

Summary of Open Justice Projects for October 2019

The following provides a summary of the Open Justice projects we plan to run in October 2019. The Open Justice Centre cannot guarantee that all projects will run.

Project 1 Online PLE

Time Commitment – You will be expected to research and produce your online PLE resources over between November and April 2020. You will need to work closely with members of your team to co-ordinate producing the materials, including regular online team meetings. Outside of the team meetings this project offers flexibility in terms of when you carry out the work.

Location – Online

Description

This project aims to produce online resources that promote the public understanding of law. This could include receiving a brief from a partner organisation to produce public information materials on a particular legal issue. Previous projects have included materials on the common law marriage myth, rights at work, social media and the law and how to use the small claims court.

You will work as part of a small group of approximately four students to research, design and produce online education materials. These materials will include both written documents and a recorded oral presentation on a given topic. Materials will be uploaded to the Open University Open Justice website for the public to view during #OpenJusticeWeek.

This project require you to apply your practical legal research skill in addition to developing online written and oral presentation skills.

Project 2 Freedom Law Clinic

Time Commitment: Approximately six hours of asynchronous online training via webinar. Minimum fortnightly online meetings between November and April 2020. Significant amount of reading of case related documents is required to get the most out of this project. You will therefore need to be able to commit significant time each week to carrying out this reading.

Location – Online

Description

More information on the Freedom Law Clinic is available at <http://freedomlawclinic.org/>

The Freedom Law Clinic uses students working in small groups to assist in the process of advising clients on the prospects of appealing their case to the Criminal Case Review Commission. All the FLC's clients are persons who have been convicted of very serious criminal offences who are maintaining their innocence. Students will be required to assist in the preparation of a client's case for the purpose of advising them on their prospects in appealing their conviction. Students will be expected to read a large quantity of criminal case files and Court transcripts and to become authoritative on their particular case. They will then be asked to produce a piece of written work to contribute to the development of the client's appeal. **It is a demanding but rewarding course which provides a unique insight into criminal practice.**

Student Feedback

"In terms of interim feedback about FLC - from my perspective it has been a fantastic experience so far. Although the workload has been more demanding than we might have expected, there have also been opportunities to really stretch our skills by getting to grips with a complex case and developing our understanding of both practical and technical approaches to issues such as special counsel and abuse of process. It has certainly given me a lot of motivation and opened my eyes to potentially looking at criminal practice, which I would never have considered before. Activities like this, earlier in the course, would certainly be a great incentive to get through the remaining modules!"

"The whole process of working with FLC felt like a professional collaboration rather than an academic exercise so this was a great motivator and certainly helped me to feel like I was contributing to a case and a client, rather than being treated as a student helper. The feedback (from [FLC] and indirectly from the tone and direction of [the client's] letter) and being given the latitude to move things forward made the work rewarding and encouraged further engagement. Being able to submit a body of material to the client, not just a one-pager, was also a high point".

Project 3 Open Justice Policy Clinic

Time Commitment – New for October 2019, you will be expected to research and produce policy analysis and advocacy documents between November and April 2020. You will need to work closely with members of your team to co-ordinate producing the materials, including regular online team meetings. Outside of the team meetings this project offers flexibility in terms of when you carry out the work.

Location – Online

Description

Your team will receive a brief related to one particular public policy area. Potential topics could include, common law marriage, environmental law, social media regulation, charity law reform etc. You will be asked to conduct desk-based research on the topic and produce analysis of strengths and weaknesses in the current legal position and advocate for how the law could be improved.

You will work as part of a small group of approximately four students.

Project 4 Open Justice Law Clinic

Time commitment: You will be required to undertake 2 x 1.5 hour online sessions of clinic training, to be held at the end of Block 2 of W360. You will then be required to practise using the case management system before entering the 'live' clinic. You will work in small groups to interview clients, research legal issues and prepare a letter of advice. This project requires you to be able to dedicate time more regularly to check and progress client matters in the online case management system. You will need to be able to meet the clinic deadlines, some of which require action every couple of days. You also need to be able to commit to attend client interviews, sometimes at short notice.

Location: Online

Description: Students in the Open Justice Law Clinic give free legal advice to members of the public under the supervision of qualified solicitors. Students are allocated to a firm of students and work on cases in teams, building and maintaining valuable working relationships with their colleagues. Students working in the clinic are subject to the same standards and professional obligations required of all solicitors so hard work and effort is required to succeed.

Student Feedback

"The experience I have had undertaking the Open Justice activities, and in particular the Legal Advice Clinic, has been some of the most rewarding of any other during my law degree and I am hoping that I can continue to be involved after I graduate".

"Working on live cases has given me the opportunity not only to make a practical difference to people's lives, but also to test my legal knowledge and skills. Many students at the OU, due to our geographical dispersal, find it difficult to access legal work experience. By virtue of the fact that the legal advice clinic is based online, you have the opportunity to work from the comfort of your own home, in your own time on a variety of cases based all over the UK. You would not be able to do so in any other law clinic. This gives you valuable experience which you can add to your CV and which you can draw from in an interview, and transferable skills which you can apply to areas other than law. Use this opportunity!"

Project 5 Prison based public legal education

Time Commitment: 3 half day sessions during office hours between November and April 2020 plus group based online preparation and research between sessions.

Description

Accompanied by a member of the Open Justice academic team, groups of 3-4 OU students will engage in a variety of prison education projects in one of several prison

locations. Previous projects have been based at prisons in London, West Midlands, Derbyshire, South Wales and the Northwest of England.

Many projects are run in partnership with St. Giles Trust . St Giles provides a range of support services for serving prisoners, those who have been released back into the community as well as with groups at risk offending, such as young people who may fall under the influence of gang culture. A key aspect of their work is to train peer advisors to support the rehabilitation process and to help ex-offenders adjust to life on the outside.

Small groups of OU Law students have worked with peer advisors to identify areas of legal need within their client community and develop suitable public legal education projects to help address that need. The legal topics are not predetermined so as to ensure that outputs will have relevance and currency, likewise the precise form of the public legal education intervention is subject to agreement, but have included producing jargon-free advice guides on release on temporary licence, joint enterprise, employment and family law.

Other possible projects include working with peer mentors in prison to produce a legal education radio programme to be broadcast on prison radio or preparing and delivering law and society education sessions in conjunction with the prison education department.

Please don't contact the St.Giles Trust directly about this project.

Student Feedback

"Today I have finished my research project with the St Giles Trust at HMP Oakwood working with Prisoners. It has been an incredibly eye-opening experience. I went into this project with an archaic opinion of what prison life would be like. I was expecting it to be more like the TV show Porridge or the film The Shawshank Redemption. The reality is vastly different. Yes, we were working with the highly trusted prisoners, men who'd used their time in prison to great effect. They'd taken rehabilitation courses, they'd educated themselves, but more than that, they were educating and mentoring other prisoners.

My first moments inside the prison I was quite apprehensive, we were taken on to a prison block where the prisoners were wandering around, quite freely and I hadn't noticed any guards. But it didn't take long for me to realise that I was perfectly safe and when interacting with the prisoners whom we were there to assist, I often didn't realise they were prisoners but thought they were St Giles staff members.

We chatted with these men, they told us their issues and we went away and we researched them. The whole time I was doing this, I very selfishly was thinking how good this would look on my CV. By the last meeting with the prisoners I'd come to realise how awful that was of me. When we finished our work, we left the prison to carry on with our lives, our degrees, our futures. For some of the people we were helping the future is so uncertain. They will remain in prison, some on indeterminate sentences and as much as I wanted to give them good news, unfortunately the outlook is quite bleak".

"The whole prison experience was utterly fascinating and so much more enriching than simply writing an assignment. My advice for anyone taking on this Pro Bono work is to go into it with an open mind and listen carefully to the people you're helping. These people want your help, they want to learn, they want to be educated and you have the tools at your disposal to do this".

"I have taken so many positives out of this experience. On a purely selfish note, I have enhanced my CV and gained valuable experience in understanding how life in a prison works. But, I also feel like I have contributed to helping these men by taking the time to research issues of huge importance to them. But they have changed me, my views on prisoners and prison life are now much higher. I no longer think that we should be locking people up and throwing away the key but that prison should be a fully integrated rehabilitation programme working towards re-integrating these people back into society".

"I want to thank the Open University for selecting me for this project, for the St Giles Trust for running this pilot scheme and for working so closely with us, but mostly I want to thank the prisoners I was helping. They have made me sit up and think about the world and reconsider my own future in law. But also to reconsider my future as a person as my outlook on certain things has now changed forever. This was such an enriching experience and one that could not possibly be achieved through writing an essay".

Project 6 Open Justice Mediation

Location: Online

Time commitment: In addition to the project briefing you will need to attend 3 x 1.5 compulsory online mediation training sessions during the Block 3 period of W360. Alongside this training there will be reading materials to absorb and prepare in advance of the training sessions which will be held in the evening during Blocks 3/4. There will then be one "mini" mediation session lasting 1.5 hours, during which you will take on different roles. The final mediation will then take place when you conduct a full fictional mediation with characters in dispute. This final mediation will last for 1.5 hours.

Description:

Mediation provides an effective and non-adversarial form of dispute resolution which is increasingly recognised within the UK justice system. Working on the Open Justice mediation project will give you the chance to undertake training in civil and commercial mediation which you will apply as mediators or associate mediators in either mock or real life online mediations.

This project will provide you with valuable negotiation skills which can then be applied in many aspects of life.

Project 7 Volunteer Adviser - Citizens Advice Bureau

Location: England and Wales

Time commitment: Subject to negotiation but approximately an average of one day per fortnight during office hours over an initial period of 9 months.

Two types of roles are available; witness service volunteer or general advisor. You will receive extensive training from Citizens Advice.

[More information on the nature of both these roles is available here.](#)

Note that for this opportunity you will need to make contact with Citizens Advice directly and comply with their recruitment procedures. If you wish to take on this role as your Open Justice Project it is your responsibility to complete the application process and to have been successful in being offered a place by 31 August 2019.

Please email open-justice@open.ac.uk to inform us you have been successful in gaining a volunteer place.