

Citation - Donal O'Donnell honorary doctoral conferring.

Many of you sitting in the audience today will know Donal O'Donnell as the Chief Justice of Ireland; the most senior judge in the country. I am here to say a little more about him and to explain why UCD, his Alma Mater, has chosen to honour him today.

Born in 1957, Donal O'Donnell grew up in Northern Ireland and was educated by the Christian Brothers in Belfast. He came to UCD in the late 1970s to study law, having developed an interest in his father's work as a judge in Northern Ireland. The UCD experience in the 1970s was a little different to what it is today, with law lectures (and indeed, graduations) taking place in the Newman Building rather than in a purpose-built Law School. However, some things are eternal: debating, sport and student politics.

Donal was a strong debater and won the Irish Times debate once, and he also won the Observer Mace, which was the competition for universities in Britain and Ireland, twice. He ran for Law Soc Auditor but narrowly missed out, was Treasurer of the L&H, and represented UCD in golf between 1977 and 1982.

Donal was interested in issues relating to Public Law from the start, and had the benefit of being taught by Mary Redmond for Constitutional Law; James O'Reilly for Family Law, and John Kelly for Jurisprudence, all of whom approached the Constitution from very different perspectives. He was consistently at the top of his class in both 1977 and 1978.

Illness prevented Donal from completing his degree with his class in 1979. He received his Bachelor of Civil Law degree in 1980, and graduated from the Kings Inns with first class honours in 1982. He went to the University of Virginia to complete a Masters degree, and was first in his LLM class. On his return, in 1983 he commenced practice at the Bar of Ireland and had a successful career. As well as practising in the Irish courts at every level, he appeared in the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union.

He became a Senior Counsel after the unusually short time of 12 years in practice. His advocacy spanned commercial law, defamation, employment law, product liability, intellectual property and other areas, and he developed a particular expertise in Irish constitutional law, appearing in a significant number of the important cases of the time.

He was made a Bencher of the King's Inns in 2009, and the following year he was appointed directly to the Supreme Court from the Bar, another honour unusually early in his career. In 2021 he was appointed as Chief Justice, the head of the Irish judiciary. He chairs and sits on many committees nationally and internationally and is recognised by academics and practising lawyers as a leading jurist of his generation.

Alongside his work in the courtroom, Donal has published scholarly articles in the Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly, the Dublin University Law Journal and The Irish Judicial Studies Journal, as well as chapters in edited books.

It is also worth noting that he has been a director of Our Lady's Hospice, has served on the Law Reform Commission between 2005 and 2012, and was a committee member and now patron of the Irish Legal History Society.

At every stage of his career, Donal has remained a part of the wider UCD community and a strong supporter of the Sutherland School of Law.

He has delivered distinguished guest lectures at UCD, such as the John Kelly memorial lecture in 2016. He has published articles in the *Irish Jurist*, the journal edited in the Law School. He has attended and spoken at many academic conferences in the School, and has collaborated with our academics on research projects, books and articles. His particular areas of expertise have been constitutional law (or public law) and legal history, both of which are fundamental for understanding how our legal system, and our society, functions. As well as his academic work, which has greatly enriched the School, he has served on many committees and worked with successive Deans of Law.

Donal has also been a strong supporter of student endeavours in the School. Over the years he has supported the UCD Law Review, the Student Legal Service and the student Law Society, always willing to share his expertise, his time and his memories of being a UCD student. He even tutored in the Law Faculty during his early years at the bar, so he has been keenly involved in all aspects of the School. Successive groups of students have appreciated and benefited from having access to one of Ireland's leading legal thinkers.

It is for these reasons that UCD chooses today to recognise Donal O'Donnell by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate.