

University House (Legal Advice Centre)
Disability Benefit Advocacy Project

Name of project	Disability Benefit Advocacy Project
Delivered by	University House (Legal Advice Centre)
Type of work / opportunity	End-to-end casework
Topic area	Welfare Benefits Law & Practice.
What is it?	Helping users to submit appeals to the First-tier Tribunals. The key to success for these cases is the production of credible and well-argued submissions.
Where is it?	Project is virtual. FFT hearings are also mostly remote.
Duration	The time commitment for each case varies between 5 to 10 hours depending on the case complexity.
Frequency	Commitment is flexible. This is not a fixed clinic.
Who is the opportunity open to?	Any trained lawyer (USA/UK qualified) and trainees. Works best in 'pairs'. Normally, law firms allocate two lawyers per case, often twinning a junior associate with someone more experienced.
What expertise does the lawyer need to have?	No previous knowledge of relevant law is required. Full training and supervision provided.
What do the pro bono volunteers do?	They use existing lawyerly skills to trawl together available evidence and produce a robust submission to the FTT.
Insurance position	Our own insurance fully covers all our volunteers.
Other support from organisation/charity	We provide training and supervision to ensure the success of this project. Training involves providing access to our training materials (including videos, templates and guidance) and then following this up with a breakfast or lunchtime Q&A training session. As for supervision, we review all tribunal submissions before they are submitted.
Fee/cost	Yes, minimum annual donation for an organisation to take part in the clinic is £8K.
Contact	Please contact NPBC In House Pro Bono lead mary@dobsonsmith.consulting for a direct introduction
Background to project/scheme	As a result of the UK Government's welfare reforms, we are inundated with clients seeking help with appeals against the stoppage of Employment & Support Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and

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	Personal Independence Payments. These clients tend to be vulnerable, and often have complex health and social needs. The Government's actions prompted us to create our Advocacy Project. The project involves training volunteer lawyers to undertake disability benefit appeals to the First-tier tribunal. So far, we have trained more than 500 volunteer lawyers from 20 law firms on how to conduct such appeals, and the success rate of the appeals is running at over 85%. One of the reasons our partner law firms appreciate this project so much is that there is no obligation on their part. Once we have trained a volunteer lawyer, we then place them on our email 'advocates' list. When we receive a Notice of Hearing, we send the details out using this list, and it is up to the 'advocates' whether they bid for the case. In practice, each case receives at least one bid, and we place appeals with the advocates depending on who placed their bid first. It works very well.
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