

11 May 2026

The Hon Justice François Kunc
Chair
Law Admissions Consultative Committee
Legal Services Council's Admission Committee
By email: submissions@legalservicescouncil.org.au

Dear Justice Kunc

Review of Practical Legal Training – April 2026 Consultation Paper

The TC Beirne School of Law welcomes the opportunity to make this submission in response to the *Review of Practical Legal Training – April 2026 Consultation Paper*.

The School supports and endorses the submission made on behalf of the Council of Australian Law Deans (CALD). We agree with CALD that reform of practical legal training should be careful, evidence-based, collaborative and attentive to the whole continuum of legal education.

We also wish to emphasise four matters.

1. Need for consideration of prescribed academic areas of knowledge

We support legal education reform that is grounded in sound pedagogical principles. However, the proposals in the Consultation Paper would have profound implications for the structure, content and delivery of Australian law degrees. A reform of the scale proposed should proceed only after a broader and prior review of the prescribed academic areas of knowledge, commonly referred to as the 'Priestley 11'. The current knowledge requirements were settled more than 30 years ago and have remained largely unchanged. They continue to occupy a substantial part of the accredited law degree across Australia. Adding further prescribed skills and practical knowledge requirements without proper consideration of what should be prescribed knowledge requirements, and the connection and enhancement of these through skills training, may create unforeseen, adverse outcomes. The proposals in the Consultation Paper add new regulatory burdens without first asking the more fundamental question: what knowledge, skills, values and professional capacities should a contemporary Australian law degree develop? That question cannot be answered by beginning with PLT and working backwards into the law degree. In our view, a review of the Priestley 11 is not a separate or later issue. It is a necessary concomitant of any successful project to relocate elements of PLT into the academic stage of legal education.

2. Broader conception of modern legal practice

We are concerned that aspects of the proposals appear to proceed from an overly narrow conception of legal practice. The Consultation Paper rightly identifies concerns about whether PLT prepares graduates for practice. However, the practical skills emphasised in the proposed model seem to focus on litigation, court-facing work and traditional private practice. That is not the professional reality into which many law graduates now enter.

The contemporary legal profession is diverse. Many graduates practise in transactional, advisory, regulatory, policy, in-house, government, community, commercial, technology, compliance and multidisciplinary settings. Many law graduates do not practise as admitted lawyers at all but use their legal education in adjacent professional roles. In recognition of this, our School continues to build on our core, elective and co-curricular programs to embed the development of fundamental skills in communication, cultural competence, professional reflection and empathy. A reform process concerned with preparing graduates for the contemporary profession must, therefore, take a broad view of legal practice.

3. **Skills and experiential learning that enhance legal education**

We support, in principle, the continued development of experiential learning, skills-based assessment, and clinical legal education within law degrees. Australian law schools, including this School, have already done a great deal of work in this area. However, skills and experiential learning must be incorporated into the law degree in ways that are academically coherent and pedagogically defensible.

The law degree is not simply a pre-admission training course. It is both an intellectual discipline and, in Australia, a pathway to professional admission. Its purposes include the development of legal reasoning, doctrinal understanding, statutory interpretation, critical analysis, ethical judgment, research capacity, written and oral communication, and an understanding of law's institutional, social and normative dimensions. Those purposes should not be subordinated to a narrow training model.

There is, of course, an appropriate place for practical skills in the law degree. Those skills must be integrated in ways that support the academic purposes of legal education. They should deepen students' understanding of law and legal institutions, not displace the intellectual formation that a university law degree is designed to provide. The present proposals do not yet adequately explain how that balance is to be struck.

4. **Implementation timing for law degree changes**

We strongly endorse CALD's concerns about the proposed implementation timeframe. A 2028 commencement date for changes of this kind is not feasible. Law schools cannot responsibly redesign accredited programs, secure university approvals, revise course structures, develop new assessment regimes, recruit or train appropriately qualified staff and manage transitional cohorts within the timeframe proposed.

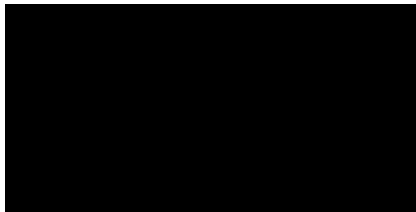
We agree on the importance of high-quality legal education to the proper functioning of the legal system and the protection of clients and the public. It is precisely because legal education matters that reform must not be rushed. The risk of the current timetable is that law schools, PLT providers and admitting authorities will be forced into hurried and sub-optimal transitional arrangements. That would not serve students, the profession, the courts, clients or the public.

The better course is a staged and evidence-based review of the whole legal education continuum. Such a review would include consideration of the Priestley 11, PLT, supervised legal practice, post-admission training and continuing professional development. It would also be undertaken in genuine partnership with law schools, PLT providers, admitting authorities, the profession, students, Indigenous legal academics and communities, and other relevant stakeholders.

The TC Beirne School of Law supports reform where reform is warranted. But reform of this scale must be done properly. It should be principled rather than reactive, coherent rather than piecemeal, and, where aspirational, it must also be practical. We, therefore, urge the Committees to reconsider

both the sequencing and the timetable of the proposed reforms, and to adopt a more measured process that begins with the broader question of what legal education in Australia should now be for.

Yours sincerely,



Associate Professor Francesca Bartlett
Acting Head of School and Deputy Head of School
TC Beirne School of Law, The University of Queensland