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Enhancing Solidarity through the Policy Clinic at Northumbria University

Abstract for a paper presentation:

The authors of this paper are clinic supervisors at Northumbria University in Newcastle upon Tyne, England and have been involved in the teaching and development of the innovative Policy Clinic within Northumbria Law School. In the Policy Clinic, students undertake empirical and desk-based research for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charities and other researchers. The aim of this work is to influence policy and/or law reform. In a previous study by the authors, it has been highlighted why law teachers should consider policy work and the benefits this brings to students, namely in terms of skills development (Dunn et al, 2020).

This paper will explore how the Policy Clinic has enhanced solidarity in the law school, between students and staff, and those external to the Law School. This paper presents data obtained from both staff and students working in the Policy Clinic during the years 2019-2021, who participated in focus groups and the students also completed a questionnaire. From data, we can see the students appreciate the experience of the PC, felt part of a community, and developed the students' social justice ethos during their time in the PC and changed how they think about their, and lawyers generally, influence on the law outside of practice. It further discusses the benefits to staff of engaging with PC work and their own research agendas. Those who are considering establishing a similar clinic, or are looking for innovative teaching methods, will benefit from this paper.