

## SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE NOTE FOR DIPLOMA APPLICANTS 2020/21

**This supplementary guidance note is for all individuals who have applied to commence the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice (“DPLP”) in 2020/21.** Given the numbers of applications for the DPLP this year and uncertainty around recruitment in the legal sector due to Covid-19, **we are issuing this as the number of DPLP applications is high this year and we wish for you to be aware that this may mean increased competition for traineeships.**

This guidance note outlines:

- An update on the numbers of applicants for the 2020/21 DPLP
- Traineeship and legal market
- An update on the application process
- Studying the DPLP

### **An update on the number of applicants for the 2020/21 DPLP**

The number of people applying to commence the DPLP in the 2020/21 academic session is circa **940**.

This represents a **13%** increase in the number of people who applied to commence the DPLP in the last academic session (2019/20).

This large increase in applications could result in students not securing their first choice provider or in the worst case scenario, not securing a place on the DPLP in 2020/21.

If there is competition for DPLP places, when considering applications, universities will take into account;

- performance at first sitting in the core modules
- any special circumstances
- whether the applicant has secured a traineeship

It is important to note that it has generally been the case that more people apply to undertake the DPLP than those who actually commence the DPLP. In recent years the difference between those applying and those commencing has been between 11% and 20%.

While we cannot guarantee this will be the case in 2020/21, it is worth noting that a similar drop off rate (e.g. using a 11%-20% drop as a guide) would suggest a DPLP cohort of 2020/21 of between **752 and 836 students**. Traineeship numbers in recent years have generally been between 540-590, however we do anticipate a reduction of traineeships due to the impact of Covid-19 and this should be considered before commencing the DPLP. It is too early to anticipate how significant this reduction will be.

While many students generally start their traineeship shortly after the DPLP, it is important to note that the DPLP has a period of validity (which is five years from completion of the DPLP) in order to start a traineeship. More information can be found on our website.

## **Traineeship and legal market**

These are uncertain times and as a result of Covid-19 there have been a large number of people placed on furlough. It is estimated that over a third of solicitors in private practice have been placed on furlough. It is known that around 30% of trainees (over 300) have been placed on furlough.

As previously advised, we anticipate the number of traineeships opportunities to decrease whilst the competition for traineeships increase. The consequence of this could result in the traineeship job market being similar to the one during the last economic downturn in 2008/09 and subsequent years.

For the past couple of years, the percentage of DPLP graduates securing a traineeship has been around 85-95%. During the last economic downturn, this percentage fell as low as 56%.

Please note, the Society is not saying the traineeship market will necessarily be the same as the last economic downturn (it is too soon to say) however we believe it is our obligation to be as open with students as possible, hence the reason for sharing these figures. While a number of DPLP students will secure traineeships, based on the possible figures above, there will likely be a significant percentage of students graduating from the DPLP who will not have a training contract in place. It is also possible that some will have training contracts cancelled due to Covid-19. It is therefore likely that many of next year's graduates will compete with a larger pool of applicants for fewer positions meaning that the traineeship will be exceptionally competitive.

It is possible that although many areas of work will be adversely affected by the current situation, other areas will be seeing a higher demand for their services. Traineeships will still be available, but it is more important than ever to research and identify firms/organisations and be proactive in your approach to securing a traineeship.

If you have already secured a traineeship, we would strongly advise that you contact your future employer to check the status of the offer and if any changes have been made to your start date.

If you are looking for a traineeship - law fairs and networking opportunities were traditionally great places to make contacts and identify particular firms / organisations you would like to work for. This is likely to still be the case, however, we may see these opportunities moving online through video conference calls and other digital platforms. The Society intends to issues advice and guidance on how to approach these events but as usual, we would fully encourage you join as many of these online networking opportunities as much as possible, and contact your careers service for the best possible advice on making the most of these opportunities.

## **An update on the application process**

As a result of Covid-19, timelines have been slightly affected. Please note, the deadline for Round 1 offers to be made to successful applicants has changed from 26 June to **10 July**.

We would advise DPLP applicants who have been unsuccessful in securing a place at their chosen university to be open to studying at a different provider. As a courtesy, we would ask that if you have been offered a place on the DPLP and you are not planning to start the DPLP this year to advise your chosen university as soon as possible, to allow the university to offer available places to other students. Indeed, the university you apply for may have a deadline for acceptance of a place – please check this.

## **Studying the Diploma during Covid-19**

We are currently in a situation where it is highly likely the DPLP will be delivered by either virtual learning or blended learning. This in itself will bring a lot of challenges. Universities are currently working extremely hard to determine how the DPLP – a practical post-graduate course – will be taught

in a different way from face to face practical group work and this is something we advise students to prepare for.

We are working closely with universities to mitigate any issues and providers will issue more information on their course as and when it is confirmed. In the meantime, we would encourage you to liaise with the university you have applied for to get a full picture of how the course will be delivered in these circumstances.

We are committed to ensuring that those on the route to qualification have the best possible information so those studying law can make informed decisions about their future. We hope this has provided an informative update.

If you would like to discuss the issues raised in this guidance note please contact me on: [darrenkerr@lawscot.org.uk](mailto:darrenkerr@lawscot.org.uk)