



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

**OPENING OF THE NEW LEO CUSSEN  
CENTRE FOR LAW**

**Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2019**

**Mr Tom Poulton**, Chair, Leo Cussen Centre for Law

**Ms Elizabeth Loftus**, Executive Director, Leo Cussen Centre for Law

**Your Honours**

**Distinguished guests**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this evening.

Tony and I are delighted to join you here for the Opening of these impressive new premises. It is a pleasure for us to see a space so perfectly designed to accommodate higher education – more specifically, the practical training and continuing education of such an important professional group within our State.

As former lawyers and judges and, most importantly, Leo Cussen instructors, it is a particular pleasure.

The Leo Cussen Institute, as it then was, was established by statute in 1972.

I was still at University at that time, and – truthfully - far more absorbed in the latest Simon and Garfunkel album (*Bridge Over Troubled Waters*) than I was in reading the legislation.

Apart from knowing the name 'Leo Cussen' as a renowned jurist, the first I became more conscious of Leo Cussen was on the first day of my Articles.

I was sent to the Supreme Court to 'instruct' (using that term very loosely), in a case about which my Principal told me very little. The only fact with which I left the office was that one of the litigants in the case was a relative of Sir Leo Cussen. That detail was apropos nothing, but such was his fame in legal circles.

As an aside, may I mention that the Bar Table in that case comprised Woods Lloyd QC leading a very young Jeff Sher, and Des Whelan QC leading Hayes Ball.

If only I had understood then just how fortunate I was to be watching that group at work!

Anyway, within just a few years, the Leo Cussen Institute became an important part of my early professional life as a family lawyer.

I taught many groups and, as I have said elsewhere, developed a highly successful - if not loss-making - practice, moving the admission of so many that I had met in the course of that teaching.

That said, it was gratifying from every point of view.

It was a way of putting back into the profession. But in truth, there is nothing quite like teaching to make you learn well, and so I am certain that I gained so much more than I gave. And some of the connections I built here, lasted across my entire legal career.

Today, Leo Cussen Centre for Law, an entrenched part of our legal landscape, does more than it did (a terrifying) more than 45 years ago now.

It provides Practical Legal Training (PLT) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for lawyers, training for overseas lawyers seeking admission to the Australian legal profession, courses for lawyers needing to requalify and courses for legal support staff.

Its spread and its reach is not something I could ever have imagined in my early connections with it.

And now, the Centre does all that from this, its new home.

It is also not something I could have ever envisaged all those years ago when I did my casual teaching here, or throughout the years when I called in to give the odd lecture or to participate in a session.

And none of us could have envisaged the number of law graduates today or the technology and contemporary ways of delivering training to lawyers at every stage of their careers.

One thing I could have told you then though. And that was that any sort of formalised practical learning was an essential element of legal training, and one in which we were largely lacking in our law schools and in our Articles.

In that case I mentioned, on my first day of Articles, when Lloyd QC told me to fetch a law report from the Supreme Court Library, I recall my less than impressive response was 'Certainly Mr Lloyd. But could you please tell me where to find the Supreme Court Library?'

Just one example of the need for good practical training during and just after law school.

And of course, today, no-one needs convincing of the need for learning across every professional lifetime.

Congratulations to everyone involved in ensuring that the learning that will take place here is in the best possible circumstances for all who are connected with it.

I am particularly taken with the modern look and feel of the new centre, with sweeping views across Melbourne. A welcome change, I am sure, from the last building with its less favourable outlook.

The flexible and diverse learning spaces and the updates to technology in the tutorial room have modernised the learning experience for the students. It feels more like a law firm than a classroom.

And it warms my heart, as the Governor of Victoria, that you have named the tutorial rooms, paying homage to great places across our state - Heidi, Grampians, Docklands - and our local flora, Iron Bark, Myrtle and Wattle.

Congratulations to the Board, and might I specifically mention the Chair, Tom Poulton: a great contributor.

I am also pleased for the opportunity to congratulate Executive Director, Elizabeth Loftus. Elizabeth, I have known you for a very long time and you are incredible! Definitely a 'stayer', not a 'sprinter'! Thirty-one years! Thirty-one years of dedication and vision. And thirty-one years in which you have touched the professional lives of so many thousands of lawyers.

And so. That leaves just one happy task. Joined by Tony, it is now our pleasure to declare this new centre open.