

Clifford Douglas Blake, AM

Category: Honours & Outstanding

Classification: Public Administration (Education)

Clifford Douglas Blake was born in Muswellbrook, NSW on 27th August, 1937. He was educated at Denman Public School and Muswellbrook High School where he obtained First Class Honours in Agriculture (first place in the State) in the Leaving Certificate. He was an active and successful member of the Junior Farmers and received many awards, particularly for judging and debating.

In 1958 Clifford graduated Bachelor of Science in Agriculture with First Class Honours and the University Medal from the University of Sydney. Clifford was awarded in 1960, the Sir Benjamin Fuller Travelling Scholarship of the University of Sydney for three years post graduate studies, University of London from which, in 1962 he graduated Doctor of Philosophy (Faculty of Science – Zoology). His thesis was entitled “Some observations on the host-parasite relationships of the stem nematode *Ditylenchus dipsaci* on oats.”

Following a Rockefeller Travelling Fellowship to USA, to visit centres of biological teaching and research, the young Dr Blake in 1963 returned to the University of Sydney as a lecturer in plant pathology, was promoted to senior lecturer and served as the Wilson Fellow and Senior Tutor at St. Andrew’s College, Sydney University.

In 1971, while still in his thirties, Cliff Blake accepted appointment as the Foundation Principal of the new Riverina College of Advanced Education in Wagga Wagga. 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 CAE in Australia.

He quickly established the College as one of the leading producers of distance education courses in Australia. He introduced courses in business, liberal studies, science and agriculture. He relocated the College from the essentially make-shift South Campus site to a new green-field site north of the city. He also developed a presence in the then government-designated growth-centre of Albury/Wodonga. In 1981 Cliff oversaw the amalgamation of Riverina College with the Goulburn CAE to establish the Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education (RMIHE).

During this period Cliff contributed significantly to the overall development of the advanced education sector. He was a member of the Board of Adult Education in NSW, 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 this 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 (comprising RMIHE at Wagga Wagga and Albury and the Mitchell CAE at Bathurst) to which in 1990 he was 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 Board of Governors.

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

Under his leadership Charles Sturt University has become the pre-eminent regional university in Australia. It has expanded into the international education market. It has developed new professional areas such as policing and pre-hospital care. It has moved into disciplines that meet emerging needs of regional Australia such as radiography, physiotherapy and pharmacy. Indeed the University has been so successful that some six years after its establishment, it was proclaimed Australia's University of the year in 1997.

Clifford Blake's contribution to regional higher education has seen the introduction of courses and research that reflect the needs of rural Australia and of courses that offer young people from the country opportunities to study and to make their future lives in the country.

In May 2001, Clifford Douglas Blake AM was admitted to the degree of Doctor of the University (honoris causa) on his retirement from Charles Sturt University.

Inducted December 2001