



# What, who and why

## The year ahead with QLS president Christine Smyth

Queensland Law Society president Christine Smyth outlines her agenda for 2017. Report by **John Teerds**.



**It won't take long for those members who don't know 2017 Queensland Law Society president Christine Smyth to realise that her direct approach is based on clear goals and a carefully considered agenda.**

The objectives of that agenda are based on 'what, who and why'.

"The 'what' is what we do – our mission – and that is to advocate for good law and good lawyers, and provide good leadership for our profession," she said.

"This means we must strive to meaningfully advance our members' interests through advocacy, policy, professional standards and innovation, while respecting and promoting tradition, diversity and inclusivity."

Christine sums up the 'who', by saying that our members must be at the heart of everything we do.

"My vision is for Queensland Law Society to be a genuine membership organisation for all Queensland solicitors and my key motivation is to strongly represent membership interests.

"Our profession faces unprecedented challenges. Queensland solicitors have to contend with economic and global competitive risks, technological change, regulatory compliance, higher rates of mental distress and graduate oversupply."

And the 'why' – the rationale for this approach – is because lawyers underpin our society, government, business and our community

"We will seek to promote the great work of Queensland solicitors," she said. "Their achievements and integrity deserve celebration. I believe advocacy is key to building and strengthening the reputation of our legal profession, and our advocacy will be for and on behalf of lawyers to government, the courts the business sector and the community.

"We must also value and respect the knowledge and expertise of experienced solicitors, while providing strong mentoring and engagement with early career lawyers. This is a key element in sustaining a thriving profession."

But what do these ideals translate to in practical terms?

Christine said assistance for members in building better business was essential in the realisation of these aims.

"We will pursue further reductions in Lexon insurance premiums and also work to improve access to tribunals for solicitors by the removal of barriers such as those that prevent solicitors appearing as advocates before the Queensland and Civil Administrative Tribunal.

"And expanding our QLS practice management support services and trust accounting support services is also key."

In advocacy, we will focus on policy development for good law through the work of the 27 QLS policy committees and continue to appear before government committees to advocate for – or against – proposed changes to laws.

Access to justice, a critical component of the justice landscape, will see us defending the courts themselves, the independence of the judiciary and the separation of powers. We will also pursue better resources for the courts to enable greater efficiencies in court processes and consequential cost reductions for clients, as well as seek better funding for legal aid and community legal centres.

"Technology will again be a significant focus for QLS," Christine said. "There are many issues that need to be addressed and we will advocate for resources and services for the legal profession around those issues. These include the impact of artificial intelligence on the profession and the threats presented by cyber-attacks and other security breaches.

"To assist in the development of better career pathways, we will aim to expand the Modern Advocate Lecture Series in a number of ways, including courses to help solicitors identify pathways to the bench."

Other important topics include harmonisation, particularly in terms of the regulations affecting firms practising across multiple jurisdictions, and the oversupply of graduates, which necessitates liaison with the universities and law school deans to explore potential solutions.

"Inclusivity is something we will aim to improve this year," Christine said. "This will include our new regional CPD roadshows and the creation of two new policy committees to address issues of importance to in-house and corporate solicitors, and those affecting the RRR (rural, regional and remote) firms.

"The mental health of our members will also continue to be a priority. We will enhance the role of our QLS Senior Counsellors to include mentoring of lawyers on career progression and practice assistance. We will also seek more female QLS Senior Counsellors and continue our engagement with the Tristan Jepson Memorial Foundation.

"A collegiate profession assists in this area, so we will aim to foster this through programs such as our Member Connect Breakfasts.



“Our communications to members are essential in bringing all these initiatives together, so we want to continue modernising and expanding our QLS communication channels. This will mean building on our use of social media and other platforms such as YouTube. Our use of webinars has been very successful, so I aim to see this program expanded.

“To reach the broader community, and elevate the profile and perceptions of the profession, we must also continue our active engagement with the mainstream press.”

For Christine herself, a partner at Gold Coast firm Robbins Watson Solicitors, stepping into the QLS presidency follows a substantial journey in not only developing her highly regarded professional skills but also returning something to the profession through her involvement with various professional bodies.

A QLS accredited specialist in succession law since 2009, Christine has had long involvement with the Society of Trust & Estate Practitioners Queensland Branch and some three years as a co-editor of the Lexis Nexis Retirement and Estate Planning Bulletin.

She has served on the Women Lawyers Association Queensland committee of management and, at QLS, has been a key member of many committees, including the Succession Law Committee, Proctor Editorial Committee, Symposium Succession Law Planning Committee and Specialist Accreditation Board.

Joining the QLS Council in 2014, Christine was elected deputy president for 2016, thereby stepping into the presidency in 2017.

As deputy, she was closely involved with many of our successes last year, including the launch of the Modern Advocate Lecture Series.

Christine, who has written the succession law column in *Proctor* since early 2013, revealed her passion for this area of law in a recent interview.

“I always thought of a lawyer as being a person who is there to champion the rights of those who can’t champion their own rights,” she said. “It’s something that has always been quite dear to me.

“When I became a lawyer, I discovered there’s a real difficulty in bringing the law, which is very complex, and in a lot of cases quite rigid, and applying it to a person’s life. Trying to help people navigate their way through the legal system is where I find a great deal of satisfaction. After all, we can do a lot to prevent things happening. But life happens at us. And the sooner you address it, the better your prospects of avoiding negative consequences later on.

“From working with people in preparing for their declining years, including their wills, to helping families cope with a complex legal landscape after a death, I’ve learnt that while we might accumulate a great deal of wealth or assets, the greatest thing we will leave behind are the relationships that we’ve created over a lifetime.”

---

John Teerds is the editor of *Proctor*.  
Image credits: © thebrandographers.com.au