

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in England and Wales

Introduction

The provision of pro bono legal services is of continuing importance to lawyers and law firms within England and Wales and remains a fixture of the culture of the legal profession. This culture is underpinned by the various organisations and institutions within England and Wales that continue to foster and develop pro bono legal activity. This includes (but is not limited to) the In House Pro Bono Group, a working group of in-house professionals that aims to foster a culture of commitment to pro bono among in-house lawyers by providing guidance and connections between various stakeholders, and the UK Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono, which is a profession-led initiative for law firms, through which participating law firms collaborate with each other in order to improve access to justice through pro bono.

At a glance

Minimum pro bono hours requirement for lawyers?	Specific pro bono licence required?	May foreign lawyers practice pro bono?	Insurance required for law firm pro bono?	Insurance required for in-house pro bono?	Rules to limit advertising pro bono work?	Does pro bono work count to CLE credit?	Limitations for in-house lawyers to do pro bono?
No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

The landscape

Professional regulation	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of legal services, including any licensing required to provide legal services. Please highlight any differences for lawyers working as in-house counsel. 	<p>The legal profession in England and Wales is comprised of legal executives, solicitors and barristers.</p> <p>Legal executives carry out similar work to solicitors, and can undertake pro bono work, although they may not carry out certain reserved legal activities (such as but not limited to litigation and conveyancing)¹ unless they are supervised by a qualified solicitor. For this survey we have not included legal executives in our commentary.</p>

¹ See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/29/section/12> (last visited February 21, 2025) and note *Mazur & Anor v Charles Russell Speechlys LLP* [2025] EWHC 2341 (KB) where it was held that only an individual who is “authorised” (or exempt) under the Legal Services Act 2007 may conduct litigation, and merely being employed by a regulated firm or acting under supervision does *not* entitle an unqualified person to “conduct” litigation.

	<p>Solicitors are governed by The Law Society and the Solicitors Regulatory Authority (the “SRA”). The SRA Standards and Regulations (“STARS”) set out the ethical and professional standards that solicitors must comply with.² The SRA also sets the entry and training requirements for solicitors.</p> <p>The Bar Standards Board (the “BSB”) regulates barristers in England and Wales. It is responsible for setting the standards of conduct, authorising barristers to practice, monitoring the service provided by barristers, setting education and training requirements, handling complaints against barristers and taking enforcement or other action where appropriate. The BSB Handbook sets out the standards with which barristers must comply.³</p> <p>To act as a solicitor in England and Wales, one must hold a practicing certificate issued by the SRA. An admitted solicitor with a practicing certificate is an authorised person under the Legal Services Act 2007 (the “Act”).</p> <p>In order to practice at the Bar of England and Wales, barristers must have a current practicing certificate issued by the BSB. This requirement is part of the Authorisation to Practice regime under the Act.</p>
<h3>Regulatory landscape for pro bono</h3>	
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>Pursuant to the STARS, solicitors in private practice owe the same duty of care when undertaking legal work on a pro bono basis as when acting for fee-paying clients. They must ensure that the service they provide is competent and delivered in a timely manner, and must act with independence, honesty, integrity and in the best interests of each client as per the SRA Principles and the SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs (“Code of Conduct”).</p> <p>When providing pro bono advice, solicitors should be aware of the distinction between “reserved legal activities”, which have some limitations to consider, and “non-reserved legal activities”, which are not limited. For a list of</p>

² See <https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/> (last visited on February 13, 2025).

³ See <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/the-bsb-handbook.html> (last visited on February 13, 2025).

	<p>“reserved legal activities” please refer to s.12 of the Legal Services Act 2007.⁴</p> <p>As per Rule 5.6 of the Code of Conduct, solicitors carrying on reserved legal activities must ensure that they have adequate and appropriate indemnity insurance cover in respect of the services provided. This is a particular consideration for in-house solicitors whose employers may not have the same coverage as private practice solicitors.</p> <p>In-house solicitors who have a practising certificate can assist in the delivery of services in connection with reserved legal activities to the public on a pro bono basis as long as it is separate from their in-house employment, supervised and formally conducted, either by a solicitor practising through a body authorised to undertake reserved legal activities (for example, a law firm) or by a body excluded from the requirement to be authorised (for example, a not-for-profit law centre or clinic, such as LawWorks).</p> <p>Self-employed barristers may provide pro bono legal services through a Legal Advice Centre, as provided for in rules rS41-42 of the BSB Handbook. Barristers must not receive either directly or indirectly any fee or reward for the supply of any legal services to any client of the Legal Advice Centre other than a salary paid by the Legal Advice Centre.</p> <p>Self-employed barristers who are Public Access registered may provide pro bono legal services directly to members of the public if they comply with the Public Access requirements set out in rC119-rC131 of the BSB Handbook.</p>
<p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>Lawyers do not require a license to provide pro bono legal services in England and Wales.</p>
<p>4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>Foreign-qualified solicitors must be registered with the SRA as a ‘registered foreign lawyer’ (“RFL”). RFL’s are permitted to practise the law of their home state and advise on English and Welsh law when providing non-reserved legal services. There are limitations on the provision of</p>

⁴ See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/29/section/12> (last visited February 14, 2025).

	<p>reserved legal services that should be considered, with reference to the STARs, before providing such services. RFLs are required to comply with the STARs.</p> <p>Foreign-qualified lawyers must apply to the BSB in order to practice as a barrister in England and Wales. This may include a requirement to pass Bar Transfer Test assessments.</p>
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	Solicitors and barristers in England and Wales are not required to work a minimum number of pro bono hours.
6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?	Aspiring solicitors and barristers in England and Wales are not required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services in order to become licensed lawyers.
7. Aside from mandatory targets (if any), are there aspirational pro bono hours targets for lawyers set by the local bar association, regulatory body or other body?	<p>The UK Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono (as described above) includes an aspirational target of 25 pro bono hours on average per fee-earner per year. Member law firms promote this target as an appropriate minimum commitment for lawyers in England and Wales and as recognition of best practice and collaborate with one another to achieve this target.⁵</p> <p>The In House Pro Bono Pledge⁶ is a way for companies to publicly demonstrate their commitment to pro bono. Signatories commit to encouraging 25% of their lawyers to undertake a minimum of one hour of pro bono work in the first year, rising to 35% in the second year and 50% in the third year.</p>
8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?	<p>No, but pro bono hours can be counted towards both solicitors’ and barristers’ competence requirements.</p> <p>Continuing Competence is the SRA’s system of assuring competence among solicitors. Under Continuing Competence, there is no requirement to complete a certain number of hours of education. Instead, solicitors are expected to review their learning needs and address them</p>

⁵ See <https://www.globalprobonohub.com/resource/gpbh/uk-collaborative-plan-for-pro-bono> (last visited February 14, 2025).

⁶ See <https://www.inhouseprobono.uk/the-in-house-pro-bono-pledge> (last visited October 24, 2025).

through continuing professional development activities. They are then asked to reflect on the learning and look at ways they can incorporate this into their practice. As such, if a solicitor identifies the providing of pro bono advice as a learning need, any pro bono work they undertake can contribute to the solicitor being able to make their required annual declaration to the SRA that they have reflected on their practice and addressed any identified learning and development needs.

Under the BSB's Continuing Professional Development ("CPD") scheme, barristers must create a CPD plan which includes objectives, CPD activities and reflection of the process overall. The CPD plan can include reflection on pro bono work conducted. There is no requirement to undertake a minimum number of CPD hours every year.

Insurance and advertising

9. Do lawyers need professional indemnity legal insurance cover for pro bono legal services they provide? Does the requirement differ for in-house lawyers?

If insurance is required, can lawyers meet the requirement by working under the cover of another pro bono provider, e.g. in partnership with a private law firm or organisation working on the same pro bono project?

Solicitors are required to have professional indemnity insurance for all reserved legal activity they undertake. Though, it is advisable to have adequate cover for all work undertaken for clients.

Pro bono work undertaken by solicitors at law firms is generally covered under the professional indemnity insurance ("PII") policy of their firm.

In-house solicitors should check that their employer's PII is adequate for the proposed pro bono work they intend on conducting. If an in-house solicitor is providing pro bono work under the supervision of an authorised or excluded body (in the way discussed above), they should ensure the work is covered by that body's PII.

Barristers must ensure that either their personal insurance or the insurance of the body through which they provide services, covers them for any pro bono legal services being provided. If a barrister holds a self-employed practicing certificate, they must be a member of the Bar Mutual Indemnity Fund.

<p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>	<p>Rule 1.4 of the Code of Conduct states that a solicitor must not mislead or attempt to mislead their clients, the court, or others. Therefore, any publications must be carefully reviewed to ensure they are not misleading.</p> <p>Similarly, under Rule rC19 of the BSB Handbook, barristers may not mislead, or cause or permit to be misled, any person to whom they offer to supply legal services.</p> <p>In relation to advertising or soliciting new clients, rule 8.9 of the Code of Conduct must be complied with which states that solicitors, RELs and RFLs must not make unsolicited approaches to members of the public, with the exception of current or former clients, in order to advertise legal services.</p>
Pro bono practice and culture	
<p>11. What are the main areas of law which require or present opportunities for pro bono? What are the major unmet legal needs?</p>	<p>The main areas of law which require the provision of pro bono legal services in England and Wales include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to justice and social welfare law which addresses unmet needs⁷ in housing and homelessness, debt, employment, disability, welfare benefits, and family law.⁸ • Charity law and social enterprise support, including helping non-profit organisations with governance, compliance and operational legal needs. • Data protection, privacy and technology law advice is increasingly sought by non-profit organisations. • Climate, sustainability and environmental legal advice supports environmental and sustainability efforts. • Immigration, refugee and asylum support,

⁷ The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) reduced the scope of civil legal aid, leaving many individuals to handle legal issues without aid, leading to self-representation, lack of assistance, or reliance on limited pro bono and charity support, and resulting in the emergence of advice deserts.

⁸ See <https://asauk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Mind-the-gap-an-assessment-of-unmet-legal-need-in-London.pdf> (last viewed on 24 October 2025).

	<p>including navigating Home Office processes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education legal advice and support for youth includes helping children with special needs and children at risk of exclusion. • Strategic litigation and policy reform focuses on impact litigation for human rights and justice. <p>TrustLaw’s Index of Pro Bono found that access to justice is the main focus of pro bono efforts across all the law firms who participated in their global survey, followed by immigration, refugees, and human rights.⁹</p> <p>The LexisNexis Legal Aid Deserts report pinpoints the locations across England & Wales with the highest need for legal aid providers and the least access to them.¹⁰</p>
<p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>	<p>The main providers of pro bono legal services in England and Wales are NGOs, legal advice centres, private law firms and Chambers and law clinics.</p>
<p>13. Are there any noteworthy examples of how innovative technology or artificial intelligence is being used to enable access to pro bono or otherwise as part of pro bono cases or matters?</p>	<p>The legal industry is continuously looking to implement innovative technologies to enhance service provision. This approach is also naturally applied to pro bono cases. For example, the use of case management systems to streamline the management of client files and onboard processes; document collaboration tools; research tools; video conferencing technology which expands access to legal advice; and leveraging artificial intelligence (“AI”) to assist in the production of documents and advice.¹¹</p> <p>LexisNexis found that AI is significantly enhancing pro bono work by streamlining legal research and drafting, allowing lawyers to save time and</p>

⁹ See <https://www.trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-TrustLaw-Index-of-Pro-Bono.pdf> (last visited on 24 October 2025).

¹⁰ See <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/insights/the-lexisnexis-legal-aid-deserts-report/index.html> (last visited on 24 October 2025).

¹¹ See <https://www.citystgeorges.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2024/november/leveraging-technology-pro-bono-clinics-step-forward-access-justice/> (last visited on October 27, 2025).

dedicate more hours to pro bono activities, with 56% of lawyers using AI having engaged in pro bono work compared to the 44% industry average.¹²

Law firms and pro bono clearinghouses are also increasingly using online platforms or secure portals to match lawyers with pro bono opportunities, manage matters, and track impact through analytics dashboards, significantly reducing administrative time.¹³

Some specific examples of AI use in pro bono matters include:

- Norton Rose Fulbright used AI to assist with their pro bono work for the charity Save the Children, as part of a review of documents from the UK government's Covid-19 inquiry in 2023. The inquiry was examining decision making in government during the pandemic and the charity wanted to look at how children's rights had been considered in policy decisions. With permission from the inquiry, AI was used to find and prioritise the most relevant documents from thousands from the inquiry for review. The documents were put through an AI assisted e-discovery platform, which analysed and sorted them according to recurring text patterns to find where children were mentioned.¹⁴
- Linklaters utilised its in-house generative AI chatbot, Laila, to accelerate the drafting of case summaries for a pro bono project in collaboration with the Tanzanian government and Lawyers Without Borders. The project aimed to address human trafficking by supporting the judiciary with insights from international cases.¹⁵

¹² See <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/insights/lawyers-using-ai-are-more-likely-to-do-pro-bono-work/index.html>? (last visited on October 27, 2025).

¹³ See <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/about-us/news/pro-bono-portal-uk>? (last visited on October 27, 2025).

¹⁴ See <https://www.ft.com/content/6d9a68a9-94db-44b8-9906-b08a461a7c12> (last visited on October 27, 2025).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hogan Lovells is collaborating with legal tech company LawFairy to develop an AI-powered tool that assists immigration caseworkers from charitable organisations in determining a child's eligibility for UK nationality by simplifying complex criteria into digestible questions, while still requiring legal support for verification.¹⁶ • Farrer & Co provided pro bono support to JUSTICE in submitting a report to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, focusing on AI's role in judicial systems. The report proposes the first rights-based framework to guide AI use across the UK justice system, to help harness AI's power while guarding against its risks.¹⁷ • Fieldfisher, in collaboration with The Open University, developed training resources to help the legal sector responsibly implement AI, as part of LawtechUK's Access to Legal initiative, aiming to improve access to justice and address the AI knowledge gap.¹⁸
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Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts

<p>14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.</p>	<p>Law Centres are a network of over forty not-for-profit legal practices. Each Law Centre is an independent charity with a defined service area. Law Centres help people living in poverty or those who have other disadvantages and cannot afford to pay for legal services.¹⁹</p> <p>LawWorks is a charity that works to connect people in need of legal advice with the skills and expertise of lawyers willing to meet those needs for free, by supporting a network of local independent pro bono clinics. LawWorks also supports charities and not-for-profit</p>
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¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See: <https://justice.org.uk/reports/ai-in-our-justice-system> (last visited on 27 October 2025).

¹⁸ See: <https://www.fieldfisher.com/en/insights/fieldfisher-collaborates-on-responsible-ai-training-for-the-legal-sector?> (last visited on October 27, 2025).

¹⁹ See <https://www.lawcentres.org.uk> (last visited on February 14, 2025).

organisations by facilitating free legal advice and providing online information.²⁰

Citizens Advice provides free independent advice on a range of areas including (but not limited to) family law, consumer rights, housing and immigration. Citizens Advice provides face to face advice from over 1,600 local Citizens Advice locations across England and Wales, as well as by phone, web chat, and its self-help website.²¹

Advocate is a charity that matches members of the public (who cannot afford legal representation and are ineligible for legal aid) with volunteer barristers who can provide advice, drafting, representation or advocacy.²²

The National Pro Bono Centre is a hub for pro bono charities across the legal sector. It supports a wide range of pro bono projects, helping individuals and community groups across England and Wales.²³

As described above, the UK Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono (the “Plan”) is a profession-led initiative for law firms. Pursuant to the Plan, a ‘trusted referral network’ has been established to facilitate the referring of pro bono matters by member law firms to other member law firms.

Free legal support funded by the Government takes the form of Legal Aid. Legal Aid can help meet the costs of legal advice, family mediation and representation in a court or tribunal.

APPEAL²⁴ is a charity and law practice dedicated to challenging wrongful convictions and promoting a fairer justice system. They support individuals and their families who have experienced a miscarriage of justice and they bring unsafe convictions and unfair sentences to the Court of Appeal and the Criminal Cases Review Commission. Matters are referred to commercial law firms.

²⁰ See <https://www.lawworks.org.uk> (last visited on February 14, 2025).

²¹ See <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk> (last visited on February 14, 2025).

²² See <https://weareadvocate.org.uk> (last visited on February 14, 2025).

²³ See <http://www.nationalprobonocentre.org.uk> (last visited on February 14, 2025).

²⁴ See <https://appeal.org.uk/> (last visited on February 21, 2025).

	<p>There are also global pro bono clearinghouses and legal services providers such as TrustLaw, PILnet and A4ID.²⁵</p> <p>The In-House Pro Bono Group is a working group of in-house professionals that aims to foster a culture of commitment to pro bono among in-house lawyers.²⁶</p> <p>Pro Bono Connect helps barristers and solicitors collaborate on pro bono cases. It matches barristers and solicitors acting pro bono on civil matters for individuals, charities and community groups who cannot afford legal advice or representation.²⁷</p>
<p>15. Is there any public or private organisation with which a local or foreign lawyer can register to be made aware of pro bono opportunities?</p>	<p>Lawyers can register their interest in pro bono opportunities by contacting the abovementioned organisations, although note that some of the non-profit organisations have membership fees.</p>
<p>16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?</p>	<p>The Pro Bono Recognition List of England and Wales is published annually and recognises all solicitors and barristers who have given 25 or more hours of legal pro bono assistance in the previous calendar year.²⁸</p> <p>The LawWorks Pro Bono Awards celebrate the best legal pro bono activities undertaken by organisations and individuals and the positive impact they have had on those helped.²⁹</p> <p>The Bar Pro Bono Awards annually celebrates the pro bono achievements of the Bar in England and Wales.³⁰</p> <p>Law.com's Best Law Firms for Pro Bono in the UK ranking, is an annual ranking comparing law firms based on total number of pro bono hours worked</p>

²⁵ See <https://www.trust.org/trustlaw/>, <https://www.pilnet.org/> and <https://a4id.org/> (Last viewed on 14 October 2025).

²⁶ See <https://www.inhouseprobono.uk/> (Last viewed on 14 October 2025).

²⁷ See <https://probonoconnect.co.uk/> (Last viewed on 14 October 2025).

²⁸ See <https://www.probonorecognitionlist.org.uk> (last visited on February 14, 2025).

²⁹ See <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/solicitors-and-volunteers/get-involved/lawworks-pro-bono-awards-2024> (last visited on February 14, 2025).

³⁰ See <https://weareadvocate.org.uk/what-we-do/nominate.html> (last visited on February 14, 2025).

	<p>as well as their participation rates.³¹</p> <p>The legal publication, The Lawyer (UK), recognises excellence across law firms, barristers' chambers, in-house teams and individuals in the UK legal market and their annual awards includes a category for Pro Bono.³²</p> <p>The Pro Bono Connect Engagement Recognition Awards celebrate the dedication of firms and chambers to the Pro Bono Connect scheme and to access to justice.³³</p> <p>PILnet's Global Awards recognise the best pro bono legal projects undertaken in a local or global context.³⁴</p> <p>The TrustLaw Awards annually celebrate the exceptional pro bono work undertaken by legal teams on behalf of NGOs and social enterprises around the world. Only TrustLaw pro bono matters are eligible.³⁵</p>
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Name of Individual(s) at Local Counsel: Sean Wells and Caroline Taylor

Learn more

[Navigate the full Global Pro Bono Guide](#) to explore the global landscape and pro bono practices and opportunities across 100+ jurisdictions.

³¹ See <https://www.law.com/international-edition/2024/11/04/the-best-law-firms-for-pro-bono-in-the-uk-2024> (last visited on February 14, 2025).

³² See <https://www.thelawyer.com/event/the-lawyer-awards/categories/?failed-login=1> (last visited October 28, 2025).

³³ See <https://probonoconnect.co.uk/recognition-award/> (last visited October 28, 2025).

³⁴ See <https://www.pilnet.org/event/pilnet-global-forum/awards/> (last visited October 28, 2025).

³⁵ See <https://www.trust.org/trustlaw/awards/the-2024-awards> (last visited February 14, 2025).