

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Huddersfield		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 18 - Law		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Huddersfield Legal Advice Clinic – Providing a Free Service for the Disadvantaged and an Experiential Learning Tool for Law Students		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013-2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Philip Drake	Senior Lecturer	2008-2018
Stuart Toddington	Senior Lecturer	2016-2018
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2013 - Present		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>The withdrawal of Legal Aid funding has restricted access to justice for some of the most disadvantaged populations in society. Huddersfield Business School researchers have sought to understand the issue, and go some way to addressing it through establishing a legal advice clinic in the heart of the town in a shopping centre in central Huddersfield. 1656 clients have benefitted from the free legal advice they have received, which empowers them to take control of their own legal problems. More than 212 students have worked as part of the Clinic, serving the needs of the community, while also gaining valuable and enriching experience that helps them to become more rounded legal practitioners, and improves their prospects for employment after graduation. Additionally, local solicitors' firms have provided regular drop-in services, providing specialist advice, enabling them to 'give back' to the community, recruit students for work experience, and take on paying clients.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Access to justice has become increasingly complex and difficult due to the significant cuts to Legal Aid that resulted from the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment Act 2013. Consequently, many people who were formerly able to access legal services are no longer able to without shouldering the considerable financial burden of engaging the services of solicitors themselves. This has disproportionately affected vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, and impeded their access to vital legal advice and support. The Huddersfield Legal Advice Clinic (LAC) seeks to address these inequalities by providing free legal advice to the local community. The Clinic serves the dual purpose of supporting local communities in gaining access to justice, while providing invaluable clinical legal education opportunities for students of the University of Huddersfield (UoH) Law School. This supports them in developing skills and professional dispositions that will enable them to become more rounded legal practitioners and improve their prospects in the highly competitive legal job market after graduation.</p> <p>Philip Drake came to the University of Huddersfield in 2008, after having been a practicing solicitor for many years, and brought with him a strong interest in the dual issues of social justice and legal education. His research, carried out and published with Professor Stuart Toddington, formed the basis for the inception of the LAC. Throughout his time at Huddersfield, Drake worked with the Clinic and the supporting research in tandem, using one to support the other in an ongoing iterative research/practice process. His thinking around the mutual empowerment of clients and students in the LAC can be seen in the research that underpins this case study.</p>		

Drake and Toddington's research points to practical clinical experience being coupled with extensive guided reflection to support students in developing 'ethical autonomy' as practising lawyers. In their research (3.1), they refer to legal and philosophical theory, along with example cases, to argue that clinical experience provides the context in which law students can go beyond classroom learning and, through ongoing guided and supported reflection, develop a deeper understanding of the ethical and moral implications of legal practice. Ultimately, they claim, embedding this reflection produces more rounded professionals who are more able to usefully navigate the cases they will be expected to deal with as professionals. Drake and Toddington also highlight here the impact of the removal of access to justice as being an important component in the operation of the LAC (3.1, 3.2).

Ongoing research carried out throughout the life of the clinic has informed the position on both of these major impacts, and further serves to underpin the vital role that the LAC plays for the University and local communities in Huddersfield and Kirklees (3.2). Research findings here, based on a combination of analysis of the broader situation in terms of access to justice, along with focus group fieldwork with students involved in the Clinic, underpinned the way that the clinic continued to develop. It recounts the collaborative approach between students that led to selection of a location in the Packhorse Shopping Centre in central Huddersfield as the site for the clinic. This location provides the local community with easier and more convenient access to legal advice, in contrast to similar campus-based services at other universities. It also increases the numbers of people the students can see as well as broadening the range of issues they are presented with.

Drake's research (3.2) revealed that students' perceptions of themselves, their future careers and their impressions of working in the LAC evolved over the course of their degree. Their involvement helped them to identify the areas of law they found most appealing, and their values and ethics developed over their time as they progressed in the Clinic.

The most important finding of the research underpinning this case study is the value of mutual empowerment in the legal advice process (3.1, 3.2). The LAC helps to fill the considerable gap left by cuts to Legal Aid, through giving members of the public the information and guidance to empower them to address their own legal problems, while also empowering students to become more confident and competent lawyers.

### 3. References to the research

This research can be described as crossing the 2\* threshold as it is published in highly rated peer reviewed academic journals, and 3.2 has been subject to external review, which placed it as being 2\* quality.

3.1. Drake, P., and Toddington, S., 'Clinical Pathways to Ethically Substantive Autonomy' (2013) 19 International Journal of Clinical Legal Education 311-320 DOI: [doi.org/10.19164/ijcle.v19i0.32](https://doi.org/10.19164/ijcle.v19i0.32)

3.2. Drake, P., Taylor, N., and Toddington, S., 'Ethical Engagement, embedded Reflection and Mutual Empowerment in the Clinical Process' in Ashford, C., and McKeown, p (eds), Social Justice and Legal Education Edited collection (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle, 2018) p 65-83. <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/product/978-1-5275-0646-6>  
[can be supplied on request]

### 4. Details of the impact

The Huddersfield Legal Advice Clinic (LAC) addresses two principal problems. The first is the gap left by cuts to the UK legal aid budget, excluding many people from access to free legal support. The second is the need for the trainee legal professionals at the University of Huddersfield to gain hands-on experience during their studies which enhances their skills, and

helps them develop a keen sense of ethical practice, as well as improving their employment prospects for after they graduate.

### **Impact on clients of the Legal Advice Clinic**

Since its inception in 2013, the Clinic has provided advice to 1832 clients on a range of issues, the most common being family law and contract and civil matters (5.1). Without the service the Clinic provides, these individuals may not have accessed any advice or support.

The location of the Clinic, in the Packhorse Shopping Centre in central Huddersfield, means that many clients attend as 'passing trade'. Clients remarked on feedback forms (5.2) that they were "walking passed [sic] and decided to call in" and that they "saw it as [they] walked past". For some, the LAC represents their last resort for accessing help for their legal problem. One client said that "I had nowhere else to turn, the LAC was my last hope" and another that they "did not know where else would help me" (5.2).

Other Universities provide legal advice clinics, but these often take place on university campuses. The Head of Clinic Support and Development at LawWorks, a charity that offers support for free legal advice clinics across England and Wales, said that the Huddersfield Legal Advice Clinic is "distinctive among University Clinics in that it takes place in a town centre location rather than on the University campus" (5.3), and that "solicitors' premises and University campuses can be seen as intimidating places, which may prevent some people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may benefit most from the Clinics' services, from attending to gain access to legal advice.". The Huddersfield LAC's location puts it at the centre of the community, in a familiar and accessible setting. Additionally, other University clinics may specialise in a particular field of law and turn away clients with different or more general enquiries, but the Huddersfield Clinic deals with whatever issues clients present with, regardless of the field of law.

Word of mouth is a powerful means by which new clients are gained, with clients remarking that they were "recommended by a friend" (5.2). The Clinic also has a Twitter presence (@LegalAdviceClin) with 872 followers to advertise its services and drop-in sessions.

When clients access the LAC, the advice process maximises their benefit while also providing advisors with the best opportunities for learning, supported by the UoH Clinic staff. The LAC is an advice only service, which means that clients receive a letter that details how they can progress with their problem themselves, and what resources or further support they might need. The process is mutually empowering; the clients get the information they need to address their problem themselves, and the advisors are empowered to understand the problem that is brought to them, and devise a strategy for the client to address it. Clients remarked that "everyone was really helpful and sympathetic to my situation," "the advice was very well received" and that they were "happy with how my case was handled." (5.2).

In response to the forced closure of the LAC in March 2020, the team worked to develop and roll out a service through which clients could be supported remotely. Clients receive the same service, provided online through Microsoft Teams. A client who accessed this service said that in her online client interview, the advisors were "extremely professional and explained everything perfectly clearly" (5.4). As many legal and court services have also been forced to continue remotely, the client had little understanding of the process. She said, "I was provided with information about the conduct of the proceedings" and that it made her "feel confident that I would be able to navigate my way through the court hearing and get the result I was looking for".

### **Impact on trainee legal professionals involved with the Legal Advice Clinic**

Drake and Toddington's research describes the ways that legal clinical education should enhance the learning experiences and ultimately the professional practice of those undergoing training to become tomorrow's lawyers. These assertions are borne out by the experiences of advisors in the clinic, who were placed at the centre of establishing the clinic (crucially, choosing the location), and remain integral to its operation.

These experiences for the early teams involved with the Clinic were built on by successive cohorts, totalling in excess of 212 (5.1) trainees working with the LAC either as advisors working directly with clients, or as observers, sitting in on sessions. The selection process is an annual application, interview and training process, which equips the volunteers with the knowledge and skills to work effectively within the Clinic setting. A small 2015 study carried out in the Law School (and later published as part of (3.2)), found that as the advisors' work with the Clinic progressed, their involvement had a profound effect on them as developing legal professionals. They reported an increased awareness of ethical issues surrounding the practice of law and concerns with concepts of liberty, justice and the impact of law and its practice on individuals, communities and wider society. This reflects the arguments made in the research that work in the LAC serves to produce more 'rounded' and ethically autonomous legal professionals. They reported that their contact with clients helped them to develop a holistic view of legal practice, and a desire and willingness to challenge norms in the interests of justice. The Clinic gives them the opportunity to "consider the law 'in the round'" (5.5).

The experiences of the advisors also serve to advantage them in the competitive job market after graduation, and solicitors' firms in the area have used the Clinic as a site for recruiting students for work experience. One former student involved with the clinic, who went on to work for a local firm, remarked: "My work with the Clinic while undergoing my legal training provided me with opportunities that may otherwise have been difficult to find. I was offered work experience at a local solicitors' firm in Huddersfield, which led to being offered a permanent professional role and am now practising full time" (5.6).

### **Impact on local solicitors**

In addition to the advisor-led sessions, the LAC provides drop-in sessions staffed by solicitors from local firms, offering advice on specific areas of law. These drop-ins have taken place for the life of the clinic and have dealt with issues across the full spectrum of law and legal practice. These drop-ins have benefits for the clients, the trainees and the law firms. Clients are able to access specific on-the-spot legal advice on their particular problems from a professional, while trainee professionals accompany the solicitors in the drop-ins and have reflective discussions that further enrich their learning. Many solicitors' firms hold their own free advice sessions in their practices, but they may not be well attended for the same reasons as people may not wish to access services based on university campuses. Providing sessions at the LAC gives them the opportunity to do this community work. A lawyer from a local firm said: "For Jordans, the Clinic gives us the chance to 'give back' to the communities we work in – we can use our expertise to help in a non-traditional way, with people who may not come to us in other circumstances" (5.5). Solicitors also refer to taking pleasure in being able to model legal practice for the 'next generation, one stating: "I came to the profession through a non-traditional route, using work-based training supplied by the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives, so I understand the value of the experiences students can gain in a setting like the Legal Advice Clinic, and really value the opportunity to be involved as a professional" (5.5). These firms may also gain new paying clients from their contact at the drop-in sessions, meaning an economic benefit alongside the other positive outcomes from their involvement with the clinic. Another solicitor stated: "Importantly, in some cases I can help clients to access Legal Aid support, and I am able to sign them up as clients of my firm where I can provide the legal support they need" (5.6).

## **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

5.1 Legal Advice Clinic statistics report. Data on the activities of the Clinic over the course of its life.

5.2 Anonymised client feedback forms. Collected from clients after they accessed the service.

5.3 Testimonial from Clare Johnson, Head of Clinic Support and Development, LawWorks. Describing how the Huddersfield Legal Advice Clinic fits into the broader network of free Legal Advice services in England and Wales.

5.4 Testimonial from a client who accessed the virtual Legal Advice Clinic service.

5.5 Testimonial from a solicitor at a local solicitors' firm providing drop-in services for the Legal Advice Clinic. Describing their relationship with the Legal Advice Clinic and the personal and professional benefits for them and the firm they work for.

5.6 Testimonial from a former legal trainee, involved with establishing the Clinic, now delivering drop-in services with a local solicitors' firm. Describing their work with the Clinic in its early days, how this has supported their career development, and their involvement now, as a legal professional.