
University of London Refugee Law Clinic Online Launch

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On 20 May 2021, the University of London hosted an online launch of its new Refugee Law Clinic. The Clinic is an innovative project providing *pro bono* legal advice for refugee clients based on a model of Clinical Legal Education for its diverse student body. It began operating in 2020. The Clinic's work focuses on advising and preparing fresh claims for asylum—an area identified as underserved in the current legal landscape—and complements the work of law firms and other service providers in London. So far, the clinic has supported over 25 clients towards submitting their fresh claims and has undertaken various activities to promote good practice around fresh claims in the sector.

The Clinic is supported by the Central University and by ten of the University's Member Institutions. Delivered in partnership with two leading international law firms based in London—Macfarlanes and Clifford Chance—the Refugee Law Clinic also provides opportunities for lawyers to undertake *pro bono* work. The Institute of Advanced Legal Studies is proud to host the Clinic on the fifth floor of Charles Clore House.

The host for the launch was Professor David Cantor, Director of the University of London Refugee Law Initiative and Chair of the Clinic's Governing Board. Professor Cantor highlighted the intercollegiate and collaborative nature of the Clinic and the work that has been accomplished, to date despite the challenges of the pandemic. The 'virtual ribbon' was then cut by the Vice Chancellor of the University of London, Professor Wendy Thomson; Louise Zekaria of Macfarlanes; and David Boyd of Clifford Chance. Professor Thomson explained how the Clinic fits the civic role of the University, which is one of the key aspects of the current University strategy.

The Clinic Coordinator, Susie Reardon-Smith, and Supervising Lawyer, Frances Trevena, then explained the achievements of the Clinic to date.

They emphasized the importance of legal work on fresh claims in the asylum field. Claims handled by the Clinic have focused on disputed nationality issues; human trafficking; and rectifying poor legal advice which clients had previously received. A national client network has been created through ongoing work with referring partner organizations.

Next to speak were Paige Achilles (Macfarlanes) and Olivia Johnson (Clifford Chance), two of the volunteer lawyers at the Clinic. They explained how the work to which they have been exposed has been very different from their usual areas of practice. Not surprisingly, this has been a steep, but intellectually rewarding, 'learning curve'. They stressed the collaborative nature of clinic work (including working with students) and the real-world impact of volunteering.

This was followed by a panel discussion which considered the Government's 'New Plan for Immigration' and its impact on the asylum system in the United Kingdom. Louise Hooper (Garden Court Chambers) emphasized that there was much that was not new in the Plan, and many of the ideas previously had been found to be unworkable or unlawful. She anticipated that, rather than limiting the number of fresh claims for asylum, the Plan instead would lead to an increase.

Professor Elspeth Guild (Queen Mary, University of London) described the Plan in terms of the frontloading of efficiency ideas into asylum processes. She predicted that this, in turn, will lead to an enormous number of fresh claims until the evidence is finally properly considered. The emphasis on efficiency has obvious implications for the 'rule of law' which was being undermined in the process.

Finally, Kamena Dorling (Helen Bamber Foundation) described the Plan as extending the longstanding 'hostile environment' and 'bogus asylum' ethos, which have been propagated by successive governments. She underscored that fresh claims to asylum are no less likely to be valid and are frequently upheld. This is due in part to the fact that expert evidence is finally commissioned in the context of the fresh claim. She concluded that we should not lose sight of the precarious existence which asylum seekers experience while waiting for their claims to be determined.

Professor Cantor closed the event by expressing the hope that opportunities for in-person events hosted by the Clinic at Charles Clore House will be possible as the pandemic recedes. He expressed his hope that the Clinic's supporters will be able to visit in person in the near future.