

Speech: Swinburne Leadership Institute Launch

Vice-Chancellor Professor Linda Kristjanson

Friday 20 April 2012

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman,

It is my privilege to welcome you to Swinburne University of Technology for this very special occasion – to celebrate the launch of the Swinburne Leadership Institute.

For centuries, universities have played the leading role in extending the boundaries of knowledge – introducing new perspectives, new cures for disease, new materials for construction and new insights into our origins and development.

Swinburne was founded with the proud but humble mission to transfer a portion of that accumulated knowledge to technical workers, to improve their lives and grow the nation's skill base.

Two world wars and the onset of the digital age have carried us to a very different era. The 21st century has been dubbed the Asian century, in recognition of the economic power, cultural influence and population intensity of the region to our north.

The omnipotence of the internet across the planet has challenged the pre-eminence of universities as holders and cultivators of knowledge – at least in popular culture. Nobody is suggesting at the moment that we are on the verge of the Universities Century. Universities must take responsibility for closing up the gap between town and gown, between lab and plant, between theses and the interests of enquiring minds.

Almost three quarters (74 per cent) of Australians trust the words of academics, according to the trust barometer released by global public relations agency Edelman – and yet academics are seldom major players within mainstream public discourse on the issues that matter.

At a time of almost unanimous outcries about the superficiality of politics, the moral crisis within business and the decline of leadership in general, universities must step up to the plate, to reclaim their true role as thought leaders of and for the community.

That is why today's launch is so exciting, and why it is so important to Swinburne. We are proud that this initiative has been inspired by the vision of our alumnus Steve Graham, who I am delighted to have with us here today.

The Swinburne Leadership Institute will undoubtedly enrich our university, our city, and our nation through its insights, training and high-voltage spotlight on issues that matter.

Universities have done many great things for centuries and it is my hope and expectation that this initiative will rank alongside those past achievements, fuelled and nurtured by ongoing support within and beyond the Swinburne community.

Thank you.