

Admissions Ceremony

18 March 2002

Chief Justice's observations

On behalf of the Judges, ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate you upon your admission to the legal profession. Your admission is confirmation of substantial intellectual achievement and a good deal of persistence and application. You are to be commended for reaching this important milestone, and no doubt you will gratefully acknowledge the support of your parents, families and friends.

You join a large profession. As some indication there are currently some 801 members of the Bar Association of Queensland, and the Queensland Law Society currently registers 5,469 solicitors as holding practising certificates. The Queensland profession is in fact even larger, allowing, for example, for corporate lawyers and the world of academia. With a finite amount of legal work, albeit in an economically bustling State, conditions within the profession are therefore quite competitive. Last year, we admitted as many as 140 barristers and 642 solicitors. This year, up to today, we had admitted 17 barristers and 249 solicitors. I mention these figures not to daunt you, but to suggest that to succeed, and shine, in this new competitive milieu, you should regard your present qualifications as but a start, as the foundation for a body of legal knowledge and wisdom to be developed throughout your professional lives.

Much has been said and written in an attempt to express the essence of practice as a barrister/solicitor. We are told that the legal profession is not necessarily universally respected and valued. While that may be so, much of the criticism of the profession is captious and demonstrably unfair to its conscientious members. My own early ethical training, like that of many of my colleagues, was based on Professor Harrison's work, "Law and Conduct of the Legal Profession in Queensland", which includes this passage I offer by way of serious encouragement:

"Civilisation rests on social order, and social order rests on the maintenance of the law. Hence throughout the ages the law has ranked as a high calling because it serves the most fundamental needs of the community, order and justice, and because at its best it calls for the highest qualities of character and intellect."

Your being admitted formally today by the Supreme Court reflects this Court's role as the ultimate determinant and custodian of legal professional standards. Just as it falls to the Judges to authorise courses of legal study and determine admission standards, so we pass from time to time upon issues of fitness to practise. We expect much of you: integrity, legal understanding, sound judgment, practical wisdom, and not the least, moral courage –all dedicated to your efficient service of the people who will depend upon your expert capacities for the resolution of their difficulties. But in the end, while the interests of the clients are extremely important, it is of course your duty to the Court and the administration of the law which must predominate: it is that predominance which distinguishes the legal profession from others.

If you do not enter into legal practice as such, I hope you will nevertheless continue to draw inspiration from the jurisprudential training which has led you to this point: it should have induced a dimension of mental acuity and moral perception of enduring value.

As you rightly bask today in the lustre of your achievements, and we particularly note the brilliance of the honours graduates, and with pleasure, the admission of former associates, I know you will remember not only those you are destined to serve, but also those who have helped you to the position you now enjoy, especially as I have said, your parents, families and friends. I do hope they will remain, for you, important sources of encouragement and wise counsel.

You go forward now with our congratulations and best wishes.
