



Ireland in Brief



A general overview of Ireland's political, economic and cultural life



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Céad Míle Fáilte

The Fun Starts Here

**DISCOVER
IRELAND.IE**



Contents

This booklet provides a general overview of Ireland's political, economic and cultural life. While it is not possible to include every aspect of life in Ireland in this short publication, we hope that you will discover a little about Ireland and its people.

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The Irish State

Name of State

The Irish Constitution provides that the name of the State is *Éire* or in the English language, *Ireland*.

Island of Ireland

The geographical island of Ireland consists of the sovereign independent state of Ireland comprising 26 counties, and the six counties of Northern Ireland to the north-east of the island, which are governed by a power-sharing Executive and Assembly as established under the Good Friday Agreement.

Language

Article 8 of the Irish Constitution makes the following affirmation:

- 1 The Irish language, as the national language, is the first official language.
- 2 The English language is recognised as a second official language.

Flag

The national flag is a tricolour of green, white and orange.



Emblem

The harp has been regarded as the official symbol or coat of arms of Ireland since medieval times. The heraldic harp is used by the Government, its agencies and its representatives at home and abroad. It is engraved on the seal matrix of the Office of the President as well as on the Irish euro coins.



Anthem

Amhrán na bhFiann (Soldier's Song) is the Irish National Anthem.

The National Day

Saint Patrick's Day, 17 March, is the National Day. Tradition holds that the use of the shamrock by Saint Patrick when preaching in Ireland led to its adoption as an Irish symbol.

Online

St Patrick's Day Festival:

www.stpatricksdays.ie

Government

Ireland is a parliamentary democracy. Its law is based on Common Law and legislation enacted by the *Oireachtas* (Irish Parliament) under the Constitution. In addition, regulations and directives enacted by the European Union have the force of law in Ireland.

The Constitution of Ireland sets out the form of government and defines the powers and functions of the President, both Houses of the *Oireachtas* and the Government. It also defines the structures and the powers of the Courts and outlines the fundamental rights of citizens. The definition of rights covers five broad headings: Personal Rights, The Family, Education, Private Property and Religion.



The Dáil chamber in Leinster House

President Michael D. Higgins

The President is the Head of State, and is elected by direct vote.

There are fifteen Government Departments, each headed by a Minister. The Ministers collectively form the Government. Executive power is exercised by or on the authority of the Government, which is responsible to the *Dáil* (House of Representatives). The Head of the Government is the *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) while the *Tánaiste* is the Deputy Prime Minister.



There are two Houses of Parliament, known as *Dáil Éireann* (House of Representatives) and *Seanad Éireann* (Senate). The *Dáil* has 166 members known as Teachtaí Dála (TD). They are elected on a system of proportional representation by universal suffrage. Elections take place at least once every five years. After the 2011 general election the main political parties represented in the *Dáil* were *Fine Gael*, the *Labour Party*, *Fianna Fáil* and *Sinn Féin*.

The *Seanad* has 60 members, eleven of whom are nominated by the *Taoiseach* while the rest are elected from a number of vocational panels and by graduates of universities. The *Seanad* may initiate or revise legislation (except Finance Bills), but the *Dáil* has the power to reject any such amendments or proposed legislation.

Online

Government of Ireland:	www.irlgov.ie
President of Ireland:	www.president.ie
Fine Gael:	www.finegael.ie
Labour:	www.labour.ie
Fianna Fáil:	www.fiannafail.ie
Sinn Féin:	www.sinnfein.ie
Irish Government News Service:	www.merrionstreet.ie

6 Local Government

The local government system is administered by 114 local authorities and is undergoing a process of renewal and reform, with a view to significantly reducing the number of local authorities.

The services provided by the local authorities include: housing and building, road transport and safety, water supply and sewerage, development incentives and controls, environmental protection and waste management, recreation and amenity, education, health, welfare and miscellaneous services.

Local government is funded partly by central government and partly by local sources of revenue.

Online

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government:

www.environ.ie

The Courts

Irish law is based on Common Law as modified by subsequent legislation and by the Constitution of 1937. In accordance with the Constitution, justice is administered in public by courts established by law. The President appoints judges on the advice of the Government.



The Four Courts, Dublin

Online

Department of Justice and Equality:

www.justice.ie

The Courts Service of Ireland:

www.courts.ie

Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions:

www.dppireland.ie

Office of the Attorney General:

www.attorneygeneral.ie



Lt Stephen Byrne, based in Uganda as part of the European Training Mission in Somalia.

Police and Defence Forces

The national police force, *An Garda Síochána*, was established in 1922. The general direction, management and control of the service is, subject to regulations made by the Minister for Justice and Equality, vested in a Commissioner appointed by the Government.

An Garda Síochána is unarmed with the exception of some specialized units. Since 1989, *An Garda Síochána* has served in numerous United Nations (UN) missions around the world. They have also served under the EU flag, most recently in Kosovo and Afghanistan, and have provided monitors for the South African and Palestinian elections.

The Permanent Defence Forces, which include the regular Army, Naval Service and Air Corps, operate under the auspices of the Department of Defence. The Department is also responsible for the general planning, organisation and co-ordination of civil defence measures. Recruitment is voluntary. The Defence Forces have extensive peacekeeping experience and have served under UN mandate in UN, EU and NATO led peace support operations all over the world since 1958. Most recently, the Defence Forces have served with distinction in Liberia (where they took on the task of providing the Quick Reaction Force for UNMIL), Chad (where the overall command of the Mission rested with the Irish Lieutenant General Pat Nash) and Lebanon (where over 350 Irish men and women are currently serving with UNIFIL).

Online

Department of Justice and Equality:	www.justice.ie
Garda Síochána (Irish Police):	www.garda.ie
Garda Ombudsman:	www.gardaombudsman.ie
Department of Defence:	www.defence.ie
Irish Defence Forces:	www.military.ie

The Ballinderry Sword,
Ballinderry, Co. Westmeath,
Ninth Century AD. Viking



History

Ireland has been inhabited for about 7,000 years, and has experienced many incursions and invasions, resulting in a rich mixture of ancestry and traditions. By the sixth century B.C., Celtic invaders had established a cultural and linguistic unity on the island. The introduction of Christianity, traditionally credited to St. Patrick, occurred in the fifth century. Viking incursions in the ninth and tenth centuries influenced the development of trade, particularly in Dublin, Waterford and Cork.

The twelfth century witnessed the arrival of the Normans, who had earlier settled in England and Wales. They quickly gained control over large parts of Ireland, which then came under the political authority of the King of England.

Following a series of revolts against the English Crown in Ireland, the last Gaelic stronghold, Ulster, was brought under Crown control in 1603. The Ulster plantation which followed brought many English and Scots settlers to Ulster and had a lasting impact on the religious and political complexion of the province.

Conflict emerged again during the seventeenth century and a struggle for supremacy was finally settled at the Battles of the Boyne (1690) and Aughrim (1691). Many of the defeated Irish leaders and followers (known as ‘The Wild Geese’) left Ireland to pursue military, religious or commercial careers in continental Europe and their legacy is still evident today. The Protestants of the Established Church monopolised political power and ownership of the land in Ireland, and penal laws discriminated against Catholics.

Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth century saw significant economic development in Ireland. The linen industry flourished, particularly in Ulster, and Irish wool, beef, butter and pork became important exports. The Protestant Ascendancy came to see itself as the Irish nation and developed a vigorous and distinctive parliamentary tradition.

The developing dispute between Britain and her colonies in North America from the 1760s helped create a tradition of radical patriotism that was ultimately, under the influence of the French Revolution, to produce the Society of United Irishmen. In 1798 a rebellion led by the United Irishmen was crushed and the Act of Union of 1800 created a full parliamentary union between Britain and Ireland.

10 The nineteenth century was dominated, initially, by the pursuit of Catholic emancipation. In 1829, Catholics, led by Daniel O’Connell, won the right to sit in parliament. Thereafter, there was a succession of efforts to reform or undo the Union between Great Britain and Ireland.

In the late 1840s, as a result of the wholesale failure of the potato crop in successive years, a terrible famine occurred: one million people died of starvation and epidemic disease and a further million were forced to leave Ireland. The population had fallen by more than a quarter from 8 million to less than 6 million by 1856, and would fall further as emigration became a dominant feature of Irish society. The Great Famine had far-reaching political repercussions, strengthening the desire among Irish voters for self-government and the right to purchase their holdings.

The question of self-government, or ‘Home Rule’ had not, however, been settled. Under the leadership of Charles Stewart Parnell in the 1880s, the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster placed the Irish question at the centre of British politics. In 1886, the Liberal party under W.E. Gladstone came to support a limited form of self-government for Ireland.

The prospects of Home Rule galvanised the Unionists in Ireland, who were predominantly Protestant, and were a small majority in the province of Ulster. Along with their allies in England, who feared it would lead to the break-up of the Empire, Unionists campaigned to prevent the granting of Home Rule in Ireland. Nonetheless, a Home Rule Bill was finally enacted in 1914. However with the outbreak of the First World War it was not implemented.

Towards Independence

In 1916 a republic was declared in Dublin and an armed insurrection took place. This rising, which initially did not enjoy significant public support, was suppressed. However, supporters of the Rising, capitalising on public revulsion at the execution of its leaders, and on opposition to the introduction of military conscription to Ireland in the First World War, succeeded in ousting the Irish Parliamentary Party in the General Election of 1918.

Sinn Féin (‘We Ourselves’), the election victors, set up the first *Dáil* (Parliament) and a war of national independence ensued. By the time an Anglo-Irish Treaty was concluded in 1921, six counties in North-East Ulster, with a roughly two-thirds Unionist majority, had already been constituted as Northern Ireland. As a result of the Treaty, the remaining twenty-six counties formed the Irish Free State, which had dominion status within the British Empire. The establishment

In 1916 a Republic was declared

of the Free State was followed by a short civil war between those who accepted the Treaty as offering effective self-government and those who held out for a full republic. The Civil War was to colour attitudes and determine political allegiances for decades.

The first government of the new State was headed by W.T. Cosgrave of *Cumann na nGaedheal*, later the *Fine Gael* party. From the 1930s onwards the *Fianna Fáil* party, founded by Eamon de Valera in 1926, dominated Irish politics for decades.

In the first two decades after Ireland achieved independence in 1922, the institutions of the State were consolidated and a tradition of political stability was established. The Constitution of 1937 and the Republic of Ireland Act 1948 severed Ireland's last formal links with Britain. Ireland remained neutral during the Second World War.

Ireland was admitted to the United Nations (UN) in 1955, and joined what is now the European Union (EU) in 1973. New economic development policies led to substantial and rapid growth.

Online

National Archives of Ireland:	www.nationalarchives.ie
Documents on Irish Foreign Policy:	www.difp.ie
History Ireland:	www.historyireland.com





Environment

The island of Ireland consists of a large central lowland of limestone with a relief of hills and several coastal mountains and is situated in the north-west of Europe. The mountain ridges of the south comprise old red sandstone separated by limestone river valleys. Elsewhere granite predominates, except in the north east which is covered by a basalt plateau. The central plain contains glacial deposits of clay and sand. It is interrupted by low hills and has large areas of bog and numerous lakes.

Longitude	5.5° and 10.5° west	
Latitude	51.5° and 55.5° north	
Total area	84,421 km ² (Ireland 70,282 km ² ; Northern Ireland 14,139 km ²)	
Coastline	3,171 km	
Highest mountain	Carrantuohill	1,041m
Longest river	Shannon	340 km
Largest lake	Lough Neagh	396 km ²
Highest waterfall	Powerscourt	122m

Climate

Influenced by the Gulf Stream, and with the prevailing south-westerly winds, the climate of Ireland is temperate.

The coldest months are January and February which have mean daily air temperatures of between 4°C and 7°C while July and August are the warmest, with mean temperatures of between 14°C and 16°C.

In low-lying areas average annual rainfall is mostly between 800mm and 1200mm but in mountainous areas it may exceed 2000mm.

Flora and Fauna

Ireland was separated from the European mainland after the last Ice Age. As a result the island has a smaller range of flora and fauna than is found elsewhere in Europe. The original forests have been cleared over most of the country. There are over 400 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) protected under the EU Habitats Directive.

A spectacular example of the impact of glaciation on the landscape is found in the Burren in Co. Clare, a region of bare carboniferous limestone containing arctic-alpine plants.

Ireland is important for its seabird colonies and migratory waterfowl, with considerable migration of birds from Iceland and Greenland in spring and autumn. Rivers and lakes contain a wide variety of fish life. Mammals are similar to those found throughout the temperate regions of Europe. The only amphibians are a single species each of frog, toad and newt. There are no snakes in Ireland and the only reptile is the common lizard.

Responsibility for protecting and conserving Ireland's natural and built heritage lies with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Office of Public Works.



The Burren, County Clare

Population

The latest census in Ireland was carried out in April 2011 and the total population is just over 4.5 million, the highest on record since 1861. The population has increased rapidly in recent years, with an increase of 1 million people in just 20 years. Ireland now has the highest fertility rate in the European Union, with an average of 2.05 children per woman. Immigration has also been an important feature of Ireland's demographic profile in recent years, with 17% of the population born outside Ireland. The largest immigrant communities in Ireland are from Poland, the UK, Lithuania, Latvia and Nigeria. In recent years there have been higher levels of emigration from Ireland – 87,000 people emigrated between April 2011 and April 2012 – after more than a decade of net immigration.

Online

Ordnance Survey Ireland:	www.osi.ie
Office of Public Works:	www.opw.ie
MET eireann	www.met.ie
The Heritage Council of Ireland:	www.heritagecouncil.ie
The Environmental Information Service:	www.enfo.ie
Environmental Protection Agency:	www.epa.ie
Central Statistics Office:	www.cso.ie



Pupils from Griffeen Valley Educate Together National School.



The Economy

Ireland had a period of extraordinary growth from 1993 to 2007, becoming one of the world's most dynamic, innovative and globalised economies, with extensive external trade and investment links.

In 2008, partly due to the open nature of its economy Ireland began to feel the effects of the global economic downturn. Pressure on the economy was significantly accentuated by the end of a prolonged Irish property market boom and problems within the domestic banking system. This led to a period of recession and a sharp contraction in economic output.

Ireland is facing its current economic challenges in co-operation with its funding partners in the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. In 2011, Ireland's economy returned to growth. GDP growth for 2011 was 1.4% and was 0.5% for the first half of 2012, with projected growth for the full year of 0.9%. The underlying government deficit continues to shrink fast and is projected to be under 3% by 2015.

Ireland's ongoing economic recovery is generally attributed to its educated and flexible workforce; government measures to ensure macroeconomic stability and to attract foreign investment; and membership of the European Union, which now provides a market of almost 500 million people. Ireland continues to be one of the most open economies in the OECD, and exports are now showing strong growth with a 5.1% increase in 2011 and a 3.8% increase in the first half of 2012. There has been particularly strong growth in the indigenous agri-food sector, with exports by value up by 25% in just two years. Our strong export performance has meant that, for the first time in a decade, our balance of payments with the rest of the world has now moved into surplus.

Innovation, enterprise and investment

Ireland has a strong track record in attracting foreign direct investment, with particular emphasis on the ICT, Life Sciences, Financial Services and Consumer, Content and Business Services sectors. Ireland's positioning as a 'Smart Economy' continues apace combining our innovative, enterprise economy with an ever-increasing emphasis on the emerging areas of Clean/Green Technologies, Services Innovation and Convergence. Ireland is also a centre for digital media in Europe with major multinational companies locating their European headquarters and a range of business support activities here. Despite

18 our economic challenges, we continue to be recognized as 1st in the eurozone for ease of doing business, 1st for the availability of skilled labour and the 2nd most attractive country globally for FDI.

Indigenous Irish companies continue to grow and compete on the international market – 2011 saw Irish-owned companies achieve €15.2 billion in exports, an all-time record and in 2012, indigenous Irish exporters recorded their highest net jobs gain since 2006. Research, Development and Innovation in Ireland has seen sustained growth and continued development in recent years, reflecting significant increases in business and government funding to the sector as well as R&D tax incentives for companies. R&D is a core element of the Irish Government’s economic recovery strategy and jobs agenda.

In the years since 2000 Irish government spend on R&D – primarily through agencies such as Science Foundation Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the Higher Education Authority – has more than doubled to circa. €600million annually. This public research funding typically leverages private investment of close to double that level, in the region of a further €1.1 billion. This very significant R&D investment has seen Ireland rise quickly up the international rankings of scientific research capability from 36th place in 2003 to breaking into the top 20 for the first time in 2009, and remaining there ever since.



Naughton Institute housing CRANN and the Science Gallery, Trinity College Dublin.



A researcher in CRANN, Trinity College Dublin.

Education and training is a vital component of Ireland's knowledge-based economy, with approximately 1 million people in full time education. 37% of the working age population (including 48% of 25-34 year olds) has a third level qualification, significantly above the OECD average.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Ireland's Embassy network work with a number of government agencies to contribute to the growth of enterprise, innovation and investment in Ireland. Enterprise Ireland helps develop Irish-based enterprise with the potential to trade internationally. IDA Ireland is responsible for the attraction and development of foreign investment in Ireland. Forfás provides overall policy advice and co-ordination for enterprise development and science, technology and innovation. Science Foundation Ireland invests in academic researchers and research teams who are most likely to generate new knowledge, leading edge technologies and competitive enterprises in the fields of science and engineering.



Dublin Port



Xi Jinping, then Vice President of China, addresses delegates at the Ireland-China Trade and Investment Forum in Dublin in February 2012.

Trade

Ireland's total trade in 2011 was approximately €304 billion, with a merchandise trade surplus of more than €43 billion. Total goods exports amounted to €173 billion, with services exports valued at €131 billion. The main merchandise goods traded include organic chemicals (mainly for the pharmaceutical sector), medical & pharmaceutical products and computers. The main services areas are Computer Services, Trade Related Business Services and Insurance and Financial Services. Ireland's main trading partners include the United States, Great Britain, Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Japan. Trade with other markets, such as China, Russia and Mexico, is also expanding rapidly.

Corporation Tax

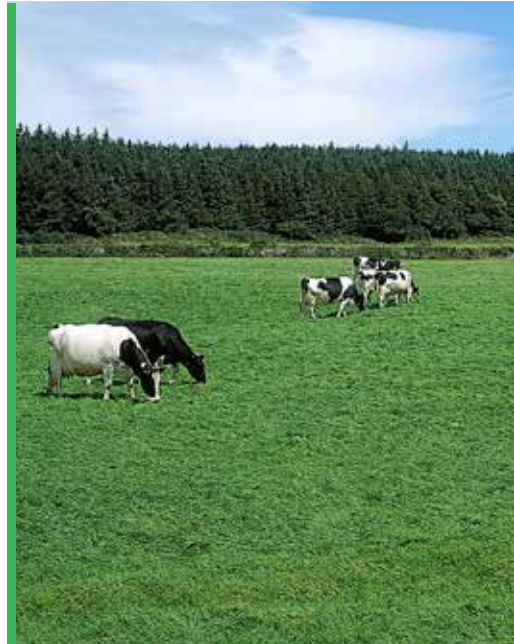
Since 2003 Ireland's corporate tax regime has been fixed at a rate of 12.5%. This applies to all Irish corporate trading profits. A rate of 25% applies to non-trading (passive) income.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:	www.dfat.ie
Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation:	www.djei.ie
Forfás:	www.forfas.ie
IDA Ireland:	www.idaireland.com
Enterprise Ireland:	www.enterprise-ireland.com
Science Foundation Ireland:	www.sfi.ie
Department of Finance:	www.finance.gov.ie
Central Bank of Ireland:	www.centralbank.ie
Central Statistics Office:	www.cso.ie

Agriculture

Of the total land area of approximately 7 million hectares (17 million acres), 5 million hectares (12.32 million acres) are used for agricultural purposes (including forestry). Beef and dairying are by far the most important sectors of the agricultural industry. The main crops are barley, wheat, potatoes and mushrooms. The Agri-Food industry makes a significant contribution to the Irish economy. The combined agri-food and drink sector accounts for 7% of GDP, over €9 billion of exports and accounts for 150,000 jobs.

A key initiative in this area is the development of Bord Bia's (Irish Food Board) Origin Green initiative, designed to establish Ireland as a world leader in sustainability. Since launching in June 2012, some 164 companies accounting for almost 60% of Irish food and drink



22 exports have signed up to the programme. These companies are currently working with Bord Bia to develop, and commit to, sustainability plans setting out clear targets in key areas such as emissions, energy, waste, water, biodiversity and corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. Individual sustainability commitments submitted by major players within the Irish food industry include a 20% reduction in energy use by 2015; the implementation of rainwater harvesting by 2014 and a 30% reduction in emissions by 2020.

Online

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine:	www.agriculture.gov.ie
Bord Bia (Irish Food Board):	www.bordbia.ie www.origingreen.ie
Teagasc (Agriculture & Food Development Authority):	www.teagasc.ie

Fishing

The Irish seafood industry provides employment for over 11,000 people. It makes a significant contribution to the economic and social fabric of the many small communities located in mainly rural areas or small towns and villages around the 3,171 kilometres of our coastline. In 2012, Irish seafood exports totalled €493 million, an increase of 18% on the previous year.



Online

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine:	www.agriculture.gov.ie
Bord Iascaigh Mhara:	www.bim.ie



Tourism

Approximately 7 million tourists visit Ireland each year, spending approximately €3.4 billion, and sustaining more than 180,000 jobs.

Tourism Ireland was established under the framework of the Good Friday Agreement 1998 to co-ordinate the work of the two tourist boards on the island, Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Ireland's successful tourism industry is built around the three themes: Irish people, Irish culture and the physical beauty of the country.

2013 is a special year for Irish tourism as we celebrate *The Gathering*, a year-long celebration of Ireland, its people and its connections, both at home and abroad. *The Gathering Ireland 2013* is a people-led project where we invite anyone who has a link to Ireland or just a love of the country, to come to Ireland for a series of events throughout 2013.



Online

Tourism Ireland	www.ireland.com
The Gathering	www.thegatheringireland.com



Bryan Dobson and Sharon Ní Bheoláin on the RTÉ Six One News.

Radio and Television

The national radio and television service is operated by *Raidió Teilifís Éireann* (RTÉ), the public broadcasting company which transmits on two television and four radio channels as well as a range of digital channels and online. RTÉ derives its revenue from licence fees and the sale of advertising time. TV3 is a commercial broadcaster and there are many commercial radio stations including Today FM and Newstalk.

Irish speakers are served by a dedicated radio channel, *Raidió na Gaeltachta* (operated by RTÉ) and by TG4, an independent Irish language television channel.

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) was established in 2009, as an independent regulator for radio and television broadcasters in Ireland. The Authority is funded through a levy on all broadcasters licensed in the State.

Online

Raidió Teilifís Éireann:	www.rte.ie
TG4:	www.tg4.ie
TV3:	www.tv3.ie
Today FM:	www.todayfm.com
Newstalk:	www.newstalk.ie
Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI):	www.bai.ie



Newspapers

Newspapers have been published in Ireland for over 300 years. Today there are national daily, weekly and weekend newspapers. There are also about 60 local newspapers, usually published weekly and a wide variety of magazines dealing with current affairs, economic issues and leisure interests.

Online

The Irish Times:	www.irishtimes.com
Irish Independent:	www.independent.ie
Irish Examiner:	www.irishexaminer.ie
Sunday Business Post:	www.thepost.ie
Sunday Independent:	www.independent.ie
Evening Echo:	www.eecho.ie
Evening Herald:	www.herald.ie
Press Council of Ireland (and the office of the Press Ombudsman):	www.presscouncil.ie



Social Services

Education, Health Services and Social Protection

Education in Ireland is compulsory from age 6 to 16 or until students have completed three years of second level education. The primary education sector serves some 510,000 pupils. There are over 3,300 schools at first-level.

The second-level sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. There are over 360,000 students in this sector attending over 729 schools.



Transition Year students from Larkin College, Dublin in the Irish Aid Centre.

Third-level Education

The third-level education sector consists of universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education. All of these are funded by the State and are autonomous and self-governing. In recent years, several independent private colleges have opened offering mainly business-related courses.

There are more than 164,000 students in full time third-level education. Almost half of Ireland's young people proceed from second to third level and some 50 per cent of these take degree level programmes.

Online

Department of Education and Skills:

www.education.ie

Higher Education Authority:

www.heai.ie



National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street, Dublin

Health Services

Public expenditure on health accounts for approximately (27%) of Government current spending. The expenditure is allocated to hospitals, community health services, community welfare services, community protection services, psychiatric services and services for those with disabilities.

The health services in Ireland are centrally directed by the Department of Health. The provision of services is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE).

Those with low incomes receive medical services free of charge. The rest of the population can avail of the public hospital services at a relatively low charge and can choose to buy private health insurance.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs deals with policy matters affecting early childhood care and education, youth justice, child welfare and protection.

Online

Department of Health:	www.doh.ie
Dept of Children and Youth Affairs:	www.dcy.a.gov.ie
Health Service Executive (HSE):	www.hse.ie

Social Protection

The Social Protection system covers all of the internationally recognised forms of social protection. Incorporating a mix of both social insurance and social assistance programmes, it provides financial support to people such as the unemployed, the elderly and those suffering from illness.

Other features of the system include supports for people seeking employment, in-work benefits and family support for people at work on low pay, and free medical care.

Online

Department of Social Protection:	www.welfare.ie
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Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland today has a far more peaceful society than when work towards peace was renewed in the 1980s. Earlier efforts such as the Sunningdale Agreement undertaken in the 1970s had not borne fruit. The Irish Government has consistently worked alongside the British Government and the political parties in Northern Ireland to bring about this change. This work continues to the present day.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty, signed in 1921, led to the current political division on the island of Ireland. From 1921 to 1972 Northern Ireland had its own devolved Government separate from Westminster but this remained in the control of the Unionist majority and Nationalists suffered discrimination. In 1969 peaceful civil rights campaigners experienced a repressive reaction and this led to civil unrest and a revival of paramilitary organizations.

In the early 1980's the Irish and British Governments began working more closely together to find a political settlement which would be acceptable to the whole community. The Anglo-Irish Agreement signed by both Governments in November 1985 allowed the Irish Government to put forward views and proposals on Northern Ireland affairs. It also put in place structures to help the two Governments work towards finding a lasting solution to the conflict.

In 1993 the two Governments issued a Joint Declaration which set out a charter for peace and reconciliation in Ireland. It established the principles of self-determination and consent in relation to the Constitutional status of Northern Ireland and gave those associated with paramilitary violence a route into the political process. The IRA and Loyalist paramilitaries announced a cessation of their activities in 1994. In December 1995 an International Body was established under the chairmanship of US Senator George Mitchell to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning of paramilitary arms, which reported in 1996. However, in February 1996, the IRA ended its ceasefire and resumed violence.

Multi-party talks began in 1996, chaired by Senator Mitchell and involving the Irish and British Governments and all the parties elected in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin were excluded until 1997, when the IRA announced a ceasefire. These talks were to culminate in the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998.

The Good Friday Agreement was signed on 10 April 1998 and it put in place structures for the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, North South cooperation and British-Irish relations. It set out a balanced and agreed

32 definition, based on the principle of consent, of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and how that could change in future. The people of Ireland showed their overwhelming approval for the Agreement, voting in referendums, North and South, in May 1998. The Agreement contains three ‘Strands.’

The first Strand set up the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive so that the elected political parties could share power. The Assembly is located at Stormont, just outside Belfast.

The second Strand set up the North South Ministerial Council to develop cooperation between both parts of Ireland.

The third Strand established the British-Irish Council which promotes the relationship between Ireland and Britain.

A key feature of the Agreement is the ‘principle of consent’ expressed as follows:

“it is for the people of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a United Ireland, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland”.

The Good Friday Agreement has been largely implemented, with just a few aspects remaining outstanding. The Northern Ireland Assembly is now fully occupied with the running of government in Northern Ireland. Cooperation at the North South Ministerial Council continues to develop, bringing benefits to both sides. The British-Irish Council has established a permanent Secretariat in Edinburgh to coordinate the cooperation between all parts of these islands.

British-Irish Relations and the Peace Process

Over the last thirty years, the context in which the Irish Government’s objectives in relation to the peace process in Northern Ireland are pursued has been transformed. The British-Irish relationship is multi-faceted, influenced by historical connections, geographical proximity and strong economic links. There is a vast network of individual connections between the two islands. Many Irish-born people live and work in Britain and vice versa. The British-Irish relationship has evolved towards an enhanced degree of understanding and a greater recognition of shared interest at almost every level.



Prime Minister David Cameron and An Taoiseach Enda Kenny

34 A State Visit to Ireland by Queen Elizabeth II took place from 17–20 May, 2011. The successful programme touched upon history, trade and community and showcased the strong partnership which now exists between Britain and Ireland. Highlights included the wreath laying at the Garden of Remembrance and at the Irish War Memorial Garden, as well as the speech made by Queen Elizabeth II at the State Dinner, where opening in Irish, she went on to refer to the need for reconciliation and “being able to bow to the past but not be bound by it”. She also commented that “with the benefit of historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all”.

The British-Irish Council (BIC) continues to develop its work programme and strengthen links between the eight administrations of the islands. Since the restoration of the Institutions in 2007, the BIC Plenary has met twice a year.

International Support for the Peace Process

The peace process in Northern Ireland has always benefited from the widespread support of the international community, including our EU partners, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and others. The focus of international support has included both political support for the evolving peace process and practical assistance in the areas of economic regeneration and cross-community reconciliation, including through the International Fund for Ireland and the EU’s Programmes for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland. The Irish Government has committed itself to sharing its experiences of the peace process and to work with others where this would prove helpful.

Online

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:	www.dfat.ie
Northern Ireland Office:	www.nio.gov.uk
The Northern Ireland Assembly:	www.ni-assembly.gov.uk



Queen Elizabeth II during her State visit to Ireland.

The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Eamon Gilmore hosts the 19th meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council



OSCE

ÉIRE 2012 IRELAND

19th OSCE

Ministerial Council

Dublin, 6 - 7 December 2012



International Relations

Foreign Policy

The Constitution of Ireland affirms Ireland's strong commitment to the ideal of peace and friendly cooperation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality. Ireland's foreign policy is based on this conviction.

As a small country in a changing world, Ireland remains firmly committed to collective approaches to international relations and security based on the primacy of the Charter of the United Nations. Key principles underlying this commitment are respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. Ireland seeks to pursue these core objectives in cooperation with regional and bilateral partners and through its membership of international organisations, in particular its membership of the United Nations and of the European Union.

United Nations

Ireland joined the United Nations (UN) on 14 December 1955. Within the UN, Ireland has sought to promote effective international action on global issues such as disarmament, peace-keeping, human rights and development. Ireland's most recent term on the UN Security Council in 2001–2002 reinforced its commitment to working with the wider UN membership for international peace and security. This commitment is reflected in the continuous participation in UN peace keeping operations by Irish Defence and Police Forces since 1958. Our commitment to the UN is also reflected in the substantial contributions Ireland is making to UN Funds and Programmes. Ireland is also a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court, established by the international community through the adoption of the Rome Statute in 1998. In November 2012 Ireland was elected to the UN Human Rights Council and will serve on the Council from 2013–2015. This is Ireland's first time as a member of the Council. Ireland is committed to actively support the efforts of the Council to promote and protect human rights worldwide.

European Union Membership

Ireland joined the European Economic Community (EEC) on 1 January 1973 and has participated actively in the evolution of what is now the European Union (EU). EU membership is pivotal to Government policy. It is a central framework within which the Government pursues its foreign policy objectives. Ireland's membership of the European Union is rooted in an understanding that the Union is the cornerstone of political and economic stability in Europe.

The fortieth anniversary of Ireland's accession to the European Union coincides with Ireland's seventh Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first six months of 2013. As Presidency, Ireland is committed to delivering real and positive decisions to support Europe's economic recovery and social cohesion. The Irish Presidency Programme reflects the desire across the EU to learn from the economic crisis and to focus on strengthening competitiveness, fighting unemployment and its causes, and driving forward proposals that will deliver sustainable economic growth and employment.



eu2013.ie

The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Eamon Gilmore and Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, during the launch of Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU.



Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Ireland chaired the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for the first time during 2012. The OSCE, with 57 participating States, is the world's largest regional security organisation with a population of over 1 billion people. In the course of our Chairmanship year, Ireland promoted human rights, internet freedom, good governance and the fight against corruption. The Irish Chairmanship also drew on the experience of building and sustaining peace on the island of Ireland to further conflict resolution efforts in the OSCE area.

Irish Aid

Irish Aid is the Government of Ireland's official programme of assistance to developing countries. The Irish Aid programme is administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Ireland has had an official development assistance programme since 1974. It has grown from modest beginnings and in 2012 was approximately €639 million. The Government remains committed to reaching the United Nations' target of spending 0.7% of GNP on Official Development Assistance (ODA).



Students at Chifwani Primary School, Northern Province, Zambia

The Irish Abroad

More than one million Irish citizens are currently living abroad, and it is estimated that as many as 70 million people worldwide can claim Irish descent. While our largest emigrant communities have consistently lived in Britain and the United States, a significant Irish presence can also be found in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, and Southern Africa.

Successive Irish Governments have accorded a high priority to maintaining and strengthening links with the Diaspora. President Michael D. Higgins awarded the first Presidential Distinguished Service Awards for the Irish Abroad in November 2012. The Award was established to provide a formal recognition by the Irish State to individuals resident abroad who have provided sustained and distinguished service to Ireland, Irish communities abroad or Ireland's international reputation.

In 2009, the Government hosted the first Global Irish Economic Forum which brought together influential Irish and Irish connected individuals from abroad for an intensive exchange of ideas on how the Irish at home and abroad could work together and contribute to our overall efforts at economic recovery.

One of the key outcomes of the Forum was the establishment of the Global Irish Network. Comprising of over 350 Irish connected decision makers from almost 40 countries, the Network provides Ireland with an invaluable resource of international expertise. A second Global Irish economic Forum took place in 2011.

Also in 2011, the Government launched the Certificate of Irish Heritage to formally acknowledge the strong and enduring connection to Ireland felt by many people.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade oversees the Government's Emigrant Support Programme which provides financial support to voluntary and Irish community organisations engaged in the delivery of services to Irish communities. With its focus on assisting the most vulnerable of our community, the programme has made a substantive difference to the lives of Irish emigrants, particularly in Britain and the United States.



An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny meets the U.S. President, Barack Obama in Dublin

Online

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:	www.dfat.ie
Irish Aid:	www.irishaid.gov.ie
Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU:	www.eu2013.ie
EU Gateway:	www.europa.eu
The Global Irish Network/Global Irish Economic Forum:	www.globalirishforum.ie
The Certificate of Irish Heritage:	www.heritagecertificate.com



Megaceros Hibernicus

Arts and Culture

Ireland's Culture

Ireland has a rich cultural past and present. The traditional lore preserved by the early Irish poets has left a colourful heritage of mythical and historical stories. Modern writers in turn have drawn on these stories to enrich their own work.

The Irish Language

Most people spoke Irish until the early nineteenth century but by 1891 the majority spoke English only. It is one of the Celtic family of languages and is closely related to Scots Gaelic, Welsh and Breton. Since Independence the State has actively encouraged the use of Irish and it is the first official language with English as the second.

The latest figures show that 41% of all adults declare a knowledge of Irish. It is widely spoken in areas known as the *Gaeltacht*, situated mainly along the western seaboard. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has responsibility for promoting the cultural, social and economic welfare of the *Gaeltacht* through *Údarás na Gaeltachta* (*Gaeltacht Authority*). The Irish Language Agency (*Foras na Gaeilge*) has responsibility for the promotion and encouragement of the use of Irish as a vernacular throughout the island of Ireland. Irish is a core subject in primary and secondary schools and a growing number of schools offer tuition exclusively through Irish (*Gaelscoileanna*). There is an Irish language national radio service (*Raidió na Gaeltachta*) and an Irish language television service (*TG4*). On 1 January 2007, the Irish language became the 23rd official language of the European Union.

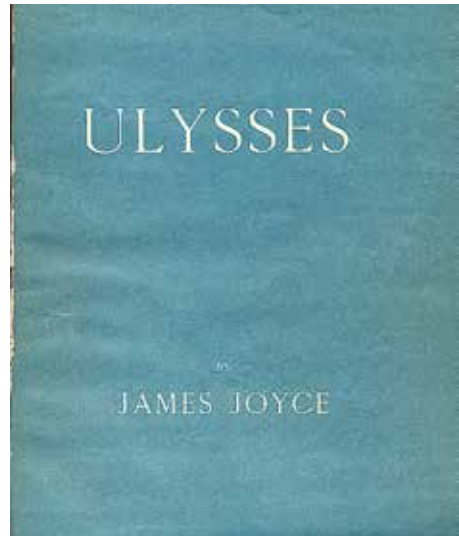
Irish Literature and Theatre

Irish writers have long made a significant contribution to world literature in both the Irish and English languages. Written literature in the Irish language dates from the sixth century. With the end of the Gaelic order in the seventeenth century and its tradition of patronage of poets, Irish writers began to preserve a record of the old civilisation. Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries members of the clergy, teachers and poets continued to write in Irish. One of the best known poets of this time is Brian Merriman (1747–1805) author of the frequently translated *Cúirt an Mheán Oíche* (Midnight Court). In the twentieth century writers such as Patrick Pearse (1879–1916) and Pádraic Ó Conaire (1882–1928) opened Irish literature to European influences. Distinguished writers in Irish in the modern period include such diverse voices as Liam Ó Flaitheartaigh (1896–1984), Mairéad Ní Ghráda (1896–1971), Máirtín Ó Cadhain (1906–70), Máirtín Ó Direáin (1910–88), Seán Ó Ríordáin (1916–77), Michael Hartnett (1941–99), Críostóir Ó Floinn (b. 1927), Gabriel Rosenstock (b. 1949), Liam Ó Muirthile (b. 1950) and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (b. 1952).

In the English language, the satirist Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) authored *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Oscar Wilde's (1854–1900) plays, prose and poetry continue to be performed and read worldwide. Irish Nobel laureates include the playwright and novelist George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) and the poet and dramatist William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), whose work inspired the modern



Oscar Wilde



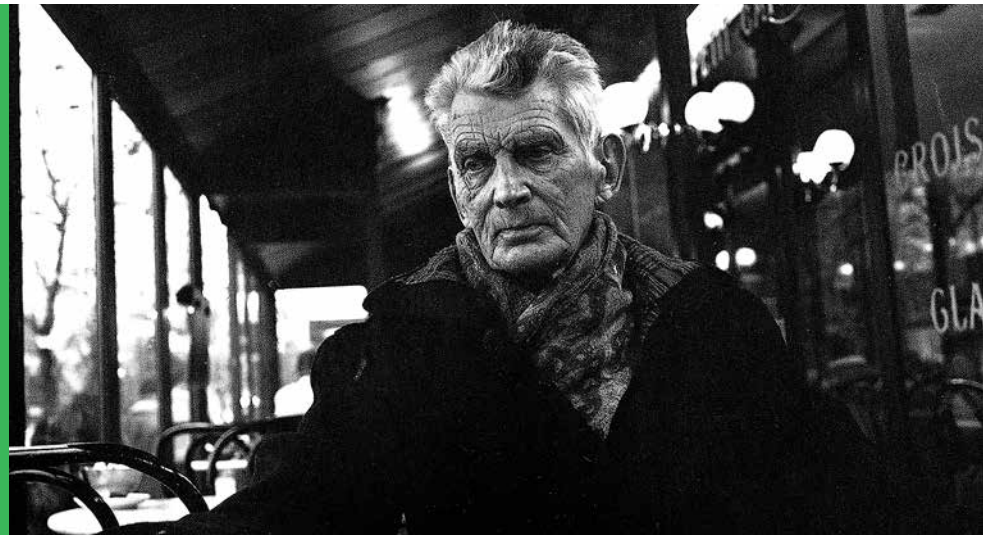
Ulysses by James Joyce

renaissance in Irish writing. James Joyce (1882–1941) wrote the pioneering modernist novel, *Ulysses* (1922) — widely recognised as one of the greatest novels ever written. Joyce inspired the work of satirist Brian O’Nolan (Flann O’Brien) (1911–66), who also wrote in Irish. Nobel laureate Samuel Beckett (1906–89) wrote in a minimalist vein, often in French. His play, *Waiting for Godot* (1953) has become a twentieth century classic of absurdism.

The generation of poets after Yeats included Patrick Kavanagh (1904–67). Kavanagh’s example as a poet of rural realism inspired Seamus Heaney whose vision of the redemptive power of poetry earned him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.

Irish fiction continues to be internationally recognised. In recent years, several Irish writers have won the Man Booker Prize including Anne Enright in 2007, John Banville in 2005 and Roddy Doyle in 1993. Writers shortlisted for the prize include Colm Tóibín (1999, 2004 and 2009), Sebastian Barry (2008) and Emma Donoghue (2010). Colum McCann’s novel, ‘Let the Great World Spin’ won the National Book Award in the USA in 2009.

Irish theatre companies such as the Abbey, the Druid and the Gate regularly tour their productions to international venues and host the work of visiting theatre companies to Ireland.



Samuel Beckett

The earliest Irish art consists of carvings on megalithic monuments dating from 3500 B.C. Celtic art reached its apogee in the manuscripts of the gospels such as the books of Durrow and Kells. After the ninth century Irish art absorbed Viking, Romanesque and Gothic influences producing, for example, richly carved stone High Crosses.

From the mid-seventeenth century decorative arts such as goldsmithery, plasterwork and glass flourished in conjunction with the large-scale public buildings of the time. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Irish painters looked to the French Impressionists for a new idiom. These include William Leech (1881–1968), Walter Osborne (1859–1903), John Lavery (1856–1941) and Roderic O’Conor (1860–1940). Crossing from Impressionism to Expressionism, Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957) towers over his contemporaries much as his brother, the poet W.B. Yeats, was pre-eminent among his peers.



Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957) *The Liffey Swim*, 1923.

Other artists, working in an abstract expressionist mode, include Louis le Brocquy (1916 - 2012) , Norah McGuinness (1901-80) and Patrick Scott. A strong new expressionist movement emerged in the late twentieth century including Brian Maguire, Eithne Jordan, Michael Mulcahy, Michael Cullen, Dorothy Cross and Alice Maher.

Sculpture in the nineteenth century was heroic and monumental as exemplified by the statues of Oliver Goldsmith and Edmund Burke by John Henry Foley (1819-1874) outside Trinity College, Dublin. This tradition continued into the twentieth century with the works of Oisín Kelly (1915-81), Seamus Murphy (1907-74) and Hilary Heron (1923-77) pioneering the use of new casting techniques and promoting the concept of an Irish vernacular sculpture. Contemporary sculpture is more abstract and witty as can be seen in the diverse work of Edward Delany (1930-2009), John Behan, Michael Warren, Eilís O’Connell, Kathy Prendergast and Eileen MacDonagh.

Online

Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht:	www.ahg.gov.ie
Culture Ireland:	www.cultureireland.gov.ie
Údarás na Gaeltachta:	www.udaras.ie
The Arts Council:	www.artscouncil.ie
Crafts Council of Ireland:	www.ccoi.ie
Ireland Literature Exchange:	www.irelandliterature.com

Architecture

For a country of its size, the global influence of Irish architects, both historically and contemporary, is considerable.

The Irish landscape is one of the oldest man-made landscapes in the world, dating back to 3500 B.C. when megalithic tombs were constructed. These include dolmens and passage graves such as Newgrange, Co. Meath. During the Iron Age (after 500 B.C.), large circular stone forts were built, usually on hilltops such as Dun Aengus on the Aran Islands. In early Christian times, Ireland's architecture once more flourished – for example in the Round Towers, which are considered unique to Ireland and formed part of important monastic sites such as Glendalough or Clonmacnoise. The most spectacular surviving early Christian site is Skellig Michael (c. 6th-8th c A.D.), on the Great Skellig Island in the Atlantic Ocean, which was inhabited by Irish monks. Irish architecture is world-renowned for its Georgian period (1714-1830), during which many architectural masterpieces were constructed such as the Palladian-style



Newgrange entrance stone

Castletown House (1729) in County Kildare and Dublin's neo-classical Custom House (1791). Dublin's elegant Georgian townhouses, generous squares and leafy parks also come from this period. Many masterpieces can be found on the university campus of Trinity College Dublin, such as the Old Library (1712) and the Provost's House (1759). Irish architects also made important international contributions in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1792 James Hoban (1758-1831) won the competition to design The White House for U.S. President George Washington.

One of Ireland's most famous architects from the early 20th century is Eileen Gray (1878-1976). A pioneer of the Modern Movement, Gray lived in Paris where she designed furniture as well as her house E1027 in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. The National Museum of Ireland holds many of Gray's iconic furniture designs and architectural models. Today, the work of Irish architects is transforming cities all over the world - from Europe to China and South America where Grafton Architects' design for a new university campus in Lima won them a 'Silver Lion' at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale.



Georgian Town House Door, Dublin



Glucksman Gallery Cork by O'Donnell & Tuomey

Music

Music has always been an important part of Irish culture, from the traditional accompaniment to festivals and funerals in the form of playing and ballad singing, to Irish dancing which is very much alive in Irish communities around the world. The harp was the dominant instrument in early historical times. One of the earliest Irish composers whose work survives is Turlough O'Carolan (1670–1738), the blind harpist and one of the last of the ancient bardic tradition.

There is also a classical tradition in the forms pioneered by other European composers. Eighteenth century Dublin was an important musical centre and Handel chose to premiere his *Messiah* there in 1742. In the twentieth century traditional Irish music inspired modern composers such as Seán Ó Riada (1931–71).

Traditional Irish music is now popular in many countries through the influence of groups as diverse as Clannad, Enya, the Chieftains, the Dubliners, Altan, Dervish, Lúnasa and Anúna, all of whom perform in a modern context without compromising the integrity of the original sound. Reflecting this versatility is the phenomenon of *Riverdance*, with music composed by Bill Whelan, combining the best of Irish song, music and dance.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann a non-profit cultural movement with hundreds of local branches around the world plays a prominent part in the development and preservation of Irish traditional music and dance.



Traditional band, Altan

There are three full-time professional orchestras performing in Ireland, the largest of which is the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, as well as a National Opera Company.

Ireland also has made a huge contribution to the history of rock music with world famous acts such as U2, Rory Gallagher, Thin Lizzy, the Boomtown Rats/Bob Geldof and the Pogues followed more recently by bands such as the Cranberries, Snow Patrol and the Frames and up and coming groups like The Script and Two Door Cinema Club. Ireland is also known for its singer-songwriters with Van Morrison in particular achieving global fame while Paul Brady, Christie Moore and more recently Damien Rice and Lisa Hannigan have also reached global audiences. Ireland can also claim to have been at the forefront of pop music, with Boyzone and Westlife achieving fame and selling tens of millions of records worldwide.



National Concert Hall, Dublin

Film

Films have been made in and about Ireland since the Lumière Brothers filmed in Sackville (now O'Connell) Street in 1897. Dublin born Rex Ingram was a Hollywood silent film director in the early 20th century. In 1910 the American, Sidney Olcott, filmed *The Lad from Old Ireland* in New York and Kerry, the first film ever made on two continents.

Throughout the last century Irish film makers were prolific in their production of amateur films, newsreels and documentaries, the most famous of which was *Mise Éire* (1960) directed by George Morrison. It was not until the 1970s however that a new wave of indigenously produced fiction films began to provide a striking alternative to foreign produced representations of Ireland. The Irish film industry has grown significantly, over the last decade and Ireland is now becoming known for our film making talent in the same way as we are known for our theatre and literature. Following in the footsteps of Jim Sheridan and Neil Jordan, we now have a new generation of filmmakers including directors like Lenny Abrahamson, Conor McPherson, Martin McDonagh and Kirsten Sheridan.



Once



The Wind That Shakes The Barley

In recent years, Irish films have won almost every major international award such as the Palm D'Or at Cannes - won by *The Wind That Shakes The Barley*, the Golden Bear in Berlin won by *Bloody Sunday* and the Golden Lion in Venice won by *The Magdalene Sisters*. *Once* won the prestigious Best Foreign Film Award at the Independent Spirit Awards and *Garage* took home the C.I.C.A.E. Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2007. Two Irish films have won the Oscar for best short film in recent years: *Six Shooter* in 2006 and *The Shore* in 2012.

Online

The Abbey Theatre:	www.abbeytheatre.ie
National Concert Hall:	www.nch.ie
Irish Museum of Modern Art:	www.imma.ie
National Gallery of Ireland:	www.nationalgallery.ie
National Library of Ireland:	www.nli.ie
National Museum of Ireland:	www.museum.ie
Chester Beatty Library:	www.cbl.ie
Bord Scannán na hÉireann:	www.filmboard.ie

Sport

Among the most popular sports are Ireland's traditional games, gaelic football, hurling and camogie, which are played almost exclusively in Ireland and in Irish communities abroad. Games in the All-Ireland hurling and football championships attract large attendances throughout the summer months culminating in the finals, the highlight of Ireland's sporting year, which are held in Croke Park in Dublin.

Soccer is popular at all ages from school to senior level in domestic competitions. The Irish International team, which plays as the Republic of Ireland, has over the past number of years enjoyed some success and is well supported by enthusiastic and friendly fans. The team has qualified for the World Cup on 3 occasions - 1990, 1994 and 2002 - with their best finish in 1990 when they reached the quarter finals. Ireland has also reached the finals of the European Championships twice in 1988 and 2011. Rugby is also popular in Ireland at international, club and schools level. The sport is managed by the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU).



Action from the Leinster GAA Hurling Senior Club Championship Final

Ireland competes in the international annual Six Nations Championship, winning the tournament on a total of 11 occasions, most recently in 2009. Ireland has reached the quarter finals of the Rugby world cup on 5 occasions.

Ireland has a strong reputation for field sports such as shooting, fishing and also for equestrian events, show jumping and horse racing. The Irish bloodstock industry is considered one of the finest in the world.

As Ireland has over 3,000 kilometres of coastline and numerous inland waterways, sailing and boating are long-established sports. A wide range of marine leisure activities such as fishing, water-skiing, canoeing, wind-surfing, diving and swimming are also pursued.

Over 400 golf courses offer facilities throughout the country. All-Ireland teams compete in international amateur golfing competitions with the major Irish tournaments on the international professional circuit being the Irish Open and the Irish PGA Championship. Ireland hosted the September 2011 biennial



London 2012 Paralympic Games - Team Ireland medal winners

Katie Taylor celebrates after winning gold in boxing at the London 2012 Olympic Games

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professional women golfers' Solheim Cup at Killeen Castle Golf Resort, County Meath. The Ryder Cup was last held in Ireland in 2006 and Irishman Paul McGinley will lead the European team as captain in the 2014 tournament. 2010 and 2011 were remarkable years for golfers from Northern Ireland: Graeme McDowell, Rory McIlroy and Darren Clarke won three major tournaments - the US Masters 2010, the US Open 2011 and the British Open 2011 - respectively. McIlroy went on to win his second major at the US PGA in 2012 and is now considered one of the best golfers in the world.

Ireland also has a rich Olympic history from the 2 gold medals won by Pat O'Callaghan in the hammer in 1928 and 1932 to the London Olympics where Ireland won 5 medals in total, including the gold won by Katie Taylor in the first ever Olympic women's boxing tournament. In between, great athletes such as Ronnie Delaney, Sonia O'Sullivan and Michael Carruth have competed and won medals for Ireland. Ireland also saw great success in the 2012 Paralympics in London, winning 16 medals including 2 golds each for Michael McKillop (athletics) and Mark Rohan (cycling).

Ireland hosted the Special Olympics in June 2003. Over 7,000 athletes from 160 countries came to Ireland to participate in what was the largest sporting event ever to take place in Ireland.

Online

The Irish Sports Council:	www.irishsportscouncil.ie
Football Association of Ireland:	www.fai.ie
Irish Rugby Football Union:	www.irfu.ie
Gaelic Athletic Association:	www.gaa.ie
Horse Racing Ireland:	www.goracing.ie
Golfing Union of Ireland:	www.gui.ie
Special Olympics Ireland:	www.specialolympics.ie
Olympic Council of Ireland:	www.olympicsport.ie



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Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Dublin.
www.dfat.ie