

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: PROFESSOR PATRICK FOTTRELL, on 6 September 2012 in the Dublin Castle, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, jointly by the Universities of Ireland on **CHARLES F. FEENEY**

A Thaoisigh;
A Aire;
A Sheansailéirí;
A Cheannairí Ollscoileanna na hÉireann Thuaidh agus Theas;
A Ambasadóirí;
A Baill Oireachtas na hÉireann agus Tionóil Tuaisceart Éireann;
A Lucht Ollscoileanna hÉireann Thuaidh and Theas;
A Aíonna Céimiúla



Taoiseach;
Minister;
Chancellors;
Heads of Universities of Ireland North and South;
Ambassadors;
Members of Oireachtas Éireann and of the Northern Ireland Assembly;
Members of the Universities of Ireland, North and South;
Distinguished guests

Special welcome to Chuck Feeney and his family. Chucks wife Helga, daughters Juliette Timsit and Leslie Baily, son-in-law Peter Baily, granddaughter, Annabelle Timsit, Brother-in-law Jim Fitzpatrick and nephews Thomas and Daniel Fitzpatrick.

During the Italian Renaissance of the 15th/16th centuries the great leaders responsible for bringing about change such as Leonardo Da Vinci were know as "Renaissance Men". Leonardo strongly encouraged students at Universities to pursue knowledge which could be more influential for them than the perceived powerful careers of the Army and the Church. Some 100 years later the following is attributed to Frances Bacon, statesman/scientist and advocate of the applications of knowledge and science in industry. "Nam et ipsa scientia potestas est" ("knowledge itself is power").

And moving forward to about 30 years ago, Chuck Feeney realised that major investment was required in higher education and research for the Island of Ireland to become a knowledge economy. He invested generously and played a major part in our renaissance in third level education and research. He is indeed the "Renaissance Man" of Irish Higher Education.

It is highly fitting, therefore, that this extraordinary Irish American with enormous vision and generosity is honoured today by all Universities North and South in a unique ceremony in the presence of such a distinguished gathering. Chuck Feeney has invested over 5 billion euro in grants internationally since 1982. Over 1.25 billion euro has been allocated to projects on this island. The largest single recipient is the higher education sector North and South which has received almost 800 million euro.

What is relatively unique about Chuck Feeney is that he donated anonymously until about 11 years ago and he only agreed to go public to encourage other wealthy individuals to "give while living". Chucks life-story is detailed in Conor O'Clery's excellent biography: *The Billionaire who Wasn't* (2007). One significant quote, from many, in O'Clery's Book is from Time Magazine, "*Feeney's beneficence ranks him among the grandest of any living American and may some day make him the most generous American Philanthropist of all time*"

He was born to Irish American parents, Leo and Madaline, in the Industrial City of Elizabeth, New Jersey. He was the only boy in a family of three and his ancestors came from Co. Fermanagh.

During his schooldays in Elizabeth he showed early signs of entrepreneurship by organising lawn-mowing and snow clearing services in his neighbourhood. He demonstrated his ability to select the right people for specific jobs by selecting the biggest boys in his class to help him with these services. He also sold Christmas cards from door to door.

After completing school he enlisted in the US Air Force and served in Korea and Japan.

After his term in the Air Force he took advantage of the GI Bill to complete a Bachelor's Degree in Hotel Administration in Cornell University, New York. He was the first member of his family to attend University. To supplement his relatively small grant, he made and sold sandwiches to his fellow students. After graduating from Cornell he completed his education in Grenoble and travelled in Europe for a while.

He is highly appreciative of the benefits he gained from a University education and of the financial pressures encountered by students with limited incomes. This regard for higher education and the importance of giving access to students from low income families had a profound influence on his future philanthropic policies.

Some years after graduating from Cornell, influenced by experience in Europe and overseas with US Forces, he developed a highly successful worldwide duty-free shopping business (DFS). This expanded rapidly and became highly profitable.

Chuck did not want the money, from the profits of his business, to consume his life. Rather, he wanted to use his money, while he was living to help people. His long time friend from Cornell and advisor, Harvey Dale, recommended the formation of a Foundation. And so in 1982, Atlantic Philanthropies was born.

He quietly and anonymously transferred the bulk of his business gains to Atlantic. When the Duty Free Shoppers Group was sold in 1997, substantial additional funds were transferred. The Board of Atlantic decided at that time to go public about its existence but grantees were not allowed to disclose the source of the gifts or to publicly recognize Chuck's generosity.

In 2001, he and Atlantic ceased anonymous grant making for the sake of transparency and with the hope of encouraging other wealthy people to explore – "Giving while Living".

It also decided, in keeping with Chuck's wishes, to spend down its remaining significant assets and close its doors by 2020.

It will be the largest Foundation on record to do so.

Atlantic, as mentioned earlier, has been exceptionally generous to the Island of Ireland and continues to advise and fund very important programmes here. It is very important to recognise the excellent leadership and professional staff of Atlantic Philanthropies especially in the offices in the North and South.

A key role of Atlantic in this regard has been the encouragement and development of the Philanthropic sector itself on this island. While many individuals and organisations are very generous, much remains to be done as regards improving the fiscal environment and infrastructure for giving. The launch by the Taoiseach of the Report of the Forum on Philanthropy in July of this year is therefore very significant. The implementation of the Forum's four key recommendations will transform philanthropic giving in the Republic of Ireland and would be a fitting tribute to Chuck Feeney.

From the outset of his giving, Chuck's main focus was on higher education. He started giving to his *Alma Mater*, Cornell, to which he still contributes generously. Last year he donated 350 million dollars for a state-of-the-art research/postgraduate facility on Roosevelt Island, New York.

He began funding third level education on this Island in the 1980s/1990s when he saw major infrastructural and other deficiencies in the Institutions.

Higher Education greatly benefited from Atlantic funding for key, much-needed infrastructural projects including teaching/learning facilities, student residences and support services and endowed Professorships.

These initiatives eventually led to most significant ground breaking discussions with the Government of the Republic of Ireland in 1997 to fund research programmes in higher education.

Chuck strongly advocated a “think big”, ambitious approach to third level research funding. He wanted to transform rather than “tinker at the edges” with the Irish Research Landscape.

Thus, the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI) was launched in 1998 by the Higher Education Authority which has professionally managed it since then. Atlantic funded 50% of the first cycle which was vital to kick-start the Programme. Levels of funding in the 100’s of million euro which had been available in other competitive countries for many years, now became available in Ireland for the first time. Five cycles of the Programme have now been completed with an investment of 1.22 billion euro which includes government and private matching funds. The programme has provided key physical facilities and personnel for research in humanities, science/engineering/technology and the social sciences including business and law.

It is important to acknowledge the support of the Irish Government for continued funding of this programme especially in our recent difficult economic times. Also to recognize the roles of the Higher Education Authority and the Government Departments of Education and Skills as well as Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

Both Universities in Northern Ireland are also beneficiaries of Atlantic funding for major infrastructural improvements and for key academic and support personnel. Building on the model developed in the Republic of Ireland a joint initiative was developed between the Department of Employment and Learning and Atlantic Philanthropies - called The Support Programme for University Research (SPUR).

The aim of this Programme was to support and strengthen the research capacity of both Universities enabling them to increase the number of Research Centres capable of being assessed as being of the highest world quality in the Research Assessment Exercise which is a periodic assessment by the UK Government of the quality of research in third level institutions.

One of Chuck Feeney’s original aims was that his funding would boost the status of research and third level education on this island.

Both the PRTLTI (in the Republic of Ireland) and the SPUR (in Northern Ireland) programmes in combination with other funding sources have had major impacts on raising the status of research and third level education.

For example, independent ratings agencies now rank the quality of research in both Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland in the top 20 in the world. About ten years ago R.O.I. was 40th in the world. Also, in strategically important areas of food and life science rankings as high as the top three in the world have been attained. These are remarkable achievements.

This enhancement of research in our third level institutions has of course had significant impact on the quality of undergraduate and postgraduate learning across practically all disciplines.

Also through outreach programmes from relatively new world class research centres in these institutions, school pupils, teachers and community groups have benefited. Furthermore, assuming sustainability of funding, third level institutions on this Island are well positioned to leverage additional funding from the EU Horizon 20:20 Programme of 80 billion euro outlined by Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn in

Dublin in July. There is great scope in this Programme for further collaborations between third level institutions North and South.

Chuck Feeney also envisaged his funding would help to boost economic growth and create better jobs.

In the R.O.I. the combination of PRTLTI funding together with funding from other agencies such as Science Foundation Ireland and industry has helped in this regard. Science Foundation Ireland's emphasis on the funding of excellent research with impact and on industrial collaboration has played a significant role. An example of one of the economic outcomes from research funding in R.O.I. is the 700 million euro in Foreign Direct Investment for Research and Development from multinational companies last year. This was won against strong international competition. It is 58% of the total FDI and will create several thousand highly skilled R & D jobs. Northern Ireland has also seen significant increases in FDI related to R & D.

Both in the North and South there have been major increases in start-up and spinout industries from third level institutions.

In addition to his interest in research and education of this Island, Chuck Feeney played an active role in promoting peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. This role is described in two excellent books – Niall O'Dowd's *"An Irish Voice"* (2010) and Conor O'Clery's *"The Greening of the White House"*. In acknowledging Chucks work we also recognise the very important parts played by others in today's audience.

Indeed the roles of so many people responsible for the success of the negotiations that culminated in the signing of the Northern Ireland Peace Accord in 1998 are very well described by George Mitchell in his book *"Making Peace"* (1999). After the signing of the Accord he was leaving his hotel in Belfast for the Airport on Easter Saturday, 1998 when he was approached by two elderly ladies who hugged him. One woman said with tears in her eyes "We want to thank you, not for us, our lives are nearly over, but for our grandchildren whose lives are just beginning. Thanks to you they'll lead lives of peace and hope, something we've never known".

These memorable words make all the work of so many including Chuck Feeney connected with the Peace Accord so very worthwhile.

Chuck's funding of so many other projects on this island and in at least seven other countries reflects his memorable comment in an RTE TV documentary in 2010 - "I always have a strong empathy with people who have it tough in life".

Some examples of these projects include:

- Promotion of peace and reconciliation in South Africa.
- Funding of campaigns which were successful in abolishing the juvenile death penalty in five US States.
- Funding of organisations which campaigned for same sex civil partnerships in Ireland and for gay marriages in South Africa.
- Also in South Africa he supports efforts to change the perception of HIV/AIDS and the securing of anti retroviral drugs (for HIV) for millions of South Africans.
- Funding the transformation of health care in Vietnam and strengthening world class biomedical research in Australia.
- In Northern Ireland and U.S.A. he funded organisations working on the recovery of billions of dollars of unclaimed benefits for over 2 million older adults.
- He has funded the transformation of end of life care for patients in Ireland to allow them the dignity and peace to which they are entitled through Hospice care.

He regards all of these as basic human rights as he does his current priority areas. These are:

- Ageing – Older adults should enjoy good quality of life especially low income adults.
- Children and Youth – especially their rights to education, health, safety and services
- Population and Health
- Reconciliation and Human Rights

In these and other areas Atlantic Philanthropies

- continues to support long term change by working closely in partnership with Governments
- addressing root causes of social injustice
- focussing on advocacy for change rather than filling gaps in services
- building on strengths of individual organisations, communities and movements to advocate on their own behalf and on behalf of others
- investing in leaders and supporting institutions who can bring about progressive change in the future

It's important to acknowledge the excellent work of the leaders and staff of so many organisations on this island, some who are present today who work closely with Atlantic and Government for the benefit of their fellow human beings. This work is very close to the heart of Chuck Feeney who says "you will never run out of people you can help".

In conclusion, since Chuck Feeney commenced giving many years ago it was his strong policy not to accept recognition. No buildings, plaques or endowments bear his name and he has not accepted any awards until two years ago when

- he was presented by Cornell with the Icon of Industry Award (2010)
- inducted into the Irish American Hall of Fame (2011)
- received the gold medal of the University of California, San Francisco (2012)

He received his first honorary degree today and it is fitting that it's from all the Universities in the North and South of this Island, in this unique ceremony. The Universities are very pleased to confer their highest honour on the most deserving of recipients.

It is our way, Chuck, of saying thank you very much for your enormous generosity to the Island of Ireland and indeed to so many other countries as well. Your actions will have major impacts for generations to come.

Praehonorabilis Cancellarii, Vice-Cancellarii, Praeses, Praeposite, totaeque Hiberniae Universitates, praesento vobis, hunc virum quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque vobis fide mea testor ac spondeo, omnibusque hic praesentibus Universitatibus.

Most honourable Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors, Presidents, Provost and members of the universities of Ireland, I present to you this man whom I know to be suitable as much in character as in learning, to be admitted to the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws and by my faith, I testify and vouch for this to you and the universities here present.