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Pictured: Armand Meijers, Conor Burns and Karl O' Connor from Kishoge Community College Lucan Co Dublin and their project 'A smart facial recognition system for medical settings' at the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition 2024 in the RDS Dublin. Pics Credit: Fennell Photography

Working with Cllr Shirley O'Hara, Cllr Vicki Casserly, Cllr Kenneth Egan & Frances Fitzgerald MEP

TOURISM EVENT AND FESTIVAL GRANT 2024

South Dublin County Council are delighted to announce the launch of The Tourism Event and Festival Grant 2024. The grant is targeted at organisations and event organisers who plan to hold a public event or festival within South Dublin County Council's administrative area.

The aim of the scheme is to fund innovative events or festivals to add value to the County's tourism product Dublin's Outdoors and grow the visitor economy across key priority areas including culture, food, sports and activity. During challenging times for the tourism industry, South Dublin County Council acknowledge

the growing importance of support for event organisers.

The maximum grant available is €7,500 and directly linked to the number of spectators from outside the county or overseas.

"South Dublin County Council is delighted to open applications for the Tourism Event and Festival Grant 2024," said Jason Frehill, Director of Economic, Enterprise and Tourism Development at South Dublin County Council. "With the recent adoption of South Dublin's Tourism Strategy, it's about promoting tourism development in the County. The scheme aims to support event organisers to develop

events in the County, attracting both domestic and overseas visitors, which will have a positive impact on Tourism growth and the South Dublin economy."

Since 2018 the scheme has provided €168,440 in funding support to events taking place across the County. Grant recipient John Walsh, of Dublin Masters

International Basketball Tournament says, "The Tourism Event and Festivals Grant has been a huge factor in the growth and the success of the Dublin Masters International Basketball Tournament."

The event started back in 2013 with 17 teams. This year will be the 10th running of the event and we expect

to have 66 teams competing from all parts of Ireland and from at least 10 countries. We would not have been able to grow the event to the extent we have without this grant and the fantastic backing and support from the SDCC."

Up to €60,000 has been allocated for this year's scheme. Applications are

now being accepted.

To apply for the scheme, event organisers can complete an online application form on sdcc.ie or by visiting <http://sdcc.ie/en/services/sport-and-recreation/tourism/tourism-events-and-festivals-grants/>. Queries in relation to the scheme should be emailed to econdev@sdbulincoco.ie.



**NEWS
GROUP**

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INCREASED AVAILABILITY AND USE OF IMITATION FIREARMS IN DUBLIN IS A MAJOR CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Fianna Fáil MEP for Dublin Barry Andrews has expressed his deep concern over the ease of access to imitation firearms in Dublin. MEP Andrews has raised his concern following the

shocking gun and knife attacks at a restaurant in Blanchardstown on Christmas Eve, which has left two men dead.

MEP Andrews said: "The

attack on Christmas Eve not only shocked the people of Blanchardstown and Dublin, but also the whole country. All gun crime is unacceptable however to read the reports about the high velocity weapon that was used in this particular attack is astounding. "I have no doubt that youths are now equipping themselves with imitation firearms that are very easily purchased from any number of shops in and around the city. While officially known as airsoft guns that are not technically illegal, they are effectively an imitation gun. I have seen them myself on display and, to the untrained eye; there is very little difference between an airsoft gun and a genuine firearm."

In ongoing operations conducted over the past 12 months, such as Operation Tara and Operation Citizen, Gardaí have seized a number of imitation firearms. As recently as last month, a man appeared in court following the seizure of two imitation firearms at his

house in Dublin.

The relevant legislation governing the possession of realistic imitation firearms in public places is outlined in the Act of 1990, which has been amended to include Section 9A. This section stipulates that anyone found in possession of a realistic imitation firearm in a public place without lawful authority or reasonable excuse can be charged with an offence. Those found guilty of this offence can face substantial fines or imprisonment, depending on the severity of the case.

MEP Andrews stated: "Incidents involving imitation firearms in Dublin are deeply troubling and have significant implications for public safety. We must recognise that the possession and use of these imitation firearms can result in grave consequences and pose a risk to the well-being of our communities."

He further emphasised the importance of strict

enforcement of existing legislation, particularly Section 9A of the Act of 1990, which aims to regulate and restrict the possession of realistic imitation firearms in public places.

"I strongly urge the

authorities and law enforcement agencies to be vigilant in enforcing these regulations, and I encourage the public to support these efforts by reporting any suspicious activities involving imitation firearms," concluded Andrews.

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SOUTH COUNTY SURGICAL HUB



Pictured at the South County Surgical Hub were Stephen Donnelly TD, Minister for Health, Councillor Lilian Gueret and Councillor Charlie O'Connor.

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ANGER AS COUNCILLORS VOTE AGAINST CPO OF DERELICT SITES

A local councillor has expressed her anger at South Dublin councillors who voted down a proposal to CPO derelict sites. People Before Profit Councillor Madeleine Johansson made the comments following the January Council Meeting where she proposed a motion to Compulsory Purchase 10 sites in the county that are listed as derelict. The

motion was defeated by 17 votes with 14 votes in favour and 2 abstentions. The 10 sites that are listed on the Derelict Sites Register are all residential and include properties on Wheatfield Rd (pictured) in Palmerstown and Grange View Grove in Clondalkin, both of which have been vacant for more than 10 years.

Councillor Madeleine Johansson commented: "I'm really angry that councillors voted down my motion which called on the council to Compulsory Purchase derelict properties and use them for social housing."

"There's over 13 000 households in emergency accommodation, thousands of them including children. It's reprehensible to continue to allow property

owners to leave homes lying vacant and becoming derelict in the middle of a housing crisis. The very least that the council can do is to initiate the Compulsory Purchase on properties that have been vacant for a long time. Those homes could then be used for families who are in desperate need."

"The derelict properties are also an eyesore in local communities and cause other problems such as vermin and illegal dumping. "Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Green Party and Labour Party councillors who voted against my motion have shown that they have no interest in solving the housing crisis. Only radical action, like what I proposed, can end the housing crisis and the establishment parties have no will to do that."



NEW BUS SHELTERS FOR RATHCOOLE 126 COMMUTERS

Rathcoole Fine Gael councillor Shirley O'Hara has confirmed that bus shelters will finally be installed for 126 bus commuters.

Cllr O'Hara said "While residents have welcomed the introduction of stops for the 126 route at Rathcoole, I have on their behalf been seeking shelters be put in place at their Rathcoole bus stops"

"Recently, the National Transport Authority (NTA) responded to me to advise they are finally commissioning bus shelters at the 126 route bus stops at either end of Rathcoole (slip road on city bound side of N7 and Poinit Stil on outbound side of N7)".

The NTA in their response to Cllr O'Hara said "We have confirmed that both stop locations are suitable for the installation of bus shelters. Our bus shelter contractor - JCDecaux - has finalised the required design work and planning packs for both stop locations. We will shortly

be submitting planning applications to South Dublin County Council for the provision of bus shelters at both stop locations, subject to the receipt of the necessary letters of consent from South Dublin County Council. Assuming that planning permission is granted, the shelters will be included for installation in next years' programme".



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The Fianna Fail Team is Barry Andrews M.E.P, John Lahart TD, Cllrs Yvonne Collins, Teresa Costello, Lilian Gueret, Emma Murphy & Charlie O'Connor. Local area Reps Lynda Prendergast and Adam Smyth



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€1K A MONTH TO LIVE IN CRAMPED MOULDY ROOM IN PALMERSTOWN - IRELAND'S RENTERS DESERVE BETTER

A report in a national newspaper recently has shown that a mother and her 18-month old son are living in a damp, mould-infested one-bedroom apartment in Palmerstown at a cost of €1,000 per month. This is indicative of how bad Ireland's housing crisis has gotten, according to David Gardiner, Workers' Party rep. for Palmerstown-Fonthill.

"These conditions are terrible for anyone to

be living in, let alone an 18-month old child, but it shows how bad the housing crisis is that €1,000 a month would only get you something like this. Unfortunately this is not an isolated incident. There are plenty of stories of people renting cramped apartments or rooms for prices way above their value. As it stands, people are left with little choice but to cough up the cash."

"Elsewhere in Palmerstown,

the apartments at Palmers Gate on the old Vincent Byrne site are costing people almost €2,000 a month for a one-bedroom unit. A two-bedroom apartment there, meanwhile, costs €2,375. Why should people pay so much for so little?"

"The Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Green government is ultimately to blame. Ireland has a total overreliance on the private rental sector and the only winners are

the landlords and the developers. They go laughing all the way to the bank while working people are left struggling."

"The solution to the housing crisis is mixed-income,

universally-accessible public housing. It can provide for those who struggle to rent, struggle to buy and struggle to keep a roof over their heads. Until we get a government who are committed to public

housing, we are going to see more people living in substandard and overpriced accommodation, more people struggling to move out of their parents homes and more people dying on our streets."

NEWCASTLE: DUBLIN'S FASTEST GROWING PLACE

Lynn Tierney, local election candidate for the Social Democrats is highlighting the important role community groups and volunteers have in creating a sense of community in Dublin's fastest growing place. Ms Tierney notes "Newcastle was identified as Dublin's fastest growing place in the most recent Census, with a 46% increase in population in 6 years. Community groups and proper community facilities are therefore so important to our villages

to ensure we have what is needed to cater to a growing population."

Ms Tierney, pictured with several of the committee members of the Newcastle Lyons Development Trust, attended the group's AGM on 10th January and congratulated the committee members on their hard work over the last 18 months.

Ms Tierney encourages residents to get involved

with their local community committees. "Volunteering, with any amount of time you can give, will make a huge difference. As a community group representative myself, I know that resident working together can lead to really successful outcomes for a community".

Ms Tierney is a Local Election candidate for the Social Democrats in the Clondalkin LEA which includes Newcastle, Saggart, Rathcoole and Brittas.



Pictured left to right: Cllr Eoin OBroin, John Kinsella (committee), Faye Kinsella (committee), Laura McGuigan (committee) and local election candidate Lynn Tierney.

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PROGRESS TO RETROFIT OLDER COUNTY COUNCIL HOMES WELCOMED

Councillor Derren Ó Brádaigh has said that whilst progress is somewhat slow and overall numbers are low, he is encouraged by the headway being made to retrofit the Council's own housing stock. The Dublin Mid-West councillor represents Lucan and Palmerstown-Fonthill and was commenting in relation to queries he has made recently.

Cllr Ó Brádaigh said "Deep retrofits of the Council's housing stock are not only an essential requirement as set out by the Local Authority Retrofit Programme, that requires our Council to upgrade their housing stock to a B2 standard, but also represents a crucial investment toward driving carbon emissions down and keeping families and particularly older residents warm in their homes.

"Our Council have 9,787 dwellings in their ownership and have identified 449 homes as needing retrofitting works since they began carrying out deep energy retrofits in 2021. This figure in itself represents less than 5% in need of such upgrades, and I am informed that 248 have been completed to

date. Clearly it is important that any homes already approved for window and door replacements are completed in tandem.

Cllr Ó Brádaigh added "In relation to the remainder of homes, I have received data that says 185 homes are listed for completion in the 'immediate period'. The timeframe to complete

surveys once a list of properties has been issued to an obligated party to survey is between 1-3 months.

Cllr Ó Brádaigh also said "Energy efficiency works in Council buildings are progressing and this is to be welcomed. This includes upgrading office lighting to LED. Last October I paid a visit to the District Heating

Centre in Tallaght to be given a tour of a truly remarkable project with immense potential. The installation of solar panels on all new buildings must become a reality. It is imperative that we are applying well thought-out construction, in delivering both housing and office premises to importantly meet Climate Care obligations."

CLARIFICATION NEEDED ON LOCATION OF PUBLIC CARPARK FOR RATHCOOLE PARK AND WOODLANDS

Rathcoole Councillor Shirley O'Hara has sought an update from the council executive on the location of the Public Carpark for users of Rathcoole Park. Cllr O'Hara said "I have sought an update from the Council Executive on the promised plan for a dedicated Public Carpark for users of Rathcoole Park. Although many Rathcoole residents walk from home to Rathcoole Park, this is not possible for everyone. Rathcoole Park is a popular and wonderful amenity. Elderly and disabled residents may need to travel here by car, while it is also used for sports which brings users from further afield. A dedicated Public Carpark has been promised for some time.

Residents Beechwood and Coolamber have also sought a dedicated public carpark separate from their estate to reduce the amount of parking by non-residents on their streets which can be an inconvenience". Cllr O'Hara's call comes after the news

that the Department of Education has applied for planning permission for a 20 classroom school on their site adjacent to Rathcoole Park and Woodlands.

Cllr O'Hara continued "The planning application has raised the issue of site access for construction traffic to the Department of Education lands. This could never be via Coolamber Estate, and would have to be via the Council owned lands adjacent to Stoney Lane and the Rathcoole Woodlands. If a construction and motor traffic route is to be identified to the Department of Education site via the council owned land, this should be examined as a future location for the public carpark for recreational users of Rathcoole Park and Woodlands". Cllr O'Hara has submitted a motion to the next area committee meeting of the County Council seeking an update from Council Executive.

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INTRODUCTION OF CONTACTLESS PAYMENTS TECHNOLOGY MUST BE PRIORITISED FOR DUBLIN BUS

The introduction of contactless payments technology on Dublin buses and across the transport network should be prioritised for all passengers, according to a Fine Gael TD. Deputy Emer Higgins has called on the National Transport Authority (NTA) to prioritise the roll-out of next generation ticketing in Dublin and for the whole public transport network which would allow passengers to use a credit, debit card or smartphone to pay for fares.

Deputy Higgins said: "We live in an almost cashless society now which was in large part brought about by the pandemic. "On routes operated by Dublin Bus, passengers can only pay by coins if they don't have a LEAP card and no change

is given onboard. In an era where most people have smartphones, there should be an option to pay using contactless technology. "I previously called for the NTA to provide virtual Leap cards for use on all public transport as Ireland remains a total outlier in Europe by not being able to provide for digital payments for some transport modes.

"We are increasingly dependent on being able to pay for our goods and services on our phones and cards. In the past year there have been 1.1 billion of these transactions in Ireland. "There will always be times where people don't have change when paying a fare on Dublin Bus and may have forgotten or lost their LEAP card. In other

cases, people may not have a LEAP card because they don't use public transport frequently so need the option to pay cash. "We should accommodate passengers in every scenario, and people who prefer to use cash must also be respected and facilitated.

"We also need to be able to offer the full range of payment options to passengers and that includes digital public transport cards. "The capital is continuing to grow with more people arriving to the city to live, work and socialise and it is therefore essential that we introduce contactless payment options across the entire public transport network. "Expressway, which serve city centres destinations in Dublin,

Cork, Limerick, Galway, Sligo and Waterford, as well as rural and local services, already has on-board terminals that can take Contactless Debit/Credit Card, Apple Pay, Google Pay and Leap Card payments. The TFI Go App is also another option for Bus Éireann users.

"The Chairperson Delegate of the National Transport Authority recently confirmed it will soon appoint a supplier in the first three months of this year to build the next generation ticketing platform, which will deliver account-based ticketing across services. This will facilitate the use of mobile phones, contactless bank cards and other digital forms of payment. "Peter Strachan

told the Oireachtas Transport Committee earlier this month that 90% of passenger journeys in London are paid for with Smart card or contactless, according to their transport authority. "Mr Strachan claimed that Ireland is currently two to three years away from this level of digital payment given where the technology is now. However, he said the board of the NTA want to accelerate this as much as possible and I will be calling on them to keep the public informed as much as possible on when it can be expected. "Anything that makes life easier for commuters and visitors to our capital and encourages more people to use public transport to ease congestion on our roads would be a positive step," Deputy Higgins concluded.

TD CALLS FOR URGENT REFORM OF CAMHS

Mark Ward TD has supported the Families for Reform of CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) call for the urgent implementation of the Mental Health Commission's 49 recommendations and for

the end to discrimination of children with intellectual disabilities in mental health services.

Deputy Ward was speaking following Families for the Reform of CAMHS

contribution on the Oireachtas Committee on Health recently. Teachta Ward said "I want to commend Families for Reform of CAMHS for their contribution at the Oireachtas Committee on

Health. "Families for Reform of CAMHS are a relatively new group of parents whose children have not been receiving adequate care from CAMHS. They now have over 800 members.

"They have called for the urgent implementation of the Mental Health Commission's 49 recommendations for CAMHS, which were made following a thorough investigation into services around the State. "We have seen waiting lists for first time appointments for CAMHS peak at over 4,400 children last year in the midst of this report being carried out. Parents and young people are being let down. "Families for Reform of CAMHS have also highlighted the discrimination that young people with intellectual disabilities are facing when seeking CAMHS supports.

"They report that 85% of their members with a child with a diagnosis of autism have been negatively impacted when being referred to CAMHS, often being turned back to CDNTs. "The Mental Health Commission's recommendations would improve CAMHS delivery and the quality of care for those that are currently being turned away. Sinn Féin's legislation to regulate CAMHS under the Mental Health Act, 2001, would give statutory powers to the Mental Health Commission, allowing them to oversee the implementation of their recommendations. "I

am calling on TDs from all parties and none to support this legislation and to deliver the change needed for all families in need of CAMHS supports."

CASTLE COFFEE SHOP OPENS IN KINGSWOOD



Pictured at the Official Opening of the new Castle Coffee Shop in Kingswood Community & Leisure Centre, Cllr Lilian Guéret, Robert Gaynor & Cllr Charlie O'Connor.

EDUCATION CRISIS IN THE NEWCASTLE COMMUNITY SAYS LOCAL COUNCILLOR

Cllr Francis Timmons recently said "I attended a meeting in Newcastle recently and there was a lot of public anger from residents about a lack of a secondary school in Newcastle, the Minister of Education has decided a secondary school will be built in Citywest, this is unacceptable to an area that has grown by 46% in six years, there is just one primary school in Newcastle, many have moved to Newcastle and feel let down and angry about no secondary school in the immediate area."

Cllr Timmons continued "Shockingly just twenty young people from Newcastle were accepted into Holy Family School in Rathcoole and up to ninety weren't accepted, that's a lot of kids with no local school come September."

Cllr Timmons concluded "There is a crisis in education in our community and the Minister just won't listen. It's not good enough, this will be an election issue in the upcoming local elections and later in the general election"

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RAMS CELEBRATE DENIS COMMINS' 80TH BIRTHDAY

As the Retired Active Men's Social, RAMS returned to full activities on the 11th January 2024 the group are off to usual activities and socialising.

To start the year, RAMS celebrate the 80th Birthday of esteem member Mr Denis Commins. Denis has been a huge supporter of RAMS since its inception in 2010. He has been a great

advocate for older men, and he has contributed greatly to the success of the RAMS. Denis works tirelessly for the Peamount United Football club, he has been the Chair of the local Community centre, Newcastle-Lyons Development Trust, and he has also received the South Dublin County Council Endeavours awards. Well earned. So, they wished

Denis a very happy birthday and many years of continued good health.

A birthday cake was presented to Denis by Vice Chair, Mr Jim Nolan, who too celebrated his 80th birthday in November 2023. Many octogenarians celebrating together. Pictured Denis being presented his Birthday cake by Mr Jim Nolan.

It has become a custom of RAMS to celebrate the 80th and 90th birthdays of any members, and much to the joy of all of members. Musical Director Mr Liam O Donnell, gave a rendition of "Happy Birthday to you" and a good auld Tipperary song for Denis, Slieve na Man. All the members joined in the sing song, and a wonderful morning was had, and enjoyed by all.

The RAMS will continue to achieve goals for 2024, and the group are pre-planning educational trips and external visits for this year. RAMS host a range of social events, and outings, including games, chat over coffee & Scones, or a day

trip. They ensure that members have plenty of opportunities to enjoy each other's company

The RAMS in Rhythm were very pleased to have contributed to many charities during 2023, and supporting our charities with a sum of €55,000. The main charities to benefit from the RAMS in Rhythm donations were, Capuchin Day Centre, SVP 4 District, Down syndrome Kildare, Our Lady's Hospice, Barnardo's, Simon Community, Gavin Glynn Foundation, Newcastle Tidy Towns, Relay for Life Cancer Support, Greenogue Tractor run for Cancer research, Bobby Fund Clondalkin, Pieta House, Darkness into light Corkagh Park, Rathcoole First Responders, Irish Cancer Daff Day and St Finian's Church renovations.

The RAMS in Rhythm are inundated with requests for singing for the next coming months. The group started singing again for the New Year. Singing for residents, staff and visitors at the Clondalkin Lodge Nursing home, where they

entertained a large group of residents, who sang and clapped along to our repertoire of songs. RAMS Newcastle. social group meets every Thursday morning in the Community Centre in

RECORD HOMELESSNESS 'ANOTHER GOVERNMENT FAILURE'

TD for Dublin South West Seán Crowe has said that, so long as Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil remain in government, homelessness will continue to rise and records will continue to be broken.

Teachta Crowe said "The November homeless report from the Department of Housing shows yet another rise in all categories of homelessness on the previous month.

"In the run up to Christmas, there were 13,514 people, including 4,105 children and 193 senior citizens, in Department of Housing funded emergency accommodation. "Once again, this Government has broken all records for officially recognised homelessness.

"Over Christmas, the Minister for Housing Darragh O'Brien had the nerve to say that any 'fair-minded' person looking at the evidence would conclude that the Government's housing plan is working. "At this point, the Government are just trying to play the Irish people for fools. Their housing plan is not working and no amount of time is going to change that.

"As long as Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are in office, the worse the housing and homelessness crisis will get and records will continue to be broken month on month. "Only with a change of Government and a change of housing plan, with a real focus on ending homelessness, can we start to undo the damage of decades of bad Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael housing policy."



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BT YOUNG SCIENTIST & TECHNOLOGY EXHIBITION 2024

The winner of the 60th BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition (BTYSTE) has been announced. Seán O'Sullivan, aged 17, a 5th year student from Coláiste Chiaráin in Limerick, has won the top prize with his project, VerifyMe: A new approach to authorship attribution in the post-ChatGPT era. The BTYSTE perpetual trophy was presented to the winner this evening at the RDS by Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD and Managing Director of BT Ireland, Shay Walsh. Many local schools from Talaght, Lucan and Knocklyon took part in the annual event.

Chair of the Technology

Group Judging Panel, Leonard Hobbs said, "The judges were hugely impressed by Sean's innovative approach to addressing a problem that has only recently emerged and his programming skills in architecting a complex software solution."

Speaking at the awards ceremony this evening, Minister for Education Norma Foley TD said, "It comes in the 60th year of the exhibition, when we must give significant credit to founders Dr Tony Scott and Fr Tom Burke who had the vision and determination to first establish this event in Ireland back in 1963 and to all of those who have

nurtured and celebrated scientific research in our school communities in the years since. Our thanks also to BT for their dedication to supporting and empowering students along the way to the momentous occasion of showcasing their own scientific research at the exhibition.

"Meeting students exhibiting projects this week and witnessing the innovation, creativity and attention to detail which they have applied to their research has been a great honour. As the 2022 results of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show, 15-year-olds in Ireland

significantly outperform many of their counterparts across the OECD in science. The BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition continues to demonstrate the breadth of what's possible in our world when open and inquiring minds ask questions and explore new opportunities and solutions. Along with the Government, I am committed to continuing to promote uptake in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in our schools for the benefit of all learners."

Shay Walsh, Managing

Director of BT Ireland, which organises the exhibition, concluded by saying: "I have been lucky enough to be involved in the exhibition for almost a quarter of a century, since BT first became custodians. Being able to see first-hand the creativity and innovation of Ireland's future leaders has been a real privilege.

This year's competition has been no exception with projects seeking to address real-world issues involving AI, health, and sustainability to name but a few." While the calibre of entries across the board has been outstanding,

on behalf of all the team at BT Ireland, I would like to congratulate all the finalists of the 2024 exhibition and thank them for sharing their remarkable ideas and innovations with us. And to all this year's winners, we look forward to seeing the future impact you will all undoubtedly make. Lastly, a special word of thanks to the teachers, parents, and guardians for their ongoing support, as well as our panel of expert judges, partners, volunteers and the BT team more broadly. This is a collective effort and one we are incredibly proud to be part of."



Pictured: Marian Stefu and Ryan Farren from St. Colmcille's Community School Knocklyon and their project Haemochromatosis- why does Ireland have the highest rate in the world and what can we do about it? at the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition 2024 in the RDS Dublin. Pic Credit: Fennell Photography

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89 YOUNG DUBLINERS TO TRAVEL ACROSS EUROPE FOR FREE IN 2024

89 young Dubliners recently received their free travel passes to explore Europe in 2024 under the DiscoverEU programme, the European Commission announced. DiscoverEU gives 18-year old Europeans from all backgrounds the opportunity to travel across Europe, learn from other cultures, build new friendships with fellow Europeans, and explore their European identity.

Dubliners are the largest group among the 407 lucky Irish winners who will also get a second pass for a friend to accompany them in their European travel adventures. The second largest bunch of Irish winners

come from counties Wicklow, Kildare, Meath and Louth - 83, while Cork and Kerry together have 67 young European voyagers.

In total, 768 18-year-olds from Ireland applied for the free travel passes in early October 2023 in the current round of Discover EU. Across Europe, a total of 144 038 young applied and 36,318 of them won travel passes. They will travel mainly by rail between March 2024 and May 2025. The next round of DiscoverEU applications will open in April 2024. To be eligible, young people must be EU citizens or legal residents of the EU.

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NEW AI ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME FOR START-UPS AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Dara Calleary TD, Minister of State for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation, has recently announced a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) accelerator programme for start-ups at University College Dublin (UCD). The 6-month AI Ecosystem Accelerator, which begins in April, will be delivered by NovaUCD, the university's hub of innovation and start-up activities, in partnership with CeADAR, Ireland's National Centre for Applied AI.

The focus of the new accelerator programme is to support entrepreneurs who are developing disruptive AI solutions in sectors including, healthcare, cybersecurity, education, sustainability, finance, content creation, supply chain and customer service, for a global market. The programme is being funded through the European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) framework, a Europe-wide initiative with funding of €700 million from both the European Commission and the Governments of member states.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, through Enterprise Ireland, is leading on the EDIH programme for Ireland and CeADAR has been designated as the European Digital Innovation Hub in AI for Ireland. Targeted supports for participants on the AI Ecosystem Accelerator include a dedicated commercial mentor and workshops on value proposition, route to market, sales strategies and securing investment. Participants will have access to co-working space at NovaUCD and access to the NovaUCD community of founders, investors, business partners and student interns. Participants will also have access to CeADAR's EDIH services which include AI technologies, and research expertise with technical mentorship.

Applications are open for the programme via <https://www.ucd.ie/innovation/aiecosystem/>

Announcing the AI Ecosystem Accelerator, Minister Calleary TD said, "There is no doubt

Ireland's entrepreneurs and founders have the talent, the creativity, and the drive to seize the opportunities of AI to improve the way we all live and work. Sitting at the crossroads of higher education, industry, and research, the AI Ecosystem Accelerator programme aims to support AI start-ups grow through dedicated technical and commercial supports.

I am delighted that funding is in place to support the acceleration of enterprises in this space, which is key element in our National AI Strategy "AI - Here for Good". My ambition is for Ireland to become a leading country in using AI to the benefit of our citizens, through a people centred and ethical approach to AI adoption and use. I encourage all interested AI start-ups to consider applying and be part of Ireland's AI ambitions."

Marina Donohoe, Head of Research and Innovation, Enterprise Ireland, said, "The adoption and deployment of AI technologies is critical to driving the competitiveness and innovation of Irish businesses in international markets. Many AI-driven Irish businesses are scaling globally, with a number of excellent start-ups following in their tracks. Enterprise Ireland sees a major opportunity for Irish entrepreneurs to take the lead in this ever-changing field.

The new AI Ecosystem Accelerator programme, funded through the EDIH programme managed by Enterprise Ireland, will be delivered by NovaUCD in partnership with CeADAR, and will nurture cutting-edge AI solutions and provide strategic support to help AI-driven businesses thrive in a global market."

Since opening in 2003 NovaUCD has developed a strong track record and has supported 550+ start-ups and early-stage ventures through the services it provides, and through business support programmes run and managed by NovaUCD. In addition, the NovaUCD entrepreneurial community has now raised €1.3+ billion in equity

funding. Tom Flanagan, Director of Enterprise and Commercialisation, UCD said, "We are delighted to be announcing a new AI Ecosystem Accelerator programme which we will be delivering with CeADAR to showcase and support the most advanced AI start-ups in Ireland.

We are currently seeking applications from Irish-based start-ups with really novel AI based products or services, who want to be part of an ecosystem of the most successful entrepreneurs in Ireland using AI. Participants on the programme will have the opportunity to network, collaborate and learn from experienced AI founders from the wider NovaUCD ecosystem such as Biosimulytics, Binarii Labs, Corlytics, DOCOSoft, Oblivious and Wayflyer."

CeADAR's mission is to help industry in Ireland adopt AI. The Centre has been awarded a multi-million-euro project as part of the EDIH programme to support start-ups and SMEs from all over Ireland who are at the early stage of their AI journey or just curious to find out how using data can increase their business.

Dr Ricardo Simon Carbajo, Director of Innovation and Development, CeADAR, said, "The AI Ecosystem Accelerator is one of the key services of CeADAR's European Digital Innovation Hub programme. Run in partnership with NovaUCD the programme will provide entrepreneurs who are leveraging the power of AI with the required support, knowledge and network to accelerate their start-ups from ideation to investment stage. We encourage entrepreneurs to find out the benefits of accelerating their venture with us and the range of other funded services for companies as part of CeADAR's EDIH programme."

Applications are now open for the first AI Ecosystem Accelerator programme via <https://www.ucd.ie/innovation/aiecosystem/>. The 6-month programme will begin in April and will end with a Demo Day in September.

RELAUNCH YOUR CAREER IN 2024 WITH UCD'S ONLINE GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN CREATIVITY, INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Jan Carroll, Fortify Institute founder on the UCD Graduate Certificate in Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship:

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That was a shift in mindset, realising that 'yes, of course I can do that.' I would say to anyone who is interested in starting their own business

- no matter what age you are (one of the things we learned on the course was that the older you are when you start a business the more likely it is to be successful) - definitely give yourself the space and time to investigate your ideas, and the Innovation Academy's

Graduate Certificate in Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship is a fantastic place to do just that."

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Jan Carroll - Fortify Institute Founder



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NEW SKODA ENYAQ COUPE OFFERS ELECTRIFIED ELEGANCE



By Breda Corrigan

The all-new Skoda ENYAQ Coupe iV is based on the Vision iV concept introduced in 2019, and it features an elegant, timeless design with clean lines and the sporty silhouette of a coupe. Shaped to achieve superior aerodynamic efficiency, the ENYAQ Coupe iV is distinguished from the regular ENYAQ iV not only by its silhouette, but also by its body-colour sills, distinctive bumpers, and stylish rear spoiler. The all-electric ENYAQ Coupe iV's dominant characteristics are its long range, zero emissions, state-of-the-art technology, and a dynamic driving experience. Depending on specification, the ENYAQ Coupé has a range of up to 545 km on the WLTP combined driving cycle. There is a choice of two battery sizes, rear- and all-wheel drive, plus power outputs ranging from 180hp to 295hp. Prices start from €56,710 inclusive of a 3-year maintenance and tyre plan.

Light & Airy Cabin.

A panoramic glass roof is standard for the ENYAQ Coupe iV. The front and rear windcreens form a unified design unit, adding to the car's attractiveness. The panoramic roof is fixed, and it is separated from the front and rear screens by padded cross-bars. From the inside, the panoramic roof takes up most of the ceiling area and it makes the cabin light and airy in the process, while a thermodynamic coating ensures that temperatures within the cabin are pleasant at all times. Just as with the regular ENYAQ iV, the coupé is available with the optional Crystal Face where the vertical ribs of the striking Skoda grille are illuminated by 131 LEDs, while a horizontal light strip rounds off the car's stunning look.

Trim & Battery Options.

The car's battery cells are incorporated into the floor, and this lowers the car's centre of gravity, which is important when driving around bends and for preserving the maximum amount of space for passengers and cargo. Two battery capacities are available: 62kWh and 82kWh,

with usable capacities of 58kWh and 77kWh respectively. These are the basis for the names of the different versions of the car: iV 60 and iV 80 - both of which send power to the rear wheels, with the 80X variant (Coupe iV & Sportline iV only) benefitting from an all-wheel drive drivetrain. In terms of specification, the ENYAQ COUPÉ closely mirrors that of its SUV sibling, with Coupe iV (60 & 80), Sportline iV (60 & 80) and flagship RS (80 only) versions on offer.

Power & Charging Options.

Power output starts at 180hp with the rear-wheel-drive ENYAQ Coupe iV 60. The ENYAQ Coupe iV 80, also rear-wheel-drive, produces 204hp from its 82-kWh battery. In addition to this larger battery, the ENYAQ Coupe 80X features a second motor on the front axle, making it all-wheel-drive, with a system output of 265hp. The outstanding aerodynamics of the ENYAQ Coupe contribute to the car's high level of efficiency. Meanwhile, the low drag coefficient has a positive impact on the vehicle's maximum range, which is up to 545 km WLTP for the ENYAQ Coupe 80. Charging the ENYAQ Coupe's batteries from 0-100% can be done via a domestic 7kW wallbox in 9.5 hours or 13 hours for the iV 60 and iV 80 respectively, but the charging times drop to just over 6 hours and 7.5 hours respectively via an 11kW wallbox charger. However, at a public DC fast charging station, the car can achieve a 5-80% charge in as little as 29 minutes (model and battery dependent).

Inspired By Modern Living.

The interior is defined by the Design Selections which are inspired by modern living environments and use natural, sustainably processed and recycled materials. With the exception of the 5.3-inch Digital Cockpit, which displays the most important driving information, everything else takes place on a central 13-inch colour touchscreen. The intuitive infotainment system provides access to Skoda Connect,

SmartLink, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi hotspot, and many other services, while the standard touch-slider can be used to change the music volume, zoom in and out of the navigation map, or change the air-conditioning temperature. Additionally, the system comes with a DAB radio, 2 x USB-C ports and 8 speakers as standard. The 2.77m wheelbase in the ENYAQ Coupe provides the driver and passengers with terrific levels of leg, elbow and head room, so that every journey can be completed in spacious luxury. The cavernous boot in the ENYAQ Coupe iV has a floor area of 1m squared, with a volume of 570-litres behind the rear seats, and it comes with a variable boot floor, cable storage bag, cargo restraint system and useful hooks to keep items in place.

Key Standard Equipment.

Standard specification across all trim variants includes: 19-inch "Proteus" alloy wheels, panoramic sunroof, LED headlights & tail lights, LED daytime running lights, chrome window surrounds, radiator grille with chrome surround, body-coloured door sills and bumpers, rear spoiler, Climatronic dual-zone air-conditioning, cruise control with speed limiter, keyless start/stop, front & rear parking sensors, rear view camera, power-folding door mirrors, auto lights & wipers, 13-inch touchscreen display, navigation system, Bluetooth & voice control, Smartlink (Apple CarPlay and Android Auto), DAB radio, fabric & leatherette upholstery, front centre armrest, rear centre armrest, leather multi-function steering wheel, LED ambient lighting & footwell lights, 'Welcome' logo projection, ISOFIX child seat anchor points, multiple airbags, and a seat belt warning system, along with a host of driver assistance systems. Sportline and RS specifications attract an even higher level of standard equipment.

Test Car Details.

My test car was a Skoda ENYAQ Coupe iV 80, which was finished in Brilliant Silver metallic paint, with optional Cognac Brown Leather upholstery and interior trim. Also included

was an optional 'Advanced Pack' which incorporates a heads-up display, 'Crystal Face' illuminated front grille, heated windscreen, heated front & rear seats, and a Canton sound system. The ENYAQ Coupe iV 80 is a dynamic performer and, thanks to its 204hp and 310Nm of instant torque, it can complete a 0-100km/h sprint in just 8.5-seconds, on its way to an electronically-limited 160km/h top speed. The car feels refined and self-assured on the road, and a well-judged suspension set-up ensures that rutted road surfaces are soaked up in a composed manner. The steering is well-weighted and precise in its operation, and this makes manoeuvring in and out of parking spaces a simple task - a task that is greatly aided by the standard front & rear parking sensors and a rear-view camera. The ENYAQ Coupe takes motorway driving in its stride and, with the provision of ample mid-range punch from the electric motor, overtaking slower moving traffic becomes a safe and predictable exercise. Thanks to multiple seat and steering wheel adjustment options, it is easy to find a perfect driving position, and the height-adjustable centre armrest enhances the relaxed driving experience.

Verdict & Pricing.

The new Skoda ENYAQ Coupe iV is a truly impressive fully-electric SUV-Coupe in every way - from its handsome good looks, to its plush and spacious cabin, cavernous boot, and generous equipment tally across all trim variants. It has a good real-world driving range, and it has a 1,000kg braked-trailer towing capacity in rear-wheel drive format, and this increases to 1,200kg in all-wheel drive guise. Pricing for the new Skoda ENYAQ Coupe iV starts at just €53,210 (iV 60, inclusive of an SEAI Grant of €3,500 for private buyers, where applicable) with my test car specification priced from €62,685 (quoted prices are on-the-road, including a tyre and maintenance plan). A 3-year/150,000km warranty comes as standard, along with 3-years Roadside Assistance and an 8-year battery warranty (T's & C's apply).

VOLUNTEERS FROM SPECSAVERS LIFFEY VALLEY EMBARK ON A SIGNIFICANT JOURNEY TO KOLKATA

Specsavers volunteers recently played a crucial role in supporting 2,414 individuals living in Kolkata's Street and slum communities in India. Among those volunteers, was Lisa Wash, Store Director at Specsavers Liffey Valley, Clondalkin and Maynooth and Abby Gorman, a Dispensing Optician at Specsavers Liffey Valley. As Lisa, Abby and their team navigated the harsh reality while volunteering at The Hope Hospital Eye Clinic, they visited local street and slum communities where they provided eye health care to those living on the streets.

During their week-long trip, the team of expert opticians visited eleven different locations and gave eye checks to 2,414 patients, dispensed over 1,904 glasses, and in more severe cases, referred patients to Hope Hospital for surgery. For the majority of these people this was their first time ever seeing an Optician and availing of the basic of eye health care that we often take for granted here in Ireland.

One of those patients was Clara Halder, a 56-year-old community care giver. A hugely passionate reader, books have always been Clara's escapism from reality, however in recent years she has struggled with deteriorating vision. What once brought her joy,

reading now brought her terrible headaches. Without opportunity or spend to see an Optician or Doctor about her eyesight, she found herself having to sacrifice her passion of reading. However, when Specsavers came to her local community with the mobile Eye Clinic she queued to be seen and was overjoyed when she was prescribed glasses and given a pair on the spot to take home. Speaking to Specsavers she said she 'can't believe she gets to take these glasses home and for nothing in return. This is a gift that you cannot possibly understand the value of. This will bring me back my joy, my peace and it's something for just me to have.'

Despite the seemingly routine nature of the eye care provided, many individuals treated by Specsavers colleagues had never accessed such services before. Dr. Samran, CEO of The Hope Hospital, emphasised the significance of the visit, noting that 90% of cases of blindness could have been prevented if timely treatment was available. This highlights the critical impact of the Specsavers team's efforts in bringing essential eye care to those who had previously lacked access.

Eight-year-old Amaira Gulzar was brought to

the Specsavers eye clinic where she spoke of sore eyes and headaches. On testing, it was clear that she needed glasses and of a very high prescription so the symptoms she complained of were not surprising. Amaira had never realised that she couldn't see clearly, assuming her vision was how all people saw things. On trying on glasses, she was overwhelmed and surprised, not quite believing the clarity she had been missing out on. Amaira was excited to get to school the next day to see how the blackboard would appear with her new glasses and was so thankful to Specsavers and Hope for giving her clear sight.

For the people seen by Specsavers on this trip to Kolkata, having glasses can be a life changing tool, be it to help in their education or help them to obtain work to support their families. This was the case for 57-year-old Dannu Prasad Ladar. A long-haul driver, Dannu is the sole provider for his family of a wife and three children. Struggling with cataracts in both eyes, Danny's job was becoming increasingly challenging and stressful, not to mention dangerous. He had refrained from seeking medical intervention in fear that he would lose his job and his family's source of income and also not be able to afford the healthcare. He speaks of the

night he stumbled upon the Specsavers Night Clinic as a 'blessing I will be eternally grateful for'. Head of Optometry at TUD, Declan Hovenden, tested Dannu and refereed him to Hope Hospital for surgery where he would avail of double cataract surgery at no cost. Dannu was also prescribed glasses which would alleviate some of his vision issues in the meantime, allowing him to continue working until his surgery. The prescription would then be updated post-surgery at the Hope Hospital to better suit his needs. This support and care will ensure Dannu continues in his employment for many years to come, ensuring the ongoing support of his family.

Following her visit, Lisa Walsh said: 'I am so grateful that we got the opportunity to visit Kolkata with The Hope Foundation again this year. 'What's really wonderful about The Hope Foundation is that they are working alongside the street communities in Kolkata, and they are changing the lives of everyone in this community. It was a privilege to be there to help them on their journey and to see the benefit of our supports to the hundreds of people we treated. 'Everyone on the team from Specsavers rose to the challenge and really stepped up. They accept the difficult working conditions and give their everything, wanting to work morning and night'.

Abby said: This trip was really special. We were able to treat a lot of children and they were so excited to see us. It's incredible to think that something so small to us can have such a massive impact on others less fortunate.

At the end of their week-long volunteering trip, Specsavers presented a cheque of €135,000 to founder of The Hope Foundation, Maureen Forrest. This significant donation will play a vital role in sustaining the eye care clinic in Kolkata. Maureen Forrest, Founder of the Hope Foundation explains that this programme 'is the difference between life and death to people who can't feed their families.' She continues: 'Vision is

everything to people and for us to be able to support them in their vision journey is a great privilege.'

In addition to the staff from Specsavers, four optometry students from Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin), Eimear Kilroy, Irene Finnerty, Brid Stack, and Ava Shiels and Paula James along with their Lecturer and Head of Optometry, Declan Hovenden travelled to Kolkata. Specsavers has an academic partnership with TU Dublin, providing expert mentorship and support to students of Optometry. The partnership is to help students develop the necessary skill sets required to excel in a professional environment and in their academic studies, so Specsavers were thrilled to be able to bring some students from the course to

Kolkata to help with their mission.

The Hope Foundation Ireland is a registered Irish charity working with street and slum children in Kolkata. The charity works to free children and poor families from lives of pain, abuse, poverty, and darkness and seeks to improve their lives by providing access to healthcare and nutrition, education, drug rehabilitation and life skills and training. With the help of Specsavers and The Hope Foundation, improved eye care will be made available to the children living in slums and hospitals in Kolkata.

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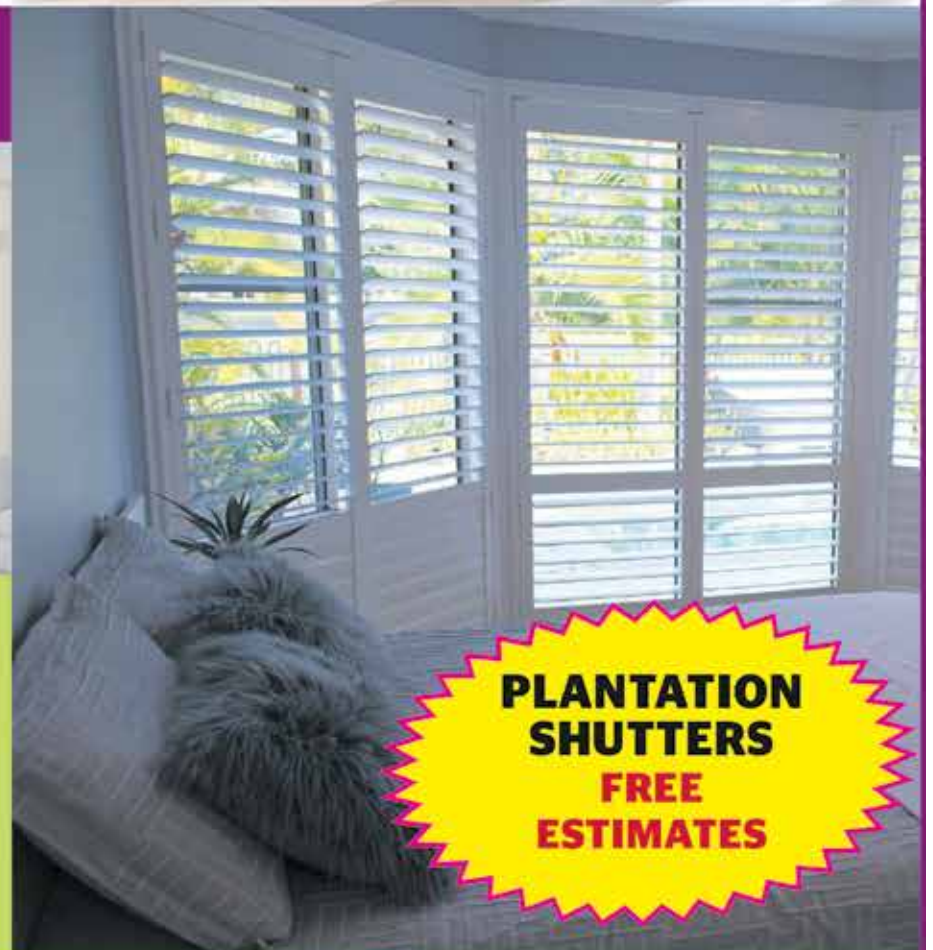
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