

The Ring of Kerry inspires my street designs in London

Working abroad: Hugh McCarthy Chartered Engineer Irish transport engineer, London

GB region



In May 2010, as I sat down for a job interview in the English town of Chelmsford, the British general election was reaching its conclusion, and a new government was being selected to remedy the recent economic collapse and job losses. The situation was all too familiar.

I graduated with a civil and structural engineering degree from Cork IT in 2008 and as soon as I started work, a bank unknown to me called Lehman Brothers was liquidated. While I spent my first few projects undertaking traffic modelling and road designs for housing developments in Cork and Dublin, the banking collapse didn't seem connected in any way to me. But by 2010, it had taken its toll on the construction industry, and there was little project work left for me to do. So I took the proactive approach, and decided to move abroad to where there was work.

25 million trips

I found a job in London as a transport engineer. While I was familiar with the surroundings of London due to sibling ties there, there is quite a gulf between just visiting a city for a weekend and actually living in it.

London is a city of 8 million people, with approximately 25 million individual trips made on a daily basis. Working for Transport for London, I have to find ways to move all these people in cars, bikes, and buses around the city safely and efficiently. I love the work I do, and its daily challenges. Perhaps surprisingly, projects in Ireland such as the Ring of Kerry cycle route and Cork's Cornmarket Street have inspired my colleagues and I in our street designs.

I immediately sought to build a life there, embracing all the city has to offer. I joined a Toastmasters speaking group in central London, and I've made friends with people from many continents but who are, like me, Londoners now.

The GB Region of Engineers Ireland has also been very accommodating. This is a branch outside of Ireland to support the many engineers who have moved from Ireland over the years. We have over 700 members scattered throughout the UK, but we aim to provide support and run technical talks every month. I set up our twitter account (@EngineersIrIGB) to promote Irish engineering while discussing issues with engineers in the UK and around the world.

Patriotism

It's amusing how emigrating has heightened my sense of patriotism. Since moving over here, new friends and colleagues have been "educated" about hurling, gaelic football, Michael Collins and Club Orange. I've also managed to distill the "Northern Ireland thing" into a bitesize one-minute history lesson.

On the other side, I've felt an odd disconnect with Irish issues that I can only read about, and I've struggled to form a passionate opinion about water charges, for example.

In May 2015, I voted in my first ever election, in the UK. Having been one year too young for the 2002 election in Ireland, exams being more important in 2007 and emigrating two weeks before the 2011 one, this election would be my first, even though it wasn't in my home country.

So I had confused thoughts as I walked to the ballot box. I wondered how my vote would affect Ireland, but soon realised this mattered very little, EU referendum apart. So, I put an X next to someone who best fitted my views on employment, education, and crime in England, where I was living, and promptly left.

I won't be back in Ireland before this upcoming election, but I'll take an interest nonetheless.

Although the past five years in Britain have been more enjoyable than my last three in Ireland, I still fly home on a regular basis and help my local community as much as I can. I may have a UK number plate on my car, with an English tax disc and a soggy UKIP flyer under the wiper, but it's the "UP CORK" GAA sticker that people seem to notice, which tells where my heart truly lies.

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