**Examples of honorary degree recipients**

**President Michael D Higgins (awarded in 2024)**

[Michael D Higgins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_D._Higgins) was inaugurated as the ninth President of Ireland in 2011. In 2018 he was inaugurated for a second term.

He has a passionate political voice, is a poet and writer, academic and statesman, human rights advocate, promoter of inclusive citizenship and champion of creativity within Irish society, He has previously served at almost every level of public life in Ireland, including as Ireland’s first Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht.

He was born on 1941 in Limerick city and was raised in County Clare. He was a factory worker and a clerk before becoming the first in his family to access higher education. He studied at the University College Galway, the University of Manchester (as a researcher in Anthropology, supervised by Prof. J. Clyde Mitchell and Prof Valdo Pons), and Indiana University.

As a lecturer in political science and sociology in National University of Ireland, Galway, and in the United States, he was a passionate proponent for the extension of access to third level education beyond the walls of established Universities. He was centrally involved in the development of extra-mural studies at National University of Ireland, Galway, and he travelled extensively across the West of Ireland to provide accessible evening classes for interested citizens.

A desire to work more directly for equality and justice led him to enter public life and he went on to serve as a public representative at many levels from Councillor and Mayor to 9 years in the Seanad and 25 in Dáil Éireann.

As Ireland’s first Minister for the Arts (1993-97), Michael D. Higgins’ achievements included the reinvigoration of the Irish film industry, the establishment of Teilifís na Gaeilge, now TG4, and the repeal of censorship under Section 31 of the Broadcasting Acts. He also established a rich network of local arts and cultural venues which brought a crucial access to citizens across Ireland to these facilities. Moreover, he drove the revitalisation of Ireland’s canal network, resulting in over 1,000 kilometres of navigable waterways, supporting thousands of jobs, and creating wealth in many rural and economically-deprived areas of the State.

He has, like many in Ireland, seen generations of his family emigrate. He has a strong interest and solidarity with the Irish abroad and has been a regular visitor to Irish Centres in Britain.

Throughout his life, he has campaigned for human rights and for the promotion of peace and democracy in Ireland and in many other parts of the world, from Nicaragua and Chile to Cambodia, Iraq and Somalia. In 1992, he was the first recipient of the Seán MacBride Peace Prize from the International Peace Bureau in Helsinki, in recognition of his work for peace and justice in many parts of the world.

He is also a writer and poet, contributing to many books covering diverse aspects of Irish politics, sociology, history and culture. He has published two collections of essays — ‘Causes for Concern — Irish Politics, Culture and Society’, ‘Renewing the Republic’ and two collections of speeches: ‘When Ideas Matter: Speeches for an Ethical Republic’ and 1916 Centenary Commemorations and Celebrations: Speeches by President Michael D. Higgins. He has also published four collections of poetry — The Betrayal; The Season of Fire; An Arid Season; and New and Selected Poems.

**Julie Hesmondhalgh (awarded in 2022)**

[Julie Hesmondhalgh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julie_Hesmondhalgh) was born in Accrington, Lancashire, where she was involved in local amateur theatre and studied A-level Theatre Studies at Accrington and Rossendale College under Martin Cosgrif. Despite planning to go into social work, she won a grant to attend LAMDA, where she studied from 1988-91. After graduating she was part of the theatre company, Arts Threshold, and, with her teacher and mentor Brian Astbury and a group of friends, built a theatre in a basement in Paddington. This led to roles on television in, among other programs, The Bill (1984), The Dwelling Place (1994), Screen One: Pat and Margaret (1994), and an episode of Dalziel and Pascoe (1996). She was spotted by the casting crew for Coronation Street (1960) while appearing in "Much Ado About Nothing" in the Royal Exchange theatre in Manchester. She played "Hayley" in Coronation Street, the first trans-character in a UK soap, from 1998 to 2014, when she left, winning a National TV Award for her performance in her exit storyline, which she shared with her screen husband, David Neilson. The couple also won Best Actor and Actress at the Soap Awards that year, as well as Best Onscreen Partnership. She returned to work extensively in theatre, radio and television, with roles in Russell T. Davies's Cucumber (2015), Happy Valley (2014) (series 2), Doctor Who (2005), Catastrophe (2015), Inside No. 9 (2014), The Trouble with Maggie Cole (2020), and The A Word (2016) (series 3). She starred in the BBC4 film, Black Roses: The Killing of Sophie Lancaster (2015), in which she reprised her stage role as the mother of a murdered teenager. This won her a Best Performance in a Single Drama Award from the Royal Television Society. Her role as a rape survivor in series 3 of Broadchurch (2013) earned her a BAFTA nomination for Best Supporting Actress in 2018. On 30 April 2017, Hesmondhalgh starred in a one-off performance at the Royal Court Theatre, of Lemn Sissay's The Report, directed by John E. McGrath.

In February 2018, she starred as Renee in The Almighty Sometimes by Kendall Feaver. It was directed by Katy Rudd at the Royal Exchange. In February 2019, she performed the title role in Mother Courage and Her Children by Bertolt Brecht, adapted by Anna Jordan. It was directed by Amy Hodge at the Royal Exchange, Manchester. She is a supporter of Arts Emergency and a mentor with the National Youth Theatre.

Driven by her socialist beliefs, Julie is an active campaigner and fundraiser. In May 2013, Hesmondhalgh appeared on ITV game show All Star Mr & Mrs with her husband Ian and won £20,000 for Maundy Relief. She is a patron of the following organisations: Trans Media Watch, Maundy Relief, Marple Drama, WAST, Manchester People's Assembly, Reuben's Retreat, The Alex Williams Believe and Achieve Trust, and The Sophie Lancaster Foundation. The latter organisation was set up following the murder of Sophie Lancaster.

In 2019, she set up the group 500 Acts of Kindness, a fundraising community where 500 members donate a pound a week to give to an individual, group, family or organisation in need.