

Law Student 2002: a profile of law students in Scotland

First year report 2002-03

Law Student 2002 followed a cohort of students at six law schools in Scotland through their studies. Results and analysis are given here from the students' first year (2002-03), covering issues such as student background, choice of the LLB degree, fees, the financial implications of study and plans after graduation.

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The 'average' first year law student in Scotland

A single 18 year old female, originating from within the city of the university she attends.

She considers herself Scottish. One or both of her parents have attended university. Her father is most likely in a management or senior administration occupation and her mother, a teacher or other education professional. None of her relatives or friends is a solicitor and she does not have any prior legal experience. She lives in a university residence.

She is studying law because the subject interests her, but also because of the expected job prospects and earning capacity. She was influenced by her family in her decision to study law. She is studying an LLB without a combined degree.

She chose her university because of its perceived reputation with employers and graduate job prospects. If she came to law school from an independent (public) school, she will likely be studying at one of the Ancient universities. Very few of her classmates are studying part time or are graduate entrants. Her classmates are generally Scots, and there are few students from different cultural backgrounds.

Her fees are paid by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland. Her living costs are funded largely by regular contributions from her parents, and she is not in receipt of a bursary. She plans to take out a loan during her first year. She does not see herself as a 'consumer' of higher education.

She had a part time job before commencing university and also plans to get some part time work, probably in a shop or pub for about 11-15 hours per week, during the week and at weekends. She calculates that she needs to earn around £61-£100 per week to pay for everything. She also has some money in the bank, around £1,000.

Upon graduation, she estimates her debt will be over £7,000 and possibly as high as £20,000. She plans to go on to the Diploma in Legal Practice and, after a traineeship in a high street or commercial firm (not a rural firm), work as a solicitor preferably in criminal law, but possibly also in commercial law or human rights. If she leaves the law, she will use her skills in the business sector.

Financial support for students in Scotland

Before discussing the survey findings it is important to have some understanding of the nature of the financial support structure in place in Scotland. It is different from,

and more complex than, the financial support structure available for English, Welsh and Northern Irish students where all students pay fees (although means tested support is available), and where all students are entitled to borrow up to 75% of the student loan (approximately £4,000) in any one year irrespective of means, with only the remaining 25% of that loan being means tested.

For all students domiciled in Scotland and studying full time for a first degree at a Scottish university, student fees are paid by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS). This payment is not means tested.

Support for living costs for 'young students' domiciled in Scotland is mainly through a loan, but students may also be eligible for a Young Student Bursary if aged under 25 when commencing their course of study; both components are means tested. (For 'mature students' the support package is different again. It is means tested, and the maximum support available is a £4,000 loan. Mature students are not entitled to a Young Student Bursary, but may be eligible for a Mature Student Bursary.) The level of support payable to an individual student is dependent on his/her unearned income (for example income from investments or trusts), as well as his/her parent's (or spousal) 'residual' income (total gross combined parental income from all sources less allowable deductions, such as superannuation contributions, retirement annuity and/or life assurance premiums, interest on loans, dependant allowances etc).

The maximum total support package (excluding certain other targeted allowances to which students might be entitled, such as travel expenses, disability allowance, university hardship funds etc) available to students living away from home in 2002-03 (the year of this survey) was £4,415 (£3,600 for those living at home). Where the combined residual parental income was less than £26,300, the student was eligible for a non-repayable bursary. Only where the combined parental residual income was under £10,240 pa was the student entitled to the maximum bursary (£2,050). As parental income rose, the amount of bursary dropped, but the loan component correspondingly increased. Where parental income rose above £26,300 pa the student was no longer eligible for any bursary component and government support was entirely through the student loan. However, as parental income continued to rise above £26,300, so the loan component decreased such that where combined parental residual income was £50,000 pa or above, students were only entitled to the basic student loan of £770 - the minimum loan entitlement for all students (£510 for those students living at home).

In other words, in Scotland the primary government financial support living costs for Scottish domiciled students is means tested with only students from lower income families eligible for the full or partial bursary, and with eligibility for the student loan component similarly means tested. The government's expectation is that as parental income rises above a particular amount (£26,300 in 2002-03), parents should make a correspondingly greater contribution to student living costs. Students are of course entitled to obtain further financial assistance elsewhere, for example through bank loans.

Given that the evidence suggests that law students in Scotland are disproportionately drawn from the higher socio-economic groups (Anderson, Murray & Maharg, 2003), and given that the mean Scottish salary for all employees in 2003

was £ 21,112 according to the 2003 Labour Force Survey, we anticipated that few law students would be eligible for the bursary. However, we did anticipate that most students would access the student loan and possibly some other commercial or family source of finance.

Survey methodology

The data for this report was gathered from a survey of first year law students from six of the eight (now nine) Scottish law schools/departments. The English questionnaire was used as the template, but the opportunity was also taken to add questions focusing on the background of Scottish students and their career aspirations. It was also adapted to take account of Scottish terminology and the Scottish situation in terms of student funding.

All participating law schools/departments (henceforth 'schools') gave their permission for the survey to be distributed at their institution, and the questionnaire was circulated in advance of participation in order that account could be taken of law school comments in the final version.

Student participation was voluntary, and students were free to decline to answer any question. The questionnaire was administered to the first year students within the first four weeks of the beginning of term in order to gain an insight into their situation and aspirations at the start of their legal education and before other influences could impact on their answers. The small number of Scottish law schools meant that the questionnaires could be distributed and collected personally, and this resulted in an extremely high response rate.

The appropriate class in which to administer the questionnaire was identified by a staff member in each of the law schools. The project administrator then traveled to each to oversee the issuing and completion of the questionnaires. The project administrator, or the academic responsible for the class, provided students with the background to the research, and informed them that it was a national survey. The questionnaires were distributed and completed in that class.

The questionnaire consisted of 44 questions (a number of them with sub-questions) requiring responses ranging from affirmative/negative, the election of factors applicable to the respondent or a comparison of various factors according to a grading of importance, to short answer questions or the provision of free form responses. Results were gathered and then calculated into percentages to two decimal places.

The completed questionnaires were collected back from the students during the class in all except one university. Questionnaires from that university were mailed back to the project team. As noted above this process resulted in a very high response rate.

Survey respondents and universities

A total of 874 questionnaires were completed. We estimate that this sample of students represented approximately 70% of the total first year Scots LLB student population in the first four weeks of 2002-03. (We estimate (guesstimate?) that there were approximately 1,260 first year LLB students, including students at the two non-participating law schools. This figure must be viewed with caution, as accurate figures for new intakes at this early stage of the academic year are difficult to obtain, due to late admissions, registrations, withdrawals etc. These figures include part time entrants and graduate entrants. Our figures are based on information received from each of the schools, with appropriate caveats as to accuracy.) Uniquely one law school also offers the English LLB degree and had an intake in 2002-03 of approximately 60 students. These students were not included in this survey, as we anticipated that most of them would not be funded under the Scottish student funding arrangements.

Of the eight Scottish universities offering the LLB degree, six law schools agreed to participate. Of that six, three are 'Ancient' universities (labeled 'Ancient A', 'B', and 'C'); two are 1960s universities (labeled '1960s 1' and '2') and one a post-1990s university (labeled '1990s'). Of the two remaining universities (both post-1990s universities) one declined to participate (due to the small LLB intake) and one did not respond to the request to participate.

The three post-1990s universities offered the LLB for the first time in the 2002-03 academic year, and their student intake is, at present, relatively small.

The number of respondents from the one participating post-1990s university represents only 4% (36 students) of the total number of survey respondents. Therefore, the results cannot be regarded as representative of law students at the new universities. However, to the extent that the responses of these students reveal noticeable differences to those of other respondents, they are discussed below.

<i>table 1: number of student respondents from each university (n=874)</i>			
	total number of LLB students	number of respondents	% of total respondents
Ancient A	245	223	26%
Ancient B	274	209	24%
Ancient C	190	138	16%
1960s 1	227	166	19%
1960s 2	171	102	12%
1990s	45	36	4%

(Note: percentages for all tables may not always add to 100. Calculations are done to two decimal points and fractions will account for the difference. The total number of students may not be entirely accurate, due to late admissions and registrations, withdrawals etc.)

It is also worth noting that in Scotland the LLB degree is the only degree that qualifies students for admission to legal practice in Scotland. For graduates holding other degrees (including the BA Law/Business Law) who want to gain admission to practice, most Scottish law schools offer a 'graduate entrant' (direct entry) LLB programme, although places at most law schools are limited.

An alternative route to admission as a solicitor in Scotland is through passing the Law Society of Scotland examinations. In order to be eligible to sit these examinations the candidate must be in employment as a trainee with a qualifying solicitor practising in Scotland. Successful candidates, as well as LLB graduates, must then complete the Diploma in Legal Practice and a period of post-Diploma practical training before being able to apply for a full practising certificate. See further the education and training section of the [Law Society of Scotland](#) website.

Law graduates from England, Wales or Northern Ireland wanting to be admitted as a solicitor in Scotland must either take the Law Society's Intra UK Transfer Test comprising a number of examinations or obtain a Scots LLB. English, Welsh or Northern Irish barristers wanting admission to the Scottish Bar must pass an aptitude test administered by the Faculty of Advocates.

Results and analysis

Despite the attempt to screen out from this survey those students not studying for an LLB degree and students studying in Scotland who might be receiving funding under English, Welsh or Northern Irish funding schemes, it seems that the survey has captured a number of such students. For example, 6% of students in the 'home location' question identified themselves as having a home location in England or Northern Ireland. Unless these students meet the qualifying requirements for support under the Scottish support system they will be covered by other schemes, and this must be borne in mind in drawing conclusions from the financial data. Except where expressly indicated, the results have not been tested for significance.

Student background

What can be said of the family and social background, previous education, work experience and political and religious values of Scottish law students? In essence, where do they come from and where do they plan to go?

Age

Scotland has a young law student population. 70% of surveyed first year law students in Scotland were 18 years of age or under. The majority of students

surveyed were commencing their first year of the LLB at the age of 18 years (56%). A further 14% were aged 17 years.

1960s 1 university has the oldest law student population, with 23% of students aged between 21-25 years and a further 18% over the age of 25. This result is accounted for by the offering of a graduate entrant and also a part time LLB programme.

Gender and ethnicity

Following international trends in legal education, the majority (64%) of first year law students surveyed are now female (compared with 1970 in which less than 20% of law students in Scotland were female; Paterson, Bates & Poustie 1999). In all the universities surveyed over 60% of the respondents are female, except at the 1990s university, with a proportion of 58% female students.

The data collected also indicates that the law student population in Scotland is not at all ethnically diverse. Students identifying themselves as Scots comprised 83% of respondents, a further 10% identifying themselves as English, Irish, Welsh or British. Other European students consisted of only 1% of respondents. The remaining 6% of students nonetheless identified with a reasonably broad range of ethnic backgrounds.

<i>table 2: ethnic group</i>							
	all (874)	Ancient A (223)	Ancient B (209)	Ancient C (138)	1960s 1 (166)	1960s 2 (102)	1990s (36)
Scots	83%	89%	75%	87%	83%	85%	72%
English	7%	3%	13%	8%	2%	7%	11%
Irish	2%	2%	5%	-	2%	-	3%
Welsh	0% (3)	-	-	-	1%	-	3%
British	1%	0% (1)	1%	-	1%	1%	3%
other European	1%	2%	2%	1%	-	1%	3%
Bangladeshi	0% (2)	-	-	1%	-	1%	-
Indian	0% (4)	1%	0% (1)	-	-	1%	-
Pakistani	1%	1%	0% (1)	1%	4%	-	3%

other Asian	0% (1)	-	-	-	-	1%	-
Afro-Caribbean	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
African	0% (2)	0% (1)	-	-	-	-	3%
Chinese	1%	1%	1%	1%	-	1%	-
American	0% (2)	0% (1)	-	-	1%	-	-
other	1%	0% (1)	0% (1)	-	4%	1%	-
no response	1%	-	1%	-	1%	1%	-

The largest non-European ethnic grouping is Pakistani. 1960s 1 has the highest proportion of students who identify as Pakistani (4%).

The spread of results largely reflects the data gathered in the 'home location' question, and indicates that few students originating from non-Anglo Saxon or Celtic backgrounds are entering Scottish law schools. However, this conclusion would depend very much on the subjective self identification of the respondent. For example, a student whose family originated from Pakistan may live permanently in Scotland and may identify him or herself as Scottish.

Considering that Scotland has a small ethnic population generally (less than 3% of respondents in the 2001 Scottish Census identified themselves as belonging to a non-white ethnic group, the primary group of which is Pakistani), and given that Scottish law schools draw primarily from the Scottish population, this ethnicity result is not particularly surprising. (No students identified themselves as Afro-Caribbean. The percentage of Afro-Caribbean respondents in the 2001 Scottish Census was less than 0.2%, with some 913 young people between the ages of 18-24.)

Nonetheless, it is perhaps worth considering that the 2001 Scottish Census identified almost 14,000 young people between the ages of 18-25 as being from an Asian or other non-white ethnic background, yet only seven of the law students surveyed in 2002 identified with this background. It is worth noting the findings of a study (Anderson, Murray & Maharg, 2003) that minority ethnic students in Scotland are slightly over-represented in higher education relative to the size of the minority ethnic working population, but that such representation in law schools is slightly worse than in other high status courses with higher entry requirements, such as medicine, dentistry and a number of other science-based disciplines. The distinctive position of the Scottish law degree may be the most important factor here.

Home location

Law students in Scotland generally do not travel far from their home location to undertake their degrees. Moreover, few undergraduate law students in Scotland come from other parts of the UK, and even fewer from abroad. This apparently small number of non-Scots students wanting to study for the Scots LLB can be explained by the fact that most students will presumably want to obtain a qualification that will qualify them for admission to the legal profession in their home jurisdiction (be it England, Wales, Northern Ireland or elsewhere), and a Scots LLB will not automatically qualify them. (Scots LLB graduates wanting admission in England are likely to have to complete the Common Professional Examination/Postgraduate Diploma in Law course, depending on the content of the Scots LLB degree.) Students from outwith Scotland are therefore unlikely to want to undertake a Scots LLB, unless they intend to practise in Scotland.

The vast majority (94%) of students in Scottish law schools originate from a home location in Scotland. But not only do they originate from a location in Scotland; law students also do not travel far to attend university. All draw predominantly from their local and contiguous areas, drawing relatively few students from other regions. 1960s 2 (situated in a smaller Scottish city), for example, draws no students from Scotland's two major cities onto its Scots LLB. The small number of students from the more remote areas (for example Highlands and Islands) are spread relatively evenly across all law schools (except the 1990s university, which has none).

Of all respondents, slightly more than 6% stated their home location to be outside Scotland (England (4%), Northern Ireland (2%) or foreign country (<1%)).

Full time students: previous activity immediately before starting law school

First year law students predominantly come to university straight from school. A comparatively small number of students have come to law school by less conventional paths (for example, another career or full time parenting).

However, in contrast to the English survey finding that 72% of first year students came to university direct from school, in Scotland only 64% of first year law students surveyed had completed their schooling immediately before starting their law studies. Less than one quarter of these direct school entrants were from independent schools (21%; note however that a number of students who did not enter directly from school (but who entered, for example, after a gap year) are also likely to have an independent school background), but of those who were from independent schools, almost 80% went to one of the three Ancient universities.

10% of students had taken a gap year before commencing university studies, and a further 9% had been in full time employment immediately before starting the degree, while 11% had undertaken another course of study at a university or FE college and are studying law through the 'direct entry' (also known as 'fast track') route (a number of these students will, for example, have obtained a BA in Law/Business Law and subsequently want to obtain a qualification enabling them to be admitted to practice in Scotland).

table 3: full time students: level of entry into degree course

	all (857)
state secondary	51%
independent school	13%
FE college	3%
university	8%
full time job	9%
gap year	10%
parenting	1%
illness	0%(4)
no response	3%

Parents' occupations and links to the legal profession

Overall, the parents of the law students surveyed are likely to be in management or senior administrative occupations (15%), education (15%), health professions (8%) and associate professions (8%). Students at Ancient A and Ancient B (situated in the two major Scottish cities) were generally more likely to have parents in management and the professions.

Interestingly fewer students than one might expect have parents in the legal profession (2% overall, none in the case of the post-1990 university). It is worth comparing this with the findings of the Hughes Commission on Legal Services in Scotland in 1980 (Cmnd 7846), where 15% stated they had close relatives in the profession. However, 'close relatives' may not be confined to parents.

<i>table 4: parents' occupations</i>							
	all (874)	Ancient A (223)	Ancient B (209)	Ancient C (138)	1960s 1 (166)	1960s 2 (102)	1990s (36)
management/senior administration	15%	18%	16%	11%	14%	10%	11%
legal profession	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%	3%	-

health profession	8%	7%	11%	8%	6%	6%	4%
education	15%	22%	16%	15%	10%	9%	8%
other profession	4%	5%	4%	3%	4%	1%	1%
engineering	3%	5%	1%	5%	3%	1%	3%
associate professions	8%	10%	7%	9%	5%	9%	6%
craft/skilled	7%	4%	5%	7%	8%	15%	14%
sales	2%	1%	2%	4%	3%	1%	-
student	0% (5)	-	-	-	0% (1)	1%	-
unskilled	7%	4%	5%	8%	9%	8%	11%
self employed	4%	2%	5%	3%	4%	4%	8%
clerical	6%	5%	4%	6%	8%	13%	4%
houseperson	4%	3%	5%	4%	5%	5%	6%
none/unemployed	2%	1%	1%	2%	3%	2%	1%
retired	4%	2%	6%	5%	6%	4%	1%
deceased	1%	-	1%	-	4%	2%	1%
no response	8%	8%	9%	9%	6%	5%	19%

(Note: data represents both father's and mother's occupations. Students were asked to state their parents' occupations. The answers were then grouped into categories adapted from the standard Department of Trade and Industry classifications. This categorisation involved an element of subjective judgment, and so caution must be exercised in relying on their accuracy.)

Overall, 47% of students have parents in management or the professions (the first six rows in the table above). Nevertheless, breaking the parental occupation down by sex, the occupation types of the mother and father of law students in Scotland conform quite closely to expectations. The father is quite likely to be in management

or the professions - 50% in total (the highest percentage was Ancient A with 67%, the lowest 1960s 2, 30%), with a further 20% in craft/skilled or associated professions, while the mother is most likely to be engaged in the education professions (23%), clerical occupations (12%), management/senior administration (7%) or the health professions (10%). 9% of the mothers of the law students surveyed work as 'housepersons' and a further 9% in unskilled occupations. The largest parental groups from which law students are drawn appear to be management and senior administration and education.

67% of students were not the first in their family to attend university, although percentages ranged from 77% at Ancient B to 42% at 1990s (but note the reservations stated due to sample size). This institution obtained university status in the early 1990s and began offering the law degree in 2003-03, and may attract more students from a broader range of socio-economic groupings than the pre-1990 universities.

table 5: whether first member of immediate family to attend university

	all (874)	Ancient A (223)	Ancient B (209)	Ancient C (138)	1960s 1 (166)	1960s 2 (102)	1990s (36)
yes	32%	30%	22%	33%	37%	40%	56%
no	67%	69%	77%	67%	63%	59%	42%
no response	1%	2%	1%	-	-	1%	3%

As for the broader social background of law students, although very few had parents in the legal profession, approximately half the students surveyed have family or friends who are qualified as a solicitor or advocate. The university with the lowest proportion of students with social contacts in the profession was 1960s 2 (41%), while 1990s had 44% with social contacts.

Type of accommodation

While the home location section suggests that the law student population is fairly insular, this picture is not quite accurate. Just over half the law students in Scotland leave the parental home to undertake their studies, even if the parental home is in the city of the their university. Students most commonly live in university residences (44%, with another 7% in rented accommodation). However, there are still a large proportion of students who remain at home during their degrees (37%). (The remaining 11% of students live in their own homes - for example, mature students).

This may be indicative of the (young) age of first year students, but the results also show a significant correlation between living away from home and the father's occupation. Those students with a father in senior managerial occupations or the

professions are significantly more likely to live away from home. Students from a professional family are also those who we could expect to benefit from greater family financial support (this is supported by the evidence in table 10 below). It is possible that students from less prosperous backgrounds find it more difficult to leave home because of financial constraints such as lack of parental support, and as a result are missing out on the broader experiences (and opportunities for social integration) gained through living on campus.

Given that university residential accommodation may only be available in the first year of study (most universities give preference to first year students, or to students living outwith a certain radius from the university), it will be interesting to compare these results with the survey next year. Do students in university accommodation return home after first year, or select the (usually more expensive) option of moving into private rented accommodation? If the latter, how do they meet this expense?

Choice of LLB degree

Having given an overview of the profile and background of law students in Scotland, the focus now turns to the process of entering law school. Why did the students choose law as a discipline, and who or what influenced them in making this decision?

Importance influences in decision to study law

While few students have parents in the legal profession, nonetheless parents play an important part in a student's decision to undertake a law degree (a factor for 56% of students surveyed), as do friends and extended family (45%). This is unsurprising given that 50% of students have social contacts with the profession in the form of other relatives or friends.

Approximately 40% of students claimed to have come to law school having had some experience of a legal office, albeit as part of their previous schooling (ie as a school placement, usually lasting no more than one week), while 9% currently have or have had paid employment in the legal field. Previous work experience (paid or unpaid) was an important influence for many students (36%), as was advice and information from teachers (33%) and career advisors (26%).

TV and press reports were a factor for 27% of students, while 22% cited fictional accounts of lawyers in film, literature or TV to be a factor in course choice.

<i>table 6: important influences in choice to study law</i>	
	all (874)
parents	56%
teachers	33%

careers advisers	26%
friends/extended family	45%
TV/press reports	27%
media fiction	22%
work experience	36%
results obtained	0% (2)
own decision	2%

(Note: percentages are based on the selection of 'very important' or 'fairly important' for each category.)

Given the low level of experiential links with the profession it is understandable that parental influence as well as social contact with the professions by way of other relatives and/or friends would appear to be a very important source of influence over career choice. But is it also interesting that almost a quarter of students claimed that media fiction was an important influence on the decision to study law. There is perhaps scope for further research into the type of media fiction and the ways in which it influences expectations about the study and/or practice of law, and the extent to which these expectations are subsequently met.

Reasons for studying law

It is interesting that the desire to help others, while an important reason for studying law, is not the most important reason. Most students chose to study law because of their interest in the subject (94% of students identified this as a 'very important' or 'fairly important' reason for studying law), although given the rather limited experiential links students have with the professions it is difficult to speculate how they developed that interest (all the more so as law/legal studies is not available as a Standard (O grade equivalent) or Higher grade (A grade equivalent) subject in Scotland).

The perceived high regard held by employers for applicants with a law degree (93%), potential income (77%), the type of work one can do with a law degree (74%), status (72%) and to help others (64%) were the following five most important factors.

Students at 1960s 2 more often cited their desire to help others as a reason for undertaking the degree (76%).

<i>table 7: reasons for studying law</i>	
	all (874)
interest in subject	94%
reputation with employers	93%
potential income	77%
type of work	74%
status	72%
to help others	64%
interest in Europe	0% (4)
useful general degree	1%
personal reasons	1%
intellectual training	1%
by default	0% (4)
career progression	0% (4)
prosecute criminals	0% (1)

(Note: percentages are based on selection of 'very important' or 'fairly important' for each category.)

Again, the lack of substantive experience of law work but the important influence of parents, friends and relatives may help explain why reputation with employers, income and status are such important influences on students' decisions to study law. It may be that without much experience on which to make the decision, the more sedate concerns of parents and relatives for their offspring's future economic security may have a greater influence on the student than would otherwise be the case.

Course fees

Currently, so long as a student is eligible (ie meets residency requirements and is studying full time for a first degree at a Scottish university) then tuition fees will be met by the Scottish Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), irrespective of financial circumstances. However, graduate entrants and part time students are liable to pay their own fees (12% of the respondent population; fees for these groups are likely to be higher than those for full time degrees).

Top-up fees?

Although the Scottish Executive has stated that it does not intend to introduce 'top-up' fees in Scotland, the survey nevertheless sought to elicit student views on what the impact of any such introduction might be. When asked about the possible impact of the introduction of a top-up fee (which all students would be liable for themselves), 40% of responding students felt it would affect their choice of university, although interestingly 47% of students failed to answer this question - suggesting that the broader debate on top-up fees has not impacted on many students in Scottish law schools.

'Consumers of education'?

In the English survey, when asked if the introduction of fees had made them think of themselves as consumers, 38% said 'yes'. When Scots LLB students were asked the same question, again 38% of those who responded said 'yes'. However, this figure does not represent the full picture when broken down into full-fee paying students and students whose fees are paid by the SAAS. Of the SAAS cohort, only 31% saw themselves as 'consumers' while approximately 81% of the fee-paying graduate entrant and part time students did so. As in the English survey, we did not provide the respondents with a definition of 'consumer', but when asked to explain why they saw themselves as consumers the most common reason given by the graduate entrant and part time students was 'payment of fees'. Amongst the students whose fees were paid by the SAAS reasons included:

- Although fees paid by SAAS we have to pay a lump sum on completing the course.
- Because there is a payment and thus something should be provided in return.
- The government are constantly encouraging higher education, but force students to become thousands of pounds in debt to be able to do it!
- Wherever money is handed over in return for a product or service the person should be entitled to the same guarantee and protection as any consumer.
- I have invested something that I hope will reward me in the future.
- I am paying for my higher education and so having to buy my learning.
- Universities still usurp government money.
- Expect substantial level of service and a good efficient programme.

- Have you seen the price of the book list!!
- When you actually know what the course costs you are more aware that you are being provided a service which isn't free.

Although we have no knowledge of student perception in the past, should we be concerned about the (growing?) perception of the commercialisation of higher education? What does it in fact mean to be a 'consumer' of education and what place should the values typically associated with consumerism have in the provision of education? Is, or should, higher education be about providing students with a 'product' (their degree), or is it about providing them with an opportunity to join a community and to participate in a learning environment that challenges, stimulates, questions, is intellectually demanding and sets rigorous standards for its 'consumers'? Is there a need for institutions to engage more fully in the debate about the relationship between paying fees and student expectations about outcomes?

The financial implications of study (full time students)

(By definition most part time students will have employment. We anticipated that these students would be funding their studies largely through their earnings, and so they were not included in this section of the survey.)

Although fees for full time first degree students are paid by the SAAS, study nonetheless costs. In addition to expenses associated with the course (textbooks etc), students have to meet their general living expenses and accommodation costs. How are students meeting these costs? Are students able to draw on existing financial resources or parental support when commencing their studies? Will they take a loan? To what extent do they anticipate having to obtain employment to meet their living costs?

Bursary/scholarship

The majority of students undertaking the LLB do not benefit from any bursary or scholarship (69%).

<i>table 8: bursary/scholarship</i>							
	all (874)	Ancient A (223)	Ancient B (209)	Ancient C (138)	1960s 1 (166)	1960s 2 (102)	1990s' (36)
SAAS Young Student Bursary	21%	22%	15%	20%	19%	34%	33%
SAAS Mature Student Bursary	1%	-	2%	1%	2%	4%	-
other scholarship	4%	1%	6%	6%	4%	3%	-

none of above	69%	71%	76%	70%	69%	57%	58%
No response	5%	6%	1%	5%	8%	2%	8%

(Note: some students received more than one source of funding.)

While students receiving the SAAS Young Student Bursary consisted of only 21% of students surveyed it should not be assumed that this of itself is indicative of high parental wealth for the remainder of the students. As already discussed above, the bursary component of the Scottish student support package is means tested, and in 2002-03 was lost once combined residual parental (or spousal) income reached £26,300. (Figures released by the Scottish Executive on 2002-03 student awards indicate that of the total student population of 91,756 entitled to a Student Loan Company loan, some 35,394 had parental/spousal residual income of £29,999 or less. Figures for incomes up to the bursary cut-off point (£26,300) are not available.)

With a mean salary for full time employees in Scotland of £21,112 (in 2003), it is not difficult to imagine that a family with two earning parents would likely exceed this threshold.

Small numbers of students (1%) received Mature Student Bursaries. Students funded by other scholarships consisted of approximately 4% of students surveyed. These scholarships were likely to be private bursaries, trust scholarships or university bursaries.

Student savings

The majority of students overall had saved some money towards their university living expenses (56%, compared with 52% in the English survey). Again as found in the English survey, students in Scotland were most likely to have saved less than £1,000 (64%).

<i>table 9: if saved, how much?</i>	
	all (481)
less than £500	23%
£501 - £1,000	41%
£1,001 - £2,000	19%
more than £2,000	15%

no response	3%
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Given the fairly low amount of savings, what other forms of financial support will students access?

Financial support from family

Students are generally well supported by their families, with 63% receiving regular support (53% in the English survey). Unsurprisingly perhaps, significantly more students whose fathers were in the professions anticipated receiving regular financial support from their families (significance assessed using Chi-square tests). Students at the three Ancient universities were more likely to anticipate support, notably these are also the universities attended by more students with parents in the professions (see above table 4).

<i>table 10: regular support from family?</i>							
	all (874)	Ancient A (223)	Ancient B (209)	Ancient C (138)	1960s 1 (166)	1960s 2 (102)	1990s (36)
yes	63%	70%	75%	63%	49%	50%	44%
no	36%	29%	25%	36%	49%	48%	53%
no response	1%	1%	0% (1)	1%	2%	2%	3%

Approximately 26% of students (23% in the English survey) will benefit from savings or investment plans taken out by parents or grandparents.

<i>table 11: savings plan taken out by parents/grandparents?</i>							
	all (874)	Ancient A (223)	Ancient B (209)	Ancient C (138)	1960s 1 (166)	1960s 2 (102)	1990s (36)
yes	26%	26%	33%	25%	19%	25%	17%
no	72%	73%	65%	73%	78%	75%	75%
no response	2%	2%	1%	2%	3%	1%	8%

The smaller number of students likely to benefit at 1960s 1 can be explained by the larger number of graduate entrants and part-timers, who will likely be more financially independent.

Again, cross analysis showed that significantly more students with a professional father are likely to benefit from such a plan than those without (61% compared with 39%).

Student intention to obtain a loan from a financial institution in first year of study

Notably, while some 80% of students in the English survey responded that they intended to take out a loan in their first year, only 67% of students in the Scottish survey did so. This may be because students in Scotland do not have an immediate need to access finance on commencing study to pay fees (unlike English students). It may also be that Scotland's considerably smaller number of law students are generally drawn from a narrower range of socio-economic groupings than English law students and therefore have access to higher levels of family finance. More evidence is needed on this point, (but see above table 10 - slightly more Scottish students expect parental support than English students).

In terms of the size of first year anticipated borrowing (from all sources, not only the Student Loan Company loan, where the size of the loan available is determined by parental income), 29% of those who anticipated borrowing expected to borrow up to £1,000, while 21% expected to borrow between £1,001 and £2,000, another 21% between £2,001 and £3,000, and a further 14% between £3,001 and £4,000. 15% anticipated even higher borrowings in the first year.

Intention to take part time work during first year

As well as obtaining a loan, the majority of students also intended to take part time work during the first year (65%, the same figure that emerged from the first year English survey). Again cross analysis with the data on parental financial support reveals that those students not anticipating family support are significantly more likely to anticipate having to work

Retail sales and hospitality (bar and restaurant) type work are the types of work students most intended to obtain (66%). Clerical and call centre related work were the next most common types of work.

Of more concern however is that of those students intending to work (555 in total), only 25% indicated that they intended working up to 10 hours per week (compared with 47% in the English survey), while 56% indicated that they intended working 11-20 hours per week. It seems that students at Scottish law schools intend working longer hours than their English counterparts, and the question of what impact this level of work may have on their studies and whether students working this number of hours can in fact be considered to be full time students becomes more pertinent.

<i>table 12: intended working hours during term time</i>	
hours	all (555)
0-5	3%
6-10	25%
11-15	34%
16-20	22%
21-25	3%
26+	1%
no response	10%

In addition, 56% of students intend to work both during the week and weekend.

<i>table 13: when will work take place?</i>	
	all (555)
during week	11%
weekend	30%
both	56%
no response	4%

Anecdotally (from one institution) there is already some evidence that student work demands are putting pressure on university organisation and administration, for example in relation to issues such as class timetabling, and this in turn is putting increased pressure on the university built environment (room availability). Such pressure is unlikely to diminish with anticipated growth in student numbers.

Average anticipated weekly earnings required to cover living costs

Of those who plan to work, 27% anticipated that they needed to earn between £61-£100 per week to cover living expenses. A 25% thought they needed between £41-£60 per week. 14% needed up to £40 per week. The types of jobs identified by the students (with the exception perhaps of call centre work) are those that are likely to pay little more than the minimum wage (£3.80 for those aged 18-21) and this may help to explain why students anticipate having to work long hours.

<i>table 14: earnings per week needed to cover living expenses</i>	
	all (555)
up to £40/week	14%
£41-£60/week	25%
£61-£100/week	27%
£101-£150/week	5%
£151-£200/week	2%
more than £200/week	1%
no response	27%

Anticipated debt on graduation

Only 15% of students overall anticipate having no debt at graduation (ranging from 14% at the 1990s university to 20% at one of the Ancients), while 60% anticipated that they would graduate with debt (5% did not know and a further 20% did not answer this question).

This compares favourably with the English survey, which indicated that despite earnings from work or family financial support 73% expected to be in debt when they graduated. On the other hand, of those Scottish university respondents who anticipated debt, 35% in total (54% of those who anticipated debt) anticipated debts above £7,000 (ranging from the lowest, 23% in total at one Ancient, to the highest, 44% in total at the two 1960s universities).

<i>table 15: anticipated debt on graduation</i>	
	all (874)
no debt	15%

up to £1,000	1%
£1,001-£2,000	4%
£2,001-£3,000	5%
£3,001-£4,000	4%
£4,001-£5,000	5%
£5,001-£6,000	4%
£6,001-£7,000	2%
£7,001-£10,000	12%
£10,001-£20,000	18%
£20,001-£30,000	5%
£30,001-£40,000	0% (4)
more than £40,000	0% (2)
don't know	5%
no response	20%

It is worth bearing in mind that in estimating their level of debt students may not have taken into account the requirement to contribute to the Graduate Endowment Fund (a one-off contribution of (currently) £2,000 payable after graduation, introduced in 2001-02 for all new full time Scottish and EU students at Scottish universities; mature students, single parents and disabled students are exempt).

It is also possible that students may not have taken into account the fees and living expenses associated with undertaking the postgraduate Diploma in Legal Practice (a pre-requisite for entry into the legal profession).

Plans after graduation

Most respondents intend to enter into the legal profession. Unlike on the Continent where a law degree is regarded as a good 'generalist' degree, a law degree in

Scotland is still seen primarily as a vocationally specific qualification; 82% at this stage of their studies are planning a career in the law (in the shorter or longer term).

Immediate plans on graduation: Diploma in Legal Practice and other postgraduate study

After completion of the LLB all students who intend to enter the legal profession as a solicitor or advocate are required to take the Diploma in Legal Practice, a 26 week course offered at the Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh and Glasgow Graduate School of Law (run jointly by Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities). Current fees for the Diploma are approximately £3,750 (the fee varies between institutions and may be lower or higher than this figure), and not all diplomates will obtain a grant. (The grant is presently £2,800, and the number of grants available is 300. Grants are awarded on the basis of academic merit not means. A student who qualifies for a grant can also apply for additional financial assistance. Those students who do not qualify for a grant cannot apply for further financial assistance and are therefore fully self-funding. In the current academic year some 220 students did not receive a grant and are therefore fully self-funding.)

A large majority of student respondents indicated their intention to undertake the Diploma in Legal Practice immediately (76%). 7% overall planned to undertake some type of further postgraduate degree, while 13% planned to finish their studies after the LLB. (A further 2% did not know and 2% did not answer the question.) According to the Law Society for Scotland, in the year 2003-04 not all students who were eligible and applied for the Diploma received a place. This is apparently the first year in which demand has exceeded supply.

Overall, a slight majority of students were aware of the current fee for undertaking the Diploma (52%). This again suggests that students intending to pursue a career in the legal profession may be underestimating the associated costs, and hence their anticipated total debt. Whether this will impact on the numbers of LLB graduates wanting to enter the Diploma remains to be seen (Paterson, Bates & Poustie (1999) reported that by the late 1990s only 68% of law graduates were entering the Diploma. There is a perception that the percentage may have fallen since then, although whether this perception is accurate and if so, the reasons for the decline, are not clear.)

Longer term career plans

Predominantly, law students plan to be lawyers (82%). 4% are undecided at this stage, while 12% do not plan a career in the law. (A further 2% did not answer the question.)

After completing the Diploma in Legal Practice all intending solicitors must undertake a two year post-Diploma training contract with a practising solicitor in Scotland, leading to the Test of Professional Competence, undertaken towards the end of the two year period. Intending advocates with an Honours Scots LLB degree are required to undertake a 12 month post-Diploma training contract with a practicing advocate before they can apply to join the Bar. (The training period is longer for those with an LLB Ordinary or an LLB with Honours in another discipline.)

It appears the majority of graduates will obtain a traineeship. Law Society for Scotland figures show that there were 423 training contracts registered in 2002 and 419 Diploma graduates, although this apparent convergence may not be permanent. The anticipated number of Diploma graduates in 2004 is approximately 520. (Comparing the situation with England, 5,385 training contracts were registered in 2001-02 and 5,467 students passed the Legal Practice Course. But note that the apparent correspondence between numbers of training contracts and numbers of graduates, in both Scotland and England, may not be as close as the figures suggest, as graduates do not always obtain training contracts in their year of graduation. English figures obtained from *The Training Contract and Pupilage Handbook 2004*, Globe Publishing.)

Only just over one third of students indicated they would be prepared to consider a traineeship in a rural firm. Most attractive to students are traineeships in commercial (80%) or high street (73%) firms. It may well be that these types of firms are more attractive due to what students perceive to be the potentially higher returns.

After completion of the traineeship, most it seems will obtain a position in a law firm; although according to a recruitment specialist it may not be with a firm or in an area or specialism of their choice, and it may take some time to obtain a position. (This is different from the position in England, where graduates have little more than a 50:50 chance of becoming a lawyer - see the 2002 report on the Law Student 2000 survey, [A career in the legal profession: worth getting into debt for?](#).) The approval of new LLB programmes by the Law Society of Scotland may impact on this position in the future. Alternatively, the perception of the vocationally specific nature of the degree may change, and graduates become more prepared to consider other careers outside the profession (although existing BA Law/Business Law degrees to a large extent probably already meet the demand for a non-qualifying law degree).

At present the Law Society recommended trainee salary is £11,500 for the first year (less than the mean salary of £14,367 for employees in Scotland with no qualifications (Labour Force Survey figures), and less than the £19,185 salary paid to medical graduates during their one year pre-registration period, although their salary is paid from the public purse) and £15,000 for the second (although some of the larger firms, the Crown Office and the Scottish Executive pay a higher rate. (Information on how many firms pay the recommended rate is not available).

The first year post-traineeship salary (having completed in most cases seven years of study and training) is likely to be around £30,000-£33,000 in one of the ten or so larger Scottish firms, or £25,000 in the case of a smaller firm (information supplied by a specialist recruitment agency). It is probable therefore that many students will be entering the profession with debt and will carry that debt for some considerable time. Nonetheless, the popularity of the law degree and a law career remain high (as in England). Whether this will continue to be the case remains to be seen, as competition for Diploma places and traineeships has the potential to increase, and as the financial implications of pursuing a law career become clearer. In this respect it is hoped that the follow-up surveys of this cohort of students will identify any newly emerging trends or issues.

Conclusion

In this survey we sought to profile first year students studying for the Scots LLB at Scottish universities. We aimed to provide a companion to the English survey, which looked at the relationship between student debt, part time work and progression to the vocational stage of legal education. Recognising that there has never been a comprehensive study of law students at Scottish universities, we also sought to profile student backgrounds generally, their reasons for studying law and their ultimate career aspirations. While this survey does not claim to be comprehensive, and while the results must be viewed with caution (most of the responses depended on 'self identification' by the respondents and cannot be verified independently; only certain results have been tested for statistical significance), the survey has raised some interesting questions and indicates the need for further longer term research.

Scotland is a relatively small jurisdiction with a much smaller number of law schools and law students than England. Only one of the 'new' universities offering the LLB took part in this survey, and the small number of students at that university makes it difficult to draw any meaningful parallels or distinctions between those studying at pre- and those studying at post-1990 universities based on these results. In addition, amongst the pre-1990 universities there are important differences in the student cohorts. One 1960s university in particular has a graduate entrant and part time LLB programme (full-fee paying), and while we have not sought to compare the profile of these students with those of school leaver entrants generally, their presence may have had a significant impact on results. In addition, the different fee paying and governmental student support structure in Scotland makes it difficult to compare the Scottish survey results directly with those from the English survey.

Some of the results are unsurprising; Scots law students are fairly insular (there are few students from other jurisdictions studying for the Scots LLB), do not travel far to attend university, and have parents in the general professions. More surprisingly, a smaller number of entrants come direct from independent schools than the stereotypical image of the 'privileged law student' would suggest, and only a very small number have parents in the legal profession, although approximately half claim to have other relatives or friends in it. Prior experience of legal work is of a limited nature (primarily short school placements). This, and the fact that law/legal studies is not a high school Standard (O level equivalent) or Higher (A level equivalent) grade subject, suggests that the decision to study law is not based upon prior knowledge or experience of the discipline, but upon general perceptions and the influences of friends and family. Certainly slightly more students identified 'interest in the subject' as an important reason to study law, but 'reputation with employers' and 'potential income' were also very influential. A desire 'to help others' was important to just under two thirds of the respondents. Students perceive the LLB to be a vocationally specific degree, and on graduation most intend at this stage to go into the profession.

In terms of finances and debt, a majority of students (63%) expect to receive financial support from their family (26%, generally drawn from the group with parents in the professions, expected to benefit from savings or investment plans). Equally, while a majority had saved some money towards their first year expenses, 67% still anticipated taking a loan and 65% planned to take a part time job during first year (although significantly more students without parental financial support planned to

work than those with). Students thought they needed to earn up to £100 per week to cover their living expenses.

More worryingly perhaps is the number of students who indicated they intended to work between 11 and 20 hours week (56% of those intending to work), the same percentage indicating that they would work weekdays as well as weekends. Can these students still be meaningfully classified as 'full time' students? Perhaps the full time/part time classification is beginning to represent more an indication of how students want to perceive themselves than a valid administrative classification. Of course, student part time employment is no new phenomenon, but the prospect of incurring substantial long term debt and the need to balance study with paid employment in order to meet living expenses may not only affect the quality of the educational experience for numbers of students, but may lead others considering a career in law to reconsider their career plans.

60% of students anticipated graduating with debt (a further 5% did not know and 20% did not answer the question). Only 15% anticipated no debt. The anticipated debt range was £7,000-£20,000, but it is not clear if students have included their £2,000 contribution to the Graduate Endowment Fund into their calculations. In addition, given that 76% at this stage indicated an intention to take the Diploma in Legal Practice after graduating, it is likely that final debt levels will be higher than currently anticipated (and higher still for those who do not obtain a grant to study the Diploma).

Despite the long standing concern in Scotland about the social class composition of the legal profession (Anderson, Murray & Maharg, 2003), it remains to be seen what impact student debt will have upon deciding to study law. It is clear that students who come from families where the parents are not in the professions are less likely to anticipate benefiting from parental financial support or savings or investment plans. Will these students be deterred from pursuing a law career when they have no or little parental financial back-up, in the knowledge that they may carry student debt for a number of years after graduation in an increasingly competitive profession where starting salaries after seven years of study and training are likely to be around £25,000?

The Law Student 2002 project is now in its second year. We hope to track the students through to graduation, and possibly into the Diploma year. The second year survey will, hopefully, give us a more accurate gauge of student working hours and debt levels. Did they work as many hours as anticipated? Have students moved from university to private accommodation, and, if so, how have they met this cost? How much have they borrowed already? Are their estimates of final debt higher or lower than last year? Are their career plans changing?

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