

## **THE LAW IN THE COMMUNITY MODEL OF CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION: ASSESSING THE IMPACT ON KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines a model of clinical legal education where a university law school works in partnership with an external organisation. The partnership enables law students to attend the offices of Citizens Advice during their law degree and under the guidance and supervision of their staff, advise their service users on a range of legal issues. Using data collected from a research study involving student focus groups and semi structured interviews with the Citizens Advice supervisors, this research contributes to the understanding of whether, and how, this model impacts upon law students, Citizens Advice and the local community. This study contributes to the knowledge on the value of this model of clinical legal education from both a pedagogical and social justice perspective. The research raises questions as to how a partnership between a university and external organisation can overcome challenges, ensuring an equivalent clinical experience for all students and that effective feedback is provided to students. The results indicate that there are a clear set of pedagogical benefits to the students and benefits to Citizens Advice with regards to the service they can provide to the local community. The authors argue that this module enables students to engage in transformative and impactful work, whilst obtaining first-hand experience of the access to justice challenges (and other socio-economic issues) faced

by their local community. The study will be of interest to clinics who incorporate, or intend to incorporate, an externship model in their curriculum, both in Europe and beyond.

## **Introduction**

The Law in the Community Student Law Office module was introduced into Northumbria University's LLB Hons curriculum during the academic year 2018-2019 and has now been running successfully for four years.<sup>1</sup> In this module, the students volunteer for 4 hours each week at Citizens Advice over the course of the second semester to provide legal advice, assistance and/or legal education to their service users.<sup>2</sup> This is in addition to the fortnightly workshops that they attend with their university tutor which further develop the students' skills and aim to contextualise their volunteering experience.

Citizens Advice is a network of charities, offering free and impartial advice to members of the community.<sup>3</sup> It is a vital service which helped over 2.55 million people

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<sup>1</sup> For further information about the Student Law Office please see the webpage <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/academic-departments/northumbria-lawschool/study/student-law-office/>.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on the design and implementation of this module see Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148.

<sup>3</sup> Citizens Advice offers legal advice and assistance to the public in 2,540 locations across England and Wales, with 21,400 volunteers and 8,150 members of staff. They provide advice on a range of legal

with one-to-one advice in 2021/22.<sup>4</sup> Legal aid cuts introduced by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO),<sup>5</sup> and cuts to charitable organisations,<sup>6</sup> has impacted on access to justice. Indeed, those who seek assistance from Citizens Advice are often *'the most disadvantaged in society with the greatest needs.'*<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, through the students' volunteer work, they increase the capacity of Citizens Advice and play a key role in ensuring advice and assistance is provided to those who may not otherwise be able to access legal services<sup>8</sup>. The students develop their *'knowledge of the law and professional skills and simultaneously gain an appreciation of the access to justice challenges faced by their local community.'*<sup>9</sup>

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matters including welfare benefits, family, housing and employment law. For further information, see the webpage <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk> accessed 22 April 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Citizens Advice, 'All our impact' <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/about-us1/impact-of-citizens-advice-service/all-our-impact/> accessed 22 November 2022.

<sup>5</sup> The reforms being implemented through the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/10/contents/enacted> accessed 27 November 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Debra Morris and Warren Barr 'The impact of cuts on legal aid funding on charities' *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* Vol. 35 No.1 pp.79-94.

<sup>7</sup> Citizens Advice, 'Our impact' <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/difference-we-make/impact-of-citizens-advice-service/all-our-impact/> accessed 3 December 2022.

<sup>8</sup> See Elaine Campbell, 'Pro bono is great education for law students but they shouldn't fill the gap left by legal aid cuts' published in *The Conversation* (2014) <https://theconversation.com/pro-bono-is-great-education-for-law-students-but-they-shouldnt-fill-gap-left-by-legal-aid-cuts-34323> accessed 4 December 2020. See also Donald Nicholson (2006) 'Legal Education or Community Service the Extra Curricular Student Law Clinic' *Web Journal of Current Legal Issues*, <http://www.bailii.org/uk/other/journals/WebJCLI/2006/issue3/nicolson3.html> accessed 4 December 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148.

The benefits of law schools working with external organisations is not a new concept in clinical legal education and the benefits are well documented in the literature.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, law schools working in partnership with Citizens Advice is not new<sup>11</sup> however there is a dearth of literature on value of this model from the viewpoint of the students and the Citizens Advice supervisors. Previous research conducted by Sparrow reveals that a collaboration between the Law School of the University of Portsmouth<sup>12</sup> and their local Citizens Advice brings *'rewards for both teachers and students'* which *'have been significant'*.<sup>13</sup> For King and Jones the partnership between Birmingham City University Law School and their local Citizens Advice<sup>14</sup> brings benefits to Citizens Advice, its clients, the university and to the students. They highlight that it is *'the glue of mutually reinforcing benefits that makes this partnership so*

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<sup>10</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson and Ana Speed, 'A case study approach: Legal Outreach clinics at Northumbria University' (2019) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 26 No. 1 pp.179-215; Margaret Castles, 'Marriage of convenience or a match made in heaven? Collaboration between a law school clinic and a commercial law firm' (2016) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol. 23, pp. 7-47; Karen A Jordan, 'Enhancing Externships to Meet Expectations for Experiential Learning' (2016) *Clinical Law Review* Vol. 23 pp.339; Katie Spillane, 'Being the Change: Social Justice in Externship Program Evaluation' (2016) *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* Vol. 33 pp. 45; Judith McNamara, Catherine Campbell and Evan Hamman, 'Community Projects: Extending the Community Lawyering Model' (2014) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 21 No.2 pp.106-138; Lydia Bleasdale Hill and Paul Wragg, 'Models of Clinics and Their Value to Students, Universities and the Community in the post 2012 Fees Era' (2013) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol. 19, pp.257-270; Martin Partington, 'Academic and Practical Legal Education: The Contribution of the Sandwich System' (1984) *The Law Teacher* Vol. 18 pp. 110.

<sup>11</sup> See Sarah Nason, 'Holistic Legal Support for Litigants in Person: the North and Mid Wales Law Clinic Partnership' (2022) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 29. No 2.pp. 69-111.

<sup>12</sup> In this model the students conduct their Citizens Advice training in year two of their LLB Hons degree and then act as Citizens Advice advisers for 120 hours in year three.

<sup>13</sup> Claire Sparrow, 'Reflective Student Practitioner - An example integrating clinical experience into the curriculum' (2009) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol. 14 pp.70-76.

<sup>14</sup> In this model the students in the third year of their LLB degree attend Citizens Advice for one day each week.

*strong and enduring.'*<sup>15</sup> A more recent study by Nason analysed a partnership between seven Local Citizens Advice branches and Bangor University using 13 student reflective reports.<sup>16</sup> She concludes her research by highlighting that this model of clinical legal education has helped hundreds of people and students *'have a greater appreciation and enabling people and communities to help themselves with some elements of their justice problems, as well as being aware that this is increasingly achieved or supported using new technology.'*<sup>17</sup> Finally, in previous research conducted by the authors, the pedagogic value of this module was highlighted from the viewpoint of the academic responsible for designing, and implementing the module. The research concluded that it *'not only develops students' professional skills, but also empowers students to better understand access to justice challenges and enables them to play a pivotal part in supporting their local community.'*<sup>18</sup>

This study builds on previous research and presents the first detailed empirical evidence of the importance of the Law in the Community model, capturing the perceptions of those who supervise students at Citizens Advice and those students who learn in the clinic. The overarching aim of this research was to assess the impact of the Law in the Community module on Citizens Advice, the community and the law

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<sup>15</sup> Christopher King and David Jones 'Cui pro bono? Working on Partnership: A Possible Blueprint for the Future of Clinical Legal Education' in Linden Thomas, Steven Vaughan, Bharat Malkani and Theresa Lynch (eds) 'Reimagining Clinical Legal Education' (Hart Publishing, 2018) pp. 25-46.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Nason, 'Holistic Legal Support for Litigants in Person: the North and Mid Wales Law Clinic Partnership' (2022) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education, Vol 29. No. 2 pp. 69-111.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid pp. 106.

<sup>18</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148.

students. The study used semi structured interviews and focus groups to provide rich qualitative data. Students and Citizens Advice supervisors participated in the data collection between April and May 2022. Full details of the method adopted are set out in the Method and Methodology section.

This article begins by providing a brief overview of the Law in the Community module, highlighting its key features, and providing background and context to the research. The method and methodology adopted will then be explained and thereafter the results will be analysed.

## **Background**

### *Clinical Legal Education and the Clinic at Northumbria University*

The Northumbria Student Law Office clinic was first established in 1981<sup>19</sup> and utilises clinical legal education as the teaching method. There is no agreed definition of clinical legal education however one definition is '*Learning through participation in real or realistic legal interactions coupled with reflection on this experience*'.<sup>20</sup> The benefit of clinical

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<sup>19</sup> See Cath Sylvester, Jonny Hall and Elaine Hall, 'Problem Based Learning and Clinical Legal Education: What Can Clinical Educators Learn from PBL?' (2004) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 4 pp. 39-64.

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Kerrigan, 'What is Clinical Legal Education and Pro Bono' in Kevin Kerrigan and Victoria Murray (eds), *A Student Guide to Clinical Legal Education and Pro Bono* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011) pp. 5.

legal education in terms of skill development,<sup>21</sup> employability<sup>22</sup> and the wider community<sup>23</sup> is well documented. As Gold highlights, clinical legal education can '*stand on its own as a powerful methodology for learning.*'<sup>24</sup> Such a wide definition of clinical legal education is needed for it can encompass a variety of different models<sup>25</sup>; including, drop-in clinics, simulation, letters of advice, full representation and policy clinics.<sup>26</sup> The Student Law Office at Northumbria University is a year long module for students in their third year of the Mlaw degree<sup>27</sup> and the final year of LLB Hons

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Grimes, 'Legal Skills and Clinical Legal Education' (1995) Web Journal of Current Legal Issues Vol. 3; J Giddings, 'Contemplating the Future of Clinical Legal Education' (2008) Griffith Law Review Vol. 15, p.15; Jonny Hall, Kevin Kerrigan, 'Clinic and the Wider Law Curriculum' (2011) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education, Vol. 15. pp.25-37. For a discussion on the link between clinical legal education as a learning methodology and the extent to which students become more aware of the knowledge, skills and professional responsibility see Ann Thanaraj, 'Understanding how law clinic can contribute towards students' development of professional responsibility' (2016) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education, Vol. 23 No. 4. pp. 89-135.

<sup>22</sup> Francina Cantatore, 'The Impact of Pro Bono Law Clinics on Employability and Work Readiness in Law Students' (2018) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education, Vol. 25 No. 1. pp.147-172.

<sup>23</sup> Frank Dignan, 'Bridging the Academic/Vocational Divide: The Creation of a Law Clinic in an Academic Law School' (2011) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education Vol. 15 pp.75-84; Lyndsey Bengtsson and Ana Speed, 'A Case Study Approach. Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' (2019) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education Vol. 26 No. 1 pp.179-215.

<sup>24</sup> Nigel Gold 'Why not an International Journal of Clinical Legal Education?' (2000) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education Vol. 1 pp. 7-12.

<sup>25</sup> For a consideration of the different models of clinic see Donald Nicholson, 'Our Roots Began in South Africa' Modelling Law Clinics to Maximise Social Justice Ends' (2016) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education Vol. 23 No. 3 pp.87-136.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion on policy clinics see Rachel Dunn, Lyndsey Bengtsson and Siobhan McConnell, 'The Policy Clinic at Northumbria University. Influencing Policy/Law Reform as an Effective Educational Tool for Students' (2020) Vol. 27 No. 2 pp.68-102.

<sup>27</sup> The MLaw degree at Northumbria University is a 4 year qualifying law degree which incorporates a legal practice course (a 1 year post graduate level qualification required to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales). The way in which individuals may qualify as a Solicitor in England and Wales is changing with the Solicitors Qualifying Examinations. For further information on the Solicitors Qualifying Examination please see <https://sqa.sra.org.uk/>.

degree<sup>28</sup> to advise and represent clients on a range of legal issues.<sup>29</sup> The Student Law Office utilises the full representation model where students advise and represent members of the public under the supervision of qualified solicitors, barristers or caseworkers employed by the University.<sup>30</sup> Bleasdale-Hill and Wragg highlight that this type of internal supervision model provides for more contact with the supervisor than an external model.<sup>31</sup> This is a labour-intensive model of clinical legal education. Approximately 200 students undertake this module each year and recover millions of pounds of compensation for clients.<sup>32</sup> Within the Student Law Office year long module there is also a Policy Clinic where the students undertake impactful research with a view to influencing law or policy reform.<sup>33</sup>

As Carpenter highlights, Law Schools are increasingly looking for ways to develop their clinical experience for students beyond the traditional representation model.<sup>34</sup> In order to widen the scope of Northumbria's Student Law Office, the Law in the Community module was introduced in the 2018-2019 academic year as an alternative

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<sup>28</sup> This is a qualifying law degree which does not incorporate a legal practice course. After completion of the LLB degree, students would then need to complete either a 1 year Legal Practice Course or the Solicitors Qualifying Examinations.

<sup>29</sup> The Student Law Office advises on a range of legal issues including housing law, employment law, welfare benefits, family law, civil dispute and criminal law.

<sup>30</sup> The module is also available to the Legal Practice Course students as a 12 week module in the second semester.

<sup>31</sup> Lydia Bleasdale-Hill and Paul Wragg, 'Models of Clinics and Their Value to Students, Universities and the Community in the post 2012 Fees Era' (2013) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol. 19, pp.257-270.

<sup>32</sup> See <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/academic-departments/northumbria-law-school/study/student-law-office/>.

<sup>33</sup> Rachel Dunn; Lyndsey Bengtsson and Siobhan McConnell, 'The Policy Clinic at Northumbria University. Influencing Policy/Law Reform as an Effective Educational Tool for Students' (2020) Vol. 27 No. 2 pp68-102.

<sup>34</sup> Anna E Carpenter, 'The project model of clinical education: Eight principles to maximize student learning and social justice impact' (2013) *Clinical Law Review*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 39-94.



clinical module to the year long Student law Office module. The aim of the module was for all the law students at Northumbria University to have the opportunity to undertake a clinical module and *'gain the practical legal experience and develop their professional skills.'*<sup>35</sup> At the time the module was introduced, the Student Law Office did not have capacity to offer a clinical experience to all students.<sup>36</sup> With more of an institutional focus on student satisfaction with the introduction of the National Student Survey and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)<sup>37</sup>, it was also acknowledged that clinical modules often attracted a *'high feedback rate'* due to *'a combination of the fact that students tend to build relationships with supervisors, which they would not do on an ordinary black letter law module and secondly it is such a different way of learning to what students are used to.'*<sup>38</sup>

The impetus behind the introduction of the Law and the Community module is pedagogical driven, however there is also a potential for social justice impact.<sup>39</sup> Students develop that social justice ethos and help increase the capacity of Citizens Advice in advising the local community. Whilst social justice was not an explicit aim

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<sup>35</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> The National Student Survey and the Teaching Excellence Framework are ways in which the government assess UK universities. See Amanda French and Matt O'Leary 'Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: Challenges, Changes and the Teaching Excellence Framework' (Emerald Publishing, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148, 128.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

of the module, from this perspective the students provide support to Citizens Advice and help fill unmet legal need in the local community.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the students gain a greater understanding of the access to justice challenges their clients face.<sup>41</sup> Social justice as an aim of clinical legal education has been extensively covered in the literature in the context of live client programmes<sup>42</sup> and there is a debate as to whether it should be explicitly mentioned as a primary mission.<sup>43</sup> Many clinical programmes expressly adopt a social justice perspective<sup>44</sup> and there is academic debate as to whether social justice or the pedagogical benefit should take precedence.<sup>45</sup> However it is also important to acknowledge that students may not necessarily undertake clinical legal education because of the social justice perspective, with some students

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<sup>40</sup> Anna E Carpenter, 'The project model of clinical education: Eight principles to maximize student learning and social justice impact' (2013) *Clinical Law Review*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 39-94.

<sup>41</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148. See also Ben Waters and Jeanette Ashton, 'A study into situated learning through community leadership partnership' (2018) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol. 25 No.2, pp. 4-47; F S Bloch (ed.) (2011) *The Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Justice*, (New York: Oxford University Press).

<sup>42</sup> See for example Donald Nicholson, 'Our Roots Began in South Africa Modelling Law Clinics to Maximise Social Justice Ends' (2016) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 23 No. 3 pp.87-136; Praveen Kosuri 'Losing My Religion: The Place of Social Justice in Clinical Legal Education' (2012) *Boston College Journal of Law and Social Justice* Vol. 32 No. 2 pp. 336; Richard J. Wilson 'Western Europe: Last Holdout in the Worldwide Acceptance of Clinical Legal Education' (2009) *German Law Journal* Vol. 10 Issues. 6/7 pp.835.

<sup>43</sup> Riette Du Plessis, 'Clinical Legal Education: Determining the Mission and Focus of a University Law Clinic and Required Outcomes, Skills and Values' (2015) *De Jure* 48, No 2; Stephen Wizner and Jane Aiken, 'Teaching and Doing; the Role of Law School Clinics in Enhancing Access to Justice' (2014) *Fordham Law Review* 73, no 3, pp.997-1012.

<sup>44</sup> Paul McKeown, 'Can Social Justice Values be Taught Through Clinical Legal Education?' In C. Ashford, & Paul McKeown (Eds.), *Social Justice and Legal Education* (First ed., pp. 84-110, 2018). Cambridge Scholars.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

motivated to enhance their employability.<sup>46</sup> There is no set definition of social justice in the literature. For Weinberg *'social justice means that able members of society should challenge political, economic, societal, legal and other structures that oppress the less advantaged'*.<sup>47</sup> Research has shown that pro bono experience can have a positive impact on students' willingness to undertake public service work in the future.<sup>48</sup> Arguably, law schools play a role of raising awareness of unequal access to justice and to *'implement strategies aimed at ameliorating these'*.<sup>49</sup>

The authors' previous article highlights the consequence of austerity measures and the cuts to legal aid have meant that there is a greater need for organisations such as Citizens Advice and law clinics.<sup>50</sup> A balance needs to be struck here, however, to ensure the students are not overloaded with clients, ensuring there is a pedagogic value to their work. Indeed, as Wilson highlights *'Loading students down with too many cases of poor clients is a disservice to both student learning and client service, and even with*

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<sup>46</sup> Paul McKeown 'Law Students Attitudes Towards Pro Bono and Voluntary Work: the Experience at Northumbria University (2015) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 22 No. 1 pp. 6-46.

<sup>47</sup> Jacqueline Weinberg, 'Preparing students for 21<sup>st</sup> century practice: enhancing social justice teaching in clinical legal education' (2021) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 28 No.1 pp.5-67.

<sup>48</sup> See Sally Maresh, 'The Impact of Clinical Legal Education on Decisions of Law Students to Practice Public Interest Law' in *Educating for Justice: Social Values and Legal Education* (Jeremy Cooper and Louise G. Trubek eds. 1997); Deborah A. Schmedemann, 'Priming for Pro Bono Publico: The Impact of the Law School on Pro Bono Participation in Practice', in *Private Lawyers and the Public Interest: The Evolving Role of Pro Bono in the Legal Profession* (Robert Granfield and Lynn Mather eds. 2009).

<sup>49</sup> Lauren Carasik, 'Justice in the Balance: An Evaluation of One Clinics Ability to Harmonise Practical Skills, Ethics and Professionalism within Social Justice Mission' (2016) *Southern California Review of Law and Social Justice* Vol. 16, pp.23. See also Elaine Campbell and Victoria Murray, 'Mind the Gap: Clinic and the Access to Justice Dilemma' (2015) *International Journal of Legal and Social Studies* Vol. 2 No. 3 pp. 94-106.

<sup>50</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148.

*the most accomplished clinical supervisor cannot provide quality oversight with an excessive number of clients served by large numbers of students.'*<sup>51</sup>

### ***The Law in the Community Module***

Law schools working in partnership with Citizens Advice has become more and more prevalent over the years.<sup>52</sup> Some clinics have operated this model for several years, developing a partnership which is '*strong and enduring*.'<sup>53</sup> However there appears to be no set model as to how this partnership works in practice, with some universities requesting student volunteers to others making the module a mandatory part of their degree. Some students receive a Citizens Advice qualification/accreditation as part of their volunteer work and others provide more of an ad hoc assistance. Although not an exhaustive list, there are models of this partnership operating in Birmingham City University,<sup>54</sup> University of Portsmouth,<sup>55</sup> University of Central Lancashire,<sup>56</sup> University of Leeds, and Lancaster University.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Richard J Wilson, 'Western Europe: Last Holdout in the Worldwide Acceptance of Clinical Legal Education' (2009) *German Law Journal* Vol. 10, Issues 6/7 pp.835.

<sup>52</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher King and David Jones 'Cui pro bono? Working on Partnership: A Possible Blueprint for the Future of Clinical Legal Education' in Linden Thomas, Steven Vaughan, Bharat Malkani and Theresa Lynch (eds) '*Reimagining Clinical Legal Education*' (Hart Publishing, 2018) pp. 25-46.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. See also Birmingham City School of Law, 'Legal Advice and Representation Unit' <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/law/student-experience-and-employability/legal-advice-representations-unit>

<sup>55</sup> Claire Sparrow, 'Reflective Student Practitioner – an example integrating clinical experience into the curriculum' (2009) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 14 No.4 pp 70-76.

<sup>56</sup> University of Central Lancashire, 'Law Clinic Student Support' [https://www.uclan.ac.uk/students/support/law\\_clinic.php](https://www.uclan.ac.uk/students/support/law_clinic.php) last accessed 8 February 2023

<sup>57</sup> Lancaster University, Law Clinics' <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/study/why-lancaster/law-clinics/> last accessed 8 February 2023.

In the third year of the LLB programme at Northumbria University the students choose between the year long Student Law Office module and the Law in the Community module. The latter is undertaken alongside their dissertation. In the Law in the Community module, the students leave their university campus and work from the offices of Citizens Advice to advise members of the public on a range of legal matters. They undertake this module during the second semester which is between the months of January and May.

The students attend Citizens Advice for half a day each week for 10 weeks during the second semester. They are asked to complete approximately 16 hours of online mandatory training before the module starts so that they are ready to begin advising clients.<sup>58</sup> This training is split into induction training and core training. The induction training introduces the students to the aims, principles and work of Citizens Advice. The core training activities aim to provide the students with key skills and knowledge that they will need to provide clients with information and advice, such as interviewing skills, case recording and telephone skills. The training activities are the same as those that regular volunteers at Citizens Advice are required to complete. Where however, individuals volunteer longer term, they must complete further training.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Approximately 2 months before the start of the module the students are sent details of the online training course and asked to complete this before they begin their volunteering.

<sup>59</sup> Once the module comes to an end the student may agree with Citizens Advice to continue their volunteer work.

Whilst at Citizens Advice, the students are involved in advising clients at the daily face-to-face drop-in sessions where up to 60 members of the public can attend. The students are also involved in giving telephone advice to clients. They are exposed to a wide variety of issues and areas of law, including welfare benefits, debt, employment, consumer protection, housing, immigration, tax and travel. They also undertake a diverse range of activities on behalf of their clients, which involves interviewing clients, taking instructions and advising clients. Additionally, they may undertake legal research, draft client statements and court documents, prepare case strategies and contribute to law reform.<sup>60</sup>

The students also attend fortnightly two hour workshops which further develop the students' skills<sup>61</sup> and contextualise their volunteering experience. These workshops take place within the law school with their university tutor. The students therefore gain the benefit of learning from multiple supervisors.<sup>62</sup> As Bengtsson and Speed note, a model using a combination of university and external supervisors has the potential

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<sup>60</sup> For a discussion on the benefits of students undertaking policy work: see for example Steven H Leleiko, 'Clinical Education, Empirical Study and Legal Scholarship' (1979) *Journal of Legal Education*, Vol. 30 No.1 pp. 149. See also Rachel Dunn and Richard Glancey, 'Using legal policy and law reform as assessment' in Alison Bone and Paul Maharg (Eds) *Critical Perspectives on the Scholarship of Assessment and Learning in Law* (2019) (pp.139-163). ANU Press; Rachel Dunn, Lyndsey Bengtsson and Siobhan McConnell, 'The Policy Clinic at Northumbria University: Influencing Policy/Law Reform as an Effective Educational Tool for Students' (2020) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 68-102.

<sup>61</sup> For example, there is a workshop where the students are asked to research an area of law that they are interested in and that is of relevance to the work they do at Citizens Advice. The students complete a research report for feedback and then convert that research into a blog article.

<sup>62</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson and Ana Speed, 'Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' (2019) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 26 (1) pp. 179- 215, Plerhoples, A and Spratley, A 'Engaging Outside Counsel in Transactional Law Clinics' (2014) *Clinical Law Review* Vol. 20, pp 379, 393, Lydia Bleasdale-Hill and Paul Wragg, 'Models of Clinics and Their Value to Students, Universities and the Community in the post 2012 Fees Era' (2013) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol. 19, pp.257-270.

for 'great rewards in terms of client satisfaction, community engagement and student development.'<sup>63</sup>

A theme throughout the workshops is the development of the students' social justice awareness and ensuring that they gain an appreciation of the valuable role that they play in supporting unmet legal need. The workshops are designed to enable the students to consider their role at Citizens Advice and also explore what access to justice barriers are faced by individuals. For example, in one workshop the students are asked to deliver a short presentation about a case or task they have worked on whilst at Citizens Advice.<sup>64</sup> In preparing for this presentation the students are directed to consider points such why the client came to Citizens Advice rather than any other provider of legal services. They are also asked to consider how the case may have developed had Citizens Advice not been involved and whether there are any implications of the case beyond the individual interests of the parties involved.

During the first year of the Law in the Community module, the students dealt with a total of 475 clients. During the second year, the students handled a total of 73 client enquiries. The reduction in the number of clients in the second year was due to fewer students enrolled on the module and the second-year placements being cut short by 4 weeks due to Covid-19. During the third year, due to Covid-19 restrictions and concern over client confidentiality, the students conducted work which was non data

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<sup>63</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson and Ana Speed, 'A case study approach: Legal Outreach clinics at Northumbria University' (2019) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 26 No. 1 pp.179-215.

<sup>64</sup> To protect client confidentiality, client details or other identifying information are not mentioned during this presentation.

sensitive and did not have any direct client contact. Notwithstanding the Covid-19 pandemic, the students were still able to support Citizens Advice with legal research. Given the rapid changes in various areas of law due to COVID- 19, there was a demand for legal research and public legal education.<sup>65</sup> In the last academic year 2021-2022, the students advised 300 clients.

At the end of the module, the students are assessed by way of a portfolio containing all the work they have done both at Citizens Advice and during the workshops.<sup>66</sup> This portfolio is stored at the offices of Citizens Advice and brought to the University by the students on the day of hand in at the end of the module.<sup>67</sup> The portfolio is assessed on a range of grade descriptors including contribution to the module, knowledge and understanding, teamwork, research skills, written and oral communication, case and task management.<sup>68</sup> Each grade descriptor provides a qualitative statement for a range of levels which equate to the degree classification.<sup>69</sup> One of the grade descriptors they are assessed on is reflection, which Ledvinka describes as the *'magic ingredient which converts legal experience into education.'*<sup>70</sup> The students demonstrate their reflective analysis in a reflective journal which they are asked to complete on a weekly basis.

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<sup>65</sup> Notably in employment law and welfare benefits.

<sup>66</sup> The students' portfolio contains all of their draft work they have completed during the module together with all the feedback they have received from their Citizens Advice supervisor and their university workshop tutor.

<sup>67</sup> The students agree the date and time they will transfer their portfolio from Citizens to the University with both Citizens Advice and their workshop tutor.

<sup>68</sup> The descriptors are meant to provide a guide to the likely performance level required for each criterion. The assessment criteria are equally weighted.

<sup>69</sup> Ranging from fail to high first.

<sup>70</sup> Georgina Ledvinka, 'Reflection and Assessment in Clinical Legal Education: Do You See What I See?' (2006) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 9, pp. 29-56 at 29.



This is important to enable the students to evaluate their progress as the module progresses<sup>71</sup> and by encouraging students to reflect this develops their skills to be a life-long learner. It is also important to encourage students to begin to reflect at this early stage given that the Solicitor Regulation Authority<sup>72</sup> Competence Statement states that all solicitors need to '*reflect on and learn from their practice and learn from other people*'.<sup>73</sup> This will also be an important transferrable skill to those students entering into other professions.

## **Method and Methodology**

All students who had undertaken the Law in the Community module during the 2021/2022 academic year were invited to participate in a focus group at the end of their studies. A total of 25 students participated across two focus groups, representing 70% of the research population.<sup>74</sup> Each focus group lasted between 40-45 minutes. The use

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<sup>71</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148; Louise Crowley, 'The Family Law Clinic at UCC Understanding the Law in the Classroom and Beyond' (2020) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 27 No.3, pp 175-228; Keith Morrison 'Developing reflective practice in higher degree students through a learning journal' (1996) Vol.21 No.3 *Studies in Higher Education* pp., 317-332 DOI: 10.1080/03075079612331381241.

<sup>72</sup> Which regulates solicitors in England and Wales.

<sup>73</sup> SRA Statement of solicitor competence, A2 <https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/cpd/competence-statement/> last accessed 8 February 2023.

<sup>74</sup> The students were asked by the moderator to sign an informed consent form at the beginning of the focus group, which assured anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore their supervisor did not know who had participated and no names were referred to in the transcription. The students were also asked to read an information document before they agreed to participate. In this document, the purpose of the focus group was explained, and the authors made clear that their participation would not affect any aspect of their programme of study and was in no way linked to their grade within the SLO. The voluntary nature of their participation was highlighted, as was the fact that they could withdraw their consent to participate at any stage.

of focus groups in research is widespread.<sup>75</sup> They offer an opportunity to obtain '*high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others.*'<sup>76</sup> They offer cost effective data collection<sup>77</sup> and can elicit diverse perspectives on a particular topic.<sup>78</sup> Focus groups may also elicit information in a way which allows researchers to explore why a particular issue is important.<sup>79</sup> There are limitations to a focus group however, including ensuring the available response time for each participant is restricted so that everyone can be heard.<sup>80</sup> Also, those that feel their viewpoint is in the minority may be less inclined to share their opinion.<sup>81</sup> A framework of questions was devised to help guide the discussion and to give it focus. An example of one of the questions from the interview framework was 'what skills do you think you've developed and gained during your time in the module?' The moderator<sup>82</sup> however, could deviate from the framework and ask additional questions if required. This approach provided a balance between having a guide and flexibility.

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<sup>75</sup> Jean A King and Laurie Stevahn 'Interactive evaluation practice; Mastering the interpersonal dynamics of program evaluation.' (2013) Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage; Richard A Krueger and Jean King 'Involving community members in focus groups' (1997) Vol. 4 The focus group kit Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>76</sup>Michael Q Patton 'Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. Integrating Theory and Practice' (2015) 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Sage Publishing pp.475.

<sup>77</sup> Richard A Krueger "Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research" (1994) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Q Patton 'Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. Integrating Theory and Practice' (2015) 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Sage Publishing P477.

<sup>79</sup> David L Morgan 'Focus groups as qualitative research.' (1988) London: Sage.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Q Patton 'Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. Integrating Theory and Practice' (2015) Fourth Edition Sage Publishing.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Who was not involved in the teaching of the module for the students and therefore did not have an input into the students' assessment.

In addition to the student focus groups, all those who supervised the law students at Citizens Advice were invited to participate in a semi-structured, one-to-one interview. Interviews were chosen as they '*achieve a level depth and complexity.*'<sup>83</sup> All three supervisors agreed to be interviewed. Like the focus groups, a framework of questions was used to guide each semi-structured interview. However, the interviewee could deviate from this framework and ask additional questions if needed. From a practical viewpoint, sometimes there is simply not enough time for participants to be interviewed singly.<sup>84</sup> However, given there were only three supervisors on the module, a one-to-one interview could be undertaken with each supervisor at Citizens Advice and it would not be overly time consuming.

It also seemed more appropriate to interview the supervisors individually given the fact that one of the supervisors is the Director (and manager of the other supervisors). Watts found that participants can be inhibited where there is a dominant participant in the group<sup>85</sup> so given the relationships between the supervisors and the potential professional hierarchy, individual interviews appeared more appropriate. Of course, with any research, there is a risk that the participants could be influenced by the fact they know they are being studied, known as the Hawthorne Effect.<sup>86</sup> This is usually

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<sup>83</sup> Bridget Byrne 'Qualitative Interviewing' in C Seale (ed), *Researching Culture and Society* (4th edn, Sage 2018).

<sup>84</sup> Mike Watts and Dave Ebbut 'More than the sum of the parts: Research methods in groups interviewing' (1987) *British Education Research Journal* Vol. 13 Issue. 1 pp. 25-34

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> The Hawthorne Effect refers to a phenomenon in which individuals modify an aspect of their behaviour as a result of being observed. The term was coined during research at Western Electric's factory in the Hawthorne suburb of Chicago in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It was concluded that the

concerned with ethnographical research, but it can also be a challenge in other research methods. For example, in interviews respondents may change their answers to be more 'correct' when they know they are being studied. Fekjaer explains that a social desirability bias can occur when participants want to give a more favourable image of themselves because they want to make a good impression on others.<sup>87</sup>

All research was undertaken in accordance with the University's ethics procedure and each research participant provided informed consent to the study. Each focus group and semi-structured interview was recorded<sup>88</sup> and transcribed afterwards. Following completion of the data collection, the transcripts were thematically analysed to identify key issues and any different experiences or perspectives.<sup>89</sup> The transcripts were coded and thereafter organised into themes. The verification of the participant data by triangulation of research methods arises from the authors' observations from teaching on the module, as well as from anonymous feedback of the students in the end of year module evaluation survey.

A limitation of this research is that it examined a small-scale study, which may affect the quality of the study for some.<sup>90</sup> The authors would argue that universities

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workers' productivity was not affected by the changes in working conditions, but rather it was affected by the fact they knew they were being observed.

<sup>87</sup> Silje Fekjaer 'Old and New Methods in Police Research' (2018) *Nordisk politiforskning*, Vol 5 No. 2 pp.104-123.

<sup>88</sup> Bryan Marshall et al 'Does Sample Size Matter in Qualitative Research?: A Review of the Qualitative Interviews in IS Research' (2013) *Journal of Computer Information Systems* Vol. 54 Issue. 1, p. 11.

<sup>89</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke 'Using thematic analysis in psychology' (2006) *Qualitative Research in Psychology* Vol. 3 Issue. 3, p. 5 accessed at: (<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/1043060>)

<sup>90</sup> Ali Alsaawi, 'A Critical Review of Qualitative Interviews' (2014) *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences* Vol. 3 No. 4 pp.149-156, 151.

operating a similar model of clinical legal education can transfer the results of this research to their work, through transferability.<sup>91</sup> However, a larger cross institutional study would further develop insight into the value of this model of clinical legal education.

The themes identified are as follows: (1) Skill and attribute development (2) Impact on the local community and to Citizens Advice (3) Student perception of access to justice challenges and (4) Supervision.

## **Results & Discussion**

### *Theme 1 – Skill and Attribute Development*

A qualitative analysis of the data demonstrated that there are clear pedagogical benefits of this module to the students. There was a consensus (amongst both students and supervisors) that the module allowed the students to develop a wide range of skills and attributes, including: communication skills, interviewing, professionalism, problem solving, confidence, case management, time management and teamwork.<sup>92</sup> The students felt strongly that they had developed their interviewing and oral communication skills. One student commented:

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<sup>91</sup> Staffan Larsson, 'A pluralist view of generalization in qualitative research' (2009) *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* Vol. 32 Issue. 1, p.13.

<sup>92</sup> These are all skills students are expected to develop in clinical legal education.

*...you need to be able to communicate with people who may not understand. So, it was beneficial to me because it kind of taught me to communicate to them in a way that they will understand. I think that that's very important.*

As one supervisor highlighted, the students advise those in the community who often have no other way to turn for legal advice. Some clients may come to the interview distressed, seeking help. Citizens Advice often advise people who are vulnerable by reason of poverty, mental health difficulties or domestic abuse. One student explained that the clinical experience with these clients helps *'you learn that this is how you're supposed to talk to people, and that you need to communicate with them emotionally as well.'* The students learnt how they *'just had to adapt to the different types of people that came in.'* Supporting Bengtsson and Speed's research on legal outreach clinics, the fact the students go into the local community to advise from the offices of Citizens Advice has meant that they have been able to meet *'people in different walks of life'*.<sup>93</sup> Also, by advising within the community the students have developed their ability to work with those who are vulnerable and who have complex needs. Whilst there is no data on the socio-economic class of the students, their experience did expose them to social issues<sup>94</sup> with one student commenting *'Just knowing our privileged position, from seeing what people struggle with can be very useful. We can just develop qualities to help make world*

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<sup>93</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson and Ana Speed 'A Case Study Approach. Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' (2019) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 26 No. 1 pp.179-215.

<sup>94</sup> For a discussion on how clinical legal education exposes privileged students to social issues see Jane H. Aiken 'Striving to Teach Justice, Fairness and Morality' (1997) *Clinical Law Review* Vol. 4 No. 1 pp.1-64.

*a better place.*' Another student described how they resorted to sliding notes across the table to use alternative methods of communication as the client was hard of hearing. The student described how they ultimately managed to advise this client acknowledging that they *'got there in the end, eventually. It's hard.'*

Some students commented on how they felt they had developed empathy for the clients and learnt how to deal with the cases on an emotional level. One student highlighted *'you have to learn to deal with it emotionally, as well as professionally. It teaches you that too.'* Another student commented *'I had a client who was crying and I just said take your time, say when you are ready to speak. Deal with the emotion too. Teaches you that too.'* For another student the experience *'personally opened my eyes to the real world in a sense. People coming in for food vouchers. I knew it went on but didn't realise it occurred as much as it does. Gave me a real kick.'* When students encounter clients who share their problems and emotions this can be a challenge for them.<sup>95</sup> As Fletcher and Weinstein note, this allows the students to deal with such situations both as human beings and as future lawyers.<sup>96</sup> Part of the mandatory online training focuses on emotional clients in the interviewing skills section to prepare them for these types of situations. The work they undertake at Citizens Advice allows an opportunity for the university workshop sessions to discuss concepts such as justice and equality with the students and allow them the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

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<sup>95</sup> Lauren E Fletcher and Harvey M Weinstein, 'When Students Lose Perspective: Clinical Supervision and the Management of Empathy', (2002) *Clinical Law Review* Vol. 9 pp.147-155.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

At times the students had to provide negative advice to their clients and advise them that their case could not be progressed. This may be because Citizens Advice did not have the capacity (or area of expertise) to assist or because the claim has little or no merit to pursue. One supervisor commented that these experiences gave the students strength and confidence when dealing with people and another supervisor commented that the students had come on '*great guns*'. This was echoed in the student focus groups which emphasised resilience and confidence as attributes which developed. Despite the shift from doctrinal to clinical learning often being a '*culture shock*',<sup>97</sup> the students commented that stressful situations where someone is depending on you, gives you confidence and determination. Whilst some felt that they had been '*dropped in the deep end*', they did feel they had developed throughout the module and their confidence grew. One student felt that they were '*more confident in practical work in general*' and another commented that initially they felt nervous and worried but by the end of the module they felt they could easily deal with clients because their confidence had increased.

The students' research skills had also really been intensively developed in this module. The supervisors explained that the students overall had advised on a '*massive*' range of practice areas (including housing law, law, consumer, employment, and welfare benefits) and often when a client came in, it was not just in relation to one issue. The supervisors commented that this meant the students had to ensure they

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<sup>97</sup> Gemma Smyth and Marion Overholt, 'Framing Supervisory Relationships in Clinical Law: The Role of Critical Pedagogy.' (2014) *Journal of Law and Social Policy* Vol. 23. pp. 62-82.



asked the client enough questions to determine what the enquiry was about. The students echoed this and felt that they were faced with clients who had various problems. They explained that they then had to research these different areas and relay the research to the clients quickly and efficiently, which they had never had to do prior to working at Citizens Advice. This thereby affords the students with a breadth of experience in different areas of law. Some students had a few clients in the same area of law, which is equally beneficial as they are exposed to the same legal issue but from a different perspective.<sup>98</sup> Some students felt that sometimes the work they did felt was more akin to *'social work'* rather than providing legal advice albeit they did not provide examples of this. However, the inclusion of interdisciplinary work is beneficial as we are also teaching our students that you may need to think outside the legal system and this *'enhances their ability to identify and cultivate additional resources and partners'*.<sup>99</sup>

The students felt that the module enabled them to develop their teamwork skills both with other students and with their supervisors. In addition, the supervisors enjoyed engaging with the students and *'helping them along and showing them how to do things'*. This presented the students with an opportunity to experience a trainee/supervisor relationship, similar to that they will experience in legal practice, or other professional workplaces. The module also offers the students the benefits of learning under

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<sup>98</sup> Emil Winkler, (2013) 'Clinical legal education: a report on the concept of law clinics', accessed at [https://law.handels.gu.se/digitalAssets/1500/1500268\\_law-clinic-rapport.pdf](https://law.handels.gu.se/digitalAssets/1500/1500268_law-clinic-rapport.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> Robin S Golden, 'Collaborative as Client: Lawyering for Effective Change' (2012) *New York Law School Law Review* Vol. 56 pp.393.

different supervisors, their Citizens Advice supervisor who is an experienced worker within Citizens Advice and their university workshop tutor who is an academic and qualified solicitor and who help contextualise their clinic experience.<sup>100</sup> Interestingly one supervisor commented that those students who were more confident '*acted as mentors to those less confident. We saw that in quite a few of them.*' A previous study by Dunn highlights that leadership skills are only really developed when students go into practice.<sup>101</sup> A more recent study by Dunn, Bengtsson and McConnell highlights however that students develop this skill in the policy clinic, where they undertake empirical research with a view to influencing policy or law reform.<sup>102</sup> However leadership skills or mentoring were not mentioned in the student focus groups, suggesting that they may not have seen themselves as mentors or developing leadership skills.

However, it was apparent from the data that not all students will have developed each of their professional skills at the same level. Both supervisors and students commented that those students who attended Citizens Advice in the morning had a different clinical experience to those in the afternoon. Those who attended in the morning had the benefit of the client drop-in service, and so could interview clients

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<sup>100</sup> Lydia Bleasdale-Hill and Paul Wragg 'Models of Clinics and Their Value to Students, Universities and the Community in the post 2012 Fees Era' (2013) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol. 19, pp.257-270.

<sup>101</sup> Rachel Dunn 'The knowledge, skills and attributes considered necessary to start day one training competently and whether live client clinics develop them' (2017) Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University.

<sup>102</sup> Rachel Dunn, Lyndsey Bengtsson and Siobhan McConnell 'The Policy Clinic at Northumbria University. Influencing Policy/Law Reform as an Effective Educational Tool for Students' (2020) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 27 No. 2 pp.68-102.

and advise them in person. Those who attended on an afternoon did not benefit from the client interviews but dealt with all the email enquiries. One supervisor commented:

*Well the students that have been in the morning have had the advantage because they've done face to face work. So they've done a lot more because they are been governed by the numbers coming in and us moving them on. The people who came in in the afternoons haven't not done as much, they've been doing email enquiries and enquiries by phone. But it means they've done less. Some were sufficiently enthusiastic to change around to come in in the mornings.*

They therefore had the opportunity to change the times they attended to maximise their learning. However, it is apparent that some didn't take this opportunity or perhaps did not really understand that they could change sessions. One student commented '*Personally (I've) only had 2 face to face (clients) and that's really frustrating for me but I hear morning session students complain about how busy they are. I'd really appreciate it if that could change*'. By contrast another student commented that they had had '*over 20 face to face clients*.' This issue also translated into some concerns expressed by the students about their assessment, given that their portfolios may not have contained enough interview notes or emails. The fact that students can change the times they attend needs to be more explicit going forward (in the induction sessions and reinforced with regular reminders from both the university workshop tutor and Citizens Advice supervisor), so that students attend a combination of both morning and afternoon sessions.

Furthermore, there were some skills not mentioned in the data (including understanding of legal ethics, critical analysis and commercial awareness). However it is not surprising that students did not mention commercial awareness given the type of work they undertook at Citizens Advice and what previous research states in relation to this skill. Notably, McConnell suggests that students working in business, civil and employment clinics ranked commercial awareness more highly as a skill they developed compared to those working in family, housing and welfare clinics.<sup>103</sup> However it is surprising that there was not more of a discussion on ethics, especially as one workshop explicitly covers this.<sup>104</sup> The students did highlight however that they felt they had developed professionalism. Given the importance of understanding ethics (this was one of the key recommendations of the Legal Education Training Review),<sup>105</sup> it would be beneficial if the tutors are more explicit going forward as to the development of these skills during the module.

Some students were able to think about how they could use their experience and skills gained in the module in future job applications, indicating that the module has had a positive impact on the student perspective on their employability. One student highlighted in the context of discussing communication skills that he has '*applied for*

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<sup>103</sup> Siobhan McConnell, 'A Study of Supervisor and Student Views on the Role of Clinical Legal Education in Developing Commercial Awareness' (2022) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 29 No. 2 pp. 4-67.

<sup>104</sup> Focussing on the article from Ross Hyams, 'On teaching students to 'act like a lawyer': what sort of lawyer?' (2014) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 13. pp.21-32.

<sup>105</sup> Julian Webb et al (2013) *Setting Standards: The Future of Legal Services Education and Training Regulation in England and Wales* (The Legal Education and Training Review [LETR]), p.140. Accessed at <http://letr.org.uk/the-report/index.html> last accessed 10th February 2023.

*various jobs'* and that this skill tends *'to be the main criteria they're looking for. I relate to Citizens Advice. I can say I worked at a supermarket, but it is not the same as dealing with clients.'* McConnell highlights that the students must be able to articulate how their experience makes them more employable and they tended to lack confidence in how to use their experience to demonstrate it.<sup>106</sup> However the data did not suggest that the students lacked confidence in articulating their skill development in future job applications or interviews. Indeed, some students expressed confidence in attending assessment day type interviews because of the workshop tasks. One student explained how in one workshop *'we did an exercise where you had to rank all the different qualities a solicitor should have. Like a diagram of a pyramid from most important, and that could be an exercise that we could have in an interview.'* Also, from an employability perspective the time spent at Citizens Advice may constitute qualifying work experience (QWE). This is important because the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE), which is the new system for qualifying as a solicitor in England and Wales, requires at least two years of QWE as well as passing two examinations.<sup>107</sup> To constitute QWE, the work must entail providing legal services that allow candidates to develop the competencies required to practise as a solicitor.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Siobhan McConnell 'A Study of Supervisor and Student Views on the Role of Clinical Legal Education in Developing Commercial Awareness' (2022) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 29 No. 2 pp 4-67.

<sup>107</sup> For information about QWE see <https://www.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/sqe/qualifying-work-experience-candidates/> last accessed 8 February 2023. For a discussion on the SQE and QWE see Andy Todd and Lucy Blackburn 'Qualifying Work Experience in England and Wales: the Opportunities and Risks Presented to University Law Clinics' (2022) *Asian Journal of Legal Education* Vol. 10 Issue. 1.

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/career-advice/becoming-a-solicitor/solicitors-qualifying-examination-sqe/qualifying-work-experience-qwe> last accessed 8 February 2023.

## ***Theme 2 - Impact on Citizens Advice and the local community***

The volunteer work undertaken by the students in this module undoubtedly increases the capacity of Citizens Advice to provide advice and assistance to those who may not otherwise be able to access legal services.<sup>109</sup> One student commented *'I didn't expect the amount that Citizens Advice deal with. I expected them to be all benefits. The diversity and amount they deal with – I didn't realise that.'* Another student said *'I think it definitely showed how many people actually use Citizens Advice. Because it's just like a constant amount of people coming in. The staff there as well, I know that Leslie had said that it makes their lives a lot easier and even being on the phone to people, they've got more people that can help.'*

All three supervisors clearly shared a similar view to these students and commented that having the students at Citizens Advice meant that more clients could be dealt with. One supervisor referred to the students as a *'valuable contribution'* and a *'massive help'*. Two of the supervisors commented that the number of volunteers had reduced since the pandemic so having the students made a *'huge difference'* and one felt that the students *'filled a useful gap'*. The supervisors commented that having students at Citizens Advice to answer emails, for example, allowed the supervisors to do other work and if clients could not be seen in the morning, students could deal with these

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<sup>109</sup> For a discussion on whether clinical legal education fills a gap in legal aid see E Campbell (2014) 'Pro bono is great education for law students but they shouldn't fill the gap left by legal aid cuts' published in The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/pro-bono-is-great-education-for-law-students-but-they-shouldnt-fill-gap-left-by-legal-aid-cuts-34323> accessed 10 February 2023. See also Donald Nicholson 'Legal Education or Community Service the Extra Curricular Student Law Clinic' (2006) Web Journal of Current Legal Issues, <http://www.bailii.org/uk/other/journals/WebJCLI/2006/issue3/nicolson3.html> accessed 10 February 2023.

in the afternoon, increasing the overall number of clients advised and improving client service.

This increase of capacity at Citizens Advice to advise and assist members of the community supports unmet legal need in the local community.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, a total of 300 clients were advised by Northumbria students taking this module between academic year 2021 and 2022 and one of the supervisors commented that for many of these clients, it is their '*last hope*'. One supervisor remarked that one of the benefits of having the students at Citizens Advice was that clients were getting the advice '*very much immediately*'. Informal feedback received from one client was that the students had provided her with exactly what she needed and that they were '*brilliant*'.

The data suggests that the main aims of Citizens Advice in this module centres around social justice and the impact on the local community. In contrast, the aim of the module from a university perspective was more pedagogically focused. The module was introduced so students could gain practical legal experience and develop their professional skills.<sup>111</sup> This is reflected in the Student Law Office's approach to taking on cases. Where supervisors feel cases are too complex, too urgent, outside the area of their expertise or are not in line with the educational aims, they will not take the case

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<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Jeff Giddings 'Contemplating the Future of Clinical Legal Education' (2008) Griffith Law Review Vol. 17 No. 1; Stephen Wizner, 'Beyond Skills Training' (2001) Clinical Law Review Vol. 7 pp. 327-340; Antonette Sedillo Lopez, 'Learning through Service in a Clinical Setting: the Effect of Specialization on Social Justice and Skills Training' (2001) Clinical Law Review Vol.7, pp. 307-326; Warren H. Binford (2008-09) 'Reconstructing a Clinic' Clinical Law Review Vol. 15, pp. 283.

<sup>111</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148.

on.<sup>112</sup> Carpenter argues that clinicians who put pedagogical aims first however can still meet social justice goals and engage in meaningful transformative work.<sup>113</sup> Smyth and Overholt also recognise that parties involved in clinical placements often have varying interests which can be challenging, but this can also provide the opportunity for authentic, deep and critically reflective relationships between the parties involved<sup>114</sup> ultimately having a positive impact on Citizens Advice and the local community.

It is important to note however that one supervisor did explain that having to spend time at the beginning explaining procedures, supporting students and answering a number of questions can be *'demanding'* and *'intensive'* which can put *'big pressure'* on the supervisor. This could arguably affect the level of productivity in the workplace. On the other hand, the supervision could inadvertently act as Continuing Professional Development for the supervisors. One of the supervisors commented that having the students at Citizens Advice acts as a *'good refresher'* for the supervisors because *'[we] need to remember what we need to explain about, who we are and what we do and the procedures we have.'* This could help develop and improve supervisors' skills and competencies and in turn enhance the workplace and ultimately the service received by the local community.

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<sup>112</sup> Student Law Office Terms and Conditions, section 2.

<sup>113</sup> Anne E Carpenter 'The project model of clinical education: Eight principles to maximize student learning and social justice impact.' (2013) *Clinical Law Review*, Vol. 20 No.1 pp. 39-94.

<sup>114</sup> Gemma Smyth and Marion Overholt 'Framing Supervisory Relationships in Clinical Law: The Role of Critical Pedagogy.' (2014) *Journal of Law and Social Policy* Vol. 23. pp. 62-822.



### ***Theme 3 – Student Awareness of Access to Justice Challenges***

One of the aims of the module is for students to develop an understanding of the access to justice challenges faced by their local community.<sup>115</sup> Smyth and Overholt comment on the importance of students developing an understanding of the marginalising role that law and legislation can play and how impactful it is to meet the people, families and communities systemically affected by the law and legal systems. They suggest that meeting clients in person often catapults students into understanding or at least confronting, the human consequences of legislative and judicial choices.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Grose believes that the social justice mission of law clinics is not only to expose students to the legal system and its place and role in society, but also to challenge students to think critically about the system and their place in it.<sup>117</sup>

This critical approach was certainly reflected in the student focus groups where it was found that the experience raised the students' awareness of current issues and many said they were surprised at how many people came into Citizens Advice. One commented that Citizens Advice was a '*constant flow of helping people*'. One student said that the module '*personally opened my eyes to the real world in a sense*' and similarly, another student commented that the module gave them '*a different perspective*.' They felt that '*people are really struggling*' and one student said that the module helped them

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<sup>115</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson, Bethany A Court and Callum Thomson, 'The Law in the Community module at Northumbria University: Working in Partnership with Citizens Advice as an Effective Educational Tool' (2021) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol.28 No.1 pp. 111-148.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Carolyn Grose, 'Beyond Skills Training, Revisited: The Clinical Education Spiral' (2013) *Clinical Law Review* Vol. 19 No.2 pp. 489-516.

to develop qualities to ‘*help make the world a better place*’ and ‘*attempt to change legal aid cuts.*’

The supervisors also felt that the experience opens students’ eyes, encourages them to think about the community and makes them want to help people more. One supervisor commented on the fact that students could see how often individuals are not getting responses from authorities such as the City Council and they struggle with accessing information online, often in relation to housing, council tax, rent arrears and debt collection.

The supervisor also spoke about how the module helps students develop an understanding of the access to justice issues where it is caused by language barriers which can be ‘*quite an issue*’ particularly with regards to immigration cases for example. Research has found that the monolingual criminal justice services in England and Wales can limit access to legal advice, especially in relation to immigration issues; as well as general assistance and information to guide individuals through the criminal justice processes and rehabilitative interventions under the probation and prison services.<sup>118</sup> It has been found that a number of individuals suffer anxiety regarding their immigration issues because they don’t understand procedures.<sup>119</sup> The lack of support and information is linked to wider funding cuts in the criminal justice

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<sup>118</sup> Gillian Hunter, Bina Bhardwa, Tamar Dinisman, Ania Moroz, Andrea Anastassiou, Anna Lynall, ‘Language Barriers in the Criminal Justice System’ (2022) Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/app/uploads/2022/03/Language-barriers-in-the-criminal-justice-system.pdf](https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/app/uploads/2022/03/Language-barriers-in-the-criminal-justice-system.pdf) (last accessed 10 February 2023).

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

system. Hunter et al highlights the importance of raising awareness of language barriers and their implications for fairness and equality within the Criminal Justice System.<sup>120</sup> Their research identified five key areas in which policy and practice reforms are urgently needed to address the language barriers. One of these recommendations was: *'Ensuring that all written and web-based materials offering information and guidance about the Criminal Justice System are available in easy read formats, using 'plain English''*.<sup>121</sup> Whilst at Citizens Advice, students can be involved in providing advice at drop-in sessions, they also undertake a wide range of activities, including producing legal information leaflets or factsheets for members of the public. Students at Citizens Advice can make a positive impact in this area and are likely to have a particular inclination to do so having been exposed to the difficulties faced by individuals and thus having their awareness of access to justice challenges raised. One student commented that it is important to show people that pro bono work is a huge part of society.

Furthermore, some studies suggest clinical legal education and pro bono work can have a positive impact upon students and their willingness to undertake public service work<sup>122</sup> and indeed students felt that when working at Citizens Advice, they

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> See Deborah A. Schmedemann, 'Priming for Pro Bono Publico: The Impact of the Law School on Pro Bono Participation in Practice', in *Private Lawyers and the Public Interest: The Evolving Role of Pro Bono in the Legal Profession* (Robert Granfield and Lynn Mather eds. 2009); Sally Maresh, 'The Impact of Clinical Legal Education on Decisions of Law Students to Practice Public Interest Law' in *Educating for Justice: Social Values and Legal Education* (Jeremy Cooper and Louise G. Trubek eds. 1997).

had '*done something good*' and having had this experience, they were more likely to take part in pro bono work in the future.

The general consensus amongst Citizens Advice supervisors and students was that they felt that they were positively helping the local community. However, a number of students commented that they felt they were not doing enough. For example, when they were referring someone onto a solicitor for legal advice, one student said they felt they were '*shipping people around*' and the students felt this was '*unsatisfactory*' and '*not ideal*'. They felt that they wanted to take the case further and help more. However, as Speed and Bengtsson note, from their experience as clinic supervisors, where a one-off advice appointment is not sufficient to resolve the client's issue, the advice will usually give the client the confidence, self-esteem and capacity to advance the case themselves.<sup>123</sup>

#### ***Theme 4 – Benefits and Challenges of Supervision***

The students benefit from having two supervisors in the Law in the Community module, one at Citizens Advice and one at Northumbria University for their workshops, providing them with a dual supervision experience. Smyth and Overholt explore the differences between clinical and doctrinal approaches to legal education. Amongst others, they observe that in a clinical setting teaching is generally conducted

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<sup>123</sup> Lyndsey Bengtsson and Ana Speed, 'A Case Study Approach. Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' (2019) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 26 No. 1 pp.179-215.

one-on-one or in small groups. Conversely, with regards to doctrinal approaches, teaching is usually conducted in medium/large classes and lectures.<sup>124</sup> This one-on-one experience with a clinical supervisor is conducive to what the student will experience in the workplace following university and it provides them with an opportunity to practice building these relationships at this early stage. Smyth and Overholt comment that these relationships can play a crucial role in the formation of students' professional identity as students often take their clinic supervisor's advice as reflective of a valid construction of the meaning of legal practice.<sup>125</sup>

Even though the Citizens Advice supervisors have said that having the volunteers can be quite '*stressful*' and '*intensive*' until they have settled in, they generally felt that having the students at Citizens Advice, was a huge benefit, increasing their capacity and ultimately having a positive impact on the service received by the local community. In contrast, students raised the fact they felt like a '*burden*' at times and they didn't have a chance to talk to supervisors. One felt that their supervisor simply didn't have the time to supervise students. However, these views differed between students who attended in the mornings and students who attended in the afternoon. A student who attended afternoon sessions, reported that they received '*quite a lot of feedback from supervisors*'. Furthermore, although some students felt they were '*dropped in at the deep end*', for example when they had to research areas of the law they had not

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<sup>124</sup> Gemma Smyth and Marion Overholt, 'Framing Supervisory Relationships in Clinical Law: The Role of Critical Pedagogy' (2014) *Journal of Law and Social Policy* Vol. 23. pp. 62-82.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

come across before, one student commented that their supervisors were '*really good*' when checking the emails and provided them with constructive feedback. It seems therefore that supervisors were less able to spend time with students in the mornings as this was often a busy time for them. It is worth noting that since these focus groups took place, a different approach for students' attendance times at Citizens Advice has been adopted and will be implemented in academic year 2022/23. Rather than attending either in the morning or afternoon over the course of the module, the students will arrange their volunteer sessions each week, a week in advance, for a mutually convenient time. This will provide them with the opportunity to choose from a variety of times each week. It is hoped that this approach will not only provide them with a more diverse experience at Citizens Advice, but will also allow them to engage with supervisors more if they are attending at quieter times for some of their sessions.

The data also demonstrated that there were some concerns in relation to feedback in regards the work the students conducted at Citizens Advice<sup>126</sup> and in turn whether this translated into a fair assessment.<sup>127</sup> This is unsurprising as Law teachers report a

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<sup>126</sup> The students also received formative feedback on their workshop work but this concern was specifically in relation to their work done at Citizens Advice.

<sup>127</sup> A recurring theme in clinical legal education literature is how students can be assessed fairly. See José García Añón, 'How do we assess in Clinical Legal Education? A "reflection" about reflective learning' (2016) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol.23 No.1 pp.48-65; Justine A Dunlap and Peter A Joy, "Reflection-in-action: designing new clinical teacher training by using lessons learned from new clinicians", (2004) *Clinical Law Review*, Vol.11, pp.49-113.

consistent criticism that students do not receive enough feedback.<sup>128</sup> Feedback is pivotal in clinical legal education and as Hyams highlights it '*is a powerful and effective vehicle for student learning.*'<sup>129</sup> Effective feedback will reinforce good practice and provide a pathway for students to improve their skills.<sup>130</sup> It will also motivate students.<sup>131</sup> Although the students in this module were each allocated a supervisor at Citizens Advice, they tended to seek advice and support during their volunteer work from all three of the supervisors. Their allocated supervisor, however, was the one who completed the two feedback sheets. The feedback sheet contains a section for all the portfolio grade descriptors except reflection<sup>132</sup> with a qualitative (with room for the supervisor to make comments) and quantitative aspect to each descriptor (numbers from 1 to 5) for them to rate performance (with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent). The first feedback sheet is completed at the midpoint and a second is completed at the end of the module.<sup>133</sup> In assessing the portfolio at the end of the module, the university tutor draws upon the Citizens Advice feedback sheets in addition to all the work that is in the portfolio and work completed in the workshops.

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<sup>128</sup> David F Chavkin, 'Matchmaker, Matchmaker: Student Collaboration in Clinical Programs' (1994) *Clinical Law Review* Vol. 1 pp.199-244; Susan Bryant, 'Collaboration in Law Practice: A Satisfying and Productive Process for a Diverse Profession' (1993) *Vermont Law Review* Vol. 17 pp.459-531.

<sup>129</sup> Ross Hyams 'Student assessment in the clinical environment – what can we learn from the US experience.' (2006) *Journal of Clinical Legal Education* accessed at [file:///C:/Users/kdqc2/Downloads/79-Article%20Text-160-1-10-20140718%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/kdqc2/Downloads/79-Article%20Text-160-1-10-20140718%20(2).pdf) (last accessed 27 February 2023).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Elizabeth Molloy and David Clarke, 'The positioning of physiotherapy students and clinical supervisors in feedback sessions', (2005) *Focus on Health Professional Education*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 79 - 90.

<sup>132</sup> The grade descriptors include knowledge and understanding of the law, research skills, oral and written communication skills, case and task management and strategising, commitment and teamwork.

<sup>133</sup> These feedback sheets are emailed to the student and to the University tutors and the students are asked to reflect on their performance in light of the comments made.

Several students expressed concern about their feedback sheets if they spoke to another supervisor at Citizens Advice a lot more than their allocated supervisor who completed the sheets. One student commented *'I feel like it would be fair for us to be judged by the supervisor that we go to the most, rather than the ones we were assigned to.'* Another student felt the sheets were *'quite limited'* and wanted more detailed feedback. Concerns were also expressed by the Citizens Advice supervisors, notably that they felt they the feedback sheets needed amending as they did not feel that they were working as well as they could. One supervisor gave the example that they are required to comment on the students' knowledge and understanding of the law, however at the mid-point they feel that sometimes students are often still understanding the basics such as interviewing technique and research skills and not yet been able to demonstrate their knowledge.

A change has been implemented for the 2022/2023 academic year so that supervisors will now meet with students at the mid-point and conduct a feedback conversation. This aims to encourage learning to reflect and motivate them to improve.<sup>134</sup> The conversation will enable the students and the supervisor to reach a shared view on what improvements can be made. Moving away from a written feedback sheet to a feedback conversation may also lead to a greater understanding by the student on their performance as they will have the opportunity to ask questions. Given the

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<sup>134</sup> Peter Cantillon and Joan Sargeant, 'Giving feedback in Clinical Settings' (2008) accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.a1961> (last accessed 27 February 2023).



accusation in the literature of subjectivity regarding assessment,<sup>135</sup> it is acknowledged that each meeting must adopt the same structure so that the same areas are discussed. It was agreed that Citizens Advice would use a pro forma feedback document during the meeting to ensure consistency. Supervisors will also consult each other in relation to each student before the feedback meeting and inform the students that this consultation has taken place. The onus will be on the student to record a note of the meeting afterwards and place that record on their portfolio.

In the focus groups, students also commented that they felt there was a lack of knowledge exchange between university supervisors and Citizens Advice supervisors. They commented that their university supervisors appeared '*surprised*' and '*confused*' at times when they explained what they did during their volunteer sessions and suggested that it could help if the university tutor attended Citizens Advice to '*see what goes on*'. This module is intended to have a dual supervision model which, as we have seen, has benefits, and having the university supervisor attending Citizens Advice would not be feasible, nor would it be necessary. Moving away from the written feedback sheet to a feedback conversation and allowing the students to record this themselves to document in their portfolio is likely to help alleviate concerns that there is a lack of knowledge exchange between the supervisors. A further change which was implemented for the 2022/2023 academic year was having

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<sup>135</sup> Ross Hyams, 'Student assessment in the clinical environment – what can we learn from the US experience.' (2006) Journal of Clinical Legal Education accessed at [file:///C:/Users/kdqc2/Downloads/79-Article%20Text-160-1-10-20140718%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/kdqc2/Downloads/79-Article%20Text-160-1-10-20140718%20(2).pdf)

a supervisor from Citizens Advice attend the induction lecture at the university at the start of the module. This was intended to not only allow students to meet the supervisor and ask them any questions, but also introduce them to this unique dual supervision model early on and provide a sense of partnership and collaboration between the university and Citizens Advice.

## **Conclusions**

This research contributes to the knowledge and practice on the value of this model of clinical legal education from both a student and Citizens Advice perspective. Supporting previous research that has been conducted in this area; the results demonstrate that there are clear pedagogical benefits to the students, benefits to Citizens Advice and the local community. This research demonstrates that the model provides a rich and dynamic learning experience for law students, developing a range of professional skills. It also gives them first-hand experience of advising those who are vulnerable and who have complex needs, whilst simultaneously gaining that insight into the access to justice challenges faced by the local community.

There are also benefits to Citizens Advice and the local community as the students increase their capacity so that they can advise and assist more clients. Since the module began hundreds of clients have been helped by the students. In addition to this, supervising the students inadvertently acts as Continuing Professional Development for the supervisors, benefitting the supervisors personally, Citizens Advice as a whole and subsequently the local community receiving the services. The partnership

between the university and Citizens Advice engages students in valuable work which fills an unmet legal need in the community in which it operates, an approach to clinical legal education which as King and Jones point out is *'well suited to the ongoing climate of austerity prevailing not just in the UK but many other countries.'*<sup>136</sup> Indeed, some students do not stop their volunteering at the end of the module, instead choosing to stay on at Citizens Advice bringing value beyond the timescales of the academic year.

Smyth and Overholt describe supervision in a law clinic setting as *'immensely gratifying, particularly when supervisors are able to participate in the development of the next generation of social activist lawyers'*<sup>137</sup> Indeed, the Law in the Community supervision model has proven very effective. The combination of dealing with live clients under the supervision of Citizens Advice and contextualising and reflecting on this with their university supervisor has challenged the students to think about their place in the legal system and we have seen that having had this experience, the students feel they are more likely to take part in pro bono work in the future. It has not been without its challenges, but the authors believe the new approaches in relation to supervision and feedback implemented in the academic year 2022/23 will address the previous concerns raised by the students, enhance their educational experience, and ultimately engage in transformative and impactful work for the local community.

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<sup>136</sup> Christopher King and David Jones 'Cui pro bono? Working on Partnership: A Possible Blueprint for the Future of Clinical Legal Education' in Linden Thomas, Steven Vaughan, Bharat Malkani and Theresa Lynch (eds) 'Reimagining Clinical Legal Education' (Hart Publishing, 2018) pp. 25-46.

<sup>137</sup> Gemma Smyth and Marion Overholt 'Framing Supervisory Relationships in Clinical Law: The Role of Critical Pedagogy.' (2014) *Journal of Law and Social Policy* Vol. 23. pp. 62-82.