

Flying high

From jet fighters to a soaring career in a city law firm, this graduate's feet have hardly touched the ground.

KIRSTIN Ferguson's energy fills the 17th floor Riverside office building where she works – a very modern, almost clinical space with magnificent views of Brisbane city.

By her own admission, the QUT law alumnus never imagined 10 years ago that she would be working for Deacons, a top national law firm.

Kirstin, now 31, started her career as an airforce cadet with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). While at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) she completed an arts degree in history with a final year for honours.

"I always wanted to study law, but I knew I had plenty of time and at 17 years of age, I was seduced by the thought of being paid to study and I also saw the defence force as being an exciting way to start my career," she said.

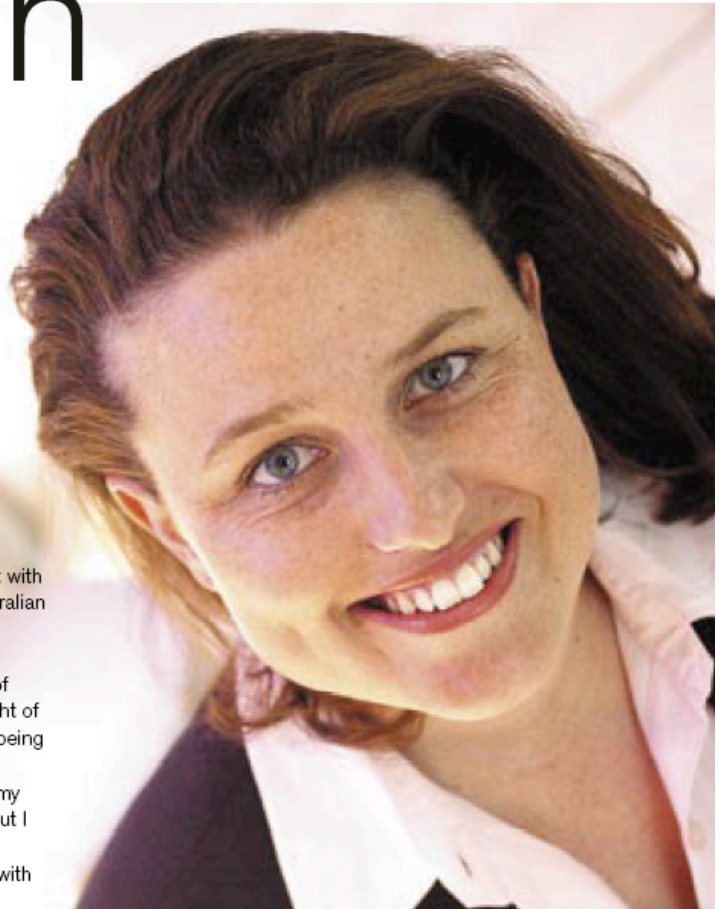
"I started studying law externally a year after finishing my arts degree. I must be a glutton for punishment I know, but I loved it."

Kirstin says the experiences she had with the RAAF were incredible and included flying in a Hawk fighter jet over the Welsh countryside with the RAF; riding on an open ramp of a Hercules at 250 feet; performing aerobatics in a light aircraft over Canberra and England; and flying at 50 feet in a US Black Hawk helicopter on exercise in remote Northern Territory.

Another highlight was being awarded a scholarship to study in London by the Chief of the Air Force during her honours year at ADFA.

"The greatest experiences though were being given responsibility at such a young age," she said.

"At 20 I was in a senior leadership position at ADFA, and by 21 I had staff working for me who were often twice my age."



During the five years it took Kirstin to complete her law degree (with honours) she had two daughters and has memories of being eight months pregnant while sitting her law exams.

"That was crazy even for me. I actually think at one stage I was living in the UK, working full-time, studying externally part-time and pregnant, but never for a moment did I consider giving any of it up," she said.

"You should never see anything as a disadvantage, as long as you take every opportunity as it arises and do what you are passionate about."

She now works full-time at Deacons in a senior management role as its director of corporate services where she manages around 100 staff nationally and provides high-level executive support.

Kirstin said that while she did not miss practising law on a daily basis, she had recently been able to combine her legal and military knowledge after being awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 2003.

It allowed her to work in the US for two months researching ways of reducing litigation by bereaved families as a result of a death in the Defence Force.

Her completed report is currently with the Senate Inquiry into Military Justice.