Shaping the Future

The Honourable Dame Susan Glazebrook DNZM[1]

I start with the basic principle that must underpin our discussions at this important conference: respect for the rule of law. In 2012 the General Assembly of the United Nations said the rule of law was of "fundamental importance for political dialogue and cooperation among all States and for the further development of the three main pillars upon which the United Nations is built: international peace and security, human rights and development."[2] The "New Vision for the Rule of Law", an initiative of the Secretary-General, reiterates the "commitment [of the United Nations] to the rule of law as a principle of governance" and acknowledges "the interrelatedness of the rule of law with all human rights." The New Vision is grounded on already agreed documents and "addresses the connection between the rule of law and several key contemporary issues, including technology, the planet, human rights, and access to justice."[3]

The International Institute for Justice Excellence's *International Compendium of Goals to Attain Excellence in the Administration of Justice* also emphasises the importance of the rule of law, stating that a well-functioning justice system plays a "pivotal role in maintaining order, protecting rights, ensuring fairness and upholding the rule of law".[4] Good administration of justice is also an essential tool in combating corruption, allowing the delivery of timely justice, tackling backlogs and maintaining public confidence in the justice system.

---

1 Acting Judge of the New Zealand Supreme Court| Te Kōti Mana Nui o Aotearoa. This address was given at the Conference "Building Strategic Alignments for a More Effective Administration of Justice" held at the Royal University for Women in Bahrain on 19 September 2026 in conjunction with the International Institute for Justice Excellence.

2 Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 24 September 2012: Declaration of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the rule of law at the national and international levels. See also the recent speech on the economic value of the rule of law by Lord Hamblen, "The Importance of the Rule of Law for Development and Economic Prosperity" Public Lecture given on 18 September 2026 during the visit of the United Kingdom Judicial Delegation to Kathmandu, Nepal.

3 "New Vision for the Rule of Law" instigated by the Secretary-General: see at un.org, What is the Rule of Law | United Nations and the Rule of Law.

4 International Institute for Justice Excellence, *International Compendium of Goals to Attain Excellence in the Administration of Justice* [*Compendium*], 3 June 2026, at 3 to be found at www.iije.org.

Judicial independence is a vital component of the rule of law.[5] The same applies to a strong and independent legal profession.[6] In 2025 the Salzburg Global Cutler Center for the Rule of Law, in partnership with the International Bar Association, released a statement on the Critical Role of Lawyers in Safeguarding the Rule of Law. It says:[7]

> Upholding the Rule of Law is a whole-of-society endeavor. No one is above the law, and it is our shared responsibility to hold all those who would subvert or undermine the Rule of Law to account. Lawyers play a particularly fundamental role in the defense of the Rule of Law and have an ethical and professional duty to preserve it.

It is trite to say that law students are the lawyers of the future and that they must be properly prepared to shape the future of justice and to uphold the rule of law in their countries and globally. This is recognised in Goal 4 of the *Compendium of Goals,* which outlines some practical measures that can be taken to ensure students are practice-ready, including that law schools should adapt their curricula to include skills, such as advocacy, witness examination, Alternative Dispute Resolution, negotiation and client interviewing.[8] I interpolate that such experiential based learning can lead to students having the opportunity to compete in international competitions in order to hone their skills and to learn from and benchmark themselves against their colleagues globally.[9]

Learning by observation is also important. As one example, my Court, the Supreme Court of New Zealand | Te Kōti Mana Nui o Aotearoa has instituted a student outreach program. This involves students sitting in on the hearing of an appeal and then meeting with the judges and

---

5 *Compendium* Goal One at 6. See also "Basis Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary", Adopted 6 September 1985 by the Seventh United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders" held in Milan from 26 August to 6 September 1985.

6 "Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers" adopted on 7 September 1990 by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Havana, Cuba.

7 The Statement reflects a consensus among the Salzburg Global Fellows who attended the Salzburg Global session convened by the Salzburg Global Cutler Center for the Rule of Law in partnership with the International Bar Association on "Safeguarding Democracy and the Rule of Law: The Crucial Role of Rising International Lawyers" in March 2025. The views expressed in the statement are those of the individual fellows and should not be taken to represent those of any organizations with which they are affiliated.

8 See for example Ashley Jones Hall, "Student Note: The Art of Advocacy Revealed through Law School Curriculum" (2025) 54(1) Journal of Law & Education.

9 Such as the Philip C Jessup International Law Moot Court competition, the Nelson Mandela World Human Rights Moot Court Competition, The William C Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot and the Red Cross International Humanitarian Law Moot and the International Negotiation Competition. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the New Zealand Law Students' Association holds competitions in each university and then a national competition: see www.nzlsa.com.

counsel after the hearing. We try and pick cases that fit within the curriculum and that are likely to be of particular interest to students. For example, the first case concerned whether nuisance and negligence claims against alleged emitters should be struck out, an appeal of obvious relevance to environmental law students.[10]

To prepare the students, a short video is circulated before the hearing. In that video, one of the judges and each of the counsel briefly explain the issues in the case. We are very grateful that counsel have been prepared to do this as, of course, they are very busy. But they, like us, see the importance of this program for future lawyers. The video provides the necessary background for the students to read the judgment appealed from and counsel's submissions (which are now usually put up on the Ngā Kōti o Aotearaoa | Courts of New Zealand website if there are no suppression issues).[11] The students then attend the hearing, which gives them the opportunity to see the law in action through hearing the oral submissions made by counsel and observing the interactions between counsel and the bench.

The program finishes with afternoon tea where students have the chance to meet informally with judges and counsel (to show the human face of the courts). This is followed by a question-and-answer session in the courtroom where the students can ask question of both judges and counsel. This of course does not include questions on the particular case or overtly political questions. These sessions have gone well and I think have been one of the most valuable parts of the program. The questions asked by the students have all been thoughtful and sometimes quite challenging to answer.[12]

---

10 *Smith v Fonterra* [2024] NZSC 5, [2024] 1 NZLR 134.

11 <www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/>.

12 The student outreach program is just one of the many initiatives in Aotearoa/New Zealand to make the courts more accessible and to improve public understanding of the justice system. For a discussion of some of other measures see "Beneath the blindfold: responsive to society or caving to pressure?" (Constitutional Law Forum at the 65th annual conference of the International Association of Judges (IAJ) and its 70th Anniversary) available on the courtsofnz website. Similar measures have been instituted by courts in other jurisdictions.

Another way of students gaining practical experience is through legal clinics supervised by practising lawyers. These can involve legal advice to students on campus, concentrating on issues of particular interest to students, such as employment, tenancy and health issues. Or they can involve advice to the general public, including in community law centres or through investigating cases of alleged miscarriages of justice, like the legal clinics associated with the Innocence Project in the United States.[13] These clinics also encourage students to respect and embrace one of the long-standing traditions of the legal profession – public service.

These clinics can also be of real benefit to those who struggle to find access to justice. In 2019, a high-level taskforce estimated that 5.1 billion people — two-thirds of the world's population — lack meaningful access to justice.[14] People in all countries are affected but the justice gap is not evenly distributed. Women and children find it hardest to access justice, as do other vulnerable groups, such as those living in poverty, people with disabilities, and people from minority ethnic communities.[15] While up-to-date figures are not available, it seems likely that, if anything, the numbers lacking meaningful access to justice have increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is also important that law students are equipped for the future. We live in what has been called a NAVI world (nonlinear, accelerated, volatile and interconnected),[16] and one characterised by constant disruption. Businesses, including lawyers and law schools (and indeed courts) need to plan for such a world, including planning for a wide range of scenarios, some not yet thought of.

Law students must also be prepared for an uncertain and evolving future and given the skills to adapt.[17] Leaving aside technology, which I will come to, and without claiming any particular expertise in future thinking, I suggest the following future challenges: the blurring of national boundaries in business but also increasing protectionism, digital business models and the gig economy. Increasing and evolving regulatory requirements are also likely. On a wider scale,

---

13 These clinics investigate claims of innocence: see for example the William & Mary Law School Innocence Project Clinic.

14 World Justice Project *Measuring the Justice Gap: A People-Centered Assessment of Unmet Justice Needs Around the World* (2019) at 5.

15 Vulnerable populations, "such as disabled persons, the elderly, indigenous persons, and children", are those who are most likely to lack legal identity for example: at 18:

16 See Hanne Jesca Bax and Gautam Jaqqi, EY Global "What if disruption isn't the challenge, but the chance".

17 See for example Thomas D Morgan "Educating Lawyers for the Future Legal Profession" (2005) 30 Okla City U L Rev 537.

we have we have geopolitical conflict, climate change, including extreme weather events, changing demographics (including aging populations), evolving family structures and possible future pandemics.

The lawyers of the future will need resilience and flexibility, problem solving skills and the ability to adapt to change, treating it as creating opportunities as well as challenges. This will require a broad understanding of the law but also of other relevant disciplines, such as financial skills, project management, cross border issues and an understanding of society.[18] Understanding society requires a broad liberal education to enable law students "to be able to situate and contextualise" future developments, including technological developments.[19]

At the same time, the traditional values of respect for the rule of law, justice, honesty and fairness must be cultivated.[20] As Professor Catherine Renshaw has said recently:[21]

> Our students live in a world shaken by disinformation, assaults on the Rule of Law and injustice. Part of our [Law Schools] job is to bolster hope by showing students that there are ways to make government accountable, enable access to justice regardless of wealth, privilege, or power, and defend democratic freedoms, including freedom of speech.

I note too that not all law students will practice law and law schools should recognise this and prepare their graduates for other careers.[22] Some may enter the business world, the non-profit sector or take on roles in government, including as politicians. They will bring to those professions the commitment to the rule of law and the practical skills learnt at law school, which can only be of benefit to those professions and to society as a whole.

---

18 Paul Ippolito, "Why lawyers need to know a bit about the Future of Everything" Presented on 20 November 2023 at the Legal Education Research Conference 2023 on Situated Learning: Climate Change, First Nations Recognition, Generative AI.

19 David Goldsworthy "The Future of Legal Education in the 21st Century" (2024) 41(1) Adelaide Law Review 243 at 262.

20 See for example Kendall Kerew, "The Rule of Law, the Lawyer's Role as Public Citizen and Professional Identity: How Fostering the Development of Professional Identity Can help Law Schools Address the Crisis Facing American Democracy" (2024) 75 Mercer L Rev 1449.

21 Professor Catherine Renshaw, "Law schools, legal education, and the future of the profession" Lawyers Weekly, January 21, 2026.

22 See for example Harry W Arthurs, "The Future of Law School: Three visions and a Prediction" (2014) 51(4) Alberta Law Review 70.

Finally, it is important that the lawyers of the future reflect as far as possible the makeup of society generally. This will allow them collectively to understand the society they serve, which is vital for upholding the rule of law and proving access to justice for all. As the Chief Justice of Aotearoa/New Zealand has said: [23]

> Ours is a diverse society. It is to the justice needs of this diverse society that the legal profession and the judiciary must respond. To respond we require, at least as a collective group, an ability to understand the different lives, values, and needs of these diverse communities. The first responsibility of a legal system is to strive to uphold the ideal of the rule of law so that we are equal before, and equally entitled to the benefit of, the law. Ignorant of those we represent or see before us, we risk failing to meet this ideal.

And now to technology and especially artificial intelligence (AI). Assuming AI does not wipe out humanity,[24] there is no doubt that it will have a major effect on society and on the legal profession.[25] The generative AI tools currently available can lead to major efficiency gains and particularly in managing large quantities of data. Empirical research conducted by Professor Daniel Schwarcz has shown that lawyers with access to AI tools perform better than those without such access.[26]

There is also no doubt that the tools will continue to develop and that some of the issues with them, such as the infamous hallucinations, will diminish if not altogether disappear. But this

---

23 Dame Helen Winkelmann, "Keep Running Up that Hill: The Challenge of Educating a Legal Profession Fit for the Next 150 Years" Public Lecture to Celebrate 150 Years of Legal Education at Canterbury University, 13 July 2023, available at www.courtsofnz.govt.nz. She was of course speaking about Aotearoa/New Zealand but her remarks are applicable to all jurisdictions. See also Susan Glazebrook "A Call for Diverse Thinking – Address at the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women" (2021) NZWLJ 114 and "Gender Myths and the Legal Profession" (2016) Canterbury L Rev 10.

24 See the discussion in Robert Booth, Dan Milmo and Aisha Down, "Could AI really wipe out humanity – six experts spell out the risks" *The Guardian* 15 September 2026 and in Toby Walsh "How would AI actually 'kill all humans'? Here are the top five most likely scenarios" *The Guardian* 23 September 2026. For a recent discussion on possible regulation see Susan Watson "Reining in Big Tech Corporations: Why Platform Governance Requires Structural Regulation", ECGI Working Paper Series in Law, *European Corporate Governance Institute Law Working Paper No 928/202. The University of Auckland Faculty of Law Research Paper Series 2026.*

25 See for example KPMG "Top 10 predictions on how the legal function will evolve" at www.kpmg.com and Deloitte Legal "The future of legal work? The use of Generative AI by legal departments" June 2024 and Ragunath Rarnanathan "Future of Professionals" report analysis: Why AI will flip law firm economics, October 15, 2025, Thomson Reuters.

26 See for example Daniel Schwarcz and others "AI-Powered Lawyering: AI Reasoning Models, Retrieval Augmented Generation, and the Future of Legal Practice" Journal of Law and Empirical Analysis (2026) Vol 3(1) 220-250.

does not remove the need for qualified and experienced humans, both for checking the output but also for ensuring the quality of inputs (to avoid the classic "rubbish in, rubbish out" scenario).[27] There is also a real potential for well-designed consumer self-help tools to be developed which will enhance access to justice as long as the digital divide is addressed.[28]

Using technology for making decisions creates real risks, however. Goal 11 of the *Compendium* is suitably cautious in this regard, limiting automated decision making to certain types of cases and where there is the availability of appeal or review. Technology is not required to take moral responsibility for the decisions it makes. It is not a member of the community to which any decisions it makes will apply. Decision making tools are also wont to suffer from the same biases as the material they are drawing on. With proprietary systems too the way they work is also not accessible and this creates issues with testing the material generated.

There are some spectacular instances of technology failures which have caused real injustice. One example is the UK Post Office Horizon scandal which resulted in hundreds of sub-postmasters being wrongly prosecuted, despite issues with the computer system being known.[29] The official inquiry into the scandal concluded that at least 13 people may have died by suicide as a result of the false accounting accusations and wrongful prosecutions.[30] Many more had their lives disrupted.

I also refer to the so-called Robodebt scandal in Australia, which concerned a compliance and debt recovery programme to claw back supposed overpayments to welfare recipients.[31] It used a process known as "income averaging" to assess income and entitlement to benefits. This did

---

27 Sir Geoffrey Vos, Master of the Rolls, recently made a similar point in the John Lehane Memorial Lecture "The implications of the development of artificial intelligence on the judiciary and the legal professions" given on 18 August 2026 in Sydney. For other views on AI and the legal profession see Lord Briggs, "AI and Civil Justice: Preparing for the Tsunami" Address to Oxford Civil Justice Systems in the 21st Century Conference, May 2026, Lord Pannick KC, Hamlyn Lectures, Cambridge University Press 2023 "The Future of Advocacy" in *Advocacy* at 126ff and Hon Andrew Bell AC, "The Judiciary under Siege – Addressing Threats to Judicial Authority" 5th Judicial Roundtable on the Future of Justice, Kyoto, Japan, 20 -23 September 2026.

28 According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, an estimated 37% of the world's population, or 2.9 billion people, have never used the internet.

29 See "Post Office Horizon scandal: why hundreds were wrongly prosecuted" BBC 9 October 2025.

30 Tom Espiner and Esylit Carr "Post Office scandal had 'disastrous' impact on victims" BBC 9 July 2025.

31 For an overview of the scheme see *Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023) at xxiii-xxix. For a brief explanation see Professor Emeritus Terry Carney "Unraveling Robodebt: Legal Failures, Impact on Vulnerable Communities and Future Reforms" University of Sydney Law School News and Events, 13 December 2023 and Chiraag Shah, "Australia's Robodebt scheme: A tragic case of public policy failure", Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford.

not produce accurate results and did not comply with the relevant legislation.[32] It was not the only aspect of the scheme that did not comply with the law. The scheme was also unfair and there were attempts at a "cover-up" lasting some years.[33] The victims of the scheme were among the most vulnerable of Australians and it led to three known suicides and adversely affected hundreds of others.[34] The Commission set up to investigate the failing said in very strong terms that:[35]

> Robodebt was a crude and cruel mechanism, neither fair nor legal, and it made many people feel like criminals. In essence, people were traumatised on the off-chance they might owe money. It was a costly failure of public administration, in both human and economic terms.

Against this background there is no doubt that law schools must embrace technology and equip law students to meet the future challenges posed by technology. But, at the same time, they must ensure that the traditional skills are not lost and that students are equipped to help avoid the pitfalls. Concern has been expressed that AI is causing cognitive surrender[36] and a proper balance must be found between embracing technology and letting it dominate.[37]

In conclusion, we must not lose sight of the traditional values of the legal profession and in particular the respect for the rule of law. Maintaining the rule of law requires a partnership between law schools, the profession and the courts. The lawyers of the future must be given the skills to survive in the world of the future and in particular adaptability, flexibility and resilience.

---

32 Commission report at v.

33 Commission report at xxviii.

34 Frances Mao "Robodebt: Illegal Australian welfare hunt drove people to despair" RNZ 8 July 2022.

35 Commission report at xxix. An example going the other way is Operation Protego, a scam that occurred in 2022 and 2023 in Australia. It was promoted on social media and involved fraudulent GST (goods and services tax) claims from non-existent businesses. This resulted in an estimated $2 billion of false claims being paid out before the Australian Tax Office (ATO) shut down the loophole. It appears that the problem was a combination of automatic refund payments and flaws in the fraud detection processes, See "How Australia's tax office lost billions in a simple scam" RNZ 28 July 2025. The ATO maintains that the scam was ended by AI and not caused by it.

36 Mark Arsenault, Dana Goldstein, Alan Blinder and Sarah Mervosh, "An M.I.T. Report Warns AI is causing 'Cognitive Surrender.' Universities are in a Bind" New York Times 15 September 2026.

37 For the ways some universities are responding see Michelle Weyenberg "Suffolk, NCCU lead list of this year's most innovative law schools" *National Jurist*, October 15, 2025