

Children’s Sexual Offence Legal Adviser (CSOLA)

Information for Applicants



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Background to the Sexual Offences Legal Adviser Project

**Sexual Offences Legal Adviser (SOLA)**:

Victim Support NI has been asked by the Department of Justice (DoJ) to establish a scheme to provide publicly funded, independent legal advice and advocacy to child complainants in serious sexual offence cases. This is an extension of the current pathfinder scheme launched in April 2021 for adult complainants. The main purpose of the SOLA role is to prepare and provide sound, informed, pre-trial legal advice to complainants in serious sexual offence cases as they navigate the criminal justice system.

The post-holder will manage a caseload and provide direct service to clients pre-report or from the point that an offence is reported throughout the process up to the commencement of the trial.

**Background to Project:**

At present, there is no publicly funded legal aid for complainants in Northern Ireland, and a lawyer representing complainants has no right of audience at a trial for serious sexual offences.

The 2019 report of the [Gillen Review of the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/gillen-review-report-law-and-procedures-serious-sexual-offences-ni) noted that a recurring criticism heard from complainants is that they often feel that they themselves are placed on trial as well as the accused. Providing legal advice and advocacy to complainants to support them through the criminal justice process can be effective at reducing secondary trauma, reducing attrition and enhancing confidence in the criminal justice system. It has overwhelming support from the public and victims’ groups.

You can read Victim Support NI’s response to the Gillen Report here:

[**https://www.victimsupportni.com/2019/02/11/our-gillen-report-response/**](https://www.victimsupportni.com/2019/02/11/our-gillen-report-response/)

*What did the Review say?*

The Gillen Review recommended that:

publicly funded legal representation should be granted to all complainants in all serious sexual offence cases in the following circumstances:

* *to afford relevant information and general legal advice on a time limited basis throughout the process up to the commencement of the trial, with the option of bringing such matters to the attention of the court prior to trial;*
* *where complainants wish, to exercise the right to appear in court to object to disclosure of private material to the accused’s defence team or to ensure it is restricted to the minimum necessary; and*
* *where complainants wish, to appear in court to object to the introduction of their previous sexual history.*

In April 2021 the DoJ, in response to this recommendation and in partnership with criminal justice partners, established a pathfinder project, delivered by Victim Support NI, to provide to adult complainants in serious sexual offence cases only:

* + A basic entitlement to relevant information and legal advice from the point of a report being made;
	+ specific legal advice and advocacy on disclosure of evidence in respect of personal information that would engage an individual’s Article 8 rights under the ECHR (including, but not limited to both medical and counselling records, as well as any personal digital information, for example, phone records); and
	+ specific legal advice in respect of the introduction of previous sexual history.

The legal advice provided under this scheme is uncapped. The advocacy role allows legal advisers to advocate directly with the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), and, with the permission of the judge in pre-trial application hearings, on behalf of their clients, to ensure that the complainant’s views are represented when decisions are made by the PPS.

HOW TO APPLY

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION CAREFULLY BEFORE COMPLETING THE APPLICATION FORM

**Applications and attached sheets CV’s:**

* Applications will only be accepted on Victim Support NI application forms. CVs will not be considered.
* It is the responsibility of all applicants to clearly demonstrate – in their application form – exactly how they meet the essential (and desirable if applicable) criteria for the post as stated. Failure to do so may result in not being short-listed.
* Attached sheets – within the 500 word per criterion limit – will only be considered where they are continuation sheets of a section of the Application Form where insufficient room was available to include all the necessary details.
* All information provided by an applicant on an application form must be true and accurate. Any application forms containing information that is discovered to be untrue or inaccurate will not be accepted. If an appointment has already been made, it may result in disqualification from appointment or dismissal.
* Applications submitted by email will require a handwritten signature at interview.
* Applications must be received by the designated deadline (time and date). Those applications received after the designated deadline will not be accepted.
* Completed applications should be emailed to recruitment@victimsupportni.org.uk OR by post to the HR Department, Victim Support, Albany House, 73-75 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, BT2 7AF.
* **Please note that it is our policy to communicate with applicants primarily by email, so we ask that you check your email account regularly to avoid missing any emails**.

**Essential and Desirable Criteria**

* Essential and Desirable criteria are a vital part of your application. Read the Job Description and Personnel Specification carefully before completing this section and base your supporting evidence on the Essential and Desirable criteria.
* It is essential that you demonstrate by providing personal and specific details – within the word limit - how you meet the essential criteria, otherwise you may not be shortlisted.
* It is not sufficient to simply state that you possess the criteria – you must fully demonstrate in your responses, by outlining your experience and qualifications.

It is recommended that you use the following S.T.A.R model to describe how your experience is relevant to the essential and desirable criteria:

**Situation:**

Describe a specific example that relates to the criteria

**Task:**

Explain the context or background to the example. What were the particular circumstances etc. What was your role or task, who else was involved?

**Action:**

Outline the specific actions you took to address the task and situation.

**Result:**

Describe the result or outcome of your actions. Consider if, with hindsight, your actions were correct; what, if, anything would you do differently now; and what have you learnt from this experience.

For further information on the STAR method please see the link below:

[The S.T.A.R method (nationalcareers.service.gov.uk)](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/interview-advice/the-star-method)

**Selection and Interviews**

* Where a high volume of applications is received, desirable criteria may be relied upon during shortlisting.
* The interview process may include the use of selection tests in addition to a panel interview.
* Candidates shortlisted for interview will be advised of the interview process via email.
* At interview candidates will be questioned about their experience regarding the main functions of this post.
* The interview panel will assess all candidates based on performance during selection tests and at interview.
* Should you require reasonable adjustments when attending interview, please let us know to ensure we can accommodate your needs wherever possible.

**Waiting Lists**

* A waiting list **may** be retained for a period of 12 months for future permanent and temporary vacancies for similar positions.

The Role

**JOB SPECIFICATION**

**Title:** Children’sSexual Offence Legal Adviser (CSOLA)

**Responsible To:** Head of Advocacy Services and Projects

**Location:** The post base can be decided upon appointment

Belfast Hub - Albany House, 73-74 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, BT2 7AF

OR

Foyle Hub - 6th Floor Embassy Building, 3 Strand Road, Foyle, BT48 7BH

Candidates may be requested to attend other venues as necessitated by the needs of the

business

**Hours of Work:** 37.5 Hours per week Monday to Friday

Candidates may be required to work additional hours including alternative shift patterns when authorised and as necessitated by the needs of the business.

**Duration:** Fixed Term Contract 30th November 2025 - with possibility of extension, subject to funding.

**Salary:** £39,553 FTE per annum

**Equal Opportunities**: We are an equal opportunities employer. We welcome applications from all suitably qualified persons. However, as Black and Minority ethnic groups, disabled people and people from the LGBT community are currently under-represented within the organisation, we would particularly welcome applications from the above-mentioned communities and backgrounds. All appointments will be made on merit.

**Purpose:**

Victim Support NI supports people affected by crime in NI. We are recruiting for CSOLA’s as a part of a project scheme to provide publicly funded independent legal advice and advocacy to child complainants in serious sexual offence cases.

The main purpose of the role is to prepare and provide informed legal advice to child complainants in serious sexual offence cases as they navigate the criminal justice system, in a way that is accessible and age appropriate to children and young people aged under 18. The post-holder will manage a caseload and provide direct service to clients and their families from the point that an offence is reported throughout the process up to the commencement of the trial. They may also on occasion provide advice to victims who are considering reporting a crime.

While it is important to emphasise that this role will be based within Victim Support NI it is also very important that applicants appreciate that this is a legal appointment requiring highly relevant experience.

**Dimensions:**

Direct Reports: Nil

Budget responsibility: Nil

**Main Responsibilities:**

* Prepare and provide relevant legal advice, information, and their role and entitlements to child complainants in serious sexual offence cases, pre-report or from the point of referral following the report of a relevant offence, in a way that is accessible and age appropriate to Children and Young People (CYP), their parents and guardians.
* Prepare and provide case-specific legal advice, as required, on disclosure of evidence where personal information would engage a CYP complainant’s ECHR Article 8 rights and on the introduction of previous sexual history.
* Represent and communicate the interests and views of CYP complainants to PPS in respect of issues relating to the disclosure of evidence engaging Article 8 rights or where the CYP complainant wishes to object to the introduction of their previous sexual history.
* Subject to the necessary management direction, prepare instructions to seek Counsel advice where that is considered appropriate and in the public interest in individual cases.
* Support the empowerment of CYP victims in a trauma-informed way, by delivering an adaptable and flexible service with a clear child-centred focus. Ensure that the CYP victim’s voice is heard and taken account of and that their views are represented to PPS or other parties, so they may be taken account of, as appropriate.
* Demonstrable awareness of the entitlements of CYP within the [Victim Charter](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/victim-charter) and working with the ChISVA in ensuring the CYP victim is aware of and understand their entitlements.
* Where appropriate, liaise with PSNI, PPS and the Victim and Witness Care Unit (VWCU) regarding any on-going complaint, in order to track progress through the criminal justice system.
* Occasionally, and where appropriate, observe or attend pre-trial hearings.
* Provide advice to parents and designated appropriate adults, helping them to help their CYP understand the criminal justice process.
* Ensure that at all stages of the CYP complainant’s engagement, services are undertaken in a victim led, trauma informed manner with the needs of the CYP placed at the centre of all actions and decisions.
* Ensure that all engagements are conducted in an appropriate manner according to the age and needs of the CYP, including directly to the CYP and in premises approved and accredited as appropriate for CYP support.
* Ensure that all support is undertaken in conjunction with the provisions of the Statutory Services and avoid, as far is ever possible, duplication of services.
* Prioritise, manage and monitor own caseload effectively within safe capacity limits, ensuring that each CYP victim receives a service appropriate to their individual needs, as agreed in conjunction with the CYP and their parent / appropriate adult and refer/signpost to other relevant support services as required.
* Ensure safeguarding is prioritised and timely referrals are made in line with local Safeguarding policy and procedures, including keeping any on-going Joint Operating Protocols appraised of changes to safety, risk and service engagement.
* Demonstrate a clear understanding of the myths and facts of sexual violence, domestic violence, rape trauma and the long-term mental health implications particularly on CYP.
* Undertake any other duties that fall within the nature of the role and its responsibilities.
* Contribute to effective information gathering and monitoring performance to facilitate operational and strategic development and evaluation of the pilot; record statistics in line with service provider and funder requirements (anonymised where appropriate)
* Engage with internal and external stakeholders, including the media to promote the experience of victims and effect positive change
* Maintain electronic case management records to a high standard ensuring they are accurate, completed in a timely fashion and follow confidentiality policies and procedures.
* Comply with GDPR, data protection legislation, confidentiality and information sharing policy and procedures and legislation connected to the legal advisor role. Remain up to date and compliant with organisational procedures, policies and professional codes of conduct and uphold standards of best practice.
* Support the promotion of the service with statutory and voluntary partners to help improve the multi-agency response to victims of serious sexual offences.
* Travel to other Victim Support NI Office locations and outreach locations, where we provide support service will be expected.
* Full compliance with all financial, HR and other VSNI corporate responsibilities.
* Ensure that all Victim Support policies, particularly those relating to Confidentiality, Health & Safety and Equal Opportunities are applied consistently.

***The above detail of main responsibilities is not intended to be an exhaustive listing and the post-holder may be expected to accept additional / amended responsibilities in line with the organisation’s needs. Such additions / amendments will be in line with the capabilities of the post-holder.***

**Essential Criteria:**

**Qualifications and Experience**

* University level degree, or equivalent, in law or another relevant subject.

And must;

* Be a qualified solicitor or barrister who holds a current NI practicing certificate OR be on the Roll of solicitors in NI and eligible to obtain a NI practicing certificate by the date of appointment.
* Be qualified to practice in Northern Ireland with a minimum of three years’ post-qualification experience gained within the last five years.

**Knowledge and Skills:**

* Have proven substantial experience of providing legal advice in a criminal law setting to children and young people with a range of age, comprehension and vulnerability.
* Have proven experience of managing large caseloads in respect of advice, review and advocacy, including challenging and sensitive cases.
* Have a demonstrable track record of exceptional client care; and
* Experience of working with organisational information systems.
* Excellent verbal and listening skills and the ability to communicate well with a wide range of people from a wide range of diverse backgrounds, including children and young people.
* Demonstrable knowledge of the criminal justice system, court and police procedures and how these relate to sexual offences and in particular children and young people;
* Demonstrable understanding of safeguarding protocols and familiarisation with the roles of agencies and services involved in cases where child protection issues are raised and the associated legal responsibilities.
* Demonstrate an understanding of the Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview process and the requirements for victim care and evidence gathering and presentation.
* Experience of supporting victims and a commitment to anti-discriminatory practice.
* Awareness of the HSCT/PSNI Joint Protocol for investigating allegations of child abuse.
* Current knowledge of the enhanced protection children and adolescents have under the criminal law in NI, specifically in relation to the ‘best interests of the child’ principle;
* A working understanding of the Youth Court will also be essential as peer-on-peer offences are frequently prosecuted in this court, its sentencing powers are both complicated and unique.
* Excellent written communication skills including report writing.
* Good crisis management skills and the ability to work effectively under pressure and to deadlines.
* Ability to manage own workload and prioritise tasks; and
* Experience of representing an organisation and its interests with a range of key internal and external stakeholders.

**Desirable Criteria:**

In addition to the above essential criteria, the following additional desirable criteria may be used to shortlist applicants:

* Previous experience of providing legal advice in respect of serious sexual offence cases in Northern Ireland;
* Previous experience of providing legal advice in relation to Article 8 ECHR rights; and
* Experience of working with the media.

We reserve the right to enhance the criteria as deemed appropriate in the event of a large volume of applications.

**Additional Requirements:**

* The post holder will be required to demonstrate the ability to meet the mobility requirements of the post.
* The post holder will be required to undertake child Safeguarding training and regularly refresh on an ongoing basis, skills in communication with children and young people and being aware of their rights under the UNCRC etc.

Background Information

Victim Support has focused on addressing the harm caused to victims and witnesses of crime since 1981. On a daily basis we witness the impact of crime and the Criminal Justice System can have on an individual, their family, friends, and the local community.

Our Redress, Restore, Recover strategy for 2020-24 builds on our past successes, sets out what changes we wish to see and what we as an organisation will focus on to help achieve this.

It aims to address the recovery and wellbeing needs of victims and witnesses by addressing the harm and vulnerability caused by crime. It broadens our focus on the justice journey to include the wider recovery journey and needs of victims of crime.

Please find below the links to our Strategy on the website and on YouTube showing an animation explaining the Strategy.

**Website:** <https://www.victimsupportni.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Strategy-document-2020-24.pdf>



**YouTube:** <https://youtu.be/pDRNwBT4hsc>

Our Vision & Values

A society that ensures tailored support and information is available for people affected by crime

The long-term vision of our organisation is of..

Our mission is to..

Reduce the harm caused by crime and advance the rights of victims and witnesses of crime in Northern Ireland



Our core values of Integrity, Respect & Compassion allow us to respond to the needs of victims and witnesses, providing tailored support, enabling them to recover and move on from the impact of crime. We will help victims to seek redress when their needs are not met. We will uphold and promote the rights of victims and witnesses, and will campaign for a cross governmental approach to address the harm and vulnerability caused by crime.