

Graduation address: Mitchell Davies

Hon Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Colleagues of the Cayman Judiciary, Hon Deputy Governor, Hon Members of Cabinet, Hon Attorney-General, Graduands, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I beg your further attention on behalf of the Legal Advisory Council which I chair and the Hon Attorney General, to offer this tribute.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to reflect, for a few minutes, on a not insignificant anniversary that occurs this month. For it was 30 years ago that the Director of Truman Bodden Law School, Mitchell Davies, first arrived in Cayman.

Mitchell (or Mitch as we affectionately call him) arrived as one of the few lecturers at what was then known as the Cayman Islands Law School under its first Director of Legal Studies, Peter Rowe. The school was then housed in very modest quarters on the upper floor of the Court Building. Peter Rowe returned to the UK shortly after Mitchell arrived (although he assures me there was no connection).

The Law School did not have a large number of students or staff then but even fewer than today, and lecturers were expected, as now, to cover a fairly broad range of subjects. Indeed, all TBLS students are still able to benefit from Mitch in the classroom as he still contributes to the teaching of Criminal Law in the first year of the LLB, as well as his more specialist Conflicts of Laws modules on both the LLB and LLM.

As most of us will recall and others might imagine, Cayman was a different place 30 years ago. And so, ever the Englishman, Mitch would keep tabs on events that were occurring in the UK, even if this required listening to the BBC World Service on a radio on the roof of his house, pretty much the only place he could receive a signal!

At that time, the Law School was more or less still in its infancy. Just two years after arriving, in 1992, Mitch successfully applied for the post of Director of Legal Studies. He is, in fact, only the fourth Director in the history of the School, following David James (who succeeded Peter Rowe) and Rick Findlay. And, after 30 years, Mitch remains in that post to this day.

Under his leadership, the Law School has grown from strength to strength. The link with the University of Liverpool remains that University's longest-lasting overseas partnership and, like all marriages, it has its ups and downs but the relationship remains in robust health. It is a credit to the Islands and a remarkable thing, that students need not leave Cayman to obtain a degree from a UK Russell Group university.

Senior management from the University came for their regular 5-yearly inspection visit in March last year. The visit went well and, in the University's words in the final report, 'The relationship between TBLS and the University of Liverpool continued to be positive and underpinned a successful partnership'. The students here today, as well as their illustrious predecessors (including I know he won't mind my saying, such as the Hon Deputy Governor, who is also here today), benefit from varied and high quality career opportunities due to having earned a Liverpool degree.

For many years, the undergraduate LLB was the only programme offered by Liverpool through TBLS. More recently, 2017 saw the first cohort of Masters in Law students embark on their studies at the Law School. The Law School had turned into a 'grown-up' institution, capable of offering academic postgraduate education to the same high standard as the University of Liverpool itself.

2017 was indeed a busy year for the Law School. Mitch oversaw the validation of the long-established Professional Practice Course by Oxford Brookes University in the UK. Receiving the stamp of approval

from that University added another partnership to the Law School and showed that the local Course could more than match up to equivalent Legal Practice Courses offered in the UK.

But it is not just law courses, however good they are, that make the Law School central to the life of the legal profession in Cayman. There are numerous other examples of how the School interacts with the legal community: for instance, it has hosted the educational series of lectures put on by the Caymanian Bar Association (now CILPA) for some years. Mitch has supplemented those by arranging guest speakers from Canada, America and the UK to visit on a regular basis to teach students the finer points on dispute resolution or judicial decision-making. He ensures staff are kept on their toes by arranging seminars from overseas academics, which are often also to the benefit of members of the wider Portfolio of Legal Affairs. He, and his colleagues, are on hand whenever required by the wider Portfolio, to help with recruitment to the Portfolio, as well as briefing on the requirements of legal education.

TBLS is also involved in overseas activities as well. For a number of years, the School sent a team of students to Vienna to participate in the Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot. And students may participate in the American and Caribbean Law Initiative project, led by Stetson University in Florida, which enables the students to develop their negotiation and analytical skills. Speaking of Stetson, the links that Mitch has forged with them have seen them visit Cayman for a number of years every January to offer a programme of activities in TBLS and across the Island for not only their students and students from a number of other different American universities, but TBLS students as well.

Throughout his 30 years, Mitch has had to deal with his fair share of challenges. The events of 11th and 12th September 2004 will always be remembered by those of us here when Hurricane Ivan struck. The damage meant that the former home of the Law School, the Tower

Building, was rendered uninhabitable. But in short order, and thanks to the local firms rallying round in those pre-Zoom days, Mitch arranged classes for the student cohort with little disruption to their studies. Something similar happened just this year when the Law School was closed overnight in March due to COVID-19 concerns. Nonetheless, students were able to benefit from classes held on-line and their learning continued with a minimum of disruption. On a day-to-day basis, the patience and time he has dedicated to the student cohort are a true credit to the teacher in him.

Mitch also serves as convener of the LAC which has regulatory oversight of the TBLS. The fact that he has unerringly guided us through more than 150 meetings over the years speaks for itself.

Of course, Mitch cannot, and does not, run the Law School single-handedly. He has benefitted from capable colleagues over the years helping him deal with the day-to-day trials and tribulations that occur when running any business. For 14 or so years, his right-hand woman was Deborah Barker-Roye, (who is also here today) and, working together, they forged a strong partnership for the smooth operation of the Law School. At home, the support offered by his wife Shevaun and his family should not go unmentioned – behind every great man and all that – and one should not underestimate the pressures that a senior manager often has to deal with and how his family keeps him sane at the same time.

I am told that just a few weeks ago, Mitch celebrated a significant Birthday. For him, 2020 marks both that Birthday and an equally significant period of time that he has spent at the Law School in Cayman. Both are achievements worth marking. It is not impossible, but admittedly unlikely, that he will spend another 30 years as Director although we look forward to seeing him around in Cayman for at least that length of time. He has guided the Law School with patience, diligence and conscientiousness since 1990 and it is

appropriate that we take a moment to thank him for that in the usual way, with a standing ovation.

Thank you very much.

Hon Anthony Smellie
Chief Justice
Chairman, Legal Advisory Council

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