

FACULTY OF ADVOCATES

Faculty of Advocates, Free Legal Services Unit

Becoming an Accredited Agency Policy

1. Introduction and Purpose

This policy provides comprehensive guidance for organisations seeking accreditation with the Faculty of Advocates' Free Legal Services Unit (FLSU) and for current staff managing the accreditation process.

The FLSU facilitates access to justice by connecting qualifying individuals and community groups with advocates who provide pro bono legal services.

Key Principles:

- Pro bono work supplements, never substitutes, publicly funded legal services
- All pro bono work must be free to applicants with no payment to advocates
- Services are provided voluntarily by advocates in private practice
- Accredited agencies act as intermediaries, maintaining the client relationship throughout

2. Eligibility Criteria for Accreditation

2.1 Organisational Requirements

To qualify for accreditation, agencies must demonstrate:

- Legal Status and Structure:
- Established legal entity (charity, company limited by guarantee, or statutory body)
- Clear governance structure with defined accountability mechanisms
- Appropriate insurance coverage for advice services
- Compliance with relevant regulatory requirements

Service Delivery Capacity:

- Demonstrated experience in providing legal advice or related support services
- Qualified staff or volunteers capable of case assessment and management
- Established client intake and case management systems
- Appropriate data protection and confidentiality procedures

Quality Assurance:

- Written procedures for case assessment and referral decisions
- Staff training programmes covering legal aid eligibility and case evaluation
- Client feedback mechanisms and complaints procedures
- Regular supervision and quality monitoring systems

2.1 Alignment with FLSU Objectives

Agencies must demonstrate commitment to:

- Serving individuals and community groups unable to afford legal representation
- Prioritising cases where legal aid or alternative funding is unavailable
- Supporting the Faculty's mission to improve access to justice
- Working collaboratively to enhance publicly funded legal services

3. Application Process

3.1 Initial Application

Prospective agencies should submit the following essential documents and information.

Documentation Required:

- Completed FLSU Agency Accreditation Application Form
- Organisational constitution or governing documents
- Latest annual report and audited accounts
- Evidence of relevant insurance coverage

T 0131 226 5071
A Parliament Square, Edinburgh, EH1 1RF

- Staff qualifications and training records
- Sample case management procedures
- Data protection policy and procedures

Supporting Information:

- Description of current services and client demographics
- Evidence of experience in legal advice or related fields
- Details of quality assurance mechanisms
- References from partner organisations or funders
- Explanation of how FLSU accreditation fits organisational objectives

3.2 Assessment Process

The FLSU will evaluate applications based on:

Technical Assessment:

- Review of submitted documentation
- Verification of organisational credentials
- Assessment of case management capabilities
- Evaluation of staff competency and training

Site Visit (where appropriate):

- Meeting with key staff members
- Review of case management systems
- Discussion of referral procedures
- Assessment of client service standards

Decision Timeline:

- Initial acknowledgment within 5 working days
- Full assessment within 6-8 weeks of complete application
- Written notification of decision with feedback
- Appeal processes available for unsuccessful applications

4. Responsibilities of Accredited Agencies

4.1 Case Assessment and Referral

Accredited agencies must:

Pre-Referral Responsibilities:

- Conduct thorough initial client interviews
- Assess case complexity, novelty, and client importance
- Verify client's financial eligibility (inability to pay for representation)
- Confirm unavailability of legal aid or alternative funding
- Evaluate whether advocate services are necessary and appropriate
- Ensure realistic prospect of successful outcome

Referral Process:

- Complete comprehensive referral forms with all relevant information
- Provide clear case summary including legal issues and background
- Include all relevant documentation and evidence
- Specify urgency and any time constraints
- Maintain complete case records throughout process

T 0131 226 5071
A Parliament Square, Edinburgh, EH1 1RF

4.2 Case Management

Throughout the pro bono representation:

Client Relationship:
- Maintain primary client relationship and responsibility
- Handle all client communications and case administration
- Arrange consultations between client and advocate
- Manage client expectations regarding pro bono limitations

Administrative Support:
- Prepare case materials for advocate review
- Coordinate meeting schedules and deadlines
- Handle correspondence and document management
- Provide administrative support equivalent to solicitor services
- Maintain detailed case records and time logs

Quality Monitoring:
- Monitor case progress and advocate performance
- Collect client feedback on services received
- Report any concerns to FLSU coordinator promptly
- Participate in case outcome tracking and evaluation

4.3 Compliance and Reporting

Agencies must:

Ongoing Compliance:
- Maintain accreditation standards throughout partnership
- Notify FLSU of significant organisational changes
- Participate in periodic review and reaccreditation processes
- Comply with FLSU guidelines and procedures

Reporting Requirements:
- Submit quarterly statistical returns on referrals and outcomes
- Provide annual report on pro bono case activities
- Participate in evaluation studies and feedback surveys
- Share learning and best practice with other accredited agencies

5. FLSU Support and Services

5.1 Coordination Services

The FLSU provides:
- Case matching with appropriate advocates
- Communication facilitation between agencies and advocates
- Technical guidance on referral procedures
- Support with complex or unusual cases

5.2 Training and Development

Available support includes:
- Initial orientation for newly accredited agencies
- Regular training updates on legal developments
- Best practice sharing sessions
- Access to FLSU coordinator for advice and guidance

T 0131 226 5071
A Parliament Square, Edinburgh, EH1 1RF

6. Quality Standards and Monitoring

6.1 Performance Standards

Accredited agencies are expected to maintain:

- High-quality case assessment and selection
- Timely and comprehensive referral documentation
- Professional client service standards
- Effective communication with advocates and FLSU
- Accurate recording and reporting of case activities

6.2 Review Process

Regular monitoring includes:

- Annual performance review meetings
- Case file audits (sample basis)
- Client and advocate feedback evaluation
- Compliance with reporting requirements
- Assessment of continued eligibility for accreditation

7. Reaccreditation Process

7.1 Periodic Review

Accreditation requires renewal every three years through:

- Updated organisational information and documentation
- Performance review covering referral quality and outcomes
- Evidence of continued compliance with standards
- Demonstration of ongoing professional development
- Client and advocate feedback assessment

7.2 Continuous Improvement

Agencies should demonstrate:

- Response to feedback and recommendations
- Implementation of quality improvements
- Staff development and training updates
- Enhanced service delivery methods
- Contribution to sector development and learning

8. Withdrawal of Accreditation

8.1 Grounds for Withdrawal

Accreditation may be withdrawn for:

- Failure to maintain eligibility criteria
- Consistent poor quality referrals or case management
- Non-compliance with reporting requirements
- Breach of client confidentiality or professional standards
- Significant organisational changes affecting service delivery

8.2 **Process**

- Written notice of concerns with opportunity to respond
- Formal investigation if issues persist
- Appeal process available
- Transition arrangements for ongoing cases

T 0131 226 5071
A Parliament Square, Edinburgh, EH1 1RF

- Support for addressing identified problems where possible

9. Contact Information and Support

FLSU Email: flsu@advocates.org.uk

For Applications: Submit completed documentation to the above email address

For Complaints: Use the same contact for any concerns regarding FLSU services or volunteers

For Guidance: The FLSU coordinator is available to provide advice and support throughout the accreditation process and ongoing partnership

T 0131 226 5071
A Parliament Square, Edinburgh, EH1 1RF