

FACULTY OF ENGINEERING: learning on the move

A less than harmonious past brought

The history of UCD engineering is marked by campus moves, male-dominated classrooms and lots of innovation. John Holden reports

The UCD engineering school, in its entirety, had a relatively brief spell on the Earlsfort Terrace campus.

In fact, the longest period its faculties were ever located together was when it was on the grounds of a wholly different college.

The history of UCD engineering, therefore, can be spread out over three different locations – Earlsfort Terrace, Merrion Street in the former Royal College of Science for Ireland (RCSd), and the Belfield campus – although it could be argued that its time in Earlsfort Terrace was the most important.

Prof Vincent McCabe was a UCD lecturer in mechanical engineering from 1959, and dean of the faculty of engineering and architecture at UCD from 1986-1992. He was one of six brothers who all did degrees in mechanical and electrical engineering in UCD. "At one time there were four of us studying together – one in first, second, third and fourth year," laughs Prof McCabe. By the time he began his studies, the school of

civil, mechanical and electrical engineering had moved to Merrion Street in what was originally the home of the RCSd. "The whole school had only been in Earlsfort Terrace from 1909-1926," says Prof McCabe. "These were, however, very formative years for Irish engineering."

In the early years, the UCD engineering school would be overshadowed by the state-sponsored RCSd. Based on earlier institutions, it was established in 1867 and it had access to a far greater pool of resources. "Money for the RCSd was always much more flathuillach. We were meant to be financed by the government of the day as well but we never got as much," says McCabe.

Differences in financial support, professional rivalry, and a small amount of religious and sectarian division, made relations between UCD engineering and the RCSd less than harmonious at times.

When it was later decided in 1916 that UCD engineering students would have to complete their third

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and fourth years in RCSd as the expertise lay in the Royal College, UCD authorities made every effort to enforce their authority by demanding that their students sit a separate examination from RCSd students.

The fortunes of Earlsfort's engineers were to change after the foundation of the Free State. "After the War of Independence, the RCSd hoped, in vain, that they might be left alone to become a centre for research in Ireland," says McCabe. "UCD authorities, however, had already made plans for the Merrion Street premises and agreed terms with the Irish provisional government in 1926 for the merger of the two colleges. The University Education Act of 1926 leased the buildings of the Royal College to UCD for a period of 99 years at a rent not exceeding five shillings."

After this time the story of UCD engineering is somewhat more cohesive, even if there were to be several more moves. The whole school moved to Merrion Street in 1926 where it then became possible for engineering to really flourish.

FACULTY OF LAW: changing times

Remembering the early days of gentle revolution

Law students played a key part in social and academic life at Earlsfort Terrace, writes Peter McGuire



Above: Senior Counsel Dermot Gleeson pictured with Dorrie Finan attending a Literary and Historical society event in 1968.

Law students have always been at the centre of the most important episodes in UCD's history.

When Michael Tierney was president of UCD, he was regularly engaged in battles of will with the students of the literary and historical society, which was dominated by law students.

Many law students went on to

play a role in the so-called "Gentle Revolution" of the early 1960s, when UCD students rebelled against the structures of UCD authority.

An era of UCD's history ended with the transfer of the faculty of law to the Belfield campus in 1970, but many of the most significant and influential names in the legal profession can still trace

their roots back to Earlsfort Terrace.

One of Ireland's most eminent barristers, Paul Conlon SC, was a law student in Earlsfort Terrace. He has worked as a prosecutor and defender on a range of civil and criminal cases, constitutional law cases and international law cases.

He has fond memories of his

time in the Terrace, where he studied both arts and law before sitting his professional law exams.

"I remember those times as a period of awakening," he says. "There was a great emphasis on real study, analysis, communication and transparency in the university, and that was slowly beginning to feed out into wider society. . . . Sadly, I think that ethos is under constant challenge in Ireland today," he believes.

"At that time, students from all the different faculties would have mixed together a lot more."

"Students from architecture, arts, commerce, medicine and dentistry would all have been in the same building, so you could get to know a large number of other students. Students from different areas wouldn't have been fragmented."

Students from the UCD faculty of law were heavily involved in Tuairim, a political discussion group which analysed and debated some of the problems of Irish society.

"Economic and political life was at a low ebb in the 1950s and this was when people began to think about how the country could move forward," explains Conlon who, along with other law students, was a member of the group.

"We had discussion groups and from these groups emerged a journal. We were trying to formulate ideas for development and employment in Ireland. The group and the journal were pluralist in that we were open to all ideas and opinions."

"We analysed problems or issues and we put our results before the relevant authorities," he says.

Within UCD, Tuairim was engaged in regular discussions about the move to Belfield and often released pamphlets and statements opposing it, which were treated seriously at the highest levels of government.

According to Conlon, much of the inspiration for the ideas of Tuairim came from the teaching staff of the faculty. "There were great lecturers on the course who could really stimulate interest," he says.

"Seamus Henchy, for example, who became a Supreme Court judge, was an excellent lecturer in constitutional law. He was always very insightful and challenging."

"Even outside the law faculty, this was a time when people like Dudley-Edwards and Kevin Nolan were reviving the department of history, while John Kelly

was instilling students with a love of, and interest in, politics."

Much student time, however, was taken up by social life rather than academia. "There was much more time to really get involved in the college life," Conlon recalls.

"There was a great number of clubs and societies, from the bigger ones like the L&H to the smaller ones like the commerce or law society. They were more like social centres than societies focusing on a particular area."

"The Terrace was a very friendly place, and when you were walking through it, you would always see someone you knew. You could then walk from the Terrace, through the Iveagh Gardens to Newman House."

"Newman House had newspapers, sitting rooms and a large room for societies to meet. It was very much a part of the social life of the college."

Conlon was a committee member of the L&H while he was in college.

He feels that the society may have been less political in the 1950s than it was to become in later years. "From the 1960s, you would have found more people using it for personal or political purposes."

"We always got in interesting speakers. One of my highlights was when the writer Ulick O'Connor addressed the society. Seamus Sorohan, who is now a senior counsel, was a frequent speaker at the L&H during my time there. Other people who were involved were Richard Ryan (who would go on to become the minister for finance), and Patrick Connolly (who served as attorney general in the 1980s)."

The societies were a vital life-line for students in the 1950s, Conlon believes.

"Going to societies was a good way for students to socialise when they wouldn't have had the money to drink."

"I remember there was so little money around that when I graduated in 1954, I had a conversation with Ronan Keane (later to become chief justice of Ireland) about how we might be able to save up enough to go to the 1960 Olympics in Rome, and that was a long time away."

Those days of hardship are now a distant memory.

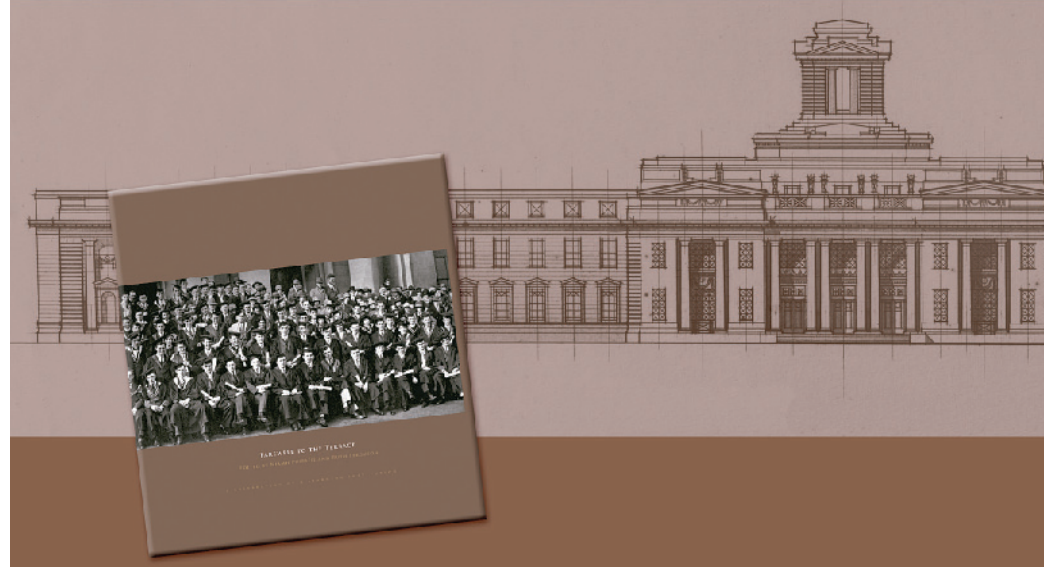
Today, Roebuck Castle towers over the Belfield campus. It aims to continue where Earlsfort Terrace left off, striving to produce students who will leave their imprint on the social, political and academic life of the nation.



A portion of the Kevin Barry memorial window in Earlsfort Terrace. Photograph: UCD archive

A LASTING MEMENTO:

FAREWELL TO THE TERRACE



The *Farewell to the Terrace* commemorative book is a celebration of the many students and staff that were educated, worked and taught in Earlsfort Terrace.

Beautifully illustrated with photographs of life at the Terrace, the book is edited by historian Niamh Puirseil, and Ruth Ferguson, Curator of Newman House. It comprises reminiscences of student days, accounts of academic life and perspectives on the history and architectural heritage of the building.

Farewell to the Terrace captures some of the rich history and folklore of Earlsfort Terrace, and will evoke fond memories for the reader.

Copies can be ordered by sending a cheque, payable to UCD University Relations, for €40, (plus €8 P&P) to *Farewell to the Terrace* c/o UCD University Relations, Tierney Building, UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4



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