

CAREER PATHS

The career destinations of Australian law graduates: first report of a five-year study

M Karras & C Roper
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Editor's Note

This small monograph contains the results of a survey of Australian law students who graduated in law in 1997. It is the first stage in a longitudinal study of the career destinations of a cohort of law graduates. The stated principal aims of the study are: to find out where the population have gone as regards to the legal work upon which they have embarked; to trace over a period of five years the movements in their careers; to obtain a better understanding of their pre-admission training; and to paint a far more accurate and three dimensional picture of what law students actually do with their qualifications.

There is advice given both as to the uses to which this report can be put and examples of how it can assist the various intended audiences in their policy and planning decisions. It builds upon an earlier body of research which took a snapshot of two separate student cohorts, namely graduates from 1991 and 1995¹. In this more recent study the researchers were able to contact as large a proportion as 61% of the population of 1997 graduates from whom they succeeded in securing the very high response rate of 71%, justifying the claim that the data collected are from a representative sample.

The purpose of this editor's note is to draw attention to this study, rather than to summarise and discuss the implications of the many research findings. This report is recommended reading for researchers in other jurisdictions who are looking for guidance about how to design their own study. It is safe to assume that there is widespread interest in how law graduates use their qualifications to equip themselves for the large variety of legal careers open to them and how they move in and out of different kinds of legal work as their careers progress.

In their final chapter the authors draw together the strands of their findings and essay the answers to three thorny questions of whether there are too many law graduates, whether law is becoming a generalist degree and who are the graduates working 'outside the law'.

¹ Vignaendra S, *Australian law graduates career destinations*, Centre for Legal Education, 1998

CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION

A circle game: issues in Australian clinical education

J Giddings

10 *Legal Educ Rev* 1, 1999, pp 33-59

The term clinical legal education (CLE) has been used quite loosely in Australia. The definition of CLE may well become a contested one in the near future as law schools position themselves to obtain a share of Commonwealth funds earmarked for this area. Students and practising lawyers tend to relate CLE to work with real clients or to skills. This is also the model which has been adopted by the Commonwealth government for its funding of CLE programs. Other law teachers usually give CLE a broader meaning, focussing on the use of teaching methods other than traditional lectures and seminars.

The increasing interest in undergraduate CLE is related to the very rapid increase in the number of both law schools and law students. The more competitive law school environment has ironically promoted a teaching method which emphasises, amongst other things, the value of working cooperatively. Despite this increased interest, the Australian clinical movement is currently quite small.

We can expect substantial movement with a number of law schools either introducing or exploring the possibility of offering a pre-admission Practical Legal Training (PLT) course themselves or in-

corporating teaching which satisfies PLT requirements into their LLB programs.

The dividing line between undergraduate CLE and PLT courses is becoming increasingly difficult to define. This lack of clarity arises from changing perceptions of the place of legal skills teaching in undergraduate law programs. Legal skills development can play an important part in clinical teaching but this relates to the value of these skills as more general learning tools rather than their value simply as skills. While CLE programs should not focus strongly on legal skills training, it is important to acknowledge the central role which the prospect of skills development play in attracting students to clinical programs. Students are understandably concerned to maximise their future employability. They will be interested in acquiring skills which they see as directly relevant to their prospective work.

In the early 1990s the University of Newcastle law school moved to introduce a different system whereby students could satisfy their PLT requirement through their undergraduate program by way of involvement in a range of clinical activities. The university established the Newcastle Legal Centre which has been the key clinic site and has been involved in an impressive range of major litigation, particularly in relation to police accountability. Ninety students are able to participate in what is described as the Newcastle Professional Program. This program requires students to complete a range of subjects during the final four semesters of their law degree.

Concerns in relation to CLE tend to be raised particularly in the context of the resource commitment required. To a large extent, the resourcing of clinics is an issue because of the mechanism used to allocate public funding to Australian universities. The staff/student ratio for clinics are very different to those for lecture-based teaching. CLE programs should be promoted on the basis that their benefits extend well beyond the students who participate directly in the program.

Australian clinical teaching has to date been focussed on live-client clinics, al-