

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by: **PROFESSOR PAUL GILLER**, Registrar and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, in University College Cork on 8 June, 2007, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Education, *honoris causa*, on **BERTIE KELLIHER**

A Leas-Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

The quality of universities is assessed by the quality of their staff and students, and the quality of their students depends in no small measure on the quality of the schools in which the students have been educated.

In turn, the success of the schools depends on the teachers and most particularly on the inspiration, vision and ethos set by their Principals. It is thus with great pleasure that we are able to recognise the tremendous contribution of one such visionary educator today, Mr Bertie Kelliher, former Principal of Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh.

In Munster, we are fortunate to have some of the best schools in the country, as evidenced by the consistently high performance of the students in their Leaving Certificate examinations.

In Cork, we are fortunate indeed to have schools like Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh, whose recent record of achievement in the education of boys is second to none. UCC is delighted to be able to recognise the massive contribution of the second level sector to the education of our children and to honour Bertie Kelliher as a representative of that sector.

Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh was founded by the Presentation Brothers in 1964 and one of the founder members of the school was Bertie Kelliher.

Having completed a BA in Irish and Latin at UCC in 1957 and the HDip in Education the year after, Bertie taught for a few years in Templemore and Turners Cross before joining Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh. He became Deputy Principal in 1972, and when the Presentation Brothers withdrew from direct management of the school in 1992, Bertie Kelliher was appointed as the first lay Principal, a position he held until he retired in the year 2000.

From its earliest years, the school established itself as a centre of excellence. It has been a key feeder school to UCC and since 1969, when the first group of boys took their Leaving Certificate, Coláiste boys have featured in the UCC Entrance Scholarships list every year bar one, including a memorable year in the early 1990's when they achieved five scholarships in the one year.

Bertie Kelliher helped lay the foundation of the school's success from its beginning and as Principal, he built on this, holding fast to traditional, tried and tested values, and led the school towards the twenty-first century.

What he played such a major part in creating, has continued to go on to great things. In 2002, four of the top eight Leaving Cert students in the country came from Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh and in the last three years, two of the Graduates of the Year at UCC have been past pupils of the school. This academic success is fed by the school's ethos of educational quality, which in turn is set by the visionary Principal.

As well as upholding the strong academic ethos, Bertie Kelliher also had the breadth of educational vision to develop and support a large range of extra-curricula activities in the school, where the boys have also excelled.

In 1997 for example, Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh became the first Irish school to win the coveted Schools Observer Mace for debating, defeating St Pauls, London; Glasgow High School and Winchester in the final. Pupils of Coláiste have had international success as members of the Irish Physics Olympiad and Irish World Debating team. The school has also had provincial and national success in a range of sports including basketball and soccer.

The organised educational and cultural trips abroad are legendary, as I know from first hand experience – my shy and introverted youngest son came back transformed from a recent trip to Barcelona.

These balanced successes in the educational and extra-curricula areas depend on the Principal who believes in the twin values and leads from the top.

I have asked former colleagues of Bertie's about what defines him as a person and they told me that

- he is very proud of his Kerry heritage and was brought up within a strong Gaelic culture - this explains his love of the Irish language
- he taught Latin in his early years and has a great love of the classics as the foundation of other languages
- he also has a great love of history and modern politics and has probably had a wonderful feast over the past few weeks

Since retirement he has been equally active, not just spending more time with his wife Áine and their five children, but he is Chairperson of the Kerry Genealogy Project, a board member of the National Suicide Research Foundation and serves on the Boards of Management of five schools. He has also been on several commissions for the Dept of Education.

When I talked with Bertie's former colleagues about the kind of educational leader he was, I was told that Bertie was known for his fairness, his patience, his tremendous grasp of educational issues and support for the sound principles of literacy, numeracy and good manners.

He understands the essence of education and was not deceived into implementing new-fangled ideas just for the sake of them. Whilst this might give the sense of a traditionalist, I was told that Bertie Kelliher was "progressive but held a healthy scepticism over innovation".

At the end of the day, what defines an educational leader is

- the success of the institution during his or her tenure,
- the respect with which the institution is held at home and abroad,
- and the legacy that is left for the next generation.

On all accounts, to his great credit, and to the benefit of the many students that have passed through Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh, Bertie Kelliher has made a tremendous mark on the educational landscape, locally, regionally and nationally, and thus it is an honour to commend him to you for an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Education.

PRAEHONORABILIS VICE-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 Arte Paedeutica, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.