



**Remarks of the Hon. Chief Justice Anne Ferguson
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria
On the occasion of an admission ceremony in the Banco Court
Tuesday, 12 April 2022**

The Court acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which the Court sits today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. We pay our respects to their Elders, knowledge holders and leaders, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander persons present.

The Court is formally satisfied that each applicant has met the requirements for admission. An order will be made for each applicant to be appointed an Australian lawyer and an officer of the Supreme Court of Victoria.

Congratulations.

The admission of lawyers to practice in the State of Victoria is steeped in history and tradition. The first 'Victorian' admission ceremony took place on 12 April 1841, on the opening of the Supreme Court of New South Wales for the District of Port Phillip. This was a decade before Victoria secured independence from New South Wales and the Supreme Court of Victoria as we now know it was established. Admission ceremonies have been taking place in this courtroom, the Banco Court, for over 135 years.

There has been an unprecedented break in admission ceremonies. Today's sittings are the first in-person admission ceremonies since they were suspended more than two years ago in March 2020 after the outbreak of COVID-19.

The Court's priority throughout the pandemic has been to ensure new lawyers can be admitted and begin their legal careers without delay. This has meant over four thousand new lawyers have been admitted to practise 'on the papers'. Today I would again like to thank those new lawyers who were not able to attend a formal ceremony. As I told them during a virtual address last year, it may not have been the way they envisaged their entry into the legal profession, but their admission is just as significant and important as ever.

Due to ongoing risks following the outbreak of the Omicron strain, we continue to manage the logistics of providing a safe environment for all court users.

However, we are very pleased that pandemic restrictions have eased enough for us to begin holding these important ceremonies again. Today, we are holding five ceremonies – and although it may not look quite the same as others that have gone before, we are delighted to welcome you all to the Banco Court.

I'd like to start by thanking you for the hard work and sacrifices you have undoubtedly made over the past two years. Many of you may have been studying or working remotely. Not having the same connections with fellow students or colleagues, and perhaps providing additional support to loved ones, put a significant strain on many people. You were all forced to adapt to changing circumstances and transform how you got things done. Congratulations on navigating those challenges.

Today is not about the past. It is about the future – your future. Today marks the start of your journeys as Australian lawyers and officers of the Supreme Court of Victoria.

On this occasion, I would like to share with you my thoughts on how best to succeed as you embark on this next phase of your career.

First, embody the qualities that you would hope to see in your colleagues. Be responsive and diligent. Be receptive to feedback, and open to learning. Be a team player. Focus on the contribution you are making and the real value you are adding, rather than just on the number

of hours you spend working. And when there are problems, focus on solving those problems, not on casting blame. Look to learn from mistakes.

At the same time, ensure you look after your wellbeing as best you can. I strongly believe that wellbeing is a vital element of a healthy, well-functioning and sustainable profession. There may be times as a lawyer when you find it difficult to get the balance in your life right – particularly in the short term. But to the extent you can, always prioritise things outside work that are meaningful to you – whether that is spending time with friends and family, exercise, or other hobbies and interests. Because you can have a very rewarding and balanced life as a lawyer, and it is possible to thrive personally and professionally at the same time.

But if there are ever times where things are becoming overwhelming, do not be afraid to reach out. The profession has come a long way from where it once was. These days, we are better at recognising the need for fostering sustainable careers, rather than careers that burn bright and fade fast. If the need ever arises, please speak up and ask for the help you need.

I strongly encourage you to seek out mentors and peers to share your experiences with them.

Take every opportunity to develop your skills by watching and talking to others more experienced than you. For those pursuing a career as a litigation lawyer, work on your court craft skills, court etiquette and your written and oral communication.

I would like to reflect briefly on the huge shift in technology in our courts. Remote hearings have made it easier for some people in the suburbs, regional Victoria and interstate, or those with greater accessibility needs, to participate in the court process. It has been more efficient and effective for some types of hearing. Through streaming, more people than ever now have access to the work of the courts. These positive developments should not be overlooked.

You are beginning your careers as Australian lawyers in a digital environment that has altered dramatically. Much of this will be to your advantage. Established lawyers have had to adapt their skills in the online environment, but these platforms will be second nature for many of you.

While the future will not be devoid of in person hearings, I see online hearings having a continuing role in our courts. It is imperative that you keep pace with the ongoing digital transformation. Familiarise yourself with new technologies, and be creative and innovative in your approach to practice. You have a unique opportunity to help forge a legal profession tailored to serve the needs of a technologically savvy and technologically dependent community.

This brings me to another issue that is extremely important to me – building safe, productive and respectful workplaces. In my experience, as lawyers we thrive in healthy work environments - when we're engaged with our work, with our colleagues and with issues we're passionate about.

Research shows that a major cause of stress for lawyers in their work environment is rudeness and, in its extreme form, bullying.

A culture of incivility is proven to deplete energy and motivation, increase burnout, and inflict emotional and physiological damage.

Robust and vigorous legal debate and adversarial exchanges are common for lawyers, but we must always be mindful that there is no excuse for rudeness.

We must treat people with respect and dignity. Treat others as you would have them treat you.

Engaging with all people in a court environment respectfully not only makes it a better place to work, it enhances the confidence of the community in the courts.

However, this is only part of ensuring the respectful environment we want to foster. It is critical that leaders in legal practice are role models

for these standards of professionalism too. This also applies to the judiciary.

I want to reiterate here today that inappropriate behaviour should never happen in the Court and that I am very sorry that in the past it did. Every person who works or comes into our Court should feel safe. They must be able to feel they are respected and can trust everyone in their workplace.

We know how hard it is to make a complaint, but we encourage people to speak up when they experience or witness inappropriate behaviour. We will investigate any complaints, past or present. Anyone who reports bullying, discrimination or sexual harassment will be supported and treated fairly. The responsibility to change culture lies with the courts and the profession. For its part, the Court has made and will continue to make changes to ensure that it does.

And finally, I remind you that as an Australian lawyer, your paramount duty is to the Court and the administration of justice. This duty attaches to you personally upon your admission to practice. It cannot be delegated. As an Australian lawyer, you must be familiar with and act in accordance with your paramount duty at all times. It must prevail to the extent of any inconsistency with any other duties, such as those you might owe to your employer or your client. If you take a staunchly ethical approach to practice from day one, you will soon find yourself winning the respect of other practitioners and building a solid professional reputation.

I'd like to conclude by noting that today is a very special day not only for you, but for your family and friends too. On your behalf I thank them, your educators and colleagues for guiding and supporting you to reach this milestone today.

It is a great privilege for us to sit on your admission ceremony. You each play a part in the evolution of the legal profession. What it will look like in 10, 20 or even 50 years' time is up to you.

No matter what lies ahead, you will soon find that your legal training provides you with a solid foundation. Your skills, capacity for hard work and ethics will be highly valued wherever you go.

Today is the day to celebrate your achievements – first here in this ceremony, next outside in the court precincts and later with family and friends somewhere else. Make the most of it and enjoy the day. More importantly, I trust that those of you remaining in the legal profession find it a fulfilling, if at times challenging, vocation.

My colleagues and I sitting on the bench today extend our warmest congratulations to each of you as the newest Australian lawyers. We wish you all the very best for the life that lies ahead of you.

Adjourn the Court.

The Hon. Chief Justice Anne Ferguson
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Victoria

12 April 2022