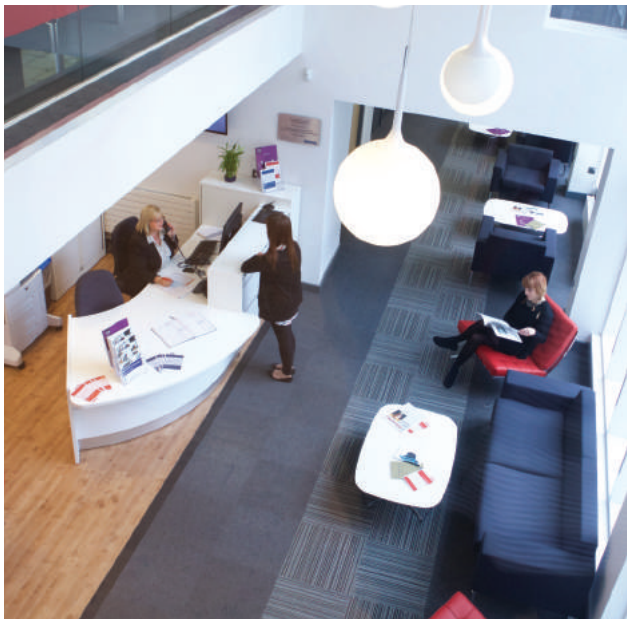
Nottingham Law School

Legal Advice Centre

Annual Report 2016-17



Nottingham Law School
Legal Advice Centre

LawWorks Clinics Network
supported by The Law Society

FRU
Free Representation Unit

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

Contents

Overview

2016/17 was the 11th full year of operation of the legal advice service provided by Nottingham Law School (NLS). Following our award-winning year in 2015-16, the Legal Advice Centre continued to enjoy great success this year and recognition both locally and nationally. The Centre also grew considerably, expanding the number of staff, students and clients engaged. As well as expanding the existing service, we continue to develop new services, in particular the Business and Enterprise Law Service, which was formally launched in May 2017.

The Centre was shortlisted for its Pro Bono work, as part of the Law Society Excellence Awards in October 2016 and Faye Deverell, our Senior Supervising Solicitor, received Nottinghamshire Law Society's Solicitor of the Year Award in March 2017.

Billy Shaw, one of our final year LLB student advisers was shortlisted for the Best Contribution by an Individual Student Award in the annual Attorney General / LawWorks Student Pro Bono Awards 2017. Billy was also nominated for the Dean's award for the Law School, partly in recognition of his excellent work in the Centre.

We also celebrated our 10th birthday with an event during National Pro Bono Week in November 2016, which was well attended by staff, students, members of the local legal profession and community organisations.

Overall, we have now advised or represented over 1300 clients since 2006 and nearly 1500 students have participated in some form of pro bono work during their time at NLS. During 2016-17, we also achieved the landmark of recovering more than an estimated £1,000,000 in compensation and recovered benefits through representing clients in Tribunal as part of our partnership with the Free Representation Unit.

We also continued to work closely with local organisations, such as Nottingham Personal Support Unit, Broxtowe Citizen's Advice, and the Ark in Gedling, St George's Community Centre in Netherfield, Notts Refugee Forum and the Nottingham Women's Centre. These organisations continue to provide excellent opportunities for our students and effective client referrals. We also maintain strong links with national organisations such as LawWorks, the Law Centres Network and the Clinical Legal Education Organisation. The development of the Business and Enterprise Law Service has also meant we are increasingly developing links with the local business community and NTU's own External Engagement team.

We continue to operate as a wholly owned charitable subsidiary of Nottingham Trent University and hold an Alternative Business Structure licence from the Solicitors Regulation Authority. We continue to develop our service to meet the objective of establishing a fully functioning legal practice within the law school.

Ultimately, we aim to provide our students with vital experience of working within a fully regulated practice, while at the same time developing and delivering innovative ways of ensuring our clients get access to justice. This year we have begun to offer low-cost services to the public where a need is not met by the commercial /voluntary sector. Any income received will be invested in the charity.

In the long term, we also aim to develop a research capacity within the Centre to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of assistance with a view to promoting access to justice.

Activity and Student Engagement

In 2016-17, we created 375 opportunities for students to work in the Centre, which were taken up by 249 students. Over the previous four years we have roughly tripled the number of opportunities for our students to engage in Centre activity. In the past year, the number of student opportunities increased by around 25% and the number of students engaged by around 20%.

We saw a further significant increase in student activity within our Free Representation Unit (FRU). 67 students successfully passed the FRU selection test, nearly twice as many as the previous year. The number of cases handled increased substantially with Nottingham FRU handling 85 cases, 17 Employment and 68 Social Security. Over the past three years, we estimate that we have assisted clients in recovering more than £1,000,000 in compensation, settlements and recovered benefits. We continue to enjoy an excellent relationship with FRU London, who attend and deliver training once a year and provide support to our representation service.

During 2016-17, 18 students worked on miscarriage of justice cases, as part of our Miscarriage of Justice Project. We have set up a screening service and will be in a position to develop this further in 2017-18. Our objective is to enable more clients to benefit from the service we provide as well as providing more focused work to our students than is available in full case reviews.

The Business and Enterprise Law Service (BELS)

In May 2017 we formally launched the Business and Enterprise Law Service at an event attended by Professor Edward Peck, the Vice Chancellor, Colonel David Sneath, High Sheriff of Nottingham, Professor Janine Griffiths-Baker, Dean of the Law School and Councillor Nick McDonald, solicitor with Potter Clarkson and City Council Cabinet member for Economic Development.

The aim of the service is to provide first level advice and services to small and medium sized enterprises in Nottingham and the surrounding community through tailored advice, undertaking specific legal tasks and other services such as workshops and seminars run by staff, students and supported by the local legal community. We also aim to develop information resources and toolkits to enable small businesses (both for profit and not for profit) to better understand their legal rights and responsibilities and to provide a trusted resource for businesses to use.

Over the course of the year, the Centre hosted a number of breakfast seminars involving staff and students. Seminars covered topics such as Intellectual Property law, Data Protection, bringing small claims and commercial property issues. We are grateful to external partner lawyers who worked on these seminars with our students. These seminars also ran as part of our contribution to NTU's European funded project "Enabling Innovation", a three year project designed to enable innovating businesses in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire to get support from partner universities. Our work on this project will continue until March 2019 with the aim of providing formal support to 42 eligible SMEs.

As well as significantly increasing the number of commercial cases undertaken by the Centre, we also engaged in other commercial law projects designed to involve our students in providing support to businesses. The number of business cases taken on by the Centre increased from three in 2015-16 to 48 in 2016-17.

Our students were also engaged in the Legal Education Foundation funded project "Educating Tomorrow's Commercial Lawyers" in collaboration with Queen Mary University and University of Ulster. Targets on this project were significantly exceeded. The Centre received just under £20,000 as part of its participation in this project. Students participated in advice and public legal education sessions as part of this project including delivering webinars to a European audience, working on data protection sessions and drafting advice notes and toolkits while being supervised online by external lawyers.

Students also ran Intellectual Property health check sessions in June at the NTU Degree show, which provided legal assistance to 36 students who were displaying their work at the show.

As well as the significant funding received in 2016, we were delighted and grateful to receive a further significant donation that has enabled us to retain our Legal Assistant role within the Centre, which will enable us to provide significant support to BELS.

Autism Law Service

In 2016-17, the Centre began work to establish its Autism Law Service. The service is the idea of Callum Scott who recognised that many of the clients using our advice and Tribunal service had autism. Following discussions with local organisations, we decided to explore setting up an Autism Law Service. Broadly, the aims of the service will be to:

- Develop an advice representation service targeted at and sensitive to the needs of people with autism and autistic spectrum disorder;
- Running staff development events which aim to raise awareness of the issues of this client group;
- To enable our students to understand the issues faced by such clients and develop communication skills to fit these requirements.

The service may also provide us with first-hand evidence of the impact of legal changes on this client group. We are grateful to Santander plc for providing us with funding to employ a development assistant to work with us in planning this service and to Malvika Jaganmohan who did some excellent work in that role over the summer. Centre staff and students attended a training day delivered by the National Autistic Society and we have begun discussions with Autism East Midlands to work on further development of the service.

In July 2016 we hosted a seminar delivered by Clive Day, Partner in Gateley Plc, Nottingham and featuring a presentation by one of our clients and their support worker, Darren Stapleton of Nottinghamshire County Council. This focused on autism and disability discrimination in the workplace. The seminar was delivered as part of the Enabling Innovation Project. The aim of the seminar was to provide guidance to employers on potential adjustments that could be made when employing those with autistic spectrum disorder. It highlighted simple and cost-effective steps an employer could take to enable those who find the standard working environment difficult to develop their potential in the workplace.

Legal Literacy Projects

We also continue to work closely with local schools to deliver public legal education and Streetlaw sessions giving our students the opportunity to deliver presentations to those with an interest in particular areas of law.

Supervised by former Centre solicitor Stephanie Wright, students participated in these legal literacy projects either extra-curricular or as part of the GDL Law in Practice module. We were grateful to Aldercar School, Langley Mill and Quarrydale Academy in Sutton-in-Ashfield school for hosting these talks. Students developed sessions on topics such as Social Media and the Law and the Legal Implications of Brexit.

Next year we will be aiming to develop this further in conjunction with the law school's Pathways to Law project as well as working closely with our existing partners.

Events and training

In addition to the National Pro Bono Week event and our BELS launch referred to above, we hosted a one day symposium in conjunction with the Law Centres Network in May 2017. The aim of the day was to explore different models by which law school clinics and law centres / voluntary agencies could work together and delegates provided some excellent examples and models of collaborative work.

Support and Partnerships

We continued our partnership with the Personal Support Unit (PSU), a charity which trains and provides volunteers to assist litigants-in-person. The project, based at Nottingham County Court, uses volunteers from NLS, the University of Nottingham School of Law and the local community to assist those at court. Last year we recruited 10 NLS students who each provided valuable assistance to those at court as well as, importantly, developing their own skills and experience. We also assisted with training University of Nottingham students engaged in the scheme.

We have very successful referral arrangements with Broxtowe Citizen's Advice, Rushcliffe Advice Network, Derbyshire Law Centre and Nottingham Citizen's Advice, who have helped greatly by referring a suitable cases for our FRU reps. We have also publicised our work through Advice Nottingham, the Rushcliffe Advice Network and continue to foster links with the Bar Pro Bono Unit and LawWorks.

We continue to operate as a LawWorks Clinic and adhere to their Protocol on Pro Bono work and have also signed the Law Society of England and Wales' Pro Bono Charter. Our students also assisted Advice Nottingham in carrying out a client survey and we worked with Notts and Nottingham Refugee Forum to recruit and train advisers to work on their refugee advice projects. We continue to have close links with ACAS and attend Tribunal user group meetings.

We continue to hold outreach advice sessions at the Nottingham Women's Centre and St George's Community Centre, Netherfield. We have also begun discussions with Inspire, the Council owned social enterprise, which runs Nottinghamshire's libraries to use some of their excellent facilities to run outreach and public legal education sessions.

We have continued to receive significant support this year from local legal practices who have supervised students and appeared at other events. Our thanks go to staff at Potter Clarkson, Gateley Plc, Browne Jacobson and Geldards for their invaluable support, which has enabled us to broaden the range of work we do with clients. We also continue to work closely with the NTU Business Development team, with NTU Volunteering and the Schools and Colleges Office at NTU and are grateful for their support in promoting the Centre.

Students also worked on talks as part of our collaborative project "Creating Tomorrow's Commercial Lawyers". We have also been in discussion with Panjab University in India to set up a Collaborative On-line interactive learning sessions in 2017-18 for Centre students to work on.

Staff

The Legal Advice Centre staff continue to work tirelessly to provide an extraordinarily high level of support to students working in the Centre and their clients. They have consistently delivered a high standard of service to clients and demonstrated significant dedication to their work.

Supervising Solicitors

Faye Deverell's excellent work as Senior Supervising Solicitor in the Centre was recognised in her receiving the award of Nottinghamshire Solicitor of the year in March 2017. Faye has continued to work hard to develop strong ties with advice and referral agencies, which has been crucial in developing the FRU service in the Centre. She has also taken significant steps to develop a partnership with local county libraries (through Inspire).

Mat Game has continued to provide excellent supervisory support to students on employment cases and cementing links with ACAS. Mat also provided excellent support to students delivering public legal education sessions and presentations on employment law during the year and worked in delivering sessions as part of the Enabling Innovation Project. He also successfully set up our pilot drop-in service, which we will be rolling out in full in 2017-18.

Mike Jarrett, who joined us from Staffordshire University provided significant support to establish and publicise BELS and enabled us to substantially increase the number of commercial cases. Mike recently took up a post at Aston University and we are grateful to him for his work in developing BELS during his time with us.

Linda Green continued to provide excellent administrative support to the Centre staff and students and successfully supervised students working in administrative support roles, expanding the number of places available to get students fully involved in the running of the Centre.

We were delighted to welcome Carlota Gonzalez Laynez to the team. Carlota joined us on secondment in May 2017 and will work with us until 31 March 2019 to coordinate our contribution to the Enabling Innovation Project. She has already made a significant contribution to enable us to meet the targets set as part of the project.

Legal Assistants and Legal Officers

Last year, we welcomed to the team recent students Brogan Roache and Callum Scott, who joined us as Legal Assistants for a year. These posts, funded through the Santander donation and BELS NLS funding, have proved highly successful, enabling us to develop the FRU service, increase the number of cases we handle and provide excellent opportunities both for the postholders and our students who work with them. We have as a result been able to handle around 120 more cases during 2016-17.

Both have worked with students on the NTU Acceler8 programme; Brogan in developing a "Student Exit Survey" with the students (information from which is contained below) and Callum in assessing the feasibility of the Autism Law Service. They have also impressed visitors from law firms elsewhere with the professionalism, skill and enthusiasm they have demonstrated.

We are delighted that both of them will be continuing to work with us in 2017/18 in newly created Legal Officer roles, which we have developed with the Enabling Innovation Project and donation funding. The posts will largely support BELS.

Thanks to generous funding from the law school, we have also recruited a student from the LLB Sandwich course to undertake a placement year with us. Lauren Kilbride will work with us in 2017-18 as a Legal Assistant supporting us in the full range of work undertaken at the Centre.

We are keen to explore ways in which the experience obtained in these roles can be used to enable the postholders to move towards qualification, particularly in view of the proposed changes to solicitor training.

Wider Support

We also received great support from Rachel Rowley and Rachael Dawson, who supervised family cases in the Centre in Katie Smith's absence on maternity leave. Janice Denoncourt and Jane Jarman also worked closely with us in supporting the Intellectual Property work of the Centre. We were also delighted to welcome Pina McAleer to the Centre team. Pina has provided substantial support in supervising IP cases in her first full year at NLS.

Jeremy Robson worked on the Miscarriage of Justice Project and provided invaluable support to the students working on those projects and their clients. We also received excellent support from the NLS Employability team, our Alumni Fellowship Coordinator, the BLS Marketing team and NTU's press office.

Jenny Chapman, Law School Deputy Dean, continues to act as Compliance Officer for Legal Practice and Gemma Jarvis Compliance Officer for Financial Affairs for the Centre. Nick Johnson is the Centre Director.

Curriculum development

Stephanie Wright continued to successfully lead the Law in Practice module on the Graduate Diploma in Law, as well as Law in Practice on the LLB, significantly increasing the number of students using Centre experience for academic credit. In 2016/17, nearly half the students undertaking the Graduate Diploma in Law took Law in Practice.

Helen Taylor also joined the Centre teaching team and worked successfully to develop and expand the Student Law Office module which in 2017-18 will be delivered as a half and full-year module and on Client Finance.

These modules enable students to use Centre experience for academic credit. A similar LLM module has been established on the BPTC led by Simon Parsons. We are reviewing the modules the Centre offers in the light of the SRA and Bar Council's reviews of professional training and investigating ways of ensuring that our students are able to use the work done to count towards qualification under the new framework proposed by the SRA.

Funding, Awards and Recognition

The Centre is generously supported by NLS, which provides the vast majority of our funding. We receive enormous support from the law school and we are grateful to the Dean, Professor Janine Griffiths-Baker and Jenny Chapman, Deputy Dean and the Centre's Compliance Officer for Legal Practice, for their commitment to the Centre.

As mentioned earlier, we have received significant donations from individuals as well as support from Santander plc. This funding has enabled us to establish and deliver the Business and Enterprise Law Service to SMEs and community enterprises and provide invaluable experience to our students. We have also received funding from the European Regional Development Fund through NTU's Enabling Innovation Project. We are very grateful for the support of the NTU Alumni Fund and certain private donors.

As mentioned earlier, the Centre received recognition in three awards in 2016-17:

- Faye Deverell awarded Nottinghamshire Law Society's Solicitor of the Year Award April 2017;
- Billy Shaw shortlisted for Best Contribution by a Law Student, Attorney General and LawWorks Student Pro Bono Awards 2016-17;
- The Centre was shortlisted for the Law Society of England and Wales' Excellence in Pro Bono Award in October 2016.

Training and Selection of Student Volunteers

Before working in the Centre, all volunteers participate in compulsory training and induction sessions. Those working on Advice Sessions attend a compulsory Large Group Session which focuses on procedure and ethical issues. Student Advisers also attend two additional compulsory Small Group Sessions in which they work through case studies based on cases handled in the past. Student volunteers are also required to be familiar with the contents of the Centre Handbook. Last year, as part of the review of practices when obtaining the ABS Licence we decided to enhance student training in research skills and professional conduct and have implemented new procedures for student induction.

We will also be introducing further compulsory Centre induction sessions to ensure our students fully understand their role and obligations when working in the Centre.

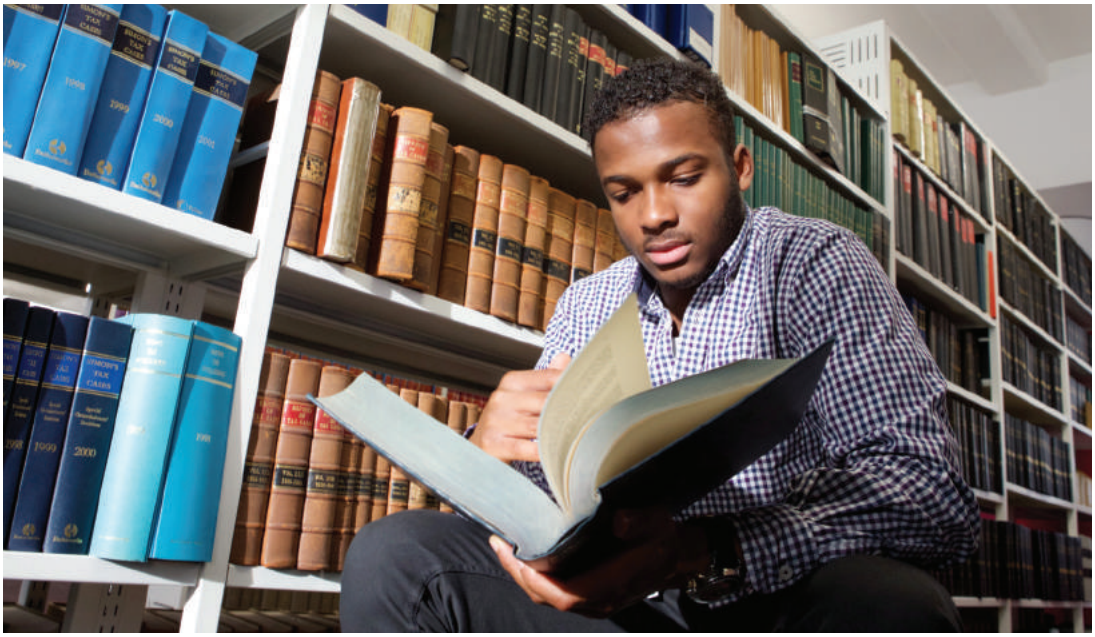
We employ a variety of different selection methods and encourage students who are not selected to seek support from the Employability advisers who regularly attend the Centre.

Free Representation Unit

FRU students are trained in Nottingham and London. Students are required to take a test set by FRU following the training. Once they have passed the test, observed an employment tribunal and attended an induction, they become ratified FRU advisers and NLS students are eligible to take on employment cases in Nottingham or London.

Next year we will be introducing bursaries to enable a wider group of students to participate in the training.

We also run separate induction and training programmes for the Miscarriage of Justice and Streetlaw projects, the Personal Support Unit, drop in services and Outreach Advice sessions.



Future Plans

In 2017-18, we are seeking to:

- Significantly expand and develop the BELS through the recruitment of additional staff and full participation in the business law schemes outlined above. In particular we will be aiming to fully meet our objectives in relation to the Enabling Innovation project. We will also be looking for opportunities to partner with outside organisations to develop this service further and develop online resources for SMEs to use to support their work;

- Continue to develop links with outside advice agencies to obtain more suitable case referrals, particularly for FRU cases and to develop an integrated service, which will enable us to better serve our clients;

- Pursue resources to enable us to develop new services and to evaluate the effectiveness of these services with particular reference to the possible development of collaborations with those in the health fields. Of particular interest will be those who work with families affected by autism;

- Develop new links with legal practices to assist with supervision of cases and support in developing public legal education projects, in addition to cementing our relationship with those we already work with;

- Develop further opportunities for the Streetlaw and other public legal education projects, for our students and clients;

- To develop, through the online partnership project with Panjab University, a model of effective international partnership and give a global perspective to the work of the Centre. In particular, through our Alumni-funded scholarships, we will seek to develop collaborations with law school practices and clinics elsewhere in the world;

- Continue to monitor ABS management and regulatory systems for the Centre to ensure its long term growth;

- Continue to increase the numbers of students obtaining academic credit for their work in the Centre, improve feedback to students and engage more academic staff in modules involving the Centre's work;

- Work closely with academic colleagues to fully realise the opportunities to tie the Centre’s work into the new training framework for solicitors;

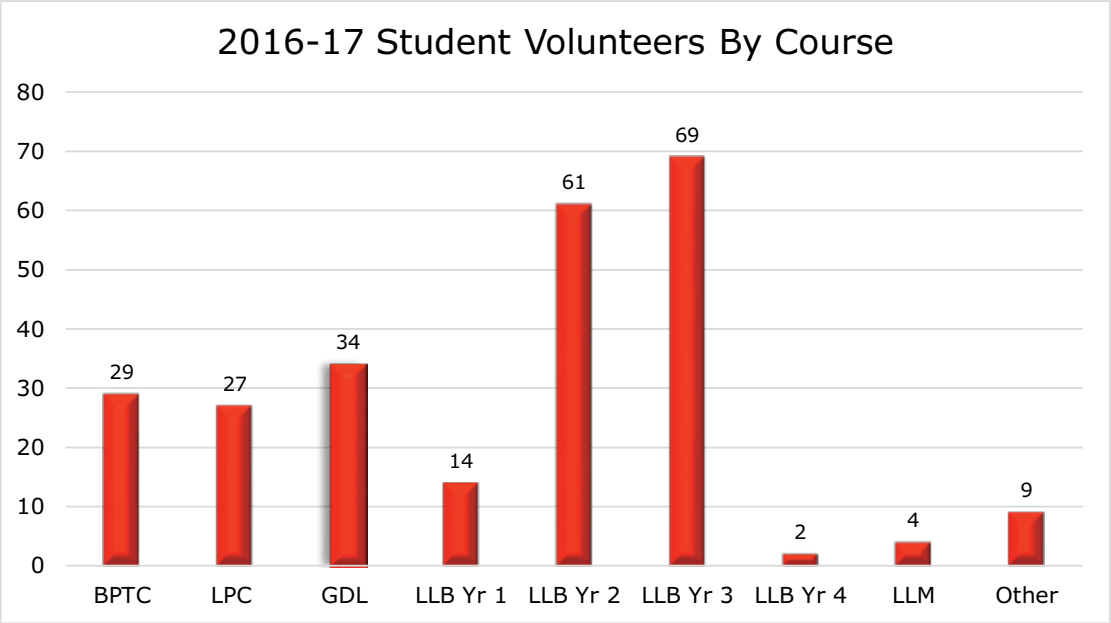
- To develop ways of involving our students in the running of the practice, to ensure that they develop an understanding of the professional, regulatory and ethical framework in which the Centre operates;

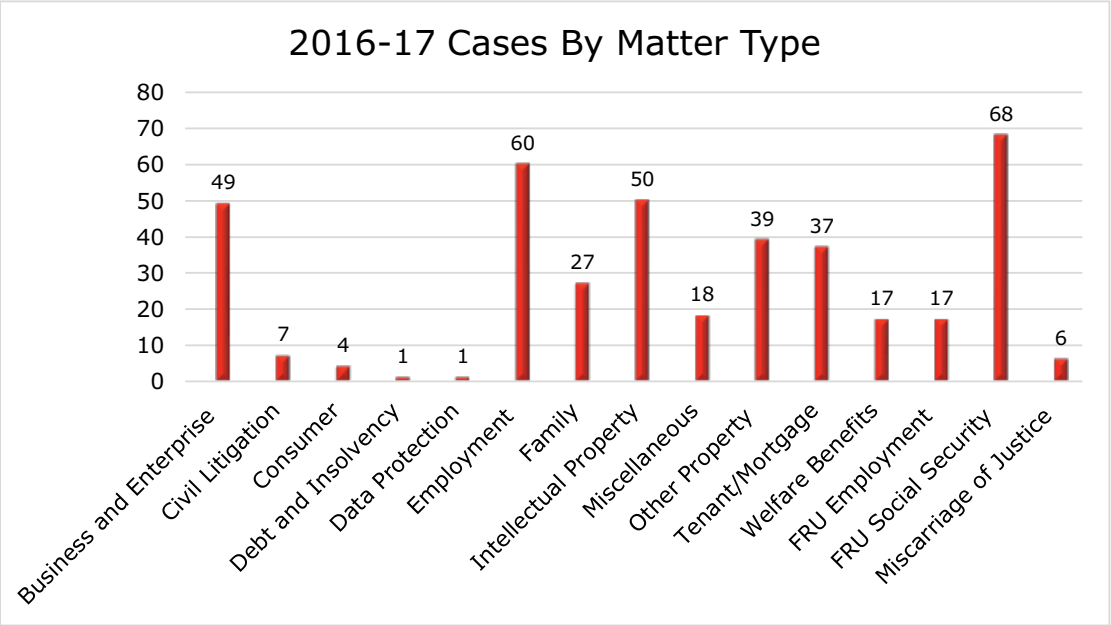
- With the support of colleagues from NTU’s Success4All, to review the profile of students participating in the Centre against overall student profile and to identify where necessary measures to ensure those participating reflects this profile.

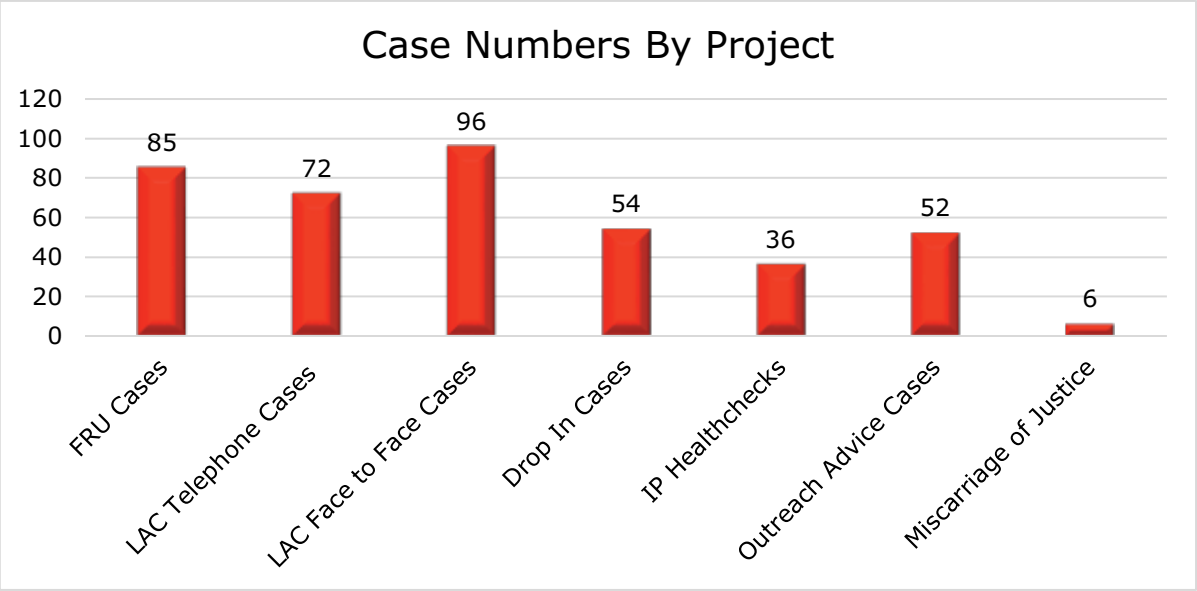
We welcome the support of all staff, alumni, legal and other professionals and other friends in any aspect of the work we do.

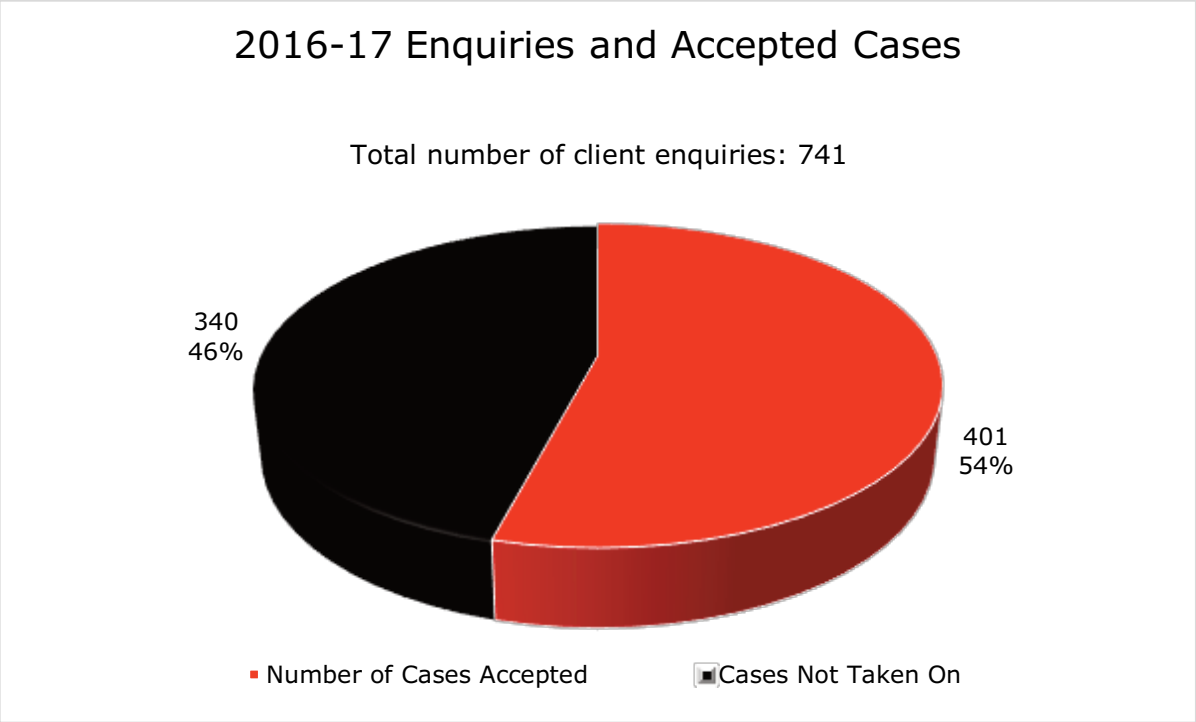
2016-17 NLS Legal Advice Centre Annual Report Data

Legal Advice Centre Student and Case Numbers

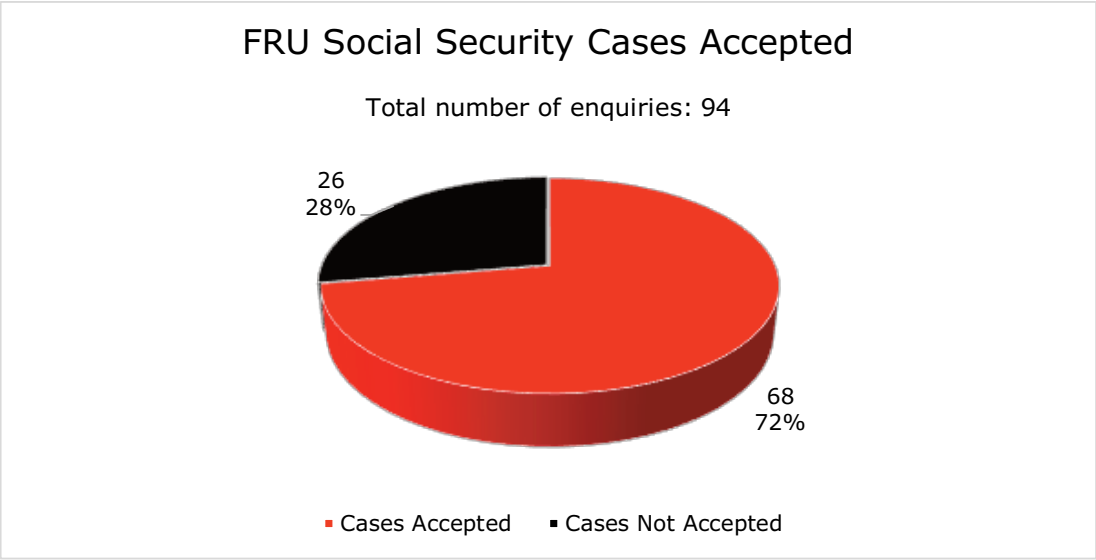


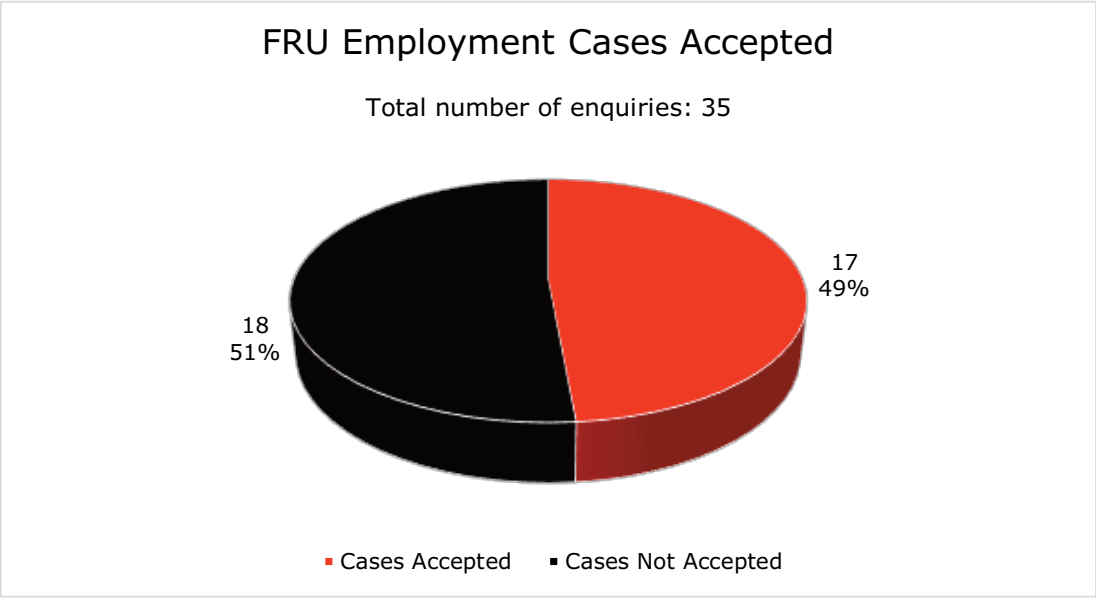



Case Numbers By Project
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
85
72
96
54
36
52
6
FRU Cases
LAC Telephone Cases
LAC Face to Face Cases
Drop In Cases
IP Healthchecks
Outreach Advice Cases
Miscarriage of Justice


2016-17 Enquiries and Accepted Cases
Total number of client enquiries: 741
340
46%
401
54%
Number of Cases Accepted
Cases Not Taken On

FRU Case Data



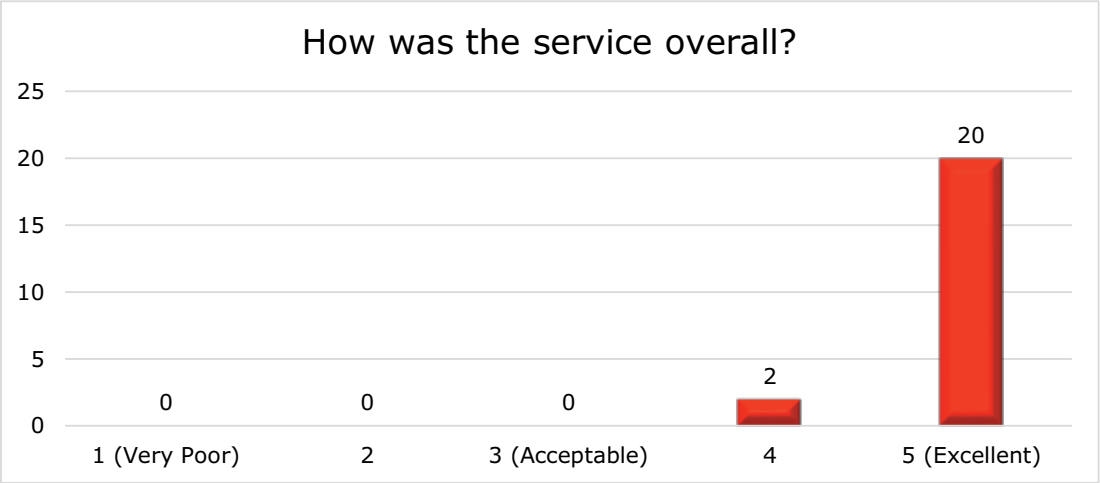


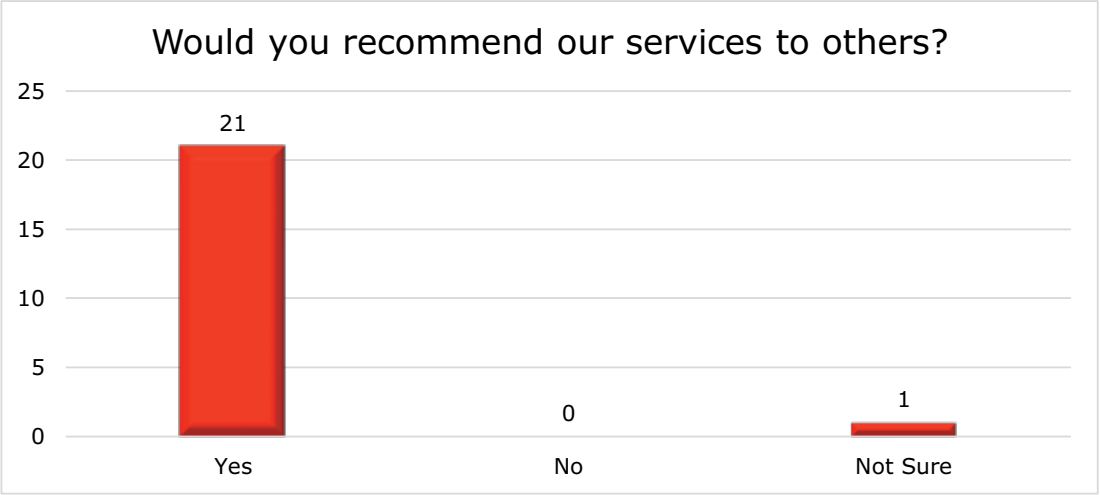
LAC Client Feedback

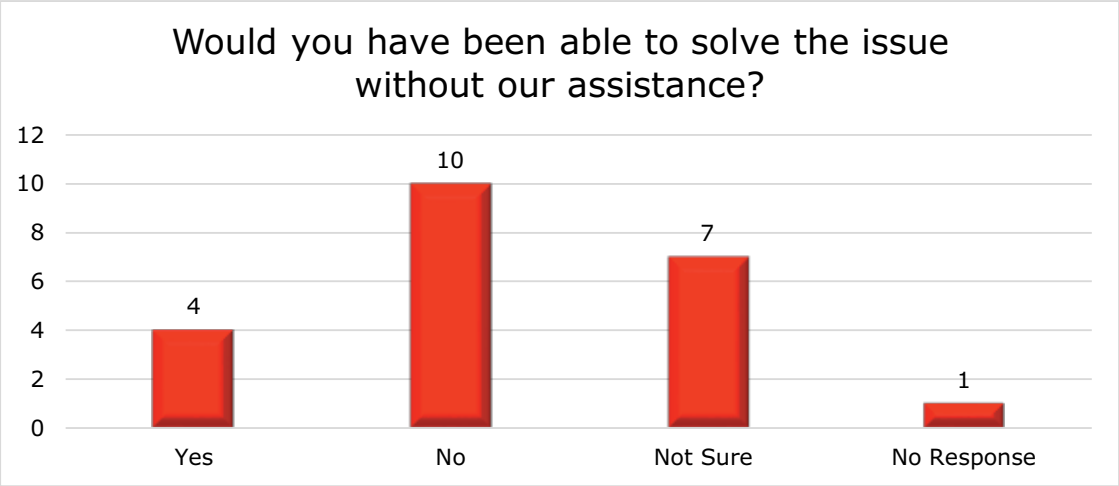
'The use of Skype made the service highly accessible… Highly recommended and a service that is extremely valuable to the community for start-ups and small businesses.'

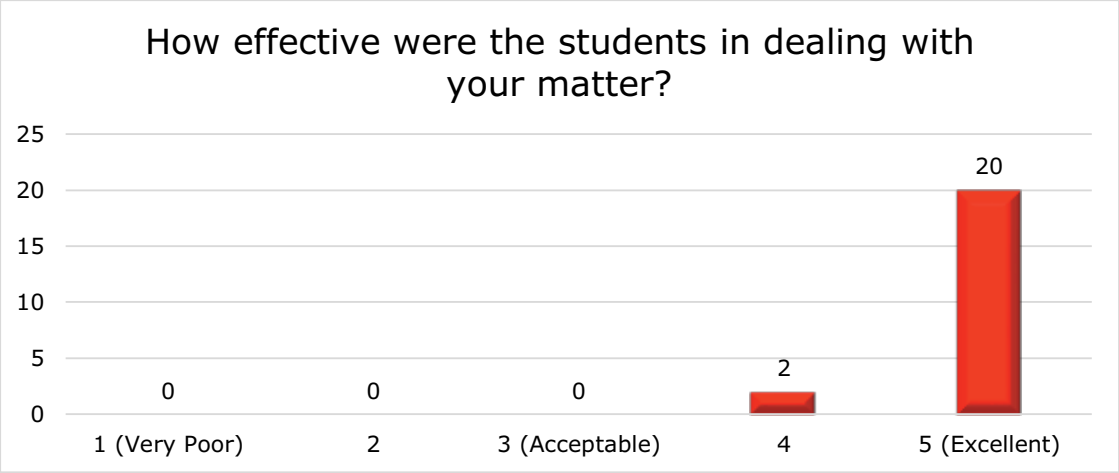
'Excellent, professional and courteous. Fantastic service and students were [very] professional.'

'Clear and concise information… very informative and the advice given was extremely detailed.'






Would you have been able to solve the issue without our assistance?
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
4
10
7
1
Yes
No
Not Sure
No Response


How effective were the students in dealing with your matter?
25
20
15
10
5
0
0
0
0
2
20
1 (Very Poor)
2
3 (Acceptable)
4
5 (Excellent)

FRU Client Feedback

'From start to finish [my representative] was very approachable, listened to what I had to say and [was] analytical to details and facts. Every step of the way I was informed and made to feel that my case mattered…'

'FRU services were very understanding and in my case everything was done to the highest standard…'

'I was completely satisfied and impressed with your services and fail to see how any improvements could be made…'

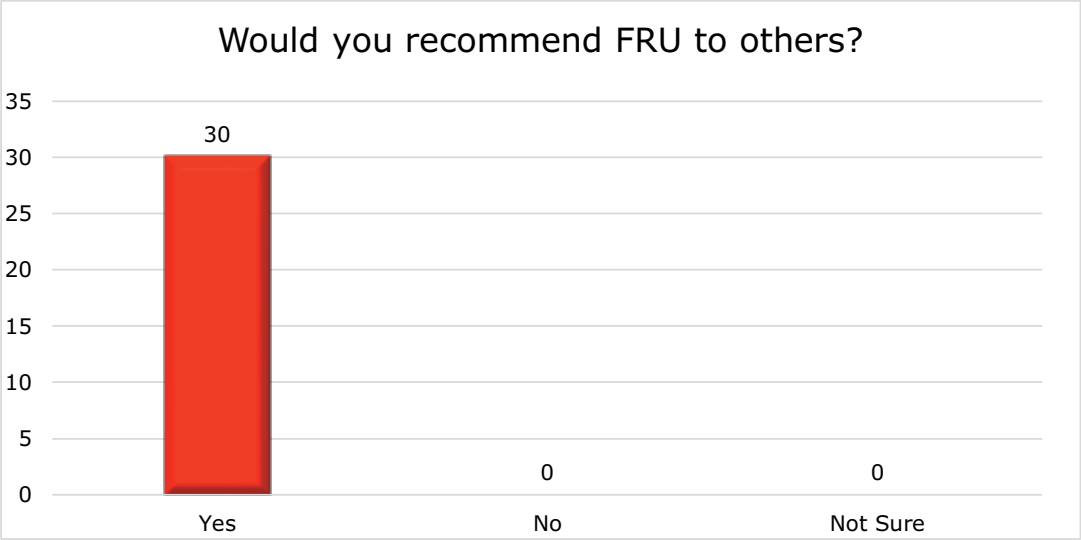
'[FRU] were brilliant, understanding and calming while I was in a stressful situation… you really do have remarkable students that will make excellent lawyers. I'm both happy and glad that I had the chance to use your service and meet them. Keep up the good work and truly thank you for all the help you have given me…'

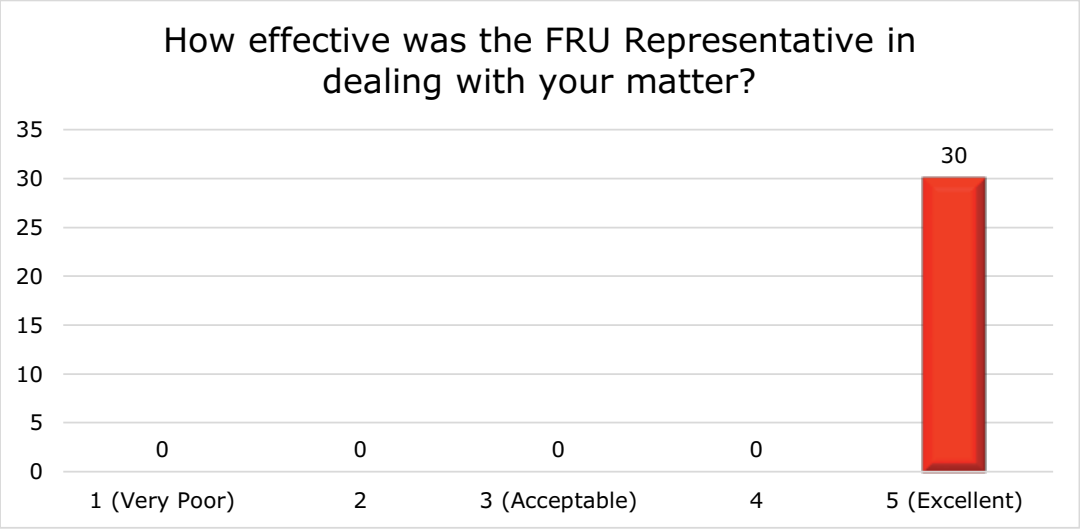
'Everyone was professional, helpful and supportive. They did not give up…'

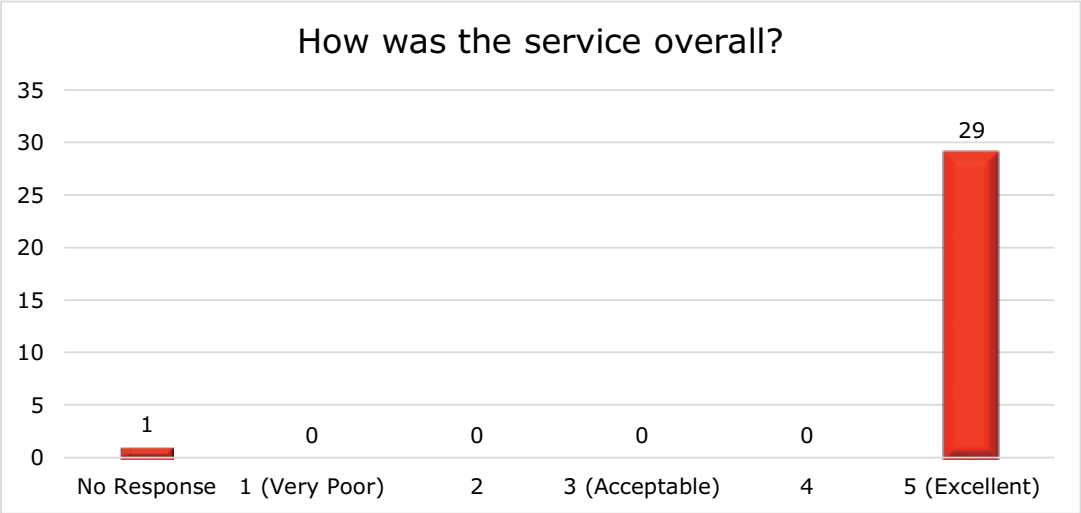
'From start to finish your service and representation was excellent and professional at the highest level. Second to none. A big heart felt thank you to you all…'

'I have just been brilliantly represented by yourselves in my ESA Court appeal which was highly successful, and for me personally truly life changing… [my representative] was warm, friendly, caring, efficient, informative, professional and supportive at the highest possible level and I genuinely don't think I'd have gotten through or been able to cope without [them]…'

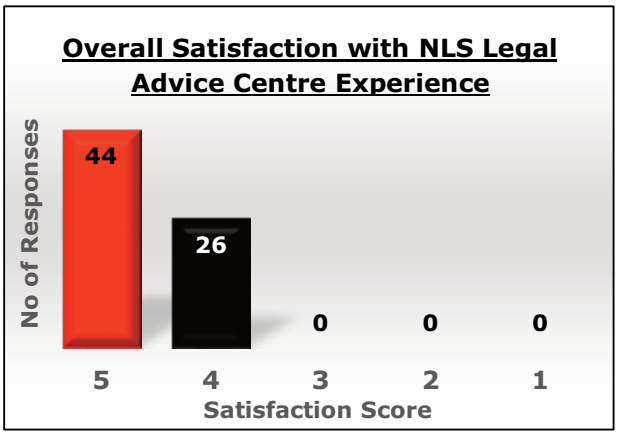
'I will forever highly recommend you and never forget you and never be able to thank you enough…'

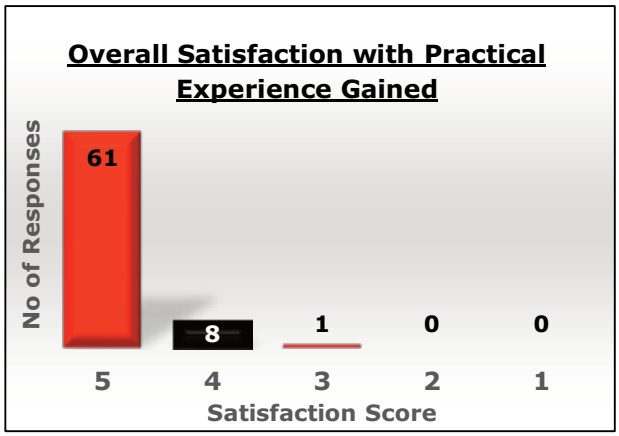

Would you recommend FRU to others?
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
30
0
0
Yes
No
Not Sure

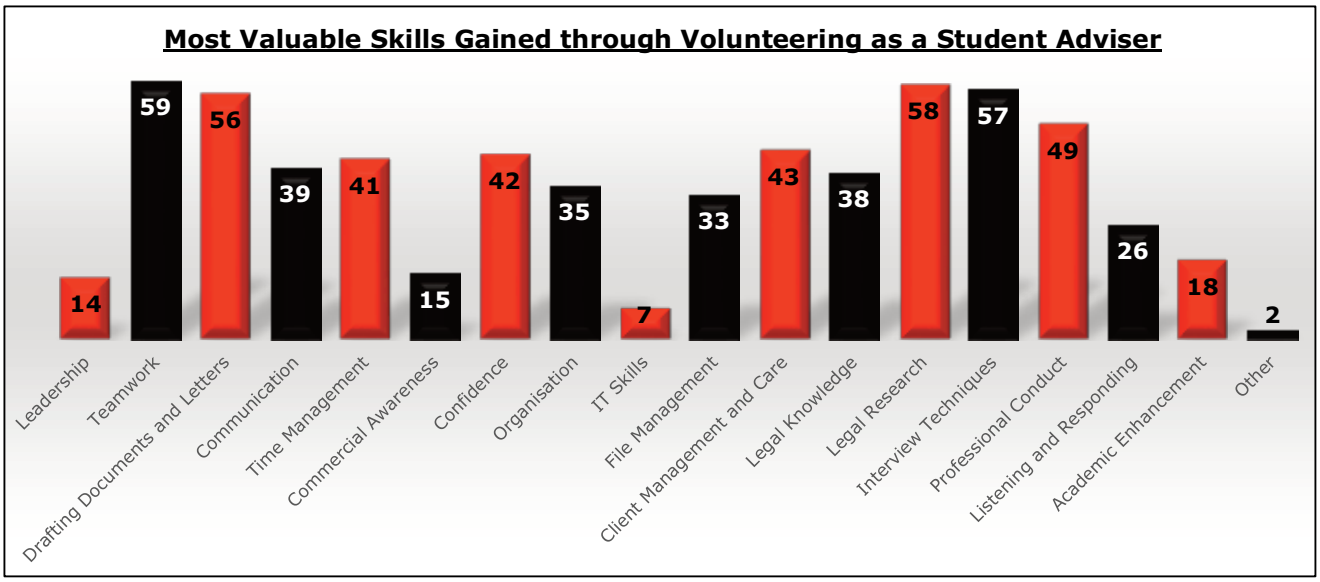

How effective was the FRU Representative in dealing with your matter?
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
0
0
0
0
30
1 (Very Poor)
2
3 (Acceptable)
4
5 (Excellent)

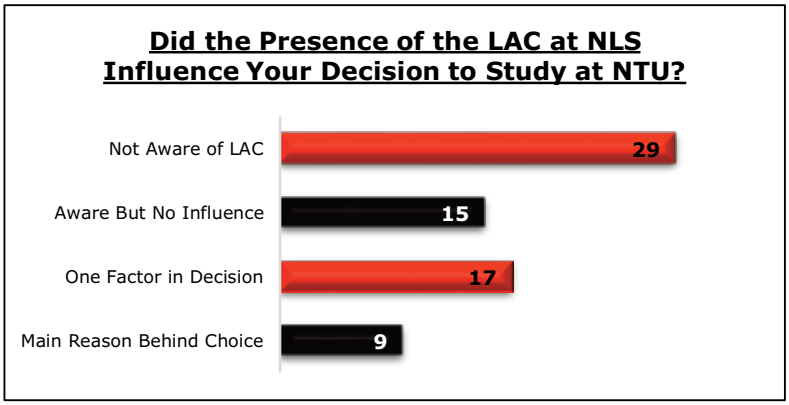

How was the service overall?
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
1
0
0
0
0
29
No Response
1 (Very Poor)
2
3 (Acceptable)
4
5 (Excellent)

Student Feedback

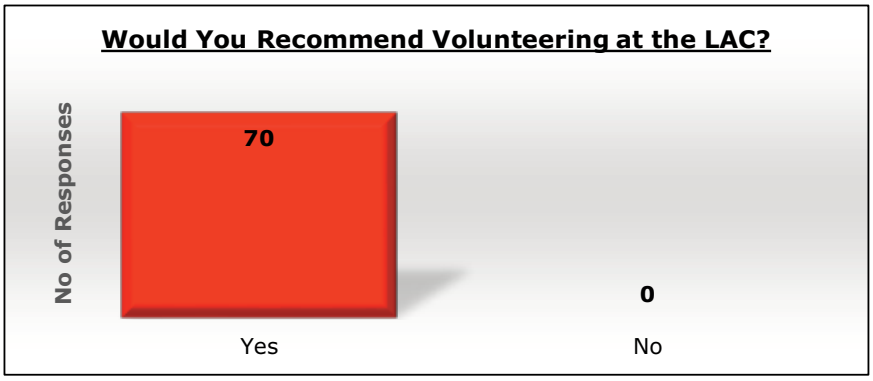


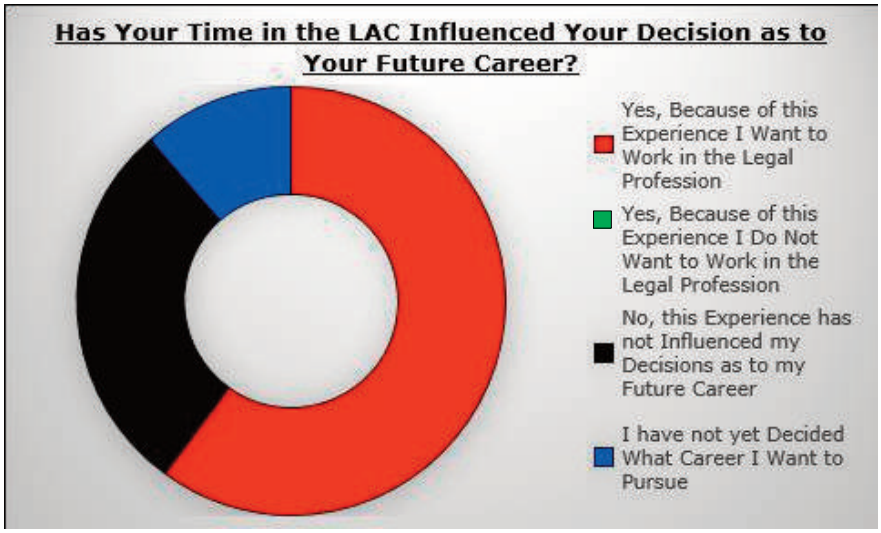






Student Advisers were asked why they applied to volunteer at the LAC. The predominant reason was to **gain practical, legal experience** and **enhance their skills**. Also important to most was a **desire to work with real clients** and **help the local community**, as well as **enhance their CV**. A lower number of Student Advisers reported that their motivations were linked to **improving their academics**, a desire to do **pro bono work** and **course module** requirements. One Adviser applied because *'GDL friends enjoyed their experiences'*.





'I found that working with clients has allowed me to exit the Law student mind-set and this has improved my grades…'

'It feels very rewarding putting in so much work and being thanked so much, you don't even think about the fact you're not paid!'

'Before working here I was still undecided if a legal career was for me. But now I know this is exactly where I want to go. Working here was never a chore, but instead a privilege. I have really cherished the experience and all the people I have had the pleasure to work with.'

'All staff and solicitors have been fabulous! Any time you need help or a steer in the right direction they're always more than happy to help anyone. Such a fun and rewarding experience and made some great friends.'

'The LAC has really influenced me in the direction I want to go and made me feel more confident'

'I can't put into words how immeasurably helpful this experience has been. I've been so impressed by the degree of responsibility afforded to Student Advisers; the quality of training and supervision, and the unparalleled opportunities to delve into new areas of law.'

'Now that I have some experience working in the legal environment and have skills such as legal researching and how to conduct client interviews… I feel confident that I have a really good foundation of skills and experience to help me progress onwards into the legal profession.'

'Great experience, met and worked with lovely people. Cannot wait to work in the LAC next year…'

'I am grateful to have received this opportunity at the LAC. It provides wonderful experience and the chance to gain/ enhance so many skills.'

'This experience has improved my skills and confidence and this is something I will take with me into future employment.'

'I really enjoyed my time in the Legal Advice Centre as I feel more prepared for doing the LPC and going into practice…!'

'Hope the LAC have another successful year. Really enjoyed working with everyone… I would very much look forward to working with the Centre again.'

'…The Centre is [run] very professionally and the supervisors guide students through cases very supportively.'

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