



NLS Legal Annual Report 2023/24



NLS Legal
Nottingham Law School



PRO BONO
RECOGNITION
LIST
ENGLAND & WALES



About us	03
Executive summary	04
Funding and governance	04
Acknowledgments	05
Data summary	06
Service areas	14
Other services and projects	25
Our intra-curricular activity	29
Awards and recognition	32
Feedback and testimonials	34
Meet our student volunteers	38
Our 23/24 team	42

Please note – The information and data within this report covers the period 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024.

About us

NLS Legal is Nottingham Trent University’s (NTU) teaching law firm and forms part of Nottingham Law School’s (NLS) progressive approach to legal education and training. NLS is one of the leading providers of academic and professional legal education with an outstanding reputation in the delivery of innovative courses. NLS is one of the largest law schools in the UK, with over 100 staff and approximately 3,000 students.

As part of NLS’s commitment to the delivery of transformational legal education and its commitment to supporting access to justice, NLS set up a fully regulated law firm – NLS Legal (formerly the NLS Legal Advice Centre) in 2015 as a major milestone in the development of the NLS’s pro bono advice clinic, which was first established in 2002.

NLS Legal, an exempt charity, is a wholly owned subsidiary of NTU and holds an Alternative Business Structure (ABS) licence from the Solicitors Regulation Authority. The model has parallels to the teaching hospital model traditionally seen in the medicine discipline context providing the opportunity for our students to obtain valuable work experience and develop their practical skills alongside their studies. The firm is the only model of its kind in the UK.

Legal advice, assistance and representation is provided on a not-for-profit basis to individuals and organisations that cannot access legal aid or afford legal representation across a large range of service areas, providing a vital service to the community.

NLS Legal is based within the Chaucer Building, City campus, allowing a professional and confidential space for clients, staff, and students. The firm operates both in person and remotely. The current facilities were officially opened in 2014 by Dominic Grieve QC, MP (then Attorney General).

NLS Legal is multi award-winning, and has received regional, national, and international recognition.

Executive summary

Welcome to our Annual Report 2023/24

I want to start by thanking the team for their continued hard work, dedication and commitment. This year, we dealt with over 370 cases and provided over 920 opportunities to 766 students. The team is continuously innovating and developing new initiatives to enable as many students as possible to be involved with the firm's activity, whilst ensuring our clients are provided with high quality and supportive representation. To that end, I was delighted to see our **Intellectual Property team**, win 'Team of the Year' at the **Nottinghamshire Law Society Annual Awards 2024** - very well-deserved! In addition, it was fantastic to see five of our solicitors being named on the inaugural Pro Bono Recognition List, an initiative by the Attorney General's Pro Bono Committee to recognise solicitors and barristers undertaking pro bono work.

A significant development for the firm this year, was the launch of our partnership with national firm, **Hodge, Jones & Allen (HJA)**. This collaboration has enabled us to introduce a **Personal Injury** service to the firm. Our students, supervised by HJA's qualified lawyers, offer initial advice to those that have been injured in an accident, through no fault of their own. It is a pleasure to work with HJA to provide this service, offer our students a new service area to gain experience in, and work together to help improve access to justice.

I take this opportunity to thank the University for their continued unwavering support and commitment. In particular, I would like to thank **Jenny Chapman, NLS Executive Dean**, the **Board of Governors**, the **Vice Chancellor**, **Professor Edward Peck CBE**, the **University Executive Team** and the **NLS Legal Board of Directors and ABS Management Board**.

Laura Pinkney,
Head of NLS Legal



Funding and governance

The staff budget for NLS Legal is supported by NTU and NLS and forms part of NLS's overall staffing budget. NLS Legal also receives funding from private donors and commercial organisations. We are immensely grateful to the generous financial support of a number of individuals and organisations which have supported further expansion of the firm.

NLS Legal Ltd (trading as NLS Legal) is a company limited by guarantee with its sole member being NTU. NTU covers the costs of all the property, assets, staff, and other services required by the firm.

The NLS Legal Board of Directors and ABS Management Board 2023/24:

Professor Cillian Ryan
Pro Vice-Chancellor International
(retired in May 2024)

James Lacey
NTU Director of Finance

Rebecca Jenkyn
NTU Head of Governance and Legal Services

Joanne Cenic
Finance Business Partner and NLS Legal's Compliance Officer for Finance and Administration

Jenny Chapman
NLS Executive Dean and NLS Legal's Compliance Officer for Legal Practice

Laura Pinkney
Head of NLS Legal

This year, we dealt with over 370 cases and provided over 920 opportunities to 766 students.

Acknowledgements

NLS Legal would not exist without the innovative vision and the generous financial assistance provided by Nottingham Trent University. We would like to thank the University's **Board of Governors**, the **Vice-Chancellor Professor Edward Peck CBE** and the **University Executive Team** for their commitment and unwavering support to NLS Legal and the student opportunities it creates.

A special thank you to former Director, **Professor Cillian Ryan**, who retired in May 2024 after serving eight years on the Board. Cillian provided expert leadership and has been a great advocate for NLS Legal. We wish him a very happy retirement.

We also said goodbye to Solicitor, **Callum Scott**. Callum originally joined NLS Legal as a student volunteer back in 2015 whilst studying the Postgraduate Diploma in Law. He then joined us as staff in 2016 and progressed through the firm, qualifying as a solicitor in October 2022 – the first member of the team to achieve such an accolade. Callum made an outstanding contribution during his time at NLS Legal, including establishing our Special Educational Needs and Disability service. We wish him all the very best for the next chapter of his career.

We express our deepest appreciation to: **Richard Bagley, Paul and Lynne Bowden, Linda Hunter** and her late husband, **Martin Hunter**, for always championing our vision, for supporting us in various ways over many years, and whose very generous financial donations have enabled NLS Legal to provide additional student opportunities and expand our vital services to the community. In our next annual report we will be delighted to share further details about the incredible impact such support provides. We are truly grateful.

Thank you to **Hodge, Jones & Allen**, who generously volunteer their time enabling us to expand our services to our clients and offer a broader range of experience to our student volunteers. It is a pleasure working with their team to further our shared commitment to access to justice (**read more at page 21**).

We also want to say a massive thank you to **Clio** who generously provide us with free access to their case management software to support the smooth running of our pro bono service.

Sincere thanks to **Santander Universities UK** who have continued to provide vital funding to support our work. Following a successful launch in 2022/23, we again utilised the funding to provide students undertaking the NTU Black Leadership Programme with a funded work experience placement. A total of 10 students completed a one-week placement with us and we are grateful to Santander for enabling us to provide transformative opportunities to our students (**read more at page 26**).

Thank you also to other individuals who have made donations to support our continued work – your kindness and generosity is immensely valued.

In addition, we are grateful to the other firms, organisations, and charities that we work with and that form part of our referral network, who also offer such vital assistance to the community.

Our sincere thanks to:

- | | |
|---|--|
| – AskUS Nottingham | – LawWorks |
| – Bipolar Lift | – Nottingham County Council – Benefits Team and i-work |
| – Business and Intellectual Property Centre | – Nottingham Law Centre |
| – Citizen's Advice Nottingham and District | – Nottinghamshire Law Society |
| – Citizen's Advice Broxtowe | – Nottingham Women's Centre |
| – Derbyshire Law Centre | – NTU Enterprising Ashfield Team |
| – Education Selection Box | – St George's Community Centre, Netherfield |
| – Environmental Law Foundation | – Support Through Court |
| – Free Representation Unit | – The Ark Gedling |
| – Improving Lives | |
| – JUNO Women's Aid | |
| – Kee Mediation | |

We also want to say a huge thank you to the students who deliver so much as part of our team. Our students continue to make us proud, impressing us with their talent, dedication, and enthusiasm.

Data summary

Following the expansion of the team in September 2022, we are delighted to have once again been able to increase both the number of cases handled and the number of student opportunities.

We dealt with 378 cases this year, across ten different service areas, a 4% increase from 22/23. We were delighted to secure over £560,000 in compensation, settlements, and benefits for our clients this year, bringing our cumulative total to date to an impressive £6.7 million.



Our service continues to see exceptionally high levels of demand with over 1800 enquiries received this year, demonstrating the huge unmet legal need in our community. Whilst we are unable to accept the vast majority of enquiries that we receive, either due to capacity, ineligibility or due to the enquiry being out of our areas of expertise, we do provide signposting information to all of those we cannot assist, with a personalised response wherever possible.

This year we introduced a new, more inclusive approach to our student volunteer recruitment. We have moved away from an application-based process and, instead, all students that complete our training and induction process are added to our volunteer pool, enabling them to take up work experience opportunities. This significantly increased both the number of students participating in NLS Legal this year (766 this year, compared with 636 students in 22/23, a 20% increase), and the number of student opportunities (929 this year, compared with 823 in 22/23, a 13% increase). The number of opportunities exceed the number of students as some students were able to take up multiple opportunities, working across different projects or services.

Whilst we saw a reduction in the number of our students utilising their experience for academic credit (426 this year, compared with 489 in 22/23), this is due to the launch of the successful NLS partnership with the national charity Support Through Court, as they have kindly taken over some of the modules we previously supported, as well as offering additional opportunities. The combination of NLS Legal and Support Through Court has significantly increased the number of on-campus legal work experience opportunities we can offer at NLS, something which we are hugely proud of. Embedding work experience and practical skills development into the curriculum is a priority focus, as we know it helps produce well rounded graduates with increased employability skills. In addition, it helps to address equity of opportunity. Work experience opportunities should not just be for those who have the contacts and/or who can afford to take up extra-curricular volunteer opportunities.

The graphs at **pages 12 and 13** contain our Success for All student groups. Success for All is a strategy

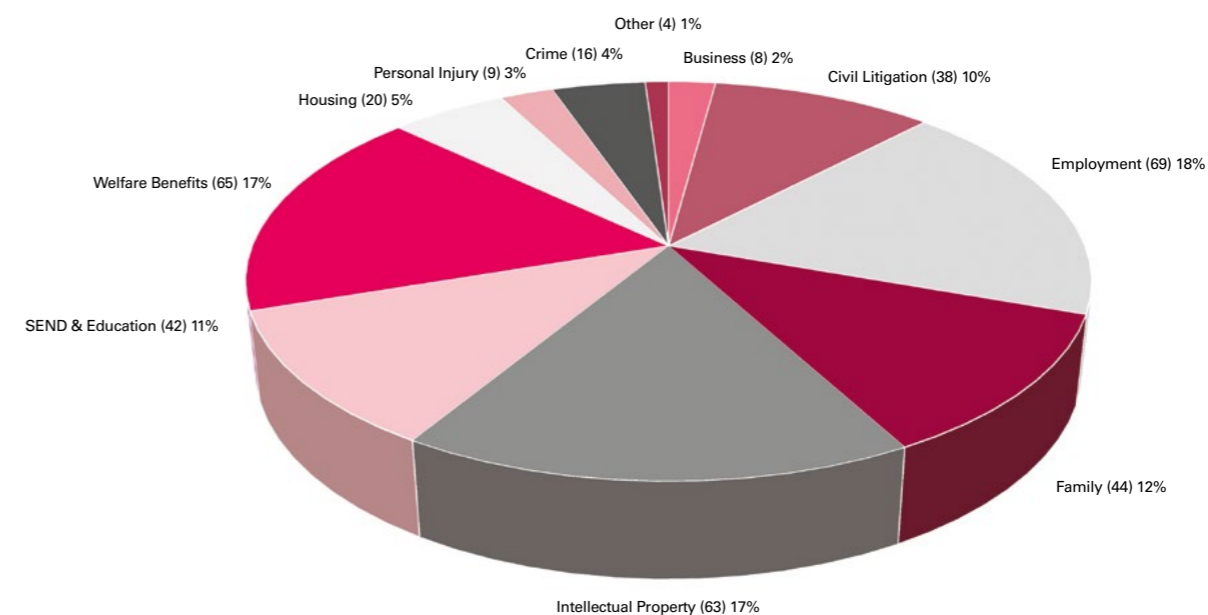
within educational institutions to improve diversity and close attainment gaps between groups that often face additional barriers. As can be seen from those graphs, NLS is proud to have a very diverse student base and we are proud of the work we do within NLS and NLS Legal to support Success for All initiatives. In terms of our undergraduate profile, save for mature students (who are likely to have increased caring and/or work responsibilities limiting ability to participate in extra-curricular opportunities), the percentage of each of our Success for All category of students engaging in NLS Legal broadly correlates with the percentages for the NLS student cohort. In relation to our postgraduate profile, we saw significant numbers of international students and students from minoritised ethnic groups undertaking work experience with NLS Legal, which is positive in terms of improving diversity of the legal profession, one of our aims.

We were delighted to see that, once again, those students undertaking live client activity with NLS Legal outperformed their peers, with 85% achieving a first or 2:1 in their degree, compared with 71% of all NLS students. As you can see from the graph at **page 11**, this is a consistent trend. This year, the gap between NLS Legal and NLS students narrowed, which we attribute to two main factors. The first being that our new open recruitment strategy has widened the net, enabling students that would have not previously been able to overcome the barriers that an application-based process brings to secure opportunities. Secondly, due to

successful initiatives across NLS that have seen results improve across the board. This is a very encouraging result and we believe it demonstrates that our more inclusive approach to recruitment is improving equity of opportunity, ensuring that opportunities are not exclusively taken by high-performers and maximising access to opportunities for those that may experience additional barriers.

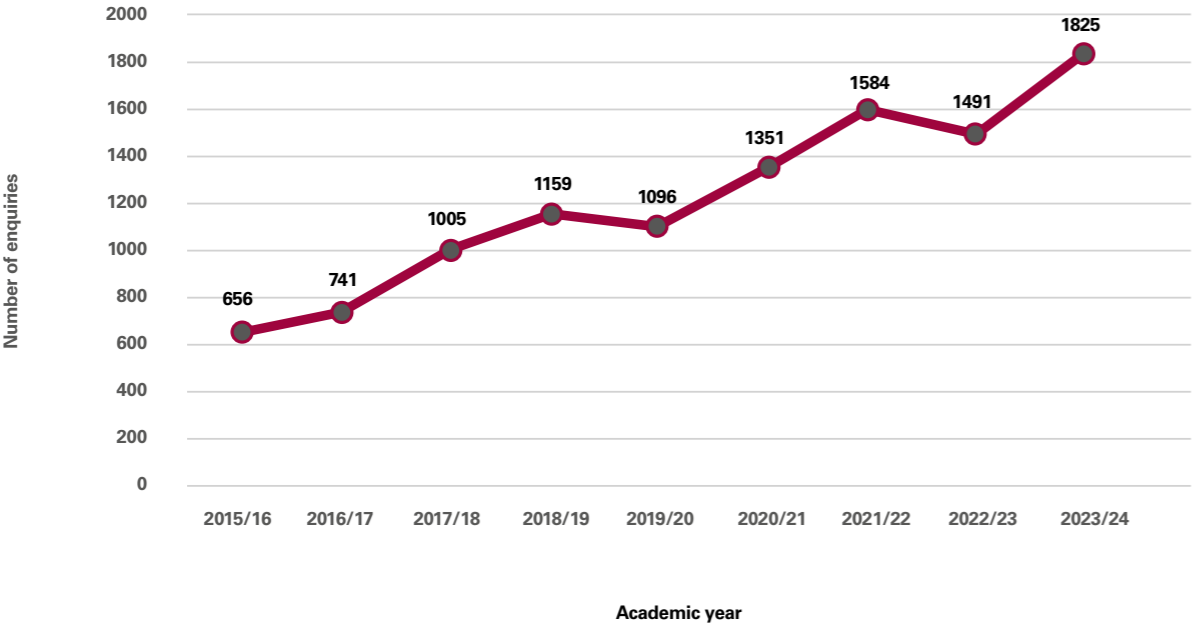
One of the most motivating parts of our job is receiving positive feedback. In addition to the client and student feedback featured at **pages 34 – 37**, we are proud to report that, based on our student feedback survey data, 100% of our students said they would recommend volunteering at NLS Legal to future students. For 62% of our students this was their first work experience in a law firm, underpinning the importance of being able to offer these opportunities to our law students. It was also encouraging to see the vast range of important employability skills that our students told us they had developed whilst with us, the top five being: drafting, research, professional conduct, legal knowledge and communication skills. It was also pleasing to see 'confidence' score highly, only narrowly missing out on a top five place. Based on our client feedback survey data, 95% of the clients who completed our client survey said our service was 'excellent' and 92% described our students as 'very effective' in dealing with their matter. 97% said they 'would recommend our services' and 'would use our services again'.

Cases by area of law (total: 378)

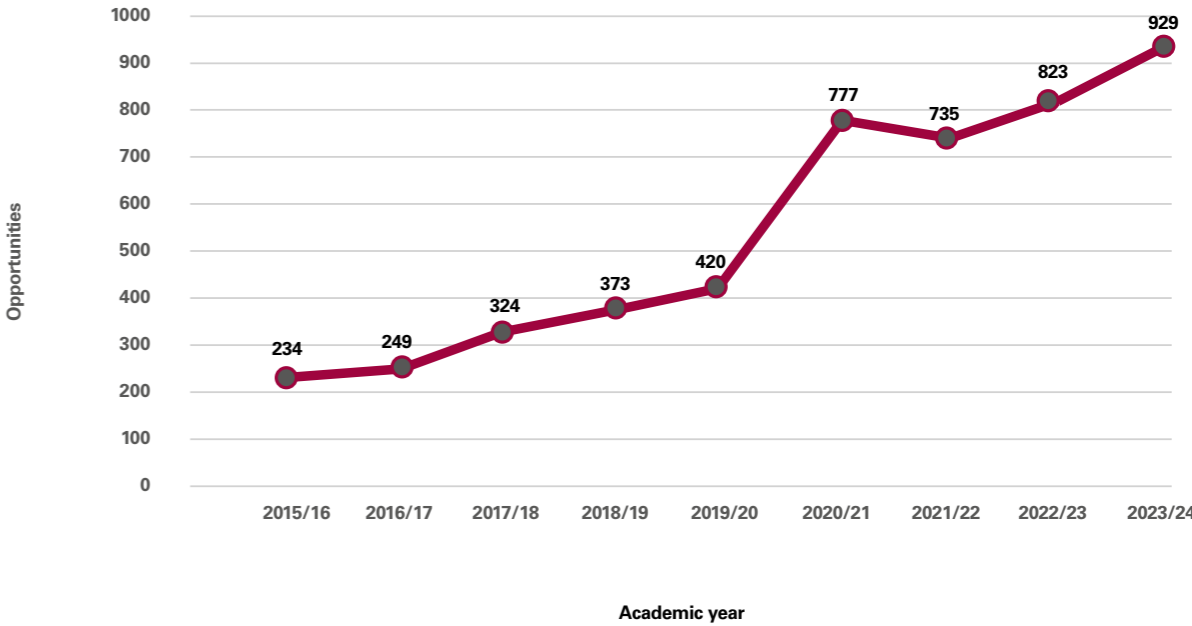


*Our Trade Mark Attorney also delivered four one-off advice sessions as part of his voluntary work for the Chartered Institute of Trade Mark Attorneys (CITMA).

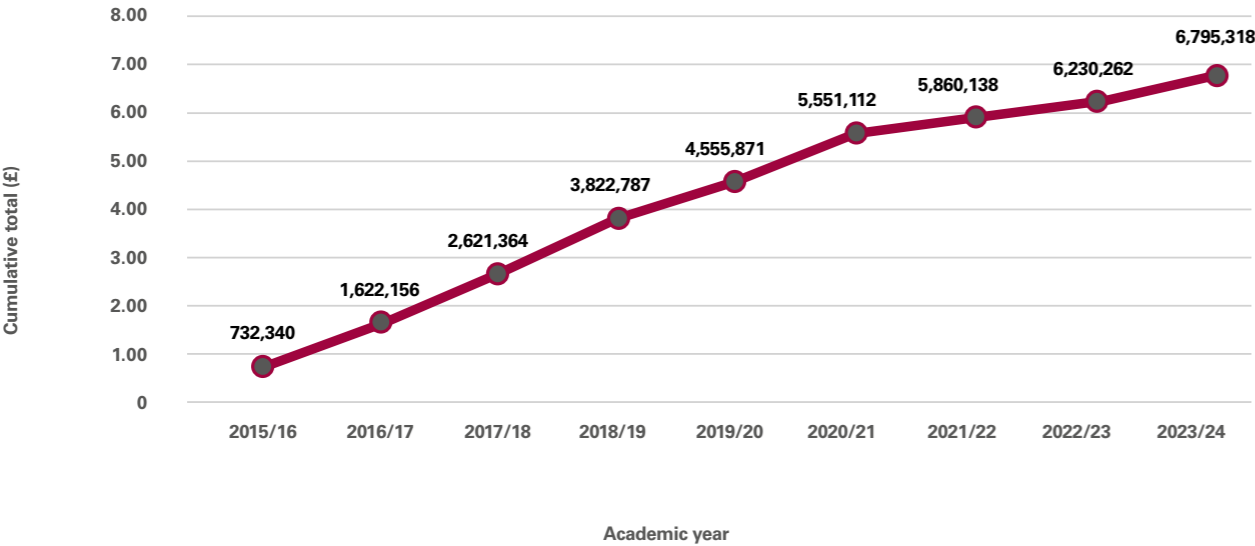
Total number of enquiries received



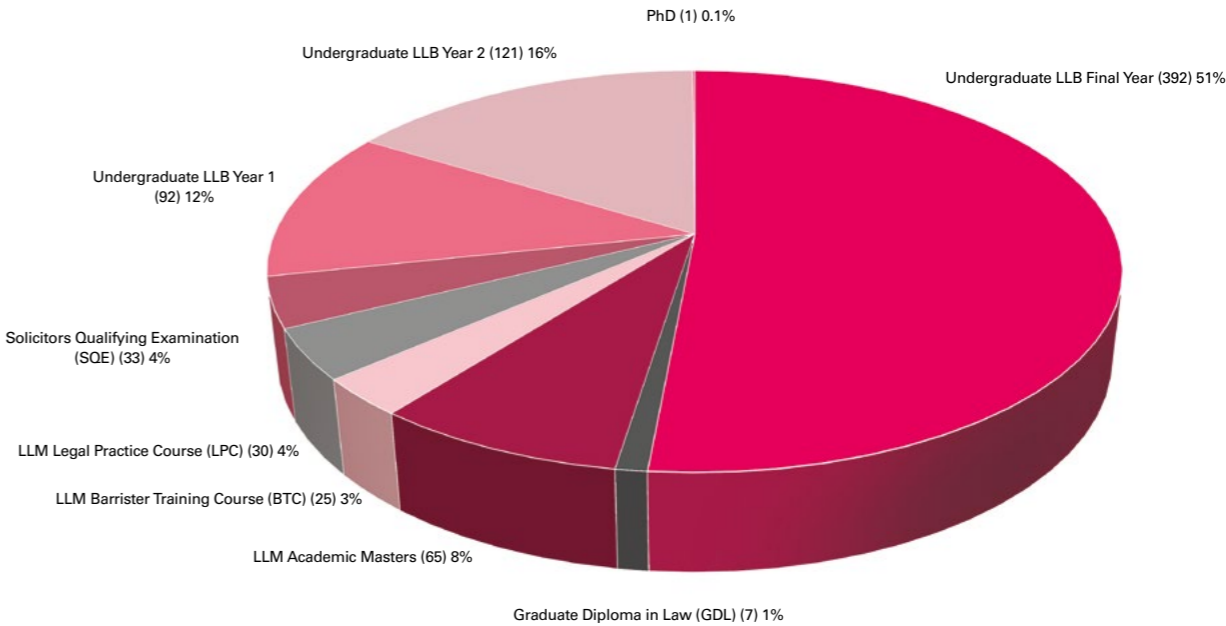
NLS Legal student opportunities



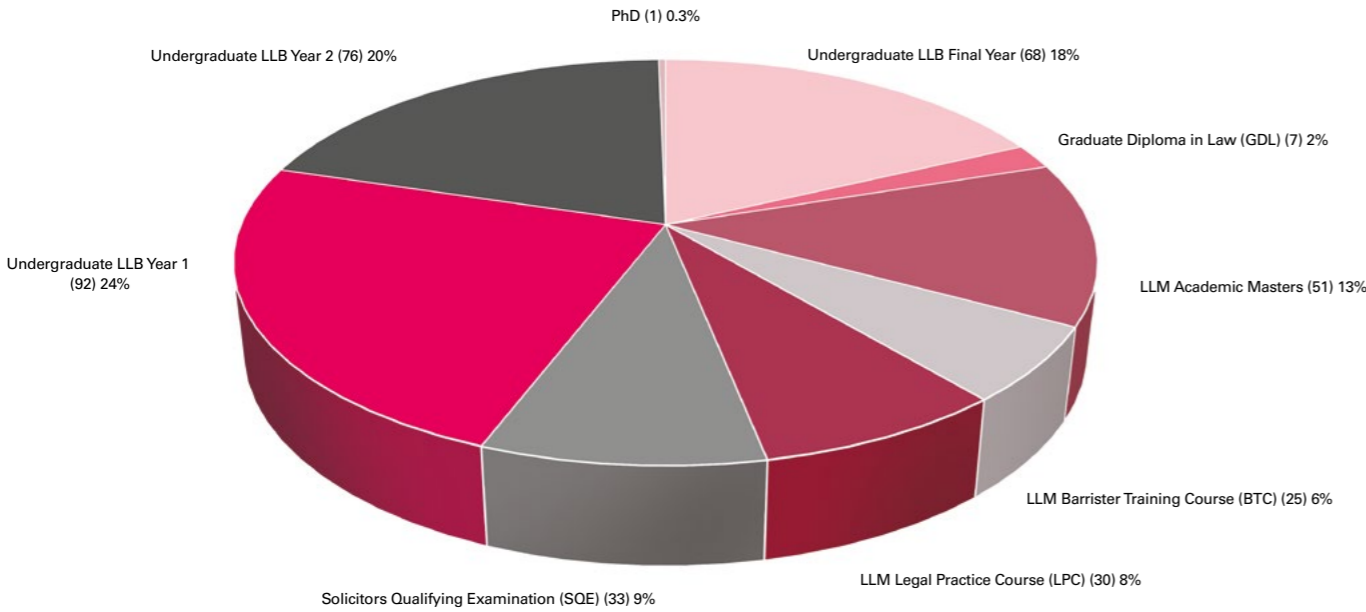
Financial awards achieved for clients



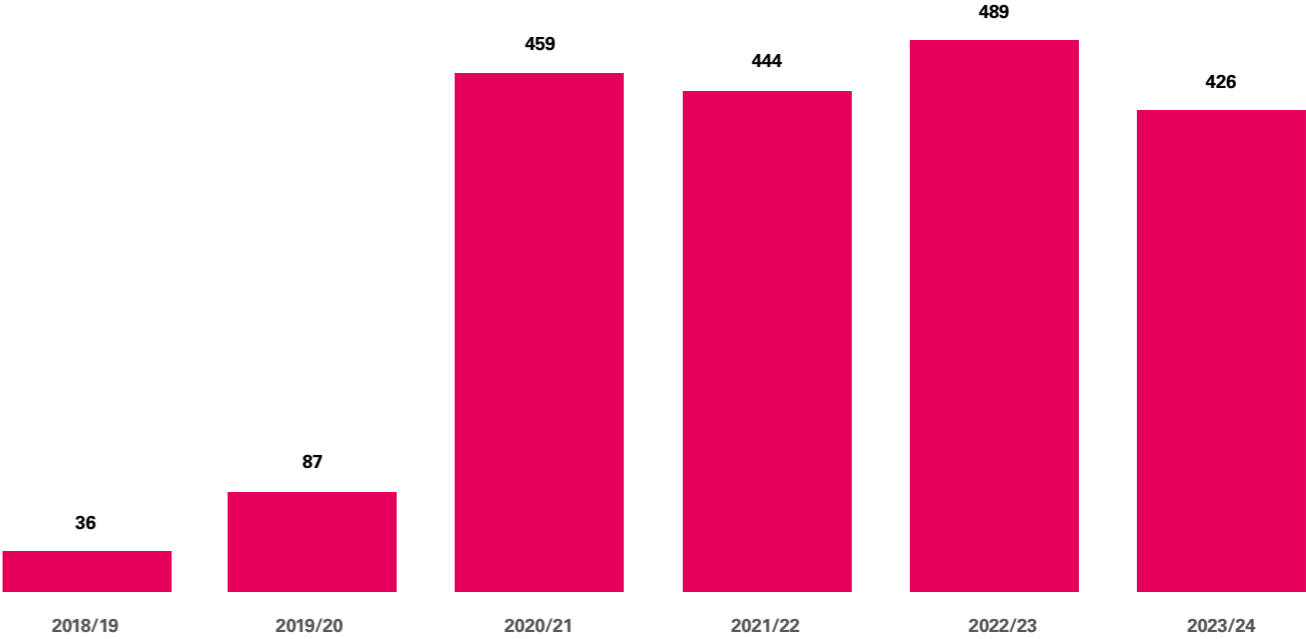
Students by course: intra and extra-curricular (766 students)



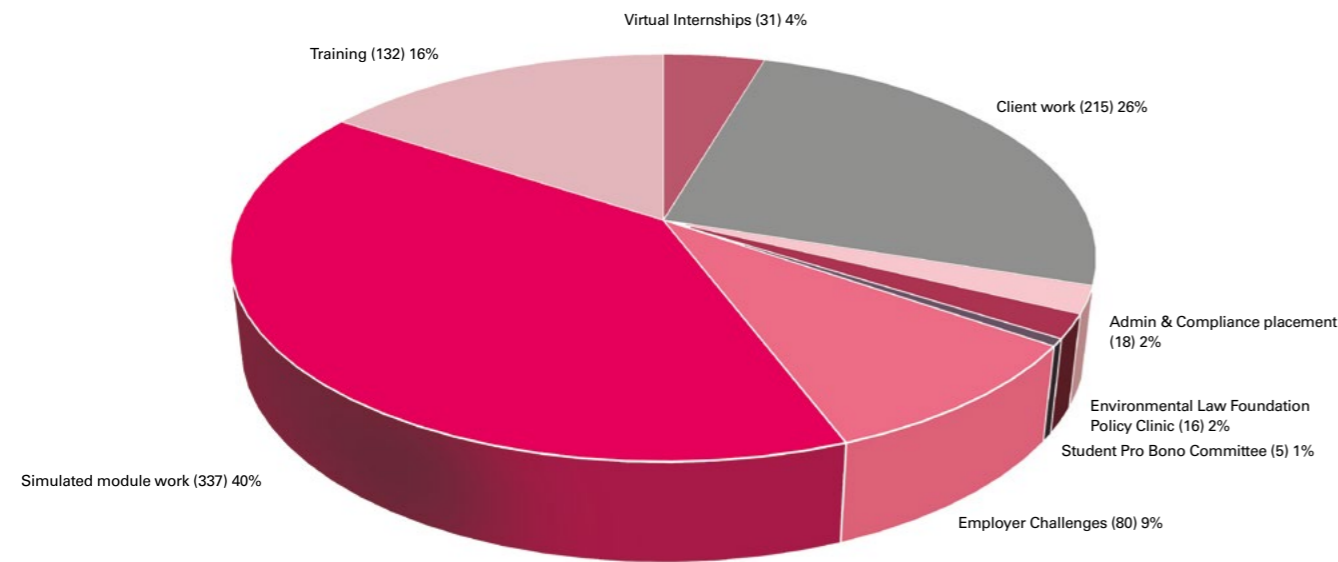
Students by course: extra-curricular (383 students)



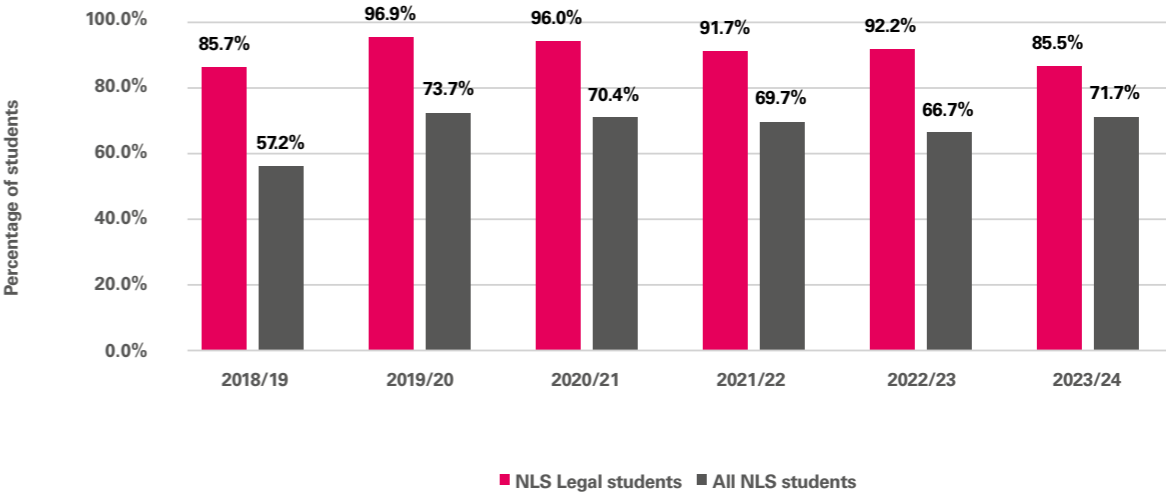
Students involved in activity for academic credit



Students by experience type



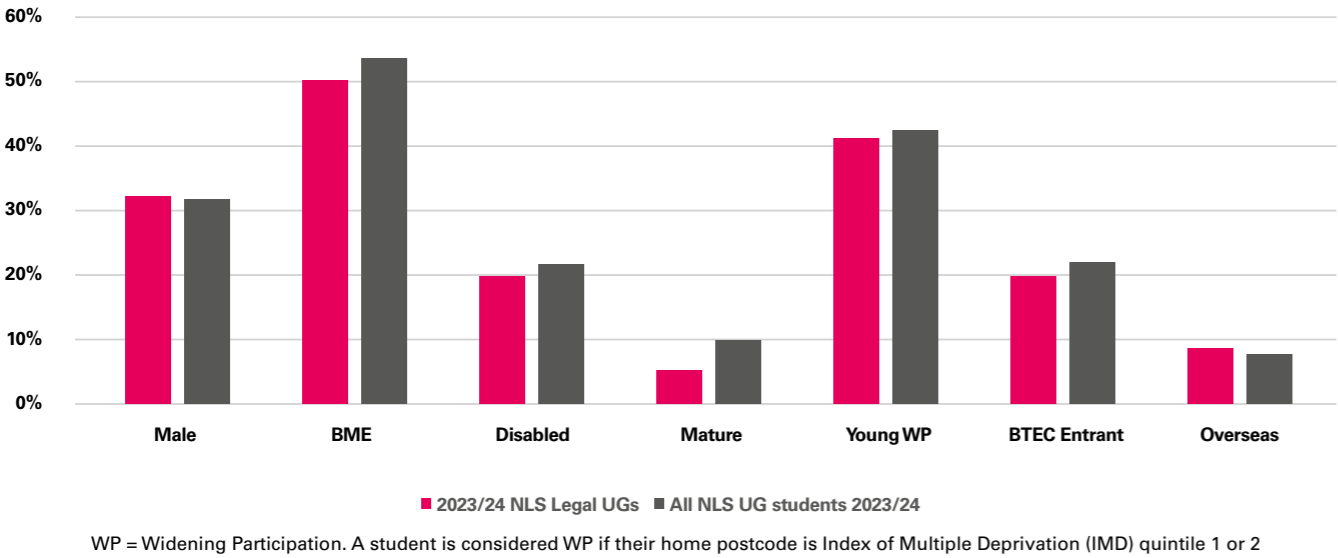
NLS Legal students achieving a 2:1 or first-class degree, compared with total NLS student population



*Figures exclude those undertaking simulated tasks only to enable a like-for-like comparison across the years

2023/24 NLS Legal students participants by Success for All groups, compared with all NLS students (undergraduate)

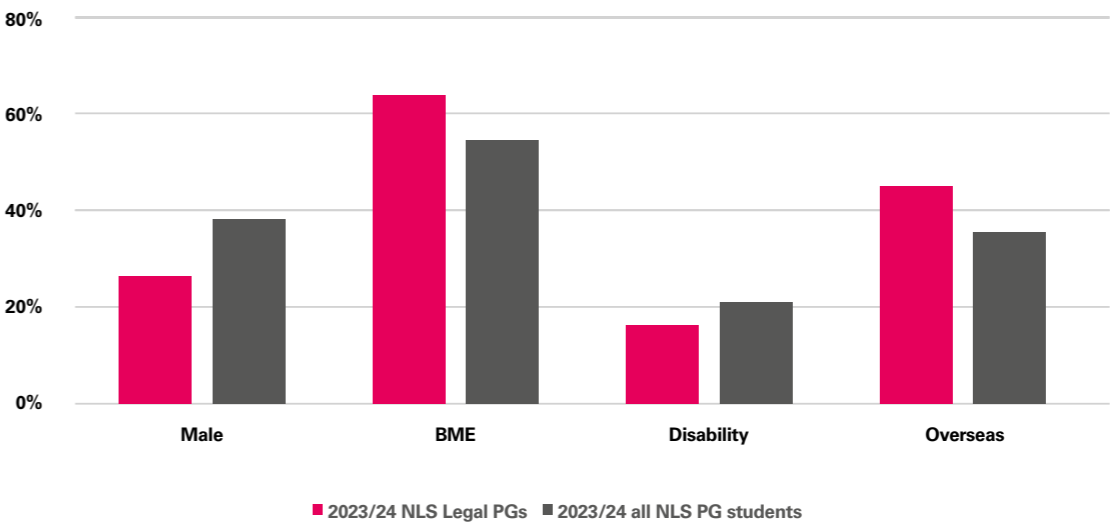
Success for All profile of NLS Legal students (undergraduates)



	Male	BME	Disability	Mature	Young WP	BTEC Entrant	Overseas
2023/24 NLS Legal UGs	33%	50%	20%	5%	42%	20%	9%
2023/24 All NLS UG Students	32%	53%	22%	10%	43%	22%	8%

2023/24 NLS Legal students participants by Success for All groups, compared with all NLS students (postgraduate)

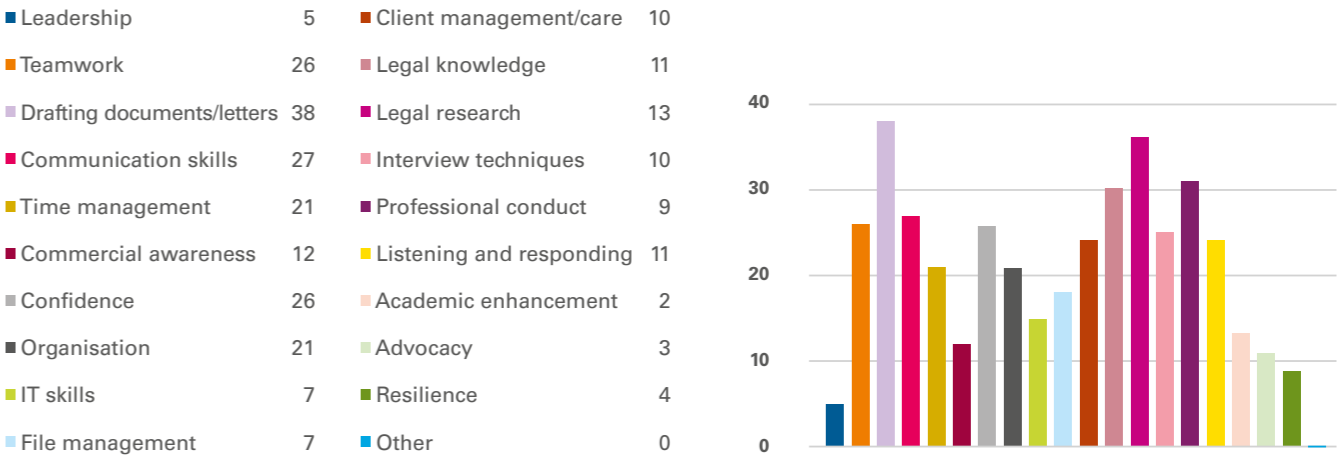
Success for All profile of NLS Legal students (postgraduate)



	Male	BME	Disability	Overseas
2023/24 NLS Legal PGs	29%	66%	16%	48%
2023/24 All NLS PG Students	38%	53%	21%	35%



The below graph represents the answers given in our 2023/24 student survey in response to the question: **‘What are the most valuable skills that you have gained through volunteering at NLS Legal?’** The results demonstrate the large volume of skills developed as part of the student experience, with drafting, communication skills, research, teamwork, confidence, listening and responding, time management, legal knowledge, client care and interviewing amongst the most commonly chosen options:



Service areas

We provide advice, assistance and representation across a number of service areas including business, civil litigation, crime, employment, family, housing, intellectual property, personal injury, special educational needs and disability and welfare benefits.

Our student volunteers are involved in all aspects of our casework including attending client meetings, drafting attendance notes, undertaking legal research and drafting documents such as advice letters, statements and legal submissions.

We detail below our various service areas and projects.



Civil litigation and Business service

Our civil litigation and business service provides primary client support in two key areas: a civil litigation service addressing contentious disputes, and a business service focused on non-contentious commercial matters. The service was reshaped in 2022 with the addition of our civil litigation and business solicitor to the NLS Legal team, allowing us to further develop and expand to meet client needs.

Civil litigation service

This service offers advice and representation to individuals and SMEs in a range of civil disputes. Over the past year, we have seen a steady increase in enquiries regarding money disputes, consumer claims, and enforcement matters. With the ongoing economic downturn, there has been a notable rise in debt disputes. The high demand for legal support in civil matters underscores the difficulties members of our community face in pursuing claims without adequate legal guidance or representation.

Business service

Our business service has continued to provide guidance and support to a diverse range of clients, including sole traders, start-ups, SMEs, charities and social enterprises, on an array of commercial matters. This support includes advice on company structure, governance and specific commercial agreements. As in previous years, the service has been particularly beneficial to start-ups and SMEs that might otherwise face financial barriers to obtaining private legal advice.

Student volunteers' involvement

As the service continues to expand, we remain committed to meeting the diverse needs of our clients while providing valuable, practical learning experiences for our student volunteers. Students actively participate in a wide range of casework responsibilities, including conducting client interviews, performing in-depth legal research, and drafting key documents such as written advice, letters before action and commercial agreements.

“My placement, spent at NLS Legal, was such a rewarding experience... A special thank you to Charis, who always encouraged me to think for myself and to be solution-focused! If you are thinking about doing a placement, any form of volunteering, do it – it truly is a transformative experience that enhances your skills, allows you to have practical, hands-on experience and gives you the opportunity to make a meaningful impact!”

Student feedback

Case studies

This year, we supported two separate vendors in the wedding industry with their civil disputes. Both clients are sole traders who would not have been able to access legal support if they had to pay for it privately. In the first case, our client faced a dispute involving a third party who cancelled services before the wedding. We represented the client in responding to a potential contractual claim raised on the grounds of frustration. This was an emotional matter for the client, as it was their first dispute in many years of working in the wedding industry. After two months of representation and without-prejudice negotiations, the parties reached a pre-action settlement avoiding the need for court proceedings:

“Thank you so much Charis for everything. I’m glad it’s over...”

In the second case, we represented a wedding performer in a breach of contract claim. We advised the client on his merits and sent a letter before

action on his behalf. The matter was resolved quickly, with our client receiving the full amount he sought, much to his satisfaction.

“I am ever so grateful for your help Megan, I have learned a lot from working with you.”

As part of our ongoing support, we also advised clients on various contractual matters. This included a complex auction dispute involving an auction house, an online listing company, the vendor, and the buyer (our client). We guided the client on identifying the relevant party for a claim, issues of contract formation, practical considerations for bringing a claim and next steps:

“[My wife] and I would like to thank you very much for your help. Knowing that we had people who could help

us brought us massive relief from the stress of having to deal with everything by ourselves.”

Additionally, through our business service, we provided pro bono advice to a local start-up cleaning company on service contracts for different client scenarios. This positioned the start-up to collaborate with larger clients, and it was rewarding to see them expand and strengthen their business relationships in the community:

“I’d like to thank you for your assistance and the support that you have provided us with throughout this process. Contracts are signed and the client very pleased! Thank you again!”

Criminal service

Our criminal service is divided into two strands: our victims' rights service and a service for those serving custodial sentences.

Victims' Rights service

This service offers advice and assistance in relation to the Victim's Right to Review Scheme. This assists victims with challenging a decision made by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) or police not to prosecute a suspect. We also assist victims submitting applications to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme as well as providing victim-focused advice in relation to criminal investigations, prosecuting and information on charities who can offer victim support during the trial process.

Prisoner Advice service

We continue to offer advice and assistance to prisoners, primarily those based at the male category B prison HMP Stocken. This has been expanded to other prisons through word of mouth of prisoners we have previously advised. We have provided one-off advice to clients on a wide range of issues, such as the prison complaints process and potential unlawful imprisonment matters.

We also continue to assist those who remain either in custody or secure hospital settings serving Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences. IPP sentences have been described by Lord Brown, a former justice of the UK Supreme Court, "as the greatest single stain on our criminal justice system". This assistance has included providing updates on changes in the law, proposed changes and introducing the clients to charities who can offer ongoing support as well as campaigning for release. Our work in this area highlights the injustice to those that remain detained under these sentences and raises awareness with our students about a regime that is no longer taught, as they were abolished in 2012, but continues to negatively impact thousands of prisoners and their families.

Case study

A client faced a scenario where there was potential unlawful imprisonment following several delays with his parole hearing. Our student volunteers undertook some research into the matter and provided advice on unlawful imprisonment, as well as providing details of firms who could assist with his parole hearing on a legally aided basis. The client provided the following feedback:

"Big thank you to the students Phoebe and Charlotte and Paralegal Rachel Williams. You have all done yourself proud, went above and beyond. I now have my parole delay being dealt with by a firm you researched so thank you for that."

Employment law service

The employment service mainly advises clients in unlawful deduction from wages and unfair dismissal matters. We also assist charities and SMEs in preparing HR handbooks.

This year we assisted a number of clients both for one-off advice and for ongoing support up to and including representation at the Employment Tribunal.

Case studies

Tribunal representation

We secured a positive result for a client in respect of a claim for unlawful deduction from wages, unfair dismissal and discrimination, with the client receiving a five-figure payment. Following the outcome the client emailed us the following:

"Massive thank you to you both for all of your hard work with my case. I would never have been able to achieve this without you so I'm very grateful. I got the outcome I was hoping for."

Highlight

A highlight of the year involved assisting and representing a client at a multi-day employment tribunal hearing. There were complex issues and allegations of pregnancy and maternity discrimination, which left our client with no choice but to resign. This matter also gave some of our students the opportunity to observe live advocacy by shadowing the representative. Importantly, after several hours of cross-examining the employer's key witness, we were able to elicit key admissions which ultimately led to our client succeeding on all main claims. Having won the claim, we persuaded the tribunal to award in excess of £7,000 to our client. This case gave both our junior staff and volunteers valuable experience in complex matters and the nuances of employment law discrimination claims. Afterwards, the client emailed us to thank us and to say that our advocacy has taken 'a big weight off [their] shoulders.'



One-off support

We provided crucial one-off assistance for a client in preparing cross examination questions in a challenging discrimination hearing where they were self-representing. We received the following feedback from the client about some of the questions we helped her to prepare that the judge asked on the client's behalf:

"The judge questioned [a witness for the Respondent] for two hours. If I don't get a penny those two hours were worth everything to me, honestly better than a year of therapy!"



Family law service

The family law service also continues to provide one-off advice, assistance and representation to clients in divorce, financial remedy, domestic abuse and private law children matters. This year the service has provided many clients with one-off advice and assisted a number of clients with court applications and negotiations. We have also continued to represent clients in their ongoing Family Court proceedings, helping them obtain final orders, and/or interim orders. This has created many student opportunities, and more students than ever have worked with the family law service this year.

Highlight

During term 3, we launched a new family law virtual internship on private law children matters. This provided many student opportunities, and enabled students to have an interactive practice-like experience, in a way which was accessible for them, fitting around their studies and other work commitments. The internship was popular, with over 70 students registering. Those who completed the internship provided positive feedback, which highlighted how it was a valuable learning experience and helped students develop the confidence to volunteer with us on live case work matters.



Case studies

This year we concluded a financial remedy case for a client, after the matter had been ongoing for several years. We helped them obtain a consent order, settling the matrimonial finances and securing them a clean break order, which was their main goal. The client was overwhelmed with the complexity of the paperwork and struggled to navigate the process alone. The other side was represented by a solicitor which meant they felt out of their depth. When the matter concluded, the client provided the following feedback in respect of our service:

“You lot are amazing. Without your help with my divorce I dread to think where I would be today. I cannot thank each one of you enough for saving my life and my future.”

We have helped a number of clients obtain child arrangements orders this year, securing them contact with their children. We also assisted a client to establish paternity, obtain parental responsibility and a child arrangements order for their child. When we were first instructed, the client had not met the child, and did not know their whereabouts. We advised and assisted them at several court hearings, leading to an order for parental responsibility, and an order securing regular time with the child. The client said:

“I just wanted to let you know how grateful I am for you both representing me these last 2 years. Without you I wouldn’t have been able to be a part of my child’s life and I am forever in your debt....Again, I really can’t thank you enough. You’re both angels and the work you do really does deserve recognition.”

The family law service also continued to provide one-off advice at Nottingham Women’s Centre, St George’s Community Centre in Netherfield and Mansfield library, as part of our Community Outreach Service.



Case study

Several student volunteers and our placement student assisted the client on various matters over the course of this year. The client was not eligible for legal aid funding for their possession matter due to their status as a student.

The client suffered from multiple physical and mental health difficulties and was feeling overwhelmed by their situation; their health had deteriorated making them unable to work. They claimed benefits, which had been stopped and in turn this caused them to accrue substantial rent arrears. Accordingly, their landlord was seeking possession of their property.

We assisted the client to negotiate with the landlord for more time to resolve the linked welfare benefits problems. The landlord then issued possession action before these negotiations concluded.

We reviewed the papers in the case, took instructions from the client before merits assessing the chances of defending the action. We went on record with the county court and drafted, filed and served a defence with our client.

We assisted the client to claim and backdate the welfare benefits to which they were entitled, resulting in the rent account being in credit at the date of the possession hearing. We therefore applied to strike out the landlord’s application on the basis that there were no legal grounds upon which to make any order against the client. We negotiated with the landlord before the hearing and reached an agreement whereby they withdrew their application. This was accepted by the District Judge and no order was made against our client.

Our client retained their home, cleared the rent arrears on their account and now have a stable income. They received an income recovery award totalling some £70,000 over the next seven to eight years.

“You make a difference. You have changed my life and saved it. Thank you doesn’t cover my gratitude to yourself and all at NLS Legal...Thank you. You really changed the course of my life.”

Housing law service

The housing law service continues to focus on assisting those who are not eligible for legal aid funding, but who cannot afford to pay for a solicitor. We have focused our service this year on clients with interlinked housing and welfare benefits issues. Towards the end of the year, we saw an increase in demand for our services due to a reduction in the availability of local legally aided housing advice. Unfortunately, we expect this trend to continue into the next academic year.

Our caseload was split between possession and homelessness matters, all too common issues faced by our local community. Our student volunteers have been exposed to drafting submissions to local authorities. Our postgraduate students have assisted in drafting applications to the county court and shadowing the subsequent hearings, where they also provided support for some of our more vulnerable clients.

Intellectual Property service

The Intellectual Property (IP) service has had a busy and successful year continuing to help a range of small businesses and individuals with their IP matters.

The highlight of the year for the IP service was winning the “Team of the Year” award at the Nottinghamshire Law Society Awards 2024. It was wonderful to have the work done by the IP Team in helping local businesses recognised in this way.

We have, as in previous years, continued to act for clients with respect to a wide range of matters including those which are more complex or where multiple pieces of advice were required.

We have advised clients as to the selection of trade marks for new product launches, helping them avoid potential conflicts, and secured trade mark protection for businesses ranging from community interest companies in the healthcare sector to those making and selling items of clothing.

On the contentious side, we have continued to develop the offering and have provided advice and representation on a number of matters. This has allowed us to support clients going through what can be very stressful experiences to achieve the best possible outcome. This has included assisting a local client in enforcing their rights against a much larger entity causing them to rebrand. We also acted in complex negotiations for a retail client accused of infringement. This resulted in an amicable resolution to the dispute which had, prior to our involvement, resulted in threats of litigation and serious financial consequences for the client.

Case study

The IP Team assisted a small local business who found themselves with a much larger entity launching a new brand under a similar name to that used by our client. This would likely have resulted in our client having to change its name and had already seen some confusion occur. With our assistance, the client was able to push against the bigger company causing them to agree to change the brand name to one which did not collide and ensuring that our client was able to continue using their chosen brand name.

“You've been fantastic, I think we would've given up without the offer of you taking on the case pro bono.”

Client feedback

We also continued to provide educational seminars on IP, offering eight sessions to over 130 delegates. This included Priority Skills courses provided via the European Social Fund, as well as supporting the Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) team at Nottingham Library by offering their Hobby to Business scheme a session on IP. We are also now working with the Enterprising Ashfield team at NTU to provide IP advice to businesses in Ashfield.

The IP service continued to have more demand and enquiries than capacity and it is good to be able to provide support in a complex area to businesses who would otherwise be faced with going alone. It has also been valuable to be able to provide our students with exposure to a variety of IP case work with several of our volunteers having subsequently taken up positions in IP firms.

To the best of our knowledge, we are the only law firm in England and Wales providing wholly not-for-profit advice from a qualified Trade Mark Attorney. In addition, as Nottingham Law School is a leading provider of IP courses, it has been good to continue to develop the IP services, complementing our academic and practitioner course offerings.

Personal Injury service

This year, we were absolutely delighted to partner with national law firm, Hodge, Jones & Allen (HJA), to offer a one-off personal injury advice service to our clients. In its first year, the service has supported nine clients, providing initial advice to those who have sustained injuries through no fault of their own. The launch of this service has also been of huge value to our law students. The service has received extremely positive feedback, as follows:

“I thought my experience was efficient and very helpful. I would not have been able to pursue my issue without everyone’s help. I found the whole experience extremely informative and smooth-running.”

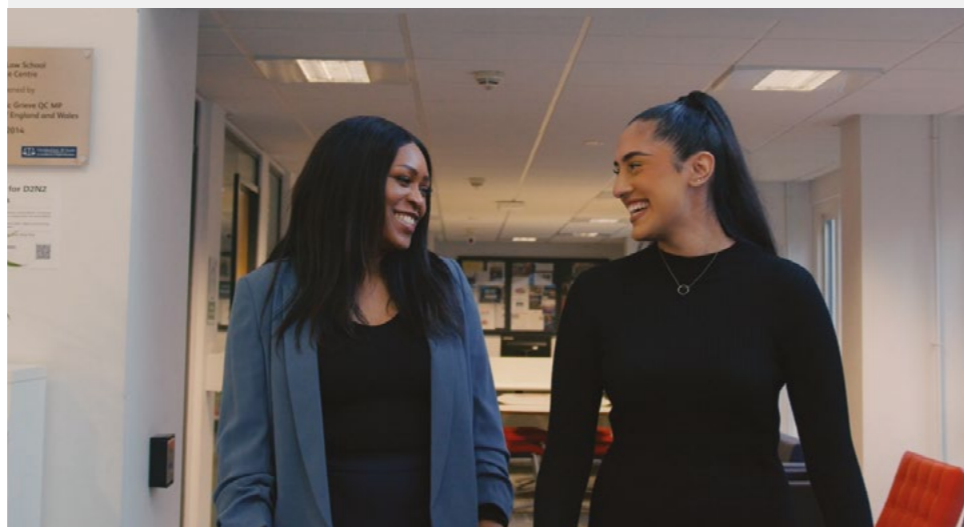
Client feedback

“Working on this personal injury case has been extremely interesting. I feel I have learnt how to structure and write important client documents such as attendance notes and client letters. It also gave me the ability to work with partners in the firm Hodge, Jones and Allen, which is a huge opportunity for me and I thoroughly enjoyed it! As I was able to follow the whole case through and the documents that I had drafted were the documents used in the case, I really felt that I have had a huge impact on the local community. I got to meet with the client and really got to gauge her appreciation for the work and aid provided to her.”

“I was not familiar with pro bono work at all. I understand it now and I will look to do more pro bono in the future.”

Student feedback

As a not-for-profit teaching law firm, the partnership with HJA was an obvious choice for us. HJA are committed to access to justice and recognise the value in providing law students with hands-on experience. We look forward to this successful collaboration continuing into 2024/25, and beyond.



Special educational needs and disability service

NLS Legal's special educational needs and disability (SEND) service assists families of children and young people with special educational needs. This service mainly advises clients in securing the educational, health and social provisions they are legally entitled to. This year, the complexity of enquiries continued to grow with clients often requiring assistance across multiple issues, such as obtaining personal budgets and formal complaints against their Local Authority. We have also continued to provide assistance on appealing the contents of the Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans, up to and including representation at the SEND First-Tier Tribunal.



Case study

We supported the parent of a child who had requested a special school be named in the EHC Plan after the setting named were unable to meet his special educational needs. The Local Authority opposed naming a special school and were of the view that the child's needs could be met within a mainstream setting.

NLS Legal represented the family in an appeal to the First-Tier Tribunal, including filing Grounds of Appeal against the Local Authority's decision to not name the client's preferred placement. NLS Legal assisted in negotiations with the Local Authority, leading the Local Authority to concede and name the specialist setting within the EHC Plan ahead of the new academic year, avoiding the stress and cost (to the state) of a Tribunal.

The child's parent provided the following feedback:

“Rachel and Callum have both been outstanding ensuring I knew all aspects of the law in line with my expectations. With their expert advice and support I have been able to secure a SEND school of my choosing for my child which will benefit his life in years to come. I found them both comforting and professional and the overall outcome was outstanding. Would highly recommend as I have two SEND children I would absolutely love to use them again if the need arose and feel without them I would not have got the outcome my child deserves.”

Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) service



Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

My name is Simon, I'm 35 years old, married to Karolina and have two children: Jayden (10) and Sophie (8). Karolina is a Senior Healthcare assistant within the NHS and I'm a Police Sergeant with the British Transport Police. We've been together for just short of 14 years and married for nearly 10. Jayden was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and developmental delay when he was four years old.

Why did you decide to get in touch with NLS Legal?

NLS Legal was recommended to us by our Special Education Needs Advocate after we'd been fighting our son's school initially, and then the local authority regarding his Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). We were constantly battling against our assigned case worker who we felt was placating us and essentially deferring us year after year despite our son's needs not being met and the school acknowledging they couldn't meet his needs.

How has NLS Legal supported you?

The assistance we received from Callum through NLS Legal was the legal guidance and expertise we needed to challenge the local authority and fight to gain the support needed going forward. NLS Legal was able to provide us with advice and assistance initially with the EHCP and with regard to the school placement. The team also provided representation with discussions, negotiations, and mediation with the local authority, and finally when we progressed to appealing to a pre-tribunal. The matter couldn't be resolved early despite the team's best efforts, and we took them to a pre-tribunal hearing where the Local Authority relented after the Tribunal Judge advised them that we had a very good case, and it was in their interest to negotiate with us. There and then they offered us our chosen school placement and therapies through the school.

What impact has your experience with NLS Legal had?

Without the assistance of NLS Legal we would likely still be fighting to get our son the most appropriate care and support for his needs. We wouldn't have been able to afford the cost associated with taking this matter through the legal system and we will forever be thankful for NLS Legal's support. Shortly after the conclusion of our case, we were able to make a small donation to NLS Legal for their help and support. I still to this day wish I could have given more because I know how much time and hard work went into our case. I have since recommended to colleagues and friends to contact NLS Legal in case they would be able to help with their legal matter and can't sing their praises enough.

Welfare Benefits service

The Welfare Benefits service advises clients on entitlement to benefits and provides representation at Social Security Tribunal appeal hearings at the First and Upper Tier levels. Income recovery for this service exceeded that of 22/23 by 236%, and an average award per client represented at Tribunal of just over £28,000.

We received a steady volume of referrals throughout the year, reflecting the increased demand for this work since the pandemic. This trend is likely to continue with the Tribunal service reporting a backlog of some 69,000 cases as of March 2024. Accordingly, we have changed our model to better cater for this increased waiting time by taking on cases before they have a hearing date. This means that our cases are open for longer, giving our students more time to prepare their submissions and build a relationship of trust with our clients.

This year saw an increase in student volunteers seeking advocacy experience before deciding on their future career paths. We are very grateful to provide our students with real-life practical experience to assist with making this decision, while also providing advice and representation to our local community. Many of our Tribunal Advocates for this year had also volunteered on social security cases in 22/23, giving them an increased exposure to legal work over a longer period of time. This work has allowed our student volunteers to develop their legal skills in a practical setting. It introduced them to a new area of law as this was the first time they had gained work experience with social security law and attended a hearing.

Case study:

This matter was an appeal of a negative decision made by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) whereby our client's application for personal independence payment (PIP) was rejected.

The client had physical and verbal involuntary tics which were exacerbated by stress. They struggled to engage with everyday tasks such as eating due to the risk of injuring themselves with cutlery when having a tic. They were struggling to navigate the Tribunal process as a litigant in person, primarily because they had difficulties talking at all when stressed.

We received this referral several months before the hearing, but the instruction taking process was complicated due to our client's deteriorating mental health during this time. We made an application to go on record at the Tribunal to represent the client, drafted, filed and served submissions setting out our client's grounds of appeal. We represented the client at the hearing. The hearing was adjourned after five minutes due to our client's obvious distress, and a successful decision made on the papers we had provided.

Our client was given a five-year award, meaning that they will not have to navigate the review and reapplication process during this time. They received a backdated payment of approximately £8,000 and a guaranteed award of over £28,000.

“[The award] will make a world of difference. Really thankful for all of your help, you were fantastic and I would want you on my side all of the time.”

Client feedback

Other services and projects 2023/24

Community Outreach Advice Services - Nottingham Women's Centre, St George's Community Centre (Netherfield)

We provide a free advice service, based at both the Nottingham Women's Centre and St George's Community Centre in Netherfield. This is a student-led project and a long-term collaboration which we are proud to continue to offer. This one-off advice and information service provides clients with initial advice or, in cases involving areas of law outside of our service areas, signposting to other organisations and to useful resources. The outreach sessions run fortnightly throughout October to March. This year, our two student project leaders, supported by a further 12 students, assisted 19 individuals as part of this service, providing supervised advice and assistance across a large range of areas including family, employment and housing.

Administration and Compliance Support placements

Our Administration and Compliance Support placements are an excellent opportunity for our students to become involved in the work of NLS Legal and gain confidence, with some of the placements being ring-fenced for our first-year students. This academic year, 18 students worked with us in this capacity. This initiative allows the students to learn first-hand how a law firm works, gaining invaluable skills for their future degree and career. The students involved undertook administrative tasks, such as reception duty and dealing with new enquiries, as well as supporting us with risk and compliance projects, by undertaking file reviews, raising awareness of our regulatory obligations and best practice. As a regulated law firm, risk and compliance are a key part of our day-to-day obligations and this opportunity provides valuable insight and skills that very few graduates would gain at such an early stage of their careers. Dealing with new enquiries allows volunteers to have a better understanding of clients' needs and the service areas we cover. It also improves their communication skills, particularly around managing expectations and client care. Reception and administrative tasks are also key elements of our daily work that give students a very valuable insight of the running of a law firm and equip them with skills that employers value. We find this is a fantastic way to start volunteering in NLS Legal, with a view to undertaking further volunteering opportunities in later years. We have been offering this opportunity for several years now, and it is really good to see how students improve their confidence and often continue volunteering with us on client work afterwards, making our administration and compliance support placements a perfect way to start the volunteering journey with NLS Legal. This year, we were able to offer some extra places during the summer too. We are very grateful to our fantastic team of students, that did a truly helpful and valuable job.

This initiative is made all the more valuable to students in view of the experience they gain with Clio, our case management system. **Clio** kindly donates their **case management system** to us for free to support our work.



“Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to volunteer with you, it has been an incredible opportunity. I have learned so much, and gained a lot of valuable skills. It has also positively had an effect on my confidence.”

Student feedback

Black Leadership Programme

Thanks to generous funding from **Santander Universities UK**, and following a successful launch in 2022/23, we were once again able to offer funded work experience placements to law students on the NTU Black Leadership Programme. A total of 10 students undertook a minimum of 35 hours work experience and were involved in a range of activity within the firm, supporting our team of lawyers with client and case work. We are hugely grateful to Santander for enabling us to offer such outstanding opportunities to our students. The following LinkedIn testimonial from one of the students taking part in the programme highlights the impact that the placement had:

LinkedIn Post from Precious Akowuah (LLB Law with Criminology student):

“And just like that, my 1-week internship with NLS Legal funded by Santander has come to an end. It’s been an incredible experience, and I’ve learnt so much in just one week. From cross-examinations to attending client meetings and preparing essential case documents, it’s been a valuable journey. A special thank you to The Black leadership Programme for helping me secure this opportunity, and a massive thank you to all the staff at NLS Legal; Carlota Gonzalez Laynez, Matilda Kapala, Rachel Williams, James Sinclair and Matthew Game for their supervision this week.

It does not end here! I look forward to picking up more opportunities during the summer with NLS Legal and proceeding with my new role as student volunteer.”

International Partnerships

NLS is proud to partner with other institutions from across the globe. As part of these partnerships, students visit NLS as part of their degree transfer programme. During their time at NLS, students from our international partnership institutions join us in NLS Legal to gain some practical experience and insight into the legal system of England and Wales. This year, 11 students from University of London in Bangladesh, Brickfields Asia College, Malaysia and Advance Tertiary College, Malaysia, spent four days with us undertaking tasks such as attending client meetings, conducting legal research and drafting attendance notes. The students also took part in advocacy training with our Employment Solicitor, Mathew Game, which incorporated an innovative interactive exercise with the aid of generative artificial intelligence (AI) software.

Policy Reform – Environmental Law Foundation Policy Clinic

Over the course of 2023/24 we were delighted to again support the work of the Environmental Law Foundation by running a policy clinic in collaboration with them. Solicitors, Callum Scott and Mathew Game, supervised the work of the policy clinic, with paralegal, James Sinclair, overseeing the day to day running of the project. Nine students assisted with the clinic across two projects.

The projects required the application of complex laws and substantial desktop research was undertaken. Both projects provided the opportunity for students interested in environmental law to obtain a detailed understanding of environmental law issues and allowed them to develop their skills as future legal practitioners in a policy context. Our findings were provided to the Environmental Law Foundation to support them in their ongoing work.

Mansfield and Ashfield

NLS Legal represents NLS in the wider NTU project to support regeneration in Mansfield & Ashfield (M&A). This year we delivered our first in-person outreach sessions at Mansfield library, offering residents free family and civil disputes advice. Further outreach sessions are planned for 2024/25.

In addition, we are delighted to be able to support the NTU Enterprising Ashfield programme. This is a funded initiative which supports entrepreneurs and start-ups in the Ashfield area. Our intellectual property team delivered a public legal education seminar to a number of Ashfield based businesses to raise awareness of IP matters. Following this seminar, we have supported one of those businesses with IP legal advice as part of the programme with further work in the pipeline.

In 2023/24 we supported a total of 21 clients from the M&A area.

Virtual Internships

Having introduced virtual internships as a response to the covid pandemic, we continue to offer these to support more students to gain legal work experience. This year, our virtual internships were completed by 31 students, covering employment and family law issues.

Virtual internships allow us to offer opportunities to all students, whatever their circumstances. The flexible way in which they can be completed ensures this is a very inclusive approach to volunteering opportunities. In addition, as virtual internships are increasingly used as part of law firm recruitment processes, it is a further way to improve the employability of our students and prepares them for life post-study. Our students receive a post-completion certificate for their efforts.

Student Pro Bono Committee

Our Student Pro Bono Committee (SPBC) comprises students who provide a significant contribution to NLS Legal. The SPBC help us develop the firm, improve our service for both clients and students, raise awareness of pro bono and access to justice, support other student volunteers, and promote the firm during Open Days and other events. This year, the SPBC comprised of our placement student, Mia Zaw, Support Through Court’s placement student, Ade Adegroye, Lily Cotton, Louis Hancock, Nick Pardhanani, Meg Paterson, and Darion Smalls. In addition, they participated in the Law School Challenge to raise funds for two pro bono charities, Advocate and LawWorks. Their efforts saw them finish in 5th place on the national leader board, a great achievement! In total, all universities taking part in the challenge raised just under £4,000 for access to justice organisations.

LawWorks

We are a member of the LawWorks network and continue our close collaboration with them. LawWorks is a charity working in England and Wales to connecting people in need of legal advice, who are not eligible for legal aid and cannot afford to pay and with the not-for-profit organisations that support them. We are a member of the LawWorks East Midlands Hub, meeting with other local pro bono providers to share experiences and best practice, update each other on our services and other activities, and facilitate signposting in order to make sure our pro bono work reaches as many individuals in need as possible. We once again supported LawWorks by submitting statistics for their annual report. Special thanks go to our East Midlands Clinics Support & Development Officer, Anne-Marie Dhillon, for her unwavering support.

Pathways to Law

We were once again delighted to provide continued support to the Pathways to Law programme this year. Pathways to Law is an initiative of The Sutton Trust supporting those aged 16 to 18 from disadvantaged backgrounds into careers in the law. It aims to widen access into the legal profession and improve social mobility. As part of the law school's Pathways to Law activity, we hosted an online interactive client interviewing session, providing 20 Pathways students with an insight into the communication skills needed in order to represent clients effectively. The feedback from the students was extremely positive:

- 100% of the students agreed that the session was useful
- 100% of the students agreed that the session was informative
- 100% of the students said they would recommend the session to a friend

NLS partnership with Support Through Court

In previous years, NLS Legal has assisted the national litigants in person charity, Support Through Court (STC), by recruiting up to 30 student volunteers per year to help them deliver their vital service. In October 2022, when STC were faced with losing significant Ministry of Justice funding, NLS launched a new partnership with STC which saw their STC Nottingham Service relocate from the Nottingham County Court to the Law School. In 2023, NLS was chosen by STC as the host for their new National Online Service, which launched in July 2023. The services run from the law school's premises and our two services now work closely together for the benefit of our respective clients and with the shared aim of providing access to justice. We signpost people to each other's service, share client meeting and online hearing facilities (with procedures for maintaining client confidentiality in place), and are a source of support for each other to help share the load of the pressures of working in frontline access to justice work.

This year, STC provided 237 NLS students with outstanding work experience (40 of those students utilised their STC work experience for academic credit) and, together, STC and NLS students supported litigants in person on over 5,700 contact points, which included support by in-person appointments, telephone, online, or at hearings (both online and in-person). NLS also seconded one of their sandwich placement students to support STC activity, which we know has been hugely appreciated and of great value to the charity.

In November, Head of NLS Legal, Laura Pinkney, attended the STC Guardian's Gala with NLS student, Nouhaila Ouassil. Nouhaila delivered a very impressive speech to the VIP audience talking about her experience as a STC volunteer and how it had enhanced her legal studies and her development. As well as being very proud of Nouhaila, Laura was very happy to get a picture with the Lady Chief Justice and former Law Society President I. Stephanie Boyce!

In June 2024, STC took the difficult decision to close the Nottingham Service following further MoJ funding cuts. However, we look forward to supporting STC with their National Helpline Service from September 2024. We are extremely proud of this partnership and it is a pleasure to support it and work so closely with such a wonderful organisation. We look forward to building the partnership further and becoming the sole host university for STC's National Remote Services (Online and Helpline) in 2024/25.



Our intra-curricular activity

As part of our commitment to integrating practical skills and work experience into a student's academic course, we offer numerous intra-curricular options, over and above extra-curricular opportunities. This aligns with the NLS ethos to embed practical skills within every stage of the curriculum and in recognition of how experiential learning improves degree results and increases employability.

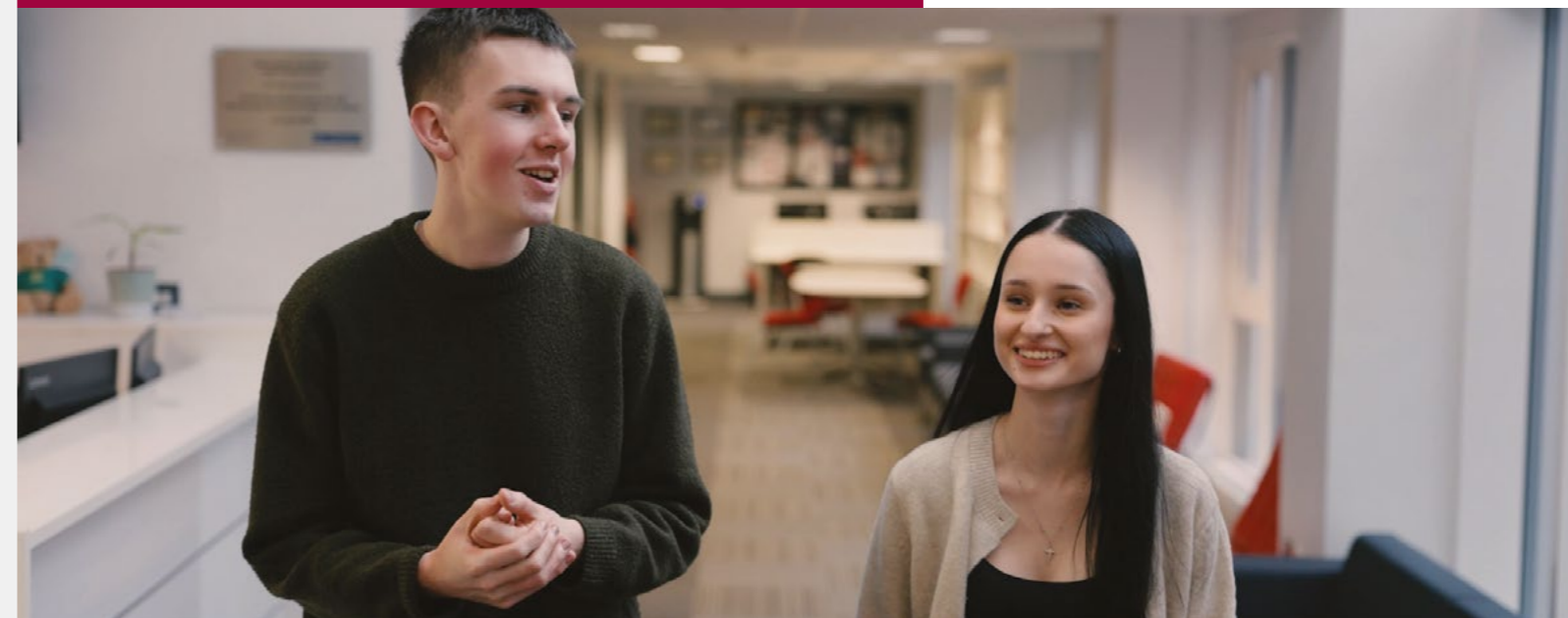
This year, a total of 426 students took part in NLS Legal activity for academic credit. As discussed within the data summary, this was a decrease from the previous three years, due to the launch of the NLS partnership with Support Through Court (STC), which has seen some of our intra-curricular activity shared with STC. For the activity detailed below, save for Employer Challenges, the students will prepare a reflective portfolio, reflecting on the knowledge and skills developed as part of their practical experience, which is then assessed and forms part of their grade. This helps our students develop as reflective professionals.

We detail below our diverse variety of intra-curricular activity:

Placement students

Each year, we offer a year-long placement to one of our NLS students, allowing them to complete their third year with us on placement as part of their Law (Sandwich) LLB degree. Our placement student undertakes the role of Legal Assistant, completing a mix of legal work and administrative duties to support the firm.

Our 23/24 placement student was **Mia Zaw**. Mia provided significant contribution to the firm, supporting numerous service areas and activity. Mia was fantastic to work with, produced very high-quality work and was a hugely valued member of the team. It was such a pleasure to see Mia's confidence grow and her development throughout the year. We wish Mia all the best for her future studies and career, we know that she will be a real asset to the legal profession and we wish to thank her for being such a credit to NLS Legal. Please do read on, to hear first-hand about Mia's experience.





Mia Zaw

My placement year at NLS Legal was transformative, both personally and professionally.

Owing to the firm's flexible and collaborative structure, this afforded me the opportunity to support various service areas as required; namely family, employment, welfare benefits, housing, personal injury, crime and intellectual property. This broad exposure has not just allowed me to develop my organisation and adaptability skills as I was required to adapt to different working styles and expectations, but it has also deepened my understanding of the procedural differences and unique challenges within each field.

I found that working with colleagues from various professional backgrounds definitely enriched my learning experience. Sharing knowledge, viewpoints and expertise not only developed my understanding of legal concepts, but also helped me to refine my own legal skills by offering fresh perspectives and approaches to tackling complex legal matters. I also found it enjoyable to work with a diverse set of clients and legal issues as doing so has prepared me to tackle a wide range of legal issues with greater confidence and competence in the future.

During my placement, I predominantly assisted my supervisor with the Family Law Service. One of my main responsibilities was handling the administration of new enquiries and arranging client appointments. I also engaged in casework responsibilities which included attending client meetings, drafting detailed attendance notes, undertaking legal research and participating in court hearings. One of my notable experiences was taking the lead on a family client interview and afterwards, conducting in-depth research on child relocation within the UK which is a niche legal area. This experience enhanced my client interviewing and research skills. Furthermore, I was also given the opportunity to draft client care and advice letters, electronically prepare court bundles and assist in a negotiation relating to a child custody dispute.

In addition, I actively participated in the development of the Family Law Service. One of my significant contributions was managing the rollout of the 'Family Law Children Virtual Internship' which attracted 71 students. I set up the Teams communication channel, tracked student engagement, monitored and organised submissions, created the feedback form and designed personalised participation certificates. This was rewarding as my efforts largely contributed to the creation of a lasting educational resource that could be utilised for future initiatives or recruitment opportunities. It also allowed me to further develop my leadership and communication skills.

I was also afforded the invaluable opportunity to lead on two complex welfare benefit cases, from the initial client interview to representing the clients at the First Tier Social Security Tribunal. In both of these cases, I was able to secure a positive outcome totalling £98,400 in benefits for my clients, which is significant. Although I was initially hesitant to take on these cases due to nerves and a lack of self-belief, I ultimately found the experience incredibly fulfilling as I was able to secure life-changing outcomes for both clients, who could not otherwise afford legal representation.

I strongly believe that working within a professional, supportive environment with an open-door culture fostered a strong foundation of trust and communication within the team. My relationship with my supervisor was particularly impactful, as her mentorship encouraged me to step outside of my comfort zone. This contributed significantly to my personal growth as it positively challenged my resilience. Furthermore, the team's constant support and encouragement empowered me to recognise my capabilities and maximise my true potential. Overall, my placement year and the incredible team that I was privileged enough to work alongside, has been instrumental in affirming my desire to pursue a career in law.

Applied Legal Knowledge (Criminal and Business Practice)

Applied Legal Knowledge is a third-year module with a practical focus and includes an NLS Legal element. This year, the module enabled 337 students the opportunity to work on cases that NLS Legal has dealt with (albeit with any identifying features redacted and certain facts changed to protect client confidentiality). It is designed as a mini work experience and provides students with insight into how to put theory into practice and provides the chance to develop their employability skills by undertaking tasks such as drafting a letter of advice to a client. The business task focused on insolvency and the criminal task involved advising a client on the Victims' Right to Review Scheme. Students work in groups to undertake the tasks set and are given personalised feedback by our solicitors on their work. They also reflect on their experience within group sessions and in their end of module reflective portfolio, encouraging our students to develop a reflective and growth mindset.

Law in Practice

Eight students completed their placement with NLS Legal, as part of their Law in Practice final year LLB module. The students worked on family law, employment law, SEND and social justice matters, undertaking a minimum of 35 hours work experience for academic credit.

We were delighted to read the following feedback from one of our wonderful students:

LinkedIn Post from Maizie Nelson (LLB student):

"I am thrilled to announce the successful completion of my recent placement at NLS Legal, as part of my Law in Practice Module. During my time in the Family Law Sector, I had the invaluable opportunity to grow both professionally and personally.

Throughout the placement, I honed my interpersonal skills, particularly in navigating delicate discussions with clients. Additionally, I gained valuable insights into the administrative aspects of legal practice, including conducting client interviews and drafting letters of advice.

The experience has been truly transformative, offering me a profound understanding of the legal profession that I eagerly anticipate being a part of in the future. It has reaffirmed my passion for Family Law and solidified my career aspirations.

I am immensely grateful to NLS Legal for all their support and guidance throughout my placement. I look forward to the opportunities that lie ahead and am eager to continue my journey in the legal field!"

Employer Challenges

A total of 80 students completed Employer Challenges with NLS Legal (60 undergraduates and 20 postgraduates). The challenges involve the students working in groups to give presentations to our supervising lawyers on topics such as how Artificial Intelligence (AI) could benefit our firm, how the firm can develop its services to further help address unmet legal need in the local community, and how our firm can develop projects and/or its services to increase diversity in the legal profession.

Awards and recognition

Our Intellectual Property Team won 'Team of the Year' at the Nottinghamshire Law Society Awards 2024

We were super proud of the Intellectual Property (IP) team in achieving this well-deserved award. Trade Mark Attorney and Associate Professor Peter Vaughan leads the IP team, supported by Solicitor, Callum Scott, Solicitor, Professor Jane Jarman and Paralegal, Matilda Kapala.

The Pro Bono Recognition List of England & Wales 2024

We were delighted that five of our solicitors – Laura Pinkney, Mathew Game, Katie Smith, Charis Wong and Megan Shirley - were included on the inaugural Pro Bono Recognition List of England & Wales. The List recognises barristers and solicitors who gave 25 hours or more pro bono legal assistance over the last year. The initiative is endorsed by its Patron, the Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales, The Baroness Carr of Walton-on-the-Hill, the Law Society, the Bar Council and all the major pro bono organisations under the aegis of the Attorney General's Pro Bono Committee.



The following students were also recognised for their contribution to NLS Legal via the NLS Annual Prizes for 23/24 and we thank them for their incredible commitment and achievements:

The NLS Dean's Award for Outstanding Achievement: Manayka Walia

NLS Richard Bagley Award for Outstanding Contribution to Pro Bono (Undergraduate) – Taylor-Jai Hawk

NLS Richard Bagley Award for Outstanding Contribution to Pro Bono (Postgraduate) – Robert Sadler

Knowledge Exchange

UCL Centre for Access to Justice and the UCL Centre for Law and Ethics Event - Is it time to recalibrate the relationship between access to justice, law school clinics, and legal services regulation?

On 19 March, Head of NLS Legal, Laura Pinkney was a guest panellist at this UCL event, speaking about her experience of running a university owned regulated law firm. The event was Chaired by Rachel Knowles, Head of Legal Practice at the UCL Centre for Access to Justice and featured a keynote address by Stephen Mayson, Honorary Professor at UCL, who spoke about his research and work in this area. Laura was joined on the expert panel by Rebecca Wilkinson, CEO of LawWorks. The event was well attended and was also streamed online. Delegates included regulators, clinical legal education professionals, academics, amongst other stakeholders.

Media coverage

The launch of our new Personal Injury service in collaboration with Hodge, Jones and Allen, was covered in the legal press (October 2023): [Nottingham Law School's teaching law firm to offer personal injury advice through tie-up with London outfit - Legal Cheek](#) and, Laura Pinkney, Head of NLS Legal, appeared on [Notts TV, a local TV channel, to promote the new service: Notts Today, Friday 27th October – Notts TV News | The heart of Nottingham news coverage for Notts TV](#) (clip starts at 2 minutes 15 seconds).

Practice Manager (now Head of Operations), Carlota Gonzalez Laynez, and Family Solicitor, Katie Smith, were interviewed for the Nottinghamshire Law Society Bulletin following their awards success earlier in the year (October 2023 and November 2023):

[An Interview with Business Support Champion 2023 - Carlota Gonzalez-Laynez - Nottingham-Law-Society](#)

[An Interview with Solicitor of the Year - Katie Smith - Nottingham-Law-Society](#)

Our Housing Supervisor, Emma McGowan, contributed to an article for Inside Housing magazine titled "Ready to check out: the lengthy repairs forcing tenants to live in hotels" (February 2024).

Our Intellectual Property's 'Team of the Year' Award at the Nottinghamshire Law Society Annual Awards 2024 was featured in the East Midlands Business Link (May 2024):

[Team of the Year award for IP lawyers helping small businesses - East Midlands Business Link](#)

NTU press release following the inclusion of NLS Legal solicitors on the inaugural Pro Bono Recognition List (June 2024):

[Recognition for Nottingham solicitors offering free legal advice | Nottingham Trent University](#)



Client feedback

“An absolute godsend to so many people in need of support in a very broken system.

“A complete lifeline service for our daughter. She would not be starting college this September without their help. The process to tribunal is made far too complicated and stressful for most parents to tackle by themselves.

Absolutely Amazing. Would highly recommend. Professional from start to finish. Genuinely cared.

“Amazing service. Megan and all the students put so much time and effort in we truly felt safe and in good hands. We cannot put in words how grateful we are to NLS Legal, we hope this service stay active for anyone else who may find themselves unfortunate to need the same support.

“I couldn't have had a better experience; I went with a very sensitive case and received more help than I ever expected. I would never have been able to face the tribunal without their help and am extremely grateful to them for the time and effort they made to help me through it.

I am really grateful to the service I received. My solicitor Katie was wonderful, a rare mix of knowledgeable and experience whilst truly understanding the trauma I was going through. I'm so thankful a service like this exists.

“Staff and student volunteers were incredibly nice and helpful all the way through the process.

*Taken from responses received to our 23/24 client survey

95% of our clients rated our service as “excellent”. *

Peter and the team were absolutely fantastic dealing with our case. As a small start-up we were so worried about the legal matter that was presented to us and really didn't know how we were going to deal with it. They 'held our hand' throughout, explaining matters in layman terms, walking us through the steps and giving us options for our decisions. They were open and honest about options and, whilst not telling us what to do, guided us with advice and understanding. We really cannot thank you enough for your hard work on this matter. I am not sure what we would have done without you.

“Everyone that was involved were absolutely excellent in all aspects from start to finish, representation was faultless. We wouldn't have been able to do all the work that was involved ourselves. We are so thankful to everyone involved in the case.

“Great service provided by a great team. Effective communication throughout.

“Very supportive and knowledgeable. I wouldn't have been able to do it without their help.

“Extremely professional and personable; never felt judged and was confident in the advice given in that it was always clearly explained.

Our ladies were brilliant. Very supportive. Easy to talk to. Very reassuring. Made a scary experience much easier for us.

Student feedback

To all future NLS students, volunteering with NLS Legal will not only teach you so many skills useful for entering the professional workplace, but it will also teach you life skills and broaden your mindset.

“My volunteering with NLS Legal has greatly improved my confidence to apply for future jobs and has helped me inform me of the career choices that I wish to pursue. It has reaffirmed that a career in law is what I want, and it has both made me appreciate what work is required when practicing law and how law firms operate.

“NLS Legal is a pillar of the Nottingham community and well thought of in the legal circles. So, to the team, thank you for all your support and incredible work.

“My time at NLS Legal was one of the most valuable experiences I am leaving university with.

“I would like to mention how wonderful the team is that you will meet and interact with, everyone is so incredibly friendly and supportive, which is an asset to have as you progress through your studies and career.

“Prior to NLS Legal, I had not practiced any of the skills I had learned over the course of my time at university. Being at NLS Legal gave me the real life experience I was looking for.

62% of our students said this was their first work experience in a law firm.

“I had an amazing time completing my placement. The support and guidance was incredible and I really valued the before and after client interview discussions not only to make sure we were all ok but to properly speak about the cases. I feel like it really helped me to hone my skills and understand each situation far better.

“The team with NLS Legal have been incredibly supportive, giving me the opportunity to learn and demonstrate the best of my abilities. Whenever there has been an issue that I did not understand or needed assistance with, the team were quick to respond and not only made sure that it was resolved but gave me guidance on how to best address similar issues in the future.

I have learnt so much from the interactions I have had with the team and the client interviews I have attended. It has also highlighted the difficulty vulnerable members within society face when they try to seek advice on issues that affect their day-to-day life.

100% of our students would recommend volunteering at NLS Legal to future NLS students.

“An enriching and rewarding experience that gives real life experience of working in law, I would highly recommend it to any student in need of wanting to help people or to gain insight into the practical side of law.

“I am really grateful for this experience being open to law students in all years, I am able to gain insight into life after education and hone skills I will need in my career and be ready to go into the employment in law after I graduate. Thank you to everyone that works at NLS Legal and supports student volunteers.

Meet our student volunteers



Darion Smalls

NLS Legal as a Pathway to Belonging

Background Information

The Distance Learning LLB was my second degree. My first degree was a Bachelor of Science in Diplomacy and International Relations from Seton Hall University. I went through the fairly popular American experience at university. I joined a fraternity in my first year and that was my community for four years. I had some brief experience with mock trial but for the most part, my experience was limited to my fraternal bonds.

My first job after graduation was working for the State of Florida, Guardian ad Litem Programme part time as a Volunteer Trainer and part-time as a Legal Intern. This was my first exposure to report writing and responding to court processes. I also had some brief exposure to legal research. Over the next few years, I bounced between regulatory roles and technology roles as a Trainer or Change Manager. I knew that I didn't want to keep doing what I was doing, I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in the law, and I knew I didn't want to stay in the US. My first search online presented me a few Distance Learning options but the one that stood out was Nottingham Trent University. It had the best reputation for distance learning programmes, and it had plenty of ways to get practical experience; the opportunity that students spoke most highly about was the school's regulated firm.

In 2022/23 Darion was awarded the NLS Richard Bagley Award for Outstanding Contribution to Pro Bono (Undergraduate) for his work with NLS Legal.

Introduction to NLS Legal

While 2020-2021 was a rough year for everyone, it represented a convergence of opportunity. The world had been effectively shut down which meant that businesses (including NLS Legal) had to rethink how to continue their offerings at least partially online. As a result, distance learning students had the opportunity to volunteer. The summer after my first year, I was granted the opportunity to work on my first case. The case was a fairly straightforward legal case, my involvement was largely centred around an attendance note and some preliminary research. I enjoyed the client interaction, loved the legal research, and found the feedback that I received immediately valuable.

When the call for volunteers for the 2021 – 2022 academic year opened, I made it a point to apply as quickly as possible. This time it was an employment law opportunity. I found that the enjoyment I got from helping didn't dim at all and again, the feedback that I received was immediately valuable. During the 2021-2022 academic year, I decided to move to the UK. The only guidance I had from others on my cohort were places to live in Nottingham. With no credit, no work experience in the UK, and no friends in the Nottingham area, I was overwhelmed fairly quickly in trying to find a place to live. Once I had my student ID in hand, the first building I visited was Chaucer and came right to NLS Legal to introduce myself in person. The first person I met smiled, was friendly, and perhaps most importantly to me, knew who I was from our interactions online. It was just the breath of fresh air that I needed just to feel seen in Nottingham and at NTU.

Experience at NLS Legal

I've been granted the opportunity to wear a lot of hats since that first moment of being seen. I've had the opportunity to be a part of the NLS Legal pro bono committee and to hopefully engage students that may not have known NLS Legal was an opportunity for them without the prompting. I've had the opportunity to fundraise on behalf of access to justice and gain some exposure to the business of NLS Legal as a fully regulated firm. However, the "hat" that I gain the most joy from remains that of a volunteer. Around my penultimate year I figured out that getting legal experience in specific areas gave me the opportunity and push to research areas of law outside of the ones provided in class and to get feedback on the arguments or research I put forward. I gained valuable experience in client-interviewing, preparing an attendance note, and presenting information to clients. These skills have been positive in both my academic and professional life.

I was able to finish my degree with first-class results, when I look over my transcript, those courses in which I was able to gain practical experience always received the best outcomes. I have a community of individuals that have supported me and given me a place to "belong" and given me opportunities to continue growing as I build myself up in a new career.

I don't often make guarantees, however, I guarantee that volunteering at NLS Legal will never be a regret that you have as a law student at NTU. The opportunity to get relatively safe work experience from top class professionals is something that Russell Group and Oxbridge students won't get as early and as often as we can. Why wouldn't you use this resource while also being able to make a positive impact on our community?

Darion Richard Smalls
LLM Technology Law Student



The opportunities NLS Legal has been able to offer me, during and after my placement year, have been beyond all my expectations.



Georgia Roe-Ely

My sandwich placement year at NLS Legal was the keystone of my university career. The wealth of knowledge and experience I gained during this year was the reason I was able to walk into my first interview for a legal role, two weeks after finishing my undergraduate degree, and be offered the job.

I completed my undergraduate degree in Law in 2023, and I am currently studying the LLM Legal Practice Course part-time whilst working full-time in the Legal Services branch at a police force. My year in industry during my LLB set me up perfectly for my final year of study, my professional postgraduate course, and employment in the legal sector.

The opportunities NLS Legal has been able to offer me, during and after my placement year, have been beyond all my expectations. For instance, under supervision, I was able to conduct research and articulate legal advice to clients. I have recently moved into a Paralegal position in the Operational Policing Unit in Legal Services, and one of my responsibilities is to give legal advice to police officers in relation to incidents they attend. My NLS Legal experience acquired was pivotal in this interview, and although I only graduated in 2023, I was able to draw on examples of conducting research in areas I had never studied and was able to advise clients accordingly.

Another of my responsibilities is to draft legally binding documents for bundles for civil order applications – orders that are enforced by the police. My placement experience provided countless drafting opportunities which have been directly transferrable to my new role.

I am now in my sixth (and final) year at Nottingham Law School, in the second year of my LLM Legal Practice Course. My placement experience allowed me to develop my interviewing, writing, drafting and advocacy skills – all assessable skills on the LPC. I went into these modules with some level of ease because of the experience NLS Legal was able to offer me at the very early stage of my career.

I cannot thank the team at NLS Legal enough for the guidance and encouragement they have given me during my placement year, and beyond.

Volunteering with NLS Legal was instrumental in enabling me to apply my academic knowledge to real-world legal practice and ultimately contributed to securing pupillage.

I completed my foundation year, undergraduate degree, and my professional and postgraduate courses at Nottingham Law School (NLS). My experience at NLS would not have been the same without the exceptional services provided by NLS Legal, which benefit both its clients and NLS students immensely.

During my undergraduate studies, I was selected to serve as a Student Advisor at NLS Legal, focusing on intellectual property law. It was a privilege to translate theoretical knowledge acquired in lectures and seminars into practical skills, including client interviews, drafting legal documents, and understanding the day-to-day application of law in professional practice.

While undertaking the Barristers Training Course LLM and preparing my applications for pupillage, I had the opportunity to volunteer on a family law matter with NLS Legal. This experience was invaluable in shaping my career path, as I was pursuing pupillage in family law and sought to deepen my practical experience in this area. NLS Legal provided exceptional support and encouragement throughout, enabling me to successfully complete the task and receive excellent feedback.

These experiences not only offered valuable insight into the legal profession but also allowed me to demonstrate my dedication to a career in law. I was able to enhance my confidence, develop my legal expertise, and refine both my oral and written advocacy skills.

I cannot recommend volunteering with NLS Legal highly enough. I strongly encourage all NLS students to participate if they have the opportunity. Not only will it bolster your career prospects, but the outstanding team at NLS Legal will also play a pivotal role in shaping your development as a future lawyer.



Phoebe Duterloo

These experiences not only offered valuable insight into the legal profession but also allowed me to demonstrate my dedication to a career in law.

Our 23/24 team

“NLS Legal is an incredible service that offers fantastic and much needed support to those who would usually find it difficult to access legal advice/support. The team are extremely friendly, kind and approachable.”

NLS and NTU community

We are extremely grateful to our many other NLS and NTU colleagues, both academic and professional services, who support NLS Legal in a variety of ways.

Our 23/24 staff team Top to bottom (left to right):

Jenny Chapman (NLS Executive Dean and NLS Legal Compliance Officer for Legal Practice)

Laura Pinkney (Head of NLS Legal, Solicitor)

Mathew Game (Employment Solicitor)

Jane Jarman (NLS Professor, Solicitor and NLS Legal Training Principal)

Callum Scott (SEND Solicitor)

Katie Smith (Family Solicitor)

Peter Vaughan (NLS Associate Professor and Trade Mark Attorney)

Charis Wong (Business and Civil Litigation Solicitor)

Emma McGowan (Housing and Welfare Benefits Supervisor)

Carlota Gonzalez Laynez (Practice Manager, now Head of NLS Operations)

Melissa Bailey (Administrator)

Declan Austin (Paralegal)

Megan Russell (Paralegal, now Trainee Solicitor)

James Sinclair (Paralegal)

Rachel Williams (Paralegal, now Trainee Solicitor)

Matilda Kapala (Legal Assistant, now Paralegal)

Mia Zaw (Legal Assistant – Placement Student)

Megan Shirley (NLS Senior Lecturer, Solicitor)

Our 2023/24 Student Pro Bono Committee:

Adetoun Adegoroye
Darion Smalls
Lily Cotton
Louis Hancock
Meg Paterson
Mia Zaw
Nick Pardhanani





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