

YORK LAW SCHOOL

Legal Clinic Annual Report 2020/21

WHAT IS THE LEGAL CLINIC?

The Legal Clinic is a free legal service for the public that opened its doors in 2011. In 2020/21, 65 students were involved with the Clinic as part of their studies. All work done is supervised by professionally qualified lawyers who ensure that the work carried out meets the high standards of service expected of a solicitors' practice. The Clinic provides much needed help for clients, whilst also supporting students to put their learning into practice and preparing them for their next steps in their legal careers.

Despite the challenges presented by the COVID 19 pandemic, we have continued to operate throughout. Along with most other student legal clinics around the country, this involved moving our services online. With students interviewing clients and working with their supervisors remotely using a new secure case management system, we maintained case work and our students continued with their studies in the Clinic.

During 2020/21, some of our students were involved with the Family Court Community Legal

Companion Scheme, which is delivered in partnership with York St John University as part of the CLOCK (Community Legal Outreach Collaboration Keele) network. Our law students were trained as Community Legal Companions to assist people who have no legal representation and need help with a family matter, such as going through a divorce or separation, or preparing for child arrangement proceedings.

This year also saw our students taking a leading role in the second annual Student Law Clinics Global

Day of Action for Climate Justice. This worldwide initiative led by the University of York Law School works to connect legal clinics in order to raise awareness of the role of the law in the climate emergency. Since the first GDA in 2019, over 50 university student legal clinics have taken part - from Delhi to California to Melbourne. In its first year, students tackled the theme of air pollution, last year the theme was the rights of nature and next year the theme will be single-use plastics.

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. We have supported clients who may struggle to find or afford legal advice. The Clinic has been able to provide its expertise into a range of areas including; family, employment, consumer and landlord and tenant disputes, as well as creating charities and companies. Since the Clinic began, we have advised over 350 clients and have worked in schools, courts, tribunals and prisons. The Clinic has also collaborated with other service providers such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and other local legal services, both making and receiving referrals.

Most of our clients come from York and the surrounding community. This year, due to Covid-19, we changed our processes to ensure we could keep providing legal advice whilst in lockdown. This meant we were able to help clients from further afield by interacting with clients online.

We try to help clients with their legal issues if we can. Following cuts to Legal Aid entitlements, there has been a general increase of unmet legal need and members of the public become more reliant on advice provided by services like the Clinic. In cases where we are unable to help, we always explain why and refer on to specialist advisors where possible.



Comments from Clients

"The entire process was brilliant."

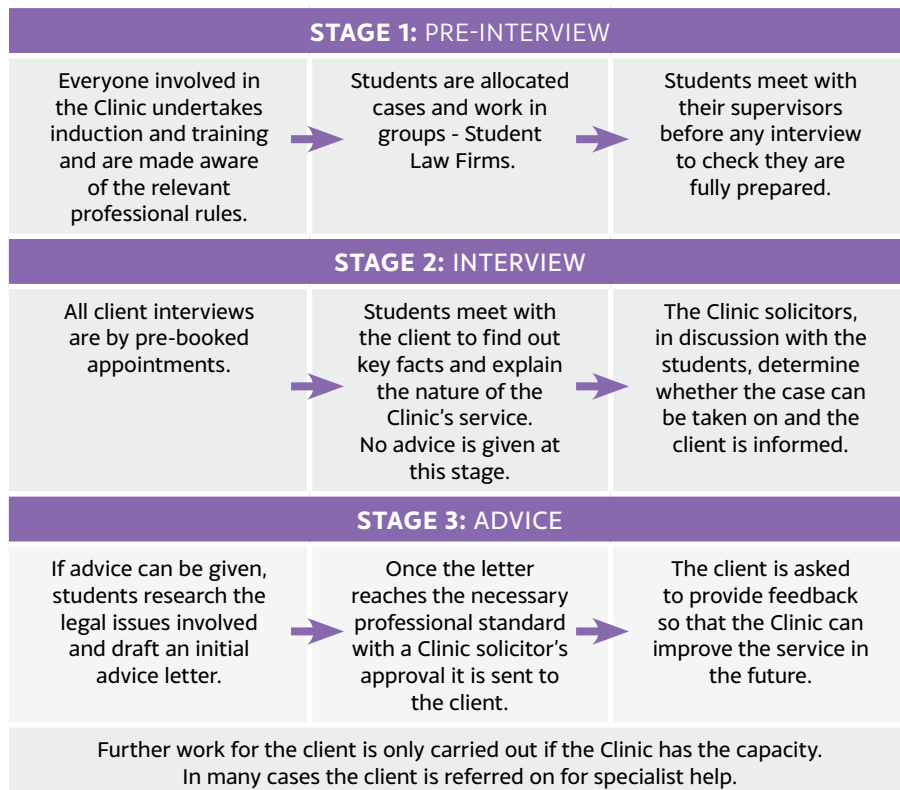
"The advice was relevant, well-presented and extremely helpful."

"I had confidence in the students who advised me. They were very professional, patient, understanding and very committed."



THE CLINIC PROCESS

Everyone in the Clinic follows a clear set of tried and tested procedures. As a result, clients can expect to receive a high quality, confidential and professional 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 involved. All work undertaken by students is supervised by qualified solicitors with practicing certificates. The University's Professional Indemnity Insurance covers the Clinic, thus providing further protection for clients, students and staff.



CLINIC CASES 2020-21

■ Civil matters: 12.5%	■ Consumer contract: 20.8%
■ Family: 4.2%	■ Employment: 16.7%
■ Business/charity: 16.7%	■ Housing: 16.7%
Total cases advice given: 24	■ Property: 12.5%



EXAMPLE CASES STUDIES

Property - party wall. Our client had recently purchased a property with a party wall. Since moving in, the client experienced problems with a vent in the party wall. We advised about how to challenge the seller, estate agent and neighbour to resolve the issue.

Consumer contract. Our client engaged a building firm for repairs to the roof of their property. The builders found repeated needs for extra work and the cost of the project increased. However, work was of poor quality. We advised about consumer rights, how to negotiate a resolution and whether to bring in an alternative contractor to repair previous work. We also advised about how to make a civil claim for negligence.

Private tenancy - shared student household. Our client had signed a private tenancy with a group of students before Covid lockdown. All but one of the household continued to pay their contracted rent and one refused. We advised about joint and several liabilities, breach of covenant, guarantors and tenancy deposits.

Commercial - new app. Our client had started a new fitness training app that expanded rapidly during lockdown. We advised about employing and contracting new staff, and about how to ensure privacy and liabilities policies were compliant.

STUDENT SELF-EVALUATION

"The redrafting of letters has been very useful and has taught me lots about the differences between academic writing at university and the more practical writing of solicitors. I have learned how to write more concisely and to the point by considering a different audience."

"I loved the practical element of it. It was one of the main reasons why I took the module in the first

place. It was good to see what we learnt in Legal Skills and Advanced Skills actually be applied in real life. I enjoyed having real clients who actually needed us to help them with their problems."

"The chance to work on real cases and learn practically how to write for clients was hugely beneficial to me. Learning from working lawyers about how to communicate with clients and

how to improve my legal writing really helped my confidence in this area."

"The client interaction felt very beneficial. I felt that this was a great experience to have. It made the process very real and motivated me. The opportunities for letter drafting have been great. I have learnt a lot about the drafting process and the importance of clarifying the facts following a client interview."