

# **UNIFORM STANDARDS FOR PLT COURSES AND PROVIDERS**

**July 2015**

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# Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>CORE STANDARDS FOR PLT COURSES</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Fundamental requirement	1
1.2	Course objectives	1
1.3	Course content	1
1.4	Teaching and learning methods	2
1.5	Teacher: student ratios	2
1.6	Course materials	2
1.7	Assessment	3
1.8	Workplace experience	3
1.9	Length of course	4
<b>2.</b>	<b>CORE STANDARD FOR PLT PROVIDERS</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1	Teaching staff	4
<b>3.</b>	<b>ADDITIONAL STANDARDS FOR PLT PROVIDERS</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1	Financial status	5
3.2	Accommodation and teaching facilities	5
3.3	Legal information resources	6
3.4	Support services and staff	6
3.5	Governance and management	6
3.6	Financial control systems	7
3.7	Student admission and support	7
3.8	Quality assurance procedures and policies	7
3.9	Prerequisite for entry	7
3.10	Collaborative arrangements	8

## **1. CORE STANDARDS FOR PLT COURSES**

### **1.1 Fundamental requirement**

A PLT course must enable its students to acquire and demonstrate an appropriate understanding of, and competence in, each element of the skills, values and practice areas set out in the *PLT Competency Standards for Entry-level Lawyers (PLT Competency Standards)*.<sup>1</sup>

Information about each of the following matters is required to reach a conclusion about whether a course will, or will continue, to meet this requirement.

### **1.2 Course objectives**

- (a) The common aim of all PLT courses is to enable students to acquire and demonstrate an appropriate understanding of, and competence in, each element of the skills, values and practice areas set out in the PLT Competency Standards.
- (b) Each PLT course must set out a clear statement of its objectives, which is compatible with the common aim in paragraph (a).
- (c) The curriculum for, and each element of, a course must consistently reflect the statement of objectives.

#### *Comment*

A PLT provider is encouraged to show that course objectives have been carefully and thoughtfully developed, and how they will be implemented consistently throughout the course.

### **1.3 Course content**

- (a) The content of a PLT course must enable students to acquire and demonstrate an appropriate understanding, of and competence in, each element of the skills, values and practice areas set out in the PLT Competency Standards.
- (b) The content of a PLT course must be designed to reflect current law and current practice.
- (c) A PLT course must provide training at a level equivalent to postgraduate training. It should build on the knowledge and understanding of the law, the legal system and of legal practice which a graduate is expected to have acquired by the end of an undergraduate law degree.
- (d) A PLT course must introduce students to the problem of ensuring adequate and affordable access to justice for all and the role of lawyers in promoting such access through mechanisms such as legal aid and pro bono schemes.
- (e) A PLT course must include practical experience in using current information technology.
- (f) A PLT course may be designed to allow competence in one relevant area to be acquired in the course of acquiring competence in another relevant area.
- (g) The comparative weighting given to elective elements in the course must be indicated by reference to teaching and assessment times.

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<sup>1</sup> LACC Uniform Admission Rules 2014, rule 3(1) and Schedule 2; Legal Profession Uniform Admission Rules 2015, rule 6(1) and Schedule 2.

#### 1.4 Teaching and learning methods

- (a) Appropriate teaching and learning methods for each major element of a course must be designated.
- (b) In whatever mode a PLT course is delivered, it must be designed:
- (i) to enable regular opportunities for interaction between students and teachers (either individually or in small groups);
  - (ii) to provide timely feedback from teachers to students;
  - (iii) to provide adequate supervision of students, where supervision is appropriate;
  - (iv) to convey the interactive, dynamic nature, and the cultural environment of, of legal practice.
- (c) A PLT provider must set out the hours which a student is expected to devote respectively to on-campus learning and on-line learning, for the course as a whole and for each of its major elements.

##### *Comment*

- (i) A PLT provider is encouraged to outline each of the teaching, learning and assessment methods used in the course; describe how they will enable regular and adequate interaction and timely feedback; and will convey the interactive, dynamic nature of legal practice and its cultural environment.
- (ii) A PLT provider is also encouraged to describe to the admitting authority how on-line services will be used to:
  - manage and monitor student engagement;
  - deliver information and instruction to students;
  - submit assignments or assessable work;
  - provide students with feedback on work;
  - meet other needs.

#### 1.5 Teacher: student ratios

A PLT provider must have an adequate and appropriate ratio of teaching staff to students for the course as a whole and for each of its major elements.

#### 1.6 Course materials

Course materials must be kept up-to-date and reflect current law and current practice.

##### *Comment*

- (i) This standard complements Standard 1.3(b).
- (ii) A PLT provider is encouraged to give the admitting authority:
  - a list of the printed and on-line materials to be provided to students; and
  - examples of materials, to demonstrate compliance with the Standard.

## **1.7 Assessment**

- (a) A course must have formal means of determining whether, and certifying that, a student has acquired and demonstrated an appropriate understanding of, and competence in, each element of the skills, values and practice areas set out in the PLT Competency Standards.
- (b) The course materials for each major element must clearly state the level of understanding and competence required to satisfactorily complete that element.
- (c) Methods of assessment must be aligned with the objectives of the course referred to in Standard 1.2.
- (d) Various methods of assessment may be used.
- (e) To the extent possible, each component of assessment must reflect the actual requirements of legal practice in the relevant area.
- (f) Assessment arrangements must be designed to minimise opportunities for cheating or plagiarism by students.
- (g) A course may provide for students to re-sit components of assessment in which they have not demonstrated the required knowledge or competence.

### *Comment*

- (i) A PLT provider is encouraged to explain its arrangements for meeting these Standards in general terms, and to give illustrations of its processes and practices.
- (ii) Item 4.5(b) of the PLT Competency Standards envisages that a student's competence in a practice area might be assessed in a way which allows competence in relevant skills and values to be demonstrated at the same time.
- (iii) A PLT provider is encouraged to involve practising lawyers in its assessment processes, where practicable.
- (iv) Standard 1.7(e) is not intended to preclude assessment components conducted under controlled examination conditions.
- (v) Standard 1.7(f) reflects the concern of admitting authorities about the prevalence of certain types of academic misconduct on the part of applicants for admission, and seeks to guard against problems arising for both students and institutions where disclosure of such misconduct is required.
- (vi) Standard 1.7(h) is designed to afford a PLT provider the flexibility necessary to allow students to re-sit certain assessment components, where appropriate.

## **1.8 Workplace experience**

- (a) A PLT provider must set out how any workplace experience required as part of a PLT course will contribute to meeting the objectives referred to in Standard 1.2.
- (b) If workplace experience is designed to enable a student to acquire an understanding of, or competence in, any element of the PLT Competency Standards, a PLT provider must explain how this will be done.
- (c) A student undertaking required work experience must be supervised by either:

- (i) an Australian lawyer who has been practising for at least the two preceding years and is either in legal practice or a government, semi-government, corporate or community legal officer; or
  - (ii) another lawyer, if the PLT provider is satisfied that the student will acquire experience appropriate for the purposes of either paragraph (a) or (b) under that person's supervision.
- (d) Workplace experience must be administered in accordance with the prevailing legislative and other requirements relating to admission and workplace experience, including the LACC Standards for PLT Workplace Experience.

## **1.9 Length of course**

A PLT course must comprise either:

- (a) a program of study at graduate diploma level; or
- (b) a non-award training course of at least six months (900 hours); or
- (c) an integrated program of academic study and PLT that:
  - (i) requires the equivalent of three years' full-time academic study of law, apart from the time required to undertake the PLT components of the program; and
  - (ii) has been recognised by the relevant Admitting Authority for the purposes of preparing students for admission to the legal profession.

of which at least 450 hours is "programmed training" and at least 3 weeks (the equivalent of 15 days full-time) is "workplace experience", as those terms are respectively defined in item 2.1 of the PLT Competency Standards.

### *Comment*

- (iii) A PLT provider is encouraged to indicate how the total length of the course is calculated by reference to the length of each of its elements.

## **2. CORE STANDARD FOR PLT PROVIDERS**

### **2.1 Teaching staff**

- (a) A PLT provider must engage appropriately qualified people to teach the course and to assess the knowledge and competence of students.
- (b) Such people must, at the time of their appointment, either have substantial recent experience practising law in Australia, or comparable relevant qualifications or experience.
- (c) Those responsible for designing elements of the course must include people with appropriate qualifications or experience in designing such courses.
- (d) A PLT provider must operate an adequately-resourced and appropriate development programs for all teaching and assessment staff.
- (e) Those designing, teaching or assessing elements of the course must be evaluated at least annually.

### *Comment*

A PLT provider is encouraged to:

- (i) give the admitting authority a list of persons employed or engaged, setting out their respective qualifications and their roles in designing, teaching or assessing elements of the course;
- (ii) ensure that each teacher is appropriately qualified to teach the elements of the course for which that person is responsible;
- (iii) give the admitting authority job descriptions for all key positions;
- (iv) indicate whether any of those positions are vacant or are yet to be filled;
- (v) if a significant proportion of the teaching staff is not employed full-time, explain why the proposed arrangement is appropriate;
- (vi) outline the role of any guest teachers.

### 3. ADDITIONAL STANDARDS FOR PLT PROVIDERS

Standards 3.1 – 3.10 relate to the initial accreditation of PLT providers and the particular requirements of rule 7(1)(b) of the Legal Profession Uniform Admission Rules 2015.

Information about these Standards will only be sought from certain intending or existing PLT providers of courses. Any existing PLT provider which has been, and remains, accredited by both any host institution (such as a university) and any relevant State and Commonwealth higher education quality-assurance or accreditation agencies, will automatically be taken to comply with each of the ten Additional Standards.

#### 3.1 Financial status

- (a) A PLT provider must have the financial capacity to conduct, and to continue to conduct, the PLT course.
- (b) A PLT provider, or the institution of which it is a part, must have approved, or must undertake to the admitting authority that it will both approve and provide, sufficient funds to establish, maintain and conduct the course adequately, for the period of approval.

##### *Comment*

- (i) Where the PLT provider is part of a higher education institution, or other body with substantial financial reserves, the provider is encouraged to give the admitting authority evidence that ongoing financial support will be provided for the PLT course. It is not necessary to provide financial information about the host institution.
- (ii) The admitting authority may ask a PT provider to provide financial reports relevant to this Standard.

#### 3.2 Accommodation and teaching facilities

Accommodation and teaching facilities available to a course must be both adequate and appropriate, given the nature of the course, the proposed modes of delivery and the number of students and staff.

##### *Comment*

- (i) "Teaching facilities" includes teaching rooms, audio-visual and computer equipment and similar educational facilities.
- (ii) The requirements for on-campus and on-line courses may well be different.
- (iii) A PLT provider is encouraged to:

- explain why the proposed accommodation and facilities will be appropriate and adequate for the type of course and proposed enrolment at any time;
- explain the nature of any arrangements to share either or both accommodation and facilities with other users.

### **3.3 Legal information resources**

- (a) A PLT provider should have, or have access to, a library or legal information resources suitable for legal practice, which is available to support the proposed course.
- (b) All students should have free and reasonable electronic or other access to the library or legal information resources.
- (c) The library or legal information resources should be supported by adequate and appropriate staff.

#### *Comment*

A PLT provider is encouraged to explain:

- (i) the extent to which students will need to use a library or legal information resources to complete the various elements of the course;
- (ii) what arrangements exist for student access, if the relevant library does not belong to the PLT provider;
- (iii) what arrangements exist for on-line students to have the access envisaged by Standard 3.3(b);
- (iv) the general nature and holdings of the relevant library or legal information resources, and how they will be adequate for students to undertake the research and reference work required by the course.

### **3.4 Support services and staff**

- (a) A PLT provider must have sufficient and appropriate support services and staff to conduct the course competently.
- (b) Sufficient and appropriately-skilled information technology support staff must be available to deliver any on-line components of a course, and to support both staff and students.

#### *Comment*

The type and extent of the required support services and staff will vary from course to course. A PLT provider is encouraged to explain why the proposed support services and staff will be both appropriate and adequate for the relevant course.

### **3.5 Governance and management**

- (a) The governing body of a PLT course must:
  - (i) have such autonomy; and
  - (ii) such clearly designated functions and powers; and
  - (iii) be constituted in such a way, as will allow it both to govern the course effectively, and to fully discharge its responsibilities to the admitting authority.

- (b) A PLT provider must have a management team which gives full attention to the management of the course.

*Comment*

A PLT provider is encouraged to produce appropriate evidence to assure the admitting authority that the proposed course will be governed and managed appropriately in the manner envisaged by this Standard.

### **3.6 Financial control systems**

A PLT provider must employ financial control systems that enable it to conduct the course competently.

*Comment*

A PLT provider is encouraged to produce appropriate evidence to assure the admitting authority that the provider will have financial control systems which ensure that there is competent financial management for the course.

### **3.7 Student admission and support**

- (a) A PLT provider must operate a fair and equitable admissions policy.
- (b) A PLT provider must give prospective students sufficient and timely information which explains:
  - (i) how the course will delivered; and
  - (ii) what will be expected of a student who wishes to complete the course successfully.

### **3.8 Quality assurance procedures and policies**

A PLT provider must apply, and be subject to, appropriate quality-assurance procedures and policies.

*Comment*

- (i) The Standard envisages that every PLT provider will become, and will remain, accredited by both any host institution, such as a university, and any relevant State and Commonwealth higher education quality assurance or accreditation agency.
- (ii) A PLT provider is encouraged to explain the relevant quality-assurance procedures and policies applied to the course and provide information about the nature and frequency of such mechanisms as internal or external course reviews, student evaluations and staff evaluations.

### **3.9 Prerequisite for entry**

- (a) An applicant may commence PLT:
  - (i) in the case of Supervised Workplace Training, only after the applicant has completed an academic qualification in law, leading to admission to the legal profession;
  - (ii) in the case of a PLT course that is not integrated with the applicant's academic qualification in law, only after the applicant has completed an academic qualification in law leading to admission to the legal profession, unless the applicant has no more than two academic subjects to complete:

- (A) neither of which is one of the Academic Requirements for admission; and
- (B) for which the applicant must be enrolled while undertaking the PLT course,

and the applicant has received the prior permission of the Admitting Authority to commence the PLT course.

- (b) Despite paragraph (a), an applicant may undertake an integrated program of academic study and PLT that:
  - (i) requires the equivalent of three years' full-time academic study of law, apart from the time required to undertake the PLT components of the program; and
  - (ii) has been recognised by the relevant Admitting Authority for the purposes of preparing students for admission to the legal profession.<sup>i</sup>

### **3.10 Collaborative arrangements**

Where a PLT provider collaborates with another organisation to design, manage or deliver a PLT course:

- (a) the respective functions and responsibilities of each collaborator must be clearly specified and documented; and
- (b) the PLT provider remains responsible for, and accountable to the admitting authority for, conducting the course in accordance with these Standards.

#### *Comment*

- (i) The Standard is designed to meet the situation where a PLT provider contracts with an organisation that may neither be accredited by higher education quality assurance agencies, nor accountable to the admitting authority.
- (ii) A PLT provider is encouraged to explain to the admitting authority the nature of any collaborative arrangements which might be subject to this Standard.
- (iii) The Standard is not intended to apply to arrangements where, say, a PLT provider deliver a course for, and on the premises of, a law firm.