

## DR GAJARAJ DHANARAJAN

### Citation for the conferral of a Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*)

Professor Dhanarajan is arguably the world's foremost distance educator. By agreeing to accept this award from Charles Sturt University, Professor Dhanarajan acknowledges the pre-eminent position of this University as Australia's largest distance education provider.

Gajaraj Dhanarajan is a citizen of Malaysia who studied at the University of Madras, India, where he obtained the degrees of Bachelor and Master in Zoology. From there he went to London and completed a Diploma from Imperial College and a Master's degree in Applied Entomology from the University of London. In 1971 the Association of Commonwealth Universities awarded him a Commonwealth Staff Scholarship to study in England. He chose to study at the University of Aston, Birmingham, from where he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Biology.

Dr Dhanarajan commenced his professional career as a Scientific Research Officer with the Forest Research Institute in Malaysia. From there, he went to the newly-created Science University of Malaysia as a lecturer in Biology. He returned to England in 1978 having been awarded a Senior Fellowship by the inter-University Council. His studies took him to the Museum of Natural History and brought him into contact with The Open University - thus combining his love of natural history and his developing interest in open and distance education which was to result in his becoming an active advocate of open and distance education in Asia.

It was during his tenure at the Science University in Malaysia that Dr Dhanarajan became actively involved in distance education - first as a course developer and manager and eventually as the Deputy Director of the University of Penang's pioneering and highly successful Centre for Off-Campus Studies. This led to his appointment to the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong, first as the Associate Director (Academic) and then as Director from 1991 until 1995. Under his leadership, the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong grew to become one of the largest distance education providers in the world providing access to higher education to many Hong Kong residents unable to gain entry to the existing universities or polytechnics in that country. Under his leadership the Institute quickly matured and only a few years later was accorded the status of a university. In recognition of his dedication, the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong conferred on him the title Professor, which he retains with *emeritus* status.

Late in 1995, he was appointed the President of the Commonwealth of Learning. The Commonwealth of Learning was created by Commonwealth governments to widen opportunities for learning, by promoting cooperation between Commonwealth educational institutions, with a particular emphasis on utilising the potential of distance/open learning and the application of communication technologies to education. With headquarters based in Vancouver, this international organisation currently serves 53 member countries. Given his commitment to open and distance learning, the appointment of Professor Dhanarajan as the second President of the Commonwealth of Learning was particularly appropriate.

In 1992, the University of Maryland awarded him an honorary doctorate in Humane Letters. In 1994 he was conferred with an Order of Chivalry by the State of Penang, Malaysia - one of the relatively few non-Malays to be so honoured. In 1995, The Open University of the United Kingdom conferred on him the degree of Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*). In

1996, Kota Open University in Rajasthan, India, conferred on him a Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*), the University of Abertay Dundee Scotland conferred on him a Doctor of Education (*honoris causa*) and the College of Preceptors in London awarded him an Honorary Fellowship. In November last year, he was the first recipient of the Asian Association of Open Universities Meritorious Service Award to the Cause of Distance Education in Asia.

Before his appointment as President of the Commonwealth of Learning, Professor Dhanarajan was the Secretary General of the Asian Association of Open Universities, served on the Executive Board of the International Council for Distance Education and was the educational adviser to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. He has also served on many international consultancy bodies.

Professor Dhanarajan has edited and joint edited some eight books on subjects ranging from Mangrove Production in South East Asia to Economics of Distance Education: Recent Experience. His many papers and reports also cover a similarly wide range of subjects.

The University is delighted to recognise Dato' Gajaraj Dhanarajan, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth of Learning, graduate of the University of Madras, India, of the University of London and of the University of Aston Birmingham, England, recipient of honorary degrees from the University of Maryland USA, The Open University of the United Kingdom, Kota Open University, Rajasthan, India, and the University of Abertay, Dundee, Scotland, a distinguished forest entomologist, emeritus professor of the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong, honorary fellow of the College of Preceptors, London, holder of the Order of Chivalry from the State of Penang Malaysia, an internationally recognised educator and advocate for open and distance education for admission to the degree of Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*).

**Dated this Sixteenth Day of April One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety Eight**