

# Housing now home to certified quality

"a highly successful and respected educational institution with its own financial viability".

He praised Richardson's leadership of the Society as he steered it into the unknown waters of voluntary membership and "achieved a membership rate which is the envy of professional associations, both legal and otherwise, here in Australia and overseas".

McIntyre spoke of Richardson's efforts after the collapse of HIH to protect solicitors from professional indemnity disaster, as did the NSW Attorney General Bob Debus. "His deft participation in negotiations concerning a rescue package and the creation of a better compulsory insurance regime spared many professionals what would otherwise have been certain financial and personal pain," Debus said.

Richardson provided "genuine and rational leadership" and was "an unabashed and, where necessary, a robust advocate for the profession", the Attorney General said: "He did not, however, engage in pointless battles. His lack of posturing made the government listen and accommodate the Society's concerns."

High Court Justice Michael Kirby, who as chair of the Australian Law Reform Commission gave Richardson his first job, spoke of the former CEO as a young man, "when he was a quiet, self-reproachful, very modest person recognised by someone and given a position which led on to fame and fortune".

John Dowd, NSW Attorney General when Richardson led the NSW Legal Aid Commission, said he was "an exemplary public servant" who "gave me good advice, sometimes whether I liked it or not".

"But in all of his doings there has never been any question about [his] integrity," the former Supreme Court judge said, "... nor the significance of what he has done." □

JULIE LEWIS

HE WORK CAN RANGE from advising on multi-million dollar public-private partnerships to freedom of information requests. The need for speed, quality and efficiency is paramount.

That's why the 40-strong team at the Legal Services Branch at the NSW Department of Housing were determined to put in place a quality assurance management system, and why earlier this year

ensuring that everyone in the organisation sticks to them.

It's often thought of as a scheme for private legal firms, but Greg Dwyer, director of practice development at the College of Law, said this view is wrong. "The basic tenet is that you are trying to get the best return on the resources available to a practice, and that can either be a private sector practice or it can be a public sector practice."

He said several more pub-

According to Dreis, the big difference between QLII and LAW 9000 is that the new scheme not only requires participants to have good administration systems in place but, during the certification audit, the auditor checks that the systems are being used in accordance with your policies and procedures. "I found that really useful," she said. Regular follow-up audits ensure the branch will stick to and improve its systems.



they became the first public legal office in Australia to gain LAW 9000 certification.

"It is really, really important for government to have accurate, timely and great legal advice," Colleen Dreis, the branch director, said. "We need to make sure the internal branch can provide that from its own resources and not just be a conduit for external legal providers."

The branch must rigorously account for how it makes decisions, practice manager Marisa Pacchiarotta said. "We are subject to risk arising from complaints to the Director General or the Ombudsman as well as ICAC inquiries and we need to ensure that all processes and decision making are very well documented and transparent."

LAW 9000 is a process of analysing the policies, practices and procedures that legal practitioners use to run their businesses, identifying where they can be improved to best serve clients, documenting the best practices to comply with the LAW 9000 categories, and then

**Marisa Pacchiarotta, Colleen Dreis (r to l) and the rest of the team at the Legal Services Branch at the NSW Department of Housing can match it with the best of the private providers.**

public sector organisations were looking at LAW 9000 certification. A working group set up to support public sector legal departments interested in quality certification was suspended about 18 months ago during the transition from the QL best practice scheme, LAW 9000's predecessor. Now that LAW 9000 was up and running, plans were afoot to reactivate it, Dwyer said.

The Department of Housing's Legal Services Branch gained certification under QLII, so Dreis and Pacchiarotta knew the benefits certification to LAW 9000 could bring. In particular, they felt it built team spirit and morale.

"To have external recognition and to say that we can match it with the external legal providers was really good," Dreis said. "And as a result of that, the staff felt good about themselves."

According to Pacchiarotta, an important part of successfully implementing LAW 9000 is setting the date by which you want to be certified: "If you don't set a date ... you could lose the momentum." It took the branch six months to be ready for certification.

Another tip is to make sure best practice is always on the agenda.

"Keep the communication up," she said. "You need to go back and say, 'Look how much you have achieved. Look, we are halfway there.' You need to keep that incentive up."

You also need the right person coordinating the project. "Marisa was very, very patient," Dreis said. "You have to have someone who is persistent and tenacious, but .... very kind, and won't judge you for losing that first set of documents you needed to comment on." □

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