

Note of meeting of the student/trainee liaison committee held at 2.15 pm on 17 January 2001 in Glasgow.

Present: Peter Lockhart (convener), Jason Bell, Stuart Clubb (student, Aberdeen University), Kevin Crombie (student, GGSL), Graeme Dickson (trainee, GGSL), Sally Ferrie (trainee, Dundee University), Amy Fox (student, Dundee University), Charles Hennessy, Sally McKenzie (student, Edinburgh University), Lisa Naylor (trainee, Aberdeen University), Carol Snow (trainee, Edinburgh University)

In attendance: Liz Campbell

Apologies for absence were intimated from Caroline Flanagan

Diploma fees

After introductions of new committee members, discussion turned to the question of fees. Once again, the justification for the increase to £3,500 was queried. The convener explained that the Law Society had written to each Diploma provider in December asking for further information about the level of fee being charged and the student/staff ratio. To date, replies had been received only from Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

Liz Campbell explained that she understood that the increased fees did not relate only to the student/staff ratio, but also to the increased amount of small group teaching and the additional burden placed on tutors of class contact and marking/feedback. Stuart Clubb stated that Aberdeen University had informed him that the fees paid by students go to general university coffers, rather than the department. Sally McKenzie confirmed that at Edinburgh, tutorial sizes vary between 15 and 20 students. She went on to query the increased fees in the light of the fact that the course is shorter (only 22 weeks of teaching at Edinburgh). Kevin Crombie pointed out that at GGSL, students do not know how long the course is, as timetabling is undertaken on a term by term basis. Charles Hennessy pointed out that the purpose of this committee was to provide students with an opportunity to speak to the Law Society direct and that it would be appropriate for the Law Society to take these very legitimate and straightforward concerns back to the universities. Carol Snow requested that the Law Society ask the universities to provide a detailed breakdown of changes from last year to this. It was **agreed** that this should be requested.

List of training vacancies

Sally McKenzie then raised the question of the list of training vacancies compiled by the Law Society and queried when it would be available. Liz Campbell explained that this was the second year in which the Law Society had not compiled such a list and that the Diploma units and careers services at each of the universities had been informed that the list would no longer be produced. She clarified that this decision had been taken as a result of the list being found to be ineffective. There had been no way of ensuring that firms gave an accurate prediction of their recruitment plans (indeed, some of the smaller firms would not be able to plan particularly far ahead) which had led to frustration on the part of students when applying for traineeships. Additionally, for perfectly understandable reasons and partly as a result of this lack of

accuracy, students had tended to apply to all firms, regardless of whether or not they had indicated they wished to take a trainee. It was noted that some students had been informed at university that the list would be forthcoming and it was therefore **agreed** a further letter should be sent explaining that the list was no longer being produced.

Diploma materials and course structure

Sally McKenzie raised concerns about the new Practice Management course on the Diploma which she and her fellow students felt was aimed at middle management and, as such was irrelevant to trainees. She queried how the cost of bringing in management consultants to teach the course could be justified. Stuart Clubb agreed that the course was irrelevant and added that each seminar was merely a repetition of the previous one. Lisa Naylor pointed out that now that she was in a traineeship, there were certain things that she wished she had been taught at university. Amy Fox stated that she thought the course was useful, although there was too much of it and it could be condensed into a few lectures. Sally McKenzie queried the value of bringing in outside speakers to tell them about computer systems, without allowing any hands-on experience.

Concerns were raised about the Conveyancing materials, which were not indexed or paginated. In addition, pages appeared to be missing and the quality of reproduction was poor. Jason Bell stated that it was his understanding that the materials contained factual errors (names of companies which do not exist and reference to certain banks by their former Building Society names) and dates which do not coincide.

Agreed that these comments would be passed on to the Diploma Co-ordinating Committee for consideration when planning next year's materials.

The students also raised the issue of exams and the lack of uniformity in how much assessment is undertaken by means of continuous assessment rather than examination in the four centres. In addition, it was noted that different centres had different lengths of teaching day, with GGSL, whose day runs from 9-6, being the longest. Carol Snow stated that, given that the Diploma was the Law Society's professional qualification, such matters should be uniform.

Communication with students

Kevin Crombie stated that at GGSL there is resentment of the Law Society with the students feeling that there is an element of "buck passing". It was explained that this committee was established in an attempt to communicate direct with the students. Liz Campbell pointed out that information bulletins would be issued to all students after each liaison committee meeting. However, unless the student representatives undertook to seek agreement from their colleagues to release addresses or e-mail addresses, the Law Society had no way of communicating with students other than through the universities. She also pointed out that, in spite of invitations having been issued to the universities for a meeting with the students, to date only the Dundee meeting had taken place. A meeting at GGSL is scheduled for 7 February, but Aberdeen and Edinburgh have both yet to fix dates.

Professional Competence Course

The convener explained that there will be a pilot PCC run by the GGSL from 4-22 June inclusive. At present research is being carried out to underpin the content of the course. The numbers participating in the pilot will be between 12 and 20 and the pilot will be evaluated by an outside agency.

Kevin Crombie asked whether the Law Society would recommend that firms pay the fees. It was explained that that is Law Society policy. **Agreed** that a further letter should be sent to firms stating this.

Agreed that the question of bursaries for those outwith commuting distance of a PCC provider would be looked at again by the Law Society.

Test of Professional Competence

The convener explained that the TPC Panel was due to report to the Education and Training Committee on the structure of the TPC by the end of February. That information would then be made available to this committee and published on the Law Society's website. A pilot TPC was to be run, probably in October.

Questions were raised about whether there would be an appeals procedure for anybody who fails the TPC and it was **agreed** that there would have to be, although the exact mechanism had not been established as yet.

Agreed that the next meeting should take place in early March at a date to be agreed.