

“Moving forwards we want to build on the outstanding work that the Law Clinic does by expanding our presence in Bristol, by accepting more clients, and working on a variety of different projects within the local community”

Oliver Foudah,
Incoming Student Director, Law Clinic



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Collaborating for justice
Law Clinic Annual Review 2015-2016



“Justice delayed is justice denied”

William E Gladstone



“The partnership with the Law Clinic provides an essential service for families at a very difficult time. For parents of children living with cancer, understanding their legal position can help alleviate some of the pressure that comes with their diagnosis.”

Rachel Banks, Social Team Work team leader,
CLIC Sargent

Collaborating for justice

The University of Bristol’s Law Clinic provides pro-bono legal advice, ensuring those that most need it are not denied the justice they deserve. The demand on its services and subsequent growth during 2015/16 is the result of a series of collaborations. Collaborations that have led to students with the confidence and the skills required to provide legal advice for all those who need it – and to the Law Clinic nurturing partnerships with local organisations that help reach some of the most vulnerable people in the community.

A solid case for growth

This academic year the Law Clinic experienced a three-fold increase in cases. The rising demand for our services is recognition of the difficulties people face in finding accessible advice. We know cuts to legal aid, many feel that they are left without a viable option for getting the justice they rightly deserve. Often seen as a last resort, the Law Clinic aims to provide a legal service that supports the client throughout the lifetime of his or her case.

The increase in cases has been mirrored in the increase in enquiries from students wanting to be involved. This illustrates the desire of students to give something back, to use their legal skills in a positive and constructive way – and of the opportunities there are to be mentored by academic staff, local legal firms, alumni and more so they graduate demonstrating the softer skills so many prospective employers are looking for.

Whilst this year we also developed a new drop-in service model to help us reach more people in the most effective way, it also saw us introduce a tighter selection criteria to determine which cases we took on. This meant prioritising cases from people who live within the Bristol postcode and that fall within the competence of the supervising staff and within the capability of the students.


For all involved, turning down a case is always difficult – knowing we are likely to be delaying, if not denying completely, a person’s access to justice. It is our hope that within the next two years we will be able to offer ten per cent of all University of Bristol Law students a place or experience in the Law Clinic at some point during their course of study – and with that an opportunity to reach more people.

We know with this is entirely possible through the continued development of this wonderful collaboration between students, colleagues and alumni, local charities, legal bodies and law firms. We are hugely grateful to all of you for the work you have put in this year to support the Law Clinic and our students make a real difference to the people in our community.

It would not have been possible without you.



John Peake
Director, Law Clinic

A close-up portrait of Louise Chalice, a woman with dark, curly hair, smiling gently. She is wearing a dark top with a colorful patterned scarf. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“This academic year the Clinic has taken on over 145 cases. It has been an honour to be involved in work that is really helping some of the most vulnerable people in our society.”

Louise Chalice
Executive Assistant, Law Clinic

A partnership for change

The University of Bristol Law Clinic is an integral part of the University of Bristol Law School with the day to day running of the Clinic managed as a partnership between Law School staff and students. At the heart of the organisation is the leadership team, who work together to ensure that the Clinic operates smoothly and efficiently, bringing insight, empathy and an ‘above and beyond’ commitment to the work of the Clinic.

The Vice Chancellor’s Award for Education 2016

John Peake has been the Director of the University of Bristol Law Clinic since September 2014, providing academic support and a wealth of experience in the provision of legal advice. This year John was selected from 16 short-listed individuals to receive the University of Bristol’s Vice-Chancellor’s 2016 Award for Education in recognition of his outstanding work in enriching the student experience. John was commended for the truly collaborative nature of the work undertaken by the Law Clinic which has seen students, staff and local organisations working together to support people in the local community.

A crucial new support role

This financial year saw the appointment of Louise Chalice, the Law Clinic’s first Executive Assistant. Louise offers guidance to both those with legal enquiries and to Law Clinic students, helping them deliver the best results for the clients. Previously working in higher education, on local community collaborations and supporting people in crisis through her own counselling work, Louise has both the experience we needed to enable Director, John Peake, to focus on the introduction of a new Clinical Legal Module - and a solid commitment to the Law Clinic’s strong emphasis on community and student development.

Law Clinic Volunteer of the Year Award 2016

Law Student Alice Ratcliffe graduated with a 2.1 in Law this July. Alice had been a vibrant member of the Law Clinic Committee and was also chosen to be the first recipient of the Best Student Volunteer in the Law Clinic award. “Deciding to join the Law Clinic has been invaluable in the development of a number of key skills, allowing me to put the law that I have learnt into practice as well as improving my adaptability and flexibility as an individual. I am extremely proud to have been a part of such an important, passionate and supportive organisation. I cannot explain how beneficial it has been, not just for myself but also to the wider community”.

“This brilliant partnership with the Law Clinic will connect people with the legal advice they need to get started on resolving their problems and help accelerate change”

Maggie Telfer,
CEO of Bristol Drugs Project

Proud to be connected

This year we laid solid foundations for a new model of working and we are currently finalising details for a number of Law Clinic Drop-ins with local partners – connecting us to those that need us most. This enables us to provide specialised support to those that need it, and maximise the impact of student time, whilst complementing the way we work on the numerous ad-hoc cases that come in from the general public. We have also seen a rise in referrals from our long-standing partners, the Citizens Advice Bureau and Personal Support Unit at the County Court.

A model for change


As we reached the end of the 2015/16 academic year, we were firming up the details for a new partnership with the Bristol Drugs Project. The partnership will see pairs of students attend the drop-in sessions to provide legal advice to some of the most vulnerable people in the community – those struggling to gain access to the legal support they need to start taking back control of their lives. Working with partners such as Bristol Drugs Project is testimony to our dedication to provide pro-bono legal advice to those who most need it, whilst allowing students to deeply appreciate the issues facing them. This is an area of development for us.

Fostering a team approach

This year the Clinic was made up of 90 student volunteers, typically paired up to work together on the case that they have been allocated. Currently, students generally work on a variety of different cases as opposed to specialising in a specific area of law. This allows students to get involved in a case at the earliest opportunity, rather than ‘waiting around’ for something that fits with their specific specialist field. Moving forwards, we are looking to foster the team approach further with support from Osborne Clarke who will be providing training sessions and mentoring services to our students.

Generating regular referrals

The Personal Support Unit (PSU) at Bristol County Court operates in a similar way to Victim Support in the Criminal Courts. The staff are there to provide support rather than legal advice. Meanwhile the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has too many people asking for its support. There is a gap in provision which we meet. Over the past year we have received approximately one referral a month from the PSU and two referrals a month from the CAB. Helping reduce demand on these services means providing help to people who might otherwise do without. This has been very motivating for students involved in their cases. We are looking forward to continuing this relationship into the next academic year.



“We’re taking on a greater number and greater diversity of cases, we have more partnerships in the local community, and we have more student places on offer than ever before. I’m really looking forward to continuing my legal education with the Clinic.”

Rhona Egerton
Incoming Student Director, Law Clinic

Together for student development

Ranked within the top ten Law Schools in the UK, the Law School has always attracted the very best talent from all over the world. The introduction of the Clinical Legal Studies module for the 2015/16 academic year was a move to embed practical application of law into the qualifications of undergraduates who choose it as a third year option. These students get automatic access to the Law Clinic – and are supported by local legal firms and alumni to further develop the skills they need to stand out when they graduate.

Learning in practice

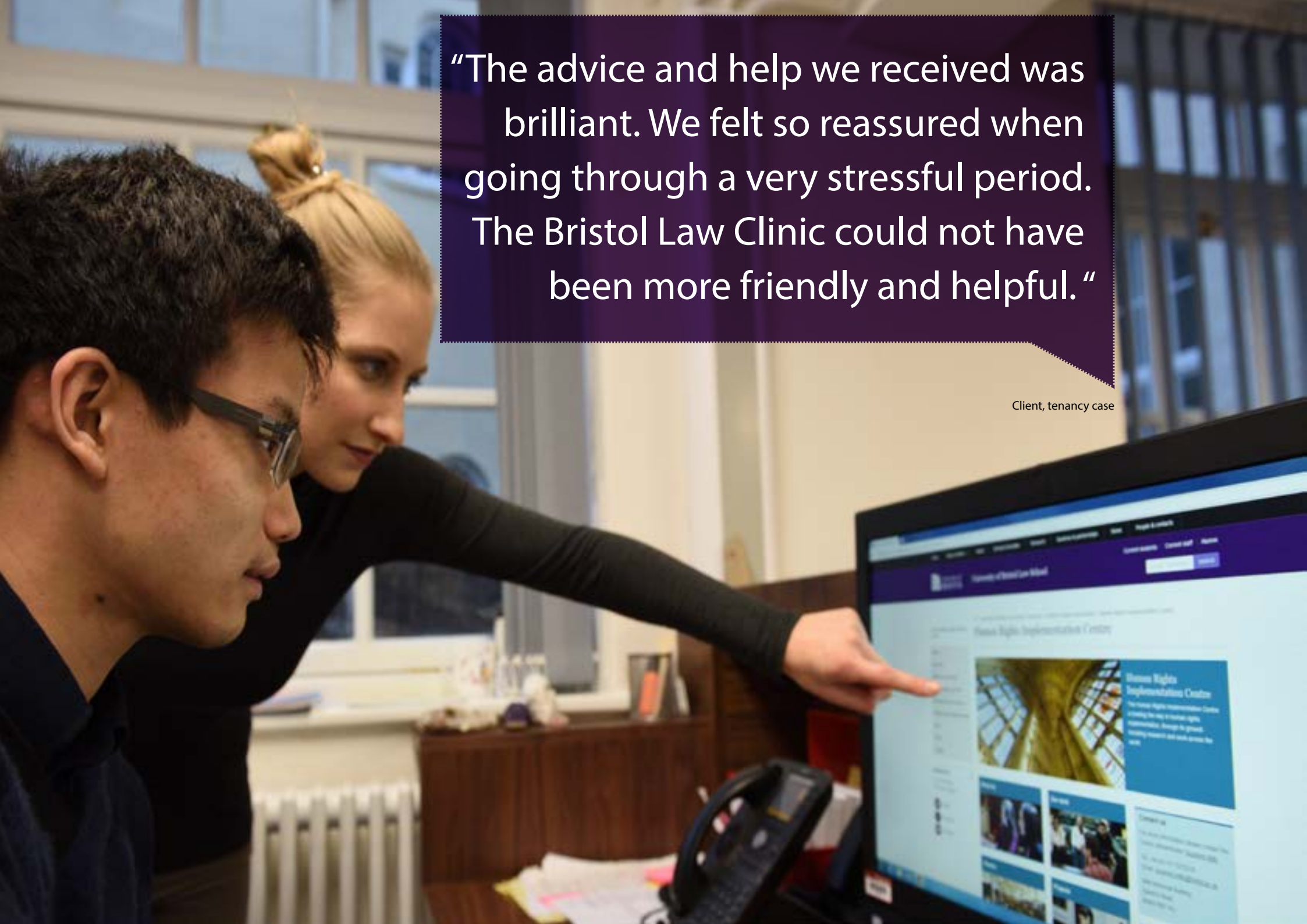
Over the course of the last academic year, we successfully introduced the Clinical Legal Studies module, which received positive feedback from the students who were able to take questions about their cases into the classroom. The objectives of the course were to develop a module to help students bridge the gap between academic study and the practical application of law and to help students develop a rich appreciation of the impact of law on peoples’ lives.

A year round service

Those involved in a legal dispute will acknowledge that they do not just occur during term time, or outside the exam period. The Law Clinic’s intention is to provide a year round service for those who need it. If a student is unavailable, a case or its client should not have to wait. This year, our alumni helped support four summer interns to continue the work of the Clinic over the summer with students able to both follow through on live cases and support new enquiries that arose. This year the summer interns took on 31 cases.

Training

As we take on more cases, and as the number of student volunteers that we recruit continues to increase, it is necessary for the Law Clinic to create links to support with the development and training of each member. This year we forged links with law firm, Osborne Clarke, and developed a partnership that will see the organisation provide a number of training sessions designed specifically to help students deal with cases of the Law Clinic. We look forward to starting this initiative in the 2016/17 academic year.

A woman with blonde hair tied back is pointing at a computer monitor. A man with dark hair and glasses is looking at the screen. The monitor displays the University of Bristol Law Clinic website. The background is a blurred office or library setting.

“The advice and help we received was brilliant. We felt so reassured when going through a very stressful period. The Bristol Law Clinic could not have been more friendly and helpful.”

Client, tenancy case

The people we've helped

The Law Clinic provides legal advice and help on a pro-bono basis to members of the public who cannot afford legal fees. We are often their only chance of getting such support. The Clinic deals with a vast array of issues including housing and property, landlord and tenant disputes, neighbour and nuisance disputes, contract law questions, employment law queries, consumer rights, welfare benefits and social security. The case studies provided below give a feel for the diverse range of issues that the Law Clinic has taken on this year, and illustrates the positive impact that the Clinic's work has had on peoples' lives.

The benefit appeal applicant

The client came to the Law Clinic for advice after the Department for Work and Pensions accused her of claiming benefits that she was not entitled to. She wanted to appeal against this decision, and the subsequent overpayment in benefits that they had ordered her to pay, which amounted to more than £4,500. With the support of the Clinic and the students, the applicant was able to successfully appeal this decision which resulted in the cancellation of the overpayment and a reinstatement of the benefits that she was entitled to.

The employee

The employee was a 30 year old man, working as an engineer for a small firm. Having worked at this firm for two years, he decided that he wanted to leave to set up his own business. However, his contract of employment contained a number of restrictive covenants which prevented him from creating his own business in a similar field of work. The Law Clinic was able to successfully advise the employee, guiding him in a direction so as to avoid any repercussions that might arise from breaching his contract of employment. As a result, the employee was able to leave the engineering firm and sought new employment whilst developing his own business on the side.

The tenant

The tenant in question was experiencing a dispute with her landlord, therefore she contacted the Law Clinic for advice. She explained that the landlord failed to secure the deposit and as a result refused to repay it. With the help of the student volunteers, the case was taken to the County Court where it was decided in favour of the client. As a result of the support of the Clinic, the client was awarded the return of the deposit together with a further payment. The further payment was double the deposit, meaning the total sum awarded to the client was in excess of £2000.



“Amazingly helpful from start to finish. Sound advice and good communication.”

Ed Bramwell, client

Listening to feedback

This academic year the Law Clinic comprised of over 90 student volunteers and the number of enquiries that were received has doubled since last year. At the end of the 2015-16 academic year, the students as well as the clients were asked to comment on how they found their experience with the Law Clinic. The feedback provided has been both positive and extremely encouraging whilst allowing the Clinic to develop and grow efficiently.

What the clients had to say

- 73% were satisfied with the overall level of service received from the Law Clinic
- 88% said they would recommend the service to someone else
- One client explained that the Clinic’s service and knowledge of the legal system is “very comforting to those in need”
- Another client expounded that he would recommend the Law Clinic on the basis that “it was a great source of information and extremely helpful to those who cannot afford a solicitor”

What the students had to say

- 95% of the students found involvement in the Law Clinic to be a positive experience
- A similar 95% of students said they would recommend the Clinic to other students
- 90% of students felt fully supported throughout their time working with the Law Clinic
- Moreover, 77% of students involved who have just finished their legal studies expressed their interest in remaining a part of the Clinic following their graduation.

What students gain

Many students expanded on their feedback, expressing that the Clinic allowed them to have hands on, practical experience of legal issues that they had learnt throughout their academic studies. In addition to this, working in a client-orientated environment was highlighted as being useful in improving valuable communication skills and taught the students how to effectively deal with clients and their legal issues. As well as enhancing invaluable legal research skills, several students positively ranked the Law Clinic as it enabled them to give back to the community and clearly impacted on peoples’ lives in a beneficial way.

“January 2017 will see us move into newly developed offices in Berkeley Square, providing a dedicated space for members of the general public to come in and get free legal advice.”

John Peake
Director, Law Clinic

Looking forwards

2015/16 has exceeded our expectations and is the result of the close collaboration and full support of the Law School and the student committee. As we look to the future, we need to make sure that we do not lose momentum and use the next year to consolidate procedures and performance so as to maintain a high level of client and student satisfaction. This means providing a professional and credible advice service so that outside organisations and individuals trust us and continue to refer cases to the Clinic.

For 2016/17 we are aiming:

- To continue to develop the partnership with law firm, Osborne Clarke, to provide professional training sessions so important to student development.
- To make further links with organisations such as LawWorks to provide students with access to online tutorials, ensuring they are equipped to deal with diverse legal issues.
- To strive towards employing a further member of the academic staff for September 2017 to help continue smooth operation of the organisation.
- To maintain and increase student numbers through a transparent and open admissions process.
- To expand in size so that by the end of 2017-18 we are able to offer a place in the Law Clinic to 10% of the Law students.

Street Law

The Law Clinic's StreetLaw project involves students delivering presentations to schools or groups in the community so that they are better able to deal with particular types of situations in the future. We are currently looking at building on work started this year. Our first presentation of the academic year involved assisting a teacher from Bristol Metropolitan Academy with her ongoing contract law course. Presenting in front of younger students saw our members adapt the pace and language to fit the pupils' ability. The success of the session has opened up many opportunities with the Clinic invited back to the School to deliver an interactive session on how to keep safe when using social media.

Advice Organisations

With the continuing growth of the Law Clinic, it is essential that we carry on developing ties with other advice organisations. This work has already started, and we are proud to announce that from September 2016, we will be offering drop-in sessions through CLIC to the parents of children undergoing treatment in the Bristol Royal Infirmary Oncology Department. We are also taking referrals from UWE Advice Centre. We are committed to the continued development of our collaborations with the Personal Support Unit at the County Court and Citizens Advice Bureau.

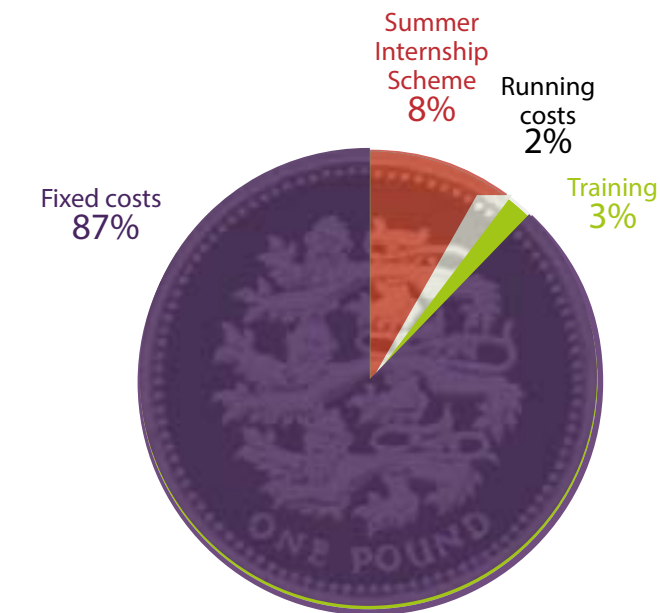
"It is testament to the collaborations the Law Clinic has developed between staff, students, alumni and the community that 2015/16 saw us maintain the growth of this valuable service - whilst continuing to deliver a high standard of legal education and advice."

Professor Joanne Conaghan
Head of the Law School



Finances

For the academic year September 2015–September 2016 our expenditure grew by 46% from £39,558 to £57,755. This reflects our commitment to expand the service to those that need it most - and saw us taking on over 145 cases for the year. We would like to thank the commitment and generosity of our alumni and other sponsors whose support, both in time and in funds, has allowed us to reach more people than ever before this year. It would not have been possible without you.



I must thank and commend the commitment and generosity of our alumni and other sponsors who through their support have allowed us the scope and freedom to develop the Law Clinic:

- The Clinic Student Committee: It is testimony to the Committee, ably led by Nicholas Roper, that the clinic's transformation from a volunteer-led organisation into something more vibrant encountered few of the problems such a rapid change might often provoke
- Osborne Clarke for our recent partnership providing invaluable support to our students
- Our alumni donors for covering the costs of four students so we could extend our service throughout the summer, providing valuable support to those people whose cases were still active during this time. And to Emily Kelvey, Tom Canham, Alice Ratcliffe and Mariya Koloyimets for giving up their summer holidays to make it happen.

- All our partners, with whom we share a mutual commitment to the local community.
- The Law School, for providing us with pro-bono offices in the new Berkeley Square development which we are looking forward to moving into early in 2017.
- The Law School and University, for its ongoing support of the Law Clinic.

I am particularly thrilled to have received the Vice Chancellor's Award for Education this year in recognition of the work undertaken within the Law Clinic. It has been a privilege to come from a private practice, non-academic background and venture into this highly regarded University to work on such a fulfilling initiative. The award also has to be seen as recognition of the hard work and commitment on the part of the students.

John Peake
Director, Law Clinic

Funding requirements for 2016/17

To reach more people it is essential that we continue to increase our support of students through a balance of training, mentoring and ongoing academic support. We are therefore looking for funding for the following:

- £35,000: To fund a new academic support role
- £ 5,000: To fund our summer internship scheme
- £ 2,500: To fund a student training initiative
- £ 1,700: To cover day to day Law Clinic running costs
- £ 650: Sponsorship of Volunteer of the Year award

If you are interested in supporting in this way please contact john.peake@bristol.ac.uk

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