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THE
**NATIONAL
PROBONO**
CENTRE

THE **GUIDE** TO STUDENT **PRO BONO**

A guide to student pro
bono for frontline advice
organisations

WITH THANKS TO



Student pro bono is a fantastic resource for organisations in the UK seeking to enable access to justice. Students are passionate about providing frontline legal services, for they hope to better understand the areas of law and types of legal skills that appeal to them, as well as to make a positive impact on society and cultivate a sense of professional and personal responsibility.

Likewise, organisations have much to gain by supporting student pro bono. Students can increase internal capacity by providing legal research, triaging cases, attending to general administrative tasks, drafting case summaries, and signposting to other organisations. Removing these tasks from members of staff or external legal pro bono support can allow organisations to increase or expand the services they can offer to those in need.

So, what is it?

Student pro bono is the provision of voluntary help by law students with work that supports free legal advice and representation. Under the Joint Pro Bono Protocol for Legal Work, legal pro bono is voluntary and the end-user receives the service at no cost. The purpose of this guide is to provide insight into various models of student pro bono with the overarching hope to grow student pro bono and enable increased access to justice.

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Motivation

Students engage in pro bono work for a range of reasons, including but not limited to:

- » To help others/genuine interest
- » Employability in a competitive graduate market
- » Improve academic understanding/legal knowledge
- » Gain new skills/improve CV
- » Develop existing skills
- » Ethical/moral reasons/professional responsibility
- » Networking
- » Develop commitment to pro bono work
- » To gain [Qualifying Work Experience](#) (QWE) – see extensive guidance about how to ensure your student pro bono offering is eligible to be counted as QWE on the Clinical Legal Education Organisation (CLEO) website



Legal services that volunteer students can assist with

Student volunteers can assist with a range of supervised/unsupervised services. It is quite common for students to signpost, draft case summaries, or provide research on a specific issue. You may wish to provide sufficient training for student volunteers to assist in a wide range of tasks, including:

- » Responding to phone calls, e-mails, enquiries
- » Signposting to other agencies
- » Legal research on a specific point of law for a case or for legal reform
- » Interviewing clients
- » [Under supervision] Providing advice (face-to-face, over telephone, on Zoom/Teams)
- » Assisting in general case management
- » Gathering evidence from third parties
- » [Under supervision] Drafting case summaries, letters of advice, court documents/small claims, legal guides, e-mail updates to subscribers, witness statements and submissions
- » Form filling
- » Translation
- » Victim support
- » McKenzie services
- » [Under supervision] Representation

Areas of Law

Law students volunteer in many areas of law including:

- » Asylum & Immigration
- » Civil
- » Commercial
- » Consumer
- » Crime
- » Debt
- » Discrimination
- » Disability rights
- » Domestic violence
- » Employment
- » Environment
- » Family
- » Health care
- » Housing
- » Human Rights
- » Intellectual property
- » Medical negligence
- » Mental health
- » Personal injury
- » Residential property
- » School exclusion
- » Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- » Sports law
- » Welfare benefits/social security



How to recruit students to help you

Recruiting students to do legal pro bono depends on what you want the student to do. There are three main models of recruitment, but sometimes you might want different models for different projects.

a) Students volunteer through their university or society

In this model **you** (as the frontline advice charity) **would work directly with a university or university society** (e.g. Pro Bono Society, Law Society).

Selecting students:

- » The university or society sharing details of your project or scheme takes the lead selecting students to volunteer with you, likely via an interview process.

Training:

- » The university should provide generic training to the students about volunteering. You would be expected to give all selected students training specific to your project or scheme.

Supervision:

- » You are responsible for supervision and management of the students once they are on board.

b) Students participate in a Pro Bono module/course with the University

- » Similar to the above, the **university will provide your organisation with student volunteers and then you will attend to training and supervision.**

- » The difference in this model of recruitment is that the student is undertaking a compulsory/elective module that relates to pro bono or clinical legal education which is evaluated for academic credit.
- » Student volunteers will be required to participate for a certain number of hours and will likely submit an assessment relating to their experience to the university.
The main contact at the university will be the module leader or course director.

Advantages to this model include:

- » An increased likelihood that the student volunteer is committed and reliable as there is an element of personal gain for the student.

Considerations for this model include:

- » As it is part of the students credited work, **you will need to ensure the university requirements are met.** Resources may be necessary to comply with any requirement - in some cases, universities will provide you with a fee to accommodate the additional expense.

Example:

An example of this type of pro bono includes the LLM Bar Vocational Studies option at City University, which requires student volunteers to complete a clinical legal project with a real client across 200 hours between September to June.

c) Students contact you directly

With this type of recruitment, **you will either advertise for student volunteers or respond to individual enquiries from students who wish to volunteer** with your organisation.

Students may include recent graduates who have not yet secured pupillage or a traineeship and are looking to gain further experience within the legal field.

Unlike the above two models, **you are responsible for the entire process of recruitment, all training and supervision.**

Advantages to this model include:

- » Working with student volunteers that took the initiative to contact you and will therefore be more likely to maintain commitment to their role.
- » Interested **students may also have a personal connection to the specific cause of the your organisation, which could act as further incentive.** Additionally, if you opt to advertise for student volunteers, you can request specific experience, qualifications, and time commitment from the students.

Considerations for this model include:

- » **Providing sufficient training and supervision** to ensure the student can provide work effectively. Additionally, liaising directly with the student could mean there are more administrative tasks involved.

Tips

- » Ask the university to **share the assessment calendar with you so you know when students will have exams and will be less available** so you can plan for those periods.
- » Make sure you **have provided the university with as much information as possible** at what will be expected of students once they are on the programme.
- » Think about whether you would like students on different courses and stages of their education or students on the same programme at the same level. The former may **avoid students being absent at the same time** (i.e. during assessment week or reading week) and the latter may **encourage teamwork amongst classmates and/or consistency in scheduling.**
- » Consider appointing **one student as your volunteer lead or liaison point** to help plan schedules and deal with any issues which could arise.

Training

Training can be informal or heavily structured depending on the nature of the pro bono service the student will provide. Some examples include:

- » Internal training
- » A combination of pre-recorded/live lectures, quizzes, and resources

Providing guidance on:

- » Email/Content Management System (CMS) access
- » How to access and update templates
- » Relevant law
- » Relevant forms
- » Who to communicate with internally/externally
- » How to manage specific types of client (e.g. vulnerable clients)
- » Ethical considerations: confidentiality, professionalism, scope of service
- » Research methods
- » How to draft a specific document (e.g. witness statement)
- » Confidentiality
- » Shadowing more experienced student volunteers or legal practitioners within the organisation
- » Providing examples of a typical client

Trained by a qualified provider:

- » On a specific area of law; i.e., if you require all of your volunteers to be OISC (Office of Immigration Services Commissioner) qualified, you may refer volunteers to external training providers (i.e. Refugee Action).
- » On a specific type of client; i.e., children, vulnerable clients, etc.

Advantages to training include:

- » Ensuring student volunteers are capable
- » Removing the need for close supervision
- » Instilling confidence in student volunteers
- » Avoiding errors

It is important to consider the following:

- » What delivery method of training will encourage engagement with materials and retention of information?
- » Who will provide the training?
- » What costs will be involved?
- » How often will training occur?
- » How often will training be updated?
- » How will you assess that training has been completed and understood?

Training may be provided by:

- » Law school academic or non-academic staff
- » Qualified solicitor/barrister
- » Legal professionals
- » Law centres
- » Local government

Supervision

Supervision is an important and essential part of student pro bono. It ensures ethical and professional standards are upheld and a high standard of legal service is provided.

You can opt for **different types or combinations of supervision** depending on the types of client, service and/or project the student volunteer is responsible for.

Direct supervision:

- » A solicitor/barrister (including retired lawyers interested in local volunteering opportunities) closely oversees the student volunteer's work and provides frequent guidance and feedback.
- » The supervisor is responsible for any work produced by the student.
- » This may require regular meetings to discuss a specific case, legal issues, or different approaches to the task at hand.
- » Students do not provide legal advice in this role without approval or supervision from the supervisor.
- » The client's main point of contact is the supervisor.

Ethical supervision:

- » A member of staff or volunteer solicitor/barrister ensures ethical obligations of the organisation are complied with.
- » The supervisor may provide training or be an ongoing point of contact.
- » Quality control
- » A member of staff or volunteer solicitor/barrister ensures compliance with legal standards by reviewing the students output on an ongoing basis.

Feedback sessions:

- » Supervisors provide regular or ad hoc feedback sessions on students' general progression and areas for improvement.

Group supervision:

- » Students work collectively on a case and periodically meet with a supervisor to seek direction and receive feedback.

Common supervision apprehensions

- » If your organisation is looking at advertising for student support, it may be worth also advertising for volunteer supervision help. For example, many retired lawyers look for local opportunities to volunteer using their legal skillset. Recruiting their help could triage the supervision workload for your team and be mutually rewarding for members of your community as well as a direct source of support for your organisation.
- » Some organisations worry that issues can arise when students are not committed – like with any volunteer dynamic. One way to combat this is with a robust recruitment process. For example, if you partner with a university it may be more likely the student is inclined to take accountability.
- » Another consideration is that charities can assume students know how to do what they are asking of them, but this is not necessarily the case. By investing in training and expectation setting - on both sides – as well as having in place a solid supervision structure will ensure you get the most out of student volunteers, and vice versa.



Time commitment

Time commitments for student volunteers are varied and will likely depend on the recruitment model. For example, students may commit to:

- » A regular weekly, fortnightly, or monthly slot, allocated to the volunteer on a rota or selected by the student volunteer themselves;
- » A certain number of hours per week;
- » Ad hoc volunteering where the needs of the client will dictate how much time is required by the student volunteer (i.e., where the client has an upcoming hearing or there is a deadline to submit further submissions).
- » Student volunteers may participate for one academic year;
- » Term-time placements or holiday 'internships';
- » Rotating shifts, weeks, or months at a time; or
- » Monthly full-time or part-time placements.

Tips

- » Organisations who work with students say that **consistent contact with students, for example a weekly slot, tends to work best** to ensure the student is committed to their work, and in return they get the most out of their experience.
- » **An awareness of student responsibilities is important;** many need to juggle paid jobs around their studies, particularly in the current cost of living crisis.
- » **Communicating expectations from the start** will be the best way to ensure consistent engagement.

Support and wellbeing

For many organisations, the **frontline delivery and casework content can be distressing and sometimes triggering**, which must be considered in terms of offering support to students.

Having a **strong relationship with student support at the university and knowing where to signpost** a student who might be struggling will be both important to the students wellbeing, and be a helpful step in ensuring a student is willing to continue volunteering. This is important to raise should you be looking to partner with a local university to recruit students and should also be factored into the training provided to the student – depending on the type of work the student will be completing and the level of exposure to potentially harmful scenarios.

Additionally, if your organisation has a Volunteer Coordinator or similar, it would be worth tracking attendance to see if any students have repeatedly missed sessions or appear to be lacking in communicating availability.

Another important consideration is to be aware and inclusive of students who may have hidden disabilities. Some ways to do this include:

» **Review all aspects of your project critically, including the supporting materials and any communications going out to student volunteers.**

» An organisation may be very open to adapting a project to accommodate different student needs, but is this being made explicit to potential student volunteers? Are you using appropriate language in your website materials? If not, you may be putting off students applying to your project without realising it.

» Use feedback/focus groups with current student volunteers on their experience of your project (including the recruitment and participation phases) and ideas of how to improve it – both generally and on an individual basis. They might notice things you don't.

- » **Identify if there are any aspects of your project which you could adapt to increase inclusion for student volunteers** e.g. timing of appointments; mode of delivery; roles students can take on within a team.
- » **Risk assess your venue**, identify what facilities are available and consider accessibility issues.
- » **Look to external resources to support specific needs.** For example, supporting socially anxious volunteers: Anxiety UK (anxietyuk.org.uk/) and No Panic (nopanic.org.uk/) are organisations which offer a variety of information, advice and support on managing anxiety.

Insurance

Insurance options are:

- » General insurance policy at the university
- » Separate insurance policy from the university
- » Membership of organisation: For example, LawWorks provides insurance for some projects that members can join. They may also provide insurance to clinics on their network (note: you must apply for this and it is only given in exceptional circumstances)
- » Cover provided by your organisation

Insurance can include:

- » Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII): provides coverage for claims arising from professional negligence or mistakes of the students (and supervisors).
- » Public Liability Insurance (PLI): provides coverage for claims arising from personal injury or property damage caused by the organisation.
- » Employers' Liability Insurance: provides coverage for claims made by the students if they suffer injury or illness while volunteering.
- » Building & Contents Insurance: provides coverage for the physical building and contents where students may be volunteering. Note many organisations arrange student volunteering remotely, so this may not be necessary depending on your arrangement.

Inspiring examples of student pro bono

University of Chester x Pregnant Then Screwed Partnership

“Working with Chester University law students has been brilliant! They have engaged fully with the work of Pregnant Then Screwed (PTS) to really understand how they can best support the thousands of women who reach out to us for advice every year.”

The University of Chester Law School operates student-run community outreach projects under the umbrella of Chester Community Law Project (CCLP). CCLP and PTS started a partnership in 2022 following CCLP being inspired by the work PTS carry out to tackle the root causes of maternity discrimination and promote the rights of women. Responding directly to what PTS identified as being most needed, CCLP students researched and devised a series of 'your rights' information sheets for the PTS website covering issues such as redundancy, discrimination claims and parental leave and pay, providing accurate legal advice and practical steps on how women can advocate for themselves. Breaking complex legal principles down into easily digestible information sheets assists women who may not have anywhere else to turn. The first batch of information sheets went live on the PTS website in February 2023 and as at August 2023 had been downloaded over 38,000 times, demonstrating the huge impact this project has by empowering thousands of women across the UK.

University of East Anglia x Norfolk Community Law Service: Law Student Volunteer Scheme

Norfolk Community Law Service works in partnership with the Law School at the University of East Anglia (UEA) to give students the opportunity to volunteer with them and learn practical skills in a legal advice setting.

Around March/April each year, a talk is held at UEA providing information about the scheme. After this talk interested students are invited to make an application - if successful they are invited to an interview to fully assess their suitability for the scheme. The process is competitive and applicants are not guaranteed a place.

If successful, students are assigned to a particular service for the academic year. They are involved in a range of work from greeting clients, taking attendance notes, administering services and client bookings, to attending Court and Tribunals and undertaking research.

A previous UEA volunteer said about her time as a student volunteer:

“ Working at NCLS has been the best opportunity that I have had as a student; not only do you get a chance for legal work experience but you really gain insight and motivation for what you are working towards. You get the chance to be treated like a professional, to be given responsibility and ultimately to really make a difference to people’s lives.”

An outstanding individual student contribution to pro bono:

Benjamin O’Connell, University of Essex: *“Ben has consistently exceeded all expectations. He is extremely client-focused, with a clear passion for helping vulnerable clients access advice.”*

Inspired by his experience of being made homeless at 17, Ben has shown exceptional commitment to pro bono work. He began volunteering at University of Essex Law Clinic in October 2020, focusing on housing and family law. Across just one year Ben has taken on more cases than any other volunteer, accounting for more than one fifth of the overall caseload! As Deputy Student Director and then Student Director for the clinic, he has also given a voice to the concerns and interests of student volunteers within the clinic, helping to shape it into a “better institution.”

Ben is involved in other projects at the clinic, including relaunching an advice outreach in Jaywick- one of the most deprived areas in England - he also leads the Innocence Project and the Housing and Homelessness Project, which operates in partnership with local charity Beacon House, Ben has been key to expanding this collaboration, visiting weekly. Last summer he undertook to review over 150 casefiles to improve the provision of emergency s188 accommodation to clients in priority need. Beacon House says this project transformed the local authority's approach, resulting in more street homeless clients being accommodated on an urgent basis.

For more, check out LawWorks' [Student Pro Bono Awards](#) – maybe you'll be submitting a student for an award very soon!



Get Involved

Now you are familiar with the processes and expectations of what student pro bono involves, we hope you're ready to get started. Find details below of what your next steps could be:

National Pro Bono Centre

The team at [NPBC](#) put together this information, alongside support from individuals at a range of clinics and universities nationally.

- » You can [advertise a volunteer opportunity](#) on the NPBC website, or get in touch for further support in starting your student recruitment process.
- » The team will be able to help advise on your project and put you in contact with CLEO to help match you to appropriate universities.
- » The NPBC also provides information for retired lawyers who are keen to undertake pro bono and regularly hear from individuals who want to get started, so let us know if you would like to work with retired lawyers.

Clinical Legal Education Organisation (CLEO)

[CLEO](#) is the umbrella charity for Law School clinic and community engagement activity and can help with advertising a position with your organisation. They also provide extensive guidance on QWE.

- » CLEO should be able to help match you to an appropriate educational organisation, either near you or aligned with your purpose.

LawWorks

[LawWorks](#) is the leading UK solicitors charity. It has a range of resources and programmes that may be of use to you in this context, including:

- » The LawWorks Clinics Network. LawWorks helps set up and maintain sustainable clinic partnerships between LawWorks members, law schools and advice agencies to help address unmet legal need in the community.
- » LawWorks also provides some additional information and resources regarding [law schools and student pro bono](#).