

# Students make the news at Press Pass awards

**Evelyn Ring**  
The *Irish Examiner* columnist Michael Clifford told aspiring journalists how much he loves picking up one thread of a story and then finding another.  
The 2016 NewsBrands Ireland Journalist of the Year was speaking at a national competition that encourages students to read newspapers. This year more than 4,000 transition year students took part in the NewsBrands Ireland Press Pass initiative and yesterday in Dublin's Convention Centre, 16 national finalists were awarded for their journalist endeavours.  
Mr Clifford said he was an engineer before moving into journalism in his late 20s and loves being at the centre of things and conveying what is happening to readers.  
One issue could lead to another and become a story of major public interest: "You can pull one thread, and it leads to another."  
"Believe me, it is a career that is certainly very rewarding. You won't get rich, but you will have a hell of a lot of good times along the way," said Mr Clifford.  
Disabilities Minister Finian McGrath, who presented the students with their awards, said newspapers have a vital role to play in any free society.  
"They are the watchdogs, chroniclers, and the eyes and ears that go where most cannot be. Just look at the past few weeks — good journalism in Ireland has helped to uncover some of the most unpleasant scandals of our past."  
Mr McGrath praised Mr Clifford for bringing the light of Garda whistle blower Sgt Maurice McCabe to national attention. He also

praised another *Irish Examiner* journalist, Connal Ó Fátharta, for his lengthy and in-depth investigations into the 'Tummy Mother' and Baby Home. Two other *Irish Examiner* writers, Fiachra Ó Cionnaithe and Daniel McConnell, were praised for their investigation into alleged abuse at a foster care home in the South East that led to the 'Grace' inquiry.  
Mr McGrath said Press Pass is a fantastic initiative that promotes literacy and critical thinking skills by bringing newspapers into classrooms and encouraging students to study them in depth: "When you engage with newspapers you engage with society. When young people engage with society, that society benefits enormously from their input and their energy."  
NewsBrands Ireland chairman Vincent Crowley thanked *Irish Examiner* news editor John O'Mahony and the newspaper's marketing graphic artist, Edward Butt, for producing the Press Pass guidebook.  
Participating schools receive newspapers and a specially-created workbook free of charge. The students are encouraged to read and analyse the newspapers and submit an original work of journalism.  
This year's overall winner is Tomás Ó hUallacháin from Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne, An Daingean, Co Kerry. Tomás is one of three national winners from Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne.  
His English teachers, Fergal Daly and Piona Kirwan, said Tomás picked up on a good news story after his neighbour, Tomás Mac an t-Saoir, pedalled across America to raise funds and awareness for the Donal Walsh Life Foundation.



At the NewsBrands Ireland Press Pass awards in Dublin were, from left: Tomás Ó hUallacháin, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne, An Daingean, overall winner of the Press Pass Awards; Jack Farrell, Causeway Comprehensive School, Kerry, winner of the photojournalism category; Emma McGoey, Meán Scoil Mhuire, Longford, winner of the sports category; and Caitriona Ní Chonail, Coláiste Ghobnatan, Baile Mhiclé, Co Cork, winner of the features category.

Chairman of the judging panel, the former press ombudsman Prof John Horan, said Tomás engaged the reader from start to finish in a way many professional journalists would salute.  
As well as the overall winner there were five category winners:  
**Features:** Caitriona Ní Chonail, Coláiste Ghobnatan, Baile Mhiclé, Co Cork.  
**Opinion:** Siotra O'Dwyer, Scoil Mhuire, Bunranna, Co Donegal.  
**News:** Kate Ní Dhubháin, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne, An Daingean, Co Kerry.  
**Sport:** Emma McGoey, Meán Scoil Mhuire, Longford.  
**Photojournalism:** Jack Farrell, Causeway Comprehensive School, Causeway, Co Kerry.

# Senior gangland garda given tribunal role

Det Supt Tony Howard, key figure in fight against Kinahan cartel, to run response to Disclosure Tribunal

**Cormac O'Keeffe**  
Questions have been raised over the Garda commissioner's decision to appoint one of her most senior gangland officers to co-ordinate the Garda Síochána's response to the Disclosure Tribunal.  
Detective Supt Tony Howard, a lead officer of the Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau (DOCB), is at the forefront of the organisation's fight against gangland crime, including the Kinahan cartel.  
The highly respected officer is also tasked with co-ordinating the Garda's role in the State's National Drugs Strategy, which is currently being drafted.  
The DOCB has driven operations against the cartel, responsible for an estimated 10 murders in its feud with the Hutch group. The bureau has played a major role in preventing an estimated 18 attempted homicides, most of them linked to the feud. It has also been behind the seizure of massive quantities of drugs and firearms from the cartel and the arrest of many of its associates.  
"Tony was put out there as the front man fighting

the Kinahans and now he's pulled into this," said one garda source.  
"This is not a criminal investigation, this is a tribunal of inquiry. It's about locating files, administrative stuff. He has a lot more responsible things to be doing."  
"There is a whole legal and governance section in Garda headquarters. They should be doing this. Usually, an assistant commissioner or at the least a chief superintendent would be the liaison person."  
"Tony is a busy man and has a lot on his plate and I'd say he'd prefer not to be doing this. Given his job and the huge amount of work this tribunal is going to take, you'd have to wonder about the decision."  
However, a senior source disagreed: "Yes, he already has 10 things to do, so this is number 11. But we have assistant commissioners double or even triple-jobbing. At the end of the day, the needs of the organisation come first and he has been selected to help with what is a huge operation in supplying the tribunal with documentation."  
Another senior source

also disagreed: "There are two other detective superintendents there, so with this impact operation? Absolutely not, 100%."  
Questions may also be raised about the optics of the selection, given that Det Supt Howard's immediate boss is Chief Supt Jim McGowan, the husband of the commissioner, Nóirín O'Sullivan.  
"Why Tony? That's the question," said a source. "It looks bad and unfair to Tony. Unfortunately for him, he's stuck between a rock and a hard place."  
However, a senior source disagreed: "Yeah, people could be commenting on that, but he's been selected because of his experience in running an incident room, which this is going to be like, not because of who his boss is."  
"Tony is his own man and he is no fool. He has his own career to think of and would not do anything to jeopardise that."  
It is understood that Det Supt Howard will supervise the team being set up within Garda HQ to conduct the job of identifying, locating, gathering, assembling, and supplying all documentation of relevance to the tribunal.

# Ireland targeted in 200-courier cocaine trafficking operation

**Cormac O'Keeffe**  
Ireland was one of eight EU countries targeted in a sophisticated cocaine-trafficking operation from Brazil which involved 200 couriers.  
Garda, along with police from the other states, co-ordinated by the EU police

agency, Europol, arrested the couriers.  
According to Europol's Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment, 2017, a hike in cocaine production in Colombia could lead to "intensified" trafficking into the EU.  
"Brazil is among the main

countries of departure for couriers trafficking cocaine to the EU," said the report.  
"This has been confirmed by the results of Operation Fulco, an effort by member states, supported by Europol, targeting cocaine couriers arriving to the EU's major airports."

Nearly 200 cocaine couriers were arrested and almost 500kg of cocaine were seized in the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany, and Ireland.  
The report said that over the last two years, the production of cocaine in

Colombia has "intensified significantly". It said: "An increase in the production output in Colombia will likely impact on the EU, in the form of intensified trafficking activity, as well as greater availability of cocaine on drug markets in the member states."

The modus operandi associated with the cocaine trade has largely remained the same, with it typically trafficked as part of large shipments in containers, or in smaller quantities by couriers. The main routes are into Spain, via a northern route into Netherlands,

Belgium and, on occasion, through Britain and Ireland. A southern route splits to west and south Africa.  
The United Arab Emirates and destinations in East Africa have emerged as hubs for cocaine couriers travelling to the EU. Cruise ships departing from the Carib-

bean are increasingly used to traffic cocaine to the EU.  
More organised criminal groups (OCGs) are involved in cocaine-trafficking than in any other criminal activity. There are 5,000 OCGs in the EU now, operating at an international level, compared to 3,800 OCGs in 2013.



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