

Citation – The Hon Julia Gillard AC

15 October 2025, 2:30pm

Vice-Chancellor, it is my honour and privilege to present to you the Honourable Julia Gillard AC for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) in recognition of her distinguished career in law and politics, and her ongoing work in the fields of education, mental health, and leadership, which have had an enduring and transformative impact on Australian society.

Born in Wales, Julia migrated to Adelaide with her family in 1966. She began her studies at the University of Adelaide before transferring to the University of Melbourne. In 1983, she was elected President of the Australian Union of Students, marking the beginning of a lifelong commitment to leadership and advocacy.

After graduating with degrees in Arts and Laws, Julia joined Slater and Gordon, specialising in employment law. By 29, she had become a partner in the firm, an early sign of her remarkable drive and capability. In 1996, she transitioned to politics, serving as Chief-of-Staff to John Brumby, the Victorian Opposition Leader at the time. Two years later she was elected to the House of Representatives for the seat of Lalor.

Julia's parliamentary career was defined by her dedication to social justice and reform. She held key shadow portfolios before becoming Deputy Leader of the Australian Labor Party in 2006. Following Labor's landmark 2007 victory, she was appointed Australia's first female Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, where she led transformative reforms that continue to define the educational landscape, including the national curriculum, NAPLAN and the My School website.

Her commitment to equity in education saw the launch of the Digital Education Revolution program, which provided digital resources for schools, and the Building the Education Revolution program that allocated \$16 billion in funding for refurbishments. She is perhaps best remembered for commissioning David Gonski to recommend a needs-based school funding model and then commencing its implementation. The generational overhaul of secondary and tertiary education funding focused on fairness and opportunity.

On 24 June 2010, Julia Gillard was sworn in as the 27th Prime Minister of Australia. She is the first and only woman to serve as Prime Minister. Her leadership during the Global Financial Crisis helped safeguard Australia's economy, while her government introduced major reforms in education, health care, disability support and climate policy. As part of her commitment to sustainability, she opened the University of Sydney's Centre for Carbon, Water and Food, a state-of-the-art research facility developed to tackle regional food security and the environmental challenges. She started the nation's first ever national scheme for people with disabilities (NDIS) and began construction of the National Broadband Network.

Julia's 2012 speech confronting sexism and misogyny created worldwide headlines and drew global attention to the issues faced by women in leadership positions. Today, she continues this work as inaugural Chair of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, advocating for inclusive and equitable leadership worldwide.

Julia's commitment to education over decades of service in Australian public life is exemplary. She was Chair of the Global Partnership for Education from 2014 to 2021, a leading organisation dedicated to expanding access and quality education worldwide. She is also Patron of the Campaign for Female Education, which addresses poverty and inequality by supporting girls' access and right to quality education, and to empower young women to be changemakers in their communities.

Her post-political career reflects her enduring commitment to public service. She was Chair of Beyond Blue, Australia's leading mental health awareness body, from 2017 to 2023, and has been Chair of Wellcome Foundation, a global charitable foundation which supports science to solve urgent health challenges, since 2021. She is a Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution and an Honorary Professor at the University of Adelaide, and was awarded a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2017.

Vice-Chancellor, as we stand in this place devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and progress, I present to you The Hon. Julia Gillard AC for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa), and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.