

STREETLAW AT SUSSEX ONE YEAR ON: WHERE DID WE COME FROM, HOW FAR DID WE GET AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the broader clinical legal education movement and the employability agenda in the context of a UK law degree, this article reflects on the experience of introducing a Street law (“StreetLaw”) programme into the curriculum at the University of Sussex. Drawing on the findings of a small-scale research study, this article explores the value of StreetLaw in community and educational settings from the perspectives of the undergraduate students participating, and the organisational partners. Themes include building community relationships; ‘giving back’; access to justice; professional skills development, and embedding learning in a real-world context. Alongside this, in step with the widespread recognition of the importance of reflective practice for students in clinical legal education, the author reflects on the challenges and opportunities of developing and leading the project.

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Introduction

Clinical Legal Education (“CLE”) has become a widely established component of Law Schools in the United Kingdom². This aligns with the social justice ethos of many Law Schools, particularly given the rise in number of self-represented litigants or litigants in person (“LiPs”) over the last decade in the post *Legal Aid, Sentencing & Punishment of Offenders Act 2012* (“LASPO”) landscape. Recent work by the Law Society of England and Wales has highlighted the increase in “legal aid deserts” in the areas of housing, community care, education, immigration and welfare benefits.³ Playing a part in plugging the access to justice gap, the Law School typically provides legal advice for citizens in the local community who cannot afford to pay for legal services on a range of areas including family law, housing, employment, areas from which legal aid has for the most part been withdrawn.⁴ Alongside this is the perhaps less altruistic but arguably equally important aim of providing real world learning opportunities for law students, widely used as a recruitment tool at open days and in marketing.⁵ Law Schools often follow the model of one-off term-time appointments, where a pair of students, supervised by a practitioner, interview a client and provide initial advice with a follow up letter providing more detail and where applicable,

² See e.g. Bloch, F.S. (ed.), *The Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Carney, D., Dignan, F., Grimes, R., Kelly, G., & Parker, R. (2014), *LawWorks Law Schools Pro Bono and Clinic Report*, (2014, LexisNexis UK).

³ [Legal aid deserts | The Law Society](#) (accessed on 10.06.24).

⁴ These Law School clinics, including Sussex Law School, often sit within the [LawWorks | The Solicitors Pro Bono Group](#) network (accessed on 10.06.24).

⁵ See for example [Sussex Clinical Legal Education: Law Department: University of Sussex](#) (accessed on 10.06.24).

signposting to resources and other services. Sussex Law School (“Sussex”) also has an Environmental Justice and Performing Arts clinic, which are research focused, with students working on briefs from local and national organisations.

StreetLaw sits within CLE in its widest sense, but is perhaps better understood as contributing to Public Legal Education (“PLE”), which Grimes usefully summarises as providing the individual and/or community organisation with:

“an awareness of the law and the legal process, an ability to use that awareness in addressing problems or issues and to realise when help may be needed or where to go for assistance.”⁶

StreetLaw at Sussex was introduced in the 2023 academic year following a pilot the previous year, kickstarted by a Connector project, a funded programme providing students with the opportunity to work on a range of activities across the university with faculty and academic development staff.⁷ Perdue and Wallace et al note the reluctance of many law schools to recognise StreetLaw programmes as worthy of being credit-bearing, and make a convincing case for why StreetLaw should sit within the curriculum, rather than being co-curricular.⁸ Many of the themes they identify resonate with the Sussex experience and will be explored below. At Sussex, the Head

⁶ Grimes, R. *Public Legal Education: The Role of Law Schools in Building a More Legally Literate Society*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2021) p3.

⁷ [About the Connector Programme: University of Sussex](#) (accessed 10.06.24).

⁸ Perdue, B. & Wallace, A., Preparing Lawyers for Practice: Developing Cultural Competency, Communication Skills, and Content Knowledge through Street Law programmes, *Journal of Legal Education*, Vol 70, 1, Fall 2020.

of the Law School, who had led the initial Connector project, was an advocate for StreetLaw being assimilated into the final year CLE module (“the module”) i.e. credit-bearing. Any reservations were on my part, with concerns primarily as to whether StreetLaw would fit with the pedagogical approach of the module as a whole.

This article provides a brief overview of the historical background to StreetLaw and proceeds to explore the pedagogical context; the experience of establishing StreetLaw at Sussex; the findings of the research study to gain the perspectives of participating students and community partners, and some personal reflections, concluding with thoughts on moving forward alongside thinking points for those thinking of developing StreetLaw at their institution.

Background and History: the Origins of StreetLaw

The concept of StreetLaw was developed in the 1970s at Georgetown University, Washington DC (“Georgetown”), in response to an awareness of the need to help the wider public to become more familiar with the law as a whole and their rights in particular. As Ridout and Thomas note, this was set against the backdrop of the civil rights movement, where racial discrimination, such as that enshrined in the so-called “Jim Crow” laws came sharply into focus.⁹ A group of law students at Georgetown designed a programme of activities and lessons on the law for local high school

⁹ Ridout, F. & Thomas, L. *Street Law Theory and Practice*, (Hart Publishing, 2023) p19.

students, and this is thought to be the origin of StreetLaw as offered by law schools today.¹⁰ Following the success and growing popularity of this initial programme and wider recognition of the broader contribution to PLE, Grimes notes the follow on development of the NGO Street Law, Inc., which, as he notes, is a useful source of information and resources for anyone wanting to find out more about the history and current projects, many global as well as in the USA.¹¹

Impressively, as Ridout and Thomas note, Street Law Inc., incorporated in 1996, has worked in 45 countries, 50 USA states and inspired at least 200 Street Law programmes across the world. This includes the programme established in South Africa during the apartheid period, where the importance of understanding and having the tools to challenge discriminatory laws was sharply in focus.¹² As others have written extensively on the history and development of StreetLaw, it is not necessary to extend that discussion here.¹³ However, the potential impact of the knowledge of the importance of the StreetLaw movement on anyone setting up a programme at their law school is discussed in the reflective section towards the end of this article.

¹⁰ [Georgetown Street Law Program | Georgetown Law](#) (accessed 12/06/24).

¹¹ Supra, note 6, Grimes, R., p36, and [Street Law - Education. Empowerment. Justice.](#) (accessed 12/06/24).

¹² Supra, note 9, Ridout, F., & Thomas, L., p20.

¹³ For an in-depth discussion see Grimes, R., McQuoid-Mason, D., O'Brien, E., & Zimmer, J., 'Street Law and Social Justice Education' in Bloch, F. (ed) *The Global Clinical Movement* (New York, Oxford University Press), 2011, 225.

Context and Challenges of Developing StreetLaw at Sussex Law School

At Sussex, the origins of the programme came from the local community. The Law School was asked whether we had an education rights related clinic and would be able to work in the Whitehawk area of Brighton and Hove, which is Brighton and Hove's most deprived area.¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, the educational achievement disparity between children growing up in Whitehawk and those in the rest of the city is stark. Whitehawk children are also twice as likely to be excluded from school and three times more likely to be placed in non-mainstream educational settings such as pupil referral units.¹⁵ At the time we did not have capacity or the necessary expertise to establish an education clinic, though this is something we are piloting going forward. However, we realised that StreetLaw could potentially have a role working with the children in the community through the Crew Club, an independent youth and community charity supporting young people and their families in Whitehawk.¹⁶ What we did and how this developed will be discussed below, but it is very much in keeping with the ethos of StreetLaw that this was led by the community interest and need.¹⁷

¹⁴ [Index of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\) | CDRC Data](#) (accessed 13/06/24).

¹⁵ [About the campaign – Class Divide](#) (accessed 13/06/24).

¹⁶ [The Crew Club](#) (accessed 02/07/24). For a fascinating insight into the history of the Whitehawk area and the education inequalities experienced told through the lens of one family, see [Podcast – Class Divide](#) (accessed 02/07/24).

¹⁷ *Supra*, note 9, Ridout, F., & Thomas, L., p24.

We worked with four organisations in the first year and all of the relationships developed somewhat organically, building on existing relationships with the wider university. Drawing on insights from the Director of CLE at Lancaster University Law School, who established the StreetLaw programme there, our work fell broadly into two categories: community settings for Semester 1 and education settings for Semester 2.¹⁸ I had thought that having education settings first would be preferable for Sussex, to give the students a chance to develop their design and delivery skills in environments they were more familiar with. However, logistics meant this was not possible, and this proved to be fortuitous as will be explored in the research findings below, with the students finding one of the education settings in particular more challenging.

A challenge ahead of the year, and one which will hopefully lessen as StreetLaw within our CLE module becomes more established, was student recruitment. Students at Sussex can select CLE as one of their final year options and within that they select a first, second and third choice from the range of clinics. Going forward, more work needs to be done at the selection stage to articulate the skills development benefits of working with the StreetLaw clinic. Pinder, drawing on feedback from former students, reflects on their recognition of how participation in the programme has assisted them in their legal roles.¹⁹ In their article on the CLOCK Legal Companion (CLC) scheme, another experiential learning opportunity, where students provide assistance to

¹⁸ [Kathryn Saban - Lancaster University](#) (accessed 14/06/24).

¹⁹ Pinder, KA., (1998), Street Law: Twenty-Five Years and Counting, *Journal of Law and Education*, 226.

Litigants in Person in court settings, Ashton and Waters find that, despite the absence of the traditional clinic model of students interviewing clients with a supervising practitioner, the skills developed map onto those highlighted in the Legal Education and Training Review (LETR) published in 2013, which made recommendations for law schools to embed practice-skills within the legal education curriculum.²⁰ Similarly, the 2023 QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Law, which sets out what can be expected of a law graduate, includes a number of transferable employability skills, all of which are essential for effective StreetLaw delivery and could be highlighted in the recruitment stage.²¹

As explored below, students recognised the benefits in terms of skills development as they reflected on their StreetLaw experience, but this clinic was a harder ‘sell’ when students were selecting their clinic choice. Firstly, this was the first year as part of the CLE module and secondly it was something of an unknown, particularly when compared with our long-established traditional clinics such as Family and Employment. Only one out of the five students in the first cohort selected StreetLaw as their first choice, however, at the end of the year, all were happy with the outcome, particularly as the year ended with a ‘Highly Commended’ recognition for ‘Best Contribution by a Team of Students’ at the prestigious national LawWorks and

²⁰ Webb, J., Ching, J., Maharg, P. and Sherr, A., *Legal Education and Training Review (LETR), Setting Standards: The Future of Legal Services Education and Training Regulation in England and Wales* (London: Legal Education and Training Review, 2013). Available at <http://www.lettr.org.uk/the-report/index.html> (accessed on 14.06.24.)

²¹ [Subject Benchmark Statement: Law \(qaa.ac.uk\)](#) (accessed 14.06.24).

Attorney General Student pro bono awards and a trip to the House of Lords!²² Fortunately, given the Head of Law's support for StreetLaw and the shared delivery of the wider CLE module, this was able run with a small number, and numbers for the subsequent year are higher. However, financial constraints could mean that running StreetLaw with only a small number of students at least initially, despite the advantages of this from a practical perspective, would not be feasible at some institutions. Perhaps this will change as it 'beds in' at Sussex, but StreetLaw has required greater financial and time investment than other modules, for example funding students and faculty to attend the UK and Ireland Street Law conference ahead of the academic year. This gives students the opportunity to start forming connections with each other as a team, to participate in StreetLaw style activities, which informs their own design and delivery, and, hearing from a range of inspiring speakers, helps them to feel part of a wider PLE community.²³

²² [LawWorks and Attorney General Student Pro Bono Awards | LawWorks](#) (accessed 14.06.24).

²³ Sussex students from the pilot had the opportunity to review the conference: Nwosu, R. et al UK and Ireland Street Law conference 2022, (2022) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 6, No.1.

Pedagogical Context

Experiential Learning and Reflective Practice

StreetLaw, along with more traditional clinic work, is set within the pedagogical context of experiential learning and reflective practice. Moon states “a person learns when she retains an idea in such a manner that she can use it to guide new learning”.²⁴ Dewey’s key role in developing the educational movement towards experiential learning through reflective practice has been well documented and this forms the basis for much of the thinking around CLE.²⁵ Drawing on Dewey’s work in developing his own model, Kolb states “When learning is conceived as a holistic adaptive process, it provides conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work, portraying learning as a continuous, lifelong process.”²⁶ The assessment for the module at Sussex is a reflective portfolio, with students required to reflect on their experience and learning of their particular clinic, situated in the context of access to justice and grounded in the literature of reflective practice. The student focus groups took place prior to students preparing for the assessment, although they were encouraged to make notes on their experiences shortly after the various delivery sessions, which they would then be able to draw on when writing their portfolio. Their thoughts on the benefits of ‘learning by doing’ came through strongly in the focus

²⁴ Moon, JA., *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning, Theory and Practice* (Routledge,2013) p71.

²⁵ Dewey, J. *Experience and Education*, Kappa Delta Pi, 1938.

²⁶ Kolb, D. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (New Jersey, PTR Prentice-Hall, 1984), p.33.

groups with one student reflecting on a session introducing law through topical news stories “I felt it kind of jogged my memory of some stuff that I did in first year. We were discussing contract law and it was helpful for me as well as teaching them.”

Maranville makes a strong case for integrating experiential learning into the law curriculum, arguing that it sustains law students’ original motivation for studying law, enriching learning by placing it in context. Her thoughts on a decline in student engagement seem even more pertinent in the current UK Higher Education space post Covid-19 that “Many law students are so bored by the second year that their attendance, preparation and participation decline precipitously; by graduation they have lost much of the passion for justice and the enthusiasm for helping other people that were their strongest initial motivations for wanting to become lawyers.”²⁷ The Sussex StreetLaw team all felt that their experience had been something different from the normal teaching and learning experience, that in delivering sessions to young people in the community without a background in legal education, they were able to move beyond “regurgitating typical black letter law” and “fancy legal jargon” and situate the law within the young people’s lives. They had in effect moved from “spectator to participant in legal education.”²⁸

²⁷Maranville, D. “Infusing Passion and Context into the Traditional Curriculum through Experiential Learning” (2001) 51(1) *Journal of Legal Education* 51.

²⁸ Maharg, P., *Transforming Legal Education: Learning and Teaching Law in the early Twenty-first Century* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007) p.156

Skills Development and Employability

Whilst the debates prior to the introduction of the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (“SQE”) as to what might be lost from an overly practice driven law degree may have somewhat subsided following its introduction, the employability agenda across HE continues.²⁹ Indeed, with the introduction of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act, 2022, it may be that potential degree students become more focused on the employability related opportunities as they consider university choices. There is a wealth of literature on the importance of including employability skills in HE³⁰, alongside academic criticism that the balance has tipped too far in this direction.³¹ In the legal education space, Nicholson argues that employability enhancement is an expected feature of a law degree and that, as in any other consumer market, failure to deliver on this aspect is likely to put the institution at a competitive disadvantage “prospective students may well vote with their feet if providers choose not to focus on this aspect at all, or do not do so effectively.”³² At Sussex, embedding employability into the curriculum is a strategic priority, set within the ‘Sussex 2025 World Readiness

²⁹ For a critique of the employability and professional practice agenda see Guth, J. and Ashford, C. “The Legal Education and Training review: regulating socio-legal and liberal legal education?” (2014) 48(1) *Law Teacher* 5

³⁰ Tibby, M and Norton, S (2020) *Essential frameworks for enhancing student success: embedding employability A guide to the Advance HE Framework (Advance HE)* [Embedding employability in higher education | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/advance-he-framework/essential-frameworks-for-enhancing-student-success-embedding-employability) (accessed 02/07/24)

³¹ Rooney, S. and Rawlinson, M. (2016) ‘Narrowing Participation? Contesting the Dominant Discourse of Employability in Contemporary Higher Education’ 36 *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling* 20 <https://doi.org/10.20856>

³² Nicholson, A. “The value of a law degree – part 4: a perspective from employers” (2022) 56(2) *Law Teacher* 2 p173.

and Employability Strategy'.³³ Whilst the embedding versus co-curricular question is not the focus of this piece, research indicates that lower-income and working-class students are less likely to engage in extra-curricular activities and this may be due to paid work and responsibilities outside university including caring responsibilities.³⁴ This was evidenced in the student focus group, with the two domestic students, the others being from our Canadian cohort, stating that they had been unable to take up co-curricular opportunities due to their work and childcare responsibilities. Having StreetLaw embedded within the curriculum made it more “accessible” and “integrated....with hours already set out for you.”

Whilst employability as an offer to students has no single definition, a common thread in the literature is enabling students to gain skills and attributes which will put them in a good position to gain employment in their chosen field.³⁵ When asked about any

³³ Huns, E (2022) 'Employability Blog Series: Driving change through strategy – a case study from the University of Sussex' (*Higher Education Policy Institute*, 6 May 2022) <www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/05/06/employability-blog-series-driving-change-through-strategy-a-case-study-from-the-university-of-sussex/#:~:text=The%20Sussex%20World%20Readiness%20and%20Employability%20Strategy%20has,Strategic%20objective%201%3A%20Embedding%20employability%20into%20the%20curriculum> (accessed 08/07/24)

³⁴ Bathmaker, AM, Ingram, N and Waller, R (2013) 'Higher education, social class and the mobilisation of capitals: recognising and playing the game' *British Journal of Sociology of Education* Vol. 34, No. 5/6, 723-743 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.816041>, Purcell, K, Elias, P, Atfield, G, Beale, H, Ellison, R and Luchinskaya, D (2013) *Transitions into Employment, Further Study and Other Outcomes: The Futuretrack Stage 4 Report* (Warwick: Institute for Employment Research) [Futuretrack Stage 4 : Transitions into employment , further study and other outcomes ,](https://www.futuretrack.ac.uk/~/media/FutureTrack/Reports/Transitions%20into%20employment%2C%20further%20study%20and%20other%20outcomes%20stage%204%20report.pdf) Hordósy, R and Clark, T (2018) 'Beyond the compulsory: A critical exploration of the experiences of extracurricular activity and employability in a northern red brick university', *Research in Post-compulsory Education*, 23 (3): 414-435 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2018.1490094>

³⁵ Rigg, D., "Embedding employability in assessment: searching for the balance between academic learning and skills development in law: a case study" (2013) 47(3) *Law Teacher* 404, p406.

perceived benefits of participating, the StreetLaw students without prompting, were able to articulate the transferable skills they felt they had developed throughout the year, including “collaborative working”; “thinking on your feet”; “responsibility” and, perhaps surprisingly, “creativity”, “We get to make something ourselves, not just have something presented to us by professors”.

Delivery at Sussex: who we worked with and what we did

Community groups

The first of these was young people supported by the charity Friends, Families and Travellers (“FFT”).³⁶ The traveller community is one of the most marginalised groups in the UK³⁷ and the relationship developed through Sussex University’s work in relation to a national pledge to support the inclusion of GTRSB (Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, Showmen and Boaters) students in higher education.³⁸ At a roundtable discussion with FFT, we wanted to try something different, to work with the young people in their own space and to find out what they are interested in. The StreetLaw team undertook training including the culture and way of life of the community and

³⁶ Friends, Families and Travellers gypsy-traveller.org (accessed 02/07/24). For a fascinating insight into a project outside the UK, see Urban, M. and Draslarova, H. “Street Law for Czech and Slovak Young Roma Musicians” (2016) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 23 (3).

³⁷ See e.g. [EHRC Developing a national barometer of prejudice and discrimination in Britain \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](http://EHRC Developing a national barometer of prejudice and discrimination in Britain (equalityhumanrights.com)) which found that this community faced a greater level of discrimination than other protected characteristics groups (accessed 08/07/24).

³⁸ [GTRSB \(Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, Showmen & Boaters\) Pledge: Race equality: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: University of Sussex](http://GTRSB (Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, Showmen & Boaters) Pledge: Race equality: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: University of Sussex) (accessed 02/07/24).

the inequalities faced. We were aware that this is a community on the edges of Brighton and Hove, with visitors often perceived with trepidation. Again, our priority was to work with the young people, to hear what they wanted to discuss and/or learn about and tailor our sessions on that basis.

We were mindful that the young people in the community often leave traditional education earlier than those outside, that they were choosing to be there and that it was a privilege to be invited into their space. We prepared interactive activities such as 'build the law' with Lego and draw the law. Unsurprisingly, the builds and images were negative, for example prison cells and hostile interactions with the police, especially as a round of site evictions had taken place shortly before we arrived. We opened up discussions and then asked about interests, gradually introducing areas of law they had not considered and might help with their future aspirations.

We developed a series of sessions, including expected topics such as rights with the police and discrimination law, but also how to start a business, including health and safety considerations and marketing. The Jaffa Cake activity was very popular, and the group were astonished to find that their biscuit versus cake arguments were similar to those put forward in the court! Our work culminated in a mock trial, again tailored to the young people. We were also privileged to be invited to join the young people at a bespoke GTRSB outreach session at Lewes Crown Court. One of the highlights of the visit was hearing from June Warwick, first known qualified criminal

barrister from a traveller background, who shared her experiences of growing up in the traveller community and what inspired her to pursue a legal career.³⁹

The second community group was young people at the Crew Club (“CC”), an independent charity supporting young people and their families, with a range of activities including sports; parents’ groups; crafting; music activities, and youth clubs. Our first visit was to the evening youth group. The club lead spoke to the team about the community, club history, and ethos. We spent time getting to know the young people, finding out what areas of law might be of interest. Supported by training from a School of Education colleague ⁴⁰, the students designed and delivered interactive sessions on rights at work, shopping, and law relating to social media. Particularly given that most of the young people had been at school all day, the sessions had to be fun and engaging. For our final session the CC requested a mock trial and we developed this with the young people, who enjoyed playing the parts and dressing up in gowns and wigs, with a member of the CC team on trial, which they very much enjoyed!

³⁹ [Rose Court Chambers](#) (accessed 03/07/24).

⁴⁰ [Emily Danvers Profile | University of Sussex](#) (accessed 08/07/24).

Education settings

The first of these was Sutton District Training (“SDT”) ⁴¹. SDT provides vocational training for young people and adults for whom a traditional academic pathway is not suitable. Operational for over 25 years, SDT supports young people in South London and surrounding areas. We worked with the Brighton hub, delivering sessions on the STEPS programme, a small, supportive programme for students with additional needs, with a focus on developing skills for adulthood. Alongside helping students develop essential employability skills and build confidence, the programme provides insights and taster sessions for a variety of vocational roles such as hairdressing and travel, and facilitates work experience with local employers. ⁴²

Following conversations with the programme leaders, we designed an “Introduction to Law” session. Unlike the community settings, we had access to the standard classroom audio-visual equipment, and opened the sessions with a series of visuals from current news stories, asking students to identify any areas of law which might be applicable. The StreetLaw team spent time identifying stories which they felt would be recognisable and interesting for the students, with the aim of building confidence for the rest of the session. News stories included the then topical stories of Lewis Hamilton’s move to Ferrari ⁴³, the ‘deep fakes’ circulating of Taylor Swift ⁴⁴, the case

⁴¹ [Varndean College](#) and [Sutton And District Training | Specialised Vocational Training | \(suttondistrict.co.uk\)](#) (accessed 02/07/24).

⁴² [STEPS | Sutton and District \(suttondistrict.co.uk\)](#) (accessed 03/07/24).

⁴³ [Lewis Hamilton will make shock move from Mercedes to Ferrari - BBC Sport](#) (accessed 03/07/2024).

⁴⁴ [Taylor Swift deepfakes spark calls in Congress for new legislation - BBC News](#) (accessed 03/07/24).

of Abdul Ezedi, perpetrator of an acid attack on his former partner who had been granted asylum in the UK ⁴⁵, and, whilst not then in the news, the fun row between Colin and Cuthbert, Marks and Spencer and Aldi's respective caterpillar cakes.⁴⁶ The SDT students were able to identify applicable areas of law including contract; intellectual property; criminal; social media, and immigration. This then led to discussions on various legal issues, with all students contributing.

Whilst, for logistical reasons, we had not been able to carry out an initial scoping session with the students, we had designed a series of interactive activities on areas of law which we thought would be of interest to the students at SDT following input from the programme leaders. These were rights at work, rights in shops and online, and online safety, consisting of an introductory activity where students were invited to share an experience related to the area, followed by short quizzes and input on the law. Aligned with the StreetLaw ethos of empowerment and working with communities, the topics were offered as a menu for students to choose from, giving them choice over their learning. We finished the sessions with an insight into the variety of legal roles available, with the aim of breaking down some of the barriers in thinking of working in the law as something inaccessible for students 'like them'.

⁴⁵ [Clapham chemical attack: Immigration row over refugee granted asylum despite sex crimes | The Independent](#) (accessed 03/07/2024).

⁴⁶ [The case of the caterpillar cakes: why legal protection for a shape is so hard to come by \(theconversation.com\)](#) (accessed 03/07/24).

The second education setting was Varndean College, an FE provider, with students primarily from 16 to 18 years old. Whereas we had worked with all the other organisations in the pilot prior to StreetLaw's introduction into the CLE module, this was the first time working with Varndean. As with SDT we were unable to have a scoping session and instead liaised with the college about what was required. This was our most traditional delivery and one which, as discussed below, the StreetLaw team found in some ways the most challenging, despite it being the delivery most closely aligned to their own educational experience. Working with two A-level law groups we had been asked to deliver input on the right to protest, covered in the syllabus for their Human Rights module and to provide some insight into the undergraduate university experience in law and more generally.

The StreetLaw team designed an interactive opening activity, using visuals to highlight high profile protests including "Just Stop Oil"⁴⁷ and the Sarah Everard vigil⁴⁸, moving on to explore in small groups experiences the students' experiences of protests, either protesting themselves or being inconvenienced by a protest, what they felt they would protest about, and where they felt the parameters of lawful and unlawful protest should be. The StreetLaw team then delivered input on the applicable European Convention on Human Rights provision, domestic legislation and common law, focusing on the key cases as set out on the A-Level syllabus. This was followed by a scenario modelled on one of their upcoming exam questions, where

⁴⁷ [Take action! – Just Stop Oil](#) (accessed 03/07/24).

⁴⁸ [Sarah Everard: Met Police breached rights of vigil organisers - BBC News](#) (accessed 03/07/24).

they worked in groups with the StreetLaw team to identify the applicable legal issues and apply the relevant law. The session culminated in a Q and A session about their experiences as law students at Sussex, student life more generally, and what they wished they had known on Day 1 of their degrees. This was a particularly enjoyable conclusion to the delivery, with the Varndean students sharing their aspirations for study and beyond.

Research Findings

Methodology

Following ethics approval, in order to gather the data for this empirical research study, a purposive sampling approach was utilised, consisting of separate focus groups with the StreetLaw module students and both community partners, i.e. CC and FFT.⁴⁹ The student focus groups took place at the end of each semester, when the delivery experience was relatively fresh. Acknowledging the potential for power imbalance given that I would be facilitating the focus groups, I stressed that participation was entirely optional and their grades and future work on the module would not be impacted in any way. All five of the StreetLaw students decided to participate in both focus groups. This was for a combination of reasons, the relationship we and they had

⁴⁹Denscombe, M. *The Good Research Guide for small-scale social research projects* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), *The Oxford Handbook of Empirical Legal Research*, eds Cane and Kritzer (Oxford University Press 2010). Feedback was provided by the education setting leads, with permission to share, but this was not within a focus group, primarily due to the pressures of imminent exams.

built as a team; wanting to assist me with my study; because they wanted to contribute to the development of StreetLaw for future cohorts; because they had enjoyed StreetLaw and wanted to share their experiences with me and each other in this dedicated space, and because they felt this would help with their reflective assessment.

The focus groups were semi-structured, with questions for the students on their drivers for selecting the StreetLaw CLE option, particularly in its inaugural year; whether they had any prior experience of working in the community which informed that decision; their expectations for the module; their experience of the work including the challenges; any differences between the community and education settings delivery, and any impact on their skills development, for example professional skills such as team-work, presentation, organisation and skills linking with their academic work, for example legal research.

The community partners' focus groups took place separately, with two FFT leads and two CC leads participating separately. Again, these were semi-structured, with discussion including why they had decided to partner with StreetLaw; whether this was a new connection with the university/Law School or whether they had worked with us before, such as through a widening participation programme; their expectations of working with StreetLaw; their experiences including any challenges and aspects which could be improved upon for in future iterations; their thoughts on

the participants' experiences, and whether this had helped build links with the university.

Given that that the number of participants in the study was small, nine in total, its limitations should be acknowledged and whether the experiences of the participants are representative more widely would need to be the subject of further research. It would be interesting, for example, to explore projects involving larger cohorts and if there is any difference in experience where the Law School has initiated the partnership or the approach has come from the community. Nevertheless, the themes which emerged will hopefully be of interest to those running similar projects or thinking about setting up a StreetLaw programme.

Building community relationships

The opportunity to work within the local community was a key theme for both the UK and Canadian students, with the latter feeling that through StreetLaw they had learnt much more about the UK. One of the UK students, a first-generation student, felt a particular connection with the young people we worked with, stating:

“Although I had “big dreams” of what I wanted to achieve in life, it wasn’t long until some of these things began to seem out of reach and inaccessible to someone “like

me". To be able to work with community groups, youth clubs and other similar provisions close to the area I myself grew up in, has been an amazing opportunity"

Discussing the work with FFT, the students reflected on the preconceptions that the UK students had of the traveller community, which one described as "growing up in the UK, you are kind of instilled with a prejudice against the traveller community".

They spoke about how they felt prior to going onto the traveller site for our first delivery session "it was kind of scary because you hear all this stuff about what happens on them." For this student in particular, the experience was transformative "And then, you actually go. And they're just kids". They went on to think about the potential impact they could have in the future in challenging prejudice "If I hear other people say stuff about that community, I can actually say that's not true."

The potential wider impact of this small StreetLaw project was echoed in the focus group with the FFT leads. One reflected on the impact on the young people, who can form a view of law based on the negative interactions the community may have had. They said this work "has kind of broken down a stereotype", and that the young people were surprised about the range of law in their lives.

The students acknowledged the emotional impact of listening to the lived experience of discrimination of the young people on the traveller site. Reflecting on the difference between learning about this in the FFT training session prior to delivery and their encounters with the young people, one said "There were times when I would hear things that were really upsetting", but that they had learnt "how to carry myself in

that situation” and “try to use those emotions to trigger something positive and show them that there could be ways that they could make changes”.⁵⁰ They all felt that working with StreetLaw had helped them to see the potential for law as a positive force to effect societal change, rather than as something simply to be studied for their degree.

Building community relationships was also highlighted by the CC leads. One noted that the local universities, here Sussex and the University of Brighton, don’t often come out into the community, stating “what really attracted me was that you were willing to come and speak to the young people first...rather than have a kind of template.” They praised the approach of the team: “the students came at this with so much gusto and enthusiasm. That's what you need....to start up a conversation with genuine interest in the young people and their lives”.

Helping people and public legal education

This was another theme which came through in the student focus groups. They spoke about “helping people through sessions catered to their needs”, one felt that they had played a part in demonstrating that that “law, access to justice and legal education can and should be accessible to all” and that StreetLaw had made them

⁵⁰ For an interesting discussion of the emotional aspects of working with the law see Feenan, D. ‘Law and Compassion’ (2017) Vol 13 (2) International Journal of Law in Context 121.

aware of the disconnect between legal education and the legal profession and many communities, particularly with funding cuts to legal aid and charitable services in recent years. Reflecting on the negative perceptions of the law in the community settings, one spoke about their own experience as a person of colour. They stated “it was quite difficult to dream big but when I saw someone who looks like me working in law I thought, oh, there’s opportunity for people like me”. They connected this with their work on StreetLaw, that they could in some way help these young people to “rewrite the narrative”, so that they “can be part of forming a new narrative for their community.”

A CC manager spoke about the initial wariness of the youth club group when told StreetLaw were coming in, with one asking if this was connected with the police. They spoke about the learning experience for the young people “it was nice to be able to talk about law and things they could get into trouble with, that they could be open and ask questions.”

The SDT lead spoke about how the sessions had helped to enable their students to make connections with everyday life and the law which they had not explored before, stating “Our students enjoyed the content of the talk and how friendly/down to earth the session was. You certainly made it very accessible to all.”

The students discussed the potential downsides of being in the first cohort of the StreetLaw module, but felt on the whole that this was a positive experience and that they had felt we were “in it together”, being first was “exciting”, that this module was

different from the rest of their degree and that they felt they were building StreetLaw with me, that it was genuinely co-created.⁵¹ They wondered if this would be the same for future cohorts as they felt that as the programme 'beds in', there would likely be duplication of successful sessions which they had delivered. One spoke of feeling part of something bigger than the year, saying:

"I'm hoping one day I can look back on my education and my time with the StreetLaw clinic and see success and progress and feel a sense of pride that I was involved right at the beginning."

Professional Skills Development and Employability

One of the CC leads spoke about the benefits for the StreetLaw students in terms of professional skills development. They spoke about the need for them to be flexible in their thinking, comfortable in the unknown and to be able to work with young people with different learning styles. This was echoed in the student focus groups. They were able to articulate the transferable skills they had developed including presentation skills, written and oral communication, teamwork and research. One spoke about their reticence in coming forward for presentations, but that being part of StreetLaw had given them the confidence to do this saying "I've learnt a lot, what presentation

⁵¹ For an interesting discussion of the value of co-creation, see Dollinger, M. & Lodge, J. (2020) 'Understanding value in the student experience through student-staff partnerships', *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39:5, 940-952, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1695751> (accessed 08/07/24).

looks like in front of different groups of people” and that “we can be open and share our own experiences”. Another said the work had “actually made me proud of myself”.

Without prompting, the students were able to link these skills to their future career paths. One stated they had had to do a presentation to the partners at a law firm as part of an interview, and that StreetLaw had helped to prepare them for that. Speaking about the need to be able to adapt the session plan to the circumstances when for example the young people were becoming less engaged, they spoke about “contingency skills” “knowing how to react on the fly and thinking on your feet” and made connections with professional legal skills, “you’re dealing with a witness and they say something unexpected, you need to be able to think quickly”.

Embedding learning

The students were asked if they felt participating in StreetLaw had helped to embed some of the learning from the rest of their degree. Their feeling was that whilst much of the content they had studied was not relevant for StreetLaw, some was, and that where they were delivering sessions on legal content, whether they had studied it or not, they had to ensure their research was thorough and their delivery and activities were accurate, “we needed to get the law right”. The session all but one found the most challenging was the Varndean session. Here, whilst one liked the more familiar structure, the others felt more pressure, noting that the students had to be there, unlike

the FFT and CC sessions, and to some extent the SDT sessions, and that they had the responsibility of delivering part of the A-Level syllabus, even though they knew that the class teacher was doing a follow up consolidation session the following week. One said “This is stuff they get examined on, so if we taught it wrong, they could fail and that could have a big impact on their lives.” A concluding thought was that whilst sometimes there would be a correlation with a particular area they had studied, such as the contract law point mentioned above, working with StreetLaw had given them an increased awareness of how important law actually is in people’s lives.

My reflections

As noted above, the assessment for the CLE module is a reflective portfolio, with students asked to draw on the key literature and utilise one of the models to guide their reflective process on their clinic. In the whole CLE module cohort lectures, they are introduced to the well-established models for reflection, with most adopting the Kolb⁵² or Gibbs model.⁵³ Whilst thinking about this article, I realised that, whilst I was able to support my students with this assessment, the first time they had had this type of assessment, whilst I do think about what went well and what did not, I approach this from an actions-focused perspective, and gloss over some of the stages of reflection. Drawing on the Gibbs model, I lean into ‘Evaluation’ and ‘Conclusion’,

⁵² *Supra*, Kolb., note 26, at 50

⁵³ Gibbs, G., *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods* (Oxford, Further Education Unit, 1988).

without engaging fully with the holistic cycle of reflection. Thus, in the spirit of 'walking the walk' as well as 'talking the talk', I offer the following reflections on my experience of the first year of StreetLaw at Sussex.

The year started with myself, our Senior Clinic Coordinator, and some of the students attending the StreetLaw conference. Hearing from a range of speakers and taking part in interactive StreetLaw style activities was inspiring and, as well as being an opportunity to get know some of the students, we came away with ideas and activities we could use for our sessions. Despite the supportive and welcoming environment, it was however somewhat daunting hearing the stories of the impact of StreetLaw around the world from key academic clinicians in this space. I felt the pressure of the students looking to me as 'leader' of this new module, what would we achieve and how much impact would we have? Imposter syndrome in academia is well documented, but, coming from practice and on an education track pathway, this was not something I had personally felt prior to undertaking StreetLaw. Achieving national recognition at the LawWorks pro bono awards, Highly Commended in the 'Best Contribution by a Team of Students' category⁵⁴ has, perhaps surprisingly, not alleviated this feeling. What if this was a one-off, will the incoming cohort have higher expectations this year?

Another personal reflection is on the team dynamic and my place within that. As Employability lead for Sussex Law School, I have long been an advocate for co-

⁵⁴ *Supra*, note.22.

creation and participatory design, with input and influence from students beyond the standard module evaluations and surveys.⁵⁵ As well as highlighting teamwork and collaboration in the focus groups, the students provided insightful reflections in their portfolios, working through their perceptions of their role in the team and how they navigated challenges inherent in collaborative work, such as a team member not completing their part of the work in the agreed timeframe. My overarching message for the year was that I would guide and support them, but that I wanted them to feel that this was their project. Striking the right balance between empowering them and overwhelming them with too much responsibility was challenging and something I will be working on for future cohorts. As StreetLaw lead, I had developed the connections and built on relationships with the organisations we worked with and naturally felt a sense of responsibility and accountability. As well as supporting with the planning of the sessions, I came to all but one, when teaching commitments meant that I was unable to join. This session was a follow-on session and I was confident that the team would be able to 'manage' without me. They did manage, and interestingly, one reflected in a focus group that, whilst they appreciated me "stepping in" when there was a lull in engagement, for this session, without me there, although they had felt anxious prior, they felt "proud" that they had achieved this by themselves.

⁵⁵ See Ashton, J. [LPS 2021 Employability showcase: making a difference through co-creation | Learning Matters \(sussex.ac.uk\)](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/learning-matters/2021-employability-showcase-making-a-difference-through-co-creation) and Ashton, J. & Duncan, K. [They told us what they want, so now what?: Reflections on the participatory design of a Business Law and Practice module – part 1 | Learning Matters \(sussex.ac.uk\)](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/learning-matters/reflections-on-the-participatory-design-of-a-business-law-and-practice-module-part-1) (accessed 04/07/24).

Considerations for introducing StreetLaw

- i. Whilst having a credit-bearing law clinic within in the UK law school is becoming an increasingly standard feature of the 'offer' to prospective students⁵⁶, anyone thinking of introducing StreetLaw and/or any form of PLE may have to work to convince department heads that this is just as valuable as the live client work⁵⁷. Consider running a co-curricular pilot project and accompanying research study to identify the value to students and wider community relationship building;
- ii. When developing a StreetLaw programme, reach out to colleagues in departments focusing on teaching and learning, such as the 'School of Education' to see if they can provide input on teaching and learning theory and practice. You may have many years of teaching experience but the students probably have not. Having such support was invaluable at Sussex, and, whilst this was only one of the seminar sessions for the module, the students drew on this input throughout the year when planning their delivery;
- iii. Think about collaborative work spaces for the students to work together. Particularly in final year, students are likely to have different timetables and commitments outside of university, meaning that in-person

⁵⁶ [LawWorks Law Schools Report 2020_0.pdf](#), though numbers are likely to have increased since publication of this report (accessed 04/07/24).

⁵⁷ *Supra* note 8, Perdue, B. and Wallace, A. p.123.

preparation is not always possible. For the incoming CLE module cohort, an additional hour outside of the taught sessions is being timetabled, and we hope that this will help students to work together;

- iv. When considering which organisations to work with, consider reaching out to wider networks within the university, who may have connections who would be interested in working with StreetLaw, such as a widening participation team;
- v. When planning the year, build in sufficient planning time, alongside space for reflection on a session to utilise for future planning.⁵⁸ Students may expect and/or want to be out in the community weekly, but this is unlikely to be sustainable;
- vi. Finally, support but do not be afraid to step back.

Concluding thoughts and moving forward

Whilst as discussed above, there were certainly challenges in the first year of StreetLaw at Sussex, the experience for the participating students, the community and myself has been overwhelmingly positive. I am looking forward to implementing the learning from this year to ensure that the programme is both beneficial for future cohorts and sustainable for Sussex Law School. Building on this year, we are working

⁵⁸ For practical planning resources and guidance see *supra*, note 9, Ridout, F., & Thomas, L.,

with the partner organisations to plan future work, including the education rights clinic mentioned above, a young person's rights hub, extending the number of sessions, and potentially embedding the work within other programmes the organisations are running.

StreetLaw provides students with a unique opportunity for experiential learning within the CLE framework, alongside assisting them to become reflective practitioners, which will hopefully help them to navigate their professional lives after graduating. Working in the wider community enables students to feel more connected with the 'real-world', and can reinvigorate their interest in the law, taking it from something to study and pass assessments in, to something with tangible impact on individuals and communities. It would be interesting to research the impact of working on such projects as the students progress through their careers and whether they are more likely to champion access to justice and pro bono work than those who have not participated in such a module.⁵⁹

The benefits of participating in StreetLaw from the perspectives of legal education and employability can also be viewed in conjunction with the requirements for law graduates as per the QAA Subject Benchmark for Law 2023 which identifies a number of transferable skills which the students were able to identify and articulate

⁵⁹ See e.g. McKeown, P., 'Pro Bono: What's in it for law students? The students' perspective', *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 24, No 2 (2017) pp 43-80 which explores students' motivations for participating in pro bono work and considers whether this is likely to instil a public service ethos which they will carry forward.

themselves, including employability skills; effective verbal and non-verbal communication; presenting legal information and argument in a comprehensible way, and working collaboratively. For students wishing to qualify as solicitors in England and Wales, skills developed through this work should assist them with Stage 2 of the Solicitors Qualifying Exam, which has an emphasis on practical legal skills.⁶⁰

From a personal perspective, my experience of StreetLaw is undoubtedly a career highlight. I have felt more connected with the students, wider university networks and the local community. I would like to conclude this piece with the thoughts of one of the FFT managers, reflecting on the potential impact of the work with the traveller community on the StreetLaw team, who they saw as future policy-makers “they're potentially going to be in high positions. And that's how you have an impact on institutional changes.”

⁶⁰ [How the SOE works | SOE | Solicitors Regulation Authority \(sra.org.uk\)](#) (accessed 04/07/24).