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## **Addressing the high levels of psychological distress in law students through intentional assessment and feedback design in the first year law curriculum**

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*A study of the Brain and Mind Institute released in 2009 established that more than one third of Australian law students suffer from psychological distress (BMRI, 2009). The psychological health of law students is therefore a critical issue for Australian legal education, and strategic change is necessary to address the stressful nature of studying law. This paper argues that intentional first year curriculum design has a critical role to play in addressing and preventing psychological distress in law students. In particular, we argue that assessment and feedback practice in the first year can be harnessed to assist students to successfully transition to studying law at university by supporting their development as independent and self-managing learners, and assisting their acquisition of the necessary tertiary literacies. First, we consider the problem of psychological distress in law students. Second, we explore a range of theoretical and practical strategies to assist the implementation of good assessment and feedback practice in the first year of legal education. The paper concludes that intentional assessment and feedback design in the first year of law is critical to alleviating psychological distress levels in law students.*