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**THE LAW IN THE COMMUNITY MODULE AT NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY-  
WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CITIZENS ADVICE AS AN EFFECTIVE  
TEACHING TOOL**

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**Abstract**

This article discusses the Law in the Community module, which has recently been introduced into the curriculum at Northumbria University. In this module, the students attend fortnightly workshops with their university tutor and volunteer each week at their local Citizens Advice. The aims of the module are to develop the students' knowledge and professional skills and appreciation of access to justice challenges, whilst simultaneously advising members of the community through their volunteer work at the Citizens Advice. The purpose of this paper is twofold: firstly, to present and discuss data from a semi-structured interview with the academic responsible for the design and delivery of the module during the first year of its inception. Secondly, to evaluate the pedagogical benefits and the benefits to the wider community.

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**Key Words:** Clinical Legal Education, Law in the Community, Legal Education, Citizens Advice, Access to Justice

## **Introduction**

The Student Law Office (SLO)<sup>2</sup> at Northumbria University has, for over 20 years, provided law students with the opportunity to develop their professional skills by providing free legal advice and assistance to members of the public.<sup>3</sup> The Law in the Community module has recently been introduced into the curriculum and provides an alternative clinical option to the SLO module<sup>4</sup> to the law students. In this module, the students learn through a combination of fortnightly workshop groups with their University tutor and conduct volunteer work each week at the local Citizens Advice where they provide legal advice, assistance and/or legal education, under their supervision, to the organisation's service users. Northumbria University remunerates Citizens Advice for each student they supervise.

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<sup>2</sup> For further information about the SLO please see the webpage <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/academic-departments/northumbria-law-school/study/student-law-office/> accessed 4 July 2020.

<sup>3</sup> C Sylvester, J Hall and E Hall (2014) 'Problem-based learning and clinical legal education: What can clinical educators learn from PBL?' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 4, pp.39-63; Dunn, R (2017). 'The knowledge, skills and attributes considered necessary to start day one training competently and whether live client clinics develop them' Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University

<sup>4</sup> The SLO provides a full representation assistance to members of the public. Students in their third year of the LLB Hons and MLaw Exempting degree undertake the SLO as a full year module. The module is also available to the Legal Practice Course students as a 12 week module in the second semester.

Citizens Advice is a charitable organisation which provides free, confidential and impartial advice to the local community on diverse areas including welfare benefits, family, housing and employment law.<sup>5</sup> Legal aid cuts introduced by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO),<sup>6</sup> together with cuts to charitable organisations,<sup>7</sup> has resulted in a significant loss or reduction of legal services. The volunteer work undertaken by the students in this module increases the capacity of Citizens Advice to provide advice and assistance to those who may not otherwise be able to access legal services,<sup>8</sup> whilst simultaneously allowing the students to develop their knowledge of the law and professional skills under this model of clinical legal education (CLE).

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<sup>5</sup> For further information, see the webpage <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk> accessed 4 December 2020.

<sup>6</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 4 December 2020.

<sup>7</sup> D Morris and W Barr (2013) 'The impact of cuts on legal aid funding on charities' *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* Vol 35 (1) pp79-94. See also Citizens Advice 'Citizens Advice Submission to the Justice Enquiry into the impact of changes to civil legal aid under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012' <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/policy/policy-research-topics/justice-policy-research/access-to-justice-policy-research-and-consultation-responses/access-to-justice-consultation-responses/jsc-inquiry-into-the-impact-of-changes-to-civil-legal-aid/> accessed 9 December 2020.

<sup>8</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 4 December 2020. See also D 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 2020.

This article adds to the sparse literature in this area through an exploration of the design and implementation of this clinical module, including an evaluation of the pedagogical benefits and benefits to the wider community. The article will first set out the key features of the module. The second part will set out the methodology adopted in this article. The third part will discuss the design and implementation of the module, presenting data as a case study from a semi-structured interview with the academic responsible for its design and who was module leader during its first year. The aims of the module will be explored, together with challenges faced during the design and implementation stages. The fourth part of this article will analyse the benefits and limitations from a student and community perspective from the authors' own experience of teaching this module during its first two years.

## **Introducing the Law in Community Module**

### *Working with Citizens Advice as a Model of CLE*

Law schools working in partnership with external organisations and indeed, Citizens Advice is not a new concept in CLE.<sup>9</sup> There is an increasing use of Citizens Advice as

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<sup>9</sup> For an example of law schools working in partnership with external organisations, see L Bengtsson and A Speed (2019) 'A Case Study Approach. Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 26 No 1 pp.179-215; M Castles (2016) 'Marriage of convenience or a match made in heaven? Collaboration between a law school clinic and a commercial law firm' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 23, pp. 7-47; L Bleasdale-Hill and P Wragg (2013) 'Models of Clinics and Their Value to Students, Universities and the Community in the post 2012 Fees Era' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 19, pp.257-270.

a means of furthering CLE; for example, in the University of Plymouth<sup>10</sup>, Birmingham City University<sup>11</sup>, University of Central Lancashire<sup>12</sup>, Lancaster University<sup>13</sup>, University of Northampton<sup>14</sup>, among many others. Notwithstanding the increasing prevalence of such a partnership, there appears to be no typical module structure or uniform link with Citizens Advice. Universities differ in their approach, from students volunteering and receiving a Citizens Advice qualification/accreditation, to the module being mandatory, or the Citizens Advice providing ad hoc assistance and experience for the student. The approach of the Law in the Community module at Northumbria University is considered in the Case Study section below.

This model of CLE with universities working in partnership with Citizens Advice not only prepares students for the world of work<sup>15</sup> but supports unmet legal need in the local community.<sup>16</sup> Access to justice is often the subject of debate among academics, practitioners, the judiciary, government and the public more generally, particularly so

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<sup>10</sup> University of Plymouth, 'Law Clinic: work-based learning and volunteering' (2018/2019) [https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/9/9747/Law\\_Clinic\\_Handbook.pdf](https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/9/9747/Law_Clinic_Handbook.pdf) accessed 24 August 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Birmingham City School of Law, 'Legal Advice and Representation Unit' <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/law/student-experience-and-employability/legal-advice-representations-unit> accessed 24 August 2020.

<sup>12</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) accessed 24 August 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Lancaster University, 'Law Clinics' <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/study/why-lancaster/law-clinics/> accessed 24 August 2020.

<sup>14</sup> University of Northampton, 'Pro Bono Advice Clinic' <https://www.northampton.ac.uk/about-us/services-and-facilities/pro-bono-advice-clinic/> accessed 24 August 2020.

<sup>15</sup> C Sparrow 'Reflective Student Practitioner – an example integrating clinical experience into the curriculum' (2009) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 14 (4) pp 70-76.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* See also B Waters and J Ashton (2018) 'A study into situated learning through community leadership partnership' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 25(2), pp. 4-47; F S Bloch (ed.) (2011) *The Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Justice*, (New York: Oxford University Press).

since the introduction of LASPO on 1 April 2013. A key aspect of a person's access to justice is the ability to receive legal advice and assistance, whether privately paying, through insurance or by way of state support. The concept of the state making payments to lawyers to act for members of the public is not a new concept. The formal legal aid system was introduced on the recommendation of the Rushcliffe Committee following the second World War, wherein it was stated that, '*legal aid should be available in all courts to a wide income group and at a scale of contributions for those who could pay something towards costs but free for those who could not*'.<sup>17</sup> Richardson and Speed note that the benefits of legal representation for a client cannot be overstated; clients, '*often lack the experience and skill required to identify the key issues in dispute and put forward their strongest legal arguments*' and, '*legal aid is often regarded as the fourth pillar of the welfare state, alongside health, education and social security*'.<sup>18</sup> The introduction of LASPO systematically dismantled aspects of the welfare state.<sup>19</sup> It is appreciated that the Conservative - Liberal Democrat Coalition government needed to reduce the financial deficit for the United Kingdom, which had reached £956.4 billion in 2009/2010<sup>20</sup>, but such drastic measures for the justice system have impeded access to justice. It was

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<sup>17</sup> K L Richardson and A K Speed (2019) 'Restrictions on legal aid in family law cases in England and Wales: creating a necessary barrier to public funding or simply increasing the burden on the family courts?' *The Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, Vol 41(2), pp. 135 – 152.

<sup>18</sup> K L Richardson and A K Speed (2019) 'Restrictions on legal aid in family law cases in England and Wales: creating a necessary barrier to public funding or simply increasing the burden on the family courts?' *The Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, Vol 41(2), pp. 135 – 152.

<sup>19</sup> B Waters and J Ashton (2018) 'A Study into Situated Learning through Community Legal Companionship' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 25(4) pp. 4-47.

<sup>20</sup> G Heung (2017) 'The Underprivileged See No Light in LASPO Act 2012' *Legal Issues Journal* 23 (5) , pp. 26.

envisaged in 2013 that the proposed cuts to legal aid would result in annual savings by the state of £220 million.<sup>21</sup> There may be a cost saving, though this saving is reversed somewhat by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even just within the criminal courts, *'the government will need to devote additional spending to the criminal courts for up to two years after the crisis: £55m–£110m per year for two years would be sufficient to clear the backlog...and return waiting times to 2019/20 levels'*<sup>22</sup>, which is, *'somewhat ironic that this is the exact same amount that it was hoped would have now been saved through the civil and criminal legal aid reforms, although stage 1 of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) review has indicated that the real amount saved to date is much lower'*.<sup>23</sup>

There are serious non-financial consequences that must be addressed if the justice system is to continue functioning. In consequences of the dismantling of the system, the most foreseeable non-financial impact was the increase in self-representing litigants (otherwise known as litigants in person).<sup>24</sup> There is a greater likelihood of litigants in person suffering access to justice issues compared with legally represented

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<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Justice, 'Transforming legal aid: delivering a more credible and efficient system', (9 April 2013), page 5 <https://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/transforming-legal-aid.pdf> accessed 17 July 2020

<sup>22</sup> The Institute for Government, 'The criminal justice system: How government reforms and coronavirus will affect policing, courts and prisons', page 8 (28 April 2020) [https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/criminal-justice-system\\_0.pdf](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/criminal-justice-system_0.pdf) accessed 25 August 2020.

<sup>23</sup> A Speed, C Thomson, and K Richardson (2020) 'Stay home, stay safe, save lives? An analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the ability of victims of gender-based violence to access justice' *The Journal of Criminal Law*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022018320948280>

<sup>24</sup> A Speed and K Richardson (2020) 'Restrictions on legal aid in family law cases in England and Wales: creating a necessary barrier to public funding or simply increasing the burden on the family courts?' *The Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* Vol 41(2), pp 135 – 152.



parties, worsened by the erosion of legal aid eligibility, most notably in civil and private law family cases. There was a fall in civil law cases from, 724,243 prior to LASPO, to 258,460 in 2015/2016.<sup>25</sup> The Lord Chief Justice provided data on the rise of litigants in person to Parliament in January 2019 for private law family cases, whilst acknowledging the dearth of statistics pre-2012/2013, particularly for defended civil claims.<sup>26</sup> The lack of data hinders the prospect of a comparative analysis of pre-LASPO and post-LASPO statistical data. In the financial year 2012/2013, the Lord Chief Justice provided that, *'a total of 58% of parties were recorded as having legal representation in private law cases that had at least one hearing. In 2017/2018...this had reduced to 36% of parties'*.<sup>27</sup> The reduction in representation was noted as similar for both applicants and respondents.<sup>28</sup> *'In 2012/2013, 72% of applicants and 46% of respondents had legal representation, compared with 45% of applicants and 28% of respondents in 2017/2018.'*<sup>29</sup> Given the withdrawal of legal aid for advice and representation, there needed to be a plug for this gap in legal assistance. The plug should be made by government, though this is unlikely in a system realistically

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<sup>25</sup> G Heung (2017) 'The Underprivileged See No Light in LASPO Act 2012' *Legal Issues Journal* 23 (5), pp. 28.

<sup>26</sup> Lord Burnett of Maldon, 'Statistics on Litigants in Person' (25 January 2019) <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/Justice/correspondence/250119-LCJ-statistics-litigants-in-person.pdf> accessed 13 July 2020

<sup>27</sup> Lord Burnett of Maldon, 'Statistics on Litigants in Person' (25 January 2019) <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/Justice/correspondence/250119-LCJ-statistics-litigants-in-person.pdf> accessed 13 July 2020

<sup>28</sup> Lord Burnett of Maldon, 'Statistics on Litigants in Person' (25 January 2019) <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/Justice/correspondence/250119-LCJ-statistics-litigants-in-person.pdf> accessed 13 July 2020

<sup>29</sup> Lord Burnett of Maldon, 'Statistics on Litigants in Person' (25 January 2019) <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/Justice/correspondence/250119-LCJ-statistics-litigants-in-person.pdf> accessed 13 July 2020

propped up by goodwill of the professionals therein, so it inevitably falls to law clinics, charities and other pro bono services to plug said gap. In other jurisdictions, there is a mandatory contribution to pro bono work by lawyers; for instance, pro bono work is a condition for admission to the New York Bar and lawyers are required to dedicate a small proportion of hours to pro bono work in Australia.<sup>30</sup> Waters and Ashton recognise that, '*initiatives have...been explored and implemented by the Ministry of Justice through investment in Personal Support Units (PSU), LawWorks, Law for Life and the Royal Courts of Justice Advice Bureau*'.<sup>31</sup> In consequence of general austerity measures and the cuts to legal aid, there is greater use of law clinics and services akin to Citizens Advice by the public. Richardson and Speed note:

*Whilst these organisations provide a valuable service, they can by no means fill the gap left by legal aid because they are often unable to assist in complex or urgent matters. For example, the purpose of law school clinics is to provide a practical, educational benefit to its students, alongside providing free legal advice to the community. The cases those clinics take on therefore have to be suitable for students with little to no prior practical legal experience.*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> G Heung (2017) 'The Underprivileged See No Light in LASPO Act 2012' *Legal Issues Journal* 23(5), pp. 50.

<sup>31</sup> B Waters and J Ashton (2018) 'A Study into Situated Learning through Community Legal Companionship' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 25 ( 4), pp.4-47.

<sup>32</sup> K L Richardson and A K Speed (2019) 'Restrictions on legal aid in family law cases in England and Wales: creating a necessary barrier to public funding or simply increasing the burden on the family courts?' *The Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, Vol 41(2), pp. 135 – 152.

Clinics are often unable to assist in complex matters, but that does not preclude the possibility entirely.<sup>33</sup> For instance, Sussex University won Advice Project of the Year from Citizens Advice in 2018.<sup>34</sup> Of the 722 people helped over the academic year, 532 were “complex cases”, though this phrase is not defined in the award announcement and is a subjective term.<sup>35</sup> This demonstrates the importance of clinics joining forces with Citizens Advice, who can advise on a wide range of complex legal issues.

Citizens Advice is a vital service which 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.<sup>36</sup> The service helped 2.8 million people in 2018/2019 in person, or by telephone, email or web chat.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in 2018/2019, Citizens Advice saved the government and public services at least £485 million.<sup>38</sup> Citizens Advice clients are often ‘the most disadvantaged in society with the greatest needs.’<sup>39</sup> Indeed a 2015

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<sup>33</sup> K L Richardson and A K Speed (2019) ‘Restrictions on legal aid in family law cases in England and Wales: creating a necessary barrier to public funding or simply increasing the burden on the family courts?’ *The Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, Vol 41(2), pp. 135 – 152

<sup>34</sup> University of Sussex, ‘Sussex law students win ‘Advice Project of the Year’ from Citizens Advice’ (29 October 2018) <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/46413> accessed 17 July 2020

<sup>35</sup> University of Sussex, ‘Sussex law students win ‘Advice Project of the Year’ from Citizens Advice’ (29 October 2018) <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/46413> accessed 17 July 2020

<sup>36</sup> Citizens Advice, ‘introduction to the Citizens Advice service’ <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/introduction-to-the-citizens-advice-service/> accessed 13 July 2020

<sup>37</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 2020

<sup>38</sup> Citizens Advice, ‘Making a Difference: our impact in 2018/19’ [https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Public/Impact/ImpactReport\\_2019\\_V6.pdf](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Public/Impact/ImpactReport_2019_V6.pdf) accessed 13 July 2020

<sup>39</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 2020

study showed that seven out of ten of their clients live in poverty.<sup>40</sup> Arguably, law schools should raise awareness of unequal access to justice and also to '*implement strategies aimed at ameliorating these*'.<sup>41</sup> This wealth of experience within Citizens Advice and significant insight into charitable working within the access to justice arena can only benefit students and the local community. The public can attend Citizens Advice on an ad hoc basis for initial advice, application drafting and signposting to relevant services for full representation. Citizens Advice seek to partner with local organisations to extend their reach in assisting the public with accessing justice.

#### *Key Features of Northumbria University's SLO Law in Community Module*

Within Northumbria University, all students studying the LLB (Hons), LLB (Hons) with Business and LLB (Hons) with International Business degree may choose the Law in Community module as a second semester option during their third year. If they choose this as a module, it is worth 20 credits of their mark for the year.<sup>42</sup> The module was introduced in the academic year 2018-2019 as an alternative clinical option to the

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<sup>40</sup> Citizens Advice, 'Briefing Local Citizens Advice Income Profile'

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Public/Impact/Client%20poverty%20briefing%20-%20England%20and%20Wales%20-%20June%202015.pdf> accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020.

<sup>41</sup> L Carasik (2016) 'Justice in the Balance: An Evaluation of One Clinics Ability to Harmonise Practical Skills, Ethics and Professionalism within Social Justice Mission' *Southern California Review of Law and Social Justice* 16, pp23. See also E Campbell and V Murray 'Mind the Gap: Clinic and the Access to Justice Dilemma' *International Journal of Legal and Social Studies* Vol 2(3) pp. 94-106.

<sup>42</sup> Along with this module, the students also complete a dissertation which is worth 60 credits during the second semester.

year-long 60 credit SLO module. During the first year of this module, 30 students chose this option and in the second year, there were 22 students. The module involves six, two-hour workshops, which take place within the law school with the students' University tutor and also weekly attendance for one day at the Citizens Advice under the supervision of members of staff who work there. The students therefore gain the benefit of learning from multiple supervisors.<sup>43</sup>

Whilst at Citizens Advice, the students are involved in giving advice to clients at the daily face-to-face drop-in sessions. At these sessions, up to 60 members of the public can attend and be advised on a range of legal issues. The students are also involved in giving telephone advice to clients. They are exposed to a diverse range of practice areas, including welfare benefits, debt, employment, consumer protection, housing, immigration, tax and travel. They also undertake a wide range of activities on behalf of their clients, which involves some, or all, of the following:

- Interviewing clients, taking instructions and advising clients
- Undertaking legal research
- Drafting client statements and court documents
- Preparing case strategies and identifying appropriate next steps in relation to a case

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<sup>43</sup> For a discussion on the benefits of learning from multiple supervisors see L Bleasdale-Hill and P Wragg (2013) 'Models of Clinics and Their Value to Students, Universities and the Community in the post 2012 Fees Era' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 19, pp.257-270 and also L Bengtsson and A Speed (2019) 'Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 26 (1) pp 179- 215.

- Producing a legal information leaflet or a factsheet for members of the public
- Engaging in campaign work around the law or legal practice

At the end of the module, the students are assessed by way of a portfolio, which is securely stored at the offices of Citizens Advice throughout the module and only brought into the University on the specified hand in day. The portfolio contains both their workshop work and live client work undertaken at Citizens Advice throughout the module.<sup>44</sup> The same assessment criteria are applied for both the workshop work and work undertaken at Citizens Advice.<sup>45</sup> Within their portfolio, the students also include a reflective journal, which represents the student account and associated reflections on the module. Morrison notes that a reflective journal offers '*personal, academic, professional and evaluative development*'.<sup>46</sup> Allowing the students to reflect in a journal as the module progressed is more authentic than asking a student to write an essay at the end. As Crowley highlights, the student reflective journal leads to the development of self-awareness, '*inculcating a greater awareness of their personal and academic development*.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The workshop work is printed at the University and put on their portfolio when they next attend Citizens Advice. In terms of their live client work, clients are asked to sign an agreement authorising the students to put the work they have done on the case into their portfolios. This is explained in further detail during the case study.

<sup>45</sup> The assessment criteria for the portfolio is divided into 7 grade descriptors: knowledge and understanding of the law/legal practice, written communication skills, research skills, case and task management and strategising, teamwork skills including contribution to community based project and workshops, oral communication skills and reflective analysis and insight.

<sup>46</sup> K Morrison (1996) 'Developing reflective practice in higher degree students through a learning journal' 21(3) *Studies in Higher Education* pp., 317-332 DOI: [10.1080/03075079612331381241](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079612331381241)

<sup>47</sup> L Crowley (2020) 'The Family Law Clinic at UCC Understanding the Law in the Classroom and Beyond' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 27 (3), pp 175-228.

## **Methodology**

A two-hour semi-structured interview took place with the academic responsible for designing and implementing the module, Ana Speed.<sup>48</sup> The interview was recorded and transcribed. The data from the interview will be presented as a case study arising from the long interview method of data collection. Woodside, who also refers to McCracken, states that the typical features of long interviews include<sup>49</sup>:

*(a) a two to six-hour, face-to-face meeting with the interviewer and respondent; (b) interviewing the respondent in his or her life space, that is, the environment related to the topic under study; (c) asking open-ended, semi-structured questions with deeper exploration of unexpected topics related to the study as opportunities occur; (d) tape recording of responses (when not disruptive) during the interview; (e) verification of responses by triangulation of research methods (e.g., comparing answers with data from direct observation and documents); and (f) developing thick descriptions of individual cases (individual customers' buying and using behavior[s]).*

Woodside's identified indications of the long interview method are used within this study. As aforesaid, the two-hour semi-structured interview took place with the academic responsible for designing and implementing the module. The limited ability

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<sup>48</sup> Ana Speed is a Solicitor Tutor in the Student Law Office at Northumbria University.

<sup>49</sup> A G Woodside, *Case Study Research : Core Skills in Using 15 Genres*, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2016, pp 274, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/northumbria/detail.action?docID=4717024>.

to generalise is a particular disadvantage of long interview data collection using one participant,<sup>50</sup> though generalising is not the main purpose of this study; rather the aim is to evaluate the Law in the Community module to assist with development of the module at Northumbria University and to showcase the possibility of this model being used in other aspects of CLE or at other universities. This approach, therefore, does not necessarily affect the validity and value of case study research from a generalisability perspective, which was highlighted by Johansson (2003), Merriam (2009) and Stewart (2014), as cited by Harrison et al.<sup>51</sup>

A framework of questions was used to guide the interview and to address key considerations, such as how the module was designed, the impetus for its introduction and any challenges faced during the design and implementation. In consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, the participant was interviewed over Microsoft Teams, which is akin to the 'life space' that was adopted towards the end of the module as a result of the prohibition on persons entering the University and Citizens Advice during the UK lockdown period. As regards the third of Woodside's typical features, the participant was asked open-ended questions to facilitate a semi-structured interview, thereby allowing the participant to develop their responses and allowing the

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<sup>50</sup> A G Woodside, *Case Study Research : Core Skills in Using 15 Genres*, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2016, pp. 277, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/northumbria/detail.action?docID=4717024>.

<sup>51</sup> H Harrison, M Birks, R and J Mills (2017), 'Case Study Research: Foundations and Methodological Orientations', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 18(1), Art. 19, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1701195>.



interviewer not to be curtailed by a fixed structure, but to further explore unexpected topics related to the study. The ability to learn the reasons for certain responses and to use probing questions is an advantage of this research method.<sup>52</sup> As regards the fourth of the typical features, there was a recording taken of the interview to allow considerable analysis of the responses. The verification of the responses 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 ordinary module appraisal and from materials used in the development and progression of the module, including the module handbook and workshop materials. This approach is a particular strength of using the long interview research method, which also seeks to mitigate the inherent potential issue of researcher bias, often associated with case studies and this method of data collection.<sup>53</sup> The descriptions, evaluations and consequent developments that follow in this article satisfy the final typical feature of the long interview method outlined by Woodside.

The study received ethical approval from Northumbria University and the academic who agreed to the interview signed an informed consent form. The consent form

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<sup>52</sup> A G Woodside, *Case Study Research : Core Skills in Using 15 Genres*, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2016, page 276, ProQuest Ebook Central,

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/northumbria/detail.action?docID=4717024>

<sup>53</sup> A G Woodside, *Case Study Research : Core Skills in Using 15 Genres*, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2016, page 275, ProQuest Ebook Central,

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/northumbria/detail.action?docID=4717024>

reminded the participant that she could withdraw from the interview at any stage and her participation was voluntary. Permission was given to record the interview.

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interview and the authors' views, open a window to the value of this module.<sup>54</sup> However, future research involving a survey or interviews with staff at Citizens Advice, a client questionnaire to the service users and focus groups with the student volunteers over a few years is needed to build upon this research.

The next part of the article sets out the data from the semi-structured interview with Ana Speed, the academic responsible for the design and implementation of the module.

## **Case Study**

### *The Design and Implementation of the Law in Community Module*

During the summer of 2018, Ana was tasked with the design and implementation of the Law in Community Module (the module). She highlighted that the aim of the module is for students to gain the practical legal experience and develop their

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<sup>54</sup> S Rahman (2017) 'The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language "Testing and Assessment" Research: A Literature Review' *Journal of Education and Learning* 6(1), pp.102-112.

professional skills. She explained that '*Northumbria University intended to provide law students with a clinical experience, whether they were undertaking the LLB or MLaw degree.*'

The SLO, at the time, did not have capacity to supervise LLB students in addition to MLaw students, so the Law in Community module was created to enable students to obtain practical legal experience and develop their professional skills.

The addition of the module was a useful tool in maintaining the number of students in the SLO. Without such a module, there would have been around a further six to eight firms, which would have required additional staff supervision and additional live client enquiries. Furthermore, the module gives students another clinical option, one which is shorter alongside a dissertation to the year-long SLO module.

As well as aiming to provide the students with a clinical experience, Ana explained that '*clinical modules typically receive a very high feedback rate*' which was further inspiration for designing this module. She believes that the high level of feedback is 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. These modules boost student satisfaction rate, thus benefitting the law school and University as a whole. There is a greater focus on student satisfaction with the introduction of the National Student Survey and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For specifications see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-specification> accessed 3 December 2020.

Offering a Law in the Community module, coupled with a dissertation, can impact positively on student satisfaction.

Due to the nature of the module and the fact that an external organisation is involved, there was an abundance of additional legal and administrative duties and challenges to comply with at design and implementation stage. Ana described this as *'3 months' full time worth of work'*. The help from her clinic team and those who engage in pedagogical research at Northumbria University *'was invaluable'*. Others had already designed clinic modules, so they were willing to provide constructive assistance. The Director of the Student Law Office and the colleague responsible for designing the Street Law module were able to offer their input and assisted Ana with determining the appropriate workload and level of assessment for a 20-credit module.

The first task for Ana when designing the module was to find a partner organisation with which to work, to provide the students with a clinical experience and this involved a consideration of all those organisations with which the University had previously and currently worked. Ana was aware that there may be potentially 60 students that would be enrolled on the module. There was one organisation who *'stood out in terms of meeting capacity and live client experience'* and who *'is famous for providing pro bono advice to people who cannot afford legal advice or assistance elsewhere'*. This organisation was Citizens Advice. They were very receptive when they were initially approached by the University to be the partner organisation for this module. Citizens Advice agreed based on the fact the students would help increase their

capacity to advise members of the public and they received remuneration in return. There was also the potential of volunteer retention if the students lived locally and were able to continue after their degree.

Having identified the partner organisation, funding needed to be secured. A proposal was put forward to an external funder, an alumnus of Northumbria University, and it was agreed that the nature of the module was fitting with the funder's objectives. The fund is managed by the University and is treated as a budget to pay Citizens Advice annually. This creates further administrative duties, for example invoicing to remunerate Citizens Advice, which needs to be done through the University procurement process and tendering, being a public sector organisation.

As with any new module, proposal forms needed to be completed and signed off and standard University documentation needed to be written such as, the module handbook, the workshop materials, and the assessment criteria. In addition, there was legal documentation and documentation of Citizens Advice. The documentation included a legal agreement between the University and Citizens Advice, a privacy policy, which allowed the students to obtain consent from the clients of Citizens Advice to enable them to place confidential work on their portfolios, and a confidentiality agreement, which was signed by every student. Citizens Advice also

have several policies and procedures that the students were required to read and to which they were to adhere.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, before starting Citizens Advice, the students are asked to complete an online training course, covering several core areas, including reception duties, knowledge of the law, interviewing, conducting research, negotiating and recording cases. At the end of the online training, there is an online assessment, and the students must attain 80% for a pass. The students cannot begin their volunteer work at Citizens Advice until they have completed the training course and passed the assessment. Ana explained that the intention is that by completing the same training as the volunteers already at Citizens Advice and having access to the same resources, the students will '*hit the ground running*'. Ana made the online training available around 6 weeks before the module started, however a challenge during the first year was that some students instead completed this in the first few weeks of their volunteering, and this reduced the ability to undertake live client work straight away. Ana explained that the number of policies and procedures with which the students were expected to familiarise themselves, in addition to the online training course, understandably left many students feeling as if there had been an "*information overload*" before the module had properly commenced.

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<sup>56</sup> These included the following: Clear Desk Policy, Client Confidentiality Policy, Dealing with Aggressive or Abusive Clients Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Equality and Diversity Policy, Dress Code Policy.

At the very start of the module, an induction lecture took place. During this lecture, Ana introduced the module and ensured that the students signed all the necessary forms to take over to Citizens Advice<sup>57</sup>. Ana then took the students to Citizens Advice to introduce them to the staff, and the students were then given a tour of the building.<sup>58</sup> At this point, the students agreed with Citizens Advice the day that they would attend each week based upon their University timetables and availability of supervisors at Citizens Advice. This presented another challenge, as Citizens Advice had capacity to supervise 6 students per day and it transpired that there were some days that were more convenient than others for the students. All students were scheduled for a suitable day to attend Citizens Advice during each week of the module.

With regards to their scheduled day, Ana acknowledged that she had not been completely clear about how to deal with students missing a week through illness. Citizens Advice were at capacity most days, so students could not rearrange their missed session. She, therefore, had to adopt a '*strict line*' of refusing student requests to rearrange, which was better than using discretion to decide which excuse was appropriate for missing a week. This was useful, as between January and March, she had '*around 20 requests from students to change sessions.*' The reasons for the requests ranged from illness, to family deaths, to work commitments. The answer remained

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<sup>57</sup> Namely the Confidentiality Declaration, the Student Advisor Agreement which sets out the roles and commitments of the students and Citizens Advice, Training Record, Emergency Contact Form and Risk Assessment Form

<sup>58</sup> This tour was also mandatory to comply with Citizens Advice's healthy and safety policy.

the same for each request: Citizens Advice do not have capacity. A further consideration had to be the additional administration of changing sessions for students, whether that be administration for Ana, or for staff at Citizens Advice. All questions and requests had to be made to Ana direct, save for questions relating to the actual work, so that a consistent line could be taken. Although there were no disabilities, chronic illnesses or disabilities disclosed at the time, if this were to arise in future, this would need special consideration in line with the university's DSSR procedure and in cooperation with student support and relevant programme leaders. Bespoke arrangements could then be developed to cater for the individual students' needs.

For Ana, the main challenge in designing the module was GDPR<sup>59</sup>, confidentiality and data security. The clients that the students advised remained the clients of Citizens Advice, as opposed to the University's clients. There had to be a way, therefore, for the students to collect client data from their volunteer work at Citizens Advice to use on their portfolios. Permission had to be obtained from the University for the students to use hard copy personal files, rather than electronic files, to satisfy GDPR, client confidentiality and data security. This meant a departure from the standard university electronic portfolio; therefore, a special exception had to be granted. For the special exception to be granted, Ana had to show that she had exhausted all other options, including use of the popular software, PebblePad.

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<sup>59</sup> General Data Protection Regulations 2016.



Online platforms, such as PebblePad, are not sufficiently secure and bespoke to protect confidentiality of client information. Furthermore, students could have opened PebblePad on their home devices, which may not be a confidential environment. With a hard copy portfolio, students could only print it out, or would have to purposefully breach confidentiality by emailing the work from Citizens Advice, which would be an issue for Citizens Advice, rather than the University. It was agreed that the students would have to print and compile hardcopy portfolios and bring them to the University from Citizens Advice on the day that they were due to be submitted for assessment.

An added challenge was how to get the students' portfolios from Citizens Advice to the University at the end of the module for marking, as there were concerns around lost files and students taking files home. In this regard, it was '*drilled in*' to students at their induction lecture and at regular intervals throughout the module, that their files must always be kept at Citizens Advice and at no point must they take them away from there, as it would breach client confidentiality. The only exception to this was on their very last day when they were directed to walk directly over to the University from Citizens Advice. Ana explained '*I went as far as to say that they should collect their files in a rucksack, zipped up*' and they were only allowed to put client information into their portfolios if the clients had signed the relevant consent form. Indeed, this is a limitation of the portfolio, as some students may not obtain or receive consent from clients to allow their information to be included within the portfolio.

Regular review meetings were set up to take place between the University and Citizens Advice, to deal with any challenges or concerns. If something of concern arises, the organisation emails the concern to the University. Ana explained that this worked well as feedback was forthcoming. However, more can be done to obtain feedback from the clients, and this could be developed with Citizens Advice.

In addition to the administration associated with the clinical experience at Citizens Advice, the fortnightly workshops at the University also had to be designed. As well as wanting the students to develop their practical skills, *'a key learning outcome on this module was understanding their experience in context.'* Ana wanted the students to *'contextualise their experience'* and develop *'an understanding of the issues surrounding access to justice.'* This theme runs throughout the workshop tasks. Students are given questions around access to justice to discuss and are set written tasks to complete following their workshops to develop their social justice awareness and appreciate the valuable role that they play in supporting unmet legal need. These workshops were designed by Ana to allow the students to situate their experience, consider their role and explore what access to justice barriers are faced by individuals.

Within the workshops, Ana was also keen to include an opportunity for students to reflect on their work at Citizens Advice and to consider feedback from their external supervisor. The module was therefore designed so that Citizens Advice provide not only day-to-day feedback to the students, but also two summaries of students' performances with a mark of 1 to 5 in relation to how the students are

performing. Ana also highlighted that in theory, if a student does not attend Citizens Advice, but does attend the University workshops, the supervisor would *'still have sufficient work on which to assess them, including reflective tasks detailing how they deal with the case, presentations, research report, blog article and legal writing'*. This would allow the workshop tutor to assess the students against the requisite skills. The workshop tutor would also still see work from the portfolio, which should have written feedback on it from the supervisors at Citizens Advice. Oral feedback could be written down by the students and included within the portfolio.

Ana was asked what she would change if she was to redesign the module. She said firstly, she would have had the students attend Citizens Advice for half a day every week rather than one full day. The students fed back that an introductory lecture, a workshop every two weeks and volunteering at Citizens Advice one day a week was a high workload for a 20-credit module, with which Ana agreed. Ana stated that it became apparent midway through the module's first year that half a day a week would be better and would *'still be an appropriate amount of work'* with a *'similar level of experience'* Ana accepts that this may not be quite as extensive, but the students would still be carrying out the same tasks and types of work on the cases that they are working on by going in for half a day a week.

Ana also feels that there needs to be a way to streamline the administration attached to the module but states:

*Maybe I have the blinkers on because I designed the module but unfortunately, I can't envisage a way of streamlining that process while still adhering to the legal, GDPR requirements and making sure everything runs smoothly between us and the partner organisation.*

Also, there is 'an ongoing obligation on the module leader to liaise with the in-house university law department to ensure documents remain up-to-date', including privacy policies and adhere to GDPR, as well as compliance with procurement and tendering. Inevitably, this can be time consuming to work through the documentation and to draft and approve agreements. A report must also be provided each year to the external funder to detail how the module has progressed, including feedback from Citizens Advice and students about the module overall. The ongoing administrative duties is an issue that must be anticipated and managed by those contemplating developing similar modules.

### **Analysis of the Law in Community Module**

As well the financial benefit to Citizens Advice, the module increases their capacity to advise and assist members of the community, thereby supporting unmet legal need.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The literature is well established on the community benefit of CLE. See, for example, S Wizner (2001) 'Beyond Skills Training' 7 *Clinical Law Review* pp. 327-340; A Sedillo Lopez (2001) 'Learning through Service in a Clinical Setting: the Effect of Specialization on Social Justice and Skills Training' *Clinical Law Review* 7, pp. 307-326; J Giddings (2008) 'Contemplating the Future of Clinical Legal Education' *Griffith Law Review* 17( 1); W. Warren H. Binford (2008-09) 'Reconstructing a Clinic' *Clinical Law Review* 15, pp. 283.

In theory, the students should be of the same standard, if not better, as the existing volunteers at Citizens Advice, having completed two years of a law degree, completed the same training and having been provided with the same resources. This increases the capacity of Citizens Advice to assist with those unable to obtain legal advice and assistance elsewhere. During the first year of the module, the students advised a total of 475 clients and in the second year, a total of 73.<sup>61</sup> The impact of the module to the community attracted media attention in two local newspapers where the students' work in helping '*plug the legal aid gap*' was reported.<sup>62</sup> This also had reputational benefits to the University. It is important to acknowledge, as Ana mentioned, that the students only provide one-off advice to clients, so '*it's only as good as one-off advice can ever be*'. However, in the authors' experience of CLE, one-off advice can often be sufficient to resolve the client's problem and if not, the clients gain the benefit of being referred onto an organisation who may be able to help further.<sup>63</sup> There may be a perceived risk of referral-fatigue when clients are signposted to third party services, however the clients are aware that they are accessing Citizens Advice rather than a

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<sup>61</sup> The number in the second year is substantially lower as a result of the fewer students who participated in the module and also the fact the module was cut short by 4 weeks as a result of the COVID19 pandemic. The COVID19 pandemic resulted in the students moving to online teaching and they could no longer undertake their volunteer work at Citizens Advice. The students completed the module by working on a simulated enquiry with their University tutor.

<sup>62</sup> The Chronicle 'Legal aid cuts and nightmares leave citizens depending on law students' accessible at <https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/legal-aid-cuts-benefits-nightmares-15973512> accessed 21 November 2020 and The Journal 'Students help plug the legal aid gap' 24 March 2019, <http://thejournal.newspaperdirect.com/epaper/viewer.aspx> accessed 21 November 2020.

<sup>63</sup> See L Bengtsson and A Speed (2019) 'A Case Study Approach. Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 26 (1) pp.179-215 for a discussion on how students giving one off advice at a local law firm could often refer clients on for further help and the benefits of this.

service known for providing, or potentially providing, longer term legal services and retainers. It is important to ensure that clients are aware of the extent of the assistance being provided to them. It is important to explicitly document the limitations of the service, just as CLOCK does with its Community Care Letter, though it is acknowledged that CLOCK perhaps requires greater emphasis through not providing legal advice<sup>64</sup>.

The benefits of CLE to students are well established,<sup>65</sup> however the model adopted in the Law in the Community module ensures that students gain an appreciation of the access to justice challenges faced by their clients by going into the local community<sup>66</sup> and contextualising their experiences in the fortnightly workshops. Their legal knowledge, professional skills and understanding of professional conduct rules develop as a result of participating in the fortnightly workshops and volunteering at Citizens Advice. From the authors' experience of teaching the workshops, each one effectively focuses upon all valuable skills that the students will need for both legal

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<sup>64</sup> Ben Waters and Jeanette Ashton, 'A Study into Situated Learning through Community Legal Companionship' (2018) 25 Int'l J Clinical Legal Educ 4, 29

<sup>65</sup> The literature on CLE and its educational benefits are extensive. See for example R Grimes (1995) 'Legal Skills and Clinical Legal Education' Web Journal of Current Legal Issues Vol. 3; R MacCrate (2004) "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Building the Continuum of Legal Education and Professional Development" Clinical Law Review, Vol. 10; J Giddings (2008) 'Contemplating the Future of Clinical Legal Education', Griffith Law Review Vol. 15, pp.15; J Hall, K Kerrigan (2011) 'Clinic and the Wider Law Curriculum', International Journal of Clinical Legal Education, Vol. 15, available at: <http://www.northumbriajournals.co.uk/index.php/ijcle/issue/view/15>; R Dunn (2017). The knowledge, skills and attributes considered necessary to start day one training competently and whether live client clinics develop them. Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University.

<sup>66</sup>L Bengtsson and A. Speed (2019) 'A Case Study Approach. Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' International Journal of Clinical Legal Education Vol 26 (1) pp.179-215

practice and other professions; notably, written and oral communication skills, negotiation and research to name a few.<sup>67</sup>

A study by Walsh suggests that students lose their desire to engage in social justice as they continue their studies.<sup>68</sup> Evans highlights the importance of class content and reading, and supervision and reflection to ensure that social justice aspects of law are incorporated into clinical teaching.<sup>69</sup> As previously discussed, the design of the workshop tasks allows students to develop their social justice awareness. In addition to this, working at Citizens Advice gives the students the opportunity to participate in policy work and to provide public legal education to Citizens Advice clients.<sup>70</sup> Participation in policy work allows the students to contribute to law reform.<sup>71</sup> This gives students the opportunity to see how laws can be influenced and leads them to

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<sup>67</sup> For example, in workshop 1, students are tasked with taking part in an 'auction'. In groups, the students are provided with a list of skills and a 'sum of money'. The task involves formulating a strategy for which values/skills they will bid on and the sum of money they are prepared to pay for each skill/value. The workshop tutors found that this inevitably involved negotiation between the students within their groups when they were deciding the level of importance of each skill/value, prior to bidding in the auction. In workshop 3, students develop their written communication skills through a task where they are asked to discuss in groups the purpose of written correspondence and consider what could make written correspondence poor. The students' verbal communication skills are also developed throughout the workshops when they are tasked to present their work to the workshop tutor and the whole group.

<sup>68</sup> Tamara Walsh, 'Putting Justice Back into Education' (2007) 17(1) *Legal Education Review* 119, 131.

<sup>69</sup> Adrian Evans et al *Australian Clinical Legal Education: Designing and operating a best practice clinical program in an Australian law school* (ANU Press 2017) 122.

<sup>70</sup> It has been argued for years that students should undertake policy work: see for example S H Leleiko (1979-80). *Clinical Education, Empirical Study and Legal Scholarship*. *Journal of Legal Education*, 30(1), pp. 149. See also R Dunn and R Glancey (2019). Using legal policy and law reform as assessment in A Bone and P Maharg (Eds) *Critical Perspectives on the Scholarship of Assessment and Learning in Law* (pp.139-163). ANU Press.

<sup>71</sup> R Dunn, L Bengtsson and S McConnell (2020) 'The Policy Clinic at Northumbria University: Influencing Policy/Law Reform as an Effective Educational Tool for Students' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 27(2), pp. 68-102.

being more engaged, as they see it *'may have a positive impact in generating change.'*<sup>72</sup> Policy work also helps foster a social justice ethos, allowing students to identify any contentious issues and areas for reform.<sup>73</sup> A social justice ethos is instilled in the students and as Rosas argues, students who experience pro bono work while in law school are likely to continue to do so in their future careers as lawyers.<sup>74</sup> Policy work develops similar professional skills to that in live client work; however, they are developed from the perspective of research and law reform.<sup>75</sup> Students gain an appreciation as to why their participation in both the policy work and live client work can have a wider impact on society.<sup>76</sup>

The partnership between the University and Citizens Advice also enriches the student learning experience as the students learn from, and work under, at least two supervisors.<sup>77</sup> Giddings argues that a learning environment can be diluted where the

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<sup>72</sup> L Curran (2007) 'University Law Clinics and their value in undertaking client-centred law reform to provide a voice for clients' experiences' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 12, p107-108.

<sup>73</sup> L F Smith (2011) 'Fostering Justice Throughout the Curriculum' *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy*, Vol 18(1), pp. 427.

<sup>74</sup> C M Rosas (2002) 'Mandatory Pro Bono Publico for Law Students: The Right Place to Start,' *Hofstra Law Review* Vol. 30 (3), Article 18 1069, 1078

<sup>75</sup> R Dunn, L Bengtsson and S McConnell (2020) 'The Policy Clinic at Northumbria University: Influencing Policy/Law Reform as an Effective Educational Tool for Students' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 27(2), pp. 68-102.

<sup>76</sup> R Dunn, L Bengtsson and S McConnell (2020) 'The Policy Clinic at Northumbria University: Influencing Policy/Law Reform as an Effective Educational Tool for Students' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 27(2), pp. 68-102.

<sup>77</sup> L Bleasdale-Hill and P Wragg (2013) 'Models of Clinics and Their Value to Students, Universities and the Community in the post 2012 Fees Era' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 19, pp.257-270. See also L Bengtsson and A Speed (2019) 'Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 26 (1) pp. 179- 215.



supervision is focused on controlling casework rather than student learning.<sup>78</sup> The Law in the Community module arguably alleviates these concerns through its supervision model. Citizens Advice supervisors provide continuous feedback to the students on their work and performance alongside controlling the casework, which is a system analogous to many law clinic environments. However, in addition, the University workshop tutors facilitate the learning and development of skills and this is their sole focus, ensuring a rich learning environment. This not only provides students with more support and the opportunity to develop their skills, but as Ana highlights, it is also reflective of practice. Rather than being assessed by a single supervisor, which is common practice in legal clinics, they are provided with feedback from multiple supervisors at Citizens Advice, as well as their workshop tutor, who are likely to have different styles and approaches.

The module also allows the students to gain experience and an appreciation of what it is really like to be a legal practitioner in order to decide whether this is the career that they want<sup>79</sup> and specifically, the different areas of law in which they could practice. During their time at Citizens Advice, the students may be exposed to a wide variety of issues and areas of law. Indeed, during the first two years of the module, the students advised in areas of: welfare benefits, debt, finance, employment law,

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<sup>78</sup> J Giddings (2008) 'Contemplating the Future of Clinical Legal Education' *Griffith Law Review* 17 (1), pp.1-26 at 17

<sup>79</sup> P Childs, N Firth and H D Rijke (2014) 'The gap between law student career aspirations and employment opportunities' *The Law Teacher* Vol 48 (1) pp. 51-68. J Marson, A Wilson and M Van Hoorebeek (2005) 'The Necessity of Clinical Legal Education in University Law Schools: A UK Perspective' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 7, pp. 29-43.

consumer, education, health, housing, immigration, relationships, tax and travel. As Curran highlights, students who are afforded experience in different areas of law may *'have more choices about the areas of law they may wish to practice in.'*<sup>80</sup> The students may also advise and assist a number of clients on the same area of law. Gaining experience in the same area of law is equally beneficial, as they are exposed to the same problem, but from different perspectives.<sup>81</sup> If a student is interested in a particular area of law, they are informed by the University Tutor at the outset that Citizens Advice will try to ensure that they gain experience in that area, however this is not guaranteed. The students are ultimately asked to advise and assist on where the legal need may be.

It is important to note that the clinical experience embedded in this module could also be considered as a limitation. As this module is part of an LLB degree, the students may not have any desire to progress into a career as a lawyer. Students may feel that this clinical experience has been imposed on them. However, as noted above, the workshops and work undertaken at Citizens Advice develop key skills, which are valuable in professions, other than law. As Kemp et al state *'There are many ways in*

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<sup>80</sup> L Curran (2004) 'Innovations in an Australian Clinical Legal Education Program: Students Making a Difference in Generating Positive Change' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, Vol 6, pp.162-176 at pp.174.

<sup>81</sup> E Winkler (2013) 'Clinical legal education: a report on the concept of law clinics', [https://www.academia.edu/40214205/Clinical\\_Legal\\_Education\\_A\\_report\\_on\\_the\\_concept\\_of\\_law\\_clinics](https://www.academia.edu/40214205/Clinical_Legal_Education_A_report_on_the_concept_of_law_clinics) accessed 4 December 2020.

*which students can be given experience of law in the real world and provided with transferrable skills which they can then use in occupations other than being a lawyer.'*<sup>82</sup>

This means that the module is undoubtedly beneficial to students in terms of employability.<sup>83</sup> Employability is 'a critical issue for both government and Higher Education Institutions'.<sup>84</sup> It is also important for Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and its emphasis on post-graduate employment.<sup>85</sup> Law students enter a competitive employment market on completion of their degree. Practical work experience during their law degree increases self-confidence, practical experience and consequently, employability.<sup>86</sup> Many students are working alongside their studies, which is a barrier to gaining unpaid legal work experience<sup>87</sup> and some students would not necessarily have the confidence to put themselves forward for

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<sup>82</sup> Clinical Legal Education and Experiential Learning: Looking to the Future <https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/schools/law/main/news/Clinical-Legal-Education-Final-Report28.09.2016.pdf> accessed 3 December 2020

<sup>83</sup> For a discussion on the benefit of CLE in enhancing student's skill profile see R Hyams (2008) 'On teaching students to "act like a lawyer": What sort of lawyer?' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 13, pp. 21-32; S Caplow (2006) 'Clinical Legal Education in Hong Kong: A Time to Move Forward' *Hong Kong Law Journal* Vol 26, pp. 229; F Dignan (2011) 'Bridging the Academic/Vocational Divide: The Creation of a Law Clinic in an Academic Law School' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 15, pp. 75-84.

<sup>84</sup> V Saunders and K Zuzel (2010) 'Evaluating Employability Skills: Employer and Student Perceptions' *Bioscience Education* Vol 15 (1) pp1-15, p1.

<sup>85</sup> The proportion of graduates in employment or further study after six months of graduation is one of the six metrics to rate Universities for the TEF.

<sup>86</sup> F. Cantatore (2015) 'Boosting Law Graduate Employability: Using a Pro Bono Teaching Clinic to Facilitate Experiential Learning in Commercial Law Subjects' *Legal Education Review* Vol 25(1), pp. 147- 172. See also L Bleadale Hill and P Wragg (2013) 'Models of Clinics and their Value to Students, Universities and their Communities in the post 2012 fees ERA.' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 19, pp.257-270.

<sup>87</sup> J Alexander and C Boothby (2019) 'Stakeholder perceptions of clinical legal education within an employability context' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 25 (3) pp. 53-84.

work experience<sup>88</sup>. This module gives students the opportunity to undertake work experience within an organisation as part of their degree, thereby allowing them to develop skills and enhance their CVs. In addition to these employability benefits to students through the work experience gained at Citizens Advice, students could also benefit in terms of employability through forming and continuing relationships with Citizens Advice. Indeed, as highlighted by Ana, this one was of the reasons for Citizens Advice agreeing to be the partner organisation. These continued relationships would also provide long term benefits to Citizens Advice in terms of capacity. As regards the Solicitors Qualifying Exam, it is noted that time spent 'at a voluntary or charitable organisation such as Citizens Advice...' <sup>89</sup> can constitute as qualifying work experience. A solicitor or compliant officer for legal practice (COLP) would be required to confirm that the candidates qualifying work experience. It is pertinent to note that the solicitor or COLP is not assessing competence as a solicitor; rather, that the work experience has taken place. The competence to practice is assessed by the SQE.

Although the benefits to students, Citizens Advice and the wider community have been highlighted, there were some lessons learnt from the module's first year. The initial administration required at the first induction lecture, as highlighted by Ana,

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<sup>88</sup> J Alexander and C Boothby (2019) 'Stakeholder perceptions of clinical legal education within an employability context' *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol 25 (3) pp. 53-84.

<sup>89</sup> Solicitors Regulation Authority, 'Qualifying work experience for candidates' <https://www.sra.org.uk/trainees/qualifying-work-experience/qualifying-work-experience-candidates/> accessed 19 February 2021.

and the online training required, could not be streamlined in the second year. All administration and training were necessary. However, in response to the students in the first year feeling that there was an *'information overload'*, a short video was produced in the second year which, in the authors' view, helped with this issue. The video was produced between Northumbria University and Citizens Advice and was an excellent way of reducing information that needed to be given to the students on this module. The video gave an overview of what they should expect during their time at Citizens Advice and what is expected of them. Students respond particularly well to video as an educational tool<sup>90</sup> and indeed, informal feedback from the students was that they found this helpful at the outset.

Another change to the module in the second year was that the students' time at Citizens Advice was reduced from one day per week to half a day. From the authors' perspective, this was an appropriate and positive change. The students gained the same experience of client drop-in sessions and undertook the same range of tasks.

Overall, from the first few years of the module running, the participating students valued the blend of workshops and volunteer work at Citizens Advice and the opportunity to develop their professional skills whilst promoting access to justice. Informal feedback from the students was that they feel that they developed valuable

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<sup>90</sup> R Kay (2012) 'Exploring the use of video podcasts in education: A comprehensive review of the literature' *Computers in Human Behavior* Vol 28 pp. 820-831

skills for the world of work and gained a direct insight into the access to justice many clients faced who attended the drop-in service:

*'It's been challenging yet interesting module. I personally find that the knowledge gained will be a life changer in the future.'*

*'The practical nature of the module, with direct access to client advisory work at Citizens Advice, provides a fantastic opportunity to develop a range of interpersonal professional skills through experiential learning. These skills are further developed through university workshops and assessed tasks, focusing students' development on the legal practitioner context.'*

## **Conclusions**

The Law in Community module was designed with the aim of engaging law students in a model of CLE which ensures they understand their experience in the vital context in which Citizens Advice operates. Through the blend of workshops and weekly volunteer work at Citizens Advice, the students not only develop their professional skills, but also contribute to the greater public good. Through the method of a long interview, this article provides an insight into the design and implementation of the module, together with challenges faced and lessons learnt. Future research would be beneficial in this area; including client questionnaires to measure community benefit and student performance from the clients. Interviews with supervisors at Citizens

Advice to obtain their views on the module and focus groups with the students to measure student perceptions on the value of the module would also be beneficial.

The authors would recommend that other Law Schools consider implementing a similar Law in the Community module into their curriculum. Whilst we should all be realistic as to the administrative time and documentation involved, this model 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.