

# The Australian Women's Register

---

**Entry type:** Person

**Entry ID:** AWE5728

## Rathus, Zoe Scott

---

**Occupation** Academic, Lawyer, Solicitor

---

### Summary

A former Australian Young Lawyer of the Year, Zoe Rathus is Director of the Clinical Legal Education Program and Senior Lecturer at Griffith University's Law School in Queensland. She was previously a solicitor, and then co-ordinator, at the Queensland Women's Legal Service, in whose establishment she played an integral part. In 2011 Rathus was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for service to the law, particularly through contributions to the rights of women, children and the Indigenous community, to education and to professional organisations.

Zoe Rathus was interviewed by Kim Rubenstein for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Oral History Project. For details of the interview see the National Library of Australia [CATALOGUE RECORD](#).

## Details

Zoe Rathus graduated from the University of Queensland with Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws (Honours) degrees in the early 1980s. One of Rathus' Law tutors was Quentin Bryce, later Australia's first woman to hold the office of Governor-General. Bryce was also a mentor and role model to Rathus when women in such positions were few and far between for female students [The Australian].

In 1983, Rathus was admitted as a solicitor, working at the time for Lillie and Associates, a small suburban law firm. She practised mainly in family and criminal law. She subsequently joined the firm Goss Downey Carne. In 1984 Rathus was one of those involved in setting up the Queensland Women's Legal Service. (She recalls that Bryce, by this time the first director of the Queensland Women's Information Service in the Office of the Status of Women, was a valuable supporter of, fundraiser and networker for the nascent Legal Service) [The Australian].

As a solicitor with the Legal Service, Rathus was an advocate for women who experienced domestic violence. She was chairperson of the Queensland Domestic Violence Council and assisted with the defence of Dagma Stephenson who successfully pleaded self-defence after the homicide of her violent husband of 22 years [Green Left Weekly]. In 1990, Rathus received the accolade of Australian Young Lawyer of the Year, awarded by the Young Lawyers' Section of the Law Council of Australia.

With the matter of women in the legal system continuing to occupy her thinking, in 1993 Rathus wrote what has been described as a 'seminal' report, entitled 'Rougher than Usual Handling: Women and the Criminal Justice System'. The report was "[b]ased on the knowledge of women's experiences before the law accrued from experience in the community legal sector, [and it was said to have] made an invaluable contribution to the reform of Queensland criminal law" [Galloway].

From 1995 to 1998 Rathus' continuing contribution to gender issues and the law acquired an international focus. She became involved in consultations concerning a key policy document seeking gender equality for South Africa: 'Justice Vision 2000?' [Gender Policy].

Rathus became co-ordinator of the Queensland Women's Legal Service in 1989. In this role, she enjoined the Queensland Government to make changes to stalking laws to increase women's protection, and opposed funding cuts to Legal Aid which adversely affected women on low incomes who were involved with the Family Court [Courier Mail; Meryment].

In 1999, Rathus was deputy chair of the Women's Taskforce Review of Queensland's criminal justice system, which examined the impact upon women of the Queensland Criminal Code, court practices and the legal system. As a result of the Review's findings, in 2000 law reform was enacted which provided increased protection for women and children in rape and child abuse cases [Monk & Parnell].

Rathus was presented with the inaugural Queensland Woman Lawyer of the Year Award by the Women Lawyers' Association Queensland in 2001. Two years later she was the recipient of the Centenary Medal, for distinguished service to the law and women's issues in Queensland.

In 2005, Rathus became Director of the Clinical Legal Education Program at Griffith University. She was also appointed Senior Lecturer; she lectures on family law, particularly in relation to family violence and gender-related matters, and women and teaches ethics and professional practice, which includes consideration of diversity within the legal profession and access to justice. An inspiration to her students, in 2011 they showed their appreciation, with Rathus receiving the 'Best Lecturer-Brisbane Award' by the Golden Key International Honour Society for her work as Program Director [Griffith].

Also in 2011, Rathus was appointed as a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia for service to the law, particularly through contributions to the rights of women, children and the Indigenous community, to education and to professional organisations. Rathus has, furthermore, been recognised with the Travis Lindenmayer Award for services to family law.

She is a board member of the Innocence Project and also a member of the member of the management committee of the Immigrant Women's Support Service. She was previously a board member of Legal Aid Queensland and the Legal Services Commission.

Rathus was instrumental in establishing the Queensland Women's Legal Service and her passion and longstanding advocacy for family law, for women's and children's rights and access to justice, continue to have an impact on communities across Queensland.

## Published resources

### Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

## Archival resources

### National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Zoe Rathus interviewed by Kim Rubenstein in the Trailblazing women and the law oral history project](#)

### Author Details

Larissa Halonkin

**Created** 30 May 2016

**Last modified** 1 November 2016

## Digital resources



**Title:** Zoe Rathus

**Type:** Image

**Date:** 3 May, 2023