

# NEWCASTLE LAW SCHOOL

Leaders in clinical legal education

# GRADUATE SKILLS PORTFOLIO



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NEWCASTLE**  
AUSTRALIA

Thank you for considering a Newcastle Law School student or graduate for employment. Newcastle Law School is Australia's leading clinical law school and our students and graduates have had unparalleled real-world experience from the very first year of their law degree. We emphasise resilience, self-reflection, and awareness of a bigger global picture.

Completion of a Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice alongside a law degree ensures that our graduates are practice-ready. No other Australian university provides such in-depth practical training and hands-on experience. The Newcastle Legal Centre ensures that all of Graduate Diploma students work on real cases and have honed their skills working with clients and with our team of lawyers.

The Newcastle Law School has implemented a unique and dynamic program that integrates skills teaching into the curriculum. Each core course incorporates specific skill areas into the course learning outcomes and assessment. The result is evidenced in these pages: the many positive qualities outlined in this brochure are not mere aspirations but rather reflect skills and attributes that have been specially taught and assessed by the Law School and makes our graduates uniquely qualified.

# OUR GRADUATES ARE SKILLED AT

## SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

Newcastle Law School graduates are familiar with commercial, business, and social realities and the impact of transactional arrangements on clients.

Graduates are able to demonstrate advanced knowledge of the justice system, supportive arrangements, litigation alternatives and negotiation approaches that can be tailored to the needs of the client.

They are able to ascertain client and other party interests in a range of social, government and commercial contexts.

## PLACING LAW IN CONTEXT

Our graduates have contemporary knowledge of the Australian legal system and are able to compare Australian laws with those in other jurisdictions.

They have a deep understanding of the broader context in which legal issues arise, as well as the value of justice and ethical practice in terms of lawyers' roles.

## ADVANCED LEGAL KNOWLEDGE

Newcastle Law School graduates are able to demonstrate the fundamental legal knowledge required to work as a lawyer, including understanding underlying principles and concepts.

Graduates are knowledgeable about expert information systems and how they can support lawyers and clients.

# A SKILLS EMPHASIS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM



## PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

Through **extensive practical experience** gained at the Newcastle Law School, our graduates are well-equipped with professional communication skills. These include being able to appropriately communicate with **legal and non-legal audiences**, as well as present material reflecting **client interests**, from various perspectives in an engaging manner. Applying highly developed advocacy skills, graduates are able to **interview** clients, provide clear and practical advice, and **negotiate** effectively. Graduates engage in **active listening**, take into account a **range of perspectives and skills**, and when necessary **express disagreement thoughtfully** and respectfully. When working with a network of people remotely and face-to-face, graduates **collaborate cooperatively** and treat others with **courtesy, respect and empathy**.



## WORKPLACE READY

Newcastle Law School graduates learn to work with a high level of **autonomy, accountability and professionalism**. They are able to be **flexible, adaptable and resilient** in response to unforeseen or changing circumstances, and make use of **feedback** as appropriate to support their professional development. Building on foundational skills developed at the Newcastle Law School, graduates are able to **work in a range of contexts** including a single-person practice, in an online environment, a large firm, as in-house counsel, in government positions and non-legal employment. In terms of day-to-day practicalities, graduates possess the capacity to **plan** a project, understand a **budget, manage tasks** and people, collaborate, and use **technology** to more efficiently serve clients.



## CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

Our graduates possess a keen **eye for detail**, and are highly accustomed to identifying, articulating and **resolving complex legal issues**. They apply legal reasoning and research, while demonstrating **sophisticated cognitive and creative skills**, to understand and consider appropriate responses in formulating arguments. Graduates are not afraid to **ask questions** in a range of settings to gather relevant information to support their understanding, as well as engage in **critical analysis** to make reasoned and **appropriate choices amongst alternatives**. By doing so, they are able to better understand client interests and assess a **range of approaches** to address any issues. Through the use of credible references to cases, legislation and other sources, graduates are able to develop arguments of their own in relation to the **current state of the law**. Graduates are also able to explain why they agree or disagree with suggested legal arguments in a manner that is **evidence-based, thoughtful and persuasive**.



## WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS

From their first year at the Newcastle Law School, our graduates develop the written communication skills required to work in a professional capacity. This starts with a demonstrated proficiency in **grammar** and **spelling** and the ability to write **original sentences** and paragraphs. Our graduates have prepared written work that has a **coherent, rational structure**, including well-structured paragraphs and smooth transitions from one argument to the next, with **clear explanations** of the relationships between the different arguments presented. Consistent with the high expectations of **academic integrity**, students reference their work in a manner that is consistent with the requirements of **Australian legal referencing**. Their writing is **clear, concise** and **engaging**, and strives to be appropriate for the intended audience regardless of their level of legal expertise.



## STATUTORY INTERPRETATION

Newcastle Law School graduates are able to understand and interpret statutory text at multiple levels, including the ability to apply accepted rules of statutory interpretation, apply case law interpreting any given statutory context, and to be aware of the interplay between competing statutory and common law provisions. They can provide advice to clients on their statutory rights and obligations, but also understand and critique the policy context of a statute, and propose amendments in a law reform context.



## INTELLECTUAL AND PRACTICAL RESEARCH

As part of their education at the Newcastle Law School, our graduates receive in-depth training in legal research techniques and are equipped with advanced skills suitable for high-level research work. Graduates are able to justify and **interpret** theoretical prepositions, legal methodologies, conclusions and professional decisions, in addition to identifying, evaluating and synthesising relevant factual, **legal and policy issues**. They are taught to undertake effective searches of **online databases** and use other research techniques to identify all of the key **primary and secondary sources** relevant to a particular area of law, as well as assess **reliability** and **validity**. Graduates are then able to develop and implement a **targeted strategy** for **reading** and **taking notes** in relation to those sources, focusing on the most important sources and the most relevant sections of those sources.



## ENGAGEMENT WITH PUBLIC POLICY

Newcastle Law School graduates go beyond the surface of the law, and are capable of identifying the goals of a **particular policy, general law** or **statutory rule**. By drawing on theoretical and policy **debates** surrounding the **desirability of those goals**, they assess the extent to which the current policy or rule achieves that outcome. Where appropriate, graduates implement the higher-order thinking needed to **suggest amendments** or alternatives to the existing rules that would more effectively achieve the desired goals. In doing so, they use sufficient, credible, and **relevant evidence** to develop logically consistent arguments based on valid and well-justified inferences, clearly presenting and justifying their own views while responding critically and thoughtfully to the ideas of others.

# WE INSTILL IN OUR GRADUATES...

## THE CAPACITY TO ACT WITH INTEGRITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

An advanced and integrated understanding of approaches to ethical decision making.

An ability to recognise and reflect upon, and a developing ability to respond to, ethical issues likely to arise in professional contexts.

An understanding of self-management approaches that can promote resilience, flexibility and wellness.

An ability to recognise and reflect upon the professional responsibilities of lawyers in promoting justice and in service to the community.

An ability to exercise professional judgment.

An awareness of the importance of pro bono work.

## AN ETHOS OF SERVICE TO CLIENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

A real-world understanding of of client empowerment.

Capacity to assess possible courses of action and the range of likely outcomes in terms of risks and rewards.

Competency in assisting to resolve disputes, and advising clients appropriately.

Familiarity with a range of processes including court adjudication, negotiation, mediation and arbitration.

## A PASSION FOR ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE

An ability to respond to demands for law reform and use tools to promote social justice.

A duty to act as an advocate for the just rule of law and awareness of the barriers that people can face in accessing the legal system.

A sensitivity of culturally diverse practices and the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and others in the Australian legal system.

## TECHNOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND A FUTURE-ORIENTED OUTLOOK

An understanding of the changing dynamics of the legal profession, the law, and the justice system.

Competencies needed to be 'future-ready' including global awareness and understanding of current and emerging technology.

# SKILL ALLOCATION TO COURSES

To ensure that skills are covered systematically across the curriculum, the following skills are allocated to individual core courses and are embedded into that course's design, content, and assessment.

		Practical Skills	Legal Skills	Personal Development Skills	People Skills	Research and Writing Skills			Practical Skills	Legal Skills	Personal Development Skills	People Skills	Research and Writing Skills	
<b>1ST YEAR</b>	<b>SEMESTER 1</b>							<b>SEMESTER 2</b>						
	<b>Legal System and Method 1</b>					✓	<b>Legal System and Method 2</b>						✓	
	Legal research and database use					✓	Grammar and spelling						✓	
	Client interview and interest analysis			✓			Oral communication for a legal audience				✓			
	Self-reflection and resilience			✓			Statutory interpretation		✓					
	Project management in legal practice	✓					<b>Torts 2</b>							
	<b>Torts 1</b>						Writing for a legal audience						✓	
	Note taking					✓	Seek and implement feedback			✓				
	Structural and writing skills					✓	Legal research and database use						✓	
	Problem solving	✓												
<b>2ND YEAR</b>	<b>Constitutional Law</b>					✓	<b>Criminal Law</b>						✓	
	Writing for a legal audience					✓	Oral communication for a legal audience						✓	
	Advocacy		✓				Practice context	✓						
Assess and use sources					✓	Statutory interpretation		✓						
<b>3RD YEAR</b>	<b>Contracts 1</b>					✓	<b>Contracts 2</b>							
	Note taking					✓	Risk management	✓						
	Problem solving		✓				Questioning skills						✓	
Referencing					✓	Critical thinking	✓							
<b>4TH YEAR</b>	<b>Civil Dispute Resolution</b>					✓	<b>Administrative Law</b>							
	Writing to a lay audience					✓	Content management	✓						
	Policy analysis and law reform		✓				Advanced statutory interpretation		✓					
	Negotiation				✓		Social Justice			✓				
	<b>Professional Conduct</b>						<b>Property</b>							
	Ethical decision making			✓			Indigenous awareness	✓						
Change in the legal sector		✓				Assess and use sources						✓		
Technological skill development	✓					Theory and methodology		✓						
							Advanced problem solving	✓						
<b>5TH YEAR</b>	<b>Evidence</b>					✓	<b>Company Law</b>							
	Listening skills				✓		Statutory Critique			✓				
	Oral communication to a legal audience				✓		Theory and methodology			✓				
	Collaboration				✓		Advanced critical thinking and logic	✓						
	Advocacy Skills		✓				<b>International Law</b>							
	<b>Equity</b>						International awareness	✓						
	Respectful discussion				✓		Critical and thinking logic	✓						
	Structural writing skills				✓		Policy analysis and law reform		✓					
	Advanced problem solving	✓					Accountability / adaptability / autonomy			✓				

