From the Vice-Chancellor (Swinburne’s 2013 Annual Report)

In 2013, Swinburne remained focused on implementing our 2020 vision to be Australia’s leading university in science, technology and innovation. High quality teaching, excellence in research and strong engagement with industry continued to be at the centre of our work.

We continue to be recognised for the quality of the educational experience that we offer our students, and it is a source of great pride that the University was awarded high ratings for overall graduate satisfaction, teaching quality, generic skills, staff qualifications and graduate employability in the Good Universities Guide 2014. These achievements speak volumes about the dedication of our academic staff, the high standard of teaching we offer and why, increasingly, students are choosing to study at Swinburne.

We continued to develop innovative teaching techniques that engage and inspire our students in new ways. The rapid growth of Swinburne Online and the continued popularity of online courses delivered through Open Universities Australia have ensured that we are able to provide educational opportunities to students well beyond our campus footprint in Melbourne’s east, including many more from low socio-economic status and regional backgrounds.

I was very pleased that Swinburne consolidated its position in the top 400 universities in the world as assessed by the Academic Ranking of World Universities and one of the top 100 in the world in the field of physics. Swinburne finished the year world-ranked by each of the three major international ranking systems. For an institution that only gained university status in 1992, these are considerable achievements.

This year, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Swinburne’s Industry-Based Learning program. In 1963, Swinburne was a pioneer among Australian tertiary institutions with the introduction of a unique program in which students undertook part of their studies with employers in their field. This program continues to grow and flourish – in 2013, more than 450 undergraduates from more than 30 degree programs took up industry placements as part of their degrees. Students in our vocational education programs also continued to enjoy strong support from employers with whom we collaborated to ensure that we are delivering the skills that industry needs.

The year also renewed our focus on engagement with industry and the community, with the appointment of Mr Andrew C Smith as Vice-President (Engagement) and the development of a series of new initiatives to improve the value that we offer our external partners. We endeavour to be the most connected university in Australia, easy to work with and responsive to the communities we serve.

A significant process of organisational change, informed by valuable feedback provided by our staff and students, led to the creation of three new faculties that will position our higher education offerings for growth in the years ahead, create better alignment among common disciplines and improve interdisciplinary research opportunities.

The new Faculty of Science, Engineering and Technology will capitalise on Swinburne’s existing capability and recognised strength in STEM subjects, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. This faculty brings about a logical discipline grouping that will help promote collaboration and new research opportunities within science and technology-related fields.

The new Faculty of Health, Arts and Design will bring elements of design, such as communications design, film and TV closer to academic areas in media, multimedia and journalism creating new
opportunities for students and researchers alike. There are also strong links and opportunities between the areas of design, health and the social sciences which the creation of this faculty will help facilitate. Establishment of this new faculty also signals Swinburne’s aspirations to grow in the health sciences, recognising the nation’s increased demand for health professionals as our society continues to age.

The Faculty of Business and Enterprise aims to be Australia’s top business school for entrepreneurship, innovation and leadership. It offers a range of programs that equip graduates with the practical skills and knowledge they need for a successful business career, and partners across the University to offer double-degree programs to equip students from other faculties with business capabilities.

Our vocational education programs continued to be well supported, with the successful launch of new nursing programs at the Wantirna campus which were strongly embraced by the local community. We remained true to our reputation for excellence in the delivery of high quality trades programs at Croydon, embracing innovative new courses and international study exchange opportunities for our students. There was continued strong demand for vocational education at the Hawthorn campus, including in business, design and ICT, programs from which many students choose to take their learning further by progressing to undergraduate study.

Demand for preparatory programs offered by Swinburne College grew under the direction of new Chief Executive Officer, Mr Peter Krikstolaitis. The College offers a pathway to university study for students from more than 40 countries as well as an increasing number of Australian students.

Under the leadership of Professor Anthony Cahalan and with the contributions of the remarkable staff and students at Swinburne Sarawak, 2013 has been an exceptional year with many impressive achievements exemplifying the commitment to excellence that typifies Swinburne. I was extremely proud of the 696 students from Sarawak who graduated in November, including three PhD graduates.

Also on the international front, we expanded key partnerships with several of China’s leading universities, including the Beijing Institute of Technology, Beijing Foreign Studies University and Shanghai University, and we deepened our teaching engagement with Northeastern University in Boston. The Swinburne Design Factory propelled us into exciting educational directions and collaborations with colleagues in Aalto University in Finland, Stanford in the United States and Tongji University in China. We were delighted to be part of the 20th anniversary celebrations for the Keck telescope in Hawaii – a strong relationship that has been central to Swinburne’s research achievements in astronomy.

The year also saw the commencement of a process of engagement and consultation with Indigenous elders from among the communities we serve in the development of the University’s first Reconciliation Action Plan.

Throughout its hundred-year history, Swinburne has adapted and evolved both to anticipate and respond to the changing needs of the communities of interest served. As I reflect on all that happened in 2013, I see a strong and vibrant University that has stepped up to the challenges of uncertain funding settings and a complex operating environment, and one that has embraced change to ensure a strong and successful future.

Professor Linda Kristjanson
Vice-Chancellor and President