Context

University law clinics are an important tool for both legal skills-based and academic education. As well as providing students with experience of law in action and a practical base for academic enquiry, law clinics are an important means of providing practical legal work experience to enhance career opportunities, especially where they can provide experience of working with clients who face social problems that many students may never face themselves.

In recent years, cuts to legal aid, and austerity measures more generally, have combined to dramatically impact the landscape of advice provision, often affecting the most marginalised or disadvantaged groups in society. Legal aid is no longer available in many areas of social welfare, family, and immigration law. Those voluntary sector advice agencies that remain open cannot meet demand. The pro bono sector has become the fastest growing area of independent advice provision in the UK, and student law clinics lie within that. In 2020, the Law School Pro Bono and Clinics Report produced by LawWorks noted that “pro bono activity now takes place in the vast majority of law schools” and that it “has now become a mainstream part of legal education, as well as law schools’ wider community engagement.”

QMCLAC, in keeping with law clinics more generally, faces various challenges and limitations in improving access to justice. These include uncertainty in the university sector; issues around capacity to conduct casework which is as much to do with the physical environment as student numbers; measuring the reach and impact of our work; the availability of particular expertise and regulatory issues; and the true cost of running a university law clinic. Law clinics require high staff resources, and students require intense supervision.

What is clear to us is that the need for QMCLAC is greater than ever, both within the local community and advice sector. The demand from law students at QMUL, who value the opportunities QMCLAC brings for their personal and professional development, has also increased dramatically.

History

QMCLAC was the first university legal advice clinic to be set up in London in 2006. The aim was to provide free legal advice to our local community and to give students real-life ‘law in action’ experience. QMCLAC is a small organisation with a big impact. Since it began, over 4,000 individuals have been provided with advice and representation.

Since its inception, QMCLAC has consistently been at the forefront of clinical legal education, and has been a model that other universities have followed when setting up their own law clinics. This has been recognised in numerous QMUL and national awards including: the Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (Advice HE 2020), the Best Contribution by a Law School to Pro Bono (LawWorks and Attorney General Student Pro Bono Awards 2019) and The Richard Garriott Award for Leadership in Public Engagement (QMUL 2019).
Introduction
The Strategic Plan 2022-2027 sets out the vision for the Queen Mary Legal Advice Centre (QMLAC) for the next five years. It is designed to be a visionary strategy which ensures that the QMLAC builds on its established position in the sector and grows (in terms of size, reputation and innovation). This vision is designed to ensure that the QMLAC continues to: a) adapt to the needs of its local community by developing its student community and b) collaborate with the legal profession. This vision is intended to keep the QMLAC at the forefront of clinical legal education in the UK and globally.

This strategy is designed to complement the QMUL Law Department’s continued pride in, and support of, clinical legal education and its recognition of the QMLAC’s impact on students and the Law School’s wider reputation. Further, this document sits alongside the QMUL Strategy 2030 and the core values the University promotes:

• Inclusive – nurturing students, staff and volunteer lawyers.
• Proud – to make a difference.
• Ambitious – innovative and flexible.
• Collaborative – continuously using methods of co-creation and cooperation.
• Ethical – acting ethically at all times.

Further this strategy embodies QMUL’s aims to engage globally, championing education and student excellence and delivering award-winning community service. It seeks to embody the 4 pillars of excellence in education. In student engagement, in employability and in learning and teaching environment. Although typically not part of the core research of the Law School, this strategy takes strength from the work of clinical legal education within the School.

These five years cover a key period of innovation, development and growth for the QMLAC given the anticipated additional physical space. This physical expansion will provide a new platform which will need to be supported by an increased staff support resourcing plan. This strategy can be partially implemented before a transition to a new premises and fully realised thereafter.

The work of the QMLAC should be reported against these strategic goals in Summer 2024, Summer 2026 (interim reporting) and December 2027 (end of the strategic period).

Strategic goals for 2022-27

Goal 1: Increase and focus our provision of quality legal advice and public legal education projects

1. Develop metrics to focus our advice and public legal education work on those we can help.
2. Use these to develop and measure the value and impact of the work of the QMLAC.
3. Focus on ensuring current and future projects are designed with local community needs in mind; in part by liaising with local organisations and community groups.
4. Develop impactful policy clinics with the QMUL Law Department and collaboratively within the QMLAC.
5. Continuously review and develop the systems and training available to QMLAC staff and students to maintain the high standards of service. This includes opportunities for staff career development within the Centre.
6. Increase staff and space resource to enable the development of this strategy (ensuring that the level of development accords with the resource available).

Goal 2: Embed clinical legal education within the QMLAC Law School and wider QMUL community

1. Explore various ways clinical legal education can be embedded even more in undergraduate Law programmes.
2. Continue and develop the 3 cr credit modules; Practice of Law in a Clinical Environment and wider QMUL community.
3. Continuously work to support academics wishing to include clinical legal education elements in their modules; and actively encourage colleagues to do this when proposing new modules.
4. Actively seek to engage academics, particularly those with practice experience, in the QMLAC.
5. Provide opportunities for the external legal sector to help in the development of the next generation of lawyers.
6. Work to ensure that engagement with the QMLAC is efficient, straightforward and welcoming to all external partners.
7. Embed clinical legal education within the Law School, Faculty, and QMUL staff and student community.

Goal 3: Provide educational opportunities for QMLAC students

1. Develop a broad range of experiences for students (public legal education and client advice), covering a range of different areas of law and accessible to all students.
2. Continue to develop and focus work on opportunities to provide public advice.
3. Provide educational opportunities for QMLAC students, ensuring they are accessible for all students.

Goal 4: Develop attractive opportunities for the external legal sector to engage in pro bono work

1. Ensure constant improvement through regular annual progress meetings with external volunteers.
2. Develop suitable channels for the external legal sector to provide and receive feedback.
3. Work to ensure that engagement with the QMLAC is efficient, straightforward and welcoming to all external partners.

Goal 5: Expand the profile of the QMLAC, positioning it as a key USP for QMUL

1. Maintain our public profile in the UK and globally; and increase awareness of QMLAC among key groups so we can continue to have impact across the voluntary and academic sector.
2. Ensure the QMLAC and QMUL’s branding through websites, visual materials and social media are used as effective tools to promote the QMLAC.
3. Maintain and develop the external reputation of the QMLAC within the Law School, Faculty, and QMUL staff and student community.

Goal 6: To operate a well-resourced and purposeful organisation

1. Ensure the proper governance of the QMUL through an internal QMUL Management Committee, an external Advisory Board and proper reporting channels within QMUL.
2. Develop better systems for sharing information and best practice within QMUL, the wider clinical legal education sector, and the pro bono community.
3. Develop better systems for working with all external partners.
4. Upgrade and improve our fundraising systems and capacity.

Mission Statement

The QMLAC has two key aims; enhancing the education of our students and promoting access to justice in the community. Our aims are achieved through four objectives:

• providing our students with the opportunity to work on live cases thereby developing their legal and non-legal skills, and understanding of the law in context.
• developing innovative clinical legal education, experiential learning, and teaching methods;
• developing professional and ethical awareness and instilling a lifelong commitment to promoting justice in the community. Our aims are achieved through four objectives;
• providing our students with the opportunity to work on live cases thereby developing their legal and non-legal skills, and understanding of the law in context.
• developing innovative clinical legal education, experiential learning, and teaching methods;
• developing professional and ethical awareness and instilling a lifelong commitment to promoting justice in the community.

Goal 1: Increase and focus our provision of quality legal advice and public legal education projects

1. Increase and focus the provision of quality legal advice and public legal education education projects.

Goal 2: Embed clinical legal education within the QMLAC Law School and wider QMUL community

1. Embed clinical legal education within the QMLAC Law Department, Law School and wider QMUL community.

Goal 3: Provide educational opportunities for QMLAC students

1. Provide educational opportunities for QMLAC students.

Goal 4: Develop attractive opportunities for the external legal sector to engage in pro bono work

1. To operate a well-resourced and purposeful organisation able to achieve excellence.