



The Law Society

Law Society Diversity Access Scheme 2014/15

Work placements guide



Diversity Access Scheme awardees 2014

"The Law Society Diversity Access Scheme means much more to me than just funding. It is allowing me to access a career in law which due to my social and personal background I never considered to be attainable. I come from a community first area and have experienced and overcome many hardships in my life. My family have never encouraged my academic capabilities and due to financial restrictions furthering my studies seemed an impossibility. The scheme has allowed me to push through social and financial barriers and pursue my dream of a career in the legal profession – there are no words to fully express my gratitude for the opportunity this has given me."

"Not only has the Law Society given the funding I greatly needed to qualify as a solicitor, it has also shown that my hard work in extreme circumstances is genuinely valued by the profession. At a time when I had all but given up hope of qualification the DAS award has given me the funding to enable me to reach my full potential in my career."

"When I applied to study the LPC I had no idea whatsoever how I was going to manage to cover the fees. My application was submitted on blind faith alone, all I knew was that I was going to do whatever it takes. The idea of going to law school became a huge burden on my entire family and now this massive weight has been taken of all of our shoulders. The worst thing is the idea that you may not be able to achieve your dream; not because you are incapable or because you won't enjoy it, but because you simply can't afford it. The DAS has given me hope and provided me with a light at the end of what was a very dark and what seemed to be a never-ending tunnel. I started to think that people like me just can't do law, but now I know that I can."

"The award made by the Law Society represents a miracle. Fighting against all the odds of controlling family and arranged marriage I escaped the Eastern European regime and found myself alone in a foreign country. Here I was met with homelessness, domestic abuse and poverty and only thanks to my sheer determination and hard work I was able to get on my feet. To my delight my efforts have been recognised by the Law Society and without their help I could not possibly continue to pursue my dreams."

Introduction

The Law Society Diversity Access Scheme (DAS) supports talented aspiring entrants to the solicitors' profession. The scheme seeks to address three of the fundamental obstacles to fair access - finance, professional contacts and opportunities to gain high quality work experience - through the provision of financial assistance with LPC fees, work placements and professional mentors. All applicants are required to demonstrate exceptional financial need, the ability and commitment to become a solicitor and that they face or have overcome exceptional social, educational, or other personal obstacles to qualification.

More information about the scheme including a short video and the report on the last application round can be found at www.lawsociety.org.uk/careers/diversity-access-scheme/

Work placement requirements

High quality work experience is at a premium and access to it has been identified as a major obstacle to entering the profession by students from non-privileged backgrounds, particularly those without personal contacts in the profession.

The aim of the placements is to provide DAS students with a quality experience of working in a legal practice. We therefore ask those hosting DAS students to provide the following:

1. A placement lasting **one or two weeks**
2. **Travel and lunch expenses** as a minimum
3. **A named contact** within the practice with whom they will be able to liaise in preparation for and during the placement
4. **An authentic experience** of working in a **business environment**
5. **Insight into the practice and roles** within it
6. **Varied work** that will provide a range of experiences including client meetings where possible
7. **Networking opportunities** to make professional contacts and build confidence
8. **Constructive feedback** on the experience to the students and the Law Society

Student requirements

We are also careful to manage the expectations of the DAS students who understand that:

- Work experience placements do not form part of a training contract application process and in no way represent any undertaking for the subsequent provision of a training contract or any form of employment.
- Practices offering work placements and their staff will not necessarily maintain contact with DAS students beyond the duration of the placement unless expressly agreed by both parties.

- Confidentiality is paramount and non-disclosure agreements may need to be signed where required.
- The highest professional standards are to be upheld at all times on placement including: smart and appropriate business dress; punctuality; prompt responses to any communications; and a courteous and helpful attitude.

Organising placements

All successful DAS students are invited to complete a mentoring and work experience application form, indicating their preferences for the type and size of practice, geographical location and areas of law that they are most interested in. They are also asked to highlight any personal limitations in respect of travel or the timing of placements.

The information provided by students is used to identify suitable legal practices that have expressed interest in offering work experience opportunities from a database.

Once a potential match has been identified, the work placement form and current CV of the student(s) is sent to the practice and they are asked to make contact with the student to agree details of the arrangement within the parameters set out above.

We find that this is the most efficient way of arranging placements providing flexibility for both sides and only ask for confirmation once the date of the placement has been agreed.

Timing

While timing is up to the individual parties to agree, we do ask that if possible they are completed by the end of August 2015 before the new intake of DAS students start their course.

As natural academic breaks, Easter and summer placements are the most popular times. However, work placement can be arranged for any other mutually convenient time though hosts are asked to consider exam periods and revision needs.

Feedback

We also ask that following the placement both parties provide feedback on their experience so that we are able to monitor the impact of the scheme and strive for continuous improvement.

The Law Society's role

Our experience is that work placements work best when the details are arranged directly between the student and the host. We have oversight of the whole scheme, are able to broker the introduction, offer a framework and collate feedback. We are also here to support and advise students and hosts and if there is anything you are concerned about or would like to discuss during the placement, please contact:

Policy officer for social mobility and wellbeing

Tel: 020 7316 5792

diversityaccessscheme@lawsociety.org.uk

Please also don't hesitate to make contact if you would like to extend your support beyond work experience placements by sponsoring a place on the scheme and/or acting as mentor.

Please note:

- DAS students are from a very diverse range of backgrounds and ages. All are undertaking the LPC however, some of them will be on the full-time course ending in summer 2015 and others on the part-time course ending in 2016.
- While we are clear that there should be no expectation of contact between hosts and students beyond their placement, we would in no way wish to discourage ongoing contact where relationships are developed and mutual consent is given.
- Again, while there is no expectation of a training contract or employment beyond the placement, where there are relevant and suitable opportunities we would encourage details to be shared with the students.
- The most valuable opportunities are those that help students to enhance their CVs and demonstrate skills to potential employers.
- Some students have also been matched with a professional mentor through the scheme who is offering them personal support and guidance.
- Giving students as much information as possible about the business, the placement and what you are expecting of them will help them to prepare and get as much out of the experience as possible.
- We try to accommodate student preferences as far as possible but many are at the beginning of their careers and may not yet have an appreciation of the opportunities across the legal profession. The placements are intended to help them to develop this, and it is just as useful that they are able to rule out a particular area of law or practice after a placement as to decide that it is something that they wish to pursue.