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INTRODUCTION TO THE LAW CLINIC

This handbook provides information about the current opportunities that are available to you in Plymouth University Law Clinic. The Law Clinic aims to enrich student educational experience and enhance employability, while also providing legal advice or support and information for the benefit of the wider community. We want to develop projects that provide practical experience and to enable you to think imaginatively about the settings in which you can develop your skills.

Plymouth Law School has a long tradition of pro bono work dating back to the early 1990’s when staff and students in the School ran a Free Representation Unit for members of the public unable to access legal advice elsewhere.

In more recent years the Clinic has developed well established projects such as the South West Employment Rights Centre (SWERC) and works in partnership with organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and the British Red Cross.

Over the coming years we intend to grow the Clinic into new and broader fields. Social welfare remains an essential part, particularly as funding cuts take effect but we are also starting business, commercial and cross disciplinary projects, as well as educational and publishing ventures.

This is an exciting time to be involved in the Law Clinic but the projects do require a commitment of time and energy from you so you need to think carefully about how your work in the Clinic will complement your studies and fit into your life.
**SOUTH WEST EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS CENTRE**

SWERC is a well-established pro bono employment law project run from Plymouth Law School. The project offers legal advice and representation to clients who have employment law problems. Members of the public are able to access the project directly or are referred by other agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. SWERC almost always advises employees.

The project is run by an experienced employment law advisor, who provides induction training and on-going supervision and support to the students involved. The project is also well supported by the local legal profession.

SWERC provides students with a lot of hands-on experience of employment law cases. Students can gain experience of taking instructions from clients, writing letters, making representations, negotiating with employers and on some occasions taking cases to the Employment Tribunal.

**LAW CLINIC PROJECTS**

The following projects are those currently available but we are always working towards possible new project opportunities. The projects may change or not run if there is insufficient interest or work available.

**FAMILY LAW CLINIC**

This is a new project that we are looking to build and expand over the course of the coming years, to assist those who are involved in family law disputes or who are divorcing and unable to access legal aid. This is particularly important in light of the legal aid cuts that took effect in April 2013.

An information and help desk is run by students to provide initial information and support to Litigants in Person. We have good links with the courts, local practitioners and CAFCASS (the Children and Family Courts Advisory and Support Service) and students may have the opportunity to shadow professionals in those settings as part of their training and induction.

The help desk focuses on some basic information delivery. For example, orientation to the location, layout and procedure of the family court as well as assistance with form filling such as fee exemption forms, divorce forms and Children Act forms.

Clients are referred to the project by solicitors and agencies in the city where no other form of advice is available. We have assisted a small number of clients in the project so far with a variety of queries including divorce, parental responsibility, contact and residence issues for children.

This project is suitable for students who want to become practitioners and who are particularly interested in Family law. As the project is in its infancy it is fairly small and so the numbers of students able to undertake this project are capped.
The Clinic works in partnership with Refugee Services at the British Red Cross. This enables students to get involved in asylum and refugee work and to undergo formal British Red Cross Volunteer training. Once undertaken the training enables volunteering at any BRC office. Students can get involved with a variety of projects in addition to Family Reunion such as the Red Cross’s work around destitution, the welcome project, access to further and higher education, and international tracing and messaging.

**INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**

Within the Refugee project and in partnership with the British Red Cross students are able to take part in the international humanitarian law project, which delivers workshops on international conflict to students in a local secondary school.

The educational officer at the Red Cross delivers a number of mandatory training sessions on content of the workshops as well as teaching skills before you are expected to teach. The module runs for 7 weeks leading up to a final mock trial conducted in the style of an international war crime tribunal.

The workshops give you a great opportunity to develop your international legal, political and diplomacy knowledge and improve your presentation and communication skills. The workshops are also a great way to build awareness of international conflict and human rights within the community.

**REFUGEE AND FAMILY REUNION**

In September 2014 we established the Refugee Family Reunion project in partnership with the British Red Cross and the Clinic has been undertaking casework since then. The project is registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) and provides advice and assistance to refugees who have been separated from their family as a result of the circumstances that forced them to flee their country of origin.

Students are able to shadow and assist in casework under the supervision of an experienced adviser and the volume of casework varies according to the capacity of the project.

Case work includes interviewing clients, researching areas of law and country background information and supporting clients through the family reunion procedure.

Students may consider undertaking external OISC assessments to seek accreditation and this can be discussed with the project director.

This project is suitable for students who want to become practitioners and who are particularly interested in immigration and refugee law.
**MEDICAL LAW AND ETHICS**

The new Medical Law and Ethics project is a cross disciplinary project with the Peninsular Medical School. Students from the law department work with medical students looking at issues such as confidentiality, consent to treatment, medical negligence, organ donation, reproduction and medical research.

The aim of the project is for Law students to work collaboratively with Medical students in order to consider the legal perspective of clinical practice. This project is suitable for students who are interested in medical and clinical negligence law.

**BUSINESS**

We have a new Business Start-Up project working with the Business School to help young entrepreneurs with the legal aspects of setting up businesses. The aim of project is to help bridge the practical working gap between the two disciplines where the students are undertaking a joint Law and Business degree, as well as to introduce single honours Law students to commercial awareness in business.

**STREET LAW**

Street law is a concept which originated in the USA in the 1970’s to provide a service to particular groups in the community and an educational opportunity for students.

It involves students preparing and giving interactive presentations to an identified group about a particular area of law. This enables law students to use some of the legal expertise they have gained for the benefit of a wider community.

Sharing of knowledge enables the target audience to gain a better understanding of an area of law or their legal rights and responsibilities and this in turn can help individuals identify whether they need more specialist legal help.

It is an opportunity for students to conduct some in depth research and consolidate their understanding of a particular area of law as well as develop communication and presentational skills.

Part of the work of the Street Law project is for students to identify groups who may benefit from the project. The street law hub is suitable for students with interest in research and it’s application in community engagement.
We have developed a successful partnership with Plymouth Citizens Advice which provides opportunities for students to train either as Gateway Assessors or Advisors and then to volunteer at the CAB providing assistance to members of the public on a variety of topics.

Citizens Advice is often the first port of call for people who are facing social policy difficulties in relation to welfare benefits, debt, consumer issues and a range of other matters with a legal context. This is a particularly useful placement for those considering a legal career.

In volunteering with the CAB you will gain experience of assessing a client’s problem and identifying key issues so that you can establish what a client wants/needs and refer them appropriately or assist them to solve their problem.

The CAB provides full training leading to a nationally recognised certificate which means that you can volunteer at any CAB once you are trained. The CAB requires a minimum commitment of around 8 hours volunteering per week for one year (though obviously allowance is made for holiday periods).

If you do wish to apply to the CAB, you can arrange an informal talk with Rob Bourne the Volunteer Manager: Rob Bourne, Apprentice and Volunteer Manager, Plymouth C.A.B, Cobourg House, Plymouth, Devon, PL1 1QX. Tel: 01752 676092. Rob.Bourne@adviceplymouth.org.uk.

An induction for students accepted on to the CAB Gateway Assessor Programme will be held with the Law Clinic Director and thereafter all training and work will be undertaken at the CAB premises and under the supervision of CAB staff.

This is a student-led initiative started in September 2014. The aim of the project is to provide information and advice to Plymouth University students about private tenancies and to assist students to be proactive about their tenancies and any difficulties they may encounter with landlords.

Students are clearly in a strong position to understand the potential issues that might arise with tenancies and law students in particular will be able to use their expertise to assist their peers.

Initially the work of the Centre focused on producing a booklet of information and advice about the issues that surround entering into a tenancy. You can see this booklet on the Moodle site.

The further development of the project is the establishment of a contract checking service and deposit protection advice hub. We are also hoping to develop a community project to assist people whose possessions have been disposed of by their landlords following eviction.

The advice booklet will be reviewed on an annual basis and we are looking at developing some policy work also. TAC is suitable for students who are particularly interested in housing law.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why should I get involved with the Law Clinic? The Law Clinic provides you with opportunities to engage with the law in real settings, develop your skills and enhance your prospects of future employment. Some projects enable you to gain an additional qualification. We also hope that the projects will be rewarding and enjoyable and provide you with opportunities to engage in areas that interest you.

How much time will I be expected to devote to the Law Clinic? You will be expected to give a regular weekly commitment to the Clinic project. The amount of work required may vary but an average commitment is between 6-10 hours per week. If you are undertaking Work Based Learning you should consult the WBL module guide regarding the total hours you need to undertake (generally 100 hours of work is required, around 80 of which will be clinical work and 20 of which is writing up). If you have any queries about WBL you should contact Nigel Firth who is the Module Leader.

When will the project start? You may be able to start work on the project straight away and there are opportunities to work through the summer on most of the Law Clinic’s activities. Alternatively you can start working on a project in September at the start of the academic year. This will depend on your own circumstances and can be discussed with the Law Clinic project Coordinator.

Will I receive any training before the project starts? Yes. All the projects require you to undertake an induction training programme. This will provide you with some basic training on relevant subjects such as client care, professional ethics and basic substantive law (applicable to the particular project).

If I am already involved in a Law Clinic project and I would like to continue in that project next year do I need to apply again? Yes. It is helpful for our record keeping. The application form has a box to complete for those continuing a project from year to year.

What happens if I cannot continue with the project for some reason? If you are unable to attend a project on a particular date (for example because you are ill) you must inform the project co-ordinator or the professional with whom you are working. You are expected to engage with the Clinic in a professional manner at all times. If your absence is going to be longer term or if you know you cannot continue with the project you must let the Law Clinic Project Coordinator know so that someone else can be given an opportunity to get involved.

There are lots of projects, how do I decide which one to get involved with? You should consider which area of law appeals to you. You should also be realistic about how much time you have to give. All of the projects require a weekly commitment of 8 hours but some projects are more intensive than others. You should consider whether you would like to work in a setting outside the University, whether you would prefer a more structured project and what type of work you would like to do e.g. would you like to give advice or would you prefer to work on a presentation about a particular legal area.

Do I have to study the related topic to get involved in a project? It is not compulsory but you may find it useful to get involved with a project that links with your studies and where relevant members of staff will be involved in the projects according to their expertise.

Should I choose Work Based Learning or work as a Volunteer? You can work in the Law Clinic either for all or part of your Work Based Learning or as a Volunteer. You can elect to take Work Based Learning (20 credits) in Years 2 or 3 or both. Choosing whether to volunteer or do WBL will depend on your other choices on the course and so you should speak to your personal tutor as well as to the Law Clinic project leaders.
If you have any questions or would like any further information then contact Rosie Brennan, Nigel Firth or Sarah Guy or have a look at the Law Clinic Moodle page and Law Clinic webpage.

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HOW TO APPLY

Before applying please read through the project descriptions in this booklet to get an idea of which projects would be of most interest to you. You should rank the projects you are interested in in order of 1, 2 and 3 (with 1 being your first preference and so on). All projects are subject to an application and selection process (sometimes administered by our external partners) and some projects have a limited number of spaces so will be more competitive. Therefore we cannot guarantee that you will be accepted on to a particular project but we will endeavour to place you in one of your three preferred projects.

Submit your application by the deadline given and according to the instructions on the Law Clinic application form available on the Moodle site. There may be opportunities to get involved in the Clinic through the academic year but it is preferable for you to apply in the previous year so that we can allocate people to the projects before the summer.

LINKS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

LAW WORKS  
The national pro bono group which promotes the clinical work of Law Schools. Plymouth Law School Law Clinic is a member to Law Works: www.lawworks.org.uk.

CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU  
www.citizensadvice.org.uk or www.plymouthcab.org.uk

REFUGEE SERVICES AT BRITISH RED CROSS  
www.redcross.org.uk

STREET LAW  
There are sources online for information on Street Law. For example: www.streetlaw.org/en/home.