

Professor Keith Jackson Hancock AO

Keith Hancock has made an outstanding contribution to labour studies in Australia over the last 50 years. He was one of the originators of research and teaching in this area of economics in Australia with his path-breaking research on wages and employment outcomes in Australia that he commenced in the early 1960s. He had a substantial impact on the area in his role as Deputy President of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission and the Industrial Relations Commission between 1989 and 1997, and as part-author of several major Commonwealth government reports.

Keith graduated from the University of Melbourne with a Bachelor of Arts (First Class Honours in Economics and History) in 1955. He completed a PhD at the London School of Economics in 1959. He was a Lecturer in Economics at the University of Adelaide between 1959 and 1963. In 1954, he became the foundation Professor of Economics in the University of Adelaide at Bedford Park, which became Flinders University in 1966. Between 1980 and 1987 Keith was Vice-Chancellor of Flinders University.

In his academic work on Australian labour markets, Keith was one of the pioneers in the use of empirical methods. In his initial research papers he developed methods for evaluating the effects of Australia's system of labour market regulation on wage outcomes – such as on the rate of wage inflation and the extent of dispersion in wages earned by workers in different occupations and industries. As a student of industrial relations or labour economics – from the 1970s to the 1990s – you would have been sure to have a large number of articles authored by Keith on your reading list.

In 1987, Keith resigned his Vice-Chancellorship to take up appointment as Deputy President of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (now called the Fair Work Commission), and later became a Senior Deputy President. During his ten years as Deputy President and Senior Deputy President, Keith participated in several significant national wage decisions, as well as other major decisions such as on the 1989 Pilots Dispute. He retired from this position in 1997. On his return to academic life he continued to write about both contemporary industrial relations issues and the history of wage setting. His definitive history of Australian wage fixing up to World War II was published in June 2013.

Keith headed two major Commonwealth government reviews: the 1974-77 review of National Superannuation; and the 1983-85 review of Australian Industrial Relations Law and Systems. He was a member of a committee appointed in 1973 to review Commonwealth Employment Service Statistics, and of the 1983 review group into the Australian Financial System (chaired by V. E. Martin). For the South Australian government, Keith chaired an inquiry into the racing industry.

External recognition of Keith's contribution has come via his election as a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia in 1968, and Life member in 1996. He was President of the Academy from 1981 to 1984. Professor Joe Isaac and Keith are the two Australian Honorary Fellows of the London School of Economics and Political Science. Keith was appointed an Officer in the Order of Australia in 1987 for his contribution to education.

Over a period spanning more than 50 years, Keith Hancock's energy, insight and wisdom have contributed both to our knowledge of labour markets, and to public policy. The Faculty of Business and Economics is privileged to be able to honour Professor Hancock's contribution with the award of an Honorary D.Com.