



EVOLVING RELATIONSHIPS IRELAND, THE UK AND BEYOND

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
University of Limerick
Ulster University

Conference Programme

11–12 May 2026

Centre for British Studies

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin



Sponsored by



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This two-day event, held under the auspices of the Centre for British Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, is the latest in a series initially devised and organised jointly by the Centre for Irish-German Studies, University of Limerick, and the Centre for Public Administration, Ulster University, building on the success of four earlier events held in Ireland.

The initial Irish conference was entitled 'Unions, Break-ups and Special Relationships – Aspects of the Irish-German-UK Relationships' (University of Limerick, 18th International Conference in Irish-German Studies) and was held at the University of Limerick, 4-5 November 2021. The second conference was held at Ulster University in Belfast, 3-4 November 2022, and entitled 'New Ways of Engagement and the International Context: Northern Ireland and Ireland'. In the third event, 'Engaging Cross Borders: Perspectives from Ireland and Europe' (University of Limerick, 20th International Conference in Irish-German Studies), held again at the University of Limerick, 16-17 November 2023, we explored current & future challenges across borders in comparative perspective (including in trade and culture) and reflections on key anniversaries in cross-border relations. The most recent gathering event returned to Ulster University, 28-29 November 2024. Entitled 'Reflections on a Changing Ireland and its Relationships', that conference considered: changing relationships in Historical Perspective, relationships within a Changing Northern Ireland, the Cultural Context and its Impact on Changing Relationships and Identities; North-South, West-East Relationships; and Irish Relationships in a Changing Europe and Changing World.

Building on the success of these gatherings, we seek to broaden the scope of enquiry. The conference format reflects the experiences of, and participant feedback from, all four previous events, alongside concurrent discussions with colleagues in the Centre for British Studies. Hence, like its predecessors which were multi- and interdisciplinary in nature, the event aspires to establish how the changing nature of the complex political, governmental, economic, social, literary, artistic and cultural relations within and between both the UK and Ireland, might be best captured in the future focus of our work. While our key focus remains Ireland and Northern Ireland within Europe, we also take into account Scottish and Welsh experiences and relations with Ireland and taken together with their respective evolving relationships with Germany, we believe that a great opportunity exists to refresh and refashion how we pursue studies of the UK and Ireland, in comparative perspective.

PROGRAMME

Day 1: Monday 11 May

12.00 - 13.00 Monday

REGISTRATION AND AN INFORMAL SANDWICH LUNCH

13.00 - 13.30 Monday

WELCOME & OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

Prof Julia von Blumenthal (President Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Prof Gesa Stedman (Director, Centre for British Studies)

H.E. Maeve Collins (Irish Ambassador to Germany)

Natalie Toms (Minister-Counsellor, Economic & Global Issues, British Embassy)

Prof Gisela Holfter (Director, Centre of Irish-German Studies, University of Limerick)

Prof Paul Carmichael (Centre for Public Administration, Ulster University)

13.30 - 14.45 Monday

SESSION 1: EVOLVING RELATIONSHIPS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UK AND IRELAND (AND BEYOND)

Chair: John Gormley

Eamon Gilmore (EU Special Representative for Human Rights and former Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dublin); Paul Gillespie (Dublin);

Prof Deirdre Heenan (Ulster University); Natalie Toms (British Embassy)

14.45-15.15 Coffee Break

15.15 - 16.30 Monday

SESSION 2: CELTIC COUSINS – DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING SCOTTISH AND WELSH ALONGSIDE IRISH AND ENGLISH/ENGLISH REGIONAL STUDIES

Chair: Prof Paul Carmichael

Prof Rainer Emig (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz); Prof Katharina

Rennhak (Bergische Universität Wuppertal); Prof Sigrid Rieuwerts (Scotland Hub, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz); Prof Klaus Stolz (TU Chemnitz);

Ailsa Kienberger (Head of Education, British Council Berlin)

16.45 - 18.00 Monday

SESSION 3: BORDERS, MEMORY AND IDENTITY QUESTIONS – IRELAND, THE UK AND GERMANY

Chair: Prof Gisela Holfter

Prof Eda Sagarra (Trinity College, Dublin); David Donoghue (former Irish Ambassador to Russia, Austria, Germany and the UN); Susan McKay (Author and Irish Press Ombudsman, Dublin)

INTERMISSION

19.00 Monday: PANEL DISCUSSION, IRISH EMBASSY BERLIN

Chair: Susan McKay

Sam McBride (Belfast); Paul Gillespie (Dublin)

RECEPTION

Day 2: Tuesday 12 May

09.00 - 10.15 Tuesday

SESSION 4: SHARED IRELAND – INSIGHTS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Chair: Prof Deirdre Heenan

Hilary Reilly (North South Ministerial Council); **Richard Hill** (North South Ministerial Council); **Prof Oran Doyle** (Head of Law Dept, Trinity College Dublin); **Ralf Sotscheck** (Journalist and Author, Dublin); **Sam McBride** (Belfast); **John Gormley** (Former Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Lord Mayor of Dublin)

10.15-10.45 Coffee Break

10.45 - 12.00 Tuesday

SESSION 5: THE TRANSATLANTIC & EUROPEAN DIMENSION AND BRITISH, IRISH AND GERMAN STUDIES

Chair: Dr Paolo Chiocchetti (Centre for British Studies)

Prof Brigid Laffan (Chancellor, University of Limerick); **Dan Mulhall** (Former Irish Ambassador to Germany, the UK and the USA); **Elke Hanusch** (Head of German Studies Department, DAAD); **Prof Gesa Stedman** (Director, Centre for British Studies)

12.15 - 13.15 Tuesday

SESSION 6: ON CULTURAL AND LITERARY IDENTITY

Chair: Prof Gesa Stedman

Jan Carson (Author, Belfast); **Hugo Hamilton** (Author, Dublin)

13.15-14.00 Sandwich Lunch Break

14.00 - 15.00 Tuesday

CONCLUDING ROUNDTABLE: EVOLVING POLITICAL, CULTURAL, ECONOMIC AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIPS

Chair: David Donoghue

John Gormley (Former Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Lord Mayor of Dublin)

Prof Brigid Laffan (Chancellor, University of Limerick)

Dan Mulhall (Former Irish Ambassador to Germany, the UK and the USA)

The conference is supported by the DAAD (as part of a PGS project on “Irish-German Studies and its many facets” based in the University of Limerick), the Centre for British Studies and the Irish Embassy in Berlin.