



Honorary degrees: procedures for awarding

Summary

University College Dublin has not in the past awarded honorary degrees. It would appear that the university is legally empowered to do so, since the enactment of the Universities Act 1997. The process by which the university will award such degrees is proposed.

The award of degrees is a matter for Academic Council. However, proposals and decisions on honorary degrees must be handled sensitively and confidentially. It is proposed, therefore, that sub-committee of Academic Council, acting on delegated authority of Academic Council, would assume the responsibility for awarding honorary degrees. The Academic Council Committee on Honorary Degrees will comprise the President, Registrar, Vice-President for Research, and two senior academics from each College, nominated by the Principal of the College and appointed by Academic Council.

Background

University College Dublin (UCD) has not in the past awarded honorary degrees. This is anomalous, and relates to the origins of UCD as constituent college of the National University of Ireland (NUI). Prior to the enactment of the Universities Act 1997, the constituent colleges, UCD included, did not have the power to award degrees. Students pursued courses of study in the constituent colleges, but the NUI awarded and conferred the degrees. The award of honorary degrees was thus a matter for the university (the NUI) not the constituent colleges.

The Universities Act 1997 established the constituent colleges of the NUI as full universities (albeit constituent universities of the NUI). Given that, since 1997, UCD has awarded degrees in its own right, it would appear that the university is also legally entitled to award honorary degrees.

It is likely that the four constituent universities will soon begin to independently award honorary degrees. It is necessary to establish a procedure for such awards. The proposed procedure is outlined.

Procedure for award of honorary degrees at UCD

1. The award of degrees is a matter for Academic Council. However, proposals and decisions on honorary degrees must be handled sensitively and confidentially. It is proposed, therefore, that sub-committee of Academic Council, acting on delegated authority of Academic Council, would assume the responsibility for awarding honorary degrees.

2. The Academic Council Committee on Honorary Degrees will comprise the President, Registrar, Vice-President for Research, and two senior academics from each College, nominated by the Principal of the College and appointed by Academic Council.
3. The President will present candidates for the award of an honorary degree to the Committee, with supporting documentation including the biography and achievements of the candidate and the rationale for the award.
4. Where representations are made to the President, from within or without the university, that an individual merits the award of an honorary degree, in order to protect the confidentiality of the process, the President will not indicate whether or not that individual will be or has been considered by the Committee.
5. The proceedings of the Committee are strictly confidential.
6. A meeting of the Committee shall be quorate when six or more members are present. A proposal to award an honorary degree must be supported by two-thirds or more of the members present and voting in order for the committee to recommend the award of the degree.
7. The candidate must not be approached unless and until the Committee recommends the award of an honorary degree.
8. Where the Committee recommends the award of an honorary degree, the President, or a member of the university acting on behalf of the President, will approach the candidate to determine if they will accept the degree.
9. Where a candidate recommended by the Committee is willing and in a position to accept the degree, the university will confer the degree.
10. Where a candidate indicates they will accept an honorary degree and is to be conferred, their candidacy will be brought to the attention of the next meeting of Academic Council and the next meeting of Governing Authority as an item for noting
11. The name of a candidate recommended by the Committee for the award of honorary degrees shall not be released unless and until the candidate has indicated they will accept the degree, and then only on the direction of the President.

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