

Mr Fred Argy AM OBE

The honorary degree of Doctor of Science in Economics was conferred upon Fred Argy AM OBE by the Chancellor the Hon Justice Kim Santow at the 11.30am graduation ceremony held on 21 March 2003.

Citation

Chancellor, I have the honour to present Fred Argy, AM OBE for the conferring of the degree of Doctor of Science in Economics (honoris causa).

Born and raised in Alexandria (Egypt), Fred Argy came to Australia in 1951, at the age of 20. His first languages were French and Spanish, reflecting the origins of his parents. His early schooling had been in French. It was only when he became a secondary pupil at Victoria College, in Alexandria, that he was introduced to English. At the College, he took the School Certificate examinations; no doubt this helped later, when he sought university admission.

On arriving in Sydney, he joined the staff of the MLC Assurance Company. In the following year, he matriculated in this University. As an evening student, he then took six years to complete his undergraduate studies, which culminated in the award of first-class honours in economics. While still an MLC employee, he went on to prepare a thesis – written in splendid English, incidentally – for which he was awarded the degree of Master of Economics, in 1961.

In 1964, Fred and his family moved to Canberra, where he joined the Commonwealth public service. Among the many appointments of a distinguished career were those of Deputy Secretary (Labour Economics) of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Director of the Office of the Economic Planning Advisory Commission, and a posting to Paris as Australian Ambassador to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Since his (nominal) retirement in 1991, he has undertaken several further public roles. These include membership of the Commonwealth Grants Commission from 1991 to 1996, and a current appointment as Visiting Fellow in the Graduate Program in Public Policy at the Australian National University.

Perhaps most notable of all is his recent career as a dangerous serial author – dangerous because his policy views discomfort politicians of both left and right. In a number of books and journal articles, he has urged governments to pursue both market efficiency and social justice. As Fred sees it, that sense of justice is needed to ensure that all groups in society share in the fruits of economic efficiency; it also serves to promote social cohesion.

Looking back, we see how Fred Argy's story illustrates two important points: first, that even 50 years ago, Australian universities welcomed students who had come here from other countries; and secondly, that Australia has benefited greatly from the talents and energies of its migrants.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting to you, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science in Economics (honoris causa), the administrator, scholar and public intellectual, Fred Argy AM, OBE.