Report on the work of the Liverpool Law Clinic
September 2018 to September 2019

Opportunities for Students and Services to clients

Between Sept 2018 and Sept 2019 the Law Clinic provided legal services to 375 clients and over 300 students helped to provide those services. Students either take the module or volunteer on projects.

The Module

Module Clients

Students work in groups of six. Each group advises clients in one area of law. Students cannot choose what type of work they do on the module, as the casework depends on the expertise of their supervisor. The groups are randomly allocated by timetabling. Module students assisted with advice and casework in:

Family law:
- Private law disputes over children

Children with disabilities:
- Special educational needs and Community care

Immigration Advice:
- EU Settlement Scheme

Immigration Casework:
- Statelessness
- Family Reunion
- Asylum Fresh Claims
- Nationality

“Can I pass on my heartfelt thanks to you and Charlotte for your support today. Your time was invaluable and helped far greater than you know.”
Client Feedback

“I would just like to say that you really have inspired me to work in an area I didn’t know existed and I hope that I will be able to impact other peoples’ lives like we helped to do in the clinic.”
Student Feedback

Students:

A total of 204 students took the module over the two semesters. The overall satisfaction rates on the EVAYS module evaluation were quite high. There were more negative comments than in previous years, but there were no consistent themes on what students were unhappy with. It was perhaps not surprising that we had some negative feedback given the logistics of managing the change to a larger and more varied module.

When asked to comment on the strengths of the module, the most common answers were:

- that it is practical
- provided real life experience and
- that they receive regular feedback from tutors.

Liverpool University Staff Awards

Deb Tyfield and Lucy Yeatman joint lecturers of the year
Skills Developed on the Module

The Refugee Fresh Claims Project run by Jared Ficklin and Sarah Wodehouse. 17 students took part in the project and assisted 12 clients.

The project assesses cases for asylum seekers whose claims have been refused and have exhausted their appeal rights. The project is a joint effort by the Liverpool Law Clinic and the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU). We give advice on the legal test for asylum and how the client’s case meets the fresh claim criteria, or whether further evidence is needed. The project also organises the client’s papers into an indexed bundle and adds appropriate background evidence. We refer the prepared cases to firms with a legal aid contract.

Projects

In 2018-19 the Law Clinic developed more opportunities for first- and second-year students to gain practical experience through volunteering. In total 111 students achieved HEAR protocols by participating in 11 projects.

The Refugee Fresh Claims Project run by Jared Ficklin and Sarah Wodehouse.

17 students took part in the project and assisted 12 clients.

Your team have been amazing!

Client Feedback

Students work directly with qualified lawyers assisting in interviews carrying out research on legal and factual issues in accordance with instructions, drafting statements and gaining experience in weighing evidence.

This project enables clients with poor cases to receive advice. Due to legal aid rules an asylum seeker whose first claim has failed, will only be able to get advice if they can show that they already have real prospects of a successful fresh claim. On this project, legal advice is available to people who may still need to gather significant evidence in order to take their case forward.
The Family Court Project run by Lucy Yeatman

“Thank you so much to Farida and Lucy who took the time to discuss my case before and after the hearing. The advice and support was so gratefully received and we were glad that you were there.”

Client feedback

18 students took part in the project and assisted 76 clients

The Law Clinic runs a weekly outreach advice project in Liverpool Family Court for litigants in person involved in cases concerning children. Up to 70% of litigants in the family courts are unrepresented and many of them have had no legal advice prior to attending the first hearing. The majority of Children Act cases involve allegations of domestic violence and often these allegations are linked to concerns about alcohol abuse or mental health problems.

The project runs on a Thursday as this is the day that the court holds first hearings in child arrangement cases.

“The best thing about the Family Court Project is helping litigants in person and feeling as though you are making a positive impact on their lives”

Student

Students work with court ushers to identify litigants who may need support. Students take initial instructions, assist a solicitor in an advice meeting, and accompany clients into court to take notes in their hearings. All clients are given a leaflet with a note of the hearing when they leave court. Students then draft a letter, explaining the advice given.

The project runs weekly in term time. Some clients receive follow up help with advice appointments in the Clinic and sometimes students will attend subsequent hearings with clients as McKenzie friends.

Family Reunion Project run by Judith Carter:

7 students took part in this project

This project assists people recognised as refugees to apply for permission for their families to join them in the UK. Under the supervision of Judith Carter, a solicitor, students attend client interviews, complete visa application forms, conduct practical research, draft statements and prepare bundles of documents.

“You get to practice the law rather than just learning it.”

Student
MPs’ Advice Clinic and Caseworker Project
organised by Deb Tyfield

It is common for people attending MPs’ surgeries to have legal problems that could be resolved with expert advice. The Law Clinic worked with Dan Carden’s office on two projects, the Caseworker Project and the MP’s Advice Clinic:

The Caseworker Project

3 students took part in this project.

The aim of the project was to assist caseworkers with constituent work, to gain an understanding of the depth of legal issues impacting our community and understand the work of an MP. This is a widening participation project and was aimed at students from the Merseyside region who might not otherwise be able to gain legal work experience.

Students went once a week for a morning or afternoon during term time for the whole academic year.

They assisted the caseworkers with their work. Writing letters, doing practical legal research, assisting with speech writing and policy work. They mainly worked on immigration and benefits issues.

Feedback from the MP’s casework team was excellent. Students were also offered a trip to the House of Commons including a visit to PMQs. One of the students was offered a part time job in the constituency office and worked there throughout her final year. The project was re-advertised for this year but is on hold pending the General Election.

“You gain an understanding of issues with access to justice; it is an eye opener”

Student

MPs Advice Clinic

3 students took part in this project and assisted 11 clients.

Deb Tyfield attended Dan Carden’s constituency office to provide on the spot legal advice to parents of children with disabilities. The students assisted by taking notes in the interview and then conducted online research to provide advice to the clients.

The students also had an opportunity to meet with Dan Carden and his team and spent a day observing a housing clinic.

“The legal advice session you gave me was both compassionate and informative. It really helped me to be listened to at a time when I felt I was banging my head against a brick wall.”

Client feedback

SEN Advice and Appeals Project run by Deb Tyfield

12 students were trained for this project which started in the summer.

The projects aim to help parents and young people navigate the SEND system and prepare them for appeals to the Special Education Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST); prepare for mediation before appealing to SENDIST; and prepare complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman about either social care or education.

Students assist parents to prepare Grounds of Appeal, carry out practical legal research and prepare short letters of advice.
MENCAP Chatbot Project organised by Deb Tyfield

13 students took part in this project.

The aim of the project was to help MENCAP design an on-line advice tool in order to advise and filter prospective clients.

To give students an understanding and taste of the on-line advice sector and its creation.

To give students an introduction to the issues affecting disabled children and their families.

The role of students is to design questions and think about different ways of asking questions relevant to disabled children and their families. This is a collaborative project working with parents and those in the advice sector in order to do this.

The project was initiated by Deborah Tyfield in the summer, but has now been taken over and is run by the students as a student – led project in collaboration with MENCAP.

“It challenged me to learn and research differently.”

Student

Interpreting organised by Jo Bezzano

24 students were trained and worked as interpreters in the Clinic.

Our committed team of student interpreters is essential to enabling us to provide advice to and representation for our immigration clients.

Interviewing organised by Jo Bezzano

9 students were actively involved with the project. They saw 34 clients over the year.

We were approached by the Red Cross about trafficking cases over the summer of 2018. As a result of this we set up a new project advising victims of trafficking. We intended this to be early advice only. The Red Cross referred some very complex cases and the project expanded from “advice only” to representation. Six of the clients seen were taken on by the Law Clinic as active cases where we are dealing with ongoing claims for status.

The in depth longer term work on complex cases has given students a really good breath of experience. They have seen how criminal and immigration law interact with each other.

We have had guest speakers from the Anti Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit (ATLEU) and Garden Court North Chambers.

“An amazing experience that has taught me a lot about the real world, as well as teaching me about the law in practice”

Student
Deborah Tyfield and Lucy Yeatman gave talks at two international clinical legal education conferences. Lucy is part of a national working group looking at the implications of the new routes to qualification for law clinics.

In June Judith Carter organised a round table gathering at our London campus of lawyers running, or intending to set up, university Law Clinics specialising in immigration work.

Lucy Yeatman continues as a trustee and co-chair of the Clinical Legal Education Organisation (CLEO). As part of the role she has organised workshops on legal tech and access to justice, research methods in legal education and SQE.

Case Study

ND was one of our first clients on the Trafficking Project. She had been in the UK for 12 years when we first saw her in November 2018. She has served a prison sentence and spent over a year in immigration detention. Her children were in care.

She was brought to the UK by her husband who controlled her. This control included involving her in criminal acts from which he benefited. ND remained under his control and the control of his family and associates until she made contact with the Red Cross in autumn 2018. At that time she was part way through a criminal trial for fraud and, if found guilty, faced the possibility of a further prison sentence. The Red Cross referred her to us.

We obtained her extensive case papers from the Home Office and took very detailed instructions from her. We put her case to the National Referral Mechanism through which she was identified as a victim of trafficking. As a result, the CPS offered no evidence against her in the criminal trial and the Judge recorded a verdict of not guilty. She may also be able to appeal against the existing conviction. ND has now been recognised as a refugee and granted leave to remain in the UK.

Clinic Community

We are part of a wide national and international network of university law clinics. We work with other clinics to share good practice in relation to both teaching and legal practice.

Teaching Excellence

Lucy Yeatman shortlisted for Law Teacher of the Year
The Law Clinic is committed to improving access to justice in Liverpool. Legal practitioners in the Law Clinic are working with academic colleagues from the Law School to develop research projects developed from our work with clients in the community. We have specialist knowledge and experience that means we are in a good position to develop research proposals. We hope that by bringing together the socio-legal research expertise of our colleagues in the department with our practice based expertise in the Clinic we will build some innovative and ground breaking research projects.

Statelessness

The Law Clinic, as founder member of the UK statelessness forum, continues its meetings with the Home Office asylum policy team, resulting in some positive changes in the treatment of stateless people in the UK. Judith Carter has attended, as an expert, two government level meetings organised by the Council of Europe and UNHCR on statelessness determination procedures. The UNHCR has engaged Jo Bezzano and Judith Carter to update the UK Index on Statelessness, which is hosted on the European Network on Statelessness website.

Special Educational Needs

Deborah Tyfield, Amel Alghrani and Seamus Byrne have started an empirical research project to explore the impact of Local Authority decision-making relating to provision of services for children with special educational needs;

The aim of the research is broadly to assess the impact of austerity on provision of services in Merseyside for families with disabled children and whether the cuts to entitlement to free legal services have had any impact on the provision of services. The research was developed directly from the experience of Deb in giving advice to families of disabled children. The team have conducted interviews with parents, made FOI requests from local authorities and collected data from clients.

There is a one day conference in January 2020 to present initial findings.

Trafficking

Jo Bezzano is working with Samantha Currie on a research project drawing on trafficking cases. They are planning a northern conference on trafficking next summer. This will bring academics and practitioners together. They have met with Dame Sara Thornton (the Independent Anti Trafficking Commissioner) in July this year. She is very interested in the research and said she would be interested in coming to the conference.

TALE

Law Clinic staff have been involved with the TALE project throughout.