



Review of Practical Legal Training in New South Wales

In February of this year, I wrote to members of the profession in relation to a survey to be undertaken on behalf of the Legal Profession Admission Board (**LPAB**) by Urbis in relation to practical legal training (**PLT**). I now publish the results of the survey and the Urbis Report.

The survey was principally directed towards practitioners who had completed PLT in the last decade as well as those who have supervised practitioners in that period. Over 2,500 responses were received from the cohort of recently admitted practitioners, and over 2,000 from supervisors, numbers which generate statistically significant results. The responses to the survey provide much valuable data and have also generated some serious concerns about the cost and quality of PLT available in the marketplace.

Only 43% of recent graduate respondents considered assignments were practical and career relevant with only 40% considering that methods of teaching were satisfactory. Only 13% of recent graduate respondents considered that the course was reasonably priced.

On a more favourable note, some 74% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the work experience component of PLT was useful for building practical knowledge and skills.

In terms of qualitative findings, Urbis identified the following themes from the responses:

- PLT is seen as a box ticking exercise, lacking deep relevance to legal practice;
- the move to most of the course being delivered online has led to a lack of in-depth learning;
- a lack of academic rigour was reported with the course being seen as hard to fail;
- PLT costs can be prohibitive and are not seen as providing value;
- work undertaken during study, such as paralegal work, was reported to be more useful than PLT; and
- employer-funded PLT could steer new lawyers towards private practice, deepening existing workforce imbalance across practice areas.

My colleague, Justice Tony Payne, who is the Presiding Member of the LPAB, has constituted a PLT Working Group consisting of members of the LPAB and senior practitioners from around the State to consider both short and long term proposals for reforms addressing the cost and quality issues relating to PLT. As a next step, the Working Group is conducting detailed focus group meetings with practitioners about the issues identified in the survey. Further consultations, including with current PLT students and recent PLT graduates are planned. The LPAB has last week written to PLT providers providing a copy of the Urbis report and seeking detailed information to inform the LPAB's review of the current state of PLT available in New South Wales.

Members of the profession are also invited to make any submissions to the LPAB (margaret.horan@justice.nsw.gov.au) in relation to the results of the survey. The input of the profession will be extremely important for the LPAB's review and I thank the many members of the profession who have taken and are taking a genuine interest in this issue.

The Honourable A. S. Bell
Chief Justice of New South Wales

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