

Text of the introductory address delivered by DR. MICHAEL B. MURPHY, President, University College Cork on 3 December 2008, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, on PROFESSOR PETER GREGSON

Professor Peter Gregson, who has been President and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast since August 2004, is in the vanguard of the new generation of university leaders. As a world-class research scientist who successfully negotiated the transition to senior management he combines clear strategic vision with the integrity, ambition, energy and the enthusiasm necessary to motivate those around him to embrace change.



Peter Gregson was born in Dunfermline, the ancient capital of Scotland, on 3 November 1957. Educated at Imperial College London, he graduated with a first class BSc (Eng) in Materials Science in 1980 and was awarded the Bessemer Medal; he obtained his PhD in 1983 and was awarded the Matthey Prize.

He was appointed as a lecturer at the University of Southampton in 1983 and Professor of Aerospace Materials in 1995. During his career at Southampton he occupied a number of key academic and managerial posts, including Head of the Department of Materials, Deputy Head of the new School of Engineering Sciences, Director of Research for the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor from 2000 to 2004.

As a research scientist at Southampton he founded two internationally acclaimed research groups; one in aerospace materials, the other in innovative approaches to replacing hip and other joints, and he was personally responsible for attracting more than £6 million in research grants.

As President and Vice Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, Peter's strategic vision has encompassed a number of key themes and the results of his leadership are impressive.

To support the ambitious targets in the university's Corporate Plan 2006-2011, he coordinated a £260 million investment in strategic appointments, improved capital infrastructure and research studentships.

He has restructured the university from five faculties to three and created a much sharper institutional research focus. Throughout his career he has been committed to and promoted the concept of interdisciplinary research and this commitment has been translated into a network of research clusters designed to create an efficient and effective research network at Queen's. Research income has doubled during his period at the helm and the successful development of an enhanced research infrastructure was publically recognised when Queen's was invited to join the Russell Group of leading research intensive UK universities in 2006. Queen's is the only University to join the Group since its foundation in 1994.

Peter Gregson coordinated the development of international strategic partnerships between Queen's and Georgetown University in Washington DC, the University of Malaya and Petronas in Malaysia, Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin.

He strongly supports the University's commitment to the 'Queen's Experience' which encompasses the quality of the intellectual challenge on offer at the University as well as the cultural, social and sporting opportunities that students can enjoy while they are at Queen's.

Peter believes that Queen's is at the heart of the community it serves and a major challenge for him has been to get the balance right between prominence on the world stage and serving the community. Queen's contribution to the economy of Northern Ireland is well documented. It is the most successful UK university in terms of job creation through spin outs and second only to Cambridge in terms of spin out company turnover.

He is committed to raising the public profile of Queen's and, as part of the centenary celebrations, honorary degrees were awarded to Nelson Mandela, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern. Queen's was also the Times Higher (THES) 2008 Winner of the prize for arts contribution.

To all of the above initiatives he has brought the qualities of leadership, a willingness and ability to make decisions, intellect and the ability to get the best out of those who work with him.

During his distinguished career Peter's contribution to his profession has been recognised in a number of ways. He is a Chartered Engineer (1983). In 1995 he was awarded the prestigious Rosenhain Medal and Prize of the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining in recognition of his research on advanced aerospace aluminium alloys.

He was elected a Fellow of the institute in 1998. In 2001 he was elected Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering and has served on Council since 2005. He was elected Fellow of the City and Guilds Institute in 2006, and Fellow of the Irish Academy of Engineering, Member of the Royal Irish Academy and Companion of the Chartered Management Institute in 2007.

His contribution to society extends far beyond the boundary of higher education. In addition to his active involvement in Universities UK and Universities Ireland, he has been appointed to the Council of the CBI Northern Ireland and he represents Northern Ireland on the US-Ireland R&D Partnership. He also serves on the Northern Ireland Economic Development Forum. He was appointed Non Executive Director of the Rolls Royce Group in 2007.

Above all Peter Gregson is a family man. He is married to Rachel, a research physiotherapist, and they have three daughters, Ellie, Maria and Chrissie. Peter freely admits that Rachel helped to shape his professional life as well as influencing his decision to go to Queens. Her father was educated in Bangor, County Down and she has family living near Dublin. In the limited time that he has outside of work, recreational pursuits include spending time with his family, hill walking, tennis, sailing and family holidays.

Today the NUI is not only honouring one of the UK's most distinguished research scientists but also an outstanding academic leader whose ambition for Queen's University Belfast to become a significant player on the world stage is fast becoming a reality.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Scientiae, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.