

BUSINESS BOUND

For the fourth year running, IMAGE is teaming up with UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School, offering you the chance to win an MBA scholarship. As thinking caps go on and pens hit paper, we meet the women behind Ireland's top business institution.

THE TEACHER



Professor Niamh Brennan on teaching on the MBA ...

I have been teaching financial reporting on the MBA since carbon dating experiments began(!) and I love it. More recently, I have added a corporate governance elective to the MBA curriculum, which I'm really enjoying too. The real world is not black and white. It's full of challenges and I try to replicate that in the classroom. So debate, disagreement and argument are essential features in my lectures. In fact, I am happiest when students are disagreeing with each other, and better still, with me.

Classes usually start with a group of students presenting one of the readings for the module. Material is thus delivered to students by their peers, which is more interesting than listening to just one voice (mine!) week after week. At the same time, students improve their presentation skills. Woe betide groups who do not entertain their classmates – laughter is a potent ingredient to effective learning and essential during my lectures.

With recent curriculum revisions in UCD, continuous assessment is a feature of most modules. MBA project work is generally done in groups, so that students learn from each other's business experiences, as well as from the lecturer. Subject matter is up-to-date and reflects the changing economy. As such, my modules tend towards the practical rather than being overly academic. Students are encouraged to actively analyse individual companies relative to their interests and career paths.

My modules are tough, and I make no apologies for that. Only the best is good enough – for me, for my students, and for the future businesses and organisations that Smurfit School graduates will join and through which they will hopefully make a significant contribution.

NIAMH BRENNAN, BSc (Microbiology), PhD (Warwick), FCA, CDir, is both a chartered accountant and a chartered director. She holds the Michael MacCormac Professorship of Management and is academic director of the Centre for Corporate Governance at University College Dublin.

Professor Brennan is chairman of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority. Previously, she held non-executive positions with the Health Service Executive, Ulster Bank; Lifetime Assurance, Bank of Ireland's life assurance subsidiary; Coillte, the State forestry company; and Co-Operation Ireland, a voluntary body promoting north-south relations in Ireland. She served for seven years on the audit committee of the Department of Agriculture and Food.

She has published widely in the areas of financial reporting, corporate governance and forensic accounting.



FOR FULL DETAILS ON THE IMAGE MBA SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION AND YOUR CHANCE TO ENTER, DON'T MISS OUR MARCH ISSUE.

IMAGE MBA SCHOLARSHIP

THE ALUMNI

DO YOU DREAM OF GOING FURTHER, BUT WORRIES HOLD YOU BACK? HERE, TWO GRADUATES OF THE MBA AT UCD MICHAEL SMURFIT GRADUATE BUSINESS SCHOOL SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES.

MARY VASSEGHI

A working mother in her fifties, Mary Vasseghi completed the two-year MBA in Health Care Management in 2009, after working in healthcare in France, Iran and Ireland.

It was the loss of my 18-year-old son to sudden cardiac death (SCD) that pressed me to undertake such an extensive course. I needed to obtain the necessary skills to effect changes within the Irish healthcare sector, particularly in the cardiac and patient safety fields; the MBA in Smurfit proved the perfect choice.

The course was populated with people from a variety of healthcare and general backgrounds. This mix of experiences from so many sectors added an unquantifiable value in regards to both learning and networking. The course content and delivery was of an excellent standard, involving close interaction with first-class lecturers. Individual and group projects brought very different insights and expertise to bear, while external speakers, international modules, projects, problems and presentations from the real world added a valuable dimension. Time management and the balancing of work, study and private life was – for virtually everyone – one of the biggest challenges, but being part of such a closely knit group certainly helped to keep us all afloat. We quickly realised that mastering time merely required organisation and commitment and once you found what worked for you, it all became possible and enjoyable.

Completing the MBA has armed me with the confidence and knowledge I need to effect real change. These days, I'm nurturing a new non-profit organisation, Heart Check Ireland, and have received a prestigious award from Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, whose support is allowing me to promote this project – providing heart checks to Ireland's young people (who continue to die at a rate of approximately two per week from SCD). I now also chair the Sudden Cardiac Death Council, which works in partnership with healthcare professionals, the public and organisations. I have also become a WHO Patients for Patient Safety champion, working at both national and international levels. The MBA is, in my opinion, the only course that can provide the vast training one needs when working in such complex environments. It was a busy, wonderful and enriching experience and I'm delighted I did it.



SIOBHAN BYRNE

Following a career in sales, marketing and HR in the hotel business and as managing director of Active Ireland, mother-of-four Siobhan Byrne undertook her ultimate goal – achieving a first-class honours MBA degree.

The time was right. I felt my tenure at Active Ireland and the difficulties I faced could be used as an action research project for an MBA degree – everything I learned could be applied immediately. I needed to learn how to crystallise my ideas into effective business strategies. Plus, I got free professional feedback from the experts in every business discipline on day-to-day issues that faced me in the company. It was an extremely tough, albeit rewarding, two years, coupled with the fact that I was going through the initial stages of a difficult divorce. It was thanks to the dedication of the lecturers and the steadfast encouragement of my peers that I got my First. I was so proud when I graduated with my class. It meant something special and all my boys were there with me.

I've since realised that it is not what you learn when you are doing an MBA that's important, it's from whom and how you learn. All of the lecturers were so open to questions and active in our education. I learned so much from the other students in class and also from discussing case studies outside of class. During the MBA you enter a stage of 24-hour learning awareness – at home, work and play – though, it must be said, you don't get much time for play.

It was my MBA colleagues who encouraged me to start my own company with my business partner, John Colclough. I did my thesis on the business plan for the company and, in March 2005, set up Adams & Butler Ltd, an incoming tour operator offering personal attention and full concierge services in Ireland, Scotland and England. Now I have the confidence to go further. My true passion is Africa. I have fallen head over heels in love with Kenya and a Kenyan, and together we have set up a new company, Adams & Butler Africa, which will be a specialist tour operator offering tailor-made vacations and safaris to Africa.

I gained a lot from my MBA: lifelong friends, the confidence to become an entrepreneur and the opportunity to live the life of my dreams.



UCD Michael Smurfit
Graduate Business School