

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN**  
**HONORARY CONFERRING**  
**Monday, 1 September 2014 at 4.30 p.m.**

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY **PROF GERALD BYRNE, UCD School of Mechanical and Materials Engineering** on 1 September 2014, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa* on **Liam Connellan**

**A Uachtarain, President, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Dr. Liam Connellan, a UCD engineering graduate is an extraordinary Irish engineer, businessman and visionary. It is a great honour and pleasure for me to welcome Liam, his wife Marie, his family and his guests to University College Dublin. Today, in full acknowledgement of his outstanding contribution during the course of a career spanning in excess of 50 years, Liam Connellan returns to his alma mater to receive the highest award which UCD can offer - the Degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*.

Liam – welcome back to your Alma Mater.

It is indeed appropriate to present the career trajectory and journey of Dr. Liam Connellan to you here at this ceremony this morning as you yourself graduate and as you make preparations for your own journey - as you prepare to move into the next phase of your career.

Liam Connellan grew up in Strokestown, Co. Roscommon. At a young age his great interest and fascination was in making things, in manufacturing, in jobs and in the creation of jobs. This interest is now - decades later, in complete alignment with the current Irish Government policy on economic development.

Liam opted to study Engineering in UCD. He graduated in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering from UCD 57 years ago in the year. After graduation, Liam Connellan received his early years of training in Sweden and also at Associated Electrical Industries in England. He returned to Ireland in 1960 and worked as a divisional engineer with a strong focus on manufacturing engineering at ACEC Electrical Manufacturers in Waterford for a 5 year period. In most great careers it is possible to identify a small number of persons in the background who play a pivotal role. In Liam's case one such person - a key influencer, was Mr. Luke O'Sullivan, Chief Engineer at ACEC.

Following his time at ACEC, Liam Connellan joined the staff of the Irish Management Institute in 1965 where he lectured on production management and small business development. He rose to the position of Head of Division at the IMI. Again it is interesting to note that a second key influencer in Liam's career was Senator Noel Mulcahy, a member of the senior management team at IMI at that time.

Then out of the blue Liam's career was to suddenly change.

Sadly, a tragic air crash occurred in the year 1972. It was a flight from London to Brussels and all passengers and crew died, 118 people in total. Twelve captains of Irish industry were on that flight. A major vacuum opened up in senior business and industry circles in Ireland. Shortly afterwards Liam Connellan was seconded to the Confederation of Irish Industry, CII initially for a 6 month period. Later that year he became Director General of the CII. He subsequently led it through transformational change as Director General for a 20 year period. This was a major national role that was fitting of someone with the talent and ability of Liam Connellan. You must remember that at the time, Ireland was just entering the European Union and the survival and growth of the Irish industrial sector was a major concern on an island troubled with instability in the Northern part. The CII, which later merged with the Federated Union Employers FUE to form IBEC, played a major role in representing business and industry on economic, trade and industry matters. Liam Connellan did this with great distinction during his period in office. Liam provided the leadership to steer things through very difficult times in the seventies and eighties and helped lay the foundation for economic success that began in the nineties. He served under 10 Presidents of the CII. This was a pivotal role and he made a seminal contribution to Irish Economic Development in this period.

In 1995, Liam edited a very interesting and important book in his role as Vice-President of the Royal Society Dublin and as former Chair of the RDS Industry Committee. It was an ambitious piece of work which involved the coordination and editing of 21 contributions from industry and business leaders of the day. It was a 25 year vision for Ireland's Business and Industry. The book was entitled "Vision 2020 - What Future for Business?". It is interesting today, almost 20 years later, to read the prediction for top three areas identified: 1) Air Transportation, 2) Information Technology and 3) the Freeing of International Trade. In more recent years our Academies of Engineering, our international think-tanks in engineering are telling us that we are currently on the cusp of the 4th industrial revolution in the Cyber Physical Era - the era of the internet of things, of smart, intelligent systems in an open, global innovation environment. Such megatrends don't just happen - they are made to happen. There are people, engineers, policy makers behind national and international industrial and business policy developments. Liam Connellan's outstanding work at the CII and his visionary approach as evidenced in his book which I just referred to have laid solid foundations for Irish economic development up to the present day.

The recent Irish economic downturn was dramatic, in particular for the construction sector. However, one of the most significant and enduring pieces of national infrastructure from the "tiger" economy period was the Irish National Road Infrastructure. Liam Connellan provided leadership when he became the first Chairman of the National Roads Authority on its establishment in 1994. As Chairman, he had a strategic role in advising and influencing the transport infrastructure policies such as the National Development Plan 2000-2006. Prior

to the NRA, road enhancements had taken the form of poorly connected by-passes and small elements of road widening. The new NRA policies, developed under the direction of visionaries such as Liam resulted in completely new motorway developments linking the cities of Ireland. It is fair to say that the primary roads network in Ireland has been transformed over the last 15 years as journey times have been shortened and congestion reduced.

Liam's view of the world has always encompassed a strong international vision for Irish industry and business and Liam sees intrinsic value in international linkages and networks. His international agenda is reflected in some of his activities and indeed in the awards he has received. For example, he has been a member of the Board of the Irish American Partnership since its establishment and was elected President of the German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce in 1995. He is a Past-President of the Irish-Swedish Business Association. He was a member of the Board of the Irish College in Paris for many years. Recognising his international contribution he was conferred with the Knight Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany and also as a Chevalier of the Order of Merit of the Republic of France. He is the recipient of numerous awards and decorations including a honorary doctorate from the National University of Ireland, Galway.

With the CII and the NRA I have given you but two examples of the outstanding leadership which Liam Connellan has provided to the Irish economy and society and there are many more.

Liam has been a member of many national bodies associated with policy and strategy going back to his time on the central review committee of the first two National Recovery Programmes. There are too many of these groups to mention – I counted some 70 senior leadership roles listed in his curriculum vitae. Liam served as President of the Royal Dublin Society, the RDS from 1995 to 1998. He has been Chairman of the companies within the Veolia Environmental Group in Ireland from 1994 to 2011. He is an active member of the Peter McVerry Trust which assists homeless young people.

Having myself been on a number of Boards with Liam, I have first hand experience of his ability and his vision.

He has always maintained a deep involvement in the engineering profession throughout his career. He led the Profession as President of the Institution of Engineers of Ireland in the year 2001 (an organisation now known as Engineers Ireland). He was a founding member of the Irish Academy of Engineering in 1997 and was elected President of this Academy in 2004. Another seminal contribution was his work on the IAE report on "Engineering a Knowledge Island 2020" which he coordinated and edited in 2005. Here he proposes a vision for a knowledge-based economy which would place the island of Ireland in the forefront of the most advanced economies by 2020. An excellent assessment of the skills requirements in Ireland was undertaken here.

Despite his always extremely busy diary, Liam has also made an outstanding

contribution to UCD directly. He was President of the UCD Engineering Graduates Association 1989-91, a member of the Board of the University Industry Centre 1986-94 and a member of the UCD Engineering and Architecture Development Council, 2005. He was recognised by his peers of the Engineering Graduates Association with the distinguished graduate award, 2013.

He is an engineer who has helped shape the future of industry, business and educational research in Ireland. A single common thread runs right through the career of Dr. Liam Connellan – his unwaivering focussed attention on strengthening Ireland’s place in international business and engineering. Parallel to his outstanding achievements in the development of industry and business, Liam Connellan has invested a considerable amount of his time and energy into voluntary activities supporting the Irish national engineering, education, research and business fields where he has also had a highly significant impact. He was a member of the Irish Universities Quality Board and a member of the Irish Research Council for Science Engineering and Technology, IRCSET.

Liam Connellan is no ordinary engineer, Liam Connellan is no ordinary businessman. He is a passionate man, he is an inspirational engineer who puts genuine value on knowledge creation - on education, on research - on careful analysis. Liam Connellan’s place at the pinnacle of Irish Engineering and Business is secure – he is a national figurehead.

To reuse words he used in his own writings: In the imagery of WB Yeats 1912 you yourself Liam have looked up into the “suns eye”, and indeed you truly have given the Irish Nation the “right twigs for an eagle’s nest”

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*Praehonorabilis Praeses, totaque Universitas,*

*Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus Scientiae; idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.*