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Pictured: Michelle Gallen | Talkirish.com

Talkirish.com

When Belfast-based Michelle Gallen tried to access an online Irish language learning course, she couldn't find one. So the e-learning consultant and experienced blogger decided to create a website herself.

"I didn't get the chance to learn Irish at school, but I was always curious about the language, and picked up pieces here and there," explains Michelle. "Because of my busy lifestyle, I found it hard to commit to a face-to-face class and decided to teach myself online. I searched for Irish language e-learning websites, but couldn't find one. That's when the idea of creating my own site first took root."

Around this time, Michelle was asked to develop an interactive Irish learning website for the BBC's online learning service, BBC Jam.

"I was contracted for my e-learning skills, not for my proficiency in Irish," says Michelle. "I worked with a great team on fantastic materials but unfortunately the entire BBC Jam service was pulled so the website never launched. At that stage I thought 'someone has got to do this', so I put my thinking cap on."

Talkirish.com was in the early stages of development when Michelle was accepted onto the Transform programme and it proved to be exactly what she needed to catapult her idea into the business arena.

"Every element of the programme was beneficial to me," Michelle explains, "from learning how to develop a business plan, to sharing ideas and experiences with other participants. And the financial assistance was crucial as it meant I could cut back on my consultancy work and concentrate on developing the site."

The site is a social network for teachers, speakers and learners of Irish across the globe. It has already attracted members from Ireland, the UK, Canada and America and will soon be marketed in Australia.

"At the moment everyone can access our existing learning tools such as the dictionary, games and flashcards free of charge," explains Michelle. "As the site develops, however, we will be releasing a range of products which learners can choose to pay for."

"My long-term goal is that Talkirish.com becomes a home for Irish speakers, teachers and learners across the world, a place where they can come to share and use the language. Because 'is fearr dhá theanga ná ceann amháin'...two tongues are better than one!"

