

Northumbria University

Legal Practice Course (LPC) profile September 2009

Please note: The information contained in this profile is supplied by Northumbria University; it is the provider's responsibility to keep this information up-to-date.

Introduction from the SRA

The SRA's requirements allow providers considerable freedom to design and focus their courses to meet the needs of particular student cohorts and particular types of legal practice. Providers have a corresponding responsibility to provide clear and useful information to those making choices about where to study and which particular course to follow. To enable potential students to make informed choices, the SRA requires all providers to supply a standard set of information about their provision.

General information

The School of Law at Northumbria University has been a provider of legal education at both undergraduate and professional level for 40 years and has a wealth of experience and expertise to draw upon in both the design and delivery of its programmes. The School has been at the forefront of innovation in legal education; in particular the way it has integrated the teaching of legal rules and legal skills. This is evidenced by the development of the first Exempting Law Degree in England and Wales which has run successfully since 1992 and the integration of skills teaching into core practice areas and elective subjects on both the Legal Practice Course and the Exempting Degree. It is also apparent in its groundbreaking approach to clinical legal education via the Student Law Office modules which are available on both Post-graduate and Undergraduate professional programmes.

The School of Law has offered the Legal Practice Course (full time and part time) and the Exempting Law Degree full time since 1993. The School previously offered the Law Society Finals course and so has an established reputation and profile for legal education. The School's national reputation for innovation and high quality teaching was confirmed by the award of Excellence from the HEFCE. The School also achieved the SRA's top grade of Commendable Practice in all six areas of assessment of its Legal Practice Course provision in April 2007.

Types of LPC

Legal Practice Course Full Time: Stages 1 and 2 (Commercial route or General Practice route).

Legal Practice Course Part Time: Stages 1 and 2 (Commercial Route or General Practice route).

M Law Exempting Law Degree (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

M Law Solicitors Full Qualification (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

Key features of the different LPC courses

Legal Practice Course

The School of Law at Northumbria University offers Stage 1 of the Legal Practice Course in two alternative routes, General Practice ("General") and Commercial Practice ("Commercial"). These alternatives are designed to allow students to tailor Stage 1 of their Legal Practice Course to the area of legal practice in which they plan to specialise during their training contract.

The General route is designed to prepare students for a training contract in a small or medium sized general practice or "high street" firm, which undertakes a broad spread

of legal work of a more general nature, deals primarily with individuals or smaller businesses (whether operating as sole trader, partnership, or company) and may undertake some publically funded work. Each of the core practice areas of Business Law and Practice, Property Law and Practice and Litigation (Civil and Criminal) are given equal weighting on this route to reflect this more general, broad spread of work. The Legal Practice Course Skills are taught and assessed across the core practice areas and in Wills and Administration of Estates.

The Commercial route is designed to prepare students for a training contract in a larger commercial practice, which undertakes legal work of a more commercial nature and deals primarily with larger businesses operating as partnerships or companies. On this route, Business Law and Practice has a slightly greater weighting than either Property Law and Practice or Litigation. Both Civil and Criminal Litigation are taught on this route, however, Criminal Litigation forms a much smaller part of the Litigation core practice area than on the General route and Civil Litigation includes Alternative Dispute Resolution. The Legal Practice Course Skills are taught and assessed across the core practice areas (except in Criminal Litigation) and Wills and Administration of Estates.

M Law Exempting Law Degree (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

This is an integrated Masters programme. Graduates obtain a Masters level qualification while at the same time achieving a Qualifying Law Degree and exemption from the Legal Practice Course. It enables graduates to go straight into a law firm as a trainee solicitor subject to obtaining a training contract. Students are introduced to legal rules and concepts in both their theoretical and practical contexts from day one. They engage in clinical and experiential learning throughout the course culminating in full case work on behalf of real clients in the final year. The advantage of this course is that it enables students to develop their skills and knowledge over a four year period. Students study the core qualifying law degree subjects together with a wide range of over fifteen options (from commercial options such as commercial leases through to International Human Rights, family law and employment law). Students also study the core Legal Practice Course areas.

M Law Solicitors Full Qualification (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

A law degree leading to full qualification as a solicitor (5 years). Northumbria Law School is the first ever Law School to be approved by the Solicitors Regulation Authority to run an academic programme where graduates will be fully qualified solicitors. This groundbreaking programme enables students to combine traditional study with skills development, clinical legal education and placement in practice in order to develop the knowledge, skills and abilities required to work as a solicitor. Graduates are exempt from the Legal Practice Course and will complete their Work Based Learning (equivalent to the Training Contract) during the course of their studies. This exciting programme is an extension to the M Law Exempting Law Degree. Entry onto this programme is not guaranteed. It will have limited numbers of places and entry is dependent upon securing an approved placement on a competitive basis. The availability of placements is dependent upon employers offering them and is not in the control of the Law School. Selection for this programme will take place during year 2 or 3 of the M Law Exempting Degree.

Maximum number of students in the different types of teaching and learning sessions

All courses

The entire cohort of students attend large group sessions (lectures or practicals). The maximum number of students in small group sessions (workshops) is 18.

Maximum number of students it will recruit onto each course

Legal Practice Course

Stage 1 General and Commercial routes: 150 full time students; 100 part time students (across years 1 and 2 of the part time programme).

Stage 2: 150 full time students; 100 part time students (across years 1 and 2 of the part time programme).

M Law Exempting Law Degree (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

360 students

M Law Solicitors Full Qualification (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

40 students

Entry requirements

Legal Practice Course

- (a) Qualifying law degree; or
- (b) Graduate Diploma in Law.

The University statement on admissions seeks to select students who have the ability and motivation to benefit from their intended programme of study. Candidates are considered solely on the basis of their individual merits, abilities and potential with regard being given to academic merit. For each individual, all relevant factors bearing on their previous and likely attainment are taken properly into account.

M Law Exempting Law Degree (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

Applicants should possess one of the following:

Five GCSEs at grade C or above including English Language and Mathematics

GCE and VCE Advanced Level
320 UCAS tariff points (ABB)
General Studies is not accepted

Edexcel/BTEC National Diploma
Distinction, distinction, merit

Scottish Highers/Advanced Highers
ABBBC at Higher, ABC at Advanced Higher

Irish Highers
AABBB

Progression Diploma
Only acceptable in combination with Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL)

Advanced Diploma
Grade C in the Progression Diploma, plus GCE/VCE A Level grade A

HEFC Access
Three distinctions and three merits, plus Toolbox

Other QAA-recognised Access programme

Full Access Award. Some units must be achieved at Distinction grade, others at merit.

Return to Learning

We positively welcome applications from mature students and are willing to consider, on an individual basis, those who do not meet traditional entry criteria. However, that should not be read as meaning that we will generally accept applicants with no formal qualifications, and, where we do so, we would normally be looking for an appropriate level of relevant experience. We are strongly supportive of the University's Access to Higher Education course, the HEFC, which provides an excellent basis for preparing adult students for entry to Higher Education – more details are available from the Return to Learning Service.

M Law Solicitors Full Qualification (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

Students must have been accepted onto the M Law Exempting Degree and be accepted by a placement provider approved by Northumbria Law School.

Policy on Stages 1 and 2

Legal Practice Course

The School will accept both full and part time students onto Stages 1 and 2 of the course. The School will also accept students onto Stage 1 only of the course in both its General and Commercial routes. Likewise, both full and part time students who have taken Stage 1 assessments elsewhere will be accepted onto Stage 2 only of the course at Northumbria. Such students may either enrol for all their Stage 2 electives at Northumbria or (subject to timetabling restrictions) one or two electives. The Student Law Office elective will, however, only be open to students who take both Stages 1 and 2 in their entirety at Northumbria.

M Law Exempting Law Degree (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

M Law Solicitors Full Qualification (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

Not applicable

Academic qualification that will be awarded to successful students

Legal Practice Course

Successful students who complete Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the course at Northumbria University will be awarded a Diploma in Legal Practice. The award can be at Pass, Commendation or Distinction level. The general principle with regards to a Diploma in Legal Practice is that a Commendation will be awarded where a student has an average mark across the course of at least 60% and at least four subject marks in that class. For a Distinction, the figure is at least 70%.

Successful students who complete only Stage 1 of the course at Northumbria University will be awarded a Certificate in Legal Practice. The award can be at Pass, Commendation or Distinction level. The general principle with regards to a Certificate in Legal Practice is that a Commendation will be awarded where a student has an average mark across the course of at least 60% and at least two subject marks in that class. For a Distinction, the figure is at least 70%.

In addition, all students will be issued with a transcript of their marks on completion of each stage of the course.

M Law Exempting Law Degree (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

Successful students will graduate with a Masters level qualification in law, thus achieving a qualifying law degree and exemption from the Legal Practice Course. The award can be at a Lower Second (2.2), Upper Second (2.1) or First Class level.

Learning resources available to support the course, including library and IT provision

Accommodation

The School of Law is housed in the newly constructed City Campus East building, where all Law teaching takes place. The building is well equipped and rooms comfortably accommodate the class sizes on the LPC Full Time and Part Time programmes and the Exempting Law Degrees.

The accommodation available to the Law School includes:

- three tiered lecture theatres with a room capacity of between 200 and 400;
- three Harvard-style lecture rooms, with capacities of 60, 75 and 100;
- 28 flat teaching rooms ranging in capacity from 16 to 30
seven of which are flexibly furnished to allow for use as workshops, seminar rooms or as simulated courtrooms.
- a criminal courtroom with six editing booths
- two civil courtrooms and
- a dedicated IT lab

All lecture theatres have full wireless coverage and are equipped with cameras and speakers for video conferencing, DVD/VCR, projection screens, visualisers, PCs, induction loop and audience voting systems. All classrooms have full wireless coverage, VCR, projection screens, whiteboards and PCs. OHPs are available for use in these rooms.

On floors 1 and 3 (the primary Law floors) student hub areas, incorporating IT facilities (143 PCs), group work areas and social space are provided. Floor 1 houses an expanded Student Law Office facility (with 85 PCs) adjacent to the Law Practice Library which has increased study space, 80 PCs and group and quiet study areas. A separate IT lab accommodating 30 PCs is located on Floor 1. Additionally, an LPC base room is provided on Floor 3 incorporating social space, locker storage facilities and several PCs.

Café/coffee bar/dining facilities are provided on the ground floor and vending machines and free water dispensers are available on each floor.

LPC teaching will take place primarily on Floor 3 and Exempting Degree teaching on Floor 1 in both instances using the flat teaching rooms located around the hub areas which will allow students, where necessary, to break out into the hub area and use the IT facilities available there (for example for drafting or research activities). Large group sessions will take place in the tiered lecture theatres on Floor 0. The court room and editing booths are used in oral skills teaching and assessment to enhance realism.

IT Provision

Northumbria University has been named the country's 'Most IT Enabled Organisation'. The policy of the School of Law is to introduce students to the use of IT in a way that reflects as closely as possible its use within practice. Aspects of IT will therefore permeate the course and students will be exposed to IT throughout their programme. The IT provision in the School is set out below.

Computers

- 338 PCs on the Law floors of City Campus East Building: 82 in Professional Hub areas; 30 in IT lab; 61 in Undergraduate Hub Area; 85 In Student Law

Office and 80 in the Law Practice Collection area
464 PCs in City Campus West Open Access
Centres.

- 1250 PCs in University labs that can be used by students when not used for teaching.
- The University has one 24 hour Open Access centre. This is located in Pandon Building. There are 145 computers in this lab. Additionally, the City Campus Library which has 380 open access computers is normally open 24 hours during term time.

IT/AV Technicians:

- Team of 20: 10 IT technicians (part of a team of 47) are located within the City Campus East building; 10 AV technicians.

IT Training

- LPC students complete self assessment of IT skills on or prior to enrolment and training is provided where necessary
- All Exempting Law Degree students have an introduction to IT during the first year induction
- All Exempting Law Degree students are offered Lexis/Nexis training throughout the course with a compulsory programme in year 3.
- All campus attending students are given an introductory training session on Northumbria Systems.
- IT help sheets are made available on the e-learning portal.
- IT training videos for online database training made available on e-learning portal.
- Electronic lecture on IT for law students made available to students on e-learning portal and freely on the internet.
- IT information for law students - handout provided upon enrolment.

Support

- IT support desks positioned in each open access area.
- Direct link telephones to IT helpline positioned adjacent to each PC area.
- IT Helpline contactable telephone (freephone number available as well as ordinary landline), email, text and direct computer login.
- IT helpline open 8.00am – midnight 363 days a year.

Specification:

- Industry Standard

Operating System:

- Microsoft Windows XP

Proportion of Networked
PCs:

- 100%
- There is access to the University's wireless network throughout City Campus East and in all student and

public areas in City Campus West, including all floors of the University Library, Students' Union etc.

- Word Processing Package: • Word 2007
- Keyboard Skills Package: • Mavis Beacon
- Spreadsheet Package: • Excel 2007
- Presentation Package: • PowerPoint 2007
- Internet Access: • Internet Explorer 7
- E-mail: • Outlook 2007 with off campus to email via Outlook Web Access or the remote desktop, Desktop Anywhere, a browser based application that gives students access to email, their U drive and the same desktop applications available in open access areas
- Virtual Learning Environment: • E-learning portal based on Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment is used for discussion, announcements and the distribution of materials during the delivery of the programme
- Online Legal Research Databases: • Casetrack
• Casebase
• Criminal Law Week Online
• Estates Gazette Interactive
• Gore Brown
• Hein Online
• Justis
• Mental Health Law Reports
• Weekly Law Reports
• Daily Cases
• Family Law Reports
• Lawtel
• Lawtel UK
• Human Rights
• EU Law
• Lexis Nexis Butterworths
• Medical Litigation Online
• PLC Corporate
• Westlaw
- Computer Aided Learning Packages: • IOLIS
- Student IT Audit and Training: • Yes

Library Resources and Facilities

The Library resources supporting the teaching and research programmes of the School of Law are located in the City Campus Library, and in the Law Practice Collection in the School of Law itself on Floor 1 of the new City Campus East building. The City Campus Library is normally open 24 hours. The Law Practice Collection is open during semesters from 9.00am – 9.00pm Monday to Thursday, 9.00am – 5.00pm Friday and Saturday, and 11.00am – 5.00pm on Sunday.

The resources in the City Campus Library comprise a broad-based undergraduate collection, and are located in three separate areas. A wide range of law reports, statutory materials, loose-leaf encyclopaedias, other practitioners' works, and textbooks and monographs are located on Floor 3. Print journals (volumes back to 1997) are located on Floor 2, while previous volumes of the journals are located in the Sub-Basement, which also contains a substantial amount of historical material, for example individual sets of the Private or Nominated Reports. The Law Practice Collection is principally a practice-based postgraduate collection intended to service the Legal Practice Course and the legal practice elements of the Exempting Degree.

The book stock is up to date: the latest editions of all titles are purchased as a matter of course, and there is a policy of relating provision to meet demand, with multiple copies of practitioners' works (for example loose-leaf encyclopaedias and the Sweet and Maxwell Common Law Library) and textbooks being purchased. A high priority is placed on updating loose-leaf encyclopaedias immediately on receipt of the updating supplements or issues. To facilitate availability, all stock except for the textbooks is reference only in the City Campus Library; all the stock, without exception, is reference only in the Law Practice Collection. There are subscriptions to both LexisNexis Butterworths and Westlaw, as well as to a wide range of other electronic legal databases. These are accessed via the Library portal NORA, which also provides access to over 2000 electronic Law journals.

Print and electronic resources, and study facilities are integrated in both the City Campus Library and in the Law Practice Collection. The City Campus Library has an IT suite on Floor 1 consisting of 175 workstations where students can work individually or in groups, and two research hubs containing silent study facilities and multi-media IT facilities. Other IT facilities are located on all the subject floors of the Library. Floor 3, for example, where the Law Collection is located, has 40 study places with IT workstations in addition to 60 conventional study places. In total there are approximately 380 IT workstations plus approximately 600 conventional study places in the City Campus Library which also has 30 laptops for loan as well as wireless hotspots throughout the building. There are 80 study places in the Law Practice Collection, of which 82 have designated IT workstations, and students can also use library materials in the Student Law Office which has a further 85 IT workstations. Both the City Campus Library and the Law Practice Collection have areas for group work and discussion, and silence areas for individual study, thereby providing different study environments for students to choose as appropriate.

There is a Library Information Specialist based in the City Campus Library with designated responsibility for services to the School of Law who supervises collection development and general management of the resources in the main City Campus Library and the Law Practice Collection at City Campus East. In the City Campus Library, the Information Specialist is available for consultation during 'office' hours, and until 9.00pm on a Wednesday during semesters, and there is an Enquiry desk in the Information Suite on Floor 1 staffed from 9.00am – 9.00pm Monday to Friday and 1.00pm – 5.00pm on Saturday and Sunday, and during opening hours in the vacation. Staff on the desk provide both subject support and support for students

using the IT facilities and there is a staffed IT helpline which is open from 8.00am – 12.00 midnight seven days per week. There is also an electronic enquiry service (NEED) to which students can e-mail enquiries which are then directed to the Information Specialist for a response. The welcome desk on the Ground Floor of the City Campus Library is staffed throughout the Library's opening hours. Staffing the Law Practice Collection is undertaken by professional library staff and senior clerical library assistants from the Library's Customer Support Services who provide service and general support for the use of the library services throughout all the hours the Collection is open.

The Library provides services (based in the City Campus Library) specifically for part-time and distance learning students. There is a postal loan service through which students can borrow up to their loan limit (ten items, or twelve items for final year students); if required material is from a reference book, then up to one chapter of that book can be photocopied and posted out, provided this falls within UK copyright law. Photocopies of journal articles will also be supplied, and the Library provides an inter-library loan service providing eligible students with photocopies of journal articles and copies of books which are not held in any of the University's library collections. Students can also apply to join SCONUL Access, a co-operative venture between higher education libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland, which allows them reference and borrowing rights from all the libraries which are members of the scheme.

Percentage of teaching staff who are qualified as solicitors or barristers

Legal Practice Course

96% (only one member of staff teaching on the course is not professionally qualified).

M Law Exempting Law Degree (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

M Law Solicitors Full Qualification (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

Most teaching staff at the School of Law are solicitors or barristers. On academic subjects teaching can be by both solicitors, barristers and other academics. On subjects that involve Legal Practice Course subjects, 98% of staff are professionally qualified (only 1 member of staff does not have a professional qualification).

Percentage of teaching staff with higher level teaching qualification

Legal Practice Course

70% (includes staff who will have their qualification by September 2009).

Exempting Degrees

56% (includes staff who will have their qualification by September 2009).

Teaching staff profile

The School of Law teaching team comprises a dedicated and dynamic group of staff with a wide range of practical and teaching experience. Current staff members include recent practitioners, staff who combine working as a solicitor in practice with their teaching, staff who hold judicial appointments, staff who are members of Law Society committees and staff who act as external examiners at other institutions. The wide range of backgrounds amongst the teaching team gives a high degree of expertise and allows specialist electives to be offered.

Fees

Legal Practice Course

Fees for the Legal Practice Course commencing September 2009 are £8,000. This includes all course materials. Continuing students from some programmes offered by the School of Law receive a discount on these fees.

M Law Exempting Law Degree (incorporating LLB (Hons)).
M Law Solicitors Full Qualification (incorporating LLB (Hons)).

Fees are as for other undergraduate degrees in England and Wales. They are payable across the 4 years of the programme (Student Loans and other support available to undergraduates are also available across the 4 years). All students pay an additional fee for the first 2 years of all programmes. The fee reflects the skills and vocational elements of the programme and is currently £900 per year. Students who continue on the M Law Solicitors Exempting and M Law Full Qualification routes also pay this fee in Years 3 and 4. Even so there are potential savings to be made compared to the typical three year LLB plus LPC. The Northumbria Scholarship is available to home students who are eligible to pay fees. It is an annual, non-repayable scholarship of £250. In the first year, all home students who meet the entry requirements set out in the offer letter will automatically receive the scholarship. From Year 2 onwards, the full scholarship will be awarded to students who score more than 60%. Students achieving less than 60% will receive 70% of the scholarship but may make up the remaining 25% if their marks reach the target level through the year.

Pastoral support, including dedicated careers guidance staff

The University has a Student Services Centre providing students with a one stop shop for all pastoral related matters including careers, counselling, finance and accommodation. This provision is supplemented at School level with an individual Guidance Tutor system.

All students are allocated a Guidance Tutor. The tutor serves as the first point of contact for any personal problems that the student may be having while on the course. Guidance Tutors can also serve as a source of careers advice and can act as referees for the student. However, all tutors are aware that in relation to any specialist needs the University provides 'experts' to whom students should be referred when necessary. This expertise includes the University counselling service, disabilities advisers, a mental health adviser and welfare advisers.

The School pays significant attention to the future careers and employability of all its students. During the Foundation Course, students are given advice on the careers support they will receive at Northumbria and some initial guidance on the steps they should be taking to secure a training contract. A full careers programme then runs throughout the year. On the Legal Practice Course, the careers programme comprises sessions aimed at the entire LPC cohort, sessions aimed at students on the General route and sessions intended specifically for Commercial route students. On the M Law Exempting Degrees careers sessions are aimed appropriately at students as they progress through all 4 years of the programme.

Careers support within the School includes:

Weekly drop in sessions in the School during term time with a University Careers Advisor and/or booked 40 minute appointments in the Careers Centre ; Careers fact sheets, advice on CVs, application forms and training contracts on School Careers eLearning sites; CV /application form checking and advice; Psychometric test preparation advice; Practice interview scheme; Information sessions, workshops and presentations, such as Life in a High Street firm, application form workshops and

preparing for interviews workshops; Targeted careers sessions oriented to year of study (delivered jointly with the University Careers Service); Email updates/job adverts; Careers notice board which is regularly updated with job vacancies and presentation information.

The School has strong links with local firms who run open evenings for its students. Solicitors from practice in local firms, local authorities and local businesses participate in the careers programme by being involved in panel discussions and/or specific sessions explaining their work type. Additionally, national firms, such as Freshfields and Allen and Overy send delegates to the annual Careers in Law Fair and host other career events during the year at the School of Law.

A very popular feature of the careers support offered to students is the practice interview scheme, whereby students who have interviews for training contracts are offered a mock interview with staff who have relevant experience in practice. This scheme has been taken up by numerous students who all report the experience to have been helpful to them. A professional contact scheme has also been introduced which affords students the opportunity to contact a Northumbria graduate who is working in an area of practice that the student is interested in.

A major element of the School's implementation of 'employability' is the clinical legal programme run in the Student Law Office. This programme is nationally and internationally renowned and is a compulsory part of the M Law Exempting Degree. It is available to the full time LPC students as an elective option. This offers a unique opportunity to undertake casework and representation under the close supervision of practitioner members of staff.

On the Legal Practice Course, in addition to this elective, the School has developed a legal literacy programme, StreetLaw, which runs in conjunction with Eversheds. This offers an opportunity for students who do not want to take on the elective, but who nonetheless want the opportunity to experience a form of pro bono work. It not only offers students the opportunity to undertake presentations on areas of law to school children and community groups, but it also gives them the experience of working with trainees in practice, thus helping to bridge the divide between the LPC and entry into a training contract.

Contact details

For further information, please contact the provider direct:

Website: <http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/law/>

Email: LPC – dawn.haynes@northumbria.ac.uk

Exempting degree – lorraine.white@northumbria.ac.uk

Contact name: LPC – Dawn Haynes

Exempting degree: Lorraine White

Telephone: 0191 227 4494