

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Scotland

Introduction

The demand for pro bono legal advice in Scotland has risen in recent years due to an increase in the number of people that are not eligible for legal aid but who also cannot afford to pay for legal representation. The provision of pro bono legal services in Scotland is also becoming increasingly important for private law firms within Scotland as a result of corporate social responsibility commitments. Many law firms in Scotland seek to fulfil their pro bono initiatives through collaboration with law centres and interaction with local communities. The 2024 TrustLaw Index of Pro Bono also features an overview of pro bono within Scotland.¹

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	No	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 Scotland is divided into three branches: solicitors, solicitor advocates, and advocates.</p> <p>Solicitors are regulated by The Law Society of Scotland (the “Law Society”) and must observe the Law Society of Scotland Practice Rules 2011 (the “Rules”),² which govern the provision of legal services by solicitors. They must also undertake a minimum of 20 hours of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) each year.³ In-house solicitors must observe the same Rules and CPD requirements and must remain intellectually and</p>

¹ Please see <https://www.trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-TrustLaw-Index-of-Pro-Bono.pdf> at page 133 (last visited 25 February 2025).

² Please see <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/rules-and-guidance/rules-and-guidance/> (last visited 25 February 2025).

³ Please see <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/cpd-training/about-lawscot-cpd/cpd-requirements/> (last visited 25 February 2025).

	<p>technically independent from their employer.⁴</p> <p>Solicitor advocates are also regulated by the Law Society and must also observe the Rules. However, as solicitor advocates have extended rights of audience to higher courts alongside advocates, they must pay particular attention to Rule C4 which governs the conduct of solicitor advocates.⁵</p> <p>Advocates are regulated by the Faculty of Advocates (the “Faculty”) under powers delegated to it by the Court of Session. The Court of Session is responsible for regulating the professional practice, conduct, and discipline of advocates under the Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2010. The Guide to Professional Conduct (the “Guide”) sets out the principles and rules of professional conduct applicable to advocates in Scotland.⁶</p> <p>To practise as a solicitor/solicitor advocate in Scotland, a person must be admitted as a solicitor, have their name on the roll, and hold a practicing certificate. Such practicing certificates are obtained from the Council of the Law Society.</p> <p>Pursuant to the Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2010, persons are admitted to the office of Advocate by the Court of Session. The Court of Session is also responsible for prescribing the criteria and procedure for admission but delegates this to the Faculty. However, such criteria and procedure are subject to the approval of the Lord President of the Court of Session.</p>
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>The provision of pro bono legal services by solicitors and/or advocates in Scotland is not regulated by any separate rules specific to pro bono legal services. However, as noted above, all solicitors in Scotland must observe the Rules, and all advocates in Scotland must adhere to the Guide, which also applies to the provision of pro</p>

⁴ Please see the Law Society of Scotland’s guidance for in-house lawyers <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/professional-support/in-house/in-house-guide/> (last visited 25 February 2025).

⁵ Please see <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/rules-and-guidance/rules-and-guidance/section-c/rule-c4/> (last visited 25 February 2025).

⁶ Please see <https://www.advocates.org.uk/about-advocates/professional-standards/guide-to-conduct> (last visited 25 February 2025).

	<p>bono advice.</p> <p>Pursuant to Rule B2.1.2, in-house solicitors in Scotland must not act for two or more parties whose interests conflict. As it is the role of in-house solicitors to provide legal advice to the company or organisation that employs them, they should be mindful of the potential for conflicts of interest that may arise with respect to providing pro bono legal advice to third-party clients.</p>
3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?	There is no requirement in Scotland for an additional licence to be obtained by lawyers in order to provide pro bono legal services.
4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?	<p>There is no bar to lawyers qualified in another jurisdiction working in Scotland to provide pro bono legal services, provided that they do not describe themselves as “solicitors” and instead must describe themselves under their home title.</p> <p>Foreign lawyers cannot undertake certain types of work reserved by statute for Scottish-qualified solicitors. These are set out in section 32 of the Solicitors (Scotland) Act 1980⁷ and include the conveyancing of land and/or buildings, litigation (civil or criminal), and obtaining confirmation in favour of executors (the Scottish equivalent of probate).</p>
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	Lawyers in Scotland 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 lawyers in Scotland 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>There are no aspirational pro bono hours targets, but most large commercial firms encourage their lawyers to do pro bono work and may set aspirational targets as such.</p> <p>Some law firms are participating members of the UK-wide initiative “UK Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono”⁸ so their Scottish offices would contribute</p>

⁷ See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/46> (last visited 25 February 2025).

⁸ See <https://www.globalprobonohub.com/resource/gpbh/uk-collaborative-plan-for-pro-bono> (last visited 25 February 2025).

	to the initiative’s aspirational target of 25 pro bono hours on average per lawyer in each participating firm.
8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?	Pro bono work does not constitute CPD for solicitors, solicitor advocates, or advocates in Scotland.
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 organization working on the same pro bono project?	<p>Pursuant to Rule B7.1.2,⁹ the Law Society maintains the Master Policy, which is a compulsory professional indemnity insurance arrangement that covers all Scottish solicitors working in private practice (this includes cover for pro bono legal services). However, there is no requirement for professional indemnity insurance for in-house solicitors.</p> <p>Under paragraph 5.1.4 of the Guide, advocates are obliged to maintain a reasonable level of professional indemnity insurance cover having regard to the nature of that advocate’s practice.</p> <p>As well as holding professional indemnity insurance coverage in its work for their direct employer, a lawyer must have coverage if they act for a client other than their employer, including a pro bono client. An in-house lawyer should be cognisant of this if taking on any pro bono work for a third-party client.</p>
10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?	<p>Rule B3.2¹⁰ states that solicitors in Scotland must not make a direct or indirect approach, whether verbal or written, to any person whom they know or ought reasonably to know to be the client of another regulated person with the intention to solicit business from that person and, as such, solicitors must consider whether a potential third-party pro bono client is already a client of another solicitor or law firm before approaching them.</p> <p>Paragraph 10.2 of the Guide sets out several prohibitions to an advocate’s right to advertise their services in Scotland. These include that any</p>

⁹ See <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/rules-and-guidance/rules-and-guidance/section-b/rule-b7/rules/b7-1-master-policy/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

¹⁰ See <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/rules-and-guidance/rules-and-guidance/section-b/rule-b3/rules/b3-advertising-and-promotion/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

	<p>such advertising must not be inaccurate or likely to mislead, make direct comparisons in terms of quality with or criticisms of other identifiable persons, and/or include statements about the advocate's success rate.</p>
11. What are the main areas of law which require or present opportunities for pro bono? What are the major unmet legal needs?	
11. What are the main areas of law which require or present opportunities for pro bono? What are the major unmet legal needs?	<p>In Scotland, civil legal assistance is split into two distinct categories: (a) Legal Advice & Assistance (any assistance given to an individual, not including court representation); and (b) Assistance by Way of Representation, which covers court representation. The main opportunities for the provision of pro bono legal services are (i) providing advice not covered by the Scottish Legal Aid Board pertaining to personal injury, certain elements of employment law, and advice to companies/charities, or (ii) providing advice to individuals who are deemed ineligible for any form of Legal Aid.</p> <p>In addition, some smaller charities may seek to benefit from pro bono assistance on non-litigious matters, usually provided by commercial firms.</p> <p>The primary focus areas of pro bono in Scotland for firms responding to TrustLaw's survey, which provided a basis for its Index of Pro Bono 2024, were access to justice (63%), immigration, refugees and asylum (50%), and women's rights (38%).¹¹</p>
12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?	<p>The main providers of pro bono legal services in Scotland include NGOs (such as Citizens Advice Scotland through their Citizens Advice Bureaux,¹² Scottish Women's Rights Centre,¹³ the Ethnic Minorities Law Centre¹⁴ and the Scottish Child Law Centre¹⁵), charities (such as Shelter Scotland¹⁶), law school and university pro bono centres, and clinics¹⁷ and private law firms.</p>

¹¹ Please see <https://www.trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-TrustLaw-Index-of-Pro-Bono.pdf> at page 133 (last visited 25 February 2025).

¹² See <https://www.cas.org.uk/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

¹³ See <https://www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

¹⁴ See <https://emlc.org.uk/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

¹⁵ See <https://sclc.org.uk/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

¹⁶ See <https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

¹⁷ See Aberdeen Law Project (<https://abdnlawproject.com/legal-advice>), University of Dundee (<https://www.dundee.ac.uk/law/clinic>), University of Edinburgh, (<https://www.law.ed.ac.uk/community/legal-advice-clinics/free-legal-advice-centre>), Edinburgh Napier Law Clinic (<https://enlc.co.uk/>), Glasgow Caledonian University

	<p>The Faculty of Advocates also provides pro bono legal services through its Free Legal Services Unit.¹⁸</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>There is an AI tool built on ChatGPT designed to provide legal advice regarding a range of immigration queries for people settling in Scotland; however, it is unclear whether the author of this tool has a legal background and how accurate the tool is.¹⁹ Anyone looking to obtain specific legal advice should always contact a solicitor with expertise in the relevant area of law.</p> <p>In partnership with CivTech, Citizens Advice Scotland launched an innovation challenge aimed at exploring how technology could support Citizens Advice advisers in delivering the best possible outcomes for their clients by leveraging data and collective expertise. The winners of this challenge, Wyser, developed an AI tool to transcribe interviews, generate case summaries, and pre-populate Citizens Advice Scotland’s case management system, among other functions.²⁰</p> <p>Inspiring Scotland’s pro bono team and J.P. Morgan’s pro bono “Force for Good” program offered expertise in innovative technology to Scottish charitable organisations in 2018.²¹</p>
<p>14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.</p>	<p><i>Governmental</i></p> <p>The Government Legal Service for Scotland (the GLSS) is a professional community of government lawyers in Scotland. The GLSS Pro Bono Network is designed to encourage government lawyers to volunteer their legal services for the benefit of the wider community. Through the GLSS Pro Bono Network,</p>

(<https://www.gcu.ac.uk/aboutgcu/services-and-facilities/lawclinic>), Robert Gordon Grampian Community Law Centre (<https://www.rgu.ac.uk/life-at-rgu/learning-facilities/law-facilities/grampian-community-law-centre>) and University of Strathclyde (<https://www.lawclinic.org.uk>) (each last visited on 25 February 2025).

¹⁸ See <http://www.advocates.org.uk/instructing-advocates/free-legal-services-unit/free-legal-services-unit-homepage> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

¹⁹ See <https://theresanaiforthat.com/gpt/legal-help-for-new-scots/> <https://www.cas.org.uk/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

²⁰ See https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/case_studies/case-study-empowering-citizens-advice-advisers-with-ai-technology/ <https://www.cas.org.uk/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

²¹ See <https://inspiringscotland.org.uk/technology-social-good-working-jpmorgan/> <https://www.cas.org.uk/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

	<p>government lawyers can become involved in a number of pro bono activities, including providing advice at their local Citizens Advice Bureau, serving as a charity trustee, raising funds, lobbying at local and national levels, negotiating agreements, and establishing Citizens Advice Bureaux.²²</p> <p><i>Non-Governmental</i></p> <p>The main non-governmental sources of pro bono in Scotland include bodies that work to connect organisations that are able to provide pro bono legal services with individuals or bodies that require them, such as Citizens Advice Scotland,²³ Inspiring Scotland,²⁴ and the Faculty of Advocates Free Legal Services Unit.²⁵</p>
<p>15. Is there any public or private organization with which a local or foreign lawyer can register to be made aware of pro bono opportunities?</p>	<p>Thomson Reuters Foundation’s TrustLaw service provides participants with pro bono projects to give them an opportunity to offer assistance.²⁶</p>
<p>16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?</p>	<p>The Herald Law Awards of Scotland has a category for pro bono work.²⁷</p> <p>There is a national pro bono guide for Scotland (last updated in November 2024) that helps users signpost clients to pro bono services and other free advice.²⁸</p>

Acknowledgements

Name of Law Firm: Shepherd and Wedderburn LLP

Name of lawyer: Peter Alderdice

Learn more

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

²² See <https://www.gov.scot/groups/government-legal-service-for-scotland/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

²³ See <https://www.cas.org.uk/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

²⁴ See <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

²⁵ See <http://www.advocates.org.uk/instructing-advocates/free-legal-services-unit/free-legal-services-unit-homepage> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

²⁶ See <https://www.trust.org/trustlaw/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

²⁷ See <https://newsquestscotlandevents.com/events/lawawards/> (last visited on 25 February 2025).

²⁸ See <https://probonoweek.org.uk/guide> (last visited on 25 February 2025).