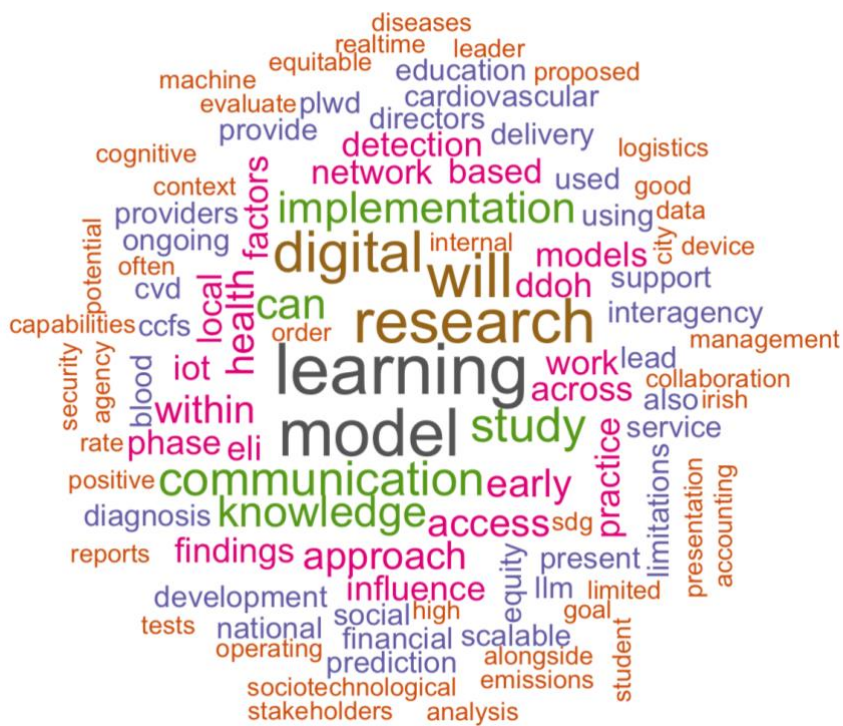




NCI Research Day

7th edition

Thursday 18th of June 2026

9:00 am – 13:30 pm

Executive 1

(Online Live on MS Teams)

Agenda: NCI Research Day 2026

Thursday 18th June 2026, Executive 1, National College of Ireland

09:00 – 09:05	Welcome Introduction Dr Arghir-Nicolae Moldovan (<i>School of Computing</i>)
09:05 – 09:15	Welcome Speech Prof Gina Quin (<i>President, National College of Ireland</i>)
09:15 – 09:45	No One Protects What They Don't Care About: Reconnecting Head, Heart, and Hands for Research That Matters (Keynote) Dr Lucia Walsh (<i>Office of the Vice President for Sustainability, Technological University Dublin</i>)
09:45 – 10:00	Adaptive Sparse-Aware Quantized Deep Learning for Scalable and Privacy-Preserving IoT Networks Dr Eric Gyamfi (<i>School of Computing</i>)
10:00 – 10:15	Facilitating and supporting interagency collaboration in a community-based Area Based Childhood (ABC) programme in Ireland, the role of the lead agency Kappa Grealy, Jacqueline Cullen & Rhonda Hill (<i>Early Learning Initiative</i>)
10:15 – 10:30	The Influence of Cognitive Communication Factors on the Preparation of Financial Narrative Board Reports Dr Donnchadh Ó Madagáin (<i>Finance</i>)
10:30 – 10:45	The Digital Determinants of Health: A New Era for Global Public Health Dr Nicole Gross (<i>School of Business and Social Sciences</i>)
10:45 – 11:00	A game-theoretical model for green urban logistics coordination: exact and data-driven methods Dr Ade Fajemisin (<i>School of Computing</i>)
11:00 – 11:15	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11:15 – 11:30	Social Equity and the Mersey Gateway PPP: Bridge to Prosperity or Route to Inequality? Desmond Gibney (<i>School of Business and Social Sciences</i>)
11:30 – 11:45	Early Diagnosis Prediction for People with Cardiovascular Conditions using Machine Learning Methods Dr Charlyn Rosales (<i>School of Computing</i>)
11:45 – 12:00	An Update on Research from the ProBrain Lab: The CR-Ireland and SUSTAIN-CST Projects Dr Michelle Kelly & Dr Caoimhe Hannigan (<i>School of Business and Social Sciences</i>)
12:00 – 12:15	A Scalable RAG-Enhanced Multi-LLM Architecture for Intention-Aware Autonomous Vehicle Decision-Making Dr Mohit Garg (<i>School of Computing</i>)
12:15 – 12:30	Exploring Accounting Student's Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Internships as a Mode of Learning in Higher Education Tara Cheevers (<i>School of Business and Social Sciences</i>)
12:30 – 12:45	Closing and Awards Dr Arghir-Nicolae Moldovan
12:45 – 13:30	<i>Lunch</i>

Speakers

Keynote Speaker: Dr Lucia Walsh

*Office of the Vice President for Sustainability,
Technological University Dublin*



Title: No One Protects What They Don't Care About: Reconnecting Head, Heart, and Hands for Research That Matters

Abstract:

In this opening keynote, Lucia will reflect on how research can contribute meaningfully to thriving for all within the means of the planet. While research often centres the “head” through evidence, analysis, and knowledge, meaningful change also calls for the “heart” of care, connection, and compassion, and the “hands” of action, practice, and responsibility. Drawing on examples from Lucia’s research and practice in sustainability and entrepreneurship education, transformative learning, social innovation, regenerative leadership, and place-based work, the talk will explore how research and practice can help us ignite curiosity, question taken-for-granted assumptions, disrupt “business as usual”, and respond with greater care, courage, and responsibility. It will also invite reflection on power and privilege, how we show up in our everyday work, and what it means to be a good ancestor.

Biography:

Dr Lucia Walsh is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Business at TU Dublin, currently seconded as Sustainability Education & Innovation Lead in the Office of the Vice President for Sustainability. A deeply curious educator and researcher, her work explores how we can reconnect what has become disconnected between head and heart, knowledge and action, and human systems and the living world.

Her teaching and research span social entrepreneurship and impact, regenerative business and leadership, and transformative approaches to sustainability and entrepreneurship education. She is particularly interested in cultivating awareness, care, and agency in learners, enabling them to understand complex challenges, critically question underlying assumptions of ‘business as usual’, and engage with them more consciously and thoughtfully. Lucia’s research has been published in leading international journals and presented at international conferences, and her work has been recognised through a number of awards.

Lucia’s work is driven by a commitment to contributing to a world where we can all thrive within the means of our planet and to engaging others in developing the mindsets, courage, and compassion needed to respond to the challenges of our time and ultimately to consider what it means to be a good ancestor.

Dr Eric Gyamfi
School of Computing



Title: Adaptive Sparse-Aware Quantized Deep Learning for Scalable and Privacy-Preserving IoT Networks

Abstract:

The growing deployment of Internet of Things (IoT) devices in smart environments introduces critical security challenges due to limited computational capabilities and increasing exposure to cyber threats. Traditional deep learning-based intrusion detection systems (IDS) are unsuitable for real-time operation on these resource-constrained devices. Hence, this research proposes an Efficient IoT security system based on Sparse-Aware Quantised Deep Learning (SAQDL), which integrates structured pruning, quantisation-aware training, and a lightweight optimisation module to maintain high multiclass attack detection accuracy under strict resource limitations.

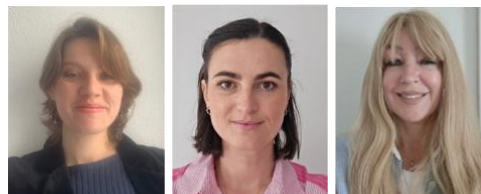
Biography:

Dr. Eric Gyamfi is an Assistant Professor at School of Computing, National College of Ireland. His research focuses on cybersecurity for the Internet of Things, machine learning, AI in cybersecurity, MEC & wireless networks and secured quantum communication for IoT. He has led multiple interdisciplinary research initiatives integrating machine learning, network security, and distributed systems, with publications in reputable international venues. Dr. Gyamfi is also an experienced educator committed to applied, concept-driven teaching that bridges mathematical foundations with real-world cybersecurity implementation. His academic and industry-orientated work reflects a strong dedication to advancing secure and intelligent computing systems.

Links:

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=ZIVvFYAAAAJ&hl=en>
www.linkedin.com/in/eric-gyamfi-0b618891

**Kappa Grealy, Jacqueline Cullen &
Rhonda Hill**
Early Learning Initiative (ELI)



Title: Facilitating and supporting interagency collaboration in a community-based Area Based Childhood (ABC) programme in Ireland, the role of the lead agency

Abstract:

This presentation assesses how the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) charity, facilitates and supports interagency collaboration between local organisation for children and families, as lead agency in an Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme in Grangegorman, in the North-West Inner City of Dublin. Based on a co-creation interagency model; incorporating expertise of local partner organisations and ELI staff; from programme oversight to administration and research. Alongside the site in Dublin Docklands and North-East Inner City, which ELI has been involved in since this beginning in 2012, ELI has come into this role as lead agency in January 2025 in Grangegorman. This examines the early stages of this role, and how ELI as lead agency can reflect, reinforce and support existing interagency collaboration as well as build on it existing networks and systems. It adopts a Community Action Research methodology, operating within the participatory and transformative paradigms, and a mixed method approach (surveys and interviews) engaging internal staff, partner organisations and local stakeholders. This research is preliminary and ongoing. It outlines the working approach to facilitate and support interagency collaboration in the area, outlines the steps taken so far and what work is still in progress.

Biographies:

Kappa Grealy is the Data and Evaluation Coordinator at the Early Learning Initiative. She holds a Masters in Psychosocial and Community Intervention from the Autonomous University of Madrid. From 2022 to 2024 she worked in a research project aimed at improving the well-being and inclusion of adolescents and young people with migrant and refugee backgrounds in educational contexts in Madrid. She completed her Master's Thesis within this project, on the role of social entities, and designed a best practice guide for professionals working with migrant adolescents in that context. Kappa's research interests include early childhood education, the wellbeing of young migrants and refugees, community-based interventions for marginalised groups, and interagency collaboration. In her role at ELI, Kappa supports the coordination of research and evaluation activities for the Area Based Childhood, Dublin's Inner City and National Programmes.

You can find a link to ELI's research lab here: [ELI Research | National College of Ireland](#)

Jacqueline Cullen is an early years professional with over 15 years' experience supporting children, families, and educators across the education, disability, and community sectors. She holds qualifications in Early Years Education, Applied Behaviour Analysis, and Leadership and Management, and has a particular interest in inclusion, child development, and collaborative practice. In her current role as Senior Specialist with Grangegorman ABC, Jacqueline works with a range of partners to support positive outcomes for children and families, drawing on her experience in service development, mentoring, and professional support.

Rhonda Hill is an experienced higher education administrator at the National College of Ireland. She has worked across a range of programmes including the Early Learning Initiative (ELI), the CINNTE Institutional Quality Review in Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (QIE), and the ABC Programme at ABC Grangegorman.

Her experience includes supporting programme coordination, governance, communications and partnership working across education and community settings. As Project Officer for CINNTE, she supported the coordination of NCI's institutional quality review process, while her work in ELI and ABC Grangegorman has focused on supporting children, young people, families and communities.

Rhonda was a recipient of the NCI President's Impact Award as part of the CINNTE Working Group and is the author of *Anything but Covid*, published by the Community Action Research Network (CARN). She co-presented *Facilitating and Supporting Interagency Collaboration in a Community-Based Setting* with Kappa Grealy and Jacqueline Cullen at NCI Research Day 2026.

Dr Donnchadh Ó Madagáin

Finance



Title: The Influence of Cognitive Communication Factors on the Preparation of Financial Narrative Board Reports

Abstract:

Internal communication of financial information to boards of directors is a key element of corporate governance practice. Cognitive communication factors (CCFs) have the potential to affect or influence, often unconsciously, the judgement of managers preparing internal financial board reports. This study explores the influence of CCFs on the preparation of financial narrative board reports. Qualitative semi-structured interviews are conducted with 24 senior finance executives from a range of industry sectors. The data is analysed using thematic analysis. It is found that communication between management and non-executive directors is facilitated and influenced by a range of CCFs: common ground and shared intentionality; the curse of knowledge and knowledge illusion; intuition; perception; and context. Some of these factors are considered necessary for good communication and have a positive effect; the effect of others can be either positive or negative depending on circumstances. We provide a model illustrating the potential influence web of the identified CCFs. If management are unaware of these factors, or have not considered them, we suggest the result can be an unconscious effect on their judgement regarding what information to provide to directors and how to present it. An enhanced awareness and understanding of these factors, and how they interact, should lead to improvements in practice in the preparation of board reports and the overall communication between management and non-executive directors.

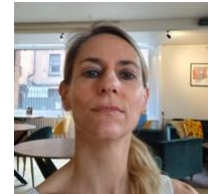
Biography:

Donnchadh Ó Madagáin is Director of Finance and Company Secretary at NCI. He has worked in senior leadership roles across a range of different organisations in the private sector, publicly quoted sector, and public and independent not-for-profit sectors and has practical experience of working with boards from both sides of the table. In addition to being a qualified accountant (FCCA), he holds a post-graduate Diploma in Corporate Governance, a BA in Accounting & Finance, and is a qualified Tax Consultant (AITI). In recent years he completed a Doctorate in Business Administration with research into subconscious influences on internal management reporting to Boards with a thesis titled “The Influence of Cognitive Communication Factors on the Preparation of Financial Narrative Board Reports”.

See published paper at: <https://afgr.scholasticahq.com/article/137534-the-influence-of-cognitive-communication-factors-on-the-preparation-of-financial-narrative-board-reports>

Dr Nicole Gross

School of Business and Social Sciences



Title: The Digital Determinants of Health: A New Era for Global Public Health

Abstract:

Digital transformations exert growing influence over the lives of the global population, shaping opportunities and challenges for health and wellbeing across the spectrum of digital access and engagement. The scale of influence of digital transformations on human and planetary health mark the urgency of attention to the digital determinants of health (DDOH). In this article, which is the first paper in a Lancet series of 3 papers on the DDOH, we present a conceptual foundation for the DDOH. Specifically, we describe a prevailing digital socio-technological order as the structural source of the DDOH. The digital socio-technological order is composed of a set of dominant assumptions that motivate digital practices operating through four features to promote positive and negative health-related outcomes. We describe the implications of the digital socio-technological order for understanding, studying, and governing the DDOH, and present recommendations for future work.

Biography:

Nicole Gross is an Associate Professor in Business & Society at the National College of Ireland. Her research interests sit in between organization studies, digital tech markets and the 'greater good' in the context of healthcare. She is particularly interested how business models and markets work, if/how market trajectories can be changed and what needs to be done to deliver public value in digital healthcare. Nicole is an active member of various research groups (e.g., <https://misfires.ucd.ie/>) and collaborates with Irish as well as European advocacy groups on issues related to AI and health (e.g., <https://healthai.haiweb.org/the-members/>). Nicole has been awarded funding from Research Ireland for her recent work on generative AI in healthcare and her research has been widely published in outlets such as *Organization Studies*, *Big Data & Society*, *Business & Society*, *Organization*, *Sociology of Health & Illness*, *AI & Ethics*, *Journal of Medical Ethics*, *BMJ*, *Health Policy & Technology*, and *Marketing Theory*. Nicole tweets under @tech_spaces.



Title: A game-theoretical model for green urban logistics coordination: exact and data-driven methods

Abstract:

This study presents a single-leader, multi-follower game aimed at minimizing carbon emissions in urban logistics. First-Mile (FM) delivery service providers transport parcels to satellites at city outskirts, after which Last-Mile (LM) service providers with more eco-friendly vehicles finalize delivery to customers. In this game, FM and LM delivery service providers are follower players that form a two-echelon logistics network which is coordinated by a leader player representing a green urban logistics platform. The leader optimally assigns parcels to satellites and LMs to minimize emissions across both echelons, while FM and LM followers adjust their operations accordingly. To determine optimal strategies, an exact cutting-plane algorithm is developed and benchmarked against a scalable data-driven heuristic approach based on constraint learning. To model followers' best responses to leader assignment decisions, we implement a network-oriented learning approach where we learn FM and LM predictive

models that can be used with large city-sized network instances. The proposed approaches are tested on realistic problems instances from Berlin, Madrid and Bologna. Our findings highlight the potential of the proposed game-theoretical model for reducing emissions while ensuring that stakeholders' preferences such as on-time deliveries are taken into account.

Biography:

Dr. Ade Fajemisin is a researcher and lecturer in computing at the National College of Ireland (NCIRL) in Dublin. He holds an MSc in Mathematical Modelling and a PhD in Computer Science from University College Cork. His research focuses on data-driven optimisation, machine learning, and artificial intelligence. His aim is to use data, machine learning, and AI tools to aid the formulation and solution of real-world optimisation problems. He is particularly interested in tackling challenges that lead to meaningful social or environmental outcomes.

Links:

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ade-Fajemisin-2/research>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ade-fajemisin-14612757/>

Desmond Gibney

School of Business and Social Sciences



Title: Social Equity and the Mersey Gateway PPP: Bridge to Prosperity or Route to Inequality?

Abstract:

Governments around the world turn to private finance, particularly public private partnerships (PPP), to meet infrastructure demand. In the context of UN Sustainable Development Goal 9 and Target 9.1 on infrastructure, namely “affordable and equitable access for all”, we evaluate the Mersey Gateway tolled bridge-crossing in northwest England, through the lens of Social Equity Budgeting (SEB).

We show how everyday practices (i.e. digital-only tolling), automated enforcement, contractual incentives, and central government financing guarantees, shape who pays, who benefits, and whose capabilities are enhanced or constrained.

Despite promises of a “Bridge to Prosperity”, users in a comparatively deprived region face unavoidable tolls and disproportionate penalties. Fines contribute one-fifth of total revenue since the bridge opened; while public budgets remain supported by ongoing central government grants and guarantees.

Drawing on SEB literature’s four dimensions of equity and on practice-based fairness, we find that procedures associated with the Mersey Gateway undercut social equity, burden non-resident regional users, insufficiently mitigate the digital divide, and privilege contractual and local fiscal objectives over regional capabilities. We demonstrate how budgeting and contracting practices can systematically undermine social equity, even when projects meet technical or financial targets, and offer SEB-aligned policy remedies for equitable access, enforcement, and financing.

(Paper co-authored by Anne Stafford and Sarah Russo, both from University of Manchester)

Biography:

I am an academic, accountant, author and researcher. Following an accounting career in industry and in public practice, I’ve been lecturing in accounting and finance since 2002, firstly in UCD and then since 2003 in National College of Ireland. My research interests include publications on accounting, finance, public sector, business history and accounting history. I’m an assistant professor in the School of Business & Social Sciences. I’ve also published on family history topics. And I’m making my festival debut this Autumn, when I’m presenting as part of the Dublin Festival of History!

My research profile is on ResearchGate at <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Desmond-Gibney>

My presentation for NCI Research Day 2026 is a collaboration with Prof Anne Stafford and Dr Sarah Russo, both from Alliance Manchester Business School in the University of Manchester. The presentation is based on a conference paper and an upcoming journal article submission. My involvement in the project was indirectly inspired by Michael O’Leary’s realisation that Ryanair was making too much money from penalties levied on the airline’s passengers!

Dr Charlyn Rosales
School of Computing



Title: Early Diagnosis Prediction for People with Cardiovascular Conditions using Machine Learning Methods

Abstract:

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a prevalent health condition that encompasses various heart and blood vessel disorders, often caused by factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and lifestyle choices. Early diagnosis of CVD and managing its impact on an individual's health and lifestyle is essential. Diagnostic tests, such as echocardiogram (ECG), 2D echo, blood pressure monitoring, and blood or cholesterol tests, are commonly used for early detection, but there may be limitations in accessibility. This study used machine learning algorithms for early diagnosis of cardiovascular diseases based on some results of laboratory tests, age, and gender. The dataset to be utilized for this research will be obtained in Kaggle, and various data preprocessing techniques will be applied, including Synthetic Minority Oversampling Technique to balance the data. Hyperparameter tuning was carried out through GridSearchCV, integrating 10-fold cross-validation to optimize the machine learning algorithm's performance. The goal is to determine the most appropriate configurations for the machine learning algorithm to be applied in the development of a CVD prediction model. The result of this study is a CVD prediction model capable of early diagnosis of cardiovascular diseases. To evaluate the performance of the prediction model, statistical measures such as accuracy, specificity, sensitivity, and ROC-AUC will be used. The developed prediction model will be utilized and integrated in the development applications that aid in the timely and accurate diagnosis of cardiovascular diseases.

Biography:

Dr. Charlyn Villavicencio - Rosales received her BS and MS degrees at Bulacan State University (BuSU), Philippines. She attained her PhD degree at I-Shou University (ISU) majoring in Information Engineering under the scholarship from the Taiwan Ministry of Education (MOE) and International Faculty Scholar of BuSU - where she served as Assistant Professor for over a decade. Her research interests are Web Development, AI and Machine Learning, Natural Language Processing, Data Mining, and Data Analytics.

Links:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/charlyn-rosales/>

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=AnsNkF8AAAAJ&hl=en>

Dr Michelle Kelly & Dr Caoimhe Hannigan
School of Business and Social Sciences



Title: An Update on Research from the ProBrain Lab: The CR-Ireland and SUSTAIN-CST Projects

Abstract:

This presentation will provide an overview of ongoing implementation research from the ProBrain Lab, focused on improving equitable access to evidence-based psychosocial interventions for people living with dementia (PLWD) in Ireland. We will present findings from two national implementation projects: CR-Ireland and SUSTAIN-CST.

The CR-Ireland project evaluated a trainee-supported model for delivering Goal-Oriented Cognitive Rehabilitation (GREAT-CR) within a specialist Memory Clinic. Using a mixed-methods implementation design, master's-level psychology trainees delivered GREAT-CR under supervision to PLWD. Findings demonstrated improvements in goal attainment, satisfaction, and subjective memory, alongside evidence of acceptability and feasibility among PLWD, carers, and stakeholders.

The presentation will also provide an update on SUSTAIN-CST, a national implementation project focused on promoting sustainable access to Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) for PLWD. Phase 1 findings identified significant barriers to CST implementation despite widespread practitioner training, alongside key facilitators and evidence-informed recommendations to support long-term delivery. In Phase 2, our ongoing work focuses on co-producing and evaluating a national CST Implementation Plan. Collectively, these projects address sustainability through workforce development, scalable service models, and implementation planning, contributing to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Biographies:

Dr Michelle Kelly graduated from Maynooth University with a BA Hons degree in Psychology in 2006; and with a doctorate in Behaviour Analysis and Therapy in 2011. She completed a postdoc with Trinity College's Institute of Neuroscience (TCIN) and the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (2011-2014), where she was responsible for the research and development of brain health interventions people with dementia. Michelle was a lecturer in psychology and behaviour analysis in Maynooth University from 2014-2017, before taking up a post at the National College of Ireland (NCI). Michelle is an Associate Professor in Psychology in NCI and co-directs the ProBrain Research Lab. She is a PI on research projects on Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) and Cognitive Rehabilitation (CR) funded by Research Ireland and the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland and provides clinical and research supervision in Trinity College Dublin and University of Galway. Michelle is also an accredited Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) trainer, a Chartered Behavioural Psychologist, and sits on the Psychological Society of Ireland's (PSI) Undergraduate Accreditation Committee, Postgraduate Accreditation Committee, and on PSI Council.

Dr Caoimhe Hannigan completed her PhD in Psychology at Trinity College Dublin. Caoimhe has significant experience in the design and implementation of research related to cognitive function, loneliness, and health and well-being in older populations. Her key research interests include cognitive ageing, modifiable risk factors for chronic health conditions and dementia, loneliness and its impact on health, brain health and dementia prevention, successful ageing, and interventions to support health and well-being in older adults. Caoimhe has received over €200,000 in research funding and has over 30 peer-reviewed publications in the field of psychology of ageing. Caoimhe is currently co-Principal Investigator for a HRB funded project (HALO) investigating the effects of a befriending intervention on loneliness and health. She is currently co-supervising a PhD candidate investigating the effects of mindfulness on sleep quality and cognitive ageing.

Dr Mohit Garg
School of Computing



Title: A Scalable RAG-Enhanced Multi-LLM Architecture for Intention-Aware Autonomous Vehicle Decision-Making

Abstract:

The use of large language models (LLMs) within Autonomous Vehicle (AV) systems is showing great promise to enhance their decision making. Existing methodologies, however, possess several limitations, including insufficient grounding in domain-specific knowledge, lack of standard methods for inter-agent communication, and limited adaptability to different operating environments. To fulfill these gaps, this paper presents GRASP, a scalable AV architecture that integrates a retrieval augmented generation (RAG) for grounding LLM decisions in traffic knowledge, agent-to-agent (A2A) communication protocols for semantic intention sharing, and a model context protocol (MCP) for standardized access to vehicular resources across heterogeneous large language models (LLMs). It also presents the first comprehensive evaluation of the next generation of LLM families including Open AI's GPT-5 Series, Anthropic's Claude 4.5 Family, and Google's Gemini 3 models in safety critical AV applications. By separating the knowledge base layer, communication layer, and decision-making layer, our methodology enables multiple LLM providers to seamlessly integrate their products into a single interface. Results from testing across 59 different application scenarios indicate that Claude Opus 4.5 + RAG + A2A + MCP achieved a collision rate of .4% (a reduction of 91% vs. vanilla LLM), a regulatory compliance rate of 98.2%, and a weighted score of .945, all while maintaining a response latency under 200 ms in time sensitive scenarios.

Biography:

Mohit Garg is an Assistant Professor in the School of Computing at National College of Ireland (NCI). He holds a Ph.D. in Computer Science from Trinity College Dublin (2024), an M.Tech. in Electrical Engineering from NIT Kurukshetra (2016), and a B.Tech. in Electronics and Communication Engineering from UPTU Lucknow (2012). Prior to joining NCI, he worked as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Trinity College Dublin.

He has over six years of combined teaching and research experience in Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, with a strong focus on reinforcement learning, control systems, and intelligent systems. His research interests are connected autonomous vehicle (CAV) technologies, AI-based optimization of cyber-physical systems, Control theory, Distributed systems and Wireless communication networks.

Dr. Garg has authored 15+ peer-reviewed publications with over 150 citations and is actively engaged in collaborative research and funding proposals while fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Tara Cheevers

School of Business and Social Sciences



Title: Exploring Accounting Student's Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Internships as a Mode of Learning in Higher Education

Abstract:

Producing work-ready graduates has been widely researched, yet limited attention has been given to the benefits of embedding internships within curricula. This doctoral study explores undergraduate accounting programmes to enhance the student learning experience. It aims to critically evaluate internships as a mode of learning from the student perspective while incorporating insights from educators and employers. The research examines what students learn through workplace participation, how this learning occurs, and the benefits and limitations of internships as an educational approach. The findings will inform consideration of a more internship-integrated curriculum within Irish higher education accounting programmes.

The study adopts a three-phase mixed methods design. Phase 1 involves a national student survey across multiple Irish higher education institutions to establish baseline attitudes and patterns. Phase 2 consists of an in-depth case study at an Irish University, using semi-structured interviews with lecturers, placement coordinators, and students. Phase 3 gathers employer perspectives through focus groups. This triangulated approach captures diverse stakeholder viewpoints.

Framed by Experiential Learning Theory, the study analyses how workplace experiences support learning and knowledge integration, offering valuable insights for both academia and the accounting profession.

Biography:

I have been a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) since 1999 and am the Managing Director and Owner of ACO Financial & Business Solutions Ltd, a boutique accountancy firm based in Trim, Co. Meath.

My professional qualifications include Certified Public Accountant, Chartered Tax Adviser, Personal Insolvency Practitioner, and Higher Education Lecturer. I also hold a Diploma in Business Development & Strategy, a Postgraduate Master's degree in Training & Education, and a Master's degree in Education Practice.

With over 25 years' experience in accounting and finance, I have developed extensive expertise in management, strategy, and financial advisory. I was licensed as a Personal Insolvency Practitioner (PIP) in 2013 and worked in this area until 2025, building a strong reputation for my knowledge, insight, and practical experience across accounting, finance, and personal insolvency.

Alongside my professional practice, I have been actively involved in higher education for over 13 years, lecturing across professional, diploma, and degree programmes. My teaching experience spans multiple disciplines and includes the supervision of Master's dissertations.

I am currently undertaking a Doctorate in Higher and Adult Education at Maynooth University, which I commenced in September 2023. My research focuses on accounting education, with particular interest in the role of internships within undergraduate programmes. While the development of work-ready graduates has been widely examined, there has been limited focus on the integration of internships into the curriculum. My doctoral research is an exploratory study aimed at enhancing the undergraduate learning experience in accounting.

I will be presenting my research at the IAFA 20th Annual Doctoral Colloquium on 10 June 2026.