

**OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN, GAILLIMH**  
**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY**

Text of the Introductory Address delivered by **DR ALMA MCCARTHY**,  
National University of Ireland, Galway on 12 June, 2015 on the occasion of  
the Conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, on  
**PHILLIP SMYTH.**

A Uachtaráin, a Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine  
uaisle.....

Phillip Smyth was born in Dublin and completed both his undergraduate and postgraduate MBA studies at what was then UCG. His early career was in the Irish Army where he served as an officer for 17 years. During that time he reached the rank of Commandant and served with the United Nations in Lebanon. He was extensively involved in education and served as a lecturer in the Military College and was also involved in the training of non-commissioned officers.

In 1989, Phillip Smyth took over the directorship of Shannon College. Shannon College of Hotel Management was founded in 1951. Over the last 26 years, Phillip Smith has led the development of the college from a small

private hotel school to one of the world's leading hotel schools whose qualifications and graduates are recognised worldwide by international hotel companies, foreign governments, overseas universities and international hospitality organisations. Currently, 40% of the student body are international students from over 20 countries worldwide.

Key milestones in the development of Shannon College under the leadership of Phillip Smyth include bringing the programme to honours degree level, attaining membership of the CAO and the development of an extensive network of international placements with many of the leading global hotel groups. Access to Shannon College was widened from 2001 onwards when Free Fees and Higher Education Grants were won for EU students. New buildings and facilities were developed between 1996 and 2004 funded entirely by voluntary contributions, many from alumni.

In the early years, the diploma in hotel management programme focused heavily on strong practical training and placement, and while this strong grounding in professional practice remains, the honours degrees now offered by Shannon College at Shannon and NUI Galway also have a strong focus on the development of commercial awareness and business acumen. The long list of illustrious alumni currently holding senior management positions in hotel companies in Ireland and worldwide is testament to the unique ethos and professional approach to hotel management education that has been

protected at Shannon College throughout the last 20 years of growth, development and change. Shannon College continues to thrive and boasts a record of 100% employment on Graduation Day every year.

The Shannon College brand is exceptionally strong throughout the world and Shannon College students and alumni enjoy a reputation for excellence, attention to detail, discipline and skill development to the highest international standards. This April, Shannon College alumni and staff were welcomed by the Ambassador at the Irish Embassy in London to a reception where Mr Phillip Smith was guest of honour. Speaking at the event, the Ambassador celebrated the valued contribution made by members of the Shannon College Alumni to the wider UK economy.

The next milestone in the college's future is the imminent incorporation of Shannon College of Hotel Management into NUI Galway, remaining in its historical location at Shannon Airport. This involved the final step of convincing government that Shannon College, which developed outside the public education sector, although owned by the State, should join a major university.

NUI Galway has strongly supported the development of Shannon College since 1991, supporting it to become a Recognised College of the NUI and offering a joint qualification. The University greatly values the ethos and brand

of Shannon College. For the first time, Shannon College will be in a position to compete for state funding and has specific targets to launch a Master's Degree and deliver quality research for the hotel sector. I have had the pleasure of directly liaising with Phillip and his colleagues as we plan the design of a Hotel Management stream on the NUI Galway Executive MBA programme which would be a highly valued offering for Shannon College alumni.

Thus far, I have reflected on the key milestones, achievements, outcomes and outputs of Shannon College over the past quarter century. It is now well-established that the critical driver of organisational success – public, private or third sector – is effective leadership. Reflecting on effective leadership, it is perhaps fitting, given Phillip's army background, to quote Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff of the US army in the 1930s who surmised that:

*“A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent.”*

Conversations with alumni and former colleagues of Phillip's as I researched this citation consistently pointed to a number of essential leadership characteristics that Phillip displays which align with MacArthur's conception of

effective leadership: Phillip's fairness; his engaging approach, his empathy with staff, students and alumni; his involved leadership approach – not a Director at a distance; fun to work with; his compassion; and respectfulness.

Furthermore, Phillip instils in students and alumni a deep sense of camaraderie and discipline which he has very effectively translated from his army training to the Shannon College context and is a Director who “leads from the front”.

It is clear from his vision and development of a globally recognised brand of excellence in hotel management education over a quarter century that Phillip Smyth provides an excellent example of effective leadership in action by leading from the front with charisma, integrity and character. It is, thus, a great pleasure to introduce **Phillip Smyth** as a recipient of an honorary doctorate from NUI Galway.

**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 utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.*