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## Belonging, being, becoming: exploring the value of a statement of law student ideals

### Abstract

In 2017, the School of Law at the University of Wollongong commenced an educational 'experiment', designed to make an important symbolic message to students that their career as a legal professional starts from the day they begin their law studies. It invited First Year Students to commit to core values, attitudes and practices that are seen as important to developing a positive legal professional identity. As part of the evaluation and review process, in 2018 the original 'Pledge' was redesigned as the Law Student Statement of Ideals. This article reports on the learnings gained through adopting the Law Student Statement of Ideals and reflects on its impact, benefits and effects on shaping students' attitudes and understanding of their developing professional identity as future "lawyers".

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## BELONGING, BEING, BECOMING: EXPLORING THE VALUE OF A STATEMENT OF LAW STUDENT IDEALS

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*Karina Murray\* and Trish Mundy†*

### ABSTRACT

In 2017, the School of Law at the University of Wollongong commenced an educational ‘experiment’ designed to send an important symbolic message to students that their career as a legal professional starts from the day they begin their law studies. It invited first-year students to commit to core values, attitudes and practices that are seen as important to developing a positive legal professional identity. In 2018, as part of the evaluation and review process, the original ‘Pledge’ was redesigned as the ‘Statement of Law Student Ideals’. This article reports on the learnings gained through adopting the Statement of Law Student Ideals, and reflects on its impact, benefits and effects on shaping students’ attitudes and understanding of their developing professional identity as future lawyers and professionals.

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† Professor, Dean, School of Law, University of Wollongong. The authors acknowledge the contribution of the other members of the Statement of Law Student Ideals research team: John Littrich (Senior Lecturer) and Kate Tubridy (Lecturer), School of Law, University of Wollongong.

## I INTRODUCTION

Positive professional identity development and law student wellbeing have been key concerns among legal educators for the last decade or more.<sup>1</sup> Since 2002, the School of Law at the University of Wollongong ('UOW') has been refining its first-year programme to provide a more integrated curriculum and evidence-based transition pedagogy for first-year law students as a means of attending to critical law student transition and wellbeing issues.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, the authors, with the other members of the research team within the School of Law, embarked on an 'experiment' that was designed to engage students in thinking more purposefully about their professional and ethical identity as commencing law students. It did this through the introduction of a Law Student Pledge ('Pledge') for the incoming first-year cohort of 2017. It invited these students to commit to core values, attitudes and practices that are seen as important to developing a positive professional and ethical identity and meeting the standards expected of them as future lawyers.

This article outlines the exploration and redevelopment of the Pledge into the current Statement of Law Student Ideals ('Statement'), introduced to incoming first-year law students for the first time in 2018. The Statement was redesigned with a more explicit focus on wellbeing, social justice values and connection to, and respect for, others. It sought to reflect the values of UOW Law and the expectations of beginning professionals embarking on the study of law. Reflecting the team's ongoing commitment to collaborative practice, student feedback, evaluation and refinement of our work, the authors seek to share our practice and learnings arising from this later work with the aim of strengthening opportunities in the law curriculum that may enhance students' capacity to reflect on positive professional identity development and their own wellbeing.

In doing so, this paper has adapted Wilcock's 'occupational dimensions' framework as a helpful lens through which to understand the student feedback about the Statement and its introduction across the first-year programme.<sup>3</sup> The authors suggest that a Belonging, Being and Becoming ('3B') framework offers a useful vehicle to enhance positive professional identity and wellbeing in the context of a broader transition and wellbeing strategy. In particular, it finds that the Statement fosters:

- Belonging — an enhanced sense of belonging and connection to peers, law school and law studies.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Molly Townes O'Brien, Stephen Tang and Kath Hall, 'Changing Our Thinking: Empirical Thinking on Law Student Well-Being, Thinking Styles and the Law School Curriculum' (2011) *Legal Education Review* 71; Rachael Field, James Duffy and Anna Huggins, *Lawyering and Positive Professional Identities* (LexisNexis Butterworths, 2014); John Littrich and Karina Murray, *Lawyers in Australia* (Federation Press, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, 2019) ch 2.

<sup>2</sup> See Cassandra Sharp et al, 'Taking Hints from Hogwarts: UOW's First Year Law Immersion Program' (2013) 6(1) *Journal of the Australasian Law Teachers Association* 127.

<sup>3</sup> Ann A Wilcock, 'Reflections on Doing, Being, Becoming' (1999) 46 *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal* 1–11.

- Being — a reflective, confident law student who is more mindful of their own wellbeing.
- Becoming — a professional mindset with a commitment to social justice and the courage to question.

Part II of this paper begins by providing background context to the Statement and the School of Law's motivation for introducing it. It describes the development of the Statement and its purposeful integration within the law curriculum, including the structured engagement of students with the Statement throughout their first year. Part III outlines the reflective process undertaken to refine and improve the usefulness of the Statement. It first details the research methodology and processes associated with gaining student feedback via surveys and focus groups. It goes on to outline an analytical '3B framework', based on an adaptation of Wilcock's 'occupational dimensions' model. The final part offers an analysis of the feedback through the lens of the 3Bs — Belonging, Being and Becoming — to assess the effectiveness of the Statement for developing a positive professional identity for law students.

## II BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR MAKING A STATEMENT

In 2017, in considering ways to inculcate a developing positive professional identity in law students, the research team decided to explore the use of a Law Student Pledge, something that was quite uncommon in Australia yet extensively used internationally.<sup>4</sup> Oaths, or pledges, have important functions in the legal profession: being used as a regulatory mechanism; setting aspirations for a profession; and providing ethical guidance.<sup>5</sup> A combination of these three functions was behind the conception of the initial UOW Pledge. Introduced as part of Orientation activities, the Pledge was symbolic and aspirational in nature, designed to 'induct' students into the idea that their professional identity development begins at law school. Students were invited to sign the Pledge in their first weeks of law school and reinforcement of the Pledge occurred within the curriculum at key points throughout their first year, with particular linkage made to the legal ethics and professional responsibility subject studied in second semester of first year. The impact and utility of introducing the Pledge was subsequently evaluated and our learnings have been shared elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

The key learnings the research team identified from the 2017 Pledge pilot were that, while it was seen to have an overall positive message, the purpose and aims of introducing the Pledge were not sufficiently articulated. This left students with an overemphasis on the regulatory aspects of an oath. Some students were concerned that signing the Pledge could lead to its specific enforcement against them, while others felt it was largely aimed to address plagiarism

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, AD Kehner and MA Robinson, 'Mission: Impossible? Mission: Accomplished? Or Mission: Underway? A Survey and Analysis of Current Trends in Professionalism Education in American Law Schools' (2012) 38 *University of Dayton Law Review* 57; Nicola Booth-Perry, 'Enforcement of Law Schools' Non-Academic Honour Codes: A Necessary Step towards Professionalism?' (2011) 89 *Nebraska Law Review* 634.

<sup>5</sup> CR Andrews, 'The Lawyer's Oath: Both Ancient and Modern' (2009) 22 *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics* 3.

<sup>6</sup> Trish Mundy et al, 'The Role of the Law Student Pledge in Shaping Positive Professional and Ethical Identities: A Case Study from Australia' (2020) *International Journal of the Legal Profession* (forthcoming).

and academic misconduct. Some staff involved in the implementation of the Pledge identified that, while there was inherent value in raising the important ethical issues outlined in the Pledge, they felt it needed greater integration into the curriculum to have real effect on students. Further, a number of students commented unfavourably on the ‘American’ feel of a pledge. There was also some pushback against a perceived assumption that students felt was inherent in the Pledge: that they had interest in the traditional practice of law, that is, joining the profession as a solicitor or barrister.

In reflecting upon and seeking to address the student and staff feedback, the Pledge was reimagined as the Statement of Law Student Ideals (see Figure 1). While removing the signing aspect attended to the contractual concerns raised by some students, the shift to a Statement also more clearly articulated that these ideals, derived from primary aspirations of diligence and integrity, were expected of all law students. The broad practice of law was enunciated, acknowledging the importance of a positive professional identity, irrespective of the ultimate career choices yet to be made. Additionally, in line with the original drivers behind the project, an explicit emphasis on wellbeing was incorporated. Lastly, as a core driver of the UOW School of Law, a commitment to social justice was added to the Statement.

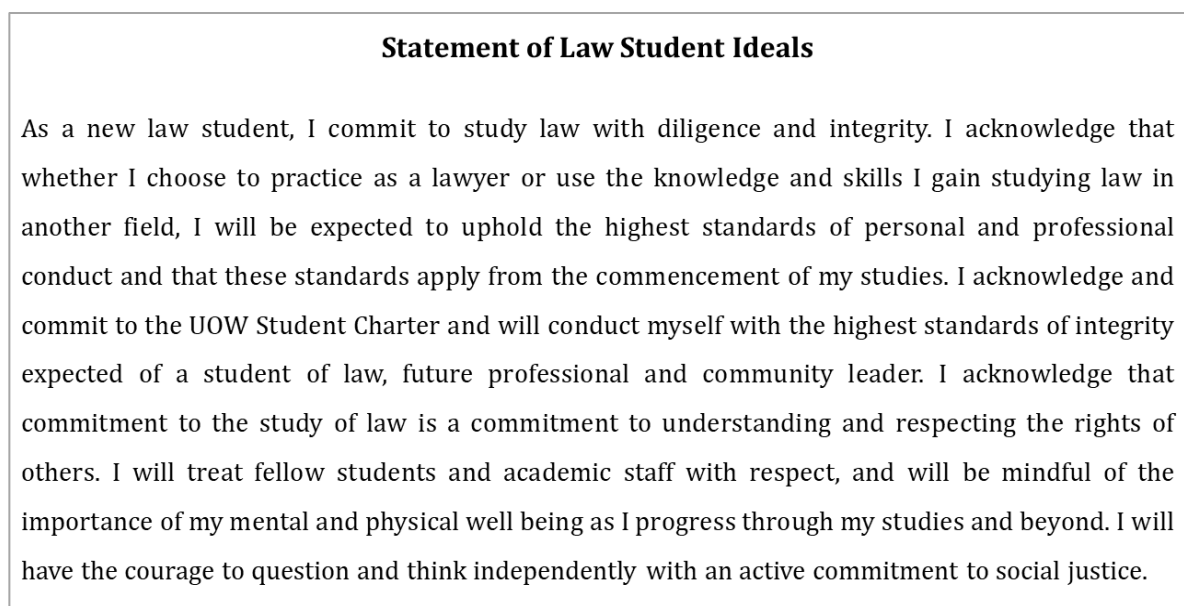


Figure 1: Statement of Law Student Ideals

The Statement was introduced to students commencing their first year of law school in 2018, as part of the Orientation programme. It was then integrated into a number of seminars in the subject ‘Foundations of Law’ in the first semester, with a focus on successful approaches to tertiary studies and student wellbeing. It was also discussed in a ‘Foundations of Law’ lecture, by the Dean of Law. It was reintroduced in the second semester to students at the beginning and end of the subject ‘Ethics and Professional Responsibility’, with a focus on ethical behaviour and developing a positive professional identity.

### III RESEARCH AND REFLECTION

This section first explains the research methodology used to evaluate the introduction of the Statement for newly commencing law students at UOW. Our key interests were to explore how students responded to the Statement in its new form and its value as a tool through which students' sense of connection to, and identity as, a law student and a future legal professional could be enhanced. The research team continued our commitment to ongoing 'collaborative review' of our work,<sup>7</sup> and the teaching strategies and curriculum integration associated with the introduction of the Statement. We met regularly throughout the project, engaging in mutual discussion, reflection and analysis of our professional practices at each stage of implementation.

#### A *Research Methodology*

This research project involved conducting an online survey and one focus group with first-year students, as well as surveying the academic teaching staff involved in using the Statement for their reflective insights. Human Research Ethics approval was obtained from UOW,<sup>8</sup> and the research was conducted in accordance with human research ethics guidelines.<sup>9</sup> There were 12 students in total who provided their feedback on the Statement; 11 completed the anonymous online survey while one attended an open focus group conducted by an external, independent facilitator. Initially, the team had planned to conduct two focus groups, as had previously been held — however, in view of the low student response rate of one, it was decided to offer students the opportunity to provide feedback via an anonymous online survey. From this online survey, a further 11 students provided formal feedback. While an external facilitator was engaged to conduct the focus group so as to ensure that students felt as 'safe' as possible to participate and were aware that no School of Law staff would be involved, thus minimising concerns about perceived or actual conflicts of interest, the small participation level in the focus group suggests that students did not necessarily feel fully comfortable to offer feedback in a focus group setting.

Participants, whether via focus group or online survey, were asked about their views on the School's introduction of the Statement; their initial response to the Statement; what they thought were the aim(s) or purpose(s) of the Statement; and whether they felt the Statement had influenced any aspects of their studies and, if so, how? Finally, students were asked if there was any particular aspect(s) of the Statement that they felt was helpful or unhelpful to them. Importantly, students were made aware that we were interested in hearing from them regardless of their views on, or support for, the Statement.

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<sup>7</sup> David Gosling has argued that adopting a process of collaborative review is 'the most effective, and ethical, framework to support professional learning about teaching [and] learning and related issues'. See David Gosling, 'Collaborative Peer Supported Review of Teaching' in Judyth Sachs and Mitch Parsell (eds), *Peer Review of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: International Perspectives* (Springer, 2014) ch 2.

<sup>8</sup> University of Wollongong Human Ethics Approval Number: 2018/390.

<sup>9</sup> 'Human Ethics', *University of Wollongong Australia* (Web Page, 2020) <<https://www.uow.edu.au/research-and-innovation/researcher-support/ethics/human-ethics>>.

Students were recruited to participate via several email communications forwarded to all first-year law students enrolled at UOW in 2018. The email outlined the research project and invited students to contact an identified contact person, either by email or telephone, should they be interested in participating in a focus group or if they wanted information about the research. The groups were held on different days and different times to ensure that as many as possible could attend if they wished. In addition, students were referred to the anonymous online survey to complete at their convenience.

Academic teaching staff involved in the delivery of either the first session subject, 'Foundations of Law', or the second session subject, 'Ethics and Professional Responsibility', were emailed to invite them to share their perceptions on the reception and engagement of students with the Statement. They were asked to provide their personal views about the Statement, as well as their perceived views on their students' reactions to the Statement and its integration into their subject. Of the seven staff approached (not including two members of the research team that were involved in the teaching), three comprehensive responses were received (an additional response was received indicating that the staff member would like to respond at a later date, but never did).

The team were acutely aware of the power imbalance inherent in the student/teacher relationship and sought to minimise any possible concerns students may have had in coming forward to participate. First, the team ensured that the focus groups were conducted only after release of all assessment results and final grades. Second, the contact person for the research was a member of the team who was not teaching any first-year subjects in the second semester. This meant they had no formal role in the teaching and assessment of the student cohort. Third, it was agreed that this person would not share information about the identity of students who participated in the study with the rest of the research team. Finally, the team engaged an external, independent person to conduct the focus groups and to do so in such a way as to ensure that student contributions were de-identified and kept anonymous from the researchers. Even with these efforts, it is possible that students were concerned that the academic members of the research team may have contact with these first-year students over the coming years through both teaching and/or future employment opportunities.

While we hoped that more students would participate and despite our recruitment attempts, interest was much less than expected. This affects the sample size — however, we believe these student views, combined with the academic teaching staff responses, can offer us insight into the use and utility of adopting the Statement.

### B *An Analytical Framework: The 3Bs*

This section describes the analytical 3B framework adopted for this research, namely, the conceptual tools of Belonging, Being and Becoming through which to understand and explore law students' experiences of the Statement. The framework has been adapted from the work of Ann Wilcock and the 'occupational dimensions' model of Doing, Being, Becoming and



Belonging,<sup>10</sup> as well as the more recent *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, developed in the context of early childhood learning as a key phase in developmental transition.<sup>11</sup>

Wilcock views occupation as a synthesis of Doing, Being, Becoming and Belonging,<sup>12</sup> and sees these as integral to occupational health and wellness.<sup>13</sup> While people have similar needs, Wilcock considers that ‘health and well-being depend on all people having the chance to develop their [unique] potential’ and that ‘rules and structures ... must encourage and enable occupation that has meaning and value to individuals and communities’.<sup>14</sup> Many scholars have since applied and adapted these concepts,<sup>15</sup> with variations in the dimensions utilised and a growing prevalence across the professional literature and discourse.<sup>16</sup> For example, Molineux has written on the professional identity of occupational therapists;<sup>17</sup> Ennals et al have explored the shifting occupational identity of academics transitioning from professional roles into the academy;<sup>18</sup> and Skott has considered the professional identity of mathematics teachers.<sup>19</sup> The framework has also been adopted as a means of understanding the emotional process of being and becoming a student transitioning into university.<sup>20</sup>

What do these dimensions mean? ‘Doing’ is said to refer to one’s occupational performance<sup>21</sup> and the various roles one enacts.<sup>22</sup> Doing is the social mechanism that facilitates personal and societal growth and development,<sup>23</sup> and ‘creates and shapes the societies in which we live, for good or bad’.<sup>24</sup> ‘Being’ is described as the ‘contemplation and enjoyment of one’s inner life’ — the call to self-discovery and self-reflection as a requirement to understand and sustain one’s roles.<sup>25</sup> Hitch et al refer to Being as the ‘sense of who someone is as an occupational and human

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<sup>10</sup> Wilcock (n 3). Note that ‘Belonging’ was later included in Ann Wilcock, *An Occupational Perspective of Health* (SLACK Incorporated, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, July 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Department of Education and Training, Australian Government, *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Council of Australian Governments, 2009) <[https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/belonging\\_being\\_and\\_becoming\\_the\\_early\\_years\\_learning\\_framework\\_for\\_australia\\_0.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia_0.pdf)>.

<sup>12</sup> Wilcock, ‘Reflections on Doing, Being, Becoming’ (n 3) 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>15</sup> Danielle Hitch, Geneviève Pépin and Karen Stagnitti, ‘In the Footsteps of Wilcock, Part One: The Evolution of Doing, Being, Becoming, and Belonging’ (2014) 28(3) *Occupational Therapy in Health Care* 231.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 231.

<sup>17</sup> M Molineux, ‘Standing Firm on Shifting Sands’ (2011) 58(1) *New Zealand Journal of Occupational Therapy* 21.

<sup>18</sup> Priscilla Ennals et al, ‘Shifting Occupational Identity: Doing, Being, Becoming and Belonging in the Academy’ (2016) 35(3) *Higher Education and Research & Development* 433.

<sup>19</sup> Jeppe Skott, ‘Changing Experiences of Being, Becoming, and Belonging: Teachers’ Professional Identity Revisited’ (2018) 51(3) *International Journal on Mathematics Education* 469.

<sup>20</sup> Hazel Christie et al, ‘A Real Rollercoaster of Confidence and Emotions: Learning to Be a University Student’ (2008) 33(5) *Studies in Higher Education* 567.

<sup>21</sup> Louise Pang, ‘Framework of Doing-Being-Becoming’, *OT Theory* (Web Page, October 2019) <<https://ottheory.com/therapy-model/framework-doing-being-becoming>>.

<sup>22</sup> Ennals et al (n 18) 440.

<sup>23</sup> Wilcock, ‘Reflections on Doing, Being, Becoming’ (n 3) 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

being’ and encompassing of the meanings a person gives to their life and experiences, including their unique physical, mental and social capacities and capabilities.<sup>26</sup> ‘Becoming’ speaks to the process of life and the potential for transformation and self-actualisation.<sup>27</sup> Hitch et al see Becoming as a process of change and development: a ‘dynamic and emergent perspective on identity’<sup>28</sup> that is guided by one’s own particular goals and aspirations.<sup>29</sup> To achieve wellbeing, says Wilcock, ‘people must be enabled towards what they ... want to become’.<sup>30</sup> ‘Belonging’ refers to ‘a sense of connectedness to other people, places, cultures, communities, and times’, and is the context within which occupations happen.<sup>31</sup> Belonging, at its core, is relational and includes connections to people, places and groups. For a useful summary of current understandings of Doing, Being, Becoming and Belonging, see Hitch et al.<sup>32</sup>

*Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, developed in 2009, aims to ‘extend and enrich children’s learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school’.<sup>33</sup> It recognises that the characteristics of Belonging, Being and Becoming are fundamental to children’s lives,<sup>34</sup> and it offers a curriculum and pedagogical framework to direct and support the professional practice of early childhood educators. The framework understands Belonging as ‘knowing where and with whom you belong’; it is relational in that it ‘acknowledges children’s interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identity ... and crucial to a sense of belonging’.<sup>35</sup> Being sees childhood as a time ‘to be, to seek and make meaning of the world’, knowing oneself, building and maintaining relationships, and engaging with the joys and complexities of life. Becoming reflects childhood as a time of rapid change and growth.<sup>36</sup>

We suggest that this 3B framework, while developed in the context of early childhood learning, can be usefully understood in its broader setting and relevance to transition and identity development. After all, transitions occur at many points in life, and transition to university has, as we have already canvassed,<sup>37</sup> long been acknowledged as a critical time of transition, full of opportunity and demanding similar curriculum and pedagogical responses. This framework, in synergy with the four ‘occupational dimensions’ identified within the professional literature that connect to wellbeing and identity development in the occupational context, offers a highly useful analytical model with which to understand the experiences and impacts of the Statement

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<sup>26</sup> Hitch, Pépin and Stagnitti (n 15).

<sup>27</sup> Wilcock, ‘Reflections on Doing, Being, Becoming’ (n 3) 5.

<sup>28</sup> Hitch, Pépin and Stagnitti (n 15) 241.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Wilcock, ‘Reflections on Doing, Being, Becoming’ (n 3) 5.

<sup>31</sup> Hitch, Pépin and Stagnitti (n 15) 242.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Department of Education and Training (n 11) 5.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 7.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Sharp et al (n 2). See also Cassandra Sharp, “‘Represent a Murderer ... I’d Never Do That!’” How Students Use Stories to Link Ethical Development and Identity Construction’ in M Robertson et al (eds), *The Ethics Project in Legal Education* (Routledge, 2011); S Kift and K Nelson, ‘Beyond Curriculum Reform: Embedding the Transition Experience’ in A Brew and C Asmar (eds) *Higher Education in a Changing World* (HERDSA, 2005).

on first-year law students. Through the themes of Belonging, Being and Becoming, we will explore the ways in which the Statement has enhanced students' sense of belonging to the law, their peers and the law school, enhanced the overall wellbeing of students, and enabled a sense of emerging professional identity and connection to their role as future lawyers and professionals.

#### IV BELONGING, BEING, BECOMING A LAW STUDENT

This section analyses the student feedback received about the Statement and discusses the overall findings of the research. Each author individually immersed themselves in the student feedback before coming together for collective reflection on our observations and, ultimately, formulating our findings and considering the analytical framework adopted. In this instance, it was considered that Wilcock's 'occupational dimensions' of Belonging, Being and Becoming was a valuable lens through which to explore the data. Interestingly, these dimensions emerged from, or were grounded in, the data itself rather than being imposed on the data. We now turn to discuss student feedback through the 3B framework.

##### A *Belonging*

Developing a sense of Belonging is an important aspect of any successful transition. This applies to the transition from secondary schooling to tertiary learning, or in fact non-study to tertiary studies. This transition phase provides an opportunity for the institution and its academics to set a positive direction for the new experience, particularly through the timely development of a sense of connection and belonging. In particular, it has been specifically identified that 'the potential for enthusiastic engagement in the curricula should be harnessed in the critical first days of the first weeks of the first year, thereby promoting a sense of belonging, so often missing for the contemporary learner'.<sup>38</sup> Students were introduced to the Statement from their first interaction with the School of Law, at Orientation. This was built upon in their first seminar in 'Foundations of Law', in their first week of law school.

##### 1 *'As a new law student ...'*

The expression of a Statement symbolically plants students in law school and in the law, situating and creating an attachment to the locus or place for their legal studies journey.<sup>39</sup> Students expressed a diverse range of initial responses to the Statement that indicated a developing sense of belonging. One student specifically identified that the Statement 'gives a sense of belonging to the program'. Almost all students recognised the Statement as a marker of transition and the commencement of a new stage — illustrated by such comments that featured 'the law school being the start of my career'.

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<sup>38</sup> Kift and Nelson (n 37) 6.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Göksenin Inalhan and Edward Finch, 'Place Attachment and Sense of Belonging' (2004) 22(5/6) *Facilities* 120.

## 2 *'I will be expected to uphold the highest standards of personal and professional conduct'*

By making explicit the expectations of the School of Law, the Statement aims to create those relational connections necessary to a sense of belonging. The Statement aims to connect students to the expectations not only of the School of Law and UOW, but to their expectations of one another — 'I will treat fellow students and academic staff with respect'.

It reinforced their own values and motivations in choosing the study of law, typified by the following student comments in response to being asked about the usefulness of the Statement: '[s]et the tone of my studies'; '[r]einforced and reflected my values and motivation [for studying law]'; '[r]eminded me why I chose law in the first place'.

The Statement's ability to serve as a conduit to a sense of belonging is a positive indicator for student success and wellbeing. Belongingness has been identified as having 'multiple and strong effects on emotional patterns and on cognitive processes. Lack of attachments is linked to a variety of ill effects on health, adjustment, and well-being.'<sup>40</sup> This early intervention assists students to develop their sense of community and confidence, which supports and encourages them towards success. In this way, one student remarked that the Statement becomes a 'guideline that sits in the back of my mind' while they embark on their academic path in law school.

## B *Being*

The aspect of Being is an essential element of identity, with a cohesive sense of being correlating strongly to a positive outlook and wellbeing. Beyond wellbeing, there is a growing focus on the importance of the development of an ethical professional identity, starting in the para-professional educative phase.<sup>41</sup>

### 1 *'the highest standards of personal and professional conduct'*

At its simplest, perhaps, professional identity is 'the sense of being a professional'.<sup>42</sup> A more fulsome definition outlines professional identity as 'the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role'.<sup>43</sup> Tertiary studies are, therefore, an important time for the development of the sense of identity as a future professional. This identity development occurs largely through engaging in reflection and reflexive practices. Trede, Macklin and Bridges recognise 'the role of self, such as self-reflection, agency and self-authorship as being

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<sup>40</sup> Roy F Baumeister and Mark R Leary, 'The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation' (1995) 117(3) *Psychological Bulletin* 497, 497.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Field, Duffy and Huggins (n 1); Littrich and Murray (n 1).

<sup>42</sup> MJ Paterson et al, 'Clinical Reasoning and Self-Directed Learning: Key Dimensions in Professional Education and Professional Socialisation' (2002) 4(2) *Focus on Health Professional Education* 5, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Herminia Ibarra, 'Provisional Selves: Experimenting with Image and Identity in Professional Adaptation' (1999) 44(4) *Administrative Science Quarterly* 764, 764–5, citing Edgar Henry Schein, *Career Dynamics: Matching Individual and Organizational Needs* (Addison-Wesley, 1978).

a key part of the process of professional identity development'.<sup>44</sup> The Statement was designed and integrated into the curriculum as a vehicle for discussion about the opportunities that law school provides in moving into the role of future lawyer or professional. Students were engaged in a number of reflective activities concerning the Statement, relating to study and wellbeing early in the year, and then more specifically linked to the development of an ethical identity in the second semester. While one-third of respondents indicated that the Statement had little or no impact upon their sense of identity, the remaining students commented positively. By way of example, one student responded that '[t]he Law School [is] the start of my career', while another commented that '[y]es, it has encouraged me to reflect on why I chose to study law, particularly as a professional in the future'.

## 2 *'student of law, future professional and community leader'*

The Statement's reference to the broad career choices afforded by the study of law, as well as the forward-looking declaration of the student as a 'future professional and community leader', aims to focus students on the consideration of their career path and build a sense of control in the direction. Students identified strongly with this, providing the following comments: '[m]ade me feel proud ... and [gave me] confidence that I was on the right track'; '[i]t showed ... how professional identity starts in law school and the choices you make in law school can have drastic consequences on professional identity'.

## 3 *'... will be mindful of the importance of my mental and physical well-being'*

A key purpose behind the introduction of the Statement was to enhance student wellbeing, leading to the promotion of a positive learning experience and retention of students. The importance of this purpose has been articulated by Hall, O'Brien and Tang:

[L]aw school is a particularly important time in the formation of students' academic and professional identities, and the impact of this process is not short term. In particular, commitment to a dominant identity can lead to the formation of cognitive schemas that regulate the long-term processing of self-related information based on that identity.<sup>45</sup>

Field, Duffy and Huggins have posited that '[i]f law students can see an authentic sense of who they will be as a lawyer through the law curriculum (and particularly the first-year law curriculum), they will transition better to their legal education and have a greater sense of psychological well-being'.<sup>46</sup> The Statement was provided at the beginning of the law school journey and explicitly referenced the importance of wellbeing. In embedding it in key points throughout the year, it was designed to become a touchstone — a prompt to work at balance

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<sup>44</sup> Franziska Trede, Rob Macklin and Donna Bridges, 'Professional Identity Development: A Review of the Higher Education Literature' (2012) 37(3) *Studies in Higher Education* 365, 375.

<sup>45</sup> Kath Hall, Molly Townes O'Brien and Stephen Tang, 'Developing a Professional Identity in Law School: A View from Australia' (2010) 4 *Phoenix Law Review* 21, 37.

<sup>46</sup> Rachael M Field, James Duffy and Anna Huggins, 'Supporting Transition to Law School and Student Well-being: The Role of Professional Legal Identity' (2013) 4(2) *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education* 15, 17.

throughout their studies and remind them of the bigger picture. This was an aspect that was positively recognised by most students, highlighted by the following comment:

A great reminder throughout the first year of study, especially if I was getting stressed over an assessment or not understanding a subject. It reminded me of why I was studying law and that I was doing it for me and not anyone else.

Part of the reason for underlining the importance of wellbeing for students is to assist them towards their own recognition of the need for reflective practice throughout their career. Through the activities incorporated across the first year, students were afforded opportunities to reconnect with the Statement and reflect upon the important ideals within. Students responded supportively to this:

The Statement said to ensure that you make time for outside activities or being social, not focussed 100% on study and not having a life outside of that ... That was an essential part for me to read because when I took time out for myself between study, then I found I wasn't as stressed and I was sleeping better and generally feeling better within myself. Re-reading came at an essential time.

Overall, the aspect of Being was recognised as a strength of the Statement, identified through the favourable student feedback. The Statement's ability to start students on a positive path toward identity development and wellbeing marks it as a useful instrument.

### *C Becoming*

Tertiary studies, particularly within the professions, have traditionally been primarily about Becoming. Historically, commencing law school was the necessary precursor to entering the legal profession: becoming a lawyer. In recent times we see law students with a broader view of the purpose behind a law degree. While it is difficult to ascertain exact figures, it has been suggested that more than one-third of law graduates today go on to careers other than a lawyer.<sup>47</sup> This could lead to a minor dilemma for law schools, in understanding and addressing the needs of their students. However, with a significant portion of an accredited law degree prescribed by the Priestley 11, most law schools are left with little space for addressing non-lawyer needs in the academic content of their degree. However, students, particularly in first year, are increasing wanting to 'keep their options open' and not presuppose a career as a solicitor or barrister. This message came through strongly in the previous Pledge research, discussed above. That being said, a law degree is still a professional qualification. As such, 'in becoming a professional, one starts to develop knowledge, sets of skills, ways of being and values that approach being identical to those held by other members of the profession one is part of'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Littrich and Murray (n 1) 16–17.

<sup>48</sup> Trede, Macklin and Bridges (n 44) 380.

1 *‘to practice as a lawyer or use the knowledge and skills I gain studying law in another field’*

In response to student feedback in relation to the previous Pledge and its perceived focus on entering the profession, the Statement is explicit in appreciating the options available to a law graduate. Upon reflection, this is a clear benefit in studying law and it makes sense to embrace this ambiguity in Becoming. The Statement still seeks to incorporate aspects of the ethics of the legal profession, but focuses on the broadly applicable duties and professional responsibilities, primarily ‘diligence and integrity’. The students were still able to recognise the sense of becoming: ‘[Y]ou are joining a wider community once you study law. I feel like [the Statement] was trying to convey in that sense.’

2 *‘the courage to question and think independently with an active commitment to social justice’*

Overall, the notion underpinning Becoming is aspirational. This links well with an essential element of professionalism, being ‘an ethos of altruistic service’.<sup>49</sup> Students recognised that the Statement and its ‘commitment to social justice’ provided ‘something to strive for’. Ultimately, some of the most encouraging responses to the Statement related to skills and qualities that will be valuable no matter what the student chooses to become: ‘[t]he courage to question’; ‘[c]onfidence — bravery to question and critique’; ‘[r]elevant no matter how your degree is used’.

## V CONCLUSION

The Statement of Law Student Ideals is an ongoing project, but we believe it has potential to be part of supporting positive transition and wellbeing for law students and can be a vehicle for positive professional identity development and messaging around values to law students as future lawyers and professionals. The analysis suggests that there can be positive benefits to students in integrating a Statement into their first year of study, and also benefits to law schools in the process of drafting one. The authors also found usefulness in the 3B framework as a model for consideration of transition and identity. The above findings and observations have served to inform and guide the research team in our next iteration of the Statement, which was introduced to the intake of first-year law students in 2019.

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<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey Millerson, *The Qualifying Associations: A Study in Professionalism* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) 5, cited in Ysaiah Ross, *Ethics in Law* (LexisNexis Butterworths, 6<sup>th</sup> ed, 2014) 55.