

Gerry Mckenna

Professor P Gerry McKenna has been a pioneering and visionary figure in higher education. A former Dean of Science, Pro Vice Chancellor (Research), and ultimately Vice Chancellor and President of the University of Ulster (1999-2005), he was a key architect in the transformation of the University from a largely teaching-only institution in the 1980s into one with a strong reputation for research and knowledge transfer by the beginning of the new millennium. He internationalised the University through collaborative research and teaching linkages with leading universities in the United States, Hong Kong, China, India, Malaysia and Australia.

McKenna has been a hugely innovative force in teaching and learning. Among many teaching initiatives, he established the University of Ulster as a leading UK centre for e-learning and for widening access, particularly through the 'Step Up Programme'. Under his stewardship, Ulster became the most extensive provider of undergraduate and postgraduate healthcare programmes in the UK, and rose to being the 8th most popular UK university for undergraduate applications and the largest university on the island of Ireland. It was shortlisted for the Sunday Times 'University of the Year' in 2001.

Gerry McKenna was the progenitor and driver of Ulster's highly successful research and knowledge transfer strategy which saw the University become one of only twenty universities to obtain two 5* ratings (in Biomedical Sciences and Celtic Studies) in the 2001 UK-wide Research Assessment Exercise. It was subsequently ranked 24th in the UK for 'research power' and 17th for QR (Quality Research) funding.

McKenna has been centrally involved in developing many national and international initiatives including the establishment of Universities Ireland (as founding chair), the Heads of University Centres of Biomedical Science (HUCBMS) and the US-Ireland R&D Partnership. Locally, he was a pioneer of knowledge transfer, influenced by his many collaborations with the United States. He was co-founder of the Northern Ireland Science Park and established incubator facilities for start-up companies and science research parks at each of the University of Ulster's main campuses.

An internationally distinguished researcher in the areas of DNA repair and mutagenesis, McKenna built his subject area, biomedical sciences, from a zero base at Ulster in the early 1980s into a leading international centre by the mid-1990s; obtaining the highest possible 5* ratings in successive Research Assessment Exercises (RAEs) in 1996 and 2001 and being top-ranked in the UK under the revised descriptors used in the 2008 RAE.



Professor McKenna has received many plaudits including: Membership of the Royal Irish Academy, Freedom of the Borough of Coleraine, Honorary Doctorates from the National University of Ireland and Queen's University Belfast, Coleraine Business Person of the Year Award, Keys to the City of Portland Maine, and Honouree of the Harvard Friends of Celtic Studies and the Flax Trust, New York. He is Deputy Lieutenant for Co. Londonderry.

A Professor Emeritus of the University of Ulster, Gerry McKenna remains highly active in higher education circles; advising institutions and organizations, nationally and internationally, on research strategy and policy, biomedical and healthcare education, business planning and biotechnology. He is President Emeritus and Hon. Executive Secretary of the Heads of University Centres of Biomedical Science.

