



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland

**Address given by Dr Maurice Manning at the presentation of
NUI Awards 2009, in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham,
on Wednesday 25 November 2009 at 2.30 pm**

Members of the University, distinguished award winners and guests

As Chancellor of the National University of Ireland, I am delighted to be here this afternoon for the annual Presentation of Awards. It gives me great pleasure to welcome to this awards ceremony the distinguished graduates and students from the NUI constituent universities and recognised colleges. We have come here this afternoon to honour and celebrate their academic excellence and their achievements.

I also welcome members of the Senate of the University, representatives of the NUI institutions, other friends and colleagues and guests. I am particularly pleased to be joined on the platform by my fellow officers of the University, Dr. Michael Murphy, President of University College Cork and NUI Vice-Chancellor; Professor John Hughes, President of NUI, Maynooth and Pro-Vice-Chancellor; Dr Martin Butler, Vice-President for Students, UCD and Ms Mary O'Riordan, Vice President for the Student Experience. at NUI Galway.

The Charter of the National University of Ireland granted in 1908 empowers the University to 'encourage original research, promote scholarship, and spread learning throughout the land.' Today is a day when we pursue those objectives in a special way.

The National University of Ireland is a federal university. It incorporates four constituent universities – UCD UCC NUI Galway and NUI Maynooth and a number of Recognised Colleges of which the National College of Art and Design and the Royal College of Surgeons are represented today. NUI has over 60,000 students spread across the campuses of the four constituent universities and the recognised colleges. In 2008, approximately 27,000 qualifications ranging from certificates to higher doctorates were awarded in NUI. We have here today at this assembly the highest-achieving graduates and students from across the federation. These award winners today have emerged at the top in a range of competitions organised by NUI and open, in some cases to students, in others to graduates, of the constituent universities and recognised colleges of the National University of Ireland. Our award winners are scholars of distinction and researchers of potential. We look forward to your future scholarship, research and discoveries.

The identification and rewarding of academic distinction is a core activity for any university and the National University of Ireland has been organising competitions and making awards since its foundation in 1908. Very many of those who have received awards have gone on to even greater achievement whether in academic life, in the public sphere or in other fields of endeavour. The winner of the first NUI Travelling Studentship – awarded in 1910 – was Patrick J. Browne. Better known later as Dr Pádraig de Brún, he was an accomplished mathematician and also an Irish scholar and poet. Following a distinguished academic career, he became President of University College Galway (now NUI Galway) in 1945 and served as Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of NUI.

In emphasising to the students and graduates of 2009 the longevity of NUI awards, I do so firstly to make you conscious that you are the inheritors of a tradition which we look to you to continue. You are following in the footsteps of considerable scholars. We look to you to uphold their values and extend their achievements in a new generation. I also mention the NUI legacy in the knowledge that the heritage and continuing tradition over a century which it represents are now at serious risk. As you may be aware there, the McCarthy

Report includes a recommendation that the National University of Ireland should be abolished – ostensibly on cost-saving grounds. This proposal does not stand up to impartial scrutiny. Abolishing NUI would not save money but would remove a national institution which has served the country well for over a century. While the crisis in the public finances must be addressed, in this time of crisis, the Government should not be panicked into making short-term damaging changes to our educational infrastructure, such as would occur if the abolition of NUI were to proceed. Be in no doubt about it. If NUI were to disappear, the identity of each of the member institutions would be altered and fragmentation, which has long been identified as a weakness of the university sector, would increase.

On behalf of the whole university, I extend my warmest congratulations to the graduates and students who have been awarded NUI Travelling Students, scholarships and prizes in 2009. You have done exceptionally well. Your academic distinction is valued by the National University of Ireland. Your families and friends can feel immensely proud of you.

I now call on the Registrar of NUI, Dr. Attracta Halpin to present our distinguished award winners.