



## **The Diversity Access Scheme**

Work experience guidance for prospective hosts

## **Introduction**

The Diversity Access Scheme (DAS) supports aspiring solicitors from less advantaged backgrounds to pursue their legal education and careers through the provision of:

- Finance: full LPC and SQE scholarships
- Mentoring: a solicitor mentor
- Work experience: brokered by the Law Society

Since 2005, the DAS has made over 250 awards to aspiring solicitors, with each awardee receiving a full LPC or SQE scholarship, a professional mentor to support them throughout the year and a work experience placement.

The DAS is set up to recognise the educational, social and financial disadvantages that often accompany, or indeed are the result of deprivation. It prioritises support to precisely those individuals who have not had the advantage of earlier intervention and have nonetheless demonstrated ability and commitment to a career in law. Our eligibility criteria ensure that we reach those who need it the most: those without contacts in the profession, without cash or capital to pay for their LPC or SQE fees and those who have faced other challenges in pursuing their education and careers, for example growing up in local authority care or being disabled.

## **The work experience offer**

Access to high quality work experience has been identified as a significant challenge to entering the profession. Aspiring solicitors from from less privileged backgrounds are unlikely to have professional contacts within their families and networks to advise and support them with applications and they will not have the financial support or 'safety nets' in place to undertake unpaid work. In social mobility geographical cold spots, lack of finance is exacerbated by travel and accommodation costs to legal centres.

The work experience function of the DAS is key to our offer: it enables awardees to gain valuable insight into a career in the profession as well as opportunities to grow their professional networks and build on their CV.

For those firms and inhouse legal teams who host DAS students on placements, the work experience offer provides access to a pool of talented, high-performing students from diverse backgrounds through an established Law Society run programme.

## **Our requirements**

Through offering work experience placements, we aim to provide DAS awardees with a high quality experience of working in a legal practice. We therefore ask firms and inhouse legal teams (practices) hosting DAS students to provide the following:

- A placement lasting up to two weeks (although longer placements/internships will be considered)
- Remuneration at the living wage as a minimum
- A named contact within the practice with whom they will be able to liaise in preparation for and during the placement

- An authentic experience of working in a business environment
- Insight into the practice and roles within it
- Varied work that will provide a range of experiences including client meetings where possible
- Networking opportunities to make professional contacts and build confidence
- 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:

- Unless explicitly stated otherwise, work experience placements do not form part of qualifying work experience, 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.
- 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 and prompt responses to any communications.

### **Organising placements**

All DAS awardees 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.

This information is submitted to the DAS co-ordinator and is used to identify suitable legal practices that have expressed interest in offering work experience opportunities from our database.

We work with many practices in arranging DAS work experience placements. Different arrangements suit different practices and we work flexibly to ensure that each arrangement suits the requirements of the awardees and practices involved.

We usually work with our partners in one of two ways:

#### **1. Formal vacation scheme places**

Some of our work experience partners prefer to work with us using their formal vacation scheme, ring fencing one or more places on their scheme for DAS awardees.

In these instances, we advertise the opportunity to our DAS awardees, asking them to let us know if they will be applying for the vacation scheme. We then provide the names of the DAS awardees who will be applying to the relevant HR contact within the practice. The awardee names are then flagged on the practice's system.

The DAS awardees apply in the usual way and go through the same assessment and interview processes as the other candidates. Some practices may amend parts of the process for DAS awardees. The highest scoring DAS awardees are awarded a ring fenced place on the vacation scheme.

The process is semi-competitive in as far as the awardees go through the same requirements as other, non-DAS applicants. This process is suitable for larger firms. It has benefits for both the host and DAS awardee in as far as it reduces additional administration for work experience places outside the vacation scheme; the awardees have the same opportunities and exposure as the other vacation scheme students; and it streamlines potential recruitment for the training contract application process.

## 2. **Work experience (outside the vacation scheme process)**

Other organisations may prefer to avoid the vacation scheme route and instead offer a placement over the Easter or Summer break or any other suitable times throughout the year. With this option, we contact the DAS awardee cohort advertising a potential work experience opportunity with the named practice: outlining details about the organisation, the length of the placement and confirmation that it is remunerated. The dates can either be decided in advance by the firm or discussed once awardees have been selected. The awardees are asked to reply directly to the Law Society with an expression of interest.

Once interest has been established, those candidates are asked to prepare a CV and cover letter, which are then collated by us and sent in one email to a named contact within the practice for consideration.

The practice may then either select candidates for interview or make a decision for the placement based on the content and quality of the CV and cover letters sent in. Alternatively, some practices are happy for us to select a suitable candidate/s on their behalf.

Once a potential match has been identified, the practice is asked to make contact with the student to agree details of the arrangement within the parameters set out above.

We find that this is an efficient way of arranging placements providing flexibility for both sides.

## **Timing**

DAS interviews are held in July and the awards commence in September. As natural academic breaks, Easter and Summer placements are the most popular times and offer good lead in time for advertising and arranging placements. However, we are happy to advertise and assist in arranging placements throughout the year.

## **Feedback**

We 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. Many of our work experience partners have partnered with us for a number of years and stand as a testament to the high calibre candidates taken on through the DAS.

## **The Law Society's role**

Our experience is that work placements work best when the details of the placement are arranged directly between the student and the host (for example working out placement dates, discussion of the departments hosting the placement, details of the work involved etc).

We have oversight of the whole scheme, are able to broker the introduction, offer a framework and collate feedback. If you would prefer us to have more involvement in the process just let us know. We are 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 Leila Lesan [diversityaccessscheme@lawsociety.org.uk](mailto:diversityaccessscheme@lawsociety.org.uk)

**Please 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 awardees are from a very diverse range of backgrounds and ages. All are undertaking the LPC or SQE, on a mix of part and fulltime courses. They have all been matched with professional mentors through the scheme, to offer tailored support and guidance.
- Most DAS awardees work to support their cost of living, alongside their studies. They use their annual leave allowance to undertake work experience placements and often need to negotiate this time off with their employer.
- While we are clear that there should be no expectation of contact between work experience hosts and DAS awardees beyond their placement, we would in no way wish to discourage ongoing contact where professional working relationships are developed and mutual consent is given.
- Again, while there is no expectation of a training contract, qualifying work experience or employment beyond the placement, where there are relevant and suitable opportunities we would encourage details to be shared with the awardees.
- The most valuable opportunities are those that help our awardees to enhance their CV and demonstrate skills to potential employers.
- Giving awardees as much information as possible about the business, the placement and what you expect from them will help them to prepare and get as much out of the experience as possible.