

# Universities are Ireland's Engines of Innovation

How Trinity became the most innovative university in Europe



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Research from the US venture-capital company Pitchbook has named Trinity College Dublin as Europe's most entrepreneurial university for the past six years. This did not happen by chance: the college has been busy on many fronts to encourage students from all disciplines with an entrepreneurial bent.

Last year, Dr Diarmuid O'Brien, chief innovation and enterprise officer at Trinity College Dublin, said, 'Trinity has placed innovation and entrepreneurship at the heart of its strategy.' Dr O'Brien was speaking in response to the news that Trinity had been ranked first in Europe for producing venture-backed entrepreneurs from its undergraduate programmes for the fifth year in a row. This commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship continues at Trinity, and aims to encourage students from across faculties to become change makers, business starters, and conscientious global citizens.

## Innovation and entrepreneurship: core motivations

Innovation and entrepreneurship have been core motivations at the heart of Trinity since its inception in 1592. Before we had the language to describe this aspirational and game-changing approach to education and research, Trinity embodied its principles. In 1842, Trinity founded the first engineering school in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Three Trinity graduates – Samuel Beckett, Ernest Walton, and William Campbell – have been awarded Nobel Prizes.

This innovation-driven evolution has remained central to the college's progress. Trinity is now a leading university of research practices and the only Irish university to be a member of the League of European Research Universities. It has been recognised for its research excellence in nanotechnology, immunology, mathematics, humanities, engineering, and other fields. Research centres at Trinity include the ADAPT Centre, Connect, CRANN, Amber Centre, Trinity Centre for Digital Humanities, and CONSULT Trinity, launched in 2019.

Trinity has a clear commitment to providing a space for change makers to collaborate across disciplines, innovate together, and create for each other. This ecosystem grows in importance as we enter a knowledge-based world where innovation

is essential. As a society we face unprecedented global challenges which require agile thinkers, innovative researchers, and loud disrupters to help solve.

*The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030* report by the OECD reminds us: 'We must prepare for jobs that have not yet been created, for technologies that have not yet been invented, to solve problems that have not yet been anticipated.' This report was published two years before the Covid-19 pandemic became a problem that many had not anticipated. New attitudes, skills, and behaviours are needed that stimulate the pursuit of creative tasks, address complex problems, support sustainable employment, and foster lifelong learning in innovative ways.

The pandemic has taught us many things, but most abruptly it has taught us that we must be adaptable and resilient. Trinity is committed to providing a home for students to learn this adaptability and to challenge themselves in what they can achieve, and it is committed to supporting them as they become change-makers and entrepreneurial leaders. Entrepreneurship includes the attitudes and skills to create new value in society, not just being a business owner or founder of a start-up. These behaviours give people the willingness and ability to recognise and pursue opportunities for new value creation and problem-solving in any organisational setting.

### Tangent, the ideas workspace

Tangent, Trinity's ideas workspace, was established in 2018 as part of the university's commitment to delivering a transformative learning environment that fosters innovation and entrepreneurship. Trinity understands that putting the right people in the right place at the right time cultivates ideas and allows great things to happen. Tangent is a state-of-the-art innovation hub that serves all university students, faculty, the enterprise community, government bodies, and not-for-profit organisations. It offers a space in which multiple disciplines, schools, and indeed the wider enterprise community can come together to learn, educate, and collaborate.

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By facilitating the richness granted by interdisciplinary work, Trinity, through Tangent, aims to translate ideas into transformative social, economic, and cultural impact. Its regional and global programming aims to instil an innovative spirit and entrepreneurial hunger in students, participants, staff, and external collaborators alike, creating change makers of the future. It invites participants to embrace the opportunities presented by change, enabling them to exploit uncertainty and complexity with lateral thinking.

### Trinity Access Programme (TAP)

Trinity's innovative spirit is not confined to the academic or commercial realms. The Trinity Access Programme (TAP) was set up in 1999 to offer another pathway into Trinity for young adults whose social, economic, and cultural experiences had prevented them from going to college. TAP now works in partnerships across the education sector with students, teachers,

families, communities, and businesses to enhance access to third-level education for people historically excluded from the experience.

Tangent offers a suite of postgraduate courses, which are funded as part of the Springboard+ upskilling initiative in higher education. These courses are anchored in innovation and entrepreneurship but are tailored to sector needs and feature industry leaders as contributors. They offer students the opportunity to work on real-world problems and challenges, including questions around the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These are opportunities that make Trinity truly innovative. It not only recognises that innovative and entrepreneurial character is possible in anyone, no matter their current career path, study faculty, background, or age, but it also provides pathways through which individuals can explore their potential.

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### Grand Canal Innovation District (GCID)

Trinity is a home and playground of entrepreneurial and innovative character, and our home is growing. In 2018, the Grand Canal Innovation District (GCID) was announced. The advisory group at the Department of the Taoiseach, in its associated report, noted: ‘Progressing an innovation district in the Docklands area is an opportunity to shape development there in a way that maximises the benefits for the local area, the city, the region and country.’

This is the next step in building a home for entrepreneurial and innovative students to care for their imaginations, excite their potential, and create cultural, political, social, and economic impact. The GCID provides opportunities for the Trinity community to further engage with the Irish and international entrepreneurial ecosystem, and provides opportunities to its students to engage with that ecosystem.

Trinity challenges its students. Our programmes at Tangent invite students to challenge their thinking, apply their course learnings in a cross-disciplinary manner, and become change makers of the future. Our postgraduate offerings are accessible, our Undergraduate Certificate in Innovation and Entrepreneurship is a European leader, and our dedicated entrepreneurship programmes have supported over 1,500 students to create significant cultural, social, and economic impact. By maintaining a focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, Trinity continues to nurture its talent from across disciplines.

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“ If you can dream it, you can do it.”

– Walt Disney