



The Case for Interns in Your Legal Team

Law Department Management



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For many of us working in-house, the path to our roles is likely to have included time in private practice. Our studies might have nudged us to aspire to graduate roles in top tier firms as the ultimate hallmark of a successful end to law school. For many of us, law firms were the only options made visible during our studies. Without seeing any other options, the mere possibility of working in-house may have just been unknown.

Both Stacey Pettit and Jaclyn Masters, two of the three co-authors of this article, were fortunate to get a taste for in-house practice early in their careers, with secondments and early exposure working in client teams igniting an enthusiasm for life beyond billable hours. It is fitting that they both now have the opportunity to share this enthusiasm with the next generation of law students.

Melissa Fletcher, the third co-author, joined Monash Law in 2017 to build and expand the existing program, which today encompasses over 60 host organizations and over 20 specialist legal clinics, and runs continuously all year. Since 2018, [Monash University](#) has offered a guaranteed clinical education experience for all students who wish to incorporate a practical component credited towards their Monash Law degree. They are the first law school in Australia to offer a guarantee like this for students, reflecting their belief in the transformative effect of experiential education.

A hallmark of Monash Law and highly regarded by legal professionals, the clinical legal education brings law students to the forefront of the job market, before they even graduate.

The program offers students, regardless of social or economic background, with pathways into the legal profession and practical experience to put their classroom learning into practice. It is an opportunity to be involved in meaningful work and gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the law and its application in the community, government, and commercial world.

For law students, it is a window into what opportunities exist to practice law in dynamic and exciting settings with client interfaces daily. An added benefit is to have guidance and mentorship from legal professionals and in so doing, begin to develop their own workplace practices and professional identity. For host organizations it is a chance to offer opportunities within your organization, to develop people management in legal teams that might not otherwise have the opportunity for direct reports. It cultivates a culture of growth and learning within the legal function and is an opportunity to make in-house career options very real to students who might not have otherwise considered it. As students near the end of their degrees, they realize that there is much more to being a successful practitioner than legal knowledge. Placements provide valuable guidance and mentorship from legal professionals.

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In a practical sense the intern program offers host organizations 12 to 18 days of support in the legal team which can be used for a range of tasks that the team might otherwise not have the resourcing for. The chance to have a fresh set of eyes reviewing documents, often fresh from the classroom and keen to apply their knowledge in a practical setting, helps address the familiarity bias that can often cloud our judgment when working with the same documents day in, day out.

Essendon fields

[Essendon Fields](#) is an award winning commercial, aviation, and retail precinct located on the site of Melbourne's first airport. With over 330+ businesses, it's a vibrant commercial and community hub.

Shortly after joining as general counsel in 2022, Stacey Pettit established a partnership with Monash Law School to participate in the clinical education program. Aside from expanding the resourcing available for the Essendon Fields legal team, clinical placements have also helped to improve graduate employability, increase network connections, and form a deeper understanding into the law's application in a commercial setting.

"The opportunity to secure an Australian based clinical placement has been immensely valuable for my legal career. I now have legal office and commercial experience in Australia

to refer to in interviews, and direct insight into the Australian work culture. Essendon Fields are certainly focused on producing well rounded interns at the conclusion of each program, encouraging immersive exploration of the airport and business precinct, including an airside tour on my first day!"

Rhiannon Ong – Halloran, legal intern, Essendon Fields

GeelongPort

[GeelongPort](#) is Victoria's second largest port located within Victoria's largest regional city, Geelong. Managing close to 12 million tonnes of cargo and 600 vessel visits per year, GeelongPort supports the agriculture, construction, energy, and tourism sectors.



GeelongPort started with one intern in 2022 in a pilot program co-founded by Stacey Pettit and Jaclyn Masters, and in 2024 grew their program to host four students across two universities. Returning from parental leave in late 2023 really energized having seen the success of the program run at Essendon Fields, Jaclyn Masters set up a partnership with Monash Law School as a priority to re-launch the intern program at the port.



[Stacey Pettit](#), General Counsel &

Company Secretary, Essendon Fields



[Jaclyn Masters](#), Senior Legal Counsel, GeelongPort

The legal team aims to involve interns in a variety of meaningful work that can vary depending on placement days so students get to experience the speed and complexity of what crosses the team's desks. The team ensures they provide context and the practical need for tasks given to interns to ensure they can appreciate the bigger picture and role they are contributing. Being based at the Corio Quay office also gives students a front row seat to working at an operational site and seeing firsthand the legal team's projects and matters.

The time investment has been invaluable for the GeelongPort legal team, the energy and enthusiasm that interns inject into the team and broader business is a difficult metric to measure but the feedback as to quality of work and access to ongoing development opportunities is one the team value highly. It also enables the team to deliver a regular program of training sessions across the business and really lean into a continuous growth approach.

“Interning at GeelongPort has been a highlight of my time at Monash. Working with the legal, commercial, and operations functions of the business has given me exposure to the inner dealings of the business. Learning directly from Jaclyn and Steph about how they approach risk management, procurement, and broader business strategy has been an invaluable experience, especially early in my career.”

Chehan Perera, legal intern, GeelongPort

The success of the Monash Clinical program lies in the mutually beneficial partnership between the host organizations and the law school. The commitment of host organizations such as Essendon Fields and GeelongPort has created an enriching learning experience that has literally changed the perspectives and career goals of participating students.

Creating an intern program within your in-house legal team affords you the opportunity to influence the next generation of lawyers and show the myriad of paths an in-house career can set you on. With no two days the same, and workplaces that situate you in the heart of the organization you advise in, students can also start to see the diversity of career options outside of traditional private practice pathways.

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references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.

[Jaclyn Masters](#)



Senior Legal Counsel

GeelongPort

Jaclyn Masters is the senior legal counsel at GeelongPort, a premier bulk port and major driver of the economy in Victoria, Australia. She holds her bachelor degree from Monash University, her Masters in Construction Law from the University of Melbourne, and is qualified to practice in both Australia and Texas, USA. She began her legal career at Corrs Chambers Westgarth in the construction practice group before moving in-house. Masters is passionate about mentoring and making the pathways to in-house careers more visible and accessible to law students, and has been recognized as a finalist for In-house Lawyer of the Year in 2024 by ACC Australia and Lawyers Weekly Australian Law Awards.

[Stacey Pettit](#)



General Counsel

Essendon Fields

Stacey Pettit is an experienced general counsel with broad experience in private, government and listed company environments. She is skilled in general corporate advice, governance and all aspects of property law. In her 20 years as a corporate lawyer, Pettit has built a first-class reputation of empowering teams and nurturing law students with a professional and inclusive management style that offers opportunities for team members to thrive.

[Melissa Fletcher](#)



Senior Manager, Partnerships and Clinics

Monash University

Melissa Fletcher is the senior manager, partnerships and clinics for the Law Faculty at Monash University. She has driven the growth and development of the clinical program to encompass local and international opportunities for law students in the areas of client facing assistance, in-house legal teams and legal reform and change. She is also involved in developing strategic partnerships and funding support for the program. Prior to joining Monash University, she consulted in consumer behavior, specializing in service design and delivery and leading programs across Australia and South East Asia.

