Programme Specification

Programme award and title: Diploma in Legal Practice

SCQF Level: 11  SCQF Credit Value: 120

Educational aims of the programme:
Concise (e.g. a few sentences), general statement of aims and broad purposes of the programme

The Diploma in Legal Practice (‘the Diploma’) is an integral part of the qualification route to becoming a solicitor in Scotland and is the bridge between the academic qualification of the LL.B. and the vocational training stage of the legal traineeship. The main route to qualification as a solicitor in Scotland is as follows. Students must first complete an LL.B. accredited by the Law Society of Scotland or pass the Law Society’s own professional examinations. The candidate will then undertake the Diploma in Legal Practice which is followed by a two year traineeship under the supervision of a solicitor. During the traineeship, the candidate also attends a Professional Competence Course (PCC) before taking the Test of Professional Competence (TPC) to be admitted onto the Roll of Solicitors.

Accordingly, the LL.B., which the School of Law offers, is the academic route to entry to the profession and is described by the Law Society as providing “an introduction to legal system as well as a body of legal knowledge and skills, to forms of legal analysis, and to the operation of law in Society. The professional training regime begins on the first day of the Diploma, and ends with successful completion of the TPC. The Diploma in Legal Practice expands on the academic knowledge and generic skills acquired in the subjects already studied during the LL.B. and develops legal skills in these fields.”

The Diploma is therefore a practice skills based programme, designed to develop and extend skills required for practice, over and above generic transferable skills acquired on the LL.B. programme.

Intended programme learning outcomes:
Outline (e.g. one or two paragraphs) of what the student will know, understand and be able to do as a result of their learning, expressed in the categories below. Please consider the contribution made to the student’s personal development planning (PDP) and future employability.

Knowledge and understanding

• The main purpose of the programme is to provide legal skills training for students who intend to enter the legal profession. The aim of the Diploma is to provide training in a wide range of skills relevant to the practice of law in Scotland, including interviewing, letter writing, drafting, legal research, negotiating, advocacy and interpersonal skills, building on transferable skills acquired on the LL.B. It is also designed to develop a practical understanding of the application of the law of Scotland, to develop an understanding of professionalism and ethics in line with the Law Society of Scotland’s Codes of Conduct and associated standards and to prepare students for the first stage of their traineeships, providing skills which will be relevant in practice.

• It is distinctive in that it is a skills based programme which is the first step in the professional training regime and marks the transition between the academic qualification of the LL.B. and the legal traineeship.

• Students cannot embark on the next stage of legal training without the Diploma: it is therefore fundamental to employability.

• Students will be encouraged to become reflective legal professionals, capable of adapting to change and managing complex legal transactions in a business environment.

Subject-specific skills and other attributes

• By the end of the Diploma, students will be able to do the following, at the level expected of a new trainee solicitor: take instructions from clients; undertake conveyancing transactions; prepare wills and undertake executry work; draft legal writs for submission to court and be able to undertake advocacy in court; understand the principles and application of practice management; understand and be able to apply the ethics of the profession; understand the basic principles of accounting;
research and provide suitable financial services and tax advice and draft company documents or public sector documentation (depending on which elective is taken).

Generic skills (e.g. information skills, communication skills, critical, analytical and problem solving abilities) and other attributes
- Transactional research, interviewing, drafting legal documentation, communication skills (letters, email, telephone and verbal) and the ability to apply knowledge to problems in a complex setting.

Learning, teaching and assessment strategies:
Outline (e.g. one or two paragraphs) on overall approach taken to develop and assess learning outcomes, including any distinctive features
- Skills will be developed through teaching methods designed to encourage active learning. Some lectures will be used to demonstrate basic principles and practice but most of the teaching and learning activities will centre around small group work. Tutors will follow the 'show, tell, do' method of skills training and students will be encouraged and expected to participate fully in classes. Class preparation will reinforce the learning outcomes. Face to face campus learning will be supplemented with virtual lectures and online activities where appropriate.
- There will be a strong emphasis on on-going formative assessment, particularly in the first semester, with students submitting exercises for tutor or self review on a regular basis in all modules. A number of methods of formal assessment suitable for a skills based programme will be used, with an emphasis on continuous assessment and transactional assessment. Any examinations will be open-folder which is more suitable for a skills based programme.

Professional/statutory body accreditation or recognition:
The Law Society of Scotland (Note: to be confirmed. The Accreditation Panel appointed by the Law Society of Scotland has recommended accreditation to the Council of the Law Society of Scotland. The decision of the Council is expected in the next few months).

Further details:
Entry requirements: http://www.external.stir.ac.uk/postgrad/index.php
Programme structure: http://www.calendar.stir.ac.uk/
Relevant Subject Benchmark statement (if applicable): http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework: http://www.scqf.org.uk/the_framework.asp
Introduction/revision date: September 2008.