

Citation
Proposed Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* for
Michael D. Higgins,
President of Ireland

Born in Limerick in 1941 and raised in County Clare, President Michael D. Higgins was a factory worker and clerk before becoming the first in his family to attend university, studying at University College Galway (now the National University of Ireland), Indiana University, and the University of Manchester. Commencing his academic career as a lecturer in sociology and political science at the National University of Ireland, he gave some of the earliest lectures on the sociology of migration, urban sociology, clientalism, and the sociology of law and deviant behaviour. He was committed to the development of extramural studies and travelled across Western Ireland providing evening classes for students without access to further education.

President Higgins entered public life in 1973, when he was appointed to the Seanad. He was elected as the representative for Galway West in Dáil Éireann (1981-82), and then served as Lord Mayor of Galway (1982-83 and 1991-92) and representative for the National University of Ireland in the Seanad (1983-87), before being re-elected in the Galway West constituency to Dáil Éireann in 1987, a position he held until 2011.

From 1993 to 1997, President Higgins was Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, which included responsibility for promoting Irish language and enhancing the economic and social development of Irish-speaking areas of the nation. He initiated the first Irish-language television station, repealed censorship legislation, and led the creation of a network of local arts venues across Ireland. He championed the reinvigoration of the Irish film and television industries, and in recognition of his tireless efforts, was awarded the Irish Film and Television Academy's Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Irish Film and Television industry at the 11th Annual IFTA Awards in 2014.

In 2003 President Higgins was elected President of the Labour Party, serving as Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and as a founding member of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs. After many decades of exemplary service in Irish public life, he won a landslide victory in the 2011 presidential election and was inaugurated as the ninth President of Ireland on 11 November 2011.

President Higgins has been an outspoken campaigner for human rights, advocating in Ireland on issues such as equal pay and the rights of people with disabilities, and championing human rights in countries including Nicaragua, Chile, Cambodia, Iraq and Somalia. This advocacy was recognised in 1992 when he was awarded the Seán MacBride Peace Prize by the International Peace Bureau in Helsinki. Among the other international awards which President Higgins has received are the Orden Nacional Jose Matias Delgado en Grado de Gran Cruz Placa de Oro, which was presented by President Funes, El Salvador, and The Gran Collar del Orden del Sol, Lima, Peru. He remains Honorary Adjunct Professor at the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland.

President Higgins is an accomplished writer and poet, and from 1982 until 1992 was a regular columnist for the popular *Hot Press* magazine. His work deals with Irish politics, sociology, history and culture and includes two collections of essays, *Cause for Concern: Irish Politics, Culture and Society* (2007) and *Renewing the Republic* (2011), and a number of collections of poetry, including *The Betrayal* (1990), *The Season of Fire* (1993), *An Arid Season* (2004) and *New and Selected Poems* (2011). As President, he has continued to passionately advocate the importance of universities and higher education, illustrated in his 2012 speech *The Role of a University in a Time of Intellectual Crisis*. His work has been published widely, and he is the author of three books of essays: *Causes for Concern* (2006, *Liberties Press*), *Renewing the Republic* (2011, *Liberties Press*), and *When Ideas Matter* (2016, *Head of Zeus*).

As a politician, poet, writer, academic, statesman, human rights advocate and champion of the creative industries, President Higgins has been at the forefront of contemporary Irish politics for more than four decades, and has played a significant role in advancing the arts, humanities and education in Ireland and beyond. It is fitting that the University of Melbourne should recognise his contribution to public life through the award of Doctor of Laws.