

# Progressive Development of Legal Skills



**Jeffrey Barnes**  
Senior Lecturer  
Director, Learning and Teaching School of Law  
La Trobe University  
email: j.barnes@latrobe.edu.au

## *Promoting Staff Cooperation in the Assessment Process*

### Problem

Different teaching staff develop the same legal skill in the one undergraduate program (the law program), such as legal research and legal writing, but there are few or no processes to promote a cooperative approach. Furthermore, the physical spaces and regular interactions in the Law School do not promote cooperation in an optimal fashion.

### Values

A cooperative approach to assessment is facilitated by a shared purpose to assessment. It involves valuing: a sharing of ideas about assessment; an open and safe environment in which to discuss assessment; and diverse opinions about assessment practice. And it will involve acceptance of the need for negotiation of decision-making as to assessment and the need for an ongoing dialogue with School leaders about suitable approaches to assessment.

### Process

- Review of literature on promoting “cooperation” in organisations.
- A chart mapping the skills which are (and are not) developed in the undergraduate law degree was developed, and feedback was sought from staff.
- Staff were invited to participate in discussion sessions, each concerning the progressive development of a particular legal skill. Ten staff and the project leader participated.
- Participating staff were trained (where required) in basic skills in setting assessment tasks.
- The participating staff were invited to reflect on the sessions and on the action they have taken, or are considering taking, in relation to the progressive development of legal skills and their assessment

### Outcomes



- A chart mapping legal skills in the undergraduate program was prepared and distributed.
- A group of staff became committed to greater cooperation in assessment.
- A basis for cooperation was established: unit learning guides became available to all; a bank of assessment precedents was founded; and a decision made to produce a legal writing guide for students.
- Revision of unit learning guides.
- Staff protocols amended: the idea of staff cooperation was embedded in the unit learning guide approval process within the School.