

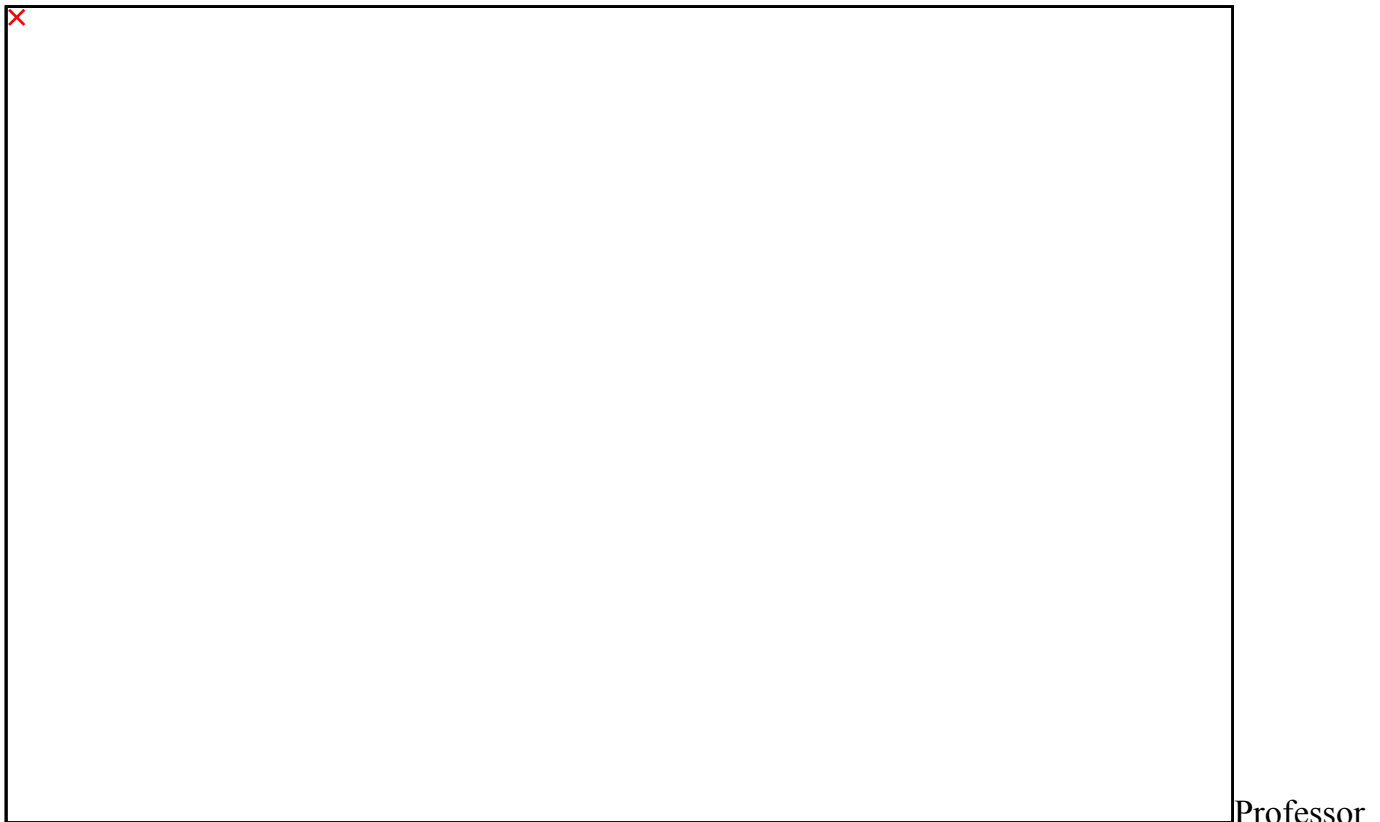


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## Professor Brian Cox inspires Ireland's future scientists at ECOC 2019

The Irish Photonic Integration Centre (IPIC) at Tyndall National Institute brings world-renowned physicist to Dublin to inspire careers in physics and engineering

One of the world's most recognisable faces in science, Professor Brian Cox, inspired 750 schoolchildren from all over the country to consider STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) careers following his appearance at ECOC 2019 in Dublin.



Brian Cox

The BBC physicist, along with the likes of David Attenborough, Patrick Moore and Neil DeGrasse Tyson, has helped bring science to mainstream audiences all over the world in recent years.

Prof. Cox presented to his young audience at the 45th edition of the European Conference and Exhibition on Optical Communication (ECOC) in the RDS in Dublin, the world's foremost event on the transmission of information using light.

Tyndall National Institute Head of Photonics and Director of the Irish Photonic Integration Centre (IPIC), Prof. Paul Townsend, who was instrumental in bringing Brian Cox to Dublin with support from Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), said a key aim of inviting speakers like Prof. Cox was to bring a new generation of young talent into the ever burgeoning field of physics and engineering.

*“This is a dynamic and exciting sector, and young people in the field can be at the forefront of major technological advances as the Fourth Industrial Revolution evolves ever further. Graduates in physics and maths progress to diverse careers across many sectors, including optical*

*communications, semiconductor and medtech, to name a few. Young Irish men and women going into STEM could one day be at the heart of major scientific progress that will benefit humanity,” he said.*

☑Professor Paul Townsend, Head of Photonics Centre  
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Donahies Community School students meeting Professor Brian Cox

To have scientists like Prof. Brian Cox inspiring Irish schoolchildren was a potential boon to future industry, he said.

*“Who knows, maybe one of those transfixed in the audience may in the future see ECOC 2019 as a seminal moment in their lives, when they knew they wanted to be scientists. It was a marvellous event for teenagers to experience.”*

A key objective of the event was to attract young women into careers in physics and engineering, where there remains a gender deficit.

Director of Science for Society at Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), Dr Abigail Ruth Freeman, impressed the need for more young women to take up STEM careers.

STEM students are typically curious and have a desire to make a difference but diverse perspectives are critical if vital issues like climate change were to be solved, she said.

Prof. Townsend said the technology intensive optical communication equipment market is expected to reach \$40.3 billion by 2024, and attracting the best of Irish talent is paramount if Ireland is to position itself as a leader.

*“We need to retain the very best talent in the arena. We do that by encouraging physics and maths in schools in the first instance. We know our talent is world-class when developed -some 64% of our photonics trainees, PhD and above, have gone straight to industry over the last five years, double the international average,” he said.*