**Citation – Mr John Leece AM**

Thursday, 4 May 2023 – 12.00pm

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Mr John Leece AM to you for admission as an Honorary Fellow of the University in recognition of his substantial contribution to the interests and welfare of the University of Sydney over many years.

John has had a long association with our University including serving for 14 years in the Sydney University Regiment, rising to the rank of Captain.

John, and his wife Anne, have devoted themselves to enabling the education of early career researchers at the University, commencing their support with annual “top-up grants” in 2005. In 2017, they pledged a gift of $250,000 to establish the John and Anne Leece Family Endowment Fund. Their gift enables early career researchers and postdoctoral students in the field of medicine to conduct their research at the Westmead Institute of Medical Research.

Following this, they made another generous gift to enhance the future careers of medical professionals with a pledge of $369,000 to establish the John and Anne Leece Family Fellowship. The Fellowship funds research conducted by the University in the field of type one diabetes. This important research focuses on the therapeutic options for type one diabetes patients, specifically looking at the use of islet transplants as an alternative to long-term insulin replacement for people with type one diabetes. Reflecting on their generosity, Dr Leigh Nicholson, a recipient of the Fellowship, wrote that it gave “me and my research group the means to investigate therapies for those with type one diabetes with the goal of providing independence from insulin replacement therapy and drastically improving quality of life outcomes for patients.”

In 2022, Family Fellowship furthered its commitment to enlarging educational opportunities for early career researchers, by making an additional gift of $150,000 to grow the Family Endowment Fund and inaugurate the John and Anne Leece Family Prize. This prize demonstrated their great belief in the importance of ensuring that those starting their research careers are provided with the support and encouragement they need to flourish. Anne and John’s passion for this area is inspiring. Their gifts through these various initiatives are enabling the next generation of researchers to develop their expertise and contribute to life-changing medical discoveries that will save lives and provide hope for current and future generations of patients.

John and Anne are driven by the belief that early career researchers represent the future of scientific exploration and their contributions are of vital importance. Through their gifts, they hope to attract and retain talented, innovative young researchers to transform the future of healthcare.

Another example of their promotion of the University’s academic endeavours was through their friendship with the late Dr Peter Weiss AO, a renowned Sydney businessman and philanthropist who was diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in 2012. After speaking about the impact of their philanthropy, John inspired his dear friend Peter to consider giving to medical research in this area at the University. Peter subsequently decided to donate four million dollars to University of Sydney researchers based at the Westmead Institute of Medical Research to investigate new ways of preventing and treating chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

In addition to their transformational gifts to the University of Sydney, John has helped brighten the futures of indigenous young people through his involvement as a Founding Trustee of the Charlie Perkins Children and Students Trust established in 2000 and also as a Founding Trustee of the Charlie Perkins Scholarships Trust. This organisation, which launched in 2010, is committed to delivering scholarships to the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge. Since its inception, the organisation has provided 27 indigenous scholarships – 18 at Oxford and 9 at Cambridge. John was also a personal friend of the late Dr Charles Perkins AO and assisted him with many indigenous matters.

Throughout his life, John has believed in the importance of generosity and giving back which he and his family have done to numerous humanitarian organisations, in addition to medical research. The University and our affiliates, including the Westmead Institute of Medical Research, are committed to attracting and retaining the very best and brightest research talent. This is because it is they who will transform the future of healthcare. John and the Leece family’s exceptional support of more than 50 research scientists over a period nearing 20 years allows us to make this possible.

Chancellor, I present to you Mr John Leece AM and invite you to confer the title of Honorary Fellow of the University upon him.