



The Law
Society

The Diversity Access Scheme

Report on Applications 2023

December 2023



What the award means to some of the 2023 awardees, in their own words

"The DAS has provided me with the financial security I needed to take the next steps towards a successful and fulfilling career as solicitor.

As an individual from a single-parent family who has grown up on a council estate, I thought I would never have this opportunity because I don't fit the stereotype of the typical law student. I lacked the confidence to progress with my career aspirations. The DAS helped to provide me with the confidence I need because others believe in me and see my potential."

"I grew up in a broken home on a council estate with a single teenage mother. I attended a school where my home life interfered with my education, and I was constantly told that I could never get a law degree and 'someone like me' isn't made for this profession.

The DAS has allowed me to feel believed in and has made me appreciate that my potential has been recognised. Without DAS, I would not be in the position to fund my LPC to become a solicitor and the mentoring DAS provides will give me exposure I've never had before. I truly feel my future career as a solicitor would not be possible without this scheme."

"I am absolutely honoured to be one of the DAS awardees this year. The DAS has made sure I can afford to make my dreams come true. I grew up on a council estate near Dudley, attending the local state school. I was then lucky enough to attend the University of Oxford to complete my law degree, but struggled throughout my studies...facing bereavement and was diagnosed with both depression and autism in my final year.

I also came out as non-binary in my first year of university, and my aspirations of becoming a medical solicitor means in the future I should be able to help trans people who are facing difficulties in their medical transition."

With thanks to our sponsors



The Diversity Access Scheme benefits from the generous support of the **A W Blackwell Bequest**

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With thanks also to the following individuals and organisations for their donations to the Diversity Access Scheme in 2023: Z.Kharas, Page Group and Chambers and Partners.

Introduction

Through the Law Society Diversity Access Scheme (DAS), we help talented people who would otherwise be unable to pursue a career in law. The scheme addresses three fundamental obstacles to fair access - finance, professional contacts and opportunities to gain work experience - through the provision of Legal Practice Course (LPC) fees or Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE) fees, work placements and professional mentors.

In 2023, funding was secured for 15 DAS awards. Seven awardees have chosen to study the SQE and 8 will study the LPC.

Application criteria

Applicants must demonstrate the ability and commitment to become a solicitor. They must also fulfil social and financial criteria. For DAS 2023 applicants were asked to confirm at least two of the following statements:

- they attended a non fee-paying school;
- they were the first generation of their family to have attended higher education;
- they received free school meals during their schooling.

They were also asked to confirm:

- they have no more than £5,000 in their bank account or otherwise invested; and
- no access to financial gifts or loans from family.

Where candidates could not confirm at least two of the above criteria, they were asked to describe any exceptional circumstances they face which make it particularly difficult to pursue their ambitions. The circumstances could be as a result of their:

- gender/gender identity
- ethnicity
- sexual orientation
- health
- disability
- other personal obstacles.

Application questions

The 2023 application process opened on 22 February and closed on 17 April. The application form required applicants to detail:

- why they wish to enter the profession
- how experience gained through vacation placements, work experience, paid employment and voluntary or personal commitments has helped them to develop skills relevant to becoming a solicitor; and
- an understanding of current affairs.

Applicants were also required to write a 750-word essay addressing the following question:

“Is the right to social care a human right?”

All submitted applications were scored against set criteria and marking guidance, including evidence of:

- commitment to a career as a solicitor
- ability to research and present complex issues concisely
- ability to marshal a coherent argument and offer a clear conclusion.

Applications received

A total of 286 applications were received, a 32% increase from 2022. The applications were marked by the Law Society Diversity and Inclusion team, two DAS alumni and seven volunteer Social Mobility Ambassadors (SMAs). Each application was marked by two advisers, alumni or SMAs to avoid unconscious bias and to ensure transparency.

34 applications were shortlisted for interview.

The interview: panel selection and interview questions

Shortlisted applicants were invited to interview with a selection panel of four solicitors and overseen by a Law Society adviser. For the first time in the DAS' 19 year history, the panel was comprised entirely of DAS alumni, who are now qualified solicitors.

A total of seven questions formed the basis of the interview and were discussed and agreed in advance by the interview panel. An assessment was included as part of the interview process. A score guide was provided and used in interviewing and assessing each candidate to ensure the process was transparent and fair.

Marketing and promotion

The opening of applications was publicised in a press release. Digital information pamphlets with links to the DAS webpage were sent to universities and LPC providers through the careers team. Marketing was also undertaken through the Law Society social media channels including Twitter and LinkedIn and the Law Society Diversity and Inclusion newsletter, PU and City Update.

Talks and information were provided at the following institutions:

- Nottingham Law School Law Fair
- Southbank University
- London Metropolitan University
- Canterbury Christchurch University

The DAS was also specifically publicised to alumni of widening participation schemes and relevant organisations including Pathways to Law (The Sutton Trust) and Aspiring solicitors.

All forms of marketing and all promotional materials contained a link to the DAS website, which received 9433 unique page views between February and April, a 17% decrease from 2022 (11,502). The most effective means of promoting the DAS has been through LPC/SQE providers and universities.

How did you first hear about DAS?	Responses
University or LPC/SQE provider	43%
Law Society and/or Junior Lawyers webpages	39%
Social media	8%
Other (including word of mouth, press and from colleagues)	10%

Applications were up 32% compared to 2022 (287 compared to 216), and remained well above average (175) for the preceding five years.

Mentoring

In addition to financial assistance, awardees are offered the opportunity for being matched with professional mentors and work experience placements during study. Students are matched with mentors based on their legal interests, the kind of support they require (whether it is legal expertise, 'soft' skills, advice and support in bringing their 'authentic selves' to the workplace or help with training contract applications) and the type of organisation in which they would like to practice. Our 2023 awardees have been matched with professional mentors. The 2022 and 2023 cohorts have fed back positively on their experiences:

"I met with my mentor this morning. You genuinely could not have matched me with a more perfect mentor! I have a few exams next week and within the space of just half an hour, she has made me feel so much more confident preparing for them. She has also given me a few things to go away and do over the weekend before I contact her again next week. Thank you so much for matching me with her and the work that went into it, I am very grateful!"

"It was really helpful talking with my mentor. It definitely helped me feel like I could carve out some space for myself. She made me feel like flexibility and part time working in the legal aid sector would be possible."

"I've really been enjoying the mentoring sessions. They've been exposing a lot of interests and dislikes that I didn't even know I had! She asks positively challenging questions which get me thinking - something I really appreciate. We meet every couple of weeks on teams and I am looking forward to putting the skills from the sessions to use."

"I have a good connection with my mentor and have made some good progress."

Work experience

Work experience placements are sought and brokered based on the legal interests of the DAS awardees. All placements are either paid or, where they are hosted by legal teams in the charity or legal aid sector, are reimbursed at the Living Wage by the DAS. Travel expenses and accommodation costs are also provided by the DAS for awardees who wish to undertake placements outside their locality.

The 2022 cohort gained insights from a wide range of legal work experience hosts, including private practice firms, in house organisations and charity legal teams. Internships and placements took place at the following organisations:

- Sackers
- Kingsley Napley
- Browne Jacobson
- Wedlake Bell
- Squire Patton Boggs
- Bindmans
- Arm
- The University of the Arts London
- Endava

We have secured interest from a further 10 organisations for 2023 - 2024, including charities, City firms, inhouse legal teams and regional firms:

- UBS
- Leeds City Council
- Hickman and Rose
- Winkworth Sherwood
- Zaiwalla & Co
- Withers
- Santander
- The National Trust
- Justice
- The General Medical Council

Funding and sponsorship for DAS 2023

The DAS retained all but one cash sponsor in 2023 and gained an additional fee waiver.

Soft skill support for DAS 2023

In December the DAS will partner with Santander's legal team and Eversheds Sutherland to provide a day of insight, work shops and panel events for our 2022 and 2023 awardees.

An update on the progress of the 2022, 2021 and 2020 DAS cohorts

2022 cohort

We made 15 DAS awards in 2022. Three of the cohort have secured training contracts: two at Squire Patton Boggs and one with Hanne + Co. Four of the 2022 cohort have secured paralegal roles. The remaining eight awardees are still seeking training contract roles.

2021 cohort

Eight of the 14 awardees have secured training contracts; two are in paralegal roles; one is waiting for confirmation of their training contract offer and the remaining three awardees are still working towards securing their training contracts.

2020 cohort

All 2020 awardees have now secured training contracts in the following organisations:

- Accenture
- Natwest Markets
- Cerberus Capital Management
- Morrison Foerster
- Charles Russell Speechleys
- Lee and Thompson
- Corams Childrens Legal Centre
- Gold Jennings Solicitors
- Cole Khan Solicitors
- Southern Co-Op

Diversity profile 2023

All applicants were asked to complete a diversity monitoring questionnaire. In line with good practice, this information was provided voluntarily and assessed to monitor equality of opportunity in the process. The information is kept on a password protected file. Data is collected on:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Whether the applicant is part of the first generation to attend higher education
- Type of secondary school attended
- Whether the applicant received free school meals at secondary school
- Whether the applicant has caring responsibilities for a child under 18
- Whether the applicant has other caring responsibilities

Response rate

The diversity questionnaire is a mandatory part of the Diversity Access Scheme application form. It is not possible to submit an application online without having filled in the questionnaire. The application form explains why we collect this data and how we use it. It also makes clear that it is not used in the selection process and that no one involved in the selection process has access to it. Between 15% - 18% of applicants answered 'prefer not to say' on most of the questions. This increased to between 20% - 23% for the questions on disability, religion and sexual orientation. We will consider how we can best encourage more applicants to share their diversity information for 2024.

Socio-economic background, ethnicity and caring responsibilities

- The application data on socio-economic background is positive and demonstrates we are reaching those from less advantaged backgrounds. Of those who applied to the DAS, 62% were part of the first generation to go to university; 58% attended a UK state school and 53% received free school meals, indicative of a low-income background. Applicants who fulfilled these criteria were more likely to secure DAS award, demonstrating that our selection process is robust: 67% of our awardees were part of the first generation to go to university, 80% attended a UK state school and 73% received free school meals.
- 48% of applicants were from Black, Asian and other Minority Ethnic backgrounds, (compared to 60% in 2022) and 30% were from White backgrounds (the same in 2022). Of those who secured a DAS award, 53% are from White backgrounds, 13% are from Asian backgrounds, 13% did not declare their ethnic background, 13% are from other Ethnic backgrounds, 7% are from Mixed Race backgrounds and 0% are from Black backgrounds. Those from White backgrounds had the highest success rate at interview and those from Black backgrounds had the lowest. This imbalance will be considered and addressed going into the 2024 application process.
- Those with childcare responsibilities made up 18% of total applications (compared to 15% in 2022) and were overrepresented at awardee stage, with 27% of successful applicants disclosing childcare responsibilities (compared to 0% last year).
- 31% of the awardee cohort have other caring responsibilities.

Age, gender and disability

- 60% of awardees are aged 18-24 (compared to 50% in 2022) 33% are aged between 25 - 34 (compared to 38% in 2022) and 7% didn't disclose their age. Older awardees are less likely to apply to the DAS (17% were aged over 35) and to be unsuccessful in securing a DAS award (0%).
- Female applicants were more likely to apply to the DAS (64% of applicants were female compared to 21% male) and more likely to secure an award than male applicants (73% of awardees are female compared to 13% male). 7% of the awardee pool is non-binary. The gender imbalance of DAS applicants and awardees is historic. Efforts to address it through rebranding the DAS as a

scholarship rather than a bursary and refreshing the interviewing panel, have made little difference to this.

- 27% of awardees declared a disability (compared to 30% in 2022), which was in line with the rate of disabled applicants (25% of applicants declared a disability in both 2023 and 2022). 21% of applicants declined to answer, and 13% of the awardee cohort declined to answer. 53% of applicants were not disabled and were slightly overrepresented in the awardee pool (60%).

The Diversity Access Scheme 2024

2024 will mark the 20th anniversary of the DAS. We will be connecting with alumni over the year and working with stakeholders to feed in ideas for marking the anniversary. Looking later into 2024, we will be considering options for setting up an DAS alumni group.

The applications for 2024 will run as usual with plans to review both the application form questions and the interview process:

- Feedback from the shortlisting panel suggests that we should review the application form questions - including considering whether to include an essay question in 2024. The panel reported back that it was difficult to differentiate between essays. Furthermore, use of artificial intelligence (including programs such as 'Chat GPT') may interfere with the authenticity of submissions.
- The interview panel are in agreement that the interview process needs to be reviewed. One suggestion to improve the process is to host a short session for applicants who are shortlisted, outlining what to expect from the interview process and what the panel are looking for. We will also review the questions and consider the option for in-person interviews. Further views and steer on both the application form and interview process will be sought from current DAS cohorts and our alumni.
- Whilst we are successfully reaching those who are either from lower socio-economic groups, disabled and/or have caring responsibilities, our data demonstrates that we need to consider how to better reach candidates from ethnically diverse backgrounds, particularly those from Black backgrounds. These points will feed into the review and ideas from key stakeholders will be sought.
- Lastly, going forward we will amend our diversity questionnaire to align with question sets we use elsewhere, to enable comparisons with the wider profession as a whole.

Age	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	47	16%	1	2%	1	100%	7%	2%
18 – 24	124	43%	20	16%	9	45%	60%	7%
25 – 34	67	23%	11	16%	5	45%	33%	7%
35 – 44	35	12%	1	3%	0	0%	0%	0%
45 – 54	12	4%	1	8%	0	0%	0%	0%
55 - 64	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	0%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	17%

Gender	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	42	15%	1	2%	1	100%	7%	2%
Male	59	21%	6	10%	2	33%	13%	3%
Female	184	64%	26	14%	11	42%	73%	6%
Non-binary	2	1%	1	50%	1	100%	7%	50%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	62%

Ethnicity	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	49	17%	2	4%	2	100%	13%	4%
Asian or Asian British	65	23%	5	8%	2	40%	13%	3%
Black or Black British	46	16%	4	9%	0	0%	0%	0%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	27	9%	4	15%	1	25%	7%	4%
Other ethnic group	13	5%	2	15%	2	100%	13%	15%
White	87	30%	17	20%	8	47%	53%	9%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	35%

Disability	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	61	21%	3	5%	2	67%	13%	3%
Yes	73	25%	9	12%	4	44%	27%	5%
No	153	53%	22	14%	9	41%	60%	6%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	15%

Religion	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	66	23%	5	8%	3	60%	20%	5%
Christian	90	31%	11	12%	2	18%	13%	2%
Hindu	8	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	0%
Jewish	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	0%
Muslim	69	24%	5	7%	4	80%	27%	6%
Sikh	5	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	0%
No religion or belief	43	15%	13	30%	6	46%	40%	14%
Other	5	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	0%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	27%

Sexual orientation	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	63	22%	5	8%	4	80%	27%	6%
Heterosexual	190	66%	20	11%	10	50%	67%	5%
Gay man	10	3%	2	20%	0	0%	0%	0%
Gay woman	2	1%	2	100%	0	0%	0%	0%
Bisexual	19	7%	5	26%	1	20%	7%	5%
Other	3	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	0%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	17%

First generation at university	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	53	18%	3	6%	3	100%	20%	6%
Did not attend University	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	0%
Yes	178	62%	24	13%	10	42%	67%	6%
No	55	19%	7	13%	2	29%	13%	4%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	15%

School type	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	42	15%	1	2%	1	100%	7%	2%
UK state school	166	58%	28	17%	12	43%	80%	7%
UK Independent/ Fee-paying	5	2%	1	20%	0	0%	0%	0%
Attended school outside UK	74	26%	4	5%	2	50%	13%	3%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	12%

Free school meals	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	65	23%	3	5%	3	100%	20%	5%
Yes	153	53%	22	14%	11	50%	73%	7%
No	35	12%	3	9%	0	0%	0%	0%
Don't know	34	12%	6	18%	1	17%	7%	3%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	15%

Caring child under 18	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	50	17%	2	4%	2	100%	13%	4%
Yes	51	18%	7	14%	4	57%	27%	8%
No	184	64%	25	14%	9	36%	60%	5%
Don't know	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	0%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	17%

Caring responsibility	Applications		Shortlisted		Successful			
	Number of applications	% of applications	Number shortlisted	% of applicants shortlisted	Number	% of shortlisted applicants	% of successful awardees	% of overall applications
Unanswered/Prefer not to say	57	20%	3	5%	3	100%	20%	5%
Yes	63	22%	5	8%	3	60%	20%	5%
No	167	58%	26	16%	9	35%	60%	5%
Total	287	100%	34	12%	15	44%	100%	15%