

# Micheál Ó Flanagan (1910-1977)

**By Michael Casserly, 2022**

Micheál, a native of Dublin, attended Belvedere College, Dublin before attending University College Dublin (UCD) from where he graduated with a degree in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering in 1932. After graduating he worked for a few years in London before taking up the post of Assistant Engineer with the Department of Posts and Telegraphs in 1934.

In 1936 he joined the Technical Instruction Branch (TIB) of the Department of Education as an Inspector and worked in the Cork/Munster area until he moved to Dublin in 1954 on promotion to the post of Senior Inspector. He became Chief Inspector of the TIB in 1958 and in 1968 was appointed Chief Inspector of the restructured Department of Education Inspectorate. He retired from this position of Chief Inspector in 1974.

In 1956 he was responsible for Ireland joining the International Vocational Training Organisation (IVTO) as its tenth member. The organisation had started in Spain in 1950 as a skills competition between Spain and Portugal. He helped the fledgling organisation develop its constitution and competition rules. He was a respected and influential member over its formative years. He was the Irish Official Delegate to the IVTO for 17 years (1956 to 1973), during which time he attended 16 competitions throughout the world. When Ireland hosted the 12th International Trade Competition for Apprentices in 1963 in the College of Technology Bolton Street, Dublin, he played a major role in the organisation and running of the event. He believed that the competitions raised the status of technical and apprentice education in Ireland through the pursuit of excellence.

For his work with the IVTO in developing and promoting the organisation he was conferred with many honours and awards by the Spanish government.

The IVTO has grown over the years, changed its name and is now known as WorldSkills International with a membership of 84 countries/regions, holding biennial skill competitions and is engaged in Vocational Education & Training (VET) research and other skill promotion activities throughout the world.

As well as his daily vernacular of Irish and English, he had a great interest in European languages and was a fluent speaker of French, Italian, German and Spanish.

In the 1950s he went on an educational study tour of the USA and returned with the conviction that courses for Technicians needed to be introduced into the education system.

He was a member of the National Steering Committee, working with the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation & Development (OECD) to produce the seminal report "Investment in Education" in 1965. This was a major analytical and statistical study of the Irish Educational System.

He took a great interest in educational developments in Europe and saw that Ireland would be more closely linked to Europe in Technical and Higher Education in the future, rather than only looking to the UK for its models. He was involved with the OECD and its education committee, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), attending its meetings held in Paris.

He was a member of a government appointed commission, set up in 1963, to advise on Design Policy and the education of Industrial Designers. The commission reported in 1967 and recommended the establishment of a new National College of Art, Design and Architecture. With two other members of the commission, he wrote a minority report which disagreed with the inclusion of Architecture in the proposed new college.

On becoming Chief Inspector (TIB), he became the manager of the National Art College, working with its director. When legislation was passed in 1971 establishing the college as the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), he was appointed its Acting Director, a position he held from July 1971 to January 1974.

In 1965, The Department of Education and the Swiss Watch Industry established the Irish – Swiss Institute of Horology and he was appointed its first Chairman, a position he held until his retirement.

He worked tirelessly and patiently to raise awareness of the need for technical education on a regional basis. He pursued this with Government Ministers and senior Civil Servants in the Departments of Education and Finance. His view was supported by an OECD report that recommended the need to improve the provision of technical education in general and particularly in regional centres. This led to the building of nine Regional Technical Colleges in the 1970s.

The 1960/70s was a period of great change across all sectors of Irish education. As Chief Inspector Micheál played a leading role in driving this change that saw enhanced educational opportunity for all and greater prosperity for the nation.

He was married to Petronella Ó Flanagáin, Theatre/ Radio Actress. He supported his young widowed sister Cora Horner in rearing her three daughters Nuala, Clodagh and Andree. His nieces were eternally grateful for his generosity and adored their uncle.