



Dr Art Cosgrove was the seventh and last President of University College, Dublin, in its status as a constituent college of the National University of Ireland under the Irish Universities Act, 1908. Under the Universities Act, 1997 he became the first President of the new constituent university entitled University College Dublin, National University of Ireland, Dublin. His statutory fixed term in office ran from 1 January 1994 to 31 December 2003. While his presidency promoted the progress and development of the institution along revered traditional and evolving lines, it also marked in several ways the end of an era.

## DR ART COSGROVE PRESIDENT 1994-2003

Art was born on 1 June 1940, in Newry, Co. Down, and was educated at the Christian Brothers, Abbey Grammar School in Newry. Graduating from Queen's University Belfast in 1961 with a first class honours BA in History, he attended the Institute of Historical Research, London during 1961/62. He was awarded his PhD by Queen's in 1971 and an LLD honoris causa in 1975 for distinction in historical work.

In 1963 he was appointed to UCD's Department of Medieval History as an Assistant Lecturer. He was promoted to College Lecturer in 1971, Statutory Lecturer in 1976, and Associate Professor in 1990. Appointed Acting Head of the Department of Medieval History 1990-1992, he was elected chairman of the Combined Departments of History 1991-1993. Rising through the ranks, he was acutely aware of the problems and frustrations associated with staffing grades and promotional opportunities throughout the College.

During all of his thirty years in what for short was called the History Department, but which in fact contained the four departments of Early Irish History, Medieval History, Modern History and Modern Irish History, he displayed a talent for administration at several levels – organising tutorials; planning the curriculum and its variety of options; and calculating examination totals – for which he had a quick mathematical brain. The Combined Departments then held plenary weekly meetings; the separate departments

less frequently held their own meetings; and several sub-committees looked after special aspects of the Combined Departments' work. Those legendary characters – Robin Dudley Edwards, T. Desmond Williams and Rev. F.X. Martin were the patriarchs of the Combined Departments and meetings were often a learning and exciting experience but also at times could be tense or stormy. As a sympathetic listener, Art Cosgrove was trusted by the junior staff. Commonsense – a former president, Dr Tom Murphy, was fond of saying – was a rare enough quality among academics. Blessed with that quality, Dr Cosgrove was often seen to use it to win opposing sides round to honourable compromise or consensus. Accepted as a natural leader, he became the champion of many an academic and administrative cause. Colleagues and students in need of help could confide in him and count upon his assistance. His sympathetic nature extended beyond the College, and unobtrusively he gave time to the Samaritans and other voluntary bodies.

Behind the affable and compassionate nature, Dr Cosgrove also possessed a steely determination and a certain divine discontent with the state of things around him. While still a young lecturer he proclaimed with force on one occasion: "This could be a great university". The conviction that UCD had the potential to become one of Europe's leading universities, thereby fulfilling Newman's vision, has motivated Dr Cosgrove

throughout his career. Dissatisfaction with the way things then were in the College turned him into an active reformer; and he became a founder member of the UCD branch of the Workers' Union of Ireland. When the boilermen went on strike he honoured his trade union principles by not passing the picket, despite a warning that academics who so behaved would suffer a deduction in salary if reported by the head of their Department. He also found fault with those tentative early efforts to establish academic Assessment Boards, and on more than one occasion argued against their recommendations.

Nor had he during all this welter of College politics neglected historical research and scholarship. On the contrary, he contributed significantly to the academic reputation of the Department – displaying, especially, a flair for organising team-work and editing the results. He planned the ten volume *Helicon History of Ireland*; acted as one of its general editors; and contributed to the series the volume entitled *Late Medieval Ireland, 1370-1541*. A member of the Board of Editors of the Royal Irish Academy's multi-volume *A New History of Ireland*, he was appointed sole editor of volume 2, to which he contributed four of its chapters. He was also the editor or co-editor of four other books on Irish history, and the author of around 20 articles or chapters in these works or in the learned journals. An active member of several learned societies and professional bodies, he was for a number of years President of the Dublin Historical Association and editor of its publications. He also served a term as President of the Irish Historical Society.

Involvement in activities to improve conditions in the College led to his membership of the College Promotions Committee 1976-78, and then to his election to the Governing Body in 1979, on which and its successor, the Governing Authority, he was to serve for the following 25 years. As a member of the Governing Body he was subsequently elected or appointed to several of its sub-committees. Throughout that time he served continuously on the Finance Committee; was Chairman

of the College Library Committee; was a member of the Committee on Equal Opportunities; the President's University Development Committee; and the President's Advisory Committee on Student Residences. He was elected in 1986 to the Senate of the National University of Ireland, on which body his membership continued until his retirement from the presidency of UCD. As procedures for electing the College's chief officer then stood, this vast experience of College affairs placed him firmly in the running for presidential office when Dr Masterson retired in December 1993.

Not that all of his attempts at winning elections had proved successful. He was the defeated candidate on two occasions – 1981 and again in 1984 – for the Deanship of the Faculty of Arts. He was also unsuccessful in his bid for the Registrarship in 1986. But electoral defeats as well as victories were all taken in his stride. He was not the favoured candidate of the Academic Council when it expressed its preferences among the candidates for the presidency. When, however, it came to the Governing Body, whose function it was to make representations to the Senate as to the filling of the vacancy, Dr Cosgrove's position was assured and his name was duly forwarded to the Senate for appointment.

Dr Cosgrove was the first non-UCD graduate to be elected President of the College. But long before his presidency, and after 30 years on the staff, he had become more of a UCD man than UCD graduates themselves – “*Hiberniores ipsis Hibernis*” as the title of one of his own articles had it. It was said of the medievalist in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*: “Oh, he dreams footnotes, and they run away with all his brains”. If some doubted that a medievalist was the safest person to be put in charge of a modern progressive university, they soon had their doubts dispelled. For there was nothing impractical or absent-minded about Dr Cosgrove: he carried with him into the presidential office that flair for team-work, administrative efficiency, and crusading spirit that had marked him out as a humble Assistant.

He began his presidential task with enthusiasm and a set of objectives for the development of the human and physical resources. The virtues which he had displayed during the previous 30 years in the History Department and in the wider College environment he was now to apply in his role as efficient head and chief officer of the institution. Many had been won over to his side by the warmth and openness of his nature, the straightforwardness of his dealings, the shrewdness of his negotiations. A lively conversationalist and witty raconteur, he had a friendly word for those he dealt with, as well as the sympathetic ear. Dr Caroline Hussey, who served as Registrar throughout Dr Cosgrove's presidency, was to put on record that they never had a cross word during the 10 years of their working relationship and this she attributed to the President's people skills. That he could talk knowingly about sport, especially horse-racing and football, with the local authority representatives on the Governing Body, gave him an advantage to be used wisely in pursuing his policies. Sporting-talk was a genuine interest and an asset that had been cultivated since he was a youth assisting in his father's pub in Newry. It used to be said of Dr Coffey, the first President of UCD, that he was never at a loss for any student's name or background or record. In the much larger College of the 1970s and 1980s, President Tom Murphy was reputed to know every member of the staff on a first name basis. Art Cosgrove shared something of this same gift for remembering names with these two predecessors. It was a characteristic born of a sincere interest in the welfare of the people around him.

By any standards Dr Cosgrove's stewardship was impressive. In the area of human resources he provided a great deal of work satisfaction for UCD's employees. Among his priorities was the issue of staff development. Additional promotional posts to Associate Professorships and Lectureships were created on a regular basis. And in place of the old method where academics across the Faculties competed against each other for a limited number of posts, a system was put in place whereby senior lectureships were graded against certain well-defined criteria. An improved scheme for the promotion of administrative staff was also introduced.

It was his good fortune to lead UCD during a period of economic prosperity. More Government funds than ever before were made available to the universities for capital spending and research. The captains of industry, commerce and finance could also afford to be generous in their donations to the College. In the period from 1990 up to Dr Cosgrove's first year in office 1994/95, capital building works of some €33m had been undertaken by the College. Nearly €27m of this was accounted for by the Merville residences and the acquisition and development of the Blackrock campus. The remaining capital building development amounted, therefore, to no more than €6m for the first half of the 1990s. The contrast with the last four years of Dr Cosgrove's presidency could not have been more arresting. In the four years before his retirement in 2003, some €230m of capital spending was undertaken. This truly extensive development of the Belfield campus – well beyond the dreams even of a Michael Tierney – began with the completion in 1997 of the Daedalus Building housing a purpose-designed, state-of-the-art Language Centre and Microcomputer Centre, the first of its kind at an Irish university. This was followed over the next couple of years with the Arts Annexe, the Food Science Building, the Student Centre and a major extension to Computer Science. Then followed special-purpose buildings for the Institute for the Study of Social Change, the Centre for Research in Infectious Diseases, The Urban Institute, the extension to Regional and Urban Planning and the Nova Innovation Centre. The building spree culminated in such major projects as the transfer of the Veterinary School from Ballsbridge to a new home for the School of Veterinary Medicine on the Belfield campus, costing €40m approximately; the undergraduate school of the Faculty of Commerce – the Quinn Business School – with its focus on eTechnology and eLearning, at a cost of over €24m; the Conway Institute of Biomolecular and Biomedical Research (to foster research within a multi-disciplinary collaborative environment) and the Health Sciences Complex; and the addition of the Glenomena residences to the on-campus student accommodation.

The Veterinary School and the Student Centre especially had been long-talked-of objectives since the 1960s. The other buildings and extensions reflected the College's response to the advances, developments and needs of a rapidly changing society. On Dr Cosgrove's retirement, a students' newspaper dubbed him 'Art the Builder'. While there was much truth in this, it only went part of the way. For the great variety of new constructions on campus also amounted to a monument in bricks and mortar to his strategic vision. The infrastructure of additional buildings was needed to promote excellence of teaching and research, and to guarantee improvement of the working environment and recreational facilities.

It was only in ancient Greece that all that was needed for a university course was a log of wood with a philosopher seated at one end and his pupil at the other. The new buildings reflected a flurry of academic innovation: they provided the latest disciplines with an operational base. And a rush of new Chairs resulted: American Studies, Equality Studies, Disability Studies, eCommerce, Meteorology, and some with titles that were a mystery even to contemporary academics – for example, the Chairs in the new technologies of Genomics, Proteomics and Bioinformatics at the Conway Institute.

During his term as Chairman of the Conference of Heads of the Irish Universities (CHIU) Dr Cosgrove pushed for the introduction of effective systems of Quality Assurance, and persuaded his own College to pilot the proposed scheme. As a result Departments engaged in a process of looking closely at their performances and at how improvements might be made. Multi-disciplinary, cross-faculty and inter-university collaboration was smoothly promoted. While it was recognised that UCD had to become more and more a research-led university, the President was careful to ensure that this was underpinned by a focus on achieving excellence in teaching. To this end the Centre for Teaching and Learning was established and expanded, and the President's Teaching Awards were conferred regularly.

Alongside the academic, physical and staff developments that had taken place, simultaneously there had also been a marked growth in student numbers. In 1993/94 the overall total was 15,854 of whom postgraduate students numbered 3,635 (almost 23% of the total). By 2002/03 the overall total had grown to 21,339 of whom 5,437 (over 25%) were registered as postgraduates. An Equal Opportunities policy was extended to cater for equality of access for mature students, students with disabilities and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Dr Cosgrove had always worked well with the students, listened to the policies put forward by the Students' Union, and gave strong support to the sporting clubs and College societies.

Dr Cosgrove would have been the first to acknowledge that he could not on his own have achieved the great advances made by the College during his term of office without the liberal co-operation of his colleagues. He had found himself in charge of a university institution that contained a great variety of talent. He followed his own natural bent and allowed his own substantial virtues to direct his policies. Essentially he was a facilitator, a player-manager. He consulted and delegated widely, and acted on the advice of his committees of the Governing Body, the Academic Council and the Faculties. And throughout his presidency he inspired the support of a loyal cohort, of whom none was more supportive than his wife, Emer. The mother of a large family of five sons and four daughters, nevertheless she gave unfailing and unstinted support to her husband and freely devoted much precious time and energy to assisting him in his leadership of the College. She welcomed parents and students to numerous conferring celebrations, was always the gracious hostess, and many within the College experienced how Art and Emer were always ready to offer comfort to the sick and bereaved among us. When the College invested in Dr Cosgrove it got two for the price of one. Emer, too, had put UCD greatly in her debt.

Dr Cosgrove had presided over 10 years of plenty and progress for the university. During that time he had

consistently and articulately championed UCD's case in discussions and negotiations with Government ministers, the HEA, potential donors and other agencies. He had left the institution in a very healthy situation, and can look back with justifiable pride on his legacy. One of his last acts was to oversee the establishment of new procedures for the appointment of his successor. The procedure adopted ensured that the next President would be appointed under a method very different from that which had given UCD its chief officers down to and including Dr Cosgrove himself. The new President would inherit an honourable tradition; be in a position to build upon what had been achieved; and launch out into the new era in which UCD found itself. And it was typical of the energy and devotion to scholarship that Dr Cosgrove had shown throughout that as soon as he had retired from strenuous office he should take up professionally the study of law and set an example of lifelong learning. He has served UCD well. UCD owes him in return a sincere and grateful acknowledgement of his splendid contribution. Dr Cosgrove and his wife, Emer, have earned the good wishes of the whole university community for many long years of health and happiness.

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