

Summary of Open Justice Projects

The following provides a summary of the Open Justice projects we plan to run in October 2020. The Open Justice Centre cannot guarantee that all projects will run.

Project 1 Open Justice Policy Clinic

Time Commitment –You will be expected to research and produce policy analysis and advocacy documents between November 2020 and April 2021. 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

Many charities and other organisations seek to influence governmental decisions, policies and laws for the benefit of the people affected by the area of law in question. Your team will receive a brief related to one public policy area which is either the subject of consultation by government or is an area of the law where reform has been suggested. For example, in 2019/20 the online policy clinic produced a report on the law protecting victims of FGM for a charity, which they will use in their response to the Scottish government's consultation on this issue. The precise topic will depend on the consultations being undertaken at the time the project runs and the requests we receive from charities and NGOs.

You will be asked to conduct desk-based research on the topic and produce an analysis of strengths and weaknesses in the current legal position and advocate for how the law could be improved. You will produce a report detailing your findings which will be used either as part of a consultation response or by the charity or organisation who has requested the work be undertaken. It is therefore important that your research, analysis and the final report is completed to a high standard.

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

Project 2 Open Justice Mediation

Location: Online

Time commitment: You will be required to undertake 3 x 1.5-hour online sessions of mediation training at the start of Block 2 of W360. There will also be preparatory work and practice to be carried out between the sessions, either individually or in small groups. You will then be required to prepare for, and participate in, two mock or real-life online mediations towards the end of Block 2. Each mediation will usually

last for approximately 2 - 3 hours.

Description:

Mediation provides an effective and non-adversarial form of dispute resolution which is increasingly recognised and encouraged 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. You will also have the opportunity to understand how mediation skills, typically used in a face to face context, can be adapted to enable mediation in an online context. This training is a significant part of the project and comprises most of the tasks you will undertake whilst working in the project.

You will then have the opportunity to apply the skills you have developed as mediators in either mock or real-life online mediations. This project will provide you with valuable negotiation skills which can be applied in many aspects of life.

Project 3 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 undertake a simulated case to practice 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 4 Prison and community based public legal education

Time Commitment: 3 half-day face to face sessions in the prison or St Giles Trust community hub during office hours between January and April 2021. This does not include travel time. A number of group online meetings are held to prepare for each session, supported by legal research and the preparation of learning materials, handouts and leaflets.

Description

Accompanied by a member of the Open Justice academic team, groups of 4 - 7 OU students will engage in a variety of legal education projects in prisons or St Giles Trust community hubs. Previous projects have been based at prisons or community hubs in London, West Midlands, Derbyshire, Surrey, South Wales and the Northwest of England. Many projects are run in partnership with St. Giles Trust. St Giles Trust is a charity which 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 of 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 inside and outside prisons 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 learning materials 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, family law and legal issues concerning employment after prison.

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

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

Student Feedback

'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'.

Project 5 Freedom Law Clinic

Time Commitment: Approximately six hours of asynchronous online training by webinar at the start of the project. Due to the significant amount of reading needed, you must be able to commit 16 hours per week to get the most out of your work in the clinic. There are regular online meetings between November 2020 and April 2021 with either the FLC, your small group or your tutor.

Location – Online

Description

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

The Freedom Law Clinic allows 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. The Freedom Law Clinic's (FLC) clients have been convicted of very serious offences. THE FLC assists clients with investigating whether there are grounds to appeal against their conviction and/or sentence. Students assist the FLC with a variety of tasks including researching and preparing legal arguments on an appeal.

Students are expected to read a large quantity of digital criminal case files and court transcripts before researching relevant issues. Students then prepare a piece of written work to contribute to the advice on appeal. The written work varies but can be a letter or an advice on a certain area. his work is a very demanding and rewarding part of the module providing a unique insight into criminal practice. 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 6 – Independent Project

Project 6 allows you to arrange your own pro bono project. This might include working as an advisor or witness support volunteer with your local Citizens Advice Bureau or working to support litigants in person with an organisation such as Support Through Court, or perhaps with your local Law Centre. W360 students have been successful in gaining valuable pro bono legal experience in all these organisations in previous presentations. Typically, students were expected to work one day per fortnight during office hours over an initial period of 9 months, but the exact arrangement is a matter of negotiation with your host organization.

Feedback from a student working at Support Through Court (formerly the Personal Support Unit)

'Approximately one day every two weeks, I volunteer in Family Court for the Personal Support Unit. The PSU exists to offer practical and emotional support for unrepresented litigants in the court system. The vast majority of litigants in Family Court do not qualify for legal aid and many cannot afford legal representation.

Every placement day I have at least one hearing and sometimes up to three. PSU clients range from the eloquent to those with limited literacy and language ability. Every day is different, and it is never boring. It is not for the faint-hearted, as you will hear serious and disturbing allegations being made by the parties.

What have I gained from this experience as a law student? The concept of supporting clients through legal proceedings has never seemed less intimidating than now. I feel confident in understanding the procedure of court hearings. I have also gained insights from observing how legal professionals negotiate in the corridor, as well as how judges skillfully question unrepresented litigants to test their

evidence. The fascinating experience of seeing how judges interact with counsel in hearings cannot be substituted by reading about it in a textbook.

[This blog post](#) discusses the experience of a W360 student volunteering at Citizens Advice.

Securing your independent placement

It is your responsibility to organise your placement prior to the start of the module.

For your placement to count towards your W360 studies you need to have informed the Open Justice Centre by emailing us at Open-Justice@open.ac.uk by 31 August 2020. Your email should provide the following information:

1. Who your placement is with?
2. Location of placement
3. Number of hours per month and agreed duration
4. Provide evidence of acceptance such as email or scanned letter from your organisation offering you the placement
5. A contact name, number and email for your host organisation.

Two important points to note:

1. Your independent pro bono placement can be with organisations other than Citizens Advice, Support Through Court or a law centre but, in line with other Open Justice projects, it should be a volunteer post and have a legal advice or public legal education focus. If you are considering sourcing your own placement with a different type of organisation, please contact Open-justice@open.ac.uk to check that it would be suitable.
2. Many organisations, including Citizens Advice and Support Through Court have a recruitment process that includes a written application and interview. You should allow plenty of time to go through this process before the 31 August deadline.

Useful Websites:

Citizens Advice <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/support-us/volunteering/>

Citizens Advice Scotland <https://www.cas.org.uk/about-us/volunteer-citizens-advice-bureau>

Victim Support Scotland <https://victimsupport.scot/how-you-can-help/volunteer/>

Support Through Court <https://www.supportthroughcourt.org/>

Law Centres Network <https://www.lawcentres.org.uk/>

Law Works <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/solicitors-and-volunteers/get-involved/pro-bono-opportunities>

LawCareers.net <https://www.lawcareers.net/MoreLaw/ProBonoInitiatives>

The National Pro Bono Centre <http://www.nationalprobonocentre.org.uk/pro-bono-week/volunteer-portal/>