

Feedback Form: Review of practical legal training

Respondent details

Name: Adj Prof Dr Brett Davies

Organisation (if applicable): Institute of Legal Training (IOLT)

Contact details: enrol@iolt.com.au

Are you responding as (select one):

- ☐ Individual
- ☒ Organisation
- ☐ Peak body / Representative group
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Jurisdiction (select one)

- ☒ National
- ☐ Australian Capital Territory
- ☐ New South Wales
- ☐ Northern Territory
- ☐ Queensland
- ☐ South Australia
- ☐ Tasmania
- ☐ Victoria
- ☐ Western Australia
- ☐ Multiple
- ☐ Other. Please specify:

Your submission will be shared with the Admissions Committee and the Law Admissions Consultative Committee and may also be shared with the Legal Services Council.

Unless stakeholders advise us otherwise, submissions may be published on the Council's website.

May we publish your response on the Legal Services Council's website (select one)?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No

We are broadly in support of the changes. The issues for us have been answered below related to mandatory online delivery.

5.1	Do you support the proposal that the LACC amends the PLT Standards to require that PLT coursework is to be delivered in person or, in exceptional cases (as determined by the PLT provider), by synchronous online delivery? Opposition to the Mandate for In-Person PLT Delivery We oppose the proposed amendments to the PLT Standards requiring coursework to be delivered in person or, in exceptional cases, by synchronous online delivery. This proposal is a deeply regressive step that presents significant equity barriers, particularly for students residing in Rural, Regional, and Remote (RRR) communities, as well as those from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. Treating online learning as a mere ‘exception’ signals to RRR students that they are an afterthought, worsening the critical shortage of legal professionals in regional Australia. High-quality asynchronous and synchronous online options must remain universally available as a standard delivery method to ensure equitable entry into the profession. The Crisis of Access to Justice in Regional Areas This proposal does not exist in a vacuum; it directly intersects with the severe access to justice crisis in regional Australia. According to 2023 data from the Law Council of Australia, while approximately one-third of the Australian population lives outside of capital cities, less than 10% of lawyers practice in RRR areas. People who train and qualify in regional areas and who have family ties in these locations are significantly more likely to stay and work in regional areas. By forcing RRR students to relocate to metropolitan centres to complete their PLT, we are actively cutting off the pipeline of local talent. If we make it logistically and financially impossible for regional students to become lawyers, we simultaneously make it impossible for regional communities to access vital legal representation. Impact on Low-SES Students and RRR Communities Restricting standard online delivery will disproportionately disadvantage specific cohorts of law graduates. Requiring students from RRR areas to relocate for a mandatory four-week in-person course imposes prohibitive travel and accommodation expenses. Furthermore, it necessitates securing extended unpaid leave from employment. Market Competition and Pricing Implications The proposal also carries negative implications for market competition and the cost of training. Smaller PLT providers that service RRR areas rely on the financial viability of online delivery models. Removing accreditation for entirely online PLT courses would
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	likely render these regional providers financially unviable, forcing them out of business. This would effectively increase the market share of the largest metropolitan providers. This reduction in competition is likely to exert upward pressure on tuition costs, further exacerbating the financial barriers for graduates. Representative Case Studies The devastating practical implications of a blanket ban on standard online PLT delivery are evident when examining the diverse student demographics that rely on this modality: • Case Study 1: First Nations Students in Remote Areas Charles Darwin University currently enrolls approximately 100 First Nations law students. Most of these students study online, reside in regional or remote areas of the Northern Territory. Many are unable to attend face-to-face instruction due to significant family and carer responsibilities. Requiring these students to apply for an 'exceptional circumstance' exemption introduces unnecessary administrative hurdles and uncertainty. • Case Study 2: The Goldfields, WA (Regional Workforce Dependency) Consider a mature-aged student working full-time in the mining sector or a local administrative role in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia. They are studying law online with the intention of joining a local generalist practice to serve the Goldfields community. An in-person PLT mandate would require them to fly to Perth, fund a month of city accommodation, and take unpaid leave from their current job. The financial strain is insurmountable, effectively ending their path to admission and depriving the Goldfields of a dedicated local practitioner. • Case Study 3: Cairns, QLD (The Mature-Aged Carer) A 35-year-old female student residing in Cairns, Queensland, is balancing her studies with part-time work and the care of two young children. Like 80.5% of CQUniversity's online cohort, she is over 25. She cannot simply pause her life, abandon her childcare responsibilities, and relocate to Brisbane for four weeks to fulfill an in-person attendance requirement. Forcing her to do so is logistically and financially unfeasible.
Delivery of PALT	
17.1	Do you support the proposal that PALT should be delivered in person or, in exceptional circumstances (as determined by the PALT provider), by synchronous online delivery? We strongly oppose this proposal. Early career lawyers who choose to practice in RRR locations provide critical access to justice in underserved communities. Reports from Community Legal Centres Australia and Parliamentary inquiries consistently show that legal needs in RRR areas are often more complex and intertwined with non-legal problems, yet access to legal services is much more limited due to an ongoing exodus of regional practitioners. Mandating in-person training penalises these practitioners by forcing them to incur significant travel

	costs, accommodation expenses, and prolonged time away from their practices. To support the retention of lawyers in regional areas, asynchronous and synchronous online PALT must be fully supported and recognised as a standard mode of delivery, not an exception.
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