

**President, Colleagues, Graduates,
Families and Friends of Graduates**

I first of all sincerely congratulate you, as part of the class of 2018 graduates from the College of Social Sciences and Law, here in UCD. It is a great personal achievement and a great family achievement to have completed your respective programmes successfully. It is absolutely right and proper that you have come together this evening to celebrate this achievement. You have worked hard here in UCD to achieve your qualification and many of you have also worked hard outside of UCD, as you engaged in part-time jobs to help fund your studies. Enrolment on a programme is no guarantee of successful completion. Third-level education, especially full-time education, is expensive and demands a huge personal and family effort. Many of you will remember colleagues who enrolled on your current or previous programmes, but did not complete them. While some may have strategically changed programme or changed career aspirations, others will have become invisible casualties of the third-level education system, often returning to the refuge of their families to pick up the pieces of their lives. This can be at a huge cost at the individual level of the student and, even from a cold impersonal, financial perspective, it is an economic cost to the system and to society. These students could be considered part of the collateral damage that can occur when society rightly demands quality third-level education, but then fails to match that demand with the requisite resources to fund it.

We cannot do quality third-level education on the cheap, without someone losing out. We have rightly focused on broadening access to third-level education, but participation and retention are equally worthy of our attention. It is quite likely that those for whom access has traditionally been an issue, retention and completion may also prove challenging. This issue is not confined to undergraduate first degrees. The fact that society demands higher qualified professionals at Master's and Doctoral level, has resulted in longer duration of professional training programmes, which can put an unsustainable burden on students and families. When academic challenges and financial pressures intersect, academic achievement and professional performance can be compromised, sometimes unfortunately resulting in failure and withdrawal. The extended training and the increased costs involved also put professional training outside the reach of many students, with the risk of professional classes becoming more elitist and less representative of society.

You are therefore to be highly commended for successfully negotiating our third-level system to postgraduate level. In that regard, you are privileged to have the talents and abilities that you possess, you are privileged in relation to your supportive families, the schools you attended and the teachers you encountered. I hope you feel privileged to have attended UCD. We up here on the platform feel privileged to have worked with you, lectured to you and supervised you. We are very privileged in that we get to teach

the teachers, to shape the school leaders, to the train the psychologists and other care professionals, and to educate the lawyers, that is, to shape the future professionals in these important domains in society. In short, we get to influence the influencers of tomorrow.

With privilege comes responsibility. I hope we have fulfilled our responsibility of instilling in you the core values of the College of Social Sciences and Law here in UCD, namely, equality, inclusion, human rights and social justice, and that these values will be at the core of your professional being. As you embark on your professional roles, you will occupy positions of power and privilege in society. Positions of power and privilege only exist because others are less powerful and less privileged. In modern, fast-paced, so-called knowledge economies, there are winners and losers and even non-starters. There will be socially and educationally vulnerable persons in the classes you teach, in the schools you lead, and they will be accessing the care services that you provide. As lawyers, you may be required to advocate for, and defend, them in the justice system.

In your professional roles, you may occupy positions where you are decision-makers in relation to other people's entitlements, where you are definers of needs, in relation to access to additional teaching support, to disability services, and social services. Unfortunately, people's needs are usually defined by persons more powerful, more privileged and often better-educated than themselves. Therein lies the uncomfortable responsibility of

our professional roles, which requires that equality, inclusion, human rights and social justice must be at the core of what we do, but even more importantly, must determine how we think about, and perceive, those who access the services we provide. Disadvantage is transgenerational, you almost inherit it. There is an all too predictable trajectory from one's first postal address to one's final social destination in life. As professionals in the education, healthcare, social care and justice systems, we must do all in our power to interrupt that pattern and to disrupt society's bell curve of advantage and disadvantage. This issue should further accentuate our concerns about the professional classes becoming less representative of society.

To conclude, and on a lighter note, you are thankfully graduating at a very fortunate time in relation to employment opportunities, with our society waiting to avail of your talents and expertise. That is good for you and good for society and is good news for your families. Go forth from here this evening, enjoy the thoroughly deserved celebrations with your families, your friends and your classmates. Some of you will then go abroad to deploy your skills and talents in distant lands, some of you will return to your native countries to serve your own societies. Wherever you go, I wish you well, go safely, stay in touch with UCD, and stay in touch with each other.

Go neiri bothar an tsaoil libh: May the road of life rise with you.

Thank you.