

The University of Law
Small Business Advice Clinic

Name of project	Small Business Advice Line (SBAL)
Delivered by	The University of Law
Type of work / opportunity	Commercial & business law advice to small businesses and start-ups Mentoring / discussion with students volunteering
Topic area	Commercial / corporate law Contract law / intellectual property / company law
What is it?	A pro bono legal advice clinic providing one-off advice calls for small businesses and start-ups on commercial and business law issues.
Where is it?	Primarily virtual, with clinics arranged according to supporting lawyer preference and availability.
Duration	Up to 45 minutes per client advice call. If time allows, the assisting lawyers are then asked to speak to the students to answer any questions regarding the advice given, the essential soft skills demonstrated (such as client care and communication) and also questions they will inevitably be keen to ask about career paths.
Frequency	Flexible and determined by volunteer lawyer availability; a common commitment is 1 hour per month. Even a one-hour clinic per month provides meaningful support to small businesses and start-ups.
Who is the opportunity open to?	Any solicitor with 3 years + PQE in addition to relevant and sufficient experience in respect of individual cases. Trainees / interns may support. Trainees may advise if directly supervised in the clinic by a solicitor with 3 years PQE as noted above.
What expertise does the lawyer need to have?	Commercial or corporate law expertise, ideally in areas such as contracts, IP, finance, company law, or GDPR.
What do the pro bono volunteers do?	Provide specialist legal advice in areas including contract law, intellectual property, company law, finance, and GDPR. Lawyers advise one client per clinic session and, where time permits, discuss the advice, client care, communication, and career insights with observing students.
Insurance position	The University of Law provides full insurance and indemnity for all volunteer lawyers.
Other support from organisation/charity	The University of Law fully supervises regulatory compliance through its in-house Pro Bono legal team. All administration, client triage, and documentation are managed internally. The University of Law provides a full guidance document for all volunteers

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Fee/cost	None
Contact	Please contact NPBC In House Pro Bono lead mary@dobsonsmith.consulting for a direct introduction
Background to project/scheme	The Small Business Advice Line (SBAL) was launched in Autumn 2021 to address the lack of commercial law pro bono clinics and respond to the rise in small business start-ups following the pandemic. The clinic was designed to fill a gap in access to justice for entrepreneurs and small businesses unable to afford legal advice. SBAL works collaboratively with referral partners including the Business & Intellectual Property Centre, Growth Hub, and LawWorks. It is also supported by a panel of volunteer lawyers from law firms, businesses, and in-house legal teams, including Disney in-house lawyers. Key partnerships, such as with Shoosmiths in the Midlands, demonstrate the strength of the collaborative model. The University of Law's team of 12 in-house practising lawyers ensures full regulatory compliance and supervises students, who play a key role in triaging clients, preparing paperwork, drafting attendance notes, and observing client care and communication in practice. The clinic's fourfold vision is to: plug a gap in pro bono services for small businesses; provide high-quality support to clients; enhance student legal and professional skills; and embed pro bono into legal education. Client satisfaction is exceptionally high, with 100% of survey respondents rating both legal advice and overall service 5/5. Student satisfaction averages 4.75/5, with students reporting significant development in drafting, research, communication, and client-facing skills. SBAL challenges the traditional focus of pro bono work by recognising the urgent need for commercial legal advice among entrepreneurs, those newly entering the market, and businesses lacking resources to obtain support.