



PDSO internship (Falkirk) – assessing the benefits

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Report Author

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Overview

The second PDSO internship was recently completed at PDSO Falkirk. This was a six-week, full time, paid position commencing 21 July and ending on 29 August 2025. This internship was offered as a Grade 3 position.

Scope of report

This report will assess how the personal account given by the intern of his experience aligns with the Job Description and Person Specification advertised.

It will explore the intern's appreciation of the opportunity afforded him by SLAB and PDSO, and the impact, if any, upon his career aspirations.

The report will also seek to identify benefits to the organisation and individuals of this opportunity.

Recruitment for intern post

It was envisaged that the intern would be a law graduate, and about to commence the Diploma in Legal Practice, or already have completed the Diploma. The position was advertised externally, and on LinkedIn. There were 51 applications for the role, and nine candidates were interviewed. Three were put forward to a second round of interview and the successful candidate was selected following that.

It is notable that one of the unsuccessful, second round candidates applied because of information given to him about PDSO at a university Law Fair. That candidate also followed up and asked for a shadowing experience, which was successfully completed. Both unsuccessful second round candidates asked for, and were given, interview feedback. Both were very positive regarding their interview experience.

The successful candidate graduated in early July 2025 with an LLB and returned to university to undertake his Diploma in Legal Practice after the summer. He attended a Law Fair at the University of Aberdeen in the autumn and gave his support to CLS colleagues there.

Alignment with Job Description

The Job Description outlines a part time, fixed term (up to six months) role. It was envisaged that the successful candidate could have a choice of two work patterns. Firstly, they could choose to do one day a week for a period of six months, or if they preferred, could opt for the second option of a full time, six-week placement in the Falkirk office. The successful candidate chose the second option and worked at Falkirk PDSO for a continuous six weeks over the summer of 2025.

1. Build knowledge of PDSO and the criminal justice system

The intern attended at all levels of courts from the JP Court through to the High Court. He observed every stage of the criminal justice court process from custody appearances, bail hearings,

intermediate diets, trials and summary case management hearings. He attended Sheriff and JP courts in Stirling, Alloa, Falkirk and Glasgow. He also attended the High Courts in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

He visited HMPs Edinburgh, Polmont, Low Moss and Glenochil alongside legal colleagues to meet with clients.

He visited The State Hospital in Carstairs to meet clients.

He attended two Examination of Facts, and one in person Parole Board Hearing.

Intern personal account: I have seen a wide range of things with people from PDSO, which has given me a really good grasp of the job and allowed me to see all the things a criminal court solicitor does. I would be involved in everything from seeing clients in the cells, to discussions with the Crown besides watching the actual court appearances, so it was fully shadowing the solicitor and *[observing]* everything they would do.

Job Description: This aligns closely with the job description of observing and shadowing solicitors undertaking a range of duties.

2. Support Solicitors with case preparation

The intern attended at client meetings and consultations with clients and Counsel. He attended at a Hearing of Evidence on Commission at the High Court (although the judge refused the request to allow him to sit in a remote room). He perused Crown Disclosure and viewed digital evidence. He produced perusal notes for files and analysed sufficiency of evidence for solicitor colleagues. He carried out a piece of research on the application of s274 and s275 of the Criminal Procedure (Sc) Act and the up-to-date cases.

Intern personal account: We'd be at court in the mornings and in the afternoons. We would look through witness statements, evidence and CCTV. We would prepare cases in advance. It was really interesting seeing how a case comes together, which meant that I could better understand what was happening in court.

Job Description: This aligns closely with the job description of supporting solicitors in case preparation by processing disclosure and assisting with file checks.

3. Legal Research

The Intern undertook legal research in respect of current files, and ensuring any up-to-date case law was placed on files. He used Linets to assist with this. He produced a piece of research on the law of evidence in sexual cases.

Intern personal account: I did a large piece of work researching s274 and s275 of the Criminal Procedure (Sc) Act. I also did some research into s38 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Sc) Act and its aggravations

Job Description: This aligns with job description of undertaking legal research to assist solicitors and ensure files have legislation and relevant case law.

Intern's personal appreciation for the opportunity

1. Supportive environment: The intern described his Falkirk colleagues as a tight knit group who were very supportive to each other but to him as well. They were always happy to give advice

and share experience and always explained procedures and evidence to him. Colleagues from other offices in Ayr and Glasgow gave opportunities to shadow them when they had interesting cases calling, and the two network solicitors were consistently generous with their time and expertise.

2. **Connection to other legal professionals:** The local private bar gave advice and help to the intern, as did partners in COPFS and Faculty colleagues. The intern enjoyed having exposure to some of the many roles the criminal justice sector offers.
3. **Insight into the criminal justice system :** The intern was given exposure to many parts of the criminal justice system, including procedure that is relatively uncommon, such as Examination of Facts and Parole Hearings. He found the work varied and interesting and commented that every day was different. He enjoyed the diverse nature of the work, and the impossibility of predicting what a day will bring. He enjoyed working in many different environments, from court rooms, consulting rooms, prisons, police stations and hospitals. The work was more diverse, more varied and more interesting than he had anticipated.
4. **Skills development and experience:** The intern is now ahead of the curve in his legal education for the Diploma. Although the Diploma in Legal Practice is designed to be more practical and skills based rather than the academic focus of the LLB, it can never mirror the real impact of access to the courts on an operational level. Our new Summary Case Management System was, and still is, being rolled out across Scotland and was an extremely new process when the Falkirk intern was exposed to it. The study of Legal Practice at university level by definition will lag behind the practical implementation of a new system in the courts, and it is to be expected that universities will await the empirical data which will not, and cannot, be available in real time. The intern attended many Case Management Hearings. He gained experience in meeting clients and taking instructions, even appearing to form a bond with a client, currently remanded, whose date of birth was very close to the intern's. Both reflected on the different paths life had taken them. He prepared Pleas in Mitigation and presented these for Falkirk colleagues in anticipation of this piece of coursework on his Diploma.
5. **Career Aspirations:** The intern had anticipated his career being in civil litigation. He now reports having reconsidered this and is now hopeful of securing a traineeship in criminal defence work. He is very grateful for the opportunity given to him by SLAB and PDSO.

Benefits of hosting an intern

The Falkirk intern elected to work for a six-week period over the summer, which is traditionally a very busy time for casework, coupled with resourcing challenges due to annual leave.

The success of any such opportunity is dependent on a carefully planned programme of activity to ensure that those taking up post are appropriately supported while also being offered varied and interesting experiences to develop their knowledge.

Careful consideration was given to the merits of taking on an intern at such a busy time of year. Given the anticipated value that such a role could add, detailed planning was undertaken to ensure that sufficient time was allocated to make this possible.

The intern's personal account highlights the benefits to him as an individual.

At an office level, the intern played a valuable role in helping to minimise the impact of operational pressures over the summer by assisting in casework, and case preparation. He undertook research and was also able to assist in the perusal of digital evidence, thus freeing up solicitor time to focus on other aspects of case work.

At a system level, it is hoped that providing exposure to criminal defence work - and the criminal defence bar more generally - will help to widen the pool of candidates applying for such roles in future, whether in the public sector or private practice. This is crucial, given anticipated demographic changes coming to the defence bar in Scotland.

It is apparent from his personal account that the intern is now considering a career in criminal law because of his internship experience, confirming the value of first-hand experience.

Conclusion

This has been another successful internship for both the intern and PDSO. PDSO can offer a unique experience to students, given our position within criminal justice as independent criminal defence lawyers with a national voice and scope to influence practice, Scotland-wide.

Internship opportunities are just one strand of our outreach work which aims to attract talented individuals to legally aided work. Through work-based learning opportunities, we can demonstrate that there is a career path in public sector criminal defence work.

Our presence at Law Fairs has also assisted in raising the profile of our work and career opportunities. There is anecdotal evidence from internship candidates who advised at interview that they became aware of PDSO and its work following their own attendance at one of the Law Fairs.

We have now offered two internships – the first in our [Dundee office](#) - both successfully completed. Learning from these initiatives will inform next steps for such roles in future.

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PDSO Falkirk