

The service to clients

Opened in September 2011, the Legal Advice Clinic (LAC) is a **free drop in face to face legal advice service for the local community** in which 2nd and 3rd year law students interview and advise real clients, under the close supervision of university-employed practising solicitors.

Operating out of dedicated and refurbished premises on campus, the LAC has so far advised **approaching 1000 clients**. We are therefore now making a small but significant dent in the overwhelming demand for high quality social welfare law advice in Southwark and the surrounding area.

Working in pairs, and under supervision, trained Law Student Volunteers interview drop-in clients and:

- Provide basic information on any legal topic
- Give generalist advice in social welfare law matters including housing, family, employment, welfare benefits and debt
- Signpost and refer to appropriate local advice agencies and legal services
- Or refer to the Clinic's own evening sessions

At the Clinic's evening sessions **Law Student Volunteers shadow volunteer solicitors** from 4 large local law firms who provide specialist legal advice in family, housing & employment.

The LAC is open term-time only. We are closed during exam periods and for the summer and Xmas vacations. Drop-in opening times are currently:

- Tuesdays 10am-1pm
- Wednesdays 10am-1pm and 3pm-6pm

Evening sessions (accessible only via initial assessment at the day-time drop in) are on:

- Thursdays 6pm-9pm

At each drop in session we aim to see approximately 6 clients; we have 2 advice teams, each comprising 2 Law Student Volunteers and a supervising solicitor. A 5th Law Student Volunteer operates the reception.

The LAC is part of the **Southwark Legal Advice Network** and we work in partnership with local solicitors and advice agencies, including Southwark CAB service, Southwark Law Centre, Blackfriars Advice Centre, Cambridge House Law Centre.

The offer to students

Law Student volunteers are provided with **two days of initial training** by the LAC's supervising solicitors and local CAB staff. There is an additional one day **refresher training** at the start of Semester 2.

Law Student Volunteers will continue to have continuous **on the job training** and always work in **pairs** and under **supervision** of a practising solicitor

In addition students can access the comprehensive social welfare law training programme offered by LawWorks, e.g. consumer, debt, employment, housing, disability discrimination

Law Student Volunteers get a **Certificate of Clinical Legal Education Placement** on completion of their **minimum 13 week placement**.

Law Student Volunteers can use the Clinic Director as a **work-based reference** on job & training contract applications, which will emphasise the client care, interview skills and practical legal knowledge acquired.

How to apply to become a Law Student Volunteer

There is a big demand by students for volunteer places. There is an **annual equal opportunities recruitment process** (an application form and an interview) and Law Student Volunteers are selected on merit, according to a person specification which puts the emphasis on reliability and commitment, interpersonal skills and being open-minded and non-judgmental about clients and their problems.

Recruitment opens in April of each year and the selection process is completed by the end of May, with Law Student Volunteers starting their placements in September i.e. the start of the next academic year.

Praise and Recognition for the LAC

The LAC has gained widespread national and indeed international recognition as a result of its innovative drop-in operating model (other university Law Clinics do not offer drop in face to face immediate advice).

- In 2012, the LAC was praised in the **Million+ think tank's report on innovative teaching in modern universities, 'Teaching that Matters'**, for involving students in a valuable community service while they gain real-world legal experience, develop transferable skills and enhance their employability prospects.
- In 2012, the LAC Team won the **LSBU Vice-Chancellor's Enterprising Staff Award**. The £5,000 prize was awarded to the LAC Team for their demonstration of enterprise in enhancing the student experience and employability, providing a significant benefit for the local community, and demonstrating a wider significance to other higher education institutions nationwide.
- In 2012 & 2013 the LAC team presented its drop-in Clinic model at several **national and international clinical legal education conferences** - in Liverpool, Durham and Portsmouth
- In 2013 the Clinic Team published its 70 page **Drop-In Clinic Operating Manual** as a free teaching and learning resource for other higher education institutions who might wish to develop similar projects. The manual was launched at **our own national conference on Clinical Legal Education** attended by 140 academics, lawyers & students. The manual is available via the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and LawWorks.
- The LAC has just been **highly commended in the LawWorks and Attorney general's pro Bono Awards 2014 in the 'Best Contribution by a Law School'** Category. This commendation is for the Clinic, the operating manual and the Clinic's satellite helpdesk at the Lambeth County Court.
- The Clinic team be presenting our drop-in model at a conference in May 2014 in Dubrovnik on the **EU-funded European Project on Access to Justice** ("Triple A for citizens - access to information, advice and active help")

Alan Russell is a Senior Lecturer in the Law Department at LSBU. He teaches Public Law, Working in the Law, and Civil Litigation (CILEx-exempting) at Levels 4, 5 & 6. Alan is also a practicing solicitor and Director of the LSBU Legal Advice Clinic.

Before joining the University in January 2011, Alan managed Camden Community Law Centre for 20 years where he conducted housing and public law litigation with a

special focus on homelessness and defending possession proceedings, particularly on behalf of vulnerable and mentally disordered people. He is currently on the steering group of the Southwark Legal Advice Network and a member of the Housing Law Practitioner's Association.

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