EFFECTIVE ANIMAL ADVOCACY

The best ways to use your time as a law student - and beyond - to help animals
The most important decisions you’ll ever make...

If you want to use your limited time and resources to maximise your impact for animals, you should plan your time carefully. Planning might take a few hours, but given how much time each of us has in our careers, it’s worth investing those hours; changing your career plan could easily make your impact for animals 10 or 100 times greater. The website 80,000 Hours provides free guides and tools to build considerations of “doing the most good” into your career planning.

For lawyers and law students seeking to maximise their impact to improve the lot of animals, there are several ways you could think about how to use your time and next career steps most effectively:

1. Continue to study/work in legal areas, but use your spare time, skills and money to support effective animal advocacy efforts.

2. Use the career capital you have gained through your legal experience to work full time for animals.

3. Use the career capital you have gained through your legal experience to pivot into another career sector where you think you might have more impact.

Which path is the right one depends on both strategic and personal factors. But you certainly don’t have to wait until you’ve worked out all the answers before getting involved in some of these areas, and you may like to try out many of these options. There’s no shame in pursuing the first option for a while, building up your career capital (see especially the section on “more specific opportunities” below) and then switching, although earlier in your career is often better to try out different opportunities. The rest of this guide will be divided into activities associated with the above three routes.

There are also some useful reflections on the opportunities to do good in general from UK commercial law here.
Career Options

Option 1: Animal advocacy alongside legal work

Broad opportunities that lawyers are especially well-placed to act on

Donating to effective animal charities

If you give to effective charities, you can do a huge amount of good. Lawyers are especially well-placed to donate compared to others, provided that they work in a well-paying part of the profession. This is an especially important issue, given that animal advocacy is probably constrained more by lack of funds than by lack of activists and effort.

And remember, money makes you happier, but only a little - it’s not that important a part of job satisfaction.
Pro bono legal work

Unskilled volunteering can be a drain on resources for charities, whereas skilled volunteering can be extremely helpful. And what is even more the “comparative advantage” of lawyers and law students than donating money? Legal skills and knowledge! Bear in mind, however, that offering legal expertise is only helpful if charities have a need or undersupply of it; otherwise, donating might still be more helpful.

Consider seeking out and helping the most effective animal charities if you want to maximise your impact for animals and think about these ongoing debates within animal advocacy.

There are some legal skill sets that are likely to be more relevant than others when it comes to helping the animal protection community. For example, experience in administrative law could be helpful to groups engaged in policy work or to advise groups considering public law challenges such as judicial review. A public law challenge has the potential to benefit many animals by ensuring that animal protection laws are properly applied and enforced. However, these skills are likely to be more useful to lawyers seeking to incorporate animal law within a general legal practice, as it is usual (and generally advisable) for groups seeking advice about potential public law challenges to engage the services of a solicitor or barrister on a professional basis.

Experience in other areas, such as charity law, commercial contracts, employment and criminal law can also be useful if you are prepared to donate some time to provide pro bono ancillary support to animal protection groups and charities. If you have experience in any of these areas and want to help animal groups, A-law would like to hear from you, as we may be able to put you in touch with charities and voluntary organisations looking for help. Alternatively (or additionally!), a lawyer with these skills might want to get involved with a local animal charity by joining their board of trustees.
Even if you do not have experience in any of these areas, there are opportunities for lawyers with general legal skills to contribute towards legal research, drafting and policy work. A-law helps to harness these skills for the benefit of animal charities and voluntary organisations. If you are interested in using your general legal skills in this way, please become a member and you can sign up as a volunteer.

There are also some senior lawyers who have set up and run animal charities or campaign groups outside their area of professional practice. For example, Duncan McNair, Chair and CEO of Save The Asian Elephant (STAE) and Natalia Chumak, founder of LAPA UK (helping dogs in Russia). It can be difficult to combine a demanding, busy legal career with running a charity or campaign group, but it can also be hugely rewarding.

**Option 2: Work full-time for animals**

*Using your legal skills directly in full-time work*

Whilst still relatively niche, there are some opportunities to work as an animal lawyer. Whilst countries like Canada and the US have had animal law practices for a while now, the UK has recently launched its first fully focused animal protection law firm, Advocates for Animals.

There are also others who practice in animal law as part of a broader practice. There are also those involved in prosecuting animal cruelty cases. In addition, some non-profit organisations may need full-time staff with direct legal knowledge and skills. If your experience lies in criminal law you could consider a career with the Crown Prosecution Service, police wildlife teams or the RSPCA prosecutions team.

There are also some firms who specialise in giving advice about dog law (civil liability, pet ownership, defending prosecutions under the dangerous dogs
legislation etc), although generally such lawyers also work in other areas, rather than exclusively in this one specific practice area.

You might also want to consider a career with the Government Legal Department or relevant statutory bodies concerned with animal interests. Read A-law’s interviews with lawyers, law graduate and legal academics, who have gone onto make a positive contribution to animal protection as part of their career.

Option 3: Pivoting you career

There are a whole host of reasons why you might decide that staying in the legal profession isn’t for you, but neither is working for an animal advocacy non-profit; ideas about personal fit, skills or lifestyle preference. Don’t fear, however, as there may well be opportunities which are even more impactful, where you can make use of the career capital you have developed.
This might include a career in campaigns or policy work for a non-profit, statutory or Government agency, which will all benefit from your legal knowledge and skills.

You might also be attracted to an academic career contributing to important research about animal interest and teaching the next generation. As animal law grows in popularity so too do the opportunities for academics teaching animal law and policy. There are a growing number of academics who incorporate animal law within the undergraduate and post graduate law curriculum and some specialist courses are springing up across the UK.

Here are some different **career path options**, and here’s a handy **career planning tool**. But if you’ve got time, it’s much better to **think through all of the logical steps** of having an impactful career. You might even decide that you can be more impactful by working on a **cause other than animal advocacy**.

**Current opportunities for students to gain experience**

*Research animal law and produce law reports* - These can be fact checked by A-law and form part of a library of information to be shared amongst students and animal groups.

*FOI requests* - These cannot be done in A-law’s name without prior approval, but can be done on behalf of yourself to obtain useful information about how the use of animals is regulated and enforced. The information can be useful for articles and sharing with animal groups.

*Attend animal law conferences* - Attending conferences is a chance to gain knowledge in the area, learn from people working in the field and network with useful contacts. You can find out information on any A-law conferences on the
website or social media. Effective Altruism also hosts regular events, which you can find out about by joining the mailing list.

Promoting A-law content, e.g. Animal Justice UK, the UK Journal of Animal Law, advice notes, Brexit manifesto, blogs via social media - This is a relatively low maintenance tasks, but the reach and exposure that can be given to A-law and animal law more broadly through this method is extremely beneficial.

Writing an A-law blog, article for its journal or for its student magazine, Animal Justice UK - This is an opportunity to research and write on an area of animal law and get your name out there. It is also very useful for others interested in the area to learn from your insights. If you are interested please email studentgroup@alaw.org.uk.

Start an A-law campus group or become a student ambassador - This is an opportunity to take the lead and spread awareness of animal law on your campus. A-law is here to assist you and can help arrange conferences and speakers. We advise that you organise at least one event per term and we encourage the running of stands at career fairs and freshers week. If you’d like to set up more regular events at your university, both A-law and Effective Animal Altruism London are happy to discuss suitable events and recommend speakers that you can invite.

Getting animal law courses into universities - This helps raise awareness and educates the next generation of lawyers. If you would like practical tips on how to do this then please contact studentgroup@alaw.org.uk.

Other opportunities that are accessible to lawyers and students - It’s likely to be more impactful if you can use your “comparative advantage” as a law student or professional to help animals, but there are lots of other options here. Lower time commitment options may still be a good fit for many students or professionals.
About

The UK Centre for Animal law is an organisation of lawyers, as well as scientists, campaigners and others interested in protecting animals through the law. The charity promotes interest in animal law and provides a hub of legal expertise, education and resources to improve the law protecting animal interests. See here for more.

Effective Altruism is the mindset of using evidence and reason to do the most good that you can. See here for more. Effective Animal Altruism London is a community of people engaging with the ideas of effective altruism to help animals as much as possible.

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