

Speech at the PCLL Opening Ceremony of the University of Hong Kong

Martin Hui SC
Hong Kong Bar Association Vice-Chairman

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Dean Professor Fu, distinguished faculty members, President of the Law Society of Hong Kong, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is a great privilege and honour to be invited to this year's Opening Ceremony for the PCLL programme. It is an even greater pleasure to be standing here at my alma mater where I obtained my LLB, PCLL, and LLM. On behalf of the Hong Kong Bar Association, I would like to first offer our warmest congratulations and welcome to all of you. We all know the level of competition to enter the PCLL. Well done to your achievements thus far.
2. Many years ago, I sat in the audience like what you are doing now attending a similar occasion for the opening of the PCLL programme – not physically in this building, as the Centennial Campus was not even in existence back in my days and the Law Faculty used to occupy several floors of KK Leung Building. I have countless fond memories of the “**Law Library**” – then situated on 1/F of KK Leung Building – where fellow classmates would often congregate between classes for a gossipy chat or even a quick nice nap, the “**Pigeon-hole**” message box on 5/F of KK Leung, into which inch-thick duplicated materials (“DMs”) (with the occasional anonymous love letters for some) were thrust every now and then, the “**Super-pass meal**” (“勁過飯”) in which the “cashew chicken stir-fry” dish is a must-have, etc. I also remember the feeling of being in your position – relief at having survived the LLB, excitement for what lies ahead, and a healthy dose of apprehension about the notorious rigours of the PCLL.
3. Looking out at your faces today, I see that same bright, ambitious energy. It is heartening to see, and it gives me great confidence in the future of our profession.
4. The PCLL is an important milestone marking your transition from a student to a practitioner. It is the bridge between the academic theory of law and the reality of its practice. It is more than a professional qualification – it is your first step into a profession that has served as the backbone of Hong Kong's success story.

Note: This is the text of the speech as drafted, which may differ from the delivered version.

5. Embrace this transition. The PCLL is not just another set of exams for you to pass. You will receive training to equip you for the demands of practice, which will require you to get up on your feet and roll up your sleeves. This year is a safe space for you to make as many mistakes as you want, and more importantly, to learn as much as you can from them. Be curious. Ask the “naive” questions – I assure you, they are often the most important ones. The practical skills that you will develop, along with the habits of diligence and precision that you forge in the PCLL, will all form the cornerstone of your entire professional life.
6. Speaking for myself, I was with the Department of Justice for over two decades before turning to private practice. And I would occasionally sit as a judge at the Court of First Instance in my capacity as an appointed Recorder of the High Court. Without a doubt, the skills I learned from the PCLL prepared me for all the challenges that I faced along the way, regardless of which side of the Court – be it the Bar table or the Judge’s bench – I was standing (or sitting) at.
7. As you stand at the gateway to this profession, I feel it is my duty, as a representative of the Bar, to speak about the values that underpin it. In the cut and thrust of practice, with tight deadlines and demanding clients, it can be easy to lose sight of our core purpose. Never let that happen.
8. The first and most sacred of these values is our commitment to the rule of law. It is not some abstract and distant concept. On the contrary, as future barristers, solicitors and judges, the duty to uphold the rule of law is in your very hands. Every time you give legal advice, provide representation, and defend your client’s interests, you are strengthening the rule of law by ensuring everyone enjoys the same protection under the law. That is the very bedrock of a free and stable society.
9. This brings me to our paramount duty to the court. Our ultimate allegiance is to the administration of justice. This means we must act with absolute integrity and honesty. Our responsibility is to provide professional and competent representation for our clients, not to be their mouthpiece. This is the hallmark of our profession and the reason why the public reposes trust and confidence in us. These values should not be compromised under any circumstances.
10. However, with new opportunities come new responsibilities and challenges.
11. The rapid pace of technological change demands that we adapt. A hundred years ago, barristers and solicitors had to navigate the dark labyrinths of the library and flip through

mountains of law reports for relevant cases. With the technology that we are blessed with today, we have access to tens of thousands of cases from every jurisdiction. But of course, instead of digging through the law library, we are now digging through the 100th page of law database search results.

12. Tempting as it may be, we cannot delegate our duties and judgment to technology. You may have seen unfortunate news stories where lawyers had submitted documents to the court which were drafted using AI containing fake, hallucinated case citations that do not exist. Our core duties remain the same despite the advancement of technology. In fact, it is our human experiences within society that makes us good lawyers. Empathy towards a client is a quality that will be difficult to encode in an algorithm. Never forget the humanity at the heart of the law.
13. To give full and frank disclosure, I can assure you that my speech was not generated using generative AI – or at least not entirely so.
14. As you begin the PCLL and take your first step towards your career, I hope you will remember that you are entering a profession that is dedicated to serving others. That stands true regardless of whether you choose to practice at the Bar, join a solicitors' firm, work in-house, or pursue public service. Behind every case file, every contract, every legal dispute, there is a human story. A family in crisis, an entrepreneur risking everything on a new venture, a person whose liberty is at stake. The professional skills and experience you will develop are not only for your own benefit – they are meant to be applied towards helping those that need your help.
15. The Hong Kong Bar Association, which I have the privilege to serve as one of the Vice Chairmen, remains committed to maintaining the highest standards of our profession. We advocate for the independent operation of the judiciary, the integrity of the legal system, and the interests of both our members and the public we serve. As future members of the legal profession, I hope you will inherit and further this legacy, and the responsibility to preserve and enhance it. Whether you become the future senior counsel, future partners of law firms, future judges, or perhaps the future legislators, you are all the future guardians of our legal system. That is a heavy responsibility, but it is also an immense privilege.
16. Today marks the beginning of the next chapter of your journey to the legal profession. On behalf of the Hong Kong Bar Association, I wish you every success in the year ahead.
17. Welcome and bon voyage!