

Paralegal News



Law undergraduate sweeps the board at NALP awards ceremony

A first-year law student had a double surprise at the NALP's annual awards at Sunderland University. Elsa Gibson not only won three awards for her outstanding work, but her children, Adam, seven, and Matthew, five, were on hand to present her with her prizes. Elsa, pictured left with her two sons and Amanda Hamilton, NALP chief executive, scored top marks in legal institutions and method, law of contract and was joint first with Claire Jackson in criminal law.

"I was very surprised to receive the awards," Elsa said. "Though I worked very hard throughout the year I was still amazed to

achieve such good grades. Naturally, I am thrilled and feel very proud. As a mature student with two children, studying law has proven to be quite a challenge. However, these awards have proven that all of the hard work is worth it."

Peter Minto, senior lecturer in law and paralegal programme leader at Sunderland University, said: "Particular recognition this year went to Elsa Gibson, who swept the board, by taking all three subject award plaques (one jointly) for first-year students – a tremendous achievement."

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Photo: Wendy Mszyca

Members' prospects boosted by exams body recognition

By Lyndsey Jones

Members have now been given the guarantee that the NALP courses are not only of an extremely high standard but are recognised nationally too.

The Association is the only organisation of its type in England and Wales to gain recognition as an awarding body and achieve accreditation from the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual), the regulator of qualifications in England.

The Ofqual status also means that the NALP can not only credit its own courses but others as well.

The Association has already been approached by other organisations, such as those offering legal secretarial or business management courses, to put its name to these qualifications.



It is also planning to encourage more colleges and

universities to run its courses throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland after the venture with Sunderland University has proved so successful.

"This will now put the paralegal profession on the map. It will raise the profile of the NALP and, in turn, that will raise the profile of members," Amanda Hamilton, NALP chief executive, said.

"We have gone through very rigorous checks to get this awarding body status. It solidifies our professional body's

Exams body boosts NALP

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standing and members can see what they are getting. We will concentrate on courses that are relevant to members.

“What makes the NALP’s qualifications special is that they have been specifically designed and are recognised by the profession. This means that students interested in working as a paralegal will have easier access to accredited courses and training.”

Ofqual ensures that awarding organisations that offer and deliver qualifications have good systems in place, and that they are held to account for their performance. Part of the regulator’s role is to make sure that awarding bodies meet its standards and are fit for purpose.

“The Ofqual status award has enhanced our opportunity to service the increased demand from potential students,” Ms Hamilton said.

It should also boost members’ chances of finding a job in the tough labour market. “Now we have gained the awarding body status we should start to see paralegals recognised for the work they do,” Ms Hamilton said.

“There’s no doubt that paralegals stand to reap the benefit of the consequences of recession and changes in the legal profession. We’re certainly seeing many recent law graduates opting to enter the profession by gaining practice and procedural experience through paralegal



Photo: Wendy Mszyca

‘We see operating as a freelance paralegal as a way forward – much like the IT contractor or interim manager models’

work,” Ms Hamilton continued. “For some who come straight from university that presents a real problem. They’re faced with a Catch 22 of needing experience to land a role but can’t secure a role to gain experience.

“We see operating as a freelance paralegal as a way forward – much like the IT contractor/interim manager models.

“Freelance paralegals offering fixed-rate services will be especially attractive to law firms that carry out a lot of litigation work.

“The vagaries of the market may well mean they don’t want to increase their headcount but they’d benefit from a pool of paralegal talent they could turn to when their own resources are stretched.

“One thing we have noticed in our 23

years of existence is that recruitment agencies are often slow to pick up on what paralegals can actually offer – and the fact that the term covers a wide swathe of people.

“We offer a training and development route to paralegals that offers a law degree equivalent and a level seven post-graduate diploma.

“A law degree and LPC is not the only route into law and we would certainly like more recognition for the strengths and benefits of paralegals from the recruitment world.

“I think change will continue and is inevitable. In five years, I foresee a position where paralegals are recognised as the third branch of the legal profession and are routinely carrying out a lot of the legal work that solicitors do today.”

Contact us

We would love to hear from our members. Whether you have a comment about an article in Paralegal News or want to share your views on paralegal issues, send us an email at: info@nationalparalegals.co.uk

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Dial our advisers to beat stress

By Gavin O'Toole

Stress need not lead to meltdown for dedicated paralegals thanks to valuable new support NALP will be providing members through the counselling charity LawCare.

The Association has become a sponsor of the only organisation in Britain offering legal practitioners uniquely tailored help to cope with the health and emotional issues sometimes caused by a stressful career in the law.

From March 1, NALP members can turn to a confidential freephone helpline to benefit from the advice of former lawyers with first-hand experience of the pressures they face.

Amanda Hamilton, chief executive of the Association, said: "The role of the paralegal has become far more stressful in that there is greater responsibility on paralegals, and we feel that offering our members this confidential advisory service will be of great benefit to them.

"NALP is dedicated to enhancing our members' careers – and our support for LawCare recognises that personal well-being is a key aspect of effective professionalism."

Paralegals devote themselves to solving other people's problems but sometimes find it hard to acknowledge the impact this can have upon their own lives.

Stress is recognised as a significant problem within the legal profession, and it can be all too easy to reach for a drink or some other quick fix to endure an excessive workload, bullying, lack of support, inappropriate training or the fear of redundancy.

Photo: Lyndsey Jones. Posed by model



Taking its toll

Mental toll: Stress makes you unable to perform. You lose confidence and self-esteem. Depression sets in.

Physical toll: Stress can contribute to heart disease, irritable bowel syndrome and aching joints. It weakens the immune system, resulting in illnesses and exhaustion.

Vicious circle: When you feel mentally and physically rotten, you are more likely to turn to alcohol or other substances. This can damage your career and personal life.

Listen to what your body tells you and be prepared to ask for help.

In LawCare's experience, 80 per cent of individuals seeking help for alcohol abuse started drinking due to stress at work – and the number of calls it receives rockets following the boozy Christmas season.

If an individual does not tackle stress and the problems associated with it – from alcohol and substance abuse to a poor diet and depression – this can destroy their health, families, relationships and careers.

Legal professionals can be at high risk: studies suggest that their attributes – conscientious, driven, competitive and aspirational – can make them prone to compulsive behaviour, such as the excessive consumption of alcohol, drugs and food.

And just as denial is a typical trait of problem drinkers and addicts generally, it is often considered worse among legal professionals, who can overwhelm discussion of difficult topics with elaborate arguments.

Studies suggest lawyers avoid seeking treatment because of the unshakable belief that they can handle their problems on their own.

LawCare was founded 12 years ago as legal bodies in the UK and Ireland began to acknowledge the harm caused by alcoholism, and today its volunteers tackle a broad range of issues associated

with stress, depression and addiction.

It operates a strictly confidential advisory service for legal professionals, their families and, where appropriate, colleagues and staff affected by their problems, through a freephone helpline that is staffed 365 days a year.

Volunteers who answer calls are former practising lawyers who have mostly experienced and recovered from addiction or depression. They will:

- Guarantee confidentiality and non-judgmental help;
- Assess a caller's condition and inform and advise about it;
- Motivate a caller to seek help and develop an action plan;
- Refer a caller to self-help groups, professional counselling, or sources of treatment.

Feedback suggests callers find telephone counselling puts a problem in perspective and is cathartic, but volunteers can also offer proactive advice about tried-and-tested problem-solving techniques allowing individuals to take back control.

In some cases, a caller may be referred to a volunteer who can offer additional, on-going support on a more personal level.

For more details on LawCare, visit its website: www.lawcare.org.uk



Left: Some of the 52 students who gained the Higher Diploma in Paralegal Practice at Sunderland University

Photos: Wendy Mszyca

University students win awards

By Lyndsey Jones

Law students celebrated their success at the annual NALP awards ceremony at Sunderland University.

The Association rewarded first, second and third-year students who have excelled during the academic year.

Fifty-two graduates were awarded the Higher Diploma in Paralegal Practice and six students were handed special awards for scoring top marks in their year's exams.

Elsa Gibson, a first-year law undergraduate, won three awards for scoring top marks in legal institutions and method, law of contract and was awarded criminal law jointly with fellow first-year undergraduate Claire Jackson.

Second-year prize winners were Steve Oliver, for civil and criminal practice, Gemma Bennet for law of tort, and Anne Ridley for practical employment law. In the third year, Saira Nazir was awarded for law of succession and Walter Marufu came top in family law.

Amanda Hamilton, NALP chief

executive, who presented the awards, said: "It is always a delight to reward students who have achieved outstanding success during the academic year. It is also a privilege to present the Higher Diplomas to all the graduates after all their hard work has paid off."

Peter Minto, senior lecturer in law and paralegal programme leader at

Sunderland University, said: "The university joint scheme, run in conjunction with NALP, has proved to be a continuing success since its inception back in 2005. The students gain a valuable, additional qualification along with their LLB (Hons) Degree, which is a great asset to them when applying for LPC/BVC places or



Above: The students who won special awards in their subjects are from left: Walter Marufu, Saira Nazir, Elsa Gibson, Claire Jackson, Amanda Hamilton, NALP chief executive, Peter Minto, law lecturer, Steve Oliver and Gemma Bennet

employment opportunities. This year we had over 50 third-year students leave the university with their Law degree and the Higher Diploma in Paralegal Practice.

"A number of students across all three years of the programme also received subject award plaques for their outstanding academic achievements."

Below from left: Law students Alex Hope, Steve Oliver, Ashleigh Britton with Amanda Hamilton, Neerissa Clark, and Helen Goss

