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THE TSG AND PRO BONO

The TSG fully supports pro bono work and aims to assist its members in the carrying out or obtaining of pro bono opportunities across the country. The information provided on this website is in conjunction with the Solicitor's Pro Bono Group (SPBG), a national charity whose main aim is to promote, support and encourage pro bono work throughout the legal sector. The ultimate aim is to establish a commitment from you (as part of the TSG membership of students and young lawyers) that will continue throughout your career.

It is likely that you will have heard the term "*pro bono*". This may be through actually participating in a scheme, at an interview for a training contract or at Law School (usually through a careers advisor or lecturer). The likelihood is that at some point during your legal education, the term was mentioned to you. In fact, the majority of the TSG's members have been involved in pro bono or at least exposed to it. A large amount of the pro bono work in England & Wales is done by the profession's junior element.

This is a brief guide to pro bono work, what it involves and how you can participate. To find out about the SPBG and the work that they do, please visit www.probonogroup.org.uk.

Defining "pro bono"

The term *pro bono* is Latin, and literally translated means "*for the good*". It is a contraction of the Latin phrase *pro bono publico*, which is translated as "*for the good of the community*". In legal terms, then, it means conducting any legal work without a charge. So pro bono solicitors may assist an individual or group on a legal case, or fill in government applications or petitions or assist with an appeal. Pro bono is also referred to as Corporate Social Responsibility, as that term encompasses both legal and non-legal work done for the good of the community by lawyers and law firm staff.

The culture in the UK for pro bono work is not as pronounced as in other jurisdictions. For example, New York lawyers in the United States of America are recommended under ethical rules to contribute at least fifty hours of pro bono service per year.

There is no equivalent provision in the Solicitor's Code of Conduct, but pro bono work is both rewarding and fulfilling. It is seen as an excellent way for law students and junior lawyers to gain the professional experience that may assist them in gaining a training contract or paralegal position. In the UK, some firms are already asking their trainees that they commit to do some pro bono work each year.

The Law Society has put together a statement on international corporate responsibility, which can be found at

<http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/documents/downloads/corporate%20social%20responsibility.pdf>

It should be noted that pro bono is not seen as an alternative to a publicly funded legal aid system. It is voluntary work that assists the public on a small scale.

What types of work are done pro bono?

The legal community can do all kinds of work on a pro bono basis. It is done for the public good, so this is for members of the public ineligible for public legal funding but with limited means, or charitable and other non-profit making, or small fledgling organisations. Pro Bono is open to all types of firms in all manners of location!

Examples of pro bono activities include:

- Solicitors attending advice sessions at Citizens Advice Bureaux, Law Centres or other free services
- Matters accepted under a specific arrangement, e.g. as a panel member for organisations such as Liberty
- Providing free representation at tribunals and the like
- Free advice to members of organisations, e.g. trade union general advice schemes
- Secondments to Law Centres
- Free advice to charitable and community organisations
- Acting as an Honorary Legal Advisor to Citizens Advice Bureaux
- Providing Legal Literacy for schools
- Participating in mentoring schemes
- Participating in Reading Programmes

All pro bono work should be conducted in accordance with the SPBG protocol – which ensures that quality controls and consistency aims are met. It's serious stuff, but important to protect the "client" where he does not have a contract or retainer in place. Please have a look at this if you plan to undertake pro bono work at any stage:

<http://www.probonogroup.org.uk/protocol/index.htm>

Who does pro bono work?

The answer to this one is that lawyers across the spectrum undertake pro bono. These are lawyers from all kinds of firm and from all types of backgrounds. Also, lawyers at all stages of their training undertake pro bono work and, indeed, students and trainees are positively encouraged to get involved. Pro bono work is seen as a way for law students to get that all-important legal experience which may help them to stand out from the crowd when applying for training contracts.

Large law firms such as Allen & Overy, Clifford Chance, Clyde & Co, Eversheds, Linklaters and Lovells all have pro bono practices and ensure that their trainees get involved with these. In fact, all employees from managing partners to support staff are encouraged to get involved. But it's not just the largest firms who are involved in pro bono. The commitment of small high street practices and medium-sized firms is just as great. Pro bono is seen as an important part of the legal world. The idea that legal assistance should be available to all members of society is a deeply entrenched one.

What are the benefits of pro bono work?

On a human level, the advantage of pro bono work is quite simply that it provides a huge level of satisfaction – allowing you to “give something back” and contribute to the community. Very cliché perhaps, but true.

On a more professional level, pro bono gives an opportunity to extend your legal knowledge and skills. The Legal Practice Course (LPC) is geared to assisting you gain these skills, but the value of “real life” experience should not be underestimated. The academic “black letter” law that you have spent three years (or more) learning can be applied into practical situations. Real experience dealing with clients, running cases, making presentations and negotiating is invaluable.

Did we mention that it's fun?!

The benefits for all those participating can be briefly stated as follows:

Students

- Learn more effectively
- Complement other studies
- Apply knowledge
- Improve skills
- Appreciate values
- Improve the CV!
- Play a part

Clients and the Public

- Provide a service
- Meet a need
- Increase awareness

The Legal Profession/Law Firms

- Recruit trainees and others better equipped to work in real world
- Contribute to meeting needs
- Enhance reputation

Education Providers

- Aid recruitment and retention
- Support learning and teaching strategies
- Forge links with local communities

In short, everyone's a winner...!

How do I get involved with pro bono?

SPBG found that pro bono work went on in 50% of law schools in July 2000. That percentage has doubtless since increased as 88% of all the law schools stated that they would support pro bono schemes. If your law school does not have one, visit your tutor and set up a new one!

If you are at the College of Law, you will be able to join one of their Legal Advice Centres. These are centres that operate out of the College branches and offer free legal advice to the public. Volunteer students run the centres and they give preliminary legal advice only. This is provided in writing after a meeting with the "client". The centres are run to the same standard as any solicitor's practice. To find out more, go to <http://www.college-of-law.co.uk/20918.html>

BPP run a Legal Advice Clinic (BLAC), where students interview and advise clients on their problems in the areas of employment, housing, family and consumer law. BLAC's aims are to offer free legal advice to the community and to provide students with the opportunity to gain practical legal experience. Please visit http://www.bpp.com/law/left_menu/pro_bono/pro_bono.htm

There are a variety of initiatives running across the country, so please take the time to participate in or find out about pro bono in your area. There are law centres nationwide in the format above advising on housing, employment or immigration; "*Streetlaw*" programmes; and SPBG's own "*LawWorks*" programmes. There are many initiatives running, and you are sure to find a programme that reflects your own interests and skills.

Streetlaw is a legal literacy scheme aimed at raising awareness of legal rights and responsibilities within the community by providing workshops on various legal topics. *Streetlaw* works with schools, voluntary organisations, hospitals and prisons. Individual organisations choose the topic for their workshop, but topics previously covered include Human Rights, Police Powers, Homicide and Consumer Law. To get involved, contact your Pro Bono Co-ordinator or Careers Advisor.

The *LawWorks* programme is open to all, and you don't have to be a student to get involved. The overall aim of the *LawWorks* Clinics project is to match lawyers willing to give free legal advice with advice agencies to provide initial advice for individuals and local communities. The project is a joint initiative of the Solicitors Pro Bono Group and the Law Centres Federation. You can visit their websites at www.probonogroup.org.uk and www.lawcentres.org.uk. The project aims to encourage successful partnerships between advice centres and law firms, thereby facilitating the establishment of Clinics. By encouraging such new relationships and supporting the existing partnerships, it is hoped that *LawWorks* Clinics will continue to expand and thrive. The SPBG website has a wealth of information on how to volunteer for these Clinics and even how to set up your own.

Don't forget that Citizen's Advice Bureaux across the country provide a fantastic opportunity for solicitors and trainees to donate their time. Please see the link below to find out more.

If you want to find out who is doing pro bono work in your area, you may want to contact the following:

- [Law Centres Federation](#)
- [Citizens' Advice](#)
- [Legal Services Commission Community Legal services Directory](#)

What are other people's experiences of pro bono?

In order to give you a taste of what pro bono involves, and people's experiences of it, we have asked some of those who have participated in pro bono schemes to give their own accounts:

Sophie's experience

Since starting work as a trainee solicitor I have had a number of opportunities to take part in pro bono work. I have participated in the Streetlaw scheme with the College of Law, which involves working alongside college students who give presentations to the public on a variety of legal topics. I act in an advisory and support capacity for the presentations, which cover topics as diverse as equal pay and anti-social behaviour.

I have also participated in other schemes, including leading workshops in primary and secondary schools, which are designed to increase pupils' commercial awareness through different business challenges. I have given presentations on topics ranging from challenging stereotypes to languages at work, as well as promoting the law as a career in disadvantaged areas.

I have been fortunate in the level of support my firm has given me to take part in pro bono activities. I now run two pro bono schemes myself and find the challenges that the work presents me with immensely rewarding. If your firm or college offers you the opportunity to take part in pro bono work, I would advise that you seize it and, if there is no scheme in existence, what better way to get involved than by setting one up!

Aimee's experience

I have been doing pro bono since I was an LPC student. I am now a second year trainee and I still enjoy, although it can be hard and frustrating to juggle it all!

I mainly do CAB work, volunteering once a month to go give free advice in North London, the clients are varied and it really is worth it.

I also do work with children, participating in a legal literacy scheme; they definitely are the most demanding clients I have met so far in my career. My firm set-up its own literacy scheme, which was challenging, as I had to draft all of the teaching plans!

Lastly, I do work with some charities providing advice and support when and were needed.

I think pro bono is a frame of mind, you really do benefit from helping others and that it keeps you grounded and realise others do not have it as good as you, no matter how bad you think things are going for you.

Any questions?

If you have any questions at all in how you can get involved in pro bono, or what it can do for you please do not hesitate to contact one of the following:

Student Support at the SPBG – students@probonogroup.org.uk

SPBG – rb@probonogroup.org.uk

TSG Policy Director – policy@tsg.org