

Building your Pro Bono Program in the UK: A discussion with in-house legal teams
Summary of the day's discussions
21 March 2018

1. Introductions (Brenna DeVaney & Rebecca Greenhalgh)

The discussion event was organised by the UK Committee of the Association of Pro Bono Counsel, in collaboration with the UK Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono.

- The Association of Pro Bono Counsel is a mission-driven membership organisation for pro bono professionals, with over 230 members from over 100 of the world's largest law firms. APBCO aims to maximise access to justice through the delivery of pro bono legal services with much of its work carried out through member-led committees and working groups. The UK Committee of APBCO formed in 2017 and supports the efforts of law firm pro bono professionals based in the UK.
- The UK Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono has seen 40+ firms join together in an informal group, hoping to support each other in efforts to do more access to justice pro bono work, particularly with individuals. Plan firms run over 50 clinics and have successfully created 3 access to justice projects already with another one on the way.

2. What is the current status of in-house pro bono work? (Helen Rogers & Paul Yates)

Some of the issues in-house teams are grappling with include:

- Starting from scratch in the UK; how to get off the ground with limited resources; addressing practical issues (e.g. insurance).
- Considering different approaches and which to adopt: grassroots level (looking at what local needs are on the ground) versus a wider focus that may fit with a global business and sustainable development focus, for example.
- Building internal support: getting other departments to see the value from lawyers doing pro bono work; addressing concerns related to risk of overstretching the team; factoring pro bono into internal recognition processes.
- Developing the actual work – there are lots of opportunities out there, it just takes some time to develop them.

There was widespread recognition of the many benefits that pro bono can provide to in-house teams:

- Integrating pro bono and CR into performance reviews helps reinforce the employer's own community focus and culture.
- It provides a way to give the legal team (particularly junior members) new opportunities to develop themselves and feel valued in a different way to other work, leading to lawyer retention.
- Lateral hires joining from law firms are increasingly asking about pro bono and CR – the law firm lawyer is able to join the in-house team and add value by helping to build pro bono through their prior exposure and knowledge.
- In-house teams enjoy working with their panel law firms and other outside counsel on pro bono as it provides them with the opportunity to get to know individual lawyers better within firms. Law firms have a range of activities which makes it easier for teams to find a project that fits with their own business / team interests or expertise.

3. How are firms working with in-house teams on pro bono matters? (Marion Edge & Nina Garnham)

Several examples were outlined:

- Collaborative transactional projects facilitated via pro bono brokerages such as Trustlaw which count in-house and law firm teams within its membership (*Nina Garnham*).
- Combining forces with an in-house legal team with offices on the ground in countries where the firm has no presence, strengthening the overall legal research project being undertaken by the firm (*UK APBCo Committee*).
- A letter-writing clinic run with a human rights charity allows in-house teams to partner with law firm volunteers – all work is covered by the charity's own insurance (*Becca Naylor*).
- A law firm has employed a welfare benefits specialist to build a strong specialist pro bono practice in this area; in addition to supervising the firm's own lawyers on cases the specialist is able to supervise in-house lawyers who wish to assist on these cases (*Diane Sechi*).
- In-house lawyers are able to partner with a law firm to assist at a court-based helpdesk, offering information to anyone who requires assistance (*Marika Somero*).
- Remote clinics provide another opportunity for collaboration – one firm's videolink clinic with a homeless charity has been a successful way to bring in-house lawyers on board (*Marion Edge*).
- Rapid Response: where urgent legal needs arise following a crisis, Collaborative Plan firms are already set up to coordinate jointly making it easier for us to respond as a group. The more that we can build links between the law firm pro bono community and in-house teams now, the easier it is to call on each other's skills and resources in urgent situations (*Rebecca Greenhalgh*).
- An in-house team used its expertise to identify how to assist unaccompanied children in the US and partnered with law firms to achieve this; the initiative is now able to be replicated with other law firm and non-profit partners in the UK (*Felicity Kirk & Helen Rogers*).
- One firm partnered with in house legal teams to write a guide to investment in Sierra Leone to attract inward investment post Ebola. (*Rebecca Perlman via Marion Edge*).

In outlining these collaborations, a few key points were made by those presenting:

- Partnering law firm volunteers and in-house volunteers on the work increases the chance of a collaboration working successfully.
- Successful collaborations tend to occur in areas where training is easy to access and where on-going support is available to provide answers as legal queries emerge.
- Insurance can be provided through law firm sign off or a separate insurance policy.

4. Where could we be: collaborating for greater impact (Felicity Kirk & Becca Naylor)

Law firms are successfully partnering on joint law firm <> law firm pro bono projects including the examples below. Collaborative Plan firms run over 50 pro bono clinic projects between them, many of which comprise more than one firm.

- The domestic violence clinic at University House is a collaboration between several firms. Lawyers are trained by specialists and then provide advice at a drop-in clinic (*Becca Naylor & Marika Somero*)
- AIRE Centre scheme (*Marion Edge & Becca Naylor*)
- Asylum Aid Statelessness clinic (*Nina Garnham & Steve Schulman*)
- Coram Children's Legal Services (*Stas Kuzmierkiewicz & Helen Rogers*)
- Working Families answer questions about employment law rights for those with family responsibilities. Their pro bono project enables any UK qualified employment lawyer to answer anonymised legal questions using a remote platform (*Marion Edge*)

In looking at potential areas for law firm <> in-house legal team collaborations, a couple of initial thoughts were shared with the group:

- SRA discussions: the UK Committee of APBCO has engaged with the SRA's General Counsel to try and address regulatory issues which may operate to limit in-house participation in pro bono. If in-house teams are facing regulatory hurdles when trying to scope pro bono work, the UK Committee could help them engage with the GC to better understand and address the hurdles (*Paul Yates*).
- Welfare benefits: this is an area that is now completely out of scope for legal aid, with hundreds of thousands of people no longer eligible for advice when applying for, or appealing decisions relating to, social welfare benefits. Over 60% of appeals are successful at the social security tribunal, increasing to an 80-100% success rate when assisted via pro bono schemes. Pro bono projects in this area would provide positive outcomes for all participants: clients have few other places to turn and pro bono help can have an immediate impact on their lives; non-profit partner organisations can leverage their own impact through the work; with over 25% of Plan firms already running WB schemes there is a greater prospect of finding a way to partner in this area and access existing projects (*Rebecca Greenhalgh*).

The discussion finished with a few thoughts on ways to consider increasing in-house <> in-house collaboration:

- The UK Collaborative Plan has made it easier for member firms to work together and learn together. We run free professional development discussions to share knowledge and allow those new to pro bono to learn from those with more experience. We can learn about, discuss and scope new joint projects, sharing the development time and resources costs involved. We can discuss and share common challenges on behalf of all firms. This is all done at no cost with firms sharing tasks and responsibilities so that no one firm is burdened with all the work. The collaboration has further increased trust and cooperation between firms, which makes it ever easier to scope and address emerging issues together.
- Is this a good moment for in-house teams to begin a similar collaborative for in-house teams? Plan firms pro bono participation ranges from 3-109 hours per lawyer; and member firms are at varying stages of their pro bono journey (from just getting started with a formal pro bono practice to having a fully fleshed out pro bono practice and team).
- The current Plan secretariat trio (*Rebecca Greenhalgh, Stas Kuzmierkiewicz, Paul Yates*) would be happy to sit down and discuss the logistics of the plan with any in-house contacts who might be interested in creating something similar. This could allow for even more collaboration between firms and in-house teams, with the two groups sharing and coordinating in ways that address hurdles to pro bono work and increase overall pro bono participation.

Next steps

1. The attendee list for the discussion is overleaf, along with those who sent apologies.
2. Many of you will have heard about the discussion event at the Law Society on 18 April (8-10.30am) for in-house teams who wish to develop their pro bono work. If you are not aware of the event, please contact Stephen Denyer (Stephen.Denyer@lawsociety.org.uk) at the Law Society for more information or to sign up.
3. Would you be interested in discussing the logistics behind a collaborative group / roundtable / similar for in-house representatives? This group would be run by yourselves, for yourselves, with the ability to connect into the law firm Plan (and for the Plan to share information via your group). Time demands can be minimal. Let us know by adding your information at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/inhouseprobono> .

4. Plan firms arrange an annual professional development conference for law firm pro bono managers focused on law firm pro bono (UKademy) and are now arranging one-off sessions throughout the year to complement this (UKademy+) which any pro bono person in a Plan firm is able to attend. If any of the topics below are of interest, we could arrange 'expansion' UKademy+ sessions and extend invitations to your in-house team pro bono representative also, to allow for joint learning and sharing. Please click the [same Surveymonkey link as above](#) to flag your interest.
 - *Trying to get internal support / buy-in to carry out pro bono work*
 - *Insurance for pro bono work*
 - *Paperwork and procedures for partnering: the bureaucratic joys of pro bono collaboration*
 - *Know your network: understanding the non-profit advice and pro bono sectors*
5. The APBCO UK Committee hopes to arrange a further discussion with in-house teams in the summer focused on the fundamentals of beginning and growing an in-house pro bono program and will be in touch with more information when this is finalised.
6. If Plan firm pro bono teams arrange other pro bono discussions or events that they think would be of interest to in-house teams, the Committee would like to share this with in-house contacts using the email list we gathered from the March discussion. We don't anticipate this will generate a significant amount of email traffic for you – but as law firms already invite each other to pro bono events and discussions, we would like to extend the same courtesy to in-house teams with mutual interests. The [same Surveymonkey link as above](#) will again let you indicate if you wish to receive these emails (or be added to the list if you could not attend the March discussion in person).

Thank you for attending,

The UK APBCO Committee

Marion Edge

Nina Garnham

Felicity Kirk

Becca Naylor

Helen Rogers

Paul Yates

Nic Patrick

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