

Delivering practical legal advice in an online legal environment

Pro bono is derived from the Latin term *pro bono publico* which can be translated as 'for the public good'. In a professional and legal capacity, lawyers provide free legal services to members of the public who are unable to pay. A commitment to pro bono work is seen by many as part of their ethical duty and should be a key requirement of professional practice. The regulatory bodies of the legal profession actively encourage the voluntary participation in pro bono.

Engaging in pro bono work provides students with practical experience and an opportunity to see how lawyers work in the real world. It offers the opportunity to work with individuals and organisations who are facing real legal problems and challenges. Pro bono work is a fantastic opportunity for students' to develop their legal skills such as client interviewing, drafting letters of advice and practical legal research. But it is not just about legal skills it also supports the development of organisational, interpersonal and leadership skills.

The Open University Law School launched a virtual law clinic in October 2017, recognising the impact technology is having on the provision of legal services. Students provide free legal advice to members of the public under the supervision of qualified solicitors. Students are allocated to a firm of students and work on cases in teams, building and maintaining valuable working relationships with their colleagues.

Working in the Open Justice Law Clinic is demanding, students are subject to the same standards and professional obligations required of all solicitors, it takes hard work and effort to succeed. Our students have taken on a variety of complex cases that have tested them but they have risen to the challenge and made an impact. Hopefully their time in the clinic has given them an insight into what working in the law is really like and demonstrated how the legal community can make a difference by engaging in pro bono work.

We are all incredibly proud of the commitment our students have made to the service of others.

Francine Ryan

Open Justice team member