

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **DR CAROLINE HUSSEY**, Registrar, University College Dublin - National University of Ireland, Dublin, on 13 June 2003, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, on **ANGELA KERINS**

A Sheánsailéar, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle:

In 2003, designated European Year of People with Disabilities, it can be claimed that modest, but significant, improvements have taken place in societal attitudes in Ireland towards people with disabilities. From a late start and poor historical record, Ireland now ranks high on the list of nations considered progressive in the field of disability. The expectations of society about the rights and requirements of all citizens have changed, and reform of services to people with disabilities is finally becoming a reality. Promoting and achieving quality and best practice in service provision requires ingenuity, a talent to do battle and the stubborn refusal to accept the constraints of the *status quo*. Those who know her will concede that Angela Kerins fulfils all these criteria.

From a family upbringing between Tramore, Co. Waterford and Cashel Co. Tipperary, the then Angela MacCarthy's childhood memories are of basketball, national and local elections, church gate collections and being cajoled into wearing a polka dot dress, to present a full coffee set, on a tray, to the then Taoiseach's wife Maureen Lynch, a task achieved without breaking a single piece.

On leaving school, Angela found that her intention to study architecture was thwarted for a year by the age restrictions of the course. Finding nothing palatable in her parents' suggestion that she don for another year the school uniform of the Presentation Convent, she persuaded them to allow her to spend the year studying at the School of Nursing, Orsett Hospital, in Essex. She was so successful as a student that she subsequently signed on for postgraduate training in midwifery in which she topped the class.

This achievement can not have been easy, given her distraction from study by involvement in a rigorous campaign for improved student nurse pay, an activity evidenced by a large photograph on the front page of the Daily Telegraph of "Student Nurse, Angela MacCarthy" the badge on whose cap demanded: "pay, not peanuts". Perhaps driven by a desire to contain this notoriety, parental pressures were firmly exerted resulting in Angela's return to Ireland and the Meath Hospital. The highlight of this period was a fateful trip to a party at the Richmond Hospital, at which she met young Lieutenant Sean Kerins, who swept her off her feet.

Angela then spent a number of years in the Middle East, firstly in the United Arab Emirates working in the emergency room, intensive care and oncology. Then, soon after their marriage, Sean was posted to the Lebanon on peace-keeping duties and Angela, always the adventurer, headed for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to run a medical rehabilitation facility in Dhahran. Despite the difficulties of culture and the strict rules of Saudi society, she extended the hospital services to community care and developed a programme to re-train patients with spinal injuries and other traumas in English language and computer skills.

This experience set Angela's feet firmly on the pathway of rehabilitation and care for the quality of life of all citizens. On her return to Ireland, Angela was appointed to the Board of the National Council for the Elderly, where she had the distinction of being their first pregnant member of the Board. Later, as a member of the National Rehabilitation Board, she came to know Frank Flannery of the Rehab Group, who was to have a profound influence on the challenges and paths she would take – the first major step being to join Rehab.

Within the Rehab Group Angela found a place to develop innovative and entrepreneurial programmes, and she and her colleagues were successful in setting up a range of services for people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups. Angela was proactive in recognising disability as an international issue, and since 1996 she has been Rehab's permanent representative at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Angela is now the Director of Public Affairs and Group Development for the Rehab Group, and is also Chief Executive of its health and social care division, RehabCare. In setting up RehabCare, Angela firmly established its fundamental principles as a client-centred, can-do, innovative organisation, catering for the wide and changing community support needs of people with disabilities. RehabCare now provides services to over 2,700 people and currently employs nearly 600 people.

In 1996, the report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities set out the changes necessary to engender greater equality, inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in Ireland. During this time Angela served on a number of policy fora regarding services to people with disabilities and was a member of the government's Establishment Group which was given the task of implementing policies to mainstream services to people with disabilities.

Following her participation on this body, in 1999 Angela was appointed as the first chairperson of the National Disability Authority (NDA), the state authority under the Department of Justice, Equality and Law reform, which acts as a lead body on disability policy and practice in Ireland. One of her first inspirations, for which UCD is particularly grateful, was that the NDA should secure funding for Ireland's first Chair in Disability Studies.

As chair of the NDA, Angela also chairs the Government's Disability Legislation Consultative Group, a sectoral group which has recently produced unanimous landmark proposals for the core elements in the proposed new Disability Bill. Angela is also Chairperson of the Irish National Coordinating Body of the European Year of People with Disabilities 2003 and is a Patron of the Special Olympics World Games, (many of whose participants we will welcome here to the Belfield campus next week).

In her diverse involvement in Irish life Angela has chaired the Women's Political Association, served on the Board of FÁS International, created the Disability Alliance for Europe to campaign in the Nice Treaty Referendum, is a member of IBEC's National Executive.

However, despite this impressive list of accomplishments, Angela herself would rank being Sean Kerin's wife and the mother of Louise and Hugh as her greatest achievement.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS,

Praesento vobis, hanc meam filiam quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testur ac spondeo totique Academiae.