

## School No. 2

Established for at least 30 years, this law school also provides services similar to the first university. However, it also offers its students extensive involvement in local community legal services. Students are given the opportunity via both course subjects and "after-hours" extra-curricular participation in local clinics to have hands-on experience in dealing with real people and the legal issues they face in day-to-day life.

Furthermore, students are assisted in developing their own unique approaches to clients, professionals and colleagues, combining legal knowledge and interpersonal interaction skills to solve problems while creating and maintaining a solid social and professional network from a very early stage. Arguably, a law student cannot help but discover and further his or her "X factor" under this environment.

Nevertheless, these subjects and activities are not mandatory, and are only sparsely advertised and promoted within the law student community. This means that many law students have been, and will remain, oblivious to and denied this vital training.

### Improving our law schools

Practical, hands-on legal training is only one of many ways a law school can offer its law students the opportunity to find, develop and nurture their "X factor". It is vital at the outset and during the progression of a student's law degree to address the full requirements to be successful as a legal professional, encompassing the full spectrum from legal knowledge to personality and "people skills".

Universities should diversify from mainly academic-based courses to those creating situations and environments in which students must develop the skills to be flexible and capable in approaching individual clients and cases, to take command of situations, see the details as well as the ultimate goal, and to network with colleagues and professionals of differing industries.

Involvement from the legal community in general is also vital, by increasing participation and interaction with universities regarding the changing needs and expectations of the industry, clients and employers. This should be not only in an advisory capacity, but also through offering work experience or clerkship opportunities, and seminars from successful professionals about the realities of the job and its demands.

Students themselves should be motivated towards developing themselves, even be it through simply obtaining part-time employment in retail or service positions which require them to deal with different varieties of people and situations, while also improving communication skills and self-confidence.

### Last word...

It is essential that Victorian law schools begin to emphasise to law students that becoming a lawyer is more than book-knowledge and research skills. Degree programs must be reworked to include compulsory skills development components, and information and counselling for students should be available from actual practitioners on the emotional and personal preparation needed for a successful legal career. Ultimately, law schools must aim at training legal professionals in their entirety – capable and confident both intellectually and in terms of personality, and it is the responsibility of the legal community as a whole to ensure that this takes place.

# Your profession – your say

FIONA RYAN, BARRISTER,  
VICTORIAN BAR

**A good lawyer/barrister** is able to focus on the main issues of a case quickly, and communicate clearly to a wide range of people from different backgrounds.

**The best thing about working in the law** is the intellectual stimulation, the challenge, and the ability to speak for people who are unable to do so for themselves.

**On the flip side**, there is the stress of being thrown into situations that you are unfamiliar with, and the feeling of responsibility for the outcome of your client's case, which can often have a significant and serious impact on the client's life.

**"Making it"** for me is having a fulfilling and engaging career, while also having a fulfilling and engaging life outside work.

**One of the best ways to market yourself** is to do the work that you have well, and to be prepared and courteous. Otherwise there are many networking opportunities, ranging from writing papers, giving presentations or attending social functions.

**As a barrister, it's essential to market yourself.** A barrister's clerk is often the best person to advise about marketing, and to help you work out what it is you want to achieve.

**Law school did not really prepare me for legal practice.** It seems so far away now. I suppose it helped me to acquire legal research skills, but practice is just so different.

**Outside of working hours I try not to think about work.** I spend time with friends, read and see films.