

# LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS ON DROWNING RESEARCH

In their bid to reduce the numbers of deaths caused by drowning in this country, the Lifesaving Foundation and Waterford Institute of Technology has set up a new research partnership with the Gardaí to investigate the concept of self-rescue in life-threatening situations.

**T**he long-term aim of the new drowning research partnership between the Lifesaving Foundation and Waterford Institute of Technology's School of Health Sciences is to establish a permanent world-class drowning research centre at WIT.

The launch of the new partnership in early February was attended by representatives from the Garda Water Unit, Waterford Marine Search and Rescue, Irish Naval Service, Waterford Fire Service, and the Garda Síochána Retired Members' Association (GSRMA).

In his keynote address at the launch, WIT President Prof Willie Donnelly commended the work of the Lifesaving Foundation, and added that the Institute looks forward to developing world-class drowning research including priority areas such as self-rescue.

Prof Donnelly added that the new partnership "demonstrates the diversity and impact of research topics that WIT researchers work on with a wide variety of organisations".

Welcoming the new partnership, Prof John Wells, Dean of WIT's School of Health Sciences, said that the Institute's research capability combined with the Lifesaving Foundation's drowning expertise would make for a "symbiotic relationship" to benefit all those at risk from drowning worldwide.

"This research partnership between WIT and the Lifesaving Partnership heralds the development of combining the experience and knowledge of those at the coalface with an experienced research team," according to Matt Cosgrave, President of the Garda Síochána Retired Members' Association (GSRMA).

"This will enable a growing understanding of the issues of



A large number of books on drowning statistics and research was presented by the Foundation to the Luke Wadding Library at WIT. Pictured (l-r): Chief Supt John Long (Retired), International Director of the Lifesaving Foundation; Brendan Donohue, Foundation Chairman; Prof Joost Bierens (Editor of 'The Handbook on Drowning' from The Netherlands), Prof Willie Donnelly, WIT President; John Connolly, Foundation Secretary; Kieran Cronin, WIT Librarian, and Dr Stathis Avramidis (The Hellenic Centre for Disease Control in Athens).



Pictured at the launch were (l-r): Garda Lorcan Byrne, Garda Water Unit; Inspector Michael Cleary (Retired); Deirdre Doherty, daughter of the late Garda Commissioner Eamonn Doherty; Matt Cosgrave, GSRMA President, and Garda Brian Moore, Garda Water Unit.

lifesaving, the exploration of international research and developments in the area and the possibility of improved outcomes for us all," he added.

Other speakers included Prof Joost Bierens (Editor of 'The Handbook on Drowning' from The Netherlands) and Dr Stathis Avramidis (The Hellenic Centre for Disease Control in Athens), Deirdre Doherty (daughter of the late Commissioner Eamonn Doherty) and Garda Lorcan Byrne from the Garda Water Unit.

#### SELF-RESCUE CONCEPT

According to Lifesaving Foundation chairperson Brendan Donohoe, for over 100 years the main focus of lifesaving organisations has been on teaching the public about water safety and on training lifesavers and lifeguards to rescue those in danger in the water. This has been very successful, he added.

"A hundred years ago, when Ireland's population was two and a half million, the number of drowning deaths was over 200. Today, with a population close to five million, the number of drowning deaths is just over 100. The 21st century lifesaving challenge is to teach the public self-rescue techniques should they find themselves in difficulty in the water," Donohoe noted.

Lifesaving Foundation Secretary John Connolly explained that up to now drowning research has been conducted on an 'ad hoc' basis.

"The Foundation's board decided that it was time to put structure on its research and they were delighted to do this in partnership with Waterford Institute of Technology," he said.

Initial funding will be provided through the Doherty Police Research Fund, established in memory of the late Garda Commissioner Eamonn Doherty, who is best known for his successful recommendation to transfer air sea rescue services from the Air Corps to the Irish Coast Guard. Public donations can now be made to the Fund at Bank of Ireland in Lisduggan, Waterford IBAN: IE44 BOFI 9062 1664 7000 06.

## FOUNDATION SET TO OFFER POLICE SCHOLARSHIPS IN SEPTEMBER

The Lifesaving Foundation will offer two scholarships to police officers (in-service or retired) who offer papers on any aspect of police drowning prevention or rescue, in conjunction with the Doherty Police Research Fund, during its annual conference on 10-13 September.

In

making the announcement John Connolly, Secretary of the Lifesaving Foundation, said: "We will continue to offer student scholarships through the successful Surgeon Admiral Frank Golden Student Scholarship Scheme. Applications are open to students researching any aspect of drowning but preference will be given to topics associated with 'personal survival and self-rescue in common drowning situations'."

A number of major changes to this year's conference format and programme include a reduction of the total number of oral presentations and an end to the concurrent filming of conference presentations. Both of these changes are being implemented to facilitate longer discussion time on the various presentation topics, according to Connolly.

"More attention is being paid to poster presentations with longer break times to facilitate viewing them at ease. Delegates are not limited to discussing posters at set times, and they can sit beside presenters at breakfast, lunch, dinner, or during coffee breaks to discuss their posters."

The conference will also feature two major discussion-led and practical workshops on 'understanding the role of the PFD' and 'understanding challenges facing the first responder in water-based incidents'. Both workshops will be led by Dr Patrick Buck, author of the book 'A Field Guide for the treatment of drowning, hypothermia, and cold water immersion incidents'.

Brendan Donohue, Chairman of the Lifesaving Foundation, has issued an open invitation to all lifesavers to visit Ireland this year. "Come and join a group of world leading drowning prevention and rescue researchers to discuss how we can individually and collectively reduce the unacceptable high number of drowning events worldwide," he noted.