



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHÉ
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

Irish Traveller Ethnicity Week 2026



Irish Traveller Ethnicity Week.

The 1st of March 2017 marked a significant moment in Irish history when the Irish Government formally recognised Irish Travellers as a distinct ethnic group. Traveller Ethnicity Day commemorates this milestone while celebrating the richness and resilience of Irish Traveller culture, heritage and identity.

At University of Galway, this annual celebration reflects our ongoing commitment to partnership, inclusion and educational equity. Organised by the Access Centre, the programme continues our strong collaboration with community organisations to support cultural recognition and educational advancement locally and nationally.

Each year, we present the Michael McDonagh Traveller Ally Excellence Award to recognise a staff member whose leadership advances awareness of Irish Traveller history and culture, supports participation in education, and demonstrates a clear commitment to equality, inclusion and human rights.

Through a week of panel discussions, workshops and cultural events, we welcome staff, students, schools and the wider community to learn, reflect and engage. As we mark Traveller Ethnicity Day 2026, we do so in solidarity, honouring the past and reaffirming our commitment to respect, opportunity and shared understanding.

We give special thanks to those who have supported and collaborated with us to organise this annual event:

Galway Traveller Movement;
The family of Michael McDonagh;
Brendan Smith, Insight SFI Research Centre;
Kieran Hoare, University of Galway Library;

The Office of the President, University of Galway; the Access Centre team, and especially event coordinator Elaine Ryan, Community Outreach Officer.

The speakers, facilitators, schools and students who are joining us this week.



Opening Ceremony
Monday, 2 March,
11:00am

Michael D. Higgins Auditorium

Brigid Quilligan will address the Opening of Traveller Ethnicity Day Celebrations. Brigid is a Traveller rights advocate, manager of the Kerry Traveller Health Community Development Project and played a key role in the campaign to secure official state recognition of Traveller ethnicity.

As Director of the Irish Traveller Movement in 2012, as part of the campaign for Traveller ethnicity, she represented her community during the UN Human Rights Committee's review of Ireland under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and was in the Dáil on 1st March when the Government formally recognised Traveller ethnicity. Brigid has received an Honorary Doctorate from University College Cork.



Aidan Harte, University of Sanctuary Officer, was the 2025 recipient of the Michael McDonagh Traveller Ally Excellence Award.

Michael McDonagh
Award for Irish Traveller
Ally Excellence

Michael McDonagh was an Irish Traveller who championed the cause of Irish Travellers for over fifty years. From a traditional Traveller background, he served as a member of the Pathfinders, the first Irish unit with the United Nations peacekeeping force in Lebanon. A dedicated advocate for education and a custodian of Traveller culture and identity, including language, history and storytelling, he completed his third level education while living on an unofficial site in a caravan.

He worked tirelessly to develop services for Travellers and to ensure that, as an ethnic minority, they are afforded the same rights as all members of Irish society, working in solidarity with the settled community.

The Michael McDonagh Award for Irish Traveller Ally Excellence recognises a staff member who demonstrates leadership in promoting Irish Traveller history and culture, supporting participation in education, advancing human rights, and upholding equality, inclusion and diversity.

University of Galway remains committed to respect for people and communities, with inspirational leadership from staff central to the University experience.

Programme of events

2 - 6 March 2026

To register to attend any of the following events, please email elaine.m.ryan@universityofgalway.ie

Monday, 2 March

Traveller Living Exhibition

10:00am - 4.00pm,
The Plaza, Áras na Mac Léinn

The 1950's was a period of change for everyone in Ireland and it's a time that is still within living memory for many people. It was the last time traditional Traveller life was fully intact. Soon after, a move to towns and cities began and their time-honoured skills of tin smiting and crafts became less in demand. Meath Travellers Workshops Ltd have re-created a real life picture of Irish Traveller life in the 1950's.

The scene includes a fully restored Barrel Top Wagon, a traditional tent, a flat cart, working tin-smith, storytelling Traveller woman and of course, a



camp-fire.

By literally setting this scene, visitors can visit the camp and spend time learning about what Irish Traveller life was like fifty years ago.

Programme of events

2 - 6 March 2026

Tuesday, 3 March

Panel Discussion, "Leading the Way: Young Irish Travellers Shaping the Future"

11:00am - 12pm,
The Cube

This panel brings together young Irish Travellers who are creating their own path in art, education and work. Through real stories and honest conversation, panel members will share how they found their way, the challenges they faced, and what helped them keep going.

Focused on the next generation, the discussion is about challenges, confidence and ambition. It is a chance to hear from young Travellers who are breaking stereotypes and building futures on their own terms, while staying connected to their culture and community.

Panel Facilitator- Lee Anna Ward

Lee Anna Ward is a proud Irish Traveller from Galway and a senior health leader with the Galway Traveller Movement.

After leaving school at 16 due to systemic barriers, Lee Anna began her professional journey through a Community Employment scheme with the Galway Traveller Movement, where she progressed into senior implementation and leadership roles.

Her work spans community development, strategy implementation, public speaking, youth engagement, and cross-sector collaboration, building strong partnerships with public health services, NGOs, and other local, regional and national statutory agencies.



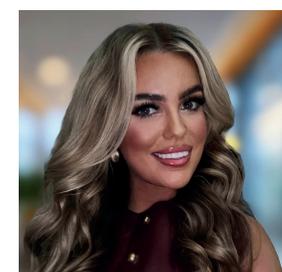
Chloe McDonagh

An artist and graphic designer whose work has been exhibited at the Hugh Lane Gallery, The Model Sligo, and the National Museum of Ireland. With four years of experience as a designer and community arts facilitator, their practice focuses on creating safe, expressive, and inclusive spaces for people of all ages. They find particular enjoyment in teaching their community and the younger generation about the creative possibilities available to them, encouraging curiosity, confidence, and ambition.



Norika Mongon

Norika is a proud Traveller woman currently completing a BA (Hons/) in Business. She works in an education and community support role, as a Community link worker with TRES, supporting young people and families with engagement, attendance and progression pathways. She plans to pursue a Professional Master of Education and become a secondary school teacher, with particular passion for representation, access to education, and empowering members of the Traveller community.



Elizabeth Connors

Elizabeth is an Irish Traveller, rapper, performer, and creative facilitator with over seven years of experience in live performance, battle rap, and youth focused arts work.

As the founder of Renegade Productions, she has organised and hosted grassroots music events across Dublin while performing at major festivals and showcases.



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2 - 6 March 2026

Tuesday, 3 March

Focus Group: Re-thinking curriculum: What can we learn from and with members of the Traveller's Community?

12pm

Galway John Room

Facilitated by Dr Tanja Kovacic and Anne Marie Stokes, Office of the VP for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, this workshop seeks to work with Irish Travellers in relation to their experiences of the education curriculum, highlighting changes that need to be made.

1:00-3:00pm: Workshops with our 'Leading the Way' panel speakers

Creative Writing Workshop: Elizabeth Connors

This high energy creative writing workshop uses rap, spoken word, and modern lyric writing to connect students with storytelling in a way that feels relevant to their world. Led by Irish rapper and performer Elizabeth Connors, the session explores how music, rhythm, and personal experience can be turned into powerful writing. Students take part in interactive exercises, group discussion, and optional performance, helping them build confidence, creativity, and a strong sense of their own voice while engaging with contemporary culture they already connect to. This workshop is all about confidence building, students stories and creative ability.

Art Workshop: Chloe McDonagh

The workshop is a relief printmaking session using LEGO plates. Each participant receives a LEGO plate to build their image on; the raised surface acts as the relief, which we then ink and print from. It's a very accessible and hands-on way to introduce relief printmaking, as it allows for experimentation, layering, and repetition without requiring prior experience.

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Wednesday, 4 March

Mincéiri campsite recognition - Sustainability and what we could learn from Irish Traveller Culture

10:00am to 11:00am

The View,

Brendan Smith presents on the importance of Irish Travellers in the economic life of rural Ireland in days gone by and on how, in the context of today's global ecological crisis, there is much that the general population can emulate from their traditional way of life.

1pm: Terryland Park

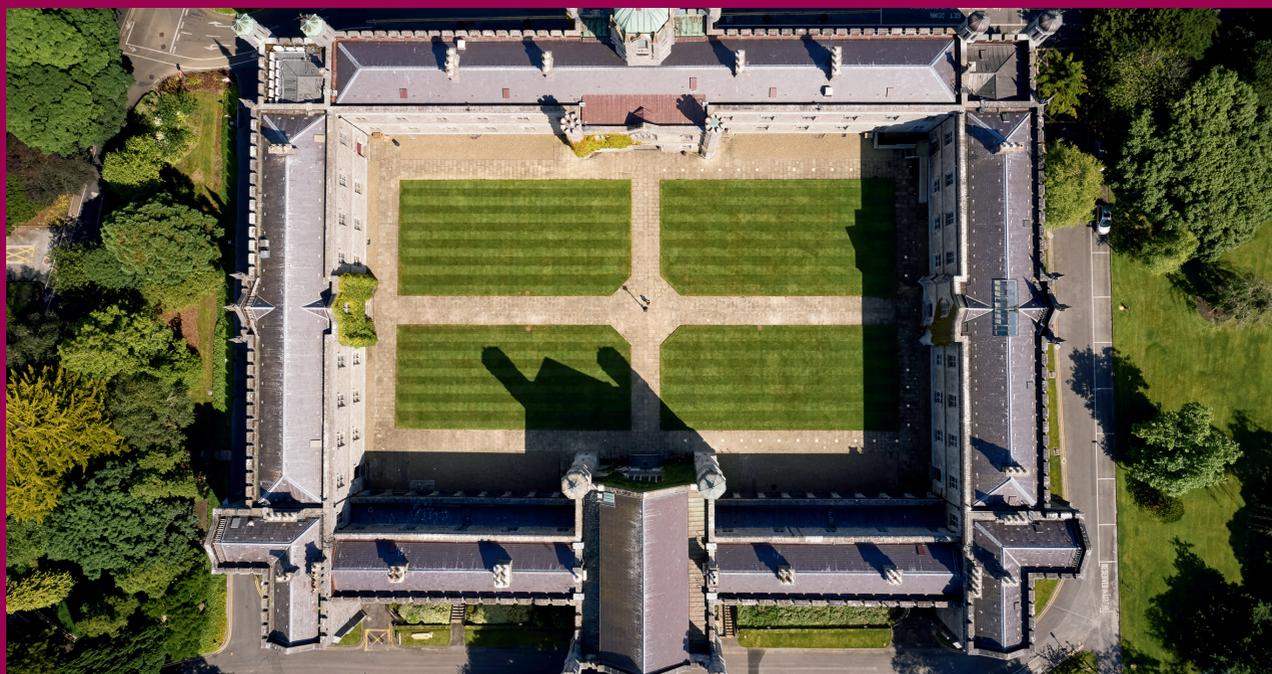
The official launch of a large visitor information board on the history and culture of nomadic Irish Travellers with reference to sustainability.

Thursday, 5 March

Mincéirs Archive

10:00 - 11:00am,
Library Archive

Mincéirs Archive is an archive of a growing collection of all types, complemented by historical documents and scholarly texts. This collection focuses on Irish Travellers from the 1960s when Ireland transformed socially, economically and culturally; its impacts on the nomadic indigenous community and the dawn of the Traveller rights movement in Ireland and Europe. The collection contains items related to Traveller human rights, education, employment, accommodation, music, folklore and photographs of the community. In addition, it also includes material from current resources located within existing catalogues and collections including the Ritchie-Pickow and the Joe Burke Collections.



The Access Centre at University of Galway provides guidance on entry routes, including Access, DARE, HEAR, Mature Student and QQI/FET admissions, and offers dedicated support from pre-entry through to graduation. Working with students, families, schools and communities, we remove barriers to higher education and create opportunities for underrepresented groups to thrive.

Our annual Traveller Ethnicity Day activities align with the University's Widening Participation Strategy. For more information, please visit our website at www.universityofgalway.ie/access/wideningparticipationstrategy.