

Law beyond the glass skyscrapers: Encouraging law students to embrace regional life and practice

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Abstract

The shortage of law graduates outside the city raises adverse implications for access to justice for Australian regional, rural and remote (RRR), and Aboriginal communities. This article discusses an extracurricular educational initiative implemented at the University of Adelaide Law School in 2021 and 2022 geared towards contributing to a solution for this problem. The initiative consisted of a series of immersion and exposure trips throughout regional South Australia for law students with interest in pursuing regional employment. This article discusses the initiative, the pedagogical rationale as well as the impact of the program, providing a blueprint for other universities considering similar initiatives.

Keywords

Legal education, access to justice, regional, rural and remote (RRR), Aboriginal communities, experiential learning, place-based learning

The shortage of lawyers in regional, rural and remote (RRR) communities across Australia is well documented.¹ South Australia (SA) is no exception, with there being a dearth of lawyers in the country compared to a bountiful supply in metropolitan centres.² Despite some 30 per cent of Australia's population (7.7 million people) residing outside of a

major city, a mere 10.5 per cent of the legal profession work in the regions.³ Retention is also a key problem, with legal firms and organisations often struggling to retain the staff they have managed to attract,⁴ and many senior lawyers in RRR areas indicating an intention to imminently retire.⁵ The shortage of lawyers in the country is, quite simply, 'dire'.⁶ Morry Bailes,

¹Productivity Commission, *Access to Justice Arrangements: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report*, vol 1 (5 September 2014); Nadia Hess et al, 'Expanding Law Student Horizons: Promoting Regional and Rural Legal Practice in South Australia' (2023) 10 *Canadian Legal Education Annual Review* 139.

²Law Council of Australia, *The Justice Project: Final Report Part I: Rural, Regional and Remote (RRR) Australians* (August 2018). This trend appears consistent across other states and territories. See, eg, Urbis, *2022 Annual Profile of Solicitors NSW* (26 May 2023) 1 (New South Wales); Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, *Growth Through Knowledge: Annual Report 2022* (December 2022) 24 (Victoria); Molly Appleton, 'Lawyers, Where Are You? Report Shows that Tassie Has It Tougher than the Rest', *The Advocate* (Burnie, 23 May 2023) (Tasmania).

³Law Council of Australia (n 2) 12.

⁴Ibid 37–8; Amanda Kennedy et al, 'Educating Law Students for Rural and Regional Practice: Embedding Place Based Perspectives in Law Curricula' (2014) 24(1) *Legal Education Review* Article 2, 6–7; Jess Feyder, 'Regional Retention, Gender Equality Remain Key Issues in NSW', *Lawyers Weekly* (online, 25 July 2022) <https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/biglaw/35035-regional-retention-gender-equality-remain-key-issues-in-nsw>.

⁵Damien Carrick, 'Lawyer Drought', *The Law Report* (ABC Radio National, 14 July 2009) <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lawreport/lawyer-drought/3071010>. See also Angela Melville, Valerie Caines and Marcus Walker, 'The Grey Zone: The Implications of the Ageing Legal Profession in Australia' (2021) 24(2) *Legal Ethics* 141.

⁶Douglas Smith, 'Young Lawyers Look at a Country Practice', *The Advertiser* (Adelaide, 21 September 2022) 21. See also Suzie Forell, Michael Cain and Abigail Gray, *Recruitment and Retention of Lawyers in Regional, Rural and Remote New South Wales* (Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, September 2010); Natalie O'Brien, 'Plea Goes Out For Lawyers, To Be Sure', *Sydney Morning Herald* (online, 3 July 2011) <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/plea-goes-out-for-lawyers-to-be-sure-20110702-1gyv3.html>; Louise Fitzroy, 'Regional Lawyer Shortage Could Jeopardise Access to Justice Says Law Council', *ABC Rural* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 5 November 2015) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2015-11-05/rural-and-regional-lawyer-shortage-threatens-access-to-justice/6915136>.

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prominent lawyer and former President of the Law Society of South Australia, has aptly described this significant imbalance as ‘a crisis in our justice system’,⁷ and one which has obvious and adverse implications for access to justice outside the major cities,⁸ especially for Aboriginal communities.⁹ Despite regular accounts as to the current over-supply of law graduates,¹⁰ both regional legal employers¹¹ and agencies working with Aboriginal communities¹² paradoxically strain to recruit and keep hold of legal staff.

The reasons for this imbalance between this supply of city and country lawyers are many and complex, although one is notorious: it is predominantly the large, affluent, metropolitan commercial law firms that market themselves to universities and law schools, meaning they typically monopolise the careers marketing materials and communications to students from universities and law schools. Students are rarely told of opportunities to work in regional communities, nor do they receive any information about what these opportunities involve. This reflects the urban-centric bias that exists within the legal system, the legal profession and the higher education system.¹³

Economides notes that regional practice ‘is not terribly visible or significant when looked at from the city’.¹⁴ In addition to this lack of visibility, regional practice is often regarded as ‘the other’, where students perceive regional work as being ‘less than’ city practice.¹⁵ They subsequently fail to ‘appreciate the diversity of practice contexts and experiences available’ outside of metropolitan centres.¹⁶ As a Brisbane law student in one study remarked: ‘There’s kind of a top tier or nothing approach

which is incredibly frustrating’.¹⁷ Another law student referred to students’ ‘fixation on the big glass building in the city’ and their own belief that ‘the city sets the pace of legal life’.¹⁸

This article details an extracurricular initiative for Adelaide Law School students that we designed to re-balance these perceptions and provide visibility to regional practice as a means of encouraging law students to consider regional life and practice upon graduation and to work with regional and Aboriginal communities. It is suggested that this initiative may provide an adaptable blueprint for others involved in legal education to work towards addressing the critical paucity of lawyers in RRR communities.

Our initiative

Our collective concern with the limited exposure that regional or Aboriginal legal employment opportunities receive in universities and law schools triggered our initial conversations around what we could do to change the narrative. Each of the authors has lived and/or worked in RRR communities across SA for extensive periods of time and possess strong social and professional networks in those communities. We decided to utilise these networks to help provide a unique, extra-curricular experience for our law students. The goal, of course, was to show them that living and working in RRR and Aboriginal communities offers so many benefits in terms of both lifestyle and work that the cities and city legal practices typically do not.¹⁹ An ancillary aim was to

⁷Morry Bailes, ‘Incentives Needed to Encourage Lawyers to “Go Bush”’, *InDaily* (online, 31 October 2019) <https://indaily.com.au/opinion/2019/10/31/incentives-needed-to-encourage-lawyers-to-go-bush/>. See also Carrick (n 5).

⁸Maria Karras et al, Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales, *On the Edge of Justice: The Legal Needs of People with a Mental Illness in NSW* (2006) 110–113; Law Council of Australia (n 2) 3, 24–42. The Law Council of Australia Report notes, ‘A wide range of areas of unmet legal need were flagged in various RRR areas. These included: civil matters such as fines, evictions, child protection, and mental health law; family law matters including family violence; and criminal matters including for driving offences’: at 33.

⁹Chris Cunneen, Fiona Allison and Melanie Schwartz, ‘Access to Justice for Aboriginal People in the Northern Territory’ (2014) 49(2) *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 219; Law Council of Australia (n 2) 4, 39, 42–3.

¹⁰See Michael Douglas and Nicholas Van Hattem, ‘Australia’s Law Graduate Glut’ (2016) 41(2) *Alternative Law Journal* 118; Felicity Nelson, ‘New Law Schools May Leave Grads Stranded’, *Lawyers Weekly* (online, 29 September 2015); Marie Iskander, ‘The Deserving and the Under-Served: A Comment on the Oversupply of Law Graduates, Diversity in the Legal Profession and Access to Legal Representation’ (2017) 5(1) *Griffith Journal of Law and Human Dignity* 66; Angela Melville, ‘It is the worst time in living history to be a law graduate: or is it? Does Australia have too many law graduates?’ (2017) 51(2) *The Law Teacher* 203. See further Michael McNamara, ‘University Legal Education and the Supply of Law Graduates: A Fresh Look at a Longstanding Issue’ (2018) 20 *Flinders Law Journal* 223.

¹¹Law Council of Australia (n 2) 37–8; Janelle Wells, ‘Calls for New Ways to Train and Retain Regional Solicitors as Shortage Bites in NSW’, *ABC News* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 22 July 2022) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-07-22/retention-of-solicitors-needed-in-regional-nsw-as-shortage-bites/101257910>. For issues in recruiting and retaining staff in the community sector, see Michael Cain and Suzie Forell, ‘Recruitment and Retention of Community Sector Lawyers: Regional Differences within New South Wales’ (2014) 16(1) *Deakin Law Review* 265.

¹²Law Council of Australia (n 2) 39; Stephanie Richards, ‘“Unsustainable”: SA Aboriginal Legal Service’s Budget Plea’, *In Daily* (online, 27 May 2022) <https://indaily.com.au/news/2022/05/27/unsustainable-sa-aboriginal-legal-services-budget-plea/>.

¹³Kim Economides, ‘Centre-periphery Tensions in Legal Theory and Practice: Can Law and Lawyers Resist Urban Imperialism?’ (2012) 2 *International Journal of Rural Law and Policy* 1, 2.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Trish Mundy, ‘“Placing” the Other: Final Year Law Students’ “Imagined” Experience of Rural and Regional Practice within the Law School Context’ (2012) 2 *International Journal of Rural Law and Policy* 4, 9.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.* 4.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹See also Kennedy et al (n 4) 10–11.

highlight the cultural and practical differences between regional and metropolitan legal work.

In July 2021, using a small University of Adelaide grant,²⁰ we coordinated and undertook a three-day pilot trip to the mid-north of SA, visiting Port Augusta²¹ and Port Pirie.²² Applications were invited from Adelaide Law School students with actual or potential interest in pursuing regional life and employment in RRR and Aboriginal communities. Academic grades were not a relevant factor, although we prioritised students who had not previously enjoyed employment or related opportunities in the communities selected for the tour and who did not have significantly established networks in those areas. Students instead provided a brief statement detailing the basis for their interest. Eight students participated in the pilot trip. The positive feedback²³ from this pilot trip inspired a successful application for Law Foundation of South Australia²⁴ funding to facilitate two further scaled-up trips in the April and September mid-semester breaks of 2022. The funding crucially covered the significant travel and accommodation costs, as well as some events we were able to arrange. This allowed us to focus our attention and energy on providing a meaningful experience for the students and ensured that there were no financial barriers for students wanting to attend.

The April 2022 trip (eight students; three days, two nights) was to Port Pirie via Clare²⁵ and Port Augusta, while the September 2022 trip (13 students; four days, three nights) was to Port Lincoln,²⁶ via Port Augusta. These locations were selected for three reasons. First, each was within reasonable driving distance of Adelaide, meaning we were able to save money on what would otherwise be costly regional flights. Second, each location boasted significant populations compared to other smaller regional towns, as well as a considerable number of public and private legal service providers allowing us to highlight a diverse range of legal careers to the students. Third, because each of the authors had lived, worked or spent time within each location, we were able to leverage professional and personal connections to enrich the experience for the students.

The selection criteria for these trips remained the same as the July 2021 trip. Each of the three trips consisted of:

- informal work experience 'placements' in local law firms, involving realistic practical tasks of a kind ordinarily undertaken in RRR law firms;
- visits to, and consultations with, the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM) office in Port Augusta to hear about working with Aboriginal clients in regional and remote communities and the barriers Aboriginal clients face in accessing justice;
- sessions with local community legal centres West-Side Community Lawyers and Family Violence Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation (FVLSAC) to hear about the provision of legal services in the community legal sector context;
- sessions with community health and service providers, such as Uniting Country SA, Tarpari Well-being Centre and Centacare, to highlight the holistic approach required to assist clients, in particular Aboriginal clients, with their legal concerns;
- networking lunches and dinners with local lawyers, politicians, community organisations and other key stakeholders to allow students to have deeper conversations in a less formal environment, to better understand regional life and practice;
- recreational activities and opportunities for 'town exploration' to allow students to get a feel of regional life;
- cultural engagement sessions with local Aboriginal Elders and community members;²⁷
- strategy sessions with local governments and Regional Development Australia to discuss perceived barriers with students considering employment in regional or Aboriginal communities;
- sessions with locals focusing on the practicalities of moving to a regional centre, including housing, lifestyle, and how to become part of the community; and
- media opportunities with local TV, radio and print media.

The July 2021 and April 2022 trips featured detailed meetings with Geoff Brock, the local Member for Stuart and currently the SA Minister for Local Government. The Port Lincoln trip also included a 'pop-up legal clinic' at the Port Lincoln Magistrates Court for law students under

²⁰University of Adelaide, Faculty of the Professions, *Learning and Development Grant* (\$2070).

²¹Port Augusta is approximately 310 kilometres north-west of Adelaide, with a population of approximately 13,000 people (with some 20% of the population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander): Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 *Census: Port Augusta* (2021) <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/UCL413003>. Port Augusta has been referred to as the 'gateway to the outback', 'the crossroads of Australia' and 'where the desert meets the sea' and is also a traditional meeting place of many North and Western Aboriginal communities in South Australia.

²²Port Pirie is approximately 220 kilometres north-west of Adelaide, with a population of approximately 14,000 people: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 *Census: Port Pirie* (2021) <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/UCL413005>.

²³See, eg, Shari Hams, 'Law Students Learn about Injustices for Aboriginal People in SA's Court System', ABC News (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 30 July 2021) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-07-30/law-students-learn-injustices-aboriginal-people-face/100336256>; David Plater et al, 'The Need to Think Outside City Commercial Practice: Encouraging Law Students to Work with Regional and Aboriginal Communities' (2021) 43(11) *Bulletin of the Law Society of South Australia* 18.

²⁴Law Foundation of South Australia, 2021 – September Round, Grant No A587-9.21 (\$31,442.90).

²⁵Clare is approximately 150 kilometres north of Adelaide, with a population of approximately 3000 people: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 *Census: Clare* (2021) <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/UCL415009>. Clare is famous for its wineries: Clare Valley Tourism www.clarevalley.com.au.

²⁶Port Lincoln is approximately 650 kilometres west of Adelaide by road, with a population of approximately 14,000 people: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 *Census: Port Lincoln* (2021) <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/UCL413004>. Port Lincoln is known as the seafood capital of Australia; see www.portlincoln.com.au.

²⁷See further Hams (n 23); Lachlan Smith, 'Adelaide Law Students to Visit Regional Communities to Learn about Career Opportunities', *Port Lincoln Times* (online, 21 September 2022).

supervision to provide legal advice to clients who probably would not otherwise have access to such a service.²⁸ Finally, to conclude the 2022 trip series, we hosted: a careers seminar open to law students at each of the SA law schools;²⁹ a tri-varsity collaborative workshop with staff and students from all South Australian law schools to discuss the role that law schools can play in promoting employment in RRR and Aboriginal communities;³⁰ and a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) event for legal practitioners to discuss ways to bridge the gap and encourage law students to consider RRR employment.

The participating students across the three regional trips represented a diverse range of the Adelaide Law School cohort. In total, 21 females and eight males attended the trips. This reflected the ratio of female and male applications and is consistent with the composition of the broader law school student profile. The students were also at varying stages of their studies. Participants ranged from first year to final year, and one student was undertaking their Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice (GDLP). Of the 29 attendees, nine were from RRR communities and 20 from the Adelaide metropolitan area. Many were also from diverse backgrounds, including one Aboriginal student.

Pedagogical rationale

As explained above, the RRR trip program was designed to broaden student horizons, exposing them to new places and experiences that universities and law schools do relatively little to advertise. We therefore drew heavily on principles of *experiential learning*, which refers to the involvement of students in an activity that allows them to ‘experience’ what they are learning and providing an ‘opportunity to reflect on those activities’.³¹ Being in RRR communities in SA and physically able to see and do, rather than just listen, enabled our students to truly immerse themselves in the experience and genuinely appreciate the social context and circumstances.³² This was especially the case in hearing first-hand from Aboriginal Elders about the historical and continuing issues facing Aboriginal communities, and in working with those communities.³³

Another key pedagogical theory inspiring our initiative was ‘place-based’ education, which harnesses the power of location

to generate an authentic, engaging and meaningful learning experience.³⁴ Students are ‘sensitised’ to the reality of regional life and practice more effectively than through traditional, static text- and instruction-based educational methods.³⁵ This allows them to better appreciate the viability of regional work and life. Being in RRR communities in SA and engaging with locals and Aboriginal Elders within those communities, also enabled our students to ‘explore localised personal narratives to gain different perspectives of cultural, social, economic and political factors that affect the everyday lives’³⁶ of such people.

We also saw the regional trips as an opportunity for students to further develop their ‘soft skills’ such as interpersonal communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and empathy.³⁷ They were able to do so in an unthreatening and informal environment, particularly at the networking functions with local lawyers and community members. Such skills were also applied and developed through the meetings with Aboriginal Elders and community members in Port Augusta and with clients at the pop-up legal advice clinic in Port Lincoln. It is famously difficult to teach such skills through legal curricula,³⁸ and so our initiative was also helpful in enriching our students’ overall learning experience.

Finally, we sought to ‘fill the information gap’ with respect to regional work and life opportunities available to law students. The ‘top tier or nothing’ mentality that seemingly permeates university and law school approaches to advertising legal employment is a source of frustration not only for us as educators but for the students who seek to know *all* potential avenues they can take with their career.³⁹ It is ‘timely and important’, Mundy notes, ‘that all law schools share in the task of promoting rural/regional practice as a potential career option and take up the challenge of rural inclusiveness by integrating a sense of “place-consciousness” into the curriculum’.⁴⁰ Of course, not every student will want to work in RRR communities. Nonetheless, they at least deserve to know about opportunities to do so.

Impact and legacy

It was important to ensure that the message we sought to convey to the trip participants about the value of legal practice in RRR communities went beyond them and also

²⁸See further Lachlan Smith, ‘Law Students Identify Issues around Access to Justice through Consultation Sessions’, *Port Lincoln Times* (online, 27 September 2022); Rebecca Magro and Natasha Davey, ‘Access to Justice: A Student Learning Perspective’, *Bulletin of the Law Society of South Australia* (May 2023).

²⁹Flinders University, The University of Adelaide and University of South Australia.

³⁰As a consequence of the tri-varsity workshop, the Adelaide University Law Students Society (AULSS) now includes a dedicated regional employment section in their AULSS careers guide.

³¹Melvin Silberman, *The Handbook of Experiential Learning* (Pfeiffer, 2007) 8, cited in Peter Sankoff, ‘Learning by Doing: the Benefits of Experiential Learning in Animals and the Law’ (2017) 27(1) *Legal Education Review* Article 6, 3.

³²Sankoff (n 31) 6.

³³Hams (n 23); Aidan Curtis, ‘Elders Have Their Say on Law Reforms’, *The Transcontinental* (Port Augusta, 27 May 2022) <https://transcontinental.com.au/news/2022/05/25/elders-have-their-say-on-law-reform/>.

³⁴See, eg, David Sobel, ‘Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities’ (2014) 39(1) *NAMTA Journal* 61; S Anthony Deringer, ‘Mindful place-based education: Mapping the literature’ (2017) 40(4) *Journal of Experiential Education* 333.

³⁵Kennedy et al (n 4) 6.

³⁶Annette Gainsford, ‘Connection to Country: Place-based Learning Initiatives Embedded in the Charles Sturt University Bachelor of Law’ (2018) 28(2) *Legal Education Review* Article 17, 9–10. This article focused on place-based learning in relation to Aboriginal communities, however these observations are just as relevant to non-Indigenous regional Australia.

³⁷Justine Rogers, ‘Teaching Soft Skills Including Online: A Review and Framework’ (2020) 30(1) *Legal Education Review* Article 5, 1.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Mundy (n 15); Kennedy et al (n 4).

⁴⁰Mundy (n 15) 10.

resonated with *all* students. Accordingly, all attendees were asked to informally document their experiences via 'vlogs' while 'on tour' and via post-trip reflections in print and video format. These reflections were packaged into promotional videos shared within the Law School and through the Law Foundation of SA, enabling other students (and potential future trip attendees) to understand the reported value of our initiative.

As mentioned above, we also hosted a number of post-trip events, open to students and staff at all SA law schools. Our collective aim is to work collaboratively to develop strategies that address the drastic shortage of legal professionals in RRR and Aboriginal communities, and to highlight to law students the opportunities available in these communities. We believe that showcasing the opportunities available to students in RRR and Aboriginal communities is one way that we can help improve the shortage of legal professionals in these communities, although we of course acknowledge that this is a broader and more complex problem requiring a multi-faceted solution combining initiatives on multiple levels: from government, from the legal profession and from law schools.⁴¹

Looking back at our initiative, and doing so impartially, we can honestly label it a real success. While it is difficult to measure the impact of an experiential learning initiative, success is measurable and can be achieved through students reporting a new understanding and appreciation of RRR perspectives and in being inspired to genuinely consider RRR practice as a viable career opportunity after graduation. We discuss some of this insightful feedback below. It is encouraging that, following our series of trips, a number of students have:

- volunteered with regional community services, such as ALRM and FVLSAC;
- applied for clerkships with firms that have regional offices;
- worked as law clerks in regional firms visited during our trips, or city firms that work with regional Aboriginal clients; and
- applied to undertake GDLP placements at many of the above-mentioned organisations.

The trips undertaken through our initiative have gained considerable media attention with television,⁴² radio⁴³ and print reports⁴⁴ in regional news outlets, and also a piece in

Adelaide's metropolitan newspaper, *The Advertiser*.⁴⁵ Students participated in all media opportunities, allowing them to develop their interviewing skills and share their perspectives. The trips were also documented through the University's media outlets.⁴⁶

Most importantly, the positive impact of our initiative on students attending the trips was clearly reflected in their post-trip reflections. One student from the 2021 trip commented:

The trip provided more than the opportunity to network with our peers and legal professionals, but the ability to see a future of legal practice beyond the typical corporate pathway, and see the ability to make a difference and be a meaningful part of a community.⁴⁷

Another student from the same trip elaborated:

It was a rare experience, not just in the context of the information learnt, and connections made with locals and legal professionals located in the area, but also in the realisation of the immense breadth of legal work available outside of major cities. Regional areas have a lot of valuable experience to offer to young professionals. Perhaps my greatest realisation following the trip was that there are many options to be considered outside of the traditional path we are encouraged to follow after graduation. I had not imagined practicing regionally prior to the trip or think I would gain so much personally from the experience. Life after Law School is a daunting prospect at the best of times, especially with the 'unprecedented' pandemic and competition for graduate positions. The opportunity to go on this trip was important, in helping us remember why we wanted to study law, and our ability to make a difference after all.⁴⁸

The trips have also been significant in relaying to students the vital but often overlooked Aboriginal context to legal practice. One 2021 trip attendee commented: 'It was very valuable to get to interact with members of a[n Aboriginal] community on a deeper, less superficial level, and have genuine conversation about the need for change with those who know it firsthand.'⁴⁹ Another reflected in depth on her experience:

Speaking to Charlie Jackson⁵⁰ and the other Elders was an eye opening and powerful experience. The stories he shared with

⁴¹See further Hess et al (n 1).

⁴²Spencer Gulf Nightly News, 'Law Students from Adelaide Are Being Given a Taster of Practicing Law in the Regions' (Facebook, 23 September 2022) <https://fb.watch/fRtFvzo3RL/>.

⁴³Emma Pedler, *Eyre Peninsula Breakfast* (ABC Radio, 20 September 2022); Dylan Smith, *Eyre Peninsula News* (ABC Radio, September 2022).

⁴⁴Isabella Carbone, 'Letter of the Law', *Plains Producer* (Balaklava, 27 April 2022) 17; Aidan Curtis, 'Upper Spencer Gulf Shows Shortages in Skilled and Professional Roles', *The Recorder* (Port Pirie, 30 May 2022); Anna Cornish, 'Careers in the Bush', *Uniting Country SA* (Port Pirie, 20 April 2022) <https://www.ucs.org.au/news/careers-in-the-bush>; Lachlan Smith (n 27); Lachlan Smith (n 28); Lachlan Smith, 'Students Learn of Regional Opportunities', *Port Lincoln Times* (29 September 2022).

⁴⁵Douglas Smith (n 6) 21.

⁴⁶Alwin Kean Loon Png, 'Adelaide Law School Students Visited Clare, Port Pirie and Port Augusta', *University of Adelaide News* (2 May 2022) <https://law.adelaide.edu.au/news/list/2022/05/02/adelaide-law-school-students-visited-clare-port-pirie-and-port-augusta>; Sarah Cervone, 'Law School Students Visit the Eyre Peninsula', *University of Adelaide News* (7 October 2022) <https://law.adelaide.edu.au/news/list/2022/10/07/law-school-students-visit-the-eyre-peninsula>.

⁴⁷Plater et al (n 23) 18.

⁴⁸Ibid 20.

⁴⁹Ibid 19.

⁵⁰See further Hams (n 23); Curtis (n 33).

us really highlighted the major disconnect between Aboriginal Law and Western Law. Charlie described Western Law as having judges, barristers and solicitors but noted that Aboriginal Law has this too, it just doesn't look the same as it does for Western Law. This was something I had probably rather naively, never considered before and made me question what more can be done to reconcile these two systems of law to operate more harmoniously, rather than one at the expense of another. It was an absolute honour and privilege to have spoken to Charlie [Jackson] and I would love for more students to have this incredible opportunity.⁵¹

One of the 2022 trip attendees revealed that she had always been interested in working in a regional area. 'You do not have to be stuck in one room just doing traffic and violations you get to learn how to do wills and estates, you get to learn how to do the criminal matters and the litigations. ... You get a lot of exposure coming out to these areas'.⁵² That student added that they would 'recommend the tour to all students who are studying law, regardless of whether or not they are considering moving to a regional area to practice law'.⁵³

The role of the pop-up clinic in Port Lincoln was notably beneficial. Two of the students involved, Rebecca Magro and Natasha Davey, described how the areas of law offered included family, employment, and wills and estates law, summary criminal cases, minor civil claims and debt recovery. Clients attending the clinic sought advice on wills and estates, guardianship and divorce. They were initially provided with verbal advice followed by written confirmation.⁵⁴ These students spoke of the value of the clinic for them and for the local community:

The recurring theme was that clients wanted to be heard and they had often put off dealing with their matter because they were uncertain about engaging with the legal community. For example, one client had been unable to resolve a matter for over ten years. After being advised that [the clinic] could help her resolve the matter entirely, the client stated that for the first time in over ten years, she felt as if she could 'finally breathe again'.⁵⁵

In addition to the personal and direct impact on the participating students, several have published articles about their trips in the *SA Law Society Bulletin*.⁵⁶

As a result of the September 2022 trip, Adelaide Law School staff briefed the SA Attorney-General's Department (AGD) Policy Team on their findings which, in turn, advised the group of progress on what was at the time referred to as the 'Unmet Needs Project'. The Adelaide Law School was later invited to join an AGD subcommittee to look further at

promoting access to justice and RRR legal recruitment.⁵⁷ In August 2023, the Adelaide Law School was recruited to undertake, and in November 2023 completed, the qualitative assessment component of the AGD's state-wide 'Legal Needs Assessment', which feeds into the federal government's review of the National Legal Assistance Program (NLAP). This component involved active consultation with regional and metropolitan providers within the community legal sector and related sectors throughout South Australia.

The response from the communities we visited has also been very favourable. Rob Muecke, a leading Port Lincoln solicitor, stressed the desperate need for lawyers in RRR communities and highlighted the broad range of legal matters that law graduates could handle when working in Port Lincoln.⁵⁸ The initiative, in his view, not only showcased this, but also demonstrated the value of the regional local lifestyle and better work-life balance that this typically facilitates.⁵⁹ Charlie Jackson, a leading Aboriginal Elder, felt it was essential for law students to gain first-hand Aboriginal perspectives given they might help shape future government policy, noting:

What I said to the law students and the people involved in that, one day those individuals could be one of those people who could have a role to play in the framing of a legislation. ... If we can Aboriginalise those legislations and then turn them into policy, those policies then have Aboriginal influence in them. Then eventually, government will have the responsibility to do a lot more for the individuals, whether it's young people or elderly people with mental health issues, and to help the vulnerable in our community.⁶⁰

Feedback like this confirms the tangible value in immersive experiences such as the series of student trips we have facilitated. It is hoped, subject to funding, to continue this initiative on an ongoing basis.

Conclusion

There is no simple solution to addressing the 'legal black hole in regional and rural South Australia'⁶¹ (that is, the shortage of lawyers). There is no one 'silver bullet' to address the problem of attracting and retaining professionals, including law graduates, in RRR and Aboriginal communities. Rather, it requires the collaborative effort of all stakeholders, including government, professional bodies, communities and universities, to achieve the multi-dimensional approach required to address the problem and to promote RRR practice as a positive long-term career option.⁶² Financial and professional incentives can be provided by government and professional bodies, but it is

⁵¹Plater et al (n 23) 19–20.

⁵²Lachlan Smith, 'Students Learn of Regional Opportunities' (n 44).

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Magro and Davey (n 28).

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Three students were co-authors of Plater et al (n 23). See also Magro and Davey (n 28).

⁵⁷Magro and Davey (n 28).

⁵⁸Smith, 'Students Learn of Regional Opportunities' (n 44).

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Curtis (n 33).

⁶¹Bailes (n 7).

⁶²See also Hess et al (n 1).

part of the role of universities to educate and inspire students to consider employment outside of metropolitan centres. Universities could showcase more diverse employment opportunities, through formal curricula as well as extra-curricular activities such as immersive regional trips discussed in this article. The role of universities should be to highlight the wide range of legal opportunities that exist, to recognise the diverse range of student interests, and to play a part in helping ensure access to justice across the broader community. Law students and law graduates should yearn for more than just the 'glass skyscrapers' in the city.

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