



A guide to
Social Welfare
Housing
Education
Employment
Community Care
Court of Protection
Immigration & Asylum
Criminal
Family
Human Rights & Civil Liberties
Public Interest Law

Foreword

The context of public interest lawyering in the UK has changed considerably over time yet has a deeply embedded history. Across the country there has long been a tradition of lawyers acting for those who cannot otherwise achieve access to justice. This might be due to lack of funds, lack of legal knowledge or a simple lack of faith in the justice system. For hundreds of years lawyers have also carried their causes through the courts and demonstrated the capacity to mobilise social movements for change. We know from the successful abolition of slavery in the 1800s to the miscarriages of justice cases in the 1970s and the many successful austerity challenges in recent years that there will always be work to be done.

The public interest lawyering path is therefore well trodden and many radical and committed lawyers have paved the way for you. Despite challenging times it remains possible to pursue legal practice that advances social justice and adherence to the rule of law. The subject areas described in this booklet we hope will help guide you in your decision-making, and I am grateful to Adam Riley, Projects Coordinator at the CAJ for compiling these resources. The options open to you are diverse: you might choose to pursue work in a local or national charity; a national or international NGO; a local law centre linked to our formidable network of law centres across the UK; a legal aid law firm; or a set of chambers specialising in civil liberties.

I have had the privilege to see many students go on to pursue engaging and fulfilling careers in the public interest during my time at UCL. I have also been fortunate through our networks in CAJ to teach and research alongside lawyers I consider to be the most tenacious and inspiring of our times. I encourage those of you interested in public interest law and with a passion for social justice to do your homework and seek them out. You will not fail to be disappointed by the richness of the work they do.

Dr Jacqui Kinghan | Head of Teaching and Learning | UCL Centre for Access to Justice.





What is Legal Aid?

Legal aid is government-funded legal support for people who are unable to pay for legal advice or representation. It comprises criminal legal aid for criminal cases and civil legal aid for non-criminal cases.

Legal Aid was first established by the Legal Aid and Advice Act 1949 as part of the measures taken by the post-war Labour Government to extend the scope of the welfare state. The Act had cross-party support and built upon the recommendations of a committee chaired by Lord Rushcliffe, a former Conservative MP, which reported on the possibility of instituting public funding for legal advice and representation in 1945.

The current civil and criminal legal aid schemes are governed by Part 1 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, known as LASPO. Part 2 concerns litigation funding and costs; and Part 3 focusses on sentencing and punishment of the offending. The overall purpose of the legislation regarding the Legal Aid regime was to:

- Discourage unnecessary and adversarial litigation at the public expense;
- Target legal aid at those who need it most;
- Make significant savings to the cost of the scheme; and
- Deliver better overall value for money for the taxpayer

The result was that Part 1 of LASPO caused legal aid to cease to be available in a number of legal practice areas. LASPO additionally tightened the financial eligibility criteria for obtaining legal aid in cases where it remained available, which had the effect of limiting access for certain claimants when compared with the previous Legal Aid regime.

Further, LAPSO replaced the Legal Services Commission, an executive non-departmental body that had previously held operational responsibility for legal aid, with the Legal Aid Agency (LAA), an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice.

Since LASPO came into force, it has faced criticism from a variety of actors, including members of the legal profession, the judiciary and concerned voluntary sector organisations as a consequence of the cuts to legal aid. Complaints include: that LASPO has compromised access to justice for vulnerable and marginalised communities; has rendered numerous areas of practice financially unviable; has led to the creation of advice deserts in some parts of the country; and that savings made by the Ministry of Justice have shifted costs onto other Government departments, as without early legal advice problems which could have been resolved early in their gestation are left to spiral, with knock-on costs to wider society.

What do we mean by Public Interest Law?

Public interest law loosely refers to legal practices undertaken to help poor or marginalized people, or to effect change in social policies in the public interest, often on a non-profit or pro bono basis.

Public interest law cannot therefore be identified with a singular body of law or a legal field. Instead, it stands for the advocacy of otherwise under-represented or vulnerable individuals, especially those living in poverty. It has grown to encompass a broader range of activities which may run alongside public interest litigation, including lobbying by civil society for human rights, civil liberties, women's rights, consumer rights, and environmental protections.

While the term 'public interest law' is commonly used in the United States, there is no directly equivalent term in the UK. The closest analogue is found in the practice of social welfare law, defined as a broad umbrella term encompassing multiple areas of law loosely united in focusing on serving community rather than corporate needs.

"My first pupil supervisor did lots of public interest work and I remember being hooked from the start. It became clear very quickly what a difference it makes for a vulnerable person having a skilled advocate representing their interests. From my own work – mostly pro bono at that stage – I learned that the highs from winning public interest/legal aid cases are pretty unbeatable. A small victory still keeps me smiling for days!"

Katherine Barnes, Barrister, 39 Essex Chambers



Pro Bono

What is Pro Bono?

Pro bono is short for the Latin term “pro bono publico”, meaning “for the public good.” It involves lawyers and students giving up their time on a voluntary basis for people who need legal assistance, but are not in a position to get the necessary support.

While pro bono generally means the provision of free legal advice, at UCL Laws not all pro bono projects assist people by providing legal advice. For example, Grassroots is a public legal education programme, which teaches students in secondary school about the importance of human rights, thereby providing them with an insight into their rights, what studying law or other subjects is like at university, and what being a lawyer is like in reality.

Pro bono projects differ greatly in what they offer to both the volunteer and those who benefit from it. If you can choose the specific pro bono project you wish to become involved with, then you should base your decision on the area of law you are most interested in. For example, if you are interested in human rights law, you could become involved in schemes like Lawyers without Borders where you can engage in raising awareness of human rights issues at home and abroad.

There is something available for everyone wishing to get involved, and you could even set up your own pro bono group! The CAJ has all the resources and expertise to help you turn your dreams of starting your own legal projects into reality. For more information, make sure to check out the CAJ website.

“My initial interest was sparked by volunteering at my local law centre assisting fee-earners with housing and welfare benefits law. I believe this very much assisted me in securing a position as a housing paralegal at a Tier 1 firm. I did however have previous work experience which I was able to evidence at interview. As such, I would highly recommend being proactive and arranging any legal work experience you can to evidence your interest.”

Rishi Joshi, Trainee Solicitor, Hodge, Jones & Allen

Why do Pro Bono?

There are extensive and varied benefits to getting involved with pro bono work, the most important of which is the benefit it provides to society as a whole. However, pro bono also offers students at the start of their legal career a space in which to put into practice skills acquired at University in a real-world context. Working within a group can strengthen your team-working skills. Getting involved in the organisation and coordination of projects can also give you great opportunities to develop your leadership and influencing experience.

Depending on the nature of the project, you might also develop other skills. For example, working directly with clients allows you to develop your client care and management experience, which can help you develop greater confidence. When you reach an advanced stage in your volunteering you may wish to move into representing clients at Tribunals with charities such as the FRU (the Free Representation Unit), which can provide an excellent means of developing your negotiation, drafting, advocacy and public speaking skills.

Doing pro bono work is also an important means of demonstrating your commitment to social justice and public interest issues when applying for pupillage, training contracts, or other positions in the charity sector.

Fundamentally, getting involved in pro bono can offer you the opportunity to apply the skills you are acquiring through your university studies in support of individuals who can benefit from your assistance.



“Pro bono is a hugely important part of being a law student, and I knew I wanted to be involved with different projects from my first year. I have learned so much through the different kinds of pro bono work I’ve been involved in, relevant both to law and our wider society – I would definitely recommend it to anyone who is interested.”

Natalia Ventikos, UCL Laws LLB student 2016–19

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Social Welfare Law

Social welfare law refers collectively to large areas of civil (i.e. non-criminal) law in which marginalised individuals experience legal difficulties.

Most definitions encompass working in areas of law such as debt advice, discrimination, mental health, welfare benefits, employment, education, community care and housing. This section explores what working in welfare benefits involves in particular.

What does a typical day look like for a social welfare lawyer working in welfare benefits?

Most welfare benefits lawyers will find themselves helping individuals with mental and physical health conditions apply for benefits, ensuring they're getting the correct amount, and challenging negative decisions at court.

Lawyers will need to have strong interpersonal skills to work with vulnerable clients and professionals such as doctors, social workers and others who may be also involved in their client's life.

How to get started

Notwithstanding cuts to legal aid, a number of organisations continue to support individuals to access the benefits to which they are entitled, without which they would face destitution.

For opportunities to get started and acquire volunteer pro bono experience it's worth researching the following organisations in particular as a starting point:

- The Free Representation Unit (also known as the FRU);
- The Law Centres Network
- Citizens Advice Bureaux

“My advice would be to undertake as much work experience as possible so that you have a better understanding of the different roles available and so that you can get an idea of what area of specialism and what type of a firm would be the best ‘fit’ for you. Some firms will offer permanent roles to work experience staff if they do well so work experience can also open up further opportunities as well as providing experience. I would also suggest relevant volunteer work, which does not have to be directly related to law, or shadowing an advisor at a law advice centre as a way of gaining further experience. Finally, I would say that if this kind of career is something that interests you, don't give up! It's a career that is wonderfully challenging, interesting, varied and rewarding.” **Melissa Law, Assistant Solicitor, Mackintosh Law**

Housing Law

Housing law encompasses a broad range of landlord and tenant disputes, and clients can include private individuals, such as tenants or local authorities, landlords or housing associations.



What does a typical day look like for a Housing Lawyer?

Clients can be especially distressed, angry or frightened if possession proceedings are imminent (which can lead to an individual losing their house and becoming homeless). Determination, a non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills and negotiation and advocacy are crucial to success in this field – being able to negotiate on behalf of a client who is facing possession proceedings can mean the difference between their being evicted from their home and onto the streets, or being allowed to continue to reside at the property.

Lawyers often act on a range of issues including homelessness matters, property disrepair, eviction, or allegations of harassment.

Routes into the profession

Firms with a large social housing practice (primarily acting for Tenants) include:

- Anthony Gold
- Hodge, Jones & Allen
- Edwards Duthie

Chambers with expertise in social housing include:

- Cornerstone Barristers
- Doughty Street Chambers
- 4 – 5 Gray’s Inn Square
- Five Paper
- Garden Court Chambers

There are many charities that focus on housing and homelessness including:

- Shelter
- Crisis
- Housing Justice

“... you make such a tangible difference to people’s lives – there is no other area like it. There are not many jobs where you can, with the power of the law, get someone housed when they have been on the street or keep someone’s home when five minutes before they were terrified they would lose it.”

Vicky Fewkes, Solicitor, Ealing Law Centre

Education Law

The main cases which education lawyers often focus on can include acting on behalf of parents of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in negligence cases where children have not been provided with the services or education they should have received at school or elsewhere, as well as cases involving admissions and school exclusions.

Ensuring access to education and appropriate services for children, especially in SEN, can be crucial to ensure a child has the best start in life.

What does a typical day look like for an Education Lawyer?

Most cases will turn on established public law principles. A solid grasp of these is vital to ensure success. Parents can be very concerned or distressed if they find their child is being mistreated or not receiving the proper services to which they are entitled. Excellent interpersonal skills are therefore crucial to work effectively with clients and gain their trust.

Routes into the profession

Firms with practice areas including Education Law include:

- Douglas Silas Solicitors
- Simpson Millar
- John Ford Solicitors

Chambers with expertise in Education Law include:

- Matrix Chambers
- 11KBW

Charities with a focus on Education Law and Special Educational Needs in particular include:

- IPSEA (Independent Parental Special Education Advice) – representing families of Special Educational Needs children (SEN) at tribunals
- Just for Kids Law
- Child Law Advice (Operated by Coram Children's Legal Centre)



Employment Law

Employment lawyers may work with employees and employers. Few firms work exclusively for employees given legal aid is strictly limited.

Typical contentious cases (i.e. involving argument between two or more parties) can include disciplinary, grievance or cases of unfair dismissal, discrimination, or employer negligence.

Non-contentious work can include lawyers advising employers on their employment policies and contracts.

What does a typical day look like for an Employment Lawyer?

This is a dynamic field of law. An understanding of contract law is crucial. A number of employment law rights are derived from EU law, so an understanding of EU law is also helpful. A typical day will vary and can include time spent taking instructions from clients in conference, drafting advice notes for employers on new regulations, or representing employers or employees in Tribunal hearings or at Court.

Routes into the profession

Firms with practice areas in Employment Law include:

- Leigh Day
- Slater and Gordon
- Hodge, Jones & Allen

Chambers with expertise in Employment Law include:

- Littleton Chambers
- Matrix Chambers
- Cloisters

Charities and trade unions operating in employment law include:

- Unison, GMB, TUC, Unite, IWGB, LSWU.
- ELIPS (Employment Tribunal Litigant in Person Support Scheme)
- ATLEU (Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit)

“I knew when I began my law degree that I eventually wanted to work in an area of law that was person focused and where I would be able to make a real difference to people’s lives.”

Georgia Byrne, Assistant Solicitor, Mackintosh Law

Community Care

Community Care involves challenging the decisions of government authorities and social services regarding vulnerable adults and children – often individuals will seek legal services when a service has been cut, or if the level of service provided does not adequately meet an individual's needs.

What does a typical day look like for a Community Care Lawyer?

Clients with mental health or physical health disabilities not receiving the right level of support can be in a state of crisis, destitute, or even homeless. Community Care lawyers often have to act quickly to compel authorities to provide emergency assistance.

Other work may involve securing respite care for parents of children with disabilities; securing care services for children in care or leaving care; or ensuring local authorities are providing care home and nursing home assessments and placements.

Routes into the profession

Solicitors firms with a strong community care practice include:

- TV Edwards
- Simpson Millar

Chambers with expertise in community care include:

- 1 Garden Court
- 39 Essex Chambers
- Garden Court Chambers

Charities operating in community care include:

- Just for Kids Law

“Usually these clients are the most vulnerable people in society, and whatever work you do for their case can make a huge difference to them. Even if it is just speaking to them to go through funding applications, what their case means to them is always palpable.” **Shakti Bhagwansigh, Trainee Solicitor, Hodge, Jones & Allen**

Court of Protection

The Court of Protection was created under the Mental Capacity Act 2005. It has jurisdiction over the property, financial affairs and personal welfare of people who lack mental capacity to make decisions for themselves. The purpose of the court is to protect vulnerable people and ensure their affairs are properly looked after and that no one takes advantage of their situation.



What does a typical day look like for a Lawyer working in the Court of Protection?

Given the jurisdiction of this court, lawyers in this specialised area of law can find themselves working with clients who have suffered a brain injury, or individuals with Alzheimer's or dementia, or because they have a birth injury such as cerebral palsy.

Some common issues include everything from the need to make decisions about when a person can be deprived of their liberty under the Mental Capacity Act; the need to make an urgent application where a decision must be made on behalf of someone without delay (for example, surgical procedures); or appointing deputies to make ongoing decisions for those who lack mental capacity.

Routes into the profession

Firms with a Court of Protection practice include:

- Mackintosh Law
- Irwin Mitchell
- Stephenson Solicitors LLP

Chambers with leading practitioners in work involving the Court of Protection include:

- 39 Essex Chambers;
- Serjeants' Inn Chambers
- 5 Stone Buildings
- Doughty Street Chambers

Immigration & Asylum

This is a complex and ever-changing field of law. Changes in Government can often lead to dramatic changes in the legal landscape. Given the varied and international client base strong interpersonal skills and an interest in local and international politics are helpful for pursuing a career in these areas of law.

What does a typical day look like for a Lawyer working in Immigration & Asylum?

Working in this area requires a broad knowledge of human rights, social welfare and any number of issues with which vulnerable clients seeking asylum may have need. This area of law has huge responsibilities – your actions could potentially save a person fleeing persecution or worse in their home country.

Alternatively, immigration lawyers acting for companies and private individuals may find themselves focusing on assisting corporate bodies obtain appropriate immigration status for their employees, applying for residency for private individuals or appealing decisions where residence is denied.

Routes into the profession

Firms of solicitors with a strong Immigration & Asylum practice:

- Duncan Lewis Solicitors
- Wilson Solicitors LLP
- Bindmans LLP
- Gherson

Chambers with expertise in Immigration & Asylum law include:

- Garden Court Chambers
- Doughty Street Chambers
- Lamb Building
- One Pump Court

Charities and other organisations working in immigration and asylum law:

- Haringey Migrant Support Centre; Hackney Migrant Centre
- Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
- London Welcome Project; Kalayaan
- Migrants Organise



Criminal Law

The range of work undertaken varies considerably depending on the nature of the work (prosecution or defence) and the type of crimes defended or prosecuted, including anything from white-collar, serious assaults, terror offences or sexual offences to state but a few.

Changes to legal aid mean that firms and chambers which once specialised in general crime are now diversifying their criminal expertise to encompass niche areas such as regulatory work, licencing and professional discipline.

What does a typical day look like for a Lawyer working in Criminal Law?

There's no such thing as a typical day in crime. On any day you may be: meeting your client and counsel, liaising with the prosecuting authorities and the police, reviewing the evidence in a case, or even meeting your client for the first time in the cells at court.

Criminal practice can move fast – to succeed you need: a tough skin, resilience, an ability to communicate with people from different backgrounds, the ability to think on your feet, and strong advocacy and negotiating skills.

Routes into the profession

Firms with specialist practice in criminal defence include:

- Edward Fail, Bradshaw & Waterson Solicitors
- Hickman and Rose
- Kinglsey Napley
- Tuckers Solicitors

Leading sets practicing in general crime include:

- 2 Bedford Row
- 2 Hare Court
- 6KBW College Hill
- 25 Bedford Row
- QEB Hollis Whiteman

Remember that the Crown Prosecution Service, the chief prosecuting agency in England & Wales, now offers a Legal Trainee scheme, and despite cuts employs around 2000 solicitors and Crown Court Prosecutors.

“I'd recommend building your CV with different roles in the field whilst always keeping in mind your overall goal. As long as you enjoy the type of work you're currently doing you can never be too far off the right path.”

Zachary Whyte, Trainee Solicitor, Hodge, Jones & Allen

Family Law

Family lawyers are present throughout a person's life – through marriage, divorce and all matters involving children.

There is a general divide between high street firms which complete large case-loads of legal aid files, and niche firms specialising in matrimonial divorce and working with high-net worth individuals.

What does a typical day look like for a Lawyer working in Family Law?

Child law lawyers will often represent parties in care proceedings. These proceedings begin where a local authority's children services department asks a court to review a child's situation and decide whether it is necessary to put a legal order in place to keep them safe.

Lawyers working in divorce often are involved in taking instructions from clients, negotiating settlements and child contact arrangements, and in mediation outside of court, or providing advocacy on behalf of their client in court.

To succeed you need excellent communication skills – resilience to work with individuals who may be under considerable stress, angry, frightened or upset is also crucial, especially in cases involving abuse or children.

Routes into the profession

Firms with practice areas in family law include:

- Bindmans LLP
- Stephensons Solicitors
- Anthony Gold

Chambers with expertise across family law include:

- Coram Chambers
- 1 Garden Court
- New Court Chambers

“I found it extremely difficult securing my first legal job and entering the legal aid sector... I persevered, however, because of a passion for helping people who have been mistreated by the state... My advice is simply: get varied experience, seek advice from people who work in the legal aid sector, and stay committed and focused on your goal.” **Sioned Morgan, Paralegal, Hodge, Jones & Allen**

Human Rights & Civil Liberties

There is no such thing as a Human Rights lawyer per se. The rights protected in the UK by the Human Rights Act are broad and wide-ranging, meaning they can be found across numerous areas of practice. For example: disputes over whether an individual's right to life or right not to suffer inhuman or degrading treatment were interfered with may feature in inquest proceedings, immigration law or in civil actions against a variety of state bodies.

Civil liberties are basic rights and freedoms granted to citizens of a country through common or statute law. These include rights such as freedom of speech, movement, association, religious worship and freedom from arbitrary arrest. In the UK these freedoms have evolved over several centuries through the common law, legislation and via international conventions such as the European Convention on Human Rights.

What does a typical day look like for a Lawyer working in civil liberties?

Lawyers working in civil liberties are typically expert in the following areas of practice: actions against the police; police complaints; judicial review and challenges under the Human Rights Act; challenging failures of state bodies to investigate crimes; holding authorities to account following deaths or injury in detention; inquests; and claims for miscarriages of justice.

Routes into the profession

Firms noted for their practice in Civil Liberties include:

- Hodge, Jones and Allen
- Bhatt Murphy
- Deighton Pierce Glynn
- Leigh Day
- Hickman and Rose

Leading sets with expertise in civil liberties include:

- Matrix Chambers;
- Doughty Street Chambers
- Garden Court Chambers

Charities operating in civil liberties include:

- Inquest
- Liberty

“I was really inspired by American lawyers responding to the US ‘travel ban’ to protect individuals’ and families suddenly separated or stuck as a result of the ban, filing briefs and applications from the floor of the JFK airport. It reminded me that the law can be a strong, progressive force for change and how in turbulent political times the courts are a safeguard and a check against executive overreach.”

Helen Baron, Caseworker, Duncan Lewis

Application Advice

How do I find out whether an area of practice is for me?

When determining where you wish to apply it's important to let your decisions be guided by your interests and experiences. If you are completely unsure of what areas of law interest you a good starting point is to begin by reading the legal and non-legal press and making a note of the stories that interest you. Reflecting on why these issues interest you can provide a good starting point for narrowing down your search.

Online research can provide a quick means of learning more about an area of law, and numerous external resources are provided on the following page. However, there is no better way of finding out whether an area of law is for you than to acquire first-hand experience, through mini-pupillages, work placements, working or volunteering part-time during your studies. Most law firms and chambers will advertise whether they offer these sorts of placements on their websites. If they are not advertising, do not be afraid of emailing an organisation asking if they would be willing to allow you to shadow an individual working there for a few days, attaching a copy of your CV and covering letter outlining your motivation and experience.

What should I consider when choosing which sets of Chambers or Solicitors Firms to apply to?

Beyond the nature of the work conducted by the firm or set of chambers it's also important to make sure your lifestyle and personality are a good fit. A good starting point is to look at their website and social media to find out a bit more about the organisation and what other people are saying about them. As above, obtaining a work placement at the firm will also offer you some direct insight into the workplace culture.

Location is also another key consideration. While the majority of legal firms and chambers are based in London there are opportunities outside of the capital which offer opportunities in legal aid and other areas of non-commercial law.

Getting organised and preparing your applications

Once you've successfully narrowed down the areas of law that you are interested in as well as the type of workplace culture you are looking for then it's time to start preparing your applications.

When getting organised it's vital as an initial step to make a note of key deadlines for submitting your applications, as well as to plan time to focus on preparing your applications. It's important to make sure you tailor these as closely as you can to the organisation you are applying to. Always make sure to give yourself plenty of time and to plan to submit your application well before the deadline.



Helpful links

Links for researching practice areas

Chambers Student provides a comprehensive report into numerous legal practice areas, in addition to a 'True Picture' report for a number of sets of chambers and firms, detailing their application process, workplace culture and main areas of work:

www.chambersstudent.co.uk/law-firms

Chambers UK and the Legal 500 rank all the best firms and chambers across numerous areas of practice:

<https://chambers.com/> & www.legal500.com/

The Legal Press including The Law Society Gazette, Legal Week, The Lawyer, provide professional commentary on the latest legal developments.

Legal Blogs including Legal Cheek, and others such as '*The Secret Barrister*' and '*Keep Calm Talk Law*' can provide an accessible introduction to numerous current legal topics.

Links for finding work in legal aid and public interest law

Young Legal Aid Lawyers Jobs and Opps page:
A one-stop shop for legal and non-legal volunteering and employment opportunities:

www.younglegalaidlawyers.org/jobs

Justice First Fellowship: This scheme was established to support the next generation of students committed to public interest and social justice issues, providing pupillage, training contract and CILEx routes into the profession: **<https://jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org/>**

Charity Job: Website providing listings of vacancies in the charity sector: **www.charityjob.co.uk/**

UCL CAJ Public Interest Jobs and External Opportunities Page:
www.ucl.ac.uk/access-to-justice/public-interest-jobs-and-external-opportunities



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