



## **Diversity Access Scheme**

Guidance for Mentoring

## What is the Diversity Access Scheme (DAS)?

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, work placements and professional mentors. The DAS also offers the option of SQE exam and preparation course fees as an alternative to the LPC scholarship.

To date, the DAS has helped over 250 aspiring solicitors in pursuing their legal education and career.

## How does mentoring DAS students differ from mentoring the other groups?

DAS students are not qualified solicitors: they are still studying for their LPC or SQE. As such their needs as mentees on the brink of starting their careers in law are different from those who are already qualified. Additionally, the core objective of the scheme - that of improving social mobility and diversity in the legal sector - means that DAS students come from diverse range of backgrounds rather than those more 'traditional' backgrounds usually associated with the profession. For example, more often than not, DAS students:

- are the first in their family to attend higher education;
- are without a professional family network;
- grew up in households with financial constraints; and
- have overcome exceptional financial, personal, or socio-economic hurdles in pursuing their ambition to become a solicitor;

Given that many DAS students are in the process of trying to obtain training contracts and almost all DAS students are the first aspiring professional in their family, they require a mentor who can provide them with a range of advice on starting a career in law.

## Motivation and commitment for becoming a DAS mentor

There are no special requirements to become a DAS mentor, however, knowledge and experience of early careers issues - particularly training contract application processes, work experience placements and interviewing for these roles - would be beneficial.

Additionally, where DAS students and mentors who have had some similar life experiences are matched, we believe the likelihood a good mentor/mentee relationship developing are stronger. To that end, mentors who:

- Attended non fee paying schools
- Were the first in their family to attend university
- Are the first solicitors in their family
- Did not necessarily have a 'traditional' route into law
- Or are otherwise from an underrepresented group

Would be particularly welcome in applying to mentor a DAS student.

## The mentoring partnership

### Responsibilities

Each mentoring pair will decide how they want their partnership to work and will set this out in their initial meeting.

It is expected that mentees will:

- set clear, realistic objectives
- be jointly responsible for scheduling meetings and rescheduling them if needed
- be open to feedback from their mentor and receptive to new ideas
- show consideration for their mentor's time
- adhere to confidentiality of the mentoring partnership
- maintain commitment to the mentoring partnership - the frequency, structure and length of the partnership will be discussed and agreed with the mentor, but it's typically 1 hour per month for a period of 12 months
- advise the Law Society DAS contact of any breakdown in the mentoring relationship

It is expected that mentors will:

- motivate and encourage their mentee to take responsibility for learning and career development activities
- help identify learning and networking opportunities
- provide constructive feedback and act as a sounding board for ideas
- challenge their mentee to take a broad perspective
- use listening skills and a facilitative approach to increase their mentee's awareness of strengths and weaknesses
- adhere to confidentiality of the mentoring partnership
- maintain commitment to the mentoring partnership - the frequency, structure and length of the partnership will be discussed and agreed with the mentee, but it's typically 1 hour per month for a period of 12 months
- advise the Law Society DAS contact of any breakdown in the mentoring relationship

### Matching mentoring pairs

Mentoring pairs are matched based on the information provided by prospective mentors and DAS awardees. Matching is a qualitative process which considers the career objectives of the mentee (for example, their legal interests and career ambitions) alongside the skills and expertise of the mentor (for example, their legal expertise, the type of firm they work in and their career path). It also takes into account of specific requirements by awardees. Where we can, we will seek mentors with specific characteristics and experiences that will support the awardees in areas where they need additional guidance.

We aim to match mentoring pairs by October.

## The first meeting

Once pairs are matched, the DAS lead will e-introduce the potential mentor and the mentee. After being introduced, unless otherwise specified, the mentee is responsible for making initial contact and introducing themselves, within 2 weeks.

Ideally, the first meeting should cover:

- introductions and mentor/mentee background
- expectations of the mentoring partnership, and role and responsibilities of each
- what the mentee and mentor hope to get out of the partnership
- the mentee's learning/career objectives
- frequency, structure, length and logistics of the meetings
- action points and agenda for the next meeting

In preparation for the first meeting, it may be helpful to think about and note down your thoughts on the following:

- What are your expectations of mentoring? What outcomes are you aiming for?
- How do you see your role and responsibilities?
- How often would you like to meet? And for how long?
- Where/how will meetings take place?
- Are you happy to have direct contact with each other between meetings?
- What limits will you put in place in terms of confidentiality?
- Are there any areas / topics that are outside the scope of your mentoring partnership?
- How and how often will you review how things are going?
- What will you do if you think the partnership isn't working out?
- What will success look like at the end of the mentoring partnership?

## Establishing ground rules and setting boundaries

### Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important element of the mentoring relationship and is central to a successful partnership. The Law Society provides the following guidance for DAS mentoring:

- Anything said during the course of a mentoring meeting is confidential to the parties involved and should not be repeated without the express consent of those individuals.
- The mentoring discussions will remain confidential to the mentoring partnership both during and after the formal mentoring relationship has finished.

### Inclusivity

When discussing the additional ground rules and boundaries of your mentoring partnership, you might want to consider the following:

- be inclusive: inclusion is the responsibility of everyone in the workplace and many disabilities are invisible.

- accessibility and the allocation of time to mentoring. How will you keep in touch between meetings and how much time will you allocate to mentoring?
- some mentors will have time for calls or emails between sessions, others may not
- issues that are off-limits to the mentoring relationship - for example, you may agree to focus solely on work-related issues.

Mentoring pairs should discuss and reach agreement on ground rules or boundaries early on in the relationship.

### **Mentoring meetings**

A good mentoring meeting should:

- have a clear agenda
- review actions from last meeting and assess progress
- be related to agreed learning objectives
- focus on exploring the mentee's issues
- identify clear actions and next steps, including any learning activities the mentee will undertake between sessions
- agree a date for the next meeting

### **Keeping the mentoring partnership on track**

Try to build in time at specific points during your mentoring partnership to reflect on how things are going and what progress is being made towards achieving the mentees objectives.

Taking stock of what has or hasn't worked along the way will help keep the relationship on track and ensure you get the most out of the mentoring experience. It will also help identify any issues which, if left unchecked, could cause the mentoring partnership to break down.

If you feel that the mentoring partnership isn't progressing as you'd hoped, consider scheduling some time to raise this with your mentee/, ensuring you have a clear agenda for discussing the situation.

### **Closing the partnership**

The mentoring partnership should last for 12 months with an option to continue if the mentoring relationship is proving productive and successful. Occasionally, mentoring partnerships may need to close early due to unforeseen circumstances (for example a change of role) or simply because the relationship is not achieving the aims of the mentee. Where this is the case, close down the partnership without fault or blame attached to either party and please inform the Law Society. Alternatively, contact the DAS lead at the Law Society who will close down the relationship on your behalf.

At the end of the mentoring partnership, we will ask mentors for feedback on the process, not on the content of the discussion.