enjoys writing children characters because, while the language and experience of females and teenagers feels foreign to him, "children don't differentiate between what's officially important and what isn't - everything is important". But very quickly, he turns his focus toward making sure his characters are good, "not good as in morally good, good as in a well-written character and that becomes more important than anything." In his fourth book, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996), Doyle said he had to push aside thoughts of good versus bad morality and "concentrate on the quality of the prose". For Doyle, the story is not about the issue, it is about "creating a story that people can immerse themselves in. It's important to remember that no matter what I want to achieve, perhaps politically, I'm writing a novel and the fact that it's a novel is more important than the subject matter."

Duran and I noticed two distinct characteristics of Doyle's novels; the lack of the modern-day conception of a 'hero' character, and his minimal use of description with emphasis on dialogue, especially in his early works. When asked about the absence of a 'hero', Doyle said, "I find heroism is in the daily struggle," mentioning his admiration for frontline workers of the Covid-19 pandemic, and especially those working in hospitals: "who would've thought, 18 months ago, that caterers in hospitals could be considered heroic. But, now, there's heroism attached to that". Doyle went on to say; "I wouldn't want to burden anybody with the phrase of a 'hero' or 'heroine' because it seems to deny their humanity, and I think we're all flawed and it's vital that we remember that" and to him, the best, most well-written characters are flawed.

When asked about his minimalistic approach to description and reliance on dialogue, Doyle alluded to his first novel, *The Commitments* (1987): "There are all these different voices, you know, and I never got around to describing them physically, except for a few key things, because it seemed irrelevant." In *The Commitments*, all of his characters talk very quickly and Doyle felt it would be more effective to distinguish the different voices by giving them repeated phrases. In regard to *The Snapper*, because it was a more intimate story, Doyle found the use of dialogue was the most efficient way of communicating their emotions, asking himself "what's the best way for her to give the news to her parents? Tell them. What's the best way for them to convey their feelings? Talk." He feels words say a lot more than facial expressions.

The Commitments is a short novel built around Doyle's love for music, which has continued to influence his work. "I loved the pub music scene. I went to a lot of pubs that have music and I went to a lot of gigs, and that was really what inspired *The Commitments*, trying to imagine a bunch of kids from the area that I began to call Barrytown, doing what I watched being done". He not only wanted to portray the live music scene in Dublin but also capture the "noise of Dublin, the voices, the humour that's in the air". Whenever he sits down to write, Doyle listens to music on the record player in his office, enjoying artists like Philip Glass, Steve Wright, and John Lydon's Public Image LTD. "It's the music I need when I'm writing a story. When I have a new piece of work, I tend to look for a new piece of music to associate with the new story. It somehow makes the room a bit more like the particular room for that particular piece of work".

Doyle himself has been an atheist since he was a teenager, however linguistic references to religion and God appear throughout his work, with characters using phrases such as "for God's sake" and "Jesus Christ, we're not going out today." Doyle feels a layer of Catholicism will always be somehow present in Ireland. While religion does not have a direct impact on his work, he makes sure to be aware of the people for whom religion is still quite important. "In a way, it's a bit like traditional Irish music. You may not like it, but it's there, you know. It's always gonna be in the air somehow and religion is a little bit like that as well. I have to be alert to the fact that when I'm writing about characters, just because religion means nothing to me, it doesn't mean [that] it doesn't mean anything to anybody".

In addition to the ever-changing societal views of religion, Doyle incorporates other social, economic, and political topics into his stories such as racist language, alcoholism, domestic abuse, and immigration. While he said it was not his intent to highlight these issues as a way to bring about change, many people still view his work as strong, raw accounts of problems which need to be discussed and addressed in society. However, his collection of short stories, *Deportees and Other Stories* (2007), was written with the intention of raising awareness about the change in Irish society in relation to the economic pick-up in the 90s and early 2000s and the increase of immigrants from all over the world. Regarding the recent Black Lives Matter movement, Doyle said, "I think Black Lives Matter is brilliant because I don't think it's going anywhere. It's not a fad that is going to be put back up on the shelf till the next time. It forces us to think".

Today many critics raise the question of 'who should be allowed to write what?' This is a concept which has never

“

I find heroism is in the daily struggle.. who would've thought, 18 months ago, that caterers in hospitals could be considered heroic. But, now, there's heroism attached to that ..

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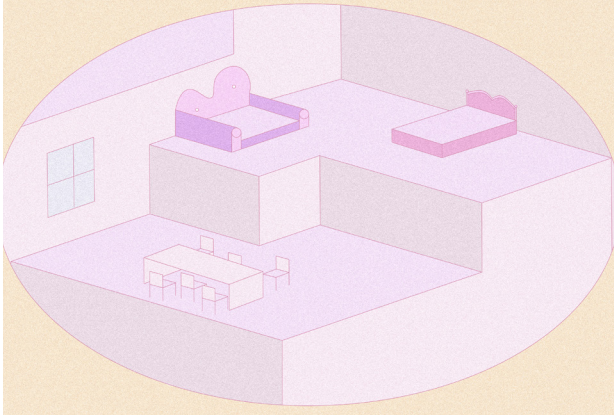
eluded Doyle. He works very hard to be aware of what is considered appropriate in societal norms. "I think it's something I've always been alert to. When you're writing about somebody you don't have first-hand experience with, you have to choose the words carefully and always be alert that the Dublin I step out into today is not the same place as it was thirty years ago". In 1987, after the publishing of his first novel *The Commitments*, Doyle may not have thought anything of using the n-word in the story because it was normal then, however, he is very conscious that is no longer appropriate.

In response to a suggestion that the protagonist's pregnancy in *The Snapper* was a result of rape, Doyle said "It's certainly open to interpretation. In 1986, it wasn't. I think some people have difficulty understanding that, essentially, the book is a comedy and they ask, how can you write a comedy about a rape? And my argument would be, it's not about rape, it's about a woman taking control of her own circumstances and I could have no problem justifying it that way. But, when I wrote it, I didn't have to justify it". This then begs the question, how should society respond to these controversial topics in Doyle's work? Doyle couldn't have answered the question better: "I think the way is to leave it and allow it to be discussed and debated and explored in the way that history is, rather than try to pretend that it didn't exist. And who knows what we now consider a norm, what the perspective will be in a few years from now. So rather than try to impose a present-day outlook on the entire human existence, to allow for the layers of progress and regression to explore literature in that way."

Over Doyle's 35 years of writing, he has allowed his characters and his subject matter to age and evolve with him. "*The Commitments* was written by a younger man who is writing about younger people and they don't look back. "As you get to my age, a lot of it is retrospective. You don't look forward too much, because there's not much there to look forward to. It's like you reach an age where you've got a sack and it's full of your life. Whereas when you're younger, you don't have that sack, you're much more mobile". He said that as one ages, their priorities and perspectives change, and as a result so does his writing. Doyle tends to write about what is in the air and so he "might run out of energy, but [doubts he'll] ever run out of things to write about. It seems that year on year, the angle in which you look at the world changes."

While Doyle is most known for being a prolific Irish author, he also co-founded the non-profit organization Fighting Words with Seán Love in 2009. "I would like to think the Fighting Words experience makes young people more secure in their independence... [allowing] children, young people, and older people to take command of their own words. That is fundamentally vital". Doyle says it is not the brick and mortar of a roof over your head that brings you through life, it's language and the experiences you have, and the stories you share with others. It is upon these same ideals that Doyle built Fighting Words, helping people on their way through teaching the language of words and stories in a safe environment of creative freedom.

Roddy Doyle is writing a collection of short stories titled *Life Without Children*, which he will be delivering in March and will be released in the autumn of this year. It was an incredible experience chatting with Doyle about his work and his writing processes. "Interviewing Roddy Doyle was like having a chat with an old friend," said Duran. "Not only is he a smart and talented writer, but a down to Earth person, empathetic and witty, with fascinating life stories, and Fighting Words is proof of that - a creative space where everyone you meet feels like a longtime friend". For all you know, you might knock on the door of Fighting Words one day and find Roddy Doyle there to open it.



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staff writers //

Sophia Finucane
Liam Ferguson
Rory Galvin

contributors //

Natalia Duran
Sinéad Mohan
Aoife Rooney
Simon Dobey
Lorcan Kelly
Coline Segers
Katie Kilcoyne
Lucy Mackarel
Michael Bergin
Caoimhe Mahon
Robyn Murphy
Ryan Jennings
Michael Tuohy
Gavin Cassels

the team

editor	//
Doireann de Courcy Mac Donnell	
deputy editor	//
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art and design editor	//
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otwo co- editors	//
Andrew Nolan Ellen Duggan	
literature & drama editor	//
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art & architecture	//
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fashion editor //

Ellie McCreanor

film & tv editor //

Odin O'Sullivan

games editor //

E. Keogh

travel editor //

Killian Conyngham

food & drink editor //

Sophie Tevlin

agony aunt //

Joanne Joanne

chief of illustration //

Samaneh Sadeghi Marasht

social media editor //

Méabh de Courcy Mac Donnell

chief of photography for arts and culture //

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chief of videography for arts and culture //

Phillip Du Moulin



literature & drama

Being a Drama student during a pandemic...

Coline Segers

Coline Segers reflects on the benefits and challenges of having to study Drama and Performance online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This academic year has been, at the very least, unusual. With lectures transferred onto Zoom, many students have found it difficult to be invested and motivated without a usual 'routine' to follow, friends to socialise with, and so on. But it is not just our habits that have changed – our curriculum and ways of learning have changed too.

As a student currently doing a Masters in Drama and Performance Studies, studying drama in the midst of a global pandemic has proven itself to be a challenge. Indeed, a drama course is evidently going to be centred around theatre visits followed by interpretations of the live performances, but these are no longer available to us. This has resulted in the entire curriculum being modified to fit what can be watched online. Going to the theatre, discussing expectations in the foyer, the emotion and feelings of surprise, excitement, and apprehension, that buzzing around you during a show, –all in all, the *theatre experience*– is gone. Another consequence of viewing theatre online, highlighted in a conversation I had with Ellie Hanan Moran, [another student studying Drama and Performance in UCD], is "the absence of liveness". The main difference between theatre, as opposed to film, is its *liveness* which consists of the "atmosphere" you experience and the fact "anything could happen" during a live performance. Moran also argues that the production, and maybe even the intent of the directors themselves, may be distorted by the means of capture. For example, the camera does not let you choose what you want to focus on, it forces you to watch a certain character on stage, when one may want to focus on what is happening just behind them. Indeed, a captured performance is often very different from a movie that is produced for the screen: where a movie focusses on specific details, objects, or characters through the use of different shots,



a theatrical performance relies on lighting to lead the audience's gaze, and cannot easily force anything onto the spectator.

However, not all is bleak, and the appearance of online theatre has given us many things. Firstly, new forms of theatre. At the beginning of the year, we were asked to watch *Twenty Fifty*, directed by Dan Colley for the Dublin Fringe Festival. This interactive play was not originally tailored to be online, but the production team had to radically alter their mode of performance. Instead of being in the same room as the audience and their guest speaker, the actors were seemingly all in different places, on their respective laptops, just like the audience. However, they revealed later that the actors were, in fact, in the same room as each other. This resulted in a piece of theatre that

was incredibly collaborative. The audience were called upon to contribute, all spectators could see one another, some of whom tuned in from countries around the world, and could watch each other's reactions. Online theatre has also made itself much more accessible. One of my colleagues, Irati Agirrezabalaga, stated that the result of "companies putting shows online has allowed [her] to access plays that [she] wouldn't have access to otherwise, like the *National Theatre at Home* series, some North American shows and other European performances". Theatregoers around the world now have many more opportunities of seeing international performances which opens up an entirely new perspective on theatre, introducing people to the theatre of different cultures which may not have been known otherwise.

in 1961; Maya Angelou and Miller Williams at Bill Clinton's inaugurations in 1993 and 1977; and Elizabeth Alexander and Richard Blanco for Barack Obama in 2009 and 2013.

On 20th January 2021, Joseph R. Biden became the 46th President of the United States and his speech of reuniting Americans was hopeful, but it was the performance of Amanda Gorman's original poem "The Hill We Climb" which captured the hearts and minds of all those who heard it. She may have been preceded in History by world-renowned poets, all of whom were at least twice her age, but that did not diminish the passionate and ambitious look in Gorman's eyes, as she recited how "a skinny Black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother" ("The Hill We Climb").

To call it a performance may be an understatement. Gorman simply spoke truth and infused dignity into the pride of the American people. She reminded us that no matter what we face or what new terrors the world has in store, we as people, not just Americans, have the power to better ourselves and teach future generations how to endure pain and emerge triumphant "if we merge mercy

“ a theatrical performance relies on lighting to lead the audience's gaze, and cannot easily force anything onto the spectator. ”

UCD has given all of its students free access to Drama Online, a bank of play scripts and recorded performances, making theatre much more accessible. Another positive aspect of this is the option to rewatch performances. This, of course, is especially helpful as a student for the analysis of theatre as one can watch specific moments of a performance over and over.

Theatre studies are a challenge to follow in a pandemic, and some students come to wonder whether they should have deferred for a year in order to have the true *theatre* experience at the centre of their studies. However, if this situation has revealed anything, it is that theatre can only benefit from being more accessible to everyone.

with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change, our children's birthright" ("The Hill We Climb").

Her reading at Biden's Inauguration was not the first time Gorman has been recognized for her poetry. In 2017, she was the first person under the age of 18 to be recognized as a National Youth Poet Laureate, honouring her with the title of National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States. Amanda Gorman's work continues to be acknowledged, gaining more attention after her performance of yet another stunning poem, "Chorus of the Captains", at the pre-show for Super Bowl LV in Tampa, Florida on 7 February. A special edition of *The Hill We Climb: An Inaugural Poem for the Country*, with a foreword by Oprah Winfrey, will be released on 30th March 2021, followed by the publication of her collection *The Hill We Climb and Other Poems* in September.

literature & drama

Precedented Times: The Plague, politics and literature

Simon Dobey

Simon Dobey unveils the harsh reality of what the Coronavirus has done to us through the eyes of literary figures so that we can learn from our past mistakes.

"Unprecedented times", it's a phrase we've heard a lot lately, but how unprecedented are these times? In reality, not very. While the globalised nature of the world today presents its own specific challenges in battling Covid-19, the devastating nature of infectious diseases and the societal fallout they precipitate have already been explored in classical literature.

Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, takes place amidst a plague which devastated the city of Thebes. It is difficult to say exactly what caused the plague that sickened the residents of Thebes. Some have suggested that the plague, like our own, is a 'zoonosis', meaning it jumped from animals to humans. In fact, there are several references throughout the text of *Oedipus Rex* which highlight the death of animals: "a blight upon our grazing flock and herd" - a statement which echoes the sentiments of the rats in the town of Oran Camus illustrates in his novel, *The Plague*, published over 70 years ago in 1947.

The time in which *Oedipus Rex* was most likely written coincides with the period that Thucydides documents

“ A statement which echoes the sentiments of the rats Camus illustrates in the town of Oran in his novel, *The Plague*, published over 70 years ago in 1947. ”



the plague of Athens. Thucydides determined that the plague was most likely spread by returning soldiers from the Peloponnesian wars, mirroring the global spread of the Spanish flu one hundred years ago. Myth and superstition were undoubtedly a major part of life in ancient civilizations, even one as sophisticated as ancient Greece. However, the characters in *Oedipus Rex* display a keen understanding of disease in spite of the absence of our modern medicine and scientific tools. Lines 179-181 state: "wasted thus by death on death all our city perishes; corpses spread infection round."

The inhabitants of Thebes placed the blame for the plague at the feet of Ares, the Greek God of War, and not Apollo, who was often considered the God of Disease. The plague had been transported to the city as a result of the Peloponnesian War, but within the city walls, the God of War continued to divide the city's residents. Sophocles divides the chorus into a Strophe and an Antistrophe, two groups who often served to reveal the clashing social interests. However, they did agree on one thing: the plague posed an existential crisis for their lives and their polity.

Strophe and Antistrophe pleaded with their king to cure the ails which the plague had brought. Unlike our modern monarchs, Oedipus eventually recognises that he is responsible for the plague as a result of the corruption he has brought to the highest office of the city. World leaders today are often quick to highlight the collective responsibility of society while they relinquish blame for their laboured responses.

An ancient city in the throngs of an epidemic would



“ Covid-19 will be used to cast an uneasiness over the prevailing narrative to exemplify the corruption of our politics and to show that, in spite of a common enemy, humanity often chooses to fight amongst itself ”



have been left vulnerable to outside invaders. Internally, the sight of death and the prevailing atmosphere of fear would have undermined the social norms and led to looting, rioting, and hoarding. Throughout Europe, we have seen violent protests in opposition to lockdowns and curfews. The pandemic has likely inspired people to take action in the face of uncertainty and even boredom. On the international stage, we have seen the U.S. and others blame China for the pandemic, and most recently vaccine protectionism as European nations recall why they used to fight for resources.

Ireland has not been immune to the God of War's influences either. The pandemic has given fresh impetus to a far-right nationalist movement. The movement led by the Nationalist Party has latched onto the prevailing atmosphere of frustration and helplessness to promote its message of ethnic nationality. Even an issue as seemingly trivial as wearing a mask has been used to garner publicity. In October, an anti-fascist action led by radical republican groups seemed to have stopped the movement in its tracks. The horrifying incident of a racially motivated attack upon Dublin Lord Mayor, Hazel Chu, suggested otherwise.

Modern literature and cinema have predominantly depicted disease within the narrative of a zombie apocalypse or a flesh-eating virus. The literature in the once again post-pandemic society that is to come is likely to be more akin to *Oedipus Rex*. Covid-19 will be used to cast an uneasiness over the prevailing narrative to exemplify the corruption of our politics and to show that, in spite of a common enemy, humanity often chooses to fight amongst itself.

Inaugural Poetry & Amanda Gorman

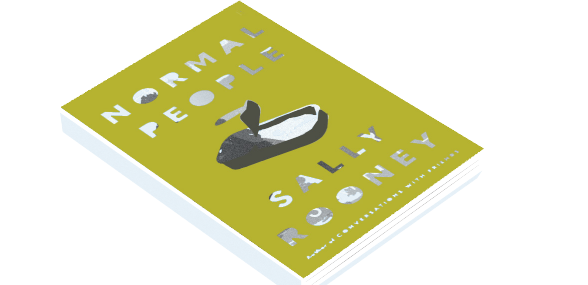
Anna Blackburn

Anna Blackburn revels in the work of poet Amanda Gorman and her poem "The Hill We Climb."

The book did it better:

Normal People by Sally Rooney

Katie Kilcoyne



Normal People–a coming-of-age novel and series phenomenon which grasped and subdued the emotions of both readers and viewers throughout the world. The story of Marianne Sheridan and Connell Waldron (played by Daisy Edgar-Jones and Paul Mescal in the 2020 adaptation) took our breath away as they grappled with social expectations, hierarchies, and the glib realisation of what it means to be 'normal'. Throughout the globe, people fell in love with the malleable characters hailing from a small town in county Sligo. However, it is the book that grants the reader deeper access into the psyche of the protagonists on their journey of self-discovery.

Readers observe the relationship between Connell, a victim of internal turmoil for self-loathing, and a detached Marianne, who believes she is unworthy of love, as they find comfort and security in each other's presence from their encounters in Camillea to Trinity College Dublin.

The novel creates a more intricate narrative for this relationship. Through a series of monologues and dialogues we, as readers, gain a deeper understanding of the enigmatic elements that make up their thoughts and views. "People used to like me, he feels like saying as a joke." The simplicity of the language utilised by Rooney creates harrowing images of two individuals who yearn for acceptance within society. This effective technique creates a strong bond between the readers and the characters as it presents Connell and Marianne in a vulnerable light. We are privy to their flaws and most dependent thoughts. Like Connell and Marianne, we too experience the joys of their successes and the lows of their tribulations.

The viewer is deprived of such an opportunity in the new TV series. Producers cannot afford to hone in on such minor yet crucial details which, as a result, prevents the protagonists' relationship from flourishing. The ability for readers to evolve with both Marianne and Connell is exclusively obtained through the captivating language of Rooney. It induces an element of primacy into the reader's experience, allowing the story to linger with them long after the last page is turned.

Little Fires Everywhere by Celeste Ng

Aoife Rooney



Traditionally with book-to-film adaptations, the viewer often finds themselves harbouring a sense of loyalty towards the novel, for fear that it will not be done justice in its pending picturization. While this is not the case with *Little Fires Everywhere* (2020), an exquisite mini-series adaptation of author Celeste Ng's story starring Reese Witherspoon and Kerry Washington, it is doubtful in my mind that an attempt to bring this story to life in an alternative medium could match this novel's brilliance.

Little Fires Everywhere, is a Hulu mini-series which rigidly follows the narrative of the residents of Shaker Heights, Ohio. There are some considerable discrepancies between the novel and its screen adaptation, for instance, one of the major plot points regarding the youngest Richardson daughter, Izzy. The novel gives an acutely painful description of the ordinary but complex difficulties of navigating adolescence, compounded by the fact that Izzy is so ostracised by her family and community. In the same vein, this feeling is echoed by Pearl, but for the intelligently dealt-with reason of race and money being the driving force in her circumstance. I found the novel did a better job with the execution of conversations on race. While the adaptation made admittedly successful attempts at showcasing the intrusion of racial microaggressions perpetrated by the white residents of the town, the book allowed for further conversation on the topic such as the interior monologues of Mia and Elena wildly contrasting and staggering. The series also shows cracks in the portrayed image of Elena more so than the novel, something that Ng dealt with expertly: even in her own mind, Elena refuses to show signs of weakness or vulnerability.

As would I recommend for all books brought to the screen: read the novel first. It often tells the story in a better and more detailed way!

Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda by Becky Albertalli

E. Keogh



There are very few films that even come close to being as good as the book, however, *Love, Simon* (2018, starring Nick Robinson) is one of them, but the book still did it better. The story follows a closeted teen in high school as he discovers that someone has anonymously written a poem coming out as gay. He emails the mysterious "Blue", and an online relationship ensues. The book is heartwarming, full of suspense, and showed lots of representation, and as a queer teen, it was just what I needed.

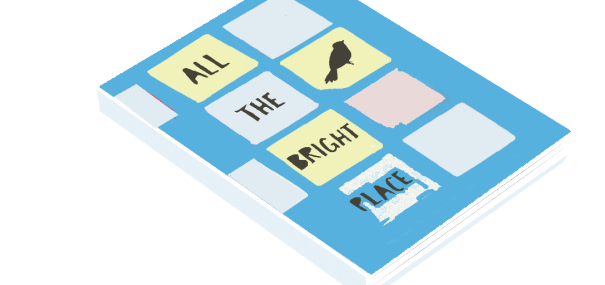
The movie improved a few things about *Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, such as shortening the title, including a person of colour as the love interest, and although I really enjoyed staying awake till 5am to read the book, the fact that it was turned into a more accessible, shorter form of media helped the story of Simon reach a wider audience. It did however come at an expense.

One of Simon's sisters was absent from the whole film. Her college-age self amalgamated with Simon's younger sister, which in turn made her seem a lot older in her years than in the book. In my opinion, the casting of Keylana Lonsdale as the love interest, a queer person of colour, added to the authenticity of the story and meant that the story was no longer just a representation for white queer people. This would've been a better addition for the book, as Blue's character is much more well explored with the rest of the characters.

I'll always prefer books because of the amount of detail and character exploration they can include, especially when it's telling a story so close to your heart that really does need the in-depth exploration of Simon's inner thought to bring him to life; to make him more than just a story, to completely flesh out the character and get the audience and readers to realise Simon's story isn't just a film or a book. It's a reality for many young queer people, and the book will always be better able to explain this navigation of life.

All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven

Lucy Mackarel



WARNING! This piece contains spoilers.

I want to preface that, while I wholeheartedly stand by my opinion that the book did it better, this film adaptation of Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* is good. It was always going to be an Olympic feat to bring such complex and emotional work to the screen without shedding some of what made the novel so fantastic. *All the Bright Places* centres on Violet Markey and Theodore Finch, two eighteen-year-olds with their respective emotional baggage and the journey of healing they go on together.

Violet's issues with survivor's guilt and depression are well documented throughout the film, but Finch's character was underdeveloped. His undiagnosed bipolar disorder is explored more thoroughly in the book. However, this lack of explanation makes Finch less endearing to viewers; in fact, people I've introduced the on-screen version to who haven't read the book, sometimes go as far as describing him as irritating which is simply not the case. Like the book says, "people are a lot more sympathetic if they can see you're hurting" and unfortunately the film doesn't let us see how much Finch is hurting.

A key piece of Violet's character that was also left on the cutting room floor: her passion for writing. Taking this out made Violet less of her own person and meant one of the best parts of the book didn't exist. Elle Fanning's performance as Violet in the 2020 film is stellar, particularly in its climax, where she discovers her friend has killed himself. But the scene itself changed a lot. Violet no longer wades into the water to find her friend because "People like Theodore Finch don't die. He's just wandering". Nor does she have to identify his body, likely because it was considered too graphic for a visual adaptation – but scenes like that in the book were necessary. It drives home the heart of the story. Finch is dead. He can't come back from that and everyone is forced to face life without him, capturing the very real effects of suicide on others. That's why the book will always do it better.

book nook :

When We Were Orphans by Kazuo Ishiguro

Lorcan Kelly

Lorcan Kelly critically analyses and praises the work of Japanese-born British novelist, Kazuo Ishiguro, and describes a fitting spot to read his work.

Born in Japan and raised in England, Kazuo Ishiguro often incorporates the contrasting cultures of both the East and the West into his writing. *When We Were Orphans* is no exception, detailing the life of a man who, like Ishiguro, moved from East to West when he was a young boy. Ishiguro was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017, particularly lauded for the acute sense of emotion and intense humanity in his work.

Ishiguro's fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans*, was first published in 2000. Set in England and China during the interwar years (1918-1939), the reader follows widely renowned detective Christopher Banks as he rises to the peak of his career: accumulating notoriety and prestige with every case he solves, during a period of economic hardship and heightened criminal activity.

The novel is structured in three broad segments. The first follows Banks' navigation through the social plane of London's upper-class elite, and the superficial social dynamics that come with such a lifestyle. The second follows his reflection of his childhood in the international settlement of Shanghai and the uncertain fate of his parents. The final segment details Banks' return to Shanghai as an adult and his investigation into the disappearance of both his mother and father.

As in his Booker Prize-winning *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and the popular *Never Let Me Go* (2005), Ishiguro employs his signature reflective style of writing, incorporating the inherent flaws of human memory, emotion, and perception with a practised hand. In this novel, we see Christopher repeatedly second-guess his own memory – a recurring feature throughout Ishiguro's works. This method of unreliable narration exemplifies the intrigue and mystery of the novel, invoking an intense curiosity within the reader which few authors are able to fully achieve.

Those unfamiliar with Ishiguro's work may look at the novel's blur and write it off as just another by-the-books

what to read

“ The first two sections of the novel establish these cityscapes in a beautifully tangible manner. . . ”

true crime story in the never-ending tsunami of work in the genre. However, those who are more acquainted with Ishiguro would understand that this is a completely inaccurate preconception to its form. Not once throughout the novel is the reader walked step-by-step through logical analyses of some gruesome crime scene, nor are they kept guessing by tiresome red herrings. In fact, the more criminological elements of the story take a back seat in place of a much more pensive, emotional journey undertaken by a man with a troubled childhood.

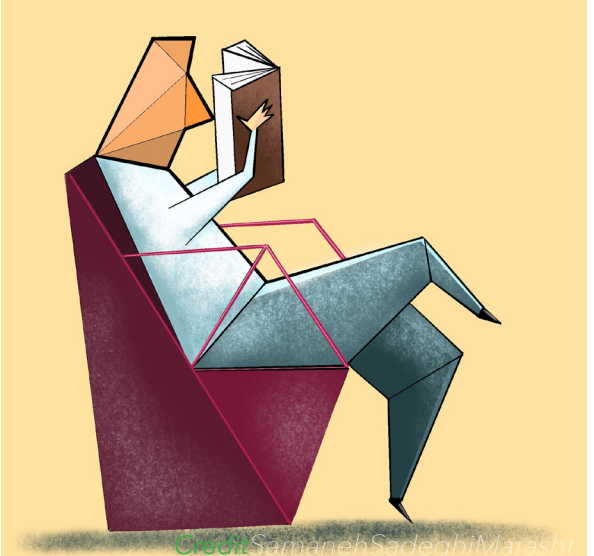
Ishiguro also displays his mastery of conveying setting, immersing the reader into the bustling urban landscapes of 1930s London and Shanghai. This surprised me at first – having read Ishiguro's other work, I was familiar with the author's fondness of rural settings (The Artist of the Floating World (1986) and The Buried Giant (2015) come to mind). The first two sections of the novel establish these cityscapes in a beautifully tangible manner, walking the reader through central London and Shanghai in a dreamlike fashion. The final section of the novel portrays the city as becoming a claustrophobia-inducing hellcape of violence and destruction, a section I read in one sitting with my heart banging and completely unable to tear myself away. Ishiguro is a master of concise description, giving the reader just enough to immerse, while avoiding the forcing of paragraph after paragraph of adjective-laden sensory writing. This economical style allows Ishiguro to say a lot without saying very much at all, and encourages the reader to consume his work at a leisurely pace.

where to read it

The sounds of Dublin City crash around my ears as I step off the bus at Dawson Street. It is 12.45, so I know I'll have to rush to reach my nook before the office workers and builders monopolise the area on their lunch breaks. At a pace somewhere between walking and running, I turn around and slide through the throng of shoe shoppers, coffee drinkers, and cigarette smokers, and dart across the suddenly empty road toward the black iron gates.

Stephen's Green is quiet, but it won't be for long. I have to hurry.

In my loping half-jog, I eventually make it to the bench. I spent so much of my summer on its chipped brown wood instils a sense of comfort and warmth in me – an intangible shield for the biting November air. I catch my foggy breath and sit down in the middle of the bench. Now, one might suppose that this is quite rude. Of course, there is enough space on the bench for two people to sit with a healthy half-meter between them. But I won't tolerate it today. I've had enough of sharing. You see, I shared my seat on the packed bus into town with a man who wouldn't stop wiping his dripping nose on his sleeve. I shared a raunchy joke with my family at breakfast, only to be met with outcries of "we're eating!" and "now is NOT the time!" (That's what I get for trying to lighten the mood). That's twice I have shared today, and no more sharing shall do.



“ A beautiful fusion of person and place; this hub of perpetual movement which defines this city. ”

A bell echoes in the distance, signalling the oncoming crowd of worker-drones and their short-lived freedom. I take my book from my bag and shuffle forward a bit before finding my mark. Before I open the page, however, I am struck with some divine urge to look around, so I do.

The November air rustles through the trees as I survey the scene – people in suits and shirts rushing to find their nooks; young friends laughing and huddling together in the cold; the faint sound of the Luas as it pulls away from the platform. A beautiful fusion of person and place; this hub of perpetual movement which defines this city.

A wondrous sense of comfort bubbles up inside me, and I open my book ensconced in a warm blanket of absolute tranquillity.

music

Artists from the Streets who have conquered their corners.

Isabella Ambrosio

Isabella Ambrosio looks at the harsh upbringings of some of the most famous musicians in recent years.

There's a certain type of awe surrounding artists who have built their empire from the ground up. Artists who have fought homelessness, drug addiction, and often violent adversity bring something more to the table. They bring a passion, a certain view of life that isn't common among most celebrities. Some of the most notable musicians have had to come from the ground up.

Eminem

One of the most notorious stories of coming from nothing is Eminem. Named Marshall Mathers III, he didn't stay in one place for more than a year or two at the maximum, mostly with family members. His mother's drug addiction was apparent throughout his childhood; he even said she would sprinkle her Valium on his dinner. She would take money from his paychecks as he worked multiple jobs to survive while living in many public housing projects in Detroit. He ended up dropping out of school at 17, after failing the ninth grade three times. Eminem's rough upbringing is mentioned throughout his music, "Cleanin' Out My Closet", "My Mom" and more. His painful upbringing led him to live a life where his net worth is \$230 million, selling 220 million records worldwide, and even having a movie made about his childhood.

Snoop Dogg

Snoop Dogg's, legally named Calvin Cordozar Broadus Jr., net worth sits at a comfortable \$150 million, selling nearly 40 million albums worldwide and having 14 singles in the Top 10 on Billboard's Top 100 (and let's not forget



Credit

the additional 8 where he was a featured artist). But his fortune is self-made. His childhood was strenuous with an absentee father, and he faced multiple incarcerations for possession of narcotics when he was a teenager. He was a member of the Crips gang in the Eastside neighbourhood of Long Beach, California. Snoop Dogg was also arrested in 1993 in connection to a gang shooting, where he was charged with murder. He was acquitted in 1996. Before his trouble with the law, he was a dedicated student and worked at a young age in order to help support his mother and make ends meet. No matter his upbringing, he has remained with his high school sweetheart, having three kids and a grandchild. He is now known for his laid-back demeanour (due to his heavy cannabis use, which has become associated with Snoop Dogg's brand) and party songs.

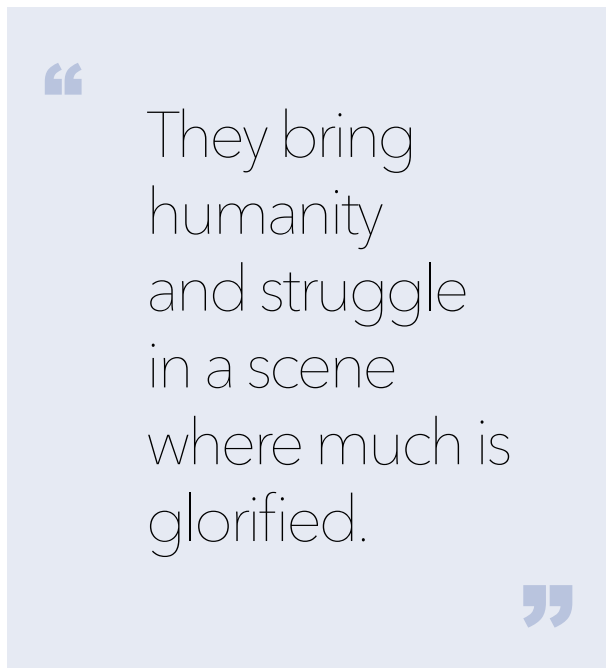
Bugzy Malone

Bugzy Malone, Aaron Davis, struggled with homelessness, poverty, and drugs through the entirety of his childhood. Growing up in Manchester, he was born into a family of known career criminals. He watched his stepfather physically abuse his mother, while never knowing his biological father. He was surrounded by gang activity, to the extent of having to watch his uncle get murdered, and started partaking in illegal activities when he was just eleven years old. He was arrested at the age of 16 and sent to prison. Upon release, he attempted to get into boxing. His career looked promising until he ultimately decided to take up music. His mixtapes gained him a popularity that saw him invited to feature on Charlie

Sloth's 'Fire in the Booth' series. The video currently has 25 million views and is the most popular video in the series. His music is candid - he speaks about his time in prison, his life of crime and depression that often lingered because of his traumatic upbringing. Songs like "Moving", "Make or Break" and "Run" document the inner turmoil Malone faced. His net worth is currently £2 million with three separate collaborations with Supply & Demand and his trainers stocked in JD.

Hobo Johnson

Hobo Johnson, real name Frank Lopes Jr., adopted the stage name 'Hobo Johnson' after being homeless for several months at the age of 19, where he lived out of his car after his father kicked him out of the house. His stage name was originally 'Homeless Johnson', but after the time spent in his 1994 Toyota Corolla, he changed 'Homeless' to 'Hobo'. He released his debut album in 2016 titled the 'Rise of Hobo Johnson' and was awarded four separate titles from the Sacramento Area Music Awards: Best Emcee, Best New Artist, Artist of the Year, and Best Hip-Hop/Rap. Afterwards, Johnson was a part of NPR's Tiny Desk Contest in 2018. While he didn't win, his career had only just begun. He appeared in several different festivals and had his song "Typical Story", featured in EA Sports video game NHL 20. His style of rap is categorised as 'emo-rap' and 'spoken word', where he addresses his own insecurities, battles with depression and failed relationships. While his net worth isn't known, his tracks have begun to chart on Billboard's Alternative Songs chart. It surely isn't long before one of his singles sits in the number one slot.



Jay-Z

Jay-Z, born Shawn Corey Carter, came from Brooklyn, New York, where he was raised in a housing project by his mother, his father deserting the family when Carter was young. His older brother, Eric, was a victim to the crack cocaine epidemic occurring in Brooklyn during the 1980s. He himself turned to the streets, selling crack and joining a gang. Carter even shot his brother when he was 12 - and when Carter went to visit his brother in the hospital, his brother apologised for what crack had turned him into. Drugs and firearms were easily accessible all throughout Carter's upbringing. He spent 14 years selling, while never touching the drug himself, to support his family. Now, Jay-Z has a net worth of \$1 billion and is married to one of the most famous pop stars in the world - Beyoncé. Jay-Z has sold over 50 million albums and has 22 Grammy Awards.

Each of these artists has had successes beyond their wildest dreams and become world-renowned for their own reasons. Eminem's brutal and often uncomfortable honesty, Snoop Dogg's calm nature despite his violent upbringing, Bugzy Malone's stories of selling drugs as a teenager, Hobo Johnson's vulnerabilities, and Jay-Z's cinematic recollections of his life experiences; it serves them all well. They bring humanity and struggle in a scene where much is glorified. It isn't always just partying and about hooking up in clubs; struggles lie around so many street corners and each artist expresses them in their own way.

music

The Geography of Music

Michael Bergin

With Eastern bands impacting on Western music more than ever before, Michael Bergin compares the musical scene in both regions

Musicians, I think it's fair to say, would make horrible geographers. One must only look to the Electric Picnic and the inevitability of at least one headline act introducing themselves with an ill-placed "Good evening Dublin" to confirm this. However, a more glaring example is usually to be found in the marketing for said musician's "World" tour, a glossy line-up of venues in North America, Western Europe, and probably some Australian destinations, if only to justify the cost of a private jet. Yet, the more geographically astute of you may realise that Earth is generally accepted to have more than three continents. For the musicians amongst you, take a moment, I know this may come as a shock.

So then, what lies in these hidden lands, untouched by Western music (or, at least, Western musicians)? As it turns out, a bustling music scene, that many in the west could do well to emulate.

Take for instance, India. One of the most populous regions in the world, and though we seldom think of it, one of the most culturally powerful. The immediate example of India's musical prowess that comes to mind for many is the influence Indian tradition had on George Harrison of 'The Beatles', widely considered one of the most influential bands in Western music. Harrison's love for Indian musical styles helped to embolden and engender a new generation of musical experimentation in the west, providing the soundtrack to the psychedelic end of the 1960s.

Today, India's music scene is dominated by the big artists of Bollywood, though in recent years, a remarkably agile and fast-moving indie scene has sprouted up, with a plethora of online festivals to promote these artists. The potential for inspiration in a land which is practically untouched by Spotify (who had only mustered two million users in a nation of 1.3 billion as of February 2019) is virtually limitless.

Moving away from India, and the obvious cultural superpower in Asia seems to be South Korea and its ever-increasing swarm of tightly choreographed K-pop bands. While these bands have seen enormous success in the west, this success has virtually eradicated the thoughts of other genres of music blossoming in the country - the K-pop surge fails to tell the whole story. For decades, South Korea has possessed a booming music scene, with a variety of genres such as rock and roll, swing, blues, and R&B centred around the fashionable Hongdae district, which is itself lined with Karaoke parlours and nightclubs.

Among the most popular genres of music in South Korea is "trot", which combines swing, rock and blues



Credit

into something entirely new, and though trot has existed in South Korea for decades, it has in recent years experienced a resurgence. There are a variety of trot-inspired game shows on South Korean television, which have been endorsed by leading figures in the K-pop industry such as Shin Ji of Koyote, among others.

All told, there is much more to South Korea's music scene than the K-pop that seems to exclusively reach western shores. Seoul is a regional capital of rock, blues, trot, and indeed, soul.

Finally, any examination of the eastern music scene could not be complete without taking a look at the situation in Japan, so often derided in the west as a country of bizarre musical tastes and traditions, it is one which in reality offers room to experiment that is unthinkable elsewhere.

In Japan, restrictive copyright laws and the prominence of inverted business models that tend to funnel money away from artists have caused enormous strife for musicians in recent years, who struggle to finance their own art. However, the difficulty presented to artists does not rob them of opportunity. In order to comply with the dominant forces in the market, Japanese artists are asked to either craft suitable music to be sold to the masses, and if refusing to cooperate, rely instead on their own talents to succeed. Increasingly, artists are taking the latter option.

This trend in Japan has produced some truly erratic, though inspired, work, most notably the genre of idol metal, a fusing of vicious basslines and energetic drumming with girly vocals and poppy presentation. If nothing else, this gives Japanese artists a desire to create

Harrison's love for Indian musical styles helped to embolden and engender a new generation of musical experimentation in the west, providing the soundtrack to the psychedelic end of the 1960s.

something new and fresh, a desire that can be tellingly absent in the west.

How then, does the blossoming music scene of the east compare with its perhaps more lucrative western rival?

In the west, hip hop, pop, and techno have been the dominant market forces for the best part of the last 20 years, though the market forum for these artists to share their work has changed from record shops to viral apps such as TikTok. The prevalence of 'viral' music at the top of the charts is a concern to some music purists, who view the dominance of short, catchy hooks as being fundamentally destructive to musical creativity. Though of course, this is purely a matter of personal opinion. There has also been a post-punk revival in recent months, with bands such as Fontaines DC leading the Irish charge.

Yet, when comparing east with west, it becomes very easy to fall into the trap of debating which musical world is superior, forgetting about the influence both have had on one another. Without slick western boy bands, it is very unlikely that K-pop bands such as BTS could have achieved their rapid success in recent years. Similarly, were it not for eastern-inspired pop rhythms and creativity, a sizable chunk of western music would simply not exist.

In comparing the two, we allow ourselves to fall into the geographer's trappings, drawing imaginary lines to divide cultures, when optimal success, and real innovation, occur only where cultures mix with each other.

Musicians may not be the best geographers in the world, but geographers wouldn't make great musicians either.



One of the downsides that comes with releasing an excellent debut album is the expectation to generally move forward in a similar direction, lest the artist be accused of pandering. This was something I noticed with Lady Gaga's trajectory - she is known first and foremost for her dance-pop. Releasing a country record in 2016 can be jarring, even among her otherwise dedicated fanbase. When you see success within a specific genre, you are still somewhat genre bound - it takes real talent and versatility like Gaga to succeed across the board.

This is one of the things that excites me the most about Rico Nasty. In an era dominated by the Doja Cats and Megan Thee Stallions of the world, it can often seem easy to predict the direction an artist will go - Megan and Doja are undeniably talented, but they play to their strengths and are unlikely to completely reinvent their entire sound anytime soon. Rico, on the other hand, has the talent of her peers as well as the ability to wear many hats - her long-awaited debut album, *Nightmare Vacation*, is one of the strongest and most exciting debuts I've heard in a very long time.

Nightmare Vacation is composed of a solid sixteen tracks, but still only clocks in at 39 minutes. This is down to the brief runtime of every song on the album - only two songs ("Back & Forth" and "Smack a Bitch") break the three-minute mark. This is likely due to the mechanics of streaming services - when you're only getting paid when someone listens to thirty seconds of a song, it's more lucrative to make 16 short songs than 12 longer ones. That said, I don't think any of the songs on the album suffer greatly from their runtimes - it doesn't feel like Rico Nasty is selling herself short. For the most part, she does



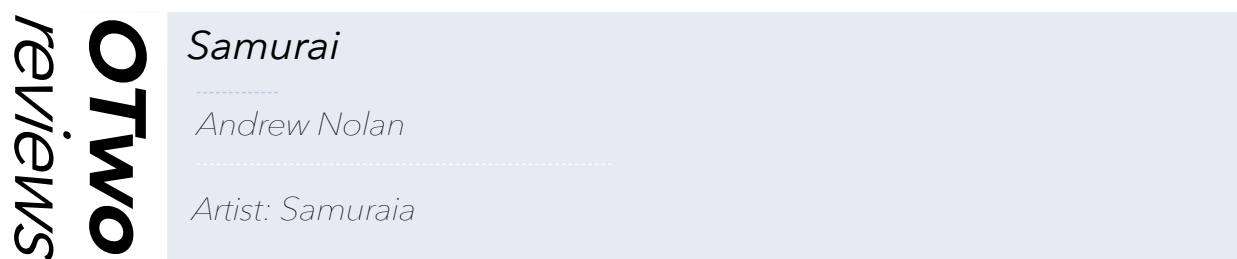
Credit

what she needs to in two and a half minutes or less.

And what she does in those two minutes speaks to her immense versatility as a musician. There's a lot of range that Rico shows off in *Nightmare Vacation* - many of the tracks sound completely different, yet it all feels cohesive as a single body of work. The album as a whole has a darker, feistier sound to it - it has similar nu-metal influences to SAWAYAMA, and the unexpected resurrection of nu-metal in the 2020s is something I am 100% here for. But Rico does not limit herself to nu-metal or rap - the lead single "IPHONE" is hyper pop excellence and would not feel out of place on a 100 gees record. This may be due to 100 gees' Dylan Brady's production of the track, but Rico's own range cannot be denied. You could listen to "IPHONE", "Don't Like Me" and "Own It" and you would be forgiven for thinking they were by three separate artists - let alone three tracks from the same album.

And what she does in those two minutes speaks to her immense versatility as a musician.

Nightmare Vacation is an extremely promising and endlessly exciting debut record for Rico Nasty. It's loud, it's feisty, and it's chaotic as all hell. *Nightmare Vacation* is 39 minutes of sensory overload - but in the best way possible. Rico Nasty has proven that she can adapt herself to a wide variety of sounds, and I cannot wait to hear what's next. She has set an extremely high bar, not just for herself but for those who dare to release as ambitious a debut record as hers.



Credit

As much as the controversy surrounding CD Projekt Red's *Cyberpunk 2077* has very much dominated the conversation thus far, there is a lot that the game got absolutely spot on. Facets like mood and world-building are 'definitely executed well, in spite of its less-than-stellar reputation. The latter is helped to no end by its application of soundtrack - the neopunk not only suits the immediate landscape its set in, but the implementation of sound in key moments helps to make the overall picture a lot more cohesive.

The most notable of this, for me, is the rock-group *Samurai*. Fronted by the game's cult-of-personality Johnny Silverhand, the motion-capture and voice of the ever-popular Keanu Reeves solidify the presence of one of the game's most important characters. His

you're experiencing the band's rise in real-time. In terms of bringing said subject to life, it's subtle, yet incredibly effective.

anti-corporate nature is conveyed succinctly with the band's angry sound and commanding presence. Characterisation aside, why does this act specifically do so much for the world-building that *Cyberpunk* is famed for?

See, the band *Samurai* themselves actually exist. Kind of.

If you look for their music on Spotify, for example, their music is all available. It isn't listed as an OST, or any game-affiliated media, they exist independently of the game itself. The music isn't digitally rendered - mind you, the songs are performed by real-life punk giants Refused, who took on the mantle of Samurai to bring the digital band to life. As they were allowed to exist as their own entity, it genuinely feels like a part of the game that you can take away and enjoy in your day-to-day life. It adds incredibly to the immersion the game offers, as some of the biggest characters in the game are brought to life in their own, unique way. Not only does it make the environment feel a lot more lived-in, but it makes the world feel a lot more realistic. You see, in-story, the band were at the peak of their powers in the late 2010s/early 2020s. Whether it was a purposeful choice or not, this pattern is replicated in the real release of the music, with "Chippin' In" released in 2019, and the latest single "Black Dog" released last November. To me, that is just the coolest thing. Of course, it will always exist as an extension of its subject but listening to them now adds the caveat that you're experiencing the band's rise in real-time. In terms of bringing said subject to life, it's subtle, yet incredibly effective.

Even if you're not a fan of video games, or think that *Cyberpunk* is a bafinle and nothing more, *Samurai*'s music stands on its own two feet. "A Like Supreme" and "Never Fade Away" are more-than-fitting punk anthems, conveying enough adrenaline to get the head moving. Then there are tracks like "Black Dog", which are more subdued but just as fitting. Whether you're listening as a fan or not, *Samurai*'s are a safe shout for any fan of punk, and when observing it as a concept, highlights the role music can play in opening up the fictitious world it's set in.

A Celebration of SOPHIE

Ellen Duggan

In honour of her passing, Ellen Duggan reflects on Sophie's career and her musical genius

Perhaps a lot can be said for the power of presented transparency in virtuoso.

If this is the case, exposing the pellucid self-awareness present in underground music scenes and the penchant for conventional 'niceties' in above ground sounds was a tried and tested aspect of Sophie's genius.

Through exposing us, kindly and gently, to musical ruptures, clamorous uncertainties, and electronic depictions of a frantic nervous system, Sophie evoked a desire for difference in our previously traditional listening experiences.

Following her sudden passing, she encourages us, posthumously, to recognise that our ears often need more than most musical producers possess the vocabulary to even suggest to offer us. Although her transparency lends itself to odes in her honour, it was more so her faceless anonymity that maintained her status as a genius. She cut a fearlessly experimental, precise and invigorating unknown figure.

Sophie's emergence from anonymity, after years as a producer to the stars and collaborator of experimental label PC Music, coincided with her first-ever vocal performance on: "It's okay to cry" from her first album *Oil of every Pearl's un-insides*. Upon learning of her death, this was the song I saw posted in her honour the most frequently and it is easy to understand why, as the title lends itself so naturally to grief - be it cultural or personal. Through the title alone, Sophie seems to say "It is okay to cry, it is okay to be upset"; but it is more that she grants us permission to be seen in this state of upset - the ending of her anonymity corresponding with the release of such a delicately vulnerable song, that feels particularly poignant.

Whilst grieving for celebrities may often take on the form of uncomfortable social media performance, Sophie seemed to commend us in a direction that would lead to the most healing: allowing ourselves to be transparent and united in sadness and celebration of an incredible musician.

The video for 'It's okay to cry' displayed Sophie for the first time - her beautiful exterior matching every strand of her newly solo vocals. Delicate, glossy and commanding. She stares right down the barrel of the camera, encouraging you to touch your own face as she caresses hers - to explore yourself. To understand the importance of acceptance, to understand upset and grief.

Through borrowing the well-known language of popular music, Sophie channelled a famously glitzy vocabulary of



Credit

unflinching confidence, perched on top of the musical undercurrent of unstable glitches and minor explosions of sound. Nothing is as it seems, and that is okay - she seemed to be inviting us to ponder.

"I hope you don't take this the wrong way/ But I think your inside is your best side," she sings.

Born in Glasgow in 1986, to parents who held an obvious understanding for their daughter's musical needs,

allowing her to accompany them to raves from a young age, she spoke about the enormous effect science fiction had upon her creative abilities as a Glaswegian teenager. J.G Ballard and art film creator Matthew Barney's work were credited as being on a loop in her mind, presenting her with an idea of encapsulating the future that did not involve saccharine nostalgia - only innovation.

Although a rare interviewee, she documented her young dedication to her passion, remembering telling friends as she exited the school gates that she was going home 'to write an album' with the small amount of music equipment her father had salvaged for her. Speaking on the importance of dialoguing with her inner child, an activity that seems to have lent itself to her audible playfulness, she spoke of how she would encourage herself as she sat, writing and producing for artists like Madonna on 'Bitch I'm Madonna' by thanking her younger self for all of the unnoticed and persistent dedication she provided, "I thank my younger self for putting in that effort and being persistent and keeping going even though nobody was showing any interest".

She sustained herself through her teen years in Scotland as a Wedding DJ. Despite having no keen interest in DJing - "no one understood" what she was "doing up there" in her room, people assumed that DJing must be it, and so began to book her.

Upon moving to L.A., keen collaborators and friends were created through the likes of innovators such as Kim Petras, Charli XCX, and Arca to name but a few. Upon her passing, messages that spoke towards her kind and contemplative

If each musician's work can be simply defined through one word, harmony would be Sophie's

nature and her unignorable genius were shared by these aforementioned collaborators, giving the reader a sense that this was not just a passionate career choice for Sophie, but a means for beautifully expressive connection.

If each musician's work can be simply defined through one word, harmony would be Sophie's. Although her music may be thought of as intense, or evoking a kind of visceral sustained aggression, heard in songs such as 'Is it cold in the water?', upon closer listening, it is as though the song opens out to you with every ounce of additional attention you gift to it.

It can become evident through this process of sustained attention that music that sparks in feelings of aggression, is in fact music that is more future-facing than we may feel capable to process-music created by artists who, it can be sonically perceived, trust the electronic instruments they utilise and see beauty and hope in the future of people and music. This kind of harmony is a gift that Sophie will never cease giving us. In her own words: "You can't speak louder than your music. You speak through your music".

This ethos spilled over into every aspect of her life, as an openly trans woman, when asked what transness means to her, she stated: "For me, transness is taking control to bring your body more in line with your soul and spirit so the two aren't fighting against each other and struggling to survive".

A harmonious statement from an incredible talent, who reinvented pop and ideas of selfhood - all in her 34 years upon this planet.



AboveCredit
ModelMairidh NicCormaic
PhotographerMairidh NicCormaic
StylistSew it Seems
Photo EditorNurina Iman Nizam

The Harry Styles
Vogue Cover - a
conversation about
gender, sexuality and
fashion

Caoimhe Mahon

Whether you agreed with the Harry Styles' 2020 Vogue cover or not, you cannot deny that it started some much needed conversations. Caoimhe Mahon discusses the controversy and whether or not Vogue made the right decision.

Vogue magazine has produced a multitude of striking, powerful and applauded covers throughout its one-hundred-and-twenty-eight-year history. Peter Lindbergh's iconic 1990 cover would go on to redefine what it meant to be a supermodel within the fashion industry, whilst the 1991 mirror cover welcomed in the millennium, and in 2019 Vogue issued a historic cover entitled, 'Forces for Change.' Clearly, Vogue has a renowned reputation for generating conversation and evoking influence via its

world-famous covers. In Vogue's December 2020 issue history was made once more when musician Harry Styles dawned the cover as the first solo male to do so in the magazine's print history. However, what made the cover even more striking was the Gucci jacket and dress which Styles modelled for the shoot. The decision to have a cis-gendered white male assume this role roused both feelings of pride and discontentment, making it one of the most controversial covers in Vogue's history.

The twenty-seven year old first came under the spotlight in 2010 as a member of the pop boy-band 'One Direction' on the reality TV show 'The X Factor.' After the star found fame, conversations that surrounded Styles in the public sphere varied, encompassing a number of personal issues ranging from his high profile relationships to his promiscuous reputation, and even raising questions about his sexuality. In 2015, the band split and Harry Styles embarked on a solo career. This would see his musical tastes take a different course alongside his flamboyant and experimentative image. Therefore, the December 2020 Vogue cover was revolutionary as a cis man, modelling a dress, depicted both fashion and gender fluidity, thus encouraging rigid gender stereotypes to be torn down.

However, Vogue received backlash in the wake of the December issue especially from members of the LGBTQ+ community who believed that, given the origins of this fashion culture, a white cis male was not the appropriate person to generate this discussion. Styles was praised for using his platform to celebrate diversity and encourage acceptance by many. Though, many LGBTQ+ members found this insensitive given that history reveals that the LGBTQ+ community, particularly the black community within it, were largely responsible for this fashion culture and were ostracised and condemned for

“ If Harry Styles was not viewed through the lens of a celebrity, if he was not white, if he was not a heterosexual male, would this cover have been as popularly recieved? ”

expressing gender fluidity through fashion. Therefore, the progressive nature of this cover was questioned, raising concerns around race, wealth, sexuality and status. If Harry Styles was not viewed through the lens of a celebrity, if he was not white, if he was not a heterosexual male, would this cover have been as popularly received? Is society more comfortable with hinting at acceptance rather than actively accepting through inclusivity? Is this a step towards changing ideas of heteronormativity or confirmation of its gripping presence in society?

Of course, given the history that surrounds this issue, society must be sensitive to the concerns and disagreements about Vogue's choice of model amongst members of the LGBTQ+ community. However, in the hope of sourcing a greater level of acceptance within our society, where rigid social norms and gender barriers can be torn down, I am determined to recognise the positives within this cover. Harry Styles, with his 36.5 million Instagram followers, is evidently an influential and highly recognisable public figure whose fan base extends across age groups, sexualities and genders alike. His status and reputation have allowed the conversation to spill out into society, generating a number of diverse and powerful conversations. Such conversations crucially need to be had including that of the inequality that exists between cis white men and the LGBTQ+ community when they dawn the same garment and yet receive such different responses. However, the very fact that this cover has opened a door for these conversations to be had is surely a benefit of the cover. Styles also represents how fashion is a statement, how it is an expression of emotion and of personality, and how fashion is personal, inclusive and individual. Fashion should not be segregated by gender, and one should not be confined to a box based on what is considered masculine and feminine and therefore, socially acceptable. This cover is so much more than a fashion statement. Instead, it harvests a political

and cultural agenda where the patriarchy propped up by heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity must be smashed. Not only does this Vogue cover signal that gender exists on a spectrum, but it also signals how fashion too can be fluid. In today's society with greater levels of diversity people do not have to confine themselves to binaries enforced in society through generations of norms and conventions. Though, with this newfound freedom comes an intensification of labels which are challenged in this cover. Perhaps it is not so much about identifying with a specific gender or sexuality when it comes to fashion and more so about freedom. Perhaps this cover is powerful for the very same reason it comes under scrutiny, because it dilutes toxic masculinity by showing that it is okay to be a straight white male and yet feel the ability to express yourself through clothing more typically associated with the feminine.

Therefore, whilst given the unequal and turbulent history that surrounds the LGBTQ+ community and gender-fluid fashion, it is understandable that this cover could rouse feelings of discontent and unhappiness. These feelings only heighten the urgency required for important conversations to be had across society where each individual is heard and represented. An individual with the following of Harry Styles is arguably a suitable candidate for projecting the message and instigating a conversation. His cover opens up the conversation to people of many backgrounds and identities and allows them to carry the conversation on because they have been given the recognition they deserve. However, for that cis white male who picked up Vogue in December 2020 and saw someone just like them on the cover in a dress being praised, maybe that will be enough to encourage them to love every part of themselves, to throw away the rule book and use fashion as a tool of freedom and exploration.

Denim days

Ellen Duggan

Ellen Duggan explores the History of our favourite fabric.

One of my earliest denim related memories came from the mouth of self-proclaimed 'first supermodel' Janice Dickinson. I remember finding myself young, dungaree-clad and glued to our family's 16 inch TV, as she recounted the quest of her golden era: to find Jeans that felt as though they had been created with a woman's body in mind. She spoke of how she stole a then boyfriend's tightest jeans, placed them on herself, ran a bath and submerged her body, watching the clinging denim in the warm water.

In a world where jeans were not yet catering to women, Janice took matters into her own pruned hands. She expressed that her prerogative for doing this was to ensure that the jeans would adapt to her body, to project the then subversive idea that, from the waist down, her body had been intentionally catered for by the World of Fashion. Many could argue that this infamous bath scene is the Fashion world's equivalent to the athlete's 'ice bath', both definitely result in similarly earth-shattering progress.

Although denim may appear to us today as one of the clothing world's more 'obvious' fabrics, what Janice's fable explains is the complex history of denim, how it's utilitarian purposes at a time when women were expected to be found 'sitting pretty' in the domestic sphere meant that ideas of durability and comfort in clothing were

concepts that had to be brought by women TO Fashion, not given to us BY fashion.

In 1853, Loeb Strauss began a business in which denim jeans were supplied to mineworkers. The material was selected having proven itself to be durable, whilst the pockets served functionality for carrying tools in a pre-fanny-pack era. In 1873, Loeb changed his business name to 'Levi', sound familiar yet?

Initially, denim was worn solely by individuals in the mining or mechanics industries, but around the 1950s a statement was discovered in the simplest of textiles. Denim was adopted by musicians, artists and Actors. At times of political strife, an intention of support and camaraderie could be found in the sporting of this denim. The durability and functionality of it seemed to embody a message within itself that the world needed to hear.

That we are connected in the simplest of feats, existence.

Flash forward from the dark mines of West Virginia in 1835 to the illuminated streets of New York, November 1988. Anna Wintour's first issue as the editor of American Vogue, model Michaela Bercu had returned from a holiday and could not fit into a sample size couture skirt. Instead, Wintour had the brainwave of having her photographed whilst sporting a Christian Lacroix beaded shirt and stonewashed Jeans. Taking the grand prestige of Couture and placing it gently in the context of the demands of day to day Manhattan life, bringing denim to the world of Vogue, allowed our universal drive for comfort to release fashion from its haughty ideals and reposition itself as something resilient, something moldable and something that could be easy, just like denim itself.

Sew it Seems

Ellie McCreanor

Mairidh NicCormaic, or as her Instagram followers know her, @sew_itseams, is a Depop seller based in Galway gracing our feeds with her handmade fleeces. The collection featured in our shoot this issue is her Valentines collection. The collection is filled with soft, romantic pastels with pops of bold prints littered throughout. However, if this is not your colour palette don't fret, she has something for everyone on her Depop shop, with the next drop happening in March. Mairidh is an amazing example of the talent emerging from the Irish fashion scene, and is definitely one to watch.

film & tv

David Lynch at 75

Sophia Finucane

Sophia Finucane explores the work and lasting influence of one of America's most iconoclastic artists.

David Lynch: director, writer, painter, musician, sound designer, actor, singer and photographer, has recently reached the platinum milestone of turning 75 years old. The lauded filmmaker has, of course, produced the hit ABC show *Twin Peaks* (1990-1992, 2017), along with classic films like *Eraserhead* (1977), *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001). In more recent years, Lynch has turned to Netflix as a distributor of his 2017 surrealist short, *What Did Jack Do?* and regularly updates anyone who wishes to watch on the weather and the 'number of the day' on his YouTube channel. His latest update, on February 1st, which garnered much anticipation with some suspecting a new season of *Twin Peaks*, turned out to be that he was debating taking a break from his YouTube videos, but decided against it, as everyone had been so kind in the comments. Lynch seems to only continue to communicate ideas, affect and observations as he ages, and any argument that his work is indiscernible becomes less and less solid.

1977's *Eraserhead*, often analysed to be about the paralyzing fears of child-rearing, begins Lynch's feature film career off with a bang of body horror and hallucination. In a 2016 documentary, *David Lynch: The Art Life*, Lynch describes how, upon showing his father some of his art experiments, he replied: "Dave, I don't think you should ever have children!" However, this idea that some critics have of his work being too dark, and unrealistically so, for shock value, or indeed that Lynch has a psychotic problem, is untrue. Lynch lived in Philadelphia at the time and saw the rampant crime caused by the severe economic inequality of late-70s America every day. And make no mistake, Lynch celebrates the world in many aspects of his art, but he seems to be merely exhibiting the truths about society that many others actively ignore in their work, especially in Hollywood.

Born in Montana on January 20, 1946, demographically, Lynch is the poster-boy for Baby Boomers. No more is this seen than in *Blue Velvet*, in which a man on the



Credit: Laetitia Tarrant

cup of real adulthood in the white-picket-fence US of times-gone-by, is introduced to the subversive and cynical world of America behind the post-war veneer. For this reason, Lynch is seen by many as a defining artist of the postmodern-era, alongside masters like Don DeLillo, marking the end of a zeitgeist and asking where we go from there. This complicated relationship with America can be seen to inspire many filmmakers, Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) being an example, and the ways in which he uses hallucination or nightmare to represent unsettling thoughts inspires late 20th/early 21st American landmarks like *The Sopranos* (1999-2007). Laura Dern appearing radiant in the darkness in *Blue Velvet* echoes the introduction of Grace Kelly in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954). If *Blue Velvet* is your introduction to Lynch, you could deduce that his work mounds these times gone by. Even learning that Lynch enjoyed a Bob's Big Boy chocolate milkshake for 7 years in real life could lead you to believe his sentimentality for the old times, but perhaps he is not so simple.

David Lynch encounters the life problems that we all do and responds to them by representing characters in a way that is truthful, laying life out more frankly and

honestly than anyone else in the American film industry. No better is this illustrated than in *Mulholland Drive*. By 2001, Lynch goes all-out representing dreams and reality warped by disillusionment and disorientation. This is neatly encapsulated in the framing he chooses for the infamous scene at Winkie's diner in which a point of view shot approaching the nightmarish image fills us with dread. However, this aesthetic persists throughout the film. The dreamlike world of Naomi Watts disintegrates into the betrayal and pain of life not turning out the way America promised her it would. Her dreams do not come true. Lynch can be analysed using affect theory perhaps here more than ever, not only in scenes that cause the spectator to jump, cringe and recoil, but scenes of tender sexuality between women that, thankfully, avoid objectification, unlike many, many films made by Lynch's contemporaries. In this way, Lynch's women play on the expectations and presumptions of women that Hollywood has created. This is clear in his other works, but perhaps most maturely represented in his 2001 film. No female personality, or any personality for that matter, is static, and Lynch is possibly the greatest American director for addressing this truth. Watts' character sets the stage for characters like Nina in Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan*

Oscar Predictions 2021

Robyn Murphy

Robyn Murphy takes a look at the Covid-era award season and predicts who will win big at the Oscars

Were this any other year, awards season would be well and truly underway by now. We would have already enjoyed the Golden Globes, traditionally held in early January every year, and would have a clear idea of who the front runners were for this year's Oscars. But this is not any other year, and with a slew of awards contenders already having decided to push back their release dates, and changes in the Oscar's eligibility rules to reflect the ongoing disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been challenging to keep up with precisely what films are and are not in the running for the industry's top prizes. However, there is hope that this year's ceremony will be able to go ahead, with the Emmys setting the precedent for how to hold a Covid-friendly virtual ceremony in September, and a number of other awards shows pressing ahead and announcing their respective nominees. So let's take a look at some of this year's big awards contenders, and some underdogs who could end up flying under the radar to success.

As the Oscars are typically the last awards show of the season, we won't have a clear idea of the projected nominees until we start to see more of the other awards show announce their nominees. However, there are a few front runners already beginning to emerge. Without a doubt, two of the most stand out selections for awards season glory this year are Chloe Zhao's *Nomadland* and Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman*. *Nomadland*, which is projected by *Variety* to land the most nominations of any film this year, centres on an old woman who embarks on a journey across the west coast of America in

two of the most stand-out selections for awards season glory this year are Chloe Zhao's *Nomadland* and Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman*

a caravan after losing everything in the Great Recession. Nominations for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Actress for Frances McDormand are all but guaranteed, with up to six other nominations across various categories expected. *Promising Young Woman*, starring Carey Mulligan, focuses on a woman, traumatised from an event in her past, who seeks vengeance against those who cross her path. The film could feature in the Best Film, Best Actress, Best Director and Best Original Screenplay races, and numerous publications have already tipped Mulligan as the standout favourite for the Best Actress Award.

Other films which are already generating a buzz within the industry for multiple possible nominations and wins include *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Best Film, Best Actress - Viola Davis, Best Actor - Chadwick Boseman), *Da 5 Bloods* (Best Film, Best Director - Spike Lee, Best Actor - Delroy Lindo, Best Supporting Actor - Chadwick Boseman, Best Original Screenplay), and *Minari* (Best Picture, Best Director - Lee Isaac Chung, Best Supporting Actress- Yuh-Jung Youn, Best Original Screenplay, Best Cinematography).

With the year that is in it, the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences, who run the Oscars, have made some amendments to their eligibility criteria for this year's ceremony. For this year only, to reflect the challenges posed by the pandemic and the closure of cinemas, streamed films will be eligible for Oscar nominations. Previously a film had been required to have a cinematic release for at least one week in Los Angeles county in order to be eligible for the Oscars, but as a result of the prolonged closure of cinemas, this requirement has been shelved. Similarly, the deadline by which films must be released in order to be eligible for this year's ceremony has been extended until February 21st. These two amendments mean that there is a possibility that films which would not have previously been seen as awards contenders could earn nominations, and that films which have not yet been released could come from behind and beat out some of the early frontrunners.

Two examples of films which are yet to be released but could end up making a big splash this awards season are *Cherry*, and a possible surprise acting nomination for lead Tom Holland, and the much talked about *Malcolm and*



Credit: TurnalmanNizam

For this year only... streamed films will be eligible for Oscar nominations

Marie, which could see stars Zendaya and John David Washington make a play for coveted Best Actress and Actor nominations.

While this year's winners may still be too early to call, what we can tell from looking at the projected winners and nominees and the previously announced Independent Spirit Award nominations is that this tumultuous year has the potential to be one of the most diverse groups of nominees in the Academy's history. With 4 of the 5 Best Director nominees at the Independent Spirit Awards being women, there is a strong chance that this year could see the second-ever female Best Director winner. As well as this, Best Supporting Actress frontrunner Yuh-Jung Youn (*Minari*), could potentially become only the second Asian actress ever to win in this category.

Regardless of the winners and losers, it's safe to say that this award season may change the Oscars forever.

No female personality, or any personality for that matter, is static, and Lynch is possibly the greatest American director for addressing this truth

(2010) among others, and once again Lynch is quietly but incredibly influential on many works that follow his.

David Lynch's day is far from finished. His surrealism lacks pretension, in case anyone made the mistake of thinking otherwise. His famous refusal to divulge in interviews on his plots is not because he 'wants to seem smart and mysterious', but because, as he said himself, 'if there's 100 people in the audience, you're going to get 100 different interpretations, especially when things get abstract. It's beautiful. Everybody's a detective and whatever they come up with is valid in my mind'. And what is more relevant to art as an imitator of life in 2021 than perception being subjective and open to interpretation, expectations leading to disappointment, and small moments of joy or appreciation in a simple day having the potential to be beautiful. Lynch has devoted much of his life to telling people to embark on transcendental meditation, because, in his words, "the human being is an exquisite being, and we have a potential, and that potential is called enlightenment". Perhaps this message is the most essential aspect of David Lynch for film in his 75th year.

over rated under

Star Trek

Ryan Jennings

Ryan Jennings makes the case for the under-rated Star Trek franchise

Hey, you. Yes, you! Don't avert your eyes away now! I know the very mention of Star Trek conjures up images of overzealous nerds crowded into a basement sweating and bellowing over the most minor inconsistencies across a series that spans 600 hours (25 full days) of watch-time. Well, it can be like that but also so much more. Precisely because of this reputation, people scoff at it, but any show where somebody is willing to invest that much time into it deserves a deeper dive.

Star Trek has played a vital role in shaping our world. A plethora of doctors and engineers have attributed their inspiration from watching Bones and Scotty on screen every week as small children. It also featured a diverse cast, including one of the first African-Americans in a leading role, an Asian-American, and a Russian character as a good guy during the height of the Cold War. Martin Luther King Jr wrote to Nichelle Nichols encouraging her to stay on the show and that it was the only thing he'd allow his children to stay up and watch. It was different from the suffocating Whiteness of television at the time.

I want to conduct a little thought experiment. Think of 5 or so TV shows or movies that depict the future. I can almost guarantee that your choices depict a dark, depressing dystopian future full of misery, death and edgy mood lighting. If you couldn't think of any, here are some examples: *Terranator*, *Alien*, *Blade Runner*, *Ready Player One*, *Interstellar*, *I am Legend*, *The Hunger Games*, I could go on. The central thread running through major mainstream imaginings of the future is that we are in for a bleak, harrowing time as we progress further in time. Who could blame them? If you look around you see a society heading towards climate change oblivion, where we can barely afford to live, and never mind even dreaming of being a homeowner.

Star Trek stands in stark contrast to other shows or movies in the genre. They live in a post-scarcity society where hunger, war and disease have been eliminated. There is so little strife on Earth that they travel around the galaxy solving ethical problems and helping alien races to progress the plot. Star Trek has taught me a lot about being a right and just person, and after a bleak round of modern news, nothing brings me joy like sitting down to an episode and thinking that one day we will get there.

If you'd like to learn more or if you want to see first-hand proof then lucky you as all the Star Trek shows are available on Netflix right now. A perfect beginner episode is 'Star Trek: The Next Generation' Season 5 episode 25 'Inner Light'. Live long and prosper.

film & tv reviews

WandaVision: Review so Far

Liam Ferguson

Liam Ferguson reviews Marvel's flagship Disney+ show WandaVision.

Over the last decade, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) has dominated the conversation around popular culture as well as the film industry's box office. Now, after over a year without a movie from the universe that is one of Disney's tentpole moneymakers, the creatives are taking a bold new stretch into the realm of television. *WandaVision* is the first of these miniseries that will stream on Disney Plus every week and kicks off the fourth phase within the MCU. This jump to a televised format is not a first for the franchise, with previous shows such as *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, Netflix's *Defenders* properties and the much-maligned *Inhumans* having technically taken place in-universe. However, it is the first to properly link itself with the major film releases, having the aim to connect with the upcoming untitled *Spider-Man Far From Home* sequel as well as 2022's *Dr Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*. As of writing this article, four episodes out of an announced nine have aired for *WandaVision*, and in that timeframe the show's premise has been solidified. From what has been released thus far, it is clear Marvel has something special on their hands with this series and it is setting up a much more creative, open and promising future for the MCU.

When Marvel first announced their slate of TV content for Disney Plus with *WandaVision*, *The Falcon & The Winter Soldier*, *What If and Loki*, it was easy to view *WandaVision* as the unlikely outlier. Sure, the eponymous characters of Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen) and Vision (Paul Bettany) are popular enough, but they certainly do not gain the fanfare from people in the way Loki, for example, would. One would never have truly expected a film starring these two as the protagonists, let alone a nine-episode series. However, there is an ongoing presumption that Marvel knows what they are doing and supposedly have their content plan lined up through the 2020s. It is also clear from *The Mandalorian* that Disney is more than willing to pump movie-sized budgets into their Disney Plus exclusive content in an effort to create a diverse range of prestige television in the streaming age. When the first trailer for *WandaVision* dropped, it portrayed a sit-com-inspired and creatively rich premise that it has thus far delivered on.

The premise of *WandaVision*, so far, is simple. The protagonists Wanda & Vision are a newlywed couple who have moved to a small town named Westview, in a series that takes its inspirations from sit-coms that have come before. Each episode moves up a decade in the history of television with the first paying homage to the TV of the 1950s, specifically the famous sitcom *I Dream of Genie*, going so far as to be filmed in front of a live studio audience and entirely in black and white. However, there is one small caveat, as far as the audience is concerned. The character of Vision got his brains ripped out in 2018's *Avengers: Infinity War*. This alone is a breath of fresh air for many of those who critique the MCU of being too formulaic

OTWO reviews

Death to 2020: The Effect of the Mockumentary

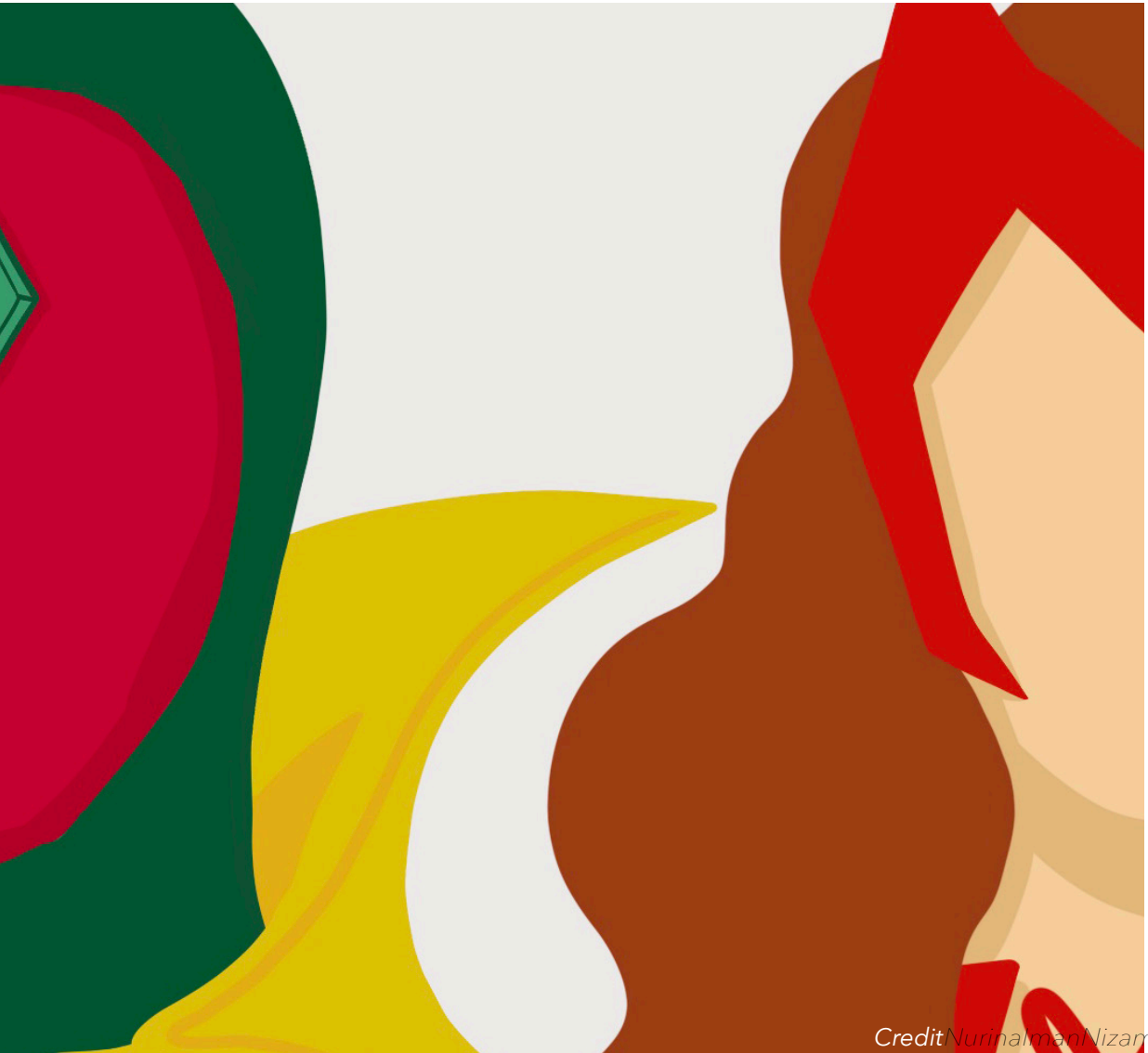
Anna Blackburn

Anna Blackburn highlights the techniques and effects of a mockumentary-style film in Netflix original "Death to 2020", a film everyone should experience.

Before the many life-changing events that occurred in 2020, it seemed that people had no fear: spending endless nights out in crowded pubs, taking holidays abroad, and even simple things like going to work or school all seemed mundane. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has, and continues to, dominate the headlines and suspend travel, work, school, and socialising, but it was not the only major event in 2020.

On 27th December 2020, Netflix released *Death to 2020*. However, this is not a spy rom-com or box-office thriller. It is a "mockumentary" - a documentation of real-life events in a fictionalised documentary style, directed by Al Campbell and written by the creators of *Black Mirror*, Charlie Brooker and Annabel Jones.

The film starts with an introduction of the characters that will be interviewed throughout the film, before beginning in January detailing major events in 2020: Australian wildfires, Brexit, Covid-19, the Black Lives Matter movement, the US Presidential Election, and talk of the vaccine. In order for the writers to get the message of an urgent need for action, the commentary of the interviewees includes swearing, humour, and false accounts of history. The use of multiple perspectives in this film not only displays diversity on-screen but reaches



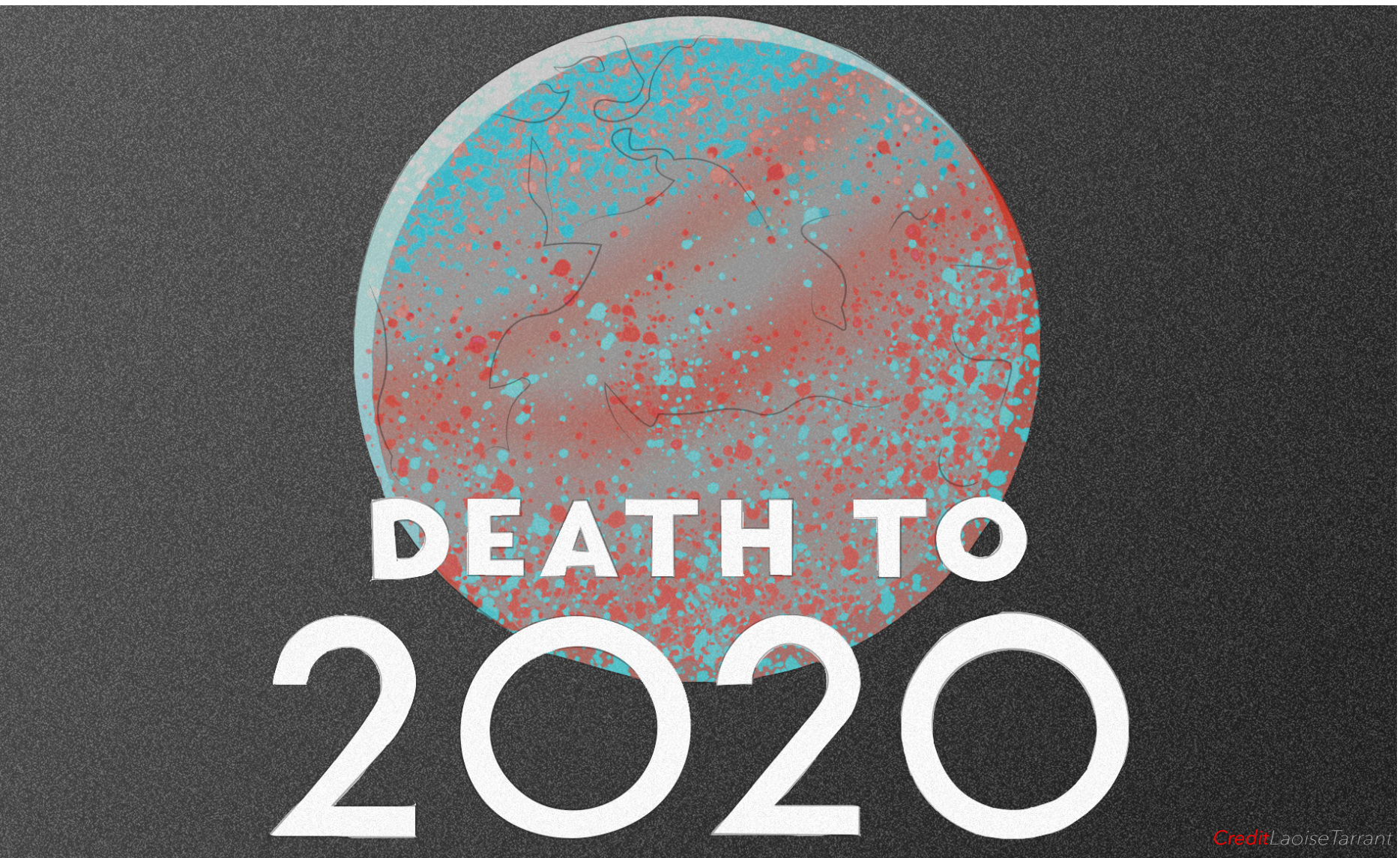
Credit: TurnalmanNizam

Each episode moves up a decade in the history of television with the first paying homage to the TV of the 1950's

with its properties. The series has its own unique style that lifts both musically and visually from the era of the TV it is portraying in any given episode. On top of this, there is a hook in the question around how Wanda has found herself in this strange place with the seemingly resurrected Vision. With each answer, there are more questions, some of which begin to gain their answers in episode four.

In many ways, *WandaVision* is indeed very different with this interesting premise and style. That being said, there is a lot within the series that sticks to the Marvel formula. On the surface level of the mystery and intrigue surrounding the town of Westview and its citizens, there is the usual reliance on humour that is present in every MCU property. The difference here is how quickly the shift from humour to genuinely nail-biting and intense sequences can creep up on the viewer. One minute Wanda can be having a pleasant conversation with her neighbour until said neighbour references a point of trauma from Wanda's past that throws the Scarlet Witch into a fit of rage. Shocking imagery such as Vision's limp, grey corpse with a hole in his head can be followed up with a laugh track and ditsy sitcom music. While there have been plenty of shocking and intense moments within the MCU before this, these stark shifts from comedy to tragedy are reminiscent of the work of David Lynch and feel like the franchise is finally taking some creative risks.

The series also does an excellent job of connecting itself with what has come before while not completely relying on those events as a narrative crutch. The MCU is known



Credit: Laetitia Tarrant

[*Death to 2020*] is a film which makes light of traumatic events and aims to inspire and promote real change by pointing out where we went wrong.

a wider audience. After showing real clips of speeches, news reports, or natural disasters explained by the narrator, each figure shares their opinion on the situations, often involving a backhanded comment, such as Tennyson Foss (Hugh Grant) commenting on Boris Johnson being infected with coronavirus: "as a line of national crisis, the Prime Minister might have to be replaced by someone less qualified than him. Which is impossible."

"With unprecedented access to experts... politicians... powerbrokers... monarchs... scientists... psychologists... and average citizens", this satirical film is similar to *Weekend Update*, a segment on *Saturday Night Live* which reports the news and then makes fun of it. Previously, you may have encountered other mockumentary-style television shows like *The Office* or *Parks and Recreation*, but this new film is not only a mockumentary. It uses its characters to lambast biased politicians, with Jeanette Grace Susan (Lisa Kudrow) disputing factual doc footage: "Ok I know this doesn't fit with your agenda, but this never happened". It highlights the all-too-real effects of lockdown on the 'average' person, with Gemma Nicnick (Diane Morgan) stating: "I live on my own, and after a while, I got so lonely I developed a multiple personality disorder on purpose so I could keep myself company". It also tastefully promotes the ideals of the Black Lives Matter movement while simultaneously critiquing the actions

When the first trailer for *WandaVision* dropped, it portrayed a sit-com inspired and creatively rich premise that it has thus far delivered on

for consistently paying off character arcs set up in previous films and expanding upon seemingly one-off gags or lines later on. *WandaVision* begins to answer a question that one can only imagine will linger throughout at least the next phase of MCU films and TV: what is the lasting implication behind half of the population disappearing for five years before suddenly reappearing out of thin air? Without spoiling too much, *WandaVision* showcases the unsettling premise on a grounded level to normal people inside of a hospital setting, and helps to remind the audience that this universe-altering event will not go ignored now that Iron Man has saved the day. On top of this, the series is filled to the brim with small easter eggs and connective tissues to previous in-universe events, both big and small, and features characters such as Kat Dennings' Darcy Lewis that have not been seen in years.

Furthermore, the performances thus far in *WandaVision* have been nothing short of excellent. Elizabeth Olsen especially seems to have grown into her role as Wanda Maximoff and is effortlessly able to switch between the comedic and the serious at a moment's notice, subtly changing her performance style based on a given episode's time period. Other stand-out performances thus far include MCU newcomer Kathryn Hahn as the mysterious and delightfully on-the-nose Agnes, as well as the always hilarious Randall Park returning as FBI agent Jimmy Woo.

Overall, *WandaVision* is setting itself up to be a smash hit for Disney and Marvel as well as an engaging and intriguing starting point for the fourth phase of the MCU. It is clear from the get-go that Marvel has not yet run out of original ideas which is, of course, helped by the endless supply of comic book history to pull from, but this series may be their most ambitious project yet. Every set piece has the look of quality one would expect from the MCU at this point and the performances and premise only bolster them. With a close-quarters presentation and character-driven story that builds upon what has come before it, while offering an extremely exciting look at what is to come next, *WandaVision* is absolutely not one to miss out on and offers a breath of fresh air for those jaded by formulaic and consistent action.

Each figure shares their opinion on the situations, often involving a backhanded comment,

of leaders and police officers involved in the character of Dash Bracket (Samuel L. Jackson). "Fact is, that those officers didn't see George Floyd as a human being, but the world did... In some ways, I prefer the coronavirus to the police... at least it doesn't pretend to be there to help."

There is little more to be said about the humour and solidification of reality *Death to 2020*. It is a film which makes light of traumatic events and aims to inspire and promote real change by pointing out where we went wrong. I highly recommend this Netflix Original Comedy Event to all those who would already like to forget 2020.

travel

Why I Travel

Killian Conyngham

Killian Conyngham reflects on the 'why' of travel, and some of the ethical considerations that come with it.

The pandemic continues. As does it's accompanying travel restrictions, both legal and ethical. And as I daydream of far horizons and future trips I can't help but wonder, what is it about travel that has me yearning for its return?

While there are many things to look forward to, and outside of human contact in general, travel always seems to be the one my mind fixates on. And it seems worthwhile exploring why that is. Why is it that I have continued to write, read and obsess about something I can't do at the moment, and haven't been able to for most of the last year? What is the strange force that has me feeling stuck when I stay somewhere too long, prodding me to take the leap and get myself somewhere unfamiliar? And, more generally, what is travel, and why do we do it in the first place?

“ It is often very tempting to romanticise travel. Not just as an escape, but as a journey. ”

Travel as a definition

I suppose I should clarify what I am talking about in the first place when I say travel. Because you can travel to work, you can travel to college, you can travel for business, and you can travel for necessity, but none of these things are what I am talking about. What I am talking about is travel for its own sake. Moving for the sake of being far away, rather than getting somewhere.

It also seems important to detail my personal, and somewhat arbitrary, distinction between travel and going on holiday. Because while going on holiday certainly involves travel, they are not synonymous. Travel is an activity, a verb, something you do which puts distance both metaphorically and physically between you and what you are used to. So while most holidays usually do involve travel in some form, it's entirely possible to spend a holiday eating, the same food, staying somewhere familiar and avoiding interactions with the locals or their culture, and return to find you have done very little travel at all. By my own narrow definition of the word at least. This is balanced by the fact that you don't have to go far to travel. As many who embraced the staycation last summer experienced, there is plenty of travel to be done without going too far at all. In fact, even short day trips and outings can contain every bit of what makes travel unique, if the right mindset is employed.

Travel as Leisure

Starting at its most basic, travel is a form of leisure. We travel because it is an enjoyable activity. As a friend of mine noted, when asked why he had spent the vast majority of the 4 years preceding the pandemic on the move: 'maybe it's just because it's fun'.

And I think that's important to acknowledge. Part of what makes travel enticing is simply reckless hedonism. And regardless of whatever other benefits it might bring, sometimes that really is the crux of it. Even when we go out of our way to get out of our comfort zone, when we push ourselves through discomfort or challenges, or try to make our journeys about something greater than ourselves, it would be dishonest to treat travel as a selfless endeavour.

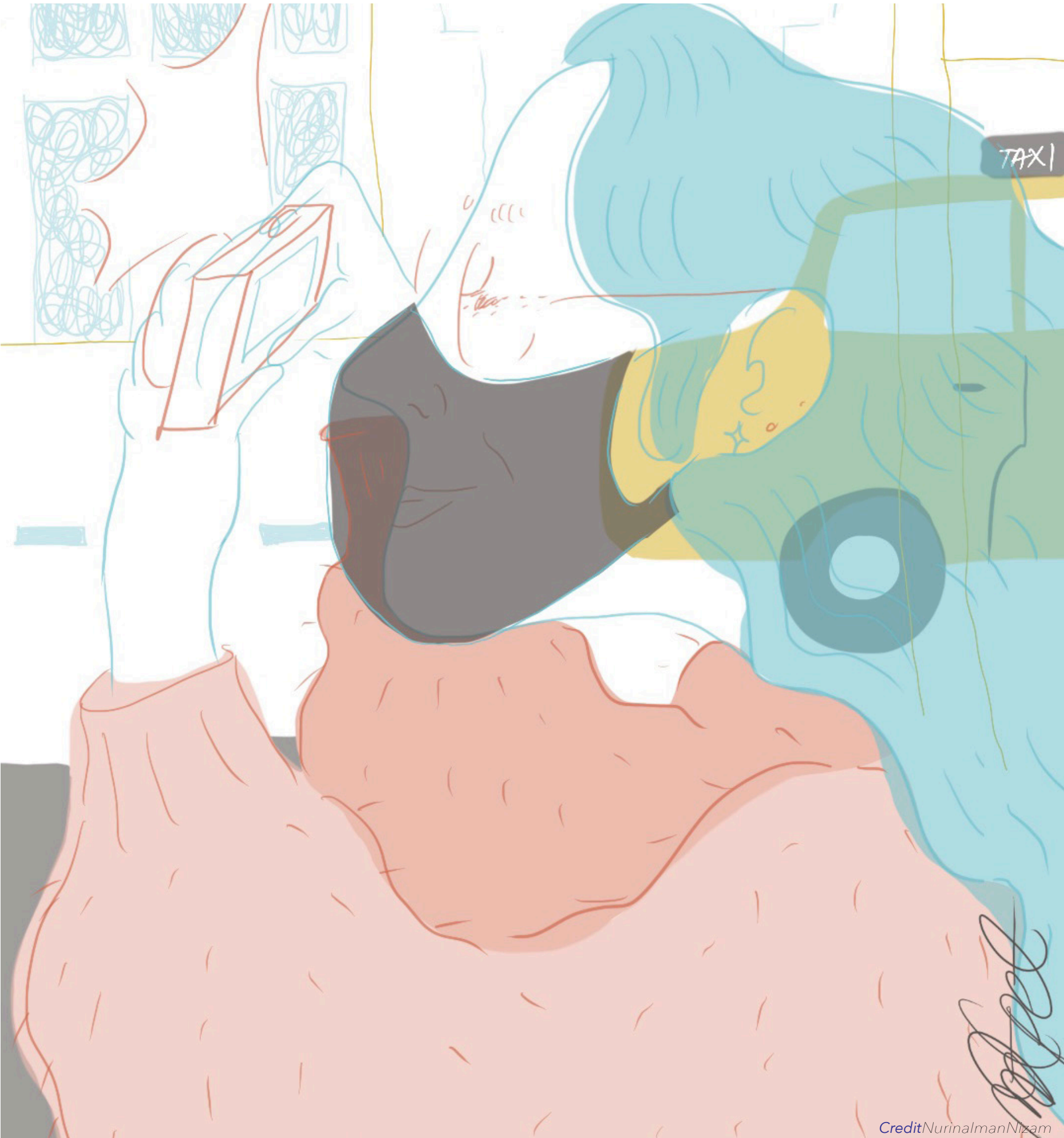
Leaving our consideration of travel there, however, also seems unwise. Because if it exists purely for thrills, we could arrive at the conclusion that travel is inconsequential. That the world would be no different if it were to be substituted out for another form of leisure. And so if it were to emerge that there were some serious negative consequences associated with travel (spoiler alert: there are), we should probably give up on it, leaving it to rot with other abandoned pastimes, such as croquet and duelling. But, to me at least, this doesn't seem quite right either.

Travel as escapism

This to me seems like the perfect place to start when understanding how travel can become idolised. As a kid, I was lucky enough to be brought to faraway places by my equally travel-obsessed parents, and I can distinctly remember the sensation of feeling like I was on a different planet. Not just because my surroundings were different, but because it felt like all the worries and concerns from my life were so far away. There was a purity of mind, a singleness of goal: to enjoy myself.

Years later and there is still something about travel that evokes this feeling. Holidays or time off spent at home can leave me with a sense of guilt that I am not doing enough. Surely the time I am spending watching Netflix would serve me better finally learning to sew, or sorting out my old notes or finally fixing that problem with my bike or whatever else is on my mental to-do list. When I am travelling, this all disappears. I get to wake up every morning with a sense that my only real obligation is to live that day to the fullest, and exactly how I decide to interpret that today is up to me. And even when there is something that needs doing, some task that the internet makes impossible to outrun, I have found myself far more capable of just sitting down and getting it done when travelling. The calm derived from distance seemingly gives me the strength to turn toward and face whatever it is head-on, free from the usual cloud of panic and guilt.

Sometimes the escape can be more literal too. There is a city in the south-west of Poland, which in my memories appears as a sort of limbo. A place I spent my days alone, wandering mostly, enjoying the pierogi from the local market and taking what was, in retrospect, some much



CreditNurAlmanNizam

needed time to recover. During my time there I saw some sights and got to know the three other guests in the hostel better. It seems as if, returning from a stint abroad, I have barely even downloaded the photos off my camera before my fingers begin to write about how the experience has changed my perspective or something as equally trite. It is worth considering to what extent this tendency comes from a desire to communicate how we truly feel changed, and to what extent it's just a post hoc attempt at justifying an experience - an attempt at rationalising the travel already undertaken, giving it a greater meaning or goal beyond personal enjoyment.

Travel as a romantic ideal

It is often very tempting to romanticise travel. Not just as an escape, but as a journey. From *Around the World in 80 days* to *Into the Wild*, popular culture has had a hangup on the fanciful notion of the tourist as an idealistic adventurer for a very long time. A brief glimpse at any travel-related tag on social media will make this abundantly clear. There seems to be nothing quite as inviting for a foray into poetry or prose than a photo of someone in a different country.

And I speak with no detachment from this phenomenon. It seems as if, returning from a stint abroad, I have barely even downloaded the photos off my camera before my fingers begin to write about how the experience has changed my perspective or something as equally trite. It is worth considering to what extent this tendency comes from a desire to communicate how we truly feel changed, and to what extent it's just a post hoc attempt at justifying an experience - an attempt at rationalising the travel already undertaken, giving it a greater meaning or goal beyond personal enjoyment.

Even still, it is hard for me to speak on travel without mentioning lofty sentiments of freedom and self-discovery and the like. I think back to the summer after my first year in college when my childhood home's floorboards were being torn up, and I was looking forward to 6 months of crashing on couches, staying in hostels, camping in fields and eventually settling down for the college semester on a pull out bed in a living room. I remember walking away from my house literally jumping for joy, with the same

“ It's getting chatting to your taxi driver who laughs at you for assuming there would be a bus from the regional airport of Wrocław at 2am, and proudly blares his personal techno mixtape as you coast into the night ”

clipped phrase repeating over and over again in my head, to the point where I found myself repeating it under my breath: "I am finally exactly where I needed to be: on the road". It didn't matter that I still had a week left in work, or that I wouldn't be leaving Dublin for even longer than that, what mattered was that I had everything I needed on my back, and that I had no idea how or where I would be spending the next 3 months. I felt free, I felt myself, and in that moment it did not matter to me hugely whether that feeling was a cultural hangup or some fundamental human yearning for exploration.

Travel as growth

Thoroughly interconnected with the romantic notions ascribed to travel is the more specific idea that travel can be a journey of self-discovery or something similar. It can be an idea that is easy to deride, the stereotype of someone coming from a year abroad telling you how "it just completely changed me, man" coming to mind. But I would be lying if I said I didn't think travel has changed me, has given me huge amounts of self-confidence and belief, and has helped me realise what I truly enjoy. There is something about travel, especially solo travel, that is just very conducive to such introspection. Maybe it is the constant need to put yourself out there and strike up conversations with strangers, the near infinite possibilities to throw yourself out of your comfort zone, or just the vague sense of being lost and out of your depth. Whatever it is, it seems to be quite common, and however stereotypical, one of the main reasons given when I prylingly enquire why people I have met have opted to spend a portion of their time on this planet on the move. It's not just anecdotal evidence either, psychological studies have linked travel to increased trust, creativity and open-mindedness.

Travel as a Privilege

Deeming travel a privilege is essentially undeniable. Not only does it usually require money, but more succinctly it requires time, and freedom from important burdens that may hold many in place. According to the World Bank, countries reported 1 442 billion tourist arrivals in 2018. As individuals can be counted twice in this metric, we can be fairly certain that the vast majority of people on this planet are excluded from travelling, whether by choice, or, more likely for most people, economic circumstance.

Travel is also a privilege in a more unassuming way. Even with financial barriers aside, the whole world can't travel. In fact, not even a significant proportion of the world can travel. Not the way we currently travel anyway. According to research published in *Nature*, Climate Change, tourism accounted for approximately 8% of global carbon emissions in 2018. Combining this with the fact that tourists tend to consume more water, produce more litter and often damage the sites they visit, it would be an ecological catastrophe if a significant proportion of the world picked up travel as a hobby.

As an activity that comes at the exclusion of billions, travel seems many other pastimes commensurate to high-income nations. For travel, this seems especially bitter, as it is often portrayed as bringing us closer to the far reaches of our world. Of course, there is nothing fundamentally keeping travel from ever being better in this regard, and many movements are striving to do just that. But I find it is nonetheless a difficult square to circle when the activity that gives us the opportunity to meet the diverse inhabitants of our planet is reserved for a select few.

Travel as a way of meeting people

I think ultimately, that is what travel is for me. As the past year has taught me more than anything else, I absolutely cherish meeting people. For the first time, for the second

“ I found myself repeating it under my breath; “I am finally exactly where I needed to be: on the road” ”

time, or for the thousandth time, whichever it is, it's an experience I value very highly. And when I travel, it's my favourite thing to do by far. Of course, sometimes the people I am meeting are dead, and it's called history, and other times they are amalgamated into an amorphous culture which shines through in the food, art, architecture and way of life. But often, it really just is meeting people that I am talking about. It's getting chatting to your taxi driver who laughs at you for assuming there would be a bus from the regional airport of Wrocław at 2am, and proudly blares his personal techno mixtape as you coast into the night, having run out of mutually intelligible words. It's the elderly Hungarian couple who happily point your way to one of Budapest's secret tea houses after you almost walked into their apartment trying to find it, and wave at you as you show some friends the way a week later. It's the locals; the bar staff and hostel workers, bus drivers and tour guides, who, if you are lucky enough, might just have a spare second for a conversation or a friendly greeting. It's all the people with wildly different life stories and circumstances, with whom you can find common ground and human connection.

Travel as an idea

Obviously, this exploration is far from exhaustive. There are many other things that draw people to travel I have missed, and many that I wouldn't make sense to include. Individual reasons, temporary reasons, and reasons that can't fully be explained. There is many a motivation for setting off, and no list will ever properly encompass them all.

It is still important to take stock, still worthwhile to consider the why of travel, and to do so repeatedly as it changes or as you forget. Partly as motivation, and a way to guide the type of trips you take. But mostly because, in knowing why you do something, you also gain meaningful insight into when it no longer makes sense. So when international pandemics, or personal circumstances, or moral considerations, or whatever else it may be tell you it's not the time to travel, you can treat those things not as a nefarious imposition, but as pragmatic indicators that tell you now just isn't the time. Understanding that travel at the expense of the very reasons for doing so would be counterintuitive at best. And remembering that when the time comes and it once again makes sense, you can drop everything and head back out into the world. Safe in the knowledge that, if questioned, internally or externally, you have at least one or two decent reasons as to why. And that you can say with some confidence:

That's why I travel.

food & drink

Rice cookers are great actually and you should have one: a manifesto.

Sophie Tevlin

*knock knock * "Hi! I'm Sophie Tevlin - do you have a moment to talk about rice coo-" you try to close the door but I wedge my foot in it and keep talking -

A quick disclaimer before I begin. Any readers from the continent of Asia or who already know how to cook rice properly - a Venn diagram that I suspect closely resembles a circle - do not need to be told any of this. This will all be a load of old hat to you, and you may find it tedious. If that is the case, please do not feel obliged to read on (though of course, you are more than welcome to) - I promise I will not take it amiss if you skip to the Fatal Fourway.

As for the rest of you!

I can hear them now! The excuses. The prevarication. "I don't need another single-use appliance" you whine. "The rice I make on the stove is fine!" Coward. Pusillanimous fool. How do you make toast, may I ask? Do you and your family gather round the fire of an evening with your meagre hunks of bread impaled on rusty toasting forks, elbowing each other for the best spot? The victor exulting because their toast is only mostly burnt? The loser wailing as their toast falls to its doom in the grate? No? No, you have a toaster? Isn't that a single-use appliance?

And no. The rice you make on the stove is not fine. There's always either not enough or way too much. It's so gloopy your housemate thought you were making risotto (you weren't, but you just played along to save face). It boiled over while you were trying to get a TikTok of that cute thing your dog does and destroyed your mum's favourite pot. I know because I've been there. Yes! I was once a clueless schmuck like you! I know. It seems hard to believe. But there is a wiser, better way.

Let me tell you about Perfect Rice Every Time. It will change your life.

A rice cooker comes with a metal pot that fits inside it, and a measuring cup. One cup is enough rice for one person. You give the rice a rinse to wash the starch off, and you put the rice in the basin. Then you add water to the level marked on the inside of the basin. You close the



CreditNurAlmanNizam

lid, plug the appliance into the wall socket and flick the switch to 'Cook'. That's it! Your job here is done! When the water's all absorbed or evaporated and the rice is plump and tender, the rice cooker stops cooking automatically and switches to keeping the rice warm until you're ready to serve it. Frankly, it's genius. (How exactly does it know to do this? Damn it Jim, I'm a food writer, not a scientist! Something very clever involving the bowl being made of a metal alloy that stops being magnetic at a certain temperature. Google it if you're interested.) Anyway! It's that simple. It's that quick. You fill 'er up and turn your undivided attention to whatever else you're cooking, safe in the knowledge that the carbohydrate portion of your meal is all under control. I bought mine from the Lidl middle shelves two years ago, for the princely sum of 17.99, and it produces Perfect Rice Every Time. Perfect, plump, tender, piping hot rice. Every time. Now my housemates and I eat so much rice that a 20kg bag of extra long grain basmati permanently occupies a kitchen chair, doted on like an aged relative. Rice complements rich stews, bulks out vegetable soups, softens spicy curries. It goes with everything. It is the perfect food. Yes. Yes, it is better than pasta.

If you're unwell, or unhappy, if you're convalescing, if you've been working on a project for twelve straight hours and forgotten to eat for so long that the thought

of food makes you queasy, if you've been ordering too many rich takeaways recently, if you've lost your appetite or you just don't know what you want to eat - you put on the rice cooker. Maybe you make a pot of short-grain white rice. Maybe you boil the kettle, and you put a tablespoon of miso paste in a big mug with hot water and stir til you have a mug of savoury broth which you top with a little bit of finely chopped spring onion. Maybe there's a jar of pickles in the cupboard with your name on it. The rice cooker's been busily steaming away in the background, and now you hear the click that means it's finished cooking the rice and is now patiently keeping it warm for you. You serve yourself a deep bowl of sticky, steaming rice and you eat it with the miso soup, the pickles, some chopped cucumber or avocado, a cup of that fancy camomile tea you bought for dry January, and a big glass of ice-cold water. Or maybe it's fragrant, long-grain basmati with slivers of fresh yellow salted butter melting into it, freshly ground black pepper and toasted sesame seeds and dukkah if you have it. Maybe there's a soft-boiled egg involved somewhere. My point is that rice is a meal by itself.

Just make sure there's enough leftovers the next day for egg-fried rice. Leftover rice is ideal as it's dried out a bit - moist freshly cooked rice will soak up the cooking oil

“ Now my housemates and I eat so much rice that a 20kg bag of extra long grain basmati permanently occupies a kitchen chair, doted on like an aged relative. ”

without crisping up enough and your finished dish will be greasy. If you've watched the Uncle Roger YouTube videos you probably already know what not to do, but the bare bones are: wok, cooking oil, garlic, cooked rice, egg, season with soy sauce, sesame oil and MSG and garnish with chopped spring onions. Everything else is negotiable. I like making it with white onion, sliced bavette and courgettes cut into half-moons, but at its heart fried rice is a leftovers dish and will accommodate a pretty wide variety of components - the remnants of Sunday's roast chicken, frozen peas, broccoli, those bagged already prepped stir-fry mixes that are always 80% beansprouts... Just avoid making a Jamie Oliver-style show of yourself and adding chilli jam. dear_christ_the_brits_are_at_it_again.jpg

Truth be told, it's not really even a single-use appliance. Most models include a steamer insert, which is a shallow plastic dish with holes in it that fits inside the rice pot. Half fill the pot with water and fill the steamer insert with your chosen ingredient, and you have a very simple and healthy way to cook vegetables or fish. Steaming is especially good for preserving the fresh tenderness of asparagus, which should be coming into season by the time you're reading this. But the primary use I've found for the steamer insert is in sampling the vast array of frozen dumplings to be found in the freezer aisles of Dublin's East Asian supermarkets. Siu mai, gyoza, ha kau, xiaolongbao, coconut custard buns... a third of the price of the takeaway equivalent and easier to prepare than oven chips - and a far, far better use of your freezer space. I might add that Lunar New Year is fast approaching, and in Chinese tradition eating jiaozi on the first day of the Spring Festival is supposed to bring prosperity - a custom I think I might adopt. Look, it's been a very long year, and frankly at this stage I'll take all the luck I can get. Even if it doesn't work out I'll still have a bellyful of jiaozi. I believe that is what you call a win-win.

Right. I rest my case. What on earth are you waiting for? I'm sure you can find one online easily enough, so off you pop. Go on! Scoot! And bon appetit.

OTWO reviews

Chef

Michael Tuohy

A meal for the senses; Michael Tuohy discusses Jon Favreau's 2014 hit film *Chef*.

At an early point in *Chef*, the title character cooks a grilled cheese sandwich for his 10-year-old son, Percy. It's a familiar recipe - bread, butter, and cheese - but the way that the camera lingers on the melting cheese, and the care taken in how the food was served, made me want to reach into the screen and take a bite. If *Chef* were a meal, it would be comfort food. When comfort food is done right, boy does it hit the spot.

Jon Favreau directs and stars as Carl Casper, a celebrated chef at a swanky Los Angeles restaurant, whose creativity and integrity is compromised by the restaurant's controlling owner. After a video of him losing his temper at a food critic goes viral, he is fired and ends up unemployed, but a proudly blares his personal techno mixtape as you coast into the night, having run out of mutually intelligible words. It's the elderly Hungarian couple who happily point your way to one of Budapest's secret tea houses after you almost walked into their apartment trying to find it, and wave at you as you show some friends the way a week later. It's the locals; the bar staff and hostel workers, bus drivers and tour guides, who, if you are lucky enough, might just have a spare second for a conversation or a friendly greeting. It's all the people with wildly different life stories and circumstances, with whom you can find common ground and human connection.

There is a beauty and a rhythm in the food preparation scenes, and the amount of them included in the film is just right, so as not to feel overindulgent. While

Cupboard Love: Frozen Fruit

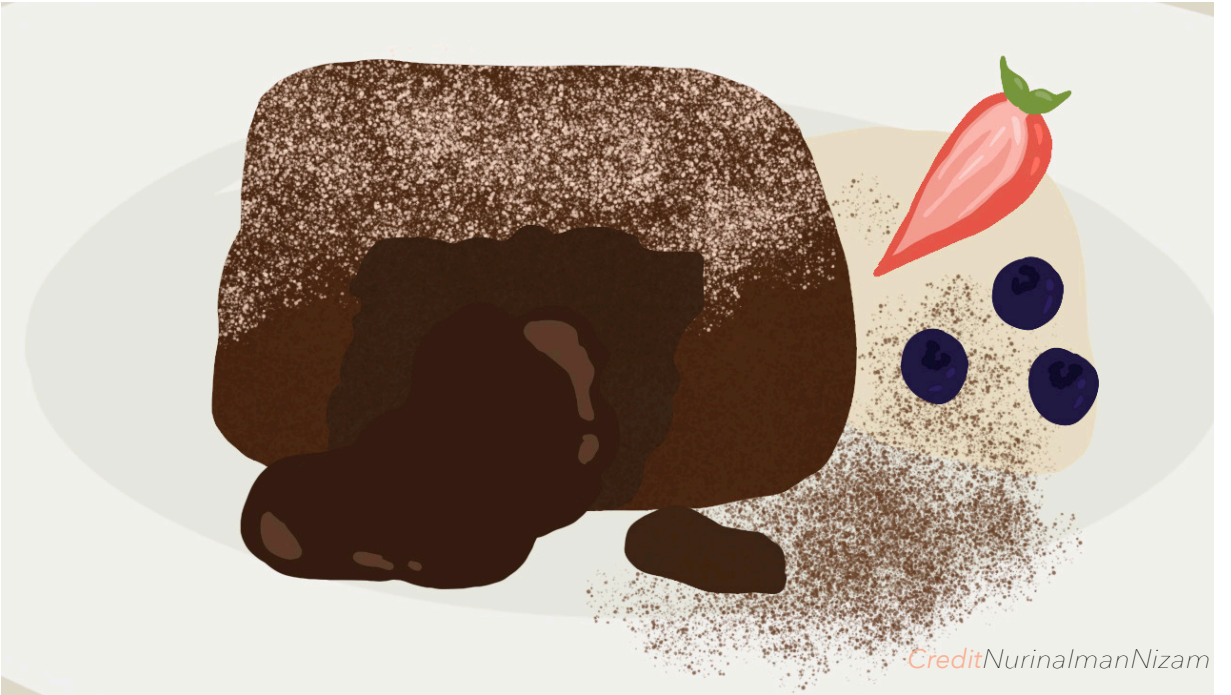
Sophie Tevlin

Sophie Tevlin reveals the secret to a perfect brownie.

How many times have I been tempted by a punnet of beautiful fresh raspberries, brought them home with me, and turned my back for five minutes to discover them unhappily succumbing to mould? This is why frozen fruit is such a great freezer staple - cheap, delicious, easy to store, and, since the interval between harvesting and freezing is shorter than the time fresh fruit takes to reach shelves, potentially retaining more of its nutrients. Obviously smoothies are king, but don't be afraid to expand your baking options. Make up a bag of crumble topping and freeze it, and within five minutes of thinking "hmm, I could really go for a crumble right about now!" you'll have one in the oven. Frozen blueberries and raspberries are gorgeous in a bowl of ice-cream or dotted throughout muffins, and frozen cherries and a spoonful of yoghurt tart up your morning porridge very nicely.

“ the rich bitterness of the chocolate and the sweet-sour tartness of the blackberries and cherries feel quite sophisticated ”

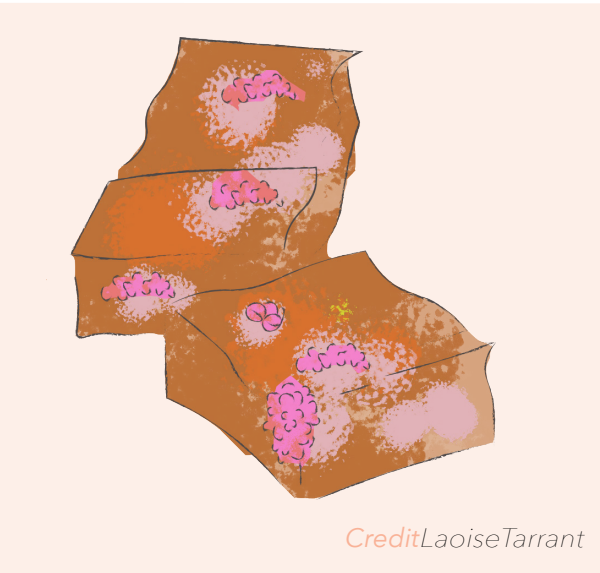
Dark chocolate and forest fruits go together extremely well - in Black Forest Gateau, for example. These brownies aren't quite that fancy, but the rich bitterness of the chocolate and the sweet-sour tartness of the blackberries and cherries feel quite sophisticated - a square pairs very well with your mid-morning cup of coffee after a draining 9am tutorial, or after dinner with a scoop of vanilla ice-cream. Go on. Treat yourself. Anything with fruit in counts



CreditNurAlmanNizam

the film is certainly a feast for the senses, at its core it's about restoration: restoring the father-son relationship, and restoring passion. It's also wonderful to see an oft-forgotten family dynamic where a father and mother have split up but don't actually hate each other.

It's hard to ignore the parallels to Favreau's own career: after breaking out in the 1996 indie hit *Swingers*, Favreau has, in recent years, become a director of the mega-blockbusters: the first two *Iron Man* movies, and the less



CreditLaoiseTarrant

as healthy, them's the breaks.

You will need: 150g butter, 75g dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids), 2 teaspoons cocoa powder, 200g frozen berries (cherries, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, etc.), 3 large eggs (beaten), 300g soft light brown sugar, 75g plain flour, 1 generous teaspoon of baking powder.

staff writes Worst Valentine's Day

fatal
fourway



Nathan Young

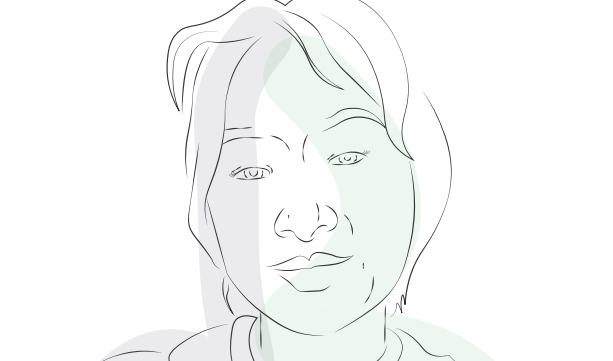
One year in early February, my then-partner and I decided that the best Valentine's plan was to hang out in the UCD clubhouse and mingle. We loved our little date nights to small restaurants on random weekdays when it was quiet, but competing with large gangs of heterosexuals for seating in restaurants seemed like it would suck.

That's when an acquaintance of mine, a belligerent chap who I shall call "Ignatius", although that's cruel to John Kennedy O'Toole's character, decided to join us. He told us that he was trying to flirt with a girl in the smoking area, and would like our help as "Gay men know a lot about women and dating". I can't remember what we told him to do, but it was probably something like "Be kind, and be yourself" even though that's an oxymoron for Ignatius. He left to continue his flirting, and my partner and I got back to hanging out.

About 5 minutes later he returned, and informed us that "That fuck Fred* is now also flirting with Sarah", but she will go home with me". We tried to explain that he really shouldn't view flirting as a competition for women and that Sarah can go home with anyone and no one if she wants. He took this to mean he should see flirting as a competition, and one that he was winning as Sarah was going to choose him.

Later we learned that Fred and Sarah were just old friends who were chatting, and that while Sarah did go home with Ignatius, the sex was "disappointing".

*Not their real names



Nuriya Iman Nizam

About two years ago, I went on a Valentine's date night at Ramen Bar with my current boyfriend. We loved this restaurant and were regulars, so thought it was a good idea to head down there for our date night. We were seated at the front end of the restaurant, nearby their sushi fridge display, and ordered our food. The both of us were having a good ol' time waiting for our food, 'till my ex showed up along with his brother and mum. Since the restaurant was crowded, they decided to wait to be seated; right next to our table.

I tried my best to not make eye-contact for what felt like forever. I excused myself to the toilet hoping they'd be seated whilst I was gone. Knowing my luck, I came back to the table to see that they were still there waiting right by our table. My boyfriend noticed something was up, but he didn't mention anything. About 20 dreadful minutes later, they upped and left cause there were no spots available.

We got back home, he asked me why it was awkward during dinner time and I told him that I saw my ex. To which he then got upset (understandably) and the night ended sourly. Arguably, the worst part of all is that I started associating the awkward night every time I went to eat at Ramen Bar. Took a while for my brain to ease out the whole association thing, overall it wasn't fun.



Luke Duffy

I normally spend Valentine's Day alone, but I have one specific and unfortunate memory of an exception to this rule. Usually, I am firmly against watching a movie on the first date. It's rarely a good choice to start off because you don't really get to talk to the person. However, back in first year, I ignored my own advice and went on a first date to see a movie. To be fair, it was with someone I had known for years - we'd known each other since we were teenagers, so I figured it was ok to watch a film together since we'd known each other for so long. We got the bus into town, got some ice cream, and headed to see the movie.

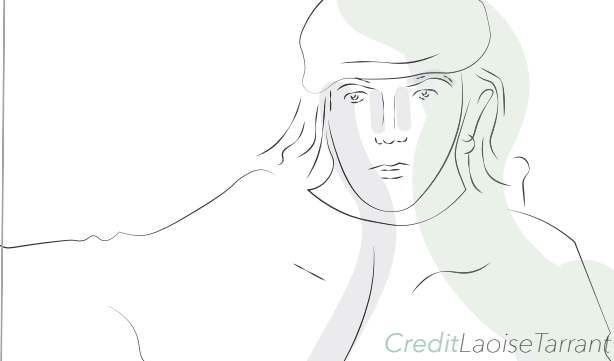
The movie? *BlackkkKlansman*.

To clarify, *BlackkkKlansman* is an excellent film - it's based on the true story of one black detective and his mission to infiltrate and expose the local Ku Klux Klan chapter. It's shocking, informative, and deeply, deeply disturbing. It was one of the most acclaimed movies at time of release, and rightfully so. *BlackkkKlansman* is many things, but it is absolutely NOT romantic.

Without going into too much detail, there are some truly horrifying scenes in that movie - the kind that you think about for days afterwards. The ending uses actual, real-life footage of racist violence. It's at the end - seconds after watching some of the most shocking footage I've ever seen committed to film - that my date turns to me and asks:

"...so, are you a top or a bottom?"

Not the time. Not the place. Read the room.



Simon Dobey

Nothing says stale romance more than a holiday associated with the Catholic church designed to display love for a partner. Call me a cynic, and believe you me many people do, but I have never gotten a romantic partner a gift for Valentine's Day. Flowers have always struck me as awkward and cumbersome and a box of chocolates is a well-overplayed cliché.

However, I'm not simply cynical. Valentine's day is on a par with Christmas for unnecessary holiday jitters. This particular Valentine's day presents its own set of distinct challenges. For the past year, any potential romantic interest has been stifled either by lack of excitement or things simply moving too fast. I put this down to the inability to get to know someone on a friendly basis, after all, no one really knows for sure if tomorrow they won't have to self isolate for a two week period or be locked down for a matter of months.

My aversion to Valentine's day predominantly stems from a belief that love should never feel forced. Displaying affection should be spontaneous, not confined to a specific day and its beleaguered tropes.

This Valentine's day I have resigned to shed my angst cynicism - or at least appear to have. I purchased flowers and had dinner by candlelight. It's still embarrassingly early doors. I won't be engaging in these activities in light of a newfound optimism but because of the enormous social pressure I feel to live up to expectations.

Soapbox

Anti maskers, anti-lockdown heads, anti-vaxxers and the government

E. Keogh

I really wish I could swear in this article because my God, anti-maskers, anti-vaxxers and anti lockdown heads are actually so silly. It's gotten to the point where I no longer debate with them, I just let them run their course until they'll inevitably loop back onto their argument and disagree with themselves.

This one customer always comes into me every week when we were open before this lockdown, and every time he'd come in and spout the same "facts" he always does. He'd go on about how the

government managed everything so poorly, which I agreed with, then he'd say how he disagreed that they were forcing everyone to take a vaccine with God knows what in it, like microchips and whatsoever else, and how the government shouldn't control us, we should control them. He also likes the phrase herd immunity.

The guy vapes. He's taking a minimum wage worker's word on vapes not doing him harm. The only thing I know about vape is that the particular brand of vapes is of low quality. So it's probably not too good for his lungs. As for herd immunity, that's literally what a vaccine does. It establishes herd immunity by forcing the body to produce antibodies against Covid... without actually having to catch the virus? That's the whole point, you don't want to catch it...you get vaccinated? He said he had the flu jab, but only because it wasn't forced, and said if it wasn't forced on him he'd probably get it. Sorry, I thought I was meant to be reliving my emo phase, sounds like you're the one who doesn't want to listen to the grown-ups.

Well, I sleep like a baby at night knowing who he voted

for, and that he along with lots of other people are why the government, who can't even get RTÉ Player to work, are the ones making decisions on our behalf. Like, come on, you're talking about the government who can barely remember which one of the two members of the two-and-a-bit system is Taoiseach. The same government who instead of pulling a New Zealand zero-tolerance COVID policy, decided to confuse the hell out of everyone with their "2 and a bit" lockdown. then their level 5 Lite for Christmas, their level 5 plus after New Years, and Level 5 pro now.

Government of Ireland, I beg you to give me and the rest of this country the level 5 pro XL max that we desperately want. You're not paying me enough to get the newest iPhone, hell you're barely paying me enough to pay my bills. The least they can do is give us a big ol' lockdown so that I can go see My Chemical Romance. But no, the repeated efforts of people against lockdown and masks will make sure that's cancelled again. These people really want to have a big cry over a bit of cloth on their faces. If you don't abide by medical guidelines to save people, at least do it for my thirteen-year-old self?



Credit Laoise Tarrant

Staff recommends Evil Cocktails

Andrew Nolan: Jäger Grenade

This is more of a shot as you could probably deduce from the headline. Though it could probably do the job as a cocktail, sitting on the beach taking in a sunset, if you are an absolute sadist. But hey, different strokes and all that. I have friends who would consider your standard Jägerbomb something of a copout; after all, it's already half sugary-mixer, and Jäger isn't exactly rough on its own. But if you're dedicated to the heartstopper and aren't willing to switch, maybe take this as an alternative.

Honestly, this isn't a special recipe; it's just a Jägerbomb with a couple of extra steps. I'd recommend that you fill a short tumbler about half-ish with Red Bull. Feel free to vary your level of mixer based on how hard of a reset you're going for. Fill two shot glasses, one with Jäger, and a second with a spirit of your choosing, and place them tightly in the rim of the tumbler, ready to fall in; the idea is that they don't mix with the chaser just yet.. Pull out one of the shot glasses, as if it were the pin of a grenade (see title for reference of 'a picture coming together') and drink it, letting the other spirit mix with the red bull. Now, enjoy the Jägerbomb, you absolute delinquent, you.

I wasn't lying when I said it's just a Jägerbomb with notions, but g'wan, try a few of them and tell me how you get on. I probably won't understand a word of it. But do try!

Sinéad Keating: Le Bleu

My favourite cocktail I've ever made started with an invention by my sister. During her J1 to Chicago, her friend with a wicked sweet tooth found a blue raspberry bonbon vodka that was as sweet as it was strong. Wanting to recreate it back home for this friend's birthday, my sister bought a naggin and some blue bonbons, and set the sweets in the vodka to dissolve. Two days later to our delight she unveiled a bright blue, delicious 40% spirit. I was amazed at how simple it was to make.

The next time my roommate suggested a night-in of cocktails and Mario Kart, I knew I had to recreate this blue vodka. On the night I mixed it with Tesco raspberry flavoured sparkling water, and since the vodka was about 50% sugar at this point you could easily drink half a naggin in one glass. The dissolved bonbons even make a nice white froth to top off the glass. The cocktail went down an absolute treat, and we named it 'Le Bleu', because by that stage of the night 'bonbons = French, therefore, the cocktail = French' was about as much logic as we could manage. The only problem with this cocktail is that it entirely hides how strong it is. The following day my body was hating me for the alcohol and the sugar but it was the most I'd enjoyed vodka in years, so I still count it as an absolute winner of a drink.

Doireann de Courcy Mac Donnell: Margarita

There is no cocktail more evil than the margarita. She's the temptress of intoxication, her majesty of methanol, the alcoholic enchantress. If the margarita were a Disney character it would be Maleficent, fundamentally bad, but oh so glamorous and delicious.

Why is a margarita so evil? It is because she is 99.999% booze and 0.001% lime juice. And she hides in plain sight with all the other (basically) respectable cocktails like the Cosmopolitan or Mojito on the drinks menu. Don't be fooled. A margarita is one shot of Cointreau (risky), one shot of Tequila (dangerous), followed by another shot of Tequila (DANGER) with a squidge of fresh lime juice, agave syrup and a salt rim (nothing will save you now, sorry). The perfect balance of sweet, sour, salty, and citrus. So delicious on your first sip and next thing you know you're dancing on a table.

But the hangover, oh the hangover. The one mollifying factor is there is no fizzy sickly sweet mixer involved, so at least you don't feel like hanging-out over the toilet bowl all day. You just feel a bit like death.

I really really love a margarita. And to add fuel (tequila) to the fire, the problem for me is that my boyfriend fancies himself as something of a Rick Dalton type and so the Margarita has become his 'signature' drink. I'm not going to say no. We are both enablers. Time enough to sort ourselves out when we graduate. For now, you know the way to my heart.

Gavin Cassells: Anything with Icecream

Cocktails are basically dessert, right? Sure, your mouth is often writing cheques your body will refuse to cash tomorrow, but they can be such sweet deliciousness. Now add Ice Cream. Yes, this one is for safely consuming at home, which is appropriate to the times. Take some Cointreau, the tiniest dash of Crème de Cacao, a nice big dollop of vanilla ice cream and voila, your very own Chocolate Orange. Feel free to upgrade the Ice Cream to Chocolate for the true chocoholics but be warned the Crème de Cacao is to be used sparingly.

Another great approach is the Super Split of Regret. You likely all know that Captain Morgan's Spiced Rum and Club Orange tastes like a Super Split Ice cream. Now throw some actual vanilla Ice Cream in there and add some Peach Schnapps for extra fruitiness. Guaranteed to make you wonder why you've woken up alongside the University Observer again.

There's a tradition of strengthening Baileys with Cognac, and if this article is doing it for you so far, you're probably no stranger to Baileys. How about you find some Baileys Ice Cream and pour the brandy over it. An Irish whiskey or something like Drambuie or Irish Mist works too. Be warned ice cream makes high strength liquors like Whiskey and Brandy go down a lot easier, so you might want to call in sick before you start that Zoom call.

AGONY AUNT

Hello! My name is Joanne Joanne - drag legend, eleven-time Grammy winner, full-time resident of the tunnels in the Newman Building. This is the first instalment of what will be O'two's best ever Agony Aunt column - that's right, the good people at The University Observer saw the way 2020 has gone, thought about who can be there as a light in the dark for the struggling students of UCD, and settled on a twenty-year-old drag queen from the backarse of County Wicklow. I'm as delighted as you are! I'll be answering your questions on love, sex, college or anything else via submissions in my Tipbox - do send your questions in! Nothing is too weird! I am incredibly nosy!

"Dear Joanne Joanne,

My best friend is in a long distance relationship with an American, and she blocked me from her instagram because she said her boyfriend doesn't like her talking to other guys, despite the fact nothing would ever happen between us. It's been months since she blocked me, so how do I tell her that he's controlling and to unblock me?

Thank you!!!"

This behaviour? WACK. The boyfriend being possessive over his partner? WACK. The fact that this has been going on for months? INSANITY.

If she has you blocked on Instagram, what forms of communication do ye still have? If ye're best friends then surely ye can keep in touch in other ways - it might be worth pointing this out to her. Her blocking you doesn't even achieve what this ratbag of a partner thinks it does. It's also worth pointing out that, as far as I'm concerned, this is straight up abuse - the boyfriend has absolutely no business deciding who his partner can or can't talk to. It's a huge violation of her ability to make her own decisions.

She may genuinely not know that she's being manipulated until someone spells it out for her. It'll be a hard conversation but definitely the right one to have. Let me know how it goes - if it doesn't work, I will personally order a hit on her boyfriend. For legal reasons, that is a joke.

"Dear Joanne Joanne,

I have a major problem. I got very drunk on Grindr one or two (or five) times during lockdown, and happily shared my phone number, nude pics, and some very freaky ideas to some guys. Now it is more locked down than ever, and some of them are expecting me to come over and live up to my filthy promises. How do I explain to them that I don't really want to meet up in lockdown, and even if I did I might not be able to live up to my crazy kinky promise to them?

Yours,
Feeling Regret sEnding About Kink"

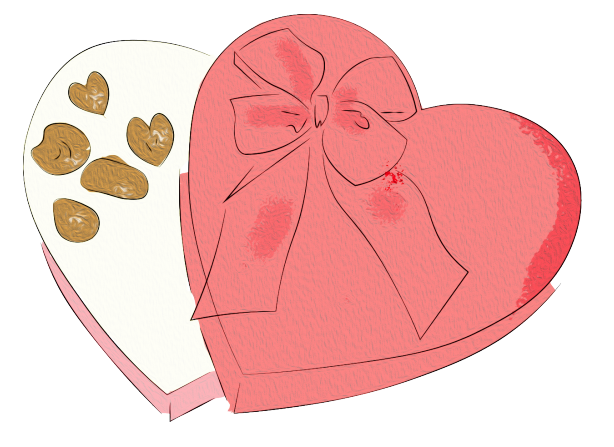
The overwhelming impression I'm getting from the questions I've answered this year is that Grindr really is a hellscape. I won't be convinced otherwise.

Sometimes (only sometimes), the best thing to do is be honest - if you're still interested in these guys and would like to meet up with them at some point, it's probably best to let them know that you may have been, for lack of a better word, ambitious while flirting with them. Honestly, who knows when restrictions will lift at this point, so I think it's important that you let them know that meeting up during lockdown is off the cards. Not only would you be risking getting Covid, you'd also risk a bad hookup - a real nightmare for any homosexual.

It might be uncomfortable to let them know your intentions have changed but you have every right to do so; one of the most important things about consent is that it can be revoked at any time. Just because it was 4am on a Friday night when you were texting them doesn't mean you're as - ahem - invested now as you were then.

Alternatively, when restrictions ease, you could always change your name, vanish without a trace and start a new life in Mexico. Now THAT'S drama.

That's all from me this time! I got a lot of submissions for this issue - more than I could answer in one go - but if your question wasn't answered this time don't let that stop you from sending them in! If you would like to ask for my advice, you can find the link to my Tipbox on the UO's "Contact Us" page and their social media pages. You can find me (and the link to the Tipbox) on Instagram at @joannesquared, and you can catch me on Saturdays downstairs in the Newman Building eating a Petit Filous in the corner between 4 and 5am.



Credit Laoise Tarrant