

HAVE WE ‘PUSHED THE BOAT OUT TOO FAR’ IN PROVIDING ONLINE PRACTICAL LEGAL TRAINING? A GUIDE TO BEST PRACTICES FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the efficacy and appropriateness of online programs which are currently used as a principal means of completing pre-admission training requirements for admission to practice as a lawyer in many Australian States and Territories. The author queries whether institutions and accrediting bodies gone too far in accepting online practical legal training courses as an alternative for the more traditional face-to-face course structure? After considering the relationship between training and the standards of the profession the author focuses on the literature pertaining to online delivery generally and in the area of legal education. The paper queries whether connections can be drawn between technological advances and changes in the learning and training of lawyers and whether such changes are for the benefit of the profession generally. By reference to the observations of students and teaching staff in both the oncampus and online courses of the Postgraduate Diploma of Legal Practice, Skills and Ethics (PDLP) at Monash University, the author considers whether the important communication skills (critical for legal work) can be obtained through flexible delivery modes and the perceived limitations of such programs. Finally, recognising that online courses are now part of the legal education landscape the author proposes best practices and design methodology for producing future online programs in this area.

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