

History of practical legal training in Tasmania.

The first course of practical legal instruction was held at the University of Tasmania in February 1970, subsidised by the Council of Advanced Education and conducted by the Law Society. Its objective was to “introduce a practical training course to recently qualified lawyers without practical experience.” (Law Society of Tasmania Report by Mr H E Cosgrove, Chairman - The Legal Practice Course 1970).

The first of its kind to be arranged in Australia, the course was held with 82 students over a period of 120 hours. As the course was not a prerequisite to admission, content was general and designed to cover as much ground as possible, giving instruction in such areas as: Conveyancing, Litigation, Wills and Probate, Administration and Accounts, Financial Law, Matrimonial law.

After the trial run, the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education conducted the course. The TCAE became the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology in 1985, which in turn merged with the University of Tasmania in 1991. The University then funded the course.

What had begun as separate components for a career in the law, had become a University managed process, culminating in the scenario that existed until 1997- five years full time law school followed by 6 months practical legal training all funded by the University.

Prior to the 2000 intake of the course, all graduates were required to complete a period of “apprenticeship” within a legal firm before admission to the Bar of the Court. This period of ‘apprenticeship’ was initially of 18 months duration and in latter times of 6 months duration.

Between 1989 and 1997 fees for the course were HECS based. In 1989 the fee was \$1,800.00, in 1996 \$2,442.00. In 1997 the changed HECS schedule placed the course in Band 3 and charged \$5,600.00 for the six-month course.

In 1996 DEET requested universities to review funding arrangements in place for non-research postgraduate courses. As a consequence, postgraduate coursework programs were required to find alternative sources of funding. Around Australia, other institutions responsible for practical legal training found it necessary to review their situation in the light of discontinued DEET funding. Some were forced out of the parental relationship with their founding university/college whilst others continued to fight annually for funding.

In 1998, as a result of the University of Tasmania no longer wishing to provide the then Legal Practice Course because of withdrawal of Commonwealth funding for postgraduate courses, the Centre for Legal Studies Ltd was established. This is a company limited by guarantee, the board members of which are one nominee from the Board of Legal Education, and two nominees of each of the Law Society of Tasmania and the University of Tasmania. It is effectively a joint venture of the Law Society and the University. Given the absence of available funding from any organisation or

institution, the Course was only able to operate in 1998 by way of an up-front fee paid by the trainees who attended it.

In 1999 the University was able to include the course within its regime again, and this position continues today. The course now culminates in a Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice provided by the University of Tasmania. The management and instructional functions are, however, contracted to the Centre for Legal Studies Ltd.

In 2010 the course (now called the “Professional Legal Training Program”) will be HECS funded.

Since 1999 there have been many structural changes to the PLTP and there has been a great deal of development and refinement of its unit/module content and teaching methods, the most recent of which occurred in 2008 and 2009.

Centre for Legal Studies Ltd is a member of the Australasian Professional Legal Education Council and the PLTP is conducted in accordance with the competency standards required by that body of its members.