

# THE BALANCE OF THE FORCE



*Iognáid Ó Muircheartaigh, President of NUIG.*

## USAC and NUIG: A Thirty Year Success Story

President Iognáid O' Muircheartaigh of the National University of Ireland in Galway has been with that great centre of Irish learning for over thirty years - about the same period of time that the Defence Forces, through the 'USAC' scheme, have been sending commissioned officers to the University to attain their requisite third level degrees. The President speaks to SIGNAL about the fruitful relationship between the two organisations, which recently celebrated its thirtieth anniversary.

"I arrived at the end of the 1970, the Cadets had arrived just before me in 1969. I think it was apparent very early on that the Cadets would have a major impact on the university. Clearly they stood out in their uniforms and they were a very welcome addition to the campus.

### The Origins

It is my understanding that the genesis of this relationship goes back as far as the 1920's when there were proposals for military

officers to gain university qualifications. It was something that was considered by the Defence Forces even at that early stage - one firm advocate of the scheme was General MJ Costello, but unfortunately the budgets at the time didn't allow for it.

However General Costello remained determined to secure university education for commissioned officers. "In the 1960's he was part of the Commission on Third Level Education and he sought to revisit the issue. The Commission's report recommended that officers in the Irish Defence Forces should receive a third level education. The strong Irish language element in NUIG, and indeed throughout the Galway area, made the university appropriate for the cadets to attend.

"I think their presence made an immediate impact on the campus, a positive one. By the mid-seventies there was on average 140-150 Officers on campus. The most common subjects for them were Arts, Science, Commerce and Engineering. Those numbers represented a peak to date. The numbers

have decreased somewhat, but they are still healthy, we would have about 75 on campus at the moment."

The thirtieth anniversary celebrations of the relationship between the

Defence Forces and NUIG were held recently and included events organised by both USAC (the military abbreviation for the University Student Accommodation Complement) and NUIG. "I met the Chief of Staff at these celebrations and it was then that I realised what a strong bond had been formed between the two organisations. It was made known to me by the Chief of Staff that he placed very high emphasis on the importance of the scheme and that he held NUIG in very high regard and that the College had always been receptive to the particular needs of students during their time here."

"There has always been a strong working relationship between the Registrar of NUIG and the Officer Commanding USAC. I was Registrar myself prior to becoming President so I have some knowl-

edge of the strong working relationship. Another development from the strong relationship between the two sides is the increased participation of military officers in post-graduate education and the increase in the amount of courses provided by us to cater for military personnel. For example we now have courses related to Peacekeeping and other specific subjects.”

### The Balance Objective

“From a personal point of view, when I take broad look at NUIG, I think the Defence Forces’ students bring a very good balance to the university. I also believe that their appearance in uniform at College is an impressive statement. To me it is a clear defining statement that these students are proud to be part of the Defence Forces.”

“For Officers coming to NUIG, I would like to think that we help provide a balance in their lives. Before they come here they are part of a rigid, hierarchical structure in the Cadet School. While here they are part of a broad, liberal, non-structured environment. I think when you combine both you can produce a very balanced and valuable individual. “Our commitment to the Defence Forces has been reinforced in our new strategic plan for the university, and this relationship, which has spanned more than three decades, is something we are very proud to continue.”

In addition to the educational benefits of USAC at the university, President O’Muircheartaigh was also highly complementary in regard to the officers’ participation in sporting and social events. “The ability of the officers to integrate effectively at every level of university society is shown in the amount of them involved with clubs and societies at NUIG. The social and sporting facet of university life is a vital one when you consider our key aims here, which are to provide a balanced educational and social environment.”

### The Officer’s View

Lt Sharon McManus, outgoing chairperson of the USAC RACO committee and a civil engineering student at NUIG, reinforced the views of President

O’Muircheartaigh; “USAC officers gain a tremendous amount from attending NUIG. Apart from receiving an excellent all-round education, the relaxed informal atmosphere of NUIG contrasts completely with the well structured formal atmosphere of the Cadet School and provides a good balance for any officer.”

In return USAC officers contribute



*The 30 year relationship between NUIG and the Defence Forces has been mutually beneficial.*

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greatly to the university through clubs and societies. “Many of the sporting clubs in NUIG are captained by USAC officers or have at least one officer on their committees at any time. The most popular clubs for offi-

cers include the Men’s and Ladies GAA teams, rowing, basketball, soccer, rugby, boxing, martial arts, badminton, squash, mountaineering, orienteering, hillwalking and more recently the surfing club, which was



*The more informed atmosphere at NUIG provide a counter-balance for incoming officers.*

started by USAC officers and is one of the most popular and successful clubs in the college at present. "The officers of USAC provide their organisational and leadership abilities to encourage cohesion between new students joining clubs and to help form a well structured and successful club," adds Lt McManus.

traditional links with musical and drama societies." The incoming chairperson of USAC's RACO committee echoed the views of his predecessor. Sub Lt Paul O'Brien, a third year mechanical engineering student said; "Coming from the cadet school, the university provides a good balance in terms of the environment we study in. There are



Lt Sharon McManus

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USAC officers are also involved in the societies of NUIG but sporting clubs remain more popular with officers. "However, we have forged a strong relationship with societies such as Literary & Debating, with which USAC officers have had a very distinguished and successful record, we also have

none of the rigid military structures that officers have become accustomed to but we attend in uniform so our identities are always distinct in that respect. NUIG is also excellent from a social and indeed sporting point of view, with officers involved in a wide range of both sporting and academic clubs

and societies. It's a great tradition between the Defence Forces and NUIG and it's one that provides us, the officers, with an excellent educational opportunity." Sub Lt O'Brien is a member of the Naval Service and is currently stationed aboard the LE Niamh.



Officers at NUIG are kept aware of all relevant Defence Force issues through USAC's RACO committee.

# Competition

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