

Predictions for the 21st Century: The Importance of Engaging with Pro Bono Practice'

UK Context.

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act came into force from April 2013. It reverses the position where legal aid has been available for all civil cases except those specifically excluded by the Access to Justice Act 1999. The new act removes some types of case from the scope of legal aid funding, and says other cases will only qualify when they meet certain criteria. The aim is to cut the £2bn annual legal aid bill in England and Wales by £350m a year, with a further £220m cut to criminal legal aid. An estimated 600,000 people will lose access to legal advice as a result. Lord Bach estimated that the cuts will remove 86% of the funding law centres receive to provide advice and 'legal help'.

Provides access to the law for all

LawWorks role is to work within England and Wales to connect people in need of legal advice and assistance, and not for profit organisations that support them, with the skills and expertise of lawyers willing to meet those needs for free. LawWorks does not give legal advice, but provides details of lawyers and centres offering free advice. Universities are increasingly becoming involved in such initiatives, for a variety of reasons.

LawWorks is the operating name of the Solicitors Pro Bono Group.

<http://www.lawworks.org.uk/>

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UCLAN - has provided an advice only free law clinic for the last 10 years (and more in a different format). Today advice is given to UCLAN staff and students by LPC students, in pairs. Supervision is by qualified solicitors who are also employed as tutors. The students research and prepare their letters which are scrutinised by their supervisor and sent to the client, all by email.

UCLan has also started a law clinic credit-bearing module for 3rd year UGs. The module involves workshops on professional conduct, role of SRA, skills of interviewing, writing, research and professionalism, and conducting several real-client interviews. Next year this will be extended with more groups and more clients.

Client numbers have increased dramatically this year - from 21 clients over the final 3 months of the clinic 2014 to 31 in March alone 2015.

'McKenzie friends' : UCLan recently secured significant funding to expand its pro bono provisions and to open a type of 'personal support unit' in the Preston courts. This followed requests by the local judiciary who have found the numbers of un-represented client increased dramatically with the funding changes. This will cover general litigation as well as family matters. Our students will act as McKenzie friends where appropriate. This will be operational by summer 2015.

According to a 2014 Ministry of Justice Report: 'The major reason for self-representation was an inability to afford a lawyer, with only around one quarter of LIPs indicating that their appearance in person was wholly or partially a matter of choice. Over half of the LIPs observed had had legal representation at some stage during the current proceeding and/or in previous family law proceedings. Only a small minority of LIPs were able to represent themselves competently in all aspects of their family law proceedings.' (Report, Litigants in person in private family law cases (Ministry of Justice, 2014)

Pro Bono Value

Private practice solicitors in 2014 provided £601m of Pro Bono advice. (2.8% of total turnover - and increase in value and proportion of total turnover from 2013.

(Law society, 'The Pro Bono Work', of Solicitors', PC Holder Survey 2014)

82 Per cent of respondents to Law Society survey in 2007 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that providing pro bono work **'enhanced the reputation of the profession.'**

64 per cent 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the provision of pro bono work **'enhanced the reputation of the firm in which they worked,'**

(Law Society 'The Pro Bono Work of Solicitors 2007')

Why Participate: Application to Learning

For students:

"Pro Bono work enriches the learning experience".

"We believe that Pro bono programmes help students develop the professionalism and an understanding of a lawyer's ethical responsibilities, both crucial attributes for a law career. Other benefits include increasing their knowledge and marketability, gaining practical experience, developing skills, and enhancing their own reputations. ' Viv Ivins (UCLan Law School Lead for Innovation and Enterprise and Administrator of the Pro Bono Law Clinic).



Students at pro bono clinic (UCLan)

Global Effect

'Pro Bono work has the potential to aid environmental, humanitarian and social issues which otherwise might suffer from a lack of sufficient legal resources.' (TrustLaw) TrustLaw Connect, for example, founded in 2010, 'Brings together legal teams to provide free legal advice for Non-Governmental Organisations, Charities, Social enterprises and social entrepreneurs, in any jurisdiction in the world.'

<http://www.trust.org/trustlaw/connect/>