

This is a post by Thomas Jamieson and John Stringer, of the [University of Strathclyde Law Clinic](#). It reflects on a recent one-day conference at London South Bank University.

Introduction

When we journeyed to London for the [Clinical Legal Education Conference on Quality & Supervision](#) we were not sure what to expect. It did not take us long to establish that the law clinics/pro bono organisations present all shared a commitment to providing access to justice to their communities. What was striking, however, was the diversity of models and approaches used by various organisations to achieve this goal and the extent to which this – rather than student education – is seen as the overriding goal of law clinics. Although all clinics work broadly under the same banner, no two clinics were the same and there was no consensus as to how students should be recognised for their efforts. The differences in approach are fascinating and it is beneficial to have opportunities like this conference to showcase our own approach and learn from others. This post gives a brief overview of the day, before offering some observations

Supervisors

[Northumbria](#) and other attending law clinics offered insight into their methods of supervision. This was communicated through a role play performed by two Northumbria students and one of their supervisors who had to supervise a simulated case “cold”. The process of meeting with one’s supervisor is familiar to most students, but the structure and purpose of the meeting demonstrated by Northumbria was somewhat novel to us both. While some clinics adopt a more fluid approach, others found that there was a set structure to how a supervisory meeting should occur. From reflecting on our own approach at the University of Strathclyde Law Clinic (USLC) (which was discussed in detail by our Director, Professor Donald Nicolson OBE) it seems that, in general, our meetings are far more direct and to the point when compared with, for example, the Northumbria model. Our primary concern is to resolve clients’ issues in the most efficient way possible while keeping their best interests at the forefront of our activities, while other Clinics appeared to emphasise the learning and development of their students in these supervisory meetings. Students across the board are supported by their supervisors, but this support manifests in different ways.

Through this collaborative discussion, we better understand different methods for tackling access to justice problems. It would seem that while the USLC offers a greater number of students the chance to gain practical legal experience and to help people, other clinics focus on the deeper education of a smaller group of students. Learning at the USLC is by contrast an organic offshoot of our primary focus - helping the client.

Students

Students spoke to their own experiences, with common themes being learning, personal development and community. It seemed that all students agreed that the more engaged they were, the more they got from their respective clinic, and the more they felt they were able to give to it. Interestingly, some students seemed to feel that without credits there would be a drop in student engagement. This is not something we agreed with. Our own experience at USLC tells us that positive results occur whether or not there is academic reward. (For the vast majority of our student advisors, there is no academic recognition of their clinic work.)

Students described their respective organisations' unique projects, such as the Dementia Unit at the University of [Manchester](#). This was particularly interesting as it seemed that, like some of our own projects, it had developed from the ideas of students. In many different and interesting ways, it seems that all clinics have the capacity to develop based on the links they have. By outlining what each clinic focusses on we may be able to complement and rather than simply replicate what others do.

Conclusions

We had a fantastic time meeting our fellow student advisors from across the UK and indeed Europe. We were intrigued by the (often wildly) different models of approach to providing access the justice. All delegates left London South Bank University hoping to build on the relationships made and with a desire to keep their own clinic working collaboratively and closely for the benefit of their community. Hopefully this post will spark a similar desire for those who were not able to make it to the conference.

With thanks to Malcolm Combe, current chair of the [Scottish University Law Clinic Network](#), for his valued input towards this post.