



The Institute of Chemistry of Ireland Postgraduate Chemistry Research Symposium – Connecting young chemists in challenging times

12 October 2020 – The inaugural Institute of Chemistry of Ireland Postgraduate Chemistry Research Symposium (ICI PCRS) took place on September 9th 2020, with over 150 registered delegates joining the conference over Zoom call throughout the day. This online event was designed to give postgraduates an opportunity to share their research results, in a year when most physical conferences have been cancelled.

Professor Celine Marmion, President of the Institute of Chemistry of Ireland opened the event by thanking the organising committee for arranging such a varied programme in a very short space of time. Acknowledging that it has been a difficult year for postgraduate students, having been shut out of their universities for many months by Covid-19 restrictions, she thanked the organisers of the Symposium for quickly bringing together a new event in this challenging time to present an opportunity to postgraduate students to present their work and build their profiles. Professor Marmion launched the competition for this year's ICI Postgraduate Award. The 2019 winner of the ICI Postgraduate Award Saoirse Dervin delivered her award lecture at the end of the day.

Flash and oral presentations by postgraduate chemists made up the bulk of the programme, organised into four thematic sessions, with topics ranging from medicinal and synthetic chemistry to supramolecular and analytical chemistry. In total 43 PhD students from all over the island of Ireland shared their work with their peers.

The symposium also hosted the **first ever mental health seminar delivered at an Irish chemistry event**. Delivered by Miffy Hoad of Mental Health Ireland, the two 30-minute sessions gave concrete methods on how to stay connected, reduce stress, increase mindfulness and cope with these unprecedented times.

The event design also included time for meaningful connection and networking, with breakout rooms used to allow small groups to meet each other and talk about the content of the 13 research posters on display.

Dr. Adele Gabba of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, who won the ICI's Postgraduate Award in 2018, delivered a unique and unforgettable career talk, bravely sharing both her personal successes and struggles, and outlining how this has influenced her and her career. Industrial chemists also delivered career talks to the assembled young chemists, including Will Gough & Yeliz Genc from GSK as well as by Dr. Patrick Kielty from Abbvie.

In total, 11 of Ireland's top research institutions were represented in flash and oral presentations, with a number of international attendees also tuning in. Nine prizes were sponsored by the ICI, the European Young Chemists' Network and Eurachem.

Lorna Conway from UCD, winner of the ICI Award for Best Oral Presentation said of the day: "I thought that it being online and free to attend made it very accessible. It meant taking less time out of the the working week to attend, which is always good. Not only was it great to see the vast range of interesting topics being researched by our fellow postgraduates, but it was also a wonderful opportunity to connect and network with our colleagues at such a strange time. "

Fiona Gordon from NUI Galway, winner of the Eurachem Prize for Best Flash Presentation said: "The symposium was an excellently organised event provided by the ICI. It was the first conference I attended since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak. The event provided me a great platform to share my research. It was nice to meet with PhD students in the different universities and see the diversity of chemistry research happening in Ireland! Overall it was a very enjoyable day. The organising committee did a fantastic job in making the event possible and running the event so smoothly"

A notable aspect of this symposium was that the **organising committee was made up of postgraduate students** nominated by various Third Level Institutions across Ireland, in order to represent the diversity



of research interests in the country and create a unique event designed for postgrads and by postgrads. Dr Mark Kelada (ICI Young Chemists Representative) and Dr Joseph Byrne (NUI Galway) coordinated the meetings, which due to the current times, all, just like the event itself, took place over Zoom. The members of the committee, who chaired various sessions of the Symposium were: Colm McKeever (Maynooth University), Fionn Ó Fearghail (Technological University Dublin), Jessica O'Neill (Dublin City University), Lauryn Bracken (Athlone Institute of Technology), Lukas Hallen (Trinity College Dublin), Niamh O'Mahoney (University College Cork), Siobhán O'Flaherty (RCSI) and Syl Byrne (NUI Galway).

Prof. Celine Marmion, President of the ICI said: "On behalf of the Institute of Chemistry of Ireland, I would like to congratulate the symposium organising committee for bringing together our Irish postgraduate chemistry community at a time when many conferences are either being cancelled or deferred as a result of the Covid pandemic. This virtual symposium provided PhD scholars across Ireland with a unique opportunity to showcase their cutting edge research, forge new collaborations and build their professional profiles. A particular strength of the symposium was that it was led by postgraduates for postgraduates. The quality of the research and the tangible enthusiasm of the postgraduate scholars on the day were clearly evident for all to see."

A survey was carried out on the day, where 71% of attendees said they would be interested in joining a new professional network targeted at young chemists, in order to continue to connect with and support their peers across the island on an on-going basis. As a result of this level of support, the Council of the ICI approved the **establishment of the Irish Young Chemists' Network** at their meeting on October 1st 2020. This network will be launched formally in the coming weeks and will build on the success of the Symposium in future years.

-ENDS-

The full list of those who won prizes at the Symposium is as follows:

ICI Oral Presentation Prize: Lorna Conway (UCD)

Eurachem Flash Presentation 1st place prize: Fiona Gordon (NUIG)

EYCN Flash Session 1 Prize: **Danielle Curran (UCD)**

EYCN Flash Session 2 Prize: **Iñigo Iribarren Aguirre (TCD)**

EYCN Flash Session 3 Prize: **Alex Horan (UCD)**

Eurachem Flash Session 4 Prize: **Caytlin Boylan (MU)**

ICI Peoples Choice 1st Place Poster Prize: **Ciara-Ruth Kenny (CIT)**

ICI Peoples Choice 2nd Place Poster Prize: **Aoibhín A. Cullen (DCU)**

ICI Judges' Choice Poster prize: **Sophie M. Connolly (DCU)**

About the Institute of Chemistry of Ireland (ICI)

The Institute of Chemistry of Ireland is the professional body representing chemists in Ireland. Its members are chemists who satisfy the requirements of the Institute with regard to qualifications and experience. The Institute promotes the study of chemistry, sets professional standards and organises lectures, meetings and social events for its members. It offers advice and comment to Government in areas relevant to the profession. Irish Chemical News, the official journal of the Institute is published twice yearly. The Institute of Chemistry of Ireland promotes excellence in chemistry through a series of competitions and awards for chemists at all career stages from 2nd level students onwards. More information is available at www.chemistryireland.org

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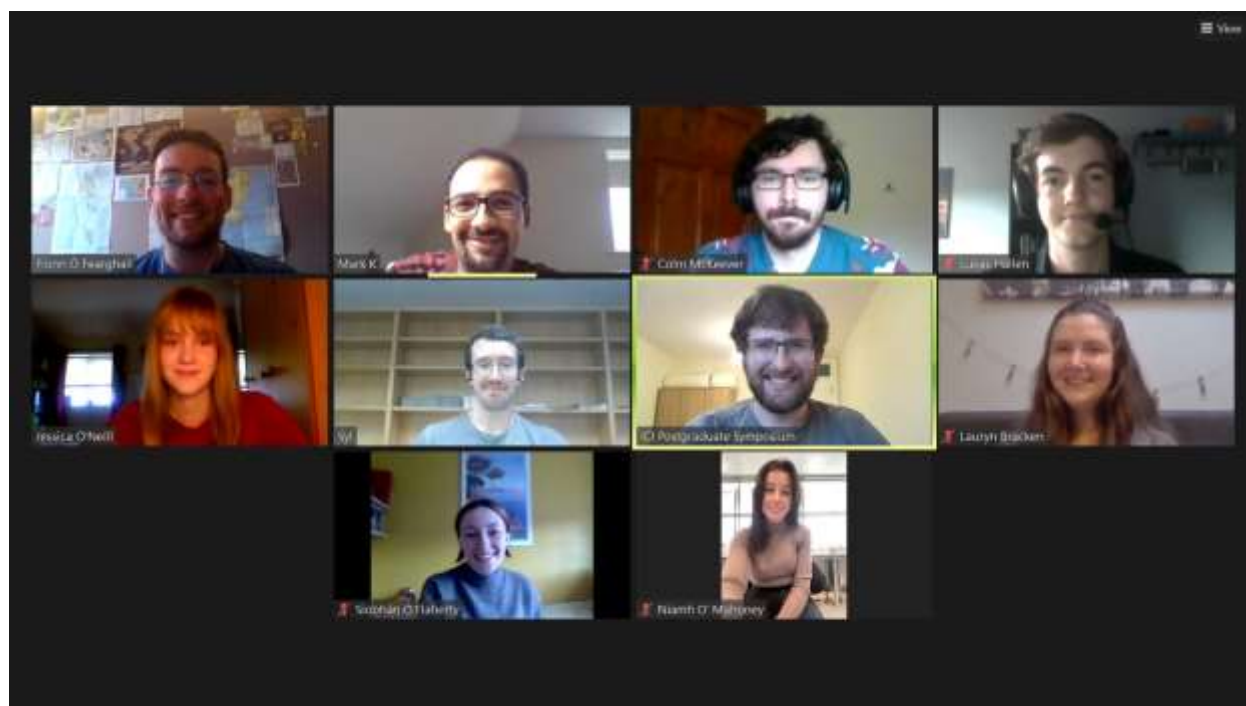


Image 1. Organising committee of the ICI Postgraduate Chemistry Research Symposium.

Top row: Fionn Ó Fearghail (Technological University Dublin), Dr Mark Kelada (ICI Young Chemists Representative), Colm McKeever (Maynooth University), Lukas Hallen (Trinity College Dublin).

Middle row: Jessica O'Neill (Dublin City University), Syl Byrne (NUI Galway), Dr Joseph Byrne (Honorary Research Lecturer, NUI Galway), Lauryn Bracken (Athlone Institute of Technology).

Bottom row: Siobhán O'Flaherty (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland), Niamh O'Mahoney (University College Cork)





Image 2. Prize winners from the event.

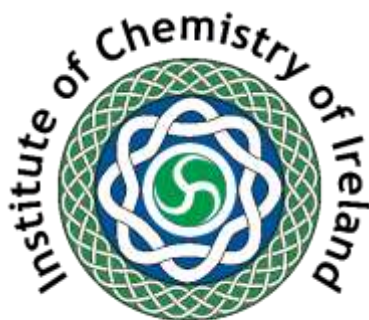


Image 3. Logos of sponsors European Young Chemists' Network, Eurachem and Institute of Chemistry of Ireland