



UACHTARÁN NA hÉIREANN
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

Message from President Michael D. Higgins

On the Occasion of the Centenary of Eamon de Valera's Election as Chancellor

May I thank the National University of Ireland Chancellor, Dr. Maurice Manning, and Registrar, Dr. Attracta Halpin, for the invitation to send a message to all the staff and students in the National University of Ireland as the University marks the centenary of the election of Eamon de Valera as Chancellor of the University – a position which he held until his death in 1975.

As one of the major political figures of twentieth-century Ireland, Eamon de Valera's involvement at the very heart of the emergence of the Irish Free State, and later of the new Irish nation as defined in Bunreacht na hÉireann, is well documented. As well as his political contribution, de Valera had a tangible connection with the National University of Ireland, having been a mathematics graduate and indeed, for a short time, in 1912-13, he was Head of the Department of Mathematics and Mathematical Physics at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, a recognised college of the National University of Ireland.

The role of Chancellor as a leader of a college or university is an important one. As the chief officer of the University, the Chancellor sets the tone and overall direction of the University.

De Valera treated his position as Chancellor as a formal and ceremonial office, diligently presiding over the activities of the university with dedication, but rarely intervening to influence decisions or to shape academic policies. He was, however, alert to the implications for the NUI of the new constitutional settlement between the Irish State and the British which he engineered between 1932 and 1939. The King of the United Kingdom was recognised by charter and statutes of the NUI as the Visitor of the National University with significant powers. This led to some bitter disputes, including a row over the control and administration of a new dairy science faculty at University College Cork. The row was eventually resolved by an order, which bore de Valera's imprint, adapting the charter to cede the King's powers to the university's Executive Council.

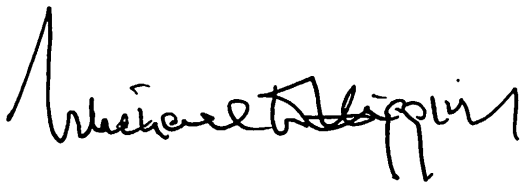
De Valera was the second Chancellor of the National University of Ireland, it having been formally established under the Irish Universities Act 1908. The period that de Valera presided as Chancellor – for more than half a century – was an exciting and productive time, a period that witnessed consolidation of many of the colleges within the State into a powerful and significant force that, over time, scaled up its teaching and research capabilities.

The role of universities today in offering transformative, independent and emancipatory outcomes for those who study within them must remain their very *raison d'être*. We must stand with the university in resisting the inordinate utilitarian pressure on them which has been taking place for several decades now, a continuous assault from a variety of overt and covert sources, which is resulting in attrition of range and depth, loss of interdisciplinary exchange, and can lead to a degradation of the very scholarship and teaching for which universities were established. Such adjustments are often rationalised as an inevitable search for contemporary relevance, usually in the name of market forces and the inexorable drive towards a pervasive utilitarian reductionism.

The university is, I suggest, a space from which new insights may emerge, and we must make sure that this continues, and we must do so with urgency through the recovery of the diversity of scholarship, the unity of scholarly support, striking out for originality, and seeking as comparative standards the great moments of intellectual work from around the world. The possibility of the emergence of truly emancipatory paradigms of policy and research are visible on the horizon, as well as the joy of living better, having come to know more together.

May I conclude my message by sending my best wishes to the current NUI Chancellor, Dr. Maurice Manning, and to all the staff and students of the university as it celebrates this centenary milestone in its history.

Beir beannacht

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael D. Higgins', written in a cursive style.

Michael D. Higgins
Uachtarán na hÉireann
President of Ireland