A guide to careers in law for JD students
RMIT University Art Collection.

As part of the relaunch of the Emily McPherson Building (Building 13) as the Graduate School of Business and Law, the RMIT Art Advisory Committee was asked to commission two major public artworks on behalf of the Vice Chancellor. Alexander Knox’s expansive sculpture “We Love This Life”, which rises high above an internal staircase, alludes to the economic rationales of the site’s various histories though a cryptic frieze of intertwining arrows and swollen, splitting flow paths. Mr Knox, an alumnus of RMIT and a past lecturer, took the title of his work from the official song of the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy.
Source: RMIT News, 24 June 2013

If you have any feedback or would like to contribute to the next edition of the RMIT LSS Careers Guide, please contact:
Danica Kustura, Vice President RMIT LSS on email
VicePresident@rmitlss.com

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Contents

Message from the RMIT LSS President, Paul Melican 4
RMIT LSS Sponsors 4
Message from the RMIT JD Program Director, Professor Anthony Forsyth 5

Career Planning
RMIT Careers Toolkit 6
Create your future career action plan 6
Finding your career path in the big wide world of law 7
The job market for lawyers domestically and internationally: What are the prospects within law firms for graduate law students? Taylor Root Legal Recruitment 8
LIV Careers Centre 9
Choosing the PLT course that is right for you 10
LIV Traineeship & Seasonal Clerkship Guidelines - 2015 Schedule of Dates 16
LIV Seasonal Clerkship Guidelines 2015 17
LIV Traineeship Guidelines 2015 18
Innovative legal practices - Family Law Starts Here and Nest Legal with Stan Winford, CIJ 30
The Centre for Innovative Justice 31

Events
LIV Ideas for Careers - Seminar Series (Family Law 20 May; Property Law 22 July) 9
LIV Legal Careers Fair, 1 July 2015, 5-8pm 47

Practical Legal Training
Leo Cussen Centre for Law 11
Aaron Peppin, A Leo Cussen graduate shares their story 13
Christie Beller, A current Trainee Lawyer with Leo Cussen 14
ANU Legal Workshop 24

Q&A with past and present RMIT JD students
Samantha Tasic Law Graduate, Mills Oakley Lawyers 20
David Mejia-Canales Lawyer and Researcher 22
Jonathan Steffanoni Lawyer, QMV Super Solutions 25
David Bellchambers IT Manager and Volunteer Darebin Community Legal Centre 27
Kylie Caminha Lawyer, Angela Sdrinis Legal 29
Daniel Black Lawyer, Coulter Roache Lawyers 32
Naomi Keessen Paralegal, Nowicki Carbone Lawyers 34
Elise Steegstra PTA Administrator, Allens Patent & Trade Mark Attorneys 36

Our sponsor firms
DLA Piper 40
Lander & Rogers 41
Allens Linklaters 42
Alexandra Lanyon, A graduate perspective 43
Baker & McKenzie 44
Emma Burn, International Clerkship in Frankfurt 45
Russell Kennedy Lawyers 46

The Legal Industry - Feature Articles
Careers in Community Legal Centres - Ariel Couchman Not for profit, Youthlaw 37
Careers In-House - Australian Corporate Lawyers Association (ACLA) 38
Alice Linacre, General Counsel, Programme Litigation and Review Branch at the Department of Human Services.
Welcome to the 2015 RMIT LSS Careers and Clerkship guide. This year we have been fortunate to receive some wonderful stories from our current and former students on how they have navigated their law careers. To those of you close to finishing your studies, this guide will hopefully provide you with some handy insights from those who have gone before.

We have dedicated a significant portion of this guide to the Practical Legal Training providers and in particular an article from our 2014 Publications Officer, Christie Beller on her experience in choosing which provider was right for her. Christie and I spent a lot of time last year talking with the various PLT providers, going to information nights at Leo Cussen and The College of Law and holding information sessions at RMIT. There are differences in their courses and the approach so for those of you who are going to be completing the PLT in 2016 attending the information sessions in second semester is well worth while.

I would like to thank our Premium Sponsors Leo Cussen Centre for Law; our Gold Sponsors ANU Legal Workshop and The College of Law; our Silver Sponsor Nowicki Carbone Lawyers and all of our Bronze Sponsors Allens Linklaters, Lander & Rogers, Russell Kennedy, DLA Piper and Baker & McKenzie. Without their support none of this would be possible.

I would like to thank the RMIT Alumni, current students who contributed to this publication, the Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT Faculty, Taylor Root Legal Recruitment, ACLA and the Law Institute of Victoria for their valuable contributions.

Finally, I would like to thank the RMIT LSS Committee for their efforts, and in particular Danica Kustura, our Vice President. She has spent an inordinate amount of time making this a professional publication that we are proud of.

I hope that this guide benefits you and I wish you all the best for your emerging law career.

Paul Melican
President & Treasurer RMIT LSS
treasurer@rmitlss.com

Thank you to our sponsors
As the numbers of graduates from the RMIT Juris Doctor Program increase, we in the Graduate School of Business and Law are focusing more on career development for JD students.

This is something we firmly believe needs to be fostered while you are completing your JD studies. In a highly competitive market for graduate positions in law firms and with other legal sector employers, students can't afford to focus on future careers towards the end of the JD. It really must begin from 'day one'.

These are some of the legal career initiatives we have implemented recently:

• Guest talks from Law Institute of Victoria (LIV) Young Lawyers Section: 'Your Legal Career Starts Here', in the introductory law course.

• Three career workshops have been held already in 2015, with more to come. We've had representatives on campus from corporates like Coles Myer, big firms including Corrs Chambers Westgarth, and legal innovators in start-up practices (Nest Legal & Family Law Starts Here).

• Working with LIV on their annual Legal Careers Fair, being held on Wednesday 1 July 2015; for details see www.liv.asn.au/careersfair. This is a great opportunity for students to get in front of a wide range of legal industry employers, including private sector firms and government/legal aid.

• Expanding our student placements programs, providing students with real life legal experience at organisations including Victorian Magistrates Court & Koori Court, County Court of Victoria, Victorian Supreme Court (Court of Appeal), Neighbourhood Justice Centre, and working on refugee cases and criminal trials in the courts. Some placements are for credit in the JD Program (through the Legal Research Project course), while others are ad hoc opportunities that are both rewarding and add to your CV. If you're interested in a placement, contact david.goodwin@rmit.edu.au or stan.winford@rmit.edu.au

• Expansion also of the Clinical Legal Practice course through Mental Health Legal Centre and CIJ, enabling us to double the number of students each semester who are able to gain experience by advising real clients under supervision in a clinical setting. For more information, contact stan.winford@rmit.edu.au

• Rob Hulls from the Centre for Innovative Justice has made some excellent videos, interviewing various people from all sectors of the legal profession about their careers and what they are looking for in job applicants – see www.rmit.edu.au/about/our-education/academic-schools/graduate-school-of-business-and-law/research/centre-for-innovative-justice/what-we-do/video-repository/

These thoughts from Heidi Roberts, Workplace Relations and Pro-bono Partner at Corrs, at the recent 23 April RMIT Careers in Law event give you an idea of some of the challenges and opportunities in the mid-large commercial law firms – the rest of this careers guide provides many other perspectives on legal practice:

With 100s of applicants each year for a small number of seasonal clerkship and graduate positions, Heidi emphasised the importance of applicants having a clear idea of why they want to work for Corrs. They need to thoroughly research the firm's key practice areas, and come to interview ready to speak knowledgeably about the work of relevant partners and lawyers in areas of interest to the applicant. Making a connection through genuine interest is critical.

Heidi talked about the firm's extensive pro bono work for charities, not-for-profits and individuals who can't afford access to justice. She also highlighted the recent launch of a separate part of Corrs' business, Orbit, which places lawyers on a short-medium term basis for projects with major corporates and other businesses. This is proving to be a successful combination of the needs of business, and those of many lawyers who are increasingly looking for flexibility as to where, when and how they work.

Keep in mind also that your lecturers are a fantastic source of advice about where you might want to take your career. For example, I've spoken to many labour law students over the years about my very full CV (including positions in legal firms, government, the union movement and academia), and offered suggestions to students about their next step.

I'm sure all my colleagues on the JD teaching staff would be just as willing to assist students in relation to their specific areas of law. Career advice is also available through the Centre for Innovative Justice: www.rmit.edu.au/gradbuslaw/innovativejustice and RMIT Career Development and Employment: www.rmit.edu.au/careers

You should also get involved with the LSS, including mooting and client interviewing competitions, as these are great additions to your CV. So, get active – start planning your career now – and use the excellent resources we are making available to you.

Professor Anthony Forsyth  
JD Program Director  
RMIT Graduate School of Business and Law  
anthony.forsyth@rmit.edu.au
The Careers Toolkit is an online resource for RMIT students to support student global career development. The Careers Toolkit gives you access to all the information you need to:

• write professional resumes and application letters
• succeed at interviews
• plan your career development and
• increase your employability.

The Careers Toolkit also contains:

• global job search for over 50 countries
• an interview simulator
• practice psychometric tests
• e-learning modules
• downloadable careers quick tips
• links to over 230 professional associations and
• over 100 videos with advice from industry professionals.

Explore your career options

• Check CareerHub https://careerhub.rmit.edu.au for resources and the many career related programs and events on campus including expos, workshops, seminars, information sessions and more.
• Join your professional association, attend activities and start to build your network.
• Keep your resume current.
• Get program-related work experience. This may be vacation work, an internship, a professional placement or any other work related to your program—paid or unpaid.
• Consider doing voluntary work to develop skills, experience, confidence and networks.

Develop the skills employers value

• See the Careers Toolkit for help with building your employability.
• Participate in campus activities to further develop leadership, organisational and interpersonal skills through RMIT LEAD, RMIT Link and RUSU.
• Consider how international experience will enhance your career prospects. Study abroad, summer camps, international volunteering — there are many programs to choose from.
• See Education Abroad — www.rmit.edu.au/globalpassport/educationabroad

The Middle Years: Time to get experience

Understanding your career options and preparing to meet the requirements of graduate employers are the major career development tasks of the middle years of your program. But first, you may wish to reflect on the direction you have chosen and consider if your skills, interests, goals and values have changed. Some tools to help you are:

• the ‘Plan My Career’ section in the Careers Toolkit
• www.myfuture.edu.au
• if you are unsure whether to stay in your program and want to discuss this, see a careers consultant.

Final Year: Engage! Connect with your career

If you are completing an undergraduate or postgraduate degree and wish to apply for graduate positions, early preparation is essential. Recruitment by major graduate employers begins in February for positions beginning the following year.

• Attend employer information sessions on campus.
• Check CareerHub regularly: https://careerhub.rmit.edu.au
• Visit the Graduate Opportunities website at www.graduateopportunities.com.au and Unigrad at www.unigrad.com.au
• Research the employers you wish to apply to by visiting their websites.

Refine your job search

• Check www.rmit.edu.au/careers for job search tips.
• Have your application checked by completing the Application Express online tutorial: www.rmit.edu.au/careers/applicationexpress
• Make sure that you are known by the academic staff you wish to nominate as referees.
• Watch videos on interview techniques and use the interview simulator in the Careers Toolkit.
• Familiarise yourself with Assessment Centre activities and selection testing—see Quick tips for assessment centres and Employment seminars on CareerHub.

Besides graduate programs and other advertised vacancies, you may make a direct approach to an employer of interest or use your networks to uncover opportunities.

Source: Extract from RMIT Careers Toolkit. Refer to Disclaimer in the PDF online.
Finding your career path in the big wide world of law

There’s no doubt that finding your career path from student to gainfully employed lawyer is challenging – scary even. But the ‘right’ path for you is not always clear and direct, but it will still get you there. Here are some words of wisdom I have found useful thus far in my quest to navigate the big, wide world of law.

What do you like? What are you good at?
Often, the answers to these two questions are one and the same. You tend to be better at what you enjoy doing. So take this into account when mulling over your career choice.

What kind of lifestyle do you want?
Like many professions there will be busy periods and long days due to impending deadlines and urgent applications. However the importance of ensuring work/life balance is becoming a priority for many practitioners and firms, but to varying degrees. When considering a role make sure you are aware of their expectations and ensure they align with yours.

Don’t settle in a ‘this will do for now’ job too long:
A few people I know are so scared they will wind up living in a cardboard box that they apply for every single job they see, and will just take whatever they are offered, regardless of practice area and title. I can understand this mentality and sense of panic, but what if you really hate that job? How long do you plan on it sticking out in a job you don’t like?

Don’t despair if you get a rejection letter:
Believe me it’s going to happen. I know someone who is now a QC that sent out over 100 applications after graduating before she found her first job. Use each rejection as a learning curve. Make contact with the HR representative and ask why your application was unsuccessful, and build upon it.

Don’t be afraid to ask for advice or guidance:
Remember, everyone currently in the profession were once graduates themselves, and were probably facing the majority of the challenges you’re going through. So they probably have some great words of advice, and would most likely want to share it with you.

Get more creative with your job choices:
Why not consider policy work, or in-house counsel. There are a bunch of jobs out there that may not be practice related, but a law degree would certainly come in handy for.

If you don’t get a grad position, don’t panic:
You can still get to a top tier firm, if that is where you choose to go. It does not mean the end of the world. It just means you have a bit more time on hands to reassess your approach and destination. Believe me; I’ve heard stories from people who are currently working as associates and at firms who have spent the first few years of their careers doing weird and wonderful things. If you really want to work in a particular area or in a certain position, you’ll get there. Just keep trying.

So there are my pearls of wisdom. Bottom line is, if you have found where you want your career to go, persist. You’ll get there in your own time. Also, broaden your horizons; there are other options out there than just simply practicing in a firm. Once you think about the possibilities, a whole new world will open to you. Good luck!

Christie Beller
RMIT JD Alumni, 2014
Trainee Lawyer, Leo Cussen Centre for Law
LIV Young Lawyers Section Blog, October 2014
The job market for lawyers domestically and internationally

The domestic and international legal market

The global economy has been incredibly volatile in the last seven years, resulting in seismic shifts in the legal job markets both domestically and internationally. In recent times, law firms have made headlines for merging with other firms, reducing staff, freezing pay and losing partners and teams of lawyers to key competitors.

Furthermore, the graduate intakes at law firms across the board in Australia and overseas have been in decline. In the last eight years, intake numbers have almost halved. As a result, today’s law graduates find themselves in a fiercely competitive market for seasonal clerkships and graduate positions. For law students at all levels, there is sense in thinking critically about what needs to be done to secure that all-important graduate position and what opportunities exist for lawyers beyond the graduate year.

Bad news aside, what I have seen as a recruiter in the last 12 months, suggests that there is better news ahead. There has, without doubt, been a marked increase in vacancies for lawyers with at least one years’ post admission experience. This has been driven by a number of factors, but primarily, there is strong evidence to suggest that the UK and US economies are in recovery. This has led to increased optimism which, in turn, has fuelled a significant increase in transactional flow as corporates start becoming more active. This perceived optimism has flowed on to Australia where transactional activity has picked up significantly – heralding more work and better billings for law firms.

The key practice areas which have picked up globally in the last 12 months are all the major transactional areas; namely, Corporate, Banking and Finance, Projects, Construction, Property and IT. The appetite for lawyers with these skill-sets has increased markedly during this time and this is great news for Australian lawyers with experience in these areas. Australian lawyers with experience from internationally recognised firms with at least one year PQE (Post-Qualified Experience) are getting snapped up by international law firms in the UK, Asia and the Middle East and these international departures are, in turn, creating a dearth of locally qualified lawyers at the 1-6 PQE year level in the larger firms. Deals are currently being staffed by partners, senior associates and very junior lawyers with virtually no one in between.

Whilst these larger Australian firms are currently being exceptionally picky in recruiting for their current vacancies; seeking top academic results and experience from other top tier firms, I expect to see a gradual relaxation of standards in the next twelve months. I expect that larger firms will be increasingly willing to look at candidates with good quality transactional experience from smaller midtier and boutique firms.

What does this mean for law students? Several things, in my view. The first is that I expect to see better prospects for law graduates in the coming years who wish to gain international experience (provided that experience is in the right practice areas and from internationally recognised firms).

The second is that I expect to see a steady increase in local vacancies at law firms of all sizes as transactional activity picks up and the law firms take an optimistic view of their recruitment needs in the coming years.

The third is that I expect to see graduate positions slowly pick up. Over the next few years, law firms will simply have to take on more graduates to create more future lawyers - just as they did prior to the global financial crisis in 2008.

Applying for graduate positions

If you are thinking of applying for graduate positions, it is a good idea to be thinking about what your application would look like from your very first year of a law degree.

Academic results are crucial – right from year one. This statement holds truer for top tier firms and larger mid-tier firms than smaller firms but it cannot be overstated how important taking your degree seriously is. Partners at law firms can be fairly conservative and many of them view an academic transcript as a prima facie indication of a candidate’s technical skills. I have conversations with senior associates who completed their law degree over 10 years ago who express disbelief that they are still being asked for their transcript for a current job application, however, this is the reality. Rightly or wrongly, many law firms, particularly the larger ones, care enormously about university marks. If as a graduate, you would like to keep your options open down the track, study hard.
Have a well-rounded CV - Working part-time during your degree is incredibly beneficial. If this work is law-related (such as para-legal work or legal research based positions), all the better, however even if it is not; any work which develops strong verbal and written communication skills, a commercial outlook and the ability to relate to people is helpful. Law firms rarely want people who have exceptional black-letter legal skills and nothing else. They want skilled negotiators, lateral thinkers and lawyers who are capable of dispensing digestible, relevant legal advice. Prior work experience helps to hone these skills.

Extracurricular activities are also important. It is vital, however, to highlight activities on your resume that are relevant and show either excellence or commitment. A laundry list that includes your 3rd place in the Year 7 egg and spoon race is not necessary.

Read up – publications such as Lawyers’ Weekly, The Lawyer and the Legal Affairs section of the Financial Review (not to mention the Financial Review itself), give invaluable insight into the legal industry which can be extremely useful at interviews. A student who can speak intelligently on the myriad domestic and global issues facing law firms at the moment will impress at an interview.

Conclusion
There is plenty to suggest an improved outlook for law firms in the coming years. It is still however, an incredibly competitive market for law graduates, particularly as more and more universities offer law degrees across Australia, resulting in more graduates looking to enter the workforce. For those looking to apply for graduate positions within law firms, thinking critically from the early stages of your degree about how to distinguish yourself from the competition, and applying yourself diligently to completing your degree with the best possible results will give you plenty of career options. And that’s not a bad thing when you have HELP debt to discharge.

Shobana Richmond
Manager, Taylor Root Global Legal Recruitment
www.taylorroot.com.au

In 2006 Shobana joined the Melbourne office of Taylor Root recruiting lawyers at all levels across the Melbourne private practice market. She spent nearly four years in the London office of Taylor Root recruiting Europe based lawyers into Australia, Asia and the Middle East. Shobana returned to the Melbourne office in 2012 and manages the Taylor Root private practice, international and in-house divisions. She recruits for law firms in Melbourne as well as Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the US at all levels up to Special Counsel / Senior Associate.

LIV Careers Centre

The Law Institute of Victoria (LIV) is the state’s peak body for lawyers and those who work with them in the legal sector. The LIV leads and shapes debate on legal issues affecting the profession and the community. As the leader of the legal profession in Victoria, the LIV offers 150 years of experience and expertise to help you throughout your studies and your legal career.

LIV FREE student membership  LIV membership is your gateway to expert resources, information, education, support services and professional networks, all designed to support and develop your career. Become a LIV student member for free today. Simple go to their website www.liv.asn.au or email membership@liv.asn.au

LIV Young Lawyers Section  The Young Lawyers Section (YLS) is a dynamic group established to enhance the legal skills, knowledge and professional networks of members in the early stages of career development. When you’re just starting out, LIV Young Lawyers can support you as you build your legal career. Membership is free to eligible LIV members. Visit www.LIVyounglawyers.asn.au

LIV YLS Later Lawyers  LIV YLS Later Lawyers networking committee organises social and networking events and is specifically targeted at later lawyers.

Events & Networking  Develop professional networks and increase your knowledge by attending the many events and educational activities held throughout the year. For the full list of activities visit www.liv.asn.au/whatsOncalendar

Ideas for Careers – Seminar Series  Designed to assist law students put their learning into context:
Family Law – Wednesday 20 May
Property Law – Wednesday 22 July

Careers Centre  Provides valuable information to help you develop your career plan.
• Information for Students  Explore the ways you can qualify as a lawyer in Victoria and find information regarding seasonal and graduate recruitment.
• Managing my Career  Learn how to maximise your employment opportunities and secure your ideal job in the legal profession. Our resources will keep you one step ahead.
• Jobs Portal  Our jobs portal provides you access to the latest jobs and graduate positions, and offers practices and job seekers a locum service.
• Mentoring Program  Do you want to become, or are you looking for a mentor? Sign in to find out more and browse through our Mentor Directory to find the right career mentor for you.
Choosing the PLT Course that is right for you

Beginning law school is so daunting within itself, that you simply forget, or file away, what you plan on doing when you finish. However, it is a good idea to start thinking about these things early in your studies. Practical Legal Training, or PLT, is the step between graduating from your law degree and admission to practice.

There are a number of PLT providers, so you will need to decide which you would like to attend. There are a lot of influences that affect the decision of which provider you choose.

Ultimately, PLT is pretty much the same. You are placed into an imaginary ‘firm’, and are expected to act for fake clients by preparing documents and making court appearances. The differences between providers are how the course is delivered, and the amount of attendance required.

The following is a list of the considerations I took into account when deciding on my PLT provider. It is not in any means an exhaustive list, so please do your own research on it too.

Leo Cussen Centre for Law

- they find a placement for you
- assigned a mentor, which you share with a small group
- like a real firm: you are assigned a work space and need to work on files
- careers advisor who will help you with resume, cover letter and job searches
- places are capped and drawn by ballot, you could miss out, although you will be put on a wait list and most likely be given a place in midyear entry
- if completing online, need to find own placement
- no option of evening face to face classes

ANU Legal Workshop

- can no longer do concurrent enrolment in Victoria anymore, unless special grant is sought
- ideal if you are working whilst undertaking PLT as it is delivered online
- pay as you go: pay for each unit undertaken, as opposed to a lump sum
- 5 day face to face practical element before undertaking online component
- group you into ‘firms’, and you complete tasks as they are emailed to you
- the more work experience you do, the less electives you need to do, and vice versa

The College of Law

- no class number cap
- offer evening classes, which means you can work as you do PLT
- free copy of the renowned College of Law practice papers
- need to organise your own placement, but they provide some resources and help out if you can’t find one
- lowest fees in Vic

Handy Hints in choosing the provider for you

- Go to the PLT provider’s open night. There is no better way to get a feel for a place then to go there and see it and talk to current students.
- Ask questions! Remember that there is no such thing as a stupid question, and trust me, the PLT providers LOVE to have a chat about their course.
- Don’t be disheartened if you do not get a place straight away. Remember there are huge numbers of graduates getting pumped out of uni every year, where are they all going to go?! Take the opportunity to work and save up some cash, go travel (it may be your last opportunity to do so before full time work), or simply have a break. Typically, if you do not get an offer in your first round, you will be allocated a place at a later date, so don’t despair!
- Remember, deciding which PLT provider is right for you is a personal choice. The views expressed above are my own, and reflect my personal circumstances. You may disagree with something I have said, and that’s okay!

Christie Beller
RMIT JD Alumni, 2014
Trainee Lawyer
Leo Cussen Centre for Law
PLT at Leo Cussen Centre for Law is practical, relevant, comprehensive and highly regarded by the legal profession.

At Leo Cussen, you learn about the realities of legal practice from leading legal professionals who support and encourage your development as a lawyer. Our training is founded on the principle of ‘learning by doing’, with no exams. At Leo Cussen you will build practical legal skills and gain the confidence to make choices about your career.

Choose the course that suits you best.

- Online (Full-time)
- Online (Part-time)
- Onsite (Full time)

For more information visit leocussen.edu.au/apply

facebook.com/leocussencentreforlaw
linkedin.com/company/leo-cussen-centre-for-law

leocussen.edu.au
Leo Cussen has been operating since 1972 and provides high quality practical legal training and professional development programs for entry-level lawyers through to senior legal practitioners.

The Leo Cussen experience enables law graduates to learn how to practise law in a professional, yet friendly and engaging environment. Our Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice is comprehensive and well respected by legal employers. Employers may sponsor their graduate employee to do the course.

Practical Legal Training at Leo Cussen is practical, comprehensive, designed to meet the National Competency Standards for Entry Level Lawyers and delivered in a supportive training environment.

Successful completion of the Practical Training Course (PTC) entitles you to apply for admission to the legal profession as an Australian Lawyer which, in turn, entitles you to practise as an Australian Legal Practitioner in any Australian jurisdiction.

The Learning Experience
The Practical Training Course (PTC) is founded on the principle of 'learning by doing' and is designed to lead you to reach the required Competencies in an active and practical training environment.

Current Matter Program
Set up your own 'law firm' and run up to 10 simulated files covering a wide range of practice areas and presenting a range of legal and practical problems reflecting those you encounter in real-world legal practice. We operate an in-house registry and banking facility to assist the simulation of real practice.

Course Reference Materials
A detailed set of reference materials is provided for each practice topic, this is a great resource during the Course and a handy reference in your first year of legal practice.

Mentors
You work in a small group with the guidance of one of our staff. All our training staff are experienced lawyers. Their job is to help you develop your practical legal skills, professional values and confidence to work as an entry level lawyer.

Collegiality
You form friendships during the course and begin to build the personal and professional networks that support you during your entire career. PTC trainees organise a variety of social activities during the course to make sure the fun doesn't disappear in the midst of all the hard work.

For further information please contact:
Aimee Vogler
Administrator, Practical Training Course
Phone: 03 9602 3111
Email: ptcadmin@leocussen.vic.edu.au

Practical Training Course
(Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice)
I chose Leo Cussen for its reputation amongst the profession as a supportive and interactive environment where students can build upon and develop the skills necessary to make a successful transition from university student to professional, without the stresses of six-minute time increments, demanding clients and long hours.

Right from the start, I was exposed to the day-to-day tasks of a legal practitioner. From establishing and maintaining my own trust and office accounts, to preparing and lodging applications with a working registry and making appearances in various courts and tribunals, I was given hands-on, practical experience and challenged to produce my best.

Added to this was the opportunity to learn from and network with some of Melbourne’s most respected legal professionals. The highlight of the course for me was an appearance in the Federal Magistrates’ Court before the Honourable John Wilczek (former Justice of the Family Court of Australia)!

The Current Matter program, designed to provide a simulated experience of handling your own files, also allowed me to develop the essential skills of letter writing, client interviewing, drafting and costing.

For example, the Magistrates’ Court Current Matter began with receiving initial instructions from a client, filing a complaint with the court, negotiating with a fellow trainee as my opposing party, drawing a deed of settlement, and finishing with a final letter and bill of costs.

This work was supervised by a mentor, also a practising member of the legal profession, who was responsible for approving my work, providing constructive feedback and monitoring my progress through the course.

The 3 week placement component at the end of the course was a further opportunity to apply the skills I had learned. I quickly learned that my time at Leo Cussen had thoroughly equipped me for practice, as I was handed a civil enforcement file, and asked to advise on the appropriate course of action and draw up the necessary documents. As we had covered this topic not two weeks prior, I knew the appropriate course was to prepare a Summons for Oral Examination.

The skills I had refined during the course eventually paid off, as about 4 weeks after my placement had finished I was called by the firm and offered a full-time position.

I would have no hesitation in recommending the PTC course to law graduates looking for a way to consolidate their skills and prepare for their first job in the legal profession in a supportive, hands-on and challenging learning environment.

Aaron Peppin
Lawyer
Kenna Teasdale Lawyers Melbourne
Christie Beller
A current Trainee Lawyer with Leo Cussen

Did you have a career plan?
I did have a career plan, and it has changed many times over the last three and a half years. The path I envisioned myself taking in first year is very different to what I see myself doing now. Of course, when you begin law school you see yourself heading for a top tier law firm, inching your way to becoming the next Harvey Specter or Alan Shore.

But this soon changed when I realised how competitive it would be to land one of these sacred jobs, and how, once you get there, the long hours you will be working. Today, I am not sure where I am headed, but I am trying to be more open to different opportunities and am trying to be more flexible in where my career is heading.

What was your first legal job?
I volunteered at my local Community Legal Centre in my first year of the JD.

What was this experience like?
This was the best learning experience I have ever had; I highly recommend volunteer work to all students. This taught me drafting skills, as I was writing letters, filling out applications and proof reading other documents such as Wills.

It also refined my legal research skills, as I was instructed to look up different Acts or find precedent cases, and sometimes find relevant court forms or rules. I also sat in on client interviews, and learnt how to write file notes and how to conduct an interview from this.

By doing all of this, I received an appreciation of a wide range of laws, from road safety rules to court procedures. I also helped run files, and opened/closed them. These skills are critical as they are seen as basic skills that you should know when you enter into the workplace, so an early exposure to them are invaluable.

What are you currently doing?
I am currently undertaking my Practical Legal Training full time, onsite at Leo Cussens.

What is the most challenging part of the PLT?
Time management. You need to be super organised to get work done on time, and even more so if you don't want to take work home with you. I have seen many people fall behind and have to exhaust themselves in order to catch up.
What are your day to day tasks in the PLT?
PLT is literally a mix of university and work. I clock on in the morning and head to my desk (which is a tiny cubicle, much like I expect any first year lawyer would sit at), then organise myself for the day. Most of our days are structured, and we sit in lectures that outline procedures and drafting relating to a specific area of law.

Then we will have seminars in smaller groups that delve deeper into this, much like a university tutorial. Between all of this, and on designated ‘practice days’, we run files, called our Current Matters. We are currently running six files concurrently. As part of these Current Matters, we also conduct hearings, client interviews, negotiations and settlements.

What has been the best career advice you have received?
Be open to different avenues, even if they may seem a bit obscure at the time. There is more than one way to reach the same point. With jobs being so scarce these days, you need to be more flexible in what you are looking for. At the beginning of your career, any experience is good experience; you can always move on later.

Looking back, what advice would you give yourself as a final year law student?
Get as much experience as you can and take up as many opportunities as you can. Volunteer at the Centre for Innovative Justice; RMIT JD students are so lucky to have an affiliation with an institute like this.

Take the more practical based subjects like advocacy, clinical legal education and legal research project. The skills that you will get out of these are so useful and are viewed favourably by employers.

“Enter competitions. Not only can you put your skills to practice; but you can get some valuable feedback from judges who work in the legal industry and any prizes look fantastic on a resume.”

Finally, enjoy your time being a student (this is to those who are not working full time whilst studying), because believe me, full time work is exhausting!

If you had your time again would you do anything different?
I would have stayed longer than I did at the Community Legal Centre and worked there at least one day a week throughout my whole JD degree, and would have entered more competitions, especially moots.

Christie Beller
RMIT JD Alumni, 2014
Trainee Lawyer
Leo Cussen Centre for Law
# 2015 LIV Traineeship & Seasonal Clerkship Guidelines

## Schedule of Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seasonal Clerkship</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application period opens</td>
<td><strong>Monday, 13 July 2015</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traineeship</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market application period opens</td>
<td><strong>Monday, 20 July 2015</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Tuesday, 11 August 2015</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10am</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Thursday, 13 August 2015</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seasonal Clerkship</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sunday, 16 August 2015</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.59pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traineeship</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Market application period closes</td>
<td><strong>Sunday, 23 August 2015</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.59pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traineeship</strong></td>
<td><strong>Monday, 28 September 2015</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market offers made</td>
<td>10am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seasonal Clerkship</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tuesday, 13 October 2015</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Offers made</td>
<td>10am</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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LIV Seasonal Clerkship Guidelines 2015

1. To be eligible to apply for seasonal clerkships a student must be in their final or penultimate year of study, that is, they intend to commence their final semester in 2016. Students who have already completed their law degree are eligible to apply; however, applications will be accepted at the discretion of each firm.

2. Applications for seasonal clerkships will open no earlier than 9am on, Monday 13 July 2015.

3. Applications for seasonal clerkships will close no later than 11:59pm on Sunday, 16 August 2015.

4. Any offer made under these guidelines relates to clerkships within a one year period from the date of offer, but can be extended in circumstances agreed between the student and the firm for a further one year period if a student requests a deferral of the clerkship.

5. Any offer of clerkship must remain open for a minimum period of 24 hours from the time the offer was made or until 11am the following business day for offers made prior to 11am, subject to paragraph 5(a):
   a. Students must not hold more than four seasonal clerkship offers for a period of more than 2 hours.

6. Law firms will not make offers concerning seasonal clerkships before 10am, Australian Eastern Daylight Savings Time on Tuesday, 13 October 2015.

7. Law firms who have entered sponsorship arrangements with disadvantaged students, such as those employed under the Indigenous Cadetship Program, are exempt from complying with the Guidelines in relation to those students.

8. A firm may withdraw from the guidelines by giving (30) days written notice of its intention to the Law Institute of Victoria (LIV), the law faculties and law student societies at all Victorian law schools.

9. The LIV will maintain an up to date list of all signatory firms which will be publicly available on the LIV website.

10. Please note that students are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the firm’s clerkship application policy to which they are applying.

11. Signatory firms are not obligated to offer seasonal clerkships each year but must follow the Seasonal Clerkship Guidelines in the event that they do. For a full list of current opportunities please visit the Seasonal Clerkship & Recruitment Registry at http://www.liv.asn.au/For-Lawyers/Careers-Centre/Seasonal-Clerkship-Graduate-Jobs or contact signatory firms directly.

FURTHER INFORMATION
T: 9607 9370 E: younglaw@liv.asn.au
1. Applications for graduate traineeships will open no earlier than 9am on Monday, 20 July 2015.

2. Applications for graduate traineeships will close no later than 11:59pm on Sunday 23 August 2015.

3. Subject to paragraph three (a) any offer made under these guidelines relates to a graduate traineeship commencing in 2016, it is open to students who have already completed their law degree or students who will commence their final semester in 2015.
   a. Successful applicants who have already completed their law degree are eligible to commence their graduate traineeship prior to 2016 by agreement between the firm and the applicant.

4. An applicant who, due to ‘genuine necessity’, will be unable to attend an interview during the interview period, should apply to the Law Institute of Victoria (LIV) for permission to either:
   a. be interviewed at an earlier date; or
   b. by electronic means if the applicant is overseas at the time of the genuine necessity application and will not return prior to, or during the interview period. The form of electronic means is to be agreed upon between the firm and the applicant.

5. Interstate law students who commence formal semester classes on or before Monday 31 August 2015 may be interviewed by individual arrangement prior to that date in the year in which it is anticipated the student will commence his or her final semester provided that no offers or arrangements concerning traineeships are made other than in accordance with paragraph seven.

6. Except as provided in paragraphs eight, nine and ten, law firms will not make offers or arrangements concerning traineeships before 10am, Eastern Standard Time on Monday, 28 September 2015. Graduate traineeships can be deferred in circumstances agreed between the student and the firm for further one year period if a student requests a deferral of the traineeship.

7. Except as provided in paragraph ten, an offer of traineeship will remain open for a period of not less than twenty-four (24) hours from the time the offer was made or until 11am the following business day for offers made prior to 11am. Firms should make this known to students at the time of making offers in accordance with paragraph six.

8. Law firms who have entered sponsorship arrangements with disadvantaged students, such as those employed under the Indigenous Cadetship Program, are exempt from complying with these guidelines in relation to those students.
Law firms may make ‘priority offers’ of traineeships to eligible students in accordance with paragraph three on the dates set out in paragraph ten, to the following students:

a. students who within the previous two years preceding the date of making the offer referred to in paragraph ten, have substantially completed seasonal clerkships of at least two weeks’ duration with the offering firm, either in Victoria or at one of the firm’s interstate or international offices;

b. students who during the previous two years and for a minimum period of 30 working days, have performed paralegal work for the offering firm, either in Victoria or at one of the firm’s interstate or international offices.

The ‘priority offers’ made under paragraph nine can be made between 10am on Tuesday, 11 August 2015 and 12.00pm on Thursday, 13 August 2015. A ‘priority offer’ must remain open until the earlier of acceptance/rejection in accordance with paragraphs ten (a) & ten (b) or 4.00pm on Thursday, 13 August 2015.

a. An applicant will not hold more than two ‘priority offers’ for longer than a 2 hour period;

b. An applicant must accept/ reject any ‘priority offer’ received within 4 business hours of it being made (i.e. offers made at 10am will be open for acceptance/ rejection until 2pm the same day) unless the priority offer is made on or after 3pm in which case the priority offer must be accepted/ rejected by 10am the next day.

For the purpose of this clause ‘business hours’ is defined as the period between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Firms intending to make priority offers are not permitted to interview applicants or to make offers or arrangements concerning traineeships prior to making a priority offer. It is accepted that firms invite students to express their interest in being considered for a priority offer at the conclusion of their clerkship.

A firm may withdraw from the guidelines by giving (30) days written notice of its intention to the Law Institute of Victoria (LIV), the law faculties and law student societies at all Victorian law schools.

The LIV will maintain an up to date list of all signatory firms which will be publically available on the LIV website.

Signatory firms are not obligated to offer traineeships each year but must follow the Traineeship Guidelines in the event that they do. For a full list of current opportunities please visit the Seasonal Clerkship & Recruitment Registry at http://www.liv.asn.au/For-Lawyers/Careers-Centre/Seasonal-Clerkship-Graduate-Jobs or contact signatory firms directly.
Samantha Tasic  
Graduate at Mills Oakley Lawyers

Why did you decide to pursue a legal career?  
I had never set out to be a lawyer. In fact, I saw myself becoming a nurse. It wasn’t until after our ENTER scores came out that I decided to enrol in the Bachelor of Arts (Criminal Justice Administration) program at RMIT, which then led me to the Juris Doctor program at RMIT. To this day, I’m still not exactly sure why I changed my mind - I just followed my gut!

What did you dream your first legal job would be?  
Throughout my Arts degree I became quite fascinated with the court system, and had my eyes on a job with one of the Victorian courts.

What was your first legal job and how did you get this?  
My first legal job was as a work experience student at the Supreme Court Registry. As mentioned, I had become increasingly interested in the court system throughout my Arts degree and submitted an application to the Supreme Court Registry. After I completed the work experience program I was extremely fortunate to be offered a paid position as a Registry Officer. I then realised that there were more job opportunities in the court system for those who had law degrees – that was one of the reasons why I decided to study law. Approximately one year into my degree, I was very fortunate to be offered a Junior Associateship to the Hon. Justice Ferguson. I stayed with Justice Ferguson for about three years.

What was this experience like?  
I learnt so much during my time at the Supreme Court. As a registry officer, I had to quickly familiarise myself with the rules of civil procedure in order to do my job. My tasks included typing court orders, answering telephone enquiries and working on the filing counter. As a Judge’s Associate I learnt a great deal about good (and not so good) advocacy.

“I also learned that commercial law, contrary to my initial beliefs, is in fact interesting - it can throw up a variety of interesting characters and legal problems.”

Have you done any internships?  
Yes, I was recently a Legal Intern at the United Nations Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. I worked specifically in the Office of the Co-Prosecutors. The ECCC was set up to prosecute senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge (headed by Pol Pot), who are alleged to have committed a number of horrific crimes in the 1970’s. Around 1.6 million Cambodians died as a result of the Khmer Rouge regime.

How did you come across this opportunity?  
I was scrolling through the Beyond Law Job Hub (which, as a side note, is an excellent job-seeking site for law students/junior lawyers) and saw the internship advertised. I thought it looked like an extremely interesting opportunity and submitted an application. While I had a commercial law background, I have always been interested in social justice and thought it would be a great way to round out my studies in law.

What was it like and what did you learn?  
When I was offered the internship, I was a little apprehensive about accepting it. Being unpaid, there were financial considerations to take into account as well as the idea of being away from home for three months (including Christmas!). I ended up pushing those concerns to the side and accepted the position. It was one the best decisions I’ve made - it was an extraordinary experience.

I learnt a great deal about international criminal law and the issues that international courts can face such as under resourcing and delay. For the duration of my internship I worked solely on an appeal brought by two of the leaders who had been convicted of crimes against humanity. My tasks were more or less confined to research and drafting, but the subject matter was fascinating. I also had the opportunity to sit in court for the case that was running at the time - an incredible experience.

I also learnt a lot from living in Phnom Penh - about myself and about the people who have suffered as a result of an oppressive government. Despite their painful history, Cambodians (or the ‘Khmer’ as they are known) are the most resilient, patient and kindest people I’ve met.

What area of law are you working in at the moment?  
Commercial Law, in particular the area of Financial Services.
What is your current job and how did you get this?
I have recently commenced as a graduate at Mills Oakley Lawyers. I got the job by applying for the graduate program and making my way through the various stages of the recruitment process.

I am currently based in the Financial Services team and will complete two further rotations in Commercial Disputes and Insolvency and the Corporate Advisory teams.

What are the day-to-day tasks of your current job?
The Financial Services team is involved in the areas of superannuation, trusts, financial services licensing, and litigation arising out of managed investment schemes and insolvent companies.

“As a grad, my workload is unpredictable, however to date my tasks have included preparing correspondence, drafting court documents, research tasks, participating in client meetings and delivering documents.”

What is the most rewarding part of your job?
Going into this job, I was fairly sure that I was interested in litigious work. Very recently, I was involved in preparing for a Supreme Court trial and I experienced the addictive adrenaline that comes with the fast pace of litigation. That for me confirmed that I have picked the right area of law in which to practice. This has been the most rewarding job so far, knowing that I am heading in the right direction!

What is the most challenging part of your job?
The unpredictability of the work. As a grad I can be given anything to do, at any time. While this can be challenging in terms of planning my day, there is also a sense of excitement in not knowing what's coming next. Of course, there is also the challenge of working for so many different people – everyone has their own ways of doing things.

What advice would you give to people wanting to practice in your area?
In the limited experience I have had in this particular practice group, I have found that people respond really well if you vocalise your interest in a particular area of law. People are more likely to include you in client meetings, or even just take the time to sit down with you and have a chat about interesting developments in the industry.

What has been the best career advice you have received to date?
Be a sponge – soak up the most you can out of every single experience.

What job searching advice would you give?
Be positive and proactive - approach people you know in the field and ask them if they have time for a coffee 9 times out of 10 they will say yes. The jobs I’ve had in the law have been a classic case of being in the right place at the right time.

“I think it’s important to make contact with as many people as possible as you just never, ever know what can happen down the track.”

Have 3-4 people read over your resume and cover letter – having that many people editing your drafts results in an amazing finished product.

Many of the JD students at RMIT have had different careers prior to coming into the law. If that's the case, use it to your advantage and highlight that in job applications. Moreover, working and studying at the same time is something that I found to be highly regarded by potential employers – it's a great way to demonstrate your organisational and time management skills.

Looking back, what advice would you give yourself towards the end of your legal studies?
First and foremost, I would tell myself to stop stressing over everything – marks, job prospects and so forth. I would also tell myself to be more organised with due dates for clerkship and graduate applications – and not prepare applications the night before they are due (it's amazing how many typos one can miss in the middle of the night!).

If you had your time again would you do anything different?
Absolutely not! I, like many other JD students, worked full time throughout my degree and while that was extremely challenging, I would still do it again. It taught me a great deal about organisation and time management. I've found these to be extremely valuable skills in practice.

Samantha Tasic
RMIT JD Alumni, 2014
Law Graduate
Mills Oakley Lawyers
Why did you decide to pursue a legal career?  
I've always wanted to be a lawyer, I just took a really long way to get there. The moment I knew I wanted to be a lawyer was when I was in year 10 we went to the local Magistrates Court and I was just in awe at the process. I had no idea what the lawyers were saying and I wanted to! Every Friday I would skip the last two periods of school and go and hang out at the Magistrates Court just to watch proceedings. About 13 years later or so, I was admitted to practice myself.

What did you dream your first legal job would be?  
Probably running a case against a major corporation like Erin Brockovich and that Christian Bale would play me in a telemovie of my life based on how I saved the world with nothing but my wit, charm and legal knowledge.

What was your first legal job and how did you get this?  
It wasn't me running a case against a major corporation but it really wasn't too far off. I only applied to three firms for clerkships which is something I wouldn't advise, because you limit your chances. I didn't get any of them but I persisted with the one firm I wanted to work for.

I went to their events, I connected on LinkedIn with their people and asked them to help me redo my resume. I annoyed them so much they gave me a job as a paralegal in their commercial division. I ended up being involved in big disputes where companies had done some awful things to people and it was our job to stand up for the little guy. It was incredibly fun.

What was this experience like?  
I learnt so much! On my first day the lawyers sent me to instruct counsel at the Supreme Court. I almost had a heart attack because I was so nervous. They even let me run some files myself in my first two weeks. They were either very trusting or incredibly foolish. The main things I learnt were:

“Law school actually begins when you start practicing. Unless you practice, you know nothing!

Your reputation is everything. If you do not have a reputation as being honest, hardworking and reliable then you will quickly be phased out.

Even though law school actually begins in practice, if you don’t know any of the theory that you learnt at university then you know nothing at all!”

What area of law are you working in at the moment?  
Academia, I’m working at a university running a research project looking at refugees in Australia.

What is your current job and how did you get this?  
I got approached by a philanthropic organisation because they knew about some of the work I’ve done in the past. Before becoming a lawyer I was working in health promotion and Aboriginal issues. Because I had a legal background and a strong interest in human rights law I was offered the position of heading up this research team.
What are the day to day tasks of your current job?
Reading, reading, reading, then reading some more. I also read a lot, then I read some more. Then I try to synthesise what I’ve learnt into something that is useful.

I spend my days reading research papers, tribunal decisions, court cases, policies and so on. I also interview refugees to gain an understanding of their experiences before coming to Australia and during the refugee settlement process.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?
I know I’m making a difference to people’s lives and how they live them. I can see it, every single day. It’s wonderful.

What is the most challenging part of your job?
The terrible legal and social landscape refugees and asylum seekers find themselves in Australia is quite literally harming and killing people. I have to deal with the remnants of this every single day.

What advice would you give to people wanting to practice in your area?
We need academics, we need GOOD academics. If academia is something you want to pursue then I think you need to be creative, not just in the research you do and the findings you arrive at but the creativity needs to kick in when you have to turn your findings into real life solutions. Not enough academics are good at that aspect and I really think they should be.

What job searching advice would you give?
BE CREATIVE! don’t just carpet bomb firms with applications, be creative and resourceful. Some of the things I did were to get a graphic designer to design my resume. My resume immediately popped out to people because it wasn’t made on word. Have a web presence, make sure you’re on LinkedIn and even have your own website or blog. Look for opportunities, even when you can’t readily see any. For example once I was asked to apply for a legal job by sending a cover letter alone. I had to sell myself in 250 words, so instead of writing 250 words I sent them 50 words and a link to a video I made where I got to talk about my strengths directly to the committee.

Tell us about your blog www.aftersalazar.com
The rule of law only works at its best when it is understood by as many people as possible. So, my aim is to help people understand the law through my blog. I named this site after a fellow countryman Salvador Efrain Salazar Arrue (Salarrue) a celebrated Salvadoran poet and intellectual. Whether you’re a law student, a new lawyer or just plain nerdy and want to know a little bit more about something else you’ll find something for you here.

What has been the best career advice you have received to date?
Your reputation will always precede you. Always.

Looking back, what advice would you give yourself towards the end of your legal studies?
JUST KEEP GOING, eat right, sleep well, don’t drink too much. It’ll be over soon.

If you had your time again would you do anything different?
I wouldn’t have taken four subjects in one semester, work full time and also hold down a casual job. That was so stupid.

David Mejia-Canales
RMIT JD Alumni, 2012
Lawyer and Researcher
www.aftersalazar.com
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Get off the beaten track: it may not always be pretty, but it will always be interesting.

As you reach the end of your law degree, you will no doubt be thinking about what lies ahead. Some of you will know exactly what you want to do; some of you have no idea what you want to do; and some of you may find yourself agreeing to do something that you know will be a temporary step to something greater.

Wherever your journey starts and wherever your journey takes you, be open-minded and do what truly fulfils you as a professional. It might sound pretty straight forward but it takes great courage to think outside the box, accept what you truly want to do, and even more courage to do it. And most of the time, it means stepping outside your comfort zone.

No one goes into the legal profession because they want a pretty easy life. We all know that we will work hard; really hard. Facing adversity, going through challenging times and dealing with difficult people—it only adds to your resilience and opportunity to learn and grow as a professional.

But when you find yourself trying to fit a mould that is not what you created; when you cannot see where your professional journey is taking you...that is when you might ask yourself: am I on the right track? And if you’re not, then get off it! After all, wouldn’t you rather your journey be interesting than predictable?

Elizabeth Lee is a lecturer in professional legal skills, litigation and legal clinic.

Elizabeth is passionate about advocating for the legal profession and has been lucky enough to have danced with high profile judges at conferences in her capacity as Chair of the Australian Young Lawyers Committee.
Wherever your journey starts and wherever your journey do something that you know will be a of you may find yourself agreeing to what you want to do; some of you have lies ahead. Some of you will know exactly you will no doubt be thinking about what time, it means stepping outside your comfort zone. Want to do, and even more courage to do it. And most of the great courage to think outside the box, accept what you truly professional journey is taking you...that is when you might ask not what you created; when you cannot see where your opportunity to learn and grow as a professional. Facing adversity, going through challenging times and dealing pretty easy life. We all know that we will work hard; really hard. No one goes into the legal profession because they want a predictable?

It! After all, wouldn't you rather your journey be interesting than yourself: am I on the right track? And if you're not, then get off the beaten track:

Get off the beaten track:

As you reach the end of your law degree, it’s time, it means stepping outside your comfort zone. Want to do, and even more courage to do it. And most of the great courage to think outside the box, accept what you truly professional journey is taking you...that is when you might ask not what you created; when you cannot see where your opportunity to learn and grow as a professional. Facing adversity, going through challenging times and dealing pretty easy life. We all know that we will work hard; really hard. No one goes into the legal profession because they want a predictable?

It! After all, wouldn't you rather your journey be interesting than yourself: am I on the right track? And if you're not, then get off the beaten track:

Get off the beaten track:

What area of law are you working in at the moment?
Superannuation and financial services law, which is a complex intersection between so many different areas of law. Practising as a lawyer in the superannuation industry requires expertise in Corporations Law, Tax Law, Equity & Trusts, Contract, Family Law, Employment and Workplace Law, superannuation and financial services specific laws and insurance law (as a starting point).

What is your current job and how did you get this?
I am currently employed as a Senior Legal & Regulatory Consultant at QMV Super Solutions, and we consult for clients such as UniSuper, NAB, AMP, Colonial, Mercer and Equity Trustees. I have been in this role for over five years, and originally got the job after being approached directly by QMV.

What are the day to day tasks of your current job?
I’m involved in a broad array of tasks including making recommendations to trustee boards (drafting board papers), drafting contracts, eliciting client (business) instructions, planning and facilitating committee meetings, liaising with external law firms, keeping up to date with legislative and regulatory change, ensuring effective governance of conflict of interest and general project management. I’ve also been involved in the discovery process, briefing counsel and commercial dispute resolution through arbitration.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?
Working with smart people on complex and challenging issues.

What is the most challenging part of your job?
Understanding the commercial aspects of the industry and individual organisations is an important challenge. Especially understanding that the role of legal services is to inform decisions but not making decisions for clients.

Has there been one very proud moment that you can share?
While it's important to come into the profession with humility, the proudest moment would be the admission ceremony in the beautiful Banco Court in the Supreme Court of Victoria. It was wonderful to stand before Chief Justice Warren and sign the roll, exactly as all previous practitioners have done. It is the only opportunity we get as lawyers to enter the court room knowing with certainty that the matter will be resolved favourably.
What advice would you give to people wanting to practise in your area?

Experience within the superannuation and financial services industry doesn't need to wait until you've graduated and been admitted. There are plenty of opportunities to become involved in the superannuation industry, and to learn the fundamentals of how the system works.

“There is a growing need for risk and compliance professionals, and a good understanding of the law is always a great asset.“

Studying a vocational course on the side (such as an RG146 compliance or diploma of financial services) can be a great way to gain entry to the industry.

An existing skill set in information technology, accounting or investments is also particularly complimentary to a legal professional’s skill set in superannuation and financial services.

What skills are employers looking for in your current industry?

Subject matter expertise. It is becoming increasingly important for superannuation funds and the related financial services industry to have a thorough grasp of the dynamic regulatory environment.

Looking back, what advice would you give yourself as a final year law student?

Learn to enjoy the law, as learning doesn't stop once you are handed your degree and admitted. A career in the law requires continual and ongoing learning, so developing a genuine interest and habit in reading the law will make the transition to practice so much more natural and rewarding.

Was there anything you did during your JD studies that, in hindsight stood out as making a difference to your career plan or experience in the workforce?

“Mooting. As one of the distinctive features of the RMIT JD over other courses, the extensive opportunities to be involved in mooting should be embraced by students.”

While it can certainly be intimidating at first, mooting is such a valuable form of developing the ability to communicate clearly, concisely and confidently. This skill can be such a distinctive competency when in the workforce, regardless of whether we ever intend on practising as a barrister.

What career advice would you give?

“Have a vision for what you want to do, where you want to go and then tell people about it passionately.“

There's nothing more unattractive in a job applicant than uncertainty, apathy and a sense of entitlement. The beauty of telling people what your goals are is that you then need to hold yourself accountable to achieving these.

If you had your time again would you do anything different?

It probably took me until half way through my JD course to realise that I wasn't getting as much out of the experience as I could or should be. Studying a JD while working full time is a huge commitment of time and money, and it is crazy to not get as much as possible out of the experience. There are plenty of opportunities to become involved and engaged in the law while studying.

The Law Students Society, the RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice, LIV, CLCs, ALSA and many other organisations present students with plenty of opportunities to engage with the profession. In hindsight, I would have pushed myself out of my comfort zone and become involved as early as possible.

How did you do your PLT? What was that experience like?

I completed my Professional Legal Training through ANU Legal Workshop, completing the Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice (GDLP) over a period of about six months. The course was primarily delivered online, but there was a one week intensive in Melbourne focused on advocacy which was very useful. The PLT is intensive, and does require the commitment of significant time and effort. Ultimately, you get as much out of the PLT course as you put in.

Jonathan Steffanoni
RMIT JD Alumni, 2014
Lawyer, Senior Consultant
QMV and ASFA Associate
My journey to a legal career is a continuing one. I’m a later lawyer having had a long career in Information Technology. For the last 15 years I’ve worked as either an IT Manager, consultant or Chief Information Officer across a number of organisations. It has been a rewarding career but I have always had a latent interest in the law dating back to high school where I did legal studies as one of my VCE subjects.

I pursued other interests at university until some years later I was involved in litigation against a large IT vendor. At the time it seemed stressful as I was heading up commercial negotiations with the vendor and the relationship had broken down to the point where we had briefed counsel and had a court hearing date set. Fortunately, common sense prevailed and the matter was settled at virtually the amount that I’d estimated two years earlier. I considered that my first legal ‘win’!

Fast forward a few years to 2008 and I had just finished an MBA (also through RMIT). I had inquired about studying law only to find there weren’t very many courses available for those wanting to study part time while still holding down a day job. When RMIT introduced the Juris Doctor program, I saw an opportunity and signed up. About this time, I became a father for the first time adding additional complexity! Key learning there is to have a very supportive (read: forgiving!) partner.

For the next five years I worked steadily on the Juris Doctor entirely part time while juggling full time work and family - including the arrival of my second daughter. However, I was not alone and had numerous class mates with families of their own or jobs in distant countries or on remote farms. It adds a new dimension to group work when you turn up for moot court to meet two other people on your team who you’ve never laid eyes on before!

Upon graduating in 2012, I signed straight up to complete the Practical Training Course at the Leo Cussen Centre for Law. In my mind, I wanted to practise at some stage, so knuckled down again for one last year. Some would describe this as being emotionally over committed by this stage, but it’s amazing how far sheer bloody mindedness can get you sometimes.

Finally, in February 2014, I turned up to the Supreme Court to be admitted to practice. So what then? With a young family and good job in IT, my journey would not be to immediately look for a graduate role in a firm and go back to re-establishing a whole new career, at least not at this time. Sometimes you need to know when to give back, so the next few years are about family time first.

However, I haven’t been idle on the legal front and started volunteering at Darebin Community Legal Centre with their night service.

“This has been a revelation and opened up a whole new world of challenges. In any night, I can see clients with legal issues as diverse as family law, family violence, criminal offences, consumer affairs and magistrates’ court appearances.”

Add in to this the social issues of substance abuse, mental health and homelessness problems just to name a few. For anyone wanting to learn about law at the grass roots level, I’d highly recommend it.

David Bellchambers
RMIT JD Alumni, 2012
RMIT MBA Alumni, 2007
Manager Information Technology
City of Boroondara
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Contributing to the prevention of child abuse

In 2010 I started the JD at RMIT as a mature age student and a single mother of a newborn and toddler. I had a background in customer service, administration and sales, with no specialist and/or professional experience. I was bored and wanted something challenging.

I remained open to what field of law I would enter. I was advised that it would be hard to get a job as a new lawyer and so I worried constantly about being a mature age, unemployed lawyer with a big HECS debt at the end.

To build my resume, I volunteered at Victoria Legal Aid and two community legal centres. Although all of the roles were not areas of law that I was interested in, they were hands-on so I gained invaluable experience. I dealt with clients and worked beside many different lawyers. Although unpaid, the experience on my resume made it worthwhile. In my penultimate year I applied for clerkships and gained a role in a local firm. The same firm selected me to undertake a legal traineeship whilst I completed the practical legal training at The College of Law.

During my traineeship I rotated between property, litigation and commercial. Property and commercial were areas of law that I had never thought about working in. I gained a taste of each field. My role involved attending client interviews, conferences and court, drafting correspondence, drafting and analysing contracts, conveyancing, research and discovery (avoid where possible).

A challenging part of my role, and something you do not learn in university, was verbally communicating legal facts and issues to lawyers; this took some practice. I worked weekdays 8.30am until 6pm plus overtime, whilst completing my PLT. Stressful? Yes.

The practical legal training was very different to the JD. We learned whilst working on cases. It required reading but no research! We learned how to apply our knowledge in the workplace, including conveyancing, how to file and serve documents, mooting, time recording, and law firm accounting. We were given textbooks to refer to, which are simple to read and understand, and useful at work.

When my traineeship ended, I sought a firm of interest. I saw an ad on the College of Law website seeking a part time graduate to work in the field of personal injury. The firm specialised in Comcare, sexual and institutional abuse, TAC and public liability and involved making claims for compensation. I wanted to help people and make a difference in their lives so I applied and was selected to start immediately.

Within six months I was permanent five days. My role requires me to meet new clients, take witness statements, draft documents including letters of demand, draft letters to clients, liaise with stakeholders, participate in telephone conferences, etc. My specialist knowledge and confidence is growing every day. My job is rewarding because I am assisting injured people and contributing to the prevention of child abuse.

To get a job after your law degree, I suggest being proactive and different. This is needed because the competition is high.

“Even though my results were respectable, my volunteer work impressed employers the most.”

I found that employers sought mature people with people skills. The best interview advice I received was to relax and appear confident; as though I already had the job. Employers will be thinking about how you will be able to fit into their firm and relate to clients, so be friendly and professional.

Kylie Caminha
RMIT JD Alumni, 2014
Lawyer
Angela Sdrinis Legal
Innovative legal practices

At the Centre for Innovative Justice, we are always looking for opportunities to let students know that in a challenging employment environment, it doesn't have to be a choice between big firms and pro bono work, or even the big firms or the community sector. It's possible to conceive of legal practice differently.

Legal practice is not immune from the changes technology and information have brought to other sectors. Just like Uber and the taxi industry or AirBnb and the accommodation sector, internationally we're beginning to see examples of new legal practices that are tapping into unmet demand for legal services by embracing flexibility and innovation to make the law more accessible and affordable for consumers. Interestingly, many US law schools are also establishing law practice “incubators” to support graduate lawyers to establish their own practices in what are equally challenging conditions for young lawyers seeking work in a changing legal services market.

In this context, I thought it would be interesting for RMIT’s JD students to hear from two young lawyers who have started up their own innovative legal practices. Rebecca Thomas from Family Law Starts Here and Laura Vickers from Nest Legal talk about the opportunities that opened up for them to work flexibly with low overheads, escape the tyranny of the billable hour and meet the growing demand for reasonably-priced legal services supported by upfront, transparent pricing structures such as fixed fees and unbundled services.

Family Law Starts Here

Rebecca Thomas completed her law degree at Macquarie University in 2009 and opened Family Law Starts Here (www.familylawstartshere.com.au) in April 2014 after a period in private practice and time with Maddocks lawyers as well as roles with Macquarie Bank and Ernst and Young.

Family Law Starts here provides flexible appointments and telephone legal advice, as well as fixed fee advice below the Family Court scale, and includes a fixed fee service for drafting court documents. For Rebecca, starting out on her own was a big step, and only possible with mentoring and support from a much more experienced practitioner.

Rebecca told students that despite not even enrolling in the subject during her law degree, when she happened upon family law practice, she knew straight away that it was what she wanted to do for the rest of her legal career.

Rebecca and Laura both say not to get too “hung up” on which subject-matter area to specialise in during their law degree, as it had not made much difference to what they ended up doing in practice.

Nest Legal

Laura Vickers graduated from the University of Melbourne with a communications degree and first class honours in law in 2006. She did articles at Maddocks in the State Government team and after a few years moved to the Victorian Government Solicitor’s Office as a constitutional lawyer. Whilst on maternity leave with her first child and unable to secure childcare, she created Nest Legal (www.nestlegal.com.au), one of Australia’s first online law firms.

Marketed as an after-hours boutique law firm for busy parents and others unable to meet a lawyer in business hours, Nest Legal won the 2014 LexisNexis Legal Innovation Index prize for its “innovative approach to client service that perfectly services its target market.”

Nest Legal advertises its fixed fees online, and obtains initial instructions via secure web forms. Laura’s firm also provides dispute strategy sessions where clients pay for a one-hour phone or Skype consultation, after-hours online video conference and basic document drafting in the field of disputes.

Laura explained that she had a “light-bulb” moment while struggling to manage her restless toddler during an appointment with her accountant in his city office as he painstakingly tapped away entering information from a form that could easily have been provided online.

She thought that there had to be a better way of delivering accessible and convenient legal services to people who have young families, and thought that technology must be part of the answer.
Laura researched her idea for a virtual firm by looking at US-based online models. Dealing with the ethical, accounting and regulatory requirements of a virtual law firm, and setting up systems and processes was a big job. Laura uses cloud computing and a range of applications to chat with clients online, document management software, document sharing and accounting software, which are all relatively inexpensive, to run her practice.

Both Laura and Rebecca thought it would be possible to start your own innovative practice fairly early in your career, but noted the requirement for supervised practice for two years post admission would have to be addressed.

Laura says that she finds her work interesting and enjoyed the challenge of starting her own business, but the best part of her model for legal practice was the flexibility it provided for her young family. She says that legal innovation doesn’t require big budgets and infrastructure, just a bit of imagination and putting yourself in the shoes of your clients.

Stan Winford
Principal Coordinator, Legal Programs
Centre for Innovative Justice
RMIT University

The Centre for Innovative Justice

Student involvement with the Centre
The Centre for Innovative Justice provides students, through placements and research opportunities, with practical exposure to the process of law reform and an understanding of the social context of the law, equipping them to use their legal training to advocate for and achieve change. The Centre’s objective is to develop, drive and expand the capacity of the justice system to meet and adapt to the needs of its diverse users.

Innovative justice is the key to making modern justice systems more affordable, effective, understandable and efficient. Legal services innovation has a critical role to play in ensuring that everyone, no matter what their incomes, has meaningful access to justice. Emerging innovations in legal practice take a consumer-focussed approach and recognise that transparency and flexibility about services and costs are the key to maintaining a sustainable legal profession.

Innovations such as fixed fees, discrete task assistance, and online and virtual legal services are all practices that have developed as responses to a sector that, for many people, has become out of reach and irrelevant.

How to get involved
The Centre has a strong focus on developing opportunities for student learning and engagement, both within and outside the Juris Doctor curriculum. Simply contact us with your CV and some details about your areas of interest.

Contact CIJ
If you are interested in becoming involved in the Centre’s activities, or would like to find out more, please contact us.

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www.rmit.edu.au/innovativejustice
twitter.com/InnovateJustice

Pictured left to right: Rebecca Thomas (Family Law Starts Here), Stan Winford (CIJ) and Laura Vickers (Nest Legal)
Daniel Black
Supervised Workplace Training

Why did you decide to pursue a legal career?
Coming from a Commerce background I had previously worked in finance and financial planning for a number of years. I was working at ING Financial Planning at the time, and along came the Global Financial Crisis.

The company introduced firm wide salary and promotional freezes for an indefinite period of time. This was the trigger for me to think of a career change, and I remembered back to my university days when I studied a few (modified) law subjects, enjoying them and actually getting decent marks in those subjects.

Whilst still working full time I decided to enrol in “Introduction to the Australian Legal System and Legal Methods” at RMIT. During the intensive weekends I met some great people, and formed the beginnings of a now long friendship with another student who was in a somewhat similar position to me (and shared a passion for motorcycles).

Towards the end of the introductory subject we both decided to enrol in Contract Law the following trimester, so we would at least have study partner to keep each other on track. At that point I was enjoying the law far more than my finance job, so in 2009 I decided to give up full time work and concentrate on finishing the JD.

What was your first legal job and how did you get this?
My first legal job was as a legal secretary/paralegal position at a small CBD firm called Kempsons Lawyers. It actually took me six months of applying for every single “legal secretary, paralegal, law clerk, legal assistant, research assistant position” I could find advertised, before I got the job at Kempsons Lawyers. I initially started working two days per week whilst studying three subjects per trimester at RMIT.

What was this experience like? What did you learn?
Getting a foot in the door at a law firm and starting at the bottom of the ladder so to speak was a great experience. You start interacting with clients, lawyers, partners, barristers, court staff and everyone else that comes in contact with a law firm.

You also learn a lot of very important things that are not taught (or was not when I was studying) at university. You learn things such as:

- what a Contract of Sale of Real Estate and Section 32 Statement looks like and the legal terms they contain;
- what a Retail Lease and Disclosure Statement looks like and contains; and
- the structure, form and general content of documents such as File Notes, Memorandums, Briefs to Counsel, Affidavits, Originating Motions, Summons, Notices of Defence, Requests for Further and Better Particulars, etc. (which can be very helpful for some of the JD subjects).

“Basically, you start to get real world experience in a law firm, which can be a good test to see if you actually like working in the law, the culture, and everything that comes with being a lawyer. “

What is your current job and how did you get this?
I am currently a Lawyer in the Wills, Estates and Succession Law department at Coulter Roache Lawyers in Geelong. My wife and I were looking at moving from Melbourne to Geelong to be closer to family, so I sent an email to a number of firms in Geelong with my CV and a covering letter. After a couple of interviews I was lucky enough to receive job offers from two firms in Geelong, and decided to go with Coulter Roache Lawyers.
Did you do PLT or SWT? What was that experience like?
I always wanted to do Supervised Workplace Training (SWT) over Practical Legal Training (PLT). When I completed the JD, I asked the Managing Partner of Kempsons Lawyers whether he would take me on as a Trainee Lawyer, he thought about it for about five seconds, and then said yes.

Having already worked for the firm for two years part time, I didn't find that it was a big transition to SWT. Obviously the workload increased and the range of files you worked on broadened (to meet the 10 competency areas), but by having a Partner oversee all of your work it was a nice safety net to have.

My advice to anyone thinking of doing SWT in the future is to make the most of this 12 month period. Learn as much as you can and do as much as you can. It is an opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them (before anything is sent to the client, the Court or another practitioner). Make the most of it as this grace period does not last forever.

What career advice would you give?
I think it really depends on what you want to get out of the JD, and whether you want to seek admission as a legal practitioner and work in a law firm, or whether you want further your existing career.

Whilst I was completing the JD there were quite a number of mature age students, with established careers, who were looking to use the JD to move into senior management and board level positions. To those students, I don't think I can really provide much career advice as they will have a clear idea of what they need to do to progress to the next level in their chosen career.

However, to those students who do wish to seek admission and practise as a lawyer, my advice is to consider a stepped approach into the law.

Putting in the time and effort to obtain good grades is the starting point, and from there I would recommend seeking some work experience in a law firm (either paid or unpaid) to see if you like it. It can take time, and you will probably receive many "rejection letters", but be persistent.

In your final year of study you will need to think about whether you are going to do PLT or SWT, and start making the necessary arrangements to get this in place once you finish your final subjects.

Finally, if you don't get a clerkship or graduate position at a top tier law firm it is not the end of the world. The market for law graduates is the most competitive and saturated it has ever been.

“However, if you really want to work as a lawyer my advice is to be persistent, seek relevant part-time or voluntary work experience, use all of your networks (family, friends, professional, sporting, etc) to find hidden job opportunities, and broaden your geographical area (if possible).”

Daniel Black
RMIT JD Alumni, 2011
Lawyer
Coulter Roache Lawyers
Why did you decide to pursue a legal career?
I decided to pursue a legal career only a couple of years after finishing my undergraduate studies. I came to realise that I just didn't love working in either of the sectors my degree led to, and I had always been drawn to law.

I actually got into undergrad law and found that I just wasn't mature enough to pick readings over going out with friends!

What did you dream your first legal job would be?
Honestly, I didn't really ever dream about my first legal job! I spent most of my first year back at university being worried that I wouldn't actually finish the degree! Now I dream that my first legal job will be with Legal Aid, hopefully in criminal or family law.

Did you have a career plan?
I did have a career plan, I intended to work part time and study full time the entire way through my degree and then go on to work for NAB as a member of their legal counsel. That didn't work out, partly because I found myself getting very tired and frustrated working, when I felt I should be focusing on my studies.

I also felt that the work I was doing wasn't giving me the right experience to get a job in the legal sector when I finished. After much frustration and deliberation, I eventually quit my job at the bank. Eventually I got a job in a law firm, and am trying to amass as much legal experience as possible before I graduate at the end of this year.

What was your first legal job and how did you get this?
My first legal job is my current job. I am a paralegal at Nowicki Carbone Lawyers.

What area of law are you working in at the moment?
I work in a Personal Injury law firm and I am one of the Workcover paralegals.

What are the day to day tasks of your job?
On any given day, I have a file to work on, and I have to draft documents for that file. The documents I draft are normally either; an affidavit with a connected statement of claim; one of a range of chronologies; or a proof of evidence.

Once I have the file, I spend a small amount of time reading through it, to try and gauge the injury I am dealing with and where the file is up to. After that, I start drafting the document. At some stage, I will have to call the client to get further information off them, but I try to know as much as possible about their claim before I do that. Once the document is drafted we give it back to the lawyer and wait for feedback.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?
The most rewarding part of this job for me is the knowledge that you are helping someone. I never thought about how life changing a personal injury can be especially if it could have been prevented by an employer.

What is the most challenging part of your job?
During the drafting process, especially for an affidavit we do have to ask some very personal questions and that can be difficult for me. These questions include things like ‘How has your sex life changed since the injury?’ and ‘How has your relationship with family changed since the injury?’ I often feel like I’m prying into our client’s personal information and that doesn’t always feel great.

Has there been one very proud moment that you can share?
I had a client tell me how happy he was with my personal understanding and knowledge of his claim. He actually felt this so strongly he passed that message onto his lawyer!

What advice would you give to people wanting to practice in your area?
This area of law is very client focused; and if you don't like dealing with people this isn't for you. You also need a degree of patience as people in these situations are often quiet upset about what has happened to them, and sometimes they need reassurance about something that might seem simple.
Do you have any advice for preparing for job interviews?
Practice!! The first question I always get asked (and I hate it) is “Tell us about you?” and for the first couple of times I did a very good impression of a fish blowing bubbles.

“Think about your answers to anything you might get asked in an interview, and practise them with a friend who is happy to give you honest feedback!”

What has been the best career advice you have received?
I once had a boss who told me “You could do anything you want, if you put your mind to it’. So basically, be confident in what you want to do, and understand that you will have to work for it!

Alternatively “fake it, until you make it’ is always good! (Pretend to be confident until you are – don’t make things up!)

Looking back, what advice would you give yourself as a final year law student?
Cancel your Netflix subscription!!! I seem to spend an awfully large amount of time watching some pretty questionable televisions shows (The Nanny for instance!)

If you had your time again would you do anything different?

“I would start trying to volunteer sooner! You learn so much about the law, when actually working in it, that you could never in the classroom.”

Was there anything you did during your JD studies that, in hindsight stood out as making a difference to your career plan or experience in the workforce?
At the moment I am doing Clinical Legal Education and this has really made a difference to my career plan. I have always have a list of areas I wouldn’t mind working in, but this subject has helped me to really focus on a few key areas, because it has made me so passionate about helping people who really need it!

Naomi Keessen
Current RMIT JD Student and RMIT LSS Executive Officer
Paralegal
Nowicki Carbone Lawyers
I work as a Patent and Trade Mark Administrator. I do administrative work in the intellectual property field. Interestingly, Patent and Trade Mark attorneys are not lawyers (although many are) but they have completed an accredited patent or trade mark attorney course.

They are the true attorneys of our legal system. Patent & trademarks is a very small industry where everyone is familiar with all the other key operators in all the other firms. So, while I work in a law firm and in the legal industry, I don’t necessarily work in a field that I am looking to practice in when I graduate.

I started at Allens, almost like a cliché, in the photocopy room. Not quite the mail room, but mail room adjacent. I wasn’t planning on studying the law when I started but it soon became clear that it would be interesting and fun work.

Also, my partner started studying the JD at RMIT and it looked like a lot of fun. I thought that if he could do it, I could do it (nothing like intra-family competition). He also said that it was great to go to law events, especially at national competitions, where everybody was the smartest guy in the room.

A quote from a Christmas cracker (that google tells me is by Julia Morgan) comes to mind that applies in my situation.

“Never refuse a job because it is too small; you never know where it will lead you.”

Studying law gives you skills that have many applications outside of just the field of law. Studying law teaches you critical thinking and logical reasoning. I have used the skills learned in the JD in the not-for-profit field as well as in my professional life.

I sit on various committees in the non-profit sector, for example the executive committee of Girl Guides Victoria. I have worked on drafting organisational constitutions, leasing deals, and executive appointments. It is exciting and rewarding to be able to help many different organisations in a way that adds value.

So I feel that even though the firm I work at may not be my home when I graduate, I have benefited greatly from working there, and experiencing a “big” law firm - (the Christmas parties are pretty epic).

Elise Steegstra
Current RMIT JD Student and RMIT LSS Secretary
PTA Administrator
Allens Patent & Trade Mark Attorneys
Ariel Couchman has been the Director at Youthlaw, a small not for profit legal centre committed to addressing the needs of vulnerable and marginalised young people, under 25 years of age since 2008. Her position involves managing and providing leadership to a staff of seven, five lawyers, a policy officer and a finance officer. In this profile she tells of her journey from criminal law to her present position, discusses the day-to-day functions of her position and talks about the work-life balance in the CLC sector.

Ariel started studying an arts degree before transferring to law, she says ‘I began an Arts degree and during later years of this degree transferred to law. Undoubtedly studying Arts was very important to my latter career development. I studied politics, history and sociology and learnt an enormous amount about the world and myself through that degree.’

Ariel made a splash in the legal profession upon her admission in 1987, aged 28, Ariel became the first woman in Victoria to be admitted to the profession wearing pants and the first woman to be admitted as a ‘Ms’ rather than a ‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs’.

After admission, Ariel followed what many would consider to be a non-traditional career path, which involved working for a number of years in regional and rural locations, ‘I began my legal career as an articled clerk in a criminal law firm. Following this I worked in Alice Springs at an Indigenous land council. I was employed there as a result of changes to the law in South Australia that made previously private roads public and opened up litigation possibilities. I was a young lawyer travelling the beautiful Pitjantjatjara Lands to take instructions from indigenous people about past car accidents. This was a very special experience listening to stories of the past and spending time with people on the lands and camping out under the stars.

I returned to Melbourne and took up a position as a legal officer at the then Domestic Violence Resource Centre. This position was created with funding from the Victorian government to educate and advocate in the community about the newly enacted Crimes Family Violence Act that introduced intervention orders for the first time.

In 1996 I returned to Alice Springs and took up the position of lawyer at a Domestic Violence Service. Alice Springs is without a Bar and this position provided opportunity to support victims of domestic violence from application for an intervention order right through to representation at contested hearings. During 9 years in Alice Springs I also assisted establishment of the Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit.’

Ariel no longer works as a lawyer, though she is still in the legal industry and she says that her experience as a lawyer informs her work at Youthlaw, ‘I am a lawyer but do not currently practice as such. As a lawyer I bring my knowledge of the law to managing and leading including speaking to media about the significance of our test cases and the obstacles to young people seeking legal assistance.’ As for her day-to-day duties, Ariel says, ‘On a day to day basis I manage the organisation and staff. I explore opportunities to develop Youthlaw, seek funding and advocate to government and within the community about injustice and for systemic change to assist vulnerable young people.’

Ariel also addressed the work-life balance in the CLC sector, stating that ‘My work-life balance is generally good although work can be very busy and requires being able to prioritise what is necessary to achieve our goals. Having children has taught me to be highly organised and plan so that I can manage my work within timelines. Community Legal Centres in general offer greater work-life flexibility than private firms or being at the Bar. Many parents choose to work in CLCs for this reason.

At Youthlaw we are very supportive of each other and recognise the need for all staff to have a healthy work-life balance. CLCs can be stressful because of the great demand for our services and limited resources. The uncertainty of our funding and future at the hands of changing government’s can also be wearing and create insecurity. We have developed a workplace culture that values our work, encourages working hard but also supports attending to our health and well-being and having fun.’

She further added that being employed on an outcomes basis can result in sometimes being required to work long hours, ‘As a manager I am employed on the basis of meeting the outcomes required of my position rather than on the basis of fixed hours. As is the case with many management jobs in the not for profit sector the workload is high and intense. In general we I try to manage staff hours including my own so they are fairly regular. My experience is that consistent excessive hours are not healthy or productive for staff or the organisation. As we are an advocacy organisation operating in an ever changing political and social environment we do have periods of increased hours when we respond to government announcements and identify opportunities to achieve change.’

Youthlaw runs a volunteer program for people looking to get CLC experience while studying, the next intake will be in early 2016 and information can be found here: http://youthlaw.asn.au/get-involved/volunteer/

Ariel Couchman
Director, Youthlaw
www.youthlaw.asn.au
When I was asked by The Australian Corporate Lawyers Association (ACLA) to reflect on my experience moving from a role in a private law firm to an in-house legal role in a Commonwealth Government Department, I was initially struck by how much change there has been in the last twelve months and how much I have learnt.

I was not actively seeking to move in-house. I had been happily working in litigation in private practice and had no real intention to depart from a role that I found challenging, exciting and fulfilling. However, when an opportunity came up to work in a large litigation team in-house in Government I started to reassess my career path. Deciding to take the leap was not easy and in the end my decision was based on four key factors:

1. The in-house role presented an opportunity to work in administrative law litigation on a scale that I was unlikely to ever experience in private practice.
2. The in-house role presented me with opportunities not only to practice in litigation, but also to contribute to the impact of the litigation outcomes.
3. The in-house role would involve skill development in a broader Government and practice management context.
4. The in-house role would present challenges in managing a large team that I could not experience in private practice.

I was impatient to continue to grow my skills, but I was also nervous that the professionalism and ‘lawyer’ focus I valued would be something I would need to trade to experience these things. I was wrong. There has been no trade.

One of the greatest surprises for me has been the applicability of my private sector skills in client management. There is, I think, a misconception that in-house lawyers do not experience the same pressures to ‘get work’, to become trusted advisors and to deliver exceptional client service. In my experience, if anything, the pressures on in-house lawyers in these respects are greater than in private practice.

Becoming trusted in-house lawyers means that when someone calls you for a chat, it is because there is an advice or a current issue that you may, or may not have previously been involved in that they want your legal assistance with. The client expects that you understand their business and the pressures that they face, because they should also be your pressures. The client expects that if there is another area of the department facing similar or intersecting issues that you will be in a position to identify and link those. These are not unreasonable expectations and they are an in-house lawyer’s currency. These expectations are also what makes in-house practice incredibly exciting and rewarding.

Building client relationships in-house involves networking, it involves building trust and it means identifying legal issues while facilitating the business of the department. In private practice it was rare that a client would call to run a proposal past you without knowing whether a tangible legal risk existed. As an in-house lawyer, providing legal reassurance is as important as identifying legal problems.

Without solid client relationships an in-house lawyer is not assisting the business and will not be utilised to facilitate the work of the Department. In my view, a client engaging with a lawyer in private practice is like going to a restaurant for dinner. You don’t see the dishes, you expect an excellent meal and you pay at the end. There is a tangible service relationship and expectations are clearly defined. In-house legal practice is like feeding the client dinner at home, the commercial interaction is not as apparent, the client may see some of the preparation and will still expect an excellent meal.

Sometimes at a restaurant you don’t always get exactly what you want. In your own kitchen you should be able to get a meal that is entirely and consistently tailored to your tastes. Even better, an in-house client should expect that the home-cook understands their allergies and dietary requirements without even having to ask. The challenge for an in-house lawyer is ensuring that everyone wants to keep coming to your house for dinner, there is never room for a night of take away, because your job is to provide a great meal every night.

My journey has involved a rapid adaptation to understanding that my clients expect me to know who they are and what matters, inherently. My clients expect me to be able to provide them with input and legal risk management on an ongoing basis and my clients rely on my work to drive their business. They expect that I will continue on that journey with them.

That, in my view, gives rise to a challenging legal environment in which I have never paused for breath and in which, as a lawyer, I cannot fail to be motivated and driven to provide exceptional client service.

The other significant change for me has been the size and depth of the team I work in. Coming from private practice, in which I worked in a team of about fifteen lawyers, to my current role in which I manage a team in excess of 50
people has been a big change. The flexibility in practice management has been a critical learning curve and reflects the fact that the legal practices are responsive to business needs. We have to work in a way that is relevant. Clients do not come to us for a set service; we work to meet our clients needs and that means constantly reassessing how we do that. Part of that experience has been managing staff through those changes. I have learnt to measure my solutions against long term goals and impacts and to work with staff to drive change. This has probably been my greatest challenge on this journey. As part of that process I have learnt to value diversity and skill sets that may not be traditionally legal, but which I have watched foster client relationships and bring about legal innovation.

Working as an in-house lawyer has also meant that I feel that I am part of a bigger picture. My teams have worked with changes and developments in law and policy that are at the forefront of the development of administrative law. I have also been rewarded by watching the broader business objectives of the Department come to fruition and known that work that my teams have done has played a part in those ‘big picture’ achievements. More than ever before, I see the value of my role as a lawyer and I am inspired by the work of my colleagues both in the legal area and the broader department.

My journey has, so far, been less than twelve months long. I do not think that I have had a single day where the expectations of what my day would include resembled the way my day progressed. I am more motivated to innovate and present strategic legal approaches because that is the unique value that I bring to my in-house clients. It can be hard, but it is the most exciting role I have ever had. If I have learnt only one lesson, it is never to underestimate the benefits of diving into in-house legal practice. You cannot fail to learn and grow as a lawyer.

Alice Linacre
Alice Linacre is the General Counsel, Programme Litigation and Review Branch at the Department of Human Services. Prior to this, Alice was a Special Counsel in Litigation and Dispute Resolution at Clayton Utz.

Article provided by The Australian Corporate Lawyers Association
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Lander & Rogers is a leading independent Australian law firm operating nationally from Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. We have seven main areas of practice and are a principal advisor to many publicly listed and private Australian companies, Australian subsidiaries of global companies, as well as all levels of government. We provide practical legal advice, along with exceptional client service, and we are renowned in Australia for our down-to-earth and friendly culture.

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On joining us you’ll be teamed with two lawyers (one experienced, and another a little closer in level to you) who will immerse you in the day to day running of their practices. What that means on a practical level will vary depending on the practice group you join (we’ll ask you to indicate your preferences), and could involve:

- Researching points of law and summarising your findings;
- Drafting correspondence, court documents and sections of commercial agreements;
- Reviewing and analysing legislation and case law;
- Observing our lawyers in action at meetings, conferences, mediations and court;
- Attending practice group discussions and;
- Participating in tailored learning and development sessions.

These experiences will provide you with a much clearer idea of what it means to be a lawyer. You’ll also develop a better feel for the human side of Lander & Rogers, such as why our people work here, where they’ve come from, and what they do when they’re not being lawyers.

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We value our people and understand the importance of our staff maintaining a healthy and balanced lifestyle. Our health and wellbeing committee, LandersMax!, encourages our people to get involved in various activities, including BootCamp, Pilates, tennis, triathlon and indoor sports competitions, language classes, in-house massage, social events and much more.

What we look for

We’re in the business of dealing with people, whether that is each other, our clients, barristers or you. So, we aim to recruit people who are friendly, down to earth, and who can engage with a whole range of people in the workplace.

You’ll also need intelligence to tackle the most interesting of legal scenarios, energy to absorb new concepts and a willingness to work productively with lots of different people.

We don’t expect that you’ll be a gun at all of these things straight away, but when we meet you at interview we’ll be curious to learn more about your potential to handle these things in the future, based on the skills and experience you’ve already built through study, any legal and non-legal part-time work, volunteer work and any university activities you’ve tackled.

Getting in touch

HR Contact: Laura Grant, Graduate Resourcing Consultant
Email: lgrant@landers.com.au
Phone: +61 3 9269 9333
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Working With Blue Chip Clients – A Graduate Perspective

During my first rotation at Allens in the Banking and Finance team, I had great exposure to our clients and their business needs. I have had the opportunity to liaise directly with Australia's top four banks and investment banks, Australia's ASX top 100 companies and, through the Allens alliance with Linklaters, I have worked directly with top international companies and law firms.

You may ask, well that all sounds great but what does 'working' with these clients actually involve? At the early stages in the Banking & Finance team, it involved drafting and sending emails to clients about the matters I was working on and, by the end of the year, it involved answering client questions, discussing the progression of matters over the phone, coordinating the signing of key documents or settlement of large transactions. In sum, as a junior lawyer you become the first point of contact for the client once the transaction is in full swing.

As a junior lawyer in Banking and Finance I have had the ability to build up my client contacts, attend client networking events and assist in developing client relationships on the matters I was working on and beyond. It is an important part of a lawyer's role to be able to communicate with clients effectively, to understand their business needs and key concerns and translate that into practical solutions and high quality work. Having that early exposure to clients is crucial to developing those skills. While it may sound like a scary concept at first, and believe me I was terrified when I answered my first client phone call, it becomes the highlight of your day. There is nothing better than chatting to a well-known client about a high profile matter, but also about their impending holidays or the cricket. On top of this you are supported 100% along the way by the partners and senior lawyers you work with.

Apart from the day to day interaction with clients, working with 'blue chip' clients means that the type of work and the type of documents that you draft or review are interesting and involve complex legal or commercial matters. Often the deals I have worked on are cross jurisdictional, are multimillion dollar transactions, often highly sensitive (imagine reviewing documents in locked rooms) and involve complex corporate structures. You know you are on an exciting deal when a) you can't talk about it b) the white board marker is pulled out to draw indecipherable diagrams and c) the matter is published in the paper.

I encourage every prospective lawyer to get involved in understanding what clients want and building client relationships from the moment they start at a law firm. While my experience has been transactional and corporate focused, there are also plenty of opportunities to work with 'blue chip' companies in the litigious and pro bono sphere.

Undertaking a clerkship is the perfect way to get a taste of what working with clients is actually like.

Alexandra Lanyon, Lawyer (2014 Graduate)
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After completing a clerkship with Baker & McKenzie in 2013, and subsequently being offered a graduate position with the firm, I was fortunate to be selected to participate in the International Clerkship program in February 2015. With some trepidation at the prospect of experiencing a European winter, I travelled to Frankfurt, Germany, where I spent four weeks working in the Employment practice group. I was excited about working in Frankfurt because of its status as a significant financial and legal centre in Europe and the sound reputation of the Frankfurt office, particularly the reputation of its Employment team.

Although Germany is not generally renowned for its hospitality, I was warmly welcomed by the Employment team in Frankfurt and settled easily into my role. My few self-taught words in German were quickly rendered unnecessary by the fluency with which all members of the office spoke English. Thanks to the benefits of Germany efficiency, my apartment was a 5-minute metro ride from the office, and within a half hour’s walk of the main shopping, financial and cultural areas of Frankfurt.

My clerkship in Frankfurt clearly reinforced the ‘truly global’ nature of Baker & McKenzie. During my first week, I was fortunate to be able to attend one of the monthly “Passionately Global” breakfasts, where a lawyer who has worked for a period of time in one of the firm’s other offices shares some insights into that country’s culture and their way of doing business. We heard from a partner in the Employment group who spent a year in the Chicago office - and enjoyed a themed breakfast that included bagels!

The team also regularly invited me along to firm meetings and development sessions, practice group meetings, and social lunches. The Frankfurt office actually has its own company “bistro” in the building where many people eat lunch and get their morning coffee!

In terms of work, I was able to learn about, review and amend bilingual employment agreements, and conducted research on the employment aspects of corporate asset deals on 28 different EU countries. I was pleased to be able to use some foreign language skills to conduct research about a secondment involving three different jurisdictions too. I also helped the team prepare and coordinate an advice for a multinational client requiring employment documents to be prepared and reviewed by various Baker & McKenzie offices throughout Europe. In addition, I was regularly invited to accompany associates to court, which gave me a valuable insight into the Labor Court system in Germany. Interestingly, you can become a judge in Germany soon after finishing university and, in fact, cannot apply to begin a judgeship if you are over 35 years old!

While Frankfurt is often overlooked by tourists, it has the headquarters of the Deutsche Bank, Trade Fair halls, museums, fantastic food markets and a huge international airport - making it a wonderful place to live and work. I thoroughly enjoyed spending my free time exploring the city on foot, getting to know some of the local interns, and savouring the local food and drink such as “applewine”. I was also lucky to be in Germany during the time of “carnival”, an important and very enjoyable celebration that involves lots of floats, costumes, confetti and Berliners (jam donuts!). Frankfurt is also so well connected by rail that I had the chance to visit various small typical German towns in Hessen state, and take a weekend trip to Paris on the fast train and be back in time for work on Monday!

My international clerkship in Germany has greatly enriched my understanding of the way Baker & McKenzie operates seamlessly and maintains its culture across borders. The practice group I worked with are experts in various parts of German employment law, and have used that expertise and their international connections to build a robust, interesting cross-border practice. I thoroughly enjoyed my experience and I look forward to implementing my insights as a graduate in 2015.

Emma Burn
Graduate
Baker & McKenzie
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