

# LEGAL EDUCATION

icy as implemented by the Victorian Council of Legal Education, the Consultative Committee has drawn up a nine page specification of what is to be covered in each of the 11 areas. Furthermore, it recommends that a National Appraisal Committee (academics and practising professionals to be equally represented) be given the task of assessing Australian law courses to determine whether their curricula comply with the academic requirements.

While the Consultative Committee claims that it has 'rejected an approach which sought to dictate curriculum requirements or compulsory subjects to Universities', it is a strange kind of rejection. It would appear that the Committee is attempting to achieve a degree of uniformity on a fairly specific set of requirements which many legal educators would find misguided in substance and repugnant in principle. It is unlikely that the Law Schools will quietly bow to the inevitable in this form. Stay tuned.

On a second front, the NSW Law Society has unveiled its Blueprint for

the Preparation for Practice as a Solicitor in New South Wales. Because of the burgeoning number of law students across Australia and the enormous economic and other pressures on the Practical Legal Training institutions in most States, this is likely to have a significant impact on lawyer preparation across Australia.

The Law Society proposals envisage a three part process for the preparation of solicitors: academic, practical training; practical experience on the job. Thus after completion of the academic study of law, a lawyer aspirant will proceed to the College of Law or its equivalent (any institution accredited by the Law Society) for a period of 12 weeks for practical training. However, there is provision for this practical training to be offered by law schools, thus the concern indicated above that legal education may be affected by changes in preparation for professional qualification.

Following the completion of a spell at an institution offering practical training, the intending solicitor must then undergo 33 weeks of practical

experience, i.e. learning on the job. Of course, to fulfil this requirement one has to have a job. Is this a return to articles? Well, not quite. One is allowed to work in private practice, public sector including community legal services, a corporate legal office, or any other organisation deemed by the Practical Experience Committee to be appropriate. During this period there will be 100 hours of study just to ensure that the practical experience is integrated with the practical training, whatever that may mean. At the completion of all this, armed with an LLB (or equivalent) and 45 weeks of training and experience, our Blueprinted solicitor will be able to practise law, with restrictions for the first 12 months.

While this scheme has been guided through the Law Society by its energetic President, John Marsden, it is likely to get a rough ride in some quarters. Again, stay tuned.

**Richard Morgan**

## LETTER

Dear Editor,

I am writing to inform your readers of the availability of the Urban Ministry Network's 'Evaluation Report of the Neighbourhood Mediation Centres Pilot Project'. The report is available in the library of the Attorney-General's Department, and can be obtained by request from the Dispute Settlement Centre Program Office.

The report was completed in October 1989. Our contract for the evaluation began with the Legal Aid Commission of Victoria, and was assigned to the Attorney-General's Department from 1 July 1989, when the program was transferred to the Department. Our contract with the LACV stated that the Commission 'will release a public report on the pilot project'.

In September 1990, one year after the report was completed, I wrote to the Attorney-General asking whether a public

report had been released. My letter was not acknowledged, and telephone enquiries were not followed up. In September 1991, I wrote again, and again our letter was not acknowledged.

In December 1991, the Springvale Legal Service, acting on our behalf, wrote to Mr Kennan seeking a response to our earlier letters about the public release of the evaluation. This letter was not acknowledged either.

Finally, the SLS wrote to Mr Kennan in February 1992, stating that failure to reply in 10 days would be viewed as consent for our organisation to publish the report. In the same month, we received the advice that the evaluation report was a public document available through the Departmental library.

I hope your readers who are interested in mediation will read the report, as there is so little research in Australia on mediation services. And what there is, is largely

descriptive. This report does make a contribution to the debates about mediation services, especially in regard to the issue of the effect of unequal power relations between disputing parties, and whether mediation actually resolves disputes in the longer term.

The evaluation reports on detailed interviews with 122 clients who had received either dispute counselling, mediation or an assisted settlement. Information from referrers, committee of management members, and mediators is also included.

At a time of scarce research funding, our organisation believes that publicly funded projects should be accessible to those active in the field. We hope that those interested in alternative dispute resolution will find our report of assistance to their thinking about this important area.

**John Bottomley**  
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