



*Speech by Professor Eeva Leinonen,  
on the occasion of her Investiture as  
Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University  
on 11 August 2016.*

A stylized, calligraphic signature of the name "Eeva Leinonen" in a light beige color.

# Welcome

*Your Excellency, the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, Governor of Western Australia*

*Chancellor, Mr David Flanagan and Mrs Sarah Flanagan*

*Distinguished Guests and friends of this fine university*

*The Honourable Sue Ellery, MLC, representing the Honourable Mark McGowan, MLC, Leader of the Opposition Party*

*The Consul Generals of the Republic of Indonesia and Malaysia and a representative of the Consulate General of the United States of America*

*The Majors of the Cities of Cockburn, Fremantle, Melville and a representative of the Mayor of the City of Rockingham*

*Mr Terry Budge, previous Chancellor of Murdoch University*

*Professor Patrick Loh, our distinguished guest from Singapore*

*Senate members*

*Members of the Banksia Association*

*Fellow Vice Chancellors and senior university officers*

*President of the Student Guild*

*Colleagues, good to see so many of you here*

*Braden Hill, Manager of the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre; thank you for being part of the robing ceremony*

*And my friends and family members, my husband Peter Suren, my daughter Niina (who is joining us live from London via FaceTime) and Iain Suren.*



# Speech

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which Murdoch University is built, the land of the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation. I would like to pay my respects to Elders past, present and future, and all aboriginal people present here today.

Thank you all for being part of my investiture, this time-honoured academic tradition where a new Vice Chancellor is officially installed. I would like to concur with Sir Ronald Wilson's sentiments that he expressed in his investiture speech as the 2nd Chancellor of Murdoch University when he said that "whatever mistakes the installed may make in the future cannot be blamed on faulty installation".

Winston Churchill once said: "The farther backwards you look, the farther into the future you are likely to see".

This is what we need to understand as new leaders in order to build on the wisdom of those gone before us, and in order to learn from the twists and turns that have led us to the place we are in now.

Looking back on the 41 year history of Murdoch University, reflecting particularly on the first ten years as documented by the late Geoffrey Bolton, a number of highlights have caught my imagination.

Just before Sir Walter Murdoch passed away in July 1960, he agreed to the second university in WA to be named after him, with the well-known proviso, that 'it had better be a good one', which is, by the way, the title of Geoffrey Bolton's book. The West Australian then ran the story saying that "Murdoch will have its special inspiration", "...there will be no humbug or pretence or ready acceptance of convention on their campus", "Murdoch will be characterised by idealism, thoughtfulness and, above all, humour". These sentiments still resonate closely with Murdoch today and it is interesting to note that in the late 11th century the world's oldest university, the University of Bologna came into being by 'convention being broken' when masters of rhetoric, grammar and logic began to teach law independently from the ecclesiastic schools. Doing something differently, breaking free from 'the known', taking bold steps is what universities are and should be about, and 'not accepting the convention' is a key to creativity and innovation.

When thinking of how this new university would fit in with the existing university, with the University of Western Australia, the Planning Board, chaired by Professor Noel Bayliss, thought that Murdoch should perhaps focus on part-time and external students (those not able to always attend campus). It was thought that there was scope for this through "recent advances in audio-visual technology". This of course wasn't digital technology in the early 70's. It was tape recordings and cassette tapes, if you remember those wonderful innovations of the past as well as bundles of paper arriving through post.

But with the arrival of the first Vice Chancellor, Professor Stephen Griew, Murdoch went beyond this external student concept and granted eligibility to all who were deemed to be able to benefit from higher education and in Geoffrey Bolton's words "Murdoch brought tertiary education within the reach of housewives, people holding full-time jobs and others whose circumstances made it difficult for them to attend regularly on Campus". Geoffrey Bolton goes on to say "This was innovative thinking at its best". This was also essentially about inclusiveness and non-elitist education for Western Australians and it is interesting to note how many world-renowned universities of today had similar inclusive beginnings. For example, King's College London, where I spent some time, was established some 185 years ago as the alternative to what became University College London to provide evening classes for working men in the City of London. So, Murdoch, before the first students, all 741 of them, had walked through the bush (or the sandpit which may be a better description) to the bright new lecture theatres, Murdoch had stamped its mark on WA Higher Education as an innovative and inclusive university (well before innovation became the buzzword we all know it to be nowadays).

Today, 48% of our students are mature, non-school leavers, many are single parents, main household providers, often with complex family circumstances. I do not know how well we have fulfilled our quota of housewives, but I expect we have a fair peppering of Educating Ritas and Roberts among us. But we are a diverse university with ever strengthening school leaver and international student populations. We have now some 23,000 students studying for Murdoch degrees, nearly 6,000 of them on our campus in Singapore and some 600 students in Dubai. We have some 60,000 alumni, many making notable contributions in the world.

We have built from those early foundations to become a university with significant global reach, not only in teaching but also in research, and much of our research, in fact 87% of it, is recognised as being above world standard. Our researchers are well known for food, agriculture, biosecurity, environment and sustainability, medical and veterinary sciences, exercise sciences, health, and particularly "one health" which characterises the interface between human and animal health. And our research in the Arts, particularly through the Asia Research Centre, politics, public policy, history and theology, are all world renowned. And Murdoch University is certainly well placed to capitalise on the Federal Government innovation agenda, connecting with industry and business by translating its scientific discoveries for the common good of local, national and global communities.

We have come a long way in the past 40 years. The ride ahead is undoubtedly not a smooth one for any university: funding for teaching and research is increasingly diminishing and competitive; the policy environment is uncertain; there are many new providers with much more flexible operating models than what we have in universities, but my sense is that with grit under the saddle this university will ride even harder and further.

In May this year, I ran my first senior leadership, two day retreat, as we called it, in Mandurah, where we came together to start working as a senior group. The very first three day 'think in', as it was called then and which, I must say, has a much more academic ring to it than 'retreat', took place in July 1973 at a motor inn in Scarborough, by the wintery beaches of the Indian Ocean. This is where the founding fathers (indeed, they were all men) of Murdoch came up with the first Murdoch strategic goals. It is documented that they "accepted without dissent" that the University should respond to a need for humane and vital intelligence by playing the role of a healer. These are not words one tends to see in modern strategic plans.

The goal of being humane refers to the university's role in developing maximum human potential for creativity, growth, community and joy; Vital in the sense that the university's activities are rooted in the emotional, spiritual and physical needs of people rather than "mere cleverness". And it was said at the 'think in' that as the world was at that time "profoundly troubled and pathology riddled" that the highest calling for a university would be that of healing. The world today continues to be a challenging place, so perhaps sentiments such as vital and humane intelligence and healing have a place in modern university plans too as they are essentially about creating tolerant, compassionate and prosperous societies.

I believe that universities must not lose sight of their core mission focused on the human endeavour, and as university leaders we need to increasingly translate between the language of the academic and the business, the local and the global, the unfamiliar and the well-rehearsed, the unthinkable and the comfortable, the risk and the reward. We often walk an untrodden path, sometimes we even need to be pioneers. This all, undoubtedly, makes for a very interesting life and a career for us Vice Chancellors but above all, it engenders a huge sense of responsibility, but one that is shared through good governance, underpinned by rigorous debate and trusting relationships.

Against the backdrop of highly complex global society and the impact of technology on working, living, learning and wealth creation, I am struck by how much has remained the same in universities over the 30 years I have spent in higher education. This strong sense of continuity has, of course, a very important positive side to it, but I believe that this is a time, perhaps like never before, when universities need to be crystal clear about what they stand for, how they operate and perhaps like never before, this is a time to break away from some conventions that no longer serve us well.

Almost a week doesn't go by without a headline or a debate somewhere about the value of universities, their place in the modern world and indeed many questions need to be seriously asked, including what is the compelling reason for a student to come to campus and how does the modern student learn, in this digital information age. Murdoch, like many other universities, has ambitious plans for its physical campuses. Our driving force is the creation of a living campus, where the academic endeavour intersects with the external world, in a seamlessly integrated physical environment; where the community is welcomed to benefit from our many facilities and importantly, here at our Perth campus, from our unparalleled natural environment, from our wetlands inhabited by long necked turtles and our ancient banksia forest where the endangered black cockatoos feed. We wish to create an environment where teaching and research, where our students and staff, collide with the external world to create partnerships, new discoveries and opportunities previously unimagined. Our 'living campus' goes back to where academic endeavour started, among people and communities, rather than in buildings with tall spires.

I had the privilege of spending some time with Her Excellency last week and we talked a little bit about 'mottos' as having a unifying, clarifying and motivating force in educational institutions. Murdoch University doesn't have a motto but we have the banksia flower in our crest and that, to me, signifies our connection to our land, our commitment to sustainable living, celebration of our WA heritage and the recognition of the wonder of scientific discovery through the intricate plant biology embodied in this beautiful native flower. I see much unifying power in that one symbol.

There are many excellent mottos and straplines that have served universities well over many years. There is one 'strapline', however, that has caught my imagination, perhaps above all, and that belongs to 'Google', as one of their 9 principles of innovation and it says 'Fail often, fail fast'. This mantra has been much debated and even maligned, but I like the boldness of having the word 'fail' associated with a world leading commercial enterprise. It is inspirational as it recognises in a very contemporary way that creativity and discovery are rooted in trial and error, and that it is not only ok to experiment, not get things right and 'break with convention' but it is a desirable and perhaps a necessary condition for creating something new. I also like the word 'fast', as it recognises the pace of discovery in the modern world; it speaks to the need to learn from what has gone before and not to dwell on the failures of the past but to 'move on' and to take the next steps.

There is much wisdom in those four words, and I wonder how universities embrace some of these ideas as a positive force for good.

We need to foster minds that are prepared for the future, students who know that part of success is to learn from failure, who continue to learn and challenge through life and who are entrepreneurial and creative. For research, we need to find the dynamic middle ground where new ideas are encouraged to bloom in an organic way, from the grass roots, from what has gone before, but also be strategically aligned to maximise resource allocation and benefit from highly competitive funding opportunities. For university/industry interaction we need to provide an obvious front door and nimble ways of working together.

I suggest that we can look at ourselves differently, and this speaks directly to the wisdom of the founding fathers of this university.

I was recently (in fact yesterday) asked in a panel debate a question about WA higher education. I am much encouraged by the WA government and Her Excellency, the Governor, for their encouragement and enabling of collaboration among the five universities and the five universities for embracing joint opportunities. I am equally encouraged by the WA drive for strengthening international education through strategy and action. As is well known, international education is the third biggest export industry in Australia and the biggest export industry in Victoria. WA is lagging behind. The Eastern states put much emphasis and investment into higher education, not only into international education, but also into research and business-industry-university engagement. To accelerate progress in WA, investment and collaboration are key. Business and government need to see expenditure on universities as an investment in the economy rather than simply a cost to the budget. And universities need to demonstrate their value-added to external communities.

I would like to end by indulging, if I may, in a personal reflection. I have asked myself the question, how can it be that a girl born and schooled in the distant north, in Finland, in the land of summers with no night and winters with no day, speaking a language not understood by almost anyone, from a modest working class home just south of the arctic circle; how can it be that she ends up leading a global university in the western corner of a large continent called Australia. I don't recall going to the careers counsellor and saying "when I grow up, I would like to be a Vice Chancellor of an Australian university please." But I do recall the unfailing belief my family and my teachers had in me as a unique human being, with a voice worth listening to, installing a strong work ethic in me and surrounding me with unquestioned commitment to integrity, respect and social justice as cornerstones of living a good life.

During my last conversation with my mother before she passed away I asked her for some advice for life. By now she suffered from severe dementia and I wasn't sure whether I would get any answer at all, not to mention a coherent one. However, she became razor sharp, her old self, and she said:

"Elämä on ihmeellinen. Tehkää kunnolla kaikki tehtävänne ja olkaa kilttejä muille ihmisille."

"Life is a wondrous journey. Always complete your tasks to the best of your ability and be kind to other people".

Life is indeed a wondrous, and even a miraculous journey, and that is how a girl from a town called Oulu can become a Vice Chancellor in Western Australia.

I am truly honoured and humbled to have this opportunity to serve Murdoch University as its ninth Vice Chancellor. With this comes both an immense sense of responsibility and an immense sense of optimism about the future.

Thank you.



*Professor Eeva Leinonen  
Vice Chancellor  
Murdoch University*