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Our ref: [JL:WD:MC]

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**Attention:** Mr John Farrell and Dr Brendon Murphy

**By email:** [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Dear Dr Popple

### Senate Inquiry into Australian University Graduates

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Law Council of Australia's response to the *Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry into Australian University Graduates*, insofar as that Inquiry relates to legal education, law schools, and the legal profession.

As the peak professional body for solicitors in Queensland, the Queensland Law Society (QLS) represents practitioners across firms of all sizes, practice types and geographic settings. While QLS is not a provider of university education, it has a direct and sustained interest in the operation of the legal education and professional preparation continuum, particularly as it affects graduate transition, supervised practice, early-career development and professional sustainability.

Legal education operates within a complex, highly regulated ecosystem that encompasses undergraduate university study, pre-admission training, and supervised professional practice. Concerns about graduate employment outcomes, graduate readiness and the student experience post-graduation, must therefore be understood across this broader continuum, rather than being attributed to universities alone or assessed solely through the lens of immediate employment outcomes.

In preparing any submission to this *Inquiry*, the Law Council is likely to have regard to relevant previous submissions and public statements, including:

- (a) the Law Council's submission on *Proposed Revisions to the Accreditation Standards for Australian Law Courses* (June 2025); and
- (b) the Law Council's submission to the NSW Legal Profession Admission Board Discussion Paper on *Practical Legal Education* (October 2025).

QLS does not seek to replicate or restate the matters addressed in those submissions. Instead, this response makes a series of complementary observations directed specifically to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, drawing attention to structural features of legal education and the legal profession that are not always captured in discussion framed primarily around graduate employability, skills alignment, or institutional performance.

This response is also made in the context of the *Australian Universities Accord – Final Report* (2024), which articulates a system-wide vision for tertiary education growth, equity and stewardship. While that report provides an important national policy framework, the observations below are directed specifically to legal education and the legal profession, where labour market dynamics, accreditation structures and professional formation pathways differ in important respects from the tertiary system as a whole.

### **(a) The state of the entry-level job market for law graduates**

Public commentary suggests ongoing concern about the relationship between the number of law graduates and the availability of entry-level legal roles in any given year. While the number of practising certificate holders continues to grow nationally, and many law graduates intentionally pursue careers outside legal practice, competition for graduate positions (particularly in private practice and metropolitan markets) remains pronounced.

Australia now has more than 40 accredited law programs, reflecting significant expansion since the 1990s alongside sustained growth in enrolments. This expansion brings the capacity of the profession, employers and training pathways to support large numbers of graduates through supervised legal practice and early-career development into question.

A further, related issue is the wide variation in entry standards across Australian law schools. Current ATAR thresholds for law range from 75 to 99.5. While diversity of pathways into higher education is important, the magnitude of this spread raises legitimate concerns about preparedness, cohort management and the downstream effects on teaching quality and student experience in intellectually demanding programs such as law.

The legal profession requires both highly developed intellectual capability and strong interpersonal and professional judgement skills, including ethical decision-making, communication, resilience and adaptability. These capacities develop unevenly across cohorts of very large size and highly mixed academic preparedness. Supporting the development of these attributes across large and academically diverse cohorts reinforces the importance of considering how legal education, practical legal training and early-career support interact across the full professional continuum.

### **(b) The quality of university legal education**

Australian law degrees are subject to multiple layers of regulation and accreditation, including TEQSA oversight, discipline-specific accreditation standards and state admission requirements. On paper, this framework should ensure a consistently high-quality educational offering.

However, the quality of the enacted curriculum (what is actually taught) and the experienced curriculum (what students encounter day-to-day) is shaped by structural pressures that are not always visible in formal compliance and accreditation processes.

As observed in the *Australian Universities Accord – Final Report (2024)*, these pressures are common across the tertiary sector and include workforce composition, workload allocation, institutional policy and imperatives, and teaching scale, all of which directly affect educational practice and student experience.

Most law academics do not hold formal education qualifications, yet are required to teach in highly complex environments characterised by

- large cohorts;
- wide variation in student capability;
- blended, online or hybrid delivery models requiring advanced digital pedagogical skill; and
- increasing administrative demands.

At the same time, academic workload models in Australian universities typically allocate no more than 40% of academic time to teaching, with the remainder devoted to research, grant acquisition and service obligations. Research performance remains the dominant driver of promotion, workload allocation and institutional prestige.

While the recent rise of teaching-focused academic roles is a positive development, a substantial proportion of teaching in law remains undertaken by sessional or casual academics, or adjuncts many of whom have no job security and receive limited academic development. This has well-documented consequences for quality of teaching, continuity and student experience across large programs.

Accordingly, there can be a material gap between the apparent robustness of regulatory frameworks and the realities of providing a quality university education at scale.

### **(c) Whether law graduates are being taught the “skills employers are looking for”**

Universities are institutions of higher education. A narrow conception of university education as a vehicle for acquiring immediately deployable job skills risks misunderstanding the role universities play within Australia’s broader education and workforce ecosystem. The *Australian Universities Accord – Final Report (2024)* expressly cautions against conflating higher education with short-term labour market training, emphasising that universities are central to developing advanced knowledge, critical capability and long-term national capacity, not merely meeting immediate workforce demand.

In law specifically, University education is directed toward the development of:

- deep disciplinary knowledge;
- critical reasoning and analytical capacity;
- research literacy and evaluative judgement; and
- intellectual independence and ethical decision-making.

This is aligned to the emphasis in the *Accord* which notes that the value of higher education lies in preparing graduates for complex, evolving careers over a lifetime, rather than for narrowly defined entry-level roles at a single point in time.

An undergraduate university education in law is not intended to prepare graduates for unsupervised professional practice. That is too large of an undertaking in a mere three-year degree and there are subsequent stages of the legal professional formation continuum to support the development of the “skills employers are looking for” and the capabilities employers themselves need to play a critical and ongoing role in developing.

In addition to developing the “skills” sought, there will be an ongoing need for continuing learning and education. The law regularly changes, often at a rapid pace and the concept of ‘life-long learning’ is well -understood and accepted in the legal profession. The undergraduate stage of the continuum is only one part of this life-long endeavour.

It is also widely understood that many undergraduate law students do not wish to or intend to enter into the legal profession in the traditional sense. For these students, the law degree offers the value of the skills outlined above, particularly with respect to critical reasoning and analytical capability. In seeking to address the issues raised in this inquiry, and with any increased focus on ‘employability’, it will be important not to dilute these other crucial elements of the undergraduate law degree which are transferrable and valuable skills for all graduates.

### **(d) Economic, social and psychological effects on graduates**

It is undoubtedly difficult for graduates who struggle to secure employment in their chosen field, and the psychological impacts of under-employment or delayed career progression should not be minimised.

However, it should be noted that there is no direct causal entitlement between holding a university degree and obtaining a specific job, whether in law or any other discipline. A university education confers capability, opportunity and preparation - not guaranteed employment.

### **Conclusion**

Issues relating to graduate outcomes in law are real and should not be dismissed. However, they cannot be reduced to questions of university teaching quality or curriculum design alone, nor resolved through policy responses that focus narrowly on graduate employability metrics.

From the perspective of the solicitors’ profession, graduate experience and readiness are shaped by the interaction between multiple stages of the legal education and professional

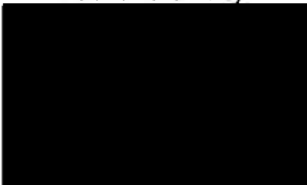
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preparation continuum, including university education, pre-admission training, supervised practice, workplace capacity and the availability of appropriate early-career support.

QLS suggests that policy settings which locate responsibility for graduate outcomes primarily within universities risk overlooking the multiple stages of the legal education continuum, each of which serves a different and important pedagogical purpose in the learning, capability development and professional formation of competent legal practitioners.

If you have any queries regarding the contents of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact our Legal Policy team via [policy@qls.com.au](mailto:policy@qls.com.au) or by phone on [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully



Peter Jolly  
**President**