



GUIDANCE NOTE FOR STUDENTS: DIPLOMA IN LEGAL PRACTICE / SAAS FUNDING

Please read this guidance note on the Diploma in Legal Practice, and in particular the availability of SAAS funding, carefully in considering whether to apply for a place on the Diploma in Legal Practice in session 2009/2010 or academic session 2010/2011.

ACADEMIC SESSION 2008/2009 – DIPLOMA PLACES AND SAAS FUNDING

To understand the position in relation to the forthcoming academic session, you should note some statistics in relation to academic session 2008/2009:

- there were 864 applications for 774 places.
- costs across Diploma providers ranged from £4,500 to £5,500, plus material costs of between about £300 and £500 (depending on the package of materials offered).
- Of 774 students, 300 received grants of £3,300. These were distributed on a proportional basis to graduates of the ten LLB providing universities and those who had completed the Pre-Diploma Traineeship, to the best performing students in the Professional subjects required by the Law Society. Funding to the 300 best performers was partial funding and did not cover full course costs.
- 474 Diploma in Legal Practice students were self-funders.
- **In session 2008/2009 the UK entered a recession. Some trainees have been made redundant, some students' traineeship offers have been revoked and students without traineeships are in a very competitive market as a result.**

CHANGES TO SAAS FUNDING: SESSION 2009/2010 AND SESSION 2010/2011

In late 2008, the Scottish Government announced to the Society its plans to change the student support arrangements for the Diploma in Legal Practice. This is part of a much wider review of a particular category of post-graduate student support in Scotland, Post-graduate Student Allowance Scheme (PSAS) funding, and will be implemented fully from academic session 2010/2011, and partially from academic session 2009/2010.

The position in relation to the session 2009/2010 is therefore an interim position only, and further information in relation to both sessions follows.

2009/2010 APPLICATION PROCESS: INTERIM POSITION

Historically, 300 SAAS funded places attached themselves to applicants to the Diploma, being outgoing students of the ten LLB providing universities and those who had completed the Pre-Diploma Training Contract through the Society. These funded places attached on a proportional basis (across those undergraduate institutions and the Society) based on performance in the Professional Subjects. This funded place continued to be attached to those applicants, irrespective of which Diploma Unit they applied to or ultimately gained a place at. Please note the change and interim position for academic session 2009/2010:

In academic session 2009/2010, a set number of funded places, being a proportion of 300 funded places available, will attach to each of the six Diploma units rather than applicants. Using performance in the Professional Subjects as the criteria as has been done in previous years, these funded places will be allocated on a proportional basis to the best performing applicants in the Professional Subjects, at the point their application to that Diploma unit is successful.



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You should read the information below which details how many grants each Diploma unit is being allocated, and think carefully about where you apply. It is likely the 300 grants will be allocated in the first round of offers by each Diploma unit:

Diploma Unit	Number of Grants (09/10)	Number of Places (09/10)
University of Aberdeen	45	154
University of Dundee	25	80
University of Edinburgh	75	180
The Glasgow Graduate School of Law	131	272
Robert Gordon University	14	56
The University of Stirling	10	32

SESSION 2010/2011 AND BEYOND

To this point, this note has dealt with the position in relation to the forthcoming academic session 2009/2010. This section deals with academic session 2010/2011 and beyond.

In relation to Diploma places - please note that the University of Glasgow will deliver its own Diploma from session 2010/2011, and the University of Strathclyde its own. There will therefore be seven Diploma providers and the Society will provide information on the number of places as soon as it is available.

In relation to student support from SAAS - the Government's review of PSAS funding necessarily involves the Society, Faculty of Advocates and providers of legal education entering into discussions about the future of financial support from the Government in relation to legal education from academic session 2010/2011. It is the intention of the Society, Faculty of Advocates and providers of legal education to lobby Government on behalf of students of legal education in Scotland and provide information to future applicants as soon as it is available. However:

Those considering applying either this year or next should make a decision on the basis that 300 funded places for students embarking on the Diploma may not be available after session 2009/2010.

WHAT GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD I HAVE WHEN THINKING ABOUT APPLYING FOR A DIPLOMA PLACE?

In previous years, entry to the Diploma has been very competitive. The Society and providers of the Diploma recommend this year, as we have in all previous years, that students consider carefully whether to apply for the Diploma in Legal Practice. Whilst the decision to apply is yours, you should remember:

- Based on recent years only 70%-80% of those who apply may be successful in gaining a place
- Of those who are successful, a substantial majority of students on the Diploma in Legal Practice are self-funders
- Those who are awarded a funded place will require to make up the shortfall as the funded place amounts to £3,300 (please note that in addition those awarded funding also qualify to apply for a means-tested maintenance grant)
- Traineeship recruitment, Honours classification and Diploma entry are not automatically linked, and having a traineeship or a 1st class Honours degree may not necessarily improve your chances of a Diploma place.

In particular, possession of a traineeship offer will have no effect in relation to allocation of Diploma funding.

- In 2008 592 traineeships were registered, whereas in that year around 700 Diploma students exited the Diploma (the Law Society of Scotland is currently looking favourably upon individual applications to extend the validity of the Diploma, which currently expires on 31st December in the year two years after you complete your Diploma, in order to assist those seeking traineeships)
- **In the current economic climate, securing a traineeship is considerably more competitive than in previous years**
- **The interim changes to SAAS funding for session 2009/2010, and the uncertain position in relation to session 2010/2009 mean that you should think carefully about whether you apply and, in session 2009/2010, where you apply.**

Embarking on the Diploma gives you the opportunity to compete for entry to the next stage, the traineeship. However, there can be no guarantee that you will secure a traineeship and you must consider your career aspirations and financial position carefully.

IS THERE ANY OTHER FUNDING AVAILABLE TO ME?

In the past, many students have funded the Diploma through Career Development Loans. Whilst the Law Society of Scotland does not formally endorse such loans, we note how useful they have been for previous students of the Diploma in Legal Practice. You should note that in the current economic climate it may be more difficult to secure such finance from banks.

You should note the existence of the Pritchard Educational Trust, which was established **to assist those who are of academic ability and wish to qualify as solicitors but who, through financial constraints, are unable to do so**. Particular emphasis is given to those students embarking on the Diploma in Legal Practice.

Whilst the Trustees will decide year on year how many grants to distribute, in academic session 2008/2009 four grants of £1,000 were distributed. You should visit the Society's [website](#) (click on the link if you are reading this on our website, or if you have a paper copy the link is at the bottom of this note) for further information on the Trust. The closing date for applications is Friday, 26th June 2009.

QUESTIONS?

The purpose of this note is to ensure all potential applicants to the Diploma have the relevant facts at their disposal when making a decision. This note does not take account of individual circumstances and advises from a regulatory stance, but the Society has a responsibility to manage the expectations of those who choose to compete for entry to the profession, particularly during a difficult time.

Ultimately the decision to embark on the Diploma in Legal Practice is yours, and it brings you one step closer to achieving your goal of qualifying as a solicitor. Part of the Society's pastoral role is to be available should you wish to discuss some of the issues contained further with us before you make that choice. If you have any questions about what is contained in this guidance note, please contact the Education and Training Department of the Society:

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[**www.lawscot.org.uk/training**](http://www.lawscot.org.uk/training)