

Women on Walls Launch – Tuesday 5 March 2019

Mr Ken Mealy, President, RCSI

Response to Minister & Unveiling

Thank you very much Minister Mitchell O' Connor for your considered words and for joining us here today for this very special occasion.

If I could draw your attention for a moment to a small plaque on the spiral staircase at the back of this room, which is named after one of our Women on Walls, Emily Winifred Dickson.

In 2011 this plaque was put in place by our first female President Professor Eilis McGovern, who was also the first female President of any of the UK and Ireland Royal Colleges of Surgeons.

The plaque was put in place in recognition of the fact that up until 1984, the wives of male surgeons attending dinners here were required to sit in what was then known as the Minstrel Gallery. This fact was alluded to in our performance earlier this afternoon.

Just last month we held the annual Charter Day dinner here in this room. I received a thank you letter from one of my guests which noted that the last time he attended the Charter Day dinner, his wife was required to sit in the balcony and that he was glad that was no longer the case!!

I can assure you, my own wife who is an academic in another institution and who cannot be here today, has had considerably more strident views on this issue particularly at the time of my entrance to surgical training in the 1980's: it is hard to believe such segregation was so relatively recent.

But today in RCSI, we continue to work to embed equality, diversity and inclusion across our day-to-day work here in the College. This included holding the first Women in Surgery meeting in conjunction with the American College of Surgeons here in Dublin last summer, another milestone for this College. The Women on Walls campaign undoubtedly marks a further step in the right direction.

I am immensely proud that the achievements of Dr Coffey, Dean Crowley, Dr Dickson, Dr Dunleavy, Dr Hannan, Sr and Dr Lynch,

Dr Stokes, Dr Strangman have been recognized here today. It is only right that we would have such role models on our walls.

If I can mention a few housekeeping issues. Once the Minister has opened the Boardroom, I would like to invite those of you with gold tickets - family and friends of the portrait subjects and artists to join us in the Boardroom for the first viewing.

As this is the first time family and friends will see the portraits, we recognise the importance of allowing the family some time to view the portraits.

For our other attendees, those with silver tickets, I would ask you to kindly remain seated for the moment and then take the opportunity to enjoy some refreshments ahead of your own dedicated viewing and we look forward to welcoming you for the second viewing very shortly.

I would like to echo Cathal's gratitude to everyone involved in making this momentous occasion so special and thank you to you all for coming here in such strong numbers today. In particular, Mr

Alastair Blair and Dr Michelle Cullen from Accenture Ireland and Mr Andrew Hetherington, CEO, Business to Arts.

Today is a very important day for so many people – for the family and friends of our portrait subjects, for the artists who brought them to life and for the cultural history of this College and Ireland. Congratulations to these marvelous women and their families, the artists and everyone involved in this process – you have much to be proud of today.

Over the coming weeks, we will hold a series of public tours and school group events, and we look forward to sharing these portraits and the stories of our Women on Walls heroines more widely.

Finally, on behalf of RCSI, I would like to close our official proceedings today by inviting Minister Mitchell O' Connor to undertake the ribbon cutting to mark the portrait unveiling.