

MICROBIOLOGY

at University College Cork

Issue No. 1
September
2012

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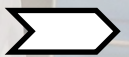
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Summer in the City

Summer 2012 will be remembered for the rain in Ireland but for nine diligent students the new Undergraduate Research Experience in Microbiology (UREM) programme will be the silver lining



The Microbiology Department encourages the training of young scientists through its new Undergraduate Research Experience in Microbiology (UREM) programme. Summer scholarship schemes provide undergraduate students who are considering a research career with practical experience in a science laboratory. Students become familiar with research processes, techniques and methodologies by conducting a small project.

This year nine undergraduate students participated in the UREM Programme which was funded by various sources including HRB, SGM, BSPP, Microbiology, APC and SEFS. The UREM Programme also provides students with an opportunity to work with well-established investigators, in high quality research environments and introduces them to research that is relevant to their studies and of benefit in relation to their academic degree.

Pictured above L-R: Jennifer O'Leary, Niamh Horan, Niall O'Mara, Kieran James, Noreen Lanigan, Stephen Murphy, Jessica Lynagh, Laura Coughlan, Sinead Murphy.

Front page: UREM programme and second year BSc Microbiology student Jessica Lynagh who was sponsored by the British Society of Plant Pathology, in the lab with her supervisor Dr Max Dow. Jessica's project examined the possibility that plant pathogenic bacteria of the genus *Xanthomonas* species can associate as symptomless endophytes in plants in which they do not cause disease. This may reveal an unsuspected phase in the lifestyle of these important pathogens.

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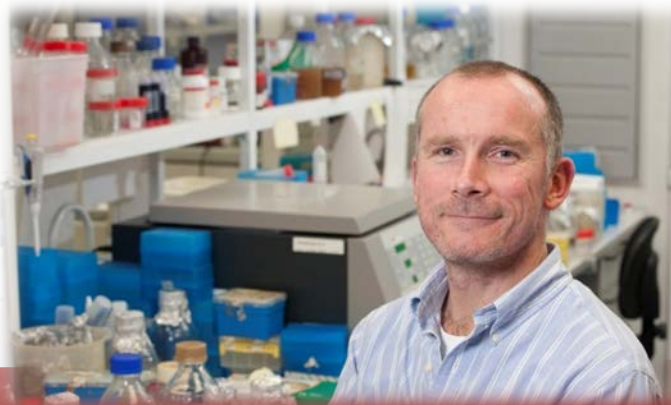
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Healthy Community

New research published in the prestigious journal Nature shows that a relationship exists between diet, gut bacteria and the health of older Irish people

The findings provide exciting new opportunities for the food industry as there is now the scientific basis for developing foods to promote healthier ageing.

The discovery was made by a multidisciplinary team of scientists from UCC and Teagasc Food Research Centre, Moorepark. Dr Paul O'Toole (below), Microbiology Department, UCC who led the study says, "It is well known that gut microbiota, or the community of bacteria in our gut, is required for immune development in infants and maintenance of health in adult life, and changes in the composition of our microbiota have been linked to inflammatory and metabolic disorders such as Inflammatory Bowel Disease, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, and obesity.



"Particular food ingredients that promote certain components of the gut microbiota may be useful for maintaining health in older individuals."

*Professor Paul Ross,
Head of Biotechnology at Teagasc,
Moorepark Food Research Centre.*

As we get older, we may experience deterioration in our dental health, salivary function and digestion, and this can also affect the good bacteria that live in our gut. Some of these changes are out of our control, but we can control our diet. However, until now, links between diet, gut microbiota composition and health in large human studies were unclear".

The team collected information on diet, physical activity, immune function, and cognitive function, and measured the faecal microbiota composition of 178 older persons living in different settings in the South of Ireland.

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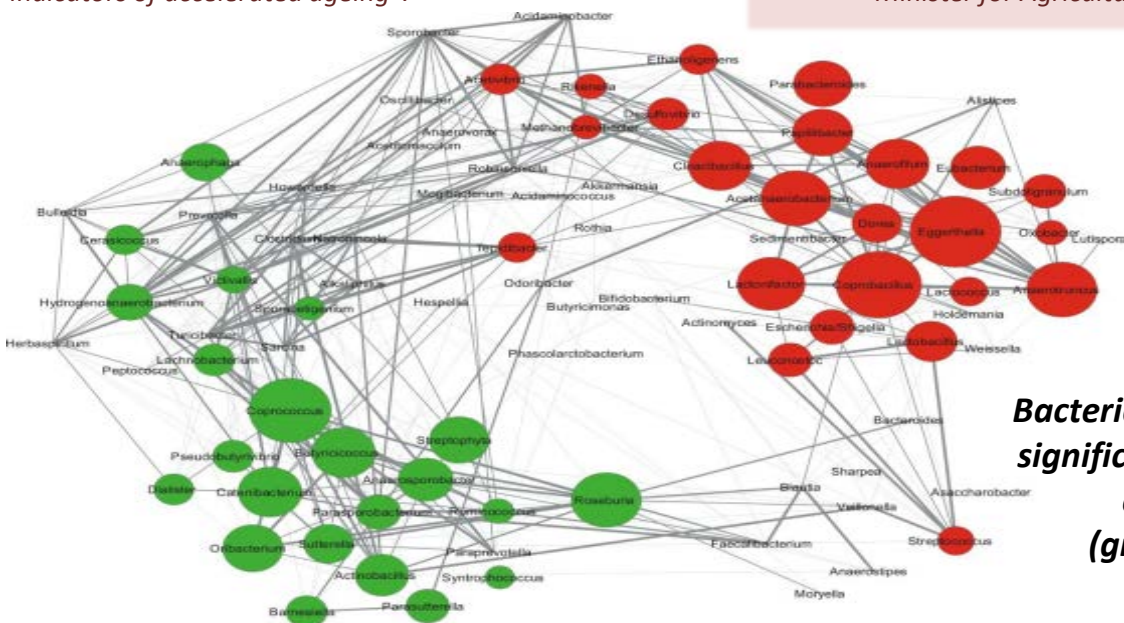
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The study funded by Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine and the Health Research Board found that the composition of the gut microbiota can positively and negatively impact the health of older people in our population. Dr O'Toole explains:

"The healthiest people live in a community setting, eat differently and have a distinct microbiota compared to those in long-term residential care. It can be inferred from findings related to increased inflammation and increased frailty, that there is a diet-microbiota link to these indicators of accelerated ageing".

"The Irish food industry will directly benefit from the scientific knowledge generated on foot of this research and be in a position to develop new food products to enhance the health of older citizens in the ever increasing ageing population. These new products will also help to achieve the targets set for Ireland's agri-food industry under Food Harvest 2020"

*Simon Coveney
Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine*



Bacterial genera that are significantly abundant in either Community (green) or Long-stay (red) residents.

Source: Claesson, M.J., Jeffery, I.B., Conde, S., Power, E., O'Connor, E.M., Cusack, S., Harris, H.M.B., Coakley, M., Lakshminarayanan, B., O'Sullivan, O., Fitzgerald, G.F., Deane, J., O'Connor, M., Harnedy, N., O'Connor, K., O'Mahony, D., van Sinderen, D., Wallace, M., Brennan, L., Stanton, C., Marchesi, J.R., Fitzgerald, A.P., Shanahan, F., Hill, C., Ross R.P. & O'Toole, P.W. (2012). Gut microbiota composition correlates with diet and health in the elderly. Nature. 488; 178–184.

The publication can be viewed online at: <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/vnfv/ncurrent/full/nature11319.html>

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High Spirits

Engineering yeast to produce a taste-retaining, low-alcohol beer

Researchers in the Microbiology Department at UCC led by Dr John Morrissey have investigated ways of engineering yeast strains to produce low-alcohol beer with otherwise comparable attributes such as taste, foaming and colour.

The development of a taste-retaining low-alcohol beer, while avoiding the processing costs incurred in reducing alcohol levels as an add-on process, has caught the attention of Europe's leading brewers. The researchers generated new yeast strains that have significant potential in this area.

These yeast strains are currently being evaluated for protection under patent. The research was supported by funding from the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine FIRM programme and is a good example of how fundamental research can lead to biotechnological applications.



With the current interest in low-alcohol beer and issues with alcohol in society, this research has also attracted a lot of media attention.

Dr John Morrissey, Microbiology Department, UCC (picture courtesy of Des Barry, Irish Examiner)

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Read a full report here:
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22934780>

Young Microbiologists

UCC hosted the second Young Microbiologists Symposium on Microbe Signalling, Organisation and Pathogenesis on 21-22 June 2012



This two-day international conference, funded under the Science Foundation Ireland Conferences and Workshops programme, brought together 150 microbiologists from 15 different countries, to discuss their current research. The meeting was specifically aimed at providing a platform for junior scientists to present their work to a broad audience. A MicroMeeting report highlighting some of the most significant advances and exciting developments reported during conference is now available (see above).



Pictured above: event organisers, Dr Delphine Caly and Dr Robert Ryan, both BIOMERIT Research Centre, Microbiology Department, UCC.

Prizewinners (left) clockwise from top left: **Victoria Marlow**, University of Dundee, UK, winner of the Biochemical Journal poster prize and Professor Colin Kleanthous, University of Oxford, UK; **Charlotte Michaux**, University of Caen, France, winner of the Nature Reviews Microbiology talk prize and Professor Mike Prentice, Microbiology, UCC; **Kate Twomey**, Microbiology, UCC, winner of the Molecular Microbiology poster prize; **Clare Kirkpatrick**, University of Geneva, Switzerland, winner of the Trends in Microbiology talk prize; **Sara Hernandez**, University of Seville, Spain, winner of the Trends in Microbiology talk prize; **Matej Butala**, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, winner of the Biosciences poster prize.

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Safe Toxins

Advancing research on food-grade antimicrobial peptides ('bacteriocins'), which can be employed to enhance food safety and improve human and animal health

Evelyn Molloy (right) graduated with a BSc in Microbiology in 2007 and was conferred with her PhD in Microbiology in 2012. During her PhD Evelyn's interest in toxins of the food poisoning bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes* led to a collaboration with Professor Doug Mitchell's lab at the University of Illinois, trips to the US and publication of a review in Nature Reviews Microbiology. In the review entitled 'Streptolysin S-like virulence factors: the continuing saga' the identification, genetics and biochemistry of streptolysin S (SLS), a bacteriocin-like toxin produced by the bacteria *Streptococcus pyogenes* is discussed. *S. pyogenes* causes a wide variety of infections of the upper respiratory tract and the skin, with complications leading to invasive diseases such as the "flesh-eating" skin disease, necrotising fasciitis, and streptococcal toxic shock syndrome. As a consequence of these diseases, and other auto-immune complications like acute rheumatic fever, and subsequent rheumatic heart disease, up to half a million deaths per year worldwide are attributed to *S. pyogenes* infections.

Further research into this group of toxins will lead to the identification of novel targets for antibiotic and vaccine development for the treatment and prevention of human disease. The research involves collaboration between Microbiology and the Alimentary Pharmabiotic Centre based in UCC and Teagasc Moorepark Food Research Centre, along with colleagues at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA.



Evelyn's PhD was supervised by Dr Paul Cotter, Prof Colin Hill and Prof Paul Ross, and funded by the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology, the Society for General Microbiology and Science Foundation Ireland. Evelyn is currently working in UCC as a Post-Doctoral Researcher with Prof Douwe van Sinderen.

Read more at:

<http://www.nature.com/nrmicro/journal/v9/n9/full/nrmicro2624.html>

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Class of 2012

This year a total of 15 PhD students and 4 MSc Research students graduated over the Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer graduations



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Microbial Altruism

Microscopes donated to Cork schools & outreach support centres

The Department of Microbiology was fortunate in receiving Sustainability and Income Generation funding for upgrading equipment for teaching support, including 30 modern microscopes and four state of the art computer controlled fermentation units. A number of old microscopes were donated to schools and to teaching and Outreach support centres within UCC.

Pictured below: Claire Lehane accepting microscopes from Professor Gerald Fitzgerald, Microbiology Department, UCC, on behalf of the Applied Sciences Department, Colaiste Stiofan Naofa.



Microbiology Department hosts promising young scientists

Two 2nd Year students from Colaiste Choilm, Ballincollig who competed in the 2012 BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition were given a helping hand by Dr Max Dow. The students approached Dr Dow about characterizing and examining microorganisms isolated from make-up brushes and test pads from leading beauty salons and department stores.

BT Young Scientist & Technology programme is aimed at secondary school students to promote an understanding and appreciation of science in young people. The programme allows students the opportunity to conduct 'hands-on' experiments in the hope of encouraging students to study science at third level. For more information see: www.btyoungscientist.ie

Pictured above: Enya McNamara, Colaiste Choilm, Kate Twomey, BIOMERIT Research Centre, Department of Microbiology, UCC, Nora Spillane, Colaiste Choilm and Dr Max Dow, BIOMERIT Research Centre, Department of Microbiology, UCC.

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International Highlights

Hokkaido University (Japan) visit Microbiology at UCC

The primary focus of the visit was to explore research collaborations between Irish Universities and Hokkaido. There is a particular interest in Food, Functional foods and the ambition to add value to foods beyond their basic food/nutrient value.



Pictured below: Gerald Fitzgerald, Microbiology, Sally Cudmore, APC, Alan Dobson, ERI, Yasuhiro Hasegawa, Hokkaido University, Tsunehisa Araiso, Hokkaido University, Kunihiro Kitano, Northern Advancement Centre for Science and Technology, Yoshinobu Kiso Hokkaido University, Colin Hill, Eddie Hughes, Director Japan, Enterprise Ireland.

The 2012 International Conference on Cyclic di-GMP and Xanthomonads.

Dr Max Dow was invited by his peers to chair the conference and was responsible for overseeing the scientific content of the conference as well as the selection of speakers, discussion leaders and attendees. The Conference took place at the National Chung Hsing University, Taichung, Taiwan. See <http://biochem.nchu.edu.tw> for more details.

Picture: Dr Max Dow (3rd from left) with other conference dignitaries



The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) appoint Professor Alan Dobson as a member of its External Review Working Group.

The overall role of the working group is to facilitate EFSA in achieving its goal in becoming globally recognized as the European reference body for risk assessment on food and feed safety, animal health and welfare, nutrition, plant protection and plant health.



Conference note:

Marine Microbiology & Biotechnology; Biodiscovery, Biodiversity and Bioremediation

This upcoming Society for General Microbiology conference will be held in University College Cork, from 14-16 November 2012. For further information please see: <http://143.239.128.67/en/mmbiotech2012/Homepage/>

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Prizes and Awards

PhD student Claire Flaherty (right) won best poster award at the 4th International Congress on Food and Nutrition which was held together with the 3rd SAFE Consortium International Congress on Food Safety in Istanbul, Turkey.



The joint congress was held in parallel with two FP7 events (Mycored and Safetechnopack). Over 547 individuals belonging to academia, industry, and governments from 41 countries participated. There were 28 sessions, including two key-note speakers and two plenary sessions that encompassed 145 oral and 266 poster presentations. It was complemented with exhibitions from both local and international companies. Best poster awards were presented during the closing ceremony of the congress with Claire's poster entitled '**Real-time monitoring of luciferase-tagged Cronobacter sakazakii infant milk formula**' achieving 1st Place.



Aramark Alumni Award for Science

Professor Fergal O'Gara, Director of the BIOMERIT Research Centre and Emeritus Professor of Microbiology at UCC, was awarded the Aramark Alumni Award for Science by An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, at a function to honour NUI Galway's graduates.

At the NUI Galway Alumni Awards 2012 were (l-r): Sandra Butler, Chair of the Alumni Association Board; Professor Fergal O'Gara, Aramark Alumni Award for Science; NUI Galway President, Dr Jim Browne; and Donal O'Brien, CEO Aramark Ireland.

Dr Robert Ryan awarded the WH Pierce Memorial Prize

Dr Robert Ryan was awarded the 2012 SfAM (Society for Applied Microbiology) WH Pierce Memorial Prize in recognition of his work aimed at understanding the complex interplay between bacterial pathogens during polymicrobial infection. For further information about the Oxoid WH Pierce Memorial Prize, please visit the SfAM website at www.sfam.org.uk.

Pictured: Dr Robert Ryan receiving his award from Richard Marsh, Director of Sales at Oxoid Ltd and Thermo Scientific.



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UCC BioSciences Institute Researcher of the Year

Dr Jerry Reen achieved first place in the postdoctoral category award for this year's UCC BioSciences Institute Researcher of the Year competition and went on to achieve 3rd place in the national competition.

Pictured right: Ms Nicole Bubien, Roche, Dr Jerry Reen, BIOMERIT Research Centre, Microbiology Department, UCC and Professor Tom Cotter, Biochemistry Department.



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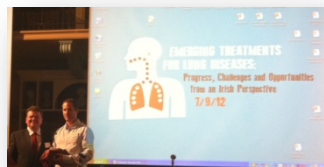
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Best poster at the Royal Irish Academy Workshop on Emerging Treatments for Lung Diseases

Dr Jerry Reen was also recently awarded best poster prize at the Royal Irish Academy Workshop on Emerging Treatments for Lung Diseases. The workshop comprised a series of presentations by clinicians, researchers and companies followed by a session to discuss the establishment of a network of interested parties. The network aims to identify research capacities, needs and opportunities with a view to developing a strategic response to the challenges in lung disease treatment.



Pictured above with Jerry, Dr Michael Maguire, Chief Executive Officer at Profcor Life Sciences.

Dr Des Field awarded training fund to attend the prestigious SFI/EI TIDA 2011 Entrepreneur Training Course

This course aims to provide SFI funded post doctoral researchers with the necessary skills and expertise to facilitate the assessment of the existing or potential market for their research (in the case of Dr Field (right) the novel nisin peptide technology), the market competition, likely partners and/or competitors, and possible funding routes to develop their research further.



Dr Marlies Mooij awarded an IRCSET EMPOWER Postdoctoral Fellowship

Dr Marlies Mooij's (left) research will be part of the Marine Biodiscovery Programme in UCC. The marine environment is emerging as a 'gold-mine' for bioactive compounds. These marine natural products possess an enormous range of novel chemical structures, quite distinct from other classes of bioactives and as such are an inspiration for creating new entities via synthetic chemistry. The aim of the project is to identify novel compounds from the marine environment, in particular from marine sponges that kill multidrug resistant bacteria.



MiXed BaG

Microbiology's Julianna O'Callaghan held her first solo art exhibition in UCC

The exhibition 'MiXed BaG', opened by Dr Dominique Bouchard, Curator of Education and Outreach at The Hunt Museum, Limerick, ran for the month of May 2012 in Café Oasis, Ground Floor Áras na Mac Léinn

MiXed BaG aptly described Julianna's collection of diverse work. The imaginative and real worlds combining to provide the viewer with an array of beautifully distinct images. Nature has heavily influenced almost every piece, from mouse and squirrel, to birch tree and body form, while quirky illustrations abound. With surreal characters thriving in graphic and word form, spilling from picture books to posters. Intense outlines of pencil and ink dominate the show, with watercolours adding a slice of colour to the collection. Julianna's aim – to make the eye want to take a closer look.

Julianna has previously exhibited in Art @ Oasis, the Jennings's Gallery, and Crawford College of Art & Design in Cork. She is currently writer-in-residence at The Hunt Museum in Limerick, where she runs writing and illustrating workshops for children, as well as producing her own short stories and illustrations inspired by the museum's collection. Her children's literary work has been published in The Looking Glass magazine.



"Julianna has a very real talent, her work is very detailed and beautifully rendered – very imaginative and ethereal. I am delighted to be the proud owner of an original 'O'Callaghan'"

Professor Colin Hill, Microbiology, UCC



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Welcoming New Staff

Dr Marcus Claesson joins Microbiology as Lecturer in Bioinformatics

Marcus completed his BSc in Chemical Engineering in 1999 and MSc in Bioinformatics in 2001 at Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden. He worked at the start-up company AngioGenetics before coming to UCC in 2002 to study for a PhD. During his PhD he was instrumental in the sequencing of the first bacterial genome in Ireland, that of a commensal *Lactobacillus* strain. He also discovered a so-called mega-plasmid which was the first one of its kind in Lactic Acid Bacteria.

Having completed his PhD in 2006, Marcus worked with data-mining at Alimentary Health in UCC. This was followed by a postdoctoral position in Dr Paul O'Toole's lab where, up to recently, he has been leading the bioinformatics platform for the ELDERMET project. The most recent findings, presenting novel links between gut microbiota, diet and health in the Irish elderly population, were published this July in Nature.

During his time at UCC Marcus has also been a guest researcher at both The Wellcome Sanger Institute in Cambridge and The Joint Genome Institute in California, where he has studied methods in comparative genomics as well as metagenomics.



Another field of interest is the role of the gut microbiome in inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) pathogenesis. Since 2009 Marcus has been awarded postdoctoral fellowships from both IRCSET and the Health Research Board for metatranscriptomics analysis of colonic bacteria in Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis patients. Using NGS RNA-Seq this method allows for high-throughput profiling of microbial gene expression, which is hypothesized to play a role in the topographic distribution of colonic lesions. Enticing preliminary analysis of a small number of patients led to both a Health Research Board Award and a SFI Starting Investigator Research Grant (SIRG). The latter award includes a PhD student and the necessary resources to continue the project on a much larger and more well-defined cohort of IBD subjects.

In addition to lecturing in Bioinformatics at undergraduate and postgraduate level Marcus will coordinate the taught MSc program in Bioinformatics with Systems Biology, now in its fourth year.

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Retirements

Department celebrates retirements

On 9 March 2012 the Department celebrated the retirement of Mr Liam Burgess and Professor Kevin Collins. Liam and Kevin worked in the Department of Microbiology UCC, for 42 and 34 years, respectively. A social gathering to mark the event with family and colleagues, past and present was held to wish them well.

Pictured below L-R: Mr Liam Burgess, Mr Pat Higgins, Professor Kevin Collins, Mr Maurice O'Donoghue.



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Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this newsletter, which is of a condensed and general nature, is accurate at the time of publication. Microbiology cannot accept any liability for any errors or misstatements or for the contents of web links which are provided for convenience only. Microbiology would like to acknowledge and thank David Waldron of the School of Food and Nutritional Sciences, for his assistance with design and technical aspects of this newsletter.



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Micro Families

Introducing some of the New Arrivals and Weddings in the Microbiology family

Nathan Caly (right) was born to delighted parents Delphine and Tristan on January 10, 2012, weighing 8 lb 6 oz



Jenn Mahony & Jason O'Driscoll
28 July 2012 in Blarney (Adam O'Driscoll groomsman on far right).



Lisa Quigley & Kevin Croarkin
23 June 2012 in St Anne's Church, Rathnure, Co. Wexford.



Máire & Arthur O'Dwyer
24 March 2012 in St Mary's and St John's Church, Ballincollig.



John O'Halloran & Edel Roche
27 April 2012 in St Josephs Church, Castleconnell, Co. Limerick.



Proud Grandparents Margaret and Pat Higgins welcomed their first two grandchildren last year, both in the same month!

Jack (left), born to parents Elaine Higgins and Gavin Martin, on the 4th March 2011, 8lbs 4oz, and his cousin Claire (below left), born to parents Michael Higgins and Theresa Cullinane, on the 31st March 2011, 6lbs 5oz.



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The MicroSoc year...

The UCC Microbiology Society had another successful year. The main events included the Department Christmas Party in the Imperial Hotel, Post-Exams reception, and the Annual Summer BBQ. Thanks to the outgoing committee members: Kate Twomey (Auditor), Ronan McCarthy (Secretary), Frank Egan (Finance Officer) and Rob Phelan (PRO). The incoming Microbiology Society Committee consists of Alan Barry (PRO), Karen McCarthy and James Nolan (Co-Auditors) and Alicia Campion (Secretary). To contact the society:

Email: alan@societies.ucc.ie

Facebook: www.facebook.com/uccmicrobiologysoc



Pictures above from the Microbiology Society Summer BBQ in Sober Lane on 9 August 2012.



Controversial win in East Cork for UCC!

The postgrads supervised/co-supervised by Dr Paul Cotter, descended on Paintwars in Aghada to battle it out on a miserable summer evening (Aug 16th).

Teagasc: Paul Cotter, Alan Marsh, Lisa Quigley, Siobhan Clarke, Peter Skuse and Eileen O'Shea.

UCC: Des Field, Catalin Iancu, Lorraine Draper, Karen Daly, Brian Healy and Stephen Stockdale. Kiera Considine rotated between the teams.

After a fiercely competitive but fun night, UCC held out for a controversial 3-1 win.

...All still recovering!?

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FIT Microbiologists...

Members of the Microbiology Staff form part of the very successful UCC Staff Athletic Club and partake regularly in the Business Houses Athletics League. Recent successes are as follows:

Pfizers 6 mile road race May '12: UCC won Grade C 1st team which included **Paul O'Toole** (38.34) and **Niall O'Leary** (39.16).

Daniel Kingston 5K Memorial, Macroom June '12: **Paul O'Toole** 2nd o/45(!!) in a time of 19.43

Garda 5K, July 12: UCC came 3rd in Grade C which included **Niall O'Leary** (18.51)

Army/Navy 5 mls, August 12: UCC came 2nd in Grade B and **Paul O'Toole** scored on this team in a time of 32.25 while UCC also came 3rd in Grade C with **John Morrissey** scoring in a time of 34.19

LeisureWorld 5 mls, August 12: Niall O'Leary 32.01; John Morrissey 33.45

Many Microbiology staff are regular lunch time runners including Paddy O'Reilly (aka **SUB-3 Marathon Runner!**), David Clarke, James Murphy, Aine Murphy, Dag Lyberg, Mike Prentice and Bernie O'Connell among others.

If you would like to join in any lunch time for a jog they leave the Mardyke every day at 1 pm



"The Runs" complete Cork City Marathon relay

Five of Paul O'Toole's Lab 339, including Paul O'Toole, James Collins, Brian Forde, John O'Callaghan and Eibhilis O'Connor, entered the Cork City Marathon (in June 2012) as part of a relay team called "The Runs." They finished in 3:10:40, and were 28th out of 570 entrants in the team relay section. Well done everyone!



Upcoming Events:

Cork-to-Cobh 15-mile and Dublin City Marathon on 29th October 2012. Many Microbiologists will be taking part!!

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