

PROFESSOR CLIFFORD DOUGLAS BLAKE

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

Chancellor, I have the honour to present Professor Clifford Douglas Blake AM for the conferral of the degree of Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*).

Cliff Blake was born at Muswellbrook in regional New South Wales in 1937. He graduated from The University of Sydney in 1958 with the University Medal in Agriculture. A Sir Benjamin Fuller Travelling Scholarship took him to the Rothamsted Experimental Station in England where he completed a doctorate on nematode parasites in oats from The University of London. Following a Rockefeller Travelling Fellowship to the United States of America to visit centres of biological teaching and research, the young Dr Blake returned to The University of Sydney as a lecturer in plant pathology. As a member of the Faculty of Agriculture he was promoted to senior lecturer and served as the Wilson Fellow and Senior Tutor at St Andrew's College.

In 1971, when still in his early thirties, Cliff Blake accepted appointment as the Foundation Principal of the new Riverina College of Advanced Education. This decision was to have far reaching consequences for the higher education landscape of regional New South Wales. Over the next twenty years he used a unique combination of imagination, pragmatism and energy to build this fledgling institution into one of the most diverse and dynamic colleges of advanced education in Australia.

He quickly established the College as one of the leading providers of distance education courses in Australia. He introduced courses in business, liberal studies, science and, following amalgamation with the Wagga Agricultural College, in agriculture that supplemented the teacher education courses that had been offered through the Wagga Wagga Teachers' College out of which Riverina College had been established. He relocated the College from the essentially make-shift South Campus site to a new green-fields site north of the city - a site that is attractive, modern and well planned. He also developed a campus in the then government-designated growth-centre of Albury/Wodonga. In 1981, he oversaw the amalgamation of Riverina College with the Goulburn College of Advanced Education. The new institution becoming the Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education.

During this period he contributed significantly to the overall development of the advanced education sector. He was, at one time or another, a member of the Board of Adult Education in New South Wales, a member of the Advanced Education Council of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission and the Chairman of the NSW Advanced Education Conference. In recognition of his contribution to advanced education he was made a member of the Order of Australia in 1988.

Cliff Blake played a definitive role in the establishment of the new Charles Sturt University to which he was later appointed Foundation Vice Chancellor and Professor of the University. In this office he served nine years as the President of the Australian Higher Education Industrial Association and as the Australian representative on the Commonwealth of Learning Board of Governors. He also served terms as the Foundation Chair of the National Conference on Open and Distance Education and as Convenor of the New South Wales Vice-Chancellor's Conference.

Professor Blake is an Elected Fellow of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science, was awarded the Farrer Memorial Medal for distinguished contributions to agricultural science in 1996, was granted the freedom of the City of Wagga Wagga and is an Honorary Citizen of the City of Bathurst.

Chancellor, this is a brief outline of an exceptional career in higher education; a unique achievement of thirty years as chief executive officer of two institutions of higher education. It is however, in the achievements and roles of these institutions that one finds the lasting contribution that Professor Blake has made to the cultural life and economic fabric of regional New South Wales.

Under his leadership Charles Sturt University has become the pre-eminent regional university in Australia. It has more than doubled in size since its establishment. It has expanded into the international education market through the innovative and effective strategy of course delivery through partnerships with offshore educational providers. It has moved into professional areas such as policing and pre-hospital care and areas that were once the exclusive preserve of the traditional universities such as pharmacy. Indeed the University has been so successful, and such an integral part of the higher education scene, that it was proclaimed Australia's University of the Year in 1997.

Cliff Blake was a country boy who, when faced with the choice of a traditional academic career at Australia's oldest university or the challenge of developing a new concept of regional higher education, chose the latter. His has been a contribution that has seen the introduction of courses and research that reflect the needs of rural Australia, of courses that offer young people from the country opportunities to study and to make their future lives in the country.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting to you, for admission to the degree of Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*), scholar, administrator, patron of the Arts and a great Australian, Professor Clifford Douglas Blake AM.

Dated this Second Day of May Two Thousand and One