

Pro Bono Week 2023: an overview of key topics that emerged

During November 2023, 62 public and internal events involving an estimated 3,000 attendees took place across the UK to encourage and discuss the role of the lawyers in volunteering to provide legal assistance to those in need. Law students from around the UK volunteered to act as rapporteurs to take notes at most of the events, from which the following points have been distilled to summarise some of the key topics and themes that emerged.

Pro Bono Week 2023 also saw various stories about pro bono on legal outlets and posts on social media and websites, a summary of which can be seen at probonoweek.org.uk/2023report

If you would like to be introduced to organisations involved in discussions set out below, e.g. to find out more about a project or to look into addressing challenges, please contact info@probonoweek.org.uk.

Types of events hosted in 2023 included:

- Key launches and publications (see box below)
- Those with a focus on recruiting more lawyers to do pro bono
- Firms highlighting the pro bono organisations they work closely with
- Those with a specific regional or area of law focus
- University-hosted events to encourage more involvement from students and highlight the benefits of pro bono.

Notable launches, announcements and publications in November 2023 included:

- The launch of the first guide to [Pro Bono & Other Free Advice in Scotland](#), published jointly by the Faculty of Advocates, the Law Society of Scotland and JustRight Scotland.
- The publication by the Law Society of England & Wales of case studies showing the [impact of pro bono by solicitors](#) whose firms have signed up to the [Pro Bono Charter](#).
- The announcement by the Bar Council of England & Wales that the [Working Lives Survey](#) showed 49% of 3,237 barristers undertook pro bono in the past year.
- The announcement of the shortlist for the [LawWorks Pro Bono Awards 2023](#).
- The launch by Advocate of a new [South West Chancery Litigant In Person Support Scheme](#) & South West County Court Appeals Scheme.
- The launch at the Supreme Court of [Pro Bono Expert Support](#), the UK's first pro bono litigation support service, delivered jointly by Pro Bono Connect and the National Pro Bono Centre.
- The first meeting of the new Yorkshire Pro Bono Committee.
- The launch at Parliament of an updated [Guide to Pro Bono & Other Free Advice in England & Wales](#), including a chapter produced by the [Pro Bono Committee for Wales](#) containing the first guide about free legal advice in Wales.
- The launch of [guidance for retiring solicitors](#) and [barristers](#) on how they can undertake pro bono in retirement, published by Advocate, LawWorks and the National Pro Bono Centre.
- The launch by Advocate of the new [Court of Protection Scheme](#).
- A roundtable in Southampton which decided to establish a [Hampshire & Isle of Wight Pro Bono Committee](#).
- The launch by Support Through Court of the new flagship [Support Through Court National Online Service](#).

1. The use of technology

Many events explored the use of technology within pro bono. This included a wide variety of tasks and technology. Key examples include:

- *Lawyers using technology to complete more administrative tasks, like taking meeting notes, preparing action lists, collating documents, and assisting with document review, allowing lawyers to focus on the substantive legal issues.*
- *A note that junior lawyers need to be up to speed with the different types of technology available, as they may be the ones asked to assist others with using the technology where there is a knowledge gap.*
- *A pro bono scheme reported successfully using a password protected website to share useful content with pro bono lawyers; guidance, references to previous resolutions, court cases, overview of issues likely to arise and how to tackle them.*
- *Some events mentioned AI; one focused on giving legal guidance for not-for-profits around AI, and another shared examples of technology which could help improve access to justice but which often include paid-for add-ons.*
- *More than one event reflected on the fact that now many people can volunteer from any location, especially since Covid.*

2. The importance of clinics

The importance of clinic work was highlighted by lawyers who prioritise this type of pro bono work. The particular benefits mentioned throughout the week include:

- *Clinic work is highly impactful because you get to work with real life clients, on real assignments, understanding their needs.*
- *Feedback from clients in clinics is received in real time; you hear the impact of your advice on the client instantly.*

3. Sharing practical tips that support the growth of pro bono

At many events lawyers currently doing pro bono shared tips with other lawyers, with a particular focus on how to grow the pro bono ethos, and to share pro bono stories more widely to help raise awareness. Quotes from across events include:

- *Post about your experience volunteering on LinkedIn, to reach a wider audience and highlight the work you're doing.*
- *We can be driving change within our own law firms, encouraging more pro bono work.*
- *To advocate change in a firm - look at what other firms are doing that we can aspire to do, what are hurdles internally, what do we need to satisfy to get it signed off, what are the proposals which will allow endorsement.*
- *There's a necessity to spread awareness within chambers by talking about pro bono with colleagues and advocates to increase the engagement in such initiatives.*

The power of **junior lawyers** was mentioned in this space, alongside the importance of involving lawyers at all stages of their careers:

- *Young solicitors are heavily influenced by the culture of firms and what they are doing in terms of pro bono.*

- *Young lawyers are holding their leaders to account for pro bono.*
- *It is important to have a senior manager who champions for pro bono in order to institutionalise it within an organisation.*

There were many examples of firms supporting pro bono in structural processes:

- *In my firm pro bono work is billable, therefore actively encouraged and benefits you internally.*
- *The firm recognises a certain percentage of volunteering hours towards your chargeable hours as a way of showing support.*
- *The firm has already implemented a pro bono billing code which is extremely beneficial to encouraging lawyers to take on pro bono cases and is a great resource for accurately recording pro bono efforts.*
- *The need for firms to recognise the value of pro bono and via innovative approaches like time codes and mapping to enhance pro bono engagement.*
- *Where firms have adopted a Pro Bono policy, there has been double the work done.*

4. In 2023 many events had a notable focus on the impact of pro bono

Some of the themes in 2023 focused on those affected by receiving pro bono help as well as maximising the impact of pro bono. This meant that many events included reflections on how pro bono really can change lives – those of the clients as well as the volunteers. Key quotes include:

- *Work as a pro bono lawyer is really valuable, even if you cannot achieve client satisfaction at all times. It is not only in the success cases, but unsuccessful cases, where ultimately listening to clients and explaining their case through pro bono demonstrates the importance for each individual's voice being heard as a client.*
- *Changing one person's life is enough.*
- *Pro bono changed the way she sees she can use her legal skills (being able to help 20 clients in just a tiny part of her working week).*
- *I just remember coming out of the court and seeing how relieved and happy she was and how free she felt because of the help we were able to provide her.*

5. Secondary specialism

As in previous Pro Bono Weeks, we continued to hear about examples of lawyers undertaking pro bono outside their normal area of practice. Lawyers had spotted that this was a great way to “step into areas of law [they] would otherwise have limited access to”.

6. The growth of student pro bono

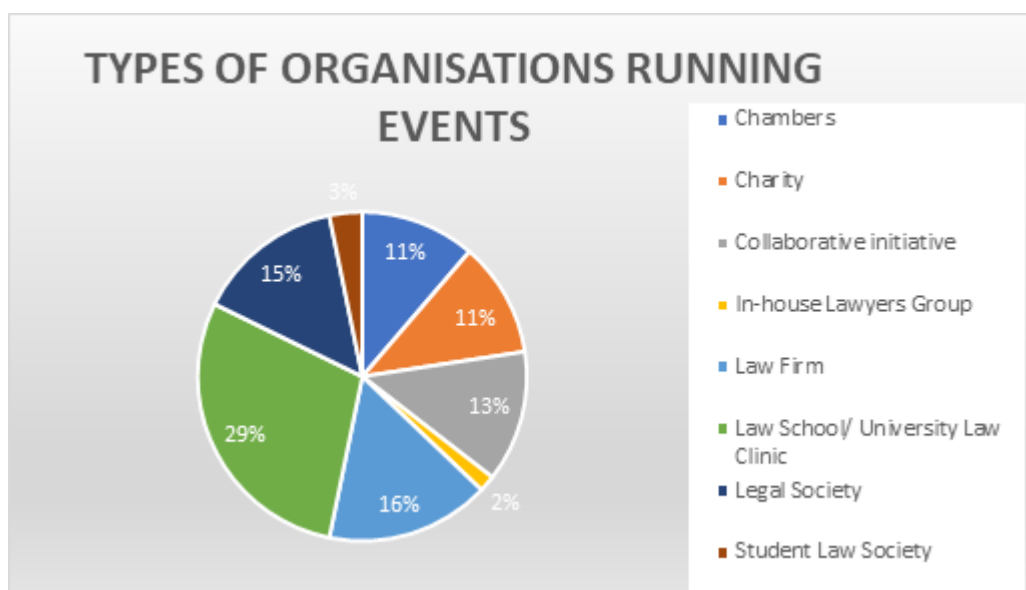
Many law schools hosted their own events, and lots of events hosted by other organisations involved and features law students. It was clear that student pro bono is on the rise nationwide, and is really valued by the benefitting organisation as well as the students themselves. There were also examples of members of the judiciary celebrating the involvement of students.

- *The tribunal was pleased to see that students are engaged and enthusiastic in such voluntary work.*
- *The student initially saw the placement as a tick box exercise. [However] she continued to*

volunteer after her module had finished and explained that she learnt many skills from supporting clients and found the experience enriching and fulfilling.

- *Students report that their confidence had skyrocketed since becoming involved with the pro bono work.*
- *79% of law schools do pro bono.*
- *Students who do pro bono work at university then go on to join practices that have pro bono as part of their work.*
- *Pro bono helped me to understand the law in practice and the skills needed to be a good lawyer.*

Pro Bono Week 2023: key statistics



Event locations:

Location	Count
Belfast	1
Birmingham	2
Bristol	3
Chester	2
Derry	1
Dundee	1
Edinburgh	4
Glasgow	2
Leeds	1
Liverpool	1
London	18
London/ Nationwide	6
Nationwide / global	7
Manchester	6
Newcastle	1
Norfolk	1
Norwich	1
Nottingham	1
Reading	1
Southampton	1
St. Albans	1
Grand Total	62

Target audience:

Who was the main target audience(s)?	Number of events
a. Lawyers already doing pro bono	23
b. Lawyers interested in pro bono	22
c. Students already doing pro bono	15
d. Students interested in doing pro bono	17
e. <u>Non-lawyer</u> volunteers	6
f. Pro bono coordinators	7
g. Voluntary sector organisations	10
i. MPs	1
Grand Total	101

Event theme:

Theme	Number of events
Official PBW theme - 1. Changing lives through pro bono	14
Official PBW theme - 2. Maximising the impact of pro bono	4
Official PBW theme - 3. Pro bono within ESG: from climate to sustainable development	1
a. Celebratory/ networking	10
b. Launch	5
c. Fundraising	1
d. Training	5
f. General pro bono discussion	12
e. Pro Bono Fair/ drop in	7
g. other	3