

ABOUT ASHURST ALUMNI

Alumni news

Catch up on the latest news about Ashurst and Blake Dawson alumni.



If you are an alum of the firm who has started a new position, won an award or perhaps moved into a different career path then please let us know, we'd love to hear from you. Please email us at alumni@ashurst.com.

Achievements and appointments

Congratulations to our alumni on their recent achievements and new appointments.

SYDNEY: HIS HONOUR JUDGE PETER JOHNSTONE APPOINTED CHIEF MAGISTRATE OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES LOCAL COURT. ^



Congratulations to Sydney alumnus, His Honour Judge Peter Johnstone (Partner, Sydney until 2006) on his appointment as Chief Magistrate of the New South Wales Local Court. The appointment was made by fellow alum Attorney General The Hon. Mark Speakman, (pictured with Judge Johnstone).

The New South Wales Local Court has the largest number of judicial officers in a summary jurisdiction in Australia. The Chief Magistrate is the principal judicial officer.

Judge Johnstone was admitted to practice in 1973 and became a partner at Dawson Waldron (now Ashurst) just four years later. He quickly rose to become National Chief Operating Partner in 2001 before leaving the firm to become a full-time judge of the District court in 2006. Since 2012 Judge Johnstone has led the Children's Court of NSW as its President. He has also held additional roles as a part-time NSW Law Reform Commissioner and Deputy Chair of the Medical Tribunal of NSW.

What is your favourite memory from your time at the firm?

It is difficult to identify one single thing after 35 years at the firm. I remember fondly the culture of collegiality, teamwork and mutual support, and the making of many enduring friendships, and the environment that enabled me to grow, learn and develop as a person and as a practitioner. I particularly enjoyed my terms as Managing Partner, especially my three years as Melbourne Managing Partner. The annual recruitment of graduate solicitors was always a thoroughly rewarding program. I helped recruit Paul Jenkins through this process! My favourite client was the Federal Airports Corporation, who took me to London several times for the renewal of the Sydney Airport Operator's Liability Insurance Program. In terms of matters, I enjoyed working with John Kench on several high profile Trade Practices cases, and with Bill Conley on the long-running Adler/Ganke litigation, and with Elizabeth (M) Johnstone on privatising the NSW Crown Solicitor's Office. But my favourite was working with Mark Buchanan redrafting all the insurance policy wordings for the NSW Government Insurance Office following the introduction of the Insurance Contracts Act (Cth) 1974.

LONDON: CAROLINE RAYSON APPOINTED HEAD OF PROGRAMMES (SOLICITOR TRAINING COURSE) AT BPP UNIVERSITY ^



Congratulations to London alum Caroline Rayson (Associate until 2007) on her new role as Head of Programmes (Solicitor Training Course) at BPP University Law School.

Congratulations on the new role. Tell us a little about it.

Thank you! The way in which solicitors are trained in England and Wales changed fundamentally on 1 September 2021. Subject to transitional arrangements, the well-worn path of LPC plus training contract will no longer be possible in the years to come. Instead, future solicitors will be required to pass a series of centrally set exams in both knowledge subjects and skills, alongside a period of qualifying work experience with up to four employers.

My new role is to head up the programmes which BPP has designed in response to these very significant changes. As part of the design process, we have worked with client firms to determine the skills and competencies which a trainee solicitor will need in the years to come. As such, the new programmes will combine preparing students for the SRA's centrally set exams with ensuring that they have the practical training they need to be an effective member of the firm from day 1.

What do you love most about working in legal education?

The most compelling aspect of working in legal education is the students themselves. It is a privilege to engage with and help to mould these young people as they approach the world of work. I still have strong memories of the tutors who inspired me when I studied at Guildford and would like to hope that I have been able to do the same for my students.

What was your biggest learning curve on entering a career within legal education?

I hadn't realised until I moved into legal education that teaching is a form of performance: in a certain way, the classroom is the stage and the staff room is the wings. My task as a new tutor was to find my own voice in that environment. I found that this came fairly naturally but it certainly marked a change from drafting prospectuses.

What new skills do you think lawyers need to develop for the future?

I think that lawyers will need to be increasingly commercially aligned with their clients in the future. It is no longer sufficient to be a good solicitor in a silo: lawyers need to understand how and why their work will add value to their client's business. This may, of course, include helping the client to understand the value that the legal work adds.

In addition, with increased remote working, young lawyers are likely to have fewer opportunities to learn by example from their supervisors and colleagues. They will need to actively seek opportunities to understand the law as it is practised and refine their judgement. As such, more than ever, communication skills, adaptability and resilience will be crucial to the lawyers of the future.

What is your favourite Ashurst memory?

My favourite Ashurst memory is the fabulous completion party for Project Warren which took place at the Natural History Museum in 2002. Think flaming torches lining the front steps of the museum, a fantastic live band and an evening spent among the dinosaurs. As a trainee, the whole event was more than a little mind-blowing: what I didn't appreciate then was that times were already changing and that the rest of my career would not see too many other events on that scale!

LONDON: DENVA POYNTZ JOINED RIO TINTO AS REGIONAL HEAD OF COMMERCIAL LEGAL - PACIFIC IN BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA 



Congratulations to London alum Denva Poyntz (Senior Associate until 2015) who recently joined Rio Tinto as Regional Head of Commercial Legal - Pacific in Brisbane, Australia. Since leaving Ashurst, Denva has had an extensive career and held a number of senior positions, including a General Counsel role during her time in the Middle East.



Congratulations to Melbourne alum Kerry Gleeson (Senior Associate until 2004) on being appointed to the Chrysos Corporation Board as a Non-Executive Director.

You recently joined the Chrysos Corporation Board as a Non-Executive Director. Tell us a little about this new role?

I was appointed to the Chrysos Corporation Board in July this year. I am also a member of the Audit and Risk Committee and ESG Committee. Chrysos is at an exciting time in its corporate history- it holds PhotonAssay technology which is used in the mining industry, particularly in gold analysis. PhotonAssay is an environmentally friendly replacement for fire assays with reduced Co2 emissions and less hazardous waste. The Company has just completed a \$50 million private placement to support its growth trajectory with an IPO planned in 2022.

You hold a number of board positions in a variety of very different organisations. What do you enjoy most about this work?

I am also on the Board of two other companies in the mining industry- St Barbara Limited and New Century Limited as well as being Chair of Trinity College, University of Melbourne - a very varied portfolio which I enjoy. This variation of industry sector ranges from mining, technology and education and encompasses the differing strategic opportunities presented by the entity although there will be some commonalities, for example international drivers on performance, or issues like responding to ESG matters, or indeed in recent times, COVID-19.

How do you juggle the varying roles and responsibilities that come with sitting on multiple boards?

Ahhh, a lot of good diary and time management!

It's important to always bear in mind that being a director is a 24-hour role. Aside from the scheduled Board and Committee meetings, there can be times when additional meetings are needed, for example on major corporate transactions or in responding to a global pandemic, and so you need to have flexibility to be able to meet those requirements. Being well prepared and informed on the business, its strategies, risks and opportunities is important. I also like to stay abreast on much broader issues relevant to the industry sectors for my Boards such as macroeconomic matters, specific industry or regulatory developments or on matters such as ESG and safety.

What advice would you give to lawyers thinking about taking on Board roles?

Lawyers have the requisite skills to make good directors, aside from their focus on compliance and good governance I see lawyers able to both analyse complex facts and to consider different perspectives and engage in robust debate and discussion. There is an important transition to be made from being an adviser to being more of a collaborator. It is a lawyer's commercial experience gained through private practice or in-house that will be valuable to a Board and not necessarily the deep knowledge you may have in a particular legal discipline. My advice would be to look for a Board role that is best suited to your particular skills, and, importantly, in an industry sector you find interesting.

What is your favourite Ashurst memory?

I have so many happy memories from my Ashurst days and could easily slip down Memory Lane. I joined the firm, then known as Blake Dawson Waldron, in August 1999, straight from the UK where I had been a Partner of an English law firm. It was a "sliding door moment" that led me to where I am now. I had just returned from maternity leave and a partner, Tony Greenwood, came to my office and asked me if I would work on a small matter - that small matter turned into the merger between Incitec and Pivot Limited. A year later I was appointed as General Counsel and Company Secretary of Incitec Pivot, a role which I held for almost 10 years and which saw the Company expand into mining and explosives, hence my interest in the mining industry today. It seems a long, long time since I first was admitted as a lawyer and used to run along Fleet Street in London to the Royal Courts of Justice to now where I find myself very comfortable in steel toe capped boots and Hi Viz!



Congratulations to Perth alum Rebecca Shanahan (Senior Associate until 2016) who was recently promoted to Regional Legal Counsel at Gold Field.

Congratulations on the new role. Tell us a little about it and what you think the biggest challenge will be?

Thank you! I've recently taken on the position of Regional Legal Counsel for our Australian operations. In this role, I'll have primary responsibility for all our land access matters – including approvals, tenements, native title and heritage. While it's predominantly a legal role, I'll also be managing our tenement team and working closely with our sustainable development teams both in our Perth office and on site. I'll continue to work closely with the rest of our legal team on business as usual legal matters and other projects as they come up.

The biggest challenge for me at the moment is coming into this role on a part time basis, as I've just returned from parental leave. It's very easy to take on a full time load without realising, and so having good boundaries in place and open channels of communication with the team is critical. I'm lucky I have a fantastic boss (our Vice President of Legal and Compliance) and work with a great team of women, many of whom are also doing the juggle! So I couldn't be in a more supportive environment.

The mining and resources industry is constantly changing and evolving. What do you think the key issues and changes over the next 3-5 years will be?

I have seen a big shift in our business over the last five years towards greater awareness of ESG matters, and I can't see that focus getting any less in the coming years. As an industry, we need to respond to heightened community expectations about how we operate – it's no longer acceptable to do things how we've always done them. To me, this represents a huge opportunity and I'm excited to work on some of the initiatives that Gold Fields is progressing, including powering our mines with renewables, increasing our commitments to Indigenous communities and collaborating across industries to make real change.

Do you have any tips for lawyers wanting to make the move to an in-house role?

Be prepared to wear many hats! Something that I have loved about moving to an in-house role is the changing nature of the work and learning about all the different aspects of the company. Getting closer to the business was always interesting to me – this was part of the reason I started my MBA while at Ashurst, and I have found what I learned in that course really complemented my existing skills and helped progress to my current role.

Being an in-house lawyer forces you to become more commercial, and really balance different views – while at the same time sticking to your guns when it comes to the important legal issues. For this reason, it's important to cultivate good relationships so that you are seen as someone who can help out in difficult situations, rather than as a blocker. This forces you to get to know people and understand what they do – which in my case, means taking trips out to site, which I absolutely love!

What has been the biggest life lesson you have learned in your career so far?

Run your own race – it's easy to compare yourself to others, but in the end you are only competing with yourself! Make sure you understand what is important to you, and build your life and career around that.

What is your favourite Ashurst memory?

I have many great memories of my time at Ashurst – mainly around our team lolly table (a dangerous habit, especially when a long day of due diligence stretched ahead!) or at our many team functions. I am still friends with people that I met while working at Ashurst – some of whom I continue to work with now, although this time as the client! Those relationships, the support and the learning I experienced while working at Ashurst are things that I will always value in my career.



Congratulations to Sydney alum Luke Heilbuth (Paralegal until 2005) on his recent promotion to CEO of BWD, a sustainability advisory firm

Congratulations on the new role. Tell us a little about it and what you are most excited about.

BWD is an advisory firm that specialises in sustainable business strategy. We work with blue-chip corporate clients around the world and have offices in Sydney and New York.

Our strategy is to focus on doing just a few things well. It works for us, because our clients know they are dealing with a team who has genuine expertise in what they do. Niching positions us favourably relative to larger competitors, who may not have the same level of focus. Experience helps, too. Sustainability is now the flavour of the month, but we've been doing it for 20 years.

As CEO, I'm excited by the prospect of building on the extraordinary skillset we have in-house, and becoming internationally renowned for our climate, biodiversity, double materiality, investor benchmarking and corporate reporting knowledge.

I'm also keen for us to be ambitious in living our purpose, which is to partner with business to shape a better future. To give one example, we're implementing a science-based net zero roadmap for 2030, and have free resources to help larger companies follow our lead.

Reading the paragraph above may make your eyes roll. Fair enough. It's PR spin for many businesses. But we monetise sustainable outcomes for a living. If we don't abide by the highest standards of ethical behaviour, transparency and impact, we don't deserve to be here.

Finally, I'm excited by the prospect of combining technological innovation with sustainability. Our long-term vision is to build a digital platform and marketplace where companies can take care of all their ESG and reporting needs in one place. We've already solved some of the technical challenges around systematising our corporate knowledge, and we're looking forward to bringing a product to market in the years ahead.

Tell us a little bit about your career journey from paralegal at Ashurst to CEO of BWD Strategic.

I was a paralegal at Ashurst (then Blake Dawson Waldron) for two years while completing my law degree at the University of Sydney. I decided early on that corporate law wasn't the path for me. So I joined the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as a graduate.

Some highlights included working on Somali terrorism and piracy while based in Nairobi, learning Arabic full-time for two years, and serving as a diplomat in Lebanon during the Arab Spring, mostly covering the war in Syria.

I also worked in the Foreign Minister's Office, and was seconded for two years to the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet. In that role, I wrote speeches for the Prime Minister on foreign and strategic policy, oversaw Cabinet processes, and coordinated briefings for the Prime Minister's meetings with President Obama and dozens of other world leaders.

Leaving public service was a tough decision. But I've never looked back. I wanted to work on the issue (climate change) that I considered most meaningful to my kids' futures. And I also wanted to have greater control over my career. It's difficult to be innovative in the bureaucracy – good ideas routinely die because senior bureaucrats and politicians are incentivised to minimise their personal exposure to risk.

What's the best career advice that you've been given?

My dad taught me from a young age to treat everybody with kindness, and to never act as if I was better than someone else. While it's true that transactional people often get ahead career-wise, they end up sabotaging their ability to find long-term happiness because they don't understand the importance of relationships.

Life is short. These days, I insist on working only with good people who believe in mutual respect. Naval sums it up when he says, "play long-term games with long-term people. All returns in life, whether in wealth, relationships, or knowledge, come from compound interest." I don't always get it right. But I try to make every decision in life with the idea of compounding in mind.

You are currently in lockdown in Sydney. How are you managing life in lockdown and what is the biggest lesson you have learnt from the past year?

Lockdown has been challenging for us, just like for everyone else. My wife and I worry our children (6 and 8) are not getting the socialisation they need. And it's obviously tough balancing work and home schooling.

But we try to reframe our experience as an opportunity to practice gratitude, and to pass that sentiment on to

our children. After all, we have access to bushland on our back doorstep. To electricity, shelter, clean water and delicious food. Our family is healthy and together, bonded in love.

I spent many years talking with Syrian refugees living in appalling conditions in Lebanon. Their stories were horrifying. Many had lost everything. Their sons and husbands conscripted or brutally killed. While not wishing to trivialise the real mental health impacts of lockdown, it helps me keep things in perspective. Australia is a paradise. Its citizens are quite literally among the luckiest people to have ever lived. And I am lucky, even by Australian standards. I count my blessings every day.

What is your favourite Ashurst memory?

I was hired by Elizabeth Broderick, then a partner at Blake Dawson Waldron. I still remember how authentic, charismatic and impressive she was, well before she rose to national fame. In our interview, I asked if I could do something impactful if I was accepted into the internship programme. She subsequently arranged a rotation with the pro-bono team, where I worked with senior lawyers helping Indigenous kids in youth detention. Seventeen years have passed, but I still remember the experience.

MILAN: CATCH UP WITH URBANO CINTI



Milan alum Urbano Cinti (Lawyer until 2009) is the Reference Legal Counsel for the second largest Italian multi-utility company, A2A S.p.A., assisting in co-development projects and M&A transactions.

We caught up Urbano to find out about his career since leaving Ashurst and why he loves working in-house.

Read the interview [here](#).

Forums and events

We are delighted to welcome our alumni to participate in Ashurst forums and events.

ASHURST EMERGING ARTIST PRIZE 2021 - WINNERS ANNOUNCED

Ashurst and Oaktree & Tiger are pleased to announce the winners of the Ashurst Emerging Artist Prize 2021.

The prize has been hugely successful receiving almost 4,700 artworks submitted by over 2,000 international artists, from all around the world including South Korea, China, France, Argentina, Pakistan, Ireland, America, Japan, Australia, Canada and the UK.

Five winners were selected from the 30 shortlisted artists, receiving £10,000 worth of prizes and solo exhibitions. [View the winners here](#).

Thank you to all of our alumni who voted in the Choice Award.

In memoriam

We are very sad to share the below news about the loss of two members of our Ashurst family.

JEREMY HILL



Jeremy Hill joined Ashurst Morris Crisp & Co as an articled clerk in 1982 after attending Oxford. Jeremy was a partner in the Corporate Department in London from 1992-2003 and a member of the Management Board. He sadly passed away in March 2020, after a short illness just as lockdown began. Jeremy specialised in insurance law, and was widely regarded as a leading UK and cross border transactional lawyer. Following an early secondment to Lloyd's of London, he built up a group of colleagues specialising in all aspects of commercial law and he was highly regarded in the profession for his legal skills and by Chambers as a Senior Statesman for non-contentious insurance work.

Jeremy joined US firm Debevoise & Plimpton as a Corporate Partner and Global Co-Chair of the Financial Institutions Group, spending fourteen years at the firm. Jeremy had recently joined

Mayer Brown on a consultancy basis prior to planned retirement, working there with a former AMC colleague

A man of strong views, Jeremy had very high standards, both for himself and others, his fierce intelligence made him a formidable practitioner. Never afraid to roll his sleeves up, he was regarded by those who worked for him with enduring affection. Jeremy was a highly amusing man and totally loyal to his friends. He will be very sadly missed.

PHILIP SIMONS

We are sad to share the news that Philip Simons has recently passed away.

Philip was a partner in our Sydney office from 1977 – 2001 and is remembered fondly by his former colleagues as a great partner and a great man.

Firm Friends yearbook

Our yearbook contains a selection of articles and interviews with alumni from across our global network. If you would like to feature in our next edition please get in touch with alumni@ashurst.com.

[READ FIRM FRIENDS 2022](#)

Alumni contact

If you have any questions or you need to update your contact details, please email alumni@ashurst.com or get in touch with Nikki.



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