

# Institute of Physics in Ireland Annual General Meeting

1 Apr County Arms Hotel

## Summary Report

### Annual Activities and Outreach

The annual calendar of events for the Institute of Physics in Ireland such as the lecture programme, awards, exhibitions, heads of Physics meeting and teachers conferences have all been excellently received. Record numbers attended the schools Tyndall Lecture, no doubt due to the teenage-friendly title: 'Rock Guitar in 11 dimensions: strats, strads and superstrings'. At the Radar and football stand at the BT Young Scientist Exhibition thousands of students queued over the three days of the exhibition waiting to take a shot at goal – and they even answered a couple of questions on Radar as the prerequisite for taking a kick.

Themes on Science and Society were examined in a meeting held in Limerick to commemorate the life and work of the Irish born physicist J D Bernal (1901 1971), whose former post graduates included no less than six subsequent nobel prize winners. Of interest to chemists, physicists, structural biologists and science philosophers this meeting provided a fine opportunity for multidisciplinary discussion.

Professional musicians and physicists were brought together when IOPI collaborated with the British Council, the RDS and UL on 'Superstrings' which was a touring outreach event created during Einstein Year. The concepts of particle physics and string theory were presented through combining a physics lecture with a violin recital which included many of Einstein's favourite pieces.

This year's Spring Weekend event, 'Fission impossible? A discussion on climate change and energy', has drawn greater numbers than ever, not least because of the newly designated Graduate Research award, The Rosse Medal, which has succeeded the traditional post graduate poster prize. The silver medal, which has been commissioned by the institute, commemorates the 3rd Earl of Rosse (*Sir William Parsons K.P., F.R.S*) and his contributions to science. Sir Brendan Parsons, the seventh Earl of Rosse, gave great help and support with the planning and design of the medal. It is a great honour to the Institute that the inaugural award was presented by Lord Rosse at Birr Castle this year.

Career Guidance Counsellors and Physics Teachers throughout Ireland all received copies of the colourful new publication 'A Day in the Life', which is based on journal style articles by physics graduates who are either from Ireland or working in Ireland. A second print run is planned for the Autumn.

### External relations and Policy

Over the past year, the Institute has been highly active in initiating contact, meetings and joint projects with key organisations such as, Engineers Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Royal Dublin Society, IBEC, Institution of Engineering and Technology, American Chamber of Commerce Education and Research group, and Forfas

Policy development has certainly been influenced by the recently instituted meetings of Heads of third level physics departments. The last such meeting in May 06 was addressed by Tom Boland, CEO of the Higher Education Authority and by Prof. Ian Halliwell of the Scottish Universities Physics Alliance.

In a submission in June 2006 to the Advisory Council for Science, Technology and Innovation's Review of Health Research, the Institute noted that basic research is fundamental to many of the most innovative branches of health research and called for enhanced funding this area.

In a wider ranging Institute submission to the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, in July 2006, the requirement that the skills base in the physical sciences be strongly supported was emphasised, with support for physics being sought at both second and third level.

Enhancing the profile of physics at both national and international level was addressed in a response to the Higher Education Authority's consultation exercise on research infrastructure. In particular the Institute called for Irish membership of CERN and the European Southern Observatory (ESO). This was followed up with a letter on the same topic to the newly appointed Chief Science Adviser to the Government, Prof. Patrick Cunningham and will be continued with a meeting of Heads of Physics in May 2007 with Prof. Keith Mason, CEO of the UK funding agency, PPARC.

In addition, key statistics on the profile of physics in Ireland were gathered and published, giving a useful picture of many aspects of the area.

### **Education & Industry**

The Education Group has been active producing the annual Physics courses in Ireland brochure, organising the Frontiers in Physics teachers meeting, the Tyndall Lecture, nominations for the teacher award, management of the Earnshaw undergraduate award and feedback on physics Examinations. Developing the website to become a 'portal' for Transition year students who have an interest in Physics will form part of plans for the second part of this year. The committee membership of the Education Group is evolving to become representative of a broad number of academic institutions and includes both physics teachers and third level physicists.

Paul Nugent and Vida Given, teacher network co-ordinators, manage a very wide and diverse set of objectives in supporting and hosting events for teachers from all around the country. The physics teachers meeting in Queens University Belfast, Frontiers in Physics, designing Transition Year modules, workshops, Science on Stage and Paperclip Physics to name but a few. They distribute and provide training on IOP initiatives such as SPT 11-14 and the Virtual Physics Laboratory. Maintaining and developing links and working with other education agencies such as the Junior and Second Level Support Services, the ISTA, the Teachers Panel and the ASE in Northern Ireland forms a major part of their work. Their commitment and dedication is to be applauded.

The innovative joint meeting arranged by IOPI with Engineers Ireland, on the theme of Nanotechnology, brought together participants from physics and engineering backgrounds and provided an ideal forum for people from industry and academia to interact.

A report on the extent of Physics Based Industry in Ireland is being prepared and will be launched in the autumn of 2007.

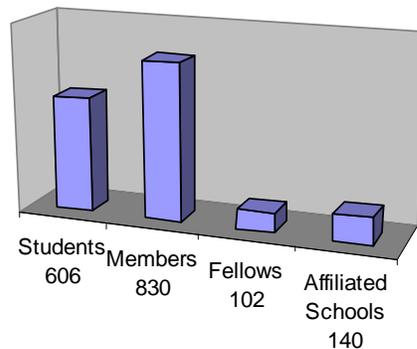
In a new departure for the Irish branch, a Key Insight Business Briefing dinner is being planned for May 2007 and will address the question of 'A Future for Nuclear Energy in Ireland?'. This high level meeting is aimed a senior industrialist and government figures and is being jointly organized with the Royal Dublin Society.

In a major project, initiated by the Irish Branch, the Institute of Physics is preparing the 'Physicists Think' campaign. This is aimed at recruitment companies and personnel managers of companies not traditionally thought of as employers of physics graduates and will highlight their employability strengths.

## Membership

The Institute of Physics in Ireland has been very active in the past year, working and planning to serve and represent the interests of more than 1725 members. Of these members 1678 are resident in either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.

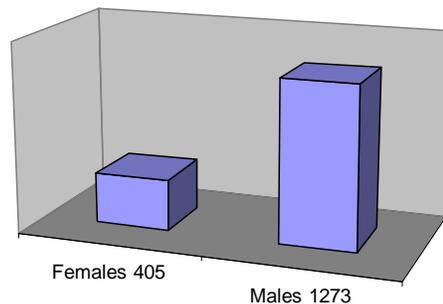
### Membership Distribution



The membership distribution between males and females and between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is shown in the table below.

Of the 102 Fellows in the Institute in Ireland only 3 are female which would suggest we should encourage more of this section of our membership to apply for Fellowship.

### Male-Female breakdown



The new IOPI website, which is managed and designed by headquarters, will be a resource that is to be enhanced and improved over the next year. A number of the archive details are being uploaded so that information such as past winners of awards will be included.

The membership email service has been kept to a minimum by only communicating updates on lectures, conferences and events.

### For the Future:

The close working relationship between the Representative, Policy Officer, Teacher Co-ordinators and Committee continues to work well as a means of delivering a very full and active programme for the Institute of Physics in Ireland. For the future we hope to encourage further collaboration with external bodies, through the medium of academic, industry and outreach events, in order to influence the future of physics in our schools, universities and in the wider domain.