University bestows its highest honour on outgoing VC Professor Peter Rathjen

The University of Tasmania has bestowed its highest honour – the degree of Doctor of Letters honoris causa – upon outgoing Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen.

The award is decided by the University’s governing council and it is reserved for people who have given outstanding service to the State or the University.

University Chancellor Michael Field AC said the period since Professor Rathjen’s arrival in March 2011 had been defining for the institution.

It had been marked by:

- significant growth in domestic student numbers;
- a sustained climb in global rankings driven by strengthening research excellence;
- heightened global engagement and an associated increase in international student numbers, now a key economic sector for the State;
- significant capital investment in each of the University’s communities; and
- the emergence of a new model of higher education aimed at lifting the productivity and prosperity of the State by addressing its poor educational outcomes.

“Professor Rathjen has been an outstanding leader,” Chancellor Field said.

“He has invoked an institutional culture in which we expect excellence without apology, can challenge the status quo without embarrassment, question national policy directions...
without fear or favour, stand firm where matters of principle and equity have been at stake, and build a coalition of the willing around the University.

“He has been instrumental in positioning the University as a world-class institution and as a driver of socio-economic prosperity in Tasmania.

“By proposing that education should be placed at the heart of Tasmania's cities, to improve the profile of and access to higher education for all Tasmanians, he has provided the vision and impetus for key infrastructure developments in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie and the reinvigoration of the social, cultural and economic life as a result.”

Professor Rathjen was a graduate of the University of Adelaide and a Rhodes Scholar, who has an illustrious research career as a biochemist and stem-cell scientist. He was Foundation Executive Dean of Science at University of Adelaide, later joining the University of Melbourne as Dean of the Faculty of Science and subsequently Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research).

He leaves the Vice-Chancellor and President’s role at the University of Tasmania to take up the equivalent position at the University of Adelaide.

“It is well known that my time at the University of Tasmania has been highly formative for me,” Professor Rathjen said. “This University is unique in its role as the sole university in the State – something which is both a great privilege and a great responsibility.

“I leave with enormous pride in what has been achieved here and a deep, enduring appreciation for those who have helped achieve it.”