

Citation – Linda Burney

Monday, 25 May 2026 – 2.30pm

Pro-Chancellor, it is my privilege to present to you the Honourable Linda Burney FAHA to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa). A proud Wiradjuri woman, Ms Burney is an exceptional leader demonstrating lifelong advocacy for Indigenous rights, and transformative contributions to education, public service, and reconciliation in Australia.

Born in Whitton in the NSW Riverina in 1957, Linda was raised by her great aunt and uncle and spent her childhood working in the local fruit picking industry while attending school in nearby Leeton. These early experiences, shaped by community, resilience, and the realities of growing up as an Aboriginal girl in regional Australia, profoundly influenced her lifelong commitment to education, equity, and public service.

Linda's educational path began with a Diploma in Teaching from the Mitchell College of Advanced Education—now Charles Sturt University, where she later received an Honorary Doctorate in Education in recognition of her leadership and contribution to public life.

Linda's career is defined by historic firsts, unwavering advocacy, and a lifelong commitment to justice, equity, and the empowerment of First Nations peoples. She began her professional life as a public-school teacher in 1979.

In her early career, she helped establish the first Aboriginal Education Unit within the NSW Department of Education and played a central role in creating both the state's first Aboriginal Education Policy and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group—initiatives that became national models for Indigenous-led educational reform.

Linda has been a trailblazer throughout her public service. She was the first Aboriginal person elected to the NSW Parliament in 2003, where she held key ministerial portfolios including Community Services, Youth and Fair Trading. In 2016, she became the first Aboriginal woman elected to the federal House of Representatives, and in 2022, the first Aboriginal person to serve as Australia's federal Minister for Indigenous Australians. In this role, she championed Indigenous-led health programs, justice reinvestment, remote housing initiatives, and the establishment of a national Indigenous children's commissioner. She also supported the Yoorrook Justice Commission, Australia's first formal truth telling process, which has brought national attention to the historical and ongoing injustices experienced by Aboriginal people.

Even in the wake of the unsuccessful Voice to Parliament referendum, Linda remained steadfast in her commitment to reconciliation, advocating for local and regional voices, mandatory Aboriginal studies in schools, early childhood education, and the eradication of racism in educational systems. Her leadership has consistently elevated Indigenous perspectives in national policy and public dialogue, inspiring Australians to pursue truth, justice, and meaningful reconciliation.

Linda's legacy is one of visionary leadership, courage, and profound service. She has reshaped education, advanced Indigenous rights, and opened pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially women, to lead and thrive. Her impact continues to guide Australia toward a more just, respectful, and inclusive future.

Pro-Chancellor, as we stand in this place devoted to Leadership for Good, I present the Hon Linda Burney for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa), and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.