# Vale Professor Peter Cyril Poole (1931—2017)



*Professor Peter C. Poole, circa 1985*

Professor Peter C. Poole commenced with the University in August 1975 as the foundation chair of computing at the University, the first Professor appointed into the (then) Department of Information Science.

After studying at the Mackay State High School, Poole completed an undergraduate science degree (Mathematics and Physics) at the University of Queensland, and then worked for four years as a secondary teacher, completing a B.Ed.(Hons) while doing so. In 1957 he commenced a PhD at the University of Sydney under the supervision of Professor C.B.A. McCushen, working on the SILLIAC computer. After graduating in 1964 the next two years were also spent in Sydney, as a Lecturer undertaking teaching and research.

At the time of his appointment to Melbourne, Poole was an Associate Professor of Computer Science at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he had been since 1972. The six years prior to that he had worked at the Culham Fusion Laboratory of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. His work at Culham had involved early use of time-sharing operating systems, and at the same time he had developed an interest in the design and implementation of large systems in general – the field that we now know as Software Engineering. When Poole taught his first subject at the University in 1976, it was an honours course on Software Engineering.

The Department that Poole joined had been established nearly two decades earlier, with the arrival in 1955 of the CSIR Mark 1 (later CSIRAC) computer on permanent loan from CSIRO. A "Computation Laboratory" was established around that pioneering computer and immediately commenced teaching computer science subjects, including programming. The successor to the Laboratory, the "Department of Computation", was split in two in 1973 following a review, one part to be responsible for providing the University's computing services (after many name changes, now the IT section of Infrastructure Services), and the other part to be responsible for academic and teaching activities in this exciting

new discipline. The latter unit was the Department of Information Science, the division that Poole took leadership of in 1975.

One of Poole's earliest requests of the University was a name change, and "Information Science" became "Computer Science" in 1976, bringing it into line with the trend in English and North American universities. As part of his appointment discussions held in February 1974 with the then Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor David Caro, Poole had also argued for a significant injection of funds into the discipline, by way of the largest setting-up grant ever awarded at the University. The number of staff and subjects grew rapidly as a result, and the Department of Computer Science quickly established itself as a leader within Australasia, including via a range of internationally-recognised research projects, notably in the area of "Machine Intelligence".

Another of Poole's legacies was his early identification of the importance of open-source operating systems. He argued for the use of Unix (and later on co-authored an introductory text for Unix users with one of his daughters) on the Department's computers, and for portable operating systems in general. Poole also actively engaged with the University administration, always arguing his case for more resources. As part of that strategy, he served in a number of key roles, including as Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Science. He was renowned for "going out on a limb", and making promises for delivery before the corresponding resources flowed. This sometimes led to growing pains within the Department, but Poole had the knack of dominating strategic discussions, and rarely letting cautionary voices prevail. Indeed, his authority was such that he was universally referred to within the Department as "Prof", even after other professors had been appointed.

Poole was an enthusiastic supporter of a range of technical developments and innovations, including work by Robert Elz and others that led in the early 1980s to the Department of Computer Science becoming the initial international e-mail gateway between Australia and the world. That connection was at first managed over store-and-forward dial-up links; then, in 1989, the first permanent Internet link into Australia was established via a Departmental server. In addition, the Department and Elz provided early support and management of the Australian network namespace, following the formal registration of ".au" in 1985.

Another review in 1990 saw the Department of Computer Science moved into the Faculty of Engineering, joining with Electrical Engineering to form the School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering (SITEE), which later became the School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (SEECS). For a period during this transition Poole filled three roles – Acting Head of EE, Head of CS, and Head of SITEE – and maintained three separate offices with which to handle them.

Throughout the 1980s Poole had argued to the university hierarchy that computing and IT were here to stay, and that the University needed to put in place appropriate structures. A far-reaching report "The Future of Academic Computing 1984-1989" articulated those arguments, and helped influence University policy through this critical period. In 1989 Poole was further appointed Assistant Vice Chancellor (Information Technology), and given oversight of all IT policies at the University. He advised the then Vice Chancellor, Professor David Penington, that a networked computer on every desk was a vision worth pursuing, and shortly thereafter arranged for such a machine (a Mac) to be put on Penington's desk. Penington rose to the challenge, and immediately learnt how to both send email to others and how to manage his own. Poole's initiatives in this regard paved the way for a University-wide networking policy, and the reinforcement of the need for a cohesive and long-range approach to University IT strategy. Poole was also an early proponent of all things "multimedia", and foresaw the immense educational role that is now played by technology across all fields of learning.

Poole resigned from the University at the end of 1992 to take up the post of Dean of the Faculty of Information Technology at Bond University, where he remained until his retirement at the end of 1997.

Amongst many honours over his long and distinguished career, Poole was inducted into the Pearcey Hall of Fame in 2010, and was awarded an honorary doctorate at the University of Melbourne in 2011.

Peter Poole passed away peacefully in Perth on 19 August 2017, in the company of his daughters, and three of his seven grandchildren. He was a pioneering leader at the University of Melbourne, and his legacy will continue to influence the ongoing activities of the School of Computing and Information Systems, and the University as a whole. An event will be held later in the year to celebrate his contributions to the University and to computing in Australia; those wishing to remember Peter and honour his memory will have the opportunity to donate to a scholarship fund for rural and disadvantaged students at Melbourne, as requested by his family.