



Pictured: President Mary McAleese (far right) receives a gift of a framed photograph from photographer and former Roslyn Park College student, Cara Mercier. The President was guest of honour at an event to mark the 25th anniversary of the college. Also pictured are representatives of Roslyn Park College Students' Union, Noeleen Coughlan (far left) and Sean O'Neill.



Pictured above: Ruairi Quinn TD, Minister for Labour, cuts the ribbon to officially open the National Training Centre, now Roslyn Park College, in 1984. Also pictured is College Director, Peter Davies (back right) and Rehabilitation Institute Chairman, Owen Ward (front left).

A Very Presidential Birthday

President McAleese joins students and staff in celebrating Roslyn Park College's 25th birthday.

DO YOU REMEMBER 1984? IT WAS the year that the AIDS virus was first identified, the coal miners' strike began in the UK and the Soviet bloc boycotted the Los Angeles Olympic Games. The Apple Mac was launched and, as a response to the devastating famine in Ethiopia, pop musicians joined together to form Band Aid and record *Do they know it's Christmas?* Roller-skating was all the rage and we spent our evenings watching television blockbusters such as *Dynasty*, *Fame* and *The A-Team*.

It all seems like a lifetime ago. Yet, 1984 was also the year that Rehab officially opened a training centre at Roslyn Park. Located in Sandymount, Dublin, Roslyn Park College was, and still remains, the organisation's largest training centre. Over the past 25 years, some 5,000 students have passed through the college, with the majority entering the workforce or advancing their educational achievement. Many of these students would have previously found it difficult to access further education, training and employment due to illness, disability or accident.

The college's 25th birthday was certainly a cause for celebration and the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, made sure that she was among those



Pictured above: President Mary McAleese (centre) with Dean McCann and Sara O'Kelly, both of whom are students in Roslyn Park College.

to wish the students and staff at Roslyn Park College a very special birthday.

Speaking to a packed audience gathered in the college gym last September, President McAleese said that Roslyn Park College had transformed lives.

"Peoples' lives have been helped and transformed by the existence of Roslyn Park College, a facility that is so different to so many other educational establishments. It has that opportunity to be almost forensically, intimately, customised around the needs of the student and that is a very, very special thing. Roslyn Park College is able to really respond quickly and with real passion to the needs of that one individual student and to offer them a pathway to jobs and on to college. Here, by the combined effort of the student and the college, lives have been transformed and doors have been opened."

When it was first opened by the then Minister for Labour, Ruairi Quinn TD, the National Training College, as Roslyn Park College was then called, offered just seven courses and had ten staff and 60 students. Today the college, which is part of National Learning Network, Rehab's training and employment division, has over 50 staff and provides 19 courses to over 280 students, including FÁS-funded vocational training and education courses in business, arts and

technology. A variety of foundation studies courses, funded by the Health Service Executive are also available, enabling students to work on personal development and to explore career options.

Welcoming President McAleese to the college, Marie Kelly, Director of Training and Employment Services with Rehab, said, "This is a day to celebrate not only Roslyn Park College's 25th birthday but also the success of its many students. In 2008, over 90 per cent of students who completed courses at Roslyn Park College progressed to employment, higher education and further training. It is great to see our students reap the benefits of their learning and forge careers in areas that match their interests and abilities."

Innovation has always been key to Roslyn Park College's success and among the courses on offer at Roslyn Park College are 'Fast-Track to Employment', where students undertake a significant proportion of their time training with leading companies, and the 'Computer Programming and Game Design' course, specifically developed to enable students to learn the skills necessary for a career in the growing digital entertainment industry.

During her visit, President McAleese conducted a short tour of the college, meeting a number of students and viewing some of the art, graphic design



Roslyn Park College and Rehab head office share a campus in Sandymount, Dublin. The site at Newgrove Avenue was originally called Sandymount Park and is the location of a beautiful 18th century villa, designed by the great architect, James Gandon, for his friend, the landscape painter, William Ashford. Ashford lived in the villa from 1780 until his death in 1824. A leading architect of the day, James Gandon designed many of Dublin's iconic buildings, including the Custom House, the Four Courts and King's Inns.

Rehab acquired the villa, now known as Gandon Villa, in 1983 as part of a site belonging to the Convent of the Sacred Heart of Mary. In addition to the villa and a convent, which was to become Rehab head office, the site also included a secondary school for girls. The school, which was officially opened by Archbishop McQuaid in 1952, contained 11 classrooms and was, according to the *Irish Independent*, "a notable addition to the educational facilities of Dublin". It was later to become the National Training Centre, the precursor to Roslyn Park College.

and photography work undertaken as part of their studies.

Unfortunately, pressing business meant that President McAleese missed out on the *Roslyn's Got Talent* show which featured performances by students of the college, including those on the innovative 'Performing Arts' course. Judging by all accounts, Roslyn Park College students definitely have the X-Factor. Simon Cowell should take note! ■