



# Government not second choice

*The most sought after job for young lawyers could be a career in government law.*

Providing legal advice to the most senior lawyer in the state – Attorney-General Rob Hulls, working with the Royal Commission into the Bushfires, the most high profile news story of 2009 . . . could this be the most sought after job for young lawyers?

Gone are the days when government law was labelled a lagging second choice behind the orthodox private firm career path.

As junior solicitors, we can tell you that you would be hard pressed to find a more stimulating work environment.

If you add the benefits of a flexible work/life balance, then the Victorian Government Solicitors' Office (VGSO) offers a legal experience like no other.

Nowadays, new lawyers have come to realise that there is more to their working life than billing clients and looking good in a suit. Those romantic notions of the law we had at law school when we debated matters of public importance, can be realised at the VGSO.

From our perspective, there are five unique benefits to being a government lawyer:

- flexible work life balance;
- variety of work;
- working on high-profile matters of public importance;
- exposure to legal work that no other law firm could possibly offer; and
- autonomy from a very early stage.

At the VGSO, we grapple with issues of public policy and high-profile work that

dominate the headlines in the major papers every day.

There is a quality of work at the VGSO which lawyers are not exposed to in the private sector.

Those with a true passion for the law should consider a career as a government lawyer.

Here is just a small snapshot of the kind of work VGSO young lawyers have been exposed to this year:

- Royal Commission into the Bushfires;
- human rights law;
- Crown copyright and other intellectual property matters;
- coronial inquests; and
- constitutional law advice to the Attorney-General.

Trainees rotate through the administrative law, commercial and property (including native title), litigation (including human rights law) and Victorian Police Branches of the office and may be fortunate enough to undertake a further placement at a fellow government entity, such as the Office of Public Prosecution.

At the VGSO, new lawyers are given the responsibility of running their own files under supervision and have support and mentoring from colleagues freely available.

In the first 18 months, the experiences are many and varied: from taking instructions from clients, running meetings, to instructing counsel.

It might sound corny, but being charged with the responsibility of instructing

counsel, while an Assistant Victorian Government Solicitor sits in the background and observes, provides a sense of pride in trainees, not only in our work, but in the fact that VGSO is willing to give juniors an opportunity to be a valuable part of the team.

The VGSO has rapidly expanded in recent years, attracting the best and brightest to a motivated team of government lawyers who are ready, willing and able to provide first class advice to the Victorian government.

The mass of talent has resulted in a culture of professionalism which reverberates around the office.

Importantly, there is a good mix of experienced lawyers who are keen to pass on their expertise to the younger crowd. With a broad range of skill sets acquired from the public sector, private sector and academia, the insights that young lawyers have access to are invaluable.

The issue of accountability is somewhat unique to the government lawyer, with the additional responsibility of acting as a model litigant.

This obligation goes beyond the normal requirement for lawyers to act in accordance with their ethical obligations, to acting with complete propriety, fairness and in accordance with the highest professional standards.

The responsibility is not just to the client, but to the state. We meet these responsibilities, but without the expectation of working long hours to do so.

While the VGSO returns a dividend to the Department of Justice, we're not driven by profit. As a result, billable hour requirements are fair and achievable, leaving time for further training and development.

Significantly, the VGSO is supportive of lawyers who wish to engage in further studies.

Three young lawyers have recently been granted a 12-month leave of absence to undertake further studies at Oxford University, the London School of Economics and Berkeley.

There are ample opportunities for secondments in other government departments as well.

Lawyers also undertake year-long stints as associates in the Supreme Court. In times where job security has become increasingly important, the organisation's flexibility and encouragement is second to none.

So could government law be the most sought after job for young lawyers? We predict that as our reputation continues to grow, the VGSO will cement its name as the most attractive workplace for a young lawyer.

A rewarding and stimulating environment awaits those who dare to take the step. ●

**GEORGETTE APOSTOLOPOULOS & JAMES PERRY**, YLS EDITORIAL COMMITTEE AND VGSO

*Georgette is a first year solicitor, VGSO commercial and property branch and James is a first year solicitor, VGSO litigation branch.*

# Quiz: Finding the Perfect Partner

*We all hope that one day we will find the One – that perfect Partner that appreciates you, guides you when lost, cheers you up when down, rejoices in your victories . . . Yes, well, then there's reality. So how does your partner stack up against the ideal? Complete this fun quiz for a guide to your Partner's type.*

**1 You have been trying to make sense of a task given to you by the Partner, but no matter how many times you go over the instructions, you still have no idea what you are meant to do or even where to begin. You gather enough courage to approach the Partner for further explanation.**

**The Partner says:**

- A "You can't be serious, it's such a simple task!"
- B "Ah yes, a difficult problem – good luck with that"
- C Nothing – he/she is not there
- D "Try Google"
- E "Stop fumbling around and get it done"
- F "Sure. Let's break this down into issues"

**2 You're in a monthly department meeting. The Partner:**

- A Interrupts everyone
- B Sits quietly and leaves halfway through to start his/her weekend early
- C Is not there
- D Passes off your idea as his/hers
- E Hands out work with unrealistic deadlines
- F Allocates work based on everyone's skills and experience

**3 There's drama over a letter of advice that went out to a major client, which appears to be entirely unchecked.**

**The Partner in charge:**

- A Waits until the Friday night drinks and then has a go at anyone who comes within 5 metres of that letter
- B Blames you, the person who prepared the draft letter and gave it to him/her to proof-read
- C Does not know about it, as he/she is not there
- D Re-reads the sent letter and says "Gentlemen, I'm still not seeing the problem"
- E Engages HR to discipline "the perpetrator" and demands they apologise
- F Accepts responsibility to the client and counsels the team about the best way to avoid a repeat in the future

**4 Think back to your interview. The Partner:**

- A Appeared disinterested and disengaged except when speaking about themselves
- B Called you by the wrong name
- C Was (you guessed it) not there, leaving the HR lady to make excuses for his/her absence
- D Asked you oddly specific legal questions and frantically jotted down your answers
- E Spoke exclusively about how she made it as a Partner and how you, as a woman, had to prove yourself to be acknowledged
- F Had read your covering letter and CV and asked careful questions

**5 It's the firm Christmas Party. The Partner:**

- A Talked loudly with their buddies about the incompetency of their team
- B Attended the pre-function lunch where he/she had too much to drink and had to go home
- C Is there, which is a little surprising as most of their department is absent, working on a huge merger
- D Is using this opportunity to solicit the tipsy trainee lawyers for advice about their practice area to help them on their current litigation files
- E Attends half an hour late, complaining she was left to clean up the mess of junior solicitors and then mixes only with the Partners for the rest of the night
- F Reminds their team about appropriate behaviour beforehand, mixed with all staff and left early

**TANYA SKVORTSOVA**, YLS EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

*Lawyer, Christopher Burnett Lawyers*

*To find out if you are the Perfect Partner turn to page 13 for Quiz results.*