



**Nottingham
Law School**
Nottingham Trent University

KNOWLEDGE REALLY IS POWER: NLS Legal Research and Impact Evaluation Report - Measuring the effectiveness and impact of NLS Legal in improving access to justice, key social development goals, and its role in student and staff development.

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NLS Legal Research and Impact Evaluation Report 2024**Acknowledgements**

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Executive Summary

This Research and Impact Evaluation (RIE) of NLS Legal focuses on NLS Legal's work on educational development of students, direct service delivery (including public legal education as well as information, advice, casework, and representation), access to justice and policy work.

NLS Legal is currently the sole fully regulated teaching law firm in the UK. It is an exempt charity and an Alternative Business Structure (ABS) and is fully integrated into a law school in England, namely Nottingham Law School (NLS). As a regulated law firm and licensed ABS, it carries out 'reserved legal activities.' It provides on-site legal assistance on the NLS campus in the Chaucer building at Nottingham Trent University's (NTU) City campus. It also is a 'teaching law firm' providing NLS law students with opportunities to learn and develop skills and exposure to access to justice work.

Emerging is also a model for practice and legal education in the only teaching law firm in the UK. The data across the multiple tools used indicates that students have enhanced their skills, have been able to use their experience at NLS Legal for their resumes, and have found employment. NLS Legal is contributing to NLS students in their future employability and educational attainment of critical practice skills. This is positioning NLS students for real life work. Students, staff, and the external agencies interviewed observed its transformative value for NLS students. The students report NLS Legal experience has raised their awareness about access to justice. In addition, the quantitative data collected by NLS Legal showed that the grades had increased for students of the teaching law firm compared to the general student cohort. The data also indicated that the teaching law firm at NLS Legal was also being utilised by a diverse range of students. This is significant as it is a step towards ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds gain not only employment experience but are given an opportunity to find future jobs in the legal or broader professions.

Significantly, there is now an emerging body of international research that emphasises the significance of the signposting. The approach employed by NLS Legal, particularly through secondary consultations.¹ This method is not only crucial in helping clients access assistance but also provides clients who may not seek legal support with essential information to navigate legal processes through their trusted intermediaries. Trusted intermediaries are frontline workers who help and support clients and act as intermediaries to help them gain legal help with legal problems to help clients holistically, so they improve their social, economic, and wellbeing outcomes (see Definitions). Additionally, it is recognized as valuable on-the-spot training, especially by resource-strapped organizations. The data suggests that those people who are the poorest, the most disadvantaged, and those in need of legal help for multiple and complex problems are struggling to find help, and that NLS Legal is a critical port of call in Nottinghamshire.

¹ Above note 16 196-201.

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Overarching research questions for this study included:

- Does NLS Legal play a role in improving NLS students' skills, employability and awareness and commitment to access to justice?
- Does NLS Legal positively impact the development of its junior staff (some of whom are students)?
- Does NLS Legal provide quality service to its clients?
- Is NLS Legal effective in delivering legal services to clients, and why or why not?
- Does NLS Legal's work have a positive impact on clients' lives? If so, how? If not, how might this be improved? This includes enhancing not only justice outcomes but also the flow-on effects on clients' social determinants of health (e.g., safety, housing, income).
- Does the strategic casework, policy, and law reform work of NLS Legal have a role in shaping improvements in laws, policies, and their administration over time?

Key conclusions from the study:

- NLS Legal is having a transformational effect on personal and professional development, attainment, and employability prospects for students. (See Student comments on legal empowerment (see page 54). Students reported that because of their experiences at NLS Legal they see the importance of access to justice and the value of pro bono work within wider society (see page 82). If this study is revisited in three – four years as planned, it would be useful good to track their trajectory through quantitative data.
- There is some evidence that student involvement with NLS Legal has been a factor in improving their overall grades. This is suggested by the differential between the NLS Legal students and the General Student cohort in the percentages of students achieving a 2.1 or first-class degree (see page 46-49). Notably, the number of students opportunities has increased between 2015 and 2022 (see page 92). The increase student opportunities NTU has been facilitated through the increased staff base 74% of the students in the survey noted that the existence of NLS Legal was significant in their choice to study at Nottingham Law School (see page 51).
- The significance of the university support in the impact and effectiveness of NLS Legal cannot be understated. This bold and innovative model and long-term investment and commitment of NTU Senior Leadership Team is a key enabler in the provision of this service to students and the community.
- The work that NLS Legal undertakes is important, innovative and has a demonstrable positive impact. Evident in all the qualitative data collected and the interviews conducted was a level of commitment, passion, and compassion towards the clients that NLS Legal serves.
- The value of signposting/and Professional Legal Education of non-legal practitioners-in conversations (“secondary consultation”) with Trusted Intermediaries (TIs, see

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definition section page 12) is evidenced in the qualitative data from the TIs. The value of informal legal information sharing and conversations conveying tips on navigating the legal system for TIs has immense reach. This reach is often beyond clients formally seen by NLS Legal. These secondary consultations offered by NLS Legal help many TIs to support their clients downstream and often at point at need and for clients who are at risk of otherwise not accessing legal help (see page 78).

- The amount of compensation recovered for clients for example in the year of the data under examination in this study has been significant and NLS Legal provides an important service to Nottinghamshire that is not as widespread in some other regions of England. NLS Legal recovered £995,240 in compensation, settlements, and benefits for clients in 2021-2022 (the year examined in this research), bringing NLS Legal's cumulative total to £5.5 million. After data analysis for this report was concluded in the year 2022-2023 it was £6,230,262 (see page 20).
- There is a clear power imbalance between local and national government departments and community members/clients. TIs reported that people accept what Authorities (e.g. local councils, government departments decision-makers and companies) tell them, even though this can be wrong in law (see for example, pages 43 and-56). This is a concern as limited access to legal support means that some people will be disadvantaged if they are misinformed or wrongly advised and do not have the capability to challenge decisions.

Recommendations

1. There are some good practices in the NLS Legal model enabling earlier intervention and the provision of holistic legal support and expertise. This includes, for example, its use of sign posting/legal secondary consultations for the charity sector enabling greater reach to people who might otherwise not gain help. It is also building legal capability in the charity sector so that it can identify issues when they might have legal options for resolution. Such examples could be examined and adopted by the government and regulators. Such approaches can provide models and strategies for the improvement for access to justice in the UK if adequate funding was put in place.
2. Governments have obligations due to the constitutional obligations around the rule of law and ensuring substantive equality before the law. In raising revenue from the taxpayer, Government should ensure this is used effectively to improving the lives of community members through access to justice. Whilst the role of NTU in supporting NLS Legal is commendable, it is not a substitute for sustainable state-led access to justice programmes. Whilst NLS Legal has delivered clear benefits for many disadvantaged groups across Nottinghamshire, access to justice remains a nationwide problem.
3. NLS Legal should continue its work with clients, students and trusted intermediaries to improve the lives of clients and their communities. NLS Legal should continue with its 'growth mindset' in its use of reflective practice to develop, innovate and drive positive change for community and its students and staff. It continues with its culture of innovation in its leadership and staff commitment.

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NLS Legal Research and Impact Evaluation Report 2024**GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS****Abbreviations**

C & P	Care and Protection Services
CLE	Clinical Legal Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EHCP	Education, Health, and Care Plan
FRU	Free Representation Unit
ISE	Immersed Students Experience
LAC	Nottingham Law School Legal Advice Centre
LETR	Legal Education and Training Review
LSB	Legal Services Board UK
NLS	Nottingham Law School
NTU	Nottingham Trent University
PIP	Personal Independence Payment
QWE	Qualifying work experience
RIE	Research and Impact Evaluation
RPC	Reflective Practice Conversation
SC	Secondary Consultations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SRA	Solicitors Regulation Authority
SQE	Solicitors Qualifying Exam

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TI	Trusted Intermediary
SDGs	United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals
SDH	Social Determinants of Health

NLS Legal Research and Impact Evaluation Report 2024**Definitions**

Client	Client of NLS Legal as a regulated law firm.
Free Representation Unit (FRU)	FRU provides representation in employment and social security hearings.
Immersed students experience (ISE)	The student experience can sometimes depend on the level of contact with the placement, the quality of that placement, as well as whether it is 'immersed' in the more ongoing nature of casework or, by contrast, to an experience that is brief or fleeting in nature and thereby 'light touch' experience. As this study is focusing on the impact of NLS Legal, its primary focus will be on students who have the deeper level of contact with the placement i.e., 'immersed students' that they experience at NLS Legal.
Principal Research Evaluator (PRE)	Dr Liz Curran, Associate Professor Clinical Legal Education and School Research Impact Lead, Nottingham Law School Nottingham Trent University.
Qualifying Work Experience (QWE)	The completion of two years' Qualifying Work Experience (QWE) is one of the requirements candidates must fulfil to qualify as a solicitor under the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) .
Reflective Practice Conversation (RPC)	The term uses narratives and dialogue to draw out valuable knowledge and experience that resides in people's heads that can often be missed in other data collection or

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information systems. It opens a space for participants to pause and reflect on a range of evaluative elements that can be tailored to the needs of the program, e.g., achievements and underlying success factors, challenges, and areas for improvement, what's working for whom, in what circumstances and why, unexpected outcomes, lessons learned, growth and insight, etc.

Secondary Consultations (SC):

Secondary consultations are where a lawyer gives one-to-one information or advice in a timely and approachable way to 'trusted intermediaries' likely to have contact with vulnerable and disadvantaged clients. It is an effective way of reaching clients who would otherwise not gain help or advice. The premise is that legal secondary consultations build capacity and confidence in professionals to identify legal issues so they either support a client or, where appropriate, refer clients who would otherwise not get help because of a range of inhibitors. Legal secondary consultations enable people to identify legal issues which, if unidentified or unresolved, can impact significantly on their lives (Curran 2017, 2020).

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) System

The SEND system supports children and young people with additional needs throughout their education.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They are a call to action and targets to end poverty and inequality. Social goals 1 (poverty), 3 (health and wellbeing), 10 (inequality), 16 (justice & strong institutions), and 17 (partnerships) are relevant to this study and are underpinned by the SDH.

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Trusted Intermediary Staff (TI)

Frontline workers who help and support clients and act as intermediaries to help them gain legal help with legal problems to help clients holistically, so they improve their social, economic, and wellbeing outcomes. Agencies in the charity sector that offer clients non-legal support (such as counsellors, doctors, nurses, support at court, social welfare, financial advisers, etc) and/or that refer cases to NLS Legal and/or that NLS Legal works with on client matters.

The social determinants of health (SDH)

The social determinants of health (SDH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies, and political systems. It can include these aspects or a combination of them: Income and social protection, education, unemployment, and job insecurity, working life conditions, food insecurity, housing, basic amenities and the environment, early childhood development, social inclusion, and non-discrimination, structural conflict, access to affordable health services of decent quality.²

² World Health Organisation, "Social determinants of health" <<https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab 1>> accessed 23 February 2024.

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PART ONE

1. Background

1.1 Research Aims and Scope

This Research and Impact Evaluation (RIE) explores the impact and effectiveness of NLS Legal on students, staff who work with and for NLS Legal, and the firm's client lives and client contexts. It focuses on NLS Legal's impact on the educational impact on students, its direct service delivery (including public legal education as well as information, advice, casework, and representation), access to justice and policy work. The research commenced with the ethics application in November 2022. Data collection occurred from March 2023 through to 31 August 2023. Data analysis, draft reports and finalisation of this report between August 2023 – December 2024.

Key research questions include:

1. Does NLS Legal play a role in improving NLS students' skills, employability and awareness and commitment to access to justice?
2. Does NLS Legal positively impact the development of its junior staff (some of whom are students)?
3. Does NLS Legal provide quality service to its clients?
4. Is NLS Legal effective in delivering legal services to clients, and why or why not?
5. Does NLS Legal's work have a positive impact on clients' lives? If so, how? If not, how might this be improved? This includes enhancing not only justice outcomes but also the flow-on effects on clients' social determinants of health (e.g., safety, housing, income).
6. Does the strategic casework, policy, and law reform work of NLS Legal have a role in shaping improvements in laws, policies, and their administration over time?

In line with the NTU's Strategic Plan, this report explores NLS Legal's impact on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), poverty (SDG 1), good health and wellbeing (SDG 3) inequality (SDG 10), collaboration (SDG 17) justice, and strong institutions - i.e. Includes access to justice (SDG 16). It will inform future strategic and operational decisions of management.

The broader intent of this project for the public interest, is to unpack complexity and provide a narrative about what the change looks like, how it occurred, when it occurred, and what elements were critical in achieving this outcome.

1.2 Structure of this Report

This Report is divided into five parts. This part (Part One) provides a background explaining the unique role of NLS Legal as the UK's only regulated law firm operating out of a

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university. While primarily existing for the benefit of students, the firm provides a vital service to its clients and the community. This opening section explains how NLS Legal, as a teaching law firm, differs from other clinical legal education programmes. It identifies key commonalities in philosophy in clinical legal education which advance students' practical skills, competencies, and awareness of access to justice issues.

Part Two of this report examines the development of the research, research questions, methodology used, data collection, participants, and ethics process which is participatory action research, underpinned by a reflective practice framework. This was co-designed by the researcher, Curran, and the NLS Legal team. This approach ensures that the research is relevant, practical, and useful. Most importantly, it also enables key concepts were understood in the project design and to reduce additional burdens on NLS Legal with its primary aims to deliver legal services to clients and to provide opportunities for NLS students.

Part Three provides the reader with detailed data including extracts from notes and direct quotes from the interviews, professional journals, surveys, and other data collection modes.

Part Four provides case studies elicited from the professional journals of the lawyers and interviews with participants. These have been provided to give an idea of some of the complexities that sit behind the clients of the law firm's contexts, some of the challenges of the work and how people experience the justice system. They also reflect the interventions of NLS Legal and how these affected clients including the value of having the support and legal expertise of NLS Legal. It is important to note that in the questioning of participants both benefits and detriments of the involvement of NLS Legal were sought to ensure balance.

Part Five of the report includes the findings and conclusions. These include a small number of achievable recommendations not only for NLS Legal but also in the broader context of access to justice in the United Kingdom. It is important to note that considerable data was collected for this study but not all of it is contained within the report. The findings and conclusions as well as the data extracted a representative of significant themes that were consistent across all the data collection methods.

1.3 About NLS Legal

NLS Legal (formerly Nottingham Law School Legal Advice Centre), is currently the sole fully regulated teaching law firm in the UK. It is an exempt charity and an Alternative Business Structure (ABS) and is fully integrated into a law school in England, namely Nottingham Law School (NLS) and wholly owned by Nottingham Trent University (NTU). As a regulated law firm and licensed ABS, it carries out 'reserved legal activities.' It provides on-site legal assistance on the NLS campus in the Chaucer building at NTU's City campus.³ As a

³ Jenny Chapman and Jane Ching, "The impact of alternative business structures on legal education in law firms and law schools in the United Kingdom" in Terri Motorshead (ed), *Innovating talent management in law firms* (National Association for Law Placement 2010), 133-169.

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'teaching law firm' it provides NLS students with opportunities to learn and develop skills and exposure to access to justice work. The charity's objectives as defined by the Articles of Association are:

For the public benefit, the advancement of education, in particular by providing opportunities for students at NTU to:

- Be involved in the practice of law as part of their overall student experience, their studies, and their preparation for employment; and
- Engage with the local community of Nottingham and the wider region by means of the provision of legal advice and legal services.

It operates on a not-for-profit basis.

As a regulated law firm, NLS Legal, is required to abide by the high professional and ethical standards as set out by the SRA's Standards and Regulations. Their regulated status allows them to carry out "reserved legal activities"⁴ which enables the firm to undertake litigation work and exercise rights of audience (the right to appear before and address a court, including the right to call and examine witnesses⁵). This has allowed NLS Legal to offer a broad range of services to their clients and to offer their student volunteers a greater breadth of experience and was a decision, in part driven, by the nature of work experience that students were seeking. Working within a law firm also ensures that law students are provided with early insight into professional and ethical conduct within a regulated environment. The regulated status of NLS Legal also affords its clients a greater level of protection by requiring certain information to be provided, certain processes to be in place, and to ensure that the firm has insurance in place that meets the SRA's minimum terms and conditions.

Traditionally, university pro bono clinics are led by academic staff, increasingly former practitioners, and are delivered alongside the academics' teaching and/or research commitments. They often run term time only and may limit their offering to initial or one-off advice and may be more generalist in nature. NLS Legal's law firm model, offers full representation, including representation at court or tribunal. Many of the cases are complex and the advice is specialist in nature. Solicitors and other staff, both legal and administrative staff, are employed solely for the purposes of operating the law firm and their roles are dedicated to supervising cases and students and in meeting regulatory requirements. To discharge its regulatory obligations to its clients, including managing hearings and other deadlines, NLS Legal is operational all year round and offers student work opportunities both in and outside of term time.

NLS Legal involve the students in all aspects of the firm, from administrative and business support, such as dealing with new enquiries, onboarding clients and monitoring risk and compliance, through to case work such as research, client interviewing, legal drafting, and representing clients at tribunals. This provides students with a deeply immersive and authentic experience and grants them access to the type of work and environment that they

⁴ Legal Services Act 2007, Section 12 [Legal Services Act 2007 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/27/section/12)

⁵ Legal Services Act 2007 Sch 2 para 3(1) [Legal Services Act 2007 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/27/schedule/2/paragraph/3)

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aspire to work in post-study (see section 3.3 of this report). The breadth of services offered by NLS Legal allows students to experience areas of law that are not traditionally covered and in areas where there is an acute shortage of solicitors causing and problems with retention, recruitment and finding supervisors.⁶

NLS Legal is owned and funded by NTU which covers staff costs, premises, and equipment. NLS Legal also receives some external private donation funding which is used to help support the development of new areas or projects. It uses the Clio (brand name) case management software, which is provided by Clio for free to support its pro bono work. It has some private donors. Its structure has enabled it for many years to address unmet legal need and to provide litigation and other legal support to some of Nottinghamshire's communities most in need. For example, those whose children have special needs having their claims for special education reviewed.

The Legal Services Act 2007 enables entities, which includes non-lawyer owners or managers, to enter the legal service market in England and Wales.⁷ Australia (more specifically, New South Wales) was the first jurisdiction to undertake this law firm arrangement after a competition policy review.⁸ NLS Legal is required to meet certain expectations around service delivery, and professional ethics standards with a fundamental obligation to clients. This distinguishes it from other clinical legal education programs. NLS Legal is regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority in England and Wales.⁹

Notably, NLS Legal is distinguishable from other regulated law firms dealing with social justice issues in that it does not receive legal aid funding through the Legal Aid Agency (LAA), which oversees and regulates Legal Aid contracts 'sponsored' by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).¹⁰ The Legal Aid Agency allows only certain kinds of work funded by the government. This limitation can mean that the work set out by the terms of its contracts with legal aid often constrains the areas of work that law firms can undertake and for which they can receive funding.

Research has indicated that people experiencing disadvantage can have between 5-10 legal problems which are complex, often cascading and can easily become entrenched.¹¹ As

⁶ Frontier Economics, 'Research on the Sustainability of Civil Legal Aid: Final Report' (Law Society of England and Wales 2024) <<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/civil-legal-aid-sustainability>> accessed 22 August 2024, 6 and 26.

⁷ Jayne R Reardon, "Alternative Business Structures: Good for the Public, Good for the Lawyers" (2016) 7 St Mary's Journal on Legal Malpractice & Ethics 304.

⁸ Tahlia Gordon and Steve Mark, "The Australian Experiment: Out with the Old, in with the Bold" in Paul A. Haskins (ed), *The Relevant Lawyer Reimagining the Future of the Legal Profession*, (2015, The American Bar Association, United States), 185, 188.

⁹ Other jurisdictions, such as Scotland and Northern Ireland, have different regulations, but this is not relevant to this report.

¹⁰ Legal Aid Agency, "Legal Aid Agency" <<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/legal-aid-agency>> accessed 23 February 2024.

¹¹ Pascoe Pleasence and others, "Public Understanding of Law Survey: Everyday Problems and Legal Need" [2023] <<https://victorialawfoundation.org.au/research/research-reports/the-public-legal-need>>

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noted in the access to justice literature referenced in this report and in Section 1.8 ‘Legal and Policy Context’, all legal providers are under pressure to improve access to justice but as the studies evidence, with constraints imposed by resourcing and changes in policy and staffing as also noted in these studies.

It is acknowledged that much of the pro-bono sector, including NLS Legal, generally seeks to address (sometimes vulnerable) clients’ unmet legal needs. Whilst the provision of a pro bono service is not a substitute for a properly funded justice system, it plays a vital role in addressing the access to justice gap. Although this report focuses on NLS Legal, we wish to acknowledge the important pro bono work undertaken by universities across the country, who are providing a service that people would otherwise be deprived of.

Whatever the pro bono model and type of work undertaken, the pro bono sector plays a critical role in supporting access to justice in a vastly underfunded justice system. Indeed, there is a significant contribution in the legal assistance sector in the Nottinghamshire area from pro bono offered by private law firms, barristers, charities, and law centres. This report and the research underpinning it however examines the work of NLS Legal specifically whilst from time to time it may discuss implications in the broader legal landscape.¹²

understanding-of-law-survey-puls-volume-1>, Pascoe Pleasence and others, “Multiple justiciable problems: common clusters and their social and demographic indicators” (2004) 1(2) *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 301, Pascoe Pleasence and others, “Mounting problems: Further evidence of the social, economic and health consequences of civil justice problems” in Pascoe Pleasence, Alexy Buck, and Nigel Balmer (eds), *Transforming Lives: Law and Social Process* (Stationary Office 2007), Pascoe Pleasence, Nigel J Balmer, and Tania Tam, “Failure to recall: Indications from the English and Welsh civil and social justice survey of the relative severity and incidence of civil justice problems” in *Access to Justice* (Emerald Group Publishing Limited 2009) vol 12, and C Coumarelos and others, “Access to Justice and Legal Needs Legal Australia-Wide survey: legal need in Australia” (New South Wales Law and Justice Foundation, 2012) <[https://web.archive.org/web/20240114103225/https://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/site/templates/LAW_AUS/\\$file/LAW_Survey_Australia.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20240114103225/https://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/site/templates/LAW_AUS/$file/LAW_Survey_Australia.pdf)>.

¹² Competition and Markets Authority, *Review of the legal services market study in England and Wales* (Competition and Markets Authority, 2020) ; National Audit Office, ‘Government’s Management of Legal Aid - NAO Report’ (Ministry of Justice, 2024) <<https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/governments-management-of-legal-aid/>> accessed 9 February 2024.; Jo Wilding, ‘No Access To Justice: How Legal Advice Deserts Fail Refugees, Migrants And Our Communities’ (Refugee Action, Community Justice Fund, Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2022) <<https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/no-access-to-justice-how-legal-advice-deserts-fail-refugees-migrants-and-our-communities/>> accessed 7 February 2024; Legal Services Board, ‘Segmentation of People Using Legal Services’ (Legal Services Board 2022) <<https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/research/segmentation-of-people-using-legal-services>> accessed 27 February 2024; Amnesty International, *Cuts that Hurt: The impact of legal aid cuts in England on access to justice*, (Amnesty International UK, 2016) <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/aiuk_legal_aid_report.pdf?VersionId=891MnCc87uY9_XjZOFStfBZYYRuljpn> accessed 26 February 2024; Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel Balmer, ‘Legal needs surveys and access to justice’ (OECD, 2018) <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10065865/8/Balmer_Legal%20Needs%20Surveys%20and%20Access%20to%20Justice_report_VoR.pdf> accessed 26 February 2024; Roger Smith, ‘Digital Delivery of Legal Services to People on Low Incomes.’ (The Legal Education Foundation, December 2017) <<https://thelegaleducationfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Digital-Technology-Winter-2017.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2024; YouGov, ‘Legal Needs of Individuals in England and Wales

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1.4 Areas of Work

NLS Legal offers the following service areas: civil litigation, criminal, employment, family, housing, intellectual property, special educational needs, and disability (SEND), and welfare benefits.¹³

Opportunities for students include supporting the firm's administration and compliance, and tribunal advocacy, client and casework and public legal education. In addition, students have the chance to get involved in Employer Challenges, integrate into the LLB and LLM students' course curriculum, pursue virtual internships, secure placements, and explore graduate internships.

NLS Legal recovered £995,240 in compensation, settlements, and benefits for clients in 2021-2022, bringing NLS Legal's cumulative total to £5.5 million and after data analysis for this report was concluded in the year 2022-2023 £6,230,262.¹⁴ This data is detailed in this report in section 3.2.2.5 entitled 'Financial Awards'.

NLS Legal's strategic aims (which have also informed the evaluation tools used in this research) are to:

- Provide students with legal work experience opportunities to enable them to develop vital practical skills. Those include raising awareness of access to justice issues and how the practice of law differs from the theory. NLS Legal aims to improve student's attainment and employability and promote increased equality and diversity in the legal profession.

Summary Report 2019/20' (*Law Society of England and Wales; Legal Services Board, 2020*) <<https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Legal-Needs-of-Individuals-Summary-Report-Final-January-2020.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2024; J Zhao and others, 'Scoping the future law and social justice: listening & hearing from the frontline' (*AHRC, 2023*) <<https://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/49438/>> accessed 26 February 2024. Zubaida Haque, 'Gender gaps in access to civil legal justice' (*Women's Budget Group, 13 July 2023*) <<https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/reports/gender-gaps-in-accessto-civil-legal-justice/>> accessed 23 February 2024. Leanne Smith and Emma Hitchings, 'Where the wild things are: the challenges and opportunities of the unregulated legal services landscape in family law' (2023) 43(4) *Legal Studies* 658; Law Centres Network, 'Annual Review 2022-2023' (*Law Centres Network, 2023*) <https://assets.ctfassets.net/y26owwfe9yxn/12bmAhK1TRH0UGiFBij4xy/43e4f1c706d883c2ef40c47db288bf21/LCN_Annual_Review_2022-23.pdf> accessed 26 April 2024; Frontier Economics (May 2024) 'Research on the Sustainability of Legal Aid', Law Society England and Wales, <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/civil-legal-aid-sustainability> Accessed 1 August 2024.

¹³ Correct at the time of case specific data was collated. Since October 2023 NLS Legal also offers personal injury via a collaboration with Hodge, Jones and Allen and in 2024 that has been extended contested probate.

¹⁴ NLS Legal, "Legal Aid Agency" (Nottingham Law School) <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/2016658/NLS-Legal_Annual_Report_2021.pdf> accessed 23 February 2024, 18.

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- Improve access to justice and address unmet legal need in the local community through high quality service and highly innovative model.

1.5 The Staff

The staff team includes the Head of NLS Legal, supervising managing solicitors, lawyers as caseworkers, paralegals, legal assistants, a practice manager, and administrative support. All NLS Legal volunteers are NLS students.

It is also supported by NTU finance, marketing, DT and NTU Governance and Legal Services. The NLS Executive Dean serves as COLP (Compliance Officer for Legal Practice) with other NTU staff in finance as the Compliance Officer for Financial Administration). Laura Pinkney, Head of NLS Legal, the Executive Dean, and other NTU staff are directors. Some academics are involved in NLS Legal. It enhances and informs their teaching. Their involvement also helps academic staff stay up to date with changing developments in practice.

1.6 Clinical Legal Education in the United Kingdom: context and environment

NLS Legal stands out uniquely as the sole fully regulated law firm within the higher education section. Nevertheless, an understanding of clinical legal education as a pedagogy remains relevant, providing a context for much of the student learning and their supervision as volunteers at NLS Legal.

Curran has defined *clinical legal education* (CLE) as involving:

*students, as part of the law degree... involved in practical legal skills development. It generally includes learning outcomes beyond merely skills attainment to include critical thinking and a greater awareness of the role of lawyers in society and legal professional conduct... Student supervision is required by a qualified solicitor who holds a practising certificate. The most typical clinical legal education programs... can include the provision of legal information, advice, representation, the preparation of legal documentation, community legal education, or community development and engagement in law reform activity.*¹⁵

In the UK the first CLE clinic was launched in 1970 based on models elsewhere including South Africa, Chile, India, Zimbabwe, the United States, and Australia.¹⁶ The number of CLE clinics has increased significantly in number in the UK in the past decade. This has been largely fuelled by the changing legal policy settings in the UK.

¹⁵ Liz Curran, *Better law for a better world: New approaches to law practice and education* (Routledge 2021), xiii.

¹⁶ Jeff Giddings, "Contemplating the future of clinical legal education" (2008) 17(1) *Griffith Law Review* 1, 1 – 26.

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The 2013 *Legal Education and Training Review* (LETR) is one of many elements that has led to significant changes in solicitor and barrister qualification routes in England¹⁷ and Wales.¹⁸

The regulatory environment includes the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). There is a recently introduced Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) enabling some *qualifying work experience* (QWE) to be carried out in clinics namely: *any experience of providing legal services that offers a candidate the opportunity to develop some or all the competencies needed to practice as a solicitor*. It includes *experience of providing legal services which enables an individual to develop some or all of the competencies outlined in the Statement of Solicitor Competence, including professionalism and ethics needed to practice as a solicitor*.¹⁹ The *Statement of Solicitor Competence* consists of three parts (a *Statement of Solicitor Competence*, the *Threshold Standard*, and a *Statement of Legal Knowledge*). The competence statement defines the continuing competencies required of all solicitors in England and Wales.²⁰ Some of these were used as a guide in developing the online student/alumni survey (see discussion below).

The Clinical Legal Education Organisation (CLEO) provides legal clinicians in the UK with advice, support, guidance, and expertise and is a not-for-profit charitable agency seeking to address unmet legal need and improve access to justice. It aims to also improve best practices and publishes a Handbook. Clinical legal education programs have become increasingly popular with students in the UK. The challenge is that this can increase demands for students. Clear aims for undertaking clinics for educational and qualifying needs of students need to be recalibrated especially where there are 'live' clinics and clients' needs must be met.²¹ Balancing these two imperatives can present challenges in supervision where students²². NLS Legal is a member of CLEO whilst the operating frameworks may differ it offers a range of useful resources and a network for discussions about student learning and supervision.

The Law School Pro Bono and Clinic Report, 2020 (Law Works & CLEO) provides findings from two online surveys carried out by Law Works into pro bono activity and trends in law schools. In its periodic surveys undertaken across the UK. 75% of respondent law schools said that their pro bono offerings included generalist advice and/or generalist advice with

¹⁷ For the purposes of this research, it is not critical to go into detail about the differentiations between the different devolved regulatory frameworks and those in England.

¹⁸ Jane Ching and others, "Legal Education and Training Review: a five-year retro/prospective" (2018) 52(4) *The Law Teacher* 384.

¹⁹ Solicitors Regulation Authority, "Statement of solicitor competence" (Solicitors Regulation Authority, 9 August 2022) <<https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/cpd/competence-statement/>> accessed 23 February 2024.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Liz Curran, Judith Dickson, and Mary Anne Noone, "Pushing the boundaries or preserving the status quo? Designing clinical programs to teach law students a deep understanding of ethical practice" (2005) 8 *Int'l J. Clinical Legal Educ.* 104.

²² Adrian Evans and others, *Australian Clinical Legal Education: Designing and operating a best practice clinical program in an Australian law school* (ANU Press 2017).

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casework; 68% said that they ran 'Street-Law'/public legal education projects. In the most recent survey in 2020, responses were received from institutions based in London (15% of responses) and the Northwest (15% of responses), followed by the West Midlands and the South-East, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (15% responses). Of note, the 2020 report found in the staff survey, educational value and employability ranked as very important for around 90% of respondents but 71% also ranked social justice as very important. In the student survey, the responses that scored highest were about improving and enhancing legal knowledge and skills and helping others rather than about getting a job.

1.7 Distinguishing Features and Challenges

NLS Legal differs significantly from UK university law clinics as it is a regulated law firm. It offers law students opportunities to be involved and develop skills and awareness of access to justice. NLS Legal (formerly Nottingham Law School Legal Advice Centre (LAC)), seeks to reach the most marginalised groups of people and those ordinarily hard to reach by providing access to justice to those who cannot afford legal services or otherwise access legal services via legal aid or other sources. There are some key distinctions between the law firm and the law clinic model.

NLS Legal's model requires significant investment and proactive and intensive risk and compliance management. As one participant notes:

We robustly assessed the benefits to our students and community and concluded that, with the appropriate infrastructure, staff, and supervision in place, it was a risk worth taking. We feel strongly that we have a sustainable model that allows us to commit to the law firm long-term and, for us, it encapsulates our law school's commitment to vocational training and access to justice. It also allows us to remove the barriers that many of our students face when trying to secure legal work experience, this is something that we hope will help to improve diversity in the legal profession. (Interview with Manager).

CLEO/LawWorks guidance does not always apply to NLS Legal due to the regulated status of NLS Legal. This means that NLS Legal has considerations that are different to that of law clinics. As a regulated law firm, NLS Legal has a heightened regulatory status with its obligation to its clients. This combines with its dual aim, given its university setting, to offer educational and practice experience for NLS students. In addition to offering extra-curricular opportunities, NLS Legal also offers intra-curricular opportunities, allowing students to undertake work experience with NLS Legal as part of their course or module.

Ching & Henderson note:

... where the experience is very short, very constrained, or very junior, opportunities to acquire or develop competence in even these may be depressed. Vacation

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schemes appear to be too short and too constrained to allow for very much more than informed career choice and to be part of a firm's recruitment processes.²³

NLS Legal provides law students with practical experience and as noted, does take student volunteers through term breaks, which is rare in clinical legal education settings. Data has been gathered for this report which explains the numbers, years and types of students and their experiences as they engage with the NLS Legal (See Part 2).

In 2020-2021,²⁴ NLS Legal dealt with 150 client matters across eight different service areas, with a trade mark attorney supporting an additional 12 people via the Chartered Institute of Trade Mark Attorneys' (CITMA) free Intellectual Property (IP) advice clinic service. It provided public legal education webinars to over 200 individuals and organisations on topics including employment, welfare benefits and special educational needs and disability. The report notes that due to limitations around capacity and specialisms, NLS Legal was only able to accept 12% of enquiries received. NLS Legal received over 1300 enquiries in 20-21, a significant increase of 23% from the previous year. To address this, NLS Legal provided signposting information to all of those it could not assist, providing 'warm referrals' wherever possible. After data analysis for this report was concluded in the year 2022-2023 there were 1491 enquiries: 362 matters and 292 different clients. Again, this reflects a continued trend of the increase in clients and matters that NLS Legal is fielding. This study references the data from 2020-2021 as this was contemporaneous to this study's data collection and its analysis.

Managing this public demand is a continuous need, and as such NLS Legal has developed signposting, referral pathways, and the provision of legal information and its assessment and triage. This material was provided to the author as part of the data considered. It is important to note that NLS Legal is a university supported initiative, rather than one funded by traditional legal aid pathways that exist for other services through funding such as the Ministry of Justice or the Legal Aid Agency. It is not a substitute for properly funded legal assistance services.

These steps of signposting and in assessing and triage in client cases helps ensure that the service is being taken up by the people most in need who cannot afford legal advice. The data in this report discussed in Part Two reveals that NLS Legal is achieving by filtering out people who can go elsewhere. The impacts of this and the experience of clients through the service formed part of this research.

1.8 Legal and Policy Context

²³ Jane Ching, Pre-qualification work experience in professional legal education: literature review (Nottingham Trent University 2016), 9.

²⁴ NLS Legal (n 7), 18.

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Existing research reveals that legal problems have a detrimental impact on the health, safety, and well-being of many children and young people experiencing disadvantage, who recent research identifies as currently having difficulty accessing a lawyer. Disadvantaged people only consult lawyers for about 16% of their legal problems.²⁵

The passage of the *Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders* (LASPO) Act in 2014 has placed significant stress on legal aid agencies as sources of publicly funded free legal advice have been significantly reduced.²⁶ This reduction is a further stage in a series of statutory reductions in the scope of legal aid over a period of years. LawWorks notes '*Cuts to legal aid, reduced funding for law centres and local advice services, and the introduction of tribunal and court fees have significantly reduced the ability of many to access legal advice and representation.*'²⁷ Since 2013, cuts to civil legal aid providers across the UK have led to siloed, fragmented, reduced, and inadequate services and advice. Austerity reduces opportunities for human-centred responses, addressing causes of inequality and systemic drivers. Legal expertise required for inroads into systemic causes of inequality is missed. Problems are compounded by poverty and worsened for certain disadvantaged groups.²⁸

NLS Legal offers representation and specialist advice that is not generally available in the UK²⁹ (subject to capacity) due to the unique model where NLS employs lawyers and staff to work solely in NLS Legal. Additionally, academic practitioner staff enhance the service. The distinction is that NLS Legal, through its resources of funding from the university and its volunteer student base and non-legal aid funding, has been able to offer holistic and responsive services to its clients according to the overall data emerging in this research.

There is now an emerging body of international research that emphasises the significance of the signposting approach employed by NLS Legal, particularly through secondary

²⁵ Coumarelos and others (n 6). PT Pleasence and Nigel Balmer, *Legal needs surveys and access to justice* (OECD 2018) <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10065865/8/Balmer_Legal%20Needs%20Surveys%20and%20Access%20to%20Justice_report_VoR.pdf> accessed 23 February 2024. Pleasence, Balmer, and Tam (n 6), 43–65.

²⁶ Frontier Economics, 'Research on the Sustainability of Civil Legal Aid: Final Report' (Law Society of England and Wales 2024) <<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/civil-legal-aid-sustainability>> accessed 22 August 2024, 6.

²⁷ LawWorks, "LawWorks Clinics Network Report - April 2014 - March 2015" (LawWorks, 10 November 2015) <<https://www.lawworks.org.uk/sites/default/files/LawWorks%20Clinic%20Network%20Report%202014-15.pdf>> accessed 23 February 2024.

²⁸ Zubaida Haque, "Gender gaps in access to civil legal justice" (Women's Budget Group, 13 July 2023) <<https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/reports/gender-gaps-in-access-to-civil-legal-justice/>> accessed 23 February 2024. Hilary Sommerlad and Peter Sanderson, "Social justice on the margins: The future of the not-for-profit sector as providers of legal advice in England and Wales" (2013) 35(3) *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 305. Hilary Sommerlad, "Some reflections on the relationship between citizenship, access to justice, and the reform of legal aid" (2004) 31(3) *Journal of Law and Society* 345.

²⁹ Frontier Economics, 'Research on the Sustainability of Civil Legal Aid: Final Report' (Law Society of England and Wales 2024) <<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/civil-legal-aid-sustainability>> accessed 22 August 2024.

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consultations.³⁰ This method is not only crucial in helping clients access assistance but also provides clients who may not seek legal support with essential information to navigate legal processes through their trusted intermediaries. Trusted intermediaries are frontline workers who help and support clients and act as intermediaries to help them gain legal help with legal problems to help clients holistically, so they improve their social, economic, and wellbeing outcomes (see Definitions). Additionally, it is recognized as valuable on-the-spot training, especially by resource-strapped organizations.

³⁰ Above note 16 196-201.

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PART TWO

2. Methodology (Including Ethics)

2.1 Methodological Approach

Curran (the author) uses a participatory action research continuous learning, development, reflection, and improvement model involving relevant parties in both co-design (informed by research), and regular debriefs and feedback on progress and developments. A critical element in this Research and Impact Evaluation is its collaborative, participatory and co-designed approach. This means it was not designed by Curran alone. Rather, discussions about what the research questions should be, what approach was best, what sorts of methods to extract data (**tools**) Curran should use, how many and how often. Staff also examined and provided feedback on the Research and Impact Evaluation Framework, they made edits and suggestions for additions of other tools and questions and provided a suggested list of external referral agencies that could be interviewed.

This co-designed and participatory approach gives a sense of ownership of the research (important for engaging participants) and facilitates a growth mindset with findings shaping and informing future good practice.³¹ It also helps NLS Legal to shape and inform future practices and recalibrations. The research and evaluation include quantitative and qualitative indicators of the impact of NLS Legal including whether its service is tailored to the nature of the clients, students, staff and stakeholders using multiple tools such as professional journals kept by lawyers, surveys with students and clients, interviews with supervising lawyers, managers and 'trusted intermediaries' and referring agencies. By using multiple tools, these can be cross referenced to test and verify data from other tools. This reduces bias and enables rigor in drawing conclusions. It also enables comparisons between different people's experiences.

Factors considered in the development of the tools include:

- The need for a low burden on staff, given existing caseloads and commitments and the stretch of community service agencies.
- How to engage the client group best and safely through survey and/or interview.
- How the project might obtain valuable input from the staff, students, and client group of their experience of NLS Legal.
- Acknowledging the importance of client voice, and a need for second hand accounts from staff to gain insights about clients who it would not be appropriate to interview/survey directly, so deep insight into client experience and complexities of their situations can be uncovered.

³¹ Liz Curran and Pamela Taylor-Barnett, "Evaluating projects in multifaceted and marginalised communities: The need for mixed approaches" (2019) 19(1) Evaluation Journal of Australasia 22.

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In this Research and Impact Evaluation (RIE), Dr Curran examines the extent of reach, improvements in engagement, capacity, capability, confidence, collaboration, empowerment, and impacts on social determinants of health (including stress, hope, and anxiety levels). A key focus is on determining whether engagement with NLS Legal has resulted in enhanced decision-making for individuals, communities, students, and partner organizations.³²

2.2 The Research Framework and Evaluation Program Logic

In impact evaluation, a Programme Logic is often used in evaluation to enable transparency and provide a framework for operation. It sets out what a project will do and how it will do it. In research terms it is like the 'methodology'. A programme logic outlines in advance of an evaluation the thinking, planning, and implementation tools for the evaluation along with the strategy, approach and, in this case, the method to examine impacts on social, justice, economic, and political development. This includes identifying the problem or objectives sought to be achieved by the service being examined. It examines short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes. It includes identifying external influencing factors and unpacking underlying assumptions. Additionally, it identifies program indicators of impact or effectiveness unpacking how a program is intended to work by linking activities with outputs, intermediate impacts, and longer-term outcomes.³³

In this RIE, it is recognised that multiple facts and activities and the contexts in peoples' lives can also have a bearing on outcomes that can be influenced by factors outside the service's control. For example, funding, availability of complimentary service supports, poverty, or poor experiences of the law or legal system. To address this it examines resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes. This is reflected in the research questions (above), tools, data, and the way it is analysed as discussed below.

Uniquely, in this study, the interventions of NLS Legal in supporting clients and their experience are examined. Accordingly, it is critical that clients were participants in the research, with primary data collected by Curran and secondary data collected by NLS Legal. This data is gathered to understand the difficulties, complexities, and experience of the legal system, including the legal aid landscape. The qualitative data in interviews and the professional reflective journals discussed below are key in this exposition. No clients with an ongoing case were studied, as clients whose cases were ongoing might be under the impression that their willingness to participate in this research was in some way connected or might affect the level of service in relation to their cases. For this reason, clients were targeted who had closed files (i.e. their legal matter had concluded) rather than focusing on clients who might have a momentary or fleeting advice session or information request. This reflects that this is a RIE, and that impacts often only occur over time.

³² Ibid.

³³ Better Evaluation, "Rainbow Framework" (Better Evaluation) <<https://www.betterevaluation.org/frameworks-guides/rainbow-framework>> accessed 23 February 2024.

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Curran is accustomed to the conduct of legal practice, research arrangements, and is a qualified solicitor (non-practicing) herself, as well as an expert in legal professional ethics, these aspects, alongside NLS Legal, provide additional safeguards to protect client professional privilege.

Diagrams A and B (below) are from evaluation sources and informed and shaped this study. The overarching goal (NLS Legal’s effectiveness and its positive impacts on clients, staff, and students) is examined by looking at a set of desired results which contribute causally to the goal here described as elements or **benchmarks**).

Diagram A

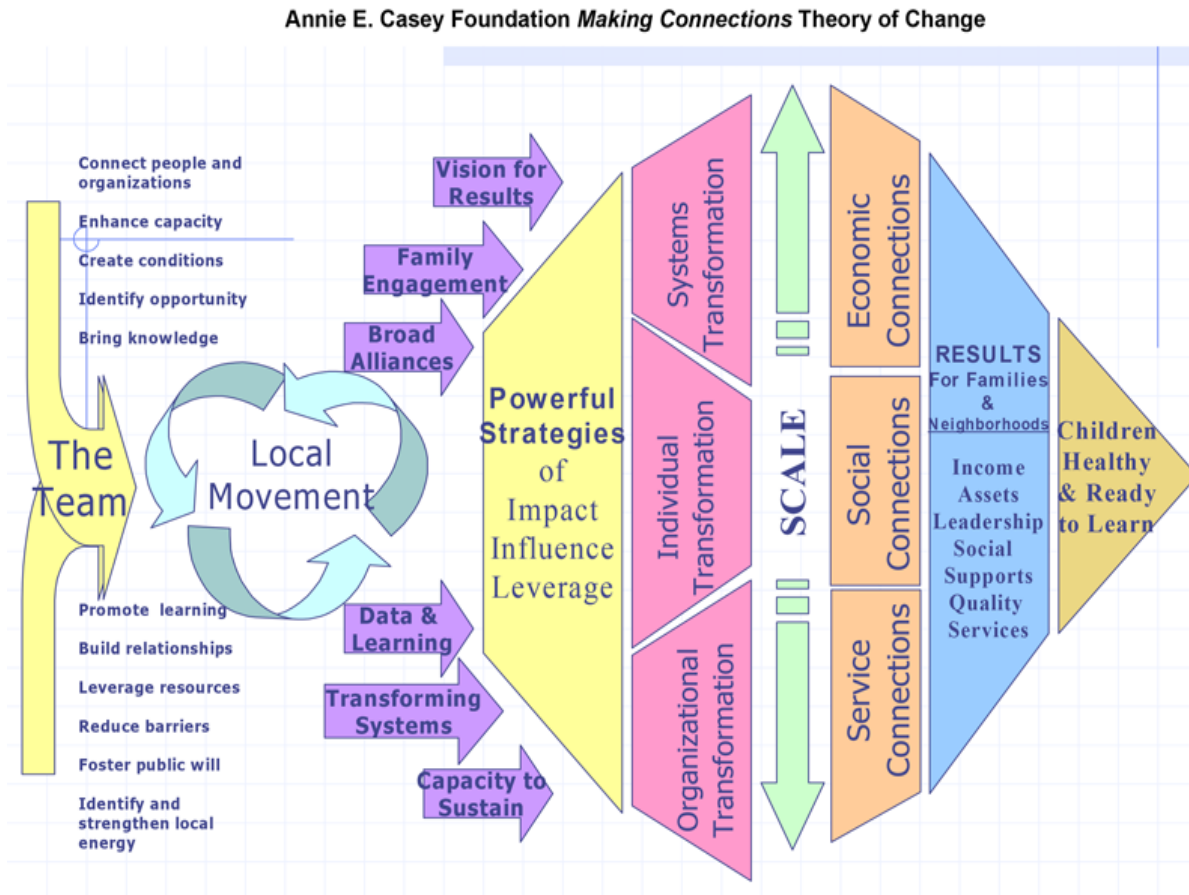
From *Better Evaluation*³⁴.



³⁴ Anne Kazimirski and David Pritchard, "Building Your Measurement Framework: NPC’s Four Pillar Approach" (NPC 2014) <<https://www.betterevaluation.org/tools-resources/npcs-approach-developing-impact-measurement-framework>> accessed 23 February 2024.

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Diagram B³⁵



In line with this guidance around outcomes in evaluation, the study includes experiences from those agencies beyond law centres who refer and utilise the services of NLS Legal. This includes clients, students, trusted intermediaries, and referring agencies (see Diagram A above). This reflects the research that people's legal problems come within a context of other problems and socio-economic and cultural factors.

The study also looks to NLS Legal's role in transformation, learning, and its local connections and its role in the health and well-being of its clients, rather than just looking at a narrow view of justice outcomes (See Diagram B above). This and the NLS Legal's

³⁵ Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Developing A Theory of Change: Practical Theory of Change Guidance, Templates and Examples" (2022) <<https://www.aecf.org/resources/theory-of-change>> accessed 23 February 2024.

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strategic aims (discussed above) form the Theory of Change that this study examines and NLS Legals' progress indicated towards these objectives.

Key benchmarks are the elements determined by the author (based on previous research and the literature) as preconditions to measure service impact and effectiveness. These benchmarks have been established to use as measures for impact and effectiveness in advance of the study that the data can be compared against. Indicators identify things that, if evidenced in the data, suggest whether the benchmarks are being met. The benchmarks and indicators used are those which, Curran, has developed and tested in previous research. They are utilised in the study to measure NLS Legal's effectiveness and impact, relationships, reducing barriers, leveraging necessary change, empowering, and strengthening agency and autonomy for clients, and student skills and competency through exposure as volunteers at NLS Legal. In addition, in line with the participatory nature of this research, views were sought from NLS Legal on their appropriateness and any further refinements specific to this service.

2.3 Targets – Threshold for Success

Diagram C below represents a simple diagrammatic explanation of the key benchmarks measured in this study.

Diagram C © Dr Liz Curran



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The key elements/benchmarks in more detail than the diagram above are:

- Reach – to students of NTU, to clients who would otherwise not be able to gain legal support or who are excluded – this can include through ‘legal secondary consultations’³⁶ where ‘trusted intermediaries’ are enabled to provide information to community members by being skilled up by NLS Legal, reaching clients who might not be able to see the lawyers.
- Engagement – clients, local community, agencies, legal profession, students, local authorities, etc.
- Capability – Public Legal Education research indicates that mere legal knowledge is not enough and that the capacity, capability, confidence, and ability to take the next steps or act are all critical. This enables people's ability to avail themselves of legal protections, rights and understanding of responsibilities.³⁷ This includes improving NLS student capability, competency, professionalism and skills.
- Collaboration – This term encapsulates trusted intermediaries, partners, students, and community.
- organisations, the legal fraternity, clients, and academics (collaboration is a part of a trajectory which goes beyond networking and leads to genuine, authentic, and seamless exchange and cooperation).³⁸ Curran’s analysis has used a ‘Collaborative Measurement Tool’ that she has developed in other studies, based on indicators of this trajectory informed by work of Vic Health)
- Empowerment – This includes clients, students, staff at NLS Legal, and relevant referring agencies and trusted intermediaries. Empowerment goes beyond capability and entails not only obtaining information about rights and how to enforce them but also strengthening their own representative organizations, interactions between individuals and the State, or enhancing NLS Legal’s strategies to engage with other actors. It is strengthening the capacity of all people to exercise their rights, either as individuals or as members of a community. It enables communities facing injustice to

³⁶ Liz Curran, “Lawyer Secondary Consultations: improving access to justice: reaching clients otherwise excluded through professional support in a multi-disciplinary practice” (2017) 8 *Journal of Social Inclusion* 1.

³⁷ Amartya Sen, *The idea of justice* (Belknap 2009), Pascoe Pleasence and others, *Public Understanding of Law Survey: Everyday Problems and Legal Need* (Victoria Law Foundation 2023), Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel J Balmer, “Justice & the capability to function in society” (2019) 148(1) *Daedalus* 140, Alexy Buck and Liz Curran, “Delivery of advice to marginalised and vulnerable groups: the need for innovative approaches” (2009) 3 *Public Space: JL & Society Justice* 1, Liz Curran, Alikki Vernon, and Pamela Taylor Barnett (2017) 19(1) *Flinders Law Journal* 37.

³⁸ Mark F Harris, Jenny Advocat, Benjamin F Crabtree, Jean-Frederic Levesque, William L Miller, Jane M Gunn, William Hogg, Cathie M Scott, Sabrina M Chase, Lisa Halma, and Grant M Russell, ‘Inter-professional teamwork innovations for primary health care practices and practitioners: evidence from a comparison of reform in three countries’ (2016) 9 *J Multidiscip Healthc*, 35–46, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4743635/> accessed 28 February 2024.

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use legal mechanisms to pursue transformative improvements to laws and the system.³⁹

Indicators for the Key Benchmarks above

- Holistic service
- Confidence
- Capability
- Impacts on wellbeing and the social determinants of health (including stress, hope, cultural respect, and anxiety levels)
- Changes in practice and behaviours
- Justice and social determinant of health outcomes (also overlapping with the social development goals)
- Enhanced decision-making (at an individual, community, organisational and policy & decision-making levels)
- Autonomy and self-determination
- Enrichment of society
- Diversity and inclusion
- Employability, skills development, and transformation for students
- Transformation
- Access to justice
- Empowerment of people

2.4 Data Collection

Data Gathered from Each of the Tools Used

As part of the methodology, secondary NLS Legal data is used alongside Curran's primary data. This not only provides a range of rich data sources but also allows for the testing of NLS Legal's internal data against Curran's primary data for rigor. Curran kept handwritten, de-identified notes using randomised participant numbers. These numbers were later changed to further deidentify participants. Her notes were later transcribed by her using Microsoft Word's 'dictate' function on a password and security protected NTU computer. Records of participant details were kept in a separate folder and separated from the data in the event of withdrawal in the time frames set out in the Information Sheets and Consent Forms.

³⁹ Aimee Seligstein, "Fund 101: What Is Legal Empowerment?" (The Fund for Global Human Rights, 25 September 2021) <<https://globalhumanrights.org/commentary/fund-101-what-is-legal-empowerment/>> accessed 28 February 2024.

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The data is also examined through looking at recurring themes across different tools collecting data.⁴⁰

Qualitative data collected

Over 200 pages of qualitative data has been extracted from all the tools. In the interests of brevity, only key data is extracted in this report. This data is selected as representative of emerging themes and consistent patterns that were replicated across all the tools.

The extracts below are *not* presented as direct quotes since they derive from the author's notes taken during interviews and reflective practice conversations. Although not verbatim, they are transcribed directly from the researcher's written notes during the conversations. However, there are some short direct quotations that the researcher was able to capture verbatim during the interviews, which have been recorded within quotation marks in her notes.

In this report, the qualitative data has been thematically coded and measured used against benchmarks and indicators (outlined earlier) as proxies for measurement of effectiveness, quality, and impact. Namely, reach, engagement, capability, empowerment, and collaboration. These themes are considered firstly under the key benchmark headings. Other key themes emerging from the data on a recurring and significant in number have been given categories and headings. Pertinent data that is representative of the qualitative data collected across all the tools has been extracted under each of these headings. In addition, suggestions from participants across the tools for improvement of the service and recommendations in terms of policy and broader implications on access to justice have been replicated here only where they were reiterated across the different tools.

In this way, the material that is cited in this report has been selected only because it represents comments that are reflective of the repeat patterns and comments made by different participants representing different cohorts consistent across all participant groups. This cross referencing between the tools for repeated patterns and consistent views or perspectives and experience adds robustness and rigour. Part Three contains the findings, conclusions and recommendations based on this emerging data analysis.

What is important about this research is that it not only asked those who run the service and those directly participating in the service delivery but includes evidence such as students' views of their effectiveness, and external people, specifically clients and trusted intermediaries or networks, who work alongside NLS Legal for their own independent views.

By doing this through primary data, it gives the perspective of those external to the agency alongside the insights of those involved in the operations of NLS legal.

⁴⁰ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic analysis: a practical guide* (1st edn, SAGE Publications Ltd 2022).

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Process in coordinating with NLS Legal

Reflecting the co-design and the need to ensure the approach is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART), an initial set of participatory conversations to shape the project was conducted. The first phase included staff conversations and initial training in reflective practice and guidance on evaluation by Curran for NLS Legal staff.

The following base line data was collected by NLS Legal from the previous academic year to the study. This reflects annual reporting timelines, so as not to unduly increase the burden on NLS Legal:

Secondary Yearly Data Collection: NLS Legal Service Aggregated & Deidentified Data

Secondary data is used in this report alongside Curran's own primary data.

This data was provided to Curran by NLS Legal for analysis as part of this study on 31 August 2023.

- a. Overall annual data
- b. Numbers of clients seen
- c. The nature and number of client matters
- d. Number of cases
- e. Referrals to and from the services
- f. Data at file closure, with clients exploring levels of stress, anxiety, hope, experiences of the service, and any outcomes in their lives because of the legal assistance and support (designed by Dr Curran for a short survey on file closure).
- g. Financial awards
- h. Student volunteers by course
- i. Student volunteers by year of course
- j. Students whose course mandates time in NLS Legal
- k. Diversity breakdown of students' utilisation of the existing NLS Legal Student Survey (deidentification by NLS Legal staff before it came to Dr Curran)
- l. Utilisation of the existing NLS Legal Client Survey (deidentification by NLS Legal staff before it came to Dr Curran)

Primary Data Collected Through the Following Tools by Dr Curran from End March, Then May 2023 - End July 2023

- a. A Reflective Practice Conversation (RPC) with the full paralegal and legal assistants & client service staff
- b. Online Survey with students
- c. Guided Professional Journal for lawyers (annual)
- d. Reflective Practice Conversation (data collection and draft report phase) (managers (including NLS Executive Dean, Director, and Managing Supervising Solicitors)

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- e. A 30-minute in-depth interview with Stakeholders/'Trusted Intermediaries' (i.e., those non-lawyers and other lawyer agencies who support/work with/refer to NLS Legal for example Support Through Court, Improving Lives, etc.).
- f. Collaboration Measurement of Progress Tool (administered by Dr Curran in data analysis)
 - A 30-minute interview with NLS and NLS Legal Managers (Head of NLS Legal and Executive Dean)
 - Interviews with clients
 - Closed File questionnaire by lawyers (deidentified)
 - Case studies emerging from above data.
- g. A culminating final phase of data collection in the Reflective Practice Conversation (RPC) with managers where the full data is considered and reflections occur on the data, its significance and any plan for action/recommendations are identified after dialogue informed by the data. These discussions were confidential in nature to ensure freedom to have robust conversations about the data and its significance.

Participants included:

- Immersed students and alumni in the previous 12-month period
- Stakeholder agencies, Trusted Intermediaries from whom NLS Legal takes referrals or works with (5)
- Clients of NLS Legal (2)
- Supervising Solicitors (3)
- Lawyers (6)
- Paralegals, legal assistants/administration, and operational staff in RPC (9)
- Managers of NLS and NLS Legal (2)

2.5 Client Participants Response Rates

In April 2023, NLS Legal contacted 20 clients, seeking their consent to be interviewed by Curran. Curran approached four clients for an interview, two of whom were successfully interviewed in 2023. Four clients agreed and were subsequently contacted by Curran, receiving information and consent forms. Three clients were approached via email, and an additional client by post. Three clients who initially agreed to be interviewed via email did not respond to further emails suggesting a time and place, one client did respond, albeit after the writing of this report, rendering their inclusion impractical.

Of the two confirmed clients, one was interviewed at the client's convenience on Microsoft Teams. The other (for personal reasons) asked if they could not be interviewed but provide written responses. To accommodate this, the interview questions were sent to this client with two return envelopes for the survey and consent form. This data was included as interview

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data because the data and its analysis are still valuable and served as a method to verify the internal client survey data collected by NLS Legal.

It is noted that in studies of this kind it is difficult to have high response rates. It is ethical for NLS Legal to firstly request the clients' consent to be approached by the researcher. Clients may feel that they need to say 'yes' but when the time comes for the researcher to approach them, they may feel less inclined. This may also be because clients have moved on from their legal problems or requires them to revisit problems they would rather forget.

2.5.1 Staff Participation

NLS Legal aims to improve the development of its current and future legal practitioners and students who might embark on different professional endeavours once they leave university. For this reason, some of the measurement tools look at developmental contributions of NLS Legal to staff capability and confidence. Overall staff involved across all the tools were interviewed, undertook a professional development journal, or took part in Reflective Practice Conversations. The participating staff included the Head of NLS Legal, supervising managing solicitors (3), lawyers (4), paralegals (5), legal assistants/client service administrators (2), and operational NLS Legal staff (2). Additionally, all lawyers and two supervising solicitors completed professional journals and answered questions on file closure, which were submitted to Curran at the end of July 2023 and early- late August 2023.

2.5.2 Student Participation

This study examines and tests the impact of NLS Legal on student development, namely the role of NLS Legal in student transferable skills development, perceptions of legal practice, and understanding of access to justice, as well as whether they feel/felt better positioned because of their engagement with NLS Legal.

As noted above, a survey of students has been administered internally by NLS Legal for the academic year 2021-2022. The results are discussed and analysed later in this report.

A student survey was conducted separately by Curran through MS Forms to all 'immersed students' and alumni. Only immersed students were surveyed (see definitions section page 20-23).

Responses were anonymous. Due to the online survey being released in May 2023 (which was after many students had ceased their courses) only four students/or alumni completed the survey. The survey asks participants to identify if they are student or alumni to assist in data analysis. This was a lower-than-expected response rate. This was largely to do with the timing related to a delay in ethics approval. It had been anticipated that ethics approval would have been finalised in January 2023 and that the online survey would have occurred much earlier in the academic term. Nonetheless, the data and its analysis have been included in this study as it is still valuable. It verifies the internal survey data collected by NLS Legal.

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2.5.3 Stakeholders/Trusted intermediaries' participation

NLS Legal provided the stakeholders/Trusted Intermediaries (TIs) list to Curran. The nature and work of these stakeholders/ TIs have been described above. The choice of TIs to be interviewed was made by Dr Curran rather than NLS Legal therefore reducing bias. In 2023, five trusted intermediary emails and contact personnel were provided to Curran. Curran approached all 5 and all agreed to be interviewed. (100% response rate).

2.6 Ethics

This Research and Impact Evaluation (RIE) had ethics approval from the NTU Business, Law, and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of NTU. It was also conducted in accordance with NTU's policies on research ethics and integrity. In line with this ethics approval and the Data Management Plan, efforts have been made to de-identify all participants, especially as the cohorts were small and the regions local to Nottinghamshire this was important to ensure confidentiality. As this occurred at data collection stage and so attribution after data analysis phase is not possible. It is important to note that due to the small number of participants in each group of the study, further deidentification was necessary. This includes not providing the participant number which would ordinarily be allocated in larger studies. This was acted as a further control as in each cohort to provide a participant number might enable a reader to join the combined comments and identify the participant. Curran was mindful of the small staff of NLS Legal and the risk of ease of identification not only between these participants but by readers of this report.

Documents examined to ascertain the legal parameters have been reviewed to ensure legal professional ethical standards and adhered to considering the research relating to a regulated law firm and clients. These documents include the *Solicitors Regulation Authority Standards and Regulations*.

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PART THREE

3. DATA AND ANALYSIS – SUMMARY ONLY

The total number of NLS Legal new enquiries from the public has increased since 2015-2016 (n = 656). It nearly doubled from the inquiries received in the year 2018-2019 (n = 1159). In the year 2020-2021 (during the COVID lockdown), there was also an increase in enquiries (n = 1351). In the 2021-2022 period, which is relevant for this analysis, there was a significant increase in numbers compared to 2020-2021 (n = 1584).

Earlier in this report, the policy context was discussed (Section 1.8), and the reason for this increase in inquiries may be attributed to the passage of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act in 2014. As noted, this has placed significant stress on legal aid agencies, as sources of publicly funded free legal advice have been significantly reduced, combined with the statutory reductions in the scope of legal aid over the years.

A significant finding is that the data shows NLS Legal largely serves clients who do not qualify for legal aid and lack the financial means to afford a private lawyer or access other services needed to support clients facing significant and life-changing legal problems.

3.1 Quantitative Data

3.1.1 NLS Legal Aggregated Data – 2021/22

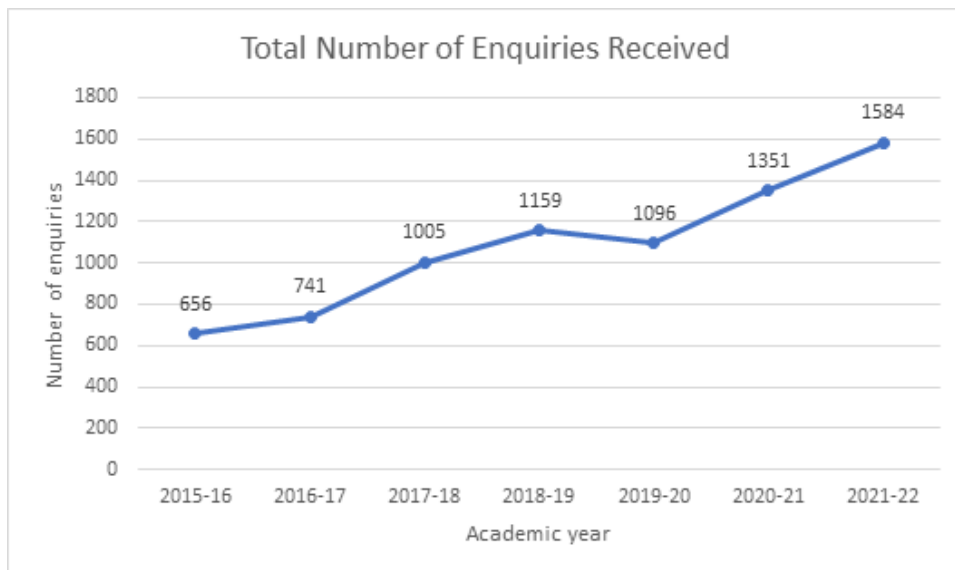
Most of the primary qualitative data was collected in early 2023. The secondary data used for this report covers the period from 2021 to 2022. This dataset was available during the analysis and writing of this report.

The Appendices contains more detailed data, which shapes and informs the conclusions, findings, and recommendations.

3.1.2 Client Data

3.1.2.1 Number of Inquiries Received

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3.1.2.2 Clients and Matters

As indicated by the nature of the work done and spread of client work detailed in the charts below, NLS Legal does a large amount of civil law advice and case work. The work is targeting areas that impact of social determinant of health outcomes including social support specifically to children and women at risk of domestic abuse, assisting to stabilise housing and work entitlements.

Number of matters: 199

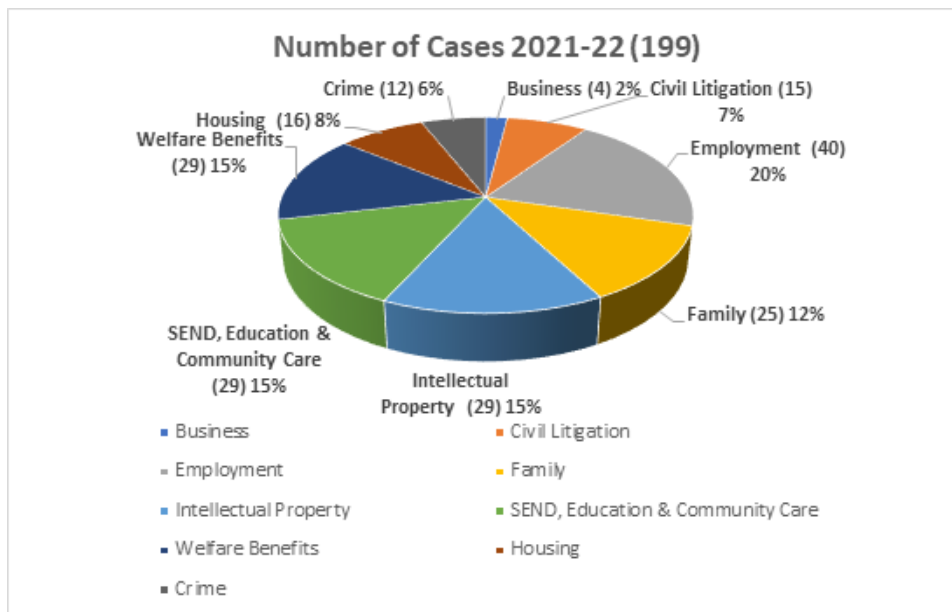
Number of different clients: 157

The primary areas of law in which NLS Legal operated in 2021-22 included employment (40 cases), followed by Intellectual Property (29 cases), SEND (29 cases), Welfare Benefits (29 cases), and Family Law (29 cases).

The provision of family law services has seen notable improvement over the past year with the addition of a dedicated family law expert. The impact of this enhancement is already significant in terms of the number of cases handled.

It is also noted that housing features in the higher numbers (16).

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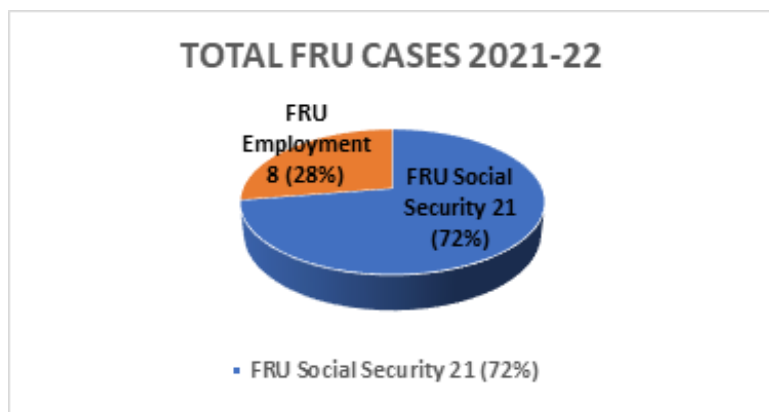


Area of Law	Number of Cases
Business	4
Civil Litigation	15
Employment	40
Family	25
Intellectual Property	29
SEND, Education & Community Care	29
Welfare Benefits	29
Housing	16
Crime	12

3.1.2.3 Total Free Representation Unit FRU Cases

The qualitative data reveals very little civil legal aid for court hearings and tribunal matters. Whilst many services provide one-off advice services, NLS Legal is filling a significant gap in the provision of legal aid by providing legal expertise at hearing stage. This would not be otherwise available were it not for NLS Legal. 21/22 was the last year of NLS Legal’s official partnership with FRU. From 22/23 this work has continued via NLS Legal. NLS Legal maintains an ongoing relationship with FRU and each signpost matters to the other.

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FRU CASES	TOTAL FRU CASES
FRU Social Security 21 (72%)	21
FRU Employment 8 (28%)	8
Total	29

3.1.2.4 Referrals to and From the Services

Referrals received directly from agencies: 24 (out of 1564) and 20 outreach clients.

Total = 44

320 enquirers have cited another organisation as to where they heard about NLS Legal services.

NLS Legal only started collecting direct referral data from April 2022 at the request of the author for this research and impact evaluation.

NLS Legal has noted that when it cannot assist, it signposts enquirers individually whenever resources permit (for example availability of members of staff/urgent cases/area not within expertise, etc.)

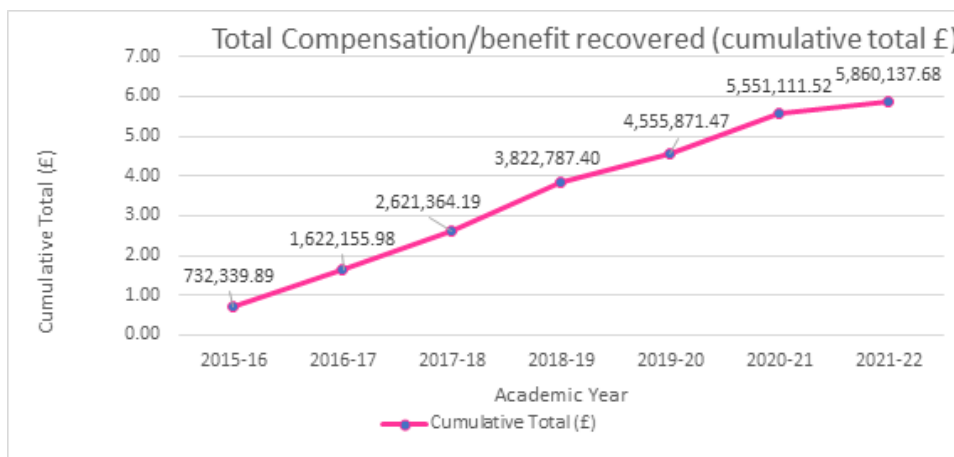
A voicemail message has been implemented to provide a wide range of alternative resources to enquirers. The content of the automated e-mail response is provided in the Appendix 1.

3.1.2.5 Financial Awards

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This graph describes the financial awards for the period 2015-2016 until the year 2021-2022 for clients of NLS Legal.

The breakdown can be seen in the **Appendix 2**



This Graph (directly above) shows compensation and redress recovered. Compensation and redress recovery is a significant identifier of the impact of the work of NLS Legal in making a difference in the lives of clients. The qualitative data (discussed later) elaborates on the significance, highlighting the increase in life opportunities and reductions in poverty that these financial awards have made for clients.

Consistent with the increases in the number of enquiries about the service, there has been a large increase in financial awards. This might be attributed to the increased capacity through additional staffing and resources that the legal service has secured since financial awards were first recorded in 2015 to 2016. The significant amount that NLS Legal has been able to secure for clients is an indicator of its effectiveness in advocating at the tribunal level for clients to receive pay and compensation by way of exemplary damages.

Since NLS Legal started to record in 2015 to 2016, financial awards have increased more than fivefold (£732,339.89 to £5,127,797.79 in 2021-2022). NLS Legal data is unique as they are one of the few organisations to measure the financial awards that they had been obtaining on behalf of clients through their advocacy work over this time.

On a policy level this data suggests that something is wrong with the decision-making process at preliminary decision making and review levels. The qualitative data collected indicates that many of the clients who NLS Legal represents at tribunal and court stage had been ‘muddling along’ on their own without legal support until they were referred. The critical role of NLS Legal in holding authorities to account in ensuring the articulation of compelling arguments, the gathering of relevant evidence, and the legal interventions has seen matters overturned by tribunals and judges.

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A study by the Ministry of Justice in the UK indicates that with intervention at tribunal or judicial review stage⁴¹, people's outcomes can be improved. This RIE raises a real concern that, given across the UK, there is limited legal representation of the nature that NLS Legal provides in Nottinghamshire there are people who are missing out on gaining compensation or financial awards they are entitled to by law due to a lack of legal support of the nature being provided by NLS Legal. That begs the questions as to how many other citizens have been refused their legal entitlements or have been unlawfully wronged in their quest for social support?⁴² *The Independent* on 3 February 2024 reported that 50,000 people seeking a personal independence payment (PIP) had an initial refusal overturned at tribunal without the need for further evidence. Data was released in a parliamentary response to a question by a member of parliament based on a report. The report states that since PIP was introduced in 2013 almost 3/4 of all appeals have either been successful at hearing or 'lapsed', the latter meaning that government concedes prior to a hearing. This report notes that last year hundreds of thousands of people were wrongly denied these payments. It also notes that government figures indicate that 235,300 appeals have been overturned in favour of the complainant in the tribunal since 2013. A further 71,920 people were awarded the payment they wanted after the appeal 'lapsed'.⁴³ This information suggests that there are a large number of people in the United Kingdom who are not at tribunal or judicial level, who may be missing out on their entitlements because of the lack of availability of the sort of legal support and expertise in terms of representation and advice that NLS Legal is currently offering in Nottinghamshire.

3.2 Secondary Data on Client Experience NLS Legal Data

Further details of the NLS Legal Client Survey can be found in Appendix 2

The data on client experience of NLS Legal indicates that NLS Legal provides services that may not be available elsewhere, either through private lawyers or legal aid. This is reiterated by the TIs consistently in interviews. It also verifies the qualitative primary data, confirming that, without the support offered by NLS Legal, many clients would not have been able to get help from other sources.

The pivoting to online and telephone advice caused by COVID, is being utilized by clients in accessing legal help. A majority of clients out of the 12 respondents for the survey sought online and telephone help. In addition, other clients utilized in-person support or a mix of the above.

⁴¹ Ministry of Justice, "Legal Support: The Way Ahead: An Action Plan to Deliver Better Support to People Experiencing Legal Problems" (2019) <<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c5b3a0840f0b676e6ddc6dc/legal-support-the-way-ahead.pdf>> accessed 23 February 2024.

⁴² Jinchun Zhao and others, "Scoping the future law and social justice-listening & hearing from the frontline" (2023) <<https://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/49438/>>.

⁴³ Aimee Seligstein, "DWP under fire as 50,000 overturn disability benefit decisions without new evidence" (*The Independent*, 3 February 2024) <<https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/50000-disability-benefit-claimants-forced-to-court-to-win-payment-2887619>> accessed 28 February 2024.

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There is significant emerging post-COVID research that indicates that a combination of face-to-face and/or online and/or telephone advice services to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups increases access.⁴⁴ For example, face-to-face services may not be feasible due to care giving commitments, distances to be travelled, or safety concerns. For others, face-to-face communication is critical to building trust that is necessary for some groups, such as older people, who have limited capacity to access online technology or limited literacy and other capabilities. The offering of varied modes of service delivery by NLS Legal, in the light of the client cohort it is targeting, is commendable and an effective way of continuing to enable choice and accommodate diverse groups and needs.

3.2.1 Student Data

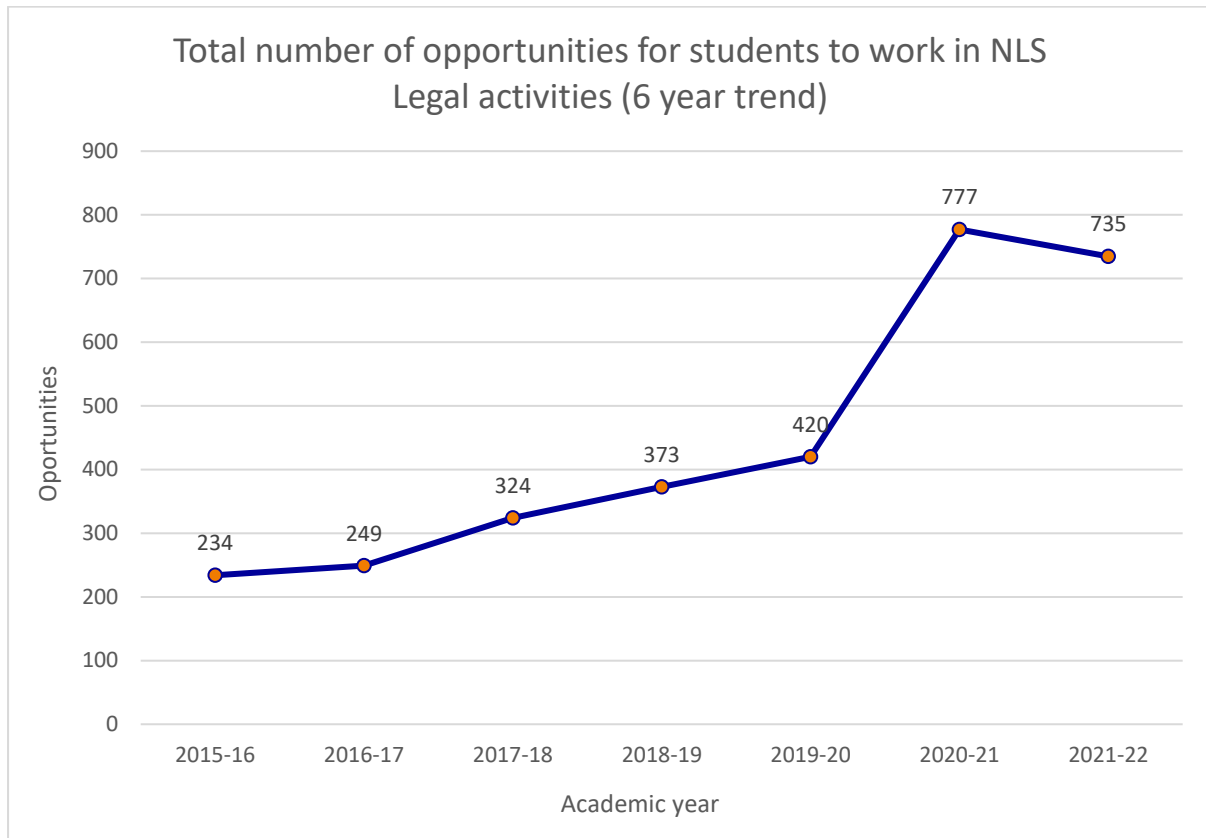
3.2.1.1 Opportunities for Law Students to Gain Law Employment Experience at NLS Legal

There have been a significant number of students opportunities for volunteering at NLS Legal since 2015 to 2016 (234) increasing in 2021-2022 (735). Opportunities exceeded the number of students as some students may take up multiple opportunities. The large increase between 19-20 and 20-21 is largely due to the introduction of Applied Legal Knowledge (Criminal and Business Practice), a final year module that includes an NLS Legal element (simulated), and a significant increase in number of Employer Challenges. These are challenges set for students by employers which are offered in a second year and final year university which are mandatory for all law students at NTU. These Employer Challenges and can occur at NLS Legal or with other employers in the program.

This has largely been due to an increase in the numbers of staff, a restructure of the service to a regulated law firm, and a drive by the University, NLS and NLS Legal to increase intra-curricular assessed work like experience (described at NTU as 'employability') opportunities for students. The graph (below) is a visual representation of the significant number of opportunities for law students to gain experience with NLS Legal. More of the quantitative data collected is also provided in Appendix 2.

⁴⁴ Catrina Denvir, "Assisted digital support for civil justice system users: Demand, design and implementation" (2018) <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/cjc-report-on-assisted-digital-support.pdf>; Olasile Babatunde Adedoyin and Emrah Soykan, "Covid-19 pandemic and online learning: the challenges and opportunities" (2023) 31(2) Interactive learning environments 863.

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3.2.2 Profile of NLS Legal Student Volunteers by course -

3.2.2.1 NLS Legal Student Participants: Success for All Groups vs. Underlying NLS Student Population - Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught

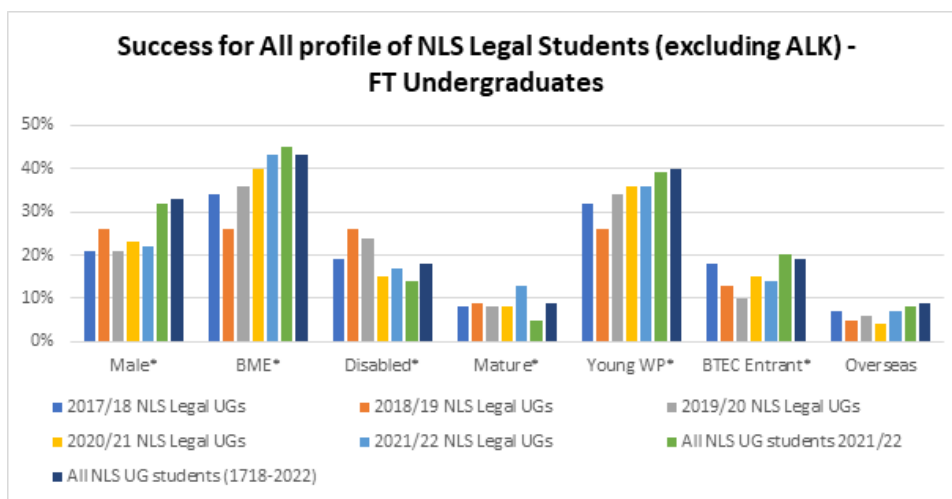
The volunteer students at the legal service represent high numbers of black and minority ethnic groups, students with disability, mature-age students, and young students from overseas.

This ability to provide an opportunity to diverse students to participate in the programme is attributable to the strategies and policies of NTU in its intake which seek to attract students from a diverse background.

Nonetheless, despite the high numbers of diverse students that NTU attracts, NLS Legal is also attracting a significant cohort of diverse students from the available pool. There has been a steady increase in the number of diverse students undertaking volunteer work at NLS Legal since 2017. The graphs (below) of undergraduate, postgraduate and comparators between student groups provide the detail.

Undergraduate

Figure 1: 2017/18 to 2021/22 NLS Legal Students participants by Success for All groups, compared with underlying NLS student population (undergraduate)

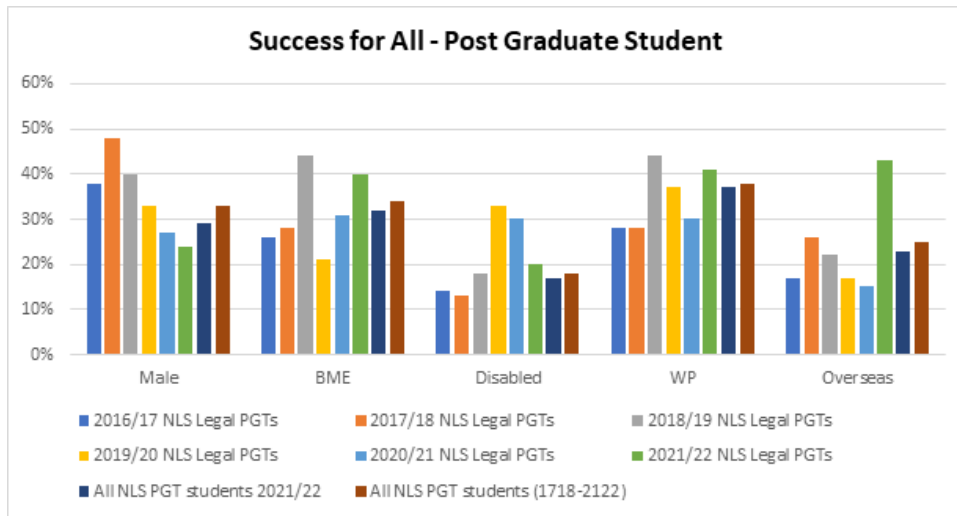


* "excluding ALK" means not taking into account cohort of module students undertaking simulated tasks only.

Postgraduate Taught

Figure 2: 2016/17 to 2021/22 NLS Legal Students participants by Success for All groups, compared with underlying NLS student population (postgraduate taught)

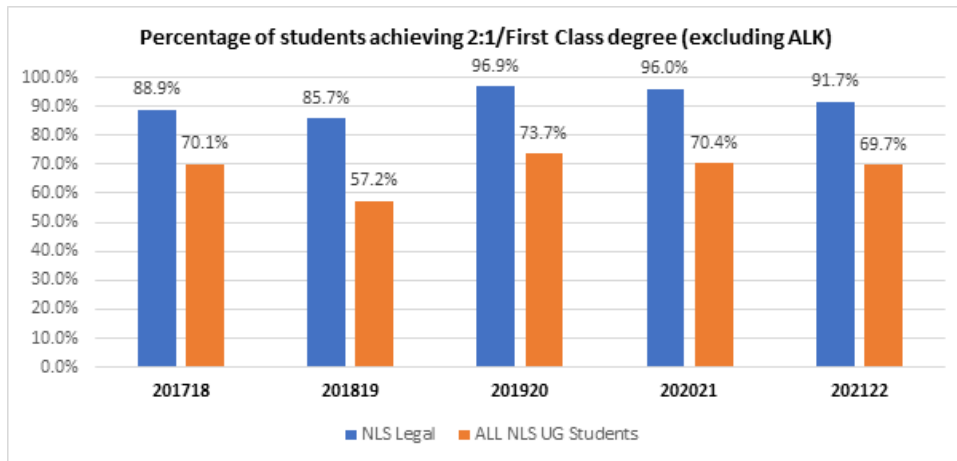
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3.2.2.2 Comparison of Grade Outcomes: NLS Legal Student Volunteers vs. All Law Students

The following graph compares grade outcomes of NLS Legal student volunteers to all the law students.

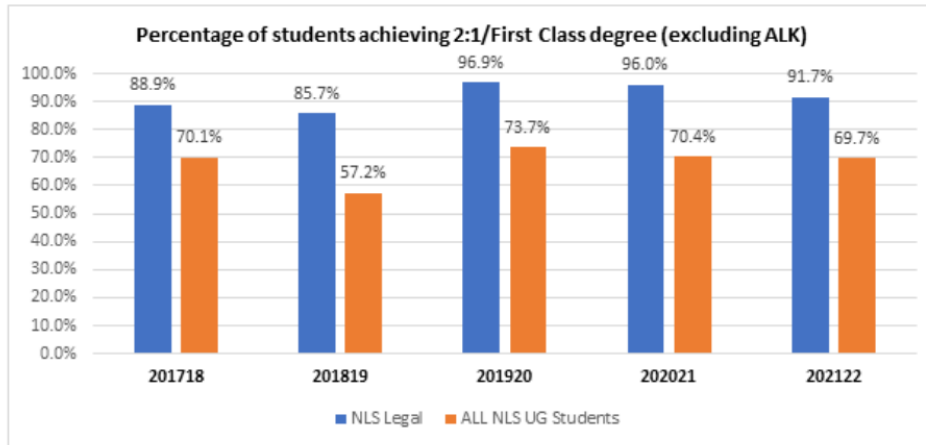
Figure 3a: 2016/17 to 2021/22 Legal Advice Centre participants achieving a 2:1/First Class Degree, compared with the underlying NLS student population.



*'excluding ALK' means not taking into account cohort of module students undertaking simulated tasks only.

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Figure 3a: 2016/17 to 2021/22 Legal Advice Centre participants achieving a 2:1/First Class Degree, compared with the underlying NLS student population



* ‘excluding ALK’ means not taking into account cohort of module students undertaking simulated tasks only.

Some Observations

The quantitative data is indicative of an improvement in educational and skill development outcomes throughout the law degree.

It appears that students who undertake study through a placement or volunteering at NLS Legal benefit through an improvement in their grades overall, in comparison to students who do not go through the programme.

This is a significant statistic. When combined with other data about students’ perceptions and experiences of undertaking the legal placement, it demonstrates the benefit not only in student grades but has the flow-on effect on employability, as employers are seeking students with high grades and employment experience.

The legal placement is attracting a diverse range of students, with the data suggesting that this placement positions these students for securing pathways into legal practise. Students from diverse backgrounds already face challenges.⁴⁵ Providing better opportunities to increase their likelihood of breaking through existing barriers is crucial.

3.3 Secondary Additional Student Data Collected by NLS Legal

⁴⁵ Beth Swords and Ramya Sheni, Brick Wall After Brick Wall: The lived realities and concerns of Black communities in the UK (ClearView Research Ltd and Black Equity Organisation 2022).

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The students seem to value the level of supervision and exposure to different types of work that the placement at NLS Legal offers them.

They also valued contributing to the community, evidenced in the indicators of an awareness of a commitment to the community, and providing legal services to them.

Unfortunately, the researcher was only able to collect a limited amount of qualitative data as noted earlier. Nonetheless, this data verifies the NLS Legal secondary data adding to its robustness. For the additional Student Survey data see Appendix 2

The student perceptions of the value of their placement, in terms of the skills and attributes needed for employment and legal practise, and the array of opportunities that they felt they received was notable. Many of the skills that they indicate that they received would not be possible other than in a situation that exposes them to legal practise and to clients. This is exemplified by the responses by student participants to the following questions, extracted with responses under relevant headings:

Challenges of placement

What challenges did you encounter during your time as a Student Adviser? (Tick all that apply).

Challenges working with other students - 5 (26.3%)

Challenges with specific case(s) - 4 (21.1%)

Challenges with specific client(s) - 1 (5.3%)

Challenges with supervisor(s) - 1 (5.3%)

Challenges with time management (e.g., deadlines, juggling with course) - 9 (47.4%)

Challenges with legal research (e.g., insufficient textbooks/legal databases) - 6 (31.6%)

Challenges with facilities (e.g., computer availability, I: Drive, workspace) - 3 (15.8%)

Challenges with NLS Legal opening times - 0 (0%)

Other - 1 (5.3%)

Placement at NLS Legal attraction to NTU⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Italics denote direct quote rather than from notes.

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Did the presence of the NLS Legal (previously LAC) and other pro bono opportunities within NLS influence your decision to study at NTU?

Yes, it was the main reason I chose NTU - 4 (21.1%)

Yes, it was one factor in my decision to choose NTU - 10 (52.6%)

No, I was aware of the LAC/NLS Legal, but it did not influence my decision - 3 (15.8%)

No, I was not aware of the LAC until I arrived at NTU - 2 (10.5%)

Why did you apply to volunteer at the LAC?

I wanted more experience. But it really surpassed other legal work experience I have undertaken. It was much better in reflecting solicitors' role rather than the usual admin roles in other experiences.

As they provided a great opportunity for me to gain work experience at a law firm which is something I did not yet have. Going forward, I knew that this experience would allow me to build my skill set and apply for further experience and opportunities that may arise. I see it as the beginning of a domino effect of my working career. Also, I was eager to partake in some extracurricular activities at the NTU as I had not yet done so, and I was looking for a new experience in doing so.

Employability

To gain a taster of what activities I would do as a trainee and gain more legal work experience.

To boost my CV

To fulfil graduation requirement

To gain legal experience

Would you recommend volunteering at the LAC to future students?

Yes - 19 (100%)

Access to Justice Value Noted

Has your time in the LAC affected your attitude towards pro bono work generally?

Yes - 7 (36.8%)

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No - 7 (36.8)

Unsure 5 (26.3%)

Feedback:

It was new and not something expected. It's enlightening to handle actual cases in the community. You gained some legal experience and offered help to others at the same time.

It has showed me how important Pro Bono work can be towards helping the community and anyone involved with the programme in general.

It has also shown me just how many skills you can pick up by partaking in pro Bono work.

I already had high regard for the importance of pro bono work this experience solidified my view.

Value**Feedback:**

NLS Legal provided me with great opportunities throughout the year which has really made my time at NTU much more enjoyable. It has also shown me what sets NTU and the NLS Legal apart from other universities which do not provide opportunities like these ones. Overall, I am glad that I partook in the processes at NLS Legal and will be looking forward to getting more involved in my second year of studies!

Observations based on the Student Feedback

A significant number of the student participants in the survey (12 out of 19) expressed the belief that their experience would enhance their prospects for employment. They mentioned feeling better positioned to apply for jobs. Some respondents were uncertain about their future career paths (21.1%), while a majority (68.4%) thought that the placement assisted them in making job applications, preparing for interviews, and exploring further work experience opportunities.

In the data, students sometimes indicated that things could be improved, and some of these suggestions ought to be considered by NLS Legal. It is important to note that, when they suggested improvements, they acknowledged that there was significant pressure on the staff and that there were issues in terms of resources in urgent cases, the demands that clients placed on them, the limitations of capacity, and legal aid demand. These comments suggest that students participating in this survey have gained insights into access to justice and some of the constraints that real-life legal practice entails.

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The students overwhelmingly indicated that they were pleased to be involved in delivering pro bono services and noted the importance of access to justice.

74% of the students in the survey noted that the existence of NLS Legal was significant in their choice to attend at Nottingham Law School.

An important indicator of the students' appreciation of their placement experience is reflected in the statistic that 100% of the participants in this student survey indicated that they would recommend doing the placement to another student.

3.4 Primary Students Data

A further MS Forms Survey was administered by Curran as primary data. The survey was sent to 40 former or current 'immersed' students (see the definition section) or alumni. Five students/or alumni responded to this survey. 4 of the 5 respondents to the immersed and alumni students survey were alumni. None of the students surveyed were currently volunteering at NLS legal.

In terms of the nature of the work, the competency skills the students selected as the most prominent skills they felt there exposed to:

- a. Working with real life clients – 2
- b. Moving from academic studies to practice (if relevant) – 1
- c. Time management and workload - 1
- d. Increased exposure to clients/enquirers in distress - 1

Some of the feedback included the following:

Challenging to put academic knowledge into advice, which is accessible to clients, and to manage difficult clients.

From going to no legal work experience with direct client contact, it meant that I initially felt out of my depth when first speaking with clients (also feeling like I didn't have enough legal knowledge to speak with them). However, I quickly became confident in myself due to the support from the NLS Legal Team.

All the students surveyed indicated that they had had a wide variety of exposure to different practise experiences.

Four of the five students indicated that they were given opportunities to reflect on their development and placement experience.

Some of the questions (e.g. question 8) asked the students about the relevant competencies at NLS Legal. A range of options were provided using the SQE competencies and students could include which they felt they were exposed to.

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All five students said they were supported through the work experience by supervisors, the wider NLS Legal team and administration staff.

Comments in response to the question eliciting this data included:

I did work for each of the supervisors during my time at NLS Legal, and I received constructive feedback on each piece of work I completed.

Fantastic support at NLS Legal gave me the confidence to get involved with further experience - putting myself forward for roles I would not have considered previously.

Yes, the NLS Legal team were very supportive.

Key relevant data on student access to justice experience included:

Legal empowerment coincides with access to justice, and how the right to access legal advice and guidance is a right each individual is entitled to, regardless of their background. It is important for each citizen within each community to have access to legal advice and be able to exercise their rights in accordance with the law. As someone from a disadvantaged background, the work that NLS Legal does is particularly important to me personally. Especially in light of the cost-of-living crisis and funding cuts to legal aid, the work NLS Legal does is more important than ever.

The ability of every individual to know, and be able to rely on / enforce, their legal rights. It's important for clients to get advice that allows them to assess all of the options available to them so that they can make the best and most informed decision for themselves. It is important for the community so that all individuals and organisations feel safe, fulfilled, and set up for success. It is important as a legal professional to enable this empowerment through our advice to clients.

Ensuring that everyone has access to justice and has an understanding of their rights.

To me, legal empowerment is educating people about their rights and how they can enforce them. More importantly, it is making said rights accessible to all. Not just those who are able to foot the bill but even then, struggle to do so.

Legal empowerment means to help people exercise their legal rights and it is important as it ensures that everyone has access to justice.

Responses:**Future career**

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Having 11 and a half months of experience at NLS Legal not only set me up very well when completing my final year of study, but also in respect of my future career prospects. This opportunity meant that I have had a chance to develop my legal skills and translate what I had learnt on my first and second year of my LLB and put this into a practical context through research, interviewing and articulating advice letters to clients. b) I feel as though I am in a good position when I graduate to find a junior level legal position, as well as feel confident about starting my Legal Practice Course (LPC) part time in September.

Summary

The overall feedback from the students overwhelmingly suggests that they developed a range of skills through their placement at NLS Legal that equipped them to develop key competencies that they would need in practice. Many of the students also reflected on the value of being engaged with pro bono legal services and learning about the real-life impacts of the law on members of the community.

3.5 Primary Clients Data Collected

Two of the six clients approached were interviewed. This was reflective of the short time frame from when ethics approval was granted and for reporting.

The responses were 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with both clients indicating that their levels of stress and resilience had reduced, while their responsiveness and knowledge had remained the same.

Both clients indicated that their sense of hope had increased because of the advice provided.

One client in the later response to questions said that their experience of NLS Legal was moderated down to an 'agree' response because of his disenchantment with the legal system in general, and the inability of NLS Legal in this context to do anything about the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) changing the goal posts after he won his initial case, which set him back again.

3.6 Primary Trusted Intermediaries Data

In terms of the quantitative data collected from the 'trusted intermediaries'/agencies that NLS Legal works with, all five respondents approached agreed to be interviewed. The data from these has been analysed against the benchmarks and indicators for effectiveness, impact and quality. A summary of extracts from the notes from the trusted intermediaries have been used below to provide examples of the consistent data against the various themes attaching to the benchmarks and indicators, and to provide the reader with illustrative data that has shaped the analysis and conclusions drawn. Headings have been provided that match these benchmarks and themes.

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Analysis and comments:

The majority of trusted intermediary or network participants agreed or strongly agreed with statements designed to elicit comment about the experiences and the effectiveness of the service.

One participant of the five interviewed commented on a need for more recognition by NLS Legal staff of the expertise of people within their own agency but the other trusted intermediary participants said this recognition existed. This mutual recognition of different skills and the important lens that interdisciplinarity can bring to client work is an important element in enabling reciprocity, interdisciplinary awareness, and trust between agencies which the research shows improve client outcomes.⁴⁷ The only agency that did not often 'strongly agree' but 'agreed' qualified this in their statements indicating any issues related to NLS Legal's resources or capacity.

One agency also indicated that they would not ordinarily look to examine clients' problems and changing systemic causes of those problems and so responded 'neutral.' This participant however, said that this was something that should be within the remit of legal advocates such as NLS Legal. The quantitative data of all trusted intermediary participants felt that NLS Legal had a role in developing policy. This was also reflected in the qualitative data collected (see discussion below).

Extracts from notes of 'trusted intermediary' research participant interviews under headings for benchmarks for impact and effectiveness

In this section extracts from notes and direct quotes (in italics) taken during interviews conducted by the researcher are provided. These are indicative of the overall data upon which findings and conclusions in this report on each of the benchmarks have been extracted and feedback from across the research participants on each of the themes. Where there are italics, these are direct quotes taken from the notes. The extracts provided in the report are not complete but rather representative of the data across the tools.

The extracts have been selected after analysis and align with the key benchmarks discussed earlier around what is indicative of impact and effectiveness namely: reach; engagement; capability; empowerment and collaboration. These extracts or quotes are indicative and

⁴⁷ Liz Curran, "Going Deeper" - The Invisible Hurdles Stage III Research Evaluation Final Report, (*Centre for Rights & Justice, Nottingham Law School & Curran Consulting*, 2022) SSRN Scholarly Paper 4147431 <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4147431>> accessed 29 February 2024; Liz Curran, 'First Research and Evaluation Report - Phase One Consumer Action Law Centre Project: Responding Effectively to Family Violence Dimensions of Debt and Credit through Secondary Consultations & Training with Community Professionals' (*Australian National University*, 2017) <<https://workers.consumeraction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2017/12/Final-CALC-FV-Research-Evaluation-Report-Phase-One-29-November-2017.pdf>> accessed 29 February 2024

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representative of the sort of participant feedback received overall. The relevant tools are indicated after each extract or quote in brackets.

Reach

NLS Legal has the legal foundation. It has been able to assist us in thinking things through within the legal framework and telling us the parameters of what the authority cannot do. What is affirming for the clients is that I can also check in with NLS Legal to see that I am on the right track. Sometimes, I can't find out what to do. NLS Legal know the law and they know what I can do. The majority of parents cannot access judicial review. This is why I'd love NLS Legal to help us spread it into this area which is so critical to getting social supports. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

You must understand this is really not a just process. Initial decision-makers make poor decisions which they then affirm on review, even often if the client can present evidence to them that would indicate a different result. Reasons for Decisions they provide are often based on a template (often with errors or based on one used for other cases). When you read them, they bear no resemblance to the situational circumstances of the particular client that we are supporting. What is a contrast is when they get help from NLS Legal, they say it's helpful, supportive and it's a different experience of agencies. They don't trust the system or the regulatory processes, but they do trust the lawyers and sometimes if the lawyer can intervene as advocate, it will restore their confidence in the system. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

We can't solve the problems of access to justice, but we do our bit to help in the national crisis. We maximise benefits with the structure and resource is that we have. If there was more funding, it could go into new areas and to existing areas where there are deficits. We have a lot of enquiries without the capacity to respond to all of them. (Interview with Manager)

Engagement

Getting access to the legal service there is no cost to us or the client. We have a great relationship with the Practice Manager and the legal team, and they have helped our needs. NLS Legal supports us so we can support small businesses. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

Secondary Consultation

The international research indicates (as discussed in section 1.8 Legal and Policy Context) that secondary consultations have been key in building trust, engagement and reach not only for and to clients but also the trusted intermediaries to whom the clients are likely to disclose legal issues. Therefore, building the capability for time poor, resource strapped charities to not only identify that a problem of a client might have a potential legal solution

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and to provide a pathway for information or referral is critical. It has also been found to be good on the spot training at point of need and result in downstream reach to clients who would otherwise not find their way to lawyers or legal support but which a trusted intermediary can once made aware rectify.

Not only does NLS Legal provide us with this legal support, indirectly helping the families, but also in assisting us to navigate our way around. It is effectively a secondary consultation, having had this term explained. They also provide us with training. We would like to have some more training on the specifics of the appeal process. We are a very small charity and trying to punch above our weight. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

A lot of the training that we have is on the spot training due to circumstances of time and place. The issue is a lot of people are time poor, but we can use this information again and again. I like the notion of signposting that we can get given by the lawyers and an idea of the legal frameworks and how to navigate them. This is a form of 'secondary consultation'. If this could be done on a continuous basis it helps. We work in a busy environment. A little advice can go a long way or having the right information at the right time and knowing what to do can help a range of other clients downstream. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

Capacity/Capability

I've participated in a lot of training by the legal service and find it really of great utility. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

Student Learning

We can challenge the students in their assumptions and their assessment can be corrected. This is a powerful opportunity for us to prevent dangerous practice in students in the future. (Interview with Manager)

Your confidence increases over time, and it develops and grows. (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

It gives us a reality check; something as law students we wouldn't have thought about is what you do when you don't have resources and when you can't help people, or even when you can't answer their issues. You come to realise you can't give the client all the answers. (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

You come to realise the clients can have legal options and a strong case, but can you pursue it if it's going to damage their children? It's going to have flow-on effects

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in the context of their lives. This is the sort of question you don't think about when you're doing a straight law course, that you actually realise when you're actually working and interacting with clients, as we have to here. (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

Private lawyers have the context of money making. What this programme does is it gives students a perspective on a different side of legal work. You see the impact of pro bono. We realise it's not just about the money. (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

Many of us are at the start of our legal careers so we don't know what's out there. What concerns me is that law students in general only see a very limited range of things they can do as legal experience. What I really like about this programme is it's opened me up to other options I would never have considered. In my view, having had this experience of a placement and being a student here as well as working as a paralegal, I'm informing choices about what my next steps and what my career might look like. (Two Participants agreed with participant two's comment). (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

Empowerment

They wrote a professional letter which I could not have done. There was a time limit for NLS Legal to respond. Their help was around the process and what options I had. It helped me evaluate. In the future, I think I'd have a better idea of what to do now.' (Client Interview)

The legal assistance also has enhanced the ability for us as staff of charitable agencies legal options and rights. This means we further understand, so we give the right advice to our own clients. Through this interaction we have the ability to grow in terms of our own personal practise. It's a wonderful collaboration and every day is a school day. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

We have a good relationship of trust with the legal service. So many of our clients are in tears and have deep gratification for what the legal service does for them and for their help. We see immediate gain in confidence, and this is really important to our client group. Even if a client loses part of their case, they say they are glad they went because they had an opportunity to be heard that they would not have otherwise had without the support of NLS Legal. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

Clients also feel that they are helping a future generation of lawyers by being supported by students who are allowed to work with them. They get the benefit of the service, but they also help with the students' development. (Interview with Manager)

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What it means for many of our clients is they are more informed about what the situation is so they can make informed decisions. Without this advice they might make poor choices. They are often stressed and don't think things through. This is because of the pressure of situations they find themselves in and being overwhelmed by an incomprehensible legal system. The other problem is they think that they are the problem when in fact sometimes it is the system that's the problem. An example I would give is the cases of survivors of domestic abuse. Many times, they realise that this domestic abuse can take the form of financial, emotional, and controlling behaviour. By having this clarified by NLS Legal it can be, and is, empowering. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

Collaboration

Through the collaborative way in which we work together we often find another way forward. We have a really strong relationship with one particular staff member at NLS Legal. This has enabled us to know what the law is and the parameters of it and when the legal authority doesn't exist, or the family are being given the run around, rather than smashing down walls to build bridges to leave the families better off. For this reason, because of the style of the personnel that we work with, NLS Legal makes them a natural ally. When we sit down and collaborate, we often find a path for these families. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

I see NLS Legal, even though it's a law firm, as part of what we do as a law school. We have collegiate relationships. We see the legal services as part of our fabric and our identity not an add on or something separate. It enhances the Law School as a unique law school and showcases the professional and legal employability of students who are working there. (Interview with Manager)

Because we are a regulated law firm, and we are providing this within the context of a law school, huge resourcing is provided by the law school; this includes hiring of staff. What we have is the support of the wider university. This is rare and significant. We have the full support of NTU, the Board of Governors, the University Executive, and the Vice-Chancellor. We have resources and support for this project. It involves major building work investments from the estates, staff budgeting, staffing, and obtaining the ABS structure. It takes up lots of resources for the licence. The fact that there is this investment shows the strength and the understanding across all facets of the university of the vision and a commitment to civic duty, to the community and to students. (Interview with Manager)

What I value about this relationship is we give time to each other's organisations. This is rare you don't see it in other enterprises or collaborations. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

3.7 Other Themes Emerging from Data

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As well as the themes identified as relevant to the key benchmarks the data has some other recurring themes the headings below are these themes that have been identified as emerging from a detailed mining of the data.

3.7.1 Responsiveness

It's really important and amazing for someone in my stage of early business to get help and I appreciate the help that I got. - Client Interview.

NLS Legal, specifically the lawyer with whom we interact, is incredibly invaluable. They offer their expertise and are incredibly patient, not only with the clients but also with us. - Interview with Trusted Intermediary.

The clients we see experience high levels of nervousness and anxiety. They don't understand what's happening to them. Often, they don't want to be involved in the law and they have no choice about this. They can't prepare the documentation or represent themselves on their own. When they do, they do not present their case effectively, get confused and/or mess it up. This is not fair if they have rights and entitlements that the rest of the community, who might be better off and more articulate, can avail themselves of. We rely on NLS Legal and students as our advocates to support our clients. They have value in helping with complicated documentation which our clients wouldn't be able to prepare. They also represent them, enabling them to have a voice and be listened to and heard. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

3.7.2 Effectiveness

These extracts from the data were examined considering the indicators set by the methodology discussed above and selected as they represented the effectiveness of NLS Legal in engagement, building capability, empowerment, and collaboration.

As a result of the advice and support that I got, I now know I'm protected. This gives me peace of mind and I feel I am safe and secure for the next 10 years. It was a very good outcome. It was a stress for me and now I can go ahead and focus on other things. (Client Interview)

The legal service offered by NLS Legal is tremendous in terms of its value. We can tune into them. We do get very specific training that we can use in the moment and use again and again. What I love about NLS Legal, and the management is they take on and use what we learn about in debriefings. They reflect and the team try and integrate this feedback into their service. Volunteers also do this. It's a great model. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

We know that they go the extra mile. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

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For many of our claimants, £12-15k can make an incredibly expansive life change. You have to understand they're on a low income and simple things can mean a significant amount. It's funny when you think about the DWP; if they spent less time arguing with a valid claimant there would be less cost to the system and that money could have actually been paid to the person with a disability to help them in life. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

In one case I was involved in we saved the person's house. Before they came to the hearing and had legal advice, they were sure they were going to lose their house. With our help they saw how they could stay in the house. The client said *you have lifted a huge load off our shoulders*. (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

There was a direct and causal link between our legal support and the client's son's access to a specialist school setting, and to therapeutic interventions (speech and language; occupational therapy) which were secured as part of the package of provision associated with the school placement. (Closed file questionnaire – lawyer)

3.7.3 Social Determinants of Health

One of the measures used in the benchmarking for impact is whether because of justice interventions by NLS Legal there had been an impact in the social determinant of health outcomes for clients. The data suggests that this is the case and some of it is extracted below to illustrate this and support later findings/ conclusions in this report.

The system takes a high toll and the implications of our clients not getting help are significant. There is no legal aid and most of them could not afford a private lawyer. That's the whole point. Because we're talking about benefits here. Not only that, but there are also not many private lawyers who do this work and do it well and understand our client group. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

What I've noted is that in the handover, the clients come to me, not as hyped-up as they would have been if they had just come without these NLS referrals. That says something about the way NLS Legal operates. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

There is an amount of stress and trauma in going before a tribunal. This can be significant for our clients. It is our role to take them away from the stress and to make them feel we are the buffer. We try and introduce the human element with laughter and enjoyment of life beyond their case. This makes the client less worried. (Interview with Supervising Solicitor)

Apart from professional support, we also supported the client emotionally as they were under huge pressure (debt of £22k, the client was diagnosed with dementia 1-2 years ago and his wife had an operation in hospital). Our representation helped as

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the client wouldn't be able to obtain legal advice otherwise and the client also wanted a "barrier" between the other side and themselves to minimise the stress they are going through. (Closed file Client Questionnaire by Lawyers)

3.7.4 Numbers of Clients with Mental Health Impacts from Legal and other Problems

The data revealed clients' mental health worsened due to their legal problems, difficulties navigating the service prior to finding their way to NLS Legal. This has flow on effects in other areas of their lives.

There seems to be a group of people who 'slip through the net' when it comes to being offered necessary legal, health, and other support – when those who come across as being confident, are of a certain age and seem to have lived a fairly 'normal' and functional life. They are often judged as not needing, or perhaps not wanting, specialist or professional support, because of which it is neither offered nor explored sufficiently to assist the person as best as possible. (Closed file Client Questionnaire by Lawyers)

It was unlikely that the client would have been able to access appropriate support other than NLS Legal due to being reluctant to admit their illiteracy... The appeal was ultimately successful, one of the best NLS Legal have had in welfare benefits this year... (Closed file Client Questionnaire by Lawyers)

3.7.5 Access to Justice

The data makes it clear that NLS Legal is grappling with significant issues presented by a lack of access to justice.

There is significant need not only in the United Kingdom but also in Nottinghamshire despite the best efforts of NLS Legal and other pro bono organisations. There is not enough legal support to support the rule of law which is predicated on equality before the law.⁴⁸

Those who are poor, experience disadvantage or who have complex needs are being left behind. Whilst governments pass the laws the public are not being equipped with the means they need to access their legal rights, protection of the law or to ensure adherence to the law and often face 'repeat players' who have the resources and wherewithal to overwhelm such community members and ignore their legal rights.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ World Justice Project, *World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2020* (2020) <<https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/publications/rule-law-index-reports/wjp-rule-law-index-2020>> accessed 29 February 2024; Guillermo O'Donnell, 'The Quality of Democracy: Why the Rule of Law Matters?' (2004) 15(4) *Journal of Democracy* 32.

⁴⁹ Legal Services Board, 'Segmentation of People Using Legal Services' (2022) <<https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/202220609-Segmentation-of-people-using-legal-services-Infographic-FINAL-V2-003.pdf>> accessed 23 October 2023.

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As legal aid is widely available for criminal defence (investigation and prosecution stages), we only do work within NLS Legal that falls outside of the scope of legal aid. If we were contacted by those eligible or potentially eligible for legal aid, we signpost to local legal aid providers and/or provide information on the duty solicitor scheme. For those that fall outside the scope of legal aid (e.g., victims, post-conviction offenders - primarily those wishing to appeal conviction or sentence (after they have exhausted the appeal advice/representation permitted under the legal aid scheme), many prison law matters), we need to be realistic that we do not have the capacity to assist them all. We are, therefore, narrowing the focus of the scope of service whilst still retaining some flexibility to extend the breadth of the service, if appropriate, and keeping this regularly under review. (Lawyer - Professional Reflection Journal)

If it hadn't been referred to the NLS Legal lawyers, I wouldn't have had access to a lawyer, as I thought they would have charged. I have no budget for lawyers and am only starting up my business. If it hadn't been a free service, I would have had to think twice. (Client Interview)

Because the system is so complex, challenging, and exhausting, if I get the support from NLS Legal, even with this, the clients are less likely to drop out. They are one step closer to justice that they often deserve in this difficult journey to get their cases to a tribunal. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

In civil litigation a client had no legal assistance there was nowhere else they could go and there wasn't legal aid. When the client came, and we were able to help them in doing the work to support them to be able to help themselves they told us that it was the first time that they 'felt heard'. (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

In the area of special needs education and disability, parents are really struggling. Their children are often in mainstream settings, and because of the class sizes, it's crucial for the child's learning and educational attainment. Managing the child's behaviour is crucial. The problem is often that the system is so focused on not supporting them and saving money that these children can get overlooked, and the impact on their lives later could be immense. This is a real eye-opener. (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

Jingchen Zhao and others, 'Scoping the future law and social justice: listening & hearing from the frontline' (2023) <<https://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/49438/>> accessed 26 February 2024.

Zubaida Haque, "Gender gaps in access to civil legal justice" (*Women's Budget Group*, 13 July 2023) <<https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/reports/gender-gaps-in-access-to-civil-legal-justice/>> accessed 23 February 2024.

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It's good for students. They can see the limited options for clients and the limitations in commercial businesses of providing pro bono assistance. In pro bono there is a huge gulf in legal aid an income eligibility and ineligibility for legal aid. So, NLS Legal can offer areas of law where there are gaps. For example, we have a family law service. The legal service can offer specific supportive environments to clients with specific needs, immediately overcoming so many barriers, such as e-mail and websites, for the hugely vulnerable who don't have access to the things of other clients. (Interview with Manager)

In the majority of cases, people will end up on a roundabout. No one can get help. This happens quite often. Two or three organizations in the pro bono world can offer something similar to what NLS Legal provides, but policy support for change would be great to make change that is needed to happen. (Interview with Supervising Solicitor).

3.7.6 'But For the Intervention of NLS Legal' – A Question to Elicit Impact of NLS Legal Interventions on Its Clients and Students

These extracts were in response to reflections by participants across the different tools on what might have happened for either the clients or the TIs were it not for the intervention through legal support or tribunal/court representation or case work of NLS Legal.

They (clients) are baffled because they wouldn't know about the limitation period; consequently, they'd lose their right to go to the tribunal, and I would not be able to justify their claim. They wouldn't be aware of the limits of their case or the strengths of their case, and they wouldn't know where to start. (Interview with Supervising Solicitor)

Domestic violence has a range of other legal problems and non-legal problems. This woman has fled the matrimonial home because of the domestic violence. This means that the husband is staying in the matrimonial home. She is the one in a private rental in precarious circumstances with financial problems. She is trying to juggle the needs of the children. Had things been better she might have been able to get some earlier intervention advice that she did not, and should not, be the one to leave the home, for instance. This would have prevented some of the escalation of the problems from coming away from the family home. Unfortunately, she did not get early legal advice until she came to us, so she did not understand the implications and ramifications of being the one who left the matrimonial home. (Interview with Supervising Solicitor)

The client could not afford legal advice or assistance. They had asked several firms who gave quotes outside their means. They would have had no choice but to attend the tribunal on their own, or to withdraw their appeal and accept the DWP's negative decision, meaning they would not have received any financial support for their health conditions. (Closed file lawyer questionnaire)

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The threat of eviction is seen as a stigma not to be discussed by many clients. Eviction arises from multiple factors, such as limited finance, debt, family circumstances, getting out of control. We are seeing an increase in this in recent years as more clients are in dire straits. Clients with mortgage arrears are often outside of scope for legal aid assistance. (Closed client file lawyer questionnaire)

You have to understand that the pensions or the benefits are there to help people who are severely ill. Many of our referrals come from people who are mentally unwell, and referrals come from a mental health nurse. The DWP has refused their claim, often when they have expert evidence to support it. Without the right support, our clients are likely to be put back into hospital which can have the worst outcomes. Downstream, without the intervention of the legal service, it costs more for the system and more for the person if they are sectioned in a mental health ward. Often our clients want support for tribunal. They have very little time to prepare a case. Many clients will wait six months and have been unsuccessful in finding help. So, with two weeks to go the client finally gets there and appreciates the help from the legal service. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

The problem is that the authorities take it very personally. The authorities use their resources to thwart these families from getting the entitlements that they often deserve. We gather a whole lot of professional and medical recommendations, but they refuse to budge, concede, or even examine the evidence. They will pay for a barrister to go to court, rather than admit they might have actually got it wrong. This can take 13 months or longer and this time lag means that the families have no provision of support in this time. The other issue is the authority does not have to provide reasons or, if they do provide reasons, they do not have to be sound. For example, they ignore all the independent expert evidence which may be important in establishing the client situation. So, this legal service is critical in identifying where the authority is wrong, so we can educate people that it's wrong. We can educate people and empower people to not accept what the authority says is correct as final, particularly when they are entitled and struggling. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

3.7.7 Need for Policy Input

What is evident from the data is that many of the legal problems emerge from poor decision making by authorities (such as the DWP) also illustrated by the last extract in the above section. Problems are exacerbated for people by an 'unnavigable' legal system. This leads to inefficiencies, unfairness and can impact upon people's health, wealth, and wellbeing with flow in effects on children including educational attainment and income support. This is exacerbating inequality and reduces trust.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Tara Mulqueen, Lisa Wintersteiger and Claire Stern, 'Experiences of Legal Need and Barriers to Access to Justice for Marginalised Groups' (*Advice Now*, 2022)

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Many problems recur across members of the community. Policy intervention and early intervention could prevent problem escalation, and the harm caused.

There are so many issues we see at the frontline, but no one is looking at root causes and solutions. I'd love to be a part of making that happen, but we don't have the time, capacity, ability, or resources. Working with legal experts to do this might make inroads possible. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

There are so many issues we see about the way authorities just flout the law, and without legal help they get away with it. This is a systems failure, and no one holds them to account, so they get away with it. It destroys families, especially children and their potential. It needs to change. Policies need to be informed by lived experiences but now its hidden as there is so little legal help and expertise to support the communities who are struggling. No wonder there is no trust. People are exhausted, overwhelmed and pushed down. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

We at the frontline are ideally placed to join with research - being part of a university - and ensure the wider implications of improving things, by bringing the two (legal services and university research capability) together... There is potential in developing policy capability by working with our academic colleagues and involving students in this. Researchers and students could support us with this, utilising our frontline experience. We are positioned to identify concerning trends. Students could learn problem solving and policy skills. Such a course could extend the capacity to shape and inform policy and government. We are not doing this to scale and it's not

<<https://www.advicenow.org.uk/sites/default/files/Local%20Legal%20Need%20Project%20-%20Briefing%20November%202022%20%281%29%20%282%29.pdf>> accessed 12 April 2024; Amnesty International, *Cuts that Hurt: The impact of legal aid cuts in England on access to justice*, (Amnesty International UK, 2016)

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/aiuk_legal_aid_report.pdf?VersionId=891MnCc87uY9_XjZOFStF BZYYRuljpn> accessed 26 February 2024; YouGov, 'Legal Needs of Individuals in England and Wales Summary Report 2019/20' (*Law Society of England and Wales; Legal Services Board, 2020*) <<https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Legal-Needs-of-Individuals-Summary-Report-Final-January-2020.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2024. Pascoe Pleasence and others, 'Multiple justiciable problems: common clusters and their social and demographic indicators' (2004) 1(2) *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 301; Nigel J Balmer and others, 'Everyday Problems and Legal Need: The Public Understanding of Law Survey (PULS) Volume 2' (*Victoria Law Foundation, 2024*) <<https://www.victorialawfoundation.org.au/research-publications/understanding-and-capability-puls-volume-2>> accessed 29 February 2024; P Pleasence & NJ Balmer (2019) 'Justice and the capability to Function in Society' Winter 2019 *Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, doi:10.1162/DAED_a_00547 140- 148. doi:10.1162/DAED_a_00547; Pleasence, P & Balmer, NJ 2009, '[Mental health and the experience of social problems involving rights: findings from the United Kingdom and New Zealand](#)', *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 123–140; Pleasence, P, Balmer, NJ & Buck, A 2008, '[The health cost of civil-law problems: further evidence of links between civil-law problems and morbidity, and the consequential use of health services](#)', *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 351–373 and Liz Curran, *Better law for a better world: New approaches to law practice and education*, Chapters 1-4 7-61. (Routledge 2021).

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possible for our service, given the demands of case work and unmet legal need (Interview with Manager)

It is an ongoing trend that victims have very little understanding/insight into the process around investigations and prosecutions. They are given very little information by the police/CPS around timescales, court processes, arrangements for witnesses, possible outcomes, etc. Victims feel very vulnerable, and I don't think the system currently does much to reassure. (Closed file lawyer questionnaire)

3.7.8 Student Input in Case work

It is critical for student embarking on a legal career not only to attain technical legal skills but to also be able to engage with different types of clienteles, and develop rapport, emotional intelligence and to understand the contexts in which their clients live to be able to effectively assist and respond. Applying their legal knowledge alone will not be enough unless the students and new lawyers are able to tailor it to clients' specific circumstances and ability to convey information in a way the clients can understand, enable the client to explore all options and make informed choices. All these skills are critical competencies for effective legal practice and sit also within the conduct rules that legal professionals ought to comply with for the protection of clients.⁵¹

These extracts convey some of these attributes that NLS Legal is offering immersed students.

What it does is expose students to the reality of client situations. Through being engaged, the students connect with clients. They have to use their skills and take responsibility (under supervision). This means they become more confident over time. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

From my vantage point, what I can say in terms of the students who are run through the legal service is it they get exposure to a range of areas; they get a lot of support, and they are shown the quality and importance of quality that they need to get ahead of the game. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

I wish I'd had the same opportunities that students have that are based at NLS Legal. ...They look at the documents and they do an appraisal and a quick summary which is invaluable. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

⁵¹ Liz Curran, *Better law for a better world: New approaches to law practice and education* (Routledge 2021) and Liz Curran, Judith Dickson and Mary Anne Noone, 'Pushing the boundaries or preserving the status quo? Designing clinical programs to teach law students a deep understanding of ethical practice', *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, UK, December 2005, pp. 104–122.

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It also shows students that clients happen in different contexts and that there is often an interlinking of different problems with different social circumstances. It has to be eye opening. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)

I came to realise that clients are not just a name on paper but are real people and not a research project. I came to see them more as human beings. (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

It's not just great that we certainly get the competences for the SQE, but it's more than that. It's the empathy in the way we interact with clients that we learn. We also learn to question and work out when it's right to push and not right to push so hard. (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

3.7.8.1 Student Learning and Growth

These extracts are indicative of the data on student and staff reflections on their personal learning, development, and growth because of their work and exposure through NLS Legal's offerings.

The work environment here is amazing. You learn how to work as a team and support each other. The atmosphere is really encouraging. The supervisors create a safe space. Even though we're students, we're colleagues and we can see a career progression. This comment was affirmed by all 9 participants including operational and service staff in the conversation. (Reflective Practice Conversation with paralegals and legal assistants (some of whom are also students), administration and operational staff)

I want the students to not only be good lawyers but to be brilliant lawyers and my colleagues want this. We think the high level of client care matters. Not just what suffices or is adequate, it's a higher level than that. (Interview with Manager)

3.8 Resource Constraints

Much as this NTU funded teaching law firm tries to meet unmet legal need and support students and the local community. Whilst commendable, this is no substitute for the proper legal support that governments can provide. This is particularly the case as they have the role in making the laws that people need to understand. Governments raise tax revenue and have common law and legislative obligations considering its fundamental obligations to its citizens due to the rule of law.

NTU is providing opportunities to students and exposing them to legal practice and employability skills and providing a critical service to the people of Nottinghamshire who are the most disadvantaged through NLS Legal. It is the only university to operate such a law

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firm that is not subject to the vagaries of legal aid contracts and siloed approaches to legal practice which have been found in research to be so problematic for those most vulnerable and the disadvantaged.

The dilemma is that we want to assist as many clients as possible but at the same time we only have a limited capacity, and we also want to provide an excellent service to the clients within our limited capacity. (Lawyer Professional Reflection Journal)

I think NLS Legal has filled part of the gaps of the unmet legal need in the area. We always have a lot of enquiries from people who would otherwise not be able to receive legal advice elsewhere. I feel that a positive impact has been made within our community. Perhaps the limitation is that as much as we hope to assist all the people in need, we are only able to advise part of them due to capacity issues. (Lawyer Professional Reflection Journal)

PART FOUR

4. Case Studies

The purpose of collecting these case studies was to convey the client journeys including barriers to access to justice, the sorts of problems that NLS Legal intervenes in, and to unpick some of the complexities of the work and the client exigencies. Initially, we collected 17 case studies but have selected some of the representative of the overall case studies for the purposes of this report.

This section draws from all the tools across the participant ground eliciting 17 case studies that convey the client stories. They are represented here to illustrate the client contexts, journeys and to provide this report with a dose of reality about how clients are affected by their legal problems. Most importantly they provide some voice for the clients that NLS Legal assists. They are selected as they are pertinent to the following aspects of this research around effectiveness and impact.

- Reach – to clients who would otherwise not be able to gain legal support or who are excluded, reaching clients who might not be able to see the lawyers.
- Engagement – clients, local community, agencies, legal profession, students, local authorities, etc.
- Capability – that mere legal knowledge is not enough and that the capacity, capability, confidence, and ability to take the next steps or act are all critical. This enables people's ability to avail themselves of legal protections, rights and understanding of responsibilities.⁵²

⁵² Amartya Sen, The idea of justice (Belknap 2009), Pascoe Pleasence and others, Public Understanding of Law Survey: Everyday Problems and Legal Need (Victoria Law Foundation 2023), Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel J Balmer, "Justice & the capability to function in society" (2019) 148(1) *Daedalus* 140,

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- Collaboration – This term encapsulates trusted intermediaries, partners, community organisations, the legal fraternity, clients, and academics (collaboration beyond networking and leads to genuine, authentic, and seamless exchange and cooperation).⁵³
- Empowerment – This includes clients, students, staff at NLS Legal, and relevant referring agencies and trusted intermediaries. Empowerment goes beyond capability and entails not only obtaining information about rights and how to enforce them but also strengthening their own representative organizations, interactions between individuals and the State, or enhancing NLS Legal’s strategies to engage with other actors. It is strengthening the capacity of all people to exercise their rights, either as individuals or as members of a community. It enables communities facing injustice to use legal mechanisms to pursue transformative improvements to laws and the system.

4.1 Interviews with Trusted Intermediaries (Participants Not Numbered and With Case Study De-Identification)

Data was also undertaken to extract a number of case studies specific to client experiences with a specific question asked of the trusted intermediaries to discuss particular client journeys so as to convey to the reader specific client or trusted intermediary experiences in relation to individual problems.

Case Study 1

The young person had attempted suicide three times in different settings. Their case was before the Tribunal. They were very emotional, and that was taking a huge toll on them. There was real trepidation by the Trusted Intermediary (TI) about the child's welfare if the tribunal hearing did not go well. The TI made a referral to NLS Legal after their charity realized that the legal knowledge required was outside its area of expertise. The lawyers were able to reassure the client and advise them that they had grounds for appeal. The individual achieved a favourable outcome in the tribunal which, without this legal intervention, would not have been possible as technical legal advocacy was critical. The child was able to gain the support and protection as duly critical through independent support.

Alexy Buck and Liz Curran, “Delivery of advice to marginalised and vulnerable groups: the need for innovative approaches” (2009) 3 Public Space: JL & Society Justice 1, Liz Curran, Alikki Vernon, and Pamela Taylor Barnett (2017) 19(1) Flinders Law Journal 37.

⁵³ Mark F Harris, Jenny Advocat, Benjamin F Crabtree, Jean-Frederic Levesque, William L Miller, Jane M Gunn, William Hogg, Cathie M Scott, Sabrina M Chase, Lisa Halma, and Grant M Russell, ‘Inter-professional teamwork innovations for primary health care practices and practitioners: evidence from a comparison of reform in three countries’ (2016) 9 J Multidiscip Healthc, 35–46, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4743635/> accessed 28 February 2024.

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Case Study 2

The Trusted Intermediary (TI) was uncertain whether the money taken from the family was correct. This matter underwent a review, revealing that the applicant had not handled the paperwork effectively. The charity sought assistance from NLS Legal. A detailed analysis of the complex matter was necessary, along with an assessment to guide the family out of the quagmire. By explaining the law to the family and aiding them in organizing their documentation, NLS Legal supported the TI in accomplishing tasks that the TI could manage. Thanks to this legal expertise, the family, who were in dire straits due to a lack of funds, could present a compelling case and achieve a favourable result.

Case Study 3

The family was on the point of giving up. They did not have enough money and did not qualify for legal aid. They were not accessing special education because the Local Authority was arguing that there was a limit on the number of hours of support for which the child was entitled. Using the guidelines, NLS Legal advised the family. Based on the information the TI had, the lawyers were able to deduct some things that they weren't entitled to and add things that they were entitled to. The result was a transformative change for a severely disabled child, who transitioned from receiving minimal education to full-time education because of the intervention of the legal service.

Case Study 4

A client had a small business and had an issue with a builder doing an extension. The client was cash poor. They had paid a lot of money to the builder up front. They got support from NLS Legal and were successful in their outcome. Having access to the lawyer made them less stressed. They received some compensation towards rectifying the problems the builder had created.

4.2 Lawyer Professional Journals

As part of the data collection process the lawyers were asked to complete professional journals reflecting on specific days guided by questions set by Curran designed to elicit responses to the research questions as well as to assist in measuring the key benchmarks and their indicators. Below are some of the case studies extracted from these journals however again, not all the case studies collected are represented in this report.

Case Study 5

The client, the victim of a serious sexual assault, came to NLS Legal as they felt let down by the police investigation. The process had been very traumatic for them. The client felt that they were not alone because they had NLS Legal supporting them. NLS Legal was able to highlight deficiencies in the police investigation. As a result of NLS Legal's intervention, the police re-opened the case and completed various lines of enquiry that NLS Legal had

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identified as outstanding. Whilst the perpetrator was not ultimately prosecuted, the steps taken meant a lot to the client who received vindication that there had not been a full or reasonable investigation at the outset. When sending a draft police complaint letter to the client, prior to submission to the police, the client responded to say she “finally felt heard”. For the client, NLS Legal was valuable as they acknowledged what she had been through and how it had made her feel.

Case Study 6

This client had misunderstood the role of alternative dispute resolution. She thought it was a trivial matter and did not realise the implications and the importance of this phase of the case. The advice from NLS Legal was critical in helping her manage her expectations. She did not understand all the complex concepts and we were able to do this and talk her through the process step by step.

4.3 Closed File Questionnaire of Lawyers

As part of the data collection process the lawyers were asked to complete 3 short questions provided by Curran to reflect on when they closed the file. This was in order that the lawyers could reflect on the overall client interactions from the beginning of the file until it's closing. The lawyer participants were asked to respond to three questions including one examining the impact of the justice intervention undergone on the social determinants of health outcomes for the client. Below are some of the case studies extracted from these journals however again, not all the case studies collected are represented in this report.

Case Study 7

This was a matrimonial finance case. The client had separated from their spouse over 15 years prior to instructing NLS Legal. The client's ex-spouse-initiated divorce proceedings, but the finances of the marriage were not being dealt with. The client could not afford to pay solicitors and was concerned about confronting the issues. The client's home was jointly owned by them and their ex-spouse. They were worried that if their ex-spouse sought their 50% share of the property, they would be in dire financial difficulty and lose the home they had lived in for over 20 years. The client was stuck in limbo. They wanted to make improvements to their property but were conscious the ex-spouse was still a joint owner. NLS Legal contacted the ex-spouse to request that matters were dealt with amicably and out of court. He did not engage in the process, despite many attempts to start negotiations. NLS Legal then advised the client which gave her confidence to initiate court proceedings. NLS Legal negotiated a settlement which provided for the former matrimonial home to be transferred to the client outright, with the ex-spouse walking away and retaining his own assets. The client was delighted with the outcome and stated that it placed them in the best possible position for their retirement. This was an excellent outcome. Without this assistance, it is likely that the finances of that marriage may still be unresolved.

Case Study 8

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The client originally instructed us to represent her in a Disability Discrimination (Equality Act 2010) claim. This was against the school at which her son (a child) was previously a pupil. The client subsequently instructed NLS Legal to act on her behalf in relation to a dispute arising from her child's Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP). The Respondent in the case was a Local Authority, as the decision-making body responsible for the preparation and maintenance of the EHCP. NLS Legal was instructed part-way through the appeal but after much of the disclosure process had already been completed.

After extensive negotiation with the Respondent, NLS Legal was able to reach a satisfactory settlement between the parties. This was then taken to the Tribunal for their endorsement, as the settlement was agreed. This was too late for the appeal to be disposed of without a hearing. Unfortunately, the Tribunal refused to endorse the agreement noting that the statutory deadline for the Respondent to review EHCP was a matter of mere weeks away. Rather than endorse the agreement reached as to the contents of the EHCP, the Tribunal disposed of the appeal with a direction (an instruction) that the Respondent's assessment be reviewed with the EHCP to comply in accordance with the timescales set out in the legislation.

At the review's subsequent meeting, the Respondent took a very different approach to that adopted in the appeal. They reneged on many of the commitments made during the settlement negotiations. In the view of the client, this significantly weakened the support to be provided via the EHCP to her son. The client felt that the Respondent had not acted in good faith and was not behaving as a responsible public authority should.

Several months later, after NLS Legal's advocacy, the Respondent had assigned a new decision-maker to the case. This decision-maker then reinstated the commitments previously made. This has required extensive rounds of consultation and negotiation with the Respondent. Some 12 months after the initial client instruction and having attended three Tribunal hearings and a mediation session, she now has an EHCP to provide specialist provision to meet her son's complex needs – and to which her son is legally entitled to.

However, the client's trust and confidence in the state (i.e. the Local Authority) has been severely affected. Further, she has been required to incur significant financial expense to secure expert reports, and provision for her son to 'fill the gaps', pending the resolution of her case.

The client had little faith in her Local Authority and in 'the system' at large. This has eroded faith in accountability and the legal system.

Case Study 9

The client had applied for universal credit after they left work, but their health conditions meant that they were unable to return to a work environment. They had applied for the relevant component of universal credit, called limited capability for work (LCW), but had been refused. There was a dispute as to the relevance of the fluctuating nature of the client's

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main health condition. The DWP felt the client could work when the condition was not flaring up. While LCW is decided on a points-based system, NLS Legal argued a legal exception, whereby it would be unsafe to the client to work by virtue of his health conditions.

NLS Legal provided evidence showing the extreme impact on the client's physical and mental health during and after a flare up of their medical evidence. They also provided evidence from his previous employers. This explained that the client had to finish work due to impact of this condition on his ability to work. This helped to show a pattern of the client's work history which, when coupled with the medical evidence, showed that the client met the relevant legal exception.

The argument was successful, and the client received a significant backdated payment of LCW. The client will not have to fulfil the requirements to try to return to work and will be given a stable income and can focus on managing their health condition. It was rewarding to successfully argue this exception. It is exceptionally rare for there to be circumstances to argue this legal exception, and this was the first case where NLS Legal has successfully argues this on behalf of a client.

Case Study 10

The client was elderly. Their partner had passed away. This caused an almost 50% reduction in their income. As a result, they were in mortgage arrears.

NLS Legal was able to advise the client on their entitlement to other welfare benefits and, after successfully making these applications, NLS Legal were able to assist the client in restructuring their mortgage payments to remain living in their property. NLS Legal had negotiated with the mortgage provider to ensure that this could be agreed before court proceedings were issued.

Case Study 11

The client instructed NLS Legal to advise and represent him in respect of 1) his dispute with an online bank that had frozen his account and 2) a complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS). NLS Legal advised the client on his position and guided him on his case throughout, including corresponding with the police and other third parties, assisting with an 'appeal' to FOS and drafting statements/preparing bundles for the client. Eventually, the client obtained a FOS award that was three times higher than the original decision. The client would not have been able to access legal advice/assistance elsewhere as his funds were frozen by the bank initially. He was also in a severe mental state and would not be able to find affordable legal assistance elsewhere.

Case Study 12

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The client was a sole trader of a small business who purchased some faulty goods from another business. He issued a claim against the defendant and successfully obtained a court order in his favour. The client came to NLS Legal as he was unable to enforce the court order. The other side was not co-operative and ignored the judgment. They did not pay him at all. Later, NLS Legal found that there was a further complication as the client changed his trading name - his current trading name did not match with the one mentioned in the court order. NLS Legal's representation helped as the defendant seemed to realise that this was a serious issue and complied with the court order after NLS Legal got involved and demanded that they make payment. Since the client is a sole trader running a small business, the legal support offered helped the client to claim around £2,500 back. His small business would have made a complete loss on this purchase if he had been unable to obtain the funds back.

Case Study 13

The client was in mortgage arrears following a period of bereavement, ill health, and a sudden, unexpected reduction in their income. They were in considerable debt and had dealt with this by taking on more expensive debt, i.e. payday loans and secured loans, none of which they could repay. The client was also dealing with the threat of eviction for at least the second time and had not told their partner on either occasion. They were, in essence, managing the stress of this alone. The client had possession hearing date when they approached NLS Legal. After representing the client at the hearing, we assisted them to restructure their mortgage payments to an affordable level because of which they retained possession of their house.

Conclusions from Case Studies:

The case studies reveal the struggles of members of the community in accessing legal support. This includes averting homelessness, providing safety from domestic abuse, reinstating entitlements to income and keeping children in schooling. The case studies are representative of the data which contains other illustrations of the impact on lives of NLS Legal interventions. This extends not just to its own clients but, for trusted intermediaries has also led to the capability of charities to offer improved support to their clients downstream who may not even be seen by NLS Legal because of their work in capability building. The benchmarks were used to sift through case studies for their relevancy.

More work in this area might be desirable considering the dearth of legal access and the likelihood of disclosures to such trusted intermediaries about legal problems. NLS Legal however, as noted earlier cannot fill the gap left by inadequate funding of the legal assistance sector by governments (including local and national).

The presence and interventions of NLS Legal provide a clear illustration of how with timely legal advice, support with document preparation and the linkages and relationships with many in the charity sector, positive interventions can result that would not otherwise be possible. The case studies highlight that impact of not gaining help on client lives including educational disadvantage for children with disabilities, the impacts on their carers, the

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descent into poverty and the increased levels of stress and anxiety that bewilderment at the legal system and its complexity can lead to.

The case studies provide clear indicators of effective service interventions by NLS Legal including the value of secondary consultation, tribunal representation (which is often not otherwise available) and the value of holistic service to the community, that its unique model of service delivery provides, not only in Nottinghamshire but in the UK.

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PART FIVE

5. Findings, Conclusions

The Reflective Practice Conversation with managers occurred on 5 June 2024 with two managerial participants. The key recommendations emerging based on the consideration of the data report and the key significant findings were discussed informed by this data including future actions. The discussions are confidential in nature to encourage robust dialogue and so do not appear in the data.

Research Questions

Does NLS Legal Play a Role in Improving NLS Students' Skills, Employability and Awareness and Commitment to Access to Justice?

The data across the multiple tools used indicates that students have enhanced their skills, have been able to use their experience at NLS Legal for their resumes, and have found employment. NLS Legal is contributing to NLS students in their future employability and educational attainment of critical practice skills. This is positioning NLS students for real life work. Students, staff, and the external agencies interviewed observed its transformative value for NLS students.

The students report NLS Legal experience has raised their awareness about access to justice, with all students surveyed in the two surveys (primary and secondary data) having learned a lot about the dilemmas facing the clients. The data collected in the reflective practise conversation with students/volunteers who had transitioned to being paralegals and legal assistants included observations of the impact on other students of the teaching law firm, and on their own personal and professional lives. In addition, the quantitative data collected by NLS Legal showed that the grades had increased for students of the teaching law firm compared to the general student cohort. The data also indicated that the teaching law firm at NLS Legal was also being utilised by a diverse range of students. This is significant as it is a step towards ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds gain not only employment experience but are given an opportunity to find future jobs in the legal or broader professions.

Does NLS Legal Have a Positive Impact on the Development of Its Junior Staff?

What emerged in the lawyer journals, the reflective practise conversation, and in the questions in response to the closed files, is a willingness of staff to reflect and to implement changes upon reflection. Participants in this research also noted that they felt that the research questions, and the time that was taken to discuss and respond to them, also gave them an opportunity to slow down, think, and re-calibrate their own practice.

The external stakeholders, namely the trusted intermediaries who participated in this research from the five organisations selected, also noted that they valued the reflective practise that came from the staff of NLS Legal but also from the organisation itself. Most of these participants commented on the use of their feedback on service delivery, especially in relation to vulnerable clients being integrated into future service models by NLS Legal. This indicates that NLS Legal is an organisation prepared to grow and learn. Whilst many of the

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participants indicated areas that needed improvement, such as their capability in relation to clients with a mental health issue and trauma informed practise, all of them were working to avail themselves of any professional development in this sphere. The junior staff, particularly in the reflective practise conversation, discussed how much they had learned and the patience of their supervisors, as well as their professionalism and dedication.

All of this indicates that NLS Legal adopts a 'growth mindset'. It is very difficult in a busy law firm, which also teaches students, to be able to take time out to think, grow, and develop strategic responses to the problems they encounter. The aggregated data and the qualitative data suggest that, even though this is challenging, there is a level of leadership and openness to improvement.

Does NLS Legal Provide Quality Service to Clients of the Law Firm?

Based on the data, both qualitative, quantitative, NLS Legal is providing quality legal services to members of the community. The clients are those who are in significant need of legal support and expertise.

The data when tested against the benchmarks and indicators suggests that NLS Legal is having a positive impact. Namely, in its reach to clients who would otherwise be excluded from finding legal help.

The data suggests that students, clients and trusted intermediaries feel, empowered because of NLS Legal's interventions.

The way NLS Legal engages with clients and trusted intermediaries is considered appropriate and often NLS Legal goes the extra mile.

NLS Legal's work is building capacity and capability of clients and trusted intermediaries although there are areas where they could do more with trusted intermediaries for example secondary consultations to a wider range of organisations and more often.

NLS Legal is working in ways which encourage partner agencies to wish to, and its work in collaborate further with NLS Legal to address access to justice.

Is NLS Legal Effective and (Why or Why Not) in Delivering Legal Services to Clients?

Whilst there are recommendations in this report for improvement, the data is clear that the legal service is having a significant and positive impact on client outcomes, students' educational and skill attainment (and therefore employability), and on staff development.

There is now an emerging body of international research that says the sort of signposting (secondary consultations) that NLS Legal does is incredibly critical. Not only in assisting clients to get help, but also enabling clients who do not have access to legal support to have the necessary information needed to navigate the legal processes through their trusted intermediaries. It is also seen as important, on the spot training in resource strapped organisations and extending NLS Legal's reach to disadvantaged community members.

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The data suggests that those people who are the poorest, the most disadvantaged, and those in need of legal help for multiple and complex problems are struggling to find help, and that NLS Legal is a critical port of call in Nottinghamshire.

Does NLS Legal's Work Have a Positive Impact on Clients' Lives? If so, how? If Not, How Might This Be Improved? This Includes Improving Not Only Justice Outcomes but Flow on Effects on the Clients' Social Determinants of Health (e.g., Safety, Housing, Income)

In the Nottinghamshire area, NLS Legal fills the significant gap left by inadequate legal service provision and legal aid. For this reason, it is addressing access to justice. Its representative work and advice, especially at tribunal level, is significant because this is a law firm. Particularly considering the significant financial recovery through benefit recovery that it has obtained for its clients, enabling them to have access, for example to educational disability support, housing stability and income to assist in avoiding poverty. This means that its clients have been able to put food on the table, avoid eviction and enable children with disabilities to regain access to important support, such as occupational therapy, and aids considering their disabilities.

The data suggests that by NLS Legal's interventions, they have been able to alleviate stress and anxiety and increase levels of hope, in a broader context of increasing distrust in authority and poor decision making.

Does the Strategic Casework, Policy, and Law Reform Work of NLS Legal Have a Role in Shaping Improvements in Laws, Policies, and Their Administration Over Time?

A significant factor in NLS Legal's effectiveness is the committed university resources and leadership support from NTU. This is increasingly important considering the advice deserts, barriers to access to justice, and the lack of availability of legal expertise in the United Kingdom. This is not a substitute for proper government for legal support and expertise to those who are the most disadvantaged. NTU's support of NLS Legal in Nottinghamshire is addressing access to justice. This is demonstrative of the role the university is having, not only in educating students but significantly in addressing inequality and poverty. This sits within its strategic commitment to addressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and its commitment to the community and NTU's civic commitment.

Evident in all the qualitative data collected and the interviews conducted was a level of commitment, passion, and compassion about the clients that NLS Legal serves.

Findings

- i. Overall feedback from clients, students, and trusted intermediaries or the network of referrers is that NLS Legal delivers a quality, professional, responsive, and effective service for clients, particularly in the context of deficits that exist in the current legal aid service landscape. As a result of its interventions, clients are generally better able to assess their claims, avail themselves of rights available to them at law, and overcome pressures that imply that they do not have legal rights when, in fact, they do.

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- ii. NLS Legal is targeting clients who, without their support, would otherwise not be able to afford legal services, where private lawyers do not provide advice or representation, where there are advice deserts, and where there are limited, if any, opportunities for representation before judges or tribunals.⁵⁴ In this way, it is providing an essential service to the community. The data suggests that the legal service is already reaching groups in the community who would otherwise not get legal support or intervention and constitute some of the most disadvantaged or poorest members of the local community.
- iii. Vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community are struggling, in general, to gain legal help where NLS Legal is not accessible as a resource in early stages. Individuals who came to NLS Legal late, either through referral or signpost, have often struggled or lost cases previously, without the expert legal help that NLS Legal could have provided.

This is having a significant impact on the public's confidence in the legal system and trust in the government and authority. This lack of trust is leading people to give up hope or, when they have valid claims, to reach such a level of exhaustion that it harms their health and wherewithal to proceed with valid claims in relation to their legal rights. This is a consistent finding across many studies and in the most recent research literature.⁵⁵

- iv. NLS Legal is considered by the trusted intermediaries and referral networks (that were interviewed for this research and evaluation) to be an organisation that listens to feedback and endeavours to provide the best service that it

⁵⁴ Frontier Economics, 'Research on the Sustainability of Civil Legal Aid: Final Report' (Law Society of England and Wales, 2024) <<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/civil-legal-aid-sustainability>> accessed 22 August 2024.

⁵⁵ Beth Swords and Ramya Sheni, 'Brick Wall After Brick Wall: The lived realities and concerns of Black Communities in the UK' (*ClearView Research Ltd and Black Equity Organisation*, 2022) <<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63fe141151515543830a1746/t/642d821dc1e7a412b947f239/1680704043976/Black+Equity+Organisation+Report.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2024; J Zhao and others, 'Scoping the future law and social justice: listening & hearing from the frontline' (*AHRC*, 2023) <<https://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/49438/>> accessed 26 February 2024. Zubaida Haque, 'Gender gaps in access to civil legal justice' (*Women's Budget Group*, 13 July 2023) <<https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/reports/gender-gaps-in-access-to-civil-legal-justice/>> accessed 23 February 2024.; Daniel Rourke, Ed Cripwell, Joseph Summers, and Jo Hynes, 'Access to immigration legal aid in 2023: An ocean of unmet need' (*Public Law Project*, 2023) <<https://publiclawproject.org.uk/content/uploads/2023/09/Oceans-of-unmet-need-Sep-2023.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2024; Roger Smith and Nic Madge, 'The National Legal Service: A New Vision for Access to Civil Justice' (*Legal Action Group*, 2023) <<https://www.lag.org.uk/document-downloads/213950/the-national-legal-service-a-new-vision-for-access-to-civil-justice-roger-smith-and-nic-madge>> accessed 29 February 2024; Liz Curran, 'How earlier support for sub-postmasters could have made a significant difference in averting miscarriages of justice', (*NTU Expert Blog*, 23 January 2024) <<https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/news/news-articles/2024/01/early-legal-support-could-have-prevented-post-office-scandal>> accessed 19 March 2024 and R Thomas, 'Benefit complaints: a critical analysis' 44(2) *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 258; R Thomas 'Analysing systemic administrative justice failures: explanatory factors and prospects for future research', (2021) 43(3) *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 339, 340.

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- can. The trusted intermediaries and networks were aware that there were resource and capacity constraints placed on the legal service but were unanimously of the view that the legal service within these limitations went the extra mile, was prepared to listen, and recalibrate, and was unique in the way in which it collaborated with their agency.
- v. NLS Legal is doing what they can in a limited legal aid landscape. This law firm, because it has a university investment fully behind it, allows clients see a variety of lawyers for a variety of problems. It is considered by clients and trusted intermediaries to be a critical support, impacting on and improving life outcomes through its advice and advocacy.
 - vi. NLS Legal is an incredible asset and incredible strength in an otherwise exhausted landscape where committed pro bono lawyers, barristers and other agencies are stretched and fatigued. Many are vacating the field for various reasons including burdensome administration, staff attrition and absence of expertise, the unsustainability of businesses if they do non-fee generating work and so on.⁵⁶ NTU is to be commended for its vision, investment, and commitment. 'I don't know of any other university that does this – it's exemplary and a model for others'. (Interview with Trusted Intermediary)
 - vii. Student development, employability, increasing insight into legal practice, and the development of a range of critical competencies for future employment have been enhanced by their exposure to placements and work or volunteer opportunities at NLS Legal. The data suggests that in some cases it has assisted alumni in their pathways to pupillage and employment. An overwhelming number of students surveyed, and who participated in the reflective practice conversation, found the client contact, interaction with legal professionals through this work, and exposure to the realities of client work and access to justice limitations transformative.
 - viii. Providing earlier intervention, through legal support and expertise by NLS Legal, to claimants and applicants, who would otherwise not have the wherewithal to navigate the legal system or understand how to carefully articulate valid claims, has led to earlier intervention and correct decision-making. Children with disabilities get their OT, speech therapy, language therapy, and education. In one case, NLS Legal assisted a parent who was struggling to get this support for a 14-year-old, who was 10 at the time of application for support to the department.
 - ix. Poor experiences of authority an un-navigability of services and poor infrastructure and a lack of legal support services is affecting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community.⁵⁷ Community

⁵⁶ Daniel Rourke, Ed Cripwell, Joseph Summers, and Jo Hynes, 'Access to immigration legal aid in 2023: An ocean of unmet need' (*Public Law Project*, 2023) <<https://publiclawproject.org.uk/content/uploads/2023/09/Oceans-of-unmet-need-Sep-2023.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2024.

⁵⁷ Tara Mulqueen, Lisa Wintersteiger and Claire Stern, 'Experiences of Legal Need and Barriers to Access to Justice for Marginalised Groups' (*Advice Now*, 2022) <<https://www.advicenow.org.uk/sites/default/files/Local%20Legal%20Need%20Project%20-%20Briefi>

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members are struggling in general to gain legal help. The data is consistent with other studies across the UK.⁵⁸ NLS Legal is providing an essential service in the Nottinghamshire area. The data is suggestive that NLS Legal's work is leading to improvements in public's confidence in the legal system an important contribution considering the other research in the UK .

- x. There are levels of exhaustion and often a loss of hope about the way in which the legal system is structured and responds to clients.⁵⁹ This not only affects the clients, but there is an awareness of the staff of NLS Legal of the harm this is causing to the health and wellbeing of clients who often have valid claims in relation to their legal rights when assessed by NLS Legal. It is commendable that this unique model, as findings 1 -7 above indicate, that NTU through supporting this teaching law firm, is making such a difference in the lives of its students and in the community of Nottinghamshire. Almost all participants in the research, including clients, identified serious areas where there were problems with the law or administration by authorities of the law. There was a consistent view, particularly amongst trusted intermediaries and the clients interviewed, that this has a significant impact on people's trust and confidence in the law, as they feel there is little accountability and often no point in pursuing legal avenues without legal support. The lawyers, in both the questionnaire on file closure and in the professional journals, also reflected on the impacts on clients trust of having had to navigate complex processes and laws without access to appropriate legal support. These views are consistent with findings in other respects with recent UK-wide research also conducted by NTU.⁶⁰
- xi. The data reflected that many of the clients seen by the legal service had made applications and requests for reviews with minimal support and assistance and were unable to properly articulate their claims. This often led to a refusal of valid applications. It was only with the intervention of the NLS Legal that these were often overturned on review.
- xii. With the significant financial recovery rights of the legal service and the small amounts of clients that NLS Legal can see, it is suggestive that many people in the community are missing out on their entitlements. This is indicative of a potential 'tip of the iceberg' because NLS Legal is providing a service that is

[ng%20November%202022%20%281%29%20%282%29.pdf](#)> accessed 12 April 2024; Amnesty International, *Cuts that Hurt: The impact of legal aid cuts in England on access to justice*, (Amnesty International UK, 2016) <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/aiuk_legal_aid_report.pdf?VersionId=891MnCc87uY9_XjZOFStFBZYRuljpn> accessed 26 February 2024; YouGov, 'Legal Needs of Individuals in England and Wales Summary Report 2019/20' (*Law Society of England and Wales; Legal Services Board, 2020*) <<https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Legal-Needs-of-Individuals-Summary-Report-Final-January-2020.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2024.

⁵⁸ See note 40 above.

⁵⁹ Frontier Economics, 'Research on the Sustainability of Civil Legal Aid: Final Report' (Law Society of England and Wales, 2024) <<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/civil-legal-aid-sustainability>> accessed 22 August 2024.

⁶⁰ J Zhao and others (n 40)

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otherwise not available across England because it is not subject to limitations other law firms encounter in doing legal aid work.⁶¹ Whilst some agencies might do some of the same type of work, those agencies will be unregulated, so NLS Legal provides a service that is otherwise not available across England (see Background to this report). There is considerable pro bono work going on in regulated firms but as noted earlier, in difficult circumstances in the current context with consequential retreat from this kind of work as evidenced in recent literature.⁶² In view of the substantial amounts awarded in financial recovery or redress for this small pool of clients, this begs the question as to how many other people in the United Kingdom, who have valid entitlements are missing out. There is very limited legal representation, a 'retreat from legal aid' or legal expertise to assist clients in making their claims. This flows from the lack of availability of private firms and the cost of law firms, which is beyond many members of the community as noted in the UK wide literature referred to earlier.

- xiii. The lack of availability of civil legal aid⁶³ presents a significant issue for people who have rights at law but cannot get the necessary legal support to establish their entitlements. The data throughout the research has highlighted the significant implications on the lives of clients of delays in receiving their entitlements through the work done by NLS Legal. This includes children not being able to get the special needs support that they need to stay in school or to keep up with their educational attainment. It also means that many clients have had to live without food, housing, and other essential needs because they do not have the income to afford these for either their families or their children.
- xiv. Whilst NLS Legal is an effective intervention to address some of the unmet need, the fundamental role of government, as the destination of public taxes, the creator of laws and legislation that its citizens must navigate ought in Curran's view see governments as having the primary responsibility for adequate funding for legal assistance services and access to justice. This flows from governments obligations to ensure equality before the law. This equality before the law is the key underpinning of the rule of law and democracy. Currently government funding is not meeting the public need.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Daniel Rourke, Ed Cripwell, Joseph Summers, and Jo Hynes, 'Access to immigration legal aid in 2023: An ocean of unmet need' (*Public Law Project*, 2023) <<https://publiclawproject.org.uk/content/uploads/2023/09/Oceans-of-unmet-need-Sep-2023.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2024.

⁶² Daniel Rourke, Ed Cripwell, Joseph Summers, and Jo Hynes, 'Access to immigration legal aid in 2023: An ocean of unmet need' (*Public Law Project*, 2023) <<https://publiclawproject.org.uk/content/uploads/2023/09/Oceans-of-unmet-need-Sep-2023.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2024.

⁶³ Frontier Economics, 'Research on the Sustainability of Civil Legal Aid: Final Report' (Law Society of England and Wales, 2024) <<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/civil-legal-aid-sustainability>> accessed 22 August 2024.

⁶⁴ YouGov, 'Legal Needs of Individuals in England and Wales Summary Report 2019/20' (*Law Society of England and Wales; Legal Services Board*, 2020) <<https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/wp->

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Nottingham Trent University is a standout given its significant support of NLS Legal to support student attainment and exposure to legal practice and access to justice as the data collected for this study demonstrates. It sees its role as providing student opportunities, as being engaged in community, and promoting the public good. This University resourcing however is not a substitute for the proper funding of legal aid by governments which raise taxes and pass the legislation that people need to comply with. This is especially the case, considering the harm and distress caused to community members by poor legal access, evidenced in this reports data in the cases where clients had struggled to navigate the legal system and supports prior to NLS Legal's involvement (See data from TIs).

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NLS Legal Research and Impact Evaluation Report 2024**APPENDIX 1 - Sign Posting Messages****NLS Legal Automated Email Response**

Thank you for contacting NLS Legal. This service is for those unable to afford, or otherwise access, legal services. If we are able to assist, you may be asked to complete a financial questionnaire to check your eligibility for this service before we offer an appointment. We are a teaching law firm and our team of lawyers are supported in providing advice and representation by Nottingham Law School students.

Please note that given the high volume of enquiries we receive, we are not able to assist with or reply to all enquiries received. We will only contact you if we may be able to assist or provide some signposting information/useful resources. Please allow up to 5 working days for a reply. Dependent on the nature of your enquiry and our capacity, we may be able to assist with issues relating to:

- *Employment*
- *Family*
- *Housing*
- *Tribunal Representation*
- *Education, including Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND)*
- *Welfare Benefits*
- *Crime (Victim's Rights including Victims Right to Review Scheme applications to the Crown Prosecution Service/police and Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority applications)*
- *Civil disputes (including money claims/debt recovery, contractual disputes, consumer disputes, ombudsman complaints, negligence claims and enforcement)*
- *Business*
- *General contract review*
- *Intellectual property*

Please note that as we are a teaching law firm, which relies on student volunteers, we cannot deal with urgent matters. Please refer to the list of other organisations who may be able to assist listed at the end of this email if your matter is urgent.

New Tribunal Representation enquiries

If you require representation at an Employment or Social Security Tribunal, please ensure that you have provided us with full details of your hearing, and we will contact you as soon as we can. Please provide the following documents:

For an Employment Tribunal

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- ET1 (Claim form)
- ET3 (Response)
- Notice of Hearing from the Tribunal confirming the date and venue of your Hearing.

For a Social Security Tribunal

- DWP/Local Authority Appeal Bundle
- Notice of Hearing from the Tribunal confirming the date and venue of your Hearing.

Please note:

- We generally require a minimum of 14 days' notice prior to any hearing.
- We have very limited capacity to assist in hearings lasting more than one day as all our representatives are volunteering around their studies.
- If your tribunal is scheduled in London or the South East, please contact the Free Representation Unit (FRU) London on admin@thefru.org.uk or visit: <https://www.thefru.org.uk/>

Unable to assist

In the event we are unable to assist, you may wish to contact the following organisations:

- Citizen's Advice: <http://citizensadvicenottingham.org.uk/>
- Nottingham Law Centre: <https://www.nottinghamlawcentre.org.uk/>
- Nottinghamshire Law Society's Find A Solicitor Service: <https://www.nottslawsoc.org/services/solicitor>
- Support Through Court: <https://www.supportthroughcourt.org/>
- Civil Legal Advice telephone line: 0345 345 4345
- East Midlands Region – Law Clinics referral list:
 - University of Derby Student Law Centre (family law and CICA queries): studentlegaladvicecentre@derby.ac.uk
 - University of Law Nottingham Legal Advice Clinic (Landlord/Tenant issues): probono-nottingham@law.ac.uk
 - United Legal Access (Nottingham) (initial advice on contractual disputes, consumer rights, employment law, housing law and race quality): info@unitedlegalaccess.com
 - University of Leicester Law School Legal Advice Clinic (family, consumer/contract disputes, employment, wills/probate, housing): lawadviceclinic@le.ac.uk
 - Staffordshire University Legal Advice Clinic (family, contentious probate, housing, consumer, employment): SULAC@staffs.ac.uk

You may also find the following website of assistance:

Advice Now website: <https://www.advicenow.org.uk/advicenow-guides>

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Please note:

- *We are unable to assist if your query involves or could involve taking action against Nottingham Trent University or a related body, or its employees and/or current students.*
- *No contractual or fiduciary relationship, or retainer, is made between us unless and until we have either sent you our signed terms of engagement, or expressly accepted your instructions in writing.*

Please visit our website for further details: www.ntu.ac.uk/nlslegal

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APPENDIX 2

Additional Client and Students' Data Used for Report Discussion and Conclusions

Clients Data

Number of enquiries received:

Academic year	No of enquiries
2015-16	656
2016-17	741
2017-18	1005
2018-19	1159
2019-20	1096
2020-21	1351
2021-22	1584

Financial Awards

Academic Year	Cumulative Total (£)
2015-16	732,339.89
2016-17	1,622,155.98
2017-18	2,621,364.19
2018-19	3,822,787.40
2019-20	4,555,871.47
2020-21	5,551,111.52
2021-22	5,860,137.68

Utilisation of the Existing NLS Legal Client Survey with Some Minor Tweaks Including Deidentification by NLS Legal Staff (12 Respondents)

Summary Only

How was the service overall?

4=Good - 2 (16.7%)

5=Excellent - 10 (83.3%)

How effective were the Student Volunteer(s) in dealing with your matter?

4=Good - 4 (33.3%)

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5=Excellent - 8 (66.7%)

Would you recommend our services to others?

Yes - 12 (100%)

No - 0 (0%)

If you had not been able to access our services, would you have been able to afford to pay for the legal advice/assistance you received?

Yes - 2 (16.7%)

No - 8 (66.7%)

Not sure - 2 (16.7%)

Other Types of support:

Outreach Advice Project (Netherfield or Nottingham Women's Centre) - 2 (16.7%)

One-off advice - 2 (16.7%)

Tribunal Representation - 4 (33.3%)

If you had not been able to access our services, would you have been able to afford to pay for the legal advice/assistance you received?

Yes - 2 (16.7%)

No - 8 (66.7%)

Not sure - 2 (16.7%)

If you had not accessed our services, would you have been able to access legal advice/assistance elsewhere?

Yes - 1 (8.3%)

No - 4 (33.3%)

Not sure - 7 (58.3%)

How was your case dealt with?

Remotely (online/telephone) - 6 (54.5%)

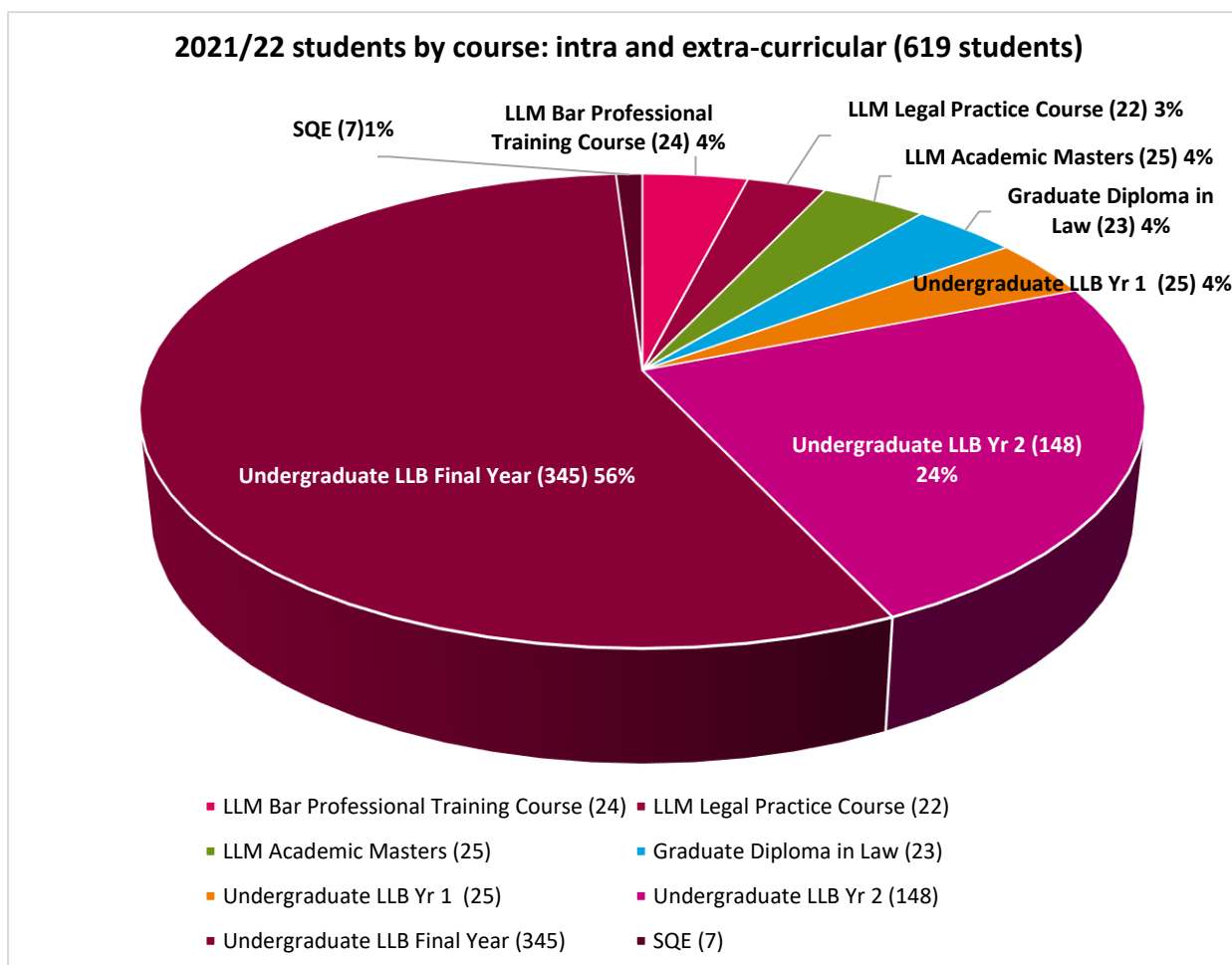
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In person - 3 (27.3%)

Mix of the above - 2 (18.2%)

Student Data

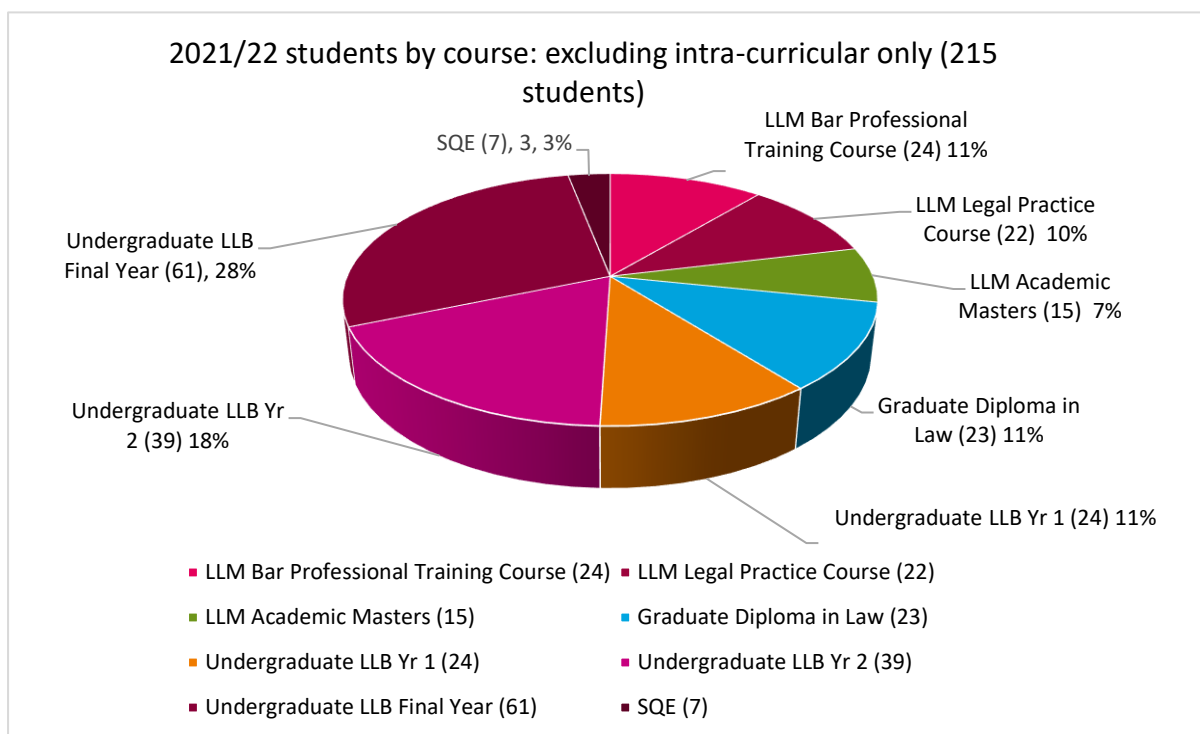
Academic year	Number of student opportunities
2015-16	234
2016-17	249
2017-18	324
2018-19	373
2019-20	420
2020-21	777
2021-22	735



LLM Bar Professional Training Course (24)	4
LLM Legal Practice Course (22)	3

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LLM Academic Masters (25)	4
Graduate Diploma in Law (23)	4
Undergraduate LLB Yr 1 (25)	4
Undergraduate LLB Yr 2 (148)	24
Undergraduate LLB Final Year (345)	56
SQE (7)	1



LLM Bar Professional Training Course (24)	4
LLM Legal Practice Course (22)	3
LLM Academic Masters (25)	4
Graduate Diploma in Law (23)	4
Undergraduate LLB Yr 1 (25)	4
Undergraduate LLB Yr 2 (148)	24
Undergraduate LLB Final Year (345)	56
SQE (7)	1

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Students Whose Course Mandates Time in NLS Legal

Number of curriculum students – Applied Legal Knowledge (Civil Practice) (ALK2) , Applied Legal Knowledge (Criminal and Business Practice) (ALK3), Employer Challenges (EC), Law in Practice (LiP), 60 credit module: 443.

Number of curriculum opportunities – ALK2, ALK3, EC’s, LiP, 60 credit: 444 (1 student did ALK3 & LLB LiP).

Profile of NLS Legal students

*UK domiciled

	Male*	BME*	Disabled	Mature	Young WP*	BTEC Entrant*	Overseas
2017/18 NLS Legal UGs	21%	34%	19%	8%	32%	18%	7%
2018/19 NLS Legal Ugs	26%	26%	26%	9%	26%	13%	5%
2019/20 NLS Legal Ugs	21%	36%	24%	8%	34%	10%	6%
2020/21 NLS Legal Ugs	23%	40%	15%	8%	36%	15%	4%
2021/22 NLS Legal Ugs	22%	43%	17%	13%	36%	14%	7%
All NLS UG students 2021/22	32%	46%	14%	5%	39%	21%	8%
All NLS UG students (1718-2122)	33%	44%	18%	9%	40%	23%	9%

Postgraduate Students

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*UK domiciled

	Male	BME	Disable	WP	Oversea
2016/17 NLS Legal PGTs	38%	26%	14%	28%	17%
2017/18 NLS Legal PGTs	48%	28%	13%	28%	26%
2018/19 NLS Legal PGTs	40%	44%	18%	44%	22%
2019/20 NLS Legal PGTs	33%	21%	33%	37%	17%
2020/21 NLS Legal PGTs	27%	31%	30%	30%	15%
2021/22 NLS Legal PGTs	24%	40%	20%	41%	43%
All NLS PGT students 2021/22	29%	32%	17%	37%	23%
All NLS PGT students (1617-2122)	33%	34%	18%	38%	25%

Figure 3a: 2016/17 to 2021/22 NLS Legal participants achieving a 2:1/First Class Degree, compared with the underlying NLS student population.

Grade comparison NLS Legal students and UG students

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
NLS Legal Students	88.9%	85.7%	96.9%	96.0%	91.7%
ALL NLS UG Students	70.1%	57.2%	73.7%	70.4%	69.7%

Additional Student Data Collected by NLS Legal

Summary Only

Please indicate the type of volunteering experience you have been involved in at the NLS Legal

As part of a course/module (intra curriculum) – 1 (5.3%)

On top of my studies (extra curriculum) – 16 (84.2%)

Both intra and extra curriculum – 2 (10.5%)

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being very) how satisfied were you with your overall experience of volunteering at the NLS Legal?

3 1 (5.3%)

4 8 (42.1%)

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5 10 (52.6%)

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being very) how satisfied were you overall with the support offered by your supervisor(s)?

3 1 (5.3%)

4 3 (21.1%)

5 14 (73.7%)

Feedback:

'Very approachable, easy to speak to'.

Support was always available, and I always felt like I could approach anyone for help if needed.

My supervisors have invariably been supportive and encouraging.

Occasionally I found it was tricky to get hold of a supervisor because of the volume of other work they had on at the time. They were very supportive in guidance on the tasks. Although I had a lot to do by myself, I always got feedback and could ask for help if needed.

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being very) how confident are you that you have helped the local community through volunteering at NLS Legal?

2 1 (5.3%)

3 5 (26.3%)

4 6 (31.6%)

5 7 (36.8%)

Feedback

I was involved in the processes behind the procedures of logging new enquiries of clients and contacting them to signpost them on to other firms who may be able to help them.

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I feel like I did contribute to the LAC in taking some workload of their shoulders (with all my overall tasks including archiving etc.) however I would have liked to have been involved in a client case and take on some more roles within the LAC, this would have allowed me to grow my skill set but also help the local community. Maybe I can get involved in any cases that need assistance before the end of the year as there is still some time left!

It is sometimes difficult to see the value of giving advice in non-adversarial cases, but the FRU work I have done has recovered a substantial amount of money for vulnerable claimants.

This was the most rewarding aspect of volunteering at LAC. I hope I was helpful but equally hope to be a greater help in the future.

What are the most valuable skills that you have gained through volunteering at the LAC? (Tick all that apply).

Leadership Teamwork – 1 (5.3%)

Teamwork – 10 (52.6%)

Drafting documents/letters – 15 (78.9%)

Communication skills – 11 (57.9%)

Time management – 7 (36.8%)

Commercial awareness – 7 (36.8%)

Confidence – 5 (26.3%)

Organisation – 6 (31.6%)

IT skills – 4 (21.1%)

File management – 8 (42.1%)

Client management/care – 13 (68.4%)

Legal knowledge – 13 (68.4%)

Legal research – 15 (78.9%)

Interview techniques – 6 (31.6%)

Professional conduct – 9 (47.4%)

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Listening and responding – 8 (42.1%)

Academic enhancement – 7 (36.8%)

Advocacy – 3 (15.8%)

Resilience – 5 (26.3%)

My FRU experience has encouraged me to continue to seek opportunities for pro bono work in future, focusing on cases where there is a clear outcome to be achieved, e.g., aiming for a successful recovery of money through the Tribunal.

What changes to the training, if any, do you feel would have been useful in your role as a student volunteer?

Templates – brief but enough to know what needs to be provided in certain documents etc.

One of my supervisors doesn't seem to reply to my Team's messages whenever I'd completed a task. I understand that solicitors at LAC are incredibly busy, but it would be nice to know if ... had read the message, or if my work wasn't up to par, then at least I'd know and could have a chance to improve.

Adequate training was given in every perspective in my experience. I think it would be useful if volunteers could sit in on more client meetings.

It is straightforward.

What, if anything, could be done to improve the service for students?

The LAC administrator has done a perfect job in informing us of new pro bono opportunities.

I was very satisfied with student service with all cases that needed volunteers were advertised on Teams for everyone affiliated with the LAC Volunteers to see and also E-mails being sent out to advertise roles.

I would suggest possibly having alternative ways of applying to be assigned to a case rather than just replying to the associated message on Teams, maybe having some sort of link to sign yourself up for the role.

Where possible, more and more frequent communication between supervisors and volunteers once a case has been taken on would be welcome. However, I recognise that supervisors are often very busy and have to juggle multiple cases at once.

What, if anything, could be done to improve the service for clients?

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In person meeting with clients (if COVID is less of a threat).

Although a few clients will need to be signposted on (as the NLS Legal will be unable to help) I feel that the NLS Legal (and the solicitors there) do everything they can do to help each client, this is done by each respective solicitor checking each case that is assigned to them, even if they may initially be logged as unable to assist.

Client service face to face seemed excellent to me when observed, I was always observing and learning how my peers dealt with clients and walk ins in terms of the service and communication provided.

Perhaps the NLS Legal could look into developing an online portal for individuals looking for advice/representation. This could provide initial advice on the law/the clients' potential options before they go ahead and seek a referral into LAC.

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being very) how satisfied are you that your time in the LAC has increased your confidence in applying for future jobs or further education?

2	1 (5.3%)
3	5 (26.3%)
4	3 (15.8%)
5	10 (52.6%)

Has your experience in the NLS Legal assisted you with making job applications, interviews and/or further work experience opportunities?

Yes – 13 (68.4%)

No – 1 (5.3%)

n/a – 5 (26.3%)

Feedback

I now feel more confident with future interviews as I feel that I now have a strong point to advertise myself with having worked in a regulated law firm early on in my career and this experience is something that i can centre my interview (regarding work experience) around.

It has proven invaluable in securing pupillage interviews.

Has your time in the LAC influenced your decision as to your future career?

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Yes – 12 (63.2%)

Feedback:

Because of this experience I want to work in the legal profession

Because of this experience I do not want to work in the legal profession

Feedback:

No – 3 (15.8%) This experience has not influenced my decisions as to my future career.

I have not yet decided what career I want to pursue – 4 (21.1%)

Secondary Additional Student Data Collected by NLS Legal.

Please indicate the type of volunteering experience you have been involved in at the NLS Legal

As part of a course/module (intra curriculum) – 1 (5.3%)

On top of my studies (extra curriculum) – 16 (84.2%)

Both intra and extra curriculum – 2 (10.5%)

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being very) how satisfied were you with your overall experience of volunteering at the NLS Legal?

3 1 (5.3%)

4 8 (42.1%)

5 10 (52.6%)

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being very) how satisfied were you overall with the support offered by your supervisor(s)?

3 1 (5.3%)

4 4 (21.1%)

5 14 (73.7%)

Feedback:

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'Very approachable, easy to speak to'.

Support was always available, and I always felt like I could approach anyone for help if needed.

My supervisors have invariably been supportive and encouraging.

Occasionally I found it was tricky to get hold of a supervisor because of the volume of other work they had on at the time. They were very supportive in guidance on the tasks. Although I had a lot to do by myself, I always got feedback and could ask for help if needed.

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being very) how confident are you that you have helped the local community through volunteering at NLS Legal?

2	1 (5.3%)
3	5 (26.3%)
4	6 (31.6%)
5	7 (36.8%)

Feedback

I was involved in the processes behind the procedures of logging new enquiries of clients and contacting them to signpost them on to other firms who may be able to help them.

I feel like I did contribute to the LAC in taking some workload off their shoulders (with all my overall tasks including archiving etc.) however I would have liked to have been involved in a client case and take on some more roles within the LAC, this would have allowed me to grow my skill set but also help the local community. Maybe I can get involved in any cases that need assistance before the end of the year as there is still some time left!

It is sometimes difficult to see the value of giving advice in non-adversarial cases, but the FRU work I have done has recovered a substantial amount of money for vulnerable claimants.

This was the most rewarding aspect of volunteering at LAC. I hope I was helpful but equally hope to be a greater help in the future.

What are the most valuable skills that you have gained through volunteering at the LAC? (Tick all that apply).

Below are the percentages of student's responses to a question about the skills gained.

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Additional Students Data Collected by NLS Legal

Skills	Percentage
Leadership Teamwork – 1	(5.3%)
Teamwork – 10	(52.6%)
Drafting documents/letters – 15	(78.9%)
Communication skills – 11	(57.9%)
Time management – 7	(36.8%)
Commercial awareness – 7	(36.8%)
Confidence – 5	(26.3%)
Organisation – 6	(31.6%)
IT skills – 4	(21.1%)
File management – 8	(42.1%)
Client management/care – 13	(68.4%)
Legal knowledge – 13	(68.4%)
Legal research – 15	(78.9%)
Interview techniques – 6	(31.6%)
Professional conduct – 9	(47.4%)
Listening and responding – 8	(42.1%)
Academic enhancement – 7	(36.8%)
Advocacy – 3	(15.8%)
Resilience – 5	(26.3%)

The following were the responses from the students directly extracted from the MS form:

The current and future context of legal services and legal practice	4
Legal ethics, client care and application	5
Client interviewing and/or legal negotiation	5
Structured, succinct, and persuasive oral persuasion	3
Forensic analysis of materials to establish veracity, gaps, and evidence that you will need for your client’s case (this includes a critical appraisal of materials and assessments based on this)	3
Investigation, analysis, and pleading	2
Document and case analysis	5
Awareness of procedural requirements and options and alternatives	5
Structured, succinct, and persuasive written submissions	5
Applying abstract legal concepts to real world contexts and simplifying them into plain English so clients can understand their rights and options and make informed choices tailored to their needs	5

NLS Legal Research and Impact Evaluation Report 2024**Student responses primary surveyed data**

The question specifically relating to access to justice was: What are your reflections on your experience at NLS Legal on the following:

- a. Do you feel you are able to reach a more diverse clientele through NLS Legal than you might be otherwise exposed to?
- b. Do you feel more capable of managing unexpected situations and digesting legal concepts, translating and applying them?
- c. Do you feel your experience at NLS Legal has enabled you to connect with peers and the broader legal profession?
- d. Do you have a greater understanding of the issues and obstacles in access to justice?
- e. Has your perception of pro bono changed because of your role with NLS Legal?

Select the relevant letter above, answer yes or no first, and then feel free to elaborate indicating which area you are referring to.

Responses included:

All of the above.

- a) - yes, b) - yes, c) - yes, d) - yes, e) - no, I think I've always felt that pro bono is important, and this perception remained throughout my time with NLS Legal

C - working at NLS set me up incredibly for the broader profession. I was not only able to connect with qualified solicitors through the work, but I was also able to connect with those that were further advanced in their studies and were therefore able to share their experience.

All of the above

- a. Yes. b. Yes. c. Yes. d. Yes. e. Yes.

Question 14 - What does legal empowerment mean to you and why is it important for your clients, the community and for yourself as a legal professional/working in a legal environment?

Question - What are your future career aspirations? In your answer you may like to consider some of the following:

- a. Do you think that working at NLS Legal will set you up for your future career and what now does this look like?

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- b. Do you think NLS Legal experience will position/help you in that way?
(Note: later we may ask you to reflect on this answer and what your reflections are again when you have been at NLS Legal for a while longer and as alumni if you consent to be interviewed later on.)
- c. How has this involvement in NLS shaped you or equipped you in your current endeavours and approaches?

Select the relevant letter above before you discuss in the free text box below, so we can identify which area you are referring to. If there is anything additional that we haven't mentioned, please feel free to add as well.

Already a qualified solicitor working in commercial law.

C - I am currently a Trainee and my aspirations are to become a qualified Solicitor. Working at NLS set me up for my current role as without the vast experience from NLS, I do not think it would have been so achievable to get a paralegal role so quickly and progress from there.

Become a barrister.

Barrister-at-Law. NLS Legal has definitely helped me to achieve my primary career goal.

Trusted intermediaries

If I were to make these statements in relation to NLS Legal, how would you respond?

- 1. I can confidently and positively refer.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree x 1 Strongly Agree x 4

- 2. Referral process to and from is clearly understood.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree x 1 Strongly Agree x 4

- 3. High level of mutual understanding and trust between NLS Legal and my agency

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree x 1 Strongly Agree x 4

- 4. The staff involved in the NLS Legal recognise and utilise the professional expertise of our staff.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral x 1 Agree x 2 Strongly Agree x 2

- 5. The lawyer/s are responsive to client need.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree x 2 Strongly Agree x 3

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6. We do not only examine the individual clients' problems but look to change the systemic causes of problems including the laws and how they are administered.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral x 1 Agree Strongly Agree x 4