

DR MICHAEL SPENCE – FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR (2008–2020)

Dr Michael Spence was the University of Sydney's 25th Vice-Chancellor and Principal and a Fellow of Senate from 2008 to 2020.

PROFILE

Dr Michael Spence AC BA LLB *Sydney* DPhil PG DipTheol *Oxford*
Vice-Chancellor and Principal and ex-officio Fellow of Senate 2008-2020

Education and early career

An alumnus of the University of Sydney, Dr Spence graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Laws, with first-class honours in English, Italian and law. His other languages include Chinese and Korean. He lectured in law at the University and worked for the Australian Copyright Council prior to undertaking doctoral studies at the University of Oxford. There, he obtained a Doctor of Philosophy, a Postgraduate Diploma in Theology and became a Fellow of St Catherine's College at Oxford. During his 20 years at the College he headed Oxford's law faculty and its Social Sciences division.

Accomplishments as Vice-Chancellor and Principal

Dr Spence served the University with distinction during his 12 years as Vice-Chancellor and Principal and left a significant legacy for current and future generations of staff and students. Under his leadership, the University:

- transformed its undergraduate experience to give our students the confidence to become tomorrow's leaders
- rose to first in Australia and fourth in the world for graduate employability and earned a regular ranking in the top 50 universities in the world
- increased its position in all four major international rankings
- simplified its faculty structure, which makes it more ready to address modern challenges
- transformed the Camperdown-Darlington Campus, including eight major buildings and three student accommodation facilities, together with significant investment in world-class infrastructure at the University's other campuses
- embedded diversity, inclusion and cultural competence as bedrocks of a values-driven culture, where respect and disagreeing well are the norm
- raised a record \$1 billion during the INSPIRED philanthropic campaign
- created strategic partnerships with leading industry, government and community organisations across the globe
- excelled at collaborative multidisciplinary research to find solutions to the world's most pressing issues, establishing initiatives such as the Charles Perkins Centre, the Sydney Nanoscience Hub and the Brain and Mind Centre
- simplified its administrative processes to achieve efficiencies and ensure strategic use of resources
- fostered deeper engagement with China, India and Southeast Asia
- progressed its vision for a second principal campus in the heart of Western Sydney.

In February 2020 Dr Spence announced that he was leaving the University to take up a new appointment as President and Provost of UCL (University College London). UCL is consistently ranked as a world top 10 university and is considered one of the world's great research institutions. Before departing Sydney Dr Spence said that while he was excited about the new role, he would always be tremendously proud of the institution at which he studied as an undergraduate and had the pleasure to lead for more than a decade.

“I have seen such growth in our University community over the past ten years, and I believe that we have been able to stay true to what is good in our tradition whilst embracing new ideas, ways of working and seeing the world,” he said.

“I am particularly proud of our work in developing the Industry and Community Project Units (ICPUs) which provide students with the opportunity to work on authentic problems and issues set out by industry, community and government organisations. The University’s partners have agreed that these have allowed them to genuinely consider projects in a different way which improve the way they operate.

“Finally, but perhaps most importantly, I am proud that we have embedded diversity and inclusion in the University’s culture. We created the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Strategy and Services), our Indigenous strategy (Wingara Mura-Bunga Barrabugu) and a comprehensive culture strategy. These initiatives are not the work of any single individual or even one team, they are wholly owned by the institution as the way we now conduct our teaching and research.”

Other notable accomplishments

In 2017, Dr Spence was awarded one of Australia’s highest honours – Companion of the Order of Australia – in the Australia Day Honours for his service to leadership of the tertiary education sector, to the advancement of equitable access to educational opportunities, to developing programs focused on multidisciplinary research, and to the Anglican Church of Australia.

In July of that same year the University of Sydney’s Administration Building (also known as F23), which houses many of the University’s central portfolios and professional services teams, including the Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, was re-named the Michael Spence Building in recognition of Dr Spence’s extraordinary service to the University. Chancellor Belinda Hutchinson AC announced the honour in December 2020, paying tribute to Dr Spence’s remarkable achievements.

“As Chancellor, and on behalf of Senate, it has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with Michael. His courageous and inspiring leadership has achieved transformational change that will underpin the University’s continuing success,” she said.

“I am very pleased that Senate has decided that in recognition of his contribution to the University, we will name the new Administration building (F23) in his honour and confer on him an honorary Doctorate of Laws at a ceremony next year when he visits Australia.”