
What Makes a Competent Lawyer: Findings from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census

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Dr Georgina Rychner and Prof Nigel J Balmer

Legal Services
Research Centre

Victorian Legal Services
BOARD + COMMISSIONER



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This report is published by the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner (VLSB+C). The Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner are independent statutory authorities responsible for the regulation of the legal profession in Victoria.

The VLSB+C aims to:

- protect and empower consumers
- maintain and enhance legal practice and ethics
- improve access to justice.

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This document should be cited as:

King, Alice Catherine, Magalie Baete, Georgina Rychner, and Nigel J Balmer.
What Makes a Competent Lawyer: Findings from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census. Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, 2026.

ISBN: 978-1-923725-99-7

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The Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land, and pay respect to their Elders past and present.

Acknowledgements

Many people made an important contribution to the development of the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census. Most importantly, we thank the lawyers who participated in the lawyer census for their time and insights into key issues facing the Victorian legal profession. We also thank colleagues at the VLSB+C who provided their expertise in developing and refining content.

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Key findings

The 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census sought to understand a range of issues affecting the legal profession, including how lawyers understand professional competency. Lawyers were asked to rate the importance of a bank of 38 competencies to their own legal practice, spanning legal-specific and broader professional skills. Responses were analysed as a whole, and related to career stage and practice area.¹

The lawyer census was a voluntary online survey distributed to all Victorian lawyers holding practising certificates to which 1,887 lawyers responded. Each respondent was asked to rate a random selection of 10 of the 38 competencies, on a 4-point scale from 'not that important' to 'critical', or to indicate that a competency was 'not applicable' to their role.

1. For the 4 substantive areas with the highest numbers of respondents in the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census: commercial law, criminal law, family law, and wills and estates.

The profession values a broad range of competencies and is largely aligned on what those are

Victorian lawyers saw competency far more broadly than a narrow set of technical legal skills. They rated competencies across every domain as important to practice, from substantive legal knowledge and ethical judgment, to communication, critical thinking and professional development. Twelve competencies were rated 'critical' by most lawyers, the most highly rated being: understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area; clear and effective verbal and written communication; critical thinking and analysis; and being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries). A majority rated all but 4 of the 38 as 'very important' or 'critical'. This breadth points to a shared view of competent practice as resting on a wide range of capabilities, encompassing both legal-specific and more generic professional skills.

Lower importance and the diversity of practice

Where competencies were rated less critical, this often reflected their relevance to particular forms of practice rather than a view that they were unimportant in principle. For example, competencies associated with running a practice or business, such as understanding trust account obligations, managing client billing and financial management, had both lower importance ratings and higher rates of 'not applicable' responses. Moreover, the distinction between 'not applicable' and 'not that important' was not always clear-cut, and some 'not that important' responses are also likely to reflect a similar lack of relevance to a respondent's role. Low importance ratings should not, therefore, be read on their own as evidence that a competency is unimportant to the profession. The ratings more often reflect the diversity of legal practice, and the fact that what is central to one lawyer's work may have limited bearing on another's.

Applicability and the relationship between competencies

Ratings correlated for a broad set of competencies spanning legal knowledge, ethics, communication and general professional skills. These were linked by their broad applicability across roles and practice areas rather than by shared subject matter, since they fall across different domains. Standing apart were competencies for which relevance is defined by the particular nature of a lawyer's work, such as those concerned with running a practice or serving particular client communities. These were strongly related to one another but only weakly related to the broadly applicable set. This finding does not contradict the broad importance lawyers attached to competencies. While almost all competencies were valued, those valued together (and so forming the common ground across the profession) were the broadly applicable ones. The more practice-specific competencies were valued mainly by the lawyers they concern.

Career stage and the changing nature of work

While a core set of competencies remained stable, others varied with career stage. The importance attached to several competencies declined with seniority, most notably those associated with maintaining your wellbeing and professional development. These include maintaining an appropriate work-life balance, accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate, and recognising and managing work-related stress, and they showed the largest differences in the data. A smaller number rose in importance with seniority, including negotiation, recognising and managing conflicts of interest, and understanding trust account obligations. This finding is consistent with the greater responsibility associated with experience.

Area of law and the demands of different practice

Across the 4 areas with the largest numbers of respondents – commercial, criminal, family, and wills and estates law – a core of competencies was rated consistently, while others varied in line with the nature of the work. Understanding of court processes showed the widest variation of any competency, as it was rated ‘critical’ by 65% of criminal lawyers but only by 25% of commercial lawyers. Understanding trust account obligations was rated ‘critical’ by 48% of wills and estates lawyers but only by 13% of criminal lawyers, which reflects the routine handling of trust monies in deceased estates.

Distinct patterns of cultural awareness and sensitivity

Cultural awareness and sensitivity, particularly First Nations peoples’ cultural awareness and sensitivity, were rated as ‘critical’ by relatively few lawyers overall. First Nations peoples’ cultural awareness and sensitivity was the only competency not endorsed as ‘very important’ or ‘critical’ by a majority once ‘not applicable’ responses were excluded. However, this low baseline varied in important ways. Both competencies were rated as ‘critical’ far more often by criminal and family lawyers than by commercial or wills and estates practitioners, which is consistent with criminal and family lawyers’ greater exposure to marginalised, vulnerable client communities. Even so, the highest ratings remained modest. First Nations peoples’ cultural awareness and sensitivity was still rated ‘critical’ by only 27% of criminal lawyers and 21% of family lawyers (compared with 8% of commercial lawyers). More striking still is the pattern by career stage, where the importance of First Nations peoples’ cultural awareness and sensitivity declined sharply with seniority. It was rated ‘critical’ by 22% of early career lawyers but only by 8% of those with 20 or more years in practice. Its perceived importance may rise over time as successive cohorts, who place greater weight on the competency, progress and reshape views.

What the findings mean

The findings indicate a Victorian profession with a clear and broadly shared understanding of what competent practice entails. Competency was viewed broadly, with a closely agreed, stable core. Differences in views are often attributable to the nature of different forms of work. This consensus provides a useful foundation as it identifies which competencies are understood to be universally important and where competency importance depends on role, career stage or practice area.

It also indicates where attention may be warranted. Competencies regarded as 'critical' across the profession are those any standard of legal competency must address. A lower rating, however, does not necessarily denote lesser importance. The ratings provide a benchmark of how the profession currently values each competency, against which the profession, individual practitioners and firms, professional and peak bodies, educators and regulators may reasonably take the view that a given competency warrants greater emphasis. They may do this because the competency's importance is expected to grow, because it matters more than practitioners presently recognise, or because a particular client group depends on it.

This report provides a useful means to understand perceptions of what is important. It checks assumptions, verifies models, and indicates where training and development could focus. Measuring proficiency alongside importance would sharpen the last of these research benefits. The gap between importance and proficiency is the most direct indicator of training need, and quantifying it is a priority for future research.

01

Introduction and methodology

This section provides background on lawyer competency, including the skills and knowledge considered necessary for competent legal practice, as well as how domains of competency can be defined and measured. It draws on legislation, policy and research from Australia and around the world to explore how competency is understood and regulated. It then describes the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census and the competency module used in this study.



Lawyer competency

Defining competency

In legislation and policy

Competency is referenced both explicitly and implicitly across legislative frameworks governing legal practice, though no universal definition exists. In Australia, the Legal Profession Uniform Law identifies ensuring lawyers are competent as a core objective,² while the Legal Profession Uniform Law Australian Solicitors Conduct Rules 2015 reinforces this in professional conduct obligation by requiring lawyers to ‘deliver legal services competently, diligently and as promptly as reasonably possible.’³ Neither, however, define what constitutes competency in substantive terms.

In the United States, the American Bar Association’s Model Rules of Professional Conduct require lawyers to provide competent representation to clients, which is defined as requiring ‘the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for representation,’⁴ alluding to components of competency without detailed specification.

Canada takes a more comprehensive approach, with The Federation of Law Societies’ Model Code of Professional Conduct setting out (under Rules 3.1-1 and 3.1-2), a detailed description of the skills and attributes that constitute a competent legal practice.⁵ Accompanying commentary explicitly clarifies that the standard is not one of perfection, nor does it make all errors actionable in negligence. Instead, it is the normative standard of effective professional practice.

In England and Wales, the Solicitors Regulation Authority developed a competency framework comprising 3 elements: a statement of solicitor competence, a threshold standard, and a statement of legal knowledge.⁶ The framework defines competency broadly as ‘the ability to perform the roles and tasks required by one’s job to the expected standard’. The introduction of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) in 2021, which replaced the previous practical legal training requirement, has given fresh impetus to questions of how competency is defined and assessed at the point of entry to practice. This development has prompted similar conversations in comparable common law jurisdictions.⁷

2. For example, in the objectives of the Legal Profession Uniform Law in section 3 it indicates that the objectives of this law are to promote the administration of justice and an efficient and effective Australian legal profession, including by ‘ensuring lawyers are competent and maintain high ethical and professional standards in the provision of legal services’. Legal Profession Uniform Law s 3.
3. “Legal Profession Uniform Law Australian Solicitors’ Conduct Rules 2015,” NSW Government, accessed 22 July 2026, <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/sl-2015-0244#sec.4-oc.2>.
4. See “Model Rules of Professional Conduct,” American Bar Association, accessed 22 July 2026, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications/model_rules_of_professional_conduct/model_rules_of_professional_conduct_table_of_contents/.
5. Federation of Law Societies of Canada, Model Code of Professional Conduct, which is then adopted and adapted as appropriate by the various provincial and territorial law societies. See, for example, “Rules of Professional Conduct,” Law Society of Ontario, accessed 22 July 2026, <https://lso.ca/about-lso/legislation-rules/rules-of-professional-conduct>.
6. “Statement of Solicitor Competence,” Solicitors Regulation Authority, updated 9 August 2022, <https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/competence-statement/>.
7. For commentary on the introduction of the SQE to legal education see: Rachel Dunn et al., “The Impact of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) on Undergraduate Legal Education in England and Wales: A Content Analysis,” *Legal Studies* (2025): 375–393; Lucinda Bromfield and Giligan Sproule, “Review of SQE: A Challenge and an Opportunity,” *The Law Teacher* 59, no. 2 (2025), edited by Katherine Langley et al.

In scholarship

Research on lawyer competency, what it means to practise effectively, and how standards could be defined and assessed, has been the subject of considerable empirical and theoretical inquiry.⁸

Although definitions vary across this literature, a general consensus has emerged around the view that competency represents ‘the ability to perform an activity to the standard required using an appropriate mix of knowledge, skills and attitude’.⁹ Building on this, the 2013 Legal Training and Education Review in the UK adopted a more granular approach, distinguishing 4 constituent elements:

1. Competence (a generic term) – an ability to perform the tasks and roles required of a lawyer to (at least) a minimum standard of effectiveness.
2. A ‘competence’ or ‘competency’ (specific term) – a sub-category or component of competence, defined in terms of a task to be performed or attribute to be demonstrated. These may be defined at a comparatively high level of abstraction (the broad view) or with a considerable degree of task-based detail (the narrow view).
3. A ‘learning outcome’ or ‘outcome’ – The expected result of a learning process defined in terms of scope (what is to be known, understood or demonstrated). This will often be attached to a marker describing the expected level of performance.
4. Standard – a means of assuring or measuring the level of performance in a component of competence. This may involve a statement of measurement against predetermined criteria or by reference to, for example, a collaborative process (such as that used in medical assessment) that determines the characteristics of a ‘good enough’ performance.¹⁰

This taxonomy informs the approach taken in this report, in which discrete competencies are assessed within broader competency domains. As the review of legislation and scholarship illustrates, despite broad agreement on the general constituents of competency, translation into specific, measurable standards remains a challenge. However, this challenge is being addressed by a growing interest in competency frameworks as regulatory and educational tools.

8. See Susan Swaim Daicoff, “Expanding the Lawyer’s Toolkit of Skills and Competencies: Synthesizing Leadership, Professionalism, Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution, and Comprehensive Law,” *Santa Clara Law Review* 52, no. 3 (2012): 795; Marjorie M. Shultz and Sheldon Zedeck, “Predicting Lawyer Effectiveness: Broadening the Basis for Law School Admission Decisions,” *Law & Social Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2011): 620–661; Stephen Gerst and Gerald Hess, “Professional Skills and Values in Legal Education: The GPS Model,” *Valparaiso University Law Review* 43, no. 2 (2009): 513–572; William M. Sullivan et al., *Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law* (Jossey-Bass, 2007); American Bar Association Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession, *Legal Education and Professional Development – An Educational Continuum (MacCrate Report)* (American Bar Association, 1992); Bryant G. Garth and Joanne Martin, “Law Schools and the Construction of Competence,” *Journal of Legal Education* 43, no. 4 (1993): 469–509.
9. Legal Education and Training Reform, *Competence*, briefing paper 1/2011 (Legal Education and Training Reform, 2011).
10. Legal Education and Training Reform, *Competence*.

The importance of competency

Competency, wellbeing and access to justice

Competency, at the system level, is important because competent lawyers are instrumental to the administration of justice and the effective functioning of the legal system. Competency has direct implications for access to justice, since individuals who need legal advice or redress are likely to have their needs unmet if they encounter a lawyer who is unable to perform their role adequately – despite having incurred costs, time and stress.¹¹ Consequently, competency goes beyond professional standards to be a condition of the legal system's ability to deliver just resolution of legal issues. Research also points to a relationship between competency and individual wellbeing, with lawyers who feel able to perform their roles effectively reporting better wellbeing outcomes.¹²

Outcomes-based (legal) education

The rise of competency as a key cornerstone of legal practice can be drawn from the move within legal education away from a knowledge-based focus and towards occupational outcomes.¹³ Today, it is widely accepted that technical knowledge of the law is not enough to make for an effective and competent lawyer, with legal education reflecting this.¹⁴

In Australia, the foundational knowledge element of legal education remains evident with the continued existence of the 'Priestley Eleven'¹⁵, supplemented by Threshold Learning Outcomes for both LLBs and JDs. The question of what legal education ought to look like has attracted sustained research attention, and has become more pressing in recent times as generative AI plays a growing role in both education and legal practice.¹⁶

11. Sarah Marsden and Sarah Buhler make this link explicitly in "Lawyer Competencies for Access to Justice: Two Empirical Studies," *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 186 (2017): 162.
12. See Vivien Holmes et al., *Lawyer Wellbeing, Workplace Experiences and Ethics: A Research Report* (Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, the Law Society of New South Wales, and the Legal Practice Board of Western Australia, 2025); Soon et al., "Towards a Context-specific Approach to Understanding Lawyers' Well-being: A Synthesis Review and Future Research Agenda," *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 31, no.3 (2024): 550–573.
13. Research has debated the advantages of moving towards a skills-driven education for legal practice, which is not directly relevant here but may provide useful context, for reference see Cath Sylvester, "Measuring Competence in Legal Education: A View from the Bridge," *The Law Teacher* 49, no. 2 (2015): 242–256; Sally Kift, "Lawyering Skills: Finding Their Place in Legal Education," *Legal Education Review* 8, 1 (1997): 43; Jack Burke and Hugh Zillmann, "Creating a Gold Standard for Practical Legal Training in Common Law Countries," *Journal of International and Comparative Law* (2018): 9–41.
14. See Kift, "Lawyering Skills," 43, for early arguments in favour of moving towards structured skills learning which links together theory and practice.
15. The Priestley Eleven refers to 11 core subject areas that must be undertaken for an individual to be admitted to practice.
16. See Kate Galloway et al., "The Legal Academy's Engagements with Lawtech: Technology Narratives and Archetypes as Drivers of Change," *Law, Technology and Humans* 1 (2019): 27–45.

Upon completing a law degree in Australia, individuals must then undertake further vocational training before being able to practise law. Practical Legal Training (PLT) courses emerged in the 1970s, before which the practical elements of legal training took the form of articulated clerkship. In 2000, and as a response to the growing amount and forms of PLT offerings across Australia, the LACC and APLEC drafted the PLT Competency Standards for Entry-Level Lawyers, providing a clear set of learning outcomes and skills that PLT providers should adhere to.¹⁷ These standards were further revised in 2015 and include competencies under the categories of skills, compulsory practice areas, optional practice areas and values.¹⁸ The standards are outcomes-driven, focusing on those undertaking the courses as opposed to education providers. This outcomes-based focus is also reflected in scholarship on lawyer formation. For example, Furlong characterises formation as the process through which lawyers become competent, confident, and independent practitioners. Furlong argues that training should focus on the needs and interests of both lawyers and clients rather than the transmission of legal knowledge alone.¹⁹

The Victorian regulatory context

In 2023 and 2024, the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner (VLSB+C) asked both supervisors and supervisees about their experiences of supervised legal practice. Survey respondents indicated a need for more resources to support effective supervision, and identified the absence of a publicly available competency framework (like those in Canada and England and Wales) for Victorian lawyers as a gap. Those findings in turn contributed to the development of a competency framework for Victorian early career lawyers, which the VLSB+C published in 2025.²⁰

This study

This report draws on data from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census to examine how Victorian lawyers rate the importance of a range of professional competencies, and what those ratings reveal about how competency is understood across the profession.

17. Sally Kift and Kana Nakano, "Reimagining the Professional Regulation of Australian Legal Education," Council of Australian Law Deans, published 2021, https://cald.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Reimagining-KiftNakano_FINAL.pdf.
18. Kift and Nakano, "Reimagining the Professional Regulation of Australian Legal Education."
19. Jordan Furlong, *The Future of Lawyer Formation: Fundamental Challenges and Opportunities for Professional Legal Educators* (Australasian Professional Legal Education Council, 2024), <https://aplec.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/01-The-Future-of-Lawyer-Formation-Jordan-Furlong.pdf>.
20. See "Early Career Lawyer Capability Framework", Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, 12 December 2025, <https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/resources/early-career-lawyer-capability-framework>. Early findings from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census, including from the competency module reported here, informed the development of that framework.

Methodology

The 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census

This study uses data from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census, which was conducted by the Legal Services Research Centre (the independent research function of the VLSB+C). The lawyer census was a voluntary online survey distributed to all Victorian lawyers holding practising certificates to which 1,887 lawyers responded. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Full details of the lawyer census methodology, including the questionnaire and development process, are available in the accompanying technical report.²¹

The survey covered 7 key areas: artificial intelligence, lawyer identity, ethics, competency, wellbeing, experiences of uncivil behaviour, and sexual harassment. It also collected professional and personal demographic information to enable analysis of response patterns across different lawyer groups.

To ensure the survey results accurately represent the broader Victorian lawyer population, post-stratification weighting was applied based on age, gender and practising certificate type. This statistical adjustment corrects for potential biases from under or over-representation of certain groups in the sample, using benchmark data from the VLSB+C's certificate renewal records. All analyses in this report use these weighted data to provide more reliable population estimates.

The competency module

The competency module comprised a bank of 38 competencies, mapping to a set of 6 core domains. Participants were presented with a random selection of 10 of the 38 competencies and asked how important they thought they were to their legal practice. Respondents were presented with a random subset of items due to time constraints in the multi-topic lawyer census questionnaire.²² Responses took the form of 4-point Likert scales ('not that important', 'quite important', 'very important', 'critical'), although respondents could also respond that items were 'not applicable' to their role.

The individual competency items and domain structure were developed through a review of existing competency frameworks from Australian and comparable international jurisdictions, details of which are set out in the domain descriptions in this section. The resulting item bank deliberately spans both legal-specific and broader (generic) professional competencies. This reflects the fact (which is also evident in the frameworks reviewed and drawn on) that effective legal practice draws on a range of skills that are not unique to the law (such as communication and problem-solving) but are still central to legal practice, management and service delivery.

21. Legal Services Research Centre, *The 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census: Technical Report* (Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, 2025).

22. This means you cannot look at all competencies for an individual, but it does yield sufficient numbers to contrast the perceived importance of different competencies across respondents.

Competency domain 1 – Legal knowledge and how to apply it

This domain spanned 2 subcategories and sought to encapsulate relevant knowledge of the law, and how to effectively apply it.

Substantive legal knowledge
Understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area
Understanding of court processes
Practical legal skills
Legal research and analysis
Legal writing
Managing cases and matters effectively
Keeping appropriate client records and files (e.g. recording file notes)
Client advocacy
Understanding trust account obligations
Managing client billing

Given the broad array of practice areas represented in the lawyer census, the substantive legal knowledge items were designed to capture legal knowledge without reference to specific practice areas. Research in Queensland has highlighted this as a core area of weakness among early career lawyers,²³ while, the VLSB+C's CPD review similarly references substantive legal knowledge as a priority area for competency frameworks.²⁴

Although the LACC's PLT standards address legal knowledge through specific prescribed and optional practice areas rather than as a holistic domain, a practice-area-neutral measure was considered more appropriate for a census spanning Victorian legal practice.²⁵ Understanding of court processes, while not prominent in some comparable international frameworks, is included given its presence in the LACC's standards.²⁶

23. Francina Cantatore et al., *The Job Readiness of Law Graduates and Entry-Level Solicitors in Private Practice* (Queensland Law Society, 2022), <https://www.qls.com.au/content-collections/reports/2022-job-readiness-report>.

24. Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, *Report into CPD in Victoria*, (Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, last modified 15 August 2024), <https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/resources/report-cpd-victoria>.

25. Law Admissions Consultative Committee, *Practical Legal Training Competency Standards for Entry-Level Lawyers* (Legal Services Council, revised October 2017), <https://legalservicescouncil.org.au/documents/PLT-competency-standards-for-entry-level-lawyers-Oct-2017.pdf>.

26. Law Admissions Consultative Committee, *Practical Legal Training Competency Standards for Entry-Level Lawyers*.

The practical legal skills items similarly reflect competencies recognised across Australian and international frameworks.²⁷

Legal writing and client advocacy have been identified as areas of particular difficulty for early career lawyers in Queensland,²⁸ and client billing was included given the prominence of cost-related complaints brought to the regulator.²⁹

Competency domain 2 – Ethics and professional responsibility

This domain covers understanding and having the ability to apply the ethical and professional responsibilities necessary to work within the law.

Ethics and professional responsibility
Understanding of, and ability to, apply ethical principles
Being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries)
Recognising and addressing ethical dilemmas
Recognising and managing conflicts of interest
Cognisant of duty to the court and administration of justice

Again, a number of these skills are included in the LACC competency framework as well as being incorporated into CPD requirements and solicitors' conduct rules.³⁰ Research in England and Wales has also identified the importance of understanding ethical principles, and maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries as key skills for effective lawyering.³¹ Being cognisant of your duty to the court and the administration of justice, although not included in existing competency frameworks, is an integral part of conduct rules in Uniform Law jurisdictions.³²

27. See Law Society of British Columbia et al., *Western Canada Competency Profile: Competencies for Entry to Legal Practice* (Law Society of British Columbia, Law Society of Alberta, Law Society of Saskatchewan, and The Law Society of Manitoba, 2024); "Statement of Solicitor Competence"; Law Admissions Consultative Committee, *Practical Legal Training Competency Standards for Entry-Level Lawyers*.

28. Cantatore et al., *The Job Readiness of Law Graduates and Entry-Level Solicitors in Private Practice*.

29. See for example, Victorian Services Board and Commissioner, Annual Report 24–25, (Victorian Services Board and Commissioner, 2025), p 27, <https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/resources/2025-annual-report>.

30. Law Admissions Consultative Committee, *Practical Legal Training Competency Standards for Entry-Level Lawyers*.

31. Julian Webb et al., *Setting Standards: The Future of Legal Services Education and Training Regulation in England and Wales*, (Legal Education and Training Review, 2013). Richard Moorhead et al., *In-House Lawyers' Ethics: Institutional Logics, Legal Risk and the Tournament of Influence*, (Hart Publishing, 2018), Richard Moorhead and Victoria Hinchly, "Professional Minimalism? The Ethical Consciousness of Commercial Lawyers," *Journal of Law and Society* 42, no. 3 (2015): 387; Richard Moorhead, "Precarious Professionalism: Some Empirical and Behavioural Perspectives on Lawyers," *Current Legal Problems* 67, no. 1 (2014): 447; Richard Moorhead et al., *What Does It Mean for Lawyers to Uphold the Rule of Law?*, (Legal Services Board, 2023), <https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/FINAL-LSB-Lawyers-and-ROL-Report-2023.pdf>.

32. See Legal Profession Uniform Law 2015 and Legal Profession Uniform Law Australian Solicitors' Conduct Rules 2015.

Competency domain 3 – Interpersonal and communication skills

This domain encompasses the interpersonal and communication skills required to work effectively with the range of people encountered in legal practice, including clients, colleagues and other legal professionals.

Working with people
Cultural awareness and sensitivity
First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity
Clear and effective verbal and written communication
Active listening
Negotiation
Dispute resolution
Managing professional integrity and courtesy with all people encountered in your practice
Ability to have difficult conversations with people you work with (i.e. clients and colleagues)
Client-centric skills
Managing client relationships
Client interviewing

Specific competencies relating to First Nations peoples' and broader cultural awareness and sensitivity were included in line with the LACC's standards and reflect comparable inclusions in other jurisdictions.³³ The domain also encompasses more legally specific skills, including negotiation and dispute resolution, which have been identified in the Queensland Law Society's review of early career lawyers as areas requiring development. Managing client relationships and client interviewing are treated here as a distinct subdomain given their centrality to legal practice. Both competencies feature in the LACC's PLT standards,³⁴ and in comparable frameworks in other jurisdictions.³⁵

33. Law Society of British Columbia et al., *Western Canada Competency Profile*.

34. Law Admissions Consultative Committee, *Practical Legal Training Competency Standards for Entry-Level Lawyers*.

35. Law Society of British Columbia et al., *Western Canada Competency Profile and "Statement of Solicitor Competence"*.

Competency domain 4 – General professional skills

These competencies reflect the broader professional skills required to function effectively in many professional environments. Their inclusion acknowledges that effective legal practice depends on transferable capabilities alongside technical legal expertise.

General professional skills
Problem-solving
Being able to use legal and other business technology effectively and safely
Work planning and organisation
Time management
Critical thinking and analysis

These competencies are reflected in the LACC framework, the Canadian competency framework and the Solicitor's Regulatory Authority Framework in England and Wales.³⁶

Competency domain 5 – Maintaining your professional development and wellbeing

These competencies concern the ongoing management of professional development and wellbeing in legal practice.

Maintaining your professional development and wellbeing
Identifying and addressing knowledge skills and gaps
Accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate
Recognising and managing work-related stress
Maintaining an appropriate work–life balance

Professional development features prominently in comparable competency frameworks, including the SRA's Statement of Solicitor Competence and the Western Canada Competency Profile.³⁷ The wellbeing of legal practitioners has received growing attention in Australia and internationally, with research identifying elevated rates of psychological distress, burnout and work-related stress among lawyers.³⁸ The inclusion of wellbeing-related competencies reflects the recognition that sustainable legal practice requires attention to health and wellbeing alongside professional obligations.

36. Law Society of British Columbia et al., *Statement of Solicitor Competence*.

37. Law Society of British Columbia et al., *Statement of Solicitor Competence*.

38. Tienielle Hagland et al., *Wellbeing in the Legal Profession: Findings from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census* (Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, 2026).

Competency domain 6 – Practice management and managerial skills

These competencies concern additional important skills that did not fall within the other domains and are more broadly applicable to professional settings.

Practice management and managerial skills
Financial management
Business planning
Conflict management
Coaching and mentoring
Staff management

The additional competencies were not reflected in any competency frameworks at the time of the survey, nor were they included in the Early Career Lawyer Competencies set out by the VLSB+C. However, these competencies were included to cover general professional skills. Staff management, conflict management, and coaching and mentoring are important skills for any individual in a senior or management position within a profession. Financial planning has been identified as important, particularly within rural and regional areas of Victoria as it can impact the succession planning of legal practices for retirement or deaths.

Limitations

The design of the competency module introduced some analytical limitations. First, due to the length constraints of the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census (in part a function of its multi-module approach), each respondent was presented with a randomised subset of 10 competencies from the full pool of 38.³⁹ While this approach reduces respondent burden and survey fatigue, it means that importance ratings for each competency are based on a subset of respondents, rather than the full sample completing the module. Second, the module asked respondents about the importance of each competency. Ideally, items would also have explored proficiency for each alongside importance, allowing the difference to be quantified, and yielding a more direct basis for identifying training and continuing education needs. The importance ratings reported nonetheless provide a useful quantitative foundation for understanding how the Victorian profession values different competencies, and how future work could extend the approach to include a matched proficiency dimension. Finally, the generalisability of findings is subject to the potential biases associated with voluntary survey participation, and non-response bias in particular.⁴⁰

39. Consequently, findings reported were unweighted, since lawyer census weights were designed to be used for all census data, rather than a randomised subset. Legal Services Research Centre, *The 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census: Technical Report*.

40. Legal Services Research Centre, *The 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census: Technical Report*.



02

Perceived importance of professional competencies among Victorian lawyers

This section examines how Victorian lawyers rated the importance of competencies included in the lawyer competency module of the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census. It presents findings by competency domain, by individual competency, and by career stage and area of law. It then explores how perceptions of importance for individual competencies relate to each other or cluster.



Individual competencies

Table 1 shows lawyers' views on the importance of each of 38 individual competencies to their practice,⁴¹ reflecting both significant variation in the perceived importance of different factors as well as differences in their relevance to different forms of legal practice.

Table 1 – The perceived importance of 38 individual competencies to Victorian lawyers' practice

Competency	Importance to practice				
	'Not that important'	'Quite important'	'Very important'	'Critical'	'Not applicable'
Understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area ⁴²	0.5%	4.0%	27.7%	67.4%	0.5%
Clear and effective verbal and written communication	0.2%	2.8%	30.8%	65.9%	0.2%
Critical thinking and analysis	0.8%	2.5%	32.1%	64.4%	0.3%
Being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries)	0.7%	6.4%	30.1%	62.6%	0.2%
Problem-solving	0.0%	4.3%	37.2%	58.3%	0.3%
Managing professional integrity and courtesy with all people encountered in your practice	0.0%	6.4%	35.9%	57.2%	0.5%
Managing cases and matters effectively	0.7%	6.7%	35.0%	55.5%	2.1%
Legal writing	1.0%	10.3%	33.6%	54.9%	0.2%
Cognisant of duty to the court and administration of justice	1.9%	11.8%	30.8%	53.7%	1.7%
Understanding of, and ability to, apply ethical principles	0.9%	7.7%	40.4%	49.9%	1.1%
Keeping appropriate client records and files (e.g. recording file notes) ⁴³	2.4%	12.1%	35.2%	49.1%	1.3%
Managing client relationships ⁴⁴	0.5%	7.5%	42.7%	47.7%	1.5%
Time management	1.4%	12.6%	38.4%	47.1%	0.5%
Recognising and managing conflicts of interest	4.0%	12.4%	36.0%	46.7%	0.9%
Ability to have difficult conversations with people you work with (i.e. clients and colleagues)	0.7%	11.8%	40.5%	46.5%	0.5%
Active listening	1.4%	10.0%	41.7%	46.4%	0.5%
Recognising and addressing ethical dilemmas	3.7%	12.1%	38.2%	44.3%	1.7%
Client advocacy	5.3%	15.7%	33.7%	41.9%	3.4%
Work planning and organisation	1.4%	12.6%	43.4%	41.7%	0.9%
Client interviewing	7.2%	14.9%	33.4%	41.6%	3.0%
Understanding of court processes	10.4%	17.9%	27.4%	41.1%	3.3%
Recognising and managing work-related stress	4.5%	18.5%	36.5%	40.0%	0.5%
Negotiation	2.7%	16.3%	39.8%	40.0%	1.2%
Legal research and analysis	3.4%	16.1%	40.9%	38.9%	0.7%

41. As set out in the methodology. Respondents received a subset of competencies. This resulted in between 373 to 469 responses (weighted) for individual competencies.

42. Understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area.

43. Keeping appropriate client records and files (e.g. recording file notes).

44. Managing client relationships (e.g. keeping clients informed of progress and managing expectations).

Competency	Importance to practice				
	'Not that important'	'Quite important'	'Very important'	'Critical'	'Not applicable'
Maintaining an appropriate work–life balance	5.0%	18.8%	37.9%	37.4%	0.9%
Dispute resolution	6.3%	18.4%	37.4%	34.7%	3.2%
Conflict management	5.7%	18.9%	40.0%	33.3%	2.2%
Identifying and addressing knowledge skills and gaps	1.1%	16.0%	49.3%	32.9%	0.7%
Coaching and mentoring ⁴⁵	9.7%	18.2%	36.4%	28.2%	7.5%
Accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate	7.6%	22.2%	39.6%	26.8%	3.8%
Being able to use legal and other business technology effectively and safely	6.2%	26.1%	41.1%	26.1%	0.5%
Managing client billing ⁴⁶	12.7%	14.5%	30.5%	23.6%	18.7%
Financial management	11.8%	22.3%	33.4%	23.2%	9.2%
Cultural awareness and sensitivity	16.7%	25.7%	33.8%	23.1%	0.7%
Understanding trust account obligations	21.2%	10.3%	18.7%	20.2%	29.6%
Staff management	15.2%	16.4%	29.5%	20.0%	18.8%
First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity	26.0%	25.8%	25.8%	16.8%	5.5%
Business planning	16.0%	27.9%	33.8%	13.8%	8.5%

Table 1 is ordered by the percentage of respondents rating each competency as 'critical' to their practice. At the top of the table, several competencies are almost universally recognised as being either 'critical' or 'very important'. Understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area, clear and effective verbal and written communication, critical thinking and analysis, and being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries) were each rated 'critical' by more than 60% of respondents, alongside negligible 'not that important' and 'not applicable' percentages. In all, 12 competencies were viewed as 'critical' by the majority of Victorian lawyers, forming a common core of what Victorian lawyers consider constitutes competent practice.

While importance progressively declines for competencies moving down Table 1, the majority of respondents consider all but 4 to be either 'very important' or 'critical'. If 'not applicable' responses are removed, all but one competency (First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity' at 45%) were considered 'very important' or 'critical' by the majority of respondents. In part, variation is also likely to reflect genuine variation in applicability to different roles and forms of legal practice rather than a view that specific items are unimportant in principle. This is explored further in this report regarding areas of practice.

45. Coaching and mentoring (for example, ability to effectively teach new staff necessary skills).

46. Managing client billing (for example, accurately scoping and costing work).

Further down Table 1, the picture requires more careful interpretation. For several practice management and managerial skills competencies, including managing client billing, understanding trust account obligations, financial management, staff management, and business planning, both ‘not that important’ and ‘not applicable’ rates are substantially elevated, with ‘not applicable’ reaching 30% for understanding trust account obligations and 19% for client billing. This reflects that some competencies are simply inapplicable to many forms of legal practice (and here, some ‘not that important’ responses may also capture this inapplicability).

The First Nations peoples’ cultural awareness and sensitivity competency warrants particular attention. Its ‘not that important’ rate is the highest in the table at 26%, though its ‘not applicable’ rate is comparatively low at 5%, unlike the practice management and managerial skills competencies where the 2 responses tend to move together. This indicates a competency that is generally applicable to work, but not regarded as a day-to-day priority. This is elaborated on in the area of law analysis provided later in this section.

By competency domain

Table 2 presents the average percentage of respondents rating competencies within each domain (as set in the methodology) as ‘critical’. Overall, respondents were most likely to rank capabilities relating to ‘ethics and professional responsibility’ as ‘critical’, followed by capabilities in ‘general professional skills’, ‘legal knowledge and how to apply it’, and ‘interpersonal and communication skills’. Respondents were less likely to rank competencies in ‘maintaining your professional development and wellbeing’ and ‘practice management and managerial skills’ as being critical.⁴⁷

Table 2 – Average percentage of competencies considered ‘critical’ for each competency domain

Domain	Avg % ‘critical’	Capabilities in domain (count)
Ethics and professional responsibility	51.4%	5
General professional skills	47.5%	5
Legal knowledge and how to apply it	43.6%	9
Interpersonal and communication skills	42.0%	10
Maintaining your professional development and wellbeing	34.3%	4
Practice management and managerial skills	23.7%	5

47. Domain averages reflect the mix of competencies within a domain. Domains containing a wider range of competency types (including some with greater role specificity) will tend to yield lower average ‘critical’ ratings than those comprising a more homogeneous set of broadly applicable (or more generic) competencies.

Within each domain, the range of 'critical' ratings across individual competencies varies considerably, reflecting the heterogeneity of competencies grouped within broader domains. In the legal knowledge and how to apply it domain, understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area had a 67% 'critical' while only 20% considered understanding trust account obligations as 'critical'. Similarly, within interpersonal and communication skills, clear and effective verbal and written communication was rated 'critical' by 66% of respondents, while only 17% considered First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity 'critical'. As with Table 1, within-domain differences in Table 2 are likely to reflect differential applicability of competencies to different forms of legal practice. Table 3 shows the individual item with the highest percentage of 'critical' ratings and highest percentage of 'not that important' ratings for each domain.

For each domain, Table 3 and 4 show the competency considered 'critical' by the largest percentage of respondents. In contrast, Table 4 shows the competency most likely to be considered 'not that important'. In particular, understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area, clear and effective verbal and written communication, and critical thinking and analysis stood out as critical skills that respondents valued. When it came to skills respondents rated as 'not that important' across different domains, First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity was rated highly (26%), as was Understanding trust account obligations (21%) and Business planning (16%).

Table 3 – The competency considered 'critical' by the largest percentage of respondents for each domain

Domain	Top competency ('critical')	% 'critical'
Legal knowledge and how to apply it	Understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area	67.4%
Interpersonal and communication skills	Clear and effective verbal and written communication	65.9%
General professional skills	Critical thinking and analysis	64.4%
Ethics and professional responsibility	Being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries)	62.6%
Maintaining your professional development and wellbeing	Recognising and managing work-related stress	40.0%
Practice management and managerial skills	Conflict management	33.3%

Table 4 – The competency considered ‘not that important’ by the largest percentage of respondents for each domain

Domain	Top competency (‘not that important’)	% ‘not that important’
Interpersonal and communication skills	First Nations peoples’ cultural awareness and sensitivity	26.0%
Legal knowledge and how to apply it	Understanding trust account obligations	21.2%
Practice management and managerial skills	Business planning	16.0%
Maintaining your professional development and wellbeing	Accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate	7.6%
General professional skills	Being able to use legal and other business technology effectively and safely	6.2%
Ethics and professional responsibility	Recognising and managing conflicts of interest	4.0%

By career stage

Table 5 shows the percentage of lawyers rating each competency as ‘critical’, broken down by the length of time they had held a practising certificate: early career (fewer than 5 years), mid-career (5 to 19 years), and late career (20 years or more). The final column in the table reports a p-value from simple statistical tests comparing the proportion rating each competency ‘critical’ for each practising certificate group.⁴⁸ The table is ordered from the smallest to the largest group difference (or largest to smallest p-value), so competencies that lawyers tend to agree on regarding the importance (irrespective of career stage) appear towards the top, and those where they differ appear towards the bottom. The ‘critical’ percentages are also shaded separately within each career stage column, highlighting the competencies each group rated as more or less critical.

48. This is a simple way to indicate where different career stage groups differed most and least in their assessments of the importance of different competencies.

Table 5 – Percentage of lawyers rating each competency as ‘critical’, by career stage

Competency	Less than 5 years	5–19 years	20 years or more	Group diff. p-value
Understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer’s practice area	64.8%	67.7%	66.4%	0.91
Recognising and addressing ethical dilemmas	41.1%	44.1%	45.2%	0.85
Legal writing	52.1%	55.2%	51.7%	0.81
Clear and effective verbal and written communication	67.5%	68.2%	64.3%	0.76
Managing professional integrity and courtesy with all people encountered in your practice	57.9%	59.2%	54.6%	0.72
Legal research and analysis	40.5%	40.9%	36.3%	0.71
Problem-solving	57.3%	61.5%	56.3%	0.68
Managing client billing	25.0%	21.2%	25.2%	0.67
Cognisant of duty to the court and administration of justice	55.7%	51.0%	49.6%	0.67
Active listening	47.7%	43.6%	49.2%	0.63
Managing cases and matters effectively	58.2%	55.5%	51.5%	0.62
Being able to use legal and other business technology effectively and safely	25.8%	23.0%	28.4%	0.60
Being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries)	55.7%	61.9%	62.7%	0.57
Critical thinking and analysis	59.7%	62.7%	66.9%	0.57
Identifying and addressing knowledge skills and gaps	37.3%	33.5%	30.1%	0.54
Staff management	19.7%	17.2%	22.7%	0.51
Cultural awareness and sensitivity	25.3%	23.0%	18.6%	0.48
Client interviewing	38.2%	39.5%	45.8%	0.46
Dispute resolution	40.0%	34.2%	31.1%	0.43
Understanding of court processes	41.8%	44.2%	36.4%	0.38
Financial management	17.3%	25.8%	21.4%	0.33
Ability to have difficult conversations with people you work with (i.e. clients and colleagues)	52.0%	50.0%	41.3%	0.25
Business planning	9.1%	16.7%	11.2%	0.20
Work planning and organisation	37.8%	47.2%	37.5%	0.19
Conflict management	38.0%	39.0%	28.7%	0.16
Managing client relationships	55.8%	50.0%	41.5%	0.12
Coaching and mentoring	37.0%	29.9%	23.0%	0.09
Recognising and managing conflicts of interest	39.8%	45.0%	54.8%	0.08
Negotiation	31.9%	40.9%	48.8%	0.07
Understanding trust account obligations	13.4%	21.5%	25.6%	0.05
Understanding of, and ability to, apply ethical principles	39.1%	55.6%	50.7%	0.05
Keeping appropriate client records and files (e.g. recording file notes)	56.9%	52.5%	40.2%	0.05
Client advocacy	53.9%	43.1%	34.4%	0.02
First Nations peoples’ cultural awareness and sensitivity	21.9%	18.2%	8.4%	0.01
Recognising and managing work-related stress	50.6%	40.3%	29.2%	0.01
Time management	51.9%	52.5%	34.1%	0.01
Maintaining an appropriate work–life balance	49.4%	40.2%	21.3%	0.00
Accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate	44.2%	28.3%	12.7%	0.00

Note: The final column shows where there is least difference (higher p-value) and greatest difference (lower p-value) between career stages.

Table 5 can be usefully interpreted across both shaded dimensions, in other words how widely a competency is regarded as ‘critical’ overall, and whether or not views differ by career stage. From this we can see competencies widely seen as ‘critical’ that lawyers at different career stages agree on, as well as competencies widely seen as ‘critical’ but on which views differ. We also see the competencies less often considered ‘critical’ that those at different career stages agree on and competencies less often seen as ‘critical’ but on which views differ. The results are interpreted in line with these 2 intersecting dimensions.

The first and largest group includes competencies more often regarded as ‘critical’ and rated consistently across career stages. This includes competencies such as understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer’s practice area, clear and effective verbal and written communication, critical thinking and analysis, problem-solving, and being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries), which have a comparatively high percentage of ‘critical’ ratings and little variation by career stage.⁴⁹

A second group of competencies were also relatively stable across career stages, but viewed as less critical overall. Here lower importance may reflect applicability rather than career stage, and included some factors associated with running a practice or business (for example, financial management and staff management), as well as being able to use legal and other business technology effectively and safely, managing client billing, and cultural awareness and sensitivity (where the lack of career stage variation contrasts with First Nations peoples’ cultural awareness).

A third group includes competencies more often regarded as critical, but where ratings differed by career stage. The clearest examples are keeping appropriate client records and files (e.g. recording file notes) (rated ‘critical’ by 57% of early career lawyers, falling to 40% of late career lawyers) and time management (rated ‘critical’ by 52% of early career lawyers, falling to 34% of late career lawyers). This fits the more hands-on, client-facing work that characterises earlier career stages that senior lawyers tend to delegate.

49. Comparing the 10 competencies most often rated ‘critical’ by each group, 7 competencies were present in all 3 lists. This included clear and effective verbal and written communication, critical thinking and analysis, problem-solving, understanding and ability to apply the law, managing professional integrity and courtesy with all people encountered in your practice, being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries), and managing cases and matters effectively.

Meanwhile, some competencies were viewed as comparatively less critical overall, while also varying by career stage. In most cases, this involved importance declining with seniority, with wellbeing and developmental competencies prominent. For example, maintaining an appropriate work–life balance (falling from 49% ‘critical’ to 21%), accessing support, supervision and mentoring (44% to 13%), and recognising and managing work-related stress (51% to 29%).⁵⁰ Conversely, some did tend to rise in importance with seniority, for example negotiation (32% to 49%), managing conflicts of interest (40% to 55%) and understanding trust account obligations (13% to 26%). First Nations peoples’ cultural awareness and sensitivity was also characterised by a low overall percentage considering it a ‘critical’ competency, though unlike more general cultural awareness and sensitivity, there was variation by career stage, with a marked decline in ‘critical’ ratings from 22% of early career lawyers, to 18% of mid-career, and 8% of those who had held a practising certificate for 20 years or more. Rather than applicability by role, this more likely reflects changes over time in legal education and professional expectations. So, while the percentage viewing the competency as ‘critical’ was low, we can reasonably expect its importance to rise over time as more recently admitted lawyers progress through their careers.

By area of law

Table 6 shows the percentage of lawyers rating each competency as critical, broken down by practice area, for the 4 substantive areas with the highest numbers of respondents in the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census: commercial law, criminal law, family law, and wills and estates.⁵¹ The final column shows the range in ‘critical’ ratings across these 4 areas for each competency, used here as a simple descriptive indicator of variation rather than a formal significance test.⁵² As for career stage, Table 6 is ordered by the extent to which percentage viewing each competency as ‘critical’ was stable, or varied (in this case by area of law). Competencies that lawyers tend to agree on regarding importance (irrespective of area of law) appear towards the top, and those where they differ appear towards the bottom. The ‘critical’ percentages are also shaded separately within each area of law column, highlighting the competencies each group rated as more or less critical. Table 6 can be read along 2 dimensions: the overall level of ‘critical’ ratings, and the degree to which those ratings vary across practice areas.

50. Client advocacy (54% to 34%) also followed a similar pattern. Accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate also appeared among the competencies that late career lawyers most often rate as not that important.
51. Analysis is limited to these 4 areas to ensure sufficient respondent numbers for reliable estimates ($n = 511, 319, 309$ and 302 respectively). Results for other areas are available on request from the Legal Services Research Centre.
52. The range column sets out the difference in percentage points between the highest and lowest ‘critical’ rating for each competency across the 4 practice areas included. It constitutes a simple descriptive indicator of variation rather than a formal statistical significance test, which would require adjusting for the fact that areas are not mutually exclusive.

Table 6 – Percentage of lawyers rating each competency as ‘critical’, by area of law (top 4 substantive areas only numerically)

	Commercial law	Criminal law	Family law	Wills and estates	Range
Understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area	68.3%	64.0%	62.9%	62.3%	6.0
Managing cases and matters effectively	54.5%	58.2%	53.4%	51.7%	6.5
Identifying and addressing knowledge skills and gaps	34.3%	31.1%	37.8%	34.9%	6.7
Accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate	20.0%	26.6%	24.7%	27.7%	7.7
Being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries)	61.1%	67.1%	66.3%	56.9%	10.2
Coaching and mentoring	24.4%	31.3%	33.8%	23.4%	10.4
Managing client billing	22.2%	13.6%	24.1%	23.4%	10.5
Managing professional integrity and courtesy with all people encountered in your practice	55.9%	57.8%	53.3%	47.1%	10.7
Critical thinking and analysis	62.0%	62.7%	64.5%	53.8%	10.7
Legal research and analysis	45.0%	43.0%	34.8%	34.2%	10.8
Clear and effective verbal and written communication	65.3%	64.2%	65.9%	54.9%	11.0
Conflict management	26.9%	32.9%	38.1%	35.5%	11.2
Managing client relationships	47.8%	40.0%	50.0%	51.9%	11.9
Time management	48.3%	53.3%	41.4%	43.2%	11.9
Dispute resolution	36.7%	35.4%	45.0%	32.9%	12.1
Business planning	19.7%	7.1%	11.5%	14.1%	12.6
Work planning and organisation	45.7%	43.7%	48.5%	35.6%	12.9
Active listening	44.1%	49.3%	51.3%	38.0%	13.3
Recognising and managing work-related stress	31.5%	45.1%	44.6%	32.9%	13.6
Staff management	15.3%	15.2%	30.4%	16.2%	15.2
Cognisant of duty to the court and administration of justice	49.5%	64.9%	54.9%	49.3%	15.6
Legal writing	64.1%	47.2%	63.4%	62.3%	16.9
Problem-solving	62.2%	64.1%	53.3%	46.4%	17.7
Keeping appropriate client records and files (e.g. recording file notes)	42.4%	60.3%	59.4%	46.4%	17.9
Being able to use legal and other business technology effectively and safely	29.8%	13.0%	31.3%	23.0%	18.3
Recognising and addressing ethical dilemmas	38.0%	43.8%	56.5%	42.0%	18.5
Maintaining an appropriate work–life balance	29.3%	41.5%	45.2%	26.6%	18.6
First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity	8.3%	27.3%	21.1%	13.4%	19.0
Recognising and managing conflicts of interest	42.5%	51.9%	62.9%	55.8%	20.4
Understanding of, and ability to, apply ethical principles	43.0%	63.5%	63.4%	45.0%	20.5
Ability to have difficult conversations with people you work with (i.e. clients and colleagues)	39.8%	57.1%	47.7%	34.6%	22.5
Cultural awareness and sensitivity	9.3%	30.6%	32.1%	17.8%	22.8
Client advocacy	39.5%	61.8%	51.9%	38.8%	23.0
Negotiation	42.3%	32.1%	55.1%	31.7%	23.4
Financial management	24.1%	10.7%	35.1%	32.9%	24.4
Client interviewing	36.4%	50.0%	62.9%	50.0%	26.5
Understanding trust account obligations	19.6%	13.0%	34.6%	47.7%	34.7
Understanding of court processes	25.2%	64.9%	57.1%	41.9%	39.7

Note: The final column shows where there is least difference (smallest range across values) and greatest difference (largest range) between areas.

Several competencies are rated 'critical' by a majority of lawyers in each of the 4 areas. This includes understanding and applying the law, clear and effective verbal and written communication, critical thinking and analysis, being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries), and managing cases and matters effectively. Such competencies are applicable and important across practice areas. Some other competencies are highly rated overall but show some variation across areas, in line with the characteristics of different forms of practice. Problem-solving, for instance, is rated 'critical' by 64% of criminal lawyers but only by 46% of wills and estates lawyers, while most commercial lawyers value legal writing (64%), which can be contrasted with criminal lawyers (47%).

Other competencies are less likely to be considered 'critical' across all 4 areas. This includes competencies such as business planning, managing client billing, accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate, and identifying and addressing knowledge skills and gaps. As with the career stage findings, relatively consistently low ratings are likely to reflect applicability to specific roles and settings rather than simply the area of law.

Where the practice area does make a difference, this is in line with core differences in the nature of work associated with different areas. For example, understanding of court processes shows the widest range in Table 6 at 40 percentage points and was rated 'critical' by 65% of criminal lawyers compared with only 25% of commercial lawyers. Client advocacy was also rated 'critical' by 62% of criminal lawyers, compared to 39% of those working in wills and estates. The same effect is evident in family practice, where client interviewing was rated 'critical' by 63% of family lawyers compared with 36% of commercial lawyers.⁵³

Among competencies viewed as less critical overall, the variation is often the most striking. For example, understanding trust account obligations has the second widest range in Table 6 at 35 percentage points, with 48% of wills and estates lawyers rating it 'critical', compared with 13% of criminal lawyers. Financial management is rated 'critical' by 35% of family lawyers but only 11% of criminal lawyers, while negotiation is considered 'critical' by 58% of family lawyers compared to 32% of those working in wills and estates.

Competencies associated with cultural awareness and sensitivity and First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity both merit specific comment. Both are more likely to be rated as 'critical' by criminal and family lawyers than by commercial or wills and estates practitioners, which is consistent with the greater exposure those lawyers have to marginalised, vulnerable client communities. The variation is substantial. General cultural awareness and sensitivity was rated 'critical' by 31% of criminal lawyers and 32% of family lawyers, compared with 17.8% of those in wills and estates and 9% of commercial lawyers. The pattern for First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity was similar, rated 'critical' by 27% of criminal lawyers and 21.1% of family lawyers, compared with 13% of those in wills and estates and 8.3% of commercial lawyers.

53. Conversely, several of these competencies are also among those least likely to be rated 'not that important' by the practitioners they are most relevant to.

How competencies cluster

This section explores the extent to which competencies cluster and the relationship between competencies based on how important participants ranked each competency. However, the way in which lawyers perceive the importance of competencies and how they relate to each other does not necessarily correspond to the domain structure set out in the methods section of this report. In some cases, competencies within a domain may relate strongly to each other and in other cases they may not. To explore the pairwise relationship between competencies in detail, Spearman rank correlations⁵⁴ were calculated between all pairs of competencies, excluding 'not applicable' responses. The full correlation matrix is in Appendix A.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the breadth of competencies lawyers viewed as important (Table 1), the majority of competencies were positively correlated. However, as illustrated in Appendix A, in some cases variations in strength of relationship could be informative.

The strongest correlations were between competencies that were conceptually close to each other or substantively related. So, for example, general and First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity are very strongly correlated ($\rho = 0.83$), as are recognising and managing work-related stress and maintaining an appropriate work-life balance ($\rho = 0.76$). Similarly, being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries) and cognisance of duty to the court and administration of justice ($\rho = 0.72$), and problem-solving and critical thinking and analysis ($\rho = 0.72$), were strongly related.

Beyond such pairings, a broad set of competencies spanning substantive legal knowledge, ethics, and more general interpersonal and professional skills tended to be rated as important together. For instance, understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area, understanding of, and ability to, apply ethical principles, problem-solving, clear and effective verbal and written communication, and managing professional integrity and courtesy with all people encountered in your practice all positively correlated reasonably strongly with each other. Associations also cut across the subject matter domains. For example, a lawyer who viewed applying the law as an important competency also tended to perceive clear communication and ethical practice as important. These competencies belong to different domains, and appear related by broad applicability (across roles and practice areas) rather than shared (domain) subject matter.

A further pattern links the maintaining your professional development and wellbeing competencies. Recognising and managing work-related stress and maintaining an appropriate work-life balance are particularly closely associated ($\rho = 0.76$), and both connect in turn to accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate, which is itself linked to identifying and addressing knowledge skills and gaps ($\rho = 0.51$). As with other patterns discussed, this cuts across the report's subject matter domains.

54. Spearman's rank correlation coefficients (ρ) measure the strength and direction of association between 2 variables based on their rank ordering, and is appropriate for the type of ordinal data responses recorded for the perceived importance of competencies. Rho values range from -1 (a perfect negative association) through 0 (no association) to +1 (a perfect positive association).

Contrasting patterns were evident elsewhere, for example among competencies related to the running of a practice, such as understanding trust account obligations, managing client billing, financial management, and business planning. These correlate strongly with one another (for example, for managing client billing and financial management, $\rho = 0.61$) but weakly, and in some cases slightly negatively, with some broadly applicable competencies. For example, understanding trust account obligations correlates weakly with understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area ($\rho = 0.19$) and slightly negatively with problem-solving ($\rho = -0.11$). What links these competencies is not domain membership, which spans both legal knowledge and how to apply it and practice management and managerial skills, but a shared dependence on whether or not a lawyer runs or helps to manage a practice, which is something that bears little relationship to how they value substantive legal or ethical competencies. A similar dependence on practice context can also be seen elsewhere, for example, linking staff management and coaching and mentoring ($\rho = 0.60$), both of which also relate weakly to the core legal and ethical competencies.

A similar detachment from the substantive legal and ethical competencies is evident for the cultural awareness and sensitivity items. First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity, for example, correlates weakly or slightly negatively with legal writing ($\rho = -0.10$) and critical thinking and analysis ($\rho = -0.03$). As with the practice-running competencies, the relevance of these competencies appears to depend heavily on practice settings and particular client contexts, such that they are rated independently of core competencies.



03

Discussion

This section provides further commentary on the findings detailed in the previous section. It considers the competencies that the practitioners rated as ‘critical’ or ‘not as important’, observed trends in area of law and seniority, and the implications for the profession. It concludes by considering directions for future research.



A shared understanding of competent practice

The findings point to a profession with a broadly shared understanding of what competent legal practice requires. Across the items, Victorian lawyers identified a wide range of capabilities as being important to practice. These competencies span legal knowledge, ethics, communication, critical thinking, client-focused skills, and broader professional capabilities.

While there was variation in the importance attached to some competencies, a relatively stable core emerged that transcended career stage and practice area. The competencies most often regarded as ‘critical’ were rated as such by more than 60% of respondents, indicating broad agreement across the profession. These were: understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer’s practice area; clear and effective verbal and written communication; critical thinking and analysis; and being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries).

Beyond the core, the generally broad concept of competence is consistent with the trajectory of legal education and regulatory scholarship over recent decades. Competency frameworks and influential accounts of legal professional formation have progressively moved beyond narrow conceptions of legal knowledge to encompass a wider range of professional behaviours, skills and attributes.⁵⁵ What is notable in the present findings is not simply that such frameworks advocate a broad conception of competence, but that the profession itself appears to endorse it. Competent practice was not reduced to knowledge of the law. Rather, lawyers placed substantial importance on communication, ethical judgment, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, professional integrity, and other capabilities that contemporary competency frameworks identify as being central to effective legal practice.

Variation reflects the nature of practice, not disagreement

Despite endorsement of a broad array of competencies, some items were considered notably less important than others. However, lower ratings should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence that a competency is regarded as irrelevant. Rather, much of the observed variation appears to reflect differences in the nature of legal work. Competencies associated with running a practice or business, such as understanding trust account obligations, financial management, managing client billing and business planning, attracted lower ratings overall but also higher rates of ‘not applicable’ responses. Similarly, substantial variation by practice area occurred where a competency was particularly relevant to some forms of practice but less central to others. Understanding of court processes was considerably more important in criminal practice than commercial practice, while understanding trust account obligations assumed greater significance in wills and estates practice. These patterns suggest that lawyers distinguish between competencies that are universally required and those for which importance depends on the context of legal service delivery.

55. Sullivan et al., *Educating Lawyers*; Shultz and Zedeck, “Predicting Lawyer Effectiveness: Broadening the Basis for Law School Admission Decisions,” 620–661; Webb et al., *Setting Standards*; Daicoff, “Expanding the Lawyer’s Toolkit of Skills and Competencies”.

The correlation analysis reinforces this interpretation. Competencies did not cluster primarily according to the subject matter domains used in the framework. Instead, the strongest pattern was a broad cluster of legal, ethical, communicative and professional competencies that tended to be valued together across the profession. Standing somewhat apart were competencies for which importance depends on particular roles, organisational responsibilities or client contexts. Practice management and managerial skills competencies correlate strongly with one another but only weakly with the broadly applicable competencies. A similar pattern emerged for cultural awareness and sensitivity competencies.

Lawyers share a strong consensus about the competencies that underpin practice generally, while differences arise principally where a competency is relevant only to particular kinds of work. Such variation should be expected in a profession that serves diverse clients, operates across markedly different practice environments, and encompasses a spectrum of responsibilities ranging from frontline legal service delivery to business ownership and organisational leadership.

Competence across a career: development, responsibility and wellbeing

Although the core competencies remained relatively stable across career stages, some notable shifts emerged. Unsurprisingly, competencies associated with senior responsibility, including negotiation, conflicts of interest and understanding trust account obligations, tended to increase in perceived importance as lawyers became more experienced. As practitioners progress through their careers, they are more likely to assume responsibility for complex client relationships, supervision, business management and strategic decision-making – functions that increase the salience of these competencies.

Conversely, early career lawyers were more likely to rate wellbeing and developmental competencies as being important. Maintaining an appropriate work–life balance, accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate, and recognising and managing work-related stress all declined substantially in perceived importance with seniority.

Focusing specifically on wellbeing, if those in leadership positions place less importance on competencies linked to wellbeing, this may have consequences for the sustainability of the profession and for the experiences of early career lawyers. This possibility resonates with growing evidence concerning lawyer wellbeing and the relationship between workplace culture, supervision, stress and professional functioning.⁵⁶

However, the findings should not be taken as evidence that senior lawyers are indifferent to wellbeing in its entirety. Yet they do raise important questions about how wellbeing competencies are understood across the professional lifecycle. If lawyers most directly responsible for shaping organisational culture are also those least likely to regard such competencies as critical, there may be a risk that wellbeing becomes viewed as a developmental concern for junior lawyers rather than an ongoing professional responsibility relevant throughout a legal career. Future research exploring the relationship between competency, wellbeing and professional role could usefully examine this question in greater depth.

56. Hagland et al., *Wellbeing in the Legal Profession: Findings from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census*.

Cultural awareness and First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity

Overall, importance ratings for cultural awareness and sensitivity and First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity were comparatively low. At the same time, important variation was evident across practice area and career stage for both competencies. For example, criminal and family lawyers attached greater importance to those competencies than lawyers in commercial law or wills and estates practice, which, as with other competencies, may be more to do with salience than a disregard for that competency. Criminal and family lawyers generally have greater exposure to marginalised, vulnerable client communities, including those from diverse cultural backgrounds, compared to commercial or wills and estates practitioners. In particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are disproportionately overrepresented in the criminal justice system, meaning First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity competency is of increased relevance to those practising in criminal law.⁵⁷

Early career lawyers were also more likely than late career lawyers to regard First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity as critical, a pattern consistent with changes in legal education and shifting societal expectations more broadly. However, as with other competencies discussed, these findings should be interpreted cautiously. Lower ratings do not necessarily imply opposition or a failure to recognise their value. For some lawyers, cultural awareness may genuinely occupy a less central place in day-to-day practice. Nonetheless, the findings carry practical significance given the legal profession's obligations to serve diverse communities and support access to justice. They also establish a baseline against which future changes in professional attitudes can be assessed.

Limitations and future directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Respondents only assessed a randomised subset of competencies, meaning the study does not provide a complete individual-level profile across all 38 competencies.

The most important direction for future research concerns the distinction between importance and proficiency. This study provides insight into how lawyers value different competencies, but not how effectively they believe those competencies are performed. Measuring proficiency alongside importance would allow the gap between the 2 to be quantified, and provide further insight into learning and development needs. Such an approach represents a logical next step in understanding how competency is experienced and developed across the profession.

57. See Australian Law Reform Commission, *Pathways to Justice: Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, ALRC Report 133 (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2017); Christine Coumarelos et al., *Legal Australia-Wide Survey: Legal Need in Australia* (Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, 2012).

Conclusion

This study found that the Victorian legal profession shares a broad and largely consistent understanding of what competent practice constitutes. While the importance of some competencies varies according to career stage, area of practice and professional role, there is strong agreement on a stable core that combines legal expertise with ethical, interpersonal and professional capabilities. These findings reinforce the view that competence is not simply a technical standard or regulatory construct, but a multidimensional foundation for effective legal practice.

The significance of this shared understanding extends beyond the profession itself. Competence underpins the quality of legal services, the functioning of the legal system, and the public's ability to obtain fair and effective outcomes through it. A profession that agrees on what competence demands has the foundation for delivering it. Ultimately, competence is not an abstract ideal or merely a professional aspiration. It is the means by which lawyers help people navigate legal problems and move toward their just resolution. In that sense, competence is not only a hallmark of professionalism, but a condition of access to justice itself.

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Appendix



Appendix A

The correlation (Spearman's rank) between pairs of competencies.¹

Item #	Competency
1	Understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area
2	Understanding of court processes
3	Legal research and analysis
4	Legal writing
5	Managing cases and matters effectively
6	Understanding trust account obligations
7	Keeping appropriate client records and files (e.g. recording file notes)
8	Client advocacy
9	Managing client billing
10	Understanding of, and ability to, apply ethical principles
11	Being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries)
12	Recognising and addressing ethical dilemmas
13	Recognising and managing conflicts of interest
14	Cognisant of duty to the court and administration of justice
15	Cultural awareness and sensitivity
16	First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity
17	Clear and effective verbal and written communication
18	Active listening
19	Negotiation
20	Dispute resolution
21	Managing professional integrity and courtesy with all people encountered in your practice
22	Ability to have difficult conversations with people you work with (i.e. clients and colleagues)
23	Managing client relationships
24	Client interviewing
25	Recognising and managing work-related stress
26	Maintaining an appropriate work-life balance
27	Identifying and addressing knowledge skills and gaps
28	Accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate
29	Problem-solving
30	Being able to use legal and other business technology effectively and safely
31	Time management
32	Work planning and organisation
33	Critical thinking and analysis
34	Financial management
35	Business planning
36	Conflict management
37	Coaching and mentoring
38	Staff management

1. Correlation coefficients (rho values) range from -1 (a perfect negative association) through 0 (no association) to +1 (a perfect positive association).

Competency item number

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	1.00	0.33	0.43	0.40	0.58	0.19	0.47	0.42	0.30	0.61	0.43	0.54	0.41	0.55	0.26	0.14	0.40	0.31	0.41
	0.33	1.00	0.38	0.43	0.33	0.18	0.39	0.50	0.37	0.34	0.46	0.29	0.24	0.62	0.33	0.31	0.33	0.09	0.16
	0.43	0.38	1.00	0.44	0.31	0.01	0.28	0.32	0.28	0.30	0.43	0.36	0.36	0.43	0.18	0.19	0.42	0.38	0.21
	0.40	0.43	0.44	1.00	0.23	0.08	0.40	0.15	0.13	0.25	0.17	0.22	0.31	0.26	-0.04	-0.10	0.44	0.23	0.43
	0.58	0.33	0.31	0.23	1.00	0.17	0.43	0.35	0.23	0.36	0.45	0.35	0.33	0.40	0.17	0.20	0.58	0.21	0.36
	0.19	0.18	0.01	0.08	0.17	1.00	0.24	0.17	0.42	0.20	0.17	0.31	0.27	0.06	-0.03	-0.11	0.03	0.08	0.23
	0.47	0.39	0.28	0.40	0.43	0.24	1.00	0.41	0.22	0.34	0.51	0.46	0.46	0.31	0.30	0.38	0.28	0.26	0.21
	0.42	0.50	0.32	0.15	0.35	0.17	0.41	1.00	0.30	0.39	0.47	0.37	0.45	0.50	0.28	0.15	0.29	0.49	0.44
	0.30	0.37	0.28	0.13	0.23	0.42	0.22	0.30	1.00	0.03	0.29	0.19	0.29	0.24	0.21	-0.13	0.17	0.23	0.38
	0.61	0.34	0.30	0.25	0.36	0.20	0.34	0.39	0.03	1.00	0.58	0.61	0.64	0.61	0.28	0.26	0.39	0.66	0.40
	0.43	0.46	0.43	0.17	0.45	0.17	0.51	0.47	0.29	0.58	1.00	0.58	0.46	0.72	0.13	0.21	0.14	0.49	0.35
	0.54	0.29	0.36	0.22	0.35	0.31	0.46	0.37	0.19	0.61	0.58	1.00	0.65	0.60	0.43	0.22	0.38	0.34	0.27
	0.41	0.24	0.36	0.31	0.33	0.27	0.46	0.45	0.29	0.64	0.46	0.65	1.00	0.52	0.40	0.32	0.37	0.48	0.28
	0.55	0.62	0.43	0.26	0.40	0.06	0.31	0.50	0.24	0.61	0.72	0.60	0.52	1.00	0.29	0.30	0.22	0.35	0.21
	0.26	0.33	0.18	-0.04	0.17	-0.03	0.30	0.28	0.21	0.28	0.13	0.43	0.40	0.29	1.00	0.83	0.12	0.35	0.22
	0.14	0.31	0.19	-0.10	0.20	-0.11	0.38	0.15	-0.13	0.26	0.21	0.22	0.32	0.30	0.83	1.00	0.15	0.19	0.14
	0.40	0.33	0.42	0.44	0.58	0.03	0.28	0.29	0.17	0.39	0.14	0.38	0.37	0.22	0.12	0.15	1.00	0.53	0.35
	0.31	0.09	0.38	0.23	0.21	0.08	0.26	0.49	0.23	0.66	0.49	0.34	0.48	0.35	0.35	0.19	0.53	1.00	0.43
	0.41	0.16	0.21	0.43	0.36	0.23	0.21	0.44	0.38	0.40	0.35	0.27	0.28	0.21	0.22	0.14	0.35	0.43	1.00
	0.35	0.48	0.25	0.19	0.44	0.10	0.35	0.50	0.20	0.35	0.23	0.16	0.47	0.43	0.15	0.12	0.37	0.16	0.30
	0.59	0.23	0.44	0.48	0.48	0.02	0.48	0.42	0.04	0.43	0.57	0.30	0.48	0.47	0.23	0.36	0.48	0.54	0.34
	0.29	0.30	0.21	0.19	0.31	-0.01	0.30	0.33	0.05	0.34	0.37	0.19	0.12	0.28	0.32	0.27	0.44	0.47	0.45
	0.46	0.16	0.35	0.30	0.49	0.39	0.54	0.40	0.34	0.24	0.13	0.19	0.40	-0.01	0.17	0.01	0.28	0.36	0.32
	0.43	0.50	0.37	0.27	0.31	0.46	0.52	0.52	0.45	0.47	0.45	0.54	0.48	0.43	0.33	0.07	0.24	0.46	0.40
	0.24	0.10	0.39	0.15	0.57	0.08	0.10	0.34	0.15	0.24	0.24	0.17	0.21	-0.02	0.51	0.31	0.12	0.33	0.32
	0.37	0.15	0.32	0.09	0.31	0.11	0.40	0.08	0.14	0.26	0.23	0.27	0.26	0.33	0.33	0.38	0.13	0.35	0.21
	0.51	0.22	0.50	0.32	0.31	0.09	0.50	0.39	0.35	0.48	0.36	0.40	0.44	0.30	0.24	0.22	0.31	0.48	0.55
	0.50	0.36	0.10	0.06	0.37	0.06	0.42	0.26	0.27	0.26	0.27	0.43	0.47	0.22	0.42	0.17	0.43	0.27	0.31
	0.66	0.17	0.23	0.34	0.41	-0.11	0.44	0.45	0.08	0.25	0.22	0.34	0.37	0.37	0.26	0.12	0.42	0.42	0.34
	0.31	0.12	0.34	0.10	0.32	0.26	0.22	0.27	0.33	0.12	0.30	0.12	0.28	0.10	0.21	0.10	0.26	0.32	0.35
	0.45	0.16	0.47	0.40	0.36	0.09	0.24	0.22	0.00	0.34	0.25	0.33	0.30	0.35	0.37	0.08	0.34	0.40	0.22
	0.40	0.16	0.25	0.30	0.43	0.12	0.43	0.21	0.10	0.37	-0.06	0.29	0.29	0.11	0.42	0.18	0.62	0.40	0.27
	0.52	0.25	0.35	0.49	0.26	0.11	0.32	0.41	0.13	0.29	0.27	0.14	0.35	0.32	0.08	-0.03	0.55	0.55	0.40
	0.25	0.12	0.49	0.05	0.15	0.51	0.07	0.01	0.61	0.14	0.10	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.22	-0.05	0.10	0.17	0.22
	0.12	-0.08	0.08	0.22	0.20	0.41	0.13	0.02	0.38	0.04	0.06	0.23	0.29	0.06	0.00	-0.02	0.18	0.24	0.26
	0.29	0.42	0.30	0.18	0.37	0.31	0.38	0.44	0.21	0.52	0.26	0.43	0.50	0.37	0.35	0.23	0.36	0.47	0.47
	0.12	0.11	0.15	0.11	0.30	0.15	0.13	0.17	0.28	0.24	0.31	0.28	0.25	0.19	0.16	0.11	-0.01	0.36	0.26
	0.05	-0.06	0.09	0.17	0.07	0.44	0.25	0.06	0.22	0.07	0.05	0.15	0.19	-0.06	0.29	0.19	0.05	0.12	-0.05

Item #	Competency
1	Understanding of, and ability to, apply law relevant to lawyer's practice area
2	Understanding of court processes
3	Legal research and analysis
4	Legal writing
5	Managing cases and matters effectively
6	Understanding trust account obligations
7	Keeping appropriate client records and files (e.g. recording file notes)
8	Client advocacy
9	Managing client billing
10	Understanding of, and ability to, apply ethical principles
11	Being able to comply with professional conduct rules (e.g. maintaining client confidentiality and professional boundaries)
12	Recognising and addressing ethical dilemmas
13	Recognising and managing conflicts of interest
14	Cognisant of duty to the court and administration of justice
15	Cultural awareness and sensitivity
16	First Nations peoples' cultural awareness and sensitivity
17	Clear and effective verbal and written communication
18	Active listening
19	Negotiation
20	Dispute resolution
21	Managing professional integrity and courtesy with all people encountered in your practice
22	Ability to have difficult conversations with people you work with (i.e. clients and colleagues)
23	Managing client relationships
24	Client interviewing
25	Recognising and managing work-related stress
26	Maintaining an appropriate work-life balance
27	Identifying and addressing knowledge skills and gaps
28	Accessing support, supervision and mentoring when appropriate
29	Problem-solving
30	Being able to use legal and other business technology effectively and safely
31	Time management
32	Work planning and organisation
33	Critical thinking and analysis
34	Financial management
35	Business planning
36	Conflict management
37	Coaching and mentoring
38	Staff management

Competency item number

	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38
	0.35	0.59	0.29	0.46	0.43	0.24	0.37	0.51	0.50	0.66	0.31	0.45	0.40	0.52	0.25	0.12	0.29	0.12	0.05
	0.48	0.23	0.30	0.16	0.50	0.10	0.15	0.22	0.36	0.17	0.12	0.16	0.16	0.25	0.12	-0.08	0.42	0.11	-0.06
	0.25	0.44	0.21	0.35	0.37	0.39	0.32	0.50	0.10	0.23	0.34	0.47	0.25	0.35	0.49	0.08	0.30	0.15	0.09
	0.19	0.48	0.19	0.30	0.27	0.15	0.09	0.32	0.06	0.34	0.10	0.40	0.30	0.49	0.05	0.22	0.18	0.11	0.17
	0.44	0.48	0.31	0.49	0.31	0.57	0.31	0.31	0.37	0.41	0.32	0.36	0.43	0.26	0.15	0.20	0.37	0.30	0.07
	0.10	0.02	-0.01	0.39	0.46	0.08	0.11	0.09	0.06	-0.11	0.26	0.09	0.12	0.11	0.51	0.41	0.31	0.15	0.44
	0.35	0.48	0.30	0.54	0.52	0.10	0.40	0.50	0.42	0.44	0.22	0.24	0.43	0.32	0.07	0.13	0.38	0.13	0.25
	0.50	0.42	0.33	0.40	0.52	0.34	0.08	0.39	0.26	0.45	0.27	0.22	0.21	0.41	0.01	0.02	0.44	0.17	0.06
	0.20	0.04	0.05	0.34	0.45	0.15	0.14	0.35	0.27	0.08	0.33	0.00	0.10	0.13	0.61	0.38	0.21	0.28	0.22
	0.35	0.43	0.34	0.24	0.47	0.24	0.26	0.48	0.26	0.25	0.12	0.34	0.37	0.29	0.14	0.04	0.52	0.24	0.07
	0.23	0.57	0.37	0.13	0.45	0.24	0.23	0.36	0.27	0.22	0.30	0.25	-0.06	0.27	0.10	0.06	0.26	0.31	0.05
	0.16	0.30	0.19	0.19	0.54	0.17	0.27	0.40	0.43	0.34	0.12	0.33	0.29	0.14	0.26	0.23	0.43	0.28	0.15
	0.47	0.48	0.12	0.40	0.48	0.21	0.26	0.44	0.47	0.37	0.28	0.30	0.29	0.35	0.26	0.29	0.50	0.25	0.19
	0.43	0.47	0.28	-0.01	0.43	-0.02	0.33	0.30	0.22	0.37	0.10	0.35	0.11	0.32	0.26	0.06	0.37	0.19	-0.06
	0.15	0.23	0.32	0.17	0.33	0.51	0.33	0.24	0.42	0.26	0.21	0.37	0.42	0.08	0.22	0.00	0.35	0.16	0.29
	0.12	0.36	0.27	0.01	0.07	0.31	0.38	0.22	0.17	0.12	0.10	0.08	0.18	-0.03	-0.05	-0.02	0.23	0.11	0.19
	0.37	0.48	0.44	0.28	0.24	0.12	0.13	0.31	0.43	0.42	0.26	0.34	0.62	0.55	0.10	0.18	0.36	-0.01	0.05
	0.16	0.54	0.47	0.36	0.46	0.33	0.35	0.48	0.27	0.42	0.32	0.40	0.40	0.55	0.17	0.24	0.47	0.36	0.12
	0.30	0.34	0.45	0.32	0.40	0.32	0.21	0.55	0.31	0.34	0.35	0.22	0.27	0.40	0.22	0.26	0.47	0.26	-0.05
	1.00	0.27	0.39	0.21	0.42	0.13	-0.01	0.44	0.38	0.15	0.22	0.34	0.28	0.11	0.11	0.31	0.48	0.27	0.14
	0.27	1.00	0.31	0.37	0.43	0.45	0.22	0.41	0.34	0.46	0.31	0.30	0.29	0.32	0.16	0.07	0.42	0.17	0.19
	0.39	0.31	1.00	0.47	0.49	0.35	0.34	0.57	0.28	0.36	0.18	0.39	0.29	0.41	0.12	0.21	0.33	0.23	0.18
	0.21	0.37	0.47	1.00	0.25	0.28	0.25	0.50	0.45	0.47	0.35	0.45	0.41	0.04	0.11	0.24	0.53	0.26	0.26
	0.42	0.43	0.49	0.25	1.00	0.18	0.16	0.40	0.41	0.27	0.37	0.18	0.29	0.26	0.42	0.15	0.49	0.17	0.07
	0.13	0.45	0.35	0.28	0.18	1.00	0.76	0.31	0.50	0.39	0.39	0.58	0.31	0.26	0.10	0.29	0.29	0.39	0.23
	-0.01	0.22	0.34	0.25	0.16	0.76	1.00	0.42	0.41	0.29	0.24	0.34	0.36	0.22	0.14	0.14	0.22	0.17	0.21
	0.44	0.41	0.57	0.50	0.40	0.31	0.42	1.00	0.51	0.47	0.43	0.38	0.45	0.44	0.22	0.23	0.37	0.43	0.25
	0.38	0.34	0.28	0.45	0.41	0.50	0.41	0.51	1.00	0.43	0.36	0.32	0.27	0.17	0.15	0.29	0.32	0.55	0.25
	0.15	0.46	0.36	0.47	0.27	0.39	0.29	0.47	0.43	1.00	0.13	0.49	0.22	0.72	0.11	0.18	0.31	0.16	0.20
	0.22	0.31	0.18	0.35	0.37	0.39	0.24	0.43	0.36	0.13	1.00	0.39	0.42	0.26	0.42	0.30	0.24	0.43	0.17
	0.34	0.30	0.39	0.45	0.18	0.58	0.34	0.38	0.32	0.49	0.39	1.00	0.58	0.47	0.25	0.18	0.28	0.24	0.21
	0.28	0.29	0.29	0.41	0.29	0.31	0.36	0.45	0.27	0.22	0.42	0.58	1.00	0.36	0.34	0.35	0.32	0.37	0.35
	0.11	0.32	0.41	0.04	0.26	0.26	0.22	0.44	0.17	0.72	0.26	0.47	0.36	1.00	0.26	0.21	0.17	0.20	0.01
	0.11	0.16	0.12	0.11	0.42	0.10	0.14	0.22	0.15	0.11	0.42	0.25	0.34	0.26	1.00	0.55	0.21	-0.04	0.26
	0.31	0.07	0.21	0.24	0.15	0.29	0.14	0.23	0.29	0.18	0.30	0.18	0.35	0.21	0.55	1.00	0.25	0.36	0.43
	0.48	0.42	0.33	0.53	0.49	0.29	0.22	0.37	0.32	0.31	0.24	0.28	0.32	0.17	0.21	0.25	1.00	0.30	0.25
	0.27	0.17	0.23	0.26	0.17	0.39	0.17	0.43	0.55	0.16	0.43	0.24	0.37	0.20	-0.04	0.36	0.30	1.00	0.60
	0.14	0.19	0.18	0.26	0.07	0.23	0.21	0.25	0.25	0.20	0.17	0.21	0.35	0.01	0.26	0.43	0.25	0.60	1.00

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