

The Faculty of  
Health Sciences presents

# The Inaugural Lecture of Professor Joan Lalor 20th March 2025

Inaugural lectures provide newly appointed professors with the opportunity to showcase their academic activity to the College community and members of the public. An inaugural lecture is a significant event in an academic staff member's career. At Trinity College, inaugural lectures are a ceremonial occasion, which is why academic robes are worn by the inaugural professor and the rest of the platform party.





## Advancing Maternal Health: Integrating Practice, Policy, and Research for Better Outcomes.

Joan Lalor  
Professor of Maternal Health

Trinity College Dublin Faculty of Health Sciences



Prof Joan Lalor is the Professor of Maternal Health in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Trinity College Dublin. Joan was awarded a BNS, MSc, MA, PGDip in Clinical Health Sciences Education, a PGDip in Statistics and a PhD from TCD and a Diploma in Legal Studies and a Barrister at Law degree from the Honorable Society of the Kings Inns Dublin. Joan was elected as a Fellow of Trinity College Dublin (FTCD) in April 2022.

Joan's research programme developed from her experience as a clinical midwife working in ultrasound and, in particular, around the diagnosis of fetal anomalies in pregnancy. Seeking to understand the impact of such a diagnosis on women and families led to the development of her PhD study, and becoming the first midwife to be awarded Clinical Fellowship from the Health Research Board, Ireland.

Joan's research contribution in Maternal Health is organised around i) Maternal and Fetal Health including Birth Related Trauma and Complex issues in Childbirth, ii) Optimising Maternity Services to improve maternal and neonatal health outcomes and iii) Research Methodology, Healthcare Ethics and Law. Joan is also centrally involved in a number of collaborative international interdisciplinary projects across Health, Education and the Humanities.

More recently, Joan designed and led a pan-European COST Action "DEVOTION" This project has had significant impact on the development of evidence within the area of birth-related trauma internationally. Joan's research programme in birth related trauma and maternal health has expanded further through a new Cost Action-Treasure, in which Joan leads a sub group reviewing the evidence on parental perinatal stress.

As a consequence of Joan's work in perinatal mental health and birth-related trauma, Joan is leading on the development of a policy statement *"Adding value to Horizon Europe and beyond: the EU Framework Programme for R&I as a policy driver for mental health and well-being"* and as a result has been invited to share her expertise and to advise the European Commission on priorities for funding in the area of perinatal mental health.

Joan has recently been awarded HORIZON Europe funding through the Marie Curie Joint Doctoral Awards Scheme, securing support for the Healthy Adaptation to Pregnancy, Postpartum and Parenting (HAP3) project which aims to examine risk and protective factors, and mechanisms of obesity and mental health problems. She has also been awarded funding from the Irish Research Council; The IRC CORALE project aims to investigate, for the first time, the operation of the right to conscientious objection in abortion services in Ireland and to develop a coherent framework for situating conscientious objection within a system of access to abortion services in a manner that is proportionate, effective and legally robust.

In addition Joan has recently been awarded further funding to explore the issue of maternal consent for interventions in later pregnancy and birth. The CONTENT Study investigates whether the legal principles that govern consent to treatment are applied in practice in Irish maternity care. The project will be designed to influence consent in practice and to inform policy in this area.

Perhaps most important of all are Joan's collaborations with service users and advocacy support groups who represent and support those most affected by the maternity care they receive. Joan is delighted to work with Placenta Accreta Ireland on a number of research projects, which have led to the development of a greater identification of the significant psychological consequences of a diagnosis of PAS on mothers and fathers and a deeper understanding of how parents navigate this traumatic birth experience. This work has informed the development of the HSE Guideline on the Diagnosis and Management of Placenta Accreta Spectrum.

Joan is grateful for the opportunities received, the awards granted and most of all for the collaboration over many years with amazing colleagues, researchers, students and families.

However, work in this area is ongoing and must continue until we make respectful care a reality and not a mantra. If we can generate the evidence to get the framework to underpin maternity care right, we can optimise outcomes, and in doing so, support women and families to have a positive birth experience.