Media Release
Chiefs of Staff, News Directors
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Professor Peter Rathjen appointed VC at University of Adelaide, starting 2018

Renowned scientist and university leader Professor Peter Rathjen has been appointed Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Adelaide.

When he takes up the role at the start of 2018, it will bring to a close almost seven years as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmania - a period which is already being described as historic in the life of the institution.

University of Tasmania Chancellor Michael Field said the transition in leadership would be undertaken with an emphasis on the principles of stability and continuity.

“Changes in leadership are part of the usual course of events for long-standing institutions, but they invite reflection for each successive period,” Chancellor Field said.

“Without doubt, Professor Rathjen has led a transformative phase for the University and we face the future built on a set of foundations which will serve us well in the years, if not decades, ahead.

“Professor Rathjen has navigated a complex and mercurial period in which the relationship between the University and its State have been fundamentally reimagined and redefined. This process has been ongoing and will continue to be, but it was clearly manifest in the signing of the historic agreement with the Tasmanian Government, which bonded the efforts of the University with the vital economic and social outcomes required for our State’s future.”

Professor Rathjen said while the decision was a difficult one, it represented somewhat of a homecoming. He was raised in South Australia, son to highly respected teacher and plant breeder Dr Tony Rathjen, whose work underpinned the advance of the national wheat industry.

Professor Rathjen said the strategic intent of the University was well understood. He said significant reforms at the University were sufficiently advanced to not only be delivered by, but benefit from new leadership.
“Across community, research and infrastructure, our University has laid the foundations for an enduring period in which we will deliver research outcomes which are world class, infrastructure which is among the very best in the sector and a philosophy around innovation in higher education curriculum which has guided national policy in the field,” Professor Rathjen said.

“These are things about which the University, its staff and alumni should feel great pride. I certainly do and it’s been the relationship I’ve built with the University, its people and the State more broadly which has made this such a difficult decision.”

Chancellor Field said Professor Rathjen’s leadership had fundamentally and positively impacted the vision and direction of the University.

“From the early days of his tenure Professor Rathjen led a concerted effort to lift and better articulate our University’s research excellence. This included a targeted program to recruit scholars of world standing in areas of research strength. We have seen our national and world standing lift tangibly as a result.

“He has provided the vision and impetus for key infrastructure developments, including the National Rental Affordability Scheme student apartments in Burnie, Launceston and Hobart, and the emerging Hedberg cultural and performing complex, co-located with the majestic Theatre Royal.

“It was his vision which led to the proposal of university campuses embedded physically within their city hearts, improving profile and access for young Tasmanians, as a means of addressing two historic impediments to educational attainment in Tasmania. These ideas ultimately led to the delivery of campus relocation projects now underway in Launceston and Burnie, and proposals such as Hobart’s Science and Technology Precinct, now listed as a priority project for Infrastructure Australia,” Chancellor Field said.

“Professor Rathjen has been at the forefront of conversations nationally about innovation in higher education, of the affordability and relevance of university qualifications. These notions are now deeply embedded in the development of our University College and its offerings in the associate degree space. At their heart, they provide the promise of deep social and economic change in Tasmania’s future.”

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