



# Thriving *in Law*

PREPARING FOR  
YOUR LEGAL CAREER

*A guide from  
The Law Society  
of New South Wales*



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PREPARING FOR YOUR LEGAL CAREER



THE LAW SOCIETY  
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

# INTRODUCING THE LAW SOCIETY OF NSW

*The Law Society of NSW is Australia's largest and most influential membership association for solicitors. We represent over 33,000 members and act as the voice of the legal profession by:*

- **Driving law reform:** We encourage debate and actively drive law reform issues through policy submissions and open dialogue with governments, parliamentary bodies, the courts and the Attorney-General's Department.
- **Regulating the profession:** Endowed with co-regulatory duties with the Office of the Legal Services Commissioner, we maintain the integrity of the profession through setting and enforcing professional standards, licensing solicitors to practise, investigating complaints and administering discipline.
- **Guiding the profession:** We provide guidance to solicitors about the Legal Profession Uniform Law and it's associated legislation. We also provide a range of learning and development opportunities designed to comply with professional development obligations.
- **Uniting the profession:** We unite the profession and help members across the state stay in touch with legal developments and with fellow members through a range of publications, networking opportunities such as our Welcome to the Profession celebrations, and regional law societies.
- **Supporting our members:** No matter what stage of your legal career journey you are at, we provide a range of personal and professional support services including wellbeing events and resources, tailored communications and mentoring opportunities.
- **Connecting the profession and the community:** We ensure that the public has appropriate access to justice and can be easily connected to the profession when required.

**Law students represent the future of the legal profession. The Law Society of NSW is committed to providing information and resources to best equip students during their studies to transition into the profession.**

Scan here to learn more:



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**Student membership of the Law Society of NSW is complimentary.**

**To be eligible, you must:**

- not be otherwise qualified to be an Associate Member; and
- be studying law or have successfully completed a course in law at any university, college or institution in Australia recognised for admission as a lawyer in Australia and signify intention to practise as a legal practitioner.

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# STUDYING

*The first step to being admitted as a lawyer is completing an undergraduate degree. Here is a quick guide to help you through.*

## IS A LEGAL CAREER FOR ME?

There is likely to be more than one occupation that is right for you. But for now, welcome to the legal profession! Take this special time now at the start of your career to consider what your hopes and vision are for your future. Talk to lawyers about their experience in practising law.

Websites such as myfuture.edu.au, Australia's online career information and exploration service, provides information and tools to help people investigate and navigate career pathways. It includes comprehensive information about occupations, courses and state-by-state labour market information, which may assist you in determining whether a legal career is right for you.

Your future employer in many professions (including law) can request a copy of your academic transcript and confirmation of your university entrance rank when you apply for graduate positions.

However, do not be persuaded to study (or practise) law simply because you obtained a high entrance mark or feel pressured by family or friends to study. Choose a course which you are interested in and passionate about. Even if you have now completed your course, think about what you want your next move to be. Young people today will have long working lives which will take many different turns.

If you are serious about a career in law, evaluate your abilities, work inclinations and personal goals. Being a lawyer can be fulfilling if you enjoy working in a team, working under pressure to meet deadlines, learning about

various industries (including health, finance, property and construction), thinking critically, participating in legal debate, undertaking research and resolving complex factual scenarios. You will also need good organisational skills, interpersonal skills, good time management (at work and at home) and of course, a passion for equality and justice.

## STUDYING AT UNIVERSITY

The first prerequisites to a career in law are the intelligence, diligence and commitment to undertake and successfully complete either the Legal Profession Admission Board's Diploma in Law, or an accredited law degree, such as a Bachelor of Laws or Juris Doctor.

## IN-PERSON VS. ONLINE LEARNING

Over the last couple of years, we have seen the steady return to in-person learning following the changes to remote learning implemented during COVID-19. That being said, it is likely that most universities will continue to hold some lectures, seminars and other events in a hybrid or wholly virtual format.

Learning virtually can have many benefits including avoiding lengthy commutes, flexibility with time and location, an ability to pause/rewind content as needed and not having to worry about wearing your pyjamas in the afternoon. However, research has shown that on campus activities can lead to improved student wellbeing, contribute to positive health outcomes and support academic achievement.

It is important to understand what works

# Top tips for studying

## **ORGANISE YOURSELF**

We're more likely to study when it's scheduled in our diaries, this also allows us to better manage our workload across a variety of modules.

## **SPEAK UP**

If you have a question, don't let it escalate. Reach out to your tutor or even a friend or classmate. Showing initiative can pay off!

## **ACTIVE STUDYING**

don't just copy from your textbooks when revising, explore techniques and find what works for you whether that's mind-mapping, que cards, colour coding or getting family/friends to quiz you.

## **DO NOT DISTURB**

We all know how a quick glance at social media can turn into a 3-hour binge. Avoid distractions by turning your devices to 'do not disturb' and creating a focused space for your studying.

## **BEAT PROCRASTINATION**

The Pomodoro Technique developed in the 1980s has shown that breaking down work in 25-minute intervals with five minute breaks in between allows students to better concentrate and complete tasks. This is because 25 minutes allows you to be productive and creates urgency to help you stay focused without being too long.

best for you and find the balance that best supports your mental and physical wellbeing. Most universities have implemented COVID-19 safety measures to ensure students can return to in-person learnings on campus safely.

## **SOME TIPS FOR THE FINAL YEARS OF STUDY**

Be prepared to spend a lot of time analysing cases, preparing coursework and writing assignments. Law is a demanding degree but there are plenty of ways you can balance study and productivity with a fulfilling life.

In order to maintain your mental health, it is important to make time for yourself; read something other than a law textbook, join a university team or club and make sure you maintain a healthy social life. You can also consider doing your degree part-time. If you experience difficulties during the course of your studies, one option would be to do fewer subjects at a particular time or even deferring for a semester or two. There is nothing wrong with taking a little more time to complete your degree; often those that take their degree at a slower pace can dedicate more quality time to each subject.

## **TAKING A GAP YEAR**

You may choose to take a break from study to travel, pursue a hobby, earn money, volunteer, or gain skills and life experience before continuing with your studies or beginning your law career.

Taking a gap year may help you to think about the career you want to pursue. It can also increase your life skills and experiences, enhance your understanding of a chosen field of study, and add to your future employability.

# STAYING WELL AT UNIVERSITY

*The skilful student takes care of developing their study skills by creating a mindset that supports their studies. Getting organised is essential and there are great productivity habits and resources that can help with organising and scheduling tasks.*

Stressful times and events are a common experience for students especially around exams and submission dates. The internal self-talk can add pressure and uncomfortable sensations arise. We know this as the stress response: flight, fright, freeze.

The moment we anticipate stress in any form, most of us tend to stop breathing and hold our breath. Breath holding activates the fight/flight/freeze response; it tends to increase the sensation of pain, stiffness, anxiety, or fear.

You can learn to use breathing exercises to shift your focus away from stress or pain. The human mind processes one thing at a time. If you focus on the rhythm of your breathing, you're not focused on the stressor. Deep breathing also activates the parasympathetic nervous system responsible for the rest, digest response. The vagus nerve is responsible for slowing down the heart rate and activating digestion. Deep breathing practices activate the vagus nerve so you can consciously interrupt the stress response – slow down your breathing rate, breathe in through your nostrils and exhale slowly with a sigh and a smile. Repeat this five or six times and you will have activated the relaxation response.

## CHOOSE ONE OR TWO SELF-CARE HABITS.

According to James Clear in his book Atomic Habits, we can all incorporate small additions to our daily routines that are enjoyable and beneficial.

For example, introducing the practice of deep breathing. Box breathing is a pattern where you count 4 as you inhale through the nose, another 4 as you hold, 4 again as you exhale through the mouth, pause for 4, and then repeat the breathing cycle 4 times; two sit-ups; drink a glass of water.

Add to your diary your first new self-care habits; a morning routine and an evening routine (pre-sleep). The morning routine could include physical exercise, eating a nutritious breakfast and listening to a 5-minute mindfulness practice.

An evening routine to prepare for sleep could include switching off all screens and technology 20 minutes prior to sleep; listening to a five-minute mindfulness practice or setting an intention to sleep well and wake up refreshed in the morning.

You already have a busy schedule, with studies, work and relationships, so look for the breaks in between these activities. Be mindful of your self-talk, are you being kind

## HELP IS ALWAYS AT HAND

### Beyond Blue

Mental health support  
1300 224 636  
beyondblue.org.au

### Headspace

Youth and student  
mental health support  
Headspace.org.au

### Lifeline

24 hour crisis hotline  
131 114  
Lifeline.org.au

### Reach Out

A safe online space for  
young people to chat  
au.reachout.com

*In an emergency Call 000 immediately*



to yourself? Reframe negative and critical self-talk with more supportive and encouraging statements. “I am doing well”. Include regular short breaks throughout the day to keep hydrated, nourished, and connect with others.

Explore what activities relax you; listening to music, laughter, yoga-gentle exercise, massage, spending time in nature, mindfulness, deep breathing, humming, and singing all activate the relaxation response. Activate positive hormones with your daily DOSE: Dopamine, Oxytocin, Serotonin and Endorphins

#### PERMA MODEL OF WELLBEING

**Positivity:** Positive emotions can include happiness, hope, love, humour, and gratitude. Try to remain conscious of when you experience a negative emotion and aim to identify a positive element of that situation. A small action you can take is writing 3 things you are grateful for every day.

**Engagement:** Clearly defined activities that allow you to immerse yourself with a sense of purpose. Moving forward in a direction you can be proud of.

**Relationships:** Supportive and respectful interactions – be open and curious about meeting new people, intentionally form meaningful friendships and mentors.

**Meaningful:** You are studying in order to open opportunities for meaningful contribution that will align with your values.

**Acknowledgement:** Notice your achievements have intrinsic reward, and extrinsic reward, recognised and acknowledged by teachers, mentors, significant people in your life.

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*An evening routine to prepare for sleep could include*



**Switching off all screens and technology 20 minutes prior to sleep**



**Listening to a five-minute mindfulness practice or**



**Setting an intention to sleep well and wake up refreshed in the morning.**

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#### KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS:

People who can apply their strengths to tasks are more likely to be engaged, productive and fulfilled. Review the Values In Action website to assess your character strengths and human values: [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)

# LEGAL WORK EXPERIENCE

*It is advisable to get some legal work experience whilst still at university.*

Try obtaining a position as a paralegal, law clerk, legal secretary or any other paid position within the legal profession. Practical experience will always provide a realistic insight. It can also provide you with legal contacts, skills and experience that might assist you to obtain your first job as a lawyer. It can also help set you apart from other applicants for roles. If you work hard and perform well in the role you might have the benefit of obtaining a professional referee from this work experience.

As well as potentially growing your future job prospects, work experience provides a real insight into the culture of a workplace which can vary markedly from job to job. Workplace culture is made up of the people, the style of management and the psychology, attitudes, experiences, beliefs and values of the workplace. Through work experience, you can also become familiar with the type of work, clients and their policies on flexible working.

If you are unable to obtain a paid legal position, another alternative is a voluntary position at a community legal centre or similar organisation.

## HOW CAN I FIND OUT ABOUT LEGAL POSITIONS?

Positions are commonly advertised online, via the Law Student Portal, NSW Young Lawyer channels and on university and College of Law notice boards. Government legal positions are typically advertised through [iworkfor.nsw.gov.au](http://iworkfor.nsw.gov.au) and [apsjobs.gov.au](http://apsjobs.gov.au). You can also register with online job websites (including [ethicaljobs.com.au](http://ethicaljobs.com.au)) so that jobs fitting your criteria are emailed directly to you.

Another option is to register as a temporary or casual paralegal or legal secretary, either directly with a firm or via a legal recruitment agency. Barristers' chambers also often hire legal clerks, receptionists and legal researchers so contact your local chambers to ask if they have any potential upcoming positions.

If you opt to contact a firm or chambers directly, research the people and the firm thoroughly before contacting them. You can research the firm by browsing their website, speaking to contacts you know who work there or by performing a Google and/or Australasian Legal Information Institute [AustLII] search to find out what cases they have recently been involved in and the type of work they do. This will arm you with information to demonstrate that you are both keen to work at the firm and that you have an understanding and curiosity about their business.

Getting involved and actively attending Law Society of NSW events are great ways to develop a network and can be valuable in building potential job connections and opportunities. Keep an eye on our website and communications to ensure you're up to date.

There are a number of ways to gain work experience before embarking on a career in law. One of the most common ways is to secure a clerkship with a law firm but it is not the only way.

## DON'T BE AFRAID OF FAILURE

Rachel Zeng is an early career lawyer practising in insolvency and restructuring at Johnson Winter Slattery. Zeng is particularly interested in litigation and dispute resolution. She

## Words of wisdom

*"If the legal profession, in all its ranks, is more reflective of Australian society, that can be nothing but a good thing. We are not used to seeing women of minority backgrounds in an esteemed profession. That plays a role in alleviating and challenging stereotypes. The law shouldn't be a profession that is a privilege that only people of wealthy backgrounds can afford to enter. That goes without saying across many industries. The circumstances of your birth shouldn't dictate what opportunities you are afforded."*

Chief Executive Officer Media Diversity Australia,  
Lawyer, Founder & Chair Islamophobia  
Register Australia **Mariam Veiszadeh**



was a former NSW Golden Gavel finalist and is the co-creator and host of 'Women in Suits', a podcast showcasing trailblazing women in law.

"I've had to embrace failure because I've realised that some of the best lawyers in the industry have failed more times than any other lawyers have. People who are at the top often made the most mistakes. It's about learning from your mistakes and not tripping over the same stone more than once that gets you the right amount of experience. It can be challenging because I was used to not failing at university. It is a steep learning curve after university and many lawyers, who are a bit further ahead in their career, have told me they felt the exact same way"

### SEASONAL CLERKSHIPS

Most seasonal clerkships are approximately 11 weeks of full-time work in the summer break between the penultimate (second to last) and final year of a degree. Clerkships are usually (but not exclusively) offered by mid to top tier law firms and they are a valuable opportunity to obtain hands on experience.

Many firms provide a rotation program, and ideally a mentor each rotation, to enable you to gain exposure and work experience across a broad range of practice areas. Students who participate in clerkships develop a greater understanding of employment opportunities and legal experience, whilst adding to their resumes. A further



“ I’ve had to embrace failure because I’ve realised that some of the best lawyers in the industry have failed more times than any other lawyers have. People who are at the top often made the most mistakes. It’s about learning from your mistakes and not tripping over the same stone more than once”

benefit is that you may be offered a graduate or casual/part-time paralegal position upon completion of the clerkship.

As many firms recruit their graduates directly from their seasonal clerks, it is wise to apply for a seasonal clerkship, if you plan on going into private practice. To be eligible for a seasonal clerkship you must be in the penultimate year of your degree. Some exceptions may apply, however it is best to contact the firm you are applying to if you are planning to apply outside your penultimate year.

#### WHEN SHOULD I APPLY FOR A CLERKSHIP?

In NSW some firms advertise seasonal clerkship positions on ‘cvMail’, an electronic application system used by law firms around the world to advertise and process applications for graduate and seasonal clerkship positions.

It is important that you familiarise yourself with the relevant application dates for each firm. Whilst a strong academic transcript is

undeniably appealing to a prospective employer, marks alone are not enough to secure a seasonal clerkship/graduate position. Participation in extra-curricular activities or work experience can give you skills that are not attainable through mere study. It is these skills that the law firm will seek to differentiate the candidates most suited to their organisation.

#### HOW DO I APPLY FOR PLACEMENTS?

Timeframes apply for the opening and closing of applications for graduate positions and summer clerkships. The making and accepting of graduate employment and seasonal clerkship offers are in accordance with each of their respective guidelines. For those employers participating in the Law Society of NSW Graduate and Clerkship Recruitment programs, these guidelines are available on the Law Student Portal. Read more about legal graduate positions on page 14.



Make sure to check out the Law Society Law Student Portal for further information on our Clerkship Recruitment Program including key dates.

### ARE CLERKSHIPS COMPULSORY?

If you don't think a formal clerkship is for you, there's no obligation to apply. There are plenty of other legal work experience opportunities in other law firms, government organisations, in-house corporate teams and in the community legal sector. If you later change your mind, many organisations also have a graduate intake. You may feel that you are expected to apply for and receive a clerkship offer as they are heavily promoted by law firms and a common topic of discussion between students around June to September. However, there are many different ways to gain experience and access to the legal profession.

### WHAT IF I MISS OUT ON A CLERKSHIP?

Many law students are unsuccessful in obtaining clerkship positions as there are simply not enough places available. If you are one of the unsuccessful candidates don't become disheartened. Formal clerkship programs are not the only way to obtain legal experience.

If your clerkship application is unsuccessful, it is a good idea to contact the Human Resources department to seek feedback. The feedback you receive may assist you in improving your resume and interview technique for future applications. Try to obtain some other form of legal work experience. Keep in mind



that completing a clerkship is not a pre-requisite for gaining graduate employment.

If you are initially unable to obtain a paid legal position, consider applying for voluntary positions within community legal centres or other non-profit legal organisations. These positions usually provide excellent legal opportunities and experience. Voluntary work is an excellent way of experiencing new challenges and providing a valuable service to the community. A variety of organisations rely on volunteers and it can be a great way to build new skills and add to work experience. For more information see [www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org).

## A DAY IN THE LIFE

# Regional Lawyer

**JEN SPEAR**, PRESIDENT  
OF THE ORANA LAW SOCIETY,  
CHAIR OF THE NSW YOUNG LAWYERS  
BUSHWEB SUB-COMMITTEE, LAWYER  
WITH DUFFY ELLIOTT IN DUBBO



**07.30** Take my two large, beautiful pups for a walk through the parklands near my home.

**08.30** Leave for work. Barely have time to listen to the radio news before I arrive to face the day.

**08.35** Arrive at work and park metres from the back door in my allocated park. Thankfully, have very helpful assistant who provides coffee on my arrival (I am not a morning person, and she understands that the sooner I have my caffeine fix, the more sprightly I will be).

**08.45** Between general gasbagging and morning debrief, finalise sentencing submissions for Court.

**09.15** Client arrives and provides last minute references and a letter of apology. Their letter is... unhelpful. I amend and arrange client to sign, my assistant makes copies, and client and I walk across to the court together.

**09.30** Arrive in Court on time (heaven forbid you are late and a grumpy magistrate discovers this!). Wait for my turn to appear (according to the unspoken rules of court etiquette and the seniority hierarchy). Whilst waiting, enjoy a chinwag with other practitioners and arrange catchup for later in the week to discuss a matter. Finally do court appearance – well prepared submissions calm the nerves significantly, and client receives appropriate result. Leave Court and have short meeting with client to explain the outcome and attend registry to help them sign into any bonds. Sneaky coffee on the way back to the office.

**11.00** Review incoming snail mail that has been placed on my desk. Read and respond to short emails, and set tasks for larger items that myself and my assistant will need to work on throughout the next day or so.



**12.00** Appointment for a new estate. Greet and comfort family, review the estate needs, and provide advice accordingly. Clients are naturally very upset and often uptight during initial estate appointments, so must remind myself to not take it personally, and respect that they are grieving.

**13.00** Lunchtime – I drag my assistant to lunch to ensure we both have a break away from the desk – important to refresh and rejuvenate for the afternoon. Whilst walking, an interesting shopfront catches our eyes and we duck in to make a sneaky purchase! Grab a takeaway lunch, and a little sweet treat for later.

**14.00** Refreshed after lunch and back at my desk, I review the new estate file from this morning's appointment. I enter matters of importance onto our legal software and set tasks while it is fresh on my mind. I then take time to review the several letters that my assistant has prepared throughout the day and send back to her with amendments for her to update.

**14.30** Take time to prepare a letter reporting the outcome of Court earlier today and issue invoice. Keen to bill and get the matter off my desk as soon as possible so it's one less matter piling up.

**15.00** Police have served a brief (unhelpfully served exactly 14 days before an upcoming DV hearing so need to look at this ASAP). Have another cuppa while I review brief material and listen to CD (and wonder why the Police are not modern enough for USBs yet).

**15.30** Prepare a couple of quick routine letters. Sign off on those and any letters that my assistant has edited so they can make the outgoing mail that day.

**16.00** Appointment with client to sign off on estate planning documents. Thoroughly run through Will, Power of Attorney and Enduring Guardian documents, answer their queries, and arrange execution. Clients leave feeling like 'weight has been lifted off their shoulders' (If only I had \$1 for every time a client said this expression at the end of their estate planning matter).

**17.00** Yay! The phones have stopped ringing and I have an opportunity to turn my mind to the more onerous tasks. Perfect opportunity to do that letter of advice for tricky matter requiring research and comprehensive opinion.

**18.05** Login to online meeting (5 minutes late, as was immersed in tricky letter) for Young Lawyers, and ensure regional viewpoint is heard!

**19.30** Dash out of work, run late to dinner with friends – pizza and The Bachelor (or equivalent classy tv show). Important viewing to escape the serious business of day-to-day work (although on other days, the same evening stress relief can be found in my team netball/volleyball games).

# GRADUATE POSITIONS

*Graduate positions can range from six months to two years and provide an opportunity to rotate through several practice groups.*

The content of graduate positions varies between each law firm. Ideally, a graduate position is structured with the intention of providing you with the necessary knowledge, skills and practical experience to help you decide which area of law you most enjoy and wish to work in.

If you are fortunate enough to be offered several graduate positions, consider whether the firm or organisation offers a graduate rotation, or which firm or organisation offers the type of work which you are most interested in or most suited to. Do not make a decision based purely on remuneration.


## WHEN SHOULD I APPLY FOR A GRADUATE POSITION?

This varies between firms and various government departments so check with the Human Resources department of the particular employer within your first few years of university, so you do not miss out on a graduate opportunity.

Alternatively, check the employer's website at least 12 months before you graduate. Many employers select graduates from their seasonal clerks or interns.

If you are keen to obtain a graduate position at a particular firm, you should apply for a seasonal clerkship to increase your chances of obtaining a graduate position.

Even if you have a particular firm in mind, stay flexible as you may discover that there are several other firms which are a suitable fit for you. Alternatively consider commencing your career in another firm and then applying to your preferred firm once you have obtained a few years' experience.



“ Even if you have a particular firm in mind, stay flexible as you may discover that there are several other firms which are a suitable fit for you. ”





### WHAT IF I MISS OUT?

If you are unsuccessful in obtaining a graduate position, there are other ways of obtaining legal experience. Law societies and similar organisations have been working hard over the last few years to dispel the myth that the only way to break into a successful legal career is to obtain a graduate position at a top tier law firm because this is simply not true. It is a good idea to look into graduate positions offered by mid-tier and boutique firms where often you get more one-on-one experience with mentors.

Many firms make second round offers when graduates decline an offer or resign in the first few months or weeks. With this in mind, it is important, to keep in touch with your contacts in particular firms and maintain an open line of communication to ensure you become aware of positions as soon as they arise.

There are also similar positions working in federal government agencies such as the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC), Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), Australian Taxation Office or State and Territory government agencies such as the NSW Crime Commission and the Department of Roads and Maritime Services. Many of these government organisations offer cutting edge graduate programs and interested law students should be familiar with the application dates for these. Alternatively, many of the government organisations also offer ad hoc roles on their recruitment websites. For examples of federal government roles see [aps.jobs.gov.au](https://aps.jobs.gov.au) and for NSW government roles see [iwork-fornsw.gov.au](https://iwork-fornsw.gov.au).



## Words of wisdom

*“Looking for opportunities outside the ‘big city’ can be a great way to start your career. Think about regional jobs where you might be part of a smaller team and get your hands on some interesting work. You’ll also get to know another part of the country which can be very rewarding.”*

**JONATHAN HUNYOR,**  
CEO AT PUBLIC INTEREST ADVOCACY CENTRE



If you have exhausted the legal options, consider a legal adjacent job. This is a legal-related job which involves advising on or working with the law, but is not necessarily in a law firm, and you are not necessarily employed as a lawyer. For example, working in-house or working in insurance companies handling insurance claims or working as an insurance broker.

### BEYOND THE FIRM

Working in a firm is only one option for the new lawyer. Some other options to practise as a lawyer are:

Work for yourself. However, after admission you will have a Restricted Practising Certificate (which requires you to be supervised during legal practise for two years of full-time employment, by a practitioner with an unrestricted Practising Certificate). After two years, you can apply for an Unrestricted Practising Certificate to enable you to practise as a sole practitioner, principle (partner) of a law firm, or the solicitor with supervisory



Make sure to check out the Law Society Law Student Portal for further information on our Graduate Recruitment Program including key dates.

responsibility in a corporation or government department. Obtaining clients while competing with large firms is the most difficult aspect of this route. This option is not recommended until you have obtained at least two years post admission experience and you have obtained your Unrestricted Practising Certificate.

Work as a government and/or public service lawyer.

Work for a corporate entity as an in-house counsel. You advise on legal matters and practice to a certain extent. You have a guaranteed client, but it's always the same one.

Work in a not-for-profit legal clinic (for example the Public Interest Advocacy Centre)

Work in a Community Legal Centre (for example Kingsford Legal Centre)

### ENGAGING RECRUITERS

Once you have graduated you may also like to consider contacting legal recruitment firms.

Recruiters are paid a commission by the firms to find someone who can fill a vacant position; therefore, they do not charge you any fees. They can also be valuable sources of 'inside' information and if they like you, and/

or think you are an appropriate candidate, being the right fit for the position, they will work very hard in selling you to the firm and assisting you to secure the position.

Do not rely solely on recruiters as the commissions for more senior positions are far more attractive than those paid for placing junior or graduate lawyers. Do not be surprised if recruiters do not take an immediate interest but persist in being listed on their books. It is useful to build a relationship with a reputable recruiter who can serve as a touchstone for salary negotiations and possible opportunities later in your career.

Be aware of being pigeon-holed. If you are unsure of the area of practice you want to specialise in, don't stay in a position you don't enjoy for years as you will find it increasingly difficult to transfer practice areas. Legal recruiters have an unfortunate reputation for pigeon-holing candidates. While it can be difficult to jump practice areas, with persistence, it can be achieved, but you will need to go to great lengths to convince the employer of your transferable skills, capabilities and ability to meet the selection criteria.



To find out more about potential careers paths and hear from firms and employers, make sure to attend the Law Society's NSW Law Careers Fair [lawsociety.com.au/careersfair](http://lawsociety.com.au/careersfair)

# EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS

*There are many different paths your legal career can take after admission - here's a quick guide to some of the places you might want to look at.*

## SMALL FIRMS

Smaller firms can either be generalist (as in practice in lots of areas, e.g. family, criminal, conveyancing) or boutique (specialise in one area, e.g. tax). You will often have greater responsibility, a broader range of experience and be more likely to receive advocacy experience and more client exposure in a smaller firm. You will be working in a smaller team and are more likely to receive one-on-one training. Small firms are generally less rigid and many permit lawyers to work on more flexible schedules. The retention rate is greater in small firms. Smaller firms have comparatively lower salaries. They generally demand fewer billable hours, and as a result, you are likely to have a better work-life balance and spend fewer hours at the office.

## MID-TIER FIRMS

Mid-tier firms are generally considered the healthy median between small, boutique firms and top-tier firms. You will likely be given a higher salary than in a small firm, but may be expected to bill more hours. You will have less autonomy but the matters you work on are likely to be more specialised and complex. Mid-tier firms generally have many of the benefits of larger firms, such as mentoring, training and other perks, but still have a smaller, friendlier environment.

## TOP-TIER FIRMS

Top-tier firms will have more a more defined hierarchy and may offer more training and mentoring opportunities. However, this is not





“ Mid-tier firms generally have many of the benefits of larger firms, such as mentoring, training and other perks, but still have a smaller, friendlier environment. ”

always the case, and you may be overlooked and/or utilised for large discovery tasks which may take up to 12 months.

Generally speaking, top-tier firms pay higher salaries, require longer hours and more demanding billable budgets. You are less likely to have autonomy or responsibility for files for the first few years of your practice. Career progression may be structured and slower and the work is often more specialised. However, there may be opportunities to move practice group and practise in different areas if you request a transfer and the firm wishes to retain you.

You are likely to require a degree with honours to obtain a position in a top-tier firm. However, if you don't get high grades, once you have a few years' experience or have developed a good professional reputation, your grades matter substantially less than when applying for graduate positions.

Top-tier is generally used to describe the largest leading professional services firms. Top-tier firms are obviously impressive on your resume, but they are not for everyone. For example, many top tier firms don't have family law or criminal law practices.

So, if you dream of a career in family law or criminal law, a top-tier firm may not be an option for you. Just because you do not initially obtain a position in a top-tier firm does not mean that you will not be able to secure a position at the firm of your choice later once you have obtained two - three years post admission experience (PAE or PQE), if this is your goal.

#### **RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE PRACTICE**

Access to justice in rural, regional and remote locations is a major issue in some Australian communities. Considering a role in these areas can be extremely fulfilling and provide you with an opportunity to make a real difference to a local community.

There are a range of career options available to lawyers in rural, regional and remote areas. These include private practice, where many lawyers may also take on publicly funded legal aid work, and the public profession. The latter includes services such as Legal Aid, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, Community Legal Centres and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services.

Benefits of working in a rural, regional or remote location often include better work/life balance, beautiful locations and a bigger sense of community. If the fast pace of working in a city doesn't appeal to you, you might want to consider gaining some experience in a rural, regional or remote location.



## **The Law Society's Mentoring Program**

Mentoring is an incredibly rewarding experience that allows you to further your personal and professional development and build connections with more experienced members of the profession to set the groundwork for a prosperous and successful legal career.

The Law Society Mentoring Program is open to students in their final and penultimate years of study. By participating, you will be strategically paired with an experienced mentor who aligns with your goals and career objectives.

#### **Benefits of becoming a mentee:**

- Receive guidance for your career and professional development in the legal profession from someone with experience
- It's an opportunity to reflect on professional challenges and opportunities
- Identify professional growth and career planning
- Be supported as you transition from a student to working in the profession

*Bookmark this*



**Mentoring dates and details**  
[lawsociety.com.au/mentoring](http://lawsociety.com.au/mentoring)

## CRIMINAL LAW

There is a division within the practice area of litigation: criminal or civil. A criminal litigator can work either for the government by representing the state or the Commonwealth (as a Crown Solicitor or public prosecutor) or representing the accused as a criminal defence lawyer.

## IN-HOUSE LAWYERS

Some companies employ their own legal team to work for the company rather than sending the work out to firms. This is called working in-house. The head of the legal team is usually the General Counsel and they will have a team of lawyers working with them.

One of the advantages of working in-house is that it is unlikely that you will be required to record your time on a timesheet. The work is usually varied and can range from highly specialised, with little variety, to a whole range of commercial legal issues. In-house legal teams tend to be smaller and more close-knit.

You are likely to gain an intimate knowledge of the business and often opportunities arise to move into management and more senior quasi-legal roles. A disadvantage of moving in-house early in your career is that it may limit your future career prospects if you want to go into private practice or other areas of law.

Larger companies which use multiple panel firms can provide a path into a panel firm in later years. In-house is becoming increasingly popular as companies try to reduce legal costs. Increasingly, large companies are keeping more interesting work in-house. This wasn't always the case as in-house teams used

to act as managers of panel firms. Many in-house lawyers now run matters for the company, with the assistance of external firms as required. An in-house legal career can have the added benefits of perks, such as a company car, as well as the possibility of reduced working hours (compared to litigation and transactional corporate roles in private practice).

## GOVERNMENT POSITIONS

Some government departments outsource their legal requirements to law firms and others have in-house lawyers. There are many benefits of working for the government including flexibility, good working hours and a solid salary (when compared with private practice).

## COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES (CLCS)

Some students and graduates may be more interested in human rights and social justice. This area, as with most practice areas, is widely varied and can range from international criminal law to human rights to environmental law and many more. CLCs often do not offer graduate roles as they are, for the most part, not government funded.

However, if you are determined to work at a CLC, most will take volunteers. Some examples of CLCs include Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), the Aboriginal Legal Centres, Redfern Legal Centre, Salvos Legal and the Refugees Advice and Casework Services (RACS).

To find out more about CLCs, visit the CLCs NSW website: [clcnsw.org.au](http://clcnsw.org.au)

## A DAY IN THE LIFE

# CLC Graduate

**KATE SINCLAIR,**  
PUBLIC INTEREST ADVOCACY CENTRE



**7.00am** My phone alarm rouses me briefly. Briefly, because I'm quick to snooze. No way am I making the gym this morning.

**8.00am** Another alarm, 'shh'.

**8.06am** Fine, I'm up. Read news headlines then get going.

**8.30am** My balance of working from the office vs from home is around 50/50 per fortnight. Today's an office day, so I bus to work.

**8.55am** Arrive to work and approach the strategic litigation team's area. Both coffee and breakfast are in hand – I've pre-ordered a latte from the bus and made a bowl of Weet-Bix in the kitchen. I'm greeted by the team's early risers. I choose a desk and set up for the day: laptop and glasses out of bag. Inhale Weet-Bix.

**9.05am** Respond to pressing emails. Categorise non-pressing emails to deal with later. We have a few meetings with partners in the works. We want to discuss a strategy for a police accountability matter with one our partners. Another partner is investigating a matter concerning prisoner rights and wants our input. I give my two cents and offer to arrange the catch-ups.

**9.15am** Now that the emails are dealt with, I consult my to-do list in One Note. I carry over yesterday's tasks into today's column and include any new tasks: draft pleadings (carry over), call a client (new), call the NSW Police GIPA team (new). Chasing the Department of Housing, updating an internal policy document and applying to remove the supervision condition from my practising certificate are pushed to tomorrow ... again.

**9.20am** Open draft pleadings. This task requires deep thinking. Because I have a few hours before my first meeting, it's up first. Yesterday I considered our precedents and prepared the scaffold. Today I get into the detail.

**9.30am** Last week I had a very useful meeting with the principal solicitor about the approach to these pleadings. Based on this chat, I'm constantly thinking: what do we need to prove (via pleading) and what context do we need to provide to make the claim understandable (via particular)? There are many incidents in this claim so it will be a long statement. Pleadings are repetitive, basically mathematically. But every word must be chosen carefully, so the defendant is able to understand the case put against them.

**10.05am** Our discrimination team has come out of a meeting and they're debriefing near my desk. It's about their work on making a fairer NDIS. My work doesn't relate but it's interesting. I return to drafting pleadings.



**10.45am** Strike up a conversation with the lawyer sitting next to me. We have an upcoming conciliation acting for a client who has been discriminated against because of his disability. I ask if there's anything she'd like me to prepare in the lead up to conciliation. She confirms everything is in the respondents' court for now. Back to pleadings.

**12.20pm** Reheat and take my lunch to Hyde Park, where I listen to a podcast and walk around.

**1.00pm** Meeting time. This one is a fortnightly catch-up with my supervisor. If we hadn't spoken already today (unlikely), we catch up on the weekend's happenings first. We then talk about how I'm finding things – Workload ok? Is good! I have a good mix of matters and policy advocacy work. This includes: acting for Aboriginal young people who the police have subjected to excessive bail compliance checks; acting for people disproportionately impacted by the use of public health powers; acting for a person discriminated against during air travel; advocating for the NSW Government to implement the recommendations of the Family Is Culture report (in partnership with AbSec, the ALS and UTS Jumbunna); co-coordinating PIAC's Yes campaign for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament. Anything bothering me? While we have regular access to trauma-informed debriefing sessions, this is a good time to discuss anything on my mind. Since I have already vented to her about this or that, we move on to discussing my matters in detail. I ask my burning questions and we confirm the matters are on track.

**2.00pm** Next meeting. It's the Policing and Prisons practice's fortnightly catch-up. We discuss what's going on across this project and any interesting meetings/developments/issues. It's a good opportunity to leverage the team's collective experience and increase knowledge sharing across the practice. It also keeps us all on the same page.

**3.10pm** Refill water and head to the quiet room to make calls. I call a client to give a matter update. We've been engaged to advise on the prospects of success of her claim but, before we can do that, we need to obtain information from a government agency. We've received heavily redacted versions of relevant documents. We think the agency should reconsider the redactions, so we have sought internal review. I explain this and obtain instructions to apply to NCAT should it be necessary (ie, if the internal review decision affirms the original decision).

**3.30pm** Call NSW Police information access team, who handle information requests made under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009. We've been told we need to narrow the scope of our request. I discuss this with the relevant officer because I disagree with their reasoning. We arrive at a mutually agreeable solution.

**4.00pm** A few tasks have arisen throughout the day. I consider whether I can knock over any now? Yes – I prepare an agenda for an upcoming meeting, apply for our client's grant of Legal Aid to be extended, and email NSW Police to confirm the outcome of our earlier conversation.

**4.45pm** My supervisor has finished reviewing draft observations to counsel. I consider her mark-up. Looks good to me. I try to internalise her changes as lessons to remember for next time. I make a few further changes.

**5.10pm** Send the draft observations to the principal solicitor for review.

**5.15pm** Change into exercise clothes and walk toward home, stopping at the gym on the way.

**7.15pm** Swing by Harris Farm to collect fresh vegetables.

**7.25pm** Home. My cat screams at me as I walk-in. I must be the first one home and he hasn't been fed... No, the cat's just hoping for second dinner.

# GETTING ADMITTED

*There are a number of key steps you need to complete before you begin your life as a working lawyer*

Upon completion of your academic law course, in order to be eligible for admission to practise law, it is necessary to complete Practical Legal Training (PLT).

Some universities incorporate the Practical Legal Training (PLT) requirements into the course requirements of your degree but if your university course does not offer this then you must attend a college such as the College of Law to complete your PLT.

Prior to being admitted as a lawyer you will be required to apply to the Legal Profession Admission Board and submit evidence of your qualifications, as well as about your character including written references. You must also disclose any matter which might be relevant to the Board's consideration of whether or not you are a fit and proper person to be admitted to the Australian legal profession.

Upon completion of the relevant Academic Requirements and the PLT, you are eligible to apply for admission as a lawyer.

See the LPAB website for more information.

## ✓ ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

You need to have sufficient academic training in the following areas of knowledge:

- Criminal Law and Procedure
- Torts
- Contracts
- Property
- Equity
- Company Law
- Administrative Law
- Federal and State Constitutional Law
- Evidence
- Ethics and Professional Responsibility

Usually this is met by the completion of a law degree (LLB or JD or the Legal Profession Admission Board (LPAB) Diploma in Law.

## ✓ PRACTICAL LEGAL TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Practical Legal Training (PLT) is a structured training program that will develop your practical skills and proficiency in the day-to-day practice of law. It is usually undertaken at the completion of your law degree and is an essential requirement to apply for admission as a lawyer in Australia.

In New South Wales the PLT requirements include both structured and supervised training and workplace experience.



## Admission Requirements

Admission of lawyers in New South Wales is governed by the *Legal Profession Uniform Admission Rules 2015 (NSW)* and Part 2.2 of the *Legal Profession Uniform Law (NSW)*.

For admission, you need to:

- ✓ Meet the academic requirements
- ✓ Meet the Practical Legal Training (PLT) requirements;
- ✓ Meet the character test
- ✓ Submit your application and pay the admission fees; and
- ✓ Attend the admission ceremony

The training includes:

- Lawyer's Skills
- Problem Solving
- Work Management and Business Skills
- Trust and Office Accounting
- Civil Litigation Practice
- Commercial and Corporate Practice
- Property Law Practice
- Ethics and Professional Responsibility
- Two of the following electives:
- Administrative Law Practice
- Banking and Finance
- Criminal Law Practice
- Consumer Law Practice
- Employment and Industrial Relations Practice
- Family Law Practice
- Planning and Environmental Law Practice
- Wills and Estates Practice

The training takes approximately three months full-time or eight months part-time. Workplace experience requires around 75 working days (15 weeks) of supervised experience in the delivery of legal services. A portion of previous work experience completed can count towards these 75 days.

#### ✓ CHARACTER TEST

You need to demonstrate that you are a fit and proper person to be admitted to the Australian legal profession with:

- consent to a National Police History Check;
- two independent character references;
- law student conduct reports in certain circumstances;
- answers to questions on suitability; and
- disclosures of any relevant matters affecting suitability (the honesty and candour of such disclosures are also assessed).

The LPAB also conducts its own inquiries on candidates for admission.

#### ✓ APPLICATION AND FEES

Applicants can apply for admission as a lawyer online. You will need to sign up to use the LPAB's online Admission Portal.

Visit the LPAB website for more information and the current admission fees.

The LPAB recommends you consult the *Guide for Applicants for Admission as a Lawyer* before starting your online application.

#### ✓ ADMISSION CEREMONY

If the LPAB approves your application, you can schedule a date to attend an admission ceremony at the Supreme Court of New South Wales. You must organise for a person to "move" your admission at the ceremony. This person must be on the Roll of Legal Practitioners in NSW at the time of your admission or must be an Australian legal practitioner holding a current practising certificate.

Once your admission is moved, you are called to give the oath/affirmation of office. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New South Wales makes a speech, and then you proceed to the ground floor foyer to sign the Supreme Court Roll and collect your certificate of admission.

At this point you are a "lawyer". However, you need to apply for a practising certificate from the Law Society of NSW to engage in legal practice and you need supervision for the equivalent of two years full-time practice.

*Bookmark this*

 **Legal Profession Admission Board**  
[www.lpab.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.lpab.justice.nsw.gov.au)

# COMPLETING A JOB APPLICATION

*When applying for a legal position always include a cover letter with your application (unless otherwise specified).*

## YOUR COVER LETTER SHOULD:

- capture the attention of the reader
- summarise your qualifications, qualifying skills and achievements promoting the aspects of your background and experience which are relevant to the position
- be addressed to the correct contact person, ensuring you have spelt their name correctly and used their correct professional title
- be concise, succinct and accurate—not more than one page
- be tailored to the selection criteria of the position and the culture of the firm
- be signed and dated.

For further information and tips on drafting a successful cover letter, refer to career websites and legal recruitment sites. Your university careers department may be able to assist you with drafting cover letters and preparing for interviews.

## YOUR RESUME

Your resume is the first impression of you and any typographical or formatting errors are likely to deprive you of the opportunity to secure an interview. Your resume should set out your education and employment history in reverse chronological order.

The first page should include brief but specific achievements that are relevant to the job you are applying for. Keep it brief with the most important information on the first page as the subsequent pages of your resume are often not read and/or absorbed in detail. Ensure your resume is well structured and easy to read with plenty of space and subheadings. Use bullet points where possible. Be concise and highlight particular skills gained and previous responsibilities which relate to the particular position you are applying for.

Research the firm, review their website,



“ You need to convince the selection panel/person that you have the necessary skills and capabilities for the job and that you are the correct match for the particular team environment. ”

## Words of wisdom

*“For me, the reason [I studied law] is that it allows me to give back to my community and improve the position of Indigenous Australians in the criminal justice system.”*

Proud Wiradjuri man, student in Bachelor of Law/Criminology and Criminal Justice at UNSW **Kyle Fox**



be aware of their culture and values, and the criteria and competencies for the position to make sure that your resume and cover letter are aligned and relevant to the firm’s values and culture.

Make sure that you provide evidence of how you meet the required criteria by using specific examples drawn from your experience. You need to convince the selection panel/person that you have the necessary skills and capabilities for the job and that you are the correct match for the particular team environment. Try to discuss your achievements and accomplishments in your previous position instead of simply listing your skills. You should cite examples of situations you have faced and describe in detail your actual involvement in those situations. One successful way of achieving this is by applying the following STAR criteria (very frequently used in government job interviews)

- **Situation** – provide a very brief out-line of the situation or setting
- **Task** – outline what you did
- **Action** – outline how you did it
- **Result** – describe the outcomes.

Make sure your resume is honest, bearing in mind you will be questioned on its content in an interview. Read and proofread your resume and cover letter for spelling and grammatical errors. Also ask a reliable family member, friend, colleague or fellow student to proofread your cover letter and resume to identify any errors and to provide you with constructive feedback. Put every effort into your applications and try to find a firm whose culture and work specifications suit you.

For more advice on writing your resume, check out the resources available on the online Law Student Portal.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A Government Solicitor

MICHAEL SICILIANO, SOLICITOR AT THE  
NSW DEPARTMENT OF CUSTOMER SERVICE



**5.30 am:** The first of my five alarms starts to blare a familiar tune. Instinctively, I ignore the first three. At some point, I drag myself out of bed and to the gym. As a public servant, I have a Fitness Passport that gives me access to gyms and facilities across NSW.

**9.00 am:** It's a Monday, so I'm working at the office. For the remainder of the week, I work from home. The upside to only coming in one day a week is that people are quite pleased to see you. I spend a moment catching up with my colleagues on how their weekends unfolded.

**9.15 am:** I play catch-up with my inbox and review my spreadsheet for tasks that I need to prioritise today. My main goal today is to review a few hundred documents in response to an Order for Papers that has been passed by the Legislative Council of New South Wales - which is like a super-charged subpoena. It's my role to assess whether privilege applies to these documents, such as public interest immunity, and prepare an accompanying submission. It's not unusual for documents produced under a Standing Order to turn up on the news the following day, so I make sure to review each document carefully.

**10.30 am:** Each week we alternate between a branch meeting or a smaller team meeting. This week we're in a team meeting. At this meeting, we each take a moment to update the team on advice that we've provided in the preceding week. The topics range from submissions to government and parliamentary bodies, drafting legislation and statutory instruments, and providing advice to regulators to ensure they are complying with their numerous obligations.

**11.30 am:** I hold a client meeting to seek some additional information that I will likely need to finalise a piece of advice they have requested. In my role, my clients are also my colleagues and it's important to build effective relationships to understand their needs and provide practical support that helps them achieve their goals. The meeting ends with the client agreeing to send me the documents that I need to consider for the advice.



**12.30 pm:** My department is hosting an in-house CLE seminar on caretaker conventions as part of an initiative to share organisational knowledge across the department. We have the option to attend in-person, but I need to keep reviewing documents, so I'm listening via Microsoft Teams.

**1.00 pm:** We have a lunch to farewell someone taking a year-long secondment. A secondment is a useful way for a government lawyer to try other areas of law, experience a different department or even a different role, such as policy development. We say our farewells noting that we will see each other in the near future, probably over a Microsoft Teams meeting in a few weeks. It's a small community of government lawyers, so you get used to seeing familiar faces in unexpected places.

**2.30 pm:** One of the business units in our department is holding a showcase for new technology they are taking live to improve how customers (the people of NSW) access services online. Legal regularly plays an important role in clearing the legislative and regulatory hurdles to bring these projects to life. It's always a great moment to see the tangible outcome of your efforts that will have a positive impact on society. The new digital solution seems easy to use, and I make a note to try it myself once it goes live.

**3.00 pm:** I have finished reviewing the documents for my Standing Order and my client from earlier today has provided the necessary documents, so I move on to my regular advice work. My clients are rarely lawyers, so when drafting my advice, I place importance on ensuring it is clear and outlines the next steps they will need to take, and when they need to take them.

**4.00 pm:** I attend an afternoon meeting with a policy team within the department to support a legislative project that aims to make obligations easier to understand. I may be required to provide various advice and support to ensure the changes are readable, align with policy intentions and are appropriate to implement.

**5.30 pm:** I finish up for the day and update my timesheet, noting I have worked an extra half an hour over my required time for the day. As a government solicitor, I am entitled to 'flex leave' which allows me to save extra time that I have worked and 'spend' it as leave in a given period. Eventually, my flex leave will build up and I'll be able to take a long weekend.

# HOW TO ENJOY YOUR FREE TIME

*By definition, free time is devoid of expectation. It's the sparkling reward for all your hard work. But having and deciding what to do with free time can be very stressful – especially in law where busyness is a status symbol and idle, unproductive time is often treated with suspicion.*

Some people feel enormous pressure to maximise their precious downtime with meaningful activities and a full calendar, while others struggle to see the value in time away from work despite ample health-related evidence to the contrary. Instead, experts recommend an approach that respects the mind's need for rest.

## HOW LAWYERS PERCEIVE FREE TIME

Stephanie Thompson, a corporate psychologist and executive coach at Insight Matters who works with a large legal client base, says she observes two common approaches to free time in the profession.

“There are some people who have a fear of missing out and a need to make the most of every minute, so they might fill their calendar with exercise or socialising,” she says. “There are also people who think, ‘if I’m not working, I really don’t see the point’. They are so task-focused and work-focused – that’s really all there is.”

She says these perspectives are a natural extension of the types of personalities attracted to a career in law. “Either they’re hyper-intellectual and achievers, or high-energy, world-conquering kinds of people.”

For the FOMO crowd, “the natural manifestation of that outside of work is something that looks the same, it’s just the subject matter is different,” Thompson says. “They’re still running around trying to win and achieve and get things done. It’s just that what’s on the plate is different.”

These attitudes may also be a consequence of the very small amount of free time the average lawyer has in a 50 or 60-hour work







week. A recent Canadian study published in Emerald Insight that examined male lawyers' experiences of work-life balance found opportunities for any sort of equilibrium are still limited. Prominent in the 'career script' of what it means to be a male lawyer is an expectation of very little free time.

What's more, the free time lawyers eke out is often spent attending work-related social events and activities, explains one of the study's co-authors, Julia Richardson, a professor of human resource management and head of the School of Management and Marketing at Curtin University.

"These activities often involve high performance and competition," she says. "For many men there is some suggestion that cycling has replaced golf as one of the most popular work-related activities for networking. If you go out cycling with your clients or other lawyers, generally there's still that pressure to be listening to your clients and your boss.

"What ends up happening is that your leisure time becomes an extension of your work time."

#### THE CASE FOR HEAD SPACE

So, are these full-steam-ahead or disdainful approaches to free time good for you?

Thompson says some people can live and work at a frenetic pace with little need for free time if they are particularly resilient. "Resilience

“ Resilience is both a trait and a learnable skill. Somebody who is very resilient and has also good organisation, good structuring of their work and domestic lives, they can sometimes do quite well without really suffering too much. ”



“ Our minds need frequent rest and taking breaks can improve mood as well as your performance at work. ”

is both a trait and a learnable skill,” she says. “Somebody who is very resilient and has also good organisation, good structuring of their work and domestic lives, they can sometimes do quite well without really suffering too much.”

But resilience only takes you so far. Eventually, Thompson says, difficulties arise “when you try to do other things with your life, such as ordinary things like have a family”.

When you don’t give your brain time to pause and refresh, it doesn’t work as efficiently. You’re also at higher risk of burnout and health problems associated with chronic stress, like heart disease, arthritis and type 2 diabetes.

“If you’re pushing, pushing, pushing in a way that is unsustainable, biologically and psychologically, then at some point your body will force you to take downtime because you’ll fall sick,” Thompson says.

Likewise, viewing free time as wasteful and unproductive may lead to less happiness and poorer mental health, according to a new study by Ohio State University. The researchers found higher levels of stress and depression were associated with the naysayer cohort.

Ample research shows our minds need frequent rest and taking breaks can improve mood as well as your performance at work. “We have to start thinking about proper downtime to

get that psychological space,” Professor Richardson says.

“The more work-life conflict there is, the more negative the impact on your work performance. It absolutely makes sense from a career perspective to have balance.”

### MAKING TIME FOR FREE TIME

As for what to do with your free time, Thompson recommends “low intellectual involvement, peaceful activities” like yoga and swimming. You might cook dinner, read a novel, hang out with your kids or lounge around in front of the television.

Try to resist the pull of a full calendar and tune in to what you want to do. “Start with one evening a week and try that, see how that feels,” Thompson says.

Ultimately, it’s about taking a break from the always-on, achievement-oriented mindset – even if your activity of choice seems a little more demanding. “Perhaps you’re taking classes and learning Spanish,” Thompson says. “You might try quite hard in that class to do well. It’s really about switching off that competitive behaviour and enjoying what you’re doing.”

Professor Richardson suggests starting with small, incremental changes. “Ask yourself, ‘Who am I spending time with? What am I spending my time on? Where might I make some adjustments?’” she says.

Importantly, she says, how much time you devote to free time depends on individual preference. What matters is you’re enjoying it in some capacity.

## Words of wisdom

*“Although we have inherited these colonial structures, we still have control over what life we bring to these structures and what we do with these structures to serve the community. We have many colonial structures, in the literal sense. Take the art gallery for example, one can appreciate the colonial architecture. More than that, one can appreciate the space it provides. But if you were to fill it only with 19th century European art, it would fail in its objective of serving the community. It is a structure that accommodates the ancient and modern artworks that reflect us as a people – and as a result is frequented by, and serves, a broad population. In order to transform our profession, we need to inhabit our structures with people from diverse groups who will offer fresh and challenging perspectives. This requires a profession which is inclusive and open to difference.”*

NSW SUPREME COURT JUSTICE HAMENT DHANJI

# BECOMING A LAWYER

*The first two years of your working life as a lawyer will be under the supervision of an experienced legal practitioner. Here's what that means.*

You must apply for a practising certificate issued by the Council of the Law Society, before being authorised to engage in legal practice. You can do so by downloading a copy of the application form from our website.

## SUPERVISED LEGAL PRACTICE

Your first practising certificate will be issued subject to the following conditions:

- Continuing professional development (condition 1);
- Supervised legal practice (condition 2);
- Practice Management Course (condition 3); and
- Unauthorised to receive trust monies (condition 5b)

Condition 2 is a statutory condition imposed on your practising certificate. It requires you to, in this jurisdiction, engage in legal practice only for the required period – usually 2 years. Unless otherwise prohibited, a solicitor whose practising certificate is not subject to condition 2 is entitled to supervise legal practice by others. Supervision may be provided by more than one supervisor, either concurrently or consecutively provided there is supervision over the total period.

Generally, with respect to private practice, a solicitor with an unsupervised practising certificate will be a principal or senior solicitor employed by the law practice. In an in-house role, you should be supervised by a person who holds an unsupervised practising certificate.

Please refer to our website for detailed information regarding supervised legal practice requirements here.





“ Supervision may be provided by more than one supervisor, either concurrently or consecutively provided there is supervision over the total period of Supervised Legal Practice.”

#### BEST PRACTICE FOR SUPERVISION

The Law Society has developed a helpful Quick Guide to Supervised Legal Practice, that will assist you in developing and maintaining best practice for your supervision.

#### APPLYING TO REMOVE CONDITION 2 FROM YOUR PRACTISING CERTIFICATE

After at least two years of continuous full-time supervision, you can apply to have this condition removed. Detailed information on the application process can be found in the Supervised Legal Practice Guidelines.

#### WHY APPLY ?

The Law Society of NSW recommends that solicitors apply as soon as they qualify, regardless of their current intentions, in order to facilitate future career development. For example, lifting condition 2 from your practising certificate is the first step towards gaining a certificate that allows practise as a sole practitioner or partner in a firm.



The Law Society has developed a helpful **Quick Guide to Supervised Legal Practice**, that will assist you in developing and maintaining the best practice for your supervision.

# SIX MINUTES WITH ENOCH HUI

*A lawyer at Mills Oakley specialising in health insurance, Hui works with health agencies, medical practitioners, and allied health practitioners in both the public and private sectors. His expertise is in medical malpractice, coronial inquests, health disciplinary inquiries and health regulatory inquiries.*

## WHY DID YOU PURSUE A CAREER IN LAW?

There are numerous skills that I consider to be essential – critical thinking, reading, and writing. Law happens to be a profession that encapsulates all three of these skills into one profession. I also think that the law is subtly embedded across many different areas of life. When you consider purchasing a property, or buying goods, or acquiring health care, there's some aspect of law underlying each of them. By having a foundation in law, I knew it would broaden my career options.

“ Choose an area you're interested in and whole-heartedly pursue it ... it's so important to enjoy and have passion about what you do. ”

## HOW DID YOU CHOOSE WHAT AREA TO SPECIALISE IN?

I always aspired to specialise in a sphere where I could assist health practitioners and health organisations. I have family members who are medical practitioners and witnessed first-hand what they do for the community and the stresses they go through. I believe that stresses in the health profession are very underappreciated by the general public. In most jobs you can make errors without affecting someone's well-being, but when it comes to the medical

profession there are lives at stake. Our health is fundamental to our enjoyment of life and health practitioners play a big part in maintaining it. These past few years with COVID-19 have really emphasised the importance of health practitioners in society.

## HOW DID YOU NAVIGATE THE SHIFT FROM UNIVERSITY TO FULL TIME WORK?

I tried to pinpoint the differences between succeeding at university and succeeding at full time work. For example, as a university student you can get away with poor sleep patterns, but with work you certainly can't. Also, at university, most of the results are based on your individual performance in an exam or an assignment. In the workforce, interpersonal interactions are very important, whether it's dealing with clients, colleagues, or other parties. I believe pinpointing these differences and trying to adapt my lifestyle accordingly helped the transition into full time work.

## WHAT HAS BEEN A PARTICULAR CAREER HIGHLIGHT?

Supporting health practitioners through a stressful legal process has been the highlight of my career. At the start of the proceedings, my clients are usually stressed and anxious because their impressions of the legal system are often based on what they've seen on TV. For example, I'm often asked whether their case will be broadcasted in the media, when in reality it's very different as most cases are kept confidential. Being able to support my clients,



and in the process cultivate trust and friendship, has definitely been a highlight.

#### **DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR NEWLY ADMITTED LAWYERS?**

Firstly, choose an area you're interested in and whole-heartedly pursue it. When you're entering a graduate position, it can be easy to pick the first option that's available to get your foot in the door. But I think it's so important to enjoy and have passion about what you do. Secondly, never be afraid to ask questions. As a junior lawyer, it's easy to worry your questions might be burdensome or take up time when in fact they set a foundation for your knowledge and help you grow. Thirdly, consider how you can improve the culture at your workplace. It's easy to focus on impressing others through work performance; however, while this is important, a good work culture is

paramount to enjoying the work that you do. I would encourage newly admitted lawyers not to underestimate the role they can play in improving their workplace culture.

#### **WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION?**

I hope to see more innovative efforts implemented to make the legal profession more appealing to the general public and to law students. I think the reputation of the legal profession is that it consists of long judgments and complex terminology, when there's actually much more to it. My wife and I recently visited the Sir Harry Gibbs Legal Heritage Centre in the Queensland Supreme Court where they used comics and charts to explain legal processes. It was very engaging and my wife, who has no legal background, stayed to read through all the content.

# CONNECT WITH US

*Join the Law Society of NSW - a community of over 33,000 legal professionals dedicated to supporting you in all the stages of your career*

## NSW YOUNG LAWYERS

NSW Young Lawyers is an exciting service offered by the Law Society of NSW to deliver innovative and engaging networking and development opportunities for our members. We are here to support practitioners in the early stages of their career development, giving them the opportunity to extend their network, expand their knowledge, advance their career and contribute to the profession and community.

## EXCLUSIVE MEMBER CONTENT

As a member of the Law Society of NSW, you will gain access to a range of high-quality publications.

Student members will receive the Law Society of NSW: Student Connect, a digital publication released four times a year with information that law students need to know as they embark on their legal careers.

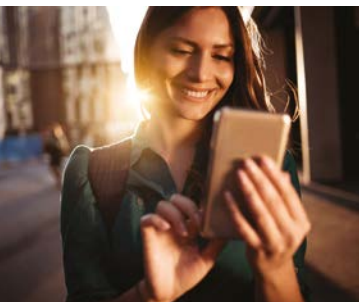
Every month the Law Society of NSW publishes Debrief, a digital publication exclusively available for subscribers of NSW Young Lawyers. Debrief includes columns by the Law Society's ethics specialists, legal updates relevant to those in the first five

years of practice and the podcast Brief Exchange, where the Law Society's journalists sit in conversation with early career lawyers from a wide range of areas and specialities to unpack the things they wished they knew at the start of their legal career and their professional goals.

As a member of the Law Society of NSW, you will also receive a copy of LSJ Media's flagship publication, the quarterly *Law Society Journal*.

This award-winning magazine features essays from leaders in the profession, profiles of leading law makers, investigations and features from the Law Society's experienced journalists, ground-breaking thought leadership, a technology news section, a dedicated arts and culture hub, comprehensive coverage from regional NSW and deep dives into law reform and advocacy.

Members also receive the quarterly Ethics and Standards Quarterly. This new publication aims to provide the profession with more information about the co-regulatory role of the Law Society and the outcomes it achieves through regulation.



To be eligible to access NSW Young Lawyers resources and events, you must:

- be under 36 years of age or be in your first 5 years of practice (post-admission in NSW)
- be a member of The Law Society of New South Wales

And be a person that:

- holds a current practising certificate as a solicitor; or
- is ordinarily resident or practising in NSW and is (or is entitled to be) a NSW legal practitioner under the Legal Profession Uniform Law.

**To find out more visit the NSW Young Lawyers website.**





“The Law Society exists to amplify the voice of the profession; together we can develop policy and advocate change.”

### RECOMMENDED LISTENING

JustChat is LSJ Media's monthly podcast, featuring conversations with those making and shaping the law. Guests have included Teela Reid, Bri Lee, Law Society President's Medal recipient Nicholas Stewart, playwrighter Suzie Miller, international human rights law campaigner Bill Browder, Amani Haydar, entrepreneur Courtney Bowie and District Court Judge Kara Shead SC. Visit [lsj.com.au](http://lsj.com.au) for a full list of episodes or search "Just Chat" in your preferred podcast player.

### OUR EVENTS

The Law Society of NSW hosts many exciting student events and programs each year designed to expand your skills and knowledge. Our NSW Young Lawyers also hold a number of networking and development events.

### MEMBERSHIP OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF NSW

Law students are eligible for complimentary membership to the Law Society of NSW. By joining us, you become part of a community of over 33,000 members whose wellbeing and success are our priorities. The Law Society exists to amplify the voice of the profession; together we can develop policy and advocate change. As a member you can enjoy access to an unrivalled range of legal resources and exclusive offers from our Member Connexions partners, Experience *LSJ Media's* award-winning content online or in print, including a digital archive with issues dating back to 1963 and get the news you need to know every week with our Monday Briefs newsletter, where you can stay up-to-date on legal current affairs, legislative and regulatory changes, training and events.



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## **THRIVING IN LAW: PREPARING FOR YOUR LEGAL CAREER**

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## Tips and tricks to get your legal career off the ground

Get a head start on your legal career journey with expert tips and knowledge from the Law Society of NSW - from studying and admission, finding your first job and looking after your physical and mental wellbeing.



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