Royal Irish Academy Leaders in Higher Education Address 2015

RIA

Professor Louise Richardson is currently Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of St Andrews. A native of Tramore, she studied history in Trinity College, Dublin before gaining her PhD at Harvard University, where she spent twenty years as a professor of government and latterly as Executive Dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. She served on Scotland's Council of Economic Advisers and currently sits on the boards of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Booker Prize Foundation and numerous other charities.

A political scientist by training, Professor Richardson is widely recognised as one of the world's foremost experts on terrorism and counter-terrorism. Her publications include *Democracy and Counterterrorism: Lessons from the Past* (2007), *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat* (2006), *The Roots of Terrorism* (2006), and *When Allies Differ* (1996). She has also written numerous articles on international terrorism, British foreign and defence policy, security institutions and international relations, lectured to public, professional, media and education groups and served on the editorial boards of several journals and presses. Her awards include the Sumner Prize for work towards the prevention of war and the establishment of universal peace, and honorary doctorates from MGIMO University, Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Aberdeen. Professor Richardson will take up the position of Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford on 1 January 2016.

Foreword

Professor Mary E. Daly, President of the Royal Irish Academy

As President of the Royal Irish Academy, it gives me great pleasure to introduce the Leaders in Higher Education Address 2015. This is the second annual address which acknowledges the contribution of leaders in higher education both at home and abroad, and offers a platform for their adept perspective on higher education. It is truly an honour to welcome Professor Louise Richardson, whose distinguished career has included positions at Harvard University, as Executive Dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, St Andrews University, as Principal and Vice-Chancellor, and from January 2016, Professor Richardson will become the first woman Vice-Chancellor of one of the world's most prestigious universities – the University of Oxford. Professor Richardson's record both as an educational leader and as an outstanding scholar makes her a fitting choice to deliver this year's address.

Professor Peter Kennedy MRIA, Policy and International Relations Secretary

Last year, the Leaders in Higher Education Address by Ruairi Quinn TD focused on both a national and political perspective. In this year's address, Professor Richardson will deliver her unique take on higher education from an international perspective and academic viewpoint. A political scientist by training, Professor Richardson's higher education experience encompasses the best of Irish, American, Scottish and now English educational systems. Her perspective as teacher, learner, educator and manager will inform her address on 'Universities in the 21st Century'. We are looking forward to hearing about her unique insight into this challenging and robust debate.

Universities in the 21st Century

Good Evening. Thank you for inviting me to talk to you today. I'm deeply flattered by the invitation and delighted to be back in Dublin. I'm delighted too to speak here during the tenure of the first woman president of the Royal Irish Academy, Professor Mary Daly, whom I first met at Harvard a great many years ago.

The Royal Irish Academy was founded in 1785. That was an extraordinary period in Irish history. I took my special subject with the late, great, Professor R.B. McDowell on Irish Radicalism 1775–1800 in my final year as a history undergraduate in Trinity, so I have some sense of just what a vibrant, creative period it was in the political, intellectual and cultural life of the country.

The Royal Charter creating the RIA declared its aims to be:

'The promotion and investigation of the sciences, polite literature, and antiquities, as well as the encouragement of discussion and debate between scholars of diverse backgrounds and interests.' From the beginning there was an admirable desire to balance the sciences and the humanities. While I'm not entirely clear what constitutes polite literature I do hope that all the discussions and debates were not always polite. The university as a place where debates should be robust, and politeness – on occasion – sacrificed, is something I'll come back to.

It was almost fifty years after the establishment of the Royal Irish Academy that Lord Stanley introduced the national educational system in Ireland and a hundred years before the 1892 Education Act that made education free and mandatory for 6–14 year olds here. Unfortunately, Stanley's idealistic, multi-denominational system was eroded by the Powis Commission which segregated national schools along denominational lines, thereby demonstrating that time doesn't necessarily bring progress. It was only in 1966, within the lifetime of many people in this room, that secondary education was made free for all. Today, Ireland has the highest proportion of its young population at third level education in the EU, almost 60% of them in university. This is remarkable progress.

Like Scotland, Ireland has historically taken great pride in education as a means of transmitting culture, driving the economy and enabling social mobility. The recent Irish success in attracting foreign investment has often been attributed to the benefits of having a highly educated workforce, plus a little help from tax policy! The success of the Irish abroad can also be attributed in part to the education we received in national schools before we emigrated.

I was amused – and a little bemused – to discover on my appointment as Vice-Chancellor of Oxford that the university did not recognize my Harvard degrees and my Harvard robes. But

all was not lost: it transpires that Oxford only recognizes the degrees from two other institutions in the world, Cambridge and Trinity!

My current university, St Andrews, was founded at the beginning of the 15th century, before the printing press, by some French educated Scotsmen determined to ensure that Scots had access to the best education available. Our first graduate was a young man named William Yellowlock who graduated in 1414. I often wonder what he would think if he were transported back today. He would undoubtedly be surprised by the comfort of our lives, by the electricity, the cars, the absence of clerics, and the presence of females. Yet he would immediately recognize the basic model, scholars convening together to study and students travelling to learn from them. Universities, I believe, have lasted so long, longer than most organizations and institutions, precisely because of the enduring value of what we do. Universities serve as foundations of our democracies, as guardians of our cultures, as engines of our economies, as drivers of social mobility and always, as generators of new ideas. As we think about future trends we must ensure that universities continue to serve all these purposes and that we not content ourselves with advancing just some of them.

It is worth remembering that longevity in itself is no virtue, and that ancient institutions and their influence can change. Consider the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland 30 or 50 years ago, and today. When I was a student in Trinity we campaigned in vain for the right to contraception; earlier this year over 60% of voters opted in favour of same sex marriage. When St Andrews was founded the monasteries were among the most influential institutions in Europe. By the time Trinity was founded, they looked very different. The Soviet Union in 1980 looked impregnable; a decade later it didn't exist. We cannot, therefore, assume that the fact that universities have been around a very long time means that they will remain as they are.

In fact we hear constantly that universities are in crisis. In the US the crisis is seen as the soaring cost, and declining value, of a university education. In the UK the issues are those of student debt, access, and ever more intrusive regulation. In Scotland the government is trying to overhaul the governance of universities without identifying the problem such an overhaul is trying to solve. In Ireland the concerns are that declining government investment in the wake of the financial crisis has caused the international standing of universities to fall. Universities invariably feel that they do not receive enough government investment; governments invariably find the needs of universities insatiable. Serious debates about how the costs of education can most fairly be distributed are avoided by politicians because they are so difficult.

Things are unlikely to get easier for universities but we will need to be able to adapt if we are to continue to thrive, and even to survive. John Kenneth Galbraith once said that there are two kinds of forecasters: those who don't know, and those who know they don't know. Well, I know I don't know, but I'm going to talk about a few trends that are likely to affect universities in the 21st century and I'm going to speculate on some ways that universities might adapt.

In honour of my beloved and recently deceased mentor, Stanley Hoffmann, who always argued in threes, I'll mention three trends and three possible models for universities. The trends are globalisation, technological innovation, and escalating cost.

Globalisation

The much criticised – and more often consulted – world rankings and global league tables remind us that we are operating in a global marketplace. This is not a new phenomenon but the scale is unprecedented. We compete globally for academics and for students. 45% of the students at St Andrews are from outside the UK, while globally an estimated 5 million students are studying outside their home countries – a figure that has more than doubled in a decade, and is more than six times what it was when I was a student in Trinity – notwithstanding what often appears to be the best efforts of border agencies and immigration authorities to make it as difficult as possible to study abroad. Asia is driving much of this international mobility and constitutes over half the international students. These figures can be volatile. The number of Chinese students studying in Britain rose by 54% in four years while the number of students from India declined by 49% in the same period. There are, incidentally, 11,500 students from the Republic of Ireland studying in the UK.

As travel becomes cheaper and communications easier, as more countries offer instruction in English, as immigration policies become more restrictive in some countries, and as some countries invest heavily in a targeted group of campuses, patterns of mobility are likely to change. The US has long been the world's most popular destination and so it remains, with an estimated 900,000 international students. Nevertheless, its market share is declining. We are already seeing greater movements within regions than we've seen in the past. We are also seeing the rapid development of transnational education as universities establish branch campuses overseas, either alone or in partnership with local universities. Over three years the number of satellite campuses operating overseas grew 43% and the number of host countries grew from 36 to 51.

In straitened times foreign students are major financial contributors. In 2011–12 the higher education sector as a whole generated £10.7 billion in export earnings for the UK. British universities attracted over 435,000 international students. They spent £4.9 billion in goods and services off campus and $4.4 billion on fees and accommodation. Nearly 20% (£13.9 billion) of the output generated by the higher education sector and 137,000 jobs can be attributed to the enrolment of non-EU students in the UK.

The real contribution of foreign students, however, is not captured by these figures. The real contribution lies in the diversity of perspective they bring with them. I've had occasion to teach classes on terrorism to Master's students in St Andrews. It is rare in these classes for more than two students to share a nationality. The quality of the discussion that takes place in a classroom in which nobody shares your assumptions and yet everyone respects your right to your opinion, on a topic as charged as terrorism, is unrivalled. It is exactly the type of education we should be providing to our students to prepare them to enter a globalised world.

It's not only students who are mobile, of course. Academics are even more so. The brain-drain has become a brain-train as academics move across borders from one university to another. Half the world's top physicists no longer work in their home country and cross-border science

collaboration has more than doubled, as measured by the percentage of internationally co-authored articles. Research funding, such as the EU's Horizon 2020, is also providing incentives for international research collaboration. Increasingly too, in looking for leaders, universities seek out those who can bring international experience to bear.

Competition for students, staff, and research funding is not in itself a problem; on the contrary, it can cause us to raise our game, to learn from others, to question how we do things and to figure out how to do them better. It is also worth remembering that increasing knowledge is not a zero sum game. The focus on global rankings that see Asian universities rise and European universities fall contributes to the misguided notion that their gain is our loss. There is no finite amount of knowledge in the world that we have to fight over; rather, knowledge is the ultimate public good, it can't be contained within national boundaries and the more of it there is, the better for all of us.

The trends towards globalisation, nevertheless, will pose real questions for the place of universities as national institutions as their students, staff, research funding, and even teaching facilities become less and less national.

Technology

A second trend that will challenge the traditional role of the university in the 21st century is the advance in technology, especially around distance learning. Only a few years ago universities were being declared defunct, dead at the hands of Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCS. The initial wave of euphoria that greeted the arrival of MOOCS, in which world famous teachers could teach their courses for free to anyone and everyone interested, has been tempered by the reality that the completion rate for courses rarely hits 5%, that those taking the courses tend to be well educated males in first world countries rather than impoverished women and men in the developing world, and that the business plans, the means by which participation could be assessed, and costs covered, have not been satisfactorily resolved.

It would appear that reports of the demise of universities have, like Twain's death, been exaggerated. The concept of distance learning is not a new one. Harold Wilson justifiably claimed that the policy of which he was most proud was the creation of The Open University in 1969. Nearly a hundred years earlier St Andrews ran its own distance learning programme, for women, who were not admitted to the university until 1892. From the 1870s the university offered a programme whereby women could study at home for a degree called LLA (Lady Literate in Arts!)

While MOOCS may not have effected the immediate revolution anticipated by their advocates, new technologies *will* transform how universities operate. Students now arrive at university fully networked with their friends and families around the world. They are accustomed to instant access to information on the internet, to watching films on laptops, to reading books on tablets, and to doing all three simultaneously while eating lunch or chatting to their mother on Skype. What is the place of a library in this world? For many universities the cost of the library is second only to staff salaries, yet the introduction of the internet has had the biggest impact on access to information since the production of the Gutenberg Bible. Eric Schmidt of Google put it graphically: 'Every two days we create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilization to 2003.' Will our libraries become charming historical relics beloved only by antiquarians? Or can we preserve the place of the library as the intellectual hub of university life by bringing new technologies inside, adapting to the ways our students learn, educating them to be wise consumers in a world of information overload, teaching them the difference between information and knowledge, and instilling in them a desire for wisdom?

Many have wondered whether we need universities at all in the age of the internet. Think of the large carbon footprint as teachers travel to a classroom to give a lecture and students travel to hear it. Would we not stay at home and speak to a computer and let our students access the lecture when it suits them? If all one needs is a computer, why convene at a place called a university at all? As funding becomes tighter these questions will be asked by serious people, and those of us who believe in the value of universities must be prepared to address them. The early experience of MOOCs suggests what many of us have long felt: that there is no substitute for the personal interaction between student and teacher. Nevertheless, there is no going back. Through the blended classroom the internet can free us up to spend more time with our students, not less, by having students listen to a lecture online before coming to class and to use class time, instead of passively taking notes, actively engaging with the material, guided by the teacher.

Again driven by costs constraints, we are likely to be asked why it takes four years to get a university degree, especially given the long holidays and infrequent and variable contact hours. Why not three years, or two? I feel enormously privileged that my children and I have had the benefit of a four year residential undergraduate degree. It strikes me as unlikely that by the end of the 21st century students will invariably be aged 17–21 and stay for four years. It will be incumbent on those of us who run universities to ensure that we are clear in our own minds as to what is the essential mission of a university, that we engage technological developments, and harness them in furtherance of that mission, and not get side-tracked in a futile effort to defend the status quo.

My own view, and I say this as someone who has spent my life as a university teacher, is that students who come to university learn at least as much from their peers as they do from their teachers. The process of convening as a voluntary community of learning and intellectual exploration, or engaging with others from different national, racial, ideological and socio-economic backgrounds as you seek to acquire knowledge, enhance your understanding, develop your judgement, and join the quest for truth has to be conducted in person. I'm not sure what

the optimal period for that process might be and I am sure that one can earn qualifications otherwise, but I am convinced that the ideal is for education to be conducted in the flesh and surrounded by others engaged in the same pursuit. I also recognise that it is an extraordinary and expensive privilege.

Cost

This brings us to the question of costs. Derek Bok famously said, 'If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.' The ongoing debate about public funding and public control of universities is sure to affect the development of universities in the years to come. Whereas the 6,000 American institutes of higher education represent a diverse array of institutions, some state funded, some not; some – including the most elite – private non-profits; and some – the fastest growing sector – private for-profit institutions, European universities tend to be publicly funded. The OECD average of public funding of universities is 73%, in Ireland it is 85%, in the US it is 34%.

In Britain the figure is 65% and Universities UK argues that in return for this, universities in 2011–12 generated £73 billion in output and accounted for 2.7% of all UK employment. Universities contributed £39.9 billion – 2.8% of GDP – in 2011. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) estimates that a 1% increase in the share of the workforce with a university degree raises the level of long-run productivity by 0.2–0.5%. The UK has 1% of the world's population but undertakes 5% of the world's scientific research and produces 14% of the most highly cited papers. In other words, British universities are good value.

In Scotland third level education is 'free'. The former First Minister famously declared that the rocks would melt in the sun before there were tuition fees in Scotland. Mr Salmond recently had this statement carved into a large slab of stone (a curious thing to do in light of the fate of the last party leader in Britain to carve commitments in stone). But, of course, education is not free; it is expensive and so it should be given its value. It is a matter of deciding who should pay for it. Politicians have been avoiding these questions but they will have to be addressed.

The reality of course is that there are both private and public gains from a university education. In Ireland 83% of those with a higher education qualification are employed, compared to 66% with a leaving certificate and 51% with a junior cert. On average an Irish male with a higher education qualification earns €353,000 more in his lifetime than one without. The figure for females is €198,000. There are public benefits too. In Ireland the financial benefit to the exchequer from a higher educated male is €220,000 and a female €123,000. These figures do not begin to compute the incalculable non-monetary benefits of higher education. At some

point we are going to have to address the funding of universities and we are going to have to become altogether more creative in devising ways to generate additional sources of revenue.

One of the downsides of generous public funding of universities is the degree of bureaucratic control that accompanies it. The biggest surprise to me in moving from the US to the UK was the degree of regulation of universities. The evidence of a direct correlation between institutional autonomy and institutional quality is overwhelming. Ireland actually scores fairly well on the autonomy front. Among OECD countries Ireland scores first in academic autonomy, sixth in organizational autonomy and eleventh in financial and staffing autonomy.

If European universities are to thrive in the more competitive global marketplace in education that is emerging, then we will need to be altogether more flexible in responding to market forces while preserving the essentials of what we do. At present the regulatory weight of bureaucratic compliance undermines our ability to respond flexibly and creatively. The governmental desire to improve the quality of teaching or to harmonise standards across Europe are laudable in many ways but it is worth examining the internal costs of compliance and asking ourselves whether those resources might not be better spent in the classroom, library or lab.

As universities we are daily called to account to justify our expenditure of public funds, but universities are complex organizations and what we are trying to achieve often cannot easily be measured. The language of the university has become suffused with the language of business. We are given Key Information Sets and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are often chosen more on the basis of ease of measurement than performance to be evaluated. That some of those KPIs may run counter to others – say, raise standards/increase access – is ignored. Rather than constructive intellectual engagement with the complexities of education our work is often reduced to matrices of easily quantifiable indices. Rather than trusting the academics we hire to conduct their research and teach their courses, we evaluate their syllabi, peer review their teaching, monitor their exam questions and provide second and third opinions on their marks, all to prescribed and machine readable formats.

I have been surprised to discover that alongside this obsession with audit and measurement there has been no effort to measure the effectiveness of the measurement. Vast resources have been expended in complying with regulatory measures of teaching quality but there is no demonstrable evidence that all the measurement has actually had any impact at all on quality. (I know where my axe would fall if I were responsible for implementing cuts in the education budget. Let's dismantle this massive regulatory apparatus and check back in five years to see if we've missed it.)

In the future, as European governments face relentless pressure to get their economies back on track, there is an opportunity for universities to try to break the mould by, for example, offering to trade less public money for more autonomy. For their part, governments will be confronted with making choices about whether they are willing to loosen the reins of control, to recognise diversity in the sector, to allow different funding models and to invest more heavily in successful institutions. I hope that European universities in the 21st century will be a diverse

and variegated mix of institutions with differentiated funding models and with students advised and able to attend the university that is the best fit for them rather than a homogenised assembly line manufacturing ever faster, ever cheaper, and ever more similar degrees.

The challenges posed to universities by globalisation, by technological developments, spiralling costs and a perception of decreased gains may well cause the university system to fragment. The tendency in Britain has been to expand the label of 'university'. With a population roughly the size of Ireland, Scotland has more than twice as many universities. (Universities Scotland represents 19 Institutions.) Ireland's division between universities and Institutes of Technology seems more sensible.

Even the most research-intensive universities no longer have a monopoly on research. Well-funded think-tanks and R&D arms of major companies are producing research that rivals that of any university. Companies tired of hiring ill-qualified graduates are starting to train their own, students struggling for access to mediocre lectures are finding spectacular ones on the web, entrepreneurial youngsters are finding themselves better paid but forgoing university and heading straight into business. So what is a university to do?

Universities and their funders may conclude that the higher education sector needs to be more diversified. It might include a range of institutions broadly of three types, some small and residential, readily recognisable to us all; others vast and global that certify largely online education. Others of intermediate size would focus on technical training and links with industry found primarily in major cities. First degrees would be acquired in any one of three broad types of institution and each would provide a route to graduate and professional degree programmes provided in more specialised schools. This could not be a three-class system; rather it would consist of three different types of educational institution of equal status, though institutions within each category would compete for standing with one another. They might be labelled classic, vocational and technical or old, practical and new. None could escape the implications of the technological revolution we are experiencing, all would have to engage way beyond national borders, and the funding model for each would have to be different.

In the case of the new or vocational universities, students would number in the hundreds of thousands and while they would be attracted to a brand, they need not be attracted to a place. With so many students the individual charges need not be high, as costs would primarily be around the production and translation of courses and management of assessment. National governments might not be prepared to assume the cost for a global good, so funding would have to be generated from advertising, licensing and relatively small charges to large numbers, though these charges might be paid by national governments. The great advantage of this system is that it allows global access to high-quality, low-cost courses and the unpredictable consequences of citizens of very different countries and cultures studying the same subject together, if only virtually. Each student would operate on their own timetable, so the length of time to degree would be entirely personalised. Institutions would compete around the quality of their courses and the additional assistance provided. This kind of institution would appeal to students without the means or desire to expend vast sums on their education and at varying points in their lives. The emphasis would be on teaching, not research.

The second, medium-sized or technical institution would be entirely different. Based in a particular place, usually a big city, students likely to number in the tens of thousands would be preparing directly for the workplace. Study of a subject, whether economics, chemistry or computer science, would be linked to a job or apprenticeship/internship where the skills are acquired. Student interactions with their peers would be balanced by interactions with their workmates, so there would be less of a sense of student culture. As the emphasis would be on the acquisition of a particular set of skills and applying them in the economy, the duration of the degree is likely to be shorter than the current four years and the school year would coincide with the regular work cycle. Funding would be provided in part by the government in furtherance of its interest in having a highly skilled workforce, student costs would be lower as residence would not be required, time to degree would be shorter and employment prospects more predictable, with the likelihood of some payment for work as an apprentice. Business too might contribute to costs, especially in return for a multi-year commitment to employment for promising employees. This kind of institution would appeal to students who know that they want to work in business. Research would be conducted jointly by business and the technical institution.

The classic or small university – which, we are told, is going the way of the dinosaur – has a chance of survival in this tripartite system. With no requirement to demonstrate the impact on the economy of the work of their medieval historians, those historians would be free to research subjects because of their intrinsic interest and to educate the next generation to do likewise. The institutions are likely to be small and expensive to run. They might be recognisable to John Stuart Mill, who said: 'The moral or religious influence which a university can exercise consists less in any express teaching, than in the pervading tone of the place.' They would be expensive because they would be residential and would require enough faculty to engage actively with students. Their purpose would be the purpose Mill ascribed to universities 150 years ago: 'A university exists for the purpose of laying open to each succeeding generation … the accumulated treasures of the thoughts of mankind.' But who would fund them? It would take an enlightened politician to see the value of what they do. In all likelihood funding would have to come in part from the government, come in part from the students who benefit, and in part be raised privately by those who believe in the importance of educating the next generation to be critical thinkers, ethical actors and engaged citizens. People who can help us deal with the fundamental ethical questions raised by developments in science and especially medicine; people who are not focused on making money or the latest fad in fashion or thought. People who step back and ask the unasked questions. People who think about the long-term impact, be it environmental or economic, of how we behave. These would be universities that 'dare to disturb the universe'.

Any change in universities is, of course, inextricably linked to pre-university education. We need pupils educated to make informed choices and to take advantage of whatever third level education they select. In all likelihood, rather than an orderly transition to this or any other coherent arrangement, most universities will muddle along, competing in all three spheres. Given the universalism that is intrinsic to universities, they perhaps should, and thereby produce both Mill's competent doctors and shoe makers as well as cultivated human beings.

Finally, I'd like to talk about another trend: this is a more near-term one. It may not seem as portentous as the others I've mentioned but ultimately I think is quite fundamental, and speaks to the whole purpose of being a university. This is the concept of free speech. In a world in which wealth and military might mean power, for universities the currency is words, and they are powerful. We all remember how Yeats agonised: 'What if words of mine sent out certain men the English shot?' In St Andrews, our physical surroundings offer a daily reminder of the power of words. The magnificent cathedral that once dominated the town is in ruins. It was destroyed because of the words of a preacher, John Knox. He gave an angry sermon from the pulpit of a local church. The congregation were so incensed that they marched out of the church, down the street, and sacked the cathedral, even then many hundreds of years old. Our campus is peppered with memorials to those who were burned at the stake for their beliefs. Never underestimate the power of words. Today freedom of speech is a core academic value. It is a freedom that must be cherished, nourished, and exercised.

As you know, Scotland recently held a referendum on the constitutional future of the UK. The SNP, the government of the day, wanted a vote for independence. University leaders were caused to consider: What is the responsibility of a university in such a situation? The atmosphere was febrile, the debate robust, but it was peaceful. In both Ireland and the US, the two countries whose citizenship I hold, and in a great many others besides, bloody civil wars have been fought on the issue of whether a region has a right to secede. But in Scotland for two years we had a protracted, vigorous and peaceful debate. This was an extraordinary achievement.

All universities in Scotland are publicly funded and the institutions and their leaders were instructed not to take a position on the constitutional question. This is fair enough. It would be difficult to encourage free debate in a university if the leadership were partisan. It is imperative, however, that academics are free to utilise the freedom of expression they enjoy to express their point of view. It is our obligation as scholars to subject all ideas to rational analysis and free and civil debate. It is our obligation as teachers to model to our students how to debate contentious subjects about which we feel strongly and to treat respectfully ideas we find objectionable. It is our obligation as universities to provide a forum for free and open debate.

This role is constantly under challenge from both within and outside the university. Recent counter-terrorist legislation in the UK suggests that extremist views have no place in a university. I believe the opposite. A university is the best place for extremist views to be expressed because it is precisely in universities where they can be challenged. As a student in Trinity I remember the mantra 'No free speech for fascists', so it seemed only fair that a few years ago when introducing Gordon Brown I was confronted by angry students marching behind placards declaring: 'No free speech for war criminals'. Both then and now students failed to understand that the only free speech that's worth protecting is objectionable speech. Not long ago I received a deputation of students complaining about the appointment of a philosopher with deeply conservative positions. Students argued that they would not feel comfortable in a classroom with someone of his views. I countered that education is not about feeling comfortable; quite the reverse, it is about hearing views you dislike, understanding why you dislike them, and fashioning reasoned arguments to counter them. On many American campuses today there

is a movement to protect students from unpleasant speech: we hear of 'triggering' and 'micro aggressions'. I hope this latest fad is short lived as it is quite pernicious and corrosive of the unfettered exchange of ideas that universities must champion if we are to deserve to survive the kinds of societal trends that will confront us in the years to come. We must resist efforts to constrain academic freedom, however well-intentioned, wherever they come from, if we are to prove ourselves worthy of the eighteenth century founders of learned societies like the Royal Irish Academy, whose declared aim was to encourage debate among scholars of diverse backgrounds.

Thank you.

Louise Richardson