

ABA Advanced Trial Advocacy Intensive Course in Brisbane 2025

In November 2024, I was honoured to be invited to join the Faculty for the Australian Bar Association Advanced Trial Advocacy Intensive Course in Brisbane, which took place from 20th – 24th January 2025 on a self-funded basis. This prestigious program brought together esteemed Senior Counsel from the Australian Bar and Judiciary, along with faculty members from New Zealand, South Africa, and Singapore. Together, we guided approximately 40 experienced practitioners from Australia and Singapore through an intensive training course modelled after the renowned South Eastern Circuit Advanced International Course at Keble College, Oxford. The training sessions ran daily from 9am to 6pm, primarily within the state-of-the-art Supreme Court Complex in Brisbane — a thoroughly modern facility housing numerous courtrooms across multiple floors. Additionally, one day of teaching was held at the nearby Federal Court building.

True to its name, the course was indeed intensive, requiring over three days of preparation in advance. Participants were divided into two groups: the Criminal Stream and the Civil Stream. The Criminal Stream focused on a complex case scenario involving two prisoners accused of conspiring to bomb the homes of judges and a police officer. The Civil Stream, on the other hand, examined an equally complex contractual dispute, exploring breach of contract issues and the resulting damages. Additionally, a dedicated day was allocated to handling expert witnesses—psychologists assessing fitness to plead in the criminal exercise and financial experts calculating quantum in the civil exercise.

Throughout the week, participants attended daily plenary sessions led by senior trainers, covering key advocacy skills and featuring Masterclasses. Their performances were reviewed using the “Hampel” method, complemented by video recordings to provide detailed feedback. Participants also received personalized coaching to refine their delivery, including voice training to enhance their courtroom presence. The program culminated in a final trial before District Judges (equivalent to the UK Circuit Bench), High Court Judges, and Court of Appeal Judges. In the Criminal Stream, cases were even presented before juries drawn from local law students, adding an invaluable layer of authenticity to the training.



Beyond the rigorous training, the course also fostered a strong sense of camaraderie. Faculty and participants enjoyed well-hosted evening gatherings at various local restaurants, providing a relaxed setting to engage informally and decompress after a long hard day. A particular highlight was a special dinner for the Faculty and International Faculty at a lovely restaurant in Brisbane's Cultural District. The program concluded with a memorable Gala Dinner at Brisbane City Hall, celebrating the hard work and achievements of all involved. A particular note of thanks to Geoffrey Diehm KC, the Course Director and leader of the Civil Stream, Sharyn Hall, who led the Criminal Stream, and Ian Robertson-Clarke SC, the Chair of the Advocacy Training Council. Their dedication, along with the hard work and expertise of the staff and Faculty members, played a crucial role in ensuring the success of the Course.

Reflecting on the experience, while the course was undeniably demanding—as expected from an "intensive" program—the opportunity to contribute was immensely rewarding. The 23-hour flight (with a stop in Dubai) was a challenge, but the exceptional training environment and the chance to collaborate with outstanding legal professionals made it all worthwhile and I would wholeheartedly recommend teaching on this program.



HHJ Neil Chawla