



**IRN Conference 2025**

DATE Thursday, March 13th, 2025

START 8.50am sharp

VENUE O'Reilly Hall, UCD

# **Think Anew, Act Anew:** adapting employment relations to change



**IRN Conference 2025 will hear from industry leaders on the major events in the ever-changing landscape of industrial relations and employment law. Featuring a range of panel discussions and case studies, the Conference is an important opportunity for practitioners to keep connected and informed.**



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We are delighted to invite you to the annual Industrial Relations News Conference – the premier industrial relations and employment law event in Ireland.

As major world events, such as a new Trump Presidency, reshape political realities, this will impact policies on workplace relations in Ireland and across the EU. In addition, technological advancement, such as Artificial Intelligence, carries uncertainty around how to harness its potential.

IRN Conference 2025 will feature important discussions that home in on these focal points, including pay and employment practice trends; insights on collective bargaining; how the HR function can embrace AI; new employment regulations which bring significant obligations; major recent caselaw; dispute resolution systems and other expert perspectives on the workplace of today and tomorrow.

Workplace relations practitioners are operating in a very dynamic environment, making it all the more imperative to keep up to date and connect with experts and peers at IRN Conference 2025.



CONFERENCE CHAIR  
INGRID MILEY, BL,  
is a former Industry  
and Employment  
Correspondent for RTÉ.

# Morning

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8.00: *Registration & Tea/Coffee*

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8.50: *Conference opens*

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9.00: **IRN-CIPD PAY AND EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES SURVEY 2025**

**MEG DUNPHY, HR POLICY AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER AT CIPD IRELAND**, will present the findings of the 2025 IRN-CIPD pay and employment practices survey. Marking its 13th year, the joint survey of IRN subscribers and CIPD members is a trusted and informative source on pay and employment trends in Ireland.

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09.30: **COLLECTIVE BARGAINING: RYANAIR AND FÓRSA**

Ryanair's move to recognise trade unions for collective bargaining in 2017 was a landmark event in industrial relations. **DARRELL HUGHES, RYANAIR CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER**, and **KATIE MORGAN, FÓRSA HEAD OF SERVICES & ENTERPRISES DIVISION**, will discuss how both sides have worked through collective bargaining, providing insight into how both the employer and union achieve their goals.

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10.00: **TEA & COFFEE/NETWORKING**

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10.20: **EMPOWERING PEOPLE, ENABLING AI: HOW LEADERS CAN GET STARTED WITH AI**

In this feature session, acclaimed growth & talent development leader and **FOUNDER OF SP CONSULTING, STEPHANIE PRENDERVILLE**, will show how HR leaders can embrace AI to build intelligent, human-centric organisations. Delving into case studies, including **LAYA HEALTHCARE** and **MATER PRIVATE**, this discussion will be of keen interest to business leaders and HR practitioners.

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10.50: **PAY TRANSPARENCY AND INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION**

New EU rules on pay transparency are set to become law by 2026. In addition, a host of other EU rules seek to enhance employee voice through information and consultation. In this session, **MARY BRASSIL, PARTNER AND HEAD OF EMPLOYMENT GROUP AT McCANN FITZGERALD, FIONNUALA NÍ BHRÓGÁIN, HEAD OF ORGANISING AND CAMPAIGNING AT CWU**, and **PAULINE O'HARE, IBEC SENIOR LEGAL DIRECTOR**, will discuss what these changes mean for employers and workers.

This panel will be followed with a conversation with **ESTHER LYNCH, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION**, on the trade union leader's views on the opportunities and challenges for trade unions in 2025 and beyond.

11.50: **McCANN FITZGERALD'S EMPLOYMENT LAW OVERVIEW**

In this highlight session of the Conference, **DONAL HAMILTON**, PARTNER AT McCANN FITZGERALD, and **DAVID MCCAULEY**, SENIOR ASSOCIATE AT McCANN FITZGERALD, will discuss the major themes and recent developments in employment law and analyse recent high-profile employment decisions of the WRC, Labour Court and the Superior Courts, with a guide for what practitioners should focus on over the coming year.

12.30: **LUNCH**

# Afternoon

13.30: **THE WRC AT TEN YEARS: THE ROAD TO THE WORKPLACE RELATIONS COMMISSION**

To mark the first decade of the Workplace Relations Commission, renowned professors **BILL ROCHE (UCD)** and **PAUL TEAGUE (QUEEN'S)** will explore how and why the WRC was formed. Drawing from their research that features in their new book (with Dr Denise Currie), *The Reconstruction of Workplace Conflict Resolution*, Roche and Teague consider the lessons to be drawn from the reform of dispute resolution in Ireland and the challenges that lie ahead.

14.00: **DISPUTE RESOLUTION, NORTH & SOUTH**

Recently taking leadership of the **WORKPLACE RELATIONS COMMISSION** and the **LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY (NI)** respectively, **AUDREY CAHILL** and **MARK McALLISTER** will discuss dispute resolution in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland; the similarities and differences cross-border, in the context of an all-island approach, as well as perspectives on how dispute bodies adapt to a changing world of work.

14.30: **CAREER REFLECTIONS**

Two highly experienced and respected figures in industrial relations and employment law, **JANET HUGHES**, INDEPENDENT INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS DISPUTE RESOLVER, and **TERENCE McCRANN**, INDEPENDENT ACCREDITED MEDIATOR, will discuss their careers in workplace relations and the changes they have seen over several decades.

15.00: *Conference close*

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# about the speakers

**MARY BRASSIL** is **Partner and Head of the Employment Group, McCann FitzGerald**. Mary advises public and private sector organisations on all aspects of the employment relationship, and has extensive experience advising on complex employee relations issues, workplace investigations as well as the management of protected disclosures. She is expert in the employment law issues that arise on corporate transactions and restructurings, as well as outsourcings and redundancy situations. Mary represents clients before the WRC and the Labour Court and advises organisations on industrial relations matters. Mary is a member of the European Employment Lawyers Association and writes and lectures widely on all topics relating to her practice area.

**AUDREY CAHILL** is **Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission**. Taking up the WRC leadership post in February 2024, Audrey is a seasoned Chief People Officer with over 27 years of experience in the human resources field. She has successfully led strategic change initiatives that have significantly contributed to the organisational strategies and their effectiveness across industries such as Manufacturing, Retail, FMCG and most recently Private Healthcare. With a proven track record in Industrial Relations, Strategic Planning, Team Development and Operational Excellence, she has been instrumental in developing and shaping HR policies and practices that prioritise and balance the well-being and growth of employees whilst serving the organisational goals.

**MEG DUNPHY** is **HR Policy and Engagement Manager at CIPD Ireland**. Meg is an experienced HR professional with a background in HR Business Partner roles across the Irish public sector and global enterprises. As HR Policy and Engagement Manager at CIPD, she drives value for members and the wider HR community through key events, learning initiatives, research, and thought leadership. Passionate about the power of the people profession, she delivers key insights that influence HR practitioners and the broader business community.

**DONAL HAMILTON** is **Partner, McCann FitzGerald Employment, Pensions and Incentives Group**. Donal advises domestic and international employers on all aspects of the employment relationship, and has extensive experience advising on business transfer and outsourcing issues, corporate immigration, complex employee relations issues, and employment investigations, disputes and mediation. He also represents clients before the WRC and Labour Court and advises organisations on complex industrial relations and contentious employment matters, including the management of protected disclosures and the resolution of subsequent litigation.

**DARRELL HUGHES** has been with **Ryanair** for 23 years in various roles in Ireland and the UK. As **Chief People Officer**, Darrell manages Ryanair's HR and Talent Acquisition teams, looking after the HR and recruitment needs of over 27,000 staff across 95+ European bases. Darrell also has line management responsibility for over 14,000 cabin crew and 6,000 pilots. Darrell and his team are at the forefront of ensuring that Ryanair has the right talent and people strategies during this expansion. Darrell holds a business degree from Dublin City University and an MBA from the UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate School of Business.

**JANET HUGHES** is an **independent dispute resolution expert**. Soon to retire as a WRC Adjudication Officer, Janet was also a Rights Commissioner under the former Labour Relations Commission, from 1997 to 2007. Previous to her time as an independent IR dispute resolver, Janet was a Regional Secretary with SIPTU. Having been instrumental in resolving many disputes over the last two decades, Janet also conducted a major review of Ireland's Joint Labour Committees.

**ESTHER LYNCH** is the **General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation**. In her work at the ETUC, Esther led on social dialogue, collective bargaining and wage policy, trade union rights, gender equality. She has extensive trade union experience at Irish, European and international levels. Before coming to the ETUC, she was the Legislation and Social Affairs Officer with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). She led successful actions aimed at improving workers and trade union rights in legislative initiatives such as the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages, the Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive and the Whistleblowing Directive.

**MARK McALLISTER** is the **Chief Executive of the Labour Relations Agency in Northern Ireland**. He has a wealth of industrial and employment relations experience as a senior manager and director of employment relations services for the Agency, over the past 20 years. Mark has an employment law and regional

trade union negotiator background and has held positions including the former NI Convenor of the Charter Institute of Arbitrators and the NI Chair of the Governance Institute. He is a former lecturer in employment law and a qualified mediator and author on several legal and employment relations topics and is steeped in the world of industrial and employment relations. He is recognised as a leader in the field on both the local and international stage.

**DAVID McCAULEY** is **Senior Associate, McCann FitzGerald Employment, Pensions and Incentives Group**. David advises private and public sector clients on both contentious and non-contentious aspects of employment law, with extensive experience advising clients before the WRC, Labour Court and Superior Courts, as well as through mediation. David regularly advises on complex employment investigations, processes and disputes, in particular in the area of protected disclosures, as well as corporate restructurings, business transfers, outsourcings and redundancy situations. David writes widely on employment law and is a committee member of the Employment Law Association of Ireland.

**TERENCE McCRANN** is an **independent accredited Mediator in workplace and organisational disputes**. Terence was head of the employment law group at law firm, McCann FitzGerald LLP, for over 30 years and is a solicitor and senior counsel. He is a former chair of the Employment Law Committee, Law Society and was also the Irish Board member of the European Employment Lawyers Association (EELA) and has written and spoken widely on a range of employment, equality and industrial relations law topics.

**KATIE MORGAN** is **Head of Fórsa Enterprises and Services Division** since 2022. Working with a team of union officials and officers, Katie oversees organising and industrial relations for the union in state agencies, former state enterprises, and multiple employments in the private sector and the community and voluntary sector. Katie is a vice president of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and has been a member of the executive council of ICTU since 2021. Since 2024, Katie has formed part of the ICTU delegation to the Labour Employer Economic Forum.

**FIONNUALA NÍ BHRÓGÁIN** is the **Head of Organising and Campaigning with the Communications Workers' Union**, responsible for the union's organising, campaigning, membership growth and activist engagement. She is a member of the Low Pay Commission, appointed in 2021 and she is a member of the Executive Council of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. She was subsequently elected as Vice-Chair of the Private Sector Committee of ICTU and has been a member of the General Purposes Committee since 2023.

**PAULINE O'HARE** is **Senior Legal Director at Ibec**. Pauline O'Hare is a graduate of University College Dublin, where she obtained a Bachelor of Civil Laws degree and a Masters in Commercial Law, before qualifying as a solicitor in February 2006. Pauline previously worked in private practice before joining Ibec's Employment Law Services team in 2008, where she advises employers on both contentious and non-contentious matters. Pauline specialises in employment law and industrial relations and engages with key stakeholders on policy matters at both a national and EU level.

**STEPHANIE PRENDERVILLE** has, for over 25 years, been helping businesses worldwide drive results through their people, leveraging leadership, culture, and now AI and technology. Recognised for creating enabling cultures and capacity for change, she has guided companies through diverse growth phases – across scale-ups, SMEs, and multinationals. As **Founder of SP Consulting**, Stephanie pinpoints where businesses are losing value and implements rapid, cost-effective solutions. Her leadership in growth, talent development, and digital transformation prepares organisations for the future-is-now, balancing technological advancements with human-centric strategies.

**BILL ROCHE** is **Full Professor of Industrial Relations and Human Resources at the School of Business, University College Dublin**, where he teaches at the Smurfit Business School. A graduate of UCD, he completed his doctorate at Oxford University. He has written and edited 10 books and published in excess of 100 peer-reviewed papers and book chapters. He has led or contributed to major strategic reviews of industrial relations and conflict resolution.

**PAUL TEAGUE** is **Emeritus Professor of Management at The Queen's University Belfast**. He holds a PhD from the London School of Economics and has been a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Massachusetts. He is a Fellow of the Irish Academy of Management and has written widely on the themes of the employment relations consequences of deeper European integration, social partnership and employment performance, workplace conflict management and human resources in the recession. He has published numerous books and over 70 papers in top tier journals on these themes. He has worked with the EU Commission, ILO, and the OECD, as well as numerous European Governments.