

Candidate: Regional VP Elect, Europe (2025-2027)



Karen English, BSc, MSc, PhD

Professor of Immunology

Maynooth University

Ireland

Summary of academic and professional background:

I have been working in the cell therapy field focusing on mesenchymal stromal cells (MSCs) for the past 20 years. I graduated with my PhD in 2008 from Maynooth University. I carried out my first postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Oxford in the Transplantation Immunology Group having won a highly competitive Marie Curie Fellowship. Following that I secured a competitive Health Research Board Postdoctoral Fellowship to return to Maynooth University where I started to establish my own research group in 2012. I expanded my research group with the help of highly competitive research grants including a Marie Curie Research Integration Grant (2012) and a Science Foundation Ireland Starting Investigator Award (2015), an Irish Research Starting Laureate Award (2018) and a Science Foundation Ireland Frontiers for the Future Award (2021). I secured a permanent position as an Assistant Professor at the department of Biology at Maynooth University in Ireland in 2015 with promotion to Associate Professor in 2020 and Professor in 2022. I have published >70 peer reviewed articles with >5000 citations. I have secured > €4 million in research funding and received a number of honours including the Irish Research Council Early Career Researcher of the Year Award in 2018. My team have contributed to the mechanistic understanding of how MSCs mediate their immune calming effects using both in vitro models and state of the art pre-clinical models of inflammatory disease. In particular, my team have contributed the understanding of the role and potential of licensing MSCs to enhance their therapeutic efficacy in vivo. My recent work on the influence of MSCs on innate immune memory will significantly enhance our understanding of the long term effects of MSC immunomodulation in vivo.

Affiliated professional and commercial associations and any perceived or potential conflict of interests:

Professor at Maynooth University. As part of my role at Maynooth University, I have carried out a number of collaborative research projects with drug and cell therapy companies including Athersys, Regenesys, Avectas and Sigmoid Pharma. Currently, I am part of a large European consortium (MAGIC) focused on accelerating development of genetic therapies for muscular dystrophies and I sit on the MAGIC executive board.

I am currently an executive board member of the Irish Society for Immunology. Previously, I sat as a non-voting member on the board of Food for Health Ireland and as a board member of the National Biophotonics Imaging Platform (NBIP). I am also a member of Academic Council at Maynooth University. From 2018-2023 I was an Associate Editor for Stem Cells Research & Therapy and I am now an Editorial Board member. In 2025 I chaired the inaugural Cell & Gene Therapy Meeting in Ireland and I am a founding member of the Irish Society for Cell & Gene Therapy.

List of top notable contributions to the field (e.g. publications, patents, reports, products advanced to clinical trial or regulatory approval, asset development, mergers, acquisitions, etc.) from the last 10 years:

As a PhD, the following publications are my most notable contributions to the field:

Tunstead C et al. The ARDS microenvironment enhances MSC-induced repair via VEGF in experimental acute lung inflammation. *Mol Ther*. 2024 Oct 2;32(10):3422-3432. doi: 10.1016/j.ymthe.2024.08.003.

Bitterlich LM, et al. Mesenchymal stromal cells can block palmitate training of macrophages via cyclooxygenase-2 and interleukin-1 receptor antagonist. *Cytotherapy*. 2024 Oct 31:S1465-3249(24)00905-8. doi: 10.1016/j.jcyt.2024.10.011.

Dunbar H, et al. Mesenchymal stromal cells dampen trained immunity in house dust mite-primed macrophages expressing human macrophage migration inhibitory factor polymorphism. *Cytotherapy*. 2024 Oct;26(10):1245-1251. doi: 10.1016/j.jcyt.2024.05.010.

See a full list on <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=ptP3CUgAAAAJ&hl=en>

Summary of involvement with ISCT in the past five years:

I have been an active member of ISCT since 2012. In 2018 I attended the Montreal meeting and presented data. Plans for engagement in 2020 and 2021 were disrupted by the Covid pandemic. However, I acted as a mentor in the ISCT mentoring programme in 2021/2022 mentoring two junior researchers in Europe. I attended the ISCT Annual meeting in Paris in May 2023 where I presented my research at the Late Breaking Abstracts session. I have actively supported Prof. Dominique Farge on her excellent MSC focused ISCT course held in January 2024 and widely promoted and shared the course advertisement on my social media accounts. I had the pleasure of engaging with the ISCT community as a plenary speaker in the Science & Innovation session and participated in a round table discussion “Converting Skeptics: Understanding the Fundamentals of MSC Biology” at the ISCT in May 2024 in Vancouver. I am currently mentoring a Scientist in the 2024/2025 ISCT mentoring programme. Since May 2024 I have been a member of the ISCT MSC committee and proposed an MSC focused Roundtable discussion for ISCT in New Orleans in 2025. I have reviewed abstracts for the ISCT 2025 meeting.

Summary of strategic vision for the Global Society and in the Region:

I think that the ISCT is a wonderful global society rich in Cell and Gene Therapy expertise. My strategic vision is to significantly broaden the level of involvement by more junior/mid career Scientists/Clinicians/Industry People/ Technologists. I would relish the opportunity to act as a representative of ISCT within Europe and help grow the European membership. I envision an ISCT society in which junior/mid career members can play an equal and joint role with more established and senior members of the society. Ireland is a growing European hub for Cell and Gene Therapy research with a large industry base and I contribute to that via membership of the Cell & Gene Therapy Forum in Ireland and through my leadership as chair of the Cell & Gene Therapy Conference in Ireland (held Jan 2025) which attracted 225 registrations. This strategy of engaging junior members early and ensuring strong leadership is in place will ensure the longevity of the society. I have significant experience in the area of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and I led the first department effort to enhance EDI at Maynooth University and I am currently the co-chair of Maynooth University Athena SWAN gender equality steering group. My role on the Irish Society for Immunology executive board is also leading on EDI. I will draw on this expertise and my existing strong networks in the Cell & Gene Therapy field across Europe to broaden the diversity of the ISCT membership.