Lifting PLT from Practical to Professional Within a Coordinated Legal Education Pathway

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Abstract

Practical Legal Training (PLT) is under scrutiny in Australia. The NSW Legal Profession Admission Board review highlights a central problem: the pathway from law school to PLT to supervised practice is not well coordinated, resulting in fragmentation and uneven development. This article argues that reform should be approached as learning pathway design rather than as piecemeal change within PLT alone. It proposes a four-stage model of professional formation. PLT is reframed as Professional Legal Training at AQF Level 8, focused on turning doctrinal knowledge into reliable performance through authentic tasks, explicit standards and defensible assessment. The article argues that the LACC PLT Competency Standards are too often applied as topic checklists and proposes a skills-first redesign to improve alignment and assessment validity. It also examines the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner's refreshed supervised legal practice resources as a practical Stage 3 mechanism, providing a shared handover language between PLT and workplace learning. Finally, it treats specialist CPD as a distinct post-admission stage, arguing that specialisation involves higher-order, practice-based capability. The article concludes that an integrated skills-based pathway would reduce variability in early-career competence and strengthen public confidence in admission and regulation.

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