



SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE NOTE FOR DIPLOMA APPLICANTS 2016/17

Each year the Society issues a guidance note to all those who are apply to undertake the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice (DPLP). This is issued with DPLP application forms and is available via the society's website.

Given the numbers of applications for the DPLP this year we have produced this supplementary guidance note. This supplementary guidance note is for all individuals who have applied to commence the DPLP in 2016/17. We are issuing this as the number of Diploma applications is once again high this year and we wish you to be aware that this may mean increased competition for traineeships. We will be publishing this guidance on our website for all applicants. We are also sending it to the Universities who provide the DPLP and will ask them to forward on to applicants.

This guidance note outlines:

- An update on the numbers of applicants for the 2016/17 Diploma
- Some context for this figure
- Why has the number of applications risen over the last two years?
- What is the potential impact?
- What is the Society doing?

An update on the number of applicants for the 2016/17

The number of people applying to commence the DPLP in the 2016/17 academic session is **780**.

This represents a **7.6%** decrease in the number of people who applied to commence the DPLP in the last academic session (2015/16).

Some context for this figure

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 15% and 20%. We cannot guarantee that this will be the case in 2016/17.

Assuming, for a moment though, a similar drop off rate (e.g. using a 15%-20% drop as a guide) it would suggest a DPLP cohort of 2016/17 of between **620 and 670 students**.

Diploma numbers over recent years

	DPLP applications	Numbers commencing the DPLP	Drop off rate between application and commencing	Traineeships registered that year
2013/14	671	554	17%	530
2014/15	679	541	20%	540
2015/16	845	691	18%	TBC
2016/17	780	TBC	TBC	TBC

Although there has been a drop in the number of applications since 2016/17 it is important to understand that last year's figure was a historic high. It represented a 24% increase in the number of people who applied to commence the DPLP in the preceding session (2014/15).

The traineeship numbers are included for context though they should be considered with caution (as, for instance, someone commencing the DPLP in 2013/14 could not also commence a traineeship that year).

Why has the number of applications risen over the last two years?

It seems there are three reasons as to why DPLP applications have risen sharply over the last two years:

- The changes to DPLP funding from 2015/16 means that more people can gain loan finance to pay for the DPLP.

For a number of years all DPLP students have been eligible for a loan of £3.4k for DPLP fees (which covers around half of the DPLP fee). The number of people taking out that loan on an annual basis has generally been around 50% of the DPLP cohort.

Last year (2015/16), all DPLP students were eligible for a loan of £3.4k DPLP fees and also eligible for a cost of living loan of up to £4.5k. The monies provided by the maintenance loan, however, can be paid towards DPLP fees. This arrangement means it is now possible to cover the cost of DPLP fee via loan funding.

- These changes were announced to students prior to DPLP applications in 2014/15. It is likely that the number of people who commenced the DPLP in 2014/15 was depressed as some individuals decided to wait a year to gain access to the additional loan funding outlined above.
- In both of the last two practice years, we have seen rises in the number of training contracts registered with the Society. This combined with general confidence levels in and around the profession may have led to more students opting for the DPLP.

What is the likely impact?

Number of 2016/17 DPLP graduates against the number of traineeships

Traineeship numbers in recent years have generally been between 475-495. We do not know if the 530 traineeships in 2014/15 and 540 traineeships in 2015/16 were outliers or part of 'the new normal'. Either way, the Society is not aware of any market analysis that suggests that the number of traineeships will fluctuate significantly over the next few years.

The size of the 2015/16 cohort will have implications for those applying to undertake the Diploma in 2016/17. There will likely be a significant percentage of students graduating from the Diploma this year who will not have a training contract in place. It is highly possible that many of this year's graduates will compete with the 2016/17 cohort next year meaning that the traineeship job market next summer will be exceptionally competitive.

What is the Society doing?

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.

All LLB students will have had the opportunity to hear the Society's staff talk about the route to qualification in their first year, in their third year, and in their fourth year. As well as this the Society visits every law fair in Scotland giving students the opportunity to speak to our staff about any matter that concerns them. We also attach to the Diploma application forms a detailed guidance note which outlines the funding arrangements. We know though that those intending to do the Diploma do so without three pieces of knowledge:

- (a) The number of people who apply to undertake the Diploma
- (b) The number of people who actually will commence the Diploma
- (c) For those who do not have a traineeship in place, the number of training contracts there will be the following year

We believe it is in the best interest of students to highlight the number of people who have applied to undertake the Diploma for next session and we hope that this alongside the context offered in our visits and previous guidance will help those applying for the Diploma to get the best possible information meaning that they can make informed choices about their future. It is important, therefore, that those applying to commence the DPLP in 2016/17 are aware: that the number of applicants for the DPLP this year is still higher than recent years; that the historically high figure of Diploma graduates this year will likely impact them in terms of finding traineeships next year; and that this should be viewed against the likely future trainee job market.

The Society makes no judgement on individual cases but wants to ensure that those applying have the best possible information to decide whether or not they proceed to commence the DPLP.

We would encourage students would like to discuss the issues raised in this guidance note to contact the Society on: legaeduc@lawscot.org.uk