

Alexander Downer citation

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present to you Alexander John Gosse Downer.

The Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University (honoris causa) is being awarded to the Honourable Alexander Downer, AC, in acknowledgement of his exceptionally distinguished service to Australian society and to the University.

Mr Downer was born in Adelaide in 1951. He was educated at Geelong Grammar in Victoria and, while his father Alick was Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, his education continued at Radley College in Oxford.

In the early 1970s he completed a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Politics and Economics at the University of Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Mr Downer worked as an economist for the Bank of New South Wales, before entering the Australian Diplomatic Service, where he served in the Australian Missions to European Union and NATO, and as an Embassy representative in Belgium and Luxembourg.

From 1982 to '83, he held a senior political advisory role with former Prime Minister the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser. He then served as the Executive Director of the Australian Chamber of Commerce.

In 1984, Mr Downer was elected to Federal Parliament as the Liberal Member for the Adelaide Hills-based seat of Mayo. He held this seat until his resignation from Parliament in 2008.

During his parliamentary service, Mr Downer was Leader of the Liberal Party and Opposition Leader from 1994 to 1995.

For more than two decades, Mr Downer has dedicated his life to advancing Australia's international relations and foreign policy, with achievements spanning the areas of security, trade and humanitarian aid.

Under the leadership of the Honourable John Howard, OM, AC, Mr Downer became Australia's longest serving Minister for Foreign Affairs. He was Foreign Minister from 1996 to 2007 – a remarkable 11 years, 267 days.

One of Mr Downer's earliest initiatives as Foreign Minister was to work with New Zealand to broker a peace agreement in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, which ended a long-running civil conflict.

He played a key role in assisting the United Nations to hold a referendum in East Timor, and in negotiating the entry of the peace keeping force in East Timor.

As Foreign Minister he was at the forefront of Australian foreign policy during times of conflict in the Middle East, and global terrorism. He was an active participant and diplomatic force on issues of human rights, climate change and natural disasters.

Following his resignation from Parliament, Mr Downer was appointed Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Cyprus from 2008 to 2014. In 2008 he was also appointed as a Visiting Professor of Politics and International Trade here at the University of Adelaide.

In conjunction with the University of Adelaide, Mr Downer established the Sir John Downer Oration in 2012 as a biennial public lecture in honour of his grandfather. Sir John was a notable South Australian, twice elected Premier of South Australia, and in 1901 he became one of the first South Australian senators in the Federal Parliament. Among those to deliver the Sir John Downer Oration are former Prime Minister the Honourable John Howard, former Prime Minister the Honourable Tony Abbott MP, and former Minister for Foreign Affairs the Honourable Julie Bishop MP.

In 2014, Mr Downer was appointed High Commissioner to the United Kingdom – the same position his father once held in the 1960s and '70s. After finishing his term as High Commissioner, Mr Downer has joined King's College, London, as Executive Chairman of the International School of Government.

Mr Downer has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of South Australia, and holds a Doctorate of Civil Laws (honoris causa) from the University of Newcastle-on-Tyne.

In recognition of his many contributions and achievements, Mr Downer was awarded the Centenary Medal in 2001. In 2013 he was named a Companion of the Order of Australia – for his eminent service to parliament through the advancement of international relations and foreign policy, particularly in the areas of security, trade and humanitarian aid.

Chancellor, I am very pleased and proud to present to you the Honourable Alexander John Gosse Downer, Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Politics and Economics, Companion of the Order of Australia, for admission to the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University (honoris causa).