



# Myriad reasons for further law study

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Legal employers don't care much about postgraduate qualifications when hiring, according to David Buckley, a partner with Taylor Root, a firm which specialises in legal and compliance recruitment.

"It doesn't really make much difference to lawyers finding a job or otherwise," he says.

"You can have a master's degree but, to be honest, it's really about the experience you've gained on the job."

Universities offer a wide variety of postgraduate legal courses. Professional development accounts for some of this demand, but in large part it comes down to the desires of lawyers, says John Williams, the dean of the University of Adelaide's law school.

"There are practitioners who take their own careers very seriously and want to keep their own minds and careers moving ahead," he says. "Law firms realise that if they want to hold on to their best people they need to be supportive."

At Mallesons Stephen Jaques, employees who enrol in formal



Options ... PhD student Madeleine Fraser studies neuro-law. Photo: TAMARA VONINSKI

education are offered financial assistance for tuition fees and study leave.

The firm's graduate resourcing manager, Sam Garner, says although master's-qualified applicants occasionally come through the graduate recruitment process, in most cases further study is done once an employee has

settled upon a specialist practice area. A qualified lawyer might do a master's degree in tax or applied finance, for example. These courses typically require two years of full-time study or twice that in part-time mode.

"For experienced hires we do not normally seek lawyers with postgraduate qualifications,"

Garner says. "However, if someone has completed a master's or diploma, it would certainly be recognised."

Law academics say a peculiarity of the legal profession — unlike engineering, for example — is the seniority of those who enrol in master's or higher degrees by research.

"People come to doctorates for all manner of reasons," says Natalie Klein, the dean of Macquarie University's law school.

"It can be people who are later on in their careers and they just feel they want that intellectual stimulation. Or they might have that one particular project they've always had an interest in but have never sat down and done it."

Practitioners in certain disciplines are also more likely than others to pursue higher-level legal qualifications, Klein says.

"My field is international law and a doctorate is seen as a prerequisite in some respects, just to show you've got that level of specialised knowledge in the field."

There are also the career-changers, as well as those outside

the profession who don't want to become a practising lawyer but need to learn more about the law.

"Impressionistically I think the bigger market is people coming from non-law backgrounds wanting to learn something about law," Klein says. "Law is one of those areas where it does feed into a lot of different businesses and jobs, and so having some idea of the law as it relates to your field is going to be useful for your day-to-day work as well as employment opportunities."

In the case of Madeleine Fraser, postgraduate study is all about new frontiers. Her clinical psychology doctorate at Macquarie is in the emerging field of neuro-law, which deals with developments in neuroscience and their impact on legal processes. It is particularly relevant in case judgments about a person's mental capacity.

So new is the field, Fraser says, the job she ends up doing may not even exist yet. Ideally, she'd like to be an adviser to lawyers or judges. "It's like the rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland*," Fraser says. "Once you get involved in this area, it just opens up more and more options."