

Opening Address by the Hon Chief Justice at the Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal Panel Seminar

President of the Law Society, Chairman, Panel Members, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted and honoured to be invited to speak at the opening of this Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal Panel Seminar.

I understand that the first seminar for the Tribunal Panel was held some nine years ago in October 1993 following the establishment of the Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal Panel as a separate body having independent statutory existence. At that time, the Disciplinary Tribunal had a panel of members consisting of 30 solicitors and 10 lay persons. Today, the Panel consists of 74 practising solicitors of at least 10 years' standing, one foreign lawyer and 39 lay persons who are not connected with the practice of law.

The growth in the size of the Panel reflects the growth in the profession and the importance attached to the work of the Panel by the legal profession and community as a whole.

To all the Panel Members, I am delighted that you have accepted appointment to serve on the Panel.

The most valuable and important asset of a profession is its collective reputation. All professions must take appropriate and effective measures to uphold high standards of professionalism. This is important for ensuring a high standard of service and for safeguarding the good reputation of the profession. The legal profession is no exception.

Being the regulator of the profession, you are the guardian of the proper standards of professional and ethical conduct. It is your duty to discipline a solicitor who is found after a fair hearing to have failed to observe these standards. Your work is crucial if the confidence of the public in the honesty, integrity and efficiency of the profession is to be maintained.

Your work is most important at all times. But at this time of economic downturn when competition for work is fierce, the need for vigilance in maintaining standards is even greater.

Both the professional members and the lay members of the Tribunal can make their own distinctive contribution to the work of the Tribunal. Each complaint submitted by the Council to the Tribunal Convenor is investigated by a Tribunal which comprises 2 solicitors and one lay person from the Panel. If the case concerns a foreign lawyer or an employee of a foreign lawyer, then the Tribunal will comprise 2 solicitors, one foreign lawyer and one lay person to investigate the matter. The professional members of the Tribunal can view each complaint against standards in its proper professional context. And the lay members can bring a lay perspective and also experience and skills from a wide range of backgrounds.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for serving the public interest by taking on this very important duty. I am confident that your commitment of your time, experience and expertise will contribute tremendously to the success of the mission of the Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal Panel.

It gives me great pleasure to declare this Disciplinary Tribunal Panel Seminar open.

15 March 2002