

2018 ANZELA Conference Report

'Capricorn and Beyond' held at Rydges Esplanade Resort, Cairns 2-4 October 2018.

By Joanna Ernenwein 2018 recipient of the inaugural **Robert Horton Memorial Scholarship**.

It gives me considerable pleasure to present this report as a recipient of the 2018 Robert Horton Memorial Scholarship. Having been awarded this inaugural scholarship by the NSW Chapter of ANZELA is indeed a great honour. I understand that Robert Horton was an inspiring member of the organisation, who was passionate about, and dedicated to, developing knowledge on education law in Australia and in New Zealand. Robert Horton's outstanding contribution as a president of NSW Chapter from 2012 to 2017, as well as his numerous publications, legal work and engagement in professional dialogue leave an enduring legacy for all those interested in this challenging area of legal practice and education.

The 2018 ANZELA Conference attracted approximately 110 members, who were in attendance at the conference venue in Cairns from 2 to 4 October. Under the theme 'Capricorn and Beyond: New Frontiers in Education and Law' the conference demonstrated the importance of approaching the emerging issues in education law in a careful and pro-active manner.

During the conference, attendees shared opinions, thoughts and suggestions for consideration in their practice as educators and lawyers. Apart from the plenary lectures, thirty specific sessions were offered over two days. The conference opened with a traditional Aboriginal ceremony at the Welcome Function, which has set the tone of mutual respect and intellectual enquiry for delegates from all Australian states and territories, and from overseas. The conference dinner was held at the Cairns Aquarium in the impressive tropical setting, where attendees were surrounded by the beautiful creatures of the Great Barrier Reef, while sharing conference insights and discussions that transpired during the evening in a more relaxed atmosphere.

The conference also provided an opportunity to launch a much-anticipated publication, *The Palgrave Handbook of Education Law for Schools*, edited by Karen Trimmer, Roselyn Dixon and Yvonne Findlay. This impressive book examines the essential nature of the law within an educational context through a comprehensive selection of articles. It will be an invaluable tool to principals and teachers in navigating this increasingly challenging environment and will undoubtedly help them develop skills to manage the legal concerns in schools.

The first keynote speaker was Professor Megan Davis, who delivered a powerful speech on a variety of issues impacting education, including poor general civic knowledge and legal concerns like the duty to consult in the light of the proposed constitutional reforms within the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The second keynote speaker, Mr John Ryan, presented research on professional misconduct cases and discussed issues of professional boundaries for teachers. These insights were especially topical in the light of the recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

During the two days, the conference participants had the opportunity to choose among various topics from classroom issues like playground hazards or student surveillance of teachers using new technologies, the impact of social networking on the teaching practice, to significant legal issues including the impact of disability legislation, freedom from indoctrination, and workplace investigations in schools beyond the Royal Commission.

From the perspective of an educator and a lawyer with an interest in teacher accountability, accreditation and frameworks for professional development in secondary and tertiary education sectors, I have found several sessions particularly useful in gaining a better understanding of the challenges of enforcing adequate teaching standards.

‘Enhancing the status of the teaching profession: from regulatory to professional body’ presented by Julia McCook-Weir allowed for a comparative perspective on how professional responsibility is approached through registration in NSW Zealand. Further, John Orr’s presentation on issues of integrity of actors in education, ‘Fitness and Probity in education law’, triggered reflection on how law can assist education institutions to enhance teaching standards by providing adequate legal frameworks. Finally, ‘Staff development in the Modern Era’ by Adrian Smith looked at more dynamic approaches to professional development using innovate online learning platforms.

Teaching standards, evaluation of existing professional development frameworks and the need for further improvements in this area are especially pertinent in the light of constant reports of declining education standards in Australia. More investigation is needed in this area; in the secondary sector mainly in relation to effectiveness of current compliance frameworks, and in the tertiary sector in relation to the increasing number of sessional lecturers, the lack of uniform accreditation frameworks and the potential need for further regulation of professional standards. Gatherings like ANZELA 2018 are invaluable in creating new knowledge and in identifying issues pertaining to raising education standards. I am very grateful for this opportunity to engage in a valuable dialogue, meet experts and to create new memories.

I would like to thank ANZELA NSW Chapter, organisers and sponsors: Holding Redlich, Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns, Makinson d’Apice, Colin Biggers & Paisley, for establishing the 2018 Robert Horton Memorial Scholarship, and for their contribution to all ANZELA members. Thank you for your generosity and your ongoing support of the association.



Joanna Ernenwein center