

Irish Society for Immunology  
Cumann na hÉireann um Imdhíoneolaíocht  
The Irish Society for Immunology

The Irish Society for Immunology is essentially a young society, which was established in 1984. Prior to that a variety of Irish scientists and clinicians were studying and practicing Immunology, or using immunological methods but very few would have called themselves Immunologists. The founding of the Society is largely due to a small band of people who were enthusiastic about the possibilities for this discipline to shed light on the fundamental aspects of basic science and to contribute to human health. Foremost among this group was John Greally, a consultant Immunologist from St. James' Hospital and Trinity College Dublin, who was to become the Society's first president. However, other scientists and clinicians such as Denis Reen, Cliona O'Farrelly, Hugh McLoughlin, Alex Whelan, and Con Feighery put a tremendous effort into the formative years of the society, and it was their efforts that ensured that Immunology in Ireland was not isolated despite being geographically on the periphery of Europe. The membership during that period numbered between 20 and 30, and the debate at the time focused on whether the society was viable as a separate entity, or whether an approach should be made to become a region of the British Society for Immunology. The turning point in the Society's fortunes probably came during the presidential term of Hugh McLoughlin in 1990, when John Greally with the help of Denis Reen and Alex Whelan organised a very successful meeting on autoimmunity in Galway funded by the EU. This attracted speakers of the highest

international calibre including Hugh McDevitt and Jean Francois Bach. The resulting boost to the self-confidence of Irish Immunologists transformed the working of the Society. The 1990s saw radical changes to Ireland in general and these were reflected in the scientific community. Traditionally, large numbers of the high quality graduates and postgraduates who were educated by Irish universities and medical schools emigrated to the US or the UK, often never to return. The improvements in the research environment and economy during the mid-1990s saw this trend begin to be reversed. During the presidencies of first Denis Reen and then Con Feighery the Society started to expand as scientists began to return to Irish universities and establish or transfer research laboratories. This period also saw an expansion in the scientific scope of the society, which began to broaden from its early clinical base and saw scientists such as Dermot Kelleher, Kingston Mills, Luke O'Neill, Jacinta Kelly, Bernard Mahon, Jaythoon Hassan, Aideen Long, Derek Doherty, Philip Newsholme and Tina Deignan contribute greatly. The start of the new millennium is an exciting period for Immunology in Ireland, the membership is approaching 100, and the society is focusing on providing assistance to both postgraduates and established scientists. We aim to create closer links with our neighbours in the Ulster Immunology group and the British Society for Immunology and indeed throughout Europe and beyond. We wish EFIS every success for the future!