

## President's report for 2025 at AGM Belfast 24 Jan. 2026

I am pleased to report another successful year for the Irish Association. First, however, I have to record the names of a number of our longtime and valued members who have died in the last twelve months. Dr Donal O'Tierney served as a very capable treasurer of our organization for over two decades. He was a dedicated community doctor in Warrenpoint for 5 decades, only retiring finally at the age of 80. Susan Hedigan was a council member. She was manager of the UCD Research Office. Berrie O'Neill was a former regional manager of the Bank of Ireland. He was a great authority on and promoter of Percy French. Professor Jim Doolan, based at Galway University, was a longtime active member. Michael Johnston, a brother of Jennifer Johnston, and an early RTE producer, was a key force in the foundation of Educate Together Schools. David Neligan was a diplomat who played a key role in navigating Anglo-Irish relationships. We remember them today and are very grateful for their contributions to the work of the Association.

During the year we held 4 meetings of our council. As well, a number of meetings occurred of our steering committee, which was responsible for the organization behind our conferences. I am very grateful for all those who freely gave of their expertise and time to the work of our Association. We enjoyed a number of lunches, after which we were addressed by some very interesting speakers. On 18 January at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast, we listened to Judith Gillespie C.B.E., former deputy chief constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2009-14. On 15 March at Wynn's Hotel, Dublin, we heard from Rev. Harold Good, former President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and director of the Corrymeela Centre. He was one of 2 independent eyewitnesses to the decommissioning of IRA arms in 2005. On 17 May we were addressed by Dr Philip McGarry, president of the Linen Hall Library, Belfast, and a former chair of the Alliance party. The Malone Lodge Hotel, Belfast, was the venue for a talk by Dr Caroline Campbell, director of the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, on 13 Sept.. Dr Cormac Moore, resident historian with Dublin City Council , and author of a recent book on the Irish Boundary Commission, spoke to our members at Wynn's Hotel, Dublin, on 15 Nov.. I gave the talk at our Christmas event at the Ulster Reform Club, Belfast, on 15 Dec.. I spoke about the foundation of the club which took place 140 years ago.

During the year we conducted two major conferences as the second part of our important programme, entitled 'A vision for the future of North-South co-operation?-Strand 2-a generation on'. Funding for these events came from the Shared Island Civic Society Fund of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs. We examined the record of cross-border, island-wide co-operation since 1998 and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Under Strand 2 the Agreement included the principles and framework for new North-South relations. At our sessions, we brought together many policy makers, academics, CEOs and civil society representatives. On 18 February a symposium was convened in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, to look at Health and Environment. The opening key-note address was delivered by the two chief medical officers, Sir Michael McBride and Professor Mary Horgan. Our final symposium was held on 8 April at the Linen Hall Library, Belfast, to consider the educational and cultural impact of Strand 2. Professor Tony Gallagher of QUB gave the opening address. We then produced a report which we launched on 18 June in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin. We acknowledged the considerable economic, social and cultural benefits brought about by the 6 implementation bodies and in the 6 areas of co-operation under Strand 2. Proposals for change and improvement were put forward. Copies of the report were distributed to heads of government, North and South.

I must record that this will be my last AGM as President. We have selected Professor Evelyn Collins as our President designate, to be confirmed shortly at a council meeting. I am very pleased to welcome her to this position. I have been extremely honoured to be President for the past two years. This is a distinguished organization which has played a very important part in our civic society. With roots going back to the 1930s, we have been a tireless advocate for improved North-South relations. Through lectures, conferences and publications we have encouraged thoughtful debate on important contemporary issues affecting these relations. Through the Association we have often struck up valuable personal friendships. Finally, I want to record my deep thanks to the other Association officers, Conor O'Malley, Secretary, Dermot O'Doherty, Vice President and former Treasurer, for their support. I am glad to report that Dr Shauna Fannin has agreed to take on the position of Treasurer. I also want to thank our administrator Eimear Donnelly for her valuable work in the running of our organization. Long may the Association continue to be a force for good and thoughtful debate in Ireland, North and South!

Professor Emeritus Brian M. Walker

President of the Irish Association for Cultural, Economic and Social Relations