

Admissions Ceremony

12 December 2002

Chief Justice's observations

On behalf of all the Judges of the Supreme Court, I congratulate you, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome you to the ranks of the legal profession.

Your personal achievement is substantial. Justice Williams, Justice Jerrard and I were admitted as barristers many years ago, but the gruelling course of meticulous study prerequisite to admission as a legal practitioner never departs one's recollection; and in addition, you have completed the required practical training, which we hope you found both interesting and helpful. Your present achievement is however but the herald for a lifetime of professional development. The most effective lawyers – those who best serve their clients – are those who continue, throughout their professional lives, to broaden their professional knowledge, to hone their professional expertise.

They are also persons who maintain a broad involvement in life, rather than a narrow absorption with the law. I can do no better than quote in this regard from Sir Walter Scott's "Guy Mannering", where the Scots lawyer Counsellor Pleydell, taking Guy Mannering into his library, offered this advice: "A lawyer without history or literature is a mechanic, a mere working mason; if he possesses some knowledge of these, he may venture to call himself an architect."

Today you join a noble profession with a substantial commitment to public service including, with increasing reach, the provision of services pro bono to those of limited financial means.

I was honoured and uplifted to attend on Tuesday the launch of the "homeless person's legal advice" initiative of the Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House – a vehicle for the pro bono work of a number of Queensland law firms. This is a wonderful development which should greatly benefit homeless people, while incidentally reflecting the nobility of the profession, earlier mentioned.

The ethical standards which characterize the profession in Queensland are conspicuously high, and I say that while nevertheless acknowledging the blight on the profession, wrought by a few only, which has rightly this year been brought out into the open. You may be sure that the court is vigilant to ensure the profession continues to acknowledge and fulfil its high ethical obligation, and the discharge of its duty to clients with competence and expertise.

As you would probably already appreciate only too well, you join a competitive profession. There are currently in Queensland 728 members of the Bar Association and 5,500 solicitors with practising certificates. This year, up until today, the court had admitted 168 new barristers and 681 new solicitors. That extent of infusion of talent into an already substantial profession means there can be no doubt, for success, that you must meet reasonably high expectations.

Some of you may not enter into legal practice as such. I am sure you will in that event nevertheless continue to appreciate the mental acuity and moral commitment which underpin your new qualifications.

We hope, ladies and gentlemen, that you rise to these substantial challenges. Your prospects will be enhanced if you continue to draw support from those who have, more than likely, assisted you greatly to this present pinnacle: your families and friends, so many of whom we welcome here this morning to share your sense of fulfilment.

We again wish you well in your careers, and the compliments of the festive season.