GUIDE FOR REFERRAL AGENCIES

What is the Free Representation Unit?

The Free Representation Unit (FRU) is a charity that provides free representation for applicants to the Social Security and Employment Tribunals. We also do some Criminal Injuries Compensation cases.

FRU represents clients in tribunals mainly in Greater London and the South East.

FRU representation is provided by volunteers, who are law students and graduates and lawyers at the start of their careers. FRU volunteers are trained and supervised by experienced legal officers.

Who are FRU's clients?

FRU's clients are referred to us by advice agencies, law centres, CABx, trade unions and law firms. FRU's clients are not able to pay for their representation and are not eligible for legal aid. FRU accepts all referrals except where the client earns or has capital over £50,000.

What cases will FRU take on?

Employment Tribunals
Employment Appeal Tribunals
Employer's internal hearing with the employer's permission
Fitness to Practice panels
First tier, Social Entitlement Chamber: • Social Security and Child Support • Criminal Injuries Compensation
Upper Tribunal (Administrative Appeals) in the above areas

FRU will only take a case that has a hearing date set, unless it is an appeal in the Employment Appeal or Upper Tribunals and the appeal has been lodged. We do not help complete appeal papers unless we have been involved at first instance.

FRU assesses the difficulty of each case it receives and FRU volunteers will only take on a case that is within their ability.

FRU does not normally take on cases directly from the public – we only take cases that are referred to us by registered referral agencies. However, we are able to take short (1-2 day) final hearings in the employment tribunal through our self-referral scheme. If cases come through this scheme, we are not able to advise the client unless the case is picked up. Further details can be found on our website: www.thefru.org.uk/Employment-Self-Referral

Can my agency refer cases to FRU?

To refer cases to FRU, you must be registered as a FRU referral agency. To register as a referral agency, you must complete an application form, available on FRU's website: www.thefru.org.uk/referral-agencies and pay a referral agency subscription fee of £70 per address per financial year. Once you are registered, you may refer as many cases as you want to us.

Payment for subscriptions should be made directly from the organisation wanting to become a referral agency. Please note that the Free Representation Unit will not reimburse payment of subscriptions made by individuals on behalf of an organisation. If an individual makes payment on behalf of an organisation, reimbursement will need to be sought from the organisation they are paying for.

How to refer cases to FRU

To refer a case, a referral form must be completed. This is available on FRU's website, together with guidance on what cases can be referred: www.thefru.org.uk/referral-agencies

FRU will only accept cases:

- That have a hearing date set, except for appeals as described above
- For Social Security Cases, there are at least 10 clear days before the hearing commences
    - i.e. If a hearing is on Thursday 12th February 2026, we would need to receive the complete bundle no later than Monday 2nd February 2026
- For Employment Cases, there is at least 2 months before the hearing commences
    - i.e. If a hearing is on Wednesday 20th May 2026, we would need to receive the complete bundle no later than Friday 20th March 2026
- For Employment Cases, the hearing lasts no longer than 3 days
- Which are submitted on our online referral form, completed by the referral agency and signed by the client
- Where we have received **all** of the required case papers
- Listed for Monday – Friday; we do not take cases listed on Saturdays

Referrals must be made on the referral form. The referral must include:

- All of the **required** case papers
- The client must have seen and agree to the client acknowledgment section
- Day time, evening and mobile telephone numbers for the client and an email address
- A short case summary
- **All** the cases papers as follows:

In employment cases, except EAT cases, the case papers are:

- **ET1 –** all pages, even if they are blank
- **ET3** (unless no ET3 has been lodged) **–** all pages, even if they are blank
- Notice of Hearing
- Any orders and dec**is**ions of the Tribunal
- Any further **s**upporting document**t**s

In appeals from an Employment Tribunal decision, the case papers are:

- The notice of appeal
- The ET1 - all pages, even if they are blank
- The ET3 - all pages, even if they are blank
- The Employment Tribunal judgment
- The written reasons of the Employment Tribunal
- Copies of any application for a review
- Written reasons of any refusal of a review
- The Respondent's answer (if there is one)
    - If the Respondent is the client being referred, the answer must have been filed before the case is referred
- Any directions issued by the EAT

In appeals from a First-tier Tribunal decision or a Judicial Review in the Upper Tribunal, the case papers are:

- First-tier Tribunal decision notice
- First-tier Tribunal's written reasons
- Application(s) for permission to appeal
- Grant of permission to appeal

- Notice of appeal if separate from application for permission
- Any directions

In social security cases, the case papers are:

- The bundles prepared by the Department of Work and Pensions. This usually includes the Department's submission, the claim form and medical report; these documents are numbered
- Notice of Hearing
- Any further supporting documents: please indicate whether or not further documentation has been submitted to the tribunal, as far as you know

Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals

- The bundle provided by the Authority; this usually includes the Authority's decisions, the claim form, the notice of hearing and evidence collected by the Authority
- Any further supporting documentation: please indicate whether or not it has been submitted to the tribunal, as far as you know

What happens when I refer a case?

Receipt of the case will be acknowledged by email only to your agency and not to the client. If a case referred by your agency is taken on, the representative will contact you to let you know that he or she is acting for the client. If you don't hear from us after the acknowledgement email, it means that no one has taken the case. Please do not phone us to find out if a case has been taken.

If we have not found a volunteer for your clients case, you will receive a further email 7 days before the hearing to confirm this.

FRU cannot guarantee that any case referred to us will get a representative. We represent in around 60% of the cases referred to us. The cases most likely to get a representative are cases listed for less than 3 days. It is more difficult to find representation for longer cases. Cases in the Greater London area are also more likely to get representation. The more time there is before a hearing will also improve the chances of a case being taken up.

What happens if no representation is found?

If no representative is found for your client, the case papers will be kept and then confidentially destroyed 6 months after the hearing date.

What do we do if the hearing is adjourned or postponed?

If the hearing is postponed and subsequently relisted within 3 months of the original hearing date, please only send the Notice of Hearing indicating the FRU reference number along with any additional evidence (i.e. a copy of original bundle is not required). If a new hearing date is set, we make the case available to volunteers again.

What happens when a case is completed?

When a case is completed, the representative will send you a copy of the decision. We will advise the client about what to do next. If the case is successful, we may not be able to help with substantial follow up work and may suggest that clients seek further advice from you or another agency. We will not say that you will do anything further for the client without your permission.

We will advise about the merits of appealing where appropriate, and, if instructed by the client, will make the application for leave to appeal and provide representation at the appeal hearing. We are happy to discuss the appeal with you.

Feedback and complaints

FRU aims to provide the best possible service to clients and referring agencies. However if there is a problem, please raise it in the first instance with the volunteer handling the case. If this does not resolve the issue, please contact the relevant Legal Officer.

If you have a complaint, please put it in writing and address it to the Chief Executive.

We welcome any feedback, positive or negative, on any aspect of FRU's work.

FAQs

What cases can I refer to FRU?

Social Security, Employment and Criminal Injuries Compensation cases, **where a hearing date at the tribunal has been set**. Please note, we do not take cases listed on a Saturday.

What guarantee is there that a case I refer will get representation?

FRU cannot guarantee representation in any case. Your chances of getting a representative to take on your case will be improved if:

- You send in the case with plenty of time before the hearing
- You ensure all the relevant papers are attached
- You have clear, comprehensive contact details for the client
- You give a clear case summary
- The case is in the Greater London area
- The cases is listed for 2 days or less

We will only accept cases where there is a hearing date set.

When will we/the client know when their case is taken on?

After you have received the email acknowledging your referral, you will only hear from FRU if a representative is taking the case on. If you hear nothing, no representative has been found. We will also confirm this by email 7 days before the hearing is due to take place. Please do not contact us, as we cannot provide representation if no one is available to take your client's case on.

Is it ever too late to make a referral?

Yes. We must receive Social Security referrals at least 10 clear days before the hearing. We must receive employment referrals at least 2 months before the hearing.

Will we know the outcome of a case?

Yes, the FRU representative will contact you to let you know the outcome of the case and to discuss or inform you about any further steps or action to be taken.

Does FRU take cases directly from members of the public?

We only take cases on referral from registered referral agencies with the exception of cases through our self-referral scheme. To become a registered referral agency, you need to fill in an application form, available from FRU's website: www.thefru.org.uk/referral-agencies and pay a referral agency subscription of £70 for each address each financial year.

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