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Post-qualification pathways for future legal eagles

QUALIFYING with a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree is a massive milestone – the culmination of years of hard work, late nights, intense focus and unrelenting dedication. But as many law graduates realise when they leave the university gates for the last time, achieving this notable qualification is only the first step on the road to becoming a legal professional.

“Those graduating with an LLB degree often have many questions and concerns regarding their future,” says Riyaadh Young, Head of Programme at The Independent Institute of Education.

“They need to understand that there are various pathways to employment, and that they need to put in the work to investigate the options in the jobs marketplace and what the right approach is for them.”

Young says that traditionally, law graduates either became attorneys or advocates. However, there are now many more options available to graduates including in academia, at the National Prosecuting Authority, in non-law related services, and via self-employment.

ATTORNEYS

LLB graduates who want to become attorneys now need to secure a Practical Vocational Training Contract at a reputable law firm. Assuming the graduate secures this contract, they are

then expected to have gainful employment after completing the training. The candidate legal practitioner will be expected to complete a minimum of two years of training. Alternatively, they can undertake six months of practical legal training at the Law Society of South Africa’s Legal Education and Development (LEAD) division to reduce their training contract to one year in preparation for the Competency Based Examinations for Legal Practitioners. These four examinations have to be completed and passed prior to the candidate legal practitioner being in a position to make application to the High Court for admission as an attorney.

ADVOCATES

“Pupillage” is the pathway towards becoming a practising advocate in what is referred to as private practice. This path requires a year of unpaid pupillage, after which the “pupil” is expected to write and pass the National Bar Examination of the General Council of the Bar.

ACADEMIA

Entering academia requires the graduate to study further to hone their knowledge and research skills in order to become an expert in a field of their choice. The graduate will be expected to complete a two to three-year LLM/MPhil degree to qualify as a lecturer at

a foundational level. To progress further in academia, they would then be expected to complete their PhD/LLD degree, which takes between two and five years to complete. This career path requires a passion for lifelong learning and teaching, and gaining a reputation as a peer-reviewed published scholar.

NPA

The National Prosecuting Authority recently re-opened the Aspirant Prosecutor Programme. A graduate who is accepted to this programme will be expected to pass the entry exam, before practising as an aspirant prosecutor for one year. After completing this process, they may apply for a permanent position as a prosecutor.

NON-LAW RELATED

There are many careers where a law degree is required or is even considered an advantage, but where the focus of the field is not law-specific. These career paths can be found in a variety of sectors including financial services, human resources, labour relations and commercial as well as within non-profit organisations.

SELF-EMPLOYMENT

LLB graduates have a strong foundation from which to launch entrepreneurial ventures, as a law degree provides graduates with the tools needed to create their own employ-



LLB graduates have a wide range of career options available to them. | Freepik

ment across a wide range of industries.

Graduates who have completed their practical vocational training, passed the competency based examinations and been admitted as an attorney can even practice for their own account, provided they have met the other legal and practical requirements.

“Becoming a successful legal

practitioner requires LLB students to have both critical thinking skills and research skills. This is why it is important that prospective LLB students ensure their higher education institution of choice provides research-based modules and application styled assessments to ensure they have a competitive advantage when applying for positions,” Young concludes.