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CITATION DELIVERED BY THE
CHANCELLOR, THE HON DR ROBERT HOPE,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE ADMISSION OF
PROFESSOR KEN MCKINNON FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF LETTERS HONORIS
CAUSA ON 7 OCTOBER 1994

Members of the University Council, distinguished guests, members of the University, graduates, ladies and gentlemen, I present Kenneth Richard McKinnon.

Ken McKinnon was born in Auburn, South Australia in 1931. He was the son of a primary school headmaster and one of a family of 12. He later recalled that, to win a point in his family, you had to speak out strongly and be very sure of your argument. Ken McKinnon learnt these tactics well and applied them to great effect thereafter.

Ken McKinnon's career in education and management mirrors, in some important aspects, the Australian experience of the post-war years, notably the movement from an insular to an international perspective.

He graduated with Bachelor of Arts and then Bachelor of Education degrees from the University of Queensland in the 1950s and gained his doctorate in Education from Harvard in 1965.

His working career had begun with a teaching appointment in South Australia in 1952. Then came the critical career move that took him to the Australian Territory of Papua New Guinea as a headmaster. After 8 years, Ken McKinnon had risen to the position of Superintendent of Schools.

In 1963, he left Papua New Guinea to take up a Harkness Fellowship at Harvard but returned in 1966 as Director of Education. He had executive responsibility for a program involving 250,000 students, 13,000 teachers, 2 universities and 10 teachers' colleges during the challenging times of transition from "colonial" control to autonomy.

Michael Somare, as the prominent political leader and then Chief Minister, recognised the importance of education in readying his people for the demands of independence and found a committed and loyal supporter in the Director of Education. Professor Inglis, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Papua New Guinea from 1972 to 1975, has written of Ken McKinnon: "No expatriate head of a department worked faster, or more happily and cleverly - to do himself out of a job. The manner in which he handed over to Alkan Tololo as Somare's director of education is a model of decolonisation".

Ken McKinnon's achievement in Papua New Guinea brought him to the closer notice of Gough Whitlam, one of the architects of PNG independence and then the newly elected Australian Prime Minister. Whitlam wrote later

that "the most enduring single achievement of my Government was the transformation of education in Australia". A major vehicle for that reform was the Australian Schools Commission set up with a crusading charter "to widen the educational options of all children". In 1973, Ken McKinnon was appointed as Chair of the Schools Commission, a position which complemented his educational and political ideals and tested his administrative acumen.

His chairmanship, which lasted 8 years, outlasted the Whitlam Labor government and he presided over the application of the principle of "equality of opportunity" to the primary and secondary schools. During this period, not only funding but the expectations and standards of Australian school education were lifted to their highest levels so far.

In 1981, the still fledging University of Wollongong staged a great coup in attracting a person of Professor McKinnon's stature as its second Vice-Chancellor. His appointment was a little unusual for its time. Here was a Vice-Chancellor who had not sprung from the Oxbridge mould, someone who had not spent his apprenticeship in academia but was instead a Harvard-educated manager with the knowledge and skills to operate in the political arena. As it turned out, he was the ideal person to place this University firmly in the forefront of higher education in Australia and to give it that entrepreneurial edge that has become its distinguishing trademark.

The philosophy underpinning McKinnon's leadership style at Wollongong could be summed up in Shakespeare's words: "the readiness is all". He has a "canny" knack of discerning future trends and then seizing the opportunity of creating an advantage for the University.

He took a leading role in bringing to culmination the amalgamation of the University and the neighbouring Wollongong Institute of Education: an achievement which ensured the continued viability of the young University. He orchestrated the initiatives which saw the University develop expertise in the new technologies such as telecommunications. He encouraged the development and articulation of University and Faculty objectives and planning strategies. His forethought was instrumental in giving Wollongong the "track record" of achievement and planning to place it in the top 10 Australian Universities in the inaugural federal Quality Review in 1993.

If Cardinal Newman upheld "The Idea of a University" as a community of scholars, Ken McKinnon could be said to have created the "Model of a Modern University" - a working model in which researchers scholars and students came together to discover new knowledge but also to advance society and improve the lives of their fellows. The social justice ideals of earlier days are still evident in the more socially attuned, McKinnon approach to higher education.

Nevertheless, he maintains strong support for pure research and encourages creative endeavour.

Ken McKinnon gave his full support to the development of the outstanding Wollongong initiatives in the Creative Arts. He pursued an unrelenting campaign to create a campus that enriched the learning experience. Thus his support for the acquisition of the fine works of art which enliven the building interiors and the grounds. His, often misunderstood, zeal for building duck ponds has created an acclaimed environment for both contemplation and debate.

Ken McKinnon is in many ways, literal and other, the architect of the current University of Wollongong. At the same time, he has taken a leading role on the public stage as an acknowledged expert in educational management and public administration. Amongst other major roles, he has chaired the Australian National Commission for UNESCO and convened the Australia-USA Education Policy Project; he is a member of the Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Council, and was President of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. His interest in the Arts is evident in his roles as Deputy Chair of the Australia Council and in his continuing support of the Sydney Dance Company as its Deputy Chairman. He is the Chairman of Theatre South and a Trustee of the Wollongong Art Gallery.