

## PROFESSOR MARY O'KANE AC

The honorary degree of Doctor of Science was conferred upon Mary O'Kane by the Chancellor, Ms Belinda Hutchinson AM at a Faculty of Science graduation at 11.30am on 7 November 2018.

### Citation

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Professor Mary O'Kane AC for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science (honoris causa) in recognition of her contributions to science and engineering, national policy and higher education.

Mary O'Kane was a pioneer in the field of automatic speech recognition. She initiated the establishment of the first database of spoken Australian English, building special purpose programming languages with her research group that gave experts input to her speech recognition system.

Her academic leadership career started as Dean of the Faculty of Information Sciences and Engineering at the University of Canberra. Five years later she was appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Professor of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at the University of Adelaide, before being appointed Vice-Chancellor, a position she held for five years. At the time of her appointment she was the first woman to be appointed to the post in the University of Adelaide's 122-year history and one of the youngest vice-chancellors appointed to an Australian university.

Professor O'Kane has been active in Australia-wide higher education activities and was the inaugural chair of the Group of Eight universities. From the early 1990s she was increasingly appointed to government committees, particularly in relation to research policy in Australia. She sat on the Australia Prize Committee and was a member of the Australian Research Council Engineering, Earth and Applied Sciences Panel. She went on to become a member of the Council and chaired the ARC Research Grants Committee. She introduced a number of reforms including the push for funding grants to be assessed against the applicant's opportunities as well as achievements. She also invented the term 'early career researcher,' now an established part of the research lexicon around the world.

In 2008 Professor O'Kane was appointed the inaugural NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer. In this role she provided the Government with advice on policy matters relating to research, science and engineering. She also brokered partnerships and connections between the public and private sectors to expand the State's research capabilities and networks. She held the position for nine years before taking up a new position as Chair of the Independent Planning Commission of NSW earlier this year. Later this year she also takes on the position of Chair of the Tasmanian Energy retailer, Aurora Energy.

Professor O'Kane chairs and serves on many boards and committees. She currently chairs the boards of the Cooperative Research Centre for Space Environment Management, the Digital Health Cooperative Research Centre, and the University of Tasmania's Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies. She is also a board member of the Cross River Rail Delivery Authority. Formerly she was a member of the board of the CSIRO, the Cooperative Research Centres Committee, the Tax Concession Committee, the NSW Innovation and Productivity Council and the board of FH Faulding & Co Ltd. She has also been active in energy matters and chaired the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy Board throughout its existence and the NSW Energy Security Taskforce in 2017. She is a Fellow and former Vice-President of the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and an Honorary Fellow of Engineers Australia.

Professor O'Kane has received numerous honours and awards during her distinguished career. Remarkably, she has won both the Peter Nicol Russell Memorial Medal, Australia's most distinguished engineering prize, as well as the Percy Medal, Australia's most distinguished prize for ICT. In 2017 Mary was awarded the Erna Hamburger Prize which is awarded to distinguished female scientists who

have transformed their field and executed change. Mary is one of only 14 recipients, three of whom are Nobel laureates.

Mary was made a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2016 for eminent service to science and engineering, as a contributor to national policy development and governance, to the promotion of technology research and future energy supply, to higher education, and as a role model for young scientists.

Aside from being a stellar scientist and research leader, Mary is an inspirational mentor and role model - particularly for women in science.

Chancellor, I present Professor Mary O'Kane AC for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science (honoris causa) and invite you to confer the degree upon her.