

Host's welcome, Australian Academy of Law launch

Her Excellency, Ms Quentin Bryce, AC

I give thanks to the traditional keepers of the land on which we gather this morning.

And as its current custodian, I extend to you all my warmest welcome to this fine public building: a central and cherished part of Queensland history, and the evolution of our democratic and civilised society; a most proper venue, I think, from which to mark the beginnings of a modern guild and fellowship whose objects are directed to the protection of that society.

I feel so privileged to be part of the Academy in its foundation: to assemble with Australia's most esteemed jurists; to listen and contribute to the formative debate for the advancement of a discipline, to which I owe a lifelong debt - for the opportunities it delivered for my intellectual, political, and professional development; for the relationships that have so enriched my own offering; and for the sense of justice and humanity it taught and required of me. An indebtedness—rendered-now, a responsibility—to guide and mentor young men and women finding their place in the profession and practice of law.

Today's, of course, is a vastly different environment for learning: part-time jobs, fast-tracked programs, survival and fees to fund, a career to carve out, a balanced life to hope for.

How much more difficult it has become for students to follow their passions and achieve their aspirations; and to appreciate the nature and extent of their role in the maintenance of a just society.

And yet the complex legal landscape they are entering is so much more demanding of them.

With that serious perspective in mind, I sincerely welcome the establishment of the Australian Academy of Law, whose collective wisdom has the capacity, over the coming decades, to profoundly influence the quality and outcomes of legal education in this country; to revive traditional understandings of professional duty, ethical practice, technical excellence, and pragmatic application in diverse contemporary contexts.

In his "*I have a dream*" address to the QUT Law Society in 2004, Justice Kirby said that the best lawyers are those who remain alert to law's abiding mission as an instrument of justice:

I dream [he said] of legal education in Australia which will be strengthened by an appreciation that law is not just words or rules or statutes. That law has a deeper meaning and purpose...is a vocation committed to justice. I dream that [it will equip] lawyers with an understanding of the contemporary underpinnings of [that] vocation. [And] when, at times, we become disheartened, [we ought] remember the strengths of our discipline, for they are many.

My friends, those strengths are in our presence and pledge today, whose direction I now pass on to a lawyer with a deep sense of his own vocation, and for whom, I know, his peers and colleagues hold immense admiration and respect: Professor David Weisbrot, thank you.