

Spotlight on Scott

Claire O'Connell casts a light on the remarkable career of Prof Anne Scott.



Last month, Prof Anne Scott started her five-year tenure as the university's Deputy President. It's not the first time her career has led her into brand new territory.

"If you were looking at my CV through a traditionalist lens you would never employ me because I have moved in and out of so many different things," she laughs modestly as we talk in her new office, a room that looks sparse as it waits for her boxes to be unpacked.

That CV has spanned nursing practice, education and research and has taken her to places as diverse as East Africa and Scotland.

Born in Cavan, Scott trained as a nurse in Sligo. "I absolutely enjoyed working with patients and being a nurse," she says. "But what I couldn't bear was the unthinking structure that we seemed to have to work in."

So she decided to pursue nursing education and studied psychology and philosophy at Trinity College Dublin, a move she ranks among the best decisions she ever made.

The lure of working with patients again inspired her next move to nurse in a remote bush hospital nine hours drive from Nairobi.

"It was a tremendous experience," she recalls, particularly

because it taught her how to cope with the frustration of limited resources and overcrowding.

"For two years I ran a paediatric ward which was supposed to have 30 beds – but we usually had 120 patients," she says.

Scott briefly swapped the arid African bush for the softer climate of Edinburgh to do a Master's in Education, then returned to Kenya to run the hospital's nursing school and observe a more academic side of nursing. "For me nursing practice throws up so many of the core questions in ethics from resource issues to practitioner–patient relationships and professional judgement and decision making," she says.

Later she went back to Scotland to do a PhD in healthcare ethics and lectured there in the mid-1990s at a pioneering time when nursing education was moving into the university sector. So when she came to DCU in 2000, just as nursing education in Ireland was undergoing a similar transformation, her rich experience as a nurse and educator meant she was well placed to help develop and head the College's first School of Nursing, which offers degree-level education and postgraduate research opportunities.

"One of the hopes is that not only would the students be supported in the growth of their intellectual curiosity but they also would gain the confidence to actually challenge, so the notion of producing practitioners who are also critical thinkers is an integral part of that programme."

Also on the board of the Health Service Executive, Scott believes she takes on her new role as Deputy President at an interesting time for the College.

"I think DCU has broken the mould in many ways as a new university," she says. "Now to remain at a cutting edge we need to start looking at ourselves through a new lens which says we are not 2-years-old now, we are 25-years-old."

And she is looking forward to helping DCU look outwards and grow into its future. "What I would like to see in five years' time is that DCU is maintaining the success it has had to date and achieving at an international level."

Dr Claire O'Connell is a Dublin-based freelance journalist with special interests in science and health and frequently contributes to The Irish Times.