

Liz Watson Citation

Mrs Liz Watson has made a remarkable contribution to higher education administration in Australia. During 25 years in higher education in this country she has witnessed, studied and managed the impact of considerable administrative change on students. Her career, however, could easily have taken another direction.

After matriculating from Norwood High School in the 1950s, Liz began work at the Weapons Research Establishment, now the Defence Science and Technology Organisation. Working on rocket testing trials in the Mathematical Services Unit, she enrolled to study Mathematics at The University of Adelaide, only to realise that rocket science might not be her career of choice.

By the 1960s she had entered teacher's college, commenced a Bachelor of Arts at The University of Adelaide and started to raise a family. And it was with her family that she moved to Papua New Guinea, when in 1972, her husband began work at the University of Technology in Lae. A short time later their third child was born.

On her return to work in 1973, a temporary position in the University of Technology recruitment office soon became a full-time position in University administration that would last 5 years. When Papua New Guinea gained independence, Liz trained indigenous staff to take over senior positions at the University – a role in which she rapidly acquired her understanding of how universities work. Remarkably, she also found time to complete her BA and a Graduate Diploma in Education!

When she moved back to Australia with her family in 1977, Liz applied to the Education Department for a teaching position only to find that she was over-qualified! After a short period as Admissions Officer at Hartley College, she won the position of Assistant Registrar with the South Australian Institute of Technology.

In 1985 she was appointed Deputy Registrar and completed a Masters Degree in Educational Administration from the University of New England. With much foresight, her thesis examined the efforts of institutes of technology to be recognised as equal to, but different from, universities.

In 1989, Liz became the first female Registrar of a technological institution in Australia – an appointment that coincided with the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme – HECS. In 1991, when the University of South Australia was established, she won the position again to become the University's Foundation Registrar.

During this time, she also became a popular speaker, presenting at conferences in Australia, the United States, England and the West Indies. Her main area of interest was, and I am sure remains, the link between tuition fees and the student-university relationship.

Liz has been tremendously influential in the development of administrative systems and policies to manage a changing landscape of legislation and student expectations. During the early years of UniSA, she successfully contributed to the challenge of establishing an administration that would reflect the culture, values and direction of a new University.

Since her retirement from UniSA in 2002, she has become a valued consultant to the higher education sector.

Deputy Chancellor, it is my pleasure, on behalf of the University of South Australia, to present to you, Mrs Liz Watson, for the Honorary Award of University Fellow, in recognition of her extraordinary contribution to the University of South Australia and to higher education administration in Australia.