

# University of Bristol Law Clinic

Annual Review 2014-2015



Providing advice. Changing lives.

“Denial of legal protection to the poor litigant who cannot afford to pay is one enemy of the rule of law.”

**Lord Bingham**  
Former Lord Justice

POLICE

# A much needed service

A functioning justice system means access to both the courts and legal advice for all who need it. Yet, with cuts to legal aid expected to be in the region of 40 per cent, society's most vulnerable are being left unprotected. Meanwhile, law students graduating from university are being penalised for not having enough experience of law in practice. The University of Bristol's Law Clinic provides pro-bono legal advice, supporting those that most need it to get the justice they deserve - whilst students gain the very best clinical legal education through the provision of a valuable social service that has the power to change lives.

## A solid case for growth

We have come a long way in a year. We have laid strong foundations for the Law Clinic to professionalise and to meet the growing demand for its services – both from those needing legal advice, and from students wanting to gain real experience of law.

Since September 2014, the Law Clinic has transformed from a student-led voluntary organisation to a practitioner-led Law Clinic. We have become part of a new module based on Clinical Legal Studies, bringing the activities of the clinic into the heart of student learning. And we have built capacity to take on more cases whilst ensuring the students managing them get the right support.

This is our first Annual Review and one of which I am immensely proud. In the first six weeks of this academic year, we received double the number of enquiries than the previous year as a voluntary organisation. By the end of the year that increase was five-fold. For the students involved this meant the chance to get immersed in a wide range of issues and gain the confidence to take on the many challenges that law in practice presents.

This was particularly marked for the students working with young adults through the Kids Company. Seeing the dedication of its employees, after the organisation's demise, as they continued to work with our students to ensure all open cases were completed was both inspiring and, in many cases, career-shaping.

The Law Clinic's growth is recognition that prospective employers are no longer just looking for a good degree. They expect graduates to have solid experiences of law in practice. The clinic provides that and more. Creating an environment where students learn through the provision of legal advice not only enriches their lives – but can fundamentally change the lives of those they are supporting.



We are hugely grateful to the support of colleagues, students and alumni donors for helping us turn our vision for the Law Clinic into a reality. It would not have been possible without you.

**John Peake**  
Director, Law Clinic

“Joining the Law Clinic was one of my best decisions this year. It allowed me to explore the realities of legal practice and offered invaluable experience on how to deal with and help people with real legal issues”

**Kevin Tan**  
Undergraduate, University  
of Bristol Law School



# Providing advice: How we work

With the introduction of a Clinical Legal Studies Module, the Law Clinic needed to change how it worked. This meant ensuring there were enough cases for students to work on which, in turn, required an increase in the intensity and responsibility associated with their work loads. Whilst there was more demand for our services, it was critical that we became more selective. Only taking on cases that were within the competencies of supervisors and students ensured that student teams got the right support and were well equipped to do the best job possible for the people they advise.

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In the 2014/15 financial year  
the Law Clinic experienced a

**500%**  
increase in enquiries  
.....

## Taking on cases


Enquiries come into the Clinic in one of two ways. As a referral from a partner organisation - or as a direct enquiry. The way we work with partners varies. For some we facilitate drop-in sessions, advising those that need it directly. For others we might work out of their offices, as an extension of their team. Alternatively we deal with their cases as we would a direct enquiry - setting up a client meeting, considering the best approach, reviewing the law and drafting a letter of advice. Follow-up is available if required.

## Types of cases

The types of cases taken on are extremely varied, providing a great grounding for students as they gain a solid insight into law in practice. This year students provided advice on housing and family issues, employment and contract law, assault, problems with landlords and tracing relatives. We also started conversations with referring partners on issues of homelessness and asylum, and with the Citizen's Advice Bureau, which we hope will bear fruit in the next academic year.

## Working in firms

The Clinic is made up of teams of students organised as 'firms'. Currently they are generalist in terms of the types of cases taken on. This allows students to get involved in a case at the earliest opportunity, rather than 'waiting around' for something that fits with their firm's specialist area. Moving forward, this is likely to change. Such is the demand from referral organisations, that at least some specialist teams are expected to be set up within the next academic year.



“The Law Clinic provides an excellent service. It gives our young people the confidence to speak to the legal profession without fear.”

**Jo Morrell**  
Kids Company

# Providing advice: Our partners

For the Law Clinic to attract sufficient cases to meet the requirements of the Clinical Legal Studies module we could not rely solely on people coming to the Wills Memorial Building. We had to be more proactive in terms of promoting the service and making it accessible. We therefore established a number of links with external organisations. These ranged from charities serving the local community, Bristol County Court to many other advisory bodies. As word of mouth spread, this had a positive impact on numbers of direct enquiries through the Law Clinic - and helped us explore opportunities with other potential partners.

## **Kids Company**

Throughout the year we ran weekly sessions at the Kids Company, now replaced by the Urban Academy and Drop in Centre. On average students provide advice to up to five children each time they visit. The students attend in pairs and if follow-up is needed, the same students keep working on the case to provide consistency for the young adults they are supporting. Students also accompany Kids Company young people to meetings with solicitors. The relationships built with both key workers and their wards have been further deepened as Kids Company cases are taken up by the Urban Academy.

## **Personal Support Unit (PSU)**

The PSU at Bristol County Court operates in a similar way to Victim Support in the Criminal Courts. The staff are there to provide support rather than legal advice. There is therefore a gap in provision which we meet. The Clinic takes referrals from the PSU and where possible will provide legal advice and support. Over the past six months we have received approximately one referral a month from the PSU – and given students the opportunity to act as Mackenzie friends, assisting those clients who want to represent themselves.

## **Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)**

Bristol's CAB has too many people asking for its support. It has to prioritise areas of work based on whether it has the expertise and time to deal with a case effectively. This year we have received approximately one referral a month from the CAB. Helping reduce demand on its services means providing help to people who might otherwise do without. This has been very motivating for students involved in their cases. We are looking forward to continuing this relationship into the next financial year.

“Supporting individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds has improved my confidence and given me an appreciation of the professionalism needed when dealing with cases. It has also pushed me to use skills outside of my studies.”

**Dominique Hodgson**  
Undergraduate, University  
of Bristol Law School.





# Changing lives: Student development

The University of Bristol Law School has always attracted the very best talent from all over the world. It is dedicated to capturing that talent and supporting its students to be the very best they can be. Increasingly this has meant providing opportunities to gain solid, real life experiences of law to complement student studies and increase employability. The core curriculum is already richly supported by opportunities to participate in pro-bono work. The introduction of the Clinical Legal Studies module is a move to embed practical application of law into the qualifications of undergraduates choosing it as a third year option.

## Learning in Practice

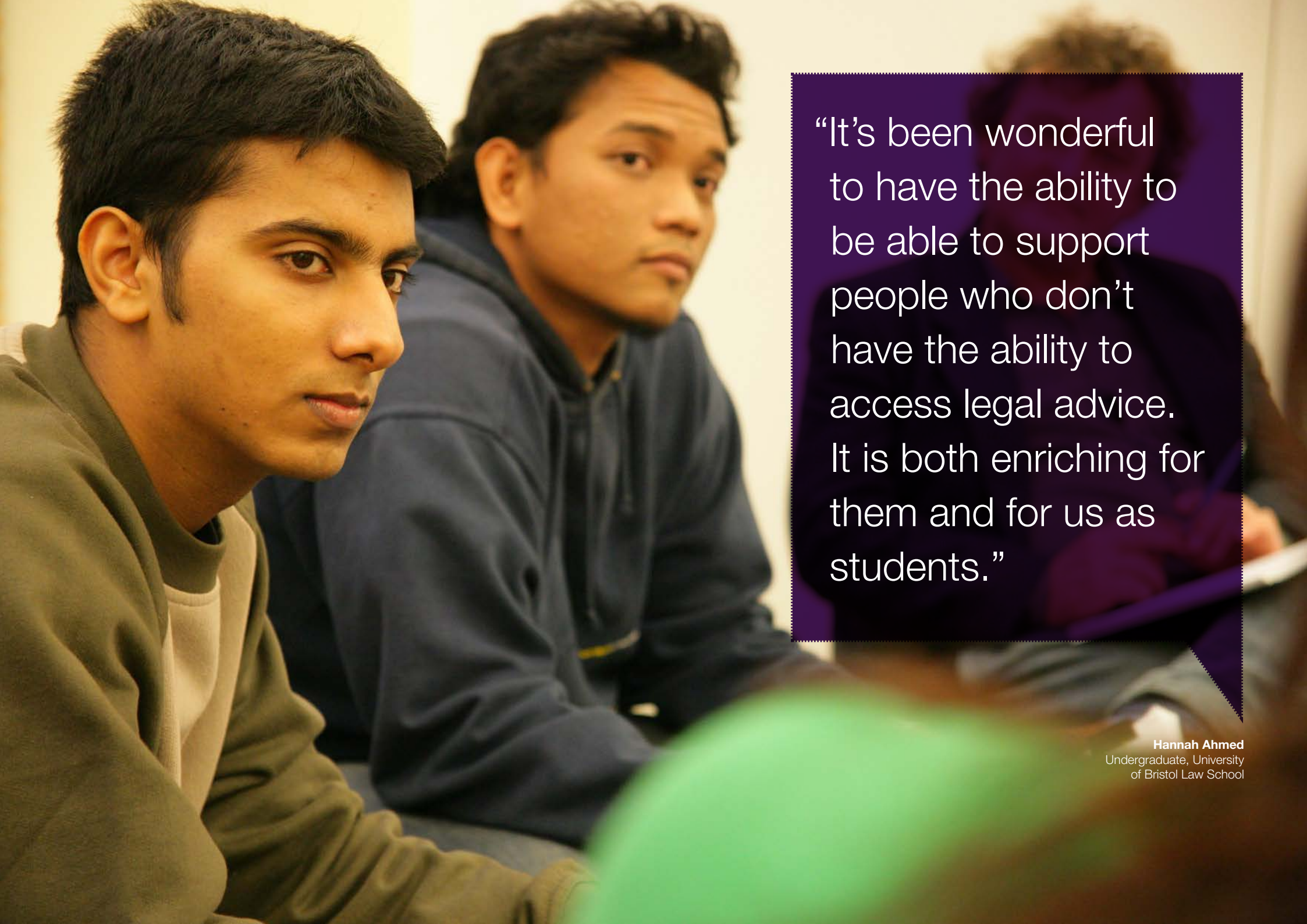
Over the course of the last academic year, but prior to the first intake of students opting for the Clinical Legal Studies module, we set about designing the course. The objectives were to develop a module to help students bridge the gap between academic study and the practical application of law. This will ensure students have a concrete practical understanding of professional ethics, court structure, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), the practice of lawyering, legal aid, access issues, submissions of pleadings, enforcement and conducting interviews – and a rich appreciation of the impact of law on people's lives.

## Mediation Competitions

Over the past 10 years, mediation competitions have become increasingly popular. They help students hone their skills for a career both in and out of law. In February this year a team of four students travelled to London to take part in a mediation competition. This was the first such initiative and the students came up against very experienced mediation competitors. Although not progressing through to the finals the students performed exceptionally well and learned a lot from the process. We hope to make this a regular feature in the Law Clinic calendar.

## Summer Internships

Anyone who has been involved with a legal issue will know that they do not just occur during term time or outside the exam period. And just because a student is unavailable does not mean that a case or client will wait. The intention of the Clinic is and remains to provide a year round service. It will necessarily be reduced during exams and holidays but the Clinic will have an ongoing presence year-round. Funded summer internships generously supported by alumni donations has allowed us to keep the Clinic open over the summer, following through on cases as well as helping out on six new enquiries.



“It’s been wonderful to have the ability to be able to support people who don’t have the ability to access legal advice. It is both enriching for them and for us as students.”

**Hannah Ahmed**  
Undergraduate, University  
of Bristol Law School

# Changing lives: The people we've helped

The Law Clinic provides legal advice and help to members of the public on a pro-bono basis. We are often their only chance of getting such support. The clinic helps on a range of issues including housing and property, landlord and tenant disputes, neighbour and nuisance disputes, employment rights, consumer rights, problems with the police, welfare benefits and social security. The nature of the clinics work is varied and sensitive. The case studies outlined below illustrate the diversity of the cases the Law Clinic has taken on – and the potential impact they can have on people's lives.

## **The job seeker**

A 19 year old man and a Polish passport holder, the applicant had lived in the UK since he was eight years old. He had completed his education in the UK, and a training course which had led onto some initial temporary work. When this finished he applied for Jobseekers Allowance, but this was stopped after three months under the new rules relating to European Nationals. The Law Clinic lodged a request for mandatory reconsideration which relied on the status of his mother, who was also Polish, who was working. The Department reversed their decision and awarded him Jobseekers Allowance.

## **The tenant**

The tenant was a 20 year old man, living in a Housing Association flat. He had been there for six months during which time there had been intermittent hot water and heating. The landlord had blamed the gas company who in turn were indicating it was the fault of the landlord. The Law Clinic supported the tenant, helping kick start communications that outlined the tenant's rights. By formalising concerns about the lack of heating and hot water and indicating a possible application for compensation, the situation was resolved. Within seven days the landlord had arranged for the boiler to be repaired.

## **The mother**

A 20 year old woman approached the clinic to help gain access to a child. She was the mother of two children, but only one of them lived with her. Contact with the older child had become difficult. One of the clinic students attended an initial meeting with the solicitor giving advice on the situation. The student then went on to assist with the application for mediation and subsequent application to the Court to review the arrangements for contact. When the case went to court, the student attended as a Mackenzie friend to the client. The case is ongoing.

“The Law Clinic is an enriching experience, providing the opportunity to practice textbook theory through real-life legal cases. I hope to continue with the Clinic for years to come!”

**Eve Robbins**  
Undergraduate,  
University of  
Bristol Law School.



# Looking forwards

2014/15 has exceeded our expectations and hopes and is the result of the close collaboration and full support of the Law School and student committee. As we look to the future, we need to make sure that we do not lose momentum and use the next year to consolidate, to improve procedures and performance. This means maintaining student numbers through a transparent and open admissions process. It means continuing to provide a professional and credible advice service that outside agencies and individuals will trust. And it means starting to specialise in distinct areas of law.

## Specialist Areas

As we take on more cases, and as students with key areas of interest are recruited to the module, it is necessary to develop specialist areas of support. Academic members of the Law School have demonstrated interest in supporting this initiative, playing a role as work supervisors on areas such as property, employment, family and company law. We have also had meetings with HHJ Wildblood the Presiding Family Judge in Bristol, and Judge Cope one of the Civil Judges, to discuss the development of a specialist court-orientated firm to help students develop their court-based expertise.

## Partners for change

As we grow it is essential we continue to develop links with external organisations. This year Refugee Action and the Red Cross have expressed an interest in students assisting them on immigration work. Although legal aid is still available for some asylum applications, no such help is there should the refugee wish to be reunited with his or her family members. The Red Cross runs a scheme whereby successful refugees are helped with the application to bring their family members into the UK. We are looking at the potential of providing students who will assist with this.

## Social Enterprise and Street Law

The provision of legal advice through clinics is normally in relation to disputes - whether court or tribunal-based. With the city of Bristol currently at the forefront of developing social enterprises, the Law Clinic is discussing a possible venture with Social Enterprise Works Bristol to put forward students to participate in advice sessions for prospective social enterprises. This is an exciting opportunity for students looking towards a commercial, rather than social welfare, future in law to be involved in the work of the Clinic.

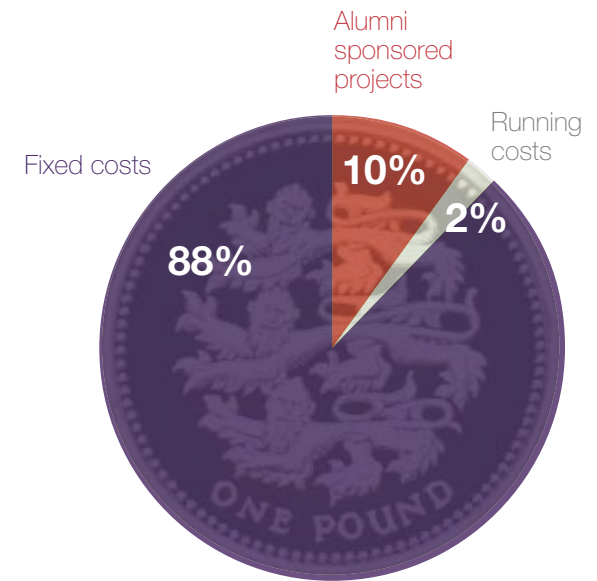
“We are immensely grateful to those that have supported our growth with funding, time and pro-bono space. 2016/17 will see us move into new offices in Berkeley Square.”

**John Peake**  
Director, Law Clinic



# Finances

Total expenditure for the academic year September 2014 – September 2015, including Alumni funding, was £39,558. I must thank and commend the commitment and generosity of our alumni and other sponsors whose support, both in time and in funds, has allowed us the scope and freedom to develop the Law Clinic. It would not have been possible without you.



## I would particularly like to thank:

After several years involvement with the Law Clinic Burges Salmon in 2015 decided to end their involvement with the Clinic. I would like to thank them for their financial and training support over the past few years.

Our alumni for enabling the establishment of the Director's post, and for covering the costs of three students so we could extend our service throughout the summer, providing valuable support to those people whose cases were still active during this time. And to Alice Mitchell, Yunzhe Zhang and Georgina Evison for giving up their summer holidays to make it happen.

## I would also like to thank:

The Clinic Student Committee: It is testimony to the Committee, ably led by Emily Smith, that the clinic's transformation from a volunteer-led organisation into something more vibrant encountered few of the problems such a rapid change might sometimes provoke.

The Law School, for future provision of pro-bono offices in the new Berkeley Square development, due for completion 2016/17.

The Law School and University, for approving my appointment as Director of the Law Clinic. It is a privilege to come from a private practice, non-academic background and venture into this highly regarded University to work on such a fulfilling initiative.

**John Peake**  
Director, Law Clinic

## For 2015/16 we are looking for funding for the following exciting initiatives:

- Red Cross 'Supporting Asylum' Partnership (Page 12)
- Street Law and Young People Education Initiative (Page 12)
- Set up of a young person's advice drop in centre

If you want to be involved, then please contact [john.peake@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:john.peake@bristol.ac.uk) to discuss.

“Taking part in the law clinic's work not only provides the student with practical skills, which go beyond the academic law degree and really give a sense of the responsibility that comes with being a lawyer, but also cuts against, to an extent, austerity measures to legal aid, which seems to contradict a key tenet of the rule of law: equality before the law. I am proud to say that our work with the clinic has helped to an extent with this major problem.”

**Nick Queffurus**  
Undergraduate, University  
of Bristol Law School



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