



# Diploma in Professional Legal Practice

## Guidance note for applicants 2021/22

The Diploma in Legal Practice (Diploma) is the postgraduate stage of the route to qualification as a solicitor in Scotland. This guidance is designed for students who are thinking about applying for the 2021/22 course. At the Law Society of Scotland, we encourage all prospective applicants to carefully consider their position before embarking upon the course, particularly in relation to funding arrangements and the traineeship job market.

This guidance note will cover:



### Diploma providers

- Differences between providers
- Spaces per course and criteria for admission
- Course fees



### Application process



### Considerations before applying

- Diploma validity
- Funding and extra financial support for Diploma students
- The traineeship employment market
- Fitness and properness
- Special considerations for international students



# Diploma providers

In session 2021/22 there are six Diploma providers. Here's who they are and how many places they have available, both full-time and part time:

Provider	Full time places 2021/22	Part time places 2021/22
University of Aberdeen	70	N/A
University of Dundee	68	4
University of Edinburgh		140
University of Glasgow	TBC	TBC
Robert Gordon University	Flexible	Flexible
University of Strathclyde	144	20

We advise that students who are considering both full-time and part-time options speak directly to the Diploma providers of their choice, prior to completing the application form. There are significant differences between providers in terms of course structures, teaching timetables and fee schedules, so it's important to be absolutely clear on all of these factors beforehand.

Full-time courses take approximately one academic year, whereas part-time courses are usually spread over two academic years.

## Competition and criteria for admission

In session 2020/21, demand from applicants exceeded the number of spaces available on the course, meaning unfortunately some applicants were unsuccessful in securing a place on the 2020/21 Diploma course. In 2020/21:



700 (approx) spaces on courses were available



1000 (approx) students applied for a place on the course

\*this figure may include duplicate applications therefore the exact figure could be slightly lower\*

For students on the LLB that started on or after 2011, admission to the Diploma is based on results in the subjects which map to the **foundation outcomes** required by the Law Society of Scotland.

If there is competition for places, Diploma providers will look at additional factors to determine how places are allocated. Explore the **Diploma section** of our website for more information.

## Differences between providers

Each Diploma course has different structures, modules and electives and will vary in terms of your course options and timetables.

This year for the first time, applicants can apply to up to three Diploma providers. We really recommend taking time to research the different universities offering the Diploma, before making your application.

Visit our Virtual Diploma Fair to compare the different providers in more detail.



## Fees

The fees for the Diploma are set annually by each Diploma provider, not the Law Society of Scotland. These course fees and additional costs are set out below.

Each university has their own arrangement for the payment of fees. Visit our Virtual Diploma Fair or contact the universities directly to find out more about your options.

Diploma provider	Full-time fees
University of Aberdeen	£8500
University of Dundee	£8650
University of Edinburgh	£9670
University of Glasgow	£9450
Robert Gordon University	£7000
University of Strathclyde	£7700



# Application process

For the first time, when completing a Diploma application, you will be **entitled to apply to up to three Diploma providers**. This will give students a greater chance of securing a place on the Diploma and we advise using this opportunity to apply to three providers and not limiting your chances by applying to just one provider. As you are not guaranteed to be offered a place with the provider you choose, it's essential you consider alternative providers.

Application forms can be found on Diploma providers websites. You must complete only one application form and email it to the relevant Diploma providers that you are applying to, listing the Diploma providers by order of preference.

Please note, some Diploma providers will require you to also complete an online application form. Information can be found on the initial application. Strathclyde University only require you to complete an online application form. See application form for more information.

For more information about the application process, search '**Applying for the Diploma**' on our website.

## Application period for 2020/21 session

**24 February:** Applications for the Diploma open

**16 April:** Applications for the Diploma close

## Round 1 offers

**7 July:** Deadline for Round 1 offers to be made to successful applicants

**23 July:** Deadline for acceptance of Round 1 offers

Should you receive more than one offer from one of your chosen Diploma providers, you must accept only one offer and decline the others. Failure to do so could result in your offers being withdrawn.

## Round 2 offers

For applicants that have not been successful in Round 1, you will fall into the round two offers. Here, Diploma providers that have available space on their course may offer you a place.

**6 August:** Round 2 offers will be intimated to remaining applicants

**13 August:** Deadline for acceptance of Round 2 offers



# Considerations before applying

## Diploma validity

The LLB does not have a period of validity, but the Diploma does. A valid Diploma is required in order for a trainee to commence a training contract.



**The Diploma is valid for five years from 31 December the year it is awarded and you must start a traineeship before that date**

e.g. if the Diploma is awarded in June 2022, it will be valid until 31 December 2027

As a prospective Diploma student, you are encouraged to consider Diploma validity alongside the fact that the traineeship market is very competitive. You may find you are still looking for a traineeship after graduating.

More information, including the standard application form, can be found by searching '**Diploma validity**' on our website.

Diploma validity is very important to consider at the moment with such uncertainty surrounding Covid-19 and the effects we have already seen on the trainee job market which could continue for some time.

## Funding and extra financial support for Diploma students

### Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) loans

For the 2021/22 session, a loan entitlement of up to £10,000 for all full-time, Scottish domiciled postgraduate students is available from SAAS. For more information we encourage you to contact SAAS directly.



**up to £5,500**

Tuition fee loan

**up to £4,500**

Living cost loan (non-income assessed)

Our understanding is for both the tuition fee and living cost loan, repayment will commence once the student has graduated, is in employment and is earning above the student loan repayment threshold, currently at £19,390. Please visit [www.saas.gov.uk](http://www.saas.gov.uk) for more information.

## **Additional sources of funding**

In addition to SAAS funding, eligible postgraduates may be able to access additional sources of funding. These include:

- University Discretionary Funds
- Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)
- The Clark Foundation for Legal Education
- Local bursaries

Search '**funding your education**' on our website for more information about these funds.

## **The traineeship employment market**

We encourage you to research and understand your position in the traineeship market before committing to the course. Traineeships are very competitive and students are not guaranteed to be successful in securing a role.

Every year we produce trainee statistics so you can understand the broad picture. Unfortunately we saw a reduction of traineeships last year compared to previous years. Here are some of the headlines from 2019/20:



### **An average of 85% of Diploma students secured a traineeship**

Based on a three year average of our annual figures. This represents a 4% decrease.



### **434 traineeships commenced**

this represents a 27% drop compared to 591 in 2018/19



### **17% of traineeships are in-house**

this shows an increase from 12% from the previous year.



### **126 traineeships started at firms with 1-5 partners**

This is 21 fewer than the number at firms with 31+ partners



### **467 Admissions**

Admissions fell 14% from 545 in 2018/19 to 467 in 2019/20, reflecting the high number of trainees placed on furlough in 2020.



## **£19,500 is the recommended rate for 1st year trainee salaries**

For 2nd year trainees, the recommended salary rises to £22,500.

As a minimum, all trainees must be paid at least the Living Wage as set by the Living Wage Foundation.

## **Fitness and properness**

A person cannot be admitted as a solicitor unless they are deemed to be a 'fit and proper person to be a solicitor'. Any person who practises as a solicitor in Scotland must be competent to do so and should not pose a risk to their clients, the public or other members of the profession.

Fitness and properness will be addressed for the first time when prospective trainees apply for an entrance certificate, which you must be granted to enter into a training contract. The Law Society will have regard to a number of factors including, but not limited to:

- Criminal convictions
- Bankruptcy/ Trust deeds
- Plagiarism

For more information, see the **fit and proper guidance** on our website. We advise that if you have any particular concerns, you get in touch with Martyn Robinson at the Law Society on 0131 476 8105 ([martynrobinson@lawscot.org.uk](mailto:martynrobinson@lawscot.org.uk)) to discuss your circumstances.

## **Special considerations for international students**

Overseas students studying with the intention of securing employment thereafter in Scotland or elsewhere in the UK are advised to make enquiries that they can satisfy any visa requirements.

The traineeship constitutes a period of work, rather than study, so students need to be aware of the change in their requirements prior to qualifying. For students that currently hold/ have held a Tier 4 visa for studying, when they undertake the traineeship and then work as a solicitor, they will need to apply for a Tier 2 visa.

If this affects you, please visit the **UK Government's website** for further information,



## **Need more advice or information?**

Contact Darren Kerr: [darrenkerr@lawscot.org.uk](mailto:darrenkerr@lawscot.org.uk); 0131 476 8128 or Visit our Virtual Diploma Fair