



The Law
Society

The Law Society Diversity Access Scheme Application Guidance 2024



Application Guidance

Diversity Access Scheme (DAS)

DAS provides financial assistance for the Legal Practice Course (LPC) and Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE) assessments and preparation courses to exceptional, aspiring entrants to the solicitors' profession for the academic year 2024/25.

Guidance

Information about all aspects of the application criteria, process and timetable is detailed in this document. Any queries that are not addressed by the guidance may be emailed to diversityaccessscheme@lawsociety.org.uk

Specific guidance on particular questions may be found at **Annexe 1**.

1. Application criteria

To automatically be eligible for DAS, applicants must fulfil the criteria in 1.1 - 1.3 below:

- 1.1 Applicants must reside in England or Wales, have the right to work and study in England or Wales and plan on continuing their studies and starting their legal career whilst living in England or Wales.
- 1.2 Applicants will be required to confirm the following statements:
 - a) They do not have access to familial loans or financial gifts;
 - b) They do not have more than £5,000 in their savings account, current account, ISA or held elsewhere.
- 1.3 Applicants must confirm at least two of the following statements:
 - a) They attended a non-fee paying school;
 - b) They are part of the first generation in their family to attend higher education;
 - c) They were eligible for free school meals whilst at school.

If an applicant does not fulfil criteria in 1.2 (b) and 1.3 above, they may still be eligible to apply for DAS if they meet the criteria in 1.4 below. Applicants that do fulfil the requirements in 1.2 and 1.3 above do not need to additionally show that they meet 1.4.

- 1.4 An applicant may be eligible if they have faced or will face exceptional circumstances to pursue their studies and career ambitions as a result of one or more of the following:
 - cultural background
 - health problems
 - disability
 - sex
 - gender identity
 - sexual orientation
 - race or ethnicity
 - religion
 - or other challenging personal circumstances

Please note that candidates who do not meet criteria under 1.1 and 1.2 (a) will not be considered, even if they have exceptional circumstances.

1.1 Applicants must also confirm that they are:

- a) Capable of and committed to a career as a solicitor in England and Wales; and
- b) Seeking to start either:
 - the Legal Practice Course in Autumn 2024 or January/February 2025; or
 - the Solicitors Qualifying Exam preparation course in Autumn 2024 or January/February 2025 and either sit the SQE (part one) in July 2025 if they have not already done so, or sit the SQE (part two) in July 2025 if they have already sat and passed the SQE (part one).
- c) Able to meet all living and any other costs incurred in undertaking the LPC or SQE (other than tuition fees) during the course of study, including for any dependents.

2. Scope of the Diversity Access Scheme

1.1 The scheme is only open to those undertaking the following courses/assessments:

- the Legal Practice Course (LPC)
- the LPC combined with LLM
- Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE) assessments and SQE preparation courses
- SQE assessments and SQE preparation courses combined with LLM.

The Law Society does not provide any funding for the law degree, PGDL, LLM as a standalone course or any other courses.

1.2 Funding provided through the scheme is exclusively for course and assessment fees and will be paid directly to the institution at which you have chosen to study, or covered by the institution directly if they are a sponsor of the scheme.

1.3 You may specify the amount that you wish to apply for up to the full cost of the LPC or SQE assessments/SQE preparation course fees.

1.4 No additional funding is available to assist with any living expenses such as accommodation, childcare, transport; nor for any other costs which may be incurred in undertaking the LPC or SQE assessments/SQE preparation course.

1.5 It will not be possible to reimburse you for any deposits which have already been paid.

- 1.6 While it is not necessary to have a confirmed place on the LPC before submitting a DAS application, all awards will be subject to acceptance onto an LPC through the normal route for an Autumn 2024 or January/February 2025 start.
- 1.7 As per 1.6, awards for those wishing to go through the SQE route will be subject to acceptance onto an SQE preparation course.

3. Financial eligibility

- 1.1 Awards made under the Diversity Access Scheme represent an investment in successful applicants by the Law Society and the scheme's sponsors. As the scheme only provides financial assistance towards LPC fees or SQE fees, you must be able to support yourself and your dependents and be able to demonstrate how all other costs during the course will be met.
- 1.2 We accept applications from those in receipt of universal credit and other benefits.
- 3.3 If shortlisted you will be required to provide evidence of your financial position as detailed in your application at interview including:
 - three months' worth of bank statements
 - proof of benefits entitlement (if you receive state benefits)
 - loan rejection or acceptances as appropriate.

4. Exceptional circumstances

- 4.1 Please see section 1, above. If you do not fulfill criteria under 1.2 and 1.3 you may still be eligible to apply for Diversity Access Scheme if you have faced or will face exceptional circumstances in order to pursue your legal studies and career ambitions.
 - 1.1 Exceptional circumstances might be based on an applicant's culture, race or ethnicity, religion, disability, health, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation or other social disadvantage including exceptional personal or family circumstances that makes the goal of qualifying as a solicitor a particularly challenging one.
 - 1.2 Applicants who do not fulfil 1.2 and/or at least two of the eligibility criteria under 1.3 are required to explain how their circumstances represent exceptional obstacles or challenges.
 - 1.3 All applicants, regardless of exceptional circumstances, must reside in England or Wales in order to be eligible for the Diversity Access Scheme.

5. Process

- 1.1 Applications to the Diversity Access Scheme must be made by completing the online application form in full. If you need the application form in a different format, please email diversityaccessscheme@lawsociety.org.uk for a copy of the form in Word/PDF format or to discuss your particular needs for an alternative format.
- 1.2 The online application form will be available on the Law Society website from 2pm on **Wednesday 28 February 2024.**
- 1.3 Completed applications must be submitted by midnight on **Saturday 13 April 2024.**
- 1.4 No extenuating circumstances whatsoever will be considered for the submission of late applications so you should make sure you send your application in good time.
- 1.5 Receipt of applications will be acknowledged by email.
- 1.6 The online application form cannot be saved and therefore we strongly advise candidates to consider the application questions in good time and to draft them out in a word document first. The questions can be previewed on the webpage.
- 1.7 It will not be possible to amend applications in any way once submitted except in order to update contact details. Please do not submit more than one application; if we receive multiple applications from you, only the first one received will be considered.
- 1.8 You will be informed whether or not you have been shortlisted by 14 June. Please do not follow up before then.
- 1.9 If you are shortlisted you will be invited to an assessment and an interview with a selection panel before a final decision is made.

6. Interview and assessment arrangements

- 1.1 If shortlisted, you must be available to attend your scheduled assessment and interview (lasting around 30 minutes) with the judging panel via **Microsoft Teams** between **11 - 13 July 2024**. If you are unable to attend the interview you will be withdrawn from the process.
- 1.2 Please let us know in advance if you have accessibility requirements.
- 1.3 Please ensure you have access to the relevant technology.

- 1.4 You will be required to provide contact details for two referees on the application form. At least one of your referees should be for an academic or professional contact, such as a teacher or employer, who can confirm that you possess the characteristics and attributes of a solicitor, including:
- honesty
 - integrity
 - the ability to solve problems and present clearly and
 - a wish to serve the wider community.
- 1.1 You may ask another contact to act as a referee where it supports your application, for example, where you have acted as a volunteer.
- 1.5 If shortlisted, we will contact your referees and require a response from them before your interview. Please ensure their contact details are correct.
- 1.6 If shortlisted, you will be required to scan and email photographic identification and evidence to support the circumstances detailed in your application including qualification certificates, three months' worth of bank statements, proof of benefits entitlement and LPC/SQE or training contract offer letters.
- 1.7 You will be advised of the final decision by **5pm on Wednesday 24 July 2024**. Please do not follow up before this time.

7. Decisions and feedback

- 1.1 As the awards are entirely discretionary, it is not possible for you to appeal against decisions taken at any stage of the application process.
- 1.2 Due to the volume of applications submitted, feedback will only be provided if you are shortlisted and attend interview but do not receive the award and will be provided upon request within four weeks of the interview taking place.

2. Data protection

- 1.1 The application process requires personal and financial information to be disclosed. This information will be kept confidential by the selection panel and staff administering the scheme.
- 1.2 Applicants are asked to provide diversity information so that equal opportunity and the effectiveness of the scheme may be monitored. This information will be separated from the application upon receipt and will not be seen by the shortlisting or interview panel and will not be used in any part of the selection process.

2. Conditions of support

- 9.1 Upon being offered a DAS award, awardees will be asked to review and sign a document outlining the specific conditions of support and the expected behavioral standards of being a DAS awardee.
- 9.2 Awards are subject to a formal offer of a place on the LPC or SQE assessments/SQE preparation course through the normal application route.
- 9.3 Awards are conditional upon the LPC commencing in September 2024 or January/February 2025, either on a part time or full time basis, online or in person.
- 9.4 For awardees going through the SQE route, awards are conditional upon the SQE preparation course and SQE 1 assessment being completed and sat by the end of the academic year 2024/25. Note that SQE2 must be taken within two years of completing SQE1.
- 9.5 If you apply to the DAS having already passed SQE1, then your award will be conditional upon the SQE preparation course and SQE2 assessment being completed and sat by the end of the academic year 2024/25.
- 9.6 Under no circumstances will deferral of a start date be considered outside these dates and the award will be withdrawn if a candidate cannot begin the LPC at the specified dates or complete the SQE within the specified time limit.
- 9.7 Where reasonable, the Law Society may require you to undertake your LPC or SQE preparation course at one of its sponsor institutions. Our sponsor institutions include:

Sponsor LPC / SQE preparation course institutions:

- BPP Law School
- The University of Law
- Nottingham Law School at Nottingham Trent University
- The University of Westminster

Sponsor SQE preparation course institutions:

- The College of Legal Practice
- Barbri
- QLTS School

- 9.8 Unless otherwise directed, successful students who are taking the SQE route will be responsible for contacting the Law Society to discuss which SQE sitting they would like to take before booking onto the relevant SQE assessments, keeping the Law Society informed at each stage.

9.9 Details for the SQE assessments can be found here: <https://sqa.sra.org.uk/exam-arrangements/dates-and-locations>

9.10 There is no restriction on individuals who have previously applied to the scheme from reapplying, however they are strongly advised to consider the likely reasons that they were previously unsuccessful.

9.11 Successful students will be required to provide regular reports on their progress to the Law Society. They may also be asked to support the Law Society's diversity and inclusion work, on a voluntary basis

10. Diversity and Inclusion

10.1 The diversity questionnaire on the application form is for monitoring purposes. It is separated from your application form before shortlisting and kept in a password protected file. Neither the shortlisting panel nor the interview panel see this information.

10.2 We will do our best to ensure all requests for reasonable adjustments are met at all stages of the process. Please let us know if you need additional support at any stage by emailing: diversityaccessscheme@lawsociety.org.uk

10.3 The shortlisting panel is made up of members of the Law Society Diversity and Inclusion team, Diversity and Inclusion network committee members and Law Society Social Mobility Ambassadors. Each application is marked by two of the shortlisting panel to ensure fairness, consistency and good practice.

10.4 The interview panel rotates every three years. It will be made up of a panel of four solicitors who are alumni of the Diversity Access Scheme. The interviews will be observed and supported by the Law Society Diversity and Inclusion team to ensure consistency and good practice.

11. Timetable for DAS 2024

28 February	Applications open at midday: application form and guidance will be available from the Law Society website
13 April	Applications close at midnight
Second week of June	All applicants advised whether they have been shortlisted
11 - 13 July	Interviews with shortlisted applicants via Microsoft Teams
24 July	All shortlisted applicants advised whether they have been successful

Annex 1:

Filling in the application form

General Points

Please ensure you answer all the questions on the application form. Incomplete applications will be withdrawn from the application process, as will applications where plagiarism is suspected.

Part 1: your details and eligibility

Please complete all the questions in this section ensuring all the details you enter are correct and that we will be able to contact you using the details you submit.

Part 2: application and commitment

Please complete these questions, using the guidance above.

Part 3: education

Please complete as appropriate, noting that there is no eligibility requirement for a first class or upper second class degree.

Part 4: about you

1. What experiences have most influenced your development as an individual?

This question is your opportunity for you to tell us about yourself.

2. What motivates you to join the solicitors' profession? (around 400-500 words)

This question is aimed at drawing out why you want to enter the profession. Applications for training contracts, qualifying work experience and newly qualified roles far exceed the number of positions available and we are interested in both why you want to pursue a career in such a competitive profession, and what you feel you can bring to the profession. Please draw on all factors you feel are relevant, including personal experiences you may have had growing up, why you chose to study law and how you spent your time at university. This list is not exhaustive and you may draw on other reasons for wanting to be a solicitor.

3. *What areas of law are you most interested in and why? Discuss a current affairs item or recent news story you have found interesting that relates to your areas of legal interest. (Around 400 - 500 words)*

A successful career in the legal profession requires an understanding of current affairs. This question is aimed at assessing the depth of your interest and commitment to a career in law. The topic you choose can be a recent development in an on-going matter or could be a story that has broken within six months of submitting your application. You should explain why you have found it significant and how it relates to the area of law that you find interesting.

4. *Identify three essential skills you believe a solicitor must have and tell us how your experiences have helped you develop these skills. (Around 400 - 500 words)*

Solicitors need a range of skills including the ability to:

- negotiate the best outcome for their client;
- communicate effectively with a range of people;
- remain calm in a highly pressured environment; and
- show determination and commitment when a task is long and arduous.

They must also be trusted to carry out all duties with honesty, integrity, and diligence.

This question invites you to tell us how you have developed these types of skills and provide examples of how you have been trusted to act honestly and with integrity through personal commitments, work experience and paid employment. These experiences do not have to be undertaken in a legal environment, but you should explain how the skills you developed could be relevant in a legal setting.

To note

Parts 5 onwards will not carry a score allocation when your application is marked during the shortlisting process. Should your application progress, the information you provide will be used as background and context that will be explored during the interview process

Course details

Part 5: LPC applicants only - course details

Please complete these questions as per the application form, noting you do not need a confirmed place on the LPC to apply to the DAS but that an award will be subject to securing a full time/part time place on the LPC for the academic year 2024/2025,

starting in either September 2024 or January/February 2025. If you do not have a confirmed place, but do have an idea of the provider, course and course structure you would prefer, please include this, noting these are your preferred choices.

Part 6: LPC applicants only - training contracts and risks

Question 6.0 - 6.2

Please complete the questions as per the application form.

Question 6.3

The DAS does not guarantee a training contract. We will need to be satisfied that you are aware of this fact; that you have considered the risks of undertaking the LPC without a training contract and your reasons for wishing to do so. We therefore require a complete answer to this question.

Part 7: SQE applicants only - course details

Question 7

Please complete the questions as per the application form. If you do not have a confirmed place on a preparation course, but do have an idea of the provider, course, and course structure you would prefer, please include this information, noting that these are your preferred choices.

Part 8: SQE applicants only - qualifying work experience

Questions 8.0 - 8.1

Please complete the questions as per the application form. Please familiarise yourself with the rules regarding the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE) assessments and Qualifying Work Experience (QWE). Please note that not all work experience, work placements and internships will count towards QWE.

Information can be found on the Solicitors Regulation Authority website.
<https://sqa.sra.org.uk/>

Part 9: financial circumstances

Question 9.0 - 9.1

The DAS provides financial assistance for the LPC/SQE. No assistance is provided towards your living costs. We therefore require assurance that you will be able to meet all your living costs and those for your dependents whilst studying. You might have a job, intend on getting a job or be living rent-free with family during your LPC/SQE, in which case:

- Please list where you work and the hours you will be working.
- If you are planning on getting a job, please tell us where you intend to work, the hours you intend to work and why you think you will be successful.
- If you are living with family in order to save money on rent, please state this.

Questions 9.2 - 9.4

We require details of your monthly income, and expenditure in order to assess your financial situation. Please complete this section as fully as possible and note that failure to fully complete these questions will result in your application being withdrawn from the application process.

We accept applications from people in receipt of universal credit and other benefits and your application will not be marked down if you receive this support.

Please note that if you are invited to interview, you will be required to scan and email three months' worth of bank statements before your interview.

Part 10: References

Please provide contact details for two references and note that at least one of your referees should be for academic or professional contacts, such as teachers or employers. Please tell your chosen referees that you have listed them as references for the Diversity Access Scheme. You must ensure that the details you provide for your references are up to date and that we will be able to contact them by email and telephone between June and July 2024, using the details you provide.

- END OF DOCUMENT -