



## **TCD Student wins the 2026 Mary Mulvihill Award**

- Cian Morgan, TCD, wins €2,000 top prize in the science media competition
- Aoibheann Kearins, TCD, & Ciaran Lynch, UCD, receive €500 judges' highly commended award
- 'Time' the theme of the 2026 Mary Mulvihill Award

DUBLIN, 20 MAY 2026—Cian Morgan, a medical student in Trinity College Dublin is the 2026 winner of the Mary Mulvihill Award, the science media competition for third-level students that commemorates the late science journalist and author Mary Mulvihill (1959–2015). He received the award and a cash prize of €2,000 at a ceremony at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies this evening.

Aoibheann Kearins, who has just completed a BA in Physics at TCD, and Ciaran Lynch, who is studying for a BA in Music and Film at University College Dublin, were highly commended, and each received a cash prize of €500.

Now in its tenth year, this year's competition invited entries on the theme of 'Time', an aspect of our existence that is difficult to define but which deeply pervades our lives and our experiences. As is customary, students were encouraged to address the topic in scientific or imaginative terms, and in any format. The number and range of submissions received reflected the broad appeal of the topic. Students from nine third-level colleges across Ireland submitted entries, which included essays, personal reflections, scientific explorations of the topic, several pieces of creative writing, film and, for the first time, an original musical composition.

“The theme for this year’s award was ‘Time’, an appropriate topic given that the award is marking ten years and the Award’s committee is wondering where time goes,” said Anne Mulvihill, a sister of Mary’s and a member of the judging panel. “It was also appropriate given that in many ways Mary was ahead of her time, pioneering science communication. Once again the judges were impressed and delighted with the wide range of entries on the subject and the winning entries strongly indicate that her legacy has lasted over time.”

Cian’s winning entry, “The Cows of Carlow: A Conversation with My Grandad”, comprises an essay inspired by his own and his grandfather’s personal and historical reflections on the topic. He winds up his great-great grandfather’s old pocket watch, although he is at first unsure whether to do so in a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction. “Much to my delight, the dormant timepiece’s second hand comes to life, and the steady ticks of its mechanical heartbeat start to measure the passage of time once more.” He writes about Dublin Mean Time, Ireland’s national standard time, established in 1880, which was 25 minutes and 21 seconds behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), and the Time Ball on the roof of the Ballast Office at Aston Quay, Dublin, which was dropped down a pole every day at precisely 1.00pm, to allow sailors on the Liffey to calibrate their marine chronometers. “Meanwhile in Tullow, my great-great-grandfather’s hometown in Co. Carlow, there was no such sophisticated community timepiece. And so possession of a personal timepiece conferred considerable social status.” Yet most people ordered their day around a much looser conception of time – far removed from our current anxious preoccupation with minutes and seconds – and even the cows seemed to know what was the “right time”.

“I really liked it and found it really informative,” said Margaret Kelleher, Professor of Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama, at UCD, who presented the awards. “Cian’s entry has many of the fine qualities of Mary’s work: it conveys substantial information in a way that is very accessible and engaging, and is very well researched.”

Aoibheann’s piece, called “Time for you, Time for me”, explores her personal experiences of time over the course of her life, as well as scientific and philosophical conceptions of time. “Before I knew how to spell my own name I knew that when Mum shook my shoulders it was time for my day to begin. When Dad came home from work, it was time for tea. I knew that when my sister’s eyes welled up it was time for a hug.” She writes about ‘dunamis’, Aristotle’s idea of potentiality: “Time allows ‘dunamis’ to unfold, the unrealised to become

real”, and about Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity, which “shows that time is not universal”. General relativity adds gravity, she notes, and clocks tick differently in different gravitational fields. GPS satellites must take both into account to avoid significant errors: “Time is elastic, physical, and relational.”

Aoibheann is the second member of her family to feature among the prize-winners. Her sister Aoife, a TCD graduate who is currently pursuing a PhD on the history of mathematics at the University of Oxford, also received a highly commended award in 2020.

Ciaran’s entry, ‘Timeless’, is an original musical composition, divided into three parts, with iterations and motifs to represent the past, the present, and the future. The main melody is played on a grand piano, but Lynch also employs a wide range of percussion instruments – xylophone, marimba, vibraphone, glockenspiel, crotales, timpani crash cymbal – to mark time and to introduce dramatic new possibilities to the piece. In an accompanying essay, Ciaran writes about remembering previous struggles, sadness and regrets, but also about the need to let them go and enjoy the present, “to push forward and seize opportunities”.

The event also included the now annual Science@Culture talk, reviving a name that Mary had introduced in 1995 for an email bulletin (later a blog) that kept readers abreast of a vast range of scientific activities and events. Lynn Scarff, executive director of the Royal Irish Academy, gave a talk titled “Twenty Curious Objects” in which she explored the intersection of art, science and culture through curious objects she encountered during her career within several cultural institutions. Her brisk tour included considerations of gold cigarette boxes, government pamphlets, prehistoric gold, wasp specimens, and cannons salvaged from the Spanish armada. She said: “It is at the intersection of disciplines that uniquely curious ideas often emerge.”

The judges for the Mary Mulvihill Award 2026 were:

**Margaret Kelleher**, Professor and Chair of Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama, UCD  
**Karlin Lillington**, Writer and retired Irish Times technology columnist  
**Anne Mulvihill**, Sister of Mary Mulvihill

### **Cian Morgan – Bio**

Cian Morgan, who is from Dublin, is studying medicine at TCD, where he is a Foundation Scholar. After completing fourth year this summer, he plans to undertake an elective in the Oncology Department at St. James's Hospital. He travelled to Uganda last summer, where he gained experience in Malnutrition and Emergency Medicine at Mulago National Referral Hospital in Kampala, and also in community outreach in the Kayunga district. He previously completed an elective in creative writing, as part of the Medical Humanities module the School of Medicine offers. In his spare time, he is both a musician and a hurler. He plays guitar, bass, and mandolin, and is currently learning steel-band music in honour of his Trinidadian grandmother. He plays in the half-forward line for the Ringsend-based club Clanna Gael Fontenoy.

### **Ciaran Lynch – Bio**

Ciaran Lynch, who is from Dublin, has completed the second year of his BA in Music & Film at UCD. He is a multi-instrumentalist and composer – and can play percussion, piano, saxophone, and the double bass, as well as traditional instruments such as the wooden flute and the guzheng. A keen piano student from childhood, he began to develop an interest in avant garde music at the age of twelve, experimenting with unconventional instruments, such as metal pipes used in construction, glass turning, and homemade instruments. In addition to his studies, he is also a freelance music teacher, designer, and workshop facilitator. He is also interested in economics, medicine, and linguistics.

### **Aoibheann Kearins – Bio**

Aoibheann Kearins is from Skreen, County Sligo, and has just completed a BA in Physics at TCD. She is about to undertake an international masters degree in laser physics under the Lascala (Large Scale Accelerators and Lasers) Programme, during which she will study at Université Paris-Saclay in France, the University of Salamanca in Spain and Lund University in Sweden. She is a passionate science communicator and was science & technology editor on the University Times and on TCD Misc. Magazine. Her undergraduate research project involved functional and mathematical analyses of the properties of 19<sup>th</sup> century acoustic equipment, including tuning forks and Helmholtz resonators.

### **The Mary Mulvihill Award**

The Mary Mulvihill Award is a project of The Mary Mulvihill Association, an initiative established by the family and friends of the late Mary Mulvihill (1959–2015) to honour her memory and her work in science journalism, science communication and heritage, and to promote her legacy. It administers and awards funds to support work that commemorates her work and its significance.

[marymulvihillaward.ie/](http://marymulvihillaward.ie/)