

YORK **LAW** SCHOOL | Clinic**What is the Clinic?**

The Clinic provides a free legal service and has been doing so since it opened its doors in January 2011. Since then we have received over 500 requests for help. In 2013/14, 75 students were involved in the Clinic as part of their studies. All work done within the Clinic is supervised by professionally qualified lawyers who ensure that the Clinic meets the standard of service expected of any solicitors' practice. The Clinic also oversees other 'pro bono' activities including Street Law (working with groups within the community so that they are better able to understand their rights and responsibilities) and a restorative justice programme (training students to be able to facilitate meetings between victims and offenders). The Clinic therefore provides much needed help for clients whilst at the same time helping students to put theory into practice.

**Who can ask for advice?**

Anyone can ask the Clinic for help and we do not charge for our services.

We work with individuals, companies and community organisations to provide a free, professional and confidential legal service. Over the past three years we have managed to help clients who may struggle to find or otherwise afford legal advice. The Clinic has been able to provide its expertise in a range of areas, from landlord and tenant disputes to creating charities and companies. Since the Clinic began we have helped over 250 clients and have worked in schools, courts, tribunals and prisons and with other service providers such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and the local legal profession, making and receiving referrals

As our work over the years has shown, most of our clients approach us from outside the University and this number has grown every year. This year most of our clients have come to the Clinic from York and the surrounding community but we have also attracted enquires from further afield.

We try to help clients with their legal issues if we can. Where we are unable to, we explain why and refer on to specialist advisors where possible.

If we can, and you would like us to, we normally give written advice inside 10 working days.

**What our clients have said...**

*"I was very pleased with the professional help given. I was impressed by the students I met."*

*"Thank you for providing this service. It is extremely valuable...I enjoyed meeting the students and had every confidence in their abilities and enthusiasm."*

*"The Clinic provided me with useful information...This is a great service. I would use it again and have already recommended it to others!"*

*"The students were clear and concise with the information they gave me...Very professional and compassionate."*

## Case study 1: a sign of the times?

Food banks are, sadly, becoming an increasing feature in many towns and cities. The Clinic was approached by a charity who wanted to get unwanted food supplies to those most in need. They were understandably concerned about potential liability that might arise in relation to the food donations that they handled, if, for example, the eventual recipient fell ill from consuming any of these products.

We were able to advise the client on liability generally, how they might enter into an agreement with food retailers making donations to limit their responsibility and what they might do to safeguard the eventual consumer.

## Case study 2: love in the air

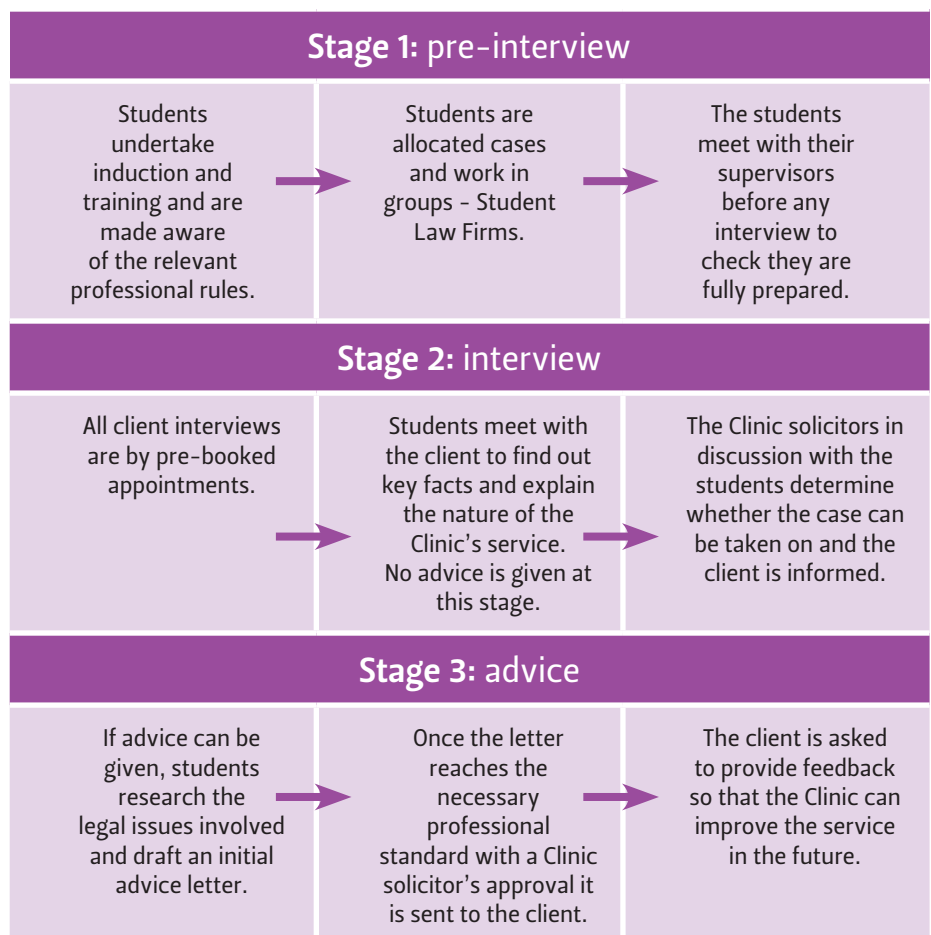
Our client, a non-UK national, came to this country on a student visa. She wanted to know if she could get married in the UK. She thought that there were legal restrictions as her partner was not based in the UK and was also not a UK citizen.

We advised the client that, on the facts and under English law there were no restrictions on her getting married. We suggested that she should check the position in her and her partner's country of origin to ensure there were no problems there.

## The Clinic process

Everyone in the Clinic follows a clear set of well tried and tested procedures. As a result, clients can expect to receive a high quality, professional and confidential service. So far as is possible, these procedures reflect the workings and demands of any legal practice. We also aim to meet the University and Law School's educational standards for the students concerned. All work undertaken in the Clinic is closely supervised by qualified solicitors with practicing certificates. Additionally, the University's Professional Indemnity Insurance covers the activities of the Clinic, providing further protection for the clients, students and staff.

Provided below is a summary of the Clinic process:



### A second year student's reflection on their Clinic experience

*"My time in Clinic as a student adviser was both insightful and rewarding. The practical experience allowed me to develop my communication, research and analytical skills, to appreciate the professional nature of a lawyer's role, and to use my substantive and procedural knowledge of the law to help clients make more informed decisions about how to deal with their concerns. I felt like I was making a real difference."*



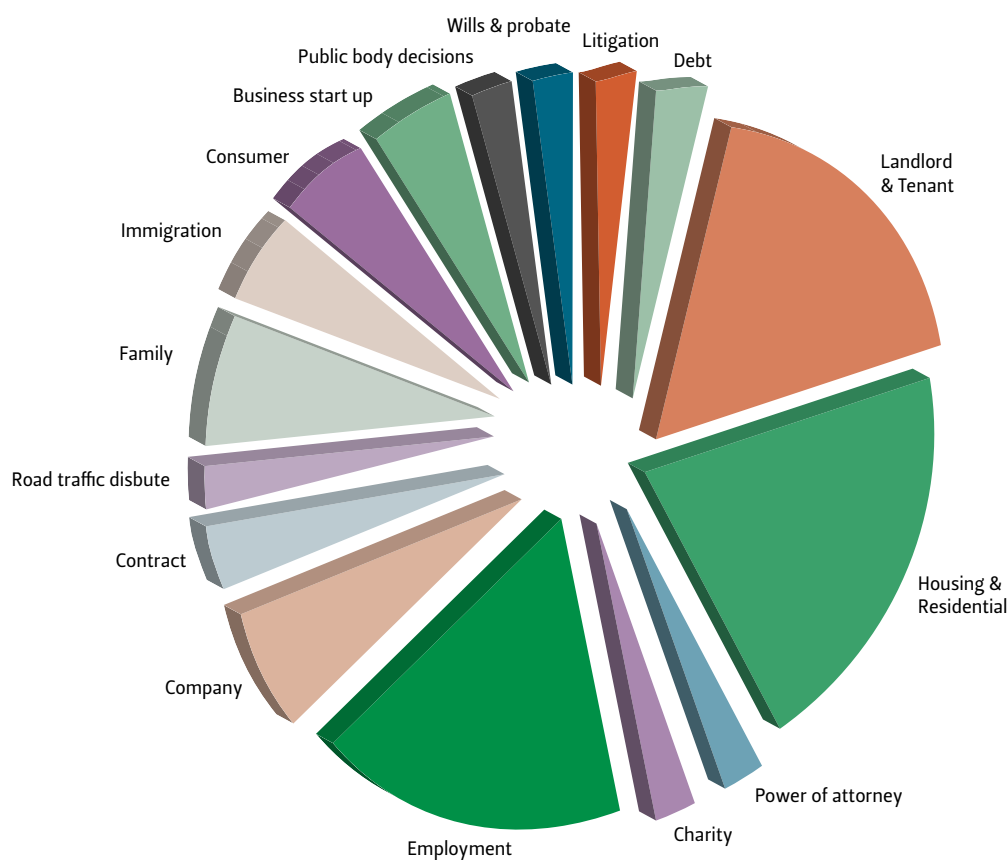
What law students in Georgia think of their Clinic!

## About our cases

This academic year, the Clinic was able to help in 45 cases, providing advice letters for every client and further assistance, such as drafting documents and corresponding with other parties, in addition, where we could. These cases covered a wide range of topics, some straightforward and others more complicated. The clients received a customised service and the students engaged in valuable learning experience.

The full range of work the Clinic undertook this year is represented in the chart below.

### Cases 2013–2014



In previous years, the majority of cases taken on have been landlord and tenant disputes, perhaps due to the Clinic being located in a university environment. The graph above indicates that this is still an important area of need but this year we have seen an increase in other aspects of work, with Family enquiries in particular picking up. This may be a direct result of cuts to Legal Aid funding in this area. The majority of this year's clients were from the local area although some were from further afield.

The Clinic aims to provide written advice within 10 working days of initial interview. We usually meet this target but if we cannot the client is, of course, told of any delay and the reason for it. The solicitors ensure that this never prejudices the client's position. This year some of our cases have required additional work and if the Clinic has the capacity we are happy to help with this. We have for example appeared in tribunals for clients and helped others to complete forms and other documents.

### Case study 3: landlord troubles

The Clinic was approached by a client who had moved into a rented flat. Once he was there however it was in such poor condition that his health suffered.

The landlord did take some steps to improve matters but a number of problems remained. When our client complained further he was told there was nothing more that could be done. At that point he consulted the Clinic.

We were able to advise the client on the steps that they could take in order to either get the problem resolved or (which is what the client eventually decided he wanted) to end the tenancy and get his deposit back. We were also able to recommend another solicitor who could help him claim damages for the impact on his health.

### Case study 4: a new venture...

We have had several clients who wanted to set up small businesses and social enterprises. The Clinic was able to give general advice on possible business structures, including charitable status, and on related issues around employment, health and safety, copyright and trading contracts. We have also referred several clients to local solicitors for more specialised work.

*"I hear and I forget.  
I see and I remember.  
I do and I understand."*

Confucius 551-479 BC

It may be an old saying maybe  
but it is at the heart of learning  
in the Clinic.

## Further afield

In previous reports, we have mentioned the work we do internationally. Regrettably, unmet legal need is still to be found in many countries and it is no coincidence that worldwide law schools are helping to tackle this issue. We are proud to be associated with this development and in the past year we have hosted or otherwise assisted in running training workshops with academic colleagues, legal practitioners, students, not for profit groups, government bodies and donor agencies in and from over 15 countries. We are pleased to report that clinics are up and running across the globe and we are actively involved in this work. Our students too have been busy. This year alone we have placed 20 students with clinics internationally and their accounts are as compelling as they are heartening. We intend to carry on with this aspect of our work and look forward, in particular, with working further with people in Afghanistan, Iran, Georgia, Pakistan, Palestine and Vietnam.

## The future

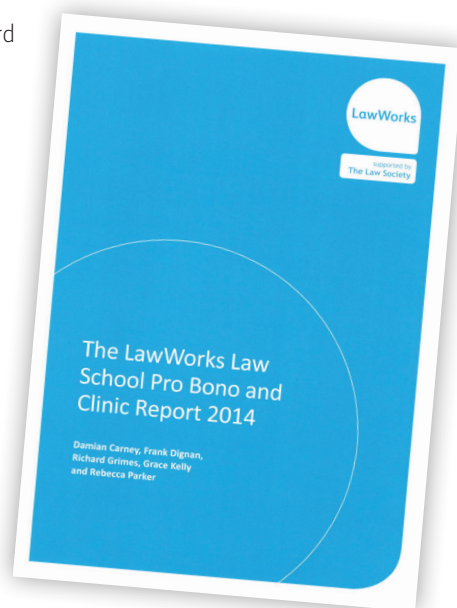
The 2013/14 session saw us consolidate the work of the Clinic. We are now confident of the quality of what we deliver and its value for our clients and students alike.

We started a postgraduate programme in 'Clinic' in September 2014 and hope to help produce new generation of lawyers who can establish and develop law school clinics. This is the first such programme in Britain.

In particular we are keen to build on our legal literacy work – helping members of the public better understand the law as it affects their everyday lives.

According to a recent survey of law school pro bono initiatives (Carney, Dignan, Grimes, Kelly and Parker, LexisNexis, 2014) at least 70% of law schools in the UK now have clinics of one sort or another. It has become the rule rather than the exception. Properly supervised, clinics offer a win/win situation for all involved. We look forward to continuing to support and extend the reach of clinical legal education and helping to improve access to justice.

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in the Clinic – our clients, our students and all those who have supervised the Clinic's activities.



## What our students say about the Clinic:

*"I feel privileged to have been a part of the Clinic team. Clients are so grateful for the service we provide – it's really quite humbling. The experience has also been a very welcome addition to what I have done elsewhere on my law degree"*

*"What with the Legal Aid changes and other cuts to public spending it is important for lawyers to pull together to help people with their problems. This has made me appreciate a bit more what it is like in the real world and how I can play my part – doing pro bono work..."*

If you would like legal advice or wish to discuss other matters please contact us:

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*All client information remains confidential*