

Advocate and the Bar:

celebrating 30 years of access to justice



advocate



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“As Advocate celebrates 30 years of service, the judiciary recognises the vital contribution that the Bar has made to access to justice through its pro bono work. It is a huge credit to practitioners that, over three decades, they have given up their time freely to support the most vulnerable members of society in need of Advocate’s services.”

The Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales, The Baroness Carr of Walton-on-the-Hill



Advocate team at the 2025 London Legal Walk

Thirty years of justice and advancing the Rule of Law

We are delighted to celebrate Advocate's 30th anniversary. Advocate is founded on a simple but powerful principle: a lack of means should never be a barrier to accessing justice. We match people in need with specialist volunteer barristers who advise and represent them without charge. We operate across every area of law and in courts and tribunals throughout the country. In both scope and function, we are truly unique. There is no other organisation in England and Wales that does what we do.

The Bar has a long and proud tradition of pro bono work, stretching back to the earliest days of our justice system. It is of great credit to the profession - to barristers, clerks and chambers staff alike - that this tradition continues to be actively supported and encouraged. Advocate exists because of that commitment, and it thrives because of it.

The support for our work has never been greater. Today, we have 5,000 volunteer barristers on our books, and more than 7,000 barristers fund our work each year. We are backed by the Bar Council, the Bar Standards Board, the Bar Mutual Indemnity Fund, the Inns of Court and the judiciary. That support is invaluable. It enables us to respond to the growing number of individuals and families who turn to Advocate each year for help at moments of real vulnerability.

The cases we see reflect the pressures and challenges of the times in which we live. Each case tells a story, not just of legal difficulty, but of the human consequences when access to justice is placed under strain.

Looking forward, our new three-year strategy is focused on ensuring that volunteer barristers are able to make the greatest possible difference through their pro bono work. We will continue to embrace technology and to complement the work of other advice and support organisations, delivering specialist input from the Bar to the cases where it is most needed.

To every barrister, clerk, colleague and friend who has given their time, expertise or financial support over the past thirty years, we are profoundly grateful. This anniversary is a celebration of your commitment - and of the enduring role of the Bar in advancing access to justice and upholding the rule of law.

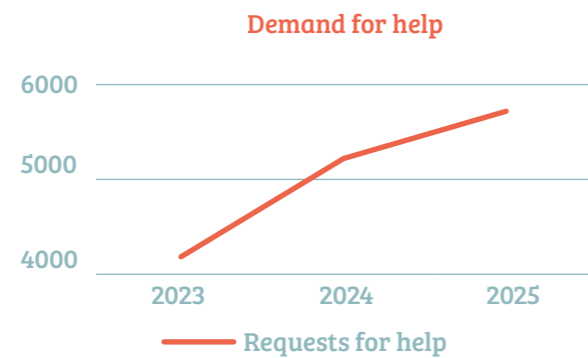
Sharif A. Shivji KC, Chairman
Rebecca Wilkie, Chief Executive



A growing need

Across the legal sector, demand for pro bono help is rising faster than the system can respond. Advocate sits at the centre of this pressure, and we see daily how the justice gap is widening for people who cannot afford to pay.

This pressure is reflected in ongoing increasing demand in Advocate’s casework data for the last five years.



Since the financial year ending 2021 to the end of 2025 there has been a:

- 21% increase in housing law applications
- 22% increase in family law applications
- 45% increase in public & administrative law applications
- 48% increase in employment law applications.

These increases are not incidental - they reflect structural pressures that continue to reshape access to justice across England and Wales:

- **The decline of legal aid** - The removal of large areas of law from eligibility from legal aid has led to unmet need on a scale the pro bono ecosystem was never designed to absorb.
- **Covid backlogs** - Delays across courts and tribunals have amplified complexity, prolonged crisis situations, and increased the need for specialist representation. Average cases now require more court time and more individuals and families face prolonged periods of uncertainty due to delays in court proceedings and wait times, leading to life altering consequences.

- **Cost of living crisis** - Financial instability is deepening family conflicts, increasing employment disputes, and driving housing insecurity. More and more households face difficulties meeting basic running costs including rent, heating and electricity, making legal fees increasingly out of reach.

These pressures are now translating directly into Advocate’s caseload.

Across core areas of law, we see a pattern of rising demand, increased case urgency, and growing complexity. Advocate’s response has been to strengthen specialist schemes, deepen collaboration, and scale our ability to mobilise barristers when people need them most.

Family snapshot

Family law is one example of a core casework area where we have seen an increase in demand for our services. Across the five-year reportable period, the breakdown of family law applications is as follows:

- 70% relate to child arrangements
- 21% relate to family property law
- 9% relate to family violence and other family law issues

For example, family violence cases, despite being a smaller proportion of our family law casework, are emerging as a growing area of need. As compared to casework data from five years ago, the demand has doubled.

Responding to the need

As demand continues to rise, Advocate plays a vital role in ensuring that barristers are only asked to volunteer in cases where no other help is available. Our thirty years of experience have shaped a robust process that ensures pro bono support reaches those with no other options and helps us identify the right person from our panel of over 5,000 volunteer barristers.

Stage 1 - triage

All cases are initially assessed by Advocate’s triage caseworker. Advocate cannot help:

1. People who can access legal aid
2. People who can afford to pay or who have legal expenses insurance
3. People with a hearing of more than three days.

Only applications that meet these criteria progress to the next stage.

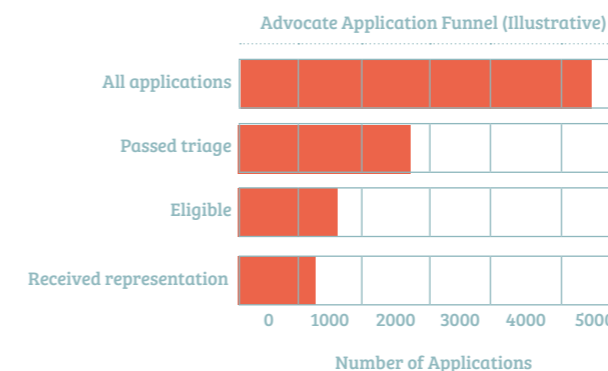
Stage 2 – specialist review

Cases are assessed by an Advocate reviewer – a senior barrister specialising in the relevant area of law. Reviewers:

1. Assess the legal merits of the case and the individual’s financial position
2. Ensure the work is appropriate for a barrister
3. Assess the suitable level of call and the time commitment
4. Break the case down into bite size pieces of work to ensure only a manageable ask is made of volunteers.

As a result of this additional scrutiny, application numbers narrow significantly at this stage, as illustrated in the graphic below.

Only applications approved by reviewers progress to the next stage.



Stage 3 – searching for a barrister to assist

Chloe Steel, Northern Circuit caseworker:

“A core part of my role is what we describe as matchmaking - finding the right barrister for the right case, at the right time. Every eligible case that comes through Advocate represents a real person in need of help, often at a moment of real difficulty.

Our first task is to present each case clearly and compellingly. We write concise case summaries and headlines, designed to capture the attention of busy barristers and explain why a case matters. Over time, we build a strong understanding of our volunteers.

Barristers often share the areas of work they are particularly interested in, which allows us to make thoughtful, targeted approaches, matching cases not just with expertise, but to interest and availability. Regional caseworkers also draw on local connections within their circuits, helping us circulate cases through nearby chambers and respond to local need.

Once a volunteer is found, we remain a point of contact throughout the case, offering practical support, and where helpful, linking volunteers with mentors. Seeing a case progress from request to representation is one of the most rewarding parts of the role.”

Stage 4 – a barrister volunteers

When a barrister agrees to assist, they only take on the specific piece of work authorised by the reviewer and not the entire case. This ensures the commitment is clear and manageable. Once that work is completed, the case returns to Advocate, and there is no obligation to continue.

We also encourage volunteers to seek pro bono cost orders where appropriate. When granted, the money goes to the Access to Justice Foundation, which distributes it through grants to frontline advice agencies – including Advocate. This means every volunteer effort can have an even greater impact, helping sustain access to justice for those who need it most.

Our story

2026

- Advocate celebrates 30 years of championing access to justice
- Advocate marks two years of the Birmingham Chancery Litigant in Person Support Scheme. The Scheme has the support of the Business and Property Court Judges in Birmingham, the Midlands Circuit, the Midland Chancery and Commercial Bar Association and the local Bar

2025

- The Competition Appeal Tribunal and Advocate launch a pilot scheme supporting litigants in person in Tribunal proceedings

2024

- The Pro Bono Recognition List of England & Wales is launched, endorsed by the Lady Chief Justice
- Advocate helps create, and moves to, the Justice Hub, a collaborative working space for legal charities committed to improving the justice system

2023

- To tackle increasing public demand, Advocate recruits 56 senior barristers to join the group of reviewers who assess cases on our behalf
- The Chambers Pro Bono Framework is launched by Advocate, providing a mechanism for sets to strengthen and highlight their pro bono ethos
- Advocate launches the Pupil Pledge to encourage pupil barristers to take on pro bono work from their second six onwards, seeing over 50 pupils pledging in the first year
- Advocate reaches the milestone of a caseworker based on every circuit across England and Wales for the first time

2020

- As the pandemic takes hold, Advocate experiences a 46% rise in requests for help in the first three months of the year
- Advocate partners with DLA Piper and the Bar Human Rights Committee to provide urgent assistance to people trapped in Afghanistan to help them find routes into the UK

2021

- At the start of the pandemic, Advocate transforms its casework service in a matter of days from paper-based to digital to enable staff to work remotely and, crucially, enables the public to continue to access our services
- Advocate sees a 74% increase in barristers joining our panel of volunteers and a record amount of pro bono work being accepted by the Bar

2021

- Advocate celebrates its 25th anniversary and launches Collaborate, a case-based mentoring scheme, and 25 for 25: The Pro Bono Challenge, encouraging barristers to do 25 hours of pro bono
- Advocate partners with Here for Good on their EU Settlement Scheme project to help people apply for status in the UK before the deadline of 30 June 2021
- The Guidance for Applicants for the 2021 QC competition is amended to reflect that pro bono cases can be used

2022

- Advocate recruits their first two caseworkers on circuit, starting with the Northern Circuit

2015

- Pro Bono Connect launches, enabling barristers to work together with solicitors on pro bono cases

2013

- In collaboration with the Chancery Bar Association and RCJ Advice Bureau, Advocate launches the Chancery Bar Litigant in Person Support Scheme (CLIPS), its first ever on-the-day duty scheme

2012

- Chair of the Bar, Michael Todd KC, introduces the campaign to ask barristers to donate to Advocate when renewing their annual Authorisation to Practise certificates
- The government implements the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act, introducing restrictions to accessing legal aid funding in England and Wales

2010

- Advocate relocates to the National Pro Bono Centre on Chancery Lane with LawWorks, ILEX Pro Bono and the Access to Justice Foundation

2001

- Advocate sets up a Court of Appeal scheme in partnership with the Royal Courts of Justice CAB
- National Pro Bono Week is born as a collaboration between barristers, solicitors, legal executives and the voluntary sector to recognise and support the pro bono contribution made by the legal profession in the UK

2002

- The Attorney General's Pro Bono Coordinating Committee is set up to support the provision of legal pro bono across England and Wales, with Advocate as a member
- The Pro Bono Protocol is developed by Advocate in partnership with LawWorks, under the auspices of the Attorney General's Pro Bono Committee, setting out how pro bono work should be delivered
- The first National Pro Bono Week takes place

2005

- Current UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer wins the Bar Pro Bono Award for his pro bono work

2007

- Section 194 of the Legal Services Act 2007 is introduced, enabling equivalent costs to be recovered in civil cases where the successful party is represented pro bono

2000

- The number of barristers on Advocate's panel of volunteers exceeds 1,000 (including 170 Silks)

1999

- The Bar Council of England of Wales becomes one of Advocate's key funders

1998

- Advocate's areas of expertise reach 50 areas of law

1997

- The first Bar Pro Bono Award is presented
- Advocate's sister charity, LawWorks, is established under the name of The Solicitors Pro Bono Group

1996

- Advocate, under the name of the Bar Pro Bono Unit, is founded by Lord Goldsmith KC. It begins with a part-time administrator and 350 volunteer barristers

Celebrating 30 years of partnership

“Advocate is the jewel in the Crown of the legal profession. Its contribution to access for justice and the development of the law is unmatched in England and Wales. Marrying the right cases to the right advocates all on a pro bono basis it is a shining beacon of hope to hundreds of litigants. ELA backs Advocate to the hilt. We put our money where our mouth is and in 2025 were delighted to be able to contribute £50,000 to support their invaluable work.”

Caspar Glyn KC,
Chair of the Employment Lawyers Association

“The South Eastern Circuit is delighted to celebrate Advocate’s 30th anniversary. It is an amazing organisation which reflects all that is great about the Bar - a desire to help others and to ensure that justice is done. We thank them for their inspiring and invaluable work over the past 30 years, and wish them well for another successful 30 years.”

Claire Davies KC,
Leader of the South Eastern Circuit

“Advocate have assisted the Law Centres Network over the years to obtain critical assistances on behalf of Law Centres. This assistance helped LCN chart the course for Law Centres at pivotal moments such as during the early days of the LASPO Act and most recently, in response to the Mazur Judgement. In addition, they are strong partners and friends to Law Centres - responsive, open, and efficient.”

Julie Bishop,
Director, Law Centres Network

“At the Access to Justice Foundation, we’re very proud of our long association with Advocate who we have supported through our funding for many years. We also work together to promote awareness of Pro Bono Costs Orders. Advocate’s awareness raising work with barristers ensures that the impact of their pro bono work is maximised. Income raised through Pro Bono Costs Orders ensures that more pro bono work is supported around the country and more people in need of legal advice and representation are able to access it. Thank you to the Advocate team for all your support.”

Clare Carter,
CEO, Access to Justice Foundation

“The Family Law Bar Association is proud to support Advocate in its vital work promoting access to justice for families. As Advocate marks 30 years of service, we commend its unwavering commitment of fairness for all, regardless of means, and we look forward to continuing our partnership together.”

James Roberts KC,
Outgoing Chair of the Family Law Bar Association

“As chair of RCJ Advice, the CAB and Law Centre at the Royal Courts of Justice I’m delighted to join the celebration of Advocate’s 30th birthday. We share your mission of securing fair access to justice for everyone, regardless of means. We benefit hugely from working closely together – long may that continue. Congratulations on all you have achieved!”

Lord Justice Peter Jackson

“I have been working with Advocate from the very earliest stages of my practice, starting when I was a pupil barrister. It has been an enormous privilege helping clients navigate court proceedings that would have been overwhelming and unmanageable for them without legal help.”

Malvika Jaganmohan,
Trustee and Panel Member

“As Advocate marks its 30th anniversary, it is right to recognise the enduring importance of pro bono work to the Bar and to access to justice. Pro bono reflects the profession at its best, using skill and experience in the service of those who would otherwise go unheard. Clerks play a vital supporting role. We help facilitate opportunities, support barristers who give their time, and ensure pro bono work is managed effectively alongside practice demands. The Institute of Barristers’ Clerks is proud to support this commitment and congratulates Advocate on three decades of outstanding service.”

Dave Scothern,
Chair of the Institute of Barristers’ Clerks

“Advocate have extraordinary reach with access to barristers across the country and expertise in every area of law. I have been impressed with their responsiveness and ability to find assistance even in the most unusual and complex cases.”

Marion Edge,
Pro Bono Counsel at Dechert LLP

“FRU congratulates Advocate on 30 years of excellence in providing pro bono advice and representation. The demand for pro bono advice and representation continues to be great. FRU and Advocate have a strong and collaborative relationship to meet that demand in different, but complementary, fields. FRU is also proud that many of its former reps go on to provide pro bono advice and representation as Advocate volunteers.”

Michael Fealy KC,
Chair of Free Representation Unit (FRU)

The difference we make

The baby inquest that led to the first prosecution of an NHS Trust for unsafe clinical care

Seven-day-old Harry suffered devastating and preventable failures in hospital during labour and in the hours after his birth. Those failures left him so profoundly brain-injured that his parents were advised to withdraw life support. Grieving and searching for answers, Harry's family wanted accountability - but they were up against a powerful NHS Trust, backed by experienced lawyers, while they had none.

They turned to Advocate. With pro bono support from barristers of Brick Court Chambers and solicitors at Arnold & Porter, Harry's family did not have to face the system alone. Their legal team guided them through a complex and emotionally charged three-week

inquest, ensuring the family's voice was heard and the evidence properly tested. As a result, systemic failings were exposed. The coroner returned a finding of neglect, and a Prevention of Future Deaths report was issued - helping to ensure that other families might be spared the same tragedy. In October 2020, the Care Quality Commission announced it would be criminally prosecuting the Trust on two counts of unsafe care and treatment - one for his mother Sarah and one for Harry - the first prosecution of its kind for unsafe clinical care. The family were profoundly grateful for the support that they received from the legal team. Pro bono support gave them the opportunity to seek closure, accountability and justice.

The family's local MP, Sir Roger Gale, said:

“I felt they needed legal representation at the inquest, which is not necessarily something you'd normally have. But this case was so difficult and so sensitive, I felt that they needed a helping hand. And oh, my God, they got it.”

Whistle-blower sacked from his job has claim struck out

Daniel worked as an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Assistant, but was charged out to a London Borough as an EHCP Coordinator at a higher rate, despite raising concerns he was not qualified. After several months, he informed his employer of data protection breaches relating to pay, underpayment, unqualified staff in senior roles, and alleged fraud arising from agencies charging higher rates without passing this on to workers.

When Daniel raised these concerns, he was dismissed the next day, and then barred from the workplace. With two young children and no means to fund representation, he brought an unfair dismissal whistleblowing claim as a litigant in person. At the Employment Tribunal, all three respondents were represented by

counsel. Daniel described the experience as overwhelming. His claim was struck out on the basis that it had no reasonable prospect of success, with the tribunal failing, in his view, to engage properly with his evidence.

Daniel appealed to the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) and was referred to the Employment Law Appeal Advice Scheme, where he received pro bono representation. With further assistance through Advocate, junior counsel supported preparation for the hearing.

The EAT allowed the appeal, holding that the tribunal had failed to identify the issues adequately or analyse the disclosures properly, particularly given Daniel's status as a litigant in person.

After the hearing, Daniel said:

“I feel more optimistic because of the help I got through Advocate. I have more confidence because I understand the case much better now and how to argue it.”

How you can help

Barristers across England and Wales play a vital role in ensuring access to justice for people who would otherwise be unable to secure legal advice or representation. The Bar Working Lives survey 2025 found that 49% of barristers undertook pro bono work, with one in three providing up to five days of pro bono work – a strong indication of the profession's ongoing commitment to giving back.

There are several ways that barristers and chambers' professionals can help through Advocate, depending on experience, availability, and areas of interest.

Taking on pro bono cases

Barristers with a practising certificate, from their second six all the way to KC, can join our panel and volunteer to take on cases. The cab rank rule does not apply; volunteers choose which cases to express interest in and when, with no obligation to accept a case after reviewing the papers. Volunteers operate under our direct access licence.

Mentoring others

Through Collaborate, our case-based mentoring scheme, senior barristers support pupils, junior barristers, returners and those working in a new area of law. The scheme enables knowledge sharing, practical guidance and flexible collaboration on pro bono cases.



“Pro bono work has given me an opportunity to bring in junior barristers on bigger cases. Not only does that give them exposure to different kinds of work, but it also gives me an opportunity to practice the skills that come with leading other barristers.”

Justin Bates KC, Landmark Chambers

Reviewing cases

Senior barristers of at least seven years' call can help by acting as reviewers, assessing the means and merits of applications for pro bono assistance. This crucial role ensures that only suitable cases are put forward, safeguarding volunteers' valuable and limited time.

Enabling pro bono behind the scenes

Pro bono work relies on more than the willingness of barristers to volunteer. Clerks and chambers' professionals play a crucial enabling role, using their knowledge of workloads, expertise and priorities to help place cases with the right barrister at the right time.

At Advocate, this sits alongside the support provided by our Casework Team. Caseworkers assess applications, match cases to suitable volunteers, manage the administration and remain on hand throughout – ensuring that both chambers staff and barristers are supported at every stage of the process.

Pro Bono Connect and Expert Support

Pro Bono Connect, a joint initiative with LawWorks, matches barristers and solicitors acting on pro bono cases. Pro Bono Expert Support provides litigation support services, such as translation, to barristers undertaking pro bono cases.



Bar in the Community

Through Bar in the Community, barristers and chambers' professionals can support charities beyond legal casework, including through trusteeships, mentoring, training, and business support.



To sign up to any of the initiatives, please visit www.weareadvocate.org.uk/volunteer or contact our Engagement Manager Faye at f.pauffley@weareadvocate.org.uk

How pro bono shapes careers at the Bar and beyond

Barristers do pro bono for a myriad of reasons, both personal and professional. According to the 2025 Working Lives survey, the most common benefits of doing pro bono work were making a difference by helping people or charities (70%) and finding the work interesting and professionally fulfilling (51%).

In addition, taking on a pro bono case can:

Support professional development, by building expertise in a new area of law, providing advocacy experience in higher courts, or assisting a return to practice

Raise your professional profile, helping to develop relationships and increase visibility with the judiciary

Strengthen applications for silk, the judiciary, or the Attorney General's Panel.

“The first time I cross-examined a witness was a case for Advocate – in which I learned to write the name of the person you're cross-examining in very large letters on every page of your notes in case you forget it in the heat of the moment... I did my first and only ever trial in the criminal courts and my first employment case acting pro bono. The first case I won as sole counsel but also the first case I lost as sole counsel were both done pro bono. The first time I did oral advocacy in the Court of Appeal and the first time I spoke in the European Court of Justice were both in pro bono cases. And when I was ready to apply for Silk, pro bono cases helped there too.”

Sarah Abram KC,
Brick Court Chambers,
Vice Chair of Advocate

“Pro bono work has been a key part of my practice over recent years, not least because I have managed to act in some really interesting cases in both the High Court and the Court of Appeal. Advocate offers a wide range of both interesting and challenging work and provided me with a number of experiences that I was able to draw upon when applying for Silk. I would encourage junior practitioners to consider working for Advocate on the basis that, not only are you using your skills for an important cause and helping vulnerable clients who are clearly in need of your assistance, but you are also building on and elevating your own practice. It is very rewarding work to do.”

Michael Jones KC,
Deans Court Chambers,
Advocate reviewer and panel member

“In the Silks application you have to hit the competencies. It's all about the competencies. I realised I was able to use a number of different scenarios in my pro bono work to kill a number of competency birds with one stone. For example, my work in establishing a specialist stream for Court of Protection cases at Advocate involving help seekers who were neurodivergent or had mental health problems, resulted in being able to talk about different teamwork competencies. Moreover, it was a topic I found my interviewers were interested in and perhaps allowed them to know a bit more about me in a context distinct from a particular legal case.”

Edward Lamb KC,
Deka Chambers, Advocate panel member

“In a world where practice areas are becoming increasingly specialised, the chances to gain exposure to other areas of law can be limited. Taking a case through Advocate can provide that wider exposure. Aside from helping to develop those core skills and getting the opportunity to practice advocacy before judges in a variety of courts and tribunals, I want to highlight the impact on career development, particularly for those contemplating any kind of judicial career. Experience gained from pro bono work is recognised as a relevant source of material to draw on in making an application via the judicial appointments commission. However varied a practice a solicitor, barrister or academic who takes a judicial appointment may have had, they will be required to deal with cases well beyond their existing experience on taking up their new role. On a more practical level, it can provide valuable evidence when it comes to satisfying the various competencies that must be established in the selection processes for judicial appointment. The recently revised judicial skills and abilities framework includes qualities such as showing flexibility of approach, being able to apply skills and knowledge in unfamiliar or developing areas, and an understanding of what is required for a fair hearing.”

Lord Justice Zacaroli,
Lord Justice of Appeal



Strengthening the culture of pro bono

As the Bar's national charity, Advocate represents barristers and chambers in the development of pro bono initiatives across the profession. While core casework and duty schemes remain central to Advocate's work, our role extends beyond them to recognising, encouraging and supporting pro bono activity in all its forms. Sitting on the Attorney General's Pro Bono Committee, we help shape and coordinate activity at a national level, acting independently to ensure the Bar's contribution is visible, while working to embed a strong culture of pro bono and support the next generation of the Bar.

Pro Bono Recognition List

Published annually, the Pro Bono Recognition List celebrates barristers and solicitors who have dedicated 25 hours or more to pro bono work in the previous calendar year. Advocate is proud to play a key role in championing this initiative and in collecting submissions each year, helping to ensure that pro bono contributions across the profession are recognised and celebrated.

Established under the aegis of the Attorney General's Pro Bono Committee, with support from the Bar Council, the Law Society, Advocate and the major pro bono organisations, the List is championed by its Patron, the Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales, the Baroness Carr of Walton-on-the-Hill.

2026 marked the third year of the List's publication, recognising 5,500 legal professionals, including 700 barristers – a 13% rise in submissions from the Bar compared with the 2025 List, and a 50% increase in submissions since the List's launch in 2024.

Chambers Pro Bono Framework

Established in 2023, The Chambers Pro Bono Framework supports sets to embed pro bono. Designed to provide a clear and practical structure, the Framework helps chambers create a culture in which pro bono is supported and championed.

By signing up, chambers commit to four annual actions: appointing Pro Bono Champions, undertaking pro bono work, hosting a pro bono seminar, and reporting annually on all pro bono work completed.

Participation continues to grow: 31 chambers joined in 2023, 45 in 2024, and 48 in 2025. On average, 25% of members from participating sets undertook pro bono work in 2024, in comparison to 18% in 2023. Each chambers receives a personalised annual report that showcases the breadth of its pro bono work, benchmarks its activity against similar-sized sets to help track progress and provides material for use on social media and in directory submissions.

Pupil Pledge

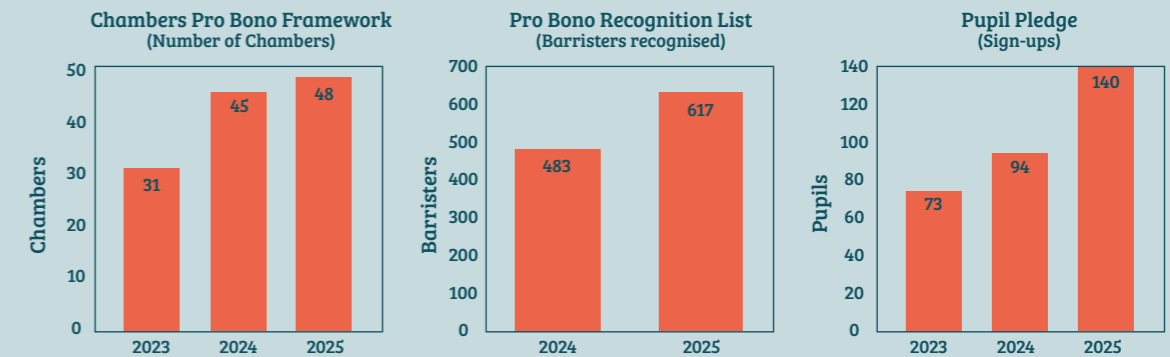
The Pupil Pledge supports pupils in their second six to gain hands-on experience while contributing to access to justice from the very start of their careers. Pupils can take on cases through Advocate and access mentoring from senior barristers through our Collaborate scheme.

After completing their first piece of pro bono work, pupils receive the Pupil Pledge logo for use in their email signatures and chambers profiles – signalling their early commitment to pro bono.

Interest continues to rise: sign-ups have increased from 73 pupils (2023), to 94 (2024), and 140 in 2025.

"The Pupil Pledge provided me with a wonderful opportunity to get more courtroom experience, interact directly with a client, and complete valuable pro bono work"

Beth Payne, Coram Chambers



Bar Pro Bono Awards

The Bar Pro Bono Awards have been Advocate's flagship event since 1997, recognising the outstanding contributions of barristers and chambers across England and Wales. Spanning nine categories - from individual achievements to chambers-wide initiatives and young barristers' involvement - the awards highlight excellence in pro bono work. Past winners include figures such as Prime Minister Keir Starmer and 2026 Chair of the Bar, Kirsty Brimelow KC, reflecting the calibre and influence of those recognised. By showcasing the accomplishments of nominees and winners, the awards both acknowledge their impact and encourage others to support access to justice.



Joanna Gosling presenting our 2025 Bar Pro Bono Awards.



Lord Briggs presenting one of our Bar Pro Bono Awards in 2025 to Jesse Crozier, Junior Pro Bono Barrister of the Year 2025.



Bar Pro Bono Awards hosted at Lincoln's Inn, 2025.

Our national reach

A key element of Advocate's strategy over the last three years has been to become a truly national charity. Across England and Wales, people are facing urgent legal problems and demand for free legal support continues to rise.

To help meet this growing need, in 2022 we recruited our first circuit-based caseworkers in the Northern Circuit and, in 2023, we were pleased to reach a significant milestone of having a caseworker based on every Circuit. Since then, regional engagement has continued to grow steadily, and we are hugely grateful to everyone who has worked with us to expand our national reach.

In addition to the growth of our core casework service nationwide, we have also expanded our partner and on-the-day duty schemes across the country to help unrepresented people in the courts on the day of their hearing. Here are some examples of our regional schemes:

The Birmingham Chancery Litigant in Person Support Scheme

delivered in partnership with the Midland Chancery and Commercial Bar Association, provides on-the-day advice and advocacy for unrepresented parties on the Interim Applications List of the Business and Property Court.

The Manchester Chancery Litigant in Person Support Scheme

launched in partnership with the Northern Circuit and the Northern Business and Property Bar Association, to provide on-the-day advice and advocacy for unrepresented parties on the Interim Applications List of the Business and Property Court.

Leeds Business and Property Court Litigant-in-Person Support Scheme

established with the support of Business and Property Court Judges in Leeds, the North Eastern Circuit to provide on-the-day advice and advocacy for unrepresented parties on the Companies Court Winding-Up List and the District Judges' Business and Property Court Applications List.

Bristol Family Law Advice Scheme

launched in collaboration with the University of Law. The clinic offers legal advice to Litigants in Person who either have or are considering bringing current Private Family Law proceedings or Family Law Act proceedings.



All of this has been made possible thanks to our dedicated casework team, working closely with pro bono networks across the country.

Some of our key national collaborations include:

The West of England Pro Bono Committee

The Greater Manchester Pro Bono Committee

The Pro Bono Committee for Wales

The North East Pro Bono Committee

The Midland Pro Bono Committee

If you would like to speak to a Caseworker based locally in your Circuit, please email caseworker@weareadvocate.org.uk and they can put you in touch.

Our reviewing barristers

Our reviewers are senior barristers who assess the means and merits of every application to ensure it is suitable for pro bono assistance, playing a vital role in the delivery of our service.

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This simple but impactful giving mechanism was introduced in 2012 by Michael Todd KC, then Chair of the Bar. While remaining grounded in the belief that pro bono can never replace a properly funded legal aid system, it reflects a longstanding tradition of generosity and a collective commitment to access to justice within the profession.

Ever since, it has acted as a crucial source of income for our charity. In 2025, it accounted for over 40% of our annual income.

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30
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