

Mr Dennis Richardson AO

An honorary award of a Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) was conferred upon Dennis Richardson by the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Michael Spence AC at a Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences graduation at 11.30am on 6 November 2018.

Citation

Vice-Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Mr Dennis Richardson AO for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) in recognition of his service to the Commonwealth of Australia - in Intelligence, in diplomacy and in defence.

Dennis Richardson is recognised as one of the most outstanding public servants of our era. In his many roles, ranging from career diplomat to Director-General of The Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation, to Ambassador to Washington, to Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to Secretary of the Department of Defence, he has made an unrivalled contribution to our national security and to Australia's contribution to a rules-based world order.

Dennis holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from the University of Sydney and was made an Officer of the Order of Australia for service to the community in a range of public policy areas including foreign policy, immigration and security.

His public service career was characterised by multifaceted strategic thinking, and was visibly shaped by his education within the history department of Sydney University.

Dennis worked for Australia in the finest Westminster tradition of serving and advising the government of the day with integrity and impartiality. The word "fearless" is a cliché when applied to Dennis. He has confessed to having fights with every Minister he served, while honouring the sanctity of elected political office. With that came the trust and respect of Prime Ministers from both sides of the political divide.

When he retired from the public service in 2017, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull noted that "In this near half century of service, Mr Richardson has served twelve prime ministers with consistent professionalism. His commitment to public service, his strategic insight, his candour and integrity have made him a trusted adviser to governments from both sides of Australian politics". Labor's Defence spokesman, Richard Marles, concurred: - "Dennis's advice and insight has helped governments of both stripes make decisions which have shaped our country's place in the world,"

When Dennis delivered the 2012 annual Michael Hintze Lecture at Sydney University he spoke of the strategic challenges caused by shifting economic power relationships, and gaps in global leadership which threaten the institutional world order. He spoke of Australia's canny diplomatic role in creating multilateral institutions - not least when Australia persuaded The United States to back the formation of the influential G20 group of developed nations which includes Australia.

Dennis's career is a testimony to the profound influence of our teachers, and how they shape their students' futures. Ironically, he himself had intended to become a teacher. This direction changed when his Sydney University history lecturer, Dr Neville Meaney, suggested that he write his BA Honours thesis on Edmund Piesse, the Australian defence director of Intelligence during World War 1, and then recommended that Dennis apply to join The Department of External Affairs, now DFAT. Unfortunately that meant that Dennis never became Secretary to the Department of Education or Director-General of the ABC.

If there are some comparisons to be made between the foreign and intelligence career of Edmund Piesse and that of Dennis Richardson, it is timely comparison, for this month we commemorate the signing of the Armistice which ended the "War to end all Wars" and when "Peace in our Time" seemed near. Sadly that was not to be. Global diplomacy failed, at Versailles. But today it is strategists and diplomats of the calibre and with the historical perspectives of Dennis Richardson who help make peace in our time a somewhat better prospect.

Vice-Chancellor, I present Mr Dennis Richardson for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) and invite you to confer the degree upon him.