N.C.E.A. and the Humanities
Professor Justin Keating’s graduation day address

The role of the humanities in technological education was raised by Professor Justin Keating in his address at the annual conferring of N.C.E.A. awards at the Regional Technical College, Athlone, on 7 November 1986. Professor Keating, who was until recently chairman of N.C.E.A., spoke of the success of R.T.C. courses generally in anticipating the needs of industry and preparing students for immediate employment. He said, however, that it was possible that the council and its associated colleges had been over-influenced by the spokespersons of commerce and industry into graduating successive cohorts of technicians and graduates whose knowledge and skills were too closely geared to the immediate needs of industry.

Professor Keating said that it was notable that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, one of the world’s leading sources of technological expertise, was concerned to ensure that all its students, however technologically specialised, included a significant proportion of studies from the humanities on their courses. In the case of engineering students, the pressure to include humanities came from the American Society of Professional Engineers. Its members recognised the value, in both personal and professional terms, of a balanced programme of study, avoiding narrow concentration on technical subjects. Other leading higher education institutions in the U.S.A. took a similar attitude to M.I.T., he said. This aspect of the American approach had to be acknowledged and reflected upon by Irish educationalists, especially in the light of the comparative performance of the Irish and U.S.A. economies, not least in their respective engineering industries.

He asked whether the colleges and N.C.E.A. had been too easily swayed by subject specialists into attempting to pack too much technical material into some courses, to the detriment of the provision of a broad educational experience which would likely prove of superior value to the student in the longer term. Professor Keating stated that N.C.E.A. intended to re-assess the issue by a comprehensive review of all courses leading to its awards, to ensure that breadth and balance of subject matter have not been sacrificed on the altar of immediate relevance. N.C.E.A. would arrange a major conference of higher education and industry interests on the theme of the role of the humanities in technological education, he said.

Mr. Ó Lochlainn Retires

Mr. Seán Ó Lochlainn, B.Agr.Sc., chief executive officer of County Westmeath Vocational Education Committee, retired in January. This brought to an end his formal association with the Regional Technical College with whose fortunes he has been closely involved since its inception. The successful establishment of the college was due in no small measure to his input and conscientious devotion to its welfare. From start to finish he has carried out his many responsibilities with kindness, good humour, efficiency, sound judgement and integrity. Staff and students of the college join in extending good wishes to him and Mrs. Ó Lochlainn for a long, happy and active retirement.

Mr. Pádraic Dunne, B.Com., has been appointed C.E.O. in succession to Mr. Ó Lochlainn in an acting capacity. College staff and students congratulate him on his appointment and look forward to a fruitful relationship with him in the future.
The French Connection Maintained

Last year's exchange with a college in Osnay near Cergy-Pontoise is being continued. A group of students from the Departments of Business Studies, Secretarial Studies and Hotel and Catering Management will visit the college before Easter and will attend lectures on subjects related to those which they are studying in Athlone. The French students will pay a reciprocal visit to Athlone.

As a result of last year's exchange, students from the Department of Hotel and Catering Management availed of an opportunity to do their work placement in France during the summer months. French students also did their work placement in Ireland. Negotiations are taking place at present to try to provide a similar opportunity for students in the School of Business and Secretarial Studies.

As participation in this exchange was limited to thirty students and as almost one hundred students expressed an interest in it, a second visit to France may be organised during the Easter vacation. Students will visit either Brittany or Strasbourg. The latter trip will include a visit to the European Parliament.

Plastics Industries Association Scholarship

The 1986 Plastics Industries Association Scholarship was awarded to Mr. Eoin Manning, 10 Retreat Park, Athlone. Eoin attended the Marist Brothers, Athlone, from 1981 - 1986 and he is now enrolled on the four-year Bachelor of Science (Polymer Technology) course at R.T.C., Athlone.

The scholarship was presented to Eoin by Mr. Terry Larkin, President of the Confederation of Irish Industry at a function in Dublin on 23 October 1986.

Economic and Social Integration Project for Handicapped Persons

The Regional College has been associated at several levels with the Irish Economic and Social Integration Project for Handicapped Persons. The Midlands Health Board area, comprising counties Laois, Offaly, Longford, and Westmeath, is the Irish District in an E.E.C. network. The purpose of the project is to promote the social and economic integration of disabled people.

Dr. Ambikairajah, lecturer in electronics, R.T.C., Athlone (left) is presented with the Economic and Social Project's Integration Award by Mr. Arthur Duffy, chairman, district advisory committee.

R.T.E. 1 in the future will look at adaptations which have taken place. Within the college, with the assistance of Mr. John Cusack, head of department of management studies and a member of the Project's advisory district committee, a survey was conducted to assess the attitude, and the levels of knowledge and understanding existing amongst students on the integration of the disabled. Those surveyed indicated a good knowledge of disability in general. Many expressed the importance of greater contact between people with disabilities as a means of increasing confidence in their social interaction. A follow-up programme is being developed, drawing upon the survey's results. Discussions will be taking place in the near future on the implementation of an integration programme between the Project, college authorities and student representatives.
Staff Development

Apart from the regular attendance of college lecturers and teachers at seminars, conferences and training sessions, 1986 was an exceptional year for the acquisition by college staff of additional postgraduate qualifications.

In the School of Engineering the pace was set by the plastics section where Joseph Farrell was conferred with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Manchester for his thesis 'Mechanical properties of short-fibre reinforced thermoplastics'. Dr. Farrell, who is a native of south Westmeath, originally studied plastics engineering at R.T.C., Athlone, graduating from the London Plastics and Rubber Institute in 1980. He subsequently obtained his M.Sc. in polymer physics at T.C.D. before joining the University of Manchester as a research assistant. He returned to Athlone as lecturer in polymer physics in 1986. Paul Blackie, lecturer in polymer technology and materials, was awarded the degree of M.Sc. by T.C.D. for his thesis 'Use of organo-titanium coupling agents in calcium carbonate-filled polyvinyl chloride'. Mr. Blackie, who is a native of Liverpool, has been a member of the plastics section at Athlone since 1979. Jim Hopkins has also been awarded the M.Sc. degree by T.C.D. for his thesis 'A study of factors affecting the mechanical and other physical properties of rubber-modified polypropylene structural form'.

In the School of Science, Séan Carr, technician in the mineral engineering department, was awarded the degree of Master of Business Administration by the University of Strathclyde. The degree was one of seven inaugurating firms.

Dr. David Fenton (college principal) with a group of college staff members who were recently awarded higher degrees. Front row (left to right): Dr. Michael O'Dwyer, Dr. Fenton and Mr. Paul Blackie. Back row (left to right): Mr. Richard O'Hara, Dr. Joseph Farrell, Dr. Harman Murtagh and Mr. Jim Hopkins.

the 'distance learning' masters degrees programme of the university, and inter alia involved Mr. Carr, who is an industrial engineer, in consultancy work with a U.K.-based multinational group of companies and several Irish firms.

In the School of Business and Management Studies, Richie O'Hara, lecturer in physical recreation, was awarded the Graduate Diploma in Outdoor Education, following successful completion of a course jointly organised by Dublin's College of Marketing and Design, Trinity College and the Association for Advanced Sports. The purpose of the course was to instruct teachers and staff of outdoor centres in the use of outdoor activities as a structured part of the curriculum. Mr. O'Hara's specialisation was in mountaineering. Michael O'Dwyer, lecturer in French, was awarded a Doctorate of Philosophy at the University of the Sorbonne, Paris, for his thesis on the novels and plays of Julien Green, the French writer of American origin, who was elected to the Académie Française in 1972. Harman Murtagh, lecturer in law, was also conferred Ph.D. by the National University of Ireland during the year.

Graduation Day

Best Academic Student

Best Student in Mineral Engineering

Left to right: Mr. Pat Barry, A.I.B., Athlone, Roman Sheehy, School of Business and Professional Studies, who received the A.I.B. award as best academic student, 1985-6, and Ms. Lil Leahy, A.I.B. student officer, Athlone.

Left to right: Mr. Sean Finlay, chief exploration geologist, Tara Mines Ltd, Derek Loughlin, best student of mineral engineering, Mr. Nigel Foley-Fisher, lecturer in mineral science and engineering.

Computing Facilities Expand

Increasing demand for graduates with computer knowledge and expertise has major implications for third-level colleges. At R.T.C., Athlone, a computer planning group was established to identify the additional computing facilities which would be required by full-time and part-time students over the next five years. A report containing its recommendations was submitted to the Department of Education. This highlighted the rapid growth in student numbers at the college and the extent to which students and their lecturers require further access to computers for teaching and research purposes. It went on to request funding from the Department for the additional hardware and software required.

The Department has now responded by granting outline approval for the purchase of enhanced computing facilities to meet the college's developmental needs. It is envisaged that the extended system will include several powerful microcomputers, each serving up to fifteen work stations, linked to form a ring network. These microcomputers, together with appropriate software and peripherals, will be located in classrooms and laboratories in the main college building and the Northgate Street extension.

The new computing facilities will ensure that graduates will be capable of applying the most up-to-date computer technology to the opportunities and problems likely to be encountered in industrial, commercial and service organisations. The proposed expansion is likely to commence prior to the start of the next academic year in September.
Technology and Scholarship in the Midlands Series

When the Regional Technical College, Athlone, opened in 1970, higher education in the Irish midlands may be said to have formally commenced. However, over the preceding centuries there were many who showed distinction in science, engineering, architecture, scholarship and the learned professions and who either originated in the midland area or spent a significant portion of their careers here. Collectively they laid the foundations of a tradition in technology and scholarship of which the college is in a certain sense the successor. The series which is continued here gives a brief appreciation of the careers of the more distinguished of this group.

II. Ward, Mary (1827-69), microscopist, astronomer, naturalist and artist. Born at Ballylin, Fertbane, County Offaly in 1827 into the King family, she was educated privately at home by a governess and subsequently married Henry William Crosbie Ward, by whom she had eight children. Her home, after marriage, was in south County Dublin and in 1861-4 in her native Offaly at Bellair, near Moate. In her lifetime it was impossible for women to attend university, obtain degrees or diplomas, or become members of learned and professional bodies. Her achievements in the light of these handicaps are all the more remarkable. From her childhood onwards Mary was a regular visitor to Birr Castle, the home of her cousin, William, third Earl of Rosse, the famous astronomer. Through him she met many of the most eminent scientists of the day. At the age of eighteen her parents bought her a fine microscope which she continued to use and demonstrate with enthusiasm for the remainder of her life. Her first book, *Sketches with the microscope*, was published in a limited edition at Birr in 1857, but quickly republished the following year in London under the title *The world of wonders revealed by the microscope* (the author being referred to as ‘The Hon. Mrs. W.’). It was the first ever book on microscopy by a woman and under the revised title *Microscope teachings* quickly established itself as a standard work, running to eight editions in all. A companion *Telescope teachings* was published in 1859. Mary was also the author of numerous scientific articles, including ‘Nettlejack toads in Ireland’ which first appeared in a scientific journal and was later reprinted in *The Irish times*, with an accompanying complimentary editorial comment. An exceptionally fine artist and painter, she illustrated all her own books and papers, and also those of others such as Sir David Brewster’s *Life of Newton*. Some of her zoological drawings were acquired by the British Museum. Mary’s life ended abruptly in 1869 when she was only forty-two: travelling at Birr in an experimental steam carriage invented by Lord Rosse, she was thrown to the ground when it jolted and crushed to death by one of its heavy wheels.

E.S.F. Grants

Since 1975 Irish membership of the E.E.C. has been of direct benefit to students following certain courses at regional technical colleges. This is because the European Social Fund has been providing financial aid for intensive programmes of one- and two-year full-time duration for middle-level technicians. At the present time all certificate-level courses at R.T.C., Athlone, are approved for E.S.F. support. Apart from meeting college fees, the major element in an E.S.F. aid is a maintenance allowance to each student — ‘the E.S.F. grant’. Currently this is £33.70 or £13.47 per week, depending on the student’s normal place of family residence. There is no means test.

Since the scheme’s inception, it has benefited 3,601 students at R.T.C., Athlone, thereby enabling a great many young people to take advantage of third-level educational opportunities. The scope of the scheme was much enlarged from 1984-5 and 869 students at the college are in receipt of E.S.F. grants in the current year. This injection of approximately £1 million into student spending power is of significant benefit to the economy of Athlone.

The Treaty of Rome commits the Community to raising the standard of living of the population in its member states. This has involved the Commission in the preparation of policies to combat unemployment and in this context the Council of Ministers has adopted several resolutions on vocational training. The Social Fund is the Community’s most concrete instrument of social policy. It has been oriented in favour of young people under twenty-five to whom three-quarters of its resources are now committed, with a definite bias in favour of high-unemployment regions, including Ireland.

Golfers Triumph

R.T.C., Athlone, students' golf team won the inaugural H.E.S.F. championship played at Carlow on 7 May 1986. Twelve teams competed and the golf was of a high standard. Victory for Athlone was secured by the last player, Michael Ashe, who brought in the best individual score of the day at level par. The 1987 championship will be played at Athlone Golf Club on 1 May. Athlone will again be entering a strong team and are optimistic about their chances of retaining the H.E.S.F. trophy.

Dr. Manuel Marín González, Spanish vice-president of the E.E.C. Commission with responsibility for the social policy of the Community and the European Social Fund.

R.T.C., Athlone golf team (left to right: Declan Ryan (Royal Tara), Michael Ashe (Birr), George Coghlan (Mullingar) and Sam Nayagam (Tullamore).

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