

### ***Pro bono – what's in it for students?***

With the introduction of tribunal fees, ever-increasing court costs, and dwindling public confidence in the legal system, pro bono work is more important than ever.

Whilst the case for the utility of pro bono for the aggrieved has been made extensively, this essay considers how the volunteers may benefit themselves in the process.

To the careerist, it offers necessary work experience to compliment applications for training contracts and pupillages. With attrition rates for career progression being as grueling as ever (most notably in the case of the bar), pro bono work offers the aspiring lawyer a chance to apply their academics to real problems. In the current recruitment climate, work experience and a commitment to the legal profession has become a prerequisite, not a bonus. Fortunately, pro bono work offers both, and is a valuable asset to any pragmatic law student.

Though it's easy to get lost in the intricacies of implied terms and the construction of contracts, practical law is often very different to academic law. Therefore, for the enthusiast, exposure to real cases and the ability to assist and advise both collaboratively and autonomously is an excellent learning tool and will invariably help cement essential legal principles in the context of tangible problems.

However, there is a strong enthusiasm for pro bono work amongst the qualified, and if the above were the predominant reasons for offering pro bono aid, there would be little appetite amongst today's professionals.

*Pro bono essay competition – Highly Commended*

Pro bono work to the existentialist is the *raison d'être*, and transcends the divide between law students and professionals. For those that live and love the law, pro bono does not burden the volunteer with *having* to work; it gifts them with *getting* to work. It allows the long hours spent in the library, the years of debt following extortionate professional qualification fees, and the mountain of extra-curricular obligations required to succeed as a lawyer to be mere afterthoughts for the student. It puts billing targets, requisitions and awkward clients in perspective for professionals.

Most candid individuals would surely agree that the inner monologue of insecurity and neuroses experienced on a daily basis is enough to make any unlucky listener deeply uncomfortable – professional and personal problems occupy a greater amount of our thoughts than anyone would care to admit. The most valuable reward of all to the aspiring (or qualified) lawyer is the validation and assurance that one's skills can benefit society and improve the lives of those that have exhausted their own efforts. There is no better way to ensure your own peace of mind than to ensure another's. Therein is the affirmation that your endeavours are worthwhile, and your inner Sartre can be silenced for a time.

Pro bono work is what the volunteer makes of it: a tool for career development, a means of broadening their legal education, or the process by which one can begin to practice as they one day aspire to – prior to even completing legal education.

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