



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland

**Address given by Dr Garret FitzGerald at the launch of *A Century of Scholarship Travelling Students of the National University of Ireland*,
in the Royal Irish Academy
on Wednesday 12 November 2008 at 6.30 pm**

Members of the University, distinguished Travelling Students and our guests,

It is a great pleasure for me, as Chancellor of the National University of Ireland, to welcome you all here to the Royal Irish Academy, the centre of Ireland's scholarly life, for this evening's celebration.

Fearaim fíor-chaoín fáilte romhaibh go léir go hAcadamh Ríoga na hÉireann don cheiliúradh speisialta seo anocht.

This year is a historic one for the National University of Ireland, and the events of this day go to the heart of the significance of the centenary of this great university. Earlier today, at a ceremony in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, over a hundred NUI awards - from undergraduate to post-doctoral - were presented to students and graduates of all the NUI institutions. Tonight, the focus is firmly on a particular group of graduates who, in each succeeding decade since 1908, have been torch bearers for NUI, both here in Ireland and internationally. Tonight the NUI is pleased to honour *all* recipients of Travelling Studentships and Travelling Studentship Prizes.

The Travelling Studentship Scheme was established early in the life of the new National University of Ireland. In the wake of the

recent American presidential election, we hear frequent mention of 'transition', and part of the transition from the Royal University to the National University was the continuance and the expansion of a fundamental policy to promote and reward academic excellence. The criteria for the award of a Studentship or indeed a Prize have always contained the three elements of competition, a minimum standard of first class honours and the requirement to study/pursue research abroad. The mode of competition has changed, the monetary value has changed, but the standard has not changed and the stream of highly motivated, first class honours graduates has continued to flow from our institutions. I can say with conviction that the Travelling Studentship Scheme has been a proud flagship of the NUI, right up to the present.

It would be remiss, in mentioning the transition from Royal to National University, not to say a few words about the first recipient of an NUI Travelling Studentship - Patrick J. Browne, better known as Pádraig S. de Brún; mathematician, classical and celtic scholar, priest, poet and translator. He was not only the first to be awarded an NUI Travelling Studentship, but he symbolises the passage from Royal to National in that he had also been awarded an RUI Travelling Scholarship, but was disqualified because of the NUI award! Pádraig de Brún is symbolic of the Studentship Scheme in other ways as well: he represents the federal nature of NUI in that he received degrees from the then Recognised College of St. Patrick's College Maynooth, and from UCD; he was President of University College Galway; and although he had no direct association with UCC, his presence as a member of the NUI Senate - elected by Convocation, later an *ex officio* member *and* nominated by the Government - from the mid-twenties until his death, ensured that he had plenty of contact with that institution! His scholarly

achievements in such varying disciplines stand out as a beacon for the generations of Travelling Students who came after him.

This evening, I am very pleased to launch *A Century of Scholarship: Travelling Students of The National University of Ireland*. The idea behind this book was a simple one - to produce 'a special publication which would provide a record of the Travelling Studentship scheme over the years, reflecting the influence of the award on the recipients' careers and lives and conversely the enriching effect of their achievements within the NUI federal learning community'. The idea was simple, the realisation was protracted and fraught with delays. The book has been 'written' by over 200 contributors, and we are delighted to have a number of them here tonight. We know from communication with many of them that the prestige alone of the award of a Studentship meant the opening of doors which otherwise might not have been accessible, and along with it, essential funding which might not have been within the ability of the recipient's family to provide; for prize winners, the cash prize together with the prestige, also launched illustrious careers. many have expressed their pleasure and pride that the NUI has chosen to acknowledge them in this way.

You will find in these pages details of the careers of a cross-section of all Travelling Students - from every discipline, from every era. You will also find that some career paths veered away from the original direction taken. You will get some idea of the vast number of publications attributable to the contributors, and by extension to the whole body of Travelling Students. You will also become aware that in several cases two, or even three, members of one family were awarded a Studentship - a good reason to feel, as Stephen Fahy says " a special bond with the Travelling Studentship Scheme"! All in all, there can be little doubt either that the

collective influence of NUI Travelling Students, in so many spheres, is prodigious or that their enriching effect within the global learning community is profound.

Many of the contributors to the book - or their representatives - are here tonight and I congratulate them. Ordinarily, it would be inappropriate to single out any individuals in such a distinguished gathering, but on this occasion I will allow myself to make a few exceptions! First of all, I have been told that from the inception of this project Professor Fearghus Ó'Foghludha, Travelling Studentship in Experimental Physics 1950, showed a keen interest in the publication. He has maintained a home in Clonskeagh and in Durham, North Carolina. An email from his son, Mike Ó'Foghludha on Monday reads as follows: *"My father and mother travelled to Ireland specifically to attend the event. Unfortunately my father's health declined precipitously while he was in Ireland and I had to fly to Ireland last week and bring them back home safely to the US. I know my father deeply regrets not being able to attend the event as he was greatly looking forward to it."* I am also aware that Dr Michael Redmond (TS Prize, Zoology 1979), all the way from Bethesda Maryland is here tonight and we welcome him and any other guests who have traveled a distance to be here.

Among our Travelling Studentship guests tonight are two Studentship winners who hark back to an earlier time, and who deserve mention, not only for their success and their longevity but because they are associated in other ways with the beginnings of the Studentship Scheme: Seán de Búrca (Travelling Studentship in Irish and English, 1941) was himself a student of an earlier Travelling Student, Professor Caitilín Ní Maol-Chróin (Kate Mulchrone, Irish and German, 1918) who referred to his 'impressive list of academic awards and distinctions'. The other, Máire MacSwiney Brugha, a historic figure in her own right with

connection to the afore-mentioned Pádraig de Brún, her first encounter with whom she recalls in her book *History's Daughter* - and whom she remembers as "a tall, imposing man with a big smiling face, a hearty laugh and a beautiful baritone voice". Their presence enriches this event, and it is fitting and symbolic that they, who represent the early years of the Scheme, should be honoured alongside the Travelling Students who are receiving their awards today.

To all who have contributed, I offer my congratulations on this significant centenary publication. *A Century of Scholarship: Travelling Students of The National University of Ireland* will, I hope, be a renewed source of pride for those whose names appear there, and will facilitate a stronger network of communication among contributors and readers alike. I want to thank the NUI Registrar Dr Attracta Halpin and her staff, particularly Magdalen O'Connell, and also Neil Brennan and Gerry Penston for the work they have done in bringing this excellent project to completion.

I know that this book will be an inspiration to this year's Travelling Students as they set out on this exciting new phase in their academic life. I have met them already this afternoon. I offer them my renewed congratulations this evening. I would now ask the Registrar to call them to the platform for the presentation of the special Centenary Medals.