



PDSO internship – assessing the benefits

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Report author

David Sinclair, Head of Office, PDSO Dundee

Overview

The first ever six-month paid, part-time Public Defence Solicitors' Office internship was recently completed at Dundee PDSO. It was the first of its kind and was intended as a test for the viability an internship programme.

I have prepared this report to assess the benefits from this recent experience.

The report looks at how the personal account given by the intern of their experience aligns with the job description and person specification that we advertised.

It also explores the intern's appreciation of the opportunity and the impact of the experience on their legal career aspirations.

This report will inform whether there is benefit – to both the organisation and potential incumbents – in repeating this opportunity and, if so, any improvements which might be made.

Alignment with job description

The job description describes a paid six-month, part-time internship where the intern supports solicitors in criminal legal defence work.

The opportunity was targeted at individuals currently studying for the Diploma in Legal Practice.

The duties focussed on observing court processes, preparing case files, conducting legal research, and interacting with clients and witnesses.

The personal account aligns with many of these responsibilities as follows:

1. Court observations:

Intern personal account: The intern describes spending considerable time observing custody appearances, bail hearings, deferred sentences, intermediate diets, and trials at Dundee, Perth, and Forfar Sheriff Courts.

Job description: This aligns closely with the job description's emphasis on shadowing solicitors in court and learning about criminal case proceedings.

2. Case preparation:

Intern personal account: The intern's tasks included reviewing witness statements, taking precognitions, drafting defence statements, and reviewing CCTV and police interviews.

Job description: These duties match the job description's mention of assisting with case preparation, processing disclosure documents, and undertaking legal research. The intern spent a great deal of time perusing statements and viewing Video Recorded Interviews.

3. Interaction with legal professionals:

Intern personal account: The personal account highlights meetings with Procurator Fiscal Deputes, court officers, defence agents, and counsel, as well as visits to prisons.

Job description: This is consistent with the job specification's focus on working alongside a committed team and building networks within the legal justice system. The intern's ability to act as instructing agent with counsel was invaluable as a resource to the office, and very helpful in building relationships with professionals outwith the organisation.

4. Client interaction:

Intern personal account: The intern discussed cases and appeals with counsel and met accused persons and witnesses, which is an integral part of understanding client needs.

Job description: This fits with the job description's emphasis on meeting with clients and attending police stations as part of the defence process.

5. Legal research:

Intern personal account: The intern performed legal research and participated in drafting necessary legal documents for the cases. A great deal of time was spent perusing statements and preparing priceless legal research on some topics (s.23 drug searches, borderline s5(1)(a) offences, pleas to relevancy in respect of lack of specification).

Job description: This aspect is explicitly mentioned in the job specification, where interns are expected to carry out legal research to support case preparation.

Personal appreciation for the internship opportunity

The intern's personal account emphasises several key areas where the intern felt appreciative of the internship opportunity:

1. Skill development and hands-on experience:

- The intern valued the exposure to a wide range of legal tasks, many of which are typical of a criminal defence trainee's role. The hands-on experience provided a deep understanding of how defence solicitors work.
- The intern appreciated how the tasks, though initially daunting, helped them gain confidence and practical skills.

2. Insight into the Criminal Justice System:

- The opportunity to observe court proceedings, visit prisons, and interact with various professionals provided invaluable insight into the challenges of criminal defence work. This real-world exposure prepared the intern for a future career in criminal law. Exposure to new initiatives within Dundee ought to stand the intern in good stead as schemes get rolled out nationwide.

3. Supportive environment:

- The intern refers to the supportive nature of the PDSO Dundee office. They noted that the team went out of their way to ensure a varied and beneficial experience, which contributed to their overall growth. Very pleasing to hear from our point of view that we have helped in this way.

4. Connection to broader legal aid services:

- The intern appreciated attending the Client Legal Services (CLS) conference, where they met colleagues from other PDSO offices, learned more about the other legal services within CLS (Civil Legal Assistance Office and Solicitor Contact Line) and the work of other Scottish Legal Aid Board directorates.
- This broadened their understanding of the wider legal aid system in Scotland and highlighted its importance in helping people access the legal support they need.

5. Career preparation:

- Ultimately, the intern felt that this experience was one of the most valuable in their legal career to date, significantly enhancing their preparation for a career in criminal law. They expressed gratitude to SLAB and PDSO Dundee for the opportunity and hoped to be the first of many successful interns.

Conclusion

The intern's personal account strongly aligns with the duties and expectations set out in the job description for the PDSO internship. They appreciated the opportunity for professional growth, gaining practical skills and valuable insights into criminal defence work, and were particularly grateful for the supportive environment at PDSO Dundee. The experience has had a profound impact on their career trajectory, furthering their interest and preparation for a career in criminal law.

David Sinclair

Head of Office

PDSO Dundee