

# Accredited Paralegal Education Programs

## Audit Policy and Framework

### Background

As part of its public interest mandate to regulate paralegals, the Law Society of Upper Canada (“Law Society”) has created a paralegal education program accreditation process for colleges of applied arts and technology and private career academies (“institutions”). The Law Society grants accreditation status to those programs which meet criteria regarding curriculum standards, including program content and processes, faculty and field placement.

This Paralegal Education Program Audit Policy and Framework sets out the principles and processes of the audits for accredited programs. Audits will be conducted by counsel in the Law Society’s Professional Development & Competence division.

### Audit Policy

Accredited paralegal education programs will be audited at periodic intervals, but no less frequently than once in the first three (3) years post-accreditation and at least once every five (5) years thereafter. These audits are designed to review, assess and report on accredited paralegal education programs in relation to the information provided by the institution about its education program. If there are substantive changes to the accredited program since it was accredited, the institution is required to submit supplementary documentation detailing the changes prior to the audit being conducted, so that these changes can be appropriately reviewed.

Audits help to ensure compliance with the stated goals, criteria, competencies and standards of the paralegal education program. Audits also promote consistency of practice between institutions offering paralegal education programs, and help to ensure that students are exposed to and develop the knowledge and skills required to provide legal services to the public.

### Framework of Audits

#### ***I. Schedule***

As part of the accreditation process, the Law Society reserves the right to audit an institution’s accredited paralegal education program. A formal review will be conducted at appropriate intervals to ensure that the representations made during the accreditation process are accurate and that the institution maintains required standards thereafter.

Initial audits will be conducted for each accredited program within the first three (3) years after accreditation. At least one (1) additional audit will be conducted within subsequent five (5) year interval after the initial audit, at the Law Society's discretion.

## **II. Scope**

The areas that will be reviewed during the audit include

- course listings, content and assessment methods
- concordance between course content and competency development
- review of qualifications and capabilities of teaching faculty
- review of field placement process and results

## **III. Methodology**

The audit process will be comprised of two parts:

1. documentation review, and
2. site visits

1. Documentation review will include the following:

- Request for and submission of accredited institution's documentation, including:
  - tests and assessments
  - textbooks and instructors' manuals
  - faculty evaluations, and
  - review of other records, including student files and assessments, where appropriate.

2. The second part of the audit process will be conducted through visits to selected campuses of the accredited paralegal education programs. Site visits allow Law Society auditors to observe how programs are delivered to students in the classroom setting and to meet with faculty, administration and students to obtain feedback. These site visits will include the following:

- meetings with the Program Director and other senior administrative staff
- meetings with a representative group of students
- meetings with faculty, and selected verification of their experience and qualifications

- observation of classes in session, and
- meetings with the field placement coordinator

The length and scope of each site visit will be decided by the Law Society's audit team, however, sufficient notice will be provided to the Program Directors in order to schedule the required meetings. Prior notice will also be given, and sufficient time allowed, for program officials to provide requested documentation as part of the documentation review. Program Directors must remain available to Law Society auditors for follow-up or clarification of audit results once the site visits are completed.

#### ***IV. Audit Reports***

Once the documentation review and site visits are completed, Law Society auditors will review and analyze the collected information. These results will be compared against the institution's accreditation application and established standards, and any gaps or deficiencies will be noted.

The Law Society's audit group will prepare a draft report for each audited paralegal education program which will summarize the group's findings. The draft report will note any discrepancies between the audit findings and the representations made in the institution's accreditation application or documentation provided. A copy of the draft audit report will be provided to each institution's program director within eight (8) weeks of completion of the site visits for that program. This copy is made available to allow the institution to provide clarification and an opportunity to address the noted discrepancies; however, no substantive changes will be made to the draft report's findings unless approved by the audit team. Once a response is received from the Program Director, the audit team will produce a final report for the audit. This report will be presented to the Director, Professional Development & Competence for her review, and at the discretion of the Director, may be presented to the Paralegal Standing Committee for its review.

#### ***V. Post-Audit Actions***

If the final audit report finds that an institution is in compliance with the requirements, no further action need be taken by either the audit team or by the institution. The institution will be expected to maintain its current standards of program delivery, and to notify the Law Society of any substantive program changes.

If the audit report finds that there are deficiencies between the representations made in the institution's application and documentation and the program's content, the audit team will notify the Director of Professional Development & Competence and discuss an appropriate course of action.

At her discretion, the Director may decide whether to take any of the following steps:

- in the case of minor deficiencies, notify the Program Director and provide the institution with a reasonable period of time to correct them to the satisfaction of the Director and/or audit team. There will be no change to the program's accreditation status while these deficiencies are being

addressed. If the deficiencies are not addressed within the designated timeframe, the Director and/or the audit team may schedule another audit

- in the case of serious and/or substantial deficiencies, notify the Program Director and provide a deadline by which the deficiencies must be remedied in order to maintain accreditation status. There will be no change to the program's accreditation status while the deficiencies are being addressed
- in the case of grave concerns which cast doubt on the institution's ability to deliver its program to an appropriate standard, notify the Program Director that the program's status as an accredited program will be revoked immediately. Such revocation will be in effect until such time as the program is modified to be compliant with the Audit Report's requirements, however it may last indefinitely or permanently if:
  - Meeting such representations would be beyond the capabilities of the institution, or
  - The Program Director/institution refuses to undertake such corrections.
- in the event that an institution has been notified regarding deficiencies as above, and such institution becomes aware that it cannot remedy the deficiencies within the specified timeframe, the institution will be required to present written reasons as to why that timeframe cannot be met. The Director will decide whether such reasons are sufficient to permit an extension.

For situations where the Director makes a recommendation regarding the accreditation status of a program, as set out above, the matter and findings of the Audit Report will be brought before the Paralegal Standing Committee for review, consideration and approval before any decision affecting accreditation is made. If the Director recommends that an institution's accreditation status should be revoked, the Director will provide written reasons to the Paralegal Standing Committee. Any changes to accreditation status which are approved by the Paralegal Standing Committee will be communicated to the affected institution.