APPROVAL AND REGISTRATION OF PRE-GDLP PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Guidelines
These guidelines are for the assistance of prospective students of the Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice (GDLP) who wish to obtain approval for and credit of a period of Professional Experience (PE) on which they are about to embark towards the overall PE required for the UOW GDLP. They describe the kinds of legal environment and proposed professional experience that are likely to be approved and information for potential supervisors as to their responsibilities.

The full PE component of the GDLP is 80 working days, undertaken under supervision in a law practice-based environment. pre-GDLP PE of up to 40 days may be acquired in the following ways:

- As a UOW student:
  - the (normally 20 days) placement period undertaken in LLB 311, LLB 190 or LLB 197 Lawyers and Australian Society; and
  - a further 20 days supervised PE that meets these Guidelines;
- As a non-UOW student, up to 40 days supervised PE that meets the pre-GDLP Guidelines.

For your proposed Pre-GDLP PE to be approved, you need to submit:
- Form 1 (placement information);
- Form 2 (supervisor’s acknowledgement); and
- a letter on firm/department letterhead describing the kinds of PE you will be undertaking specifically acknowledging that it will include some of the aspects of legal work experience included in these Guidelines. The letter should be addressed to the Director, Professional Legal Training Program and signed by you and the person who has agreed to be your supervisor.

When you complete your pre-GDLP PE, you need to submit:
- Form 2 (supervisor’s certificate); and
- your reflective journal for the period of your pre-GDLP PE.

‘Practice-based’ legal environment
The environment in which all sectors of the professional experience component are undertaken to complete your placement must be practice-based, enabling you to apply your legal knowledge and gain hands-on experience of legal work. This may include:
- experience of the types of routines and procedures commonly found in offices in which legal services (broadly defined) are provided;
- experience of the dynamics which are commonly found in the provision of legal services;

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1 Law-related environments such as law teaching, legal publishing, policy development or research and IT support do not qualify for GDLP Professional Experience as they are not practice-based.

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contact with and responsibility to the clients of the office or organisation in which professional experience is undertaken; and
experience in the process of becoming a professional.

Within that context, professional experience can be undertaken in a wide range of locations. For example:
- in a firm of solicitors (large or small, city or suburban or rural; specialist practices);
- in the legal department of a corporation;
- in the legal department of a government department or statutory authority;
- in a community legal centre, or clinic
- with an employer or employee association;
- with a judicial member of a Court or Tribunal;
- with a barrister;
- with police prosecutors;
- in the Registry of a Court or Tribunal.

The placement might include tasks such as:
- handling and reading files, including documents associated with them;
- sitting in on interviews with clients;
- sitting in on conferences with Counsel;
- attending Court proceedings;
- undertaking research;
- attending government offices for filing documents etc;
- preparing forms or drafting documents and letters; and
- discussions as to issues arising in cases and files.

**Supervision of Professional Experience**

Your supervisor must be a legal practitioner of not less than 3 years’ (full time or equivalent) experience, holding or entitled to hold a current practising certificate. In firms or offices where the principal supervisor of staff is a HR or Practice Manager, there must be a solicitor meeting these qualifications with immediate supervision of your work, who will sign the Supervisor’s Acknowledgement (Form 2) and the Supervisor’s Certificate (Form 3) referred to above. The HR or Practice manager must provide confirmation on letterhead that the student is undertaking the professional experience at that location.

The supervisor is asked to support the student's learning by having a general understanding of the objectives and structure of the GDLP. In brief these are:
- to build upon the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired in both the academic and training stages of preparation for admission to practice;
- the GDLP PE program is not merely "work experience". Research in other professions has shown that the workplace is one of the most important locations for learning and relating theory to practice; and
- the inclusion of PE in the GDLP enables students to more readily relate the 'theory' of legal practice with its practical application.

**Reflective Journal**

During your pre-GDLP professional experience you are required to maintain a journal recording your reflections and observations on legal practice. Where up to 20 days is claimed, the pre-GDLP journal must be a minimum of 2 entries (600 words or 2 pages) on separate topics and for between 20 and 40 days a minimum of 4 entries (1200 words) must be included in the journal. Hand in the pre-GDLP journal with the Supervisor's Certificate (Form 3) to the Director when you commence the GDLP
Keeping a reflective journal

The concept of the "reflective practitioner" has been described as "...one of the most powerful influences shaping the pre-service education of professionals in (diverse) disciplines (including) law." The use of a reflective journal is a technique to think about aspects of practice and your own development in the course, as part of developing your own life-long learning processes. In this way, you evaluate your own development and needs for further learning. This ability is essential to the development of critical thinking and life-long learning skills.

You can use the journal to record your observations about the Course and about your experience in legal practice in a critical way, and to review your own performance both in the Course and in professional practice.

Some of the matters you might want to record include:

- observations of skilled lawyers in action;
- particular techniques of lawyer tasks - negotiating, client relationship, self-management, risk management;
- your own interaction with others;
- ethical problems which may arise in the workplace and how they are handled;
- your own efforts and appraisals of what you have learned from the experience;
- your own learning priorities;
- using colleagues as a sounding board for your work activities;
- what you have learned from the contents of the Law Society Journal or similar practice journal;
- your achievements in in-house training programs;
- feedback from supervisors and other colleagues on your work; and
- your own vision of what you want to achieve as a lawyer.

In keeping your reflective journal you will have recorded your observations of your early life as a legal practitioner. However, the aim of keeping a journal is not just to keep a record of events but to use the recorded information, and the ideas that flow from it, to increase your awareness of your professional self and to plan for your future professional life. To be a useful adjunct to your professional development, the process of reflection is just as much about the future as it is about the past.

There is no right or wrong approach to this assignment. However, to successfully complete the assignment, your work should evidence a high level of self awareness, reflection and planning.

If you or your potential supervisor have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time.

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