What Supervisors Want, What They Get: The Handover and Developmental Gap and Reform of Practical Legal Training

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What Supervisors Want, What They Get: The Handover and Developmental Gap and Reform of Practical Legal Training

Findings from a Survey of Supervisors of First-Year Lawyers, Read Against the New South Wales Review of Practical Legal Training

Working Paper (Version 3)

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Abstract

This paper examines what supervisors expect at the handover from practical legal training to supervised practice, what they encounter, and what those expectations imply for reform. The findings show that the central problem is not a general absence of legal capability. New lawyers are generally strongest in research, reading and receptiveness to feedback, but less reliable in the qualities that make supervised work usable: accuracy, writing, self-management, following instructions, asking questions and escalating uncertainty. Supervisors attribute these weaknesses chiefly to insufficient exposure to realistic, repeated work before practice. The paper distinguishes **two gaps** that require different responses. The developmental gap concerns capabilities that properly emerge through supervised experience: developed professional judgement, autonomy, matter workflow and client communication. The handover gap concerns capabilities reasonably expected from the outset: accurate execution, clear writing and drafting, time management, responsiveness to direction, appropriate escalation and effective use of feedback. Treating both as failures of pre-admission education misdiagnoses normal development; treating both as workplace responsibilities leaves supervisors carrying avoidable deficits. The findings support two-sided standards, deeper realistic practice before admission and support for workplace development. AI intensifies both needs by raising the premium on verification while potentially shrinking the junior tasks through which judgement develops.

1 Introduction

The first year of supervised practice is where formal legal education ends and professional formation in the workplace begins. Yet there is little Australian research that asks the supervisors who receive new lawyers what they expect of new lawyers, what they actually observe and what they think explains the difference between the two. This working paper reports that evidence from a survey of 106 supervisors and analyses it against some of the finding of the most significant review of practical legal training in a generation.

Under the *Legal Profession Uniform Law*, a lawyer who qualified through a PLT course must complete two years of supervised legal practice; the period is 18 months where PLT was completed principally under workplace supervision.[1] The PLT competency standards describe what an entry-level lawyer should be able to do at admission.[2] What happens next is left largely to supervisors whose role Giddings and McNamara found had been little analysed in Australian scholarship despite underpinning the day-to-day operation of law offices.[3]

The handover is now under unusual scrutiny. In his 2025 Opening of Law Term address, the Chief Justice of New South Wales, Bell CJ, raised concerns about the cost and quality of PLT.[4] The LPAB, with the assistance of the Law Society of New South Wales, then commissioned Urbis to survey recent PLT graduates and their supervisors; more than 2,500 graduates and more than 2,000 supervisors responded.[5] In September 2025 the LPAB published a Discussion Paper, principally the work of Justices Payne and Kirk with Emeritus Professor Michael Quinlan, which concluded that PLT in its current form was no longer fit for purpose.[6] In March 2026 an Interim Report, signed by Bell CJ, Justices Payne and Kirk, Professor Quinlan and Wen-Ts'ai Lim, set out a preferred three-stage model: practical skills embedded in law degrees, a compressed in-person pre-admission course, and assessed post-admission legal training.[7] A national review by the Legal Services Council's Admissions Committee and the Law Admissions Consultative Committee (LACC), resolved in 2025, has since surveyed practitioners outside New South Wales and issued a consultation paper.[8]

At the same time, generative AI has entered legal work. Australian courts have referred practitioners to regulators for filing fictitious, AI-generated authorities,[9] and the regulators of New

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[1] *Legal Profession Uniform Law* (NSW) s 49(1).

[2] Law Admissions Consultative Committee, *Practical Legal Training Competency Standards for Entry-Level Lawyers* (1 January 2015); *Legal Profession Uniform Admission Rules 2015* (NSW) sch 2.

[3] Jeff Giddings and Michael McNamara, 'Preparing Future Generations of Lawyers for Legal Practice: What's Supervision Got to Do With It?' (2014) 37(3) *University of New South Wales Law Journal* 1226.

[4] Legal Profession Admission Board of New South Wales ('LPAB'), *Interim Report on PLT Reform* (Report, 13 March 2026) 5 ('*Interim Report*').

[5] Urbis, *The Legal Profession's Experience of Practical Legal Training* (Report prepared for the Legal Profession Admission Board of New South Wales, April 2025) ('*Experience of PLT*'); LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 5.

[6] Chief Justice Andrew Bell, 'Release of Practical Legal Training Discussion Paper' (Message to the profession, Legal Profession Admission Board of New South Wales, 30 September 2025) ('Discussion Paper Release Message'); Legal Profession Admission Board of New South Wales, *Discussion Paper on PLT Reform* (Discussion Paper, 30 September 2025) ('*Discussion Paper*').

[7] LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 6–11.

[8] Law Council of Australia, 'Law Council Supports National Practical Legal Training Survey' (Media Release, 25 November 2025); Urbis, *National Practical Legal Training Research* (Survey Research Report, March 2026), a national survey of practitioners outside New South Wales; Legal Services Council Admissions Committee and Law Admissions Consultative Committee, *Review of Practical Legal Training* (Consultation Paper, April 2026).

[9] *Handa & Mallick* [2024] FedCFamC2F 957; *Dayal* [2024] FedCFamC2F 1166; *Valu v Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (No 2)* [2025] FedCFamC2G 95.

South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia have jointly set out their expectations of lawyers who use AI tools.[10]

The reviews ask what PLT should deliver. This paper asks more precise questions as viewed through the lens of the receiving side of the handover- graduate lawyer supervisors. Because the survey measures capability at the commencement of supervised practice, the point at which PLT hands over to the workplace, it supplies an outcome measure that the evidence before the LPAB largely lacks. The paper addresses five research questions:

1. What do supervisors want from first-year lawyers at the handover from PLT to supervised practice?
2. What do supervisors report getting?
3. What do supervisors say explains the gap between what they expect and what they get?
4. What AI capabilities do supervisors want, and how do those wants sit alongside their other expectations?
5. How do these findings compare with the evidence and prescriptions of the LPAB review, and what do they imply for reform?

The paper makes two contributions. The first is a capability-level comparison of expected level, priority, timing, shortfall and supervisory difficulty. It allows the reported gap to be divided into a developmental gap, concerning capabilities that supervisors expect to develop during supervised practice, and a handover gap, concerning capabilities they expect at commencement. The second is a systematic comparison with the LPAB's evidence and prescription. On the diagnosis, the survey largely agrees with the LPAB. On the prescription, the distinction between the two gaps explains where it agrees and where it does not.

Part 2 situates the study in the literature and describes the New South Wales review. Part 3 describes the method, including the relationship between this survey and the LPAB survey. Parts 4 to 8 report what supervisors want, what they report getting, how they explain the gap, the two gaps, and AI. Part 9 compares the results with the LPAB and Urbis evidence, and Part 10 compares the prescriptions. Part 11 concludes.

2 The Handover in Context

The literature points in a consistent direction. Employers prize conduct and judgement alongside technical skill at entry, judgement develops through supervised experience, and AI raises the premium on verification. What has been missing is Australian evidence from supervisors that connects these claims at the level of specific capabilities. The New South Wales review has supplied large-scale evidence on the experience of PLT; this paper adds evidence on its outcome.

2.1 A staged pathway without an agreed handover point

Australian lawyers qualify through three stages, each with its own standard. The Threshold Learning Outcomes for the Bachelor of Laws set minimum outcomes for law graduates, including self-management: learning and working independently, reflecting on one's own performance

[10] Law Society of New South Wales, Legal Practice Board of Western Australia and Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner, *Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Australian Legal Practice* (6 December 2024).

and making use of feedback.[11] Huggins, Kift and Field argued that this outcome requires intentional curriculum design rather than assumption.[12] The PLT competency standards then describe the observable performance required at admission,[13] after which the statutory period of supervised practice begins.

Each stage has a standard, but no instrument states what a supervisor may reasonably expect on a new lawyer's first day of supervised practice. McMillan and Lilley trace the emergence of PLT courses from the 1970s and their progressive displacement of articles as the route to admission.[14] Giddings and McNamara observed that growing numbers of graduates were entering practice with less practice-based experience than in the past, and called for supervisor training and structured supervision methods.[15]

2.2 What employers say they want

Empirical studies of lawyer effectiveness consistently rank conduct and judgement alongside technical skill. Shultz and Zedeck's 26 effectiveness factors, derived from interviews with lawyers, judges, clients, faculty and students, include practical judgment, organising and managing one's own work, diligence and listening, alongside researching the law and writing.[16]

The largest study, the Foundations for Practice survey of more than 24,000 United States lawyers, found that respondents prioritised characteristics and professional competencies in new lawyers over legal skills.[17] Attention to detail was among the 20 foundations most often identified as necessary immediately, and effective legal research was the only traditional legal skill among them. Other legal skills were judged necessary but acquirable over time, and practical experience, especially prior legal employment, was rated the most helpful hiring criterion.[18]

Australian qualitative work points the same way. New lawyers followed through their first year identified developing autonomy, learning to deal with uncertainty, and reconciling their own values with those modelled in their workplaces as central to a successful transition.[19]

2.3 From novice to competent practitioner

Skill-acquisition theory explains why some capabilities cannot be completed before practice. In the Dreyfus model the novice follows context-free rules. Competence arrives only when the

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[11] Sally Kift, Mark Israel and Rachael Field, *Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Project: Bachelor of Laws Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Statement* (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, December 2010).

[12] Anna Huggins, Sally Kift and Rachael Field, 'Implementing the Self-Management Threshold Learning Outcome for Law: Some Intentional Design Strategies from the Current Curriculum Toolbox' (2011) 21(2) *Legal Education Review* 183.

[13] Law Admissions Consultative Committee (n 2).

[14] Jim McMillan and Rob Lilley, 'After Law School: A Critical Evaluation of Practical Legal Training in the Australian Context' (2024) 2 *Western Australian Law Teachers' Review* 1.

[15] Giddings and McNamara (n 3).

[16] Marjorie M Shultz and Sheldon Zedeck, 'Predicting Lawyer Effectiveness: Broadening the Basis for Law School Admission Decisions' (2011) 36(3) *Law & Social Inquiry* 620.

[17] Alli Gerkman and Logan Cornett, *Foundations for Practice: The Whole Lawyer and the Character Quotient* (Report, Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, July 2016).

[18] Alli Gerkman and Zachariah DeMeola, 'Foundations for Practice: The "Whole Lawyer" and the Path to Competency for New Lawyers' (2018) 87(2) *Bar Examiner* 17.

[19] Tony Foley et al, 'Teaching Professionalism in Legal Clinic: What New Practitioners Say Is Important' (2012) 17 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* https://doi.org/10.19164/ijcle.v17i0.42; see also Vivien Holmes et al, 'Practising Professionalism: Observations from an Empirical Study of New Australian Lawyers' (2012) 15(1) *Legal Ethics* 29.

learner, faced with more relevant features than rules can manage, must choose a perspective and take responsibility for the outcome.[20] Judgement, on this account, is built through situated experience rather than instruction.

Lave and Wenger describe that experience as legitimate peripheral participation: newcomers learn by taking real but bounded parts in the work of a community of practice, moving towards full participation over time.[21] Learning, on this view, is collaborative. The newcomer develops by working alongside others and being drawn into their practice, and legal education organised around individual assessment offers few opportunities to rehearse that role. The Carnegie Foundation's study of American legal education distinguished cognitive, practical and professional-identity 'apprenticeships', and found law schools strongest in the first, with the practical and professional apprenticeships comparatively neglected.[22] The tension is an old one, captured in Twining's contrast between the lawyer as Pericles, the enlightened statesman, and the lawyer as plumber, the skilled technician.[23]

Receiving direction and feedback is itself a learnable capability. Carless and Boud define feedback literacy as the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to improve work. It comprises appreciating feedback, making judgements, managing affect and taking action.[24] Schön's reflective practitioner, who learns by reflecting in and on action, places the same loop at the centre of professional growth.[25] These are the capabilities on which supervision depends.

Skill-acquisition research also bears on time. Expert performance develops through deliberate practice, meaning effortful and repeated performance of well-defined tasks with feedback, rather than through experience alone.[26] Practice distributed over time generally produces more durable learning than the same amount of practice massed into a short period, although the size of the effect varies with the task.[27] Both findings matter for decisions about how long, and in what pattern, pre-admission practical training should run.

2.4 AI, verification and the junior lawyer

The empirical evidence on legal AI centres on reliability. Dahl and colleagues found that public large language models hallucinated in at least 58% of responses to verifiable legal queries, struggled to predict their own errors and often accepted users' mistaken legal premises.[28] A preregistered evaluation of proprietary legal research tools built on retrieval-augmented

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[20] Stuart E Dreyfus, 'The Five-Stage Model of Adult Skill Acquisition' (2004) 24(3) *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 177.

[21] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[22] William M Sullivan et al, *Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law* (Jossey-Bass, 2007).

[23] William Twining, 'Pericles and the Plumber' (1967) 83 *Law Quarterly Review* 396.

[24] David Carless and David Boud, 'The Development of Student Feedback Literacy: Enabling Uptake of Feedback' (2018) 43(8) *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 1315.

[25] Donald A Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Basic Books, 1983).

[26] K Anders Ericsson, Ralf Th Krampe and Clemens Tesch-Römer, 'The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance' (1993) 100(3) *Psychological Review* 363 [verify].

[27] Nicholas J Cepeda et al, 'Distributed Practice in Verbal Recall Tasks: A Review and Quantitative Synthesis' (2006) 132(3) *Psychological Bulletin* 354 [verify]; John J Donovan and David J Radosevich, 'A Meta-Analytic Review of the Distribution of Practice Effect: Now You See It, Now You Don't' (1999) 84(5) *Journal of Applied Psychology* 795 [verify].

[28] Matthew Dahl et al, 'Large Legal Fictions: Profiling Legal Hallucinations in Large Language Models' (2024) 16(1) *Journal of Legal Analysis* 64.

generation still found hallucination rates of roughly 17% to 33%.[29] A randomised controlled trial with law students found that GPT-4 assistance produced large and consistent gains in speed, but only slight and inconsistent gains in quality.[30] Users over-rely on automated advice; the effect is intensified by workload, task complexity and time pressure, and mitigated by training and by emphasising user accountability.[31]

Australian regulators have translated these risks into professional expectations. Their joint statement ties AI use to lawyers' existing duties, including honesty, competence and diligence, and recommends limiting AI to lower-risk tasks that are easier to verify.[32] In *Dayal*, the fictitious list of authorities had been generated by an AI tool within practice management software.[33]

The deeper risk for new lawyers may concern learning rather than error. Beane's study of robotic surgery found that when technology allowed an expert to work without a trainee, approved routes to learning failed. Only a minority of trainees reached competence, largely through norm-bending 'shadow learning'.[34] If AI absorbs the tasks through which junior lawyers have traditionally learned, the realistic exposure that builds judgement may contract. Legal education has begun to respond,[35] but what supervisors want new lawyers to bring has remained unclear.

2.5 The New South Wales review: evidence and prescription

The Urbis survey ran in February 2025. It was open to practitioners who had completed PLT in the previous ten years, or who had supervised law graduates or early-career lawyers in that period.[36] Its graduate module asked recent graduates to rate their agreement with statements about teaching, course structure, assessment, feedback, work experience, workload, support and price. Its supervisor module asked about satisfaction with the practical legal skills of entry-level lawyers, the need to supplement their PLT, and how often they demonstrated competence to an acceptable standard in ten areas.[37] Only 43% of graduates agreed that their assignments were practical and relevant to their careers, 40% were satisfied with teaching methods, and 13% considered the course reasonably priced; 42% of supervisors were not satisfied with the practical legal skills of entry-level lawyers.[38] Urbis drew six implications: that the current PLT system is not meeting the requirements of graduates or the profession; that the entry-level skills expected of early-career practitioners need to be better defined; that cost and value for money must be considered in any change; that work experience or placement appears to be the key facilitator of entry-level skills; that capability and capacity to support early-career practitioners

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[29] Varun Magesh et al, 'Hallucination-Free? Assessing the Reliability of Leading AI Legal Research Tools' (2025) 22(2) *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 216.

[30] Jonathan H Choi, Amy B Monahan and Daniel Schwarcz, 'Lawyering in the Age of Artificial Intelligence' (2024) 109(1) *Minnesota Law Review* 147.

[31] Kate Goddard, Abdul Roudsari and Jeremy C Wyatt, 'Automation Bias: A Systematic Review of Frequency, Effect Mediators, and Mitigators' (2012) 19(1) *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association* 121.

[32] Law Society of New South Wales, Legal Practice Board of Western Australia and Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner (n 10).

[33] *Valu* [32], discussing *Dayal*.

[34] Matthew Beane, 'Shadow Learning: Building Robotic Surgical Skill When Approved Means Fail' (2019) 64(1) *Administrative Science Quarterly* 87.

[35] Kate Galloway, 'A Rationale and Framework for Digital Literacies in Legal Education' (2017) 27(1) *Legal Education Review* https://doi.org/10.53300/001c.6097; Nicole Landy, 'Early PLT Student Perceptions of the Integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Legal Education' (2025) 7(3) *Law, Technology and Humans* 33.

[36] Urbis, *Experience of PLT* (n 5) app C.

[37] Ibid app C.

[38] Urbis, *Experience of PLT* (n 5) [pinpoint]; LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 5.

vary significantly across the profession; and that online learning should be supported by lecturer contact and critical-thinking elements.[39]

The LPAB's diagnosis is one of overload. In the words of the Chief Justice's statement releasing the Discussion Paper, the review 'strongly suggests that too much is currently being sought to be achieved under the existing PLT framework with the consequence that too little is achieved in terms of meaningful skills training and education'.[40] The Interim Report locates that overload in the regulatory framework: 146 separate competencies, Australian Qualifications Framework volume-of-learning requirements that drive long placements, and competency standards that do not reflect what PLT can achieve in a realistic time and at reasonable cost, a case of the 'tail wagging the dog'.[41] It concludes that the competencies themselves are not fit for purpose.[42]

The LPAB's preferred model treats legal education as a continuum.[43] First, from 2028, all New South Wales law degrees would teach foundational practical skills in compulsory units, at an introductory level.[44] Secondly, the multi-month graduate diploma would be replaced, as the minimum requirement, by a shorter and more intensive in-person course building on those skills: four weeks, with up to a week of pre-reading, from 2028, reviewed in 2029 with a view to a possibly shorter course from 2030.[45] The Discussion Paper had suggested two or three weeks; the LPAB has since concluded that two weeks would not be sufficient.[46] Pre-admission work experience would be no more than 15 days, which could be completed during the law degree.[47] Thirdly, newly admitted lawyers would hold restricted practising certificates and complete 15 hours a year of assessed, in-person post-admission legal training (PALT) in practice-area courses over their first two years, with structured supervision, training plans and supervision reports.[48] In the meantime, New South Wales PLT providers must deliver at least 15 days of face-to-face teaching, under a trial running through 2026 and 2027.[49] Longer courses, including graduate diplomas, may continue to be accredited above the minimum.[50]

The LPAB's reasoning therefore rests on two propositions: that pre-admission PLT is overloaded, and that most real learning to be a lawyer happens in practice, so that graduates should enter practice sooner.[51] The survey reported here bears on both.

3 Method

The study is a cross-sectional online survey of legal practitioners with responsibility for supervising first-year lawyers. This paper reports the first, quantitative stage of analysis; open-text responses are reserved for a later qualitative paper.

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[39] Urbis, *Experience of PLT* (n 5) [pinpoint: Implications].

[40] Bell, 'Discussion Paper Release Message' (n 6).

[41] LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 7.

[42] Ibid 12.

[43] Ibid 6.

[44] Ibid 6–7, 16–17.

[45] Ibid 7–8, 23–5.

[46] Ibid 23–4.

[47] Ibid 8, 20–1.

[48] Ibid 8, 29–30.

[49] Ibid 26–7.

[50] Ibid 8.

[51] Ibid 20.

3.1 Instrument

The questionnaire contained 15 closed questions and optional comment boxes (Table 1).

Table 1. Survey questions

Question	Topic	Format
Q1–Q3	Role, organisation, recency of supervision	Select one or select all
Q4	Work first-year lawyers commonly assist with	Select all
Q5	Expected overall capability at commencement	Select one, ordinal
Q6	Expectations of PLT	Select one, ordinal
Q7	Expected capability level at handover, 15 capabilities	Matrix, 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)
Q8	Most important capabilities from day one	Up to five, Q7 list
Q9	Where first-year lawyers most commonly fall short	Up to three
Q10	Gaps creating greatest difficulty for supervisors	Up to three
Q11	Explanations for the gap	Up to three
Q12	Stage by which 12 capabilities should reach a reliable working level	Matrix, four stages
Q13	How AI is changing expectations	Select all
Q14	Whether AI is affecting first-year employment decisions	Select all
Q15	What would most improve the handover	Up to five

The capability lists differ by design across Q7 and Q8, Q9 and Q10, and Q12. Q7 and Q8 share a list, so expected level and priority can be compared directly. Comparisons involving Q9, Q10 and Q12 rely on a provisional crosswalk between labels, described in Part 7.

Two instrument details affect interpretation. The Q7 scale labels were not carried into the data export, so the scale is reported as 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). In Q12, a separate PLT column was removed from the live instrument. The stage ‘at commencement of supervised legal practice’ is therefore read as the PLT stage: commencement of supervised practice is the point at which PLT hands over to the workplace, so capability expected or observed at that point is the outcome of PLT. ‘By handover’ combines that stage with ‘end of law school’.

3.2 Sample

The export holds 106 submissions collected between 10 and 26 September 2026. [Author note: insert recruitment channels, distribution method and ethics approval reference.]

Most respondents were principals, partners or directors (61%) or supervising lawyers (37%); 24 selected more than one role. Private practice accounted for 71% of respondents: small firms and sole practitioners 41%, medium firms 24% and large firms 7%. The remainder worked in community legal centres (14%), government legal offices (10%), in-house teams (5%) and tribunals or chambers (3%).

Supervision experience was recent. Fifty-eight per cent were currently supervising a first-year lawyer and a further 28% had done so within the past 12 months. Two respondents had never personally supervised a first-year lawyer and one had last done so more than five years ago.

3.3 Data preparation and analysis

Two submissions from the same firm, initially flagged as a possible duplicate, were retained after it was established that different individuals had submitted them. No respondent exceeded the selection limits on Q8 to Q11 or Q15. A small number of internally inconsistent answers were resolved by rule:

- In Q14, 'No' selected with a 'Yes' option was retained as 'No', and 'No' selected with 'may affect decisions in future' was retained as the future option. At the respondent level, any remaining 'Yes' ranks above 'future', then 'No', then 'Not sure'.
- In Q9, one 'not applicable' response given alongside specific gaps was disregarded.
- In Q13, 'AI has not significantly changed our expectations' was disregarded for five respondents who also selected specific changes. It was retained for one respondent whose only other answer was a workplace prohibition on AI use.

The three respondents without recent supervision experience are included in this run; a sensitivity analysis excluding them is planned. Percentages use all 106 respondents as the base unless stated, so multi-select questions total more than 100%. Q7 bases range from 90 to 106 because of item non-response, which is concentrated on the two AI items and analysed in Part 8. The thematic groupings applied to Q11, Q13 and Q15 are the authors' own. The comparison of Q5 with Q6 pairs the two ordinal scales by position and is indicative only.

3.4 Relationship to the LPAB survey

The two surveys are complementary rather than competing, and their designs explain most of the differences in what they find. Table 2 compares them.

Table 2. Design of the LPAB survey and this survey compared

Feature	LPAB survey (Urbis, 2025)	This survey (2026)
Commissioned by	LPAB, with the assistance of the Law Society of New South Wales	The authors [Author note: funding, if any]
Timing	February 2025; results published April 2025	10–26 September 2026
Eligibility	Completed PLT, or supervised law graduates or early-career lawyers, in the past ten years	Supervisors of first-year lawyers; 86% supervising currently or within the past year
Respondents	More than 2,500 graduates and more than 2,000 supervisors	106 supervisors
Jurisdiction	New South Wales	Not recorded
What is measured	Graduates: agreement with statements about the experience of PLT. Supervisors: satisfaction, need to supplement PLT, and frequency of competence in ten areas	Expected level, priority, timing, shortfall, supervisory difficulty, explanations and improvements, for named capabilities
Expectation baseline	None; competence rated against an undefined 'acceptable standard'	Expected level (Q7) and expected stage (Q12)
Causal attribution	Not asked	Asked (Q11), with law school, PLT, workplace, graduate and AI options
Principal limitations	Process measures; attribution to PLT by framing; ten-year recall window	Small non-probability sample; multi-select shortfall format; perceptions rather than performance

Sources: Urbis questionnaire and report; LPAB Interim Report.[52]

Three design features of the LPAB survey bear on interpretation. First, its graduate module measures satisfaction with the experience of PLT: teaching, structure, feedback, workload and price. These are legitimate measures of process, but they are not measures of capability. Secondly, its supervisor module frames the question of preparation around PLT. It asks, for example, how often supervisors feel the need to supplement the practical legal training of entry-level lawyers so that they can perform entry-level tasks.[53] Because supervision is by design the next stage of training, some supplementation is to be expected; and because no item invites supervisors to attribute shortfalls to law school, the workplace or normal development, the survey cannot distinguish a failure of PLT from those alternatives. Thirdly, competence is rated against a standard that is not defined, and the survey does not ask what supervisors expect at entry or when they expect capabilities to develop. It therefore cannot separate a developmental shortfall from a failure of preparation, the distinction on which Part 7 of this paper turns.

Two contextual features also matter. Eligibility extended to anyone who had completed PLT, or supervised early-career lawyers, in the previous ten years, so the results describe PLT as delivered over a decade that included the pandemic-era shift to online delivery and preceded generative AI.[54] And the survey followed the Chief Justice's public criticism of PLT's cost and his letter to the profession about the survey, so self-selection may have favoured respondents with concerns.[55]

Other features cut the other way. Agreement scales tend to attract acquiescence, so low agreement figures may, if anything, understate dissatisfaction; and a supervisor sample of more than 2,000 is substantial. The Urbis report also breaks results down by provider and by time since completion, which allows some of these questions to be examined. [Author note: check Urbis Appendix A breakdowns by provider and by time since PLT completion.]

The strengths of the two surveys are therefore complementary. The LPAB survey has scale and a graduate voice. This survey has an expectation baseline, a timeline, a causal question and capability-level detail. Where they agree, the agreement is stronger for having been reached by different routes; where they differ, the difference can usually be traced to design.

3.5 Limitations and declared interest

The findings are supervisors' perceptions, not independent measures of graduate performance; reported shortfalls may reflect differing expectations as much as differing capability. The sample is non-probability and weighted towards small and medium private practice, with only seven large-firm respondents, and the instrument did not record jurisdiction. Because Q8 and Q9 sit next to each other and share overlapping labels, some association between priorities and reported shortfalls may reflect respondents carrying answers forward.

Two further limitations matter for the comparison with the LPAB survey. Q9 and Q10 asked respondents to select up to three shortfalls, a format that invites naming some. The 3% who chose 'generally meet expectations' should therefore be read as showing that almost all

[52] Urbis, *Experience of PLT* (n 5) app C; LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 5.

[53] Urbis, *Experience of PLT* (n 5) app C, Legal Employer Survey Q8.

[54] Ibid app C.

[55] Chief Justice Andrew Bell, 'Review of Practical Legal Training in New South Wales' (Letter to the profession, Legal Profession Admission Board of New South Wales, 14 April 2025) [verify date], referring to his letter of February 2025 announcing the survey.

respondents could identify at least one shortfall, not as a satisfaction rate comparable with the LPAB's. And Q11 offered 'limited exposure to realistic legal tasks before practice' without distinguishing simulated from workplace tasks, so the survey cannot say where realistic exposure is best provided.

[Author note: confirm wording and affiliations.] The authors include staff of Leo Cussen Centre for Law, a national provider of PLT. Leo Cussen and the Australasian Professional Legal Education Council (APLEC) made submissions to the LPAB review, which the Interim Report cites, including one with which the LPAB expressly disagreed.[56] The authors therefore have an interest in the reforms discussed in Parts 9 and 10, and readers should weigh those Parts with that interest in mind. The instrument offered law school, PLT, workplace, graduate and AI explanations on equal terms, and the paper reports results that are unfavourable to PLT, including the writing shortfall and the 25% of respondents who cite insufficient PLT preparation.

4 What Supervisors Want

Supervisors want a new lawyer who follows instructions, knows when to escalate issues, asks sensible questions and handles foundational legal work reliably, and they expect developed professional judgement and autonomy to come later. Beneath that shared core, they disagree about what PLT should deliver.

4.1 A modest baseline for broad work

Half of respondents (49%) expect a new lawyer at commencement to perform simple legal tasks with active supervision and feedback (Q5). Similar proportions expect less (14%) or more (15%, simple tasks performed independently with ordinary review), and a fifth (20%) say expectations vary by lawyer, role or practice area.

The work itself is broad (Q4). File notes and correspondence (92% each) and legal research (91%) are near-universal. Eighty-three per cent of respondents have first-year lawyers reviewing documents or evidence, and 75% have them drafting court documents. Respondents selected 7.8 task types on average, and 40% reported first-year lawyers undertaking AI-assisted or technology-assisted work.

4.2 No agreed view of what PLT is for

Asked what PLT graduates should be able to do (Q6), 56% want task-ready graduates: 33% expect graduates able to perform simple tasks with supervision and 23% want graduates immediately useful in supervised work. The other 43% see PLT as foundational preparation or as building an understanding of legal workflows, with most practical capability developed in the workplace.

Setting each respondent's Q6 answer against their own Q5 expectation shows that the division runs through individuals as well as the profession. Among respondents who gave comparable answers to both questions (excluding 'varies' and 'not sure'), only 44% hold a view of PLT that matches their day-one expectation. A further 35% set PLT's standard below what they expect on day one, locating that capability somewhere other than PLT. The remaining 21% want more from PLT than they realistically expect of new lawyers; nine respondents expect only supervised simple tasks yet want PLT graduates who are immediately useful.

[56] LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 13–15, 32–3.

4.3 Expected capability at handover

Expected levels fall into three tiers (Table 3). Legal research (mean 4.21), reading legal materials (3.92), following instructions (3.90), receiving and applying feedback (3.87) and file notes (3.86) form the top tier: foundational legal work combined with receptiveness to direction. Analytical and relational capabilities form the bottom tier: legal reasoning (3.25), ethical issue spotting (3.23), writing (3.21), professional confidence (3.13) and client communication (3.10).

Writing stands out for agreement rather than level, with 56% placing it exactly at the midpoint. The most divided items are ethics, escalation and the two AI items. For each, 40–49% rate the capability at 4 or 5, while 21–30% rate it at 1 or 2.

Table 3. Expected level at handover (Q7) and day-one priority (Q8)

Capability	Q7 mean (1–5)	Q7 rating 4–5 (%)	Q7 rating 1–2 (%)	Q8 day-one priority (%)
Legal research	4.21	79	4	48
Reading and understanding legal materials	3.92	73	9	46
Following instructions / asking clarifying questions	3.90	65	7	67
Receiving and applying feedback	3.87	63	8	38
File notes and attendance notes	3.86	62	7	42
Time management and prioritisation	3.47	47	15	35
Verification of AI-assisted work	3.47	49	24	3
Safe use of legal technology and AI tools	3.46	48	21	11
Recognising when to escalate risk or uncertainty	3.36	47	23	32
File management and matter organisation	3.35	42	14	21
Legal reasoning and problem-framing	3.25	34	22	47
Ethical issue spotting and professional responsibility	3.23	40	30	22
Clear legal writing and drafting	3.21	29	15	39
Professional confidence and initiative	3.13	34	28	14
Communicating appropriately with clients	3.10	34	28	24

Note: Q7 base is 106 except where item non-response reduced it: 105 for five items, 99 for safe use of AI and 90 for AI verification. Q8 percentages use a base of 106; respondents could select up to five.

4.4 Priorities: being directable first

Asked to choose up to five day-one priorities (Q8), two-thirds of respondents (67%) chose following instructions and asking clarifying questions, well ahead of any technical capability. Research (48%), reasoning (47%) and reading legal materials (46%) followed.

Two patterns stand out. First, legal reasoning and legal writing are wanted beyond the level expected: each is chosen as a priority by more respondents (47% and 39%) than expect it at a high level (34% and 29%). Secondly, wanting and expecting go together at the individual level. Respondents who prioritise a capability expect a higher level of it, most sharply for ethics (mean 3.96 among those prioritising it against 3.02 among others), escalation (3.85 against 3.13), reasoning (3.58 against 2.95) and client communication (3.60 against 2.95). File management is the only exception.

AI reverses the first pattern. Roughly half of respondents expect a high level of AI capability at handover, but only 11% prioritise safe use and 3% verification.

4.5 A staged pathway

Q12 expresses the same expectations as timing (Table 4). Research, legal knowledge, file notes, reasoning and basic drafting are expected by handover by a majority of respondents. Client communication and matter workflow are most often placed during supervised practice, and autonomy and professional judgement at its end. Ethics and both AI items are the least settled: no single stage attracts much more than a third of respondents.

The PLT stage itself is most often nominated for the two practical writing tasks, file notes (58%) and basic drafting (47%). Law school is most often nominated for research (73%) and doctrine (52%). Read as a timeline, Table 4 already contains the distinction developed in Part 7: its upper rows describe what supervisors expect at the handover, and its lower rows what they expect supervised practice to build.

Table 4. Stage by which each capability should reach a reliable working level (Q12, % of respondents)

Capability	End of law school	At commencement (PLT)	During SLP	By end of SLP
Legal research	73	18	8	1
Legal knowledge and doctrine	52	15	20	13
File notes and matter records	8	58	28	5
Legal reasoning and analysis	40	23	23	15
Basic legal drafting	11	47	35	7
AI and legal technology use	21	32	31	16
Verification of AI-assisted work	25	25	32	18
Ethical issue spotting	15	33	32	20
Client communication	5	21	54	21
Matter workflow and next steps	2	19	62	17
Autonomy and responsibility	4	8	22	66
Professional judgement	3	8	32	57

Note: n = 106 for every row. Rows are ordered by the combined share placing the capability at or before commencement; rows may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

4.6 Wants the capability list does not name

The gap questions reveal two further wants. Accuracy and attention to detail, and practical judgement, lead the shortfall and difficulty questions reported in Part 5, yet neither appears in the Q7 and Q8 list. They are wants that a capability-based framework, like the one the instrument used, does not name.

5 What Supervisors Get

Supervisors report that first-year lawyers meet expectations in research and reading but fall short on accuracy, writing and practical judgement. The shortfalls that cost supervisors most concern self-management and the supervisory relationship. Only 3% of respondents chose the option

that first-year lawyers generally meet expectations. Although the question format invites respondents to name shortfalls (Part 3.5), almost all could identify at least one.

5.1 Shortfalls and supervisory difficulty

Q9 asked where first-year lawyers most commonly fall short, and Q10 which gaps create the greatest difficulty for supervisors (Table 5). Accuracy and attention to detail leads both: 47% name it as a common shortfall and 51% as a source of the greatest supervisory difficulty.

Table 5. Where first-year lawyers fall short (Q9) and gaps causing greatest supervisory difficulty (Q10)

Gap	Falls short, Q9 (%)	Greatest difficulty, Q10 (%)	Difference (points)
Accuracy and attention to detail	47	51	+4
Legal writing and drafting	33	26	−7
Practical judgement	32	25	−7
Understanding client context	25	11	−13
Time management and prioritisation	25	33	+8
Knowing when to ask for help	21	26	+6
Initiative and confidence	20	21	+1
Legal reasoning and problem-framing	19	16	−3
Understanding matter workflow	16	10	−6
Reading and understanding legal materials	12	11	−1
Communication with clients	9	8	−2
Communication with supervisors	8	17	+9
Legal research	5	4	−1
Legislative interpretation	4	1	−3
Applying feedback	3	8	+6
Ethical issue spotting	2	8	+6
Safe use of AI or legal technology	2	5	+3
Verification of AI-assisted work	—	1	—

Note: n = 106; respondents could select up to three options in each question. Differences are computed from counts before rounding. Verification of AI-assisted work was offered only in Q10.

5.2 The core is working

Research (5%), reading legal materials (12%) and applying feedback (3%) are rarely reported as shortfalls, although supervisors expect a high level of each at handover (Table 3). On the evidence of this survey, the traditional foundations are being delivered. One qualification is needed. ‘Reading legal materials’ most naturally refers to cases and legislation. Much first-year work involves other materials, such as evidence, court documents and transaction documents, which receive less attention in law degrees, and the survey did not ask about them separately.

5.3 Frequency and cost

Frequency and cost diverge. The gaps that cost supervisors more than their frequency suggests concern self-management and the supervisory relationship: communication with supervisors (+9 points), time management (+8), knowing when to ask for help (+6) and applying feedback (+6).

The gaps that are common but less burdensome concern the work itself: understanding client context (−13), writing (−7), practical judgement (−7) and matter workflow (−6).

Ethical issue spotting shows the first pattern in miniature. It is rarely named as a shortfall (2%) but four times as often named as a source of difficulty (8%): rare, but costly when it occurs.

Writing is the starkest single case. Only 29% of respondents expect a high level of writing at handover, yet a third (33%) say first-year lawyers fall short on it. Supervisors have already set a modest expectation and report graduates falling below it.

6 How Supervisors Explain the Gap

Supervisors locate the gap in a lack of realistic experience rather than in any single institution. This is the survey's most striking single result.

6.1 Limited exposure to realistic tasks

Three-quarters of respondents (75%) cite limited exposure to realistic legal tasks before practice (Q11, Table 6). It was the most frequently selected explanation by a wide margin, and remained so under resampling. Graduate attributes follow: lack of confidence or professional maturity (33%) and variability in baseline preparedness (23%).

Table 6. Explanations for the gap between expectation and capability (Q11)

Explanation	Respondents (%)	Group
Limited exposure to realistic legal tasks before practice	75	Pre-practice exposure
Lack of confidence or professional maturity	33	Graduate
Insufficient law school preparation	29	Institution
Insufficient PLT preparation	25	Institution
Variability in baseline preparedness	23	Graduate
Unrealistic expectations of first-year lawyers	15	Workplace
Limited supervision time	12	Workplace
Unclear expectations from supervisors or workplaces	9	Workplace
Lack of induction	5	Workplace
AI changing the tasks available to junior lawyers	3	AI

Note: n = 106; respondents could select up to three. Groupings are the authors' own. Either institutional option: 42%; any workplace option: 37%. Five respondents gave an 'other' explanation.

Institutions are named less often. Insufficient law school preparation (29%) and insufficient PLT preparation (25%) are each cited by fewer than a third of respondents, and 42% name either. Workplace factors are named by 37%. Two smaller results are telling. Three of the five 'other' responses cited over-confidence, the reverse of the listed option. And only 3% attribute the gap to AI changing the tasks available to junior lawyers, although, as Part 8 shows, a third report that those tasks are changing.

6.2 What would improve the handover

The most requested improvements (Q15) were more realistic matter-based tasks (52%), stronger writing and drafting training (48%) and a clearer statement of what PLT graduates should be able to do (47%). Grouped by theme, 70% of respondents selected at least one option concerned with clarity of standards and 63% at least one concerned with practice realism. Assessment of

practical performance or judgement and support for supervisors were each selected by 42%, and 22% asked for a supervisor guide to developing capability during supervised practice. Better preparation in AI use, verification and risk was selected by 21%.

6.3 Diagnosis and remedy

Diagnosis and remedy align only moderately. Of the 79 respondents who cite limited exposure to realistic tasks, 54% chose more realistic matter-based tasks as an improvement, against 44% of other respondents. Supervisors appear to see the problem more clearly than its solution. The three most requested improvements nonetheless point in one direction: more realism, better writing and clearer standards, all of which concern what happens before practice begins.

7 Two Gaps: Developmental and Handover

Set side by side, what supervisors want and what they report getting do not describe a simple failure of preparation. The reported gap is two gaps. A *developmental gap* concerns capabilities that supervisors themselves expect to develop during supervised practice. A *handover gap* concerns capabilities they expect at commencement and report missing. The two differ in timing, in cost and in the response they call for.

Comparisons in this Part use a provisional crosswalk between the Q7 and Q8, Q9 and Q10, and Q12 lists. Following instructions is paired with communication with supervisors, escalation with knowing when to ask for help, and file management with matter workflow. Practical judgement is paired with professional judgement in Q12, and initiative and confidence with autonomy. Results that depend on these pairings should be read as provisional until an agreed crosswalk is settled.

7.1 Disappointment is about quality of execution

Accuracy and attention to detail tops both gap questions, and practical judgement ranks third among shortfalls. Neither appears in the lists of what supervisors expect or prioritise, yet 69 respondents (65%) name one or both as a shortfall. Supervisors frame their expectations as discrete capabilities but experience disappointment as quality of execution and judgement, which cut across every task. Work can draw on each listed capability and still not be good enough to send.

7.2 The top want is defined by its absence

Following instructions and asking clarifying questions is the most wanted capability (67%) and is expected at a high level by 65%. Its crosswalk counterpart, communication with supervisors, is rarely named as a shortfall (8%) but is twice as often named as a source of difficulty (17%). The capability appears to be wanted because its absence is expensive: it is the medium through which all other supervision works.

7.3 The developmental gap

A substantial share of reported shortfalls concern capabilities that supervisors themselves do not expect at handover. Sixty-four respondents (60%) named at least one shortfall in a capability that they placed, in Q12, during or at the end of supervised practice. Practical judgement is the clearest case: 32 of the 34 respondents who named it as a shortfall also said professional judgement should not be expected until later. The same holds for matter workflow (14 of 17) and communication with clients (8 of 10).

These shortfalls are common but comparatively tolerable. Understanding client context (−13 points), practical judgement (−7) and matter workflow (−6) are named more often as shortfalls than as sources of greatest difficulty (Table 5). They describe the normal trajectory of a novice. On the Dreyfus account, judgement and autonomy are properties of competent rather than novice performance, and emerge only through responsible engagement with real situations.[57] New Australian lawyers describe the same transition in terms of developing autonomy and learning to deal with uncertainty.[58] Supervised practice is where these capabilities are built. Asking law school or PLT to complete them is a category error.

One qualification matters. 'Judgement' names more than one capability. Knowing when to escalate, when to ask for help and when work is ready to send are forms of *entry-level judgement*, which supervisors expect from the first day. *Developed professional judgement*, meaning the capacity to weigh competing considerations in an unfamiliar matter and take responsibility for the outcome, is what supervised practice builds. Respondents who named 'practical judgement' as a shortfall may have had either in mind, and the instrument cannot tell them apart. The developmental gap is best confined to developed professional judgement; entry-level judgement belongs to the handover gap.

7.4 The handover gap

The second gap concerns capabilities that supervisors expect at commencement and report missing. It has three components (Table 7). The first is accuracy and attention to detail, the leading shortfall and the leading source of difficulty. The second is writing and drafting: supervisors place basic drafting (58%) and file notes (66%) at or before commencement, set a modest expectation of writing, and still report a shortfall (33%). The third is being supervised: following instructions and communicating with supervisors, knowing when to ask for help, managing time and applying feedback. These are among the most wanted capabilities (Table 3), and they include the forms of entry-level judgement identified above.

Table 7. The handover gap and the developmental gap

Capability	Expected at a high level, Q7 (%)	At or before commencement, Q12 (%)	Falls short, Q9 (%)	Greatest difficulty, Q10 (%)
Handover gap				
Accuracy and attention to detail	—	—	47	51
Legal writing and drafting	29	58	33	26
Time management and prioritisation	47	—	25	33
Knowing when to ask for help (escalation)	47	—	21	26
Following instructions / communication with supervisors	65	—	8	17
Receiving and applying feedback	63	—	3	8
Developmental gap				

[57] Dreyfus (n 20).

[58] Foley et al (n 19).

Capability	Expected at a high level, Q7 (%)	At or before commencement, Q12 (%)	Falls short, Q9 (%)	Greatest difficulty, Q10 (%)
Practical / professional judgement	—	11	32	25
Matter workflow (file management in Q7)	42	21	16	10
Communication with clients	34	26	9	8
Understanding client context	—	—	25	11
Initiative and confidence (autonomy in Q12)	34	12	20	21

Note: n = 106. '—' indicates that the capability was not offered in that question. Pairings across lists use the provisional crosswalk described above, and the classification into two gaps is the authors' analytical grouping. File notes, expected at a high level by 62% (Q7) and placed at or before commencement by 66% (Q12), was not offered in Q9 or Q10.

The two gaps differ in cost as well as timing. The gaps whose cost clearly exceeds their frequency all belong to the handover gap: accuracy (+4 points), time management (+8), knowing when to ask for help (+6), communication with supervisors (+9) and applying feedback (+6). Ethical issue spotting and safe AI use show the same pattern but are rarely named, and initiative and confidence is close to even (+1). Otherwise the developmental capabilities run the other way. Writing is the exception within the handover gap: common (33%) but less often the greatest difficulty (26%).

The handover gap is also where supervisors' leading explanation bites. Accuracy, writing and being supervised are capabilities that develop through volume, repetition and feedback on real or realistic work, which is precisely what supervisors say is missing before practice (Part 6). They are also the capabilities that a framework of discrete competencies is least able to capture, because they are qualities of execution rather than items of knowledge.

7.5 Disappointment tracks priorities

At the level of individual respondents, those who prioritised a capability were more likely to report first-year lawyers falling short on it (Table 8). The pattern holds in every matched capability except AI verification, where no respondent reported a shortfall.

Table 8. Share reporting a shortfall (Q9), by whether the respondent prioritised the capability (Q8)

Capability	Prioritised it (%)	Did not prioritise it (%)
Professional confidence and initiative	47	15
Legal writing and drafting	46	25
Escalation / knowing when to ask for help	26	18
Legal reasoning and problem-framing	24	14

Note: The escalation row uses the provisional crosswalk pairing.

A high expected level in Q7, by contrast, does not predict shortfall in the same way. For writing, reading, client communication and following instructions the relationship runs the other way. For writing, 26% of those expecting a level of 4 or 5 report a shortfall, against 36% of those expecting less. This suggests that expectations are calibrated by experience: supervisors who have seen

weak writing now expect less of it. Because Q8 and Q9 are adjacent and share labels, part of the association in Table 8 may reflect respondents carrying answers forward.

Blame follows the same pattern. Of the 17 respondents whose wants for PLT exceed their own realistic day-one expectation (Part 4.2), 53% name insufficient PLT preparation, against 17% of those whose views are aligned and 14% of those who set PLT's standard below their own expectation. Those who set PLT's standard below their own expectation look instead to the graduate: 45% cite confidence or maturity. The group of 17 is small, so this is a lead rather than a finding. It suggests that criticism of PLT tracks what supervisors want from it, and that a clearer statement of what can reasonably be expected at handover would change where blame is placed.

7.6 What the two gaps mean

The distinction changes the question reform must answer. The developmental gap is not a failure of pre-admission education. The right response is deliberate development during supervised practice, supported by supervisors who are themselves supported. The handover gap is a failure of pre-admission education, of law school and PLT together, and it calls for more realistic, repeated and assessed practice before admission. Part 10 argues that the LPAB's prescription is well suited to the first gap and poorly suited to the second.

8 The AI Skills Supervisors Want

Supervisors want AI judgement more than AI fluency. Asked directly, they most often want new lawyers to know when AI use is appropriate, to disclose it, to protect confidentiality and to verify outputs. Asked to choose freely among all capabilities, they almost never select AI at all.

8.1 Expected in principle, rarely prioritised or missed

About half of respondents expect a high level of safe AI use (48%) and of verification of AI-assisted work (49%) at handover (Table 3), and about half place these capabilities at or before commencement (Table 4). When respondents choose among competing capabilities, however, AI rarely surfaces (Table 9). AI capability is, for now, an expectation held in principle. It is not yet a priority or a commonly observed deficiency.

Table 9. AI-related options where respondents chose among competing options

Question	AI-related option	Respondents (%)
Q4 Work first-year lawyers assist with	AI-assisted or technology-assisted work	40
Q15 Improvements to the handover	Better preparation in AI use, verification and risk	21
Q8 Day-one priorities	Safe use of legal technology and AI tools	11
Q10 Greatest supervisory difficulty	Safe use of AI or legal technology	5
Q8 Day-one priorities	Verification of AI-assisted work	3
Q11 Explanations for the gap	AI changing the tasks available to juniors	3
Q9 Where first-year lawyers fall short	Safe use of AI or legal technology	2
Q10 Greatest supervisory difficulty	Verification of AI-assisted work	1

Note: n = 106.

8.2 What supervisors want when asked directly

Q13 asked how AI is changing expectations of first-year lawyers (Table 10). The most common answers describe professional responsibility and judgement. Grouped by theme, 77% selected at least one governance option (appropriateness, disclosure or confidentiality) and 67% at least one judgement or verification option. A third (33%) selected the option closest to tool fluency, that AI may make first-year lawyers more productive if properly trained.

Table 10. How AI is changing expectations of first-year lawyers (Q13)

Change in expectations	Respondents (%)
Need to know when AI use is appropriate or inappropriate	71
Need to record or disclose AI use where required	58
Need stronger judgement because AI outputs may be unreliable	58
Need to understand confidentiality and professional responsibility risks	56
Need stronger verification skills	47
AI increases supervision burden because outputs must be checked	40
Some traditional junior tasks are reducing or changing	33
AI may make first-year lawyers more productive if properly trained	33
We do not permit first-year lawyers to use AI tools	17
AI increases pressure on senior lawyers doing work previously delegated	12
AI has not significantly changed our expectations	6
Not sure	6

Note: n = 106; respondents could select all that applied. The 'not changed' row reflects the cleaning rule described in Part 3.3.

Workload effects are also visible. Forty per cent say AI increases the supervision burden because outputs must be checked, and a third report that some traditional junior tasks are reducing or changing.

8.3 Unsettled timing and selective non-response

Supervisors do not agree when AI capability should be in place. In Q12, AI use is placed at the end of law school by 21%, at commencement by 32%, during supervised practice by 31% and at its end by 16%; verification splits 25%, 25%, 32% and 18%. In Q7 the two AI items are among the most divided, with 48–49% rating them at 4 or 5 but 21–24% rating them at 1 or 2.

The AI items also drew unusual non-response. Sixteen respondents left the Q7 verification item blank and seven left safe use blank; all seven also left verification blank. No other Q7 item was skipped by more than one respondent. The blanks concentrate where AI is not part of first-year work. Seven of the 16 work where first-year lawyers are not permitted to use AI, against 17% of the whole sample; 14 of the 16 do not report first-year lawyers doing AI-assisted work; and six are from community legal centres, 40% of all community legal centre respondents. The most plausible reading is 'not applicable in my workplace' rather than indifference, although the survey cannot establish this. Because Q12 required an answer, respondents who skipped the Q7 AI items still placed AI capabilities on the timeline, which may add noise to those rows.

8.4 Effects on employment

AI is beginning to affect entry-level employment for a minority of workplaces (Q14). At the respondent level, 27% report at least one current effect, 18% expect an effect in future only, 37%

report no effect and 18% are unsure. The reported effects are changes to the kinds of entry-level tasks available (18%), to the capabilities recruited for (14%) and to the value placed on AI, technology and verification skills (14%). Twelve per cent say AI is reducing, or is expected to reduce, the number of first-year lawyers they employ. Current effects are reported more often where first-year lawyers already do AI-assisted work (38%, against 20% elsewhere). Only one of the 15 community legal centre respondents reported a current effect.

8.5 AI raises the premium on accuracy

The AI findings align with the evidence base. Supervisors' emphasis on appropriateness, disclosure, confidentiality and verification mirrors the regulators' joint statement,[59] and the hallucination studies explain why verification cannot be optional.[60] The survey adds a connection the literature has not drawn: verifying AI output is accuracy and attention to detail under another name. The capability supervisors most often find wanting is the one on which safe AI use most depends.

Two risks follow. First, automation bias is intensified by workload and time pressure,[61] the conditions under which new lawyers already struggle with time management, and AI assistance improves speed more reliably than quality.[62] Unverified AI use could therefore amplify the accuracy problem rather than solve it. What new lawyers need is the capability to work in tandem with AI through an iterative process of instruction, checking and correction that keeps the lawyer in control of the output. [Author note: DF to add reference to the iterative 'control' framework for working with AI.]

Secondly, 33% of respondents report traditional junior tasks reducing or changing, and 18% report changes to the kinds of entry-level tasks available. Beane's evidence suggests that when technology removes the trainee's role in the work, learning moves into the shadows and fewer trainees reach competence.[63] If AI absorbs the realistic tasks through which judgement develops, the exposure supervisors already find lacking may shrink further, inside the workplace as well as before it. That bears directly on any reform that relies on learning in practice (Part 10.2).

The finding that AI is expected but rarely prioritised or missed may be temporary. Where first-year lawyers already do AI-assisted work, supervisors report current employment effects nearly twice as often (38% against 20%). As AI use spreads, AI capability is likely to move from an expectation held in principle to one tested in practice.

9 Comparing the Results with the LPAB and Urbis Evidence

Read against the evidence assembled for the LPAB, this survey agrees with the diagnosis and refines it. Table 11 summarises the comparison; the discussion below takes each theme in turn.

Table 11. This survey compared with the LPAB and Urbis evidence

[59] Law Society of New South Wales, Legal Practice Board of Western Australia and Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner (n 10).

[60] Dahl et al (n 28); Magesh et al (n 29).

[61] Goddard, Roudsari and Wyatt (n 31).

[62] Choi, Monahan and Schwarcz (n 30).

[63] Beane (n 34).

Theme	LPAB and Urbis	This survey	Position
Is the PLT outcome adequate?	No. 43% of graduates found assignments practical; 42% of supervisors were not satisfied with entry-level lawyers' practical skills	No. Accuracy shortfall 47% (greatest difficulty 51%); writing short of a modest expectation (33%)	Agree, on different measures: the experience of PLT and capability at handover
Overload	Too much sought, too little achieved; 146 competencies; standards unrealistic for the time and cost available	Core delivered; shortfalls concentrate in quality of execution and being supervised; supervisors divided over what PLT is for	Agree; this survey identifies what the 'too little' is
Entry-level standards	Competency standards not fit for purpose; to be replaced by a Skills Schedule. Urbis: skills need better definition	70% want clearer standards; the leading shortfalls, accuracy and practical judgement, appear on no list	Strong agreement; this survey supplies content and a caution
Causes	Not asked; preparation framed around PLT	Realistic exposure 75%; law school 29%; PLT 25%; workplace factors 37%	Differ: supervisors spread responsibility across the pathway
Shape of the gap	Treated as a single gap, measured against an undefined standard	Two gaps: developmental (belongs in supervised practice) and handover (expected at commencement)	Differ: the distinction is this survey's main contribution
Supervisory capacity	Urbis: capacity varies significantly. LPAB: reform should factor in capacity to supervise	Costliest gaps lie in the supervisory relationship; 37% cite workplace factors; 42% want support for supervisors	Agree; capacity is a binding constraint
Work experience	Urbis: placement the key facilitator. LPAB: no more than 15 days before admission, citing poor-quality placements	'Realistic exposure' not divided between simulation and placement	Open
AI	Treated mainly as a threat to the integrity of assessment	Supervisors want AI governance; a third report junior tasks shrinking	This survey adds a dimension

Sources: for the LPAB and Urbis column, see Parts 2.5 and 3.4.[64]

9.1 The outcome falls short

Commencement of supervised practice is the point at which PLT hands over to the workplace. Capability measured at that point is therefore the outcome of PLT, built on everything that preceded it. Measured there, the outcome falls short. Accuracy and attention to detail is named as a shortfall by nearly half of supervisors and as the greatest difficulty by more than half; writing falls below an expectation that supervisors have already set low; and almost every respondent could name at least one shortfall.

On this evidence the survey supports the LPAB's conclusion that PLT in its current form is no longer fit for purpose, and it bears out, from the receiving side of the handover, the concern that led Bell CJ to initiate the review. It does so on a different kind of evidence. The LPAB survey's headline results describe graduates' experience of PLT and supervisors' general satisfaction; this survey describes capability, item by item, against supervisors' own expectations. Instruments with different populations, designs and weaknesses point in the same direction, and that convergence is stronger evidence than either survey alone. The magnitudes are not comparable: the 3% of respondents who said that first-year lawyers generally meet expectations

[64] Urbis, *Experience of PLT* (n 5); LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 5, 7, 12, 16, 20–2, 26, 32.

cannot be set against the 42% of LPAB supervisors who were dissatisfied, because the formats differ (Part 3.5).

9.2 Too much sought, too little achieved

The deepest agreement concerns overload. The LPAB located it in a framework of 146 competencies and volume-of-learning requirements that ask more of PLT than it can achieve in a realistic time.[65] This survey cannot measure breadth, but it shows what the 'too little' consists of. The core is delivered: research, reading legal materials and receptiveness to feedback are expected at a high level and rarely missed. The shortfalls concentrate instead in quality of execution and in being supervised, capabilities that develop only through repeated, realistic performance with feedback. Supervisors are also divided over what PLT is for: 56% want task-ready graduates and 43% foundational preparation, and fewer than half hold a view of PLT that matches their own day-one expectation (Part 4.2). A course asked to do everything for everyone has too little time for the few things supervisors judge by. That last step is an inference rather than a finding, but it is the inference the LPAB's own diagnosis invites.

9.3 Entry-level standards need redefining

Urbis concluded that the entry-level skills expected of early-career practitioners need to be better defined, and the LPAB has concluded that the competency standards are no longer fit for purpose and should be replaced by a schedule of practical knowledge and skills.[66] This survey agrees strongly. Seventy per cent of respondents chose at least one improvement concerned with clarity of standards, and 47% asked for a clearer statement of what PLT graduates should be able to do. It also adds content and a caution. The qualities supervisors miss most, accuracy and practical judgement, are not capabilities that any list names, because they are qualities of execution that cut across every task (Part 7.1). A better list will not capture them unless listed skills are assessed under realistic conditions of volume, time pressure and consequence.

9.4 Causes, and the shape of the gap

Here the evidence diverges, largely because of design. The LPAB survey did not ask what explains the shortfalls it recorded, and it framed preparation around PLT. Asked directly, supervisors in this survey locate the gap in limited exposure to realistic tasks before practice (75%), and divide institutional responsibility between law school (29%) and PLT (25%), with workplace factors cited by 37%. On supervisors' account, the PLT outcome falls short but its causes run through the whole pre-admission pathway: law school and PLT each carry part of the responsibility, and neither carries it alone. The LPAB's prescription recognises the pathway problem, since its continuum model responds to the absence of scaffolding between law degrees, PLT and practice,[67] even though the evidence on which it drew attributes the problem to PLT.

The second divergence concerns the shape of the gap. Without an expectation baseline or a timeline, the LPAB survey treats entry-level shortfalls as a single gap measured against an undefined standard. This survey shows two: a developmental gap that supervisors themselves locate in supervised practice, and a handover gap in capabilities they expect at commencement (Part 7). Some of the dissatisfaction the LPAB survey recorded may therefore reflect

[65] LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 7, 12.

[66] Urbis, *Experience of PLT* (n 5) [pinpoint: Implications]; LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 12, 35.

[67] LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 12, 15.

developmental shortfalls that no pre-admission course could close. The distinction is this survey's main contribution, and it is the hinge of the comparison of prescriptions in Part 10.

9.5 Supervisory capacity, work experience and AI

Urbis found significant variation across the profession in the capability and capacity to support early-career practitioners. The LPAB has acknowledged complaints about the supervision of placements and the need for reform to factor in employers' capacity to supervise.[68] This survey agrees and sharpens the point. The gaps that cost supervisors most lie in the supervisory relationship itself (Part 5.3); 37% cite workplace factors in explaining the gap; and 42% want support for supervisors. Any solution that relies on the workplace relies on this capacity.

Work experience remains open. Urbis identified work experience or placement as the key facilitator of entry-level skills, and senior practitioners told the LPAB that graduates with legal work experience during their studies were noticeably more ready for practice.[69] Yet the LPAB also heard many complaints about the quality of placements, and concluded that no more than 15 days should be required before admission.[70] This survey's leading explanation, limited exposure to realistic tasks before practice, does not distinguish simulated tasks from workplace tasks, so it can neither confirm nor refute Urbis's implication. Where realistic exposure is best provided is a question for further research.

On AI, the survey adds a dimension that the review has so far treated mainly as a threat to the integrity of assessment.[71] Supervisors want AI governance and verification, and a third report that traditional junior tasks are reducing or changing (Part 8).

9.6 The Urbis implications on this evidence

Taken together, this survey supports Urbis's first implication (the system is not meeting the requirements of the profession) and its fifth (variation in capacity to support new lawyers). It supports and adds content to the second (entry-level skills need better definition). It is consistent with the sixth (online learning should be supported by lecturer contact and critical thinking), since the capabilities of being supervised can be rehearsed only interactively. It is silent on the third (cost and value for money), which it did not measure, and it leaves the fourth (work experience) open.

10 Two Prescriptions Compared

The LPAB's prescription can be summarised as *shorten and spread*. Practical training is redistributed from a long pre-admission course into law degrees before it and assessed post-admission training after it, reducing cost and bringing graduates into practice sooner. This survey's evidence points to a different prescription, which can be summarised as *define, concentrate and support*: define a two-sided handover standard, concentrate pre-admission education on the handover gap, and support supervisors to close the developmental gap. Both are staged models, and both reject the idea that a single course at a single point can produce a practice-ready lawyer. They differ on which stage should carry the handover gap. Table 12 compares them.

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[68] Urbis, *Experience of PLT* (n 5) [pinpoint: Implications]; LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 22, 32.

[69] Urbis, *Experience of PLT* (n 5) [pinpoint: Implications]; LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 20.

[70] LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 20–2.

[71] Ibid 16, 26.

Table 12. The LPAB's prescription and the prescription this survey points towards

Element	LPAB prescription	What this survey points towards	Difference
Overall logic	Shorten and spread: skills in law degrees, a compressed course, then assessed post-admission training	Define, concentrate and support: deepen handover preparation before admission; move only the developmental gap into supervised practice	Both staged; they differ on where the handover gap belongs
Standards	Replace the competency standards with a Skills Schedule of what must be taught	A two-sided handover standard: what supervisors can expect on day one and what develops during supervised practice, naming accuracy and being supervised	Agree on replacing the competencies; this survey's standard also binds the receiving side
Pre-admission focus	Short intensive course building on skills such as interviewing, taking instructions, file notes, drafting advice, ethics and procedure	Fewer capabilities, more depth: accuracy, writing and drafting, file notes and being supervised	The LPAB narrows content but keeps breadth; this survey concentrates on what supervisors judge by
Time and pattern	Four weeks plus pre-reading from 2028; possibly shorter after review in 2029	Enough time for repeated, spaced practice with feedback under realistic conditions	The core disagreement: speed and cost against durable capability
Simulated supervision	Face-to-face teaching, to simulate practice and build professional connections	Teach and assess being supervised: instructions, escalation, progress reporting, revision against deadlines	Compatible; this survey names a specific target
Assessment	Graded assessments students can fail; limited resubmission	Judge whether work is accurate and ready to send under realistic volume and time pressure	Agree; this survey sharpens the test
Law schools	Introductory practical skills in compulsory units from 2028, on which the shorter course builds	Build realistic exposure across the degree; treat embedding as additional until graduates are shown to arrive with it	Same direction, different use
Sequencing	Law degree changes and the compressed course both from 2028	Define the standard, embed and evaluate law school change, then decide course length	The LPAB compresses before the new foundation exists
Post-admission	PALT: 15 hours a year of assessed practice-area courses for two years; restricted certificates; supervision reports	Deliberate development of judgement, autonomy, workflow and client communication in the workplace, with support for supervisors	Agree for the developmental gap; differ for the handover gap
AI	Mainly a concern for the integrity of assessment	AI as professional responsibility; verification as accuracy; protect junior learning tasks	This survey adds a dimension
Cost and access	Driven by fees and unpaid placements as barriers to entry	Not measured; measures the cost to supervisors	The LPAB has evidence this survey lacks

Sources: for the LPAB column, see Part 2.5.[72]

10.1 Where this survey supports the LPAB

The comparison begins with agreement, because there is a good deal of it. The survey supports the LPAB's insistence on face-to-face teaching. Being supervised is relational, and its capabilities, such as receiving an ambiguous instruction, deciding when to escalate and

[72] Ibid 6–10, 16–17, 23–30, 35.

reporting progress, can be rehearsed only in person or in close simulation.[73] It supports the LPAB's decision to require assessments that students can fail and to curtail repeated resubmission, a decision the LPAB justifies by the precision, attention to detail and accurate work that legal practice demands.[74] That justification names this survey's leading shortfall. The survey supports replacing the competency standards with a shorter schedule, and the LPAB's view that law degrees, as inherently vocational qualifications, should expose all students to foundational practical skills.[75] And it supports structured post-admission development: the developmental gap is real, it belongs in supervised practice, and it should be built deliberately rather than left to the varied approaches of individual firms and supervisors. On each of these points the LPAB's design and the survey's evidence point the same way.

10.2 Why compression moves the handover gap the wrong way

The disagreement concerns the handover gap. The LPAB's reasoning runs from overload to compression: PLT tries to do too much; most real learning happens in practice; so pre-admission training should be shortened and graduates brought into practice sooner.[76] The survey's evidence breaks that chain at five points.

It cuts time rather than scope. The remedy for too much sought is fewer things practised more often, not the same things done faster. The capabilities in the handover gap, accuracy, writing and being supervised, are the ones that consolidate only through volume, repetition and feedback, and a four-week intensive course is by design massed rather than distributed practice.[77] The LPAB accepts the principle. It concluded that two weeks would not be enough, acknowledged the need to allow participants to repeat activities, and endorsed a submission that contextualised practice, reflection and repetition require sufficient time.[78] The disagreement is about dose, and the survey's evidence suggests that the dose is too small for the capabilities supervisors most miss.

It moves practical capability away from where supervisors expect it to be built. Supervisors place file notes (58%) and basic drafting (47%) at commencement, the PLT stage, and rarely at the end of law school (8% and 11%); they place research (73%) and doctrine (52%) at law school (Table 4). The LPAB's law school stage is introductory, and it does not require students to pass an assessment in every skill.[79] Shifting foundational practical skills into law degrees while compressing PLT moves them from the stage supervisors associate with them to the stage they do not.

It removes the safety net before the new floor is built. Law degree changes are to take effect in 2028, so cohorts who have studied under the new regime throughout will not graduate until 2030 to 2032; the compressed course is to begin in 2028.[80] The LPAB's answer is a longer, four-week transitional course. For several cohorts, nonetheless, the pre-admission practical stage will contract before the law school stage has expanded. The LPAB itself acknowledges that embedding practical skills will require some law schools to recruit staff with practical

[73] Ibid 25–6.

[74] Ibid 27.

[75] Ibid 14, 16.

[76] Ibid 7, 20.

[77] Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Römer (n 26) [verify]; Cepeda et al (n 27) [verify].

[78] LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 14, 24.

[79] Ibid 16–17.

[80] Ibid 24.

experience, reduce class sizes and resource placements.[81] Those are the conditions on which the new floor depends.

It relocates the residual gap to the least reliable setting. PALT comprises two 7.5-hour practice-area courses in each of the first two years, four days in all.[82] It is designed to build specialist skills relevant to a lawyer's area of practice, not the generic capabilities of the handover gap, which are the same in every area. Those capabilities would fall, by default, to supervisors. The survey shows that they are already the costliest gaps, that workplace factors are cited by 37% of respondents, and that 42% want support for supervisors. The LPAB recognises that reform should factor in employers' capacity to supervise;[83] on this survey's evidence, that capacity is the binding constraint.

Its premise is weakening. The LPAB's model rests on the proposition that the best form of practical training takes place while working.[84] Yet a third of respondents report that traditional junior tasks are reducing or changing, 40% that AI increases the supervision burden, and 12% that AI is reducing, or is expected to reduce, the number of first-year lawyers they employ (Part 8). Beane's evidence shows what happens when technology removes the trainee's role: approved routes to learning fail and fewer trainees reach competence.[85] The model moves realistic exposure into practice just as AI is thinning it out there.

Cost runs through all five points. The LPAB's goal is to raise the quality and reduce the cost of PLT.[86] On this survey's evidence, compression reduces fees for graduates but does not remove the cost of the handover gap. It transfers that cost to supervisors' time, the cost that Q10 measures, and to the clients whose work new lawyers perform. PALT, moreover, is to be funded by lawyers or their employers.[87]

Two qualifications are needed. The LPAB's course is a minimum, and longer courses, including graduate diplomas, may continue to be accredited.[88] In a market in which cost is the principal concern, however, the minimum seems likely to become the norm; that is a prediction, not a finding. And the survey cannot say how long is long enough (Part 10.4).

10.3 What this survey points towards: define, concentrate and support

Read through the distinction between the two gaps, the survey points to seven measures.

1. **Define a two-sided handover standard.** A shared statement should set out what a new lawyer can reasonably be expected to do on the first day of supervised practice, and what is expected to develop during it. Unlike a schedule of what must be taught, it would bind the receiving side as well, calibrating supervisors' expectations and allocating the developmental capabilities explicitly to supervised practice. It should name accuracy

[81] Ibid 19.

[82] Ibid 29.

[83] Ibid 32.

[84] Ibid 20.

[85] Beane (n 34).

[86] Bell, 'Discussion Paper Release Message' (n 6).

[87] LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 30.

[88] Ibid 8.

and the capabilities of being supervised, which no current list names. The LPAB's Skills Schedule and the national review offer the opportunity.[89]

2. **Concentrate pre-admission practice on the handover gap.** Fewer capabilities should be practised in more depth: accuracy, writing and drafting, file notes, and being supervised. Nothing in the data argues for moving time away from research and reading legal materials, which are being delivered. Writing is the clearest curriculum signal: expectations are already modest, a third of respondents still report a shortfall, and stronger writing and drafting training is the second most requested improvement (48%).
3. **Give the handover capabilities time, spacing and consequence.** Practice should be repeated and distributed rather than massed. Assessment should ask whether work is accurate and ready to send under realistic volume and time pressure, not only whether a discrete skill has been demonstrated.
4. **Teach being supervised.** Following instructions, asking clarifying questions, knowing when to escalate, managing time and applying feedback are the most wanted capabilities and the costliest gaps. They can be taught and assessed through simulated supervision, building on feedback literacy and the self-management threshold learning outcome.[90]
5. **Build realistic exposure across the whole pathway, and evaluate before compressing.** Law school, which accounts for most of the time and cost of pre-admission education, must carry more of the responsibility for realistic exposure, as the LPAB proposes. That may require a substantial rethinking of law school curricula, including integrated work placements and teaching by practitioners. Until graduates can be shown to arrive with the handover capabilities, however, law school embedding should be treated as additional to a substantial pre-admission practical stage, not as a reason to shorten it. A repeat survey of supervisors would provide the evidence.
6. **Make supervised practice explicitly developmental, and support supervisors to deliver it.** Developed professional judgement, autonomy, matter workflow and client communication belong in supervised practice. Supervisors should be supported, through guidance, training and recognition, to develop them deliberately. The LPAB's attention to the role of supervisors is welcome;[91] the survey suggests that support, more than reporting obligations, is what supervisors need.
7. **Teach AI as professional responsibility, and protect the tasks through which new lawyers learn.** Supervisors want judgement about when AI use is appropriate, disclosure, confidentiality and verification. These can be staged: principles in law school, supervised use with verification in PLT, and workplace policy and oversight during supervised practice, with verification taught as an application of accuracy. Where AI reduces routine junior work, workplaces should preserve deliberate opportunities for new lawyers to do, and be corrected on, the work that builds judgement.

[89] LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 35; Legal Services Council Admissions Committee and Law Admissions Consultative Committee (n 8).

[90] Carless and Boud (n 24); Huggins, Kift and Field (n 12).

[91] LPAB, *Interim Report* (n 4) 32–3.

10.4 What this survey cannot settle

Three questions lie beyond the survey's evidence, and the argument above should be read with them in mind.

The first is length. The survey shows which capabilities need time, repetition and feedback; it does not show how much. That is a design question on which the learning-science literature, and evaluation of the face-to-face trial now under way in New South Wales, can inform judgement.[92]

The second is affordability. The LPAB's reforms are driven by evidence that fees and unpaid placements have become a barrier to entry,[93] and this survey did not measure cost to graduates. A prescription that preserves a substantial pre-admission stage must answer that concern. One answer is that removing the overload the LPAB identified, namely 146 competencies, mandated electives and volume requirements driven by accreditation rather than pedagogy, would free time and resources for depth without increasing cost. That is an argument, however, not a finding of this survey.

The third is whether law school embedding will work. The LPAB reports that all New South Wales law schools have said they can incorporate the required skills by 2028, some with minimal changes to their existing programs.[94] If minimal change suffices, either the skills are already being taught and are not reaching supervisors, or the standard is introductory exposure rather than practice. Only measurement of graduates at the handover will tell. Work experience, as Part 9.5 noted, also remains open.

10.5 Further research

Five next steps would strengthen these findings. The open-text responses, which drew between 12 and 53 comments per question, will be analysed qualitatively. Split runs by workplace type and recency of supervision will test whether the patterns hold across the sample. An agreed crosswalk across the three capability lists is needed to confirm the two-gap classification, and a revised instrument should distinguish entry-level from developed professional judgement, and simulated from workplace exposure. A repeat survey that records jurisdiction, conducted before and after the New South Wales reforms take effect, would allow the reforms to be evaluated at the handover, where their outcome will be felt. Finally, the perspective of new lawyers themselves would complete the picture.

11 Conclusion

Supervisors want new lawyers who can be directed, who ask good questions and whose work is accurate. They report receiving graduates who research and read well, but whose work is not yet reliable and who find the supervisory relationship hard to manage.

Measured at the handover, which is the outcome of PLT, that evidence supports the central conclusions of the LPAB's review: the current framework asks too much of PLT and achieves too little, and entry-level standards need to be redefined. Bell CJ's concern is borne out from the receiving side of the handover. Pre-admission legal education as a whole, law school and PLT together, is not delivering the realistic, repeated practice that supervisors say is missing.

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[92] Ibid 26–7.

[93] Ibid 5.

[94] Ibid 16.

The survey also shows that the gap is two gaps. The developmental gap belongs in supervised practice, and the LPAB is right to want it built deliberately there. The handover gap belongs before admission. It concerns capabilities that need volume, repetition and feedback, that supervisors expect on day one, and that cost them most when missing. Compressing pre-admission training, relocating its practical content to law degrees before that change has taken effect, and relying on post-admission courses and supervisors to fill what remains would move that gap the wrong way. AI makes the point more pressing, not less, because the junior work through which practice-based learning occurs is beginning to thin.

The pathway therefore needs three things: a handover standard that binds both sides of the handover; pre-admission education, across law school and PLT, concentrated on realistic, repeated and assessed practice in the capabilities supervisors judge by; and supported, explicitly developmental supervised practice. Law schools, PLT providers, admitting authorities, employers and supervisors each hold part of that responsibility.