

Teaching and delivering clinical and public legal education in distance learning environments: challenges and opportunities

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What is clinical legal education?

- Clinical legal education (CLE) is an educational ideology that seeks to promote learning through doing, meaning for law students they learn about the law through working on real-life cases
- It emerged initially in the United States as a social justice mission – aimed at providing legal services for the poor through pro-bono work
- In CLE students work under the supervision of experienced legal practitioners
- It is increasingly becoming part of UK law school curricula

What is public legal education?

- Public legal education (PLE) provides people with awareness and understanding of rights and legal issues
- It also helps people recognise when they may need support, what advice is available and how to get it
- Law students deliver sessions with the support of academic tutors or qualified lawyers to ensure that the content is accurate
- PLE is often referred to as 'Street Law' which emerged in the United States

The Open University Law School



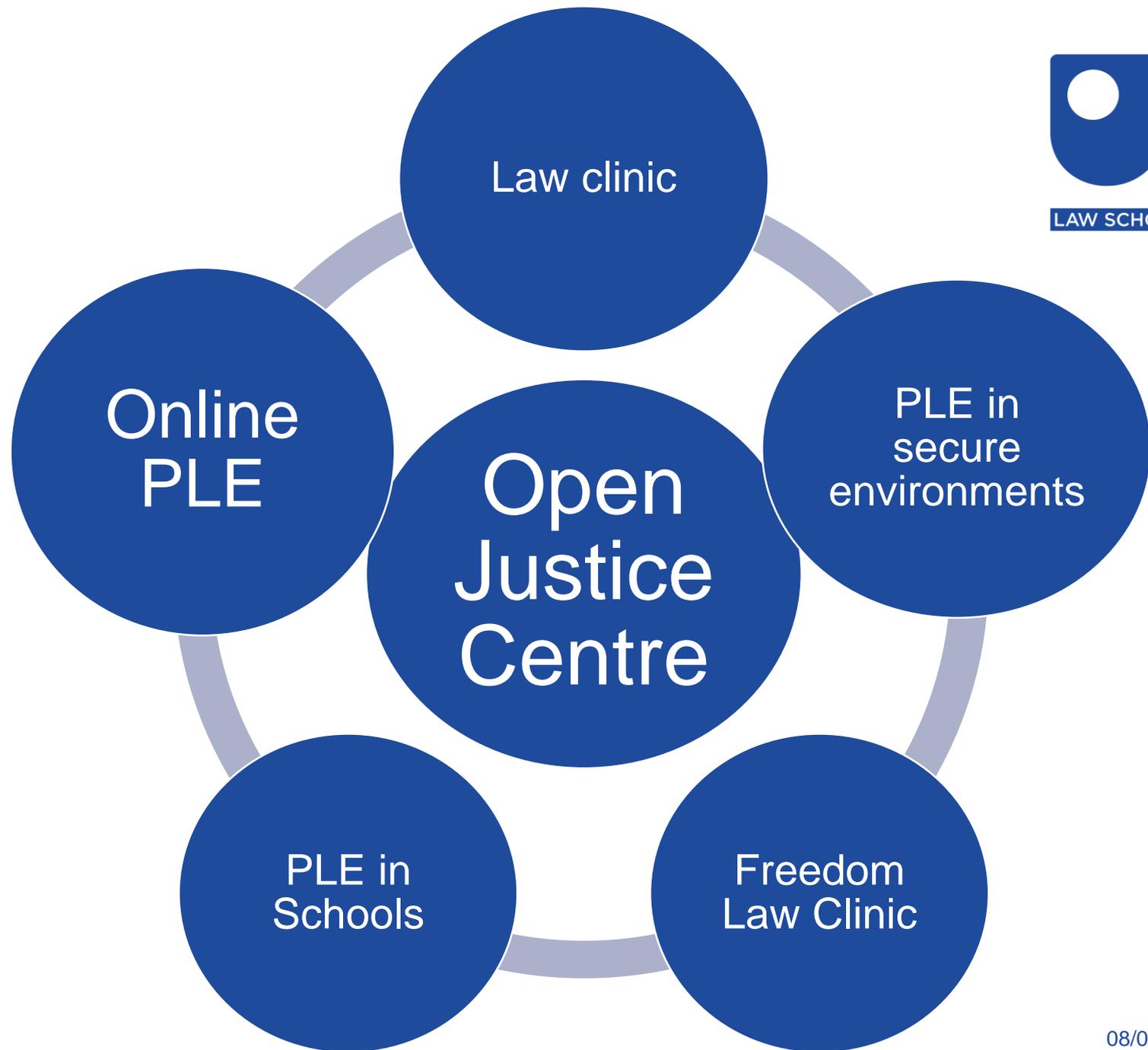
- Largest provider of undergraduate legal education in the UK
- Open access distance learning
- Mission of social justice

The Open Justice Centre



LAW SCHOOL

- The Open Justice Centre was established in September 2016 to fit in with the Open University's mission of social justice, provide practical experiences for students to help with their learning and their employability skills
- The challenge for the team was to provide practical experience, within a distance learning setting
- To do this, we sought the innovative use of technology
- Within the accompanying module there is also a focus on:
 - Values, ethics and professional identity
 - Employability
 - Community engagement



Online legal clinic



- Launched 2017
- Supervised online advice
- Free to the public
- <http://law-school.open.ac.uk/open-justice>

PLE in schools and secure environments

- These were conducted F2F within schools all across the UK and in prisons
- Students discussed issues of interest, often pre-selected by the location
- In schools, for example, we conducted PLE activities on social media and the law, which proved to be very popular

Online PLE

- We held an event called Open Justice Week where students submitted material which was presented on an externally facing website and blog
- This including audio-visual material and other written materials (e.g. factsheets, blogs etc).

The Online Public Legal Education Project

Dispelling the common law marriage myth

In this public legal education activity, Open Justice Centre Firm 26 will be looking at some of the myths which perpetuate in our understanding of 'common law marriage'. These activities will educate you on some of the legal issues which arise because married partners and non-married partners are treated differently by the law.

Introduction

This presentation introduces the issue of the common law marriage myth: [Dispelling the Common Law Marriage Myth](#)

Part 1 – Registering a baby's birth and parental responsibility



Reg birth and PR.pptx

Attendees (1)

- Sharon O'Donnell

Hosts (1)

- Sharon O'Donnell

Presenters (0)

Participants (0)

Chat (Everyone)

Let's look at what happens when you register the birth of a baby

Freedom Law Clinic



- Collaboration with the Freedom Law Clinic, an organisation sponsored by a number of legal firms – Allen & Overy; Bates, Wells, Braithwaite; Hughman’s Solicitors
- Freedom Law Clinic work on civil liberties and criminal appeals cases. Students work on real cases, but not ‘live’ cases, so they do not need to be legally qualified
- Students worked last year within the Freedom Law Clinic, using an online platform to communicate and for the dissemination of legal documents
- Students are given tasks to complete within the clinic

Challenges



- How do you give students practical experience in an online distance learning environment?
- How do you get students to work together in an online distance learning environment?
- How do you know students, whom you've never met, will perform?
- How do you make their experiences worthwhile?

Overcoming challenges – utilising technology

- Online clinic – submission of online queries using Clio case management system
- Freedom Law Clinic – digital conferencing platform
- Public legal education – the VR app – an immersive simulation tool
- Open Justice week – Adobe Connect and audio-visual presentation; dissemination on websites and advertising through Twitter

Opportunities

“At the end of it all, we emerged rather different people from the experience than the way we entered it: more confident, proudly sporting the badges of public speaking, team work, the capacity to think on our feet and to respond to the ground shifting in real-time under our feet. We gained the ability to impart our legal knowledge and to demystify the law – in essence, to be a small part of the movement which attempts to improve social justice outcomes for the public”

(Lidia, Hannah, Ayesha and Samina writing about conducting PLE sessions for teenagers)

Opportunities



LAW SCHOOL

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

(Jon, discussing his time at HMP Oakwood).

Opportunities

“Although the workload has been more demanding than we might have expected, there have also been opportunities to really stretch our skills by getting to grips with a complex case and developing our understanding of both practical and technical approaches to issues such as special counsel and abuse of process. It has certainly given me a lot of motivation and opened my eyes to potentially looking at criminal practice, which I would never have considered before”

(Khaled, Freedom Law Clinic).

Conclusion

- There are a number of challenges in conducting CLE and PLE in an online distance learning environment
- At times, students have found the work challenging – collaboration proved to be particularly difficult
- Yet, many of the students found at the end of their work that they got much more out it