



Law Society  
of Scotland

# Diploma in Professional Legal Practice

## Guidance note for applicants 2020/21

**This document has been updated to include information impacted by COVID -19**

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 2020/21 course. At the Law Society, we encourage all prospective applicants to carefully consider their position before embarking upon the course, particularly in relation to funding arrangements and the traineeship 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 2020/21 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 2020/21	Part time places 2020/21
University of Aberdeen	120	N/A
University of Dundee	60	15
University of Edinburgh	140	
University of Glasgow	200	12
Robert Gordon University	Flexible	Flexible
University of Strathclyde	144	24

We advise that students who are considering both full-time and part-time options speak directly to the Diploma provider 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 2019/20, the number of full-time places on Diploma courses exceeded the final demand from applicants, meaning there was potentially a space available for everyone who applied. In 2019/20:



719 (approx) spaces on courses were available



648 (approx) students are took up a place on the course

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.

We really recommend taking time to research the different universities offering the Diploma, before making your application as you can only pick one provider to study at in your application form.

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 and materials
University of Aberdeen	£8000 (inclusive of five core textbooks)
University of Dundee	£8240 (inclusive of materials and on book provided)
University of Edinburgh	£9170 (inclusive of cost of materials)
University of Glasgow	£8850 (inclusive of cost of materials)
Robert Gordon University	£7000 + Up to £200 maximum for books
University of Strathclyde	£7500 + £350 for textbooks



# Application process

When completing your Diploma application you will be asked to select a Diploma course at **only one university**. In recent years, the majority of students have been offered their first place but this is variable depending on supply and demand in any given year.

As you are not guaranteed to be offered a place with the provider you choose, it's essential you appreciate alternative providers.

You apply for your chosen Diploma course **via the university you completed your LLB with**, by completing a paper application form. You should then still **apply online to your preferred Diploma provider**.

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

**UPDATE:** Due to the current situation surrounding Covid-19, you should now complete your application as a Word document and email it to your university. Please do not send hard copies of your application. You must then still apply online to your preferred Diploma provider. Please see our updated guidance in our Coronavirus Updates page on the Law Society website for more information.

## Application period for 2020/21 session

**Friday 21 February:** Applications for the Diploma open

**Friday 17 April:** Applications for the Diploma close

**May:** Applicants will receive an acknowledgement from your first-choice Diploma unit

## Round 1 offers

**Friday 26 June:** Deadline for Round 1 offers to be made to successful applicants

**Friday 24 July:** Deadline for acceptance of Round 1 offers

Applicants not receiving an offer of a place in Round 1 will be placed on a waiting list by their first choice Diploma Unit in case a space opens up during July. These students would have their applications reviewed again by their first choice Diploma Unit immediately after the Round 1 deadline, then made an offer if a space opens up.

## Round 2 offers

For applicants that have not been successful in Round 1, the Diploma provider rejecting the applicant will inform each affected student of the alternative destinations available to them. The student will then be asked to identify their next choice Diploma provider and their application will be forwarded on.

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

**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 2021, it will be valid until 31 December 2026

As a prospective Diploma student, you are encouraged to consider Diploma validity alongside the fact that the traineeship market is 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 effect it could potentially have on the trainee job market. However as of 1 November 2019, the Diploma validity was extended to five years which should allow students a degree of flexibility in securing a traineeship within the set timeframe.

## Funding and extra financial support for Diploma students

### Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) loans

SAAS has not yet announced changes to the funding arrangements for Scottish-domiciled students undertaking postgraduate study in session 2020/21. We would therefore encourage you keep a close eye on the SAAS website for updates.

For the 2019/20 session, a loan entitlement of up to £10,000 for all full-time, Scottish domiciled postgraduate students was available. This comprised:



**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 £18,935. 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 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. Here are some of the headlines from this year:



### **An average of 89% of Diploma students secured a traineeship**

Based on a three year average of our annual figures



### **591 traineeships commenced**

This represents an 0.7% rise on the 2017/18 figures. The figure has now remained relatively static over the last four years, suggesting stability in the market.



### **12% of traineeships are in-house**

This figure is in line with previous years.



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

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



### **4% increase in Edinburgh**

The number of traineeships in this region in 2018/19 has increased to 240 from 211 in 2017/18.

**UPDATE: The Society is not yet aware of the impact Covid-19 might have on the traineeship job market. We will be contacting law firms to gauge their recruitment intentions and we will provide updates on the Society's website when we have a clearer picture.**



## **£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 Katie Wood, Head of Admissions at the Law Society on 0131 476 8162 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