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Celebrating John Kearney's contribution to the Bond Faculty of Law

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Celebrating John Kearney's contribution to the Bond Faculty of Law

Abstract

We are very much saddened by John's passing, but with this Special Issue of the Bond Law Review and its mix of reminiscences and more scholarly articles, we celebrate just one aspect of John's life and work: his membership of the Bond Law Faculty community. His presence and support made a great difference to us, and his passing is a great loss. This Special Issue is intended as a permanent tribute to John.

Keywords

Bond University, benefactor, philanthropy, law school

CELEBRATING JOHN KEARNEY QC AM'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE LAW FACULTY

PROFESSOR WILLIAM VAN CAENEGEM*

John Kearney QC AM, Doctor *Honoris Causa* of Bond University, was a long-standing and generous friend of Bond, and particularly, of the Law Faculty. He and his family supported the Faculty in many ways, starting with an important gift which allowed us to fit out the first Moot Court 25 years ago with splendid hand-carved furniture. His other projects included support for the Law Library, the new Moot Courts in the Skills Centre, and scholarships for Bond Law students studying overseas.

I remember the goodwill and enthusiasm which John brought to the establishment of the Bond Law Faculty in the early days. They were lively times, and faculty staff were regularly invited to his home Jabiru, to debate the issues and challenges we faced, to plan, and to enjoy the Kearneys' fine hospitality. John clearly derived great pleasure from meeting and entertaining us there, and his charm and wit always added to the memories of those occasions. He was an urbane and knowledgeable man living in a place that was, at that time, known more for its enterprise and energy than its sophistication and style. He appreciated the fact that his home had become a focal point for the law staff, most newly-arrived from all corners of the world.

John and Alison valued enterprise and innovation and they were delighted that Bond Law had that in plenty. They valued excellence, too, and they funded the award of the *Gold Medal in Law* for the most brilliant student in the graduating year. They were also internationalists. John was a pioneer in his awareness of the globalisation of law and lawyers. He saw this new Law School as a potential international star in legal education, and was unflinching in his encouragement.

He and Alison gave us much moral support during some of the trying times the University community had to endure in the first years. When the university's occupation of the purpose-built Robina campus was under threat – the university had been left without a signed lease over the campus land – John's legal nous and robustness stood his favourite law school and the university in good stead.

An unstinting supporter of the faculty, his generosity never faltered, then or at any moment. Although John also supported law at neighbouring institutions and sponsored other causes, his heart stayed with Bond, and the law faculty in particular.

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John was not satisfied with mere advice, nor did he dismiss the real financial problems we faced at times: he and the Kearney family made generous and practical donations that enabled various innovative projects to see the light of day, such as the unique Legal Skills Centre adjacent to the foundation law school building.

In this way John made a real and lasting contribution to the Bond faculty, but also to legal education more generally. The Bond law faculty was a pioneering one, effectively changing the face of legal education in this country, and John was one of those who enabled us to put important innovations, such as legal skills training, especially the emphasis on advocacy, into effect.

It should be remembered that such financial contributions as John and Alison made are rare in this country. With a few well-appreciated exceptions, large law firms do not donate generously to the law faculties, even though they benefit from and like to be concerned with our work. Individuals equally tend to prefer different causes. In terms of philanthropists' priorities, law does not rate highly. Perhaps lawyers are seen as rather too ubiquitous and also quite capable of looking after themselves. But this is a misguided attitude, contrasting unflatteringly with the generosity enjoyed by law faculties in the United States. Substantial donations there have enabled very influential and significant institutions to develop and contribute to the rule of law in that country, and around the world. They have enabled some of the most prominent and admired research and educational institutions in the world to develop and shine.

Law should be higher on the list of priorities, as the rule of law and an effective legal system is recognised as central to peaceful, fair and efficient government and development of society. How often do we lament the absence of the rule of law, of independent courts and lawyers, and recognise it as one of the main causes of poverty and inequality in otherwise rich countries! And a functioning and effective legal system is made up of lawyers, who were all once law students. It is during their time at universities that these individuals are instilled with the attitudes, independent spirit, critical minds and knowledge of the law that enable them to make such a central contribution to society.

If a law faculty is to produce more than narrow technicians who comply with the minimum standards for admission, then philanthropy makes a crucial difference. It makes it possible to deliver the icing on the cake – the broader, deeper education that produces graduates with more than the minimum technical skills required, more than just a narrow interest in their own careers.

In this respect the Kearney family's contributions are a concrete example of what a great difference a generous spirit with an understanding of the importance of the law can make. Thanks to John and Alison the law faculty can offer many of its students those additional layers of education, honing their skills in mootings, mock trials, ADR

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techniques and international legal problem-solving that add so much to their experience and to their education. It all adds up to individual graduates who are able to contribute more to the good of society.

Instinctively and through long immersion, John was deeply attuned to the world of the law. He revelled in it. On the other hand, he was also a key figure in the economic development of the Gold Coast and in particular its southern end around Robina and Mudgeeraba. But, despite his support for local development, John was not a parochial man. He recognised how unique the Law Faculty actually was, not just in Gold Coast or Queensland terms, but also more widely, in Australia and the world. He enthusiastically shared our ambition, and his vision was as universal and international as ours. He never saw the university and the faculty as a mere local institution servicing only regional students: he loved the presence of staff and students from all over the world, which made this such a vibrant place in the early days of our establishment. He liked to hear about the efforts made to interest students overseas in Bond, our then varied international contacts, and the way our graduates fanned out all over the globe.

John and Alison were a talented, formidable and close couple, who gave each other and the wider Bond community much strength and inspiration. John's steady involvement with the faculty will be greatly missed. His memory lives on in the Law Faculty to whose survival and prosperity he made such a great contribution.

We are very much saddened by John's passing, but with this Special Issue of the *Bond Law Review* and its mix of reminiscences and more scholarly articles, we celebrate just one aspect of John's life and work: his membership of the Bond Law Faculty community. His presence and support made a great difference to us, and his passing is a great loss. This *Special Issue* is intended as a permanent tribute to John.