

## WHAT CONSTITUTES PLT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Before being admitted to practice, law students must pass some form of Practical Legal Training (PLT). The Law Society of NSW acknowledges that the broader purpose of PLT is to round out a legal education in a more practical manner.

As opposed to theoretical and academic aspects of completing a university law degree, PLT is required to train students in practical skillsets namely, legal research, fact and legal analysis, problem solving, legal writing and drafting, interviewing and oral communication, advising, advocacy, and dispute resolution.

The idea behind this is to ensure that students are ready for practice when they enter the workforce, not simply relying on theoretical knowledge but have the necessary skills to perform adequately in the profession.

## WHO PROVIDES PLT?

PLT comes in a number of forms and acronyms. For example, while some providers may offer a PLT course, others may offer a Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice (GDLP), and, sometimes, a Masters of Legal Practice (MLP). In this we will focus narrowly on the largest national providers, although, many universities do offer their own PLT courses as well as smaller, state-based providers.

### a) College of Law:

College of Law is a national PLT body that offers its own nationally available PLT course. It differs from ANU Legal Workshop in a number of areas. It has a marginally more flexible course structure, with a great focus on 'on-the-job' experience, requiring either 75 days work experience, or 25 days experience with the inclusion of academic reflection work. It also involves an ongoing 'seminar' aspect that is likely to cement the values taught previously. The cost of the program is between \$8,560 and \$9,850.

### b) ANU Legal Workshop:

Although it is part of the ANU, ANU Legal Workshop operate completely separately from the ANU College of Law. It runs its GDLP and MLP courses concurrently, giving students the options to opt out and be admitted to practice after the GDLP component is finished, or to continue and complete the MLP. The GDLP

component consists of four main parts, and can be complete in 6 months. These include; a compulsory, face-to-face, 5 day immersion course, compulsory 'core' courses, elective courses and practical work experience. The number of elective courses taken reduces the amount of work days necessary to complete the course and vice-versa. Cost is \$9,252 - \$12,528 for domestic students, and \$12,564 - \$16,857 for international students, depending on the amount of time spent doing practical work experience.

### c) Leo Cussen Centre for Law

Leo Cussen, a predominantly Victorian organisation, offer a very flexible approach to PLT, in that they offer both onsite and online courses to students, all run out of the Melbourne office. Both programs run roughly 24 weeks, and there are two yearly intakes, one on in January and one in July. One of the major advantages to Leo Cussen is that will organise placements for all onsite students, and provide a mentor to all online students, which is a positive alternative to those without legal employment.

### d) Other PLT Providers are Available

As mentioned above, this is not an exhaustive list of PLT options, and many universities offer a local alternative, these are simply more national providers.

## ISSUES FACED BY STUDENTS IN REGARDS TO PLT?

### a) Cost:

As any of the courses offered are postgraduate qualifications, they are not handled under HECS-Help, but, conversely, under FEE-Help. FEE-Help is used for all post-graduate qualifications, and allows students to defer fees until they are able to pay for them. However, FEE-Help is limited to \$97,728, which is substantially less than the worth of many Juris Doctor courses. This means that JD students that have completed their studies may be forced to pay for their entire PLT course out of their own pocket, which, in itself, causes a great deal of welfare issues.

b) Differences in type of PLT:

Cross-jurisdictionally, there are a few issues. For example, up until the early 2000s, it was generally accepted that one could ascertain their requisite practical legal experience through Supervised Workplace Training (SWT). Now, there is no concrete set of rules across Australian jurisdictions, as some require either PLT coursework or SWT, and, in some jurisdictions, one is free to do either. The other issue with this are the differences in approving and monitoring the way that PLT develops, with not all jurisdictions having guidelines on this. The result is a lack of consistency across jurisdictions, which has potential to become problematic when people are travelling across borders. Therefore, it is advised that students thoroughly check the admission guidelines of both the jurisdiction they intend to do their PLT in, as well as the jurisdiction in which they intend to ultimately practice.

c) Combining Work and Study:

PLT, by its very nature, requires students to be practicing within the legal profession in order to complete the training. This causes a number of issues, as employment will often come to the detriment of academic work. It is possible that employers and students are more likely to recognise the necessity to complete placement work over academic work. Therefore, it is also possible that PLT students (particularly those engaged in PLT coursework) are less likely to retain the educational value of the coursework they are completing. Therefore, it is important for students to understand the value of the work they are doing, and important to retain a balance between placement work, coursework and, generally taking the time to take care of one's self.

d) Unpaid Internships:

In accordance with the increasing number of unpaid internships being offered as a means of gaining experience for students without access to paid legal employment, there is a strong risk of firms exploiting students, who require a certain amount of practical experience to complete PLT, by offering unpaid positions. It is, therefore, advised that students consider all their options when addressing the practical aspect of PLT.

**CONCLUSION:**

An essential part of a rounded and an employment-ready legal education is the practical aspect, and PLT is an essential part of the transition from student to lawyer. Therefore, ALSA asks that all students remain mindful of all the aforementioned factors when choosing how, where and when they complete their PLT.

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