GUIDE TO PRO BONO AND OTHER FREE ADVICE IN SCOTLAND

A directory of free legal and other advice

November 2026 version

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Published for:
PRO BONO WEEK

1. INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

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This booklet is published annually for Pro Bono Week, a cross-sector collaborative initiative that through publications, launches, events and comms every November helps support the legal profession's voluntary provision of free legal help to those in need.

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This is a updated version published for Pro Bono Week in November 2026 and takes as its inspiration the Guide to Pro Bono published in England and Wales.

Please email your comments, additions or corrections to guide@probonocommittee.uk

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About this Guide

Who is this Guide for?

Advisers and advocacy workers in the third sector. MPs, MSPs, and their caseworkers. Anyone who needs to point members of the public to free legal or other advice.

What does the Guide signpost to?

- **Legal Aid** Legal help paid for by the Government.
- **Pro Bono.** Free legal advice and/or representation from volunteer lawyers. For individuals and charities who cannot afford to pay and cannot get legal aid.
- **Front-line advice organisations**. Mostly charities, providing everything from general advice to specialist legal support. Rules limit who can advise on debt and immigration matters.
- **Online Guidance** on legal problems and on how the legal process works.
- **Specialist charities providing general advice/support** that give general advice and support to particular groups, or on particular problems. When people experience legal difficulties, they often experience other problems too. Some charities also give legal advice. Others can send you on to someone who does.

What geographical areas are covered?

Scotland. Mainly national services, not local ones. Some of the charities work across the whole UK. For England and Wales, see probonocommittee.uk/guide.

Disclaimer:

- This Guide gives neither legal nor financial advice
- While charities with full-page entries reviewed those, other details may be wrong or out of date. If in doubt, check individual websites
- This Guide is not exhaustive. It provides no guarantees, including in respect of organisation suitability or service. No one accepts any liability for its contents. But we hope it helps.

The limitations of pro bono and charitable help

- Solicitors and advocates sometimes work without payment to help those who cannot afford their services achieve justice.

- But **pro bono** projects cannot guarantee to help in every case. There are three reasons:
  - They rely on volunteers. Volunteers are few.
  - Far more people ask for help than can be given it.
  - The law where help is most needed may not be the law the volunteer knows.

- Pro bono does not replace a proper publicly funded system. The system is not **legal aid**. Yet:
  - Many people cannot get legal aid, though they cannon afford a private solicitor. (See Legal Aid in Part 2.)
  - Some who qualify still cannot find a legal aid lawyer to take their case.

- The not-for-profit advice sector also needs support, alongside legal aid. There are two reasons:
  - Pro Bono help from volunteer lawyers works best, and lasts longest, when partnering with front-line advice organisations.
  - Those organisations receive limited funding so are limited in the help they can give. They are swamped with requests. They may have little room for more clients.

Points to weigh when signposting

The System

- **Capacity:** Advice and pro bono charities have little money because they receive limited funding. This restricts the amount of people they can help. More and more people are asking them for help. Tell clients / Service users plainly what to expect.

- **Narrow Limits:** Many charities can help only within a narrow field. Funding rules often decide what help they can give. Clients may find it frustrating.

- **Paid Help:** A paid lawyer, a no-win no-fee lawyer or a legal aid lawyer may give a service which is fit for a specific court action. Charities offer a variety of holistic approaches to contentious issues which gain effective solutions both through ADR and court action.

- **Legal Aid First:** Point people to legal aid whenever open to them. This delivers specialist advice and representation. Legal aid may also pay for interpreters, court fees and expert fees. It can protect the client against paying the other side's costs; the lawyer will explain. And it leaves scarce charity and pro bono help for others.

- **Pro Bono Last:** Pro bono projects usually step in only when nothing else is open to the client.

The Legal problem

- **Timing:** Clients usually seek advice at a late stage. Often, without having received any previous advice.

- **More than one problem:** Clients often raise several legal problems that are tangled together. They may meet barriers to justice. They may have suffered a recent trauma. All this complicates matters.

- **Priorities:** Some clients need help to see which problems matter most, and how to tackle these first. Such a whole-person approach to client care often works well. For other clients, specialist legal help on one problem can change everything.

Other Points when Signposting

- **Shopping around:** Help can be very difficult to find, and some clients may have to ask many charities for the same thing. This uses limited resources. Ask whether they are seeing, or have seen, an adviser.

This matters most where legal aid may be open to them.

- **Bad News:** A client may have been told by a lawyer or a respected organisation that their claim is weak. They may need help accepting this. Do not simply send them to another agency without first considering this.
- **Triage:** Citizens Advice, law centres, other charities and constituency surgeries can filter a client's problems. They find what can be done, and by whom. Where there is a legal problem, they can then refer the client to specialist help: legal aid or pro bono.
- **Signposting:** For many clients it is enough to give the name of the right organisation, with its website or phone number.
- **Referring:** Some clients need assistance to overcome barriers they face in connection with conditions or previous experiences. Perhaps they are experiencing several problems. Perhaps they are vulnerable, through disability or trauma. Refer them by name to a local or specialist charity. That gives them a better chance of getting the help they need.
- **Asking an MPs or MSPs to step in:** A client may ask their MP or MSP to speak up for them to a (Scottish) Government department, local authority or another agency.
- **Communication:** Some clients may have specific communication needs, maybe in connection with disability, age or language barriers. Make sure to ask about the best methods for contacting them, and any other steps clients need to receive advice and be understood. Set this out clearly when making a referral.
- **Understanding:** Ask whether the client can understand the information and act on it. Make sure to confirm this clearly to clients and answer any further questions they might have.
- **No Internet:** Some people cannot get online. Some cannot use online services. Some are alone, with no family or friends to help. Local libraries may offer internet access. Vulnerable people may need to be sent to a local agency that gives help in person.
- **Translation:** Where language barriers exist, ask whether the client needs a translator or interpreter to get effective advice.
- **Complaints, mediation & ombudsmen:** Consider encouraging the client to use a complaints procedure, mediation or an ombudsman. Make sure to let the client know about time limits for bringing potential legal action where applicable, and if engaging with these procedures could affect this. For ombudsmen, see ombudsmanassociation.org.

Spotting a legal problem, and training for MPs, MSPs and Caseworkers

- Many people do not know they have a legal problem. Research shows that most cannot name their legal problems correctly. People often conflate legal and non-legal issues.
- The **Mind the Gap** survey of MPs in England and Wales found that MPs and their caseworkers play a key part. They signpost or refer constituents to the legal advice open to them. Yet not every MP's surgery has the staff or the know-how to tell when legal advice is needed, or when legal aid may be available. Scottish MPs and MSPs may have the same trouble. A 2018 report by the WS Society shows some of the difficulties of pro bono legal help in Scotland.
- If it is unclear whether a person has a legal problem, send them to a **local advice agency or specialist charity.** It can identify the issues and triage them. It can signpost or refer a client to legal aid, to other advice agencies or to Pro Bono (See next section.)
- Once you know the legal problem, this Guide may show where to send the person.
- **Free training is available to MPs and their caseworkers.** It teaches them to spot legal problems and other common issues. The House of Commons Learning and Development team runs this, together with the APPG on Access to Justice. The courses cover:
    - an introduction to casework and advising constituents
    - housing law (homelessness and possession, disrepair, housing allocation security of tenure)
    - mental health casework
    - community care casework
    - anti-social behaviour
    - additional support needs
    - employment law
    - civil and criminal legal aid.

  Sessions run online and in person. Contact the House of Commons Learning and Development team for details. The House of Commons Library also has guidance on casework. The House of Commons Library also has some casework guidance.

MPs and MSPs and local organisations

- MPs, MSPs and caseworkers who do constituency work should **find what local organisations exist.** They should learn of any local networks or schemes.
- This Guide does not, as a rule, list local advice agencies. You can find them on the websites of the umbrella bodies listed below (Citizens Advice and AdviceUK). You can also find them through advicelocal.uk and advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk.
- **Invite Somone** from your local Citizens Advice, law centre or similar agency to give an account of local services.
- This may help **build relationships** between the MPs/MSPs/caseworkers and the local organisations. This can particularly help ensure that effective referrals can be made.
- One suggested model: hold your **surgery** inside a Citizens Advice or law centre outreach session, or in its premises.
- Being able to make a **referral** for a named individual (rather than just signpost) to a local organisation may be more effective, especially for those with mental health or other vulnerabilities, or those with multiple problems where the local agency can triage.
- A **referral** for a named person beats a plain signpost. This is especially true for people with mental health problems or other vulnerabilities, and for people with several problems, where the local agency can provide triage.
- Knowing a local organisation also gives you **practical facts**. You learn when opening hours change. You learn that the office is on the ground floor.
- Get the person's **consent** before you send their details to an advice provider. It may help to mention any disability in the referral.
- Look into **social prescribing** and other health partnerships in your area. They may be run by primary care or by a charity such as Age UK. Another name is **community referral**. GPs, nurses and other health and care workers use this to send people to local non-clinical services. Models differ. Most use a link worker or navigator who helps the person reach local support.

Sources of legal help at a glance

1. Online resources

Online guides can explain legal rights and how disputes are settled. They can guide people who speak for themselves in court. See Part 2 of this Guide, including:

- advicelocal.uk (see the Scots law sections)
- advicenow.org.uk (including guides to going to court or tribunal without a lawyer)
- Citizens Advice Scotland

2. Help provided or funded by insurance

Some insurance policies include legal help. Household and motor policies often include this or offer it as an extra. Some subscriptions, such as Which? include legal advice.

3. Help from a Trade Union

A union may give its members free or cheaper legal help, for example on employment issues.

4. Legal Help you pay for

To find a solicitor, use the Law Society of Scotland: lawscot.org.uk/find-a-solicitor

A solicitor may tell you that you can instruct an advocate. The public cannot normally instruct advocates directly: advocates.org.uk/instructing-advocates

The Scottish Legal Complaints Commission (**the SLCC**) publishes guides for consumers who instruct lawyers in certain fields of law: scottishlegalcomplaints.org.uk/resources/consumer-guides

5. Legal aid (paid for by Government)

Legal aid pays for advice and representation in some fields of law. It usually goes only to people of limited means. See *Legal aid* in Part 2. For more details, see the Scottish Legal Aid Board and the JustRight Scotland factsheet.

6. A Local advice agency

A local charity or not-for-profit body may help by phone or in person. It is often the best place to start. It can triage several problems. It can signpost or refer to other help, including legal aid. See Part 2 of this Guide.

Two directories help you find local agencies:

- advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk
- advicelocal.uk

To find Citizens Advice and law centres in particular:

- cas.org.uk
- mygov.scot/legal-advice

7. Specialist charities

Many charities help particular groups of people, or people with particular problems. They may give general advice or whole-person support. Some give legal advice or representation. Some can signpost or refer to legal help, including legal aid.

8. Pro bono clinics and charities

Free legal help may come from pro bono clinics: the LawWorks Clinics Network, law schools, the FLSU, or other charities. See Parts 2 and 3.

Important, Pro bono help usually goes only to people who cannot pay for legal help and cannot get legal aid.

Scotland: devolved law

Scots law differs from the law of England and Wales in many ways. Material from an English organisation, or written from an English and Welsh view, may not suit people in Scotland who seek pro bono help.

Where you can, send clients to a Scottish organisation that knows the field, or to the Scottish branch of a national one. But do not hold back from engaging with an English organisation where no Scottish one exists.

Several organisations in this Guide serve the whole UK. Some have a Scottish arm. Age Scotland is one. When you refer someone, say plainly that the matter is in Scotland.

2. GENERAL SOURCES OF FREE LEGAL ADVICE

This part points to:

- **legal aid**
- **key websites with online guidance**
- **websites to locate local agencies**
- **networks of advice agencies and pro bono clinics**

This is referred to elsewhere as the "GENERAL section".

Legal aid

Legal aid may pay for legal advice, for family mediation, or for representation in a court or tribunal. The Government covers the cost. The Government also decides who qualifies. Most legal aid work is done by private firms of solicitors and by advocates. Some agencies, such as law centres, do it too.

What follows is a short account. For more, see:

- mygov.scot/legal-aid
- slab.org.uk/new-to-legal-aid/eligibility-estimators

Whether a person gets legal aid depends on three things:

- **The type of case**. It must be "in scope". See below
- **Means**. Availbale funds are considered. There are only a few exceptions. See below
- **Merits**. The case must have merit. Again, there are few exceptions.
- The merits of the case (again subject to only limited exceptions).

A legal aid solicitor can apply for legal aid for a client. To find a solicitor or firm with a legal aid contract, try:

- lawscot.org.uk/find-a-solicitor (tick the legal aid box); or
- slab.org.uk/new-to-legal-aid/find-a-solicitor

Criminal legal aid

Criminal cases are normally in scope, bar certain minor offences. Anyone arrested and taken to a police station can get free advice. There is no means test for this. Beyond that, help in the criminal courts depends on two things: the merits (the "interests of justice" test) and the client's means. See mygov.scot/legal-aid/criminal-cases. There is also a Public Defence Solicitors' Office: pdso.org.uk

Civil legal aid (including family)

General information on civil legal aid:

- mygov.scot/legal-aid/civil-cases
- https://www.mygov.scot/legal-aid/advice-and-assistance

The Scottish Legal Aid Board also runs advice centres called the Civil Legal Assistance Office. They cover certain fields of law and certain parts of the

country: clao.org.uk

The civil means test. Applicants must give financial information. Many will not qualify on means, even though they cannot realistically afford private legal help. The Scottish Legal Aid Board website has an online estimator. It shows whether you qualify on means: slab.org.uk/new-to-legal-aid/eligibility-estimators/estimator-civil-legal-aid

In scope civil cases may include the following (check at lawscot.org.uk/what-a-solicitor-can-do-for-you/legal-aid and mygov.scot/legal-advice):

- Benefits
- Children's Hearings
- Claims for money
- Criminal injury
- Debt
- Discrimination
- Divorce or separation
- Domestic abuse
- Employment
- Housing
- Certain or specific Immigration cases.
- Mental health
- Some personal injury claims
- Trouble with the police

The following may be **outside of scope**:

- Consumer and other contractual disputes
- Certain or specific Immigration cases
- Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority cases
- Most private family law such as divorce, money and children (unless, for example, they involve domestic abuse or violence, or child abuse)
- Personal injury or death
- General claims for civil wrongs such as nuisance, unjustified enrichment
- Conveyancing
- Will-making or trust law
- Company, partnership or business law
- Legal advice on a change of name
- Defamation or malicious falsehood (with exceptions for defenders in some cases)

Cost of living advice

Cost of living trouble may involve benefits, debt, housing, childcare, disability and health. Both legal advice and non-legal advice can help with these issues.

The national networks later in this part, such as Citizens Advice and the law centres, may help with them too.

Specialist charities help with benefits and debt. They lie outside the scope of this Guide. Debt charities should be able to help with fuel debt. Other specialist charities give cost of living advice and support to the communities they serve. Age UK is one.

Government and charity websites give guidance on cost of living support, including payments and discounts. These can point you to services:

- UK government: gov.uk/cost-of-living
- Citizens Advice: citizensadvice.org.uk/costofliving
- Scottish Government: mygov.scot/support-money-debt
- Money Advice Scotland: moneyadvicescotland.org.uk/resources-for-people-with-money-worries
- National Debtline: nationaldebtline.org/cost-living-hub-s

Local authorities may also have web pages on the cost of living, pointing to local support.

You can locate foodbanks at using advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk.

Advicelocal

Advicelocal is a website built by the advice charity *Rightsnet*. It helps people with social welfare problems. It gives links to information for each area of law. It lists free, independent local advice organisations. They can help with:

- Welfare benefits and tax credits
- Council tax
- Debt and money advice
- Housing and homelessness
- Employment and work issues
- Disability and social care
- Asylum and immigration

How to get help

Go to advicelocal.uk. Enter your postcode. Choose a topic. You will find:

- Links to online advice and information.
- Details of local advice organisations across the UK that may be able to help.

Citizens Advice Scotland

Citizens Advice Scotland is a network of charities. It gives confidential advice free, online, by phone and in person. This can include legal advice. It can help with:

- Benefits
- Work
- Debt and money
- Consumer
- Housing
- Family
- Law and courts
- Immigration
- Health

How to get help

1. Read advice online: citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland
2. Phone Citizens Advice Scotland on their national phonelines. They are listed at cas.org.uk/spotlight/scotlands-citizens-advice-helpline. The list includes online chat and RelayUK/Textphone.
3. The Free Helpline is **0800 028 1456**.
4. Go to your nearest Citizens Advice office, find it at: cas.org.uk/bureaux

Law centres

A law centre is a law practice that is a charity. It employs expert solicitors and caseworkers. They give free legal advice and representation to people who cannot afford a lawyer.

Some centres work in social welfare law. They might cover some or all of these:

- Welfare rights
- Disability rights
- Immigration and asylum
- Housing and homelessness
- Employment rights
- Community care
- Discrimination
- Debt

Other areas of work might include:

- Public law
- Mental health
- Family law
- Education rights
- Young people and children's rights

Some law centres work in one area. Some serve one community or one field of law. Others give legal advice across the country on a range of issues. Most Scottish law centres also do legal aid work.

National

- Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland: ercs.scot
- Ethnic Minorities Law Centre: emlc.org.uk
- Civil Rights First: civilrightsfirst.co.uk
- Clan Childlaw: clanchildlaw.org
- JustRight Scotland: justrightscotland.org.uk
- Legal Services Agency: lsa.org.uk

- Scottish Child Law Centre: sclc.org.uk
- Scottish Women's Rights Centre:scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk
- Shelter Scottish Housing Law Service: scotland.shelter.org.uk

Regional and Local

- Castlemilk Law and Money Advice Centre (Glasgow): castlemilklawcentre.co.uk
- Dundee Law Centre: dundeelaw.org
- Fife Law Centre: fifelawcentre.co.uk
- Govan Law Centre (Glasgow): govanlc.blogspot.com

How to get help

Several law centres publish factsheets, guides and other material on their websites. Several run free legal advice helplines. Some give appointments, or hold walk-in legal surgeries.

AdviceUK

AdviceUK is the largest network of advice organisations. It has 650 members across England, Scotland and Wales.

The members differ in size and in the advice they give. Some are large, such as National Debtline. Some are small community groups and foodbanks. Fifty members employ lawyers.

For some members, advice is the main work. For others it is part of wider work in housing, community development, student welfare, disability, health and culture. Some look to the whole person and the whole community.

Some give advice across social welfare: benefits, debt, housing, immigration and employment. They take on casework and speak for clients at court or tribunal. Some work with particular communities or groups who need advice.

You can find individual AdviceUK organisations at adviceuk.org.uk/about/contact

Find an Adviser **advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk** is a directory. It uses data kept by AdviceUK. It lists advice organisations and other help, whether local, regional, national. You search by postcode. The topics are:

- Benefits
- Bereavement
- Debt
- Disability
- Domestic Violence
- Foodbanks
- Housing
- Homelessness
- Immigration
- Legal issues
- Mental health
- Work

AdviceFinder is also open through other channels. Helpline teams can use it to signpost. Organisations can feed its search data into their own websites, client portals or apps. For more, visit advicefinder.org.uk.

LawWorks Clinics Network

The LawWorks Clinics Network is a UK network of about 300 law clinics. They give free first legal advice. LawWorks supports them. In Scotland the clinics are the Edinburgh School of Law Free Legal Advice Clinic and the University of Strathclyde Law Clinic. See Page 25.

Clinics advise individuals in several fields of law. These include employment, housing, consumer disputes, debt and welfare rights. Some can advise only clients from a certain place, of a certain kind, or on a certain field of law.

Students may give the advice. If so, it may take longer to get. There may be less of it in university holidays and exam periods.

How to get help

Visit lawworks.org.uk/catchment/all-scotland to find your local LawWorks clinic. You will see what help it gives and how to contact it.

You can search by postcode and filter by area of law:

- Asylum
- Charity
- Child
- Civil litigation
- Community care
- Consumer
- Contract
- Corporate structure
- Crime
- Data protection
- Debt & insolvency
- Domestic violence
- Education
- Employment
- Environmental
- Family
- Health & safety
- Housing
- Immigration
- Insurance
- Intellectual property
- IT & internet
- Personal injury
- Property
- Tax & VAT
- Delict (civil wrongs)
- Welfare benefits
- Wills & probate
- Windrush

University law clinics

Most university law schools give free legal advice through law clinics and other pro bono projects. Most belong to their umbrella charity, the Clinical Legal Education Organisation (CLEO).

Students run most clinics. Academic staff supervise them, or outside partners such as law firms. The students give free legal advice and help to clients.

The advice may be general. It may be specialist advice on certain issues.

Clinics may also write letters of advice, help fill in forms, signpost, or represent clients.

Most clinics work by appointment only. Some close in academic holidays. Where students give the advice, it may take longer to get, and there may be less of it in holidays and exam periods.

How to get help

These Universities have law clinics:

- Aberdeen University: abdnlawproject.com
- Dundee University: UoDLawClinic@dundee.ac.uk
- Edinburgh Napier University: enlc.co.uk
- Edinburgh University: law.ed.ac.uk/about-us/free-legal-advice-centre
- Glasgow Caledonian University: gcu.ac.uk/lawclinic
- Glasgow University: University of Glasgow - Schools - School of Law - GO Justice - What we do - Emma Ritch Law clinic
- Robert Gordon University: rgu.ac.uk/life-at-rgu/learning-facilities/law-facilities/the-law-clinic
- Strathclyde University: lawclinic.org.uk

3. PRO BONO LEGAL HELP

This part lists national pro bono services. Lawyers give advice and representation freely, in many fields of law.

Note the limits set out in *The limits of pro bono and charitable help* **in Part 1 of this Guide. Demand usually exceeds supply. Help usually goes only to people who cannot pay and who cannot get legal aid.**

To be read in conjunction with the INTRODUCTION and GENERAL sections above.

Faculty of Advocates: Free Legal Services Unit ("FLSU")

FLSU help is only available by referral from a charity or a solicitor FLSU is the Scottish Bar's pro bono charity. On referral, it finds free legal help from volunteer devils (trainee advocates) and members of Faculty (advocates). It helps people who need advice on a court case, or help at a hearing, who cannot afford to pay and cannot get legal aid.	
Area covered	Scotland.
Type of legal help	Advocates can give: • representation in any court or tribunal • legal advice in a meeting or by phone • legal advice in writing • drafting of documents, such as skeleton arguments.
Areas of law	Every area of law.
Who can get help	The full eligibility guidelines are here: advocates.org.uk/instructing-advocates/free-legal-services-unit/free-legal-services-unit-homepage The core tests are these: • You have instructed an Accredited Agency to act for you. • You need an advocate to help with your case. • Your case is based in Scotland. • Your hearing or deadline is more than three weeks away from the day you send in a completed application. There are exceptions in certain exceptional circumstances.
In-person service?	No.
Online or remote?	Applications are processed online.
Pro bono?	All help is given pro bono by devils and advocates.
How to apply	Go through an advice agency. See: advocates.org.uk/instructing-advocates/free-legal-services-unit/free-legal-services-unit-homepage/accredited-advice-

	agencies Those who refer should help the applicant write a summary and gather the documents. See: advocates.org.uk/instructing-advocates/free-legal-services-unit
Website	advocates.org.uk/instructing-advocates/free-legal-services-unit
Email	flsu@advocates.org.uk
Phone	0131 226 5071
Important	**Help from a devil or an advocate cannot be guaranteed.**

Other pro bono in Scotland

Many lawyers and firms give free legal help direct to the public, charities and community groups.

Lawyers also volunteer through dedicated pro bono schemes. Besides the FLSU, these include:

- FLSU Accredited Advice Agencies
- KIND UK: legal advice and representation to undocumented children on immigration and nationality issues.
- Ukraine Advice Scotland – JustRight Scotland: immigration advice for Ukraine war refugees.
- Scottish Woman's Rights Centre: assistance for women aged 16 years and over living in Scotland who have been affected by violence or abuse. They have two helplines available here: https://www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk/services-helpline/
    - An advocacy helpline operated by experienced advocacy workers to give initial information and support.
    - A pro-bono helpline operated by volunteer solicitors to provide free legal advice.

Many charities also use pro bono help from volunteer lawyers. They use it alongside specialist lawyers and other staff the charity employs itself.

Other representation and support services

Some agencies give support, advice and representation where no legal advice or court representation is involved. They may help with certain disputes, or where another form of advice or representation is needed:

- **Tax Aid** gives UK-wide help to people on low incomes who have trouble with HMRC: https://taxaid.org.uk/
- **Tax Help for Older People** gives similar UK-wide help to people over 60 with tax problems: https://taxvol.org.uk/
- **The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance** is a network of agencies. They provide lay advocacy help across Scotland on public services of many kinds: https://www.siaa.org.uk/
- **Enquire** and the charity **Contact** give advice, support and representation on educational needs: enquire.org.uk. Contact has Scottish resources here.
- **The Equality Advisory & Support Service** runs a helpline. It may advise on issues under the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998. These can include housing, employment, consumer and public services: https://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/

4. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

This part covers the usage of Artificial Intelligence (Ai), what it is, how it can help and where it can go wrong.

To be read in conjunction with the INTRODUCTION, GENERAL, and PRO BONO LEGAL HELP sections above.

Artificial Intelligence

Many people now use generative AI tools such as chatbots and writing assistants. Used with care, they can save time and help people find their way to appropriate advice. Used carelessly, they can give wrong answers with great confidence, expose private information, and leave someone worse off than before. This section is for members of the public, legal providers, MPs, MSPs and their caseworkers, as well as front-line organisations. It is general guidance only. It is not legal advice. It does not replace the rules of a professional body, the policy of your own organisation, or data protection law.

Know which kind of tool you are using

A public AI tool is one that anyone can use, often for free. A private tool is set up for one organisation under a contract that deals with confidentiality, security and use of data. Treat whatever you type into a public tool as something that may be seen, kept and reused. If you are not sure which kind you have, treat it as public. Read the terms of use. Some providers reserve the right to reuse what you enter, and many disclaim responsibility for what the tool produces. If things go wrong, there may be no one to hold to account.

Some people and organisations may wish to avoid using AI generally on principle, due to the major negative impact it has on human life and the environment. This should be respected.

Where AI can help

Summarising and organising information is generally safer than asking a tool for the answer to a legal question. Using it for core advice is like relying on an unqualified assistant: the work may be very good or it may not, and someone qualified must check it. These uses are generally sensible, provided a person checks the result:

- **Explaining** a general legal term, or a letter you have received, in plainer words, so that you can ask an adviser better questions.
- **Preparing** for a call or meeting: listing the dates, documents and questions you want to cover.
- **Drafting** a first version of a letter, email or timeline of events, which you then correct and send in your own name.
- **Translating or simplifying** information for someone who needs it in another language or format. Where the matter is important, ask a fluent speaker to check it.

- **Sorting** your own papers, summarising long documents that are not confidential, and tidying up spelling and grammar.
- **Suggesting** the kinds of organisation that might help. Then use this Guide, not the AI tool, to find the actual service, its contact details and whether it can take your case.

Where AI goes wrong

These are the most common and avoidable mistakes:

- **Treating an answer as legal advice.** AI tools predict plausible text. They do not know your facts, and they can be wrong, out of date, or silent about something important. Many were trained on material up to a fixed date and may not know the current law. They often state the law of England or of another country without saying so, and they often confuse what is reserved to Westminster with what is devolved to Holyrood. Asking the tool whether its answer applies in Scotland does not solve this, because it can be wrong about that too. Many problems come with time limits. Do not rely on an AI tool to tell you whether you are in time.
- **Trusting names, cases, laws, telephone numbers and web addresses.** AI tools sometimes invent them. UK courts have criticised lawyers and party litigants who put non-existent legal authorities before them. Check each one against an official source.
- **Typing in private information.** That includes names, addresses, health details, immigration or benefits details, and the facts of a case. Removing a name does not always make information anonymous. If a person can still be identified, it is still personal data. An AI tool may also be open to attack, and information fed into it can in some cases be drawn out again.
- **Believing a confident answer.** Fluent, plausible writing is easy to over-trust. Build in a habit of checking, above all for anything that will go to a court, tribunal, public body or another lawyer. Do not send AI-written material to any of them unless a person has read it, checked every fact and statement of law, and is ready to answer for it. Responsibility stays with the person who signs or sends it.
- **Using AI to decide who gets help.** Do not use an AI tool to judge eligibility for legal aid, a benefit or a service, or to rank, filter or turn away people who ask for help. Such decisions need human judgement and a way to challenge them.
- **Believing the label.** A tool that calls itself an “AI lawyer”, or promises a certain outcome, is not a lawyer. A chatbot owes you no duty of confidentiality or care, carries no professional insurance, and answers to no professional regulator.
- **Forgetting its blind spots.** These tools learn from uneven material. They

tend to do less well with dialects, languages other than English, and the lives of minority communities, and they can repeat bias. A person in distress needs a person to talk to, not a machine.

- **Overlooking the scammers.** The same tools make scams easier. Convincing emails, texts, voicemails and cloned voices can appear to come from a colleague, an official, a constituent or a lawyer. Check any unusual request, especially one to reset a password, send money or send documents, by a second route.

Who should do what

- **Members of the public.** AI may be used to prepare, not to decide. The free services in this Guide will want to hear your version of the problem, not the machine's. If you do use AI, leave out details that identify you or other people. If your problem has a deadline, such as an appeal or a tribunal time limit, speak to an adviser promptly. If you represent yourself, you remain responsible for what you put before a court or tribunal.
- **Legal providers: duties.** Your professional duties apply in full, whatever tool you use. For solicitors, the Law Society of Scotland's Practice Rules on independence, confidentiality and competence all bear on AI use. For advocates, the Faculty's Guide to Conduct does the same. In short: do not let a tool dictate your advice, do not outsource your judgement to it, and be able to assess for yourself whether its output is useful and appropriate. Verify every authority and statement of law. Supervise AI-assisted work as you would a trainee's. But remember that the particular checks you use for a trainee may not fit, because a tool's errors differ from a person's.
- **Legal providers: client information.** Keep confidential and personal information out of public tools. A private tool is acceptable only if you have a written contract that keeps your data confidential and bars its use to train other models, you have satisfied yourself on security and on where the data is held, and you have the data protection terms in place. Consider whether data is to be sent outside the UK and the EEA. Check your professional indemnity cover as well. Insurers have said that cover continues where AI use complies with the rules, but it does not extend to the tool's supplier.
- **Legal providers: openness and organisation.** You need not tell a client that you used AI for routine drafting or research where no confidential information was entered, unless your terms of engagement require it. But ask whether the client would expect to know. Tell the client where confidential information is used, where a tool does a significant part of the work, where you cannot check all of its output (large-scale document review, for example), or where its use affects cost. Update your terms of engagement to say so. Adopt and follow a written best practice policy

covering what AI may and may not be used for, how output is checked, and what training staff and volunteers must complete.

- **MPs, MSPs and caseworkers.** Constituent enquiries often hold sensitive personal data, and you are responsible for it under data protection law. Do not paste a constituent's details into a public AI tool. Use only tools your office or parliament has approved. Limit AI to general tasks, such as improving the clarity of a draft. Do not let it supply legal advice in a reply; signpost the constituent to the services in this Guide instead. Check whether the issue is reserved or devolved yourself. A person should read and approve every reply, and be alert to fake requests that appear to come from senior colleagues.
- **Front-line organisations.** Be open about when and how you use AI in your services, and say what happens to the data. Seek informed consent before offering an AI tool to the people you serve, and be able to explain in simple terms how it works. If you put an AI tool on your website, say prominently that it does not give legal advice and explain what is done with the data. Always give a clear route to contact with a person and, where you can, a service with no AI in it. Test outputs with the people you serve, including those who speak languages other than English. Train staff and volunteers, and weigh the environmental cost of heavy use.

Before you rely on an AI answer

Ask five questions. Does it say which country's law it means, and is that Scots law? Can I find the same answer in an official source or in this Guide? Have I left out private details? Has a person checked it? Could I explain to the person affected how I reached it? If the answer to any of these is no, stop and ask an adviser.

Further reading

The Law Society of Ireland compile resources from the UK, Ireland, the American Bar Association, and the International Bar Association: https://lawsociety.libguides.com/AI/professional-guidance.

From the Law Society of Scotland: https://www.lawscot.org.uk/media/pl1lnu5n/ai-guide.pdf

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Please help us improve this Guide.
Email your comments, additions or corrections to:
guide@probonocommittee.uk.