GUIDANCE NOTE FOR STUDENTS:

THE DIPLOMA IN PROFESSIONAL LEGAL PRACTICE

The Diploma in Professional Legal Practice is the postgraduate stage of the route to qualification as a solicitor in Scotland. Please read this guidance note carefully in considering whether to apply for a place in session 2017/2018. In particular please note the position in relation to funding and loans for students. This Guidance Note will outline:

- The arrangement for student funding
- The number of Diploma providers and the differences between providers
- Available financial assistance
- Diploma validity
- Information in relation to traineeships
- General considerations
- Information in relation to Professional Education and Training (PEAT)

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS - SESSION 2017/2018

TUITION FEES LOAN
Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) have recently announced changes to the funding arrangements for Scottish-domiciled students undertaking postgraduate study from 2017/18.

There has been an introduction of a universal loan entitlement of £10,000 for all eligible one-year full-time taught postgraduate students. This comprises of a tuition fee loan up to £5,500 and a non-income assessed living cost loan of £4,500.

Part-time students undertaking an eligible course over two years can apply for a tuition fee loan of up to £2,750 per year.

Tuition fee loans will be provided for full-time EU students undertaking a postgraduate course commencing in 2017/18 and part-time students starting a course taken over two years from 2017/18.

Our understanding is for both the tuition fees loan and the living cost loan, repayment will commence once the student has graduated, is in employment and is earning above the student loan repayment threshold, which is currently £17,495. Please visit www.saas.gov.uk for up-to-date information on the loans, and how to apply. Please note that applications usually open in April.

As well as a tuition fee and living-cost loan, eligible postgraduate students can also apply for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). Information on postgraduate funding, including the DSA can be found on the SAAS website.

In addition to the funding available from SAAS, eligible postgraduate students may be entitled to help from their university’s Discretionary Funds. These funds are intended to provide assistance for students in financial difficulty and can provide help towards study related costs, including travel and
accommodation. The funds are allocated by Scottish Ministers and administered by individual colleges and universities. Each college or university is responsible for deciding which students should receive payments from this fund and how much each payment should be. More information, including how to apply is available from individual universities or at www.lawscot.org.uk/virtualdiplomafair.

SESSION 2018/2019 - The position for funding arrangements has been set out for the year 2017/2018 above. However the position has not yet been confirmed for the year 2018/2019. Students should be aware of the fact there have been a number of changes in relation to the funding arrangements for the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice and therefore it is possible the situation will change again in future years.

FEES

The fees for the Diploma in session 2017/2018 will vary from university to university and range from around £6,700 to £7,700. The course fees and cost of materials are set out below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diploma provider</th>
<th>Full-time fees and materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Aberdeen</td>
<td>£7,400 including cost of 4 textbooks. Discounts offered on additional recommended textbooks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Dundee</td>
<td>£6,900 + cost of materials TBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Edinburgh</td>
<td>£7,650, inclusive of cost of materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Glasgow</td>
<td>£7,700, inclusive of cost of materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>£6,630 + a maximum of £380 for textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Strathclyde</td>
<td>£7,200 + £280 for textbooks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note every university will have its own arrangement for the payment of fees and some can offer students the opportunity to pay in installments over the course of the academic year. Please contact the universities directly to find out more about the arrangements.

Your application for the Diploma is not an application for a tuition fee, or living cost loan. Please ensure you do apply for a loan(s) if you require to do so – the applications forms for the loans will be available on the SAAS website: www.saas.gov.uk.

DIPLOMA PROVIDERS

Number of places available: in session 2016/2017 the number of places available at Diploma providers exceeded the final demand for places: there were around 750 places available and 675 students commenced the course.
In session 2017/2018 there are six Diploma providers. The table below outlines the providers offering the Diploma in the session 2017/2018 and where known, the number of places available: full time and part-time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diploma Provider</th>
<th>Number of places 2017/18 (full time)</th>
<th>Number of places 2017/18 (part time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Aberdeen</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Dundee</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Edinburgh</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Contact the university*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Glasgow</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>Around 33 (no set limit)</td>
<td>No set limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Strathclyde</td>
<td>No set limit</td>
<td>No set limit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students wishing to study the Diploma at the University of Edinburgh on a part-time basis are encouraged to contact the University to discuss possible options.

Students considering both the part-time and full-time courses are encouraged to discuss their options with the Diploma provider of their choice prior to completing the application form.

**Criterion for Admission**

For students who started the LLB before 2011, admission to the Diploma is based on results in the subjects required by the Law Society of Scotland. These subjects are commonly referred to as the Professional Subjects. Results are based on marks obtained in the first sitting of each examination.

For students on the LLB who started on or after 2011, admission to the Diploma is based on results in the subjects which map to outcomes required by the Law Society of Scotland. Results are based on marks obtained in the first sitting of each examination.

(Detailed information about the subjects can be found at [www.lawscot.org.uk/subjects](http://www.lawscot.org.uk/subjects))

This criterion could be moderated (in either direction) by the class and type of Degree obtained, overall number of failed subjects at undergraduate level, other qualifications (both undergraduate and postgraduate) and special circumstances (unless already taken into account internally) affecting the academic performance of individual students such as illness, other personal factors and the weight and nature of curriculum. The fact that an applicant has an offer of a traineeship at the time of applying for a Diploma place may also be a factor taken into account, but ONLY as another possible factor when deciding among applicants who have extremely similar academic records.
Key dates for applications

Applications will open on Monday 27th February 2017. The deadline for applications is Friday 14th April 2017.

For further information about the application process and details about the application timeline, please visit our website.

Please note you are not able to defer your entry following a successful application. However, students may apply in future and will be treated as a ‘first time applicant’ i.e. they will not automatically be successful in receiving an offer because they have in the past, but equally a previous application will not count against them.

Differences between providers - each Diploma course will have different courses, electives and modules and will vary in terms of options and timetables. The Society recommends taking time to research the different universities offering the Diploma to ensure you are making an informed decision when deciding where to apply.

This year, like last year the Society is hosting a Virtual Diploma Fair, where you will be able to look at the electives, sample timetables and details of all 6 universities. The fair can be accessed at www.lawscot.org.uk/diplomafair

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Below are details of some available trusts and bursaries which may be of assistance. A directory outlining additional funding can be accessed on the grants and trusts page of our website.

The Clark Foundation for Legal Education: The Clark Foundation for Legal Education invites applications for Grants and Scholarships from persons practising law in Scotland whether as solicitors or advocates and from persons studying at Scottish Universities or other institutions of higher education based in Scotland. Read the guidance note.

The purpose of the Foundation is to promote and advance the legal and business education and training of Scots lawyers and students of Scots Law. Awards will be made annually in September and the application deadline is expected to be around the end of March. To request an application form please contact clarkfoundation@shepwedd.co.uk.

Scholarships and Bursaries: There are usually a number of scholarships and bursaries available to Diploma students across the universities, including hardship funds. Please check with the universities offering the Diploma to see what options may be available.

Professional and Career Development Loans: In recent years, some students have successfully applied for Professional Career Development Loans in order to help with the costs of the Diploma, whilst funding through this means is dependent upon the bank's own criteria, and therefore never guaranteed, this year it has been brought to our attention, one incident where a PCDL application has been rejected. The bank rejected the loan on the grounds of 'double funding', i.e. receiving the SAAS maintenance loan and a PCDL is not permitted. The student in question appealed the decision and was awarded a PCDL. The student who brought this to our attention intends to bring this to their local MSP in order to highlight this as a
potential issue for other students on the Diploma. Each bank will set their own criteria for agreeing a PCDL, and we encourage students to explore these options carefully.

**DIPLOMA VALIDITY**

The LLB does not have a period of validity, but the Diploma does.

The Diploma is valid for 2 years from 31st December in the year in which the Diploma is awarded, i.e. awarded in June 2018, valid until 31st December 2020.

You may apply to the Law Society for a validity extension. Applications will be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis. As part of your application you will be required to display evidence of appropriate work undertaken, appropriate study, endeavours to obtain a traineeship and evidence of endeavours to keep up legal knowledge. For more information visit [www.lawscot.org.uk/diplomavalidity](http://www.lawscot.org.uk/diplomavalidity). Questions should be directed to legaleduc@lawscot.org.uk.

**INFORMATION IN RELATION TO TRAINEESHIPS**

**Traineeship statistics** - Students are advised to consider the number of traineeships registered in previous years for a picture of the traineeship market. The number of training contracts commenced in practice year 2015/16 was 549 which represents an increase of 2% compared to those commenced in practice year 2014/15 (540). This is the same percentage increase as the previous practice year

- 90% of those admitted in the last practice year are now employed as solicitors (compared to 88% last year)
- 11% of traineeships are in house, this is in line with previous years
- 80% of traineeships commenced in the central belt, an increase on 75% the previous practice year
- There was a 26% drop in the number of traineeships in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire
- There was an overall 6% increase in the number of traineeships in firms with 21-30 partners, and a corresponding decrease in the number at firms with 11-20 partners
- There are 675 PEAT 1 (Diploma) students who commenced in academic year 2016/17 compared to 691 for academic year 2015/16

Further information on trainee statistics can be accessed at [www.lawscot.org.uk/traineestatistics](http://www.lawscot.org.uk/traineestatistics)

**Trainee salaries** - From June 2016, the recommended rates are £17,545 for a first-year trainee and £21,012 for a second-year trainee. The rates are reviewed annually.

Please note the rates are recommended and not a minimum paid. Some organisations will offer more, some will offer less. All trainees are required to be paid at least the National Minimum Wage. If you have any queries in relation to salaries you are encouraged to contact katiewood@lawscot.org.uk.

**The Fit and Proper Person Test** - In order to enter the legal profession, a trainee must satisfy the Law Society of Scotland that he or she is a fit and proper person. The Society will have regard to a number of factors including but not limited to:

- Criminal convictions
- Bankruptcy / Trust deeds
- Plagiarism

When applying for an entrance certificate prior to starting a traineeship the Society will undertake a number of checks, including:
The Society welcomes early approaches from applicants who are in any doubt about their eligibility to become a solicitor. The Admissions Sub-Committee can give advice but the final decision will be made at traineeship stage. If you would like additional information or to discuss a future application please email legaleduc@lawscot.org.uk, or telephone 0131 226 7411.

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

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. There are several factors to consider when deciding not only whether to apply for the Diploma, but which Diploma provider to apply to and the options and courses on offer will vary from provider to provider.

Whilst the decision to apply is yours, you should remember:

- Students receiving a loan from SAAS will require to make up the shortfall of the course fees as the maximum loan amount is £5,500.
- Students studying the full time Diploma can now access a living cost loan of up to £4,500.
- In the practice year 2015/16 549 traineeships were registered, whereas in that year around 691 Diploma students started the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice course. While it is a fluctuating market and the picture is improving there are still a number of students / graduates looking for traineeships, and securing a traineeship remains very competitive.

Guidance for those on a Tier 4 Visa

It is very important that if you are undertaking the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice with the intention of securing employment thereafter in Scotland or elsewhere in the UK (as a trainee solicitor or otherwise), that you make enquiries to satisfy yourself that you meet the appropriate visa requirements.

Currently, the salary threshold to sponsor a Tier 2 visa for a trainee/solicitor is £24,700, which is significantly more than a first year trainee’s recommended salary. This threshold may increase as it is regularly reviewed. Please check the up to date information on the UK Government’s website www.gov.uk.

This matter is being brought to your attention now so that you may make an informed decision about whether you wish to undertake the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice.

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.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON PEAT

Professional Education and Training (PEAT) is a landmark development in Scottish legal education. In academic session 2011/2012 the Diploma in Legal Practice became Professional Education and Training stage 1 (PEAT 1) and the traineeship became Professional Education and Training Stage 2 (PEAT 2).
PEAT comprises PEAT 1 (the vocational stage, also known as the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice) and PEAT 2 (the work-based stage; also known as the traineeship). PEAT should be regarded as a whole, with PEAT 1 and PEAT 2 forming two components of that whole. PEAT will facilitate the development of legal skills and will integrate these with legal knowledge and ethical behaviours.

PEAT is a two-stage process incorporating the post-graduate vocational element PEAT 1 which is the stage of legal education where knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are learned in a simulated environment.

The work-based element, PEAT 2, is the stage of legal education where the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are built upon and honed in a workplace setting. Trainees are required to undertake Trainee Continuing Professional Development (TCPD).

PEAT 1 and PEAT 2 should be viewed as a three year process with similar outcomes which are continually assessed over those three years. The vocational element links to the work-based stage and work-based stage builds upon what is learned in the vocational stage.

This means that there are a series of Outcomes which apply across PEAT: PEAT 1 Outcomes and PEAT 2 Outcomes. PEAT 2 builds on what is taught during PEAT 1. For the first time, solicitors will know the minimum of what can be expected from a Day 1 Trainee, as that is demonstrated by the PEAT 1 Outcomes.

The options and electives available at each Diploma course will vary from provider to provider. Please ensure you have researched all the options available to you. Further details of all the courses, electives and options can be found www.lawscot.org.uk/diplomafair

The provider and electives you choose should be suited to you and the type of organisation at which you intend to practise so you should choose your options carefully.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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 economic time and at a time of transition in relation to post-graduate funding.

Ultimately the decision to embark on the Diploma 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 Training and Qualifications Department of the Society: legaleduc@lawscot.org.uk.