PRESS RELEASE – 2 NOVEMBER 2026

World's oldest Pro Bono Week gets under way in UK after 25 years

As the silver anniversary Pro Bono Week begins today until 6 November, with events hosted by law firms, chambers, law schools and charities in all four corners of the UK, new figures show law firms carried out a record-breaking 645,000 hours of pro bono work last year.

When Pro Bono Week was established in 2002 as a global first, it sought to celebrate and encourage the legal profession's commitment to volunteering to provide free legal help. In the decades since, pro bono has significantly developed in the UK, as seen for example by the number of pro bono schemes since established, by the fact of having over 100 pro bono professionals at UK law firms, and by the 5,000+ lawyers on this year's Pro Bono Recognition List.

The Pro Bono Weeks over a quarter of a century in the UK have seen as many as 200 pro bono initiatives and publications unveiled. Suitably, tonight's official launch of Pro Bono Week 2026 will reflect on that legacy, whilst looking to the future under the theme: "*Celebrate a tradition. Inspire action. Shape the future*." The Attorney General for England and Wales, the Rt Hon Ellie Reeves KC MP, will provide the keynote.

Hosted by TrustLaw, the pro bono legal network of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the launch will also hear from Pro Bono Week's chair Toby Brown, Justice 4 Windrush lawyer Pauline Campbell, the Thomson Reuters Foundation's head of legal for access to law Kathryn Beck, Hogan Lovells Cadwalader's international pro bono partner Yasmin Waljee OBE, and Northern Ireland barrister Wesley McGrady BL.

On Tuesday, the Solicitor General for England and Wales, Andy Slaughter KC MP, will join others in addressing young barristers and solicitors at one of the three Young Lawyers events forming part of this year's programme, which invite early-career lawyers to consider their role in advancing access to justice through pro bono work.

The full list of events, which are taking place online and in Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow London, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and York, can be found at: probonoweek.org.uk/events

Many organisations and initiatives across the pro bono sector are celebrating landmark years, with a range of anniversaries and record-breaking figures including:

- The **UK Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono** today launches its 2025 statistics, revealing that 645,453 hours of pro bono work were carried out by 88 member law firms in 2025 – an increase of 1.29% on the previous year.
- The **History of Pro Bono** exhibition, launched in Parliament last week and now available at historyofprobono.uk, for the first time traces the legal profession's pro bono tradition from mediaeval times to the modern day.
- **Advocate**, the English and Welsh Bar's national pro bono charity, which this year celebrates its 30th anniversary, recorded 5,634 requests for help in its 2025/26 financial year – a significant 35% increase from the year before.
- The **Law Society of England and Wales** celebrates the 10th anniversary of its Pro Bono Charter, which invites firms, in-house teams and alternative business structures to show their commitment to improving access to justice.
- The **Pro Bono Recognition List of England & Wales** for 2026 has grown by 16% on the previous year, recognising 4,630 solicitors, 700 barristers, 136 legal executives, 47 registered foreign/European lawyers, and 37 trademark and patent attorneys (who are included this year for the first time).
- The world-first **Student Clinical Legal Education Recognition List** has recognised 1,881 law students from universities across England and Wales who have volunteered 25 hours of more through law school clinics or programmes.
- The **Faculty of Advocates** in Scotland is launching a new exhibition on the history of Scottish pro bono in Parliament Hall today and will host the next meeting of the new **Scottish Pro Bono Roundtable** on Wednesday.
- **Public Interest Litigation Support Northern Ireland** is celebrating the 15th anniversary of its Pro Bono Register, now comprised of more than 120 lawyers, including 87 barristers (20% of whom have taken silk) and 30 solicitors.
- **The Pro Bono Committee for Wales'** event on the history pro bono in Cardiff on 4 November will include a copy of 14th century Laws of Hywel which may have contained the UK's first law for the provision of free advocates for litigants.

The Attorney General, Ellie Reeves KC MP, *said:*

"For 25 years, Pro Bono Week has shown the legal profession at its very best. Pro bono can be a lifeline when an everyday problem turns into a legal crisis, and the lawyers who volunteer should be applauded for their participation. As we celebrate everything that has been achieved over the last 25 years, I hope we also look ahead and make sure this tradition of legal volunteering continues to grow and change lives."

Law Society of England and Wales president Brett Dixon commented: *"As Pro Bono Week marks its 25th anniversary, the Law Society is proud to celebrate the dedication and expertise of solicitors who give their time to ensure access to justice. This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the Law Society's Pro Bono Charter, which reflects the profession's longstanding commitment to supporting pro bono work and helping those who might otherwise struggle to access legal support."*

"While these contributions should be recognised and celebrated, pro bono support cannot and should not be expected to replace a properly funded legal aid system."

Bar Council of England and Wales chair Kirsty Brimelow KC said: *"The Bar Council is thrilled to mark the 25th annual Pro Bono Week, celebrating the dedication of barristers who volunteer their time and expertise to help people access justice.*

"Later this month we also present the annual presentation of the Lifetime Achievement in Pro Bono: the Sydney Elland Goldsmith Award at Bar Conference. This year Rob Rinder MBE will present the award.

"The Bar has a long and proud tradition of supporting pro bono work. In collaboration with organisations such as Advocate and the Free Representation Unit (FRU), barristers represent for free some of the most vulnerable people, often at the lowest point in their lives.

"Pro bono work can be beneficial for barristers by enabling them to develop experience in diverse and new practice areas. Also, the work can be hugely rewarding.

"Pro bono work is not a substitute for legal aid and should not act as a substitute for a properly funded justice system. However, there always will be a place for it in society and we celebrate Pro Bono Week."

Neil Mackenzie KC, Convenor of the Faculty of Advocates' Free Legal Services Unit in Scotland, said:

"The visitor to Faculty's Pro Bono Week exhibition will first pass Sir Walter Scott's sandstone gaze, which sees nobody.

"Carlyle said it was Scott who first taught us that the past was filled with living people, not with 'protocols, state-papers, controversies, and abstractions of men'.

"The history of pro bono is filled with them: some generous, some compelled, some in it for the credit. They are worth listening to now, with public money short and ever-cleverer machines."

Kate Barry, Director and Solicitor at Public Interest Litigation Support (PILS) in Northern Ireland, said:

"Every pro bono matter is a collaboration, where access to justice becomes a reality, not an aspiration.

"For 15 years, PILS' Pro Bono Register has connected human rights activists across the north of Ireland with dedicated lawyers willing to act for free.

"We have no doubt that Northern Ireland's community of pro bono practitioners will be vital in defending our human rights in the years ahead."

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Editor's notes

Now in its 25th anniversary year, UK Pro Bono Week takes place from 2-6 November 2026. This year's theme is: "Celebrate a tradition. Inspire action. Shape the future."

To view the full calendar of events, visit: probonoweek.org.uk/events

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