

President's ambition to put college in Europe's top 30 antagonises rivals

# Go-getting UCD is university of year

■ **Mark Tighe and Jonathan Milne**

HE may have upset other universities with his aggressive recruitment policy, and his staff have only just deferred strike action, but Dr Hugh Brady's University College Dublin has been voted as The Sunday Times university of the year.

This is the first time UCD has won the award which is assessed on questionnaires and a league table of academic achievements.

Brady, president for the past 21 months, is credited with making the changes that have seen Belfield improve in most measures, including degrees awarded, research quality and graduate employment levels.

Lampooned in some quarters as a base for Ross O'Carroll-Kelly clones more interested in sport and socialising than study, two-thirds of UCD students now graduate with a 2:1 or better. But they have also rated their experience as among the best in the country with high marks for sport, social events and cultural activities run by the college.

Iognaid O'Muircheartaigh, president of the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG), said last month that universities should not be obsessed with their world ranking and that Ireland is too small for colleges to be competing against each other for staff. But Brady refused to sign UCD up to a "no-poaching" protocol with other Irish universities, saying it is anti-competitive.

Since becoming president his mission is to put UCD into the top 30-ranked universities in Europe. UCD, Trinity College and University College Cork are the only Irish colleges ranked

among the top 500 in the world.

Although Trinity College tops The Sunday Times league rankings – it has been top for the past four years, thanks mainly to its intake of high-point scorers – UCD has moved up to joint second, in part by generating the highest research income among all universities.

UCD's growing international reputation, and particularly its Conway Institute for biomedical research, swung the title its way. Brady's restructuring of UCD degree programmes also allowed more flexibility for students to choose their subjects and this has helped to boost applications for the college by 10% this year.

Dublin City University was runner-up to UCD, with Cork Institute of Technology awarded institute of technology of the year after gaining consistently high grades and a multi-million-euro investment in its 80-acre Bishopstown campus.

Manchester's reputation as a party city has helped it to claim the university of the year title in Britain, beating off competition from the world-renowned Cambridge and Oxford colleges.

Its students have a reputation for sex and drug taking, yet Manchester University attracts more applications than any other college. Now it is planning to propel itself into the global premier league of academia.

The university has begun a campaign to hire five Nobel prizewinners and embarked on a £350m (€515m) programme of new buildings and refurbishments, the biggest capital spending plan in British higher education.

Manchester's emerging status as a national and international competitor has been shown in its

steady rise up the league tables. It is ranked 15th this year, up three places from last year, in the overall ranking in the Sunday Times University Guide, published today.

It aims to become one of the world's top 25 by 2015, a move that Alan Gilbert, the vice-chancellor, said would bring "tangible benefits for students", including the presence of the Nobel winners. The university has already recruited Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel economist, to work part-time at Manchester.

Although the teaching and research excellence of Cambridge mean it tops the Sunday Times league table in Britain – as it has every year since the survey was first published in 1998 – Manchester leads a strong tier of universities outside the traditional "ivy league" of Oxbridge and London colleges that dominate the top five places.

This group of consistent strong performers includes institutions such as Nottingham, Southampton, York, Durham, Warwick, Loughborough, Bristol, and Exeter, which was named runner-up to Manchester as university of the year.

## THE TOP UNIVERSITIES

Ireland top 10 (2005 in brackets)

- 1 Trinity College Dublin (1)
- 2= University College Cork (2)
- 2= University College Dublin (3)
- 4 Dublin City University (6)
- 5 NUI Galway (4)
- 6 University of Limerick (5)
- 7 NUI Maynooth (7)
- 8 Dublin Inst of Technology (8)
- 9 Cork IT (10)
- 10 Waterford IT (11)

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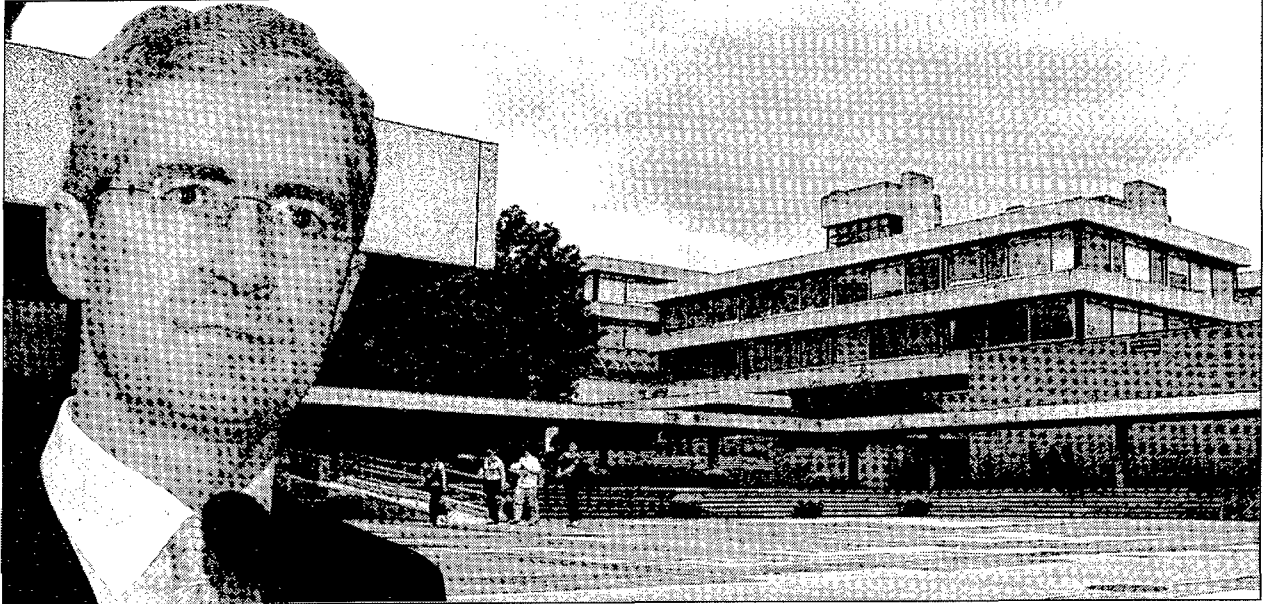
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Dr Hugh Brady, left, is credited with making the changes that have seen University College Dublin improve in so many areas

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