

FIRST NATIONAL LLB WRITING DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

On 11 and 12 September 2014 delegates from 12 law faculties in South Africa along with representatives from various branches of the profession and a number of language experts gathered in Stellenbosch for the first national workshop on the development of LLB graduates' writing abilities.

The workshop was organised by Geo Quinot and Theo Broodryk of the Stellenbosch Law Faculty. The aim was to start a conversation between law teachers and other stakeholders at a national level on what can be done to develop law students' writing abilities.

In opening the workshop Quinot expressed the idea behind the event as follows:

"There can be little doubt that being able to write properly within the discipline is a core attribute of a law graduate. One can hardly call yourself a jurist without the ability to skilfully convey your thoughts in writing.

But writing skills is not only important from a vocational perspective – it is not something that law faculties should only be concerned about if they want to prepare their students for life beyond academia, whatever that may be for any particular student. The academic enterprise itself is one that is to a very significant extent premised on the ability to convey thoughts in writing.

Writing ability is thus important not only *in* legal education, but also *for* legal education. In a sense it is both an outcome of and a prerequisite for effective legal education. And in this point lies the reason for our gathering here today.

At the exit level – where writing skills should be an outcome, an attribute of LLB graduates, we are bombarded by feedback that those entering the professions cannot write. We are thus often criticised for not delivering on one of the key learning outcomes that law graduates should master.

But on the input side, we are also grappling with a massive articulation gap between secondary and higher education. We often refer to students' underpreparedness as shorthand for this challenge. One key part of the preparation that we routinely find lacking in our students as they enter legal education is in fact writing skills.

These experiences of a lack of writing skills, at the entry and exit levels almost seem to bookend legal education in South Africa at present. They have undoubtedly played a major role in triggering the LLB summit in 2013 under the title "Legal education in crisis?" In the joint press statement that announced the summit the LSSA co-chairpersons are quoted as saying

"For some time the profession has been of the view that graduates of the four-year LLB degree seldom have the necessary attributes to enable them to take full advantage of the vocational training provided by the profession. This results in a significantly weakened profession."

The President of SALDA in turn stated in the same press release that "South African law faculties are concerned about the capacity of students entering university to cope with legal studies" pointing to "indications ... that the majority of students enrolling for the LLB degree do not have the requisite academic literacy ... skills to complete the undergraduate LLB degree in four years".

It is out of these concerns that the idea for our gathering was born. The basic objective of our workshop is to start a conversation between law teachers at a national level on what we can do to develop law students' writing skills. How should we go about to compensate for the fact that many students have very little academic writing skills when they enter legal education, that is, how do we bridge the articulation gap? How should we go about developing students' writing skills during their years of legal education so that they graduate as expert writers in law – ready to face vocational training, that is, how do we ensure that there is no articulation gap in respect of writing skills again when students leave university and embark on the next phase of their training?"

Over the two days of the workshop law faculties shared their approaches and experiences in developing their graduates' writing abilities. A number of language experts also shared insights from their research on current thinking in writing development. Representatives from various branches of the professions conveyed their views on what is needed and also indicated what is happening in the post-university stage of legal education to enhance writing abilities.

At the close of the workshop it was agreed that active engagement across all stakeholders in legal education must continue around the issue of writing development. It is contemplated that similar workshops will be held in future and that faculties will increasingly share materials for writing development. Delegates also committed to more active collaboration between the professions and law faculties in this regard.

The full programme of the event is available [here](#).

- Prof Geo Quinot



EERSTE NASIONALE LLB SKRYF-ONTWIKKELING WERKSWINKEL

Op 11 en 12 September 2014 het afgevaardigdes van 12 regs fakulteite in Suid-Afrika saam met verteenwoordigers van verskeie vertakkinge van die regsprofessie en 'n aantal taalkundiges in Stellenbosch byeengekom vir die eerste nasionale werkswinkel in die ontwikkeling van LLB studente se skryfvaardighede.

Die werkswinkel is georganiseer deur Geo Quinot en Theo Broodryk van die Stellenbosch Regsfakulteit. Die doel was om 'n gesprek tussen regs dosente en ander belanghebbendes op nasionale vlak te begin oor wat gedoen kan word om regstudente se skryfvaardighede te ontwikkel.

Tydens sy opmerkings by die opening van die werkswinkel het Quinot die idee onderliggend aan die byeenkoms as volg beskryf:

"There can be little doubt that being able to write properly within the discipline is a core attribute of a law graduate. One can hardly call yourself a jurist without the ability to skilfully convey your thoughts in writing.

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developing students' writing skills during their years of legal education so that they graduate as expert writers in law – ready to face vocational training, that is, how do we ensure that there is no articulation gap in respect of writing skills again when students leave university and embark on the next phase of their training?"

Deur die loop van die twee dae van die werkswinkel het regs fakulteite hul benaderings en ervarings in die ontwikkeling van hul studente se skryfvaardighede gedeel. 'n Aantal taalkundiges het ook vanuit hul insigte voortvloeiend uit hul navorsing aangedui wat die huidige denke is rondom skryfvaardighedsontwikkeling. Verteenwoordigers van verskeie vertakkinge van die professies het aangedui wat hul verwagtinge is rakende LLB gegradueerdes se skryfvaardighede en ook wat gedoen word in die fase van regsopleiding ná universiteitstudie om skryfvaardighede te ontwikkel.

By die sluiting van die werkswinkel is daar ooreengekom dat aktiewe interaksie tussen alle belanghebbendes in regsopleiding moet voortgaan rondom die kwessie van skryfontwikkeling. Soortgelyke werksinkels is in die vooruitsig gestel en fakulteite het ingestem om toenemend materiaal met mekaar te deel vir gebruik in skryfontwikkeling. Deelnemers het ook ingestem tot groter aktiewe samewerking tussen die professies en regs fakulteite in hierdie verband.

Die volledige program is [hier](#) beskikbaar.

- Prof Geo Quinot



