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Citation:

Dunn, R and Bengtsson, L and McConnell, S (2021) Building a Policy Clinic Network - CLEO Workshop 13th May 2021. International Journal of Clinical Legal Education, 28 (1). pp. 244-248. ISSN 1467-1069 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19164/ijcle.v28i1.1132>

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Document Version:

Article (Published Version)

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## **BUILDING A POLICY CLINIC NETWORK – CLEO WORKSHOP 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**Rachel Dunn, Lyndsey Bengtsson and Siobhan McConnell, Northumbria**

**University, UK\***

### **Defining Policy Clinics**

Policy Clinics/work are not a new concept and there have been many other legal educators who have established this kind of work.<sup>1</sup> There is no set definition of Policy Clinics, nor a prescription of what they should and shouldn't, or can and cannot, do. It may be that you are already doing this kind of work at your institution without realising it. We take a very liberal stance with policy and law reform education, *taking it to mean any pedagogic methods which incorporate or fully embrace the contribution to policy and/or law reform as an end result*. This can be through a full credited module, policy work incorporated into an already established module, or extra-curricular activities, such as responding to consultation papers.

Some modules may incorporate elements of it, for example, by assessing students on a report outlining an area of law which should be reformed and sending it to a relevant

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<sup>1</sup> For example, please see William Wesley Patton 'Getting Back to the Sandbox: Designing a legal policy clinic' (2011) 16 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 96; Michael Coper, 'Law Reform and Legal Education: Uniting Separate Worlds' (2007-2008) 39 *University of Toledo Law Review* 233; Liz Curran, 'Innovations in an Australian Clinical Legal Education Program: Students Making a Difference in Generating Positive Change' (2004) 6 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 162

stakeholder, e.g. local MP.<sup>2</sup> Some supervisors and students in Live Client Clinics will experience an area of law or policy which is not working well in practice, and do further law reform work to try and change it.<sup>3</sup> Others will do smaller projects, such as client newsletters to external organisations. At Northumbria Law School, and other institutions such as the Open University, we have a full Policy Clinic, whereby students undertake empirical and desk-based research for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and researchers. Ultimately, no work big or small aiming at influencing policy and law reform, which engages students in the process, should go unnoticed or undervalued.

### **Why do Policy Clinic?**

We have written elsewhere about why law teachers should consider Policy Clinics/work and the benefits this brings to students.<sup>4</sup> Policy Clinics/work allows students to engage with the kind of research they may not have the opportunity to elsewhere on their programme, for example empirical work or large-scale projects for external clients. Through this, they develop a range of skills, such as project

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<sup>2</sup> Rachel Dunn and Richard Glancey, 'Using legal policy and law reform as assessment.' 139-163. Found in Bone, A. and Maharg, P. (Eds) *Critical Perspectives on the Scholarship of Assessment and Learning in Law*. (2019 ANU Press)

<sup>3</sup> Liz Curran, 'University Law Clinics and their value in undertaking client-centred law reform to provide a voice for clients' experiences' (2007) 12 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Volume 105; Jeff Carolin, 'When Law Reform is Not Enough: A Case Study on social Change and the Role that Lawyers and Legal Clinics Ought to Play' (2014) 23 *Journal of Law and Social Policy* 107

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Dunn, Lyndsey Bengtsson and Siobhan McConnell, 'The Policy Clinic at Northumbria University: Influencing Policy/Law Reform as an Effective Educational Tool for Students' (2020) 27(2) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 68

management, oral and written skills, teamwork and data management.<sup>5</sup> Further to the skills gained and developed through Policy Clinics/work, students are also given the opportunity to make their voices heard and contribute to how the law *can be*, not just how it is already. Students can see how their work '*may have a positive impact in generating change*'<sup>6</sup> and thus develop a social justice ethos. Through this social justice ethos, they can realise how they can be drivers of change, both during their education and later in their careers. As MacCrimmon and Santow highlight '*while it is crucial for students to learn how to identify and apply legal rules, this should not be the sum total of their skills set.*'<sup>7</sup> Thus, Policy Clinics/work can be a vehicle for opening conversations with students as to how the law should be and actively work together to influence it.

Further to the student benefits, it also creates opportunities for universities to engage with NGOs, build research and policy networks and be at the forefront of influential research. An added bonus for universities is that anyone who can research can teach or supervise Policy Clinics/work, as there is no need for practising certificates or specific qualifications. This opens up clinical activity to those it may have been previously closed to and brings together academic and clinical staff where there may

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Liz Curran, 'University Law Clinics and their value in undertaking client-centred law reform to provide a voice for clients' experiences' (2007) 12 International Journal of Clinical Legal Education Volume 105

<sup>7</sup> Les McCrimmon and Edward Santow, 'Justice Education, Law Reform and the Clinical Method' 211-224. Found in Frank S. Bloch, *The Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Justice*, (2010 Oxford University Press)

have previously been tensions.<sup>8</sup> Policy Clinics can be integrated into already established Live Client Clinics and Policy Work can be integrated into any already established modules or extra-curricular activities.

### **Policy Clinic Network**

During a Connecting Legal Education Session with Rachel Dunn (Northumbria University) and Liz Hardie (Open University), there was a lot of interest in Policy Clinics and how to establish one.<sup>9</sup> It was decided that a loose network would be created for academics to come together, from all disciplines. The aim of the network is to share best practices and experiences from policy work, help academics to engage with this kind of teaching, and discuss ways in which the network can go forward. There will be a Teams site academics can join, which will feature research and documents relating to Policy Clinics/work, which can be used to establish or extend the work at interested institutions. It will also be a place where academics can talk, meet and share ideas. An ultimate aim of the network is to have Policy Clinics and students work together to create national and international research.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Frank Bloch, 'The case for clinical scholarship' (2004) 4 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 7; Paul McKeown and Rachel Dunn, 'The European Network of Clinical Legal Education: The Spring Workshop' (2015) 22(3) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 312

<sup>9</sup> For more information, please see the ALT Blog post: <http://lawteacher.ac.uk/connecting-legal-education/connecting-legal-education-being-the-change/>

## **Clinical Legal Education Organisation (CLEO) Workshop**

On 13<sup>th</sup> May, CLEO are hosting a free 1 hour Zoom workshop on Policy Clinics/work and we would love to see as many academics there as possible. The aim of the session is to bring together likeminded academics who are, or want to, create impactful work through their teaching and engage with this kind education. The session will start with a short presentation from Siobhan McConnell, Lyndsey Bengtsson and Rachel Dunn on what policy clinic and law reform work is, highlighting the work done at Northumbria University. Attendees will then be put into break out groups to discuss the work they do at their institutions or are planning to do. We will come together at the end to share ideas for the network and future Policy Clinic/work ideas. Attendees are encouraged to share their contact details, to be added to the Teams site and set up an informal CLEO mailing list.

For more details on the CLEO Workshop and to register, please visit:

<https://www.cleo-uk.org/events/>